

* The following is taken from the Introduction, Notes on Classification, and appendix sections of the [Mystery Photo](#) archival book.

"This book could be viewed as the catalogue for an archive of photographs that currently exists on the shelves of libraries across Nottinghamshire. The archive itself is the culmination of a project begun two years ago entitled 'Mystery Photo'.

All the Images were submitted by Nottinghamshire library-goers and all have in common a certain ambiguity: their content, meaning, or provenance is unclear, and will remain unexplained.

Notes on Classification

This project was influenced by many factors, both expected and unexpected.

On the Positive side, there was the challenge of attempting to fit inherently ambiguous images within the constraints of the Dewey decimal system.

More problematic, however, were problems arising from the gaps between what I expected and demanded of the system, and what the system was able to provide. Specific examples of these include the apparent lack of a centralized and 'universal' Dewey system applied consistently by all libraries, the lack of access to concise Dewey categories in a single volume (even for the heads of library archives), differences in terminology from one edition of Dewey to another, and overlaps in the semantics of numerous topics.

Occasionally during the archiving process I came to an image that seemed to require the creation of a specific category. However, in the early stages of this project I made the decision to only work within the constraints of the Dewey decimal system as was.

Librarians classify information according to a 'primary characteristic': in their assessment the most important aspect of that information. Therefore, although in many cases the viewer may not agree with my decisions, I feel that they have been made entirely according to this tradition of largely subjective classification.

Appendix

I made the Decision to include more than one category for each image, with the chosen one being highlighted, to demonstrate the thought processes

that went into their classification. This approach allowed me to suggest several categories that could be used to define each photograph, and seemed the best way of describing images of this nature. In much the same way as a list of synonyms in a thesaurus can describe many aspects of a given word.

It is of course possible that more appropriate categories exist for many of these images, though they were not available to me during the collation of the piece. If they exist, they would probably be listed within the nine hundred and ninety nine initial sub-categories (I.E. extraterrestrialworlds.999) but with several numbers after the decimal point. Some of these more specific categories are listed in the 'Crack the Code' index provided by the Library Education Service, but this is of extremely limited scope and only gives a peek into the breadth of the Dewey decimal system, for instance:

hobbies.collecting.790.132

There seem to be issues surrounding access to specific and detailed catalogues.

Perhaps further sub-categories (with three or more number after the decimal point) are so specific that they would be defined by the individual libraries' collections rather than by a 'universal' Dewey system? If so, then a 'library' should not be regarded as an archival system defined by its strict and universally accepted placements, as I had first thought, but as an independent collection (of its time) in which the Dewey decimal system merely suggests starting points for the exploration of subject matter.