

3. Mr Sarony comes to town (1856-7)

On 11th October 1856 (and again on 18th October) an announcement appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* that can have meant nothing to most of its readers.

Photographic Portraits. Mr Sarony begs to return his thanks to the Nobility and Gentry of Norwich for their most liberal patronage bestowed upon him during his stay in Norwich, which terminated on Saturday, September 27th; and before quitting this city he begs to introduce to his patrons, as his successor, his Pupil, Mr. W. Freeman, Jun., Whom he recommends with confidence to continue his well-tried process and successful method of photographic Portraiture.¹

A small number of Lynn's inhabitants will have been aware of Sarony's stay in the county town. A very few may have even travelled to Norwich to make use of his services. For most, however, the news that something had stopped happening in Norwich could have held little interest. Some may reasonably have wondered why a person should spend money mentioning his withdrawal from one town to the inhabitants of another, where his name meant nothing at all. But Sarony intended that his name should become familiar to the people of Lynn: he was acting as his own harbinger, and his October statement was designed to prepare the ground for his arrival in person the following month.

There was, as it transpired, a false start. Initially, Sarony announced that his Portrait Rooms would open 'opposite the railway station, Lynn, ... on Monday next, November 3rd'.² The hours of business would be from ten to three, and specimens of his work could be inspected at 'No. 49, High Street; at Messrs. Thew and Sons; and at the Gallery, opposite the station.' Then came a change of venue and a slight delay, with the promise of opening on the Tuesday Market Place a week later.³

Despite this setback to his arrangements, there was no lack of confidence in Sarony's sales pitch.

Mr Sarony begs to invite attention to his Photographic Portraits, taken by a New and Improved Method, which renders them permanent and equal, in artistic execution, to the Works of the First Portrait Painters, while for Fidelity of Likeness they are unequalled. The successful practice of his profession in Norwich evinces an appreciation of the superior excellence of his Productions, and he assures the Public that it will be ever his study to merit their patronage. For this purpose he has secured the services of several First-Rate Artists to finish his Photographs in Water Colours, or Sepia, so as to resemble the Finest paintings on ivory, or the best Mezzotints, with the advantage of being more life-like and permanent than the ordinary Photographic Pictures.⁴

Oliver François Xavier Sarony and his younger brother, Napoleon, were born in Quebec, and both took up photography after the family moved to New York. Oliver's early career included periods of work in Canada, the United States and Ireland before he arrived in England, where he set up in business as an itinerant daguerreotypist. By 1855 he was offering a choice between the daguerreotype method and the wet collodion process. When he eventually reached Lynn, he had been on the road for at least a decade and could look back on a long series of residencies. He had worked in Bradford in 1846.⁵ He had been in Hull (where he married) in 1850⁶ and Thirsk in 1851.⁷ He had taken portraits in Mansfield⁸ and Chesterfield⁹ in 1852, and Huddersfield,¹⁰ Filey, Hull,¹¹ Louth and Boston¹² in 1853. In 1854 he had visited Doncaster,¹³ Stamford, Spalding, Holbeach,¹⁴ Wisbech and, briefly, Long Sutton.¹⁵ From late 1854 until the beginning of 1856 he was in Cambridge, which is where he began to offer collodion prints as well as daguerreotypes.¹⁶ 1856 continued with, apparently, a very short return to Stamford¹⁷ before his arrival in Norwich. This list is almost certainly incomplete. Between his stays in Bradford and Mansfield there were probably travels into mainland Europe, including a stay in Venice, and there is limited evidence for a period in Scarborough in 1850.¹⁸ Lynn was the latest town in a long catalogue of destinations, and it was to be the last. There would certainly be future excursions, but they would be from a fixed Yorkshire base. Lynn was where Sarony said his goodbye to a full-time life on the road.

Here as elsewhere, Sarony publicised himself with vigour, investing in double-column advertisements, not sparing the word-count, and blowing his own trumpet (or, if the opportunity arose, allowing others to blow it for him). So it was that, to his notice of a Lynn opening, he added two reviews of his work from the *Norwich Mercury*. The first had been written during the early part of his stay there:

There is an artist named Sarony at present in this city, who, for his great excellence in portraiture, deserves the highest encouragement and patronage. His style is photographic, but his pictures so taken are, if observed, heightened by the application of tints, similar in tones to the rich warm browns and neutrals of the collodion process, or finished in colours. The specimens that have been submitted to us we can, with severe adherence to the truth, declare to be the most truthful in similitude to the original, and the most highly-finished examples we have examined, and as superior to the common description of photographs as a fine piece of painting is to a common *silhouette* of the olden school. By Mr. Sarony's process, also, any fear that the photographic shadow may not be permanent is at an end, as in the tinted portraits this shadow is used as an artist uses his first sketch, making it the groundwork of the afterwards perfected picture. A visitor to Mr. Sarony's establishment well repays inspection; the neatness, order and elegance of his travelling house or houses are worthy examination; while the liberal spirit and good feeling of the artist himself are as pleasant to know and experience, as it is satisfactory to admire the beauty and excellence of his processes and their results.¹⁹

The second review reflected on his impending departure from Norwich:

We presume this is the concluding occasion on which we shall have the pleasure of calling attention to the portraits of Mr. Sarony, as his stay in this city is fast drawing to a close. We pay this last meed of praise with great pleasure as regards the expression of our admiration, though we cannot but regret his departure. We neither desire to thrust Mr. Sarony before the public, nor to say one word more in his praise than he deserves; but we may confidently appeal to those who understand these things, whether in correct portraiture (the foundation of recommendation) and the beauty of colouring, his own and the productions of his artists have ever been excelled, if equalled. Excellent as are those specimens openly exhibited, yet the most charming productions of his establishment are not seen by the public, though they might be examined on application. We have been favoured with the view of some of these last-named specimens, which we do not hesitate to say, in the general *pose* of the figure, full moulding of the features, delicacy and charm of colouring, might be offered as examples worthy of imitation to the best portrait-painters of the day. Roundness of form and light and shade may, may, perhaps, be comparatively managed; but true excellence is found in the semi or half-tones, which temper force with delicacy. Another excellence of Mr. Sarony's portraits is the knowledge of opposing colours, and the tints of the dresses of his sitters, especially ladies, are as artistically opposed to each other as the tissues of which they are composed are evident to the observation.²⁰

The people of Lynn had encountered several photographers by this time, but never had they been treated to such a blast of self-promotion. There was more to come in the weeks that followed.

On November 15th, having at last commenced business, Sarony repeated his earlier plea for the public's attention and gave yet another address for his operation: 'Portrait Rooms, on Common Staith (sic) Quay, Lynn, (Back of the Corn Exchange,) Now Open.'²¹ The arrangements had once more failed to go to plan. Sarony's projected site on the Tuesday Market Place had fallen through, and he'd been obliged to content himself with a nearby location that was tucked behind the Corn Exchange and a little less in the public eye.

The reason for the changes of address was, probably, that Sarony had brought his own studio with him. He was not looking for a ready-made accommodation, but rather for a place to park. His premises were two horse-drawn wagons, described by a Cambridge observer as 'Two remarkably neat houses upon wheels, ... the photographic portrait rooms of Mr. Sarony.'²² These were entirely devoted to housing his business, and living space was sought elsewhere. In Thirsk in 1851, for instance, the census showed him lodging at the inn of George Fawcett.²³ But the wagons were his commercial premises. He could set them up together to provide studio space, a sales area and even a tuition facility, as in Cambridge, where he proclaimed that, 'Mr. S. has fitted up one of his Splendid Carriages as a Photographic School, where instructions and Complete Sets of Apparatus may be obtained'²⁴. Alternatively, he could send one wagon off, in the care of an assistant, to serve as a temporary branch in a nearby town or village. He did this during his stay in nearby Wisbech in 1854, when, during September, he announced that, 'One of Mr. Sarony's Photographic establishments is now stationed at Long Sutton for a

short time'.²⁵ It took a lot of horsepower to move the vans, but there was no need for Sarony to keep horses himself. There would have been months at a time when they were standing idle and being housed and fed without earning their keep. So – to use a modern term – Sarony outsourced his logistics requirements, as on the occasion of his move from Cambridge to Stamford at the end of 1855:

Ten horses wanted to convey Mr. Sarony's Photographic Portrait Rooms, from Parker's Piece, Cambridge, to Stamford Lincolnshire. Mr. S. is willing to contract with one or more parties, but not for a less number than Four or Six Horses.²⁶

(This visit to Stamford must have been exceptionally brief, since he was advertising his presence in Norwich early in the New Year.)²⁷

There was no sign that the problems with his Lynn studio address had in any way dented Sarony's enormous confidence, and to the notice of his arrival in town he appended a further – and slightly puzzling – extract from the *Norwich Mercury*. It took the form of an anonymous letter to the paper:

Perfection and Mediocrity.

Sir, – I abhor mediocrity in the fine arts, equally as I do in music, and I hope I shall always feel a desire to repress any intention, however good-natured it may be, to exalt the imperfect, at the expense of perfection. It appears to have become a system among the managers and writers of the newspaper press to succumb to any request made to them to speak highly of inferior things, to declare to the public that a man is a musician when he is a learner – an artist, when he is in ignorance of principles and devoid of experience, in fact, when he is a student only. I make these remarks, especially at this moment, because attempts have been made to depress the works of one of the finest masters in portraiture (Mr. Sarony) who has ever visited this city, and to praise the efforts of another, who, as a student, has a long distance to travel before he approaches the results of the man he imitates. I admit that Mr. Sarony has nothing to fear from such forced competition – if competition, the proceeding can be named. The other person should regret the juxta-position in which some of his friends appear desirous of thrusting him, the more so, when his crude beginnings are lauded in the columns of contemporaries whose lucubrations on the subject would seem to have been penned without the slightest knowledge of the things spoken of. Both gentlemen are comparatively strangers in this city, and I perceive are each advertisers in your columns; both, therefore, stand on an equality, but there exists a difference so vast between the merits of the men as artists, that the attempted exaltation of one by the depression of the other is ludicrous, and calls for notice. Without especial reference to this matter, I cannot avoid saying, that it would seem some systematic attempt prevails to pull down old Norwich, and all which it contains, to the level of mediocrity. I hope I shall never be found aiding and abetting so suicidal a course, and I trust I shall never find you either doing that to which I now urge objection, or defending such a proceeding, – but, on the contrary, abiding by the highest standard, whether in music, in literature, or in the

excellence of one artist above another. I beg to state that Mr. Sarony has no knowledge that I have written one word in his defence, nor that I have any knowledge of him beyond that which the admiration of his talents has given me.

I am, Sir, yours truly,
A Lover of Truth.²⁸

The advertisement concluded by quoting the *Mercury's* editorial endorsement of the letter's 'propriety and truth'.

Lynn's reading public must have been a little bemused by all this. The anonymous letter was, in fact, an attack on John Robert Sawyer of Norwich. Some months earlier, in March, Sarony had taken exception to a fairly innocuous newspaper advertisement by Sawyer and an article in the same issue written in Sawyer's praise.²⁹ He had replied with a contemptuous notice of his own³⁰, and had been supported in print by 'A Lover of Truth'. The anonymous letter was verging on hysteria – Sawyer's admirers really were not trying to bring about the end of civilisation as Norwich knew it – and cynics may be tempted to wonder about its author's true identity. Sawyer, for his part, seems to have taken the whole episode in his stride, and he subsequently had the satisfaction of acquiring, as an addition to his studio, the premises that Sarony had been renting for advertising purposes³¹.

The readers of the *Lynn Advertiser*, however, could be expected to know nothing of this feud. So it has to be asked why, half a year later, Sarony dredged up the affair again in a new location. One obvious reason is that it gave him a chance to quote someone unreservedly singing his praises. But perhaps it also provided an opportunity to drop a hint to his competitors – Taylor, Belchambers, the Dexters and (if he was still in business) Turner – and to offer a subtext: 'Don't cross Sarony. It doesn't pay.' Literary competitors – like, perhaps, Taylor – might have been reminded of Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*, with its polished handling of a veiled threat. They might also have wondered whether the letter's orotund style was not faintly familiar. But, whether literary or not, they probably recognised a warning when they saw one.

Though the resident photographers may have been less than pleased at Sarony's strident presence on their doorstep, the Lynn public – or that section of it that could afford Sarony's prices – had no such qualms. The great and good of the town turned up in significant numbers on Common Staithe Quay to have their pictures taken, as the *Lynn Advertiser* recorded:

Mr. Sarony's portraits are exciting the greatest interest and admiration amongst the inhabitants of Lynn and its neighbourhood. Several of those whose features are among the best known to the public have favoured the artist with a visit, and added their effigies to his almost boundless collection. The likenesses are in every case most striking, and the artistic style and finish of the pictures, to the best of our belief, unsurpassed.³²

The Lynn correspondent of the *Cambridge Independent Press* was overwhelmed by the naturalness of Sarony's images:

Nothing can exceed the beauty and faithfulness of the portraits he takes. Most of those we have seen by other artists have a stiffness and formality about them which greatly detracts from their beauty; such is not, however, the case with these – for more graceful, easy and life-like pictures it would be impossible to produce; and those which are coloured cannot be surpassed by the best miniature painter of the day.³³

The Norfolk News approached the visit from a historical point of view:

In the “olden time” the aristocratic and the affluent alone ventured to require that a representation of their features should be portrayed on either canvass (sic) or paper; and when so expensively executed the “likeness” was handed down as an heirloom to their posterity. But in this age of progress in which we live, the art of Photography has brought into existence a number of artists, who are becoming as numerous as blackberries. Happily now and then a star darts in the direction of our old borough town, and by a superior touch of art, the faces of our own friends are so perfectly depicted that we smilingly recognise our “auld acquaintances”, and rejoice at the low figure at which such a treasure may be possessed. The appearance of Mr Sarony amongst us has led to these remarks; and while we gaze on his works, whether as photographic productions, or beautified by the hand of the artist, we are compelled to admit that hitherto that gentleman has had no competitor qualified to snatch the palm now so generally awarded to him.³⁴

All this was fulsome praise. It was, though, perhaps not quite fulsome enough for Sarony, who, on later settling in Scarborough, used reviews from Norwich rather than Lynn in his publicity.³⁵ He nevertheless professed himself well pleased with his reception in the town, and, in his next advertisement, he set about lauding the taste of its inhabitants:

Mr. Sarony sincerely thanks the Ladies and Gentlemen of Lynn and West Norfolk for the highly flattering commendations which they have so generously been pleased to express of the productions in his establishment. Confident as he was on his first arrival in Lynn that no works of equal excellence had hitherto been seen in this part of the country, he was nevertheless quite unprepared for so extensive a patronage as he had had the honour to receive from the Nobility and Gentry of the Town and district.³⁶

He was aware, though, that his potential market was limited and concluded his announcement by trying to promote a sense of some urgency:

As Mr. Sarony's stay will be necessarily short, he must beg those who intend visiting his studio to take an early opportunity of doing so.

The next week he returned to the theme of praising his West Norfolk clientele. Cynics might, perhaps, have thought he was saying they had not proved such philistine yokels as he had expected, but most would presumably have been flattered by his unqualified approval of their judgement and taste.

Mr. Sarony, gratified by the high encomiums universally passed on his productions by the Nobility and Gentry of this division of the county, has, at considerable cost, effected arrangements for imparting additional value to his life-like and highly artistic portraits.

It was with some hesitation that Mr. Sarony determined upon visiting Lynn, fearing that with so limited a population he would be unable to meet with a patronage that would remunerate him in consequence of the extent of his establishment and the necessary employment of a staff of competent artists. He has however been pleased to find that the inhabitants of Lynn and neighbourhood are fully alive to the merits of first-class works of art, and would far more cheerfully pay a good price for a production which it is impossible to excel, than receive gratuitously a picture which, being good for little or nothing, might be purchased for a trifle.³⁷

Indeed, Sarony argued, his customers in the town showed a level of discernment that they shared with royalty:

In this respect the Queen has graciously set a noble example, her apartments being adorned with Photographic Portraits of many of the Crimean Heroes, and amongst the rest of Major General Windham who kindly favoured Mr. Sarony with a sitting. Her Majesty in fact knows well enough that in the fine art as in every other matter the best productions will always secure the best prices, and that bad works are dear on any terms. The people of Lynn have manifested the same appreciation of high talent, and Mr. Sarony promises that, during his limited stay, that talent shall at any cost be applied to every picture sent from his establishment.

To wind up, he showed a perhaps surprising sensitivity to what would now be described as privacy issues:

No Portraits will be exhibited when the persons object, but very fine specimens may be seen at the Portrait Rooms, Common Staith Quay, King's Lynn.

It is clear that Sarony habitually targeted the upper end of the market, routinely referring to his clientele as the nobility and gentry or, in the case of Cambridge, 'the Universities (sic) and the Principal Families throughout the county'.³⁸ Clearly, too, he set his prices accordingly. He stressed the heavy investments he had made; he had engaged staff that included skilled colourists as well as assistants who could offer the full range of photographic skills when the wagons were working independently; and he allowed himself a generous advertising budget. All these things had to be paid for. His Lynn advertisements do not, unfortunately, refer to his charges, but his references to 'a good

price' and 'the best prices' indicate that he had no inclination to sell his portraits cheaply. Comparison can be made with Norwich, where he was supplying 'Portraits from one guinea'³⁹ – a starting price that was the same as T. H. Ely's back in 1844. When, in 1855, he had introduced portraits on paper, he had offered them 'at the same rate as his Daguerreotypes',⁴⁰ even though the general tendency among photographers was to reduce prices when adopting the collodion process.

This does seem expensive, especially when the fees of other contemporary photographers are considered. The only available comparison from Lynn during these years is with Frederick Sisson, whose prices in 1855 started at one shilling and sixpence. But Sisson was operating at the Mart, aiming at a much less affluent section of the public, and quite possibly selling an inferior product. In Cambridge, however, in 1854 and 1855 the entirely respectable William Nichols was offering portraits by the collodion method from two shillings and sixpence⁴¹, while in Huntingdon, in 1854, Mr Beattie was charging upwards of six shillings and sixpence.⁴² Nevertheless, Sarony was not quite as uncompromising about the value of his work as he sometimes chose to appear. In Wisbech he had offered 'Portraits from six shillings',⁴³ and in Cambridge he had advertised 'Prices from 6s. to 30s.'⁴⁴ The truth of the matter must be that, in any given location, Sarony charged as much as he thought the market would bear, and in King's Lynn he set his prices according to that principle. (It seems possible, in view of his avowed surprise at his reception in the town, that he underestimated its people's ability to pay. But his surprise should not necessarily be taken at face value.)

On December 20th he repeated his previous advertisement, but with a new heading, which proclaimed, 'For Three Weeks Longer'. On 27th December the heading became, 'For Two Weeks Longer'. The countdown was then stuck at two weeks for the next fortnight, to be followed on January 17th with a new – but date-free – reminder to prospective patrons of the need for prompt action:

Mr. Sarony's stay in Lynn is now drawing to a close in consequence of other imperative engagements, and it is therefore important that those who desire at the same time a Life-like Portrait and a first class work of Art, should at once avail themselves of the opportunities offered them.⁴⁵

Sarony was a great believer in the tactic of stimulating demand by the threat of withdrawing products or services, and, as a stay progressed, he reminded prospective customers with increasing frequency that he would be moving on. But the focus of his current advertisement then shifted from clients to competitors. No other single photographer had, like Sawyer in Norwich, caught Sarony's particular attention, so he took a general swipe at them all in a passage that began by heaping praise on himself and went on to heap lordly scorn on others:

That his productions are appreciated as unsurpassed by those of any other Photographer, is evident from the extensive patronage awarded them by the Nobility and Gentry, not in Lynn only, but in every other town where Mr. Sarony has visited, so that in this respect there need be no fear of disappointment. Mr.

Sarony thinks it necessary to say this, because he is well aware that in every place he has been preceded by men whose professions were not accompanied by a practical acquaintance with the Art; and that therefore many persons may be on that account deterred from giving him a trial. A visit however to his Establishment will remove all doubt, as Mr. Sarony will cheerfully allow an inspection of several Portraits taken by other Professors as well as by himself – in order to show the contrast. In fact, several years' study of the adaptation of the laws of Art to the production of Portraits has enabled Mr. Sarony to give a grace and elegance to his pictures which are never seen in those of the ordinary practitioners.

On 24th January he stepped up the pressure on wavering would-be sitters, resuming his countdown to departure and insisting that this would be 'Positively The Last Week But One'. When 31st January arrived, it brought the announcement of 'Positively The Last Week.' So far, the first two of Sarony's closing three weeks had lasted a month. But that was just a preliminary demonstration of the elasticity of Sarony-time. On 7th February a new announcement was made:

In consequence of the large number of fresh orders received during this week, Mr. Sarony must remain one week longer.⁴⁶

The gallery on Common Staithe Quay would remain open for business during that time, but a new aspect of arrangements was also mentioned:

Specimens may be seen at Mr. Sarony's shop in High Street, or at Messrs. Thew and Son's.

Thew, the stationer, printer and publisher, had hosted a display of Sarony's work from the beginning of his stay. But premises in Sarony's own name had not previously been mentioned. 49 High Street (possibly untenanted at that time) had displayed some of his work for publicity purposes, but an active shop was something new. Its exact nature and location would not be identified in print until the end of the month.

Seven days later there was still, readers were told, one more week to go. The *Lynn Advertiser* grieved over the photographer's imminent departure, noting that his customers had included 'members of nearly all the most influential families in the town and neighbourhood', and reminding waverers that 'the opportunity is not likely to be soon, if ever, repeated.'⁴⁷ Then, on 21st February, Sarony set a precise date for leaving town and revealed the decisive step that he had taken:

Having sold his establishment, Mr Sarony will not take any more Portraits at the back of the Corn Exchange after Thursday next. Mr. Sarony, in announcing the termination of his stay in Lynn, begs to return his sincere thanks for the patronage he has received from the Inhabitants of this Town and the Neighbourhood, and wishes to call the attention of those requiring a faithful and unsurpassable Photographic Portrait of themselves or their friends to the announcement which he has made above.⁴⁸

This was as unequivocal as anyone could ask for. In selling his vans Sarony had given up his studio facilities and his itinerant way of life. But his 'last week' was not over yet, and last weeks took their time. In Norwich he had given 6th September as the definite date of his departure, and he had overrun his own deadline by three weeks. In Wisbech he had given five days' notice of his intention to move on to Cambridge, and those five days had lasted well over two months. In Cambridge, where he had interrupted his last week to reap more benefits from his adoption of the collodion process, the notional seven days had stretched from July 1855 to January 1856. So Sarony's next Lynn advertisement, dated 28th February 1857, should come as no surprise:

Mr. Sarony, finding it impossible from the number of orders he has received during the week, to leave as he announced, and having sold his Photographic Gallery, will continue to take Portraits for one week longer, commencing Friday 27th inst., at Mr. Pridgeon's, Jeweller, High Street, who has erected, under Mr. Sarony's directions, a very Convenient Gallery at the back of his shop.⁴⁹

The vans had indeed been sold, but Sarony's business had found a new temporary home at 103 High Street with William Read Pridgeon, the ambitious young clockmaker, jeweller and dealer in china and glass. It was Pridgeon's shop that had been hosting a display of Sarony's work since the beginning of the month, and it was Pridgeon's shop that had been expanded to create a new photographic studio. Sarony's one week in the High Street turned predictably into two, and then, at last, there came on 14th March a valedictory advertisement confirming that he had gone. Even then, there was one final twist:

Mr. Sarony begs to return thanks to the Nobility and Gentry for the liberal patronage bestowed on him during his residence in Lynn, and he has now the pleasure of introducing as his Successor his pupil, Mr. W. R. Pridgeon, whom he can recommend as fully competent to practice and continue his long-tested and successful process of Photographic Portraits.⁵⁰

This was no new ploy for Sarony. In Norwich, as has already been seen, he left William Freeman to occupy his photographic shoes, and in Boston he had trained up Peter Fields and Henry Vauban as his successors.⁵¹ There will, of course, have been fees, both for the tuition and for the business goodwill, and that made such arrangements attractive to Sarony. His competitors must have been relieved to see the back of such a self-assertive rival; but they must have been less than delighted by his last-minute legacy.

Sarony was next heard of in Scarborough in July. In theory, there was time for a quick stay in some other town after leaving Lynn, but no such visit has yet been discovered, and he was now without his mobile studios. A little time was therefore needed to set up and equip a fixed-location business on Scarborough's South Cliff. This was an adapted rather than a custom-built studio, and when the summer season was over, Sarony went north to Newcastle where he operated for the winter. Scarborough was nevertheless where he intended to settle down, and he commissioned a firm of local architects to build a new

permanent studio, which opened in the summer of 1858.⁵² It was a building that was designed to impress, as a visitor later reported:

Imagine a well-built square of white houses in a fashionable part of town. The garden of the square is protected by handsome railings; there are green shrubs and trees in the vicinity of the railings, and, for the rest, a well-kept lawn decked with flower-beds, and intersected with brown gravel walks. In the centre of this garden is the Sarony establishment. It is a solid, oblong building, Grecian in style, and, at a rough guess, 120 feet long. The building is white, with cream-coloured corner stones, and a broad flight of steps at either end of the building form a fitting entrance. We go in by the eastern door – the threshold guarded by a pair of lions rampant.⁵³

Inside, the client was met with a display of opulence:

We walk along the corridor. On the right, as we proceed, are the reception and waiting rooms. These are magnificent. Handsomely furnished, more after the style of a French salon than an English drawing room, the apartments are the embodiment of good taste and costly elegance. Rich divans and velvet lounges, lofty mirrors and gilded tables, attract the eye on all sides; pictures are on every wall, and one of the salons contains a collection of most exquisite water-colours.⁵⁴

Despite the eventual opening of other branches, these impressive premises (in what came to be known as ‘Sarony Square’) remained the photographer’s main studio for the rest of his life.

He is, however, entitled to a postscript. The impression so far given of Sarony is perhaps of a man inclined to hectoring, pomposity and self-aggrandisement, and that is not unfair. It is not, however, the whole picture: justice requires both the acknowledgement that he was a very able photographer, and the revelation that there was more to him than bombast, as the events of 2nd November 1861 were to demonstrate.

The Yorkshire coast that day was hit by a hurricane, and Scarborough, where Sarony was now settled in his new studio, bore the worst of it. Many houses were unroofed and some buildings – photographers’ studios among them – were blown down. The schooner *Coupland*, carrying a load of granite from Aberdeen, was wrecked on rocks only a short distance from the Spa, but when the new Scarborough lifeboat attempted a rescue it was dashed repeatedly against the sea wall and destroyed. Members of the public lined the shore at the base of the cliffs and joined lifeboat volunteers in trying to help survivors from both boats get back to shore. Sarony was one of those rescuers. Having themselves at one point been dragged into the sea, he and a Mr Rutter tried to help Lord Charles Beauclerc regain shore and eventually (but too late) managed to fasten a line around him. Then Sarony and Rutter were swept away again by the waves and were eventually hauled out up the cliff with ropes. The *Coupland*’s crew, who were all rescued by rocket apparatus, were more fortunate than some of the lifeboat crew and bystanders. Sarony was exhausted, suffered a gashed forehead, and was lucky to survive 20 minutes in a

raging sea.⁵⁵ Six RNLI silver medals for gallantry were awarded for that day's events – three of them posthumously – and one of the surviving recipients was Oliver Sarony.⁵⁶ The medal was thereafter proudly displayed in his studio.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, back in 1857, the Lynn photographic market was adjusting itself to its changed conditions.

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- 1 *Lynn Advertiser*, 11th October 1856.
 - 2 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1st November 1856.
 - 3 *Lynn Advertiser*, 8th November 1856.
 - 4 Ibid.
 - 5 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Bradford 1843-1900* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 96, 1992).
 - 6 Civil Registration index of marriages: 1850, March quarter, volume 22, page 313.
 - 7 1851 census: HO107, piece 2371, folio 221, page 5.
 - 8 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Derbyshire 1843-1914* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 118, 1997).
 - 9 Anne & Paul Bayliss, *Photographers in mid nineteenth century Scarborough – The Sarony Years*, p20 (Scarborough: Bayliss, 1998).
 - 10 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Halifax and Huddersfield* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 104, 1994).
 - 11 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers on the Yorkshire Coast from Withernsea to Redcar, 1842-1900*, (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 106, 1995).
 - 12 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Lincolnshire* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 99, 1993).
 - 13 Keith I P Adamson, *Commercial Photographers in Doncaster* (Bath: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement, 1982)
 - 14 Keith I P Adamson, *Professional Photographers in Lincolnshire* (London: Royal Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 99, 1993).
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