

President's Address, at AGM, 8 December, 2007:

“As this is my first address I understand it is usual to say a little bit about how and why I came into shorthand so, if you will indulge with my ego a bit I will tell you a bit about my background history. I have brought some things with me.”

“Firstly, how I got into shorthand was when I was at school: at about 13 or 14 years of age, I started to write a children's novel and I gave it to my English teacher to look through and she said, “Yes, it's very good, actually.” I asked, “Do you think this paragraph is too long?” as it went on to nearly two pages. “When it is typed it won't be so big.” I thought, “Oh, there's an idea. Why don't I teach myself to type?”

“In those days it was typewriters, not computers! There was a typewriter shop in Sheffield, so I went there and noticed the keyboard layout was exactly the same so, not having much money in the family (my father had died when I was young and my mum was not allowed to work due to ill health) I couldn't afford to buy a typewriter. There I was with a piece of paper and a pencil sitting outside in the street writing down the keyboard on a piece of paper. I went to the local library and borrowed a book on typing. So, with a piece of paper with the keyboard layout and that book I practised asdf ;lkj, asdf ;lkj: that was my first typing lesson and I taught myself to type.”

“Eventually, having saved my spending money, I managed to buy an old typewriter. I believe it was an Imperial 1938 typewriter, for £10, which more or less broke the bank for me in those days. The tab stops were pegs which actually moved across. The only place to practise was my living room dining table where my mother was watching television and when you “threw” the carriage return the table would move and we feared there would be no table left. Eventually I saved up and bought a portable Smith Corona.”

“I would type away day after day after school, forgetting about school studies. As I gained speed the keys started clashing. I thought that it was okay doing this, but I realised that my typing was slower than my thought processes, so what could I do quicker by writing to capture information? I thought of shorthand!”

“So, I actually bought a shorthand textbook which was Pitman 2000 in those days for me, so I taught myself, initially, Pitman 2000 and got up to about unit 12 in the book. They didn't teach shorthand at school and I approached the headmaster and asked if it was all right for me to go to evening classes to learn shorthand whilst still at school. He approved and I went to evening classes. There I was also taught Pitman 2000. During those first three or four months I learned the whole theory and seemed to be quite adept. I had 70 wpm, but the exams weren't until June, so you had one chance and that was it! So, because I was well ahead of everybody else, the teacher kind of held me back and come June time I actually only just managed to pass 50 wpm.”

“As a result of all that going on, I then went and did a year at secretarial college where I did my typing, shorthand, English and maths and things like that.”

“Over the course of time I have accrued quite a few certificates. There is my CV and then my certificates.”

“My IPS Fellowship certificate (dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1992), Pitman's Legal Secretary qualification, at 130 wpm, 'O' Levels, 'A' Levels and many, many more.”

(Richard showed us his folder and then it was handed round)

“I continued to do secretarial training and then moved down to London.”

“In those days there was Pitman 2000 and New Era and Memo magazine and I managed to attain 70, 80 wpm Pitman 2000, but couldn't seem to go beyond this speed, so I actually taught myself Pitman's New Era shorthand and my speed went up to 130 wpm. I didn't adapt these theories: I learned the new theory. I had a lot more rules and regulations to learn.”

“One of the things I wanted was some kind of proof for me that I knew my theory, so I managed to get in touch with the IPS and became a Fellow. Then I undertook a Pitman New Era theory examination. We had a day in Stratford-upon-Avon and there I am being presented with my certificate for the theory of Pitman New Era.”

(Richard handed round his photographs of Barbara Wynne presenting him with his certificate)



“Because of my knowledge of shorthand I was really keen, and at that time the court reporters were being cross-trained on to stenography and thought I could earn more money than a secretary doing 130 wpm. However, I found that as a trainee court reporter with 160 wpm I would earn less! I thought, “Something's wrong here!” So I decided to continue with being a secretary although I did teach myself stenography and I managed to achieve 100 wpm through the IPS – and the certificate is in there! I then became more and more involved in computers and obtained my degree in computing.”

“I then decided that there had to be more than this, and got fed up with computers. For 12 years I just kept my hand in with shorthand and stenography and I then started to apply for a job and the job I just happened to take was for Pitman Training. You have probably all heard of Pitman because Pitman Training no longer have the one college in Southampton Row, but it is now a franchise throughout England and Scotland. It just so happens that the franchise that I look after is in the city and we get quite a lot of journalists and trainee journalists and as a result of that we are quite often able to go to universities to teach shorthand at the universities. Most of them are supported by NCTJ (National Council for Training Journalists) and they prefer Teeline shorthand. So it was a case of a quick grounding in a refresher course in Teeline, and then I was at Brunel University, Westminster University and sometimes City University teaching Teeline shorthand. As

well as that, we also teach in the private sector. I recently taught some admin people down at Revenue and Customs, and also at the Football Association. I taught both their journalists and their secretaries. We have done insurance groups and Frogmore Property Developments.”

“So, I am actually going out there teaching shorthand in quite diverse areas and there we were, only a few years ago, thinking that shorthand had more or less died a death. So, my message to you is that shorthand has not died: it is very much alive.”

“One point in favour of shorthand recently was the Michael Jackson case. Apparently the American press reporters were going in with recorders, which they are not allowed to do, and there was this one British journalist who did shorthand and did the reporting. When he was finished reporting, all the reporters were vying for his notes because he was the only person who was allowed to report because he was the only person who could do shorthand in the court.”

“I thought that was very interesting and “hear hear” for shorthand!”

“One of my other hobbies, as you may know, is I actually collect shorthand books and I have 300 – 400 of them. So, what I have got here are a few to show you:

Pitman 2000

Pitman New Era

Boyd shorthand dictionary (a different system) circa 1914

Script Stenography (a different system).”

“You probably remember Emily D Smith, she invented her own PitmanScript, but that didn’t last long.”

“Gregg speed, mostly in America and Ireland, though it was over here in a few places, such as Clark’s College.”

“In 1947 the Dewey system. 1890 Eclectic System.”

“Then, bringing us up to date, Teeline Short Courses, Teeline Fast.”

“A book actually computerised for journalists – very modern, it came out last year and it even incorporates a CD which you can download and copy on to mp3. It is speed dictation, but instruction format as well.”

“I also have E H Butler’s Journalists’ Guide to Pitman’s Shorthand – which is New Era.”

“I have lots of novels which aid with reading and I’ve just brought the one example, Sherlock Holmes. I had thought of writing to JK Rowling to ask permission to translate Harry Potter into Pitman’s or Teeline!”

“At the moment I am teaching a Council Teeline and did actually have a Pitman New Era person in Greenwich for a Council teaching revision which was very good.”

In reply to a question from the Chairman about whether he also knew Gregg’s shorthand, Richard replied, “I found that I could read it early and write it, but at dictation speed of only about 80 wpm.

I find myself switching between systems mid-sentence! In Teeline, quite often, we have students reaching 140 wpm. In order to qualify journalists have to have 100 wpm and we do that in under a year, six, seven months. We try to make it more fun. Writing to music!”

“Basically, that was my speech: I wanted to tell you that shorthand is very much alive!”

Chairman thanked the President for his interesting talk.



John Dawson congratulating the President after his Talk.