



OXFORD GUILD OF PRINTERS

NEWSLETTER

April 2011

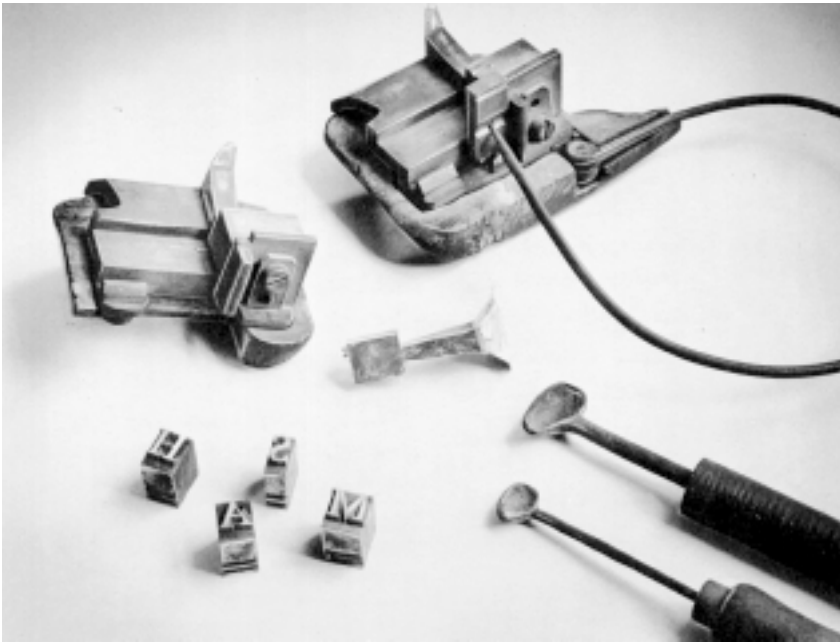
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A hand-mould, ladles and cast type

Meeting recall

On 4 April we met to hear Geoff Hulett, formerly of Stephenson Blake, talk about and demonstrate hand-typecasting. A problem quickly became evident. The room at The Bell was well equipped with smoke-detectors and, since the melting of the type-metal would inevitably generate heat and fumes, it was feared this would activate the detectors and bring the fire-brigade. Despite noble attempts by Mr Hulett to light his burners on the patio, and by Louisa Hare to melt type-metal in The Bell's kitchen and transport it to the meeting room, it was clear that the talk would have to proceed without a practical demonstration of typecasting. In the end, this mattered not at all, for all the paraphernalia of typecasting was there – punches, matrices, moulds and sundry specimens – so that Mr Hulett was able to give an excellent demonstration and description of the whole process without the need to melt metal at all.

Punches were originally cut by hand, and this continued at Stephenson Blake until around 1960, when the last of the punch-cutters (who represented the most expensive part of the process of making type) retired. Matrices were made by

Guild meetings

Meetings are held at The Bell in Charlbury, usually at 7:30 for 8:00 p.m. The Bell serves food (as well as booze, naturally) and some members have taken to dining there before meetings. The food is recommended, and there is often a special (and very pleasing) £6.00 menu available from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Monday 2 May *The Pen and the Quill*. Calligraphy in performance by master of the line Paul Antonio. You can expect to see some extraordinary flourishes and curlicues, and to hear resonant music.

Monday 6 June, 6:00 p.m. *Visit to Stonehouse* to the workshops of John Grice and Tom Mayo (fine printers) and Stan Lane (typecaster *extraordinaire*). Details and directions will be included in the May Newsletter.

Other events

A **Printers' Wayzgoose** will be held in Chipping Campden Town Hall on Saturday 7 May (10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). Several OGP members (and,

P.T.O.

striking punches into copper bars, but other techniques were invented in the latter part of the nineteenth-century. Mats could be engraved using a pantograph, or manufactured from existing pieces of type on which an electrotype shell could be grown over the course of ten or twelve days; this shell could then be filled with molten metal and fused to a copper bar to form a new matrix. Several hand-moulds were shown, and their use demonstrated, the matrix fitting neatly between two jaws and controlling the width of the aperture in which the body of each piece of type was cast. We also saw an example of the 'Unicast' machine, an adjustable mould into which any piece of type could be fitted in order to create a temporary matrix capable of casting a few sorts to strengthen a fount or supply missing characters. The makers hoped the Unicast would make redundant the sorts-service of foundries like Stephenson Blake. But, happily for SB, that was not to be.

After the demonstration Mr Hulett answered questions about type manufacture, and about the history and practices of Stephenson Blake. We learned of the massive production of type between around 1945 and 1965, after which letterpress began to decline and type manufacture became increasingly uneconomic. The SB typefoundry finally ceased production in the 1990s, although the casting of Mazak type (a hard type used for blocking and embossing) is still going on in Sheffield using some of the original mats owned by Stephenson Blake. Despite the technical difficulties it was a most enjoyable evening, an excellent demonstration of typecasting and a glimpse of the history of the twentieth-century's leading typefoundry.

Best Remembered?

Miles Wigfield drew my attention to the following quotation from *Types best forgotten* (Parsimony Press, 1993). Colin Cohen's contribution to the subject is 'Anything designed since Palatino' and beneath three examples appears the editor, Robert Norton's, comment:

If you need to know something about the graphic industry, there are conventional ways of salving problems. You can go to libraries. You can subscribe to trade magazines. You can visit shows. You can do all these things. But if you would rather spend time on the beach you need do none of these things. You just ask Colin Cohen.

Those of you know the book will know it as a *tête-bêche* volume, with the other half, upside-down, being *Types best remembered*. Here Colin champions – yes, you've guessed it – Palatino, which he describes as 'probably the best typeface in the world'. Other wise heads choose Bell, Bembo, Caslon, Centaur, Delphin, Janson and other great types, while a few, quite inexplicably (to me), go for Helvetica. Miles informs me that the book has now been remaindered, and can be found in the basement of Collinge and Clarke's bookshop, but adds 'enter at your own risk'. P.W.N

it is hoped, the Guild itself) will have stalls. This is part of the Chipping Campden Literature Festival, which runs from 3–7 May; further details can be found at www.campdenlitfest.co.uk. If you would like a stall at the Wayzgoose, please contact Louisa Hare on 01608 685924.

Small ads

Bell type wanted. If you are able to lend, or sell, me some 18-point Monotype Bell type to complete a student project, I should be most grateful. If you can help, please contact the editor, Paul W. Nash, by phone on 01608 654349 or e-mail paul@strawberrypress.co.uk.

Glockner-Mercedes platen press free to a good home. The press is believed to be complete, but in need of some attention and cleaning. It is currently located in Verwood, Dorset. The owner would like to dispose of it quickly, ideally within the next few weeks. If interested, please ring Mrs Warr on 01202 814396.

Composing stick wanted. If you are able to sell me a modest, functional composing stick, for a keen student, I should be most grateful. If you can help, please contact Paul W. Nash, by phone on 01608 654349 or e-mail paul@strawberrypress.co.uk.

P.S. Thank you

Thanks to John Smith for supplying the image used for last month's invitation card. It shows a 'rat's-tail' type-mould – so-called because the curved spring or bow resembles the long curled tail of the second most noble of rodents (after the coypu) – punches, mats and type, and was taken from the back of the catalogue of the *Printing and the mind of man* exhibition of 1963. I think it must be by Reynolds Stone. Special thanks go to Louisa Hare for printing the card so beautifully. P.W.N