

J. T. Chapman Ltd

Josiah T. Chapman was a photographic chemist of great skill who pioneered many of the early advances in plates and emulsions, and designed and sold photographic apparatus. The Museum's photographic collections include a good selection of Chapman's cameras and plates, largely donated by the company itself.

Josiah was born in 1843 in the village of Staverton in Wiltshire. He came to Manchester in 1858, to be apprenticed as a chemist and druggist to his uncle, Josiah Slugg, who had premises in Stretford Road, Hulme. Slugg was also an optical instrument maker and Chapman also received tuition in optics. Slugg produced catalogues to advertise his business and Chapman helped make the wooden blocks used to print the illustrations. The introduction of various photomechanical processes led Chapman to develop an interest in photography.



In 1865, Chapman finished his apprenticeship and went to work for Robert Hampson, a chemist and photographic equipment dealer at 63 Piccadilly. Soon after Chapman joined Hampson, another young chemist and keen amateur photographer, J. B. Payne, came to work there. In 1871, Hampson retired and the two young men bought the business, renaming it Payne and Chapman. In the same year, Chapman married Elizabeth Gardiner and they eventually had six children, Elizabeth, Samuel, James, Florence, Nellie and one child who died in infancy. The business partnership did not last long and Chapman set up on his own as

a chemist and druggist in 1874 at 162 (later 168) Deansgate, before moving to the new Scottish Provident Buildings at 7 Albert Square in 1883. Chapman gradually gave up the dispensing business in favour of the growing photographic side.

Chapman developed a working formula for the production of dry plates using gelatino-bromide of silver with alcohol. The addition of alcohol was a big improvement on the formula developed by Dr R. C. Maddox. In October 1873, under the pseudonym 'Ostendo non Ostento', Chapman published the formula in the *British Journal of Photography*. He first advertised his commercial emulsion-making in 1876. He continued to experiment with emulsions and, in around 1879, he produced a plate he initially called the 'Lancashire' and later the 'Manchester'. The introduction of reliable dry plates meant that photographers no longer had to prepare and develop their own plates, nor did they have to expose them

immediately. This meant that photographers could buy prepared plates from dealers and have them developed.

At this time, the emulsion speed of plates was mostly a matter of guesswork by the manufacturer. Photographers had difficulty attempting to equate emulsion speed to the exposure time and lens aperture required when taking a photograph. Ferdinand Hurter and Vero Driffield, chemists at a plant in Widnes, began to experiment on emulsion speed in the late 1880s. Hurter and Driffield used Chapman's Manchester plates as these were the most accurate in their speed rating. They were so complimentary in their published works that photographers rushed to buy them. In 1898, Chapman set up two small developing and printing offices near to his Albert Square premises. They were so successful that he moved to larger premises on Brasenose Street.

Chapman also designed cameras, the earliest of which was the quarter-plate Manchester camera, introduced in 1883. The company introduced the British range of cameras in 1886 – these were robust and basic, but of good quality and workmanship. By the early 1900s, they were available in seven sizes. The Manifold stereo camera, introduced in 1904, was similar in pattern to the British cameras.

J.T. Chapman died in 1907 and the business, now a limited company, was run by William Hughes, who had worked for Chapman for many years. Chapman's son, James Gardiner took over the business in 1917. He said: "My father never grudged, or considered wasted, any time spent in helping a photographer – young or old; and it is to this more than anything else that I attribute his success and the success of the business."

From the mid-1920s, the company concentrated on supplying photographic equipment and chemicals and developing photographs. The company built a works for developing and printing at Old Trafford and by 1922 Chapman employed about 40 people here. The company could offer a 24-hour service, as a quick turn-round was important to repeat business: "...pictures taken during a week-end visit often produce a good order for re-prints for distribution among other guests if only the original D & P order is delivered quickly." Chapman capitalised on Kodak advertising by following up every Kodak advert in the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Daily Despatch* newspapers with an advert of his own. By this means, he linked his business with Kodak photography and secured a lot of business from travellers from other countries.

In 1965, Chapman's grandson Edward moved the shop to 62 King Street. In 1968, the business merged with Frederick Foxall Limited to become Foxall & Chapman. The business was taken over by William Kenyon & Sons in 1981.

For more information:

Read Channing, Norman & Mike Dunn. *British Camera Makers: an A-Z guide to companies and products*. Esher, UK: Parkland Designs, 1996.

Chapman, J. G. *Manchester and Photography*. Manchester, UK: J. G. Chapman, 1934

Richards, E. H. *The Manchester Camera Shop*. Altrincham, UK: E. H. Richards, 1984.

Visit The Museum's Collected Cameras Gallery.