

Some Photographers of the Past

These days most people enjoy taking photographs and with modern digital cameras this could not be easier. Photography has made considerable advances since the early nineteenth century when it began. The first men to make permanent photographs were two French men and the first English photographer was a physicist, William Henry Fox Talbot. From 1833 Fox Talbot lived at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, now run by the National Trust, where there is a fascinating museum of his photographic work and equipment.

The recent competition held for the 2012 Nayland Calendar produced some wonderful photographs of the village and there is no shortage these days of images of Nayland and Wiston. Compare this with the Victorian era when hardly anyone had a camera.

We all enjoy looking back at old photographs and here in Nayland and Wiston we have been very fortunate to have had several residents with an interest in photography since its early beginnings.

Most of the surviving photographs dating from the early years of the twentieth century were taken by Charles Gowing who was a baker and confectioner in Birch Street. He was born in 1846 and in his handwritten memories of Nayland during his lifetime (now in the Bury Record Office) he explains that after 35 years as a baker he passed on the bakery business to Mr Albert Butler in 1901. He then moved to Cambridge Cottage in Stoke Road to devote more time to photography, "shortly after the passing of my cousin, Mrs Frank Gowing, who at Wiston and Bulmer Farm had carried on photographic work for some years." This he continued to do for about 14 years.

Mrs Frank Gowing was married to Charles Gowing's cousin who with his family lived in a cottage at Wiston Mill in the 1880s. They presumably later moved to Bulmer Farm. Whilst most of Charles Gowing's photographs were of Nayland, where he lived, his cousin produced some wonderful photographs of Wiston and the river. Many family portraits were taken by Charles Gowing, and Bill Norfolk, who died in 2001 aged 90 and lived round the corner from the Gowing family, in Mill Street, told me that he knew Charles Gowing very well. Bill had a photograph of himself dressed as a page boy at an aunt's wedding, aged 5, taken by Charles Gowing.

In his memoirs, Charles Gowing said that he believed the first photographer in Nayland was Thomas Barber who is listed in the 1858 Kelly's Directory as a cabinet maker in the High Street. Gowing said that "He of course used the wet plates". However, he said he had strong reasons for believing that the Reverend CW Green, Nayland's vicar from 1846 until 1863, was the first 'amateur' photographer who did some work previous to Mr Barber.

Thomas Barber was followed by Henry Faiers whose family had lived in Nayland since the 1780s. In 1844 Robert and Henry Faiers were coopers and basketmakers in Nayland and had a shop and workshop in Bear Street. Henry's son was also a cooper but later had an ironmongery and furniture shop in the High Street in the 1880s. A descendant of the Faiers family believes that the younger Henry was the photographer and in his book about the family he has included several photographs of his family and of Nayland taken by Henry Faiers. Henry's brother, Thomas, carried on as a cooper and basketmaker in Bear Street until he gave it up to open a grocer's shop and when he and his wife died, their children Olive and Alec continued to run the shop until Alec died in 1971, followed by Olive in 1972. A lot of residents still remember the shop before it closed.



An Archer photograph of Faiers Shop in Bear Street

Charles Gowing in his memoirs tells us that Charles Abbott followed Henry Faiers. According to the 1901 census Charles Abbott was a Watchmaker and Photographer, aged 38, living at Churchgate House, next to the High Street butchers. Little is known about Charles Abbott but at that time Charles Gowing was about to give up his bakery business to take up photography so he and Charles Abbott may have been in competition.

Charles Gowing had given up photography by 1920 and his place was taken by Tom Archer, who always signed his photographs TWC Archer. Tom Archer lived in Fen Street next to the old factory (now the flats) and took many photographs of Nayland during the 1920s and 30s. His work was very professional and his photographs of families and events were always well presented. Before he died, in 1936, Sidney Butler (son of Albert Butler who had taken over Gowing's bakery in 1901) bought up all Archer's photographic equipment and took over the work that Tom used to do for the local newspapers, village weddings and other events.

A lot of Gowing and Archer photographs were produced as postcards and were widely available to residents. Many of these postcards were used for their proper purpose of communicating and we are lucky that so many have survived. They show the many changes which have taken place in the village, the horse-drawn transport, the many shops and businesses which are no more, the changing street scenes and the smiling faces of people long gone. Despite the advances of modern photography we treasure these old images of Nayland's history which have a unique and evocative quality all their own.

Wendy Sparrow, Parish Recorder

[Sources: *The Descent and Issue of John Green Faiers* by John Parsloe; *Charles Gowing's Memoirs*; *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*]