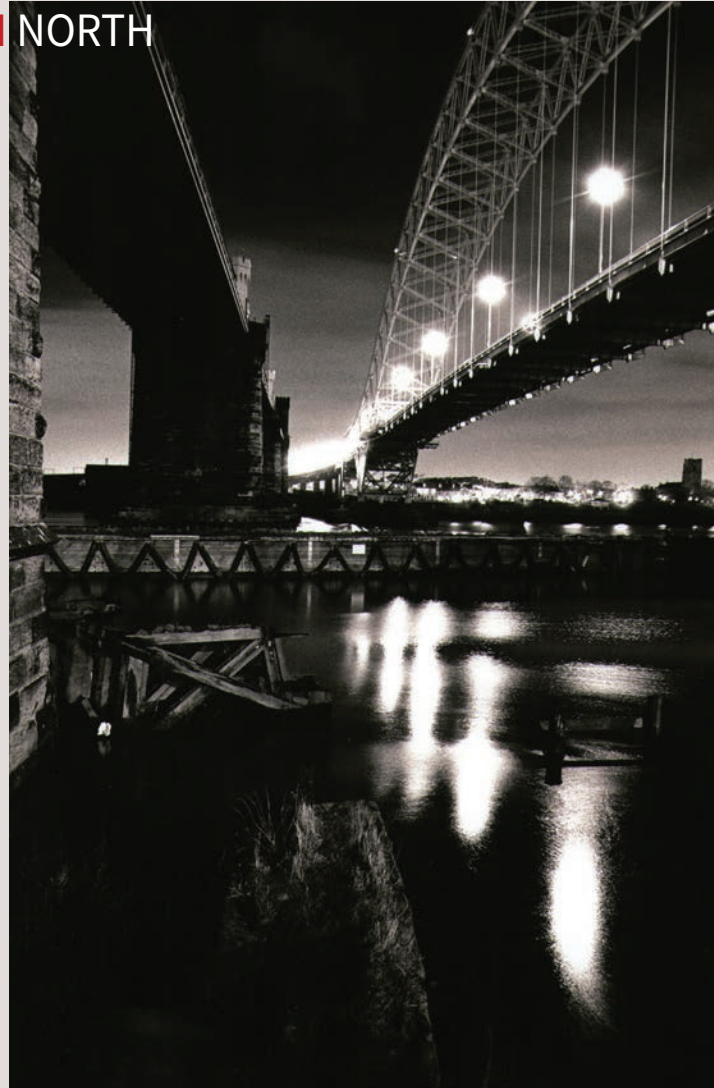


PHOTOGRAPHING THE ENGLISH NORTH

1890 - 1990



PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Bill Brandt
John Bulmer
John Davies
Ian Glover
Fay Godwin
Edward Chambré Hardman
Bert Hardy
Leeds City Council Collection
Michael Kenna
John Kippin
Sirrka Lissa Konttinen
John Macdonald
Tish Murtha
Martin Parr
Humphrey Spender
Chris Steele-Perkins
John Stoddart
Frank Meadow Suttcliffe

Curated by
Dr Ian Glover
with help from
Dr Keith W Roberts
at
Bolton Museum
Le Mans Crescent
Bolton. BL1 1SE

Cover Image
Runcorn Bridge, Cheshire
Ian Glover
1995

From 14th March to 26th April 2020



Tow Path, Blackburn, Lancashire,
England. 1984 © Michael Kenna.
Courtesy Huxley-Parlor Gallery,
London.

This short essay is designed to offer visitors to the exhibition some background information on both the artists who created the work displayed whilst discussing the reason for the show's inception.

Firstly, I think it is important to reflect on previous visual evidence, at this time in our geographical, historical and demographic development, as we leave the European Union to examine how the north of England has been represented by photographers. From the early Victorian ethnographic styles of recording from around the 1890s through to the broader, more varied documentary approach, including both people and places that display elements of the human interactions that have altered and shaped the north we live in today.

This exhibition was curated to present Humphrey Spender's *Worktown*, northern photographs as part of the wider view of northern photographic representation. For example Spender's outsider view, the view of a non-Boltonian sits comfortably alongside the outsider view of photographer Bill Brandt, who himself visited the English north, a place in the 1930s that might have appeared to him at the time as a strange land. A place of various colourful characters with unusual accents and towns full of sprawling terraced houses and industries of all types. But never the less these photographers and many more like them recorded northern life as they travelled through country, village and town, up from a then smoke filled London, through the English heartland and into the crucible that was the north of England.

Brandt's moody, people-less image titled *Coal miner's houses with no windows*, recorded in 1937 in east Durham contrasts against Spender's records of life at that period in Bolton. Both photographers depict the view of investigative outsiders sent to examine the condition of the north at a time of particular hardship. Something arguably visible today with the rise in the need for community-initiated support groups, an expanding demand for food banks and reduced government-led support.

Earlier views of the region form clues to the lifestyles and living conditions of people from the English north. Leeds city engineers photographed representations of poor housing as evidence to subvert the profiteering private landlords from as early as the 1880s in support of their citizens health and well being. Recording techniques quoted by John Tagg possibly adopted from Thomas Annan's earlier ethnographic records of Glaswegian slums areas, which had been presented in Leeds around the late 1870's. In contrast Frank Meadow Sutcliffe's more personally recorded Whitby views exude nostalgia to today's audience, with their tall ships and eclectic posed and non-posed seaside town scenes. Acutely reminding today's viewer of an earlier time when Whitby was a less tourist-driven location and a more economically viable seaport whose trade at that time, the manufacture of jet jewellery and fishing were of key importance.

This exhibition was formed through a mediation born from research that examined some of the expected as well as less expected views of the region. Michael Kenna is usually recognised for his almost Zen-based visual 'conversations' with globally-sourced subjects but his roots are forever sown in the north of England. Kenna's formative years included studying away from home at the seminary, St Josephs College in north Lancashire. Following his later creative education and establishment as a landscape photographer, he revisited the region of his formative years to explore and record night views thus presenting some of his earliest fine art representations. The results observed whilst walking through the dark and mysterious northern English urban landscape. northern paths were key to Fay Godwin's carefully crafted photographs, here the scene, a moody, almost surreal view

recorded at Top Withens noted for inspiring Emily Brontë's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*. A location also recorded by Brandt many years earlier. The photograph is part of a body of work that juxtaposition alongside personally themed poems by Ted Hughes, which were published in 1979 and titled *Remains of Elmet*. The writing was based on personal themes and was the region from which Hughes originated. The book presented an investigation introducing readers to this northern region, a once ancient site and one of the last Celtic strongholds, becoming later a somewhat legendary place that was said to have been a lawless retreat for brigands and folk who wanted to abscond from governed society through to a more recent, late twentieth century site of post-industrial revolution redundancy.

Many photographers have been drawn to areas of significant economic and social interest. Liverpool, once a significant global leader in ship-based transportation as well as shipbuilding and commerce made many press and news headlines during the late twentieth century due to its staunch labour force and later anti-conservative government posture. Before Martin Parr photographed his famous New Brighton terminus titled *The Last Resort*, in the 1980s he produced a series of earlier Liverpool (and Manchester) -based commissioned studies that examined the established and expanding Chinese communities. A subject covered by then *Picture Post* commissioned photographer Bert Hardy. Both photographers show crafted observations of life from an outsider view, Hardy and Parr both became established tour-de-forces in British photography. John Stoddart was another photojournalist who made many representative images of a broad spectrum of the city's people, here we see an untitled images with a group of men juxtaposed outside a social club based in the city offering a snapshot from the period. Stoddart was born in the city but moved away and worked globally shooting many famous faces and many that were less noted. Insider views were also recorded by E Chambrè Hardman, a photographer who's Rodney Street studio captured both portraiture and significant evidence of documentary landscape as viewed here in the form of an imposing view of *The Ark Royal* as she was under construction in docks at Birkenhead.

The north west of England featured in several series of work during the 1980s and 90s, John Davies presented views of industry, society and communication networks including the enclosed images that display his topographical observational style, which he notes is influenced through painting and earlier photographic influences. I have included a few of my less expansive and possibly more expressive views of the regions taken from a range of commissioned projects from the 1990s. The work was based on previous learning and influence from both Davies and Kenna who I had the privilege to learn from during my formative years.

Not far (geographically) from Brandt's coalminer's cottages is the northeast coast with its coal seams and ship building heritage. John Davies's, again topographical approach is almost always shot from above his subjects presenting carefully constructed, detailed accounts of his view of the subjects. Here we see Davies recording the disappearing coalfields at Easington and east Durham. A bit further north and one arrives at Newcastle upon Tyne, a location recorded by local photographers Tish Murtha and Sirkka Liisa Kontinnen. Murtha's early work followed development through David Hurn's Newport documentary course. The result of this visual preparation leading to Murtha presenting intimate views of teenage life from 1980s Newcastle upon Tyne. She lived alongside many of her subjects and presented an intimate, insider view of those she represented. Kontinnen, although Finnish by birth, arrived in Byker, an eastern region of Newcastle in 1973 and never left. She recounts how she became accepted, over time into the community and began recording the every day activities of the people who lived around her. The huge national economic and social changes that played out between the 1970s and 1990s impacted severely

on this close community, with the demise of major employers including the Tyneside shipyards. Kontinnen's work displays both the resolve and humanity of her subjects as they navigate the changing economic landscapes.

John Kippin responds to the traditions of northern documentary photographic practice through re-inventing its method, which involved pictorial landscape aesthetic influences, which integrate political and cultural themes. His work requires the viewer to examine the message apparent through visual symbols, text and careful positioning of his subjects. In many respects John Bulmer presented featured sequences of northern life, mainly for The Sunday Times Magazine that established the use of colour within the documentary genre and presented a more traditional view of northern representation. His work contains echoes of earlier black and white pieces presented by others but shifts the level of aesthetic through the use of bright colours, affording viewers a more realistic and relatable view of northern life. We also see this on many of the northern views of seaside beach life shot by Chris Steele-Perkins who recorded this image as part of his series The Pleasure Principle in 1982.

My visual contribution to the group presents shots made in the mid 1990s. Subject matter includes areas that had been known to me but in many cases not accessible. Having been commissioned to create bodies of work at that time, it allowed me to gain access to previously restricted locations. It is important to also mention that previous learning and training both through the academic system as well as in the line of site of both John Davies as well as Michael Kenna allowed for an established working method. In my experience I would advocate very strongly, to any up and coming photographer that a balance of skill, knowledge and awareness of subject should be accompanied alongside professional, practice-based learning. This gave me both insights into the practices of professional photographers and inspirational determination that really allowed continuity through times of adversity.

The images titled Bilge Water and Oil Slick were a series shot at Stanlow Oil Refinery near Ellesmere Port, a very controlled location during the 1900's. The piece titled Rock Savage was an earlier shot made to juxtapose the demise of the farming history of Runcorn against the development of chemical processing, specifically the Castner-Kellner separation process, which was established in the town in 1895. The final view is one I had been previously aware of since living near the Runcorn Widnes Bridge (from birth). Based partly on a fascination with the scale of the structure and partly based on an awareness of light and shadow and how these can transform common objects the image was the final version from a series of studies that began many years earlier. It should be added that none of the previous images were really that good but after years of trying I feel I achieved a satisfactory outcome.

Finally, with reference to the show as a whole, the selected images we see here were assembled as a small reflection of the much greater amount of work shot and presented that could be classed as northern. To be honest I initially wanted a much broader group of pieces but after discussion and debate, as well as funding allowances this fine selection of pieces was formed.

Written by Dr. Ian B. Glover



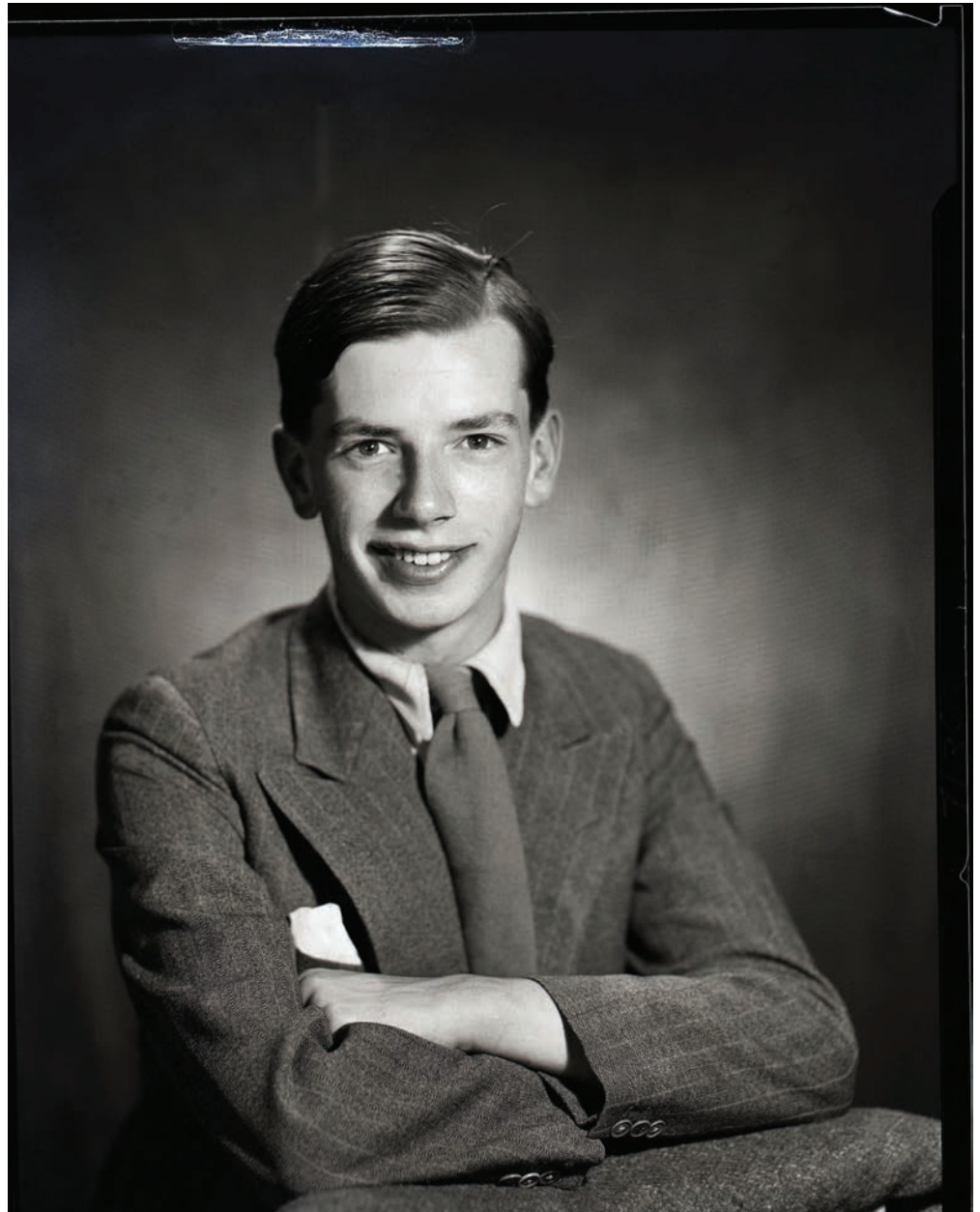
Girl on a Spacehopper from
'Byker', 1971, © Sirkka-Liisa
Konttinen, courtesy Amber / L.
Parker Stephenson Photographs

Born in County Dublin, Edward Fitzmaurice Chambré Hardman (1898-1988) practiced as a commercial portrait photographer in Liverpool between 1923 to 1966. Initially with his business partner Captain Kenneth Burrell, their first photographic portrait studio was based on the first floor at 51a Bold Street, Liverpool. Hardman (without Burrell) subsequently moved to 59 Rodney Street premises now synonymous with his practice in 1949, retaining the business name Burrell and Hardman Ltd.

His archive is now held at Liverpool Central Library, with the commercial portraiture component being owned by the library and the rest of the works, including his house and studio on Rodney Street, by the National Trust. Hardman's photographic practice can be split into two clearly distinct areas, including the commercial portraiture work he conducted on a day to day basis, and as previously mentioned, his landscape and topographical views of Liverpool and the North West, to which he more closely and personally identified with.

Hardman's commercial portraits tend to include those who belonged to the more privileged classes of society, potentially excluding those who might be considered more socially subordinate. A reason for Hardman attracting such clientele can be explained through the photographic process his practice employed. The use of large format film was an expensive method in comparison to paper negatives, which were more commonly used on the high street for photographic portraiture at this time, thus making his practice exclusive only to those affluent enough to afford it. It is therefore relevant to note that although the quality of the materials Hardman used has undoubtedly contributed to the longevity of the archive in terms of conservation, consequently the subjects photographed do not represent a cross-section of society in the geographic area of North West England, within where he practiced.

Written by Dr. Keith W. Roberts



George Melly, 1944
E. Chambre Hardman

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The University of Bolton Photography programmes; BA (Hons) and Master of Arts, as well as Graphic Design and Photography BA (Hons), offer students the opportunity to work alongside internationally recognised practitioners. The programme offers learners real work based experiences in the form of placements and industry talks as well as projects and study visits to meet and observe industry specialists.

The academic team are all industry specialists with high calibre experiences and expertise. This brings together a synthesis of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to the programmes, which is shared with the students. We offer a range of visits to education establishments as well as open days and practical activities for interested colleges who want to learn about our success as well as to offer opportunities to try out our cutting edge resources.

For further information please contact Dr. Ian Glover at ibg1@bolton.ac.uk or call 01204 900600.



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