

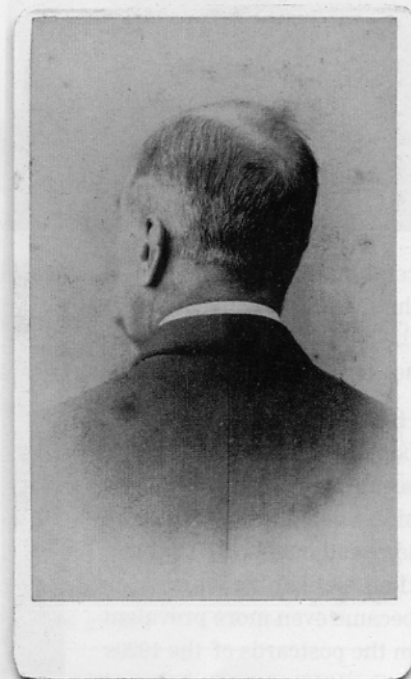
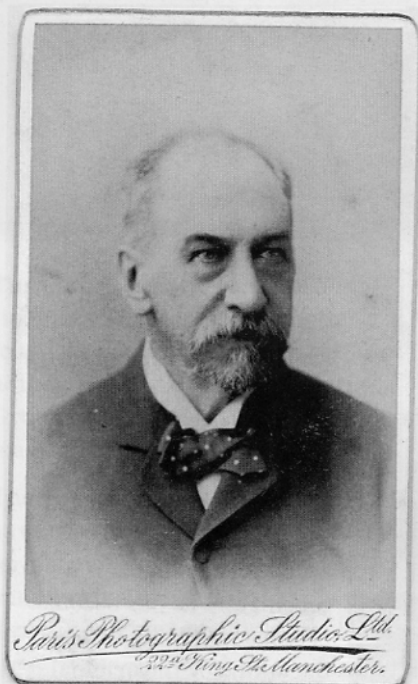
## Cartomania: Photographic humour

# Even Queen Victoria must have been amused

By Ron Cosens

*I'm sure there are some people we would all like to see the back of ! So here is the way to do it!*

*Humour, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder, or something like that. And this article, by definition, must be a personal view of what is, and what is not, funny.*



VICTORIAN carte de visite humour seems to stem from three main sources:-

- there are some cartes de visite which, quite clearly, were mass produced and published specifically to make people smile;
- some others merely reflect the sense of humour of the photographer or his subjects;
- others are not really 'funny' at all but do make me, personally, chuckle during the hours and hours of sorting and databasing that I inflict upon myself purely for the sake of posterity.

So let's look at a few examples from each of the three categories and see if at least some of them could have brought a smile to the regal frown.



### Fun from the publisher

Ashford, Brothers & Co., photographic publishers of 76 Newgate Street, London EC were next door to the very prolific studios of the London School of Photography and were perhaps the biggest and most popular photographic publisher of them all. They produced individual cartes de visite in very large quantities and sold them through the trade

as postcards are sold today. They also produced books, often compendiums of famous people which were illustrated by, or from, photographs.

However, many other smaller firms also published satirical, moralistic and political artwork which was popular for photographic reproduction.

A few examples are shown on the next page.

The Victorians also liked 'upside down pictures' - so turn your magazine upside down to see the hidden picture on the left.

### Fun from the photographic studio

We think we are clever today but very little is new. The mystery of double exposures was well known as well as

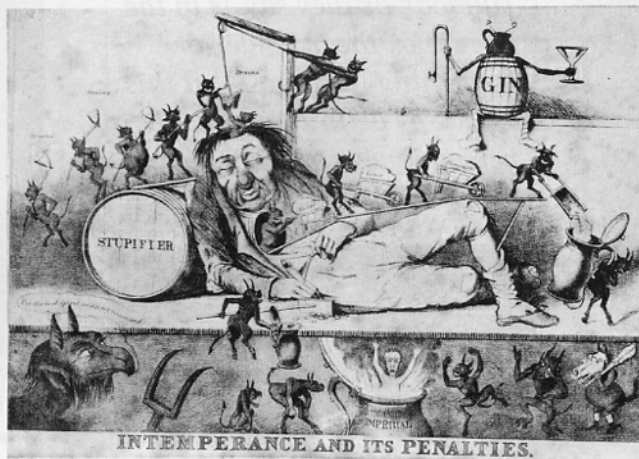


Left, above, right and below: Fun from the publisher

combination printing and 'half' exposures to conjure up the ghostly spirits of the day, as seen below.

Humorous poses were also popular and for some reason seemed to crop up at the sea-side when people were on holiday and having a relaxing time - something which became even more prevalent in the postcards of the 1920s to the 1940s, as seen below right.

We even have an example of one photographer who took so long to take



the picture that his poor sitter has wasted away and another where his

subjects nearly came to blows, seen on the next page.

And why oh why is one poor gentleman - on the opposite page - obscured (almost) in entirety - just his shoes are showing.

This is perhaps 'dark' humour. Maybe this is a reprint and he has become persona non grata between the taking of the original photograph and the copy which was made at a later

date - there is definitely an interesting story here!



Ghostly spirits of the day



Above and right: Humorous poses

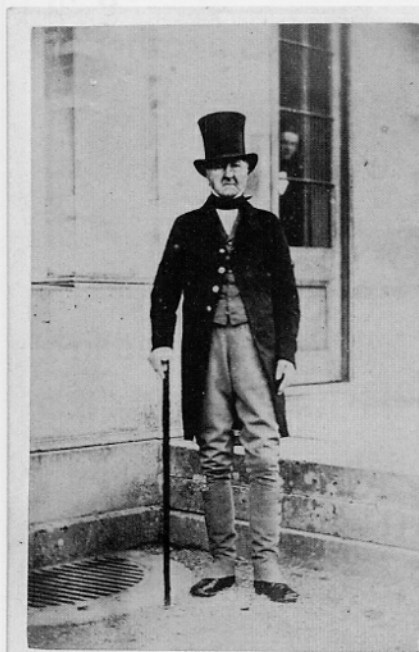






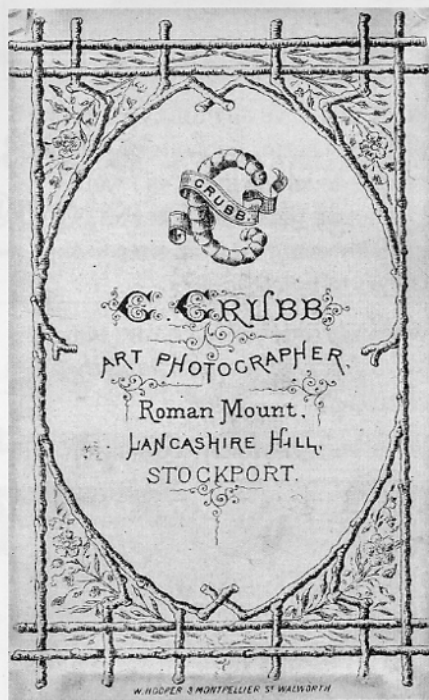
Turn over the carte de visite and (intentional) humour is sometimes found on the back. Take a close look at the carte on the right to see Mr. Grubb's idea of a joke - a smiling maggot!

There is also unintentional humour as our rather fine gentleman poses for his picture whilst someone (a servant maybe) peers out from the window to spoil his lordship's gravitas.



## Fun for one's own amusement

There are lots of cartes de visite which do not have funny images but



the wording on the back is worth a second glance. For instance there was...

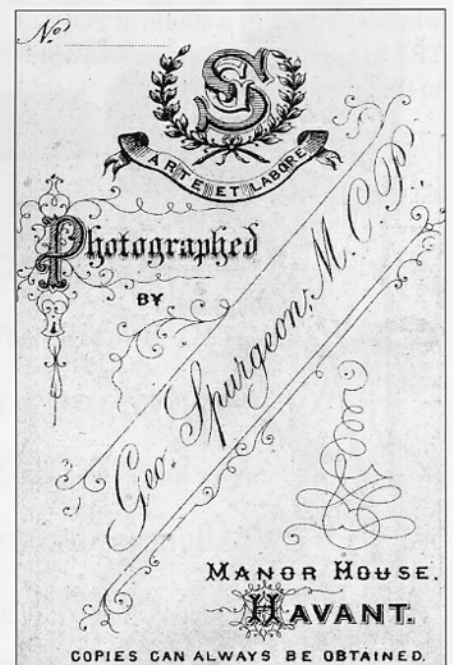
- Mr Foote and Mr Bird and Mr Quick from Bath
- Mr B Rhodes - who obviously avoided motorways
- Mr Shores of Bridlington by the Sea
- Chambers & Sellars - where was the studio?
- Mr Mickethwaite from Heckmondwike and Biggleswade who



*More humorous poses in the studio*

probably did not talk about it a lot

- Moon and Son - open night and day
- A B Leaver from Blackpool - which religion we do not know
- Mr B Leach from Macclesfield
- Stirling Coyne from Leicester - imperial type I presume
- R Cade from Ipswich (no other address given)



- Takewhel & Pretti from London - should make a good picture!
- M. Silli from Nice

■ George Spurgeon noted that he was an M.C.P. - who wants to advertise that sort of sexist attitude?

And some famous people took photographs before they were even born (not a lot of people know that). There was

Charles Chaplin from Colwyn Bay, John Major from London, Tom Jones of Hereford, Henry Cooper from Northampton, Richard Burton from Dublin, Beethoven from London, Mozart from London, Slade from London, Jessops from Grays, and Frank Spencer from Reading. There was even a P. C. Dixon from London - presumably from Dock Green?

A few photographers even seemed to be confused as to who they were and where they lived, such as Mr. Pickering from Leicester, Mr York from London, Mr. Doncaster from Manchester, Mr. Cork from Bradford, Mr. Bermingham from Liverpool, Mr. Annan from Glasgow, Mr. Aston from Birmingham, Mr. Bedford from Woking, Mr. Beverley from Blackpool, Mr. Blackburn and Mr. Bolton from all over the country, and many, many more.....

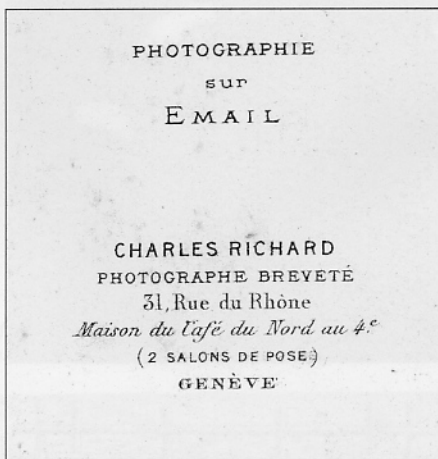
And then there was Mr. H W Bird who started off in a studio at POULTRY in London and later moved out to the suburbs at PECKHAM.



## Finally...

Just a couple of other oddities...

Charles Richard from Geneva appears to have invented email back in the 1870s, whilst a lovely lady from Bedale has obviously fallen out with her hubby - in what was the unkindest cut of all.



So, if you have any funny (or funny peculiar) cartes de visite or cabinet cards - do let me know as I would love to see them and, after all, we all need cheering up from time to time. Do get in touch.

[www.cartedevsite.co.uk](http://www.cartedevsite.co.uk) - info on Victorian photographers and their studios

[www.victorianimagecollection.com](http://www.victorianimagecollection.com) - the Victorian picture library

