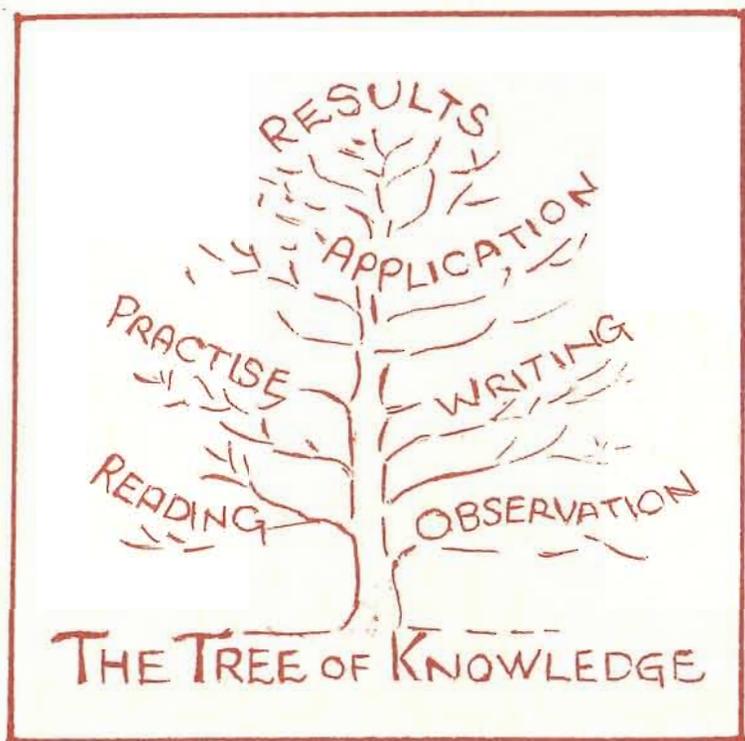


Writing Matters

Promoting better handwriting



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Edited by Nicholas Caulkin
203 Dyas Avenue, Great Barr, Birmingham B42 1HN, England

The Journal & Newsletter of the Soc. for Italic Handwriting

A Word from the New Chair:

Foster Neville

Many of you will know Wilfrid Blunt's book *Sweet Roman Hand*, its title taken from *Twelfth Night*. I saw a production of Shakespeare's play this summer. On the line "I think we do know the sweet Roman hand", the actor – with a suitably theatrical flourish – produced a page, not of Italic but of...Copperplate!

Over the past few weeks, together with our Secretary Nick, I have been selecting material which might appear on the Society's new website. Old SIH Bulletins and Journals are a rich source of information not available elsewhere. In particular there are a number of historical articles we hope to make accessible to members online.

The substitution of Copperplate for Italic in *Twelfth Night* is perhaps inevitable in an age when communication is almost exclusively by mobile 'phone, text message or email. I imagine most twenty-first century theatre audiences would regard fine writing as something either unattainable or unsuitable for everyday use. The difference between the Roman hand (as Italic was known in England in this period) and Copperplate now regarded as specialist knowledge.

In 1987 the piece set for the Society's Handwriting Competition was a paragraph from Alec Guinness' *Blessings in Disguise*, where he describes his correspondence with Sir Sydney Cockerell, and makes reference to Cockerell's Italic hand and his encouragement (via a gift of Patrick Barry's *Handwriting Sheets*) that Guinness should improve his hand. (Incidentally, if you're wondering, the winning entry that year was penned by one Nicholas Caulkin).

The Editor of the old *Bulletin* published *Views of Handwriting*. These took the form of short extracts from books (both fiction and non-fiction), which mentioned handwriting. A contemporary example from 1959 was John Updike's novel *The Poorhouse Fair*. This featured a character with a "somewhat studied Italic hand". (Studied or not he managed to 'scribble' in it, which seems quite an achievement to me). The narrator of *The Poorhouse Fair* seems to hold the same opinion as found in the following lines from *Hamlet* (Act V, ii):

I once did hold it, as our statisticians do,
A baseness to write fair...

In 1959 of course, Italic handwriting was news. The Society was reviving a tradition of fine writing in England. Many writers have favoured the 'sweet Roman hand' for use themselves. To readers of the old Journals, the names of antiquary John Leland (1506 – 1552) and the dramatist and scholar Nicolas Udall (1505 – 1556) might be familiar. John Cheke (1514 – 1557) and Roger Ascham (1515 – 1568) are other notable sixteenth century exponents of Italic. What these people had in common was that they lived in a letter-writing age, when the Italic hand was used, for example, for diplomatic correspondence. Ascham was letter-writer to Cambridge University.

I wonder if members have discovered their own examples of the Italic hand figuring in other works. Perhaps *Views of Handwriting* could appear in *Writing Matters*.

Someone who corresponded with Alec Guinness was Dodie Smith, the author of *I Capture the Castle* and *101 Dalmations*. In Valerie Grove's 1996 biography of the writer, *Dear Dodie*, adopting the Italic hand is shown as a pleasant pastime, like taking up the piano or painting, in 1950s England.

Instead Dodie opted for italic calligraphy.
Hours each day were spent on improving her

hand and she kept detailed notebooks of her progress for the next four years: 'I thought I had set my way of making ascenders with a kick to the right, so – *h, k, l, b* – but on this page I seem to be making the tops dead straight.'

(The author is let down by her typesetter, who presumably had no italic type with that characteristic kick to the right. So, ironically, the 'tops' or ascenders on the printed page become straight too.)

In fact her handwriting, already neat and legible, became 'astonishingly' fine, and the Swan calligraphic pen became her favourite. Sir Ambrose (Heal), a collector of italic manuscripts, gave advice.

Oddly Smith seems to have drafted her letters in Italic and then had them typed up by her husband, Alec.

Notes from nickthenibs

THE LONDON WRITING EQUIPMENT SHOW

This is being held on Sunday 12 October at Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8 7NX from 10.30 – 5. Entry to the show is £5 for adults, free for children under 12. You can find out more at:

www.londonwritingequipmentshow.org.uk

SQUARES

I need more squares for future issues! When submitting, please make sure that your artwork is in black ink on white paper otherwise it will not reproduce successfully. The square should measure no larger than 3½ inches by 3½ inches.

NEXT ISSUE

Issue 35 will be published in December so let me have all material by 15 November 2008, please. Remember that you can send contributions via post or email. Material of a festive nature is especially required. Have you designed a calligraphic Christmas card in the past? Or written out a Christmas greeting? If so, why not send it in for inclusion in the December issue? As with the squares, it should be ideally written in black on white paper.

Sweet

Roman

Hand

Five
hundred
years

of

by

Lord Cholmondeley
with much gratitude
& every best wish
from
the author

W.W.

Local Groups News

SIH WEST SUSSEX

Chairman: David Tregear, 36 Henty Gardens, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 3DL. Tel: 01243-532231 email: tregear david@hotmail.com

Secretary: Sandra Stansfield, 53, Ranelagh Crescent, Ascot, Berks. SL5 8LQ. 01344 8883962

Treasurer: Jane Gribbon, 34 Worcester Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 8AP. Tel: 01242-788861

SIH HAMPSHIRE

Chairman: Rod Hoyle, 16 Mill Lane, Romsey SO51 8EU. Tel: 01794-515677

Secretary: Reg Nutting, Aldwin Cottage, 7 Patrick's Copse Road, Liss, Hants. GU33 7EN. Tel: 01730-300779 E-mail: aldwinjr@ntlworld.com

Treasurer: Diana Holdsworth, 2 Western Road, West End, Southampton SO30 3EL. Tel: 02380-326852

The group met on 14 June and also attended an open day at Badger Farm Community Centre on 22 June, giving calligraphy demonstrations.

SIH SOMERSET

Organiser: Rod Dixon, Moorsedge, Chedzoy, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA7 8RB. Tel: 01278-451647.

No recent news received about the groups.

The Writing's on the Wall - but Will we be Able to Read it? Holly Kirkwood

It's hardly the world's deadliest killer, but bad handwriting has, nonetheless, been found to be the cause of as many as 7,000 deaths worldwide due, according to a recent study, to hurried doctors' illegible scribbles being misinterpreted with fatal results. Unfortunately, physicians of the future aren't likely to improve the statistics - another report found that two-thirds of teachers hadn't received any training at all on how to teach handwriting skills.

As this is the time of year when formal invitations are being issued and responded to, it seems worth reflecting that the proper art of handwriting is unquestionably dying. Traditionally, an enjoyable weekend house party or wedding would be an occasion to merit a formal, handwritten thank-you letter, but, instead, the exhausted host more commonly receives a casual email or -heaven forbid - a text message as thanks for their efforts. Manners in general may not be quite on their last legs, but many of us are guilty of neglecting our own handwriting as we embrace the quick-fix solutions of the laptop and the Blackberry. The less we make the effort to pick up a pen, especially a traditional ink-filled fountain pen, the more difficult it becomes to do so.

THE AGE OF TXT

What's worse is that some people may even be saved the luxury of forgetting how to write: primary school children already familiar with texting are moving quickly onto computers, where they learn touch-typing and use of email. Although useful for their future careers, this may prove less so when it comes to more personal expression in their lives. The invention of a new language composed almost entirely of consonants, numbers and capital letters (RU gna B L8?) may serve well for a casual rendezvous, but is not so effective in more complex social situations.

Handwriting isn't just about decorum; the skill can lead to talent in other departments. Children who are proficient at cursive writing have also been shown to be more adept at articulating complex thoughts and ideas, which in turn leads to better exam results.

And as thousands of pupils currently await those very results, one has to ask whether this will be the last real chance in life for them to practise putting pen to paper. Increasingly, university courses are conducted using laptops and Dictaphones, making impromptu student shorthand a thing of the past and copying lecture notes a matter of cutting and pasting emails. If touch-typing replaces the written word as a legitimate mode of communication, there will be a considerable loss to the cultural and biographical canon; surely there would have been little valuable analysis of the annotations and letters of F. R. Leavis or Samuel Johnson had everything been left on the hard drive.

HALTING THE MALAISE

There is hope, however. People such as Nick Caulkin stand in defiance of handwriting's malaise. As a member of the Society for Italic Handwriting, which was formed in 1952, he and his colleagues aim to reinvigorate the art of italic writing, which, as Mr Caulkin says, is 'a fast, attractive hand that has many possibilities.' Elizabeth I and William Morris were devotees of this style, and Mr Caulkin is keen to see it revived as an art form in an effort to prevent the skill from being lost altogether. The Society has about 300 members and is growing fast.

Handwriting's other big plus is that it can reveal much about a personality. Missives that arrive scribed in capital letters written in green ink are traditionally given a wide berth in most sensible households, and inevitably reveal a fascinating, if unusual, mind. Graphology – the study of personality through handwriting – is a rapidly expanding academic practice, and can be useful in all sorts of situations, such as when interviewing potential staff.

This is a pen which I bought at The Art in Action show on 17 July. It is made with a wooden barrel and cap in Cocobolo wood. The nib is medium italic - right-handed, but written with my left hand.

It is quite weighty, but feels good in the hand and has nice ink flow. It is made by Piers of Reading - Artisan Pen makers.

There are 16 different woods to choose from. Apart from pens, they also make pen boxes. They may find their way to special friends for Christmas presents!

By the way I had a converter fitted to take bottled ink of my choice, since not all cartridges fit.

Kathy Lacy

It's a way of knowing people better, from complete strangers to your own family, through looking at the way they form their words, points out Sarah Mooney from The London College of Graphology. 'You also come to know yourself lots better,' presumably for better or for worse.

There is surely merit in fighting to ensure that the art of handwriting stays alive, both for interpreting our past and for securing our future. It shouldn't be just for a small group of aficionados, but should be revived as common practice: let the laptop/Blackberry backlash begin.

Meanwhile, it seems that the majority of us out there could do worse than bearing in mind the impression a hurried scrawl can have on others, and spending more than a few seconds dotting those i's and crossing the t's.

This article first appeared in the 23 July 2008 issue of *Country Life* magazine. Reproduced by kind permission.

RICK BRADLEY'S WATER-COLOURS

27 Granville Road, Hove 2, Sussex

Telephone: Hove 33431

1 January 1960

Dear Mr. Batchelor,

Mr. Wolpe has sent me a copy of your kind letter about "Renaissance Handwriting", & I felt I must write to you to express my thanks. As yet we have not seen any reviews of the American edition of the book and therefore it was a particular pleasure to have your letter.

You may think it worthwhile, & I hope you will, to join the Society for Italic Handwriting because of its Bulletin, so I take the liberty of enclosing an application form.

Yours sincerely

Alfred Fairbank

Letter by Alfred Fairbank
(by kind permission of Tom Merrill)
Tom tells me that he found this and the accompanying envelope (opposite) tucked away in a sale-book which he purchased in an old book store in Boston, USA.



Mr. Henry B. Batchelor
Cape Neddick
Maine
U. S. A.

Envelope by Alfred Fairbank
(by kind permission of Tom Merrill)

Forty Years Ago

The Autumn 1968 issue of the Journal was devoted to the SIH's American members. It was called the *US issue, Number 56, Fall 1968*. This is one of the articles that appeared in it.

HOPE AND FEARS FOR THE ITALIC HAND

Most laymen who 'discover' the italic hand like to talk about its special qualities – its slimness, its grace, its sudden opening of a vast, unsuspected horizon in aesthetics. But what they are generally silent about is the modest tool that makes the achievement at all possible – the edged pen.

This simple, unregarded instrument is in fact among the most ingenious inventions known to man and yet its special powers remain largely unrecognised and its benefits are largely ignored.

Edged pens were first cut from reeds or quills, but by the early 18th century they were stamped out of metal, and these latter are in general use today, except where a scribe needs hairlines extremely fine – a task for which the quill's sharply cut bevel is supremely suited. The pens we know best are those with tips pointed or blunted. The Palmer or Zanerian business handwriting is done with a stiff, pointed steel nib; it can also be written with a ballpoint, since both these scripts are mono-weight, all strokes in whatever direction having a common thickness. The pointed pen works in principle like an ice-pick dipped in ink; the edged pen works more like a jeweller's screw-driver dipped in ink. The stroking of a pointed pen or ballpoint is, alas! only too unvarying and produces a mere monotone of 'colour' on the page.

In contrast, the edged pen records an undulating ribbon of thicks and thins, regularly alternating from one to the other without manual pressure; the scribe's only task is to

maintain the pen's edge at some agreed angle to the established writing line. So maintained, the pen 'remembers' to yield the requisite variations of thickness, the scribe's heart skipping a beat as he delightedly watches the 'remembering' powers of this co-operative tool – an experience he shares with so many departed scribes of Renaissance Italy, and with the many Britons who early acquired the italic hand.

In the noble quarto of Fairbank and Wolpe entitled *Renaissance Handwriting* appears a virtual gallery of scholars and sovereigns whom posterity can call Italic's British pioneers, among whom are, with date affixed:

Thomas Linacre 1517; seven year old Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond 1526; John Cheke 1543; Katherine Parr 1544; Lady Jane Grey 1552; Bartholomew Dodington 1561; Roger Ascham 1542, and his Princess pupil of 1552 who was to become Queen Elizabeth. Among the *Mayflower's* passengers arriving at Plymouth in 1620, only two or three wrote an italic hand, and those were the only college men on board.

The remembering quality above mentioned was what made the edged pen famous and universal in the western world from the earliest antiquity, famous, in the late Edward Johnston's phrase, as the supreme letter shaping tool.

The tool it is that shaped not only the Latin alphabet but the Hebrew, Greek and Arabic as well, along with the variant scripts these languages were to develop through their histories. My Cooper Union students, for instance, spent virtually the whole spring term of their second year planning, writing and illustrating quarto (in vertical or oblong format) titled *Ten Historic Scripts Written with the Edged Pen*, successive pages being devoted to each, arranged in chronological order. Each script of course has its own optimum pen angle to the horizontal writing line. For Italic and Arabic it is some 45°; for Hebrew and for Rustic caps, 75°; for the humanistic Roman forms, some 25°. But the greatest surprise comes with the earliest

Roman letters – the classical lapidary capitals still visible in Rome, notably those of the Trajan inscription dating from 114 AD. Carved into their 9' x 4' oblong stone panel at the base of an 80' column, these letters were first written with an edged tool (this time an edged brush about ½" wide, dipped in whitewash) and then cut in V-incision, usually by the man who had done the writing. The Trajan characters show the brush-edge position at some 15° to the horizontal for all letters save the O and Q, where the angle drops to 8°.

These lettershapes became the norms whence the ensuing variants were to develop in the centuries to come. An O for example, is made of a backward crescent joined without seam to an answering forward crescent: the axis-line through the two thins running slightly northwest-southeast – that is, at right angles to the brush-edge's sidling motion to northeast-southwest of the O's equator.

In Italic, with the pen's edge riding a diagonal in the square, we get more than a mere variance in bulk of strokes. With each upward rebound from base-line, the hand is propelled forward by the angular spring as we write, and since the angle remains constant, the interval between downstroke and downstroke remains constant too, as if to assure the scribe of the very regularity he seeks in letter-spaces within each word. These are intervals the pens seems to measure for us, once we learn the general shapes of the italic letters.

And what spacing should we aim for? Arrighi's *Operina* tells us that the average small letter at *x*-height will fill a parallelogram whose height is double its breadth, and this goes for all letters except *i j m w*. Our task, then, is to contrive in every line a slight-sloping picket fence with optically equal spaces between paling and paling. Each such space is to be as wide as that enclosed between the legs of the *n*, which means that each word's letters attain an optical equilibrium between their interior and exterior spaces. The eye, the mind, the hand – all these conspire to produce the regularity we seek. It is a regularity optical,

Editor's Note

This issue of the
JOURNAL
is particularly dedicated
to our

American members

in recognition of their generous support
of the Society

[Written by Fred Eager]

Page taken from *Journal* 56, Autumn 1968

not metrical; the eye is pleased so long as the intervals are not grossly irregular.

Indeed, if a scribe was cursed with the dubious boon of ultra-precision, his informal italic shapes would become disaffecting, as looking too measured, too mechanical, over-precise. It is worth remembering the late James Wardrop's acute observation that Italic is the only script which thrives upon informality. Every scribe will have noticed what added, unexpected grace a slightly wayward stroke may bring – though here, as elsewhere, the problem is how to remain only slightly wayward.

Italic's very modesty of form seems to contain within itself a self destructive danger, which has been noted by historians of aesthetics. Its quiet patrician grace and its general avoidance of prettification have occasionally brought upon itself the crudest efforts at decoration – mostly by eager beavers who have still to discern how much decoration is already built into this script, or by the tasteless, who will not scruple to impose alien traits from the gothic or the baroque. And since the edged pen enables a scribe (even when wearing a blindfold) to produce arabesques and flourishes at will, every page may become infested with them, their 'creator' alone unaware of the blight they bring to the scribal landscape. Even professional folk, who should know better, sometimes show this pathetic reliance upon a questionable asset that is certain, in the end, to displease creator and victim alike.

The simple way to avoid such temptations is to look at examples of Italic at its best; and, like so many another art and craft, Italic was at its very best when it was born; by the middle of the 1500's its decay was well begun – in Italic itself and in the rest of Europe as well. Perhaps the best single source of spirited italic scripts is the Fairbank-Wolpe quarto already mentioned. A more modest working volume is Fairbank's earlier handy King Penguin title, *A Book of Scripts* now being expanded to 80 plates from the present 60. Studying these the beginner – or even the practised

scribe – will by degrees come to prefer some masters to others, and will thereby learn to discriminate between mere virtuosi (quickly recognising their present-day counterparts) and the solid, tactful and legible scribes whose letters continue to reproach all pretentious excess.

The quondam user of a pointed pen or ballpoint stylus who takes up an edged pen becomes at once a special person – special not only to those destined to read his improved script, but special even to himself.

He seems to be witnessing a recurrent miracle as each italic character in every line of his writing obeys a law dating back some two thousand years when the tool was first developed. By contrast, all hairline writing, so anaemic in its colour as to be a simulacrum, a mere pretence of flesh-and-blood script – all hairline writing suddenly becomes a reproach. Its period of widest acceptance came just before the emergence of the typewriter; but now that the typewriter and the business machine have taken over the drudgery of industrial correspondence and accounting, the hand can recapture the graces of writing tool long sacrificed.

The experience of such a recapture by the use of the edged pen is no routine matter. It is an event, though in different degree, for children and for adults. For children it is like their first response to the miracle of a snowfall. For adults it assumes rather the nature of Balboa's first sight of the Pacific. If I call each of these an understatement, it is because every scribe discovers in his own way the promise of the edged way, a promise that began as a truism, then lapsed into something long forgotten, then denied and now is newly revealed.

As practice continues, the writer's sense of re-discovery deepens; the sight of grace returning to his letter forms brings a continued wonder and delight. As the characters improve, the scribe feels a fresh obligation to make his workaday prose worthy of its medium, the exemplar script. I began by thinking this curious response peculiar to

myself; but the passing years have brought me ample evidence that such a response is well-nigh universal. If this be so, we owe to Italic a cultural debt beyond calculation.

Paul Standard

From *Journal* 56 Autumn 1968

SIH Line Up 2008

PRESIDENT: Vacant position

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Dom Patrick Barry, OSB, The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Nairne, GCB, MC, David Nicholls, CB, CMG

CHAIRMAN: Foster Neville*

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Vacant position

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Clifford Bryant, Nicholas Caulkin, Joy Daniels, Kathy Lacy, Graham Last, Paul Lines, John Nash, David Nicholls*, Mark Russell*, Ludwig Tan, Martin Taylor & Gordon Wratten* *(Trustee)



Calligraph Records



"Unaccustomed
as I am..."



Floriote Etoria

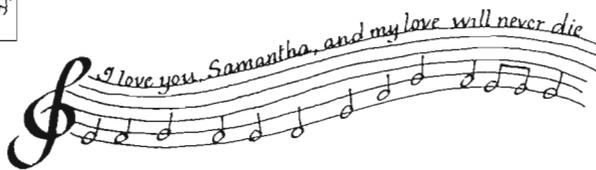


Humph



100 CLUB

1922 - 2008



Reluctant Chairman - I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue

Designed by Betty Eskenazi
as a tribute to our late
President, Humphrey Lyttelton

Sign of the Times: Your Correspondence

STIPULA PENS - AGAIN

I recently visited Florence where I saw a pen and stationery shop with a couple of Stipula pens in the window! No, it wasn't, "Hurrah! I've found one!" The price was €268. Even I didn't have the nerve to go in and ask if a) they had any left handed italic versions and b) could I try them out. My Italian was not really up to a discussion on the subject when I had no intention of buying one at that price. Pity, I rather wish I had.

When I visited Art in Action in July, there was a pen stand with Piero of Reading, the Artisan pen makers, who make pens in all sorts of beautiful wooden barrels. I indulged in a Cocobolo wooden one with an Italic nib. It was supposed to be a fine nib but was more of a medium. The nib is quite firm but the ink flow is good and writes smoothly.

Kathy Lacy, Farningham, Kent, England

Some years ago my daughter & family were
in a world trip, part of which was a week's
course. It was supposed to be the end for bodily
hygiene had been attained to the 7-year-old son.
Late one afternoon a group of the tourists disem-
barked for a presentation at a prep school. This
dragged on & people began thinking about getting
back to the hotel for a night. Finally it came to
"any questions?" whereupon one very spoke up
with "yes - have you anything for young feet?"
This broke up the "meeting in hours of laughter"
& my daughter & the rest gratefully withdrew
to dine.

*Ken Brookfield
Nov. 07*

This is a five times reduction of the letter to the readers' stories page of a Scandinavian magazine, as printed earlier this year. The fact that it is still readable says something about the clarity of the Italic script and also of the printing, of course.

Ken Brookfield, Vancouver, Canada

HAND FONTS

Here are the hand fonts that I have produced to date with David Kettlewell. I draw them, he digitises them for type!

This shows that good handwriting can be made into computer fonts if you know how! Perhaps readers of *Writing Matters* will be better just enjoying writing with pen and paper; it is far less stressful!

I appreciate all you do for the Society and your excellent work for *Writing Matters*.

Richard Bradley, Gosport, Hants., England

FOR SALE

We have some old *Journals* and *Bulletins* to dispose of, namely:

The Bulletin of the SIH, Nos. 4 - 16 (excluding No. 9), 1983 - 1989

The Journal of the SIH, Nos. 99 - 122 (excluding 110), Summer 1979 - 1998

The Newsletter of the SIH, No. 1, Spring 1991

All *Journals* and *Bulletins* are in good condition and in need of a good home.

These are our contact details:

1 Towneley Road West, Longridge, Lancashire PR3 3AB

Phone: 01772-784444

Email: penmandirect@supanet.com

Lola & Martin Taylor, Longridge, Lancashire, England

Contributors

The following people have contributed to this edition: -

Wilfrid Blunt, Richard Bradley, Ken Brookfield, Fred Eager, Betty Eskenazi, Alfred Fairbank. Holly Kirkwood, Kathy Lacy, Foster Neville, nickthenibs, Reg Nutting, Paul Standard & Martin and Lola Taylor.

Square by Thomas Clowes

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Front cover designed by nickthenibs

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The Society for Italic Handwriting

A REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 287889R

The Society was founded in 1952 by Alfred Fairbank, a most notable British calligrapher, & Joseph Compton, a Director of Education in London. Its aim is to spread the practice of the Italic script. It achieves this by holding meetings and workshops & publishes a quarterly magazine called 'Writing Matters', which contains up-to-date information on ^{the} pens, paper, writing equipment & other matters relating to the study and practice of this beautiful hand. A handwriting competition is held annually.

Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in good handwriting, an interest for one's own self-improvement in handwriting, for teachers and for those who enjoy the historical aspects of writing and calligraphy.

'A Simple Guide to Italic Handwriting' by member Nancy Winters is available from the Society at £6.50, including postage & packing. Members' price is £5, including p & p.

Subscription Rates

Adults: £15 or US \$ 25; Juniors (under 18): £6 or US \$12;
Corporate Educational: £20 or US \$40.

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