



A rare view: One of the 109 photographs taken of his family by the Earl of Craven on his estate near Newbury, Berks, in the mid-19th century

Earl's family album may fetch £700,000

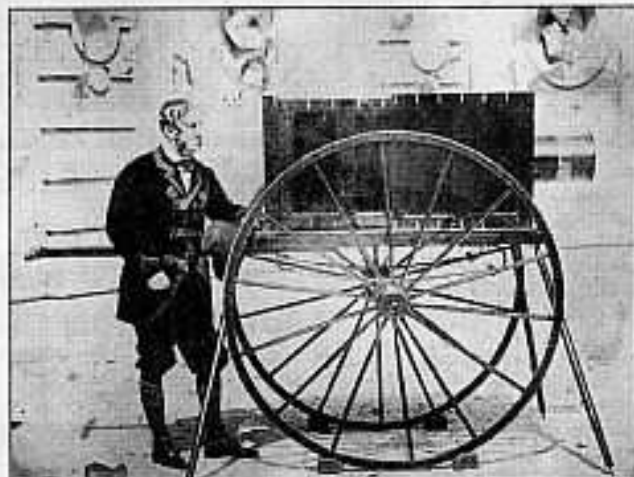
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A COLLECTION of pictures by one of the pioneers of Victorian photography which have not been seen in public for almost 150 years could become the most expensive family photo album ever sold.

The 109 photographs taken by the Earl of Craven in the mid-19th century and kept in a red goatskin leather album are expected to fetch up to £700,000 when they are sold by the auctioneers Bearn's in Exeter on May 12.

The photographs, many of which depict the earl's children and scenes on his estate near Newbury, Berks, provide a rare and fascinating insight into the life of the landed aristocracy in Victorian times.

William, 2nd Earl of Craven, was a talented eccentric and one of a group



The earl using his horse-drawn hand-made camera

of gentlemen enthusiasts who produced some of the finest photographs of the 1850s and later became founder members of the Royal Photographic Society.

He travelled around Britain with a huge hand-made camera in a specially

built photographic van drawn by a horse. He crouched in the back coating the film with chemicals and peering through a lens poking through the coachman's seat.

But this album, which has remained in the possession



The album's first page

of his descendants and was shown in public for the first time by Bearn's in London yesterday, contains the personal photographs of a devoted family man.

"It is a wonderful collection of images of his children whom he adored

and who adored him," said Robin Barlow, chairman of the auction house.

"The pre-sale estimate of £500,000 to £700,000 reflects the rarity and quality of the photographs," he added.

The Earl suffered from poor health in his final years, partly because he inhaled a noxious cocktail of chemicals including mercury vapour during the developing process.

He died from a stroke in 1866 aged 57.

"In a sense the album is a sort of valedictory study by him before his health began to decline," said Mr Barlow.

Although the album will be sold at a traditional live auction at Bearn's, potential buyers will be able to enter bids on the internet via icollector.com up to 24 hours before the sale. They will have to be registered users of icollector.

Web Link
icollector.com and bearnes.co.uk