



## HISTORY

# Early photographers in Lincolnshire

**Words:** Christine Hibbert

*Below from top: The elaborate card given out by F Fisher of Grantham; John Starbuck's trade card*

*Opposite from left: George Beales' carte-de-visite; An elderly couple photographed by Mr Willey of Louth in around 1860*

The French may have been pioneers in the techniques of photography but the first photographic studio in Europe was set up in London in 1841. It was not long before studios began to appear throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles in order to capitalise on this new method of producing portraits. By the 1850s, most cities and towns of any size had at last half a dozen practitioners of this new craft.

Traditional artists, perhaps sensing that their livelihood was in danger of being stripped away, were among some of the first to embrace this new technology as an enhancement to the services they already offered. Photography did away with the need for lengthy sittings, capturing an instant likeness from which a portrait could then be produced. Photographers were now set to become 'artists' in their own right. They were soon producing thousands, if not millions, of the images known as 'cartes-de-visite' a term derived from their resemblance to the standard visiting card.

The artistic community was not slow to adopt the new technology. By 1856 at least half the known artists in Lincoln were utilising photographic techniques. A similar number had jumped on the bandwagon and set up purely photographic studios. By 1861, Lincolnshire had more than a dozen studios offering photographic portraiture and in the course of the next few decades this number quadrupled to more than fifty.

Among the early pioneers of photography in Lincolnshire was George Beales, who established a studio at New Road, Spalding, in 1859, specialising in both portrait and landscape photography. From here, George and his sons expanded the business into other towns - Gainsborough and Boston. The Beales family business was a good example of one that flourished; many others were not so fortunate or simply not good enough. Their star burned brightly for a few years before they disappeared from the record to be replaced by another wave of eager hopefuls. It is inter-

esting to note that of the dozen or so Lincolnshire studios in existence in 1860, very few appear to have survived for any great length of time.

Due to the high level of competition, in what was often a cut-throat business, photographers used all possible avenues to promote themselves and their studios. 'Cartes-de-visite' photographs had been avidly collected from the outset and handed out to friends and family or kept in large, luxurious albums. It did not take the studios long to realise they could utilise the reverse of the 'cartes' as a trade card to

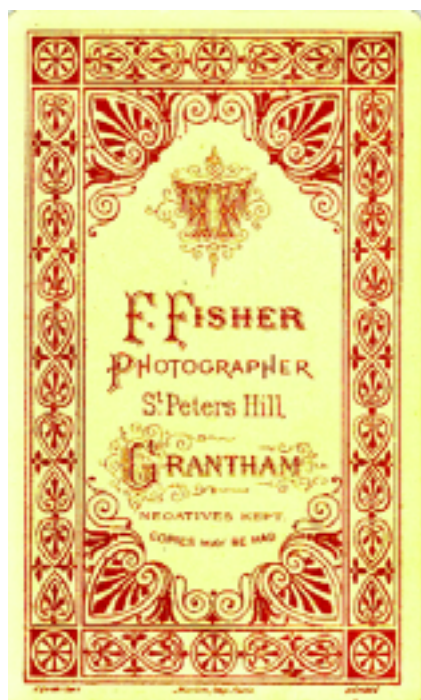
advertise both the studio and the services on offer to prospective clients. Early trade cards were used to impart essential information in a clear, concise way. The name of the photographer and the address of his studio were set out, often in copperplate script.

This format can be seen on the trade card of John Starbuck of Alford, photographer and maker of picture frames.

As time went on, trade cards became more decorative and eye-catching and images such as local landmarks were incorporated into the design. Mr Hardy of 1 Norman Place, Lincoln decorated his trade card with the city's most potent symbol, the Cathedral, set against a bright primrose background. This image continued to be used by Mr Hardy's successor, Alfred Twigge Osbourne, when he took over the Norman Place studio some time before 1876. Sleaford photographer Albert Tippins illustrated the link between photography and art by the use of another popular motif. The card advertising his Jermyn Street studio was illustrated with an arrangement of photographic apparatus against which an artist's palette had been placed. This design proved very popular and appeared on the trade cards of many photographers from the 1860s onwards. Exotic landscapes, flowers and cherubs were also widely used as decorative motifs.

On the surface it seems that photography was an exclusively male preserve but this was not the case. Husband and wife, Charles and Emma Smyth of Northolme,

Back in Victorian times  
county entrepreneurs  
were quick to seize  
on the new art of  
photography and turn  
it into a business



worked as partners in their photographic business. Occasionally, widows took over the family calling after the death of their husbands and in some cases Lincolnshire women managed their own studios, such as sisters Louisa and Emma Walton of Boston. Mrs E Higgins ran a successful studio for more than twenty years in Maiden Lane, Stamford, and Eleanor Audas and Clara Knighton both had studios in Grimsby in the 1890s. Photography also offered opportunities to younger women who were frequently employed as photographer's assistants or colourists when hand-tinted photographs were required.

Not all of Lincolnshire's photographers operated out of studios. Some roamed from town to town, county to county, picking up commissions as and when they could. A glance through census returns shows that at any one time there were roving

photographers lodging at inns, boarding houses, even in prison or the local lunatic asylum. Some photographers were evidently travellers in the true sense of the word, like the seven or so who descended on Grantham in the spring of 1881. They were in town for Grantham Fair and parked up their show vans and caravans at various points around the town, mainly in the Blue Lion Yard and the Market Place. One of these photographers, William Wilson, brought along his family, including two sons, to act as photographic assistants. His daughter, Ellen, took no part in the family business; she was in charge of the rifle gallery which also accompanied the Wilson family on their travels.

One man journeyed further than most to become a Lincolnshire photographer. Luigi Cella arrived in England from his native Italy some time before 1860. He took up residence in Boston where he

opened a studio as artist and photographer. An advertisement of his, dating from 1863, states that 'Life Size and Other Portraits & First-Class Cartes-de-Visite could be taken daily', at his Bargate studio. Signor Cella was evidently a man of some energy and ability as his studio was to remain in business well into the 1890s. However, not everyone showed the same determination to succeed. For some the world of photography proved just too demanding. Thomas Wardle of Laceby, one-time photographer, gave it all up to become a gardener.

These are just some of the strands in the story of the early photographers who lived and worked in Lincolnshire during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is thanks to them that we can still catch a glimpse of our Victorian ancestors in the images these photographic artists left behind.

