

Cartomania 3: Victorian Studios - What were they really like?

It's all in the cartes

By Ron Cosens

I am always fascinated when I see a picture of a studio and several questions spring instantly to mind. Is it still there? Has it changed very much? What would it have been like to walk through the door? Oh to be a time traveller. As well as studying the cards, perhaps we could all do a bit towards providing the answers to the above. More details later!

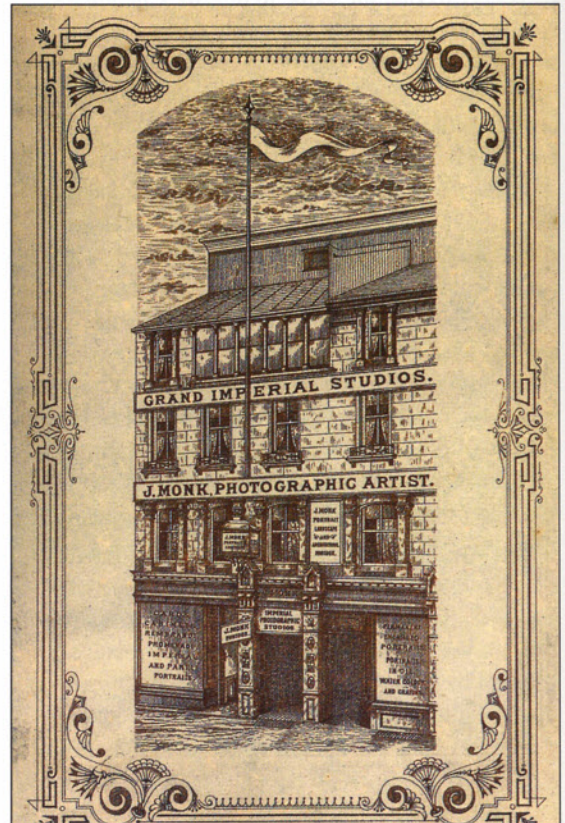
Right: Grand Imperial Studio of Jonathan Monk, 135A Church Street, Preston with a glazed studio on the top floor

Below: Photo by R Milne (Aboyne & Ballater). Camera moved back to accommodate the group - accidentally revealing head-rest and the edge of the backcloth.

SOME carte de visite and cabinet cards give us clues on the back of the mount:-

- actual studios illustrated
 - actual studios illustrated within a townscape
 - studios described
 - stylised illustrations of studios, but not of the actual studio
 - stylised illustrations of equipment, props etc.
- Cards also give us clues in the image itself:-
- studio furniture
 - studio backgrounds
 - studio equipment (uncommon)
 - pictures of photographers (even more uncommon).

And of course nearly every mount bears the studio address - valuable evidence for the keen sleuth. Although not evidenced by the cards themselves, there



are still some studios around which have been preserved as they were in Victorian times and therefore which have changed very little. These, of course, help to answer some of the questions posed above - except for the people, the bustle and, I guess, the smells of the trade (chemicals) and the Victorian period (horse droppings, smoke etc.).

Studios illustrated on the backs of mounts

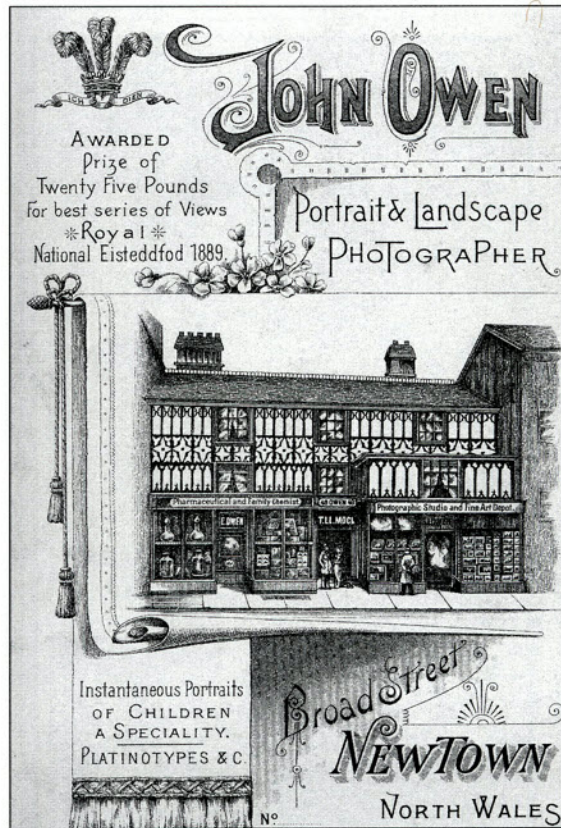
Victorian photographers were proud of their studios and sometime had them illustrated on their pre-printed mounts. I have over 47 examples, but I'm still looking for one from Sarony in Scarborough - I know it exists as I have seen it illustrated in a book.

The studios of J Monk of Preston, J W Heawood of Leicester and John Owen of Newtown, North Wales are particularly fine examples. Are they still standing today? Someone in the club must know. In fact, this is where YOU can help. Can you tell me about ANY of the studios on the list? Can you send me a photograph as it is today?

Studios illustrated within townscapes on mounts

In some cases, the engraving shows the studio in the background of a townscape. For John Burton & Sons, Leicester this is done for a good reason ~ to link the location of the studio to a well-known Leicester landmark. In some other cases it is less obvious why the studio has not been given more precedence.





Far left: A 'Day & Electric Light' studio in Leicester with interesting shop front

Left: Chemist and fine art dealer as well as a photographer - post 1889

Studios described on the backs of mounts

Some cards describe unusual features; a few examples include

"...only elevator connected with photography in the WORLD"

"Studios on ground floor"

"...studio approached by a lift constructed on the most approved patents...."

"Dressing rooms and lady attendants"

"General public studio 43ft. long".

The "Revolving Studio" (London) was really interesting as it followed the sun.

Anything to differentiate from the opposition or maybe merely to show off a little. Who knows? Other, more itinerant, descriptions include "Bailey's Auction Vans and Photographic Studio in this district for a short time" and "Dark carriage for taking groups,

views, parties at own residences". Itinerant photographers are a very interesting subject in themselves and deserve a separate article in the future.

Left: Detail of Milne's photo on the opposite page, showing the headrest.



Stylised illustrations of studios, equipment and props

Many photographer's mounts were standard stationery items purchased from Marion and Co, Osborne, Reeves & Hoare, Fallowfield etc. and the artwork then simply customised to include the photographer's name and address. Because of this, the same artwork appears throughout the country (and the world) and, although it gives a feel for what studios looked like, it is not an illustration of a particular studio. An example from Snowden & Co. of Hull is shown. Items illustrated in this way included cameras, developing equipment, photograph albums and viewers. In addition, Alfred Hughes of the Strand, and Mr. Langton of Belgravia, both of London, had a number of very distinctive designs of studio lighting to promote their use of the new technology.

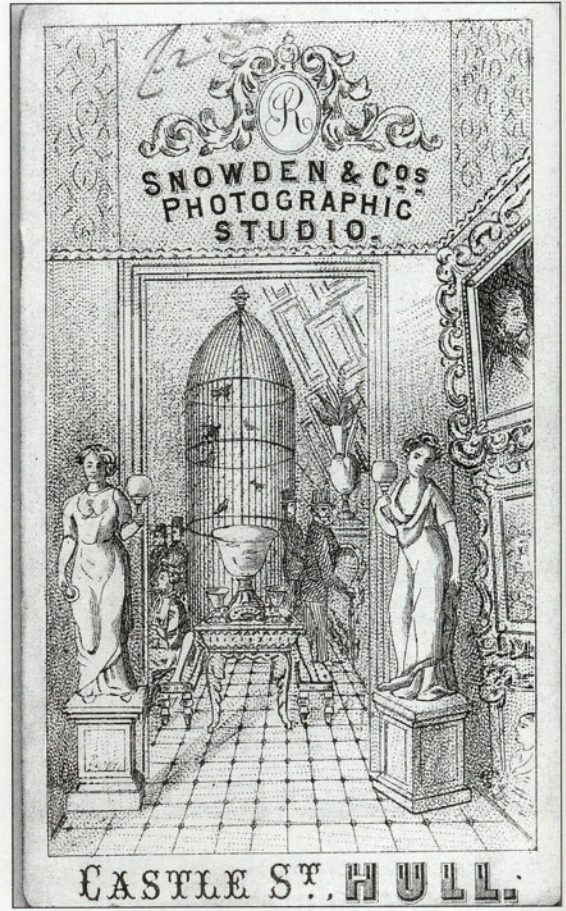
Studio furniture

Studio furniture ranged from a simple kitchen chair through various up-market chairs and couches to posing stands which would appear to have been absolutely useless for any other purpose. Is this why we never see them today? Again our friend Mr Sarony of Scarborough made an important contribution. A quote at the time said "In 1865, to ease the problem of sitters holding difficult poses during photography, Sarony took out a patent entitled 'Improvements in the Rests or Apparatus employed when taking Photographs of the Human Figure'". Another quote said "A meeting was held in London chaired by John Mayall (photographer) to discuss Sarony's invention which was tested out on several corpulent gentlemen in the audience and was generally welcomed."



Right: Burton's studio, small but clear, to the right of a well known Leicester landmark - the clock tower .

Far right: A stylized interior - not the real thing.



There was also a wonderful range of contraptions for children and for babies. There were rocking horses, prams, miniature chairs, high chairs and many devices for keeping the treasured offspring safe (?) and still. It is not unusual to see glimpses of rope or a steadying (but disembodied) arm or the ubiquitous tartan sash being brought into use. The whole subject of studio furniture (and backgrounds) is worth a second look in a future magazine.

Below: Stylized equipment including camera, electric studio light and three little cherubs

Studio backgrounds

Artists and photographers have a very intertwined history as photography displaced the need for portraits and painted miniatures. However, this did allow many studios to use the talents of those under-employed

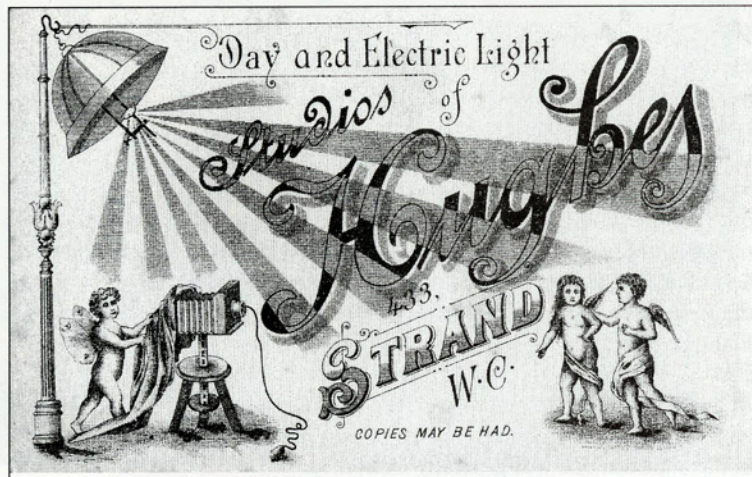
artists who were commissioned to produce superbly painted backgrounds - see Newland & Co. from Portsmouth.

Not all backgrounds were so sophisticated and there are plenty of examples which appear to have been painted by the photographer's children or the decorator down the road. Some studios sufficed merely with a plain cloth (and not even ironed in some cases).

Studio equipment

It is quite unusual for images to show studio equipment except for the occasional base of a headrest visible behind the legs of a gentleman client. In most other cases the stand was hidden by the lady's dress or by a carefully draped curtain. Otherwise, equipment is usually only glimpsed when the photographer has to rearrange his studio for some reason (to accommodate a larger group etc.) and accidentally forgets to move the equipment out of shot.

The photograph by R Milne of Aboyne and Ballater is one of the best examples I have seen. A neck-rest is shown clearly on the right - and even the edge of the backcloth has been carelessly left in view.



Photographers

Although every studio had a photographer, studio shots of photographers are surprisingly uncommon considering many had assistants and the facilities and skills readily to hand to take them. In reality, there are

probably thousands of photographs of photographers 'out there' but they cannot be recognised as such unless a camera is included on the image. One that we can be sure of is Mr. J Peers of Lower Mosley Street, Manchester shown leaning on his camera which is equipped with a magnificent lens.

Studios where time stood still (or almost)

Although not 'evidenced by the cards' it is interesting to know where some old studios are. I have not visited all of the following and, in fact, cannot even say whether or not you would be offered a warm welcome, unless you wanted to order a photo session to help the turnover along that is.

- **Hutton-le-Hole, N. Yorkshire (museum)** - original studio of William Hayes which was moved 30 odd miles on a wagon all the way from Monkgate, York because the local factory there emitted contaminants that spoiled his plates.
- **W W Winter, Alexandra Rooms, Midland Road, Derby** - the studio shop has been altered very little and still retains a nice genuine Victorian feel.
- **Edward Reeves of High Street, Lewes** - the studio has been beautifully preserved and is still run by descendants of the original photographer
- **Clappertons of Galashiels** - said to be substantially original.



Mr J Peers of Lower Mosley Street, Manchester with his impressive camera

Studios Illustrated on the Backs of Carte de Visite and/or Cabinet Cards

Ainley, Mr & Mrs J H Appleton & Co. Barraclough, E	426 London Road, Lowfields, Sheffield Horton Lane, Bradford South Cliff Cottage, Ramsdale Road, Scarborough	Northern Art Photo Co Northern Art Photo Co Owen, John Page, R	Turnbull's Buildings, Market Place, Blyth Bridge Street, Morpeth Broad Street, Newtown, North Wales Bohemia House, 17 Darlington Street, Wolverhampton
Beaufort, J W Bettoney, Samuel Boak, M Bowness, M Brown, T Burton, John & Sons Byron, J Crosse, J R Gibbs, R W & Co. Glover, M Goodchild, A Heawood, J W Hey, S Holroyd, T & J Hughes, H J James, A Katterns, J Jennings Kirk, Samuel London & Chester Photo Maclure, Macdonald & Co. Monk, J Mower, H	25 Colemore Row, Birmingham (interior) Maryport George Street House, Driffield Lake Road, Ambleside Maryport Leicester Long Row, Nottingham 44 Watergate Street, Whitchurch, Salop Albert Bridge, Middlesbrough 124 Stephen's Green, Dublin Alexandra House, Bath Street, Redcar Coronation Buildings, High Street, Leicester 2 Dane Street, Manchester Road, Rochdale Esplanade House, Harrogate 1 & 2, Victoria Street, Twthill, Carnarvon Ramsgate House, Louth 14 Marefair, Northampton Skipton Albert Street, Nottingham 7 & 9 City Road, Chester 2 Bothwell Circus, Glasgow 135A, Church Street, Preston 8 The Triangle, Bristol (map)	Patterson, George Pettingell, Charles Priest, S J Robinson, G Allen Robinson, W J Royal Exchange Portrait Co. Ruddock, R E Sawyer, J R Shaw, Jonathan E Stringer, John R Turnbull & Sons Wallis, G Ward, Mr. & Mrs. Wheeler & Day Wilkinson Wilson, T	Parade, Ramsey, Isle of Man 180 London Road, Liverpool (demolished but similar on next road) 22 Paxton Terrace, Barrow in Furness Burlington House, Bridge Street, Hawick 167 Commercial Road, Landport, Portsmouth 9 Cornhill, London Goldsmiths Hall, corner Blackett St./ Pilgrim St., Newcastle 46 London Street, Norwich Burlington House, Greenhead Park, Huddersfield 15 Waterloo Place, Sunderland 10 Jamaica Street, Corner of Argyle Street, Glasgow Kyber House, Whitby Opposite Railway Station, West Croydon 106 High Street, Oxford Claremont Hall, New House, Huddersfield 94 Stamford Street, Ashton-Under-Lyme

**Can
you
help?**

I have posed a few questions throughout and I would really be delighted to hear from anyone that can add to the lists or the information included. If you know something or you live near one of the studios illustrated or you can let me see any unusual cartes de visite, do please contact me on email - ron.cosens@btinternet.com - or by telephone on 01751 477790. Thanks.