

A Guide to Negatives from the Post Office Terrace Studio, Cambridge

1. Post Office Terrace Photographers and their Dates

The Studio at Post Office Terrace was occupied by a series of photographers as follows:

- Arthur Nichols 1865 – 1877. Thomas Cox, his brother in law, may have been involved in the business around 1877
- John Edward Bliss 1878 – 1885, assisted for part of that time by his brother Henry James Bliss
- Valentine Louis Blanchard c.1885-7
- Valentine Louis Blanchard and William Henry Lunn trading as “Valentine Blanchard and Lunn”, 1887 – 1889. William Henry Lunn alone briefly in 1889
- Colin Lunn 1889 – c.1892
- J Palmer Clarke c. 1894 – 1930s. By 1901 Charles Goodrich and Frederick Herbert Sanderson were running the business, still trading as Palmer Clarke. Herbert Sanderson, son of FH Sanderson, may have been involved
- Ramsey and Muspratt, 1934 – 1978, partners Lettice Ramsey and Helen Muspratt (and for some of that time plus Phillip Brunney)
- Nicholas Lee 1978 - 1980
- Peter Lofts 1980 - 1985

Peter Lofts was the final owner of the business and occupant of the studio. Over the years every nook and cranny in the building had been used to store tens of thousands of negatives of photographs taken by all of his predecessors.

Peter Lofts offers for sale prints of some of the older photographs of Cambridge and selected other images via his website at <http://www.loftyimages.co.uk> . However, most of the collection has now been deposited by him and his predecessor, Nicholas Lee, with the Cambridgeshire Collection, where most of the negatives have been catalogued. This is the largest photographic archive held by the Cambridgeshire Collection, with negatives containing over 300,000 individual images. This is however by no means the whole output from this series of photographers. Many glass negatives were washed and re used over the years and others have been lost due to a variety of causes, including space limitations at the Studio.

2. Classification of PO Terrace Negatives in the Cambridgeshire Collection

The collection of negatives has been divided into three main sequences – in date order (oldest to most recent) these are:–

- Old Cambridge **OC** ,
- Palmer Clarke **PC** and
- Ramsey and Muspratt **RM**

3. Old Cambridge (OC) negatives 1868 – c.1880

These are photographs, mostly by Arthur Nichols (although including some by other early PO terrace photographers), of various views around Cambridge, from the 1860s through to the 1880s. There is no comprehensive index of the OC negatives. There are around 12 wooden boxes of various sizes of OC glass negatives with 40-50 negatives per box. Some boxes are labelled with, for example, the name of a particular college to which they relate.

There are prints of some of the OC negatives stored in “the Nichols Album” at C.65.5 LS (a 14in x 11in folio of prints). These are street views, not studio portraits. Some individual OC images, from which prints have been made, are catalogued in the main “illustrations” index in the Cambridgeshire Collection Reading Room. “NA” on an index entry indicates that a negative is held.



Nichols Album Cambridgeshire Collection C.65.5 LS

4. Palmer Clarke (PC) negatives 1880s to 1930s

Although called “Palmer Clarke”, these are actually all the negatives from Post Office Terrace that are neither “Old Cambridge” or “Ramsey and Muspratt”.

The Palmer Clarke category of negatives are stored and classified in three main parts:

PCRB = Palmer Clarke Red Boxes

PCB = Palmer Clarke boxes stored on site at the Cambridgeshire Collection.

PCT = Palmer Clarke boxes held in the Collection’s Cottenham out-store.

The **PCRB** (Palmer Clarke Red Boxes) are red card boxes containing up to ten glass negatives. In some cases the negatives are loose inside the boxes, in other cases they are separated and protected by pieces of paper or are in paper envelopes. In a few instances paper or envelopes contain the photographer's name. Where paper envelopes are present these have the name of the customer and information about the number and type of prints ordered, usually cartes de visite or cabinet photographs. Individual negatives have information written on their edges in ink with the name and address of the customer. Red boxes are approximately 7in x 5in x 1.5in and negatives are approx 6.25in x 4.8in. The boxes are labelled with the surnames of customers. A surname may appear on more than one box label. Some of these plates are covered by one exposure, some have two portraits side by side on the same plate, taken with a camera with a two position sliding back. PCRB negatives are stored on site at the Central Library. These are believed to be the oldest negatives in the Palmer Clarke collection. The box labels also have the word "Cambridge" on them, suggesting that at one point they were stored somewhere with non-Cambridge boxes. This fits with the fact that J Palmer Clarke also operated from Bury St Edmunds Suffolk from 1888 to 1903. These negatives are mainly portraits. There are approximately 600 of these boxes. At the end of the sequence are 30 larger sized red card boxes (classified **PCRB LS**) holding larger format glass negatives.



Palmer Clarke Red Boxes

The **PCB** negatives collection comprises 920 wooden boxes, each containing up to 50 glass negatives. Inside the lids of most boxes are paper labels showing fairly minimal information about each negative in the box. Most of the individual negatives have the details of the subject written on them in waterproof ink. Most, but not all, are portraits.



A typical PCB box

Glass negatives are 4.75in x 6.25in (half plate). Boxes are approximately 11in x 7.5in x 5in. Most boxes and negatives are dirty, some boxes and some negatives are damaged. In some cases distortion of the wooden boxes has made negatives a tight fit and difficult to remove from or replace in their allotted slots. PCB negatives are stored on site at the Cambridgeshire Collection in the Central Library.

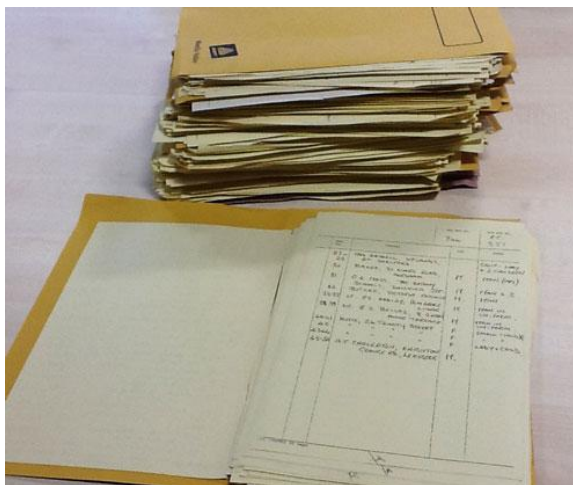
The **PCT** negatives are of a similar description and are in similar boxes to the PCB negatives, and are slightly fewer in number. These have been stored at the Cambridgeshire Collection's off-site storage facility at Cottenham. An arbitrary split between the two sites was made before the boxes were catalogued and so these boxes have not been selected for off-site storage by any criteria to distinguish them from the PCB negatives. For all practical purposes, with current staffing levels, PCT negatives are currently not accessible to readers.

PC Catalogues

The Cambridgeshire Collection has two catalogues for the Palmer Clarke negatives;

Name Card Index. This comprises 36 drawers of 6in x 4in index cards, in alphabetical order which contain surname, first name or initial(s) of the customer and the box number containing the negative. This index was formerly in the Cambridgeshire Collection reading room, but due to space restrictions is now stored behind the scenes and must be accessed by staff. If you are searching for a female's portrait, be aware that the name of a married woman is more likely to contain her husband's initials than her own. So "Mrs S Smith" in this index is more likely to be the wife of Mr Sidney Smith than Mrs Sophia Smith. This card index covers all parts of the PC collection, i.e. PCRB, PCRBS, PCB and PCT negatives. For PCRB negatives cards simply say "PCRB", for others a box and a negative number within the box are shown.

PCB Box Catalogue Lists. This comprises folders of A4 catalogue sheets completed by Cambridge Family History Society volunteers in a massive, well organised project to make this material more accessible. Catalogue sheets are arranged by box number then negative number sequence. These include name, address and space for remarks. Remarks relate to anything descriptive about the subject or the intended purpose of the photograph, including comments like: *male, female, child, group, interesting, passport, for locket, fancy dress, uniform, nurse's uniform, young woman dancing, rooms, with two dogs, academic dress, mayor, glasses, large hat, Masonic regalia*, etc. Remarks also record missing or damaged negatives. In some cases the written details on individual negatives are unreadable. This index only covers the PCB negatives and does not cover PCRB or PCT negatives.



Part of the PCB name card index and some of the PCB Box Catalogue lists

The Cambridge Family History Society is in the process of adding all the data from the PCB Box Catalogue Lists to its Ancestor Finder online database at www.cfhs.org.uk . In the meantime the CFHS has kindly made the data available for free download at www.fadingimages.uk/POT1.asp . The download is a 6MB Excel spreadsheet. There are two versions, one in box and negative order, and the other in order of customers' surnames.

Generally neither of the two catalogues contain the dates when individual photographs were taken. Occasionally, where a CFHS volunteer has been able to tie in a particular year (e.g. the date when a particular student matriculated), then this information has been added to the catalogue sheet. However, it seems unlikely that boxes were filled in exact date order as there are clusters of negatives in boxes in alphabetical sequence by surname, so dating one or two negatives in a box does not date the whole box.

First Eastern General Hospital. Palmer Clarke photographers took a number of photographs of the WW1 First Eastern General Hospital in Cambridge. A commemorative booklet produced for a Royal Visit to the Hospital by HRH King George V on 11 Feb 1915 contains many Palmer Clarke photographs. The studio also produced real photograph postcards of the visit and the hospital. In the 1970s Lettice Ramsey allowed the Cambridgeshire Collection to make two sets of prints from negatives relating to the Hospital. One set was returned to Lettice Ramsey with the negatives, the other set (207 images) has been retained in the Collection in a box with an accompanying list. (Not yet catalogued, stored on filing cabinet No 3). The negatives of these prints are believed to be somewhere in the current collection, but have not been cross referenced. Also there are some additional negatives of portraits of staff and patients at the hospital listed in the PCB catalogue, which have not been included in the FEGH box,

5. Ramsey and Muspratt negatives 1934-1988

RM Portraits. The Cambridgeshire Collection has the original photographic studio card index from the Ramsey and Muspratt firm for portraits. This comprises a large filing cabinet of 6in x 4in index cards, arranged in alphabetical order by surname and first name. Each index card states the customer's surname, first name(s) or initial(s), address, gives a job number, print requirements and payment details. The top of each card is coloured – pink for a woman, blue for a man and yellow for a child, groups, pets etc. Where an image has also been catalogued in the Cambridgeshire Collection's main illustration index in the reading room, the catalogue reference has been added to the studio index card.



RM studio card index, index cards and a packet of negatives

The job number on the studio card relates to a packet of negatives. These packets are in glassine envelopes on which are written the job number and customer name. In each

glassine envelope are a number of jobs and each job may comprise several individual negatives cut into strips – each strip having the customer’s surname written on it. The negatives are either 35 mm or 120 film.

Many of the early RM negatives are on highly inflammable cellulose nitrate based film and are degrading, so they are stored in the Cold War bunker on the Shire Hall site and have to be fetched to the Cambridgeshire Collection when needed. Generally most, but not all negatives taken before 1952 are stored in the bunker. Most of the later negatives (job numbers 28,012 – 46,666) are stored on site at the Central Library.

RM Commercial Photographs. The Cambridgeshire Collection also has a collection of Ramsey and Muspratt commercial negatives (non portrait work, including buildings, shop displays, copies of other pictures, some University buildings and interiors) which are kept separately and have a separate index. The RM commercial negatives, on film stock approximately 4.75in x 6.5in, fill a conventional filing cabinet drawer and have a number sequence of job numbers from No 89 to 908. Where the Cambridgeshire Collection has in the past had prints made of some of the more interesting of these images, individual photographs are also catalogued in the main illustrations card index.

US Service personnel from WW2. A series of RM portraits from the 1940s of United States service personnel has been digitised and these are available online on the CALM Archives catalogue, illustrated with small contact prints – search on “America in Cambridge”.

RM Theatre Groups. Ramsey and Muspratt took many sequences of photographs relating to local theatrical productions at the Arts and the ADC Theatres. The Cambridgeshire Collection has around 180 card window display boards of various sizes displaying prints offered for sale from the studio from different theatrical productions. There are also around 200 envelopes, one per production, containing negatives, prints and in many cases programmes. The theatrical productions date from 1932 to 1951 and are listed in a hand list kept with the envelopes. These are not yet catalogued and are stored in the Cambridgeshire Collection store, rolling Bay A 18.

RM Miscellaneous Prints. Two boxes containing miscellaneous prints of images from the RM negatives are stored with the Ramsey and Muspratt index filing cabinet No 9. These currently await cataloguing, and will eventually be assimilated into the Cambridgeshire Collection’s general picture collection. Where Cambridgeshire Collection users and staff have ordered prints from RM negatives and staff felt the images to be important or particularly interesting, an additional copy has been added to this box. The box includes some advertising from the studio and a number of Lettice Ramsey’s photographs from her visits to Soviet Russia and now represents a cross section of the type of images to be found in the RM collection.



A Ramsey and Muspratt studio poster advertisement from the RM Miscellaneous Prints

6. Searching for a portrait in the Post Office Terrace collection at The Cambridgeshire Collection.

Ask the staff for a search of the card indexes for the Post Office Terrace Collection. If you are certain that the portrait you seek was taken before 1934, ask for the PC (Palmer Clarke) index cards, if taken after 1934, ask for the Ramsey and Muspratt index. If unsure, ask for both.

The staff will bring you the appropriate card index drawer(s) for the surname you supply.

If the Palmer Clarke index cards give you a likely hit with a PCB reference, make a note of the box/negative no, and ask to see the catalogue sheets for the appropriate box which contain a little more information than the index cards. Check that the details there tally with the person you are seeking, or whether these further details rule out that particular negative. Alternatively you can download a spreadsheet of the PCB catalogue sheets from www.fadingimages.uk/POT1.asp which can be searched for your ancestor's surname or address.

For the post 1934 portraits, the Ramsey and Muspratt cards themselves will contain additional information e.g. an address, and this will enable you to discriminate further.

When you are happy that you have found likely subjects in the indexes, the next step is to ask the staff to bring up the negatives. They might be able to respond there and then if the box / packet containing the negative is in the collection's store at the Central Library (PCRB, PCB or RM post-1952 negatives). In practical terms with current staffing levels it is not possible to find and bring up PCT negatives from the Cottenham Store. If the negatives you require are stored in the cold war bunker then they are retrievable by Cambridgeshire Archives staff but can take some weeks to fetch. Some of the nitrate negatives have degenerated over time to a point where images have been lost.

7. Handling negatives

The staff will fetch a box of negatives for the PCB or PCRB negatives, or a packet of negatives for Ramsey and Muspratt negatives. You will then need to find the negatives you want in the box or packet.

Negatives are very delicate and glass negatives have sharp edges. They need to be handled with care, touching only the edges of the negative rather than the image area. Cambridgeshire Collection staff will give you guidance on this and will provide you with an A4 plastic sleeve which will enable you to handle a negative without leaving your finger marks on it. Ideally, if you know you will be handling a lot of negatives, you might wish to go equipped, taking along some white cotton or powder free vinyl gloves to wear (gloves are not provided by the Cambridgeshire Collection).

8. Ordering copies of images

If your search has been positive you will want to order a scan or a positive print. If you are searching for a portrait hoping to recognise a facial likeness, you will find this extremely difficult to establish by looking at a reversed negative image. To study a portrait visually you really need to order up a scanned positive of the image. Photographic and scanning charges and processing times are shown on the Cambridgeshire Collection's website: http://www4.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20011/archives_archaeology_and_museums/177/archives_and_local_studies/6

9. Use of images from the PO Terrace collection

If you intend to use the image you are ordering in a publication or on a website or for other purposes than private personal use, then you should discuss this with staff when ordering copies. Generally, for smaller less commercial purposes, the Cambridgeshire Collection will waive reproduction charges in return for an appropriate acknowledgement and a copy of the final publication for their collection.

10. The future of the collection

The longer term future of the Cottenham storage facility is unclear at the present time and staff hope that the part of the collection there will later become more accessible. Storage at the cold war bunker is likely to move when Cambridgeshire Archives relocate away from the Shire Hall.

11. Feedback

Staff would welcome any suggestions for improvement of this guide

12. A Personal recollection of the origins of this project from the 1970s

Mike Petty, formerly the Librarian in charge of the Cambridgeshire Collection, recalls the efforts that went into identifying and acquiring this incredible collection:

“I organised an initial sorting of the Palmer Clarke negatives at Post Office Terrace when the studio was occupied by Lettice Ramsey. Having established a working relationship with Lettice, she allowed me to investigate the contents of the building that was across the courtyard at the back of the studio. I pushed open doors that had been closed for many years to discover piles of negatives, cardboard boxes of negatives and thousands of wooden boxes, each of which contained 50 negatives.

A small team of volunteers, including Derek Stubbings, Michael Sekulla and Richard Shackle worked through these wooden boxes looking for anything that was not a portrait. It was then that a box containing negatives taken at the First Eastern General Hospital was unearthed. These were printed.

There were also a smaller number of large 10x12-inch glass plate negatives of images taken outside the studio. These were far more important. However there were few of them since most had been dumped at some stage to release space. It was easier to throw away bigger negatives since one cleared more space with less effort. Two copies of each image were made; one was given to Lettice Ramsey in thanks for her assistance. They cannot have been too bad as she sold some of them off!

There the matter rested. We were content that the resource was now appreciated and that there would be less chance that it would be lost. When Nick Lee took over the business from Lettice Ramsey I maintained a connection with him, reinforcing the importance of the resource.

Then one day I had a phone call from Nick asking if we were still interested in those negatives. This was not really something I wanted to hear – the prospect of moving that bulk of material from Post Office Terrace and down through Lion Yard to the Library was daunting. However I could not say no.

Worse was to follow – Nick confessed that all those wooden boxes of negatives were not in Post Office Terrace. He had moved some of them – in his Mini – to his home at Sutton Coldfield. It had taken him a great number of journeys. Fortunately Andrew Armour had a friend in Mr Finbow, of the removal company. I joined the driver and his mate in a large removal van to make the journey to Birmingham. The negatives were loaded onboard and we returned to the basement at Lion Yard – thousands of dead Cambridge folk came home. Even when the van was unloaded the job was not done for each box had to be carried up to the third floor and stored. Much of the labour was provided

by caretaker Harry Sparkes.



Mike Petty and driver with the Palmer Clarke boxes loaded into a Finbow's removal lorry at Nicholas Lee's house ready for their trip back to Cambridge. Photo Nick Lee.

Subsequently teams of volunteers, including Susan Burgess and Derek Stubbings, worked through each box to list the details of every negative on sheets of paper. Each name on those lists was indexed on 5x3 catalogue cards. That index was housed in the main Collection search room until after the reorganisation when they were filed away unappreciated in the store area.”



A first trawl by volunteers, looking for subjects other than portraits

13. Notes and References:

Phillip Brunney (former business partner of Lettice Ramsey) has deposited some of his negatives in the Cambridgeshire Collection, currently stored in the negatives collection boxed with negatives from Starr and Rignall

Petty MJ, *"The Cambridge Photographers at Post Office Terrace"*, Cambridge No 29, Winter 1991-2.

Sutcliffe, Jessica, *"Face Shape and Angle – Helen Muspratt Photographer"*, 2016, Manchester University Press, ISBN 978152610084 9.

Helen Muspratt ran the Oxford studio of Ramsey and Muspratt and surviving material from her studio is now at Oxford Local Studies Library.

www.fadingimages.uk has individual entries for each of the photographers who operated at Post Office Terrace.

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