

GREAT CRAFTSMEN

BY

RAYMOND LISTER

CHAPTER 5

JOHN BASKERVILLE

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5: JOHN BASKERVILLE

1706-75 PRINTER AND TYPEFOUNDER

JOHN BASKERVILLE is known to us today chiefly as a printer and type-founder. His designs for type are still in use—this book is set in Baskerville type—for they are eminently clear, readable and beautiful. Yet, as we shall see, these things formed but a small part of his interests, and he certainly did not make his fortune from them. In some ways he was an amateur, but an amateur whose standards could be emulated by few professionals.

He was born in 1706 at Sion Hill, Wolverley, in Worcestershire, and was baptised in the parish church on 28th January in that year. The Baskervilles had owned land and lived at Upton Grange, Wolverley, since early in the 6th century. John's early life is something of a mystery, and he himself, for some unknown reason, was always secretive about it. It is certain that he did not, as some of his biographers have sought to claim, serve as a footman to a parson, or anybody else. It is also certain that from an early age he was seriously interested in calligraphy, and that what he knew of it was self-taught. In a letter of 1773 he wrote, 'I was brought up to no kind of business'. By the age of nineteen he was a first-class calligrapher. By the age of twenty-two he had settled in Birmingham.

At about this time he tried his hand at cutting lettering in stone, and, if the surviving example of his work of this kind is typical, he was successful. This is a piece of slate, now in the Birmingham Reference Library, lettered in several different characters :

GRAVE STONES
Cut in any of the Hands
By
JOHN BASKERVILLE WRITING-MASTER.

The inscription is accompanied by a profusion of decorative scrolls and leaves. Another example, no longer extant, was in the churchyard at Edgbaston; it was a tombstone erected to the memory of an idiot, Edward Richards, who died in 1728. It was inscribed :

If innocents are the favourites of Heaven,
And God but little asks, where little's given,
My great Creator has for me in store
Eternal joys, what wise man can wish more.

In 1737 Baskerville kept a school in the Bull Ring at Birmingham, and it is thought that the slate slab just mentioned was exhibited at this spot as a trade sign. He acquired a great reputation for monumental lettering and for calligraphy.

But he was not destined to remain a carver and letterer. He was a man of considerable ambition and, at this time, desired more than anything to make plenty of money so that he could live in luxury and state, as he so ardently desired. An opportunity that made this possible presented itself to him when a certain John Taylor, a manufacturer of fancy goods, came to Birmingham. Taylor decorated such things as snuff-boxes, buttons and buckles, by japanning (a form of lacquering and varnishing) and

found such a ready sale for them that, by the time he died in his early fifties, he had amassed a fortune approaching a quarter of a million pounds.

Baskerville, who combined artistic talents with a keen sense of business, quickly realised the possibilities of the process, and he determined to make goods similar to Taylor's, but of more magnificent quality and perfection. But first he must obtain the secrets of the trade. Taylor could hardly be expected to give them to him, so Baskerville is supposed to have sought them out by surreptitious means. The method he used was to follow Taylor about when he was making his purchases, and to go into the shops immediately after him, buying the same materials and quantities that he had bought. From this, to determining the exact methods used was a matter of experiment. Whether this story is true or not is questionable, but if so it was typical of Baskerville's resourcefulness.

Soon, he was successfully applying the process to a variety of objects—trays, candlesticks, stands and salvers being but a sample of their total. He obtained in 1742 a patent (Specification No. 582) for his 'new method' of making sheet-metal work of this kind and claimed that his japanned finish could give 'fine glowing mahogany colour, a black in no way inferior to the best India Goods or an imitation of Tor-toise Shell, which greatly excels nature itself, both in colour and hardness'. Unfortunately no specimen of his japanned work remains—at least nothing that we can identify as his.

His business prospered and grew and soon Baskerville was a rich man. He built himself a magnificent residence, which he called Easy Hill, in eight acres of ground in north-east Birmingham, at a cost of £6,000. It was burnt down during the Birmingham riots of 1791, after his death. It was described in glowing terms by Samuel Derrick, in 1760, in a letter to the Earl of Cork.

His house stands at about half a mile's distance, on an eminence that commands a fine prospect. I paid him a visit, and was received with great politeness, though an entire stranger: his apartments are elegant; his stair-case is particularly curious; and the room in which he dines, and calls a Smoking-room is very handsome; the grate and furniture belonging to it are, I think, of bright wrought iron, and cost him a round sum. . . . This ingenious artist carries on a great trade in the japan way, in which he shewed me several useful articles, such as candlesticks, stands, salvers, waiters, bread-baskets, tea-boards, &c., elegantly designed, and highly finished. Baskerville is a great cherisher of genius, which, wherever he finds it, he loses no opportunity of cultivating. One of his workmen has manifested fine talents for fruit painting in several pieces which he shewed me.

His quest for grandeur did not linger at a fine house. A magnificent carriage was acquired. Each panel of it, said W. Hutton, historian of Birmingham, 'was a distinct picture, might be considered the *pattern-card of his trade*, and was drawn by a pair of cream-coloured horses'. Cupids, flowers, rococo decorations and lavish gilding made this vehicle a sight for the curious. It must have been even more of a sight with its owner riding within, for he was a lover, too, of sartorial finery, rich even for the 18th century. His coat was usually green, edged with gold lace, his waistcoat scarlet, decorated with a generous, nay, excessive amount of gold lace, and his hat was decorated similarly. He even attended funerals thus attired.

He was made successively Overseer and Surveyor of the Highways, and later High Bailiff of Birmingham, whose duties were, to quote Hutton again, 'to inspect the market, and see that justice takes place between buyer and seller; to rectify the weights and dry measures used in the manor'.

During his period of office as Surveyor of the Highways, Baskerville was criticised for paying himself expenses without the consent of a majority of those who signed his authority. The Town Book mentions this in an entry of 29th June 1756: 'At a meeting this day held at the Old Cross we some of

the Principal Inhabitants whose names are under written do object to allowing Mr. John Baskerville Eighteen Pounds and Ten Shillings which the said John Baskerville hath paid himself out of the Poor's Levy, on account of his office of Surveyor of the Highway. It being declared by a majority of those who signed his authority that they knew nothing of the said charge being brought into his accounts of Overseers of the Poor, and we further declare that if the said Mr. John Baskerville doth not refund the said Eighteen Pounds and Ten Shillings a Bill is intended to be exhibited against him to recover the same.' The outcome of this is not recorded.

Baskerville's character was as flamboyant as his dress. Although an active and successful business man, he was anything but typical of the men usually associated with that calling. He was frivolous, witty, quick-tempered, yet polite and handsome. He was, said Hutton, 'fond of shew ; a figure, rather of the smaller size, and delighted to adorn that figure with gold lace. Although constructed with the light timbers of a frigate, his movement was stately as a ship of the line.'

His religious views were unorthodox. In his will he recorded his 'hearty contempt for all superstition, the farce of a consecrated ground, the Irish barbarism of sure and certain hopes, etc.'. To this he added : 'I expect some shrewd remark will be made on this my declaration by the ignorant and bigoted, who cannot distinguish between religion and superstition, and are taught to believe that morality (by which I understand all the duties which a man owes to God and his fellow creatures) is not sufficient to entitle him to Divine favours without professing to believe as they call it certain absurd doctrines and mysteries about which they have no more conception than a horse. This morality alone I profess to have been my religion and the rule of my actions.'

In his private life, he employed Mrs. Richard Eaves to keep house for him. The wife of a forger who had forsaken her and their children, she took them to live at Baskerville's house, and became his wife in all but name. He actually did marry her in 1764, after the death of her husband.

They had no children—Mrs. Eaves was fifty-six when they married—but his stepson, John Eaves, was a great favourite of Baskerville's. He had intended John to be his successor, but he died in 1763, 'a most amiable young man, esteemed by all who knew him and whose death is universally lamented'. Baskerville was deeply distressed by the event. One of Baskerville's endearing traits was a love of children; in his will he left £500 to a granddaughter of his wife, referring to her as his little favourite.

He was a dog-lover also, and advertised the loss of a dog in *Aris' s Birmingham Gazette* of 4th May 1767: 'Also lost on Whitsuntide morning a full curled white puppy dog about ten weeks old, the upper part of his head and (long) ears of a dark chestnut brown, a large spot of the same colour on his loins, rump and fore legs. Whoever will bring him to the owner shall have five shillings reward. If not brought home in consequence of this advertisement whoever will give notice where he is so that he may be had again shall receive the same reward and the thanks of J. Baskerville.'

Baskerville was middle-aged (fifty) and already an established man of business and affairs when he began work on his famous type-faces and printing. To this work he brought the same enthusiasm, care and lavishness that had characterised everything that he had done hitherto. It would be true to say that he found printing a trade and transformed it into an art; and this was no small achievement in a man who had not touched the craft before he was fifty. He himself set out his aims as a printer and type founder in the preface to one of his own publications, an edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This is what he said :

Amongst the several mechanical Arts that have engaged my attention there is no one I have pursued with so much steadiness and pleasure as that of Letter Founding. Having been an early admirer of the beauty of Letters, I became insensibly desirous of contributing to

the perfection of them. I formed to myself Ideas of greater accuracy than had yet appeared, and have endeavoured to produce a Sett of Types according to what I conceived to be their true proportion. . . .

It is not my desire to print many books, but such only as are books of Consequence, of intrinsic merit, or established Reputation, and which the public may be pleased to see in an elegant dress, and to purchase at such a price, as will repay the extraordinary care and expense that must necessarily be bestowed upon them. . . .

Aesthetically he certainly achieved what he set out to do. His type-face remains to this day one of the most beautiful extant, and his own books, though few, are gems of simple, yet sumptuous typography. Simplicity prevails throughout. Whereas, up to his time, printers had crammed everything possible on to a title-page, Baskerville's title-pages contain the bare essentials required by the reader—no more, no less. The trouble he took to achieve this dignified restraint was enormous, and that is why it appears so effortless. It is the same with all great simplicity. A few things brought together in just the right way, with exactly the right balance and proportions, are worth all the decoration in the world. But that exact balance is amazingly difficult to achieve.

Baskerville had the gift of using the right workman for the job. In his japanned work he had always endeavoured to use the talents of his workpeople so that they should not be wasted in any way. For his type-cutting he again found just the right man. His name was, appropriately, Thomas Handy, and it was he who worked, literally for years, to bring Baskerville's type-face up to the point of perfection, less than which would not satisfy his master's fastidious taste.

To design any kind of fount is a difficult task. Each letter must be conceived and designed as an entity, and must, in addition, be related to every other letter in the alphabet, for it will inevitably be used in conjunction with each of them, for the most part between two of them, and it is therefore essential that they should be perfectly wedded one to another, so that, as the reader's eye travels over them, it is not arrested by discrepancies and clumsiness. Having been designed, each letter must be cut in reverse on a punch—a proceeding calling for much manual skill—which is then hardened. A matrix is then formed by driving the face of the punch into a piece of copper or bronze, thus forming a sharp impression of the punch the right way round. This impression is fitted into a mould, into which molten type-metal (an alloy of lead, tempered with tin and antimony) is poured. When it has cooled and hardened, this metal is removed from the mould and it will be found to have reproduced, in reverse once more, the impression of the punch. This is the type-face from which the printing is taken. The foregoing is, of course, a simplification, but it will give a rough idea of the magnitude of Baskerville's task, especially when his aim was perfection.

The niceties of his requirements are made obvious in a letter to the playwright Robert Dodsley. 'They please me,' he wrote, 'as I can make nothing more correct . . . you'll observe they strike the Eye much more sensibly than the smaller Characters tho Equally perfect . . . The R. wants a few slight Touches & the Y. half an hour's Correction. This Day We have resolutely set about 15 of the same siz'd Italick Capitals, which will not be at all inferior to the Roman. . . In another letter of 1757 he says, 'I have pursued the Scheme of printing and Letter founding for seven Years, with the most intense Application to the great prejudice of my Eyes, by the daily use of Microscopes, & at the expense of about a thousand pounds which really makes me short of Mony.'

And Baskerville's wife said of him that 'It was Mr. Baskerville's custom to melt the types when they had completed one book, so that he always printed with new letter'. Little wonder then that his works, in the words of Macaulay, 'went forth to astonish the librarians of Europe'. Later on, however, he became

less careful, and in work printed by him just before his death, worn and broken type was sometimes used.

Moreover he had the craftsman's typical sense of secrecy in regard to his methods and products. In another letter to Dodsley, he wrote: 'I have sent you an impression of 14 punches of the two-lines great primer. . . . Pray put it in no ones power to let Mr. Caslon [another type-founder] see them.'

Not only did Baskerville cut his own type, he also constructed his own presses. He made his own ink, was possibly closely connected with a bindery, and it is possible, too, that he made at least some of his own paper, for he advertised himself as a paper-maker, although this may have been a tradesman's mere figure of speech, just as watch repairers and retailers today put 'clockmaker' over their shops. Nevertheless there is plenty of evidence that Baskerville made some of his paper; it would have been like him to have done so. He certainly made writing-paper, some of it plain, some 'ornamented', some glazed, some unglazed.

And that brings us to one characteristic of his books—the glossy surface of their pages, which is unique among the work of 18th-century printers. It was made by inserting the newly-printed sheets between hot plates of copper, which process also had the effect of expelling moisture from the paper. To modern taste this glossy surface is inoffensive, and indeed many of us find it extremely pleasing, but in Baskerville's own day and for some time afterwards, it was not often appreciated. John Chambers, for instance, quoted in his *Biographical Illustrations of Worcestershire* this extract concerning Baskerville from the *European Magazine* for December 1785: 'His paper was of a finer gloss, and his ink of a brighter black than ordinary; his type was thicker than usual in the thick strokes, and finer in the fine, and was sharpened at the angles in a novel manner; all these combined gave his editions a brilliant rich look, when his pages were turned lightly over; but when you sit down to read them, the eye is almost immediately fatigued with the gloss of the paper and ink, and the sharp angles of the type.'

Benjamin Franklin was one of Baskerville's great contemporary admirers and this letter from him to the printer, written in 1760, shows how ill-founded were some of the criticisms levelled at him by such people as Chambers.

Craven Street London, 1760

DEAR SIR,

Let me give you a pleasant instance of the prejudice some have entertained against your work. Soon after I returned discoursing with a gentleman concerning the artists of Birmingham, he said you would be the means of blinding all the readers in the nation, for the strokes of your letters being too thin and narrow, hurt the eye, and he could never read a line of them without pain. 'I thought,' said I, 'you were going to complain of the gloss of the paper, which some object to.' 'No, no,' said he, 'I have heard that mentioned, but it is not that; it is in the form and cut of the letters themselves; they have not that height and thickness of the stroke, which make the common printing so much more comfortable to the eye.' You see the gentleman was a 'connoisseur'. In vain I endeavoured to support your character against the charge; he knew what he felt and could see the reason of it, and several other gentlemen among his friends had made the same observation, etc.

Yesterday he called to see me, when mischievously bent to try his judgement, I stepped into my closet, tore off the top of Mr. Caslon's specimen and produced it to him as yours, brought with me from Birmingham; saying, I had been examining it, since he spoke to me, and could not for my life see the disproportion he mentioned, desiring him to point it out to me. He readily undertook it, and went over the several founts, showing me everywhere what he thought instances of that disproportion; and declared that he could not read the

specimen, without feeling very strongly the pain he had mentioned to me. I spared him that time the confusion of being told that these were the types he had been reading all his life, with so much ease to his eyes; the types his adored Newton is printed with, on which he had pored not a little; nay the very types his own book is printed with (for he is himself an author) and yet never discovered this painful disproportion in them, till he thought they were yours.

I am, etc.,

B. FRANKLIN.

Baskerville was criticised in more respects than one. Mark Noble, the biographer, recalled being taken to Baskerville's house with his father and said that he 'found him ever a most profane wretch, and ignorant of literature to a wonderful degree. I have seen many of his letters, which . . . were not written grammatically, nor could he even spell well. In person he was a shrivelled old coxcomb. . . . His wife was all that affectation can describe. . . . She was originally a servant. Such a pair are rarely met with. He had wit; but it was always at the expense of religion and decency, particularly if in company with the clergy. I have often thought there was much similarity in his person to Voltaire, whose sentiments he was ever retailing.'

However, I think we may discount Noble's opinion, for he was an ignoramus, whose writings were a mass of imperfections, vulgarity and error. His remarks concerning Baskerville may, on the whole, be taken as mere spite. Even more spiteful, and downright untrue, were the remarks of the *European Magazine* to which we have already briefly referred. Their correspondent, among much else, says that Baskerville was illiterate, ignorant and blasphemous. He goes on: 'His quarto edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, with all its splendour, is a deep disgrace to the English press. He could not spell himself, and knew not who could. A Warwickshire country schoolmaster, of some parish charity school, we presume, was employed by him to correct this splendid edition, and that dunce has spelt many words in it according to the vulgar Warwickshire pronunciation. For example, many of the western vulgar clap an *h* to every word beginning with an open vowel, or even the *w*, as *hood* for *wood*, my *harm* for my arm, *heggs* for *eggs* &c., &c., and again as viciously dropping the *h* in verbs, as *ave* for *have*, *as* for *has*, &c., &c. Many instances of this horrid ignorance we find in the ingenious Baskerville's splendid Milton, where *as* is often put in for the verb *has*, and *has* for the conjunction *as*, with several others of this worse than *cockney* family.'

Baskerville's own account of his method of proof reading seems to refute much of what this extract says. 'Tis this', he wrote. 'Two people must be concerned; the one must name every letter, capital, point, reference, accent, etc., that is, in English, must spell every part of every word distinctly, and note down every difference in a book prepared on purpose. . . . I would recommend and practise the same method in an English author, where most people imagine themselves capable of correcting. Here's another great advantage to me in this humble scheme; at the same time that a proof sheet is correcting, I shall find out the least imperfection in any of the Types that has escaped the founder's notice.'

Yet we must at the same time admit that his level of textual accuracy was not high when judged by modern standards, and, if he used the method he describes in the passage just quoted, his books often show small sign of it, for 'cancels' abound (cancels are leaves inserted in the place of leaves which have been cut out because of faults in printing), and other errors remain. Yet this is far from the ignoramus portrayed by Noble and the *European Magazine*.

Another accusation levelled at Baskerville was that he was in financial difficulties. In many ways he had only himself to blame for this; his ostentatious dress and equipage made him look like a spendthrift. He found it necessary to publicly deny these accusations.

Nevertheless it is a fact that his printing was far from a financial success, partly because of his unusually high prices, which made his work too expensive for ordinary commercial purposes. His charges often read more like today's inflated prices than those of the 18th century. One estimate read : 'I should be glad to serve yr Friend in printing his poem; my price is two Guineas the sheet, without pressing, and two pounds seven to be pressed as other Books which I have printed are.' His prices were, in fact, roughly four times those of ordinary printers of his day. Nevertheless it was apparent to Baskerville by 1762 that his japanning business was subsidising his printing and type-founding interests.

Another reason for the financial failure of his printing and type-founding enterprises was the conservatism of the average printer, who could hardly be expected to throw out his stock of older and conventional type to make place for Baskerville's. The new fount was largely untried on the public, who might not have taken to it at all—indeed we have just seen the reaction of some people to it. The older type, especially with the improvements recently introduced by Caslon, produced a readable page, if not necessarily a beautiful one. Was it to be wondered at that they hesitated to instal this, to them, new-fangled type invented by a newcomer to their trade, a mere amateur?

There were, though, people who appreciated what Baskerville was doing. His Prayer Book—printed by him in 1760 at Cambridge, by arrangement with the University—was widely appreciated. It is said that a certain Squire of Oxfordshire would use no other, and it was in common use in many churches. But the terms to which Baskerville had to submit in order to print it, were not calculated to lighten the heavy financial burden of the work. 'The University of Cambridge', he wrote to Horace Walpole, 'have given me a grant to print *there* 8vo and 12mo Common Prayer Books, but under such shackles as greatly hurt me. I pay them for the former twenty and for the latter twelve pounds ten shillings the thousand and to the Stationers Company thirty-two pounds for their permission to print one edition of the Psalms in metre to the small Prayer book, add to this the great expense of double and treble carriage and the inconvenience of a Printing House an hundred miles off.' The fees mentioned by Baskerville were, of course, payable because of the monopoly of Prayer Book and Bible printing enjoyed by the bodies mentioned.

Baskerville's Bible was printed at Cambridge, too, at about the same time. It was one of his greatest achievements, but it was a financial failure, despite the fact that he opened a pre-publication subscription list to guarantee his expenses. But there were only two hundred and sixty-four subscribers and Baskerville had to borrow L2,000 at 5 per cent interest in order to continue work on it.

Baskerville had working connexions, too, with Oxford, albeit of a different kind. For that University he made a new set of Greek types, for which he received a payment of £210.

Other books printed by Baskerville included the works of Virgil, Congreve, Addison, Horace, Lucretius, Catullus and Terence, as well as others. The whole of this printed work—about seventy-two pamphlets and books—was completed in approximately twenty-three years. Not all are of the highest quality, but those that do reach that standard fully justify his work as a printer, for they could not be improved. And let us not forget that he had started from scratch.

So far as Baskerville's achievements in general are concerned, I think his biographers Ralph Straus and Robert K. Dent sum them up admirably : 'Baskerville is the English representative of that Renaissance

of printing which in a measure helps to distinguish the second half of the eighteenth century. It needs but small bias to place him above that trio of artists—Didot in Paris, Bodoni at Parma, Ibarra at Madrid. Baskerville has been called the English Bodoni, but it would perhaps be fairer to say that Bodoni is the Italian Baskerville. His work cannot compare in bulk with that of the other master's, but we have his reasons for confining his efforts to so small an outlay. The subtle splendour of his work grants it a corner by itself in the world's book-shelf; his own peculiar genius is stamped upon almost every one of his productions. The types themselves were cut upon principles which might well be followed to-day by those who would introduce into their making a geometrical exactitude. Whatever may have been the popular dislike of his work in England at the time, there can be no question that he has had a lasting influence upon almost all work of the kind after his day. Printers and type-founders alike are indebted to his inventive genius. He embarked upon an undertaking which was typical of the Birmingham, as of the England, of his day, and he may be bracketed—as artist and mechanic—with those fineworkers who, no more than some half-dozen men of the Midlands, made the England of the eighteenth century what it was.'

After unsuccessfully attempting in 1762 to interest Horace Walpole in his work, with a view to obtaining government aid, Baskerville tried to sell the whole of his printing and type-founding business in Paris, asking £8,000 for it. Even with the subsequent aid of Benjamin Franklin and the reduction of his price to £6,000 nothing came of it, and Baskerville died, still holding the whole concern. In spite of the large sums he had spent on it, he still managed to leave a fortune of about £12,000, all of which went to his widow.

Baskerville's last years were spent largely in the garden of his fine house, where he devoted much of his time to mechanical experiments and printing. He had previously handed over the operation of his press to one of his journeymen, Robert Martin, who had worked for him for ten years, but he resumed control in 1769.

Baskerville's original types and punches have survived, and their story is not without romance. They were bought from his widow by the author and adventurer, Caron de Beaumarchais, for printing an edition of the works of Voltaire, which ran into seventy-five volumes. Beaumarchais printed a few other books with the type, but the venture lost money and the type and punches were sold. After passing through various hands they came into the possession of a famous Parisian firm of typographers, Deberny et Peignot. The head of this firm, M. Charles Peignot, decided that they ought to be deposited in Baskerville's native land, and in 1953 he handed them over to the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University. They are now in the safe custody of the University Printer.

Baskerville died on 8th January 1775 at Easy Hill. He had grimly expressed a desire to be buried 'sitting, standing, or lying, but he did not think they could bury him flying'. He had designed and prepared his own tomb, a cone-shaped building, previously a mill, and had composed his own epitaph, which read :

S T R A N G E R —
BENEATH THIS CONE IN UNCONSECRATED GROUND
A FRIEND TO THE LIBERTIES OF MANKIND DIRECTED
HIS BODY TO BE INHUM'D
MAY THE EXAMPLE CONTRIBUTE TO EMANCIPATE
T H Y M I N D
FROM THE IDLE FEARS OF SUPERSTITION
AND THE WICKED ARTS OF PRIESTHOOD

His body was not destined to remain undisturbed. Over forty years after his death it was removed and deposited in a warehouse, where it was exhibited to the curious at a charge of sixpence a head. In

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1829 the body was reinterred, this time in Christ Church, Birmingham. A vault belonging to Mr. Nott, or Knott, a bookseller, was offered for the purpose. Nott said he would be honoured to have Baskerville's remains with those of his family—in spite of the fact that a bigoted rector had refused, on account of Baskerville's alleged atheism, to give proper burial to the great printer's body in the church where his wife was buried. But Baskerville's body was secretly buried in an unmarked catacomb in the church. This was not discovered until 1893, when a catacomb, not entered in the church register, was examined and the identity of its occupant's remains were discovered. Christ Church was demolished in 1897 and the printer was finally laid to rest in the Church of England New Cemetery in Warstone Lane, Birmingham.

But the fate of his body matters little to us, and all the bother and fuss about it would have amused him. His greatest monument lies in his work, most of all in the fact that today, nearly two hundred years after his death, his designs for type are still in wide and regular use, are still among the most beautiful ever made. Let John McCreery, a later printer, have the final word. The verse is from his *Songs of the Press*, published in London in 1833 :

O Baskerville ! the anxious wish was thine —
Utility with beauty to combine,
To bid th'oerweening thirst of gain subside;
Improvement all thy care and all thy pride.
When Birmingham for riots and for crimes
Shall meet the keen reproach of future times,
Then shall she find among our honoured race
One name to save her from disgrace.

FURTHER READING

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