

THE BASIRE FAMILY OF COPPERPLATE ENGRAVERS. Richard Goddard borrows the first part of his book's title *'Drawing on Copper: The Basire Family of Copper-Plate Engravers and their Works'* from William Blake who, around 1810, wrote that 'drawing is the foundation & indeed the superstructure: it is drawing on copper ... and nothing else' (Maastricht, Maastricht University Press, 2016, 348 pp., 74 ills., free from author). Blake was, of course, emphasizing the vital importance of skilful draughtsmanship preparatory to engraving. This definition of the craft leads to the riches that Goddard unfolds as he goes on to write in detail not only of the whole range of intaglio processes – etching, drypoint, aquatint and mezzotint – but also passing on from the use of copper and eventually the more durable steel plate, as indeed did the younger members of the Basire family, and finally reaching the revolutionary but at that time short-lived medium of lithography.

The account opens with a family tree of the Basires, simplified so as to concentrate on those members involved in copperplate engraving and other printing media. The name of Isaac Basire (1704–68) occupies the summit and, among others of the family, those deeply involved in engraving include James Basire I (1730–1802), son of Isaac; James Basire II (1769–1822); James Basire III (1796–1869); and James Basire IV (1822–83). In 1769 the founders of the Royal Academy decided to exclude engravers from their ranks. It was claimed by one Academician that 'engravers were men of no genius ... too contemptible to merit the attention of the Academy'. Engravers were by no means without their supporters and Goddard draws our attention to such champions as Robert Strange, the Scottish fine-art engraver, who in 1775 chided the Academicians for stating that engravers were 'servile copiers'.

Chapter One presents careful distinctions between the various engraving techniques. The author refers to the terms line engraving and etching and, in doing so, quotes Martin Myrone, who states that 'engraving is properly and naturally a ploughing in brass or metal of any kind – like furrowing', whilst etching is 'done with the point or needle on grounds of wax and eaten in with acid'. Mezzotint, aquatint, stipple-engraving and lithography are all explained in detail. Chapter Two introduces Isaac Basire and the circumstances of leaving his home in Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives to travel to England. He married in St James's Church, Clerkenwell, and he and his wife and family (eventually to consist of three sons and six daughters) depended on his skills as an engraver. Isaac's early work in England consisted of engraving plates for *The Gentleman's Magazine* and various books, with the assistance of his fifteen-year-old son James, who was also to become a renowned engraver. Even at this early age, he was entrusted with engraving a pair of portraits of two Jacobite peers due

for execution. It seems that at least by the 1730s Isaac and his son were in robust competition with established British engravers.

Chapter Three gives a detailed account of the career of Isaac's son, James, who was apprenticed at the age of nearly fifteen to the cartographic engraver R. W. Seale. On completion of his apprenticeship, the nineteen-year-old went to Rome to study with a few young British engravers. He was quickly engaged as the main engraver for the publication of James Stuart's *Antiquities of Athens* and, later, he supplied four plates (of a total of 43) for the *Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew*, at the request of William Chambers (who in 1767 was to become the founding Treasurer of the Royal Academy). There follow accounts of Isaac's illustrative work as a fine art and history engraver, and also as a portrait engraver (commissioned, for example, by William Hogarth to engrave portraits of the artist's friends). Chapter Four deals specifically with James as an antiquarian engraver; he was appointed to the Society of Antiquaries in 1759 and his skills are richly illustrated by examples in this genre, for instance: *The South-West End of Great Hall at Eltham*, from the 1782 edition of the Society's periodical *Archaeologia* (fig. 296); *The Distribution of His Majesty's Maundy*, after S. H. Grimm, 1777; *Portrait of Queen Philippa from her Monument* 1796; and, from life, *Portrait of Sir Edward Warren*, 1785. The comparison of these four titles is offered here as an indication of James's versatility.

Chapter Five discusses James Basire II (1769–1822). James continued to work with his father following the completion of his apprenticeship in 1791. Times were difficult for engravers due largely to the establishing of the Royal Academy, which refused to accept engravers as artists, but also to war on the Continent. However, he was able to continue work with his father following the completion of his apprenticeship until his marriage in 1795. Eventually, James was appointed engraver to Oxford University and stayed in office, illustrating the *Oxford Almanack* for twenty years. This brought him into contact with J. M. W. Turner, whose watercolour paintings illustrated the *Almanack* for a time. Turner's watercolour *South View of Christ Church from the Meadow* as reproduced in the *Almanack* of 1799, is a dramatic example of his work translated into engraving by Basire; the painting and the engraved interpretation are also shown in instructive juxtaposition (fig. 297).

The final chapter is on James Basire III (1796–1866). James, his mother and younger siblings were in dire financial straits during the time of his father's illness and death in early 1822. This and many other factors led to a dramatic fall in the family's income. Property was sold off, including the house of James Basire I, after more than 60 years in the family. Many other financial losses occurred and the family's entire collection

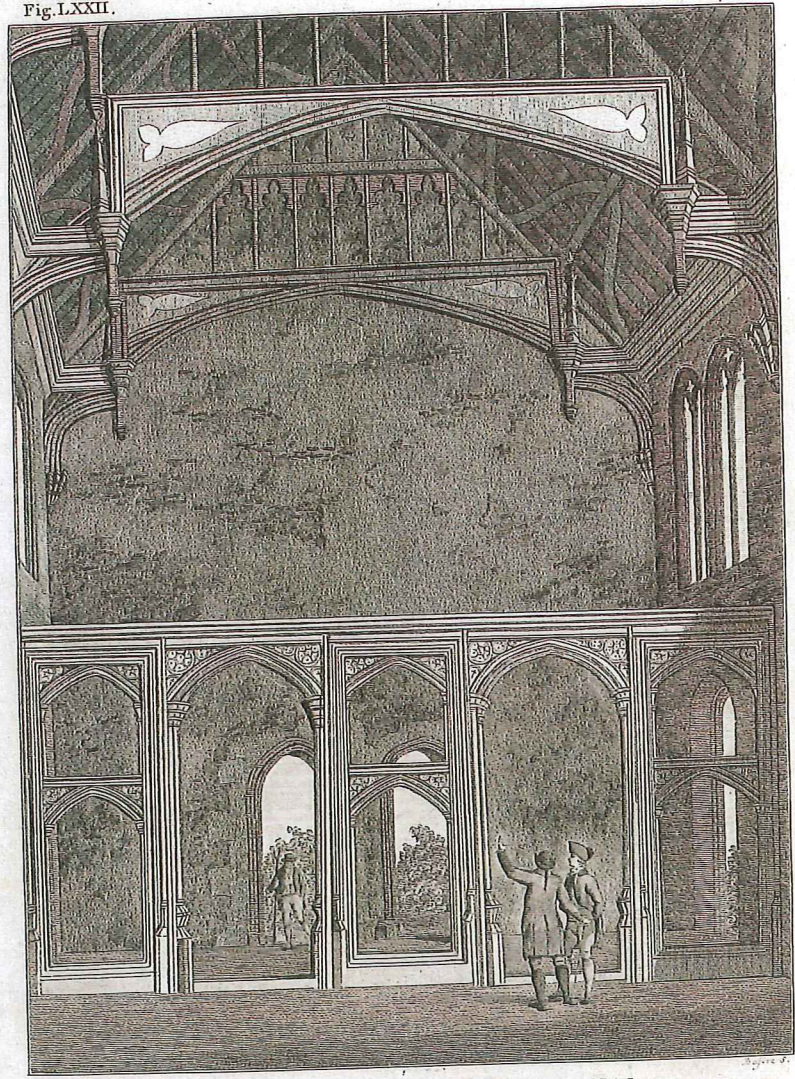
proofs and prints, framed and unframed, was also sold. But James Basire III had also kept rare proofs by James I and II and also by William Woollett. However, he restored the family fortunes and its engraving practice, extending the range, finding new customers and retaining existing clients. The priorities were: retaining membership of the Society of Antiquaries; smooth generational transition; and the support of his father's influential friends and business associates. Happily, the Society of Antiquaries hesitated to abandon the family.

The biggest threat to James's position at the Society of Antiquaries was not from competing engravers but from

another means of reproduction: lithography – 'drawing on stone'. Lithography's advantages over etching and line-engraving were that artists with significantly less training than these required could work competently in the new medium. By 1825 the Council of the Society had turned to lithography since it could produce many more impressions than could a copperplate. The author of a French treaty on lithography, published in 1819, had claimed that a lithographic draughtsman could work for a quarter the fee of a metal engraver and that drawing on stone would cost barely the seventh of an engraver's earnings. By March 1825, the Society of Antiquaries

Fig. LXXII.

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South West End of Great Hall at Eltham.

296. James Basire I after S. H. Grimm, *The South-West End of Great Hall at Eltham*, from *Archaeologia*, 1782, engraving.

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297. James Basire II after J. M. W. Turner, *South View of Christ Church from the Meadows*, from *Oxford Almanack*, 1799, engraving, trimmed 319 x 445 mm.

invited specimens of lithography and decided to adopt the medium occasionally in their publications. It was encouraging news for Basire that lithography could replace some but not all of his work. It was at this time that Charles Hullmandel's influential book *The Art of Drawing on Stone* was published. Eventually, the Society decided to commission lithography for simpler illustrations and to rely on engraving for detailed architectural plates. Basire was soon equipped to provide a full lithographic service, but the reign of that medium was much briefer than that of engraving had been; and, anyway, photographic reproduction would soon be in the offing.

The Epilogue is dedicated to the life and work of James Basire IV (1822–83), who was by 1836 training in his father's office and soon signing his name to engravings and lithographs as James Basire Junior. By 1848 he had his own engraving and lithographic office, continuing to work in parallel with his father. Figs. 72 and 73, *Burnt-out Windmill* and *Altar, Polebrook Church*, drawings from his sketchbook, indicate his

capacity as a draughtsman. He seems, however, to have been somewhat restless and, planning a career in civil engineering, he is thought to have left his father's business in his early twenties to work as a railway surveyor. The evident dwindling of his interest in engraving seems to have ended the involvement over many years of a family passionately devoted to 'drawing on copper'. ANTHONY DYSON

HENRI MARIE PETIET (1894–1980), universally referred to as H. M., was one of the most significant print dealers in Paris for more than 50 years, but has long remained an elusive figure outside the narrow world of the French art trade. At long last, much has been revealed in the biography written by his great-niece, Christine Petiet-Oddo, here reviewed in its English edition (Christine Oddo, *Henri Marie Petiet: Art and the Dealer*, contributions by Daniel Marchesseau, Hubert Prouté and Marc Rosen, Paris, Éditions Des Cendres, 2017, 302 pp., 96 ills., €42). Those with linguistic facility are advised to read the French edition. The author