

Picture Post

Another London: the photographs of Emil Otto Hoppé



Although one of the world's best-known photographers in the first half of the 20th century, Emil Otto Hoppé has become rather obscure. Like so many distinguished British photographers, he came from elsewhere (in this case Munich, where he was born in 1878), and adopted us. Arriving in 1900, he established himself as the most distinguished portrait photographer in Edwardian London, taking

memorable pictures of Thomas Hardy and Henry James. Then he turned to the stars of theatre and ballet. His next step was perhaps his most significant – he moved into the worldwide mass-market of illustrated magazines and trade books, becoming a photographer *par excellence* for the printed page.

In the 1920s and 1930s he produced a shelf-full of books on London – the photographs here were taken for these

publications. The backs of many of them are emblazoned with vivid stamps, many from the photo agency he founded, Dorien Leigh Ltd, originally at 90 Fleet Street. "Photograph on loan", a stamp announces, followed by "please acknowledge" and "valuable original do not damage".

Hoppé, who died in 1972, wrote of London with eloquence and affection in his preface to *The Image of Lon-*

don (1935). He recognised in London the contributions made by cosmopolitan incomers like himself: "It is as if the legions of people from other lands who came and helped to write the pages of her history cannot tear their spirit adrift, still clinging about buildings and ancient corners... In its casual large-heartedness people of all nations may feel at ease."

He also wrote approvingly of London's "secretiveness",

its teeming streets, and modernity – "the clean lines of modern architecture". One of his images shows a man standing in a tiled Tube tunnel. Bill Brandt once told me he had longed to photograph Alfred Hitchcock in just such a setting – but was never able to arrange the session.

A connoisseur of the informal theatre of London's pavements, Hoppé excelled at capturing hustle. Like Bill Brandt, he was alive to "the

steep contrasts of wealth and poverty". As a photographer, he relished the "subtleties of half-tones wrought by atmospheric conditions". He concluded by writing that, "Like a well-cut gem London has a thousand facets and in all of them is a picture."

Mark Haworth Booth

Hoppé's London is at the Michael Hoppé Gallery, London SW3, from 12 September to 7 October (www.michaelhoppégallery.com)

