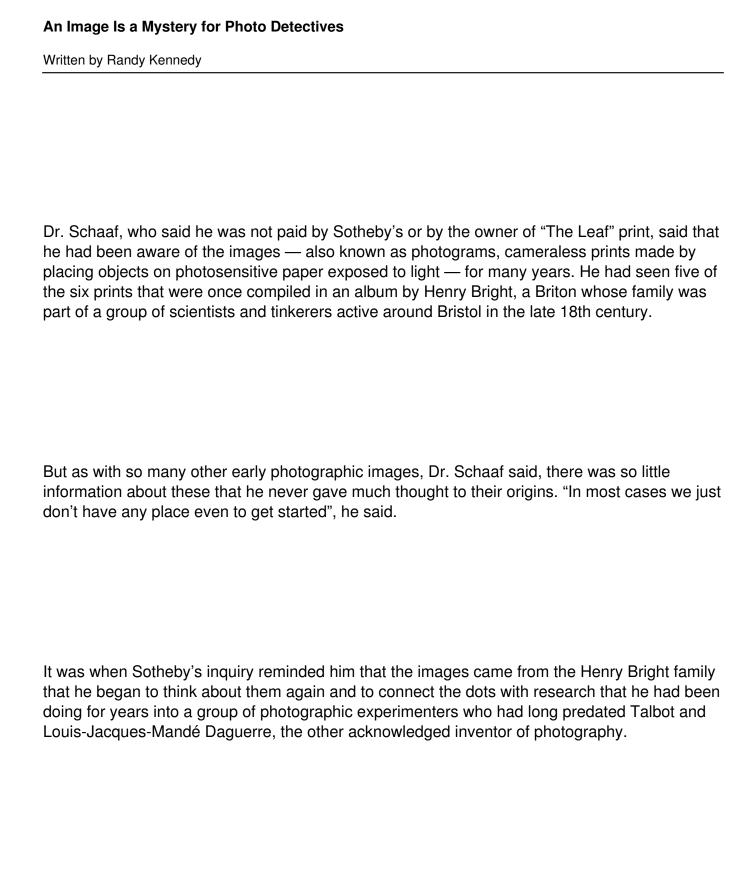


The phone call was routine, the kind often made before big auctions. Sotheby's was preparing to sell a striking rust-brown image of a leaf on paper, long thought to have been made by William Henry Fox Talbot, one of the inventors of photography. So the auction house contacted a Baltimore historian considered to be the world's leading Talbot expert and asked if he could grace the sale's catalog with any interesting scholarly details about the print — known as a photogenic drawing, a crude precursor to the photograph.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I got back to them and said, 'Well, the first thing I would say is that this was not made by Talbot,' " the historian, Larry J. Schaaf, recalled in a recent interview.

## An Image Is a Mystery for Photo Detectives



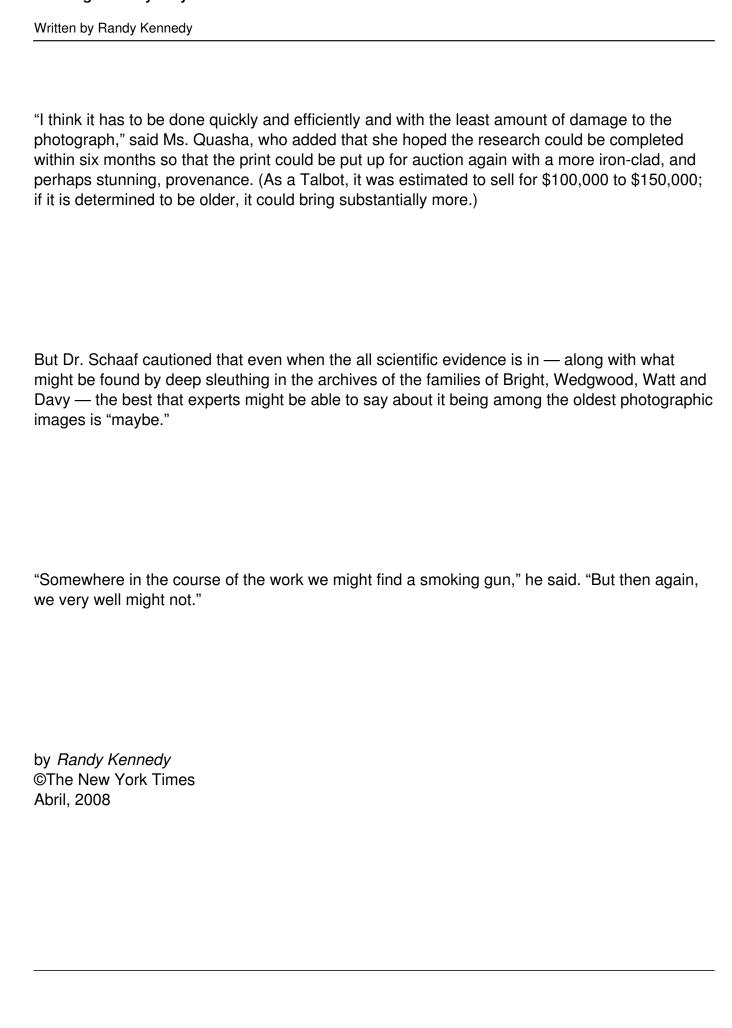


Probably in the 1790s, according to accounts written shortly afterward, Thomas Wedgwood, a son of the Wedgwood china family, began experimenting with what he called solar pictures, making images on paper coated with a silver nitrate solution. A friend of his, James Watt, wrote in a 1799 letter that he intended to try similar experiments and in 1802 another friend, Humphry Davy, wrote an account of Wedgwood's experiments in an article for a scientific-society journal, titling it "An Account of a Method of Copying Paintings upon Glass, and of Making Profiles, by the Agency of Light Upon Nitrate of Silver."

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## An Image Is a Mystery for Photo Detectives Written by Randy Kennedy

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