

A History of Learning to Write

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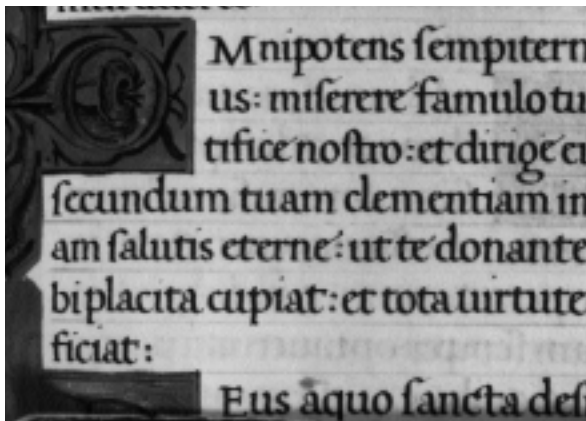
WE STAND ON THE EDGE OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE in the way handwriting is understood. Over the last half-century our knowledge of its history has developed in detail but not in perspective; new areas of scholarship¹ and technology are now changing that. Recent studies of the history of reading have opened our eyes to the sheer variety of ways in which we read; privately or in public, skimming, reflectively, slowly and repeatedly; in church, kitchen, library, train or bed. People have not always read the same way; reading has a history.² Handwriting, too, has a history and is practised in an equally rich diversity of ways. We write differently when we copy notes for revision or annotate the margins of a report, the handwriting on our telephone pad is different from that in a letter of sympathy or on a birthday card, the draft of a poem or the cheque written at the supermarket checkout is yet again different from the 'printing' on our tax return. Over our lifetime our different writings also continue to change. Most literature on handwriting treats it as an undifferentiated phenomenon. In *Handwriting: Everyone's Art* we want to look at this area afresh, not proclaiming allegiance to this or that system but simply focusing attention on what is actually already there.

This essay seeks to explore the diversity of handwriting practices by concentrating on just one issue, namely how handwriting has been taught. This focus reveals handwriting to be one of the areas where our presence to ourselves (self-identity rather than personality) is simultaneously forged and disclosed as we conform to or diverge from cultural models and work with body and mind in an integrated or disassociated way.³

I begin with a brief background account of the origins of our present letterforms and how they arrived in England. This story has its starting point in Renaissance Italy; the Gothic hands of the Middle Ages, their origins in the twelfth century and the Anglo-Saxon, early European and late Roman cursives that came before them are a subject in their own right. The focus here is on the sixteenth century, an extraordinary period in which all our contemporary concerns about handwriting have their roots. Study of the intervening five centuries challenges the view that there is nothing more to be said than to list writing masters and convey a vague feeling that it was downhill all the way. In fact it was. An understanding of the origins of our present day scripts helps us to see that the sub-text underlying most discussions on handwriting is our changing definitions of what it is to be human. This may account for some of the heat that discussion of handwriting often generates.

WRITING FROM ITALY

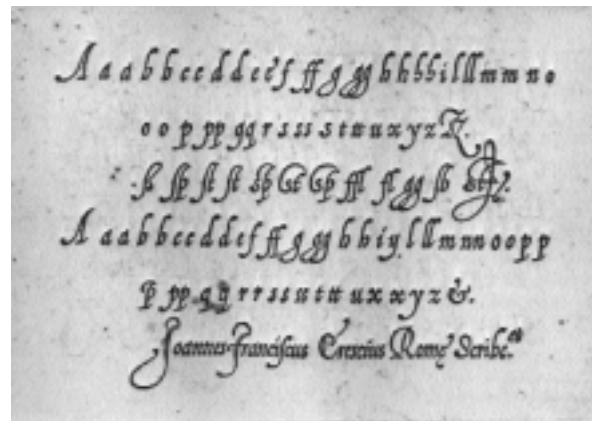
The handwriting we use today is rooted in the scripts associated with the Italian Renaissance. These scripts can be divided generically into the humanistic book-hand which provided our roman lower-case letters and italic, a cursive hand which became the source of our joined-up writing; both evolved in the first few decades of the fifteenth century amongst a circle of scholars based in Florence. The changes that led to these developments had started much earlier in the universities of northern Italy when individuals were reawakening to a current of vitality in the surviving literature of the Roman world. This would be the motivating force of the Renaissance. One scholar in



2 Humanistic minuscule. British Library Add. Ms 50002. Italy, last decade of the fifteenth century [By permission of the British Library]

particular, Petrarch (1304–74), living far from his native Florence, at the papal court in Avignon, gave force to this movement through his imaginative recreations of the classical world. Combining a passionate idealism with careful scholarship he reanimated the cultural legacy of the ancient world and passed this enthusiasm on to a new generation of followers amongst whom was Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Chancellor of Florence. Salutati was a great collector of rediscovered classical works. It was he who encouraged his copyists to experiment with clearer forms of lettering, to ensure accurate and accessible texts. His copyists, principally Poggio Bracciolini, looked for their inspiration to northern Italian writing of the early twelfth century when letterforms, based upon Caroline minuscule, were open and round, unlike later compressed and abbreviated Gothic writing. The letters that Poggio developed, known to us today as humanistic minuscule (fig. 1), were the emblems of modernity when printing was introduced to Italy in the mid-fifteenth century. In order to compete with contemporary scribes printers adopted these letterforms for the Italian market.⁴

The cursive writing associated with the Italian humanists, italic, was probably the invention of Niccolò Niccoli, another Florentine scholar in the circle of Salutati and Poggio. He combined the open letters of humanistic minuscule with the diagonal joining stroke used in running forms of Gothic writing. Popularised amongst scribes and scholars in Florence, this new hand was adopted by the papal chancery in Rome and became the handwriting of



3 GF Cresci, Writing manual. Rome 1560

choice for those who wished to associate themselves with the new spirit in scholarship and the arts that spread from northern Italy. The hand was probably first introduced to Britain by Peter Carmelianus, Latin Secretary (Foreign Secretary) to Henry VII. Edward VI and Elizabeth I both wrote the hand, and Cambridge University seems to have had many scholars who experimented with the style.

In 1522, in Rome, the first printed writing instruction manual was published by Ludovico degli Arrighi, a scribe working in the papal chancery. Other manuals for a specialist audience (largely secretaries) followed of which the most significant were the 1524 writing book of the Venetian scribe Tagliente and Giovanni Battista Palatino's *Libro Nuovo d'imparare a scrivere tutte sorte lettere antiche e moderne di tutte nationi*, first printed in 1540. Palatino's book is interesting for what it tells us about the ordinary writing of that time. Most documents in the sixteenth century were still written in varieties of Gothic cursive and Palatino illustrates examples of such hands from Milan, Rome, Venice, Florence, Sienna and Genoa. In fact almost every great commercial centre or large organisation such as the papal writing office had developed its own variety of writing. Writing was not as homogeneous as it is today and there were many different styles in use concurrently.

With hindsight, we can see that the most influential manuals of the sixteenth century were those produced by Giovanni Francesco Cresci, a scribe in the Vatican Library (fig. 2). He criticised the work of earlier masters as too slow and deliberate, 'a thing of angles and

points' with narrow letters that were difficult to join with diagonal ligatures. He introduced a rounder form, easier ligatures and an increased slope which made the script faster to write. This set the pattern for the 'Italian' hand that would be influential throughout Europe during the commercial expansion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

THE ITALIAN HAND COMES TO ENGLAND

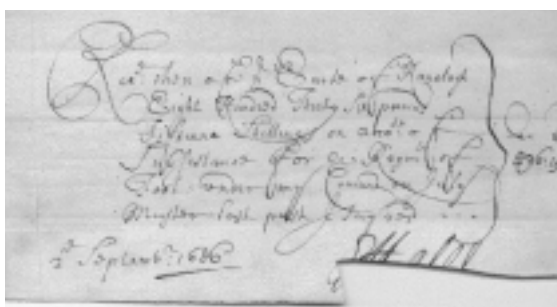
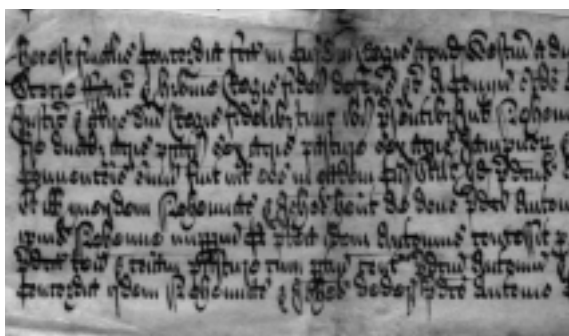
The first writing manual printed in England *A Booke Containing Divers Sortes of Hands* by Jean de Beuchesne and John Baildon was published in 1570. Other books followed including *The Pens Excellencie* (1618) by Martin Billingsley, writing tutor to the future Charles I, Edward Cocker's *The Pen's Trascendencie* (1657), John Ayres's *A Tutor to Penmanship* (1698) and George Bickham's *The Universal Penman* (1743)⁵. Over the next three centuries these books and others led to variations on Italian scripts replacing the system of Gothic and secretary hands which had developed in England from the twelfth century onwards; but for several centuries these systems existed side by side (figs. 3 & 4). In the 1500s only the nobility and their secretaries along with university academics wrote italic. By the early seventeenth century the Italian hand had developed in two directions: a narrow, sloped 'roman' considered appropriate for women's writing and a stripped-down version suitable for commerce. The later style, eventually known as English round hand, was initially modified from the Italian version by French and Dutch writing masters such as Lucas Materot (active 1608), Louis Barbedor (1589–1670) and Jan van den Velde (1569–1623), all of whom were admired by Samuel Pepys who, incidentally, was a keen follower of writing masters and collector of their work. It seems likely that it was through Dutch traders, the most successful merchant class of the first half of the seventeenth century, that this kind of writing came to influence ordinary correspondence in England, just as it was through English traders that round hand would eventually become popularised through most of the rest of Europe and in the colonies.

WRITING AND SOCIETY

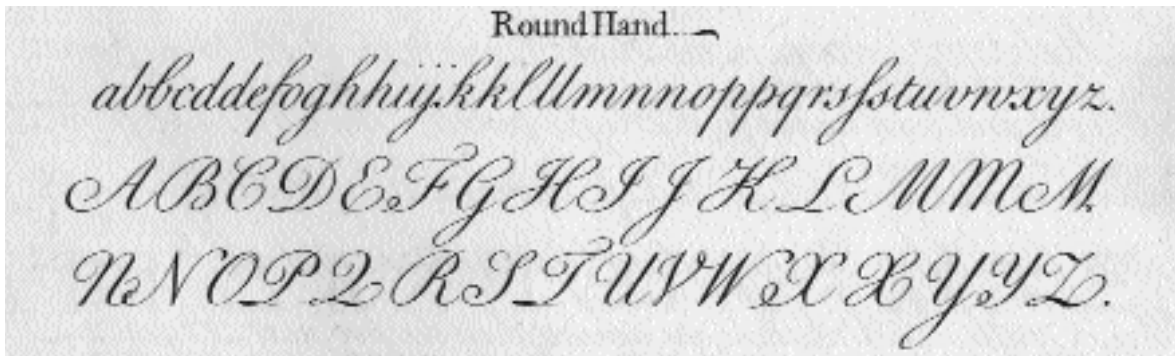
Although it would be possible to confine an account of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century hand-

writing to a list of writing masters and their books, this would obscure very real differences in the way it was understood and practised. Reading and writing were taught separately; many people were taught to read but not everybody went on to write. Writing was taught on a need-to-know rather than a universal basis. So the well-born, doctors, clergymen, businessmen, lawyers, book-keepers, and their clerks and secretaries learned to write. Some evidently taught themselves from manuals but usually students enrolled in a writing master's academy for day or evening classes.

Learning to write was a complex business requiring the mastery of several hands and the avoidance of other scripts as inappropriate for one's social station, profession or gender. The counting house and commercial world stressed hands that were round, simple and clear (fig 5); a legal clerk would have to master a variety of court, chancery and engrossing hands, and men of leisure affected a distinguishing carelessness in their writing. Women were taught a different hand to men, a narrow, sloping hand (fig. 6) often regarded merely as an accomplishment, a skill for the leisured, like needlework or dancing. This practice continued into the nineteenth century. Handwriting was withheld



4 TOP Court hand, England, early seventeenth century [Private collection]
5 BOTTOM Letter of receipt in 'Italian' hand, English 1686 [EJF Collection]



altogether from some sections of the population. Society in seventeenth century England was stratified by hierarchies of power and status. The handwriting people were taught was part of the way these boundaries were marked and maintained with tell-tale signs that shaped the kinds of messages they could write and the way in which their communications would be read. The complexity of writing styles meant that readers faced difficulties; it was not unheard of, even as late as the early nineteenth century, for someone to consider themselves a reader of books but not of handwriting. Legal scripts were so obscure they were considered inaccessible to all but members of the profession themselves and several attempts were made during the Commonwealth and the 1730s to reduce the number of hands used. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries writing was seen far less as a means of self-expression, but rather as an accomplishment appropriate to a particular milieu or station in society.

The craft of handwriting required a wide range of

skills. The scribe used quill pens that were individually cut and resharpened as they wore down. Writers would have to make their own ink and lined paper. The paper or parchment would be prepared beforehand with pounce or gum sandarac – powders that gave the pen grip on the page and sharpness of line. There were many rules about pagination and document layout to be absorbed. Letters were folded and sealed with wax or wafers, and there were no pre-prepared envelopes or universal postage system.

THE MARK OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Printing had been invented in the mid-fifteenth century but its use did not become generally widespread until much later than is generally appreciated. In Britain, Acts of Parliament had restricted printing to the City of London and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge until the last decade of the seventeenth century. It was only in the early decades of the eighteenth century that printing spread to the regional



5 TOP 'Round Hand' and 6 БОТТОМ 'Italian Hand' from George Bickham's *The Universal Penman* (1st ed. 1743)

towns of Britain. All business was transacted through handwritten documents and much more literature than we once thought was produced in manuscript. Most pamphlets of a satirical, political or religious nature were issued as handwritten copies, sometimes in editions of many hundreds. Some forms of literature gained in prestige by being published only in manuscript, poetry for example. John Donne's work was circulated principally in handwritten editions during his lifetime.⁶ Another substantial area of scribal publication was the news sheets filled with London news and gossip subscribed to by out-of-town gentlemen. It was only from the 1730s onwards when laws regulating the location and number of printing presses were eased that scribal publication diminished and a distinctive print culture emerged.

As print became more popular links between it and the pen were lessened. So, for instance, whilst Joseph Moxon in his *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* (1683–4) argues that the 'true shape of letters' should approximate geometric forms 'as modified by the course and Progress of the Pen', the French Royal Commission of 1692 recommended a reform of type design without reference to the pen; their new design was based on an analytical grid of 2,304 squares. In the public perception, print eventually came to stand for the mechanical, regular and impersonal. Handwriting, on the contrary, began to be defined as we know it today as personal, authentic and individual. It was no longer simply the appurtenance of a class or profession.

This trend to identify handwriting with the individual grew through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It would lead to the 'science' of graphology, the cult of the autograph and its use as proof of identity before the law.⁷ In handwriting education it resulted in a succession of changing approaches as the nature of the individual was understood differently over time.

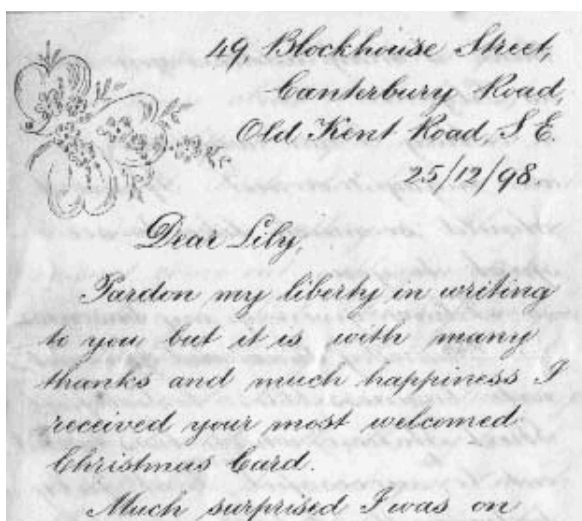
CHARACTER FORMATION

In 1714 John Clark, an English writing master expected his student to get 'an exact notion, or idea of a good letter by frequent and nice Observation of a Correct Copy'. In other words, learning to write was conceived as a largely passive process of copying an appropriate

model. Writing manuals presented ideal alphabets and model sentences that the student imitated on blank sheets of paper. This was typical of the methods used until the late eighteenth century. But it can be contrasted with the John Jenkins manual of 1791 which shows letters broken down into component parts; the alphabet is reduced to as few as six pen strokes. The student is expected not only to learn the letter shapes but also to learn by heart a catechism of letter formation recited in response to the teacher's questions. An oral and analytical element is creeping into the learning process. This would become normal practice in the nineteenth century when in 1842 the English Committee of the Council on Education recommended that Charity Schools adopt a system developed by M. Mulhauser, a schools inspector in Geneva. His system incorporated another development typical of the period. The letters were formed by command with the teacher calling out letter elements and the students simultaneously writing them down on the page; the letters mysteriously appeared out of the assembled elements. This was known as 'handwriting drill'. The pen was even picked up and dipped into ink by the whole class on shouted commands or the beat of a classroom metronome.

Such exercises were seen as character building. A sample of someone's script became a recommendation of industry and self-discipline. As the Victorians began to stress the moral nature of the individual, handwriting came to be viewed literally as a process of character formation. Writing was presented as an act of will, the mind extending control over the base and brutal body, resulting in 'command of hand'.

In America Spencerian script, based on the rhythmic forms seen in nature,⁸ and its successor the Palmer method,⁹ introduced detailed prescriptions for 'correct' posture and penhold and 'muscular' training movements. Palmer went so far as to advocate a rigid arm supported on the surface only by the little finger. All finger movement was prohibited, gestures came from the shoulder, left-handedness was rigorously discouraged.¹⁰ Although the language used to teach this method was one of freedom and movement the reality was that the writer was deprived of any sensory feedback from the writing surface and was required to produce a rigid limb whose sweeping gestures could



7 Letter in Victorian copperplate writing. London, Christmas Day 1898

[EIF Collection]

not in fact generate clear or controlled forms. The body was treated as a machine and its movements automated. Palmer writing depended on a series of seemingly endless movement drills.

The promotion of ideas such as mind over body reflecting changing views of the individual, were not the only pressures on the evolution of script. We have already seen how the rise of print culture in the eighteenth century had effected the way handwriting was understood. New technology introduced during the nineteenth century had a similar impact.

VICTORIAN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY

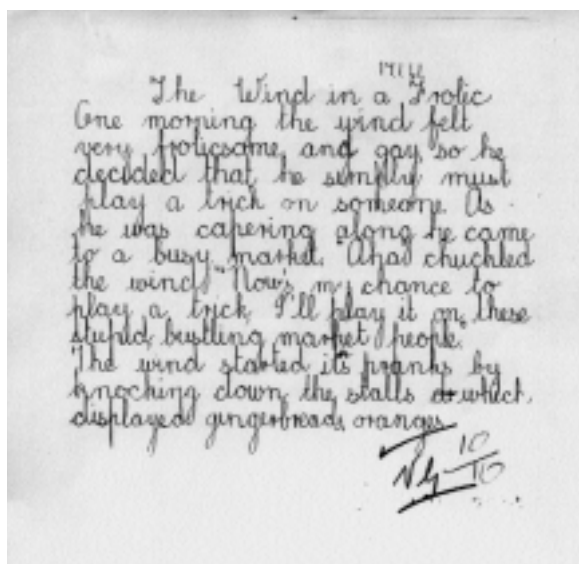
With the development of the railways, the telegraph and the postal system and consequent expansion of business, from around the second third of the nineteenth century documentation grew enormously. This brought with it pressures to find new ways to copy and store the mountains of paperwork.¹¹

By the last half of the nineteenth century the most common way of copying outgoing correspondence was the press book. Letters were written in special aniline inks that took time to dry. The letter was placed in a book of tissue paper and pressed onto the layer of tissue that lay above it. The inked impression could be read right way round through the other side of the semi-transparent tissue. Another copying method was to write in aniline inks onto paper which was then laid down on a gel to which the ink was transferred

and from which prints could be taken. The exaggerated thick and thin shading and steep slant which had developed by this time in traditional English round hand was unsuitable for these and other copying methods as some strokes were too thin to reproduce well and others filled in (fig. 7). H. L. Vere Foster, with the patronage of Palmerston, the Home Secretary, promoted a new model of writing, reverting to the wider letter body proportions of eighteenth century hands and eliminating the contrast between thick and thin strokes. The Vere Foster Civil Service hand (fig. 8)¹² was the most frequently taught writing in British schools from the 1880s until well into the 1950s.¹³

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In the early 1900s a number of other influences shifted 'expert' perceptions of handwriting. Evolutionary theory was describing humans as organisms subject to development; new sciences were emphasising the material basis of created things, in our case the body, its bones, muscles and nerves; simultaneously, psychology was explaining human consciousness as a multi-levelled phenomenon whose life was expressed not only in the mind but through the whole psychophysical complex. Academics seized on these theories to argue for a number of changes in handwriting



8 Vere Foster writing. Child aged ten, 1940

education. In America they criticised Palmer for importing methods of instruction appropriate to a business school into a classroom of children whose cognitive, perceptual and motor skills were not yet fully developed. They recommended that children be allowed to write without ruled lines, in larger shapes and using pencil or chalk rather than ink pens. They began to measure writing for individual differences. In 1909 E.L. Thorndyke of Columbia University published a handwriting scale, the first of many which set out a method for grading samples of script. This emphasis on measurement was part of a wider movement that saw the introduction of I.Q. and other quantitative tests for the assessment of both pupil and teacher. Education, like business, was developing systematic management practices.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRINT-SCRIPT

At the beginning of the twentieth century one movement reconceptualised writing in a new way. This was the result of innovative technology and its effects interacting with a wider movement for social reform. It is the effects of this interaction that we in Britain have inherited today. By the 1870s typewriters had been invented. These machines revolutionised business correspondence. Twenty-seven words a minute was the typical handwriting speed at that time, but after the development of touch-typing in the 1880s typewriters were attaining speeds in competitions of one hundred and twenty words a minute. Using carbon paper, typewriters could make up to ten copies of a letter at a time. Not surprisingly, most official work became typewritten.

Since the late sixteenth century one of the underlying justifications for learning to write had been that it enabled the student to participate in business. Now, this fundamental assumption was being gradually undermined. Once the link with commerce was broken, handwriting was once again open to redefinition. The first half of the twentieth century saw a variety of new and sometimes competing movements in handwriting education: the introduction of print-script, a revival of italic and an emphasis on creative writing. But they all shared one characteristic, an assertion of the connection between handwriting and authorship, book culture and cultural history. Once

the association with business was lost handwriting was redefined in terms of its affinity with the arts and literature. The case of print-script illustrates this.

In 1914 the London County Council introduced the writing of simplified letters for children into its schools, as a result of a long process of debate involving a number of contributors. The medical profession asserted that sloped writing was bad for posture and eyesight and roman letters might be more suitable. The calligrapher Edward Johnston suggested an evolutionary approach to writing which traced the historical development of forms eventually leading to what he called a running round hand which actually looks very like a cursive italic.¹⁴ The LCC's 1914 proposal gave us what we know today as print-script. In the United States, to which it was introduced in 1922, it was known as 'manuscript writing'. Soon, in both countries, print-script was replacing other methods of teaching writing in the early school years.

As originally conceived, the movement towards print-script had a wide sweep. Like the educational psychologists, the reformers rejected the copybook methods of business schools, but their logic was different. It was not simply that they wanted to adjust for the limitations of a child's motor development but rather that they were reconceptualising writing as a tool for individual expression. It was *writing* rather than *handwriting* that was important. Instead of handwriting drill attention was focused upon natural situations for written expression. These might include making signs and cards, recording lunch orders or ordering seeds for the classroom window box, keeping diaries or weather journals. Handwriting was being learned in the context of its use. Print-script, they argued, broke down the barrier to self-expression because it enabled even young children to write meaningful words legibly from the beginning. It also broke down the barrier between reading and writing by abolishing the difference between the letterforms used by each. Reading and writing could be taught in parallel for the first time. The traditional criteria for assessing handwriting such as speed and neatness were superseded by another, the degree to which a hand enabled self-expression from the earliest years. Problems came when pupils moved on to writing a cursive hand. The cursive forms chosen in both

Britain and the United States for the first half of the twentieth century were the looped cursive of the Palmer and Vere Foster methods with complex capitals and unusual letterforms like the open *p* and knotted *f*. There was no developmental logic between these earlier and later hands. A much better basis for the transition would have been Johnston's suggestion of a linked, sloped and slightly compressed version of print-script, a running round hand as he has called it. In effect this is what Marion Richardson (with advice from Johnston and Fairbank) endeavoured to produce in her 1937 *Dudley Writing Cards* (fig. 9). Many other systems have followed, with the Nelson scheme and Ruth Fagg's 'everyday handwriting' among the more notable.

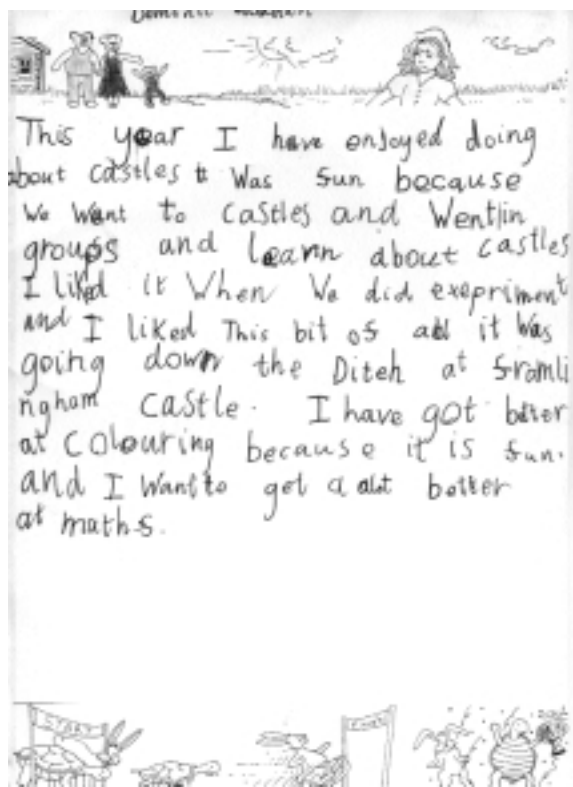
Historically, of course, we already have an example of a roman lower-case letterform, similar in proportion

to print-script, with a history of having been adapted for everyday handwriting: the form is the root form for the whole history which we have laid out above, the many variations on 'Italian hands' or italic. As John Nash discusses elsewhere in this book, in the middle part of the twentieth century a number of educationalists developed schemes based upon this letter. They fall into two categories according to their starting point. Some take early- to mid-sixteenth-century work as their model. This can give, as Cresci pointed out very early on, a rather angular and narrow letter which is hard to join when children are in the early stages of learning to write. Others have looked at more expanded and cursive forms. Such shapes lie behind Irene Wellington's *Copy Books*¹⁵ and the 'simple modern hand' of her student Tom Gourdie.¹⁶ These forms are probably closest to the shapes Johnston originally envisaged.¹⁷

REUNITING DESIGNING AND MAKING

In Britain the force that underlay the redefinition of handwriting in terms of authorship and book culture was the Arts and Crafts movement. Highly sceptical of the social and material consequences of the way industrialisation had developed in Britain, its leaders argued that factory production methods had separated the maker from the designer, resulting in both a joyless worker with no real responsibility and bad design unrelated to working methods or conditions of use.¹⁷ In print culture, so the argument ran, the original designer-maker was the scribe; the solution should then be that a reform of print required the revival of calligraphy. Both the private press movement, a revived interest in fine printing, and the twentieth century calligraphic revival sprang from these roots.

These reformers painted a history of handwriting in similar terms to that of designing and making. Engraved 'copperplate' copy books had distorted good letterforms producing shapes that could not in fact be made easily with a pen. The need, then, was for direct representations of real writing and in the interests of reuniting print and written culture the reformers advocated the use of the edged pen which produced a natural thick and thin shading without the elaborate pressure/release movements



9 Print-script. Child aged six, 1996

of copperplate writing. In origin, however, we see this critique was not simply one of style, as it seems later to have become, but part of a wider movement for radical social and educational reform. Print-script was part of this reform. It eliminated rhythmical writing exercises that were abstracted from the context of use and reunited designing and making even in learning how to write. Children were to write real things; from the earliest days the purpose and power of the written word were to be self-evident.

CONCLUSION

So where are we now? What are the facts of our own time and situation? In the last decades of the twentieth century computers have developed to the point where they are no longer simply calculating devices; connected to screens and printers and graphics software they have become new writing tools in the lineage of the quill pen and the typewriter. Our ordinary writing tools have changed too. In the middle of the last century, coinciding with the development of glazed paper, steel nibs replaced the quill, but our century has seen even more radical innovation with the invention of ballpoint and fibre-tipped pens. In just the last year in Britain we have seen a government 'Literacy Hour' introduced into schools. In some areas teachers are now being encouraged to abandon print-script and teach joined-up writing from the start.

What does our history of handwriting have to say about these developments? Some things are clear. The introduction of new technology will change our attitude to handwriting. Handwriting has been defined in relation to literature, but now computers are invading that territory, for they are certainly tools of authorship and allied to print and book culture in obvious ways – such as the typefaces they use.

Perhaps the special kind of attention and sustained focus that handwriting involves will become its strength. Free from other pressures it will be seen as a way in which we can bring our attention to bear carefully upon things; it provides an opportunity for focused expression as well as for the personal and intimate in an electronic world that is increasingly public and interconnected. Certainly, as we come to understand the diversity of ways in which we use handwriting, the discussion of whether or not it will disappear will become more grounded. Paper and

pen are useful because they are instantly accessible, robust, inexpensive. They are also transportable into all the extraordinary situations into which our bodies venture. There are parts of the world that computers will take many generations to reach in an affordable and culturally useful form. Handwriting is here to stay.

In this country government intervention in handwriting at a national level is new. The nature of the intervention is revealing. The history of handwriting education shows that this has been one of the areas where a society's anxiety about control versus freedom has found a focus. During this century as never before our society has recognised the autonomy and rights of children, but we are clearly ambivalent about what this newly acknowledged individuality might entail. The Literacy Hour illustrates this. It tries to tackle a problem but avoids engaging with the particular way it presents itself, which is always in terms of an individual. Its unit of measurement is time spent teaching rather than individual need addressed and so perhaps it discounts such things as the attention span of different ages of children, or changes in approach that might be necessary from child to child (the problem of left- or right-handedness, for instance). It could be seen as a hands-off approach for a hands-on problem.

Whilst the Literacy Hour may be one way we are addressing a feeling that a younger generation is somehow getting away from us, the paradox is that in their own terms the young are very literate. They are often the experts within a household in the new technologies of literacy – computers, and for the first time in the history of any culture youth has evolved its own vigorous vocabulary of written forms in graffiti (fig. 11). People who have not engaged with graffiti artists might not be aware of how wide is their knowledge of print and even calligraphic culture; and their sense of community is international.

For the individual teacher trying to find a way through the many handwriting schemes on offer it must be confusing, but if you are looking for guidance the history of writing says look within, ask yourself what you believe it means to be human and examine the assumptions that lie behind the scheme on offer. What is it that you want pupils to learn about the human condition and through what channels? This or

10 Graffiti. San Francisco, 1996

that scheme may argue it is faster or more legible, but faster for what? Just what are we teaching handwriting for and do our instruction methods convey this purpose?

Handwriting has changed so much over time and is used in so many different ways that we should be

sceptical of any claims to definitive authority. It is an art with all the richness and diversity of use that our lives can call forth from any art. It is one of the arts of everyday life and it really can be an art for everyone.

NOTES

1 See, for instance H. Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford 1993. Love argues that print culture developed much more slowly than was once thought and that scribal publication continued well into the eighteenth century.

2 See A. Manguel, *A History of Reading*, London 1997.

3 See T. P. Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, New Haven 1996. I am indebted to Thornton's book for this perception and thereby for much of the discussion of late seventeenth-century attitudes to writing and of physical constraint in nineteenth-century schemes. My discussion of twentieth-century developments pursues one of her basic arguments but not in a way that she has chosen to pursue herself.

4 For this history see L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 3rd ed., Oxford 1990.

5 The dates given here are for the first known editions of the work. Many of these books were continuously re-issued, with variations. Edmund Coker, for instance, is the author of up to twenty works on penmanship and this is not untypical.

6 H. Love op. cit.

7 In 1683 Algernon Sidney argued in his trial for treason that 'The similitude of hands is nothing, we know that bonds will be counterfeited, so that no man shall know his own hand'. Handwriting was not admissible as evidence. The only proof that a person had written a particular document was a witness who had seen it being written. By 1726 however Geoffrey Gilbert, a legal scholar, was arguing that everyone's handwriting like everyone's face is unique and the identification of a script is comparable with the identification of an individual. See Thornton, op. cit., p.34.

8 Platt Rogers Spencer (1800–64); in the hands of his sons the Spencerian empire eventually spread to a chain of business colleges

and its text books were marketed to forty-two states. The system reduced writing to a number of basic elements which Spencer claimed could be found in nature thus taking penmanship 'quite out of the circle of arts merely mechanical' providing it with 'dignity as an intellectual pursuit'.

9 A.N. Palmer (1860–1927). Palmer simplified the Spencerian system, reducing flourishes and writing in a strict monoline. He too built up a substantial business supplying pens and copy books and paper and teaching by correspondence. His method dominated the American education system in the first half of the twentieth century.

10 The method originated with the London writing master Joseph Carstairs, and was adopted by the Bostonian Benjamin Foster in 1829 from whom it came to Spencer.

11 For discussion of the development of business documentation I am indebted to J. Yates, *Control through Communication*, Baltimore 1989.

12 The example illustrated here is by Lindsay Castell's mother, Ruth Castell (née Chandler).

13 For a short introduction to handwriting in Britain during the Victorian period see the exhibition catalogue *Writing by Rote* with an introduction by V. H. Crellin, University of Reading 1982.

14 See E. Johnston, *Lessons in Formal Writing*, ed. H. Child & J. Howes, London 1986, p.222.

15 I. Wellington, *The Irene Wellington Copy Book*, 4 parts, London 1957.

16 T. Gourdie, *The Simple Modern Hand*, London 1965.

17 See note 8 above.

18 See the preface by W. R. Lethaby to E. Johnston, *Writing & Illuminating, and Lettering*, London 1906; 32nd impression 1994.