

#### 4. Mixed fortunes (1857-1861)

Taylor, Belchambers and the Dexters had continued in business during Sarony's stay in Lynn, but they had not responded to his combative manner. Only Taylor had run press advertisements, and their tone and content had been the same as ever. Sarony was a formidable competitor, and perhaps the knowledge of how he had responded to Sawyer's counter-advertising in Norwich had persuaded them that discretion was the better part of valour. Sarony would, after all, soon be moving on, while they were aiming to stay. But then came the news that Sarony was leaving behind a successor, William Pridgeon, who was already an established trader in the town, and who was looking to add to its number of fixed studios. This provoked a reaction, and Belchambers and Taylor both promptly sought to re-engage the public's attention.

Belchambers acknowledged the loyalty of his clients and encouraged its continuation:

In tendering his grateful acknowledgement to his Constituents and the public generally, for their unwavering support accorded him during the last two years, begs to state that, after his long experience, combined with artistic ability, he is enabled to offer such Portraits as are unsurpassed by any in Lynn as their own productions. H. B. hopes by strict attention and care, which shall not be spared, to meet with a liberal share of public patronage.<sup>1</sup>

He continued with an enumeration of his product range ('Portraits of varied sizes and styles; Tinted in Sepia or Coloured. Miniatures neatly mounted, in Brooches, Locketts, Bracelets, &c. Family Groups taken.'). and he reminded customers that his business hours were from nine in the morning until dusk. These opening hours were noticeably longer than those previously offered by others – consider, for instance, Sarony's ten till three – and they represented a serious attempt to make himself more competitive.

Taylor aimed, as he had in the past, to impress customers with his mastery of the latest technical advances:

W. Taylor begs to announce that he has completed his arrangements for carrying out the beautiful system of pure, untouched Photography, so successfully practised by M. Chevreul, of Paris, – producing Portraits equal in richness to the highest finished Mezzotint Engravings, and leaving nothing to wish for either as regards faithful resemblance or artistic finish.<sup>2</sup>

Lest 'pure' and 'untouched' should seem a little Spartan to a public already accustomed to the enhanced images offered by others, he also reminded patrons that he could offer 'highly finished Colored Portraits'. His reference to Chevreul's process, though, is a little mystifying.

Michel-Eugène Chevreul was a chemist whose long career included work on dyes, colour theory and the chemistry of fats. No specific photographic process is credited to him before the 1860s, but in the 1850s he was involved, as mentor and promoter, with the work of Abel Niépce de Saint-Victor, who made advances in the preparation of glass negatives and in the use of egg whites as a coating for printing paper. It seems likely, therefore, that Taylor was using one or more of Niépce's improvements to the wet collodion process. Albumen paper, first used in 1850, had been commercially available – ready-treated with egg-white – since 1855. But it was not produced in pre-sensitised form until the early 1870s, so photographers had to apply the photographic chemicals to the albumenised surface themselves. It could perhaps have been a new French variation of this procedure that Taylor had adopted.

While Taylor and Belchambers were making an effort to retain their market share, Pridgeon was intent on securing his. He had been instructed in the wet collodion process by Oliver Sarony, an accomplished photographer, and there had been much to learn. The fundamentals of the process had been well described in an article in the *Norfolk News*:

Iodized Collodion is spread over the surface of the plate of glass upon which the picture is to be taken, and the glass is then dipped into a chemical solution of nitrate of silver, consisting of about 30 grains of nitrate of silver to one ounce of distilled water. Care must be taken that, when this operation is being performed, the glass is kept perfectly free from dust. After a brief interval the plate is taken out of the solution, and thus prepared is put into the camera by means of a slide, as in the older processes of photography. The plate is kept in this position, opposite the subject to be copied, from 1 to 30 seconds, according to the degree of light. When removed, no picture will appear, but it has nevertheless been taken, and only awaits another operation which is to make it visible. For this purpose a solution of pyrogallic and glacial acetic acid is poured over the plate, and the picture is then gradually developed. When fully apparent, it has yet another process to undergo, or it will soon vanish on exposure to the atmosphere. To fix the picture, the glass has to be put for a short time into a solution of hyposulphite of soda, and then taken out and left to dry. The operation is then perfect, and, if desirable, copies of the picture may be printed from the glass upon paper.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main challenges, however, was not mentioned in the newspaper article. Once the collodion dried and hardened, the chemicals it hosted were no longer light-sensitive. So the glass plates could not be prepared in advance. The photographer had to apply the coatings in a dark room next to the studio, bring out the plate, put it in the camera, make the exposure, remove the plate and take it to be developed before the collodion set. Speed and dexterity had to be added to chemical know-how if the picture was to be a success. In addition, there were the problems of coating the glass evenly, posing the subject, focusing the camera, and judging at what point between one and 30 seconds to terminate the exposure. Not unreasonably, the newspaper report added, 'Success depends largely upon delicacy of manipulation and upon the quality of the chemicals.'

It is quite possible that Pridgeon found the complicated procedure a little daunting. He did, at any rate, ensure that he had some support in his new venture, as his first photographic advertisement made clear:

W. R. Pridgeon, in announcing himself Mr. Sarony's Successor, assures those who may favour him with their patronage that no pains shall be spared to ensure accurate and valuable Likenesses, combined with artistic finish. W. R. P. has great pleasure in announcing that he has entered into an engagement with Mr Brown, a first rate photographer, to assist him in the art.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing more is known of Mr Brown, who had evidently moved on by the time of the 1861 census. In all probability he was one of Sarony's assistants (for whom no work was in prospect before the opening of Sarony's Scarborough studio, and whose services may have been secured on a temporary basis to guide Pridgeon's first steps in his new occupation).

One of the things Pridgeon had learnt from his teacher was the value of securing advertising space, and his next advertisement announced that specimens of his portraits 'may be seen at Messrs Thew's & Son'.<sup>5</sup> (It may be recalled that Thew, whose publications included the *Lynn Advertiser*, had come to a similar arrangement with Sarony.) Another leaf taken out of Sarony's book was the mention, in the same advertisement, of 'Stereoscopic portraits, Views, &C.' In fact, stereoscopic photographs, which had been a minor part of Sarony's offering, were to become something of a speciality with Pridgeon.

The general public's first major chance to view three-dimensional pictures was at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and Sir David Brewster's invention of a compact binocular-style viewer made it very easy to examine them. As a result, the 1850s saw the first of a series of crazes for stereoscopy. Cards and slides were produced with side-by-side, near-identical shots which, when viewed in a suitable device, gave the illusion of three-dimensional depth. Various viewing instruments were developed, from table-top models designed to hold a number of examples to simple-hand-held devices into which individual pairs of pictures could be fitted; and publishers brought out sets of images showing scenery, buildings, exotic lands and amusing or improving tableaux. Stereoscopy quickly became the latest parlour entertainment.

Pridgeon invested in his own stereo camera for portraits and local views<sup>6</sup>, but he also bought in ready-made stereo pictures. In May 1858 he advertised:

New Stereoscopic Slides, "The Hero's Wife:"

1. The Departure
2. God protect Dear Papa
3. The Dream – the Battle-field
4. The Dream – the Reward
5. The Awakening
6. The Return

The Photography of these Pictures is very superior, the arrangement of the various groups of a high artistic character, and eminent judges have pronounced them to be the finest specimens of the kind.<sup>7</sup>

(*The Hero's Wife* was a series of six stirring and sentimental images by Alfred Sylvester, many of whose works were published by the London Stereoscopic Company during the 1850s.)

Then, a month later, the public was informed that 'W. R. Pridgeon has just purchased a lot of the best Stereoscopic Slides, which he is now selling at half price.'<sup>8</sup> In addition, for those who were not able to buy their own equipment, he was offering 'Stereoscopes and slides lent for hire'.

The evidence suggests that Pridgeon was keen to exploit every business opening that presented itself. Never was this more apparent than on one summer's day in 1858, when the *Norfolk News* reported that 'the departure ... of two junior criminals, whose term of confinement was expired, left the Borough Gaol without an inmate, save the Gaoler and his wife'.<sup>9</sup> This was a highly unusual event, and the opportunity was taken to open the building to members of the public, who 'traversed the cells where the victims of crime are required to undergo their merited punishment'. (The reporter was apparently so excited about the proceedings as to confuse victims with perpetrators.) On learning what had happened, the mayor, who presumably saw the occurrence as a triumph of crime prevention, 'handsomely united with others to give the police force a fair compliment of wine to regale themselves on such an auspicious occasion.' An impromptu celebration ensued, with the gaoler, Mr Battersbee, installed as 'Grand Master' to preside over the ceremonies, and 'the glass circulated most freely, and the prison yard rang with the unusual sounds of merriment.' Then, 'in the midst of the fun', it was noticed that a figure with a camera had appeared. It was William Pridgeon, whose studio was just round the corner, and who 'secured a photographic picture of the party around the table, and thus ... perpetuated an event which but rarely has a parallel.'

While Pridgeon's business was growing, other photographers were perhaps faring less well. Turner may have given up the business even before Sarony's visit, since the 1854 reference to his glasshouse is latest record of his endeavours that has so far been found. It seems, too, that Taylor and Belchambers were contemplating change, for their 1857 advertisements were their last as photographers.

On abandoning photography, Henry Belchambers attempted to revive his career as a portrait painter. In 1861, while Sarah and the children remained at home in Lynn<sup>10</sup>, he was working – or seeking work – as an artist in the town of March, in Cambridgeshire.<sup>11</sup> By 1871 the family was together again and living in Reigate, Surrey, where Belchambers had become a house decorator.<sup>12</sup> They were still there in 1881, when he was listed as a grainer and sign writer.<sup>13</sup> He was still involved in painting of a sort, but it was a sad outcome for one with his aspirations.

William Taylor remained in Lynn, staying at 13 High Street, but around the end of the decade he took the decision to concentrate on his original lines of business. In 1858, however, before withdrawing from the photographic scene, he gave a lecture to the *Conversazione Society* on the subject of 'Photography: Past, Present and Future'. His words, as reported in the *Lynn Advertiser*, give an unusually personal insight into the thinking of one of the town's pioneer photographers.<sup>14</sup>

He began by tracing the 19-year history of photography and outlining its processes. He produced examples to illustrate his comments, and he took care to acknowledge the work his Lynn predecessor: 'The beautiful landscapes, he said, were the productions of the successful manipulations of Mr. Bullock of this town.' As for studio work, he spoke from his own experience when he referred to:

... the many difficulties with which the operator in portraiture had to contend as regard the extreme care of chemicals, and the nice adjustment of focus, and the timing of the exposure, which latter required a lengthened observation as to the influence of light at different times of the day and the year.

He was clearly alive to the ordeal suffered by his subjects, mentioning 'the difficulty of catching the ordinary expression of sitters', which, he acknowledged, was 'owing in some degree to the difficulty every person laboured under when about to sit for a portrait.' He was frank, too, about the limitations of photography, and the examples he used this time were perhaps drawn from his own work.

He pointed out in the pictures certain unavoidable defects produced by the sphericity of the lenses at present in use. However well and apparently truthful photography might take landscapes and distant objects, Mr. Taylor thought it failed and would ever fail to take a really correct portrait, on account of the difficulty of bringing every part of the figure equally into focus; still photographic portraits were generally far more truthful than those taken in the usual way.

For the future, Taylor foresaw both chemical and optical improvements in photography, but 'he thought it was hopeless to expect that coloured pictures would be taken!'

It is tempting to hear, in the discussion of portraiture, the voice of a man who feels he has taken his achievements as far as he can. At any rate, by the time of the 1861 census a revised business plan had been put into effect. Taylor was listed as bookseller and publisher, while William Henry, his elder son, appeared as printer and compositor.<sup>15</sup> The second son, Walter, had evidently moved on, and the purpose-built studio had apparently outlived its use. William Taylor senior died later that year<sup>16</sup> and his obituary referred to his earlier life in London, his writings, his founding role in the Lynn *Conversazione and Society of Arts*, and his championing of the *Athenaeum*.<sup>17</sup> It described him as 'artist, engraver and printer' and recalled how he accumulated his remarkable collection of 'relics of the monastic age':

As an antiquary, the trifles of “the olden time” had to him a peculiar value, and the cases of our museum contain a large number of his valuables, recovered by urchins in his pay, from the different fleets, &c, in the town.

There was no mention of photography. But when, a few months later, an auction was held to dispose of Taylor’s effects, there was clear evidence of his studio past. There, for sale at the Athenaeum he had loved, among the furniture, oil paintings, water colours, books, an aquarium, cases of shells and coral, a flute and assorted busts, were the tools of the photographic trade: ‘Large photographic camera with portrait lens, stereoscopic ditto, photographic apparatus, morocco cases and gilt frames’.<sup>18</sup>

There was one other photographer in the late 1850s whose business lasted only briefly. William Ray, the Lynn-born son of a porter and a sugar dealer, was a young man of around 20 when he set up a studio in Tower Street in about 1857. He was listed in the next year’s trade directory<sup>19</sup>, but no further evidence of him has been discovered and there is no sign of him in the town in the 1861 census.

There were success stories, however. The Dexters were still running their studio in Regent Street. (They weren’t given, at this stage of their joint career, to newspaper advertising, but they did appear as photographers in the same trade directory as William Ray.)<sup>20</sup> Pridgeon was now well established, and two new figures were about to make their mark on the local scene.

The first of these never intended anything but a fairly brief visit, but that visit was of some moment. Valentine Blanchard was still in the early stages of what would become a distinguished career, but already he had experience of running his own London studio in the Strand. Born in Wisbech in 1831, Blanchard had started his working life as a printer’s apprentice, and had produced his first daguerreotype in 1853 or 1854.<sup>21</sup> He would go on to become one of Victorian England’s most respected studio photographers: he earned an enviable reputation for portraiture; he produced several successful series of stereoscopic views; he ran a photographic paper manufactory; he wrote; he invented the Blanchard’s Brush for coating wet plates; and he became a member of the Linked Ring – a group of photographers that included some of the day’s most eminent practitioners. He first exhibited his work in 1865, showing seven photographs at the Dublin International Exhibition<sup>22</sup>, and his pictures were regularly featured in the exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>23</sup> His last contribution to the society’s exhibitions came in 1895, by which time he had retired from professional practice.

In 1858 or early 1859 Blanchard had given up his Strand premises and returned to Wisbech, where he set up a studio in the Public Hall. It was here in the New Year of 1859 that, in a postscript to the Christmas festivities, he demonstrated an additional talent by giving a reading of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* to members of the Mechanics Institute. ‘There was a good attendance,’ the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported, ‘and the interest of the audience was kept alive during the whole of the reading, which occupied two hours.’<sup>24</sup>

It was a successful return to the town of his birth, but Blanchard already had in mind a further foray to the capital, and his business was closed for a week in April 1859 while he made 'a professional visit to London'.<sup>25</sup> In due course, this aim was achieved, and he went on to run a succession of studios in Camden Town, St Pancras, Piccadilly and Regent Street. He managed however to fit in a visit to Lynn before leaving East Anglia again, announcing in May 1859, 'that his stay in Wisbech is now necessarily limited and will not be extended beyond Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup> inst.'<sup>26</sup>

By mid-June he was operating in Lynn in 'The Photographic room of Mr Agger, Builder, Railway Road, where specimens may be seen and prices ascertained.'<sup>27</sup> Just how well suited Agger's room was to photography is not clear, but Blanchard's lighting requirements may have been more modest than most. He valued a softness of effect that could not be produced by harsh light, and in later years a visitor found his Regent Street studio distinctly gloomy:

The studio upstairs, at first sight, impresses one in a very singular manner. Instead of being light, it is dark. Indeed, there is little doubt that Mr. Blanchard employs less illumination than most of his brethren; he objects to flood his models with light... 'I consider,' said Mr. Blanchard, 'that the most perfect lighting a photographer can have is when the sun is obscured by a white cloud, and I endeavour to imitate this phenomenon in my studio. You see I have subdued illumination all on this side, and admit pure light only through two or three squares of glass.'<sup>28</sup>

Blanchard's first advertisement in the Lynn press<sup>29</sup> consisted mainly of a series of endorsements. A quotation from the *Cambridge Chronicle* was used to introduce his speciality:

Mr Blanchard is the inventor of a new process, which he calls Alabastrine, and certainly the invention is a valuable one, for the Portraits finished under that process cannot be surpassed for softness, beauty, colouring, or the correctness of likeness, &c.

Then came a few lines from the *Cambridge Independent Press*:

As his stay is somewhat limited, we wish to call attention to the superiority of his Portraits over all other Artists who have visited Wisbech, not even excepting Sarony's.

To be rated above Sarony must have been intensely satisfying for any photographer, though a little doubt is shed over the quotation by the fact that it was also used in Blanchard's Wisbech advertising, when it was attributed to the *Lynn Advertiser*.<sup>30</sup> (Since Wisbech was named as the location in question on both occasions, however, a slip in attribution may be more likely than deliberate duplicity.)

Other tributes followed. The *Photographic News* agreed that ‘The results we have seen are well worth the attention of photographers.’; the editor of *Photographic Notes* considered the alabastrine ‘a great step in the positive process’; and the *Wisbech Chronicle* observed, ‘The great peculiarity of Mr. Blanchard’s process is the entire absence of the leaden tawny look so common in the ordinary photographs.’ Then the advertisement went on to give Blanchard’s prices: ‘Photographs in Cases complete from 2s 6d upwards. Large Photographs on Paper, 7s 6d. Duplicates 2s 6d.’

These prices reflected a major advantage of a repeatable process. The second and subsequent copies were made straight from the negative and therefore cost less. Having made, at their simplest level, what a later age would call economies of scale, the photographer could afford to pass at least some of the savings on to the customer. Yet Blanchard’s prices for single copies were quite reasonable anyway, as he was soon to point out.

In his next advertisement he followed what was already a predictable formula and warned clients that he was ‘Now Open, for a Short Time Only’.<sup>31</sup> But he also said a little about what alabastrine photographs actually were:

In introducing his new and beautiful process to the inhabitants of Lynn, the inventor begs to say a few words by way of preface. Photographic portraiture, as at present so extensively practised, may be divided into two classes: - the one, where elaborate artistic finish is applied to the photograph on paper in order to make a painting as well as a portrait, necessarily becomes expensive, and therefore appeals only to the few for support; while the other and by far the larger class of portraits, have nothing to recommend them but cheapness. By his peculiar process, however, all the delicacy of a highly finished ivory miniature is secured, combined with the truth and boldness of the paper photograph, while the facility of the production allows him to supply the want long felt for something between the two classes, and to produce a really artistic picture at a low price.

As it turned out, he was giving away very little information. But a photographers’ manual written a few years later gave more detail.<sup>32</sup> The alabastrine represented an improvement to the wet collodion process rather than a new process in itself. It involved treating the developed and fixed glass plate, while the collodion was still wet, with a solution made up of ‘Sulphate of the protoxide of iron, 20 grains; Bichloride of mercury, 40 grains; Chloride of sodium (salt), 15 grains; Rain-water, 2 ounces.’ The resulting coating allowed colour (if used) to ‘penetrate into the material of the film’ rather than lie on its surface. Yet it also preserved the purity of whites and enhanced softness of tone. The technique seems particularly suited to ambrotypes – the cased photographs to which Blanchard’s advertising referred – and the use of opal glass rather than clear glass could enhance the ivoried effect. It is less clear whether the benefits would make themselves felt when printing paper pictures from the ‘alabastrinised’ glass negatives.

The inhabitants of Lynn seem to have been enthusiastic about the merits of these pictures. That, at any rate, was the implication of a new advertisement that appeared in July and continued to run until early December:

V. Blanchard begs to announce that, in consequence of the demand for portraits by his new process, and in order to ensure punctuality in the completion of them, he will during the remainder of his stay close his establishment on Wednesdays, except to those who may make appointments the day previous.<sup>33</sup>

He really had nothing to lose by this. It gave him some extra time to catch up with printing and finishing, it reinforced the public perception of his popularity, and if custom dwindled, there was nothing to stop him devoting the whole of Wednesdays to pre-bookings.

As Christmas approached, Blanchard was ready to begin the prolonged farewell that photographers (like Ely and Sarony before him) specialised in.

V. Blanchard begs to announce that in consequence of arrangements made to return to London after Christmas, his stay in Lynn will not exceed a month; and he therefore hopes that all who may be desirous of obtaining portraits by his new and beautiful process will come as early as possible.<sup>34</sup>

His plans to move back to London were genuine enough, but the timescale would prove to be a little elastic. He had, however, two other points to make in his advertisement. First, he urged patrons not to be discouraged by the prospect of winter sittings:

His studio is well heated and perfectly comfortable. The season is well suited to photographic portraiture, sunshine being totally unnecessary.

This, of course, was wholly in line with the attitude to studio lighting that he was to become known for in future years. Next, he showed an awareness of the kind of role photographs could play in people's lives and directed his marketing accordingly:

He would respectfully suggest to his friends and patrons that the most appropriate Christmas Present is a photographic portrait, for the stereoscope or otherwise, and that his views of Lynn and neighbourhood would be invaluable to those who spend their Christmas far from Lynn and home.

Then, in the New Year, he began the countdown to departure. On January 7<sup>th</sup> 1860 he announced that this was the 'Last Week but Three' and cut his lowest price to one shilling, so that, during the remainder of his stay, 'all may have an Artistic Picture at a cheap rate'.<sup>35</sup> A fortnight later his advertisement was headed 'Last Week'.<sup>36</sup> But with the next week came the predictable delay: 'In consequence of the number of orders unexecuted, Mr. Blanchard will stay One Week Longer.'<sup>37</sup> That week became a fortnight, by which time it doubtless seemed a pity to miss the sales opportunity offered by the Mart:

To Visitors during the Mart. Alabastrine Photographs. All who desire a really first-rate Photograph, artistically finished, at a cheap rate, should pay a visit to Mr. Blanchard's Establishment in the Railway Road. Portraits will be taken during the Mart from 1s, as his stay will not extend beyond the Mart. Mr. Blanchard takes the opportunity to thank his patrons for their liberal support, and would urge those who desire portraits by his new and beautiful process, to make their visits as early as possible. His stay will not exceed the time he has named.

He was as good as his word. A repeat of this notice appeared on February 18<sup>th</sup>, and he then put out no further advertisements. He did indeed return to London, and the census of the following year found him in the St Pancras area, where he opened a studio in Brecknock Place.<sup>38</sup>

While Blanchard had been working in Railway Road, another new photographic business had made its presence felt, and it had done so with a novel marketing ploy.

William Woodhouse had been born in Norfolk, at Sculthorpe, but he had spent most of his life in London. In 1851 the family was living in Tower Hamlets (as it had been, too, in 1841)<sup>39</sup> and the father, John, was working as a carman.<sup>40</sup> William, a chair maker, was already married and, aged 26, was two years younger than his London-born wife, Ann. By 1859, however, he was back in Norfolk and ready to pursue a very different career. It is possible that he had also a second occupation to attend to, but it may not have been until the 1860s that he added to his portfolio by setting himself up as a chicken farmer.<sup>41</sup> Certainly, though, there was nothing half-hearted about his adoption of photography, and his first advertisement, on November 26<sup>th</sup>, was confidently pitched:

Blackfriars' Road, Lynn. School of Photography will shortly be opened by W. Woodhouse and Company, the noted photographers of London, to supply the Public with Paper Portraits &c. There will be issued about Two Hundred Favour Tickets, to be had free of the Publisher of the Lynn Newspaper and the different shopkeepers of Lynn, to their customers only, which will entitle them on presenting the above ticket to a guinea portrait for 10s 6d, or a half guinea one for 5s 6d, or a 7s 6d one for 3s 6d.<sup>42</sup>

It is an announcement that repays some attention. The money-off coupons are what immediately catch the eye. It was the first time such an offer had been made by a Lynn photographer, and the idea was designed to stimulate a lot of early custom. Then there is the grandeur of the trading name: this was not just to be a studio; it was to be a School of Photography. Grandeur was not, though, Woodhouse's primary aim. Schools are for people, and Woodhouse was to project himself increasingly as a man of the people. His announcement did not mention 'the Gentry' (as courted by the Kerry brothers) or 'the Ladies and Gentlemen of Lynn' and 'the Nobility and Gentry' (as addressed by Sarony). He was aiming at 'the Public' who were 'customers' of Lynn shops. The point must not be overstressed, for he was not the first photographer to use the word 'public'; but the signs are that he was already looking to appeal to as broad a customer base as he could.

For the time being, the cost of portraits still worked against him, but a new development in photography would very soon allow him to pursue his populist instincts more vigorously.

The advertisement also sought to trade on the authority conferred by London experience. The ‘noted’ Woodhouse studio in London had been at 3 Sarah Place, Islington, where another William Woodhouse had embarked on the business in about 1856.<sup>43</sup> This William Woodhouse appears to have been an older relation of Lynn’s William, and he gave up his practice in 1858 or 1859, to be succeeded by Frederick Manders. (The name of Manders will figure in the Lynn story in due course.) It seems likely that the William who practised in Blackfriars’ Road had abandoned chair-making to learn his new trade in the older William’s studio.

It will be noticed that John Thew, the *Lynn Advertiser*’s publisher, was one of those who took a supply of half-price coupons. The first John Thew had founded the local paper in 1841 and was described by G G Coulton, a Lynn-born historian and polemicist, as ‘the great J.D. Thew, Jupiter Tonans of the aristocratic *Lynn Advertiser* and mainstay of the Tory party’.<sup>44</sup> After his death in 1856, his son, a second John, became head of the business and, in due course, the paper would be run by four Thew generations. The firm traded as publisher, stationer and printer and never entered the mainstream of commercial photography. Yet it was always there on the periphery. Already it had provided shop-window facilities for Sarony and Pridgeon, and now it was involved in Woodhouse’s introductory marketing scheme. It would go on to deal in photographic products of one kind and another in the years that followed, and the impression is that the company habitually kept a finger on photography’s commercial pulse.

By December, Woodhouse was ready to capitalise on the anticipation he had generated, and he announced he would open on Monday 19<sup>th</sup>. He reminded the public that ‘The 200 favour tickets are out and may be had free.’<sup>45</sup> Anyone unable to collect one in person could solve their problem by sending a stamped address envelope to Thew’s. The prices were repeated – with the additional comment that the guinea portraits, available at half the price, were actually ‘worth two guineas’ – and a number of other products and services were listed:

One hundred Brooches, Locketts &c. – Cheap Paper Portraits to send in letters by post from 1s 6d each. A stereoscope and two dozen slides lent for the day and evening for 1s.6d. – Ministers or Clergymen taken gratis.

In fastening on the notion of cheap pictures to give (or exchange), Woodhouse was anticipating an imminent market trend. He may have been showing business acumen too in his offer to take free photographs of ministers of religion. At face value, it was an act of pious respect and generosity, which could do no harm to his reputation. But in a very few years, when portraits became cheaper and multiple copies became standard, churchgoers would become keen to add a portrait of their pastor to their new family album. It seems likely that Woodhouse was identifying a possible market where a loss on

the first print could be more than offset by the sale of subsequent copies to admiring members of a clergyman's flock.

While Blanchard and Woodhouse were enjoying the limelight, their competitors were quietly doing business as usual. The Dexters, tucked away in their side road between St James' Street and South Clough Lane, were still not using the local press to win attention. William Pridgeon cultivated his contacts (he was an officer of his Masonic lodge),<sup>46</sup> and continued to keep several occupational plates spinning. By 1861 he was employing two men and three boys, spread across his varied activities, and the census enumerator could find room to list only watchmaker and jewellery dealer under the 'Occupation' heading. It was necessary to spill over into the 'Remarks' column to add china and earthenware dealing and photography.

There were times when two aspects of Pridgeon's trade overlapped. In November 1859 Arthur Plews bought a £12 gold bracelet, promising to pay for it 'in a reasonable time'.<sup>47</sup> Three months later, having still not paid, Plews returned the bracelet for a repair (costing five shillings), and had a £2 portrait taken. But he still did not pay. He was, in fact, deeply in debt, and within a few days he had put his affairs into the hands of assignees, who were to persuade creditors to settle for less than they were owed. They offered to pay the cost of the repair, but demanded that Pridgeon should hand over the bracelet to them. When Pridgeon refused, he was taken to court by the assignees, and he won his case. The judge concluded that Plews, 'who at the time (of the purchase) was hopelessly insolvent, was guilty of such a moral fraud as to entitle the defendant to retain (the bracelet) on its coming again into his hands.' The portrait is presumably still unpaid for.

Pridgeon's special focus on stereoscopy was maintained. In October 1859 he had a series of stereoscopic views of Lynn for sale, including pictures of St Nicholas' Chapel, St Margaret's Church, the Greyfriars' Tower, the South Gates and the Red Mount Chapel.<sup>48</sup> They cost a shilling each and they could be ordered by post by sending 13 penny stamps. That these were Pridgeon's own work is clear from the fact that he also offered 'Any View taken on the shortest notice.' (This means, incidentally, that he had equipped himself with some kind of portable darkroom, for wet collodion photographers had to work quickly and there was no time to carry quick-drying plates to and from the studio.) But he also continued to buy in views. Later that year he announced:

W. R. Pridgeon, 103 High Street, has just received a large lot of New Stereoscopic Views and Groups.<sup>49</sup>

He also sold viewers ('The Best Stereoscope Out, One Shilling Each') and still had pictures and equipment for hire. Just before Christmas he added to his range 'a choice collection of Views of English Cathedrals, both Exteriors and Interiors. Several of Ely Cathedral very fine.'<sup>50</sup> Then, in the New Year, he added to his hire equipment 'a patent revolving Stereoscope, containing nine dozen views'.<sup>51</sup> (This was a modest improvement on the 100-slide device invented by Antoine Claudet in 1855 and presumably made use of a similar mechanism, whereby the views were mounted on a loop that was rotated and adjusted by turning the appropriate knobs.)

The novelty of 3-D images was, however, beginning to wear thin. They were to recapture the public imagination periodically over the ensuing years, even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the first great craze for them was dying down. A new development was about to create a huge market demand and to dominate the careers of Pridgeon, Woodhouse, the Dexters and a whole new generation of studio photographers.

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- 1 *Lynn Advertiser*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1857.
  - 2 *Lynn Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1857.
  - 3 *Norfolk News*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1852.
  - 4 *Lynn Advertiser*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1857.
  - 5 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1857.
  - 6 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1862.
  - 7 *Lynn Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1858.
  - 8 *Lynn Advertiser*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1859.
  - 9 *Norfolk News*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1858.
  - 10 1861 census: RG9, piece 1256, folio 119, page 5.
  - 11 1861 census: RG9, piece 1044, folio 163, page 3.
  - 12 1871 census: RG10, piece 832, folio 46, page 33.
  - 13 1881 census: RG11, piece 797, folio 122, page 10.
  - 14 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1858.
  - 15 1861 census: RG9, piece 1256, folio 100, page 6.
  - 16 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1861.
  - 17 *Norfolk News*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1861.
  - 18 *Wisbech Chronicle*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1862.
  - 19 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1858.
  - 20 Ibid.
  - 21 Bill Jay, *Valentine Blanchard 1831-1901*, *British Journal of Photography*, 19<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> February 1982.
  - 22 De Montfort University, *Photographic Exhibitions in Britain 1839-1865*: <http://peib.dmu.ac.uk>
  - 23 De Montfort University, *Exhibitions of the Royal Photographic Society 1870-1905*:  
<http://erps.dmu.ac.uk>
  - 24 *Cambridge Chronicle*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1859.
  - 25 *Wisbech Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1859.
  - 26 *Wisbech Advertiser*, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1859.
  - 27 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1859.
  - 28 Henry Baden Pritchard, *The Photographic Studios of Europe*, p61 (London: Piper and Carter, 1882).
  - 29 *Lynn Advertiser*, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1859.
  - 30 *Wisbech Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1859.
  - 31 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1859.
  - 32 John Towler, *The Silver Sunbeam* (New York: Joseph H Ladd, 1864).
  - 33 *Lynn Advertiser*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1859.
  - 34 *Lynn Advertiser*, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1859.
  - 35 *Lynn Advertiser*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1860.
  - 36 *Lynn Advertiser*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1860.
  - 37 *Lynn Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1860.
  - 38 David Webb, *PhotoLondon database*: [www.photolondon.org.uk](http://www.photolondon.org.uk).
  - 39 1841 census: HO107, piece 708, book 6/37, page 15.
  - 40 1851 census: HO 107, piece 1536, folio 468, page 28.
  - 41 *Lynn Advertiser*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1869.
  - 42 *Lynn Advertiser*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1859.
  - 43 David Webb, *PhotoLondon database*: [www.photolondon.org.uk](http://www.photolondon.org.uk).

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- 44 G G Coulton, *Four Score Years*, p13, (London: The Readers Union, 1945).  
45 *Lynn Advertiser*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1859.  
46 *Norfolk News*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1862.  
47 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1860.  
48 *Lynn Advertiser*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1859.  
49 *Lynn Advertiser*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1859.  
50 *Lynn Advertiser*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1859.  
51 *Lynn Advertiser*, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1860.