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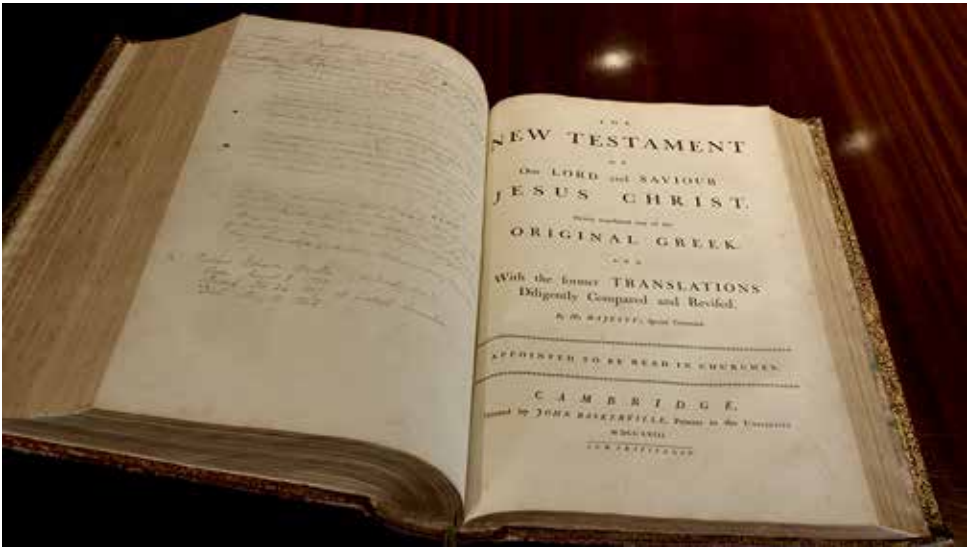

Fig. 1 : Title page for the New Testament in the Boulton family Baskerville Bible, printed in Cambridge in 1760 and annotated on the facing verso by the Boulton family enumerating the births, deaths, baptisms and ailments of its members. Cadbury Research Library. Photography : Sean Griffiths.

Baskerville at the Cadbury Research Library and the 'Great Baskerville Bible Crisis of 2020'

CAROLINE ARCHER-PARRÉ and MARTIN KILLEEN

This year is the 250th anniversary of the death of John Baskerville (1707–75), a Birmingham industrialist and Enlightenment figure who made his fortune through the manufacture of fashionable japanware while building a worldwide reputation as a printer. Baskerville is probably best known for the typeface which now bears his name. His typographic experiments put him ahead of his time, had an international impact and did much to enhance the printing industry of his day, while the volumes he created in Birmingham are recognised as masterpieces of the art and craft of book making which 'went forth to astonish all the librarians of Europe'. As well as printing in Birmingham Baskerville also became printer to the University of Cambridge, from where he issued four editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* and his great folio Bible which is still regarded as one of the world's most beautifully printed books.

To commemorate the anniversary of his death, this article recounts the 2020 campaign to prevent the Boulton Family Baskerville Bible from being sold at auction with its likely loss to the nation as a whole. It also reviews the Baskerville volumes housed in the Cadbury Research Library (CRL) at the University of Birmingham, one of the world's most comprehensive collections of material from the Baskerville Press, where the Boulton Family Baskerville Bible is now housed.

The Great Baskerville Bible Crisis of 2020

In March 2020, just as COVID-19 was causing upheaval, claiming casualties, locking us all down and casting fear around the world,

we found ourselves wholly occupied by an activity that contrasted sharply with global events: rescuing a book from the auctioneer's hammer. It was an activity that was both highly significant and yet seemingly inconsequential when set against world affairs. The volume, Matthew Boulton's Family Bible, printed by John Baskerville in Cambridge in 1763, had been placed for auction in London by the Birmingham Assay Office who had owned the Bible since purchasing it at Christie's in 1986. The volume has international typographic interest, is nationally important and has particular significance to the cultural heritage of Birmingham. Its appearance at auction placed it in danger of leaving not only the city but also the country.

The former owner of the volume, the 18th-century inventor and industrialist Matthew Boulton (1728–1809), was a skilful businessman and leading light of the influential Lunar Society. A Birmingham 'toy'-maker producing buttons, buckles and silverware, his gilded ornaments decorated drawing rooms around the world. His determination to discourage counterfeiters led to a contract to manufacture British and foreign coins and to establish the Birmingham Assay Office. Regarded as Britain's leading Enlightenment entrepreneur, Boulton was friends with the great and the good including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Erasmus Darwin and John Baskerville. The lives of Boulton and Baskerville were intertwined both commercially and socially. Baskerville, the older man, loaned Boulton money for his business; Boulton sold Baskerville's japanware; and both men served on the town's committees. Boulton purchased the land for his manufactory from kin of Baskerville's wife, Sarah, and the two men, their wives and families dined together at their respective homes at Soho and Easy Hill. Boulton was an early subscriber to Baskerville's Cambridge Bible. His personal copy included the printer's own marbled paper as endpapers and red goatskin leather boards, which were elaborately tooled in gilt with decorative borders. The importance of the volume, however, goes beyond the typographic. It is also testimony to Boulton and Baskerville's relationship, primary physical evidence of the interconnections of Birmingham's 18th-century entrepreneurs and an object of both local and national significance. The Bible was annotated by Boulton and his heirs who recorded important family events such as births

and deaths, baptisms and marriages. Also noted were family illnesses including whooping cough, measles and, most notably, smallpox – probably the single most lethal disease in 18th-century Britain. Particularly germane is the list of family vaccinations, evidence of Boulton's engagement with medical science, then still in its infancy, but from which we benefitted 250 years later with the development of the COVID-19 vaccines. Alongside its historical significance, the volume has current resonance.

We felt it imperative that it should remain in the city. To this end we formed a consortium of city heritage organisations – the Baskerville Society, Cadbury Research Library, Centre for Printing History & Culture, Birmingham Civic Society and the Lunar Society – who came together to raise funds to purchase the Bible and ensure the volume remained in Birmingham. We ran a vigorous social media campaign to raise awareness of our activities and asked people to pledge whatever they felt able. In addition, we contacted council leaders, MPs, bishops, rabbis, imams, arts and heritage organisations, libraries and museums, the typographic community, academics, the press, TV and radio to support our cause. Backing for the campaign was astonishing and pledges of funds were received from across the world. But we didn't know how much money we needed to secure the Bible at auction, because we simply didn't know who or how many we might be bidding against, the financial power of the opposition or their reasons to purchase. Over the course of just four weeks over £50,000 was pledged. This was a large sum of money, but we were not convinced it was sufficient to secure the Bible at auction, so we entered into negotiations with Birmingham Assay Office to persuade them to withdraw the volume so we could purchase it from them directly. Initially reluctant, the Assay Office eventually agreed to pull the volume from the auction and negotiate a purchase price. There was a snag: the purchase could only go ahead on condition of immediate payment, but we only had pledges and no actual money. We were fortunate that a white knight, in the shape of Baskerville Society Member Peter Allen, came to our aid and provided the necessary finances to enable the purchase. Peter's faith and generosity was remarkable because there was no guarantee that all the pledges would be honoured and that we could wholly reimburse him. But

without his commitment we would not have been able to negotiate the deal and pay for the volume. Once the contract was signed, we had the task of calling in the pledges. Alongside the good news that we had secured the Bible we were able to inform all those who pledged that we would be able to reduce their contribution by 10%. Perhaps it was this double dose of good news that ensured everyone honoured their commitment.

The whole episode of saving the Bible and the lessons learnt during the crisis provoked questions that took our thoughts beyond the text itself and which we think merit some investigations. The most noteworthy aspect of the campaign was the communality of the response and there was some evidence to suggest that, to a greater or lesser extent, COVID-19 contributed to the venture. It seemed the success of the campaign was assisted by the pandemic because it provided people with a cause on which to focus and the opportunity to practically engage at a time when they felt helpless and fearful. So many people commented that it 'felt good to attend to something other than the pandemic' and to be able to 'do something positive' for the world. The Bible was seen by many as a distillation of shared cultural values including art, science and industry, faith and family. This was all bound together by a sense of place, identity and locality. These cultural values were threatened when the volume was placed for auction. The importance of the Bible was, therefore, brought into sharper focus by the pandemic which was disrupting and threatening physical, spiritual and cultural life around the globe. The saga of the Bible raised questions about the role of heritage and history in aiding the individual and community to respond to, and cope with, global emergencies. It also made us reflect on the importance of documenting for posterity events while they happen. Boulton used the family Bible – a most important possession passed down the generations – to record 18th-century killer diseases, their effects and the consequences for the family. Two-and-a-half centuries later, the Bible once again became a vehicle for documenting our response to a 21st-century disease as it happened. Thanks to the generosity of the people of Birmingham, Britain and beyond, the Bible was secured. After languishing for two years at Forum Auctions, unable to move because of COVID restrictions, it was

finally delivered to Birmingham in autumn 2021. It is now housed at the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham, along with the Library's other Baskerville holdings, and is available for public viewing.

The Baskerville Collection at the Cadbury Research Library (CRL)

In 1954 a collection of books from Baskerville's press was presented to the CRL in memory of Victor Hely-Hutchinson (1901–47), Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham (1934–44) and an enthusiastic and informed Baskerville collector, by his brother. The original bequest comprised eighty-six items, which represents almost all the editions for which Baskerville was responsible. Most of the copies are in fine condition with handsome bindings and many have distinctive individual features of note. The CRL continues to develop this core collection, which over time has been augmented by many additional copies; two notable missing books are John Freeth's *The Political Songster* (1771) and W. Jackson's *The Beauties of Nature* (1769).

The collection includes six copies of the first book printed by Baskerville, Virgil's *Bucolica, Georgica et Aeneis* (1757), which was also the first to be partly printed on the recently invented wove paper. The simplicity of the title page layout represented a typographical revolution. From the outset Baskerville's style was in complete opposition to a prevailing fashion to cram title pages with a mass of information, ornament and decoration. Four of the copies are in the first state of this edition with only four additional names on the list of subscribers, and two copies in the second state with a further twenty-four names. Baskerville had first proposed this publication three years earlier but as a demanding perfectionist he would only be satisfied with the highest standards. He habitually corrected text throughout the printing process and several variants and cancels can be found. In addition, there are two rare copies of the fake edition of Baskerville's first book; these are also dated 1757 but were actually issued some years later. One copy is unillustrated but the second is a copy of the even scarcer two-volume edition containing plates by the artist and etcher Wenceslas Hollar (1607–77) and the engraver Pierre Lombart (1613–81) removed from a folio copy of John Ogilby's

Virgil of 1654 and trimmed to fit this quarto edition. These versions are not thought to be printed by Baskerville himself, but most likely by his foreman Robert Martin, who managed the press from 1767 to 1769, and after Baskerville's death in 1775. This suspect edition contains typographical errors not found in Baskerville's genuine original and it is printed on lower quality paper than the original.

Baskerville's second book, an edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1758), includes a rare preface written by him, in which he gives an account of the care and effort put into perfecting his books, in particular the design of his typeface and the manufacture of the paper and inks. This is the only occasion on which he directly addresses his audience, presenting a very important declaration of his typographic positioning, equivalent to his manifesto as a printer. His chief aspiration is that his books should excel due to the quality of their 'Paper, Letter, Ink and Workmanship'. The CRL holds four pairs of the two editions of this publication, including the rarer illustrated variants. Baskerville concludes the Preface with the hope that success with his Milton will help him to advance his next ambition, which was to print both a *Book of Common Prayer* and a Folio Bible. His hopes were realised through his appointment in 1758 as printer to the University of Cambridge. Baskerville and his workmen travelled to Cambridge with the types and presses necessary to carry out the work. He eventually severed his connection with the University after the folio Bible did not prove to be a financial success.

Baskerville's Cambridge Bible of 1763 is widely regarded as his masterpiece, the title page to the New Testament being particularly admired as one of his finest typographical achievements. Of the six CRL copies, one of the most interesting is that of Baskerville's wife Sarah, with her own bookplate, striking marbled endpapers and in a plain almost undecorated binding all designed by Baskerville himself. After Sarah's death in 1788, Baskerville's house was sold to John Ryland (1726–1814) and Sarah's copy became the Ryland family Bible. Just as with the Boulton Bible, the inscriptions opposite the New Testament title page comprise genealogical notes and health records including inoculations, pertaining to the Rylands, who later moved away after the house was attacked and wrecked during the Birmingham riots in 1791. The copy was donated by Benjamin

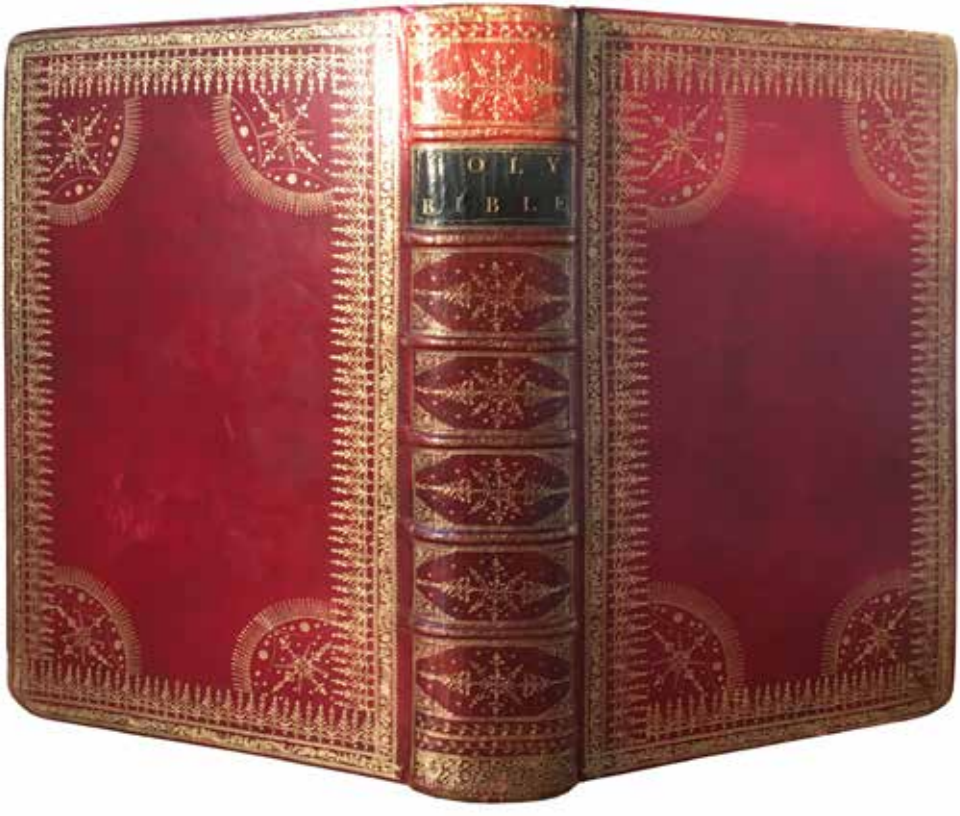

Fig. 2: A series of small hand tools and rolls were used to decorate the cover, spine, board edges and turn-ins of the Boulton family Baskerville Bible. The binder is unknown, but this is one of only a few known 'Baskerville Bindings', probably produced by a binder in Baskerville's own employ. Cadbury Research Library. Photography: Alexandre Parré.

Tillett Davis (1920–98), a forensic pathologist at the University of Birmingham, a medical historian as well as a lifelong enthusiastic and discriminating book collector.

While in Cambridge, Baskerville also issued a *Book of Common Prayer* in 1760. He noted in a letter that the size of its type 'is calculated for people who begin to want Spectacles but are ashamed to use them at Church'. Several versions were available in combinations of single lines or double columns, with and without borders, all of which are represented in CRL holdings. One especially fine BCP binding is in blue goatskin with gilt edges and decoration in the 'Harleian' style. A copy of the later, smaller 1762 edition is extra-illustrated throughout with uncredited plates bordered in gold.

Baskerville also formed a connection with Oxford University in 1761, when they engaged him to design a Greek typeface. In 1763 two editions of the New Testament were published by the Clarendon Press with his font, and the CRL holds copies of both the quarto and octavo versions. Unfortunately, contemporary reaction was universally negative, with Baskerville's designs being condemned for departing too far from prevailing conventions, still based on principles established by Renaissance printers. Subsequently, although it was not reused by Oxford, the font was reappraised, and it became a model for modern standards used for Greek type design.

The CRL holds a unique copy of *Select Fables of Esop and other Fabulists* (1761). One of the most popular books to be issued from the Baskerville Press, selling over 2,000 copies in the first three months, this edited collection was compiled by Robert Dodsley (1703–64), a major London publisher and friend of John Baskerville. While the standard vignettes engraved by Charles Grignion (1721–1810) from original drawings by the painter and illustrator Samuel Wale (1721–86) are in one set, another contains unique ink designs by the local poet William Shenstone (1714–63), another of Baskerville's friends, together with his manuscript notes on the illustrations. This copy also has the Baskerville marbled endpapers and is in a binding identified as from the workshop associated with his press.

Another major success from this early phase of Baskerville's printing career is the 1761 quarto edition of Addison's plays, which is regarded as the most beautiful version of Addison ever published.

Fig. 3 : Baskerville's trough-marbled endleaf paper, which is unlike any other European marbling of the period, was made to look like blended washes of watercolour. Produced for a competition run by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce to encourage English marbling, the paper is found in only a few of Baskerville's volumes. Cadbury Research Library. Photography : Alexandre Parré.

Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776–1847), the celebrated 19th-century bibliophile, considered it 'a good and even glorious performance'. Baskerville's presswork here directly influenced the landmark Boydell Shakespeare Folios, published towards the end of the century, through the family of his foreman Robert Martin, whose brother William was the type cutter and setter who supplied the Shakespeare Press with what became known as the Bulmer typeface, a transitional serif design.

Richard Gardiner's *An account of the expedition to the West Indies against Martinico* (1762) was also published in a French version. The errata note in the CRL copy is a typical example of Baskerville's practice of continual revision of a work while being printed (in this case the error has been corrected). Other examples of exceptionally rare CRL Baskerville holdings are the two copies of the Joseph Dalby medical book *The virtues of cinnabar and musk, against the bite of a mad dog*; one copy has the uncorrected date 1762 and the other 1764. The work was printed for the author and pre-sold to fewer than 200 people.

In 1773 Baskerville published Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* for the Molini brothers, who were leading European booksellers with outlets in Florence, Paris and London. They had sought out Baskerville to introduce their series of *editions de luxe*. There is a date typo on the imprint of the CRL quarto copy which must have been instantly spotted, as there is only one other copy where it can be found (in Cambridge). The CRL has five copies of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times* (1773), an unpopular and heavily remaindered title. One set is in a binding by Bisiaux of Paris in blue goatskin, with the arms of the well-known 19th-century collector Theodore Williams. Another set, uncut and unopened in later blue paper wrappers, shows the physical state in which many Baskerville publications would leave his office.

Baskerville continued to print up to his death. His last project in 1774 was William Hunter's *The anatomy of the human gravid uterus*, a monumental crowning achievement, one of the very few landmark medical books issued from a private press. The book revolutionised the study of the pregnant body, since physicians could see, for the first time, realistic life-sized depictions of a foetus in utero in thirty-

four engraved double folio size plates in high quality and with perfect clarity. In the Preface Hunter explained: 'The additional expense of Mr Baskerville's art was not incurred for the sake of elegance alone; but principally for the advantage of his paper and ink, which render a leaf of his Press-Work an excellent preservative of the plates between which it is placed.'

For a period of about three years Baskerville, in mid-career, had entrusted his printing house to his foreman Robert Martin, who produced several books with Baskerville's types. Some of these publications are now very scarce, such as the two companion volumes *Elegy on Prince Henry of Prussia* and *Éloge du Prince Henri* (1768) written by Frederick II, King of Prussia. This is the first English translation of Frederick II's eulogy, written on the death of his nephew from smallpox, while the text in the original French is one of only two books ever printed in French using the Baskerville types during his lifetime.

For a few years after Baskerville died in 1775 his wife Sarah and Robert Martin continued to print books with his types. Other local printers who took advantage of Sarah's decision at this time to sell remaining quantities of original Baskerville types included Pearson and Rollason, James Bridgwater, Thomas Chapman, Christopher Earl and James Smith of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Books in Baskerville types then continued to be produced for the next two decades or so and most of them can be found at CRL. Some books also appeared with incomplete publishing details and are very scarce; for instance, CRL holds the only known copy of the Brunton and Forbes *Catalogue of Forest-trees, Fruit Trees and Flowering Shrubs* (1777). Another relatively recent acquisition is a previously unrecorded item of occasional printing, a pamphlet guide for inland water transportation: *Tables of distances, rates of freight, &c, upon the navigation from the Trent to the Mersey, the Staffordshire & Worcestershire and Birmingham canals*. The imprint lacks both publisher and printer and does not provide an exact date (Birmingham: s.n. 177–?). However, it was most probably issued in the late 1770s, because in addition to supplying freight calculations for the Birmingham and Staffordshire and Worcestershire canals, which were completed by 1772, figures are also included for the

Trent and Mersey Canal which was begun in 1776 and completed the following year. The only recorded copy is held at the CRL.

Eventually the original punches and types were sold to Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–99), the French dramatist who in 1779 took Baskerville's typographic material to Kehl, where the whole of the banned works of Voltaire were printed. The CRL holds a complete set of the two editions (in seventy and ninety-two volumes) of *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Kehl: Société littéraire-typographique, 1784–89/1785–89), which were printed using original Baskerville types.

The whereabouts of Baskerville's original types are unknown, probably lost, but his punches survived and are housed in the Historical Printing Room in the Cambridge University Library. These punches are now the subject of the three-year, collaborative research project between Birmingham City University and the University of Cambridge. The £1 million project is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and is entitled 'Small performances: investigating the typographic punches of John Baskerville through heritage science and practice-based research.'

You can read more about our ongoing investigations at www.baskervillepunches.org.

For further information on Baskerville, his life and his books see:

1. Archer-Parré, Caroline and Dick, Malcolm, eds, *John Baskerville: Art and Industry of the Enlightenment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).
2. Gaskell, Philip, *John Baskerville: A Bibliography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
3. Pardoe, F. E., *John Baskerville of Birmingham, Letter-Founder and Printer* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975).