

Capturing the City: Photography at the Bank of England

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An exhibition at the Bank of England Museum and an Archive cataloguing project shed light on different aspects of the organisation's history through photographs.

Viewed from outside, the Bank of England can appear as a formal establishment, a remnant of past times. We have come a long way since Montagu Norman's 'never explain, never excuse' era of central banking. In recent years there has been a move to establish 'openness and accountability' as a core pillar of the Bank's mission to promote the good of the people of the United Kingdom. The Bank of England Museum's latest exhibition, *Capturing the City: Photography at the Bank of England*, aims to show that beyond the austere stone walls of the Bank's building on Threadneedle Street lies a hive of activity incorporating a remarkable architectural history representing the dynamism of the institution, a diverse range of occupations and a vibrant social history.

The Bank of England Archive's photography collection provides a fascinating record of the Bank, its buildings and staff since the Victorian era. *Capturing the City* looks at the Bank's past, and explores the history of a medium that has become so popular today.⁽¹⁾ This article shows a small selection of images, but there are many more on show in the exhibition. The display will provide an opportunity to see images of the Bank not easily accessible to the public as well as artworks and artefacts not usually on display.

As part of the exhibition, the Bank of England Museum worked in collaboration with the Royal Photographic Society's London chapter to produce an exciting project based on images from the Bank Archive. Members of the Society, as well as the general public, were challenged to choose an Archive image and take photographs of the same location using as much creativity and imagination as they liked. The results show some of the many changes in the City over the past century (Figures 1–4).

This article includes sections on life in the Bank and the Bank during World War II. It also includes a box on the Bank of England Archive's cataloguing project, which has been running in conjunction with the planning and research of *Capturing the City*.



Figure 1 New Change Accountant's Department (now One New Change shopping centre), view of St Paul's Cathedral dome from an 8th floor window, 1958 (15A13/2/36).



Figure 2 David Pollard ARPS, One New Change — View of St Paul's Cathedral dome, 2015.

(1) Visit the *Capturing the City* webpage for a summary of the exhibition; www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/museum/whatson/capturing-the-city.aspx.

Bank life

Early photography

Early photographic portraits relied heavily on the same principles as the painted portrait. Victorian photographers used pillars and swathes of drapery to enhance the backgrounds of their photographs, just as portrait painters had. As smaller, less expensive cameras began to enter the marketplace, it generally became easier for photographers to leave the studio to produce informal images. This resulted in the popular appeal of photography that is familiar today.

One of the Bank's earliest photographic albums dates to the 1840s and depicts images of Governors and Directors. Looking through the sepia-toned pictures, one can find the earliest photograph of a Governor — William Cotton, who was in office 1842–45 (**Figure 5**). These portraits demonstrate one of the earliest photographic processes — the salt print. Salt prints were developed in 1840, and were popular until the 1860s when they were replaced by the albumen print. Most salt prints were made by soaking writing paper (giving them their characteristic matte appearance) in a dilute sodium chloride solution, and then left to dry. The paper was then treated with silver nitrate to form silver chloride which created light-sensitive paper. The paper was put directly beneath a negative and exposed to sunlight for up to two hours to produce the final image.



Figure 3 Princes Street from King William Street, 1890s (15A13/1/3/30).



Figure 4 Valerie McGlinchey, Princes Street from King William Street, 2015.



Figure 5 Salt print of William Cotton, Governor 1842–45 (15A13/18/2/8).



Figure 6 Photograph of William Henry Clegg, c. 1930s. Note the grid lines to help Clausen plan his painting (Figure 7).

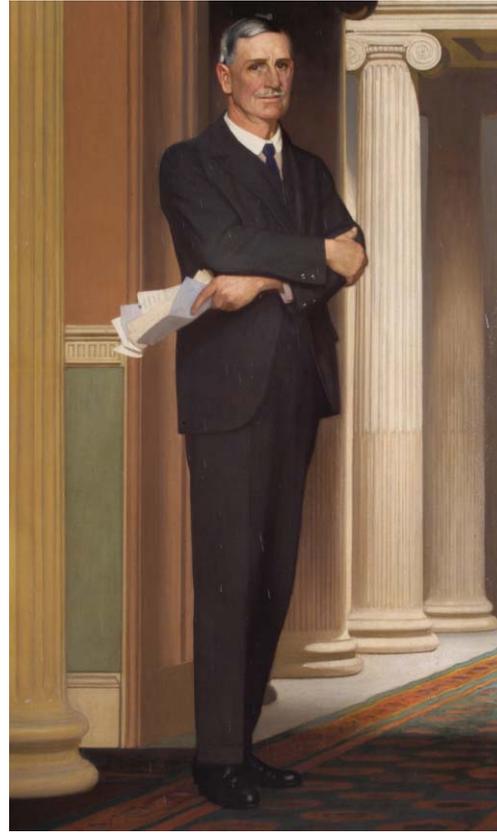


Figure 7 William Henry Clegg, Director of the Bank of England 1932–37, by Sir George Clausen (0605).



Figure 8 Digital photograph of Mark Carney, Governor 2013–present (© Bloomberg 2013).



Figure 9 Consols Office, 1894 (15A13/1/13).

With the invention of the camera, portrait painting aided by photography grew in popularity during the 19th century.⁽¹⁾ Photographs were often used as a reference tool to reduce the time spent sitting for an artist. A newly discovered photograph in the Bank Archive reveals that the artist Sir George Clausen (1852–1944) used this technique when painting his portrait of William Henry Clegg, Director of the Bank of England 1932–37 (Figures 6 and 7).⁽²⁾

Advances in photographic equipment and techniques over the past century have given photographers the ability to capture images with much shorter exposure times and to make portraits outside the studio (Figure 8). Once a pursuit for a select group of photographers in studios, photography is now a pastime enjoyed by the general public, whether on high specification SLR cameras, compact digital cameras or their smartphones.

Office technology

Technology in banking, as well as in photography, has changed significantly over the years and one can chart its progression through the Bank of England Archive photography collection. This is particularly evident in the evolution of the Bank's Accountant's Department.⁽³⁾ The original Charter of 1694 entrusted the Bank of England as Registrar, keeping books to record stock transfers, paying dividends and other aspects of stock management. In a photograph of the Consols Office, dated 1894, one can see numerous stock ledgers on countertops all of which were meticulously handwritten (Figure 9). In stark contrast is a photograph recording the use of the Programme Controlled Computer (PCC) in the Dividend Preparation Office, 1962 (Figure 10). Prior to the 1930s, clerks were expected to manually calculate and handwrite every warrant until the punched-card system was introduced in 1934. The PCC was introduced in the late 1950s. While still using the punched-card system to prepare the warrants for stockholders, the PCC's high-speed memory and mass storage meant that the process was faster and much more accurate.

The mid-1950s had seen a period of discussion and research into computerisation throughout the whole of the UK banking industry. Following several proposals the Bank decided to trial Powers-Samas equipment.⁽⁴⁾ It was described by the Chief Accountant as 'a revolutionary departure from present methods and habits of thought'. The pilot scheme was the Bank's first direct experience of computers and was installed at its new building on Cheapside, New Change (now the site of One New Change shopping centre).⁽⁵⁾



Figure 10 New Change Dividend Preparation Office, Programme Controlled Computer, 1962 (15A13/2/9).

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- (1) Writing to the politician Sir Charles Dilke in 1873, the portrait painter George Frederick Watts said that photographs 'help to make one acquainted with peculiarities and shorten the sittings necessary'. The letter is now in the National Portrait Gallery's Archive, ref. NPG 1827 (2a).
- (2) Clausen was Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy of Arts and an official war artist during the First World War. During the 1880s Clausen developed an interest in cameras, which were still a primitive technology. He would photograph his subjects but also recognised that the images were no substitute for observation and combined the medium with sketches. Clausen would have referenced his photograph of Clegg in collaboration with a sketch which is now in the Royal Academy of Arts collection, ref. 05/2996.
- (3) The Accountant's Department was renamed the Registrar's Department in 1980 and was closed in 2004.
- (4) Powers-Samas was a British company which sold unit record equipment.
- (5) For further information about technical developments in the Registrar's Department see Bank of England (1985), 'The Bank of England as registrar', *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*, September, pages 415–21; www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive/Documents/historicpubs/qb/1985/qb85q3415421.pdf.

The Bank during World War II

Early in 1937 it was recognised within the Bank that war with Germany was certain. For the next two years the Bank made preparations in what was code-named 'Zero'. When war was declared in 1939 all the activities of the Bank were able to continue with minimum disruption.

Bank staff who did not have to retain constant contact with the City were evacuated to Hampshire and by 1940 1,098 staff were billeted in the neighbouring villages of Hurstbourne Priors and Whitchurch. The first move towards the Bank's wartime evacuation resulted from a decision, taken in 1938, to transfer the printing of banknotes at St. Luke's (Old Street) and the Dividend Preparation Office from London to the village of Overton, in order that they should be in close contact with Portals paper mill.⁽¹⁾ The Bank of England has been issuing banknotes for over 300 years, and maintaining confidence in the currency is central to the Bank's mission.⁽²⁾ Two large buildings, which became known as the 'shadow factories', were erected adjoining Portals at Overton; one to house part of the Printing Works (**Figure 11**) and the other the Dividend Preparation Office.

The Accountant's Department and Establishment Department⁽³⁾ were evacuated to Hurstbourne Mansion, then in the occupation of Patrick Donner, MP, who had consented to reserve the tenancy for the Bank for a small retaining fee, and only 48 hours' notice needed to be given in the event of war. The house was suitably located close to Overton but, though large, was not large enough to accommodate both staff quarters and offices. A temporary camp was constructed for staff containing offices, a canteen and living quarters for men (**Figure 12**). Female members of staff stayed at the Mansion (**Figure 13**). Conditions were cramped: with only seven bathrooms, Hurstbourne Mansion accommodated as many as 309 women at one time.

In the spirit of 'digging for victory' some members of Bank staff started a small farm at their accommodation at Whitchurch and bought bees, two dozen chickens, two pigs, two goats, and a pony and trap. This project was so successful that the Bank took charge of the livestock, and poultry keeping was extended to ten other hostels. All labour was voluntary and all production went into the canteens. During the war staff produced 75,000 eggs, 350 gallons of goats' milk and 300 lbs of honey. The pony and trap were used by the gardeners for transporting vegetables.



Figure 11 Large Note Printing Machine, Overton (15A13/15/121).



Figure 12 Men's sleeping huts exterior at Hurstbourne Camp (15A13/15/136).

(1) Portals Ltd had supplied banknote paper to the Bank of England from 1724 until 2003 when the Bank first outsourced its banknote printing to De La Rue, based at the Bank's facility in Debden, Essex.
 (2) Another article in this edition of the *Bulletin* discusses the plans to switch to polymer banknotes. See McClintock, R and Whymark, R (2016), pages 23–32; www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Pages/quarterlybulletin/2016/q1/a3.aspx.
 (3) The Establishment Department looked after staff at the Bank. In effect, its purpose was that of a modern Human Resources department.

Work continued at Threadneedle Street and emergency accommodation was created to enable staff to work below ground. A first aid station and several first aid posts, an operating theatre and gas contamination centre were installed in the vaults with advice from St Bartholomew's Hospital (Figure 14). As fire raids began in 1940, the Bank was prepared with a team of male and female Volunteer Fire Guards (Figure 15). During a raid on the night of 9/10 September 1940 the Bank was damaged by two bombs, one of which fell in Threadneedle Street and the other on the roof north of the Garden Court.⁽¹⁾ In January 1941, 111 people were killed when a bomb fell on Bank underground station (Figure 16).

Capturing the City: Photography at the Bank of England opened on 18 January 2016 and will run until the end of 2016. The Bank of England Museum is open 10:00–17:00 on weekdays (see the Museum's website for special opening hours; www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/museum/whatson). Admission is free of charge.

To find out more about the Archive and to search our catalogue, please visit our website www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive. Any enquiries can be sent to archive@bankofengland.co.uk. There is also an associated digital slide show www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Documents/museum/whatson/capturingthecity_qb.pdf and the *Capturing the City* Flickr page <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bankofengland/sets/72157663360744376>, both of which include additional photographs from the Bank Archive.

Visitors inspired by the exhibition are invited to share their own images of the City with the Bank of England Museum via their Twitter feed @boemuseum — using the hashtag #CitySnapsBoE. Each month the Museum's Curator will select a favourite image, which will join the exhibition displays for four weeks, instantly becoming part of the Bank's history.



Figure 13 Women's sleeping quarters at Hurstbourne Mansion (15A13/15/49).



Figure 14 Medical Officer, Dr Norris and Sister Neave in the Emergency Operating Theatre in the Sub-Vault at Threadneedle Street (15A13/1/11/5).



Figure 15 Female staff stirrup pump training. St Paul's Cathedral can be seen in the background (15A13/1/11/28).



Figure 16 Bomb damage on Threadneedle Street, 1941. The Bank can be seen on the left, the Royal Exchange on the right (15A13/1/11/40).

(1) For further information about the Bank during the Second World War, the Bank of England Archive has digitised an unpublished history begun by John Osborne, Adviser to the Governors, in 1943 (ref: M5/533–539); www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive/Pages/digitalcontent/archivedocs/warhistoryww2.aspx.

The Archive cataloguing project

The Bank of England Archive's remit is to collect and provide access to the historically important records of the Bank. The information contained in these records can be accessed by internal and external researchers. The Archive currently holds over 80,000 ledgers, files and individual records. In 2014 the Archive's collection was significantly enhanced by taking over responsibility for the Bank's historic photographic collection. This diverse collection represents a huge range of activities and subjects. For example, while exploring the collection in the early stages of the project, an album of *Quarterly Bulletin* editors (1960 to 1985) was unearthed. **Figure 17** shows the earliest image in the album, Editor John Standish Fford. From the photographic collection we can glean much about subjects including architecture, technology and fashion, not to mention the history of photography over the past two centuries. The collection will, therefore, be of interest to researchers beyond those focused on economic history. A one-year project is currently under way to review, catalogue, preserve and provide access to the photographic collection which is made up of an estimated 45,000 items. This section briefly explains the different aspects of the project.

The reviewing process involves identifying which elements of the collection should be kept. 'Original' photographic items will be kept and any duplicates or modern facsimiles removed. Where the original is a negative, a print is also kept as an 'access copy'.

Archivists apply two key principles when cataloguing: provenance and original order. Provenance captures the ownership history of a collection and original order means keeping records in the order that they were created or used. Preserving these aspects retains the authenticity and context of the records, which helps researchers trust and interpret them. It is particularly important with a collection of photographs because it is in most cases unclear what motivation lay behind producing many of the images or who commissioned them. Often there is little information besides a description of the image subject and a date. These may all be criteria a future researcher uses when searching the Archive and so wherever possible this detail is captured in the catalogue.

In addition, because a single image can capture so much, a thesaurus of keywords has been added to identify themes which may be of interest to future researchers. Searching these keywords will allow users to identify items across the collection which may be of interest. **Figure 18** is a good example. It is an image of Threadneedle Street during the Second World War. The intended subject is the gas detectors at work. Incidentally, the image also captures parts of the roof not found elsewhere in the collection, particularly the lion-head rain spouts. As a result of thesaurus terms entered, searches for 'chemical warfare' and 'Second World War' will return this image in the results, but so too will 'architecture'. This and other metadata added to the catalogue makes each record easier to locate.

The collection comprises a range of different photographic media produced across two centuries including albumen prints, gelatin prints, cyanotypes, glass-plate negatives and positives (also known as lantern slides) and cellulose acetate negatives. These all have unique preservation requirements. **Figure 19** shows an unusual Victorian leather photograph album. The front cover contains a (sadly empty) compartment with a blue velvet lining. In addition to the individual photographs in the album, the materials in such covers degrade over time. The Archive's storage facilities have a controlled climate which will decelerate the deterioration of these fragile materials. Any apparent damage is recorded while cataloguing which will expedite identifying professional conservation requirements after the project.

The Archive is already facilitating access to the collection, responding to all photographic enquiries, and has collaborated with the Museum on the current exhibition. An online gallery of some further hidden gems has also been created.⁽¹⁾ In time the collection will also be made searchable via our online catalogue for researchers to browse.

(1) Visit the *Capturing the City* Flickr page to view an online gallery of additional photographs from the Bank Archive; www.flickr.com/photos/bankofengland/sets/72157663360744376.



Figure 17 J S Fforde, *Quarterly Bulletin* Editor (1960), and Editor in chief (1961–63) (15A13/18/2/11).

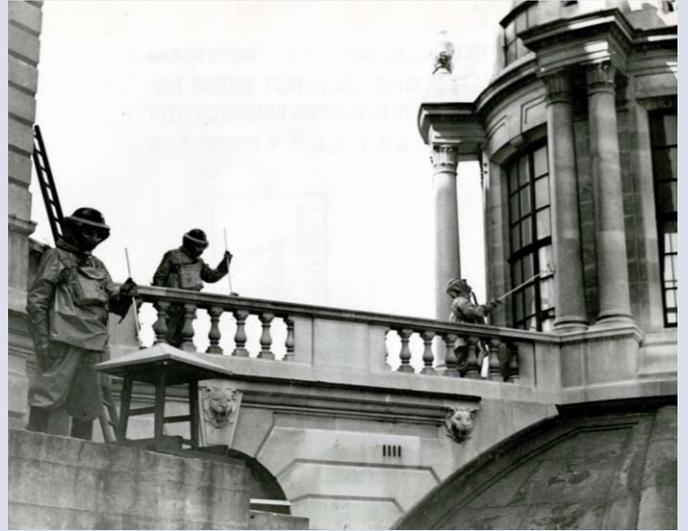


Figure 18 Gas detectors at work on the roof of Threadneedle Street during the Second World War (15A13/1/11/12).

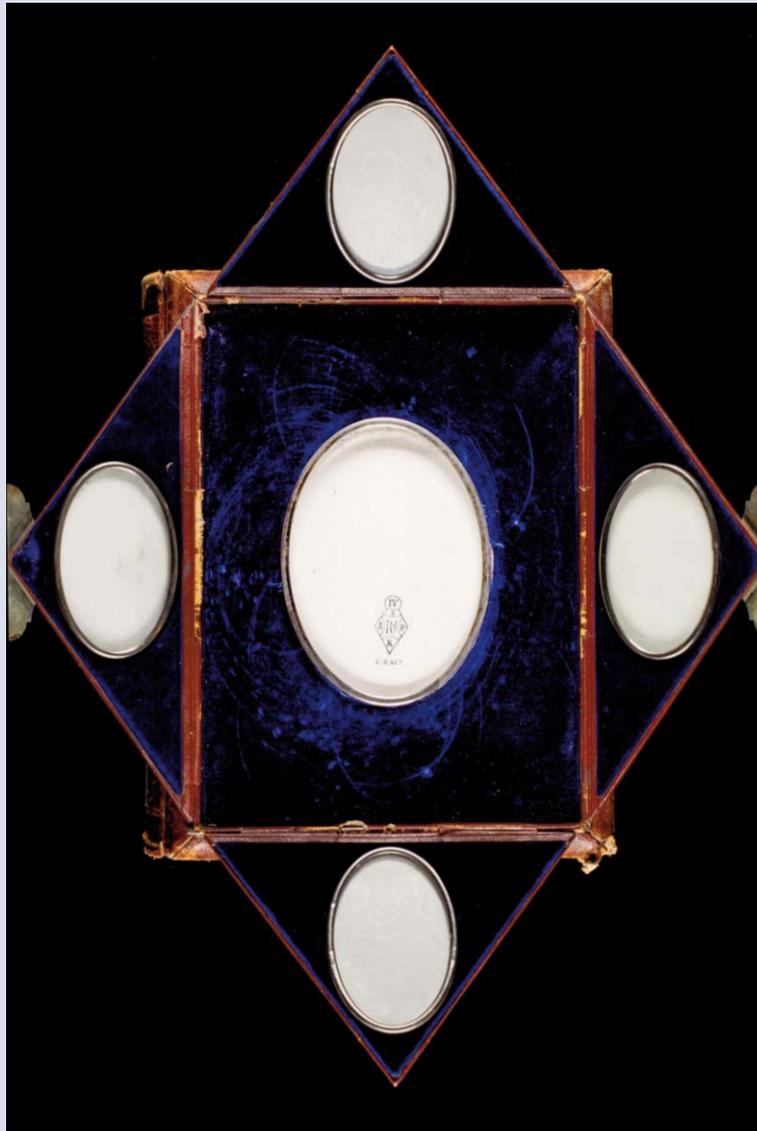


Figure 19 Victorian leather photograph album, front cover opening (15A13/18/2/12).