

## Steeple Aston through the Lens

What separates an ambrotype of Ann Wadham and a digital photograph of Simon, our splendid postman? The answer is (a) 149 years of technological change and (b) just a few feet in SAVA's exhibition, "Steeple Aston through the Lens" held recently at the Village Hall. Collected together were examples of local photography from virtually every period, charting the technological advances, changing styles and approaches to the medium that have taken place over that time.

The portrait of Mrs. Wadham, taken on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1852, was printed onto the reverse of a piece of glass known as an ambrotype and mounted in wood by "Gilbert Price, Cabinet Maker, Steeple Aston", inscribed on the reverse. The digital portrait of Simon was taken a few days before the exhibition when he broke off from his round to pose at the side of his van. His picture featured alongside those of long gone postal workers outside the old post office on South Side around the time of World War 1 in a thematic section of images of "People at Work."

Other themes included Teams, Events and Fairs, Portraits and Transport and House and Garden. The many visitors to the exhibition revelled in putting names to old faces of men standing outside the White Lion in 1945, identifying vintage cars and lorries, noting the changes to houses and cottages over the decades and spotting the fashions of the twenties and thirties.

When it came to individual and group portraits, the subjects of the photographs seem to visibly relax with each passing decade, as being photographed became less of an ordeal and a more pleasurable means of projecting a self-image. Smiling in a photograph was not encouraged much in the Victorian and Edwardian eras not because, as many think, it was hard to hold a smile for the long exposure time required, but because it would mark you out as a frivolous person who was not to be taken seriously. Much of the change was due to the introduction of the hand held Kodak camera around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when ordinary people were able to take "snapshots" for themselves without the need for professional studio photographers. A section of the exhibition illustrated these social and technological changes.

Thanks are due to all the people who allowed their family photographs to be copied for the SAVA vaults and allowed their use for the exhibition. The Preston/Wadham collection was well represented as were photos of the Franks family. Of particular note was the extensive Bradshaw contribution. The Bradshaws inhabited the Grange for part of the last century and took many early pictures not only of their family but of village life, especially fetes and flower shows. Their descendants have been generous in allowing access to a wonderful source of village history that might otherwise have been lost. SAVA is always keen to acquire copies of local photographs to keep in the archive.

Sales of SAVA publications were brisk and it is expected that there will be a good demand for the book which, as usual, will follow the exhibition, and this will be on sale shortly.