

# The Basle Paper Mill : an active museum of paper, writing and printing

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **10 (1983)**

Heft 2

PDF erstellt am: **23.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906866>

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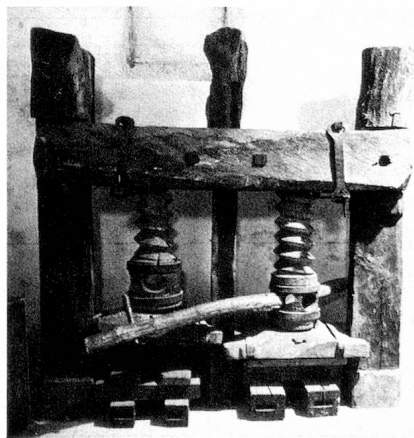
## The Basle Paper Mill: An active Museum of Paper, Writing and Printing

1980, one of the oldest buildings in Basle has appeared in old splendor: the Basle Paper Mill in the St. Alban Valley. It contains now the Museum of Paper, Writing and Printing and is not only worthy of the rich tradition of crafts it houses, but also incorporates a good deal of Basle's glorious past. Visitors enter the museum through the café in the adjoining mill and reach a courtyard after crossing the mill-pond near the water-wheel. The entrance leads straight to the workshop of the paper mill. The vat, press, stamper and beater, complete with power from the water-wheel via a king post all correspond with the technical equipment in this mill about 1790 as it is described in journeymen's books of that time. The sizing vessel and glazing equipment are also of this period, whereas the crushing roller is a witness to the mechanisation of the 19th century. For visitors who are unable or do not wish to climb all the way up to the drying lofts on the fourth floor, a small section of the drying equipment has been reconstructed in the mill room. This makes it possible to follow the course of manufacture of a sheet of handmade paper from preparation of the pulp right through to drying, sizing and finishing all in the same area of the building. The oldest entrance to the house leads straight into the heart of the living quarters, where

the history of the building comes into its own. The rag cellar houses the exhibits on the early history of paper in the Far East, whereas the entrance hall is devoted to the history of papermaking and its techniques. The different pieces of equipment used by the European papermaker are on show on the ground floor and in the old cellar, which was once used for sorting and breaking rags. In the cellar there are also an old twin-screw press, which probably dates back to the 16th century, and a flat stamper, reminding one of the forerunners of the European stamping mill.

The old staircase in the entrance hall leads up to the first floor, where the room facing south contains an introduction to the history of script and the alphabet,

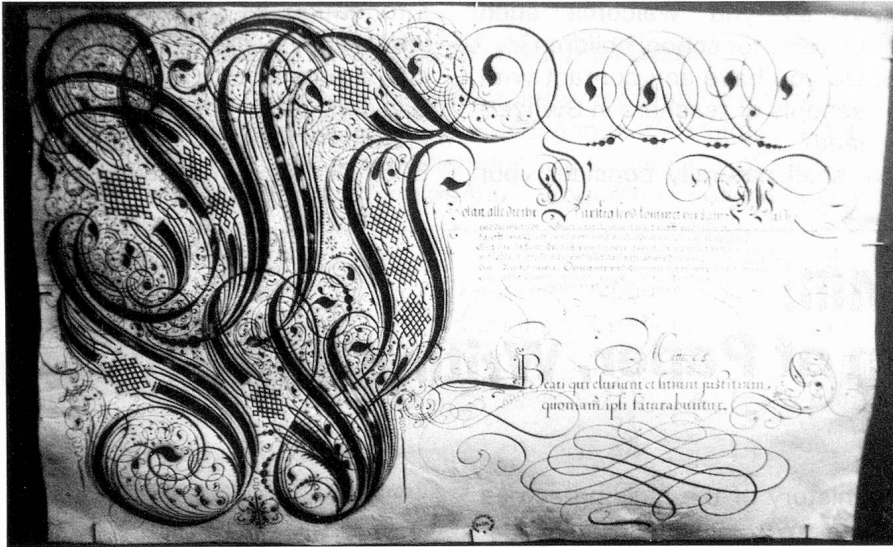
Paper press, about 1500 A. D.



The water-wheel of the Basle Paper Mill.

as well as an exhibition of non-alphabetical scripts. The rooms to the east and north take the visitor from the oldest Semitic alphabetical script to the Greeks and the Romans and, in the panelled Gallician living room, to the scripts of the Middle Ages. A synopsis of the development of handwriting up to the present day completes this section.

Through the entrance to the old sorting room of the paper mill, the visitor enters the world of technology, starting with Gutenberg's invention. A number of original machines show the history of typesetting. The Haas Room



Calligraphic script, 17th cent.

provides a brief outline of the Haas Typefoundry, the oldest still operating in the world, which can look back on 400 years of existence, and highlights the particular Haas speciality, map setting.

On the second floor we find two historical trades, printing and bookbinding. Here too, craftsmen demonstrate the techniques, bringing life to the otherwise dead matter.

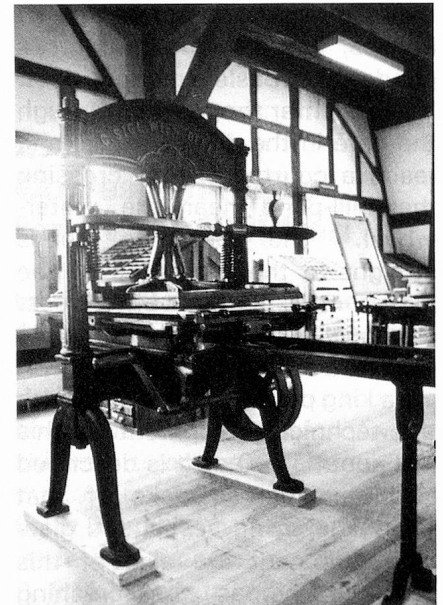
On the third floor there is a large room which will be used for temporary exhibitions, since the Museum possesses so many objects that there is only room for a few in the permanent exhibition. An-

other reason is that paper suffers under the influence of light, so that paper and objects made of paper cannot be exposed to light for too long. Temporary exhibitions also offer the opportunity to deal more extensively with special subjects and thus to provide the public always with something new. Visitors who take the trouble to climb the rather steep stairs up to the fourth floor are rewarded with the drying loft which has been reconstructed according to the traces found there. The beams and skylights date back to 1788. The tour round the Museum would be incomplete without the reminder that this building

not only contains old objects intended to acquaint the public through demonstrations with the old techniques of writing and bookmaking, from paper manufacture through printing to the finished book; it is also intended to serve the science of history. To this end, we have a library, picture archives and a series of documentary films which complete the rich collection of objects.

The Basle Paper Mill, as the meeting place of all lovers of cultural history and old crafts, and particularly of beautifully presented books, will be a treasure of more than local significance.

Printing press 1865.



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