

James Mosley (1935–2025) and French typography

Jacques André

On August 25, the British historian of typography James Mosley left us at the age of 90. James Mosley was long curator of the St Bride Library¹ in London. Thanks to his compatriots Harry Carter (father of type designer Matthew Carter) and John Dreyfus (another English typography historian), he was one of the *Compagnons de Lure*² since the late 1970s. Since then, he has been much appreciated in France for several reasons:

- He was keenly interested in French typography.
- His training as a technical printer (and especially in traditional foundries) gave him a great knowledge and understanding of the history of typography. Each of his studies was researched thoroughly, and was thus always complete and very detailed.
- He did not much care for historians who were unaware of traditional metal types (he even dedicated a blog post [1] to them). On the other hand, if you spoke the same (technical) language, he was very generous and very friendly.
- He spoke and read French fluently, though he wrote only in English.

In France his works (in depth!) include research on:

- Pierre-Simon Fournier: reissue of the edition with commentary by Carter (and therefore given additional commentary by him) of the *Manuel Typographique* (in three volumes, unfortunately difficult to find [2]); also studies on the mould and the reissue of Fournier specimens.
- the work of the French Royal Academy of Sciences (and especially of Father Truchet³) on the *Romain du Roi* [3], a theme on which he mounted an exhibition at the *Musée de l'imprimerie* in Lyon in 2002 [4, 5]. He thus made an important contribution to Kindel's history of stencils [6, 7].

First published in *La Lettre GUTenberg*, #56, November 2025, pp. 71–72, doi.org/10.60028/lettre.vi56. Translation by the author.

¹ This library possesses a rich collection dedicated to printing, typography and graphic design. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Bride_Library and sbf.org.uk/library.

² A private association of lead type printers, founded by Maximilien Vox. Today it has opened its doors to digital typographers and graphic designers.

³ Editor's note: For more on these topics, see "Father Truchet, the typographic point, the *Romain du roi*, and tilings", by Jacques André and Denis Girou, *TUGboat* 20:1, pp. 8–14, tug.org/TUGboat/tb20-1/tb62andr.pdf.

He hosted many conferences in France, participated in summer teaching sessions (for example at the École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques). He defended the Garamonpatrimoine collective for the safeguarding of the typographic heritage of the Imprimerie nationale [8].

From 2005 to 2014, he maintained a blog called *Typefoundry: Documents for the history of type and letterforms*, which is a mine of thoroughly detailed "(not so) little things"! [9, 10, 11, 12, 13] One of his articles, on the at sign [13], was the occasion for a controversy with the paleographer Marc Smith [14].

What a sad loss. . .

References

- [1] James MOSLEY, *Type held in the hand*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2012. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2012/01/
- [2] Pierre-Simon FOURNIER dit le jeune, *The Manuel typographique of Pierre-Simon Fournier le jeune; together with Fournier on typefounding, an English translation of the text by Harry Carter, in facsimile*, Darmstadt: Lehrdruckerei Technische Hochschule, 1995. ISBN 3-88607-094-8.
- [3] James MOSLEY, *French Academicians and Modern Typography: Designing new Types in the 1690s*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 1992, 14 pp. typography.network/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Mosley_TypPp_2_French_academicians_and_modern_typography_designing_new_types_in_the_1690s.pdf
- [4] James MOSLEY, Sylvie DE TURCKHEIM-PEY et André JAMMES, *Le Romain du Roi : la typographie au service de l'État, 1702–2002*, Lyon : Musée de l'imprimerie et de la communication graphique, 2002, 125 pp. ISBN 2-85682-017-4.
- [5] Michel WLASSIKOFF, *Le Romain du Roi, le caractère exclusif de Louis XIV*, Paris : Typofonderie Gazette, 2025. typofonderie.com/fr/gazette/le-romain-du-roi-the-exclusive-typeface-of-louis-xiv
- [6] Eric KINDEL, Recollecting stencil letters, *Typography papers* 5, 2003, pp. 65–101. typography.network/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Kindel_TypPp_5_Recollecting-stencil-letters.pdf

- [7] James MOSLEY, *Lettres à jour: public stencil lettering in France*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, typefoundry.blogspot.com/2010/03/lettres-jour-public-stencil-lettering.html
- [8] James MOSLEY, Preserving the typographical patrimony, *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, no. 1, Paris, 2005, pp. 3–10. In both English and French. www.garamonpatrimoine.org/coupures_presse/bibliomosley.html
- [9] James MOSLEY, *Type bodies compared*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2008. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2008/04/type-bodies-compared.html
- [10] James MOSLEY, *Garamond or Garamont?*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2011. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2011/04/garamond-or-garamont.html
- [11] James MOSLEY, *The types of Jean Jannon at the Imprimerie royale*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2012. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2012/02/types-of-jean-jannon-at-imprimerie.html
- [12] James MOSLEY, *Caractères de l'Université*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2012. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2012/07/caracteres-de-luniversite.html
- [13] James MOSLEY, *Commercial at*, Cambridge: Typefoundry, 2013. typefoundry.blogspot.com/2013/10/commercial-at_6.html
- [14] Marc H. SMITH, *La véridique histoire de l'arobase*, Paris : École nationale des chartes, 2023. www.chartes.psl.eu/editions/catalogue-des-publications/la-veridique-histoire-de-larobase

◇ Jacques André
jacques-andre.fr

Editor's note: See also Charles Bigelow, "James Mosley, type historian (1935–2025)", *TUGboat* 46:3, p. 323, tug.org/TUGboat/tb46-3/tb144bigelow-mosley.pdf