

# bulletin



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# The photographic collection of the Banco de España Historical Archive

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The Banco de España Archive holds much of the paperwork that has been accumulated since its foundation in 1856, as well as that of the former Banco de San Carlos (1782-1829) and the Banco de San Fernando (1829-1856). Although some documents have been lost over the course of 230 years, a fairly complete collection of interesting documents has survived to the present day.

Photography was probably introduced to the Banco de España in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the period when it came into widespread use in Madrid, as well as in Spain more generally. Perhaps it was the immediacy of photography and the ease with which it could be used to take portraits that led to professional photographers being commissioned from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards to record anniversary celebrations and meetings of the shareholders and the governing council, and to capture the likenesses of high-ranking officials and visiting dignitaries. However, this is all speculation, as very few images have survived from those early days. And although it is possible to trace some early photographs because they were reproduced in newspapers and magazines, there must be many more examples that did not survive.

There is hardly any information about the use of photography at the Bank, little more than a few isolated news reports. Still, the current building, built between 1883 and 1891, already included a 'Booth for photograph' (*Camarín para fotografía*), whose specific function or exact location remain unknown.<sup>1</sup> In fact, we have no

record of there being an inhouse photographer until 1903, when José Irigoyen y Zabaleta joined the Bank as a 'photographer and reproducer of clichés and electrotypes of the Banknote Manufacturing Section'. We know that he was employed in this post until 1907<sup>2</sup> but stepped down due to the termination of his position. To the best of our knowledge, very few of the photographs taken by Irigoyen have been preserved, nor was there to be another inhouse photographer until Diego González Ragel joined the Bank in 1941. He was the Bank's photographer from 1941 to 1951 and was succeeded by his son, Diego González Mellado, who worked as such from 1946 to 1983.<sup>3</sup>

## Initial situation

The earliest photographs in the Banco de España Archive date from the 1870s and cover the Bank's administrative activities. Most of them have come down to us because they are included in files and documentary series, alongside written documents. From 1874, when the Bank was granted a monopoly for issuing banknotes, the first steps towards establishing the Bank's extensive network of branches prompted the first directors to send letters to the Gov-

ernor describing the buildings in which they planned to house the new branches. These letters were accompanied by photographs of the buildings, which were filed in the same folder. From 1905, photographs of employees started to be stored in their personal files. Seen together, these constitute an interesting collection of portraits taken by

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1. Main façade of the Banco de España headquarters in Madrid. 1891. Photographer: J. Laurent y Cía

photographic studios scattered across Spain. Likewise, from the 1930s onwards, institutional events gave rise to a whole series of photographs depicting shareholder meetings, receptions for senior officials, anniversary celebrations, visits by dignitaries and other events that greatly enrich our knowledge of the institution's recent history. However, these photographs have often been filed separately from the personal files of members of staff. It should be clarified that, although in some cases the photographic documents may have been separated from the textual documents during the filing process, this separation should not prevent the link between the photographic and the attendant textual document from being acknowledged by reflecting it in the descriptive records.

The photographs transferred to the Banco de España Archive had not been processed until the project to create a photographic collection got underway in 2013, being completed in 2018. In the descriptive work that the archive had conducted hitherto the existence of photographic material had been mentioned from time to time, but always in an insufficiently detailed manner, and thus the compass of the visual record remained largely unknown. In fact, most of the photographs were not even referenced in the descriptive data. In short, although the existence of the photographs scattered throughout the archive was recognized, its true value was not appreciated.

Furthermore, the storage conditions were unsuited to conservation, while user consultations jeopardized the order and, on occasions, the very survival of the photographs themselves. As a result, approximate figures of the number of photographs in the archive were largely based on inaccurate calculations. Indeed, the first estimate yielded an approximate total of 4,000 photographs, well below the actual number.<sup>4</sup>

### **The project to establish the Photographic Collection of the Banco de España Historical Archive**

In the belief that this material had more value than previously given, a decision was reached in 2013 to launch a project to identify, organize, study, describe and disseminate photographic material: in effect, to establish the Photographic Collection of the Banco de España Historical Archive.

The first line of action was to improve knowledge of the content, the photographic processes deployed,

and to identify the photographers involved. Therefore, description and classification were specified as the first step to identify the photographs and establish their con-

text. Given the risk of deterioration that the storage conditions entailed, a second task was to ensure the best possible long-term conservation, by controlling the environmental conditions and rules for handling and access. Digitization is a means of preventive conservation and was therefore regarded as being important from the outset. The third objective was to disseminate

information about the work being undertaken in order to promote the use of the images and their associated data.

Since photographic documents require more detailed description than textual documents it was decided to feature them in a dedicated archival collection. Thus, the photographic collection is made up of all the photographic documents that have been extracted from their original locations and are now assembled in a dedicated resource. To this end, a cross-referencing system has been established to preserve the links between the photographs and their original files. Dummy cards have been placed for reference in the files where the photographs once belonged. This, together with the annotations from the back of photographs, maintains the link from a physical standpoint.

The project involved various standardization processes, using national and international standards to generate the descriptive structures, including the General International Standard Archival Description ISAD (G), the Spanish Standard Archival Description (NEDA by its Spanish abbreviation), the International Standard Archival Authority Record For Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR (CPF)), the Standard for creating standardized access points for institutions, persons, families, places and subjects in the State Archives' archival description system published by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in 2010, the recommendations of the Spanish National Plan for the Conservation of Photographic Heritage published in 2015 and the Recommendations for cataloguing photographic collections (SEPIADES) published in 2003 by the European Commission on Preservation and Access.

Photographs analysed in context retain informative value. Given that the photographs originated in the Bank and belonged to specific series and files, they were classified and described bearing in mind the context in

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2. Hall for the Shareholders' General Assembly of the Banco de España headquarters in Madrid. 1891. Photographer: J. Laurent y Cía  
3. Cashier patio of the Banco de España headquarters in Madrid. 1891. Photographer: J. Laurent y Cía  
4. Main façade of the former Banco de España branch in Barcelona. [1933]



5. Trading patio of the Banco de España branch in Bilbao. 1923



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6. Deck of the trading patio of the Banco de España branch in Bilbao. 1923  
7. Main façade of the Banco de España branch in Sevilla. 1929. Photographer: Eduardo Rodríguez Cabezas  
8. Trading patio of the Banco de España branch in Sevilla. 1929. Photographer: Eduardo Rodríguez Cabezas  
9. Archive of the Banco de España branch in Vigo. 1929. Photographer: Enrique Sarabia González  
10. Trading patio of the Banco de España branch in Vitoria. 1929. Photographer: Antonio Salinas Pastrana  
11. Employees of the Banco de España branch in Alicante. [1936]



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12. Employees of the Banco de España branch in Tangiers. [1936]. Photographer: José Blanco  
13. Portrait of a Banco de España employee (Head of wardens). [1910]. Photographer: Orestes Calvet Salvatella  
14. Portrait of a Banco de España employee (Banknote operator). [1903]  
15. Portrait of a Banco de España employee (Cashier assistant). [1910]. Photographer: Photo Hall





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16. Portrait of a Banco de España employee (Office assistant). [1940]

17. Banco de España Board meeting with associated shareholders in Madrid. 1934. Photographer: Cristóbal Portillo Robles

which they were produced, rather than as isolated objects (National Plan for the Conservation of Photographic Heritage, 2015: 228). Therefore, and pursuant to the principle of provenance, which states that 'records should be kept in the records keeping unit from which they originate, and that unit in its place of origin' (Elsevier, 1964, cited by Heredia 1991: 32-34) the classification structure of the Photographic Collection replicates the classification structure of the Archive itself. Likewise, the names of the series of origin were kept and used as the basis for the description of the photographs, or sets of photographs, themselves. This has been interpreted by referring to the files to which they belong as well as by drawing upon the contextual information provided by the documentary series itself, and the organizational structure in which it originated.

The descriptive records of the photographs themselves have been enriched with the specific descriptive sub-elements of the photographic documents, which are not included in the ISAD (G) Standard. They have, however, been added to by the Spanish Archives Portal (PARES), which uses controlled vocabularies regarding medium, size, photographic procedure, photographic genre, state of conservation, etc. A detailed analysis of each of these sub-elements and their location can be found in the National Plan for the Conservation of Photographic Heritage (National Plan for the Conservation of Photographic Heritage, 2015:228-244).

One of the most interesting features for identifying photographic documents is the name of the photographer. This information is essential for studying the history of the photograph and determining its copyright under intellectual property law. To this end, and as part of the descriptive work, it was decided to create authority records of the photographers identified in the descriptive work. An international standard, the ISAAR (CFP), provides the records with a standardized data that allows exchanges between different information systems. During the execution of the project, nearly 600 photographers were identified from all the Spanish cities where the Banco de España was established, providing an interesting glimpse of the activity of Spanish photographic studios in a specific period.

The project includes the design of a long-term conservation strategy for the collection, bearing in mind the physical characteristics of the photographs: polarity, photographic procedure, hue, the primary and secondary medium, format, state of conservation and damages. Rules for the handling of original prints are now in place which stipulate the use of conservation materials which are compliant with the ISO 18916 international standard to ensure

long term conservation. The project has successfully passed the internationally recognised PAT (Photographic Activity) test developed by the Image Permanence Institute. Storage rooms have been conditioned with air conditioning systems that guarantee stable temperature and relative humidity, and fire-proof, custom-made furniture coated with inert paint has been installed.

To conserve and disseminate these photographs to the optimum degree, the entire photographic collection has been digitized. The characteristics and technical guidelines of the digitization plan are in line with officially recognized practices and international standards that provide for the long-term preservation of digital objects and interoperability with other systems. The digitization of the original prints was carried out manually on overhead scanners complying with the ISO 19264, FADGI and Metamorfoze standard, which sets out the international quality standards that digital images must meet to be digitally preserved. The digitization process resulted in the creation of a master file for preservation purposes and a secondary file for dissemination purposes for each scanned object. The master files for positive prints have a resolution of 400 dpi and for transparency films and negatives, a minimum resolution of 3,000 pixels along their longest side. The secondary file is generated from the master file in JPEG/ISO/IEC 10918:1994 format with medium compression, optimised for the web and with the Banco de España watermark embedded. The digital objects are accompanied by their corresponding metadata in xml files, in accordance with the internationally recognized METS (Metadata Encoding Transmission Standard) and PREMIS (Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies) schemas. Among the main advantages of METS-PREMIS filing system is the structured grouping of descriptive, administrative, technical and preservation metadata of the digital objects that can be preserved in a single file.<sup>5</sup>

Archives are primarily information dissemination services. All the processes carried out would be meaningless if, once completed, dissemination did not take place (Martín Suquía, 2013). For many years, there has been a growing awareness that archives must stop being places where staff wait for users to enquire about their collections; on the contrary they should become cultural hubs that engage with society and showcase their records. These two approaches are different, and the implementation of policies favouring one or the other yield different outcomes in terms of the number and the kinds of users they attract. For the Banco de España Archive, the dissemination of its collections is a priority. That is why the activities planned for the photographic collection aim to reach as wide an audience as possible through:

- Publication of the digital images and their metadata in the Banco de España's institutional repository.
- Publication of a catalogue raisonné with a selection of the most relevant items, both in print and in electronic form.
- One-off publication of particularly significant items (in print and in electronic form). The book, *First photographs of the Banco de España building (1891)* was published in December 2019.<sup>6</sup> This publication focuses on the first photographs of the current Banco de España headquarters in Madrid, taken in 1891 by the prestigious photographic studio of Jean Laurent.
- Temporary exhibitions on the history of the Banco de España in which photographs play a useful explanatory role.

### Content of the Photographic Collection

Work on the project has helped us to understand the collection of photographs held by the Banco de España Archive. We have discovered that this collection comprises 20,500 photographs whose primary interest lies in the way such a vast collection reflects the life of the institution from a wide range of angles. Broadly speaking, and without seeking to be exhaustive, three groups of photographs can be differentiated by theme. Each one comprises around 7,000 photographs taken between 1874 and the present day.

The first group of photographs depict the Bank's buildings. This collection consists of the photographs of the buildings owned by the Bank in Madrid, as well as its seventy regional branches in Spain, and its three Moroccan branches in Tangiers, Larache and Tetouan. The coverage stretches from circa 1874, when the first branches were set up, to the present day. It reflects the transformation of the buildings over time, providing a record of their original appearance as well as the various makeovers they have undergone, often to the degree that they change out of all recognition. Some images depict other areas of the cities in which the Bank held its premises, these are of even greater documentary interest, given the changes that have

taken place over time. All in all its usefulness as a record of the architectural heritage of the Banco de España is beyond question.

A second group of photographs concerns employees. From 1905 onwards pictures of employees began appearing in their personal files, a practice that became increasingly commonplace over time. This set of photographs is interesting because it shows how the techniques and styles of photographic portraiture evolved and, given that the Bank's employees were assigned to branches across Spain, we encounter the photographers who worked for leading photographic studios across the length and breadth of Spain.

The last group of photographs is made up of an interesting record of the celebrations and events organised by the Banco de España itself, especially from the 1930s onwards. Among the pictures preserved are shareholder and governing council meetings attended by the Governor, the Deputy Governor and the Council Members; building inaugurations attended by Bank executives and civil, church and even military officials; official visits by the governors of other central banks; international symposia; bank meetings; inaugurations of governors and other executives; etc.

### Conclusion

It can therefore be said that the Photographic Collection of the Banco de España has brought to light previously unpublished images and hitherto unknown data of great informative, historical, and cultural value, which for the first time will be available to the public. The forthcoming online dissemination projects will allow this photographic material to be widely used as a primary documentary source, possibly opening new avenues of research and increasing the number of users of the Banco de España Historical Archive's collections.

All photographs: @ Banco de España Historical Archive

1 Banco de España Historical Archive (AHBE, by its Spanish abbreviation), Secretariat (Sec.), Minutes of the Building Committee.

2 List of job posts for 1907; AHBE, Secretariat, Leg. 1838, where it says he stepped down from his post due to the elimination of the position, 'although his services could be used if they were needed in the future'. He had been appointed by the Council on 23 October 1903.

3 List of job posts for 1941, 1951, 1955, 1983

4 In 2013, when we were first considering how to process the photographs in the Archive, we got in touch in Ángel Fuentes de Cía, who provided his invaluable and unstinting help on this and other occasions. One of the first questions he asked was about the number of photographs we had estimated. We answered: "Around 2,000". With a trace of irony, he replied: "You may have a few more". Indeed, there were many more, as we will soon see.

5 Biblioteca Nacional de España (2015).

6 Available at [https://www.bde.es/bde/en/secciones/informes/Otras\\_publicacion/primeras-fotografias-del-edificio/](https://www.bde.es/bde/en/secciones/informes/Otras_publicacion/primeras-fotografias-del-edificio/)



18. Shareholders' General Assembly of the Banco de España in Madrid. 1934. Photographer: Cristóbal Portillo Robles

19. XIII Monetary Conference of the American Bankers Association, opening in Banco de España in Madrid. 1966. Photographer: Manuel Aumente Menéndez



20. Official visit to Spain by Karl Klasen (governor of the Deutsche Bundesbank, central bank of the Federal Republic of Germany). 1970  
21. Official visit to Spain by Karl Klasen (governor of the Deutsche Bundesbank, central bank of the Federal Republic of Germany). 1971  
22. Banco de España Board meeting in Madrid. 1992

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