

“Drawing on Copper”

The Basire family of copper-plate engravers and their works



Richard Goddard

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Notes on conventions used in the text

In cases where it is not obvious from the context, the different James Basires are referred to by number as follows:

- James Basire (I) (1730-1802)
- James Basire (II) (1769-1822)
- James Basire (III) (1796-1869)
- James Basire (IV) (1822-1883)

To help avoid confusion, a simplified family tree of the most relevant family members is included as Figure 1.

Note on original spelling and punctuation

Original spellings and punctuation are maintained in the quotations occurring in the text unless, in the opinion of the author, this is likely to distract the reader from the sense.

Note on choice of illustrations

Plates have been chosen not only to illustrate the text, but also to convey an idea of the variety of work performed by the Basire family. There is a bias towards higher-quality plates and those which have not been published elsewhere in book form. Large and/or complex plates, such as the great historical plates and the Cathedral Series of the Society of Antiquaries, are generally not illustrated, as it is not possible to do justice to them in the format chosen for this work.

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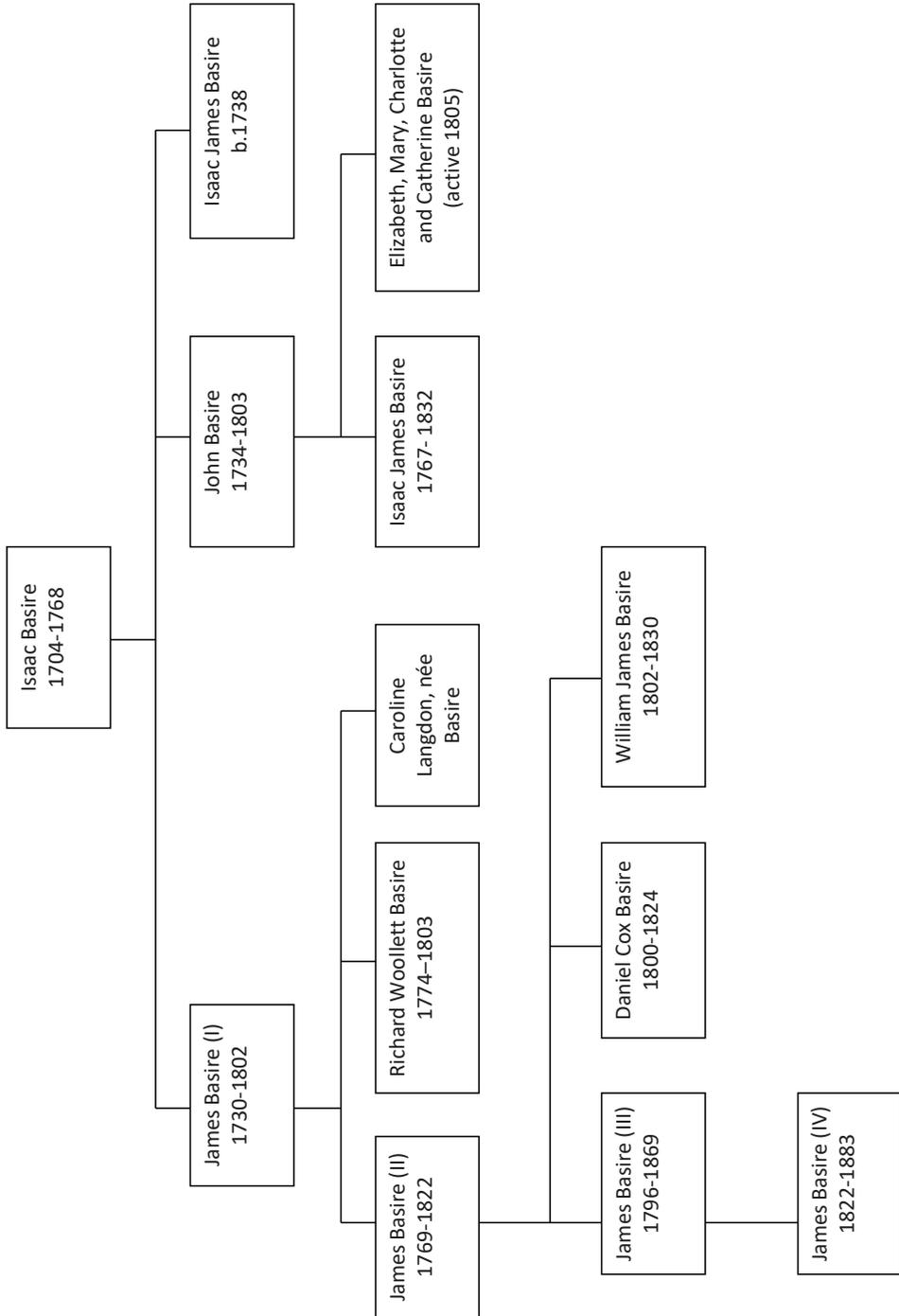


Figure 1 Simplified family tree of the Basire family, showing individuals involved in copper-plate engraving, printing and related activities

Introduction

“I request the Society to inspect my print, of which drawing is the Foundation & indeed the superstructure: it is drawing on copper, as Painting ought to be drawing on canvas or any other surface, & nothing Else.” (William Blake, *ca.* 1810)¹

William Blake is now celebrated as a mystic, poet and artist, but invariably referred to himself as an engraver. Engraving was indeed his chosen profession, exercised on a daily basis from the beginning of his apprenticeship with James Basire (I) in 1772 to his death in 1827. This quotation from his manuscript note books contains at least two elements of key importance to the current work on the Basire family of engravers. Firstly, Blake states that engraving is an art to be considered in parallel and, implicitly, on a par with painting. Secondly, he underlines this thesis with the argument that both engraving and painting are necessarily grounded in draughtsmanship. Both these points were controversial at the time, but there is support for them not only in Blake’s work, but also in that of his master and his master’s family.

In this extract from his unpublished “Public Address”, Blake was reacting both to his own personal situation and to the widespread underestimation of engraving in England during his lifetime. Contemporary engraving simply did not have sufficiently influential and articulate protagonists to promote its importance either as an art form or as a means of communication. Even during the second half of the eighteenth century, when engraving was at its high point in England, and London had arguably taken over from Paris as its international centre of excellence, the leading monographs on engravers tended to focus on earlier and foreign artists. Horace Walpole’s *Catalogue*, published in 1763, William Gilpin’s *Essay on Prints*, published in 1768, and Joseph Strutt’s *A Biographical Dictionary*, published in 1785 are all cases in point.²

When contemporary engravers did venture into print in order to justify their status, they tended to let emotion get the better of their judgment and, like Blake, descend into polemic. In many cases, this anger derived directly from the decision of the found-

¹ Geoffrey Keynes ed., *BLAKE. Complete Writings* (Oxford, 1990), p. 591, “Public Address. From the Note-Book”

² William Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints; containing Remarks upon the Principles of picturesque Beauty, the Different Kinds of Prints, and the Characters of the most noted Masters* (London, 1768); Horace Walpole, *A catalogue of engravers, Who have been born, or resided in England; digested by Mr. Horace Walpole From the Mss. of Mr. George Vertue; To which is added An Account of the life and works of the latter* (Strawberry Hill, 1763); Joseph Strutt, *A Biographical Dictionary; containing an historical account of all the Engravers, from the earliest period of the art of engraving to the present time* (London, 1785)

ers of the Royal Academy in December 1769 to exclude engravers from their ranks. In 1775, the Scottish fine art engraver, Robert Strange, quoted the Academicians as stating that “engravers were men of no genius, - servile copiers”, who were “too contemptible to merit the attention of this establishment”.³ In 1810, John Landseer, “Engraver to the King”, was invited to deliver a series of lectures on the “Art of Engraving” at the Royal Institution, but they were so belligerent that he was dismissed in mid-series.⁴ Even as late as 1845, the landscape engraver, John Pye, felt moved to publish a 400-page volume entitled *Patronage of British Art*, which in reality comprised an extended account of how the movement of artists in the third quarter of the eighteenth century was perverted from its original philosophy of social and artistic solidarity by the elitism of the Academy.⁵

Despite the fulminations of its proponents, the social and artistic status of engraving did not improve in the course of the nineteenth century. In fact, it deteriorated further. Commercial etching on copper was increasingly replaced by lithography, and line engraving became progressively commoditised through technical innovations. These included inventions such as the ruling machine, which enabled faster, more mechanical reproduction, and the use of steel plates, which allowed much longer print runs. The death knell for engraving, however, sounded quietly when the daguerreotype was invented in Paris in 1837. By 1844, the first book illustrated with photographs was published by William Fox Talbot, and the funeral bells were then already in full swing. By the 1860s, engravers had all but disappeared from London’s trade directories, and since that time, these artists have had practically no champions in the art world and have not inspired material interest among academics.

It is not the intention of this volume to right the perceived or real historical wrongs suffered by Blake, his master or other British engravers at the hands of their contemporaries or of posterity. It is instead motivated by a desire to contribute to a more balanced view of this historically and artistically important form of reproduction, which is now largely unknown to the general public or, where known, is often misunderstood. The means it will employ to achieve this end will be the telling of the story of the lives and works of one family of engravers, the Basires. This family was unique in the sense that it was active in London in engraving, copper plate printing and, finally, lithography on a continuous basis from the 1720s until the late 1860s.

The Basires have been badly served by posterity, even in comparison with their principal colleagues and competitors. William Blake went on in his “Public Address” to compare James Basire favourably and at length with three other leading London-based

³ Robert Strange, *An Inquiry into the Rise and Establishment of the Royal Academy of Arts. To which is prefixed, A Letter to the Earl of Bute* (London, 1775), pp.117-118.

⁴ John Landseer, *Lectures on the Art of Engraving delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London, 1807), p. 111

⁵ John Pye, *Patronage of British Art, An Historical Sketch: comprising an account of the rise and progress of art and artists in London, from the beginning of the reign of George the Second* (1845); followed 14 years later by the pamphlet, *A Glance at the Rise and Constitution of the Royal Academy of London* (London, 1859)

engravers of the last quarter of the eighteenth century: Robert Strange, William Woollett and Francesco Bartolozzi.⁶ Robert Strange was subsequently the subject of a two-volume biography;⁷ the glamorous Italian engraver, Bartolozzi, whom Strange described as being disingenuously smuggled into the founding membership of the Royal Academy,⁸ was immortalized in two biographies, one of which even went to a second edition;⁹ while the works of Woollett, an intimate friend of James Basire, were published with his life in a *Catalogue Raisonné* in 1885.¹⁰ In contrast, the most extensive biography of the Basires comprised until recently an entertaining, but deprecating entry in the late nineteenth-century *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹¹ Lucy Peltz has since entirely replaced this entry with an excellent article on the family in the current edition of the same work. The following chapters effectively expand on this article to book length, with the addition of a prologue and epilogue recounting the previously undocumented life of the fourth James Basire, the last engraver of this name.

⁶ Keynes, BLAKE, 591-594

⁷ Andrew Lumisden, *Memoirs of Sir Robert Strange, Knt., Engraver* (London, 1855)

⁸ Strange, *Inquiry*, pp. 113-114

⁹ Andrew W. Tuer, *Bartolozzi and his works : a biographical & descriptive account of the life and career of Francesco Bartolozzi*, 2nd ed. (London, 1885), and J.T. Herbert Baily, *Francesco Bartolozzi, R.A., A Biographical Essay* (London, 1907)

¹⁰ Louis Fagan, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Engraved Works of William Woollett* (London, 1885)

¹¹ Frederick Wedmore, *Basire, Isaac (1704-1768) etc.*, in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. III, (1885), pp. 1278-1280

Prologue

On the night of 30 March 1851, the 29-year old James Basire junior, in common with the other prisoners, placed his bread, butter and tea in the pigeon hole assigned to him.¹² This was the evening designated by the authorities for the national, decennial census, and James happened to be spending it in the debtors' prison at St. Giles, Cripplegate, often known as the Whitecross Street prison.¹³

He was in surprisingly good company. The prison had a relatively enlightened governor, and his family, staff and their families numbered about 40 souls, compared with the 180 prisoners confined on that night. There was a sprinkling of unskilled labourers among the inmates, but the vast majority comprised a motley group of skilled workers, tradesmen, merchants and professionals. They included a German-born wool dealer, a French-born language teacher, a Scottish professor of music, an Irish captain in the Spanish army, gentlemen born in Great Britain, Ireland and the West Indies, writers, accountants, lawyers and engineers.

James is described in the census form as an "engineer", a label which in his case owes as much to aspiration and self-image as to fact. He could have called himself a draughtsman, lithographer, copper-plate engraver or printer with no less accuracy. This was the great age of early Victorian optimism for the potential for new technology, the age of the railway, the steamer and spectacular engineering schemes. And, here was a young man in the thick of the excitement, who wanted to share in the rewards. In the past few years, he had opened a factory which experimented in and manufactured gas burners. He had recently invented and tried to sell a surveying instrument, which he had luxuriously manufactured in German silver. He drew, lithographed and speculatively advertised his prints of the latest locomotive engines in the newspapers.

Given James Basire's youth and the breadth of his commercial activity in the years immediately before his imprisonment, it is not surprising that he was in dire financial straits. However, he could be forgiven for not focusing in this age on his family's trade and his own talents in drawing and engraving. One corollary of the technological advances of this age was the inevitable long-term decline in many low-technology, labour-intensive activities. Such was the fate of the family's core business of copper-plate engraving. By 1851, it would take less than twenty years before the art and craft of engraving definitively ceased to be a viable commercial activity and the family business had closed for good.

Most stays at the Whitecross prison during this period were of a temporary nature. More than a thousand prisoners per year crossed its threshold at any time, and James

¹² The prologue concerns James Basire (IV), who returns as the main protagonist in the epilogue.

¹³ Census Returns of England and Wales (1851), class: HO107; piece: 1525; folio: 420; p. 7.

was no exception. The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace opened one month after the evening of the census, and James was free within another month to enjoy its marvels. He even drew for publication a huge souvenir wall chart of the vast, glass palace, which was published after the exhibitions closed on 15 October 1851.¹⁴ Given James's own fascination with new technology and his family history of constant adaptation to changes in the artistic, business and technical environment during well over a hundred years, he must have visited the exhibition not with fear, but with excitement at the even greater marvels to come.

¹⁴ See Figure 77 at the end of the Prologue

Chapter 1

Engraving and reproduction

Terms such as “copper plate engraving”, “etching” and “lithography” have already been used in the introduction and prologue, and they do not need defining for specialists. They are, however, often described in some detail in the few existing modern works on engraving, as they are largely unfamiliar even to relatively well-informed readers today.¹⁵ Such an approach should not be necessary in the context of the present volume. However, it would be useful here at least to dedicate a short, initial chapter to the reproductive techniques most relevant to the business conducted by the Basires, before analysing their lives, works and business in more detail.

As “engravers”, it might seem obvious that the Basires’ core product was the provision of images engraved on copper plate, but a glance at some contemporary descriptions of their business immediately reveals a more complex picture. In a rare, surviving trade card, Isaac Basire advertised himself simply as an “engraver”.¹⁶ Yet, George Vertue, in his annotated list of engravers on copper plate in 1744 London, described Isaac’s business more specifically as “etching”.¹⁷ James Basire (I) assumed an altogether grander title in John Mortimer’s pioneering *Universal Director* of 1763, where he was advertised as a “History, Portrait, and Architecture Engraver, and Engraver to the Society of Antiquaries”.¹⁸ This contrasts with the indenture form of the Stationers’ Company where he bound his eldest son apprentice in 1784 and more modestly referred to himself as “engraver and printer”.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, when trade directories became ubiquitous, the subsequent three generations were generally described as engravers through the 1820s, but from 1830 onwards were invariably listed as engravers *and* lithographers. These job descriptions confirm that the Basires did consider their core business to be “engraving” throughout this period, but they also reveal that this did not reflect the whole story. Their commercial activities were not limited to engraving, but also covered related products and services. Even within engraving, these labels show that they and their contemporaries distinguished between different segments of the market and differing engraving techniques.

The most important and least obvious distinction to make is that between etching and pure line engraving. Over the centuries, both of these techniques have been routinely referred to as “engraving”, and there are good reasons for this generalised conflation of these terms. Etching and line engraving are commonly found on the same plates, prepared by the same professional engravers. To the untrained eye, prints using the two techniques can be undistinguishable. Sometimes, even the trained eye has difficulty in distinguishing them without significant magnification. And yet, etching and line engraving represent quite distinct technologies. They require a totally different type and

¹⁵ There are, for example, useful summaries in the following: R.T. Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain* (Oxford, 1978), chapter 1; and Ronald Russell, *Guide to British Topographical Prints* (Newton Abbot, 1979), chapter 7

¹⁶ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Trade Cards, Heal Collection, 59.10

¹⁷ George Vertue, *Vertue Note Books*, volume VI (Oxford, 1948-50), p. 198

¹⁸ Mr. (John) Mortimer, *The Universal Director; or, the Nobleman and Gentleman’s True Guide* (1763), p. 4

¹⁹ London Metropolitan Archive, Freedom admissions papers, 1681-1925, COL/CHD/FR/02/1130-1136

level of training. They use different apparatus and have different cost profiles. They were often used in different segments of the market, but also in the same segment but for different purposes. The present text will therefore also use the term “engraving” in a general sense, and use “etching” and “line engraving” where a deliberate distinction is being made.

The practice of classical line engraving is now extremely rare and specialised, and remains strangely counterintuitive to the uninitiated. It involves carefully pushing a “burin” or “graver”, an instrument resembling a small chisel, with the palm of the hand through the surface of a burnished copper plate. The engraver can thus produce hundreds or even thousands of tiny lines, which will eventually make up a coherent image. Lines can be of different width and depth. They can be swelling, straight, rounded or worm-shaped. They can be close together or far apart, on their own, combined with flicks and dots, or used in cross-hatching. The classical burin was lozenge-shaped, but different shapes and sizes of burin could be employed to create different effects.

The long years of training and intense and persistent physical effort required to master the technique of line engraving rendered many of its exponents aggressive in their defence of its supremacy. Martin Myrone nicely illustrates this viewpoint by quoting from Vertue’s note books in his essay on George Vertue and the Society of Antiquaries:²⁰

“Engraving is the most elevated technique, because it is ‘properly and naturally a plowing in brass or metal of any kind – like furrowing’. This is opposed to etching – ‘done with the point or needle on grounds and eaten in with Aquafortis...an invention for Expedition’ – which only takes half the time of engraving, and mezzotint, a process of ‘scraping on the copper’ which takes ‘one fourth of time...’.”

This is the professional context in which Vertue’s disparaging reference to “etching” as the business of Isaac Basire should be understood.

Vertue’s offhand characterization of etching as “an invention for Expedition” has an element of truth, but also represented a self-serving and to some extent disingenuous statement, as he himself used etching at least as much as line engraving in his own plates, and etching was and remained a major art form. Some of the engravings most sought after by collectors in eighteenth century London were etchings by such masters as Rembrandt, Rubens, and van Dyck, and this was a tradition which was continued through that century by artists such as Canaletto, Gainsborough and Tiepolo. Etching may have been quicker than line engraving and certainly required less formal training, since the etching needle was held like a pen. Yet, it also presupposed a more or less sophisticated combination of fine draughtsmanship and technical skill.

²⁰ Martin Myrone, “The Society of Antiquaries and the Graphic Arts: George Vertue and his Legacy”, chapter 5, p. 107, in Susan Pearce ed., *Visions of Antiquity. The Society of Antiquaries of London 1707-2007* (London, 2007), pp. 99-121

The following succinct description of etching as a reproductive technique can be found in the most lucid manual of engraving published during the period of activity of the Basires:²¹

“The process of etching consists in covering a metal plate with a varnish called etching-ground, through which the lines composing the subject are drawn with a sharp-pointed etching needle, cutting through the varnish into the surface of the plate; these lines are afterwards corroded with an acid till of a sufficient depth.”

From a technical standpoint, the etcher needed to choose needles with the desired fineness, select and mix the appropriate ground, and cover the plate smoothly and evenly with the heated varnish or wax. He could then draw freely on the ground before biting in his fine lines with the appropriate acid or *aqua fortis*. Even the latter part of the procedure required a mix of technical skill and artistic feeling, as different effects could be achieved through an iterative process of biting in and stopping out the lines on the copper plate.

The last decades of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century arguably represented the highpoint of traditional line engraving and etching in London. However, they were also characterized by technical, commercial and artistic innovations which took a significant market share from these media. Mezzotint had been invented in the seventeenth century, but became particularly fashionable for portraits in the lifetime of James Basire (I). This was another radically different engraving technique, where the copper plates were first roughened with a tool called a “rocker”, so that they would absorb all the ink and print entirely black if not further worked. The artist would then burnish or “scrape” the plate, so that the smoothed surfaces would print with a gradation of grey shades which would provide subtle tonal effects. As a result of the significant difference in skill set between the techniques used by mezzotinters and traditional engravers, there was very little crossover between their professional practices. The occasional production of white on black etchings by James Basire (II) and (III) for scientific journals represented a rare exception to this rule.²²

There were three other engraving techniques, all closely related to etching, which also became popular in London during James Basire (I)’s career: aquatint, stipple and the crayon or chalk manner. The launch of aquatint onto the English market in the 1770s is particularly associated with the topographical artist, Paul Sandby, who used it to give the effect of wash or watercolour to his landscape prints. This complicated process involved creating a grey-coloured ground on the copper plate by means of suspending grains of resin in spirits of wine. Like mezzotint, its visual attraction rested on

²¹ T.H. Fielding, *The Art of Engraving* (London, 1841), p. 8

²² For example, in *Philosophical Transactions* CI (1811), plates IV-V, astronomical observations; CXXXIX (1849), plates I-II, hearts; *Archaeologia* XXXIV (1852), plate IX, cuneiform inscription; *Memoirs of the Royal Astronomical Society* XXIII (1854), plate III (Nebula of Orion); XXXII (1864), plates I-V (Mars); XXXVI (1867), various nebulae

the creation of potentially dramatic tonal shading. Unlike mezzotint, aquatint plates have a characteristic granular appearance and were often coloured for effect. Again, this was a technique which was little used by traditional line engravers and etchers, and would therefore have been viewed by them, like mezzotint, as a competing technology.

The technique of entirely stippling plates was reintroduced into England from France by William Wynne Ryland just prior to 1760, and became a veritable craze under the delicate hand of Francesco Bartolozzi in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In this case, the image was created by punching tiny dots in the copper plate using a special graver. Stippled plates were often printed in red ink, giving a pink effect which matched their soft appearance and frequently sentimental subject matter. Ryland was also responsible for reinvigorating the market for the chalk or crayon manner at around the same time. As its name implies, this label describes an outcome produced by various techniques and instruments, including stipple, rather than one particular process. All line engravers used stippling to some extent to create dots rather than lines in their works, but James Basire (I) was the only member of the Basire family who created a number of plates in the crayon manner, and this was only for a few fine art commissions in the early years of his career.

Lithography and its less frequently practiced relation, zincography, do not represent engraving techniques but are nevertheless relevant to the Basires, as the family decided to adopt these competing reproductive technologies as they played to their skill as draughtsmen. Unlike so-called *intaglio* processes which involved printing with ink embedded in lines and hollows which had been cut or corroded into metal, lithography was based on printing images drawn with greasy chalk on a slab of limestone. After the design had been completed, the limestone was washed with highly diluted acid in order to extract any residual alkali from the chalk. Then, prior to printing, an inked roller was passed over the stone. The ink would be repelled by the water in the limestone, but would adhere to the chalk drawing. The drawing was then pressed onto damp paper by the printing press. Zincography represented a near identical process, but used zinc plates instead of limestone slabs. It had the advantage that zinc plates were relatively easy to transport and support. The disadvantage was that errors by the draftsman were more difficult to erase. Zincography therefore remained a much less favoured technique which was used by the Basires during a relatively short period in the 1840s. The final chapters of this work will examine the usage of lithography by James Basire (III) and (IV) in parallel with their careers as engravers.

Chapter 2

Isaac Basire (1707-1769)

2.1 FAMILY ORIGINS, EARLY LIFE AND APPRENTICESHIP

The story of the Basire family of engravers begins across the English Channel in the north of France in the late seventeenth century. At this period, France had approximately twice the population as England, as well as twice the land surface. It had enjoyed a period of internal stability and a measure of military success during the long reign of Louis XIV (1638-1715), while England was racked by religious strife and civil war through a large part of that century. Supported by these factors, France had become the most powerful nation in Europe and the undisputed leader in most fields of the arts and sciences. However, a couple of important events in this period contributed to what can be identified in retrospect as a turning point in the balance of power between the rival nations.

In 1685, Louis XIV issued the Edict of Fontainebleau, an act usually known as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. French Protestants or Huguenots had been harried by the authorities for a number of years before this date, but this Edict marked the official end of their freedom to practice their religion, and sparked a mass exodus of largely skilled workers to neighbouring countries, including Germany, the Netherlands and England. Louis's formerly loyal, Protestant subjects thus became the first people to be dubbed "refugees" in the English language.

Three years later, Louis's XIV's arch-enemy, the protestant Dutch Stadhouder, William of Orange, also crossed the Channel and forced James II into exile in France. This bloodless coup became known as the "Glorious Revolution", as it effectively ended any serious possibility of the reestablishment of a catholic dynasty in England. Even when the last protestant Stuart, Queen Anne, died without a successor in 1714, the legislation had already been put in place to accept a foreign protestant dynasty, that of the Prince Electors of Hanover. Thus began the Georgian era and a period of accelerating economic and social development, on the back of internal stability and external military exploits.

It is probable that the Basire family would never have come to England, had it not been for both the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the Glorious Revolution. The first reference to "Jacques Bazire" in London occurs shortly after these events, in relation to the baptism of his son, Nicolas, at the Huguenot Tabernacle Church in Milk Alley in 1694.²³ In the baptismal register, Jacques proudly described his own birthplace as St. Pierre-Sur-Dives, a village situated some 30 kilometres south-east of Caen in Normandy. Although the village lies in the shadow of a magnificent mediaeval abbey, there was a thriving Huguenot community there for most of the 17th century, with an average of four to six baptisms a year.²⁴

A further entry in the Tabernacle baptismal register in 1701 recorded the birth of a daughter, Susanne, to Jacques and his wife, Magdelaine Lair.²⁵ The record of her birth

²³ *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XXIX (1926), p. 5

²⁴ Philip Benedict, 'The Huguenot population of France, 1600-1685: the demographic Fate and Custom of a Religious Minority', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, LXXXI, 5 (1991), p. 41

²⁵ *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XXIX (1926), p. 7

does not mention Jacques's birthplace, but gives details of his profession and domicile in London. This time, the father described himself impressively as a "garde du corps de sa Majesté, demeurant dans Wardour St proche l'enseigne du George". Wardour Street is located in the area now called Soho, part of the then fast-expanding West End of London, and approximately 20 minutes walking distance from St. James Palace. As a royal guard, it is possible that Jacques was one of the Huguenot soldiers who had accompanied William of Orange to England in 1688. If not, it is likely that he was among the many Huguenots who served with William in the summer campaigns in the Low Countries which followed the Revolution, and which pitted the united protestant armies against the forces of Louis XIV.²⁶

Jacques appears to have remained in royal service after the death of William III in 1702, but to have changed his place of worship from the Tabernacle, a small chapel in communion with the larger church at Leicester Fields (now Leicester Square), to the church of La Patente in nearby Soho. Isaac Basire, the future engraver, was baptized there on 1 October 1704, and the register indicates that Jacques was still active as a "garde du corps de Sa Majesté, de la Province de Normandie", but now spelled his surname in the more familiar form, "Basire".²⁷ At the time of the drafting of his will in 1719, Jacques still mentioned his domicile as being in St. James Westminster, but the old soldier had clearly moved on in other ways. In this document, his name is fully anglicised as "James Basire", and the name of his wife, his sole executrix, is partially anglicised as "Magdalen". The will also describes his status as "gentleman", perhaps implying that he now was retired from military service and living on a pension. This first "James Basire" was buried at St. James Picadilly in 1724, and his will was granted probate in June of that year.²⁸

It was doubtless through his personal and family connections that Jacques was able to apprentice his son, Isaac, in 1717 to a celebrated Huguenot silversmith, Louis Cuny - usually anglicised as "Lewis Cuney". Cuny is evidenced as residing at various addresses in and around Leicester Fields and Piccadilly, and so was a neighbour of the Basire family. Isaac was 14 years old when he was bound, the typical age for beginning an apprenticeship at the time. The Inland Revenue's register of duties paid for apprentices' indentures confirms his identity as the son of James Basire, gentleman, of St. James Westminster.²⁹ It seems that Isaac was replacing John Hugues Le Sage, son of Hugues, "gentleman", another respectable Huguenot refugee from nearby St. Martin's in the Fields.³⁰

²⁶ Matthew Glozier, *The Huguenot Soldiers of William of Orange and the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688* (Brighton, 2002); Matthew Glozier, David Onnekink, *War, Religion and Service: Huguenot Soldiering, 1685-1713* (Aldershot, 2007)

²⁷ *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, XLV (1956), p. 279

²⁸ Henry Wagner FSA, ed. Dorothy North, *Huguenot Wills and Administrations in England and Ireland 1617-1849*, Quarto Series of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland, LX (2007), p. 24

²⁹ The National Archives, *Records of the Board of Stamps: Apprenticeship Books*, IR1/5, record for 13 May 1717

³⁰ Joan Evans, 'Huguenot Goldsmiths in England and Ireland', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XIV (1929-1933), p. 543

This John Hugues was also able to profit from his training with Cuny, and later obtained the honour of being able to call himself “Subordinate Goldsmith to the King”.³¹

An apprenticeship with Cuny must have seemed a promising position for the younger son of a first-generation immigrant. This craftsman’s highly-wrought silverware was produced for royalty, the gentry and nobility of London, as well as for the Huguenot church and the City Livery Companies. Cuny had created a communion plate for the Huguenot church of the Savoy in the same year as Isaac started his apprenticeship.³² His workshop is known to have been patronized by the Earl of Devonshire and the Earl of Bristol in 1714, the year of George I’s accession,³³ as well as by George I himself.³⁴ He appears to have been active already from the last decade of the seventeenth century and to have been one of those Huguenot artists who brought decorative engraving on silverware back into fashion in the English capital. He was also one of the many Huguenot artists and craftsmen who contributed to the introduction of a new level of luxury and sophistication to London society.

Despite the potentially advantageous nature of his position, Isaac transferred out of the normal seven-year apprenticeship with Cuny after only four years, and was bound apprentice in 1721 to another Huguenot tradesman and craftsman, Samuel David Jallason. One explanation for the early termination of Isaac’s apprenticeship with Cuny may be the lack of career opportunities, since his master’s son, Samuel, began his apprenticeship at approximately the same time as Isaac.³⁵ It may also have been the case that Isaac, while working for Cuny, had shown a particular aptitude for engraving on silver, which extended beyond the initials and coats of arms traditionally preferred by the English to fashionable French decorative patterns. This could have been the catalyst for him to decide or be encouraged to devote himself to copper-plate engraving, rather than to complete his apprenticeship as a silversmith. In any case, it turned out to be a successful career decision. Like his great contemporary Hogarth, Isaac Basire was able successfully to transfer his manual dexterity, persistence and eye for detail from engraving on silver to copper plate, and this was unarguably a propitious time to be embarking on a career as a copper-plate engraver in London.

Isaac’s new master was another acquaintance or friend of Isaac’s father, as he is recorded as being an Elder of the Huguenot church of La Patente in Soho.³⁶ The Inland Revenue register confirming the tax paid in respect of Isaac’s apprenticeship describes Jallason as an engraver in the parish of St. James, Westminster, and confirms Isaac’s

³¹ Tessa Murdoch, ‘Second Generation Huguenot Craftsmen in London’, *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, XXVI (1995-1997), p. 251

³² Tessa Violet Murdoch, *The Quiet conquest. The Huguenots 1685-1985* (Museum of London catalogue, 1985), p. 72

³³ J.F. Hayward, *Huguenot Silver in England 1688 – 1727* (London, 1959), pp. 27 and 83

³⁴ Joan Evans, “Huguenot Silver in the Ashmolean Museum”, *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XVIII (1947-1952), p. 181

³⁵ Evans, ‘Huguenot Goldsmiths’, p. 532

³⁶ Norma Perry, ‘Voltaire in England: a quarrel with some Huguenot connexions’, *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XXII (1970-76), p. 18

father again as James Basire, a gentleman of that parish.³⁷ Jallason was, however, not only an engraver, as he became half-owner of a printing business in 1725.³⁸ In 1727, he printed English translations of historical and literary essays by Voltaire from premises in Prujean's Court at the Old Bailey, to the north of Fleet Street in the City,³⁹ and in the following year printed a new edition of the essays and an edition of Voltaire's *Henriade*. Voltaire had left France in the spring of 1726 and was in exile in Maiden Lane, just south of Covent Garden, before returning in late 1728 or early 1729. It is therefore possible that Isaac Basire made the acquaintance of his father's great countryman during the period of his apprenticeship, and that the experience and contacts obtained at this time in some measure inspired his later choice to focus his career on book illustration.

2.2 EARLY CAREER AND EPHEMERA

When Isaac left Samuel Jallason at some time in the second half of the 1720s, the market for engraving in London was evolving quickly. British self-confidence had been boosted by the Duke of Marlborough's victories over the French in the War of the Spanish Succession, which had culminated in the treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Despite the minor wobble of the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 and the Hanoverian succession of 1714 had set the stage for a period of prolonged internal harmony. On the international stage, there was to be an unprecedented generation of peace with France until the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession in the early 1740s. These developments enabled not only increased cross-border trade between the European continent and Great Britain, but also between Britain and its colonies. There were several side effects of these political developments which had a positive impact on the business of engraving. English gentlemen were able to resume the Grand Tour and cultivate their taste for art, while the middle classes expanded, leading to significant new demand for art in the affordable form of prints and illustrated books.⁴⁰

This evolution would provide opportunities for engravers in all segments of the market. At the higher end, it predictably led to immigration by highly-skilled French or other continental artists. Nicolas Dorigny had already been invited in 1711 to move from Rome to London to engrave the Raphael cartoons at Hampton Court. He brought with him Claude Du Bosc, who went on to engrave another version of the same subject, as well as prints for James Thornhill's paintings for the cupola of St. Paul's Cathedral, which were themselves inspired by the cartoons. Du Bosc, in turn, invited over Bernard Baron

³⁷ The National Archives, *Board of Stamps: Apprenticeship Books*, IR/1/08/183, dated 18 July 1721

³⁸ *Journal of the Printing Society*, 15 (1980), p. 48

³⁹ Murdoch, *The Quiet conquest*, p. 73

⁴⁰ For an excellent summary of the historical background, see Linda Colley's introduction to the exhibition catalogue, *Rococo, Art and Design in Hogarth's England* (London, 1984), pp. 10-17

in about 1720 to assist with the engraving of the Duke of Marlborough's battles.⁴¹ Even the notoriously anti-Gallican Hogarth, Thornhill's son-in-law, felt impelled not only to hire French engravers, such as Baron and Louis Gérard Scotin, who had arrived in London in 1733, but also to invite over a second wave from Paris to work on his modern moral subjects in the following decade. These French artists would not only provide manpower and a superior quality of line engraving, but also a social cachet which could be monetised by London print- and booksellers.⁴²

These developments might have represented a significant threat to the career opportunities of a young native engraver, who had honed his etching skills at a City printer. However, the timing of events actually worked in Isaac Basire's favour. His name is included in an inventory of engravers, which was published in later editions of Samuel Sympson's *A Book of Cyphers*. This work was first published in 1726 without the list, but it must have been compiled before 1730, the date of the death of John Sturt.⁴³ It mentions both Du Bosc and Baron, but otherwise consists almost entirely of engravers born or brought up in England. This implies that English engravers still largely dominated the London market in the late 1720s and early 1730s, the starting point of Basire's career. The Sympson inventory was perhaps the basis of Vertue's much better-known list from 1744, as there are a significant number of names in common. However, Vertue not only included Baron and Du Bosc, but also Vivares, Gravelot, de La Cave, Picart, Boitard, Fourdrinier, Scotin, Ravenet and several other French native engravers of the second wave of immigrants. The differences between these two lists show that the market for engraving had been transformed within a period of 15 years, and that significant demand for engraving was sucking in foreign artists at the upper end of the market. The quality of their work, together with this general increase in demand, stimulated the entire engraving business, at exactly the time that Basire was expanding his own career.

There was of course no way that the young Isaac Basire would have been able to compete with prestigious French line engravers in the years immediately after the end of his training. He had no rich patrons, no existing client base, and no established reputation. It might therefore have been more prudent to continue working as an employed assistant or journeyman. However, he clearly saw the opportunity to rise with the tide, and was already firmly and independently established in business by the age of 24 years in 1728. This is the date on a fine, baroque portrait of Gian Gastone de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, a unique copy of which can be found in the British Museum print collection.⁴⁴ This work can be classified not only as a portrait, but also as a topical print in the sense that this was the period of ongoing dynastic struggle between Austria and Spain over the succession of the Grand Duke. The same date is inscribed on a double-

⁴¹ Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802* (New Haven, London, 1997), pp. 49-55

⁴² Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, 3rd edition (London, 1989) pp. 14-6, on Bernard Baron, François Morellon de la Cave, Simon François Ravenet, and Louis Gérard Scotin

⁴³ Laurence Works and Ashley Baynton-Williams, *British Map Engravers* (London, 2011), frontispiece

⁴⁴ This print is not catalogued

page, bird's eye view of York Castle, dedicated to Thomas Dunscombe of Dunscombe Park, which was included as an illustration to Francis Drake's *Eboracum or the History and Antiquities of the City of York*, when it was published five years later. These two early, dated examples of his work show that Basire was not only trading in his own name by 1728, but that he was already entrusted with a wide range of content by a diversified client base.

The year 1728 is also significant in the sense that Isaac must already then have felt sufficiently confident in his revenue-generating capacity as an independent engraver in order to marry Sarah Flavill in the parish church of St. John the Baptist, Clerkenwell.⁴⁵ The bride and groom are described in the records as already "of this parish", which is located on the north-western outskirts of the historical City of London. They must have felt at home here from a personal as well as professional point of view, as their three sons and six daughters were all born in Clerkenwell, and both spouses were ultimately buried in the local church.⁴⁶ Isaac's professional address is described as "St. John's Court, Red Lyon Street, Clerkenwell" on a trade card from the collection of Sir Ambrose Heal at the British Museum,⁴⁷ and this corresponds to the address on the publication line of his prints for a further 40 years until his death in 1768.

It is not difficult to see why Isaac might have chosen Clerkenwell, and specifically St. John's Lane, to establish his business. It would have been cheaper than either the West End or the City, where his two masters had been based. It was also emerging as a new hub in the booming printing and publishing sector.⁴⁸ The best-known local publisher and printer in the area was Edward Cave, who had also decided to move here in the late 1720s.⁴⁹ In 1731, Cave launched the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the most influential and widely-read periodical of its time, with its iconic wood cut of his premises at St. John's Gate at the head of each monthly edition. Unsurprisingly, Isaac Basire went on to contribute plates to the *Gentleman's Magazine*,⁵⁰ as well as to several books published by Cave, such as *A Description of the Empire of China* after Du Halde (1738), Benjamin Mackerell's *History and Antiquities of King's Lynn* (1738) and Moses Brown's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1739). He must also have met many of Cave's celebrated collaborators, such as Samuel Johnson, Richard Savage and Mark Akenside, in the famous gatehouse which would have been visible at the end of his road.

It is not possible in any meaningful way to reconstitute Isaac Basire's output in the first part of his career, since much of his earlier work must have been of a more ephemeral nature than the illustrations already mentioned. It is, however, probably safe to

⁴⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, *Saint John The Baptist, Clerkenwell, Register of marriages* (Oct 1723 - Feb 1754), P76/JNB, Item 008

⁴⁶ William J. Pinks, *The History of Clerkenwell*, 2nd edition (London, 1880), pp. 231-2

⁴⁷ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Trade Cards. Heal Collection, 59.10

⁴⁸ See Jenny Uglow, *William Hogarth: A Life and a World* (London, 2002), pp. 19-30, for an evocation of contemporary Clerkenwell

⁴⁹ D.F. McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices 1701-1800* (Oxford, 1978), p. 67

⁵⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XII (1742), p. 530

assume that much of the “bread and butter” work in the early years comprised commercial engraving and printing of items such as trade cards, bill-heads, and admission tickets to balls, benefits, concerts, lectures and the theatre. In the latter part of the century, many of these would become collectible, when engraved by the likes of William Sharp and Francesco Bartolozzi after designs by such artists as Benjamin West and Giovanni Battista Cipriani. Many of these have therefore survived.⁵¹ In the case of Isaac Basire, however, I have only found one such item, dated during the peak of his career in 1746 (Figure 2). It comprises an elaborate invitation to a service at St. Dunstan’s Church, Stepney, followed by a feast. The upper half of the invitation represents the church with an outsized Union Jack, while the lower half consists of the invitation itself in copper plate writing. Considering the decorative nature of the invitation, its near folio size, and the elevated price of the ticket at 10s 6d, it is clear that it was a prestigious item and therefore also collectible. This explains the chance survival of one example in the London Metropolitan Archives.⁵² The vast bulk of Isaac’s output of this type of commercial engraving must, however, have been in the form of simpler works, with engraved copper plate text, or less elaborate designs, which were neither signed nor collected.

For an engraver in his first years as an independent businessman, the next rung on the product ladder after engraved cards, tickets and invitations, would have been standalone prints, which typically retailed at 6d, or 1s when hand-coloured. Unlike cards, tickets and invitations, standalone prints or prints in combination with poems or political pamphlets, would have been bought to keep – at least while they remained topical or fashionable. Such prints might also have some aesthetic value, but were also social identifiers which, unlike drawings and paintings, could be widely distributed among like-minded individuals.

We know from depictions of domestic interiors, such as the third scene of Hogarth’s “A Harlot’s Progress”, that unframed prints might adorn the walls of even relatively humble households.⁵³ In the latter case, the Harlot displayed next to her bed topical, engraved portraits of Captain Macheath, the highwayman from Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, and of Dr. Henry Sachaverell, the fiery parson, who was condemned to jail by the Whig ministry for his rabble-raising sermons. Other sources show that different types of print could be displayed in any domestic context, from the water closet to the mantel-piece in the drawing room, as well as in coffee shops, and in the windows of print and book shops. They were also exchanged as gifts between friends.⁵⁴ In the case of such standalone prints, there is a greater chance of occasional surviving examples than for smaller scale ephemera.

⁵¹ Baily, *Francesco Bartolozzi*, Appendix 1; W.S. Baker, *William Sharp: Engraver* (Philadelphia, 1875), pp. 98-9

⁵² London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Pr.S3, p5394883

⁵³ Paulson, *Hogarth’s Graphic Works*, 81, p. 290

⁵⁴ Sheila O’Connell, *The Popular Print in England, 1550-1850* (London, 1999), pp. 31, 49 and 51, and figures 1.3-4



Figure 2 Invitation to Divine Service and the Stepney Feast, etched by Isaac Basire (1746) (source: London Metropolitan Archives, City of London)

It is not possible to say with certainty that the chance survivals of standalone prints signed by Isaac Basire are representative of his output of this type of product. However, judging from the evidence of surviving prints by other copper-plate engravers, they do seem to be representative of the middle segment of the wider market, i.e. the segment between truly popular wood-cuts or cheaply etched prints at the bottom end, and higher-value landscapes and interpretations of old master paintings at the top end. Such prints represented the typical interests of the emerging consumer society of the first half of the eighteenth century, and would not be out of place in the mass media of the twenty-first century. Content typically ranged from exotic peoples and animals, via crime and punishment and celebrities, to political and patriotic themes.

The most “popular” print in terms of subject matter which I have found signed by Isaac Basire is a humorous one entitled, “A Companion to Yae-ough-“, which survives in its earliest version, dated 1737, in the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University (Figure 3 on the next page). As the title suggests, it is a companion to another, unsigned print, entitled “Yae-ough, cave amice“, which may also be by Basire.⁵⁵ It depicts an elderly woman with her mouth gaping in an expansive yawn. It is in a small octavo format, so that it could be easily handed around and pinned to any wall, and was available from the printseller, Thomas Bakewell in Fleet Street for the usual 6d. The drawing is, however, finely characterised and the etching, though relatively simple, is neatly executed. This perhaps explains the fact that this print was not only collected, but later reprinted by at least one other print- and bookseller, Henry Parker. The publication line of this later version, which is in the print collection at the British Museum, mentions Parker’s address as opposite Birchin Hill, Cornhill.⁵⁶ This is consistent with the early period of Parker’s business from 1762,⁵⁷ and so shows that even unpretentious prints of a certain quality could have a considerable commercial shelf life.

The contemporary fascination with exotic animals which were now arriving with trade ships from around the world is nicely represented by a print of “A Young crocodile drawn from the Life in London, October 1739“, drafted by the Jersey artist, Clement Lempriere, and engraved by Basire.⁵⁸ This was almost certainly originally conceived as a souvenir print but, like some other higher quality “popular” prints, it also benefited from a long and varied afterlife. It was first published in the *London Magazine*, which had been founded in 1732 in direct competition to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. It then appeared again in a composite plate in the second volume of the *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, published in 1745.⁵⁹ In the latter case, it was renamed “A

⁵⁵ Yale University, Lewis Walpole Library, prints and drawings, 737.00.00.02-3

⁵⁶ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 2010,7081.1698, British XVIIIc Unmounted Roy

⁵⁷ Ian Maxted, *Exeter Working Papers on Book History*, consulted on 29 August 2014 at: <http://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/london-1775-1800-p-q.html>

⁵⁸ Victoria & Albert Museum, 25016:772, Prints and Drawings Study Room, level E, case Z, shelf 2, box B

⁵⁹ (John Green), *New General Collection of voyages and travels...in Europe, Asia, Africa and America*, II, (London, 1745), I, 42, p. 370; plate reference per the copy in the Bodleian Library in Oxford



Figure 3 "A Companion to Yae-ough-" by Isaac Basire (1737), actual size 212 mm x 159 mm (courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University)

young alligator drawn from the Life in London, October 1739”, reduced in size, and combined with two other figures: a catfish and a shark, supposedly illustrating marine life off the west coast of Africa. It is probable that Basire himself reduced the engraving, as he was one of the principal engravers of this prestigious four-volume collection. In any case, it is typical of the unabashed recycling of engravers’ work between standalone prints, magazines and monographs.

The “crime and punishment” category of illustration was one of the most popular genres for standalone prints over a long period and the whole range of quality and price. In 1736, the printer, James Janeway of Whitefriars off Fleet Street, and the neighbouring printseller, Thomas Bakewell, advertised for sale a set of “Twenty six beautiful folio prints, design’d by able masters, and curiously engrav’d: representing the most remarkable transactions of twenty six celebrated malefactors, either highwaymen, pirates, murderers, shop-lifters, street-robbers, or pick-pockets”.⁶⁰ More than half of these prints were signed by Isaac Basire, while the others were signed by other mid-market, native London engravers, such as Benjamin Cole, Nathaniel Parr and W.H. Toms.⁶¹ The draughtsmanship and engraving are of variable quality, but are nevertheless generally detailed and vigorous. Taken together with the folio size and explanatory texts to the prints, the publishers must have provided a relatively large budget for the artists involved. In fact, these prints were also published as illustrations to a contemporary best-seller, *A General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers Etc.*, which had been printed by and for Janeway two years previously. Again, they demonstrate that superficially “popular” subjects could be transformed into a variety of products from standalone prints to book plates for a wide range of customers. Many copies of these particular prints survive today, as well as sometimes richly-bound volumes of the illustrated book version, which was updated and re-issued by a number of different booksellers over the following 20 years.

In some cases, the theme of “crime and punishment” could be made even more titillating to the consumer by combining it with political and patriotic themes and underlining the celebrity status of the condemned. The second and more serious Jacobite rebellion of 1745 would provide a golden opportunity for entrepreneurial printsellers and their artists alike. Hogarth could not resist rushing to meet Simon, Lord Lovat, on the way to his execution in London, in order to draw and etch a suitably sinister-looking prisoner. It was worth his while, as he reputedly sold thousands of copies of his print at a premium price of 1s, bringing in £12 per day.⁶² Isaac Basire, who was then at the peak of his reputation, was invited by the book- and printseller John Pine to engrave a drawing by the leading contemporary illustrator, Samuel Wale, which gave a more serious spin to events. “A View of the Court erected in Westminster Hall for the Tryal of Simon Lord

⁶⁰ Yale University, Lewis Walpole Library, folio 724 736T

⁶¹ Toms, like Basire, has “etching” marked against his name in Vertue’s list, in order to distinguish him from French line engravers or “burinators”, such as Boitard and La Cave

⁶² Paulson, *Hogarth’s Graphic Works*, pp. 125, 348

Lovat" is a large-scale, remarkably detailed print of the interior of Westminster, with assembled peers, and an inset plan of the court, between two scrolls framing a more detailed description of the trial in the top corners. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Isaac must have obtained outside help to complete such an undertaking within a reasonable timeframe, especially given the number of tiny portraits required and the fact that some detail has been enhanced with line engraving. The obvious candidate is his fifteen-year old son, James, who would also profit from these events in the early years of his career, by engraving an elaborate pair of rococo portraits of the two Jacobite peers who were executed together with Lovat, the Earl of Kilmarnock and Lord Balmerino.⁶³

Further topical prints engraved by Isaac Basire illustrate the development of public interest in current events overseas and the different ways in which these could be exploited by draughtsmen, engravers and their patrons. One of Isaac Basire's earliest surviving standalone prints is a large folio group portrait of seven Cherokee kings or chiefs who had been brought over from the Carolinas in 1730 to meet King George II.⁶⁴ This was the year after the Crown had purchased these lands from private interests and re-established them as royal colonies. It is of a type of larger print which could have been framed and hung in a prominent place in the home, as it is etched in detail from a painting, and is accompanied with a proud and patriotic text (Figure 4 on the next page).

At the opposite end of the quality spectrum, Basire etched a crudely drawn depiction of British sailors in a Spanish prison with the hysterical strap line: "And dare they, dare the vanquish'd sons of Spain/Enslave a Briton", which was published by the well-known pamphlet shop owner, Anne Dodd, in 1738.⁶⁵ It is unlikely that this print would have survived if it were not for its historical significance. It served as the frontispiece to a six-penny pamphlet containing an early work by the teenage poet, Mark Akenside: "The Voice of Liberty; or, a British Philippic occasioned by the Insults of the Spaniards, and the present Preparations for War".

The prints described here are diverse in style, size, subject matter and purpose, and were commissioned by a variety of magazine publishers, book-, print- and pamphlet-sellers. This implies that Isaac Basire was, at least in the 1730s, effectively for hire in competition with other engravers on the basis of price and availability, and so could not yet rely on reputation or longer-term relationships for steady work of a higher quality.

⁶³ A copy of the portrait of the Lord Balmerino can be found in the print collection of the National Portrait Gallery

⁶⁴ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, Y,1.110, British XVIIIc Mounted Atlas

⁶⁵ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 1868,0808.3597, Satires British Unmounted Roy

This conclusion may be supported by one interpretation of Basire's role in the preparation for the passing of the Engraving Copyright Act of 1734. Hogarth and the other proponents of the Act had arranged for Basire to appear before a parliamentary committee with copies of luxurious flower prints, which the young engraver had pirated from Henry Fletcher and others and then sold at half the price. Ronald Paulson states that this was "presumably at the instigation of a printseller", and he may well be right.⁶⁶ However, since there is no printseller mentioned, Isaac may also have been acting on his own account, which would give a different spin to the story. The print trade was an entrepreneurial free-for-all before and even after "Hogarth's Act", and Isaac Basire was himself a 31 year-old entrepreneur. Since he had also just taken on his first apprentice, Robert Roberts, in 1733, and so had another mouth to feed,⁶⁷ it is just as likely that Basire would combine external commissions from a variety of sources with his own, sometimes pirated, products, in order usefully to occupy his staff and provide regular footfall in his shop.

2.3 MATURITY AND THE LONDON BOOK TRADE

Having established himself in business with one apprentice, Isaac Basire must at some stage have made a strategic decision as to whether he should remain a generalist engraver or further develop his practice through increased specialisation in one sub-sector of the market. In fact, he continued to engrave a variety of commissions, but certain contemporary and later commentators pigeon-holed him as an "engraver of maps". This idea seems to have been based on a comment made by Horace Walpole on "John" Green in his widely-consulted *Catalogue of Engravers*.⁶⁸

"...bred under Basire an engraver of maps, father of the present engraver to the Antiquarian Society...."

It is true that Isaac signed a number of well-known standalone maps. These included a decorated, half-size reduction of John Kirby's "An actual survey of the county of Suffolk: taken from ye original survey publish'd in ye year 1736",⁶⁹ and the topical, "New and Accurate Plan of the City and Harbour of Cartagena, shewing the Descent of that Place by the British Fleet and Land Forces...in March and April 1741", after Lempriere.⁷⁰ However, to label Isaac Basire as an "engraver of maps" is a misconception which has unfor-

⁶⁶ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, High art and low, 1732-1750*, II (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1992), p. 40

⁶⁷ The National Archives, *Records of the Board of Stamps*, IR/1/13/156

⁶⁸ Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of the Arts in General in Great Britain to the end of the Reign of George II*, volume V, "A Catalogue of Engravers who have been born or resided in England, from the MSS of George Vertue" (London, 1763), p. 127

⁶⁹ John Blatchly, *John Kirby's Suffolk: his Maps and Roadbooks* (Suffolk Records Society, 2004)

⁷⁰ National Maritime Museum collection, object ID PAG8800

tunately lived on through Joseph Strutt's *Biographical Dictionary* of 1785,⁷¹ as well as Frederick Wedmore's article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, published exactly 100 years later.

Walpole's oversight was actually already corrected a few years after it was made in another reference work, *A Chronological Series of Engravers from the Invention of the Art to the beginning of the present Century*, which was published in Cambridge in 1770. The anonymous author states in the entry relating to Basire's pupil, *James Green*:

"Not *John*. Bred under Basire, who was no engraver of maps; but did cuts for Don Quixote from the designs of Hogarth, &c." ⁷²

This author was clearly well-informed and was at pains to correct Walpole's factual mistakes. It is most likely that he derived this information from Peter Spindelowe Lamborn, who was a pupil of Isaac Basire, and has been described as the "most celebrated engraver known to have worked in Cambridge".⁷³ The final reference to a possible involvement by Basire in Hogarth's six illustrations for *Don Quixote* from about 1726 is unfortunately a tantalising loose end.

A more accurate description of Basire's market positioning during the central part of his career would be as an engraver of general book illustrations, as these comprised by far the greater part of his known output. This would have been a logical development from the production of standalone prints produced for printsellers, who often doubled as booksellers and recycled prints between these two commercial activities. It would also be consistent with Basire's skills in etching, as opposed to line engraving, as timeliness of delivery and reasonable pricing were essential for most book illustrations. Finally, this positioning was also supported by the contemporary expansion in the market for books, which simultaneously also served to stimulate demand for qualified draughtsmen and engravers.

Developments in book illustration

The Licensing of the Press Act of 1662 had imposed state control and censorship on the book trade, which was legally enforced by the Stationers' Company. However, when this Act lapsed in 1695, the Stationers failed to reinstate their effective monopoly over copyright through Parliament, and eventually settled in 1710 for the so-called "Statute of Anne" or "Copyright Act". As a result of this Act, copyright was given to the authors themselves for a period of up to 14 years, renewable for another 14 years. These legal moves had a number of impacts on the book trade. Firstly, they gave authors of the Augustan Age, such as Alexander Pope, sometimes described as England's first profes-

⁷¹ Strutt, *A Biographical Dictionary*, I, p. 68

⁷² The correction of Green's first name to "John" is clearly a reference to Walpole's text

⁷³ David McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press* (1992-2004), II, "Scholarship and Commerce 1698-1872", p. 24

sional writer, the power to negotiate financial terms with printers and publishers and so make writing a financially worthwhile occupation.⁷⁴ Secondly, the expiry of the first 28-year period foreseen by the Statute, together with a number of grey areas in the legislation, set off the so-called “Battle of the Booksellers”, an era of intense competition between printers and publishers, which was waged both inside and outside the courts from the early 1730s. The Copyright Act can, incidentally, be viewed also as the legal stimulus for Hogarth’s “Engraving Copyright Act” of 1735, which aimed to protect original engravings for a period of 14 years, and thus stimulated this segment of the market in parallel with that for book illustration.

These legal changes, which promoted the supply of books and the entry of new booksellers into the market, coincided with an increasing consumer interest in high-quality illustration. As in the case of standalone prints, imported French draughtsmen and engravers were initially used to satisfy this new demand. The elder Jacob Tonson, Pope’s original publisher, employed the elder Boitard to design the plates for his *Shakespeare* (1709) and *Beaumont and Fletcher* (1711); while Tonson’s great rival, Bernard Lintot, commissioned Du Bosc to engrave the drawings by Louis de Guernier for Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*, which was published 1714. The second wave of French immigrants was then called upon to supply the upper end of the market for engraved book plates for the next generation. It was Du Bosc who invited over the Scotin brothers and Hubert-François Bourguignon, known as “Gravelot”, to work for Tonson on one of the most ambitious publishing ventures of the day, the English version of Bernard Picart’s *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of Various Nations of the World* (1733-7). The 223 plates in this work were actually re-engraved from the French edition, but Gravelot also drew and etched 22 new headpieces.⁷⁵ This work marked the beginning of a new era for artistic quality and original design in book illustration in England.

Isaac Basire was one of a number of native-born engravers who benefited from this trend, and an analysis of his book illustrations from the mid-1730s onwards demonstrates both the evolution of the market and the concomitant progression in his own career. Basire had already played a leading role in the illustration of the book version of the *General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen and Murderers*, published in 1734, and many of his other book plates during this period belonged to the same relatively unpretentious class of product. These plates particularly illustrated core leisure occupations, such as the theatre and gossip. Examples of theatrical plates by Basire include the frontispieces to Mrs. Cent-Livre’s, *The Artifice* (1735), Richard Steel’s *The Lying Lover* (1736), George Farquar’s *The Inconstant* and *The Twin-Rivals* (1736), and Colley Cibber’s *The Non-juror* (1736). An example of a popular monograph devoted to gossip can be found in the English translation of Mme. de Gomez’s *La Belle Assemblée: being a curious Collection of some very remarkable incidents which*

⁷⁴ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd edition, (London, 2006), pp. 55-6

⁷⁵ Hanns Hammelmann, ed. T.S.R. Boase, *Book illustrations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1975), pp. 1-2, 42, 47

happen'd to persons of the first quality in France, where at least four plates were signed by Basire: "at least four plates", because the multiple editions of this best-seller included a variety of different illustrations, ranging from one signed by Basire in the fourth edition of 1736 to four signed by him in the sixth edition of 1749, as well as a number of unsigned plates in a similar style.

All of these illustrations belonged to the same genre. They represented action scenes extracted from the relevant text, etched with reasonable but not excessive detail, and served to give a taste of the story to follow. The books were all in tiny duodecimo format, capable of being carried in a small bag, or read comfortably in bed, in a chair or even on a stage coach. They were therefore not expensive, but were also clearly not supposed to appear cheap. A typical example of this plate genre, taken from Mme. de Gomez's *La Belle Assemblée*, is given as Figure 5 on the next page.

The artists with whom Basire was associated in these contemporary editions of popular plays were established native engravers, such as Gerard Vandergucht and Giles King. Vandergucht was known for his free etching style, but Vertue's list of contemporary engravers also described his specialism as "History – etc.", and that of King as "graving history". In other words, Basire's colleagues on these works were both associated by Vertue with the highest artistic genre of engraving. Vandergucht himself was, moreover, employed by Hogarth to engrave a number of frontispieces to plays and books in a similar style to the theatrical frontispieces, while the leading English engraver and satirist of the day also authorised his former assistant, King, to make cheaper copies of the Harlot series of satirical prints.⁷⁶ Bookselling and print entrepreneurs were thus starting to rank Isaac Basire in the same league as these more senior native artists by the second half of the 1730s.

This is not to say that Isaac Basire had by the mid-1730s already established such a reputation or system of relationships to place him in the top echelons of his profession. As in the case of standalone prints, these early commissions for book plates indicate that he was still largely competing on availability and price, but within a different commercial context. In the pure print market, standalone plates were more or less a commodity. In the market for books, the considerable costs of production and promotion were frequently shared by a number of bookselling entrepreneurs. For example, *The dramattick works of the late Sir Richard Steele* (1736) were "printed for W. Feales", but the individual plays were marked as printed for the two leading publishers of the day, the younger Jacob Tonson and Henry Lintot. *The dramattick works of Mr. George Farquhar* (1736) were "printed for B. Lintot, J.J. and P. Knapton, G. Strahan and J. Clarke". In the case of the sixth edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, there were no fewer than ten promoters mentioned, including Bernard Lintot. This form of syndication resulted in a dispersion of patronage for artists, which made the achievement of a regular income from book illustrations just as difficult as from standalone prints. This must have pre-

⁷⁶ Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, pp. 12, 187-9

sented a challenge for an engraver who was still in the process of growing his business and establishing a reputation in this segment of the market.



Figure 5 Illustration etched by Isaac Basire for *La Belle Assemblée*: being a curious Collection of some very remarkable incidents which happen'd to persons of the first quality in France, by Mme de Gomez, p. 235, volume 4, from the 6th edition (1749) actual size 124 mm x 73 mm within frame (photograph: the author)

Isaac Basire's breakthrough into the first division of contemporary engravers of book illustrations seems finally to have occurred between 1739 and 1744. During this period, he engraved at least three designs by Gravelot: the frontispieces of *Poems on Various Subjects* (1739) by Moses Brown and of *Poems on Several Subjects* (1741) by Henry Price, as well as the dedication vignette for an English translation of *Circe* (1744), from the work of the Renaissance humanist, Giambattista Gelli. These prints represented a significant milestone for Basire for a number of reasons. Gravelot was the outstanding draughtsman and designer of the "French style" or rococo, which became the dominant artistic trend through the 1740s. From his arrival in London in 1732-3, Gravelot mainly worked with French engravers, such as Scotin, Baron and Fourdrinier, but later started to work with selected English engravers, such as Vandergucht, Cole, Toms and George Bickham junior. The two frontispieces created by Gravelot with Basire comprised elaborate classical allegories of a type which would have been classed as "history engraving", while the vignette on the dedication page of *Circe* was in a similar elevated style, showing the coat of arms and a view of Lord Bathurst's famously improved estate at Cirencester.

These were all vanity works which were published by and for the moderately to extremely wealthy. Moses Brown was a particular friend of Edward Cave, the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The subscriber's list of the *Poems on Several Subjects* amounted to a roll-call of the middle classes in southern England, including apothecaries, attorneys, churchmen and merchants. *Circe's* subscriber list began with royalty, continued with dozens of knights and peers of the realm, included a remarkable number of aristocratic women, and concluded with another five pages of gentlemen, churchmen and professionals. These publications represented the type of exposure which could help make Basire's signature at the bottom of a print become an additional selling point for commercial booksellers.

Taking into account Isaac Basire's entire career, such commissions with a fine art element remained relatively rare. The following paragraphs will therefore describe just two final examples of this type of work from opposing ends of the scale in terms of design and content. The first of these appeared in the second, 1739 edition of John Bancks's *Miscellaneous Works, in Verse and Prose*, which contained a dedication by Moses Brown, boasting that it was "adorned with Sculptures". This work started with a grand, allegorical frontispiece engraved by Vandergucht, which was followed by a series of relatively modest head and tail pieces engraved by Basire and George Bickham junior. Most of these were in the style of the etched frontispieces to plays or of illustrations to early novels, but reduced to a small landscape rather than portrait format. However, there were two illustrations which were more purely decorative, and these included elements of modish, rococo design: a classicizing headpiece with a *rocaille* frame by

Bickham, and a tail piece by Basire showing a scene with Bacchus in an asymmetrical frame of vines with bunches of grapes.⁷⁷

The second example of a pure art print from this pivotal period of Basire's career is a significantly more ambitious piece. It depicted "Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise" and comprised the fifth and final plate of *The History of Adam and Eve: or, an Historical and Critical Account of the Origination and Fall of Man*, published in 1740. The contrast between this and Bancks's work is complete, since this was a large-format production, which was designed to impress a quite different and much more conservative audience. The "five large and beautiful copper-plates, engrav'd by G. King, (Disciple to Mr. Vertue) and other eminent hands, from the original drawings of the famous A. Vanhaecken", were dedicated by the bookseller Thomas Edlin to the five highest-ranking clergy in England, and the fifth plate, engraved by Basire, was dedicated to Richard Willis, the Bishop of Winchester. The fact that this work went to at least a fourth edition by 1758 cannot be attributed to its unoriginal 10 pages of text, but to the high quality of the plates and the surprisingly erotic nature of their subject matter.⁷⁸ Basire's plate is illustrated as Figure 6 on the next page.

The importance of such isolated, fine-art book plates for Isaac Basire as a businessman must have been in their marketing potential rather than any potential for meaningful financial gain. They raised his profile and could, and did, lead to further commissions of a far more profitable type in the next phase of development of the English book trade.

⁷⁷ *Miscellaneous Works, in Verse and Prose of Mr. John Bancks*, 2nd ed. (London, 1739), I, pp. 1 and 288

⁷⁸ Copies of this work are extremely rare. The English Short Title Catalogue contains references to editions dated 1740 and 1753. A copy of the fourth edition of 1758 is in the possession of the author.



Figure 6 "Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise", etched by Isaac Basire after Arnold Vanhaecken for *The History of Adam and Eve* (London, 1758), actual size 314 mm x 217 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author)

Geography books

The 1740s saw an acceleration in works of an improving nature, as the ideas and the aspirations of the Age of Reason filtered down from learned bodies, such as the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries, to an expanding middle class, which was increasingly anxious to absorb and display its knowledge of geography, history and science. A new generation of publishers fulfilled this demand with vast compendia of knowledge, written by an army of hack writers, and illustrated with scores, sometimes even hundreds, of engraved plates. Fortunately for native engravers, this development coincided not only with the Wars of the Austrian Succession, but also the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, which was overtly supported by the French. These events represented the beginning of the end of the road for most of the remaining French artists in London, including Gravelot, and so opened the floodgates for native engravers.

The title of this sub-section is consciously entitled “geography books” rather than “travel books”, as most publications of this type in the 1740s had educational pretensions which went beyond the illustrated armchair travelogues popular in the latter part of the century. It was Isaac Basire’s neighbour, Edward Cave, who was the first publisher to involve the engraver in this type of work, and specifically the second edition of the English translation of Jean-Baptiste Du Halde’s *Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary*, which was published in two volumes in 1738 and 1741. Du Halde was a Paris-based Jesuit who had never himself travelled, but managed to collect and collate sufficient data to provide an encyclopaedic survey of modern China, much of it derived from fellow-Jesuit missionaries. It was first published in France in 1735, but generated such excitement among the educated and curious in England that a first translation appeared already in 1736. This one book was the principal catalyst for a fascination with *chinoiserie*, particularly in the form of porcelain, the decoration of fabrics and garden architecture, which ran as a cultural cross-current not only during the short-lived rococo period, but throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century.

It seems that Edward Cave immediately saw the commercial opportunity for a more intellectually ambitious second edition of this work which would appeal to readers of his own customer base. His lengthy preface to this edition therefore appealed to the academic aspirations of readers of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* and their like by emphasising various improvements on Du Halde’s original work, including better organisation, structure, and even a standardised transliteration of Chinese which survived until recent times. Cave’s main purpose was, however, the commercial replacement of the 1736 English translation in the home market with a more prestigious and profitable product, and a key element of this plan consisted in a hugely expanded deck of large-scale illustrations. The first edition had been published in 4 small, octavo volumes with 19 plates, including 4 maps. Cave eclipsed this with a folio version containing a total of 51 maps and plans, mostly folding out to a double-folio size, and 13 other plates. An arms race

between competing publishers aimed at producing vast, richly illustrated tomes of improving material was now on its way.

Cave's expansion of the illustration of Du Halde must have impressed his English readers when compared with the first English edition. However, in line with the generally derivative nature of English illustrated books at the time, the plates in the second edition were not original, but instead almost entirely consisted of minor improvements or other variations on those in the original French publication. Du Halde's maps and plans, which had been designed by Jean-Baptiste d'Anville, Geographer to Louis XV, were already of a uniformly high quality, and became standard works for many years to come. Not to be outdone, Cave employed Emmanuel Bowen, Geographer to George II and the leading map-engraver in London, who was able to make at least some corrections to d'Anville, such as in the longitudinal markings. Most of the illustrations to Cave's Du Halde were consequently engraved by Bowen, but not all of them. A select number of other engravers were used for the miscellaneous, non-cartographic plates, including Charles Mozley, Henry Fletcher, and particularly Isaac Basire. In all cases, their role was to provide re-engraved variants of the plates from the 1735 original French edition rather than to create or interpret any original drawings.

Basire was not responsible for the most prestigious engraving in the work, the full-length frontispiece portrait of Confucius by Fletcher, but he was the most widely-used of the secondary engravers on the project, and was entrusted with the broadest range of content. His plates included five sets of city plans, which he neatly reduced from ten plates in Du Halde.⁷⁹ He also engraved two sheets with illustrations of Chinese currency, including coins and paper currency, which he combined from two landscape-format prints from Du Halde into one plate in portrait format. He performed the same type of consolidation and reduction in the case of a crowded, but still attractive plate of Chinese plants, roots and fruit. Finally, Basire was tasked with the recreation of two highly detailed and impressive illustrations: one of "The Pompous Attendance of a Viceroy whenever he appears abroad", and the other of a Chinese funeral procession. Both of these included a large number of human figures and horses, and could thus even be classified as "historical prints". The second plate was dedicated to Thomas Finlay, who apparently managed to procure 30 subscriptions from Barbados, the sort of marketing effort which helped finance this type of relatively expensive print. The companion plate, the "Procession of a Chinese Wedding" represented the only plate signed by Charles Mozley, who may have been given this time-consuming assignment instead of Basire, in order to ensure prompt completion for publication.

Cave's edition of Du Halde's *Description* may seem an ambitious undertaking, but it was soon to be overshadowed by the third edition of the more general *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, which was published a few years later, from 1744 to 1746. The

⁷⁹ *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary*, 2nd ed. (London, 1738), volume I, plates VII-X; plates IV-VI comprise city plans engraved by Fletcher

first edition of the *Collection*, which had been published in 1704, already ran to 3,500 pages and advertised “a great number of useful maps, and cuts, all engraven on copper”. In fact, almost all the plates in this edition appeared in volume II, which printed a translation of John Nieuhoff’s *Remarkable Voyages*, describing the Dutchman’s travels to Brazil, the African coastline and southern Asia. The second edition of the *Collection*, published in 1732, was expanded to six volumes and approximately 5,000 pages in length, but contained few new illustrations. Again, they were mostly re-engraved from the Dutch and Italian plates in the original texts, and the total number of plates still amounted to around 300.

The third edition of the *Collection of Voyages* is of interest here because of its curious relationship to Cave’s work and the inclusion of two plates signed by Isaac Basire. This edition was printed by assignment from the original promoters to two major publishers of the day, Henry Lintot and Thomas Osborne, who clearly wished both to imitate and, in their turn, outdo Cave. Like the publisher of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, they used a preface to give their edition an erudite, but also topical and patriotic spin in the form of “an introductory discourse (supposed to be written by the celebrated Mr. Locke) intitled, the whole history of navigation”.

The engraved plates were then given increased emphasis compared with the previous edition by being summarized in a numbered list. In fact, only ten of these were new to this edition, but they were deliberately placed in a prominent position near the beginning of the first volume. The first five plates consisted of double-page maps with scales “from the latest and best observations” of China and the four known continents by R.W. Seale, a specialist map engraver and competitor of Emmanuel Bowen. The other five were lifted from Cave’s edition of Du Halde’s *Description*. The frontispiece consisted of Fletcher’s re-engraving of the portrait of Confucius, while the other four plates comprised the other prestigious architectural and historical prints from the *Description*: “The Observatory at Peking”, signed by W.H. Toms, and the three elaborate illustrations of processions by Basire and Mozley.⁸⁰ These plates were Cave’s property, so there must have been some sort of financial arrangement in place with Lintot and Osborne in order to enable their engravers to rework these plates with more meaningful and consistent titles, as well as to add unusually transparent attributions to the original French draughtsman and engraver.

The key to understanding Lintot’s and Osborne’s purchase of the rights of the original *Collection* and its hasty publication with very little new content, except for a few prominently-placed maps and five other prestigious plates purchased and adapted from Cave, is probably to be found in the ongoing escalation in competition for expensive, high-quality geographical works of an increasingly universal nature.

Lintot and Osborne must have known that another City bookseller, Thomas Astley, was working on the publication of a *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*,

⁸⁰ *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (3rd ed., London, 1744-6), I, plates 7-9 and, pp. 63, 66 and 72

which was published in four volumes starting only a year after the third edition of the *Collection*, and they were probably anxious to pre-empt it. Astley's "new" collection was not in fact much more original than the "old" collection in terms of its sources, but it worked hard to differentiate itself from and to supplant this unwanted competition, starting with the mother of all titles, an unusually extensive part of which served to puff the illustrations:

"A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels; consisting of the most Esteemed Relations, which have been hitherto published in any Language; comprehending every Thing remarkable in its Kind, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. With respect to the Several Empires, Kingdoms, and Provinces; their Situation, Extent, Bounds and Division, Climate, Soil and Produce; their Lakes, Rivers, Mountains, Cities, principal Towns, Harbours, Buildings, &c. and the gradual Alterations that from Time to Time have happened in each: also the Manners and Customs of the Several Inhabitants; their Religion and Government, Arts and Sciences, Trades and Manufactures: So as to form A Compleat system of Modern Geography and History, exhibiting the Present State of all Nations; Illustrated not only with charts of the several Divisions of the Ocean, and maps of each Country, entirely new Composed, as well as new Engraved, by the best Hands, from the latest Surveys, Discoveries, and Astronomical... But likewise with Variety of Plans, and Prospects of Coasts, Harbours, and Cities; besides cuts representing Antiquities, Animals, Vegetables, the Persons and Habits of the People, and other Curiosities: Selected from the most Authentic Travelers, Foreign as well as English."

This title demonstrates that the publisher specifically aspired to outdo his competitors in terms both of its complete world view and its illustrations, while the following pages also revealed that he aimed to trump rivals through an increased emphasis on a related patriotic agenda with a wide commercial appeal. The first volume was significantly dedicated to Admiral "Old Grog" Vernon, the hero of Puerto Bello and the leader of the spectacular, but failed assault on Cartagena de Indias. The list of well over 1,000 initial subscribers included another Admiral, a smattering of nobles, together with over 500 representatives of middling types, particularly from the provinces, and especially from the port of Bristol.⁸¹ This was an enlightened collection of useful knowledge, directed at the same middle-class audience as Cave's magazine, but it clothed itself with a higher purpose as an educational tool for those eager to see this knowledge at the service of British seamanship and its ambition to drive the French and Spanish from the seas.

The illustrations to the first volume of the *New General Collection* commenced in a fittingly splendid manner with an original, allegorical frontispiece engraved by the young Charles Grignion, a pupil of Gravelot, after one of the latter's last designs produced on English soil. The original frontispieces to the later volumes were then de-

⁸¹ F.J.G. Robinson and P.J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: a Revised Guide* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p. 25

signed by the leading English illustrator, Samuel Wale, and engraved by Nathaniel Parr and George Child. Basire, Parr, Child and Emmanuel Bowen's pupil, Thomas Kitchin, prepared the remaining 150 plates. The illustrations themselves were for the most part no more original than those in the rival *Collection*, but they were carefully selected, rearranged and adapted from the best-known continental European travel writers of the previous two hundred years, including Nieuhoff and Du Halde, rather than just copied wholesale from another work or a previous edition.

Apart from the frontispieces, the prints in the *New General Collection* are of a lower quality in terms of detail and closeness of engraving than the first ten plates in the rival *Collection*. However, this new publication's more differentiated approach to illustration sent its own message. The illustrative scheme must have seemed more up-to-date, as well as more focused on the content, as the plates within the text were uniformly re-etched in a contemporary style, and were all signed by four English engravers, who were clearly working together as a team under the close supervision of the publisher. The original sources of the prints were also often given in banner labels, a touch which emphasised the scientific credentials of the work, and remained an exception even in later comparable works. In this light and in a contemporary context, the title page's description of the plates as "new engraved" did not represent an undue exaggeration.

Isaac Basire himself obtained his fair share of this project, as he engraved 35 plates with highly varied subject matter covering all four volumes. These comprised a mixture of topographical views and illustrations of natives and local fish, birds and animals, including the "alligator" he had engraved many years before after Lempriere. There is one, exceptional example of a plate which was evidently adapted from a fine art to a geographical context, the "Lyons of Africa". The exact source of this plate is unclear, but it stands out from the rest of the work as it is more finely etched than the other engravings, and it is apparently based on a detail from a Rubens painting, since it is signed "P. Rubens pinxit" (Figure 7).⁸²

⁸² *Ibid*, ii, XXXVIII, 55, p. 340



Figure 7 “Lyons of Africa” etched by Isaac Basire after Rubens for *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745-46), actual size 158 mm x 214 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

It is notable that Basire only engraved one plan and one coastal map in the entire *New General Collection*, as the remaining maps were entrusted either to Child or to Thomas Kitchin who, with Bowen and Seale, would complete the triumvirate of leading specialist, cartographic engravers of the middle part of the century. Taken as whole, this was Basire’s most substantial engraving project to date, and must have been not only particularly profitable but also personally valued, as he decided to subscribe to no fewer than three sets of this work. At least one set of these volumes dedicated to “the improvement of Geography, Navigation and Natural History” must therefore have been available at Basire’s home as an inspiration both to his now multiple apprentices and to his sons, his eventual successors.⁸³

History books

Fortunately for the London engraving fraternity of the 1740s, illustrated history books were subject to the same proliferation and steady improvement in their content, both in terms of the printed word and their illustration, as geographical works. A syndicate of

⁸³ *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1745-7), I, p xi

publishers led by the Osbornes, father and son, started publishing a seven-volume, folio size *Universal History* – effectively ancient history - in 1736, the same year as the first English edition of Du Halde. From the very first volume, the title pages of this *History* announced that it would be “compiled from original authors; and illustrated with maps, cuts, notes, etc.”. It was accordingly prefaced by a learned discussion of sources; almost every page contained footnotes with original references; and the text was neither a translation nor an abridgement, but an original compilation by a team of dedicated writers. In contrast, the “cuts” in the first volume still consisted of an unsatisfactory mixture of maps, plans and views cobbled together from earlier publications by at least six different engravers. One example of this is an unsigned depiction of the Tower of Babel, which was presumably reduced by Basire himself from his plate for *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, published in 1733.⁸⁴ The other, attributed plates in the first volume represented a mishmash of prints some of which were signed by fellow English engravers, such as Fletcher, Bowen, James Mynde and John Pine. Most of the plates were, however, unattributed. In reality, quality illustration was an even less differentiating feature in this volume than in the exactly contemporary quarto edition of Du Halde.

Competition was, nonetheless, starting to close the gap between aspirations to higher quality illustration of history books and the reality. The following year, John and Paul Knapton, who embodied a rising, new generation of bookseller-publishers, entered this market segment by commencing publication of a four-volume English abridgement of a popular thirteen-volume French work, *The History of the Arts and Sciences of the Antients*, by Charles Rollin. In contrast to the *Universal History*, this was a smaller-scale adaptation of an existing product, so the Knapton brothers were able to complete this undertaking in only a couple of years, and the fourth and last volume was published already in 1739. It was produced in a relatively modest quarto format, but the Knaptons nevertheless used illustration as a particular selling point. In the introductory remarks to the first volume entitled, “The Translator to the Reader”, the Reader was assured in unusual and convincing detail that this history would not only take plates from Rollin, but would enhance these with selected illustrations from Rollin’s sources, such as Perault’s translation of Vitruvius, Folard’s commentary on Polybius, and Montfaucon’s *Antiquities*. In other words, it would take the same selective and eclectic approach as the *New General Collection*.

The Knaptons thus appeared to have a well-planned and articulated strategy for value-added illustration, and they chose Isaac Basire and W.H. Toms in order to realise this. The first volume started with a depiction of the five orders of architecture from Rollin and a plate depicting machines for removing stones, followed by a set of seven prints of plans and views of Roman temples, all of which were signed by Basire. These plates, despite being re-engravings of earlier French works, represented a relatively

⁸⁴ *An Universal History from the Earliest Account of Time* (2nd ed., London, 1747-8), I, p. 146; *The Works of Flavius Josephus which are extant* (London, 1733), p. 11

high and unusual genre of illustration for this engraver, as they could be classified as “architectural prints”. These were followed by a prestigious fold-out plate by the premium French engraver, Bernard Baron, of a fresco found in Rome by the renowned collector, Dr. Richard Mead. The second volume, also published in 1737, contained a further 40 plates, 29 of which were signed, in all cases by Toms, who also produced one of the 11 plates in the first volume. This enthusiasm for illustration seemed, however, to have waned by the time the third and fourth volumes were published in 1739. An “Advertisement” at the end of the fourth volume did promise a series of maps “that are absolutely necessary to the understanding of the history”, and noted that they could be bound in once they had been “engraved and published by J. and P. Knapton soon after the originals are done in Paris”. However, these maps never seem to have materialised, probably because client expectations were evolving quickly, and the Knapton brothers were in any case already working on a new and better plan to compete in this fast-evolving market.

The rival *Universal History* had, in the meantime, started to develop further its own approach to illustration. The printer-publishers had decided to employ a team of three native English engravers to work collaboratively on the next volumes in a similar way to that seen in the Astley’s *New General Collection*. The team again consisted of a blend of general engravers, Isaac Basire and John Blundell, plus a map specialist, Emmanuel Bowen. These artists respectively signed or are known to have engraved 14, 14 and 11 plates respectively, the majority of which were historical maps, as befitted a serious historical work. It is evident that the maps were produced in a coordinated and largely consistent style, despite the fact that they were designed or adapted by three different engravers over a period of some years. Where there are differences in decoration of the maps, these clearly did not derive from source maps or the engravers’ own tastes, but expressly reflected changes in artistic fashion during the period of publication. Many of the earlier maps were decorated with inset allegorical scenes in a late baroque manner, for example “Antient Spain”, engraved by Basire for volume IV, published in 1739.⁸⁵ From the fifth volume published in 1740, however, many of the maps were decorated by the engravers with increasingly complex cartouches in the new rococo style.⁸⁶ Self-conscious awareness of fashion was thus consciously combined by the publishers with intellectual aspiration in order to maximise the work’s consumer appeal.

This is not to say that the *Universal History* did not continue to derive a large number of the plates in the later volumes from other works. A particularly egregious example of this can be found in the large composite plate from the fourth volume which combined plans and elevations of Jerusalem, a view of the inside of the Temple of Solomon and objects from the Temple. It is signed by John Blundell, but all of its contents derive from earlier engravings by his teammate, Isaac Basire, in whose name they had

⁸⁵ *An Universal History*, IV, p. 708

⁸⁶ *An Universal History*, V, p 328; VI, p. 1

been published in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*.⁸⁷ The time when customers would come to expect bookseller-publishers to provide a full set of original plates, which they had not already seen in multiple other publications, had not yet arrived - but it was not far away.

The participants in the syndicate publishing the first edition of the *Universal History* evolved in the years 1740 to 1744 to include younger and more aggressive members. The sixth volume was co-published with Andrew Millar, who would become famous, among his other achievements, for successfully defending the copyright he had bought for James Thomson's *The Seasons*. The seventh volume of the *History* included the participation of John Hinton, who would later make the "Universal" publishing brand his own. In 1746, Millar and the Osbornes decided to intensify the war of the histories by publishing a second edition of the *Universal History* in no fewer than twenty volumes in a handier octavo format, a feat which they duly achieved in the astonishingly short timescale of two years. There were understandably very few changes in the illustrations to this second edition, except for the reduction in size and changes in labelling and numbering. However, there was one significant addition, which continued previous nods to evolving artistic fashion. This was in the form of 11 portrait heads of the early Roman emperors in volumes XIII-XV, which were uniformly engraved by Grignion with rococo scrollwork in the very latest style. The publishers' promise of an amply illustrated work covering all of ancient history turned out to be a successful bet. The subscriber list had a record number of almost 3,000 names,⁸⁸ including even relatively modest sorts, such as Isaac Basire himself, who would thus be equipped to educate his apprentices and children in history as well as in geography.

It might have been reasonable to expect that the *Universal History* had finally out-gunned its competitors,⁸⁹ but there was room in the market for another blockbuster product, a "modern" history of England with all new illustrations. The Knaptons, father and son, had already embarked on a similar venture in 1725 in the form of a translation of the great history of England by the French historian, Paul de Rapin de Thoyras, which ended with the Glorious Revolution. The plates for the French original had been engraved by La Cave, but the Knapton brothers formed an agreement with George Vertue to engrave new portraits of the English kings and other historical figures for the English version from 1733.⁹⁰ However, the time required by Vertue to produce his elaborately engraved plates in no way matched the expectations of his patrons or the market, and the Knaptons announced a follow-up project in 1736, which would circumvent their agreement with Vertue and create an even more original product. This was the publication of an illustrated version of Nicolas Tindal's *Continuation of Mr de Rapin Thoyras's*

⁸⁷ *An Universal History*, IV, p. 145; *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, p. 184

⁸⁸ Robinson and Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists*, p. 27

⁸⁹ The series went on to embrace modern history and the sixty-fifth volume was finally published in 1768, under the general editorship of Tobias Smollett

⁹⁰ Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London* (New Haven and London, 1983), pp. 149-50

History of England, from the Revolution to the Accession of George I. This work was a triumph for the Knaptons and for its illustrators, including Isaac Basire. In fact, this project arguably represented the high point of Basire's career.

The third and fourth volumes of the *History of England* (the first two volumes of the *Continuation*) covered the reigns of William and Mary, Queen Anne and King George I, and were published in the period 1744 to 1747. Unlike *The History of the Arts and Sciences of the Antients* and the *Universal History*, this work not only had a clear programme of original illustration of the highest quality from inception, but was also able to deliver on it. There were numerous delicate allegorical head and tail pieces designed by Gravelot, many if not all of which must have been produced by him after his return to Paris. The portrait heads, which were used as frontispieces and interspersed in the text, were sent to Amsterdam to be engraved by Jacob Houbraken. Their dignified compositions with a touch of rococo flair were much more popular than the old-fashioned and often off-beat compositions which Vertue engraved for the first two volumes, and they also sold much better as standalone prints. There was an extensive series of newly engraved, fold-out maps and charts of Europe, North America and their seas, drawn and engraved by Seale and Bowen, some of which were to be bound in at the appropriate point in the text, while those intended to complete the set were to be bound at the end. Finally, there were 64 plates signed by Isaac Basire, who was thus by far the major contributor to a set of engraved illustrations which also sold so well on a standalone basis that exemplars are still widely available for purchase at modern sellers of antiquarian prints and books.

Basire's main contribution to the *Continuation* comprised 43 large-scale, fold-out plans of battles, sieges and towns related to the War of the Spanish Succession. These were designed to be placed at the relevant point in the text, and so illustrate in the most direct fashion possible the victories of the Duke of Marlborough and his allies. They were engraved with significant detail and, in many cases, flamboyant rococo cartouches and other decoration, only a few of which can be mentioned as examples here. The double-page plan of Brussels had two cartouches containing the title, coat of arms, the scale and an "explanation", i.e. key, to the numbered points of interest on the plate. It mainly comprised a bird's eye view of the city, but also contained details of important churches and other buildings. Some of the cartouches on the other plates of the series consisted of relatively restrained *rocaille* work, while others, such as that decorating the plan of the Battle of Donauwörth (or Schellenberg), presented extravagant explosions of cannons, pikes, swords, flags and the other accoutrements of war. The plan of the City of Dunkirk had details of naval ships in battle, while that of the Battle of Wijnendale was brought to life with details of cavalry and supply wagons.

As in the case of the other geographical and historical works examined here, the plates largely derive from Continental European sources.⁹¹ One of the main sources for the battle, siege and town maps in the *Continuation* comprised the *Table des cartes des Pays Bas et des frontières de France, avec un recueil des plans des villes, sièges et batailles donnés entre les hauts alliés et la France*, which was published in 1712 by the Brussels-based printer-publisher, Eugène-Henri Fricx, using plates engraved by Jacques Harrewyn. A comparison of Basire's prints with their sources demonstrates the extent to which the engraver was able and/or instructed to adapt them. In some cases, the plan has been rotated. In others, there is more or less detail. The following relatively simple plates (Figures 8-9 on the next pages) can be taken as typical of the type of changes introduced.

The first point to note concerning these plates of the Battle of Wynendale is that Basire expanded the original plate to a double-page landscape format, compared to the half-page original which was integrated in the text. The plate from the *Continuation* could thus be sold separately as a luxury print. The label in one of Harrewyn's two Baroque cartouches has been moved to underneath Basire's plate, while the other cartouche with the key to the contents has been transformed into an elaborate rococo design. The style used for the battle lines, fields and forest is very similar, but Basire has added a number of cavalry and supply vehicles to enliven his print.

Basire's secondary contribution to the *Continuation* consisted of 22 detailed plates of medals from the reign of King William III and Queen Mary, with up to 14 medals drawn from the obverse and reverse sides on each plate. These engravings alone contained around 600 separate elements against an engraved, patterned background. Their completion, at exactly the same time as Basire was working on the maps and plans in the *Continuation*, the 35 plates which he signed in the *New General Collection*, as well as various other contemporary works, must have been an enormous effort for the engraver. However, this is not evident from their consistently high quality. It must be assumed that Isaac was now supported not only by competent, well-trained apprentices, but also by his precocious teenage son, James Basire (I).

⁹¹ Only two plates mention draughtsmen, in both case military: "Plan of the Battle of Eckeren" (G.T. Molberger) and the "Plan of the Lines of Brabant" (Colonel Divoy)

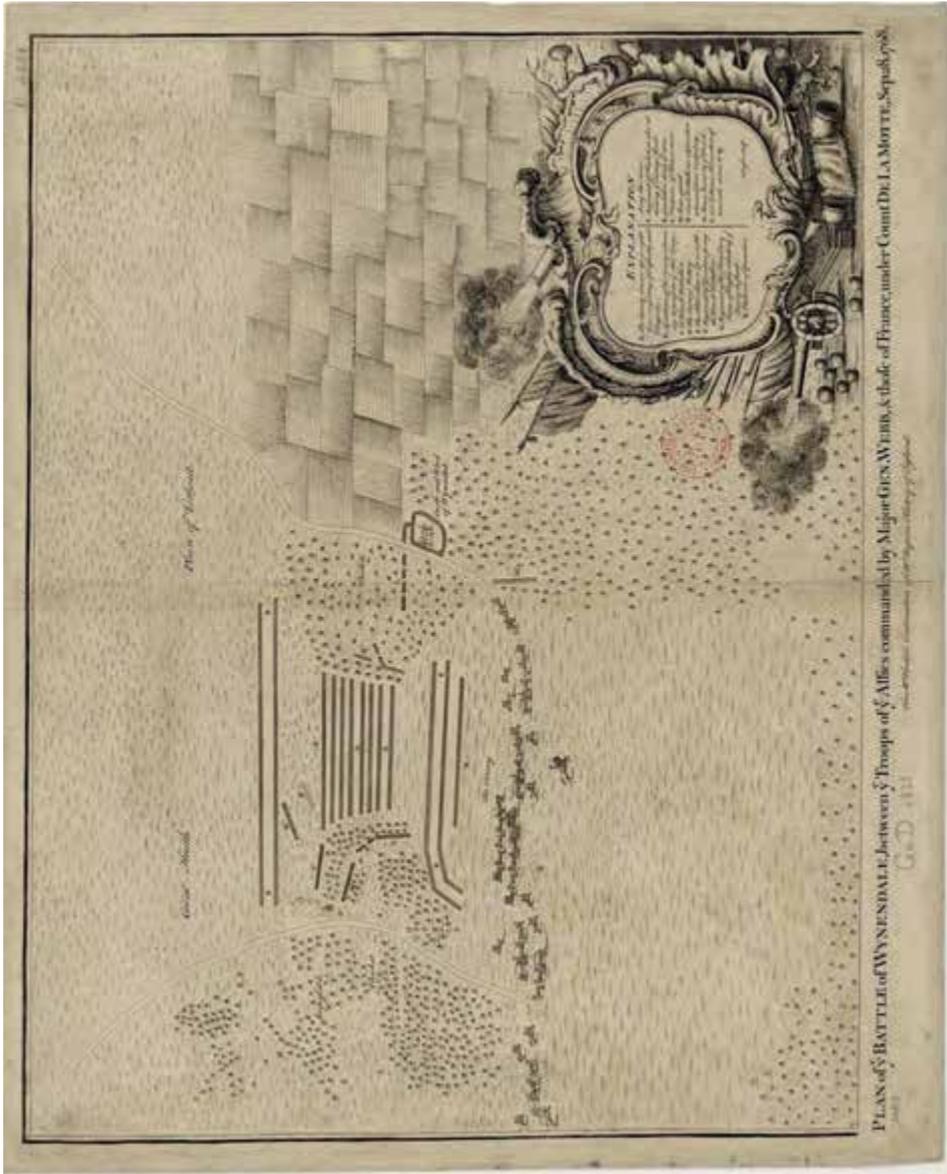


Figure 8 Plan of the Battle of Wyendale, engraved by Isaac Basire for Nicolas Tindal's *Continuation of Mr de Rapin Thoyras's History of England* (ca. 1745) (source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

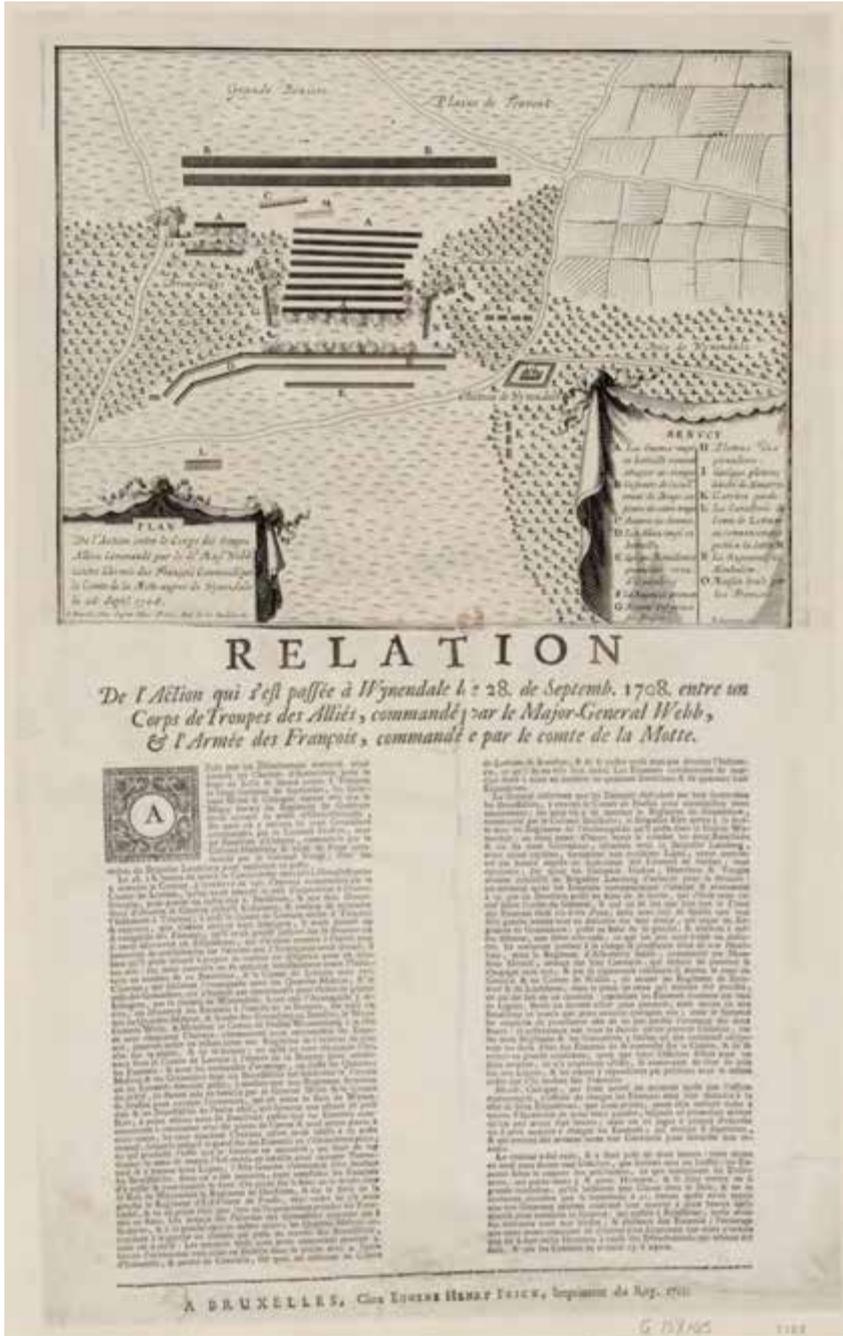


Figure 9 Plan of the Battle of Wynendale, engraved by Jacques Harrewyn for *Table des cartes des Pays Bas et des frontières de France*, published in 1712 by Eugène-Henri Fricx (source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

2.4 LATER YEARS AND TECHNICAL ENGRAVING

By 1750, Isaac Basire was 48 years old and the sharpness of his eyesight, a critical faculty for engravers, must have been starting to decline. He nevertheless remained professionally active, albeit at a steadily reducing level, for at least another 13 years. Ascertaining the exact level of his continued activity is complicated by the fact that his son, James, reached maturity at the beginning of the decade, and both engravers could sign their works as “Basire”, “J. Basire” or “I. Basire”.

Fortunately, a number of factors serve to reduce but not eradicate the potential confusion between father and son. One of these is the fact that Isaac normally signed plates as “I. Basire” at this time, while James often signed them as “James”, “Jas.” or “Js. Basire”. There is at least one work where father and son do seem to have worked together and wished explicitly to differentiate their respective contributions via their signatures to the plates: the *Botanicum Medicinale; or An herbal of medicinal plants on the list of the College of Physicians* by Timothy Sheldrake. This was a collection of attractive prints of herbs with descriptions, which were available in colour and were published by subscription and delivered in instalments from 1755 to the date of the author’s death in 1759. It is probable - but by no means certain - that the two plates signed J. Basire are by Isaac, and that James exceptionally signed a further three plates as “J. Basire Junior”, in order to distinguish them from his father’s work. In other works, where plates are signed “I.” or “J. Basire”, we need to rely on the style and type of work in order to make a case for attribution.

Distinguishing the works of Basire father and son by type is in most cases relatively straightforward, as plates which are unambiguously by James Basire (I) in this period tend to belong to the higher genres of print-making, such as decorated portraits, allegorical frontispieces, prints of old master drawings, paintings and tapestries, or of classical architecture and sculpture. Isaac’s output in the last part of his life, on the other hand, remained focused on book illustration but of an increasingly technical type. The last work by Isaac which did not fall into this category can probably be identified as *The Amusements of Aix-La-Chapelle. Containing Learned and Polite Conversations betwixt Persons of the Most Distinguis'd Rank, of both Sexes, and of different Nations*, by Karl Ludwig, Freiherr von Pöllnitz. Its two volumes were published in 1748 and 1750, and contained six plates of topographical views, three of which were signed by “J. Basire”. It resembles in style the small, duodecimo works of upper-class gossip, such as Mme. De Gomez’s *La Belle Assemblée*, on which Isaac had worked in the 1730s, and which were still being republished through the 1740s. It is unlikely that James Basire would have signed this type of work while still an apprentice, so these plates are almost certainly by Isaac.

The most substantial publication on which Isaac worked in the early 1750s was the *New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, which was “illustrated with a great number of copper-plates, engraven by the best hands”, and published by John Hinton in

1751 and 1752. Such “dictionaries” were published at the same time as Johnson was working on his dictionary of the English language, but were in effect “encyclopaedias” in today’s terminology. As such, they represented a logical extension to the demand for universal works of history and geography in the previous decade. They were also clearly influenced by the contemporary labours of Diderot on his *Encyclopédie*, which reflected the same general trend away from interest in publications concerned with the exotic and remote to a more serious middle-class preoccupation with the practical, commercial and mechanical. This tendency led in London to the foundation of the Society of the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce in 1754 which, among its other aims, promoted fine art and technical engraving on an equal basis.

In the commercial sphere, John Hinton was already profiting from this evolution in public interest by sponsoring articles and plates on like topics in the *Universal Magazine*, which he founded in 1747. Its title pages listed the wide range of subjects to be covered, which went beyond even “mechanicks” and trade to include such commonplace, but essential, economic activities as husbandry, gardening and cookery. The title pages also affirmed that the magazine was intended to be “instructive and entertaining to gentry, merchants, farmers and tradesmen”. Hinton was thus explicitly positioning his magazine in a market segment which not only targeted readers of the type who would read the rival *Gentleman’s Magazine*, but also the social levels immediately below his illustrious competitor’s readership. This corresponded with the wider, target market for his *New and Universal Dictionary* and for other similar publications of the period, which implied a continuing, albeit gradual democratisation of the printed word and related engraved images.

Compared with his predecessors, Hinton was unusually explicit, even insistent, concerning the importance of dedicated illustration within both his *Magazine* and his *Dictionary*. Every plate in the *Universal Magazine* contained the strap line: “engrav’d for the *Universal Magazine*...for John Hinton”; while every plate in the *New Dictionary* was similarly headed: “engraved for the *New Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences*”. The preface of the *Dictionary* went further and boasted of the plates that “the reader will find more than double the number in this dictionary...than in any work of this nature in the English language”. In the case of the magazine, the publisher rarely allowed engravers to append their names to plates, so we cannot know to what extent Isaac Basire and his son supplied plates for this publication. However, in the case of the first edition of the *New Dictionary*, 41 of the 61 plates are attributed, and the majority of these are signed as engraved by a Basire: 32 by I. “Basire”, 2 by “J. Basire”, compared with 5 by R.W. Seale, and 3 by Nathaniel Parr. Isaac Basire was therefore evidently the lead engraver on this project. His friend, Richard Seale, supplied high quality engravings of cartographic subjects, while Parr provided the frontispiece.

One of the new features in Hinton’s *New Dictionary*, which contrasted with previous compilations such as the *Universal History*, was the publisher’s decision to name a single author for the text, John Barrow, a teacher of mathematics. This added to the sense of

consistency and originality of the work, although the text inevitably still derived from a large number of sources. Many of the more substantial illustrations were also predictably borrowed from earlier publications. Celina Fox, in her study of *The Arts of Industry in the Age of the Enlightenment*, gives specific examples of this recycling from some English, but mainly French originals, a phenomenon already noted in the context of contemporary geographical and historical works. She notes that Parr's frontispiece is a simplified version of that in Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* of 1728, which was itself based on Sébastien Leclerc's *Traité d'Architecture* of 1714.⁹² W.H. Toms's 1738 engraving of Gravelot's drawing of Vauloué's pile-driving machine, which was used in the building of Westminster Bridge, was re-engraved and included in plate XXIX with 15 other figures. This whole plate was then signed by Isaac Basire. Gravelot seems also to have been at the origin of the illustration of glass-blowers at work in plate XXXIV, which his pupil, Grignon, had engraved for publication in the *Universal Magazine* in 1747. This image reappeared unattributed in the *Dictionary* as part of another composite plate, beneath images of terrestrial and celestial globes signed by Seale.⁹³ From Hinton's and his client's perspective, the explicit promise that the plates were "engraved for the *New Dictionary*" did not imply originality in the materials used, but in their adaptation to a new context.

A salient feature of the illustrations in the *New Dictionary* was its bold attempt to combine the maximum amount of information in as little space as possible, and then locate it as closely as feasible to the relevant text. Almost all the plates therefore contain multiple figures, with plate XXI holding the record of 39 individual engravings. The entire volume can thus be considered as containing up to 1,000 separate illustrations to entries in the text. This must have been a significant feat of organization on the part of those charged with the design of the composition of the plates.

Based on an analysis of the engravings, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was Isaac Basire himself who was responsible for determining the page layout and the allocation of work. He seems to have been leading a team of artists consisting of close associates and their assistants and apprentices, including his own son who was by then apprenticed to Seale. The fact that some of the engravings were relatively complicated, while the majority were simple line diagrams, would also have lent itself to such teamwork, as different levels of contributor could work on figures with differing degrees of complexity. Such a division of tasks must in any case have been necessary to meet the deadlines for the publication of the individual instalments.

Celina Fox proposes that the two plates signed "J. Basire" in this volume are actually by James Basire, and she may well be correct.⁹⁴ Plate LI, which contained a plan and elevation of the new piers and porters' lodges at the Royal Hospital in Greenwich "measured and delineated in July 1752", is exceptional for being dated, recent and

⁹² Celina Fox, *The Arts of Industry in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven & London, 2009), p. 257

⁹³ This plate is illustrated in Fox, *The Arts of Industry*, p. 253.

⁹⁴ Fox, *The Arts of Industry* p. 256

original. Unlike most of the other plates, it is also a high-quality architectural line engraving in landscape format with elaborate copper plate lettering, which was also sold separately from the dictionary. This plate was therefore, in my view, almost certainly created by James Basire. The other plate in question, number XLV, consisted of a highly detailed illustration of human musculature with 61 numbered references to explanations to the text of the entry on “Muscle”. It mixes etching with some detail in line engraving, which further supports attribution to the younger Basire. However, this conclusion is potentially undermined by the following plate, a rear view of human musculature in the same style, which is signed “I. Basire”.⁹⁵ Ultimately, there is no way of knowing who contributed which elements to which plates, as specific signature styles seem only to have been important to contemporary engravers when they wished to make a point about attribution in respect of a particular engraving.

Hinton followed up his *New Dictionary* within three years with a substantial *Supplement*, which demonstrated the continued evolution of his strategy to use engraved illustration as an important marketing tool. The *Supplement* began with a grand, allegorical frontispiece signed by two long-dead French artists, Bernard Picart and F.M. La Cave. This was followed by 44 plates described in Hinton’s family style as being “Engraved for the Supplement”. Many of these engravings continued the approach of the *New Dictionary* in arranging the maximum number of figures on a single portrait-formatted plate. There were, however, some further novelties. A decorated version of the arms of George III was inserted as a title page vignette, and the arms were shown again on what resembles a dedication page, but was in fact only a copy of the royal copyright. Several plates in the text combined carefully drawn, hand-coloured depictions of flora and fauna, the style of which was identical to that of plates illustrating the *Universal Magazine*.

The most striking engravings in the *Supplement* consisted of a series of detailed fold-out plates which depicted different stages in various manufactures. Celina Fox has shown that figure 3 in plate XXXIV and plate XXXIX, which illustrated rope-making and were signed “J. Basire”, derived from Duhamel du Monceau’s *l’Art de la Corderie*, published in 1747.⁹⁶ More surprisingly, she also demonstrates that some of the other plates must have been based on original drawings from real-life scenes in England. Plate XXVII, which shows three stages in the hat-making process, is signed “J. Basire F(icit)”, which is a very unusual signature style in the context of the Basires’ work. It implies that the drawing in this case was also prepared by “J. Basire”, and I agree with her assumption that “J. Basire” in this case represented the young James Basire, who was particularly known for his drafting skills (see Figure 10 on the next page).

⁹⁵ The style of the anatomical plates is reminiscent of Figure 11 above, derived from Robert James’s *Medicinal Dictionary* (1743)

⁹⁶ Fox, *The Arts of Industry*, pp. 257-262



Figure 10 Illustration to the entry “Hat”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (I) for the *Supplement to the new and universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, by John Barrow (1754) (private collection)

It is also probable that the younger Basire was responsible for “J. Basire”’s delicately engraved title page vignette of shepherds shearing sheep, framed by cornucopia and a ribbon bearing a Virgilian tag, from Malachy Postlethwayt’s *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (1751-55). This was the Knapton brothers’ uninspiring answer to Hinton’s opus. Unfortunately for the Knaptons, this publication was shortly followed by their bankruptcy, while Hinton died a very rich man.

Hinton’s *New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* seems to have been the last major achievement of Isaac Basire’s career of a more general nature, before he concentrated on less demanding scientific and technical engraving projects. His earlier works had already included relatively unexacting, technical plates, such as the four he contributed to Eleazar Albin’s *A Natural History of Spiders, and other Curious Insects* (1736), but also comprised some more complex works. Isaac Basire’s major contribution to scientific engraving can be found in his 17 large-scale and highly detailed plates or “Tables” to *A Medicinal Dictionary, including Physic, Surgery, Anatomy, Chymistry, and Botany*, written by Robert James and published by Thomas Osborne between 1743 and 1745. Basire was the lead engraver on the first volume, where he signed 15 of the 35 plates - the other named engravers being George Bickham junior (8 plates) and Nathaniel Parr’s brother, Richard (4). It seems, however, likely that Basire became overstretched at this time and decided to focus on Astley’s *New General Collection* and on the Knaptons’ *Continuation*, as he was largely replaced by Parr for the last two volumes. An example of Basire’s detailed, large-scale plates for the *Medicinal Dictionary* is included as Figure 11.



Figure 11 Triple fold-out depiction of the arterial system re-engraved by Isaac Basire from James Drake's *Anthropologia Nova* (1707) for *A Medicinal Dictionary* by Robert James, volume I, Table V (1743), actual size 300 x 402 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author)

One of the most remarkable features of the first volume of the *Medicinal Dictionary* is that it describes and lists the sources for the plates.⁹⁷ This, together with the evidence brought together in the previous pages and by Celina Fox, evokes an image of engravers' offices littered with piles of often antiquated books and related prints, which they were tasked with re-sizing, re-combining and re-engraving for use by their commissioning bookseller-publishers.

Some fascinating specifics of the less demanding technical engraving and ancillary services performed by Isaac Basire in the last years of his career can be reconstructed in particular detail thanks to the chance survival of three manuscript communications in the John Frederick Lewis collection of autographs of engravers at the Free Library of Philadelphia and one in a private collection.⁹⁸ These show that Basire worked particularly closely from the mid 1750s to at least 1767 with John Nourse, London's leading scientific and technical bookseller-publisher.

Based on the first surviving account statement from Basire to Nourse dated 14 January 1756, their relationship seems to have begun by at least 1755. This is also borne out by the earliest plates with Basire's signature and Nourse's imprint: a handful of plates for the third edition of John Bartlett's *The Gentleman's Farriery: or, A Practical Treatise, on the Diseases of Horses* (1756); and a substantial set for Field-Marshal Count Saxe's *Reveries, or Memoirs upon the Art of War*, a translation of the French original which was published in 1757. The plates in the latter work, which was dedicated to the "General Officers", were relatively undemanding from a technical perspective, as they consisted mostly of diagrams and plans of fortifications and battle formations. However, this was nevertheless a large undertaking for the engraver at this stage in his career. Most of the forty plates stretched over two quarto pages, and all of the attributed engravings were signed "I.B.". This seems to have been the last engraving project of this scale which Isaac Basire completed.

The account statement sent to Nourse in January 1756 also documents to a limited extent the supply by Basire of standalone ancillary services. In this case, he billed for the printing of no fewer than 3,000 head and tail pieces for an unnamed publication. Significant further information on the mix of services provided by Basire is then provided by the second surviving statement in the same collection, which is shown in Figure 12 on the next page. This statement, which covers the eighteenth-month period 20 March 1762 to 4 October 1763, starts with the engraving and printing of 100 copies of a plate for another translation of a classic French text book, Jean Astruc's *Treatise on the Diseases of Women* (1762). This is followed by a significant combined engraving and print-

⁹⁷ Named sources include: the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society (1702); Humphrey Ridley, *The Anatomy of the Brain* (1695); Giovanni Maria Lancisi, *Tabulae Anatomicae Bartholomaei Eustachii* (1714); William Cheselden, *The Anatomy of the Body* (5th ed. 1740, with original plates by Gerard Vandergucht); as well as works by the British, Dutch and German scientists, Francis Glisson (ca 1599-1677), Jan Swammerdam (1637-1680), Reinier de Graaf (1641-1673), and Lorenz Heister (1683-1758).

⁹⁸ The collection contains three communications between Isaac and Nourse from the years 1756-63, as well as a bill from John Basire, his second son, to Nourse dated 1776.

ing assignment, where Basire was tasked with engraving 14 plates of diagrams and printing 500 copies of these for William Emerson's mathematical treatise, *The Method of Increments* (1763). There is then another large commission for paginating and "altering" 13 plates for the second edition of John Robertson's *Elements of Navigation* (1764), followed by the printing of 500 copies.

For Engraving and Printing for M ^r Nourse		157		
by Isaac Basire		L	S	d
March 20 th 1762.	Engraving a Plate on the Diseases of Women	2	5	0
	Printing a 1000 Ditto at 1 ⁶ / ₁₀₀ Hundred	0	15	0
May 15:	500 Half Sheet plate of Hemlock	0	0	9
	Half Ream of paper for 4 th Plate of Hemlock	0	10	0
July 27. 1763:	500 Sets of Muller Fortification 34 Plates	7	13	0
Aug. 18	Engraving of 14 Plates of M ^r Emerson	12	12	0
	Printing of 500 Each M ^r Emerson at 10 th Hundred	2	18	4
Sept. 29	For page in and Altering of 13 Plates of M ^r Robertson	16	0	0
	Printing 4 Half Sheet to Ditto at 1 ⁶ / ₁₀₀ Hundred	1	10	0
	10 Quarters 500 Each at 1 ⁶ / ₁₀₀ Hundred to Ditto	2	10	0
		<hr/>		
		32	0	1
		<hr/>		
For Printing done for M ^r Nourse & C ^o				
		L	S	d
Oct. 4 th 1763:	1000 of Frontispiece two Plates Ruyss Empire	1	0	0
	Half a Ream paper	0	17	0
		<hr/>		
		1	17	0
		<hr/>		

Figure 12 Account statement dated 20 March 1762 for engraving and printing sent by Isaac Basire to John Nourse (John Lewis Frederick collection of autographs of engravers, Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department)

Isaac had engraved one plate for Robertson's work, which was the standard work on navigation at the time, but the majority of engravings consisted of maps signed by Thomas Jefferys, a pupil of Emmanuel Bowen. Finally, Isaac re-printed 500 sets of the 34 plates from John Muller's *Treatise containing the elementary part of Fortification regular and irregular* (1756), most of which had been engraved by James Mynde, the long-serving engraver to the Royal Society.

The third and final document in the Philadelphia collection comprises a note from Basire to Nourse dated 22 June 1756. This mentions a visit to Basire by James Bettenham, a major letterpress printer who was also based in St. John's Lane, Clerkenwell, and who had worked with Nourse over many years. Taken together, these communications give significant colour to the trilateral relationships between bookseller-publisher, the letterpress printer and their engraver colleagues. The different parties must have been in constant contact, dropping off books, drawings, engravings to copy, proofs in different states, and finished engravings ready for publication. This was potentially a hectic and exhausting life for a 60-year old who had worked intensively since the age of 14, but it is likely that he would have been supported by his children, especially by his second son, John, who would take over this part of the business by the time of Isaac's death in 1769. In the case of engraving, James Basire already had an independent portfolio of work, and his signature on a couple of allegorical frontispieces engraved for Nourse in 1765 may mark the end point of his father's career as an engraver of book illustrations.⁹⁹

2.5 PROFESSIONAL AND PRIVATE LEGACY

Apprentices and training activity

Isaac Basire's achievements were of course not all his own work. We know that he took on at least four apprentices during his career, and that these would have made a significant contribution to his plates, especially towards the end of their training. The surviving records of the Inland Revenue's register of stamp duty, which had to be paid in respect of apprentices during the period 1710-1811, records at least three pupils.¹⁰⁰ Robert Roberts was taken on already in 1733 in exchange for a relatively humble premium of £5. John Beckington was apprenticed in 1737, and then James Green's father was persuaded to part with the sum of £20 on behalf of his son in 1742. This evolution shows not only that Isaac Basire had become a relatively more desirable master over

⁹⁹ *Hermes or a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Universal Grammar*, by James Harris, printed for John Nourse and Paul Vaillant, (2nd edition, 1765), frontispiece; *Three treatises : the first concerning art, the second concerning music, painting and poetry, the third concerning happiness*, by James Harris, 2nd edition (1765), printed for John Nourse and Paul Vaillant, frontispiece.

¹⁰⁰ National Archives, *Records of the Board of Stamps*, IR/1/13/156, IR/1/15/134 and IR/1/16/201

time, but also that he was able to attract an exceptionally talented boy in the person of Green. We know of one other apprentice from indirect evidence, Peter Spindelowe Lamborn. He was born in 1722 and came to London from Cambridge specifically to study with Isaac Basire.¹⁰¹ Given his birth date, Lamborn must have been taken on in approximately 1735, which means that Basire probably had at least two external apprentices working with him from this time up to 1744, the period of his peak activity. Although the data is incomplete, it seems that Isaac never kept a large establishment, although his sons would certainly have helped out in the studio until they were, and perhaps even while they were, apprenticed to other masters.

Both James Green and Peter Spindelowe Lamborn went on to become successful artists and specialist architectural and antiquarian engravers, although only Lamborn would have had an opportunity to work as an apprentice on Isaac's two sets of purely antiquarian works: 15 plates for Drake's *Eboracum* (1736), and 10 plates for Mackerell's *History of King's Lynn* (1738). Lamborn went on to exhibit architectural drawings, miniatures and prints, mostly with a Cambridge theme, at the Incorporated Society of Artists between 1764 and 1774, and was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1771.¹⁰² He is particularly known for his contribution of substantially all 50 plates to James Bentham's *History and Antiquities of the Conventual and Cathedral Church of Ely* (1771). James Green was appointed as successor to George Vertue as engraver to the Society of Antiquaries and Oxford University. He is known principally for his plates to William Borlase's *Antiquities of Cornwall* (1754), as well as his engravings of city scenes for the Oxford Almanacks in the years 1752 to 1759. Sadly, James Green died at the age of thirty, shortly after being appointed to the Society of Antiquaries. By a cruel twist of fate, his death left the way clear for James Basire to become engraver to the Society of Antiquaries, and for the latter's son eventually to take over the engraving of the Oxford Almanack.

Despite the fact that Isaac Basire was evidently a successful teacher and his older son, James, a highly promising pupil, Isaac did not bind his elder son as apprentice. Instead of taking this more obvious path of action, he paid R.W. Seale the relatively small sum of £10 to take on James from September 1745.¹⁰³ There are a number of possible explanations for this transaction, and there is probably some truth in all of them. First of all, R.W. Seale can be seen as a colleague rather than a competitor of Isaac Basire. They had already collaborated on a number of major projects before or around this date, such as plates for *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1744-46) and for Tindal's *Continuation of Mr. Rapin's the History of England* (1744-47). This collaboration continued in the course of James's apprenticeship, most notably in the preparation

¹⁰¹ J.M. Morris, "A Check-list of Prints made at Cambridge made by Peter Spindelowe Lamborn (1722-1774)", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1962), p. 295

¹⁰² Algernon Graves, *The Society of Artists of Great Britain 1760-1791. The Free Society of Artists 1761-1783* (1907), 143

¹⁰³ D.F. McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices 1701-1800* (Oxford, 1978), p. 311

of plates for Hinton's *New and Universal Dictionary* (1751). Secondly, Seale and Isaac Basire had complementary skill sets. Basire was a generalist etcher, while Seale was a line engraver specializing in maps. This is illustrated most obviously by reference to their work together on the scaled-down one-sheet version of the famous *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark*, which they completed in 1749 for the Huguenot surveyor and printer, John Rocque. Isaac reduced and etched the plan, while Seale engraved the names.¹⁰⁴ Finally, it would be understandable if Isaac considered it prudent to apprentice his son to a busy, specialist engraver in a segment of the market where there was rapidly growing demand, as a result of urban and colonial expansion and a spurt in growth of antiquarian studies. Isaac knew from his earlier experiences that general engraving was inherently more insecure, as it depended on fashion, the general state of the economy, and the commercial imperatives of the print- and booksellers.

Business and financial succession

Isaac Basire's professional and personal legacy was not confined to his oldest son. Indeed, the true successor to the business he founded was his second son, John. This does not seem to have been the original plan, since John was apprenticed outside the engraving and copper-plate printing trades. He is recorded as having been bound to James Gibbs, a watch finisher, of Whitefriars in 1748. He became free of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers in 1756, and took livery in 1766.¹⁰⁵ In 1767, Isaac was still corresponding with Nourse in his own name,¹⁰⁶ but it is possible that John was already working with him at this date. In any case, John must have succeeded Isaac at the latest by this time of the latter's death in 1769. In a trade card in the Heal collection at the British Museum, John describes himself as a copper-plate printer and engraver, and as the successor to Isaac Basire (Figure 13).¹⁰⁷

Isaac's nomination of John rather than James as his successor in business is explained by a combination of factors. By the time of his father's death, James was already established as a successful artist-engraver in his own right, with at least two of his own apprentices. Both John and James must have worked with their father and learned his trade before they left home at the age of 14. Finally, Isaac's retirement and death gave John the opportunity to run his own business in his own way, with more emphasis on the technical than the artistic aspects for which he had less aptitude.

¹⁰⁴ Ida Darlington and James Howgego, *Printed Maps of London circa 1553-1850* (London, 1964), pp 99-100

¹⁰⁵ *Exeter Working Papers in Book Trade History*, 'The London book trades 1775-1800: a preliminary checklist of members', Names B (consulted on-line)

¹⁰⁶ This is evidenced by the letter from a private collection referred to above, which is dated to 10 February 1767 and concerns an order of paper for the continuing printing of the plates to Robertson's *Elements of Navigation*

¹⁰⁷ British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, *Trade Cards Heal*, 99.18



Figure 13 Trade card of John Basire, copper-plate printer and engraver (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Under John's management, the core activity of Isaac's old business was no longer engraving, but copper-plate printing, with a short-lived diversification into the publication of popular prints. John's workshop is likely to have produced engraving of a relatively ephemeral nature, such as business stationery, tickets and invitations, which have left little or no historical trace. There is, however, evidence that he did print large numbers of book plates in direct continuation of his father's activity. For example, the John Frederick Lewis collection of autographs of engravers contains an invoice from John Basire to John Nourse dated 1776 for printing 2,000 copies of two plates for Bartlett's *Farrery*. John apparently had a sufficiently substantial book of printing business to be able to hire at least three apprentices during his career.

In early 1788, John moved to 14 Charterhouse Street in Clerkenwell, and was sufficiently wealthy to retain the freehold of the property at Eagle Court, St. John's Street.¹⁰⁸ In his will, he described himself purely as a copper-plate printer, and ordered that two rolling presses be sold after his death and that the proceeds be shared among his daughters.¹⁰⁹ It was, however, his dying wish that his four unmarried daughters continue his printing business, and he bequeathed to them his household effects, remaining printing presses and other implements of trade for this purpose. Shortly after John's

¹⁰⁸ London Metropolitan Archives and Guildhall Library, *London Poll Books* (1802), p. 16

¹⁰⁹ The National Archives, PROB 11/1411

death, the sisters took on Reuben Taylor as an apprentice, and they are recorded as trading from Charterhouse Street as E.M.C. and C. Basire in 1805.¹¹⁰ There appears to be no record of them after this date, which implies that the printing business originally founded by Isaac closed soon thereafter. John's only son, Isaac James, is also recorded as a copper plate printer, but his place of work is obscure.¹¹¹ The involvement of the family of John Basire in the engraving and copper plate printing business thus probably ended during the difficult war years at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

There is little evidence that John and James collaborated at any point in their careers. Indeed, they may not have been on speaking terms for many years after their father's death, following a sordid lawsuit which divided the executors of Isaac's will into two camps: James on one side, and John and their sister, Mary Caddell, on the other. John and Mary accused James of stealing and concealing the original of their father's will in order to add a clause in the margin. This clause would have added legacies of £200 for each of James's children. James, in his turn, accused John and Mary of bribing or attempting to bribe Isaac's servant and neighbour in order to give false evidence against him. The will was finally proved without the application of the litigious clauses.¹¹²

Despite this dispute, it is possible that James may have supported John some 15 years later, when he published prints for a short-lived period. John is recorded as having sold from his premises in St. John's Lane a standalone print illustrating "Peace proclaimed at Charing Cross" and "Peace proclaimed at Temple Bar", which is dated 24 October 1783.¹¹³ This topical work referred to the end of the American War of Independence, which was formally proclaimed in London on 6 October. Both illustrations on the plate are relatively detailed, contain a large number of engraved figures, and are signed by the draughtsman, "Dodd" (probably Robert Dodd), and the engraver, "Basire". It seems more likely that James rather than John would have had the resources to engrave a print of this quality. This is less likely for another print with John's imprint in a similar style, "The Calvalcade by Land", published on 2 August 1784. This illustrates the procession of the Lord Mayor of London up Ludgate Hill in the City.¹¹⁴ It is unsigned and of a distinctly lower quality of engraving (Figure 14).

¹¹⁰ IR1/39/195, dated 19 October 1804

¹¹¹ London Metropolitan Archives, Saint Thomas, Bethnal Green, Register of marriages, P72/TMS, Item 009

¹¹² London Metropolitan Archives, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 18/80/36 and PROB 18/80/49

¹¹³ London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Closed Access Pr. L 22.41

¹¹⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, Main Print Collection, Closed Access Pr. 373:LUD(1)

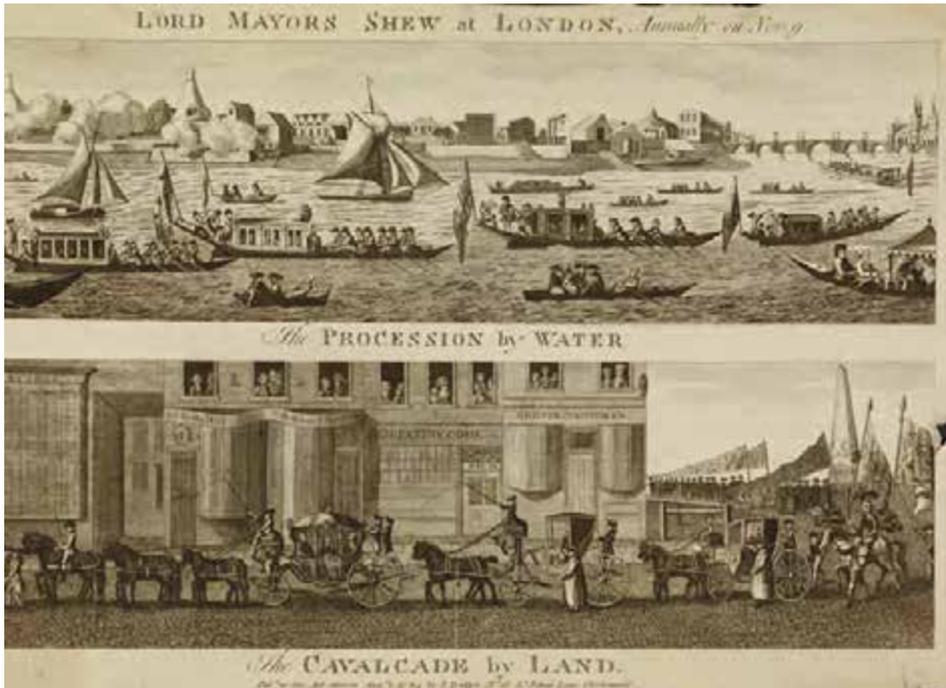


Figure 14 “Lord Mayors Shew at London”, unattributed print published by John Basire (1784) (source: London Metropolitan Archives, City of London)

1783 and 1784 are also the dates found on three further publications by John of an even more popular nature: “The King Queen etc viewing a Balloon let off in the Garden of Windsor Castle” (November 1783);¹¹⁵ “Chevalier Humgruffier and the Marquis de Gull making an excursion to the Moon in their new Aerial Vehicle”; “A Professor filling, & explaining to an audience, the nature of a Balloon” (February 1784); and a second, improved version of the Royal Family viewing the Balloon at Windsor Castle dated April 1784.¹¹⁶ These years reflect the beginning of the contemporary craze for balloons, which lasted for about two years.¹¹⁷ The Royal Society had held a special meeting in November 1783 to discuss the experiments of the Montgolfier brothers, and the first manned flight took place in France later in the same month. This event set off a fashion for balloon-related consumer goods, including popular prints and satirical cartoons, which John aimed to exploit.

Three of these balloon prints can be classed as a “topical prints”, while that imagining a trip to the moon by two fictional French aristocrats was clearly satirical. It makes fun of Gallic pretensions in relation to the new technology, which British intellectuals

¹¹⁵ Science Museum, London, Penn-Gaskell Collection, Object No. 1950-300/3

¹¹⁶ Royal Collection, RCIN 630787

¹¹⁷ Richard Holmes, “A New Age of Flight: Joseph Banks goes Ballooning”, in Bill Bryson, ed., *Seeing Further. The History of Science and the Royal Society* (London, 2010), pp. 157-181

and the public felt compelled to play down. The latter print has been referred to as the only satirical print by James Basire, but this is almost certainly not the case, since the publication line shows John's address.¹¹⁸ All of these prints were lightly and crudely etched, have survived in a coloured form, and are predictably unsigned. At least one further set of prints in a similar style, illustrating the popular cautionary tale of the Prodigal Son in a modern setting, was published by John at about the same time. The concentration of these surviving objects in a few years suggests that John's business remained focussed in the longer term on the printing rather than the potentially more lucrative, but nevertheless risky publication of prints.¹¹⁹

Isaac actually had a third son, Isaac James Basire (not to be confused with John's son of the same name), whom he apprenticed in 1759 to another freeman of the Stationer's Company, William Griffin. Griffin had an extensive printing and publishing business in Fetter Lane, the street in which James Basire was living at that time. Among other authors, Griffin published the works of Oliver Goldsmith, who was a frequent visitor to James Basire's studio.¹²⁰ According to the records of the Stationers' Company, Griffin took on three apprentices in 1759 alone and bound at least 14 in the years 1759 to 1770, the year in which Isaac James obtained his freedom.¹²¹ After this date, Isaac James Basire faded from the historic record, perhaps indicating that he died soon thereafter.

If Isaac's will, which was prepared in 1768, is to be taken at face value, Isaac James would seem to have been by far the least favoured of his surviving five children - or the least able to benefit from a material inheritance.¹²² Unlike his older brothers, he was not named an executor of the will, and only inherited £10. James received £100 in 4% consolidated government stock, Isaac's gold watch, some silverware and all his books. John inherited £200, his father's printing presses and the printing business. Isaac's eldest daughter, Mary, who was also an executrix to the will, inherited all Isaac's pictures, his best silverware, including a coffee pot, waiter, quart tankard and pint mug, as well as consolidated stock in the amount of £200. Her children by the late William Alexander Gibbons were also beneficiaries. Sarah Gibbons was originally to have received £100 to be placed in trust with her stepfather, David Caddell "gentleman", of Gold Street, although this legacy was later varied in a codicil following her marriage. Mary's son, Edward Gibbons, was to receive £40. Isaac's grandchildren were also singled out as recipients of some specific items of his beloved silverware, respectively a salt and pepper box and four best table spoons. Isaac's two spinster daughters, Ann and Sarah, inherited

¹¹⁸ Dorothy M. George, *Catalogue of Personal and Political Satires preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum*, (London, 1870-1954), VI, 1784-1792, no. 6707; David V. Erdman, *Blake. Prophet against Empire*, 3rd edition, (Princeton, 1977), p. 96, n14; Barbara M. Benedict, *A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago, 2001), p. 306, n65

¹¹⁹ This set of prints is in the author's possession

¹²⁰ Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (London and Cambridge, 1863), I, p. 15

¹²¹ McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices*, p. 149

¹²² The National Archives, PROB 11/958

£100 apiece. Two other daughters, Sarah and Rebecca, had died in infancy, and the sixth, Elizabeth, had also predeceased him.

There are no known surviving portraits of Isaac and little is known of his personality. John Nichols, printer, publisher, friend and patron of Isaac's son and grandsons, provides the only near-contemporary description: he was "a fine chubby-faced man as appears by an excellent portrait of him, a drawing by his son".¹²³ Unfortunately, this portrait does not seem to have survived. Something of Isaac's personality can, however, be surmised from some of his life choices. Apart from an ability to draw and the painstaking perseverance required for any copper-plate engraver, he must have been independent and ambitious with a strong commercial streak. He was fond of his personal possessions, but was apparently unpretentious. He seems to have enjoyed the rough and tumble atmosphere of the London print and book trade, as he gravitated to one of its hubs in Clerkenwell on completion of his apprenticeship, and stayed there for the rest of his life.¹²⁴ He does not seem to have been particularly religious, as he was prepared to marry a local woman in the Anglican parish church, unlike his sister, Marie Anne, who had married a fellow Huguenot in the family's original Tabernacle church in 1718.¹²⁵ The last evidence of contact between the Basires and the Huguenot community which had given them a professional foothold in London, was in 1767, when Isaac was named as the only next of kin in the will of a cousin, Susanna Aubert of St. Anne's Westminster.¹²⁶

2.6 CONCLUSION

Isaac Basire came a long way in 60 years, from the home of deeply religious French-speaking immigrants, to a London businessman who was able to bequeath a collection of silverware, printing presses, a thriving printing business, and well over £800 in accumulated cash and investments in government stock. Contacts within the Huguenot community enabled him to climb the first rung of the career ladder as a silversmith's apprentice, but the remainder of his journey depended on a combination of talent as a draughtsman, entrepreneurial instinct, and a degree of good fortune.

When he launched himself onto the market for copper plate engraving in the midst of the English Augustan Age in the late 1720s, there was an expanding market for ephemeral, topical and political prints, portraits, maps and topographical plates, but above all, book illustrations. Together with contemporary English engravers, such as W.H. Toms and Nathaniel Parr, he was mainly able to exploit the mid-market segment,

¹²³ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, III (London, 1812), p. 717

¹²⁴ See Jenny Uglow, *William Hogarth*, pp. 19-30, for an evocation of contemporary Clerkenwell

¹²⁵ *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, XXIX (1926), p. 23

¹²⁶ *Huguenot Wills and Administrations*, p. 394

while the higher end of the London market was occupied by French draughtsmen and engravers, who had imported the short-lived, but exuberant rococo style of design.

Isaac Basire did produce some fine art engraving, for example frontispieces based on the designs of Gravelot, in the years in which the French were beginning to desert London as a result of the War of the Austrian Succession. However, his main achievement in the 1740s, and indeed of his career, comprised major contributions as a generalist etcher to some of the period's most spectacular volumes of voyages, histories and other compendia of knowledge. During this time, he was continually employed by the major publishers of the period, such as the Osbornes, the Knaptons and John Hinton. These entrepreneurs and their engravers were able to profit from the shift in demand from pure leisure reading to an earnest middle class aspiration for patriotic self-improvement, which increasingly demanded higher quality text and illustration.

There is some evidence of collaboration between Isaac Basire, his oldest son James, and James's master, R.W. Seale in the early 1750s, but the younger Basire's solo career as an artist-engraver took off at an early stage. Isaac then spent most of the latter part of his professional life focussed on less demanding, technical book illustration, as well as copper plate printing, a business which he was able to pass on to his second son, John. Isaac had nevertheless been a key member of the group of native engravers who sowed the seeds for the great period of English engraving in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, of which his eldest son was to become one of the leading lights.

Chapter 3

James Basire (I) and his career as
artist-engraver: 1750-1770

3.1 EARLY LIFE, APPRENTICESHIP AND THE ROMAN PERIOD

John Nichols begins his one-page biography of James Basire (I) in his *Literary Anecdotes* by stating that he “was bred from infancy to his father’s profession”, and this was probably not an exaggeration.¹²⁷ Even a relatively small child would be expected to help mind the shop, clean and tidy away the large array of implements required for both copper-plate engraving and printing, as well as fetch and carry tools, paper, proofs and plates both within and outside the premises. At an early stage, Isaac Basire must have recognized that his oldest son was capable of much more than this, and would have helped him develop his drawing skills. James could then help his father with basic artistic tasks, such as reducing and adapting existing plates and drawings to the size and style required by the relevant commissions. Finally, he would start to etch increasingly complex parts of the copper plates themselves.

It is not certain that James also received drawing lessons outside the home, but this would likely have been the case. Blake wrote in his unpublished “public address” that “Gravelot once said to My Master, Basire, ‘de English may be very clever in deir own opinions, but dey do not draw de draw’”.¹²⁸ The obvious source of this quotation, with its intimate feel and humorous imitation of a French accent, is Basire himself. It may thus represent the transmission by Basire to Blake of the wisdom of his own teacher, with his emphasis on the importance of design. There are various additional arguments for this supposition. Gravelot was the premier drawing master in London in the years before and during James Basire’s apprenticeship. James’s father clearly knew Gravelot, as they collaborated on several prints at exactly this time. Isaac would have been able to afford to send his son to Gravelot’s classes at the St. Martin’s Lane Academy, which had been organized by Hogarth from 1735. Finally, James Basire himself was also invited to teach engraving at the Academy on completion of his apprenticeship, a fact which implies that he already had a relationship with this institution.¹²⁹

The benefits of formal, external education, in this case in line engraving, would have been a driver in Isaac’s decision to have James bound apprentice at the relatively late age of one month before his fifteenth birthday to his friend and colleague, the cartographic engraver, R.W. Seale. This was on 3 September 1745, at a time when the Jacobite rebels were marching on Edinburgh, one month before Gravelot himself left the country, and only a couple of months after the death of James’s mother, Sarah. This must have been a difficult decision for Isaac, but it made sense to equip his son with a wider range of technical skills, including pure line engraving, and so give James a wider possibility of expression than his father. The younger Basire would also benefit from the disciplines involved in working in a busy studio, where Seale is recorded as employing 10 apprentices between 1740 and his

¹²⁷ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, pp. 717-8

¹²⁸ Keynes ed., *BLAKE. Complete Writings*, “Public Address. From the Note-Book”, p. 594

¹²⁹ John Joshua Kirby, *Dr. Brook Taylor’s method of perspective made easy, both in theory and practice*, I-II (London, 1754), subscription list

death in 1762.¹³⁰ From a personal point of view, James had not moved far, as Seale worked during most of Basire's apprenticeship from premises in Fetter Lane on the south-eastern edge of the City, which was only 10 minutes walk from Isaac's own shop. Like Clerkenwell, this area was another important hub for the book and affiliated trades. Other contemporary Stationers in Fetter Street at this time included not only William Griffin, the future master of James's brother, Isaac, but also Edward Ryland, the father and master of William Wynne Ryland, one of James's leading colleagues and competitors.

James Basire (I) is recorded as completing his apprenticeship with Seale in the traditional 7 years, and was consequently made free of the Stationers' Company on 5 December 1752. However, these apparently banal facts belie a much more complicated reality. James seems to have spent a significant part of the second half of his training apprenticed to a different master, who was also a member of a different livery company. This was Richard Dalton, "limner" (i.e. painter), of Covent Garden, who accepted James as his apprentice in 1748 for a token premium of five shillings.¹³¹ Basire then spent a significant amount of time with Dalton in Rome, and continued to work for Dalton, at least on a part-time basis, after their return to London. This turn of events must be explained not only by Dalton's urgent need of an engraving assistant, but also by James's own artistic aptitude and his desire to do more with his career than engrave maps and other technical drawings. It is significant that Richard Seale was able to allow this flexibility thanks to his friendship and collaboration with Isaac Basire, who had been through a parallel, but more complete, career change at the same age.

Dalton is generally acknowledged to have been a mediocre artist, who had originally been apprenticed to a coach painter in Clerkenwell, where he may well have encountered Isaac Basire in the early days of their respective careers.¹³² Notwithstanding these relatively inauspicious beginnings, Dalton's energy and political skills enabled him within a few years to become one of the best-connected and most influential figures in the artistic world in the second half of the eighteenth century. By 1755, he had been appointed Librarian to George, Prince of Wales, an appointment which he maintained as Librarian to the King on George III's accession in 1760. He was the official antiquary to the Royal Academy from 1770, and became surveyor of the King's pictures from 1778. He was also one of the main drivers behind the foundation of the Academy, and as such became the principal target of Robert Strange's tirade against this institution and its exclusion of engravers.¹³³ He was therefore a promising candidate to be able to help the young James Basire take his first steps away from a career as a technical engraver based on the edge of the City of London to a fashionable artist-engraver based a few hundred yards from Covent Garden.

¹³⁰ McKenzie, *Stationers' Company Apprentices*, p. 311

¹³¹ Society of Genealogists, *Lists of Masters and Apprentices*, c. 1711-1762, on-line resource

¹³² Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of painters who have resided or been born in England* (London, 1808), p. 181

¹³³ Robert Strange, *An Inquiry into the Rise and Establishment of the Royal Academy of Arts* (London, 1775), pp. 19 seq. and 71 seq.

Dictionary entries for James Basire frequently quote Nichols's terse confirmation that Basire "studied under the direction of Mr. Richard Dalton; was with him at Rome; made several drawings from pictures of Raphael, etc."¹³⁴ It is, however, possible to add more colour to this statement by reference to some exactly contemporary documentary sources. The first of these comprises an anonymous pamphlet entitled, *Remarks on XII Historical Designs of Raphael and the Musaeum Graecum et Aegypticum*. This was published in London in 1752, and is usually ascribed Dalton's brother, John Dalton, a poet and Prebend of Worcester, since it refers to the artist in the third person. The contents, however, if not the wording, certainly derive from Richard Dalton. On the one hand, he encourages subscriptions to the two series of prints he had promised from the drawings made during his travels in Italy and through the Ottoman Empire in the years 1749 and 1750. On the other hand, he apologises for his inability to complete them within the promised timescale.

Speaking of these works, the author writes:¹³⁵

"Mr Dalton etches the Figures, himself; and has engaged as his constant assistant in the work, an ingenious young Man, who studied under him here, before his last Journey to Rome, whither he carried him for his farther improvement, and to qualify him for this difficult work".

The engravers who signed the plates referred to in this pamphlet comprised James Basire, Jean-Baptiste-Claude Chatelain, Charles Grignion, James Mason, the Müller brothers and François Vivares. All of these were mature, established artists, except for James Basire, who must therefore be the mysterious, "ingenious young Man". On this basis, it can be seen that this quotation confirms Nichols's assertion that James was studying under Dalton for some time, and that they were in Rome together. However, it also gives significant supplementary information about James's relationship to Dalton. It implies that Dalton arranged for Basire to travel to Rome, that the older man had a virtual monopoly of the younger man's time during this period, and that an important practical purpose for this relationship from Dalton's perspective was to qualify Basire to work on high-quality commercial engravings of his designs.

The second additional source of documentary evidence that Basire was in Rome with Dalton also records when he lived there and with whom. In March 1750, the nineteen-year old James appears in the records ("stati delle anime") of the parish of San Andrea delle Fratte in Rome, as living at the Palazzo Zuccari on the Via Felice (now Via Sistina). His name is spelt "Giacomo Bessier" in the source document, but his identity is clear from the context.¹³⁶ Creative spelling of non-Italian names in these records can be

¹³⁴ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, p. 717

¹³⁵ (Richard Dalton), *Remarks on XII historical designs of Raphael and the Musæum Græcum et Ægyptiacum, or, antiquities of Greece and Egypt, illustrated by prints, intended to be published from Mr. Dalton's drawings. In answer to A letter of inquiry concerning those works* (London, 1752), p. 12

¹³⁶ John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800* (New Haven and London, 1997), p. 58

attributed to the transcription by Italian clerks from spoken English. Lucy Peltz has also suggested in her article on the Basires in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that the young man may have been deliberately Italianising his name for effect, and this may certainly have been the case for his forename.¹³⁷

The Palazzo Zuccari was and is a well-known address in Rome. It is located at the top of the Spanish Steps on the Piazza Trinità del Monte, facing the famous church of that name. The Palazzo was built at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the mannerist painter and architect, Federico Zuccari, and was intended from the beginning to house fellow artists. At the beginning of the eighteenth century it had been inhabited by Maria Casimira, Queen of Poland, but was now rented out to visiting artists from around Europe. Joshua Reynolds stayed here from 1752. The pioneering German art historian, Johann Joachim Winkelmann, lived there from 1755, and James Basire co-habited with a group of sculptors, painters and architects from the British Isles. All of these had ostensibly come to study classical sculpture and architecture, as well as Renaissance and Baroque art at source, but they were also inevitably on the hunt for paying commissions and future patrons.

The effective reopening of the European continent to visitors following the conclusion in 1748 of the War of the Austrian Succession through the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle had unleashed waves of wealthy Grand Tourists, as well as a wake of younger and older artists and art-dealers who aspired to serve them either in Rome or on their return to the British Isles. This trend is illustrated by a roll-call of Basire's house-mates at the Palazzo Zuccari at this time. They included not only the older Dalton, but also a substantial group of young British artists, all of whom were in their twenties. Thomas Patch, a painter, was to stay in Italy for the rest of his life and became better known for art-dealing and his louche lifestyle than for his paintings. The architect, Matthew Brettingham the Younger, son of the executive architect of Holkham Hall, also ultimately specialised in dealing rather than architecture. The sculptor, Simon Vierpyl, eventually settled in Ireland to work for one of the grandest of Grand Tourists, Viscount (later Earl) Charlemont. Another young sculptor, Joseph Wilton, became one of the founding directors of the Royal Academy. Basire stands out from this group for two reasons. He was at least five years younger than the youngest of the other artists, and he was one of a handful of engravers who ever had the privilege of studying in Rome.

James Basire must have had significant free time to study while in Italy, as Dalton had been spontaneously invited to join the intrepid Lord Charlemont's tour of the eastern Mediterranean. The older man had met Charlemont's party by chance in Sicily in May 1749, and did not return to Rome until March 1750.¹³⁸ Contemporary reports such as the *Letters from a Young Painter abroad to his Friends in England*, which was written

¹³⁷ Peltz, *Dictionary of National Biography*, IV, p. 235

¹³⁸ W.B. Stanford & E.J. Finopolous, *The Travels of Lord Charlemont in Greece & Turkey 1749* (London, 1984), pp. 3-4, 232-233

by James Russell, a fellow resident of the Via Felice, give us some feeling for the positive aspects of the lifestyle which Basire must have enjoyed at this time.¹³⁹

“My mornings are generally spent at some palace in copying celebrated pictures, my afternoons at our Academy, and my evenings in writing to my friends in England, or in conversation with those here...There are here at this time English and Scotch, Painters and Sculptors, to the number of sixteen; among whom there is so great a harmony, that we have formed an Academy among ourselves....I sometimes, particularly on Holy-days, divert myself by taking a view of the ancient and modern buildings, of the antique pieces of sculpture, and of the vast number of excellent pictures, which adorn the churches and palaces.”

A less idealized, visual impression of the British and Irish artists in Rome is provided by Joshua Reynolds’s famous parody of Raphael’s *School of Athens* from the Vatican, which was completed in the following year. The artists depicted in this painting included Reynolds himself, who had been fortunate enough to obtain a free passage from Devon to Livorno in 1749, and was at this time staying at the English Coffee House at the bottom of the Spanish Steps. At least three tenants of the Palazzo Zuccari, Patch, Brettingham and Vierpyl, are also portrayed, and Charlemont takes a prominent place in the foreground. The composition of this painting emphasised the dependent nature of the artists on funding and patronage from wealthier travellers. Basire was in a particularly precarious position, as he was dependent on Dalton, who was himself dependent, at least for a time, on Charlemont.

Given these financial constraints, James Basire must have been confined to Rome for most of his time in Italy. It is known that Brettingham had walked to Naples in 1748, together with the painters, Gavin Hamilton and James Stuart, and the architect, Nicholas Revett, all three of whom lived at number 77 Via Felice at this period. It is therefore not inconceivable that Basire could have made similar low-budget trips. Dalton himself seems to have “come afoot” to Rome with Patch in 1747, which confirms that he was unlikely to have been able to share a significant travel budget with his protégé.¹⁴⁰

It seems that Charlemont had fallen out with Dalton by the time of their return from the East in March 1750, and instead started dispensing patronage to Patch and Vierpyl. It is probable therefore that Dalton and Basire were obliged to find their way back to London before the end of 1750, in order to be able to finalise work on the projected publication of Dalton’s drawings from Raphael and the antiquities of the eastern Mediterranean, and so attempt to monetise their trip as soon as possible.

James Basire’s subsequent whereabouts in the London of the early 1750s are obscure, but some clues can be gleaned from his professional activity during this time. Since he signed a number of plates dated April 1751 and February 1752 for Dalton’s vehicle for his drawings of antiquities from the Ottoman Empire, the *Musaeum Grae-*

¹³⁹ *Letters from a Young Painter abroad to his friends in England* (London, 1750), II, p. 360-362

¹⁴⁰ Ingamells, *A Dictionary*, pp. 268, 447, 745 on Dalton, Hamilton and Patch

cum et Aegypticum, he must have been in London at least by the end of the first quarter of 1751. He also signed further plates intended for Dalton's *Remarks on XII Historical Designs of Raphael*, which were dated to early 1753, which implies that he was still collaborating closely with this artist for at least the first two years of the decade. However, Dalton lived alone in modest conditions in a small apartment in St. James, so the younger engraver would not have been residing with him. Under these circumstances, it is likely that James Basire either returned to Richard Seale's studio, since he was still officially apprenticed to Seale until the end of 1752, or even went back to live in his father's house. In any case, while completing his work for Dalton, James also seems to have continued to collaborate on a number of works with his father and with Seale. A prime example of this was Hinton's *New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, the engraving for which was apparently coordinated by Isaac Basire with significant input from Seale. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the *Dictionary* included at least one original plate which was clearly signed by the younger Basire, that of the new piers and porters' lodges at the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, which is dated July 1752.¹⁴¹

3.2 THE ARCHITECTURAL ENGRAVER

James Basire had arrived in Rome at a turning point in the history of style. The luxuriant foliage and flamboyant decoration of the rococo or "French style" had supported the perfection of the free etching technique characteristic of the 1730s and 1740s, which was exploited by Isaac Basire and his contemporaries.¹⁴² From about 1750, however, this style was already starting to feel outmoded in more fashionable circles, and was being replaced by the strong, simple, more masculine lines of the neoclassical. The resurgence of this style of decoration can be explained by a number of factors: the revival of the Grand tour of Italy and its extension to Greece and Asia Minor; the sensational discoveries being made in Herculaneum during the 1740s; as well as the simple fact that polite society was ready for a complete change of fashion. Whatever the causes, this evolution favoured the firm, sure hand of line engravers, such as James Basire, who was in Rome at exactly the right time to meet potential patrons. It was also particularly suitable for the genre of architectural engraving, to which James Basire would lay claim in his advertisement in Mortimer's *Universal Director* of 1763.¹⁴³

Although it was not a clearly defined term, the expression "architectural engraving" was widely used in the second half of the eighteenth century to refer to a range of specific illustration types. These varied from details of decoration, through more or less

¹⁴¹ John Barrow, *New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (John Hinton, London, 1751), plate LI

¹⁴² *Rococo, Art and Design in Hogarth's England* (London, 1984), Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition catalogue, p. 30

¹⁴³ Mortimer, *The Universal Director*, p. 4

picturesque views of buildings, often within their actual or an invented landscape context, to more or less technical plans, elevations and sections of buildings. In an age where academic disciplines were not defined as they are now, engravings in the same volume of architectural plates or even the same plates could have multiple functions. Views could be seen as a record of travel, as having an aesthetic value or a scientific purpose, or all three simultaneously. Measured plans, elevations and sections could be viewed as preserving an archaeological heritage or as providing a model for modern architecture. Ornamental detail was also of aesthetic, antiquarian and architectural interest, and could be and was recycled in neoclassical interior design and furnishings. From the point of view of line engravers, such as James Basire, this type of illustration provided a lucrative seam of work, especially when it was included in large-format, luxury publications with multiple plates.

Architectural engravings for Richard Dalton

Based on the *Remarks on XII Historical Designs by Raphael*, it seems that Dalton's initial plan for the young Basire had been to have his pupil etch in the detail and strengthen with line engraving the etched lines of his planned set of 12 plates of the Raphael cartoons in the Vatican, which were considered the counterpart of the celebrated cartoons then displayed at Hampton Court.¹⁴⁴ However, Dalton's encounter with Charlemont and his party, and his acceptance of his Lordship's invitation to act as draughtsman on this tour, engendered an idea for another, even more promising project. This consisted of the publication of Dalton's drawings of the great monuments of antiquity which were then only accessible to travellers who were courageous and well-connected enough to enter and travel around the Ottoman Empire. This project not only promised to make Dalton rich and famous, but would also give his young engraver a thorough grounding in and an early reputation for the illustration of ancient Hellenistic, Greek and Egyptian architecture.

Fortunately for Dalton, Charlemont's tour was successful in terms of the number of monuments and sites the travellers were able to visit and record, albeit superficially. After leaving Sicily in April 1749, the party sailed to Malta and then to Constantinople in June. Their next port of call was Alexandria, which they left in October in order to sail along the coast of Asia Minor and visit a number of Greek islands, before reaching Athens the following month. Among the many achievements en route, the party correctly identified the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus in modern Bodrum for the first time since antiquity, and Dalton was the first to draw its famous bas-reliefs. Unfortunately for his draughtsman, it seems that the 21 year-old Viscount had no intention of approving anything so vulgar as the publication of these finds, and this may well have been a cata-

¹⁴⁴ Mark Evans and Clare Browne, ed., *Raphael, Cartoons and Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel* (Victoria & Albert Museum catalogue, 2010), pp. 58-60

lyst for their rupture. Dalton would thus have to return with Basire to London to put together a saleable publication using his own meagre financial resources.

It was probably because of this resource limitation that Dalton planned to issue prints of the drawings he had prepared on Charlemont's tour in several phases, starting with two instalments which would be issued without a title page, index or accompanying notes. On 16 April 1751, he advertised "Twenty-one Prints of the Antiquities of Athens, Mount Aetna in Sicily and Pompey's Pillar at Alexandria" in the *London Evening Post*, following the publication of less detailed advertisements in the same newspaper from 14 March. He then announced the issue of a further 20 prints in the *General Advertiser* of 20 February 1752, only days after the publication of the apologetic *Remarks on XII Historical Designs of Raphael, and the Museum Graecum Et Aegyptiacum*¹⁴⁵. All 41 prints could then be collected by purchasers and bound together at their own expense and according to their own taste but, without narrative or notes, they could hardly pretend to be a collection of significant scientific value.

These first two sets of plates deriving from his travels with Charlemont were not published in book form until 1791, the year of Dalton's death, when they appeared as *Antiquities And Views in Greece and Egypt; With The Manners and Customs Of The Inhabitants: From Drawings made on the Spot, A.D. 1749*.¹⁴⁶ As originally planned, this volume also included later engravings of other drawings from the same voyage, but it is not necessarily a direct guide to the first two sets on which Basire originally worked. It is therefore necessary to reconstruct the nature, number and order of these two initial portfolios on the basis of Dalton's *Remarks* and on the few surviving bound examples. The input of the engravers, and especially that of James Basire, can then be analysed in context. The following paragraphs therefore compare the sets which are currently located at the Royal Academy, where Dalton was later appointed Antiquarian; in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, where Dalton became an active fellow; and a third one, which is in the author's possession and resembles closely the version held at the Royal Academy.

The latter sets seem to be closest to the original, as they contain 42 and 43 plates respectively, whereas the collection in the Society of Antiquaries omits some plates published in April 1751, but includes nine additional etchings of the bas-reliefs of views and sculptures from Halicarnassus, which were evidently added at a subsequent date. Based on the fact that nine of the first twenty prints in the Royal Academy version are dated 12 April 1751 in their publication line, it appears that Dalton's first priority was to publish a set of 23 plates of Athens, preceded by a spectacular view of Mount Etna, and completed by an illustration of "Pompey's Pillar" at Alexandria, as described in his advertisement. This choice is perhaps explained by the fact that the *Proposals for Publishing an Accurate Description of the Antiquities of Athens*, which were issued by James

¹⁴⁵ Royal Academy of Arts, on-line library catalogue, <http://www.racollection.org.uk>, record number 06/3552

¹⁴⁶ The review of this volume in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXI (1791), p. 196 reconfirms the disappointing nature of the sale of the original prints

“Athenian” Stuart and Nicholas Revett in 1748, had already stimulated significant interest in this area. The second set would then contain plates of his drawings of Constantinople, the grotto on the island of Antiparos and the pyramids of Egypt, four of which were dated (15) February 1752. Both sets would therefore be arranged thematically, based on the nature and appeal of the destinations, rather than according to the chronology of Charlemont’s tour.

At the level of the individual prints, it is striking that Dalton used seven different engravers for 42 prints. On the one hand, this may suggest that he was in a hurry to publish his most attractive drawings while they were topical, and so had a number of plates engraved in parallel. On the other hand, his choice of engravers, as well as the manner in which they are deployed, seems to reveal a more subtle plan to combine a limited budget with the market appeal of some big names. The first two plates accordingly comprised panoramic fold-out views of Mount Etna and of Athens, signed by the London-based French engraver, Jean-Baptiste-Claude Chatelain. These were immediately followed by a view of the Parthenon by Edward Rooker, whom Horace Walpole described as “the Marc Antonio of architecture”, in reference to Raphael’s principal engraver.¹⁴⁷ The initial plates in the second set included a sweeping double-page vista of Constantinople and the Bosphorus by François Vivares, commonly viewed as the leading French landscape engraver based in London at the time. The bound versions then end with “Pompey’s Pillar” at Alexandria, which was engraved by another French artist, Antoine Radigues, who also signed three prints of the famous Temple of the Winds and of the Lanthorn of Demosthenes from Athens in the initial set. All plates were embellished with descriptions in English and French, which indicated that Dalton also aspired to sell his collection to a continental European clientele, who would be familiar with the names of these engravers.

The less prestigious artists used by Dalton in this project comprised the German engraver, Johann Sebastian Müller (three of the 1751 prints), his brother, Tobias Müller, another specialist architectural engraver (five of the 1752 prints), James Mason (three of the 1752 prints), and of course, James Basire, who signed twelve plates across both initial sets of engravings. Basire was in fact the principal artist by volume on the project after Dalton, who not only provided all of the drawings, but also four etchings of bas reliefs. It might be supposed that Basire was used entirely for the purpose of reducing costs, as he was not only significantly younger than the other artists, but was still formally an apprentice. A review of his plates, however, shows that this was not entirely the case.

The opening two views of Mount Etna and of Athens by Chatelain were co-signed by Basire, which was unusual and therefore implied significant input by the junior artist (see Figure 15 on the next page).

¹⁴⁷ Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England with some Account of the Principal Artists* (London, 1849), vol. III, p. 985



Figure 15 “A View of Mount Aetna in Sicily”, engraved by Jean-Baptiste-Claude Chatelain and James Basire junior for *Views and Antiquities of Greece and Egypt* by Richard Dalton, print dated 1751, actual size 399 mm x 600 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Dalton himself noted that the view of Etna was “etched with great boldness” by Chate-lain,¹⁴⁸ which may imply that Basire was employed to strengthen the senior engraver’s etched lines, as well as to complete other elements with the burin. It would also be unsurprising if the younger engraver was also called upon to add some of the more finely etched detail in order to complete the work of the notoriously lazy and eccentric Frenchman. Apart from these works, Basire contributed in his own name a variety of other plates, including views of temples and monuments, as well as details of the interiors of the pyramids, to which some rudimentary scientific measurements were added. Most surprisingly, Basire signed all four large-scale, fold-out prints for which Dalton presumably managed to gain permission for personal dedications to his fellow travelers. These comprised the “View of Mount Aetna”, dedicated to John Frederick, a veteran Grand Tourist; “The Temple of Theseus at Athens” and “A View of the Pyramids of Gize”, dedicated to Viscount Charlemont; and “The Grotto of Antiparos”, dedicated to the Viscount’s fellow Irishman, Francis Pierpoint Burton, the future Lord Conygham. Taken together, these plates constitute an impressive debut publication of an artistic nature for the “ingenious young man”.

Despite his best efforts, this project was not an artistic or commercial success for Dalton, at least not in the short term.¹⁴⁹ It is possible that potential purchasers might have been put off by the largely unofficial nature of the publication, as well as the relatively poor or at least hurried quality of Dalton’s draughtsmanship. With almost 30 years of hindsight, Dalton attributed this failure to a variety of other factors, the foremost of which was the expense of engraving and other costs. However, he also blamed “the great Expectations formed of the Views and Antiquities of Athens, to be then engraved from the Drawings of Mess. Stuart and Rivett”.¹⁵⁰

Judging from his private comments, James Stuart also focused the attention of his own potential customers on some obvious shortcomings of Dalton’s work:¹⁵¹

“I must observe that in the Prints of Architecture he has given us not one moulding has its true proportion or Profile & for his figures worse if possible than his Architecture we are often utterly unable to discover what he has designed to Imitate.”

The “figures” mentioned here refer to those in the bas-reliefs which Dalton had insisted on etching himself. The criticism of the architectural features clearly refers to the quality of the drawing rather than that the engraving. Stuart must have viewed the latter as a strong point in Dalton’s publication, as he subsequently invited James Basire to act as the main engraver on his well-patronised and significantly more ambitious *Antiquities of Athens*.

¹⁴⁸ (Dalton), *Remarks on XII Historical Designs of Raphael*, p. 26

¹⁴⁹ For a relatively positive retrospective view, see the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LIII (1788), p. 10 and footnote

¹⁵⁰ Richard Dalton, *Remarks on Prints, intended to be published, relative to the Manners, Customers, etc., of the present Inhabitants of Egypt, from Drawings made on the Spot, A.D. 1749* (London, 1781), pp. 8-9

¹⁵¹ University of Edinburgh, Stuart MS La.III.58, fol 19r, letter to Porter (draft), ca. 1752, quoted in, Jason M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti. Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2009), p. 118

Architectural engraving for James “Athenian” Stuart

James Stuart was of modest social origins, had originally trained as a fan painter in London with the Huguenot artist Louis Goupy and, like Dalton, had apparently walked much of the way to Italy when he first arrived there in 1742. However, during his eight years in the peninsula, Stuart not only studied painting, but also learned Latin and immersed himself sufficiently in ancient and particularly architectural history to develop a significant level of confidence as a self-taught scholar. He consequently published in 1750 an essay on the recently excavated obelisk of Montecitorio which included his own engravings, measurements and an erudite commentary.¹⁵² This volume helped to establish his reputation in the realm of antiquarian scholarship, and so gave increased weight to the *Proposals for the Antiquities of Athens*, which he and Nicholas Revett had already been promoting for a number of years.

During their expedition within the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett were plagued by a well-documented series of financial difficulties and physical threats which forced them to trim their ambitions with regards to the scale of their proposed publication.¹⁵³ They accordingly issued an updated version of their original 1748 *Proposals* when they arrived back in London at the beginning of 1755. This follow-up pamphlet was intended not only to stimulate subscriptions and therefore provide sufficient financing to complete their work, but also incidentally revealed the extent of the reduction in scope of the projected first volume.¹⁵⁴ This tome would now mainly cover two relatively minor monuments: the Octagon Tower of Andronicus Cyrrhestes, known as the “Tower of the Winds”, and the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, commonly called the “Lantern of Demosthenes”. It would not include the Parthenon or other more important monuments. It nevertheless remained an ambitious undertaking in terms of its promised scientific value and artistic finishing.

It is not known for sure when Stuart and Basire first met, but Stuart was also living in the Via Felice in March 1750, when Basire is attested as staying at the Palazzo Zuccari. Since Stuart left Rome with Nicholas Revett in May of that year in order to travel first to Venice and then to Greece, it is practically certain that Stuart and Basire had already met by the spring of 1750. As to the question of when and why Stuart asked Basire to engrave the lion’s share of his drawings and gouache paintings of Athens, this is much less certain. The Charlemont party had arrived back in March 1750, and Dalton must already have set about having his drawings engraved or at least prepared for engraving by Basire before Stuart left Rome. Stuart may therefore have already seen the beginnings of Basire’s first architectural plates at this time. He could also have seen proofs of

¹⁵² Angelo Maria Bandini, *De obelisco Cæsaris Augusti e Campi Martii ruderibus nuper eruto commentarius* (Rome, 1750)

¹⁵³ Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti*, p. 149

¹⁵⁴ James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, the Antiquities Actually Existing in the City of Athens, and Province of Attica* (London, 1755)

these before leaving Venice in January 1751, or received copies from friends while on his travels. In any case, it seems that Stuart and Revett had not only updated their *Proposals*, but also chosen Basire as their main engraver before their return to London, as the authors were able to circulate proof plates of their subject matter as teasers at the same time as the updated *Proposals*.

It is remarkable that these engravings already started to have a major cultural impact on an international circle of connoisseurs in the year of Stuart's and Revett's return. This influence is evidenced, for example, by a letter dated 20 December 1755 from the Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy to the Comte de Caylus, the most influential French antiquarian and artistic patron of the day. In this letter, Barthélemy commended the first proofs of the plates as being "very well executed".¹⁵⁵

The progress of the *Antiquities* was at the same time being closely followed from Rome by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the acknowledged father of art history and a proponent of Caylus's idealisation of ancient Greek over Roman art. The preface to one of Winckelmann's early works on classical architecture, which was published in 1762, the same year as the first volume of the *Antiquities*, not only proves that he too had seen the engraved illustrations well before their final publication, but also adds some colour to the years which went into their preparation.¹⁵⁶

"After his return to England, Dawkins¹⁵⁷ became a generous promoter of the description of the antiquities of Greece, and Mr. Stuart enjoyed all the comforts of his London home in order to have his drawings engraved in copper, for which he utilised two ingenious artists, Mr. Strange and Mr. Bezaire. Dawkins died a couple of years ago in his prime, and his death is a loss for the arts and sciences. The work on the book on Greece has continued, and the copper plates for the first volume were already finished two years ago. This work is anxiously anticipated."

Winckelmann's words suggest that the engravings for the *Antiquities of Athens* had already been finished by Basire and his colleagues by about 1757, the year of the death in Jamaica of James Dawkins. It is notable that Winckelmann mentioned Strange and spelled his name correctly, although the Scottish engraver only signed two prints in the final publication. Winckelmann's relative familiarity with Strange is probably explained by the fact that the latter was making a name for himself in Italy at this time, while the German connoisseur may only have known of the more obscure Basire through his correspondence or from hearsay within the English community of Rome.

The style, presentation and content of the final publication of the first volume of the *Antiquities of Athens* in 1762 could not contrast more starkly with the picture-postcard

¹⁵⁵ Abbé Barthélemy, *Voyage en Italie* (Paris, 1801), letter X, p. 60, "J'ai vu les premières épreuves des Ruines d'Athènes par les Anglais. Elles m'ont parues très bien exécutées"

¹⁵⁶ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Anmerkungen über die Baukunst der Alten* (Leipzig, 1762), Vorbericht (author's translation)

¹⁵⁷ James Dawkins (1722-1757), wealthy Grand Tourist, antiquary, oriental traveler and supporter of Stuart and Revett

approach taken by Dalton in his portfolio-style publications of a decade earlier. Stuart's preface to the *Antiquities* modestly, but correctly stated that the "Architectural Prints compose, I imagine, the most useful and interesting part of this Work". In all, there were seventy numbered full-page plates spread across five chapters, the principal ones of which comprised studies of the Lanthorn of Demosthenes and of the Tower of the Winds (see Figure 16 on the next page).

Each chapter of the *Antiquities* systematically began with a view, continued with a plan, elevations and sections, and ended with selected architectural details and decorations. All of these, except for the views, were accompanied by comprehensive measurements. Stuart had no hesitation in emphasising in his preface that these measurements, the work of Revett, were absolutely reliable, in contrast to previous publications.¹⁵⁸

The plates included a number of works by engravers who were better known in the 1750s than Basire. Some of these artists had even died before the completion of the project and thus provide further evidence of the relatively early preparation of the plates. The only foreign-born engraver involved in their production was Paul Fourdrinier, who signed one plate and had died in 1757, five years before publication. He had recently engraved most of the plates for two similar, but less ambitious publications, both of which had beaten the *Antiquities* into print: *The Ruins of Palmyra* by James Dawkins and Robert Wood (1753), and *The Ruins of Balbec* by Wood (1757). James Green, Isaac Basire's apprentice, signed one tailpiece to the *Antiquities*, which must have been produced before his untimely death in 1759. The remaining engravers comprised Charles Grignion, who contributed one, and Robert Strange who completed two illustrations of sculptural friezes; Anthony Walker who provided six plates, and Edward Rooker who prepared a further fifteen.

Despite this impressive list, including the considerable contribution by Rooker, widely considered the leading architectural engraver of the day, James Basire was nevertheless clearly the lead engraver on the project by some margin. He was not only responsible for 40 full-page plates, but also for the title page vignette; the head piece of the preface, which juxtaposes coins of Athens and George III; and almost all of the highly ornamental chapter head- and tailpieces. He was also asked to engrave the spectacular fold-out panorama of Athens which introduced the main body of the work, and contained a lively collection of Turkish figures with their animals. He was thus not only the principal engraver by number of contributions, but was also entrusted with many of the most prominent engravings with the greatest artistic and visual impact.

¹⁵⁸ James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, volume I (London, 1762), pp. vii-viii



Figure 16 The Horologion of Andronicus Cyrrhetes or “Tower of the Winds”, chapter III, plate III, from James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762), engraved by James Basire (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The illustrations to the *Antiquities* show that Basire, in his early twenties, was already in full command of his faculties as an etcher and engraver of landscape, figures, architecture and sculpture, as well as of more technical drawings. The quality of interpretation of the friezes from the Tower of the Winds and the Lanthorn of Demosthenes is equal to and consistent in style with the two friezes supplied by Strange, who had trained with Le Bas in Paris, and would become famous for the accuracy and detail of his recreation of Italian old master paintings.

Taking as an example a portion of the frieze of the Lanthorn of Demosthenes,¹⁵⁹ one modern scholar has even suggested that Stuart's engravers, and Basire in particular, "improved" on the author's on-site drawings by adding in missing details.¹⁶⁰ This does indeed seem to be the case in the example given, unless there were intermediate drawings which have not survived. In any case, "filling in the gaps" between a drawing and the final plate was understood to be part of the engraver's job. Stuart and Basire must have worked together for an extended period on a continual, interactive basis, whereby the engraver had some freedom of interpretation, but Stuart reviewed and corrected every detail on every proof state. Stuart's notorious perfectionism was indeed one of the main causes of the delay in publication.

The general consensus was that it was worth the wait for the large number of subscribers to the *Antiquities*. In contrast to Dalton's political and divisive character, Stuart was highly sociable and, despite his poor origins, sufficiently socially acceptable to have been elected to the exclusive Society of Dilettanti. His address book was therefore a key element in rendering the commercial side of the project as successful as its scientific and artistic aspects. Stuart had managed to obtain the King's agreement to dedicate the *Antiquities of Athens* to his Majesty, and the subscribers list represented the ultimate Who's Who of the then cream of the aristocracy, the political establishment, the intelligentsia and the artistic community. The Dukes of Devonshire, Grafton, Marlborough, Newcastle and Portland, Horace Walpoloe, Earl of Orford and William Pitt were among the subscribers. James Dawkins ordered twenty sets, Robert Wood eight, and Francis Dashwood five; while Robert Adam, David Garrick, Gavin Hamilton, Thomas Hollis, Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin Wilson and "James Basire, Engraver" were among those who were content with one copy each. For most of these subscribers, this prestigious publication was little more than a superior coffee table book. For some, it became *the* manual of Greek classical style to be imitated in art and architecture.

In fact, drawings or, more likely, proof prints of the engravings for the first volume of the *Antiquities* seem to have been used by Stuart already from 1755 in order to promote his evolving career as an architect, interior designer and all-round stylist to the upper classes. It is known that Lord Hyde, a fellow member of the Dilettanti, ordered a

¹⁵⁹ Stuart and Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, vol. 1, chapter IV, plate XXV

¹⁶⁰ Frank Salmon, "Stuart as Antiquary and Archaeologist in Italy and Greece", chapter 3, in Susan Weber Soros ed., *James "Athenian" Stuart, 1713-1788: The Rediscovery of Antiquity* (New Haven and London, 2006), pp. 133-135

“6 column Grecian Doric Portico” from Stuart for his garden in around 1756,¹⁶¹ and this was followed by a spate of commissions from the social elite. These included not only garden buildings, but also interior features, such as chimney pieces and reliefs, as well as furniture. Prominent examples of such imitations included features at the Earl of Holderness’s Sion Hill; the Marquess of Rockingham’s Wentworth Woodhouse; Earl Harcourt’s Nuneham Park; Lord Lyttleton’s Hagley Hall; Thomas Anson’s country seat at Shugborough, as well as his London residence, Litchfield House; and Earl Spencer’s Spencer House on Green Park.¹⁶² Stuart was thus able to use his engravers’ work to promote a parallel business which would further raise his profile and that of his Grecian designs, as well as help pay for his lifestyle, the impending publication of the *Antiquities*, and the required stable of engravers.

It is evident that engraving, and particularly the work produced by James Basire for Stuart, was a key factor in the speedy dissemination of a new aesthetic among the higher echelons of society, which went beyond the generic neoclassical design which had already been in fashion for some years. Stuart’s individual patrons may or may not have been on the Grand Tour, but nevertheless wanted to display their taste for his authentic and accurate reproductions of antique originals, which appeared to go beyond Roman imitations back to an original Greek source. The fact that all but one of the buildings featured in the first volume of the *Antiquities* comprised relatively minor, Hellenistic or Roman monuments was irrelevant. Of far greater importance was the opportunity for the upper classes to be able to identify themselves with the supposedly simple and noble style of an ancient Greek democracy, which Stuart was at pains to contrast with the decadence of Roman art and architecture and its implicit association with Catholic Italy and France. In retrospect, the Greek architectural revival which he prefigured only fully took off two generations later at the time of Sir John Soane, the architect of the Bank of England. It was, however, Stuart who gave the first impulse to a lucrative market which would benefit artists who specialised in architectural engraving for decades to come.

Architectural engraving for other patrons

The most closely-related follow-up work to the *Antiquities of Athens* for Basire comprised the *Ionian Antiquities*, which was sponsored from inception by the Society of Dilettanti, co-authored by Nicholas Revett, and was published in 1769. Land and sea travel through Europe had become problematic during the period of the Seven Years War from 1756 to 1763, but the advent of peace enabled a new archaeological expedition to be undertaken to the west coast of Asia Minor in 1764 and 1765 by Revett and Richard Chandler, with the support of a youthful draughtsman and water-colourist, William Pars. The final

¹⁶¹ Michael Cousins, “Athenian Stuart’s Doric porticos”, *Georgian Group Journal* 14 (2004), pp. 52-53, n18

¹⁶² Soros ed., *James “Athenian” Stuart*, chapters 5-7: Richard Hewlings, “The London Houses”, pp. 195-263; Julius Bryant, “‘The Purest Taste’ – James ‘Athenian’ Stuart’s Work in Villas and Country Houses”, pp. 265-315; Alexander Marr, “The Garden Buildings”, pp. 317-352

publication of the *Ionian Antiquities* was strictly modelled on the *Antiquities of Athens*, with a similar emphasis on painstaking measurement and the recording of empirical data, combined with ornamental detail and picturesque views. It was specifically designed to support the Dilettantis' intended change in image from a debauched, drinking club of former Grand Tourists to a serious promoter of the sciences and the polite arts. To this end, the preface confirmed that "this narrative professes the strictest Regard for the Truth", while still being in "the cause of Virtu".¹⁶³ It seems that Nicholas Revett, like Stuart, also used the plates to develop his own relatively limited architectural practice. For example, a modern architectural historian has described Revett's portico for West Wycombe Park, the seat of Francis Dashwood, a founder member of the Dilettanti, as "more powerful than anything by Stuart". It is thought to have been inspired by the Temple of Bacchus Teos, as engraved by Basire for this collection.¹⁶⁴

In all, eleven engravers were used in the *Ionian Antiquities*, presumably in order not only to speed up the process and give opportunities to some younger, less expensive engravers, but also to add some artistic flair and a touch of exclusivity. James Basire and Johan Sebastian Müller (now known as "John Miller") were the two principal engravers, as they each supplied eight of the forty numbered plates. Together with James Mason, another veteran of Dalton's *Musaeum Graecum*, they provided the backbone of the team. Three star engravers were then hired to provide one plate each. The decorative head piece of the first chapter was by Francesco Bartolozzi, who had arrived in England from Italy with Dalton in 1764, and was already the most fashionable engraver in London. The first plate of the third chapter was crafted by Strange's master, Jacques-Philippe Le Bas, the official engraver to Louis XV and doyen of the French tradition. The tail piece to the third chapter is co-signed by William Woollett, who had been London's leading home-grown celebrity engraver since the sensational publication in 1761 of his interpretation of Richard Wilson's historical landscape painting, *Niobe*.

Woollett's plate for the *Ionian Antiquities* is of particular interest, since it is a unique co-production with Basire, who jointly signed the plate, and who was sufficiently close to his colleague in his private life to name one of his sons "Richard Woollett Basire". This engraving comprises a delightful scene of two Turks smoking atop shattered Greek masonry, an obvious symbol of Turkish indifference to the ruins of classical antiquity (Figure 17).

¹⁶³ Richard Chandler, William Pars and Nicholas Revett, *The Ionian Antiquities*, vol. I (Society of Dilettanti, London, 1769), p. ii

¹⁶⁴ David Watkin, "Stuart and Revett: The Myth of Greece and Its Afterlife", pp. 19-57, in Soros ed., *James "Athenian" Stuart*, p. 49; Chandler, Pars and Revett, *The Ionian Antiquities*, vol. I, plates II, V and VI



Figure 17 Tail piece to Chapter III, “The Temple of Apollo Didymaeus near Miletus”, engraved by James Basire and William Woollett after William Pars for *Ionian Antiquities* by Richard Chandler, William Pars and Nicholas Revett (1769), actual size 205 mm x 233 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Unfortunately, it is impossible to distinguish the respective input to this illustration of Basire and Woollett. However, it is more likely that Basire engraved the figures, given that he considered portraits to be a particular specialism, and that Woollett engraved the landscape elements. It is noteworthy that in the *Ionian Antiquities*, as in the *Antiquities of Athens*, but in contrast to most engraved landscapes, the local inhabitants in this tailpiece are explicitly depicted with a view first to accurate representation of their aspect and dress, and only secondly for picturesque effect.¹⁶⁵ This was another important element to the academic aspirations of this sub-genre of antiquarian publication and its illustration.

Unsurprisingly, James Stuart’s ultimate nemesis as the Neoclassical architect to high society, Robert Adam, also planned a volume of illustrated antiquities, which was intended to outdo the works of Dalton, Stuart, Revett, Wood and Dawkins, and so kick-start his architectural career on his return from Rome to London in 1758. Surprisingly,

¹⁶⁵ Stuart and Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, pp. viii and 3

the plates in the *Ruins of Spalatro* (Split in modern Croatia) include one signed by James Basire, the protégé of two of his rivals, Dalton and Stuart. In a letter to his brother, John, dated 1756, Adam left no doubts as to his opinion of Basire's first patron and his *Museum Graecum*:¹⁶⁶

"...those of true taste esteem him one of the most ignorant of mortals. He went with Lord Charlemont to Greece, Athens &ca., and on his return published a book of the temples &ca. he had seen there which is so infamously stupid and ill done that it quite knocked him on the head and entitled him to that name of Dulton which is generally given him".

Then, in 1758, he wrote again to his brother, but this time concerning Stuart and Basire:¹⁶⁷

"That insignificant trifling ignorant puppyish wretch Basire has spoilt me a plate entirely...I supposed Stuart has bribed him, he's quite a sicofantish creature of his".

These fascinating quotations require some context in order to arrive at an interpretation which goes beyond their face value, which ranges from personally insulting in the case of Dalton to defamatory in the case of Stuart and Basire.

In the final publication of the *Ruins of Spalatro*, there is actually only one plate signed by Basire, a routine engraving of the "Lateral Elevation of the Temple of Aesculapius", complete with scale and measurements. It is nevertheless possible that Basire was originally meant to play a larger role in the project, and that he was dismissed by Adam for incompetence.¹⁶⁸ However, such a scenario seems extremely unlikely in the light of the fact that the vast bulk of the plates were prepared in Venice by the prestigious Italian artists, Francesco Zucchi and Francesco Bartolozzi. It is much more likely that Basire was just one of a group of experienced London architectural engravers, such as Edward Rooker (three plates) and Anthony Walker (two plates), who had proved themselves on the *Antiquities of Athens*, and who were asked to complete the final, few plates for publication on Adam's return to London.

The real reasons for Adam's criticisms are therefore probably not to be found in Basire's incompetence or deliberate sabotage, but in the ambitious young architect's abrasive manner and competitive and jealous nature.¹⁶⁹ He was equally critical of delays by his Italian and his English artists, even accusing the genial Rooker, who was well-known for his evening job of playing Harlequin in the theatre, of being "an idle worth-

¹⁶⁶ Robert Adam to John Adam, 25 June 1758, Edinburgh Record office, GD 18/4850, quoted, for example, in Watkin, "Stuart and Revett", ed. Soros, *James 'Athenian' Stuart*, p. 44, and Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti*, p. 117

¹⁶⁷ Robert Adam to John Adam, 4 December 1756, Edinburgh Record office GD 18/4826, quoted, for example, in Catherine Arbuthnott, "The Life of James 'Athenian' Stuart", chapter 2, pp. 59-101, ed. Soros, *James 'Athenian' Stuart*, p. 78

¹⁶⁸ Robert Adam, *The Ruins of Spalatro* (London, 1764), plate XLIII

¹⁶⁹ In 1757, Adam also described Robert Wood's work in *The Ruins of Palmyra* and *The Ruins of Balbec* as "as hard as Iron, & as false as Hell", quoted in Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti*, p. 169

less fellow that he would do nothing...for now the plays begin he will never work an hour in a fortnight".¹⁷⁰ In the case of Dalton, he was furious that "Dulton" had recently been appointed to the coveted post of Librarian to the Prince of Wales, whereas Adam would have to wait another three years in order to be appointed the King's "Architect of the Works", and then only jointly with another rival, William Chambers. In the case of Stuart, Adam had not only been forestalled in his architectural career by Stuart's translation of Athens (as opposed to Adam's Rome) to England, but was forced to delay the publication of his *Ruins of Spalatro* until 1764, in order not to be outshone by the first volume of the *Antiquities of Athens*. The real significance of Adam's criticism of Basire and Stuart should therefore be sought in its evidence of the intimate relationship between the engraver and his second major patron.

The final example given here of Basire's work as a pure architectural engraver comprises plates of modern versions of classical prototypes by William Chambers, the third man in the famous triumvirate of competing neoclassical architects of the day. Although a rival of Adam, Chambers sided with his Scottish colleague on the issue of Greece versus Rome, and privately denigrated Stuart and his trademark monuments in even more colourful language than Adam. He compared Stuart's flagship Choragic Monument of Lysicrates to a silver tankard with the handle missing, and the Tower of the Winds to a dovecote with no turret for the pigeons "to creep in & fly out at".¹⁷¹ Moreover, he summarised his position on the Greco-Roman question as follows: one "might with equal success oppose a Hottentot & a Baboon to the Apollo and the Gladiator as set up the Grecian Architecture against the Roman". However, these opinions did not prevent Chambers from selecting his engravers from exactly the same pool of architectural specialists as Stuart in order to execute the engravings for his own *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew*, which he published in 1763.

Following his return from Italy a year after Adam in 1755, William Chambers became close to the future King George III, upon whom his subsequent appointment as founding Treasurer of the Royal Academy in 1767 would depend. In the meantime, he was appointed in 1757 to tutor George in architecture and to act as architect to the Dowager Princess of Wales at Kew. The gardens at Kew were already decorated with a mock Gothic cathedral, an Alhambra, a mosque and a Chinese pagoda, but most of the buildings which Chambers then added were based on classical models of his own invention.¹⁷² In order to engrave these designs, he chose Edward Rooker as his primary engraver on the project (18 of 43 plates). The second engraver was Tobias Müller (7 plates), while James Basire and Charles Grignion supplied 4 plates each. Basire's plates comprised elevations with a plan and scale of three classical temples, those of Bellona,

¹⁷⁰ Roderick Graham, *Arbiter of Elegance. A Biography of Robert Adam* (London, 2009), p. 163

¹⁷¹ Watkin, "Stuart and Revett", in Soros ed., *James "Athenian" Stuart*, pp. 45-46

¹⁷² Jane Roberts, "Sir William Chambers and George III", pp. 41-67, in John Harris and Michael Snodin ed., *Sir William Chambers. Architect to George III* (London, 1997), particularly pp. 58-67

Solitude and Arethusa, plus two garden seats in elevation with a scale.¹⁷³ Of the objects engraved by Basire, only the Temple of Bellona survives today, demonstrating that accurate engraving was not only essential for preserving the memory of continually threatened ancient architecture, but also of its modern reinventions.

In summary, Basire's training in line engraving had enabled him to gain a foothold in architectural engraving in the first two decades of his career, the 1750s and 1760s, a period during which classical models predominated. The engravings which he produced could be employed for antiquarian and proto-archaeological purposes for measuring and recording remains. They were also used as patterns for and illustrations of modern neoclassical architecture by the three leading, rival neoclassical architects of the day, James "Athenian" Stuart, Robert Adam and William Chambers. Finally, both general views and decorative detail also had a strong aesthetic appeal, which could serve to attract patronage not only for architecture, but also for art engraving from *virtuosi* who had been or would have liked to have been on the Grand Tour. From Basire's point of view, this type of architectural engraving presented both a beginning and an end. On the one hand, the works described here represented the last of his private commissions for professional architects. On the other hand, they opened the door in the short term to opportunities in the wider market for fine art engraving.

3.3 THE FINE ART AND HISTORY ENGRAVER

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the terms polite or liberal arts were used interchangeably to refer to arts designed primarily for aesthetic rather than practical purposes. These terms also had a social significance in that they referred to arts which could and even should be subject to appreciation by gentlemen-connoisseurs rather than of utility to tradesmen. The initial composition of the Royal Academy, which included William Chambers, made it clear that the right sort of architecture could be included among the polite arts, together with drawing, painting and sculpture. Although engraving was initially excluded from the Academy, many artists would also have regarded engraving as a polite art to the extent that its subject matter itself could be defined as falling within the ambit of the polite arts. Qualifying subjects for art-engraving might thus include prints of aesthetically relevant classical and modern architecture and sculpture, as well as of historical and biblical scenes, landscape and portrait painting or drawing.

James Basire was able to judge for himself what he viewed as "art" among his own works, and this judgment can be directly illustrated through his selection of exhibits for the Free Society of Artists from 1761 to 1783. His choice of engravings and drawings for

¹⁷³ William Chambers, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew, the Seat of Her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales* (London, 1763), plates XII, XIV, XXXI and XXXII

these exhibitions supports a division in his career between the 1750s and 1760s, when he was primarily engaged in the engraving of fine art subjects; and the second part of his career, when he was principally occupied in engraving more utilitarian works for the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society. Having said that, the loose boundaries between disciplines at the time meant that a number of the plates he produced for these learned societies in the 1770s and 1780s were also of an artistic nature. For this reason, he was able to continue to exhibit a significant number of architectural and historical engravings, as well as portraits, even when he was primarily occupied in completing commissions for scientific and especially antiquarian publications. The focus of the following pages will be on those works by Basire which are defined here for convenience as being of a “fine art” nature, meaning that they relate specifically to the interpretation of historical and other paintings and drawings by old and modern masters, which were frequently grouped together and referred to as “historical engravings”. The special subject of portrait engraving will be examined in the following section in this chapter.

James Basire’s first significant “fine art” engravings comprised the prints of drawings of Raphael’s Vatican cartoons, which he produced for Dalton on their return from Rome by early 1751. These had represented the main purpose of their trip, but once back in London, Dalton first prioritised completion of his two volumes of prints of antiquities from the Ottoman Empire. The plates after Raphael were then issued from early 1753 in an even more incomplete form than his *Museum Graecum et Aegypticum*, published in 1751 and 1752. Their publication therefore needs to be reconstructed from even more circumstantial evidence than his prints of antiquities.

Dalton’s 1752 *Remarks on XII Historical Designs of Raphael* listed twelve planned plates of the so-called *Scuola Nuova* tapestries of the Life of Christ, based on cartoons by Raphael which were displayed in the Vatican. Within the text, he promised their publication in three sets of four plates, and implied that at least “The Adoration of the Wisemen”, “The Nativity, or the Adoration of the Shepherds” and “Christ with two Disciples at Emmaus” had already been engraved by this time. The contemporary connoisseur and collector, Charles Rogers, repeated Dalton’s list as if the set had in fact been completed in his *Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, which was prepared during the 1760s.¹⁷⁴ However, Rogers may just have been repeating what he had read in the *Remarks*.

Other sources suggest that Dalton may only have been able to complete the engraving of six of the Raphael cartoons. Two near-contemporary German print catalogues mention a set of six prints, which had apparently been published in 1752, and which depicted the birth of Christ, the presentation of Christ at the Temple, the Resurrection, Christ with the two Disciples at Emmaus, the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the stoning

¹⁷⁴ Charles Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings* (London, 1778), I, pp. 39-40

of Saint Stephen.¹⁷⁵ Five of these were also mentioned in J-D Passavant's *Raphael d'Urbain et son père Giovanni Santi* of 1850,¹⁷⁶ and only five of these same six prints seem to have survived in modern collections.

One plate, the "Christ with the two Disciples at Emmaus" can be viewed at the Royal Academy, while there are copies of three others, the "The Resurrection of Christ", "The Descent of the Holy Ghost" and "The Stoning of St. Stephen" at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.¹⁷⁷ A copy of a fifth plate, "The Nativity of Christ", has been seen by the author in a private collection.

Based on the quality of engraving of these plates, which significantly exceeded that of the *Musaeum Graecum*, it is difficult at first glance to see how they could have been a commercial failure to the point of never being completed. The largest and most luxurious of the prints, "The Resurrection", comprised a double folio-size plate signed as engraved by no fewer than three artists: Dalton, who etched the outline, including the figures; Charles Grignion; and Vivares, who is mentioned in the *Remarks* as having completed the landscape. At least four of the other five apparently completed plates were also signed as co-productions, but this time as drawn and etched by Dalton, and engraved by "James Basire junior". These plates were smaller in format than "The Resurrection", but were nevertheless of folio size or larger, and were etched in detail with a significant amount of finishing in line engraving. "The Stoning of St. Stephen" is illustrated as an example of these plates in Figure 18 on the next page.

The subject matter of the *XII Historical Designs of Raphael* should have been attractive to English subscribers, since Dalton specifically planned and sold them as a complement to the many contemporary engravings of the Hampton Court cartoons, "the richest jewel in painting possessed by any country".¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the *Remarks* claimed with some justification that his engraving was at least equal if not superior to that of Nicolas Dorigny's famous translations of these cartoons. It even seems from the final paragraphs of the *Remarks* that Dalton had shown his drawings from Raphael to his future patron, George, Prince Wales and his teenage brother, Edward, the future Duke of York, and that their names appeared at the head of an as yet unpublished subscription list.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Christophe Theophile de Murr, *Description du Cabinet de Monsieur Paul de Praun à Nuremberg* (Nuremberg, 1797), p. 24; Tauriscus Euboeus (Wilhelm, Graf von Lepel), *Catalogue des Estampes Gravées d'Après Raphael*, (Frankfurt on Main, 1819), pp.55-56

¹⁷⁶ J-D Passavant, *Raphael d'Urbain et son père Giovanni Santi* (Paris, 1850), pp. 220-224

¹⁷⁷ Royal Academy of Arts Collections, 04/2132; Victoria & Albert Museum, Prints and Drawings, DYCE.2920, DYCE.2871, DYCE.3001

¹⁷⁸ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, I, p. 39

¹⁷⁹ (Dalton), *Remarks on XII Historical Designs*, p. 35



Figure 18 “The Stoning of St. Stephen”, drawn and etched by Richard Dalton, and engraved by James Basire for Dalton’s *XII Historical Designs of Raphael* (1753), actual size 560 mm by 460 mm (source: Victoria and Albert Museum)

These observations beg the question: why then did this project also fail? In retrospect, Dalton attributed his failure to the fact that he had to defray the “great expense of the engravers” on his own,¹⁸⁰ but this was arguably a symptom not the cause. He had recently managed to complete the first two sets of 42 large-scale prints of Greek and Egyptian antiquities using similarly expensive engravers, so there must have been unique issues with respect to his Raphael project. At a practical level, the fact that the prints of the cartoons, unlike those of the antiquities, were all completed in different shapes and sizes meant that they could not be collected and stored in a portfolio. At a

¹⁸⁰ Richard Dalton, *Remarks on Prints intended to be Published relative to the Manners, Customs etc. of the current Inhabitants of Egypt* (London, 1781), p. 9

broader market level, however, there was an even greater issue. The group of fine art connoisseurs who would value this type of work was in all probability too small in London at this time. Fifteen years earlier, a similar fate had befallen Arthur Pond's *Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, which had attempted to emulate the success of the *Recueil Crozat*, a collection of prints after Italian old masters from French collections.¹⁸¹ The fact that Dalton's prints of the Raphael cartoons were mentioned as frequently in contemporary catalogues of foreign collections as they were in British ones implies that he met with some small success in exporting his plates, but this was not sufficient to finance their completion.

Dalton was nothing if not ambitious, and went on to try his hand at other fine art print ventures, once he had secured the support of the Court and a steady income. One of these also involved James Basire, who by this time was advertising himself in the *Universal Director* not only as an "architectural", but also as a "history" and "portrait" engraver. Dalton had purchased a number of drawings for the King's collection on his third trip to Italy in 1758, many of which were by the Baroque painter of the Bolognese school, Guercino, who at that time was ranked in the first division of Italian masters. Dalton then returned to Italy to add to these, as well as make other fine art purchases on a fourth journey in 1762, following the end of the Seven Year's War. It is possible that he had invited Basire to accompany him, or even that the engraver had agreed.¹⁸² However, it is unlikely that Basire did join him, even for part of the trip, because of the engraver's family and professional commitments at this time. In the end, Dalton enlisted the help of Francesco Bartolozzi in Venice, and the Florentine engraver etched some of the Guercino drawings, as well as other works of art, during their journeys together.¹⁸³ Dalton then invited Bartolozzi to accompany him back to London, where this engraver moved in with his fellow Florentine artist, Giovanni Battista Cipriani. Bartolozzi went on to etch over a hundred prints of Guercino drawings from the King's collection, and was by far the best-represented artist on Dalton's new project.

As with Dalton's other print-selling ventures, the early publication history of the Guercino prints is difficult to reconstruct, because of his relatively informal methods. It is therefore necessary to work backwards from the professional publication by John Boydell at the beginning of 1791 of a first volume of 82 prints, which he had purchased from Dalton.¹⁸⁴ The vast majority of the signed prints in this set were in Bartolozzi's name, while six were signed by Basire, who played a subsidiary role in the project, together with a Venetian engraver, Giovanni Vitalba, and the gentlewoman-etcher, Lady

¹⁸¹ Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London*, pp. 128-129

¹⁸² As suggested by Uglow, *William Hogarth*, p. 768, n25, perhaps based on a letter of Hogarth, saying that Basire was "out of town" at the time, quoted in Paulson, *Hogarth. Art and Politics*, III, p. 428

¹⁸³ Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers*, pp. 268-269

¹⁸⁴ (Richard Dalton), *Eighty-two prints, engraved by F. Bartolozzi, &c. From the original drawings of Guercino in the collection of His Majesty*, vol. I (London, 1792); Bartolozzi had already published a number of prints of Guercino drawings in the *Raccolta di alcuni disegni del Barberi da Cento detto il Guercino*, published in Rome in 1764, further indicating an early starting date for this project

Louisa Augusta Greville. In terms of style, the engravings evidence a contemporary resurgence of interest in prints in imitation of drawings in the 1760s. Four of Basire's signed prints comprised freely etched landscapes which were originally printed in red or brown ink in order to imitate the effect of chalk drawings. Three of these works are unusually signed "Basire fecit" rather than "sculp.", which indicates that the engraver considered these to be, at least in part, an original creation. In at least one case, the print was enhanced by the engraver with a watercolour wash, as shown in Figure 19 below.

The other two prints which Basire signed in this series comprised groups of figures which were etched in a similar style, but the meaning of these images remains uncertain, as the original drawings were not captioned.

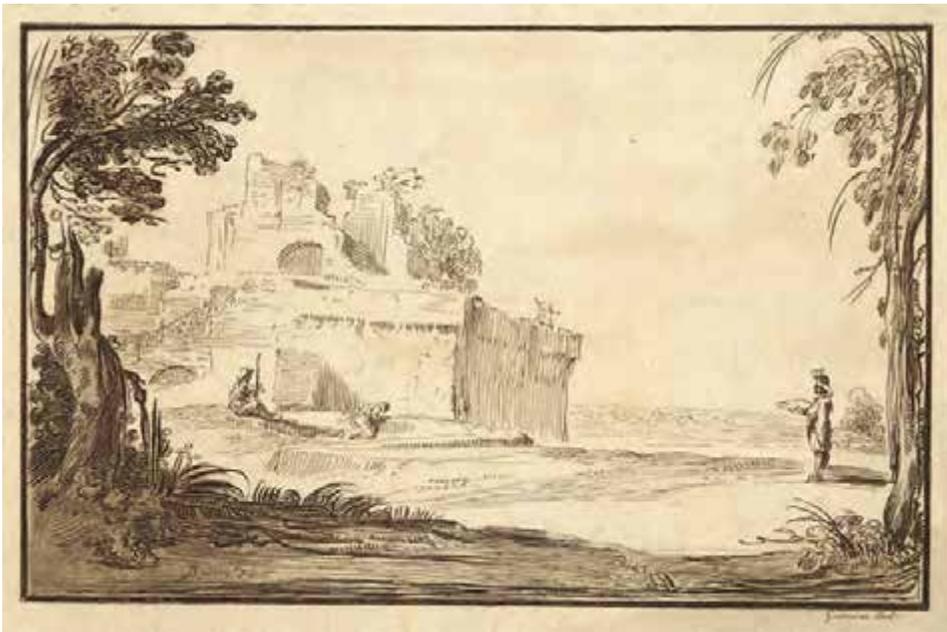


Figure 19 Italian landscape etched by James Basire (I), from Dalton's *Eighty-two prints engraved by F. Bartolozzi, &c., from the original drawings of Guercino*, published in ca. 1764-66, actual size 192 mm x 289 mm (private collection)

In terms of the date of James Basire's involvement in this project, it seems that this immediately followed the return from Italy of Dalton with Bartolozzi. One of Basire's six signed plates is dated 1764, and he showed five prints "after drawings by Guercino", which must more or less correspond to those prepared for Dalton, at the spring exhibition of the Free Society of Artists in 1765.¹⁸⁵ The catalogue for this exhibition associated the Guercino prints in a specific group of "engravings in imitation of drawings", which

¹⁸⁵ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 25

also included a print after Baciccio and another after Caracci, neither of which are related to Dalton's collection. The work after Baciccio cannot now be identified, but the Caracci print probably corresponds to one of four prints published by Charles Rogers in his *Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*: either Ludovico Caracci's "The Car of Harmony", or one of the three prints in the same *Collection* from drawings by Agostino Caracci.¹⁸⁶ Basire was therefore active at the same time in engraving imitations of drawings both for Dalton and for the fine art connoisseur, Rogers, and seems to have continued working for Rogers after leaving Dalton's project at an early stage. In all, Basire produced at least nineteen prints for Rogers's *Collection*, all of which are dated. Seven of these are identifiable as having been chosen by Basire as a central theme of his public exhibits between 1762 and 1770.

It is not a coincidence that Dalton and Rogers revived Pond's concept of having old master drawings engraved for wider distribution at almost exactly the same time. Both men were aware of the interest in this field which had been stimulated by the King's and other private collections. Rogers was one of the few *virtuosi* of the day who had praised Dalton's work in writing,¹⁸⁷ and both promoters employed Bartolozzi and Basire to play prominent roles in their projects. The similarities between their ventures, however, end here. Rogers was neither an entrepreneur nor a place-hunter, since he was already well-placed as Clerk of the Certificates in the Custom House, and he had inherited private wealth as a relatively young man.¹⁸⁸ He had been a patron of Pond and was one of the most prominent art collectors and connoisseurs of the period. His *Collection* was not a commercial enterprise, but his life's work, which he carried on through most of the 1760s and 1770s. In its final form, the *Collection* contained 112 prints from 63 mostly Italian Old Masters, including from Guercino, but also from French, Dutch and Flemish artists. It was a showcase for his personal collection of drawings, as well as for those of his friends and fellow art-lovers. Overall, it contained 42 prints of drawings from his own collection, and 70 from the collections of the King, the first Earl Spencer, the Earl of Cholmondeley, Jonathan Richardson the younger, Robert Adam, and the painters, Reynolds, Nathaniel Hone and George Knapton. The design for a sun dial by his friend, the sculptor Rysbrack, was drawn especially for this work.

Unlike Dalton's publications, Rogers's selection of prints was subsumed in a work of art history, with an introduction and a chapter on each of the featured artists. Unlike other art histories, however, it demonstrated almost as much interest in engraving as in painting and drawing, and the appendix provided a history of the graver's art. The plates were also clearly designed to demonstrate a variety of techniques used by engravers from the Renaissance to the present day, albeit with a focus on prints in imita-

¹⁸⁶ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, II, pp. 27, 32, 33 and 34

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 39-40 on the *Nuova Scuola* tapestries, and II, 245 on Bartolozzi's engravings after the Guercino drawings

¹⁸⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LIV (1784), p. 159

tion of drawings and particularly on coloured prints. His final conclusion summarises his intention with regard to the illustrations:¹⁸⁹

“...it must be allowed that prints in imitation of drawings highly finished are engraved with the highest delicacy in England, particularly by Mr. Bartolozzi and Mr. Ryland; and that prints equalling high finished Drawings in proper Colors are executed by Mr. Ryland with the utmost elegance. But it would be ungenerous to conclude without acknowledging the Ingenuity with which this Work is executed by Mr. Deacon, Mr. Bartolozzi, Mr. Ryland, Mr. Basire and Mr. Watts, or mentioning that several new Inventions, and various Methods of Handling, have been practised in it, it is hoped, with some degree of Success.”

This was evidently not just a treatise on old master drawings which were now owned by British connoisseurs. It was also a manual of engraving techniques, and a proud advertisement for their perfection by a new generation of engravers, who were contributing to London’s emerging status as a new capital of the arts.

The principal engraver of the *Collection* was William Wynne Ryland, who signed more than half the prints, with dates spanning the entire period of its production, from 1762 to 1778. In 1762, he had recently returned from five years of study in Paris, including with the line engraver, Jacques-Philippe Le Bas, and had immediately made an impression on the London market through his engraving of Ramsay’s portraits of the royal family, which the Jacobite Strange had undiplomatically refused. Ryland was of particular interest to Rogers because he had also learned the “crayon manner” while in Paris, and thus provided the expertise with which to revive Pond’s project of imitating red and brown chalk drawings in print form. James Basire was the second engraver on Rogers’s original team from its formation in 1762 to 1765, at which point Simon Watts became increasingly involved. Basire’s contribution ceased in 1770, when he started to work almost full time for the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society. A brief comparison of these three artists’ work, together with the prints contributed by Bartolozzi, shows the extraordinary range of contemporary print-making techniques which Rogers wished to display.

Ryland’s engravings for the *Collection* freely combined etching, stippling and roulette work to suggest pencil, pen and ink drawing, as well as chalk and wash effects, and were correspondingly printed in black, brown and red inks. All four of Bartolozzi’s plates were entirely in stipple and in red ink, including two elaborate, allegorical frontispieces designed by Cipriani. The relatively obscure Simon Watts was entrusted with the greatest degree of experimentation, particularly in the plates produced in the 1770s. His plates range from artists’ portraits, head and tail pieces printed from wood blocks, through simple black ink etchings to elaborate crayon-manner prints on coloured paper, as well as plates printed in multiple colours using the *au repérage* technique of over-

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 246

printing with plates inked with different tones. One particularly eye-catching example of Watts's work can be found in his interpretation of Rubens's portrait of his young, second wife. This covered a double-page spread, was engraved entirely in stipple work, and was printed mostly in black ink, but with the face and hands over-printed in light red, as if representing skin tones.

Basire's contribution to the *Collection* was, by contrast, relatively restrained in its use of showy effects. He seems to have been employed above all for his skill as a draughtsman who was able to translate chalk drawing through vigorous etching, with a subsidiary use of stippling and roulette work to suggest chalk effects and watercolour washes. In this sense, his plates in Rogers's *Collection* were similar in terms of their artistic techniques to those he produced for Dalton's prints after Guercino, but went further in their visual impact. One example of this can be found in Basire's plate entitled, "Terrae Motus". This was an engraving after a Raphael drawing from Reynolds's collection, which had served as a study for a detail of a painting in the Vatican of the prison of St. Paul. In line with the original drawing, it is a small-scale round print in brown ink, where the etching and crayon manner are used to create a chiaroscuro effect of great violence in portraying the allegorical figure of an earthquake bursting through the page (Figure 20 on the next page). Other Basire prints for Rogers's *Collection* were carried purely by the power and spontaneity of the etching, for example, the double-page "Combat with Lions" after Luca Cambiaso, and the wild-man image of Bernini after Salvatore Rosa.¹⁹⁰ The portrait of Bernini is included on the following page as Figure 21 to give a further idea of the variety of styles and techniques used by Basire in this monograph.

¹⁹⁰ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, I, p. 53 and II, pp. 152, 167



Figure 20 “Hinc Terrae Tremor; hinc Motus”, engraved by James Basire after Raphael for Charles Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, volume I (print dated 1767), actual size 218 mm x 218 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

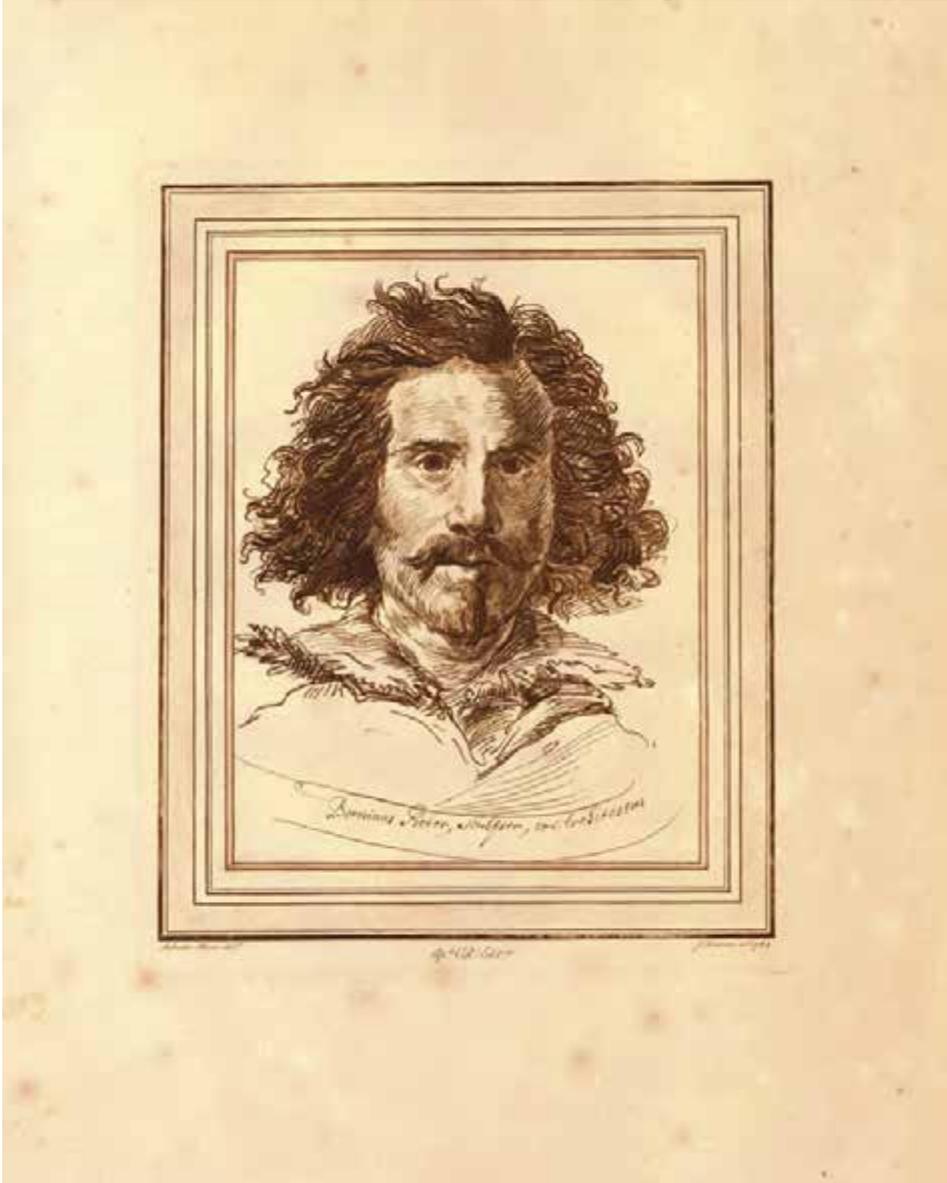


Figure 21 Portrait of Bernini by Salvatore Rosa, engraved by James Basire for Charles Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, volume II (print dated 1764), actual size 306 mm x 247 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Rogers's *Collection* helped popularise the work of Ryland and Bartolozzi, who were able to capitalise on the nationwide craze for stippled fancy subjects in the next decades. This type of engraving, however, remained relatively isolated in terms of Basire's output and career. The exhibitions of the Free Society of Artists which took place in 1764 and 1765 did include a couple of landscapes in the crayon manner after drawings by Robert Price of Foxley, the father of the picturesque theorist, Uvedale Price. In 1765, Basire exhibited his own, now unidentifiable "drawing after Raphael", which may have originated from sketches made during his period in Rome. In 1768, he exhibited some more drawings in the form of "six small academy figures", which again do not seem to have survived. However, with the exception of these and his "Pylades and Orestes", a historical painting after Benjamin West, which was commissioned by Boydell (Figure 22 below), the remaining works which Basire wished to display to the public as examples of his artistic output in the period to 1770 comprised either architectural prints after Stuart or from the *Ionian Antiquities*, or portraits.¹⁹¹



Figure 22 "Pylades and Orestes", engraved by James Basire after Benjamin West for John Boydell (1771), actual size 491 mm x 583 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

¹⁹¹ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, pp. 24-25

3.4 THE PORTRAIT ENGRAVER

James Basire's initial reputation and self-image as an architecture, history and particularly as a portrait engraver became obscured in his later years and following his death by his ultimate celebrity as an antiquarian engraver. However, it is clear from Basire's own actions and the opinions of his closest associates that he considered portraiture to represent a special calling which he pursued throughout his professional career. This was even recognised by the Council of the Society of Antiquaries which recorded in the minutes of its meeting on 30 January 1771 that this was "a Branch of the Business which he had ever made his most favourite and peculiar Study".¹⁹² The Society's Director, from 1771 to 1791, Richard Gough, who became a close personal friend of Basire, went even further when he wrote rhetorically of the engraver's celebrated portrait heads of British monarchs from monuments in Westminster Abbey, that "it is almost a perversion of his burin, which shines so much in living portraits, to employ it in Gothic ones".¹⁹³

John Nichols, who knew Basire almost as well as Gough, places the engraver's output of portrait engraving in context in a list of the engraver's most noteworthy works in the one-page biography in the *Literary Anecdotes*. Nichols refers in general to engravings prepared by Basire for Stuart, Richard Gough and the Antiquaries, but the individual prints which he mentions are – with the exception of "Pylades and Orestes" – all portraits:¹⁹⁴

"He engraved the Portraits of Fielding and Dr. Morell, 1762; Earl Camden, in 1766, after Sir Joshua Reynolds; Pylades and Orestes, 1770, from a picture by West; portraits of the Rev. John Watson and Sir George Warren's family; Dean Swift, and Dr. Parnell, 1774; Sir James Burrow, 1780, Mr. Bowyer, 1782; Portraits of Dr. Munro, Mr. Gray, Mr. Thompson, Lady Stanhope, Sir George Savile, Bp. Hoadly, Rev. Dr. Pegge, Mr. Price, Algernon Sydney, Andrew Marvell, William Camden, William Brereton, 1790; Captain Cooke's Portrait, and other Plates, for his First and Second Voyages."

The detail of the list, including exact dates stretching over almost thirty years, suggests that Nichols was consulting his own collection, and therefore his own preferred Basire portraits. His selection is, however, also remarkably representative of Basire's own view of the artistic merit of his portraits, since the vast majority of the twenty or so portraits mentioned by Nichols were also among the around thirty such works exhibited by Basire at the Free Society of Artists throughout the period of its existence from 1761 to 1783.

It seems at first sight odd that Basire should have seen himself as specialised in portrait engraving, when he was apprenticed to a cartographic specialist, and does not

¹⁹² *The Council Minute Book of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, volume I. Future quotations from the manuscript minute book are referred to in the text according to the date of the meeting, in order to avoid excessive footnotes

¹⁹³ Richard Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain* (London, 1786), volume I, part I, Preface, p. 9

¹⁹⁴ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, p. 717

seem to have engraved any standalone portraits for his first two major patrons, Dalton and Stuart. One source of training in this specialist area may have come from his generalist father. Isaac Basire mostly published engraved heads in the form of authorial frontispieces in line with his main activity as a general engraver of book illustrations,¹⁹⁵ but he also engraved a range of other portraits. For example, at the lower end of the scale, the elder Basire published a simple etching of Humphrey Parsons, Lord Mayor elect of London in hunting dress, in a rare illustration to the *Grub Street Journal* of 1730.¹⁹⁶ At the other end of the scale, Isaac was also capable of producing complex Baroque portraits, such as his early head of Gian Gastone de' Medici and a later portrait of Maria Teresa of Austria, which accompanied a patriotic poem in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1742.¹⁹⁷ James would also have been trained on portraiture in the context of formal drawing tuition at the St. Martin's Lane Academy, which he probably attended. The most important element in the development of his skills in engraved portraiture, however, must have been the practice he obtained in copying heads from Raphael, other Italian masters and the antique sculptures he studied during his sojourn in Rome.

This close connection between Basire's drafting skills and portrait engraving is supported by an analysis of the minority of prints which he signed not only as engraver, but also as draughtsman. Almost every plate which Basire self-attributed as "del.", i.e. "drawn", in the Society of Antiquaries' *Vetusta Monumenta* and in Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* comprised a funeral monument from Westminster Abbey or another church, which would typically have been characterised by contemporaries as a portrait.¹⁹⁸ This observation is further supported by the fact that a disproportionate number of standalone portraits engraved by Basire were also signed by him as draughtsman. These included two portraits of the poet James Thomson (1761), one of Queen Charlotte (1761), as well as portraits of the seventeenth-century art collector, Thomas, 21st Earl of Arundel (1763), the republican poet Andrew Marvell (1776), Nichols's master, William Bowyer (before 1778), and Sir James Burrow, twice President of the Royal Society (1780). The portraits of Queen Charlotte, Arundel, Marvell and Burrow were unusually signed "James Basire" in full, a fact which also clearly underlined the importance to the engraver of these particular plates, while the portrait of Bowyer had an even grander signature: "Jacobus Basire ad vivum". In the latter case, Basire wished not only to complement the "learned printer" through his use of Latin, but also emphasise that this was his own original drawing from life, and not just a copy of a painting or of a pre-existing portrait.

¹⁹⁵ These mostly comprise authorial frontispieces, e.g. to William Nichols, *A defense of the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England*, (3rd edition, London, 1730); *Poems on several occasions: By the late Matthew Prior* (5th edition, London, 1733); *The dramattick works of the late Sir Richard Steele: Containing, Conscious lover. Funeral. Tender husband. Lying lover* (London, 1736)

¹⁹⁶ *Grub Street Journal*, 48 (3 December 1730), p. 1

¹⁹⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XII (1742), p. 530

¹⁹⁸ For example, *Vetusta Monumenta*, II (1789), plates XXIX-XXXV; Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume I.I (1786), plates I, p. 10; V, p. 24; XVIII-XX, pp. 49-50, 57; XXII- XXIII*, pp. 57, 63; XXV-XXVII, p. 68, 75; volume I.II (1796), plates XXIX-XXXIV, pp. 85-96; XLVIII-XLIX, pp. 124-125; LIV-LV, p. 139; LX-LXIV, pp. 159-167

James Basire and Hogarth

Commissions awarded to Basire by William Hogarth in 1761 and 1762 suggest that the young engraver already had a reputation for portrait engraving at a time when he was otherwise mainly known for his work for Dalton and Stuart. At first sight, the selection of Basire by the great man to engrave a series of portraits, and even Basire's acceptance of the role, might be viewed as surprising. Basire's known output as a portrait engraver up to this date was limited. Hogarth had made his own reputation as a portrait painter, was famously exacting in his choice of engravers, and already had a group of favoured artists who could interpret his paintings and drawings. Moreover, in 1761, Hogarth had famously and hilariously lampooned the scientific pretensions of Stuart's and Basire's work on the *Antiquities of Athens* in his "Five Orders of Periwigs". He was also a leader of the group of artists who seceded from the Society of Arts and which established its own rival exhibition in Spring Gardens in competition with the Free Society of Artists, which continued to be supported by Stuart and Basire. And yet, Hogarth must still have been confident enough in Basire to entrust him with these personally significant works, and Basire must have been flattered enough to accept them.

The portrait commissions which Hogarth gave to Basire were of an entirely different nature to the types of work which the engraver is otherwise known to have engraved up to this point. One of these portraits was a deadly serious historical engraving, while the other three were effectively caricatures of some of Hogarth's closest friends: the novelist and magistrate, the late Henry Fielding; the classical philologist and Handel librettist, Thomas Morell; and the celebrated actor, David Garrick, in character as the Farmer from his comic interlude, *The Farmer's Return from London*.¹⁹⁹ The portraits of both Fielding and Morell display the outward signs of traditional engraved frontispieces, and indeed were bound in as frontispieces to the respective authors' works.²⁰⁰ Fielding's head is shown in profile on a decorated roundel surmounting books and other writing paraphernalia, while Morell is shown in three-quarter length in action behind his desk following his scholarly pursuits, with his organ in the background. Both these portraits and the full-length view of Garrick on the stage were, however, of an essentially burlesque nature, as communicated through the vigorous etching with limited detail and no line engraving.

Despite the affectionately light-hearted content and the low-brow engraving style of Hogarth's three portraits of his friends, Basire nevertheless signed all three pieces with his full name, a phenomenon normally associated with his more elaborate works. This was a sign of the importance Basire accorded to these portraits and to his collaboration with Hogarth, which is also demonstrated by his exhibition of the portrait of Fielding at

¹⁹⁹ Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, pp. 195-196; illustrated on pp. 436-437

²⁰⁰ Arthur Murphy, *The Works of Henry Fielding in eight volumes* (2nd edition, London, 1762); Thomas Morell, *Thesaurus graecae poeseos, sive, Lexicon graeco-prosodiacum* (London, 1762)

the Free Society in 1765.²⁰¹ A third sign of the importance attached to these works by Basire can be found in his curious decision to present copies of them to the weekly meetings of the Society of Antiquaries in the years following his initial appointment there in 1759. He presented the Society with “Henry Fielding” on 12 November 1761 (Figure 23 on the next page), “T. Morell” on 21 January 1762, and “The Farmer’s Return” on 6 May 1762 (Figure 24 on the following page).

The minutes of the Society of Antiquaries give some fascinating insights into the reception of Basire’s portraits. Those relating to the meeting on 12 November 1761 record that:²⁰²

“Mr. Basire presented four portraits ingraved by him: One, in miniature, of Queen Charlotte, delineated by J. Russell, which exhibits a very striking likeness to her Majesty; two of James Thomson the Poet, Author of the Seasons, etc., etc., one at the Age of 25, and the other of 46, also one of the late Henry Fielding, Esqr., from a Drawing of Mr Hogarth’s in a kind of Caricatura.”

Two months later on 21 January 1762, the minute book goes on to describe the portrait of Morell, as follows:

“...though there is a strong Resemblance of the Features, and of the Spirit and manner of the Original preserved in this piece, yet we behold a great mixture of that Caracatura in it, which is peculiar to, and characterisk of Mr. Hogarth’s Portrait painting in general.”

It is notable that the fellows considered the caricatures as worthy of a detailed aesthetic appraisal, and that the Secretary thought this of sufficient interest to record in the minutes. The fellows do not seem to have been surprised to receive them in the same context as the highly finished portraits of James Thomson and a patriotic print of Queen Charlotte, just two months after her marriage to George III. Whether Basire may have had an ulterior, tongue-in-cheek motive for these presents is another matter, and this possibility will be analysed later in this chapter.

²⁰¹ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 25

²⁰² Society of Antiquaries of London, *Council Minute Book*: dates of the minutes are given as references in the text to avoid excessive footnotes



Figure 23 “Henry Fielding”, engraved by James Basire after William Hogarth (1762), actual size 250 mm x 187 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 24 "The Farmer's Return", engraved by James Basire after William Hogarth (1762), actual size 256 mm x 217 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The fourth portrait engraved by Basire for Hogarth represented an altogether different type of work and presaged the engraver's subsequent move up-market from quarto- and octavo-sized heads which could easily be circulated by hand or used as frontispieces, to larger-scale portraits for framing and hanging or for collecting in a portfolio of fine art prints. This engraving comprised his unfinished plate of Hogarth's notorious historical painting of the tragic, literary heroine, Sigismunda, who is shown clutching the heart of her murdered husband.²⁰³ The circumstances in which Hogarth decided to try his hand at this higher genre of painting, the work's abject failure, its withdrawal from the exhibition of the Society of Artists of 1761, and his subsequent humiliation by Horace Walpole and others, were already well-documented by George Steevens and John Nichols in the early nineteenth century.²⁰⁴ The circumstances of Basire's involvement in this debacle have, however, been more recently revealed by Ronald Paulson, based on Hogarth's own words in a letter to his friend, Dr. Hay, dated 12 June 1764:²⁰⁵

“The print will have much the same appearance as the drawing in general, but more delicate, the Engraver Mr. Basire, who has the surest command of the Burin being determined to make it his masterpiece in order [to] show what he can do.”

Hogarth clearly had as much confidence in Basire's skill and sensitivity in interpreting this serious portrait through line engraving as he had in relation to the etched caricatures. However, the portrait and its engraving already had history. Simon Ravenet had been unable to engrave the painting, ostensibly because he was under contract to John Boydell. Hogarth then asked Basire to re-interpret the painting based on a drawing of it by the painter, Edward Edwards.

The postscript to Hogarth's letter reads: “I shall take care of the head myself. The Engraver being out of town the drawing can be spared for some time.” Although Basire did make some progress on the print, it seems that he was “out of town” until Hogarth's death only a few months later, and we know that the unfinished plate remained in the possession of Basire's eldest son, James Basire (II).²⁰⁶ Both father and son must have known that completion of this particular project was potentially damaging for their respective reputations and so it was simply filed. Figure 25 on the next page shows the plate in its unfinished state with the completed outline and some etched detail.

²⁰³ Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, pp. 194-195; illustrated on p. 435

²⁰⁴ John Nichols and George Steevens, *The Genuine Works of William Hogarth* (London, 1817), I, pp. 311-320

²⁰⁵ BL Add. MS 22394, quoted in Paulson, *Hogarth*, III, p. 428

²⁰⁶ Nichols and Steevens, *The Genuine Works of William Hogarth*, III, p. 174



Figure 25 “Sigismunda”, engraved in outline and partially etched by James Basire after William Hogarth (1764), actual size 454 mm x 412 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Large-scale society portraits

James Basire graduated to the status of a recognised engraver of portrait paintings on a larger scale during the 1760s, but on a selective basis. The vast majority of this type of work was executed at this time by mezzotint specialists, in order to benefit from this technique’s gentler, tonal effects. However, Basire was asked to complete five such society portraits using a mixture of line engraving and etching. The explanation for the relatively unusual use of traditional engraving techniques in this context may, in the first

example, lie in the conservative nature of the patron. This portrait comprised a seated representation of “Colonel John Campbell, who succeeded to the Dukedom of Argyll in April 1761”, after a painting by Jonathan Richardson the elder.²⁰⁷ In the other four cases, the use of line engraving may have been determined by a combination of a requirement for greater print runs and a personal connection between the engraver and the original artist and/or sitter.

Basire’s favourite among his society portraits seems to have been his engraving of Reynolds’s full-length likeness of Charles Pratt, “Lord Camden, From the Picture in Guildhall”. This was an unusual commission for a number of reasons. First of all, Reynolds closely controlled the engraving of his portraits, which were almost invariably entrusted to a small group of mezzotint engravers, such as James MacArdell, until the Irishman’s untimely death in 1765, and thereafter to the likes of James Watson and Valentine Green. Only a small portion of the painter’s output was engraved in line. Secondly, James Basire did not as a rule work with the major commercial print- and booksellers, such as John Boydell, who was the publisher of this print. In fact, his only other work for Boydell was the 1770 historical print, “Pylades and Orestes”, after Benjamin West.²⁰⁸ Thirdly, Reynolds’s 1764 portrait had already been engraved in mezzotint by John Gottfried Haid, as well as in line by Thomas Cook and Simon Ravenet, Boydell’s regular, contracted engraver.

One explanation for this seemingly redundant additional engraving of Camden’s portrait may have been Basire’s personal attraction to this subject. Charles Pratt was a close family friend of James Stuart, a relationship which led to the architect’s creation of both a “Lantern of Demosthenes” for his garden and a “Tower of the Winds” for that of his daughter.²⁰⁹ As Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, Pratt had freed John Wilkes in 1763 and publicly condemned the use of general warrants. He was thus widely viewed as a defender of private liberties. Stuart was also a friend of Wilkes, who stayed at the artist’s house while technically an outlaw on a fleeting visit to London in 1766. Finally, Stuart and Basire publicly shared ideals of liberty which they put into practice in their works and public dealings, as will be further explored in the last sections of this chapter.

The three remaining large-scale historical portraits produced by Basire over the next 15 years also seem to have had a similar element of personal motivation behind them. Two of these were based on portraits by Benjamin Wilson, with whom Basire maintained close relations at various levels. Wilson lived a few doors down from the engraver on Great Queen Street, where he had moved into Godfrey Kneller’s former house and thus associated himself with the leading portrait painter of the Augustan Age. Wil-

²⁰⁷ National Portrait Gallery, Collection number NPG D32570

²⁰⁸ Other rare exceptions to this rule include Basire’s engravings of the “Plan of Algiers in Barbary, with the soundings near the Batteries” and “North East view of the City, Mole, Fortifications, & Port of Algiers in Barbary” for Richard Ball after Robert Wilkins. They were exhibited uniquely at the rival Society of Artists in 1776

²⁰⁹ Kerry Bristol, ‘The Social World of James “Athenian” Stuart’, chapter 4 of Weber Soros ed., *James “Athenian” Stuart 1713-1788*, pp. 174-175

son was one of the most active fellows of the Royal Society, where Basire was appointed official engraver in 1771, and they would work together on a number of prints of a scientific nature.²¹⁰ Basire and Wilson also co-signed another smaller, portrait of Thomas Gray shortly after the poet's death in 1771.²¹¹ The latter engraving also hints at a possible common political agenda shared by Basire and Wilson, as a miniature lyre was added to Mason's drawing under the laurel wreath framing Gray's head. The lyre can be interpreted as a symbol of poetry, but in a contemporary context would also have suggested the political symbolism of contemporary "liberty prints", as subject which will be examined in more detail below.²¹²

The two larger-scale portraits on which Wilson and Basire worked together were entitled: "Sir George Savile Bart." and "Lady Stanhope, as the Fair Penitent" and were probably executed at approximately the same time, as they are dated 1770 and 1771. They stand out among Wilson's other portraits both in terms of their subject matter and the engraving techniques used. Wilson invariably required his scientific works to be engraved in a mixture of etching and line engraving, depending on their content. In the case of portraits, however, he used the same pool of mezzotint engravers as his rival, Joshua Reynolds, including MacArdell, Edward Fisher and Richard Houston. He must therefore have had a particular reason to work with a line engraver, and specifically, Basire, on these portraits. This may have been in part because Wilson believed that there was a commercial opportunity to sell a longer print run than would be possible with a mezzotint, and so more than compensate the additional expense of line engraving.

Another potential reason for the collaboration with Basire on these two portraits is that they had particular significance for Wilson, and he thus wished personally to etch part of the paintings, and then work together with his friend and neighbour on their finishing. This theory would be supported by the particularly elaborate set of attributions on the portrait of Sir George Savile, which are signed not only as "Painted by Benjamin Wilson", but also as "Engraved & Etched by B.W. and Mr. Basire". In other words, the two artists wished publicly to announce that this was a joint project (see Figure 26 on the next page).

²¹⁰ Wilson, Benjamin Wilson, "New Experiments upon the Leyden Phial, Respecting the Termination of Conductors", *Philosophical Transactions*, XLIV (1778), p.1012; Benjamin Wilson, *An Account of Experiments made at the Pantheon, on the Nature and Use of Conductors* (printed for J. Nourse, London, 1778); Benjamin Wilson, *A short view of electricity* (printed for C. Nourse, London, 1780), facing p. 26

²¹¹ This plate was also used as a frontispiece to, William Mason, *The Poems of Mr. Gray. To which are prefixed Memoirs of his Life and Writings* (London, 1775). The inscription reads: "Thomas Gray. W. Mason & B. Wilson Vivi memores delineaverunt". Mason had also privately commissioned Basire to design his personal bookplate

²¹² Images of the drawing and the related engraving can be seen on the website of the National Portrait Gallery, references NPG 425 and NPG D14054

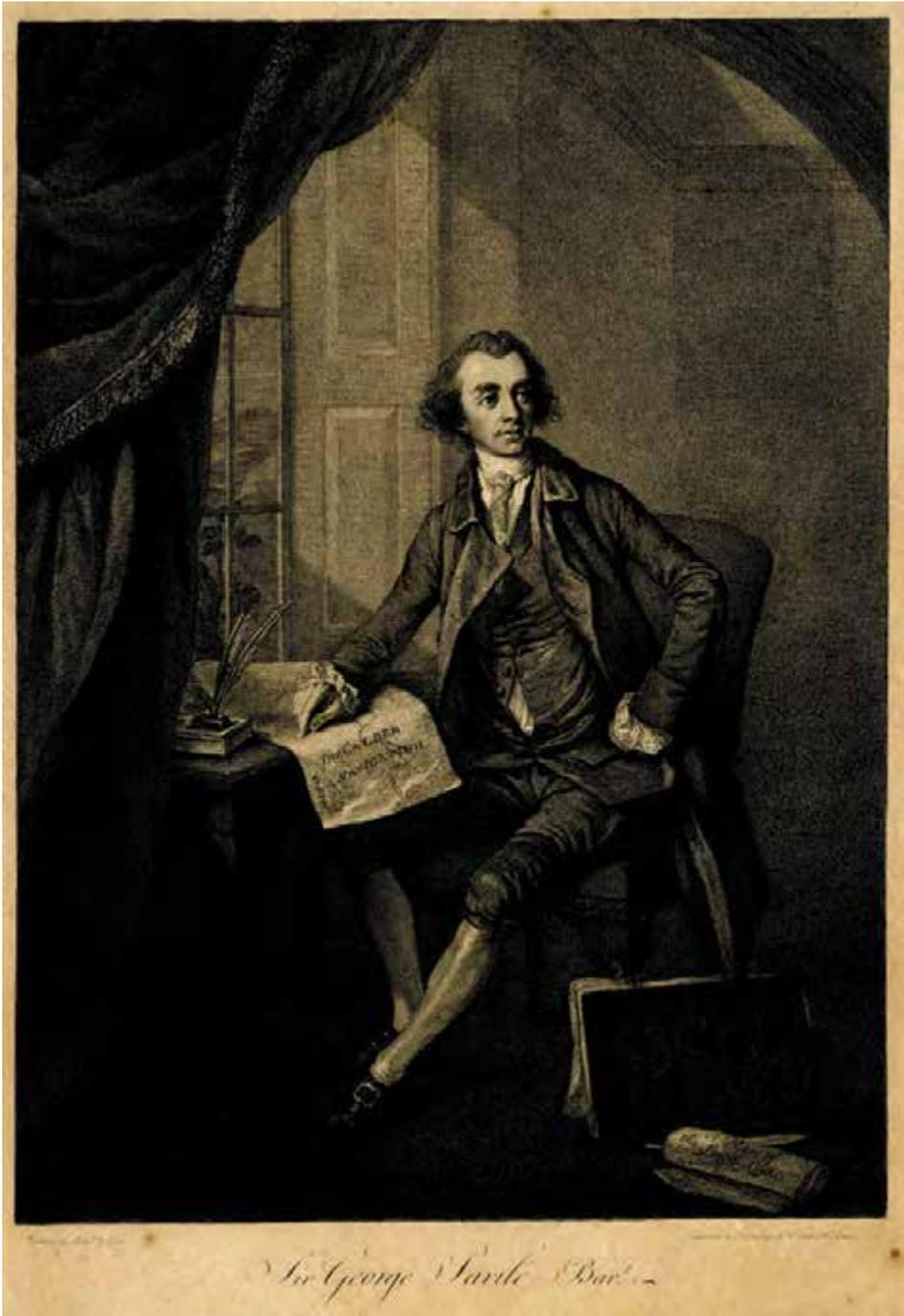


Figure 26 “Sir George Savile Bart”, engraved and etched by Benjamin Wilson and James Basire after Benjamin Wilson (1770), actual size 490 mm x 339 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

This print showed Savile sitting at his desk by a window pointing to some of his political achievements. He was a prominent and courageous parliamentarian of markedly liberal views, who had also criticised the use of general warrants, and then gone on to show understanding for the position of the rebelling American colonists vis-à-vis the British crown. Savile was therefore a politician whose moral position would have coincided with those both of Wilson and of Basire. Wilson's nineteenth-century biographer specifically mentions that this portrait, together with own paintings of Earl Camden and those of two leading Whig politicians, the first Earl Harcourt and the second Marquess of Rockingham, were considered his most successful.²¹³

Wilson's portrait of Lady Stanhope probably had even more commercial potential than that of Savile, as it reflected a perfect celebrity story. Lady Stanhope was unhappily married to the dying Sir William Stanhope. It was generally known that Edward, the Duke of York and younger brother of King George III, was in love with her. And, to cap it all, this portrait showed her ladyship playing the part of Calista in costume against the Duke's Lothario in the Duke's own theatre.²¹⁴ This portrait was, however, also relevant to Wilson's own life, as he was, among his other talents, the manager of the Duke of York's theatre until his patron's death in 1767. He was therefore personally involved in the production of this play and the real-life dramas which surrounded it. The expense and effort of intensively etching and engraving this large portrait to give the effects of shading which were much easier to obtain from mezzotint must therefore have resulted from a personal commitment by the artist to this work. It is noteworthy that the intense tonal effects achieved by Wilson and Basire on both this picture and that of Savile can easily be mistaken for a mezzotint when viewed from only a short distance.

The last large-scale society portrait signed by Basire was his 1780 print, entitled "Sir James Burrow, Fellow of the Royal Society, & of the Society of Antiquaries of London". This was based on one of three portraits by Arthur Devis of Burrow, a leading jurist who in this case is pictured posing in his magnificent robes as Master of the Crown Office. Like Wilson, Devis was Basire's neighbour on Great Queen Street, where he lived with his large family. He exhibited at the Free Society of Artists for twenty years, as did his brother and two of his sons, all of whom were closely involved with both Basire and James Stuart in the management of the Society.²¹⁵ This engraving is of particular note for the improvements made by the engraver to the composition and decorative detail of the underlying painting. Burrow's figure has been enlarged relative to the background so that it fills the print. His head is directly placed within the doorway behind him, which enhances the contrast and so lightens his face features. The engraver also significantly enhanced the detail of Burrow's robes and completely redesigned the Gothic architecture which acted as a background (Figure 27 on the next page).

²¹³ Rev. Herbert Randolph, *Life of General Sir Robert Wilson* (London, 1882), volume I, p. 15

²¹⁴ Richard and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, esq.*, 3rd ed. (London, 1856), pp. 75-77, 95-96

²¹⁵ Basire and Arthur Devis junior also collaborated on the frontispiece portrait of Samuel Pegge in the latter's, *The Form of Cury, a roll of Ancient English Cookery*, which was printed by John Nichols in 1780

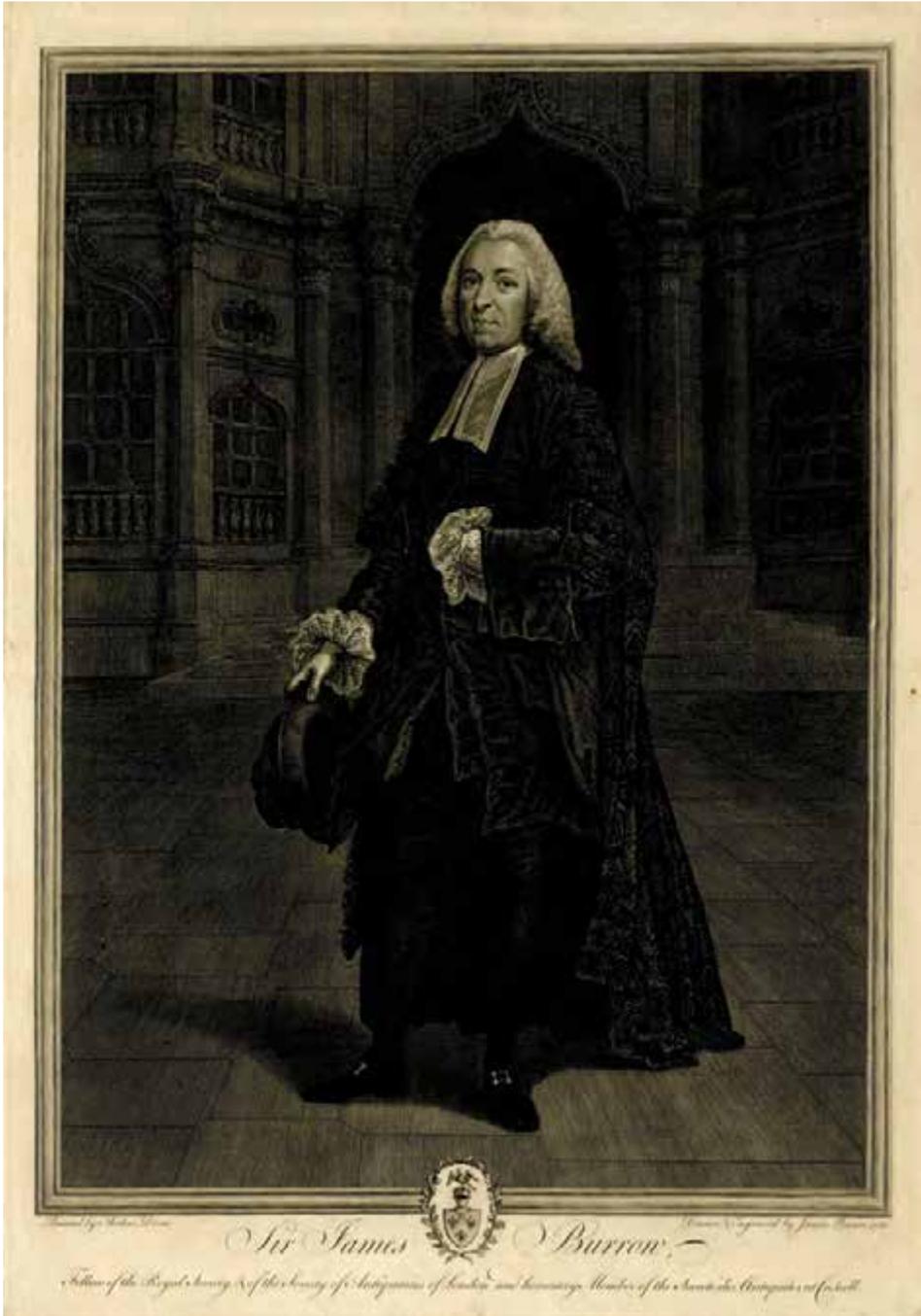


Figure 27 “Sir James Burrow”, drawn and engraved by James Basire after Arthur Devis (1780), actual size 550 mm x 385 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

These changes, which must have been agreed in advance with the sitter and the painter, explain Basire's full, extended signature: "Drawn & Engraved by James Basire, 1780". Basire's particular care in recomposing this portrait can also be interpreted as a sign of gratitude for Burrow's personal role in his appointment as engraver to the Royal Society.²¹⁶

There is further evidence that Basire himself, as well as his descendants, regarded these great portraits as among the high points of his career. As already noted, these prints contained full or extended signatures. The portraits of Camden and Savile were exhibited in 1767 and 1771 respectively. It is also almost certain that the prints of Lady Stanhope and Sir James Burrow are to be identified respectively with "A whole-length of a lady", which was exhibited in 1772, and the "Whole-length portrait of a gentleman of the law", a proof of which was displayed by the Free Society of Artists in 1780. All four of these prints were also among those mentioned by Nichols in his short biography of the engraver.

The most telling evidence, however, for the personal connection to James Basire of these portraits and their importance to his family derives from information in the catalogue of James Basire (II)'s prints which were sold by auction in 1823, following this Basire's death. The family's private collection included both original drawings and a remarkable number of proofs and final prints relating to the portraits of Lord Camden, Lady Stanhope and Sir George Savile. In addition to this, there were only two engravings mentioned in the catalogue as having hung in the Basire house in their gilt frames: the historical engraving, "Pylades and Orestes", and the portrait of Lord Camden.²¹⁷ It is also no coincidence that the prints of Lord Camden, Lady Stanhope and Savile were among the few items which Basire's grandson, James Basire (III), was able to buy in at the auction, while his uncle, John Cox, bought the two framed portraits. These may have returned to the Basire family two years later, when Cox died and his sister, Mary Basire, the widow of James Basire (II), inherited some of her brother's pictures.²¹⁸

Portraits and politics

A number of Basire's portraits from the period in which he was still establishing his practice, were clearly primarily commercial and opportunist in nature. These included not only the large-scale portrait of Colonel John Campbell, but also the smaller-scale rococo prints of Balmerino and Kilmarnock, the Jacobite aristocrats executed in 1746; a matching octavo portrait of the Royalist politician, Sir Henry Slingsby;²¹⁹ an almanac

²¹⁶ Royal Society, Council minutes of 8 November 1771

²¹⁷ Sothebys, *A Catalogue of the Collection of Prints of the late Richard Earlom, Esq...., also the miscellaneous prints, etc. of James Basire Esq....* (London, 13 May 1823), items 179-180, 249, 251, 254 and 259. The purchasers are named in pencil annotations in the copy of the catalogue at the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum

²¹⁸ The National Archives, Prob 11/1706, will of John Cox, copper-plate printer

²¹⁹ An image can be viewed on the website of the National Portrait Gallery, reference NPG D28999

frontispiece of Pitt the Elder dated 1759;²²⁰ and the print of Queen Charlotte on her marriage to King George III in 1761.²²¹

After the accession of King George, however, when the long supremacy of the Whigs ended and John Wilkes became a public symbol of supposedly lost liberties, Basire seems to have become increasingly choosy in terms of the content of the portraits to which he set his name. The foregoing analysis of Basire's large-scale-portrait engravings and of the smaller likeness of Thomas Gray produced in collaboration with Benjamin Wilson hint at a possible liberal political agenda in relation to some of these prints. This agenda is overt in the so-called "liberty prints" which Basire engraved for Thomas Hollis, as well as in a number of other aspects of the engraver's work and life.

John Nichols specifically mentioned that Basire was in Rome at the same time as Stuart, Reynolds and "Mr. Brand Hollis".²²² The latter gentleman was originally called Thomas Brand, but later adopted the name of his intimate friend, Thomas Hollis, after succeeding him as his heir. Thomas Hollis was a famous or infamous republican, depending on your point of view, who travelled with Brand in Italy in the late 1740s and early 1750s. It is not known whether Basire actually met Brand and/or Hollis while in Italy, but Hollis became an important patron of the engraver from as early as 1758, and employed him on a number of occasions until his death in 1774. The most prominent plates produced by Basire for Hollis comprised portraits in the form of so-called "liberty prints", which were an important element in the propaganda war which Hollis waged within Europe and across the Atlantic in support of his republican ideals. These small-scale prints were well-known, as they not only circulated individually as presents, but were also used as frontispieces in some of Hollis's favourite books, which he had specially bound and printed for circulation on an international basis.

The independently-wealthy Hollis seems to have found the true purpose of his life as a liberal political activist by 1758, when he commissioned Cipriani to design 17 liberty emblems which were used on tools to decorate bindings of the books which he liked to present to his international network of contacts. In the same year, Hollis asked the Italian artist to create a drawing for Hollis of the republican martyr, Algernon Sidney, which would be filled with liberty symbols and then given out to Basire for engraving.²²³ The focal point of the final print was a simple portrait head in profile, but it was surrounded by a wreath above a liberty cap and decorated with an inscription quoting the ambassador's condemnation of tyranny, i.e. royalty, and specifically the Stuart dynasty. The lettering on the print is in the typical majuscule style used by Hollis in other publications to suggest Latin inscriptions and therefore Roman republican ideals.

Cipriani's and Basire's portrait of Sidney was subsequently used by Hollis as the frontispiece to his anonymous 1763 edition of Sidney's libertarian thesis, *Discourses con-*

²²⁰ *Mr. Weatherwise's pocket-almanac, (on an entire new plan.) for 1760*, frontispiece

²²¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917, accession number, 17.3.756.1244

²²² Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, p. 717

²²³ W.H. Bond, *Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn. A Whig and his Books* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 58-77

cerning government, which gave it an even greater circulation.²²⁴ It is arguable Basire could have refused to accept this commission or decided not to sign the print. As such, he could have maintained a low political profile in emulation of the tactic deployed by Samuel Johnson, who apparently “slipt away, and escaped it” when asked by Hollis to draft an advertisement for the Society of Arts.²²⁵ Basire, in contrast, clearly had no intention of escaping association with Hollis and his ideals, and this fact was confirmed repeatedly and even more visibly in the following years.

In 1765, Basire collaborated with Cipriani in a potentially more controversial, political portrait. This was a similar, side-view bust, but this time of the contemporary republican historian, Catharine Macaulay (Figure 28).

Macaulay appeared in this print coiffed in a Roman style and surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves over a Roman coin. Hollis himself described the symbolism of the print with his characteristic, passionate combination of classical learning and political idealism:²²⁶

“The author is represented in the print in the character of Libertas on the Roman denarius stricken by Brutus and Cassius after the exit of Julius Caesar, the tyrant, and the reverse of that denarius sheweth those heroes...going to sacrifice to Liberty”

It is perhaps unsurprising that the portraits of Sidney and Macaulay were not exhibited in public at the Free Society of Artists in the tense political atmosphere of the first years of George III’s reign. Macaulay herself was nevertheless clearly pleased with her likeness and comfortable with its symbolism. She allowed this plate to be used as a frontispiece to her history of the Stuart period, a work which was published in 1767 and predictably divided the political establishment of the time.²²⁷

Basire did publicly exhibit two liberty prints which he engraved for Hollis, but these exhibitions occurred at later dates when they could reasonably have been displayed without provoking political debate and possibly uproar. In 1767, the engraver showed a disembodied portrait of the philosopher, John Locke, within a simple roundel and with no visible liberty symbols. Then, in 1776, when Wilkes was already in the process of becoming an establishment figure as Lord Mayor of London, Basire exhibited a portrait of the roundhead poet, Andrew Marvell, who had been rehabilitated at the Restoration by King Charles II. This print did have a number of similarities with that of Algernon Sidney, as Marvell’s head was placed above a liberty cap and was both crowned by an oak wreath and surrounded by a laurel wreath. However, unlike the Sidney portrait, the inscription in Roman characters was not political, but recorded in unusual detail the fact that James Basire drew and engraved the portrait in 1776 from a painting in the possession of Thomas Hollis.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121

²²⁵ W.H. Bond, “Thomas Hollis and Samuel Johnson”, p. 84, in James Engell, ed., *Johnson and his Age* (Harvard, 1984), pp. 83-105

²²⁶ Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings* (London, 2008), p. 98

²²⁷ Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Elevation of the House of Hanover* (5 volumes, London, 1763-1771), III (London, 1767), frontispiece



Figure 28 Portrait of Catharine Macaulay engraved by James Basire after Giovanni Battista Cipriani (1765), actual size 163 mm x 151 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

This date of 1776 is striking, as Hollis was by this time already deceased. He had left London, possibly because of fears for his life, in 1770, and had suddenly dropped dead on his estates in Dorset in 1774. Basire may well have visited his neighbour before he left London or have gone to his house in his absence in order to copy the portrait. He may also have dropped in to discuss it with Hollis at his country home while working on plates for Hutchins's *History of Dorset* in the early 1770s. But, it must have been Hollis's heir and fellow-traveller, Thomas Brand Hollis, who arranged with Basire the publication

of the portrait with a special inscription for the 1776 edition of Marvell's works.²²⁸ It must also have been Brand Hollis who approved it for public display in that same year.

This set of facts implies that there was a wider and longer-term personal friendship between Basire, Hollis and Brand Hollis, and this is confirmed by evidence of subsequent collaboration between Brand Hollis and Basire. Francis Blackburne's *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, which were published by John Nichols in 1780, contained six engravings by Basire of Roman funeral monuments from Hollis's collection, plus two prints of coins, which were also drawn by Basire.²²⁹ The coins could have been copied in Basire's studio, but he must have visited Hollis's home to draw the monuments. John Disney's 1808 *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis*, then included two engravings of neoclassical interiors at Brand Hollis's estate, the Hyde, near Ingatestone in Essex, after designs dated 1761 by William Chambers. These plates are probably by the first James Basire, while the same volume contained prints of antique sarcophagi and contemporary views of the Hyde which must have been by Basire's son, James Basire (II).²³⁰ There was thus a depth and longevity in the relationships between these like-minded patrons and engravers which would become a feature of the Basire family business.

It may seem a stretch to say that Basire shared Hollis's republican ideals or at least his quest for individual liberty based on their cooperation on the "liberty prints" and their extended personal connections, but this theory is supported by further evidence not only from Basire's output of portraits, but also from details from his private life.

Basire's seemingly odd presentation to the Society of Antiquaries of his engravings of Hogarth caricatures in the same context as a small portrait of George III's new Queen seems less odd when seen in the wider context of gifts of prints by Basire and Hollis to the Society in the same period. The minutes of the meeting of the Society of Antiquaries held on 1 July 1762 recorded that Thomas Hollis himself presented four more portraits, including Basire's engraving of Algernon Sidney and an earlier version of the portrait of Andrew Marvell. This was an openly political gesture by Hollis and was understandably passed over in the minutes without any mention of a discussion. The minutes of earlier meetings, however, described in more detail the gifts from Basire, including two likenesses of the poet, James Thomson, and it is possible that neither the Secretary nor the fellows picked up, on some political allusions in these presents which they might not have expected from their engraver.

James Basire's two portraits of Thomson after paintings of the poet by William Aikman and John Patoun seem to have been commissioned specifically as frontispieces for Andrew Millar's *Works of James Thomson* in 1761.²³¹ However, it is notable that

²²⁸ Capt. Edward Thomson, *The Works of Andrew Marvell Esq.* (London, 1776), frontispiece to the first volume

²²⁹ Francis Blackburne, *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis, Esq. F.R. and A.S.A* (London, 1780), facing pp. 834, 837

²³⁰ John Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis* (London, 1808), title page vignette and full-page plates bound at the end

²³¹ *The Works of James Thomson, with his Last Corrections and Improvements*, 4 volumes (London, 1762), frontispieces

both plates were engraved with much more detail and a greater element of line engraving than was customary for frontispieces, and that they were uniquely inscribed as “decorated and engraved” by Basire. The Aikman portrait was conventionally embellished with adoring *putti* bringing garlands and other gifts, but the Patoun portrait is full of Hollis’s liberty symbols: a bust of Britannia with a trident and liberty cap, one putto holding a Roman broad sword impaling a royal crown, and another with a lyre and an olive branch topped with another liberty cap (Figure 29 on the next page). An idea of the extent of the engraver’s adaptation of the lost original portrait can be gained from a comparison with a surviving copy of the painting which is included on the following page as Figure 30.

It is not known whether Millar asked Hollis to advise him on the design of this frontispiece,²³² but it is Basire who publicly described himself as the creator of this aggressively symbolic decoration. Basire apparently felt sufficiently comfortable to exhibit these prints in 1761, probably on the basis that Thomson was now known as the creator of the *Seasons*, and not as a political propagandist. His poem entitled *Liberty*, a paean to an international republican ideal, had flopped a generation earlier, and had been all but forgotten by the public. It was not, however, forgotten by Hollis’s circle, and it is prominently quoted on the title page of the 1776 edition of Marvell’s work, immediately after Basire’s frontispiece portrait.²³³

There is a final argument from Basire’s private sphere in favour of a political interpretation of Basire’s acceptance of commissions for certain large-scale portraits, for Hollis’s liberty prints, his decoration of Patoun’s portrait of James Thomson, and his cheeky presentation of this to the Society of Antiquaries. This consists in Basire’s choice of certain of his own childrens’ names, which were not selected by chance and were not derived from within the family. His first- and second-born sons were both named Richard Stuart Basire, and when these had died in infancy, he named another son Richard Woollett Basire. His sons were therefore named after his patrons and friends, Richard Seale and/or Richard Dalton, James Stuart and William Woollett. His choice of girls’ names was, however, even more intriguing. Basire named one of his daughters, Ann *Sydney* Basire, after Algernon Sydney, and another daughter, Grace *Graham* Basire. “Graham” was Catharine Macaulay’s married name, following her marriage to a much younger second husband in 1778. Polite society was horrified by this marriage, and her enemies were only too ready to associate her supposedly low morals with her liberal politics. Macaulay, however, retained the support of her political friends to the end, and these apparently also included James Basire.

²³² Bond, *Thomas Hollis*, p. 197

²³³ Capt. Edward Thompson, *The works of Andrew Marvell, Esq., poetical, controversial, and political*, 3 volumes (London, 1776), I, frontispiece



Figure 29 Portrait of James Thomson, decorated and engraved by James Basire after John Patoun (1761), actual size 273 mm x 200 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 30 James Thomson in a copy of the lost portrait by John Patoun (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

This section has necessarily focused on a few themes, mostly artistic, personal and political, related to the many portraits which James Basire (I) engraved in the first half of his career. The portraits produced in the second half of his career displayed a similar selectivity and emphasis on relationships, but rather within the context of the overlapping membership of the Royal Society and Society of Antiquaries. The portraits engraved for the Society of Antiquaries included details within large-scale historical plates, or likenesses on funeral monuments, seals and mediaeval illuminations. They also occurred in the

Society's official publications, such as *Vetusta Monumenta* and *Archaeologia*, as well as in the private publications of some of its most prominent members such as those of Richard Gough,²³⁴ Thomas Pennant,²³⁵ and the Reverend John Watson.²³⁶ John Nichols, printer to the Antiquaries and the Royal Society, commissioned portraits from Basire not only for the works he authored, but also for those he printed and published, including a considerable number for the *Gentleman's Magazine*.²³⁷ Many of these individual portraits also circulated separately and were frequently used by collectors infected by the contemporary craze for the extra-illustration of travel and history books. Basire was, however, never a mass-producer of engraved portraits and these remained throughout his life a personally important, but subsidiary part of his output.

3.5 THE MILITANT ARTIST

A depiction of James Basire both as an artist and as a man would not be complete without an account of the significant time, energy and expense which he devoted to the charitable causes related to and promoted by artists during his lifetime. Some of these were specifically related to the promotion of art and artists, such as the St. Martin's Lane Academy and its mission to train talented youngsters. Some charities were of a more broad-based nature, such as hospitals, including the famous Foundling Hospital. Other initiatives attempted to combine benefits to artists themselves with the development of society as a whole, such as the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. It was the splintering of this body that led to the creation of other societies entirely focussed on artists, including the Free Society of Artists, the Incorporated Society of Artists and, arguably, also the Royal Academy.

Hogarth was the undisputed leader of the earlier stages of these artists' movements, particularly during the period 1735-1755. He had founded the St. Martin's Lane Academy in 1735, as a successor to the drawing school of his father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill, which itself was a successor to the school established in Great Queen Street by Sir Godfrey Kneller. Hogarth had been elected a governor of the Foundling Hospital in 1746 and, on the finalisation of its buildings in 1754, organised its decoration by the leading painters of the day.²³⁸ Even Richard Dalton was caught up in the general enthusiasm for the hospital, its charges and the high society interest which surrounded it, and

²³⁴ Nichols's biography specifically mentions the frontispiece to volume I of, *Britannia by William Camden*, edited by Richard Gough (London, 1789)

²³⁵ Thomas Pennant, *The Journey from Chester to London* (London, 1782), plates 18, 19, 21; *Some Account of London* (London, 1792), facing pages 96, 389

²³⁶ *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey and their Descendants to the Present Time* (Warrington, 1782), volume I, pp. 8-9, and the frontispiece of the author mentioned in Nichols's biography

²³⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine* (1785), LV, II, p. 713 (Sir Richard Shelley); (1790), LX, II, p. 879 ("Sir Francis Drake"); and numerous further historical personages in the magazine's editions between 1792 and 1797

²³⁸ R.H. Nichols, F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 251-2

presented two casts of classical busts of Roman emperors in the same year.²³⁹ James Basire, who was then in his twenties, was also involved on the periphery of this fashionable charity from an early stage, as he is recorded as attending the artists' dinner at the Foundling Hospital on 5 November 1757, together with twelve other engravers.²⁴⁰

Basire's early commitment to the training of artistically-gifted children is evidenced by the fact that he taught at Hogarth's Academy from at least 1754, since he is listed as a member of "the Academy of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, etc in London" in the subscription list for a drawing manual published in that year by the perspective teacher, John Joshua Kirby.²⁴¹ The members of the Academy were marked by an asterisk in Kirby's subscription list and numbered twenty eight artists. These comprised eleven painters, seven engravers, three sculptors, three architects, two drawing masters and one gold chaser. The other copper plate engravers mentioned with Basire as members of the Academy were Edward Rooker, Charles Grignion, Johann Sebastian Müller, Anthony Walker and the mezzotint specialist, James MacArdell. The four line engravers were substantially older than James Basire, and all worked together with him either on Dalton's *Musaeum Graecum et Aegypticum* or on Stuart's *Antiquities of Athens* during the same period. Since Dalton is also marked as a member of the Academy, and Stuart became involved from his return to London in 1755, it is clear that this was an important centre not just for teaching, but also for artists' networking. Indeed, the Academy is now typically named after St. Martin's Lane, because this was the location of Slaughter's Coffee House, where the artists first met and continued to meet socially.

The next important milestone for the organisation of artists for charitable purposes was the foundation by William Shipley of the Society of Arts in 1754. Unsurprisingly, Hogarth was not a founder member of this organisation, given that the driving force behind it was a provincial drawing master and it seemed to have a hopelessly ambitious programme. It aimed to use prizes as "encouragements to the liberal sciences, to the polite arts, and to every useful manufactory", and so "to render Great Britain the school of instruction, as it is already the centre of traffic to the greatest part of the known world".²⁴² Hogarth nonetheless became an early joiner in 1755 when it became clear that this new Society had momentum, and his own discussions with the Society of Dilettanti concerning the potential funding of a formal, public academy of art had collapsed.²⁴³ Shipley's heady mix of patriotism, commercial ambition, artistic and scientific achievement, together with material incentives, caught the spirit of the age to such an extent that the Society already had 150 members by December 1755 and many of these were from the upper echelons of society. By the early 1760s membership was in the

²³⁹ Matthew Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame: the Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760-1791* (New Haven and London, 2005), p. 11

²⁴⁰ Uglow, *Hogarth*, pp. 601-2

²⁴¹ Kirby, *The Perspective of Architecture*, volume I

²⁴² Theobald, James, *A Concise Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce* (London, 1763), pp. 11-12

²⁴³ Paulson, *Hogarth. Art and Politics*, III, p. 196

thousands, and Shipley had succeeded in obtaining public recognition of the idea that drawing was the basis not only of the polite arts, but was also a critical skill in manufactures and technology.

Richard Dalton and Robert Strange had been requested as early as January 1755 to judge the first prizes offered for drawings, but it was James Stuart who was to become the Society's most energetic member among the artists. Stuart was another early joiner of the Society of Arts in June 1756. He sat on at least thirty committees, and it has been calculated that he personally nominated some 7% of the Society's more than two thousand members by 1764.²⁴⁴ It was Stuart who proposed James Basire as a member on 22 November 1758, and the engraver was duly elected on 29 November. At the following two weekly meetings, Stuart proceeded to propose two of his best known architectural patrons, Lord Lyttleton of Hagley Hall, and Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the leader of London's "blue stockings".²⁴⁵ Stuart's nominating activity may seem to imply that his input to the Society was mainly social and commercial, but it was also openly political. Unlike Samuel Johnson, Stuart was unafraid to work closely with Thomas Hollis, whom he had befriended in Venice in early 1751,²⁴⁶ and it is generally known that his political ideals were just as radical as those of Hollis. Robert Adam's brother, James, even cynically suggested that Stuart only suppressed his "Arguments in favour of Democracy" as long as he was in search of a sinecure.²⁴⁷

Against this background, it is unsurprising that Hollis, Stuart and Basire found the opportunity to cooperate at the Society of Arts on works directly or indirectly intended to promote their common liberal ideas.²⁴⁸ In 1758, Hollis and Stuart collaborated on the design of medals, one of which was to show "Liberty with her attributes...and the Barons obtaining the Magna Charta".²⁴⁹ Another medal, which was subsequently engraved by Basire for the title page of the Society's year book of 1760, included some of the less provocative emblems created by Cipriani for Hollis, such as a wreath and an image of Britannia holding an olive branch.²⁵⁰ However, the meaning of such symbols would have been clear to those in the know and were ready to recognise them. Hollis even provided a political dimension to Stuart's masterwork on its publication in 1762, in that he had an appliqué plaque designed for several special presentation copies of the *An-*

²⁴⁴ Bristol, 'The Social World of James "Athenian" Stuart', in Susan Weber Soros ed., *James "Athenian" Stuart*, pp. 152-4

²⁴⁵ RSA/AD/MA/100/12/01/03 *Minutes of the Society, 1758-1759*. In order to avoid an undue number of footnotes, references are made from this point to the dates of the meetings per the minutes

²⁴⁶ Bond, "Thomas Hollis and Samuel Johnson", p. 91, in Engell ed., *Samuel Johnson and his Age*

²⁴⁷ Catherine Arbuthnott, "The Life of James 'Athenian' Stuart", in Weber Soros ed., *James "Athenian" Stuart*, pp. 67 and 79

²⁴⁸ Bond, "Thomas Hollis and Samuel Johnson", p. 91, in Engell ed., *Samuel Johnson and his Age*

²⁴⁹ John Lawrence Abbott, "Thomas Hollis and the Society", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 119 (Dec. 1970-Nov. 1971), p. 714

²⁵⁰ Bond, *Thomas Hollis*, pp. 91-92

tiquities of Athens, which showed Athena together with some of Hollis's more specialist republican motifs, including an owl perched on a palm branch.²⁵¹

It might be assumed that the younger engraver became a member of the Society of Arts because of his friendship with or expected patronage from the likes of Thomas Hollis and James Stuart. However, the records of the Society show that he was also an enthusiastic attendee of committee meetings of various types in the two-year period from his election to the Society until the death of his first wife in early 1762. By the time of the summer vacation in 1759, he is recorded in the minutes of the Society as having attended at least ten meetings. Predictably, most of these related to sessions which were focused on the polite arts, and especially on engraving. They included committees to judge prizes for drawing, decide on subjects for history painting, as well as on motifs for engraving, etching, and engraving in intaglio and on medallions. However, the engraver seems also to have been driven by curiosity to attend a committee on colonies and trade on 3 February 1759, and a committee discussing prizes to be offered in relation to the herring trade and ships' blocks on 16 April. These must have been exciting times, when a young engraver was able to rub shoulders at committee meetings with the likes of the Duke of Richmond, Benjamin Franklin or Sir Nathaniel Curzon of Kedleston Hall, yet another of Stuart's patrons.

Basire and Stuart were both closely involved in the next significant move by the group of artists within the Society of Arts. This was initiated on 12 November 1759, when a "General Meeting of all Artists" met at the Turk's Head Tavern in Soho, where Joshua Reynolds and Samuel Johnson would found their literary society four years later.²⁵² The attendees, who were substantially the same as the members of the St. Martin's Lane Academy, resolved to organize a first public art exhibition, which would be held at the Great Room of the Society of Arts in April 1760. This was a logical next step after the resounding success of the semi-public, permanent exhibition of works donated to and displayed in the Foundling Hospital. The main committee of the Society of Arts decided to appoint James Basire and James Stuart to the Exhibition Committee on 5 March on the understanding that neither of these artists would exhibit that year, and so would have no conflicts of interest in the choice or hanging of exhibits. This gave them little more than six weeks to finalise preparation, since 21 April was the opening date according to the "Catalogue of the Pictures, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, prints etc of the Present Artists at the Great Room of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce".

This first public exhibition explicitly included engravings, but was not intended by the Society as a commercial venture. Instead, the "Money arising from the Sale of these Catalogues will be given by the Artists immediately after the Exhibition to some public Charity." Subsequent events showed that the charitable philosophy of this first public

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57

²⁵² Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 5

exhibition was shared by Stuart and Basire as organisers, but not by the majority of the artists whose works were displayed. In fact, a serious split opened within the artists' movement only a few months after the exhibition.

The main reasons for the split among the artists were predictably related to power, prestige and money. The Society did not accept the artists' proposal to charge a one shilling entrance fee to the exhibition, even for charitable purposes, but would only agree to the payment of six pence for the optional purchase of catalogues. This decision would probably have been uncontroversial, if it had not been for the huge public success of the exhibition and the consequent sale of over 6,500 catalogues compared to the 1,000 originally printed. The sheer volume of money collected seems to have represented too much of a temptation for some, and the substantial profit from the sale was not all given to charity. Instead, certain of the artists apparently planned to use some of the proceeds to finance the long-planned public academy and so advance their own careers.²⁵³

It seems that the most established artists participating in this first public exhibition also regretted its all-inclusive nature. The exhibits embraced works of all types from amateur drawings, through models and prints and portraits, to large history paintings. The exhibitors included not only some of the most famous artists of the day, but also aspiring artists and children who were competing for the Society's prizes. The arrangement of the works added insult to injury, since the public was not necessarily able to distinguish the great from the not so great, and in many cases assumed that established artists had been competing for and failed to win the prizes on offer. This first public exhibition was thus potentially counterproductive or even humiliating for those artists who were looking to use it to enhance their reputation.

Following discussions during the months which followed the 1760 exhibition, the Society of Arts refused to reform the organisation of future exhibitions in the interests of the more influential artists, and this resulted in the mounting of two rival shows in the spring of 1761. The exhibition at the Great Room of the Society continued the tradition of the previous year, and both Stuart and Basire remained loyal to its original conception. Stuart had accepted the office of Chairman of the Committee of Polite Arts of the Society on 31 March, four weeks before its opening, and again refrained from exhibiting. He was, however, represented both by Basire and by a Mr. Anderson, who exhibited a classical "Tripod, from an original design of Mr Stuart's". Basire, who was this time not directly involved in the organisation, exhibited eight works, which included his two engraved portraits of the poet James Thomson, a print of an antique bust from a private collection after a drawing by Cipriani, and topographical and architectural plates after drawings of classical antiquities by Stuart, mostly from the *Antiquities of Athens*.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 26

²⁵⁴ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 24

The catalogue for this second exhibition was printed by William Griffin of Fetter Lane, who was at this time master of James Basire's brother, Isaac James Basire. The candidates for premiums were now clearly marked and, as such, separated from the public exhibitors. Each catalogue was again sold for 6 shillings and contained the following wording: "The money arising from the sale of these catalogues will be given by the Artists immediately after the Exhibition to some public charity." This time, the money was donated in full after the exhibition and, according to notes in the copy of the catalogue in the library of the Society of Arts, James Basire was prominent among the artists who personally presented the money:²⁵⁵

"The exhibition produced, after all its expenses were paid, upwards of £150; which was appropriated in benefactions as follows: To Middlesex Hospital £50. To the British Lying-in Hospital £50. To the Asylum for Female Orphans £50, and the balance to poor artists."

"The money was handed in to the two first hospitals by Messrs. R. Pine, James Basire, Gabriel Mathias, Jared Leigh, and William Bellars, and to the last by Mr. Devis, who was elected a perpetual governor."

As if to celebrate their generosity, the exhibits by Robert Edge Pine, one of the most prominent painters to stay loyal to the exhibition sponsored by the Society of Arts, included a large painting of "The president and stewards of the Middlesex Hospital laying the foundation".

In the meantime, the seceding artists who exhibited at the Spring Garden could justify their actions in more material terms. Their venture had a greater attendance, was more profitable, and served to enhance their own public stature as the leading artists of the day. They doubled the price of catalogues to a full shilling in 1761, and then further increased their earnings from the following year by charging a shilling for admission per person. Their exhibition committees in the first years comprised most of the artists who had been prominent in the St. Martin's Lane Academy, including not only the engravers Edward Rooker, James McArdeall and Charles Grignion, but also the prime movers of the future Royal Academy, such as Richard Dalton, Joshua Reynolds, Joseph Wilton and William Chambers. Unfortunately for the engravers, these other artists would, in pursuit of their own interests, secede again within a few years, and thus leave these engravers and other "inferior" artists definitively out in the cold.²⁵⁶

James Basire and James Stuart continued loyally to support the Society of Arts and its exhibitions for some years. Basire resumed attending committees regularly from November 1762, including the main committee for the polite arts, of which he was one

²⁵⁵ "An Account of the Free Society of Artists compiled from 'Anecdotes of Painters' by Edward Edwards, A.R.A., and 'Patronage of British Art' by John Pye and the Catalogues themselves", in Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 332

²⁵⁶ Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, pp. 178-179

of the most frequent attendees.²⁵⁷ However, he did not attend after the spring of 1767, and he and Stuart were by this time focusing their organisational efforts increasingly on their smaller, less prestigious group of artists. This grouping had already been officially enrolled as a Society in 1762, and issued a printed prospectus. This declared that their institution was “founded on the sentiments of honour, compassion, and prudence, to be called 'A Free Society of Artists,' associated for the Relief of the Distressed and Decayed Brethren and their Widows and Children.” This wording clearly emphasized the more idealistic purpose of their association, and was designed to set it apart from that of their rivals, who were not yet organised in any official way.

It was perhaps this rival grouping of artists which started a rumour that the organisers of the exhibition at the Great Room of the Society of Arts in April 1763, including Basire, were themselves not living up to the noble sentiments expressed in the prospectus of the Free Society, and that they in their turn were improperly using the proceeds of the sale of catalogues. Jared Leigh, a landscape artist, who had become a leader of the Free Society, was therefore obliged to defend the characters of the artists involved in the organisation of this exhibition at an extraordinary meeting of the Society of Arts held on 12 March 1764. As a result of this, Basire and his associates were exonerated. The 1764 exhibition of the artists grouped within the Free Society then continued to be held “under the patronage of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce”. However, by the spring of 1765, the Free Society had also split definitively from the Society of Arts, and organised its own exhibition at newly-rented rooms in Maiden Lane, near Covent Garden.

The minutes of the Free Society, which are archived at the modern-day Royal Society of Arts, demonstrate that Basire and Stuart not only supported, but actually led this group over much of the next twenty years. They ensured that it remained true to its origins as an inclusive society, which exhibited a wide range of work by amateur, as well as professional artists, and covered the entire range of production from needlework to grand, historical paintings. The Free Society was particularly characterised by its family atmosphere. There were frequent exhibits by women, including miniature paintings, flower pieces, needlework and “work in hair”. Henry Morland and his now more famous son, George, were regular exhibitors. Three members of the Devis family exhibited, as did their apprentices, as well as four members of the Pingo family, who were the leading pattern drawers, seal engravers and medallists of the period. All of these families were also actively involved in committee meetings, the organisation of events and the general conduct of the Society.

James Basire himself was evidently considered by his peers as competent and reliable in money matters, as he was appointed honorary Treasurer of the Free Society during different periods, including in 1767, when the Society was revived for the first of

²⁵⁷ D.G.C. Allan and John L. Abbott, ed., *The Virtuoso Tribe of Arts and Sciences* (University of Georgia, 1992), pp. 99-101

several occasions. He took subscriptions at his home in Great Queen Street and personally ensured that the Society's funds were devoted to the needs of its members based on its original humanitarian mission. The exhibition catalogue in 1767 proudly confirmed that:

“From the Commencement of this Association, not a single Member, afflicted with sickness, &c., ever applied in vain; they have been relieved with, from three, five, ten to fifteen and twenty Guineas each.”

On one occasion, when Basire was chairing a general meeting of the Society on 18 April 1771, the minutes recorded that “the idle and dissolute merit reproof and not relief”. However, the minutes also record on several occasions that the engraver himself took time off from his business to visit those who needed relief. In the 1770s, when the Society was chronically short of funds, he even started advancing his own money to the needy. In the first half of 1777, he is reported as giving 3 guineas to Marianne Fillionere, a long-time exhibitor of flower pieces painted in water colours or made out of flowers, paper, paste and coloured wax. He even gave a further three guineas for her funeral as “an act of humanity”, according to the minutes of 7 July that year.

The minutes of the last ten years of the Free Society of Artists make sorry reading, but confirm the picture of James Basire and James Stuart as close friends and proud and independent-minded idealists. They were influential in the Society's ambitions to hire its own exhibition room in Pall Mall from Mr Christie for 21 years from 1769, and were asked in January 1770 to “look out for a proper room for an academy”. The room in Pall Mall was exchanged with Mr Christie in 1775 for another room which could be used for the academy, which opened later that year. Unfortunately, these new premises proved an unattractive venue for the 1776 exhibition and receipts dropped catastrophically at exactly the same time as the Society had incurred significant new expenses. On 2 September 1776, Basire was the only attendee at a committee meeting, and four days later he chaired a committee which decided to sub-let these premises. A further meeting on 18 September of that year, with Stuart in the chair, agreed to let the teaching room to a private drawing school on condition that the tenant bought the academy's utensils. By 28 January 1777, Stuart had to report that the Society owed Christie 50 guineas, and had forfeited the new premises on the grounds of there “not being sufficient money in Mr Basire the Treasurer's hands”. Stuart then personally advanced the funds required by the Society, while Basire agreed to pay the printing bills.

The minutes in the final years of the Free Society include a succession of payments by Stuart and Basire from their own pockets both to the Society and to distressed artists. Basire gave money to Mrs Fillette, the widow of an exhibitor in 1778, paid for the funeral of the painter, James Williams, in 1779, and even paid for “appropriate apparel” for Mrs Williams to attend the service. In the same year, Stuart paid 4 guineas to release a painter, Mr Alcock, from “a sponging house”, i.e. a house of confinement for debtors. Meetings were finally “postponed till further notice” on 6 December 1779. The

minutes of the meeting of 28 July 1780, reported that the secretary of the Society had been let go, that his papers were to be handed over to Basire, and that the secretary's salary had been paid "out of Mr Basire's own property". This meeting finally thanked Basire "for the readiness with which he offered to pay the Society's debt". The minute book ends with Stuart's signature. The last leaf and back inside cover of the book contains sums showing the losses on the final exhibitions and an offer from James Basire to lend the Society a final £121.

In a last act of solidarity, a number of famous artists from the competitor Society of Artists and from the Royal Academy joined the Free Society in 1783 in order to mount a final exhibition with a huge total of 337 exhibits. The catalogue reiterated the distinct, idealistic role of the Free Society of Artists in relieving distress and as a nursery for young artists. The message on the back of the title page ends:

"...the Endeavours of the few Artists who now constitute the Society, must fail; but they will have the heartfelt satisfaction of having discharged their Duty as Men; they have brought forward to Reputation some of the most eminent, and they have relieved some of the most unfortunate."²⁵⁸

Following the demise of the Free Society of Artists, there is no record of James Basire being involved in further public activities. His friend, James "Athenian" Stuart died five years later in 1788, and Basire quietly continued his practice as engraver to the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Society and to private patrons for a further ten years. The description of Basire's character in his obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, if not written by Nichols, was clearly written by someone who knew him as intimately:

"...for above 60 years a distinguished, liberal-minded artist, whose ingenuity and integrity are inherited by his eldest son and namesake".²⁵⁹

Basire saw himself, and was evidently seen by others, not just as an engraver, but as an artist, and not just any artist, but as one who valued personal honesty and generosity as much as professional skill, and who transmitted these values to those around him, and particularly to the next generation of artists.

²⁵⁸ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 341

²⁵⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXII, II (1802), p. 885

Chapter 4

James Basire (I), the antiquarian engraver

4.1 A FAMILY MAN AND A NOT SO SECURE APPOINTMENT: 1759-1769

James Basire's career has been divided here into two distinct halves and two separate chapters. This division has been made in part for the sake of clarity and convenience, but it is also justified to a large extent by the structure of Basire's career. The first part consisted of the early years when his output largely comprised works of an artistic nature for a limited group of private patrons, who mostly comprised architects, painters or wealthy individuals. The second period can be considered as starting in 1759, at the time of Basire's watershed appointment to a seemingly secure place as engraver to the Society of Antiquaries. Life is, however, rarely so tidy, and the 1760s represented a period of overlapping activity, when Basire's professional and family lives were subject to unexpected stops and starts before they finally stabilised in the early 1770s.

Appointment as engraver to the Society of Antiquaries

The circumstances of Basire's initial appointment as engraver to the Society of Antiquaries can be seen as symptomatic of the organisational indecision which dogged this role through the period following George Vertue's resignation, and only ended with the appointment of Richard Gough as Director of the Society in 1771. Vertue presented his resignation as official engraver of the Society at a Council meeting on 12 March 1756 on health grounds, and he was to die a little more than three months later on 24 July. Following almost 40 years of service by one engraver, the Society did not have an established mechanism to nominate a successor. Arthur Pond therefore suggested that John (or Joseph)²⁶⁰ Wood be entrusted on a trial basis with the engraving of the plates of coins for the long-delayed republication of the *Tables of English silver and gold Coins* by the Society's recently-deceased President, Martin Folkes.²⁶¹ This proposal was accepted, and Pond agreed with the Council's stipulation that he supervise the process, including the printing of the plates on his own rolling presses at his house in Great Queen Street. He also consented to provide the paper and to store the Society's copper plates. The Council thus found a short-term solution to the engraving and printing of plates through a form of outsourcing of both production and supervision.

Unfortunately, this arrangement proved unsatisfactory even in the short term, as Wood was not able to produce specimens of his work for Folkes's *Tables* on request at the Council meeting of 22 July 1756. The completion of this task and the resolution of the wider problem of Vertue's succession were therefore delayed until after the summer recess. By the time of their meeting on 28 January 1757, the Council had had time to reflect on the various issues and made a policy decision that the post of engraver would no longer be compatible with that of a fellow of the Society. They then held a

²⁶⁰ Sources conflict as to Wood's forename. See Laurence Worms and Ashley Baynton-Williams, *British Map Engravers* (London, 2011), p. 731

²⁶¹ Martin Folkes, *Tables of English silver and gold Coins* (Society of Antiquaries, London, 1761-1763)

formal ballot to appoint a permanent new engraver from three candidates. Two of the candidates had apparently put themselves forward in unsolicited letters to the Council: James Mynde, the long-serving engraver to the Royal Society, and Francis Perry. It was, however, Isaac Basire's former apprentice, James Green, who won the election, and this engraver was duly given a first small assignment, while Perry was asked to take over from Wood the task of completing the plates to Folkes's *Tables*.

This arrangement again proved to be a false start. Green died on 15 January 1759, by which time he had only been able to complete one significant piece of work for the Society, a composite plate published in 1758 as part of the *Vetusta Monumenta* series. This print combined a reproduction of a mantelpiece from Saffron Walden with a seal of Canterbury Cathedral, the engraving of which by Vertue had been rejected by the Council of the Society on account of its "great Inaccuracy and Badness".²⁶² Francis Perry was not considered as a candidate for Green's succession, as he too was making insufficient progress on Folkes's *Tables*. The Council therefore reviewed at its meeting on 22 February 1759 "several Specimens of Mr. Basiere's (sic) Abilities, in various Branches of his Art", but also agreed to examine the "Works of other Masters, who, they were informed, were equally desirous of the Honour of being employed in the Society's Service".

It is not clear who put Basire's name forward. Catherine Arbuthnott has suggested that it was James Stuart, who had been elected as a fellow of the Society some months beforehand on 7 December 1758.²⁶³ Basire may, however, already have been known to other more established fellows, who were also active members of the Council at this time, such as the art connoisseurs and collectors, Charles Rogers and Lyde Browne. Basire was engaged by Browne at around this time to create for him a print of the collector's antique bust of Julia Pia, which was exhibited at the Free Society of Artists in 1761.²⁶⁴ The engraver also worked on plates for Rogers's *Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings* from at least the early 1760s. In the end, the Council only seems to have considered specimens and drawings by one other artist, Peter Mazell, before formally electing Basire. The Society's new engraver was then called into a Council meeting of 8 March 1759, in the presence of Rogers, Browne and Horace Walpole, among others. At this meeting, he "promised to use his utmost Endeavours to give all possible Satisfaction in the discharge of his office".

First family life

James Basire could reasonably have expected that his new position would bring him not only prestige, but also financial security, and he therefore felt in a position to get married on 11 May 1760, a little more than a year after his appointment. His chosen bride

²⁶² *Vetusta Monumenta*, II (1789), plate XIX (dated 1758); discussed in the Council minutes of 26 January

²⁶³ Catherine Arbuthnott, "The Life of James 'Athenian' Stuart", chapter 2, pp. 59-101, ed. Soros, *James "Athenian" Stuart*, p. 78

²⁶⁴ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 25

was Ann Beaupuy of the parish of St. Peter in Mitcham in the county of Surrey, some 15 kilometres to the south of the City of London. The witnesses to the marriage were James's father, Isaac, and James Stuart.²⁶⁵ It is not known how James Basire and Ann met or whether she was also of French origin, as the name would suggest. Given the rarity of the name in England at the time, she may have been related to Jacob Beaupuy, a *chocolatier* of Long's Court in St. Martin in the Fields. This was an area of the West End where Basire would have been a frequent visitor because of his relationship with the St. Martin's Lane Academy, but this must remain speculation.

We do know that Basire was again living in Fetter Lane in the City of London at the time of his marriage, but it is not known when he moved back to this street, where his former master, R.W. Seale, had conducted his business until 1754. It was in Fetter Lane that the newly-appointed and evidently self-confident Basire took on his first apprentice on 7 October 1760, a few months after the marriage. This was James Record, in respect of whom Basire received a relatively modest premium of £31 10s. It was also in Fetter Lane that Ann gave birth to a son on 13 February 1761, exactly nine months after the marriage. Significantly, the son was named Richard Stuart Basire. Since neither "Richard" nor "Stuart" represented Basire family names, the boy was evidently named after James Stuart and either or both Richard Seale and Richard Dalton, the engraver's first masters and patrons.

Basire's appointment at the Society of Antiquaries must also have given him the confidence to move his growing household west from the City of London in early 1762 to a larger house in Great Queen Street in the relative calm and greenery of the more prestigious area around Lincoln's Inn Fields. We know from the advertisement for sale of the house following the death of his son in 1822, that it "contained three rooms and closets on a floor with kitchens, cellarage, and paved yard".²⁶⁶ The advertisement records that it was number 31, while it is recorded as number 35 in the exhibition catalogues of the Free Society. London house numbers were subject to frequent change at this time. We know, in any case that it was on the north side of the street opposite the current Freemasons' Hall, and that this row of brick-built houses from the reign of Queen Anne survives in substantially its original form.

Basire's choice of domicile also had a significant professional element, and indicated James's desire to project himself now as an established artist rather than as a tradesman. James's new neighbours were no longer print- and booksellers, printers or other members of the Stationers' Company. This was a road which had become known for its artists. These not only included Arthur Pond, who had died only a few years before,²⁶⁷ but most famously, Sir Godfrey Kneller, the premier society portraitist of the Augustan Age. Kneller lived and ran his school, a forerunner of the St Martin's Academy, in numbers 55-56 from around 1703 until his death in 1723. Then, following the re-division of Kneller's residence, both

²⁶⁵ Guildhall, *St. Dunstan in the West, Register of marriages, 1754-1762*, P69/DUN/A/01/Ms 10354/1

²⁶⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1823

²⁶⁷ Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London*, pp. 32-33

houses were also later inhabited by painters, for example, the portraitist Bartholomew Dandridge at no. 55 in 1733-1742, and Benjamin Wilson at no. 56 in 1750-1761.²⁶⁸

The exhibition catalogues of the artists' societies further indicate that almost two dozen exhibitors lived in this street from the time of the first public exhibition in 1760 to the last ones in 1791.²⁶⁹ Among these were various members of the Devis family, with whom Basire would collaborate as artists and members of the Free Society of Artists. These included both Arthur Devis senior and junior and Thomas Anthony Devis, who are all recorded as living in the street with their apprentices from at least 1761 to 1780. The engraver, Edward Rooker, and his son, Michael Angelo, were also long-time residents when the Basires moved in.²⁷⁰ Edward Rooker had worked with Basire in the 1750s on the plates for Dalton's *Musaeum Graecum* and on Stuart's *Antiquities*, and they would work together again in the first years of Basire's residence here on William Chambers's publication of his architectural creations for Kew Gardens.

In addition to painters and engravers, Great Queen Street was also associated with the wider artistic life of the capital. It was close to the Drury Lane Theatre, and was or would become home to a number of actresses, playwrights, poets and literati, such as Mrs Robinson, better known as "Perdita", Richard Brindsley Sheridan and James Boswell, all of whom lived in the street at some time during Basire's residence.²⁷¹ The engraver, his wife, and his first apprentice must have been excited at the prospect of moving from the purely commercial ambiance of the City to such an attractive and exciting area. They could not, however, have anticipated the series of disasters which was about to unfold.

Family tragedy and professional reverses

The happy events which took place in Basire's life from early 1759 to early 1762, including his appointment to the Society of Antiquaries, his marriage, the birth of his first son and the move to Great Queen Street, were overturned by a double tragedy in the second half of March 1762. On the 24th of the month, Ann and James buried Richard Stuart Basire, aged barely 12 months, at the parish church of their Fetter Lane residence, St. Dunstan-in-the-West in Fleet Street.²⁷² Then, 6 days later, Ann herself died in childbirth. The *Daily Advertiser* reported on 1 April 1762 that: "On Tuesday night died in childbed, Mrs. Anne Basire, wife of Mr. James Basire, Engraver to the Hon. Society of Antiquaries. It is imagined her death was owing to a cold she received in moving from their house in Fetter-lane, Fleet-street, to their apartments in Great Queen-street, Lincoln's Inn Fields".²⁷³ Her death may also have been related to the stress of moving house with a

²⁶⁸ 'Nos. 55 and 56, Great Queen Street', *Survey of London: volume 5: St. Giles-in-the-Fields*, II (1914), 42-58

²⁶⁹ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, pp. 24, 75

²⁷⁰ Patrick Conner, *Michael Angelo Rooker 1746-1801* (London, 1984), pp. 24-25

²⁷¹ Henry B. Wheatley F.S.A., *London Past and Present*, III (1891), pp. 135-138

²⁷² Guildhall, *St. Dunstan in the West, Register of burials, 1739-1791*, P69/DUN/A/01/Ms 10353

²⁷³ *Daily Advertiser*, 1 April 1762, quoted in the *Exeter Working Papers on Book History*, consulted on-line at <http://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/berch-b.html>, in June 2013

sick infant while heavily pregnant. The new baby, who survived the birth, was also named Richard Stuart Basire, but he too died at barely 4 years of age and was buried with his brother at the Basires' former parish church of St. Dunstan in the City.²⁷⁴

Meanwhile, back at the Society of Antiquaries, Basire's expectations for a regular income were not being met. In fact, he only completed one engraving for publication by the Society within the first five years of his appointment. This was a composite plate for *Vetusta Monumenta*, comprising 10 figures of brass trumpets, a brooch, shield and a brass ornament, together with sections of the shield and ornament, all of which derived from the private collections of two prominent fellows: Richard Pococke, Bishop of Ossory, and the future president, Charles Lyttelton, Bishop of Carlisle.²⁷⁵

Although the objects depicted on this print were of no particular historical importance, the plate itself was nevertheless remarkable for several modernising features in comparison to the immediately preceding engravings in the series. The contents were placed within a fashionable neoclassical frame. The composition was not cluttered with ornamental decoration or explanatory text, and there were detailed measurements of a similar type to those in the plates of the recently published *Antiquities of Athens*. Basire even took the trouble of signing this plate with his full name as both draughtsman and engraver, implying that he may too have been responsible for some of the newer features in its design.

This first plate by Basire for the Antiquaries turned out to be a one-off production, and hardly provided the sort of revenue or cash flow, which would be able to support his new lifestyle and dependents. A plenary meeting of the Society reviewed Basire's drawings at its meeting on 5 February 1761, received the proof prints a year later on 21 January 1762, and Basire was paid £30 on account in 1763, the year of publication. The Council did not then approve the full payment of his invoice for £39 13s until 19 April 1764, and he only received the balance of the account in the following month.²⁷⁶

The Council of the Society was aware of their engraver's dissatisfaction, but did not at the time have a programme of antiquarian illustration with which to keep him busy. The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 1762 revealed the Council's dilemma when it suggested that the members "think of some subject proper to be engraved, so as Mr. Basire may be kept employed". The meeting went on to decide that Basire could engrave for its members two crayon drawings by Cipriani which had been presented to the Society. These illustrated the "Figure of the Fauness", a "so very singular a piece of Grecian Antiquity" from the private collection of Thomas Hollis. This again represented an isolated commission for the engraver, and progress was as glacial as for the previous publication. Proof prints of this "very singular and curious Female Bronze" were only approved by Council on 4 April 1765, while Hollis was mandated to supervise the final amendments, inscription and the printing on "large and fine paper". These prints were ultimate-

²⁷⁴ Guildhall, *St. Dunstan in the West, Register of burials, 1739-1791*, P69/DUN/A/019/MSO10353

²⁷⁵ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II (1789), plate XX (dated 1763)

²⁷⁶ Source: Society of Antiquaries manuscript Audit Book

ly published in *Vetusta Monumenta* with that year's date,²⁷⁷ where they were sandwiched between the "Trumpets and Shields" and topographical views of royal palaces.

The same Council meeting which tasked Basire with engraving Hollis's statuette managed to find another, more mechanical and less profitable type of employment to keep their engraver busy, namely the reprinting "at his Presses" of 150 copies of Vertue's plate of Sandal Castle and of the warrant for beheading King Charles. The following April he was given an even larger task, being directed to print "at his own Press" 350 copies on large paper and 150 copies on smaller paper of Perry's plates for Folkes's *Tables*. This was a huge task, since the book contained 61 plates, plus 6 supplemental plates, but this was not all. At the same meeting, Basire was also instructed to print 500 copies of his drawing and engraving of the "Trumpets and Shields" plate for *Vetusta Monumenta*, as two copies were to be presented to each member of the Society together with the letterpress explanations to be printed by William Bowyer. Given the amount of printing involved here, it is possible that Basire actually outsourced some or all of the work to the printing presses owned by his father in Clerkenwell. However, it is also possible that James was equipped from early in his career to print on a commercial scale. According to a resolution of the Free Society of Artists, James Basire was responsible for printing this Society's exhibition tickets, receipts and the St. Luke's Day feast invitations from the 1760s onwards.

Despite its good intentions, the Society of Antiquaries only provided Basire with four further engraving commissions during the 1760s. These comprised "The Great East Window of the Parish Church of St. Margaret in Westminster", and three views of two former royal palaces at Richmond and Greenwich, which were to form part of a series. The idea of engraving Vertue's drawing of the window in St. Margaret's was first floated at the Society's meeting on 12 March 1761, but its completion was delayed because of the Council's concern at the cost. Basire gave estimates to the Council meeting of 21 May 1765 which separated the costs of etching the outline from the engraving of the detail, but no decision was made as to the final format until more than two years later on 4 June 1767. This print was eventually published with finely engraved detail in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1768.²⁷⁸ Basire was finally paid a reasonable price of £41 4s for (re-)drawing, engraving, printing, paper and the letter engraving. Like Vertue, he was thus able to provide a potentially profitable complete, vertically integrated service to the Society.

Unfortunately, this was Basire's last commission before he was fired at the Council meeting of 17 March 1768. A previous meeting on 10 December 1767 had refused to accept a relatively small bill for £15 8s, "several of the Articles appearing to be overcharged", and ordered their engraver to attend. The minutes of the 17 March meeting record a lengthy dispute between Basire and the Council, which ended with the engraver "consenting at length to an Abatement of a few shillings". This represented an unsatisfactory outcome for the Council, which "resolved (too much time having been already taken up here-

²⁷⁷ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II (1789), plates XXI-XXII (dated 1765)

²⁷⁸ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II (1789), plate XXVI

in) to pay the Bill, and take some other fit Person into their Employ in the future". The Society does not seem to have had any issues with the quality or timeliness of Basire's work, so it is a mystery why the engraver dug in his heels over a small amount of money, and so destroyed a relationship which was not only prestigious but potentially lucrative over a longer term. We can only surmise that he was disappointed with the limited opportunities for work which had accrued from his position. He had at this time not been paid by the Society since January 1767, and was also still accepting some attractive, artistic work from private patrons and the print entrepreneur, John Boydell. He may therefore have felt, at least in the heat of the moment, that he could afford to lose this position.

The Council of the Society of Antiquaries seems to have felt a similar lack of urgency with respect to replacing Basire as they had on the death of Vertue ten years previously. Following almost an entire year spent discussing the preferred method of engraving the text of the Domesday Book, a debate to which Basire was also invited to contribute, the Council only turned their attention to his succession at its meeting on 17 November 1768. After reviewing specimens of the work of two engravers, they decided to appoint John Pye, apparently based on the specific recommendation of Sir Joseph Ayloff and his young colleague at the State Paper Office, Thomas Astle. Pye was subsequently charged with the engraving of a second view of Hampton Court Palace, for which he estimated 25, or 30 guineas for a "highly finished" plate. The Council meeting of 2 February 1769 considered this to be "rather exorbitant" and beat him down to 20 guineas. They had intended to sell this print for 5 shillings, but at their meeting on 27 April, Richard Gough's first as a member of the Council, they realised that they could only charge 4 shillings "considering the Slightness of the Engraving". The engraving of Hampton Court turned out to be Pye's first and last (attributed) plate for the Society, and Basire was back on the payroll within a few months.

4.2 THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES: THE RICHARD GOUGH ERA

The relative lack of interest in the publication of high quality illustrations of antiquities by the Society of Antiquaries in the 1760s can be explained by a number of factors. The first one was the death of George Vertue, who was not only in a position to drive interest in the publication of prints as an influential fellow, but also profited from them as the Society's engraver. A second reason derives from the fact that the Presidents of this period, Lord Willoughby of Parham and the Bishop of Carlisle, were not closely involved in the Society's affairs, and the directors, John Taylor and Gregory Sharp, showed little interest in publications. The short tenures of these officers also inhibited the provision of a clear direction in a Society which had become split into at least two camps. On the one hand, collectors and aesthetes such as Charles Rogers, Thomas Hollis, Lyde Brown and Horace Walpole, were primarily interested in works of art, and particularly classical art. Thanks to their influence, Winckelmann was elected as an overseas member in

1761, and promptly declared to the Society that “Athens itself has long since begun to revive and fix its seat among us”.²⁷⁹ On the other hand, there were members such as Aylofffe, Astle, Andrew Ducarel, John Topham and Philip Morant, all of whom had worked at the State Paper Office, and were therefore focussed more on British national and local history, based on the painstaking analysis of manuscript historical records. Against this background, agreeing on investment in a consistent programme of antiquarian engraving was not going to be a simple matter.

A first precondition for a change in direction was realised on 10 January 1769, when Jeremiah Milles, Dean of Exeter, was elected President. Dr. Milles had enjoyed two Grand Tours with his cousin, Richard Pococke, in the 1730s, but his antiquarian interests were firmly rooted in his local county of Devon, and he pioneered the use of research questionnaires to collect data for his unpublished history of the area. The second and more decisive catalyst for change occurred when Richard Gough was elected Director of the Society in 1771. Gough and Milles saw eye to eye to a large extent on the mission of the Society and together provided much-needed continuity. Milles retained the presidency for 15 years until his death in 1784, while Gough remained Director until his resignation at the end of 1797. Gough was a relatively young man of 35 in 1771, and was able to dedicate not only his energy, but also his not inconsiderable inherited wealth to his chosen vocation as an antiquary.²⁸⁰

Gough had already started working on British topography while at Cambridge, and in 1768 had anonymously published his *Anecdotes of British Topography*. This summarised existing British antiquarian and local history publications, and provided the groundwork for a programme of comprehensive British antiquarian studies, which he was able to sponsor not only on a private basis, but also through his post as Director of the Society of Antiquaries. He had specifically noted in the preface to the *Anecdotes* that the frequent publication by the Society of copper plates of monuments had dried up since Vertue’s day or, as he delicately expressed it, “the public does not receive such frequent presents”.²⁸¹ He was now in a position to be able to reverse this situation: firstly, by managing the launch of the Society’s new periodical, *Archaeologia*; and, secondly, by reviving the flagging *Vetusta Monumenta*. Following Gough’s appointment, James Basire was immediately able to benefit from a near monopoly of engraving a regular flow of plates for these two publications.

Illustrations to Archaeologia

The launch of *Archaeologia* would become a particularly important initiative from the point of view of the Society’s engravers. It not only gave them the opportunity to en-

²⁷⁹ Society of Antiquaries, minutes of the meeting of 17 December 1761, quoting a letter from Winckelmann

²⁸⁰ Philip Whittemore and Chris Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary. Richard Gough 1735-1809* (Wynchmore Books, 2009) is the only standalone biographical monograph on the subject of Gough

²⁸¹ Richard Gough, *Anecdotes of British Topography* (London, 1768), p. xxix

grave and occasionally draw a wide range of antiquarian subjects, but also put them in contact with a network of antiquaries around the country. More fundamentally, it also provided them a relatively unexciting but nevertheless steady stream of income.

The concept of publishing the more important papers and letters read at the weekly meetings of the Society of Antiquaries was not new. It had already been floated and actively discussed in the early 1750s, shortly after the Society had been granted its Royal Charter. It had, however, fallen foul of the divide in the Society between those members who wished to encourage learning, and those with the more aristocratic view that its proceedings were for the fellows' private entertainment.²⁸² This logjam was broken in 1769, when President Milles tasked Gough, still only a member of Council, with drafting a history of the Society to date. This would both serve as preface to the first volume of the new journal and act as a manifesto for the Society's new direction.

Archaeologia was accordingly published for the first time in 1770, but in a form which was only partly typical of future volumes. Its format and design were clearly based on the *Philosophical Transactions* of its older sister, the Royal Society, which also occasionally published articles of an antiquarian nature. However, unlike the latter, the illustrations to the first issue of *Archaeologia* were few in number, poorly executed and inconsistent in style. Of the nine plates, only one is signed, by the John Bayly who had been called in two years previously to give expert testimony to the Council on the engraving of the Domesday Book. None of the plates is signed "Basire", as the Society's official engraver was not then on the payroll of the Society, and it is unlikely that he was the author of any of the unattributed plates.²⁸³

By the time of the publication of volume II in 1773, *Archaeologia* had become the identical, antiquarian twin of the *Philosophical Transactions*. There was no long introduction, the articles now comprised relatively up-to-date papers, and it contained more than 20 uniformly designed plates, almost all of them signed by Basire. By coincidence, James Mynde, the engraver to the Royal Society, had died at the beginning of 1770, and had been immediately replaced by Basire, who was therefore also responsible for almost every plate in the *Philosophical Transactions* from early in that year. In the case of the *Philosophical Transactions*, the engraver could expect an annual income. In the case of the slightly more disorganized production of the *Archaeologia*, he could expect to receive an income approximately every two years. Over time, the first James Basire would engrave well over 300 plates for *Archaeologia* and more than double this figure for the *Philosophical Transactions*. His business was thus not only financially secure from this time, but he was also able to maintain more than one apprentice to help him with the more mundane tasks. These developments nevertheless also meant that a significant portion of the work which bore his name from this time forward was necessarily of a more technical than artistic nature.

²⁸² Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (The Society of Antiquaries, London, 1956), pp. 137-140

²⁸³ Basire was later asked at the Council meeting on 3 February 1778 to quote for three additional plates for an improved second edition of the first issue of *Archaeologia*.

The plates and occasional vignettes which Basire was required to engrave for the *Archaeologia* were nothing if not diverse. They included depictions of seals, coins and other items with inscriptions, as well as miscellaneous artefacts, such as horns, celts, domestic objects and military equipment. Approximately 40% of the articles published in this period were illustrated, typically with 1-3 plates, but there were also several larger series of engravings which could swell the number of illustrations up to 50 or more. The first volume of *Archaeologia* which Basire illustrated for publication in 1773, included one such series of an unusually exotic nature. It comprised bronze Calmuc Tartar figures of household gods, which had been excavated from Tumuli in Siberia, and which accompanied an article by Pavel Grigoryevich Demidov, a major figure of the Russian Enlightenment. The watercolours which were prepared as a basis for these engravings are among a number of preparatory drawings by Basire which are housed in the archives of the Society of Antiquaries.²⁸⁴ An example of one of these watercolours is included as Figure 31 below.

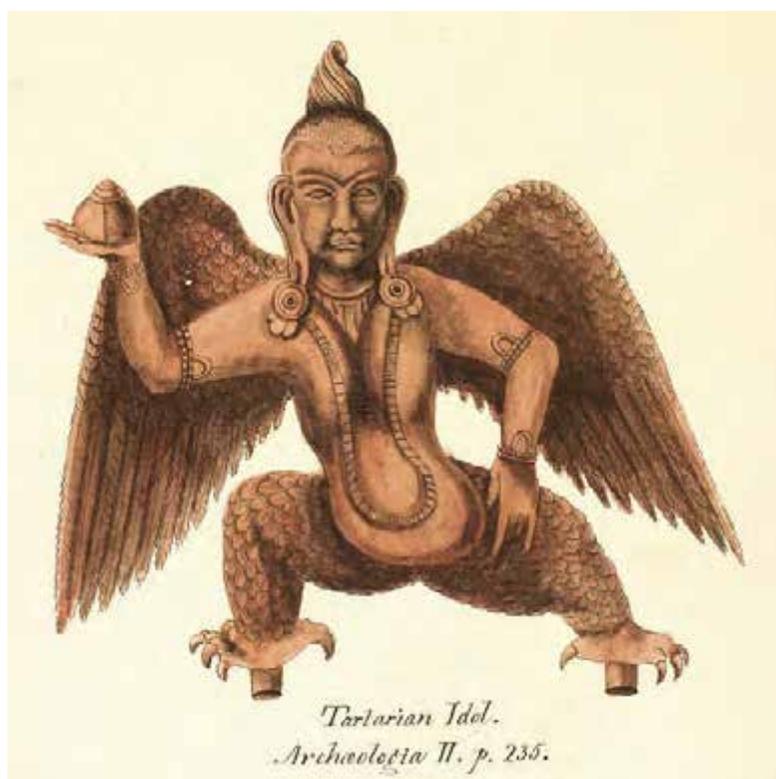


Figure 31 Watercolour drawing of “Tartarian Idol” prepared for engraving by James Basire for “Some Account of certain Tartarian Antiquities” by Paul Demidoff, *Archaeologia*, II, (1773), plate XXVII, opposite page 235, actual size 217 mm x 285 mm (Source: Society of Antiquaries of London)

²⁸⁴ *Archaeologia* II (1773), plates XIV–XVIII*, pp. 225, 235; Society of Antiquaries, *Catalogue of Prints and Drawings*, Eastern Antiquities 10.1-2, 11.1-2, 12.1-2

The next significant print series to be engraved by Basire for *Archaeologia* appeared in 1776, and consisted of 13 drawings of views and plans of Pompeii which had been obtained by the Ambassador to the Court of Naples, Sir William Hamilton.²⁸⁵ It was a coup for the Society to be able to publish this highly topical set of illustrations, which was also printed as a separate monograph by Bowyer and Nichols in the following year.²⁸⁶ The Council directed Basire first to provide a specimen and estimate under Richard Dalton's supervision, then to prepare finished drawings for engraving, and finally to send the proof prints to Sir William for review. We know from correspondence between Basire and Richard Gough that Basire actually met Hamilton, who was pleased with the engravings and even had some suggestions for improvement by lightening the shading in some parts.²⁸⁷ The Society did not, however, in the end agree to have the whole set engraved. The Council meeting on 21 June 1775 accepted Basire's estimates of six guineas a plate for the views and of four guineas for the plan of the chapel of Isis. However, they balked at paying 15 guineas for a more elaborate engraving of wall paintings on the portico of the Temple of Isis, as this would have required more detailed shading to convey the colours. Hamilton had more luck with the Council of the Royal Society, which published a number of Basire's engravings of the Bay of Naples and of Mount Vesuvius in the *Philosophical Transactions* over a period of 25 years.²⁸⁸

Subsequent series of plates engraved by Basire for *Archaeologia* demonstrate the gradual evolution of the Society's focus of interest during the Gough period from the international and the classical to the domestic and mediaeval. *Archaeologia* VI, published in 1782, included a lengthy article by Edward King, which was illustrated by 73 figures across 31 plates of views, plans, elevations, sections and details of English castles and great houses.²⁸⁹ Most of these plates cost little more than a guinea each to engrave, but the last three plates in the series, those of Eltham Great Hall, were more elaborate, were drawn by the Swiss artist, S.H. Grimm, and were priced by Basire at six, seven and eight guineas respectively. The Council meeting of 14 March 1782 requested that Basire work on King's plates with the "utmost Dispatch...consistent with the Fidelity, Neatness and Accuracy of the Engraving, particularly the three Plates of Eltham Hall". The priority attached to this series was probably not unrelated to the fact that King was an influential Council member, who was to serve as a short-lived, but reforming President in 1784.²⁹⁰ The particular focus on Eltham may also be explained by the fact that this was a former royal palace. Figure 32 on the following page provides an example of one of the Eltham plates.

²⁸⁵ *Archaeologia* IV (1776), plates VI-XVIII, pp. 160-173

²⁸⁶ Sir William Hamilton, *Account of the Discoveries at Pompeii* (W. Bowyer and J. Nichols, London, 1777)

²⁸⁷ Private Collection 1 PC1/1/41 NAD44, letter dated 5 November 1776 (source: Julian Pooley)

²⁸⁸ *Philosophical Transactions* LXI (1771), plate I, p. 44; LXIII (1773), plate XIII, p. 332; LXX (1780), plate I, p. 84; LXXVI (1786), plates X-XII, p. 380; LXXXV (1795), plates V-XII, p. 166

²⁸⁹ *Archaeologia* VI (1782), plates XXIII-LIII, pp. 240-368.3

²⁹⁰ Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries. The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York, 2004), p. 100

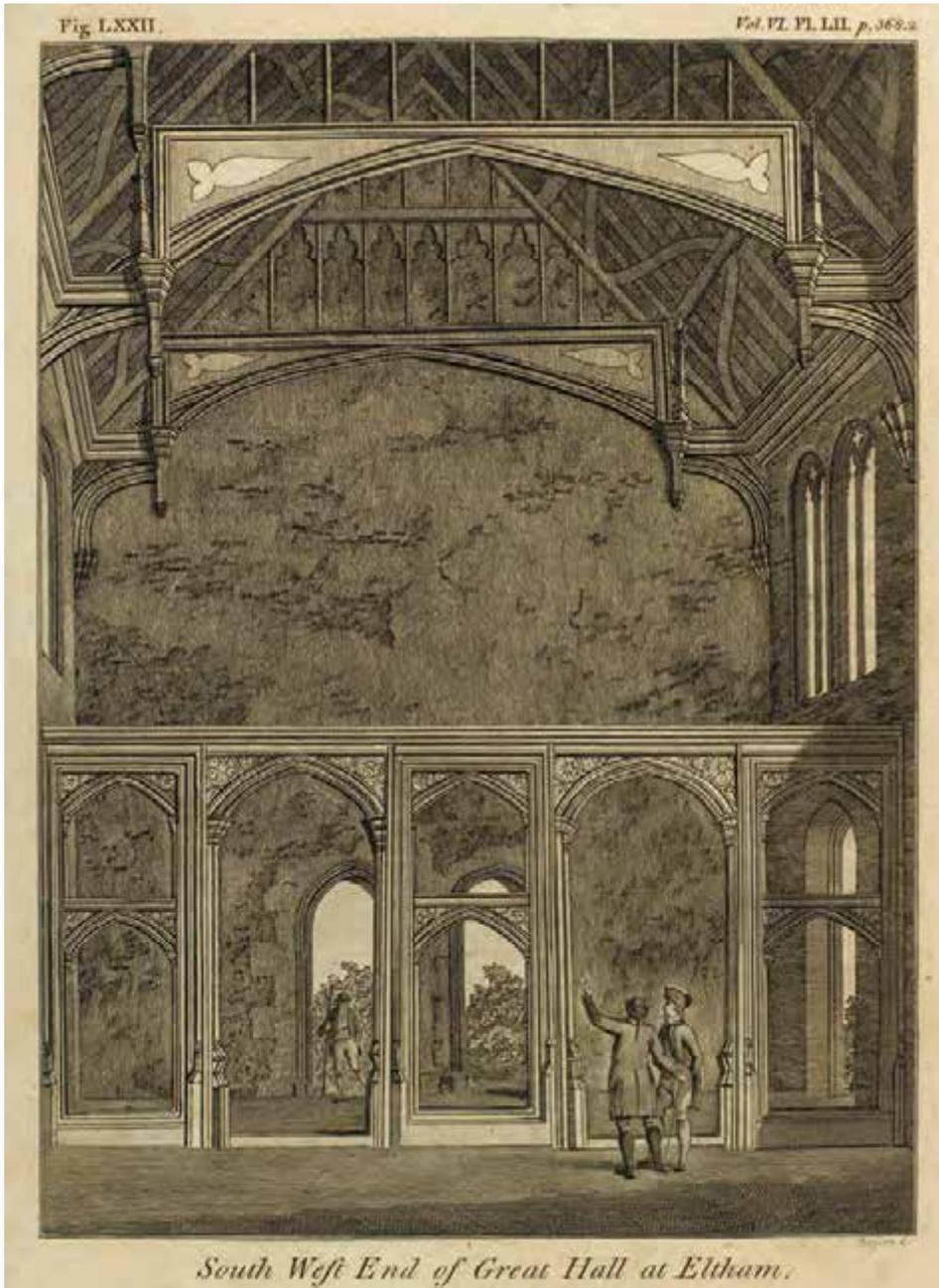


Figure 32 “South West End of Great Hall at Eltham”, engraved by James Basire after S.H. Grimm for *Archaeologia*, VI, (1782), plate LII, p. 368.2 (Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2014)

The illustrations to the last volume of *Archaeologia* engraved under the supervision of the first James Basire, the twelfth instalment published in 1796 included an equally

substantial set of well over 100 figures of Norwich Castle and related buildings in 23 plates.²⁹¹ These served to illustrate an article by the young William Wilkins, the future architect of Downing College, Cambridge, as well as a long list of Greek Revival buildings culminating in the National Gallery. These engravings attracted a degree of attention from the Council, which was equally unusual for *Archaeologia*. The Council asked Basire on 21 March and 4 April to experiment with the lightening of the shading on the engraving, and described Wilkins's drawings as "beautiful" in its meeting of 4 July 1796. It is notable that Wilkins himself signed the designs, an innovation introduced by Edward King, who ordered at the Council meeting of 8 May 1784 that draughtsmen "set their Names to the several Drawings made by them". This is indicative of another key trend in the Society's publications during this period, the increasing contribution of authors and draughtsmen who were professionals in their field.

The draughtsmen with whom Basire had most frequently collaborated in previous volumes of *Archaeologia* were not typically professionals, but rather the sort of amateur, provincial archaeologists, historians and antiquaries, who inspired Horace Walpole's ongoing and frequently quoted epistolary fulminations against the Society.²⁹² During the period 1773 to 1796, Basire engraved 13 plates to 10 articles in 7 different volumes of *Archaeologia* on behalf of the Derbyshire parson, the Reverend Samuel Pegge, and no fewer than 43 plates to 15 articles in 7 volumes for Pegge's near neighbour, the retired Major Hayman Rooke of Mansfield Woodhouse in Nottinghamshire.²⁹³ In both cases, illustrations were of artefacts and of physical remains, including so-called "Druidical Remains", which managed to infuriate both Walpole and Gough. The "Druidical Remains" in many cases actually constituted natural, geographical features.

In the case of some of the published objects, Basire was requested to draw them in person.²⁹⁴ In the case of remains, *in situ* drawings were occasionally commissioned from local draughtsmen, but Hayman Rooke also drew four of Pegge's plates and seldom permitted other draughtsmen to be involved with his own illustrations. An exception to this rule occurred at the Council meeting of 23 May 1781, when Basire was specifically ordered to reduce Rooke's seven drawings of the "Druidical Remains" on Stanton Moor. This, together with the engraved writing, earned the engraver a total of 20 guineas which, at just under 3 guineas per plate, represented approximately the average fee for the average plate which Basire prepared for *Archaeologia*.

The relatively low level of fee per plate earned by the engraver for this periodical was a natural function of its role in enabling fellows to publish their academic papers

²⁹¹ *Archaeologia* XII (1796), plates XXI-XLII, pp. 137-179

²⁹² Quoted, for example, in Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 158, 168-169; Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p. 68; and, Martin Myrone, "The Society of Antiquaries", p. 99-100, in Pearce ed., *Visions of Antiquity*

²⁹³ Both antiquaries and their works are characterised in Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 194-195

²⁹⁴ *Archaeologia* II (1773), plate VIII, facing p. 125 of two hatchets; *Archaeologia* III (1775), plates I-II, p. 24, of a richly decorated ivory horn

and other curiosities with supporting illustrations in a relatively humble quarto format. The scale and style of engraving employed was therefore generally simple and cost control was a priority. The more aesthetic touches mentioned with respect to the plates to King's Eltham Great Hall and in the case of Wilkins's drawings of Norwich Castle were the exception rather than the rule.

The revival of Vetusta Monumenta and the monuments of Westminster Abbey

Fortunately for Basire, the Society of Antiquaries eventually provided him with two other major categories of work, which kept him occupied with more ambitious plates. At the highest level of artistic finishing, the Society promoted a series of great historical prints, which were not part of Gough's programme of antiquarian study and which will be the subject of the next section of this chapter. At a more intermediate level in terms of cost and artistic finishing, the Council of the Society decided in the course of the 1770s to revive publication of the *Vetusta Monumenta*, which contained imperial-folio size plates. These could not only be used as a vehicle for more detailed antiquarian illustration than the humbler plates in *Archaeologia*, but could also be suitably reprinted as a source of presents for members and friends of the Society, as well as for public sale. From the point of view of the engraver, they provided Basire with another significant stream of work to complement *Archaeologia*. This type of work was less regular, but enabled a significantly higher level of artistic input and individual remuneration.

The last plate which Basire had produced for *Vetusta Monumenta* in the pre-Gough era had been his finely engraved interpretation of the Great East Window of the church of St. Margaret at Westminster Abbey, which was published in 1768 and which he publicly exhibited at the Free Society of Artists in the following spring. The next plate to appear in *Vetusta Monumenta* was during the period of his dismissal as engraver. It comprised a mezzotint engraving dated 1770, which was created by James Watson after Francis Cotes's portrait of the recently deceased President, Charles Lyttleton, bishop of Carlisle. A gap of 10 years ensued, during which the Society was preoccupied with the first four volumes of *Archaeologia* and its first two great historical prints. The latter part of the second volume and a third volume of *Vetusta Monumenta* were then completed by the time of Basire's retirement with a total of 73 plates, of which only 5 plates were entrusted to another engraver. These exceptions consisted of plates of the royal seals of Scotland which were drawn and engraved by the specialist heraldic engravers, Barak Longmate, father and son, and were published in 1792 to accompany an article by Thomas Astle.

The plates engraved by James Basire for the revived *Vetusta Monumenta* were almost as diverse as those published in *Archaeologia*, but they fulfilled a quite different political agenda, or rather range of agendas at the Society. They were not intended to illustrate the prize finds of collectors or the hobby-horses of its provincial correspondents, but rather to promote the differing antiquarian priorities of the leading Council

members in a larger, more impressive format. For convenience, these different priorities can be divided here into three principal categories, all of which had an impact on the work demanded of the artists involved. Firstly, many of the plates and the accompanying articles had an unmistakably royal and patriotic agenda, as one might expect from an inherently conservative body dominated by clerics from the established church, such as Milles and Pegge, and state employees, such as Ayloffe and Astle. Secondly, many of the plates served explicitly to preserve the memory of monuments which were at risk of destruction through the ravages of time or modern civilisation, a major element in Gough's personal antiquarian programme which he had inherited from his mentor, the first Secretary and long-time pillar of the Society, Dr. William Stukeley. Finally, many of the objects illustrated had some aesthetic value, and could therefore benefit from a greater degree of investment in terms of their finishing, as well as a wider circulation and sales potential among connoisseurs and collectors than the more utilitarian plates in *Archaeologia*, but at a lower cost than the great historical prints.

The Society's first new publication within *Vetusta Monumenta* can be taken as a useful example of all of these priorities, as it was highly influential in antiquarian studies over the next generation. The plates are also of particular interest to an appraisal of the work of James Basire, as they have been the object of intensive study by a number of William Blake scholars, who have reattributed them to a greater or lesser extent to Basire's most famous apprentice. The publication in question comprises Sir Joseph Ayloffe's description of three monuments at Westminster Abbey which appeared in volume II of *Vetusta Monumenta* with the publication date of 1780, the same year that it was separately printed for public sale by John Nichols.²⁹⁵ All three monuments were rediscovered in the summer of 1775, when the removal of wainscot and tapestry from either side of the high altar in the Abbey revealed images of Aveline, wife of Edmund Crouchback, the second surviving son of King Henry III; King Henry III himself; Sebert, King of the East Saxons and legendary founder of the Abbey; and Anne of Cleves, the fourth wife of King Henry VIII.

Sir Joseph Ayloffe read his paper at four meetings of the Society of Antiquaries in the spring of 1778, and James Basire was asked to attend the Council meeting of 8 July 1778 with his estimates for the drawings and engravings of the monuments. In fact, Basire not only presented his estimates but simultaneously submitted the nine finished drawings and the related invoice, all of which were immediately approved by the Council. The drawings were not simple designs for engraving, but works of art in themselves, as Basire completed them in pen, added a sepia wash to three of them, and finished the others in watercolours and gold. Notwithstanding their finishing, the Council decided that the nine "coloured drawings" should not be engraved in the form presented to them, but be combined onto seven plates for the purpose of final publication. This re-

²⁹⁵ Sir Joseph Ayloffe, *An Account of some Ancient Monuments in Westminster Abbey* (John Nichols, London, 1780)

mained, nevertheless, one of the most prestigious commissions Basire received for the *Vetusta Monumenta*. Figure 33 on the following page shows as an example the composite plate which combined the pen, watercolour and gold drawings of the paintings of King Sebert and King Henry III, which had been found on the sedilia of the one of the newly discovered monuments.²⁹⁶

The attribution to Basire of the drawings and plates for Ayloffe's *Account* would not normally be an issue, since he signed the plates and his name was also subsequently added to all but one of the drawings, which are still held in the archives of the Society of Antiquaries. However, there is a tradition among Blake scholars which dates back to the early nineteenth century and aims to include at least the drawings and sometimes also the engravings in Blake's catalogue of works.²⁹⁷ In more recent years, Robert Essick has stated that Blake was sent to Westminster "after about two years of apprenticeship" (i.e. in approximately 1774) to make the drawings for Gough's later *Sepulchral Monuments*, and that he "very likely also made the preliminary drawings" for the plates to Ayloffe's paper in 1775.²⁹⁸ Martin Butlin has gone further and included in his inventory of Blake's paintings and drawings not only the nine coloured drawings commissioned by the Society of Antiquaries, but also seven replicas of these in Gough's private collection bequeathed to the Bodleian Library, as well as twenty-nine further drawings of monuments from Westminster which were prepared for Gough's own *Sepulchral Monuments*, and which are dated in this catalogue to the period 1774-1779.²⁹⁹

This subject has been discussed most recently by Michael Phillips in his carefully researched and beautifully illustrated exhibition catalogue from 2014, *William Blake. Apprentice & Master*. Phillips concluded that the drawings for Ayloffe's paper were "almost certainly carried out by Blake", and further speculated that Basire's apprentice also completed "most, if not all, of the 35 drawings that have survived in the archive bequeathed by Gough to the Bodleian Library", i.e. the drawings of Westminster monuments prepared for Gough's *Sepulchral Monument*, as well as the replicas of the *Vetusta Monumenta* prints.³⁰⁰ Since Blake has many advocates and Basire very few, I shall attempt in the next paragraphs to unravel as far as possible the pros and cons of attribution to Blake or Basire of the drawings and engravings from Westminster not only for *Vetusta Monumenta*, but also for *Sepulchral Monuments*, as these works and the issue of their authorship are closely linked.

²⁹⁶ The watercolours of St. Sebert and King Henry III on which this plate is based can be found illustrated in colour in Nurse, "Bringing Truth to Light", pp. 143-161, in *Making History. Antiquaries in Britain 1707-2007* (Society of Antiquaries, Exhibition Catalogue, 2007), p. 146

²⁹⁷ These arguments have also been summarized by Mark Crosby in "William Blake in Westminster Abbey, 1774-1777", *The Bodleian Library Record*, 22.2 (October 2009), pp. 162-180

²⁹⁸ Robert N. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton, 1980), p. 31

²⁹⁹ Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven and London, 1981), pp. 2-14

³⁰⁰ Michael Phillips, *William Blake. Apprentice & Master*, (Exhibition Catalogue, Ashmolean Library, Oxford 2014), pp. 42 and 44



Figure 33 Paintings from Westminster Abbey of King Sebert and Henry III, drawn and engraved by James Basire for *Vetusta Monumenta*, II, plate XXXIII (1780) (the plate numbering, “V”, refers to Ayloff’s separately published *Account*, published by John Nichols), actual size 478 mm x 317 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The origin of the specific attribution of some, if not all of the illustrations of the Westminster monuments to Blake seems to be Benjamin Heath Malkin's biographical essay of the artist and poet. This was written in 1806, a generation after the period of Blake's apprenticeship, but it is nonetheless relatively reliable in comparison with other anecdotal sources for Blake's early life, and therefore merits quotation in full:³⁰¹

“He was employed in making drawings from old buildings and monuments, and occasionally, especially in winter, in engraving from those drawings. This occupation led him to an acquaintance with those neglected works of art, called Gothic monuments. There he found a treasure, which he knew how to value. He saw the simple and plain road to the style of art at which he aimed, unentangled in the intricate windings of modern practice. The monuments of Kings and Queens in Westminster Abbey, which surround the chapel of Edward the Confessor, particularly that of King Henry the Third, the beautiful monument and figure of Queen Elinor, Queen Philippa, King Edward the Third, King Richard the Second and his Queen, were among his first studies. All of these he drew in every point he could catch, frequently standing on the monument, and viewing the figures from the top. The heads he considered portraits; and all the ornaments appeared as miracles of art, to his Gothicised imagination. He then drew Aymer de Valence's monument, with his fine figure on the top. Those exquisite little figures which surround it, although dreadfully mutilated, are still models for the study of drapery. But I do not mean to enumerate all his drawings, since they would lead me over all the old monuments in Westminster Abbey, as well as over other churches in and about London.”

Malkin's remarks seems to be supported, at least in part, by J.T. Smith's recollection in 1828 of Thomas Stothard's statement that “Blake made a remarkably correct and fine drawing of the head of Queen Philippa..., engraved by Basire”.³⁰² (This plate is illustrated as Figure 34 on the next page.)

³⁰¹ Benjamin Heath Malkin, from *A Father's Memoirs of his Child* (London, 1806), cited in G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (2nd ed. New Haven and London, 2004), p. 563

³⁰² John Thomas Smith, *Nollekens and his Times* (London, 1828), cited in G.E. Bentley, *Blake Records*, p. 605



Figure 34 "Portrait of Queen Philippa from her Monument", drawn and engraved by James Basire for Richard Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, volume II, part I (1796), plate XLIX, page 124, actual size 400 mm x 285 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

There are a number of significant details to note in Malkin's and Smith's evidence. First of all, neither author mentions the monuments drawn for the Society's *Vetusta Monumenta*, but only those prepared for Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*. Secondly, there is a specific focus on the 6 portrait heads of kings and queens based on monuments in the chapel of Edward the Confessor, which form a specifically aesthetic, as opposed to antiquarian, sub-set of the 29 drawings of monuments from Westminster Abbey in Gough's work.³⁰³ The only other monument mentioned is that of Aymer de Valence, which is also illustrated in *Sepulchral Monuments*. Finally, there is a clear emphasis by both Blake and Smith/Stothard on Blake's contribution to the drawings rather than to the engravings.

Since there is no direct, positive evidence of Blake's authorship of the drawings of the Westminster monuments in *Vetusta Monumenta*, it is necessary to examine indirect positive, as well as negative evidence. Bernard Nurse has noted the long tradition whereby these drawings "have been attributed to William Blake on grounds of style and probability".³⁰⁴ The following paragraphs will not enter into arguments as to "style", as this is a highly subjective criterion for attribution, and scholars have not taken into account the wide variety of styles employed by Basire and his studio for different types of commission with different financial budgets. They will instead focus on "probability".

The strongest evidence in favour of the potential attribution of at least the preparatory drawings for Ayloff's paper to William Blake can be found in Ayloff's own words that "accurate drawings... of the monuments of Countess Aveline of Lancaster, King Sebert and Anne of Cleves" were "taken under the inspection of Mr. Basire". In other words, these drawings were not necessarily made by Basire personally. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the busy head of an engraving workshop, who was in his mid- to late forties at this time, clambering over and around these and the other monuments in Westminster Abbey. It would therefore have made sense for Basire to send out Blake and/or his fellow apprentice, James Parker, to make these drawings. Since Blake had already entered Basire's service in the summer of 1772, a year before Parker, after spending four years at Mr Pars's drawing school in the Strand, it seems most probable that Basire would have entrusted his more senior apprentice with this important assignment.

The date of completion and presentation of the final drawings for *Vetusta Monumenta* by Basire to the Council of the Society of Antiquaries in July 1778 does not undermine the hypothesis whereby Blake could also have finalised the drawings, including the pen and ink, wash, watercolour and gold finishing. He would after all remain bound to his master for another year. Having said this, Basire had completed a major assignment in the previous quarter, the engraving of the "Cowdray painting" depicting Francis I of France's attempt to invade England in 1545, and his studio was in early summer 1779 mainly employed on mundane work on plates for *Archaeologia* and the *Philosoph-*

³⁰³ These portraits are comprehensively illustrated in Phillips, *William Blake*, pp. 46-47

³⁰⁴ Nurse, *Making History*, p. 146

ical Transactions. On this basis, it is arguably more probable that Basire himself finished the drawings he presented to the Council meeting, while his apprentices worked on less prestigious tasks. Finally, the proofs for the related engravings with an invoice for the related lettering were presented at the Council meeting on 4 April 1780, which was eight months after the end of Blake's apprenticeship. It is therefore possible that Blake had limited, early involvement in the production of the engravings, but he may not have been involved in these at all.

This leaves open the question of the attribution of the 29 related drawings and engravings of Westminster monuments in Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, which have also been attributed to Blake. As in the case of the *Vetusta Monumenta* plates, all of the engravings are signed as drawn and engraved by Basire, and the vast majority of the drawings are also signed as by Basire, the others being unattributed. Butlin quotes Gough's description of the royal portraits of Edward II and his consort as being specifically "drawn and engraved...by Mr. Basire, but he qualifies Gough's words with the phrase "for what it is worth".³⁰⁵ It is indeed true that neither the signatures nor this statement by the author of the *Sepulchral Monuments* excludes the possibility of significant input from the engraver's apprentices, so it is necessary to take a closer look at dates and other factors which may shed light on the probable attribution of these works.

The different volumes of *Sepulchral Monuments* were published in 1786 and 1796, but many of the plates and related drawings would have been completed much earlier, including during the period of Blake's apprenticeship in 1772-1779. Only one of the plates of monuments in Westminster Abbey is dated. This is the "Monument of Queen Eleanor", which is specifically dated as drawn and engraved in 1783.³⁰⁶ There are also two "portraits" of Henry IV and Queen Joan, which were engraved by Basire after drawings by Jacob Schnebbelie in the late 1780s or early 1790s, which appear to complete the collection of royal portraits which forms a sub-set of the Westminster monuments.³⁰⁷ These dates seem to imply that Gough was continuing to commission drawings of the Westminster monuments many years after Blake's apprenticeship, but many of these could still have been prepared by Blake in the mid-1770s.

Richard Gough had indeed expressed an interest in and stressed the importance of the systematic illustration of funeral monuments as far back as 1768 in his *Anecdotes of British Topography*. Then, writing in his unpublished memoirs in the late 1780s, he dated the first phase of the *Sepulchral Monuments* project to a couple of years before the Westminster discoveries, and specifically connected this plan with his appreciation of Basire's skills as an engraver and draughtsman:

³⁰⁵ Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments*, I.II, p. 140, quoted in Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, p. 13

³⁰⁶ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II.I, plate XXIII, p. 63

³⁰⁷ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II.II, plates XVI-XVII, pp. 33-34

“About 1772 or 1773, I formed another design of illustrating our national antiquities by selecting from my notes all the sepulchral monuments and inscriptions which I had collected in my excursions...Mr. Basire’s specimens of drawing and engraving gave me so much satisfaction that it was impossible to resist the impulse of carrying such a design into execution.”³⁰⁸

The monuments discovered in the summer of 1775 and their description by Aylofffe in the spring of 1778 may then have inspired Gough to request that Basire draw or arrange drawings of other monuments in the Abbey at this time. This was, however, not necessarily the case.

Gough wrote the following in a private letter to William Cole dated December 1781, more than one year after the publication of Aylofffe’s paper and two years after the end of Blake’s apprenticeship:³⁰⁹

“He expressed a satisfaction in a plan I had formed of illustrating the sepulchral monuments of Great Britain from the earliest time to the 16th century – after which all traces of Gothic taste were forgotten. A plan so happily executed by Sir Joseph Aylofffe in Westminster choir monuments. I offered our Society my ideas on the subject as a continuation, & [unreadable word], as so great a Master as Sir Joseph had been pleased to countenance me. They have other objects: & I am vain enough to trust my own strength – by the help of their excellent engraver, & my very good friend – to exhibit a series of Monuments, during the above period.”

This letter to Cole suggests that Gough’s existing ideas and aspirations mentioned in the *Anecdotes of British Topography* and in his later manuscript memoirs had not yet progressed into a concrete project, and that he had envisaged his comprehensive study of British sepulchral monuments both as a follow-up to Aylofffe’s paper for the *Vetusta Monumenta* and as a project sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries. In the end, however, the Society did not support the project and Gough was to pursue it in private in partnership with, among others, the Society’s “excellent engraver” and Gough’s “very good friend”, i.e. James Basire.

Arguably, the wording of Gough’s letter makes it improbable that a systematic collection of drawings of the Westminster monuments was commissioned by Gough before Blake left Basire, and very unlikely that the engravings for the *Sepulchral Monuments* were even started at this time. The specific dating to 1783 of “The Monument of Queen Eleanor”, referred to by Malkin as among Blake’s “first studies”, may even be interpreted as undermining the credibility of the detail of Malkin’s anecdote. It is possible that Blake’s first biographer confused the two different sets of publications of

³⁰⁸ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Middlesex 11, folios 25-26. I am indebted to Bernard Nurse, former Librarian of the Society of Antiquaries for this reference

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Whittemore and Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary*, pp. 22-23

Westminster monuments by the Society of Antiquaries and by Richard Gough, and ended up attributing to Blake the more intimate and aesthetically engaging royal portraits which appeared in Gough's later publication.

A different light can also be shed on the attribution of the drawings and plates of monuments from Westminster Abbey, if we see them in the wider context of James Basire's career and reputation, rather than that of his apprentice. Basire very rarely signed his name as draughtsman on plates published by the Society of Antiquaries, by Richard Gough or by anyone else. However, he signed all the plates of the Westminster Abbey monuments in the *Vetusta Monumenta*, and referred to himself as draughtsman on almost all the related plates which he engraved for the *Sepulchral Monuments*. The obvious interpretation for this is that Basire, like his patrons, attached special importance to these depictions of important figures from British history, including the royal portrait busts in *Sepulchral Monuments*.

The description of Basire's career as an artist in the previous chapter has already demonstrated that he considered himself from the beginning of his career as a portrait specialist both in terms of engraving and drawing, and that the Society of Antiquaries itself recognised portraiture as Basire's "most favourite and peculiar study". This idea is also repeated by John Nichols, who is at least as reliable a contemporary authority as Malkin, and he does this in the specific context of Basire's work on the Westminster monuments, specifically including these portraits:³¹⁰

"The Royal Portraits and other beautiful Plates, in the 'Sepulchral Monuments', fully justify the idea which the Author had entertained of his Engraver's talents; and are handsomely acknowledged by Mr. Gough".

On this basis, it can be argued that it is improbable that Basire would have left the finishing of the drawings either for *Vetusta Monumenta* or for *Sepulchral Monuments* to Blake or any other assistant, even if this is theoretically possible.

In summary, William Blake, perhaps with the assistance of his younger fellow-apprentice and friend, James Parker, was probably responsible for many if not all of the preliminary drawings for the plates for Ayloffe's paper for the *Vetusta Monumenta*. Blake and Parker may also have been involved in some early drawings of the other Westminster monuments on behalf of Richard Gough. It is, however, probable that the master himself completed the water colours and the engravings for *Vetusta Monumenta*, as well as the related drawings and plates for Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*. These works do not represent routine studio productions, such as those produced in bulk for *Archaeologia* or the *Philosophical Transactions*, which would have represented the daily lot of Basire's apprentices. It is therefore implausible to interpret them in the context of a contemporary engraving workshop as the sole work of a precocious genius whose later work would be haunted by the ghosts of Westminster Abbey. These drawings and

³¹⁰ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, p. 717

engravings should rather be considered as the works of a mature artist-engraver at the height of his powers, who would have delegated some of the building blocks under close supervision to his apprentices, including Blake, but would have retained overall artistic responsibility for the style and quality of the end-product.

Other illustrations for Vetusta Monumenta

The subject matter of Basire's subsequent series of engravings for *Vetusta Monumenta* shows that the tide of antiquarian interest towards British mediaeval and Tudor subjects and away from classical ones had become unstoppable by the 1780s. Indeed, only three of the plates in *Vetusta Monumenta* engraved by James Basire (I) illustrated Roman remains or, more precisely, tessellated pavements.³¹¹ The vast majority of his plates for this publication instead resembled the Westminster Abbey plates in the sense that they also combined patriotic and royal connections, aesthetic qualities, and Gough's ambition to preserve the nation's mediaeval architectural heritage, but in each case with a slightly differing emphasis.

Examples of prints where royal themes continued to dominate can be found in a number of Basire's plates published in *Vetusta Monumenta*. His engravings of Vertue's views of Henry VIII's palace of Beaulieu or New Hall in Essex, which were published in 1786, effectively continued the Tudor palace series of landscape prints, the previous instalments of which had appeared from 1765 to 1768. Winchester Cathedral, burial place of the kings of Wessex and the earliest kings of England, and as such the predecessor of Westminster Abbey, was the subject of eight plates published in 1786 and 1789. St. George's Chapel, Windsor, including the tomb of King Edward IV, was also illustrated in another three prints published in 1790.³¹² The particular contemporary interest in the Tudor dynasty is then represented by seven engravings by Basire, which were based on a manuscript depiction of the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth and published in 1791.³¹³

Gough's agenda of undertaking a more proactive approach to the preservation of mediaeval monuments came to the fore in another set of plates engraved by Basire, comprising depictions of surviving mediaeval crosses. Because of their position on busy thoroughfares, such crosses were particularly prone to damage. William Stukeley had already successfully agitated for the protection of the cross at Waltham as early as 1721.³¹⁴ Engravings by Vertue of the Doncaster and Gloucester crosses had subsequently been published in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1751 and 1752. Then, in 1791, Gough penned a more detailed and systematic study of the crosses which had been erected to commemorate the funeral procession of Queen Eleanor. The engravings of these cross-

³¹¹ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II, plates XLIII-XLIV (dated 1788); III, plate XXXIX (dated 1796)

³¹² *Vetusta Monumenta*, II, plates XXXIX-XL, XLV-LI (Winchester Cathedral); III, plates VII-IX (St. George's Chapel)

³¹³ *Vetusta Monumenta*, III, plates XVIII-XXIV (dated 1791)

³¹⁴ Rosemary Sweet, "Founders and Fellows", pp. 53-67, in *Making History. Antiquaries in Britain 1707-2007*, p.61

es at Northampton, Geddington and Waltham clearly showed both their ruinous state and their dangerous location on main roads.³¹⁵ The realisation of these plates represented a significant investment for the Society of Antiquaries, as they were highly-finished and cost a hefty 21 guineas each.

To judge from a 1788 letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, such illustrations of way-side crosses represented only a small part of Gough's broader aspiration for physical rather than just pictorial preservation of such monuments:³¹⁶

“...the reparation and restoration of some select objects of antiquity, would not be an unwise expenditure, and would hardly cost more than the engraving of vile drawings of paltry pitchers, and rude masses of Druidical rocks.... WALTHAM CROSS, or NORTHAMPTON CROSS – these cry out for repair, and would not stand the Society in a larger sum, individually, than the annual engraving of the intricate involutions of a few tessellated pavements...”

This quotation not only encapsulates Gough's political position with respect to the Society's programme of illustration and engraving, but also summarises his ultimately frustrated ambition to find a consensus to pursue a more practical approach to the physical preservation of Britain's mediaeval architectural remains.

The views of crosses were preceded in *Vetusta Monumenta* by two further sets of images of ecclesiastical buildings, where the viewer was also simultaneously confronted with their beauty and the pathos of their ruined state, but in different measures. The first of these comprised Basire's interpretation of Schnebbelie's views of the rubble-strewn interior of Chapel of the Magdalen Hospital near Winchester. A detail of the overgrown door of this building is shown in Figure 35 on the next page.³¹⁷

The second set of plates, entitled “The Chapel of Chatham Church, as it appeared the 13th March 1788”, provided an even more poignant and pointed image. It not only recorded factual details of recently discovered mediaeval choir stalls at the church, but also contained a small inset figure showing two workmen with pick axes perched on the roof of the chancel. As shown in Figure 36 below, the two gentlemen engaged in polite conversation look in imminent danger of being hit by falling masonry from the demolition work above their heads.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ *Vetusta Monumenta*, III, plates XII-XVII (dated 1791)

³¹⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVIII.II (1788), p. 691, quoted in Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, p. 192

³¹⁷ The full plate and a companion plate of the interior of the Magdalen Chapel are printed in Myrone, “The Society of Antiquaries and the Graphic Arts”, in Pearce, *Visions of Antiquity*, p. 115

³¹⁸ *Vetusta Monumenta*, III, plate IV.III (dated 1788)

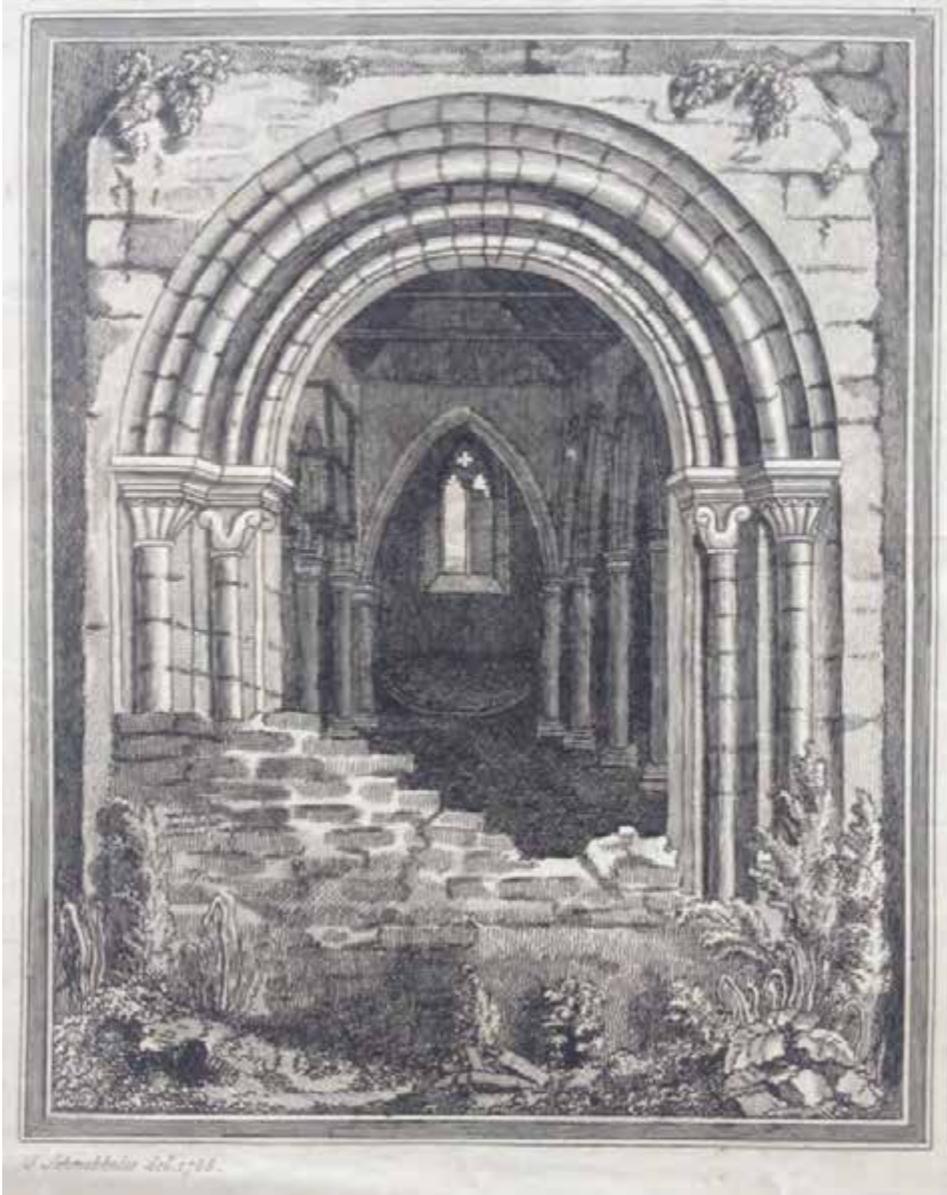


Figure 35 “Magdalen Chapel near Winchester”, figure H, “The West entrance into the Chapel”, detail of plate III, engraved by James Basire after Jacob Schnebbelie for *Vetusta Monumenta*, III (1790), actual size 160 mm x 130 mm (photograph: the author)



Figure 36 “The Chapel of Chatham Church, as it appeared the 13th March 1788”, detail of plate IV, engraved by James Basire after Jacob Schnebbelie for *Vetusta Monumenta*, III (1790), actual size 144 mm x 155 mm (photograph: the author)

The last example in this section of a plate engraved by James Basire (I) for *Vetusta Monumenta* is of an almost entirely aesthetic nature and evidences the contemporary artistic taste for picturesque views. The views in question comprised drawings of Viscount Montagu’s seat, Cowdray House, which were taken in 1785 by the Swiss artist, Samuel Grimm.³¹⁹ These included several sweeping vistas, complete with horses, cattle and busy rustics, and thus provided James Basire with a rare opportunity to create a classic set of landscape engravings in the context of a publication by the Society of Antiquaries (Figure 37 on the following page).

³¹⁹ *Vetusta Monumenta*, III, plates XXXIII-XXXVII (dated 1796)



Figure 37 “South View of Cowdray from the Cottage”, forming the upper half of plate XXIXII, engraved by James Basire after Samuel Grimm for *Vetusta Monumenta*, III (1796), actual size 252 mm x 337 mm (photograph: the author)

By chance, these prints would also become a symbol of Gough’s mission of preservation by the time they were published in 1796. They conserved the memory of the exterior appearance of Cowdray House, which was gutted in the fire in 1793 which also destroyed the murals which were the subject of the Society’s famous historical prints.³²⁰

Despite their artistic finishing and subject matter, Basire charged a relatively restrained 10 to 16 guineas for each of the Cowdray views, but this was nevertheless a substantial commission, as the total for the set amounted to almost £100.³²¹ The individual cost of these prints was subsequently topped by the final plate in volume III of *Vetusta Monumenta*.³²² The Council meeting of 5 February 1796 had initially agreed to 20 guineas for the engraving of John Carter’s view of Hedingham Castle in Essex, but then asked Basire to “de-picturesque” the plate by “leaving out the Sky and part of the

³²¹ Basire’s estimates in this section are from the Society of Antiquaries Council minutes of: 5 June 1766 (Placentia); 20 February 1786 (Beaulieu); 26 June 1786 (Winchester Cathedral); 19 June 1790 (crosses); 5 April 1794

³²² *Vetusta Monumenta*, III, plate XLIV (dated 1796)

Landscape”. However, at another meeting 10 days later, they eventually agreed to leave it “as it is” and even agreed to pay 30 guineas for the extra finishing. This was almost the highest price paid for any single plate in *Vetusta Monumenta* and was to be the last contribution to the series by James Basire the first.

The Society’s great historical prints

Investment by the Society of Antiquaries in artistic finishing was rare in *Archaeologia* and, as we have seen above, only slightly more, albeit increasingly common in *Vetusta Monumenta*. It was, however, central to the historical prints which formed the third leg of the Society’s programme of illustration of antiquities from the Gough period, although Gough himself seems to have had little say in the vast expenditure involved. The prime mover in this project was Sir Joseph Ayloffe. He had already suggested engraving the panoramic painting of the “The Field of Cloth of Gold” from the royal apartments at Windsor in a letter to the 2nd Earl of Hardwicke in 1769,³²³ before broaching the subject of this “very curious historical Painting” at a Council meeting on 2 January 1770. Ayloffe opined that the plate would cost no more than £110 to draw and engrave, and the fact that Lord Hardwicke was prepared to contribute £30 from his own pocket seems to have persuaded his colleagues. By the meeting of 1 June in the same year, discussions were sufficiently advanced for James Stuart to suggest the painter, Edward Edwards, as draughtsman, and “that Mr Basire, if approved by the said Council, be employed in engraving the same”. In one move, a coalition of the aristocratic, patriotic and aesthetic wings of the Society had committed it to becoming a print entrepreneur in the most prestigious and expensive sector of the market, and had incidentally reinstated its official engraver.

“The Field of the Cloth of Gold”, a panoramic engraving of the meeting of Henry VIII and Francis I of France near Calais in 1520, became, like its subject matter, an essay in superlatives. Edwards was sent to Windsor for 6 weeks during the 1770 summer recess to draw the painting at a cost of 1 guinea a day. Stuart was, however, only able to inform the Council at its meeting on 13 December that Edwards was almost finished, and that he would still need to prepare larger scale drawings of the principal figures to help the engraver with the likenesses. Unsurprisingly, the unfortunate Edwards had by this time run up a bill of 160 guineas which far exceeded the expectations of Milles and Ayloffe. In a meeting at the end of January, the Council agreed to pay the artist 110 guineas, and justified this sum on the basis of the huge quantity and the high quality of the work performed. Basire himself estimated 200 guineas for the engraving at the same meeting and supported this large sum by the number of portraits included in the painting. Having seen the drawings, the Council must have known that this was far from expensive for the work involved and approved the estimate after a ballot.

³²³ Nurse, “Bringing Truth to Light”, in *Making History*, p. 144

It took almost another two years of engraving before Basire attended the Society's Council in person on 23 November 1772 to present a first proof of the plate, which was then displayed in the inner room of the Society for two weeks for general viewing. At the beginning of February 1773, the Council felt sufficiently confident in the viability of the project to set up a subscription list. Over the next two months, there were detailed discussions about the quality of paper to be used, with Basire acting as an expert advisor. The Council finally decided on 3 April that the engraver's "memorandums or notes" be sent to James Whatman, famous now as then as the inventor of wove paper, for further development. It was reported at the Council meeting of 11 November in the same year that the paper was ready, but this was by no means the end of the story. The copper plate measured 686 mm x 135 mm and was thus the biggest ever produced. Whatman had to use special equipment to manufacture the largest paper manufactured to date, which appropriately became known as "Antiquarian".³²⁴ The paper was too cumbersome to be transported by stagecoach and so had to be transported by river.³²⁵ Then, Basire needed another six months until 24 June 1774 before he could show a final proof of the engraving on the chosen paper to a committee of experts consisting of Aylofffe, Thomas Brand Hollis and Charles Rogers, with the additional presence of Edwards and Stuart.

Despite the cost and the 5 years required for completion, the final engraving was considered a triumph by all concerned, and remains a milestone in the history of print-making.³²⁶ On 17 January 1775, the Council of the Society congratulated Hardwick on his donation and Aylofffe on his supervision of the print. Basire was rewarded with a gratuity of 20 guineas in addition to his agreed 200 guineas fee, as the work had been completed "to the satisfaction of the Committee appointed to supervise, and compare the same with the Drawing". Copies of the print bound in gilt paper were to be presented to both the King and the Queen, and Basire was given permission to exhibit his plate at the spring exhibition of the Free Society of Artists. A month later, the Council agreed to raise the price of the print to 2 guineas, which Richard Dalton and others justifiably commented was still "uncommonly cheap". However, making a profit was never a realistic outcome of this exercise. Instead, it served the higher purpose of enhancing the public prestige of the Society and of its royalist and aesthetic factions, at a time when it was under attack in private from the likes of Horace Walpole, and in public, for example, in Samuel Foote's 1772 satirical play, *The Nabob*.³²⁷

Gough may have supposed that the "Field of the Cloth of Gold" was a one-off extravagance, but this was not the case. The Council meeting of 14 February 1775 was still

³²⁴ The print, copper plate and a detail of the copper plate are illustrated in Nurse, "Bringing Truth to Light", in *Making History*, pp. 154-155

³²⁵ Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 160-161

³²⁶ Ad Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching 1400-2000* (Houten, Netherlands, 2012), pp. 140 and 260

³²⁷ Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p. 100. Gough's fortune was inherited from his father, himself a "nabob" of the East India Company

basking in the afterglow of the success of its first historical print, when it agreed by a majority of 9 to 4 to approach one of the Sherwin brothers with a view to buying their watercolour of the 1545 attempt by Francis I to invade England. This painting represented a historical sequel to the scene of the Field of Cloth of Gold, and was based on a frieze at Cowdray.³²⁸ Aylofffe had already prepared the ground intellectually by reading a paper to the Society on the series of paintings at Cowdray in 1773, while the Honourable Daines Barrington, fourth son of the first Viscount Barrington, promised that several gentlemen would subscribe 50 guineas. Basire was asked for estimates, and quoted 60 guineas for an outline engraving or 150 guineas with shading, excluding the costs of the copper plates and inscription. Two plates would be necessary, as the Sherwins' watercolour was almost exactly the same height as the "Field of the Cloth of Gold", but was about 50% longer - a staggering two metres.³²⁹

The scene seemed to be set fair for final approval of the second historical print on 21 June 1775, but Aylofffe and Barrington were confronted with a 6 to 8 votes defeat in the ballot of the Council. They had played their political cards badly. Basire had presented to the meeting a full costing of the project of more than £312 for the engraving, copper plates, paper and printing, in addition to the £100 which had been promised to the Sherwins for his watercolour. This was unsurprisingly almost the same total price as the "Field of the Cloth of Gold". Unfortunately for Aylofffe and his supporters, the same meeting had also been given the profit and loss account for the first historical print, which showed costs of over £440 and revenues of only 150 guineas from initial sales of 75 prints.³³⁰ This meeting was also being asked to approve Basire's estimates for Sir William Hamilton's drawings of Pompeii. Clearly, enough was enough - at least for the time being.

Aylofffe and his aristocratic friends laid in wait until early 1776, when a new Treasurer had been appointed, and put a motion to a full meeting of the Fellowship, which was packed with their supporters.³³¹ At the following Council meeting of 19 March 1776, they then used the same selling technique as they had done more than 6 years previously. Aylofffe announced that £52 10s had been collected towards the cost of the Sherwins' work, and Basire produced two sketches of some of the principal figures in outline and relief. The Council consequently agreed to Basire's estimate of 150 guineas, but "with a little relief", or shading. It then took another two years for the engraver to finalise a proof, which was shown to the Council of the Society on 14 April 1778. Despite the fact that the final cost of the plate was over £350, including a charge of £18 15s from Basire for pasting together the paper, the meeting on 22 May again offered the engraver a gratuity of 20 guineas, as the print had been executed "in a Taste and Manner superior

³²⁸ A watercolour showing the Sherwins' watercolour of a detail of the original painting can be found in Bernard Nurse, "The Sherwin Brothers' Copy of the Lost *Mary Rose* Wall Painting at Cowdray House", *The Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012), p. 374

³²⁹ There is a double-page illustration of the print in Nurse, "Bringing Truth to Light", in *Making History*, pp. 156-157

³³⁰ Sales of a further 69 prints were added in a later hand, but the project remained heavily loss-making

³³¹ Nurse, "The Sherwin Brothers' Copy", p. 381

to the Proposals given in and agreed to". Basire's tactics of being flexible in his original offer, and then investing in completion of the shading had again paid off.

Plans for a third, large historical print based on a wall-painting celebrating King Henry VIII surfaced only ten months later. This comprised "The Embarkation of King Henry VIII at Dover" from Windsor Castle, which was specifically identified by the Council of the Society as a second companion piece to "The Field of Cloth of Gold". Samuel Grimm was suggested as a potential draughtsman, and Basire was called in to the Council meeting of 22 November 1779, where he made an estimate of 170 guineas. On this occasion, 18 months passed before Basire presented Council with a proof on 22 June 1781, and "several amendments were proposed, which he was directed to execute". These must have been minor amendments, as a fresh proof was "carefully examined" eight days later, and the Council members "compared it with the Drawing". Following their expressions of satisfaction, they agreed to pay Basire in full, and the print was published with the date of St. George's day 1781.

Four years passed before the idea of continuing the series of historical prints was brought up at the Council of the Society. This may have been because of the influence of Gough, who was not happy with the level of resources being poured into prestigious publications instead of the study and preservation of mediaeval architecture and monuments. This was an opinion which he did not hesitate to restate in public in the preface to his *British Topography* of 1780, as well as in his private correspondence at this time.³³² It is, however, just as likely that the Society was temporarily preoccupied with the aftermath of its move to Somerset House in 1780, the subsequent disarray in its finances, the death in 1784 of its President, Jeremiah Milles, and the temporary presidency of the businesslike Edward King, who was also opposed to the historical prints.

By early 1785, King had been replaced as President by the Earl of Leicester, and the idea of engraving a fourth wall painting, the third one from Cowdray, was proposed at the Council meeting on 16 June. By 19 December, history repeated itself for the fourth time. Basire's estimate of 200 guineas for engraving the coronation procession of King Edward VI "in his best manner" was accepted, and Samuel Grimm was asked to prepare a drawing for 50 guineas.³³³ The new Council then went even further, and offered Grimm another 60 guineas to draw the remaining three historical paintings from Cowdray, a project originally mooted by Hardwicke and Ayloffe almost 20 years earlier.³³⁴ James Essex, an ally of Richard Gough,³³⁵ suggested hanging up the proposals to avoid surprising members before their approval. But, if this tactic was meant to stymie the Council's plans, it was not effective. By 31 March 1787, the Council noted that the plate of "The Procession of King Edward VI" was in a state of "great Forwardness", so that a proof could be exhibited at the Society's St. George's Day celebration on 23 April.

³³² Rosemary Sweet, "The Incorporated Society and its Public Role", p. 85, in Pearce ed., *Visions of Antiquity*

³³³ Grimm's watercolour is reproduced in Nurse, "Bringing Truth to Light", in *Making History*, p. 158

³³⁴ Nurse, "The Sherwin Brothers' Copy", p. 376

³³⁵ Richard Gough, *British Topography* (London, 1780), volume I, p. xxv

On 21 April, Basire estimated 70, 35 and 20 guineas for engravings in outline of Grimm's drawings of the last three Cowdray paintings, and these were subsequently published by the Society in this simpler format in 1788.³³⁶

From the perspective of the Society of Antiquaries, the era of the historical prints could be seen as having enhanced its prestige by demonstrating its fashionable aesthetic taste, its patriotism and its organisational and financial capabilities. From James Basire's perspective, the Society had provided him a unique opportunity to realise every engraver's ambition of being considered a "history engraver". He had already described himself in this way in 1763 in his entry in the *Universal Director*, probably on the basis of his engraving of classical antiquities for Dalton and Stuart. However, his first print based on a historical painting was "Pylades and Orestes" after Benjamin West, which he completed in 1771. He then only included a handful of further "historical prints" in subsequent exhibitions, such as another unidentifiable "historical piece" in 1772, and two historical engravings "after the design of Mr. Edwards, intended for the works of Shakespear (*sic*)" in 1773.³³⁷ It was therefore mainly his portfolio of seven historical prints for the Society of Antiquaries, and particularly "The Field of Cloth of Gold", which created his subsequent reputation as a history engraver.

Basire's pride in "The Field of Cloth of Gold" is clear from the uniquely extended entry in the 1775 catalogue of the Free Society of Artists, where he described his most famous plate as follows:³³⁸

"A large historical print representing the memorable interview between King Henry VIII and Francis I, on the Champ de Drap d'Or, between Guines and Ardres, in the year 1520; engraved by permission of His Majesty for the Honourable Society of Antiquaries: being the largest plate engraved in England."

The plate was indeed so large and unwieldy that the Free Society of Artists agreed at its meeting of 12 June 1775 to pay the engraver £5 to replace the glass of "Mr. Basire's great print", which had been broken by the porters of the Society.

Basire produced two further plates for the Society of Antiquaries which can also arguably be classified as historical prints, and so completed his portfolio of this most prestigious category of engraving. These comprised two densely engraved depictions of "The Distribution of His Majesty's Maundy, by the Sub-Almoner". The first of these was engraved in 1777, exhibited publicly in 1779, and is illustrated as Figure 38. The second one was engraved in 1789, the year after the final three Tudor prints. Both of these plates were published under the imprint of the Society of Antiquaries, but had been commissioned from Grimm and Basire by Sir Richard Kaye, Dean of Lincoln, chaplain to George III, and an active member of the Society. It is notable that when the Basire fami-

³³⁶ None of these prints is illustrated here because they cannot be suitably shown in this format

³³⁷ J. Bell, *Poems written by Shakespear* (London, 1784), volume III, Measure for Measure II, VII. "Your Brother is a forfeit of the Law, and you but waste your Words"; volume V, Julius Caesar IV. "I am thy Evil Genius Brutus"

³³⁸ Graves, *The Society of Artists*, p. 25

ly's own collection of prints was auctioned in 1823, it contained multiple proofs of these plates in the same lots as those of "Pylades and Orestes", as well as no fewer than 10 copies of "The Field of Cloth of Gold".³³⁹

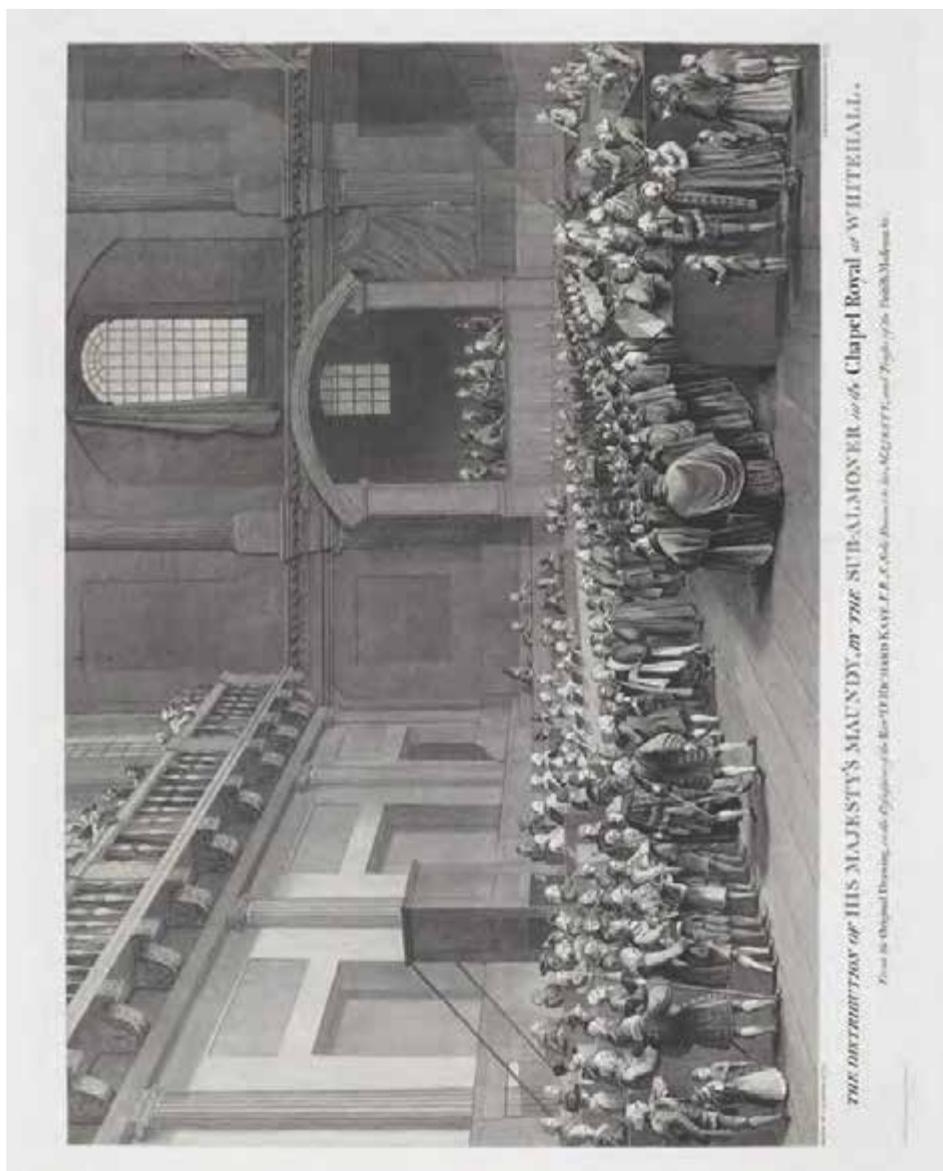


Figure 38 "The Distribution of His Majesty's Maundy, by the Sub-Almoner in the Chapel Royal in Whitehall", engraved by James Basire after S.H. Grimm (1777) (Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2014)

³³⁹ *A Catalogue of the Collection of Prints*, pp. 12-14

4.3 PRIVATE ANTIQUARIAN COMMISSIONS FOR RICHARD GOUGH

Although he is probably best known to posterity as a specialist in British antiquarian engraving, James Basire was not an obvious choice of artist for this type of work at the time of his reinstatement at the Society of Antiquaries in 1770. His father, Isaac Basire, had engraved plates of mediaeval coins, seals, heraldic devices, funeral monuments and ecclesiastical buildings for the urban histories of York and King's Lynn for private publications by Francis Drake and Benjamin Mackerell, respectively.³⁴⁰ These were, however, completed while James was a small child. Neither of James's masters, R.W. Seale and Richard Dalton, was a specialist in this area. In fact, James's preceding work as an independent professional had almost exclusively comprised fine art work, including portraits, architecture and landscape views of classical Roman and Greek remains. His track record as a British antiquarian engraver was represented by little more than a plate of miscellaneous artefacts, a stained glass window and some picturesque views of palaces which he had engraved for *Vetusta Monumenta* in the late 1760s.

It may, however, have been exactly these fine art credentials which provided Basire with his return ticket to the Society of Antiquaries, as he was apparently reintroduced through the influence of James Stuart in order to engrave the historical print of "The Field of Cloth of Gold". Nevertheless, in order to secure his position as official engraver, Basire knew that he also needed to maintain good relations with all factions within the Society, and specifically with its Director, Richard Gough. He seems to have achieved this goal within a short period of time, as he became the all but exclusive engraver of the plates for *Archaeologia* from 1773 and of the revived *Vetusta Monumenta* from 1780. He also went on to become the engraver of choice of an increasing number of private commissions from antiquaries of all types and from across the country, and first and foremost for Gough himself.

The key to the consolidation of Basire's position on his return to the Society of Antiquaries and its extension to a role as engraver of choice to a wider, national antiquarian network is to be found in the strong personal friendship he developed with Richard Gough in parallel to their professional collaboration. This friendship can be demonstrated by the tone and content of some of the surviving examples of their private correspondence.³⁴¹ For example, in a letter dated 19 September 1774 and addressed by Basire to "My good Friend", the engraver arranged a visit to Gough and his wife at their home in Enfield in order to sketch a local monument. The same collection of correspondence also includes a letter dated 15 January 1780, where Basire escalated the intimacy of his greeting to "My Dear Friend", and discussed the finishing touches to the engraving of Richard Gough's personal book plate. A third letter, dated 30 March 1795,

³⁴⁰ Francis Drake, *Eboracum or the History and Antiquities of the City of York* (London, 1736); Benjamin Mackerell, *The History and Antiquities of the Flourishing Corporation of King's-Lynn in the County of Norfolk* (London, 1738)

³⁴¹ John Frederick Lewis collection of autographs of engravers at the Free Library of Philadelphia

is even more intimate, as it thanked Gough for the present of a pig, which he had by chance received on the very day that his 50 plates for Major General William Roy's *Military Antiquities* were completed, one year in advance of the time allowed by the Society of Antiquaries. It was with a note of relief that Basire commented that the pig "came in such good time as to afford us an Agreeable Entertainment".

Basire's first engravings for Gough in a personal capacity seem to have consisted of drawings which the antiquarian himself had prepared for two articles in the second volume of *Archaeologia* in 1773.³⁴² These were followed by a few other illustrations to this periodical, but the bulk of Basire's work for Gough was performed for privately-published works, including all three of those whose titles Gough had ordered to be sculpted on his own commemorative funeral monument: *British Topography* (1780), *Sepulchral Monuments* (1786 and 1796), and a new edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1789).

The lengthy preface to *British Topography* is of interest in this context because its description of the key principles underlying Gough's antiquarian vision also incorporated the role of artists and illustration. For Gough, British antiquarianism, as pioneered by his role model, William Camden, should begin and end with the physical remains of past ages in the British Isles, starting with the "druidical" and culminating in the "Gothic". He believed that more emphasis should be placed on mediaeval than classical remains, and that this would help redress the bias in historical studies which had arisen from the institutionalised nature of classical education among churchmen, the professional and the upper classes. He also recommended that antiquaries travel, inspect and record actual remains *in situ*, and not be content with using written sources. Knowing that this was not always feasible, he suggested the establishment of a network of local correspondents. He considered that antiquarian studies should be systematic, and he specifically mentioned James Essex's illustrated article in *Archaeologia* IV on the dating of brick buildings in England as an example of useful analysis. Finally, Gough repeated *verbatim* from his 1768 *Anecdotes of British Topography* his vision of the central position of artists in the antiquarian project:³⁴³

"The arts of design, ever cultivated by civilized nations, are the happiest vehicles of antiquarian knowledge".

Appropriately, the book plate which had been designed for Gough by his friend, the Reverend Michael Tyson, engraved by Basire, and printed as the title page vignette for *British Topography* provided a pictorial distillation of this vision. The background to the Gough coat of arms featured an antique urn, maps of England, copies of the works of his antiquarian heroes, William Camden and William Dugdale, and the overgrown ruins of the Gothic, arched bridge at Pleshey Castle in Essex. As illustration to the text, *British Topography* contained eight leaves of plates, all of which depicted rare early maps. One

³⁴² *Archaeologia* II (1773), plate V, p. 84; plate VIII, p. 188

³⁴³ Gough, *Anecdotes*, p. xxviii; *British Topography*, I, p. xxxviii

of these, the *Mappa Mundi* from Hereford Cathedral is signed by Basire, and there is no reason to suppose that the remaining, anonymous plates were not also by his hand.³⁴⁴

The text of *British Topography* is also an important documentary source for the status of antiquarian engraving at this time, as Gough listed not only the major antiquarian writings published to date, but also a number of significant prints, including many by Basire. These included not only plates for *Archaeologia*, *Vetusta Monumenta* and the Society of Antiquaries' first historical prints, but also Basire's most important private antiquarian commissions from the 1770s. Under "Dorset", Gough mentioned the views of Lulworth Castle engraved by Basire in 1773 and 1774 for John Hutchins's *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorsetshire*. Under "Lincolnshire", he referred to a large standalone print of Louth Church from 1774, which was known for having been based on the painstaking drawing of a local shoemaker who was financed by the local antiquary, Levett Blackborne. Gough himself was the editor of Thomas Martin's posthumous 1779 urban history of Thetford in Norfolk, which contained several engravings of local buildings by Basire. Finally, the section on Sussex listed both a view of Lewes Castle and family seals from the Reverend John Watson's, *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey*. This work was only published in 1782, but the five views had already been publicly exhibited by Basire at the Free Society of Artists in 1779, demonstrating once again the continued crossover between the antiquarian and the artistic, in this case in the form of landscape engraving.

One of the specific gaps in antiquarian research in England which Gough had mentioned already in the preface to his 1768 *Anecdotes* and then repeated in *British Topography* consisted of a comprehensive study of funeral monuments. Ideally this would be on the model of Bernard de Montfaucon's work on those of the French monarchy. As already mentioned, this was a study which Gough had proposed as a project to the Society of Antiquaries following Ayloffé's publication of selected monuments at Westminster Abbey in 1780, but it had evidently not been accepted. Gough therefore decided to tackle this mammoth task on his own, and incidentally provided Basire with the largest single commission of his lifetime. The two volumes of Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* contained approximately 250 folio-sized plates, the vast majority of which were engraved by Basire over a period of at least 15 years until the publication of the final part in 1796.

Gough was clearly already studying individual funeral monuments as a source of inscriptions, heraldry, genealogy, as well as contemporary dress and weaponry from the late 1760s. On 22 September 1770, he read a paper at the Society of Antiquaries on a tomb at Salisbury Cathedral, which was illustrated in *Archaeologia* by an engraving by Basire after Gough's own drawing.³⁴⁵ The context of the letter of 19 September 1774, where Gough invited Basire to his home in Essex, was a request to the engraver to

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, plate V, p. 74

³⁴⁵ *Archaeologia* II (1773), plate VIII, p. 188

sketch a local monument. The idea of a more systematic and comprehensive study of this subject was then further inspired by Aylofffe's papers on the monuments at Westminster Abbey, which had been read to the Society of Antiquaries in the spring of 1778. As argued by Whittemore and Byrom, it may have been Michael Tyson who gave the final impetus to Gough in a letter written in December 1779, which also mentioned drawings of monuments by the architect, James Essex. In any case, Gough had prepared written proposals and some sample text by the time of his letter to William Cole dated November 1781, and these confirmed the influence of both Aylofffe and Tyson, the early involvement of Essex in reviewing his plans, and the central role of James Basire as engraver.³⁴⁶

The final title of the published work summarised its full intended scope in terms of content and chronology: *Sepulchral monuments in Great Britain: applied to illustrate the history of families, manners, habits, and arts, at the different periods from the Norman Conquest to the seventeenth century*. Volume I, part I, which was published in 1786, and the second part of volume I and the first part of volume II which were issued in 1796, covered the period from the Normans to the thirteenth century. The second part of volume II, which also appeared in 1796, covered the fifteenth century, and proved to be the final instalment. This delayed phasing of publication of a seemingly systematic, chronological plan is probably explained, at least in part, by the availability of illustrations. These comprised the central feature of the work, but it evidently took Gough a considerable amount of time to organise their production in an efficient manner.

A chronological analysis of the dateable plates shows that some illustrations to the *Sepulchral Monuments* were first put together in a piecemeal fashion from the early 1780s onwards, but that this process became increasingly industrialised in the mid-1780s until the final publication of the bulk of the illustrations and their descriptions in 1796. One of the earliest dateable plates is referred to in the letter from Basire to Gough dated 15 January 1780, which discussed the antiquarian's book plate. This letter mentioned proofs of prints of a monument of Matilda Fitzwalter, which were based on a drawing by Tyson from the church at Dunmow in Essex. These were ultimately published in the first part of *Sepulchral Monuments* in 1786.³⁴⁷ Tyson, who was at this time Rector of Lambourne, near Ongar in Essex, also provided drawings of other monuments in Essex, such as those of the De Vere family from Colne Priory, and from churches in neighbouring counties, for example, from St. Alban's and Watton-at-Stone in Hertfordshire, Isleham in Cambridgeshire, and Ely Minster. These drawings, together with a number of earlier or anonymous drawings, many of which may have been made by Gough himself, seem to belong to an initial *ad hoc* phase, when drawings were assembled from a variety of sources by the author and by his more intimate local correspondents.

³⁴⁶ Whittemore and Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary*, pp. 22-23. An extract from this letter is quoted above

³⁴⁷ *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume I, part I (1786), plate VII, p. 31

During this same period, Gough seems to have commissioned Basire to draw, or at least to complete earlier, preparatory drawings by his apprentices, of those monuments in Westminster Abbey which had not already been published by Ayloffe. 24 of the 26 drawings signed by Basire in the first volume of *Sepulchral Monuments* accordingly depicted funeral monuments in the Abbey, including the drawing of the monument of Queen Eleanor which he specifically dated on the print as being drawn and engraved in 1783. The remaining seven drawings signed by Basire in this work were mostly executed in London churches, which he or his apprentices could conveniently visit without excessive additional expense or loss of time. Exceptionally, Basire signed drawings of monuments from Broxbourne in Hertfordshire and Latton in Essex, which were both some distance from central London. However, since Latton is only 8 miles from Broxbourne, which is itself only 8 miles from Gough's house, it is possible that Basire prepared these drawings on his 1780 visit to Enfield or on repeat visits in the following years.

From 1784 onwards, the organisation of illustrations for the *Sepulchral Monuments* became more systematic, as Gough aligned himself with a practice introduced in that year by Edward King at the Society of Antiquaries. This consisted of the commissioning of drawings by professional draughtsmen who would sign their work next to the engraver on the final plates.³⁴⁸ The later drawings which were printed in the *Sepulchral monuments* were duly signed in almost all cases as prepared by Jacob Schnebbelie or by John Carter, the same two individuals who were employed from this time by the Society of Antiquaries to work on its own publications. Carter had been elected draughtsman at the Council meeting of the Society on 26 February 1784, and three of his drawings for *Sepulchral Monuments* were dated in that year, while Schnebbelie, who is first mentioned in the Council minutes of 12 April 1788, signed three of his drawings as completed in 1787, 1789 and in 1791, one year before his premature death in February 1792.

In the 1786 preface to the first volume of *Sepulchral Monuments*, Gough was explicit in describing his experience to date with artists in general, and Basire in particular, in putting together the illustrations for the first volume of the work:³⁴⁹

“Far am I from being insensible of the difficulty of procuring accurate drawing of monuments at a distance from the capital. This I have experienced too often when I have been obliged to borrow an inferior pencil, and have frequently been left without any help at all: where, had a *Vertue*, a *Grimm*, a *Carter*, or a *Basire*, assisted, the monuments of distant cathedrals might have been rendered as familiar as those of Westminster. Nor is it only the distance of draughtsmen from the spot, but the little practice of the subject. The walk of fame for modern artists is not sufficiently enlarged. Emulous of excelling in History, Portrait or Landscape, they overlook the unprofitable, though not less tasteful, walk of Antiquity, or, in Grecian and Roman forget Gothic and more domestic monuments. The un-

³⁴⁸ Society of Antiquaries, Council minutes, 8 May 1784

³⁴⁹ *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume I, part I, p. 9

frequency of the pursuit enhances the price. I must except from this reproach my friend BASIRE, whose praise it is to be faithful in his transcripts and modest in his prices, though it is almost a perversion of his burin, which shines so much in living portraits, to employ it in Gothic ones.”

This text seems to confirm that Basire and Carter were at this stage of the project mainly employed on drawing monuments in London, and that the earlier drawings of provincial monuments, many of which were unsigned, were the work of local artists, antiquarian correspondents, Tyson or Gough himself. It also shows that Gough was himself aware that Basire was still primarily regarded as an artist and particularly as a portraitist, which further elucidates his choice of Basire to supply drawings of the more prestigious royal monuments in Westminster Abbey. It is also notable that Basire was apparently willing to engrave antiquarian subjects for his friend at a reduced price. This can, however, also be explained by commercial reasons. The sheer volume of work produced for Gough created economies of scale for the engraver, who was able to employ up to five apprentices at any one time from the mid-1780s.

The preface to the second volume of *Sepulchral Monuments*, which was published in 1796, confirms the evolution in Gough’s approach to illustration during the last phase of its production:³⁵⁰

“...I have found a Schnebbelie, a Carter, and a Basire to second my efforts, which, without their hand, would most imperfectly have fulfilled their task.”

“Of the one hundred and fifty plates in this volume, seventy six are from drawings by Mr Schnebbelie, ten by Mr. James Basire, senior; twenty-four by Mr. Carter....”.

Gough was now working with a core team of three professionals, whose roles had become so specialised that Basire only provided a small number of drawings, but almost all the engravings, while two thirds of the remaining drawings were prepared by Carter and Schnebbelie, who travelled the length and breadth of the country for this purpose. In some cases, Schnebbelie revisited churches, such as those at Latton and Isleham, where Tyson had taken earlier, less comprehensive sketches. This artist also made some drawings of monuments at Westminster Abbey in order to supplement those made earlier by Basire and his apprentices. The only dated drawing by Basire in the second volume is from 1791, and this shows a monument at Bishopsgate in the City of London, which would have been easily accessible at any time to the busy engraver or one of his assistants.

The 1796 preface to the second volume of *Sepulchral Monuments* not only gives insights into the specific details of its production, but also describes the general relationship between Gough’s private endeavour and his somewhat wishful view of the evolution of the strategy for illustrating antiquities at the Society of Antiquaries during the same period.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume II, part I, pp. 5 and 11

³⁵¹ *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume II, part I, p. 7

“In the mean time let me congratulate the Society of Antiquaries that their views have been directed to the preservation of those public buildings which the piety of our ancestors consecrated to the service of religion, while they yet can be contemplated with useful admiration.”

This sentence alludes to the Society’s decision to have the architecture of the great cathedrals of the nation drawn and engraved, in order to preserve them from the threat of an exported French revolution or the more real danger of modern “restoration”, as had already happened at Salisbury Cathedral.³⁵² In this context, Gough’s work on the internal fittings of the nation’s foremost ecclesiastical buildings could be interpreted as dovetailing with the Society’s recording of their external, architectural fabric. It also hints at Gough’s wider view of the complementary nature of his private and public contribution to antiquarian illustration. He thus chose to illustrate in the *Sepulchral Monuments* objects from Westminster Abbey which were not covered in Ayloffe’s paper.³⁵³ Winchester Cathedral is almost completely absent from his private work, as its magnificent Gothic tombs would be published in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1789. Finally, he chose the same utilitarian style for the illustrations he promoted in both publications. As such, the final engravings for the *Sepulchral Monuments* were produced with a minimum of shading, and background details are only provided in special circumstances. Exceptions, such as Carter’s detailed recording of the Gothic fan vaulting at Hereford Cathedral in *Sepulchral Monument* (Figure 39 on the next page),³⁵⁴ can thus be seen as equivalent to the special attention given by Schnebbelie to the Winchester monuments in *Vetusta Monumenta*.

It is difficult to judge the immediate impact of *Sepulchral Monuments* from contemporary reviews, as these seem mostly to have been written by Gough or his close associates.³⁵⁵ However, a private letter dated to late 1786 from Thomas Pennant, the zoologist, antiquarian and travel-writer, who was one of Gough’s regular correspondents, does give one private point of view: “I have got Gough’s book – its merit is in the engraving.”³⁵⁶ This sentiment is strangely similar to Horace Walpole’s often-quoted comment concerning the Society of Antiquaries itself: “The best merit of the Society lies in their prints”.³⁵⁷ In the case of *Sepulchral Monuments*, Walpole was apparently not even interested in the prints, as the pages on his copies of both volumes were left uncut.³⁵⁸

³⁵² Evans, *History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 207 and 211

³⁵³ Westminster Abbey was also the subject of the first volume in the Society of Antiquaries so-called, “Cathedral series”: John Topham, *Some Account of the Collegiate Chapel of St Stephen, Westminster* (Society of Antiquaries, London, 1795). It is entirely illustrated by John Carter and James Basire

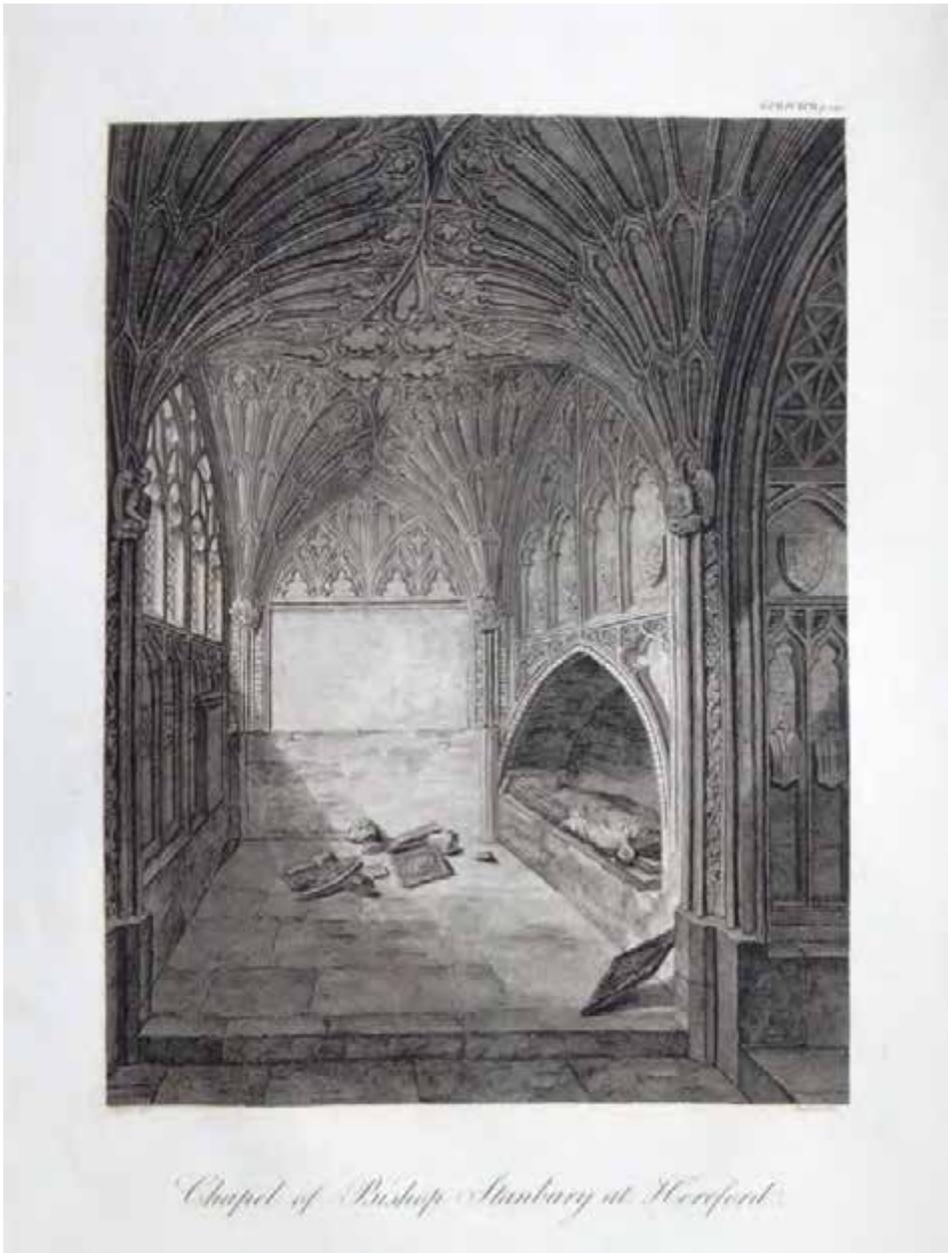
³⁵⁴ *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume II, II, plate XCIII, p. 240

³⁵⁵ Whittemore and Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary*, p. 23

³⁵⁶ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, folio 424, p. 751

³⁵⁷ Quoted recently in Arthur MacGregor, “Forming an Identity: the Early Society and its Context, 1707-1751”, pp. 45-73, in Pearce, ed. *Visions of Antiquity*, p. 63

³⁵⁸ Whittemore and Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary*, p. 24



Chapel of Bishop Stanbury at Hereford.

Figure 39 “Chapel of Bishop Stanbury at Hereford”, engraved by James Basire after John Carter for Richard Gough’s *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, volume II, part II (1796), plate CII, page 240, actual size 415 mm x 295 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author)

Despite the lack of appeal of the subject matter of *Sepulchral Monuments* to aesthetes such as Horace Walpole, Gough's work was flattered by imitation in the form of the *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, which was published in 1817 by Charles Alfred Stothard, a later draughtsman of the Society of Antiquaries.³⁵⁹ Stothard's *Memoirs* systematically criticised his predecessor's text, the drawings and engravings.³⁶⁰ This was arguably somewhat unfair given the evolution in the style and standards of reproduction in the intervening period, and John Nichols's *Gentleman's Magazine* predictably leapt to the defence of Gough's artists long after their deaths. Its review of Stothard's *Memoirs* declared that this criticism "could not apply either to Schnebbelie or Carter; or to the matchless portraits of our Sovereigns by Basire".³⁶¹

The remaining examples of private collaboration between Gough and the elder James Basire were less controversial than the *Sepulchral Monuments*, as they had a less public profile. Gough felt a special relationship to the early seventeenth-century antiquarian, William Camden, and spent almost 20 years privately translating his classic work, *Britannia*, from Latin to English, as well as adding annotations based on his own travels around the country. Unlike *Sepulchral Monuments*, but like *British Topography*, the engravings by Basire were in this volume subservient to the text and represented a miscellany of subjects, including the frontispiece portrait of Camden in volume I, funeral monuments, Latin inscriptions and remains from Roman Scotland.³⁶²

Gough's *History and Antiquities of Croyland-Abbey* was a similarly slow-burning personal project.³⁶³ He had visited Croyland on his first antiquarian tour after leaving Cambridge in 1756, and shared a love of the abbey with William Stukeley, who was also an *alumnus* of Corpus Christi College. The plates are not signed, but it is known from other sources that they were engraved by Basire in 1782-1783 after drawings by Carter.³⁶⁴ The fact that Gough extolled Carter in florid terms in the preface, which was written a year before the young architect's appointment as draughtsman to the Society of Antiquaries, implies that it was Gough who discovered: "This industrious young man, into whom I thought the spirit of Vertue was passed by a metempsychosis not unfamiliar to Professors of Antiquity." It is evident that Gough recognised that he had found a dream team in the combination of Basire and Carter, to which he later added Schnebbelie, and that these artists would guarantee the quality of illustration of both his private publications and those which he promoted at the Society of Antiquaries.

³⁵⁹ Mrs Charles Stothard, *The Memoirs of C.A. Stothard* (London, 1823), pp. 29-32 and p. 79

³⁶⁰ Philip Lindley, "The Artistic Practice, Protracted Publication and Posthumous Completion of Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*", *The Antiquaries Journal* 91 (2012), p. 399

³⁶¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XCIII.I, (1823), p. 251

³⁶² Richard Gough ed., *Britannia by William Camden* (London 1789), volume I, frontispiece, plates IX and XII; volume II, plate *IX; volume III, plates *IX, *XXVI, XXVI, XXVII

³⁶³ Richard Gough, *The History and Antiquities of Croyland-Abbey, in the County of Lincoln*, published in John Nichols ed., *Bibliographia Topographica Britannica*, no. IX, volume II, V

³⁶⁴ For example, "Biographical Memoirs of Richard Gough, Esq.", *Gentleman's Magazine* (1819), LXXIX, I, p. 492



Figure 40 “West Front of Croyland”, engraved by James Basire after John Carter (1783), actual size 407 mm x 305 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Curiously, the final published version of Gough’s *History and Antiquities of Croyland-Abbey* did not include, but did advertise for sale one larger-scale, standalone print, the “West Front of Croyland”, which was also drawn by Carter and engraved by Basire (Fig-

ure 40 on the previous page).³⁶⁵ This work was clearly important to the engraver, as he signed it in full as “Engraved by James Basire” and exhibited it at the last exhibition of the Free Society of Artists in 1783. It is also revealing in terms of the personality of Carter and his interaction with his colleagues.³⁶⁶ Gough’s private correspondence with John Nichols records that the antiquarian had advanced the money for the drawing to Carter, but that the draughtsman, “in a fit of despair”, had simultaneously sold it to Nichols, who recognized Gough’s superior claim to the property.³⁶⁷ This anecdote shows the difficulties which Gough and Basire must both have faced in working with the young Carter, whose later career would also be marked by disputes and his temperamental personality. It also demonstrates that the well-heeled Gough, the antiquarian’s antiquarian, recognized not only the scientific importance, but also the emotional and artistic impact of illustrations of the country’s great Gothic ruins, and that he too was ready to dabble in their commercial potential.

4.4 LOCAL HISTORIES, TOURS AND PRIVATE WORKS FOR OTHER ANTIQUARIES

Richard Gough was not by any means James Basire’s only patron in the development of his business of private antiquarian engraving, but he seems often to have been somewhere in the foreground or background of the engraver’s other activities in this area. The following pages examine three examples of this type of work from the second half of Basire’s career. The first is a typical county history by a provincial cleric on a low budget. The second is a private antiquarian spin-off by another provincial cleric, but with a large budget financed by a well-off, would-be aristocrat. The third example illustrates some of the first steps in the evolution of purely historical antiquarian works into more popular topographical works with a historical element, which were being produced in increasing numbers to satisfy demand from the burgeoning number of middle-class tourists travelling within the British Isles.

Gough, Hutchins and the History and Antiquities of the County of Dorsetshire

The largest gap in antiquarian studies identified by Gough in his *British Topography* comprised the county histories: “Of the forty counties of England, nine have found no antiquary hardy enough to attempt their general illustration, and the collections for the

³⁶⁵ It was later included as the frontispiece to *A second Appendix to the History of Croyland* (London, 1815), which was published by John Nichols as issue XXII of his *Biblioteca Topographica Britannica*

³⁶⁶ More details of the genesis of this print and the subscription organized by Gough are given in Bernard Nurse and J. Mordaunt Crook, J., “John Carter, FSA (1748-1817): ‘The Ingenious, and Very Accurate Draughtsman’”, *The Antiquaries Journal* 91 (2011)

³⁶⁷ Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Let. C. 356 f. 212 NAD 5680 (source: Julian Pooley)

remaining eight are still withheld from the public".³⁶⁸ Gough apparently did not consider himself hardy enough to write a county history, but he was active both in the promotion of such works and in the authorship of histories at lower levels of granularity. He completed Thomas Martin's *History of the Town of Thetford*, and authored not only the *History and Antiquities of Croyland-Abbey*, but also a *Parochial History of Castor* and *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Pleshey*,³⁶⁹ all of which were illustrated by engravings by James Basire the elder or his son. At the level of the counties, he lent copper plates from the *Sepulchral Monuments* to Ralph Bigland for use in his *Historical, Monumental and Genealogical Collections relative to the County of Gloucester*, and to John Nichols, for his *History and Antiquities of Leicester*.³⁷⁰ His greatest impact, however, was in helping his bolder provincial brethren in their attempts to complete their county histories, not least through practical advice and help on illustration, engraving and printing.

The first time that James Basire's name is mentioned in connection with a county or any local history seems to be in a letter dated 21 February 1767 from Gough to John Hutchins, author of *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*.³⁷¹ Gough, who was only elected to the Society of Antiquaries in that year, and only published *Anecdotes of British Topography* in the following year, had written to Hutchins to introduce himself and offer his help. Hutchins had apparently asked Gough to make enquiries of Basire as to the price of engraving the drawings received to date for his history. It therefore seems that Gough had not proposed Basire's name, but that Hutchins already knew of Basire as titular engraver to the Society of Antiquaries and was enlisting Gough's help as a go-between. He was pushing on an open door, and Gough acted as an intermediary in all of Basire's dealings with Hutchins and his circle of antiquarian helpers in the West Country from that date.

Prior to contacting Gough, it seems that Hutchins had first sought advice on illustrating his history at the beginning of 1766 from an old friend, Charles Godwyn of Balliol College, Oxford. Their correspondence gives a number of insights into the process of illustration, including the matching of authors with patrons and artists at this time. Godwin first advised Hutchins to include plates of the principal buildings and curiosities of the county, as this would add to the value of the end-product. He noted that it was usual for the gentlemen of the county to pay for such plates, and recommended William Borlase's *Observations on the Antiquities Historical and Monumental of the County*

³⁶⁸ Gough, *British Topography*, I, p. x

³⁶⁹ Gibson Kennet and Richard Gough, *A comment upon part of the fifth journey of Antoninus through Britain... Enlarged with the Parochial history of Castor and its dependencies...* (John Nichols, 1800); Richard Gough, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Pleshey in the County of Essex* (John Nichols, 1803);

³⁷⁰ Ralph Bigland, *Historical, Monumental and Genealogical Collections relative to the County of Gloucester* (printed by John Nichols, London 1791), "Monuments of the Berkeley family in Berkeley Church", reprinted from Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, volume II.I, plate XIV, p. 114; John Nichols, *The history and antiquities of the County of Leicester* (London, 1795-1815), I.I, plates XIV-XV; I.II, XXX; II.I, XIV, *XIV, LXXIV; II.II, CCXIV; III.I, LXXII-LXXIII

³⁷¹ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, folio 145

of *Cornwall* (1754) as “a very good plan to go upon”.³⁷² In a letter later in the year, Godwin reiterated his proposed strategy of soliciting gentlemen who have “seats proper to be engraved”, stressed the importance of finding a draughtsman, but dismissed engravers as “easy to find”. He added that “such ornaments are expected in books of this kind” and noted that engravings were currently being prepared for Philip Morant’s, *History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* (1768), and for John Bridges’s, *History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*.³⁷³

Hutchins does not seem to have contacted the Oxford don, Bridges, whose history was posthumously published in 1791 by Peter Whalley, with the inclusion of some plates by Basire and Schnebbelie. However, he did seek and receive concrete advice from both Morant and Borlase, who gave him detailed guidelines based on their own experience. Borlase was sceptical that country gentlemen would send drawings of their houses, and repeated Godwin’s recommendation to employ his own draughtsmen. He added that these should not only be proficient in drawing architecture and artefacts, but also at surveying and mapping and should work “under the inspection of one who has made these things the objects of his study”.³⁷⁴ On the subject of engraving, he suggested that Hutchins should ask his bookseller to “look out for a skilful reasonable young engraver who perhaps may want full employ for a time”. This is advice that Borlase took for himself in employing James Green, the young Oxford-based engraver, who had been Isaac Basire’s star pupil. Unfortunately for Hutchins, Green had died 7 years prior to the date of this correspondence.

Given this litany of issues which were all outside the day-to-day experience of a provincial clergyman, it is not surprising that Hutchins accepted the wealthy and well-connected Gough’s offer of a helping hand. Gough was aware that Basire would not be able to fix a price without seeing the drawings, so Hutchins sent his London correspondent the 26 drawings, including plans, which he had so far begged and borrowed from his contacts within the county. Gough was then able to send a detailed reply with Basire’s estimates in April 1767, adding a caution that any reduction or increase in size of the drawings would entail additional expense.³⁷⁵ It appears that Basire was keen on the engagement, presumably because business was slow at the Society of Antiquaries at this time. As Gough put it, “He hopes for ready money, as he engages to work for you as cheap as for the booksellers”. Basire’s quote of approximately £50 for all the drawings and 20 guineas for the map, which would need considerable original work, did indeed look reasonable. It compared especially favourably with Morant’s statement that there be “hardly any Building that can be neatly done, Drawing and all, under 10 guineas.”³⁷⁶

³⁷² Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, ff. 113-114, letter of 17 January 1766

³⁷³ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 140, undated letter of late 1766

³⁷⁴ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 28, letter of 3 December 1766

³⁷⁵ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 146, letter of 15 April 1767

³⁷⁶ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2., f. 328, letter of 13 May 1766

Basire even seems to have committed to finish the engraving by the end of the summer by taking advantage of the long days.

Unfortunately, the deal between Hutchins and Basire was not done in this form for a number of reasons. Hutchins's project was still a long way from being financially viable. His prospective printer, Benjamin Collins of Salisbury, had advised that the subscriptions collected should amount to at least 250 before having any plates engraved.³⁷⁷ Gough's Surrey correspondent, Owen Manning, wrote within two months of Hutchins's receipt of Basire's estimates that: "All our hopes about Mr. Hutchins are at an end. His subscription goes on so slow he has put off the engraver".³⁷⁸ The drawings collected to date were also far from providing a coherent whole, and Gough suggested a number of alternative sources, including even the famous, but now dated series of views by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck. The Buck brothers, however, refused. Gough was therefore involved in detailed negotiations with booksellers and printers throughout the following years in order to drum up sales, and explore arrangements to share the cost of the engraving and minimise the cost of production.³⁷⁹

In 1770, Hutchins published a set of *Proposals* which appealed for both funds and for additional drawings for plates, and this resulted in significant traction in terms of both subscriptions and illustrations thanks to the energy of the author's friends in general and Gough in particular. The final version of the first edition of the *History of Dorset*, as published in 1774, was accordingly adorned with 58 plates. This was close to the number of 60 plates in Barrow's *New and Universal Dictionary*, mostly the work of Isaac and James Basire, a book which Hutchins specifically mentioned in his correspondence as exemplifying the ideal, minimum amount of illustration in a serious monograph.³⁸⁰

Two thirds of the plates in the end-product were attributed to specific engravers, with three artists taking the lion's share: there were nine plates signed by John Bayly, eight by Victor Marie Picot, and five by Basire. The other attributed engravings were signed by a number of other artists, including several of the most famous practitioners of the day: John Caldwell, Peter Mazell, Edward Rooke, Thomas Vivares and William Woollett. In other words, Basire had been relegated to just one of the three main engravers on the project.

In fact, it was Bayly who had in the meantime been hired in place of Basire as the principal engraver. According to Hutchins himself, this was mainly on cost grounds: "(Basire's prices) are far from being unreasonable, but in general, the prices of an engraver recommended to me by the Bishop of Carlisle were more so, viz. 2 guineas and half one with another".³⁸¹ Charles Lyttleton, the Bishop of Carlisle, who was also the President of the Society of Antiquaries at this time, was apparently not a friend of

³⁷⁷ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 41, letter of 31 August 1766

³⁷⁸ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top 43, f. 14, letter of 8 June 1767

³⁷⁹ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, ff. 148-162, letters of 19 October 1769 to 7 May 1770

³⁸⁰ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 235, letter of 13 December 1767

³⁸¹ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 233, letter of 4 May 1767

Basire. He was a party to the decision in the following year to dismiss Basire, and then to engage the very same Bayly to consult on the engraving of the Domesday Book and to contribute engravings to the first volume of *Archaeologia* in 1770. The Bishop's death at the end of 1768 must have contributed to the Society's subsequent decision to reinstate Basire and discontinue its collaboration with Bayly. The latter's general attitude may also have been a factor, as he was fired by Owen Manning, the historian of Surrey, who described him as "a lazy shuffling Fellow".³⁸²

It was only in 1772, a further four years after the Bishop of Carlisle's death and five years after low-balling his competitor, that Bayly finally completed the engraving of some of the twenty-six drawings which had originally been sent to Basire. Correspondence between Gough and a friend, who was writing on behalf of the incapacitated Hutchins, gives some insight into issues encountered in finalising one particular plate, and these were not untypical of others on this and other, similar projects. Hutchins's own church of St. Mary's Wareham, had been drawn by an amateur artist using a *camera obscura*. This artist, however, did not "profess the ornamental part of drawing, and did not doubt (as he has seen very good Engravings from worse drawings than his Church), but the Engraver would have soften'd the Clouds etc and perhaps added some birds, and something grazing or walking in the Churchyard, which would have taken off the stiffness". In other words, the amateur drawing was an inadequate basis for a published engraving and the artist expected the engraver to compensate. The final engraving does not contain any of the additional wildlife requested, but it seems that Bayly was at least willing to "soften" the clouds sufficiently within the five guineas paid to him in order to placate the plate's sponsor, Mrs. Turner. Hutchins was in turn good enough to offer a free engraving to both Mrs. Turner and the local artist for their trouble.³⁸³

Given this correspondence and the fact that Bayly was essentially a technical engraver, it is not surprising that his final contribution was concentrated on the original designs for which he had offered a low price, and that these were not on the whole highly finished. They included not only the view of Wareham Church, but also engravings of Aggleston and Corfe Castle,³⁸⁴ for which the owner, Henry Banks Esq., was only willing to pay 4 guineas.³⁸⁵ Basire and the other higher-end engravers were then allocated the more ornamental engravings for which the relevant gentlemen were willing to pay a commensurate price. Almost all of the plates by the young French engraver, Picot, as well as those by Vivares and Woollett, correspondingly comprised vistas of country seats with a full complement of clouds, grazing animals and walking figures. In

³⁸² Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 51, letter of 5 November 1773, also quoted by Julian Pooley in "Owen Manning, William Bray and the writing of Surrey's county history, 1760-1832", *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 92 (2005), p. 98

³⁸³ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, ff. 71-74, letters of 10 January and 5 February 1772

³⁸⁴ William Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 1st edition (Bowyer and Nichols, London, 1774), plates I, 34; I, 217, and I, 182

³⁸⁵ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, ff. 75 and 77, letters of 25 March and 14 April 1772

the case of Basire's contribution, his plates represented a mixture of such landscape views and of mediaeval antiquities, such as Figure 41 on the next page.³⁸⁶

This engraving of the mediaeval market cross at Stalbridge, which survives as a listed monument to this day, was clearly commissioned through the agency of Gough. It not only represented one of the antiquarian's pet subjects, but the drawing was signed by Gough, and the plate was paid for by the fellows of his *alma mater*, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. It is notable that this plate, in contrast to those of other crosses in *Vetusta Monumenta* already mentioned, is depicted in an unemotional, scientific context, with a white background, figures of details and a measuring scale.

The other two engravings of antiquities by Basire were of a more miscellaneous nature and were both printed as large vignettes with letterpress descriptions. One of these represented the font at Winterborne Whitchurch, as drawn by another amateur artist, the parish clerk and local carpenter, William Shave. The third, a purely antiquarian plate, depicted a pair of snuffers, the main interest of which was that they had been recently found in 1768.

The remaining three engravings created by Basire for Hutchins's *Dorset* comprised landscapes of a higher artistic value, and were all sponsored by the Weld family of Lulworth Castle. Each of these was signed in full as "Engraved by James Basire" and dated to 1773 and 1774, i.e. during the final stages of the publication process, which Gough had taken over following the death of Hutchins in June 1773.³⁸⁷ The two full-page views of Lulworth Castle are particularly fine. One is based on a work by Giles Hussey, a retired local artist, but of international repute. The other was signed by "J. Taylor", probably Isaac Taylor, who also drew the seat of Hutchins's close collaborator, James Frampton, which was engraved by William Woollett. The first view of Lulworth was decorated with clouds, with a detailed background and foreground, while the second one contained all the ornamentation which a country gentleman could wish for: sky, birds, ships, a herdsman with oxen, and a shepherd with sheep. Both views were considered sufficiently important by Basire for him to exhibit them at the Free Society of Artists in 1773 and 1774, immediately after their completion.

³⁸⁶ Hutchins, *History and Antiquities of Dorset*, I, 68; I, 130; I, 140; I, 155; II, 245

³⁸⁷ Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. d.2, f. 393, records that the three drawings of Lulworth were transmitted on behalf of Weld by his fellow Roman catholic, Marmaduke Tunstall



Figure 41 Stalbridge Cross with its ornaments, engraved by James Basire after Richard Gough for John Hutchins's *The History and Antiquities of the county of Dorsetshire*, 1st edition (1774), volume II, page 245, actual size 338 mm x 248 mm to the plate marks (photograph: the author)

John Watson's Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey

The tension between antiquities and art, science and snobbery, which characterised the wearisome assembling of the plates to Hutchins's *Dorset*, was a recurring theme in the antiquarian and topographical works outside of, as well as inside the Society of Antiquaries. In the case of the second example given here of a private antiquarian commission, the *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey and their Descendants to the Present Time* by the Reverend John Watson, antiquities, art and science took a back seat to snobbery, but also benefited from it in terms of investment in the illustrations. The two volumes of the *Memoirs*, which were privately published with the date of 1782, provided James Basire with his second largest budget for a private antiquarian commission after Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*.

The *Memoirs* do not constitute a county or local history, but do have a number of similarities with such works. One of the most common elements of a county history was the establishment of the pedigree and family history of local gentlemen and noblemen, illustrated with images from manuscripts or, more frequently, from funeral monuments. This element was expanded in the *Memoirs* to take up the whole work, and for a reason. Watson was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Rector of Warrington, then in the county of Lancashire. He had been employed by the local landowner and Member of Parliament, Sir George Warren, to prove that Warren descended from the ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey, and so enable him to lay claim to a peerage. The result is one of the most extraordinary vanity publications ever produced. Warren had no realistic claim to a peerage, but was nevertheless prepared to finance a two-volume, 600 page work with more than forty full-page copper plates and hundreds of engraved vignettes.

The vignettes comprised coats of arms, decorative initial letters and head and tail pieces and were probably not by Basire. Only one of these was attributed: the tail piece at the end of the second volume, which was signed as drawn by Edward Edwards and engraved by John Hall in 1778. Edwards and Hall can therefore probably be identified at least as the artists behind the other original vignettes in the form of initial letters, head and tail pieces. Edwards was an Associate of the Royal Academy, and had been employed by the Society of Antiquaries to draw the "The Field of the Cloth of Gold". Hall was one of the most prestigious engravers of his day, and was working at this time with James Basire on portraits of South Sea natives to illustrate Captain Cook's celebrated *Voyage towards the South Pole, and round the World*.³⁸⁸ The heraldic vignettes were also unsigned, and were probably created by a specialist, such as Barak Longmate, rather than Basire. All of the full-page copper plates were, however, clearly signed as engraved by "Basire", "J. Basire", or in the case of the portrait frontispiece and one of the other three portraits, by "James Basire".

³⁸⁸ James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole, and round the world. Performed in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Adventure* (London, 1777), I, frontispiece; II, plates XXVI-XXVII, XLV and LX

Although the written content of the *Memoirs* comprised a sub-set of subjects covered in a typical local history, Basire's plates actually represented a full-scale system of illustration that you might find in such a work. There was a frontispiece portrait of the author with an elaborate copper plate inscription dated 1780, followed by portraits and emblems of supposed members of Sir George Warren's family, which were derived from mediaeval manuscripts. There were engravings of seals, charters and medieval funeral monuments, but the majority of plates were topographical. They represented castles and ecclesiastical buildings associated with the historical Earls of Surrey and Warren, and culminated in two picturesque views of Sir George's own seat at Poynton Lodge in Cheshire.

One of the views of Poynton Lodge is in the form of an extravagant, triple-page fold-out plate with a complete set of decorative elements. These included not only the different species of trees found in the park, flying birds and clouds, but also the house and gate-house reflected in the lake, a fisherman, walking and riding figures, and a dog, cattle, horses and swans. The other contemporary view of Poynton Lodge, taken from a greater distance, was no less picturesque, but was confined to one page and contained in a modish oval frame (Figure 42 below).



Figure 42 “A View of Poynton Lodge and its Environs. 1778”, engraved by James Basire for Reverend John Watson’s *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey and their Descendants to the Present Time* (1785), volume II, page 162, actual size 188 mm x 236 mm to the plate marks (photograph: the author)

This format was also used for most of the other topographical views of Warren “family” properties over the centuries, and so served to recreate in pictures a continuous, if bogus, genealogy of property.

Basire seems to have thought highly enough of no fewer than five of the landscape views of the mediaeval properties published in the *Memoirs* to exhibit them at the Free Society in 1779. He also distinguished four plates from this work with the addition of the phrase “engraved by” in front of his name: the pull-out contemporary view of the house and park, the frontispiece portrait of Watson, and the historical portraits of Sir John and Sir Edward Warren de Poynton (Figure 43 on the next page).

In his biography of Basire, John Nichols specifically mentioned the “portraits of Watson and Sir George Warren’s family” in his list of the engraver’s best-known works.³⁸⁹ The former portrait clearly refers to the frontispiece, while the latter may either suggest a lost conversation piece or, more likely, refer to the two above-mentioned portraits of the Warrens of Poynton from the early seventeenth century.³⁹⁰ Based on Sotheby’s catalogue of the sale of the family’s art collection, it seems that the Basires were in possession of an original, framed and glazed painting of another family member, Sir William Warren de Poynton, which most likely represented a present from Watson’s patron.³⁹¹

Thomas Pennant

The third example of private antiquarian commissions leads from the more gentlemanly, academic works described above to the beginnings of a more, but not entirely commercial type of topographical publication, the travelogue. Such works included not only antiquarian observations and illustrations, but also covered other topics, such as the beauties of the local landscape, its geology, fauna and flora, and even added observations on the agriculture, commerce and character of local people. They could be enjoyed by armchair or by real tourists, as preparatory material for travels or as souvenirs. Significantly, the pioneer of this type of publication, Thomas Pennant, was not only an active fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, but also a natural scientist with an avid curiosity about and a drive to explore and share his knowledge on all matters animal, vegetable and mineral.

³⁸⁹ Watson, *Memoirs*, I, pages 35, 41-43 and 86 for the exhibited views; volume II, pages 138 and 142 for the family portraits; page 162 for the contemporary views of Poynton Lodge,

³⁹⁰ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III (1812), p. 717

³⁹¹ Sotheby, *A Catalogue of the Collection of Prints*, p. 16, item 270

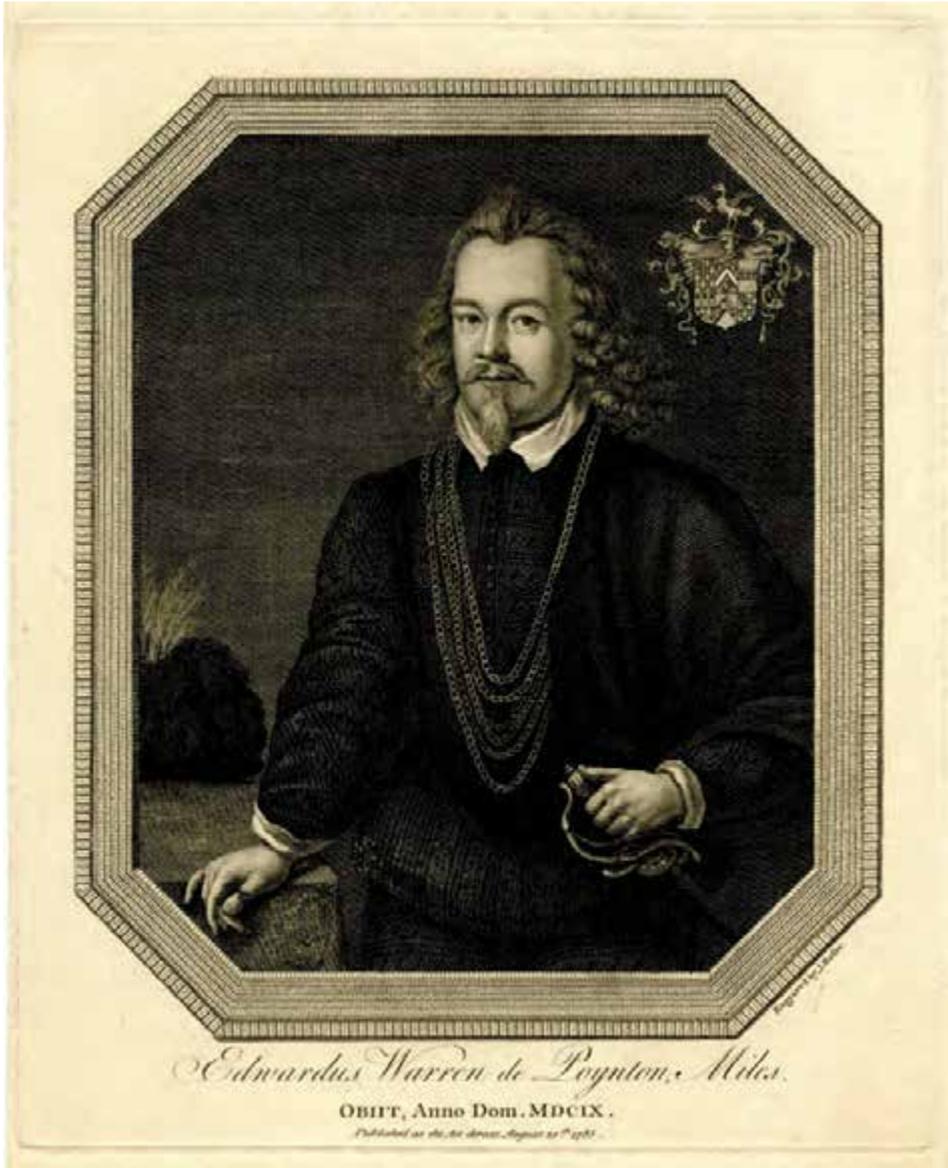


Figure 43 Portrait of Sir Edward Warren, engraved by James Basire for John Watson, *Memoirs of the Ancient Earls of Warren and Surrey* (1785), volume II, page 138, actual size 238 mm x 192 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Like Gough, Pennant had a favourite engraver. In his correspondence, he refers to Peter Mazell, one of Basire's principal competitors, as "my engraver",³⁹² and this description is borne out by a review of the illustrations of his earliest travel and more purely scientific works, for example, *A Tour of Scotland* and *A Synopsis of Quadrupeds*, both published in 1771. Like Gough, Pennant also used other engravers on a subsidiary basis, including Basire, whom he also knew in his capacity as engraver to the Royal Society. Basire had, for example, engraved the illustrations to Pennant's article, "An account of two new tortoises", which was published in the *Philosophical Transactions* in the same year.³⁹³ From this date, Basire also became one of the regular, secondary contributors of plates to Pennant's travel works, but apparently always with Richard Gough acting as an intermediary.

Pennant and Gough were both indefatigable letter-writers and their correspondence illuminates both the extent of their collaboration and their relationships with and opinions on Basire and other artists. In April 1772, Gough sent proofs of letterpress and of plates by Basire for Pennant for review during his second journey to Scotland. In return, Gough requested that Pennant's live-in draughtsman and travelling companion, Moses Griffith, draw Gothic buildings in the course of their travels, while paying "due attention to the Perspective, Proportion and Parts". In the same letter, Gough commented that the Royal Society objected to lending their copper plates of natural history topics to illustrate Pennant's travelogue, and opined that the booksellers were unlikely to be willing to have them re-engraved.³⁹⁴ Another letter from Pennant to Gough shows that the zoologist reviewed proofs on his journeys, took drawings and engravings with him of places he intended to visit, and critically compared them with the monuments he saw.³⁹⁵ He was thus able incidentally to act as a roving, provincial antiquarian correspondent on behalf of Gough and the wider antiquarian community.

The correspondence between Gough and Pennant from late 1778 and from 1779 describes intense discussions around the illustrations for the *Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland*, by the Reverend Charles Cordiner. This work took the form of a series of letters from Cordiner to Pennant and can be viewed as a supplement to Pennant's own travel works. Most of the plates in this volume were landscapes by Mazell, but there were also two fine engravings by Basire which significantly included the addition of figures. In respect of one of these, Pennant made the following request of Gough: "Please to command your engraver make the bargain and see he does justice to a most beautiful drawing of carved stones with a Caledonian hero hanging over them in deep meditation".³⁹⁶ A couple of months later he followed up, saying "I hope you made

³⁹² Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 418, letter of 24 February 1778

³⁹³ Thomas Pennant, "An Account of two tortoises", *Philosophical Transactions*, LXI (1771), plate X, p. 268. Basire also engraved plate III, page 80, of his "An Account of the Turkey", *Philosophical Transactions*, LXXI (1781)

³⁹⁴ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 195, letter of 11 April 1772

³⁹⁵ For example Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 274, letter of 5 January 1776

³⁹⁶ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 318, letter of 18 December 1778

your bargain with Mr. Basire; and that you will favour me with two proofs".³⁹⁷ Pennant seemed to be satisfied with these, as he later requested Gough to ask Basire to add the sky, and then to engrave a landscape view of the "Cascade near Carril" with a bard in the foreground, and "do full justice to the scenery".³⁹⁸ On 10 August, Pennant finally concluded that he liked "Mr. Basire's performance" in the execution of these plates, which had the peculiarity of combining antiquarian monuments with spectacular landscapes and portraits of Scottish heroes.³⁹⁹

This exchange shows that the author thought carefully not only about subjects of illustration, but also about his choice of engraver, and that he was thereby seeking not only accurate reproduction, but also consciously maximising the aesthetic and emotional impact of the plates. By asking Basire to engrave those landscapes to which a "Caldonian hero" and a "bard" had been added, he was benefiting from the engraver's known skill in figure-engraving in order to support Cordiner's and his own contribution to the gradual transformation of highland Scotland's image from a barbaric hinterland to a romantic tourist destination.⁴⁰⁰ This concern to match the engraver to the subject matter and simultaneously increase popular appeal is also exemplified in subsequent letters to Gough concerning Pennant's Welsh tour. The author had engaged the fashionable Bartolozzi to engrave plates for this work and informed Gough that "Caldwall next to Bartolozzi is I think the best and certainly most reasonable engraver". Gough seems to have defended Basire, and Pennant subsequently clarified his opinion by noting that "Caldwall...I praise only for heads. He does not succeed in Landscapes". This confirms that Basire was by this time as well-known and valued for his landscape as his portrait engraving.

The next publication in which Pennant employed Basire was his *Journey from Chester to London*, which was published in 1782. In this instance, Basire was part of a team which included Mazell, who was responsible for five plates, and Caldwell, who produced three. All the drawings were by Griffith, apart from one by John Carter. In this instance, Basire's three plates had elements of the antiquarian and of portraiture, and interpreted two three-quarter length portraits of John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, and of his Countess, plus a sculptured bust of the notorious, early seventeenth-century beauty, Venetia Digby.⁴⁰¹ In the case of the Shrewsbury plates, Pennant may have been influenced in his choice of Basire by the engraver's work for the Reverend John Watson, which was published in the same year and contained similar interpretations of early portrait paintings.

³⁹⁷ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 321, letter of 26 February 1779

³⁹⁸ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, ff. 329 and 331, letters of 2 May and 1 June 1779

³⁹⁹ Bodleian Library, MS. Gough Gen. Top. 43, f. 336, letter of 10 August 1779

⁴⁰⁰ Revd. Charles Cordiner, *Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland* (London, 1780)

⁴⁰¹ Thomas Pennant, *The Journey from Chester to London* (London, 1782), plates XVIII, p. 312; XIX, 312; XXI, p. 337

Finally, Pennant selected Basire to engrave two similar, highly-finished portraits of Tudor notables after drawings by Moses Griffith for his *Some Account of London*, the first edition of which was published in 1790. The remaining nine illustrations in this work were, however, surprisingly sparse and poor compared to Basire's plates in this and in Pennant's earlier works.⁴⁰² This lacuna seems to have been keenly felt by many readers, who were used to the well-chosen, high-quality plates by leading engravers in Pennant's other travelogues. As result of this, *Some Account of London* became famous not for the engravings which it did contain, but for those which were added by its readers in an extreme example of extra-illustration, a social phenomenon which accompanied the contemporary expansion in the market for illustrated topographical and travel books.

"Extra-illustration", also known as "Grangerising" after James Granger, a contemporary clergyman and print collector, describes the practice of inserting additional illustrations in printed books. This hobby turned into a craze in the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of nineteenth century, and led to local histories being swelled with a significant number of additional pages of pasted-in illustrations. The so-called "Crowle Pennant" is an especially well-known example, as it consists of 14 volumes containing thousands of additional prints, including some by Basire. It is based on the third edition of Pennant's *Some Account of London* and was donated by John Charles Crowle to the British Museum in 1811. It is used by Lucy Peltz as an example of the evolution of antiquarian pursuits from study within the rarefied domain of the Society of Antiquaries and its provincial correspondents to consumption within middle-class homes, including by many women, and even by actual tourists.⁴⁰³

Extra-illustration spawned its own sub-industries in terms of publishing portraits and other spin-off works, and so provided both an after-life for existing engravings from local histories, as well as new opportunities for engravers such as the Basires. This reuse of existing plates can not only be demonstrated by the *Beauties of Dorsetshire* (1816), in which John Nichols republished twenty views from the second edition of Hutchins's *History of Dorset*, but also by the same publisher's opportunistic *One Hundred and Twenty Views and Portraits to illustrate the Fourth Edition of Pennant's Account of London*, which appeared in 1815. As indicated by these dates, however, this was a trend from which James Basire's son more directly benefited, and so will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁰² Thomas Pennant, *Some Account of London* (London, 1790), "Sir Henry Lee, Knt" and "Sir Richard Clough, Knt"

⁴⁰³ Lucy Peltz, "The extra-illustration of London: the gendered spaces and practices of antiquarianism in the late eighteenth century", in Myrone and Peltz ed., *Producing the Past*, pp. 115-134

4.5 BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE BASIRE WORKSHOP

Accounts of the “lives and works” of artists tend to focus on their foreground subject matter, and underestimate the background of family, friends and staff which enabled them successfully to pursue their vocation. In the case of James Basire, he was fortunate in his choice of second wife, Isabella Turner, whom he thanked in his will for almost 40 years of devotion, using words which go beyond conventional expressions of gratitude.⁴⁰⁴ Together, they brought up five children in and around the working areas of the house at Great Queen Street. The oldest child was a girl, Caroline, who worked in Basire’s studio as an engraver until her marriage, but without being formally indentured as an apprentice. There were two sons, James and Richard Woollett Basire, who were formally apprenticed to their father in 1784 and 1787 respectively. There were also two further daughters, Ann Sydney Basire, who married a local carpenter, James Davis, and Grace Graham Basire, who died unmarried. The house even seems to have had space for lodgers, since a former Royal Navy purser called Thomas Cow, is recorded as having died at his lodging at the Basires in 1795, according to his obituary in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.⁴⁰⁵ It was thus a busy place, even without the addition of at least eleven live-in apprentices, including up to five individuals at any one time.

Basire and his apprentices: the 1770s

For Basire, as for other engravers, it would have been necessary to hire not only the right number of apprentices to cope with varying levels of business, but also to find the right profiles, at the right time, and to integrate them into the household. An apprenticeship represented a significant bilateral commitment, as demonstrated by the wording of the standard indenture form of the Stationers’ Company, as signed by Basire and his pupils:

“...the said Apprentice his Master shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawful Commandments everywhere gladly do....He shall not waste the Goods of his said Master...He shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the said Term. He shall not play at Cards, Dice, Tables or any other unlawful Games, whereby his said Master may have any loss....He shall not haunt Taverns, or Play-Houses....And the said Master his said Apprentice in the same Art and Mystery which he useth...shall Teach and Instruct, finding unto his said Apprentice, Meat, Drink, Apparel, Lodging, and all other Necessaries, according to the Custom of the City of London.”

⁴⁰⁴ The National Archives, PROB 11/1382

⁴⁰⁵ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXV (1795), p. 352

This was much more than a simple employer-employee relationship, as apprentices effectively lived as family members throughout the formative period of their lives, generally between the ages of 14 and 21.

The engraver would need to combine apprentices with different levels of experience and talent into a balanced team, which might also include family members, as well as other un-indentured staff. Junior apprentices would become immediately useful and financially viable for a busy engraver by being able to take over more mundane tasks. They could fetch and carry copper plates, paper, ink, tools, finished proofs and prints. They would be required to clean and tidy the premises, where a number of people worked at close quarters with dangerous chemicals for etching and fire for warming the plates. They could man the shop, where prints could be purchased or picked up, such as Gough's publication of the "West Front of Croyland", which was advertised as available from Basire's address. There were more skilled, but still manual jobs, such as completing the chemical process of etching, and the pulling off of proofs from the rolling press. Finally, there were the core, artistic tasks of an engraver which could be performed by more experienced apprentices, such as preparatory sketches, the resizing of drawings, finished pencil or pen and ink designs, watercolour washes, the etching and line engraving of new plates and the retouching of plates which had become damaged or worn.

If the head of the business was able to assemble an effective team, he could himself concentrate on the most value-added tasks. These might include not only the more complex and sensitive drawing and etching work, such as of portrait heads, and the high finishing of certain more prestigious plates, but also important non-artistic activities. It was his role to decide how work was performed and prioritised. He (as was invariably the case) would be responsible for negotiating pricing, and of allocating duties to more or less skilled staff in order to achieve the optimum mix of resource. He would also be expected to wait personally on important suppliers, as well as on institutional and aristocratic patrons, to listen to their wishes, discuss estimates, and take away often valuable objects to be drawn and engraved.

As James Basire's business accelerated through the 1770s, it seems that he was able to put together a small, but remarkably strong team in a relatively short space of time. Thomas Ryder, who had been recruited in 1765, was entering the last two years of his apprenticeship in 1770. On 3 March of that year, he was joined by John Ward for the sum of £47 5s, although this relationship did not seem to work out, as Ward was transferred to a master joiner in early 1772. On 3 August of that year, William Blake arrived and overlapped with Ryder for a short period, and then James Parker joined Blake one year later. Basire received the identical sum of £52 10s as a premium for Ryder, Blake and Parker, and all three went on to make their mark on the print industry in their different ways.

It is not surprising that Basire's apprentices received a first class education in their field. Their master had been trained formally as an engraver, draughtsman and painter, had studied in Rome, which was extremely unusual in his profession, and had worked

for a number of leading artists and architects in the first part of his career. He seems to have been a sufficiently good judge of character and sufficiently decisive to terminate Ward, while hiring and nurturing three exceptionally talented young artists. He appears also to have exerted a strong but sensitive - and necessary - discipline in the house, if Blake's second-hand memories, as recounted by Malkin, are to be believed:⁴⁰⁶

“Two years passed over smoothly enough, till two other apprentices were added to the establishment, who completely destroyed its harmony. Blake, not chusing to take part with his master against his fellow apprentices, was sent out to make drawings. This circumstance he always mentions with gratitude to Basire, who said that he was too simple and they too cunning.”

In fact, only one other apprentice is recorded as having been with Blake at this time, and this was James Parker, with whom Blake became sufficiently friendly that they started an engraving and print-selling business together in 1783. Nevertheless, the story does seem to record Blake's positive personal experience of working with Basire, which is further confirmed by the other flattering remarks in his unpublished “Public address”.⁴⁰⁷

At a more practical level, Basire's apprentices were able from the 1770s to benefit from a book of business which provided an exceptionally wide range of subject matter and style for them to develop their skills. If we take the years of Blake's apprenticeship as an example (1772-1779), the bulk of the studio's output in this period comprised more than 200 plates published in *Archaeologia* II-V and *Philosophical Transactions* LIII-LXVIII. These were relatively simple etchings of a wide variety of subjects: architecture and archaeological small finds from Britain and abroad in the case of *Archaeologia*; diagrams, scientific apparatus, and depictions of plants, birds and animals in the case of the *Philosophical Transactions*. At the other end of the scale, Basire was at this time finalising the “The Field of the Cloth of Gold” and working on its equally massive companion plate, “The Encampment of the British Forces near Portsmouth” from Cowdray House. Other notable achievements from this period included the illustrations to the first edition of Hutchins's history of Dorset (1774), the twenty-five plates signed by Basire in Jacob Bryant's *New System, or an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774 and 1776), and the five portraits and historical prints contributed to Cook's *Voyage toward the South Pole* (1777).

If we look at the twenty-three plates which Basire exhibited at the Free Society of Artists during Blake's apprenticeship, we can get an idea of where the master was likely to have focussed his own efforts in terms of engraving. The exhibited works comprised thirteen portraits, five historical prints, and five miscellaneous plates, including only one from the *Philosophical Transactions* and none from *Archaeologia*. On that basis, one would expect that the master would have concentrated his input on the portraits and

⁴⁰⁶ Malkin, *A Father's Memoirs*, cited in G.E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Records*, pp. 562-563

⁴⁰⁷ Geoffrey Keynes ed., *BLAKE. Complete Writings*, pp. 591-594

historical prints, while the apprentices would have been more intensively engaged on the basic etchings to illustrate the periodical publications of the learned societies. However, it would have been in the interest of both master and pupil for the apprentices not only to learn the basic techniques of etching, line engraving and copper plate printing, but also to develop their individual artistic potential on higher value prints and related activities. It is clear from the available evidence that this was indeed the case.

James Record and Thomas Ryder had entered etchings and drawings for premiums at the Society of Arts in 1763, 1764 and 1766, and Ryder was further encouraged by Basire to exhibit his drawings after old master paintings with the Free Society in the years 1766-67, the first years of his apprenticeship.⁴⁰⁸ Malkin refers to "drawings which Blake had made in the holiday hours of his apprenticeship", which he worked up into historical prints immediately after leaving Basire's studio. There is even an early engraving by Blake, "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion", which he later dated to 1773, the second year of his apprenticeship. Robert N. Essick gives a detailed appraisal of this plate's composition and technique in his study of Blake as a printmaker, noting that the artist had written in pen and ink on the only surviving impression of the first state: "Engraved when I was a beginner at Basires from a drawing by Salvati after Michael Angelo".⁴⁰⁹

Basire must also have helped successfully to prepare both Thomas Ryder and William Blake for entry to the Royal Academy, an institution with which Basire would not have had much personal sympathy, and which was hardly an obvious next step for the average copper-plate engraver. In the light of their experience at Basire's, it is hardly surprising that Ryder and Parker were among the artists selected by Boydell to engrave a number of the prestigious historical plates for his Shakespeare Gallery, and that Blake also attempted in vain to break into the prestigious world of historical engraving before creating his own, idiosyncratic combination of drawing, painting, engraving and poetry.

It is arguably possible to go even further than this in countering the image of philistinism, which Victorian and modern writers have projected onto engravers' studios, and which was forcefully expressed by Alexander Gilchrist in relation to Basire in his influential *Life of Blake*, published in 1863: "From Basire, Blake could only acquire the mechanical part of art, even of the engraver's art; for Basire had little more to communicate".⁴¹⁰ This is a theme which David Bindman also took up in his 1977 study of Blake as an artist, where he states that Blake settled on Basire, "an antiquarian engraver", because of the low level of his fee, and imagines that the "drudgery of an apprentice engraver's life did not dampen his spirit". He then goes on to mention Blake's *Poetical Sketches*, which were printed in 1783, but were mostly written during the poet's apprenticeship at Basire's.⁴¹¹ Bindman implies that Blake wrote lyrical and historical verse

⁴⁰⁸ Phillips, *William Blake*, p. 30, p. 251, n14

⁴⁰⁹ Robert N. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker*, p. 30

⁴¹⁰ Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of Blake* (London, 1863), p. 20

⁴¹¹ David Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* (Oxford, 1977), p. 12

during this period in spite of the dreary routine of the workshop. It is, however, possible to argue, on the contrary, that Blake was encouraged in his artistic and poetic beginnings by his master.

As well as being exposed to a wide range of illustration, ranging from traditionally artistic genres, such as history, portraiture and landscape, to more technical drawings and engravings, Basire's pupils would also have had access to their master's library. Subscription lists show that James Basire's own book collection included not only artistic manuals, such as John Kirby's *The Perspective of Architecture* (1754), but also works of art, such as Stuart's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762). He also inherited his father's library which contained, among other works, the *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745-1746) and the 20-volume version of the *Universal History* of 1747-1748, to which Isaac Basire had both contributed and subscribed. Finally, James Basire also subscribed to volumes of poetry and drama throughout his life. These included works ranging from *Poems on Several Occasions*, by Samuel Boyce (1757), via Bell's edition of Shakespeare (1774), to a selection of *Ossianic verse, Poetry of Nature...from the work of the Caledonian Bards*, published in 1789. Bell's Shakespeare includes plates by Basire, but this is not the case for the poems by Boyce or the Caledonian Bards. This indicates that the engraver bought literary works purely for pleasure and would no doubt have discussed them with any apprentice who showed an interest in the subject.

In addition to books, apprentices also had the opportunity to see and perhaps share in discussions with the celebrated artists, writers, connoisseurs and intellectuals who dropped into Basire's studio. Blake himself wrote that he knew the engravers, Robert Strange and William Woollett, "intimately, from their Intimacy with Basire".⁴¹² Examples of their prints also formed part of Basire's collection, so could be studied by his apprentices.⁴¹³ Gilchrist specifically mentioned the strong impression made on Blake by the Irish poet and novelist, Oliver Goldsmith,⁴¹⁴ who may have visited Basire in connection with a portrait vignette of him which Basire engraved after Joshua Reynolds.⁴¹⁵ It is, however, also possible given their respective personalities and creditworthiness, that Goldsmith was there to borrow money from his friend and fellow traveller. Despite his dissolute lifestyle, Goldsmith shared Basire's social conscience and liberal political views, as demonstrated by some of his less well-known works, such as *The Deserted Village*.

Another of Basire's friends and patrons, his neighbour in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Thomas Hollis, had already retired to the countryside before his death in the second year of Blake's apprenticeship, so is unlikely to have visited the studio during this time. Hollis is nevertheless mentioned by David V. Erdman as having potentially influenced Blake's

⁴¹² Geoffrey Keynes ed., *BLAKE. Complete Writings*, p. 593, "Public Address. From the Note-Book"

⁴¹³ Sotheby, *A Catalogue of the Collection of Prints*, title page etc.

⁴¹⁴ Gilchrist, *Life of Blake*, p. 15

⁴¹⁵ *Retaliation: A Poem. By Doctor Goldsmith. Including Epitaphs on the Most Distinguished Wits of this Metropolis*, published by G. Kearsley (London 1774)

radical politics.⁴¹⁶ This is indeed possible, but it is just as, if not more likely that Blake was influenced by Hollis through the prism of Basire's similar political views. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Basire remained true to the social idealism of the Free Society of Artists until its demise, engraved a number of Hollis's "liberty prints", and would even name two of his children after Hollis's republican icons. Finally, it is not too far a leap to interpret as a personal and political gesture the decision of James Parker and of other friends to exhibit *en masse* at the final charitable exhibition of the Free Society of Artists in 1783. This can be viewed as a symbol of their support of Basire's idealistic stance against the conservative forces which had gained ground during the American Revolutionary War, the end of which was under negotiation at this time.

1780s: a family affair

The disastrous last years of the American conflict and their aftermath of political instability had a knock-on effect on British national and business confidence in the first half of the 1780s, and it is estimated that eighty per cent of London merchants went bankrupt in 1781-1783.⁴¹⁷ The state of the national economy also impacted engravers and, as a result of this, Basire's revenues stagnated at best during this period. In 1780, the Royal Society made no payments to Basire, and the Society of Antiquaries tightened its belt at the same time. The Council of the Society of Antiquaries heard a proposal from their Auditor on 4 April 1780 on how to improve the accounts. Then, at their meeting on 3 January 1781, the Treasurer was instructed not to advance any more money to Mr. Basire until further notice. In 1783, Basire received no payments at all from the Society, and his revenues from them remained at relatively low levels over the next three years.

It was also during this period that various administrative improvements were implemented at the Society of Antiquaries, as proposed by Edward King in his capacities as Vice-President and as short-term President. It was only in 1785, that the Society settled Basire's bills for the entire period from 1783, and these only amounted to £85. Apart from ongoing work on Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, the plates for Watson's *Memoirs* comprised the only significant private commission during these years, and the fact that Basire accepted this sort of vanity work may be explained by his financial circumstances at the time.

As if in anticipation of difficult years ahead, Basire appears to have reduced his complement of apprentices to one in 1781-1782, following the departure of James Parker. This statistic may, however, be misleading, as it is also possible that Basire supplemented the work of a single apprentice and the support of family members by hiring wage-earning workers, to whom he had no fixed commitment. The presence of such unqualified assistants or qualified journeymen in engravers' studios are, however, almost impossible to

⁴¹⁶ David V. Erdman, *Blake : Prophet against Empire* (3rd. ed. New York, 1977), p. 34-35

⁴¹⁷ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People. England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 155

identify except via chance references. One such reference occurs in William Blake's notebooks in relation to the extensive use of journeymen by Woollett and Strange, and Blake, with characteristic exaggeration, goes so far as to label the works of Basire's competitors as "the Life's Labour of Ignorant Journeymen".⁴¹⁸ Another contemporary writer testified to the contemporary demand of engraving journeymen, who could cost between 30s a week and 10s 6d a day. The same author, however, also described in graphic terms the potentially destabilizing effect of more mature journeymen on the master's wider family, which could subvert the values being inculcated in the apprentices.⁴¹⁹ In the light of this and Blake's implication that his master did not use journeymen to the same extent as Woollett and Strange, it seems likely that Basire avoided taking on such un-indentured staff and focused his efforts instead on coaching his children, combining them in a team with his apprentices, and thus also assured his succession.

This hypothesis of an organic approach to developing the business and its staffing is supported by Basire's increasing use of family members during the 1780s. His eldest son, James Basire junior, had doubtless already usefully deployed his talents in the business for some years before being indentured at the beginning of 1783, and his younger brother, Richard Woollett Basire, followed suit on 3 April 1787. More intriguingly, Basire's eldest daughter, Caroline, seems also to have been a fully trained, but un-indentured assistant, until her marriage in 1785. Her father even consciously gave the world a peek of her talents, when he exceptionally allowed or even encouraged her to sign the three plates of Judge Gascoigne's funeral monument at Harwood in Yorkshire, which were based on drawings by Carter for Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*. Significantly, these plates were accompanied by an extended form of signature: "Caroline Basire, now Langdon", which specifically drew attention to them and their creator.

These plates, including the one in Figure 44 on the next following page, show not only a mastery of the etching needle, but also of the burin, and display a wide range of strokes. This indicates that Caroline had served an apprenticeship in all but name. Unfortunately, this unique attribution provides just one tantalising glimpse of the invisible army of women family members who must have worked behind the scenes of this and other engraving businesses.

Following Caroline's marriage to George Langdon while still a minor, Basire hired two new apprentices in the course of 1785, John Roffe and Philip Lautenschlager, and this led to a peak of five identifiable staff during the period 1785 to 1790. This number probably represented the largest group of individuals Basire could house and effectively supervise, taking into account that two of these apprentices comprised his sons. This was the team which supported Basire in the ensuing rapid expansion of his business in the second half of the 1780s, during which the bread and butter work on the *Philosoph-*

⁴¹⁸ Keynes, ed. *BLAKE. Complete writings* (London, 1990), p. 593

⁴¹⁹ Joseph Collyer, *The Parent's and Guardian's Directory and the Youth's Guide in the Choice of a Profession or Trade* (London, 1761), p. 133-134, 306-307. Collyer's son became an apprentice engraver shortly after this date

ical Transactions and *Archaeologia*, was supplemented by a revival of enthusiasm for print-making at the Society of Antiquaries.

The Society was once more extending the range of its publications at the upper end of the scale. Gough had again revived *Vetusta Monumenta*, which had published nothing since Ayloffé's article of 1780, so that it provided the opportunity for Basire's staff to work on twenty-seven of plates of moderate to high complexity for publication in the years 1786 to 1790.⁴²⁰ The Society also restarted its extravagant programme of historical prints after a seven year hiatus, and Basire was asked to engrave a further five large plates after Samuel Grimm: the fully engraved "Procession of Edward VI"; three further pictures from Cowdray House, which Basire was asked to etch only in outline (all dated 1788); and the second of the highly finished engravings of "The Distribution of his Majesty's Maundy, by the sub-almoner", which was published in 1789.

1790s: a father and son partnership

An analysis of the elder James Basire's business and its resources in the 1790s is complicated by the maturity of the younger James and by the gradual nature of the father's retirement and the son's succession during this period. On 17 February 1791, a few months after his sixtieth birthday, Basire senior requested of the Council of the Society of Antiquaries "that his Son might be appointed print engraver to the Society with him", and this gambit succeeded. The younger Basire, who was still a few weeks away from the end of his apprenticeship, was duly appointed by the Council "as joint engraver to the Society". In other words, he was now effectively his father's business partner. This arrangement lasted until the latter part of 1795, when James Basire junior moved to his father-in-law's nearby premises off Chancery Lane, and took on his own first apprentice, George Cooke. The following year, James Basire senior and junior sent separate invoices to the Society of Antiquaries, and from the first half of 1797, the Council only requested estimates from the son. James Basire the elder then transferred his last apprentice, Richard Roffe, to his son and successor on 7 August 1798.

⁴²⁰ *Vetusta Monumenta*, II, plates XXXVIII-LV; III, plates I-IX



Figure 44 Portraits of Judge Gascoigne and Lady engraved by Caroline Basire, “now Langdon”, after John Carter, from Richard Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments* (1796), volume II.II, plate 18, page 37, actual size 290 mm x 436 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

This era of partnership between father and son represented the most intensive and commercially successful period in the firm's life to date, benefiting from yet another spurt in the publication activity of the Society of Antiquaries. In all, the Basires received the huge sum of almost £4,000 from this Society alone during the final ten years of the eighteenth century. Fully £1,000 of this amount was received in respect of the *Military Antiquities of the Romans in Britain* by Major-General William Roy, who had died in 1790. Roy was celebrated as a pioneer of modern surveying and as the father of the Ordnance Survey, and the engraving of the fifty plates for his posthumous antiquarian work became the top priority of the Society's engravers in 1792-93. The other main contributor to the Basires' revenues during this decade comprised the beginning of the immensely ambitious "Cathedral Series", a project led by Sir Henry Englefield with the support of John Carter.⁴²¹ This project was in many ways a response to the perceived threat to the country's Gothic heritage of restorations of Salisbury and Durham Cathedrals by the neoclassical architect, James Wyatt. As a result of the political symbolism of the Series, which ostensibly served to preserve the memory of the cathedrals, almost no expense was spared in producing large folio volumes of engravings based on Carter's drawings. During the 1790s alone, the Basires were together paid almost £1,500 for the 14 plates of the Collegiate Chapel of St. Stephen's Westminster and the 21 plates of Exeter Cathedral and the Abbey Church of Bath.

In so far as it is possible or meaningful to separate the work of James Basire the elder and his son during this period, we can definitely assert the following. The elder Basire invoiced the Society for Roy's work and for the plates of St. Stephen's Westminster (1795), while his son prepared the estimates and billed for the remaining volumes of the Cathedral Series. The elder Basire completed *Archaeologia* XII, which was published in 1796, while *Archaeologia* XIII (1798) mainly consisted of work by his son. The last fourteen plates in *Vetusta Monumenta*, volume II, published in 1795-1796, are mostly the work of the father, while all the plates in *Vetusta Monumenta* III, which are dated from 1799, are the work of the son. This analysis is not only based on the estimates and invoices, but also on signatures. Both father and son tended to sign their full forenames only on particularly prestigious plates, for example, on the historical prints and the Cathedral Series. However, James Basire the elder generally signed plates to *Archaeologia* and *Vetusta Monumenta* simply as "Basire", while his son, in a clear attempt to differentiate his work, tended to sign his plates for *Archaeologia* as "Js. Basire", and those for *Vetusta Monumenta* as "James Basire". Interestingly, there is also a clear evolution in the style of engraving in *Archaeologia* during this period, as there is increasing use of line engraving as opposed to etching. The younger Basire was probably out to impress his patrons, and was fortunate enough to have inherited his father's excellent choice of apprentices in the form of Richard Roffe and George Cooke, both of whom would join James Basire junior in becoming leading engravers of the next generation.

⁴²¹ Nurse, "John Carter, FSA", *The Antiquaries Journal* (91), p. 232

Engraving for money

The previous section has given an idea of the ups and downs of James Basire the elder's engraving business over time, as exemplified by the numbers of relatively commoditised plates produced for *Archaeologia* and the *Philosophical Transactions*, the addition of more substantial commissions with significantly higher fees during the good times, as well as the number of apprentices and family members needed in order to complete the available work during periods of differing demand. If the Basires' own accounting records were extant, it might be possible to put exact numbers on the related revenues and expenses, and even assess the profitability of the business over the period, but this is not the case. Some "hard numbers" have, however, survived in the form of the accounting and audit records of the first James Basire's two major institutional patrons, and these can be combined to give the following limited overview of the development of the business in graphical form:⁴²²

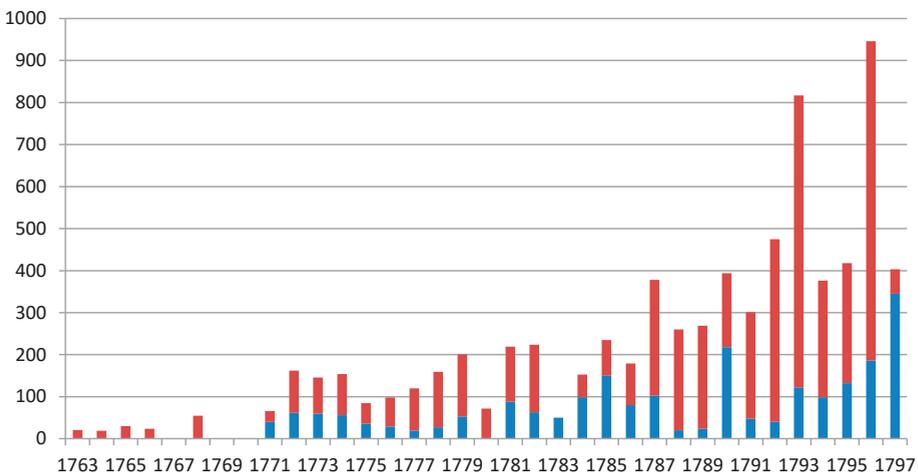


Figure 45 Chart of revenues of James Basire from the Society of Antiquaries (red) and the Royal Society (blue)

This overview is "limited" for at least two important reasons: cash payments from the two learned societies only reflect one aspect of Basire's business, and the impact of inflation is not taken into account. The reason price erosion is ignored is that inflation averaged less than 1% a year from the accession of George III in 1760 to the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1792. Adjusting for inflation would therefore not materially affect the figures plotted on the graph. The reason for the omission of payments for Basire's other commissions is that there is no documentary evidence of the

⁴²² Sources : Society of Antiquaries, manuscript Audit Books, 1763-1796; Royal Society, manuscript Account Books, 1771-1796

amounts, so that the addition of these would amount to guesswork. The inclusion of some of Basire's more significant private commissions, such as Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* and Watson's *Memoirs*, would certainly have a noticeable impact on the numbers, however, they would probably not change the shape of the graph, but rather serve to heighten and smooth it.

The chart, with all its limitations, conveys a clear message and mirrors what we already know about Basire's output and his resources. The beginning of the graph shows that James Basire only received payments of just under £150 from the Society of Antiquaries during the 1760s, and that he was not yet employed by the Royal Society. The Antiquaries did request that he engrave eight plates for the *Vetusta Monumenta* (II, 21-28) during this decade, but they mainly kept him busy with reprinting existing plates, including several by his predecessor, George Vertue. There is then a hiatus in the cash receipts from the Society in 1769-1770, following Basire's dismissal as their engraver on 17 March 1768.

This dismissal should not have been a financial disaster for Basire for two main reasons. On the expense side, he only had one apprentice during the 1760s, except for the period from August 1765 to November 1767, when there was an overlap between his first apprentice, James Record, and his second apprentice, Thomas Ryder. On the revenue side, Basire had obtained other attractive projects to keep himself and his apprentice(s) busy, which are not visible on the graph. Throughout the 1760s he continued to receive a steady stream of work of a high artistic value for private patrons such as James Stuart, Robert Adam, William Chambers, Richard Dalton and Charles Rogers. He also produced selective works for booksellers, such as the full-length portrait of "Lord Camden" after Sir Joshua Reynolds and the historical print, "Orestes and Pylades" after Benjamin West, both of which were sold by John Boydell.

The next part of the chart shows that Basire's business benefited from a steady flow of revenues during the 1770s, as a result of a number of fortunate circumstances. He had become the exclusive engraver to the Royal Society on the death of James Mynde in the first quarter of 1770. He was invited back to the Society of Antiquaries from the second quarter of the same year to engrave "The Field of the Cloth of Gold", following the failure both of John Pye and John Bayly to secure his former office. He thus enjoyed a steady annual income from the *Philosophical Transactions* from 1770, and a slightly less regular stream of receipts in respect of *Archaeologia* from the first quarter of 1773. The latter revenues were supplemented by payments from the Society of Antiquaries for the first two historical prints towards the end of that decade. In total, he was paid approximately £800 by this Society during this period, over half of which was in respect of the historical prints. Against this background, it is not surprising that Basire was able and indeed obliged to increase his complement of apprentices to two by 1770.

The hiatus in the firm's growth during the period of recession in the early 1780s is clearly visible from the graph. The growth path then resumed in the second half of the 1780s, and continued and accelerated through the 1790s. This expansion was supported on the supply side by the fact that Basire was at this period assisted by his daughter,

Caroline, and by his two sons. On the demand side, it was boosted by the revival of the *Vetusta Monumenta*, the last great historical prints, the luxurious illustration of Roy's *Military Antiquities*, and the first two instalments of the Cathedral Series. Overall, the graph shows the familiar first phase of a business lifecycle where, after initial consolidation, the main issues must have been around managing spurts of growth. Given that there is almost no evidence of complaints about delays or the quality of work in the minutes of the two learned societies or in extant correspondence, Basire seems to have been able to have assembled and managed an effective team, which consistently satisfied his main customers.

4.6 LEGACY AND CONCLUSION

James Basire senior died on 6 September 1802 in his seventy-third year. In his will, he left the freehold on his house in Great Queen Street to his wife, Isabella, who lived there for a further 20 years with their daughter, Grace Graham Basire. He was also able to leave several thousand pounds in government stock to Isabella, Grace, his two married daughters and to his son James. As if to show that he was not only a successful businessman, but also capable of long-term friendships with staff and colleagues, a codicil to his will dated August 1801 is witnessed by the copper plate engraver, Thomas Ryder, who had started his apprenticeship with Basire more than 35 years earlier, and by Ryder's sister Letitia, who had exhibited specimens of her needlework at the Free Society of Artists.

We have a good idea of James's appearance from a sensitive drawing and engraving by his son, James, who presented it to John Nichols as the frontispiece of the ninth volume of his *Literary Anecdotes*, which was published in 1816 (Figure 46 on the next page). The reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* noted of the frontispiece that this was "the first time that the animated features of this ingenious man have been presented to the publick".⁴²³ Bryan's *Biographical and Critical Dictionary*, which was also published in 1816, wrote that "little is known of the circumstances of his life,"⁴²⁴ and the review of the *Dictionary* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* agreed that "This excellent artist deserved a fuller notice".⁴²⁵ It seems that Basire was a relatively discrete and serious family man, who specifically recommended frugality to his heirs in his will. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that his life and work have received less attention from posterity than more flamboyant competitors such as the Jacobite, Robert Strange, who fought in the Young Pretender's army at Culloden in 1745, or William Woollett, who was appointed engraver to George III in 1775, and was said to have fired a cannon from the roof of his house each time he finished a major plate.

⁴²³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXVI.I (1816), p. 434

⁴²⁴ Michael Bryan, *Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* (London, 1816), p. 88

⁴²⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXVII.I (1817), pp. 246-7

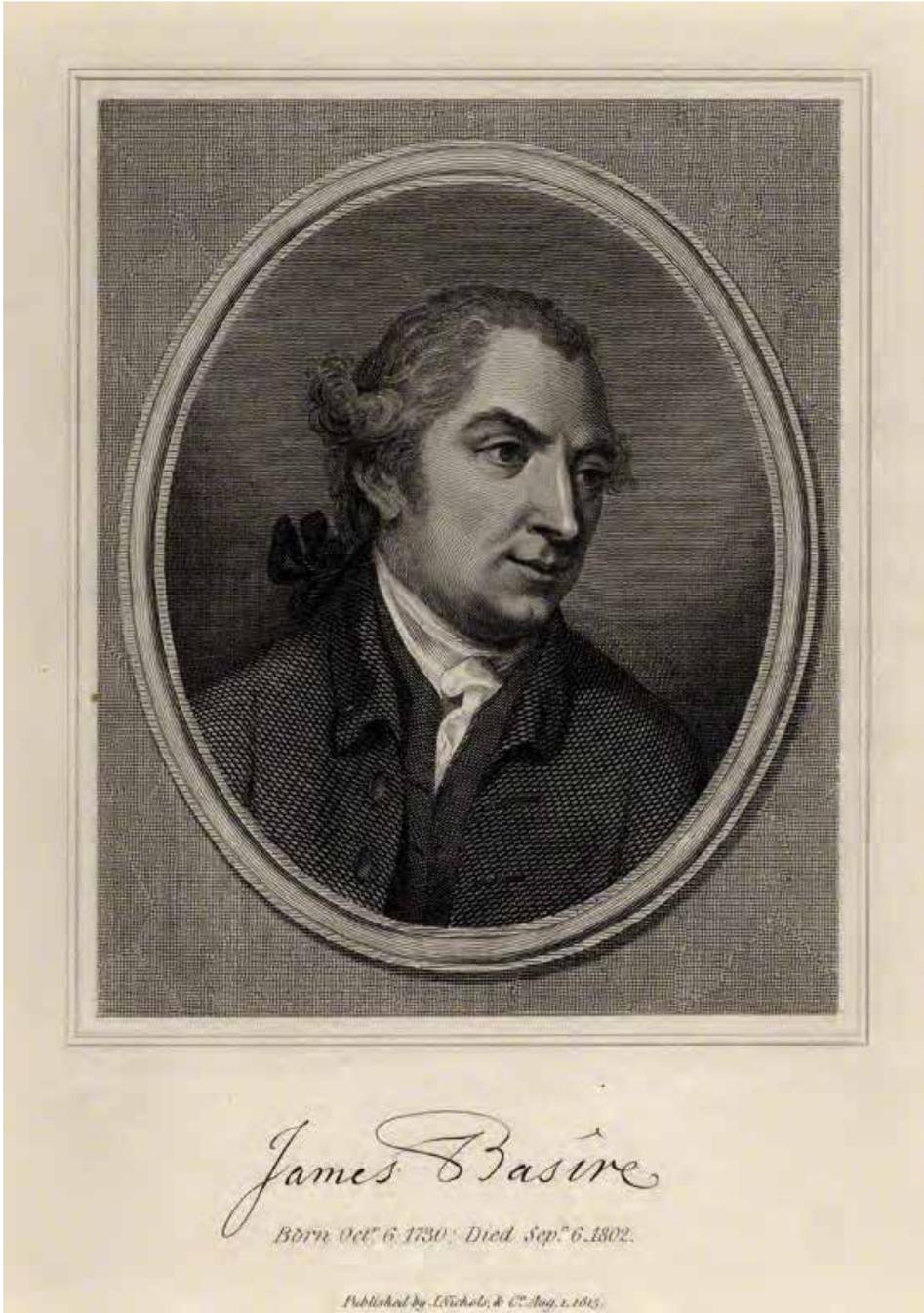


Figure 46 Portrait of James Basire (I) by his son, James Basire (II) (published in 1815), actual size 252 mm x 215 mm (private collection)

CHAPTER 4

Even John Nichols's one page biography of Basire in the third volume of his *Literary Anecdotes* from 1812 focuses almost entirely on his work, despite the fact that the engraver worked closely with Nichols over several decades. In contrast to this, the materials brought together in the previous two chapters actually reveal a man who was engaged in far more than simply earning a living as an engraver. He developed life-long friendships not only with pupils, such as Thomas Ryder; with patrons, such as Nichols and Richard Gough; but also with competitors, such as William Woollett. He managed to maintain good relations with fiercely competing and very different artists, such as Richard Dalton and James Stuart. He demonstrated his liberal leanings and social conscience by giving freely of his time and money to the movement of artists, and specifically to the Free Society of Artists with its particular mission of charity towards decayed artists and their families. He evolved a balanced portfolio of work for private and institutional patrons of an artistic and technical nature, and he was able successfully to pass down this and the relationships he had groomed over many years to his successors.

Chapter 5

James Basire (II) (1769-1822)

The political, economic and social backdrop to the careers of the first two Basire engravers may have been bumpy, but the prevailing winds were on the whole favourable for the profession. This was not the case during the career of the second James Basire. By 3 February 1784, the date on the younger Basire's indenture document binding him as an apprentice to his father, the movement of artists had run its course, and engravers' aspirations to be publicly recognized as artists had been crushed by the artistic establishment in the form of the Royal Academy. By the time he was made free of the Stationers' Company on 1 March 1791, the French Revolution had all but sealed off the Continent and brought the Grand Tour and the reign of the *virtuosi* to an abrupt end. The French Revolutionary Wars broke out a year later, and Britain was at war on an almost continuous basis until 1815. During this time, print-making was not a national priority and the export market collapsed. As a result of these factors, Francesco Bartolozzi fled London in 1802 to take up a post in Lisbon, and two years later John Boydell died almost bankrupt, after finally deciding to sell his Shakespeare Gallery by lottery. Even after the war, the extent of the accumulated national debt, rampant inflation and social tensions, culminating in the Peterloo massacre of 1819, prolonged the agony of engravers and printsellers alike.

5.1 SURVIVAL AND THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

Considering this background, it is remarkable that James Basire (II) not only survived the crises which consumed many other printmakers, but actually thrived during this period. This was doubtless in part due to the quality of the training he had received at his father's studio. He was also fortunate to be able to continue to work with his father at Great Queen Street following the completion of his apprenticeship in March 1791 until his marriage in 1795 to Mary Cox. Finally, the young Basire was also lucky to have a supportive father-in-law, the copper plate printer Daniel Cox, who invited him to share the premises near the law courts at Quality Court, Chancery Lane which he rented from Sir Edward Bacon. This relationship enabled the younger Basire to operate independently of his father from the date of his marriage, following which he appeared next to his father and his uncle, John, on the electoral roll of the City of London as "Stationer and Citizen" for the first time in 1796. Cox's business contacts, as well as James Basire (II)'s own entrepreneurial activities, also led to further business expansion, including the acquisition of significant new institutional patrons. The key to the short-term survival and the long-term success of the younger Basire's business, however, remained the family's relationship with the Society of Antiquaries and so this will be the starting point of this chapter.

Initial appointment and continued employment

The apparent ease with which the elder Basire had secured his twenty-year old son's employment as "joint engraver" to the Society of Antiquaries in February 1791 did not necessarily mean that the young Basire's succession to his father's position at the Society was a formality. When James Basire senior suggested that his son should become joint engraver, the Council asked that the young Basire produce specimens of his engraving for approval before they would accept this new arrangement. And even then, the Council emphasized "that this appointment of his Son as the joint engraver to the Society, did not exclude them from employing any other artist in that line".

The elder Basire continued to keep his son's profile as high as possible through the early to mid-1790s by bringing him along to Council meetings, until the Society finally gave the younger Basire a task of his own. The Council requested that James Basire junior personally inspect its copper plates, many of which had become corroded in storage, and then thanked him at their meeting on 31 January 1797 for cleaning the plates "very carefully" and for "placing them in order very commodiously for future use". No money seemed to change hands for this service, but on 13 July of that year "James Basire junior" was paid his first bill in his own name, and was asked for the first time to make his own estimates for engraving. This request seems to mark the final handover at the Society of Antiquaries from father to son.

Despite this seemingly smooth process, there were a number of clouds on the horizon. Richard Gough handed in his resignation as Director and as a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries at the end of 1797, and the new Director of the Society, Samuel Lysons, was not a particular friend of the Basires. In contrast to Gough, he never employed them to illustrate his private antiquarian publications, which often included his own etchings. As might be expected from a new and relatively young appointee, as well as a qualified and practising lawyer, Lysons also promptly started to review the Society's existing supplier relationships and business practices. On 1 June 1798, the Council accordingly set up a project to consider the appointment of another letterpress printer to replace Nichols, and Thomas Bensley and William Bulmer were asked for quotations. This was no idle threat, as Bensley won the ballot on 8 June, which gave him the right to print *Archaeologia* XIII, and the Nichols family lost the bulk of its business with the Society for a generation. At the same Council meeting, Lysons suggested an even greater departure from the Society's traditions, when he requested that a completely different reproductive technique, "Aqua Tinta", be used to publish twenty drawings by the Society's "Draughtsman in Ordinary", Thomas Underwood. This arguably represented the greatest menace to the Basires' position at the Society in almost 30 years.

James Basire senior's effective monopoly as engraver had been threatened at least once following his reinstatement in 1770, when Thomas Brand Hollis suggested the employment of Giovanni Vitalba to engrave a bronze Roman statuette from Cirencester. However, Brand Hollis promptly withdrew his suggestion on the grounds that the Italian

engraver was “at times, very unequal, but always dear in his Prices”, implying that the elder Basire was both more consistent in quality and more reasonable in price.⁴²⁶ Sir Henry Englefield then asked Thomas Medland to engrave two plates after his drawings for *Archaeologia* in 1782, but this was only because Basire had insufficient availability at the time.⁴²⁷ Apart from these plates, no prints published by the Society of Antiquaries from the beginning of the 1770s to James Basire senior’s retirement had been signed by any artist other than a Basire. In addition to this, every plate published by the Society since inception had been executed in traditional copper-plate engraving or etching, except for the specially commissioned mezzotint portrait of its President, the late Bishop of Carlisle, which was engraved by James Watson and published in 1770. The use of aquatint therefore potentially implied not only a completely new technique and look for the Society’s illustrations, but also the end of the Basires’ monopolistic position.

The aquatint specialist recruited by the Society was J.C. Stadler, who had recently come to public attention through his 76 aquatinted plates after drawings by Joseph Farington in John Boydell’s *The History of the River Thames* (1794-96). Stadler executed eight plates illustrating the walls of an apartment in the Tower of London, which were published in an article by the Society’s Secretary, John Brand, in the 1798 edition of *Archaeologia* XIII.⁴²⁸ These plates were not actually signed by Underwood or Stadler, but the aquatint engraver did subsequently put his name to four picturesque views of the city walls and gates of Constantinople in the next edition of *Archaeologia*, published in 1802.⁴²⁹ He was then asked to engrave a Coptic inscription drawn by Lysons himself for *Vetusta Monumenta*, which was published in 1803.⁴³⁰ This was a bizarre request, as aquatint was not obviously suited to reproducing facsimile inscriptions, and this remained the last aquatint ever published by the Society. It was also the last plate which was signed by an engraver other than a Basire until the 1830s.

There are several potential explanations for the Society of Antiquaries’ abrupt abandonment of Stadler and aquatint, and their continued fidelity to the Basires. Line engraving and etching lent themselves better to serious, scientific publication than the infinitely shaded effects which could be produced through mezzotint and aquatint. These techniques were also no cheaper and had no other practical – as opposed to aesthetic – advantages over traditional engraving. Moreover, the generally conservative members of the Society were accustomed to the more sober and rigorous effects produced by their line engraver. The fellows of its sister Royal Society, with whom it shared many influential members, were apparently even more conservative, as there is no visible sign of a handover between the Basires, father and son, in their records. There

⁴²⁶ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 3 May 1774

⁴²⁷ *Archaeologia* VI (1782), plates LIV-LV, page 38; the reasoning is explained in the Society’s Council minutes of 21 June 1782

⁴²⁸ *Archaeologia* XIII (1798), plates II-IX, pp. 68-98

⁴²⁹ *Archaeologia* XIV (1803), plates XLII-XLV, pp. 239-241

⁴³⁰ *Vetusta Monumenta* IV, plate VI (dated 1803)

was also no experimentation at this time with other engraving techniques in the *Philosophical Transactions*, whose scientific subject matter, like that of *Archaeologia*, was also more appropriately and economically reproduced through simple etching. James Basire junior was therefore able to enjoy financial security throughout his career thanks to his continued and exclusive appointment by both learned societies.

The Cathedral Series

Unlike the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries did have some aesthetic as well as scientific pretensions, and line engraving was used to aesthetic effect by the Basires in a number of its flagship publications. This was, for example, the case for the historical prints, the last of which was completed in 1788 or 1789, the respective dates on James Basire senior's engravings of Grimm's "Siege of Boulogne" and the "Distribution of his Majesty's Maundy". This was also applicable to the great series of plates of ecclesiastical buildings which preoccupied the Society's Council and occupied the Basires immediately after this date and for the next 25 years.

The first volume of the Cathedral Series was entitled *Some Account of the Collegiate Chapel of St Stephen, Westminster* and was published in 1795, during the period in which James Basire father and son were effectively working as business partners. The letterpress "Account" of St. Stephen's Chapel at Westminster was written by John Topham, a former colleague of Ayliffe and Astle at the State Paper Office, and current Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries. The text was only four pages long and so was dwarfed by the 14 plates, measuring 649 mm x 470 mm, which were engraved by the Basires after drawings by John Carter and were clearly the main focus of this work. Not only were the engravings huge in size, but they were also minutely detailed and closely engraved, which together gave an overwhelming impression of the grandeur of their subject matter. In later volumes of the series, this effect was multiplied by including fold-out plates which were sometimes at least double the size of those of St. Stephen's Chapel, and so rivalled the scale of the Society's historical plates of the previous generation.

The context of the launch of the Cathedral Series within the Society's range of publications and the tremendous opportunities it provided for its engravers can be viewed from different angles. Given that Carter was asked to prepare the drawings of St. Stephen's Chapel by the Council meeting already on 15 July 1791, it can be seen as a natural continuation of the recently completed, large-scale historical prints in a new conservative and nationalist context of threat from revolutionary France. It could equally be interpreted as a more systematic, larger-scale and architecturally-focused continuation of the plates of Gothic monuments and interiors, for example those of Winchester Cathedral and of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, which James Basire senior had engraved in the immediately preceding years for publication in *Vetusta Monumenta*. There is certainly an element of truth in both of these contexts from an evolutionary point of view. However, in retrospect, the Cathedral series has become known mainly as a product of

the politically-charged and passionate, contemporary disputes over the “improvement” and preservation of some of the nation’s greatest mediaeval ecclesiastical monuments.

Richard Gough had always courted controversy at the Society of Antiquaries because of his emphasis on the study and preservation of Gothic, as opposed to classical art and architecture. It was, however, the Council as a whole which on 30 March 1792 first resolved “that it be desirable and useful for the Society to be in possession of Architectural drawings of the different Cathedrals and other religious Houses in this Kingdom”. Sir Henry Englefield and Joseph Windham were charged by the Council on the following 19 May with the preparation of a plan to draw the chosen edifices, and this was formally approved before that year’s summer recess. On the face of it, this looked like an uncontroversial decision. The leaders of the project were both members of the Society of Dilettanti and, as such, had solid credentials as classicizing aesthetes. From this perspective, it seemed that Carter’s drawings of the Chapel at Westminster would be the starting point of a grandiose and patriotic new project whose time had come. Even William Chambers, the doyen of establishment neoclassicism, had encouraged the Society in his *Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture*, which was published in 1791, to “undertake a correct publication of our own Cathedrals”.⁴³¹

The background to this apparently reasonable project was, however, anything but innocuous. James Wyatt, another neoclassical architect, who would succeed Chambers as Surveyor-General to the King in 1796, was engaged in the “restoration” of a number of mediaeval cathedrals from the early 1780s.⁴³² His activities at Salisbury had already been brought to public attention in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1785, but the situation escalated in 1789, when Schnebbelie wrote to Gough to complain of the proposed destruction of mediaeval paintings which he was in the process of drawing for the Society. This led to a first angry exchange of letters between Gough and Wyatt in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* at the end of that year.⁴³³ The quarrel entered a new phase in 1795, when Carter exhibited drawings of Durham Cathedral, which was then also in the process of being redesigned by Wyatt, and the Society’s draughtsman was unrestrained in his criticism of the architect. At this point the dispute between different cliques within the Society became overtly political. Wyatt’s election as a fellow of the Society in 1797 was initially blackballed, but the aristocratic faction of the membership, with Lysons as its spokesman, regrouped forces and had Wyatt voted in towards the end of that year. This immediately provoked Gough’s resignation, while Carter continued noisily to oppose Wyatt and his activities in the press through the remainder of Lysons’s directorship.

Given this tumultuous state of affairs, it is remarkable that Carter and the Basires were able to continue efficiently drawing, measuring, documenting and engraving the contents of the six separately published volumes of the Cathedral Series, which culmi-

⁴³¹ William Chambers, *Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture* (London, 1791), p. 24, quoted by Bernard Nurse in “Bringing Truth to Light”, from *Making History*, p. 145

⁴³² Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp. 287-290

⁴³³ Evans, *The History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 207-213

nated in *Some Account of the Abbey Church of St Alban*, which was printed by Nichols, Son & Bentley in 1813. This achievement was largely as a result of the focussed diplomacy of Sir Henry Englefield, who chaired the body which was variously termed the Committee “for drawing antient Ecclesiastical Buildings”, the “antient Churches of England” or “for the publication of the Cathedrals”. The Committee sent Carter to spend the summer vacations to draw and measure in Exeter, Wells, Glastonbury, Bath, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Durham and St. Alban’s, while Englefield spent much of the rest of the year doing his best to cover Carter’s back at the Society.⁴³⁴ Carter had already been ordered to remove the title “By John Carter, Architect, 1791, 1792” from *St. Stephen’s Chapel*, and simply sign his name next to Basire’s at bottom of the plates. Englefield then revised and “corrected” Carter’s descriptions of the Exeter drawings, and wrote the account of the Abbey Church of Bath himself, based on Carter’s notes. He was acutely aware of the Council’s view, expressed in relation to the publication of Durham Cathedral, that: “especial care will be taken to avoid any thing which can give offence or be considered as of a personal nature”.⁴³⁵ Englefield was even good enough to secure for Carter a 50% increase in his daily rate from 1g to 1g 10s at the Council meeting of 13 June 1806.

Despite the muzzling of Carter within the walls of the Society from 1795 and the political defeat of Gough in 1797, the twenty-year project which resulted in the Cathedral Series can be regarded as a victory for their supporters. In the short term, Carter had been forbidden entry to St. Stephen’s Chapel to draw the mediaeval wall paintings which became accessible after the alterations at Westminster in 1800, and these were ultimately drawn for publication by Richard Smirke, John Dixon and the second James Basire. In the longer term, Carter was nevertheless able to complete all the other drawings for the published Series, as well as unpublished drawings of Glastonbury, Tewkesbury and Wells. The drawings of St. Alban’s which formed the core of the last publication in the set were presented to the Society by Gough himself,⁴³⁶ and the Council ordered at its meeting on 12 March 1812 that Gough’s observations on the Abbey Church be published with Carter’s explanations.⁴³⁷ It is perhaps no coincidence that this was only six weeks before the end of the short-lived presidency of Englefield, who had been elected on 6 August 1811 in a contested ballot, following the death of Lord Leicester. He was subsequently removed at the St. George’s Day meeting in 1812 in favour of the Earl of Aberdeen thanks to a campaign led by Lysons.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ On the close friendship between Carter and Englefield and for a sketch of Englefield by Carter, see Nurse, “John Carter, FSA”, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 91 (2011), p. 227

⁴³⁵ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 10 May 1799

⁴³⁶ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 11 December 1806

⁴³⁷ These observations were completed by Nichols after Gough’s death according to, John Carter, “*Specimens of English ecclesiastical costume: from the earliest period down to the sixteenth century, selected from sculptures, paintings*” (John Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1817), p. 3n

⁴³⁸ Evans, *The History of the Society of Antiquaries*, pp. 219-220

The plates for the Cathedral Series occupied a special place in James Basire the second's personal output as an artist. Smirke's drawings of St. Stephen's were ordered to be engraved only in outline, but the other plates were invariably produced "in his best manner".⁴³⁹ He signed all the cathedral plates with his full signature, "James Basire", and he kept many of them in his private print collection.⁴⁴⁰ The largest of these prints, the cross-section of Durham Cathedral, measured a gigantic 674 mm x 107 mm, and so was of similar dimensions to the largest historical prints produced by his father. The sum of 200 guineas which he charged for the engraving was also equally substantial.⁴⁴¹ In his biographical dictionary of 1812, Chalmers considered it sufficient to mention only the Cathedral Series in relation to James Basire (II)'s works. The *Gentleman's Magazine* described these plates in 1814 as "master-pieces of splendour and fidelity", and Basire's obituaries of 1822 specifically refer to these prints and describe them as "splendid engravings".⁴⁴²

The financial bounty provided by the Cathedral series was arguably even more spectacularly positive for James Basire (II) and his family than its impact on his artistic reputation. It is impossible to give exact numbers, because there is some ambiguity and lack of detail in the Audit Books of the Society, but the following figures for cash payments made to the Basires from this source give an idea of the explosion in their revenues. They were paid £165 or approximately £10 per plate for the first set of engravings of St. Stephen's Chapel, for which James Basire (I) had given the estimates. James Basire (II) then seems to have received well over £1,000, or more than £50 per plate, for the engravings of Exeter Cathedral and the Abbey Church in Bath. He was then paid almost £1,000 for Gloucester Cathedral at the same average price. He received well over £1,000 for Durham Cathedral, but in this case the average price was over £100 per plate. Finally, the engravings of the Abbey Church of St. Alban's cost the Society approximately £1,300 or about £68 per plate. Even taking into account wartime inflation, which led to an almost exact doubling of prices over this period, James Basire (II) seems to have been able significantly to increase his prices compared to his father, and still retain the business.

The financial impact of the Cathedral Series on the Society of Antiquaries of the Cathedral Series was logically the inverse to that on its engravers. On 22 November 1810, Basire handed in a monumental estimate of £1,800 for the engraving of Carter's drawings of Wells Cathedral, but this project was never realised. At the very next meeting on 6 December, the Council agreed to sell £1,500 in government stock to stem its heavy cash outflows, and further signs of the Society's financial straits and their impact on its artists were to follow. On 4 July 1811, Englefield's Council had finally agreed to pay Carter in full for the drawings of Bath and Wells which had been completed in 1794-5,

⁴³⁹ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 13 July 1797

⁴⁴⁰ Sotheby, *Catalogue of the Collection of Prints*, p. 12, item 188

⁴⁴¹ Illustrated in Nurse, "Bringing Truth to Light", in *Making History*, p. 159

⁴⁴² Alexander Chalmers, *General Biographical Dictionary* (London, 1812-1817) vol. IV, p. 105; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXIV.II (1814), p. 541; *Monthly Magazine*, IV (1822), p. 330

while on 25 June 1812, the new Council ordered Basire to suspend work on a number of projects, including a series of plates of timber houses and of Gothic arches “in his best manner” for John Adey Repton, for which he had estimated 282 ½ guineas. On 10 February 1814, Basire was finally paid £227 for work on *Archaeologia* XV, which had been published in 1806, and then on 26 March 1816, the Council was obliged to sell another £1,000 in stock in order to plug the continuing gap in the Society’s finances.

This apparent long-term financial mismanagement by the Society seems on the face of it to be irresponsible, but it can perhaps be rationally explained by the background of political strife within its membership during this period. The expenditure by Englefield and his committee can be interpreted as a form of passive resistance to the elements within the Society who had promoted the election of Wyatt and precipitated the resignation of Gough. Such a hypothesis could be supported by the fact that spending on publications reached its peak on Durham, the cathedral which became the emotional epicentre of the debate around restoration and preservation of the mediaeval fabric of the cathedrals from 1805. A contributor to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* already recognised in 1803 that these engravings served, “...not alone to please the eye by the beauties of the whole display, but to give information and instruction to the rising generation of Antiquaries and Architectural Professors”.⁴⁴³ With additional hindsight, one could go further than this and say that they and their promoters contributed to the consciousness of a rising generation, both inside and outside of the Society of Antiquaries, of the importance of the preservation and historically sensitive renovation of the nation’s mediaeval heritage.

It was in this outside world that James Basire (II) showed his true colours, since he also worked on private commissions which put him firmly on the side of Gough, Carter and Englefield in this debate. The most unexpected of these commissions consisted of work for the Reverend John Milner, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries who was also a conservative Roman Catholic priest, became titular bishop of Castabala in Cilicia and then Vicar Apostolic, essentially bishop, of the Midlands in 1803. His activities as a priest in Winchester from 1779 had been tolerated and, following the Relief Act of 1791, he built St. Peter’s Chapel there in an early Gothic revival style. This was one of the very few architectural assignments, other than drawings and designs, completed by John Carter, whose partially Irish catholic origins were not forgotten by his opponents.⁴⁴⁴

In 1798 Milner publicly took his friend Carter’s side in the Wyatt controversy by publishing a pamphlet entitled *A Dissertation on the modern Style of altering antient Cathedrals, as exemplified in the Cathedral of Salisbury*, a work which the Council unsurprisingly ordered “not to be read to the Society at large”.⁴⁴⁵ In the same year, Milner published his two-volume *History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, & Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, and this work immediately set off another celebrated, long-running contro-

⁴⁴³ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXXIII.I (1803), p. 106

⁴⁴⁴ On the close friendship between Carter and Milner and for a sketch of Milner by Carter, see Nurse, “John Carter, FSA), *The Antiquaries Journal*, 91 (2011), pp. 225-226

⁴⁴⁵ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 25 May 1798

versy, initially with John Sturges, Prebendary of Winchester Cathedral, on matters historical and architectural, as well as theological.

It does not seem surprising that Milner had asked James Basire senior, official engraver to the Society of Antiquaries, to engrave views of the West Gate and north-west aspect of Winchester Cathedral by the Society's official draughtsman, John Carter.⁴⁴⁶ It is, however, striking that James Basire (II) was not only asked, but also accepted commissions to contribute further plates to later editions of this work, as well as to Milner's other private publications over a period of more than ten years. In the case of the second edition of Milner's *Dissertation on Salisbury Cathedral*, Basire engraved two plates which compared the "proper" restoration of the altar end of Winchester Cathedral with Wyatt's "modernisation" of the altar end of Salisbury (Figures 47-48 on the following pages).⁴⁴⁷ He could thus have been seen as voluntarily siding with a notorious Roman Catholic polemicist against the powerful and ultimately victorious faction within the ranks of the Society of Antiquaries, his major patron.

The fact that the second James Basire did decide to work for Milner on publications which could have undermined any political neutrality he might have enjoyed at the Society can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, Milner genuinely appreciated his work, and specifically mentioned Basire's densely engraved views of the interior of Winchester Cathedral and its monuments in the Advertisement to the second edition of his *History* published in 1809.⁴⁴⁸ Unusually, the author even went so far as to quote a positive review of the plates from *The British Critic*. Secondly, Milner allowed Basire to deploy a high degree of artistic finishing to most of his plates, and even commissioned him to engrave a standalone, spin-off print entitled "View of the Altar end of Winchester Cathedral, Restored", which was separately published in 1812.⁴⁴⁹ Finally, the Society's engraver may, like Carter, have felt personally supported by the liberal Roman Catholic, Sir Henry Englefield, despite a contemporary background of virulent anti-Catholic feeling in circles both within and around the Society of Antiquaries. In this light, the group of individuals behind the Cathedral Series and related publications, including Gough, Englefield, Carter and the younger Basire, can be viewed not only as occupying the moral high ground in relation to architectural preservation, but also in terms of social and religious tolerance.

⁴⁴⁶ John Milner, *The History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, & Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, 1st ed. (Winchester, 1798-1801), vol. II, plate IV, p. 177

⁴⁴⁷ John Milner, *A dissertation on the modern style of altering antient cathedrals, as exemplified in the cathedral of Salisbury*, 2nd ed. (Winchester, 1811), frontispiece and unnumbered, "View of the Altar end of Salisbury Cathedral Modernised"

⁴⁴⁸ John Milner, *The History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, & Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (2nd ed. 1809), volume II, pp. 22, 35, 91

⁴⁴⁹ The Basires also engraved illustrations for Milner in *Archaeologia* over a period of 30 years: vol. XI (1794), plate XVIII, p. 411 after Underwood; vol. XVI (1812), plate II, p. 21; vol. XVII (1814), plate V, p. 38; vol. XX (1824), plates XXIV, p. 536; and vol. XX (1827), plate XXVI, p. 541 after Robert Stothard



Figure 47 “View of the Altar end of Winchester Cathedral, Restored”, engraved by James Basire after James Cave for Rev. John Milner, *A Dissertation on the Modern Style of altering Antient Cathedrals, as exemplified in the Cathedral of Salisbury*, 2nd edition (1811), frontispiece (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 48 “View of the Altar end of Salisbury Cathedral, Modernized”, engraved by James Basire after James Cave for Rev. John Milner, *A Dissertation on the Modern Style of altering Antient Cathedrals, as exemplified in the Cathedral of Salisbury*, 2nd edition (1811), frontispiece (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Vetusta Monumenta and *Archaeologia*

Arguably, the Cathedral Series did not actually die following the removal of Englefield from the Presidency of the Society of Antiquaries, but was instead transformed into a less ambitious project, which continued to provide James Basire (II) with relatively exacting work and a significant stream of revenues for another ten years. The Council meeting of 4 June 1812, less than two months after Englefield's departure, resolved that Frederick Nash, now draughtsman to the Society, redraw Glastonbury Abbey "on a scale adapted to the *Vetusta Monumenta*", and this became the first in a new series of English mediaeval architectural prints which, albeit in a smaller format than the Cathedral Series, was nevertheless of a much higher artistic value than the relatively simple quarto-format etchings in *Archaeologia*. After the issue of the prints of Glastonbury in 1813, *Vetusta Monumenta* continued as the vehicle for sets of plates of the Tower of London (1815), Malmesbury Abbey (1816), the castle keep in Newcastle (1817), the Temple Church in London (1818) and of Tewkesbury Abbey (1821). As evidenced by this list, interest in ecclesiastical edifices was extended to include secular constructions of the Middle Ages, a trend also seen in *Archaeologia*. For example, the 1796 issue contained an unusually substantial series of 22 plates of Norwich, including its castle, engraved after drawings by the teenage William Wilkins.⁴⁵⁰

All of the drawings for these plates in *Vetusta Monumenta*, except for those of Newcastle, were by Carter's successor, Frederick Nash, an established architectural draughtsman and watercolour painter who was scarcely employed for the more mundane illustrations in *Archaeologia*. Nash's drawings and the larger format of *Vetusta Monumenta* allowed Basire some artistic input within the Society's Council's stipulations and budget which, despite its financial situation, remained relatively generous. According to the Audit Books, the total amount paid to Basire for the series of mediaeval architectural prints in *Vetusta Monumenta* ranged from £236 for Glastonbury Abbey to £308 for Malmesbury Abbey, and the average price per plate ranged from £17 for the Tower of London to £34 for Malmesbury. Nash received approximately half this amount. In other words, although these plates were of much smaller size, they still cost on average half the price of the prints in the Cathedral series. To put this further in context, they cost approximately ten times the average price of the plates published in *Archaeologia* XV-XVIII in the equivalent years of 1812 to 1817. It is small wonder that the Society had to replenish its coffers again in 1816 by selling another £1,000 in government securities.

The remaining plates engraved by James Basire (II) for *Vetusta Monumenta* and *Archaeologia* shared a focus on the domestic and the architectural, which remained among the Society's main interests in the war years and beyond.⁴⁵¹ In 1806, *Vetusta Monumenta* contained three plates of the Renaissance Gate of Honour at Gonville and Caius College Cambridge by its recent graduate, William Wilkins, already known as the Greek

⁴⁵⁰ Wilkins, William, "An Essay towards a History of the Venta Icenorum of the Romans, and of Norwich Castle", in *Archaeologia* XII (1796), plates XXI-XLII, pp. 137-179

⁴⁵¹ Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries*, p. 232

Revival architect of Downing College. On 27 June 1811, the Council of the Society exceptionally accepted a similar level of expense in the case of the first four plates in *Archaeologia* XVII. These illustrated an article by the architect of the British Museum and respected architectural theorist, George Saunders. It was during the short-lived presidency of Englefield that the Council of the Society ordered these examples of the four classes of groined Gothic arches, which had been identified by Saunders, to be engraved by Basire “in a superior style”. This resulted in some of the most expensive illustrations ever published in this journal, as they cost 30 guineas each. This also shows again how the Society’s engraver became a major beneficiary of the fellows’ contemporary fascination not only with the beauty, but also the scientific analysis of Gothic architecture.

The directorship of Lysons may have been dominated by arguments around and publications of mediaeval monuments, but it also occasionally harked back to the heyday of the *virtuosi* through the illustration of antique objects in private ownership. This allowed James Basire (II) selectively to deploy wider artistic techniques which were not core to the production of the generality of architectural prints. Examples of these can be found, for example, in the five plates illustrating “An Antique Statue of Bronze found in Suffolk, in the possession of the Earl of Ashburnham”, which were published in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1807. The front and rear views of the bronze statuette of a young Roman officer and the detail of the bust demonstrate the so-called “dot and lozenge” technique of engraving to convey skin textures (see detail in Figure 49 on the next page). The dot and lozenge technique was used relatively sparingly in figure engraving by James Basire (II) and his father, but was employed heavily by other leading engravers, for instance in the historical engravings after old master paintings by Robert Strange.

The two remaining plates in the Ashburnham series show the statuette’s torso from the sides, and were engraved in an entirely different technique. The torso was engraved in outline using a contrasting mixture of thicker etched and finer engraved lines, as illustrated by the detail in Figure 50 on the following page. This technique has been described as reminiscent of the “linear style” of classical representation which had been recently popularised by the drawings of John Flaxman.⁴⁵² Basire also occasionally experimented with this style in architectural prints, for example, in his “View of the Great Room on the upper story of the White-Tower” from the Tower of London in *Vetusta Monumenta*.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Martin Myrone, “The Society of Antiquaries”, p. 117, in Pearce ed., *Visions of Antiquity*. The facing page contains a full-page illustration of Basire’s companion plate XIV dated 1807 from *Vetusta Monumenta* IV (1815)

⁴⁵³ *Vetusta Monumenta* IV (1815), plate XLVII (dated 1815)



Figure 49 Detail of an engraving after Richard Smirke by James Basire (II) of a front view of a bronze statuette now in the British Museum and thought to be of the Emperor Nero, *Vetusta Monumenta*, volume IV (1815), plate XI (dated 1807) (photograph: the author)

Another benefit of Lysons's directorship for Basire was that he was also able to display some of his skill as a draughtsman, since he was employed by the Society in this capacity for an unusual number of illustrations during this period.⁴⁵⁴ These included seven of the first nine plates published in *Vetusta Monumenta* IV between 1799 and 1803, as well as at least ten plates in the appendix to *Archaeologia* XV, which appeared in 1806. The drawings of the three mediaeval, decorated plates which belonged to the antiquary, Francis Douce, which were published in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1803, required a significant amount of figure-drawing, and were published hand-painted in watercolours in order to make them even more attractive for members and for external sale.⁴⁵⁵ The figures on the highly decorated, so-called "Townley helmet", which was illustrated in combination with related Roman antiquities at the beginning of *Vetusta Monumenta* volume IV, were even more detailed. The story of their creation adds significant colour to the relations between engravers, draughtsmen and their antiquarian patrons, and so will be told in a little more detail in the following paragraphs.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ The drawings of the Basires for the Society of Antiquaries are stored at the Society and indexed on its website

⁴⁵⁵ *Vetusta Monumenta* IV (1815), plates VIII-IX (dated 1803)

⁴⁵⁶ See also Elizabeth Lewis, "Drawings in the Society's Albums c 1750-1860", *The Antiquaries Journal*, 87 (2007), pp. 372-375 and note 39 on p. 384



Figure 50 Detail of an engraving after Richard Smirke by James Basire (II) of a side view of the same bronze statuette, *Vetusta Monumenta*, volume IV (1815), plate XV (dated 1807) (photograph: the author)

Charles Townley was perhaps the best-known connoisseur of his generation, and is still known today as the eponymous owner of the marbles which form the core of the Graeco-Roman collection in the British Museum. He had purchased an exquisitely decorated

Roman cavalry helmet found near Towneley Hall in Lancashire, and proposed to publish a description of it in an illustrated article in *Vetusta Monumenta*. A bird's eye view of the helmet was accordingly drawn by Tendi, an Italian artist whom Townley had frequently employed, and the other views were to be prepared by the Society's draughtsman, Thomas Underwood. A letter from Townley, which was read at the Council meeting on 25 May 1798, reported, however, that Underwood refused to draw the "Figures, which are imbossed on the diadem and scull piece (human figures being out of the line of art to which he has applied)". This led to a situation where Townley privately requested Basire to provide the drawings. Then, on 15 March 1799 Townley asked the Council for permission for Basire:

"...to engrave the Ribchester Helmet from his own Drawing, produced at this Council, instead of Mr. Underwood's....Mr. Basire's Drawing seeming to have been taken in a more favourable point of View".

The final article in *Vetusta Monumenta* contained five illustrations: a vignette of the "scull piece" signed simply "Basire"; a "bird's eye view" of the helmet, signed by Tendi and Basire; and three plates signed as "Drawn and Engraved by James Basire" (for example, plate 51 on the next page).⁴⁵⁷ The pragmatic Basire was thus also able to showcase his skills in figure drawing as well as engraving, and incidentally earn an attractive fee. The Council minutes of 23 March 1799 show that he was able to charge 25 guineas each for these drawings, a considerable amount which was on a par with that paid to Tendi, and far in excess of the 7 guineas paid to Underwood for his two drawings of the helmet. This was in addition to the £93 9s, which Basire had estimated for the engravings.⁴⁵⁸

This story is strangely similar to another almost exactly contemporary anecdote, which led Basire to prepare another drawing for Townley, but in this case for a private antiquarian publication, the 1801 first edition of Thomas Dunham Whitaker's *History of the Original Parish of Whalley and Honor of Clitheroe*. This volume included 15 plates engraved by Basire, many of which comprised fine landscapes after drawings by J.M.W. Turner. One drawing was, however, exceptionally prepared by Basire himself. This was the plate of Gawthorpe Hall in Lancashire, which displays the extended signature: "Drawn and engraved by James Basire", a sign that the engraver felt honoured to have the opportunity to prepare this drawing (see Figure 52 on the following page). It depicts an old painting found in London by Whitaker's friend, Townley, which Turner refused to copy, as he had already made his own drawings of the house.⁴⁵⁹ Basire was thus able to retrieve another titbit from a petulant artist, in this case a celebrated painter with whom, as we shall see in more detail in a later section, he collaborated on numerous occasions at this time.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ *Vetusta Monumenta*, IV (1815), plates I-IV (dated 1799) and p. 12 (vignette)

⁴⁵⁸ SAL, Council Minutes, III, 22 June 1798

⁴⁵⁹ W.G. Rawlinson, *The Engraved Work of J.M.W. Turner*, vol. 1, *Line Engravings on Copper* (London, 1908), p. xxiii; Luke Hermann, *Turner Prints. The Engraved Works of J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 19-21

⁴⁶⁰ For example, Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven, in the County of York*, 2nd ed. (London, 1812), p. 454, "South East View of Fountains Abbey"

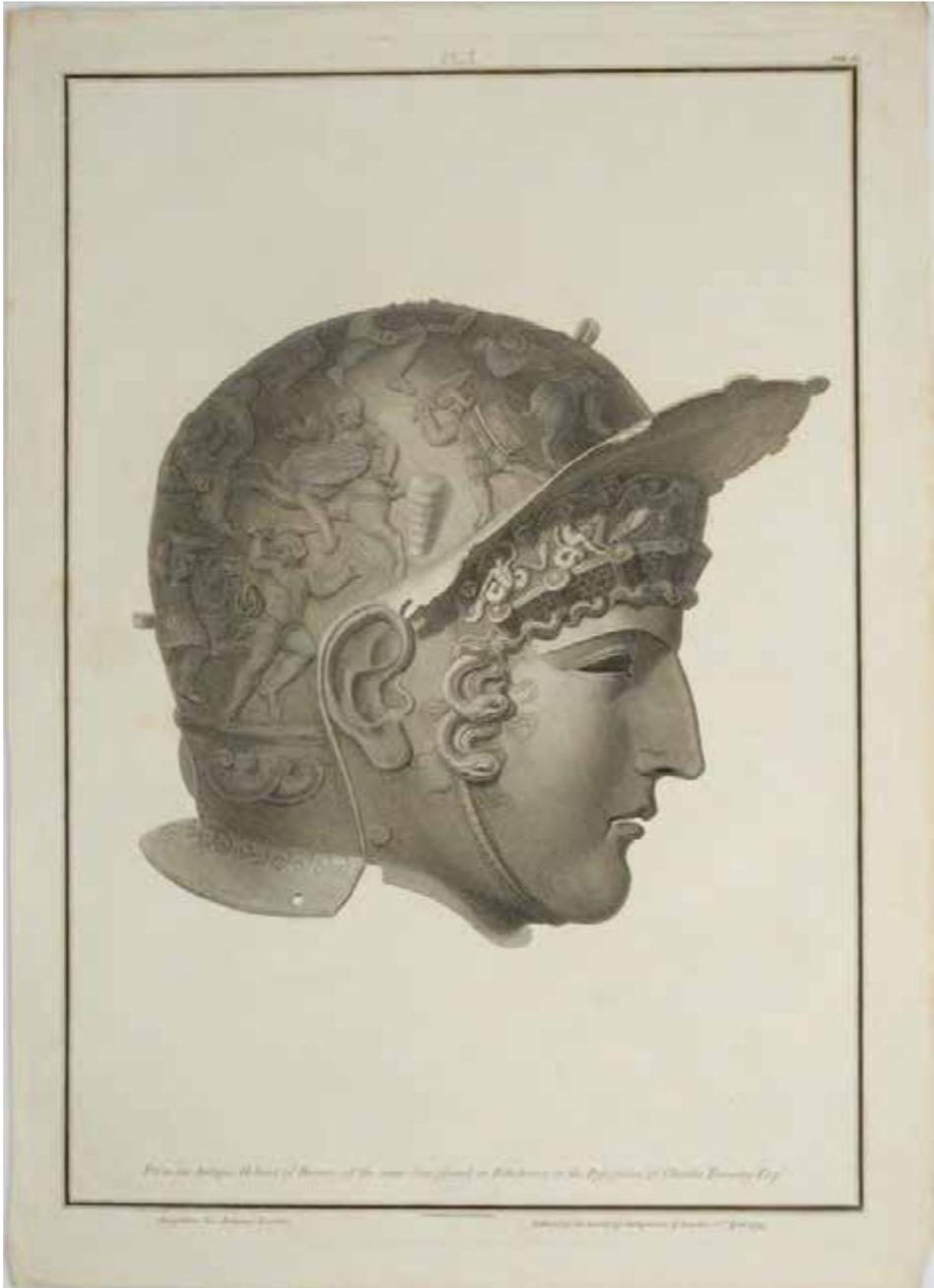


Figure 51 “From an Antique Helmet of Bronze”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (II), *Vetusta Monumenta*, volume IV (1815), plate I (dated 1799) (© National Trust Images)



Figure 52 “Gawthorp”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (II) for *The history of the Original Parish of Whalley and Honor of Clitheroe* by Thomas Dunham Whitaker (1800), actual size 248 mm x 293 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author, taken from the fourth edition (1876), volume II, page 183)

Overall, these and the preceding paragraphs demonstrate remarkable parallels between the employment of the first and second James Basire at the Society of Antiquaries. Both engravers were tasked with the preparation of plates which ranged from the simplest etchings for *Archaeologia* to the vast historical prints and the Cathedral Series. They both took whatever artistic opportunities were available either within or sometimes beyond the stipulated budget in the execution of these plates. They were also on occasion commissioned to provide preparatory drawings and watercolours for plates which they were tasked to engrave. For both engravers, receipts from the Society of Antiquaries provided the bulk of their professional revenues, but the relationships formed within the Society also led to substantial, related commissions from the wider network of fellows and their friends, both within London and throughout the country. In some cases, these comprised the same patrons. In others, James Basire (II) was able to extend the network inherited from his father into the next generation of antiquaries.

5.2 PRIVATE ANTIQUARIAN COMMISSIONS

It seems that the younger James Basire was a less outgoing character than his father, since a sympathetic biographer wrote shortly after his death that:

“His unaffected diffidence was not his least merit, and he was deservedly a great favourite with all who knew his talents, particularly with that eminent antiquary the late Richard Gough.”⁴⁶¹

As suggested, by this quotation, this relative “diffidence” did not prevent the younger Basire from maintaining the type of fruitful long-term professional friendships with like-minded patrons, which his father had enjoyed. In the case of Gough, James Basire (II) was evidently on intimate terms, since the antiquary left the engraver £500 in his will dated July 1806, which was one of the larger monetary sums left by Gough to his associates and their families. To put it in perspective, Gough bequeathed £1,000 to John Nichols, £100 to each of Nichols’s daughters, and £1,000 to the widow of Owen Manning, the historian of Surrey.⁴⁶²

James Basire (II) seems also to have been on terms of personal friendship with John Nichols and his family, and these relations contributed to a continued flow of significant antiquarian commissions even after Gough’s death in 1809. Basire thus became the or one of the principal engravers to most of the major county histories published in his lifetime, including the second edition of Hutchins’s *Dorset*, Manning and Bray’s *Surrey*, Nichols’s *Leicester*, and the first volumes of Sir Richard Colt Hoare’s *Wiltshire*. A number of plates in Nichols’s *Leicester* were also signed by James Basire (II)’s younger brother, Richard Woollett Basire, who was also the main engraver on Stebbing Shaw’s *Staffordshire*. The following sections will confine themselves to an examination of the Basires’ input to the first three of the histories mentioned above.

The second edition of Hutchins’s History of Dorset

Richard Gough recognised that a second edition of John Hutchin’s *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorsetshire* would be required almost as soon as the troubled first edition was published in 1774. He accordingly made a number of expeditions to this county with John Nichols and the younger James Basire in order to prepare the ground. As Nichols later recalled:⁴⁶³

“At three different periods was Dorsetshire traversed by Mr. Gough and Mr. Nichols, assisted by Mr. Basire and other able draftsmen for the improvement of the second edition.”

⁴⁶¹ *Monthly Magazine*, IV (1822), p. 330, under ‘Biographical Particulars of Celebrated Persons lately deceased’

⁴⁶² Philip Whittemore and Chris Byrom, *A Very British Antiquary*, p. 57

⁴⁶³ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, VI (1812), p. 283n

By good fortune, two of the sketch books completed by Basire during these trips have been preserved at the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester, and these not only give first-hand confirmation of the locations visited and the monuments inspected, but also convey something of the spirit of these journeys.⁴⁶⁴

These sketch books are bound together with miniature drawings and etchings by Basire of the monks of La Trappe who had fled revolutionary France, and the entire, composite volume is entitled: "Original sketches of Mr. Basire, made for Hutchins' History of Dorset, A.D. 1798 (many of which later engraved)". The first sketch book in order of binding follows a clockwise tour of the main towns and sights in Dorset, starting in the east at Wimborne, and taking in Wareham, Dorchester, Beaminster, Crewkerne, Hinton St. George, Sherborne, Shaftesbury and Blandford Forum. This is almost certainly the trip described by John Nichols in a letter dated 27 September 1799, where he mentions a tour around the county of Dorset, as well as part of Somerset, i.e. Crewkerne and Hinton.⁴⁶⁵ The second book describes a much more localised tour of villages and churches within approximately a ten mile radius of Blandford Forum.

The visit to the monks of La Trappe was made in the context of the first tour, as it is close to the route followed, and Nichols wrote to his daughter, Sarah, from Dorchester on 15 September 1799 of his experience of listening to high mass.⁴⁶⁶ Basire's sketches and etchings display a fascination with the details of the monks' appearance and routine, although it is not clear whether he produced these for himself, for one of his equally open-minded patrons, or for the party's hosts, Thomas Weld senior and junior.⁴⁶⁷ Weld senior had settled the monks on his estate at Lulworth in 1795 and was a life-long supporter of the conservative catholic mission of John Milner, while Weld junior would go on to become the first English cardinal since the Reformation.

Despite the title which was added to the manuscript sketch books at a later date, very few of the well over a hundred drawings they contain actually found their way into the second edition of Hutchins's *History*. One rare example consists of the portraits of Thomas and Gregory Cromwell, the final plates of which were signed as "engraved by James Basire" (Figure 53 on the next page).⁴⁶⁸ In other cases, items which had been roughly sketched by Basire were later the subject of finished drawings and even engraving by other artists. In some instances, these were eventually published elsewhere, for example in John Nichols's *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ Dorset History Centre, D.20731/2

⁴⁶⁵ Yale University Library, Osborne : Nichols Family Correspondence, Box 14 NAD4670 (source : Julian Pooley)

⁴⁶⁶ Quoted in Alan Broadfield, *John Nichols as Historian and Friend*, unpublished manuscript at New College Library, Oxford, p. 768

⁴⁶⁷ Some of these "very spirited sketches" were published by John Fosbrooke, in *British Monachism*, 2nd ed. (Nichols Son & Bentley, London, 1817, p. 410), which describes the visit by Basire, Gough and Nichols as taking place in 1800

⁴⁶⁸ Dorset History Centre, D.20731/2, f. 31; John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorsetshire* 2nd ed., vol. I (1796), p. 445

⁴⁶⁹ For example, "CRANBOURNE CHURCH, DORSET (with north and east doorways to the same)", drawn by Rev. Thomas Rackett for the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1813), LXXXIII.I, p. 601



Figure 53 “Thomas Cromwell Earl of Essex” and “Gregory Lord Cromwell”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (II) for the second edition of *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorsetshire* by John Hutchins, volume I (1796), plate XLI, page 445, actual size 197 mm x 230 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author from the reprint in *The history and antiquities of the County of Leicester* by John Nichols in volume III.I (1800), plate XLV, page 323)

It seems that these trips primarily served other purposes than the direct preparation of illustrations for the planned second edition of Hutchins’s *Dorset*. One such purpose was doubtless reconnaissance. The engraver made more or less finished sketches to record potentially interesting buildings, monuments and details for Gough and Nichols, which might later become the object of finished drawings for engraving. Another purpose was social. John Nichols described the 1799 tour in the letter to his daughter mentioned above as “delightful”, and went on to refer not only to many valuable curiosities in antiquity, but also to the extremely pleasant country, the orchards full of apples...and the incessant rain. It clearly did not always rain, as one of the sketch books contains the following note next to a sketch of the exterior of the seat of Sir John Trenchard at Lytchett Matravers: “Drawn one Sunday morning by Mr. Basire – Mr. Nichols in Company”. Despite being relatively finished, this drawing was not used in the second edition of Hutchins’s *History*, and may just as well have been drawn for practice or for pleasure as for antiquarian purposes.

The main obstacle to preparing the second, expanded edition of the history of Dorset was again financing, but this problem was ultimately solved by Hutchins's son-in-law, John Bellasis, a senior military officer and finally a Major-General, based in Bombay. Bellasis had already been in touch with Gough in 1778, and the antiquarian acted as a local agent for the soldier and his family in relation to various family and financial matters. These came to include the second edition of Hutchin's *History* following an extended visit by Bellasis to England in 1792 and 1793. The first volume of the second edition then appeared in 1798, and the second volume was issued in 1803. The third and fourth volumes were only published in 1813 and 1815, owing to three separate, but equally disruptive events: the disastrous fire at the Nichols printing house in Red Lion Passage, Fleet Street, in 1808; the death of John Bellasis in the same year; and the illness and death of Richard Gough in the following year. Fortunately, John Bowyer Nichols, the son of John, was able to step into the gap left by Gough as editor, so that the Nichols family were able to complete the project as editors, publishers and printers.⁴⁷⁰

The second edition of the *History of Dorset* was not only twice as large as the first edition in terms of the text, but it was significantly better illustrated. The first edition contained 56 plates, of which 40 were reused in the second edition. This compared with 190 plates in the second edition, of which 150 were new. The second edition was in fact even better illustrated than the third edition of 1863, which only contained 124 plates.⁴⁷¹ Of the 190 plates in the second edition, 33 were signed as engraved by a Basire, of which a handful had been carried over from the work of James Basire senior for the first edition. However, even these were re-designed and re-engraved by his son. The two elements on the composite plate showing W. Lulworth Cove and the S.E. view of Bindon Abbey, where the Welds wished to create a permanent home for the Trappists, were considered sufficiently important in order to divide them into two separate plates in the later edition. In contrast, the depiction of the font at Winterborne Whitchurch was relegated from being a full-sized plate to the status of a vignette, while the "Snuffers and Ring found at Portesham" was combined on a composite plate with illustrations engraved by Francis Cary.⁴⁷²

The surviving correspondence between Gough, Bellasis and their various helpers on this project, including the Reverend John Milner, runs to five bound volumes.⁴⁷³ It shows that Gough was as closely involved in every aspect of the publication of the first two volumes of the second edition, as he had been on the first edition. It can therefore be regarded as a form of poetic justice that Gough elevated the younger Basire to the position of principal engraver to the new edition, after his father had lost the mandate

⁴⁷⁰ Robert Douch, "John Hutchins", in Jack Simmons ed., *English County Historians* (Wakefield, 1978), chapter 6, pp. 140-141

⁴⁷¹ G.D. Squibb, *The Plates in Hutchins' History of Dorset* (published by the Dorchester Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1947), p. 70

⁴⁷² Hutchins, *History of Dorset*, 1st ed., vol. I, plates 68, 130, 140 and 555; 2nd ed., vol. I, plates 115, 214, 265 and 319

⁴⁷³ See particularly, Bodleian Library, MS. Top Dorset, d.3-4

for the previous edition to the low-balling, and finally underperforming John Bayly. As a result of this, James Basire (II)'s contribution to the plates is wide-ranging. In addition to funeral monuments, views of churches and other typical antiquarian illustrations, he also prepared a number of plates of higher artistic value. These included an engraving of Pieter Rysbrack's painting of Urless Farm, to which Thomas Hollis had retired, and a number of picturesque views of country seats and portraits. Basire's own estimation of the relative artistic importance of his contribution, as evidenced by the use of his full signature, indicates that he particularly valued his portraits of the Cromwells and his views of Langton House, the seat of James John Farquarson, and of Gaunts House, the seat of Sir Richard Carr Glynn.

Like Gough, John Nichols also seems to have been involved in sourcing illustrations for the second edition of the *History of Dorset* from an early stage. A letter to James Basire senior dated 7 May 1793 reveals that Basire visited Horace Walpole to view a portrait, which might potentially be used for this work, and that the Earl of Orford was happy for the engraver to borrow a room to re-draw it or even take it home to copy.⁴⁷⁴ It seems that it was not in the end used. The final volumes then show the distinct stamp of the Nichols family, and particularly that of John Bowyer Nichols, in the choice, sourcing and ownership of many of the illustrations. There are nine engravings by the younger Basire after drawings by the Reverend Thomas Rackett, Rector of Spetisbury for more than 60 years and a regular correspondent of Richard Gough and the Nichols family on the subject of the *History*. Five of these plates were also published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The portraits of Benjamin Stillingfleet (after Zoffany) and of Sir Richard Pultney were additionally republished in Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes*.⁴⁷⁵ It appears from a letter from the younger Basire to Richard Gough which is dated 25 October 1797 that the second edition of the Hutchins's work was also a wider family affair for the Basires. In between queries about the plates from *Sepulchral Monuments*, James Basire (II) took the opportunity to ask Gough "when the Bill for Paper & Printing for the History of Dorset would be paid". The copper-plate printer in question was none other than Daniel Cox, Basire's father-in-law.⁴⁷⁶

Manning and Bray's History of Surrey

The protracted and painful genesis of the first two editions of the *History of Dorset* was mirrored in the publication history of *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, which was commenced by Owen Manning, completed by William Bray, and finally published in three volumes dated 1804, 1810 and 1814. Although employed as an Anglican cleric in Surrey, Manning was a renowned Anglo-Saxon linguist who, by the end of the

⁴⁷⁴ Rutgers State University, MS. 86-540/55 NAD5141 (source: Julian Pooley)

⁴⁷⁵ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, II, p. 338; VIII, p. 196; Hutchins, *History of Dorset*, 2nd ed., vol. III, plates XIV and XLII

⁴⁷⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, Frederick Lewis Collection, letter from James Basire to Richard Gough dated 25 October 1797

1760s, had already become interested in compiling a history of his adopted county.⁴⁷⁷ During the same period he corresponded with Gough concerning the progress of Hutchins's *History*, and then in the early 1770s, Gough began advising and helping him with the engraving of the first plates of his own projected work. It seems that the first plates by John Bayly, who at this time was also working on the first edition of the *History of Dorset*, disappointed Manning as much as this engraver had disappointed the Society of Antiquaries and Hutchins. This led to his replacement by B.T. Pouncey, William Woollett's brother-in-law and a specialist technical engraver, who had been strongly recommended by Abraham Farley, custodian of the Domesday Book. Gough's correspondence reveals, however, that he too proved unreliable, and the antiquary was obliged to summon both Bayly and Pouncey to a conference in order to read them the riot act.

In the end, the contribution by Bayly and Pouncey to the publication of the first volume of the *History of Surrey* was confined to the 13 plates of facsimiles of the Domesday Book, which were placed at the beginning of the work. Owen Manning had already died in 1801, and Gough managed to persuade William Bray, who was Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries for a period of 20 years from 1803, to continue the task. Gough nevertheless remained closely involved in its conception until his death in 1809. At this point the Nichols were increasingly involved, although they were officially appointed only as printers to the work. The influence of Gough and Nichols is visible in the choice of engravers for all three published volumes, and it therefore comes as no surprise that James Basire (II) took first place among the artists employed, contributing 30, or almost half of the signed plates. The next best represented engraver was James Peller Malcolm, an American immigrant who was a personal protégé of John Nichols.

The illustration of the *History of Surrey* has been identified as its weakest feature, and there is some truth in this, as it contained only half as many plates as the second edition of the *History of Dorset*.⁴⁷⁸ Unlike the latter work and Gough's and John Nichols's own publications, the *History of Surrey* did not have a single backer who was prepared to finance the illustrations. This resulted in the *History's* reuse of at least eight prints recycled from previous publications: three from Nichols's *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*; two from a history of Croydon by Andrew Ducarel; and two which go back to John Aubrey's 1719 *History of Surrey*.⁴⁷⁹ The time-honoured strategy of asking local landowners or churchmen to contribute plates of their seats or other local landmarks only contributed to a smattering of individual plates by more expensive London engravers, such as William Byrne and his pupil, John Landseer. Unusually, a third of Basire's engravings in this work were also financed in this way, and many of the drawings for these were signed by John Carter, indicating that it was Gough who recommended

⁴⁷⁷ Julian Pooley, "Owen Manning, William Bray and the writing of Surrey's county history, 1760-1832", in *Surrey Archeological Collections* 92 (2005), 92, pp.96 ff

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 114

⁴⁷⁹ William Upcott, *A Bibliographical Account of the Principal Works relating to English Topography*, volume I (London, 1818), pp. 1210-1215

these artists. A third, more creative and indirect solution to the problem of the under-illustration of this work was provided by the entrepreneurial Nichols family. They attempted to monetise further their involvement in this project by offering to supply purchasers with supplementary engravings of the county's sights in order to assist them in enhancing their acquisition through extra-illustration. As a result of this type of initiative, some surviving interleaved versions of the *History of Surrey* include copies with 1,000 or more additional engraved plates.⁴⁸⁰

Further works related to the Nichols family

The Nichols family may have been relegated to a subsidiary role in the publication of the earlier editions and volumes of the history of Dorset, as well as the history of Surrey, but they took on the primary roles of author, editor and/or publisher in many other antiquarian works, and this provided a rich source of commissions for several generations of the Basire family. The predecessor firm of Bowyer and Nichols had already printed a number of monographs including plates by James Basire senior as early as the 1770s, such as the first edition of Hutchins's *History of Dorset* in 1774 and Richard Gough's edition of P. de la Serre's *Histoire de l'Entrée de la Reine Mère en Grande-Bretagne* in 1775.⁴⁸¹ Then, following William Bowyer's death in 1777, the elder Basire was chosen by Nichols to engrave a likeness of "the learned printer" from a drawing made *ad vivum*. This print was published by Nichols as the preface to his 1782 *Biographical and Literary Anecdotes of William Bowyer*, which formed the starting point of his nine volumes of *Literary Anecdotes*. This was clearly an important portrait for both engraver and sponsor. Basire publicly exhibited the print in 1783, while Nichols gave the copper plate to their mutual livery company, the Stationers, so that an impression of it could be given to each of the annuitants mentioned in Bowyer's will. Nichols was himself Master of the Stationers in 1804.⁴⁸²

Collaboration between the Basires, John Nichols, his successors and their authors accelerated once Nichols had taken over Bowyer's printing business in its entirety. Nichols printed Blackburn's *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, with eight plates by Basire in 1780, Gough's *Camden* in 1789, both volumes of Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* in 1786 and 1796, and many other antiquarian and other works with illustrations by James Basire senior, which are too numerous to mention. As an editor and publisher, Nichols included approximately 30 plates by Basire in different numbers of his *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, which appeared between 1780 and 1790. These were mostly after drawings by Carter and Schnebbelie, and included the general title page vignette, which depicted an Angel supporting a shield with the coat of arms of the editor, engraved by Basire after

⁴⁸⁰ Julian Pooley, "Owen Manning", p. 114

⁴⁸¹ Published bound in Etienne Perlin's, *Description des royaumes d'Angleterre et d'Escoce*; see plates I, p. 19 ; II, p. 24, III, p. 29

⁴⁸² John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, III (1812), pp. 603-604

Schnebbelie. These two artists were also asked to provide many of the illustrations to one of the most substantial contributions to the *Bibliotheca*, Nichols's own *Additional Collections towards the History and Antiquities of the Town and County of Leicester*.⁴⁸³ This was a major stepping stone towards Nichols's epic work, the *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, which was published in four volumes between 1795 and 1815 and represented the single most important collaboration between the Nichols and the Basires. The only Nichols publication which contained more prints signed by members of the Basire family was the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which John Nichols bought into in 1778, printed in its entirety from 1780 and edited from 1788. The *Magazine* included well over 100 plates signed by the Basires until it was sold in 1856.

The integrated approach which John Nichols brought to editing, publishing, printing and even writing for works such as the *Bibliotheca*, the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Literary Anecdotes*, was applied on a grand scale in his *History of Leicester*. It is difficult to imagine that an author who was not also his own printer, publisher and editor would have been able to finance and complete a scholarly work of 4,500 pages with almost 500 copper plate illustrations, using teams of writers and artists under his close editorial control. It was owing to this level of control that Nichols was also able to introduce a number of innovations in the production of this work.

In the case of the illustrations to his *History*, Nichols included plates which went beyond what we would call history to "natural history", including, for example, plates of fish fossils, at least one of which was sent to be drawn by James Basire senior in London.⁴⁸⁴ His greatest innovations were, however, in the design of the plates and their relationship to the text. He extended the use of composite plates which had previously mostly been used for encyclopaedic works to provide his readers with "virtually a printed county museum".⁴⁸⁵ The engravings were also on the whole much more closely related to the text than in previous county histories, and this is largely explained by the fact that they and the related explanations and analysis were largely specifically commissioned by him for this work. In fact, the borrowed illustrations were mainly limited to plates from Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, which were commonly borrowed in many county histories, and a series of prints engraved by William Walker after drawings by the Reverend John Throsby. The latter plates were derived from the Throsby's *Select Views of Leicestershire* which, like *Sepulchral Monuments*, had been printed by Nichols in the 1780s and 1790s.

The Basires were not the principal engravers to Nichols's Leicestershire, but came a close second with almost 100 plates which were either signed in their name or are known from other sources to have been engraved by them. The principal engraver to the project was Barak Longmate junior, although this artist's father probably also contributed

⁴⁸³ *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, LI (1790), vol. 8

⁴⁸⁴ John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, III.I (1800), plate VIII, page 82

⁴⁸⁵ Julian Pooley, Robin Myers, "Nichols family", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

drawings and engravings until his death in 1793. Like the Basires, the Longmates were personal friends of Nichols, and their prominence in this work is partly explained by the substantial volume of heraldic engraving commissioned by the author. The Longmates also drew and engraved many other antiquarian and architectural plates, such as churches and their fittings, but their involvement was not extended to more artistic plates, such as landscapes and portraits. In all, the Longmates were responsible for over a quarter of the engravings. The other engravers whose work appeared more than a dozen times, and mostly in the volumes published from 1798, were (in order of the number of plates): Francis Cary, J.P. Malcolm, John Prattent and William Walker.

In contrast to most antiquarian works, Nichols seems to have found it convenient and economical to combine the drawing and engraving wherever possible in one person, and so both Malcolm and Prattent also acted as draughtsmen. The main specialist draughtsman whom Nichols employed for the first volumes was Jacob Schnebbelie, who visited Leicestershire at least three times until his death in 1792. From this point, Nichols principally used the services of his son-in-law, the Reverend John Pridden. This arrangement must have allowed the family to combine the social with the practical on their frequent tours around Leicestershire, which was also home to the family of Nichols's second wife.

The importance of relationships in Nichols's choice of first-line artists is further underlined by his choice of secondary engravers. Malcolm, whose four-volume, antiquarian work, *Londinium Redivivum* (1802-1807) was printed by Nichols, was almost entirely financially dependent on the printer until his early death in 1815. In the case of Prattent, Nichols found the engraver gainful employment while he was imprisoned for debt.⁴⁸⁶ Nichols must have been sure that both these artists would prioritise work for him.

This was, however, also evidently the case for James Basire (II), as confirmed by Nichols in a letter to Robert Shirley, the seventh Earl Ferrers, dated 4 October 1802:⁴⁸⁷

"I have seen Mr Basire, & can honestly answer for him that it is his wish to make the portrait of Sir R Shirley what it ought to be for his own credit & for that of the history it is to accompany. His engagements are very numerous, & his time very precious. But I have never yet known him ultimately to disappoint my expectations, & I have paid him many hundred pounds."

It was clearly essential for prolific writers like Nichols and Gough that their artists could be relied on to deliver, and the Basires always seems to have found time for both patrons, especially when they were asked to produce relatively prestigious plates, such as this aristocratic portrait.

⁴⁸⁶ Rosemary Sweet, "John Nichols and his Circle", *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 74 (2000), pp. 14-15

⁴⁸⁷ Letter 142 JN to Ward 27 Feb 1813, quoted in Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 596. The portrait referred to here was published in Nichols, *Leicester*, III.II (1804), as plate XCV, p. 715

One of the strategies used by the Basires to fulfil the expectations of Nichols on this project was a team effort by the family, at least during the last decade of the eighteenth century. The *History of Leicester* contains some plates by James Basire senior which were clearly borrowed from earlier publications, such as nine plates from Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* and five plates from Nichols's *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*. The elder Basire may also have contributed to some of the drawings and engravings specifically commissioned for this work in the 1790s. Indeed, the surviving bill of account from 1795 which summarises the invoices for the drawing, engraving and the copper plates produced for the history in the years 1793 to 1795 was issued and the related cash was collected in his name.⁴⁸⁸ It is clear from other sources, however, that much of the work, including especially fieldwork, was performed by the elder son. For example, there is a full-page view mentioned in the bill of account, which is signed "Js. Basire del. & sc." and this work is the subject of a letter to Nichols from the Reverend Dr. Thomas Ford, the vicar of Melton Mowbray for 46 years.⁴⁸⁹ The vicar, who had financed the engraving, specifically wrote that the "Young Basire has charmed me with his drawing".⁴⁹⁰

The other young Basire, the shadowy Richard Woollett Basire, who must have completed his apprenticeship in about 1794 and who married in 1795, also signed engravings on eight plates in his own name in Nichols's *Leicester*. Most of these comprised small views of churches or architectural details on composite plates, but he was entrusted with one full-page view of a country seat, that of Cold Overton Hall. This plate featured an ostentatiously positioned carriage with four horses, which seems to have been subsequently added, presumably at the request of the Hall's owner, John Frewen Turner. This engraving must have pleased Turner, as he asked Nichols for additional copies.⁴⁹¹ None of the plates attributed to R.W. Basire can be dated with certainty after 1795.

There are very few other extant plates signed by R.W. Basire, other than the almost thirty plates in the Reverend Stebbing Shaw's, *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, for which this Basire was actually the principal engraver. This important work was published and printed by Nichols in two volumes in 1799 and 1801 and contained a number of plates which also appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. It seems likely that James Basire (II) was simply too busy to take on this additional county history and that Stebbing Shaw employed his brother under Nichols's influence. R.W. Basire also collaborated with another correspondent of Nichols and contributor to the *History of Staffordshire*, the Reverend John Homfray of Yarmouth. In the last years of the century, the younger Basire brother prepared two privately circulated etchings which were dedicated by Homfray to Richard Gough and the Earl of Leicester, but seems to have disap-

⁴⁸⁸ John Frederick Lewis collection, receipt for bill of account to Mr. Deputy Nichols dated 25 June 1795

⁴⁸⁹ Nichols, *Leicester*, II.1 (1795), plate XLVII, p. 251

⁴⁹⁰ Letter to John Nichols dated 5 June 1795, quoted in Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 595

⁴⁹¹ Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 633

peared shortly thereafter.⁴⁹² A few years later, Homfray wrote to Nichols, asking, “Pray, is R.W. Basire alive? If so, where does he live?”⁴⁹³ R.W. Basire was presumably already critically ill in 1802 when he is not mentioned in his father’s will, and he was buried in Westminster on 24 June 1803.

The majority of the plates signed “Basire” in Nichols’s *Leicestershire* almost certainly comprised the work of James Basire (II) rather than his brother or father. It is notable that these were mostly engravings with relatively high artistic pretensions, particularly landscape views and portraits, many of which were paid for by local clerics, gentlemen and aristocrats. The centre piece for the entire programme of illustration was arguably the series of 11 plates drawn and engraved by Basire at the expense of Robert Sherard, fourth Earl of Harborough.⁴⁹⁴ This set of prints was extremely varied, as it consisted of illustrations of the buildings of the Earl’s seat, Stapleford Hall, the church, statues, bas-reliefs, stained glass, funeral monuments, coats of arms and seals. One view on a composite plate is signed by Schnebbelie, but all the other drawings seem to have been personally prepared by Basire. The view of Stapleford Church is signed by him as drawn through the window of Stapleford Hall in 1795, while the surviving bill of account dated June 1795 confirms Basire’s authorship even of those plates in the series which were left unsigned.

On a financial note, a loose leaf written by John Nichols reveals that the Earl of Harborough paid £63 for these plates.⁴⁹⁵ This amount corresponds closely to the numbers in the extant bill of account, which shows prices of between four and six guineas each for the drawing, engraving - including the elaborate writing and coats of arms - and the copper plate itself. This seems a very reasonable fee, especially considering the fact that James Basire junior evidently travelled to Leicestershire on at least one occasion to complete the drawings. He would, however, have had to align his prices with those of the other artists on the project, and the trip to Leicestershire must also have been important for the busy young engraver in order to be able to cement his relationship with Nichols and his entourage.

It is fortunate that Alan Broadfield and, more recently, Julian Pooley, the compiler of the Nichols Archive Database,⁴⁹⁶ have rendered much of Nichols’s voluminous correspondence more accessible, since this adds significant colour to the understanding of the preparation and reception of some of the more prestigious landscape and portrait plates produced by James Basire (II) for the *History of Leicester*. All of the landscape views of country seats were conventionally dedicated by the author to the respective owners and patrons, but some of these were apparently surprised by the liberties taken

⁴⁹² British Museum collection, numbers, 1878,1214.325 and 1878,1214.324. They are referred to by Dawson Turner in Samuel Woodward’s, *The Norfolk Topographer’s Manual* (London, 1842), p. 72

⁴⁹³ Bodleian Library, MS. Eng lett B 18 f. 154, letter of 16 February 1812, quoted in Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 596

⁴⁹⁴ Nichols, *Leicester*, II.I (1795), plates LVII-LXVI, pp. 337-342

⁴⁹⁵ Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 895

⁴⁹⁶ <http://www2.le.ac.uk/centres/elh/research/project/nichols>; see also, Julian Pooley, “The Nichols Archive Project and its Value for Leicester Historians”, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 75 (2001), pp. 62-104

by the engraver with their property. In a letter dated 27 September 1799, John Nichols asked William Herrick of Beaumanor whether he might be able to obtain an elevation of his neighbour's, Hugo Meynell's house, Quorndon Hall, for Basire to fit into the landscape.⁴⁹⁷ It is not recorded in this instance whether the Master of the Quorn Hunt and father of modern fox hunting recognised his property or was pleased with the result, which shows the house dominated by vegetation and a fishing party on the River Soar in the foreground (see Figure 54 on the next page).⁴⁹⁸

In the case of a similar exercise performed in respect of Lockington Hall, the Reverend Philip Story, was clearly less than pleased, as he wrote to John Nichols on 30 July 1804:⁴⁹⁹

“Sir, at your request I sent you a drawing of my house. I am sorry to say that the plate which you have put in the second part of your history of West Goscote is so infamous that I have torn it out, & I wish that every volume might have the same fate.”

Broadfield plausibly suggests that the gentleman-cleric found that the house “looked insignificant in the background of one of J. Basire's ready-made views”. This may be true, but actually understates the case. The plate in question has no inscription, was unsigned by the artist, and was included as the top third of a composite plate. This is apparently all the Reverend's 10 guineas would pay for, and so John Nichols seems not to have hesitated in suggesting paying for the plate himself.⁵⁰⁰

In contrast to these landscape views, the portraits by James Basire (II) which appeared in Nichols's *Leicester* were mostly not created specifically for this work, a fact which makes this category of illustration the most heterogeneous in the whole *History*. The exception to this rule can be found in the ancestral portraits which Nichols had engraved by Basire as a present for John Herrick of Beaumanor, in recognition of the latter's services in helping with the writing of the history of his locality.⁵⁰¹ The other portraits demonstrate again the extent to which plates could be and were recycled from earlier works. The head of John Cleiveland first appeared in Nichols's own *Collection of Poems* in 1780, again in *The History and Antiquities of Hinckley* in 1782, and then once more in the *Additional Collections towards the History and Antiquities of the Town and County of Leicester* in 1790. The portraits of the Francis Beaumont, the dramatist, and of his namesake poet, which appeared on the letterpress of the *History* in 1804, were published in the previous year in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, while the head of the Reverend Samuel Ayscough appeared in the same magazine in 1804, three years before its reuse in the *History of Leicester*.

⁴⁹⁷ Yale University Library : Osborne : Nichols Family Correspondence Box 14 NAD4670 (source: Julian Pooley)

⁴⁹⁸ Nichols, *Leicester*, III.I (1800), plate XIV, p. 101

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in Broadfield, *John Nichols*, p. 593

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 594, in relation to Nichols, *Leicester*, III.II (1804), plate CXX, p. 875

⁵⁰¹ Nichols, *Leicester*, III.I (1800), plate XVI, p. 151



Figure 54 “Quorndon Hall”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (II) for *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* by John Nichols, volume III.I (1800), plate XIV, page 101, size 231 mm x 365 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author)

This recycling of portrait engravings, many of which were originally prepared by James Basire (I), continued throughout the extended period of the publication of the *History*. The Nichols family considered these plates to be part of their general commercial pool of assets, and consequently used them both to illustrate their other publications and to feed the twin contemporary crazes of portrait collection and extra-illustration. For example, the engraved head of Richard Pultney was republished in Nichols’s *Literary Anecdotes* (1814) and that of John Smith in its sequel, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* (1817). The Basire portraits of John Wycliffe, Bishop Latimer and Lady Jane Grey (Figure 55) were all included in *One Hundred and Twenty Views and Portraits to illustrate the Fourth Edition of Pennant’s Account of London*, which was published in 1815, the same year in which John Bowyer Nichols put the finishing touches to his father’s *magnum opus*.



Figure 55 “The Lady Jane Grey”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (I), reprinted in *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* by John Nichols, volume III.II (1804), plate LXXXIX, page 673, size 114 mm x 174 mm to plate marks (photograph: the author)

Other private antiquarian publications

A brief survey of James Basire (II)’s other private antiquarian commissions reveals few significant contributions other than those already mentioned. In terms of the other major county histories of the period, there was only one plate each signed “Basire” in the fourth volume of Edward Hasted’s *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (1799) and in Robert Clutterbuck’s *The History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford* (1815-1827). Basire contributed a sprinkling of plates to some local histories, such as those of the Hundred of Desborough and Deanery of Wycombe (1797), Twickenham (1797), St. Leonard Shoreditch (1798), Mansfield (1801), Scampton (1808 and 1810), and York (1818). Most of these had some involvement from the Nichols, while the others were purely local affairs. The most significant new development with regards to antiquarian patronage in the second half of Basire’s career was the development of a close, eventually almost exclusive relationship with the gentleman-antiquary, Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead in Wiltshire. In total, Colt Hoare drew and/or sponsored more than 160 plates engraved by James Basire (II) and his sons. An analysis of these will, however, have to wait for the next chapter concerning the career of James Basire (III), while the following two sections examine works produced for the

other two significant new patrons acquired by James Basire (II): the House of Commons and the Oxford University Press.

5.3 JAMES BASIRE (II), OXFORD UNIVERSITY AND J.M.W. TURNER

It seems almost inevitable that a Basire was eventually appointed as engraver to the University of Oxford, but it took some time. This post had been held for 25 years by George Vertue, who was succeeded by Isaac Basire's star pupil, James Green, who was also Vertue's successor at the Society of Antiquaries. Green's successor at the Society, James Basire (I), was, however, overlooked by the University, as the *Oxford Almanack* was engraved in the years after Green's untimely death by a series of different artists, until the appointment of Edward Rooker.

Rooker and his son, Michael Angelo Rooker, provided a period of stability for the *Almanack*, as they created all the drawings and engravings of the University and the town which were traditionally published as head pieces to the Oxford calendar, for a twenty year period from 1769 to 1788. After this date, three different teams of draughtsmen and engravers were employed, until James Basire (II) was appointed in 1796 and stayed in office for almost another 20 years. He was thus the effective successor of Edward Rooker, generally regarded as the leading architectural engraver of his day. This combination of facts implies that Basire was not appointed to this role at Oxford because of his links to the Society of Antiquaries, but due to his wider reputation for engraving architecture and townscapes.

As in the case of the Antiquaries, the surviving minutes ("Orders") and account books ("Orders and Accounts") of the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, the University's printing and publishing house, provide an inside view of the engraver's evolving relationship with his patron. In contrast to Vertue's day, there was no formal position as an exclusive "Engraver to the University", as a more modern, commercial relationship had evolved between customer and supplier. This is the background to the Delegates' order of 10 March 1796,⁵⁰²

"That Mr. Basire be employed for the future to engrave the Oxford Almanacks, at the price of fifty guineas, or more in proportion, if there be extraordinary work, besides all incidental expenses, he having stipulated to send a proof before the long vacation."

The appointment was thus at its origin specifically for engraving the *Oxford Almanack* at a fixed price for an unspecified period, while the Press continued to give a small number of specialist commissions for mezzotint portraits or for plates of maps to other engravers.

⁵⁰² Oxford University Press, MS. Orders of the Delegates of the Press, vol. II, p. 14

The Oxford views published in the *Almanack* comprised the principal and by far the most prestigious engraving commission in the gift of the Press, and James Basire was put to work on these immediately after his appointment. By the end of 1796, he had already delivered and been paid for the head piece of the 1797 *Almanack*: a view of “MAGDALEN TOWER and BRIDGE, etc.”, after Edward Dayes, a leading watercolourist, who had taught Thomas Girtin and influenced the young Turner. This engraving was much more than a pure architectural plate, as the detailed rendering of Magdalen College Tower, the bridge and the Oxford skyline functioned as a background to an idyllic scene of fishing and of cattle grazing on the banks of the River Cherwell.

The watercolour paintings and drawings by Dayes and Turner respectively, which formed the basis of the *Almanack* illustrations of the following two years, also combined architecture and landscape, as did the plates prepared for 1808 and 1811-12. The remaining plates engraved by Basire for the *Almanack*, however, predominantly comprised architectural engraving within townscapes, with the exception of two interior views: the “Inside View of the East end of Merton College Chapel” (1802), and the “Inside View of the Hall of Christ Church” (1807). In these cases, the engraver was confronted with and met the special challenge of conveying illumination within dark spaces through the combined use of the burin and etching needle.⁵⁰³

As in the case of the Basires’ other relations, the limited initial engagement to produce the engraved views for the *Almanack* led to diverse related commissions. In fact, James Basire already received £142 from the Press in 1796, and was generally able to generate at least this amount in revenues until 1809. This additional cash, beyond the basic 50 guineas fee for the engraving of the *Almanack*, originated from a variety of sources, although not all of it comprised income from his core activities. A portion of these cash receipts represented the cost of the copper plates and the reimbursement of paper and other related expenses.

In some years, Basire was tasked with engraving the calendar as well as the head-piece views (1802-1805, 1812). He also facilitated the rolling-press printing of the *Almanacks* by his brother-in-law, John Cox, and his bills included the cost of printing under his own name in his invoices up to 1806. In that year, the Press’s accounts specifically mentioned that the copper plate printing was being supplied by the firm of Cox & Barnett, but “by Basire”, i.e. through the agency of the engraver.⁵⁰⁴ From 1807 onwards, Cox and his partner started to bill in their own name and continued to supply copper-plate printing services until 1813, which corresponded exactly to the period during which James Basire was himself engaged by the Press. Like Basire, Cox & Barnett were able to benefit from spin-off work during this period by printing plates with which Basire was not himself involved, such as maps for Strabo’s *Geography*.

⁵⁰³ See Helen Mary Petter, *The Oxford Almanacks* (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 80-86, which gives small-scale illustrations of all the plates and of some watercolour drawings

⁵⁰⁴ On occasion, the firm was even referred to as “Basire & Barnett”. see David McKitterick, *The History of Cambridge University Press*, vol. II, p. 307

In addition to ancillary services, Basire also obtained supplemental engraving work from the Press in the context of its academic and related publications. This was almost a first for the family, as his father had only engraved one plate printed by the Press, a frontispiece portrait for *Ten Sermons* (1781) by Richard Hutchins, Rector of Lincoln College, which he had suitably signed in Latin as “Jacobus Basire”. The first academic publication illustrated by the younger Basire for the Press was a familiar antiquarian task for the engraver of the Society of Antiquaries, as it comprised the engraving of facsimile plates of “Coptic characters” for Charles Geoffrey Woide’s, *Appendix ad editionem Novi Testamenti Græci e Codice MS. Alexandrino* (1799).

Subsequent commissions from the Press resembled more the type of work performed by Basire for the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society. The first of these comprised 28 fold-out plates of diagrams for *A Geometrical Treatise of Conic Sections* (1802), a work specifically designed for students by its author, Abram Robertson, the Savilian Professor of Geometry. This was followed in 1806 by the engraving of three plates of diagrams for *Trigonometriae planae et sphaericae elementa*, by John Keill, who had been Savilian Professor of Astronomy in the first part of the eighteenth century. The most important work completed by Basire in this context was *Schemata geometrica: ex Euclide et aliis*, which was published in the following year. This was another volume designed specifically for students of geometry, but consisted entirely of 61 plates engraved by Basire for Robertson or re-engraved from Keill. It was attractively prefaced with a title page illustration, also engraved by Basire, of Euclid demonstrating geometric forms to his pupils (Figure 56 on the next page).⁵⁰⁵

This list of seemingly successful ventures between the University, its Press and its artists belies a number of ups and downs during the period of Basire’s engagement, as revealed by the minutes of the Delegates. Basire had taken over the more mundane engraving of the calendar section of the *Almanack* from a local engraver by 1802, but in 1806 Professor Robertson vociferously protested not only about the “unpleasant task of drawing it up”, but also of the “still more unpleasant one of correcting the errors of a very negligent engraver”. Robertson consequently demanded that he should no longer have to deal directly with Basire, and that he would have no more involvement, “if the calendar part is to be engraved under the control or superintendence of Mr. Basire”.⁵⁰⁶ The Professor predictably got his way, and Basire was replaced as engraver of the calendar by Charles Downes of Fetter Lane, a specialist technical engraver. This was, however, not the end of the story, as a change in engraver was not in fact the solution to the Professor’s real problem. A month later, Robertson went back to the Delegates to complain that it was unreasonable for him to interrupt his studies and stay in Oxford

⁵⁰⁵ James Basire also contributed plates to *The life of Alexander Nowell, dean of St. Paul*, which was published by the Press in 1809, but the engravings were commissioned and financed on a private basis by the author, Ralph Churton

⁵⁰⁶ Oxford University Press, MS. Orders of the Delegates of the Press, vol. II, pp. 203-204, meeting of 16 May 1806

during the vacation in order to work on the calendar, and the Delegates finally had to agree to find another person to fulfill this task.



Figure 56 Euclid demonstrating geometric forms to his pupils, from the title page of *Schemata geometrica: ex Euclide et aliis* (1806), engraved by James Basire (II) for the Oxford Clarendon Press (Source: Getty Images)

James Basire was doubtless relatively unconcerned by the loss of the engraving of the calendar, as it was a largely mechanical task which he would have mostly or completely delegated to his apprentices. He must, however, have been sincerely worried by a simultaneous threat to his status as engraver of the *Almanack* views. Again, he seems to have been caught in the cross-fire, but this time between the Delegates and the ever difficult J.M.W. Turner R.A. This artist had been commissioned by the Delegates to prepare ten watercolour drawings during 1799 to 1804, the period during which Thurner gained

recognition first as an Associate and then as a full member of the Royal Academy. Nine of these views were engraved by Basire and published in the period up to 1811.

Underlying tensions between Turner and the Delegates had come to a head at the same meeting on 16 May 1806, where Basire had been removed from his role as engraver of the calendar portion of the Almanack. A few minutes after this decision, the Delegates resolved to replace Turner with a new draughtsman, Hugh O'Neill, to draw St. Peter's Church, and to correct Turner's drawings of the interior of Christ Church Hall and part of the Balliol College quadrangle. Immediately after this decision, the meeting reverted to their engraver and ordered as follows:

“Mr. Basire having this day attended the Board and engaged to pay greater attention to the engraving of the Oxford Almanack, and to execute it in a better manner than it has been done for some years past, ordered that two Drawings, the one View from Headington Hill and the other of the Fellows Building etc of Corpus College, be now put into his hands expressly for another Trial.”

There are conflicting accounts as to what had happened behind the scenes, but it seems that the Master of Balliol, who was also a Delegate to the Press, objected to the fall of sunlight in Turner's drawing of his College as being physically impossible. It is therefore thought that he was responsible for the rejection of Turner's drawing, as well as for the appointment of another London engraver, James Storer, to engrave O'Neill's corrected version in place of Basire.⁵⁰⁷ It has been argued that Storer was appointed to this one-off task, because Basire had sided with Turner in his dispute with the Delegates, and had consequently refused the work.⁵⁰⁸ This is possible, but it seems unlikely, given that the engraver had much more to lose than Turner by standing on principle. He could be paid a minimum of 50 guineas per plate for the foreseeable future, while Turner had already been paid his 10 guineas per drawing. Whatever the reason behind Storer's appointment, Basire's appearance at the Board of Delegates and his general attitude of compliance appears to have helped him retain the mandate for a number of years.

It seems in retrospect that the Delegates made the right decision, as Basire's engravings for the *Almanack* have been subject to the much praise by posterity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, W.G. Rawlinson wrote that Basire was the first engraver to be worthy of Turner, and praised his “careful drawing”, “brilliant touch”, and “strong masculine style” in “the best traditions of Sir Robert Strange and William Woollett”.⁵⁰⁹ More recently, Helen Mary Petter has repeated Rawlinson's view that Basire considerably improved on Turner's “View of Oxford from the South Side of Heddington Hill” (1808) through his “judicious use of lights and darks” (see Figure 57 on the next following page), and added her own interpretation of the engraver's input to “A View of

⁵⁰⁷ W.G. Rawlinson, *The Engraved Work of J.M.W. Turner R.A.*, vol. I (1908), p. xx

⁵⁰⁸ Petter, *The Oxford Almanacks*, pp. 16-17, 84-85

⁵⁰⁹ Rawlinson, *The Engraved Work of J.M.W. Turner*, I, pp. xx-xxi

Worcester College, &c.” (1804):⁵¹⁰ “In the engraving, the shadows are darkened, giving a stormy effect, with the Observatory in the distance highlighted dramatically”. Finally, an even more recent historian of Turner’s prints has described the artist’s watercolour, “South View of Christ Church, &c. from the Meadows” (1799), as a “masterpiece”, and added that “James Basire’s rendering of it considerably clarifies and enhances its luminous tonal qualities and loses nothing at all by the conversion from colour to black and white” (see Figure 58 on the following page).⁵¹¹ In summary, Turner may have been an exasperating perfectionist, as his marks and comments on surviving proof prints of the *Almanack* head pieces testify, but he and Basire clearly collaborated closely and effectively in order to bring the best out of their subject matter in engraved form.

Unfortunately, the appointment of James Basire (II) by the University Press represented the only major institutional relationship, which the engraver was not able to transition to his successor. Curiously, the decision to terminate his mandate was not made directly by the Delegates to the Press, but by one of their draughtsmen, Charles Wild. At the end of 1813, the Press turned its attention to the *Almanack* head pieces for 1815 and 1816, and decided that the engraving for 1815 be performed by “an artist under Mr. Wyld’s directions”, and that “Mr. Buckler’s drawing of the Divinity School be put in the hands of an Engraver, to be named by Mr Buckler”, on condition that the price be reasonable.⁵¹² The minutes of the following year indicate that John Buckler, who was to become the most prolific topographical draughtsman of his age, was prepared to collaborate with Basire on the 1816 *Almanack*, but in the end agreed with the Delegates to transfer the work to Wild’s choice, Joseph Skelton. The Basires subsequently only produced one plate printed by the Press, a lithographed facsimile published in 1835.⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ Petter, *The Oxford Almanacks*, pp. 82-84

⁵¹¹ Luke Herrmann, *Turner Prints. The Engraved Work of J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford, 1990), p. 14

⁵¹² Oxford University Press, MS. Orders of the Delegates of the Press, vol. III, p. 35, meeting of 10 December 1813

⁵¹³ Benjamin Thorpe, *Libri Psalmorum versio antiqua Latina* (Oxford University Press, 1835), plate I, facing p. 1



Figure 57 “View of Oxford from the South side of Heddington Hill”, engraved by James Basire (II) after J.M.W. Turner, for the *Oxford Almanack* (1808), actual size 357 mm x 450 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 58 “South View of Christ Church, &c. from the Meadows”, engraved by James Basire (II), compared to the original water colour by J.M.W. Turner, *Oxford Almanack* (1799) (Tate Museum)

5.4 THE HANSARD FAMILY AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

When James Basire (II) was not being scolded by Oxford dons or waiting on assorted aristocrats, antiquarians and scientists, he was to be found working quietly with his colleagues in the premises he shared with his father-in-law, Daniel Cox, off Chancery Lane. Even after the death of his father in 1802, he remained in this area which, compared to his father's house in Great Queen Street, represented a step away from the glamour of the West End, and back towards the commercialism of the City of London. This was a neighbourhood which was dominated by law stationers, with a smaller number of printers, booksellers and a few engravers, in theory all fellow members of the Stationers' Company. The Nichols printing business was located a few hundred metres to the South East in Red Lion Passage, off Fleet Street, where John Bowyer Nichols also resided, even after his father moved back to his native village of Islington in 1803. Another leading firm of printers, the Hansards, worked out of Great Turnstile, Holborn, a few hundred metres in the opposite direction. This was a milieu where the younger Basire felt comfortable, and where he was able to interact on a regular basis with fellow Stationers, at least two of whom were also his patrons and his friends.

It has already been demonstrated that the Basires, father and son, were on friendly as well as close professional terms with the Nichols family. In the case of the Hansard family, the friendship was evidently even more intimate, despite a greater mismatch in age. Luke Hansard the elder was 22 years younger than James Basire senior, while his son, Luke Graves Hansard, was 14 years younger than James Basire (II). The friendship between the elder Basire and the elder Hansard is not well documented. In fact, the only direct evidence we have of it is Luke Hansard's cryptic exclamation in his private autobiography in reference to the overseers of the first British census in March 1801: "O that our Friend Basire had been one of them".⁵¹⁴ Hansard's son was, however, much more informative and vivid in his private diary, where he described the two families of the younger generation indulging together in gentrified country pursuits.

It seems that the Luke Graves Hansard rented apartments or rooms at a farm near James Basire (II)'s country house at Chigwell for the three months of the summer vacation from at least 1814, and his entries in September of that year evoke their pastimes. On the 11th, he wrote of their "schemes of amusements; of which partridge shooting formed a great part". A week later, he paid Basire for a number of items related to these diversions, including a dog, hay, powder, shot, gaiters, jackets, and a horse groom. Then, at the end of the month, he returned the pointer dog to James's son, James Basire (III), before departing to London for the first sitting of Parliament. The extent to which the two families became intertwined can be further demonstrated by the fact that Mary Basire, James Basire (II)'s daughter, agreed two years later to be-

⁵¹⁴ Robin Myers ed., *The Auto-biography of Luke Hansard, Printer to the House, 1752-1828* (London, Printing Historical Society, 1991), p. 55

come godmother to Hansard's son, Luke Henry, while three of James Basire (II)'s children subsequently became godparents to Hansard's younger offspring.⁵¹⁵

Apart from their relationship with the Basires, their physical proximity and their commitment to the Stationers' Company, the Nichols and Hansards had another important professional connection in the form of the House of Commons. The Nichols family printed the "Votes" or agenda papers, and later even moved their business from Red Lion Passage to Parliament Street in order to be nearer the House. The Hansards printed all other parliamentary documentation, as they were officially appointed as Printers to the House from 1791 to 1835. This appointment included responsibility for the management of the archives which later came under the control of the House's Librarian, as well as the ordering and warehousing of the paper required to print parliamentary papers. The Hansards also worked for different government departments, and were able effectively to dispense patronage, but always under the authority of the Speaker, who appointed them and who relied on them for advice and guidance in their areas of expertise. This chain of relationships brought the Basires another valuable mine of commissions in the form of engraving and lithographing illustrations to reports for various arms of government, but above all for the House of Commons, over a period of more than 60 years.

The Basires were not only well-connected with the family of the Printers to the House, but also well-qualified for this sort of work. They had proved through their services to the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries that they were able to produce large volumes of technical engraving, which needed to be timely, accurate and reasonably priced. James Basire the elder had already prepared occasional engravings for the *Journals of the House of Commons*, for example, detailed sections of Frigates and larger gunships published in 1792, based on the designs of the naval architect Gabriel Snodgrass.⁵¹⁶ These illustrations were important as they demonstrated the innovative use of iron fittings in ship construction, which were adopted on warships a few years later and gave Britain a lead over France in this domain. It was, however, only during the career of James Basire (II) that an explosion in parliamentary activity and related illustration provided significant, long-term business opportunities for the Basires from this source. In the first instance, many of these resulted directly and indirectly from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and from parliamentary union with Ireland in 1801. In subsequent years, they came to reflect a range of political, economic and social developments characteristic of the first half of the eighteenth century.

A number of the early illustrations engraved by James Basire the Younger for parliamentary publications had an unexpectedly antiquarian aspect. As already mentioned, several leading members of the Society of Antiquaries were employed in the State Paper Office in the Tower of London, or were otherwise influential in raising political awareness

⁵¹⁵ P. and G. Ford ed., *Luke Graves Hansard. His Diary, 1814-1841* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 4-7, 15, 34, 37

⁵¹⁶ *Journals of the House of Commons*, 47 (1792, published in London, 1803), plates I and II, pp. 364 and 574

of the need properly to preserve and maintain historical records. These were key factors in the appointment by Parliament of a Select Committee in 1800 “to inquire into the State of the Public Records”. As a result of this, six Records Commissions were appointed between this year and 1831, prior to the founding of the Public Record Office in 1838. The plates engraved by the Basires for these Commissions were of a type familiar to them from their work for the Society of Antiquaries: for example, facsimiles of the Magna Carta or other mediaeval charters, such as that illustrated in Figure 59 on the next page, as well as plans and sections of the office for the public records of Scotland.⁵¹⁷

Similar types of plates were also commissioned for related official publications. The *Taxatio ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae*, which appeared in 1802 under the direction of the Commissioners, and at the express command of the King, contained another manuscript facsimile by James Basire (II).⁵¹⁸ He was also asked to engrave the mediaeval charters published in 1811 in *A New and authentic Edition of the Statutes* under the direction of the Right Honourable Charles Abbott, Chairman of the Record Commission, Speaker of the House, and direct patron of the Hansards. These engravings were even singled out for praise in the pages of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* as follows: “The Engravings also of the Charters are such as might be expected of the skill of Mr. Basire, at once clear, accurate and distinct”.⁵¹⁹ This praise is significant, as the *Magazine’s* book reviews rarely mentioned the quality of the engraved illustrations, despite the fact that they were edited and sometimes written by the Nichols family.

Since most English minds were more occupied with conflict with France than the threat to antiquarian records during the first part of the nineteenth century, it might be expected that James Basire (II) would have been charged with a large volume of illustrations to parliamentary reports which pertained directly to war. This was, however, only true to a limited extent. He engraved a number of battle plans and related plates illustrating the second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803, an important milestone both in Britain’s expansion of its control of the Sub-Continent and in the military career of the later Duke of Wellington.⁵²⁰ This was followed by a map of Capri after its capture by the French in 1806. War-related illustrations provided to parliamentary commissions were, however, to a much larger extent connected with the domestic fear of invasion than events abroad. Such plates included Basire’s retouching of an existing engraved plan of Milford Haven in the context of plans to fortify the Welsh port in 1803.⁵²¹ This and Basire’s other engravings for Parliament show that politicians’ attention at this time was mostly focussed on matters they could directly control on a day to day basis on the domestic front.

⁵¹⁷ *Report on the Public Records of the Kingdom*, XV (1800), ordered to be printed 4th July 1800, and to be reprinted 1803

⁵¹⁸ *Taxatio ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae, auctoritate P. Nicolai IV. Circa A.D.1291* (London, 1802), edited by T. Astle, S. Ayscough and J. Caley

⁵¹⁹ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXXXI.1, (1811), p. 559

⁵²⁰ *Papers relative to the Marhatta War in 1803* (House of Commons, 1804)

⁵²¹ “Report from the Committee to whom the Book, intituled, Report, Plans, and Estimates, for fortifying Milford Haven ... was referred”, in *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons* Vol. 2. (1738-1765), p.404

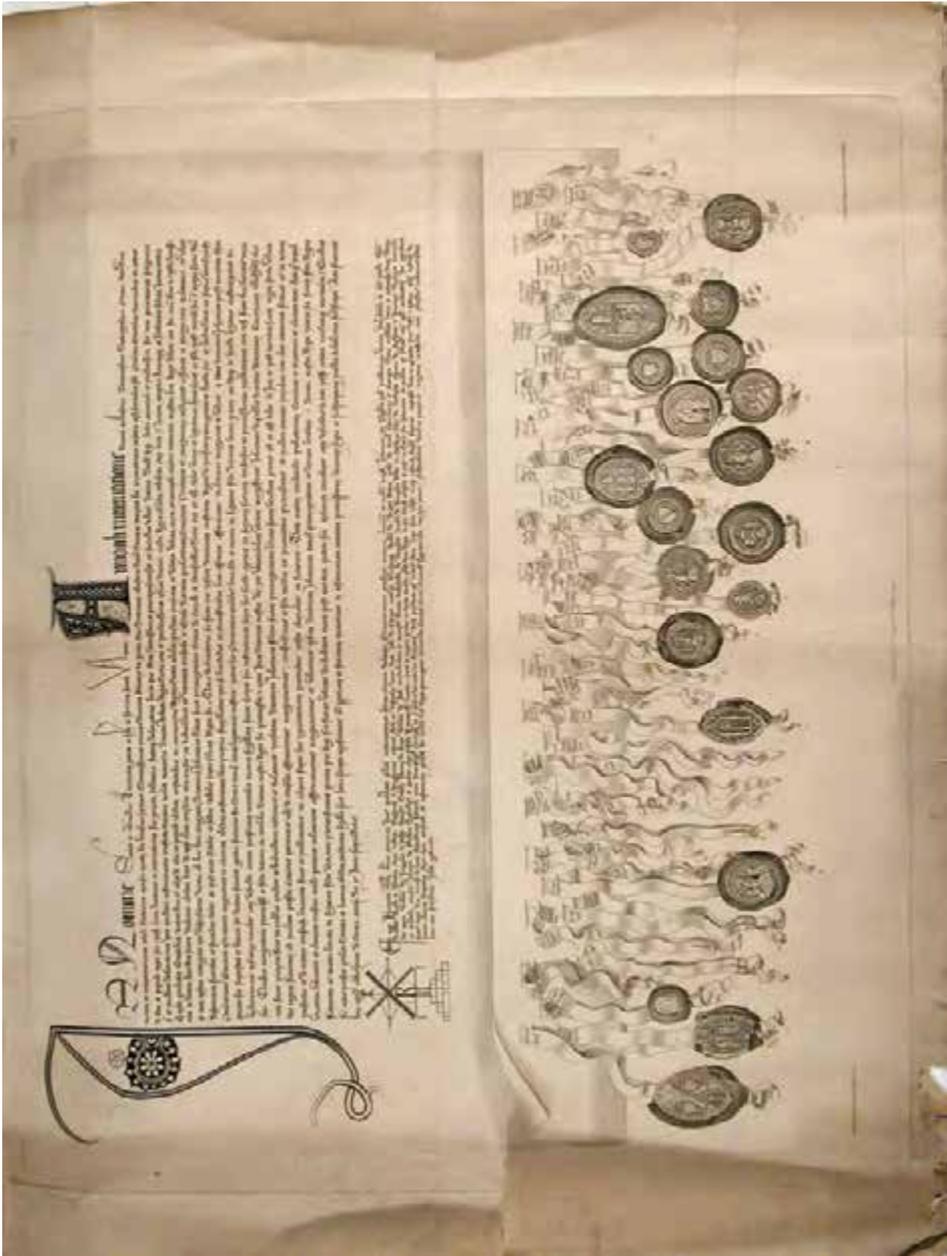


Figure 59 “Declaratio Parlamenti, ubi Johannes primogenitus Roberti, habet succedere in Regnum. 1371”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (II) for the *Report on the Public Records of the Kingdom*, volume XV (1801), Appendix, Tab XI (© National Trust Images)

One of the most important areas under the direct control of parliamentarians was the transformation of the transport infrastructure within the British Isles. This would serve

to enhance national military, energy and food security, as well as the country's trading interests, but it incidentally also provided a significant source of quality work for the Basires over a sustained period. The first such commission comprised the beautifully illustrated reports issued between 1796 and 1800 by the House of Commons Select Committee on the Improvement of the Port of London. These documents demonstrated a vision of the Port as an international entrepôt, which would benefit from and stimulate trade with Europe and the Empire. Many of the dozens of engravings produced by Basire for these reports reproduced surveyors' technical drawings of alternative layouts for the docks, wharfs and quays. Some of them, however, also recreated designs by leading architects of the day, such as Samuel Wyatt and George Dance the Younger, one of the founding members of the Royal Academy. These included proposals for bridges, the depiction of which was ornamented with more or less imaginary river scenes, complete with ships and idealised frontages. Such plates were suitable for private gifts, and were even sold commercially as separate prints. This combination of the useful and the aesthetic was, nonetheless, already starting to feel anachronistic and was destined to die out over the following years.

Following the completion of the enclosed West India, East India, London and Surrey Commercial docks in the first years of the nineteenth century, Parliament turned its attention to the improvement of communication inland from London and the integration of the further flung regions of the British Isles. In this context, Basire was charged with engraving plans not only of ports and bridges, but also of rivers, canals and toll roads in collaboration with an emerging, new breed of professional, the civil engineer. In 1809, Luke Hansard printed, by order of the House of Commons, Thomas Telford's Report on *Communications between Ireland and England via south-west Scotland*, containing dozens of drawings by "the colossus of roads" and his assistants, all of which were engraved by Basire. The following year, the Committee on Holyhead Roads and Harbour published drawings by John Rennie and W.A. Provis (after Telford) of designs for bridges to span the River Conway and the Menai Straits in North Wales. The next year again, Basire engraved plans by Rennie and Telford for the Report from the Committee on Roads between Carlisle and Port Patrick, a harbour in south-west Scotland which had potential for ferrying traffic to and from Ireland. The largest task of all of this type for the engraver comprised the illustration of the four reports of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the nature and extent of the several bogs in Ireland, which were published in the years 1810-1814. These contained a systematic set of maps and sections of the bogs, with proposals for drainage, some of which were still ornamented with extravagant flourishes of copper plate calligraphy.

The steady reduction in and the ultimate disappearance of opportunities for engravers to decorate plates directly coincided with the general trend of professionalization of engineering, surveying and related technical drawing. Thomas Telford himself had started his career as an apprentice stonemason, saw architecture as the next step in advancing his professional career, but eventually became recognised as the "father of

civil engineering”, as symbolised by his foundation of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1818. This foundation was, however, only the official face and confirmation of a tendency which had been ongoing for some time. This trend is visible already in 1814 in the case of the engineers who provided the drawings for Basire’s 45 large-scale, fold-out maps, sections and surveys for the third and fourth reports on the several bogs in Ireland. Even before the founding of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the draughtsmen whose plates Basire engraved were proud to give themselves professional engineering designations, such as “David Aher, Engineer”, “Alexander Nimmo, C.E.”, and “Richard Griffith, Civil Engineer”. This was a sign that engraving was also becoming on the whole more technical, more specialised and more utilitarian, a development which would continue to become more pronounced in the next generation and would also negatively affect the status and remuneration of engravers.

An example of the sort of utilitarian plan produced for parliamentary Commissions, which can stand for the hundreds of others is included as Figure 60 below.

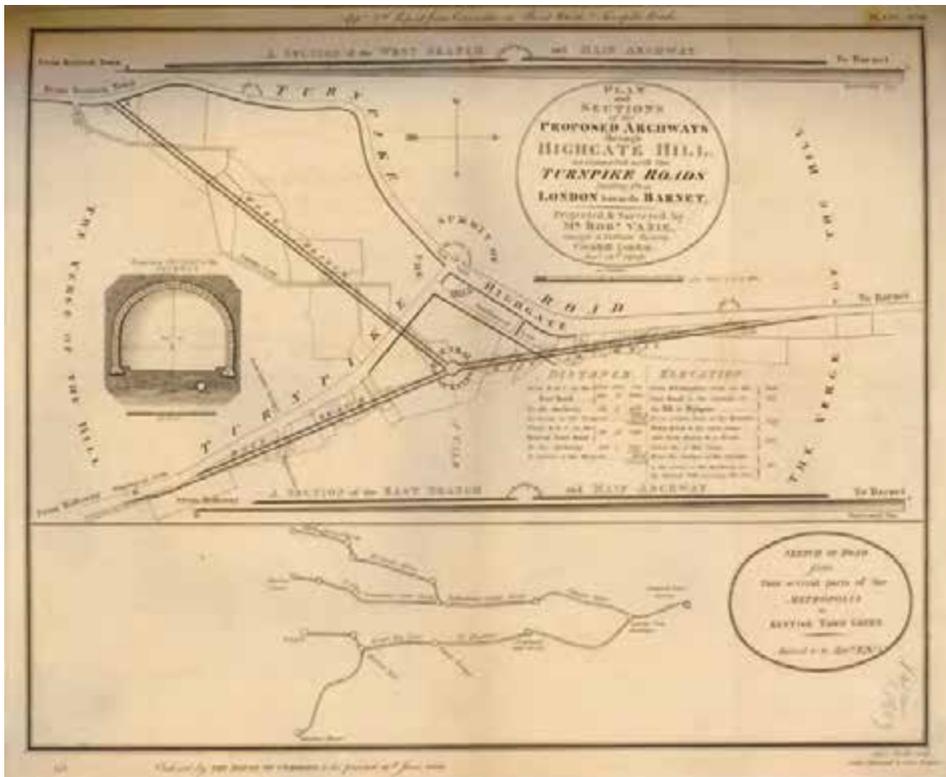


Figure 60 “Plan and sections of the proposed archways through Highgate Hill, as connected with the Turnpike Roads”, engraved by James Basire (II) after Robert Vazie for the *Third Report from Committee on the Acts now in force on the Use of Broad Wheels, and on the Preservation of the Turnpike Roads and Highways of the Kingdom*, (1809) Appendix XVIII (Photograph: private collection)

5.5 JAMES BASIRE (II) THE BUSINESSMAN

The second James Basire was brought up and educated at home within the paternalistic system of master and apprentice, which was in the process of being significantly weakened during his working life. He nevertheless maintained his father's policy of attracting and grooming talented apprentices, as this created a profitable pyramid of relatively cheap labour, even though some apprentices would inevitably go on to take market share from him and his own sons.

Unusually, the younger Basire was already able to take on his first apprentice, George Cooke, at the end of 1795, the year in which he completed his own apprenticeship. This move was undoubtedly enabled by the fact that Basire worked in partnership with his father, who was immediately able to refer work to him. On 7 August 1798, James Basire junior took over his father's last apprentice, Richard Roffe, and thus completed the formal handover of the entire family business a little less than four years before his father's death in 1802. Basire subsequently took on at least another three boys as apprentices, including the two brothers, John and Henry le Keux, to bring his total number of apprentices to five in the first years of the new century, equalling the highest number attained by his father. Like his father, he later also trained his own sons, James Basire (III) and Daniel Cox Basire, in order to ensure the continuity of the family business.

It is evident that James Basire (II) inherited his father's commitment to and talent for developing the next generation of engravers, since most of his pupils were already making their mark on their profession before their master's illness and death and while his sons were still apprentices. John Roffe, George Cooke, John and Henry Le Keux all went on to work on John Britton's first flagship topographical publication, *Beauties of England* (1801-1815), almost immediately after the end of their training periods. John Le Keux would become particularly well-known through his contribution to Britton's subsequent works, including 250 plates for the *Architectural and Cathedral Antiquities* (1807-1826); 31 for the *Picturesque Antiquities of English Cities* (1828); 78 for the *Public Buildings of London* (1825); and 40 for his *Dictionary of Architecture and Archaeology* (1838).⁵²² George Cooke and the Le Keux brothers also succeeded their master as J.M.W. Turner's favoured engravers. John and Henry Le Keux collaborated with Turner on Whitaker's *History of Richmondshire (1818-1823)*, while George Cooke worked with him on several volumes of picturesque views of southern England.⁵²³

James Basire (II)'s pupils not only succeeded as independent artists, but also took a leadership role in promoting solidarity among fellow engravers. They were prominent members of the Artists' Annuity Fund which they joined in the 1810s. In 1823, they

⁵²² T.E. Jones, *A Descriptive Account of the Literary Works of John Britton F.S.A.*, (London, 1849), Part II, pp. 86-90, "Brief Memoir of the late John Le Keux, Architectural Engraver" (1844)

⁵²³ For example, Cooke's *Picturesque Views of the Southern Castles of England* (1814-1816), *Views of Sussex* (1816-1820), and *Rivers of Devon* (1815-1823)

subscribed together to another project to finance engraving for charitable purposes,⁵²⁴ and on 10 July 1826, they were among those who signed an open letter to the Royal Academy protesting at its continued neglect of engravers. A couple of years later they joined together as the “Associated Engravers” to publish prints from the paintings in the National Gallery.⁵²⁵ It is not insignificant that the engraver, John Pye, looked back in 1845 at the charitable activities of this generation of artists, and placed it firmly in the context of a revival of the independent and idealistic spirit of James Basire (I)’s Free Society of Artists. This was the spirit which James Basire the younger had passed on in turn to his pupils.

There is no evidence that James Basire (II) himself was involved in similar activities, and it would be surprising if he had the time or the opportunity, since he led one of the busiest and most profitable engraving businesses in London during the war years.

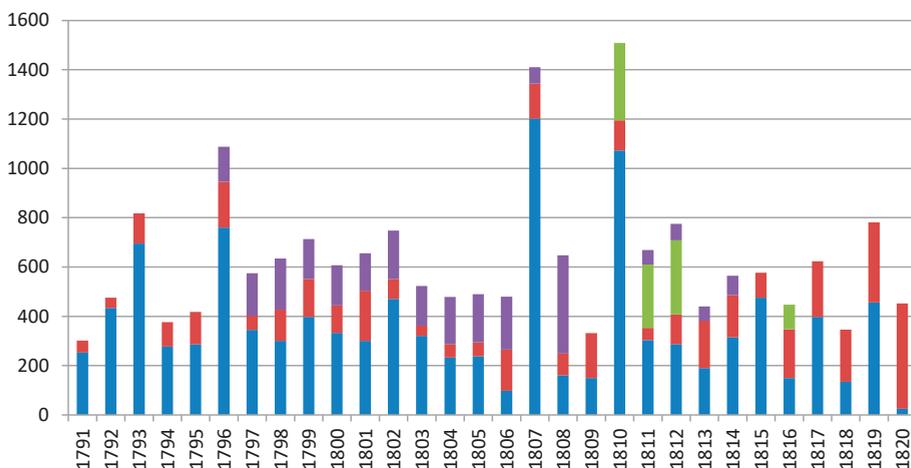


Figure 61 Chart of revenues of James Basire (II) from the Society of Antiquaries (blue), the Royal Society (red), the Oxford University Press (purple) and Sir Richard Colt Hoare (green)

The chart in Figure 61 shows the gross revenues received by the Basire studio in the thirty-year period from 1791, the year in which James Basire (II) finished his apprenticeship and became his father’s partner, and 1820, when he was too ill to contribute to the day-to-day work of his studio, which had by then been taken over by his sons.

The shape of this graph is quite unlike the one included in the section at the end of the previous chapter on the finances of James Basire (I).⁵²⁶ Instead of showing a gradually

⁵²⁴ John Pye, *Patronage*, pp. 375-95

⁵²⁵ Pye, *Patronage*, p. 192; Basil Hunnisett, *Steel-engraved book illustration in England* (London, 1980), pp. 57, 137-8

⁵²⁶ As in the chart included in the previous chapter, this graph does not take into account inflation. It does, however, include known payments not only from the learned societies, but also from the Oxford University Press and from Sir Richard Colt Hoare, a subject covered in more detail in the next chapter

growing revenue stream, it demonstrates that the younger Basire inherited a business which was already at its peak, and that he managed to maintain a high level of cash flow almost to the end of his career. As in the case of his father, the Society of Antiquaries not only remained the bedrock of his income, but also provided some exceptional bonus years, for example, 1807 and 1810, when he received payments of over £1,000 in respect of the Cathedral Series. The last years of Basire's life, however, show the start of a decrease in revenues and an increasing dependency on the Royal Society, as opposed to the Society of Antiquaries, which became a feature of the career of his son, James Basire (III).

The financial success of James Basire (II)'s business must have been in large part due to his training, his own technical skill, and the ability to hire and manage staff, including his own offspring, which he had inherited from his father. However, unlike his father, the younger Basire was also able to benefit from a simple, but important technological development. The first years of his career coincided almost exactly with the invention of the ruling machine in about 1790 by Wilson Lowry, another London-based engraver who specialised in technical and mechanical engraving, and who developed a number of labour-saving inventions. Looking back from 1826, William Palmer described this single innovation as "of as much importance to engravers, and the advancement of their art, as the steam-engine is to the manufacturer".⁵²⁷

The ruling machine consisted of a frame holding a steel bar, which was fitted with an etching needle. By means of this device, engravers and their assistants were able to create uniform lines with previously unimaginable efficiency. This invention and its almost universal adoption by engravers represented a significant milestone on the path of traditional engraving from an expensive, freehand art form in the eighteenth century to a near commodity in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵²⁸ James Basire (II) seems to have particularly valued this invention. Not only is its use visible from the uniformity of lines in many of his works, such as the Cathedral Series, but his own ruling machine was the only item of engraving equipment which is mentioned specifically in his Sun Fire Office insurance policies and in his will.⁵²⁹

The use of the ruling machine must not only have enabled a significant throughput of work, but also an enhanced level of profitability through significantly increased profit margins. We have already seen that James Basire (II) maintained the levels of gross revenues achieved at the end of his father's career. There is also indirect evidence from his private life that the second Basire made exceptional net profits from his business, and that they exceeded even those of his father. His will, as drafted in 1816, together with the Sun Fire Office insurance records of the same year, record that he was sufficiently wealthy to be able to buy a portfolio of properties, the most luxurious of which comprised his villa in Chigwell Row in Essex, where he spent the summer holidays with his family.

⁵²⁷ Quoted in Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, p. 228

⁵²⁸ Anthony Dyson, *Pictures to Print. The nineteenth century engraving trade* (London, 1984), chapter 6, 'The Engraving and Printing of Copper and Steel Plates'

⁵²⁹ See, for example, Guildhall Library, MS 11936/466/913703, as well as The National Archives, Prob 11/1661

Chigwell is less than fifteen miles north east from Chancery Lane, and was connected at this period by a daily coach from Whitechapel. An early Victorian Post Office Directory gives a feeling for this prestigious location:

“Lying close to Epping and Hainault Forests, it is much admired for its woodland scenery and pleasing prospects; in the neighborhood are many gentlemen’s seats....Chigwell row is about a mile distant; it consists of villas, principally occupied by mercantile men, and has fine views over Hainault Forest and the river Roding.”⁵³⁰

This was the sort of place where Basire could invite City friends to pursue country sports, while providing his daughters with the environment and connections to facilitate potentially advantageous marriages.

Basire’s will and the Sun Fire Office insurance documents also refer to two tenanted, investment properties which he owned at Penton Place and at Weston Place, Pentonville. They additionally mention a shop adjoining the house in Chigwell Row and four tenements there, all of which were rented out. Given this tangible wealth, it is not surprising that the younger James Basire, unlike his father, developed social pretensions. James Basire (II) generally used the suffix “Esquire” after his name to denote an elevated social status. This can partly be interpreted as a symptom of changed times and the loosening of general social distinctions, but it was also a personal statement. In contrast to his father and grandfather, who appear to have viewed themselves as craftsmen and artists, James Basire (II) saw himself as a gentleman, like his great-grandfather the Huguenot guard to King William III, Jacques Basire.

James Basire the younger retired permanently to his villa in Chigwell in 1818, as ill health prevented him from taking an active role in his studio from this time. Unfortunately, neither the country air nor the local mineral springs could restore him, and he died there in May 1822 at only 52 years of age. He bequeathed the house at Chigwell Row to his wife, Mary, and his ruling machine and other professional equipment, as well as his collection of unframed prints and drawings and books of prints, to his son James Basire (III). He appointed James, Mary, and Luke Graves Hansard as executors of his will and as trustees and guardians of his younger children. It is perhaps fortunate that he could not know that his second son, Daniel Cox Basire, would die suddenly two years later at the age of 24 at their house in Chigwell Row.⁵³¹ He would, however, at least have been relieved to know that his remaining unmarried daughters, Eliza and Susannah, found suitable husbands among the gentlemen of Chigwell Row, and that his eldest son and grandson, both also called James, were able to maintain the family business for another 40 years.

⁵³⁰ *Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, and Sussex Counties Post Office Directory* (ca. 1851), p. 48

⁵³¹ *Ipswich Journal*, 24 April 1824

5.6 LATER REPUTATION

The article on the Basires in the updated *Dictionary of National Biography* states that the second James Basire “never attained his father’s celebrity”.⁵³² This was true in his lifetime, when engravers were simply not as celebrated as they had been in the golden age of the London print business in the 1760s to the 1780s. It is even truer of the period since his death. This Basire’s reputation suffered almost immediately, as public taste was refashioned in the post-war years by new styles of engraving associated with the use of steel plates; the related propaganda of entrepreneurs such as John Britton; the increasing employment of lithography; and the domination of the fine art engraving market by mezzotint.

The remarks by Frederick Wedmore in the late Victorian edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* typify these later views of James Basire (II) as an artist. Wedmore starts off his appraisal of the younger Basire with faint praise: “there is enough to show that he was a good draughtsman, a capable and accomplished engraver....At his best the differences between his method and that of the most eminent member of his house are generally imperceptible.” However, he goes on to depreciate the second James Basire’s achievements as an engraver, and even casts doubt on his authorship of the views in the Oxford Almanack, including those based on Turner’s watercolours. This is despite the fact that James Basire the elder was already inactive or dead at this period, and so could not have engraved these famous prints.⁵³³

In better-informed circles, James Basire the younger was recognised from an early age as approaching his father’s ability, and the polite press introduced him to the public on the completion of his apprenticeship in the following terms: “...for there is a J. Basire, jun. rising equal to his father”.⁵³⁴ It is, in my view, undeniable that he did turn out to be the equal of his father in many aspects of his professional life. He continued to grow a highly profitable engraving business, to hire and develop apprentices who would themselves become celebrated engravers, as well as to assure his succession through his son.

Like his father, James Basire (II) also clearly considered himself to be an artist, and this is evidenced by his will, which refers to “the utensils and implements used in my profession of an artist and engraver”. Although he did not have the opportunity to engrave any historical prints in an eighteenth-century sense, his obituaries considered his equivalent works, the Cathedral Series of the Society of Antiquaries, as his masterpieces. He was also as prolific as his father as an engraver of other higher genre plates, such as landscapes and portraits, although the opportunities for the latter at his time mostly comprised smaller-scale portraits for book illustration and extra-illustration. Finally, the very fact that Wedmore attempted to reattribute the younger Basire’s interpretation of Turner’s Oxford views demonstrates that James Basire (II)’s greatest artistic achievements can be recognised as being on a par with those of his father.

⁵³² Peltz, *DNB*, IV, p. 235

⁵³³ Frederick Wedmore, *Basire, Isaac (1704-1768) etc.*, in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. III (1885), p. 1280

⁵³⁴ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXI, I (1791), p. 195n

Chapter 6

James Basire (III) (1796-1869)

James Basire (III), his mother and his younger siblings found themselves in a dire financial situation at the time of their father's final illness and death in early 1822. As recorded in James Basire (II)'s obituaries, "ill health compelled him of late years to leave much of the laborious part of his business to his son".⁵³⁵ In other words, the elder Basire was unable physically to contribute to the work of the studio, so that its capacity was severely reduced. At the same time, there seems to have been a slump in the external demand for the Basires' services. The discontinuation of the Cathedral Series and a hiatus in the production of *Vetusta Monumenta* had in particular caused a collapse in revenues from the Society of Antiquaries. The account books of the Society show that the Basires received only £25 from it in 1820 and nothing in 1821, compared with an average of over £350 annually in the previous twenty years. There was also a dearth in commissions from the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the same years. Sir Richard Colt Hoare was delaying payments on account for the work done at this time, while ignoring requests from the young Basire brothers for higher fees. Finally, new-style topographical publications such as those illustrated by Turner or promoted by John Britton were providing work for James Basire (II)'s older, former apprentices, but not for his sons.

Taken together, these factors led to a dramatic fall in the family's professional income which also had an immediate impact on the family's accumulated wealth and lifestyle. James Basire (III), his mother and Luke Graves Hansard, as executors of James Basire (II)'s will, were accordingly obliged to take decisive action in the eighteen months following his death. They auctioned off the tenanted investment properties at 33-34 Penton Place and 7 Weston Street, Pentonville on 6 December 1822.⁵³⁶ This was followed by two even more emotional sales by auction in May the following year. James Basire (I)'s house at 31 Great Queen Street was sold after more than 60 years in the family,⁵³⁷ just days after Mr. Sotheby disposed of the family's entire collection of framed and unframed prints, many of which comprised rare proofs of works by James Basire (II), James Basire (I), and the latter's close friend, William Woollett.

The first sections of this chapter recount how James Basire (III) was able to restore the family's fortunes and its engraving practice by extending the firm's product range, finding new customers but, above all, by retaining key existing clients.

6.1 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE AT SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

Retention of the Basire family's position at the Society of Antiquaries must have been one of James Basire (III)'s first priorities after his father's death. Such an effective monopoly could have been seriously questioned in an age of increasing scrutiny of nepotism and non-arm's length appointments in government and through society as a whole.

⁵³⁵ *Monthly Magazine*, IV (1822), p. 330

⁵³⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, 5 December 1822

⁵³⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1823

However, there is no evidence that the Society publicly considered taking advantage of James Basire's II's death in order to reassess its relationship with this key supplier.

There are several potential reasons for this second smooth, generational transition. One explanation can be found in the public support and early promotion of the latest James Basire's abilities by his father's influential friends and business associates. For example, John Nichols had written of the 16-year old apprentice in 1812 that, "...a third James Basire, born Feb. 20, 1796, has already given several proofs of superior excellence in the arts of Drawing and Engraving".⁵³⁸ Another explanation for the apparently seamless handover may have been its gradual nature, whereby the father and son openly worked in tandem on the model of the previous generation. A third and related factor which may have facilitated the transition was that a conservative, institutional patron such as the Society of Antiquaries may have hesitated in abandoning a long-term supplier because of illness and premature death—at least as long as the Basires remained reliable in terms of service and quality.

The timing of the handover from James Basire (II) to his son is not discernible in any change in style in the engravings produced by the Basires for the Society of Antiquaries during the latter half of the 1810s, but is clearly evidenced through various other sources. Luke Graves Hansard's diary reveals that James Basire (II) was already suffering from a debilitating illness in 1814, when his son was still an eighteen year-old apprentice.⁵³⁹ There is no specific mention of James Basire (II)'s withdrawal from the business in the Council minutes of the Society, but the Audit Books last mention payments to "Mr. Basire" in 1817 and then start to refer to payments to "James Basire" in early 1818. This timing for a final commercial handover is supported by business correspondence with Richard Colt Hoare, dated 24 April and 14 August 1818.⁵⁴⁰ These letters were signed by James Basire junior and his younger brother, Daniel Cox Basire, who had commenced his apprenticeship in 1814. It therefore seems that James Basire (II) was able to rely on his 22- and 20-year old sons to manage the business together, following his definitive retirement to the country at Chigwell in the spring of 1818.

Archaeologia and Vetusta Monumenta

As in preceding years, much of the work performed by this rising generation of Basires for the Society of Antiquaries was focused on routine illustration for *Archaeologia* of the articles read or the exhibits displayed by the fellows at their weekly meetings. *Archaeologia* XVIII, which was published in 1817, seems to have been the transitional volume in terms of the handover between generations. Not only is this the first volume which was invoiced to the Society in the name of the younger Basire, but the signatures on the plates are more differentiated than in the previous years, and deliberately so. For exam-

⁵³⁸ Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, p. 717

⁵³⁹ P. and G. Ford, *Luke Graves Hansard's Diary*, pp. 5-6

⁵⁴⁰ These can be found in the collection at the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes. It is not currently catalogued

ple, there are more plates signed “Jas. Basire”, compared to the styles, “J.Basire” or “Js. Basire”, which were commonly used by the second James Basire for this type of work.

The following edition of *Archaeologia*, published in 1821, includes a remarkable set of illustrations which seems to celebrate the transition between father and son, and which would again confirm the date for the completion of the handover between James Basire (II) and (III) as taking place in the first half of 1818. An article by P.T. Taylor Esq. had been read on 5 March of that year concerning discoveries made while taking down the old bridge over the River Teign in Devon. This article contained three fold-out plates, two of which were elaborately composed of different elements in a manner which was rare in *Archaeologia*. The first two of these were signed “James Basire” in full, which was only the second occasion that plates in this periodical had been signed in this way in a period of almost 60 years.⁵⁴¹ The third plate was signed by “James Basire & Son”, the only time this signature style was used by the family on any plate in a period of a hundred years.⁵⁴² These factors imply that a special emphasis was being placed here on a final collaboration by father and son.⁵⁴³

Considering the rapid scientific and technological developments in the outside world, the types of illustrations which the Committee for Papers of the Society of Antiquaries submitted for engraving by James Basire (III) evolved surprisingly slowly. The objects of the plates in *Archaeologia* remained varied, even miscellaneous in nature, and continued to be dominated by small finds, architectural details and architecture. Gothic architecture remained important, but to a lesser extent than in the war years. The emphasis on British antiquities was gradually diluted by an increasing number of illustrations of edifices and artefacts from France, Germany and the Mediterranean. A burgeoning interest in Anglo-Saxon archaeology is also evident from the early 1830s, and there were several, substantial new series of mediaeval manuscript illustrations.

The antiquaries still seemed occasionally to find pleasure in more eccentric subjects, as indicated by a couple of articles in *Archaeologia* in the 1830s. These included engravings by Basire of “Female Head-dress in England”, and “Hats, Bonnets, or Coverings for the head, chiefly from the reign of King Henry VIII to the eighteenth century” for papers by the architect, John Adey Repton.⁵⁴⁴ It seems nonetheless that the Society did have its limits in terms of the potential impact on its reputation of more frivolous objects of study. Repton’s *Some Account of the Beard and the Moustachio, Chiefly from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, was refused by the Council, and Basire’s 38 lithographed figures were printed privately for the author by Nichols in 1839.

⁵⁴¹ The first occasion occurred in *Archaeologia* XIII (1798), plates XX-XXI, p. 301, on two fold-out plates based on drawings by the architect, William Wilkins

⁵⁴² The phrase “James Basire & Co.” was also used uniquely in the same year in the context of the approval of a payment by the Royal Society dated 15 November, according to the manuscript minute books of its Council

⁵⁴³ *Archaeologia* XIX (1821), plates XVII-XVIII, p. 312

⁵⁴⁴ *Archaeologia* XXIV (1832), plates XXXV-XLII, p. 188; and, *Archaeologia* XXVII (1838), plates III-X, p. 32

At the other end of the artistic spectrum, the Society of Antiquaries did not publish any more prints of the scale of the great historical paintings and the Cathedral Series after 1813. It did, however, continue to publish prints of an intermediate level of complexity under the umbrella of *Vetusta Monumenta* sporadically and for a time. The fifth volume of this series was dated 1835 according to its title page, but 46 of its 69 plates were dated to the years 1816-1821. More than half of the plates in this volume comprised the engravings of mediaeval buildings after drawings by Frederick Nash, which effectively continued the Cathedral Series on a more modest scale: Malmesbury Abbey, the castle at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the Temple Church in London, and Tewkesbury Abbey. These plates would have given the younger generation of Basires the opportunity to cut its teeth on work of a scale and ambition between that of *Archaeologia*, and the historical prints and the Cathedral Series.

There was then a gap of fifty years until the official publication of the final, sixth volume of *Vetusta Monumenta*, but this publication nevertheless contained 30 plates signed "Basire", which were engraved during the period from 1821 to 1843. These engravings largely comprised two prestigious series of coloured prints of mediaeval art after drawings by Charles Alfred Stothard, a favourite of the Lysons brothers, who was employed as draughtsman to the Society until his accidental death while drawing in a Devon church in 1821. The first of these sets depicted the Bayeux tapestry on 17 folio pages. The second one illustrated scenes from the Painted Chamber at the Palace of Westminster, the completion of which was delayed for up to ten years by Stothard's death. In the end, these prints were finalised just before the destruction of their subject matter in the fire which devastated the Palace of Westminster in 1834.⁵⁴⁵ One of the ten coloured plates illustrating the destroyed wall paintings from the Painted Chamber is included as Figure 62 on the next page.

A review of the engraved work in *Archaeologia* and *Vetusta Monumenta* during James Basire (III)'s career confirms that his position at the Society of Antiquaries at no time came under serious threat from other copper-plate engravers. Apart from two plates by J. Swain and one by H. Shaw published in the twenty-fifth edition of *Archaeologia* in 1834, only one other engraver's name appeared in these publications during a fifty-year period from 1803 to 1853. This was G.F. Storm.

⁵⁴⁵ *Vetusta Monumenta* VI (1885), plates I-XVII, dated 1822-23 of the Bayeux Tapestry, plates XXX-XXIX, dated 1842 of the Painted Chamber at the Palace of Westminster



Figure 62 “The triumph of Largesse or Bounty over Avarice” and “The triumph of Denbonerete or Meekness over Anger” from the Painted Chamber in the original Palace of Westminster, engraved by James Basire (III) after Charles Alfred Stodhard, for *Vetusta Monumenta VI* (1885), plate XXXVIII (dated 1842), actual size 477 mm x 325 mm (photograph: the author)

Storm, who was better known as an engraver of mezzotint portraits, seems to have been employed by the Society of Antiquaries to engrave a large number of illustrations in a specific niche during the 1830s. He etched 37 facsimile plates of two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in articles by the then Director, John Gage, in the years 1832-1834.⁵⁴⁶ This was followed by 21 facsimile plates of a late antique manuscript from the Harleian Collection on behalf of the Keeper of the British Museum, William Young Ottley, in *Archaeologia* XXVI.⁵⁴⁷ Finally, he was asked to etch 8 illuminations from the fourteenth-century Luttrell Psalter and other manuscripts to be published as part of *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1839.⁵⁴⁸ As this list implies, Storm seems not to have been employed as a potential replacement for Basire, but rather to complement him. This was probably for reasons of timing, as Basire was himself asked during the same period to draw and engrave similar works for both *Vetusta Monumenta* and *Archaeologia*, such as the 53 plates of facsimiles of an Anglo-Saxon manuscript produced by 1832 for Henry Ellis, then Principal Librarian of the British Museum.⁵⁴⁹

Lithography and zincography

The biggest threat to James Basire (III)'s position at the Society of Antiquaries did not in fact come from another engraver, but from another reproductive technique. The Society had not published a mezzotint print, since the portrait of its President, the Bishop of Carlisle, had been published in *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1770. It had not commissioned an aquatint, since J.C. Stadler's plates of the walls of Constantinople appeared in *Archaeologia* XIV in 1803. However, by 1825, the Council was interested in another, newer technology, that of lithography or "drawing on stone". This was not a form of engraving, but could nevertheless potentially be used to replace this expensive form of reproduction in certain contexts.

Lithography had a number of advantages over etching and line engraving. An artist with significantly less training than a line engraver could directly draw on a slab of limestone and it would be almost ready for printing. The intermediate steps of incising or corroding the image on metal were no longer necessary. Stone could also give any number of impressions compared with the limited life of a copper plate. The author of a French treatise on lithography published in 1819 showed that there were slight cost advantages in the lithographic printing process, but significant economic benefits at the drafting stage. He estimated that a lithographic draughtsman could charge less than a

⁵⁴⁶ *Archaeologia* XXIV (1832), plates I-XXXIV; XXV (1834), plates XXVIII-30

⁵⁴⁷ *Archaeologia* XXVI (1836), plates IV-XXIV, pp. 144-186

⁵⁴⁸ *Vetusta Monumenta* VI (1885), plates XX-XXV, XXVIII-XXIX

⁵⁴⁹ *Archaeologia*, XXIV (1832), plates LII-CIV, after p. 340. The drawings for these plates by Basire are archived at the Society of Antiquaries, SAL MS/823/1

quarter of the fee of an engraver, and that a drawing on stone could be made for a seventh of the cost of an engraving once materials had been taken into account.⁵⁵⁰

Lithography had originally been invented in Munich in 1796, but its rapid commercial expansion through Europe was delayed by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. As a result of this, there was only a handful of lithographic printers in London between 1814 and 1819, but they began to be recognised as a separate type of business and to appear in directories from 1820. By 1823, there were already at least 25 such firms.⁵⁵¹ It may be that one or several of these businesses spontaneously offered their services to the Society of Antiquaries, hence this conservative body's relatively early interest in this new technology.

On 8 December 1825, the minutes of the Council of the Society mentioned lithography for the first time, and this was immediately accompanied by a call for action. Hudson Gurney, one of the Vice-Presidents, proposed a motion which was seconded by the Secretary, Henry Ellis, to appoint a sub-committee, "to take into consideration the expediency of adopting Lithography in such of the Publications of the Society to which that species of Art is applicable". On the following 8 March, the sub-committee reported to the Council "their recommendation, that certain specimens of Lithographic impressions be obtained from Messrs. Ingelman (sic) & Co. of subjects to be selected from drawings already in the possession of the Society, to form their judgment, as to the propriety of occasionally adopting Lithography in their Publications". The only good news for James Basire in these proceedings consisted in the Society's recognition that lithography could or should occasionally replace some and not all of his work.

The originally Alsatian Engelmann was one of the most famous names in lithography at that time. He had studied the subject at source in Munich, and then founded a workshop in Paris immediately after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He subsequently set up in London and was clearly keen to do business there. A satisfied Council agreed on 28 December 1826 to pay him the relatively large sum of £42 for four sample drawings on stone, but then spent the whole of 1827 discussing which subjects were best suited to this type of treatment. The Council seemed on the whole to consider that simpler subjects in outline were most suitable for lithography, but then at the beginning of 1826 took a surprisingly bold decision.⁵⁵² They ordered that the drawings by the Society's draftsman, Frederick Nash, of the remains of the Abbey of St. Mary, York, be "engraved in lithography", a phrase which suggests some confusion as to the exact nature of the new technology which they had decided to adopt. This move seemed to presage a doubly significant new departure. Not only had the Council sanctioned a new reproductive technique, but they were immediately deploying it on an elaborate set of architectural and landscape

⁵⁵⁰ Michael Twyman, *Lithography 1800-1850* (Oxford, 1970) ; *Breaking the mould: the first hundred years of lithography* (Chicago, 2001), p. 113

⁵⁵¹ Michael Twyman, *A Directory of London lithographic printers 1800-1850* (London, 1976), charts 1-2

⁵⁵² SAL, Council Minutes, IV, 16 January 1828

drawings for *Vetusta Monumenta*. This seemed to herald the continuation of the Society's series of mediaeval ecclesiastical buildings into a new era of cheaper reproduction.⁵⁵³

All ten topographical drawings of St. Mary's Abbey were prepared by Nash, but the Society decided to entrust the lithographic printing in equal shares to two firms, that of Engelmann and that of his competitor, Charles Hullmandel. This seems an odd decision, as the consistency of style of the portfolio of prints could have been compromised. However, it is possible that the Society's leaders, who evidently felt insecure in this domain, wished to test two suppliers, both of whom were leaders in this emerging market. Hullmandel was British-born and better-established in London than his rival. He had recently published an influential book on *The Art of Drawing on Stone* (1824), and was particularly known for his reproduction of picturesque watercolour landscapes. It is therefore perhaps no surprise that the final plates of the ruins turned out to be consistently romantic in style, and represented an attractive portfolio of prints by any standard. However, this seems to have been the problem. They were quite unlike the clinical line engravings and etchings, to which the fellows of the Society were accustomed and which the majority still seemed to prefer. The prints were also by no means a bargain, since they cost £300 in all to produce. This experiment was therefore not repeated, and these plates turned out to be a dead end in terms of any continuation of the reproduction of mediaeval ecclesiastical remains on a more affordable basis.

This episode was, however, not the end of the Society's initial phase of experimentation with lithography in the 1820s. The Council next decided to start a competitive process to choose the supplier and the technology to be used to reproduce the outline drawings by Charles Alfred Stothard of the mediaeval wall paintings from the Palace of Westminster. This process pitted Basire and copper-plate engraving against the deceased draughtsman's brother, Robert Stothard, and lithography. The idea of such a competitive tender must already have caused Basire considerable alarm, but he would have been even more shocked when the Council of the Society informed him that he had lost the job. Robert Stothard was thereupon directed on 7 July 1829 to complete a series of "Drawings in Lithography", a precedent which could have signified the end to the Basires' tenure at the Society of Antiquaries.

Fortunately for James Basire (III), the unreliable Stothard never delivered. At a meeting one year to the day later, the Council finally lost patience and instructed the Secretary to procure the Society's drawings and prints, using whatever legal measures necessary "in consequence of Mr. Stothard's pecuniary embarrassments". At around the same time, the Society commissioned one simple lithograph of an inscription for *Archaeologia* from another established specialist firm, that of Joseph Netherclift.⁵⁵⁴ However, this also proved to be a one-off commission, at least for a considerable period, as the Society did not publish any more lithographic reproductions for a decade.

⁵⁵³ *Vetusta Monumenta* V (1835), plates LI-LX, dated 1829

⁵⁵⁴ *Archaeologia* XXIII (1831), Appendix, plate XXXVI, p. 427, "Inscription from a Chapel at Tours"

The Society of Antiquaries seems to have rediscovered lithography and the potential benefits of competition only at the end of 1839. At the Council meeting on 3 December of that year, the members agreed to James Basire's estimate for "drawing on stone" as well as for the lithographic printing of six plates of runic inscriptions for *Archaeologia* XXVIII.⁵⁵⁵ The same edition of *Archaeologia* also contained five plates of Greek inscriptions and a plan of the catacombs in Alexandria, which were lithographed by Joseph Netherclift, as well as six plates engraved by H. Moses.

This group of commissions reveals a number of important developments. First of all, the Society of Antiquaries had in the meantime decided that the use of lithography was, after all, appropriate for cheaper, simpler illustrations, such as plans and facsimiles of inscriptions, but not for detailed architectural plates. Secondly, James Basire had meanwhile equipped himself not only to draw on stone, but also to provide a full service, including lithographic printing. This is indirectly evidenced in correspondence between the engraver and Henry Ellis dated to January 1827,⁵⁵⁶ and directly demonstrable through Basire's technical illustrations for the Houses of Parliament, such as those in a report dated May 1827 on the site of the deceased Duke of York's Godolphin House.⁵⁵⁷ Thirdly, Basire was being asked to provide both copper-plate engraving and lithographs in competition with other suppliers, so that he might again have been at risk of losing his quasi-monopoly of reproducing illustrations for the Society.

The following edition of *Archaeologia*, the twenty-ninth, published in 1842, shows that the Society had meanwhile regained confidence in Basire, since there are no plates signed by another supplier here or in any publication for the next ten years. The Antiquaries remained, however, in an experimental mood in terms of the reproductive media deployed in this volume. There were a number of lithographs and, for the first time, zincographs, which were at the height of their brief fashion at this time. Most of the lithographs and zincographs published by the Society in this volume comprised outline inscriptions and plans, but there were significant exceptions. There is a lithographed view of Culver Hole in South Wales, which gives a picturesque crayon-like effect, similar to that in Nash's images of St. Mary's Abbey, York. Another striking innovation consisted in the coloured lithograph of a red-figure kylix or ancient Greek drinking cup, recently purchased as part of the Canino collection for the British Museum (Figure 63 on the next page). Finally, there was an Anglo-Saxon brooch engraved on copper, where the colours of the enamel are brought out not only in red, blue and green, but also in gold and silver, an effect which was further enhanced by the use of shading in the immediate background.

⁵⁵⁵ *Archaeologia* XXVIII (1841), Appendix, plates XV-XX, pp. 338-366

⁵⁵⁶ Source: card catalogue of Correspondence 1801-1860, Society of Antiquaries of London

⁵⁵⁷ *Godolphin House. Copy of the lease granted to His Royal Highness the late Duke of York, of the site of Godolphin House, ordered, by the House of Commons, to be printed, 22 May 1827*



Figure 63 Figures painted on the body of a kylix or drinking cup, drawn by James Basire (III) for Samuel Birch, "Explanation of the Myth upon a fictile vase found at Canino, now in the British Museum", *Archaeologia* XXIX (1842), plate XVI, page 144, actual size 296 mm x 412 mm (Society of Antiquaries of London)

The extravagant illustration of *Archaeologia* XXIX did not go unnoticed by the author of its review in the *Gentleman's Magazine*:⁵⁵⁸

"A word concerning the plates illustrating the volume before us. We bestow merited commendation on the pretty illuminated fac-simile of the enameled Saxon ouche communicated by Mr Smith; but surely the plates of Roman antiquities, p. 166, and several others, are too crowded, and out of all proportion with the page of letter-press; the usual rule, where the plate is not folded, being to make it uniform in size with the page of type. Where volumes have to be bound *and cut*, to correspond with a preceding series, this change will be found particularly inconvenient; the plate from the Fictile Vase at p. 144, the binders will necessarily fold at the foot as well as the sides, an injury which a very trifling reduction of scale would have avoided. Lithographs and zincographs are now intermingled with Basire's copperplates; these modes of illustration may be found occasionally useful and economical, when applied to inscriptions and hieroglyphics, or other subjects not requiring elaborate finish: but we shall be sorry to see them so generally introduced as this volume seems to promise..."

This section of the review has been quoted here *in extenso* for two main reasons. First of all, it was very rare that a book reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* took the time

⁵⁵⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXIX.I, (1841), p. 509

to discuss the illustrations in such detail. Secondly, the review reveals much about the likely attitudes towards the Basires' work among two important categories of end-customer: the fellows of the Society of Antiquaries and readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. It is clear from this quotation that the aesthetic impact of the illustrations retained some importance, hence the special mention of the gold brooch and Greek vase, and the comments on the composition of the plates of Roman antiquities. It is also notable that the use of more modern technology, as exemplified by the use of lithographs and zincographs, is not condemned. However, these techniques continued to be viewed as mostly appropriate only to simpler outline plates, where they might be more economical than copper-plate engraving.

This hypothesis that economy rather than artistic effect remained the main driver behind the use of lithography in the 1840s can be further illustrated by the intervention of a reforming new Director of the Society, Captain William Henry Smyth R.N. In 1847, Smith became personally involved in the estimates for Basire's lithographs of Greek vases for another article by Samuel Birch of the British Museum. The Council minutes of 28 January and 5 July of that year approved an estimate of a maximum of £4 10s for lithographed views of these objects "including the preparation and use of the stones". This price was noticeably low in comparison to the contemporary cost of engravings of this size, particularly since the price also included Basire's attractive preparatory drawings in pen, brush and ink, which remain in the Society's collection.⁵⁵⁹

The nature of the illustrations in the volumes of *Archaeologia* through the next ten years implies that the opinions reflected by the reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* were generally respected. Experimentation with tonal effects, elaborate compositions and picturesque details can be found, but remained rare.⁵⁶⁰ There was only one more zincograph published in *Archaeologia*, and this was an unusual depiction of an inscription against a black background, which appeared in 1852.⁵⁶¹ Lithographs did, however, continue to be used in a large minority of illustrations, either for inscriptions, outline drawings, or coloured depictions of Greek vases, which were to become a recurring feature of the periodical in these years.

During their final two full decades of service to the Society of Antiquaries ending in the early 1860s, the Basires' activity was confined to producing illustrations for the 11 editions of *Archaeologia* published during this time. The approximately 300 plates which appeared in these volumes demonstrated a steady increase in the variety of reproductive techniques. The large majority of plates still consisted of etchings by James Basire (III) and his son, who together also contributed almost 60 lithographs and 5 zinco-

⁵⁵⁹ *Archaeologia* XXXII (1847), plates VIII-XII, pp. 150-162; Society of Antiquaries, Collection of Prints and Drawings, Classical Antiquities, nos. 1.3 and 14

⁵⁶⁰ For example, in *Archaeologia* XXXII (1847), plate XXI, p. 452, "Specimen of Roman Ware found at Ewell found at Ewel. Shafts formed in the Chalk at Ewell, filled with Roman remains"

⁵⁶¹ *Archaeologia* XXXIV (1852), plate IX, p. 76, "Specimens of the Scythic writing at Behistum, copied from facismiles taken by impression on the spot"

graphs. However, there were also 15 lithographs by other suppliers, and 5 plates of wood engraving by a leading exponent of this craft, Orlando Jewitt.⁵⁶² In all, fully a quarter of the plates published in *Archaeologia* from the early 1840s to the early 1850s were created using techniques other than traditional copper-plate engraving.

The years 1852-1860 also saw some encroachment by other suppliers on the Basires' territory: six engravings by J.H. Le Keux, the son of James Basire (II)'s pupil, John Le Keux, as well as a handful of lithographs by Netherclift and Kell Brothers. By the time *Archaeologia* XXXIX was published in 1863, only 3 of 24 plates were signed Basire; 6 further plates consisted of engravings by J.H. Le Keux, while most illustrations now comprised lithographs. In *Archaeologia* XL, which appeared in 1866, there were no longer any illustrations by the Basires and almost all the plates were lithographed by Kell Brothers. Engraving and small-scale lithography, as practiced by the Basires, were thus replaced by industrialised lithography at the Society of Antiquaries in the first half of the 1860s.

It was of no consolation to the Basires, but the subsequent reign of lithography was much shorter than that of engraving. Mass photographic reproduction would be sufficiently developed in the next decades in order to put the large-scale lithographers, such as Kell Brothers, out of business in their turn.⁵⁶³

6.2 ANTIQUARIAN AND TOPOGRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION OUTSIDE THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

In 1817, John Nichols Son & Bentley published a slim volume entitled *English Ecclesiastical Costume: from the earliest period down to the sixteenth century, selected from Sculptures*, by John Carter, who died in that year. As a rule, Carter preferred to etch the plates for his own publications, but this work was an exception, perhaps because of his failing eyesight or general ill health at this time. In the Advertisement, Carter explained that the drawings were commissioned by his "old and worthy friend", John Nichols, and that the plates were "engraved by Mr. James Basire junior, under my superintendence and corrections".⁵⁶⁴ The obvious interpretation for Carter's unusual statement is that this commission was a sign of friendship from the ageing Carter to the twenty-one year old James Basire (III). Significantly, this commission was granted at a time when James Basire (II) was also seriously ill, and his 21-year old son would have been appreciative of a helping hand from an artist who had been his father's and grandfather's collaborator over a period of more than 30 years. This was the type of sentiment which would enable James Basire (III) to rebuild the family's business on the basis of the loyalty of friendly patrons such as the Nichols family and of Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

⁵⁶² *Archaeologia* XXXIII (1849), plate XVI, p. 359; *Archaeologia* XXXVI (1855), plates II-IV, pp. 4-10

⁵⁶³ Joan Evans, *The History of the Society of Antiquaries*, p. 292

⁵⁶⁴ Carter, *English Ecclesiastical Costume*, Advertisement (not paginated)

Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838)

Sir Richard Colt Hoare is perhaps best known today as the scion of the Hoare banking family who inherited Stourhead in Wiltshire, added the Regency library and picture gallery to the house, and made substantial changes to the garden and across the estate. His activities as a country gentleman, however, only reflected one aspect of his personality, as well only one outlet for his considerable intelligence, energy, time and wealth. In the first half of his life, he made two grand tours of the European continent before the outbreak of the French Revolution. He subsequently made frequent antiquarian and sketching tours of the British Isles, and particularly of Wales, the homeland of his favourite travelling companion, Richard Fenton. Then, in the second half of his life, he planned and financed systematic campaigns of archaeological excavation within and around his estate, with a particular focus on pre-historic burial mounds, which were a major feature of his publications and their illustration. His frequently-quoted claim in the introduction to his *Ancient Wiltshire* that “We speak from facts, not theory” was meant to show that he saw himself not as one of the last surviving *virtuosi*, but rather as a new breed of scholar.

This was not a view shared by the popular antiquarian author, John Britton, who jealously dismissed Colt Hoare’s later, large-scale antiquarian publication, *Modern Wiltshire*, as being written by “amateur historians and topographers...under the nominal authorship of the baronet”.⁵⁶⁵ Although there is some truth in this caricature of the work of Colt Hoare’s old age, it does not fairly reflect the baronet’s life’s work. Colt Hoare’s principal fieldworker, William Cunnington, was an “amateur” in the sense that he earned a living as a cloth merchant, but he has also since been recognized as a pioneer in the methodical excavation and recording of archaeological finds. Colt Hoare’s draughtsman, Philip Crocker, was a professional surveyor from the Ordnance Survey, who was hired to record in detail the shapes of the barrows excavated, together with samples of finds and plans of the locations. The baronet himself was also hands-on in all aspects of his publications, including the engraving and illustration, as is clear from his correspondence. In a letter dated February 1806, he lamented: “What with booksellers, engravers and printers’ devils, I am almost hurried out of my senses”. The same letter then immediately went on to give Cunnington and Crocker detailed instructions to survey barrows at Amesbury prior to excavation.⁵⁶⁶

James Basire (II) was first engaged by both Colt Hoare and his friend, Richard Fenton, for the illustration of various works relating to Wales, which ranged from pure tourism to more serious, but traditional antiquarianism. This Basire’s initial collaboration with Colt Hoare comprised his etching of the baronet’s drawings of 11 views of ruined castles and picturesque views, which appeared in the first volume of Theophilus

⁵⁶⁵ T.E. Jones, *A Descriptive Account*, part II, p. 35

⁵⁶⁶ Robert H. Cunnington, *From Antiquary to Archaeologist. A Biography of William Cunnington 1754-1810* (Princes Risborough, 1975), pp. 84-85. The quotation relates to work on Colt Hoare’s edition of the *Itinerarium Cambriae*

Jones's *History of the County of Brecknock* in 1805. The following year, Colt Hoare published his own edition of the *Itinerarium Cambriae* of Giraldus Cambrensis, with illustrations of the author's funeral monument engraved by Basire after drawings by John Carter. Then, in 1811, Basire was asked by Richard Fenton to engrave Carter's drawings of seals, church features and funeral monuments for his *Historical Tour through Pembrokeshire*, a work which was both inspired by and dedicated to Colt Hoare.

From this point, however, the Basires were mostly employed on engraving Crocker's drawings for Colt Hoare's more serious archaeological works. The baronet clearly considered the engraved illustrations a key scientific component of his publications, and later deplored that "I am sorry to see, in many of our modern County Histories, much fine engraving employed and, I may add, thrown away, on indifferent subjects".⁵⁶⁷ His own histories of Wiltshire accordingly eschewed views of seats of local worthies, and focused on the products of his excavations. The plates which he commissioned, such as the one shown in Figure 64 on the next page, were mostly of a more technical nature, and were therefore entrusted to draughtsmen and engravers, and particularly Crocker and Basire, who specialised in accurate reproduction. This plate comprises a ground plan of Stonehenge containing a compass and a scale, but is nevertheless embellished with a Roman-style inscription uniform with the rest of the work.

⁵⁶⁷ Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *The Modern History of South Wiltshire, II. Hundred of Heytesbury* (J. Nichols & Son, 1824), Preface pp. v-vi



Figure 64 “Stonehenge”, engraved by James Basire (II) after Philip Crocker for *The Ancient History of South Wiltshire* (1812) by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, page 151 (courtesy of the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes)

Colt Hoare's first contribution to county history, his *Ancient History of South Wiltshire*, was published in 1812 and contained 66 plates signed by James Basire (II). This work has been justly described in recent years as "the most magnificent excavation report to have appeared to date".⁵⁶⁸ Except for seven maps by the specialist Cary brothers, all but one of the engravings were by Basire, and all of these were after drawings by Crocker, with the exception of the frontispiece portrait of William Cunnington. The third James Basire engraved a further 20 plates for the *Ancient History of North Wiltshire* (1819), all of which were after Crocker, and then 34 plates after Crocker and the architectural draughtsman, John Buckler, for the *Modern History of South Wiltshire* (1822-1837). An example of a fine landscape view of Stonehenge after Crocker is given below as Figure 65.



Figure 65 "West View of Stonehenge" engraved by James Basire (III) after Philip Crocker for *The Modern History of South Wiltshire*, by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, volume II.III (1826), page 52 (courtesy of the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes)

Documentary evidence of the process whereby two generations of Basires were engaged by the baronet to work on these publications has survived in the form of bills, account summaries, receipts and other correspondence, which are now housed at the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes. These date from the period 1809 to 1836, and give an almost year by year account of the business dealings between the Basires and Colt Hoare. Since they run in parallel to the records of the Basires' largest institutional patron, the Society of Antiquaries, they also allow a comparison of the engravers' practices in dealing with private and institutional patrons.

⁵⁶⁸ Malcolm Todd, "From Romanticism to Archaeology: Richard Colt Hoare, Samuel Lysons and Antiquity", in Mark Brayshay ed., *Topographical Writers in South-West England* (University of Exeter, 1996), p. 92

The surviving Basire-Colt Hoare correspondence begins with exchanges concerning the illustration of the *Ancient History of South Wiltshire*, which was published in 1812. These show that Colt Hoare and James Basire (II) had negotiated a flat fee of 10 guineas per plate, except for individually identified special items, such as the general map of Stonehenge, which cost 40 guineas, and the portrait of Cunnington which cost £47 5s, including the preparatory drawing and the final inscription. A letter dated 21 April 1810 indicates that Basire and Colt Hoare must have met in London to discuss the portrait, and that the engraver had subsequently added more finishing. Basire remarked that the plate was now, in his opinion, worth 60 guineas, but he did not insist on collecting this amount. The baronet was an excellent customer, who used Basire as a one-stop shop to provide the physical copper plates, as well as the engraving of images and text. He also paid his bills regularly, once both parties had agreed on the quantity and quality of the work delivered. "Regularly" at this period, however, often meant only once a year. This corresponded with the rhythm of payments received from the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society, a contemporary convention which necessitated extended credit terms between all customers and suppliers in the value chain.

By the time that the first part of the second volume of the *Ancient History of Wiltshire*, the *Ancient History of North Wiltshire*, was published in 1819, James Basire (II) was seriously ill, and Colt Hoare was routinely corresponding with the younger James and his brother, Daniel Cox Basire. Several signs of an initially more distant relationship between the younger generation of engravers and the baronet are immediately apparent in the revised terms of their business arrangements. The correspondence shows that the pricing of engraving plates was no longer standardised, but became differentiated on the basis of the actual effort involved, and the writing and copper plates also started to be billed separately. The brothers tried systematically to increase the prices originally agreed by their father, but their supplemental billings were ignored by the baronet.

If their pricing was more controlled, the young Basire brothers were at least able to benefit from the provision of some additional services, for example, in the form of colouring a map of the Hundred of Mere, as well as "painting" six coats of arms for a privately printed and distributed publication, *Monastic remains of the religious houses at Witham, Bruton, & Stavordale* (1824). The water-colouring of preparatory drawings was an artistic service which had been provided by James Basire (I) and (II), and would continue to be provided by their successors. However, this seems to have been the first time that the Basires performed the more mechanical task of colouring printed plates for insertion in a publication. This was not normally profitable for an engraver as, for example, the colouring of the map of Mere only brought in £1 in total for 400 sheets coloured at a price of 5 shillings per hundred sheets. The young Basires were, however, at this time desperate for revenues of any level and type, and would in any case have been only too willing to provide a complete service to such a valuable customer.

By 1825, Colt Hoare seems to have been sufficiently confident in the service and value provided by James Basire (III), in order to accept the latter's offer also to print his plates on the presses which had been shared by the engraver with his uncle, John Cox. On 31 March of that year, only two months after Cox's death, the baronet paid Basire a first bill for printing services. This was also only a month after the engraver had also been appointed as rolling-press printer to the Society of Antiquaries. This invoice was in respect of seven plates for an archaeological work by another author, *A Description of the Deverel Barrow*, by William August Miles. In this case, the author was working under the patronage of the baronet, who paid the bills for the entire publication. Subsequently, all of James Basire (III)'s invoices included amounts not only for engraving, but also for printing, high quality paper, packing and parcels. The commercial relationship then continued on this basis through the publication of the remaining volumes of Colt Hoare's *Modern History of South Wiltshire* from 1828 to 1837, and brought the Basires total revenues over the lifetime of the documented relationship of at least £1,600.

Despite the longevity of the Basires' business dealings with Colt Hoare, the surviving correspondence shows that the level of income received from him by the engravers was, as in the case of that from the Society of Antiquaries, on a continual downward trend. It showed a sharp decrease from a total of almost £1,000 for the 1810s, to almost £500 in the 1820s, and finally dropped to £100-200 in the 1830s. As if this secular decline in revenues was not enough, a letter dated 12 November 1834 also reveals that James Basire (III) was unable to return many of the baronet's copper plates. These had been stolen by his assistant, Edward Steed, who was jailed in that year for the theft of 340 lbs of engraved plates valued at £340.⁵⁶⁹ There is no evidence that the seventy-six year-old baronet insisted that Basire reimburse him for the loss.

The Nichols family

Sir Richard Colt Hoare was arguably the last representative of the heroic age of county histories, from which the Nichols family and the Basires had handsomely profited in the period up to the year of John Carter's death and the retirement of James Basire (II) in 1818. Indeed, an examination of the book advertisements in the *Monthly Review or Literary Journal* published in that year shows the extent to which the market in topographical books had already evolved by that time.

The younger Nichols paid for eight full pages of announcements in this magazine in order to advertise his current publications. These included not only serious county and literary histories, such as his father's *History of Leicester* and the second edition of Hutchins's *History of Dorsetshire*, but also more popular topographical volumes, such as J.P. Malcolm's *Excursions* and works by the Birmingham-based antiquarian, William Hutton, with tell-tale titles such as *A Journey to London*, *A Tour to Scarborough* or *A*

⁵⁶⁹ *Proceedings of the Central Criminal Court*, 20 February 1834, 222, consulted on www.oldbaileyonline.org

Description of Blackpool. Nichols's announcements were then immediately followed by another eight pages listing works promoted by their author, John Britton, which included his histories of the cathedrals of Salisbury, Winchester and Norwich, as well as his four-volume *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*. The latter work is described in a review quoted in the advertisement as "scientific enough to excite professional attention, and sufficiently picturesque and diversified to afford an ample treat to the general reader".⁵⁷⁰ In other words, Britton's publications were "middle-brow" works aimed to appeal to a wider readership than Nichols's county histories, and they were much better illustrated than Nichols' own publications of "excursions" and "tours".

The younger Nichols and Basires were thus left on the wrong side of a trend to more popular antiquarian and topographical works which were heavily promoted by Britton, originally a penniless orphan who was driven to write and publish both to create a living and to establish his social and intellectual status. Britton was particularly ruthless in undermining the reputations of his rivals in print, even long after their deaths. We have already seen how he dismissed the work of Sir Richard Colt Hoare as "amateur", and he was not averse to putting down the Basires and their patrons as well. In his remarkably self-congratulatory autobiography published in 1849, Britton positively compared his own *Cathedral Antiquities of England* with the Cathedral Series of the Society of Antiquaries. He described the latter publication as a "failure"; criticised the Nichols's letterpress as "very imperfect"; and opined that the plates by Carter and Basire were "not characterised by any remarkable degree of merit".⁵⁷¹ He went on in the same work to describe James Basire (II) as a "popular, though not very skilful engraver", whose pupils were engaged "systematically and almost mechanically" on plates for Gough, Nichols and the Society of Antiquaries. It is notable that Britton nevertheless went on to employ James Basires II's former pupils on a more or less systematic basis throughout his career.⁵⁷²

It was against this background that John Bowyer Nichols, drove the publication of the second edition of Hutchins's history of Dorset; prepared the later volumes of Sir Richard Colt Hoare's histories of Wiltshire for printing; and even put the finishing touches to his father's *History of Leicester*. He was not, however, an author on the scale of his father, and did not try to compete with Britton in commissioning vast numbers of plates for lavishly illustrated antiquarian and topographical works. As a consequence of this, very few of the plates signed "Basire" in publications by the second generation of Nichols represented new tasks for James Basire (III). The Basire plates in the younger Nichols's *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, the sequel to his

⁵⁷⁰ *The Monthly Review*, LXXXVI (1818, May to August), advertisements bound in at the end of the volume (not paginated)

⁵⁷¹ T.E. Jones, *A Descriptive Account*, part II, p. 62

⁵⁷² In contrast, Britton only seems to have commissioned one plate from a Basire during the same period: John Britton, *The Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, vol. II (London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809), p. 112, "Browsholme House", after John Buckler

father's *Literary Anecdotes*, were reprinted from the elder Nichols's publications or comprised portraits which had been separately printed for extra-illustration purposes.⁵⁷³ The *Encyclopedia of Antiquities, and Elements of Archaeology*, written by the Reverend Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke and published by Nichols in 1825, contained four plates which had been engraved 20 years earlier by James Basire (II) after John Carter. A further seven plates by Carter and this Basire were printed in Carter's posthumous, *The Progression of Architecture*, published by Nichols in 1827. Even John Bowyer Nichols's son, John Gough Nichols, a more prolific author and antiquarian than his father, illustrated his own works largely from recycled plates. His *Description of the Church of St. Mary, Warwick, and of the Beauchamp Chapel* (1838) was illustrated in its entirety with engravings by James Basire (I) after Carter. These were borrowed from Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* with no change, except for the addition of more explicit captions.⁵⁷⁴

Evidence of any significant level of continued collaboration between the Nichols family and the fourth generation of Basires is therefore not to be sought in monographs, but in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Isaac Basire had already been asked to provide a few plates for this organ during the period of Edward Cave's ownership. James Basire (I) became a more regular contributor when John Nichols bought into the magazine in 1778, and then became the most frequently used engraver after Nichols assumed full editorial control in 1790. Following a five-year hiatus during the handover between James Basire (I) and (II), the younger James Basire took his father's place as the most-employed engraver on the magazine from 1803 to 1817. There was then another quiet period of five years between 1818 and 1822, during which James Basire (III) and his brother took over from their father. During this period, Nichols published only two plates signed "Basire". However, by 1823, James Basire (III) had firmly established himself as one of the principal engravers used to illustrate the magazine over the next three decades.

At the time of Isaac and James Basire (I), the plates contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* included portraits, as well as antiquarian and topographical plates. In fact, 12 of the 18 plates engraved by the first James Basire for the *Gentleman's Magazine* contained some element of portraiture, derived from paintings, sculpture, medals or manuscripts. Some plates contained multiple, miniature portraits, and some combined portraits with antiquarian objects. The first five plates published by James Basire (II) in the magazine also consisted of portraits. However, this type of plate became increasingly rare in the following years so that only 9 of the 78 plates signed "Basire" for the magazine during the active career of James Basire (II) had a portrait element. Almost all the other plates were purely architectural or topographical, and this level of specialisation increased further during the career of James Basire (III). Of the 31 plates published in

⁵⁷³ John Bowyer Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, I (London, 1817), pp. 169, 221, 225, 506; IV (London, 1822), frontispiece

⁵⁷⁴ *Annals and Antiquities of Lacock Abbey, in the County of Wilts.*, (London, 1835), by John Gough Nichols and Rev. W.L. Bowles similarly shows the recycling of plates after Carter or borrowed from Sir Richard Colt Hoare

the period 1821 to 1852, there are no portraits, 2 plans and 29 views of historical buildings, an example of which is given as Figure 66 below. Almost all of these plates continued to be engraved in copper, except for the two plans, which were lithographed. The magazine therefore showed the same level of technical conservatism as the Society of Antiquaries, whose fellows were among its most active readers.



Figure 66 “North East View of the Manor House at Sandford Orcas, Somersetshire”, engraved by James Basire (III) after John Buckler for the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (New Series XX) August 1844, p. 156, actual size 138 mm x 206 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

At one level, it can be argued that the younger Nichols continued to employ James Basire (III) because he inherited his father’s specialist knowledge of architectural and topographical engraving, and that his reader base was accustomed to or even preferred this style of copper-plate illustration. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Nichols also continued to employ James Basire (III) for relationship as well as professional reasons. This is evidenced by the following. John Bowyer Nichols had purchased the shares he did not already own in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1833, and transferred a portion of the property to the print entrepreneur, William Pickering, who then formed a new editorial team. This team proceeded to launch a new series, gave the magazine a new look, and dropped Basire as an engraver in 1834. Nichols, however, retained ultimate ownership, and he and his son gradually reasserted control. Basire was then reinstated and contributed another 23 plates to the magazine in the period from 1844. In 1850, Nichols had bought back Pickering’s share, and in 1856, finally decided to sell the magazine for a nominal sum to the Oxford-based publisher, John Henry Parker. The last Basire plate

published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* had appeared in the 1852 issue, 110 years after the first contribution by Isaac Basire.

Other antiquarian commissions

In contrast to James Basire (II)'s other pupils, and particularly the Le Keux brothers, James Basire (III) only performed steel engraving on demand, and remained essentially a copper plate engraver, who developed a sideline in lithographs for more technical prints from the mid-1820s. As a result of this market positioning, Basire missed out not only on commissions from the likes of John Britton, but also on the national craze for annuals which raged in the 1820s and 1830s and relied on the use of steel plates to achieve print runs of up to 20,000 copies. It is not known for sure why Basire did not compete in this space, but a number of arguments can be adduced. First of all, there are estimated to have been over 400 artists working on steel-engraved book illustration during this period, so this was a highly competitive market.⁵⁷⁵ Secondly, Basire had inherited several established market niches from his father, for which copper-plate engraving and lithography covered the vast majority of requirements. Finally, his reputation as a purveyor of serious antiquarian, scientific and parliamentary illustrations could have been undermined by association with typical annual titles, such as *Forget me not*, *The Keepsake*, or William Pickering's contribution to the genre, *The Bijou*.⁵⁷⁶

Steel engraving became particularly popular in architectural engraving of the type purveyed by Britton, as it enabled closer ruling and more detail in a confined space than copper, and could thus lend an ethereal feel to views of Oxbridge colleges and mediaeval cathedrals.⁵⁷⁷ In parallel to this technique, both aquatint and lithography became equally popular media for topographical illustrations to guides and travelogues designed for both armchair tourists and actual travellers. These techniques were employed in different contexts to steel and copper engravings, as they conveyed quite different effects. Aquatint could be used to suggest watercolours, while lithography could imitate drawing with pencil, charcoal or crayon.⁵⁷⁸ Since James Basire (III) was not an aquatint specialist, he might reasonably be supposed at least to have participated in the market for lithographed landscapes. However, a glance at the index of J.R. Abbey's *Scenery of Great Britain and Ireland*, which catalogues illustrations from 556 topographical publications up to the year 1860, does not include a single topographical print by James Basire (III).⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ Basil Hunnisett, *Steel-engraved book illustration in England* (London, 1980), p. 53

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-152

⁵⁷⁷ Ronald Russell, *Guide to British Topographical Prints*, (Newton Abbott and London, 1979), pp. 119-140

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-118

⁵⁷⁹ J.R. Abbey, *Scenery of Great Britain and Ireland in Aquatint and Lithography 1770-1860* (San Francisco, 1991)

This apparent self-exclusion from some of the largest markets for illustration of the day does not mean that James Basire (III) did not engrave or lithograph architectural and topographical subjects outside of his official role with the Society of Antiquaries, his family's long-standing relationship with the Nichols family and his work for Sir Richard Colt Hoare. He was active in this space, but his output was largely confined to commissions for other traditional antiquarians, and particularly for scholars who had close links to the Society of Antiquaries. In this context, there were relatively few major works of a more or less traditional antiquarian type which could replace the large-scale commissions received from Colt Hoare, but there were some, and each of these was unique in its way, and quite different in style from the traditional local and county histories of the previous generations.

The most significant and curious of the later local histories illustrated by James Basire (III) comprised the *History and Antiquities of Suffolk, Thingoe Hundred* (1838), by John Gage, Director of the Society of Antiquaries from 1829 to 1842. Gage had already worked with Basire on the illustrations to his articles in *Archaeologia* from 1830 to 1844 and to *Vetusta Monumenta* in 1842, but had also employed G.F. Storm to engrave manuscript illuminations printed in the same volume of *Vetusta Monumenta* and in his articles in *Archaeologia* in 1832 and 1834. The Director of the Society of Antiquaries did not, however, use Storm to any significant extent in his private commissions, but instead chose to work mostly with Basire.

Gage's first contribution to a "much wanted" history of Suffolk was a history of his own home parish of Hengrave, which was published in 1822.⁵⁸⁰ It was a relatively richly illustrated work, which combined Basire's work with etchings by Buckler and engravings by the Le Keux brothers, but the plates remained of a traditional type. In his expanded history of the Thingoe Hundred (which included Hengrave), Gage used Storm for some seals and heraldic pieces, but otherwise worked almost entirely with Basire, and in doing so created a totally new look.⁵⁸¹ Each parish in this history is illustrated more or less systematically with a small-scale view of the church, a floor plan and depictions of salient architectural details. The church views are reminiscent of those included in Nichols's history of Leicestershire, but instead of being combined on copper plates with other elements as in Nichols's work, they are individually included in the text in steel-engraved vignettes. In other antiquarian publications, wood-carved vignettes were sometimes used on the letterpress for simple illustrations, but Gage deliberately went to the expense of having these engraved in steel, where the additional time spent engraving on this metal would to some extent have been counterbalanced by the reduced effort implied by their smaller scale.

The obvious explanations for Gage's innovations in the design of his partial county history are that he liked the look of steel engraving, which was at the height of its popu-

⁵⁸⁰ John Gage, *The History and Antiquities of Hengrave in Suffolk* (London, 1822), p. vii

⁵⁸¹ John Gage, *The History and Antiquities of Suffolk. Thingoe Hundred* (London, 1838)

larity at this time, and that he used vignettes in order to relate the illustrations more closely to the relevant text. Both of these were understandable aims, but they did not start a trend among authors of subsequent antiquarian tomes. One reason for this was that steel engraving was relatively expensive for this type of specialist publication with a limited print run. Another reason was that setting and printing letterpress on top of a sheet of paper, which has been pre-printed with a vignette, was complicated and would therefore also have represented an additional expense to the author. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Gage proceeded with this expensive publication in the same year that he inherited the Rokewode estates and changed his name to “John Gage Rokewode”.

The independently wealthy Gage could afford to experiment in his private publications, but subsequent works engraved by Basire for fellow antiquarians show more typical developments in the market, where lithographs and etched copper plates remained the favourite media. Samuel Woodward’s *History and Antiquities of Norwich Castle*, which was printed by Nichols & Son in 1847, contained 18 plates signed by James Basire. All but one of these illustrations were lithographs which were mostly drawn in outline and then coloured. This compares to the *Remains of Pagan Saxondom* (1855), by John Yonge Akerman, a renowned numismatist and Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries from 1848 to 1860. In this work, 38 out of 40 illustrations of Anglo-Saxon grave goods were entrusted to Basire. One of these was lithographed, while the others were etched and stippled. They were then all printed in coloured inks and/or water-coloured in order to give as close as possible an approximation of their actual appearance. This is demonstrated in the example in Figure 67 on the next page.

These examples of plates prepared for private patrons reflect the same phenomenon seen in *Archaeologia* during this period, but to a more extreme extent. The monopoly of traditional, monochrome copper-plate engravings of antiquarian subjects had given way to a plurality of reproductive effects, which depended on the finances, taste and scientific purpose of the author.



Figure 67 “Fibula found near Abingdon”, drawn and engraved by James Basire (III) for *Remains of Pagan Saxondom* by John Yonge Akerman (1855), plate III, actual size 243 mm x 213 mm (photograph: the author)

The debate between the use of etching and lithography in private antiquarian commissions can be illustrated by one final example from the surviving correspondence between two wealthy Norfolk antiquarians, who were part of Basire's natural network of potential clients. One of these was Hudson Gurney, Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries from 1822 to 1846, who paid for the printing of Woodward's *History and Antiquities of Norfolk Castle*. The other one was Dawson Turner, who is better known for his activities in scientific circles, but who also provided a list of plates as an appendix to Woodward's posthumous *Norfolk Topographer's Manual*, which was printed at Gurney's expense.⁵⁸²

Turner had apparently asked Basire to prepare two plates and a vignette for the 1844 re-edition of his friend Gurney's first publication, *Cupid and Psyche*.⁵⁸³ On 3 October 1843, Basire responded as follows:⁵⁸⁴

"I think they might be satisfactorily executed in stone, the each of which would be – from 5 guineas, vignette 3 guineas – engraving would cost from 12 guineas – vignette 10 guineas. If executed on stone, I could furnish you with proofs in about a fortnight."

Basire, as a trusted supplier, was proposing lithography as an alternative to engraving because of both a reduced timeframe and cost: 13 guineas for lithographs, compared to 39 guineas in total for 3 engravings - a considerable saving. It is clear, however, from Basire's next letter, which was dated 16 February 1844, that Turner's priorities involved neither expedition nor economy. Basire confirmed that he could complete the engravings within a month, and further recommended the use of line rather than stipple for the vignette. It is clear from this exchange that much of the Basires' private antiquarian clientele remained connoisseurs of engraving, and continued to value its traditional feel and quality even when it cost three times more and took twice as long to produce.⁵⁸⁵

6.3 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ILLUSTRATION

Scientific and technical illustration was a relatively more important source of revenue for James Basire (III) and his son, James, than for the previous two generations of Basires. This was partly because of a comparative shortage of other types of work, such as the more artistic and larger-scale antiquarian commissions enjoyed by James Basire

⁵⁸² Samuel Woodward, *The Norfolk Topographer's Manual* (John Nichols & Son, London, 1842), iii

⁵⁸³ Hudson Gurney, *Cupid and Psyche: a mythological tale, from the Golden Ass of Apuleius* (printed by Charles Sloman, Great Yarmouth, 1844)

⁵⁸⁴ Free Library of Philadelphia, John Frederick Lewis Collection, letters from James Basire to Dawson Turner dated 3 October 1843 and 16 February 1844

⁵⁸⁵ That this was a conscious choice is also evidenced by the fact that Dawson and Gurney also exchanged lithographs by Basire over a long period, as mentioned in letters dated 1839 and 1850, held at the library at Trinity College Cambridge (catalogue references: TURN3/A10/134 and A10/307)

(I) and (II). It was also, however, a feature of the explosion of research and publication in increasingly specialised scientific fields in the first half of the nineteenth century. Significantly, this trend did not lead to any increasing dependency on work for publishers where the Basires were obliged to compete on price, as had been the case for the technical engraving performed by Isaac Basire. Instead, this form of illustration followed the same pattern in terms of its sourcing as the antiquarian engraving commissions received by the first two James Basires. It was principally obtained from institutional patrons, such as the Royal Society; other more specialist scientific societies which sprang up at this time, such as the Royal Astronomical Society; from the House of Commons through the continued agency of the Hansards; and from private patrons who were connected with these public institutions.

The Royal Society, the Philosophical Transactions and other scientific journals

The Basires' tenure as engravers to the Royal Society was almost equal to their incumbency at the Society of Antiquaries. James Basire (I) was appointed by the Council of the Royal Society on 8 November 1770, on the death of James Mynde, 11 years after his original appointment to the Antiquaries. James Basire (II), his son and grandson then continued to invoice the senior scientific society for 99 years until the approval of their final bill on 15 April 1869, 6 years after their final payment from the Antiquaries. For most of this time, the Council of the Royal Society does not seem to have considered the appointment of an alternative engraver. Indeed, there was not even a competitive tender in respect of James Basire (I)'s appointment, a fact which may be explained by the tacit reinstatement of Basire a few months earlier by the Council of the Society of Antiquaries, following their disastrous attempt to find an equally competent and reliable, but cheaper alternative. The main decision-maker behind the Royal Society's decision seems to have been its President, James Burrow, the eminent lawyer, and influential fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, whose portrait was subsequently engraved in luxurious style by James Basire (I).

The Basires' monopoly of reproducing illustrations for the Royal Society was for most of the period of their tenure as complete as that for the Antiquaries. Of more than 900 plates published in the annual editions of the *Philosophical Transactions* in the 50 years which spanned the appointments of James Basire (I) and (II), less than a dozen, or a little more than 1%, were signed by other engravers. In all these cases, the plates by other artists were paid for by the authors of the articles or by another institution, for example, the Board of Ordnance. In the case of James Basire (III), this quasi-monopoly continued through the 1820s and 1830s until the end of the 1840s. During the 1820s, there was only one plate engraved by a competitor. This was by Edmund Turrell, bank note engraver, member of the Society of Engineers, and pioneer of steel engraving, who reproduced four illustrations to an article by Charles Babbage, the father of compu-

ting.⁵⁸⁶ In the 1830s, the Society commissioned two, isolated lithographs from Hull-mandel,⁵⁸⁷ as well as several series of large-scale maps from two specialists in this area: James Gardner, sole agent of the Ordnance Survey; and John and Charles Walker, who worked frequently for the Admiralty and were, like Gardner, founder members of the Geographical Society of London in 1830. It was only towards the end of the 1840s, when the Royal Society began to use lithography on an extensive basis that a variety of suppliers was used, but even then the Basires remained continually employed for another two decades.

The subject matter reproduced by the Basires for the *Philosophical Transactions* evolved over time, depending on wider intellectual fashions and the academic interests of the more influential members of the Society. At the time of the appointment of James Basire (I), astronomical studies were riding high on the wave of enthusiasm occasioned by the observations of the transit of Venus, the related voyages of Captain James Cook, and the search for an accurate measurement of longitude in order to enable safe navigation. The study of electricity was also popular, partly as a result of the controversy over lightning rods which pitted Benjamin Franklin against the British painter and part-time physicist, Benjamin Wilson. At the same time, the *Transactions* also contained illustrated articles by John Swinton on numismatics, which could equally have been published in the newly-founded *Archaeologia*, as well as pieces by well-known antiquarians on scientific subjects. These included works on fish by Gough's friend, the Reverend Michael Tyson; on fossil finds by the Honourable Daines Barrington; and on the history of botany in England by Andrew Ducarel. In the case of Thomas Pennant, this zoologist-antiquarian would have been equally at home checking Basire's plates of tortoises and a turkey leg for the *Transactions*,⁵⁸⁸ as he was proofing plates of antiquities for his *Journey from Chester* or for *Some Account of London*.

The plurality of subject matter in the *Philosophical Transactions* in the second half of the eighteenth century was reflected in the type and style of illustration which was produced. At its simplest, it could consist of diagrams to illustrate geometrical treatises or equally schematic astronomical observations. Drawings of scientific apparatus and equipment could be simply drawn and engraved in outline, but were sometimes also shaded. Illustrations of fauna and flora tended to be more finished.⁵⁸⁹ There were, however, a number of highly-finished engravings at this period, the purpose of which went beyond pure scientific or technical illustration. These included a number of more or less picturesque views drawn by local artists and engraved by James Basire (I) for Sir William Hamilton, Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples. These plates ranged from interior views of a house struck by lightning, to views of the harbour on the island of

⁵⁸⁶ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXVI (1826), p. 261

⁵⁸⁷ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXXII (1832), p. 238

⁵⁸⁸ *Philosophical Transactions*, LXI (1771), plate X, p. 268; LXXI (1781), plate III, p. 80

⁵⁸⁹ Some illustrated examples are given in Phillips, *William Blake*, pp. 29 and 31

Ponza and of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1794.⁵⁹⁰ James Basire (I) even considered one plate engraved for the *Philosophical Transactions* to be sufficiently prestigious to exhibit at the Free Society of Artists in 1773. This was a portrait of a Nilgai, the largest Indian antelope, which had been engraved after a painting by the equine specialist, George Stubbs, for an article by the physician and anatomist, William Hunter.⁵⁹¹

Illustrations in the *Philosophical Transactions* in the last decades of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth century remained varied, but demonstrated greater focus on hard-core scientific subjects for articles by authors who were increasingly working engineers or professional men of science, such as physicians and surgeons. Many of these plates were of a purely, minimalist, technical nature, such as those of experimental apparatus and results published by the Society between 1771 and 1809 on behalf of the Honourable Henry Cavendish, discoverer of Hydrogen, and one of the last representatives of a diminishing band of gentlemen-scientists. Other plates could be of a more complex or finished nature, even when they accompanied the work of professionals, such as the pioneering civil engineer, John Smeaton; the scientific instrument-maker, Jesse Ramsden; and the creators of the Ordnance Survey, Major-Generals William Roy and William Mudge. In the latter case, James Basire (I) and (II) not only engraved outline maps of their surveys, but also elaborate illustrations of their telescopes and other surveying apparatus which were also separately circulated and published.⁵⁹²

Two authors in particular dominated the commissioning of engraved illustrations for the *Philosophical Transactions* during the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. One of these was William Herschel, astronomer and builder of telescopes, who is perhaps best known for his discovery of Uranus. He published illustrated articles in almost every edition of the periodical from 1780 to 1818, and in many of these years multiple articles in one edition. Most of the plates in his articles consisted of astronomical observations, but there was at least one notable exception in the sixty-page description of his famous forty-foot reflecting telescope, which appeared in 1795.⁵⁹³ This article contained 19 plates engraved by the Basires, the first one of which comprised an elaborately engraved, fold-out view of the telescope, with a dedication to King George III.

The other author who dominated, even hogged the time of the Basires on the *Philosophical Transactions* in this period was Everard Home, a surgeon whose career owed much to the fact that he was the brother-in-law of both Dr. William Hunter and the even more famous Dr. John Hunter. Home is not now considered a leading scientist, but

⁵⁹⁰ *Philosophical Transactions*, LXIII (1773), plate XIII, p. 332; LXX (1780), plate I, p. 84; LXXVI (1786), plates X-XII, p. 380; LXXXV (1795), plates V-XI, p. 116

⁵⁹¹ *Philosophical Transactions*, LXI (1771), plate V, p. 170

⁵⁹² *Philosophical Transactions*, LXXV (1785), plates XVI-XX, p. 480; LXXX (1790), plates V-XV, p. 272; and, LXXXV (1795), plates XLII-XLVI, p. 592, where the plates were exceptionally engraved by John Warner

⁵⁹³ *Philosophical Transactions*, LXXXV (1795), plates XXIV-XLII, p. 408

he was responsible for a number of innovations in the plates to his nearly 80 illustrated articles, which were almost entirely engraved by three generations of Basires. They were published in practically every issue of the *Philosophical Transactions* from 1785 to 1832, and 371 plates were republished in the six volumes of his collected *Lectures on Comparative Anatomy* between 1814 and 1828. One of Home's innovations was to insist that plates to his articles were drawn by quasi-professional draughtsmen who were also asked to sign their work. This contrasts to the practice in the eighteenth century, where the plates to the Royal Society's journal had, as in *Archaeologia*, invariably been signed by the engraver, but were seldom attributed to draughtsmen, who were often gentlemen-authors, their family members, particularly daughters, or nameless locals. Home employed two talented draughtsmen in particular, William Clift and Franz Bauer.

Clift had been employed by John Hunter to look after his collection of anatomical specimens until the doctor's death in 1793, and continued to take care of this collection until it and he were taken over by the Royal College of Surgeons at the end of the century. Clift seems to have agreed at the same time to act as a technical draughtsman for anatomical and zoological illustrations for Home, as well as for a limited number of other contributors to the *Philosophical Transactions*. He continued in this role until 1823, but was joined in 1816 by the Austrian immigrant, Franz Bauer. Bauer's day job was as resident artist at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, but he was also a pioneer in the field of microscopy, and even authored articles with microscopic drawings of fungi and cereals in the *Philosophical Transactions* of 1820 and 1823. His main contribution to this organ was, however, as a draughtsman for Home's articles. In this context, he depicted details of insects, birds, human organs and bodily fluids, often in microscopic detail and with hand-colouring to give relief. James Basire (III) worked extensively with both these artists on anatomical and zoological subjects, often in microscopic detail, until about 1830.

The third James Basire was able to maintain his quasi-monopoly of engraving at the Royal Society through the 1830s and most of the 1840s, a period during which most plates for the *Philosophical Transactions* continued to be simple illustrations of scientific apparatus or observations etched on copper. There were, however, still some small signs in the illustrations to the journal during the period that not all plates had become viewed as a commodity. Figure 68 on the next page can serve as an example of an illustration of scientific apparatus and the lay-out, conduct and recording of an experiment, which still included finished engraving of figures and the background.

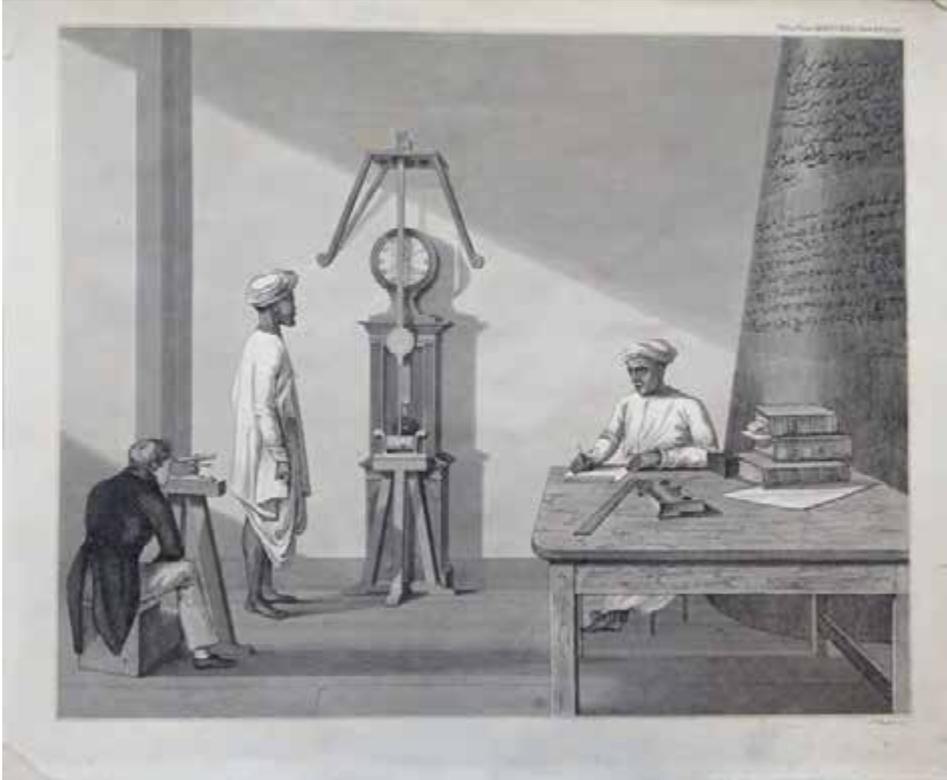


Figure 68 Illustration to “Observations for ascertaining the length of the Pendulum at Madras in the East Indies”, by John Goldingham, engraved by James Basire (III) for the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, CXIII (1823), plate XIV, p. 170 (actual size 279 mm x 335 mm) (photograph: the author)

As in previous generations, James Basire (III) and the relevant draughtsmen occasionally added a more detailed signature to plates which they considered to be of particular importance. Examples of these include certain plates created by Basire and Bauer, as well as a portrait “Drawn by C. Bell” and “Engraved by J. Basire” for an article on the nerves of the face by the artistically gifted, but famously conceited Scottish surgeon, Charles Bell.⁵⁹⁴ This traditional type of engraved illustration in the *Transactions* had, however, disappeared by the late 1840s, when lithographs became widely used and the relationship between Basire and the Royal Society definitively switched from that of artist and patron to supplier and customer.

It is arguably surprising that the country’s leading scientific society had not adopted lithography earlier for its mostly technical illustrations, especially as its Council was clearly aware of this possibility. This body had authorised the payment of an invoice to the lithographer, Charles Hullmandel, already on 17 November 1825, just a few weeks before lithography was mentioned for the first time at a meeting of the Council of the

⁵⁹⁴ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXIX (1829), plates VIII-IX, pp. 328-329; CXX (1830), plates VI-VIII, p. 86

Society of Antiquaries. It seems that both learned societies experimented with lithography at exactly the same time, but that neither of them was ready to adopt it as an alternative to engraving for a number of years.

The first lithograph published in the *Philosophical Transactions* appeared only in 1832, and was drawn and printed by Hullmandel's firm.⁵⁹⁵ Then, from 1834, lithographs began to appear on a regular basis, but were in all cases produced by James Basire (III) and his son until 1847. As at the Society of Antiquaries, lithography was to a large extent chosen for economic reasons, and it is probably not a coincidence that it was introduced to the *Philosophical Transactions* at a time when the Council of the Royal Society started to show a detailed awareness of the costs of its principal publication. For example, the minutes of the meetings dated 14 November 1832 and 30 November 1839 describe detailed analyses of the costs of illustration and printing this periodical.⁵⁹⁶

In contrast to the Society of Antiquaries there was no discernible pattern to the context in which lithography was used in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The Basires produced lithographs not only for outline maps and simple line drawings, but also for more complex representations. Examples of these were varied, and included depictions of the Aurora Borealis, details of the human brain, and most curiously, a "View of the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy", drawn by the antiquarian, Albert Way, for an article by the 30-year old Charles Darwin.⁵⁹⁷

A second lithographer was finally added to the supplier list of the Royal Society in 1847, and two more in 1848. Then, by 1850, the Basires just represented one supplier among a group of regularly employed engravers, lithographers and lithographic printers. The most frequently used providers of such services were Dinkel, Erleben and Lens Aldous, but several other individuals and small firms also contributed a limited number of plates. The only monopoly which the Basires retained during this period was in the field of zincography. This was used in a minority number of illustrations in the years 1841 to 1849, perhaps under the influence of the experimentally-minded James Basire (IV), who came of age at this time.

The Royal Society added a major firm of lithographers, Day & Son, to its supplier list for the first time in 1855 and, as at the Society of Antiquaries at the same period, the increase in the number of suppliers corresponded to a proliferation in reproductive techniques. These included not only etching on copper and lithographs, but also increasingly wood cuts.

The Basires did not stay in business long enough to see the use of printed photographs as a competing reproductive medium, but they did have the opportunity to engrave from photographs for the *Philosophical Transactions*, as these were adopted

⁵⁹⁵ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXXII (1832), plates V-VI, p. 328

⁵⁹⁶ Minutes of the Council of the Royal Society, volume I, 1832-1846 (first volume printed for the benefit of the fellows), minutes of the meeting of 30 November 1839

⁵⁹⁷ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXXIX (1839), plate II, p. 29, of the article, "Observations on the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy, and other parts of Lochaber in Scotland, with an attempt to prove that they are of marine origin"

for illustrative purposes by the scientists at the Royal Society at a much earlier date than by the Antiquaries. Basire was asked already in 1842 to engrave some photographic impressions for an article by Sir John Herschel, “On the Action of the Rays of the Solar Spectrum on Vegetable Colours”.⁵⁹⁸ Then, in the 1860s, photographs were commonly engraved or lithographed by the Basires and various other suppliers, as it was not yet possible to reproduce them by other means.⁵⁹⁹

The final 18 lithographs and engravings published with the “Basire” signature appeared in the 1868 edition of the *Philosophical Transactions*, and these were also the last plates published anywhere under the family name.

In addition to the Royal Society, the last two generations of Basires were also employed to illustrate the journals of the newly-founded specialist, scientific societies of the day, and in particular those of the Royal Astronomical Society and of the Zoological Society of London.⁶⁰⁰ In the case of the Zoological Society, which had grown out of the Linnaean Society, James Basire (III) was an occasional artist used by two authors who were also fellows of the Royal Society: John Richardson and Professor Richard Owen. Basire had produced numerous plates, almost invariably of palaeontological remains for Owen in the *Philosophical Transactions* from the 1830s to the 1860s, while Basire’s engravings for Owen in the *Transactions of the Zoological Society*, illustrated different types of Kiwi.⁶⁰¹

In contrast to the Zoological Society, but like the Royal Society, the Basires held a position of near-exclusivity at the Royal Astronomical Society from the mid-1830s until the publication of volume XXXVI of its *Memoirs* in 1867. In general, these plates were very similar to those produced for the Royal Society in that they represented mainly scientific apparatus, particularly telescopes, and astronomical observations. During this period, the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society recorded almost £750 paid to the Basires for engraving, lithography and printing. The final payment was mentioned in the accounts for the year 1869, the year of James Basire (III)’s death and the same year as the last receipt from the Royal Society. As in the case of the Royal Society, the Basires and engraving were replaced initially by specialist lithographers, and later increasingly by photographic techniques.

⁵⁹⁸ *Philosophical Transactions*, CXXXIII (1843), plate XV, p. 183

⁵⁹⁹ For example, *Philosophical Transactions*, CLII (1862), plate IX, “Fac simile of no. 25 photograph – first totality. Fac simile of no. 26 photography – second totality”, depicting a total eclipse

⁶⁰⁰ Illustrations for the Zoological Society of London are conveniently catalogued in *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London. An Index to the Artists, 1835-1936* (New York & London, 1986), by Nina J. Root and Bryan R. Johnson

⁶⁰¹ *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London*, II (1841), pp. 257-301, Professor Owen, “On the Anatomy of the Southern Apterix”, plates 47-55; and, III (1849), pp. 270-301, “Description of Australian Fish”, plates 4-11

Scientific and technical monographs

The illustration of scientific monographs already had a long history in the Basire family, and became as important for the last generations, as it had been for Isaac Basire and for much the same reasons. The later Basires, like Isaac, could not rely to the same extent as James Basire (I) and (II) on larger commissions for established institutional patrons or on engraving opportunities of a more artistic nature.

Isaac Basire had developed a relationship with the specialist, technical printer John Nourse, and this relationship seems to some extent have been inherited by James Basire (I) in the early years of his career. Following this, James Basire (I)'s work for scientists derived more or less directly from the relationships he had built with fellows of the Royal Society for whom he had engraved plates in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The first of these was Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, who engaged Basire to engrave the plates for his *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (1774-1777). This work was followed by a number of comparable commissions, mostly for similarly simple illustrations of scientific instruments for publications, for instance by Jesse Ramsden and Benjamin Wilson, all of which were distributed by John Nourse and his son.⁶⁰²

There were a number of significant exceptions to these utilitarian illustrations, which were typical of the age of the first James Basire. There are two purely functional plates in Benjamin Wilson's *An Account of Experiments made at the Pantheon, on the Nature and Use of Conductors*, which derive from a related article in the *Philosophical Transactions*,⁶⁰³ but Wilson added three further plates to these, which demonstrated a late eighteenth-century view of science, which went beyond factual illustration. One of these comprised a view of the house where the Board of Ordnance met; a second one showed the disposition of Wilson's equipment in the Pantheon; while the third one, "A View of the Apparatus and part of the Great Cylinder in the Pantheon", is a true show-piece, in line with the location of Wilson's experiment in the flashiest pleasure palace of the day. Basire's engraving was based on a drawing by the leading topographical artist, Michael Angelo Rooker, and it evoked Wilson's painterly instinct for drama which was intended to intimidate his scientific rivals. Wilson arranged for this print to be sold separately, both as a distinct work of art and to further the propaganda war for his theories. It is illustrated as figure 69 on the following page.

⁶⁰² Jesse Ramsden, *Description of an Engine for dividing mathematical instruments, published by order of the Commissioners of Longitude* (London, 1777), plates I-IV; *Description of an Engine for dividing strait lines on mathematical instruments, published by the Commissioners of Longitude* (London, 1779), plates I-III; Benjamin Wilson, *An Account of Experiments made at the Pantheon, on the Nature and Use of Conductors* (London, 1778), five plates; *A short view of electricity* (London, 1780), one plate

⁶⁰³ *Philosophical Transactions*, LXVII (1778), plates XVII-XVIII, p. 1012



Figure 69 “A View of the Apparatus and part of the Great Cylinder in the Pantheon” engraved by James Basire (I) after Michael Angelo Rooker (1777), actual size 197 mm x 248 mm (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

There were a few other plates to scientific monographs which gave James Basire (I) some freedom for artistic expression, such as the portrait frontispiece of the antiquarian, William Pryce, in his *Mineralogia Cornubensis*, which the engraver exhibited in 1778. The apogee of this era’s conflation of scientific and artistic engraving was, however, to be found in the engravings to the accounts of the voyages of Captain James Cook, which were shared between Basire and the other leading engravers of his day. The *Voyage towards the South Pole, and round the world, performed in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Adventure* (1777) contained five plates by Basire, including the frontispiece portrait of Cook, which Basire exhibited in 1777, and was widely sold as a separate print. Three of the other plates comprised portraits of natives of the island of Tanna (Vanuatu) and of Tierra del Fuego, which were also exhibited at the Free Society of Artists in that year. The fifth plate, entitled “The Landing at Mallicolo, one of the New Hebrides”, consisted of a three-page pull-out view with multiple action figures, and represented one of the few “historical prints” engraved by Basire outside his activity for the Society of Antiquaries. The follow-on work, *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, contained

two further portraits of natives from Prince William Sound in Alaska, and these were exhibited by Basire in 1783, a full year before the publication of the book.

James Basire (II)'s work for scientific monographs was much more restricted than that of his father, as book-publishing and illustration had declined in the war years, and he was in any case stretched with work for his father's existing patrons, to whom he had added the Oxford University Press and Sir Richard Colt Hoare. The second James Basire's scientific and technical plates therefore followed the pattern of his father's, in that he could hardly refuse work for Tiberio Cavallo, who had been generous in his private commissions for his father,⁶⁰⁴ or for Everard Home, whose private publications were more sparsely illustrated than those paid for by the Royal Society.⁶⁰⁵ The work by the second James Basire for scientists outside this closed circle was almost non-existent.

This was in contrast to the career of James Basire (III), whose plates not only appeared in the private monographs of frequent contributors to the *Philosophical Transactions*, such as Everard Home, Charles Bell and Michael Faraday,⁶⁰⁶ but also included many commissions which had little or nothing to do with the Royal Society. Such works could accordingly take a diverse number of forms, as illustrated by the following random examples: a detailed, fold-out floor plan of the chemical laboratory and still house at Apothecaries Hall;⁶⁰⁷ the technical, patent drawings for the double sextant and circle by David Rowland;⁶⁰⁸ and more than 20 plates depicting animals in the five-volume English adaptation by Edward Griffith and others of the section on mammals of Georges Cuvier's panoramic study of the animal kingdom (see Figure 70 as an example on the next page).⁶⁰⁹ It seems that Basire chose to compete for these commissions on third-party commercial terms in the first ten years of his independent career, while simultaneously re-establishing his father's existing network in the scientific community which radiated out from the Royal Society.

⁶⁰⁴ Tiberio Cavallo, *A Treatise on the Nature and Properties of Air, and other permanently elastic fluids* (London, 1781), 3 illustrations of apparatus; *The History and Practice of Aerostation* (London, 1785), 2 fold-out plates; *A Treatise on Magnetism, in Theory and Practice; with original Experiments* (3rd edition, London, 1800), 3 new plates; *The Elements of natural or experimental Philosophy* (printed by Luke Hansard, London, 1803), 29 plates

⁶⁰⁵ For example, Everard Home, *Practical Observations on the Treatment of Strictures in the Urethra, and in the Oesophagus* (London, 1803), volume II, frontispiece, drawn by William Clift

⁶⁰⁶ Everard Home, *Practical Observations on the Treatment of Strictures in the Urethra* (London, 1821), vol. III, plates I-VII after Bauer, taken directly from the *Philosophical Transactions*; Sir Charles Bell, *The Nervous System of the Human Body. Embracing the Papers to the Royal Society on the Subject of Nerves* (2nd ed., London, 1830); Michael Faraday, *Experimental Researches in Chemistry and Physics* (London, 1859), plates I-III

⁶⁰⁷ *The Origin, Progress and Present State of Various Establishments for conducting Chemical Processes, and other medicinal Preparations, at Apothecaries Hall* (London, 1823)

⁶⁰⁸ Letters patent No. 6528 of 1833 (1833)

⁶⁰⁹ Edward Griffith and others, *The Animal Kingdom arranged in accordance with its organization; the Class Mammalia*, 5 volumes (London, 1827)



Figure 70 “The Red Echimyis or Spiny Rat of D’Azara”, engraved by James Basire (III) after Charles Hamilton-Smith for *The Animal Kingdom* by the Baron Cuvier, volume III, opposite page 116 (1827), actual size 130 mm x 216 mm (full page) (photograph: the author)

James Basire (III)’s engraving and lithographing of diverse scientific and technical plates for a wide range of purposes and customers, including many of the mainstays of the Royal Society, accelerated from the early 1840s. A small number of examples are given here in order to demonstrate their variety. The *Account of the Northumberland Equatorial and Dome attached to the Cambridge Observatory* (1844) by the Astronomer Royal, George Biddle Airey, included 18 engraved plates of highly technical, detailed specifications of the telescope, together with one picturesque, lithographed view of the observatory. The illustrations to Sir John Herschel’s *Results of Astronomical Observations* (1847) mostly comprised astronomical observations identical in style to those in the *Philosophical Transactions*, but were also complemented by a topographical view incorporating the telescope. The *Scientific Memoirs: selected from the Transactions of foreign Academies of Science* (1853), edited by Arthur Henfrey and Thomas Henry Huxley, contained 12 plates reminiscent of the style of those in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The *Micrographic Dictionary* (1856), by Henfrey and J.W. Griffith, included 5 engravings by Basire among its 41 plates and 816 woodcuts. Finally, Huxley’s *The Oceanic Hydrozoa* (1859) included 11 engraved plates with multiple figures of microscopic organisms. For most of these, the style of illustration was minimalist, as befitted the subject matter.

This later period of production nevertheless still included some illustrations for hybrid works which went beyond Airy's and Herschel's isolated views, and harked back to a time when the distinction between art and science was more blurred. This is exemplified by the plates completed at this time by the Basires for Admiral William Henry Smyth, who had become Director of the Society of Antiquaries following his retirement from the Navy in 1846. Smyth had already worked with James Basire (III) on engravings of ancient remains from the islands of Gozo and Lipari after drawings by John Buckler and himself for the 1829 and 1831 editions of *Archaeologia*. In 1832, Basire engraved a plate for an article by Smyth in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, of which Smyth became Vice-President and Foreign Secretary. Then, in 1836, Smyth published a lithograph by Basire in his "Observations on Halley's Comet", from the *Memoirs of the Royal Astronomical Society*, of which he was also Foreign Secretary and at one time President.

In the 1850s and 1860s, Smyth authored a number of monographs which combined several of the old seaman's interests in its illustrations, most of which were engraved by the Basires. These included *Aedes Hartwellianae or Notices of the Manor of Hartwell*, which was published by John Bowyer Nichols and included engravings by the Basires of a picturesque view of Hartwell House, which had been reduced by Mrs. Smyth from an eighteenth century painting; a coloured print of the passing of Encke's comet after a drawing by the Admiral's eldest son, Charles Piazzi Smyth; views of the house and observatory after drawings by his third son, Henry Augustus Smyth; and plates illustrating objects as diverse as an Egyptian sarcophagus and the telescope. This was followed in 1860 by his *Cycle of Celestial Objects continued at the Hartwell observatory to 1859* (Figure 71 on the next page), and in 1864 by *Addenda to the Aedes Hartwellianae*. The latter work gave the Basires a late opportunity to engrave a mixture of scientific and antiquarian works, as well as two picturesque landscapes, one of which was drawn by Annabel Airy, daughter of the Astronomer Royal. Both works were published for private circulation by John Bowyer Nichols & Son.

It is fitting that the passing of Smyth in 1865 coincided with that of the art of engraving, which had enabled the last officer and gentleman-cum-antiquarian-cum-scientist to communicate the breadth of his interests to the world.

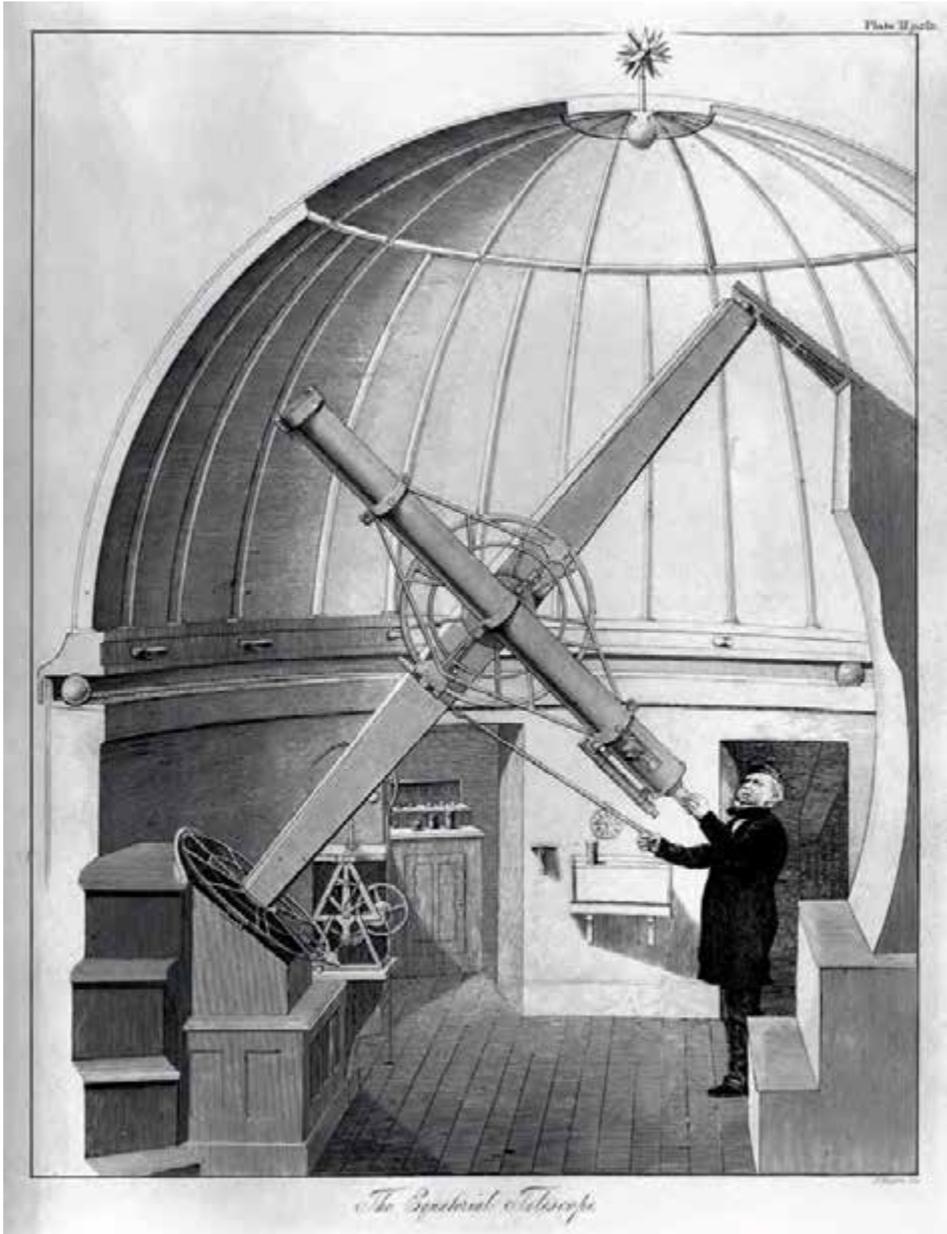


Figure 71 “The Equatorial Telescope”, engraved by James Basire (III) for *The Cycle of Celestial Objects continued at the Hartwell observatory to 1859*, by Vice-Admiral W.H. Smyth (1860), printed for private circulation by John Bowyer Nichols & Sons, showing Smyth himself manipulating his telescope (Source: Getty Images)

6.4 ENGRAVING AND OTHER SERVICES FOR MONEY

Previous chapters charted the growth in turnover of the Basire family’s business and the peak of its profitability under James Basire (II), who had to juggle the large-scale print ventures of the Society of Antiquaries with a steady flow of other work from this Society, the Royal Society, the Oxford University Press, the Nichols family and from Sir Richard Colt Hoare. The third James Basire had completely different business challenges. His first priority had been to stabilise the business, initially during his father’s illness, and then following the death of his father and brother in quick succession. His second priority was to assure the business’s longer term survival through the maintenance of its client base against a difficult economic background. He had not only been obliged to take over his father’s business at a young age, but also during the period of economic depression and social upheaval immediately after the Napoleonic wars, which promised little in the way of business expansion in the short term.

The following chart gives some idea of the achievements of James Basire (III) from a purely financial point of view:⁶¹⁰

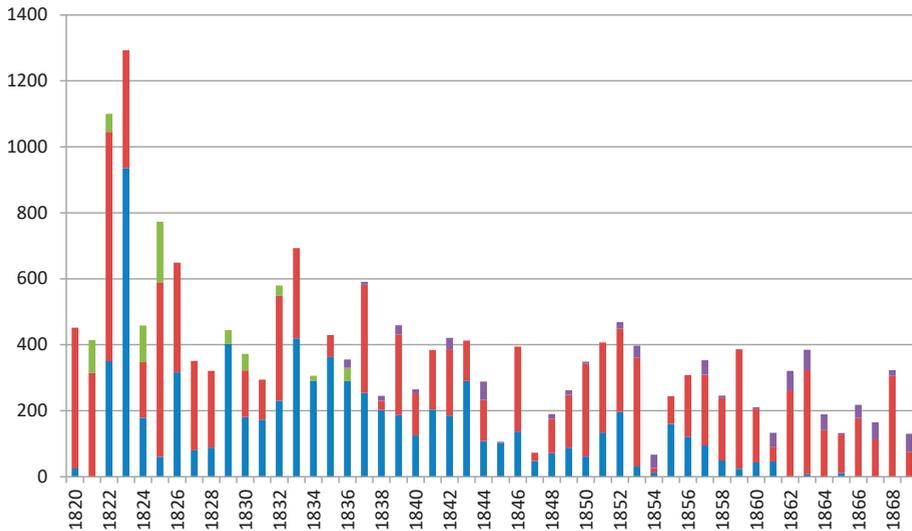


Figure 72 Chart of revenues of James Basire (III) from the Society of Antiquaries (blue), the Royal Society (red), Royal Astronomical Society (purple) and Sir Richard Colt Hoare (green)

The first main point of note in this graph, which covers the 50-year period from 1820 to 1869, is that James Basire (III) managed to stabilise the business relatively quickly after his father’s death in 1822, and that this was due to two main factors. Firstly, regular

⁶¹⁰ As in the graphs in previous chapters, no account is taken of price erosion. Wartime inflation had peaked in 1813, but prices had by 1865 returned to approximately 15-20% above their pre-war level

annual payments for the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society continued in the first two years of the 1820s, when revenues from the Society of Antiquaries dried up. Secondly, there were welcome cash injections from the Antiquaries in the immediately following years thanks to the Basires' last large-scale commissions for this Society: the engraving of plates of Tewkesbury Abbey and of the Bayeux Tapestry for the *Vetusta Monumenta*.

The second point of note in the chart is the gradual decline in the business from the 1840s until the last invoices were paid by the Royal Society and the Royal Astronomical Society in 1869. The Basires' income from its two principal institutional patrons, the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society, had reached a peak of between £350 and £400 a year in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Revenue from the Society of Antiquaries dropped sharply in the last two full years of James Basire (II)'s life, but overall receipts remained stable because of the annual payments from the Royal Society. James Basire (III) then managed to restore and retain the firm's revenues from these two institutions at an average of £250 per annum through the 1820s and 1830s, but revenues halved in the course of 1840s, and halved again in the 1850s.

The principal and most immediate causes of the gradually dwindling revenues of the Basires from the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries can be found in the waves of cost-cutting described in the records of these bodies. At its meeting on 14 November 1833, the Council of the Royal Society discussed a systematic summary of the cost of printing, paper and engraving illustrations to the *Philosophical Transactions* for the previous five years. This analysis showed that the Society's flagship publication cost on average almost £900 per year, and that a third of this cost derived from engraving. The same meeting then decided to sell £2,500 in government stock in order to cover the deficit in its finances. The same exercise was conducted at the Council meeting on 30 November 1839 with similar results. The average annual cost of the *Transactions* was reduced slightly to £850 per year, but engraving continued to make up a third of this amount. The minutes of the meeting of 14 January 1847 record how the Council analysed a longer time horizon and discovered that the total costs of publishing the *Philosophical Transactions*, the *Proceedings*, and other miscellaneous publications still averaged £800 per year. It was from exactly this point that the Royal Society started to use lithography in parallel to engraving, as well as to share reproductive work between a wider group of suppliers, including also woodcutters.

The Society of Antiquaries faced precisely the same issue of structural negative cash flows during the same period. In 1829, the year in which John Gage was appointed Director, the Council ordered the sale of £500 in government stock in July, followed by a further £200 in January of the following year. A squeeze on expenses was then continued after Gage's death in 1843 by his successor, Albert Way, who instructed the Society's solicitors to contact fellows in arrears in 1844. The following year, Way suggested offloading the significant amount of unsold stock of Roy's *Military Antiquities* and the

Cathedral Series. Then in 1846, Basire and Nichols agreed to reduce their prices, but on condition that they retained their respective monopoly positions as rolling-press and letterpress printers and that the Society honour the agreed six-month credit terms.⁶¹¹ In 1847, William Henry Smyth clamped down further. The Council minutes in that year record that only the Director could approve Basire's estimates, and that his bill for the relatively paltry sum of £23 16s 3d was only paid after being "examined and signed by the Director" and the holding of a ballot of the Council. In 1848, the Council even considered suspending *Archaeologia*, but decided to continue "with strict regard to economy". By 1849, the Audit Books of the Society of Antiquaries show that the Society was spending more on coffee than on engraving, compared to previous decades when the bills of "artists etc." often averaged 50% of the Society's expenses and the Basires' bill was frequently the largest single one paid in any year.

It is tribute to James Basire (III)'s skill as a businessman that he was able effectively to manage this secular decline in revenues over such a long period, and that he did this largely on his own: his elder brother, Daniel, had died in 1824; his younger brother, William John, developed his own business as a vellum binder in Covent Garden;⁶¹² and his son, James Basire (IV), was not fully committed to the business, as will become clear in the final part of this work. We have already seen that the extension of the Basires' product offering to lithography and zincography represented a key part of his business strategy from the late 1820s, but this was not the only form of diversification which kept revenues flowing. Another family death in January 1825, that of James Basire (III)'s uncle, John Cox, provided an opportunity which the engraver immediately seized.

John Cox and his father, Daniel, who had died in 1802, had been the rolling-press printers of both the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries for more than 30 years by the time of John's death in 1825. Daniel had shared premises with his son-in-law, James Basire (II), and John had been introduced by Basire to new customers, such as the Oxford University Press. John Cox's death could have led to the appointment by the two learned societies of another copper-plate printer, but they instead both appointed James Basire (III). It is not clear what discussions had taken place behind closed doors at the Society of Antiquaries, but the Council seemed to have acted with no hesitation when on 23 February 1825 it "ordered, that Mr J. Basire be in future the Copper-plate Printer to the Society, in the room of the late Mr. Cox deceased". In the case of the Royal Society, there is no record at all of the appointment of another supplier, but James Basire billed on behalf of his uncle's firm in 1824-1825, and from 1826 started explicitly invoicing for "engraving and printing" in his own name.

These quasi-automatic handovers seem surprising in some ways, but are clearly explicable in others. They can be seen as surprising, because both learned societies might have viewed the printing of plates, like letterpress, as a commodity, which could easily

⁶¹¹ SAL, Council minutes, V, 16 June and 23 June 1846

⁶¹² *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 17 November 1828, which hints at William John's subsequent financial difficulties

be put out to tender for the cheapest supplier with the requisite quality. James Basire (III) could, however, have argued that printing plates on a rolling press, as practiced by his paternal grandfather and great-grandfather, was a value-added activity which required a certain amount of skill, craft and even art. It involved carefully placing dampened sheets of paper one at a time on the copper plate, which had been painstakingly inked and wiped in advance. An engraver might take off a large number of proofs during the engraving process, in order to check that the image was emerging exactly as he had envisioned. There was also potentially a degree of artistic input which could be introduced to the plates at the proof state, and this is the reason why higher status engravers preferred to print their own plates. An engraver might thus experiment with different types of paper and ink, which were important factors in delivering the expected final effects.

It is unclear whether the learned societies recognised the potential advantages of having their copper-plate engraver also printing his own plates from the perspective of quality and of timeliness, or whether they simply followed the least line of resistance in recognising that James Basire (III) had effectively inherited his grandfather's and uncle's business and there was no pressing need to search for another supplier. In either case, Basire must have satisfied both institutions, as he and his son continued to bill both societies for printing into the 1860s. In the case of the Society of Antiquaries, the beginning of the end can be dated to 1855, when the Council accepted an offer for copper-plate printing by the major fine art and general printing firm of McQueen Brothers Ltd, although the Basires continued to receive payments for this service until 1862. In the case of the Royal Society, payments for both "engraving and printing" and "lithography and printing" continued to 1868.

It is difficult to give exact numbers to illustrate the impact of printing on the total revenues of the third James Basire, as the account books of the Royal Society and of the Society of Antiquaries often combined the costs together as "engraving and printing". There are, however, some exceptions to this rule, which may at least give an idea of the relative weight of engraving and printing in the business's revenues at the time. In the middle years of the 1830s, the financial records of the Society of Antiquaries temporarily distinguished between payments for engraving and printing, as follows:

1833: £199 for engraving and £220 for printing *Archaeologia* XXIV

1834: £226 for engraving and £65 for printing

1835: £261 for engraving and £102 for printing *Archaeologia* XXV

1836: £204 for engraving and £86 for printing

These figures indicate that James Basire (III) may have been able to generate around a third of his gross revenues from printing, so that it went some way towards compensating for the increasing commoditisation and reduced prices for engraving and lithographic drawing.

A further extension of James Basire (III)'s product range which helped cushion the reduction in demand and pricing of copper-plate engraving consisted in his willingness not only to "draw on stone", but also to prepare preparatory drawings for engraving. Unlike previous generations, he seems to have been more inclined to perform this relatively poorly paid job and for good reason. Drawing was now relatively more attractive in financial terms compared to lithography and engraving, since the price of engraving had been depressed both by the introduction of lithography and the generalised use of the ruling machine. Moreover, drawing for engraving represented a strategy to shut out other professional draughtsmen, who were now often capable of lithographing plates. As a result of this evolution and in sharp contrast to previous generations, James Basire (III) and his son contributed several drawings to every edition of *Archaeologia* until the thirty-eighth volume published in 1860. As in the case of the limited number of drawings contributed by James Basire (I), these generally comprised images of exhibits from meetings, particularly those published in the appendices, or of illustrations for articles by the more prolific officers of the Society, such as John Gage Rokewode, Director from 1829 to 1842, and John Yonge Akerman, Secretary from 1848 to 1860.⁶¹³

6.5 JAMES BASIRE (III) – PERSONAL LIFE AND FINANCES

After he had stabilised the family business following the death of his father, James Basire (III)'s enjoyed 20 years of relevant financial stability during which he and his two surviving sisters gradually reasserted their social status and restored their lifestyle. Like his father, but unlike his grandfather, the third James Basire invariably suffixed "Esq." to his name and referred to himself as a gentleman. He joined in his father's gentlemanly country pursuits, and remained close to the Hansard family. He was invited to be godfather of Octavius, son of Luke Graves Hansard in 1827, by which time his sisters were also already godmothers of two of Hansard's daughters. In the same year, Basire's sister, Eliza, married Robert George Rowe, a celebrated physician and writer on medical topics, who practiced at Chigwell. Then, in 1828, the youngest sister, Susannah, married Mundeford Allen, a solicitor. Allen also lived in Chigwell Row, but practiced in Bedford Row, a short distance from the Basires' London studio. It was Allen, together with his partner Edward Carleton Holmes who advised and supported the family through various legal and financial travails over a period of fifty years.

James Basire (III) seems to have married well from both a social and financial point of view. His wedding to Emma Passingham took place on 24 October 1820 at her parish church of St. Leonard's, Heston, near Hounslow, where her father, Jonathan, was a farmer with considerable local landholdings and no male heirs. Passingham's two main properties, Heston Farm Estate and North Hyde Farm Estate, were earmarked for inher-

⁶¹³ These drawings for the Society of Antiquaries are preserved at the Society

itance by his two daughters, Ellen and Emma respectively. James and Emma did not hesitate in starting a family, and Emma gave birth to 11 children who survived to adulthood during the period from 1822 to 1841. The first-born son was, of course, called James. The couple had a daughter, born the year after Victoria's coronation, who was named Elizabeth Victoria, and a son born a year after the royal wedding, who was named Albert, after the Prince Consort. This choice of names may indicate that they were caught up in the general enthusiasm of this new era, or represent a further confirmation of the relative social conservatism of this and the previous generation of Basires.

Emma and James initially moved into the premises at 7 Quality Court, Chancery Lane, which the engraver had shared with his grandfather's copper-plate printing firm, and two boys, James and Frederick Daniel, and two girls, Emma and Isabella, were born there. By 1829, they decided to buy their own separate "dwelling house", the newly-built 16 Bayswater Terrace,⁶¹⁴ some four miles from Chancery Lane via the north side of Hyde Park and Oxford Street. The fifth surviving child, Augusta, was born in 1832 in the roomier, semi-rural ambiance of this new suburb. A year later, Jonathan Passingham died, leaving most of his estate in trust for his wife, Elizabeth, but to be divided between their two daughters on her death. The financial security of the next generation of Basires seemed to be assured.

James and Emma immediately moved to North Hyde, which is approximately 13 miles west of the City of London, in order to be with Emma's widowed mother and to ensure the continuity of management of the estate. Their next two children, Mary and Letitia, were born there in 1833 and 1834 respectively, but by 1835, the family of nine had moved back to central London, where their last four children were born: John Arnold, Elizabeth Victoria, Albert, and finally George Robert, named after his uncle, the physician George Robert Rowe.

In addition to frequent trips to North Hyde, the family also maintained its relationship to Chigwell, which was situated at almost exactly the same distance as North Hyde from the City, but in exactly the opposite direction. The 1841 census records eight children between the ages of 11 months and 15 years being housed at the White Hart at Chigwell with three governesses at the time of Emma's pregnancy with George Robert. It would have been too much to ask James's elderly mother to house the brood at the family house at Chigwell House down the road, where she herself continued to live as an independent annuitant until her death there in 1858. In the 1851 census, she is recorded as "head of the family" in a household which at that time also included her daughter, Susannah, and Susannah's husband, Mundeford Allen.

Given the family's peripatetic lifestyle, combined with serial pregnancies and the management of a large household, it is perhaps unsurprising that James's wife, Emma, died in London in 1844 at the age of 41, only four years after the death of her mother

⁶¹⁴ Subscription list to Rev. Stephen Hyde Cassan, *Lives of the Bishops of Bath and Wells* (1829); Sun Fire Office records, LMA MS 11936/530/1128427

and her inheritance of a life interest in the North Hyde Estate. The stress caused by the seemingly endless legal wrangling and financial difficulties which dogged this inheritance may also have been a contributing factor.

Jonathan Passingham's had appointed a local brewer and a neighbouring gentleman, Francis Sherborn, as executors and trustees in his will. The trustees promptly leased the land to Sherborn and his brother. By 1836, the estate was allegedly devastated, and the Passingham daughters and their families brought a case against the trustees in Chancery. Sherborn was accused of "a series of frauds, misconduct, negligence and breaches of trust", which had led to "acts of destruction", including the ploughing up of valuable meadow and pasture land, denuding the estate of timber, allowing buildings to fall into decay and pulling them down". The sisters won the case, and in 1842 new trustees were appointed: Ellen's husband, another Jonathan Passingham of Cornwall, and Dr. Rowe, brother-in-law of James and Emma.⁶¹⁵ The solicitors for the new trustees were Edward Carleton Holmes and the couple's other brother-in-law, Mundeford Allen.

This was, however, just the first phase of a series of problems with the North Hyde Estate, most of which were the responsibility of the Basires themselves. Following the successful outcome of their lawsuit, James and Emma devised ambitious plans for the estate which involved taking on a significant amount of debt. They had borrowed £4,000 from the philanthropist, Samuel Wilson Warneford, already in 1842. Then, in 1845, an Act of Parliament enabled the new trustees to grant leases on the estate to dig brick earth and to manufacture bricks, and they promptly granted such a lease to James Basire. In the same year, the trustees bought the contiguous Depot Estate, which consisted of barracks, storehouses, dwelling houses, more brick-earth land, but most importantly a private canal, which could be used to transport bricks via the Grand Junction Canal to London and elsewhere. By 13 December 1845, the Basires had borrowed a further £3,800 from Henry George Hopkins, Rev. Frederick Hopkins and George Swettenham Richardson in order to finance the further development of the estate. Emma Basire died four days later.

The timing of James Basire's investment in the North Hyde Estate was disastrous. The Bank of England raised interest rates at the end of 1845, and this move triggered the bust which followed the railway and canal boom of the previous years. By early 1847, Edward Holmes and Mundeford Allen had dissolved their legal partnership, and the latter was no longer involved in the management of the estate. James Basire still owed the original £4,000 and £3,800 loans secured on his life interest on the estate, and had in the meantime borrowed a further £700 from William and Richard Fisher. In a final act of desperation on 4 November 1847, Basire borrowed £500 from his son, Frederick Daniel, secured on the latter's reversionary interest in the estate, and a further

⁶¹⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, Acc/0328, comprising 111 documents, which are the source of much of this section and that on the financial difficulties of James Basire (IV)

£270 from Edward Holmes, but it was too late. A fiat in bankruptcy was awarded and issued against James Basire (III) on 2 December 1847.

The fiat in bankruptcy referred to Basire's new professional address at 4 Red Lion Square, as well to North Hyde as a secondary residence. It also described his occupation as brick-maker, as well as engraver, but he would not be a brick-maker for much longer. Basire surrendered himself to a Commissioner of the Court of Bankruptcy 11 days after the fiat, and the bankruptcy proceedings continued with a full discovery of his estate and effects in early 1848. Later in the year, the lease on the Depot Estate was delivered back to the trustees of the Passingham estate, and Basire started to reconstruct his finances with help from his own family and from that of Edward Holmes. His daughter, Emma, and her husband, Francis Ewer Davis, borrowed £200 secured on their reversionary share in the North Hyde Estate. The £500 borrowed by Frederick Daniel Basire was assigned to Edward Holmes's brother, Rev. William Groome Holme; and Edward, Henry and Richard Holmes took over the £700 owed to the Fishers. Basire was consequently able to make a first dividend payment to creditors in early 1849, offer a scheme of composition to his creditors in late 1852, and was finally free of the bankruptcy court by 1853.⁶¹⁶

In the end, James seems to have recovered relatively well from this financial meltdown. He was able to continue to generate revenues from his core engraving and lithography business during the whole of the five-year period of his bankruptcy, and still maintained two establishments in London: his office at Red Lion Square in Holborn, and a family house in another suburban development at 6 Pleasant Row in Islington. At the time of the 1851 census, when he was still subject to bankruptcy proceedings, he was living there with six of his children, as well as a servant. By 1856, he had moved to another house at nearby 66, Huntingdon Street, Barnsbury, where he died worth almost £8,000 in 1869.

James's sons were not so fortunate. There was no family cushion of wealth from their great grandfather and grandfather. The house at Great Queen Street and James Basire (II)'s investment properties in Pentonville had long been auctioned off, and the remaining wealth had been used up to finance Mary Basire's long widowhood in Chigwell. James Basire (III) had been able to obtain significant financing from mortgages secured on his life interest on the North Hyde and Depot Estates and the revenues from brick-making, but the mortgages taken out by his older sons, James Basire (IV) and Frederick Daniel, in order to shore up their finances were relatively small. In common with their 9 siblings, James and Frederick only owned an eleventh share in the reversionary interest on the estates to use as collateral.

The consequences of the family's financial difficulties were soon felt by the older sons and sparked a diaspora in the family. Frederick Basire sailed for New Zealand on 2

⁶¹⁶ *London Gazette*, 3 December 1847, 4500; 18 February 1848, p. 661; 13 February 1849, p. 450; 3 December 1852, 3538; 4 February 1853, p. 314

November 1848, and arrived at the Port Chalmers on South Island on 4 April 1849, where he was described in the electoral roll as a “chemist”. He had apparently originally hoped to become a doctor. His youngest brother, George Robert, later followed in Frederick’s tracks, but died in Auckland on the North Island of New Zealand in September 1872 at the age of 41. James Basire (IV) was imprisoned for debt in 1851, later emigrated to the Netherlands and Denmark during the 1850s, but returned to London and continued the family business until his father’s death 1869. The remaining two sons, Albert and John Arnold, predeceased their father. As a result of this, James Basire (III) died in Islington in 1869 surrounded by his five surviving daughters and his son-in-laws, but none of his sons. It was left to two of his sons-in-law, a musician and a cleric, to act as executors to his will.

6.6 SUMMARY

James Basire (III) was blessed with a relatively healthy and long life compared with his father, but it was fraught with a string of special challenges of a personal, professional and financial nature, which his father and grandfather had not faced. The first of these was that his father was already seriously ill before James and his brothers had finished their apprenticeships. The second one consisted of the death of his brother and business partner soon afterwards.

In addition to these family issues, there were also new challenges in the wider world. There was now very little demand for expensive art engraving on copper plate, and both book and magazine illustration were becoming increasingly industrialised. On the demand side, these changes were influenced by social factors relating to the evolution of a mass consumer market. On the supply side, they partly resulted from the increasing use of steel plate, which permitted much longer print runs; and partly from the spread of lithography, which threatened to displace etching as a cheaper means of capturing images for technical publications. The technological excitement and periodic overheating of the age of railways also led to a series of spectacular economic booms and busts to which all businesses were exposed, and to which the Basires were not immune.

James Basire (III) faced all these challenges head on and in his own way. He retained his two most important institutional clients, the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society. He stayed true to the family’s core vocation of line engraving and etching on copper plate, but outpaced the threat of lithography by adopting it as an alternative element of his product offering. He successfully added copper plate printing as another core product, but was forced into bankruptcy after diversifying into brick-making on property inherited through his wife. However, he seemed to take even this reverse in his stride and manage to continue the family business until the year of his passing in 1869, when copper-plate engraving was in any case also its death throes.

Epilogue

The life and work of James Basire (IV) (1822-1883)

The obituary of James Basire (II)'s pupil, John Le Keux, has helped perpetuate the cliché that engravers' lives were boring:

“If the life of artists in general be unproductive of biographical details, that of an engraver, especially of one always fully occupied, is more of a blank than others....such occupation altogether insulates from the busy world, and compels an existence as unvaried as that of a recluse.”⁶¹⁷

The lives of the later Basires seem, however, to belie this journalistic cliché, particularly that of the hitherto almost completely unknown, James Basire (IV). He is not mentioned by biographical dictionary entries for the Basires, but was as much a part of the family business as the four previous generations. His existence is to some extent overshadowed by the longevity of his father, but he was equal in talent to any of his forebears. The problem was that he did not want to be an engraver, and this fact comes out clearly through his life and work.

On the surface, the fourth James Basire seemed to follow exactly in the family footsteps. He was born in Holborn on 22 January 1822 and was baptized by tradition at the family church of St. Andrew's. By 1836, he was training in his father's offices, and by 1843 he was already signing engravings and lithographs as “James Basire Junior” or “the Younger”.⁶¹⁸ In 1847, he was still using his father's premises in Red Lion Square, Holborn, as his professional address, but by 1848, he had established his own engraving and lithography office at 7 Princes Street, where he continued to work in parallel with his father. James Basire senior seems to have moved out of Red Lion Square by 1858, as this house was in that year the site of a famous demonstration of James Harrison's new refrigeration machine.⁶¹⁹ Since James Basire (III) moved his personal residence to 66, Huntingdon Street in Islington in 1856, this may also be the year in which he moved

⁶¹⁷ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, New Series XXV, II (1846), p. 647

⁶¹⁸ For example, *The locomotive engine illustrated on stone: elevation, vertical section, end-elevation, section of the same, and plan*, published in two editions in 1843-44

⁶¹⁹ *Illustrated London News*, 29 May 1858

EPILOGUE

office.⁶²⁰ It therefore seems likely that James Basire (III) and (IV) shared offices, at least on an on and off basis, from about 1856 until the father's retirement or his death in May 1869.

Two sketchbooks which James Basire (IV) kept in 1842-1843, the years immediately after his training period with his father, hint at the young man's real passion.⁶²¹ These sketchbooks contain notes from two separate tours. One of these took him by stage coach from London to Southampton, whence he sailed along the south coasts of Dorset and Devon, stopping at almost every port on the way. From Plymouth, he turned inland, crossed Dartmoor, and then toured the north coast of Devon, before arriving at Bristol. The second trip resembled a more traditional antiquarian trip, as it started at Oundle in Northamptonshire and comprised a walking tour of local churches, including the cathedral at Peterborough. Examples of sketches from each of the tours are shown in Figures 72-73 below.



Figure 72 Sketch of a burnt-out windmill in the South-West of England by James Basire (IV) (private collection)

⁶²⁰ Basire, James (III) refers to himself as an engraver working out of Princes Street, Islington in a legal document dated 1864: London Metropolitan Archives, ACC0380/60

⁶²¹ These sketchbooks are in the possession of the author, who inherited them via James Basire (IV)'s first wife, Mary Annie Kimpton



Figure 73 Sketch entitled "Altar, Polebrook Church" (Northamptonshire) by James Basire (IV) (private collection)

As demonstrated by these drawings, several aspects of these sketch books show a direct line of descent from the sketching tours of his ancestors. There were some depictions of landscapes, but most sketches comprised detailed reproductions of ecclesiastical buildings, monumental effigies, fonts and gothic window tracings. At one point, James even described his meeting with the Reverend Charles Henry Hartshorne, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, at Cogenhoe in Northamptonshire. Hartshorne had just published a volume on the classification of sepulchral remains in the county, and the two of them explored the rectory, admired one another's drawings, and drank wine together.

The young Basire and Hartshorne certainly discussed historical topics, but also doubtless the marvels of a new era. The parson had already been exposed to these at a young age as the son of an ironmaster in Shropshire, while the younger Basire had been involved in helping his father on technical illustrations for the Royal Society, other scientific societies and related monographs. The detailed notes, diary entries and haphazard annotations which appear between the sketches, as well as the finale of the tour of South West England, show that these had fired not only James Basire (IV)'s imagination, but also his personal ambitions.

After finishing his first journey in Bristol, Basire travelled back to London on the Great Western Railway only a year after its completion on 30 June 1841. Before this, however, he went to see the S.S. Archimedes in Bristol harbour. This was the first

steamship to have been powered by a screw propeller and it had been borrowed by the Great Western Steamship Company, so that Isambard Kingdom Brunel could assess whether this technology could be applied to his second great ship, the S.S. Great Britain. Basire reports that he took a walk to see the Great Britain, which he calls by its original name, the “Mammoth”. Elsewhere in the sketch books, Basire makes notes and sketches of detailed specifications of engines of other steam-powered ships.

More concretely, it is apparent from the sketch books that James Basire (IV) was planning a career in the rapidly expanding domain of civil engineering, and specifically in surveying the railroads which were being laid down all over the country in the 1840s. He made notes concerning surveying jobs which paid £50 a mile, payable in advance, and listed contact names from around the country, including an engineer on the Eastern Counties Railway. This and other contacts may have been derived through family ties with the industry, since the cousin of his father’s uncle, John Cox, the copper-plate printer, was William Tite, architect of the Eastern Counties, London and Blackwall, Gravesend and South Western Railways.⁶²²

Railway work was better paid, more glamorous, and arguably had better long-term prospects than engraving or lithography. Basire would also be able to benefit directly from his significant drafting skills, which he had already been deployed on the increasingly technical output of his father’s studio. This also included maps of a number of planned railways, such as a “Plan of the proposed South Eastern Brighton, Lewes, and Newhaven Railway”, lithographed after the surveyor, W.A. Provis (1845), and a coloured lithograph of the proposed “Windsor, Slough and Staines Atmospheric Railway” (1846).

It is not certain but circumstantial evidence suggests that James Basire (IV) may have left his father’s business in his early twenties to work as a railway surveyor for the South Eastern Railways. He is recorded as having lived at one point in the mid-1840s at the Elephant and Castle Inn in Ramsgate.⁶²³ This suggests that he may have been working at this time on the new line from Canterbury, which reached Ramsgate in April 1846. It could have been in this context that he produced lithographs of the latest locomotive engines and speculatively advertised them for sale in his own name in 1843 and 1844. This could also explain his invention of a surveying instrument, the blade protractor, which he had registered as a useful design in August 1847 (Figure 75 on the next page).⁶²⁴ He also had this instrument manufactured for sale, based on advertisements which he also engraved in his own name.

⁶²² Basire, James (III) engraved a number of plates for William Tite, such as: “Interior View of the Laboratory in the Royal Institution”, frontispiece to William Brande, *A Manual of Chemistry* (London, 1819), and a standalone print dated 1822 of Tite’s first major work, the Scottish church in Regent Square at St Pancras

⁶²³ *London Gazette*, 2 May 1851, p. 1192

⁶²⁴ National Archives, BT 45/6/1159

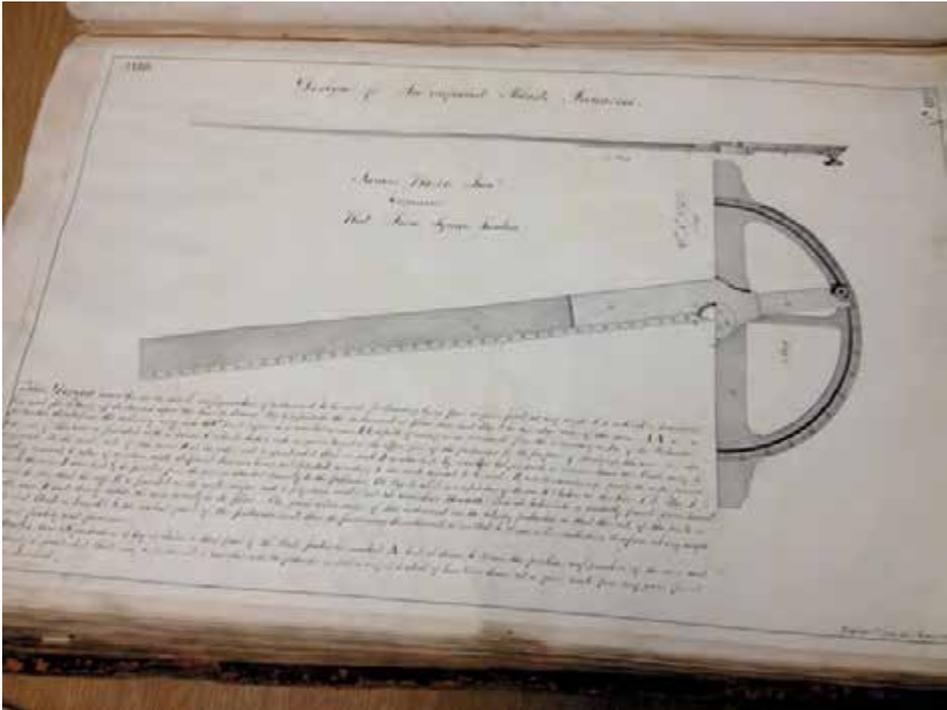


Figure 75 Registration of James Basire junior's Blade Protractor as a useful design in August 1847 (National Archives)

The end of the 1840s was characterised by the bust of the railway craze, following a banking panic which started in December 1847 and a general economic and financial crisis which lasted into the first half of the 1850s. This period also represented the crazy years of the Basire family, and James Basire (IV) followed his father into bankruptcy and was confined to debtor's prison between January and May 1851.

The younger Basire became involved in his father's new side occupation of brick-making at Heston. His sketch books, which date from the years when his father started to borrow money to develop the estate, already contained some notes about the transport of bricks. James Basire (IV) also produced in his own name, "James Basire junior", a coloured lithograph publicising a new brick-making machine on behalf of its inventor, James Hart, based on patents issued in 1848 and 1851 (Figure 76 on the next page). Brick-making was not, however, the main source of the younger Basire's financial woes.

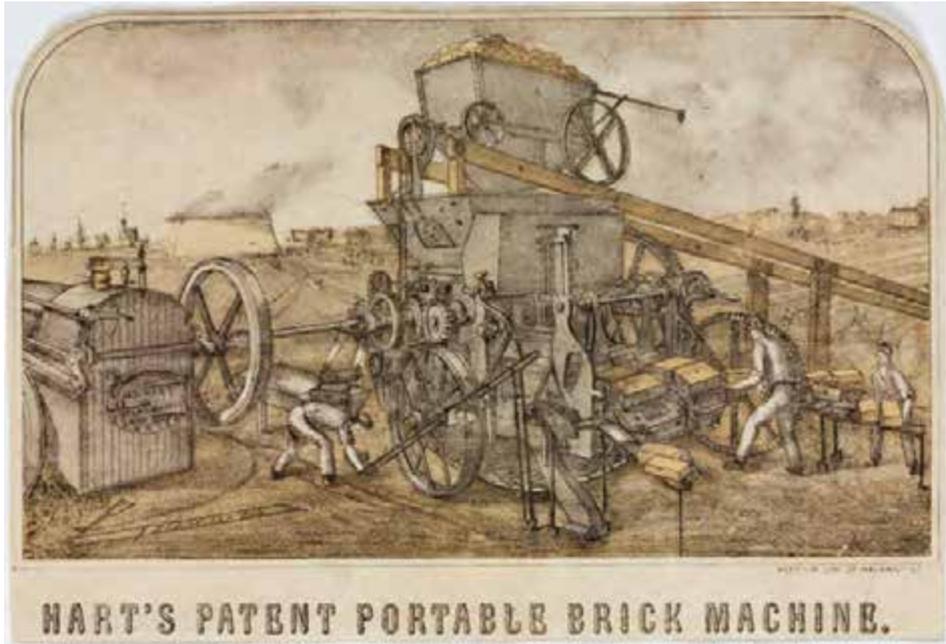


Figure 76 “Hart’s Patent Portable Brick Machine”, lithographed by James Basire junior (ca. 1849-1851) (Getty Images)

James Basire (IV)’s bankruptcy proceedings confirm that he moved back to his father’s engraving and lithography office at 4 Red Lion Court after leaving Ramsgate, but he seems simultaneously to have operated at least two other business, both of which required significant capital. On 4 August 1847, he borrowed £700 secured on his 11th reversionary interest in the North Hyde Estate from William and Richard Fisher, who were already owed £3,800 by his father.⁶²⁵ This is the same date as the registration of his design for the blade protractor, which he had manufactured in German silver, so it is likely that at least some of this money was required for this new investment.

The young James Basire, however, probably needed even more cash to support the factory which he had opened on his return from Ramsgate in the middle of the West End of London: in Aberdeen Mews, off Blenheim Street, south of Oxford Street. This business was completely unrelated to engraving, lithography, surveying or brick-making, but was established “for making experiments on and for the Manufacture of Gas Burners”.⁶²⁶ The bankruptcy court accordingly referred to James Basire (IV) not only as an engraver and lithographer, but also as a mechanical engineer. The gas burners in question could have been those used for internal gas lighting which would have been a subject of particular interest to an engraver, who was heavily dependent on quality light to work in the long winter nights. However, it is more likely that these gas burners were

⁶²⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/038/62

⁶²⁶ *London Gazette*, 2 May 1851, p. 1192

used for gas street lighting, which was rapidly spreading through the country at this time. It seems that the young James had jumped from one bandwagon to another at exactly the wrong time, and against the background of an economy which was on the point of collapse.

James Basire (III) was in no position to help his son financially, but it seems that there was some support from his family and friends. The £700 owed by James Basire (IV) to the Fishers was assigned on 22 September 1849 to the family solicitor, Edward Carleton Holmes, as well as to Henry and Richard Holmes. Edward Holmes had been the business partner of Mundeford Allen, the husband of James's aunt, Susannah Basire, and remained a trustee of the North Hyde Estate. On 1 November 1850, James borrowed a further £130 from another uncle, Francis Ewer Davis, an accountant and husband of his aunt, Emma Basire. Then, on 1 November 1851, Edward Holmes arranged for this £130 to be assigned to his brother, the Reverend William Groome Holmes.

This consolidation of James Basire's IV debt with the Holmes family provided a temporary solution to his financial problems, but the earnings from lithography, engraving on copper and even on fine glass were not sufficient to give any hope of repayment.⁶²⁷ In April 1857 therefore, Rev. William Groome Holmes delivered a bill of complaint on Basire's assignee, Samuel Sturgis, in respect of the £130 originally lent by Francis Davis. A decree in Chancery declared Basire to be in default and insolvent in July 1857, subject to a payment of £209 19 shillings, including interest, to be paid by February 1858. Since this was not paid, William Holmes was granted an order absolute for foreclosure, and James Basire (IV) effectively lost his 11th reversionary share in the North Hyde Estate to Holmes,⁶²⁸ who would only see his cash once the estate was sold in 1872.

These ups and downs in James Basire (IV)'s professional life were also reflected in his private life. He married Mary Annie Kimpton on 3 January 1853 at the district church of All Saints, Lambeth, but they are attested as already living together at 33 York Street, a short distance from Waterloo Station. James identified himself on the marriage certificate as an engineer, while Mary Annie, who was a minor, informed the Registrar that she was the daughter of "John" Kimpton, a farmer. As other Basire family members do not seem have been present at the wedding, this was probably not considered a suitable match. The seventeen year-old Mary Annie was actually the daughter of an illiterate agricultural labourer and sometime shepherd from the tiny village of Hatley St. George in Cambridgeshire. Her father's real first name was variously recorded by baffled officials as "Osland", "Oasland", "Ozland", "Oslent", and "Ozzlen".

The young couple seems then to have moved further south of the river Thames to Brixton, where two girls, Mary Annie and Emma Jemima Basire, were born in 1854 and 1855 respectively. Their married life was, however, far from settled, as eight different family addresses are recorded over a period of 10 years: 3 Devonshire Place, Kenning-

⁶²⁷ There are finely engraved glasses in the possession of the author, who inherited them via James Basire (IV)'s first wife, Mary Annie Kimpton, which are signed by "James Basire jnr." and dated 1857

⁶²⁸ London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/0328/075-078

ton Road; Upper Stamford Street; Vine Cottage, Kennington Oval; 17 Chrissell Road, Brixton; 313 Nieuwendijk, Amsterdam; 13 Ostergade, Copenhagen;⁶²⁹ 23 Rotherfield Street, Islington; and 15 South Place, Kennington Park.⁶³⁰ This peripatetic life resembled James Basire (IV)'s bachelor life, where his bankruptcy proceedings referred to addresses in the previous decade at Eliza Place, Sadler's Well; 64 George Street, Hampstead Road; and 15 Harrington Street North, Hampstead Road, as well as his father's offices at Red Lion Square, his own office on Princes Street and his factory in the West End. It is a matter of speculation to what extent these almost yearly moves reflected Basire's restless personality, his precarious financial situation or both.

There may still have been some hope for a more settled married life for the Basires when Mary Ann gave birth to a boy at Clarence Cottages, Rotherfield Street in Canonbury, only a mile from the boy's grandfather's house at Barnsbury. Unfortunately, however, the young James Basire V did not live, the marriage took another turn for the worse, and Mary Ann Basire filed a petition for divorce on 14 June 1865.⁶³¹ Civil divorce had been legally possible in England only from 1857, and it was an expensive procedure which was still seldom successfully used. James did not respond to the charges, and the divorce case was struck out on 8 November 1867, after neither party's counsel appeared.

Mary Ann's deposition nevertheless makes sorry reading. She gave evidence that she first became aware of James's adultery in 1855, two years after their marriage, when he infected her with a venereal disease. She alleged that he then constantly deserted her, used violent and offensive language, struck her with a poker and his fists, and threw knives, cups and saucers at her. Her evidence went on to say that she became aware of his adultery again in August 1861, that he tried to cut her throat with a razor in August 1862, and that he knocked her off a chair while she was dressing a child and threatened to kill her and the children in January 1863.

Within eighteen months of the abandonment of the divorce proceedings and two months before his father's death, James seems to have started a new life in a new city. The certificate recording his second, bigamous marriage to Emily Daunton, who was 25 years his junior, refers to him as a widower living in Bristol. He is also recorded on the same document as now working as a draughtsman. The birth certificates of the following 11 children, the first of whom was named James, show that James's new family also moved from place to place, including Swindon, Southampton and Cardiff. Their last child was born in 1882, one year before James Basire (IV)'s death at Barton Regis, near Bristol.

In the meantime, Mary Ann Basire was settled as a boarding house keeper in Ramsgate with their two daughters where, according to the 1871 census, she persisted in

⁶²⁹ They were presumably abroad at least during the spring of 1861, when the family is not mentioned in that year's census returns

⁶³⁰ National Archives, J77/70/233

⁶³¹ *Ibid*

calling herself the wife of a “civil engineer”. Ten years later, at the time of the next census in Ramsgate, she called herself a widow, but she must have known that her husband was still alive and already married with 10 young children.

The last James Basire with whom we are concerned here was not happy in his inherited profession of engraver and this is reflected in his life story. He did, however, persist with his real passion for engineering and kept alive the spirit of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (see Figure 77 below). In 1876, when engraving was defunct as an art, craft and trade, he described himself once again as an engineer. This time it was on a patent application, which he filed together with a Bristol brass founder. They had invented “improvements in charging and burning fuel in open fires”.⁶³² It seems that he never gave up his forty-year old dream to be an engineer, any sort of engineer, rather than an engraver.

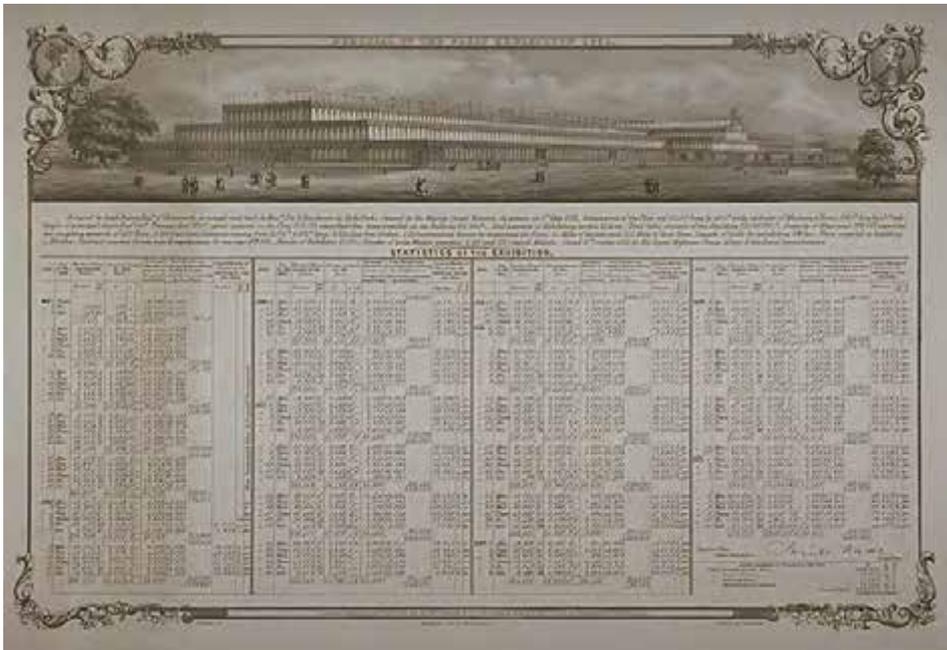


Figure 77 “Memorial of the Great Exhibition 1851”, drawn on stone by James Basire (IV) (source: London Metropolitan Archives, City of London)

⁶³² *London Gazette*, 24 November 1876, 6486

Conclusion

This volume has undertaken to demonstrate the historical and artistic importance of engravers and engraving through the medium of the life and works of the Basire family, each member of which was a unique product of his circumstances and his time.

Isaac Basire was the son of a Huguenot refugee and a founding entrepreneur, who worked mainly on the illustration of books on behalf of the leading printer-publishers of the second quarter of the eighteenth century. His son, James Basire (I), was a socially-engaged artist who was a central figure in the first great period of public art exhibitions, and went on to obtain monopolistic positions as engraver to the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries. James Basire (II) inherited and expanded his father's institutional client base, which allowed him to make a fortune despite a background of 20 years of continuous foreign wars, and so finance a gentlemanly lifestyle of country pursuits with his wealthy friends. James Basire (III) struggled to maintain the living standards of his family, but survived half a century of secular decline in the engraving industry through diversification into printing and lithography. The final James Basire never wanted to be an engraver, but nevertheless followed the family profession between his other business ventures and stints in debtor's prison until his father's death in 1869.

The Basires are of historical interest as individuals in part because of their interaction with many leading figures of their time, and in the first instance artists. Isaac Basire was specifically targeted by William Hogarth as a print pirate in the promotion of his Copyright Engraving Act of 1734, while Isaac's son, James, became Hogarth's favourite engraver at the end of the latter's career. James Basire was a leading light in the societies of artists led by Hogarth and which preceded the Royal Academy. Among others, Basire was a close friend of James "Athenian" Stuart, and they were the main protagonists of one of the societies which continued for some time to rival the Academy. James Basire (II) was a preferred interpreter of the work of William Turner in the early part of the painter's career. James Basire (I) and (II) also trained generations of leading engravers, such as Thomas Ryder, William Blake, George Cooke and the Le Keux brothers.

The Basires not only interacted with other artists, but also with many other significant characters of their day through their work for the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries and the House of Commons. Many of these interactions were purely professional, but others went beyond the accomplishment of specific tasks and lasted many years. Such relationships embraced a number of personalities who are still well-

known, particularly in specialist circles, but arguably deserve to be better known to a wider public. They include the republican activist, Thomas Hollis; the painter, prankster and scientist, Benjamin Wilson; the antiquarian, Richard Gough; the Nichols family of printer-publishers; the gentleman-scholar, Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead; and the Hansard family of printers to the House of Commons.

The importance of the Basires' work can also be viewed from various angles, which can be summarised under three headings: their artistic value; their preservation of knowledge which would otherwise be lost; and their role as a medium of communication across time and space.

The artistic importance of engraving was already underestimated in the days of the Basires and remains so today. This is in part because the vast bulk of engraved illustration was functional rather than decorative or even artistic in purpose. It is true that engraving is largely a reproductive rather than an original art form. However, just as portraiture in the eighteenth century extended from street face-painters, who sold their wares for a few shillings, to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was able by the end of his career to charge hundreds of guineas for a likeness, so there was a vast gamut of engraved work. At one end of the scale, the cheapest illustrations on popular song sheets were usually wood-cuts or simple copper-plate etchings. At the top of the scale, the historical, landscape and portrait engraving by the first two James Basires rank them among the leading exponents of its golden age in England.

It is too often forgotten that it is engraving that has eternalized images of the early modern, Georgian and Victorian periods which would otherwise be lost to the world. It was therefore crucially important that engravers combined accuracy and sensitivity to their subject matter. Such images include countless prints of now lost buildings, landscapes, extinct plants and animals, and even of our ancestors. For this reason, engravings are increasingly published in academic and generalist books today, but are seldom attributed to the draughtsmen and almost never to the relevant engravers.

A final argument for the historical importance of engraving in general and of that practiced by the Basires in particular comprises its role as an enabler in the development and spread of the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the ensuing Industrial Revolution. The explosion of engraving and related techniques from the mid-seventeenth century through the first decades of the eighteenth century was partially caused by, but also itself promoted the great scientific and technological breakthroughs of the age. Engraved illustrations of architectural and engineering innovations, experiments, apparatus and machines, as well as newly-discovered lands and their flora and fauna, flooded the nation and rapidly crossed borders. This was a phenomenon where the Basires, as engravers to the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Society, other learned societies and the House of Commons made an especially important contribution by drawing on copper – and finally also on stone.

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