

# Stereo World

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## A Closer Look *J.B. Dancer's Camera*

(Editor's note: This article begins a series of "Closer Looks," by Matt Isenberg, at a wide variety of stereo cameras. Mr. Isenberg will be the feature speaker for the N.S.A. at the May Show.)

By Matthew R. Isenberg

I hope this will be the first article of many I will be writing for "Stereo World" on the hardware or cameras that were used to make stereo images. All the cameras we shall investigate, including this one, are from my private collection which is more directed to stereo cameras rather than stereo views. One of the reasons for this initial article is to see if you readers would like to know something of the equipment that made those stereo views possible. Hopefully you will get a cross section of various types of cameras from a variety of countries and from a wide range of time periods.

As a start, I thought I would take a "closer look" at one of my all time favorites, J.B. Dancer's stereo camera of 1856. Of all the cameras I have ever

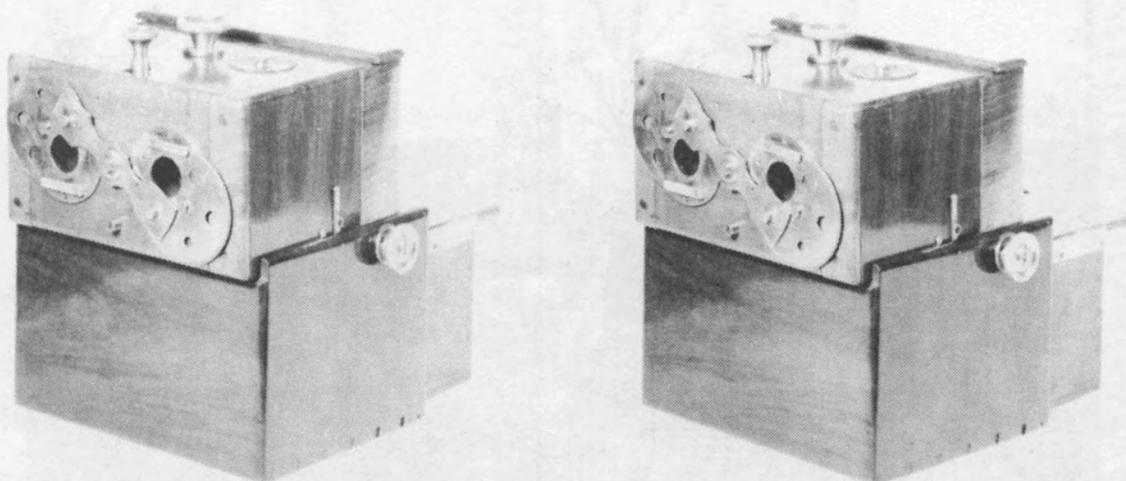
examined, this is definitely one of the most exciting visually. Well, to start with, who was J.B. Dancer? He was an instrument maker from Manchester, England, from 1812 to 1887, who was also famous for his thermometers, microscopes and microphotographs. So we now see why the camera looks like a fine instrument with generous use of brass. As a footnote to his other activities, Dancer apparently made glass stereo views, since I have one in my collection that bears the printed inscription, "J.B. Dancer, Manchester." It is a view of Parliament Oak, Sherwood and is dated Nov. 2, 1870. It measures 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " and fits exactly into the plate holders of this particular camera. It has the appearance of a view made for commercial distribution rather than for his own personal files.

On to the camera itself. Dancer received British patent No. 2064 in 1856 for this model stereo camera and it was exciting at the time since most stereo pictures were taken before then

by sliding a single lens camera body into a second position for a second exposure such as those made by Otte-will, Collis & Co. of London. This had some drawbacks since any movement of the subject matter between exposures could be a problem. The two views would not always agree and of course, instantaneous views were impossible where any motion was introduced. Even exposure variations could be a problem such as clouds covering the sun on one of the two exposures creating a much darker image on one view than the other. All the above problems were solved by the "Dancer" since it was one of the earliest cameras to take two views simultaneously.

Another innovative feature of the camera was the fact it had a changing box built into the lower section which could hold twelve dry plates of Taupenot's collodio-albumen process. Thus it either could take single wet plate stereo exposures or numerous early dry plate ones by screwing a rod in

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J.B. Dancer's 1856 stereo camera, including both upper and lower sections.





































