



WALL LABEL
ALFRED CAPEL-CURE

April 3 - June 28, 1981

Colonel Capel-Cure is one of the recently discovered English gentlemen amateurs of photography working in the "golden age" of the 1850s. His name is too new to appear in the books, but his eight years of work (1852-1860), as can be seen here, constitute a "personality" as distinctive as that of most of his peers.

His career is briefly outlined on these walls beginning with the earliest salt prints, or calotypes (printed from paper negatives). The boldness of eye, which is perhaps Capel-Cure's most distinguishable feature, appears as early as 1853 and remains with him until the end. Interestingly enough, he lingered with the paper negative process. The eight prints made in 1858-60 with collodion glass negatives define, in a sense, the essential difference between the "old" and the "new" in photography. It is the difference between the softness and mystery of sun passing through a paper negative and clarity and speed with which it passes through glass.

It is curious that a photographer with such a recognizably strong personal bias never once mentioned the word photography in his diaries. He must have been a keen amateur architectural historian. Perhaps his best pictures are the ones in which he defines the sculptural bulk of a building or ruin, almost always at a slight angle, or catches the light and shade which wraps around it.

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There is a certain fullness in the way Capel-Cure composes within the frame. Even the negative spaces are very visible, as in the photographs of abbeys. Some of the late prints show a surprising change from these earlier documents; they are pictures taken for their own sake or the sake of making a photograph -- pure and simple.

-Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr.

Little is known about the life of Alfred Capel-Cure. He was born in 1826, became a colonel in the Grenadier Guards, and was wounded in the Crimean War in 1855. He began photographing in 1852, taught by his uncle Robert H. Cheney, a watercolorist and amateur photographer. Capel-Cure died in 1896.

Unless otherwise indicated, the photographs in ALFRED CAPEL-CURE are from an album received by the Department of Photography on extended loan and as a promised gift from Mr. Peter Steil, Mr. Carey O. Cook, Mr. Raymond B. Gary, Mr. Thomas C. Melzer, Mr. Bowen H. McCoy and Mr. Edmund J. McRickard.

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