

*Eminents observed: a century of writing,  
lettering, type and typography at the  
Central School, London*

Book or Report Section

Published Version

Kindel, E. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9995-5891>  
(2018) *Eminents observed: a century of writing, lettering, type  
and typography at the Central School, London*. In: Kindel, E.  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9995-5891> (ed.) *Typeform  
Dialogues* (2nd edition). Hyphen Press, London, pp. 50-87.  
ISBN 9780907259527 Available at  
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/66607/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the  
work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Published version at: <https://hyphenpress.co.uk/products/books/978-0-907259-52-7>

Publisher: Hyphen Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law,  
including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other  
copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in  
the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

# Typeform dialogues

An interactive interface presenting a comparative survey of typeform history & description

Explained and illustrated through its User's Manual and in essays by Catherine Dixon & Eric Kindel

Edited by Eric Kindel

Hyphen Press . London

<b>Foreword</b>	3
<b>User's Manual</b> Eric Kindel	5
<b>Appendices</b>	37
Types in the interface    Catherine Dixon	
Typeform dialogues    Catherine Dixon & Eric Kindel	
Project bibliography	
<b>Eminents observed</b> Eric Kindel	50
A century of writing, lettering, type and typography at the Central School, London	
<b>Systematizing the platypus</b> Catherine Dixon	88
A perspective on type design classification	

*Typeform dialogues*

First edition, 2012; revised 2013

Second edition, 2018

Copyright © 2012, 2013, 2018, the authors

ISBN 978-0-907259-52-7

Made in collaboration with Hyphen Press,  
London. This document is available free to  
download at [hyphenpress.co.uk](http://hyphenpress.co.uk)



## Author's note

50

'Eminents observed' was written between 1998 and 2000 to accompany *Typeform dialogues*. The essay was intended to provide historical context for the interface by locating it within a tradition of Central School teaching in the disciplines of writing, lettering, type and typography. The essay was partnered with another by Catherine Dixon that detailed her thinking on systems for classifying typeforms, thinking that had informed her contributions to the *Typeform dialogues* interface.\*

In 2012, while preparing the first edition of *Typeform dialogues*, I considered including 'Eminents observed'. But the demands of other work did not allow this. Later, when revisiting the essay, I resolved to finally bring it to a publishable form, regardless of the lapse of time and despite its numerous faults. In preparing the text, I have fixed factual errors, and what I now consider to be errors of interpretation. Throughout, I have made changes to language in an attempt to improve clarity and expression, and I have inserted several new footnotes. I have not otherwise attempted to alter the essay's style (such as it is) or its somewhat tidy trajectory, which are artefacts of its original composition. Nor have I made reference to the activities of the Central Lettering Record subsequent to the writing of the essay, under the curatorship of Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon.

In publishing the text, I would like to thank two esteemed former colleagues, Stuart Evans and the late Justin Howes. In 2000, both provided insightful comments on the text in draft. I am also much indebted to Robin Kinross, who similarly offered valuable comments in 2000, and on the present text. And I extend special thanks to Catherine Dixon, whose own research during the *Typeform dialogues* project, freely shared, had a beneficial influence on my understanding of Nicolette Gray. Catherine likewise gave me helpful comments on the whole of my text in draft. In thanking each of the above, I do not wish to implicate any of them in errors of fact or interpretation that may follow.

Eric Kindel

\* The foreword to the present document (see above, pp. 3–4) gives further details about the original publishing circumstances of *Typeform dialogues*. For Catherine Dixon's

essay, 'Systematizing the platypus: a perspective on type design classification', see below, pp. 88–133.

# Eminents observed: a century of writing, lettering, type and typography at the Central School, London

51

*The moral is, if we want beautiful type, we must teach children to write beautifully.*  
Emery Walker, 1888

*On copying a Hand.—Our intentions being right (viz. to make our work essentially readable) and our actions being expedient (viz. to select and copy the simple forms which have remained essentially the same, leaving the complex forms which have passed out of use ...) we need not vex ourselves with the question of 'lawfulness'.*  
Edward Johnston, 1906

*We are too apt to be perplexed with what seems to us a jumble of styles to choose from, when acknowledgement of but one style, permitting degrees of elaboration in execution according to circumstances would unravel the whole matter. This is the remedy suggested here. The tool which developed and preserved for us so magnificent an achievement of the Roman alphabet may well be trusted for the performance of our modern needs also.*  
Graily Hewitt, 1930

*I do not intend to present any sort of watertight theory, but to examine examples which I recognize as in some way admirable and to analyse what it is in each which I admire; since the eye, not principle, is the basis of all judgement of visual things. I want to arrive at a new way of thinking about lettering from which nothing is excluded on a priori grounds.*  
Nicolette Gray, 1960

*Typeform dialogues* has been made in an institution where throughout its history the teaching of writing, lettering, type and typography has occupied a place of great importance. This institution is Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, known originally as the Central School of Arts & Crafts.<sup>1</sup> During the previous century [i.e. looking back from from the late 1990s] the Central School has employed teachers whose firmly held views on these subjects have shaped its pedagogy. Given the connections between subjects, it is not surprising that those who taught them had common concerns, as well as individual pre-occupations. In the essay that follows, those who taught (or who influenced the teaching) will be observed. Observations will highlight arguments about what sources and techniques, tools and materials, encouragements and prohibitions should be at work, in theory and in practice, in writing, lettering and typography. Attention will focus on Emery Walker, whose valuation of early printing, set out before the Central School opened,

<sup>1</sup> The Central School of Arts & Crafts was founded in 1896. It retained this name until 1966 when it was changed to the Central School of Art & Design. Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design dates from 1989 when the Central School and St Martin's School of Art were formally joined under the administration of The London Institute. As the present essay concentrates on the Central School before its merger with St Martin's, this name – the Central School – will be adopted throughout.

influenced its teaching from the outset; on Edward Johnston, whose renewal of formal writing and lettering while at the Central School established a new foundation for its practice; on J. H. Mason and Gailly Hewitt, whose lengthy tenures did much to consolidate the Central School's early innovations; and on Nicolette Gray, whose reconfiguration of the study of letterforms was embedded into the Central Lettering Record she built up in partnership with Nicholas Biddulph. In each instance, the ideas that supported teaching or practice were expressed in quite specific, even idiosyncratic, ways. Thus observations will also note how individuals gave form to their views, in published works or as designed artefacts, on the assumption that as much may be learned from structure and presentation as from content. In making observations of all kinds, historical connections and disjunctures will not be the sole concern. Rather, their compilation is intended to build up a context within which *Typeform dialogues*, as a late addition, may be located.

# I

Much of the thinking that would guide instruction in writing, lettering, type and typography at the new Central School of Arts & Crafts was anticipated by Emery Walker. One moment in particular has often served as the first instance when this thinking was cogently set out: 15 November 1888. On that day (in the evening), Walker delivered a lecture entitled 'Letterpress printing' to the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society in London. In it, he presented highlights in the development of letterforms, type, printing and illustration since the fifteenth century. The lecture was a prescient articulation of the interests and concerns that would revitalize printing in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.

Despite the lecture's foundational role in a now familiar story, Walker's words and pictures were only reassembled by John Dreyfus in the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> In a compelling investigation, Dreyfus confirmed the lecture's well-known thread of discussion: that early printing was pre-eminent, and set standards from which later efforts slowly declined. He also confirmed Walker's espousal of type partnered and printed in harmony with illustrations, a harmony that was both artistic and mechanical in nature.<sup>3</sup> Type, too, should be well-formed, derived from a vigorous practice of writing; on it all other aspects of printing depended. Walker noted that throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a living relationship existed between manuscripts and their print and typographical relations. Thereafter writing became debased, a condition echoed in types that were poorer in form and beauty. The ensuing decline terminated in the types of Giambattista Bodoni and related nineteenth-century designs still common in 1888.

Evidence of printing's triumph and fall was provided throughout the lecture by a subtly polemical group of images displayed by means of magic lantern slides. These Dreyfus also reassembled. From them,

and from reminiscences of those present in the audience, it is possible to imagine the persuasiveness of Walker's words and pictures. Recollections suggest that the images were novel both in their subject matter and in their display. Photographic enlargements of letterforms and type were arresting; they and other images of books, manuscripts and woodcuts were enchanting, and intensified by their projection in the darkened hall. Their visual rhetoric formed a powerful partnership with Walker's comments on printing's glorious past and wayward progress.<sup>4</sup>

While this account of the lecture (taken from Dreyfus) omits some details, it does give sufficient indication of Walker's views, which had a great effect not only on his audience that evening but on a movement of printing reform that followed soon after. To give his views in summary: that the historical course of writing, type-making and printing was marked by gradual corruption; that renewal might begin by collecting and examining artefacts of the past to establish guides for present-day practice; and thereafter, that the communication between type-making and writing should be re-established to encourage the latter's revival and its central role in the making of types for books.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to this process were images of letterforms and type brought from the past emphatically into the present through photography that recorded and amplified their forms and could thereby guide new designs.<sup>6</sup>

## 2

Emery Walker's lecture was well received. Apart from its immediate appeal, it was favourably reviewed at the time, while subsequent versions continued to generate comment in the printing trade press (see figure 1, overleaf).<sup>7</sup> But perhaps of greater consequence was the hold Walker's ideas took on William Morris, in whose Kelmscott Press Walker would play a significant advisory role. Though suffused with Morris's own aesthetic tastes, the books issued by the Kelmscott Press

2. John Dreyfus, 'A reconstruction of the lecture given by Emery Walker on 15 November 1888', *Matrix 11* (Leominster: The Whittington Press, 1991), pp. 27–52.  
3. According to Dreyfus's reconstruction, the last third of Walker's lecture addressed the relationship between type, illustration and their combination on the printed page. The artistic harmony referred to was partly one of form, that type and illustration should exhibit some formal equivalence. But true harmony was realized only when type and illustration were mechanically unified, i.e. when printed simultaneously and with the same effect. Indeed, Walker argued that artistic harmony was only made possible by mechanical harmony, and that the relationship should always be determined by the type. Judging from Walker's chosen illustrations, woodcut was the illustration technique he thought harmonized with type most effectively.

4. As May Morris observed, 'the audience ... were much struck by the beauty of the "incunables" shown, and by the way they bore the searching test of enlargement on the screen. One after another the old printers passed before us, one after another their splendid pages shone out in the dark room'; and 'The sight of the finely-proportioned letters so enormously enlarged, and gaining rather than losing by the process, the enlargement emphasizing all the qualities of the type'. These comments are extracted from a longer description of the lecture. The effect the images had on her father, William Morris, who also attended the lecture, was said (by her) to have sparked into action his latent interest in printing and led to the establishment of the Kelmscott Press. William Morris, *The collected works of William Morris, with introductions by his daughter May Morris*, vol. 15, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. xv.

5. This was Walker's preferred scenario. While he is perhaps best remembered for participating in the revival (or reworking) of many historical types, Walker had in fact only proposed this as an interim measure. In his essay 'Printing', published by the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (1888), Walker argued that typesetters should endeavour 'to produce once more the restrained and beautiful forms of the early printers, until the day when the current handwriting may be elegant enough to be again used as a model for the type-punch engraver.' It is worth re-emphasizing that Walker focused almost solely on types for books (i.e. for text); the discussion of letters and types for display is conspicuously absent.  
6. The excitement generated by Walker's enlargements was only the first indication of their usefulness. Such photography later provided the means for adapting a number of historic types for use by private presses (e.g. Kelmscott, Doves, Cranach, and others).  
7. Dreyfus notes Oscar Wilde's attendance at the 1888 lecture and quotes from his enthusiastic review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the following day. Reports on subsequent versions of the lecture appeared in *The British & Colonial Printer* in 1890 (6/13 February) and 1896 (2 January; see figure 1).

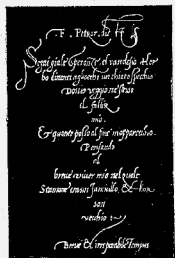
# TYPOGRAPHY

## A LECTURE BY EMERY WALKER

TENNISON said "Let us TYPE then with our own eyes." Type was in the Laureate's typol of a character; a form; or image. Although perhaps surveyed from quite a different standpoint, some materialists and practical, though none the less artistic, to Mr. Emery Walker, a gentleman whose heart and soul is devoted to the art of typography, and who delivered a most delightful lecture on that subject at the Central Art Department of the Technical Education Board, Bolt-court,



the other evening—type is also typical of a certain character, a form, or image, when to his mind it is worthy to be admitted, and, according to his remarks, more often to be found in the beautiful bold, clear, round-face type in the old-time books, such as those of the 16th century than in our modern productions, although the punches used by Caslon for casting his beautiful old-style fonts which, he said, originated from the 16th



Venetian Writing Master's Copy Book.

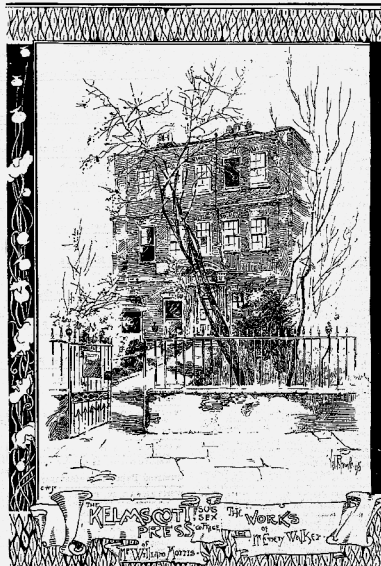
century, are still in existence, and we wonder with Mr. Emery Walker that they are not more generally used nowadays. Mr. C. J. DREXON presided over a large and appreciative audience. Before the commencement of the lecture the CHAIRMAN, in the course of a few perceptive remarks, expressed, as one of the governors of the St. Bride's Foundation Institute, the desire of that body that there should be a complete alliance between the two schools—that at Bolt-court and the one at St. Bride. They were particularly anxious, so far as pos-

Q. catulus uterque summus ornatus. Q. horrentius abbas rator quod uis multus loci plurimum u hac causa tam si cognoscitur aut et carissimum tamen amicitia possimur ueritatem atq hoc facit sunt uicem ubi uera et concedam uno CR. Pompei sibi uia et omni ubi tribuenda sunt uicem dignum ubi delectat non oportere. Oh

Witten Green, about 1470.

stable, that the two schools should work in harmony, and should interchange lecturers, and in various ways make themselves useful to one another. At St. Bride they had a large technical library—which was not used as it should be—containing works on typography and lithography, and he therefore proposed that the students at Bolt-court have the free use of that library for technical purposes, as a mark of appreciation of the kind services they at St. Bride had received at the hands of Dr. Garnett and others. This happy suggestion was received with well-deserved applause, after which

Mr. EMERY WALKER began his interesting paper, entitled "Typography."



In introducing his subject he explained his intention of showing a series of views by means of the magic lantern illustrating what was really essential to the production of a book that, in his humble belief, shall be a work of art, and this though not confining a single decoration or picture.

He first dealt in a pleasing way with the materials necessary, remarking that paper, ink and type may be said to be in the production of a book what stone, bricks and mortar are to the erection of a house, for certainly without them there could be neither books nor architecture. In the work of the latter the first thing to consider was not the painting and the carving, but the material used for walls, floor or roof, and unless sound and well-proportioned all the carvers and painters in the world would fail to make the house beautiful. And so it was with other crafts.

Having stated this simple but pleasing logical truism, the lecturer proceeded to deal with the question of paper, remarking at the outset that no one would dispute that hand-made paper was the best. With a touch of picturesque irony he said one was glad to know that notwithstanding the competition of Germany and Holland the English paper more than held its own—it was more pleasant to the eye.

Then, with regard to type, it behooved to take care to have the best type possible—that which is clear and most readable. They could not go to assure for inspiration of their shapes, but they could see in the types of the early printers and their contemporaneous calligraphers a heavy repulse of suggestion and example.

He advocated the use of the longest type, always considering its relation to the size of the page, and spoke with disgust of the white line misadventures of modern books, which they never found in old books. He also emphasized the importance that illustrations should be in thorough harmony with the type—as illustrations should look as though it belonged to the page and not put in as a botanical specimen.

In reply to a variety of questions that were put to Mr. Walker, in a very interesting discussion which followed, he explained that he considered the much

Ad que modum dominus uoluerit deus ibi innotescere. Cap. xxi. Contra Iugbiu. Quid interit inter faciem foy angloy. et faciem demoni. Ca. xxi. His 157. Nomen deoy falso ascribi diis gentium: quod in et angelis sanctis et hominibus est daturu separatu auctoritate coe et. Capitulu. xxi. Hos si plonisci.

Libri decimi natus Aurili Augustini de Ci. di incipit.

Miniature, about 1500.

machine-made paper: only shirks in the width, while the hand-made shirks all over. He pointed out the adaptability of machine-made paper for working half-tone process blocks, adding, with a grim smile, that if anyone had tried to print one of these blocks on hand-made paper, as he had, they would have found out how truly difficult it was.

Turning now to the illustrative part of his lecture, Mr. Walker pointed out, in reference to an illustration from a Ger-

manuscript of the Bible, that it was printed in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

First Book Printed in England by Caslon.

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

First Book Printed in England by Caslon.

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

First Book Printed in England by Caslon.

manuscript printed at Cologne in 1493, the legitimacy of the letters which—it is not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with a binocular as much as a human eye. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1703), and which he said was probably printed by Götting and perhaps Schöffer, the editor of the

**Figure 1.** Report on a lecture delivered by Emery Walker at the Central Art Department of the Technical Education Board, Bolt Court, London. *The British & Colonial Printer*, 2 January 1896. 437 x 289 mm (page). Despite the lecture's title, the report notes that Walker also discussed paper and ink, the harmony of type and illustration, and the relative

poorness of modern printing materials and methods; thereafter he summarized national characteristics of type. The text does not indicate that Walker discussed formal writing or its relationship to type despite the inclusion of many images of handwriting. Not reproduced here but shown by Walker were images of work from the Kelmscott Press;



between 1891 and 1896 embodied much that Walker had recommended.<sup>8</sup> Incunabular and sixteenth-century books provided models for new types and demonstrated the effective use of woodcut illustrations. The manufacture of Kelmscott books harmonized type, illustration, paper, printing and binding to produce objects whose visual and physical qualities were unique at the time.

The books of the Kelmscott Press, and the scheme of concerns that shaped them, reverberated in many quarters of Britain and in countries abroad, and are credited with reinvigorating contemporary printing and type design practices. They also spurred renewal in the sphere of education. By the mid 1890s, efforts begun some years earlier to improve technical education in various regions of England had gathered speed in London. Here the architect William Richard Lethaby played an important role. In 1894, Lethaby was appointed inspector to the Technical Education Board (TEB) of the London County Council (LCC), tasked with scrutinizing London art schools and advising on teaching practices. Two years later, the LCC opened a new art school, the Central School of Arts & Crafts, offering specialized study in the applied arts. On the strength of his work for the TEB, and with recommendations from William Morris, among others, Lethaby was appointed co-principal.<sup>9</sup>

At the Central School, Lethaby set out his programme of reform. He argued that training in technical education – the ‘artistic trades’ – should derive from workshop practice, in which tools and materials, rightly used, were crucial to design for present-day purposes. Historicism, design by rule and the dislocation of form from context were to be avoided. To this end, teaching was placed in the hands of practitioners who were masters of their craft. Under their supervision, students would engage in experimental work. The aim was to counteract the division of labour and knowledge by encouraging students ‘to learn design and those branches of their craft which, owing to the sub-division of processes of production, they are unable to learn in the workshop.’<sup>10</sup> Evening students or those on ‘day-release’ from jobs elsewhere would engage with processes of design and making in their entirety, an opportunity often unavailable to them in their workplace.

In the sphere of printing and book production, Lethaby gradually built up the Central School’s curriculum, beginning with bookbinding. Offerings in printing and book production probably owed much to Emery Walker, whose influence may be discerned in several respects. Before the Central School was opened, Lethaby would have been well acquainted with Walker’s views on printing through the activities of the Art-Worker’s Guild and its offshoot, the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (Lethaby was a founder member of both). The work of the Kelmscott Press would have been known to him also, since by the early 1890s Lethaby counted both Walker and Morris as professional friends. Walker and Lethaby had together advised on London’s first specialist printing school, the Bolt Court Technical School, and after the Central School

opened Walker became one of its Governors. Moreover, Walker served as chairman on the LCC's committee on book production.<sup>11</sup>

While Walker's presence can be detected in the character of Central School classes in printing and book production, his influence may also be found in Lethaby's wish to introduce writing into the Central School's curriculum. In 1888, Walker had declared 'The moral is, if we want beautiful type, we must teach children to write beautifully'.<sup>12</sup> Lethaby may have also regarded writing as essential to understanding the origin and appropriate form of letters and types; writing was important in its own right, while claiming a wider significance for printing and typography. His decision to offer the subject soon after the Central School opened seems to at least confirm his recognition of its value.<sup>13</sup>

### 3

In April 1898, W. R. Lethaby asked Edward Johnston to teach a class in 'Illumination' (as it was first advertised) and this began in September the following year.<sup>14</sup> Despite the title of the class, Johnston's programme of teaching would focus on writing as its primary concern and illumination secondarily. The necessary revival of writing – a 'practically lost art' without commonly understood standards – should proceed by recovering the broad-edged pen as writing's principal source. Through a kind of practical archaeology, Johnston examined older forms of writing as vestiges of the pen's construction and deployment, then made letters anew, guided by his findings. As he would articulate some years later in *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (1906), '[d]eveloping, or rather re-developing, an art involves *the tracing in one's own experience of a process resembling its past development*.'<sup>15</sup> Thus the re-development of writing would include both the intensive study of historical models and their practical re-creation in a contemporary idiom, an espousal of Walker's view that historical artefacts should guide present-day practice. 'And it is by such a course that we, who wish to revive Writing & Illuminating, may *renew* them, evolving new methods and traditions for ourselves, till at length we attain a modern and beautiful technique.' (p. xvi)

8. Morris's espousal of Walker's recommendations is found in their jointly authored essay, 'Printing' (1893). The essay is more polemical than Walker's own from five years earlier (see n. 5, above; Dreyfus attributes the change to Morris), and its discussions wider, encompassing matters such as word spacing, text colour, and the unity of the double-page spread, concerns central to work at the Kelmscott Press.

9. For details on technical education in London in the 1890s, and the roles played by Lethaby (and Walker), see Godfrey Rubens, 'W. R. Lethaby and the revival of printing', in *The Penrose Annual*, vol. 69 (London: Northwood Publications, 1976), pp. 219–32, and *W. R. Lethaby: his life and work 1857–1931* (London: The Architectural Press, 1986), pp. 173–98.

10. From an early prospectus of the Central School of Arts and Crafts, 1896. See also Stuart Evans, 'Teaching collections then and now,' *Object lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive*, Sylvia Backemeyer (ed.) (London: Lund Humphries/The Lethaby Press, 1996), pp. 15–20. This book gathers together other essays on the early years of teaching at the Central School, cited below.

11. (2018) In his comments on this essay, Justin Howes recommended that I investigate the influence of Walker's associate, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, on the Central School's curriculum. Like Walker, Cobden-Sanderson served as a Governor at the Central School; he was also secretary of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society. I have not been able to follow up this line of investigation.

12. Dreyfus, 'A reconstruction', p. 40.

13. (2018) In his comments on this essay, Justin Howes cautioned me against ascribing too much sophistication to Lethaby's views about writing at this time; cf. Lethaby's later (1906) preface to Edward Johnston's important handbook (discussed below).

14. See Justin Howes, 'Edward Johnston's first class at the Central School on 21 September 1899', *Object lessons*, pp. 33–7. When asked by Lethaby to teach the class, Johnston thought himself hardly competent, and so spent the following year teaching himself.

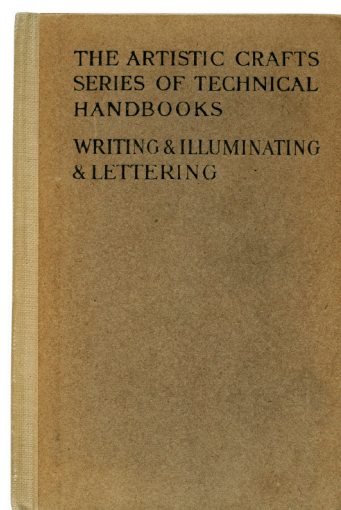
15. Edward Johnston, *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (London: John Hogg; 2nd edn, 1908), p. xvi. Quotations in this and the following two paragraphs are from this source; orthography and emphases as in the original.



If one examines *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, this programme of learning by doing is embodied in the book's order and proportions (figures 2–6). The book quickly moves from an historical overview of letterforms (a single chapter) to the practical skills of making (the following twelve). Only then are theoretical issues of letterform construction dealt with. The priority is active writing, which Johnston considered the essence of the craft and its instruction. The goal was not only 'to take the best letters we can find, and to acquire them *and make them our own*' (p. xix), but to pursue this with an aim that was also practical in outlook. '[T]he independent craftsman would have to establish himself by *useful* practice, and by seizing opportunities, and by doing his work well. Only an attempt to do practical work will raise practical problems, and therefore *useful practice is the making of real or definite things*.' (pp. xxi–xxii)<sup>16</sup>

Johnston's concern both for making and 'making one's own' meant that he often revisited the relationship between the practice of writing and its models. The models Johnston recommended were several: the Roman square capital – 'The ancestor of all our letters ... in undisputed possession of the first place' (p. 238) – and its pen-formed capital and small-letter relatives, the latter including uncials, half-uncials and his (later) Carolingian-derived 'Foundational Hand'. But the practice of writing needed to approach the work of recovery with care. Models should not be slavishly imitated or humbly copied. Instead, their regeneration must be dynamic, beginning with the perception of a model's 'essential form', on which was built the '*character and finish which come naturally from a rightly handled tool*.' (p. 240)<sup>17</sup> A useful, even hard-working letter was the first criterion that should be satisfied in the present day, not mere obedience to forms located in the historical past. Thus: '*On copying a Hand*.—Our intentions being right (viz. to make our work essentially readable) and our actions being expedient (viz. to select and copy the simple forms which have remained essentially the same, leaving the complex forms which have passed out of use ...) we need not vex ourselves with the question of "lawfulness." (p. 323)

Sample alphabets of any kind were regarded similarly. Those Johnston provided to his students were often described as freely copied, and were accompanied by annotations encouraging variations in form, shape, proportion, detail and combination. He was intent on discouraging the temptation to regard them as final forms (see figures 7 and 8, overleaf). There were good reasons to avoid doing so. Sample alphabets were themselves removed from the vitality of writing: 'if an Alphabet is written as a Specimen it is primarily a Specimen Alphabet (& is debarred from the natural Freedom or run of free Writing).'<sup>18</sup> They were also removed from true writing by the fact of their mechanical reproduction; and the impulse to 'touch-up' and perfect letters for publication threatened to further deprive them of those 'varieties, differences, faults – wh. are not real faults in Free Writing'. So the danger lay not only in the 'crystallizations' of letterforms through 'slavish' copying but in the



2

**Figures 2–6.** Edward Johnston, *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (1906; 2nd edn, 1908, shown here), cover and inside pages, 182 x 120 mm (page). Sequence of diagrams illustrating essential forms and their role in constructing letters whose specific attributes were determined by the broad-edged pen (figures 3, 4). Additional lists and diagrams give an inventory of attributes found in Roman letters (figures 5, 6). These diagrams occur in the book's more analytical second part. Here (chapters 14 and 15) letterforms are dismantled and their parts described in detail.

Johnston created many diagrams for *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, some of great inventiveness. Their success lies in their ability to demonstrate and summarize concepts and procedures with great precision. While Johnston, with his idiosyncratic flair (and compulsion) for annotation, typically integrated textual notes, the diagrams also function on a purely visual level, and can be understood solely through looking and seeing.

Despite their ingenuity, Johnston was nevertheless concerned that the diagrams should not obscure the proper aim of writing and lettering: 'it is rather as a stimulus to definite thought – not as an embodiment of hard and fast rules – that various methodical plans & tables of comparison & analysis are given in this book. It is well to recognize at once, the fact that the mere taking to pieces, or analysing, followed by "putting together," is only a means of becoming acquainted with the mechanism of construction, and will not reproduce the original beauty of the thing' (p. xxi).



16. This priority remained key to Johnston's view of writing throughout his working life. In a letter many years later describing progress on a successor to *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, Johnston pondered both making and how it might be taught: 'Perhaps you know, perhaps not, how long I have puzzled over the question at what point in my Book and how much (and how expressed) should I reveal the vital factors in Formal Penmanship. It is a kind of paradox of Teaching or Learning – To know how to make Things you must make them

– ("practising" teaches you how to practise – or rather how to do practising) but the student cannot make things (we say) until he has learnt how to make them. The solution (of How, then, does he learn?) is found in the theorem ... Achilles cannot cross a Room, for before he crosses  $r$  he must cross  $r/2$  and before he crosses the remaining  $r/2$  he must cross  $r/2/2$  and so on, leaving a fraction to be crossed. The answer may be found in the fact that Achilles does actually cross it, or, in the Act itself'. Edward Johnston, *Formal penmanship and*

*other papers* (London: Lund Humphries, and New York: Hastings House, 1971), p. 11.

17. For Johnston the implied tool was almost always the broad-edged pen. But he also made plain that the symbiosis of essential forms and a rightly-handled tool was applicable in many writing and lettering contexts.

18. Quotations in this paragraph from Edward Johnston, *Lessons in formal writing* (London: Lund Humphries, 1986), p. 134, recorded in his 'vellum-bound notebook' (not dated).



Given the Essential-Forms or SKELETONS of the Roman CAPITALS (A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z), their finished character depends chiefly on the tool used to make them: it may further be varied by the selection of special forms (such as the 'Round' varieties - see 2), and by various modes of finishing - with Terminal 'heads', 'feet', 'hooks', & 'flourishes' (see 3).

(1.) The simplest Terminal is a CROSS-STROKE as in these Skeletons: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. [NOTE: the horizontals of B, D, E, & take the place of cross-strokes (like those of A, M, & N, V) may use their own strokes (or be left AMIN). Such letters may be called 'SQUARE' or 'CROSS-TOPPED'; with some desirable inconsistencies, the Slanted-PEN forms are here given.]

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

(2.) ROUNDER forms (v. UNCIAL Pl. 5), finished generally with their own curves & 'hooks' - have been developed from the Roman Capitals: these may be called the 'ROUND' or 'BRANCH-TOPPED' letters: the Slanted PEN forms are given here.

B D D E F G H k m n r  
P S T U OR [e.g. these would match very well with the letters of No. 1.]  
for a more formal MS. head & foot may be added thus: B D D E F H k m n p r t

(3.) FLOURISHED Letters are of every form and of every variety, simply drawn-out, or reshaped, or added to: a typical skeleton is given below.

A A A B B D C E F F G H J L M M N N P Q R T U V E L T  
A A A B E F F H B M O T U V x  
M L F F 2 x x x { E M Q R V W }

Additional Varieties of Form not included in above Examples

General Note: These three 'Alphabets' - SQUARE, ROUND, & FLOURISHED - are to be regarded as varying forms, to be used freely together, of ONE Alphabet most prolific for the Penman. Provided the Penman & the movements of his pen are kept uniform, the different forms become harmonious and they occur in the same MS. and EVEN in the same word.

The forms given above may be varied in every detail, & the alteration of their proportions (see Pl. 9) or weight of pen-stroke (see Genl. Note, Pl. 4) will further give untold varieties.

PLATE 7.—“SLANTED-PEN” CAPITALS, showing admirably the constructive power of the pen in making characteristic letters out of skeleton ABCs: they are not directly copied from or founded upon any given MS.

Note: In mediæval times Capitals were not so much a necessary complement of small-letters, as a different and more important type of letter, used chiefly for large Initials and Headings: and a standard type of simple text capital to match a standard small-hand does not seem to have been recognised before the 15th century.

Any of these may be used (modified appropriately) with any slanted pen small-letter, such as those in Pl. 6, or for MS. in capitals. As models—in particular in the method of their making—they will be suggestive for craftsmen generally.

School Copies and Examples, No. 2. Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1 Amen Corner, London, E.C.4

**Figure 7.** Edward Johnston, *Manuscript & inscription letters* (1909). “‘Slanted-pen’ capitals”, plate 7 (of 16; illustrations for plates 12–16 by Eric Gill), 315 x 250 mm. The concept of ‘Essential-Forms’ (or skeletons) is demonstrated with three variants of Roman capitals made with a broad-edged pen. Each variant shows progressive elaborations until ‘letters are of every form and of every variety.’ Models illustrated in plates 2–7 are then shown in plates 8–16 in different contexts: as alternative pen forms (see figure 8, opposite), as wood-engraved letters or printing type (Caslon Old Face), and as stone-carved letters. *Manuscript*

& *inscription letters* was published three years after *Writing & illumination, & lettering*, and summarized the class sheets and notes Johnston distributed to his students. He emphasized even more frequently than in his book that alphabets should be *freely* copied and altered to ensure variety and spirit (see ‘General Note’ in this figure, above). Johnston stated in the portfolio’s introduction that in extracting these models from manuscripts, he had himself copied them *freely*, leaving the results unretouched for reproduction in order to ‘betray ... to the student not only the forms, but the actual manner of their construction.’

removal of writing's 'natural breaks and roughnesses' that revealed the act of writing and the presence of the writer. Literal reproduction – in several senses – discouraged or disguised the uniqueness of handwritten words and thereby inhibited both freedom in creating them and truthfulness in conveying their essential qualities.

Given Johnston's concern for the immediacy of writing, it is appropriate to consider his classroom teaching as an apt expression of his published pronouncements. By all accounts Johnston was a gifted teacher: reminiscences suggest a presence that surprised and engaged. Seemingly introspective, retiring, even cryptic at first, these impressions were soon dispelled by his clarity of speech and line of inquiry that alternated between direct and discursive. Though Johnston was notoriously inefficient over the syllabus tick-list, for his audience it was a lively process of revelation. His manner and method were made graphic by the act of writing, which often occurred at the blackboard. Here, he would use the long side of a piece of chalk to emulate the strokes of a broad-edged pen. Repetition played an essential role: letterforms would be written, analysed and revised as differences in form and execution were noted and evaluated. Throughout, Johnston's writing was amplified by expansive movements that produced letters whose large scale vividly illustrated their form, proportion and construction.<sup>19</sup>

In different ways, the artefacts of Johnston's teaching are an echo of it. His handbook, the portfolio of class-sheets, surviving photographs of blackboard demonstrations, and his notebooks are all detailed graphic explorations that begin with the writing, which is then analysed through lists, diagrams, annotations and cross-references. The orthography of the texts is often speech-like: (typo)graphic pauses, alignments and stresses suggest the shifts and interventions of verbal delivery. The artefacts are conversational and provisional, encouraging the student to action and, where necessary, contesting the fact of their mechanical reproduction. And the conversations they preserve are vestiges of those Johnston conducted with himself, his qualifications and admonitions turning the artefacts against themselves as they are subjected to critical analysis. That this aligns with reminiscences of Johnston's habit of mind and practice suggests that such artefacts are true and natural, expressing an animated presence that continues to instruct in his absence.

#### 4

By 1912, both Edward Johnston and W.R. Lethaby had left the Central School for the Royal College of Art, where each had been already teaching part-time. Before his resignation, Lethaby had succeeded in drawing together related areas of study. This is evident in the design of a new building in Southampton Row, occupied by the Central School in 1908. Purpose-built to a brief drawn up by Lethaby, it grouped together allied disciplines. Those related to the book were located on one floor and formed a School of Book Production. Lethaby enlarged its teaching



**Figure 8.** Edward Johnston, *Manuscript & inscription letters* (1909). 'Pen-made Roman capitals', plate 9, 315 x 250 mm.

19. A number of evocations by former students, associates and colleagues were published in *Lessons in formal writing*, among them Noel Rooke and Violet Hawkes. 'At the first sight of him, although his hands could be seen to be capable, sensitive and strong, the general impression was one of lassitude, of physical strength drained right out. Then he spoke. The clearness and vigour of his mind came as a shock, a delight.' (Rooke, p. 48) 'To watch him at work on the board was an education in itself. The easy, swinging rhythm of his strokes was unhurried and unhesitating, like the movements of an accomplished skater, combining perfect control with perfect freedom.' (Hawkes, p. 146).

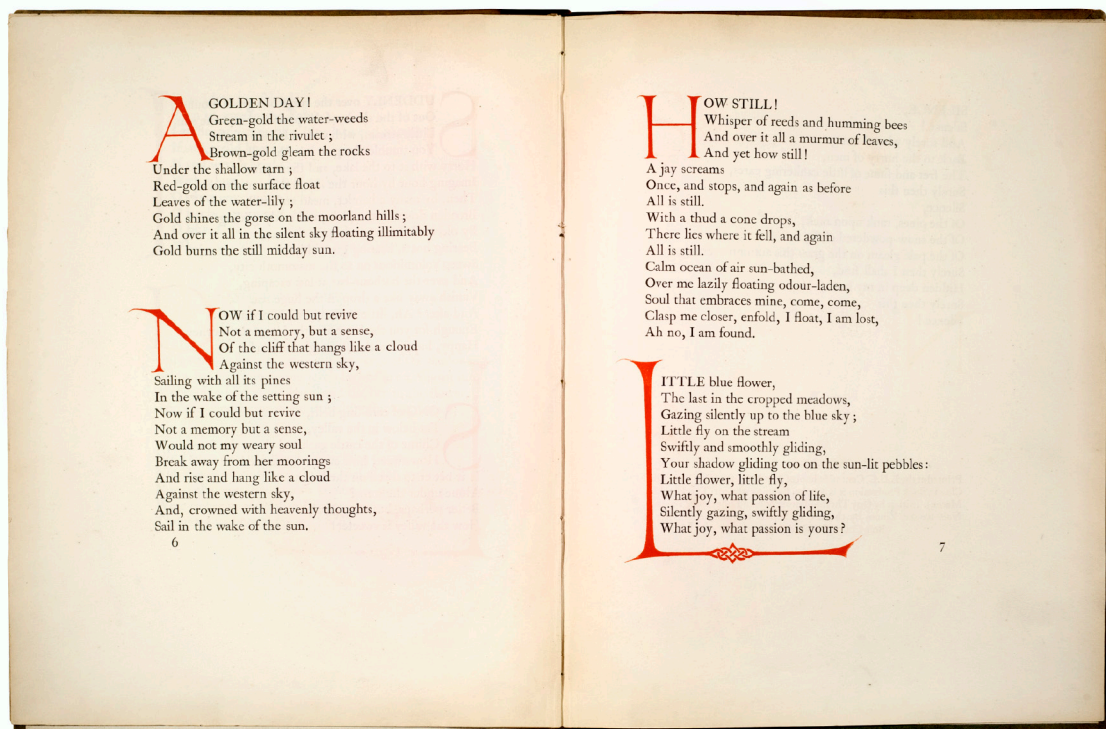
staff by appointing Noel Rooke and John Henry Mason. Rooke taught wood engraving, which he regarded as well-suited to book illustration; it played an important part in his classes in 'black & white' design, book illustration and poster design. Mason assumed responsibility for typography and printing. Mason was fresh from the Doves Press where he had served an apprenticeship under Emery Walker and T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, immersed in the principles of the private press movement.<sup>20</sup> Among those already on the Central School staff was Graily Hewitt; he, like Rooke, had been a student of Johnston's and he began teaching a second class in writing and illuminating in 1903.

The establishment of the School of Book Production marks the beginning of a period of remarkable continuity in the teaching of book production subjects that would extend into the 1940s. This continuity may be explained both by the enduring force of Lethaby's programme of technical education, and by the lengthy tenures of Rooke, Mason and Hewitt, whose firmly held and forceful views on teaching would dominate the book production curriculum through the decades. Their views were conservative by nature; that is to say, they espoused Lethaby's concern that craft work be preserved as the core of technical education, then adapted to industrial circumstances. The will to preserve was especially strong in the teaching of Mason and Hewitt.<sup>21</sup>

While risking the obvious, it is worth reiterating that teaching in the School of Book Production revolved to a large extent around *the book*, a place where several disciplines could be brought together and understood in union. If instruction was principally concerned with training apprentices for the printing trade, it nevertheless focused on book work of 'the highest type', modelled on the English private presses and explicitly distinct from advertising or indeed most trade book printing. As Mason wrote of his teaching at this time, 'the aim was to apply the lessons learned by the research and experiment of the great private presses, to technical training'.<sup>22</sup> For him, books from the Doves Press, in their austere richness, embodied many of the principles he valued. His teaching, in turn, enlisted a similar discipline and quality.<sup>23</sup> Discipline was especially evident in the role he assigned to type and typography. Here, typographic expression was circumscribed in deference to the unified book-object where all parts were harmonious and none dominant. This approach also dignified the scholarly texts Mason frequently recommended for student projects. Where type was concerned, the choice was generally Caslon Old Face.<sup>24</sup> The results thus evoked the atmosphere of private press books and the Central School became well known for work of this kind (figure 9). And, like those of the private presses, books made in the School of Book Production sat some distance from the sphere of trade printing where the standards of manufacture were almost always of a different order.

Despite Mason's emphasis on the finely made book, the concerns of trade printing did not go unaddressed. In 1913, the Central School





**Figure 9.** [oldsworthy]. Lowes Dickinson, *A Wild Rose & other poems* (1910), 275 x 215 mm (page). J. H. Mason had studied the work of the Cambridge scholar Lowes Dickinson and had maintained a long-standing friendship with him, and suggested printing an edition of his occasional poems in the School of Book Production. Two editions were eventually published, one designed by Mason, a second produced by students (shown above). (Both, incidentally, are mentioned in E. M. Forster's 1934 biography, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*.) The student-produced book typifies the kind of collaboration that took place in the School of Book Production: its typographic design and printing were carried out under Mason's guidance, while the initials were cut

with instruction from Noel Rooke (cf. figure 8, p. 61). Books made in Mason's classes at this time were similar to those of the Doves Press in their simplicity of design and their lack of illustration or typographical contrast. In this example, emphasis is laid on the basics: the relationship of text area to margins, the relationship of type size to page size, the evenness of text 'colour', and the unity of the spread of pages, in which each column of type forms a rectangle by means of its precise imposition on the column that shows through from the reverse, giving the spread symmetrical coherence. The exaggerated serifs of the initials and the woven stroke of the 'L' are the only concessions to decoration in an otherwise carefully restrained production.

**20.** Mason's appointment at the Central School in 1905 was initially part-time, while he continued work at the Doves Press. He took charge of printing and typography in the School of Book Production full-time in 1909. His appointment was warmly endorsed by both Walker and Cobden-Sanderson. Mason was a trade compositor by training (having left school at 13), though he was scholarly by inclination and had done much to advance his own education, notably in classical literature and languages. After some years in the printing trade, he was taken on at the Doves Press, which he later described (in a letter of 1941) as 'a new and beautiful world after commercial work because of its deliberate choice of only the finest standards.' L. T. Owens, *J. H. Mason, 1875–1951, scholar-printer* (London: Frederick Muller, 1976), p. 172.

**21.** While observations below focus on the

views of Mason and Hewitt, Noel Rooke offered an alternative, freer, approach to letterforms as used for posters, book jackets and other kinds of display.

**22.** Prospectus, Central School of Arts and Crafts, 1928. A similar statement appears in Mason's pamphlet, *Notes on printing considered as an industrial art* (London: The British Institute of Industrial Art, 1926).

**23.** Mason's experiences at the Doves Press encouraged the view that printing and typography should seek the highest expression of learning and culture, a view he espoused throughout his career. In 1931, Noel Rooke said of the Doves Press influence on Mason: 'Walker and Cobden-Sanderson revealed to him whole constellations of new heavens of printing, and of the literature it had come into existence to serve. Soon, nothing in printing, short of the best that could exist, would

satisfy him. Anything that was derogatory or hindered the search for perfection was an offence.' Quoted in Owens, *J. H. Mason*, p. 39.

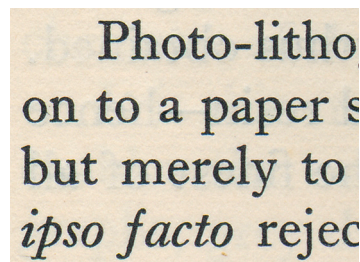
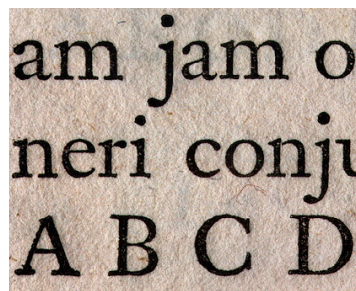
**24.** The suggestion to acquire Caslon Old Face for the School of Book Production was apparently made by Emery Walker. As it had for a number of private presses lacking custom types of their own, Caslon Old Face provided Mason with an English type of distinguished pedigree in a range of sizes. In recommending types for study, he stated: 'First of all Caslon Old Face. The design is based on the Dutch romans, and with that touch of genius so often seen in the work of our race, Caslon has embodied the English tradition in his instinctive modifications of the Continental type. He has made a gentleman of a sloven.' J. H. Mason, 'Essay on printing' (Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society, 1944), quoted in Owens, *J. H. Mason*, pp. 51–2.

prospectus listed mechanical type composition and methods of process reproduction (three-colour, halftone and line work) as among the subjects Mason covered, while newspapers and advertising were also discussed. Little evidence appears to survive of the application of processes found in trade printing, though a contemporary, bound volume does gather together small advertisements composed by students and set mostly in Caslon Old Face.<sup>25</sup> But 1913 was important in another, related way: that year *The Imprint* magazine was launched. Written, edited and produced mainly by staff at the Central School (Mason served as a co-editor and contributing writer), it sought to promote new and different standards for trade printing in general, and periodicals in particular. As a printed artefact, *The Imprint* did demonstrate that high standards need not be confined to the private presses. This was especially true of the magazine's typography, which employed a new type, Imprint Old Face. The design was instigated by Mason, and was related to William Caslon's Great Primer Roman. It was expertly customized by its manufacturer, the Lanston Monotype Corporation, to the requirements of mechanical type composition and to the hard smooth papers then common in trade printing. The type served its utilitarian remit with notable success and illustrated the benefits of industrial and craft collaboration.

*The Imprint*, however, was short-lived, running for just nine issues. The magazine probably did encourage improvements in trade printing, while at the same time reinforcing Mason's contention that private press printing was the most relevant guide for the betterment of the trade. This view is evident in articles and reviews Mason contributed to *The Imprint*, which sometimes expressed impatience with commercial print and reproduction. The perfection of means and expression he valued were elusive in the less refined regions of printing where other imperatives – scale, speed, profit – dominated the work and required compromises that Mason was loathe to countenance. In the School of Book Production, emphasis remained for the most part on fine (book) printing as the point of departure. Curricula in successive prospectuses changed little from one year to the next, while the character of the books produced early in Mason's tenure persisted in later years, if more frequently embellished with wood-engraved illustration. The principle at work remained one of diffusion: that the craft of printing should flow from the private presses through technical education into the trade, carried there by the spread of students' skills. This assumption of cause and effect helped Mason define his means and materials, but it also ensured that many other applications of printing and typography, and the broader range of visual and technical expression they might require, would remain comparatively insignificant in his teaching.<sup>26</sup>

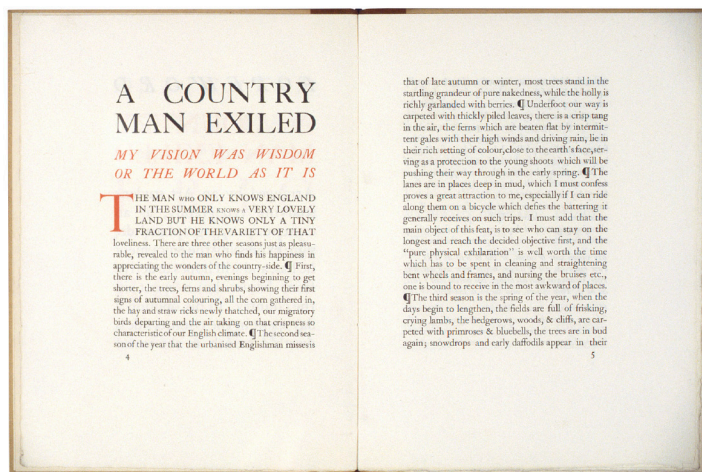
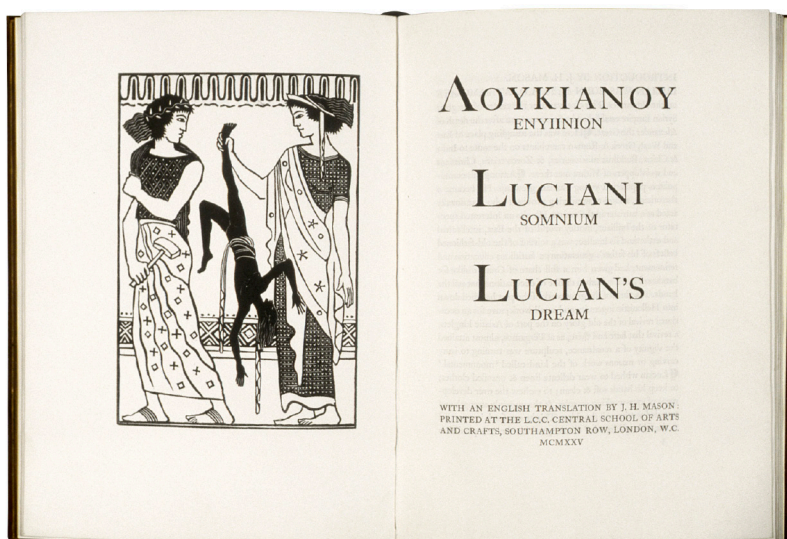
## 5

In the character of his teaching, Graily Hewitt had much in common with J.H. Mason. As mentioned, Hewitt had been a student of Edward



**Figure 10.** William Caslon I, Great Primer Roman (c. 1728), as shown in Caslon's broadsheet specimen of 1734.

**Figure 11.** Imprint Old Face (1912–13), as shown in *The Imprint* (1913).



**Figure 12.** *Lucian's dream*, School of Book Production, Central School of Arts & Crafts, London (1925). English and ancient Greek composed in Caslon Old Face, Greek translation by J. H. Mason. 282 x 210 mm (page). Woodcut by Frederica Graham (Noel Rooke, instructor); type composition by J. J. Andron (J. H. Mason, instructor).

**Figure 13.** *A country man exiled*, School of Book Production, Central School of Arts & Crafts, London (1938). Compiled and illustrated by Reeve L. Johnson. 260 x 195 mm (page).

These examples illustrate typical literary material selected for student projects, to which Mason often made scholarly contributions. Together with figure 9 (p. 63, above), they suggest the continuity of typographic expression found in Mason's workshops over the years. Writing in 1946, after his retirement, Mason made plain those principles he valued in

typography, principles resonating with the concerns that Emery Walker had outlined many years before: 'Typography has first a beauty of letter-form, from this we create a beauty of texture by word spacing and line spacing; from this we proceed to a beauty of proportion in planning a type area, in deciding the width of line in relation to the type, and depth of page in relation to the line, and then relating the margins to the printed page. Initial letters, or words or lines or masses, mark the exordium of the work and of its parts and afford the printer an opportunity for enthusiasm. A similar enthusiasm seizes the opportunity for illustration, or emphasis, but always in a strictly typographical mode. All this is to be realized in an atmosphere of loving technique. THIS IS HOW A FINE BOOK IS MADE.' 'Typography: a printer's philosophy', *Fifteen craftsmen on their crafts*, p. 59, capitalization in the original.

**25.** *School of Book Production & Printing, specimens of general jobbing advertisement & table work ...* (London: London County Council, Central School of Arts & Crafts, 1914).

**26.** Mason's approach may be additionally characterized by his recommendation that Edward Prince, who had cut many private

press types including the Doves Press roman, initiate a class in hand punchcutting. This was begun in 1914, immediately after the demise of *The Imprint*. Elsewhere, the lessons of Imprint Old Face seemingly played little role in Mason's teaching. While its success as an adaptation designed for the requirements of mechanical type composition suggest an

engagement with up-to-date concerns, students were mostly set to work drawing the typeforms of Caslon Old Face as a prelude to that type's near-exclusive use in practical studies. Both instances reaffirm the Central School's aim to revive or preserve crafts whose relevance to modern industrial production was not always self-evident.



Johnston's and subsequently began his own course in writing and illuminating at the Central School. During these years he formed a close friendship with Johnston and the two were occasional collaborators, most notably when Hewitt supplied an appendix on gilding to *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*. Hewitt's teaching followed that of his mentor in asserting the broad-edged pen as the source of writing and lettering. The applications of writing were title pages, notices, documents and addresses, while the form of the book set the 'traditional and conventional standard' for much of writing's visual expression. Like Mason, Hewitt's approach remained remarkably consistent during his years at the Central School. In 1930, when he retired, the description for his course was little changed from 1903, and the influence of Johnston's ideas remained undiminished. But in Hewitt's teaching there was a difference of emphasis on the proper role of writing, and this set him apart from Johnston in a number of important ways. The differences are perhaps best seen in two books Hewitt completed in close succession towards the end of his career.

The first was *The pen and type-design*, published to announce Treyford, a new typeface Hewitt had designed; the book was a type specimen in the mode of fine printing.<sup>27</sup> In it, Hewitt stated that Treyford was 'an attempt to represent our printed letter-forms with due regard to their creation by the pen and their adaptation for the use of the machine, and further to their conformations in our language.' (p. 31) Treyford was thus a rendition of Hewitt's writing with a broad-edged pen, adapted to mechanical type composition. His rationale for the design sprang from the pen's mediation of the forms of letters over many centuries. This encouraged a direct, even literal, translation of pen-formed letters into metal type. The goal was legibility, authorized by the historical conventions of writing.<sup>28</sup> In the preface to *The pen and type-design*, Hewitt also took the opportunity to disparage advertising's 'graphic bawl' as typified by 'block letters' (sans serifs), whose insensitive forms and aggressive deployment were, he asserted, a corruption of letters.<sup>29</sup>

Hewitt's second book, *Lettering*, was published two years later and summarized his practice and teaching of formal writing.<sup>30</sup> The book would not be like Johnston's; Hewitt felt that *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* was unsurpassed in its usefulness and he did not, anyway, wish to give his own thoughts this form. 'All who are interested in lettering are acquainted with Edward Johnston's classic. To him, as my first teacher, I owe more than most. This book [i.e. *Lettering*] represents a point of view and a settled policy in regard to writing, with reasons for the choice. Any restatement of familiar matter or figure is here only employed where the clarity and continuity of my observations or modifications have seemed to me to call for it.' Hewitt's approach, his 'settled policy', made *Lettering* treatise-like, less concerned with practical making than with the theoretical bases of writing and lettering. In tone and style, his writing was stern and occasionally sententious.

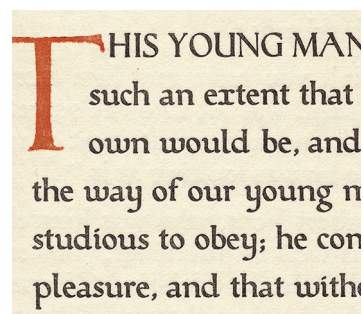


Figure 14. Treyford, designed by Graily Hewitt (1928), as shown in *Matrix 13* (1993).

The introduction to *Lettering* begins with a summary of the forces and pressures exerted by advertising and publicity, and that Hewitt detected at work in the field of writing and lettering. Here, as in *The pen and type-design*, he detected antagonisms between the accumulated conventions of legibility and good taste, and the concerns of commerce:

For some years past serious endeavour has been directed towards the improvement of writing – our alphabet’s technique. Our lives are littered with lettering, our walls plastered with it, our skies ablaze with it. We have imagined this more enduring if better done. But in considering the bettering of it we have taken certain standards too much for granted, without weighing their applicability to our modern purposes; and are now becoming aware that too often they are inadequate. We have presumed that the scholar and the artist, and now the scientist, are fit judges for the essentially legible. We have overlooked the advertiser. His legibility is not always theirs. If refinement may assist his purpose, which is to sell something, well. But that he catch your eye is the important point. Advertisement is competitive. Exceptionally a quiet sobriety may attract notice in a noisy crowd, but only so long as isolated by singularity. If all our lettering, crowded as it is, were ‘in good taste’, it would fail commercially. For the essence of advertisement is to compel attention. The lettering must assist this – somehow. The classic style does not admit this premise. How, then, can we improve our commercial lettering by reference to classic standards? The question must be answered by reference to other than these. It is being so answered.<sup>31</sup>

This passage is notable for setting out the issues Hewitt found most vexacious in writing and lettering. Oddly, he appears forward-looking at first in his acceptance that other standards of form and legibility were required for commerce, standards other than those of the scholar, the artist and the scientist of letters. But Hewitt’s seemingly pragmatic disposition is, in fact, shot through with disdain for advertising’s simple and blunt requirements. He readily admits that the ‘good taste’ of the classic style is largely irrelevant in such circumstances, and it becomes clear that Hewitt’s underlying concern is not with advertising, but rather that the classic style has little place in its operations. As such, advertising is regrettable: its crass pervasiveness crowds out alternatives in good taste, its distortions and exaggerations – the ‘noisy crowd’ – attack

27. Graily Hewitt, *The pen and type-design* (London: The First Edition Club, 1928). The book was bound in red morocco with gilt decoration; it was printed on Barcham Green hand-made paper in an edition of 250 copies.

28. Hewitt’s line of reasoning was rebutted by Stanley Morison, who reviewed *The pen and type-design* in the seventh issue of *The Fleuron*. Morison accused Hewitt of ignoring the conventions of typography by asserting the priority of written forms in type-making and printing, thereby discounting what Morison considered the more formative contributions of engraving, i.e. the work of the

punchcutter. ‘Mr Hewitt therefore is not, in our opinion, welcome to dismiss the printer as a mere corrupt imitator of the more highly endowed scribe.’ Morison, ‘The Treyford type’, *The Fleuron*, no. 7 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1930) pp. 180–5. For a digest of this episode and the process of Treyford’s design that preceded it, see Peter Foden, ‘John Johnson and the Treyford type’, *Matrix* 13 (Whittington: The Whittington Press, 1993), pp. 62–72.

29. Block letters, commercial and utilitarian, ignored ‘that prime element of beauty (as of scholarship) in lettercraft, – contrast of thick

and thin strokes, and the regular gradation from one to the other in the curves’. Hewitt, *The pen and type-design*, p. 31. Hewitt returned to the subject of block letters in other publications and in private correspondence (see n. 34, below).

30. Graily Hewitt, *Lettering for students and craftsmen* (London: Seeley Service, 1930). The book was published in a specially bound limited edition that included several original alphabets written by Hewitt, and as a cloth-bound trade edition in a paper wrapper, with no additional matter.

31. Hewitt, *Lettering*, pp. 17–18.

usually broader pen might be preferable for the last, and as upright stance certainly given to letters as more befitting formal occasion. Finish by means of the serif is especially noticeable. In the cursive these hardly appear, in grades between they are more or less slanted; and here a technical matter of great importance needs stating—the position of the pen's broad edge with regard to the horizontal. If the pen is cut at right angles to its slit, the natural manner of holding the hand so that the writer may see what he is doing, as well as have his hand at ease, sets this edge at an angle of from  $30^\circ$  to  $45^\circ$  from the horizontal. And the vast majority of the scribes of all ages have written with their pen cut thus and held so. And certainly all the cursive may be said to have been written with the pen's edge 'at an angle', whether the writing itself be upright or sloped. Only in some of the formal scripts do we notice that the pen's edge was kept parallel with the horizontal; as with the later uncial, the half-uncial, the Anglo-Irish, and some of the superlative Renaissance book-hands. With a straight-cut pen this involves a cramped position for the hand as well as its interference with the eye. And this difficulty was obviated by cutting the pen's edge obliquely across the slit, so that the shaft came away, pointing as usual beyond the writer's right shoulder, but the edge still lay along the horizontal.

Even so the method is less 'natural' or comfortable, certainly 'for rapid work than the other; and only severely determined performance has adopted it.

Its effect may be said to be rounder, opener, as well as more majestic than that of the canted pen with its suggestion rather of grace and liveliness. I prefer to call it 'flat pen' writing, the old flat conveniently reminding of the pen's edge's position; and call the more usual



Fig. 22.

method that of the 'canted-pen', with which have been written the far greater number of the manuscripts that have come down to us, including all the Gothic from the eleventh century to the fifteenth, whether formal or cursive, and whether upright or sloped.

But the actual angle of the edge has varied from a slight cant of some  $10^\circ$  or  $20^\circ$ , as in some of the Winchester books of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to an angle of even  $60^\circ$ , as in the Lombardic so-called 'broken' hands of the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, imitating the position of the pen's edge that performed the early Rastics of the fourth and fifth centuries. Generally for the 'black letter' an angle of  $45^\circ$  was adopted; but the writings in which the angle was not more than  $30^\circ$  are preferable to our eyes, as preserving the rounder character of the half-uncials or Caroline hands, without the Gothic tendency to angularity or narrowness, with added charm and liveliness. For a canted pen may still write a beautifully rounded hand; and writers are always the more successful who can retain the roundness of their curves instead of 'snagging', as shown in Fig. 24 rather than as in Fig. 25. The angle of  $30^\circ$  (or, of course,  $20^\circ$ ) has the further advantage that with it are retained the comparative thicknesses of downstrokes compared with side or horizontal strokes; and our instinct for stronger trunks than branches seems to accept this treatment as more natural than the adoption of even thickness for both, as with the angle of  $45^\circ$ , and certainly than the angle of  $60^\circ$ , whereby stems support unnaturally disproportionate branches. A capital I with a thin stem and a thick crossbar violates our sense of fitness. And a hand written even at an angle of  $45^\circ$  (which keeps them equal) yet tends *ex hoc* to an

Fig. 24. **muh** Fig. 25. **muh**

Fig. 26. **30**

EXAMPLE OF FORMAL ALPHABET

c thus **cc** Fig. 92.

d thus **ld** Fig. 93.

e preferably thus **ee** Fig. 94.

or the lobe (Fig. 91) soon tends to look upwards diagonally. But the crossbar should not be drawn at all downwards or a heaviness ensues (Fig. 92).

The cross-bar of f is drawn first, and a little upwards and backwards piece given to it (Fig. 93). This is to impart construction to the cutting of the horizontal and perpendicular, which, without cut it, may appear too casual (Fig. 94 instead of Fig. 95). This piece of construction was below the cross-bar in f, above it (as will be seen) in t.

The strokes for f are, accordingly, as shown in Fig. 96, making f as in Fig. 97, the cross-bar aligning with tops of other letters' bodies. But the f-head may be raised slightly when followed by l. At the foot of the downstroke, to give stability, the pen is drawn just slightly horizontally without leaving the paper (Fig. 98). This may also be given to the ends of the descenders p q y.

The lobe of g may be less than that of f, but the room may be given for the tail, a modification the first printers introduced to deal with the scribe's previous exaggeration of this feature (Fig. 99). The horn is important, should be horizontal, and may connect with the next letter (Fig. 100).

Fig. 92.

Fig. 93.

Fig. 94.

Fig. 95.

Fig. 96.

Fig. 97.

Fig. 98.

Fig. 99.

Fig. 100.

EXAMPLE OF FORMAL ALPHABET

h is marked thus **hhh** the bottom of the first downstroke having a little pull to the right, hookwise, as occurs later in k m n r.

i j so, the dots placed just above the letters, not so high as ascenders.

k thus **kkk** no curvature being given to the diagonals, save the little twist upwards at conclusion.

l thus **ll** Fig. 101.

m and n thus **mmn** well rounded.

o thus **oo** Fig. 102.

p thus **pp** care being taken to drive the lobe back into the perpendicular on finishing; not **P** Fig. 103.

Fig. 101.

Fig. 102.

Fig. 103.

Fig. 104.

Fig. 105.

Fig. 106.

Fig. 107.

Fig. 108.

Fig. 109.

Fig. 110.

Fig. 111.

Fig. 112.

Fig. 113.

Fig. 114.

Fig. 115.

Fig. 116.

Fig. 117.

Fig. 118.

Fig. 119.

Fig. 120.

Fig. 121.

Fig. 122.

Fig. 123.

Fig. 124.

Fig. 125.

Fig. 126.

Fig. 127.

Fig. 128.

Fig. 129.

Fig. 130.

Fig. 131.

Fig. 132.

Fig. 133.

Fig. 134.

Fig. 135.

Fig. 136.

Fig. 137.

Fig. 138.

Fig. 139.

Fig. 140.

Fig. 141.

Fig. 142.

Fig. 143.

Fig. 144.

Fig. 145.

ROMAN CAPITALS

and this may well be done now. Yet perhaps our printer's convention of perpendiculars here may well guide us in careful drawings, or a slight slope outwards in opposite directions (Fig. 267). A subtle liveliness may also be given this (and Z's also) by very slightly curving it upwards towards each end (Fig. 268).

U For our capital of this letter we have two forms of equal authority (Figs. 269 and 270). I prefer the latter as importing no fresh detail of construction into the alphabet. It has then the same detail as the G or the D reversed. If the former form be adopted care should be taken to give no serif to the head of the stem. The form shown in Fig. 271 seems undesirable, as lacking stability, and also importing a thin vertical unnecessarily into the alphabet.

V is best formed by strokes in the order given in Fig. 272, the angles then made with the horizontal will have greater probability of equality. The V-triangle is eleven-thirteenth of its height wide. But four-fifths (as with A) is also suitable.

Fig. 267.

Fig. 268.

Fig. 269.

Fig. 270.

Fig. 271.

Fig. 272.

Fig. 273.

Fig. 274.

Fig. 275.

Fig. 276.

Fig. 277.

Fig. 278.

Fig. 279.

Fig. 280.

Fig. 281.

Fig. 282.

Fig. 283.

Fig. 284.

Fig. 285.

Fig. 286.

Fig. 287.

Fig. 288.

Fig. 289.

Fig. 290.

Fig. 291.

Fig. 292.

Fig. 293.

Fig. 294.

Fig. 295.

Fig. 296.

Fig. 297.

Fig. 298.

Fig. 299.

Fig. 300.

Fig. 301.

Fig. 302.

Fig. 303.

Fig. 304.

Fig. 305.

Fig. 306.

Fig. 307.

Fig. 308.

Fig. 309.

Fig. 310.

Fig. 311.

Fig. 312.

Fig. 313.

Fig. 314.

Fig. 315.

Fig. 316.

Fig. 317.

Fig. 318.

Fig. 319.

Fig. 320.

ROMAN CAPITALS

is perhaps best made of two V's interlaced. If they are set side by side the letter becomes too wide. And if we narrow the V's a fresh diagonal is introduced into the alphabet disturbingly. It certainly has a look of affectation thus, like those interlaced C's we meet unnecessarily. And various devices have been resorted to, to avoid the interlacement, such as shortening the interior. This gives a point inconsistently at the centre, unless we treat it to a cap (Fig. 273), but the interlacement is now so common that it seems the best way out of the difficulty. Care needs to be taken to avoid reducing the area at a (Fig. 274) too much, and this is best done by drawing the letter with strokes as numbered in Fig. 274, bisecting the distance between 1 and 2 by 3 at the top. This will provide for the space properly. If this order be not observed the result is likely to be that shown in Fig. 275, or worse. The letter should be drawn within a square, as shown in Fig. 274.

X is commonly drawn too wide. The X-triangle is three-fifths of height wide. It is best drawn with strokes in the following order (Fig. 276), 1 cutting 2 at the geometric centre. Then 3 raises this centre to the visible one.

Fig. 273.

Fig. 274.

Fig. 275.

Fig. 276.

Fig. 277.

Fig. 278.

Fig. 279.

Fig. 280.

Fig. 281.

Fig. 282.

Fig. 283.

Fig. 284.

Fig. 285.

Fig. 286.

Fig. 287.

Fig. 288.

Fig. 289.

Fig. 290.

Fig. 291.

Fig. 292.

Fig. 293.

Fig. 294.

Fig. 295.

Fig. 296.

**Figures 15–17.** Graily Hewitt, *Lettering for students and craftsmen* (1930), spreads from trade edition, 197 x 135 mm (page). For Hewitt, as for Johnston before him, the broad-edged pen is the stated basis of letterform construction. Unlike his mentor, however, Hewitt grants far less importance to 'essential forms'; instead (roman) letters should follow no more than a general convention of stroke placement. Thereafter the letterform is determined by the characteristics of the pen. To accept that essential forms underlie roman letters is, to Hewitt, an espousal in principle of 'block' letters, which, unmediated by the broad-edged pen, are a contravention of its standard.

Hewitt's views meant that the letterforms he illustrates in *Lettering* are predominantly those formed by the broad-edged pen, in most instances shown at the same size as written to avoid any exaggeration of effect. The result is less demonstration through image – understanding by seeing – and rather more discourse through text. The integration of illustration and text, especially at sentence level (figure 16), offers coherence but of a kind facilitated mainly through reading. In general, the visual expression of *Lettering* is circumspect. Where the pages of Johnston's manual convey the act, energy and diversity of making, Hewitt's presentation is by comparison constrained and often monotonous, despite its strongly and consistently argued 'policy'.

valuable conventions by encouraging a new legibility determined merely by competitiveness. Despite the fitness for purpose that some (un-named) letterforms possessed in the service of commercial ends, it remained the grotesqueries of 'the competitive standard' that precluded more sensitive solutions.

While Hewitt suggested, in general terms, changes in the conduct of advertising to make way for more 'civil intercourse', he clearly recognized the difficulty of such reform. Here, he again echoed his colleague Mason by voicing interest in the variety of his discipline while at the same time avoiding direct contact with practices whose means were considered impure. Thus in his second chapter, 'The pen's standard', Hewitt left behind the complexities and vagaries of lettering that he began with and focused instead on the core issues of writing. 'The story of writing, for us whose sole concern may be said to be the Roman alphabet, resolves itself into the story of but one tool, the Pen.'<sup>32</sup> With it, the construction of letters on a standard pattern disentangled the complexities and uncertainties of writing and lettering under modern conditions.

We are too apt to be perplexed with what seems to us a jumble of styles to choose from, when acknowledgement of but one style, permitting degrees of elaboration in execution according to circumstances would unravel the whole matter. This is the remedy suggested here. The tool which developed and preserved for us so magnificent an achievement of the Roman alphabet may well be trusted for the performance of our modern needs also.<sup>33</sup>

Hewitt had now fixed his sights, though much of what followed in *Lettering* (chapters 3–20) still resembled *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* by first summarizing the letters whose source was classical Rome, then examining the methods, uses and details of writing. Both books were concerned with the practical elements of writing, and acquiring a good 'hand'. Each devoted considerable attention to the Roman square capital as a cornerstone of contemporary writing and lettering, and a guide to present-day practice. Thereafter, however, Hewitt put forward his own, more personal, opinion of the proper aim of writing and lettering by returning to the issue he had raised in his introduction: legibility. Over four succeeding chapters, he again defended the pen's standard as the only one to which present-day conventions of legibility could be traced, the standard that conditioned both the form of letters and how these forms were recognized. And while Hewitt acknowledged that each context required its own kind of legibility, he continued to excoriate departures from scribal convention. Thus *Lettering* was, like *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, partly an argument for the priority of writing in determining the Latin alphabet's most conventionally appropriate form. But Hewitt went further by insisting, in terms that were explicitly limiting, that pen-written forms derived from a Roman heritage should come before, and give order to, everything else. Where variety was required,

32. Hewitt, *Lettering*, p. 23.

33. Hewitt, *Lettering*, p. 28.

the pen's standard might be embellished, but only modestly, as implied by Hewitt's dictum of 'variety modifying order'. Diversity to any greater extent would encroach on those conventions he sought to defend.<sup>34</sup>

Graily Hewitt's tenure at the Central School lasted nearly three decades, until 1930; J. H. Mason retired in 1940, and Noel Rooke, as head of the School of Book Production, stayed on until 1947. They were among the last whose teaching reached back to the Central School's earliest years, and in the case of Hewitt and Mason, the potent if at times circumscribed approach to their disciplines underpinned teaching that was continuous and largely unwavering.<sup>35</sup> But by the late 1940s, changes first hinted at in the inter-war period were now more in evidence as teaching in design for print and in the use of letterforms and type became increasingly varied. A key figure in these changes was Jesse Collins. He had joined the Central School in the 1930s, but did not belong to the Mason tradition. As one of his students, Anthony Froshaug, later observed, Collins 'did a class on one evening a week in what I think was called advertising design. He ... had in fact been brought in, ... once a week for 2½ hours, perhaps to lend a touch of actuality to the course, which was art & crafts based.' By 1948, Collins was in a position to invite back his ex-student Froshaug to teach part-time at the Central.<sup>36</sup>

Froshaug's appointment represented an important shift in the outlook of the School of Book Production. The influences that informed his approach to typography were then uncommon in Britain. They were continental in origin and modern, and thus some distance from the historicizing tendency of the private press movement that underpinned teaching at the Central School.<sup>37</sup> A second figure who also joined the School of Book Production staff at this time was Herbert Spencer. He, too, brought an alternative view of the typographic designer's relationship to commercial printing.<sup>38</sup> And, at Froshaug's suggestion, Edward Wright began an evening class in 'extempore' typography (i.e. typography without preparation) involving the free play of wood type and letterpress furniture on the press bed to produce prints in a spontaneous and expressionistic manner. In these and other instances, new teaching methods were introduced, often small in scale but nonetheless exemplary by encouraging ways of working that were considerably different from what had gone before.<sup>39</sup>

By the early 1960s, many of the innovations that had refreshed teaching at the Central School in the 1950s had become well established. Their contribution to instruction in 'graphic design' involved an engagement with letterforms that was predominantly typographic, that is to say, where an understanding of letterforms was pursued less by making them oneself, than by receiving them ready-made as type. Some in the renamed School of Book Production and Graphic Design felt that teaching had now swung too far away from writing and lettering, whose

principles and possibilities had much to offer graphic designers otherwise preoccupied with type. To effect a change in emphasis, Nicholas Biddulph, then instructing students in letterform design, began collecting material to illustrate his classroom discussions. He first secured examples of Roman inscriptional letters that had been of such importance to his Central School forebears, Johnston and Hewitt.<sup>40</sup> Soon after, Biddulph was joined by Nicolette Gray who had been invited to develop with him a much expanded course in lettering. It would emphasize an historical understanding of letterforms while urging an adventurous and eclectic approach to their present-day design.

## 7

To provide some context for this new lettering course, and why the collecting of examples and artefacts began to accelerate soon after its launch, it is necessary to review some of Nicolette Gray's interests and

**34.** Though Edward Johnston never moved significantly beyond the broad-edged pen that he considered the 'essential arbiter' of letters – 'this magically seeming tool' – his conviction that letterforms were finally derived from the attributes of the tool and the medium left a more open, if unspecified, field for the subsequent development of writing and lettering. *Lettering* was reviewed by Johnston soon after its publication. He pointed out that Hewitt's concern to establish a standard had become disproportionately proscriptive: 'while the author shows appreciation of the value of variety, and points out that vitality and vigour are essential, yet – perhaps because of his strong desire to outline and prove a right standard – [there] is here and there a sense of prohibition which might check essays in the super-normal use of the pen, and even "obliterate", in a too literally faithful student, a "distracting choice" from that infinite variety which is the life of the craft.' Johnston, 'Review of *Lettering* by Gairly Hewitt', *Artwork*, no. 28, Winter 1931. Hewitt's rigid, even doctrinaire, consolidation of Johnston's approach was, as mentioned, sometimes expressed in his attacks on 'block letters', a recurring irritation on both formal and moral grounds. In a letter (1935) to Sydney Cockerell, Hewitt wrote of Johnston's letters for the London Underground Railways: 'In Johnston I have lost confidence. Despite all he did for us at the beginning of this century he has undone too much by forsaking his standard of the classical Roman Alphabet – giving the world, without safeguard or explanation, his block letters which disfigure our modern life. His prestige has obscured their vulgarity and commercialism.' Quoted in Wilfrid Blunt, *Cockerell*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964, pp. 94–5). I am indebted to Justin Howes for both references in this note.

**35.** The components of their teaching were consistently lettering, wood-engraving, type composition and bookbinding; many students were trained as compositors for trade

printing. Mason claimed the Central School as one of the few institutions training the 'typographic designer'. Notably, a prospectus from the late 1920s, after describing at length the work of fine book production at the Central School, ends 'but our main energies are devoted to the training of the London printer, and therefore our pre-occupation is with advertisement display and jobbing work'.

**36.** Froshaug's first, part-time, appointment in 1948 lasted three terms. He returned in 1952 to assume a full-time post as Senior Lecturer in Typography, though this appointment only lasted a further four terms. Quotation from Robin Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug, Documents of a life* (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), p. 99.

**37.** The influences Froshaug brought to his work and teaching were derived from the reforming New Typography first summarized by Jan Tschichold in Germany in the 1920s. Tschichold's *Typographische Entwurfstechnik* (1932) was especially important to Froshaug's thinking. See Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug, Typography & texts* (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), pp. 15–19.

**38.** This could be seen in Spencer's work as consultant to the publisher and printer Lund Humphries, and in his book *Design in business printing* (1952). Spencer also promulgated variety in the work of the typographic designer, as seen in *Typographica*, the periodical he edited from 1949. It brought new work from continental Europe to the attention of British designers.

**39.** To signal its broadening field of concerns, 'Graphic Design' was appended to 'School of Book Production' in 1951. Reporting on this change, Central School principal William Johnstone wrote: 'A contemporary approach ... regarding elements of printing does not necessitate a deviation from the high standards of Mason's perfectionism, but rather the application of those standards to new patterns, forms, and techniques.' Johnstone, 'Graphic design at the Central School', *Penrose Annual*, vol. 47 (London:

Lund Humphries, 1953), pp. 58–60. A less conciliatory view of this transition is provided by a student at the time, Ken Garland, who described Edward Wright's class as 'saved (for a while, at least) from the outrage of the trade printers by the fact that we were doing our awful thing only in the evening, and by the authority of Anthony Froshaug, who waged god knows how many bitter battles with those narrow-minded little people on our behalf.' Ken Garland, 'Graphic design in Britain 1951–61: a personal memoir', *A word in your eye* (Reading: The University of Reading, 1996) pp. 62–7; and in the same volume, 'Obituary: Anthony Froshaug 1920–84' (pp. 68–9) and 'Teaching and experiment' (p. 82). See also Edward Wright, 'The Central School of Arts and Crafts', *Edward Wright: graphic work & painting* (London: The Arts Council, 1985) p. 47; Robin Kinross, 'Letters in the city', *Eye*, vol. 3, no. 10, 1993, pp. 66–73; and Sylvia Backemeyer, '"Visual language": the growth of graphic design' in Backemeyer (ed.), *Making their mark: art, craft and design at the Central School 1896–1966* (London: Herbert Press, 2000) pp. 33–45, which includes a number of first-hand accounts. Discussion of this period of the Central School is also woven into Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug, Typography & texts*, pp. 29–30 and *Documents of a life*, pp. 94–103. (2018) See also Robin Fior, 'Working with Edward Wright', in Paul Stiff (ed.), *Modern typography in Britain: graphic design, politics, and society* (*Typography papers*, 8), (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), pp. 173–8.

**40.** The images Biddulph first acquired were taken by James Mosley, who had recently shot a series of photographs of inscriptional lettering in Rome. A set of enlargements were made from Mosley's negatives for Biddulph's teaching. See (e.g.) James Mosley, 'Trajan revived', in *Alphabet 1964: international annual of letterforms*, vol. 1, R. S. Hutchings (ed.) (London: James Moran, 1964), pp. 17–48.



concerns in the years before her arrival at the Central School. 'Of all those who have written about letterforms, there is surely no-one whose repertoire was quite so extensive as Nicolette Gray's. She spanned the centuries with consummate ease from ancient times to the twentieth century.'<sup>41</sup> This observation made by a younger contemporary shortly after Gray's death in 1997 alludes to an important feature of her work, the embrace of breadth and diversity in letterforms. The introduction to her first book, *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (1938) (figure 18), announced this: 'we need to explore, not to exclude'. The compendious documentation of nineteenth-century examples that followed was proof of her intentions. Exploring meant discovering the diversity of expression that letterforms could convey. Gray sensed around her a 'growing susceptibility to the power of suggestion and expression in letters', and *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* demonstrated the ways this power could be delivered. And, as the embrace of letterforms widened, so too their range (and power) of suggestion and expression would grow. Gray's explorations showed her determination to avoid proscription dictated by orthodoxy, taste or fashion, and demonstrate that the expanse of lettering was far larger and more extraordinary than many allowed. *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* was again proof of this, surveying an era of type and lettering whose exuberant and fantastical inventions had attracted the scholarly attention of few others.<sup>42</sup>

The inter-war interest in nineteenth-century letterforms, to which *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* contributed, gathered pace in Britain after 1945.<sup>43</sup> This was evident at the 1951 Festival of Britain, for example, where a variety of slab serif/Egyptian designs were deployed on buildings and in publications to reinforce the Festival's celebration of domestic industrial creativity. Interest could also be found in the pages of *The Architectural Review*, where a series of articles commissioned from Gray between 1953 and 1959 considered letters in the built environment.<sup>44</sup> These articles gave sense, order and historical context to the different letterforms architects could make use of in their work, and employed numerous photographs to illustrate both their formal qualities and their relationship to buildings and places (figures 19, 20).

In 1960, Gray assembled her articles for the *The Architectural Review* in a book entitled *Lettering on buildings* (see figures 21–24, overleaf). The content and organization of the book echoed the serial form of the articles, giving arguments scattered across many issues of the magazine a more concentrated form, while allowing Gray to also expand the arguments and refine them, and add important new material. By way of introduction, Gray turned her attention to a theory of letterforms she felt had restrained their expressive use in architecture. This was the 'classical theory', originally a Renaissance formulation of letters articulated in a sequence of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century treatises. Their common feature was the construction of Roman square capital letters based

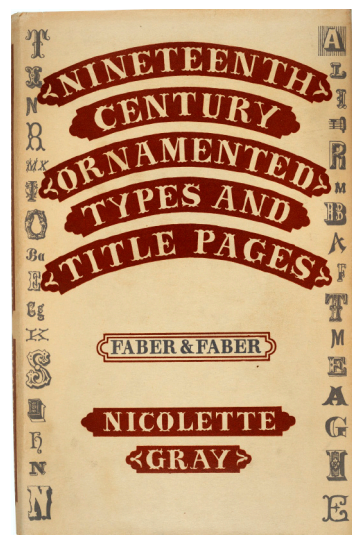
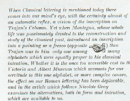


Figure 18. Nicolette Gray, *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (1938), cover, 218 x 135 mm.

Figures 19, 20. (opposite) *The Architectural Review*, spreads from articles by Nicolette Gray, 307 x 248 mm (page). 19. 'Theory of Classical' (November 1953). 20. 'Egyptians' (June 1954).



Nicolette Gray

The relationship of lettering to architecture is a subject which has exercised all architects, though few have studied it exhaustively. This is something which needs to be done, and the article which appears below is the first of a series which will examine and evaluate our vast heritage of letter-forms. Much of that heritage comes to us from the last century, when sign-writers and publicists, driven forward by the inexorable pressures of Victorian commerce, broke into new fields and devised new and original forms. But in all this ferment of adventure the architects played a very limited part, and where they did interest themselves in lettering at all it was usually to react from this inventiveness, and ultimately to exalt the classical Trajan letter as an impeccable ideal.

Architectural lettering lay locked in the deathlike embrace of the Trajanic ideal until the researches of Johnston and Gill re-opened the whole problem of type-design, and drew attention to the qualities of letters as, firstly, artefacts made from a specific material by a particular tool and, secondly, conventional signs transmitting a definite quantum of information. The distance between these two concepts is as wide as the distance between the two men. The first was an expert craftsman, the second a theorist. The first was a man of two men. The first were exquisite objects of handicraft, the latter were minimal signs stripped to the bone of legibility, and between the two the ideal Trajanic letter fell apart. Interest began to be awakened in other letter forms, in those that, lying between pure beauty and pure utility, endeavour to be appropriate to the job in hand even to the point of being vulgar but nice. The trend in the second half of the nineteenth century was towards the more decorative and individual. The trend in the

inspired or re-led; again in contrast to the V-tension of the classical, and therefore of its modernist derivative as an architectural element, causing a different sort of shadow. It is thus made up of patterns of flat spaces, mostly vertical and horizontal, arranged by Gothic curves; in fact, it is of the same physical terms as the ordinary features of post-Gothic domestic buildings—corners, mouldings, window surrounds, etc. It can, therefore, be planned as an integrated and enlivening element in an elevation. So much, of course, could have been said about the Egyptian temple facade, which also scans its section, although in a different way, when it is best used in such a way,<sup>1</sup> but the Egyptian has great advantages over us. Its bed itself gives the design finity, stability and balance. Moreover, they eliminate the embarrassing purely geometrical terms of sans-serif. The Egyptian is a formed, sophisticated letter design. Finally, it gains immensely in rhythm and vitality through the occasional insides of the shading in certain letters which are a definite, if variable, feature in the Victorian designer.

The examples which illustrate show the great variety of the Egyptian in use, mood, material nature, and design. I want to examine the elements which seem to underlie its development. To take first the architectural. The Egyptian which I would like to consider as the normal form of the letter—for architects surely it is essential to get away from this—has been the subject of much discussion in correspondence with nineteenth century architects seems to be the clearest, that is, the one which, with twentieth century terms is still in the making. The Victorians produced a sophisticated and a naive Egyptianism, and the latter is the one which I am referring to. The Egyptian in reality is not so simple, that is, so seen from below, the effect is richer and less grand than with regular square-sectioned masonry (compare with S). The modern architect has invented a new extension by introducing a flat letterhead close distance from its background, either cutting it out, or painting it, and the result is a flat letterhead. The Egyptian in reality is not so simple, that is, so seen from below, the effect is richer and less grand than with regular square-sectioned masonry (compare with S). The modern architect has invented a new extension by introducing a flat letterhead close distance from its background, either cutting it out, or painting it, and the result is a flat letterhead.

The slab serif, however, demands particular care in spacing. It is wide and heavy, and normally demands wide spacing. But because of their weight Egyptians can make a substantial and effective ornament to an elevation, if they are placed and spaced with that intention, 4 and 5. Spacing, too, affects the mood conveyed by the lettering. It has surprising variety. One thinks of Egyptians as rather dour—

3. *Infective modern use of Egyptian on a chain store of Ball*

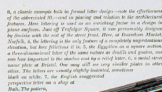
As to me obvious, that with

has produced a sophistication  
e, 7); the section is irregularly  
less rigid than with regular  
has invented a new extension  
background, either casting a  
of the letter design. One sees  
whole tradition of shaded  
will be dealt with in a later  
it may again be noted how  
the slab serif is, how, in general,  
is a more effective shaded

erif, however, demands parti-  
spacing. It is wide and heavy,  
y demands wide spacing. But  
their weight Egyptians can  
stantial and effective orna-  
elevation, if they are placed  
with that intention, 4 and 5.  
affects the *mood* conveyed  
ng. It has surprising variety.  
f Egyptians as rather dour-

\* A.B. April 1954 pp. 269-271

(continued on page 28)



EXISTING DIFFERENTIAL  
SUPPORTED BY VOLUNTARY



both in relief  
and in light and shade  
is skilful than the square section  
letter, v, also of Dutch. An excellent example  
of a shop front, such as one may still see in many  
country towns. The lettering is beautifully designed, gay and  
self-respecting like the shop itself. A few examples of beautiful  
English and several instances of the same style.

**41.** Michael Twyman, 'Nicolette Gray: a personal view of her contribution to the study of letterforms', *Typography Papers*, 3 (Reading: Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, The University of Reading, 1998) pp. 87–102. This essay provides a review of those interests and ideas Nicolette Gray pursued throughout her working life. See also Frances Spalding's 'A true statement of a real thing' in the same publication (pp. 103–14). It describes Gray's interest in modern art, which informed her study and teaching of letterforms.

42. Quotations from *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938). Gray made reference in her introduction to a doctrinaire view of typography to explain the relative lack of interest in letterforms from this era. 'We suffer today from the lucidity and insistence with

which the principles of book typography have been explained to us. Having learnt our lesson we tend to apply it indiscriminately to all forms of lettering. "Typography is the efficient means to an essentially utilitarian and only accidentally aesthetic end .... If readers do not notice the consummate reticence and rare discipline of a new type it is probably a good letter." Mr. [Stanley] Morison has stated the austere doctrine in its most extreme form, but his idea is the logical root behind all doctrines that the primary purpose of all lettering must be legibility, that its only perfect attribute is simplicity.' (p. 13)

**43.** Further evidence in Britain of an inter-war interest in nineteenth-century letter-forms includes the release of typefaces such as Chisel, Playbill and Thorne Shaded by Stephenson Blake & Co. during the 1930s. These followed a renewal of interest in slab

serif / Egyptian and fat face letterforms in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Discussion could also be found in the journal *Typography* (1936–9), whose editor Robert Harling was typographical adviser to Stephenson Blake.

44. 'Theory of Classical' (November 1953), pp. 295–302; 'Classical in practice' (December 1953), pp. 400–1; 'Sans' (April 1954), pp. 269–71; 'Egyptians' (June 1954), pp. 386–91; 'Ionic' (August 1954), pp. 119–20; 'Tuscan' (October 1954), pp. 259–61; 'Modern face and fat-face' (April 1955), pp. 273–4; 'Miniscule' [sic] (December 1955), pp. 398–400; 'Alphabet' (August 1956), pp. 109–14; 'Street lettering' (April 1957), pp. 224–9; '3D' (October 1957), pp. 252–4; 'Material and design' (July 1958), pp. 30–4; 'Expressionism in lettering' (April 1959), pp. 272–6; 'The Modern movement' (May 1959), pp. 336–40.

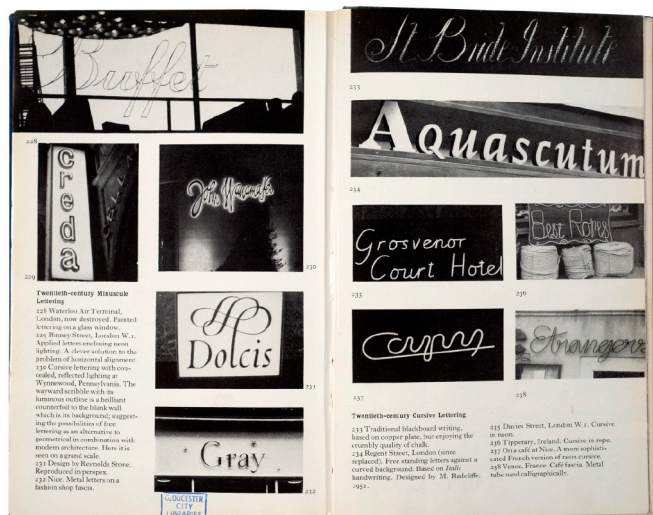




21



22



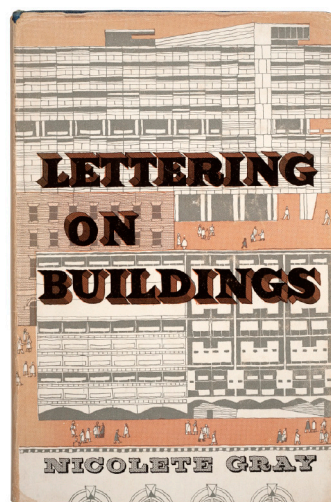
23

Figures 21–23. Nicolette Gray, *Lettering on buildings* (1960), spreads, 220 x 140 mm (page). ‘Roman Lettering’ (21); ‘Nineteenth-century Egyptian Lettering’ (22); ‘Twentieth-century Minuscul Lettering’ (23).

on idealized proportions and other geometrical relations. In this theory, Gray detected an underlying Platonic ideal at work that neglected the mediating influence of size, material, purpose or function. In twentieth-century Britain, Gray argued, the classical theory had led to the adoption and use of a particular model, identified ‘for convenience and through laziness’ as those letterforms inscribed on the base of Trajan’s Column in Rome. The result, in practice, was the tendency to uniformly impose Trajan letters – sometimes in a corrected and standardized form – on to many different contexts.

Gray linked this tendency to a misunderstanding of Edward Johnston’s earlier proposal that ‘essential forms’ underpinned Roman square capital letters. But these, Johnston had insisted, were not an imposition of reductive uniformity but rather denoted a letterform’s ‘lowest-common-denominator’ of structure and proportion, released from local detail. From its essential form, a letter could be made anew with various tools. Gray acknowledged that in Johnston’s proposal there existed the possibility of avoiding homogeneity by way of the specific qualities wrought by the tool and, implicitly, the mediating circumstances of a letter’s context of use. But what followed from Johnston, Gray argued, was often imitation and uniformity. Hewitt’s self-imposed stricture of one tool – the broad-edged pen – and his desire for legibility and a single Roman standard were symptomatic. So, too, were Eric Gill’s chiselled inscriptions, in their later manifestations excessively allied to his type designs and thereby lacking an animating spirit. From such evidence, Gray concluded that architectural lettering was in general stifled by a limited range of tools and media, and by an association with ‘typographical ideas’ that prioritized letterforms that were ‘legible and unobtrusive’. Gray specifically challenged the transposition of the latter to architecture: ‘with architectural lettering the typographical criteria must be reversed; the dominant factor is design not legibility.’ Within the built environment, identity, character and location should come before mere legibility.<sup>45</sup>

Gray sought out lettering that was alive and appropriate to architecture. Uniformity was inimical, while diversity was essential in forms and materials responsive to physical context, meaning, even sound. She argued that a reductive view of letters was untenable when many forms might equally and purposefully represent a given letter and encompass a far greater range ‘of feelings and intention, of purpose, abstract design and relation to architectural style ... for which no room exists in an idealist or purely classical theory of lettering.’<sup>46</sup> In place of a debilitating orthodoxy, Gray offered revision: ‘I do not intend to present any sort of watertight theory, but to examine examples which I recognize as in some way admirable and to analyse what is in each which I admire; since the eye, not principle, is the basis of all judgement of visual things. I want to arrive at a new way of thinking about lettering from which nothing is excluded on *a priori* grounds.’



**Figure 24.** Nicolette Gray, *Lettering on buildings* (1960), cover, 225 x 150 mm. Jacket design by Gordon Cullen.

**45.** Quotations in this paragraph from *Lettering on Buildings*, pp. 19–20. Despite Gray’s apparently novel arguments and observations, Edward Johnston made similar remarks many years before. In a lecture at the Leicester Municipal School of Art (1907) about decorative lettering of all kinds, he stated: ‘Whenever you begin a new piece of work you are a beginner, and your way will be made clear for you by having this foundation: you will regard the thing itself – whether book, chest or building – as of primary importance, and adapt your lettering to it’, and ‘Generally I advise you to make your work as readable as you can, it is such a good discipline. But in many inscriptions ease of reading is not all important; & the less readableness matters, the less you are bound by practical limitations.’ Johnston, *Lessons in formal writing*, pp. 97–8.

**46.** Quotations in this paragraph from *Lettering on Buildings*, p. 22.

The groups of letterforms Gray set out in the eight chapters that followed her introduction were organized around ‘norms’, which had, she postulated, crystallized at certain periods in history. Each norm – the Roman letter, sans serif, Egyptian, Tuscan, and so on – was not, however, reduced to a single, summary representation. Instead a norm suggested a kind of node, around which specific examples clustered to build up a composite description. The 269 photographs assembled in the book were largely grouped around these norms and illustrated their expressive range. But the photographs also made plain the extraordinary breadth of practice, for which a normative description of letters – despite allowing for formal variation – was inadequate in making sense of *in situ* factors at work in architecture. So, in the second part of *Lettering on buildings*, Gray proposed a ‘comprehensive theory of lettering’ able to address more fully those issues that lay beyond the classical theory, or the mere description of form, normative or otherwise.

Gray’s comprehensive theory began by insisting that lettering (on buildings) be considered primarily in relationship to the built environment of which it was a part. She noted that while both architecture and lettering were substantially utilitarian and functional, they were ‘unavoidably visual and formal’ as well and this encouraged each towards the artistic. In fact the artistic element was often dominant, to the extent that the message of lettering might be delivered by material form alone. In addition, both architecture and lettering, as non-representational arts, were governed by abstraction. Modern twentieth-century art had assisted in the understanding of abstraction by demonstrating the value of experiencing form and materials on their own terms, and not as representations of something other. All of this had important implications for lettering. By considering the particularity of each instance of lettering – its utility, aesthetics and physical circumstances – expression far beyond mere two-dimensional form was possible. Gray’s comprehensive theory thus began with the meaning of words and the fitness of a given design to carry this meaning, serve a stated purpose, and at the same time express the letterer’s intentions; it encompassed good or bad form, in part determined by materials; and it concluded with the letterform itself, flexible and mutable, known to the letterer’s mind as an idea, but not determined until the specifics of context gave it visible, physical form.

The photographs reproduced in *Lettering on buildings*, discussed in Part I as illustrations of form, were re-assessed in Part II according to Gray’s comprehensive theory. Letterforms were now considered in terms of their fitness to purpose and expression, and in terms of the relationship observed between their design and the materials used to make them. By re-evaluating the photographs in this way, a richer and more complex understanding of lettering was put across. But the photographs also demonstrated other ideas, if implicitly. In extent, they were proof of Gray’s wish to dispense with exclusivity and proscription. Their

arrangement in a continuous gallery precluded any from taking precedence; hierarchy was established, if at all, by chronology (though as Gray explained in her preface, this was a convenient way to suggest the subject's historical breadth). And in recording examples, photography *in situ* was preferred, in line with Gray's view that only by studying lettering in relation to its architectural setting could its effectiveness be gauged.

## 8

In *Lettering on buildings* it is possible to find many elements of the approach to letterforms that Nicolette Gray brought to the Central School when she joined its staff in 1965. This is first apparent in the curriculum of the lettering course that she began with Nicholas Biddulph. While the course surveyed principal features in the history and development of letterforms, much time was devoted to new creation. In preparation for this, students first explored the notion of ideal letters. Each student drew what they considered to be *the* letterforms of the (Latin) alphabet. The variations that inevitably emerged among the students, and in relation to existing letterforms, served to undermine the notion. The exercise offered a point of departure for analysing the attributes that gave letterforms their own identity and distinguished them from other letters; it also demonstrated what alterations or embellishments could be made without a loss of identity. Then began letterform experiments, often developed around a specific visual theme or motif. The process fostered skills of visual analysis, drawing and design that enabled students to give expression to a text. Throughout, geometrical principles helped structure the work, while historical examples provided reference and inspiration. Over eleven days, the course presented a productive alternative to theories of the ideal, and a release from the constraints of predetermined (i.e. typographic) form.<sup>47</sup>

When Gray began her collaboration with Biddulph, an ambitious programme of image collecting was planned in support of the new course. Both Biddulph, in his initial assembly of images, and Gray, in *Lettering on buildings*, had already discovered the benefits of photography;

47. This summary is from Brian Yates, 'An introduction to letterform design', in F. Baudin & J. Dreyfus (eds), *Dossier A-Z: Association Typographique Internationale 1973* (Ardenne: Rémy Magermanns, 1973), pp. 101–5. Yates was head of the Department of Graphic Design (as it was by then known) at the Central School, and lent support and encouragement to the lettering course and to the collecting of images for study and reference. Biddulph and Gray also delivered papers at the Copenhagen congress on its theme of 'education in letterforms'. Gray's paper was subsequently published as 'Lettering and society' in *Visible Language* (vol. 8, no. 3, 1974, pp. 247–60); it encapsulated her view of lettering practice and enumerated the

aims of the lettering course:

'1. It should teach students to draw, a particularly valuable contribution now that drawing from life is out of fashion; to distinguish and master the line which can alter the character of a letter by a minimal movement; and, if time allows, to master more than one drawing instrument.

'2. It should teach students to analyse existing alphabets, not just to recognise differences or learn the tricks of a style, but in order to find out the formal idiosyncrasies which create its character so as to be able to abstract and transpose these into their own idiom.

'3. It should teach students to think out design problems by integrating the conditions of material, purpose, wording, etc., with the

formal and expressive qualities of the letters which they create.

'4. As a necessary tool for the third aim, students should have a wide vocabulary of letterforms, and know how to extend this vocabulary.

'Much of this implies a considerable knowledge of past lettering. This should not, I think, be taught as the history of lettering or through obliging the student to master historic styles. It should be introduced at various stages in the course, to illustrate solutions to problems or to demonstrate the many directions in which lettering can be extended as an art. We have found our most essential teaching aid to be our Collection of photographs of examples of all kinds of lettering.' (p. 260)

now it would enable them to quickly and inexpensively record lettering that was widely divergent in style, size and material. Photography would also allow examples to be documented in a variety of localities, capturing contextual features such as lighting, or the position of lettering relative to surrounding (built) features. Specific imaging techniques were also employed: high contrast black-white film isolated and emphasized two-dimensional shape and line, while macro- and telephoto lenses brought the unseen or unnoticed startlingly near.

From the outset, Gray and Biddulph were determined that the collection of photographs should not only serve the immediate needs of lettering course, but should have a broader function, too. So the collection was given a name, the Central Lettering Record (CLR), and a correspondingly larger ambition, to gather in 'the whole history and range of lettering including contemporary developments and experiments'. This echoed Gray's view that lettering should be understood as far wider in scope and richer than was generally acknowledged; in the years that followed, the work of building up and giving order to the CLR gave tangible form to this view. Examples were gathered and ordered primarily by technique and material. Thereafter, lettering in architecture was emphasized, as were groupings of historical and contemporary letterform norms, functional lettering (signs and street lettering), and experimental work that pushed against boundaries of convention. Each group had many subdivisions ranging across numerous periods and styles. The division of material was also intended to emphasize that which was thought most stimulating or instructive, both to the practitioner and the non-expert. The aim was to avoid an arrangement whose logic or nomenclature might mystify users or relegate examples to a single grouping when they could belong to several.<sup>48</sup>

By the mid 1970s, the organization of the CLR achieved a definite physical configuration when its photographs and other artefacts were given long-term accommodation in the Central School library. Most notable was an impressive bank of labelled drawers built to house photographs in the 'Standard Series', each of which was mounted on a 24 x 24 cm card held in a plastic sleeve.<sup>49</sup> While unremarkable in itself, this system made interaction straightforward: not only were the photographs simple to access, their compact storage meant that the extent of the collection could be quickly grasped and its contents easily retrieved. It encouraged both guided and serendipitous exploration, and, using cross-references provided with each photograph, facilitated comparisons. These features were echoed in the 'Letterform Series', which was stored in standard office filing cabinets. Its images of letterforms from a wide range of sources, assembled on 24 x 37 cm cards (also held in plastic sleeves), were similarly quick and easy to find, retrieve, study and compare (see figures 25–39, overleaf).

When Nicolette Gray retired from teaching in 1981, the course in lettering she had taught with Nicholas Biddulph began to contract, and with it the activities of the Central Lettering Record. The collection had by this time grown to a considerable size, and in addition to serving the course for which it was begun, it supported externally facing activities. Among these were exhibitions and publications that explored lettering's contribution to the visual arts and design,<sup>50</sup> and work to document architectural lettering in Britain at risk of demolition. Both were part of the broader remit Gray and Biddulph had formulated when the CLR was established, namely to reach audiences both within the Central School and beyond that were not typically interested in letterforms. These included practising artists and designers, and art and social historians for whom the holdings of the CLR might supplement their enquiries and enable them to traverse conventional discipline boundaries. But after Gray's retirement, funds to develop the archive along these lines were increasingly scarce, while a research assistant post assigned to the CLR during the 1970s and early 1980s was discontinued. Biddulph persisted with the eleven-day lettering course, now with other collaborators. But in 1984, as the Central School's graphic design curriculum began to merge with that of Saint Martin's School of Art, the length of the lettering course was cut in half, treating letterforms in a similar if now abbreviated way. The function of the CLR had thus shifted, no longer serving the specific aims set out by Gray and Biddulph but instead making more diffuse and intermittent contributions to letterform studies. When Biddulph retired in 1991, he left behind a collection whose original premise was understood by relatively few people.

In 1993, this period of contraction in the activities of the Central Lettering Record came to an end with the start of a new project whose programme of research would focus on the contribution screen-based interactive multimedia could make to the study of type- and letterform history.<sup>51</sup> An important part of the research would be to revisit the aims and resources of the CLR, both as a model for learning and study, and as an aid to teaching and scholarship. The gathering and recording of exemplars would also be reactivated, in particular to document the profusion of digital typefaces whose emergence from the mid 1980s onwards had coincided with the CLR's own cessation in collecting.

48. Leonora Pearse, 'The Central Lettering Record', *Art Libraries Journal*, Spring 1976, p. 14. Early collecting efforts at the Central Lettering Record also benefitted from a collaboration with the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading, where a similar photographic archive was initiated at the same time. It remains active as part of that Department's lettering, printing and graphic design collections; it has extensive documentation of inscriptions from ancient and Baroque Rome, and from

Renaissance Florence, and lettering of many kinds from around Britain.

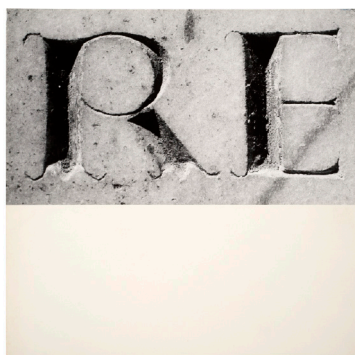
49. While most photographs in the CLR were of this size, a significant number were enlargements whose subject matter was typical Roman epigraphy, which thus took on an appropriately epic dimension.

50. The most important of these was the exhibition 'Le tracé des lettres comme trace de l'histoire', organized in conjunction with the 1981 congress of the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI) in

Brussels and accompanied by a book under the same title, authored by Gray (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-arts, 1981, 32 pp).

51. 'B9 Interactive multimedia: creative uses of interface design for typographic research' This document was compiled by Simon Pugh, then Dean of the School of Graphic & Industrial Design, with contributions from Phil Baines and Colin Taylor. The proposal was supported by Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design using funds allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.





25



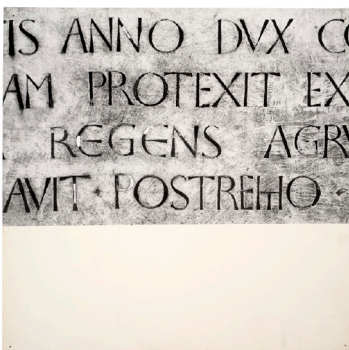
26



27



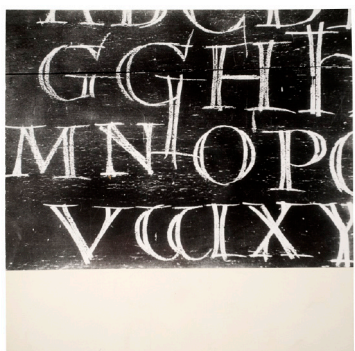
28



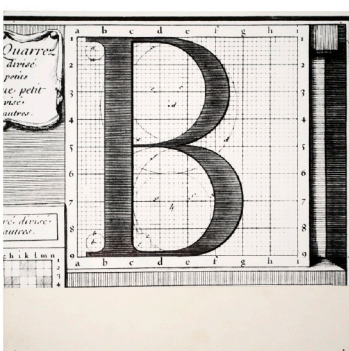
29



30



31



32



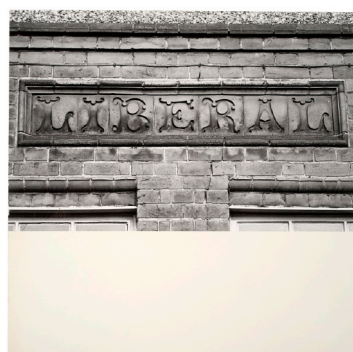
33



34



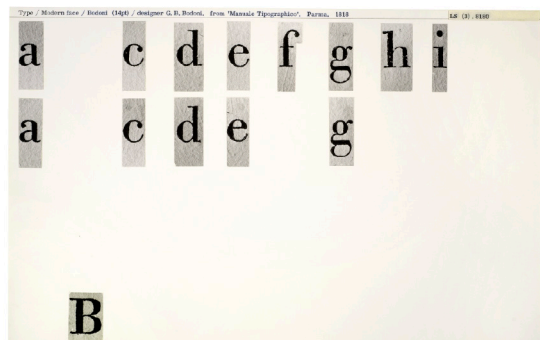
35



36



37



38



39

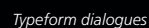
**Figures 25–36.** (opposite) Central Lettering Record, Standard Series.

24 x 24 cm. **25.** Stone inscription, Furius Dionysius Filocalus, Rome (late 4th century). **26.** Wine label, pierced silver, Charles Rawlings, England (1824–5). **27.** Street sign, painted wood, London (c. 19th century). **28.** Cafe sign, bronze (c. 1900). **29.** Stone inscription (with remnants of inlay), from the tomb of Spinetta Malaspina, Verona (15th century). **30.** Fascia lettering, ceramic, London Colosseum (1904). **31.** Blackboard demonstration, chalk, Edward Johnston (c. 1930). **32.** Engraved letter, model for capital letter 'B', Paris (before 1704). **33.** Specimen alphabet, Adalbert Carl Fischl, from *Beispiele künstlerischer Schrift* (Vienna: 1900). **34.** Fascia lettering, painted wood, London (19th/20th century, destroyed 1971). **35.** Fascia lettering, painted iron(?), Lincoln's Inn, London (date uncertain). **36.** Fascia lettering, ceramic tile, Britain (19th century). The Standard Series was designed as the basic photographic reference format. Photographs were organized into five main groups (technique, architectural lettering, letterform styles, creative & experimental lettering, and non-Latin lettering) with numerous subdivisions. Each photograph was mounted on a card held in a plastic sleeve (not shown) and stored in one of 270 labelled drawers. Details were given on a pre-printed paper form inserted behind the card; they included date, designer, location, a description of the image, and cross-references to other images in the Standard Series and to enlargements stored elsewhere.

**Figures 37–39.** Central Lettering Record, Letterform Series, 24 x 37 cm. **37.** Wood-engraved Roman capitals, Giovanni Francesco Cresci, from *Il perfetto scrittore* (1570). **38.** Printed type, Giambattista Bodoni, from *Manuale tipografico* (1818). **39.** Book hand (Foundational hand), Edward Johnston, from a copy sheet (1916). The Letterform Series was begun by Nicholas Biddulph in the mid-1970s and illustrated letterforms reaching back to the Roman republic. Though arranged by technique ('Ms', 'Type', 'Wood engraved', 'Stone inscription' and so on), its emphasis was on the form of individual letters rather than their mode or context of production. Imaging was largely achieved through macrophotography (by Biddulph), though in some instances high-contrast film was employed to isolate letterforms from their background. Photographs were typically cut apart and their letterforms arranged in alphabetical sequences. The series eventually comprised some 1100 cards held in plastic sleeves (not shown), which were stored in standard office filing cabinets.

Both series enabled users (including non-specialists) to quickly find, browse and compare material. The mounted photographs, held in plastic sleeves (not shown), were appropriately robust for informal classroom handling and display.





To narrow the initially broad programme of research following the project's approval and funding, a decision was made to focus work principally on type and its many forms. To fully engage with the larger sphere of lettering, as favoured by the founders of the CLR, lay beyond the capacity of the research team. But within the sphere of type, research work would echo an aim of the CLR by acknowledging, embracing and making sense of diversity. Work would be guided by other aims as well: to explore the presentation of (printed) typeforms onscreen; to exploit the CLR's extensive holdings to aid the demonstration of diversity; and to document and accession new types to the CLR, even if many could not be situated within the CLR's existing system of organization and nomenclature, or indeed within any existing scheme of typeface classification.

After developing a series of prototype screen interfaces, a configuration was achieved that was able to contain and express a survey of typeforms (figures 40, 41). (The interface, eventually named *Typeform dialogues*, is fully illustrated in the 'User's manual', pp. 5–36 above, accompanied by explanations of its features and their rationale.) The survey is made up of 140 types, a number thought sufficient to represent typeform diversity over five and a half centuries. Each chosen type is presented in a purely graphic form, described in a written profile, and shown in a printed context, typically an early use of the type, or in a specimen or other promotional document or advertisement. Underpinning each type is a description of its sources and attributes of form. This description is generated by a single, comprehensive framework able to cope with examples that are old or new, and whose forms are conventional or novel. Throughout the interface – indeed built into its configuration – comparison and cross-references demonstrate similarities and differences between types. Threads of relation, connection, evolution, deviation and disjuncture can be discovered and explored. Taken together, the 140 examples offer a representative view not only of typeform diversity but also of historical, technical and cultural narratives that make up their story, which is itself unified structurally and by a system of description whose method is consistent and encompassing.

**Figures 40, 41.** (opposite) Screen shots from the *Typeform dialogues* interface.

10

Looking back at a century of teaching at the Central School, London, *Typeform dialogues* takes its place in a line of published works and designed artefacts that give form to thinking about how writing, letterforms and types, in their profusion, complexity and diversity, should best be made sense of and used.

For those who played a formative role in the early Central School, above all Emery Walker and Edward Johnston, sense was found in the close relationship between the form of a letter and how it was made. Historical exemplars provided telling instances of this relationship at work, which could be transported into the present day untainted by

anachronism. The relationship was traced back to handwritten letters, made with an edged pen (narrow or broad), letters that expressed clarity and simplicity, and whose translation into types was fluent and vital, and guided by the technical and aesthetic qualities that printing needed to regain. By the early twentieth century, these notions conceived and articulated by Walker had become established and would prove enduring for the private presses and for programmes of study like that at the Central School. Johnston's teaching, and the publication of *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, enabled his own conception of contemporary practice-based historical models to also become firmly rooted.

But the results from the search for appropriate models for practice encouraged in those who followed not further exploration but tenacious consolidation, not more experiment but entrenched defence of early discoveries. This is true of Graily Hewitt and J.H. Mason, who, as eminent guides to writing and lettering, type and typography, set limits on the tools and materials thought fit for practice, and consequently on the variety of work done in the classroom or in their own professional activities. These limits frequently gave rise to finely crafted books and other documents, assembled from materials of excellent quality, in forms of high refinement, using texts of scholarly or literary merit. Such work suited Hewitt and Mason, driven by their intellectual dispositions (Hewitt was a barrister by training, Mason a self-taught classicist). Both men were less concerned with form-making as such, and more with its proper derivation and principled application. Their discipline of means reinforced the foundations that the Central School had established early on. But over time, and by the 1930s, the potently condensed teaching of Hewitt and Mason had become recalcitrant in its control of creative boundaries.

Where instruction was pursued in the first several decades of the Central School through a single tool, the pen, for writing and lettering, or a singular view of type and typography, for making fine books, teaching after the Second World War drew on a broader field of reference, and was more synthetic and often purposely experimental. New teachers expanded or reconfigured tools and media to suit the emerging work of graphic design. The collaboration of Nicolette Gray and Nicholas Biddulph reflected this. In their teaching, norms and variations, historical inspiration and pure aesthetics offered numerous points of entry into a process of design that combined drawing and analysis with an eclectic vocabulary of form. Gray and Biddulph aimed to radically expand their students' experience of letterforms and thereby extend the expressive range of work they could produce. The Central Lettering Record gave substance to this aim, following Gray's own argument 'that lettering can and should be infinitely diverse.'

*Typeform dialogues* follows this approach in several ways: its 'survey' also suggests compendiousness and demonstrates how historical and contemporary artefacts, practices and contexts all contribute to

an inclusive understanding of typeforms. *Typeform dialogues*, like the Central Lettering Record, shows in its principles of selection, organization and construction that no examples should be excluded, as Gray put it, *a priori*. Where the CLR did this expansively, *Typeform dialogues* does so selectively, but with the implication that any typeform may be described in full by its combined means of presentation, narrative and analysis. But whatever parallels may be drawn with eminent predecessors, *Typeform dialogues* should also be judged as the product of a digital, interactive environment, in which the ideas specific to the circumstances of its making can be most clearly discerned.

## Bibliography

- Sylvia Backemeyer. “‘Visual language’: the growth of graphic design”, in *Making their mark: art, craft and design at the Central School 1896–1966*, S. Backemeyer (ed.), pp. 33–45. London: Herbert Press, 2000
- Wilfrid Blunt. *Cockerell*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964
- Central School of Arts and Crafts. *School of Book Production & Printing, specimens of general jobbing advertisement & table work*. London: London County Council, Central School of Arts & Crafts, 1914
- John Dreyfus. ‘A reconstruction of the lecture given by Emery Walker on 15 November 1888’, in *Matrix* 11, pp. 27–52. Leominster: The Whittington Press, 1991
- Stuart Evans. ‘Teaching collections then and now’, in *Object lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive*, S. Backemeyer (ed.), pp. 15–20. London: Lund Humphries/The Lethaby Press, 1996
- Robin Fior. ‘Working with Edward Wright’, in *Modern typography in Britain: graphic design, politics, and society* (*Typography papers*, 8), P. Stiff (ed.), pp. 173–8. London: Hyphen Press, 2009
- Peter Foden. ‘John Johnson and the Treyford type’, in *Matrix* 13, pp. 62–72. Whittington: The Whittington Press, 1993
- E. M. Forster. *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*. London: Edward Arnold, 1934
- Ken Garland. *A word in your eye*. Reading: The University of Reading, 1996
- Nicolette Gray [sic]. *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages*. London: Faber & Faber, 1938
- Nicolette Gray. *Lettering on buildings*. London: The Architectural Press, 1960
- Nicolette Gray. ‘Lettering and society’, *Visible Language*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1974
- Nicolette Gray. *Le tracé des lettres comme trace de l’histoire*. Brussels: Palais des Beaux-arts, 1981
- Graily Hewitt. *The pen and type-design*. London: The First Edition Club, 1928
- Graily Hewitt. *Lettering for students and craftsmen*. London: Seeley Service, 1930
- Justin Howes. ‘Edward Johnston’s first class at the Central School on 21 September 1899’, in *Object lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive*, S. Backemeyer (ed.), pp. 33–7. London: Lund Humphries / The Lethaby Press, 1996
- Edward Johnston. *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, 2nd edn. London: John Hogg, 1908 (1906)

- Edward Johnston. *Manuscript & inscription letters: letters for schools & classes & for the use of craftsmen*, with 5 plates by A. E. R. Gill. London: John Hogg, 1909
- Edward Johnston. 'Review of *Lettering* by Graily Hewitt', *Artwork*, no. 28, Winter 1931
- Edward Johnston. *Formal penmanship and other papers*, Heather Child (ed.) with a foreword by Pricilla Johnston. London: Lund Humphries and New York: Hastings House, 1971
- Edward Johnston. *Lessons in formal writing*, Heather Child and Justin Howes (eds). London: Lund Humphries, 1986
- William Johnstone. 'Graphic design at the Central School', in *Penrose Annual*, vol. 47, pp. 58–60. London: Lund Humphries, 1953
- Eric Kindel. 'The Central Lettering Record', in *Object lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive*, S. Backemeyer (ed.), pp. 21–4. London: Lund Humphries/The Lethaby Press, 1996
- Robin Kinross. 'Letters in the city', *Eye*, vol. 3, no. 10, 1993
- Robin Kinross. *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a life and Typography & texts*. London: Hyphen Press, 2000
- J[ohn]. H[enry]. Mason. 'Notes on printing considered as an industrial art'. London: The British Institute of Industrial Art, 1926
- J. H. Mason. 'Essay on printing'. London: Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society, 1944
- J. H. Mason. 'Typography: a printer's philosophy', in *Fifteen craftsmen on their crafts*, John Farleigh (ed.), pp. 52–9. London: Sylvan Press, 1945
- Stanley Morison. 'The Treyford type', in *The Fleuron*, no. 7, pp. 180–5. London: Cambridge University Press, 1930
- William Morris. *The collected works of William Morris, with introductions by his daughter May Morris*, vol. 15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912
- William Morris and Emery Walker. 'Printing', in *Arts and crafts essays by members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society*, pp. 111–33. London: Rivington, Percival, & Co., 1893
- James Mosley. 'Trajan revived', in *Alphabet 1964: international annual of letter-forms*, vol. 1, R. S. Hutchings (ed.), pp. 17–48. London: James Moran, 1964
- L[eslie]. T[homas]. Owens. *J. H. Mason, 1875–1951, scholar-printer*. London: Frederick Muller, 1976
- Godfrey Rubens. 'W. R. Lethaby and the revival of printing', in *The Penrose Annual*, vol. 69, pp. 219–32. London: Northwood Publications, 1976
- Godfrey Rubens. *W. R. Lethaby: his life and work, 1857–1931*. London: The Architectural Press, 1986.
- Leonora Pearse. 'The Central Lettering Record', *Art Libraries Journal*, Spring 1976, p. 14
- Frances Spalding. 'A true statement of a real thing', *Typography papers*, 3, pp. 103–14. Reading: Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, The University of Reading, 1998
- Herbert Spencer. *Design in business printing*. London: Sylvan Press, 1952
- Michael Twyman. 'Nicolette Gray: a personal view of her contribution to the study of letterforms', in *Typography papers*, 3, pp. 87–102. Reading: Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, The University of Reading, 1998
- Emery Walker. 'Typography', *The British & Colonial Printer*, 2 January 1896



Edward Wright. 'The Central School of Arts and Crafts', in *Edward Wright: graphic work & painting*, p. 47 London: The Arts Council, 1985

Brian Yates. 'An introduction to letterform design', in *Dossier A-Z: Association Typographique Internationale 1973*, F. Baudin & J. Dreyfus (eds), pp. 101–5. Ardenne: Rémy Magermanns, 1973

87

#### Image sources

Figure 1: St Bride Library, London

Figures 2–6, 9, 14–18, 21–24: Private collections

Figures 7, 8, 10, 25–41: Central Lettering Record, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London

Figure 11: Collections of the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading

Figures 12, 13: Museum & Study Collection, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London

Figures 19, 20: Reading University Library, University of Reading

#### Object photography

Figure 1: St Bride Library, London

Figures 2–9, 15–39: Laura Bennetto

Figure 10: the author

Figures 12, 13: Museum & Study Collection, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London