

Preliminary research by R. Derek Wood on  
**The Daguerreotype in Liverpool in 1839:  
Ste Croix, A. Abraham and J. B. Dancer.**

In 1993 two companion articles on the way the daguerreotype was first demonstrated in England were published in *History of Photography*, linked by an editorial title of ‘The Enigma of Monsieur de Sainte-Croix’. The first article, by the present writer, concerned ‘Ste Croix in London, 1839’, the second by Peter James was on ‘Ste Croix and the daguerreotype in Birmingham’. A notice in the *Birmingham Advertiser* of 24 October 1839 found by Peter James showed that after spending five weeks in London followed by six days in Birmingham, the mysterious Ste Croix from Paris was due to go on October 29, 1839, to Liverpool. Only some small amount of research of Liverpool publications was done, but it was enough to show that it would not be a simple task to find out what happened when Ste Croix reached Liverpool. In 1993 <sup>1</sup> the matter had to be left by saying only that

It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the reasons or consequences of Ste Croix’s visit to Liverpool on 29th October 1839, but a preliminary search has revealed that during that fourth week of October an advertisement appeared in three Liverpool newspapers saying orders for Daguerreotype apparatus could be placed with a local optical instrument maker named Abraham ...

Intermittent investigation of the subject within the following few years was done, but nothing found in Liverpool sources specifically regarding Ste Croix – he remains as mysterious as ever. <sup>2</sup>

More was found on the optical instrument business of Abraham, and indeed of his associate the well-known J. B. Dancer. Not enough was known about Abraham to form a definitive publication, but as some interest has been expressed by other persons in the discovery of more information here presented is a preliminary and still incomplete report on Liverpool in 1839.

During the fourth week of October 1839 three newspapers in Liverpool carried a similar advertisement concerning demonstration of Daguerreotype apparatus and views. These rival weeklies were published on different days of the week, so it was in the *Liverpool Courier* that the advertisement first appeared on Wednesday, 23 October.

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<sup>1</sup> Two companion articles in *History of Photography* 1993: R. D. Wood, ‘Ste Croix in London, 1839’, *History of Photography*, Spring 1993, Vol. 17 (1), pp. 101–7; Peter James, ‘Ste Croix and the daguerreotype in Birmingham’, pp. 107–115. What little had been found in Liverpool sources was summarised within the article on ‘Ste Croix in Birmingham’, see paragraphs on pp. 108–9 and footnotes 18 and 19.

<sup>2</sup> The author thinks it most likely Ste Croix had a background in the optical instrument trade, either directly associated with the Giroux firm or as an independent venture. A possibility that he might have gone to Liverpool to sail to America was explored but this proved a false trail: see *The Arrival of the Daguerreotype in New York* by R. Derek Wood, published as a small twenty-page monograph by the American Photographic Historical Society (New York): January 1995

Two days later a slightly different version was on the front page of *The Liverpool Mercury* and then the following day of Saturday, 26 October 1839 in the *Liverpool Chronicle*.

DAGUERREOTYPE EXHIBITION- Pictures taken from nature, by a Daguerreotype, manufactured under the superintendence of Mons. Daguerre, with a view of Paris from the Quai de la Megisserie, and the process of using this interesting Instrument. Exhibited daily from Eleven till four o'clock, at 58, CASTLE-STREET, adjoining the Courier-office.

Admission - One Shilling

Orders for the Daguerreotype received at the Exhibition, or by A. ABRAHAM, Optician and Mathematical Instrument Maker, 20, Lord-street. <sup>3</sup>

Although the advertisement had been a little less detailed on its first appearance, the original version of 23 October provided some information not given later: orders received would be for daguerreotype apparatus “with improved mechanical arrangements” and no statement was yet included that it was (according to the version two and three days later) “manufactured under the superintendence of Mons. Daguerre”. <sup>4</sup>

So, in Liverpool as in London and Birmingham, information about the camera does not provide unequivocal evidence that Ste. Croix was an agent for Giroux, whose Daguerreotype cameras were labelled “made under the direction of the inventor in Paris”. Maybe Abraham was in turn appointed agent for Giroux cameras to be imported from Paris after orders had been placed with him. Liverpool would presumably be a convenient place to ship apparatus directly from France. Yet the phrase in the *Liverpool Courier* advertisement “Orders received for the Daguerreotype, with improved mechanical arrangements...” does, frustratingly, break up any clear view of Abraham Instrument Makers as passive agents, as well as posing a possibility that Ste Croix was an agent for nobody but himself, maybe intending to reach an agreement with Abraham to produce rather than simply sell daguerreotype apparatus.

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<sup>3</sup> Advertisement in *The Liverpool Mercury*, Friday, 25 October 1839, Vol. XXIX, No.1485, p.345a (front page of issue) [p345 or p853?]; and *Liverpool Chronicle*, Saturday, 26 October 1839, No.717, p.1a.

The *Chronicle* omitted the price of admission, and gave the time of exhibition as “Eleven till three”, while the *Mercury* did not have the words “with a view of Paris from the Quai de la Megisserie”, and said “highly interesting Instrument”.

<sup>4</sup> *Liverpool Courier*, Wednesday, 23 October 1839, Vol. xxxii, No. 1660, p.341 (page 5 of that 8-page issue).

DAGUERREOTYPE. PICTURES taken from nature, by the DAGUER-REOTYPE, and the process of using this interesting Instrument, will be exhibited daily, from eleven to four, at No.58, Castle-street, adjoining the Courier-office. Admission, One Shilling. Orders received for the Daguerreotype, with improved mechanical arrangements, at the Exhibition, and by A. ABRAHAM, Optician and Mathematical Instrument Maker, 20, Lord-street.

The end of October seems to have been a time of cultural activity in Liverpool. The 'Liverpool Annual Exhibition' had just opened and the 'Royal Institute' of Liverpool was starting its new season. This would obviously be a useful period in which to demonstrate the daguerreotype camera, the process, and new pictorial opportunities opened up by it.<sup>5</sup>

However, no reports (of daguerreotype demonstrations, relating to Liverpool organisations, or newspaper editorial comment) have been found that specially mention Ste. Croix. Apart from the above advertisement, slightly varied between 23 and 26 October, the only other small item regarding the daguerreotype in 1839 appeared in the next issue of *The Liverpool Courier* on Wednesday, 30 October: "An opportunity, as will be seen by the announcement in another page, is now offered for witnessing the interesting experiment of obtaining sketches from nature by means of the Daguerreotype".<sup>6</sup> A tantalising editorial sentence indeed, as such an alleged "announcement on another page" is not found! Even so it is a most interesting statement as it was made on 30 October, the day after Ste Croix's arrival. Could it have been that the proper demonstration of "obtaining sketches from nature..." had to wait until Ste Croix reached Liverpool? Maybe it was not something actually undertaken by Abraham? The earlier advertisements in Liverpool appearing the week well before Ste Croix's planned arrival were clearly for ordering the camera from Abraham and exhibition of daguerreotypes, and do (less clearly) mention "the process" but this could have been only description not demonstration. In those earlier advertisements placed by Abraham the term 'Daguerreotype' meant the camera, not the process or the resulting images. Yet Abraham's business interest in photography had started earlier in 1839 than the autumn period concerning the Daguerreotype camera – for in *Gore's Liverpool Directory* of 1839 (probably published around May) Abraham had advertised the sale of "Photogenic paper – for taking solar pictures in a few minutes".

J. B. Dancer (1812-1887)<sup>7</sup> lived in Liverpool in the 1820s and 1830s and was a business associate of Abraham. In 1886, the year before he died, Dancer recalled that the early descriptions of Daguerre's method of proceeding were crude and obscure. In consequence of this I had six weeks of hard work... nearly suffocated by the vapours of iodine, before I obtained satisfactory results. Being a practical optician, the camera used was one of my

<sup>5</sup> In two of the Liverpool weeklies the Daguerreotype advertisement quoted here had appeared immediately below one that was in every Liverpool newspaper at this period in announcing events of the Liverpool Annual Exhibition: "Exhibition of the Liverpool Academy of the Works of Modern Artists is now open at the Gallery, Church street... [held from 28 October until 14 December 1839]... Saml Eglington, Secretary to the Academy".

<sup>6</sup> *The Liverpool Courier*, Wednesday, 30 October, 1839, Vol. XXXII, No. 1661, p.352 (last page of that 8-page issue)

<sup>7</sup> H. Garnett (1928); Stirling (1938-9); L. L. Arden (1960); Alan McLeod, 'John Benjamin Dancer', *British Journal of Photography*, Vol. 120 (16 February and 16 March 1973), pp.138-41, 233. (This article has an illustration of an Abraham & Dancer handbill advertisement); 'John Benjamin Dancer (1812-87). A Family History' by Frederic Luther, *History of Photography*, Summer 1992, vol.16, pp. 123-34

own construction... One day I heard that some of Daguerre's pictures had been sent to the Adelaide Gallery in London for exhibition. That same day I left Liverpool for London, taking on of my best pictures. The result of the comparison was very gratifying to me.<sup>8</sup>

During June and July 1840 a big exhibition was held at the Liverpool Mechanics Institution when Abraham Abraham exhibited a Daguerreotype camera and apparatus, along with eight Daguerreotypes, all views of Paris.<sup>9</sup> No daguerreotypes shown in the summer of 1840 had been taken in Liverpool. Abraham had nothing to display taken by himself.

According to Dancer's autobiography written towards the end of his life, that same year of 1840 he assisted Abraham in making a line of "cheap achromatic microscopes",<sup>10</sup> and the following year he moved to Manchester opening an Optical and Philosophical Instrument business as a partner of Abraham Abraham at 13 Cross Street on 21 June 1841:<sup>11</sup>

OPTICAL MATHEMATICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUMENT ESTABLISHMENT, 13 CROSS-STREET, King street, Manchester — A. ABRAHAM, of 20 Lord-street, Liverpool, respectfully announces in conjunction with Mr. J. DANCER — they propose OPENING the above PREMISES on Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> instant. Their stock will embrace an extensive assortment of Optical Mathematical, Surveying and Mining Instruments ... a large collection of Pictures from the Daguerreotype; ... 13 Cross-street, King-street, Manchester, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841

The man worthy here of more attention is obviously Abraham Abraham. Unfortunately nothing of substance about him has been published, he appears to have received little attention. Except that is by Frederic Luther (1915-2000), who assembled a file on

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<sup>8</sup> 'Early Photography in Liverpool and Manchester' by J. B. Dancer, *Manchester City News*, 22 May 1886, p.2f, reprinted shortly after in *British Journal of Photography*, 11 June 1886, vol.33, pp.372-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Catalogue of the Exhibition of objects illustrative of the Fine Arts, Natural History, Philosophy, Machines, Manufactures, Antiquities, etc, Liverpool Mechanics Institution, Liverpool*, printed by D. Marples, Lord-street, 1840, 91 pp. Abraham's exhibits were No.s 858-66 on pp.72-3. A copy of this Catalogue is bound in 'Liverpool Mechanics Institution Leaflets', Vol. 2, 1838-1841, in the British Library, shelf-mark 1866 e7

Item No. 858 was listed in the Catalogue as "Achromatic Camera Obscura, made and invented by M. Daguerre, for taking views on prepared plates of Silvered Copper. On the same table, all the apparatus complete for taking the Daguerreotype Views, all deposited by Mr. Abraham, Lord-st." Items 859 to 866 are Daguerreotypes: View of Chateau de Tuilleries, Pont Neuf &c; Le Tour St Jacques; From an engraving, Adieux de Fontainebleau; Le Pantheon; Palais de Luxembourg; L'Arc de Triomphe; Place de la Concorde; Pont Louis Philippe. "These last two are the largest views yet taken by the Daguerreotype, and, with the others, have all been deposited by Mr. Abraham, of Lord-street."

<sup>10</sup> 'John Benjamin Dancer, 1812-1887...', *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, 1964-5, Vol. 107, pp. 115-42 (quote from p.?). The autograph manuscript of this autobiography is now held at the University of Texas. [Fred Luther wrote to me that this quote appears on pp.56-7 of the manuscript, but need to check the published 1964-5 version]

<sup>11</sup> The opening of Abraham and Dancer's Manchester premises advertised in *Manchester Courier*, 12 June 1841, Vol. xvii, No. 86, p. 1b. The same advert also re-appeared later (with words "have opened" substituted) on 26 June 1841, p.1b)

Abraham during his many years of study (published from 1940 to 1997!) of J. B. Dancer and the history of microfilm. The present author corresponded with Fred Luther and thus (due to Fred's continuing enthusiasm for the subject and his generous readiness to share his knowledge) his work on Abraham Abraham as set out in a letter of 31 October 1993 provides valuable information:

**Frederick Luther, ... Indiana, USA, to R. Derek Wood, ... Kent, England.  
Letter dated 21 October 1993 regarding Abraham Abraham of Liverpool.**

Dear Derek, Thank you for your letter of 1 October. I am sorry to be so tardy in answering it, but each year finds me going ever more slowly in all respects. I am honored by your suggestion that we might collaborate on an article or two. Instead, I'll be more than happy to give you access to ... what I have on Abraham. He deserves far more research than I was able to give him, as he had only a 6-year association with John Benjamin Dancer, my subject.

Abraham Abraham was born in Bath, the son of Jacob Abraham, an optician, and moved to Liverpool "during the war years". (1) I have assumed that he was born about 1799-1803, for he advertized as an optician at 8 Lord Street in 1818. (2) The Census of 1841 (with ages correct only to the nearest five years) identifies him as an optician at Lord Street at the age of 40, living at 4 Duke Street, North, West Derby, Liverpool, with his wife Sarah, also 40 years old, and with two live-in servants. (3)

In 1840, John Benjamin Dancer assisted Abraham in creating a line of "cheap, chromatic microscopes". (4) In Summer 1841 Dancer moved to Manchester and until 1845 he acted as sole manager of the firm "Abraham and Dancer". (5) In 1845, Dancer bought out Abraham's interest: Stirling (6) says "in 1845 [Abraham] left the business and we hear of him no more" Marton (7) says "This partnership lasted for 4 years, ending in 1845". And Gill (8) says "W. Abraham [sic] left in 1845 to join Wood (Wood Abraham) with premises in Liverpool and Manchester". But neither Abraham nor Wood appears among the 12 opticians listed among "Tradesmen" in the 1845 Manchester City Directory (9). I know only of a "Wood, Photographer" at Cornbrook Place (in 1858) and at 199 Chester Road (in 1861) in Manchester (10). Your namesakes include not only that Wood, but also Dancer's "Aunt Wood" (Sarah Dancer, who married Benjamin Jasper Wood in 1799).

On 29 August 1854, Abraham Abraham, "optician of Lord Street, Liverpool" was written in as one of three executors of the will of Moses Moses (who died 2 January 1858 at Cheltenham, Glouc.). To confuse the issue, I quote from Miss Mordy's notes: "The will was proved 8 July 1858, with a codicil, by the oaths of Abraham Abraham of 37, Acacia Road, St. John's Wood, London", but "he did not appear in the 1861 Census ... at St. John's Wood". (11) Yet in 1858 he was advertizing in the Liverpool and Manchester Photographic Journal. (12)

The Jury of the Crystal Palace (1851) said that Abraham's microscopes on exhibit "are not such as demand special notice". (13)

In January 1839, A.A. contributed one guinea to the First Annual Subscription of the Liverpool Humane Society's Fund for Shipwrecked Seamen. (14). Coincidentally, his brother Maurice (Morris ?) would die at sea in 1872, enroute from Melbourne. (15)

In 1844 and 1845 Abraham was a Senior Warden in the Liverpool Hebrew Old Congregation; and in 1852 he was Chairman of the Liverpool [Hebrew] Educational Inst. (16)

That's about all I have in my file on Abraham Abraham. But, a trio of ads which ran about the time that Abraham and Dancer would have agreed to move into the Manchester market greatly intrigued me; yet I could see no way I could track down any results of the ads. Remember that Dancer, with his own optical business ACTIVE in Liverpool, helped his older competitor, Abraham, design and market a new cheap

but excellent microscope in Liverpool; that they opened the Manchester branch on 21 June 1841; and that Dancer found immediate, enthusiastic acceptance of his microscopes among the Manchester scientific elite. He sold John Dalton his first quality microscope before Dalton died in 1844.

January 1841: "PARTNERSHIP. - A Mercantile Concern, affording very large profits, with little risk, is capable of being EXTENDED by an accession of £500 or £1,000 with a GENTLEMAN who will take an active part.- For further particulars address A.A. [sic !], Box S-36, Postoffice, Liverpool." (17)

July 1840: "WANTED a Partner, in an Old-established Lucrative Concern, admirably situated for Trade, in one of the best Thoroughfares in Town. Having an excellent opportunity of greatly extending their Business by means of capital, the Advertiser is desirous to enter into Engagements with a Gentleman possessing from £400 to £500. This offers an excellent Investment, as the Profits may be considerably increased by a steady Person taking an active part in the Business. Unexceptionable references will be given and required. Applications to be made by letter addressed to T. Thompson, Y.O., Mercury office". (18)

August 1840: "To be DISPOSED OF an OPTICAL, MATHEMATICAL, CHEMICAL &c ESTABLISH-MENT, of long standing, and in very good business, in one of the best situations, and in a first-rate town. The capital required will be very moderate, as the stock is small and well assorted,. - Application to be made by letter (with real name and address) addressed A-7, at the Mercury office". (19)

(In Summer 1840, John Benjamin Dancer was 28 years old, owner and operator of his father's optical business [estab. c. 1819] since his father's death in 1835.)

... cordially, Fred

P.S. A.A. [Abraham] died prior to 1887 (20)

Reference Notes for Derek Wood (ATZO [Fred Luther's file code]: 31 Oct.1993)

1) Isobel Mordy ((genealogical researcher in Ruislip, Mddx) to FL [Fred Luther], 11 May 1986, quoting "The Jews of Manchester" n.d., n.p.,) in the Jewish Museum, London (or in Mocatta Library, University College)

2) T. Lloyd-Jones (of Liverpool) to FL , 5 Aug 1979, quoting Gore's City Directory of Liverpool (1818 edition). A.A.'s [Abraham's] Ad for "Photogenic Papers" appears in Gore's 1839 ed. (p. 141); and for "Daguerreotype Pictures" in Gore 1841 (p. 128)

3) Isobel Mordy to FL, 10 Sept and 10 Dec, 1981, and 22 Feb. 1986. Also Jean Haynes (genealogist of Harpenden, Herts.) to FL, 9 March 1981

4) John Benjamin Dancer, manuscript autobiography in Texas, p. 56-57 (c. 1887?)

5) Abraham's ad, announcing 21 June 1841 opening of "Abraham & Dancer, Opticians", at 13 Cross St., in Manchester Courier, 12 June 1841, p. 1 (b). Dancer told of his earliest customers in a letter to the editor, "Early Daguerreotypes [sic mistake for "Early Photography"]", of Manchester City News (issue date 22 May 1886). I [FL] have only a typed copy , made for me by L. L. Ardern on 24 January 1972. I was unable to locate a source for a photocopy of the article.

6) J. F. Sterling, "A forgotten Genius: John Benjamin Dancer, Microscopist. Optician and Instrument Maker", in *Watson & Son Ltd., Microscope Record*, No. 45 (Oct 1938), p. 14.

7) H. B. Marton, "J. B. Dancer", a 15-page booklet issued by the North Western Museum of Science & Industry, n.d. (1976?), p. 4.

8) Arthur T. Gill, "Biographical Notes on John Benjamin Dancer", a 4-page leaflet issued by the Royal Photographic Society Historical Group, Dec. 1974, p.1.

9) Isaac Slater's General, Classified and Street Directories of Manchester, and Salford ..., 1845, p. 411.

10) Michael Hallett, "Significant Years in the History of Photography in the Manchester Area", a Master's thesis at Manchester Polytechnic Institute, Sept 1976, p. 131

11) Isobel Mordy to FL, 1 Sept. and 10 Sept. 1981.

12) Liverpool and Manchester Photographic Journal, New Series, v.2 (1858), 82-b, 159-c, 170.

13) London: Great Exhibition .... "Reports of the Juries..." London 1852, Spicer Bros., p. 267.

14) List of 1000 donors to the Fund, in Liverpool Mercury, 18 January 1839, p. 18, c. 2-ab (The issues of 6 and 7 January told of fierce hurricanes.)

15) Isobel Mordy to FL, 11 May 1986, quoting Cecil Roth's "Provincial Jewry" (n.d., n.p.): list of epitaphs in Gloucester Jewish Burial Grounds.

16) Isobel Mordy to FL, 1 September 1981

17) Liverpool Mercury, 22 January 1841, p. 29, c2-b

18) Liverpool Mercury, 17 July 1840, p. 237, c.-ab

19) Liverpool Mercury, 28 August 1840, p. 3-a

20) Dancer, autobiog – "the late" AA [c. 1886-7, the late Abraham Abraham]

Additional note by R. D. Wood:

It will be seen in his endnote No. 1 above that Fred Luther (who died in 2000 aged 85) refers to a book on genealogy by Cecil Roth. The full title of this book is *The Rise of Provincial Jewry: The early history of the Jewish Communities in the English Countryside, 1740-1840*, published London: Jewish Monthly 1950, and there is a copy in the British Library, shelf-mark 4517 aa13.

More information is provided about Abraham Abraham's father Jacob on pp. 27-28, 69, and plate opposite p.72, as follows

Roth, page 27: [In Bath] "Jacob Abrahams (who is, I [Roth] imagine identical with J. Abrahams, 'Optician and Mathematical Instrument maker to H. R. H. the Duke of Gloucester and His Grace the Duke of Wellington, of Bartlett Street, Bath', who also maintained an establishment 'at his shop adjoining Mr. Thompson's Pump-Room, Cheltenham' (+)" [Here Roth places a footnote:] "(+) R. S. Clay and T. H. Court, History of the Microscope, London 1932: the data are from a Trade Card. His silhouette ('Mr. J. Abraham, Optician, Montpellier Sq, Cheltenham') is in the collection of Mr. A. Rubens."

Roth, page 28: re Synagogue in Bath, "built in Corn Street and dedicated in 1841, when ... Benjamin Samuel and Jacob Abrahams were wardens"

Roth, page 69: "Maurice, son of Jacob Abrahams, formerly of Bath, who died on his voyage home from Melbourne and was buried at sea, 1872 (Transcriptions of Gloucester Jewish Burial Grounds in the Gloucester Public Library)".

Roth, Plate opposite p.72:  
reproduces a silhouette  
captioned

"From Mr. A. Ruben's  
collection. J. Abraham(s)  
of Bath and Cheltenham,  
1829."



From Mr. A. Ruben's collection.  
J. ABRAHAM(S), of Bath and Cheltenham, 1829