

Library of Birmingham Archives & Collections

John Baskerville of Birmingham, printer

- 1706** John Baskerville born
- 1737** Kept a school in the Bull Ring where he taught writing and book-keeping, and carved monumental inscriptions at Birmingham
- 1740** Started business at Moor Street as a japanner
- 1750** Began to occupy himself with type-founding
- 1757** After experimenting for several years, he produced a type with which he was satisfied
- 1758** Produced his Milton Elected printer to Cambridge University for ten years
- 1760** First printed his edition of the Prayer Book
- 1763** Printed his edition of the Bible
- 1770** A Quarto Horace
- 1772-3** A famous series of quarto editions of Latin authors
- 1775** John Baskerville died
- 1779** His printing plant purchased by Beaumarchaise

“He had the reputation of being the finest printer of modern times, though the opinion of contemporary experts was somewhat unfavourable to his type.”

The Concise Dictionary of National Biography, from earliest times to 1985, Volume I: A-F, Oxford University Press, 1992.

“His principal trade was in japanned goods. An immigrant from Worcestershire, starting with very little capital, he began in Birmingham as a stone-cutter, was then a writing master and set up as a manufacturer of japanned goods in Moor Street in 1740. From 1745 his home was a fine house on what was then the fringe of the town, at Easy Hill [i.e. Baskerville House], and from there he directed his factory for japanned ‘tea tables, waiters, and trays’ and his printing business. Among his innovations was the introduction of papier-mâché into this country. He produced it in its original manner, as the name implies, by gluing pulped paper which could then be moulded, shaped, and decorated... Baskerville achieved a high degree of devolution in his concern, through a system of managers looking after different departments, leaving him free to invent, design and cut his type. His wife was said to be in charge of japanning and both Clay [a pupil of his] and his later partner Gibbins (or Gibbons) worked for Baskerville for several years. Henry Clay himself made a fortune out of the work Baskerville had pioneered. “

VCH Warwickshire, Volume VII, The City of Birmingham. The University of London Institute for Historical Research, Oxford University Press, 1964, p 95.

Sources in the Archives

MS 1645/21-22

Baskerville House, Broad Street Photographs of people outside, 1945/50

MS 1180

Letters, newscuttings, printed and other material re John Baskerville, 1937

MS 1666

Unlisted MS. Scrapbook of letters, engravings etc. formed by Samuel Timmins.

MS 724

Baskerville, John: Notes concerning books printed by him.

MS 1385

Baskerville, John (Birmingham printer): Letter to Robert Dodsley, 12 May 1757

MS 1366/D/11

Baskerville, John: Printed item: "John Baskerville in the Judgement of German Contemporaries" 1937 by Dr Hans Bockwitz.

EP26/2/4/1

Baskerville, John: Memorandum in Christ Church parish register about the rediscovery of his coffin, 1893.

Pardoe, F.E, (d file)

List of known surviving letters of. Compiled by F. E. Pardoe.

MS 1747

Reproduction of letter to Robert Dodsley, 1757

MS 705/4

Galley proofs of book by William Bennet on John Baskerville, 1937.

MS 1630/1

Note to John Livie, 1766

MS 1227/38

Catalogue for exhibition on occasion of 74th Annual Meeting of the Society of Chemical Industry, Birmingham University.

MS 39/7, 79,

Deeds 1762-63, Will 1773

148484 [ZZ 32]

Memoir of John Baskerville, Printer, by Thomas Bell, c.1830.

201678-9 [IIR 30]

Notes etc. John Baskerville, 19th cent.

V.C.H. Vol. VII, p 326 (opp)

Illustration of Baskerville House, 1939

MBP 219, Letter Box B1, 198-214

Correspondence with John Baskerville of Birmingham, printer and japanner.

MBP Letter Book E - 15, 84

Secondary Sources

John Baskerville, printer and typefounder, an exhibition of books, documents, and associated material (Birmingham Public Libraries, 1994)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: ApQ016.094 BAS]

Industry and genius, or, the origin of Birmingham, a fable attempted in the manner of Spencer inscribed to Mr. B. (i.e. John Baskerville) (Birmingham, 1980)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: ApQ094/PAR/1980]

J. Baskerville, A letter from John Baskerville letter-founder and printer of Birmingham to Robert Dodsley bookseller of Pall Mall London (Wynkyn de Worde Society, 1993)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: ApQ094/BAS/1757]

J. Baskerville, A Description of Coalbrookdale in the county of Salop with two perspective views thereof, [list of subscribers printed by John Baskerville] (Birmingham, 1758)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: AE094/BAS/1758 Shel]

J. Baskerville, Letters of the famous 18th century printer John Baskerville of Birmingham, together with a bibliography of works printed by him at Birmingham collected compiled and printed under the direction of Leonard Jay (Birmingham: Birmingham School of Printing, 1932)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: AQ094/BIR/1931 Shel]

J. Baskerville, [Specimen of] Proposals for printing by subscription the produced works of John Milton, in two volumes. From the text of Thomas Newton D.D Volume the first (Birmingham: Printed by John Baskerville for J and R Tonson in London, 1757)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: A09/BAS/1757]

J. Baskerville, A Specimen by John Baskerville of Birmingham in the county of Warwick, Letter-founder and Printer ([Birmingham]: John Baskerville, 1754).

[Arts, Languages and Literature: AE094/BAS/1754 Loca]

- J. Baskerville, A Specimen by John Baskerville of Birmingham Letter-founder and Printer ([Birmingham: John Baskerville], ca. 1760)
[Arts, Languages and Literature: AE094/BAS/1760 Loca]
- J. Baskerville, A Specimen by John Baskerville of Birmingham Letter-founder and Printer ([Birmingham: John Baskerville], ca. 1762)
[Arts, Languages and Literature: AE094/BAS/1762 Loca]
- W. Bennet, John Baskerville, the Birmingham printer, his press, relations and friends. Vol. 2 (Birmingham: Birmingham School of Printing, 1939)
[Arts, Languages and Literature: AQ094/BIR/1939]
- J.H. Benton, John Baskerville, type-founder and printer 1706-1775 (New York: Printed for the Typophiles, 1944)
[Birmingham Archives and Heritage: 686.20942496 BAS Bir]
- T. Cave, John Baskerville: the printer, 1706-1775, his ancestry, a retrospect, by Thomas Cave (Birmingham: City of Birmingham School of Printing, 1936)
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[Arts, Languages and Literature: Q0 16.094 GAS and AQ686.2094249678.1 BAS]
[Birmingham Archives and Heritage: L78.1 BAS]
- F.E. Pardoe, John Baskerville of Birmingham, letter-founder and printer (London: Muller, 1975)
[Arts, Languages and Literature: 655.14249 BAS and A686.2092 BAS]
- F.E. Pardoe, In praise of John Baskerville, a tribute by F E Pardoe, illustrated by Anthony Christmas (Fleece Press, 1949)
[Arts, Languages and Literature: A099/1994]
- F.E. Pardoe, John Baskerville and the subscribers' list for 'A description of Coalbrookdale in the county of Salop', 1758 (Birmingham, 1988)
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- R. Straus, John Baskerville, a memoir, by Ralph Straus and Robert K Dent (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907)

[Birmingham Archives and Heritage: LF78.A BAS]

T. Underhill, Teachers of John Baskerville: John Dougherty the Elder (1677-1755) and John Doharty the Younger (c.1707-a.1763)

[Arts, Languages and Literature: Ap655014249]

B. Walker, The resting places of the remains of John Baskerville, the thrice buried printer (Birmingham: Birmingham School of Printing, 1944)

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