



A Century of Love from an
**Unmarked &
Unremarkable
German Import**





In 1927 a remarkable young man aged sixteen bought himself a humble, unmarked and unremarkable imported German camera.

That man was Edward Reginald Simmons, but to me, many years later would simply be "Gramps". For the benefit of later generations, from here on, I will just call him Edward.

Edward gave the camera to me in the 1980s and it formed the nucleus of what I call the Living Image Camera Museum, currently with 177 exhibits as of December 2025.

The camera was very cheaply made, but likely represented a significant outlay for a young man with his first earnings. Being a cheap camera it only had embossed cardboard bellows, faux leather finish and a lens of just one eighth diameter of the focal length, or f/8 in photographic parlance. This limited the camera to bright conditions or acts of extreme optimism and long shutter speeds. It also had a light leak from new.

Despite this Edward used the camera for thirty years, finally retiring it in 1959, having recorded his granddaughter with it. By then the light leak was too bad to tolerate as film speeds were much faster, and an experiment with colour film went badly wrong with almost every image spoilt. As with many things it wasn't discarded, the camera was just quietly tucked away in a drawer and kept safe for a later date.



Edward died in 1993 and among his things was a shoe box bulging with photographic negatives, a handful of early format negatives, some later 6x6cm square negatives and hundreds of 6x9cm negatives taken with the unremarkable German import. It is those that form the basis of this album. There were, and still are, some 900 negatives in the box. In their day they were mostly "contact printed", that is the negative was placed in contact with the final print paper to produce a print identical in size to the negative. Whilst small, it was acceptably sized to see clearly and this was one of the advantages of this format. Few images were enlarged in those days, so these images have never been seen as such.

In reviewing these images many times since I became custodian, it's become abundantly clear as to the love of the photographer for his subject. And his subject is always the people around him. He achieved photographs of joy requiring an immediacy really beyond what the camera was capable of. I feel a little sad that my appreciation for this skill blossomed after Edward had long gone. The remedy is this album, my attempt to allow later generations to see his view of the world. Edward rarely appears, for he is always behind us, but his presence is felt strongly.

Many of the negatives were badly damaged, some were beyond saving, some poorly exposed - hardly surprising given the camera. Some were out of focus. The work here is Edward's, but I have endeavoured to recover the images to a size never seen in their day, have removed the dust and damage and in a few selected cases have colour tinted a number of them, just to celebrate their very existence. These images were not from an image conscious mindset, they lack any sense of pretentiousness. Many were taken in a back garden in Bristol, the tin lean-to, tired brick wall and rain streaked terrace over the back are the proud theatre set where Edward recorded the loves of his life, his wife Lily, his daughter Mary and his wider family. Also sporadically recorded were the ocean liners at Southampton, these were visible from his window as a young man, and the connection with them was clearly impossible for Edward to ignore. So I have included a number of these, as he'd have wished.

If you look closely at the images, you will see that the viewpoint is low, this is due to the method of composing the images via a waist level finder. The camera would be held at waist level and the photographer would peer into a tiny reflected view that gave a guide as to what was in frame.

The image on this spread shows the very camera as it would be held, against a backdrop of the Isle of Wight across the Solent, a scene familiar to Edward. This method is notoriously difficult to get a level horizon. I have resisted the temptation to remove faults in photographs caused by the camera, they are part of the story.

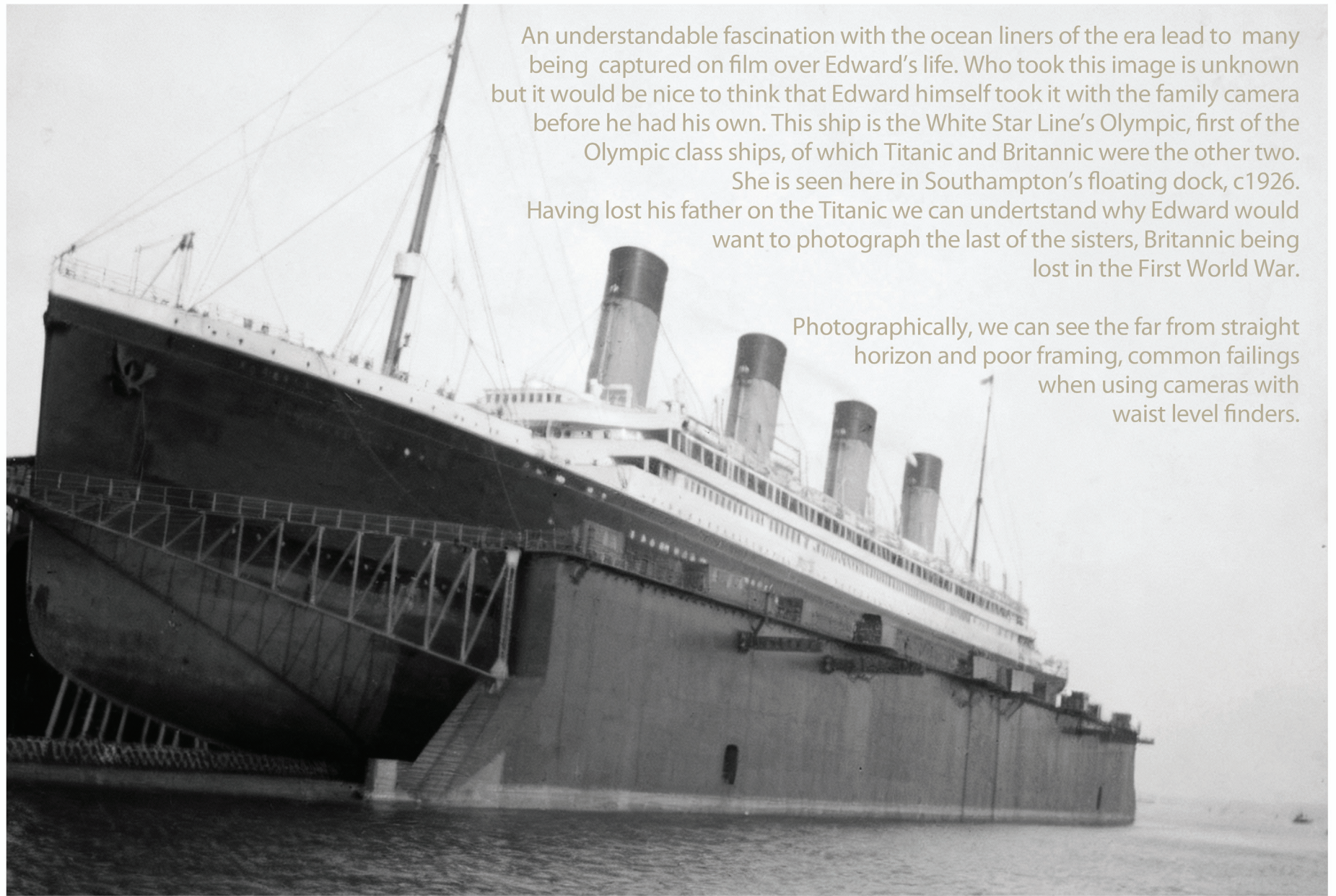
Keith South, December 2025

Among the negatives were a handful of 118 size on old cellulose base film. Badly degraded over time and poorly exposed originally, after much effort these two images were salvaged. Edward' half sister and brother, Dorothy and Donald, around 1925.



The negatives have done their job though and handed down enough information to allow this coloured version to be created in 2025, a full century later. The original negative is in such poor condition it was only after seeing the first mono version I realised that Dorothy was holding a doll so sweetly.





An understandable fascination with the ocean liners of the era lead to many being captured on film over Edward's life. Who took this image is unknown but it would be nice to think that Edward himself took it with the family camera before he had his own. This ship is the White Star Line's Olympic, first of the Olympic class ships, of which Titanic and Britannic were the other two.

She is seen here in Southampton's floating dock, c1926. Having lost his father on the Titanic we can understand why Edward would want to photograph the last of the sisters, Britannic being lost in the First World War.

Photographically, we can see the far from straight horizon and poor framing, common failings when using cameras with waist level finders.

A beach scene would figure prominently in Edward's later pictures as that was a cheap day out. Two 118 negatives yielded these images, with the top one colour tinted as never previously seen. I can't be certain, but I feel Edward's hand in this image. c1924

Below is "The Shore", a path and strip of beach just south of today's Millbrook railway station. This beach would later be buried during reclamation works to create Western Docks in the 1930s. In the distance can be seen many smoke stacks of ships at Ocean Terminal. c1922

Whilst none of these or the preceding images were taken with the 1927 German Import, They represent Edward's earliest exposure to family photography.





1927, Unmarked, unremarkable German import.

A cheap camera bought via a newspaper advert, likely The News of the World.

Pressed steel body, wrapped in faux leather.

Leaked light from new as countless images attest. The camera predates the widespread adoption of chrome plating from the mid 1930s, the bright parts being nickel plated.

Sealed cardboard bellows.

The collapsing bellows allowed the camera to fold down to fit a regular jacket pocket of the period. They also allowed the lens to be moved relative to the focal plane so the image could be focussed using a distance scale as a guide. Whilst high and medium value cameras had leather bellows, cheaper cameras made do with sealed linen and the cheapest had embossed cardboard, as here.

Waist level finder.

The only means to compose the image and results in the classic low level viewpoint seen in photographs of the era and throughout this album. The tiny view made it a challenge to keep the camera level.

Vario shutter, by AGC Gauthier.

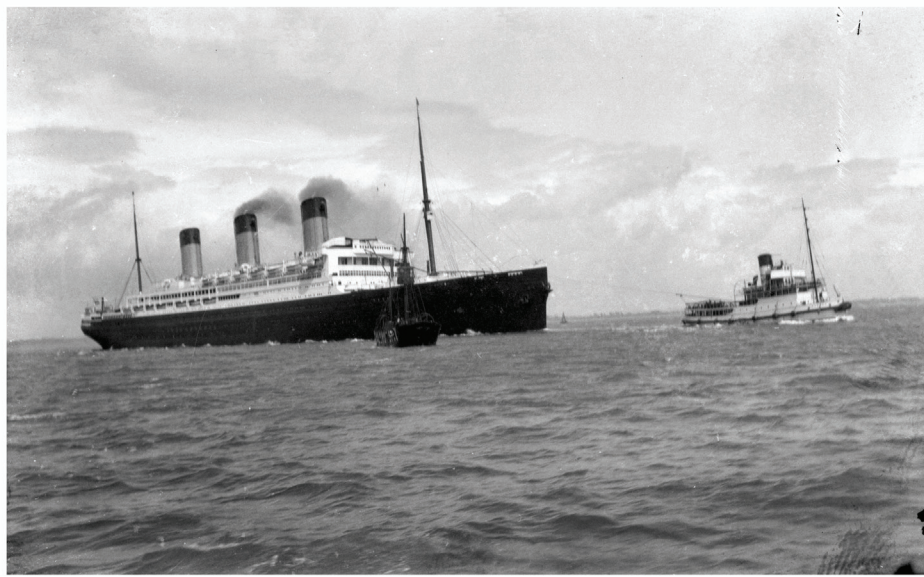
Very common mass produced shutter first introduced in 1912, By 1927 the design was outdated, being redesigned in 1929. The fastest shutter speed was a leisurely 1/100th of a second. The AGC logo is conspicuously absent.

Focus scale.

The material is an early man made material first known as Parkesine, a member of the celluloid family.

Spezial Aplanat lens.

The cost of this camera was very much the attraction, cost savings were achieved by fitting a slow f/8 lens, okay for bright conditions.



These appear to be the earliest images taken with the camera. Being unmarked I've always just called it the DRP, a reference to the only stamping found inside, and a German patent reference. From here on, I shall simply refer to the camera as "The DRP". Edward has recorded the RMS Majestic here. Laid down as the SS Bismark, she was ceded to Britain after WW1 to replace the Britannic lost to a mine in the Aegean Sea. At this time she was the largest liner in the world. The Solent Spit lightship is also seen.

Two images of Southampton pier. From the first image two clocks confirm the time at 11:27. The shadow from the tram gives a sun elevation of 51° at position 50.89N1.40W, Children are out and there are family groups, so a Sunday or Bank holiday. 1927 was recorded as notably cold summer, 1928 a hot one, so I'm guessing Sunday 29 July 1928 or Bank Holiday Monday 6th Aug. 1928



Tinted version opposite.





Photographs from c1932, 69, Regents Park Road. Edward's grandparents on his Mother's side, Martha and John Lucraft. Edward's negative has handed down enough information to see them in colour for the first time.

Edward has recorded his half sister and brothers, opposite top left. The same fence and location used for Martha and John are used as a backdrop for Edward himself, right. Below His mother Winifred, holds John - born 1930. The camera is now leaking badly. In 1932, Edward subscribed to Kodak Magazine, the influence reflected in the images of Edward. Below right, the camera has been stopped down, causing the vignette into corners, but records details better. The spectacular image, far right, would have been a challenging long exposure. I wonder who tripped the shutter?



Bristol calls, c1932

Edward took up a position in Bristol after completing his apprenticeship as an upholsterer. Here he met Lily Poole.



Perched upon Brandon hill in Bristol is Cabot Tower, built in 1897, celebrating the 400th anniversary of Henry Cabot's crossing to what we know as Canada today. Built by public subscription, entry to the tower to climb and see the view over Bristol was free. An attraction too good to miss.



Edward took these two views of Bristol from Cabot Tower in the early 1930s. I like to think he and Lily went there together. Maybe on their bicycles. Below Lily poses with her mixte framed 'cycle with Edward in attendance. Seemingly at ease with the family. The location, is Lily's family home at 30, Washington Ave, Bristol, it would feature prominently in Edward's photographs for the next quarter century taken with The DRP.





Colour tinting this image finally revealed the location to me, the board leant against the wall can be seen in other images. Lily and Edward together again in colour.





Bristol, c1933, from Cabot Tower - looking North East. The prominent structure is Wills Memorial Building.



Looking South East. At left in the distance is the Whitehall area of town where Edward's work was, and Washington Avenue.



At left are two of my favourite images Edward created with The DRP, there is a confidence in his approach here. Compositionally, they are quite similar with the eye being drawn to a position two thirds up and two thirds in from the left, a classic golden section. The location of the first is Snuff Mills, an area of parkland within Bristol City. The spatial perspective is glorious and the decision to focus on the fence as it drops over the rise is an inspired deliberate choice. The negative was well exposed and little interpretation was required to extract this image.

Then there is this masterpiece.

Love clearly brings out the best in us all, but this image is exceptional. There is no feeling that this image has been posed in any way. Lily walks towards us in spectacular elegance dressed for chores, a watering can in her hand. Taken in the Victorian terraces of Washington Avenue. The rain streaked buildings opposite backing onto Devon Rd, and the tin shed provide a set piece for this stunning photograph. Given the available light I suspect Edward was on the limit here, likely 1/25th at f/8. The resulting negative is bright and clear requiring no interpretation on my behalf. Just seen leant against the wall and in front of a sack, is a wooden planked board. The same board can be seen behind Lily's bicycle on a previous page, which is how the location of that image was determined.

This image is best in monochrome as Edward photographed it, but for later generations I am colour tinting it here as it's the only interpretation I am willing to give it, the original needs no work from me.





Edward and Lily married in 1935 and the wedding photographs were, perhaps unwisely, entrusted to The DRP. The conditions weren't in its favour, clearly blustery and rather dull. As ever it's all about people, rather than the need to find a spectacular backdrop.

The resulting negatives weren't that special shall we say, but were printed in classic contact fashion and served as the reminder for many decades. Stored safely for all this time they did have sufficient density to get these images, albeit with rather flat mid tones.

The image above was given the full colour treatment just to see what would come of it, opposite.





Edward and Lily had their honeymoon on the Isle of Wight and whilst there took scenic images and pictures around Carisbrooke Castle but I have selected these three. The image at left is probably earlier as it looks rather chilly, but it's likely 1935. Edward's study of Lily writing postcards is just wonderful and a colour tinted version has been created, right. Lily has captured Edward, below.



One of The DRPs issues was a persistent light leak, seen as the area of white in the bottom right of this image.





In 1934 Cunard and White Star line were forced to merge by the government as a result of the Great Depression. The deal involved financing the completion of ships that would become the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth in due course. This also led to the thinning out of the combined fleet. Two of the victims are seen here, photographed by Edward and The DRP in mid 1935. On the left is the Cunarder RMS Mauretania whilst on the right is the last link to Edward's father Fred, Titanic's sister ship, the SS Olympic, White Star Line.

Mauretania's masts have been cruelly truncated to allow her to pass beneath the Forth Bridge on her final passage to Rosyth for scrapping, she left on 2nd July.

No such indignity was meted out to Olympic whose last passage to Jarrow would start later on 11th October, 1935.

Edward was undoubtedly aware of this and has gone to the old shoreline not far from where the 1922 image had been taken, seen earlier in this album. Edward took four images under this sullen sky to make certain he had a record. It appeared as though he'd have liked them as a panorama, so I have joined two together.





RMS Mauretania and SS Olympic laid up in death row on a sullen day in 1935. The mud flats in front are reclamation works underway in what had previously been shoreline.



Edward with
daughter
Mary at the
Blighmont
home.

Winter
1939/40



A joyous sequence c1940, Mary,
Edward's daughter has arrived,
this likely being her first visit
to her Mother's home town of
Bristol. The Anderson Shelter
betrays the arrival of War.



Around 1936
Edward took
this delightful
image of Lily
with a bundle
of puppies.
One of these
Staffordshire
Bull terriers
would become
"Patch"



Lily and Ivy
being bridesmaids for their
sister Rose.





The Image of Lily holding the three puppies was too joyous not to give the tinting a go.



Hard to date this image of a shiny RMS Queen Mary, but she made her maiden voyage from Southampton on May 27th 1936. Edward's interest with the liners would have drawn his attention and he's made a thoughtfully composed shot here, albeit with wonky verticals, ever and issue with The DRP.





July 26th 1939 saw the arrival of Mary, Edward's joy is reflected in the sheer number of images thrust upon The DRP thereafter. The images are characterized by a marked change, - less set up and more spontaneous. The image above was taken in the new family home at 6, Blighmont Ave, Shirley, where Edward and Lily would remain for the rest of their lives. The DRPs light leak is sneaking into the bottom right corner.

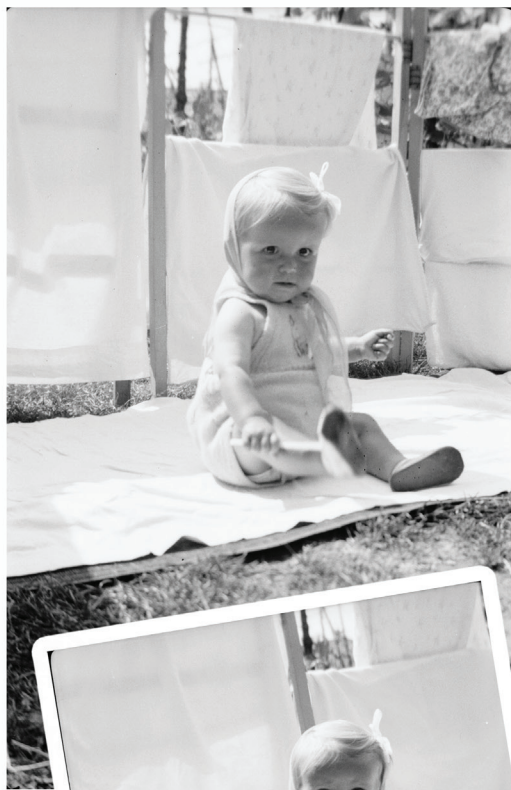


WW2 brings a freshly built Anderson Shelter in the background above, the first with Lily, Edward, Mary and Joan Poole.



Lily and Mary inside the Anderson Shelter. Ivy appears to be peering out from behind too.





The DRP comes out in bursts, when several images would be made or even an entire roll exposed. This group appear to be shot on or around Mary's first birthday, July 1940.

Patch, the Bull Terrier has grown somewhat from the puppy we saw earlier.

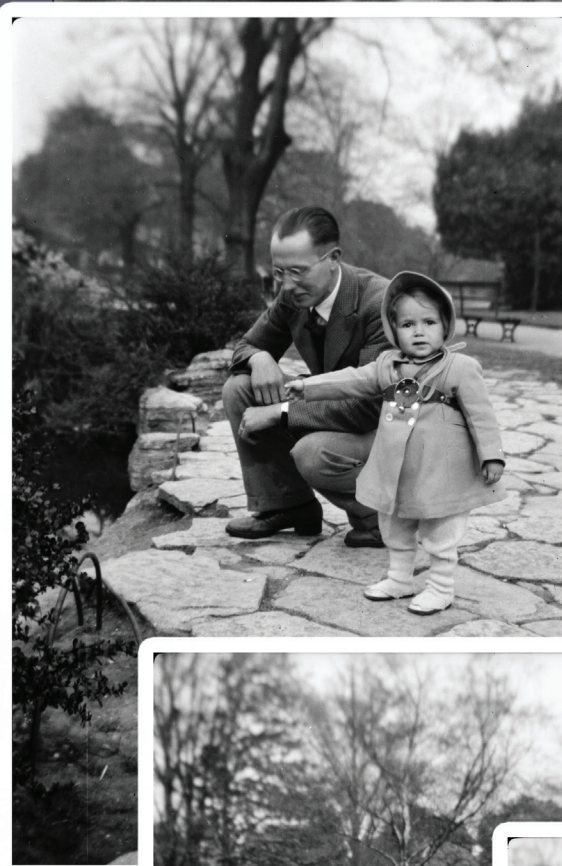




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 years old. Patch: lost Easton April
 6: £2 reward. Simmons. 30. Washing-
 ton Av., Easton.
 MISSING, Friday, black Persian half-
 grown Cat, white chest and paws;
 owner greatly distressed; reward.—18.
 Kingsley Rd., Redland.

These two images were taken on Southampton Common in the Summer
 of 1940, Lily, her sister Ivy holds a one year old Mary and Patch. Patch would go
 missing later in Bristol. Such was the desire to find him Edward and Lily posted
 this advert. It was found tucked away with the negatives. Patch was never found.

The DRP would only take eight pictures per film, one of the shortcomings of the 6x9cm format. Sometime in the winter of 1941/42 Edward and Lily took an entire roll of pictures at Andrews Park in Southampton. They took turns to be in the shots with a young, but mobile, Mary. Six of the shots are here.



The bubble session. A delightful sequence taken, as ever, in the back garden of 30, Washington Road, Bristol. Mary is playing with bubbles happy and care free. The date is likely Summer 1941, World War Two rages on, air raids are still frequent.



Edward can be seen joining in, looking closely at the original, the bubbles are being blown out of pipes, similar to old clay smoking pipes. A bubble is just emerging from Edward's. The large image reveals a reflection in the back window, possibly Lily.





Edward made the effort to grab this image of the RMS Queen Mary in the King George V Graving dock. The Queen Mary, made her maiden voyage late May 1936. Also visible in death row is the RMS Majestic, herself put out of service by the new ship's arrival. She was laid up in February 1936 and sold for scrap in May 1936. Before leaving for the Rosyth scrapyard, she would enter the King George V dock to have her funnels and masts cut down, but clearly they are attached here. So this interesting image shows the RMS Queen Mary just prior to her maiden voyage. Even though Majestic did have her funnels and masts truncated, she was reprieved and handed to the Royal Navy for a training ship, as HMS Caledonia. She served briefly from 27 April 1937 until 29th September 1939, when she caught fire and sank in the Firth of Forth.

The image at left is rather out of sequence, partly due to the trouble dating it. But I felt it had some historic value and Edward went out of his way to take it, so I ought to include it.

Mary Simmons riding the newly acquired, "Neddy".
c1942

Despite the war raging across Europe, Edward and Lily did their utmost to give Mary a happy childhood.

Edward's last subscription to Kodak Magazine had ended in 1935, and that year's editions remained unbound, likely as a means for the newly weds to focus on home life.





There is a marked absence of photographs from 1942 until the end of the Second World War in 1945. This image shows Mary in the front garden of 6, Blighmont Avenue, Shirley. Possibly around seven years old, would place this in 1945-46. It appears one pane of glass is missing from the window of the "Front Room". An entire roll of film would be used to record Mary's various dance costumes all created by Lily, and taken by the blossoming cherry tree



A little later in the year, as the tree is in full leaf.



Outside No.6, Mary sits astride Uncle Doug's Ariel Square Four, complete with sidecar. The lack of headlight shade suggests the war is over. c1946. The bike is a 4G version, available from 1936. Possibly taken the same day as Mary in the Garden, previous page. Ariel's tended to be red, so....



A noticeably more carefree approach to photography and life in general creeps into the images and regular outings feature.



The large image on right is lovely as the shadow is unmistakably Edward's.

It also has a striking resemblance to mine.



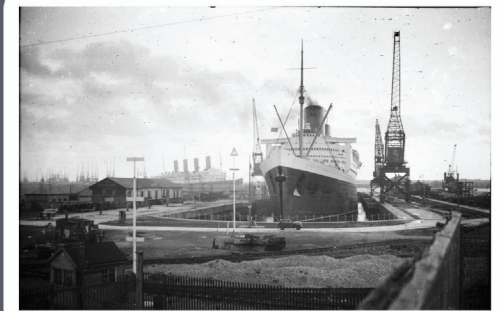


The beach figures prominently in family photographs in the post war era. The DRP is behaving itself, with few negatives ruined by the light leak, maybe Edward fixed it for a while.





Roddy replaced the lost Patch and this Kitten also joined the family at the No.6 Blighmont home. Sadly the Kitten didn't last long, but lives on in this delightful image Edward has made here. Posing Mary in the shade to soften facial shadows and keeping the black dog in the sun to maintain shape in his fur. The DRP is now 22 years into a long service. c1948



About the same time Edward makes another outing to the King George V Dock to snap RMS Queen Elizabeth. No accident that the Aquitania, last of the "four Stackers" is in death row.



RMS Queen Elizabeth and the Aquitania, around the first week of November, 1949. Aquitania went for scrap in February 1950.



Sometime around 1949/50, Lily's father or "Pop", as he was referred to, came to visit from Bristol. Trips to Southampton Common and Hythe Pier above.

At left is Lily and Mary at berth 50, or the BOAC flying boat stage, towards the end of BOAC's flying boat operations, in November 1950. The aircraft, or rather flying boat, is a Short S45 Solent. The only identifying mark to be seen is the letter I. Eleven S45s were Registered with an I, ranging from G-AHIL to G-AHIY. The clothes don't match from the other images so it's a different occasion.

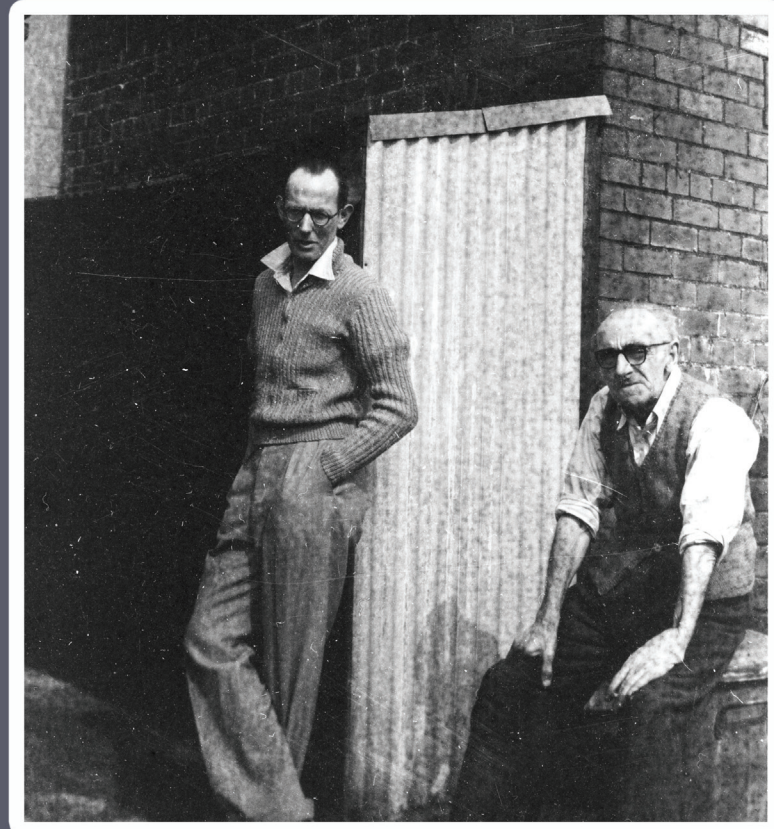


Mary, Lily and her father, c1952. The back garden at 30, Washington Road still features in the photographs, but now we see the evidence of Edward developing the films at home. Towards the top and bottom of the image is a band of cloudiness, caused by insufficient agitation during development, and the characteristic darker spots caused by the "apron" used in his bakelite Aro Tank. We can also see the repointing on the neighbour's brick wall has faded since 1939 and the outbuilding sprouted a gutter.

At right the same wall Lily had leant her bicycle against, and that path Edward had photographed her so elegantly twenty years before still form the set piece.

The DRP sees less use now, Mary has her own Ensign Ful Vue camera and family images are increasingly favouring either that, or a Dacora camera from 1954. The DRP is very much in its swansong.





Edward appears relatively rarely in general and this appears to be the only image taken with his father-in-law. Initially I thought these two images were taken on the same day. But the tin shed has been rebuilt slightly narrower and acquired an edging board in the second image, so is presumably a little later c1953/54.

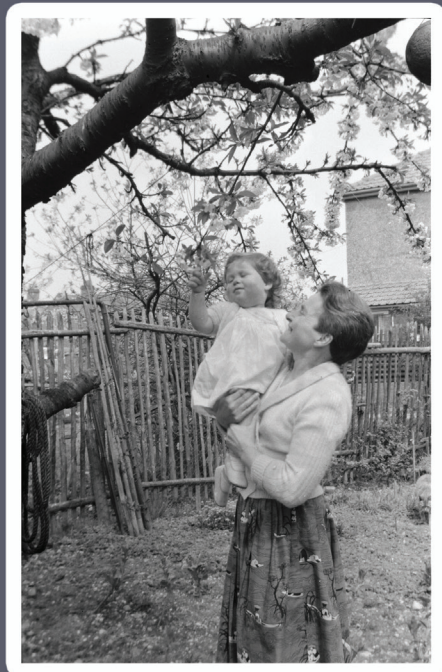


The DRP sees far less use but comes out for an entire roll again to record a day with Mary's French pen friend Françoise Duval,

The reason for the visit however is the arrival of Edward's granddaughter, Linda in November 1957. This must be soon after that.

Likely early summer 1958, Edward records Linda with her parents, Mary and William South.





This appears to be the last day that Edward used The DRP. He exposed an entire roll of monochrome film and then splashed out and put a whole roll of colour film through it, to record his granddaughter. Sadly the film was too sensitive for the leaky DRP and the entire film was fogged. To compensate, I have tinted some of the surviving monochrome images so that Edwards vision is finally realized.



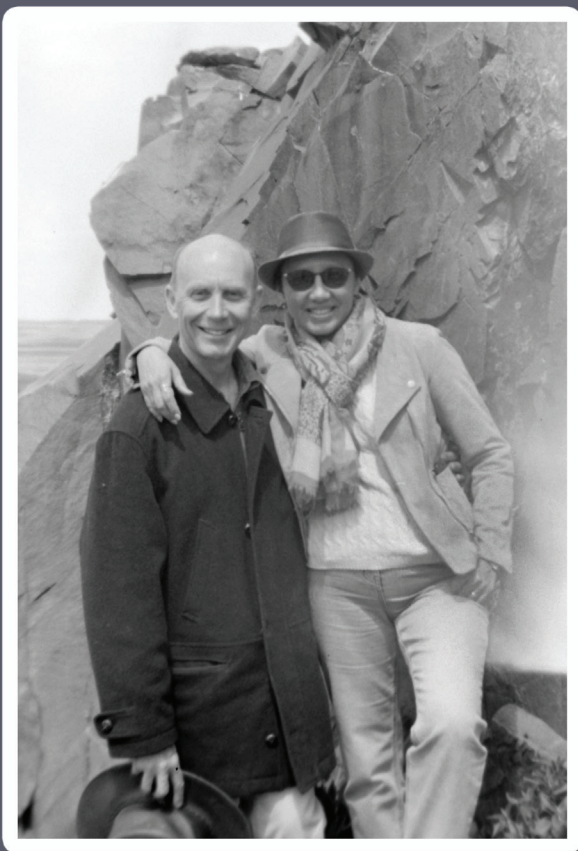
These and the preceeding page were likely taken in Spring 1959, completing thirty two years recording Edward's loves.

The colour image at left shows the same cherry tree Mary was photographed with in 1940, the Anderson shelter since demolished.

Edward's last glorious image with The DRP is Linda in the back garden of 6, Blighmont Avenue.

The DRP could now sleep.





Around 1987 Edward gave The DRP to me, his granddson, Keith, son of Mary. It joined a handful of cameras I had at the time.

Lily's Butcher's Cameo, Mary's Dacora and my own Praktica Nova B.

From these small beginnings would come many years of joy and learning, photography and camera restorations.

To celebrate its 90th birthday in 2017 The DRP was given an overhaul and taken to Kazakhstan where, despite the still present light leak, it photographed Mary at right and Keith with his wife Mai at the site of ancient petroglyphs.



Never say never... The DRPs not done yet

