

photography  
**TIME TRAVEL**

**British lensmen Samuel Bourne and Charles**

Shepherd's work from the 1800s may be the earliest examples of photojournalism in India. Catch their work on display

**Arundhati Chatterjee**  
arundhati.chatterjee@hindustantimes.com

In the 1840s, the earliest processes of commercial photography, Talbotype or Calotype — one of the first photographic processes, in which the pictures were processed on paper coated with silver iodide — were being developed in Europe. Around this time, English lensman Samuel Bourne, a former bank clerk, made his way to Indian shores with truckloads of photography equipment. By the 1860s, the visual artist had shot around 2,000 negatives that would become some of the best and first examples of commercial travel photography. Bourne, along with photographer Charles Shepherd, went on to set up some of the world's earliest photo studios across the world under the iconic label of Bourne And Shepherd. In fact, the only Bourne & Shepherd studio still operational is in Kolkata's Esplanade area.

While most of the vintage prints are in ruins or kept safe within the confines of museums and archival societies, one can get a glimpse of some of their works at the opening show of 'Tasveer's 10th season, Bourne & Shepherd: Figures in Time. Nathaniel Gaskell, associate director of MAP (Museum of Art and Photography), and curator of the show, says, "We have sourced the original photographs from the MAP collection in Bengaluru. They are stored in archival storage boxes, and individually kept in archival sleeves, as per international museum standards. Some photographs date back as far as the 1860s."

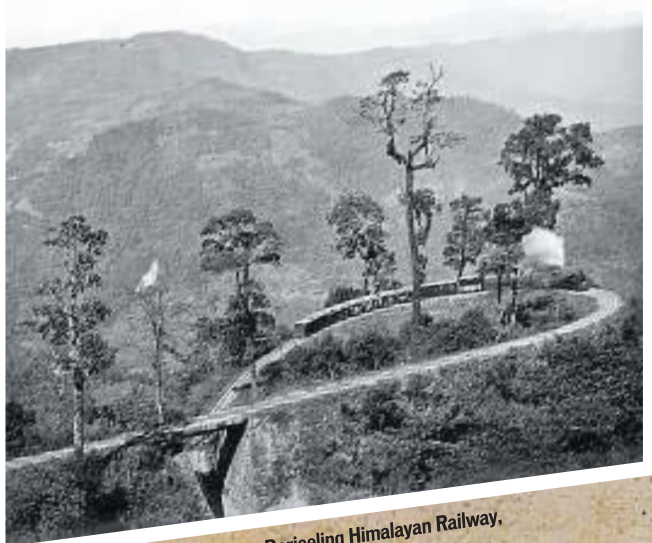
It took the gallery six months to put together the show, with two months spent on retouching the images. Gaskell says, "We made high resolution scans and retouched the images to reveal hidden details. We worked with a printer to match the tones which make the 19th century photographs so beautiful."

Like several English travellers of that time, Bourne was smitten by the romantic sensibility of 'picturesque landscape tradition' — the art of capturing the nuances of nature in its raw and subtle forms. So, although the duo photographed historic events — such as the Delhi durbars and coronation ceremonies, their legacy lies in the documentation of landscapes and monuments. "The nature of photography in the 19th century was cumbersome. Photojournalism, as we know it, didn't exist. So the beauty of their work isn't so much in showing events, but in evoking a certain sense of the period through compositions, street scenes and sweeping landscapes," explains Gaskell.

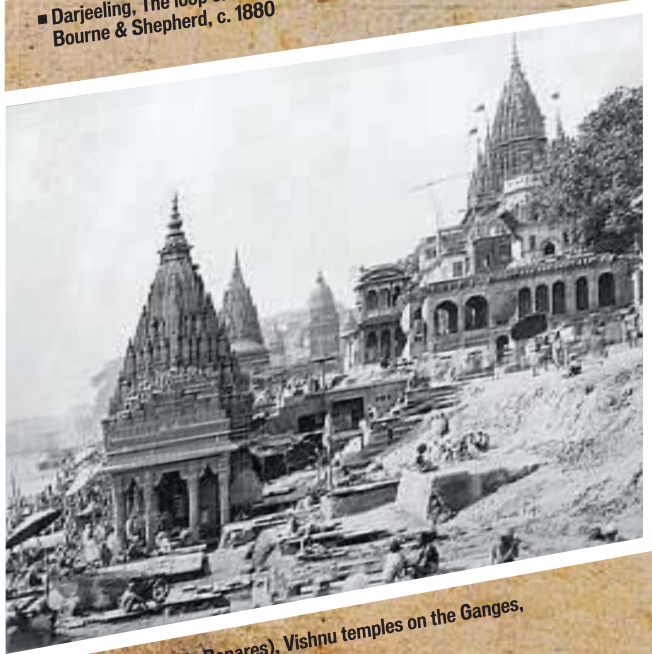
For over a decade, the lensmen travelled the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent, especially the rocky terrains of the Himalayas and the valleys and townships of north India. However, Bourne returned to the UK in the 1870s, leaving behind all his glass



Delhi, His Eminence, The Viceroy's Elephant, Delhi Durbar, Bourne & Shepherd, 1877



Darjeeling, The loop on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, Bourne & Shepherd, c. 1880



Varanasi (formerly Benares), Vishnu temples on the Ganges, Samuel Bourne, 1866



Afghanistan, Group of Affreedies from the Khyber Pass, Charles Shepherd, c. 1860

**BOURNE & SHEPHERD:**

Figures in Time is ongoing, till September 15, from 10am to 5pm (closed on Wednesdays)

Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Byculla (E).

2373 1234

For more information, visit [bdlmuseum.org](http://bdlmuseum.org)

PHOTOS COURTESY: MAP/TASVEER



Delhi, The Great Arch and the Iron Pillar at the Qutub Minar, Samuel Bourne, c. 1860

negatives with the studios in India. This colossal archive of photographs served as visual documentation till, in an infamous fire at the studio in 1991, most of the prints were ruined.

"As the leading studio of the day, in the early chapter of the invention of photography worldwide, Bourne And Shepherd's importance in the history of photography in India is undeniable. The number of frames they produced, and their quality, have given us a remarkable record of how the country looked all those years ago," says Gaskell.

**BACK IN KOLKATA**

The heydays are long gone, and the only operational Bourne & Shepherd studio is striving to survive. Jayant Gandhi, the current owner, laments the sorry state of the studio, and blames digitisation. "Today, youngsters are not interested in film photography. The whole scenario has changed. Although we still have a few dedicated users of black-and-white film, the number is negligible," says Gandhi.

While the 1991 fire destroyed most of the original glass negatives, the studio still houses some of the old equipment. "The place is barely operational now. People come here only for passport photos, and, occasionally, visitors take interest in the vintage gears," adds Gandhi.

48 hrs