

Masthead

Introduced by Dennis Bailey in 1982 with *AA Files* 2 (an issue which established the journal's graphic template), the masthead for *AA Files* is set in Big Caslon, a display type subsequently revived by Matthew Carter in 1994, and modelled on a mid-eighteenth-century specimen from the Caslon type foundry. When William Caslon began cutting punches in the early 1720s there was still a tendency in Britain to rely on imported matrices. Caslon took the fashionable Dutch Old Faces as his model (we continue the *goût hollandaise* in the new body face), and soon the foundry developed an English style (as well as the first sans-serif printing type circa 1816) which would become the standard model for much of the century. In this issue of *AA Files* we have maintained the Big Caslon masthead type but have made a ligature out of the two As, a contextual, decorative form consistent with other typographic changes inside the journal.

Body Text

The new body face for *AA Files* is set in Arnhem Blond (not quite light) and the headings in Arnhem Fine, refined, crisper and lighter for larger sizes, designed by Fred Smeijers in 2002. The authors' names are set in Arnhem Fine Italic – the type family member which most clearly shows the influence of eighteenth-century italics produced by the French punch-cutter Pierre Simon Fournier. Writing on Smeijers' Arnhem typefaces, Andy Crewdson notes that 'like many of the most enduring modern text typefaces, Arnhem addresses the past in an intelligent way while making a contribution very much of its own time'. Smeijers' craft-centred approach to type design and the techniques of making type by hand through to the transition to designing digital type are explored in his book *Counterpunch* (1996).

Display Type

By display we mean the category of type devised for highlighting particular words and letters rather than for continuous reading. The innovations by English punch-cutters in this category of letter form were first developed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century to meet the demands of commerce, print and monumental inscriptions. Many of the new nineteenth-century display letter forms originated with sign-writers and architects – reversed type on a black background work like stucco inlays on a Regency building; shadowed and shaded letters appear as heavy relief architectural lettering; and perhaps the origin of all nineteenth- and twentieth-century sans-serif letter forms can be found in John Soane's architectural drawings from 1780. Yet within the many novel variants of form, colour and contrast found in Tuscans, sans-serifs and Egyptians (the three essential variants within any typeface) there appears to be a shared

A Note on the Type

John Morgan



letter form – what James Mosely has called the English Vernacular. Mosely, as librarian at the St Bride's Printing Library on Fleet Street, expanded his thesis that there was an unself-conscious vernacular tradition in letter forms which grew out of the lettering used by sign-writers and cutters of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gravestones. He called it English Vernacular because it was largely free from outside influences.

Its development, however, was interrupted by the broad-pen lettering of Edward Johnston's writing manual and the establishment of the 'Trajan Norm'. The Architectural Room set up at the South Kensington Museum in 1862 (which survives in the present v&a) provided a plaster cast of the Trajan column. The much-admired inscription on its base became the model for inscriptional lettering. WR Lethaby, in his role as principal of the Central School of Arts and Crafts, had a copy made for his students and with it the 'Trajan norm', an imperial model, was established. Too often this led to a dull, stereotyped classical letter (as used and encouraged by municipal architects and by the Ministry of Works on all public monuments) and to the demise of the fat-faces – Egyptians, Tuscans and Grotesques – in both public lettering and type founding. There have been revivals – notably the early nineteenth-century Egyptian types at the 1951 Festival of Britain, where a British model ('as British as an early locomotive', according to Mosely) was felt more fitting than the incised Classical Roman norm.

Our plan for this and future issues of *AA Files* is to explore and develop the English Vernacular in display types with Paul Barnes (co-designer of the new *Guardian* newspaper Egyptian body face). This is not an attempt to produce a pastiche historical type family but rather to continue to explore the once vital variations on the theme of the English Vernacular and see what new ideas this stimulates. We have begun quietly, with a version of Caslon foundry sans and Italian. The much-abused, so-called 'Italian' semi-ornamental type shown on these pages is 'an Egyptian with horizontal stress and extra serifs reversed and joined to the letter by a point; a crude expression of an idea of perversity' according to Nicolette Gray in *Nineteenth-Century Ornamented Typefaces*, 1938. Unashamedly we have added a shadow, lending three-dimensional form to perversity.