

Printing History News

The Newsletter of the National Printing Heritage Trust,
Printing Historical Society and Friends of St Bride Library

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Victorian wood-engraved blocks at Ironbridge

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum has recently acquired a collection of around 2,000 printing blocks. Approximately half of them are wood-engravings, mostly prepared for electrotyping and depicting catalogue illustrations of machinery made locally in the 1860s. The remaining blocks are electrotypes, often of the same images. Most are in good condition, and some are signed or stamped on the back with names including Hare and Company, H. Sutton, W. A. Yates, the Wright Engraving Company, E. C. Dutton and Company, Wright and Langston, and Harry F. Lloyd. The blocks were found on the premises of the Aga/Rayburn cooker factory, formerly the site of the Coalbrookdale Ironworks, and it is thought that they mostly relate to catalogues of locally-made iron products, including some manufactured by the Corbett Ironworks.

The blocks are now being cleaned, proofed and catalogued. Little is known of their origins. Anyone who can help with identifying the blocks, or who wishes to see the collection, should contact Brian Russell at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Coach Road, Coalbrookdale, Telford TF8 7DQ. E-mail: blRussell@btinternet.com.

St BRIDE EVENTS

Revival! The eighth annual Friends of St Bride Library Conference will be held at the Library on 23 and 24 April 2009. Revival is to be celebrated, to be shouted abroad and to be called for. A characteristically varied group of speakers will address such matters as Revival in theory ('*Contemporary design thinking is being reshaped through the revival of ideas found within design's own intellectual "back-catalogue". We ask how and why this happens and how it might further be encouraged or discouraged*'), Revival in practice ('*Designers engaged in*



One of the wood-engraved blocks recently acquired by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum

original and exciting work tell us how making creative use of past practices can enhance conceptual skills. How are design pastiches avoided, or embraced?'), Revival in style ('Watch practitioners pulling out the nails that have been hammered deep into some of design's coffins and lament once-lauded stylistic approaches in desperate need of new vision'), Revival in life ('We share revival stories – reappraisals of work or aesthetic outlooks, maybe in connection with other insights, or changes in lifestyle and circumstance, that have renewed enthusiasm and generated a fresh creative urge'), Revival in type ('Revival has been a preoccupation of type designers from the time of William Morris. Each technological generation has made reference to those of the past, often as they are made accessible through collections such as St Bride Library's. We take a closer look'), and Revival close at hand ('Since 2000 revival has definitely been in evidence at St Bride Library. Find out about our future plans and learn how to get involved').

Tickets are available at £100.00 (£90.00 for Friends of St Bride), £50.00 for students and over-sixties (£45.00 for Friends of St Bride).

Justin Howes Memorial Lecture 2009

This year's lecture will be given by Matthew Carter at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday 28 May in the Bridewell Hall, St Bride Library, London (Hendrik Vervliet's lecture has been postponed to a future date). In keeping with the theme of this year's Friends' conference, Matthew will speak on *Genuine imitations: a type designer's view of revivals*. A number of Matthew's designs have been based on historical types, including ITC Galliard, Big Caslon, Big Figgins, Miller and Vincent. Others, like Snell Roundhand and Mantinia, were derived from existing non-typographical sources. In this lecture he explains his debt to history – and especially to the resources of St Bride. His type revivals have varied in faithfulness to their models, which raises questions about the responsibilities of the continuator of traditional forms, about degrees of interpretation, adaptation to current technology, ancestor worship and travesty. Justin Howes would probably have disapproved of some, at least, of Matthew's revivals. This lecture is offered, therefore, in affectionate

memory of a historian and fellow type-reviver who might not have agreed with Matthew, but would certainly have enjoyed the argument.

Matthew Carter has fifty years' experience of typographic technologies, ranging from hand-cut punches to computer fonts. He is a principal of Carter and Cone Type Incorporated, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In addition to the types already mentioned, he has designed Bell Centennial, Skia and Miller, and, for Microsoft, the screen fonts Verdana, Tahoma and Georgia. He has taught for many years at Yale's graduate school of Graphic Design.

Admission to the Lecture is free, but by pre-booked ticket only. Further details and on-line booking can be found at www.stbride.org/events.

Donald Milham, apprentice and journeyman Printer, 1915–2006

Peter Milham

Editor's note: This is the second part of a serialisation of Peter Milham's memoir of his father. The first part appeared in issue 21.

During his apprenticeship Don was awarded his Craftsman Certificate by the Stationer's Company and Printing Industry Technical Board, with first class examination passes, for 'cylinder machine' and 'platen machine' (1934 and 1935). It was these certificates, and particularly the prize medals (see figure above), awarded by the St Bride Foundation Institute, that started the discussion with St Bride. Any detailed records seem to have disappeared over the years, but it was interesting to discover that the award ceremony picture in Don's papers also appears in a 1933 yearbook held on the shelves of the St Bride library.

No doubt there was a community of apprentices and journeymen, with football, card schools, and some jests and pranks played by the regular staff. Being the lowest of the low, apprentices were expected to break up pages of type and distribute it back into the cases, sort out printer's 'pie' when type got mixed up, help with paper deliveries and handle the chemicals, inks and various items of machinery.

By working hard, the apprentice could gain passes useful to his future career as a journeyman. I am glad to say that Don did well; or at least he kept certificates for the courses he



Donald Milham's medals, awarded by the St Bride Foundation, 1934–1935

excelled at. Following completion of his seven-year apprenticeship in 1937, having achieved journeyman status, he needed to look for a new job.

Don found his first full employment at Sun Printers in Watford. Sun was at that time the world's largest combined letterpress/gravure plant. Now being on full pay, he saved enough money to buy an Austin car, no doubt needed to get to and from work, and to get back to see his parents in Kent.

Don's career at Sun Printers was interrupted by the Second World War. It is hard to imagine what this must have been like – to achieve good results from apprenticeship, to move away from home and get a well-paid journeyman job, and then have to put that aside for an uncertain future in the forces.

Initially called up into the infantry in May 1940, Don was posted to active service in mainland Europe as a radio operator. He met Mary his wife in Germany. Their marriage certificate from 1946 records his occupation as 'Letter Press Machine Minder'. Don and his wife moved to live close to Sun's Watford printing works. After their first son was born, he realised he needed to look further afield to get a job with more prospects and better pay. So, in 1949, he travelled to Birmingham where he was hired by Buckler and Webb, and was joined by his family.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Don worked hard and long hours to provide for his wife and two growing sons. He usually left home at 7:00 a.m. to be at work in central Birmingham by 8:00, and usually did not return home until after 6:00 p.m., sometimes working

evenings and Saturdays as overtime. At Buckler and Webb he saw the arrival of offset lithography. While he felt that the quality was not as good as letterpress he realised there were great opportunities and challenges arising from this new printing technology. In 1971 Hudson, Buckler and Webb (as the firm had become) faced closure, making my father redundant in October. Being only 56, he was keen to find another job.

Don was lucky to find a place with Martin Brothers, based in Acocks Green, a local Birmingham suburb, paying £26 per week. Martin Brothers was a smaller printing company than he had previously worked for, but it had the advantages of being closer to home, with a close-knit and friendly work force.

Don retired from printing in 1986, finishing as a letterpress machine manager, but continued working part time as a maintenance man for Martin Brothers until 1992.

In their retirement Don and his wife bought a personal computer. He enjoyed applying some of his printing skills to word processing, and in later years gained much enjoyment from using the PC, producing letters and birthday cards. He rued the lack of attention to quality that was all-too-easy with new technologies. In reading the local papers, he often saw poor litho printing and colour registration, spelling mistakes and other errors, including texts being abruptly truncated at the end of columns. That he cared shows how important his apprenticeship was in instilling an expectation of quality in the final product, a sign of a craftsman.

Looking over the submissions for the Donald Milham Award, it is clear that the latter half of the twentieth century was a period of great upheaval, and some pain, for print-workers; many felt betrayed, companies felt under increasing competition from abroad and wanted to introduce new ways of working and new technology, and trade unions struggled with their role in the changed circumstances.

My father had been trained in letterpress but told me how lithography was revolutionising the print industry. Even at Martin Brothers they had introduced litho, photo-typesetting and computer-controlled presses. Don was fascinated by this new printing equipment as it came into the works. Maybe, as standardisation and automation came in by the front door, some aspects of the craft were being lost through the back. I had not realised how extensive the decline of the British print industry had been. After my father's death, when I met and talked to people who had known him, it felt as if these changes had happened with tremendous speed. The careers of those who worked 'in the print' had been lost forever and were in danger of being forgotten.

Job losses continue today, but it is clear that the print industry is still a significant part of the UK economy. There are fewer large companies and more small ones than there used to be. A review in the December 2007 issue of *PrintWeek* stated that only 11 per cent of printing companies take a systematic approach to training (compared to 20 per cent among the other process and manufacturing industries), and that the average age of print industry workers is between 49 and 54. These figures are underlined by comparatively low levels of printing apprenticeships. In 2007 there were only 700 apprentices in training for an industry of around 150,000 employees.

So perhaps it is worth remembering and explaining to those interested in publishing and printing how heavy the founts were when they were cold metal, how justification was not achieved with the touch of a computer key, and that quality of print comes from care and attention to all stages of production, and not just from the use of the latest AppleMac software.

Part III, providing thumbnail histories of the companies Donald Milham worked for, will follow in a future issue.

The Type Museum

The following statement was issued by the Science Museum on 19 January 2009.

The Type Museum houses a significant collection of Science Museum-owned type and printing objects and machinery together with extensive and iconic collections owned by others. The Science Museum receives funds from DCMS to pay for care of the Science Museum collections and this money is transferred to the Type Museum to meet the costs of upkeep of these objects.

The Type Museum is entirely independent of the Science Museum and is run by its own Trustees, who are accountable for it. The Trustees of the Type Museum continue to seek funding to develop the Museum at its current location. The Science Museum very much hopes that the Trustees will be successful in this and will do all it can to support them in securing the necessary funding to ensure these historic and important collections are kept together in one location. The Trustees of the Type Museum will be pleased to answer questions on the history, operation and plans for the Type Museum should you wish it, and we at the Science Museum will be pleased to refer your enquiry to them.

OBITUARIES

William F. Taylor

Derek Nuttall

Bill Taylor of Harrogate, who died recently aged eighty-five, will be sadly missed by many – especially in the north of England – who either knew Bill personally or were familiar with his delightful letterpress printing. Bill was a pleasant, likeable person, whose quiet personality belied an enthusiasm for printing and papermaking which was infectious. Not only did Bill produce some superb typography on an Albion at his Palliser Press, but some items were printed on paper which he made and many of his publications included engravings on wood or PVC that he had cut himself. A selection of these is given in a 24-page booklet, *Engravings*, which he produced in 1974 as a limited edition of 120 copies.

Although I have not met Bill for several years, our friendship goes back forty years to the time when Bill and a fellow-printer from Harrogate, John



Bill Taylor in 2008 (reprinted by kind permission of Small Printer)

Mountford, joined the then newly-formed Northern Group of the Printing Historical Society. Both Bill and John were regular attenders at meetings, visits and the residential conferences organised by the Group. More recently, Bill joined the National Printing Heritage Trust soon after it was founded in 1990. An even longer commitment was Bill's membership of the British Printing Society, of which he was a very active member of the York Branch from 1961. As recently as last September members of the York Branch paid a visit to Bill's Palliser Press – sadly an event never more to be enjoyed.

John Frederick Eickhoff

Paul W. Nash

John Eickhoff, who died suddenly on 13 October 2008, will be remembered with affection by printers and printing historians as a typefounder, as an advocate of the preservation of historical equipment and practices, and as an enthusiast for all aspects of type and letterpress. He had a very varied career, working in the packaging industry, in the Merchant Navy and as a teacher, a job which he continued on a part-time basis after his retirement. He began printing as a teenager, using an Adana H51 (one of the smallest of the Adana presses) and developed an abiding interest in type and, especially, in ornaments and borders. His 'Acorntype' foundry, which he ran in later years

from his house in Bristol, supplied type in the small quantities required by amateur and hobby printers, and John's interest in unusual faces and ornaments led to his saving, and using, a great many interesting matrices which might otherwise have been sent for scrap. He used Monotype equipment to cast his type, and printed specimens and catalogues in which his love of typography is very clear.

He was an active member of the Oxford Guild of Printers, and a stalwart of the National Printing Heritage Trust advisory committee (he attended a meeting a week before his death). His enthusiasm, knowledge and generosity will be greatly missed.

Lawrence Wallis

Paul W. Nash

Among printing historians, Lawrence Wallis, who died in March 2008 at the age of seventy-four, was remarkable for his range of knowledge and publications, and for his enlightened interest in the printing technology of the twentieth century, which he feared might be lost to posterity if efforts were not made to preserve it. Lawrence was much more than an historian, of course. He was a practitioner of print, from his apprenticeship as a compositor between 1948 and 1954 to his senior and advisory roles with many of the great innovators of typesetting and pre-press technology, including Intertype, Linotype, Monotype, Crosfield, AM International and Kodak. As such, he was involved in, and helped to shape, one of the most dramatic and complex periods of change in the industry's history. He will also be remembered as a kind and patient teacher, both in the formal sense of training and lecturing on print technology and history, and as an informal consultant to students and academics, and to colleagues in the industry. As an author he wrote on type and typesetting, and was responsible for the standard biographies of Leonard Jay and George W. Jones; he was a frequent contributor to scholarly and trade journals, and had a regular column in *PrintWeek* from 1997, which became something of a cult. A long-term and active supporter of St Bride Library, the Printing Historical Society, the National Printing Heritage Trust, the Wynkyn de Worde Society and numerous other print-related bodies, he 'retired' to Plymouth a few years ago, where he continued his various research projects and became involved

with Plymouth College. He will be greatly missed, as a knowledgeable, cultured and patient colleague, as a scholar, and as a friend and mentor. His papers have been bequeathed to the St Bride Library, which held an 'appreciation' of Lawrence's life and work on 5 March this year.

The death of Vivian Ridler, former Printer to the University of Oxford, and that of Brian Hubbard, type-founder of North Walsham, Norfolk, have recently been announced. We hope to include short obituary notices in a future issue of *PHN*.

NPHT Friends

Friends who pay their annual donation by cheque are reminded that renewal was due on 1 January. The annual minimum is still only £10.00 (the Treasurer's contact details are noted below). This can be Gift Aided. Instead of paying by cheque, Friends are invited to pay by bankers order, and forms for this, or Gift Aid, can be obtained from Dr D. Nuttall, Langdale, Pulford Lane, Dodleston, Chester CH4 9NN.

If you are not already a Friend of the National Printing Heritage Trust, could we invite you to join and so support our work?

PRINTING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Members will soon receive a copy of George Scurfield's *A stickful of non-pareil*. This was one of the celebrated 'Christmas books', printed in editions of five hundred copies or fewer and sent by the Printer to the University of Cambridge (at that time, 1956, Brooke Crutchley) to his 'friends in printing and publishing'.

The illustrations are by Edward Ardizzone, and the text incorporates first-hand accounts of the work of compositors and others at Cambridge University Press a hundred years ago. Professor David McKitterick has written a new introduction describing working conditions at CUP at the turn of the nineteenth century and the series of Christmas books printed there between 1930 and 1974, and incorporating a biographical note about Scurfield and a long extract from the recorded memories of one 'comp', A. E. Reeve, which were not used in the original edition.

This reprint has been printed by J. W. Northend of Sheffield and will be sent only to members of the PHS. No copies will be for sale.

FOR SALE

A complete small printing shop, formerly run by a keen amateur (now retired). Equipment includes Thompson and Autovic treadle presses, three Adana 8 × 5 presses, large cases of borders, ornaments and blocks, large cases of type (including 24 and 36 point Windsor and Windsor Outline), small cases of type (including 30 point Fry's Ornamented, 24 point Lombardic Initials, 18 point Old Face Open), furniture, spacing material, etc. All the type and presses are believed to be in good condition. No reasonable offer by a person with printer's ink under their fingernails will be refused (as a guide, the owner would like £5–£25 each for the small type-cases, and £10–£30 for the large; £50 each for the Adanas and £200 each for the treadle presses). The items are located at Diss, on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. Please contact Jane Langston on 07890 437940 or jane.langston@ntlworld.com.

USEFUL CONTACTS

National Printing Heritage Trust
www.npht.org.uk

Hon. Correspondent: Jeremy Winkworth
jezmactastic@hotmail.com

Treasurer: E. C. James
The Pinfold, Church Road, Dodleston,
Chester, Cheshire CH4 9NG
gbf70@dial.pipex.com

Printing Historical Society
www.printinghistoricalsociety.org.uk
Chair: Peggy Smith
m.m.smith@reading.ac.uk

Friends of St Bride Library
www.stbride.org
Chair: Rob Banham
rob@stbride.org

St Bride Library, Bride Lane,
Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EE
www.stbride.org
Librarian: Nigel Roche
nigelroche@stbridefoundation.org

Printing History News
Editor: Paul W. Nash
8 Fairfield Drive, Witney,
Oxfordshire OX28 5LB
paul.w.nash@virgin.net

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