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The *Illustrated London News* and Photography

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Various source media, *Illustrated London News* Historical Archive 1842-2003



Introduction

It is safe to say that the history of *The Illustrated London News* and the invention of photography are inextricably entwined. You do not have to seek far in *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive* to find evidence of this interrelationship. For instance, in just the third issue of the periodical, 28 May 1842 the article, “*The Illustrated London News*, and the Large Engraving of London in 1842, Opinions of the Press”, contains reactions from other periodicals to *ILN*’s large-scale engraving of the London cityscape, which was based on a series of daguerreotypes by Antoine Claudet. The article describes how Claudet perched atop the York Column to create this “bird’s-eye view” that, by consensus, is declared “the most accurate, and decidedly one of the most admirably-executed pictures of London we have ever seen”.

That the inaugural issue of the first lushly and highly detailed illustrated newspaper should contain an engraving of “daguerreotypes” or photographs, a relatively new invention that itself produced lush, highly detailed visual documents, can be considered a deliberate, telling union of a new stage in periodical reportage with a new stage of visual representation. Indeed, the linkages between the *ILN* and the development of photography can be traced from 1842 through to 2003, as this article highlights.

The Photographic Invention

The story of photography’s invention in itself reveals the importance of periodical reportage to the dissemination of knowledge and scientific discovery in the nineteenth century. The process of capturing

permanent, photographic records of the visual environment was long sought after, but was mastered in France by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and in England by Sir William Henry Fox Talbot, both of whom announced their inventions in January 1839 (French newspaper articles dated 6 January described the announcement of Daguerre’s invention, known as the daguerreotype process, which spurred Talbot to make public his invention, the calotype process, on 25 January at a meeting of the Royal Institution) For more information about Daguerre’s and Talbot’s process of announcement see the *ILN* article, “Photography. Its Origin, Progress, and Present State,” (published 31 July, 1852; continued 28 August, 1852). A flurry of descriptions of early photographs (called either daguerreotypes or calotypes, depending upon which process of development and camera was used) was published in periodicals in 1839, capturing the public’s enthusiasm for and wonder towards this seemingly miraculous process that created such exact, finely detailed images.

Although photography’s invention preceded the *ILN*’s creation, the rapid advancement of photography was faithfully recorded within the early issues of *ILN*. For instance, improvements to the photographic process, the introduction of photographic portraiture and the opening of the first public portrait studios in 1841, and the growing popularity of photography (whether sitting for one’s portrait, exchanging and collecting images or attending photographic demonstrations); were all captured within the pages of *ILN*, with its attention to scientific advancement, the progress of technology, and popular social customs. As a scientific process, an artistic expression, and a visual record of family,

personal, and public roles, photography was a multi-faceted topic that appealed to a broad readership and impacted upon various aspects of Victorian life.

The Collodion Process

Other significant events in photography's early development include the announcement of the collodion process in 1851, the proud display of photographic achievement at the central Victorian event of the 1851 Great Exhibition (of which the *ILN* was a central proponent, publishing detailed supplements and guides for visitors) and the introduction of stereographic photography (photographs which, when viewed through the stereoscope viewer, appear three-dimensional) in the late 1850s. As the *ILN* grew in readership and circulation from 1842 to the late 1850s, these events were reported upon, often with increasingly detailed and numerous engravings (whether reproductions of actual photographs, for instance, or visual catalogues of the many objects on display at the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition. For more information on the role the *ILN* played in advertising and reviewing the Great Exhibition, please see Laurel Brake, "Lost and Found: Serial Supplements in the Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Periodical Review*, 43:2 (Summer 2010): 111-118.

Indeed, another way in which the relationship between photography and the *ILN* may be traced is through the increasingly sophisticated illustrations that the newspaper contained. As the process of photography became more finely-tuned from 1839 onwards, more sharply detailed and clear photographs were produced, which in turn led to engravings of these photographs

that contained greater detail and information (it was not until the late 1890s to early 1900s that halftone reproduction allowed photographs to be clearly reproduced in newspapers). The advancement of newspaper illustration in capturing visual detail and carrying more and more informational weight (alongside written text) can partly be attributed to these advancements in photography. The value that the *ILN* clearly placed on illustration from the start of its print run through to 2003 is evident in even just a cursory glance at the inaugural issue in comparison to the centenary issue.

Conclusion

The description in the third issue of *ILN* of its engraved reproduction of the London panorama daguerreotypes as photographic images notable for "beauty and boldness" and "accuracy" is an apt characterisation not only of the nineteenth-century invention of photography, but also of the innovations in periodical illustration that the other nineteenth-century invention, the *ILN*, introduced. See the article: "*The Illustrated London News*, and the Large Engraving of London in 1842, Opinions of the Press", published on the 28 May, 1842.

Highlights

The following articles highlight significant moments in the invention and progress of photography.

“The New London Panorama: South View”, 11 February, 1967

This article displays both the original 1842 engraving of the London panorama published by *The Illustrated London News* (which was based on a daguerreotype) and a reproduction of a photograph taken in 1967 of the same vista; it is a nice comparison of how far both photography and *The Illustrated London News* had developed from 1842 to 1967.

“Photographic Portraiture”, 1 October, 1842

An enthusiastic account of the recently introduced process of photographic portraiture, declared by the author “miraculous in its nature” for capturing the human subject (p. 323).

“Light and Its Applications”, 17 May, 1851, (Great Exhibition Supplement)

Opening with a description of the “spectacle” of light that is the Crystal Palace, the “fairy”-like, glass-plate structure that was at the heart of the exhibitions and displays of the 1851 Great Exhibition, the article provides a detailed study of the recent “applications of light” in technology, including descriptions of daguerreotypes, calotypes, and hand-coloured photographic portraits. The article also contains the first mention in *The Illustrated London News* of the new collodion process (introduced 1851 by Frederick Scott Archer).

“Photography. Its Origin, Progress, and Present State”, 31 July, 1852, (Literature, Music, Fine-Arts, Drama, Science Supplement); continues (under same title) 28 August, 1852, (Literature, Music, Fine-Arts, Drama, Science Supplement)

Similar to the above article, “Light and Its Applications,” this article provides the modern reader with insight into the remarkably rapid advancement of photography from its invention in 1839, detailing not only the separate processes of invention by Daguerre and Talbot, but also revealing the wondrous reactions with which the developing technology was characterized, even thirteen years after its announcement, as a form that captures “the mysteries of the beautiful” (p.176).

“Photography”, 2 April, 1853

A detailed article on the first two meetings of The Photographic Society, the first such society in London. The article discusses Sir William Newton’s well-known contribution, “Notes on Photography, in an Artistic View, and its Relations to the Arts,” which brought forth much debate about the artistic versus documentary function of photography (an issue that surrounded photography from its invention through to today).

“Photography’s Centenary: The Beginning of the Art as We Know It”, 14 January, 1939

One hundred years after the announcement of photography in periodicals like *The Illustrated London News*, the 1939 issue contains significant early photographs, including Talbot’s “The Ladder,” which

was published in his book, *The Pencil of Nature* (the first photographically-illustrated book), 1844-6.

Search Terms

Searching by **entire document** yields far more results than searching the same word by **keyword**. I also recommend using a wildcard search (for instance, **Daguerre*** instead of "Daguerre") for revealing more related results (for instance, daguerreotypes, daguerrean establishments, the inventor Daguerre, and so on). Some terms that are fruitful in researching the invention of photography include:

Photograph*

Because photograph is such a common word, from the invention of photography to the present, I highly recommend limiting the search of this word by a date range (if interested in the invention of photography, for instance, search "1839-1850").

Daguerre*

Talbot*

This search reveals results about the inventor, Talbot, as well as talbotypes. For information about Talbot in particular, I recommend searching by his full name: **William Henry Fox Talbot**, or **Fox Talbot**, since Talbot is a somewhat common name.

Calotype*

The original name for Talbot's invention.

Collodion

For information on the "collodion process," the more economical and efficient process that became (with its introduction in 1851) the standard way by which to print photographs.

Photographic portrait*

Yields many results about the introduction of photographic portraiture, the opening of portrait studios, and so on.

Mr. Beard*

Claudet's competitor, who operated one of the two first portrait studios in London (on the roof of the Polytechnic Institution, Regent Street, on 23 March 1841). Note I recommend the inclusion of "Mr." to limit results.

Claudet*

Richard Beard's competitor, the well-known photographer who operated the other first portrait studio in London (on the rooftop of the Adelaide Gallery, which opened June 1841). He eventually superseded Beard in popularity, opening a grand "Temple to Photography" in 1851 on Regent Street and becoming "Photographer-in-ordinary" to Queen Victoria (in 1853).

Stereoscop*

Yields results regarding the stereoscope/stereoscopic process, a very popular form of viewing photographs (through the stereograph viewer, which gave the illusion of three-dimensionality) that greatly increased the production and trade of printed photographs throughout the 1850s and 1860s.

Photographic Society

Provides information on the first photographic society in London, "The Photographic Society" (established 1853), a significant institution still operating today as the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain.

CITATION

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