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Roger Mayne's photos of youthful spirit in postwar Britain

The Courtauld Gallery's first ever photography exhibition celebrates the work of the Cambridge photographer, with his focus on emerging youth cultures in the 1950s and 1960s

Young people were at the heart of the postwar photography of Roger Mayne. Born in Cambridge in 1929, his pictures form a visual record of the emergent British youth cultures of the Fifties and Sixties.

Mayne's obsession with cameras and the photographic process began while studying chemistry at Oxford University. After teaching himself the basics, he started training his lens on real life. He became fascinated by Southam Street in north Kensington — not far from his home in a more upmarket part of the city — in the heart of an overcrowded slum full of crumbling, bombed-out Victorian houses. Mayne visited the street 27 times from 1956 to 1961. "My reason for photographing the poor streets is I love them and the life on them," he said at the time. One of his most renowned images, *Girl Jiving, Southam Street*, bears testimony to Mayne's ability to capture the innocence and ebullience of young people living in challenging circumstances. Much of Southam Street was demolished in the late Sixties to make way for Ernő Goldfinger's brutalist Trellick Tower.

Mayne died at the age of 85 in 2014. He had been influential in helping photography to gain acceptance as an art form. Fittingly, his work now forms the first ever exhibition of photography at the Courtauld Gallery.

Roger Mayne: Youth is at the Courtauld Gallery, London WC2, from Friday until Sep 1