

Crowdsourcing helps CERN to identify archive pictures

November 7 2014, by Rosaria Marraffino



"That's not a pipe; it's an image of a pipe" according to a helpful member of the public. It turns out the image shows the power entry for the Big European Bubble Chamber (BEBC) Credit: CERN

CERN recently asked the public to help to identify some of the pictures

in the laboratory's archives. The initiative was a great success; the articles bounced around the web and a number news sites covered the story.

CERN archivists, like true detectives, had to collect clues, follow leads and investigate every trail. So far, they have identified the subjects of all the pictures we published, thanks to the support of the hundreds of people from diverse backgrounds who responded with suggestions by email. Some of the comments we received were very precise. For example, the image that we captioned with "An extreme close-up of... something" was identified by a member of the [public](#) as "A large direct-current machine, probably a generator but possibly a motor; the picture shows part of the commutator, two brush holders, a portion of the risers (the conductors that connect the commutator segments to the armature coils) and part of the armature."

Other comments were less serious, such as: "Nice job! Actually one of my [close friends](#) looks like one guy on your photos. [He resembles him] so exactly, that he was surprised himself. Like a 100% match. Now we call him Inspector 26-12 as shown on a sign at the photo. You captured a time traveller."

Or this: "That's not a pipe. It's an image of a pipe," a reference to "La trahison des images (link is external)", by Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte. For this picture: "One's a circle, and one's triangle. You're welcome, happy to have gotten the ball rolling on this." One more, referred to this picture: "I can see the inner components of a Flux Capacitor. Hopefully they're more efficient than the original design; 1.21 Gigawatt is quite a lot of power, after all" (a reference to Marty McFly's DeLorean time machine in the 1985 movie Back to the Future).

This digitisation project is a joint effort between the Collaboration and Information Services Group (IT-CIS) and the Scientific Information

Service (GS-SIS). So far, all the photos published by CERN have been identified, but the project is ongoing, so do join in and keep up the help! You can email the archive at photo.archive@cern.ch (link sends e-mail). There are thousands of [pictures](#) whose subject still needs to be identified - such as this "dusting" image below - and plenty more stories to be told!



The "mystery inspector" - an unidentified image from the CERN archive. Credit: CERN



Dusting - but for what? Credit: CERN

Provided by CERN

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