

Gutenberg in Mainz

Where he lived and worked



Landeshauptstadt
Mainz



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Gutenberg in Mainz

Very few people have had so great an influence on the history of mankind as Johannes Gutenberg. He was born in Mainz on the River Rhine in Germany in c. 1400; this is where he lived and worked; this is where he developed his pioneering invention of book printing with moveable type which revolutionised the dissemination of knowledge through the entire world. He is thus to be considered the originator of the media. The name “Gutenberg” stands for the spread of information and perceptions which have had an impact on the development of the modern human race and our conception of the world.

From Mainz knowledge of the art of printing spread throughout the entire world. By c. 1500 there were already around 300 printing workshops in 60 cities in Germany. Centres were established in various countries, especially in university towns and flourishing trade venues; among them were Cologne, Bamberg, Venice, Lyon, Nuremberg and Valencia. Right up to the present day Gutenberg’s invention has retained its currency, for his principle of typography is and always will be the foundation of the art of printing, regardless of its methods of production which are constantly being further developed.

The Rhineland-Palatinate state capital of Mainz wishes to pay homage to the memory of the great inventor Johannes Gutenberg. Nowhere else is this more evident than at our world museum of printing. When we retrace his footsteps in our city today, we are proud that the name “Mainz” has stayed associated with Gutenberg’s invention into our present, media-dominated day and age.

Michael Ebling

Mayor of Mainz

President of the International Gutenberg Society



Stages in Gutenberg's life

1397 – 1405/6

Johannes or Henne Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg was the second son born to Friele Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg and Else Wirich zum steinen Krame. His paternal ancestors came from a rich, old-established dynasty of Mainz patricians; his mother was from a wealthy bourgeois family. The exact date of Gutenberg's birth has not yet been ascertained. The earliest date is now assumed to be 1397/1400, with the latest year of his birth named as 1405/06. Very little is known about Gutenberg's life, especially his childhood and youth. Sons of patricians usually went to a Latin school where they were taught reading, writing and arithmetic in Latin. Young Henne may have attended the monastic school of St Victor's in Mainz-Weisenau. It is possible – but not proved – that he then went on to study in Erfurt, the alma mater of the archbishopric of Mainz.

1420

In 1419 Gutenberg's father dies. In the following year Gutenberg's name appears for the first time in a document which records a dispute over an inheritance.

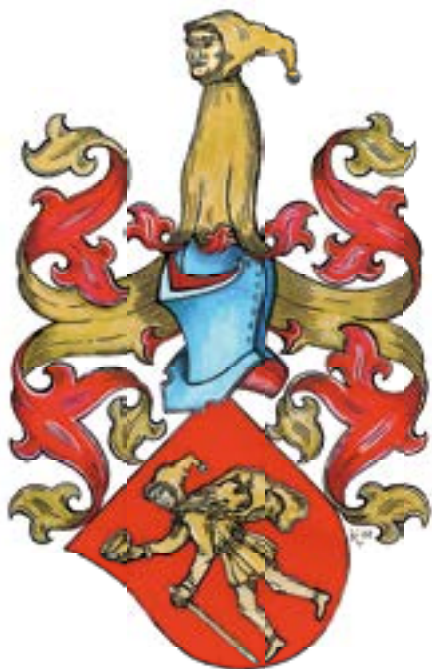
1428 – 1434

At the end of the 1420s Gutenberg becomes involved in a number of political disputes between the patricians and guilds in Mainz and eventually has to leave the city. It is on record that by 1430 at the latest he was no longer living in Mainz; it is known, however, where he spends the next few years.



1434 – 1444

In 1434 Gutenberg is in Strasbourg. He settles near the St Arbogast monastery a little way out of town and teaches a man from Strasbourg the art of stonecutting. At the beginning of 1438, together with three other Strasbourg burghers he founds a cooperative for the manufacture of mirrors for pilgrims on their way to Aachen to attend a procession of holy relics. At the end of 1438 he and his partners decide to found a second business with the secretive name of “aventur und kunst” (adventure and art). It is not certain whether this business already experimented with printing methods as the first evidence of printed books found in Strasbourg is dated to 1460. In 1444 Gutenberg pays his annual wine tax for the last time, after which his name disappears from the Strasbourg records.



| The Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg family coat of arms



1436/1439

There is knowledge of a promise of marriage which Gutenberg is said to have broken. The complaint made by Ellewibel zur Yserin Tür and her daughter Ennelin ends in a court case being brought against Gutenberg. The verdict is not known.

1444 – 1448

We have no news of Gutenberg's whereabouts or activities for the years 1444–1448. The marauding Armagnacs threatening Strasbourg in c. 1444 may be the reason that Gutenberg leaves Alsace. He is not recorded as being back in his native Mainz until 1448.

1448

Gutenberg has returned to Mainz and in the autumn takes out a large loan. He uses this money to set up his first printing workshop and develops a type called the Donatus-Kalendar typeface after the earliest known printing results. Donati were easy-to-sell Latin school grammar books by Adilius Donatus: “calendar” refers to the single-page prints indicating saints’ feast days or denoting suitable days for bloodletting. Mainz records place this first printing workshop at the Hof zum Gutenberg, an allegation which cannot be proved, however.

1450 – 1454

Gutenberg plans a large printing project and receives a loan of 800 guilders from Mainz businessman Johannes Fust, for which he pledges his “instruments” as security. A little later Fust even becomes a partner in the undertaking with a second loan of 800 guilders. With this money Gutenberg sets up a larger printing workshop where a Bible is to be printed. It may be that this workshop was installed at the Humbrechtshof, the later printing works run by Fust and Schöffer.



In the ensuing years Gutenberg's masterpiece, his 42-line Bible, was printed in Latin in Mainz and the project completed by the beginning of 1455 or earlier.



| Peter Schöffer's colophon

1455

The successful conclusion of the Bible printing project is overshadowed by a dispute between Fust and Gutenberg on the use of the invested capital. This lawsuit is documented by what is known as the “Helmaspergersche Notariatsinstrument” or Helmasperger notarial instrument. Fust demands that Gutenberg not only pays back his loan but also all interest and costs connected with it. In return, Gutenberg manages to have all of his expenses for the printing of the Bible recognised. This gives him a financial advantage. Both opponents are forced to make compromises but are able to assert some of their claims.

1455 – 1462

After ending the Bible project Gutenberg and Fust go their separate ways. Fust obviously receives part of the workshop inventory and now establishes his own printing workshop together with one of Gutenberg's former employees, scribe Peter Schöffer. In 1457 Fust and Schöffer print the Mainz Psalter, the first book to contain a publisher's mark or colophon.



Their officina is at the Humbrechthof, to which the Haus zum Korb is later added. Gutenberg also continues to operate a printing workshop.

He improves his first typeface, the Donatus-Kalendar type, and uses it to print the Turkish Calendar (1455) and the Turkish Bull (1455/56), among other items. He receives further commissions from church dignitaries and rulers and it is now assumed that his workshop was also involved in an edition of the Bible completed in Bamberg in 1460 and in a dictionary printed in Mainz.

1462 – 1465

After the city falls during the Mainz Diocesan Feud of 1462 many patricians are forced to flee the city – including Johannes Gutenberg. He probably moves to Eltville where he possibly helps the Bechtermünze brothers set up a printing workshop. In Eltville he may also have met the new archbishop of Mainz, Adolph von Nassau, who in 1465 makes the inventor a courtier in “recognition of his services”. This means that some of Gutenberg’s contemporaries at least are aware of the significance of his invention.

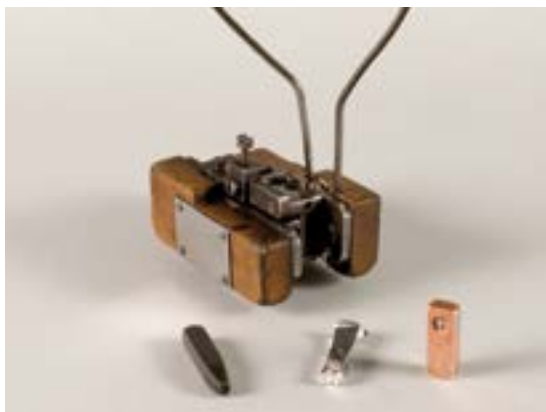
In naming Gutenberg a courtier the archbishop grants him free food and lodging and an annual court dress and releases him from court service. The ageing inventor returns to Mainz in the final years of his life which, according to an old Mainz chronicle, he spends at the Algesheimer Hof.

1468

On February 3, 1468, Johannes Gutenberg dies. He is buried in the Franciscan church in Mainz where many members of his family are also laid to rest.



A pioneering invention



Composing stick, manual caster and moveable type

Prints were made before Gutenberg using woodcuts. In this method paper was placed on the cut and inked woodblock and rubbed in a long and laborious process. The basic idea behind Gutenberg's invention was to reduce a text down to all of its individual parts, such as the small and capital letters, punctuation marks, ligatures and abbreviations traditionally employed by mediaeval scribes. These single elements were cast as reversed **moveable type** in the required number and then arranged to form words, lines and pages. The basic form or prototype for each letter was the punch.

The character was cut into the top of a steel punch, producing a precise relief in mirror image. The relevant stamp or **patrix** was then 'punched' into a square block of softer metal, usually copper, with the blow of a hammer, creating a vertical recess. The resulting **matrix** had to be reworked and straightened out to form a right-angled cube with straight sides. The image, now the right way round, had to have a uniform depth which is why the surface was worked with a file. In order to enable a piece of type to be cast, Gutenberg developed the **manual caster**.





Replica of the book-printing hand press at the Gutenberg-Museum like the one probably used by Gutenberg to print the Bible in Mainz

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Two halves enclose a right-angled casting channel, the end of which is closed by inserting a matrix. After the type had been cast in the manual caster, the casting tip had to be removed. Each character had a predetermined nick, making all letters the same height. The manual caster, the most important part of this invention, ensured that the different letters could be cast and switched over quickly in the required quantity.

The **casting metal** was an alloy of lead, tin and further admixtures which allowed the type to cool down quickly and made sure that it was durable enough to withstand the high pressure on the press. The **printing press**, which compared to the former woodblock rubbing method greatly improved and speeded up the printing process, was a spindle press with special equipment for the effective and even transferral of the printed image from the forme to the paper or parchment.

Gutenberg's masterpiece, the 42-line Bible

The apotheosis of Gutenberg's printing achievements is undoubtedly his 42-line Bible or B 42. The two-volume work with a total of 1,282 pages was created at the pinnacle of his career. Gutenberg had 290 different characters and figures cast for his Bible. The coloured initials and accentuated text were later added by hand by an illuminator and rubricator. Of the 180 copies it is thought that 150 were printed on paper and the remaining 30 on costly parchment. Forty-nine copies still exist, two of which are in the possession of the Gutenberg-Museum. With this Bible, which is still heralded as one of the most beautiful printed books in the world, Gutenberg proved that the *nova forma scribendi* was on an aesthetic par with the medieval manuscript.



One of the two Bibles (B 42) at the Gutenberg-Museum:
the Shuckburgh Bible



Where Gutenberg lived and worked

The Gutenberg Trail

1. Gutenberg-Museum

A 'monument' to the inventor
Liebfrauenplatz 5

Founded to mark the traditionally celebrated 500th anniversary of the birth of the great inventor in 1900 by the burghers of Mainz, the Gutenberg-Museum has become famous worldwide as a special museum dedicated to the art of writing and printing, focussing on the incunabula period in particular. It is distinguished by the fact that various presses, devices and technical equipment are on display alongside the books and other printed works created with their help. The highlight of the exhibition are two original Gutenberg Bibles.

The administrative building, the Haus zum Römischen Kaiser, houses a specialist library, a restoration workshop and the offices of the Gutenberg Society. The historic dwelling was built for merchant Edmund Rokoch in the second half of the 17th century. The late Renaissance edifice with its elaborate façade was the most costly patrician house in the city and served as a model for the later palaces of the nobility. In 1962 a modern exhibition wing was erected. On the occasion of the 600th anniversary of Gutenberg's birth the state capital of Mainz added a museum extension with the support of many committed citizens. The Print Shop (Druckladen), the museum's educational unit, can be found on the ground floor of this building.





| Type monument from 2000

1a. Type monument in honour of Gutenberg *between the cathedral and the Gutenberg-Museum*

Gutenberg's pioneering invention was the method of manual composition using cast moveable type. Type is a cast lead cube which features a letter in reverse on one side. This printing type, made in large quantities, enables any kind of text to be composed in a printing forme which is then used to print a single page.

The nine sandstone cubes of the monument are reminiscent of moveable type. On the sides facing the cathedral they display letters which spell the name "Gutenberg". The chapter initials of the Gutenberg Bible have been worked into this name. The respective reverse sides of the cubes outline the development of our mode of writing in chronological order from Mesopotamian cuneiform script to the modern age.

The type monument was made by stonemasons from the surrounding region and donated to the city of Mainz. In addition to the above information, the cubes also present many more interesting aspects on the art of printing and writing.

| The Hof zum Römischen Kaiser with its Renaissance façade



2. Cathedral cloister

Built 1400 – 1410
Domstraße 3

The cathedral cloister is one of the few buildings in Mainz which dates directly back to the age of Gutenberg. The cross vaults and side chambers, among them the chapter house, now harbour parts of the cathedral and diocesan museum. This owns one of the largest collections of Middle Rhine tapestries from the 15th and early 16th century. With their alluring and brilliant colours and outstanding quality they are among the most magnificent legacies of Mainz in the late Gothic period, providing us with an insight into the lives and religious themes typical of this time.

| [View of the cloister](#)





The „Haus zum Aschaffenberg“ is the oldest half-timbered house in Mainz.

3. Haus zum Aschaffenberg

*Built in the 15th century
Kirschgarten 28*

Oldest half-timbered house in Mainz: The present building consisted originally of two houses. Since the second half of the 16th century, both houses have been unified under one roof. They were renovated in Baroque forms in 1708. The cellar and substantial parts of the half-timbered construction date from the late Middle Age. In 1448 the “Haus zum Aschaffenberg” was mentioned in a document in connection with Johannes Gutenberg. The latter needed a great deal of money for the development of his invention. He received 150 gold Florins in 1448 which his cousin, Arnold Gelthus, had borrowed from two Mainz burghers at an interest rate of 5 % for him. Gelthus stood surety for the loan, stating as collateral security, among other things, rent income from the “Haus zum Aschaffenberg” in Kirschgarten.



4. Haus zum Korb

*Late Gothic patrician house
from the 14th century
Am Brand 6*

One of the few surviving late Gothic patrician houses in Mainz, this building was added to the Humbrechthof in 1476 after the latter came into the possession of the Fust and Schöffer workshop. It was thus part of one of the oldest printing works in Mainz. The house still bears excellent witness to the architecture of Gutenberg's day and age.

Drawing of the Haus zum Korb with the old open arcades on the ground floor. The building now contains a modern goldsmith's.



5. Haus zum Humbrecht

*The “print house”, stair tower from 1584
Schusterstraße 22*

All that is left of the Hof zum Humbrecht printing workshop today is the stair tower from 1584.

Mainz tradition has it that this is where Fust and Gutenberg set up their Bible workshop and produced their first printed Bible, the B 42. The complex was indeed described as a “print house” from 1481 onwards and housed the workshop run by Fust and Schöffer.

| Hof zum Humbrecht: old photograph prior to its destruction



6. Gutenberg statue

*In honour of Gutenberg anno 1837
Gutenbergplatz*

The square was laid out in 1804 as part of the imperial changes to the city carried out on the order of Napoleon. Mainz had been made the capital of the Département Donnersberg and was to be redesigned in a manner befitting the representation thereof. Gutenbergplatz formed the heart of the axis which was to run from Schillerplatz to the Rhine. The project was never finished, however; what was then rue Napoléon and is now Ludwigsstraße only went as far as Höfchen. Nevertheless, right from the outset there were plans to erect a statue of Johannes Gutenberg at this auspicious place in honour of his achievements in France. The monument was only realised much later in 1837 on the initiative of the local citizens. The larger-than-life bronze figure was fashioned by Hermann Wilhelm Bissen from plans drawn up by his teacher, Danish sculptor Berthel Thorvaldsen. It shows the great inventor in the usual manner as an impressive bearded figure clad in fine clothes with a long, open cloak and his Bible and printing type in his hands. The two relief plates in bronze around the sides of the base depicting various activities in the printing workshop were also designed by Thorvaldsen. On the reverse is an inscription which reads:

Johannem Gensfleisch/ De Gutenberg/ Patricium Moguntinum/ Aere Per Totam Europam Collato/ Posuerunt cives/ MDCCCXXXVI. (Johannes Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg/ Zur Ehre der Mainzer Vaterstadt haben dereinst in ganz Europa Bürger gesammelt, um dieses Denkmal zu errichten/ 1836)

In English, this reads as: Johannes Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg/In honour of his native city of Mainz, citizens in the whole of Europe once collected money to erect this monument/1836.

The statue was unveiled in 1837 during the course of celebrations which lasted three days. The monument and base were extensively restored in 2009/2010.



7. Gutenberg's grave

Final resting place

Alte Universitätsstraße 19

This is where a Franciscan monastery once stood in the 15th century. Like many of his family before him, Gutenberg was buried in the monastery church on his death in February 1468. During the 16th century the Jesuit order took over the complex. The university and Jesuit grammar school were accommodated in the Domus Universitatis building directly opposite the monastery, with the two facilities separated from one another by a narrow alleyway. Baroque architect Balthasar Neumann erected the church for the monastic order. It is questionable whether the Jesuits incorporated Gutenberg's grave into their new house of God. The church and monastery were lost during fighting during the recapture of Mainz in 1793 – and with them perhaps any traces of Gutenberg's final resting place which may still have existed at that time.



| Renaissance portal of the old university

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One of the later buildings on the Hof zum Gutenberg site, shown on a woodcut from c. 1890.

8. Hof zum Gutenberg

*The first printing workshop
Schusterstraße/Ecke Christofsstraße 2*

This is the site of the mediaeval Hof zum Gutenberg where the inventor Johannes Gensfleisch, known as Gutenberg, was probably born and spent his childhood and youth. All that reminds us of this building today is a plaque on the wall of Christofsstraße 2, now a pharmacy. The complex consisted of two sets of buildings. It is uncertain whether Gutenberg went back to his parental home on his return from Strasbourg. Local tradition presumes that the Hof zum Gutenberg was where Gutenberg opened his first printing workshop. This is why the inventor's place of birth is also referred to as the "original print shop". Like many other buildings the complex was first baroqueified and later destroyed during the Second World War.



9. Algesheimer Hof

Gutenberg's last home
Hintere Christofsstraße 3

Algesheimer Hof was Gutenberg's last place of residence as stated in a note in the margin of a Mainz chronicle from 1550. This is where he could have spent his final days as a courtier of Mainz archbishop Adolph von Nassau. After being made a courtier in 1465 he was granted free board and lodging. During the 14th century the complex belonged to the Algesheim family. In the 15th century it was greatly enlarged when it was joined with the Zur Bechtermünze and Zum Frauenstein buildings. Following the Diocesan Feud of 1462 the Algesheimer Hof was confiscated from its owners and came into the possession of the archbishop. Adolph, who was resident at the castle in Eltville, later placed the complex at Gutenberg's disposal. In 1477 it was procured by the recently founded university. This building was also completely rebuilt and refurbished during the 18th century. Today, only the entrance with its armorial cartouche is reminiscent of its later owners, the Jesuits.



| View of the Algesheimer Hof following its conversion

10. Church of St Christopher's

*Gutenberg's parish church
built from 1280 to 1330
Christofsstraße/Karmeliterplatz*

It is assumed that Gutenberg was christened in this early Gothic church which dates back to the 9th century. Much of the building was destroyed during the Second World War yet the outer walls are original. The salvaged ruin with its concrete frieze side aisle is now a memorial to the victims of World War II. At the former east end of the church stands an original baptismal font from the 15th century.

St Christopher's prior to its destruction
in the Second World War



10 a. Late Gothic baptismal font

15th century
St. Christoph

The font dates back to Gutenberg's lifetime yet the results of the most recent restoration project have not been able to confirm the hypothesis that this was Gutenberg's original place of baptism. The beautifully worked font is, however, a fine example of artistic Gothic masonry.

Opening times

Tuesday and Thursday: 7 pm
and on the 1st and 3rd Sunday
in the month: 5 pm.

St Christopher's is now a memorial
to all victims of war and violence.





Copper engraving of Gutenberg
by André Thevet from 1584

Gutenberg images and monuments in Mainz

Even though there are many effigies of Johannes Gutenberg, we do not know what he actually looked like. No contemporary images have survived; most of the likenesses we have of him are based on an ideal created posthumously. The portrait in question is a copper engraving published in André Thevet's "Les Vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres" in Paris in 1584. Gutenberg is depicted as an older man with a serious expression, donned in elaborate clothing and a hat trimmed with fur. He has a long, forked beard and holds a punch and a tin with letters engraved or scratched onto it. These attributes show that he is a printer. The style of his clothes is in keeping with the time at which Thevet's work was published. Researchers are agreed that patricians in Gutenberg's day and age did not cultivate beards. From this wealth of images just a few are selected here which can be viewed on the Gutenberg Trail.



Gutenberg statue

*Entrance to the Haus zum Römischen Kaiser, Gutenberg-Museum
Liebfrauenplatz 5*

This 1.60-metre-high sandstone figure used to stand in the Hof zum Gutenberg gardens. It was created by Joseph Franz Scholl in 1827 at the behest of the Casino-Gesellschaft, a reading society. This is the earliest statue of the inventor.

| Gutenberg statue by Joseph Franz Scholl



Aaltonen bronze bust

*Museum entrance
on Liebfrauenplatz 5*

Professor Wäinö Aaltonen created this bust in 1962, presenting it as a gift to celebrate the opening of the new museum building in the same year. The bust is not intended to be a natural likeness but is instead an interpretation of the inventor Johannes Gutenberg. Gazing earnestly into the distance, Gutenberg wears a hat shaped like a helmet and has a short beard. His heavy brow makes him appear extremely intellectual and determined.

| Bronze bust of Gutenberg by Wäinö Aaltonen





| Gutenberg sculpture by Karlheinz Oswald

Gutenberg sculpture

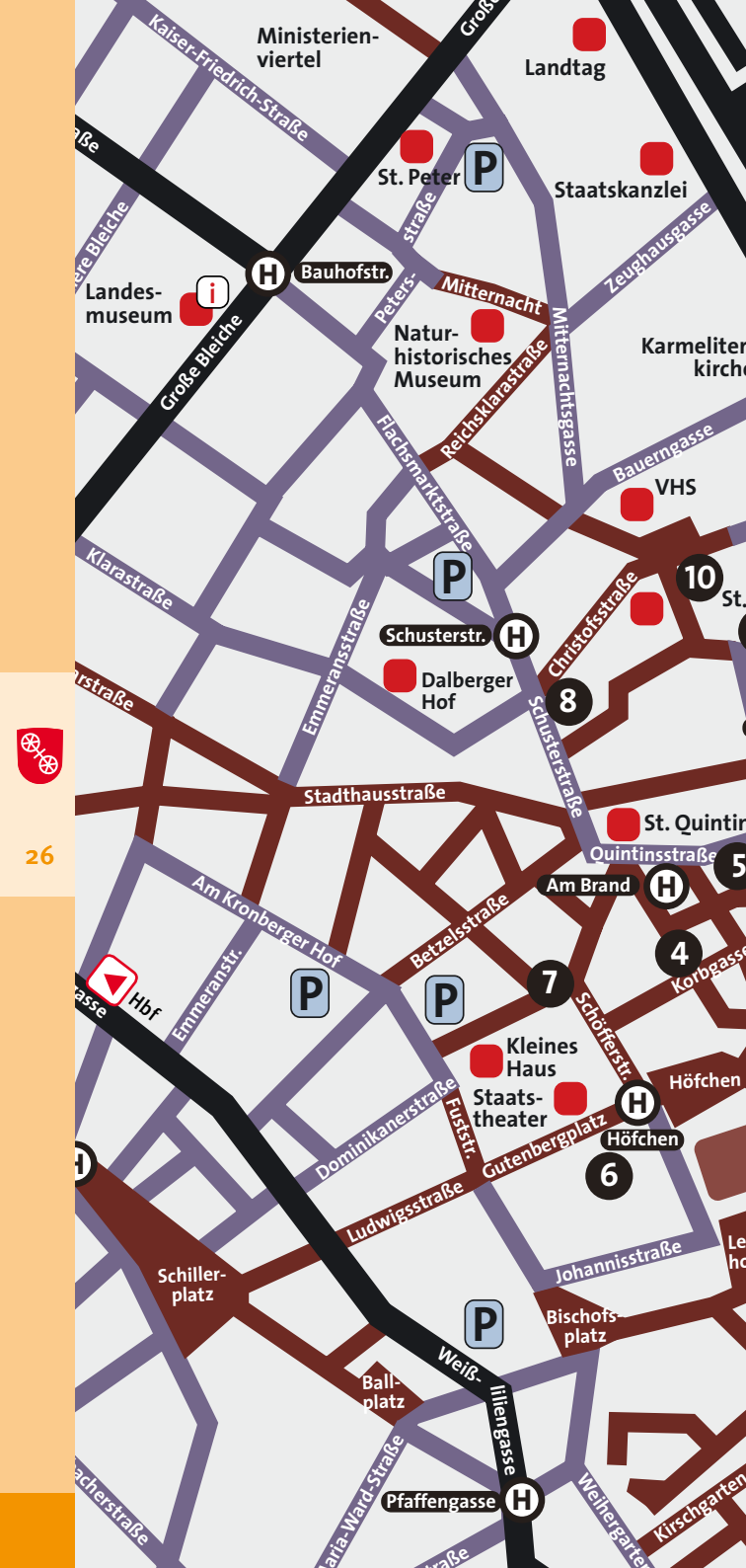
Karlheinz Oswald

Karmeliterplatz/Christofsgässchen

This life-size figure of Gutenberg, created by Mainz artist Karlheinz Oswald, was unveiled in 2001. It has been erected close to St Christopher's Church, just a few metres from Gutenberg's places of birth and death. The inventor stands on a large base plate in relief and is surrounded by several printed sheets in various guises: laid out flat, rolled and folded. The relief on the base shows signs of work and a number of freehand signatures. The technical details suggest the lever on a printing press.

Gutenberg himself is shown in action as a printer at work, the figure dynamic and tensed. The entire ensemble has been cast in iron, giving the monument a patina of rust instead of a brilliant shine.





Ministerien-
viertel

Landtag

St. Peter

Staatskanzlei

Landes-
museum

Bauhofstr.

Natur-
historisches
Museum

Karmeliter
kirche

VHS

Schusterstr.

Dalberger
Hof

St. Quintin

Quintinsstraße

Am Brand

Kleines
Haus

Staatstheater

Höfchen

Höfchen

Schiller-
platz

Bischofs-
platz

Ball-
platz

Pfaffengasse

Weinergarten

Kirschgarten





The Gutenberg Trail

The sites, buildings and monuments listed below can be found on the Gutenberg Trail which explores the places where Johannes Gutenberg lived and worked.

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Tourist Service Center Mainz



bus stops/trams



parking



main road



side road



pedestrian precinct



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GUTENBERG



STIFTUNG





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WISSEN
IM
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