

# COLONIAL LEGACY

Julienne Pascoe discusses a set of seven photographic albums from the personal collection of Samuel Bourne, which provides significant insight into 19th century colonial photography in India, while starting on page 38, Xavier Guégan talks about his journey in the footsteps of Bourne, and the resultant exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum, Durham



Divided between the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Canada, and The Royal Photographic Society Collection at the National Media Museum, a set of seven photographic albums from the personal collection of Samuel Bourne (1834–1912), a commercial photographer working in India during the 1860s, provides significant insight into 19th century colonial photography in India.

Bourne's work was part of the expansion of the British Empire, and its employment of photography to extend what is now defined as the 'Colonial Gaze'. In providing views for a British audience, Bourne not only capitalised on a colonial preoccupation with India, but also created an extensive record of the Indian landscape during a critical decade of its colonial period.

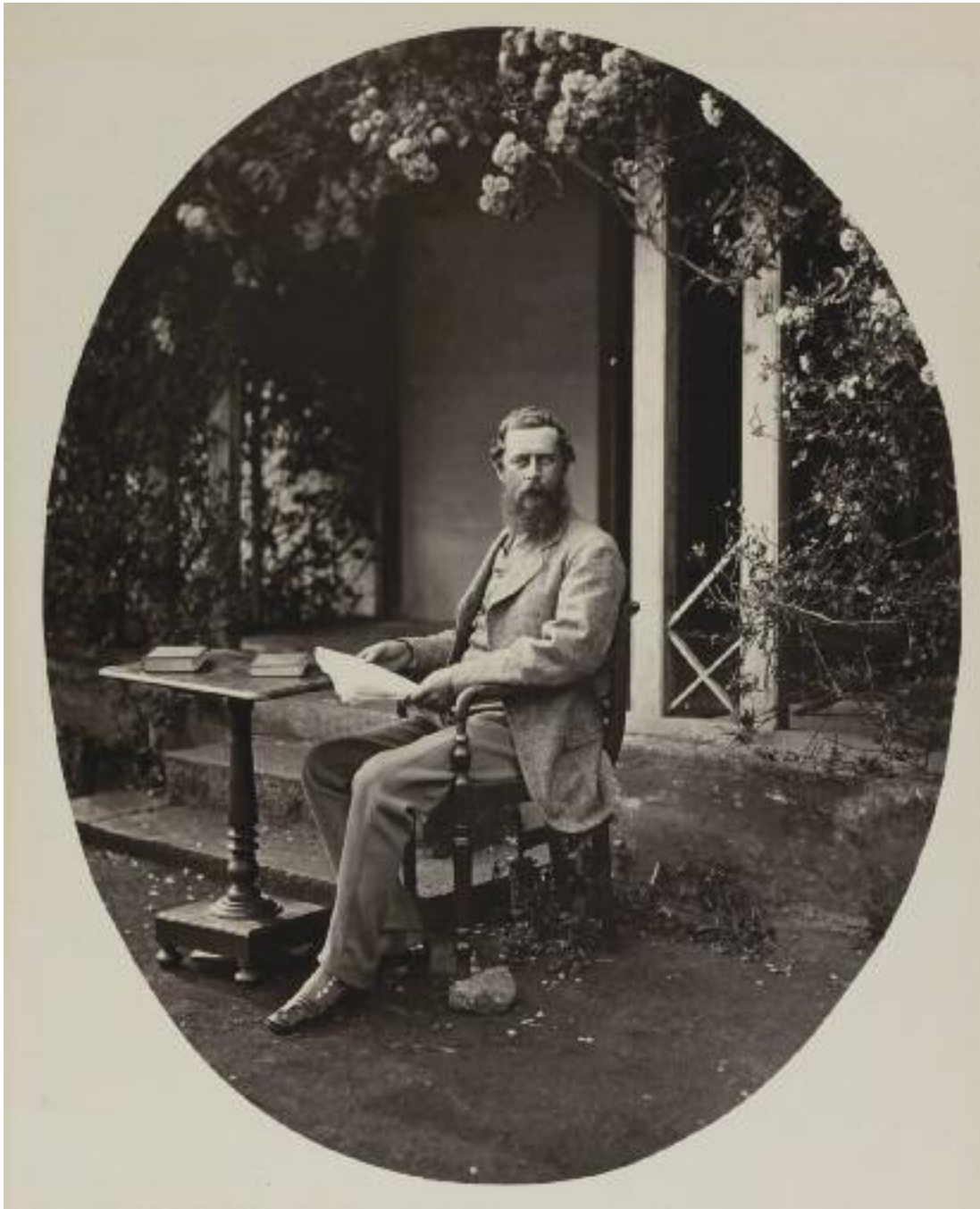
Born in 1834 and raised in Staffordshire, England, Bourne took up photography in 1851 after seeing a daguerreotype of his uncle, Richard Beard, at the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace. Bourne began to take architectural and landscape views of the English countryside, using the fothergill process, a dry-plate technique developed by Thomas Fothergill in 1858. It

was during excursions to such locations as the Lake District, that Bourne developed a sense of pictorial composition that would become the foundation for his work in India. Twelve years after his initial exposure to photography, Bourne gave up his career as a banker in Nottingham in order to establish a photographic practice in India.

Bourne's arrival in India was both timely and purposeful. The Indian Mutiny of 1857-58, which ended in the British government's assumption of colonial rule from the East India Company, resulted in an increased appetite for views of an exotic India, particularly those that referred to the recent events and that validated Britain's domination over its Indian subjects.

Upon his arrival in January 1863, Bourne quickly set up a commercial enterprise that would emerge as a leading provider of views of the Indian subcontinent to an English clientele. Bourne established a photographic studio in Simla, an important Anglo-Indian British hill station. Positioned at an elevation of 7000ft in the Himalayas, Simla was a popular retreat for the colonial administration during the hot summer months, and was one of the most politically and socially significant hill stations.

**Above: Hill Station Simla, location of Bourne & Shepherd studio. 1868. Samuel Bourne (1834-1912). Albumen print 24x29.5 cm. In the album Hill Stations of India.**



While establishing his commercial practice, Bourne set up a partnership with the firm of Charles Shepherd and Howard. The partnership operated efficiently, with Shepherd concentrating on studio portraits and ethnographic studies, Bourne contributing landscapes and architecture, and Howard conducting the printing and business affairs. They also developed strategic methods of marketing their inventory of Indian views, using a published catalogue from which clients could order either single images or a series of related views. It was through this partnership that Bourne, within six months of his arrival in India, began his travels through Northern India.

In July 1863, Bourne embarked on the first of three excursions into the wild and uncharted domain of the Himalayas. The later ones were made in 1864 and 1866. Throughout these travels, he used a cumbersome large format wet collodion, glass plate camera, producing an extensive record of these high-altitude landscapes, including a series of views exposed at an

unprecedented 18,600ft. He vividly described his many trials and tribulations in a series of articles he wrote for the *British Journal of Photography*.

One of the main problems Bourne found working with the wet collodion process was rendering distant mountain scenery, and he developed sophisticated methods of representing space which employed different sized plates and inter-related views of a site, showing the same location from different vantage points.

Although Bourne is best known for his Himalayan excursions, he also created a significant record of many architectural monuments and hill stations throughout India. In catering to a British clientele, Bourne sought out locations that held cultural and historical significance. Bourne was aware that the Anglo-European public would buy images that were aesthetically appealing in their familiar, picturesque style, while also portraying popular landmarks of very recent colonial history.

**Above: Portrait of Samuel Bourne. Attributed to Charles Shepherd (active in India, 1850s-70s) c 1865. Albumen print 29.5x24 cm. In the album Photographs.**

Bourne applied English notions of pictorial organisation and subject matter to representing the Indian landscape. The goal of the picturesque was to create a scenic composition, with key features that emphasised an overall harmony rather than specific detail. Elements such as water, rocks, rustic foliage, and the inclusion of one or two people were ideal for forming the picturesque scene. This specific composition can be seen most clearly in Bourne's work, *Up the Jhelum, from below the Island*.

Bourne's commercial practice in the 1860s sheds light on British-Indian relationships in the late 19th century. The discovery of a complete set of albums that form a coherent collection assembled by Bourne provides a vital resource with which to understand his commercial and personal intentions as a colonial photographer.

How the albums became divided is still a mystery. The first appearance of the albums was in 1972, when a descendent of the Bourne family, Major R M Bourne, of Langham Grange, Oakham, Rutland, donated four of the seven albums to The Society. Ann Turner, who has had direct correspondence with the family, stated in her 1983 *Creative Camera* article, *Samuel Bourne's English Photographs*, that Major Bourne was the grandson of Samuel Bourne, and this suggests that the albums had remained in the family until then.

The remaining three albums entered the marketplace on May 8 1992 at Sotheby's London auction, Photographic Images and Related Material. Ofkanwardip Gujral, a private collector, acquired the three albums, together with Samuel Bourne's 1867 Agra exhibition presentation cup. On September 27, 2001, Gujral sold his collection of Indian photographs, including the Bourne set, at the Christie's auction, Fine 19th Century Indian Photographs From The Collection Ofkanwardip Gujral. The Society's records in Bradford confirm its interest in acquiring the remaining set, but it is highly likely that it didn't have adequate funding for the purchase. In the end, it was the Art Gallery of Ontario that acquired the albums through a private donation in 2007.

The albums are professionally and uniformly bound, titled, and presented. The elaborate bindings unite the collection, and consist of green morocco leather with gilt details and printed titles. Each album is labelled in gilt on the front cover, with a descriptive title that relates the album to Bourne's career.

Each album contains albumen photographs of varying sizes, accompanied with handwritten ink captions that relate to the given title by the studio. Although the albumen printing process can produce variable results, all of these prints exhibit consistent tonalities and an overall professional appearance, suggesting that the same printers printed them at one time.

The prints in all seven albums correspond to the plate sizes utilised by all three photographers. Both Bourne and Shepherd worked with wet collodion, glass plate negatives and the albumen process, resulting in highly detailed prints. Although Bourne preferred using the studio's standard glass plate negative size of 25x30cm, he also worked in a variety of other sizes, including 19x32cm for panoramic views.

The arrangement of these albums reflects Bourne's understanding of his work, in that he has organised his career chronologically and geographically. Each album assembles prints that relate to either a specific period or subject of Bourne's travels in India, providing complete



coverage of his career. His three main treks are included in the three albums titled, *The Sutlej – Indian Groups etc*, *Views in Cashmere*, and *The Himalayas*. The other four albums: *Indian Architecture and Scenery Vol I*, *Indian Architecture and Scenery Vol II*, *Hill Stations of India*, and *Photographs*, relate to Bourne's work either between or after the treks, in which he focused on specific areas that he visited.

The albums do not include every single negative Bourne produced (over 2000), but a personalised selection of 705 albumen prints. Within each album, the photographs are grouped by site, and there are many series that reveal Bourne's innovative use of multiple perspectives to convey a sense of space.

The albums contain many significant rare and unpublished prints, that provide further insight into the commercial operations of the studio and its central role in colonial society. Having established a studio in Simla, the firm of Bourne & Shepherd became socially and politically well connected.

Unpublished prints, such as a group portrait of the Supreme Indian Council, reveal the studio's

**Above: From the Album Photographs. H R H the Prince of Wales' visit to India, 1876. The first tiger killed by the Prince at Jeppore. Albumen prints.**



*Lt. G. Prince of Wales, photographed in camp at Delhi - January 1877*



*At the camp in India*



*The first tiger killed by the Prince at Jhansi in India*

emerging status and connection to the British political life in India, while an image of Bourne seated with the Rajah of Chumba on his first excursion provides insight into his personal experiences travelling in the Himalayas.

Further evidence of the studio's connection to political life can be seen in the album *Photographs*, part of the RPS Collection, which includes many large format portraits of Indian and British dignitaries. This album also contains important portraits of the photographers involved with the operation: Samuel Bourne and Charles Shepherd; and Colin Murray, who took over Bourne's position after he left in 1870. Included in the album are a series of photographs that follow the Prince of Wales on his trip to India in 1876. Showing the intimate access the photographers had throughout the trip, the album includes images of the Prince and his entourage, as well as the different places and people visited throughout their travels.

My involvement with this collection began as a thesis project for the completion of my Masters studies. The project has focused on examining the

arrangement, contents and significance of these albums, as well as establishing a relationship between the two sets. In the process, all seven albums have been catalogued, and each institution supplied with the final thesis and catalogue.

During my research, I located a republished version of the original Bourne & Shepherd Catalogue, containing Bourne's negative numbers. Early on in the project, it became clear that the numbering of Bourne's negatives was chronological, and that they could then be dated through analysis of the *BJP* articles. This allowed me to chart Bourne's travels in India, and create an outline that provides dates and locations for Bourne's negative numbers.

Implicit in Bourne's work is an imperial way of seeing that shaped his aesthetic and photographic practice. These albums provide an extensive account of Bourne's career in India through his own interpretation. They are a valuable resource for expanding our knowledge of this fascinating period of colonial photography including imperial attitudes and relationships in 19th century India. **Julienne Pascoe**

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