ISSN 1468 9537

Writing Matters

A person who
never made
a mistake
never tried
anything new

Issue 85 · Summer 2021

The Journal of
The Society for Italic Handwriting

A Word from the Chair:
Foster Neville

I was sorry to hear from our president, Ewan Clayton, of the death of David Nicholls, CB CMG.

This Society meant a great deal to David; what it meant to him he demonstrated by his long commitment to it, first as chairman (1987-1996) and then as a very active vice-president.

I encountered David's name long before I encountered the man. I came to the Society in the late 1990s and had acquired a few old *Journals* in advance of joining. David seemed to have presided over the Society at a very interesting time from the evidence of these back issues (*The Icelandic Project*, Humphrey Lyttleton as president, handwriting competitions, SIH lectures and advertisements for Osmiroid pens; already these things are beginning to sound like 'cocoa and twist').

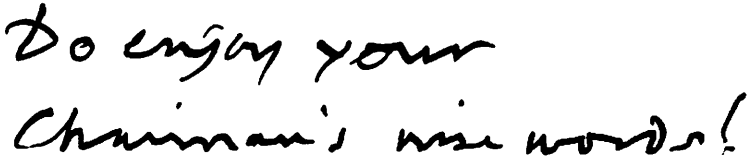
Later, when I joined the executive committee, I found David very generous with his time and expertise. He was a real friend to me, not only in terms of the Society (and as chairman, with Graham's passing, I did need a former chairman I could go to for advice) but also in my life beyond the Society. He helped me in my career as a curator, he even dutifully read through and advised on two children's books I'd written. When I got my first job in London, David arrived at the gallery to treat me to a drink in the Salisbury pub in nearby St Martin's Lane. I bought a Salisbury t-shirt, which I still have. I remember David's deep laugh, also the suit with suede shoes. At this point I believe he'd already 'retired' a number of times.

An immediate source of common ground for David and myself was that both of us were left-handers; we struggled to replicate the handwriting which we studied and admired and which had of course been produced almost entirely by right-handed people. He was modest about his own distinctive hand, generous towards mine.

As one would expect of a former chairman of the Society he knew what he was looking at; he knew what he was trying to achieve too. I was honoured a few years ago when he contacted me for advice on pens; I wish now I'd asked him about his own explorations and discoveries in that line, as well as in many others.

One of the last notes I had from David (reproduced below) said simply: 'Do enjoy your chairman's wise words!' No 'wise words' this time David, only gratitude for a friendship and appreciation of a sustained service to the cause of Italic handwriting.

Our thoughts are with his widow Margaret and family.



Notes from the Secretary: Nick the Nibs

SAD NEWS

As you will have read in Foster's *Word from the Chair*, David Nicholls, CB, CMG, our ex-chairman and latterly vice president, died on 15 May 2021. Sadly, I don't have a substantial example of his hand to show you since, as he explained in one of his first letters to me: "I word process my correspondence for speed and for record purposes! (Though my hand is poor, in any case)". Here are two examples I have taken from his letters to me, much enlarged. The SIH has sent condolences to David's widow Margaret and family.

I am also sorry to report that another one of our members, Fiona Campbell, passed away at the end of January 2021. The SIH has sent condolences to Fiona's family.

APOLOGY

My abject apologies to Ken Fraser for omitting his name off the list of Contributors in Issue 84. This was an oversight on my part and I have apologised to Ken privately.

SURVEY

Thank you to all those who completed the AGM survey and sent it to me either by email or by post. You can read the results on pages 5 & 6.

MATERIAL NEEDED

I have a square lined up for the autumn issue but will require one for December. Please continue to send me articles, examples of handwriting, quotes, etc as you know how much I rely on your contributions!

NEXT ISSUE

Issue 86 will be published in the autumn so please let me have all material by 15 August 2021. Please see *Submitting Material* on page 32 of this issue for further advice.

Oberon: I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.

from ACT 2, Scene 1, "A Midsummer Night's Dream"
by William Shakespeare

Anne Liebenrood, 2021

AGM 2021 Survey:
Results

Many thanks to those 21 members who completed and sent or emailed their forms included with Issue 84. These are the results.

Election of officers and committee members	YES	NO
I agree that Foster Neville should continue as Chair of the Executive Committee	21	0
I am happy for the current members of the Executive Committee to continue in post	21	0
I should like to put myself forward for co-option on to the Committee		
I am happy for the current Secretary and Treasurer to continue in post	21	0
I agree that Mr James Dean should continue as Auditor	21	

GENERAL COMMENTS

Many thanks to members of the committee for their work. *Writing Matters* continues to be an enjoyable and inspiring read.

The Society has proven itself to be a welcome and admirable fellow companion in a tempestuous and testing year. Once again, it has stimulated and sustained my interest all in all things italic.

Thanks to all who do the work that keeps the Society going!

I am very happy to ask the current members of the executive committee continue in office and may I register a big thank-you to them all?!

Thank you, as ever, for all your continued hard work – it's much appreciated.

I agree that Foster Neville should continue as Chair.
I am happy for the current members of the executive committee to continue.

I am happy for the current Secretary and Treasurer to continue and agree that James Dean continues as auditor.
I would like to propose we record out thanks to all for their continued work on behalf of the Society.

I thank the officers and committee for their work in keeping the Society going during the pandemic.

Thank you very much!

Thanks to all serving members!

Thanks, as ever, to all the officers and committee for you work, appreciated especially in these difficult times.

Many thanks to officers and committee members

As spring arrives, it is still a joy to receive *Writing Matters*, a constant after so many years.

Thank you so much, Nick and all members of the committee for all your hard work for the Society.

Thank you, keep up the good work.

The continued work of the Committee with Nick and Gordon is appreciated for their work maintaining the high standards of those who went before them. In an electronic age, the Society stands in saying handwriting still has its place.

Thanks to all serving members!

'Little Strokes Fell Great Oaks' — Their Removal's a Change for Many Folks:
Kate Gladstone

In this article Kate Gladstone interviews Kathleen S. Wright.

Noted, with interest, from a UK source:
https://morrellshandwriting.co.uk/blog/the-axe-falls-on-the-lead-in-stroke/ ("The axe falls on precursive handwriting from Department for Education")

The article announces that the UK's Department for Education (DfE) will soon forbid the use of lead-in strokes in school handwriting models, and will also forbid those models which teach cursive handwriting from the beginning. Though the article doesn't define "cursive," photos running with the article — and some bits of the article's wording — suggest that cursive is being defined as handwriting which joins all lower-case letters. In other words, the article's implicit definition of "cursive" would not include italic.

For those who are not "up on" teacherly terminology about handwriting, a lead-in stroke in handwriting is a stroke upwards from the writing's base-line into a lower-case alphabet letter that is not preceded by another letter which might join into it, for instance, when the letter begins a word or appears in isolation, as if the letter is begun with a join, not from any preceding letter, but from empty space.

(Examples of lead-in strokes on alphabet letters in a cursive style which uses them. This example is written by Kate Gladstone, as demonstration.)

Since lead-in strokes, with all the difficulties they create, are a common feature in the cursive handwriting styles of both the USA and the UK, I've begun by asking a USA-based handwriting consultant, Kathleen Wright, for her thoughts on lead-in strokes and on the change which the is making.

Kathleen has spent several decades employed in the handwriting industry, at various companies which publish handwriting textbooks — including a 29-year stint at Zaner-Bloser (one of the USA's largest publishers of handwriting books) before resigning several years ago to found her own independent consultant firm for handwriting issues: the Handwriting Collaborative at ***HandwritingCollaborative.org***.

Though Kathleen professes no allegiance to any particular copybook or publisher's brand-name, she has closely studied more than one handwriting method, including italic, and has in fact worked through all of ***Write Now***, the Getty-DuBay Italic Handwriting Series book for adults. Since italic (unlike many other USA and UK cursive forms) uses no lead-in strokes, I decided to ask Kathleen for her opinions on the UK's abolition of lead-in strokes in school models, and to provide her responses to each question before offering my own thoughts on the matter.

QUESTIONS:

Question 1. How would you define a "lead-in" stroke in handwriting? How far back (if you know) have they been used in cursive handwriting models for teaching, and how prevalent are they in the cursive teaching-models used at present in the USA and maybe in other countries with whose handwriting models you have some familiarity?

Kathleen: My definition of a "lead-in" stroke is the initial stroke taken to begin forming a letter. I am not certain who might have initiated the use of the lead-in stroke although I know that Platt Rogers Spencer used them in his letterforms and instructional method and models. I haven't done any research on this so am not certain which countries other than the U.S. and U.K (and quite probably Canada) used methods which taught cursive with lead-in strokes. Obviously, the methods that use or had used them include Learning Without Tears, Zaner-Bloser, Benson, D'Nealian and Universal [five cursive methods published and widely used in the USA].

Kate: Though I'd broadly agree with Kathleen's definition of "lead-in stroke," I think it needs to be made a bit more specific when we discuss this stroke's presence or absence in various handwriting styles, so that it's understood we are particularly discussing those styles which require some or all lowercase letters to begin with a stroke upwards from the baseline (writing line) before actually producing the body of the letter: this stroke being the lead-in. In some older styles, not usually

taught today, the lead-in might actually begin beneath the baseline: below, you'll see a photograph of one early example of this kind.)

For any other letter styles, I would say that the beginning stroke of any letter is an integral part of the letter's structure itself, not a "lead-in" to that structure, so the term "lead-in" does not apply. (If you removed the beginning stroke of an italic ***a*** or ***m***, or almost any other style of ***a*** or ***m***, what was left would not be at all recognizable as the intended letter — but removing the lead-in stroke from an ***a*** or ***m***, in a style which requires leadin strokes, generally leaves the letter clearly recognisable.)

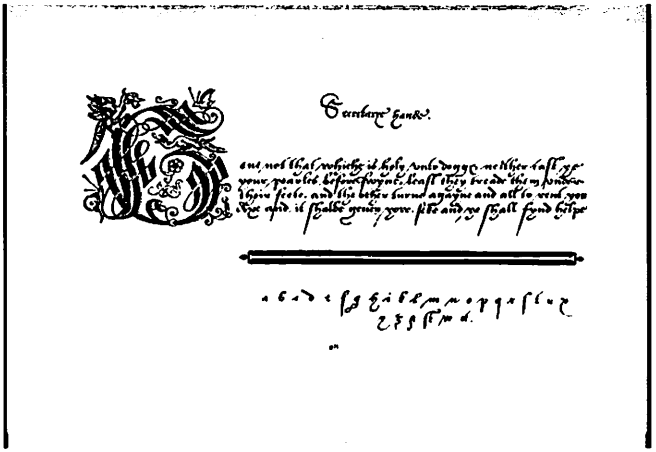
(The same style as before — but with the lead-in strokes removed)

Regarding the origin of lead-in strokes: the earliest textbook examples of these, as far as I've yet seen, appear in a copybook published in England in 1571 (*A booke containing divers series of hands* by Jean de Beauchesne and John Baildon).

As the book's title suggests, it presented numerous styles of handwriting. This style, the late-medieval "secretary hand" which persisted in England long enough to co-exist with italic and early roundhand cursives, allowed for many lead-in strokes, as can be clearly seen in this sample where most of them begin below the baseline, as was common in secretary hand.

Question 2. What arguments have typically been made for and against lead-ins? Which of those arguments do you regard as valid, or not valid? Why, or why not, in each case?

Kathleen: This is not an argument that I have heard made. As you are aware, most educators don't examine handwriting as granularly as we might. However, when there are complaints about the difficulty in



certain instructional methods (ex: Zaner-Bloser and other similar methods) it is due to the extra strokes that are required and the numerous changes of directions in forming the letters – this would include the introductory or lead-in strokes.

Kate: In the USA, at least, teachers indeed do not often closely scrutinise the details of a handwriting model that they are using. However, the publishers of handwriting styles often do mention and promote particular aspects of the style that they sell. In the USA, for instance, the producers of several cursive styles have described their use of lead-ins on all lowercase letters as an advantage.

The usual assertion, when this claim is made, is that starting every lowercase letter at the same place (the baseline) makes it easy for students to learn where to start every letter. I have often heard this assertion made by sales-representatives of two systems in particular — Learning without *Tears* and D'Nealian Handwriting — which are among the most widely sold systems in the USA. As many readers of *Writing Matters* will know, the claim is made even more frequently in the UK; it is, in fact, examined in detail — and, in my opinion, is effectively demolished — in the article at the link posted above.)

Sometimes, teachers and administrators go further, claiming, for instance, that lead-in strokes somehow add to legibility. For instance, here is how one schoolteacher is quoted in a newspaper article

https://www.ajc.com/news/national/alabama-law-mandates-cursive-writing-schools-parents-express-mixed-views/fbGIFuIM4tmqtnixVAeadO/ about a recent law mandating cursive instruction in the USA state of Alabama:

"Andrea Overman, a teacher at Alabama Christian Academy, said cursive writing is easier to read than print. 'With cursive all letters start on the baseline, which is the same place and therefore less confusing,' Overman told the Adviser. 'Individual words are connected with spaces between words, which helps with word recognition.'"

The legibility claim is easily rebutted, I think, by pointing out that cursive styles (certainly those where "all letters start on the baseline") are not used where it is important for material to be read easily and accurately. They are not, for instance, used in newspapers: not even in the newspaper which quotes and does not question Ms. Overman's claim.

I wonder just how long Ms. Overman, or any other believer in the superior legibility of cursive with lead-in strokes, would continue reading the daily newspaper if its reportage on her views or perhaps all of its reportage used the style of alphabet that she recommends:

Andrea Overman, a teacher at Alabama Christian Academy, said cursive writing is easier to read than print. "With cursive all letters start on the baseline, which is the same place and therefore less confusing," Overman told the Adviser. "Individual words are connected with spaces between words, which helps with word recognition."

(Claims for increased legibility of cursive with lead-ins — "all letters start[ing] on the baseline" — are easily tested by trying to read those claims, when they are presented on their own terms. The above passage uses a font called "Learning Curve," slightly retouched by Kate to add lead-ins to the very few lowercase letters which lack these in the Learning Curve font.)

Even the frequent claim that lead-ins allow all letters to start in the same place becomes dubious as soon as letters are used to form words.

Consider such a common word as "now." A child who has been taught to begin all letters with a lead-in has learned to think of this word's three letters as each looking something like this, when they're on their own:

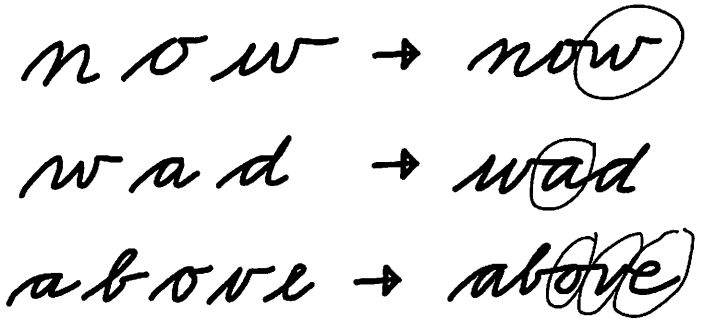
Then the same child must put them together for a word. The expected result (in a cursive hand with lead-ins) is something like this:

But arriving at that result, if one has been taught that every letter needs a lead-in, requires forgetting all about lead-ins as soon as one comes to the letter ***w***: because that letter, and anything else that's been made to start from the baseline, has to be written without the lead-in if it is to be written at all legibly after ***o*** or after any other letter which doesn't end at or near the baseline.

Students who actually try to apply the lead-in cursives' rule about "always starting in the same place," which is meant to make things so much easier, notoriously end up with something like this:

They finish the ***o***, they then remember that they've got to start every letter on the baseline, so they dutifully return to the baseline to start writing the ***w***: which doesn't work, as shown.

In other words, teaching that "all letters start in the same place," because of lead-ins, almost immediately requires teaching that letters start in a very different place whenever they follow particular other letters (***o, v, w,*** and, in almost all USA cursives and many UK cursives, also ***b***.)



Letters that "always start in the same place" often don't. Relying on lead-ins means changing where any letter starts, depending on whether or not it happens to be following some particular other letter.

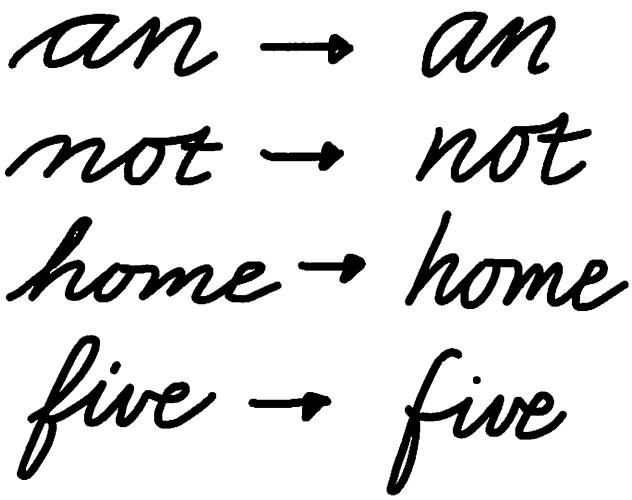
Question 3. Suppose that, for some reason, handwriting model publishers or handwriting teachers in the USA decided to completely stop using/teaching "lead-in strokes" entirely —entirely either discontinuing these for all students, or creating an alternate cursive model with no lead-ins for students whose handwriting was adversely affected by the use of lead-in strokes. How large a change would this be, for the teaching of cursive in the USA? What other changes in handwriting instruction e.g., in handwriting models would be likely to result from such a change and/or maybe even to be necessitated by such a change? In other words, when a model is revised to get rid of all the lead-in strokes, what other changes in the model may spontaneously occur as a consequence, or may need to be intentionally made as a consequence of this one change?

Kathleen: As we discussed in previous correspondence and conversations, I do not think that handwriting instruction has a high enough priority in education for the US to abolish the teaching of "lead-in strokes." Unlike some other countries, we don't have a national

curriculum model for handwriting – the Common Core Curriculum Standards don't reference handwriting instruction beyond Grade 1 or 2 and printing or manuscript writing is the only model referenced. There is not a national commitment to teach cursive – only 27 states out of 50 have a requirement for handwriting for Grades K-5 [kindergarten to the fifth subsequent year of education] and in those that do, few if any have any formal assessment for letter formation legibility.
Hypothetically, if there were a national requirement for handwriting instruction and the criteria included the absence of teaching lead-in strokes, then any publisher looking to sell a handwriting program to public schools would need to revise their instructional methods to support this practice. In addition, any and all supportive materials, visual and kinesthetic aids or tools, would also need to be revised to align with the instruction.

Kate: I agree that most teachers in the USA have not consciously considered the matter of lead-ins. However, among those teachers who are intellectually or emotionally invested in the defence of 100% joined cursive handwriting, one fairly often does find, as in the newspaper article quoted above, people who equate having cursive with having lead-in strokes ("With cursive, all letters start on the baseline," etc.), and who regard lead-in strokes as an essential means to some end, whether or not they know, or use, the term "lead-in stroke" or any other term.

It may be interesting to examine what happens to a "lead-in" handwriting model if lead-ins are completely abolished. Let's look at a few words, written twice — first with lead-ins, and then with the lead-ins entirely removed:



Interestingly, with just this one change made — one tiny variable altered, in a whole system of handwriting — many words, such as ***and/not/home*** in this example, change enough to become italic cursive, and other words (such as ***five***) change significantly, though not completely, towards italic cursive. This is one reason that I often start italic instruction for students who have grown up on 100% joined cursive, by having students make this change, and other seemingly tiny changes, to their existing script or scribble.

As Kathleen points out, of course, in the USA it is extremely unlikely that such changes would ever be made on a national scale by government order, as is apparently to happen in the UK. However, it seems possible to me that such changes might be made by individual teachers, or even individual designers of handwriting programs, if more of them could be brought to see how lead-in strokes and other specifiable features of particular styles make handwriting harder to master, and harder to produce without serious accidents, than need be. The cumulative effects of small changes might add up to a vast and beneficial simplification.

Perhaps such changes might initially be made for students with disabilities, who are in the US) legally required to be given an Individualized Education Plan, which often specifies particular

adjustments (called "adaptive methods") of fulfilling some local, state-level, or other educational requirement. Since students with various disabilities can be and often are assigned to "adaptive physical education" classes where they may, for instance, learn yoga instead of having to run laps or do gymnastics, or assigned to "adaptive math" classes and be allowed to use calculators for certain types of problems, it would be at least as realistic to establish "adaptive handwriting" classes where they would be taught the least problematic and most accident-resistant type of handwriting which, in my judgment happens to be italic, blessedly free of lead-ins and so much else that sets huge obstacles before any student, and in particular before a student with disabilities that affect handwriting.

Question 4. Would the results of such a change, the discontinuance of lead-ins, and then whatever changes follow on from that initial discontinuance, be likely to lead to an italic handwriting model, or at least to require a model which was far closer to italic than to conventional 100%-joined cursive models? What additional factors, if such a change were made (the abolition of lead-ins), would be likely to affect whether the resulting model turned out to be some form of italic, or turned out to be somewhere in the house in between italic and conventional cursive?

Kathleen: Whether or not a mandate against "lead-in strokes" would result in italic becoming the handwriting model of choice would depend on what research had to say about the impact of italic letterforms on reading acquisition. As you know, Karin James 'brain research on preliterate children [***https://www.zaner-bloser.com/HW21Summit/research-harman-james.html***] indicated that the act of forming letters with a pencil or crayon on paper from a visual model lights up the areas of the brain where reading acquisition begins. If every publisher had to print early readers with italic letters then perhaps the research would point to the need for early italic instruction.

Kate: I am not sure why using, or considering, an italic handwriting program would be assumed to require printing children's early reading books in italic letters. Readers of *Writing Matters* may be aware of the late Christopher Jarman's findings published by the UK's National Handwriting Association: *Why do We Write So Badly? A Mythology of Handwriting Teaching* in the Association's 2005 annual, establishing that children can, indeed, read more than one style of letter, at least if they receive some basic common-sense guidance where needed, to get them

started making sense of any letter-shapes that are very noticeably different from the those that they've learned to write.

For more rigorously academic experimental research, there's Rosemary Sassoon's *Through the Eyes of a Child*, published 1993 in *Computers and Typography* by Intellect Books, which established that children of a wide range of ages and ability levels, including beginning readers and those with reading disabilities, read three italic type fonts (Times Italic, Futura Italic, and Sassoon Primary) more easily and with greater comprehension and retention than they read two vertical type fonts commonly used for printed material such as books (Times Roman and Futura), even though the vast majority of their reading material had apparently been in such conventionally designed fonts.

Question 5. Maybe you could verbally describe the changes that might happen/would be likely to happen or to be required, and then I could do my best to illustrate those changes on my own, starting with a word or phrase in each of the "Big Three" cursives [the USA's three most widely sold cursive handwriting programs: Zaner-Bloser, D'Nealian, and Learning Without Tears), and then showing how that cursive word or phrase would necessarily/foreseeably change as a direct or probable result of discontinuing the use of any lead-ins.

Kathleen: As I indicated above, if there was a national mandate to remove "lead-in strokes" from all handwriting instructional programs and models then any publisher (the "Big Three" or any of the big language arts companies) currently selling handwriting books would need to be certain that their program did not include them.

Kate: Indeed, if some national mandate required changing any feature of a handwriting model, then publishers would have no choice but to go along with it. Although I am not suggesting that the USA, or any of its states, should actually go so far as to attempt to legally ban any particular feature of a handwriting model — partly because any such attempt would be resented and rejected, especially at this time when there is so much else to deal with! — I do believe that, if the educators and legislators of any nation or state do get involved with handwriting standards or mandates, they should at least make sure that the standards or mandates which they propose should be evidence-based and demonstrably beneficial. Almost always, in the USA, when some governmental body or other has gotten involved with handwriting, it has been a state legislature in which one or more legislators have successfully mandated or have repeatedly attempted to mandate cursive handwriting instruction in one or more grades: with cursive assumed, as

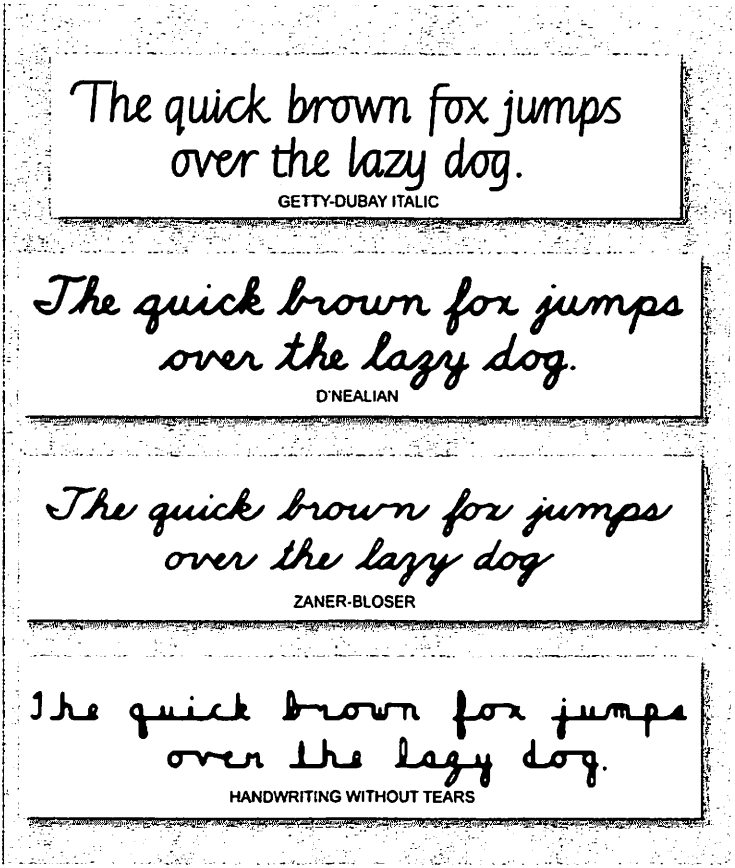
generally in the USA, to mean 100%-joined handwriting, complete with an abundance of lead-in strokes. Just as disturbing, as Kathleen and I have often discussed, is the fact that these proposals raised in USA state legislatures are often based on research which is misrepresented — unintentionally or otherwise — by the legislator who cites, quotes or misquotes, or otherwise introduces or distributes the research. The misrepresentations, as far as I have found, are uniformly done to make the research appear to support one specific type of handwriting: specifically, cursive as this is typically defined in the USA.

For example, the important brain research which Kathleen cited earlier, which found major benefits from handwriting versus keyboarding, has been repeatedly and publicly misquoted by a legislator in whose state the research had been carried out using state funds. The legislator in question had repeatedly asserted that this research proved unique advantages specifically for cursive handwriting, even though nobody in the actual study had been writing in cursive, or had been taught cursive, as they were aged 5 or 6: in other words, a few years younger than the age at which cursive would have been introduced to them.

As Kathleen noted earlier, 27 out of 50 USA states, so more than half of them, mandate some form of handwriting instruction up through fifth grad, — even though, as she also notes, these mandates generally come without any specific means of assessing how legibly the children actually write.

When a US state government mandates doing something about handwriting, the mandate is far more likely to specify that children must at some stage be taught a particular form of handwriting — cursive — than to specify that they must be able to meet any particular measurable standard of legibility or speed. If state-level mandates or individual schools' or school-districts' policies could specify some objectively measurable aspect of handwriting, such as being able to produce a certain number of unambiguously legible handwritten alphabet-letters per minute, irrespective of style then the mandates would serve some useful purpose, as teachers and parents would then find it in their interest to seek out and demand the most practical and least error-prone models of handwriting which, I believe, would turn out to be the italic models. Such pressure, from customers, would nudge the publishers of handwriting models into making more and more of the necessary simplifications.

As an example of just how far the USA has to go, in this regard, here is a style comparison graphic from ***https://handwritingsuccess.com/style-comparison/*** (on the site of the Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series):



The first of the four samples is the Getty-Dubay Italic model: the rest are the three most common models in USA cursive handwriting instruction ("the Big Three," as Kathleen and I call them: D'Nealian, Zaner-Bloser, and what was once called *Handwriting Without Tears* but has been recently re-christened *Learning without Tears*: which I still consider a misnomer).

Plainly, it would take more than a mere abolition of lead-in strokes to turn any of the "Big Three" into something simple, legible, workable and, one hopes, attractive. To my eye, the putatively *Without Tears* cursive is a particular offence. Handwriting models in the USA, plainly, needs much more than just getting rid of lead-ins. I would be glad to open a conversation, particularly with other Americans in the SIH, on what can and should be done: not just to thoroughly remodel the published conventional cursives or to interest the model's publishers in doing so, but also to make the American public "handwriting-conscious" to the extent that the public will demand that these sorts of cursive be replaced by one that looks good, that works well even at speed or under stress, and that can be taught easily. I believe that the American public can and should be brought to desire italic handwriting as a better model — ***a*** ***b***etter ***c***ursive; ***a*** ***b***etter ***c***hance; ***a*** ***b***etter ***c***urriculum for our handwriting and that of future generations — and I'd like to connect with anyone else who thinks so too.

The Letter Exchange:

Christopher Grundke

Writing letters has acquired a new importance for many during the coronavirus pandemic. The public health mandates for isolation and physical distancing from others has required many of us see our family and friends much less frequently or not at all for the usual in-person meetings. Since interpersonal encounters for work and leisure have often occurred via computer rather than face to face, concepts such as "screen fatigue" and "Zoom burnout" have entered our collective vocabulary. Email and text messaging are still seeming to press as determinedly as ever for a prompt response. In this global environment of computerized interactions and pressure, it is decidedly refreshing to correspond with others in a slow analogue fashion: the pleasures of setting pen to paper, watching the ink flow from the nib, feeling the tactile sensation of the nib on the paper are inherently calming for me. Furthermore, setting my thoughts in order slowly without the expectation of an immediate reply or the facility of easy editing and skipping about on the electronic page encourages me to think more carefully about my choice of words, which may perhaps lead to better writing. (These are purely anecdotal observations based on my own experience, of course, but I suspect that I am not alone.)

The main reward for writing, though, is not the chance to practice one's handwriting -- pleasant though that is -- but the opportunity to become acquainted with other members of the SIH. The ten current participants in the exchange come from various walks of life, various stages of youth and age, various places on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and everyone has an interesting story to tell. If you are thinking of joining for the first time, I encourage you to give it a try. The participants are a pleasant lot and not everyone has been part of the exchange for years; you would be alongside at least a few recent joiners. If you dread writing initial letters to strangers, don't let that hold you back: simply introducing yourself and describing how you first encountered italic handwriting is a great way of beginning correspondence, since we all have italic handwriting as a common interest. Conversations will gradually unfold in different directions as you become acquainted with other writers. Who knows? You may wind up with new friends as a result. If you've been part of the exchange in the past and have taken a break for a while, you're always welcome to join in again at the beginning of the next round.

The current round will end in September; if you would like to add your name to the list for October and beyond, please contact me by post or email (details below) by August 15th so that the schedule can be drawn up and distributed to participants in good time.

Christopher Grundke
3140 Romans Avenue, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3L 3W9
c.grundke@gmail.com

In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

"Bredon Hill", from "A Shropshire Lad"
by A.E. Housman.

Sign of the Tines:
Your Correspondence

ISSUE 84 MATTERS

The cover of the spring 2021 issue is stunningly professional and beautiful. It is, in fact, head and shoulders above anything that I have ever seen on the front cover of an issue of *Writing Matters*!

Foster Neville's *Word from the Chair* is, as always, excellent reading. I share his delight in looking at exemplar pages and wondering what the free handwriting of the same writer looks like.

Thanks to Nick, by the way, for alerting us all (page 2) to his new address.

Thanks also to Simon Daniel for his explanation (page 4) of why he makes his crossbars rather low. Although I continue to find his choice in this matter a little unpleasing, the excellence of his handwriting in all other regards makes me reluctant to pursue the matter. All of us, and I am no exception, have little idiosyncrasies (as he puts it) that would probably be more troublesome to alter them to leave undisturbed if the rest of the handwriting is good, as it certainly is in Mr. Daniel's case. His handwriting certainly shows up very well on the next page, in his copy (page 6) of a Shakespearean sonnet.

Tom Barney's account (page 7) of the roundabout way that he (at last) came to italic is as delightful as it is instructive. It should be required reading for all teachers, parents, and others who have to deal with the handwriting of children and with their frequent dislike of expectations to improve. Perhaps this brief article should also be shown to handwriting-averse children themselves, with their attention called in particular to its final paragraphs and the closing statement that italic Is a fine form of revenge against teachers' complaints about bad handwriting, when so much of the trouble is caused by teaching me in positions of styles that work far less well than italic.

Ken Fraser's quote on the simplicity of italic (page 9) is worth keeping in mind: not just through its immense value as a visual inspiration through its simple yet graceful shape, and as a deterrent to those of us who are sometimes tempted to make everything far too fancy.

In the SIH line up (page 10), it is good to see all positions now filled!

Cyril Deighton's article on fountain pens (page 11) is very useful and should be routinely provided to younger persons who (in the USA, at least) have hardly ever seen such a pen, let alone ever seen it in use.

Thanks immensely to David Hope (page 12 in *Signs of the Times*) for letting us all know where *Scribes and Sources* may still be purchased! Other pieces of correspondence, in this issue, are at least equally useful. In particular, I will certainly look up ***theconfidentteacher.com*** to see what that source may have to say. Also very useful is the editor's gentle reminder, at the end of *Sign of the Tines* to make sure of the copyright status of any poem (or anything else) that we copy out and submit to appear in *Writing Matters*. Copyright, after all, is literally the right to copy something, so let's each make sure that we have that right before we exercise it.

Immense thanks is due to whoever selected, for *Forty Years Ago* (page 13), the very detailed presentation and chart produced by the late Father Simon Trafford. This, too, I wish could be supplied to all teachers, and to all children who are old enough to read it and to think seriously about their handwriting. The charge in particular is better than many which I have seen seriously presented in textbooks. Equally meritorious our Father Trafford's thoughts about handwriting competitions, and the advisability of introducing some judgment of speed. This might be easier to accomplish now than then, if someway could be found to bring contestants together to write while being timed. It could conceivably also be done by having contestants submit a video of themselves writing, but this would be easier to say than having them meet personally to write together: something not easily possible now, but perhaps possible to arrange in a year or to once the COVID-19 virus is vanquished — if it ever is! Father Trafford's closing suggestions, about stimulating interest by the use of double chalk and via artistic applications of handwriting is also as valuable today as it was 40 years ago.

Ken Fraser's jesting little epigram (page 17), about writing slowly to benefit those who can't read very fast, also has its point, beneath the seeming illogic. People who can't read at high speeds are, often, dyslexics: in other words, precisely those who despite oft-brilliant minds are most easily stymied by any ambiguity in the letters which form the words that they are trying to read.

Great thanks are due to us from us all to Cyril Deighton (again) for his second appearance in this issue: his article on paper (page 18). This, too, is something to place before the eyes of anyone who thinks about handwriting and how to bring it to its best possible state.

Simon Daniel's handwriting (also page 18) is one of the most encouraging things I have ever seen in *Writing Matters*: clear and graceful, whatever its small peculiarities, and obviously able to be achieved by an ordinary person at a reasonable speed.

The late Fred Eager's sample (page 19), contrasting a Renaissance italic with a 20th-century version provides excellent advice to those considering the ***pro***s and ***con***s of either variation.

From the Archives, (page 20) is yet another of those things that one wishes could be handed out to all teachers, parents, and others who care about our handwriting and wish to see it improve. Dare I hope that, someday, the Society will gather the best of the teaching material which it has printed in its quarterly over the decades, and edit those selections into a book? If so, I would very gladly help in selecting, assembling, and (where necessary) copyediting/otherwise editing material for such a work.

Goethe's thoughts on his own handwriting (reprinted, on page 21 of this issue, in the translation and handwriting of a 1960s contributor, Stanley Godman) may also belong in such a volume — as a cautionary tale which flips into motivational anecdote, since Goethe ably discusses both the careless state of his own handwriting at one time, and the good results of the efforts at improvement which he made at the urging of a teacher.

If other teachers routinely followed the example of Goethe's Professor Gallert and made good handwriting as essential as good information when it came to getting good marks, they and their students would earn the gratitude of anyone who saw their writing.

In this connection, I hope I may fairly mention a teacher I used to know — a former student of mine, in fact — who productively instituted just such a policy. She taught chemistry at a local college: having improved her own handwriting, she wanted me to help her find some way to persuade her students to write clearly enough that their handwriting could be read at sight. The trick that finally worked was simply this: the teacher announce to her students that, in any handwritten classwork and lab work, any word that could not be

completely and instantly read it without guesswork would be considered to be the word "apples" and would be graded as such: for instance, "What is composed of oxygen and ***apples***." Despite the students' outraged groaning that this was unfair and unrealistic and totalitarian and so on, the improvement of students' handwriting was rapid, general, immense, and, I was later informed, lasting. As the teacher had always suspected, her students had already been able to write legibly, with varying degrees of excellence, but had not seen any reason to bother as long as the teacher was willing to plough through any number of less-than-legible pages.

Ken Fraser's third contribution to this issue (page 23; "Always remember that you are absolutely unique — just like everyone else") is, as his handwriting always is, stunning: to the point that I don't even mind the fact that he loops the occasional ascender. Anyone who wants to loop letters should at least do loops well, which Mr. Fraser unarguably does. The wording of his contribution, too, relates well to handwriting — as the statement is the perfect rebuttal to those who do not want their handwriting to be disciplined, or even to be decipherable, because they would much rather consider themselves "unique."

The colourful back cover (a father-to-daughter letter by the late Colin Giddings) is almost unimaginably splendid in design, even if it is a little too angular for easy reading! I'll confess that its decorative initial, along with the choice of a pen-width that was rather heavy for the size of writing, deceived me at first glance into thinking that I was looking at some late medieval work.

All in all, this was an excellent issue, which gives me hope to keep on seeing see more of similar quality and on equally varied subjects. It would be good to see even more material.

Forty Years Ago

How Italic Handwriting Changed My Life

This will no doubt appear a very melodramatic title for an article intended for so austere and understated journal as this one, but I beg you to read on before you make judgment.

My father was an accomplished amateur artist, as were two of my sisters, but for reasons which I need not detail I, the youngest, received no encouragement in this field either at home or at school, where, indeed, my regular mark for Art was 3/10. So, I took up photography, which was my only major aesthetic outlet for over 30 years.

Shortly before the end of that period I picked up in the local library a little book by John C. Tarr, chief type designer for a major typesetting machinery manufacturer, which was entitled, I think, *How to Improve your Handwriting*'. It advocated a hand freely and unslavishly based on the 16th century masters of Italic and it intrigued me immensely. I had always been fascinated by calligraphy and typography and had hopelessly envied those few people of whom I had any knowledge, who could write a few lines on a card and produce an invitation, greeting or acknowledgement more satisfying than the most perfectly printed counterpart in copperplate.

After a few half-hearted dabbles I was finally persuaded that such a possibility was not 'pie in the sky', but perhaps even pie on the table, albeit an Alice in Wonderland table at that time way up beyond my reach. But I made a start and persevered until I could produce a hand which, while it would have made Arrighi turn in his grave, was still more legible than my normal round hand in which every letter was reduced to the minimum required for its recognition. I had some excuse for this in so far as at this time I spent 90% of my working day on the telephone and the notes of my conversations had to be in longhand as they had to be available to non-shorthand readers and included a large proportion of figures and of proper names from all over the world. To detail the difficulties arising from this situation would be to court inflicting boredom. Suffice it to say that eventually I succeeded in making a complete transition, including finally arranging for the bank to accept an entirely new signature on my cheques!

By then new vistas were opening up: almost by accident I became interested in drawing maps, using of course, swash capitals for the major place names. Soon I was venturing into cartouches, sketches of Boreas, Zephyr, galleons and whales. About this time, I was housebound for a time following a leg operation and an artist friend encouraged me to while away part of my convalescence in drawing what I could see from various windows of the house; this led to an 'art evening' held at one of three houses each week and these eventually became a fully-fledged class run by my artist friend in a local hall. I found my interest in photography fading rapidly; it was followed by pen and ink drawing, scraper board and – with the aim of getting away from photographic literalness- Conté crayon.

Since I retired some five years ago another friend who had used some of my maps in a guidebook he published, persuaded me to have printed – and eventually to sell – 20,000 postcards of one of my scraper board drawings; I have had a good standard of sales at the twice-yearly exhibition of the local art society of which I am a member; have won a first prize for graphics and, jointly, an overall first prize. This resulted in the sponsors of the exhibition printing at their own expense a number of drawings of my native city as it used to be. These were exhibited in the foyer of the local theatre (now perhaps more famous as the venue of world snooker!) and subsequently published in a local monthly. I was recently commissioned to do four more such drawings for a local gallery and, in short, the whole thing has snowballed to the point where I now have as much artwork as I can conveniently handle and a very modest supplement to my pension.

An unprofitable evening in the darkroom was an evening wasted: a drawing torn up after an evening's work is a lesson learned. Over teens of years my interests have changed completely, I make a little money whilst enjoying myself and I wonder how I found time to work! Had it not been for John C. Tarr (God Bless him!) and his advocacy of Italic handwriting, it is difficult to conceive that my life today would have been half so interesting and rewarding as it is. So perhaps my title was not an exaggeration?

W.C. Wigg
(From *Journal* 106, Summer 1981)

Book Review

READ CURSIVE FAST:
Foster Neville with Nick Caulkin

This book is about the handwritten rather than the practice of handwriting per se, but as it is by member Kate Gladstone it deserves to be reviewed here.

Kate is American and Americans have a more sustained tradition of 'cursive handwriting' than the British (Palmer, Zaner-Bloser are, however, names that will not be unfamiliar to many members). Here models such as Vere Foster (surely ripe for a revival amongst letter-writing enthusiasts who object to Italic) especially the Civil Service Hand seem long consigned to history. Only in the Victorian or Edwardian schoolroom of museums are casual encounters likely with a handwriting style where most, if not all, of the letters are joined together in a flowing manner. One of the main selling points of Italic is that it is less prescriptive - you join when you feel like joining – making for a more individual and lively hand.

The book's aim is to help people who struggle to read 'joined up' writing. While it is clearly meant for both children and adults the wording feels, to an English reader, more directed towards children. That being said, the format of the book is certainly clear and easy to follow. Groups of letters are discussed and their characteristics identified after which students are encouraged to read those letters in various words when written in a cursive script (an invaluable ability). There is an interesting explanation of why uppercase and lowercase are so called.

I may have misunderstood the intention behind the book but it did put me in mind of the excellent *Handwriting: A National Survey* by Reginald Piggott. Those members familiar with Piggott's book will remember how he collected and analysed thousands of handwriting examples to produce a report on standards of legibility in the UK in 1957. Piggott also reproduced hundreds of specimens to illustrate his argument (many examples were illegible). Where Piggott's study differs is that it is a book of two halves, the second part of the book offering what he described as *A Plan for Better Modern Handwriting.* Here readers find an ideal handwriting model (Italic in nature), having been exposed to nearly 100

pages of most varied cursive writing ('print script' is little represented) they can now hopefully identify the good and the bad of handwriting. It is a wise book and deserves a place in the library of those with a more adult interest in the why and how of handwriting.

The examples of handwriting in the present book are not as well written as one could have wished. Kate evidently wants people to be able to read cursive handwriting even in its worst forms but perhaps a better case could have been made for a book which simply exposed readers to good examples of American cursive, like a visit to a good gallery can be so instructive for those not previously intelligently exposed to movements in modern art.

In the UK, handwriting and the teaching of it is left up to individual schools to select and teach whatever handwriting scheme they choose. Some schools take the teaching of handwriting seriously, while others do not; it is a very different situation in the USA. This book, therefore, will appeal more to the American market but still feels like it misses the mark in many respects. While the intentions are in the best traditions of handwriting reform, and new publications on handwriting are to be celebrated, there are older books (such as Piggott's) readily available here in the UK which are more likely to engage and appeal to an adult reader. In terms of a handwriting model, it is for good reason that some years ago the Society decided to print Nancy Winters's book *A Simple Guide to Italic Handwriting* as our recommended guide to acquiring a modern hand.

You can order the book directly from this website:
http://readcursivefast.com/

One link to the order-page:
http://readcursivefast.com/order/

If you have any queries about ordering, you can email Kate at
kate@readcursivefast.com

SIH Line Up 2021

PRESIDENT:	Ewan Clayton
VICE-PRESIDENT:	*vacant*
CHAIRMAN:	Foster Neville*
SECRETARY & EDITOR:	Nicholas Caulkin 5 Butlers Close Butlers Road Handsworth Wood Birmingham B20 2PF Telephone: 0121-240 1719 *(evenings and weekends)* Email: nickthenibs@hotmail.co.uk
TREASURER:	Gordon Wratten 3 Orchard Lane East Molesey Surrey KT8 0BN Telephone: 020-8224 0632 E-mail: wratten8@gmail.com
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:	Clifford Bryant; Nicholas Caulkin; Joy Daniels; Paul Lines; John Nash; Mark Russell, CBE*; Ludwig Tan & Gordon Wratten*

*Trustee

Contributors

Kate Gladstone, Christopher Grundke, Anne Liebenrood, Foster Neville, David Nicholls, Nick the Nibs, William C. Wigg & Kathleen S. Wright.

Front cover square by Ken Fraser
Back cover italic handwriting by Simon Daniel

Editor

Nicholas Caulkin
5 Butlers Close
Butlers Road
Handsworth Wood
Birmingham
B20 2PF
Email: nickthenibs@hotmail.co.uk
Tel: 0121-240 1719 *(evenings and weekends)*

Submitting Material

Contributions such as articles and handwriting may be submitted via email as an attachment or sent by post to the above address. When submitting handwriting examples, please ensure that they are written in **black** ink on **smooth, white paper**, as colours do not reproduce very well, blue in particular. Anything that is not in solid black, i.e., grey, will give disappointing results. However, designs for the square on the front cover may now include colour. If you have any queries about how to submit, please contact me.

Publication times:
Spring issue: late March/early April. Colour scheme: Green.
Summer issue: late June/early July. Colour scheme: Red/Orange.
Autumn issue: late September/early October. Colour scheme: Brown/Red/Orange.
Winter issue: mid-December. Colour scheme: Blue.

It takes very little water
to make a perfect pool for
a tiny fish, where it will
find its world and paradise
all in one and never have
a presentiment of the dry
bank. The fretted summer
shade and stillness and
the gentle breathing of
some loved life near - it
would be a paradise to us
all, if eager thought, the
strong angel with the
implacable brow, had not
long since closed the gates

George Eliot · Romola