Styles of Script

By Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo

Author's Bio:
Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo is the owner/webmaster for both Zanerian.com and The Ornamental Penmanship Group on Yahoo. In addition, he is the founder of IAMPETH.com. Dr. Vitolo spends most of his spare time studying and promoting the history and art of ornamental and plain cursive penmanship. An expert Engrosser's script (commonly called Copperplate) and an active member of The International Association of Master Penmen, Engrossers and Teachers of Handwriting (IAMPETH) he has published more than sixty articles on penmanship/script and lectures extensively around the country on topics ranging from science to dentistry to calligraphy. He holds two doctorates: one in Dentistry and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. Dr. Vitolo is currently the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Advanced Education for The Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University.

The purpose of this article is to examine the various styles of pointed pen script and the sometimes-confusing terminology applied. Samples provided in the reference image on the last page combined with the following information should allow the reader to visually compare and contrast the different styles of script.

Around the world, the Copperplate style of script is a very popular form of pointed pen calligraphy. It adorns many of the wedding invitations that calligraphers are commissioned to pen. The modern usage of the term Copperplate is misapplied to several styles of shaded script. Historically, the starting point for what we incorrectly call 'Copperplate' is English roundhand script (**Sample 1A**) so wonderfully represented in 'The Universal Penman' by George Bickham (~1684-1758). This publication displays the roundhand script penned using a feather quill pen by some of the finest historical English writing masters of the time. Furthermore, we know from the instruction provided in Bickham's 'The Young Clerk's Assistant' that contrary to popular belief, the quill pen was not cut to a sharp point but rather to a narrow broad edge. Yet these historic letterforms are the basis of the modern 'Copperplate style' of calligraphy. It is very important to understand that the quill-penned roundhand specimens of these early English writing masters were engraved onto a 'copper plate' by a master engraver for use in the Intaglio method of printing. This necessarily implies that when viewing the surviving printed samples of these English writing masters, we are not viewing the actual handwritten form but rather an engraved form. It has been speculated that this method of printing, using a copper plate, may have led to the use of the term Copperplate.

Modern Copperplate/roundhand (**Sample 1B**) represents an attempt to emulate the engraved/quill-pen style of roundhand writing using a pointed flexible steel pen. The earliest usage of the word 'Copperplate' applied to English roundhand that I have come across in my studies is found in Sir Ambrose Heal's 1931 publication entitled, The English Writing-Masters and Their Copy-Books 1570-1800. Though usage of the term likely predates this publication. It should be noted that there were several variants of English roundhand script including a less ornate less shaded hand that was used for day-to-day correspondence.

The next calligraphic style we will examine is Engrosser's/Engraver's script. Several historical terms have been applied to the scripts shown in **Sample 2**. These include Engraver's script (**Sample 2A**) and Engrosser's script (**Sample 2B**). The progenitor hand is the previously described feather quill-penned English roundhand. For this reason, the term 'roundhand' is sometimes used to describe this style. To add to the novice's confusion, Engravers also used this style of script to embellish their work. Hence, the application of the term Engraver's script (**Sample 2A**). These oval-based letterforms were drawn using a pointed flexible steel nib such as the legendary Gillott 303 and a

series of strokes similar to how the engraver would cut the letters into metal. In addition, this general style was also used by early calligraphers, then known as Engrossers for the calligraphic embellishment of documents, known as Engrossing, during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence, the term Engrosser's script (**Sample 2B**) also applied. These are essentially different terms used interchangeably to describe this style of script and its variants.

Next, we come to an American form of cursive handwriting called Spencerian Script. **Sample 3A** is representative of this hand. Developed in the first half of the 19th century by PR Spencer, Sr. as a shaded form of cursive handwriting. It was based on the graceful ovals and curvatures he observed in nature. Of course, the name Spencerian derives from the originator of the hand, Spencer. The lowercase letters are typically delicate in appearance and less shaded than the forms of script previously mentioned. Prior to Spencer's contribution, handwriting in America was based on an English roundhand style as typified in the American instructional books of the time like Jenkins' *The Art of Writing*. The emergence of Spencerian script would usher in the 'Golden Age' of ornamental penmanship in the United States. This period would extend through the early portion of the 20th century.

Spencerian script, in its original form was executed with a pointed quill pen. The eventual mass availability in the early-mid 1800's of high-quality flexible steel pens together with the skill of properly trained penmen, both men and women, would lead to a further refinement of the basic hand by those who came after Spencer. A good example of this refinement can be seen in **Sample 3B**. The legendary Spencerian No. 1 flexible steel nib was first produced in the 1850's. Modern calligraphers associate Spencerian script with the oblique penholder; however, it was originally taught post PR Spencer Sr. using a flexible steel pen inserted into a straight penholder.

Eventually, the artistic ability of the penman together with high quality steel nibs like the legendary Gillott Principality, the development of the oblique penholder, smoother papers and refined ink formulations would combine to embellish the basic Spencerian letterforms into a dramatic variant called Ornamental or Artistic penmanship (**Sample 4**). Ornamental script can be thought of as a stylized form of Spencerian script. Added to the basic Spencerian letterforms are beautiful swirls and curls that followed rules of symmetry along with dramatic shades opposing almost invisible hairlines. Is it or is it not handwriting? The short answer to that question is 'yes' it is still handwriting. However, Ornamental script represents a Spencerian form that floats gracefully between the realms of handwriting and art. Hence, the term 'Artistic' writing was also used to describe this hand.

The various styles of script were not always used exclusively of each other. In fact, it was a common practice to use Spencerian/Ornamental capital letters in combination with Engrosser's script lowercase letterforms to great advantage. This makes it difficult to classify specimens from past masters into neat categories. However, that is a topic that is beyond the scope of this article.

The final style we will examine is Business penmanship (**Sample 5**), also called plain penmanship. It should be noted that both English roundhand and Spencerian script were successfully employed business hands. Business writing was developed in the late 1800's for teaching in business colleges and eventually in grade schools. Business penmanship is essentially a non-shaded form of cursive handwriting that evolved after the development of Spencerian script. Since the style did not require shading, a flexible pen was not needed. Modern practitioners of the hand can easily use either a fountain pen or a ballpoint pen to equal effectiveness. I am certain that many calligraphers will remember being taught a version of plain penmanship such as The Palmer Method or the Zaner-Bloser Method of cursive penmanship in school.

Hopefully, you should now have a better idea of the basic styles of pointed pen script and the

terminology used to describe them. Pay it forward!

References

- Bickham, G., and Hofer, P.   The Universal Penman, Engraved by George Bickham, London, 1743. Dover Publications, New York, 1968.
- Bickham, G.   George Bickham's Penmanship Made Easy, or, The Young Clerk's Assistant. Dover Publications, Mineola, N.Y., 1997.
- Heal, A., and Morison, S.   The English Writing-Masters and Their Copy-Books, 1570-1800. At the University press, Cambridge, 1931.
- Henning, W. E., and Melzer, P.   An Elegant Hand: The Golden Age of American Penmanship and Calligraphy, 1st ed. Oak Knoll Press, New Castle, Del., 2002.
- Jenkins, J.   The Art of Writing, Reduced to a Plain and Easy System: On a Plan Entirely New, In Seven Books. J. and E. Sanderson, Elizabethtown, N.J., 1816.
- Mills, E. C.   Business Penmanship. American Book Company, New York, Cincinnati, 1916.
- Nash, R., and American Antiquarian Society.   American Penmanship, 1800-1850; A History of Writing and a Bibliography of Copybooks from Jenkins to Spencer. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, 1969.
- Sull, M. R.   Spencerian Script and Ornamental Penmanship, 1st ed. LDG Publishing, Prairie Village, KS, 1989.
- Tamblyn, F. W.   F.W. Tamblyn's Home Instructor in Penmanship, 8th ed. Ziller of Kansas City, Leawood, KS, 2002.
- Winters, E.   Mastering Copperplate Calligraphy: A Step-by-Step Manual. Dover Publications, Mineola, N.Y., 2000.
- Zaner, C. P.   The Zanerian Manual of Alphabets and Engrossing. The Zaner-Bloser Company, Columbus, OH, 1981.

Styles of Script

1) English Roundhand:

Virtue & Friendship

Joseph Champion (1709-1765)

1B) Modern Roundhand (Copperplate):

Learning Copperplate

Eleanor Winters

2) Historic Engrosser's script (Engraver's script):

The Union Trust Company

2B) Modern Engrosser's script (Engraver's script):

Engrosser's Script

Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo

3) Spencerian script:

A) *On the Spencerian*

Platt R. Spencer Sr. (1800-1864)

B) *Study and practice should be properly combined*

Earl A. Lupfer (1890-1967)

4) Ornamental script:

HPBehrensmeyer

Henry P. Behrensmeyer (1868-1948)

5) Business Penmanship:

Haphazard practice is very poor

EC Mills (1872-1962)