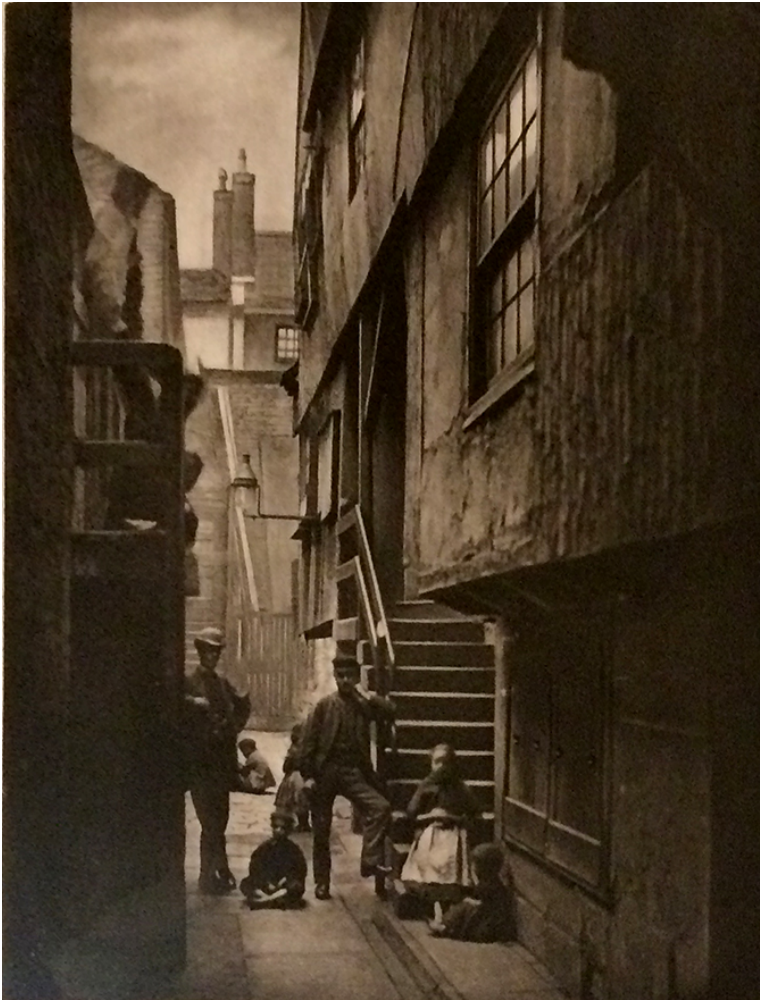


A Study of *Thomas Annan: Close, No. 28 Saltmarket*



Thomas Annan  
*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket*  
Negative 1868-71;  
Print 1900  
Photogravure  
The J. Paul Getty Museum

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## Abstract

*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket* is a photograph by Thomas Annan (1829-1887) on display at the Getty Center (2017) as part of the exhibit *Thomas Annan: Photographer of Glasgow*. Three versions of the photograph were presented along with the original glass negative. This paper shall discuss the technical and creative differences visible in each interpretation and briefly touch on the work of photographer Chris Kilip, in context with contemporary Glasgow.

Photographer Thomas Annan captured *Close, No. 28 Saltmarket* between 1868 and 1871. Annan was hired by the City of Glasgow Improvements Trust to visually document the working-class tenements of the inner city before their demolition. *Close, No. 28* is one of over thirty images published from 1871 to 1900.<sup>1</sup> Annan's original glass negative is displayed with three albums in the first room of the Getty exhibit (West Pavilion, level L2). Each album displays a differently printed version of *Close No. 28*.

The photogravure of 1900 depicts two men and five children in a walkway between two buildings. The men stand to the left, two children sit in the fore and background(s) and a young girl wearing a dress stands near a staircase on the right with the fifth child at her feet. As in many of Annan's photographs of Glasgow, the people are dwarfed by the claustrophobic confines of the scene. A third person, semi-transparent due to the long exposure, appears on the upper-left balcony. Other building features include windows with wooden siding, rough plaster and a gas-fed streetlamp. Rooftop chimneys and a cloudy daytime sky are visible above. While the general color scheme is dark, we can see a few wall sections painted in white. Each photograph has a lovely sepia tint of light to dark brown tones.

The Getty exhibit is "the first to survey the breadth of Annan's prolific career and consider how his work was printed, reproduced and disseminated in the form of photographically illustrated publications."<sup>2</sup> As mentioned, three albums of Annan's photographs are displayed next to the glass negative of *Close No. 28*, which can be illumined when the visitor presses a button.



Thomas Annan  
*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, 1868-1871*  
 Wet collodion glass plate negative,  
 retouched with white paint and  
 illuminated.  
 The J. Paul Getty Museum

All negative and print images were  
 taken by author with museum  
 permission

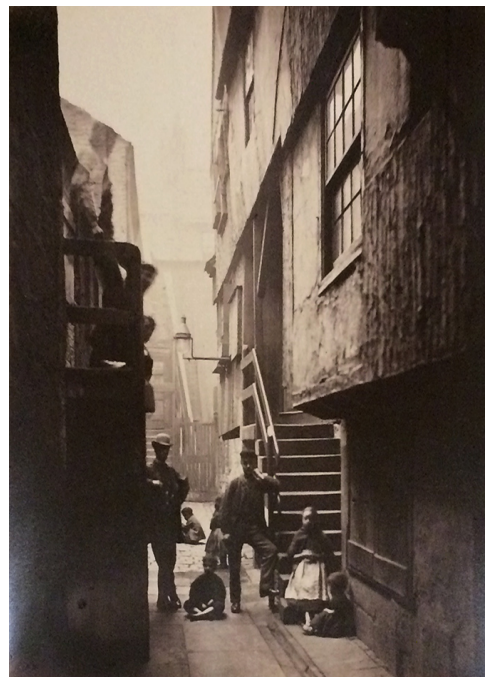
The glass negative is  $30 \times 25.3$  cm ( $11 \frac{13}{16} \times 9 \frac{15}{16}$  in.) and contains a high degree of *density*, a range of tonal values and visual detail that can manifest in a positive print at the photographer's discretion. Density is determined by emulsion sensitivity, exposure, flatness of the medium (such as glass) and chemical processing. The density present in this negative reflects Annan's high degree of skill in coating the plate evenly with wet collodion and then calculating a precise exposure. Light meters were not available in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Annan's choice of exposure time came from experience and a thorough knowledge of chemistry. Another fascinating aspect to the negative is that the outer edge and upper sky have been retouched with white paint. We shall explore this further on.

The three printed versions of *Close No. 28 Saltmarket* made from 1871 to 1900 are wonderful to examine because negative density was exploited differently for each. This author's twenty years of darkroom experience made comparing each print against the original negative a fun adventure.

*Close, No. 28* was first printed in 1871 on albumen paper and "tipped-in" (pasted directly) to a portfolio called *Glasgow Improvements Act 1866: Photographs of Streets, Closes & c. Taken 1868-1871*, published by Kerr & Richardson, Glasgow.<sup>3</sup> Albumen is a light-sensitive emulsion of silver nitrate, egg whites and salt.<sup>4</sup> Several features of the albumen print stand out for discussion: (1) the featureless white sky, (2) a partially visible building with faint chimneys in the background, and (3) incomplete tonality and exposure despite the excellent density of the negative.



*Glass negative, 1868-1871*



1871 albumen print

Wet collodion captures clouds or sky with great difficulty. This problem was solved by artists like Gustave le Gray (1820-1884), who improved landscape photography by making two negatives of the same scene. One negative was exposed in order to capture details in the sky such as clouds. Gray would sandwich the negatives together in a technique called *combination printing*. Annan, however, does not appear to have done this. Close examination of the *Close, No. 28* negative reveals that white paint was gently applied to create clouds in the empty sky. If this hypothesis is true, however, why do they not appear in the 1871 print?

One clue to the mystery may involve the albumen process itself, wherein a glass negative is pressed against light-sensitive albumen paper then exposed to direct sunlight until the image appears. The print is made permanent with a bath in sodium thiosulfate and toned with gold after drying. In Annan's day, this method, known as *contact printing*, did not allow for modern darkroom techniques like "burning," where faint areas of a print are given more light to achieve a satisfactory tonal density. The 1871 print was poorly made.

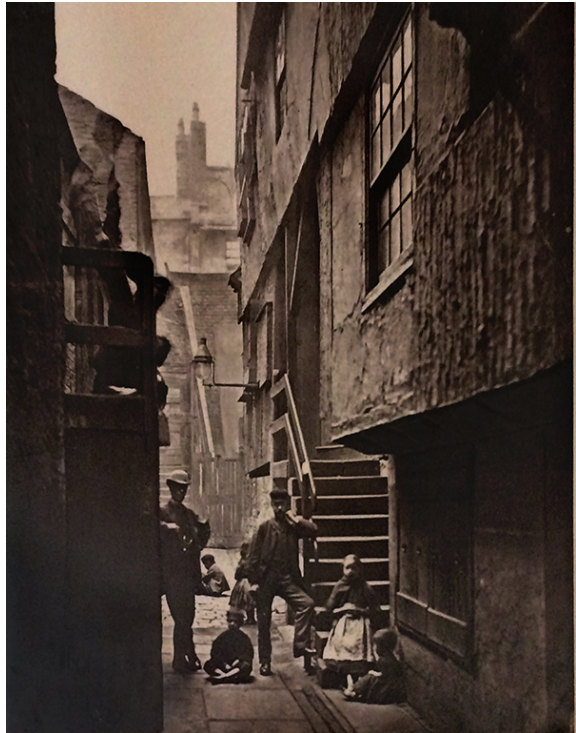
Other evidence supports this conclusion. A building in the left foreground is too dark and lacks detail, while certain wall sections of the right-hand house, gas-lamp and background are all too faint. One literary source indicates that Annan made this print,<sup>5</sup> which displays some of the limitations of albumen contact printing. The density in the original glass negative would allow for an even tonality over the entire print once proper techniques are applied.

In 1864, Joseph Wilson Swan improved a labor-intensive process known as *carbon printing*, a method that uses carbon dust to produce an image.<sup>6</sup> Annan obtained the rights to this new printing method sometime after 1871,<sup>7</sup> allowing him in 1877 to reproduce

*Close, No.28* in a newly bound volume<sup>8</sup> for the Glasgow City Improvement Trust. This print is of marked improvement in revealing the tonal density of Annan's original negative; rear buildings and rooftop chimneys are visible, the sky is a light gray but the painted clouds remain absent.



*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, 1868-1871*  
Wet collodion glass plate negative

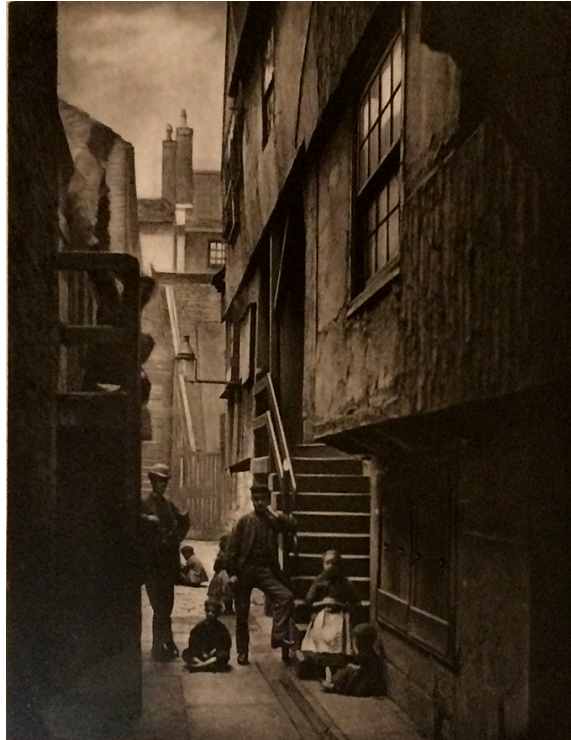


*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, printed 1877 in*  
*Photographs of Old Closes, Streets, &c.,*  
*Carbon print in bound volume*

The 1877 carbon print is surpassed in tonal quality by a *photogravure* from 1900 (next page, below right). *Photogravure* is a mechanical process involving an etched copper plate and ink to create a print with wide tonal latitude and archival strength.<sup>9</sup> When Alfred Stieglitz published *Camera Work*, photographs were reproduced as photogravure. Such images command high prices in today's photo art-market.



*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, 1868-1871*  
Wet collodion glass plate negative



*Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, printed 1900 in*  
*Old Closes and Streets: A series of*  
*Photogravures 1868-1899*  
*Photogravure in bound volume*<sup>10</sup>

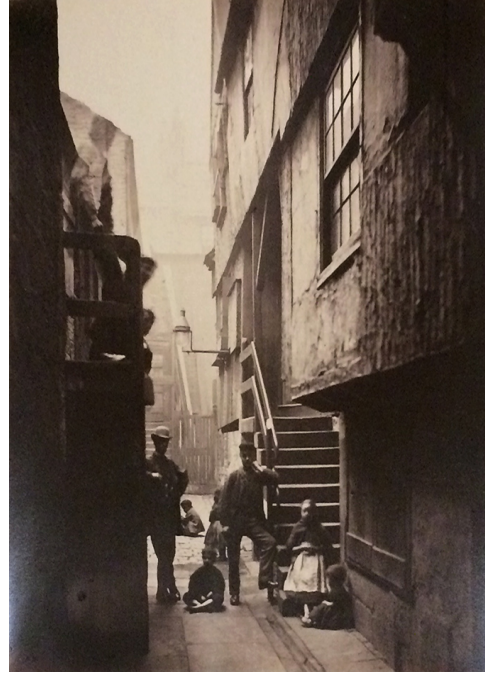
The 1900 version of *Close No. 28 Saltmarket* is slightly darker than the 1877 version yet with more detail and a broader gray scale. Clouds are visible and all of the buildings and chimneys are rich with detailed contrast.

Let us again compare the three versions with the glass negative:

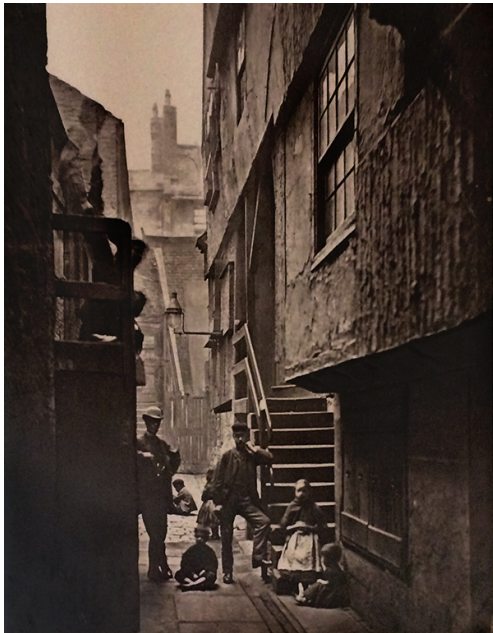




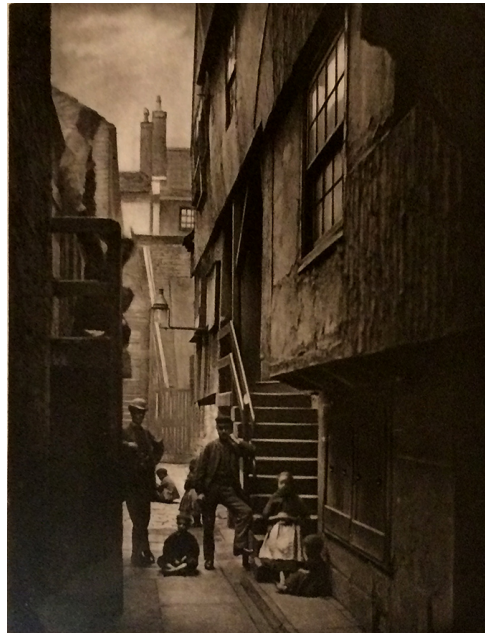
*Glass negative, 1868-1871*



1871 albumen print



1877 Carbon print



1900 photogravure

The tonal variations within *Close No. 28* almost take second place to Annan's skillful capture of visual geometry. A building edge in the center drops from the sky and turns sharply to follow a staircase railing down to a girl in a dress. From her, we look naturally to a triangular configuration of a seated boy and men standing in the alleyway. Our gaze rises left to a ghostly person on the upper porch, then up to the heavens. Annan's beautiful composition leads the eye to all aspects of the image, allowing us to critically examine the slum environment. Annan included people to emphasize scale and elicit sympathy, thus fulfilling one goal of the Glasgow Improvements Trust project.

Many of Annan's photographs evoke feelings of empathy for the people of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Glasgow, whose hard and short lives in a cobblestone plagued with disease seem devoid of grass or trees. Professor Stana Nenadic says, "Life for the poor in overcrowded, industrial cities such as Glasgow was especially likely to be influenced by sickness and early death," where the average life span for men and women was 42 and 45, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Despite these frightful challenges, the people in Annan's photo seem to have a resigned confidence, accepting their place in the world for the time they are alive. Annan not only documented the homes targeted for demolition but also a structure of time defined by the Industrial Revolution. Burgeoning European populations would soon depart for new opportunities in America; would life there be better? When we consider the documentary work of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, we have to wonder if the Glasgow Improvements Act was a good idea or not. Nenadic concludes, "Rising living standards in the later 19th century seemed to by-pass the poorest and in 1914, despite the best efforts of philanthropists and reformers, Glasgow was still a byword for intractable human misery."<sup>12</sup>

The Getty provided an interesting “then and now” perspective in the galleries next to the Annan exhibit. Photographer Chris Killip (b. 1946) documented gritty Scotland life from 1970-1990 with an intimate intensity. His images of jobless youth, port closures, tiny miner’s homes and bleak urban landscapes emphasize the failure of the Industrial Revolution (and capitalism in general) to raise the standard of living for all. The “deindustrialization” policies by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher drove Scotland and much of Northern England into economic distress, at least for the poorest inhabitants and most middle-class skilled workers. Although Killip disagrees with this<sup>13</sup>, his images provide a touching view of working-class people who suffer from government efforts at “improvement.” Annan photographed a similar scheme but kept a certain distance from the Glasgow inhabitants; Killip, by contrast, embraced his subjects with a compassion that reveals the human effects of conservative economic “development.”

“Thomas Annan: Photographer of Glasgow” is a fascinating exhibit of 19th-century photography. It is wonderful to examine *Close, No. 28* and the creative differences found in different printing technologies. Annan died in 1887 and missed the photogravure from 1900, but I like to think he would have loved it.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> J. Paul Getty Museum. *Thomas Annan: Photographer of Glasgow*, 2017. Los Angeles. [http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/thomas\\_annan](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/thomas_annan)
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Display card for *Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, negative 1868-1871; print 1871*. Albumen silver print in *Glasgow Improvements Act 1866: Photographs of Streets, Closes & c. Taken 1868-1871*, published by Kerr & Richardson (Glasgow).
- <sup>4</sup> Newhall, Beaumont. "60,000 Eggs a Day." *Image*, George Eastman House Journal of Photography, pg. 25, Vol. IV, No. 4, April 1955. [https://web.archive.org/web/20160304084043/http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH\\_1955\\_04\\_04.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20160304084043/http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH_1955_04_04.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> Gossman, Lionel. *Thomas Annan of Glasgow: Pioneer of the Documentary Photograph*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015. Pg. 7, and Thomas Annan, 'OLD CLOSES AND STREETS: A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAVURES 1868-1899,' Lot 40, Sotheby's, Catalog Notes, Photographs 05 April 2017. N.p. Web. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.40.html/2017/photographs-n09640>
- <sup>6</sup> Rosenblum, Naomi. *A World History of Photography*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1997. 197
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Display card for *Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, printed 1877* in *Photographs of Old Closes, Streets, &c., Taken 1868-1877*. Carbon print in bound volume, published by Glasgow City Improvement Trust.
- <sup>9</sup> Newhall, Beaumont. *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present, Completely Rev. and Enl. Ed.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982. Pg. 142.
- <sup>10</sup> Display card for *Close, No. 28 Saltmarket, printed 1900* in *Old Closes and Streets: A series of Photogravures 1868-1899*. Photogravure in bound volume, published by T. & R. Annan & Sons (Glasgow).
- <sup>11</sup> Nenadic, Stana. "Second City of The Empire: 1830s to 1914: Everyday Life," *The Glasgow Story*. <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/story/?id=TGSDA>
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> O'Hagan, Sean. "In Flagrante Two by Chris Killip – Bleakness and Boredom in Sharp Focus." *The Guardian*, 21 February 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/21/in-flagrante-two-review-chris-killip-thatcher-sea-coal-north-east-england-northumberland-industrial->