

REVIEWS

Stanley Morison. *Selected Essays on the History of Letter Forms in Manuscript and Print*. Edited by David McKitterick. Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1981. 2 vols. xxii, xiii, 417. 126 illus. £120.

Stanley Morison (1889–1967) has been termed ‘one of the most influential Englishmen of his generation’. Readers of Nicolas Barker’s standard biography, *Stanley Morison* (Harvard University Press, 1972), will already be aware of the breadth of his interests and contacts, although he often kept those interests within separate compartments of his life.

Barker has written that ‘Morison found typography without organized history or principles: he left it with both, and in addition a substantial body of work exemplifying them. The future is unlikely to dispute the size of this achievement: Morison’s other work is more open to question. No one can argue about the magnitude, the breadth of view, of the *History of The Times*, but even such substantial works as *John Fell* or *Politics and Script* are so strongly tinged with Morison’s original views of Church and State that his conclusions may have to be revised. Yet again no one would wish this originality away.’ David McKitterick’s perceptive introduction to this magnificent two-volume edition of selected essays is consistent with Barker’s comments. The two volumes are indispensable source material for an understanding of Morison, his place in the history of typography and thus in society.

There had been two previous attempts to publish a selection of Morison’s essays. The first, by Morison himself, was initiated in the 1920s and was scheduled for publication by Harvard University Press. It was still uncompleted in 1939 but the bulk of the existing manuscript was destroyed in an air raid on the night of 10/11th May, 1941. Barker recalls in his biography the sadness felt by Morison at the destruction, not only of his papers, but of much of his private library. ‘The finished chapters and all the illustrations and material for the ‘Harvard’ book went in another fire at the same time in another place, thought safe, a mile or two away. That, too, must have been a fine fire. I was not able to get there until the afternoon of Sunday when it was still burning. I managed to rescue some good things including copies of Yciar, Lucas and a fine *De Aetna*.’

The second compilation was to have been by S.H. Steinberg, but this never came to fruition and Morison turned his attention to the publication of *John Fell* (1967) and the posthumously published *Politics and Script* (1972).

McKitterick has omitted several articles that are easily available elsewhere, such as the introductory essay ‘On the Classification of Typographical Variations’ to *Type Specimen Facsimiles* 1–15 (1963). The essays as selected are primarily historical in their printing and palaeographical themes. McKitterick has

excluded almost all studies specifically on the *art* of typography (except the 'Memorandum' (1930) and its 'Supplement' (1931) to revise the typography of *The Times*) and Morison's writings on politics, diplomatic history and general philosophy. In passing one might mention that the best bibliography of Morison is probably Tony Appleton's *The Writings of Stanley Morison, a handlist* (Brighton, 1976).

The essays in the collection span a period of 40 years, from 1924 to 1963. Several have long been difficult to find except for those with access to research library collections, some of them indeed having been published originally in fairly limited editions. One slight criticism of the present venture, however, is that the price of the two volumes (which doubled between their first announcement and publication) will virtually ensure that most copies end up only in those same research libraries.

David McKitterick has used, as he did in his *Stanley Morison and D.B. Updike. Selected Correspondence* (London, Scolar Press, 1980), the Morison manuscript archive in Cambridge University Library. This has allowed him to incorporate Morison's revisions and afterthoughts wherever possible. For example, Morison rewrote his essay 'Towards an Ideal Roman Type' (1924) almost entirely after publication. Morison's relationship with Updike himself is recalled briefly by the last essay 'Recollections and Perspectives of D.B. Updike' (1947).

The first essay is 'The Art of Printing', which was the 1937 Henriette Hertz Lecture on Aspects of Art read before the British Academy. By this time Morison was an acknowledged master of printing design, book typography and printing history. His appointment as Adviser to the Monotype Corporation in 1923 and to the Cambridge University Press in 1925, and the founding of *The Fleuron* in 1923, were landmarks to which was added the appointment of typographical adviser to *The Times* in 1929.

McKitterick clearly outlines the fascination for Morison of the relationship between lettering and typography which is reflected in his essay 'The Art of Printing'. Morison's major papers on the history of handwriting reflect this inter-relationship, namely 'The Development of hand-writing, an outline' (1931); 'Black-letter text' (1942); 'Early humanistic script and the first Roman type' (1943); and 'Notes on the development of Latin script' (1949, partly revised to c.1962). The last three papers, written during or just after the war, are not, and were not intended to be, definitive and were published chiefly to stimulate comment and criticism, which they did.

McKitterick comments that the essays in the volumes are 'related in the closest possible way to Morison's work as typographer, which was formed by the belief not that modern book production might imitate the past with benefit — the central tenet of the private press movement a generation before Morison's — but that in the past lay a body of experiment, and in particular design, that could be

shaped and adapted so as to serve modern requirements, and specifically the requirements of the machine.'

Two other major sections relate to 'The Design of Types', comprising eight essays originally published between 1924 and 1955 (several of them emanating from *The Fleuron*), and 'The Learned Press', made up of Morison's early 1960s essays 'The Learned Press as an Institution' and 'Marcello Cervini ... Bibliography's Patron Saint'. Morison's 'The Origins of the Newspaper' (1954) is also included in vol.2 but did not break as much new ground when published as some of the other essays in vols.1 and 2.

The 187 figures in both volumes and the illustrations in vol.2, which total 126 full page plates, ably complement the texts. As McKitterick notes, in the 'great majority of cases photographs have been taken afresh from the originals in the case of printed books, or from high-quality facsimiles in the case of manuscripts'.

As implied earlier, these two volumes should be in every major library and collection concerned with the development of twentieth-century typography and book production. It is perhaps appropriate to end with McKitterick's words: 'Morison's backward step was an essential part of a typographical renaissance in book design that marks his lifetime as one of the greatest creative periods in the history of British book production'.

Colin Steele,
Australian National
University Library.

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