

Sarah Angelina Acland 1849–1930

Good afternoon! My name is Michael Pritchard, and I am Director-General of The Royal Photographic Society and a photo-historian. I have been asked to say a few words about Sarah Acland. I will not keep you here too long – no more than ten minutes.

I thought I would pick up on three aspects of Sarah Angelina Acland's photographic career:

Her connections with Oxford, her relationship with photography, and, finally, her link to the Royal Photographic Society. Inevitably, there's an element of overlap: no one's life is so easily compartmentalised.

Sarah Angelina Acland was born in 1849 in Oxford and she lived in the city until her death in 1930. Her family was privileged, with her father holding a number of university posts. Angie (as she was called) lived on Broad Street for the first 52 years of her life until her father died and she then moved to Park Town.

Angie's link to, and involvement with, photography started early. Her father knew a certain Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, who was an Oxford academic, and he encouraged Dodgson to photograph Angie and her siblings from the late 1850s. Perhaps it was this which instilled in her a love of photography? Like many Victorians she began collecting photographs and compiled albums of *cartes de visite*. There were many capable photographers in the Acland family and it's probable that she learnt the practicalities from her brothers – at least four of whom took up photography before she did.

Angie began her own photography on 26 June 1891 when her father gave her a Kodak camera for her birthday. With the ease of taking photographs from the 1880s, increased leisure, and more certainty over the results, photography had become a fashionable middle-class pastime. Although the Royal Photographic Society had always welcomed women members, their numbers grew more quickly from this time. Many of them exhibited in the Society's annual exhibition to great acclaim.

Angie received a No. 3 Kodak camera which made negatives 3 ¼ x 4 ¼ inches and like many she recorded her summer holiday that year. As Giles Hudson has remarked 'she was competent with a good eye for composition'. She photographed Ruskin – another Oxford link – in 1893. As her interest grew, she purchased a more serious plate camera. She took landscapes and seascapes, interiors and exteriors, but it was

her portraits which were particularly acclaimed – and she had access to some great subjects: Gladstone, Herschel, and Salisbury and, not least, her own father.

Angie was a member of the Oxford Camera Club from 1894 – its first woman member – and she exhibited and lectured at its meetings. She joined the Royal Photographic Society in 1899 and remained a member until her death, actively contributing to its *Journal*, lectures and exhibitions. Around the same time she began to take an interest in colour photography and it was this which preoccupied until she died – both as an artist-photographer, as a scientist, and as an advocate for colour.

She used a number of processes mirroring the evolution of colour photography during the very early 1900s: the Sanger Shepherd process where she noted that each image took no less than a fortnight to prepare. She spoke on colour photography in 1902 and gave lectures using colour lantern slides. Within the RPS she was with other female colour photographers such as Helen Messenger Murdoch, Violet Blaiklock, and Agnes Warburg among others. She was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1905.

At the first British exhibition of colour photography at the offices of the British Journal of Photography in 1906, Angie showed her work and in October the Society of Colour Photographers was formed. Acland was acknowledged as a leader in colour photography.

The Autochrome process of 1907 is often described as the first commercially successful colour photographic process and Acland was quick to try it. By October she had exhibited views of Oxford. Much of her subsequent work was made in Madeira where she holidayed for five months each winter. She also experimented with other colour processes: Dufay and Paget.

With the First World War causing difficulties in obtaining materials, and old age and poor health having an impact, Angie resolved to dispose of her equipment. However, she continued to photograph and in her last years she compiled two presentation albums of her portraits.

If you would like to learn more about Acland then Giles Hudson's wonderful book published by Oxford's Bodleian Library tells more of her career and shows many examples of her wonderful photography. As the risk of embarrassing her, in the audience today we have an Oxford resident, Janine Freeston, who is undertaking a PhD in to early colour photography. She would, I am sure, be pleased to share her knowledge with you more informally.

Thank you.