

18. The Victorian Edwardians (1901-1911)

Little has so far been said, except in passing, of the fortunes of Walter Sothern Dexter, Jasper Wright and John Smith during the Edwardian period. Each had been working in Lynn for around twenty years when the new king came to the throne, and each was the second-generation representative of a well-established family business – though, in Smith's case, that business was set up in Lincolnshire rather than in Lynn. Each had seen other studios in the town come and go, and each was well equipped to face the latest wave of competition.

The 1901 census, taken two months after the death of Queen Victoria, provides a picture of the Dexter household at the beginning of the new century.¹ Walter Sothern was listed as a photographer at 23/26 High Street, while his wife, Emily, was in charge of the fancy goods side of their activities. Owen, their third son, was also working as a photographer, while Irving, their fourth, was described as a stationer and was overseeing a further aspect of the family business. The two older sons, Walter and Sothern, had branched out on their own and were exercising the Dexter artistic gene in new directions. Walter, aged 24, was already becoming established as a painter and graphic artist. His teenage work had won local approval (including a certificate and a bronze medal at Lynn's Trades and Industrial Exhibition in 1891)², he had gone on to attend the Birmingham Municipal School of Art, and he had been giving classes and private lessons in advanced drawing and painting for the last two years.³ Sothern, two years his junior, was now an architect, and Daniel Middelburg, a Dutch architectural student visiting the family at the time, was presumably a friend of his. Alice Cooper, who worked in the shop, was also living there, but, identified as a 'stationer's assistant' she was evidently supporting Irving's work rather than engaged in the photographic studio. A cook and a housemaid completed the household. (Ida, the youngest child, was away at school.)⁴

Dexter continued to produce studio portraits in the early years of the century, and, like his competitors, he responded to the new demand for wedding photographs. The wedding group was still sufficiently novel to be commented on, as when, in 1904, Frederick Lewis and Harriet Flood of Middleton were married and the press report concluded, 'Before dispersing, the wedding party was photographed by Mr Dexter of Lynn.'⁵

He had, however, also seen the possibilities offered by another kind of photography. He had been selling local views for years, yet, on the evidence of surviving examples, he does not seem to have developed any great enthusiasm for the postcard format. Instead, he was becoming interested in photographs for book illustration.

The earliest photographically illustrated books had contained individually produced, hand-printed images pasted to a blank page. This was time-consuming, expensive, and suitable only for very limited editions. From the 1880s onward, however, various photomechanical processes were devised whereby a photograph could be transferred to a printing block and impressed directly onto the page, just as if it were text. By the beginning of the twentieth century, technical improvements and reduced costs had made printed illustrations a realistic proposition for mass-produced books.

This was the new market that attracted Dexter, and, early in the century, he set about producing and publishing *Photographic Views of King's Lynn*.⁶ Exactly when this book appeared is not stated, and the pictures, concerned more with locations than people, give very limited help. The hats of occasional bystanders do, however, support a post-1900 date (though it is possible that some earlier pictures were also included). The book is a slim volume, its maroon board covers impressed with gold printing. The pages open out, concertina-like, to display 17 local views. Images of the town's notable buildings are predictably included: the Red Mount Chapel, the South Gates, the Town Hall, the Custom House and the Greyfriars' Tower are all depicted. Both St Margaret's and St Nicholas' churches are featured, with a well-lit interior of St Margaret's. More modern buildings, too, are represented by views of the hospital and the technical school. In addition, there are two views of the Walks (one with trees in leaf and one with bare branches), busy shots of the quayside and the Tuesday Market, and, from a little further afield, pictures of Castle Rising Castle and Sandringham House. Perhaps most attractive of all, though, is a composition taken across the Great Ouse from West Lynn, with muddy bank and a derelict boat in the foreground and the town's riverfront, with boats and readily identifiable buildings, beyond.

Inside the back cover is an advertisement for 'W. S. Dexter, Photographer, Stationer and Fancy Dealer'. 'Royal Patronage' is claimed (though evidence for this has remained frustratingly elusive), and a list of portrait prices is given: 'Cabinet Photographs from 5/- half dozen. C. de V's from 5/- per dozen. Midgets 3/6 dozen, two positions.' One noteworthy detail here (apart from the vagrant apostrophe) is the mention of 'midgets'. Like John Smith, Dexter had been offering a range of alternative sizes since the mid-1890s.⁷ The cabinet print and carte de visite still had a hold on the market, and attempts to establish such alternative formats as midget prints continued. Dexter may not yet have embraced the postcard as the portrait size of the future, but, like photographers everywhere, he knew that a change was due.

In 1905 there came a new opportunity to supply book illustrations. When the Homeland Association brought out *King's Lynn with its Surroundings* – the latest in a long series of guide books⁸ – Smith and Wright invested in advertisements, but it was Dexter and Son who provided 19 photographs to accompany the text and, in the case of the Red Mount Chapel, to serve as cover picture. The view of Sandringham House from *Photographic Views of King's Lynn* was used again, but the other major buildings were re-photographed, sometimes to telling effect: the Custom House and the South Gates are both shown with the picturesque addition of fishing boats in the foreground. There are new subjects (including the doorway of Clifton House and a tangle of masts and rigging at the docks), and new interiors (including the Red Mount Chapel and a merchant's house). The previously-used picture of Sandringham is accompanied by two new scenes from the royal estate, and the church of Terrington St Clement makes an appearance. There is some attention, too, to historic artefacts, with images of a ducking stool, a mayoral 'moon' lantern and the town's King John Cup.

The book appears to have been well received, with a reviewer for the *Cheltenham Chronicle* concluding that the visitor would find it 'not only a useful guide to the "lions" of the place, but a well-illustrated souvenir of his visit.'⁹

Two years later, three of the photographs from the Lynn volume were republished as illustrations for the same publisher's *Our Homeland Churches and how to study them*.¹⁰ A view of the west front of St Margaret's was used to show early English work at the base of the tower, and pictures of Terrington St Clement's church and St Nicholas' porch served to exemplify details of the perpendicular style.

In fact, Dexter was not the only member of his family to see his work appear in book form. His eldest son found favour with the same publisher. Young Walter had been commissioned to draw the Greenland Fishery Inn as frontispiece for *King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, and in the same year he supplied a dozen very accomplished plates for *Nelson's Homeland*, the first in the Homeland Association's series of *Homeland Pocket Books*.¹¹ Then, four years later, when Norfolk and Suffolk were featured in a volume of T. F. Unwin's *County Coast Series*,¹² the two youngest sons had their opportunity: Owen (whose career would shift from photography to book illustration) supplied a watercolour of Bawdsey Ferry, at the mouth of the River Deben, while Irving contributed a photograph of Burnham Thorpe church, near the north Norfolk coast.

As ever, Walter Sothorn Dexter maintained interests outside his business and remained very active in public life. As councillor for the Middle Ward he routinely served on some half-dozen committees at any one time,¹³ and he was a member of the Board of Guardians of the Poor, to which he was re-elected in 1904.¹⁴ It was a meeting of this board, in January 1906, that provided an illustration of the compassion he brought to his duties:

Mr W S Dexter called attention to the fact that two tramps were recently charged before the magistrates with refusing to perform their task of picking oakum, which they were required to do in the open air on a cold day. He considered it was an impossible task, and that to require men to do it was barbarous and cruel.¹⁵

Oakum-picking, the teasing out of fibres from old and usually tarred ropes, was a task commonly imposed on workhouse paupers and on convicts sentenced to hard labour. It was hard on the fingers at any time and especially so in frosty conditions, yet Dexter's fellow guardians seem not to have shared his reservations about it. The issue was fudged, and it was 'decided to ask the master to exercise care in these matters, but it was left to his discretion.' Dexter, however, had shown himself sympathetic to the plight of a class about whom few respectable citizens bothered.

It is likely, too, that Dexter's public life brought him a number of photographic commissions, for some of his work seems to have been associated with civic occasions. In April 1902, for instance, he was there to take photographs when the mayor presented long service medals to eleven members of the Lynn Fire Brigade.¹⁶ Then, six months later, he was the photographer who recorded the official visit of county and municipal engineers to the town, and whose photographs of the occasion subsequently appeared in a lavishly illustrated report in *The Surveyor*.¹⁷

Other commissions came through other contacts. In July 1904, for example, at the half-yearly meeting of the Lynn District of the Order of Oddfellows, after the deputies

‘partook of an excellent dinner’ they were photographed by ‘P. G. W. Dexter’.¹⁸ ‘P. G.’ stands for ‘Past Grand’ and reveals that Dexter had previously served as the Presiding Officer of a lodge.

In the same year Dexter further demonstrated his versatility by acting as judge both at the Lynn Canine Society’s show¹⁹ and, in the pigeon section, at the Cambridge Ornithological Society’s exhibition.²⁰ (It was reported of the latter event that ‘there were excellent shows of rabbits and pigeons; the cats were also a very meritorious lot, but the mice were a weak section.’)

The man who was so much a part of his community was, however, planning to pull up his roots. Dexter’s term of council office was due to end in 1906, but at the beginning of that year new occupants took over the High Street premises:

W. H. Smith & Son (successors to Dexter & Sons) are making extensive developments in the Fancy Goods and Stationery Trades, and are adding a Large Stock of Well-Selected Books at discount prices, A Special Feature will be the Library & Reading Room. Terms for odd volumes and subscriptions on application. London and Local Newspapers, Periodicals and All Magazines on Sale. Newspapers delivered to any part of the town.²¹

The fancy goods and stationery sides of the Dexter business clearly fitted well enough with the newsagent and bookselling trades and were to be expanded, but the photographic studio was of no interest to the retail giant.

The family probably stayed in Lynn for a while after the studio’s closure, for it was not until the autumn that Dexter announced he was not offering himself for re-election to the council.²² It may, therefore have been as a resident rather than as a visitor returning to the town, that he attended the King’s opening of the new grammar school buildings in November.²³ Certainly, at any rate, he was no longer a local photographer.

Nevertheless, Dexter’s studio days were not over. He may have been happy to be done with stationery and fancy goods, but photography was in his blood: he had inherited a business dating back to its pioneer years and he had built it up and taken it into the twentieth century. By 1907 the family had moved to Felixstowe, on the Suffolk coast, and a new studio had been opened, initially referred to as Dexter & Sons²⁴ and, before long, as Dexter and Dexter.²⁵ The 1911 census showed how the family had settled in to a changed set of roles.²⁶ Walter, the father, was, once again, a ‘photographic artist’, but his wife, Emily, had left the fancy goods business in the past, had taken on the running of a seaside guesthouse, and was entered as a ‘hotel proprietor’. Irving, freed from the stationery side of the old shop, was the studio’s second photographer, but (in line with the family’s interest in pictures in print) was specialising in press work and was described as a ‘journalistic photographer’. Young Walter, who had become a member of the Royal Society of British Artists, was living there, as was Ida, now long finished with school. Sothern, the architect, and Owen were both in London. Owen had moved away from both home and photography, and was earning his living as an ‘illustrator of works and painter of pictures’.²⁷

The relocation to Suffolk had not been untroubled. Charlotte Paton, in her biography of the younger Walter,²⁸ relates the sad story of Gladys Stanton, who had been working as assistant in the Lynn shop before it closed. Gladys was one of four daughters of William Stanton, a Lynn ironmonger,²⁹ who had died in 1898 when she was 12.³⁰ She had become engaged to Irving Dexter and was distraught when he and his family left the town. Irving returned to take her with him to Felixstowe, but the alleviation of her depression was only brief. Three weeks later she selected sulphuric acid from the darkroom chemicals and swallowed what was to prove, after a period of painful illness, a fatal dose.³¹ The coroner's jury, in an age when suicide was still a crime, returned the humane verdict of death by misadventure.

Irving remained unmarried.

No evidence has been found of the Suffolk studio later than 1911, and it was in South London, where younger members of the family had already migrated, that Walter Sothorn Dexter died in 1920.³²

Jasper Wright, the youngest of the town's three long-established photographers, was 39 in 1901 and was still living at the shop address.³³ He and Emma now had eight children, the smallest of whom, Dorothy, was just a few months old. (The arrival of Vera Violet would complete the family the following year.)³⁴ A housemaid and a general servant lived in, and there was also a visitor staying on census night. This was Edith Starling, an 18-year-old pupil teacher and the younger sister of Florence Starling, who had been the Wrights' servant ten years earlier.³⁵ The girls' came from Wiggshall St Germans, a nearby village where their father, John Starling, was employed as a driver of farm machinery.³⁶ There has already been the suggestion, in James Speight's diary, of Wright as a forbearing and generous employer, and there may, too, be a hint in Edith's visit that the couple took an interest in the progress of employees and their families.

None of the Wrights' children was yet old enough to help in the shop, and Emma had three under-fives making demands on her time. Since Margaret Hammond³⁷ and Florence Porter³⁸ were listed in the census as photographers, it reasonable to conclude they were still working at the studio. The possibility, too, that Harold Squibbs was filling the role formerly taken by Speight has already been noted. Certainly, with a modest empire still to run, Wright needed assistance.

That empire continued in a healthy state in the early years of the century, though there were some changes around the middle of its first decade. Wright still maintained his branches at Fakenham,³⁹ Swaffham ('attends Saturdays')⁴⁰ and Hunstanton ('during the season')⁴¹ On the evidence of directory references and advertisements, the Hunstanton and Swaffham operations lasted until around 1905,⁴² and the Fakenham studio continued until about 1909;⁴³ but a new studio was opened in Wisbech, just across the Cambridgeshire border, and was in use from about 1904 until 1909 or a little later.⁴⁴

How Wright was presenting himself to the market can be seen from two advertisements from 1905. For W. A. Dutt's guide to Lynn he kept it simple:

For Artistic Photography at Popular Prices. Jasper J. Wright, East Anglian Studios, 125, London Road, King's Lynn, And at Wisbech, Fakenham and Hunstanton.⁴⁵

The list of branches demonstrated that his use of 'East Anglian Studios' had some justification, especially since Wisbech was in another county, and the claim to 'popular prices' was in line with the policy of affordability that dated back to his father's day. (It was a claim that would be questioned by a woman sending a Wright portrait to her sister in Suffolk and insisting, 'You must put it in a Frame they were not cheap ones.'⁴⁶ Perhaps, though, she would have been equally dismayed at other photographers' prices.) As for 'artistic', no photographer would claim less.

The themes of artistry and value for money were given more detailed attention in Wright's advertisement the 1905 Lynn yearbook,⁴⁷ which gave the studio's current prices as 'Cartes from 4/- per doz. Cabinets from 8/- per doz.' This compared favourably with Dexter's corresponding charges of five and ten shillings. Moreover, Wright's charges had not risen since 1896⁴⁸ and would stay at the same level until at least 1907.⁴⁹ (Smith's tariff for these years has yet to be found, but evidence from 1895 – since when prices appear to have been pretty stable – suggests he often charged much the same as Dexter, but sometimes a little more.) Further emphasis on the reasonableness of Wright's fees came with the statement, 'Children's Portraits a Speciality. No Extra Charge', though this was perhaps a little disingenuous. Whilst, in the earlier days of several-second exposures, some photographers (fearing wasted photographic plates) had demanded a premium for taking fidgety children, the worst technical problems of child portraiture were really in the past.

'Artistic Photography by the Most Perfect Processes', was more fully treated in this advertisement, which sought to define 'The Characteristic of J. J. Wright's Photographs', and listed: 'Beautiful Effects of Light and Shade. Natural Expression. Gracefully Posed. Exquisite Finish.'

With a deference echoing the advertising copy of earlier decades, Wright added, 'A trial solicited', but he didn't simply sit in the studio awaiting callers. Perhaps more than either of the town's other senior photographers, he was frequently out and about, fulfilling commissions, looking for picture opportunities and – often – presenting the results in the new postcard format. Many examples of his Edwardian work survive, but the mention of a few will serve to suggest the variety of his subjects.

He was booked to photograph groups of all kinds and sizes: wedding parties,⁵⁰ the cast of an operatic production,⁵¹ a successful football team,⁵² the staff and pupils of the King Edward VII Grammar School,⁵³ and the employees of the Pearl Life Assurance Company, when their District Superintendent invited them all to tea.⁵⁴ He attended events, like the Mart proclamations already mentioned, and the opening of the town's new library,⁵⁵ but he also saw and seized unplanned opportunities, such as an impromptu skating session – the kind of happening that his former assistant, James Speight, had enjoyed.

There are pictures, too, that seem to have been commissioned by local businesses and that show a wine merchant's warehouse,⁵⁶ a structural fault in the wall of a department store,⁵⁷ and haulage work in progress at the docks.⁵⁸ Possibly also

commissioned, but combining to form a striking photographic essay, is a series of views of Lynn's lanes and alleys, including Sedgeford Lane, Baker Lane, Ferry Lane and Friars Street.⁵⁹

One assignment, in 1911, highlighted an application of photography not previously encountered in these records, though it was certainly not unknown elsewhere. Photography provided an objective record that could be accorded legal status. It was, potentially at least, evidence. So, when a bulb merchant and a farmer from Terrington St Clement submitted their boundary dispute to law, Wright was called on to take and produce in court photographs of sections of a hedge, to show where allegedly illegal cutting had taken place.

Like Dexter at this period, Wright was becoming alert to the possibilities of photographic reproduction, and his *Lynn Advertiser* image of the Grammar School in 1906 was not the only picture he supplied to the press. A year earlier he had taken photographs at the North-West Norfolk Village Choir Festival, and two of these featured prominently in coverage of the event by *The Sphere*, a national illustrated weekly.⁶⁰ One of the shots depicted the massed choirs with the band of the Coldstream Guards and, under a magnifying glass, showed about 450 recognisable faces. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Wright went on to publish it as a postcard.⁶¹ Also in 1905, when the Mart was the occasion of a major gathering of the nation's roundabout proprietors and showmen, Wright supplied a picture of the assembly to the *Music Hall and Theatre Review*.⁶² Then, in 1909, when the Hull-based ketch *Brilliant* was lost with all hands while transporting a cargo of coal, he was able to provide the *Hull Daily Mail* with a portrait of Benjamin Dawson, the boat's young skipper.⁶³

Wright also saw the value of photomechanical printing for some of his own postcards. Where sufficient sales were anticipated, production in bulk had obvious attractions, and for some of his Mart pictures – the best shots from 1905 and 1907 at least⁶⁴ – he issued printed editions rather than individually processed photographs.

Despite this busy professional life, however, Wright found time to pursue his love of music. His band continued to be a popular, though not invariable, choice for trade exhibitions. When the mayor opened the Coronation Exhibition of Trades and Industry in 1902, he and the mayoress were conducted round St James' Hall to the accompaniment of music 'played by Mr. J. J. Wright's band, which is performing there nightly.'⁶⁵ In 1906, when rival attractions included 'Pharos, the Egyptian Sorcerer' and 'Miss Beckwith, Champion Lady Swimmer of the World, in her Crystal Tank',⁶⁶ it was announced that Wright's band 'is in attendance and plays during the afternoons and evening'.⁶⁷ He was, though, passed over for the Great Industrial Trades Exhibition of 1904, when a ladies' orchestra conducted by Madame Clarissa Matthews gave 'capital promenade concerts at intervals every day.'⁶⁸

Elsewhere Wright took on engagements varying from a concert at the Hospital Art Loan Art Exhibition,⁶⁹ when the *Eastern Evening News* praised 'Mr. Jasper Wright and his excellent band',⁷⁰ to 'selections on the club lawn' at 'the annual water frolic promoted by the Cam Sailing Club'⁷¹ at Waterbeach.

There were, too, occasions when the worlds of music and photography found themselves overlapping or, at least, side by side. The Choir Festival of 1905 was one

such, when Wright was called on to capture the moment. Another was the 1902 Coronation Exhibition: the press announcement promised that ‘Vocal and Instrumental Music Will be given each evening by Mr. J. Wright’s Orchestral Band’,⁷² and the subsequent report revealed that Wright, the only studio professional represented in the trades section, ‘has an excellent collection of photographs’ on view.⁷³ The most dramatic linking of music and camera, however, would come on the occasion of the Commercial Travellers’ Ball.

St James’ Hall and Assembly Rooms, located in County Court Road, provided a popular venue for big occasions. On the evening of 10th November 1904, it had been booked for a ball organised by the Commercial Travellers’ Association.⁷⁴ Wright’s band had been engaged, and all went well enough. In fact, it was not until 3.30 the next morning that the party dispersed. Up on the first floor was a carpenter’s workshop and store room where the hall’s owner, George Bridges, made scenery ‘of every Nationality and Style’ for bazaars and exhibitions, as well as proclaiming ‘Amateur Dramatic Fit-ups a Speciality’.⁷⁵ It was here that a fire broke out. It may well have already started before the last revellers left, for at 4 o’clock a passing policeman noticed flames coming from the building. The fire brigade was called, but within the hour the blaze was at its height.

The damage was extensive. The adjacent house, the home of Mr Bridges, was saved, but the hall itself was soon in ruins, with ‘damage ... estimated at several thousands of pounds’,⁷⁶ and the firemen remained in attendance for a full 48 hours. Amongst the losses were ‘some musical instruments &c., owned by Mr. J. J. Wright’.⁷⁷ Evidently, the band had left some of their property behind in the hall to be collected later.

It is not known at what point Wright realised what was happening. The hall was close to his studio, and the noise, the excitement and the light from the flames would have been evident from his home and would surely have woken him – if he had even had time to get to bed. The fire mattered to him not only as the owner of instruments that had been left there, but also as a photographer. It had to be caught on camera.

It may be that he arrived too late to record the fire’s fiercest moments, though a copy of his picture held by the Norfolk Museums and Library Service is annotated as taken at 4.30 a.m.⁷⁸ Or it may be that the results were unsatisfactory. There was clearly a problem of some kind. Wright certainly produced a photograph of the fire, and he published it as a postcard, but the image has been heavily retouched, with flames enhanced to improve the dramatic effect. It can only be hoped that healthy sales went some way to compensating for lost instruments.

Not until 48 hours later was it safe to enter the ruined building, and Wright was then able to accompany the inspection party and to capture images of the charred and debris-strewn shell.⁷⁹ The damage was extensive. Nevertheless, the hall was restored and available again for letting by the following autumn. A little over a year after the fire, at a ‘Spanish Bazaar’ held by All Saints’ Church, Wright was back in the building and contributing to a concert in the company of his gifted oldest son.⁸⁰

Wright’s young family was growing up, and his first child, Robert William Handel (commonly known as Handel), was now in his teens and showing the musical promise that, in naming him, his parents had evidently hoped for. He was also soon to be of

use in the studio, and the 1911 census shows major changes in the household. The family was no longer living over the shop but had moved out of town to a large house in West Winch Road, North Runcton.⁸¹ Only the three youngest children were at school, so Emma's burden must have been a little lighter, though she still had to cope with the fact that all eight continued to live at home. The studio in London Road had not been abandoned and Wright was once more listed as a photographer, but now he had help from family members, with Handel, Eliza and George all identified as photographer's assistants. Young Jasper and Ruth had both entered into apprenticeships, he to a general engineer and she to a draper. Photographic activities had been consolidated, for no branches had appeared in trade directories since 1909, but the studio still spread over adjacent shops (numbers 125 and 126), as it had since the late 1890s.⁸² Wright was still under 50, and the family business was not about to run out of steam.

John Smith, like Dexter, was already middle-aged at the beginning of Edward VII's reign. He was still living at his studio address, but his family circumstances had changed since the previous census. In 1894, at the age of 44, he had married 20-year old Florence Dow,⁸³ the daughter of a receiving officer and registrar of births and deaths,⁸⁴ and by 1901 the couple had two children, Graham, aged five, and Doris, aged two.⁸⁵ When he was single, his household had included his sister as housekeeper, her husband as studio assistant, their child and two servants. Now there was just one servant, and the accommodation had become a more traditional family home.

There is evidence from the years that followed that Smith had his share of out-of-studio work, which he presented either in postcard format, like his Mart pictures,⁸⁶ or as larger mounted prints, like a 1908 photograph of the King's Lynn football team.⁸⁷ Like Wright, he also had some success in supplying images to the press. In 1904 *The Era*, a weekly paper specialising in entertainment, ran an article on Historic Fairs of Great Britain and featured Smith's photograph of the Mart's opening ceremony. The piece commented on his picture in detail, identifying individual dignitaries, and reliving the event:

It is the psychological moment of the "Oyez! oyez!" of the Town Crier; and you see the Sword Bearer with the sword of King John sheathed and held aloft. On the right of the picture we get a side view of the handsome set of Venetian gondolas owned by Aspland, and managed by Ben Howden and Son. On the right we have P. Collins's, Limited (of Walsall), fine set of switchback gondolas.⁸⁸

In 1905, *The Era* used the same picture again to accompany its report on that year's Mart, using the image to 'remind our readers that the present proclamation is a revival of the ancient glories of Lynn Mart'.⁸⁹

Then, in 1906, when Henry Sharpe, the vicar of Marham, Norfolk, became rector of Marston Moretaine in Bedfordshire, the *Bedfordshire Mercury* needed a picture of the new incumbent. Smith, who appears to have frequently been the clergy's photographer of choice, provided the required portrait.⁹⁰ Similarly in 1910, when a picture of Lynn's mayor, Holcombe Ingleby, was sought by the *Eastern Daily Press* and the *Norfolk News*, Smith was able to oblige.⁹¹

The pictures of Sharpe and Ingleby were studio portraits, and studio work possibly remained Smith's main activity. On the available evidence, his production of postcards and his attendance at public events was limited – apart, perhaps, from the Mart, which he continued to photograph until the end of his career. That, at least, is the impression given when his surviving output is compared with that of Wright and the town's new postcard specialists. Perhaps a hint of Smith's preference is given, too, by his advertisement in Dutt's 1905 guide to Lynn, where he placed emphasis on 'Portraits in all the Newest Styles, Carbon, Platinotype, Bromide, Silver. Artistic in Pose, Finish and Form'.⁹²

The 'newest styles' he listed were all printing processes, and they were not all new. Carbon prints had been introduced in the 1860s and had been in fairly common use for better quality images since the 1870s. They gave strong, rich tones, and the results were impressive enough for the process to survive for two to three decades into the new century. Platinotypes, too, had been around for a while, though it was not until the 1880s that they made much impression on the market. They produced a soft, delicate image with a subtle graduation of tones, but they were expensive. Platinum was a vital ingredient in the mixture of chemicals used to impregnate the paper, and it was not cheap. When the price of platinum shot up during the First World War, the process became prohibitively expensive and fell out of use. In offering these two printing processes, therefore, Smith was not actually being particularly up-to-date; but he was showing a concern for the quality of his products and, in the case of platinum prints, aiming at the upper end of the market. Gelatine silver and bromide prints had their own prehistory, but they did provide some justification for Smith's pretensions to modernity, since it was not until the turn of the century that their professional use became widespread.

Smith's advertisement struck one other significant note, describing the studio as being 'Under Highly Distinguished Patronage'. This was a familiar claim, versions of which – including references to 'Royal Patronage' and the addition of the Prince of Wales' ostrich plumes - had intermittently appeared on the back of his photographic mounts. There had been a time when self-aggrandizing photographers had made unwarranted boasts of royal connections, but official pressure and the court action against the Taylor brothers in the mid-1880s had effectively discouraged such advertising. Smith was a respectable practitioner, so it seems likely that there was some substance to his assertions. It should be noted, too, that royal patronage did not necessarily result in portraits of family members. There were photographic records to be made of royal houses, land, agricultural equipment and animals. Unfortunately, whatever pictures Smith took for the Sandringham Estate in the late nineteenth century, the supporting evidence has not been found.

From the Edwardian period, however, just a year after the advertisement in Dutt's guide, comes proof that then, if not before, Smith did receive a royal commission. The photograph is a gelatine silver print in the care of the Royal Collection Trust:⁹³ it was taken on 9th October 1906, and it shows the Prince of Wales (the future George V) standing by a car outside York Cottage, Sandringham. Sadly, perhaps, it is credited to T Smith and Sons, King's Lynn, for even after running the High Street business for a quarter-century, John Smith was still operating under the name of a father who had died 17 years earlier.

Photographing the Prince of Wales was a high point for Smith, but the dramatic low points that had punctuated his career were not yet over. One Saturday evening early in 1910 his son, Graham, came rushing home along the High Street and down the alley beside the shop. He was being chased, as Albert Brown, manager of Hilton's boot shop, later attested,⁹⁴ by Edward Simpson, one of the town's habitual troublemakers. Simpson, who was described as 'the worse for drink', later explained that the lad had annoyed him, and that 'he went after the boy to chastise him'. But Graham had escaped and, deprived of his victim, Simpson did the next best thing he could think of: he took off his cap, wrapped it carefully around his hand, and punched the studio window. (The ease with which he smashed the pane and the precautions taken with the cap did rather suggest that Simpson was exercising a well-practised skill.)

Unsurprisingly, Simpson ('of no fixed abode') was charged with wilful damage to the window and to the display of pictures and frames behind it. It emerged in court that he had already been found guilty of similar offences on 31 previous occasions, though he protested that these convictions were 'for no crime whatsoever; only molested by the police.' In reply, Chief Superintendent Payne pointed out that it was Simpson's wont to get drunk 'and then he seemed to run amuk (sic).' He added that on Saturday, before chasing Graham Smith, 'he caused some annoyance to several ladies.' Simpson argued, by way of mitigation, that he 'struck the window instead of the boy', adding that 'If he had struck the boy, he would have recollected it. (Laughter.)' Simpson was referred to the Quarter Sessions, Graham was left to recover from his fright, and (not for the first time) Smith had to seek out the services of a glazier.

But Simpson was not happy: he had a sense of being badly treated, and he was nursing a grudge. About eight weeks later, one Thursday at around midnight, he turned up outside the studio again. A witness heard him mutter 'that he did not have proper justice in his last case,' and then, once again, he punched and smashed the shop window. In due course, he appeared on a charge of being drunk and disorderly, but there was another matter to attend to first. Presumably, he had forgotten to use his cap, and, as a result, his 'wrist was very severely cut, and it was attended to by the police surgeon,' On this occasion, perhaps, he did have 'proper justice' after all.

The census of the following year once again shows Smith at the High Street address.⁹⁵ The children were still at school, though Graham, at 15, was unlikely to remain there much longer. Florence was away in Kent, visiting her aunt and uncle, and leaving her husband to cope alone.⁹⁶ Barring the intervention of local reprobates, Graham and Doris were old enough to be of relatively little trouble to their father, and there was a servant to handle domestic affairs. But Smith was now 60, and, as will become clear, he was an old 60. He was, in fact, a man facing a fast-approaching crisis.

¹ 1901 census, RG13, piece 1889, folio 53, page 9.

² *Lynn Advertiser*, 21st November 1891.

³ *Lynn Advertiser*, 6th January 1899.

⁴ *A Portrait of Walter Dexter*, Charlotte Paton, p38, (Dereham: Larks Press, 2014).

⁵ *Lynn Advertiser*, 24th January 1904.

⁶ *Photographic Views of King's Lynn*, W Dexter, 109 High Street, King's Lynn (date not stated).

⁷ *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1894 & 1895.

⁸ *Homeland Handbooks: King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, W A Dutt, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).

9 *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 19th August 1905.

10 *Our Homeland Churches and how to study them*, Sidney Heath, (London: The Homeland Association, 1907).

11 *Nelson's Homeland*, James Hooper, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).

12 *The Norfolk and Suffolk Coast (The County Coast Series)*, W A Dutt, (London: T F Unwin, 1909).

13 King's Lynn yearbooks (various titles) 1901-1906.

14 *Lincolnshire Echo*, 30th March 1904.

15 *Lincolnshire Echo*, 7th January 1906.

16 *Eastern Daily Press*, 7th April 1902.

17 *Eastern Daily Press*, 25th October 1902.

18 *Lynn Advertiser*, 22nd July 1904.

19 *Lincolnshire Echo*, 29th September 1904.

20 *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2nd December 1904.

21 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19th January 1906.

22 *Stamford Mercury*, 26th October 1906.

23 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9th November 1906.

24 Photographic mount, dated 1907, in the author's collection.

25 Kelly's *Directory of Suffolk*, 1908, and Cowell's *Directory of Felixstowe & Walton*, 1909.

26 1911 census: RG14, piece 10880, schedule 133.

27 1911 census: RG14, PN2337, RD26, SD,5 ED52, SN106.

28 *A Portrait of Walter Dexter*, Charlotte Paton, p56, (Dereham: Larks Press, 2014).

29 1891 census: RG12, piece 1568, folio 67, page 8.

30 Civil registration index of deaths: King's Lynn, March 1898, volume 4B, page 255.

31 Civil registration index of deaths: Bosmere, Suffolk, September 1908, volume 4A, page 458.

32 Civil registration index of deaths: Wandsworth, June 1920, volume 1, page 573.

33 1901 census: RG13, piece 1889, folio 111, page 2.

34 Civil registration index of births: King's Lynn, June 1902, volume 4B, page 312

35 1891 census: RG12, piece 1569, folio 125, page 3.

36 1881 census: RG11, piece 2002, folio 74, page 23, and

37 1891 census: RG13, piece 1571, folio 49, page 4.

38 1901 census: RG13, piece 1889, folio 124, page 27.

39 1901 census: RG13, piece 1888, folio 98, page 16.

40 Various directories and year books, including Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1904 & 1908.

41 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1904 & 1908

42 *King's Lynn Red Book*, 1900 & 1901.

43 *Sconce's Illustrated Almanack*, 1905; *King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, W. A. Dutt, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).

44 *Sconce's Illustrated Almanack*, 1909.

45 *Sconce's Illustrated Almanack*, 1904-1909.

46 *King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, W. A. Dutt, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).

47 Postcard to Mrs A. Hall, Somerleyton, Suffolk, from 'Etty', 26th April 1910.

48 *Sconce's Illustrated Almanack*, 1905.

49 *Lynn News Almanack and Diary*, 1896.

50 *Sconce's Illustrated Almanack*, 1907.

51 e.g. the marriage of Annie Johnson and Herbert Bolton, Terrington St Clement; *Lynn Advertiser*, 5th October 1906.

52 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:1984.114.1. (c.1900)

53 e.g. British School FC (KILLM:1983.2.3) and All Saints' Church FC (True's Yard, KLNTY2020.605a), both 1907; King's Lynn FC 1905 (KILLM:1980.84.9/10).

54 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:2002.114.2. (c1909)

55 *Lynn Advertiser*, 23rd August 1907.

56 True's Yard Museum, accession number KLNTY2020.610.

57 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:2008.373 & 373.1 (c1900).

58 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:2008.372 (c1902).

59 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:1982.148 (date uncertain).

60 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:2007.214-225; KILLM:2008.370.

61 *The Sphere*, 13th May 1905.

True's Yard Museum, accession number KLNTY2020.608.

62 *Music Hall & Theatre Review*, 24th February 1905.
63 *Hull Daily Mail*, 25th November 1909.
64 True's Yard Museum, accession numbers KLNTY2020.606 & KLNTY2020.607.
65 *Lynn Advertiser*, 14th February 1902.
66 *Lynn Advertiser*, 23rd November 1906.
67 *Lynn Advertiser*, 30th November 1906.
68 *Lynn Advertiser*, 8th July 1904.
69 *Lynn Advertiser*, 29th October 1910.
70 *Eastern Evening News*, 12th November 1909.
71 *Cambridge Independent Press*, July 10th 1908.
72 *Lynn Advertiser*, 7th February 1902.
73 *Lynn Advertiser*, 14th February 1902.
74 Account drawn from *Lynn Advertiser* and *Diss Express*, both 18th November 1904.
75 *King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, W A Dutt, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).
76 *Diss Express*, 18th November 1904.
77 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18th November 1904.
78 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:1984.181.20.
79 True's Yard collection: TY2001.5464.
80 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1st December 1905.
81 1911 census: RG14, PN11634, RD235, SD2, ED13.
82 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1896.
83 24th June 1894, King's Lynn.
84 1881 census: RG11, piece 1999, folio 48, page 17.
85 1901 census: RG13, piece 1888, folio 124, page 18.
86 E.g. True's Yard Museum, accession numbers KLNTY2020.410 to KLNTY2020.412.
87 Norfolk Library and Museums Service: KILLM:1993.207.19.
88 *The Era*, 27th February 1904.
89 *The Era*, 18th February 1905.
90 *Bedfordshire Mercury*, 23rd February, 1906.
91 *Eastern Daily Press*, 20th October 1910; *Norfolk News*, 22nd October 1902.
92 *King's Lynn with its Surroundings*, W. A. Dutt, (London: The Homeland Association, 1905).
93 Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 2108253.
94 Details and quotations: *Lynn Advertiser*, 18th February 1910.
95 1911 census: RG14, PN11640, RD236, SD1, ED2, SN96.
96 1911 census: RG14, PN3632, RD42, SD1, ED3, SN4.