

Whiffley Puncto and Co.

Pseudonyms in 19 century photographic journals

Bill Jay

Rival magazines have a perfectly understandable reluctance to publish articles, even on different topics, by the same author in issues that appear on the bookstalls simultaneously. In my early years of writing for the photographic press this fact posed a slight problem. I was prolific enough that there was always a risk that such *faux-pas* would be committed, albeit unintentionally. The problem was solved by adopting several pseudonyms, each "name" specializing in a certain type of article. The names adopted, and the articles which "they" wrote, are best forgotten, but lately the issue of pseudonyms has presented me with a difficult and challenging exercise in historical detective work.

Many fine articles in the 19 century photographic press were written under pseudonyms for one reason or another. Who were the individuals who hid their identities under pen-names? During their lives, the secret was usually well kept. Not always. Sometimes the function of the pseudonym was not to hide the individual but to simplify the name. For example, the photographer Gaspard Felix Tournachon adopted the name Nadar (as did his son Paul, who continued producing photographs under this pseudonym long after Gaspard had retired from professional photography). Sometimes the choice of a pseudonym was made for "aesthetic" reasons; the photographer merely preferred the look and sound of a new name. Edward Muggeridge, with typical eccentricity, changed his name to Eadweard Muybridge - which was hardly a simplification - and later traded his prints under the flamboyant credit line: Helios the Flying Camera. Other pseudonyms are no longer anonymous. Every photographer with even a smattering of knowledge about the history of the medium will know that Lewis Carroll was the pen name of the Oxford don Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Perhaps less well known, but equally well documented, is the identity of Cuthbert Bede (author of the delightful and informative book Photographic Pleasures, 1855 - he was the Rev. Edward Bradley).

The personalities behind scores of other pseudonyms were better kept secrets. Names like "Piffle," "Kernel," "Dogberry," "Whiffley Puncto," "Phoebus," "A Mere Phantom," and so on, crop up with bewildering frequency in the 19 century photographic press. This enthusiasm for pen-names seems to be a peculiarly English phenomenon. Although foreigners did occasionally adopt pseudonyms (like Nadar) the plethora of pen-names in the British press point towards a fascinating social and cultural trait. But this article is

not concerned with the "why" but with the "who."

Often these pseudonymous articles are both interesting and informative; it would, I believed, be of benefit to reveal the man behind the mask. But that was easier said than done. In order to break the code and link a name with a pseudonym it was often necessary to scan up to 30 years of a journal, following the frequency of these pen-names. When they abruptly ended there was the slight thrill that, maybe, the answer would be revealed. The articles could have been terminated due to the death of the author; if that was the case, an obituary *might* provide the answer. I was looking for sentences like this: "We regret to announce the death of John Smith, who frequently contributed to these pages under the pen-name "Spartacus"..." With a sense of *eureka* I could link the pseudonym to a biography.

This is a slow, tedious and time-consuming occupation. For those of you who do not share my interest in browsing through 19 century journals, I offer the following list of pseudonyms and true identities. I am not at all convinced that any one will ever want or need this information but just in case (and to justify the time I have invested in this project of dubious utility)...

The pseudonym is in capital letters, followed by the real name and a brief biographical note. The names are not in any significant order - the numbers refer to references, included at the end of the article.

1. THE WALRUS

W.L.F. Wastell. He wrote a column called "Piffle" under this pseudonym for 25 years, from 1903 to 1928, first in Photography and then in The Amateur Photographer. Wastell wrote several books on photography and was a popular lecturer. He was President of The Royal Photographic Society for 1922-23. He died in 1941 at the age of 77.

2. ALIQUIS

A.J. Wilson. Author of Silver Printing: Its Difficulties and Their Remedies, published by the Albion Albumenizing Company in 1873.

3. ASCOT

Colonel Temple. An enthusiastic amateur who contributed many articles and letters to the photographic press, always under his pseudonym (the town where he lived). He died in 1870.

4. DAGONET

G.R. Sims. Author of "Lights o' London," "Halfway House" and other successful dramas;

contributed a series of articles to The Photographic News in 1881 on photographic topics.

5. DOGBERRY

Henry Chapman Jones. A very important name in British photography. He was an able chemist, photographer, lecturer and author. Jones was Hon. Sec. of The Royal Photographic Society from around 1891 to 1896 and its President from 1912 to 1914. He died in 1943

6. A PRACTICAL MAN

Fuller (first name unknown). He wrote for The Photographic News during the 1860s under this pseudonym. By 1870 he was almost blind and the above journal issued an appeal for funds in aid of Fuller.

7. TOUCHSTONE

W.J. Warren. Author of several books, notably on the gum-bichromate and platinotype processes. Wrote many articles for The Amateur Photographer during the 1890s under his name as well as "Touchstone." He was awarded the R.P.S. medal in 1898 for snapshots in London, although he lived in Leeds. He died in 1900, of typhoid.

8. KERNEL

H.P. Hawkes. Author of "Photography in a Nutshell ," 1891.

9. LUKE SHARP

Robert Barr. A well-known humorist and London editor of the Detroit Free Press during the 1890s. Also an amateur photographer who patented a changing box which enabled plates to be processed without removing them from the dark slides.

10. JEAN VILLE

Elizabeth Burnaby (Elizabeth Main; Elizabeth Le Blond). One of the most fascinating British photographers of the past. Apart from her pseudonym, she wrote under three names after marriages to three successive husbands. She was a renowned mountaineer and alpine photographer, and the author of several books describing her experiences. She died in 1934.

11. RICHARD PENLAKE

Percy R. Salmon. Salmon was an extremely prolific writer of books and articles under both his own name and pseudonym. He was also a good photographer, especially of stereoscopic pictures of British scenery, monuments and architectural interiors. In 1898 he made a tour of the East, photographing in Turkey, Greece, Palestine and Egypt, and

describing his experiences in a book, published in 1903.

12. CHARLES MARTEL

Thomas Delf. Delf was a daguerreotypist in America before settling in England. Throughout his life he was associated with the photographic press. He wrote one of the earliest manuals on photography published in England, then edited the Photographic Art Journal before joining the staff of The Photographic News. He died in 1866.

13. PETER ELAND

Percy Eland Newstead. Contributor of humorous articles and sketches to the photographic press during the 1880s. A popular lecturer he was also an editor of Practical Photographer. During the last years of his life he entered the theater, producing pantomimes, dramas and music hall sketches. He died in 1908.

14. WHIFFLEY PUNCTO

William Palmer. Palmer was a Manchester artist who toured the country in 1896-97 with an unusual lantern slide show. The photographs compared the horrific slums and working conditions of the poor with the lives of the rich.

15. WALERY

Count Stanislas Julian d'Ostrorog was a prominent society and court photographer in Paris, before opening a London studio in 1883. By 1886 he was photographing the British Royal Family and, at the end of the year, he opened a luxury 4-story studio in Regent Street, London. He also patented an enamel process and invented "Walery's Anti-septic Canvas," a cure-all bandage.

16. MARK OUTE

George Mason. Head of a large firm of photographic dealers in Glasgow. He took up photography in 1853 and became a prominent figure in British photography until his death in 1901. His technical articles, humorous essays and verses, signed Mark Oute, were published in The British Journal of Photography. Many were collated in book form, Pictures in Black and White; or, Photographers Photographed, 1888.

17. PRACTICUS

Edgar Clifton. Clifton began photography with the wet-plate process in 1873 and quickly became a prominent teacher (Samuel Butler, the author of Erewhon, was one of his pupils). In 1899 he became instructor of photography at the London Stereoscopic Company and in 1916 at The Regent Street Polytechnic. His frequent contributions to The Amateur Photographer and The British Journal of Photography were usually unsigned. He died in 1934.

18. PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT

W.T. Bovey. A contributor to The Photographic News who, in 1866, opened a printing establishment in London.

19. TALBOT ARCHER

W. Jerome Harrison. Harrison was one of the first historians and bibliographers of photography. (His book A History of Photography... was published in 1888.) He was a science teacher, geologist and a frequent contributor to many scientific, lay and photographic journals. A founder of the Birmingham Photographic Society, Harrison was an important figure in British photography of the last part of the 19 century.

20. CLIFF

C. Brangwin Barnes. An occasional writer for The British Journal of Photography, in which he published a particularly interesting article on post-mortem photography in 1883.

21. JAMES ANDERSON

Isaac Atkinson. Atkinson was a Cumberland watercolorist who settled in Rome and became a photographer, adopting the name James Anderson. His business prospered with the sale of prints of antique sculpture, reproductions, paintings and views of Rome. He died in 1877.

22. A COCKNEY

Henry Baden Pritchard. Under this pseudonym Pritchard published A Trip to the Great Sahara with a Camera (1885), which was serialized in The Photographic News. For many years he was the manager of the photographic department of the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, and wrote several long articles on photography and military matters. He was also the author of several textbooks as well as novels, including George Vanbrugh's Mistake (1879). He died in 1884.

23. E.T.C.

William Palmer. Author of Practical Notes on Photography: gathered from Mr. W Brooks, with diary of my own proceedings in photography (Penzance, 1866). See "Whiffley Puncto."

24. ROCHESTER

Tom Robinson. A photographer from Brighton "who was largely addicted to drinking" and "committed suicide...by taking cyanide of potassium," in 1890.

25. MORA

Mitchell. He was a photographer in Brighton who died in 1900. His first name is unknown although the town street directory does list a Percy C. Mora from 1891 to 1901. This photographer should not be confused with Mora of New York, one of the highest paid and most celebrated portrait photographers of the time, operating from J. Gurney's old studio, the first daguerreotype gallery in America.

26. OWD ABB

John Buckley. Buckley was "a typical Lancashire man" who emigrated to Australia in 1862 before returning to his home county, operating two photographic studios, at Hurst and Daisy Nook. Under the pseudonym, Buckley wrote a good deal of verse in dialect. He died in 1903.

27. ROBERT ABRAHAM

Arthur Samuel Lewis Abraham or Arthur Lewis Adams. Robert Abraham was a photographer and dealer with business in both the City of London and Stratford, Essex. His real name was A.S.L. Abraham under which he patented an improvement in camera viewfinders (1889). The following year he officially changed his name to Arthur Lewis Adams.

28. JULIUS GAMBLE

Julius Verfassner. Best known for his book The Half-tone Process, published in Bradford in 1894. It went through many editions, and was translated into both French and German.

29. PERSIUS JUNIOR

George Swan Nottage. Under his nom-de-plume Nottage published "a series of amusing and trenchant sketches of characters" in *The Photographic News*. He was the founder of the London Stereoscopic and Photograph Company. Nottage was also prominent in local politics, becoming Lord Mayor of London a short time before he died, in 1885.

30. G.S.N.

George Swan Nottage. See Above. Under his initials, Nottage produced The Shakespearian Diary.

31. PHOTO-CHEMICUS

Robert Biggs. Biggs was a surgeon at Bath, where he was "public vaccinator" and deputy coroner for East Somerset. As an enthusiastic amateur photographer he conducted research into photographic chemistry, the results of which he communicated

in journals under the pseudonym. He died in 1882.

32. MATTHEW SURFACE

Percy Lund. A popular lecturer to photographic societies ("Some Photographers I Have Met"), Lund was also an active photographer and journalist. He edited The Practical Photographer and wrote several textbooks for amateur photographers. His own photographs were pictorial in nature, illustrating Wordsworth incidents in lakeland scenery.

33. QUEEN'S JESTER

W.F. Wallett. Wallett's career spanned the early days of the daguerreotype to the hand camera. He was one of the first amateur photographers in England and toiled for three years without securing a decent picture. He was an enthusiastic traveler and was known as the "Shakespearian wit of the nineteenth century." Wallett died in 1895 at the age of 85.

34. PHOEBUS

John Leighton or Frederick Richard Pickersgill. Leighton was a designer and painter and an ardent amateur photographer during the 1850s, with both the calotype and collodion processes. He contributed photographs to The Sunbeam and other collections of contemporaneous pictures under the pseudonym "Phoebus". He died in 1912. Pickersgill was a historical painter and a Royal Academician who also contributed photographs to The Sunbeam. He was a son-in-law of Roger Fenton. There is some suggestion that he also used the pseudonym "Phoebus" but no documentation. He died in 1900.

35. LUKE LIMNER

John Leighton. See above. Leighton often exhibited and published his architectural drawings and paintings under this pseudonym.

36. SCINTILLA

Thomas Sutton. Sutton was an amazing man, forever at the leading edge of the medium in the 19 century. He wrote one of the first books on the calotype process, was partner with Blanquart-Evrard in their Jersey printing firm, was editor of Photographic Notes, and was an early inventor of snapshot and panoramic cameras. His reminiscences, "of a retired photographer," were published in 1870 and 1871 and signed "Scintilla."

37. OLD CANTAB.

Thomas Sutton. See above. Under this pseudonym, Sutton wrote a photographic

novel, called The Photographers, which was serialized in his own magazine Photographic Notes, beginning in 1865.

This list is far from complete. Many other intriguing puzzles remain to be solved. For example, who was "Lulu"? This young man was a female impersonator and gymnast who left the music-hall stage for a career as a photographer, illustrating the book Through the Kalahari Desert by G.A. Farini, published in 1886. This is the stuff of a fascinating biography, once his true identity is known.

Other identities are hidden behind pseudonyms such as: "Scrutator" (author of Photographic Failures: prevention and cure, 1903); "A Pedestrian" (author of A Peep at the Pyrenees, 1867); "Ignotus" (who wrote for the photographic press until his death in 1896); "Camaretta" (who wrote a column for women, called "For Fair Photographers," in the Photographic News, beginning in January 1896).

"A Mere Phantom" was the pseudonym for "an estimable gentleman and skillful photographer" who authored The Magic Lantern in 1865. Is "Woll" a pseudonym? He was the editor of The Photographer's Indispensable Monthly, a slender magazine published from October 1891 as an advertising giveaway for the firm of Adams and Co.

All these pseudonyms remain as enigmas. I should be most grateful for any references that a reader might be able to supply which will unravel the mystery of these hidden individuals.

Selected References:

1. The Photographic Journal, July 1942, pp. 248-262. The Amateur Photographer, 30 July 1919, p. 89.
2. The Photographic News, 6 June 1873, p. 271.
3. The British Journal of Photography, 30 December 1870, p. 622.
4. The articles for The Photographic News were not signed except as "Author of Lights o' London."
5. The Photographic Journal, March 1933, pp. 84-94; The British Journal of Photography, 11 March 1932, p. 158; The Amateur Photographer, 21 January 1920, pp. 47-48.
6. The Photographic News, 25 February 1870, p. 95.
7. The Amateur Photographer, 22 June 1900, pp. 482-483.
8. A popular book - by 1894 it had reached 9 editions.
9. The Amateur Photographer, 22 June 1900, pp. 482-483.
10. The Photographic News, 18 December 1885, p. 307. Ladies Alpine Club Year

Book, 1935. Day In, Day Out, 1928.

11. The British Journal of Photography, 4 February 1898, p. 66; 27 March 1903, p. 251. The Amateur Photographer, 3 March 1899, p. 162.
12. The Photographic News, 3 August 1866, p. 371.
13. The British Journal of Photography, 6 March 1908, p. 183.
14. The Amateur Photographer, 16 October 1896, p. 320.
15. The British Journal of Photography, 10 December 1886, p. 775; The Photographic News, 13 March 1885, p. 171.
16. The British Journal of Photography, 14 June 1901, p. 375.
17. The Amateur Photographer, 2 August 1922, p. 91; The Photographic Journal, September 1934, p. 484; The British Journal of Photography, 1934, p. 413.
18. The Photographic News, 4 May 1866, p. 216.
19. The British Journal of Photography, 24 June 1892, p. 408. The Photographic News, 8 July 1892, p. 439.
20. The Photographic News, 10 August 1883, p. 501. The British Journal of Photography, 3 August 1883.
21. The British Journal of Photography, 19 March 1880, p. 143.
22. The British Journal of Photography, 23 May 1884, p. 325. The Photographic News, 16 May 1884, editorial.
23. Manuscript in the Library of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain.
24. Photography, 23 October 1890, p. 677.
25. The British Journal of Photography, 19 January 1900, p. 43. The Photographic News, 3 June 1887, p. 348.
26. The British Journal of Photography, 26 June 1903, p. 513.
27. Photography, 24 July 1890, p. 464.
28. See La Phototypogravure a demi-teintes, Paris, 1895 and Der Halbtonprozess, Halle 1896.
29. The Photographic News, 5 October 1877. The Amateur Photographer, 17 April 1885, p. 13.
30. The Photographic News, 5 October 1877.
31. The Photographic News, 19 May 1882, p. 286.
32. The British Journal of Photography, 17 September 1897, p.606. The Amateur Photographer, 21 July 1899, p. 42.
33. The Amateur Photographer, 20 September 1895, p. 178.
34. The Amateur Photographer, 15 December 1899, p. 462.
35. He was a founding member of the Photographic Society of London and took part in the early discussions. The Photographic Journal, 21 June 1853.
36. See Helmut Gernsheim's essay on Sutton in One Hundred Years of Photographic History, UNM Press, 1975.
37. The Photographic News, 6 January 1865, p. 11.

First published in The British Journal of Photography, 12 June 1981