

The Woodburytype Resource Site

Invented in the 1860's and used only for a few decades, Woodburytype is an obsolete photomechanical process originally developed to create true continuous-tone images. The process was patented in 1864 by *Mr Walter B. Woodbury* (U.K. Patent No. 2338). Due to the fact that the technique was very difficult to master, couldn't be automated and that the pre-press preparation of the lead printing plate required an enormous amount of hydraulic power (4.28 kg/sqmm) the method became obsolete in the late 19th century.

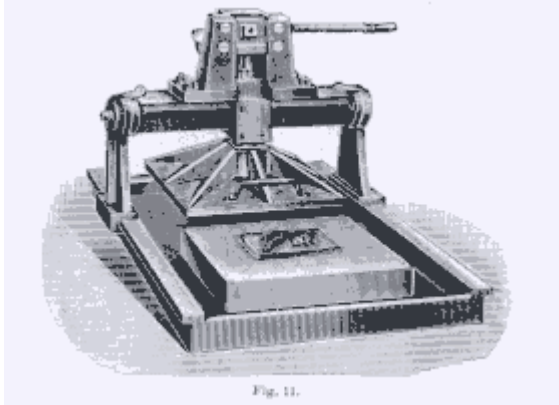


Figure 1: A hand-operated press for printing Woodburytypes.

A continuous-tone process that is more well-known and currently used by printmakers and graphic artists is collotype. Collotype and Woodburytype are based on the same idea - creating a gelatin relief by exposing a transparent original in contact with a light-sensitive gelatin layer. In collotype the final print is created by inking the moistened gelatin relief, utilizing the fact that exposed and unexposed areas differ in abilities to hold ink.

In Woodburytype the gelatin relief is impressed into a lead plate, thus creating a relief that is virtually identical to the gelatin relief. This lead plate is then inked with liquid pigmented gelatin and a sized and varnished paper is pressed towards the inked plate. Due to the relief in the lead plate, an image is created that is, in many cases, difficult to distinguish from the original photograph.

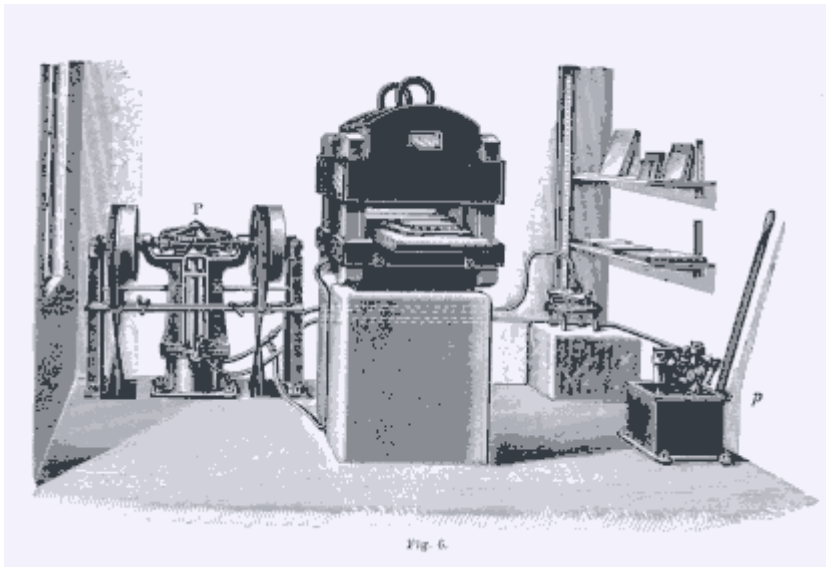


Figure 2: A press-room showing the compressors and the hydraulic press.

In February 2000 the author found what may be the only original hydraulic Woodburytype press in existence worldwide today. This Woodburytype press was found in *Eveleigh Locomotive Works* in Sydney, Australia, in the workshop of noted founders and blacksmiths Guido Gouverneur and Wendy McCaffley. Guido and Wendy run the company *Wrought Artworks*.

In its current location the press has not been used for the Woodburytype process, but was probably purchased as an ordinary hydraulic workshop press by *Eveleigh Locomotive Works* when the company was still operating. All inventories are now owned by the *State Rail Heritage Committee* in Australia.

History of the press at *Eveleigh Locomotive Works*

[Under construction]

A detailed explanation of the process

[Under construction]

16 pictures of the hydraulic press

Photos of the press in *Wrought Artworks'* shop. This is the same principal press as shown in the second woodcut above and was originally used when impressing the gelatin relief into the lead plate.

Pictures of Woodburytype presses and other equipment from *The Engineer*, October 19th, 1888.

[Under construction]

Downloadable PDF-files of Walter B. Woodbury's patents related to the Woodburytype process

[Under construction]

A bibliography on the Woodburytype process

[Under construction]

The Woodburytype process is described in detail in a large number of different books and articles. The bibliography lists these texts as well as books and articles about the inventor himself and the history of how the process was commercialized worldwide.

24 woodcuts from Léon Vidal's "Traité pratique de photoglyptie"

[Under construction]

Léon Vidal's manual "Traité pratique de photoglyptie" is the principal manual on the Woodburytype process. It is illustrated with a number of woodcuts describing the machinery and accessories used in this process. Vidal lived between 1833 and 1906 and also wrote a number of other treatises on various printing and photomechanical processes, for example "Traité pratique de photolithographie" (1893). The manual on Woodburytype was translated into German in 1897 where it was published under the title "Die Photoglyptie oder der Woodbury-druck".

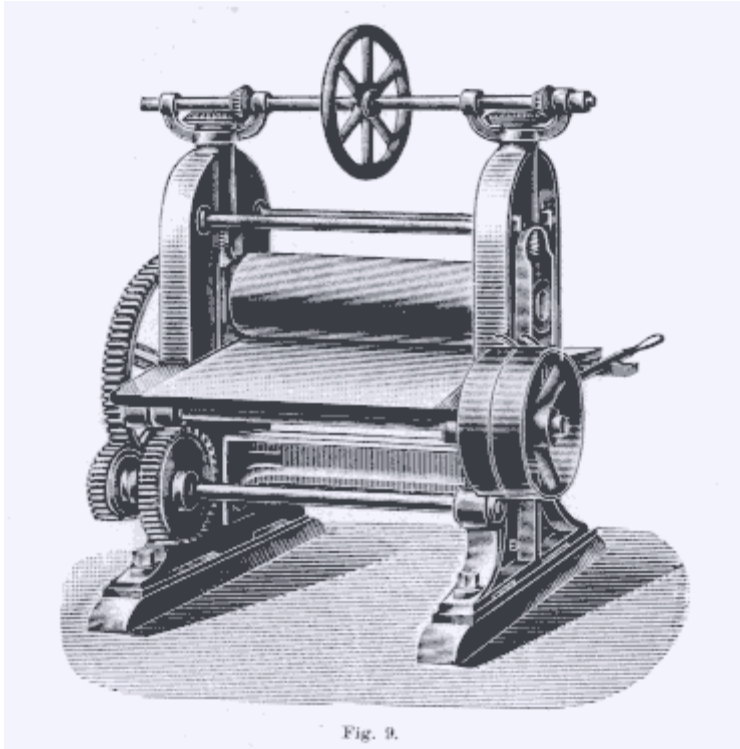


Figure 3: A press used for the preparation of printing paper.

Links to images of Woodburytype prints on the Internet

Since a well-made Woodburytype print is sometimes difficult to distinguish from a photographic print, the subtle difference don't show on the Internet. However, here are a few links to images originally printed as Woodburytypes that museums and collectors have put on-line.

Contact information

This site is updated on a very irregular basis by Mats Broberg. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

*Mats Broberg, printer
Stockholm, Sweden*

E-mail address: mats.broberg@gmail.com

[Site updated October 31st, 2002]

