

## Topfoto: from England to Europeana



0812968.jpg The line up for the 100 metres, 1896 Athens Olympics, Greece. ©TopFoto



The large fleet of cars on the quayside at Monte Carlo for the purpose of conveying tourists round the sights - February 1925  
TopFoto is an independent picture library based 45 minutes south of London in Edenbridge, Kent, England. The archive contains 10 million images from medieval documents to today's digital files being sent in by FTP from all over the world.

The core of the hardcopy archive comprises of 120.000 negatives from John Topham (an individual photographer and TopFoto's founder) plus millions of negatives and hardcopy prints from a variety of historic press agencies that have been collected by the current owner, Alan Smith, since 1975.

TopFoto supplies primarily editorial content to clients but is extremely diverse and its pictures are reproduced in all areas of visual publication. TopFoto was a pioneer in digitisation and electronic transfer and through new technologies has formed close links to international partners in over 40 countries around the world.



Holiday makers at Brighton 1937

TopFoto employs 15 people and prides itself on the specialist personal research service that it provides to clients. For the [EuropeanaPhotography Project](#), TopFoto is digitising negatives (mostly quarter plate glass negatives but including some very fragile nitrates) from its collection between the dates of 1890-1939. After adding metadata, it will make 60.000 images available on the [Europeana website](#).

TopFoto has identified four key collections to concentrate on for the project:

#### Central News, 1890 ? 1930

The collection was the picture library of the news agency of the same name est. 1870. It has world coverage and includes many masterpiece portraits of Royals and famous personalities from the era.

#### Alfieri, 1914 ? 1939 (c.20.000 relevant glass plate negatives)

Was a London based agency that supplied images to the weekly press and magazines. Although it had a global network it primarily covers London and the surrounding area with a specific focus on society and London life during this fascinating period between the wars.

#### Planet News, 1928 ? 1939

Contains a wide range of editorial news events from all over the world. This collection also has some isolated nitrate negatives on important subjects that we would like to rescue, including Russian spy trials and the Spanish Civil War.

#### John Topham, 1927 ? 1973

John Topham's legacy, the founding collection of TopFoto image library, is over 120,000 negatives of superb social history capturing the disappearance of rural life as the South East of England began to disappear under a swathe of concrete. The Arts Council of England funded a touring exhibition of his work, Memory Lane, curated by the Impressions Gallery in York, and his work is significant to the Imperial War Museum and the Museum of Rural Life, amongst others. Topham began as a policeman in the East End of London in the 1920s. When he sold his first picture for the equivalent of a week's wage, he quit the Force and from 1931-1973 he photographed, as he put it, the ?little things of life ? the way it really was?.



John Balean and Alan Smith during EuropeanaPhotography kick off meeting, february 2012

John Balean, international manager, is the key contact for the Digitisation Project at TopFoto; he explains about the work for [EuropeanaPhotography](#):

The job is already started with an excellent workflow, so that it is possible to process 300 images in an eight hour shift at a very high

resolution (40MP), thanks to Phase-One digital facilities. We have it set up to only scan negatives but in the downtime we could with extra equipment do flat art. (In the meantime flat art will continue to be done by flatbed scanners.) Our project requires and the practicalities of keywording limit us to 100 images per working day.

John has also given lectures and written about the picture industry including, Editor of the 2008-2009 CEPIC Image Trading International, Chair of Free Pictures ? Friends or Foes? at the 2009 CEPIC Annual Congress, a contributor to Photo Archive News ([www.photoarchivenews.com](http://www.photoarchivenews.com)), and as the Consultant Researcher to the Press Photo History Project ([www.pressphotohistory.com](http://www.pressphotohistory.com)): We have started with Alfieri and will follow this with Central News, Planet News and the early work of John Topham. All these archives are wholly owned and almost entirely exclusive. This will improve our margin and should create a honey pot for researchers who want to see unique and often never before seen images. These facts and the grant will obviously have a beneficial effect on our operation.

The first 500 images digitised for [EuropeanaPhotography](#) (from the TopFoto Alfieri collection) have now been added to [www.TopFoto.co.uk](http://www.TopFoto.co.uk).

If you want to take a look at some of the content please visit the page [here](#)

Learn more about the work Topfoto is doing in the [EuropeanaPhotography project](#) in the dissemination booklet ([PDF](#), 5,20 Mb)

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