

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS 5th December 2009

THE PRESIDENT: The talk today is going to be on the history of shorthand. I know that most of you are more knowledgeable than I on the history, so rather than just me doing all the talking, this time, you can contribute.

AUDIENCE: If we know anything!

THE PRESIDENT: I am sure you will. What was the first form of shorthand, according to history?

AUDIENCE : Wasn't it something in Roman times? Was it cuneiform?

THE PRESIDENT: Cuneiform. Exactly! Believe it or not just recently, in the Evening Standard, there was an article written by Shappi Khorsandi and she talked about the Cyrus cylinder which is an example of cuneiform. It actually exists in the British Museum today. Shappi says: "The Babylonian cylinder is regarded by many as the world's first human-rights declaration." It dates from about 2,400 BC. The cylinder was apparently excavated in 1879 by the Assyro-British archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam. If you check on the website you can see the Cyrus cylinder along with a transcript ([www.iranchamber.com](http://www.iranchamber.com)).

In his opening dialogue of *As Fast as Speech* Sir Isaac Pitman wrote, in 1837: "The origin of shorthand writing has been variously attributed to the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans. It is not unlikely that some form of stenography or method of rapid writing by means of signs or characters briefer than those of the script ordinarily in use was developed independently among the pen men, or scribes, of many early nations."

It was thought the ancient Indian myth that a god called Ganesh - that is the one who had the head of an elephant - took out his tusk and recorded religious texts verbatim with it and wrote so fast that he had written the words before they were spoken. That is thought to be one of the earliest forms of recognising verbatim writing.

AUDIENCE: How could he write words before they were spoken?

THE PRESIDENT: Exactly! But he was a God.

According to the Bible the earliest known reference is Psalm 45 "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer".

It is thought that both Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese pictograms have similarities with early Cuneiform but no shorthand has actually been adapted to those languages. It is thought that the pictograms were sufficient to record information.

During the fourth century AD, a form of Arabic developed that closely resembles Pitman's shorthand where all the vowels are written above or below the consonants or are left out altogether, which

makes it a very fast script. Therefore, no shorthand has actually been adapted to Arabic because it's thought that Arabic is just as fast as Pitman's shorthand.

Before the invention of printing Latin manuscripts had to be copied by monks. They often used a form of abbreviated longhand so they would use "n" for the word "non", for example. An Englishman called Mr Radcliffe of Plymouth actually developed a form of shorthand where he actually remembered several outlines to represent words; he just used one letter to represent a whole word.

It was not until 1588 that Timothe Bright produced a book "Characterie; the art of short, swift and secret writing, by character", which required the memorization of 500 words. Can you imagine only having a vocabulary of 500 words? Anything else you would have to make up.

Taylor was responsible for technical developments which led directly to Pitman's shorthand. Other notable authors were Gurney, who we have heard about, and Dr John Byrom, who obtained the Act of Parliament in 1742 which granted him, for a limited period, the whole right to teach by hire. He was more interested in making a living by teaching than selling his system. Therefore, the system was not actually published until after his death.

The greatest encouragement to shorthand in England came in 1772 when Parliament actually allowed shorthand writers to be present and take reports, so, the Government actually knows what's taken place. Up until then most of the reports were actually done by word of mouth from the doormen and suchlike.

Famous German inventor Gabelsberger later wrote: "The art of shorthand was not reduced to a system and methodically taught and studied until the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century and the honour of this attempt belongs to the English nation.." The need for shorthand in Germany really developed when the States began to have Parliaments so several English systems were adapted. The first French system by Jacques Cossard, in 1651, was also an imitation of an English one.

In 1828, Kitchingham produced his system "for the attainment of the lower orders of society", adding that "persons of common abilities with moderate application may, in a short time, make themselves thoroughly acquainted". So, it was thought at one time that shorthand was only for the elite and well-educated, but now he is making it more available to the lower classes and more easy to learn.

Isaac Pitman, left school at 13, but continued to study and trained to be a teacher. He often referred to Walker's Dictionary to help him understand the sounds of words, and through his experience of phonetics set about improving Taylor's shorthand, (which I mentioned earlier). He went to the publishers suggesting these recommendations and they said: "Forget Taylor's; invent your own." As a result Isaac Pitman had studied the different forms of shorthand prior to this and amalgamated them and actually thought what would be the better forms. So, for example, he arranged the consonants into logical groups, allocated the easiest strokes to the most frequent sounds, introduced the most complete vowel definition and wove the separate elements into an organized arrangement which has won the admiration of many.

He then modified his system in 1840 and produced a Second Edition with the advent of the Penny Plate because in 1840 that's when we first get the Penny Black, the first postage stamp. Therefore,

Pitman's shorthand was the first ever correspondence course. He then sent his brother Benn Pitman off to the States and another relative to Australia to help spread Pitman's shorthand.

The revisions of Pitman's shorthand were coming out very quick and fast with new modifications, and so on. Benn Pitman actually complained to his brother and said they were coming too fast. They were confusing both student and teacher. Benn Pitman actually stuck with the Ninth Edition of Pitman's shorthand.

By 1887 520,000 copies of Pitman's shorthand had been printed and the number of people who had learned the system would have been well in excess of this figure. Shorthand by this time had become a recognised subject in schools aided by a British Government grant. As the English Empire began to dominate the world, so did the English language and this, in turn, spread the use of Pitman's shorthand.

Sir Isaac Pitman died in 1897, but his shorthand system was subsequently modified in 1913 which he called the Centenary Edition. Shortly after that girls became employed as "typewriters".

AUDIENCE: Yes, they were actually called "lady typewriters".

THE PRESIDENT: It was not until the First World War, 1914-18, that because the men were away at war that the women actually started to take the roles of the men and started doing the shorthand as well. When the men came back from war they found that they didn't have jobs because the women had replaced them. They thought the women were just as efficient and were cheaper too to employ!

AUDIENCE: Nothing new there! (Laughter) The First World War - before Equal Pay.

THE PRESIDENT: In 1922, after the First World War, the Pitman New Era Edition was published with the common expression that the First World War was the "War to end all wars" and, therefore, it was "a new era for everybody". That's how the New Era Edition got its name. Yet the New Era Edition only had a couple of niceties and additions for high speed writers. There was nothing new by way of theory.

In 1975 Pitman 2000 came out because in the modern age people wanted quick results. It was also as a competitor to Teeline shorthand.

Teeline shorthand was named after James Hill who was born in 1908 and died in 1971. He had been forced to leave grammar school by his father because he thought he should be going out earning a living, but there again James continued his education at evening classes and became a teacher. So, a very parallel life to Sir Isaac Pitman, in a way.

He became a teacher by the age of 21 teaching Pitman's shorthand and economics.

For those interested in trivia, James Hill also invented a ruling device for the typewriter, the copy holder, a car parking device and a demonstration board which could have replaced the blackboard.

He also invented a shorthand system which was originally known as the "Shift" system and later on, because of the Second World War this shorthand system had to be put on hold. In 1952 he was actually teaching a group of trainee nurses in Grantham College. He took his system to Pitman's to see whether they would take it on board in 1956, but they turned it down because they thought of it as being a competitor to Pitman's system. At that time Pitman's had 98% of the UK market for shorthand.

In 1966 Heinemann Education Books took on board Teeline shorthand and started to produce it. More recently, in the late 1990s, with the Anniversary Edition of Pitman's New Era, which is the same as Pitman's New Era, but they had taken a lot of the old advanced shortcuts out, like "incandescence" and words like that, out of the main theory and just added them at the end as a supplemental.

That, therefore, is a brief history of shorthand, but just a couple of other things, running back through the history. Tiro who was a Roman scribe, invented a shorthand system which Julius Caesar used to use (100-44 BCE). In those days because the Roman alphabet was all done in block capitals, the way that they used to do information and taking down verbatim reports at court was that he would employ several people and they would each take six to eight words at a time and, therefore, piece it back together as a jigsaw and they would get a complete verbatim report. That is how they used to do it.

Shelton. Do we know who is - the first person who used Shelton's shorthand?

AUDIENCE: Dickens?

THE PRESIDENT: Not Dickens.

AUDIENCE: Pepys? He's the only other person I can think of.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Samuel Pepys used the Shelton system to write his diary. Gurney's shorthand, the famous person is? Someone mentioned it?

AUDIENCE: Dickens?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Dickens. Thomas Gurney published his "Brachigraphy" in 1750 and that is the system Charles Dickens used when he was a reporter in the British House of Commons.

Do we know of a famous composer that used Bertin's system of shorthand?

AUDIENCE: Beethoven? (A wild guess!)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. When he was deaf he took up shorthand.

AUDIENCE: Was that a German system?

THE PRESIDENT: Theodore Bertin adapted the Taylor's system into French in 1792 and in turn Josef Danzer, an officer in the Austrian army, adapted the Taylor-Bertin system into German. The

shorthand entries in the note-books of the composer Beethoven, which he used after becoming deaf, were written in Danzer's adapted system.

Just going back to Teeline which is the one by James Hill, this was done on spelling with the omission of vowels. Therefore, that is not referred to as "phonetic" as phonetic is based on sound, that is known as what? Nobody know? Teeline is actually the principle of taking out, or the omission of vowels, and spelling, is actually called "orthographic".

AUDIENCE: You said the first writers of shorthand were over 2000 years ago, they didn't have pens or pencils in those days? How did they write?

THE PRESIDENT: They used a clay tablet and then just used a stick. Wet clay.

THE AUDIENCE: Also on wax. After it was transcribed, they heated it, smoothed it over again and used it again. Recycling!

The President referred As Fast as Speech by Pitman Publishing 1977 and also expressed thanks to Lorraine Northway who produced a paper on The History of Modern Stenography as well as getting some information from a website [www.t-script.co.uk/history](http://www.t-script.co.uk/history)

The Chairman thanked the President for his interesting talk.

