

## 12. Wider horizons (1889-1896)

By the first half of the 1890s Dexter's, Smith's and Wright's studios dominated the town's photographic market. All three were well established: the Dexter family had been in the business since the 1850s, the Wrights had been operating since the 1860s, and Smith, the relative newcomer, had been in the High Street for ten years. The Dexter and Wright studios had moved into the second generation, and Smith, too, was a second-generation professional, though in his case the first generation had practised in Brigg, rather than Lynn, and may have been more figurehead than hands-on photographer.

The earlier generation could, of course, have still exerted some influence after handing over the reins, and in Smith's case, his father's name remained above the door throughout his career. Now, though, the elders were fading away. As has already been noted, Smith's father, Thomas, died in 1889, and his widow passed control of the business to her son in the early 1890s. In 1891 William and Sarah Dexter were back in Regent Street,<sup>1</sup> where their photographic career had begun, and they were 'living on means'.<sup>2</sup> Their son William, who had never married, was still with them. Though several years younger than her husband, Sarah died first, aged 70, on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1895. She was buried three days later.<sup>3</sup> The local press noted her death, but made no comment and carried no obituary. Yet she had been one of the town's photographic pioneers and was active some years before the advent of cartes de visite. In the early days, the couple's studio had often been referred to as 'Mrs Dexter's Portrait Rooms', and Sarah's personal attention had been presented in advertisements as the studio's particular strength.

Later that year, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, came the death of Robert Wright, of Hillington Square, aged 69.<sup>4</sup> His passing, too, was listed without comment. He seems to have been the quiet man of Lynn photography, surviving the years of aggressive competition without becoming engaged in the tit-for-tat advertising that characterised them. His studio had appeared only once in the public record, and that reference was incidental. A runaway horse 'plunged up on to the pavement opposite the shop of Mr. Wright, photographer, and not only damaged the railings but inflicted some severe injuries upon itself.'<sup>5</sup> As for Wright in person, any public notice of him was not as a photographer, but as a staunch and prominent member of his church, as when, at the 1885 anniversary of the Shouldham Methodist Sunday School, 'a sermon was preached by Mr. Wright of Lynn'.<sup>6</sup> He had not sought personal attention, and his aims were perhaps modest, for he was content to target the less affluent section of the market; but he laid the foundations of a business that would flourish well into the next century.

The principals of the town's three leading studios were now firmly setting their stamp on their respective businesses. All were still relatively young: at the beginning of the decade Walter Dexter was 41, John Smith was 39, and Jasper Wright was only 28. Each had learnt the trade in the family business, and Dexter had the additional experience of running his own studio for a period in Wellingborough. They were capable and they had some cause to feel confident, but they were not to have things entirely their own way.

There were competitors, albeit competitors who made a rather limited impression on the market.

Photographers at 4 London Road came and went. Charles Weale occupied the studio at the very beginning of the 1890s, but he was soon replaced by John Henry Hall, who in turn gave place to Hewitt.<sup>7</sup> Mrs C Brown briefly ran the East Gates Studio. This was listed at '91 Norfolk Street, opposite Railway Road' in the 1895 Lynn almanac,<sup>8</sup> and was therefore open in 1894; but an East Gates Studio mount of perhaps a year or two later gives her address as 59 Norfolk Street.<sup>9</sup> Mrs Brown herself cannot be firmly identified and could be any one of several candidates. Only two examples of her work have so far been seen, and one of these (showing an ill-at-ease young man wearing a jacket that is too small for him and frayed at the cuffs) suggests she was serving the lower end of the market. The mid-90s also saw the first trade directory entry for the Bridge Street business of John Skerry,<sup>10</sup> who will be returned to in a later chapter.

Then there were others who were described as photographers, but to whom no studio can be ascribed at the time. Three of them were noted in the 1891 census. All were single and in their twenties; all were living as boarders; and none had been born locally. Lewis Drake, aged 26, originated from London and was one of the lodgers living in St Nicholas' Street with builder Tom Smith and his wife.<sup>11</sup> Edward Roberts, 25, came from Wrexham and was staying in Friars Street with the widowed Harriet Harris.<sup>12</sup> Either or both could have been employed as an assistant in one of the towns established studios; either or both could have been an itinerant photographer who was passing through. The third, William Reynolds, aged 22 and born in Suffolk, was lodging at The Goat in Friars' Street.<sup>13</sup> Although he would eventually run his own studio, he was currently a 'photographer's assistant and would remain so for some years. He was probably already employed by Smith, as he certainly was four years later, in 1895.<sup>14</sup>

One other photographer makes a single appearance in the records of these years: he was Thomas Borrmann Gibson of 3 Purfleet Street, who, in December 1896, registered a picture for copyright at Stationers' Hall.<sup>15</sup> He was entered as both copyright owner and copyright author of the image, but there is no certainty that he was ever a professional photographer. Gibson was a bill poster,<sup>16</sup> perhaps connected with the *Lynn News and County Press*, which was also based in Purfleet Street. The picture for which he sought protection was recorded as 'Photograph of sandwich boy entitled *The Young Advertiser*', and may have been taken for trade promotional purposes. It seems that Gibson should not necessarily be regarded as a competitor in the studio market.

There was even one would-be photographer who fell even before reaching the starting line. When the Board of Health's General Purposes Committee met in May 1893 to consider the photographic aspirations of Mr R. Toombe, they 'recommended that his application for the erection of a photographic studio should not be complied with.'<sup>17</sup>

On balance, therefore, it seems unlikely that Dexter, Smith and Wright were particularly hard-pressed by competitors in the early-to-mid 1890s. John Henry Hall was probably the only studio professional who was in business long enough to make much impression on

the photographic scene, (though his use of Charles Weale's old mounts has perhaps reduced his impact on the consciousness of later generations). Yet the three main photographers still had each other to contend with, and they had to move with the times to be sure of keeping their market share. In portraiture, close-up vignettes had become the order of the day. This was the universal trend, and surviving examples show that the Lynn photographers did their fair share of following the fashion. Cabinet prints were now, nationally, ousting cartes de visite from their position of dominance, and Lynn's practitioners were certainly producing cabinet prints in greater numbers than before. Cartes seem, nevertheless, to have retained a strong place in the public's affection, and it may even be that they remained popular in Lynn for longer than in some other places. All three studios were putting out a steady stream of competent work: they were not all aiming at quite the same segments of the market, but they were all doing a sound professional job. Exposure times were now short enough for subjects to feel less strained, and Lynn's sitters generally had reason to be satisfied with what they had bought.

Walter Dexter embarked on the new decade with two businesses still to run. The 1891 census showed him as 'photographer and fancy dealer', living with Emily, his wife, five children and a servant at 109 High Street.<sup>18</sup> This was the address of the fancy goods shop, and, as already noted, fancy goods tended to dominate Dexter's press advertisements in the early nineties. The studio, if mentioned, was briefly referred to at the end of the copy, but this was not necessarily an indication of a waning interest in photography. Some photographers (like Woodhouse) had advertised regularly; others (like Robert Wright) had shown no interest in publicity beyond securing a mention in trade directories. The Dexters, over the years, had not been afraid to advertise, but they had done so irregularly, as and when they thought it was called for. Walter Dexter may, therefore, have thought the Blackfriars' Street business needed little promotion. He was, after all, both sought-after and respected as a photographer. When in 1893, for instance, he was commissioned to supply Lynn's Oddfellows' Lodge with a portrait of a past officer, 'as a memento of his valuable services', it was felt that 'the work reflects great credit upon Mr. W. S. Dexter, to whom the order was intrusted',<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Dexter's continued commitment to studio photography was amply demonstrated by an announcement in April 1895.

Dexter's New Photographic Studio and Fancy Repository, 23 to 26 High Street, King's Lynn, The Largest and Oldest Established Business in the Eastern Counties. (Under Royal Patronage.)<sup>20</sup>

The two businesses had been brought together again at one address, and photography was given pride of place. The grounds for claiming royal patronage are not known, but the advertisement's other claims, though sweeping, may well have been justified. High Street premises were numbered consecutively rather than alternately, so the new address took up four notional shop spaces. Even allowing for some shared occupancy, this was indeed generous accommodation. Number 23 alone classed as one of the High Street's more impressive buildings, offering space on three floors, a generous provision of large windows, and a yard and outbuildings that could have been useful for printing and

storage<sup>21</sup>. As for ‘oldest’, it is hard to find an East Anglian photographic business that had been longer established. The Dexters are believed to have opened their first studio in 1853. John Sawyer opened his first Norwich studio at the very end of the same year,<sup>22</sup> and that business had transmuted into Sawyer and Bird in 1871<sup>23</sup> and Albert E Coe in 1883.<sup>24</sup> Coe could reasonably claim continuity dating back to December 1853, but the Dexters may well have started operations earlier in the year. In Colchester, the long-standing photographic business of Benjamin Monson was still thriving, but he had set up shop at some time in 1854.<sup>25</sup> It is possible, therefore, that Walter Dexter had some justification for his claim to run the region’s ‘Largest and Oldest’ studio operation.

The advertisement went on to give some details of the current Dexter offering.

Cabinet Photographs from 5/ the half dozen. C. de V.’s<sup>26</sup> Photographs from 5/ the dozen. Midgets (Promenade) from 3/6 a dozen, two positions. Views, Groups, Copies and Life Size Photographs. The Best Selection of Local Views. Pictures Framed on the Premises in Every Style.

The price of cartes had not changed, but cabinet prints had been reduced by sixpence, and both formats were still popular. They had however, been around for a long time, and photographers were looking for a new way of presenting portraits that would catch the public imagination. The breakthrough would not, in fact, occur until the arrival of the postcard format at the beginning of the new century, but in the meantime a variety of new shapes and sizes were launched, and Dexter’s midget prints fell within this category. As elsewhere, they probably proved to be of some novelty value, without actually finding a secure place in customers’ hearts.

The announcement ended with an enumeration of the items for sale in the other part of the shop.

The Most Varied Stock of Albums, Leather Bags, Bibles, Prayer Books and Hymn Books, Dressing Cases, Desks and Workboxes, Combs and Brushes, Stationery, View and General Fancy Goods. New Show Room for Toys, Dolls, &c. Large Assortment of Stove Screens.

‘Most Varied Stock’ was clearly no understatement, and variety was also a feature of the framing side of Dexter’s business, as an advertisement later in the year made clear.

Pictures of all kinds framed on the premise. A Large Selection of Gilt, Oak and Fancy Mouldings (newest designs) Always in Stock.<sup>27</sup>

Jasper Wright, on the other hand, seems to have reduced (or even phased out) the fancy goods side of his business. At the very least, he was not promoting it in his rare advertisements. That element of his trade was still being mentioned in the late 1880s, when, almost as an afterthought, he referred to ‘A choice assortment of Photo Frames, Albums, and other Fancy Goods.’<sup>28</sup> Even then, it was the portrait-related items that were

specifically mentioned. For Wright, diversification had to do with life in general, rather than simply with his business.

In 1891 he was living with Emma and their first three children – Levina<sup>29</sup> May, Robert and Jasper – at the studio in London Road.<sup>30</sup> In the following years the young family continued to grow; and the studio business appears to have grown too. At some point between 1891 and 1894 Wright was able to expand his activities into the adjoining premises at number 126: on census night they were occupied by Robert and Rose Callaby, but a few years later the studio address was listed as 125 and 126 London Road.<sup>31</sup> (Frequent references to number 126 in succeeding years are evidence that the additional accommodation was retained.)<sup>32</sup>

There was, however, a shadow cast over the business in the summer of 1895. Wright had given a job as studio trainee<sup>33</sup> to 14-year-old Ernest Bouch, a fisherman's son.<sup>34</sup> Late one June afternoon the boy and his friends had gone to a hayfield on the banks of the Nar Valley Drain to swim. Later, after tea, Ernest returned to swim alone, but got into difficulty. According to the press report, two teenagers, Maggie Hammond and Florence Starling were watching from a bridge and 'saw him go underneath and come up and throw his hands up, but he did not shout or struggle, and they thought there was nothing the matter with him'. They were wrong, for 'about a quarter of an hour later the deceased was found in the water close to the bank'. The inquest came to a verdict of accidental drowning.

This event was disturbing to Jasper and Emma on more than one level. Not only was the victim one of Wright's staff – and evidence from later years will suggest that Wright was no distant or forbidding employer – but the witnesses both had (or soon would have) connections with the family. By 1898 Maggie Hammond was one of Wright's photographic assistants,<sup>35</sup> and she may already have been working in the studio. Florence Starling had been living in the Wrights' home as general servant in 1891<sup>36</sup> and may have still been there. Certainly a more than formal relationship existed between the two families, for on census night 1901 Florence's younger sister, then 18 and a pupil teacher, was staying with Jasper and Emma as a guest rather than an employee.<sup>37</sup> Both the drowning and the unwitting witnessing of it will have shaken the Wrights and their circle.

In studio matters, meanwhile, Wright continued to develop his empire beyond Lynn. The Long Sutton studio had been fairly short-lived and the Downham Market venture did not survive beyond the early 1890s. But in an 1896 advertisement he listed his branches.

East Anglian Studios, 125 London Road, King's Lynn; Station Road Fakenham; Market Place, Swaffham; and (during the season) The Pier, Hunstanton.<sup>38</sup>

The Fakenham studio lasted some time. It had first been advertised in 1887<sup>39</sup> and it was still in business around 1908.<sup>40</sup> The Swaffham branch survived at least three or four years into the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>41</sup>, as did the seasonal studio that targeted the holiday market at Hunstanton. In short, Wright was building a modest but effective chain of studios. It is therefore understandable that his advertisement struck a confident note.

Artistic Photography. 6 Valid Reasons Why all People should be Photographed by Jasper J. Wright. ...

1. Because Wright's Artistic Photography is unique.
2. Because it is beautifully finished and absolutely life-like.
3. Because Wright adopts the most perfect processes.
4. Because these produce magnificent results.
5. Because Wright's charges are strictly moderate.
6. Because Jasper J. Wright is the popular Lynn Photographer.

Kindly Note the Fact that All Photographic Work Executed at Jasper J. Wright's is under the Personal Supervision of the Principal Himself.

Wright clearly liked the tone of this, for he used the same copy for almanac advertisements over the next five years.<sup>42</sup> In using the word 'popular', incidentally, he may have had something more than 'well-liked' in mind. Without the stridency with which William Woodhouse had claimed to be 'the people's photographer' some thirty years earlier, Wright may have been nominating himself as photographer to those of limited means. The prices quoted at the end of his advertisement – prices that were held until at least 1901<sup>43</sup> – certainly show that, as ever, photographs by Wright were a little more affordable than those of his main competitors: 'Note prices – Cartes from 4/- per doz. upwards. Cabinets from 8/- per doz. upwards.'

Photography was not the only art to which Wright was devoted. The naming of his first son in 1888 gave an obvious clue: the lad was called Robert William Handel.<sup>44</sup> Outside the studio Jasper Wright was a very able and versatile musician. Since the early 1880s he had been in charge of church choirs in the Methodist circuit,<sup>45</sup> and the importance of this aspect of his life had become very evident by the turn of the decade. In 1889 he conducted a cantata performed by an orchestra and chorus drawn from churches and chapels across the town,<sup>46</sup> and in 1890 he conducted an 80-strong choir in the first concert of the Lynn Musical Union,<sup>47</sup> and another of the cantatas of which Victorian audiences were so fond.<sup>48</sup> When not managing choirs and orchestras, he was available on the harmonium as accompanist<sup>49</sup> or leading the Methodist string band.<sup>50</sup>

By 1889, too, he had joined with Walter Owen Jones, a professor of music and organist who was some fifteen years his senior,<sup>51</sup> to form Jones and Wright's Orchestral Band, which would go on to perform at many local events. It was in its early days, however, that the band attracted national attention, when it found itself entangled in the affair of the contralto and the coffin.

Towards the end of 1889 a Miss de Warren Fitzhugh arrived in Lynn and set about making herself known in respectable society.

She was attired in mourning, seemed to be of good address, and freely entered into conversation with her newly-formed friends upon various subjects, principally music. She told them that she was a vocalist to the Prince and Princess of Wales, and produced a circular upon which "Miss Warren de Fitzhugh"

appeared in conspicuous type. With the aid of this she sought professional engagements as vocalist (contralto), but stated that she could not accept them without receiving “Royal assent”, as she was not expected to be “too far away from their Royal Highnesses”.<sup>52</sup>

Naturally enough she got to know Jones and Wright, and they were keen to make use of her abilities. She came, after all, with the highest credentials, and there is no doubt that she could sing. She rehearsed with their orchestra and, in the weeks that followed, performed a number of solos, including ‘The Lost Chord’, at two of their Sunday afternoon concerts. She also showed an inclination toward good works, establishing a fund to give a dinner to poor children of the town and receiving ‘subscriptions in furtherance of the object varying in amount from trifling sums to 10s.’<sup>53</sup> Miss de Warren Fitzhugh was fast becoming prominent in the town’s artistic and charitable endeavours.

Her public and private faces were not, however, aligned. At the beginning of her stay she had taken very respectable lodgings at the Temperance Hotel, and she paid her account promptly at the end of the first week. After that, the bill began to build up.

When it reached £7 Miss Hall, the proprietress, pressed for payment, and her lodger then said she was daily expecting a cheque for the rental of some property at Hastings. Ultimately it was announced that the cheque had arrived, but a further delay ensued, owing, as the lodger said, to mistakes occurring in the making out of the cheque. After an interval, during which the cheque was supposed to have travelled several times between Lynn and Hastings, the lodger stated that, after all, “it was crossed,” and that that the Mayor had consented to give her one of his own cheques in exchange for it. Then the lodger became ill, and declared her inability to cash the cheque which the Mayor had given her.<sup>54</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Miss Hall was by this time thoroughly suspicious, and Miss de Warren Fitzhugh made a sudden recovery and disappeared without paying her bill.

She didn’t go very far, for she was next heard of at Wolferton, a village forming part of the Sandringham estate, lodging in an elderly labourer’s cottage. It was at Wolferton, almost in the shadow of her alleged patron’s country retreat, that she was arrested by police officers from London on the charge of ‘obtaining a coffin under false pretences’.

Miss de Warren Fitzhugh turned out to be Eliza Ann Fitzhugh, and she did not work for the Prince or Princess of Wales. (The royal couple did employ a Miss Fitzhugh, but she was a housemaid at Marlborough House.) The unpaid bills in Lynn were merely recent additions to the unpaid bills she had left behind in London.

When her father died, Eliza and her mother had incurred a series of debts, including the cost of Mr Fitzhugh’s coffin and funeral, together with long-running accounts with a baker and a dairyman. She had also borrowed money from a dispensing chemist and the manager of a department store’s music department.<sup>55</sup> In securing credit she had routinely traded on her alleged position as singer to the Prince and Princess of Wales, and she had

also made much of her supposed attachment to the Duchess of Cambridge. One of the loans was, avowedly, to buy mourning for the duchess' funeral, which 'she was wanted to attend by the authorities of the Royal household'.<sup>56</sup> Mrs Fitzhugh had joined wholeheartedly in the attempts to enhance Eliza's credit rating, and she had told the undertaker 'that the late Duchess of Cambridge was very partial to her daughter, and had asked the Princess of Wales "not to forget Lizzie"'.

The two women were duly tried at the Old Bailey, where the mother was acquitted of conspiracy but the daughter was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for obtaining goods by false pretences. As for Wright and Smith, they had been used by a confidence trickster to give her the protective colouring of respectability, but other worthy citizens of Lynn had been used in the same way. They had paid her to sing, but she had performed as required. They must have suffered a little from wounded pride, and they probably made individual contributions to the fund for the poor children's dinner (of which no report has been found), but they were relatively unscathed – except, that is, for losing an able soloist.

Wright continued his varied musical career, both with Jones and as choirmaster, and in 1891, when he conducted a 40-voice choir for the inauguration of the Primitive Methodists' new organ, the audience numbered nearly 1,000.

Then, in 1894, he had a further opportunity to exercise his musical versatility, when the King's Lynn Town Band made its first public appearance in new hussar-style uniforms. A picture from that year survives,<sup>57</sup> and in the centre of the back row stands Jasper Wright, holding his string bass. He is one of the shorter members of the group, slightly built, with prominent cheek bones, heavy eyelids and a very dark beard. With his pill box hat set squarely on his head (rather than worn at the angle affected by others) he looks less jaunty than his companions, but no diffidence of manner could hide his musical and organisational abilities. By the next year he was bandmaster and presiding over a series of concerts that found favour with the local press:

Lynn Town Band, – Another successful Sacred Concert was held in the St. James' Hall, on Sunday evening last, when there was a large and appreciative audience.<sup>58</sup>

The programme, the report continued, 'was nicely rendered under the leadership of Bandmaster J. J. Wright'. Band pieces and instrumental solos and duets were interspersed with songs. These included two plaintive numbers by Master Whomes: 'Kiss me mother ere I die, and 'No one cares for me'. The evening finished with a 'Grand' march and the Hallelujah Chorus.

For John Smith, too, life was busy. Though still unmarried and living away from Brigg (the centre of family life), he seems often to have had family members around him. On the night of the 1891 census there were four of his relatives in the house.<sup>59</sup> His sister Amelia, four years his junior, was visiting, and his sister Florence was living there with her family. Florence, it may be recalled, had been visiting on the occasion of the previous census. Now she had married Edwin Harrison,<sup>60</sup> and the couple – with their infant son –

were listed as boarders. In fact, they had become a major part of Smith's life, for Florence was recorded as his housekeeper and Edwin was working for him as 'photographer's assistant'. This arrangement may not, however, have lasted for long, for in 1894 Smith married<sup>61</sup> a woman over twenty years his junior and by the end of the decade the couple had a young family of their own.<sup>62</sup>

Like Dexter, he was looking for the next photographic format to rival and replace the long-popular cartes and cabinet prints, and a double-page advertisement in town's 1894 almanac gave an indication of his product range and prices.

Season 1894. Specialities in Portraiture. Midget Portraits. Carte de Visite Portraits. Cabinet portraits. Boudoir Portraits. Panel Portraits. Grand Panel Portraits. At Popular Prices. Midgets 2/6, C.D.V.'s 5/-, Cabinets 12/-, Boudoirs 30/- per dozen. Special Offer. For every order of One Dozen Cabinet Portraits at our 15/- and 21/- rates we shall present the same Portrait printed on Opal. For the 15/- rate we shall issue one of the above in Black and White; and for the 21/- rate a lovely Opal Portrait, finished in our well-known style in Water Colours.<sup>63</sup>

A carbon printing process was generally used for portraits made on white opal glass, and the resulting image was characteristically both sharp and delicate. Smith's free offer was therefore of an attractive item. His basic price for cartes was the same as Dexter's and more than Wright's. His were the most expensive of the three studios' cabinet prints, but the opaltype offer did something to offset the cost of his premium options. He also promoted, in the same advertisement, his copying and enlarging service.

Send us your Photograph of that of any Friend or Relative whose memory you cherish, and We Will Enlarge It by a Beautiful Process in First-class Style, and finish it by hand, and mount on a Thick Plate sunk, India Tint Mount, 19 by 15 inches, so as to Resemble a Fine Steel Plate Engraving. Usual Charge 30/-, for 21/-, Guaranteed Permanent. Framed complete in White Enamelled and Gold Frame, or finished in Water Colours 30/-, usual charge 42/-. Faithful Likeness and Complete Satisfaction Guaranteed.

The advertisement ended with three footnotes. The first was addressed to visitors to the town: 'Our Studios and Show Rooms are near the Tuesday Market Place. N.B.— Call and Inspect the Specimens.' The second advised: 'Send for Price Lists, Post Free.' The third — 'Energetic Agents Required' — shows that, despite competition from A. & G. Taylor, and despite being cheated by his canvassers in 1886, Smith had persevered with the use of representatives to promote his work and seek orders.

A very similar advertisement appeared in the next year's almanac. Space was found, however, for the announcement of Smith's latest attempt at empire-building. The Lynn studio itself was, of course, an outpost of the family business in Lincolnshire, but Smith had for some years been keen to expand his own sphere of activity. His Long Sutton venture seems to have been short-lived, and his Fakenham studio had apparently closed in the late 1880s,<sup>64</sup> but he still had premises in Swaffham. This business, unfortunately, is

neglected by trade directory listings, but it is mentioned on photographic mounts datable to the early and middle 1890s. So Smith already had two Norfolk studios when, at the end of 1894, he announced the opening of his second Lynn branch.<sup>65</sup>

T. Smith & Sons, 60, High Street, King's Lynn, beg to announce that they have taken over the Business and Premises of 4, London Road, lately carried on by Messrs. Mowll, Wheal, Hall and Hewitt. It is under efficient management, and only the very best class of work will be turned out, and prices will be most moderate.<sup>66</sup>

It is, in part at least, a rather sorry list of past practitioners. Mowll had gone on to a successful career elsewhere, and Hall had managed something of a stay, but Hewitt's tenure had passed almost unnoticed, and Weale's name was not sufficiently memorable to spell correctly. Nevertheless, they had left a stock of old negatives that were now in Smith's possession. These represented a big storage requirement, but they were already housed at London Road, and Smith had a home in the High Street for his own negatives. Such a collection of old glass plates had some potential earning power. It was usual for photographers to retain negatives, for a while at least, in order to make reprints or enlargements. In Lynn, over the years, Wallis and Manders, Robert Wright, Edwin Mowll, William Woodhouse and Charles Weale (as well as Smith himself) had all devoted some carte mount space to offering this service. It isn't clear how often customers took advantage of the offer, and it seems probable that repeat orders were most likely to be for relatively recent work. (Woodhouse must have taken this view, since at one point his mounts bore the message, 'Negatives kept only two years'). Yet some such orders must have been placed; otherwise fewer photographers would have used their archive as a selling point. So the value of Smith's new premises was enhanced by his inheritance of these old plates.

The London Road business may not have been long in Smith's hands. Its possession was announced in time for the 1895 season, and its only trade directory listing in his name came in 1896.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it strengthened his studio presence in the town, and it would soon prove to have been a timely acquisition.

Studios were not, however, the only places where photographers worked. Since the arrival of dry plates, location work had become so much easier. Local views continued to be popular, and photographers could readily accept commissions to visit their clients and undertake bespoke work for them.

Already major national firms of topographical photographers were combing the area in search of saleable scenes, James Valentine and Sons of Dundee, going from strength to strength despite the death of their founder in 1879, had expanded their activities into England. Their work could be bought at Dexter's,<sup>68</sup> but they did not confine themselves to studio outlets for their images. An 1890 survey of local businesses identified Cawston and Son, a jeweller and optician of St James' Street, as 'agents for "Valentine's" photographic views of Lynn and country, holding a large stock of these beautiful pictures in hand for inspection by their customers'.<sup>69</sup> Frances Frith's photographers, too, were on

the scene. Frith had been producing scenic and architectural views since the 1850s and had made his name with images taken on his third Egyptian expedition of 1859-60. He had since made it his object to produce a record of every possible town in the British Isles, and his Reigate business had grown into a hugely successful photographic publishing company. In 1891 his representatives took a series of views of Lynn: they visited the High Street, Norfolk Street and the Tuesday Market Place; they made records of the South Gate, the Town Hall, St Margaret's, St Nicholas' and the Greyfriars' Tower; they took in the Walks and the Red Mount Chapel.<sup>70</sup> (They would return in 1898 for another systematic look at the town, and they would continue to visit at intervals thereafter.) The greatest boom in the sales of pictures by Valentine, Frith and other national companies would not come until the postcard era in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but already these operations were major forces to contend with.

Not all out-of-studio competition came from the big names, however. There were also small-time opportunists who were looking to make a profit, sometimes by dubious means. Newspaper reports from the last 20 years of the century throw up a number of cases of photographic fraud, and King's Lynn did not go unaffected.

In the winter of 1891/1892, Lynn citizens were among many across the country who were caught out by a postal photographic swindle. The victims received circulars from Frederick Carr & Co. of Worthing, advertising a colouring and copying service whereby the customer would send them a photograph which they would reproduce as a framed pastel print. The print would be free, but there would be a charge for the frame, and payment was required in advance. There was no shortage of takers, and it was later reported that, on one day alone, Carr & Co. were sent around £800 in postal orders.<sup>71</sup> Predictably – with hindsight – no framed prints were ever delivered.

After some months, 'the firm having, it would seem, made a satisfactory "pile"',<sup>72</sup> the fraudsters decided it was time to disappear. They summarily dismissed the innocent young women they had employed as secretaries, and then they left. But they marked their departure with a gesture designed to mock their dupes and taunt the police.

To remind the credulous of the profitable nature of Carr & Co.'s operations, the front windows were filled with a collection of "curios", including heaps of letters from correspondents, a mutilated leger,<sup>73</sup> and a mimic feast, consisting of scraps of stale food, with a dead mouse as the chief "dish".

The details of the window display were bizarre, but there was no doubt as to their gloating intent, and, just in case the public did not feel sufficiently sneered at, 'above and below the mouse were the words "Good receipt for jugged hare – first catch your hare," and other messages of a like character.'

Customers from London, Portsmouth, Norwich, Lynn, Lowestoft and Birmingham were prominent among the victims of the con men.

A case on a smaller geographic scale occurred in the early spring of 1893, when John Wilson, a travelling photographer based in Ipswich, left Suffolk with his family, and arrived in Lynn. He then started travelling around the area, offering his services, taking the required pictures, accepting payment, and going away to process the plates. That, of course, was the last the customers saw of him. But the police were up to the challenge. Wilson was arrested and brought before the mayor on a charge of fraud.

Chief Constable Ware said that prisoner had been in the town for about a fortnight, with his wife and three children, lodging in All Saints Street. He had been hiring ponies and traps and making excursions around Sandringham and district, taking photographs. He (Mr. Ware) had received complaints from persons who had paid Wilson 10s. and 7s. 6d. in advance for photographs of their houses, and that they had been unable to receive the photos in return.<sup>74</sup>

It was clear that Wilson was a con-man, but Ware realised that he was not just a local offender.

Examining the *Police Gazette* he saw that the prisoner was “wanted” – a warrant being out against him – at Halesworth, charging him with fraud. When asked whether he was the man who was “wanted” and as described in the *Police Gazette*, he said that he was.

When Wilson was arrested, his rooms were searched. Superintendent Andrews (who had been investigating his activities in Suffolk, and who had now travelled to Lynn) examined the photographic equipment and found that, ‘A camera, dark shutter and lens were in a most dilapidated condition.’ Furthermore, there was no tripod, ‘no dark box for development, and not much of chemicals.’<sup>75</sup> Wilson had, it appeared, taken no photographs, and it was even in question whether his equipment was capable of taking any.

Wilson was returned to Halesworth, where he duly stood trial. Andrews had amassed evidence of fifty cases in which the photographer had obtained money by false pretences, though it proved unnecessary to plough through them all. Wilson testified that ‘all this trouble had come upon him because his furniture, which he held ... on the hire-purchase system, was confiscated in the winter.’ He was found guilty of the first batch of charges and (having already been in prison for three months awaiting trial) was sentenced to a further three months with hard labour.

While Wilson was behind bars in Suffolk, a very similar case was brought to court in Wisbech, where a youth from King’s Lynn was charged with failing to supply photographs for which he had taken payment in advance. On this occasion the offender was able to produce some negatives, and he was discharged with a caution, having promised to print and send the copies that had been paid for. It had, perhaps, helped his case that his mother had spoken up for him and had, indeed, been the one who went back to Lynn to unearth the negatives. So far, so unremarkable – but the interest lay in the youth’s identity. His lodgings were in All Saints Street; his name was John; and his

mother, Mary Ann Wilson, when asked his father's whereabouts, 'admitted that he was in Ipswich gaol on a similar charge to that preferred against her son'!

The John Wilsons, father and son, had been able to practice their deceptions because there was now a market for out-of-studio and commissioned photography, and – naturally enough – Lynn's professionals widened their horizons to serve that market. Later generations can look at only a small fraction of such images, but surviving examples give at least some indication of the variety of work they undertook at this period.

Despite stocking other people's views, Dexter took some of his own, though they are hard to date. (Photos of scenery and buildings offer fewer dating clues than portraits of people.) A group of topographical pictures in the Norfolk Museum Services collection probably dates from the 1880s or 1890s and includes images of St Nicholas' Chapel and of the cliffs, lighthouse and Golden Lion Hotel at Hunstanton.<sup>76</sup> In 1891 Dexter also went to All Saints Church, Hilgay, where the Rev. E. J. Alvis had commissioned him to take photographs of the memorial to Captain Thomas Manby, the inventor of the Manby cradle for transferring sailors to safety from stricken ships.<sup>77</sup> He also applied to Stationers' Hall for the copyright protection of two pictures during these years. The first, taken in 1890, was entered as 'Photograph of a double limbed child'.<sup>78</sup> It is, in fact, a harrowing post-mortem record of conjoined twins. Walter Dexter was registered as the photographer, but the copyright owner, who commissioned the picture, was Jane Lilley, a midwife of Crooked Lane, Lynn, who had presumably attended at the delivery. (This allows the hope that the picture was ordered as a medical record rather than for its curiosity value.) The second picture to be submitted was of 'Black Emperor', a Jacobin pigeon.<sup>79</sup> (Jacobins are a fancy breed of pigeon distinguished by a large mane and hood of feathers, and they are still popular. The Jacobin Society was formed in 1896 – the year after Dexter took the photo). In this case, Dexter was noted as both copyright owner and author, so he must have judged there was enough local interest in Jacobins to make the picture saleable.

Wright was also looking for out-of-studio opportunities. In the mid-1890s he seems to have built up a customer base among sports teams and local businesses (areas in which he would continue to be active well into the next century). In 1894, for example, he photographed the town's North End football team,<sup>80</sup> and in 1896 members of the King's Lynn Cycling Club stared into his camera.<sup>81</sup> At some time in this decade, too, he took pictures of routine production and delivery work for J. Gray, a Lynn confectioner and baker.<sup>82</sup> His photos of a warehouse interior, taken for wine merchants Peatling and Cawdron, date probably from around the end of the decade.<sup>83</sup>

In the same year that Wright photographed the North End football team – but operating a little higher up the market – Smith took a picture of the King's Lynn side, complete with linesman and referee.<sup>84</sup> In about 1890 he was at the Alexandra dock photographing a crane and dock workers,<sup>85</sup> and in 1895 he was commissioned, on the occasion of a divisional police inspection, to record the parade of constables.<sup>86</sup>

The fact remains, however, that indoor portraiture was still at the heart of all three of the town's main photographic businesses. So, when John Smith's capacity for studio work came under pressure in 1895, he was to be very glad that he'd acquired the additional studio in London Road.

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- 1 At number 70 this time, rather than number 2.  
2 1891 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 66, page 5.  
3 Burial register, St Margaret's, King's Lynn.  
4 *Lynn Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1895.  
5 *Lynn Advertiser*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1879.  
6 *Lynn Advertiser*, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1885.  
7 See Chapter 10.  
8 *Thew & Sons' Almanac Companion, King's Lynn*, 1895.  
9 True's Yard Museum, accession number KLNTY2020.695.  
10 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1896.  
11 1891 census: RG12, piece 1568, folio 13, page 20.  
12 1891 census: RG12, piece 1570, folio 43, page 3.  
13 1891 census: RG12, piece 1570, folio 42, page 2  
14 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1895.  
15 The National Archives, Records of the Copyright Office, Stationers' Company: COPY  
1/427/1015.  
16 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1896.  
17 *Lynn Advertiser*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1893.  
18 1891 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 36, page 2.  
19 *Lynn Advertiser*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1895.  
20 *Lynn Advertiser*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1895.  
21 Martin Scott, *King's Lynn High Street History*: <https://kingslynn-history.uk>.  
22 *Norfolk News*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1853.  
23 *London Standard*, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1871.  
24 *London Gazette*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1883.  
25 David and John Appleby, *The Magic Boxes, Professional Photographers and their Studios in  
North East Essex 1845-1937*, (Essex Record Office, 1992).  
26 Sic. Then as now, greengrocers had no monopoly of misused apostrophes.  
27 *Lynn Advertiser*, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1895.  
28 *Lynn News Almanack and Diary*, 1887 and 1888.  
29 'Lavina' in some records.  
30 1991 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 125, page 3.  
31 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1896.  
32 E.g. Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, 1916; Turner, *Directory of King's Lynn*,  
1901.  
33 *Lincolnshire Echo*, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1895. (Also the source for subsequent details.)  
34 1891 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 89, page 16.  
35 1898 diary of James Speight.  
36 1891 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 125, page 3.  
37 1901 census: RG13, piece 1889, folio 111, page 2.  
38 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1896.  
39 *Lynn News Almanack and Diary*, 1887.  
40 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1908.  
41 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1904.  
42 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1897-1901.  
43 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1901.  
44 Civil registration birth index, June quarter, 1888: King's Lynn, volume 4b, page 373.  
45 *Thetford & Watton Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1882.  
46 *Lincoln, Rutland & Stamford Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1889.

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47 *Thetford and Watton Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1890.  
48 *Thetford and Watton Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1890.  
49 *Thetford and Watton Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1890 and 18<sup>th</sup> July 1890.  
50 *Thetford and Watton Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1890 and 25<sup>th</sup> July 1891.  
51 1891 census: RG12 piece 1568, folio 138, page 3.  
52 *Lynn Advertiser*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1890.  
53 *Bury & Norwich Post*, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1890.  
54 Ibid.  
55 *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1890.  
56 *St James's Gazette*, March 8<sup>th</sup> 1890.  
57 Michael Winton, *King's Lynn As It Was*, page 9, (Haddon Publishing.1972).  
58 *Lynn News*, February 9<sup>th</sup> 1895.  
59 1891 census: RG12, piece 1568, folio 99, page 3.  
60 Civil registration marriage index: September quarter 1884, Glanford Brigg, volume 7a, page 1096.  
61 24<sup>th</sup> June 1894, King's Lynn.  
62 1901 census: RG 13, piece 1888, folio 124, page 18.  
63 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1894.  
64 Last mention: *Lynn News Almanack and Diary*, 1887.  
65 There is, actually, one piece of evidence for another Lynn studio. A mount in a private collection is in the style of the (possibly early) 1890s and gives the address of T Smith & Sons as 40 High Street rather than 60 High Street. No other indication of a studio at this address has been found.  
66 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1895.  
67 Kelly, *Directory of Norfolk*, 1896.  
68 *Lynn Advertiser*, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1893.  
69 *A Guide to Leading Commercial Enterprises in Norfolk & Suffolk*, (Birmingham: British Industrial Publishing Company, 1890), [Norfolk section reprinted as *Norfolk* 1890, (Norwich: Norfolk Industrial Archaeological Society, 2016)].  
70 A number of examples appear in: Barry Pardue, *Photographic Memories: Francis Frith's King's Lynn*, (Frith Book Company, 2001).  
71 *Shields Daily Gazette*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1891.  
72 This and subsequent quotations from *Lynn Advertiser*, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1891.  
73 Meaning may be open to question. This may be an eccentric spelling of 'ledger' (book of business records) but a fisherman's 'leger line' with bait, would not have been inappropriate.  
74 *Ipswich Journal*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1893.  
75 *Ipswich Journal*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1893.  
76 Norfolk Museums Service collection – NWHCM: 1954.138.  
77 Receipt dated 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1891; Norfolk Record Office ref. MS 11322/954.  
78 The National Archives, Stationers' Company records, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1890: COPY 1/401/146.  
79 The National Archives, Stationers' Company records, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1895: COPY 1/419/105.  
80 Norfolk Museums Service collection – KILLM: 1993.207.24.  
81 Norfolk Museums Service collection – KILLM: 2001.309.  
82 Norfolk Museums Service collection – KILLM: 1985.92.5; KILLM: 1985.92.6; KILLM: 1985.92.6.2.  
83 Norfolk Museums Service collection – KILLM: 2008.373 and KILLM: 2008.373.1.  
84 Norfolk Museums Service collection – KILLM: 1993.207.23.  
85 Collection of True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum.  
86 *Thetford & Watton Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1895.