



OXFORD GUILD OF PRINTERS

NEWSLETTER

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Henry Fox Talbot and the Reading establishment

Martin Andrews gave us a lively, interesting and coherent talk on Henry Fox Talbot and the birth of photography, which, as we all now know, has become so commonplace that we have, perhaps, become complacent and ignorant of its early origins.

The eighteenth century was one of great expansion and entrepreneurship, especially in England and Europe. Charles Dickens and Isambard Kingdom Brunel, along with Fox Talbot were amongst many entrepreneurs.

Fox Talbot, born in Wiltshire at Lacock Abbey, became a scientist, a botanist and eventually a photographer. His interest in the camera obscura and its reversed images took on a new dimension when he began experimenting with his camera lucida (similar to the camera obscura) and sensitized paper. By 1835 he had developed the process to a remarkable degree and produced what was to become known as a negative.

The concept of capturing an image for posterity began much earlier than this, with Aristotle and Leonardo da Vinci. Three hundred years elapsed before it became a reality.

Others, such as Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687-1744), Thomas Wedgwood (1771-1805), and Humphrey Davy (1778-1829) were experimenting with chemicals and coated sensitised paper to fix images that were seen through the camera obscura. Exposure times were long and they had no way of neutralising the light sensitivity. In France Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833) was experimenting with silver chloride and eventually bitumen of Judea. By 1826 he had made the first successful permanent image using the action of light.

Another Frenchman, Louis Daguerre, having made his name as the inventor of the Diorama in 1822, discovered that silver iodide was sensitive to light. With the assistance of Niépce, Daguerre developed the process further and realised that a latent image created on an exposed sensitised plate could then be developed and brought out by exposure to mercury vapour. In 1837 they discovered a way to stop the action of light and fixed the images permanently by washing the exposed plate in a hot solution of saturated salt water. The result was the Daguerreotype.

Where does Fox Talbot come into all of this innovation? Whilst Daguerre and Niépce were experimenting in France, Talbot was himself working on the effects of light and chemical changes on colour. One method was to take the camera obscura and throw the image of the object on to a piece of transparent paper. Although the object could be seen, it could not be held in place. But with further experimentation using silver nitrate, silver chloride and salt, he managed to refine the process

Guild meetings

Unless otherwise noted, the meetings are held at the Bell in Charlbury, at 7:30 for 8:00p.m. The Bell serves food (as well as drink, naturally) and some members have taken to dining there before meetings. If you would like to order food in advance to avoid the rush, please contact Lidia Dhorn on 01608 810278.

Tuesday 6th May: Nick Sanford: Works Manager, Smythsons.

Wednesday 28th May: Visit to Madresfield Court, near Malvern.

Monday 2nd June: Ian Mortimer: 'Printing that can really only be done on a hand press – and an Albion for preference'.

Monday 7th July: David Wakefield: Typographer: Letterpress printer.

Sunday 10th August: Picnic at Coneygar Lodge, Quenington, GL7 5BZ.

Monday 1st September: Patrick Randle of Nomad Press.

Saturday 10th October: Wayzgoose at Oxford Brookes.

Monday 3rd November: Miles Wigfield: 'Letterpress printing with some reference to T.E. Lawrence.'

and produced what we now call a 'contact'.

Fox Talbot, a member of the Royal Society, gave a paper in 1839 to the Society, entitled, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing' detailing his processes – later to be known as calotypes. It was similar to the Daguerreotype, which led in time to great rivalry between Fox Talbot and Daguerre.

However, with the growth of his photography business, Talbot decided to set up a photographic studio. He enlisted the help of Nicolaas Henneman, a Dutchman, who had joined the Fox Talbot household in 1838. Fox Talbot had, at around this time, been considering producing illustrations in a book. He understood that the mass duplication of pictures could open up huge possibilities. But in order to do this he needed to set up a factory – called the Reading Establishment – to undertake such production and he then enlisted the help of Henneman.

Suitable premises were found in Russell Terrace, Reading and by 1844 Henneman moved from Lacock to run the business. The factory produced prints for framing and mounting. Commissions to take portraits and photographs of country houses soon became the norm. Book illustrations could also be attempted, as the processes now being used could provide multiple copies of images. One of the first publications with illustrations was *The Pencil of Nature*, which was to be produced monthly. The first edition appeared in 1844 and became the first attempt at photographic publication in the world. Production of further issues became erratic and finally ceased.

The Reading Establishment factory was not destined to last more than a few years. Financially the business was not doing well, and so in 1847 the factory closed.

For a more detailed account of Fox Talbot's enterprise, please read Martin Andrews' book, *Fox Talbot & the Reading Establishment*, published by Two Rivers Press, ISBN 978-1-901677-98-0. Priscilla Frost

Notes from the Chairman:

Madresfield Court visit Wednesday 28th May: there is still time to join this trip but you'll need to let me know by Thursday 24th May if you want to come. There is a charge of £12 entrance to Madresfield. There is to be a gathering for lunch in the Swan Inn at Newland. I will be in direct contact soon with those of you who are coming.

Ephemera on Show: My thanks to Peter White for organising this and to all of you who contributed. I know there are one or two of us who have nothing better to do so the efforts of those of you actually earn a crust from your printing are particularly appreciated. Dare I encourage you to plan your piece for next year?

Letterpress for the Literati: Louisa Hare's Wayzgoose, part of the Chipping Campden Literary Festival, on Sunday 11 May should be well worth turning out for. The Guild will have a table.

Members' Links on the Guild Website: There are a few members website listed as links on the Guild's website. It would be good to see many more. Why not contact our website manager, Phil Treble, (phil@philtreble.net) and ask him to add your press name? This will save me having to write to you all individually to nag you into doing so.

Monday 1st December:
A.G.M. followed by Chip
Coakley & the Jericho Press.

Wayzgoose:

The 4th annual Printer's Wayzgoose 'Letterpress for the Literati' will be held at Chipping Campden Town Hall on Sunday May 11 from 10:00am till 4:00pm as part of the Chipping Campden Festival of Literature.

London Original Print Fair:

Thursday 24th to Sunday 27th of April: The Royal Academy of Arts hosts the 29th London Original Print Fair. Printmakers from Dürer and Rembrandt to Anita Klein and Banksy will be on display (and for sale). Tickets are £12.00 (including a catalogue) or free to Friends of the RA. In addition to the exhibits, there are daily talks and guided tours. Visit their website for opening hours and further information: <londonprintfair.com>

Member's request:

OGP Member Heather Haythornthwaite is looking for any spare type, leads, spaces, galleys and furniture to help the Medway Fine Printmakers (a not-for-profit organisation in Rochester, Kent) begin running letterpress taster days. The Printmakers already have screenprinting and etching facilities, but have received many requests for letterpress. If you can help, please contact Heather on 01634 826536, 07702 269972 or by email: heatherhtt@mac.com.