

# Typographic design, one character at a time

**Letterpress printing, the craft once revered as the means by which a message was carried to the masses, was how the vast majority printed matter was achieved for over half a millennium. The underlying technology changed little from when Gutenberg overcame the problem of movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century to its ultimate commercial demise in the latter half of the twentieth century. With this demise, I feel, something important was lost; the physical craft of typography.**

A want to become more hands-on in my work led me away from commercial graphic design around 2009 and on a typographic journey that is still ongoing today. After a two year MA spent exclusively working in letterpress with Seán Sills at Distillers Press, NCAD I moved to the UK where I spent six months working with Justin Knopp at his studio, Typoretum. It was here that I was able to see the day to day operations of a commercial yet creative-driven letterpress studio. During this time I concentrated on a series of broadsides. One such example is based on a quote from Ellen Lupton; *Typography is What Language Looks Like* (2012) was produced by building up layers of type and colour within the tight constraints of a small proofing press.

It was while working with Justin that I decided to start The Salvage Press; an imprint devoted to preserving, promoting and pursuing excellence in design, typography & letterpress printing. My aim with the press is to actively preserve the age old traditions and crafts of letterpress printing while at the same time explore through practice how this technology is relevant in today's art and design environment. The imprint would be nomadic, producing work in various letterpress outfits in an endeavour to learn from these great ambassadors, studios and workshops. Produced on my return to Distillers Press, the first book under the imprint was *The Works of Master Poldy* (2013), a Joycean themed edition utilising metal and wooden types to convey both atmosphere and narrative.

Although the process is labour intensive, difficult and tedious work, the art of

composing and printing type by hand is one that cannot be underestimated. It is a craft that lies within the very fundamentals of typographic design. The process of realising design through letterpress printing is one where each and every decision must be considered thoroughly and executed precisely. Typically, pieces of metal or wooden type are composed by hand before being arranged on the bed of a printing press. Following this ink is applied either mechanically or by hand-held roller before paper is then '*letter pressed*' to create an impression. It requires slowing down and respecting the technology, only then will the end result be worth while. That end result can be delicate macro-typography, bold textured layers of woodtype, or the tactility of their intersection. The great type families were first cast in metal, their end purpose was to put ink directly onto paper.

Since 2012 I have concentrated on fine press books with an Irish interest, each one designed to offer a new learning curve. *Maldon* (2014), a recent book based on a translation by Michael Smith of the Anglo-Saxon epic '*The Battle of Maldon*', saw calligraphic lettering, wood engraved illustrations and hand composed typography appear side by side. The time between books is spent producing larger scale broadsides, mostly typographic, sometimes experimental, which have themselves been the starting point for further projects. A broadside based on the Mexican film *La Juala De Oro* (2014) hints at the perilous journeys undertaken by the four protagonists through overprinted Grottesque wood types.

La Juala De Oro (2014)  
 Jamie Murphy / The Salvage Press

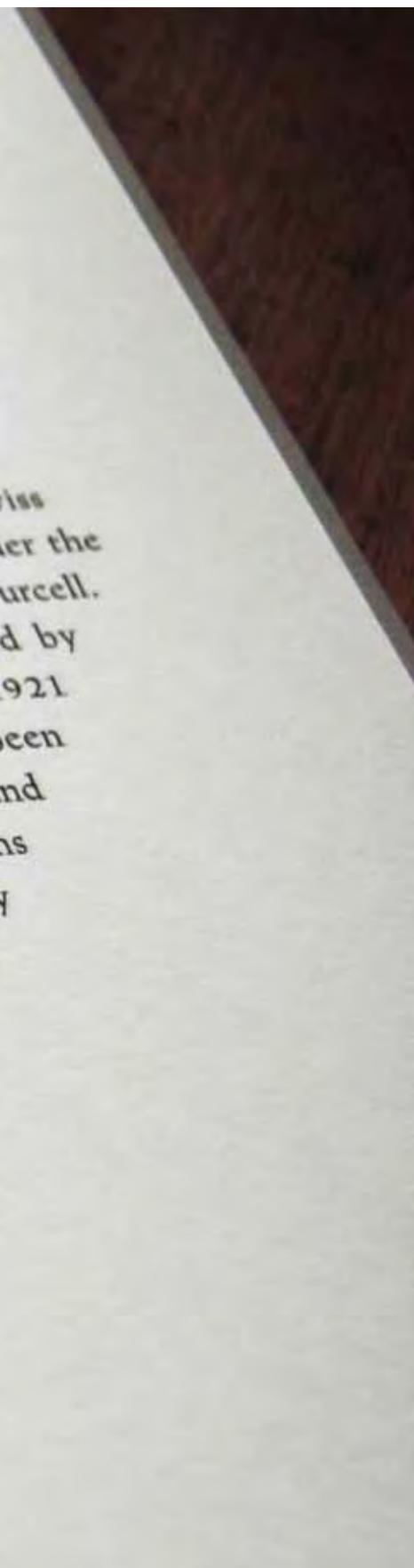


The only book I have made which has no connection to Ireland in its content or its authorship was made in Sweden based on a local folk-tale, but then when I think about it, I only travelled there in pursuit of an

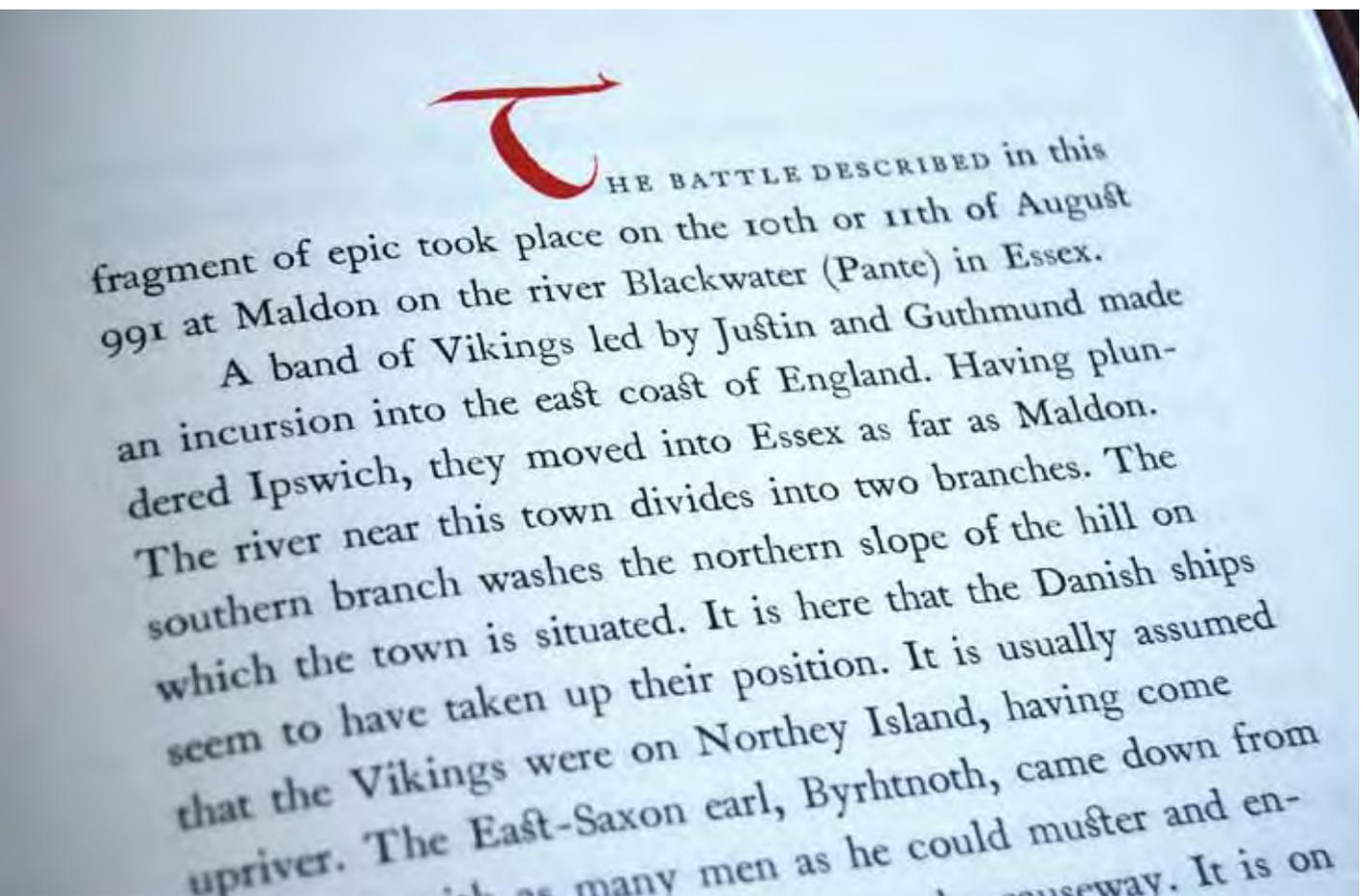
elusive typeface; *The Rooster, The Hand-Mill & The Swarm of Hornets* (2014) is hand-set in 12, 16, 20 and 24 point *Trajanus* (designed by Warren Chappel, 1940).

*Kalafati* - Designed, typeset by hand  
& letterpress printed with some pleasure  
by Laura & Jamie Murphy in February 2014,  
while expecting their first child. Jamie achieved his  
first woodcuts to illustrate the book. The type has been  
set in 12, 16, 20 & 24 point Trajanus, designed in 1940 by  
Warren Chappel. The text pages went through a Korrex proofing  
press during a one week residency at Grafikverkstan Godsmagasinet,  
Uttersberg, Sweden, with sound advice & guidance from Lina Nordenström  
& Lars Nyberg. The illustrations have been cut & printed on a FAG Sw  
Proof 40 at Distillers Press, NCAD, Dublin, during a year's residency und  
watchful eye of Seán Sills. The paper is Zerkall 170 gsm supplied by John P  
This folk tale was originally printed in *The Swedish Fairy Book*, edited  
Clara Stroebe, translated by Frederick H Martens & published in 1  
by Frederick A Stokes Company, New York. This book has b  
printed in an edition of 50 copies. Standard copies are bou  
in paper sides & are numbered 1 — 40. De Luxe version  
are quarter bound in cloth & board by Tom Duff  
at his workshop in Dublin's Five Lamps area,  
housed in a slipcase & are marked A — J.  
You are currently holding copy: 5

Jamie Murphy



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