

Henry Grant: London Street Photographer

Transcript

Henry Grant was a photographer with a passion for capturing everyday life on the streets of London. He began working in the 1950s, and over the next thirty years he recorded people's lives, from fashion to political protest, children at play and immigrant communities.

He was born into a well-to-do family in 1907. He refused to join the family's textile business, and turned to his camera to earn his living. He spent his career as a freelancer on assignments from magazines and newspapers. But he did much of his street photography in between assignments, taking pictures constantly, searching the city for stories and images that few others would consider worthwhile.

Grant was a committed socialist, and his pictures often contain a layer of social comment. By choosing to photograph poor East Enders or the unemployed, he was highlighting the harsh existence of people who would otherwise remain unseen. He was married to Rose Grant, a journalist on the communist newspaper, the Daily Worker. He took his camera to many political rallies and protests. He did not simply record the events, but focused on those taking part. More than just news images, he created portraits of the people in the crowd, giving a sense of them as individuals.

Henry Grant's visual style was all about spontaneity and movement. He tried to catch the way people behaved naturally as they went about their normal activities. He was prepared to wait until someone almost forgot the camera was there so he could take a candid shot. His skill lay in creating powerful compositions that captured the sense of what it was like to be there at that moment. When you look at his pictures, it's easy to imagine yourself rubbing shoulders with the people inside the frame.

Grant began his working life taking portraits of children and he had a real affinity for young people. Children were ever-present on the streets of post-war London, and Grant succeeded in recording them naturally at play. He was [a passionate believer in education as a vehicle for social change](#) and did a great deal of work for the Times Educational Supplement, chronicling developments in education.

Grant's socially aware style of photo journalism was influenced by Picture Post, a prominent British magazine of the 1940s and 50s. One of his trademarks was his awareness of social change. He was able to spot the areas likely to be affected by future transition, such as immigration, housing and technology. For instance, he observed the emerging Caribbean and Asian communities taking their places on London's streets. His shots of West Indian men show that he was sensitive to their experience of the weather, unemployment and social division.

The rise of youth culture was another of Grant's favourite topics. Teddy boys, rockers, hippies and punks all became his subjects. Grant was ever-present to view them at festivals, concerts or just hanging out 'on show' in the streets and cafes.

Grant was often drawn to the vibrancy and bustle of London's street markets. He turned the camera on the market traders and their stalls as well as shoppers, looking for fleeting expressions and stories evolving as they reacted to one another.

Although Grant's body of work is hugely varied, it is his street photography that is the most evocative. When he died in 2004 he left behind an archive of images telling the story of the hidden lives of Londoners. These pictures are important historical documents which allow us to understand how much our lives have changed over the years. Not only are his photographs visually stunning, but they provide richly detailed evidence of London in the twentieth century and how it became the 21st century city we know today.

This audio slideshow was Curated by Anna Sparham, Edited by Deborah Fajerman, Produced by Jason Webber and Narrated by Lynne Connell

Links on Exploring 20th Century London

Henry Grant: <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.70>

Picture Post: <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.170>

Demonstrations, 1950-1980:


<http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.22>





Children: <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.324>



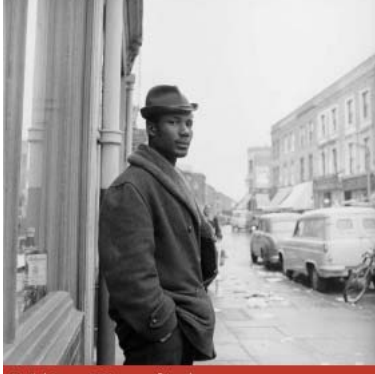


London Communities: <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.27>





London sub-cultures 1950-1980:






<http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conInformationRecord.219>





Caption		
<p>Men stand outside a Menswear store on the corner of Charing Cross Road, 1951</p>		<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6593</p>





<p>Cyclists pass through Ponders End station, Enfield, 1957</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6709</p>
<p>Trades Union Congress demonstration, Trafalgar Square, 1980</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6951</p>
<p>Bertrand Russell at the anti-Polaris protest, Whitehall, 1961</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6774</p>
<p>A man and boy at a Christmas 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament' vigil, 1959</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6743</p>

<p>Demonstrators outside Parliament, 1959</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=collectionObject.6702</p>
<p>A Bengali family demonstrate for Bangladesh's independence, Trafalgar Square, 1971</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=collectionObject.6883</p>
<p>A man stands on a street, Notting Hill, 1961</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=collectionObject.6770</p>
<p>Security Warden outside National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, 1973</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=collectionObject.6908</p>
<p>Dockers campaign in an east London park, 1951</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=collectionObject.6597</p>

<p>A boy plays on wasteland, East End, 1951</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6614</p>
<p>An elderly man begs in Cable Street, Stepney, 1951</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6617</p>
<p>Passers-by rest on the steps of the University of London's main building, 1952</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6634</p>
<p>Rail passengers on a platform in Waterloo Station, 1950</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6599</p>

<p>Children trainspotting at a London railway station, 1955</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6661</p>
<p>Children sit on steps in an East End street, 1954</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6674</p>
<p>Children play in the street with toy guns, 1963</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6844</p>
<p>Browsing a toy-shop window, 1955</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6693</p>
<p>Four boys play on wrecked cars parked in the street, 1967</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6846</p>

<p>'Punks' in a gathering at a park, 1981</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6952</p>
<p>A trader at Petticoat Lane street market, 1952</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6638</p>
<p>A man browses outside a bookshop, Charing Cross Road, 1951</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6700</p>
<p>Man advertising photographic services, Oxford Street, 1970</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6882</p>

<p>A boy flies a kite on the summit of Parliament Hill, Hampstead Heath, 1955</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6605</p>
<p>Bikers outside the Ace Café, North Circular Road, 1963</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6802</p>
<p>A young couple with a scooter, north London</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6838</p>
<p>Parthenon sculptures on display at the British Museum</p>	 <p>Digital Image © Museum of London</p>	<p>http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/server.php?show=conObject.6796</p>