Photograph - Draw Bridge at Broad Quay, Bristol

Public access description

This photograph shows a busy drawbridge crossing the old harbour in the centre of Bristol. On the right it is possible to make out the prow of a ship, it is blurred because of its movement during the long exposure time needed to take a photograph with a early paper negative or calotype. There are also areas of 'fog' in the foreground and on the bridge caused by the movement of people and horse drawn vehicles, which could only be photographed if they kept still.

Calvert Jones began to experiment with photography from the moment the new art was announced in 1839. He became closely connected with its British inventor, W.H. Fox Talbot through relatives and friends who lived near Jones' home in South Wales.

Descriptive line
19thC; Jones Calvert, Bristol dock

Physical description
The railings of the drawbridge dominate the photograph. The water of the harbour can be seen in the foreground. In the centre of the image on the far side of the harbour lie quay side buildings. Much of the photograph is faded, the darkest parts are the shadows below the drawbridge and the building to the centre right of the image.

Dimensions
Height: 17.4 cm, Width: 21.3 cm

Museum number
PH.44-1983

Object history note
During the 1830s William Henry Fox Talbot invented a way of making paper negatives and from them multiple paper prints. In doing so, he laid the foundations of modern photography. Calvert Jones learned of these developments in 1839 through a neighbour who was a cousin of Talbot. Jones lived in South Wales and he made many photographs there and in the West of England. He also travelled widely, making photographs on the continent. Jones' work stands out in the early development of photography because he was one of the first to apply a schooled artist's eye to the medium.

This is the second occasion on which Calvert Jones photographed the drawbridge at Broad Quay; a few years earlier, he had used a smaller camera from the same viewpoint. (The two calotype negatives in the Science Museum Collection, 1937-3055 and 1937-3056, overlap to form a panorama.) The juxtaposition of the foreground and bridge lead the eye to the white buildings on the far side of the dock, where there is a glazed photographer's portrait studio roof on the top of the central building.

Historical context note
St Augustin's Bridge, known as the drawbridge, crossed the River Frome in Bristol's old harbour. There were frequent delays and disruption to traffic when the bridge was drawn back to allow small coastal vessels to pass. On the quay side, the sign below the glazed, rooftop photographic studio reads 'Photographic Portrait Rooms'.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O139345/draw-bridge-at-broad-quay-photograph-jones-calvert-richard/