Globe-spanning Networks (online/London, 26 Nov 26)

Online / Birkbeck, University of London, Birkbeck Central Building, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7JL, Nov 26, 2026

Jason Bate

Globe-spanning Networks:
Mapping Photographic Clubs and Societies
in Local, National, and Transnational Contexts.

This hybrid symposium looks at photographic clubs and societies from a global perspective and follows on from a workshop held at Birkbeck in 2023. Assessing amateur photographic communities as a phenomenon is more urgent than ever because many of these minor groups were poorly documented at the time, and the majority of their collections have been broken up, dispersed, or lost. These amateur groups show the unrestricted flow of photographic knowledge, often through exhibition, unimpeded by geography or language, and made possible by the efficacy of print communities. Some amateur societies and clubs were founded for specific specialisms, concerns, and aesthetic preferences in a variety of locations, while others evolved from learned societies and earlier forms of education.

The earlier trend of forming clubs and societies for scientific and associational activity reflected broader developments in national and global trade economies. The variety of local photographic clubs and societies, as well as the benefits they provided, served as a vector for new ideas, new values, and new kinds of social alignment, as part of a larger surge in new forms of national, regional, and local identity inspired variously by, for instance, learned societies, Victorian arts and crafts organisations, or medieval guild influences.

Yet, much of this associational world can be traced back to British culture in ways that have not previously been considered. However, these networks and influences cannot be contained within ideas of ‘national traditions’. To recover these voluntary associations and practices requires more to be done to map and research the impact of transnational networks on British amateur communities, and a shared history, not only with Euro-North American networks, but also with global south countries like South America, Asia, and Africa, especially in the postwar years following rapid decolonisation. It would seem timely to examine the culture of sharing ideas through the rich written world of photographic publishing; the work of foreign correspondents; the circulation of lantern sets and prints; and the mobility of photographers and artisans through transnational exchanges and rigorous theoretical and historical reflection. This will allow us to rethink the role of British culture in the development of amateur clubs and societies, and their wider historical relationships across national boundaries.

This symposium opens a critical conversation about the under-researched origins and evolution of photographic clubs and societies around the world, and outlines new agendas to research, theorise, and interpret the variety of historical amateur circles that brought together technology, science, and art to enable a constituency of dedicated non-professional individuals to learn from one another.

The keynote speaker is Professor Emerita Elizabeth Edwards who will talk about Photographic Sociability and the Dynamics of Association.

The event is supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art.

PROGRAMME
THURSDAY 26 November 2026

9.00–9.30 Registration and coffee
9.30–9.40 Welcome: Jason Bate, Birkbeck
9.40–10.10 Keynote Lecture (Chair: Jason Bate)
Elizabeth Edwards – Photographic Sociability and the Dynamics of Association
10.10–10.25 Discussion
10.25–10.35 Comfort Break

PANEL 1. CONSTITUTING AMATEUR COMMUNITIES (CHAIR: TBC)
10.35–10.45 Carolyn Bloore – The ‘Calotype Club’
10.45–10.55. Sandrine Chene – ‘When found, make a note of’. Photographic Forums in the Royal Photographic Society Journal
10.55–11.10 Peter Buse – The Liverpool Photographic Society and its Journal
11.10–11.25 Rose Teanby – ‘Ladies shall be eligible’: How the Photographic Society of London Helped to Promote Equality for Women
11.25–11.45 Discussion

PANEL 2. STABILISING AND TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES (CHAIR: TBC)
11.45–12.00 Alice Duncan – Framing Country: Amateur Photographic Clubs, the Australasian Photo- Review, and Settler-Colonial Ways of Seeing
12.00–12.10 Maria Manuela Gomes Gonçalves – From the Factory to the World: The Photography Section of the CUF Sports Group and Transnational Networks of Amateur Photography Under the Estado Novo
12.10–12.25 Jürg Schneider and Paul Weinberg – Was Afrapix (Also) An Amateur Photographic Club?
12.25–12.40 Discussion
12.40-13.40 Lunch (for speakers and chairs only)

PANEL 3. INDIVIDUAL-COLLECTIVE RELATIONS (CHAIR: TBC)
13.40–13.55 Sara Dominici – Developing the Self: Amateur Photography Between Home and Club Darkrooms, 1880s-1900s
13.55–14.10 Carolin Görgen – Archiving Sociability: The Los Angeles Camera Club Archives as Ecosystems of Collective Photography
14.10–14.25 Discussion

PANEL 4. CONTAINMENT VERSUS REGIONALITY (CHAIR: TBC)
14.25–14.40 Feargal Fitzpatrick – The Dublin Photographic Society: Tremors in the British Colonial Landscape
14.40–14.55 Ilya Leonov – Imperial Networking: Amateur Photography Clubs in Austria-Hungary, 1860s- 1900s
14.55–15.10 Michael Pritchard – 'no longer an appendage of the RPS': The Postwar Decline of the Royal Photographic Society's Affiliation Scheme for Overseas Societies
15.10–15.25 Discussion
15.25–15.40 Coffee Break

PANEL 5. THE GLOBAL ECONOMY OF PHOTOGRAPHY (CHAIR: TBC)
15.40–15.50 Julieta Pestarino – From Society to Photoclubs: Amateur Photographic Institutions in Argentina
15.50–16.05 Alise Tifentale – One Photographer, One Year, a Hundred Exhibitions: The Statistics of Ambition in Cold War Photo Clubs
16.05–16.20 Samuel Salgado Tello – Mapping an Invisible Tradition: An Ongoing Research Project on Latin American Amateur Clubs and the 1973 First Latin American Photography Meeting
16.20–17.00 Discussion

17.00 CLOSE OF SYMPOSIUM

Full details and registration by 24 November: https://www.bbk.ac.uk/events/event/65332/

The symposium will be held in a hybrid format; registered attendees will receive the Teams link a few days prior to the event.

Reference:
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