

2. Competing processes (1851-1856)

Professional photography returned to King's Lynn in 1851 with the arrival of R. and W. Kerry, who had been in business as itinerant silhouette artists and portrait painters in the 1840s¹, and who had now embraced this new method of making likenesses for their customers. Advertising themselves as operating under Beard's patent, they set up their 'Operative Rooms' in St James' Street during the second half of August, and their pitch was confident:

(Messrs Kerry) Wish to inform the Gentry and Inhabitants of Lynn, that they are now taking Photographic Portraits with all their most recent and beautiful Improvements in Colours; they have constructed one of the best sets of Photographic Apparatus in England, with which they can take any number of Likenesses in one group that may be required, with the colours chemically fixed.²

This was something quite special. If photographs were still a thing of wonder – and, to the people of a provincial town, they certainly were – then to offer coloured images was to offer wonder piled upon wonder. These were not the products of colour photography in any modern sense: they were monochrome images that were developed, fixed and then hand-coloured. This, if done well, was a skilful and demanding process. The standard procedure was to trace the portrait, use the tracing to make a separate stencil for each colour, and to brush or shake a powdered colour, containing a little gum Arabic, over the stencil. Then, once the powder coated the chosen area, the colourist breathed gently on the surface. The warmth and moisture of the breath were sufficient to dissolve the gum Arabic and allow the pigment to adhere to the metal of the daguerreotype. This was a time-consuming and delicate operation, and prices were adjusted accordingly. The Kerrys charged 5 shillings for a small plain portrait, but 7/6d for the coloured equivalent. Plain and coloured medium-sized portraits were 7/6d and 10/6d respectively, and large portraits were 15 shillings and one pound. Patrons might reasonably feel that the resulting images deserved to be protected, and the Kerrys offered 'Handsome Cases, Frames, &c., at Moderate Charges'.

The photographers also took the opportunity to dispel a myth: 'The Sunshine is not at all required for taking Likenesses by the new process.' It was true that good light made for shorter exposure times, and that reducing a sitter's period of forced immobility made for a better portrait, but the harsh blaze of strong and direct sunlight brought its own problems. A softer, more diffused light was much to be preferred. Plenty of light was certainly desirable, which is why, back in 1844, T. H. Ely had sought a room with windows in both the wall and the ceiling. But that light needed to be managed. Reflectors could help to illuminate the darker areas of the picture, and blinds or – in the more ambitious studios – blue glass could be used to reduce glare. Indeed, as studios began to be purpose-built, photographers developed a preference for north facing studios, which were spared the direct probing of the sun's rays. Dull weather might mean longer

exposures, but pictures could still be taken, and it was necessary to persuade prospective clients not restrict their custom to the brightest days.

The Kerrys' stay in Lynn was to be brief. Their advertisement warned the public that the studio would be maintained beyond August for 'A Few Days Only!!', and the *Lynn Advertiser* picked up on the sense of urgency:

We beg to draw the attention of our readers to an advertisement in another column, which announces the arrival here of the Messrs. Kerry, who are actively employed in taking likenesses by their novel and improved instrument, which we are assured, from those we have observed, cannot fail to give a true delineation of feature and expression of countenance, It is rarely that an opportunity like this presents itself in Lynn, and as the stay of these parties is only for a few days, we would advise our friends at once to test the accuracy of the beautiful apparatus of these talented artists.³

It is possible, but by no means certain, that R. and W. Kerry made a return visit the following year. They were definitely working in Eastern England in the summer of 1852, when the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* praised their daguerreotypes as 'very perfect',⁴ and Henry Hillen, in his history of Lynn, claimed they were in town that year and enthused about the implications of accessible portraiture:

What a comfort it is to have the likeness of some departed relation or absent friend on which to look and say –

With thee though speechless there's a converse;
Though above – a sweet and rapturous society.⁵

He accurately identified the emotional value of photography, and he went on to quote a set of prices that differed from those of 1851: 'Portraits small 2/6 each; Coloured 5/-; with hands coloured 7/6'. But he also reported that 'Messrs Kerry introduced photography' to the town, and that was certainly not the case. He was writing in the early 20th century, and if he was speaking from memory, the memory was not his own. (He had been a babe-in-arms at the time of the alleged 1852 visit.) The mention of prices suggests he was working from some documentary evidence, but his ignorance of Ely's 1844 stay in Lynn indicates that his treatment of early photography in the town must be viewed with caution.

One detail of the Kerrys' 1851 advertisement needs to be returned to. Their reference to 'any number of Likenesses' is potentially misleading. It does not mean that copies could be supplied. Since, as their mention of Beard's patent confirms, they were producing daguerreotypes, any multiple likenesses must have been separately taken. Daguerreotypes were one-off products, allowing no possibility of subsequent copies. The image was there, caught on the metal surface, but a second likeness would require a second exposure. What the market needed – and what the daguerreotype could not offer – was repeatability.

Yet repeatability was already possible.

The announcement of Daguerre's photographic process in January 1839 had come as a shock to the English experimenter, William Henry Fox Talbot. Talbot had already devised a method of using paper (rather than metal) as a material for sensitising to light and exposing in a camera to record an image. He quickly made his progress known, and by September 1840 he had made considerable improvements to it. Initially he had needed an exposure of half an hour or more before his light-sensitive paper showed a negative image. Then he discovered that a much shorter exposure was enough to have an invisible effect on his paper plate. By using a chemical developer, he could 'excite' this latent image and turn it into a fully visible negative. If the paper negative was then oiled or waxed, it was rendered sufficiently translucent for it to be laid over a second sheet of sensitised paper. A further exposure then allowed light to pass through to the lower sheet, reversing the light and dark tones for a second time, and creating a positive image. Talbot had discovered two principles that would, in due course, become vital to the future of photography: awareness of the latent image would allow a considerable reduction in exposure times, and the fact that many positives could be printed from a single negative meant that an image was repeatable. He called his pictures 'calotypes', though some of his admirers preferred the term 'Talbotype'.

Waxed paper negatives were not, however, ideal. Though translucent, they were not fully transparent, and the grainy fibre of the paper reduced the sharpness of the final image. But this problem was solved by Frederick Scott Archer when, in March 1851, he introduced his wet collodion process. This used a glass plate, which had been coated with collodion (gun-cotton dissolved in ether) and silver nitrate, and which – exposed to light, developed and fixed – became a negative that could be used repeatedly to produce paper prints. Then, a year later, he demonstrated how the glass negatives could themselves be bleached and black-backed to turn them into one-off positives (or ambrotypes). In short, Archer's process could offer the equivalents of both calotypes and daguerreotypes.

A complication for would-be photographers was the question of copyright. Archer generously gave his process to the world, but Talbot, having licensed the calotype, argued that collodion photography, as a method of producing prints on paper, was an extension of his process. So, though there was now a choice of photographic processes, there was also – until the patent on Daguerre's method ran out at the end of 1852 and Talbot abandoned his attempt to control paper-based processes in 1854 – some uncertainty as to the legal ground on which a photographer might stand. Nevertheless, new photographers did appear and some existing photographers switched (with or without approval) to the new method. The Kerrys, who had already made the transition from paintings and silhouettes to daguerreotypes, were amongst those who made a change. By October 1853 they were advertising a limited season at Leamington Spa, where they would be making coloured photographic portraits 'under Fox Talbot's Special Licence'.⁶

King's Lynn, meanwhile, had become home to its own creator of repeatable photographs. In the spring of 1851, 30-year old⁷ Henry Brame Bullock was working in the wine and grocery business of his father, Brame Bullock, at 110 High Street.⁸ By 21st August 1852

he had set himself up in a part of the family premises as a photographic portrait artist.⁹ It was a large shop, with ample accommodation on the first floor, a yard at the back and a warehouse,¹⁰ so it may not have been too difficult to find and adapt a suitable space to serve as a studio.

It was Talbot's method, as improved by Archer, that had attracted Bullock into photography, and his advertisement explained why he practised 'The New Photographic Process by the Collodio-Iodide of Silver':

The advantages offered are a Correct Likeness, Superior in many respects to the Daguerreotype, at about one-fourth of its cost; and the power of Multiplying Copies: by which from a single sitting of a few moments, and at a trifling additional expense, a whole circle of friends may be supplied. The pictures being on paper, may be coloured and worked up as Miniatures in the highest perfection.¹¹

He emphasised that his prices were 'strictly moderate', and he also offered tuition in the collodion and Talbotype processes. He did not, though, plan to stay long in Lynn, for it was still common practice to work a market and move on. The cost of photographs had been greatly reduced by the advent of collodion, but they were still beyond the reach of the poorer majority of the population. It is also open to question how long the cuckoo of photography could be conveniently accommodated in a grocer's shop nest. Understandably, therefore, Bullock warned, 'An early application is requested, as the Season must of necessity be shortly brought to a close.'

His newspaper advertisement last appeared on October 9th, and it's not clear how soon after that he left town. By June 1853 he was operating in Hull¹², and at some point he worked at Cundall's Photographic Institution in London's New Bond Street. But by the summer of 1854 his itinerant days were over, and he had entered into partnership with William Dolamore to run a studio at 30 Regent Street.¹³

Bullock was Lynn's first home-grown professional photographer, and his subsequent career deserves to be noted.

The Dolamore and Bullock partnership lasted 13 years and, though studio portraiture was a major part of their business, they also specialised in architectural and engineering photography. They regularly courted public attention, with examples of their work appearing in the London Photographic Society's exhibitions of 1855, 1856, 1857 and 1858, the Birmingham Photographic Society's 1857 exhibition, the Architectural Photographic Association's exhibition in 1861, and the London International Exhibition of 1862.¹⁴ In 1856 they published a series of views entitled *Scenery of the English Lakes*; they recorded the first trial run – with Gladstone as one of the passengers – on the Metropolitan Line of the London Underground in 1862; their services were sought for the 1864 wedding of the Count and Countess of Paris. Their reputation endures, and examples of their work have found their way into the Royal Art Collection and the holdings of the National Portrait Gallery and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

It is usually impossible to tell which photographer took which pictures, since images were generally ascribed to the partnership. Twice, however, in the relatively early days of his association with Dolamore, Bullock exhibited under his own name. In 1856 he showed collodion prints of Kenilworth Castle at an exhibition mounted by the Norwich Photographic Society, and in 1857 he contributed 15 pictures, mostly of Lake District scenes, to an Art Treasures exhibition in Manchester.¹⁵

Bullock kept contact with the town of his birth. It must have been his interest that led to Dolamore and Bullock photographs being supplied for the inauguration of Lynn's Athenaeum in 1854¹⁶ and for a loan art exhibition in 1869.¹⁷ He also had family matters to claim his attention. In August 1855 his father, Brame Bullock decided to concentrate on the wine side of the business, allowing Frederick, the second son, to take over the grocery department.¹⁸ By 1861 Brame had retired completely, and Frederick was at the helm with three men working for him.¹⁹ But all was not well, and a year later Henry found himself acting in tandem with Albert Fincham, a London grocer and tea dealer, as trustee in the matter of Frederick's bankruptcy. Their role was outlined in a notice drawn up by Richard Bethell, Registrar of the Court of Bankruptcy:

Conveyance and Assignment of all the real and personal estate, in possession, reversion, remainder, or otherwise, of the said Frederick Bullock, unto the said trustees, for the benefit of the said trustees and the other persons, parties thereto, of the third part, creditors of the said Frederick Bullock, who should execute the deed within twenty-eight days from the date thereof.²⁰

It was a responsibility Henry could probably have done without. His own career, on the other hand, prospered. His collaboration with William Dolamore lasted until 1867, when the *London Gazette* announced that their partnership 'in the trade or business of Photographers was ... dissolved by mutual consent, as from the 25th day of March'²¹ – an event also noted in the *British Journal of Photography*.²² It is possible that he then practised alone for a brief period, but if so, it was not for long. By April 1871 he had retired to Burwash in Sussex, where he was living on an annuity with his older sister, Elizabeth, and one servant.²³ (One person who will have followed his career with interest was his much younger brother, Edwin, who by 1871 had become a photographer himself, and of whom much more will be heard in due course.) Henry Bullock died later that year and was buried beneath a curved headstone – showing a cross and four shields – in St Bartholomew's churchyard in Burwash.

Back in Lynn, the gap left by Bullock's departure towards the end of 1852 was soon filled. In or about 1853 William and Sarah Dexter opened their first studio at 2 Regent Street, three doors away from Mr Garner's livery stables²⁴, in a corner property later referred to as '2 Regent Street, St James' Street'.²⁵ William, like his twin brother John, had begun his working life as a shoe maker,²⁶ and he was still listed as a Regent Street boot and shoe maker in the mid-1850s²⁷. The couple's earliest appearance as photographers in a trade directory was not until 1858,²⁸ but the 1853 founding date is derived from their claim in 1865 to have been established for twelve years.²⁹ (It should,

though, be recognised that such claims were often a little approximate.) They were founding a business that would engage members of three generations and be a feature of Lynn life for over half a century. At this pioneering stage of their career it is worth noting that, despite having three children under the age of seven to look after, Sarah played a vital part in the enterprise. The studio was variously referred to over the years, sometimes as hers, sometimes as his, and sometimes simply as Dexter's. But her importance from the outset is evident from the labels on early cased portraits that refer to the studio as 'Mrs Dexter's Likeness Rooms'.³⁰

The collodion method was quickly winning new practitioners and converting old ones, and within a couple of years it would dominate the market. Moreover, because collodion photography was less expensive, that market was growing. More of Lynn's people could afford to be photographed, and more of Lynn's people were becoming alert to the importance of photography. Some of them had visited the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and marvelled at (among many other things) the wonders of photographic art. But those who had stayed at home were soon beginning to see those wonders too. In January 1854 the Lynn Conversazione and Society of Arts played host, at the Albion Hall, to 'the public Exhibition of a series of Photographic Pictures, collected by the London Society of Arts'.³¹ Admission was 6d, a descriptive catalogue was twopence extra, and the opening times of noon until four, and then seven until ten in the evening, made it possible to visit outside working hours. This was the Society of Arts' first ever touring exhibition of photographs, and Lynn was the eleventh location to be given a chance to see the work of pioneers, such as William Henry Fox Talbot and Frederick Scott Archer, and of those now achieving eminence in the photographic world, such as Joseph Cundall, P. H. Delamotte, Roger Fenton and Gustave le Grey.³² The exhibits were hailed by the press as a 'splendid collection of Photographic Pictures', and one of the evenings was made the occasion of a musical soirée and a public lecture explaining the collodion process.³³

Photography featured, too, in the plans for creating an Athenaeum as a permanent home for the town's various literary, scientific and musical societies. The idea was proposed in 1852; the town council offered provisional financial support; and in February 1853 work began on the preparation of the site. A management committee was appointed, and it decided that the inauguration should be marked by a display 'of an educational character, illustrative of the various purposes for which the new building was designed'.³⁴ A list of suitable exhibits was drawn up, and it included examples of fine arts, manufactures, medieval art, photography, foreign curiosities and natural history. The photography section of the list went into some detail and showed an awareness of the current range of processes and techniques:

Photography, – Pictures by daguerreotype, talbotype, collodion and wax paper processes (crystoleum): coloured specimens to be accompanied by untouched specimens of the same subject.³⁵

(The crystoleum, it should be explained, was an image transferred from paper print to glass and then coloured from the back.)

The building and the exhibition opened in August 1854, and the *Lynn Advertiser* gave a slightly confusing account of the pictures on display:

Photographs were exhibited by Delamotte and Bullock, of London, Mr Taylor, of Lynn, and Mr Ladbrooke. A series of photographs, sent by the Society of Arts, represented the progress of the Crystal Palace.³⁶

The paper was having some trouble with its Dolamores and its Delamottes. In fact, the London partnership was Dolamore and Bullock, and Henry Bullock was, as has been seen, a native of Lynn. Delamotte did, however, exist. He had been represented in the Society of Arts' exhibition eight months earlier, and he was the creator of a series of calotypes of the Crystal Palace being rebuilt at Sydenham, when the Great Exhibition was over. This series, well known to this day, was evidently included in the Athenaeum exhibition.

William Taylor, mentioned in the report as another exhibitor, was a recent recruit to the ranks of Lynn's professional photographers. Like the Dexters, he was seeking to establish a fixed studio in the town rather than simply exploit the market and move on.

Originally from Southwark in London, William Taylor moved in the mid-1830s to Great Massingham, a few miles from Lynn, where he became the village schoolmaster. During his time there he further developed his own talents as well as those of his charges, and by the early 1850s he had moved to Lynn and set up in business as an engraver, draughtsman, printer, stationer and bookseller. He had also become a prominent local antiquarian with a number of books to his name.³⁷ His sons, William Henry and Walter, now worked with him as printers and compositors.³⁸ At some point between 1851 and 1854 the family moved to business premises at 13 High Street, and it was from this address that the new photographic studio was advertised.³⁹

By this time Taylor was well past fifty, and one might think him unlikely to be open to new ideas or keen to learn new skills. Certainly, there are hints in his writings that he preferred the ancient to the modern. 'When we have to speak of architectural beauties in our churches,' he argued, 'we necessarily speak in the past tense, the present is used in describing deformities.'⁴⁰ In a similar vein he asserted that the gravestones of the past 'were Christian memorials, very different from those which now degrade our burial places'.⁴¹ It would, be unwise, however, to underestimate the intellectual curiosity of a Victorian with a scholarly turn of mind, and Taylor had spent much of his life cultivating a graphic literacy and developing a mixture of artistic and technical skills.

In fact, letters from Taylor – written to his London friend William Barton during the Great Massingham years – give a remarkable insight into the range and growth of his interests.⁴² Describing the pair of them as 'we antiquaries',⁴³ he discussed church architecture and furnishings, brass rubbing, Caroline furniture and Roman remains. He referred to his new garden and 'the pleasure of planning it entirely in accordance with my own taste'.⁴⁴ He recorded his efforts 'to train a little choir for sacred music',⁴⁵ and complained of the cost of obtaining sheet music in Massingham, asking Barton to look

out for second hand copies in London, where ‘you may pick up an odd duet or two for the voice almost at wastepaper price’.⁴⁶ Returning from a visit to the coast he speculated on the geology of Hunstanton cliffs and was fascinated by the lighthouse, ‘where by means of polished mirrors a small quantity of light is magnified and reflected to a distance I think of 15 miles.’⁴⁷ He was certainly a traditionalist in both arts and politics, expressing satisfaction at the local election of two Conservative members, praising Handel and Haydn (‘Music is not the better for being modern.’⁴⁸), and choosing predictable subjects for sketching (‘Churches of course.’⁴⁹).

In the visual arts, however, his tastes were not standing still. He recognised the value of illustration and appended sketches to some of his letters, and he was very interested in reproducible images, both woodcuts and engravings. By 1841 he was not simply collecting prints of notable antiquities; instead, in a foreshadowing of the direction his career would later take, he was focussing on the business of their production, amassing ‘a little collection illustrative of the history and progress of the act of printing’.⁵⁰

Moreover, as the printer and engraver in him began to awaken, so did the first leanings towards another future activity. Taylor was beginning (albeit by traditional methods) to turn his hand to making portraits. In 1839 he reported that he had completed several likenesses: ‘They have turned out very satisfactory ... and as I get a fair price for them, (I) shall devote my Saturdays to that pursuit, as an agreeable change from my other studies.’⁵¹ Two years later, he was still painting portraits and was experimenting with a new format: ‘I have just finished a pair of Miniatures of King Charles 1st and his Queen.’⁵² It would be some years before he would produce his portraits by photography, but the ground was already being prepared.

In short, William Taylor was a perfect example of a certain kind of Victorian: an eager collector and investigator of varied interests, with a strong attachment to the past, but also with a lively sense of curiosity and a willingness to try something new. Photography was both art and science; it had now become (thanks to Frederick Scott Archer) an affordable area of exploration; and it sat very comfortably beside Taylor’s other lines of business. It was just made for someone like William Taylor.

By November 1853, he had not only taken his first steps in photography, but one of his portraits had been put to effective public use. When Lynn-born Samuel Gurney Cresswell became the first naval officer to cross the Northwest Passage, the *Illustrated London News* featured a picture of the hero of the day and explained, ‘The portrait we engrave is from a Photograph by Mr W. Taylor of High-street, Lynn.’⁵³ Next, in the following January, at a soirée of the Lynn Conversazione Society, Taylor joined with a Mr Rowney to present a history of photography, ‘with an interesting description of the process of production, the agents employed, and the circumstances under which a successful or adverse result would be obtained.’⁵⁴ Then, having established his credibility, he was ready to launch his professional studio.

Taylor made his first press announcement in February 1854 and offered ‘Photographic Portraits, Guaranteed Likenesses taken by the above process’.⁵⁵ By this time, enough

people had visited studios for word to have spread that being photographed was something of an ordeal. Prospective clients would have heard disturbing tales of enforced immobility and long exposures, so Taylor was at pains to reassure them: 'Time of sitting, 10 seconds.'

This mention of ten-second sittings provides no sure evidence of which process he was using, since improvements to both daguerreotype and wet collodion methods had brought reduced exposure times. 1854 would have been a rather late date at which to take up daguerreotypy, though practitioners who had already embraced the process might still be persevering with it. What is more significant is Taylor's use of the word 'photographic'. Once Archer's process had become established, daguerreotypists tended to refer to their own process by its specific name, whereas 'photography' and 'photographic' came increasingly (though not invariably) to refer to the wet-collodion method. Subsequent Taylor announcements, with their mentions of 'Talbotype Photography'⁵⁶ and pictures on 'glass or paper',⁵⁷ leave no doubt that it was the wet-plate process that was being employed in the Taylor studio.

Perhaps, though, the public was more concerned with the finish and presentation of the end product than with the means by which it was achieved. Taylor's early advertisements certainly brought such details to their attention with:

(Portraits) Also highly finished in Wax Water Colours, by a new and beautiful American process, by which the aid of Colour is obtained, without obscuring the delicate touches of the Photographic Picture. – Specimens may be seen.⁵⁸

and:

Photographic Portraits in every style of finish for Frames, Morocco cases, Locketts, Brooches &c; by the glass or paper process, plain or coloured, taken daily.⁵⁹

He also reminded the public that portraits were not the only products of photography, and that he could make 'copies of pictures, sculpture &c.'⁶⁰

At first, Taylor made do as best he could in the existing accommodation at 13 High Street; but he was keen to take portraits in an environment designed with photography in mind, and in June 1855 he made an important announcement:

Photographic portraits. – Wm. Taylor having made very complete arrangements for perfecting this branch of his business, by the erection of a suitable glass house, is prepared to furnish warranted likenesses in every style of finish. Sitters will find a waiting room with every convenience for the arrangement of dress, &c.⁶¹

The glasshouse may have been freestanding on the ground at the back of the property; it may have been attached to the existing building or rebuilt from a part of it. It could even have been erected, as some were, on a flat part of the roof. It required ample windows in

the ceiling and at least one side, and it was, of necessity, designed to make the most of whatever daylight was available. Taylor had not abandoned his other well-established activities – as ‘this branch of his business’ indicated – but he was evidently concerned to keep up with the latest developments in studio photography. ‘Glass house’ studios were now beginning to appear across the country, and one street in London would become so popular as a location for new photographic premises that its name would in due course be changed to Glasshouse Street.

Taylor had thought not only of his own requirements as a photographer. His creation of a waiting room provided clients somewhere comfortable to prepare for their sitting, offered them facilities – including, no doubt, a mirror – for adjusting their Sunday best, and probably gave him a chance to impress with examples of his work displayed on the walls. The surroundings can hardly have been as grand as the palatial waiting areas offered by some London practitioners, but they will have been intended to inspire confidence and create a sense of occasion.

This was not, however, Lynn’s first custom-built studio. After Taylor had set up as a photographer, but before he had embarked on building a glass house, a Mr Turner appeared on the photographic scene.

The name was first mentioned by the Lynn correspondent of the *Cambridge Independent Press* as part of a partnership, quite possibly itinerant, that was operating at an unspecified address in July 1854.

Messrs. Turner and Walker are now taking portraits here by means of the Photographic process. The specimens exhibited are certainly very good, and any person desirous of handing down his beauties to posterity must be poor indeed if even in these hard times he cannot raise the sum required for the purpose.

The ‘photographic process’, as already indicated, was a term usually applied to the wet-plate method, and the insistence on its relative cheapness seems to confirm that Turner and Walker were not producing daguerreotypes. A William Turner and a Samuel Walker had, back in the 1840s, held daguerreotype licences for Bristol and York respectively,⁶² and it is not impossible that they had now teamed up to create portraits by the new technique. It is also possible that Turner then decided to stay on in Lynn and run a solo venture. But if he did so, he also reverted to the old technology that was rapidly losing ground, for in September 1854 the *Norfolk News* reported the opening of Lynn’s first custom-built daguerreotype studio – a studio that pre-dated Taylor’s glasshouse by nine months. The practitioner was a Mr Turner, and while two different Turners offering portraits in a small town at the same early date is not impossible, it would be quite a coincidence.

Turner, it appeared, had erected near the railway station ‘a building of very modest pretensions, and one by no means likely to attract much attention’.⁶³ On closer examination, however, it would ‘be found admirably constructed to effect the object which the proprietor has in view; – namely, that of taking portraits on an improved

principle of Daguerreotype'. The practitioner, moreover, was judged to be quite as fit-for-purpose as the premises:

Mr Turner, the gentleman referred to, appears to be a very successful artist, and has, by his improved method, been able to render his plates so highly sensitive, that his style is equal, if not superior, to any we have before seen. When required, the colouring process is added, and should the sitting be favourable, the likeness cannot fail to be perfect. Mr Turner invites inspection, and parties desirous of comparing his process with that of the photographic (i.e. collodion), already so ably represented in this town, cannot do better than pay this talented artist a visit.

Turner's studio may have been humbler than Taylor's, and it may have lasted for no great time. (Perhaps his insistence on using the daguerreotype method as late as 1854 was a little short-sighted and limited the life of the venture.) But it appears to have been the first building in Lynn to have been erected specifically for the production of photographs.

Adapting and making do, however, remained the norm. T. H. Ely and the Kerrys had simply found accommodation that was sufficiently well-lit to suit their purpose. Bullock and the Dexters appear to have adapted parts of existing buildings for use as portrait rooms, just as Taylor himself did in the first instance. Sybilla Bennett and, perhaps, Henry Belchambers opened studios in the town after Taylor's first advertisement and before his construction of a glass house, but no suggestion has been found that they built premises specifically designed for photography.

Sybilla Bennett set up her studio in the family home at 7 London Road. She was the wife of Charles Bennett, a builder and contractor from Lincolnshire whose flourishing business employed, according to the 1851 census, 'about 100 Men as Carpenters and Bricklayers'.⁶⁴ His most notable and enduring contribution to the Lynn scene was the building of St John's Church in the 1840s, and he later expanded his operations to include railway construction.⁶⁵

The couple appear to have been childless, and it is tempting to imagine Sybilla looking for an outlet for her energies. Her 1854 advertisement, at least, suggests someone with a capacity for activity:

Photographic Portraits are taken by Mrs. Chas. Bennett, and coloured if required. The hours for obtaining the best pictures are from ten until two. Lessons given in the Art of Modelling Wax Flowers. Specimens of both may be seen at the Athenaeum Exhibition now open.⁶⁶

The colouring of portraits and the making of wax flowers sound suitably ladylike for a successful tradesman's wife with time on her hands, but wet collodion photography – implied by the word 'photographic' – was messy as well as exacting, involving the use of chemicals that were sticky and that stained. In practise, therefore, Mrs Bennett should perhaps be seen as a skilled, determined and resourceful character, rather than a stereotypical Victorian little woman trying her delicate hand at the latest novelty.

Indeed, she could have been seeking to make a useful contribution to the family income, for her venture into business may have coincided with a downturn in her husband's fortunes. The 1850s seem to have been a period of decline for Charles, whose workforce, by 1861, had dwindled to only 20 men.⁶⁷ This, admittedly, falls well short of penury, and a degree of recovery followed. In 1871 the employee headcount had risen again to 50, and the couple had felt able to take on a second domestic servant.⁶⁸ But there certainly appears to have been a period of relative difficulty in the 1850s, and it may be that Sybilla was looking to play her part in addressing it.

Admittedly, Mrs Bennett's studio seems not to have lasted long, since a single advertisement is its only record. But her accommodation was probably less than ideal. She named ten until two as the best times for taking photographs, and this was in August. Eleven years earlier, T. H. Ely had been soliciting business from ten until dusk during the gloomiest winter months. This suggests that lighting may have been something of a problem for Sybilla, and perhaps that her studio windows were overshadowed by surrounding buildings or foliage for much of the day. But whatever her difficulties in sustaining a business, she took her work seriously enough to show it in the Athenaeum's inaugural exhibition. Her name, unlike that of William Taylor, was not mentioned in the newspaper report, but that listed only 'the principal contributions of paintings in water colours, drawings, photographs, prints, &c, &c.'⁶⁹

The other wet-plate photographer seeking to establish a studio at around this time was Henry Belchambers, the son of a Lynn shoemaker. (The launch of his business is assigned to 1855 on the strength of a reference to two years' experience in an advertisement from 1857.)⁷⁰ He opened his grandly named Lynn and West Norfolk Photographic Establishment in Chamberlain Buildings, Railway Road. He was to describe himself in 1857 as a 'photographist', but he was listed in an 1856 trade directory as a 'photographic portrait painter'⁷¹, and that provides the key to his background. Belchambers had started his career as a portrait painter, and that was his occupation when, on census night 1851, he was a young man of 22 staying in Hilgay at the home of Charles and Anna Balls.⁷² But portrait painting was perhaps a less certain career to follow, once photography caught the public imagination and came within more people's financial reach. Belchambers evidently saw how the market for likenesses was developing and changed his career accordingly.

The age of the fixed studio was, however, in its infancy, and there were still photographers who pursued the itinerant option. Like T. H. Ely in the 1840s, they saw the advantage of visiting Lynn in February, when the Mart was attracting its crowds. Established by charter in the reign of Henry VII, the Mart had, since the middle of the eighteenth century, begun on Valentine's Day and lasted for a fortnight. Over the years its nature had changed, as William Taylor explained in his 1848 guide to Lynn:

It was originally a trading fair and was resorted to by foreigners and other large dealers who supplied the small traders and country shops in this and the adjoining County to a considerable extent with goods. The trading character of the Mart is

now nearly lost and it has assumed that of a mere pleasure fair, where rope dancers and jugglers, giants, dwarfs, peep shows, swings, wild beasts and gingerbread buttons are the various attractions.⁷³

Lynn resident William Armes was more scathing, describing those attractions in his memoirs as ‘those abominable shows where naughty people and ill-instructed boys and girls go’.⁷⁴ In fact, however, the Mart attracted people of all kinds and classes, the town filled up for the occasion and, as publisher J. D. Thew later recalled, ‘the houses of the Lynn magnates were filled for a fortnight with their country cousins’.⁷⁵ In short, Lynn in February provided the perfect time and place for practitioners of a mysteriously wonderful art, and two records of Mart photographers survive from the first half of the 1850s. The first of these to arrive were Worts and Crews, who set up shop at the Wheatsheaf Inn in Norfolk Street in February 1854.⁷⁶ They claimed to have learned their trade in one of Richard Beard’s London studios,⁷⁷ which suggests that they were still producing daguerreotypes (for which Beard was the original licensee). Nothing more is known about Worts, but Crews appears to be William Crews, who was born in London in 1811. He had been working alone in Bungay, Suffolk, at the beginning of 1853, when his work ‘attracted considerable attention’ along with a recommendation to ‘all who desire a faithful and well-finished portrait to visit his studio’.⁷⁸ Later, in the first half of the 1860s, he went on to run a studio in Camden Town.⁷⁹

Worts and Crews had timed their visit to coincide with the Mart, but in February 1855 the next itinerant, Frederick Sisson, went one better. He set up his temporary studio in the Bazaar Row of the Mart itself, and he appealed to the Mart-going public’s instinct for a wet-plate bargain. His advertisement was headed ‘Cheap Photographic Portraits’, and it continued:

Mr. Sisson wishes to draw the attention of patrons of this splendid art to his superior style and quality of Portraiture, combined with Low Prices. Mr. S., being aware that many unaccomplished persons are attempting to palm on the public likenesses of a very inferior quality, parties will do well to examine the specimens which may be seen on applying to him. All Likenesses guaranteed correct, or no money taken. Sunshine not required.⁸⁰

He listed his prices, which began at 1/6d for a ‘warranted likeness’ and rose to 3/6d for ‘Ditto, in Morocco case, lined with Velvet’, and he reminded prospective customers that an early visit was advisable ‘as the stay is short, the 3rd of March being positively the last day in Lynn’. His next destination, like that of most stallholders, was the Wisbech Mart, just a few miles away. Here, ‘taking likenesses at very low charges’, he competed for attention with Wombwell’s menagerie, a waxworks show, a Lilliputian Circus and a re-enactment of the Siege of Sebastopol by Clapton’s Mechanical Exhibition.⁸¹ He remained in the business of photography for at least a few years after this: he was recorded in Lincolnshire in 1857, when he made stays in Lincoln, Spalding and Stamford,⁸² and while operating in Norwich in 1859, he was bound over to keep the peace after a confusing and inconclusive trial for assaulting and threatening to murder his wife.⁸³

There is no indication that he worked again in Lynn, but he lingered in people's memories, as a press announcement from the year after his visit shows:

£5 Reward. Notice to the Public. A report having been spread about in Lynn that Frederic Sisson, Photographic Artist, was imprisoned in Cambridge Castle for robbing a female, the above Reward will be paid by the said Frederic Sisson to anyone who will give information of the base slanderer, who raised so foul and cruel a lie against his character. Cambridge, July 17th 1856.⁸⁴

It is clear that travelling photographers continued for many years to appear at the Mart. In 1869 the *Lynn News* referred to the usual assortment of 'shooting galleries, photographic booths, weighing machines, peep-shows, bazaars and stalls'.⁸⁵ In 1872, having sneered at the Mart's 'host of nomads, whose daily and nightly occupations, judging by appearances, are of a very doubtful character', the *Norfolk News* nevertheless admitted, 'photographic studios are here producing a likeness which equals the looking glass.'⁸⁶ But once photography had lost its absolute novelty, most itinerants (with some notable exceptions) had no budget for newspaper advertising. Their concern was to do whatever business they could and then move on, and, in most cases, their identities went unrecorded.

Before the narrative also moves on, there is one further figure whose activities in the early 1850s should be noticed, though his photographic career still lay in the future. William Read Pridgeon, the son of an East Walton farmer, was an enterprising young man. After a period working in 'a house of business' in London, he returned to Norfolk and set up as a watchmaker and jeweller in Lynn, first taking a shop on the Saturday Market Place and later transferring to premises in the High Street.⁸⁷ This aspect of his work was to continue throughout his career, and his clocks and barometers still sometimes come up for sale and fetch respectable prices. It seems that, even as a young man, he had some air of authority: it was for him that his relation, Ann Pridgeon, sent when shoplifters were noticed at work on her haberdashery premises, and he seems to have handled the situation calmly and firmly.⁸⁸ But he also had a degree of restlessness that led him engage in a range of interests and activities. He was involved in the trading of stocks and shares,⁸⁹ perhaps as a legacy of his time in London. In February 1853 he appeared on the list of those who had so far bought shares or made donations towards the building of the Lynn Athenaeum,⁹⁰ and he went on to be elected to the building's management committee.⁹¹ In the same year he was involved in the running of a Fine Art lottery with half-crown shares and with 50 prizes, which he displayed in his shop.⁹² (This seems to have been a fairly ambitious undertaking, for half-a-crown was not an insignificant sum.) In August 1855, having moved to the High Street, he announced the opening of a china and glass establishment next to his clock and jewellery shop.⁹³ By 1856, at the age of 31,⁹⁴ he was ready to embark on a new venture, but this would not be before the town had played host to one of early photography's most flamboyant figures.

¹ Bernard & Pauline Heathcote, *A Faithful Likeness: The first photographic portrait studios in the British Isles, 1841 to 1855*, p88 (Lowdham: Heathcote, 2002).

² *Lynn Advertiser*, 30th August 1851.

3 Ibid.
4 *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 25th June 1852.
5 Henry J Hillen, *History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, Volume 2, p618 (Norwich: East of
England Newspaper Company, 1907).
6 Bernard & Pauline Heathcote, *A Faithful Likeness: The first photographic portrait studios
in the British Isles, 1841 to 1855*, p88 (Lowdham: Heathcote, 2002).
7 Baptised 13th September 1820; parish register, St Margaret's Church, Lynn.
8 1851 census: HO107, piece 1829, f227, p6.
9 Lynn Museum: record number – KILLM: 1984.34.9; assigned number – KL 34.984.9.
10 Martin Scott, *King's Lynn High Street History*: <https://kingslynn-history.uk>.
11 *Lynn Advertiser*, 25th September 1852.
12 Bernard & Pauline Heathcote, *A Faithful Likeness: The first photographic portrait studios
in the British Isles, 1841 to 1855*, p64 (Lowdham: Heathcote, 2002).
13 David Webb, *PhotoLondon database*: www.photolondon.org.uk.
14 De Montfort University, *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839-1865*: <http://peib.dmu.ac.uk>.
15 Ibid.
16 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19th August 1854.
17 *Lynn Advertiser*, 27th February 1869.
18 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18th August 1855.
19 1861 census: RG9, piece 1256, folio 84, page 2.
20 *The London Gazette*, 27th June 1862, p3294.
21 *The London Gazette*, 19th April 1867, p2387.
22 *British Journal of Photography*, Volume 14, p202 (London: Henry Greenwood, 1867).
23 1871 census: RG10, piece 1046, folio 103, page 22.
24 Labels on back of cased photographs in private collections.
25 *Lynn Advertiser*, 11th April 1863.
26 1841 census: HO107, piece 786, book 5, folio 24, page 11.
27 Craven's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1856.
28 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1858.
29 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1st July 1865.
30 Examples in private collections, and one in Lynn Museum: record number – KILLM: 1972.123;
assigned number – KL 123.976.
31 *Lynn Advertiser*, 21st January 1854.
32 De Montfort University, *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839-1865*: <http://peib.dmu.ac.uk>.
33 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 28th January 1854.
34 Henry J Hillen, *History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, Volume 2, p635 (Norwich: East of
England Newspaper Company, 1907).
35 Ibid.
36 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19th August 1854.
37 Most notably, *The Antiquities of King's Lynn* (1844).
38 1851 census: HO107, piece 1829, folio 479, page 35.
39 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18th March 1854.
40 William Taylor, *The Pictorial Guide to King's Lynn, Norfolk*, p8 (Lynn: William Taylor, 1848).
41 Ibid, p35.
42 Letters of William Taylor to William Barton, 1836-1841, transcribed by Anthony Robinson.
43 Ibid, 25th September 1836.
44 Ibid, 4th June 1839.
45 Ibid, 12th October 1837.
46 Ibid, 4th June 1839.
47 Ibid, 25th September 1836.
48 Ibid, 4th June 1839.
49 Ibid, 12th October 1837.
50 Ibid, 26th February 1841.
51 Ibid, 16th September 1839.
52 Ibid, 26th February 1841.

53 *Illustrated London News*, 5th November 1853.
54 *Norwich Mercury*, 28th January 1854.
55 *Lynn Advertiser*, 25th February 1854.
56 *Lynn Advertiser*, 31st March 1855.
57 *Lynn Advertiser*, 3rd May 1856.
58 *Lynn Advertiser*, 27th May 1854.
59 *Lynn Advertiser*, 3rd May 1856.
60 *Lynn Advertiser*, 2nd September 1854.
61 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9th June 1855.
62 Bernard & Pauline Heathcote, *A Faithful Likeness: The first photographic portrait studios in the British Isles, 1841 to 1855*, pp118/119 (Lowdham: Heathcote, 2002).
63 *Norfolk News*, 30th September 1854.
64 1851 census: HO107, piece 1829, folio 592, page 22.
65 John D. Thew, *Personal Recollections: by a Lynn Sexagenarian*, (Lynn: Thew & Sons, 1891)
66 *Lynn Advertiser*, 26th August 1854.
67 1861 census: RG9, piece 1257, folio 143, page 4.
68 1871 census: RG10, piece 1865, folio 112, page 4.
69 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19th August 1854.
70 *Lynn Advertiser*, 4th April 1857.
71 *Craven's Directory of Norfolk*, 1856.
72 1851 census: HO107, piece 1830, folio 411, page 5.
73 William Taylor, *The Pictorial Guide to King's Lynn, Norfolk*, p56, (Lynn: William Taylor, 1848).
74 William Armes, Papers read at the Athenaeum, 1858, and printed in the *Lynn Advertiser*, 1872.
75 J D Thew, *Personal Recollections: by a Lynn Sexagenarian*, p132 (King's Lynn, Thew & Son, 1891).
76 Bernard & Pauline Heathcote, *A Faithful Likeness: The first photographic portrait studios in the British Isles, 1841 to 1855*, p163 (Lowdham: Heathcote, 2002).
77 *Ibid*, p124.
78 *Norfolk News*, 29th January 1853.
79 David Webb, *PhotoLondon database*: www.photolondon.org.uk.
80 *Lynn Advertiser*, 24th February 1855.
81 *Cambridge Independent Press*, 17th March 1855.
82 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Lincolnshire* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 99, 1993).
83 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 24th September 1859.
84 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19th July 1856.
85 *Lynn News*, February 1969; quoted in Lynn Museum's 'Art of the Mart' exhibition, 2015-2016.
86 *Norfolk News*, 17th February 1872.
87 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1st June 1900
88 *Norfolk News*, 5th May 1855.
89 Martin Scott, *King's Lynn High Street History*: <https://kingslynn-history.uk>.
90 *Lynn Advertiser*, 12th February 1853.
91 *Norfolk News*, 6th May 1854.
92 Lottery notice. Lynn Museum: record number – KILLM: 1990.508; assigned number – KL 508.990.
93 *Lynn Advertiser*, 11th August 1855.
94 Bap. 14th June 1824, St Margaret's parish register.