

by Carolyn Fraser

the winged art

Let us all labour in the eye of the motto:
The Future is greater than the Past.

— ISAAC PITMAN, 1873

ISAAC PITMAN—Britain's teetotal, vegetarian, Swedenborgian spelling reformer and the self-described Inventor of Phonography—was also almost the inventor of the modern day postage stamp. In 1839, the British Government offered a £200 prize for the best suggestion for verifying payment under a new system of pre-paid postage. Pitman proposed stamp, printed in sheets of 240 from engraved plates. The stamp, Pitman suggested, would have dual purpose in both indicating receipt of payment and sealing the envelope shut, a suggestion his brother later described as an “unlucky stroke of economy.” Like Pitman, the eventual prize winner also proposed stamps, however the victor’s idea was to affix the stamp to the front of the envelope, all the more convenient for its cancellation.

This loss, however, was a very minor setback in Isaac Pitman’s reforming agenda. The advent of the Penny Post was crucial to the successful dissemination of Pitman’s life-long undertaking—to reform English spelling and to teach a phonetic shorthand that would allow writers to render speech verbatim and in doing so, relieve the tedium of writing longhand. “To save time is to prolong life,” wrote Pitman in 1841.

To be clear, Pitman did not invent shorthand. Various methods had been employed throughout history, extending back to the Greeks and Romans. Pitman himself was self-taught using Harding’s edition of Taylor’s system. Pitman’s innovation was to develop a system based on phonetics, in which “not only every sound has a sign, but as, also, every sign represents a sound, all ambiguity ends.” This was the utopia promised by Pitman’s shorthand: that in freeing writing from the arbitrary strictures of spelling, writing would thus be infused with the living trace of speech. The speed offered by shorthand promised mimetic accuracy previously unattainable, and as such, allowed a transparency to the workings of government and the law previously unimaginable. And all this—politic, religious, and social reform—was possible with the purchase of an inexpensive instruction book, well within the means and capabilities of working and lower middle-class men and women.

Pitman’s first manual (*Stenographic Sound-hand*) was issued in 1837. A 12-page letterpressed booklet (3.5 x 5”) with two lithographed plates, it was “enclosed in a drab cover of thin cardboard.” Pitman apologised for the sewing of the first

200: “Since this first essay we have had a lesson on the subject from a stationer.” Pitman continually revised his system, and after devoting himself full-time to phonography, he toured Great Britain promoting the system and selling his instructional pamphlets.

Grasping the commercial implications of the Penny Post, Isaac Pitman walked the eleven miles back and forth between his home in Bath and the engraving establishment of S.J. Lander in High Street, Bristol, in order to supervise the engraving of his Penny Plate, a remarkable conspectus of his system miniaturised onto a 6.5”x 8” plate. The rules of the system are outlined in 35 points (the last, no. 35: *Reader, Practise & Persevere.*) Tables illustrate the symbols and outlines; the Lord’s Prayer and various psalms are rendered in full. Examples are given in French and German, with the note that any language may be written in phonography with “trifling difference in the sound of some letters.” Pitman announces “Any Person may receive lessons from the Author by post gratuitously. Each lesson must be enclosed in a paid letter. The pupil can write about a dozen verses from the Bible, leaving spaces between the lines for the corrections.” As can be imagined, the success of

Invented & Drawn by I. Pitman, 5, Nelson Place, BATH. PRICE ONE PENNY. Mounted on Canvas & bound in Cloth, lettered with two chapters from the N. T. (Mat. & Rev. 2) as additional exercises. LONDON: S. Bagster, 15, Paternoster Row, 1840.

RULES FOR WRITING illustrated by EXAMPLES.

- Write by sound as pique (pāh) seat (sēt) set (sāt) sat (sāt) sit (sīt) sight (sīt) For c write k, as cough or s, as city or sh, as negotiate For x write ks, as box or gz, as exist or ksh, as noxious For q write k or one of the double or treble vowels made of u (pronounce this letter like who without the aspirate) as queen quart
- Especially observe the proper sound of the short vowels every one of which in the common hand is out of place thus, neat | knit | age | edge | psalm | Sam (Samuel) | raw | rot | tone | tun | pool | pull
- Pronounce the vowels as they sound in the alphabetical words and examples placed to them. Pronounce every consonant at once by means of the small vowel put to it. Learn by heart the natural order of the single vowels & single consonants as below. New names are given to some of the single cons. to express their true sound, or to keep them in unison
- Mark the difference between sp & spr, sj & str, sch & schr, sk & skr at the commencement of words; also ps & rps, ts & rts, chs & rchs, ks & rks at the conclusion of words. See Joining Table
- S joined to a hook or small letter becomes a dot, as spl | snt r | lts | l | kts, do, spr is instead of rts & for & k
- Vowels before consonants are placed to the left of perpendicular & leaning strokes, as eat | weight | wet | eyes | ape | owl | air | and above horizontal strokes, as eager | aim | Anne | walker
- Vowels after cons. go to the right, or under, as joy | toet | high | cov
- The vowels places are counted from the beginning of the cons. ea & their derivatives take the first place, as she | daw | ply | week | noise | royal | a o & their derivatives take the second place or middle of the cons. as air | oat | upper | ache | oat | and a o & their derivatives have the third place or end, as Pa | loo | due | l | now | house | youth
- When a, o & o are put to cons. they may point any way, when they stand alone for words they always lean to the right, as whom | (neither of them the loop s) is to be placed thus, a first or second place vowel after the first cons. as team | cord | tweed | trifle | void | net | boat | A third place vowel goes before the last cons. as rack | loom | duke | L | man | mouth | shaft
- The loop dot s taken no vowel, when a vowel is put close to one, it belongs to the cons. connected with it as pass | secure | sickle
- If two vowels come between two cons. give one to each, as poet
- When two vowels begin or end a word, put one close to the other at a little distance as iota | oasis | saiah | Victoria
- Never join a short straight letter (which is always a double or treble cons.) to a letter in the same direction, but write the single cons. for it, or take off the pen, as fact | or | not | steam | ed | or | started
- Sh after n & r, and before is curved thus, as nation | portion | missionary
- Make the stroke s in these cases only, when a word contains only s & a vowel, as yes | sigh when s is repeated, as cease | assize | also when a word begins with a vowel followed by s, as ask | or ends with a vowel preceded by s, as tendency | whenever you want to put a vowel to s, as sumptuous | or
- All rules relating to the sharp consonants p, t, ch, k, f, th, b, sh, are also applicable to their correspondents, flats, b, d, j, g, v, th, z, zh
- When short l stands alone, count the vowels places downwards, as shoe | law | allow | When either letter is joined to the loop s only, write it downwards, as issues | lace | sale
- Make r and shn with a tick when either letter stands alone, as or | rye | ocean | when it is succeeded by the loop s only, as arise | airs | oceans
- The letters chn & rch must never stand alone, nor with the loop s only added, because of sht & rl
- Each letter in the Alphabet stands for the words put to it, (except the examples in short hand) & all others of the same sound, as I and eye, &c. for other words write all the consonants that sound (joining them together) & the principal vowels, as appeared
- S may be added to an Alphabetical word without taking off the pen, as words | thoughts | hands | thinks | Other letters must be separated as established | distinction
- The horizontal & half sized cons. (k, m, nd, &c.) when representing words, stand at the top of the line for words contain. first place vowels, and at the bottom for words cont. second & third place vowels. In the Alphabet, these words are divided by a colon.
- All middle place vowels (o, wa, &c.) when standing alone, go at the bottom of the line, as away | yet | one
- Compound words must be reduced to their primitives, and written near together, as within | without | altogether | somewhat | yourselves
- Disjoin Prefixes & Affixes, as interest | Phonography | or | for a plural affix add s, as subscriptions | tenements | earldoms
- Com & con are written by a light dot before the next cons. as comply | consider | & accom by a heavy dot, as accommodate | accomplished
- For ing put a small dot after the last cons. as starting | the plural ing is a large dot, as workings
- If a word reaches too low, or does not join well, take off the pen, as constituted | chargeable
- Choose the best manner of writing a word, as part | not | armor | not
- Generally omit h, for the sake of brevity, as comprehensive
- A first place vowel, standing at the beginning of a word, should be written in point of time, before the cons. to which it is placed, as peaceable
- FIGURES. Write the digits thus, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, () Put all other numbers in short-hand words, as 20 | 46 | or join the digits, placing a line under, as 396 | 666 | 1840
- STOPS. Contma | Semicolon | Colon | Period, or leave 4 & 5 inch spaces. Hyphen | Irony | Exclamation | & all other stops & marks as usual. Italic See Psalm 133 Accent, décent | noble | deny | tarry | present | present | Inflexions rise | fall | as is it so or so? | altogether | somewhat | yourselves

12 VOWELS

e	the, see	ye	ye, year-s	wē	we, between
ā	say, mate	yā	Yates	wā	a-way, where
ā	a, Bgth	yā	* yawl ?	wā	* walk
ā	all, awe, ought	yā	yawn	wā	water, wall
ō	O, note	yō	yoke	wō	wag, wave
ō	to, who-m	yō	(ō) you-r-s	wō	wag, woof
ē	in, it, sin	yē	* (new tube)	wē	with, wilt
ē	me, yester	yē	yet, yester	wē	well, when
ā	and, an, at	yā	yard day	wā	thwack
ā	of, not	yā	beyond	wā	was, what
ō	nut sun	yō	young, young	wō	were, won
ō	put, should-st	yō	* (ster)	wō	would - st
ō	(I) I, by th	yō	* (pine)	wō	(ā) voice, (how)
ō	* (I) I, by th	yō	* (pine)	wō	(ā) thou, about

62 DOUBLE VOWELS (regular marks may be pronounced & written either long or short)

WY	(ōā) wh ite	WY	(ōā) * (wind) s
WAO	(ōā) * (wine)	WAO	(ōā) wound, (oid)

62 TREBLE VOWELS

WY	(ōā) wh ite	WY	(ōā) * (wind) s
WAO	(ōā) * (wine)	WAO	(ōā) wound, (oid)

22 SINGLE & 96 DOUBLE CONSONANTS

P	up, upon	K	king, comp	S	saw, society, so
bt	wrapped	kt	object, inspect	sh	shalt, ship
Pr	principle	Kr	call, calculation	st	God, good
Pl	participation	Kl	CHRIST, cor, system, sorption	shl	glory, glad
B	be-an, but, before, bility	kn	cannot, can, give-n, gave	shr	great, graph
abd	robbed	kn	cannot, can, give-n, gave	shn	begin-ning
Bd	public, breadth	gn	again-st	zh	for it, off, for
Br	re-member	gn	again-st	zhd	after, left
T	out, time	gn	again-st	zhd	treasure
tl	till, little	gn	again-st	zhd	occasion
Tr	truth, trans	gn	again-st	zhd	LORD, also
tn	ten, town	gn	again-st	zhd	help, ally, elbow
D	day, done	gn	again-st	zhd	difficult-y
disco	disco, dom	gn	again-st	zhd	hold, world
d	deliver-y	gn	again-st	zhd	filch, fold
D	dear, D	gn	again-st	zhd	indulge
din	down, London	gn	again-st	zhd	milk
Ch	which	gn	again-st	zhd	wolf
cht	fetchd	gn	again-st	zhd	alphabetical
chl	children	gn	again-st	zhd	resolve
chr	natur-s	gn	again-st	zhd	health
chn	question	gn	again-st	zhd	
Jo	Jesus, general	gn	again-st	zhd	
jd	obliged	gn	again-st	zhd	
jd	individual	gn	again-st	zhd	
jr	Jerusalem	gn	again-st	zhd	
jn	margin	gn	again-st	zhd	

THE LORDS PRAYER Matthew, 6, 9 to 13. Ornamental

Any Person may receive lessons from the Author by post gratuitously. Each lesson must be enclosed in a paid letter. The pupil can write about a dozen verses from the Bible, leaving spaces between the lines for the corrections.

by Dan Shepelavy

A BALLET FOR arrows

I WAS BROWSING a densely packed bookstore, one where the shelves are surrounded by ever-accumulating mounds of unsorted, precariously stacked books. These reefs often contain treasures, drawing your eye in a flash of detail—a fragment of type, the shard of a phrase, a swatch of illustration.

So it was with *The Technic of the Baton*. It was a faded and foxed pamphlet, with its title, sub-title, description, author's biography, and publisher's information centered across the cover, like the radiating bones of a fish skeleton. I picked it up, and while absentmindedly flipping through it, happened upon these marvelous little diagrams.

Gorgeous, right?—What struck me immediately is their depth, which makes them read almost spatially. Their proportions are nearly that of the human figure, which gives them an uncanny physical presence. Diagram no. 6 is a particularly captivating example. The arrows dance, joined at the ends of dotted arms, bending elegantly across their lengths—arcing and tracking together as they inscribe measures of time.

One of the joys of this little book is the melodramatic grandeur of its descriptions of conducting —“The performers should feel that the conductor feels, comprehends, and is moved; then his emotion communicates itself to those he directs, his inward fire warms them, his electric glow animates them, his force of impulse excites them; he throws around him the vital irradiations of musical art.”

The aesthetic stakes in play here imbue these simple gestures with considerable raw power. These filigrees of motion bind a roiling mass into a single organism, tease from it emphasis and colour, and simultaneously transmit and evoke interpretations both subtle and profound.

All this, I think, accounts for the particular character these diagrams possess. At first glance, they are supremely simple, pleasing graphic constructions. But ponder them a moment longer, and they come alive, like arrows engaged in elegant ballet. **U**

Pitman's Penny Plate, issued on January 10, 1840—the first day of the new Penny Post—resulted in a tremendous workload.

The first shorthand magazine—the *Family Messenger*—was circulated between the nine Pitman siblings resident in England. Other magazines followed, and became known as Evercirculators. The Phonographic Corresponding Society, and later the Phonetic Society, facilitated communication between students and practitioners of what was known as the Winged Art. In Manchester, on March 15, 1843, the first phonographic festival was held, attracting “100 friends of Phonography, who partook of tea and indulged in speechmaking.” Other festivals followed, and tea parties and “phonographic soirées” were held throughout Britain.

During the early years of phonography's popularity, shorthand was practiced as often in the séance room as the courthouse (shorthand allowed accurate recording of both the voices of the living and the dead.) Pitman's publishing company supplied popular and religious literature both in phonetic type and in shorthand, working with typefounders to develop the metal types to do so. The shorthand fraternity, in constant communication through the mail, were targeted in the advertisements that accompanied this literature. It is argued that the category of “clerical worker” that arises at this time is the first truly mass audience. Quickly, shorthand becomes less the preserve of the hobbyist and avocational practitioner and instead, a crucial skill for this new breed of worker.

According to his biographer Alfred Baker, Pitman spent Queen Victoria's coronation day

labouring over his new shorthand system. Later, Pitmanites would claim the system to be the most useful invention of the Victorian Era. Without doubt, the interest and popularity that surrounded the development of phonography points to anxiety about and a yearning for the capture and representation of the human voice in print. Media theorists Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin write that “the cultural work of defining a new medium may go on during and in a sense even before the invention of the device itself.”

In a curious aside in *The Life of Sir Isaac Pitman*, Baker writes “A singular rumour was rather prevalent in phonographic circles in the early seventies, to the effect that Isaac Pitman was not quite in his right mind.” By this time, Pitman shorthand was well established in the business world. Between the 1851 census and WW1, the number of women filling clerical jobs would multiply more than 80 times. The spelling reform Pitman hoped for had failed, but his phonetic shorthand was set to play a central role in clerical practice for the next century. The 1870s, however, saw the invention of both the phonograph and the telephone. Perhaps Pitman, exhausted by his tireless efforts in promotion of phonography, saw that phonetic shorthand had become all that it was ever going to be, and that from now on, machines would bear the burden of preserving the spirit of human voice. **U**

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