

MESSIEURS SILHOUETTE, POUBELLE AND DAGUERRE

By David Royle (with substantial help from Wikipedia) November 2022

During our visit to Bry-sur-Marne in September 2022 we came across/renewed acquaintance with three figures from history who are all linked to Bry.

1 Étienne de Silhouette (5 July 1709 – 20 January 1767) was a French Ancien Régime Controller-General of Finances under Louis XV. He has his own street name close to the RER station where we assembled for our departure.



He was born in Limoges, studied finance and economics and spent a year in London learning about the economy of Britain. With Madame Pompadour's support he was awarded with the position of Controller-General on 4 March 1759, one of the most extensive administrative positions in the Ancien Régime, albeit a very unstable one. His job was to end France's spiralling deficit and strengthen the finances for the Seven Years' War against Britain (1754–1763). He managed to cut back Royal household expenditure, revised state pensions and encouraged free trade by reducing some ancient taxes and establishing new ones, in accordance with the vision of a unified French market.

De Silhouette forecast a bleak budget for 1760: income of 286 million livres compared to expenses of 503 million livres, including at least 94 million to service the national debt. In an attempt to restore the kingdom's finances by taxing the rich and privileged (nobility and church were exempt from taxes in the Ancien Régime), de Silhouette devised the 'general subvention', i.e., taxes on external signs of wealth (doors and windows, farms, luxury goods, servants, profits). On 26 October, he took the war measure of ordering the melting down of goldware and silverware. He was criticized by the nobility, including Voltaire, who thought his measures, though theoretically beneficial, were not suitable for wartime and the French political situation. On 20 November 1759, after eight months in the position, he left the court and retired to Bry-sur-Marne, where he set about improving the budget.

The Silhouette legacy. Despite Étienne de Silhouette's short tenure as Treasury Chief, he became the subject of hostility. His penny-pinching manner led to the term *à la Silhouette* being applied to things perceived as cheap or austere. During this period, an art form of growing popularity was a shadow profile cut from black paper. It provided a simple and inexpensive alternative for those who could not afford more decorative and expensive forms of portraiture, such as painting or sculpture. Those who considered it cheap attached the word 'silhouette' to it. This art-form is still practised and named silhouette cutting, or art, to this day. Despite his name being applied to the silhouette art form, there are no portraits of Étienne de Silhouette in existence, not even a silhouette. Although several portraits were created depicting Silhouette, all were oil paintings destroyed during the French Revolution. On 20 November 1759, after eight months in the position, he left the court and retired to Bry-sur-Marne, where he set about improving the budget. After his death in 1767, his nephew and heir Clément de Laage completed his work.

2 Eugène Poubelle (15 April 1831-15 July 1907) was born to a bourgeois family in Caen. He studied to become a lawyer and obtained a PhD. He taught at universities in Caen, Grenoble and Toulouse before being made préfet, or government representative and regional administrator, in the Charente in April 1871. He then successively became préfet for Isère, Corsica, Doubs, Bouches-du-Rhône and finally, from 1883 to 1896, for the Seine département.



Stone tablet near the Pont de Marne in Bry

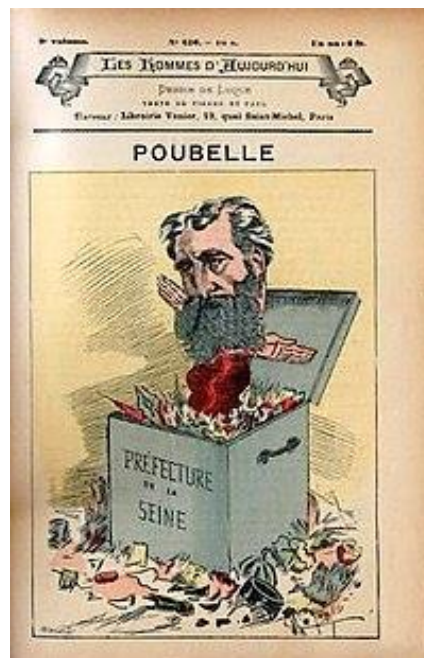
The Préfet of the Seine was a very powerful position, and as préfet he effectively exercised in Paris the powers that the elected mayor would have had in other French cities. On 7 March 1884, Poubelle decreed that owners of buildings must provide their

residents with three covered containers of 40 to 120 litres to hold household refuse. The refuse was to be sorted into compostable items, paper and cloth, and crockery and shells.

The population of Paris, then close to two million, needed a system to empty the containers regularly. Parisians began to name their boxes after Poubelle, a habit encouraged by the newspaper *Le Figaro*, which called them *Boîtes Poubelle*. Owners of buildings resenting paying for the cost of providing and supervising the bins, and traditional rag-and-bone men, the *chiffonniers*, saw them as a threat to their living.

The boxes deteriorated, but the principle of what Poubelle established survived. However, it was not until the end of the Second World War that dustbins and their collection by municipalities become common. - By then *poubelle* as a noun had been established, and was first recognized by a supplement of the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du 19ème Siècle* in 1890. Eugène Poubelle also campaigned successfully for direct drainage. A resurgence of cholera in 1892 led him to decree in 1894 that all buildings were to be connected direct to the sewers, at the expense of the building's owner.

Poubelle became ambassador to the Vatican in 1896 and to the Roman court in 1898. He was consul general of the canton of Saissac in the Aude from 1898 to 1904, and president of the Société Centrale d'Agriculture de l'Aude, where he defended the interests of wine in Southern France, also called 'Le Midi' by the French.



Caricature of Poubelle, by Manuel Luque (Wikipedia)

Poubelle died in Paris on 15 July 1907 and is buried in the Herminis cemetery near Carcassonne; a bust of him is outside the city's Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rue Eugène Poubelle, a street between the Avenue de Versailles and the Quai Louis-Blériot in Paris's 16th arrondissement, is named after him.

3 Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (18 November 1787-10 July 1851) was a French artist, painter, photographer, and a developer of the diorama theatre. He is the most famous for the development of the daguerreotype, which is one of the earliest successful methods of photography.

Louis Daguerre was born in Corneilles-en-Parisis, Val-d'Oise, in France. He collected his knowledge through apprenticeships in architecture, theatre design, and panoramic painting. Inspired by the camera obscura, he tried to find a way to preserve the image that it creates. He heard about Nicéphore Niépce, who had also experimented with photography, and they partnered in 1829 with the aim of improving the photographic process. Niépce invented the heliograph, which used a plate covered with Bitumen of Judea, which hardened when exposed to light. Soft parts were easy to remove but the plate had to be exposed for hours or days and the entire process was not practical. When Niépce died in 1833, Daguerre continued with his experiments and shifted his focus from bitumen to silver salts, which are also light sensitive. He used a thin silver-plated copper sheet and exposed it to the vapour given off by iodine crystals, which gave him a layer of light-sensitive silver iodide on the surface. He called the process daguerreotype and at first it also needed prolonged periods of exposure to show an image. Later he found out that an invisibly faint image (called 'latent image') that is a result of a much shorter exposure could be chemically developed into a visible image if exposed to vapours given off by mercury heated to 75°C.



Villa Daguerre, Bry-sur-Marne

After efforts to interest private investors proved fruitless, Daguerre went public with his invention in 1839. At a joint meeting of the French Academy of Sciences and the Académie des Beaux Arts on 7 January of that year, the invention was announced and described in general terms, but all specific details were withheld. Under assurances of strict confidentiality, Daguerre explained and demonstrated the process only to the Academy's perpetual secretary François Arago, who proved to be an invaluable advocate. Members of the Academy and other select individuals were allowed to examine specimens at Daguerre's studio. The images were enthusiastically praised as nearly miraculous, and news of the daguerreotype quickly spread. Arrangements were made for Daguerre's rights to be acquired by the French Government in exchange for lifetime pensions for himself and Niépce's son Isidore; then, on 19 August 1839, the French Government presented the invention as a gift from France 'free to the world', and complete working instructions were published. In 1839, he was elected to the National Academy of Design as an Honorary Academician.

The Diorama is an oil on canvas painted by Louis Daguerre for the apse of the parish church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Prottais in Bry-sur-Marne in 1842. Placed behind the apse of the church, this painting is designed to make the viewer believe that the bottom of the modest church is extended by a much larger gothic church. With the magic lantern, the diorama is the ancestor of the cinematograph. It is also an emblematic work of current scientific and artistic research from the end of the 18th century. The last and only diorama in the world, it was classified as a Historic Monument in 1913.

The **Villa Daguerre** is one of the oldest properties in the municipality of Bry. Mentioned from the 17th century, it was used for several centuries as a country house by Parisian nobility in search of calm and greenery near Paris. Extending over two hectares, it consisted of a vast park, a house, and an outbuilding with a dovecote, which was used as a stable. The property was built facing the Marne, in the immediate vicinity of the Bry ferry (converted into a bridge in 1831), thus allowing quick access to Paris, via Nogent-sur-Marne and the Bois de Vincennes.

Louis Daguerre bought the property in 1840 and the house and settled there in the year following the public disclosure of the daguerreotype process and the fire in his Parisian performance hall, the Diorama (1839). Affected by the loss of his Diorama, he resolved to settle in the countryside to take a rest while remaining close to Paris. He set up his painting studio in the outbuilding, with a laboratory for his photographic experiments. The dovecote became a belvedere, which offered him a remarkable view of the village of Bry. It was from this belvedere that he made his daguerreotype representing a view of Bry-sur-Marne, now kept by the Société Française de Photographie. He also redesigned the park to improve its perspective. He created a garden of romantic inspiration which looked like a small Swiss valley, according to the historian and former mayor of Bry-sur-Marne Adrien Mentienne (1841-1927). It was in this house that he

died on 10 July 10 1851 from a heart attack. A monument marks his grave there. Daguerre's name is one of the 72 names inscribed on the Eiffel tower.



Daguerre's diorama in Bry-sur-Marne

Sources

Wikipedia

<http://www.photographyhistoryfacts.com/photography-inventors/louis-daguerre/>

Le musée Adrien Mentienne, Bry-sur-Marne <https://museedebyry.fr/#/>