

Joseph Sidebotham (1824-1882)

Joseph Sidebotham was one of the first people in Manchester to practice photography and one of the most important local amateur photographers. The Museum's collections contain photographs taken by him and a camera that he used.

He was born in 1824 at Apethorn House in Hyde. His father was the manager of Gibraltar Mill in nearby Gee Cross. His father died a year later and his elder brother drowned whilst bathing in the River Tame. His mother, Anne, was able to ensure he had a good education. He was first tutored by Reverend Parr Gresswell in Denton, then attended Stockport and Manchester Grammar Schools. At the age of 16, he went to work as a calico printer at Nelson Knowles & Co. He soon attended classes in Natural History at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester, where he met J. B. Dancer, who showed microscopic slides. Dancer had arrived in Manchester from Liverpool in 1841 and soon began teaching photography to others, including Sidebotham.

In 1846, Sidebotham became the junior partner in Mellands, Appleby & Sidebotham on High Street, Manchester. Three years later, he became senior partner of the Strines Calico Printing Company in the Goyt Valley. This became famous for its use of alizarin to produce a wide variety of red colours. Between 1852 and 1860, two employees of the company produced a free newspaper, *The Strines Journal*, for which Sidebotham wrote articles on various subjects and submitted photographs. Only one handwritten copy was produced and handed round for the company's workers to read. Sidebotham was able to persuade some distinguished people to contribute articles, including James Glaisher, of the Royal Greenwich Observatory, and James Nasmyth.



Conway Castle by Joseph Sidebotham, c. 1854.

revolutionary stereoscopic camera to the Society. He also invented the roller-blind shutter, which he did not patent as he could not overcome technical difficulties in its operation. John Thornton finally designed a commercially viable roller-blind shutter almost 40 years later.

In 1852, he became a member of the Manchester Literary & Philosophical Society. He was already friendly with Dancer, James Nasmyth and John Mercer, who were also members. He married Ann Coward in 1852 and they spent their honeymoon in North Wales, where Sidebotham took some magnificent photographs that survive in public collections. A group from the Literary & Philosophical Society formed the Manchester Photographic Society in 1855 and elected Sidebotham Secretary. The following year, he demonstrated Dancer's

In 1866, Sidebotham moved to a large house in Bowden. He had inherited several coal mines from his cousins and become a wealthy man. He retired from the Strines Print Works in 1877 and received a photo album, which he said was his most treasured possession. It showed all staff working at their trades and was signed by each member of staff. In 1880, he founded the church of St Anne at Haughton, near Denton. His eldest child, Edith, laid the foundation stone.

Sidebotham was an amateur botanist, entomologist, astronomer and photographer. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and lectured to the Mechanics Institute on astronomy and electro-magnetism. His wife, Ann, died in 1882; Sidebotham died three years later. They were both buried in Bowden Churchyard and left seven children: Edith Watson, Emily Alice, Joseph Watson, May, Edward John, Annie Elizabeth and James Nasmyth Sidebotham.

For more information:

- Read* Davies, David. 'The Manchester Camera Makers, 1853 – 1940', *The Photographer* 68/69 (Winter/Spring 1986).
 Hallett, Michael 'The Strines Journal and the Nasmyth Steam Hammer',
 History of Photography 13, no. 5 (July-September 1989).
- Visit* The Local History Unit at the Manchester Central Library.
 The Museum's Collected Cameras Gallery.