

Capturing the City: Photography at the Bank of England

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 can appear as a formal establishment. 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. This slideshow includes a small selection of images, but there are many more on show in the exhibition and in the accompanying online **Flickr** gallery, along with further detail on the exhibition and Archive project in the associated ***Quarterly Bulletin*** article.

Cover image: Gas Detectors on the Bank roof (Ref: 15A13/1/11/12).



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.



Left: Salt print of William Cotton, Governor 1842–45 (Ref: 15A13/18/2/8). Right: Digital photograph of Mark Carney, Governor 2013–present (© Bloomberg 2013). Advances in photographic equipment and techniques have given photographers the ability to capture images with shorter exposure times and to make portraits outside the studio.



Early photography



Talotype print of George Lyall, Governor 1871–73 (Ref: 15A13/18/2/8). This print by Hennah & Kent of Brighton has faded due to insufficient washing during processing. Ink has been applied to conceal defects and blend in with the silver image. The dark retouching spots (which once blended invisibly) are now evident.



Hand-tinted photograph of Edward Howley Palmer, Governor 1877–79 (Ref: 15A13/18/2/1). Before the popularity of colour photography in the mid-20th century, black and white prints were often hand-coloured. Dyes, watercolours, oils or pastels were applied to the image surface using brushing, fingers, or cotton swabs.



Left: Photograph of William Henry Clegg, Director 1932–37. Right: William Henry Clegg by Sir George Clausen (Museum Ref: 0605). Portrait painting grew in popularity during the 19th century with the help of photography. Writing to the politician Sir Charles Dilke in 1873, the painter George Frederick Watts said that photographs 'help to make one acquainted with peculiarities and shorten the sittings necessary'.



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. The Bank's role has expanded to include setting interest rates, producing banknotes, protecting and enhancing the resilience of the UK financial system and ensuring the United Kingdom's banks and insurance companies are safe and sound.



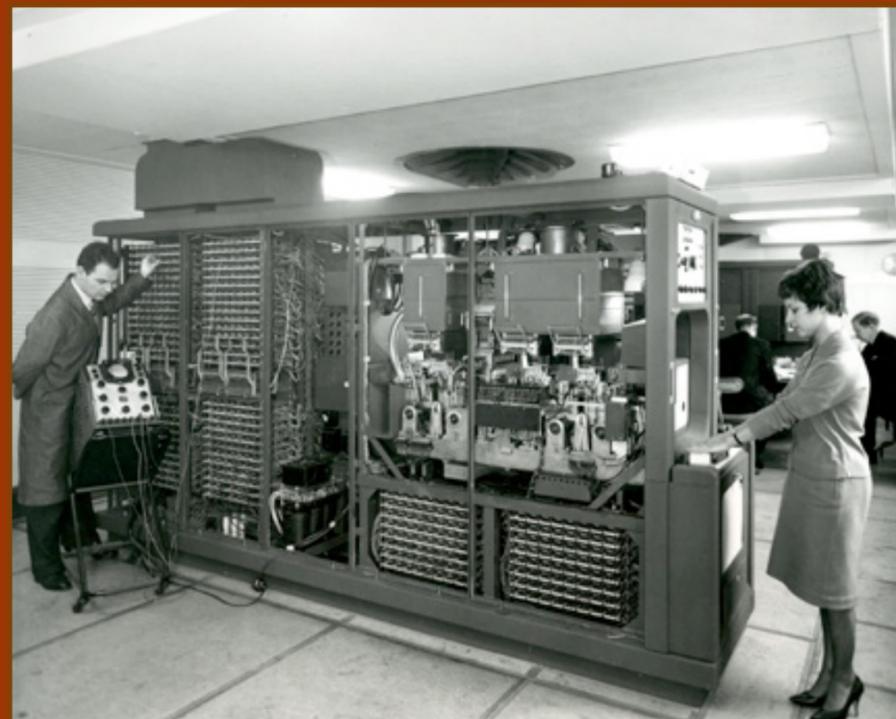
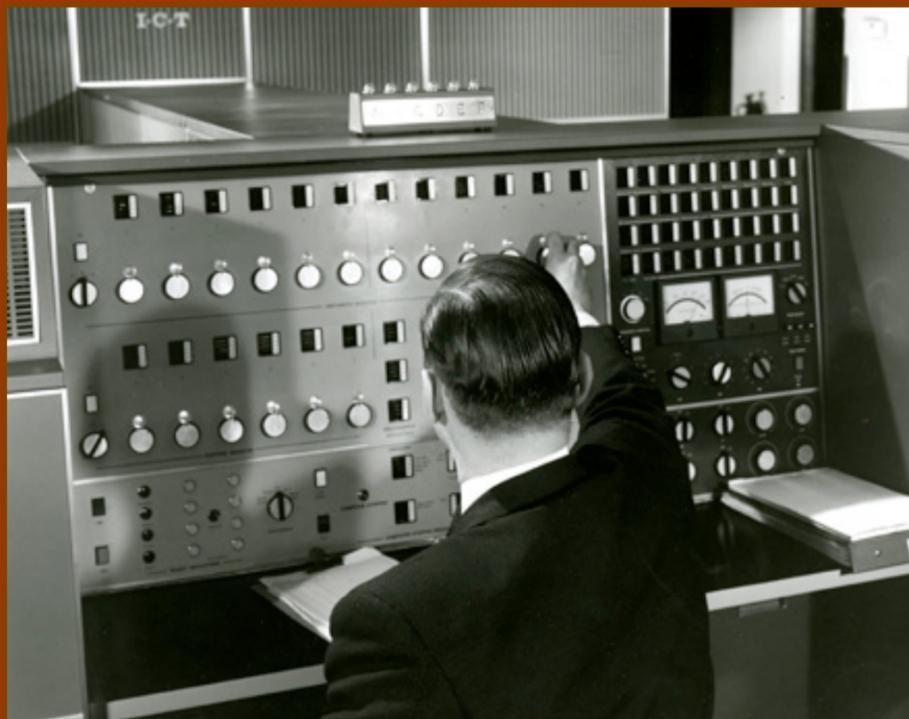
Left: Consols Office, 1894 (Ref: HOO/68). Right: Drawing Office, 1942 (Ref: HOO/64). The original Charter of 1694 entrusted the Bank of England as Registrar, keeping books to record stock transfers, paying dividends and other aspects of stock management.



Left: Dealing Room, 1965 (Ref: HOO/136). Right: Foreign Exchange Dealing Room, 1990s (Ref: HOO/166). The Dealing Room is where the Bank undertakes its operations in markets, buying and selling assets with other financial institutions.



Office technology



Left: Dividend Preparation Office, Computer Control Console, New Change, 1952 (Ref: 15A13/2/11). Centre: New Change Dividend Preparation Office, Programme Controlled Computer, 1962 (Ref: 15A13/2/9). Right: Computer Centre, 1974 (Ref: HOO/135). The mid-1950s saw the Bank's first direct experience of computers and they were installed at its new building on Cheapside, New Change (now the site of One New Change shopping centre).



The Bank during World War II

Relocation to Hampshire

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.



Above: Hospital ward (Ref: 15A13/15/95).
Right: Dental surgery (Ref: 15A13/15/92).
Staff medical facilities were set up at
Bere House in the village of Whitchurch.





Relocation to Hampshire



Above: Staff allotments (Ref: 15A13/8/2/4).
Left: Bank bees (Ref: 15A13/15/88). Staff were encouraged to 'Dig for Victory' and the Bank's sports field at Roehampton was transformed into allotments to grow vegetables. Staff also kept their own chickens, rabbits, goats and bees.



Left above: Women's sleeping quarters at Hurstbourne Mansion (Ref: 15A13/15/49).
Left below: Men's sleeping hut interior at Hurstbourne Camp (Ref: 15A13/15/139). A temporary camp was constructed at Hurstbourne for staff containing offices, a canteen and living quarters for men. Female members of staff stayed at Hurstbourne Mansion. Conditions were cramped: with only seven bathrooms, Hurstbourne Mansion accommodated as many as 309 women at one time.





Threadneedle Street during the War

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. As fire raids began in 1940 the Bank was prepared with a team of male and female Volunteer Fire Guards. During a raid on the night of 9/10 September 1941 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.



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



Medical Officer Dr Norris and Sister Neave in the Emergency Operating Theatre in the sub-vault at Threadneedle Street (Ref: 15A13/1/11/5).



Gas decontamination centre in the vaults at Threadneedle Street during WW2 (Ref: 15A13/1/11/2).



Threadneedle Street during the War



Volunteer Rescue Squad practicing on the roof of the Bank (Ref: 15A13/1/11/14).



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



VE Day celebrations outside Mansion House, 8 May 1945 (Ref: 15A13/1/11/59). Victory in Europe (VE) Day on 8 May 1945 marked the formal acceptance by the Allies of Germany's surrender of its armed forces.

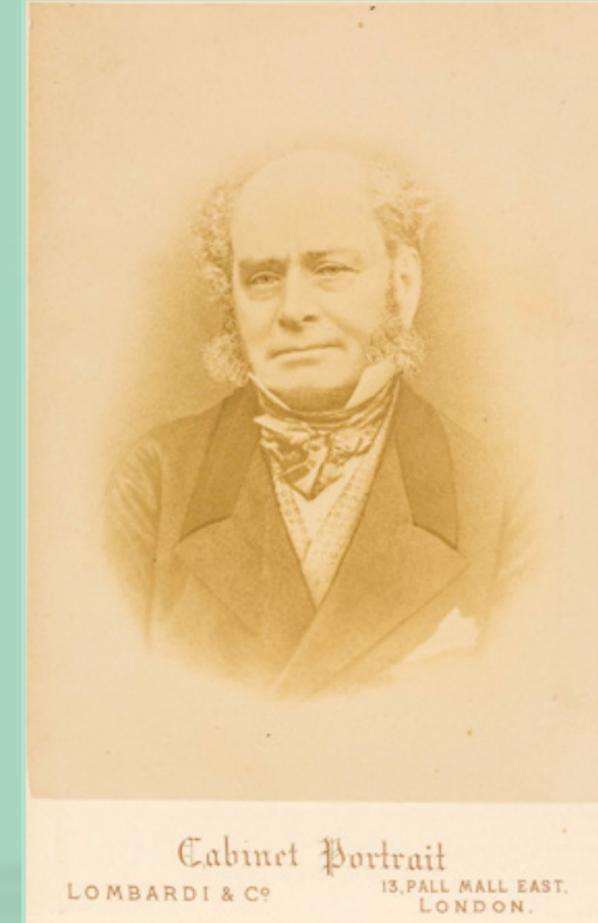


The Archive cataloguing project

The Bank of England Archive exists to collect and provide access to the historically important records of the Bank. It currently holds over 80,000 different records on a range of subjects created by people as they carried out their work at the Bank. The information contained in these records is available to both members of staff and the public.



R P Newham, Chief Clerk of the Branch Banks Office, retired on 16 November 1926 after over 46 years (Ref: 15A13/18/2/12). The 'Carte Midget' was the smallest format available for commercial portrait photography (3 x 1 5/8 inches). The 'Carte Midget' format was introduced in the early 1880s, but these tiny photographs did not become widely popular until the 1890s.



Cabinet Card depicting James Morris, Governor 1847–49 (Ref: 15A13/18/2/8). During the 1860s and 1870s the cabinet card became popular (4 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches). Its popularity overshadowed the art of the miniature painters who until this time were still working successfully. Having a portrait made was no longer the privilege of the very rich.



The Archive cataloguing project

The Archive recently took over the management of the photographic collection (approximately 45,000 items) and a one-year cataloguing project is now in progress. This involves reviewing the collection to decide which items should be kept then cataloguing them and packaging them in specialist archival quality materials to preserve them for the future. This will help us to make the collection accessible to others. The collection consists of 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 which all have different preservation requirements.



Above left: Old Bristol Branch, mid-19th century (Ref: 15A13/14/1/1). Above right: New Bristol Branch, 1963 (Ref: BRIS/5). The Bank of England had a branch in Bristol since 1827. In 1847 the building in Bridge Street was sold and the branch moved to Broad Street from 1847 to 1963, a building designed by Charles Cockerell. The new Bristol Branch in Wine Street was designed by Sir Howard Robertson in 1963 and closed in 1997.

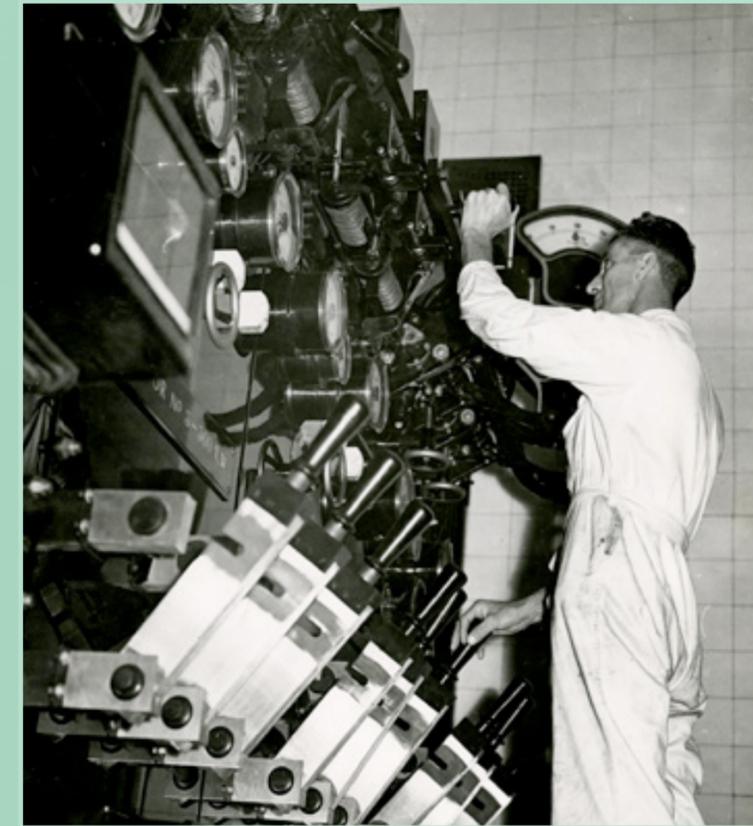


The Archive cataloguing project

The photographic collection will be useful for researchers interested in a range of subjects beyond economic history. As you can see from the pictures here we can learn about subjects including architecture, technology and fashion, not to mention the history of photography over the last two centuries.



Bank of England Ladies Tennis team, 1928 (Ref: PG/1836).



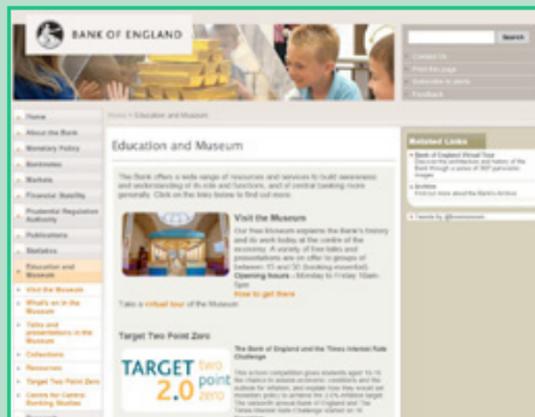
Main switch board, 1942 (Ref: HOW/15).



Bank of England Record Office, Roehampton, 1942 (Ref: ROE/5).

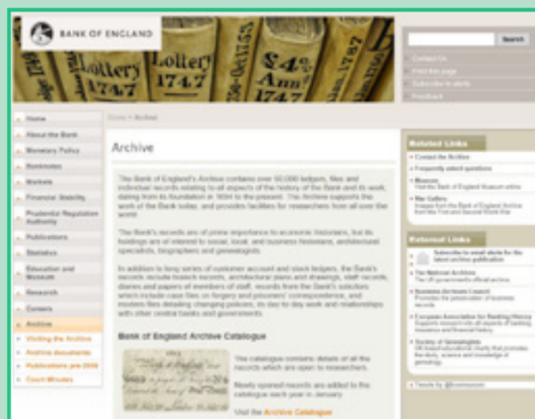


New Change Chief Accountant's Programmer's Office, 1965 (Ref: 15A13/2/42).



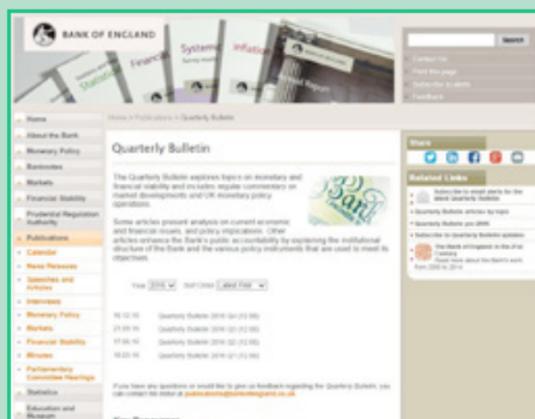
Capturing the City: Photography at the Bank of England

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). Admission is free of charge.



Bank of England Archive

To find out more about the Archive and to search our catalogue, please visit our [website](#). Unless otherwise stated the Reference numbers in this article relate to the Archive Catalogue. Any enquiries can be sent to archive@bankofengland.co.uk.



Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin

To see the latest issue of the *Quarterly Bulletin*, visit the website at: www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Pages/quarterlybulletin/default.aspx.

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.

