

# EARLY DAYS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN SEVENOAKS

by  
**Derek Medhurst**

I have collected photographs by early professional photographers in and around Sevenoaks for many years.

This led to my researching their working lives. I focused most research on professionals as there is at least some publicly available information.

I am showing copies of photographs – portraits and scenic images – along with a few notes about the photographers. This may give a flavour of the photographic trade in Sevenoaks in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In most cases I have chosen not to renovate the copies digitally. But on a few I removed heavy spots or scratches.

We are mostly seeing them as they exist now - up to 150 years old - not as I think they would have looked originally. Please note that the illustrations are not to scale.

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# OUTLINE TIMELINE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN SEVENOAKS

## **pre-1839**

Experimental work by Wedgewood, Davy, Niepce, Daguerre, Fox Talbot

## **1839**

Photography announced by Daguerre in France & by Fox Talbot in England: different processes

## **1840s**

Protected by patents in England & Wales  
Practice limited to professionals and well-to-do amateurs

## **1843**

Anna Atkins of Halstead Place produces first ever photographically illustrated book: cyanotypes of British algae

## **1850s**

Patents eased. "Wet collodion process" announced. Expansion of photography in earnest

## **1851**

Only 51 professional photographers identified in the country's census

## **1858**

Henry Neale, travelling professional photographer, sets up his photo carriage on The Vine; well reviewed in local press

## **1863**

J Willis, professional of London visits St John's House to take portraits; no evidence it is a permanent studio

## **1863**

Hon Edward Stanhope, local amateur, is taking photographs, probably at Chevening

## **1864**

Henry Guy Inskipp opens first permanent photographic studio in Sevenoaks at 26 High Street

## **1871**

"Dry plate process" introduced: easier and faster timings

## **1880s and following**

Introduction of and improvements to gelatine silver processes

# FORMATS and PROCESSES

The originals of most photos in this display are from one of these formats:

The ***carte de visite*** was a small photograph mounted on a card only 4" x 2.5". Introduced in England in 1857 they became so popular that the word "cartomania" was coined for collecting them. Cards were of family and friends and celebrities.

**Cabinet cards** were introduced in the 1860s, again a photo mounted on card. The card was larger at 6.5" x 4.25" and grew in popularity steadily towards the end of the 19th century.

In the early 20th century photos could be printed onto photographic papers of **postcard size** with the postcard back template already on them.

## Collodion process

The big expansion of photography was enabled by the collodion process, introduced in 1851 by F Scott Archer. He did not patent his invention, so allowing its widespread use.

In the wet collodion process a glass plate that formed the negative had to be coated, exposed and developed in about 15 minutes while wet. In a studio set-up this was demanding but manageable.

Outdoor photography meant the photographer had to use a portable darkroom, often taken on a horse-pulled cart.

## Dry plate process

Introduced in the 1870s, with later enhancements, this removed the need for the preparation and processing of photographic plates at such speed. It slightly simplified the technical side of being a photographer.

## Gelatin silver process

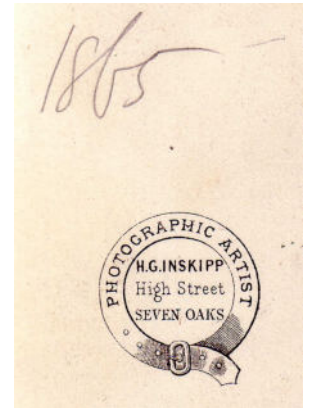
Introduced in the 1880s. Its many enhancements led through glass plates to the convenience of photography on film.

# HENRY GUY INSKIPP

Active Sevenoaks 1864 to 1866/67  
26 High Street

Born in Battle in 1840, he was a warehouseman's assistant prior to becoming Sevenoaks' first permanent studio photographer, describing himself as "photographic artist" – common at the time.

His studio portraits were quite simple. But he was clearly in demand as he photographed members of the Stanhope family of Chevening, which are in the National Portrait Gallery and the Royal Collection.



He also travelled around the area photographing local big houses and scenes.

This was not easy as he had to take his camera AND darkroom with him, probably on a cart pulled by a horse. He had to prepare the photographic plate, take the photo and develop them within about 15 minutes.

# HENRY GUY INSKIPP

As well as his regular photos of local houses and scenes he took many on the stereocard format.

When seen through a stereo viewer the two very slightly different left and right frames merged to give an impression of the scene in 3D stereo.



The photo of the Upper High Street includes his premises on the far left side of the street.

The stereo of Knole at the left is one of many taken of local big houses.

He also recorded quite ordinary shots of the area, such as London Road, to the right, and Chipstead Lane, Riverhead below.



After leaving Sevenoaks he was active in Southborough. He even created his own brand of the recently introduced dry plate technology in 1877. Negatives no longer had to be developed so quickly after taking.

# JAMES STANGER

## Active Sevenoaks c1867 to c1883

### 26 High Street

Born in Chatham about 1807 his main lifetime occupation was as a carver and gilder. About 1867 he took over the studio business of H G Inskipp but also continued his other work.



The logo design is identical and some studio shots show the same flooring and furniture as Inskipp's.

The base of the supporting frame can be seen behind the boy on the right. This would have helped the subject to remain steady.

He sold *cartes de visite* and stereocards of local scenes, but it is not clear how many were from Inskipp's negatives acquired with the business.



In 1873 Princess Louise, one of Queen Victoria's daughters, visited Stanger during a trip to the area and bought photographs of Ightham Mote.



The studio was acquired by Charles Essenhigh Corke about 1883. James was about 76 years old and unsurprisingly seems to have retired.

# RICHARD WICKS

Active Sevenoaks c1874 to 1876  
Exact location in St John's unknown

Born in London c1837, by 1871 he was a coal merchant living in Bradbourne Road. He operated as a photographer from c1874 to 1876, but seems to have kept his coal business as well.



He operated first as *St John's Photographic Gallery*; the portraits above are from there. The gentleman in the wheelchair seems to have been pictured outside or in a glasshouse. The background seems too busy to be decorated studio props.

Wicks has also made good use of vignetting in the centre photos.



He changed the business name to *St John's Studio* before disposing of it (to T H Challis). These two portraits are from that era.



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I have seen only portraits by Wicks, no scenic pictures. After he left Sevenoaks he was active as a photographer in Brighton.

# THOMAS HOLT CHALLIS

Active Sevenoaks c1876 to 1881

St John's area and then 39 London Road

He was born in 1846 in Brighton and first followed his father into the pub trade. By 1875/76 he was in a photographic partnership in Woolwich as Cobb & Challis.

In 1876 he took over the St John's business from Richard Wicks and moved to a new studio behind 39 London Road in 1878.



These portraits show the variety of styles he used: different seating or standing poses, a vignettted portrait, and a three child group is a detailed studio setting. This latter might have been using new props in the new London Road studio, but it is not certain.



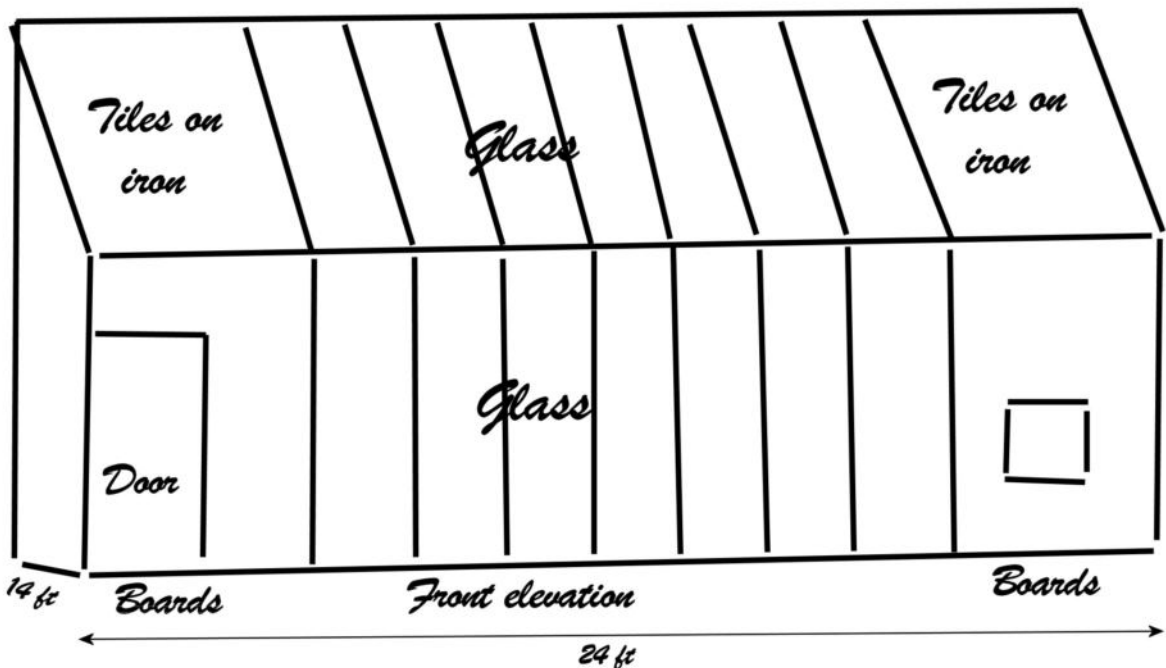
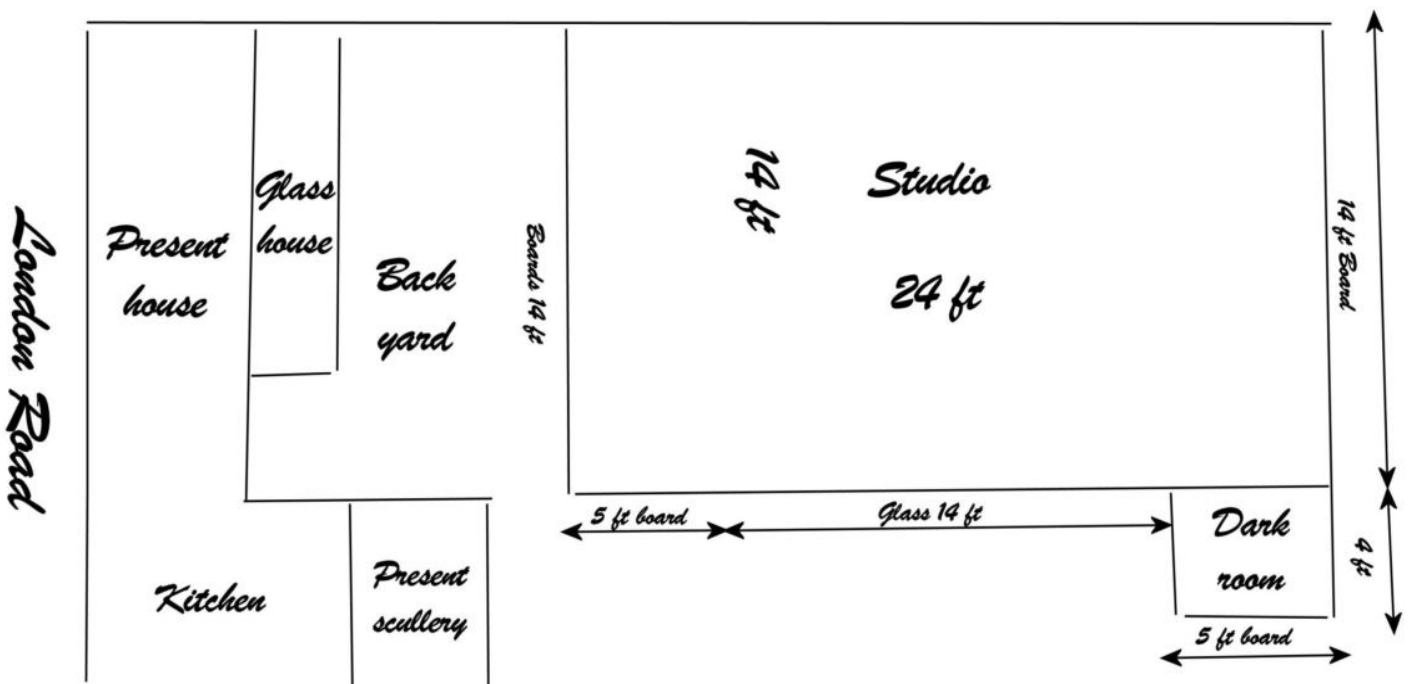


# T H CHALLIS

## New Studio at 39 London Road

In February 1878 the Local Board approved Challis' plans for a lean-to studio behind 39 London Road. Built by H Owen of Quakers Hall, Challis retained the name St John's Studio.

The diagrams below are from the original plans at Kent Archives. Much of the roof and front wall was of glass and it faced north to take advantage of the soft light from that direction.



# THOMAS HOLT CHALLIS

He worked outside the studio for some pictures, including this interesting open air equine/human portrait



His scenic photos include St John's Church (below) and an interior of St Nicholas (right).



## A French connection

A *carte de visite* portrait by Challis exists of Louis Napoleon, The Prince Imperial, taken between 1876 and 1879. In 1872/73 Louis Napoleon was at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. The connection might have developed when Challis was in partnership in Woolwich, but must have been strong for the Prince to be photographed by Challis after the latter moved to Sevenoaks.

Challis acted as a French language interpreter in a Sevenoaks court case in 1880, but I have no evidence how or where he learned the language.

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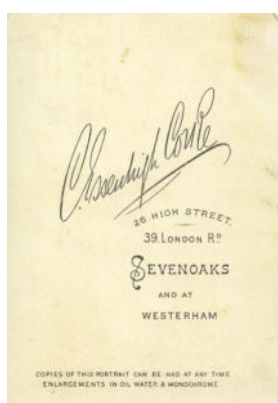
St John's Studio passed to Charles Esenhig Corke in early 81. Thomas Challis ultimately returned to the pub trade in and around Brighton.

# CHARLES ESSENHIGH CORKE

Active 1881 to c1910

39 London Road

Born in 1852 to a local family, Charles Essenhig Corke is the most widely known early Sevenoaks photographer. But he did not start the business. This reverse of a *carte de visite* shows that he took over the studio from T H Challis. That was in early 1881 and overprinting card backs like this was not uncommon on a change of ownership. On his own very early card backs he was an "artist photographer".



The card at left, from c1883, shows that he had taken over Stanger's studio at 26 High St, and that he also worked at Westerham. (Every Wednesday at Joseph Jewell's studio.) He had now dropped the artist photographer description.



The photo above right is a very early one by Charles, as is the mother and child to the left. That to right is later and shows a sporting pose.

The lovely vignettted portrait below, taken in 1892, is of a lady named as F A B Marchant.



# CHARLES ESSENHIGH CORKE

These photos are from after 1895 as his distinction of Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society is shown on the back of both.



The card to the left shows Charles together with, I believe, his wife Alice. That is also post-1895.

The card to the right states that it is an "At home portrait by electric light". The service was probably for events at the local big houses.



Charles photographed many local big houses and scenes, which were often published in guide books or as postcards, as in these two examples.



Charles stepped back from the firm around 1909/10 but continued with his painting, which he never gave up through his photographic years. The photo business was left in the very capable hands of his son Henry.

# HENRY ESSENHIGH CORKE

Active 1898 to 1919  
39, 41 and 43 London Road

Son of Charles, Henry Essenhigh Corke photographed royalty at Knole in July 1898 when he was only 14  $\frac{3}{4}$  years old! He joined his father in management of the business in 1901. He was a photographic innovator and real pioneer before his sad early death in 1919 at the age of only 35.



The picture at left can be seen as one of Henry's standard studio portraits, still appreciated no doubt by the lady.

The vignetted, soft, toned mother and child picture at right shows Henry's creative side. The photo will surely have been treasured.



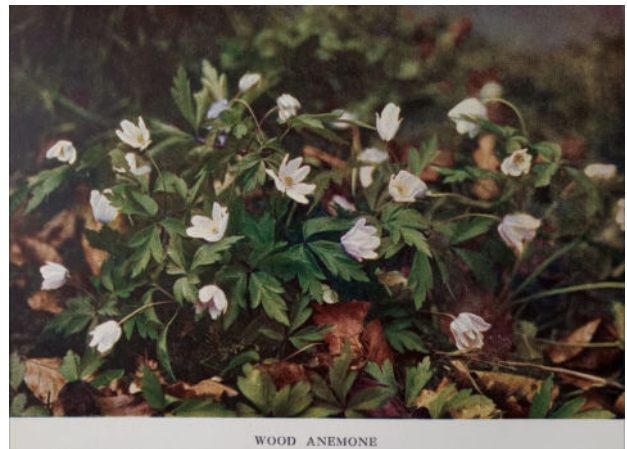
The photo on the left has been enhanced by the addition of light pencil strokes. The pencil work may have been done by an assistant rather than Henry but again shows a creative outlook.

The railway depot at the right is a copy print by Henry of a painting, not from life. Copying paintings was a service his father Charles had carried out too, especially those at Knole which were offered for sale to the public. An earlier version of buying postcards at a gallery now!



# HENRY ESSENHIGH CORKE

From 1908 Henry was one of the first – and finest - users of the Autochrome, the first readily available colour process. His botanical photos illustrated at least 12 books published by Cassell; just two examples here.



This autochrome “Mother and Child” is believed to be of his wife and first daughter. It gained no formal recognition in the 1912 Royal Photographic Society Exhibition but has stood the test of time as a century later it is often found on the world wide web with glowing comments.



THE CIGARETTE SMOKER. Self-Portrait.

Henry created new ways of lighting studio portraits by daylight only, prompted by the studio not having electricity. The self portrait at left uses one of his techniques.

He did not keep the methods secret and from c1906 he wrote many articles for the professional and amateur press about these and his other photo approaches.

# AMY HENWOOD: assistant to the ESSENHIGH CORKES

Many assistants/apprentices worked in the business. Amy Henwood was there with Charles in 1891 and was still with the firm into the 1900s until returning to her home town of Cheltenham before 1911.

Moore's Directory of Sevenoaks (of c1906) is illustrated by many pictures credited to Henry Essenhigh Corke, including the two below. But there also seems to be a cipher with the letters A, M & Y above Henry's name.



*H. E. Corke.*



High Street, Town End.

*H. E. Corke.*



London Road.

*H. E. Corke.*

I believe that Henry allowed Amy to have some credit. But was she the photographer? Or maybe the printer? We'll never know.

It may not be unique to allow assistants to have some credit, but certainly unusual. So we find Henry to be something of an enlightened employer.

# HENRY ESSENHIGH CORKE

**I believe that Henry was the true photographic pioneer of Sevenoaks. His achievements and activities include:**

1906ff: developed innovative daylight lighting for the studio

1908: started to use the new Autochrome colour process & became a leading expert

1909: photographed the Lord Mayor in colour: the first picture of him in colour, and the first of him in colour by flash

1909: made the first commercial duplicate colour photograph

Contributed many articles to professional and amateur press

Illustrated numerous books with his photographs

Gave countless talks to photographic clubs around the country

Designed his own portable micro-greenhouse for flower photography, to prevent movement by the wind

Royal Photographic Society Council Member from 1913 until he died in 1919

## **Others were similarly impressed:**

“Though a professional photographer, Mr Corke has quite the amateur spirit, and his lecture is a very free and frank account of methods which are the outcome of his own ingenuity.

“Secretaries of societies will be doing themselves a good turn by putting themselves in communication with Mr Corke at the Studio, Sevenoaks.”

*British Journal of Photography 3 September 1909*

“His work in the field represents some of the finest Autochrome colour transparencies which have been made”

*Obituary in British Journal of Photography Almanac 1920*



# BEATRICE ESSENHIGH CORKE

Active (in all) 1907 to 1930  
43 London Road

Born in 1888, Beatrice worked in the family firm from about 1907. When her brother Henry died in 1919 she took on the business. A former pupil of Henry's, Mr G Spiers Goodchild, helped her. The photos I have by Beatrice are all portraits.



These two portraits are of Joan Igglesden who worked for Beatrice. The fireside photo – from 1923 - harks back to a lighting style and use of the fireplace that Henry had devised 16-17 years earlier.



These five pictures show Beatrice's ability to use a variety of costume and lighting to produce very different portraits.



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In 1930 Beatrice passed the business to Howard King and afterwards spent much time in Canada with her husband Henry Mist.

# HOWARD KING then GEORGE P KING

Active 1930 to c1967  
43 London Road

When Howard King took on the former Essenhigh Corke studio in 1930 it started another father and son era at London Road. Howard had a studio in Croydon but took on this one in Sevenoaks and ran it until about 1936. A promotion in 1932 shows that he had been proud to have survived the two lean depression years of 1930 and 1931.

Readily available photos by Howard are postcards of local scenes such as these of Knole and St Nicholas: the staples of many local photographers.



Son George P King was working with his father by 1933 and had success in that year in the Professional Photographers Association exhibition of Modern Industrial Photography. He took over fully from his father around 1936.

In the early 1950s George photographed Chartwell. The National Trust there thinks that postcards may have been produced to help Clementine Churchill raise funds for charities she supported.



George could turn his hand to a range of photography and the studio at 43 London Road was in regular use. These portraits of model Barbara are from 1948.



George P King died in 1967 but the business continued for about 20 years in the same name but in the hands of Dennis Witchell

# GEORGE P KING: DENNIS WITCHELL 1967 to 1980s

After the death of George P King in 1967 the studio was run by Dennis Witchell, under the old Geo P King name, until it closed in the 1980s.

The window displays showed his expertise in a range of disciplines, including the very different demands of industrial and portrait photography.

He was supportive of Sevenoaks Camera Club, inviting us most years to have a practical portraiture evening in one of the two studios. The only photo I have from this era is one of my own pictures from a Camera Club evening!



# Francis Hards Jeffery

Active c1880 to c1891

3 Hortus Place, St Johns's Hill & 132 High Street

Francis Jeffery had been a gas lighter/fitter living in Hartsland. Around 1880 – when he was about 53 years old - he started a photographic business at 3 Hortus Place, now Prospect Road. This was five years after his son Albert had also started as a photographer.

These cards from his Hortus Place studio include an early photo of St John's Congregational Church with the spire still in place. It was removed in 1880.



By 1884 he was at 132 High Street. These three cards are marked as from that studio, including an interesting location shot of a mounted gent with three (probable) employees.



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His son Albert sometimes worked on his own account from the same location and at other times from a different one. I have no photos by him.

# WALLIS; WALLIS & BARTON; FRANK BARTON; CRANBOURN PHOTOGRAPHIC

Active 1892 to c1901 under Wallis and/or Barton  
74 High Street

W Edmond Wallis and Frank Barton in four studio incarnations in the 1890s.

In 1892 Wallis built a studio behind 74 High Street.

About 1895 he entered a partnership with Frank Barton.

In September 1896 Wallis left and Barton carried on at the same studio.

By 1898 the business name had changed to Cranbourn Studio (sometimes spelled Cranbourne). Frank Barton left c1900.

Cranbourn then became part of the Essenhig Corke firm.



Two by  
W Edmond Wallis



Two by  
Cranbourn



Cards from the various business incarnations. Cranbourn(e) continued as part of Essenhig Corke until at least 1922 when it was in Bank Street and a photographic retailer as well as studio.



Two by Wallis & Barton (notice the baby seems to be levitating)

One by Frank Barton

# FRANK HOLBROOK

Active in all c1892 to c1912

## St John's Studio: 4 Cedar Terrace

Looking for a new position in 1902 he described himself as an "assistant operator and Retoucher; a good all-round hand", and that he could manage a branch. He claimed 10 years good experience; he may have been working at Essenhigh Corke.

It is not clear if he set up for himself then or later. In 1909 St John's Studio was under his ownership, but in 1912 it was taken over by W Brunton.



*F. Holbrook,*

*Sevensoaks.*



*Frk. Holbrook*



ST. JOHN'S STUDIO,  
SEVENOAKS

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It is not clear what Frank did after selling the business to Brunton.

# W BRUNTON

Active c1912 to at least 1926  
St John's Studio: 4 Cedar Terrace,  
then 40 Hollybush Lane.  
Later at The Studio, 7 London Rd



These photos have postcard backs and are embossed with St John's Studio on the front



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Brunton's son James was also a photographer, seeming to work out of the same addresses as his father. In 1929 he became President of the Professional Photographers' Association, Kentish Centre. He may also have been involved in the short-lived Sevenoaks & District Photographic Society

I have none of his photos.

# ERNEST FIELDER

## Active c1918 to 1969

### 121 St John's Hill

With his two brothers William and Herbert he ran the (probably) legendary photographic shop near Bat & Ball.

But he was also a fine photographer in the studio, in people's homes and outdoors. Here are just two example postcards produced by him.



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They treated a young schoolboy in their shop as an adult, leading I'm sure to my lifetime interest in photography.



# PHOTOGRAPHERS LESS SEEN

I sometimes have just a single picture by a local professional but have found no information about them. On at least one occasion I have found newspaper mentions but no photos. This panel shows some.

T Turnell  
Brasted



James Cork  
1 Bethel Rd



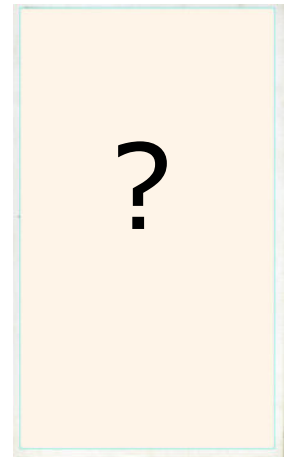
E Sims  
St John's Rd



B Graham  
Plaxtol



A E Welch  
18 Victoria Rd.  
(also in Westerham)



T S Swatridge  
had a studio at  
113 High St in  
1883 and then  
Tubs Hill. I have  
found no cards  
by him at either.

# PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANTS IN SEVENOAKS

Many assistants are identified in the Sevenoaks area in the regular censuses. They cannot often be linked to a specific photographer but here are those that I have identified so far\*. It appears that only Amy Henwood had some public credit by their employer.

Ernest G Corke

Nelly Corke

Nelly Dann

William Deakin

Harry Dean

Gladys Green

Amy Henwood

Joan Igglesden

Ethel Lewis

Herbert Poole

Doris Annie Saxby

Fred Spalding

John Stevenson

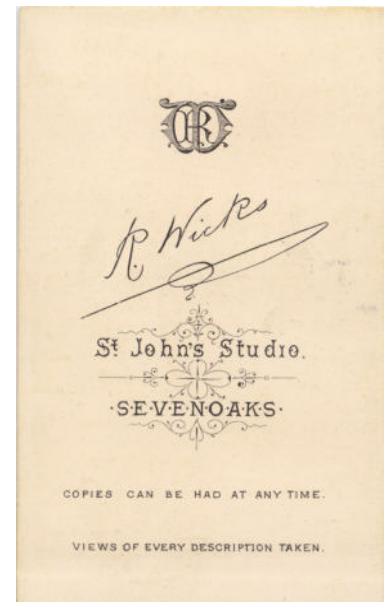
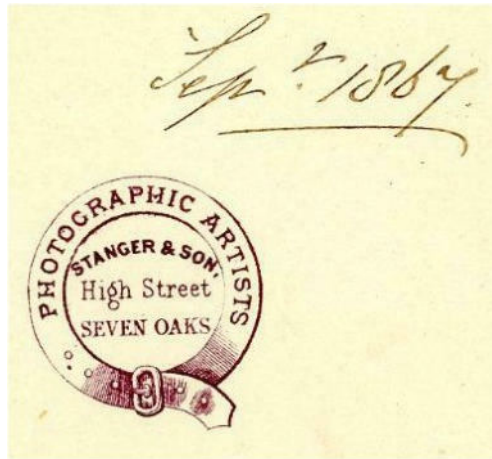
Lucy Stroud

Frederick A Thompson

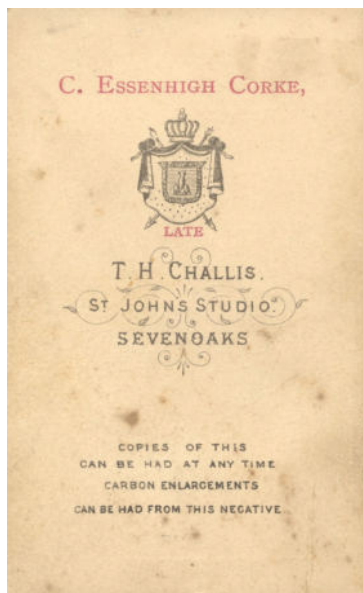
Edith Warr

\* I have ignored direct parent/child assistants in this list

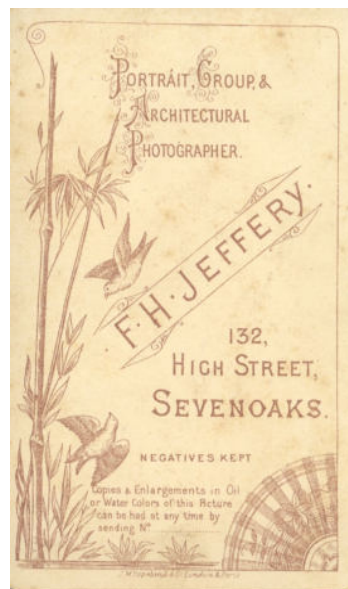
# INCREASING CARD BACK ARTISTRY



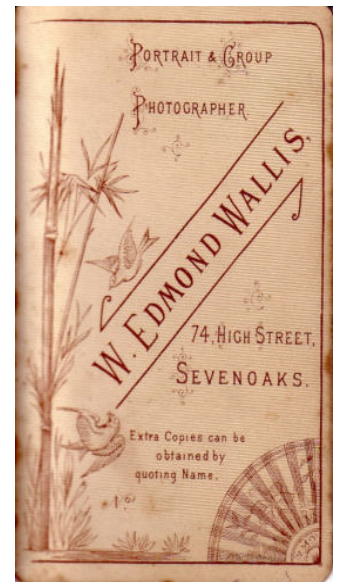
c1875



c1878-81



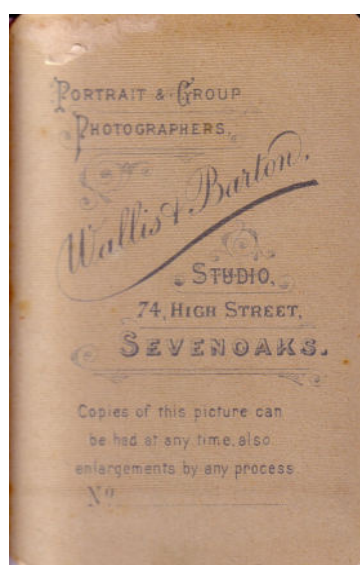
c1884-90



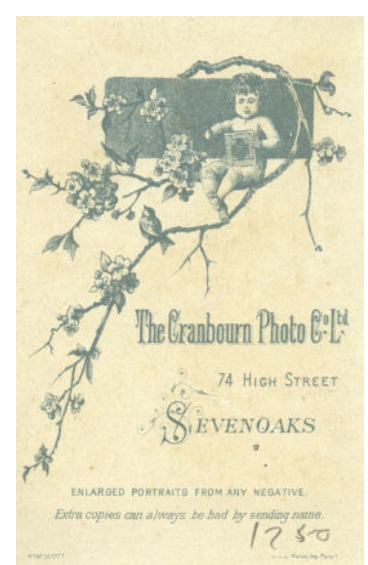
C1892-95; same design as Jeffery



C1892-95



c1895-96

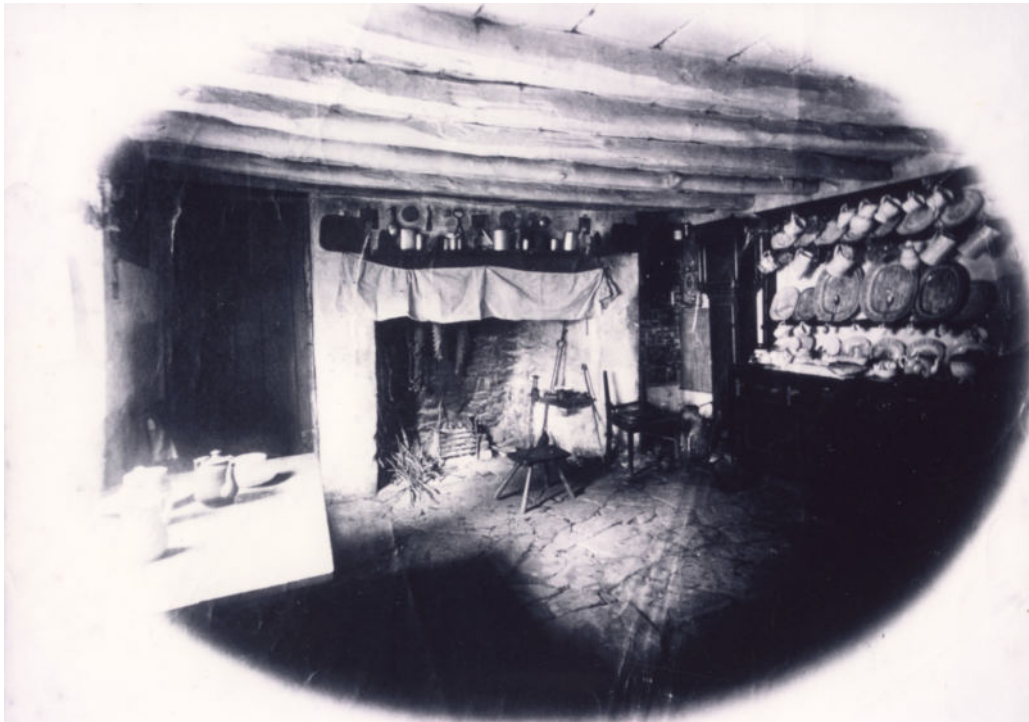


c1898-1906

# ALFRED EDWARD EMSLIE

Alfred Emslie was an artist who lived for a time in Otford. Whilst not a professional he did take photographs and these two are of note.

They show the interiors of farmworkers' cottages near Sevenoaks. The V&A Museum date them to around 1883 and on acquiring them in the 1990s they commented how rare such subjects are.



With thanks to the V&A Museum  
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