

James Mudd (1821-1906)

James Mudd was one of Manchester's most important Victorian photographers. The Museum's collections include a large number of his photographs taken for the Beyer, Peacock company. These form part of the Beyer, Peacock company archive, which is held in the Archive Strongroom within the Collections Centre.

Mudd's Photographic Business

James Mudd was born in Halifax in 1821, the son of Alice and Robert Mudd. In the late 1830s, the family moved to Manchester and James began an apprenticeship as a pattern designer. In 1846, James and his brother Robert opened their own textile design business at 44 George Street. A year earlier, James had married Ann Peacock and their only child, James Willis, was born in 1848.

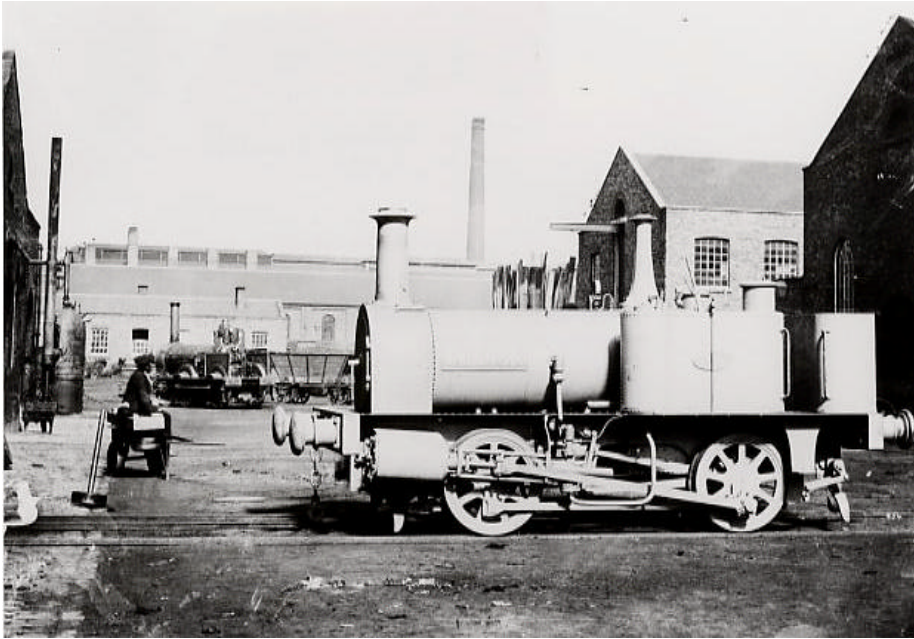
James Mudd's interest in photography probably began soon after. His earliest known photographs were landscapes taken using the waxed paper process in 1854. It seems likely that he learned most of what he knew about photographic techniques and processes from Joseph Sidebotham, whom he met in the same year, and Sidebotham's teacher, John Benjamin Dancer. Dancer was an important Manchester scientific instrument maker who had practised photography since its introduction in 1839.

In 1857, James and Robert Mudd opened a photographic studio at the top of 94 Cross Street from where they also sold photographic apparatus. The two Mudd businesses must have been very successful as James moved from Salford to a large house at Rose Hill in Bowdon, Cheshire, a year later. By 1861, James Mudd had acquired a new studio on his own account in the fashionable area of St. Ann's Square. At the same time, he also hired an assistant, George Wardley, who would have helped with studio portraiture. After six years, Wardley left Mudd's employment to open a studio of his own in Salford. In about 1862, James S. Platt, a pattern designer, became Mudd's partner. Mudd was probably finding it difficult to manage both businesses. In 1864, Platt took over the design business on his own account - presumably the photographic studio was by now doing well enough for Mudd to rely on it for his income.

In 1873, Mudd's son, James Willis Mudd, joined the firm. James Mudd also hired a new assistant, George Grundy, in about 1880. He remained in Mudd's employment until the studio officially passed to him in about 1900, although it seems likely that he was already managing the studio before then. George Grundy stayed in business until about 1924, having moved his studio to St Ann's Passage, off King Street.

Mudd's Photographic Achievements

James Mudd was probably the first Englishman to photograph industrial subjects on a regular basis. In 1856 he took on the first of several commissions to photograph locomotives and machinery made at the Beyer, Peacock works, Gorton, Manchester.



Locomotive Robertson, built in 1858, albumen print.

Mudd experimented with the wet collodion process but found it too difficult to produce a picture of acceptable quality. As a result, he reverted to using waxed paper negatives for a few months, until the beginning of 1857 when he began using the dry collodion process. He then used dry collodion almost exclusively until he retired in about 1900.

In 1861, Mudd began applying dark varnish to industrial photographs to mask out the background so that the subject was clearly delineated. This would obviously prove more useful for foundry records and publications than if parts of the surrounding factory were allowed to intrude on the picture. Mudd's assistant, George Grundy, may have taken over the production of Beyer, Peacock photographs in the 1880s.

Mudd's success with the Beyer, Peacock photographs may have led to other non-industrial commissions. In the summer of 1857, James and Robert Mudd were commissioned to take 11 photographs as evidence for the Pendleton Alum Works indictment. James Mudd also took 'pictorial' photographs and entered many of them in important exhibitions. The first of these was a Manchester Photographic Society exhibition in 1856. He received his first medal at the 1860 Photographic Society of Scotland exhibition for *Waterfall near Coniston*.

Towards the end of his life, James Mudd concentrated on painting and drawing. His subjects were the landscape and marine views which had been the subjects of his exhibition photographs. He exhibited paintings at least five times in the 1880s, including some work at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition held at the Walker Art Gallery. In the early 1870s, Mudd was inspired to illustrate Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The drawings were published in a booklet by the Coleridge Society in Manchester.

James Mudd died in Bowdon in 1906 at the age of 85. He was a very versatile photographer who took many important photographs, portraits and prize-winning photographs of artistic subjects. His technical expertise was much greater than many other photographers of his time.

For more information:

Read Wetton, Jenny. 'James Mudd, Photographer (1821-1906)', *Scottish Photography Bulletin*, 1, 1990.

Visit The Museum's Collected Cameras Gallery

Consult The Beyer, Peacock photographs in the Collections Centre Study Area.