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Nigel Bicknell's Cambridge Christmas Books find their way back home

Nine rare books from the 1960s and 70s by the Cambridge University Printing House director Brooke Crutchley were presented by Marcus Bicknell to the Cambridge University Printing House's museum on 25th January 2023. The Printing House made a book every Christmas for 40 years to give to clients and friends.

One recipient was Nigel Bicknell, a friend of the Crutchleys and a fervent typographer and designer. He had taken a key role in choosing fonts for, and laying out, the posters for the annual fireworks display in the garden of Finella in Cambridge every year. Nigel collected the books from 1949, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1964, 1971 and 1974. They were left to his son Stephen (1957-2007). Stephen's husband Jon Vanner passed them on to Marcus Bicknell (another of Nigel's sons, in September 2022) who decided to find a suitable home for the books.

Their new home

Ros Grooms, Cambridge University Press Archivist, snapped up the offer with alacrity. She wrote back to Marcus "Your enquiry comes at a perfect time as Cambridge University Press & Assessment is celebrating the Christmas Books as an important part of our heritage. It was only last Christmas that we, as an organisation, acquired a complete the set of the 34 books and we are preserving them in digital form.



<http://cambunipress.prod.acquia-sites.com/news-and-insights/insights/the-cambridge-christmas-books-creating-a-digital-archive>

"We have a museum in the University Printing House on Shaftesbury Road and each year we display the Christmas Books. We have a copy of each book, but duplicates allow us to display title pages, covers and interior pages. If you and your family feel able to give the Christmas Books in your possession as a gift to Cambridge University Press & Assessment, we would be most grateful to preserve and display them. Anna Crutchley [the printer's daughter] is using her archival skills assisting me with the catalogue of the Cambridge University Press archive. Both Anna and Ed [Crutchley] have been supportive of our initiative to digitise the Christmas Books to bring their fascinating story to a wider audience."

The Printer

Brooke Crutchley began his influential printing career at the age of twenty-three, when Cambridge University offered him a position as assistant university printer. He would remain at the printing house for forty-four years, the last twenty-eight as head printer. Cambridge University's press was regarded as one of the best in the world, and so, when Crutchley shifted the press's focus from hot-metal composition and letterpress printing to filmsetting and offset, the rest of the printing world soon followed suit. In addition to leading the printing house and curating book-arts exhibitions, Crutchley wrote two memoirs of his life as a printer and commissioned Stanley Morison's beautifully produced account of the Monotype program, *A Tally of Types*. These books, which Crutchley printed at Cambridge, are now considered classics on the subject of typography and art objects in themselves.

The Books

They are mostly year-end gifts made by Brooke Crutchley for friends and business contacts – see the list attached. “When Walter Lewis and Stanley Morison produced the first Christmas book in 1930 they could hardly have guessed that the series would continue, apart from three unavoidable breaks, for over forty years. During this time, these volumes – modest in scale if not in subsequent reputation – have given great pleasure to a large number of friends of the Printer and of the University Printing House.”



Our photo of 25 January 2023 at the Cambridge University Press museum shows Marcus Bicknell, Anna Crutchley, Ros Grooms (Cambridge University

Press Archivist) and Heidi Mulvey (Head of community engagement, Cambridge University Press & Assessment)

The books donated by the Bicknells are

Words in Their Hands. A series of [15] photographs by Walter Nurnberg with a commentary by Beatrice Ward. Copyright Brooke Crutchley 1964.

The Four Elements by John Rastell, edited by Roger Coleman 1971. 8 images, some by Charles Keeping.

A Distraction of Wits – Nurtured in Elizabethan Cambridge. An Anthology selected and introduced by George Rylands, with [12] drawings by Michael Ayrton. Christmas 1958.

Lucien Pissaro and Notes on the Eragny Press, and a letter to J.B.Manson [1913, from Pissaro]. Edited with a supplement by Alan Fearn. Cambridge. Privately printed. 1957. With 11 illustrations, engravings by Pissaro, some in colour. 500 copies.

A Printer's Christmas Book (Retrospective volume) 1974. Forward by Euan Phillips. Notes on each of the Christmas keep-sake books produced by the University Printer at Cambridge between 1930 and 1973. 12 images. Copyright Brooke Crutchley 1974

A Stickful of Nonpareil. Written by George Scurfield. Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone (12 engravings). Cambridge: Privately Printed at the University Press. 1956. 500 copies. 17x23.5cm.

Voltaire's Essay on Milton, edited by Desmond Flower. Cambridge. Privately printed 1954. 12x19cms. "The types and ornaments used in this book were made by Fonderies Deberney & Peignot of Paris from newly-engraved copies of the original Baskervills punches now preserved at the Cambridge University Press". One plate in the frontispiece.

The Survival of Baskerville's Punches by John Dreyfus. Cambridge. Privately Printed by the University Printer for Friends in Printing & Publishing. Christmas 1949. 15x22.5cm. 250 copies printed. 5 illustrations and a large facsimile sheet of Baskerville's types, Birmingham 1777.

John Baskerville 1757. A Specimen of Printing Letter Designed by John Baskerville about the Year MDCCLVII – Recut by The Lanston Monotype Corporation Limited for use on the "Monotype". London, 43 and 44 Fetter Lane E.C.4. MCMXXVI. (1926). 15x23cm. This book is not in the series of Cambridge Printer's Christmas keep-sake books. The publication is in the public domain in the UK. A scan of it is online on Dave Hughes' "MetalType.co.uk" site, in its library at: <http://www.metatype.co.uk/library.shtml> "Unfortunately, page 13 is missing from this scan". Source, David M. MacMillan,