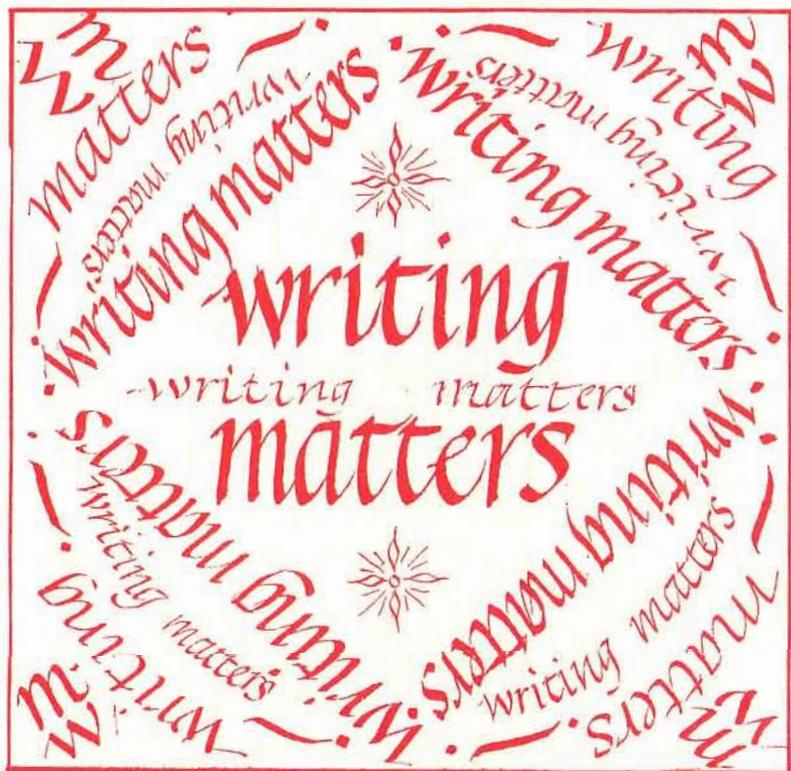


# Writing Matters

Promoting better handwriting



Issue 37    June 2009    ISSN 1468-9537

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 Chair:

Foster Neville

Italic handwriting has long lost its grip on the public consciousness. There was a time in the 1950s when, to judge from the extensive newspaper cuttings in the Society's archive, everybody knew about it and was trying to reform their hands. Not being able to do it of course didn't prevent anyone being Prime Minister or a lawyer, and certainly not a doctor. It was about projecting an image of yourself as you wished to be seen onto the page. This was an age of quick brown foxes and lazy dogs that was firmly aspirational. It was the era of the well-produced book - such as Wilfrid Blunt's *Sweet Roman Hand* - concerned with the Italic hand's history, practice and application in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now it would have to be a website (such as we will be shortly launching), an interactive DVD or even a Wii ('Write - yes write! - like Nick Caulkin'. There would also be Jack Trodd, Paul Standard and Alfred Fairbank settings).

It is strange however, at a time when society is so obsessed with appearances, that writing Italic should be such a little sought out art. We have experts to vet our wardrobes so that we may project the right image and yet who hasn't received a note or letter where a poor impression of the writer was formed because of the handwriting? The rarity of the handwritten in an age of texts, emails (and Blackberries, or is it Blueberries, or even Burberries?) only lends added significance to those who still strive to write well. There is no doubt however that this is a generation for whom the usefulness of handwriting has largely come to an end, and it may be discussed in the same way that are pot lids, old buttons and clay pipes. If people think of handwriting at all it's probably with regard to historical documents in a museum or items bid for on ebay. Even doctors have patient management systems in place of the old medical

records cards (personally I shall miss the candour it was possible to find in some of those!). Good handwriting is now thought of as something to be seen only in special collections, like Hepplewhite chairs. But whereas finding a piece of Georgian furniture or an undiscovered Rembrandt in your loft or garden shed may get you a few column inches in a newspaper, being an Italic mud lark will not.

Even in the 1950s Italic handwriting had something of the collectors' item built-in to it though. To do it well, which has always been the aim – no half measures with Italic, required a good deal of historical detective work and more than a little engaging with the past. In the fifties the Society had a large number of weekly classes in the London area, at Goldsmith's College, Morley College and a number of Literary Institutes across London; week-end courses at Jordan's Hostel near Beaconsfield run by Alfred Fairbank no less. Now it's all gone. Word processed expense accounts emailed in probably seem much less personally accountable than ones written in your own hand.

This Society was recovering a lost art in the early 1950s. Then it was the tools, the dreaded ball-point against the edged ink pen, which was the concern of many of its members and the public alike. The SIH is still recovering the lost art of handwriting today and reviving the second R, but now with modern methods. I like to think of Italic as a prized collectable in a throwaway age. It's a durable style of writing and, as many members will testify, well worth finding – especially today.

## Notes from nickthenibs

### AN APOLOGY

In the *Signs of the Times* letter *Legible Handwriting* by John Smith on page 21 of Issue 36, the word *advert* on line 1 should read *report*. Please accept my apologies, John and all readers for this error.

### RARE EDWARD JOHNSTON POSTCARD

On the centre pages of this issue I have included a reproduction from a postcard of some of Edward Johnston's handwriting. The post card was kindly sent to me by Leonard Perry, which was in the possession of calligrapher and illuminator Daisy Alcock. The back of the card explains that Johnston wrote out the directions for cleaning out a fountain pen for his Uncle Andrew on Christmas Day, 1904. Johnston would have been 26 years old at the time. The original size of the card is 104mm by 92 mm and the writing is in sepia ink.

### AGM

The results of the AGM survey are included in this issue. Many thanks to those members who took the time and trouble to complete and return their forms.

### SIH AT THE SSI

It was a great pleasure meeting some of you at the SSI Lay Members' Day on Saturday 25 April at Kings College London. I would like to thank both Linda Winnett and Kathy Lacy for helping me that day. Incidentally, I have written a brief history of the Society for the Summer 2009 of the SSI's *Newsletter*, which was published in May.

## NEXT ISSUE

Issue 37 will be published in September so please let me have all material by 15 August 2009, please. Remember that you can send contributions via post or email.

## Local Groups

### SIH CHICHESTER (was West Sussex)

**Organiser:** Arthur Reynolds, 14 Roman Way, Fishbourne, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 3QN. Email: arthur@fishbourne.plus.com

### SIH HAMPSHIRE

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

### SIH SOMERSET

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

The groups have a break during the summer months.

January 21st, 1957.

This specimen is written with a Swan 'Calligraph' pen fitted with a fine nib. The ink is Quink Permanent Black. A certain sharpness and precision is imparted to the writing, I find, by placing the paper on some hard surface: this is on 'formica', which I use as a working 'table'.

Sherwin Bailey

---

The Revd. Dr. D. S. Bailey,  
85 Fountain Road,  
Edgbaston, Birmingham 17.

Sherwin Bailey

# Forty Years Ago

## CORRESPONDENCE

1.

Dear Mr. Osley,

An adequate response to Mr. George Thomson's article, in the form presented (*Journal 57*) seems impracticable. One can only implore him to read Johnston's book through at least twice, paying particular attention to the Author's Preface. Work of "no more than technical competence" Johnston assigns to the Artist-Beginner; he states that, within the limits of the craft, the scribe cannot have too much freedom; he instructs us that "...as to its particular virtue each work stands alone – judged by its merits – in spite of all rules".

At the outset, one would contest that Johnston wished or intended to stultify any development of his teachings, and he would doubtless have judged experimental works by their merits of freedom, character, vitality and fitness for their office. It would appear, therefore, that the unfortunate sneer in which Mr. Thomson indulged did Johnston less than justice and that, although maligned, he may yet help in the solution of present problems. Having discovered an affinity, Mr. Thomson may further discover that other precepts stated in the book may be worthy of more respect than he had accorded them hitherto.

In his approach to his craft, it is hoped that Mr. Thomson does not lean too heavily on the theories, for the time being, of those concerned with education; for, unlike the basic truths rediscovered for us by Johnston, they may be subject to alteration at short notice. Some hold that contemporary art education is inept, a view apparently shared by students at Hornsey and Guildford.

In modern times, when licence is more fashionable than discipline and anarchy more popular than good order, one

may reasonably expect the crafts, as such, to fall into decline. The field of lettering, generally, is vast and there is accommodation for all tastes and shades of opinion. One technique may influence and improve another, but if Miss Backhouse attends an SSI exhibition and finds there, of all places, work unacceptably remote from Johnston's liberal concepts she should say so: it should not be taken as an excuse to impugn her integrity or competence as a critic.

We shall not know the verdict of posterity, but one can guarantee that in five hundred years, the work of true scribes will exist, fresh and of imperishable quality, for the enjoyment of our successors when much "creative" work will have long since gone to dust for want of craftsmanship in its creation.

*Lewis Trethewey*

2.

To the Editor,

It was the word 'mere' on line 16 of page 26 in the 1968 summer number of the *Journal* which prompted this letter.

Your review of the SSI exhibition deplores the risk of lettering degenerating into mere components of a design, and issues a warning for those perilously close to the borderline between calligraphic display and mere graphic design based upon words and letter form. Fortunately it is hard to draw this borderline with any precision, and peril is much more likely to arise from restrictive or inhibitive thinking.

It has been said that the criterion for handwriting will be a legibility which entails beauty as a bonus – in that order – but for professional letterers this order surely need not always hold. In fact, use of the alphabet, may well transcend the act of recording or the presentation of words expressing ideas. The emotion of design may be permitted to play a part, and all work with no play makes Jack a dull

11 1 Iowa JJÿ

11111 In illo

John JJJJJ

Jeannette JJJ  
JJJJ

K K K K K K K K  
K K K K K  
K K K K K  
K K K K  
von Karajan

Swash capitals by Thomas Laudy  
From his booklet,  
*Renaissance Capitals*  
Reproduced by kind permission

boy indeed.

One envisages a wall-piece intended for enjoyment as decoration per se, constructed intentionally from letters of the alphabet in the way pictorial, or abstract, embroidery is constructed of individual stitches. The appeal is primarily visual, yet upon closer inspection the lettering technique is present and may be appreciated also. Decorative possibilities are quite unlimited, and there could be nothing against such play with letters, either all of a style or in variety, if well formed. One would not perhaps subscribe to wilful disharmony but even this on occasion may induce an escape from lethargy or serve to clarify one's responses. It is also recalled that random visual associations frequently produce consequences of value, utterly out of reach of course to those whose only working dress is a traditional straightjacket.

Printing aside, we have arrived at transferred lettering and its natural counterpart the spacing machine, but there emerges a vastly wider scope for hand lettering itself than might at first be suspected, from recording, copying and presentation at the one end of the band to the most adventurous work not dependent upon function alone at the other. One cannot but foresee an increasing appreciation of situations where visual stimulus itself is the main spring not just the bonus, with legibility a still valid but secondary consideration. Indeed even in cases where a readable message is included it may well yield priority to the overall excitement of the rest of the chase.

The greatest need is for an extension in the craft of hand lettering, of which calligraphy is a part, i.e. the exploration of arrangements of lettering primarily decorative and one may hope, technically sound as well. A fresh approach to substantial areas of lettering skills is something already well in hand in art departments and establishments overseas and for no craft is this irrelevant, least of all for lettering.

Adventurous lettering is no more linked to the values of a sales index than was for instance the impulsive painting of a Van Gogh or a Gauguin, in the inevitable face of apathy on the part of the academic authority of the day.

Within its own expertise, and with the assistance of letterers, the Printing Fraternity has explored the alphabet and its possibilities. It is up to the letterers similarly to regard their own traditions as a springboard rather than as a drogue, gladly accepting the borderline perils, if any, towards progress in their particular field.

For some, La Fonda is the destination; for others it can always be further on.

*William Gardner*

From *Journal* 59 Summer 1969

## SIH Line Up 2009

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

SECRETARY & EDITOR: Nicholas Caulkin, 203 Dyas Avenue, Great Barr, Birmingham B42 1HN. Tel: 0121-244 8006 (*evenings and weekends*)

Email: [nickthenibs@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nickthenibs@hotmail.co.uk)

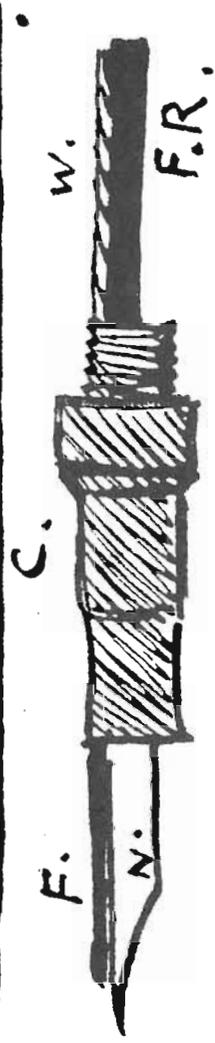
Website: [www.nickthenibs.co.uk](http://www.nickthenibs.co.uk)

TREASURER: Gordon Wratten

E-mail: [wrattens@ntlworld.com](mailto:wrattens@ntlworld.com)

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

\* N.  flat place



C = case

F = Feeder

F.R. = Rod

N. = Nib

W. = Wire

 W.

 F.R.

1. Pull out W. & F.R. (Hold <sup>together</sup> between finger and thumb) direction 
2. Pull out nib (moving it slightly if necessary from side to side) 

CLEAN

1. Place ~~F.~~ N. & N.  F.R.
2. Push backwards into case 
3. Push fitting edges of N. carefully into slots in C. (see ) (see )



# AGM 2009 Survey: Results

Many thanks to those 30 members who completed and sent in their forms included with Issue 36. These are the results. All Officers and Executive Committee members for 2009/2010 are listed in *SIH Line Up 2009*.

<b>Election of officers and committee members</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
I agree that Foster Neville should continue as Chair of the Executive Committee	30	0
I am happy for the current members of the Executive Committee (listed within Issue 36 of <i>Writing Matters</i> ) to continue in post	30	0
I should like to put myself forward for co-option on to the Committee (Name: _____)		
I am happy for the current Secretary and Treasurer to continue in post	30	0
I agree that Mr James Dean should continue as Auditor	30	0

## SOME COMMENTS:

- ❖ I'm looking forward to the appearance of the website in due course. Many thanks to the Executive Committee for their work.
- ❖ *I am most grateful to Foster and Nick for their continuing work for the Society.*
- ❖ Thank all Committee members and officers for all their work and efforts on our behalf.

- ❖ *Any chance of the members coming together, say, the summer of 2010 at the Art Workers' Guild? You would have to ballot the members for a consensus. This would be a semi-social meeting.*
- ❖ Thank you, Nick, and the Executive Committee for all you do to maintain our unique society.
- ❖ *Keep the good work going.*
- ❖ Whilst unable to commit to taking any duties on my shoulders, I would like very much for the group to continue and wish all officers elected the very best for 2009 and subsequent years.
- ❖ *I know times are hard but I do miss our annual get togethers of whichever sort.*
- ❖ I would like to thank all officers and committee members for their efforts and work in the past year.
- ❖ *As they say in Norfolk: "Keep a troshin' 'bor."*
- ❖ I would be more than happy to take out a life membership if such a category were available – it might save on admin costs over the long term. Please thank the Committee and yourself, Nick, for all their generous hard work for the Society.
- ❖ *None other than to wish you well as Secretary of the SIH.*

# Sign of the Tines:

## Your Correspondence

### MONOLINE PENS

Like Nicholas Caulkin (Issue 36), I also use the Pilot G-Tec C4 pen and hate having to use a scrappy ball pen which may be to hand. The ink dries quickly and the nib bites the page well. The ink comes in different colours and I think that Martin Taylor can supply the 'innards' if you keep the barrel. Don't ever lend the pen to anyone as if it is dropped the nib can be ruined.

You can get an edge of sorts if you fasten two pens together with an elastic band. I haven't tried it but I would have thought that it would be good for small pen sketches.

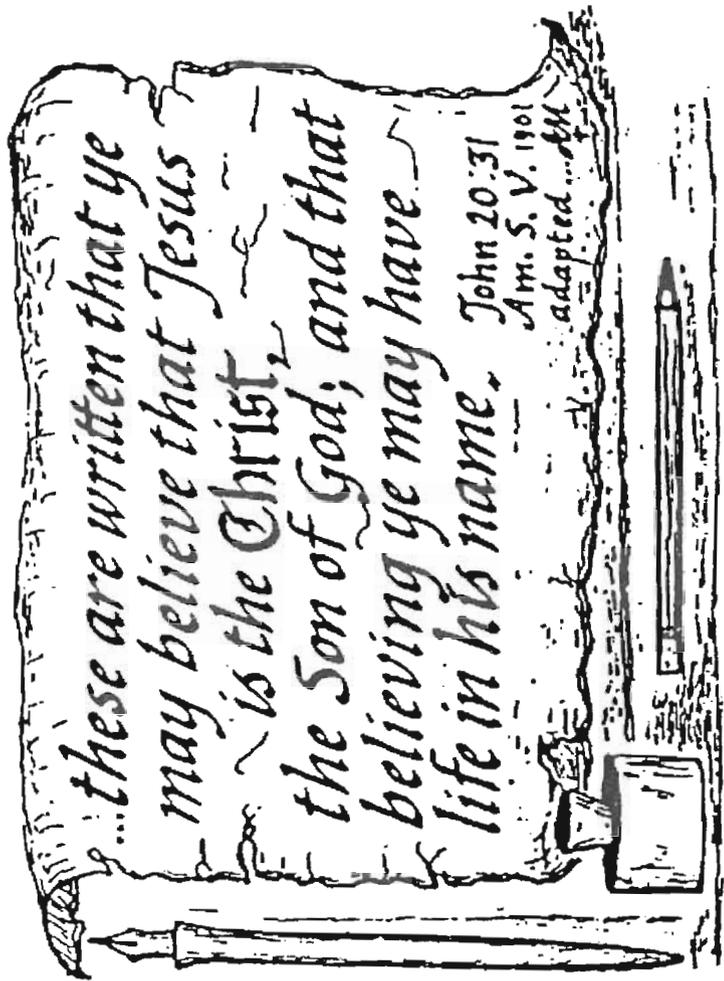
As Treasurer, it is my joy to write cheques with compressed writing on good quality cheque book paper. The Pilot allows me to try my flourishes and there is no greater satisfaction than producing the perfect curve in a capital.

*Gordon Wratten, East Molesey, Surrey, England*

### LETTER EXCHANGE

I have just completed my nineteenth letter and the last in this series, as listed in Joy Daniels' list of October 2007 for the Letter Exchange.

In theory I should have received nineteen letters but, so far, I have only received twelve, which is a great pity as I enjoy receiving as well as writing and sending letters. For those who have written to me I would like to say thank you. Not only have the contents been interesting (and some amusing), but all have given me some beautiful writing, some being excellent examples of cursive Italic. I would



...these are written that ye  
may believe that Jesus  
is the Christ,  
the Son of God; and that  
believing ye may have  
life in his name.

John 20:31  
Am. S. V. 1901  
adapted...AM

also like to thank Joy for her work in organising Letter Exchange.

Lastly, I would make a plea for **all** members whose names appear on the Letter Exchange schedule to actually write their letters on time. If they are unable to meet the monthly challenge they should advise Joy.

*Russell Robertson, Bungay, Suffolk, England*

### **EXPRESSION THROUGH LETTERS**

One "theme" that has brought some interest in my classes is adapting letters to match, visually, somehow, the meaning of their word texts. A simple example might be a very high t or l ascender in the word "tall," if the text includes discussion of a tall building. A happy birthday card might have the word Happy, with the cross line of the capital H up-curved, as a smile. Dots can be added for eyes -- making a smiling face. Examples, anyone?

Will the computer - word processor diminish the importance of handwriting, as such? Not necessarily.

I was told that about 100 years ago musicians feared that recording sound devices would reduce the need for live bands, say at hotels. The "victrola" would, supposedly, cause many musicians to lose jobs. You can see today that the opposite occurred. Recorded music (if you want to call some of it music) just made performers more popular, and actually brought more concertizing.

Movies have not diminished the popularity of live stage. We can hardly feel that the automobile has done away with horseback riding.

I say that many of us can help the "cause" of handwriting and/or calligraphy by showing this to be a fantastic tool for self expression. Computer sophisticated children may still

3 March 1969

78 Park Road,  
Cosley, Leicester.

Dear Marjorie,

Many thanks for the copies of the Journal. I had not realised that such a society exists. The articles are most interesting and many of the thoughts expressed I can sympathise with!

This example of my hand is good only for today, as tomorrow it may be much larger. I have been using a ball-point pen for about two years and I must say that it makes a pleasant change to use a nib pen with the interchangeable nib system. When you think that at one time the fountain pen was frowned upon by our teachers of so-called writing the mind boggles. Perhaps it was really the nib they were objecting to as it did not give the 'thin up and thick down'. The nib I am using now is a fine italic.

I had no formal instruction in the italic hand. In the early days of my training to be a designer I noticed the poor form of my school round hand in a design context and since I became interested in lettering and typography italic just cried out to be tried. Many of my design roughs are covered in the lettering of the day. I have always thought that lettering is one of the most subtle forms

James Constant

enjoy expressing feelings through letter graphics. Some of these graphics may include letter modifications that actually relate to feelings --the H, with curved cross bar for a smile or other way, for a frown. Showing feelings, through subtle -- or not so subtle -- letter modifications may bring fun, and more profound gratification.

I believe these are themes that deserve attention.

*Art Maier, Fulton, Missouri USA*

### **OXFORD SCRIBES**

Oxford Scribes have just celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary by publishing a beautiful book illustrating 26 lettering hands from Greek to computer art. Also in the book is a gallery of work by twenty-two members of Oxford Scribes. The gallery is currently on exhibition at Corinium Museum, Park Street, Cirencester until 21 June. It continues at Said Business School, Oxford throughout July River and Rowing Museum, Henley, 25 September to 29 November and County Record Office, Cowley, Oxford 1 December until January 2010.

The book, *The Long Tradition*, is available from Gilly Middleburgh:

Tel. 01844 273498; Email [gill@middleburgh.co.uk](mailto:gill@middleburgh.co.uk)

*Russell Robertson, Bungay, Suffolk, England*

## Pen Snippets:

### Russell Robertson

In issue 36, Kate Gladstone discussed writing instruments and exhorted the use of modern tools for a new 'aspect' in writing. The editor comments that one of his writing instruments is the Pilot G-Tec-C4 and also the use of a mapping pen nib for work on a piece of calligraphy.

Like most writers, I have my favourite pens (and inks and paper). I use a Parker Reflex pen, now over 10 years of use, with a fine nib and Parker black washable ink. I also have a wide variety of writing instruments built up over 40 years or so. These include fountain pens with standard or edged nibs, ball points, a wide variety of calligraphy pens and handmade pens - bamboo, Norfolk reed, quills, etc.

Modern tools do not give better results than some early writing instruments, e.g. quills, but some will give pleasing results and can be fun to use.

Some writers spend a lot of money, particularly on fountain pens, but money does not mean you will get a better pen. I think that the most I have spent on a fountain pen is about £55, a Sheaffer bought about ten years ago which is beautifully engineered and writes well.

When pen manufacturers recommend a particular ink for their pens, it is often wise to use it (e.g. Parker recommends Parker inks). However, I use other good quality inks for writing and for calligraphy but I prefer water colours or gouache for calligraphy. I have a selection of about twenty-five different makes of ink - not all good! - but if you like to experiment, go ahead.

Remember also to thoroughly clean all parts of your pen when trying out a different ink. For a choice of ink, try the Writing Desk based at Bury St. Edmunds. They stock at

least fifteen brands, most of which are illustrated in their full colour range on the website: [www.thewritingdesk.co.uk](http://www.thewritingdesk.co.uk). They also have a large range of writing instruments and paper, etc.

I recently purchased a new Rotring Art Pen with a 1.1 mm nib. I was surprised to see that it was made in the UK, no doubt the result of Rotring being taken over by Sanford. It appears to be identical to the original German pen. It is a great pity that Sanford have also reduced the size range of the Art Pens. Can anyone tell me where I can buy a Rotring Art Pen with a 0.6 mm nib?

For ladies who like to carry a small fountain pen, the Pilot Birdie is only 110 mm long and less than 9 mm diameter. It has a medium nib, but looks and writes as a fine nib. The price is less than £10. The pen has a sac filler with a sprung stainless steel bar, similar to some earlier Parker pens. The barrel and cap are stainless steel and the pen weighs just 15 grams.

Lastly, remember that most fountain pen nibs can be re-ground to suit the user. Regrinding has to be carried out by someone who is skilled in this work.

# Doodles

Are you sure ?

These are my doodles  
the clean and the ruddles  
My rhymes and my jottings  
complete with ink blottings  
The squiggles and scratches  
with lines of was matches  
Each dash dot and scribble  
my pen happens to dribble  
Line after line  
with fat nib or fine  
Nothing makes sense  
the letters too dense  
It's not so exciting  
all this handwriting  
my inkers get cramping  
& the page awfully damp  
This page should be ripped  
of this terrible script  
Torn to a shred  
So I'm off to bed.

Goodnight

David Elvy

## Contributors

*The following people have contributed to this edition: -*

Sherwin Bailey, James Constant, David Elvy, William Gardner, Edward Johnston, Thomas Laudy, Art Maier, Foster Neville, nickthenibs, Len Perry, Russell Robertson, Lewis Trethewey & Gordon Wratten.

*Square by Ken Bartlett*

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*Front cover designed by nickthenibs*

*The SIH is a registered charity number 287889R Revenue number X99453A*

# The Society for Italic Handwriting

A REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 287892

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 <sup>the</sup> 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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## Application Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to 'The SIH' and send to: —  
Nicholas Caulkin, Sec; 203 Dyas Ave. Great Barr. B'ham B42 1HN