Fine print and private press collections

This page lists our major collections of rare books demonstrating fine printing and from private presses.

Aston Bindings

This is a 50-volume set of Sacred Books of the East, printed at the Clarendon Press 1879-1910, including an **1880 edition of the Qur'an (http://libcat.bham.ac.uk/TalisPrism/doSearch.do?REF=%3C1%3D%221.0%22%3E%3C2%3E%3C3%3E%3CAnd%3E%3C3%3E%3C3%3D%3E%3C4%3EKeyword%3C%2F4%3E%3C5%3EHenry+edward+palmer%3C%2F5%3E%3C%2F3%3E%3C%2F2%3E%3C%2F1%3E%3C%3D%3E%3C4%3EIlliW%3C%2F4%3E%3C5%3Equr%26apos%3Ban%3C%2F5%3E%3C%2F%3D%3E%3C%2F3%3E%3C%2FAnd%3E%3C%2F3%3E%3C7%3E%3C9%3E%3C8%3E14%3C%2F8%3E%3C%2F%3C9%3E%3C%2F7%3E%3C%2FZ%3E%3C8%3D%22allslms%22+%3E%3C%2FR%3E%3C%2F" target="_blank">in the translation considered to be the best in English and closest to the spiritual content of the original, together with a comprehensive and illuminating preface on the Prophet and the religious and political context of Arabia by Henry Edward Palmer, who had an intimate knowledge of the language of the Bedouins.

Also part of the set is the first printing of the landmark comprehensive English version of the I Ching in 1882, translated by various Oriental scholars and edited by F. Max Muller. The set is sumptuously bound by J. Aston in full red, green or black leather with gold tooling, silk endpapers and all edges gilt.

Baskerville

This collection of the books from the press of the 18th century Birmingham letter-founder and printer, **John Baskerville (1706-1775) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Baskerville)**, creator of **one of the world's most famous typefaces (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baskerville)**, was presented in memory of **Victor Hely-Hutchinson (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Hely-Hutchinson)** (Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham 1934-1944), by his brother.

Baskerville was an entrepreneur from Wolverley, near Kidderminster in Worcestershire, who made his fortune in japanning in Birmingham but whose lifelong passion was for the production of finely printed books. In addition to pioneering the use of smooth wove paper, Baskerville used his technical skills and knowledge to introduce innovations in press construction and to invent a superior black ink. His books are especially noted for his own elegant type-face and spacious marg and many of our copies are in Baskerville's own magnificent bindings.

In 1757 he published his first book, an edition of the poems of Virgil, printing it on the hand press at his house at Easy Hill, Birmingham. His last great work was Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (1773), which was illustrated with engravings by leading artists of the day. The most recent addition to our collection is **Baskerville's wife Sarah's copy of the Cambridge Bible (1763) (http://libcat.bham.ac.uk/TalisPrism/doOpenURLSearch.do?sid=Talis:prod_talis&pid=Key%3A19673%3BArtifactType%3AMarc21Slim%3BsearchLocation%3Atalisimsi)**, widely acknowledged as his masterpiece; this copy was donated by Benjamin Tillett Davis, a forensic pathologist at the University of Birmingham and a medical historian.

Birmingham School of Printingbaskervill

This collection comprises approximately 500 books, pamphlets and emphemera, printed under the direction of Leonard Jay during the period 1926-1953 at the Birmingham School of Printing. In his teaching he advocated the application of the aesthetic principles of the Private Press and the Arts and Crafts Movements to the mechanical composition of commercial printing.

Among the holdings is a set of The Torch (1933-1950), the first issue of which contains a catalogue, with sample pages and illustrations, of the books published by the press 1925-33 and copies of photographs, advertisements and commercial stationery by the students.

Our copies of the School's work are in the wide range of original bindings and there are many limited editions such as:

- the quarto printing of The Song of Songs (1937), composed as a drama by Ernest Renan, with illustrations by Bernard Sleigh
- Selection from Ballads of Old Birmingham (1945), printed on laid paper
- Eight Poems by Thomas Bodkin, who was Professor of Fine Arts and the founding Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in the University from 1935 until 1952, where he acquired the nucleus of one of the finest art collections of the Twentieth Century.

The complete output of the press is recorded in the bibliography of Leonard Jay (1963) by L. W. Wallis.

Bodoni

Giambattista Bodoni of Parma (1740-1813), an Italian engraver, publisher, printer and typographer is now remembered for the famous typeface named after him. In 1768 he was appointed printer to the court of Parma, where, greatly influenced by the work of John Baskerville (see above), he developed an international reputation for technical refinement, combining classical typographical elegance with purity of materials.

Our Bodoni collection comprises about 170 books and includes splendid editions of the classics, such as his folio of Horace's Opera (1791), and Italian authors, such as the two volume edition of Tasso's La Gerusalemme Liberata (1795), as well as copies of Gray's Poems (1793) and The Castle of Otranto by Walpole (1791). The last is superbly bound by William Edwards of Halifax in Etruscan calf, decorated by acid staining in contrasting shades of terra cotta leather and bla tooling, with rectangular panels on each cover, bordered with Greek palmate leaves in black with outer borders tooled in gold, the spine also being decorated in gold and black with classical ornaments in six panels.

Foulis

This collection of about 200 titles represents about one third of the total output of this celebrated 18th century Glasgow press, which was founded by the brothers Robert (1707-76) and Andrew (1712-75) Foulis. In 1741 Robert opened a bookshop at Glasgow University and from 1742 began to publish books at his own press, being appointed as University Printer in 1743. With his brother in partnership, the firm acquired an international reputation for their high quality editions of th classics, such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey (1756-58). They also published ordinary editions of both classical and modern authors, bringing the works and values of the Enlightenment within reach of the ordinary citizen. Many titles were scholarly, and although some were produced as collectors' items (such as miniatures), they were all carefully edited, neatly formatted on good paper and excellent value. In particular, Foulis set a new standard of title-page layout, replacing a contemporary vogue for unhelpful clutter with classical simplicity and elegance.

Kelmscott

The Kelmscott Press was established at Hammersmith in 1891 by William Morris and Emery Walker. Inspired by the beauty of 16th century roman type-faces and wood-cut illustrations, they aimed to equal the highest standards of the past. The book designs were modelled on medieval incunabula and the roman Golden Type, fashioned by Morris, was influenced by the French engraver and printer Nicolaus Jenson (1420-1480), who worked in Venice. Morris himself oversaw all aspects of book production, selecting the paper and the form of type, spacing the letters and setting the type himself.

More than 50 books were produced at the Press between 1891 and 1899. The most magnificent is the edition of The works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1896), which is printed on paper made entirely of linen with a Morris-designed watermark copied from an Italian incunable in his own library, illustrated with 87 woodcuts by the great Birmingham artist Edward Burne-Jones and with variously repeated woodcut borders, frames, and initial words and letters all designed by Morris. The boo are in their original bindings, either in limp vellum with silk ties or quarter blue holland boards.

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