

## **5. Cartomania (1861-1867)**

In the Lynn press, the first indication that a revolution had occurred in studio photography came not from a photographer but from John Thew. In September 1861, advertising in his own paper, he announced:

Photographic Albums, with and without clasps, on sale at Thew & Sons, Lynn.<sup>1</sup>

This may not, at first, appear remarkable. But the production and sale of photo albums makes sense only if certain conditions have been met. Individuals must be amassing images in sufficient quantities to feel the need for a storage and display solution. Photographs must have become cheap enough for people to have acquired such numbers. The pictures must be of a predictable size and shape that will fit an album page. The number of potential customers needs to be high enough to justify bulk production.

All of these conditions were met by the arrival of the *carte de visite*, and Thew had been quick to see its importance.

The *carte de visite* was essentially a new format rather than a new process. Collodion-coated glass negatives were still created, and albumen paper was still used for printing, but multiple images were formed on the same negative and, subsequently, on the same print.

In 1854 Parisian photographer André Disdéri had patented a camera with four lenses and a sliding holder that allowed just one part of a photographic plate to be exposed at a time. This made it possible to make a number of pictures on the same plate, creating several images simultaneously, or taking a series of them on different areas of the plate, one immediately after another. Once printed, the small images were cut apart, trimmed and pasted to cardboard mounts that were about the size of a visiting card. These were *cartes de visite* and their appeal to photographers was considerable. Inevitably, variations of camera and holder design were soon devised, but the four-lens camera with sliding holder serves as a good example to illustrate the business value of the *carte de visite*. Using such a camera, a professional photographer could produce two slightly different sets of four portraits in the time it took to make one full-plate negative and print one positive sheet from it. Since glass, paper and chemicals all went eight times as far, money – as well as time – was saved.

The public took a little while to fall in love with the *carte de visite*. For Disdéri, it is said, the breakthrough came in 1859 when Napoleon III visited his studio. In England, the boost given by royal approval came in 1860, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were photographed in *carte* format by John Mayall. Though these portraits were also published in book form, it was as individual *cartes* that they became eagerly sought after. Where the monarch had led the way, her subjects followed. Everybody wanted to be photographed, and many more people could now afford to be. At first, admittedly, the

cost of a visit to the studio was not so very much cheaper, but customers received a great deal more for their money, having extra copies of their image to distribute among friends and relations. This new function of the photograph as an exchangeable treasure led, of course, to the need for albums in which to display – in exciting proximity – royalty and relations, friends and celebrities. So great was the craze for collecting and exchanging these little pictures, that a word was coined for it. They called it ‘cartomania’.

If, in September 1861, Thew was selling albums, Lynn’s photographers must have already been producing cartes de visite, and their customers must have started buying them. It wasn’t until the next year, however, that the new format was mentioned by name in a photographer’s announcement, and the photographer was, perhaps predictably, the one who had already shown some keenness to reach a wider market.

Six Carte de Visite Portraits for 5s; 12 for 9s; or 24 for 14s, by a first class London operator, W. Woodhouse, Blackfriars’ Road, Lynn.<sup>2</sup>

Woodhouse was quick, too, to stock supplies of albums, and soon he was advertising them alongside his ‘very cheap’ frames and cases, in addition to his ‘small Lynn views, 6d each; large ditto, 2/6’.<sup>3</sup>

Woodhouse’s competitors also needed to respond to the new format. Pridgeon evidently had to rethink his position. For most of 1861 and 1862 he took no advertising space for his photography business, though notices relating to his other lines – especially lamps, china and glass – appeared regularly in the *Lynn Advertiser*’s columns. Then, in October 1862, came the first indication of his new strategy:

To Amateur Photographers. – To be sold cheap, a very Superior Apparatus, with Lens, Stereoscopic Camera and Chemicals complete. Apply to W. R. Pridgeon, High Street, Lynn.<sup>4</sup>

One photographic craze had eclipsed another. Stereoscopy would have its revivals, but for the moment cartes de visite were the wonder of the day, and Pridgeon (who had focused on the stereo market more than most) had decided to dispose of at least some of his equipment.

Yet even at this stage, photographers must have felt some qualms about committing themselves unreservedly to the new craze. Even William Woodhouse, Lynn’s first champion of the carte, felt the need to retain some diversity of products. As late as August 1861 he placed a *Wisbech Chronicle* advertisement in which no mention at all was made of the new format:

If You Want Your Portrait You can have it in a leather case, coloured first-rate, for 2/6; large size 3/6: or in an oak or rosewood frame, 2/6; large size 3/6. Paper Portraits, 8½ by 10½, 7/6. Small paper ditto, to go by post to all parts of the world, 3/6 each; second copy of the same, 1/6. Works of art and photographs copied, and copied three times as large as the original if required, at the School of

Photography, Blackfriars' Road, Lynn, by the celebrated London Photographer, W. Woodhouse. N.B. – Brooches and Locketts for Likenesses in great variety, and at all prices.<sup>5</sup>

It was in the following spring that *carte de visite* competition became really lively, with fresh announcements from Woodhouse, Pridgeon and the Dexters all within one week. Woodhouse offered a reduction on the larger orders. The price for six cartes stayed at five shillings, but twelve cartes (at eight shillings) and two dozen (at 13 shillings) were now a shilling cheaper; and he continued to remind readers of his photographic pedigree as 'a first-class London operator'.<sup>6</sup> Pridgeon, having sold off unwanted old equipment, had made major investments both in the new technology and in the premises that housed it:

Cartes de Visite. W. R. Pridgeon, 103, High Street, Lynn, begs to announce that he has just completed the rebuilding of his photographic studio, which combines several important improvements, and he has also added to his apparatus a new Lens and Camera by Dallmeyer, specially adapted for Carte de Visites. W. R. P. begs to invite attention to his 'Album Vignettes' which will be found equal to the finest productions.<sup>7</sup>

There was nothing half-hearted about Pridgeon's re-launch. German-born Dallmeyer had founded his company in 1860 and within two years he had become a leading manufacturer of lenses and supplier of cameras. Pridgeon was opting for top-of-the-range equipment, and his new lens may have been the recently introduced Dallmeyer 1B Quick-Acting Portrait Lens. He was also looking for something distinctive in terms of product presentation and was offering vignetted portraits, where a round or oval image faded away into a white background.

For Woodhouse and Pridgeon, advertising was not new. Both men satisfied the property requirements needed for a place on the electoral roll, and both had the opportunity to exercise their right to vote in July 1865, when elections took place for two knights of the shire. (Woodhouse voted for the Whig candidates, while Pridgeon backed the successful Conservatives – even though his later political exertions would be in the Liberal interest.)<sup>8</sup> They were, therefore, men of some substance, who could afford to think in terms of an advertising budget.

The Dexters, responding to the changed market, chose the rise of the *carte* as the time to make their first press announcements. In 1862 they had placed a series of simple notices in the *Wisbech Chronicle*<sup>9</sup> – a paper which at this time incorporated both the *Lynn News* and the *Isle of Ely and West Norfolk Gazette*. Styling themselves 'Mrs. Dexter's Likeness Rooms', they gave their location as 'three doors from Whin's Livery Stables' (for the stables had changed hands since their address appeared on the labels of the couple's early images). They offered *cartes de visite* and drew attention to their 'Waiting and Dressing Rooms for Ladies'. Like Taylor before them, they realised the importance of suitable facilities for their clients. Ladies might well be glad of a little privacy, not only to adjust their trimmings and check their appearance before facing the camera, but also, sometimes, to make changes to their clothing. Early photographic emulsions responded

eccentrically to certain colours: blue, for instance, could come out unnaturally pale; colours in the yellow-to-red segment of the spectrum could appear much darker than they really were; and black garments needed some visible sheen or texture to relieve their density of tone. Clients had to choose their costume with care, and photographers sometimes offered the use of more photogenic garments. The provision of dressing rooms was, therefore, both genteel and reassuring.

Then, in April 1863, the Dexters shared the front-page spotlight of the *Lynn Advertiser* with Pridgeon and Woodhouse, giving a more detailed idea of their services, but not trying to match Woodhouse's prices.

Mrs. Dexter's Photographic Rooms, 2, Regent Street, St. James' Street, Lynn. Carte de Visite Portraits taken, 12/ per dozen. N.B. Copies, post free, one shilling each, upon receipt of postage stamps, or post office orders. Portraits on Glass, in Frames, Brooches, Locketts, Rings, &c, &c.<sup>10</sup>

Sarah Dexter's was still, at this point, the name above the door. She – as later evidence shows – presided over the actual posing and photographing of the sitters.<sup>11</sup> William Sothern Dexter's role is less clear.<sup>12</sup> He had originally been a shoe maker,<sup>13</sup> but by 1861 he was describing himself as a photographer. If Sarah was concentrating on the customer-facing aspect of the work, he was presumably more concerned with the darkroom activities of plate preparation, developing and printing. He may even have retained some of his shoemaking work. Many photographers distributed their eggs over more than one basket: Pridgeon with his watch-making and assorted retail lines, and Woodhouse (rather more literally) with his chickens, are two good examples.

In 1864, in an advertisement that was otherwise much as before, the Dexters essayed a modest rebranding of their studio. 'Mrs. Dexter's Photographic Rooms' had been dropped, to be replaced by the rather grander sounding 'Lynn and West Norfolk Carte de Visite Establishment, Mrs Dexter'.<sup>14</sup>

During this period when the Dexters were raising their profile and reviewing their image, one Lynn photographer found himself involved in 'what to the little Lynn world' (as historian G. G. Coulton later put it) 'was a famous disaster'. For the schoolboy Coulton, the incident was particularly memorable because it explained why Mrs Bush, who sold his favourite currant buns, had only one leg: Mrs Bush had been just one of over 50 victims of a railway accident.

The railway link between Lynn and Hunstanton, on the corner of the Wash, had opened in 1862, and within a year it had transformed the coastal settlement. Formerly, according to *Blackwood's Magazine*, it had 'consisted of an inn, a bricklayer's cottage, a bathing machine, two donkeys and a stone cross'. Now, suddenly, it was a bustling seaside attraction.<sup>15</sup> On one busy day in July 1863, for example, the *Norfolk Chronicle* reported that excursion trains from Cambridge, Ely, Wisbech and Lynn had brought 2,000 visitors to enjoy the 'pure and bracing air and picturesque scenery' that were 'rendered so easily accessible by the railway'.<sup>16</sup> The day-trippers flocked to 'the bathing machines (of which

there are now a dozen), boats, photographic “studios” (three in number), and refreshment booths.’ The last return train in the evening had to be made up of 34 carriages, and it took two engines to pull them.

It was in the following month that a returning evening train of 15 carriages, carrying 500 or more passengers, ran into a bullock that had escaped onto the line about two miles from Lynn, and that single animal was the cause of a major accident.<sup>17</sup> Several carriages were thrown off the rails, and there were many casualties. Newspapers around East Anglia quickly picked up the story. ‘The end of a third class carriage was smashed in, the hindermost part of the third class carriage entering it; the next carriage was thrown right on to its side, and the following two appear completely smashed,’ the *Cambridge Independent Press* told its readers. ‘The shrieks and cries were most heart rending.’<sup>18</sup> Three, then five, then six, and eventually seven deaths were reported, along with a rising number of injured.

A few weeks later, Mrs Sarah Mace, a widow living in Blackfriars, Road, wrote to her son in the Cape Colony, apologising for a delay in sending him her photograph. She had made an appointment for a portrait, but the photographer (whom she failed to name) had been one of those injured in the accident, so her visit to the studio had been put off for a month.<sup>19</sup>

Although the *Lynn Advertiser* had catalogued those who were taken to the hospital for treatment, perusal of the casualty lists reveals no photographer. But in the ‘list of the persons more or less seriously, but not fatally, injured’ there appears ‘Mrs. Woodhouse, Blackfriars Road – Severe contusions of the chest.’<sup>20</sup> William Woodhouse, it transpires, had been on the train with his wife, Ann. Perhaps they had been simple day-trippers, or perhaps they had been operating one of those temporary studios around which the *Norfolk Chronicle* had placed its patronising inverted commas a few weeks earlier, but their return to Lynn on the eight o’clock train had involved them in a dreadful accident. Ann Woodhouse’s injuries had evidently been greater than William’s, and it may even be that he was one of the relatively unscathed passengers who, as the light faded,<sup>21</sup> ‘assisted in the most praiseworthy manner to recover the bodies of the wounded and the dead from the debris of the broken carriages, whilst the engine immediately went off to Lynn for medical aid’.<sup>22</sup> More probably, he was one of those who had to be helped out. What is clear, however, is that such wounds as he received, together with the shock of a terrifying event and the need to ensure Ann’s recuperation, were enough to keep him from his business for some weeks. They must have seemed long weeks to one who was working so vigorously to hold and increase his share of what was becoming a feverish market.

It was at about this time that another studio opened up. The photographer was Robert Wright, a native of Lynn, and his premises were in Providence Road. Wright had tried his hand at various occupations over the years: in 1841, aged 15, he was following his father’s trade as coal porter;<sup>23</sup> in 1850, on the occasion of his first child’s baptism, he was a printer and butcher,<sup>24</sup> though a year later he was just a butcher;<sup>25</sup> he was described as a grocer in a baptismal record for 1859 and less precisely in the 1861 census as a general shopkeeper.<sup>26</sup> At an 1862 baptism he was a grocer and dairyman, and an 1863 trade

directory showed him as a shopkeeper.<sup>27</sup> His first directory listing as a photographer didn't come until 1865.<sup>28</sup> Since trade directories were usually prepared well in advance, his change of occupation is likely to have been between 1862 and 1864. Like the Dexters in the earlier years of their studio, Wright seems to have been uninterested in press advertising; but, as with them, a quiet entry into the field heralded the beginning of a long-lasting family business. It also added to the pressure of competition.

For their part, the Dexters, having gained a taste for self-promotion, were now looking to improve their market offering. Their studio was feeling rather cramped. Perhaps the waiting and dressing room space had begun to seem inadequate. Perhaps it was becoming harder to find room for all the backcloths and items of furniture that were now called for. The rise of the *carte de visite* had been accompanied by a taste for full-length shots that allowed views of grand surroundings with solid furniture, heavy drapes and painted backgrounds showing (for example) panelled rooms or book-filled libraries. Surviving *cartes* from the Regent Street days show that the Dexters were keeping up with the demand for impressive studio furnishings, but the space for storing them may have become uncomfortably crowded. Whatever the reason, the Dexters had decided they needed more room, and at the beginning of 1865 they had an announcement to make:

Notice of Removal. Mr. and Mrs. Dexter, Carte de Visite Photographer, Regent Street, Lynn, beg to inform their numerous friends, that in a short time they will remove to more commodious premises in a different part of the town, of which due notice will be given in this journal.<sup>29</sup>

Until such time, it was business as usual, and they took the opportunity to mention Sarah's particular skills:

N.B. – To ensure a good Photograph, strangers are requested to ask for and see Mrs. Dexter, who is always in attendance at the gallery as above.

Unsurprisingly, this news from the Dexters prompted the town's other established photographers to remind the public of their presence and to draw attention to their own innovations. Woodhouse was effusive in his enthusiasm:

Cartes de Visite! Wonderful!! Mr. Wm. Woodhouse has invented and constructed a patent Glass House and Apparatus that will enable him to take 12 portraits on paper at one sitting in different positions, for 3s 6d the dozen, 1s 6d the second dozen, and 1s the third dozen. Large Lynn Views 1s 6d each, ditto small 6d each.<sup>30</sup>

No evidence has been found of Woodhouse applying for a patent, but he had presumably had made some sort of studio alteration, and he was also fitting twelve images onto his glass plates. The dramatic cut in prices was not, however, one he would be able to sustain for long. In July, still drawing attention to his new glasshouse and equipment, he revised his prices and clarified the offer of 'different positions':

Six beautiful Carte de Visites in three positions for 2s 6d, one dozen in six positions, 4s 6d, and two dozen for 7s 6d, – Call and see specimens; they are gems.<sup>31</sup>

This suggests that he was using a camera with two lenses and a holder that could be moved to expose up to six different areas of the plate. The three-dozen price was not repeated, perhaps because, even in the days of cartomania, few people could find a use for 36 images of themselves.

Pridgeon, too, had something new to announce under the heading 'First Class Photography'. Not only was he 'furnished with the newest and most improved apparatus for taking Portraits of all kinds, Views, &c.',<sup>32</sup> but he was also promoting the latest novelty:

W. R. P. invites attention to the new and popular style of Portrait for the Album, the Patent Diamond Cameo. It would be difficult to find anything more agreeable and pretty than this Photosculpture of the Album, as the style has been designated.

The Diamond Cameo Portrait had been introduced by F. R. Window the previous autumn. It was a carte de visite showing four small medallion-shaped images of the sitter's head. The four different shots were arranged into a diamond shape and punched from behind to give the relief effect that Pridgeon referred to as 'photosculpture'. Pridgeon was one of thousands of photographers across the world who bought a licence, but Diamond Cameos were more expensive than standard cartes and their popularity was both limited and brief. The investment may not, therefore, have been very wise.

In his practice generally, however, Pridgeon was enjoying some success. Surviving cartes from this period show a decently equipped studio, with a choice of chairs (coolly elegant or richly ornate), an evenly carpeted floor, and a painted dado simulating carved and panelled wood. He also had a backcloth depicting an open French window through which could be seen a terrace, a balustrade, and parkland beyond. This 'view-through-a-window' style of backcloth was becoming very popular as the 1860s progressed, and Pridgeon was keeping up with the trends. He was also showing himself a competent photographer, for he appears to have been able – at least some of the time – to dispense with the head-clamp or neck-rest that many photographers still used to keep their subjects still while the photographic plate was exposed.

Pridgeon was also willing to work outside his studio – he had done so ever since he began making stereoscopic images – and at the bottom of his Diamond Cameo advertisement he added, 'Views taken on the shortest notice'. Architectural cartes de visite of Sandringham Church and Hillington Hall survive to prove that he did indeed take his camera beyond his four walls, and his 1858 photograph of the empty-prison celebrations<sup>33</sup> had provided good evidence of his ability to respond to the needs of the moment. He was, therefore, a natural choice to record work-in-progress when steps were taken to deal with a flooding crisis in the Fens.

On 4<sup>th</sup> May 1862 the St German's sluice gave way. The sluice had been built at the point where the Middle Level main outfall drain joined the River Great Ouse, a few miles south of Lynn, and it was vital to the water-management system of the reclaimed fenland. Its failure, which let in 'tidal waters, which ebbed and flowed throughout a distance of twenty miles' was quickly followed by a new and linked misfortune, when 'the western bank of the Middle Level drain burst, about four miles from the sluice, by which 6,000 acres of land were inundated.'<sup>34</sup> Pridgeon may well have made his first visit to the scene in the early days of the drama, for, by mid-May, he was advertising 'Stereoscopic Views of the Ruins of Middle Level Sluice One Shilling Each, or post free for 13 stamps'. He may, of course, have been retailing someone else's work, but the event took place several months before he started selling off redundant stereoscopic equipment, and he was certainly a photographer who recognised an opportunity when he saw it.

First-aid measures, in the form of an attempt to construct an earth and cradle dam across the Middle Level drain, were soon abandoned, and work started about half a mile from the sluice on a coffer dam designed to facilitate drainage. Massive piles had to be driven into the ground, heavy panels had to be lowered into place, and the work was slow. When, in early June, a party of engineers and officials went to inspect progress, they wanted a record of what they saw, and it was Pridgeon – perhaps returning to the scene – who took on the role of documentary photographer. The *Cambridge Chronicle* reported:

Photographs were taken from several points of view by Mr. Pridgeon, of Lynn; and the pictures thus obtained of the works on the dam will be of great value, as marking different stages of progress.<sup>35</sup>

The pictures may have had market as well as documentary value. Photographs could not yet be reproduced in newspapers or magazines, but they were often used as the basis for engravings, which could be incorporated into the printed page. The *Illustrated London News* followed the Middle Level story with great interest during the spring and summer months, and it featured a series of engravings in successive editions. Though the original sources were not acknowledged, these illustrations had to be based on photographs or on-the-spot artists' impressions, and then embellished with such additional lively detail as seemed appropriate. A fortnight after Pridgeon photographed progress on the coffer dam, the *London Illustrated News* published a picture of just that scene.<sup>36</sup> The engraving's details of men digging and trundling barrows could not have been copied from a photograph, since such action shots were not yet possible. Clouds, too, would have to be added, since skies became uniformly blank during the long exposures needed by early cameras. But the 'piles girded together by iron bolts fixed into the bed of the river' and the banks 'lined with clay to the number of many thousands' – as shown in the illustration and described in the accompanying article – were precisely what Pridgeon had been asked to record. It is therefore possible (though tantalisingly incapable of proof) that copies of his photographs became part of the engraver's source material, though it has to be admitted that other photographers visited the scene on other occasions. In July, publishers Thew and Son advertised 'Instantaneous Stereographs of the Inundations in the Fens. Price one shilling and sixpence each. Published by C. E. Elliott, London,<sup>37</sup> and

in August the Dexters were selling stereo cards of the damaged sluice on the same terms as Pridgeon had been offering in May.<sup>38</sup>

Out-of-door photography of the Middle Level kind required some organisation. Because the light-sensitive plates had to be exposed and processed while the collodion was still damp, it was necessary to have facilities to hand for coating the glass and developing the negative. This meant that a photographer needed to take a portable dark room on any projected expedition. It is not surprising that no record of Pridgeon's arrangements survives, but they may have had much in common with those of Thomas Howard, a photographer working a few miles away at Wells-next-the-Sea on the North Norfolk coast.

Howard was an enterprising character, whose curriculum vitae included printing and gas-works proprietorship as well as photography, and his creation of a mobile darkroom was reported by the *Norfolk News* in 1859.

Mr. T.W. Howard, photographic artist, of this town, has invented an ingenious carriage or barrow for the use of those who like pictures out of doors. Simplicity of construction, cheapness, and extreme comfort, are its great recommendations. To use the words of its inventor – “Its mode of propulsion or traction is perfectly at the option of the photographer. If a self-reliant and independent spirit, he would doubtless prefer ‘pushing his case’ before him in the world; or if inclined to indulge in the *dolce far niente*, he can attach to the shafts a Jerusalem pony, and slowly drive through the pleasant ways of ‘merrie England’.” The barrow is an exceedingly light and simple affair, consisting of a slight but strong framework of wood covered with American cloth, and balanced upon springs attached to an axle, on the arms of which two nicely made but extremely light wheels rotate; the addition of shafts completes the concern. The dimensions are six feet high and three feet wide; length across the top four feet, and the bottom two feet. It is entered by a door behind, and lighted by an orange coloured glass pane in front, immediately above the operating bench. Ventilation is duly provided for by blinded apertures at top and bottom, thus securing coolness. Ample space is provided for apparatus, &c., and for that photographic essential, abundance of water.<sup>39</sup>

Pridgeon needed something similar: without a mobile darkroom, his out-of-studio work would have been impossible. It was perhaps his ability to travel that helped to secure him a notable triumph when, on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1865, he was summoned to Sandringham. ‘We and the whole party were photographed (in a group),’ noted the Prince of Wales, ‘by Mr Pridgeon, a Lynn photographer, and the result was satisfactory.’<sup>40</sup> The Prince’s praise may have been faint, but in December, on the occasion of the Princess of Wales’ birthday, Pridgeon was once again sent for.

As it was afternoon yesterday before the gentlemen of the Royal party reached the Woodcock cover, there was not time before the hour of luncheon to do very much execution among the pheasants. About half-past one o’clock the Princess, with the

ladies on a visit at the house, walked through the park to the cover, where a hot luncheon was provided. Here Mr. Pridgeon, a photographer of Lynn, was in attendance, and took several views of the group, the majority of which are excellent, though it is not known whether his Royal Highness will permit the publication of any copies.<sup>41</sup>

Permission was probably not forthcoming, since, had it been, the pictures might have become better known. Instead, it is in the catalogue of the Royal Collection that evidence of them must be sought, and there, attributed to Pridgeon, are a number of pictures, though with no indication of which were taken on which of the two occasions. The Prince and Princess of Wales were among his subjects, of course, as were the Princes Alfred, Leopold and Arthur, Princess Alice, an assortment of European royals and a scattering of civil or military grandees.<sup>42</sup>

These events must have been a highlight of Pridgeon's photographic career. They prompted him, for a while, to add a sketch of the Prince of Wales' feathers to the design on the reverse of his mounts. It may be, too, that they led to other commissions among the gentry, and a series of images of Hillington Hall may fall into this category.<sup>43</sup> There is also a surviving carte de visite – judged from its mount to date from the second half of the 1860s – which appears to have been taken in a private house rather than a studio.<sup>44</sup> It shows a gentleman in an elaborate historical costume that is consistent with attendance at a fancy-dress ball. (The lower orders, it will be appreciated, had little opportunity to enjoy such occasions and little money to procure such good-quality outfits.)

Woodhouse and Pridgeon were not the only photographers who, in the busy year of 1865, were jostling with the Dexters for attention. Before the Dexters could reopen their business in new premises, a further studio had been announced.

New Photographic establishment, St James's Street, Lynn, (Opposite the Old Tower). E. Bullock begs to inform the clergy, gentry and residents of Lynn and its neighbourhood that it is his intention to open as above on Monday June 5<sup>th</sup>, when he respectfully solicits their patronage. E. B. has, at great expense, erected a commodious glass house on the most improved principle, replete with every convenience for the accommodation of visitors; and, having had considerable experience in some of the leading photographic establishments in London and Manchester, will be able to offer first-class photographs in every branch of the art.<sup>45</sup>

The newcomer was, in fact, a returnee. Edwin Bullock was the much younger brother<sup>46</sup> of Henry Brame Bullock. Photography had been high in his awareness for well over a decade. In the early 1850s, while still a teenage apprentice watchmaker, Edwin had seen his brother set up a studio in part of their father's Lynn shop. Then his brother had moved on and had become part of the successful Dolamore and Bullock partnership in London, where he still was. In due course, Edwin too had sought a career in photography. His experience in London is likely to have been gained in Henry's business; some of his experience in the Manchester area may actually have been in Salford, at 1 George Street,

where James Bullock (one of a northern branch of the family) ran a studio for a while in the mid-1860s.<sup>47</sup> But he also briefly had a studio in his own name a few miles to the south of Manchester, in Knutsford, Cheshire,<sup>48</sup> which is where his first two children were born.<sup>49</sup> Now he had come back to Lynn.

As the reference to ‘clergy, gentry and residents’ suggests, Bullock was not aiming at quite the same market as Woodhouse. To emphasise this point, he added, ‘Prices Will Be Strictly Moderate’, thereby indicating that he aimed to give value without necessarily striving to be the cheapest photographer in town. He sought, too, to improve his chances of success by continuing in his original trade:

It is also his intention to carry on, in conjunction with the above, the Watch-Making and Jewellery business, and, by strict attention and superior workmanship, he trusts to meet with a share of public support.

Bullock duly began business on June 5<sup>th</sup>, and a slightly adapted advertisement (‘the above Establishment is now open’)<sup>50</sup> reminded readers of his presence for the next two months.

A fortnight after Bullock’s arrival, the Dexters were at last able to open their new doors to the public.

Removed. The Lynn and West Norfolk Carte de Visite Establishment. Mr. & Mrs. Dexter beg leave to thank the Ladies and Gentlemen of Lynn and West Norfolk, for the very liberal support they have received during their 12 years’ practice in the above profession, and to inform them that they commenced business at their new and more extensive premises on Monday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, in North Clough Lane, six doors from the Athenaeum, where they hope to receive a continuance of that patronage hitherto so liberally bestowed; and to assure their numerous friends, that nothing shall be neglected on their part to send out first class portraits.<sup>51</sup>

The announcement continued with the familiar reminder that strangers should ask specifically for Mrs Dexter. (It is tempting, too, to see this focus on personal service in the claim to regard their customers as ‘numerous friends’.) The notice ended with a repetition of ‘Six doors from the Athenaeum’.

The proximity to the Athenaeum was important to the Dexters, and over the years they would refer routinely to its closeness. As the town’s centre of artistic endeavour and scientific enquiry it was a desirable kind of neighbour for a business that practised the art and science of photography. The new studio did not, however, rival the Athenaeum in grandeur. Originally the town’s first Methodist chapel, the building had taken on a series of identities over the years, as Lynn historian Henry Hillen recounted:

As the congregation increased, greater accommodation became necessary. ... The old building was therefore abandoned and was turned into a school for girls; Miss Blencowe later carried on a ladies’ seminary in the same room; latterly, it was tenanted by Mr Brown, a liquor merchant.<sup>52</sup>

William and Sarah Dexter followed Mr Brown and were later followed by Mr Piper, a plumber. So it was no custom-built studio. But there was a passage of several months between the notice of removal and the actual event, and that suggests some time was spent in adapting the old chapel to its new function. The particular aim of the move had been to acquire 'more commodious premises', and that was presumably achieved.

Like Bullock, the Dexters kept the advertisement for their new studio running through the summer. Pridgeon and Woodhouse also stayed in the public eye with repeats of their latest notices. Then, at the start of 1866, came a fresh development from the Woodhouse studio, when the proprietor announced that he had 'succeeded in gaining the valuable services of J. A. Prout, Chief Operator and Manager of the Largest Photographic Society in London.'<sup>53</sup>

He neglected to say just which organisation it was that John Prout had worked for, but such lack of precise detail was not unusual from photographers desiring to impress. Though Prout seems not to have run a London studio under his own name, he may have had connections with Edgar Prout of Regent Street or Victor Albert Prout of Portman Square, both of whom were active in the early-to-middle 1860s, or he may have worked at one of the several branches of Samuel Prout Newcombe's London School of Photography.<sup>54</sup> What is clear is that he had been born in Kent in 1824, the son of the Rev. John Prout and Harriet,<sup>55</sup> that he had been educated at Huntingdon Grammar School,<sup>56</sup> and that he was in Gloucestershire (where his first child was born) shortly before joining Woodhouse in King's Lynn.<sup>57</sup>

Having introduced this newly recruited associate, Woodhouse went on to reveal his latest bargain:

(W Woodhouse) will commence from New Year's Day, 1866, to give seven Cartes to the half-dozen, one of which will be most beautifully and richly coloured, without one farthing extra charge. Prices low as usual. Call and see the coloured specimens – like ivory – worth all the money charged for the seven.

He then concluded his advertisement by awarding himself a new title:

Remember Woodhouse's, the People's Photographer, Blackfriars' road, Lynn, opposite the Baptist Chapel.

This self-designation was, of course, noticed by Woodhouse's rivals, and, as if to rebuke his pretensions and question his claim to be the People's Photographer, the Dexters soon inserted an unusually simple one-off advertisement in the *Lynn Advertiser*:

The Lynn and West Norfolk Photographic and Carte de Visite Establishment. Mr. and Mrs. Dexter, Practical Photographers, opposite the Athenaeum.

(‘Practical’ seems comfortably in line with a business where the wife’s customer management was recognised as a strength, and where clients could be addressed as friends.)

Throughout these years, competition was lively, and out-of-town professionals also sought for a share of the market. In 1865, Mason & Co of Norwich (and London and Cheltenham)<sup>58</sup> ran a series of advertisements in the Lynn paper. Robert Mason was anxious to give wide publicity to his book, *Norfolk Photographically Illustrated*, which included views of Sandringham and Castle Rising that might be of particular interest to the inhabitants of North West Norfolk. He also recommended his equestrian portrait of Lord Hastings (‘mounted on India Paper 7s 6d. Coloured copies, Three Guineas each’)<sup>59</sup> and drew attention to the services of his studio in St Giles’ Street, Norwich. He may possibly have attracted a few customers to the other side of the county, but more challenging was the intervention of William McLean, who, in the summer of 1866, set up a studio in the increasingly busy town of Hunstanton and announced his arrival in the Lynn press:

Those who wish for a good Portrait should pay a visit to McLean’s Photographic Rooms, Hunstanton, recently fitted up with every convenience for the production of first-class Cartes de Visite.<sup>60</sup>

McLean may possibly have been one of those who set up the makeshift studios observed by the *Norfolk Chronicle* reporter in 1863. If so, he was now aiming to establish a more enduring business. Towards the end of the year he followed up his first advertisement with one that was regularly repeated in the weeks that followed:

W. McLean, in tendering his thanks to his numerous friends and the public for favours conferred on him, wishes to state that he has, at a considerable expense, purchased powerful Lenses for the dull days, and with his present arrangement can guarantee a first-class Portrait quite equal to one taken in the brightest days in Summer. Every other kind of apparatus kept for different branches of the business. W. M. will be happy to attend persons at their own residences, previous notice being given. Hours of Photography, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., during the winter months.<sup>61</sup>

Though few people in Lynn would have felt the need to travel out to his studio, some of them may have been attracted by the offer of home visits. Perhaps more significantly, McLean was a contender for the custom of the inhabitants of Hunstanton and the coastal villages, who would previously have had to make the journey to a studio in Lynn. In fact, he quickly established himself and remained in business into the next century despite, in due course, facing competition on his own doorstep. After the winter of 1866/67, however, his advertisements in the Lynn press became a rarity – presumably because they no longer seemed necessary.

It was not only professional photographers who were excited by the commercial opportunities of cartomania. Non-photographers, too, were keen to be associated with the

market. Thew and Son, as might be expected, maintained their position on its periphery. They regularly took in new supplies of albums, offering ‘a choice supply’ on ‘the lowest terms’,<sup>62</sup> a double album ‘elegantly bound in Morocco, embossed and handsomely gilt’,<sup>63</sup> and albums as ‘Mart Presents’.<sup>64</sup> They also saw the potential of topical photographs, as their marketing of fen flood stereos has already indicated, and even photographic equipment passed through their hands (perhaps when a local professional upgraded or an unidentified business failed):

Photography – An excellent apparatus complete for sale, equal to new, good size. Specimens of what it will do may be seen, Price £10 10s – Apply to Thew & Son, Lynn.<sup>65</sup>

But the Thews were not alone in seeing the importance of the photographic market. In 1866 another printer and retailer of albums, Mr Milbourne of 88 High Street, had a set of equipment for sale ‘with all the requisites, to be sold on easy terms’.<sup>66</sup> In 1867, or thereabouts, Mrs Bayes enjoyed the glamour of association with a photographic business by setting up a fancy goods shop within the Dexters’ studio.<sup>67</sup> (Perhaps it had proved more commodious than they needed, after all.) But possibly the most imaginative opportunist of all was John Irwin of the Grampus Inn in Pilot Street, who had evidently witnessed the use of mobile studios and portable darkrooms. When, in 1863, he wanted to get rid of an old caravan (‘suitable for a Shepherd’s House or Living Van’) that was sitting unused in Sun Yard, off Norfolk Street, he addressed his advertisement ‘To Farmers, Photographists, Hawkers and others’.<sup>68</sup>

The boom years of cartomania did, however, produce some failed studios, and not all who embarked on photography succeeded. One of the very brief careers was that of W. Ryder, who was listed as a photographer at 93 High Street in an 1865 trade directory.<sup>69</sup> The building was very old and was divided up for multiple occupancy. (Mrs Ann Ryder, a milliner, was also running a business there in the same year.) The ground-floor and first-floor rooms had low ceilings and were scarcely likely to create the airy impression required of a photographic studio, but there was an attic with small dormer windows and an additional roof light.<sup>70</sup> It may be the overhead light source that convinced Ryder that these were suitable premises for a photographer, but his studio was apparently short-lived, and no other evidence has been found of him (or of Ann).

Another unfortunate was a Mr Hunt, who fell foul of the town’s paving commissioners when in 1867 he erected a studio – address unknown – that ‘neglected to comply with the proper conditions’.<sup>71</sup>

Mr Thompson, of London Road, also had cause to regret his 1866 venture into photography:

A Photographic Booth on Fire. – On Wednesday morning, about nine o’clock, the ‘Photographic portrait Gallery’ of Mr. Thompson, – one of the usual wooden buildings on wheels, which has for some weeks past been located in the fore court of a house on the London-road, caught fire from the over-heating of the stove

pipe, and was in imminent danger of destruction. The flames first burst out amongst some paper near the flue, and thence communicated to the shelving, and the bottles of chemicals (including spirits) thereon. Mr. Thompson was from home, but Mrs. Thompson, with the aid of some boys, and afterwards Sergeant Butcher (who was quickly on the spot) succeeded in putting out the fire with buckets of water, but not until three photographic cameras, a stuff dress, and other articles to the estimated value of £12 had been destroyed, and the interior of the van greatly charred and damaged.<sup>72</sup>

The saddest case, however, was that of George Kelly, aged 25, who was employed as doorkeeper to 'Professor Lawrence', a travelling photographer. Professor Lawrence, whose real name was Lawrence Townley, was running his operation as a fairground attraction in 1862 and had taken Kelly on as his assistant for the Lynn Mart, which marked the beginning of the showman's year. Kelly, according to the *Wisbech Chronicle*, 'was very shy and reserved in his manner, and gave no account of himself beyond that he had been employed in a Manchester warehouse at £150 a year, and had been discharged with many others on account of the depression in trade.'<sup>73</sup> Townley offered him five shillings a week, plus his board, 'with the privilege of making what he could in the evening'. For much of his time in Lynn Kelly seemed rather depressed, and when the showmen and traders moved on to Wisbech, the next fixture on the calendar, he neglected to pay the bill for his Lynn lodgings – a failure that, in retrospect, was taken as a sign of distraction rather than dishonesty. His behaviour became morose and abrupt. When Mrs Townley found him at the studio table where chemicals were kept and asked what he was doing, 'he replied in his usual short way, "Nothing that signifies to you."' It was the landlady at his Wisbech lodgings who eventually discovered the truth. As he tearfully told her, and as the *Lynn Advertiser* subsequently revealed, he had left behind in Manchester a young lady 'to whom he was attached' and of whose death he had since learned.<sup>74</sup> In his despair, Kelly swallowed a quantity of bichlorate of mercury (a chemical that was ready to hand, since it was used as an intensifier in the production of prints from collodion negatives). A doctor was called but could be of no help, and Kelly's suicide was attributed, at the ensuing inquest, to 'temporary insanity'. (This verdict at least allowed Kelly's relatives, who attended his funeral in Wisbech, the consolation of seeing him buried in consecrated ground.)

Kelly was a sad, lost soul employed on the periphery of the photographic profession, but even an established market position was no guarantee of a certain future. At some point towards the end of the 1860s William Pridgeon decided to reconsider his career plans. In 1865 he had added the Prince of Wales to his list of customers, and his advertisement for Diamond Cameos continued to appear until the end of the same year. He had capitalised on his royal connections by commissioning a stock of carte mounts displaying the Prince of Wales' ostrich feathers above his name. When cabinet prints (which, like cartes were mounted on card, but which were much larger) were introduced in 1866, he brought out some architectural views in the new format.<sup>75</sup> He also continued to keep up with trends in studio furnishing, acquiring a new painted backcloth depicting an outdoor scene with grass and trees. This was in a style rarely seen before the end of the decade. Nevertheless, from 1866 his advertisements referred only to the other branches of his business, and he

was not listed as a photographer in any trade directory after 1865. His new backcloth, his production of cabinet prints and a new stock of carte mounts in a modern design suggest that he continued his studio work well into the later 1860s, but there is no printed confirmation of this. Photographs by him were included in an exhibition at the town's museum in February 1869, but so were photographs by William Taylor, who died in 1861. Occupation of wall space was not necessarily proof of current practice.

The reasons for Pridgeon's withdrawal from the photographic market are not known. Perhaps he was disappointed that royal commissions had not led to lucrative and prestigious publishing opportunities. Perhaps he regretted the investment in stereos and, later, in the Diamond Carte format. He was certainly facing increased competition. Indeed, one of the new studios – that of Edwin Bullock – brought competition on more than one front, for both men were watchmakers and jewellers as well as photographers. There seems no doubt that, without photography, Pridgeon could still run a thriving business, and that is what he decided to do. He did not lack for other interests: by 1861, if not before, he had become a freemason,<sup>76</sup> and in 1863 he was promoted to the rank of corporal in the Volunteer Rifle Corps.<sup>77</sup> If giving up his studio left him with energy to spare, he soon found new outlets for it: in the later 1860s he became treasurer of the King's Lynn Races;<sup>78</sup> he served on the committee of the Royal Regatta<sup>79</sup> (in which role, in 1868, he offended members of the London Rowing Club by questioning their ability to behave like gentlemen);<sup>80</sup> he campaigned against a plan to subsidise a tramway between the docks and the railway station;<sup>81</sup> and he was elected as a Paving Commissioner.<sup>82</sup> His involvement in local politics dated back to the early 1850s, and in 1871 he at last won the Liberal seat that marked the beginning of a long career on the town council.<sup>83</sup>

But most surprising of all business changes in Lynn studios was the heading of an announcement that appeared in April 1866, three months after Woodhouse had taken on John Prout to assist him:

Portraits. – Mr. Prout, Artist and Photographer, from London, successor to W. Woodhouse, Blackfriars' road, Lynn.<sup>84</sup>

The People's Photographer, it appeared, had forsaken his people.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1861.

<sup>2</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1862.

<sup>3</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1861.

<sup>4</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1862, & *Norfolk Chronicle* 25<sup>th</sup> October 1862.

<sup>5</sup> *Wisbech Chronicle*, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1862. (Earlier appearance on 17 May.)

<sup>6</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1863.

<sup>7</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1863.

<sup>8</sup> West Norfolk Poll Book, 1865 (Society of Genealogists).

<sup>9</sup> *Wisbech Chronicle*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1862, (and subsequently until at least 29<sup>th</sup> November).

<sup>10</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1863.

<sup>11</sup> *Lynn Advertiser*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1877.

<sup>12</sup> William's full name was William Sothern Dexter; though 'Southern' occasionally found its way into print, and 'Southerland' appeared years later in the parish register on the occasion of his death. (Burial register, St Margaret's, King's Lynn, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1899).

13 1851 census: HO107, piece 1829, folio 380, page 39.  
14 *Lynn Advertiser*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1864.  
15 *Blackwood's Magazine*, September 1897. Quoted in: James Hooper, *Nelson's Homeland*, p1,  
(London: The Homeland Association).  
16 *Norfolk Chronicle*, July 18<sup>th</sup> 1863.  
17 Details drawn from *Bury & Norwich Post*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1863, *Cambridge Independent Press*, 6<sup>th</sup>  
August 1863, *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1863, *Lynn Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1863, and  
18 *Herts Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1863,  
*Cambridge Independent Press*, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1863.  
19 Vera Perrott, *Victoria's Lynn, Boom & Prosperity*, pp24-25, (Seaford: Vista Books, 1995).  
20 *Lynn Advertiser*, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1863.  
21 The train travelled at a steady speed of around 20 mph and, allowing for timetabled stops, would  
have reached the crash site two miles north of Lynn well after 8.30. Sunset would have been at  
around 8.45.  
22 *Herts Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1865.  
23 1841 census: HO107, piece 786, book 1, folio 23, page 13.  
24 This and subsequent baptisms: Transcript of Lynn Primitive Methodist Register, True's Yard  
Museum.  
25 1851 census: HO107, piece 1829, folio 489, page 51.  
26 1861 census: RG09, piece 1257, folio 72, page 23.  
27 Harrod's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1863.  
28 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1865.  
29 *Lynn Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1865.  
30 *Lynn Advertiser*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1865.  
31 *Lynn Advertiser*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1865.  
32 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1865.  
33 *Norfolk News*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1858.  
34 *The Builder*, Volume 21, p317, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1865, (London).  
35 *Cambridge Chronicle*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1862.  
36 *Illustrated London News*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1862.  
37 *Lynn Advertiser*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1862.  
38 *Wisbech Chronicle*, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1862.  
39 *Norfolk News*, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1859.  
40 Frances Dimond, *Developing the Picture, Queen Alexandra and the Art of Photography*, (Royal  
Collection Enterprises, 2004), p29.  
41 *The (London) Standard*, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1865.  
42 Catalogue: *Wales Family Photographs, Volume II*, The Royal Collection Trust,  
[www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk).  
43 True's Yard Museum accession numbers: KLNTY2020.125-127.  
44 True's Yard Museum accession number: KLNTY2020.124.  
45 *Lynn Advertiser*, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1865.  
46 Bap. 18<sup>th</sup> December 1833, St Margaret's parish register.  
47 Gillian Jones, *Lancashire Professional Photographers 1840-1940*, (Watford: PhotoResearch,  
2004)  
48 Gillian & Graham Jones, *Professional Photographers in Cheshire 1849-1940*, (London: Royal  
Photographic Society, *PhotoHistorian* supplement 108, 1995).  
49 1871 Census: RG10, piece 1864, folio 114, page 4.  
50 *Lynn Advertiser*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1865.  
51 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1865.  
52 H J Hillen, *History of the Borough of King's Lynn*, volume 2, p548.  
53 *Lynn Advertiser*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1866.  
54 David Webb, *PhotoLondon database*: [www.photolondon.org.uk](http://www.photolondon.org.uk).  
55 Baptismal register, Rainham, Kent, 39<sup>th</sup> May 1824.  
56 1841 Census: H107, piece 455, folio 1/18, page 1.  
57 1871 Census: RG10, piece 1093, folio 37, page 17.

---

58 Michael Hallett, *Professional Photographers in Cheltenham 1841-1914* (Baths: RPS Historical  
Group, 1986)

59 *Lynn Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1865.

60 *Lynn Advertiser*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1866.

61 *Lynn Advertiser*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1866.

62 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1862 and 18<sup>th</sup> April 1863

63 *Lynn Advertiser*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1867.

64 *Lynn Advertiser*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1868.

65 *Lynn Advertiser*, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1863.

66 *Lynn Advertiser*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1866.

67 *Lynn Advertiser*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1876.

68 *Lynn Advertiser*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1863.

69 Kelly's *Directory of Norfolk*, 1865.

70 Martin Scott, *King's Lynn High Street History*: <https://kingslynn-history.uk>.

71 *Norfolk News*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1867.

72 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1866.

73 *Wisbech Chronicle*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1862.

74 *Lynn Advertiser*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1862.

75 E.g. True's Yard Museum accession numbers: KLNTY2020.126 & KLNTY2020.127.

76 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1861.

77 *Norfolk News*, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1863.

78 *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1866.

79 *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1867.

80 Rosemary & Stan Rodliffe, *Glimpses of Fiddaman's Lynn* (Bristol: Rodliffe Associates, 2000).

81 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1868.

82 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1869.

83 *Lynn Advertiser*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1900.

84 *Lynn Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1866.