

## No Daguerreotype for the young Queen Victoria: a case of English protocol or perfidie?

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On October 4, 1839, a letter <sup>1</sup> was dispatched from the British Embassy in Paris to the Foreign Office in London:

Paris, Oct 4, 1839

[To] Honble W. Fox Strangways

Sir,

Mr Daguerre has requested me to ascertain whether Her Majesty would receive a copy of his recent inventions. Would you have the goodness to inform me whether the peculiarity of the case would authorize any exception to the general rule of refusing presents.

I have the honor to be Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant

Henry Lytton Bulwer

H. L. Bulwer <sup>2</sup> (not to be confused with his younger brother, the novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton) had only been at the British Embassy in Paris as Secretary since the middle of July <sup>3</sup>. He took over officially as Chargé d'Affaires on 19 August 1839 <sup>4</sup> to serve until the Ambassador, Lord Granville, <sup>5</sup> returned from a visit to England at the end of October <sup>6</sup>.

Regarding Bulwer's letter, received in London 7<sup>th</sup> October, Lord Palmerston <sup>7</sup>, the Foreign Secretary, on 12 October made a note <sup>8</sup>:

[Concerning letter from] Mr Bulwer Oct 4/39. Mr Bulwer to endeavour to ascertain more precisely what it is which Mr Daguerre wishes to present to The Queen.

**P** [Palmerston] 12/10–39

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- 1 [Document 1] Letter dated 4 October 1839 from H. L. Bulwer, Chargé d'Affaires at the British Embassy in Paris, to W. Fox-Strangeways, Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, London. National Archives (Kew) : Foreign Office General Correspondence: France : FO 27/587. Also the Embassy's draft copy of this letter is filed in the Paris Embassy Archives Book, FO 146/214. The letter, received in London 7th October, is marked by Strangways "R Oct 7. Answered Oct 15/39. WFS"
  - 2 Muriel E. Chamberlain, 'Bulwer, (William) Henry Lytton Earle, Baron Dalling and Bulwer (1801–1872), diplomatist, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, 2004; Online edn, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3935](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3935).'
  - 3 See letters of 1839 Bulwer to Granville in Granville Papers at the National Archives (Kew): PRO30/29/[piece No.] 14/10, Letters 30-31 (dated 27 June and nd). Also Palmerston to Granville in Granville Papers, PRO30/29/[Piece No.] 14/6, Letter 48 (dated 26 June).
  - 4 Monday 19 August (the day of Francois Arago's lecture about Daguerre's process!) was the day Bulwer presented his official credentials to the King of France and when Granville was to leave Paris: see 'British Embassy in Paris, Dispatches Home'. (FO 147/18 and FO 146/213), dated August 16, but "Mr. Bulwer has delivered his credentials as MP [Minister Plenipotentiary] in the absence of Earl Granville" is not recorded until dispatch dated 23 August (FO 146/214, 1).
  - 5 Muriel E. Chamberlain, 'Gower, Granville George Leveson-, second Earl Granville (1815–1891)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, 2004; online edn, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16543](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16543)
  - 6 Granville returned to Paris 23 October, see FO 146/214, 326
  - 7 David Steele, 'Temple, Henry John, third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, 2004; Online edn, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27112](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27112)
  - 8 [Document 2] Note by Lord Palmerson (Principal Secretary of State) dated 12 October 1839 in Foreign Office General Correspondence, France: FO 27/587.

Accordingly the following letter dated 15 October was sent to France <sup>9</sup>

Foreign Office  
October 15, 1839  
[To] Henry Lytton Bulwer Esq

Sir, With reference to your letter to Mr Fox Strangeways of the 4th instant; stating that M. Daguerre had requested you to ascertain whether Her Majesty would receive a copy of his recent Inventions, I am directed by Viscount Palmerson to request that you will endeavour to ascertain more precisely what it is which M. Daguerre wishes to present to Her Majesty.

I have the honor to be, Sir,  
Your most obedient humble servant  
J Backhouse

On the 22 October Lord Palmerston made another note <sup>10</sup>

Remind Mr Bulwer that what he / said Mr D / offered was “a Copy of his Invention” & though we knew that Mr. Daguerre had invented a Method of fixing the Impressions made by the Solar Rays, yet the words “copy of his Invention” conveyed no intelligible meaning.

**P** [Palmerston] 22/10-39  
[in another hand] Done Oct.25/39

Two days later (when Granville was back in Paris) he drafted the following document: <sup>11</sup>

[In pencil ‘[concerning] Letter from Mr Bulwer 4 Octr’]  
State to Ld Granville that The Queen having made it a general Rule not to accept Presents from Individuals abroad, H Majesty ~~does not~~ thinks it /would not be / expedient to depart from that Rule in the present instance; and the more especially because a conflicting claim with respect to priority of invention has been put forward upon the matter in question by one of Her Majesty’s subjects, and The Queen by accepting M. Daguerre s [ no apostrophe’] apparatus & by sending him a present in return might appear as indirectly pronouncing judgement between him & Mr Talbot — Ld G should therefore convey /verbally/ to M. Daguerre [ ‘verbally’ obviously added later in a slightly paler ink] Her Majesty’s thanks for the offer, ~~but and~~ but should explain to him that the Rule which HM has found it necessary to lay down with regard to the acceptance of Presents prevents Her from availing Herself of that offer.

**P** [Palmerston] 24/10-39

The actual reply sent by J. Backhouse to Paris was dated the next day of 25 October: <sup>12</sup>

Foreign Office  
October 25, 1839

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<sup>9</sup> [Document 3] Letter dated 15 October 1839 from John Backhouse, Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in London, to H.L. Bulwer, Chargé d’Affaires at the British Embassy in Paris. Public Record Office, London: Archives of the British Embassy in Paris (FO 146): FO 146/210. Also the Foreign Office draft copy of this letter is filed in Foreign Office General Correspondence: FO 27/577.

<sup>10</sup> [Document 4] Note by Lord Palmerson dated 22 October 1839 in Foreign Office General Correspondence, France: FO 27/587.

<sup>11</sup> [Document 5] Draft dated 24 October 1839 by Lord Palmerston of reply to be made to the British Embassy in Paris: Foreign Office General Correspondence, France: FO 27/587.

## No Daguerreotype for Queen Victoria

[To] His Excellency  
The Earl Granville GCB

My Lord

With reference to the letter from Mr. Bulwer to Mr. Fox Strangeways of the 4th inst; stating that monsieur Daguerre had desired Mr Bulwer to ascertain whether Her Majesty would receive a copy of his recent Inventions; and to the letter which by Ld Palmerston's order, I wrote to Mr Bulwer on the 15th instant; asking to be informed more precisely what it was which Monsr. Daguerre wished to present to the Queen; I am now directed by Viscount Palmerston to state to your Excellency that The Queen having made it a general rule not to accept Presents from Individuals abroad, Her Majesty thinks it would not be expedient to depart from that Rule in the present instance; and the more especially because a conflicting claim with respect to priority of Invention has been put forward upon the matter in question by one of Her Majesty's subjects, and The Queen, by accepting M. Daguerre's apparatus, and by sending him a Present in return, might appear as indirectly pronouncing judgement between him and Mr. Talbot. Viscount Palmerston therefore desires that Your Excellency should convey verbally to Monsr. Daguerre Her Majesty's Thanks for the offer; but should explain to him at the same time, that the Rule which Her Majesty has found it necessary to lay down with regard to the acceptance of Presents, prevents Her Majesty from availing Herself of that offer.

I have the honor to be, My Lord,  
Your Excellency's Most obedient humble servant  
J Backhouse

### Foreign Office diplomacy

The Foreign Office<sup>13</sup> in 1839 was in Downing Street, off Whitehall, London, now widely familiar due to No. 10 being the office and residence of the British Prime Minister. Probably better to call it the Old Foreign Office, for it was demolished in 1861. Yet "it" is also a misnomer, for the old FO consisted of four connected houses each with a separate entrance:

dingy and shabby to a degree, made up of dark offices and labyrinthine passages four houses, at least, tumbled into one, with floors at uneven levels and wearying corkscrew stairs that men cursed as they climbed a thorough picture of disorder, penury, and meanness. Yet which of the two was the great Foreign Office ...

Writing in 1872-73 the diplomat author of that remark was from his own experience making a contrast between the buildings ramshackle old FO and the new monumental replacement nearby and the work done inside them. His opinion of a successful office, certainly coloured by nostalgic imperialist fervour, was for the old FO under "presiding genius" Palmerston. <sup>14</sup>

12 [Document 6 ] Letter dated 25 October 1839 from John Backhouse, Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, London, to Lord Granville, British Ambassador at Paris. Public Record Office, London: Archives of the British Embassy in Paris (FO 146): FO 146/210. As well as the letter actually sent, the Foreign Office draft copy is filed in Foreign Office General Correspondence: FO 27/577.

13 For informative writings on the FO at this period, see Ray Jones, *The Nineteenth Century Foreign office: an administrative history*, London School of Economics Monograph, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971, pp. 11-21 and end notes pp.189-91 ; 'Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic Service', *United Kingdom Parliamentary Papers*, 1861, Vol. 6 (*Reports*, Vol. 2), Cmmd 459. Includes Edward Hammond's evidence given over four days in April 1861 see pp. 1-76 in which he give a detail account of the office routine of dealing with dispatches and the role of the Under-Secretaries ; E. Jones-Parry, 'Under-Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs 1782-1855', *English Historical Review*, Vol. XLIX (1934), pp. 308-320 .

14 Sir Horace Rumbold, *Recollections of a Diplomatist*, Vol. 1 (Downing Street, New and Old), London: Edward Arnold 1902 (2 Vols), pp. 109-110, 112.

Palmerston indeed is widely considered a workaholic, he did not delegate. He made the political decisions and policy. He had two permanent Under-Secretaries of State. They were administrative positions, definitely of considerable status and influence, but they were not decision makers – especially not under the iron command of Palmerston. The reason for two Under-Secretaries was because the work of the FO had previously been divided into two divisions, (north and south countries), but by recent change, in 1839 the two Under-Secretaries (John Backhouse<sup>15</sup> and Strangways) shared the work of dealing with despatches from everywhere. Palmerston remarked to Granville in letter dated 22 November 1839 <sup>16</sup> that “Backhouse & Strangways are very much like the two figures in the Weather House & rusticate & labour alternatively, so that if the office were left vacant for a short time it would only be as if one of the two were in the country recuperating from his fatigues”.

Palmerston was not a favourite of the young Victoria, although he did express some admiration for her on one occasion to Lord Granville<sup>17</sup> Lord Granville fitted in more, and visited her while back in England. Palmerston indeed was at Windsor Castle most days. Comments are made about Palmerston by the Queen in her journal during October 1839 — there are a couple, for example, where she notes that he was looking ill — but no record has been found of him consulting her about accepting Daguerre’s gift, nothing in Victoria’s diary. <sup>18</sup> H. L. Bulwer benefited in his career by being held in high regard by Palmerston, and Bulwer returned that respect by later writing a two volume *Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*.<sup>19</sup> That biography of Palmerston’s early career up to 1841, might have been a perfect source of information on this episode of Daguerre’s proposed gift to Queen Victoria, especially as it is often as much about Bulwer himself as Palmerston, but yet again nothing was recorded.

Palmerston’s decision of 22 October not to depart from a general rule that the Queen not accept “presents from Individuals abroad” would be a natural one for him, but the second consideration (which one indeed was the major factor?) on “a conflicting claim with respect to priority of invention” [a phrase redolent with the aura of W. H. F. Talbot] to avoid the appearance of “indirectly pronouncing judgement between him [Daguerre] & Mr Talbot”, is away from Palmerston’s usual range of interests. Although, it might be thought, perhaps he would himself have already investigated news reports about Daguerre, spurred perhaps by his notorious anti-French attitudes (or at least notorious within France).

Palmerston’s second phrase regarding Talbot and priority of invention does have rather the characteristics of being one produced for him by what would now be

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15 R. A. Jones, 'Backhouse, John (1784–1845)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, 2004; online edn, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50517](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50517)

16 Granville Papers: National Archives, Kew, PRO30/29/ [Piece No.]14/6, letter 67.

17 Granville Papers: PRO 30/29/14/6, letter 38 (dated 10 May 1839)

18 Queen Victoria’s daily journal 7 August 1839–31 October 1839 (Lord Esher’s typescript at Royal Archives): now online at [www.queenvictoriasjournals.org](http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org)

19 Henry Lytton Bulwer, *The life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, London: Richard Bentley 1870, Vol. 2, book [chapter] XIII (pp. 289-388) deals with the period May 1839-1841 with the last section (pp. 384-388) being thoughts on Palmerston’s character, especially on attitudes towards France.

called a Special Advisor. Here the first document quoted above is amazingly relevant. When Henry Lytton Bulwer in Paris penned his letter of 4 October to the Foreign Office, to an Under-Secretary, in particular William Fox Strangways<sup>20</sup>, could he have been aware that Strangways was the beloved uncle of W. Henry Fox Talbot?

Bulwer himself had asked the crucial question in his letter of 4<sup>th</sup> October “whether the peculiarity of the case would authorize any exception to the general rule of refusing presents.”, on which Palmerston (or even the Queen?) agreed was the first reason to say not authorized. As to the second objection sent back by Palmerston, on ‘Priority of Invention’ and the British Talbot, then is it conceivable that Strangways (with his close tie to Talbot) would not be significantly involved?!

No surviving correspondence between Strangways and Talbot, or other records other than that of the Foreign Office records at the National Archives reported here, have been found relating to this matter of a proposed gift to Queen Victoria from Daguerre.

It is worth noting that some Royalty, and heads of state, of other countries in Europe were pleased to accept Daguerreotype images from Daguerre, and other Ambassadors in Paris were eager to expedite this.

What might have taken place in Paris after the British Embassy received Palmerston’s instructions to “convey verbally” to Daguerre the reasons that “prevents Her Majesty from availing Herself ” of his offer: a search of present archives of documents and correspondence of the Foreign office at the National Archives, of Lord Palmerston<sup>21</sup>, of Lord Granville <sup>22</sup>, and Henry Lytton Bulwer <sup>23</sup>, has found nothing. But time to do this has been limited, and some of the archived papers such as of Palmerston and Granville are extensive.

When a report to a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Diplomatic Service was made in 1861 by E. Hammond, then permanent Under-Secretary who had been at the FO since 1854, the Embassy in Paris was discussed. Not surprisingly nothing relevant to our present concern. But it could be of some passing interest that it seems the staff at the Embassy in Paris did not “go so much in Society”, “even though they generally spoke excellent French and was probably due to the late hours followed at that Embassy 12-7pm so conflicting with common dinner times in Paris of 7pm”.<sup>24</sup>

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20 ‘William Thomas Horner Fox-Strangways, 4th Earl of Ilchester (1795-1865)’, [edit. G. E. Cokayne], *The complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom*, vol. 4, Peerages G-K (1892), p. 313. There is no definitive form for his surname. Simply Strangways or alternatively (more meaningful) Fox-Strangways. He was younger half-brother of W. H. Fox Talbot’s mother.

21 The extensive ‘Palmerston (Broadlands) Papers’ MS52 at the Hartley Library of the University of Southampton, has not been fully searched, but in reply to an enquiry by letter in 1993 the then Deputy Archivist Ms Karen Robson kindly searched for any relevant correspondence between Queen Victoria and Palmerston in October 1839 finding only one dated 7 Oct 1839 but discussing only general matters. (Letter Karen Robson to R. D. Wood., 30 April 1993).

22 Granville papers at National Archives: PRO30

23 ‘The Diplomatic Papers of Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer’ at the Norfolk Record Office. None of the letters to him in 1839 amongst those preserved there in BUL/19/1-108 and BUL/20/1-24 concern Daguerre. The catalogue of the collection is now online at <http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk/DServe/DServe.exe>

24 Edward Hammond, in ‘Report from the Select Committee on Diplomatic Service’, 1861 [*op.cit.* see earlier footnote 13], pp. 74-76. In that 1861 Report, France is considered further on pp. 185-195, 218-234, 359-61.