

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

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

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

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

Invented & Drawn by I. Pitman, 5 Nelson Place, BATH, PRICE ONE PENNY. Mounted on Canvas & bound in Cloth, lettered with two chapters from the N.T. (Mat. 5 & Rev. 22) as additional exercises. LONDON: S. Bagster, 15, Paternoster Row, 1840.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING: Illustrated by EXAMPLES.

1. Write the sound as pique (pâk) seat (sât) set (sâf) sat (sâf) sit (sât) sight (sîf). For write, as cough or s, as city, or sh, as negotiate for write ks, as box, or g, as exist or ksh, as noxious. For g write k. One of the double or treble vowels made of v, pronounced this letter like who without the aspirate, as queen, quant. Y is e & w is o when commencing a syllable, in which case they never occur except in combination with another vowel. I will be found under the double & treble vowels, as Yorkshire, west's wife.
2. Especially observe the proper sound of the short vowels, every one of which in the common hand is out of place, thus, neat, knif, age, edge, psalm, Sam (Samuel), rawk, rot, tone, tun, pool, pull.
3. Pronounce the vowels as they sound in the alphabetical words and examples placed to them. Pronounce every consonant at once by means of the small vowel put to it. Learn by heart the natural order of the single vowels & single consonants as below. New names are given to some of the single cons. to express their true sound, or to keep them in unison.
4. Mark the difference between sp & spr, sj & str, sch & schr, sk & skr. At the commencement of words, also psk rps, ts&rs, ch&rchs, ks & rks.
5. S joined to a hook or small letter becomes a dot, as spi, snt & Its I, his, do, spi, is instead of s, for &.
6. Vowels before consonants are placed to the left of perpendicular leaning strokes, as eat I weight I well I eyes I apex, owl I air I and above horizontal strokes, as eager I aim I Anne I walker I.
7. Vowels after cons. go to the right, or under, as joy, tooth, high, coy.
8. The vowels' places are counted from the beginning of the cons. & a, as she I dawl I ply I week I noise I royal I a, o & their derivatives take the second place or middle of the cons. as ai I oat I up I ache I oay I and a, o & their derivatives have the third place or end, as Pa I loo I due I now I house I youth I.
9. When a, e, o are put to cons. they may point any way, when they stand alone for words, they always lean to the right, as whom I.
10. A vowel between two cons. (neither of them the loop s) is to be placed thus: a first or second place vowel after the first cons. as team I cord I Tweed I trifle I void I net I boat I. Third place vowel goes before the last cons. as rack I loom I duke I man I mouth I shaft I.
11. The loop dot s taken no vowel, when a vowel is put close to one, it belongs to the cons. connected with it, as pass I secure I sickle I.
12. If two vowels come between two cons. give one to each, as poet I.

PHONOGRAPHY, OR WRITING BY SOUND, being also A New & Natural SYSTEM OF SHORT HAND. Engaged & Printed by E. J. Landon High St. Bristol.

TABLE OF SOUNDS.

SPACING.	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N	N
P	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N	N
T	T	P	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N	N
B	B	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
V	V	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
I	I	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
S	S	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
Z	Z	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
A	A	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
L	L	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
R	R	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
M	M	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
N	N	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
H	H	P	T	B	V	K	V	I	S	Z	A	L	R	M	N	H	F	B	P	D	T	K	G	K	V	F	V	S	H	M	N	N	N	N
F	F	P	T	B																														

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

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

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

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

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

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

REFERENCES
Alfred Baker, *The Life of Sir Isaac Pitman*, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1908
Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell (eds.) *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture*, Ashgate, 2005
New Course in Pitman's Shorthand (New Era Edition)
Transactions of the International Shorthand Congress 1887, Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1888

by Dan Shepelavy

A BALLET FOR arrows

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

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

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

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

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

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

