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Blogs - 2014 - March

[2](#) North Greenwich Riverside

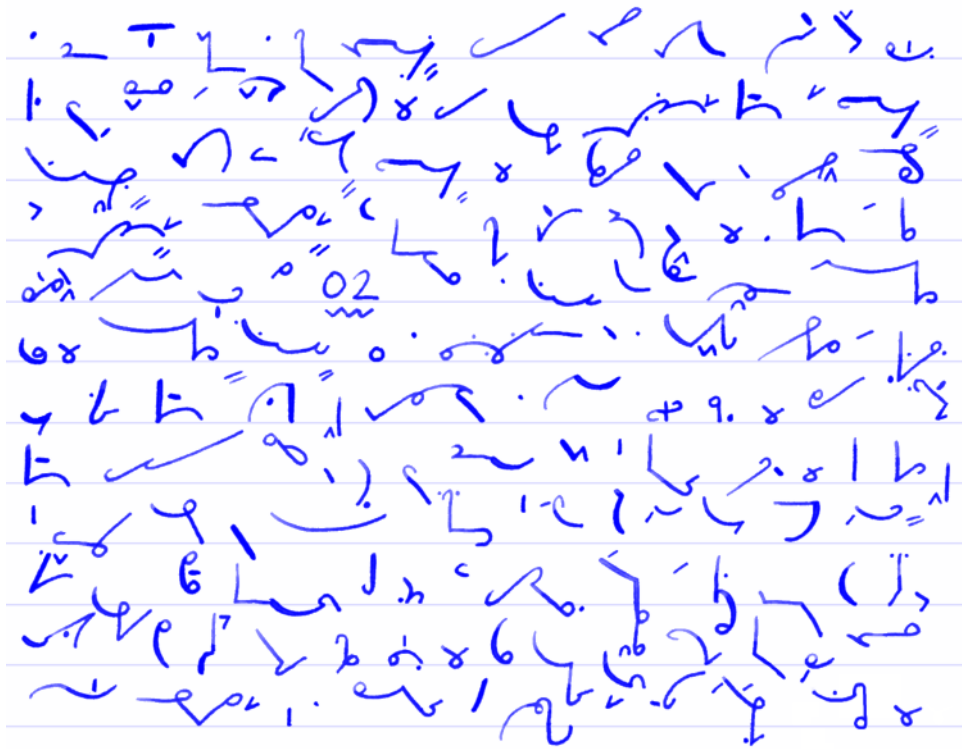
[6](#) Blog Dictations

[10](#) Crows

[13](#) Daffodils

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PDF Date: 15 December 2024



North Greenwich Riverside

A week ago I took a trip to Greenwich, where I used to live, lured by the sunny day, blue skies and mild weather. We visited the Millennium Dome on the Greenwich Peninsula, also called North Greenwich. This was built to house the exhibitions of the Millennium Experience that took place during the whole of the year 2000. The Dome and its surroundings are now known as "The O2" a venue for music and entertainment events. Entertainment Avenue is a semicircle of a variety of restaurants and eateries under the edge of the Dome, laid out to resemble

a long curved street. As we approached the Dome, we were surprised to see people walking about on top of the roof. It turned out on closer inspection to be another attraction on offer, although not for the casual non-agile visitor, as those taking part had been issued with one-piece bodysuits and tethers to keep them attached to the handrail as they toiled upward towards the summit. This photo of the view from the top is not of course my own experience, but a snap of the large illustration on the wall opposite the entrance



North Greenwich Riverside

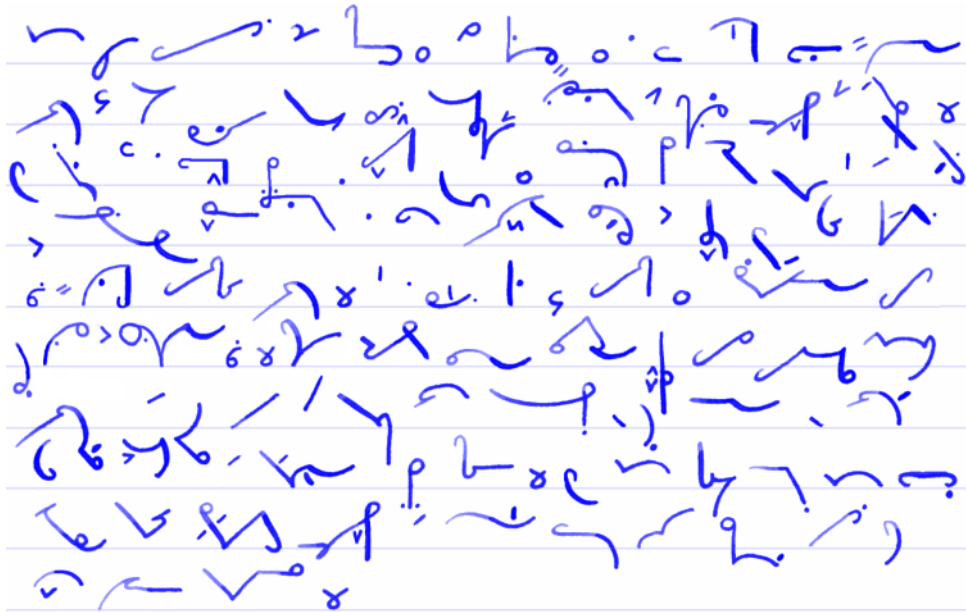
The attractions of The O2 complex were somewhat limited for our interests, as it is chiefly for those attending the events, so we did not* stay very long. We took a short walk to view the cable car service that crosses the Thames, which we had often seen from a distance, and which is, as always, much bigger and faster when you are standing almost underneath it. Of greater interest to us was the River Thames itself and all the various buildings and activities along its banks. Rather than take the bus back to the town of Greenwich, we decided to walk along the Thames footpath back to the Cutty Sark area, a distance of about two miles. Away from the Dome area, it is all rather bleak and empty. There are great swathes of vacant ground, cleared of old buildings, piled high with spoil and

rubble, or scraped clean and with huge new developments* in progress, most of which seemed to be blocks of riverside apartments. As river views are so highly prized nowadays, they clearly wish to get in as many dwellings as possible facing the waterfront.*

* The "we" and "did not" are not joined, see www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand.org.uk/phrasing7-misc.htm#contractedapostrophe

* "developments" Optional contraction

* "waterfront" Note that "front" on its own has a reversed Fr stroke, but here it is written with the left form so that it can join

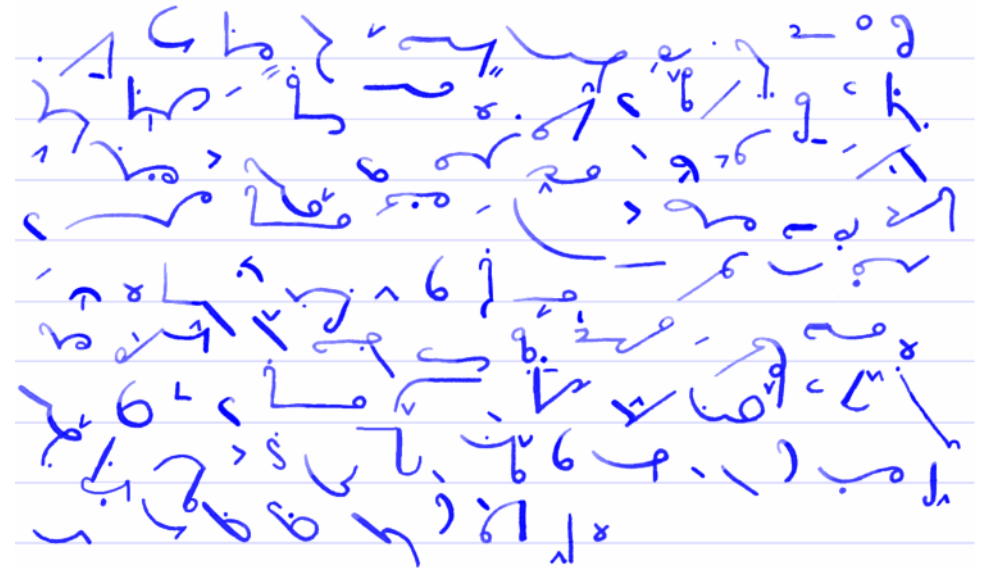


North Greenwich Riverside

I am still wondering what the attraction is, as the Thames is a cold muddy grey-looking river, with the only scenery being the surrounding industrial landscape and the treeless countryside on the opposite bank. However, compared with a crowded cityscape the wide view is secure as it cannot be built on, and open to the expansive sky, a more reliable source of the desired blue than the turbid silt-laden water of the river. On a sunny day when the water is sparkling one sees less of the

swirling silt. There will always be something happening outside one's windows, and I am sure riverboats* and ships are much better and more interesting to see going to and fro, than noisy and polluting city traffic. However, I am definitely keeping to my green and pleasant part of the suburban countryside, and my own clear little stream running through my local parks.

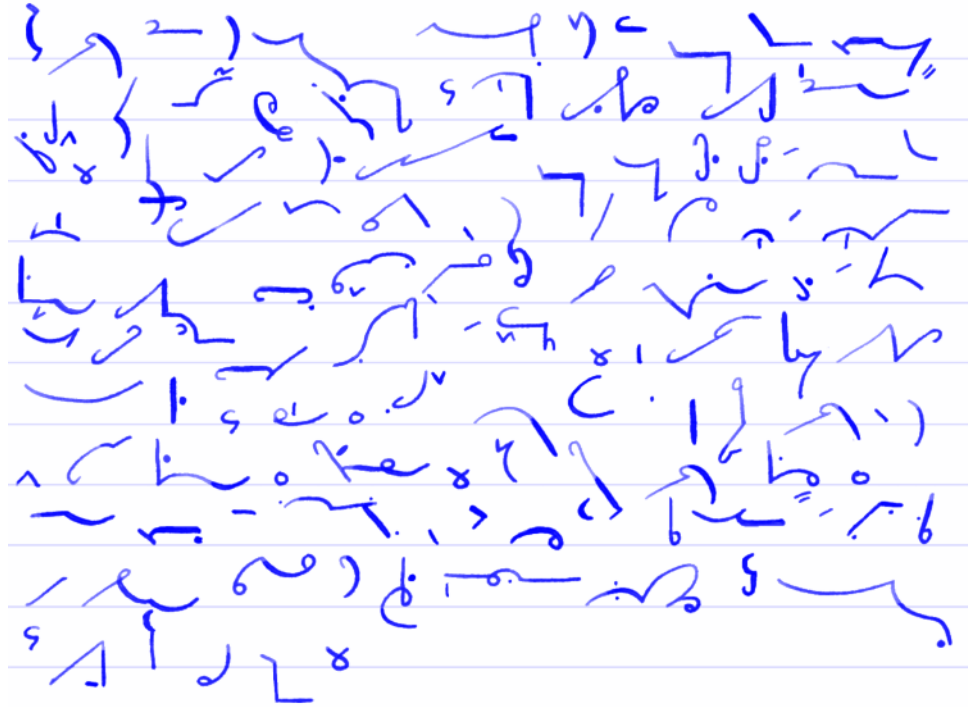
* "riverboats" Note that "boats" on its own has full stroke T



North Greenwich Riverside

The route along the Thames Path on the Greenwich Peninsula is not a pretty walk, as there is so much demolition and construction going on. The huge building sites are strewn with debris and the remains of the previous buildings, small mountains of stored soil and rubble, building materials, tractors and cranes, and, after all the storms, great sheets of water and mud. It can be hard to imagine how

this controlled chaos can result in smart apartments surrounded by crisp clean streets, walkways and riverside gardens. Obviously this is why building contractors like to adorn the boundary fences with giant computer-generated images of the planned finished accommodation, to entice those interested to put their names down now for the best places, before they are sold out.

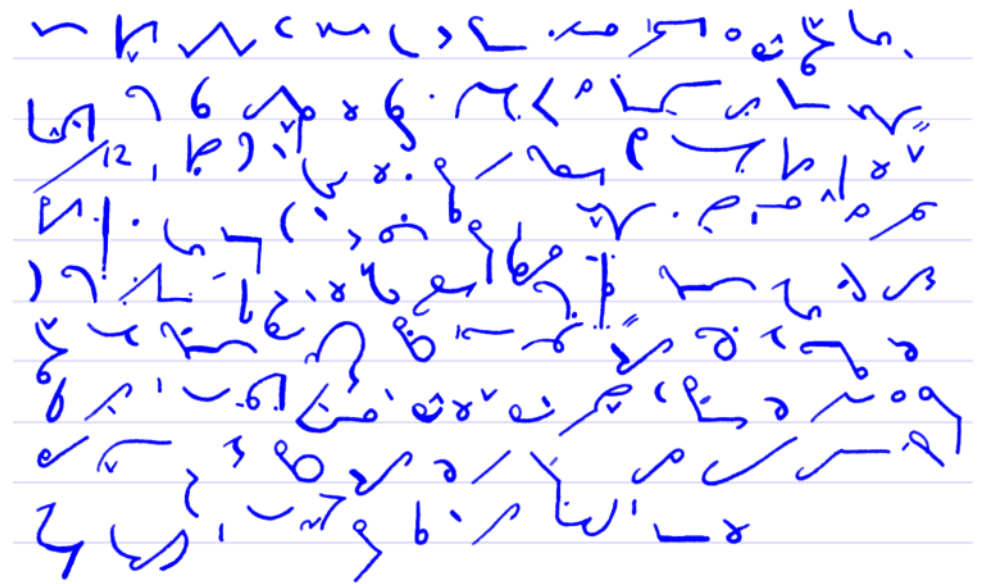


North Greenwich Riverside

Although the river walk was informative and interesting, I was glad to get back to Greenwich town, which was actually "civilisation" compared with the muddy wastelands* we had been walking past. It was beginning to rain, so we were glad to get into the train station and make for home, where I am happy to say that there is much less mud and murk, decaying woodwork, green slimy rocks, rust and peeling paint, and much more in the way of greenery, shelter and quietude. But we will definitely return another day, when the sun

is shining, maybe along a different stretch of the river, to see how well the taming is progressing. I think probably the River Thames is going to agree quite amicably to all the improvements that its neglected and ragged edges are receiving, as long as they are tasteful cosmetic embellishments that do not interfere with the route that it wishes to take. (1169 words)

* "wastelands" Not in dictionary, Using full stroke T rather than omitting it, so it does not look like "wetlands"



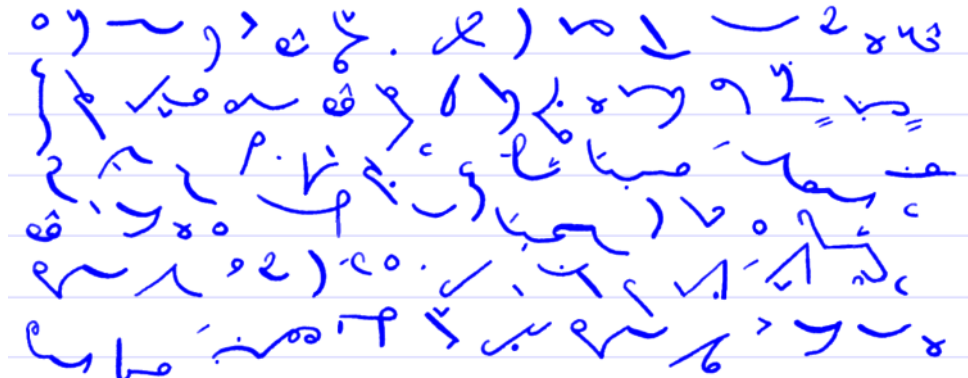
Blog Dictations

I am delighted to report that I now have all the blog articles recorded as sound files for you to download from this website. This has been a lengthy job, as the backlog went back to April 2012*, but at last they are all finished. The speeds are presented as they naturally turned out. I started editing a few to get them all to the same speed, but this was entirely a lost cause, as the result was very erratic and difficult to listen to. I have been using the free Audacity program and if you open one of the files in that program, you will see* that the spaces occur mostly between phrases, and that groups of words just run on in

solid chunks of sound. I soon realised that spoken words are not as separate as we like to think, and that the "spaces" between words are potential ones, where we can stop and change if we wish, but in actual speech it is all run on together.

* "2012" Long slash to represent current century, arbitrary sign with no phonetic value

* "see" and "say" in phrases often need a vowel for clarity, but here only "see" makes sense



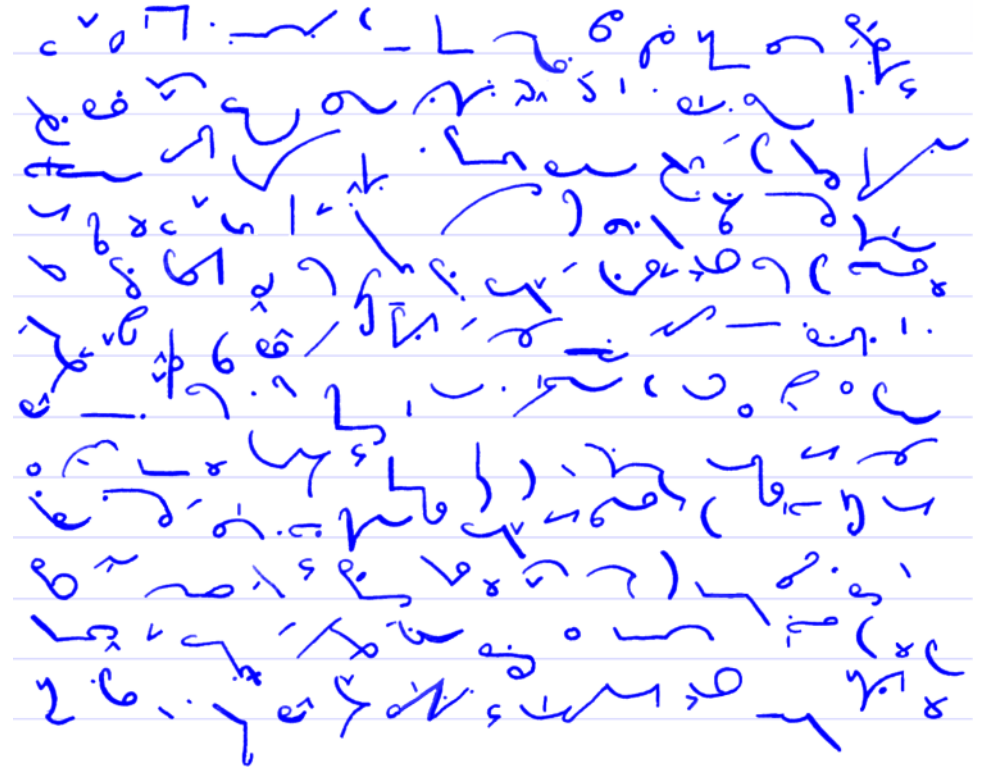
Blog Dictations

As I was going through all the sound files, the waveform was almost becoming another shorthand. I found that it was possible to recognise certain sounds of speech just by their shapes. I am sure Sir Isaac Pitman would have loved to have such a tool to play with, when he was studying phonetics and investigating the exact sounds of English. His interest in phonography was part of his preoccupation

with spelling reform, and his shorthand was offered as a way to enable people to read and write without suffering the difficulties and embarrassments caused* by the wayward spelling rules of the English language.

* "caused" Special outline, to distinguish it from "cost"

Horizontal lines for writing dictations.



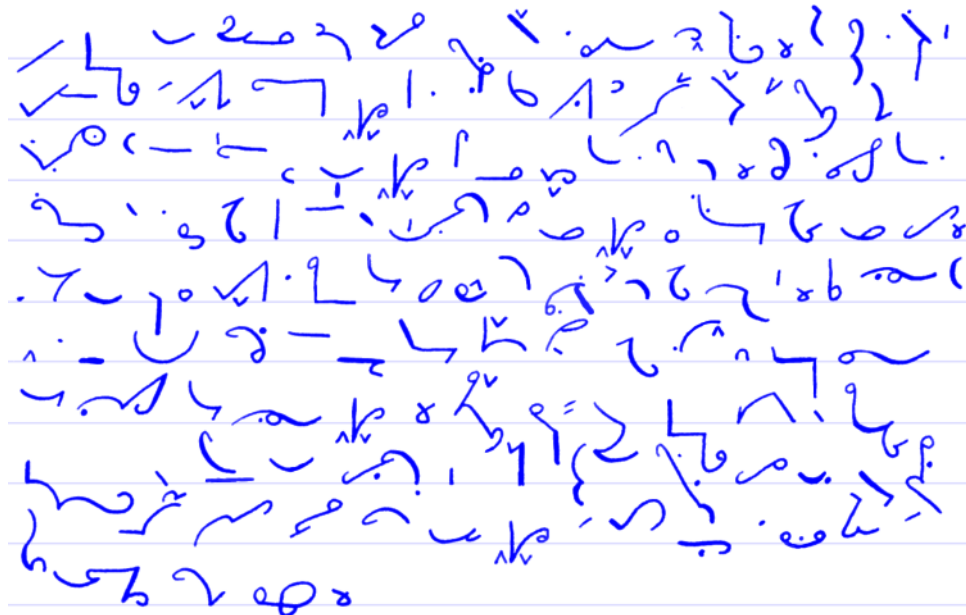
Blog Dictations

When I first got a camera that could take movies as well as stills, I took some supposedly peaceful scenes of my goldfish swimming lazily around the pond on a sunny spring day, with the gurgling water filter outlet, a blackbird singing beautifully and other birds twittering in the trees. When I viewed it on the computer later on, there seemed to be endless cars zooming past, planes overhead, shouts from children playing nearby and various noises from other gardens. Obviously, whilst outside, these sounds are tolerated and mostly ignored, and one can concentrate on a sound coming from a particular direction,

but in a recording that information is lost as everything is lumped* together. Fortunately, with the dictations, it was easy to remove the intrusions - mostly passing cars and some concrete drilling nearby - as long as they occurred on their own in the spaces, and not mixed up with the spoken parts. My method was to keep half a second of background on the clipboard, and replace the offending sections as I came across them. However, I was not averse to a bit of sound file surgery when the unwanted noises could not be isolated.

* "lumped" The P sound is omitted

Horizontal lines for writing dictations.



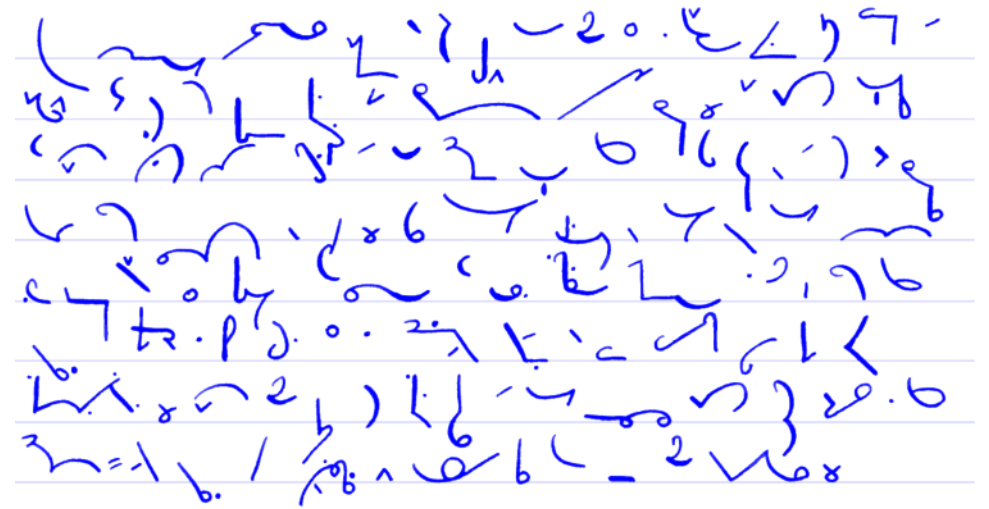
Blog Dictations

Our dictations in shorthand class were always preceded by a certain amount of tension. Although there was a battle on to recall and write the correct outlines at a fast rate, what really piled on the pressure was the paralysis that can occur when no outline at all comes to mind for a particular word. There is a hesitation for a fraction of a second and then it can all unravel, as the next outline is affected, and then the next one. The only thing to do is to write a stroke for the first sound or syllable of the word, and then move on. It is amazing*, though, how a good efficient phrase can give you back the time lost, and even allow you to get something in the margin for the

missing outline. High-pressured* speed-pushing dictations help to strengthen the determination to overcome any wavering, but I do think that prepared ones need to be the staple, so that you actually learn and use more new outlines, and also gain a sense of achievement and encouragement from the successes.

* "high-pressured" Keep the halved Ish short, as "high-pressure" would also make sense here

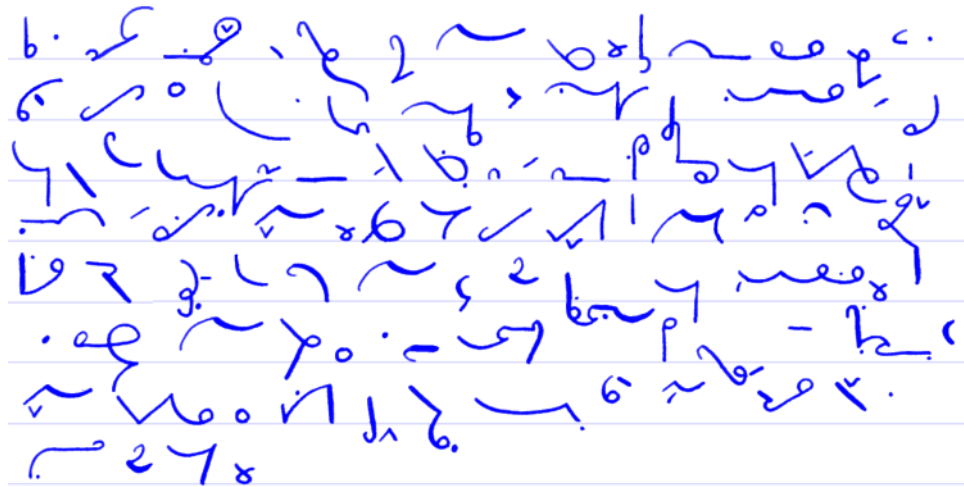
* "amazing" "amusing" Always insert the second vowel, to differentiate



Blog Dictations

After making the recordings, I took all of them down in shorthand as a final check on their quality, and I found that the ease or difficulty depended on the subject matter rather than the speed. I also noticed that my lazy little brain and hand worked no faster than they had to, and so all the speeds felt very similar to each other. This natural tendency to only put in the minimum effort to get by is definitely

something that needs addressing and taking a short but very fast piece at the beginning of a study session, as a wake-up "bucket of cold water", will do the job admirably. My shorthand teacher was adept at this, and in the exams also there was always a faster warm-up piece, which illustrates how necessary it is for good shorthand performance.



Blog Dictations (Continued)

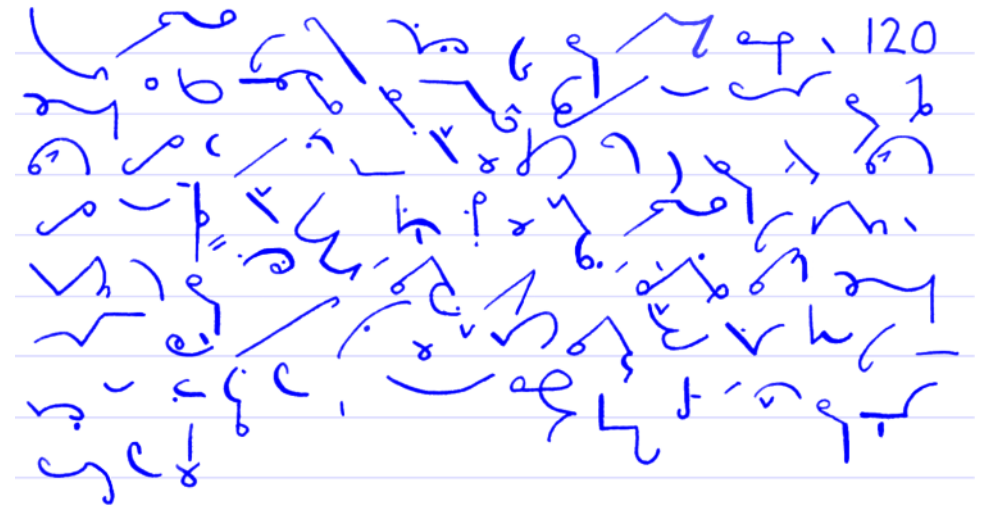
It is a worthwhile* exercise to persevere through the longer* pieces. It would make sense to start with a slow one, as after a few minutes all the mental distractions, nagging and wishes for it to be over eventually give up pestering you, and you can settle into purposeful but calm and serene writing. This is the only way to write at length, as the mad high-speed dashes cannot be sustained for very long without the shorthand disintegrating into nonsense.

A successful long passage is a great encourager, as it proves quite dramatically that writing performance is held down by these interrupting thoughts, and not always by a lack of shorthand knowledge. (Continued)

* "wor(th)while" Optional contraction

* "longer" Keep the Ing clearly doubled, as "long" would also fit the sense here

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Blog Dictations (Continued)

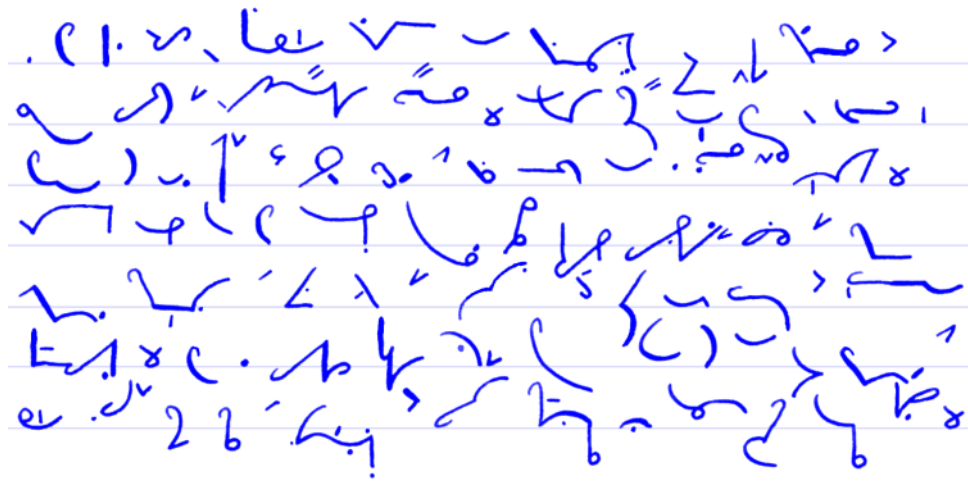
Future recordings will probably remain within the speed range of 60 to 120 words a minute, as faster examples of speaking can be found elsewhere in normal speech, and it is the slower ones that are hard to come by. It is also very easy to speed up the slower ones in Audacity by changing the Tempo setting. I hope these recordings will help you to pursue* your speed ambitions and hopefully reach and surpass the hundred words a minute mark sooner rather than later. I also hope that the final

bell at the end will come to mean not "Glad that's* over" but "Another successful dictation done and my speed goal nearer than ever!" (1019 words)

* "pursue" Note that "pursued" is written with circle S and stroke D

* See more at www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand.org.uk/phrasing7-misc.htm#contractedapostrophe

Blank lined paper for writing notes or answers.



Crows

The other day I went to Danson Park in Bexleyheath to check out the progress of the spring weather on the ornamental gardens. Unfortunately* there were no flowers to photograph, but everything was neat and tidy, with the roses pruned and the beds covered in a grass mulch. I looked instead for other interesting features, such as the twisted wisteria stems on the brick and beam pergola, and checked up on the lily* pond, which was now clear of the clogging duckweed. However, the woodland daffodil area further along was in full bloom and the sun shining through the trees and

illuminating all the yellow trumpets made for some cheerful photos* at last.*

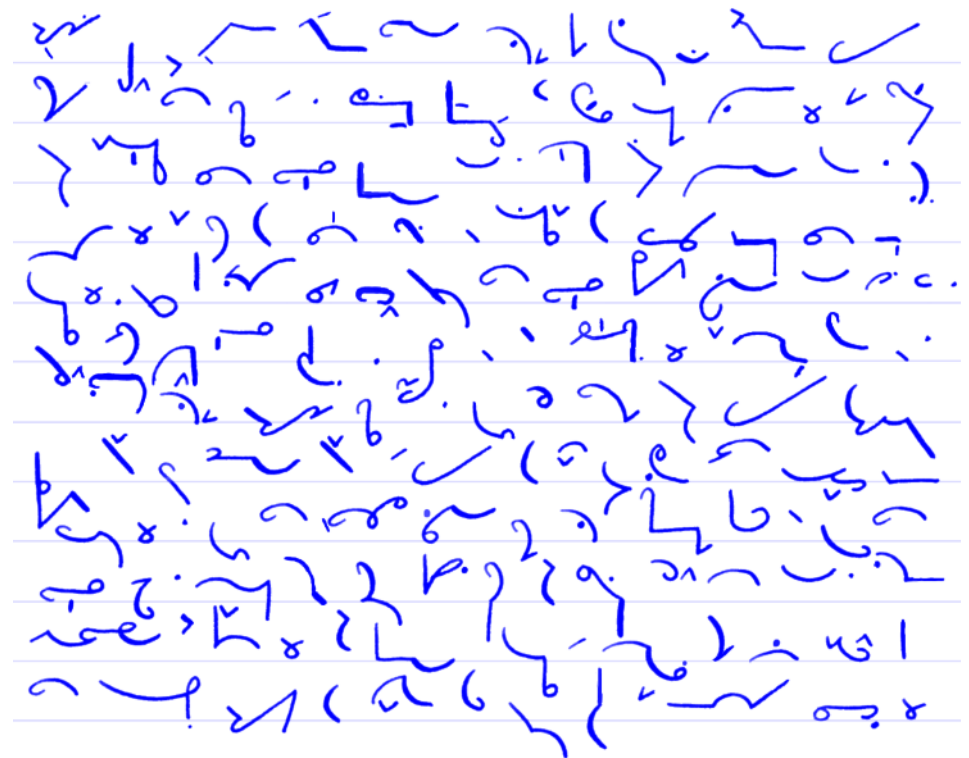
* "unfortunately" Optional contraction

* "lily" Insert last vowel so it does not look similar to "little"

* "photos" Helpful to insert the last vowel, and the diphone in "videos" as these are similar outline and meaning

* "at last" "at least" Always insert the vowel

Blank lined paper for notes.



Crows

I wandered down to the rock and bog garden area at the far end of the park*, where there are more trees and a secluded duck pond that flows into the lake. On the approach path, I noticed some crows digging in a muddy patch, looking for an easy meal. I threw them some bread, to entice* them closer to get some good photos. The pieces had hardly hit the ground before more crows started wheeling in, landing with a bounce and their loud caws advertising the situation to all and sundry. I moved over to a grassy area between the trees, a few yards from the path, where they would not be disturbed by people walking by and where they might feel safer and more inclined to come nearer. A few more morsels sailing through the air

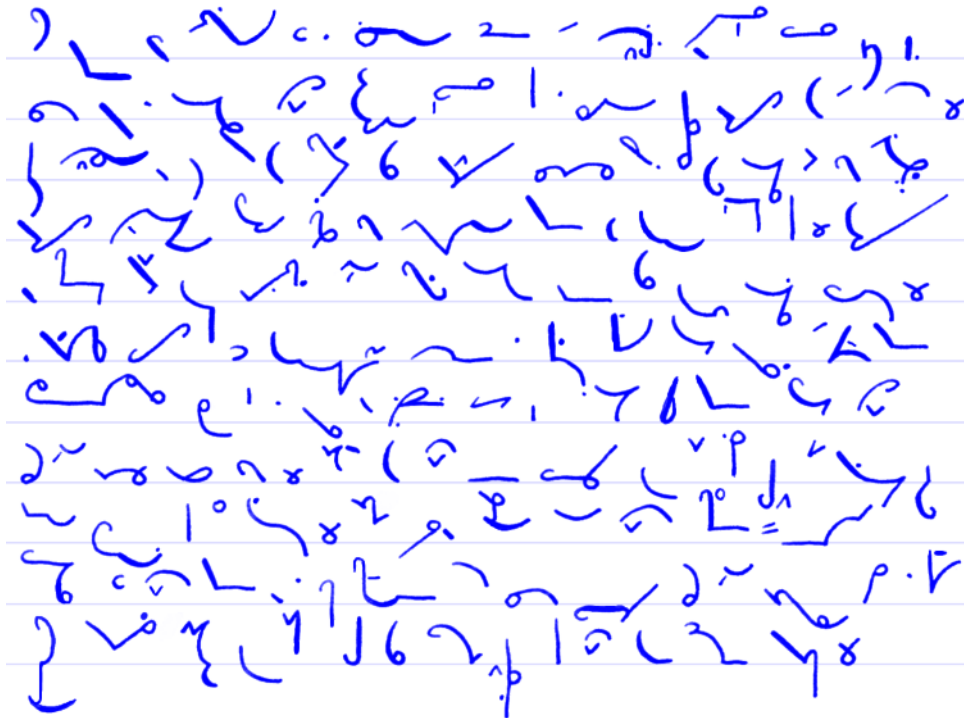
attracted the attention of even more crows, and within a minute or two there were at least* thirty of them spread around me in an arc, and increasing all the time. Although taking photos and movies was the aim, I found it more interesting to watch them "live" than peer at them on the camera screen.

* "park" This abbreviation is only used in phrases

* "entice" Advisable to insert the vowels, as this outline shape would more often be "notice"

* "at least" "at last" Always insert the vowel

Blank lined paper for notes.

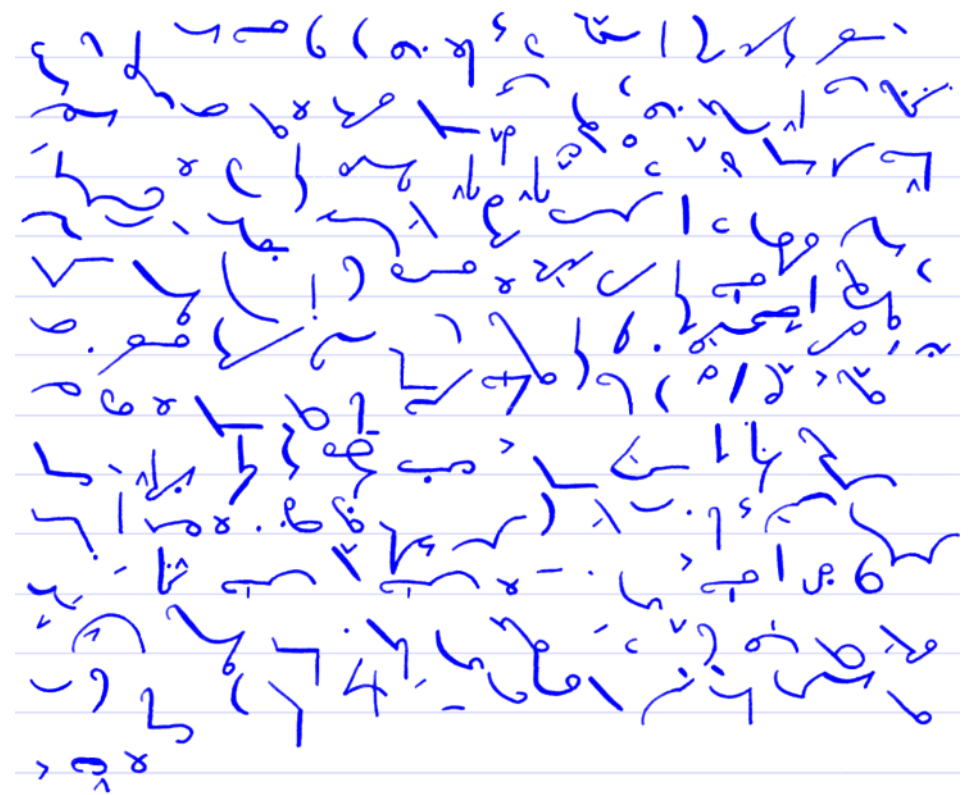


Crows

They are big, bold and brash, with a swaggering walk and impudent raucous calls, but there did seem to be an invisible line that they would not cross, at a certain distance between them and me. It was amusing* to see them approaching this boundary, sometimes stopping within inches of the bread, and vacillating between lunging forward towards the bread and pulling back without having got it. They were too attracted by the food to retreat and not brave enough to get those few inches nearer. The boldest one would eventually make a daring dash for the piece and jump back as quickly as possible, as if

on a piece of elastic - but only just back over the line, so as not to miss the next opportunity. I thought they might come closer if I sat down on the bench, but then I could not fling it as far. I tried the ruse of standing, in my dark-coloured clothes, with my back to a tree trunk or some greenery so as not to present such a tall threatening appearance and I think that if I had done this from the outset, it might have worked better.

* "amusing" "amazing" Always insert the vowel



Crows

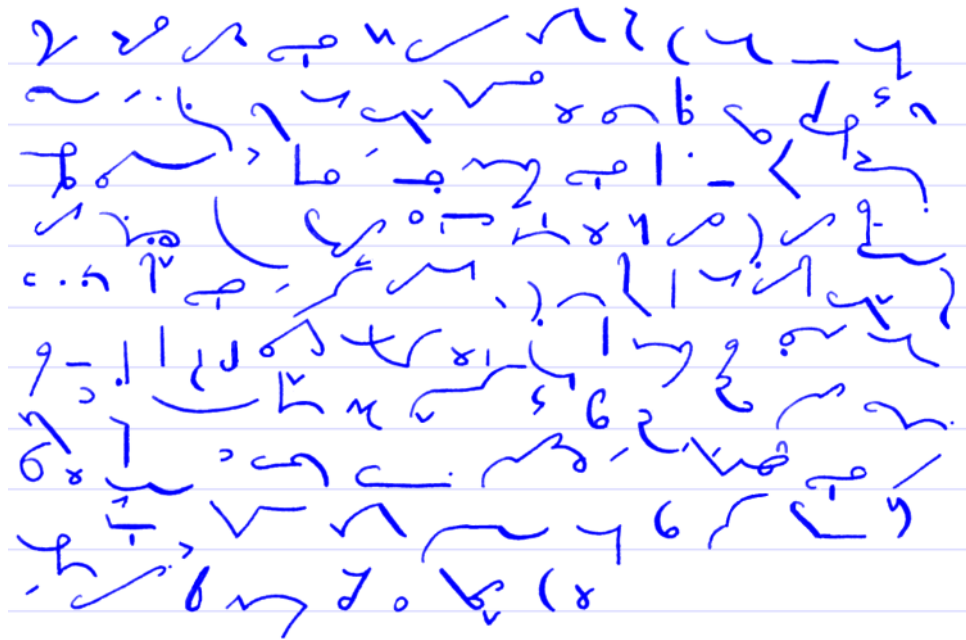
Whenever the bread disappeared in the grass, then they seemed to consider* that the effort of finding it was not worth the risk of missing the next piece. If it was bigger and more visible, that seemed to bring out more bravery and determination. However, it was certainly not* "out of sight, out of mind", as when I stepped back, the whole crowd moved in to investigate and clear up, as they would normally do when visitors leave the park benches after eating their snacks. I wondered whether it was the crows' different personalities that influenced the risks they were willing to take, or perhaps it was just the hungriest ones who made the most efforts. Bigger pieces drew greater courage from them, as the large size of the prize began to outweigh the danger, although the successful claimant of the big chunk had

the additional problem of keeping it to himself. The safest place to deal with the meal was up in a tree, with the lump firmly underfoot and devoured crumb by crumb. Quite a few of the crows had stationed themselves on the lower branches, to get a better view of proceedings, and when I threw some pieces upwards in their* direction, they paid much more* attention and could often be lured into following the piece to the ground.

* Omission phrases "to (con)sider" "much mo(re)"

* "certainly not" N Hook and halving, to represent "not"

* "in their" Doubling for "their"

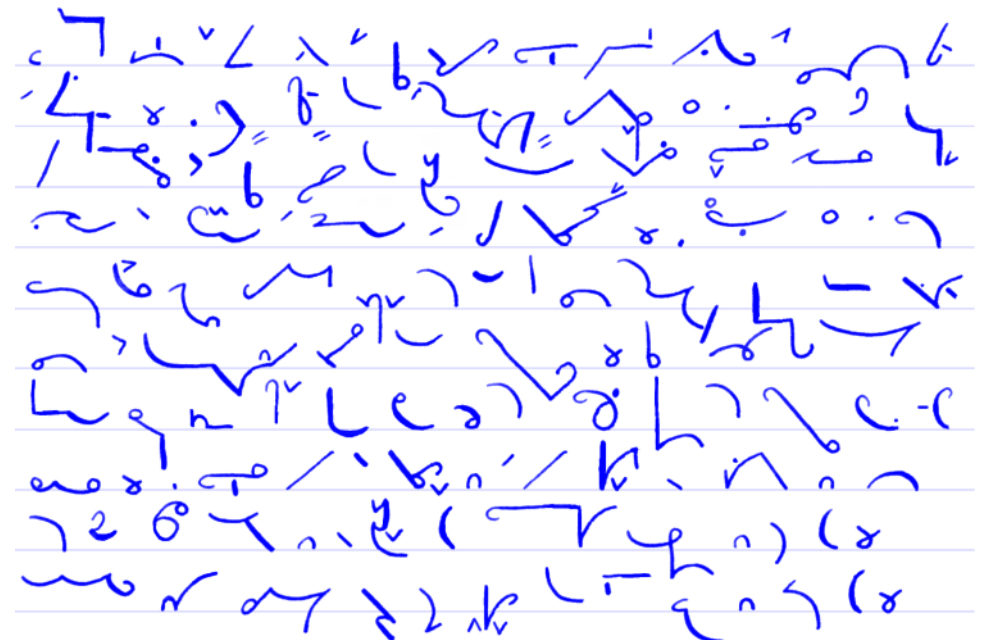


Crows

There are always one or two* crows about where I live, although they never come into the garden, and a fair* number in the nearby parks. Some days people's generosity with the bread exceeds the hunger of the ducks and geese, and I am sure the crows do a good job of clearing away the remains, after everyone has gone home. I did once see one struggling with a hard dry crust and really wanted to see him drop it in the water nearby so that he could eat it, but that did not happen, unfortunately*. But if he had, I am sure he would have been smart enough to remember what to do another time, and I think it likely that the others would have learned from him as well. Knowing what

clever quick learners and opportunists crows are, next time I go to the park I will be looking into those little black eyes and wondering just how much* intelligence is behind them.

- * Omission phrase "one (or) two"
- * "fair" Insert the vowel so that it does not look like "fewer number"
- * "unfortunately" Optional contraction
- * "how much" Full outline for "much" instead of the short form, to enable joining

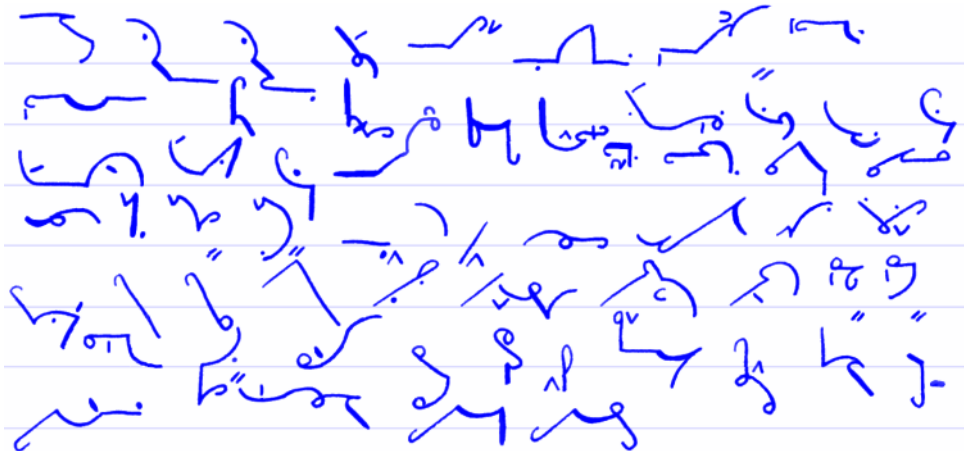


Crows

When I got home I checked up on the differences between crow, rook, raven and the similar chough* and jackdaw. The British Trust for Ornithology website has an excellent short video which explains all the differences used for identification*, in their appearance, cries and calls, manner of flying and walking, and general behaviour. The narrator has a very clear voice and if you wanted to try your hand at some ornithological dictation, I give below some of the vocabulary to use in preparation. It is mostly natural talking speed, but you could try doing several words or phrases at a time*, or perhaps every other sentence.

The crows are all behind you and are delighted to help you improve your shorthand, as well as enable you to identify them correctly next time you see them. In any event, you will certainly be able to see the outline for "caw" whenever you hear them. (1044 words)

- * Pronounced "chuff"
- * "identifi(ca)tion" Contraction
- * Omission phrase "at (a) time"



Crows

accomplished, aerobic, aerobically, buzzard, carrion, Celtic*, Cornwall, corvid, cronk*, deliberate, deportment, distinctive, down-curved, eponymous, feathered, fingered, fledged, folklore, forage, frayed, garrulous, graduated, gravelly, habitat, hackles, handsome, ID, Ireland, Irish, ki-ow* or chow*, mistaken, noteworthy, oily*, passerine, plumage, proportioned, proportions, raptor, rarest, recognisable, repertoire, ruffle, Scotland, Scottish, scruffy, Shetland*, social, species, splendid, stout, strikingly, trousers, tumble, two-tone, unique, unmistakable, winged, wingspan

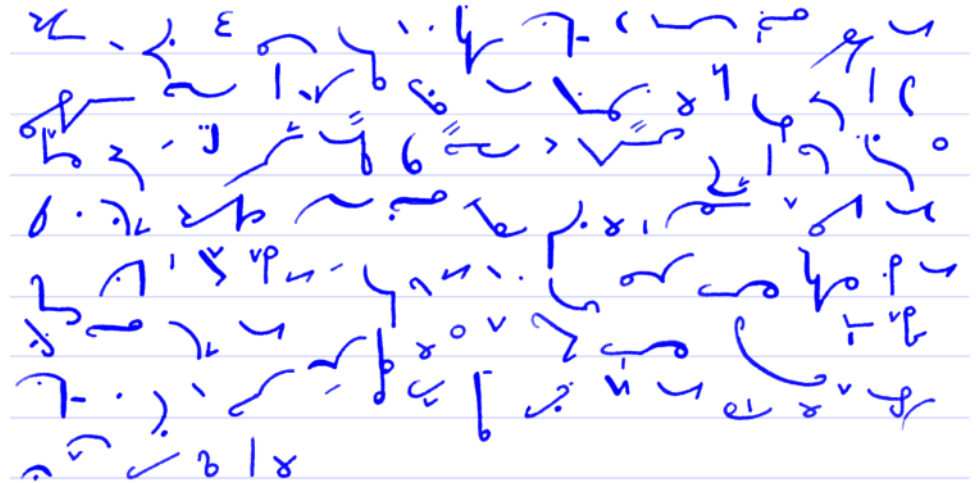
* "Celtic" can also be pronounced (but not written in longhand) with an initial S sound

* "cronk, ki-ow, chow" Not in dictionary, birders have many made-up words to describe calls

* "oily" The diphthong is rotated slightly in order to join the stroke

* "Shetland" The Ish is not halved here, as it would be illegible with the L following

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Daffodils

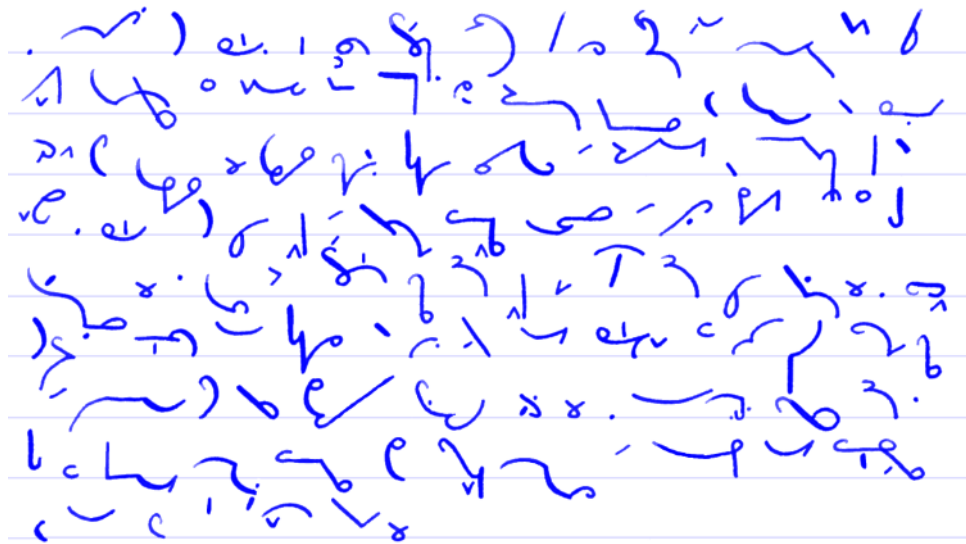
I would like to share with you some photos of a daffodil meadow that I came across recently in the historic garden at Hall Place in Bexley. I had visited here at other times of the year and had not* really noticed this corner of the parkland, seeing it from afar as just an area of woodland, long grass and pleasant shade. But last week* I headed in that direction, led on by the sight – and photo opportunity – of a few small clumps of daffodils, set in the open grass area in the middle distance. As I approached the

clumps, further on I caught sight of the meadow, a sea of yellow and white dots, waving about in the sun. I instantly made my way towards it.

* "had not" needs the dot Hay and dot vowel, to distinguish it from "do not", alternatively write the two outlines separately

* Omission phrase "las(t w)eek"

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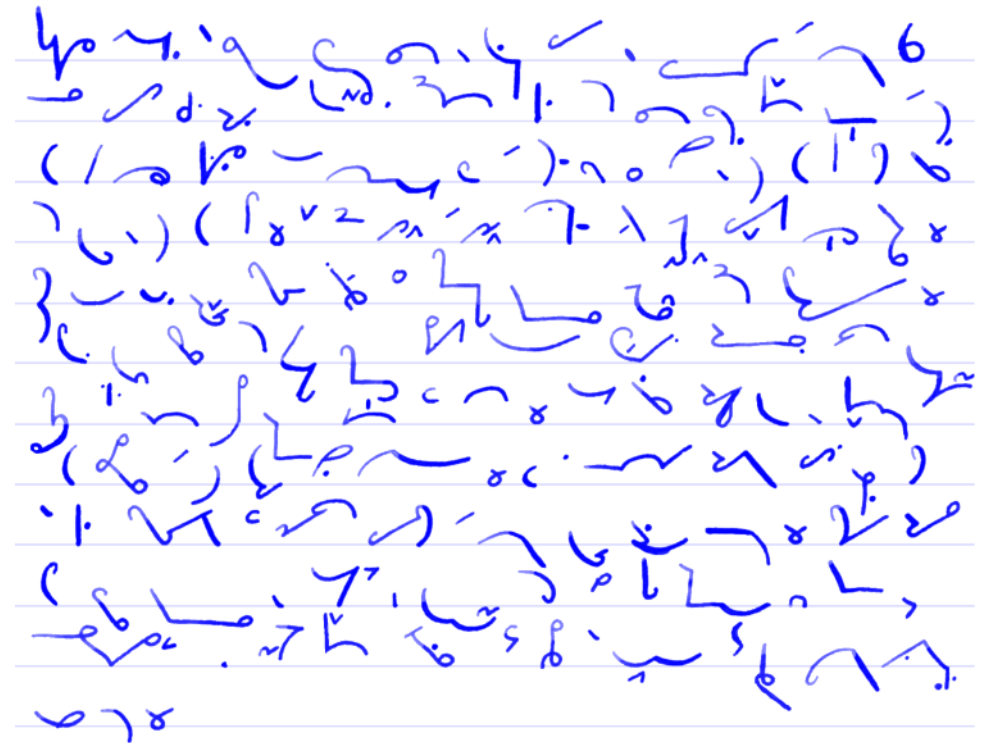
Daffodils (Continued)

The morning was sunny but somewhat blustery and fresh, which meant that there were not many people about, just right for my purposes, as I knew I could get lots of clear pictures without having to skirt around the other visitors. This was truly daffodil heaven and I wanted to capture it all whilst the sun was still out and before the clouds increased and rain started, as had been forecast. A few of the blossom trees were out, but the majority were still bare. The ground was completely covered

in daffodils, all lit up in the sunlight with little shade from the trees, and looking their best, as they were freshly* opened. The intermittent breezes were an advantage when taking the movie clips, as they provided movement and interest in the close-ups without any effort on my part.

* The F stroke is not reversed, this allows joining with the next stroke, compare "fresh" in the top line

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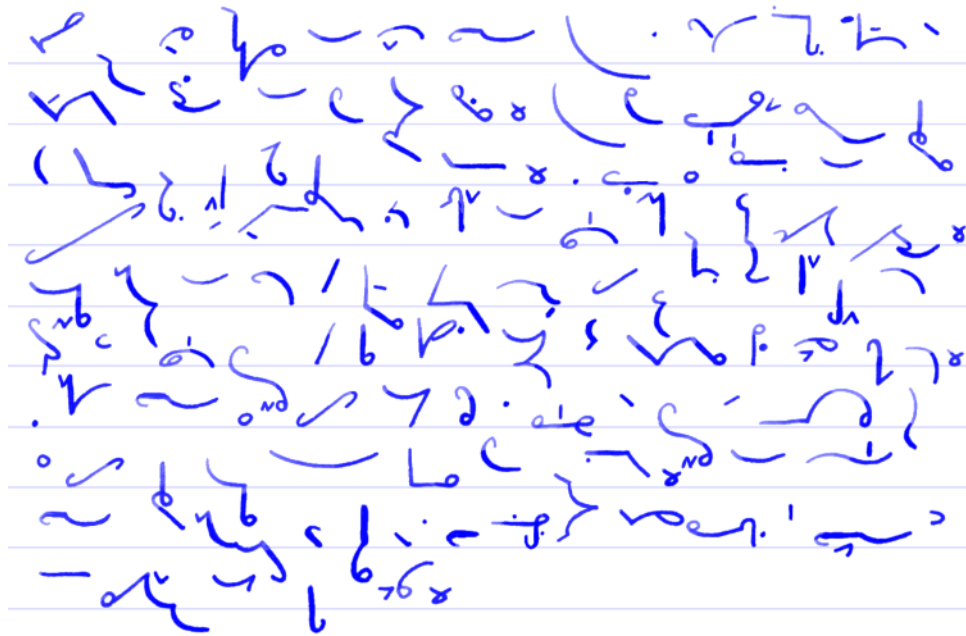


Daffodils

Daffodils and indeed all spring flowers seem to fade away too quickly, and maybe this is because one tends to wait for a warm day, or some free time, to go and see them, which means delays in making the effort, and so opportunity is lost to see them at their best, or even to see them at all. I walked round and round the meadow, up and down the wide mown paths. There was no need to find the perfect composition, as attractive pictures and views were everywhere. Every few steps or change of direction started another flurry of clicks,

and more visual treasures added to my stash to take home with me. In the past, I would just have to admire them as much as possible, and wish they would last longer. Without a camera, I would be wanting to stay there all day, preferably with warmer weather and maybe even the painting gear. There are always other people's pictures to enjoy, but viewing your own has the advantage of taking you back to the experience, the actual time and place, with the satisfaction of knowing that the display will be repeated next year.

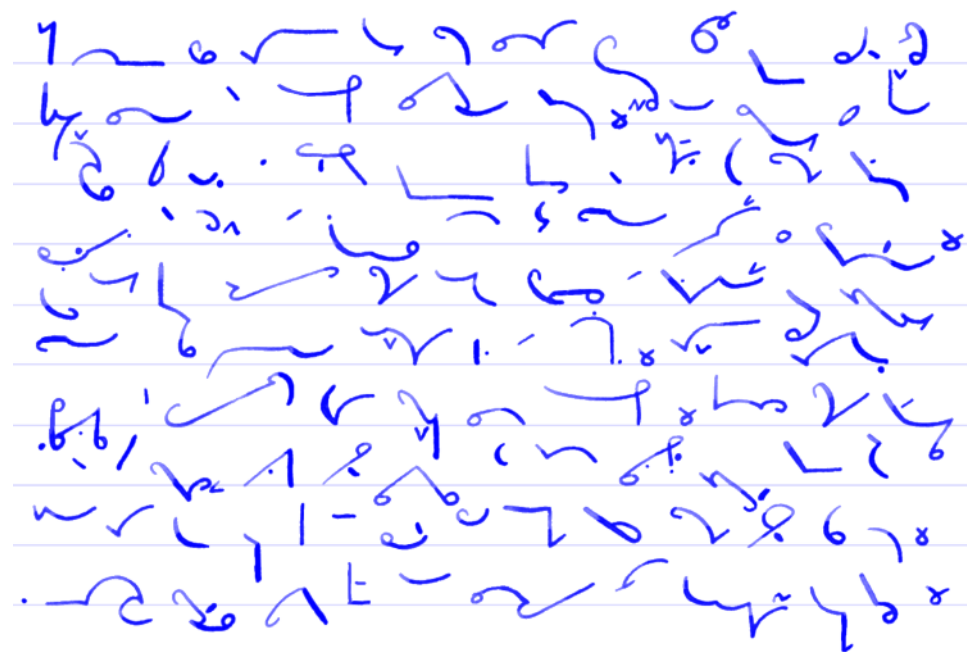
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Daffodils

I used to have lots of daffodils in my garden, after a particularly active autumn of bulb planting in every available space. After several glorious spring displays, they began to thin out and then disappeared altogether. The clay is soggy in winter and rock hard and dry in summer, and I had to admit that it was not worth replanting. Nowadays, I have them in very large tubs, which can be moved away when they die

Blank lined writing area for notes.



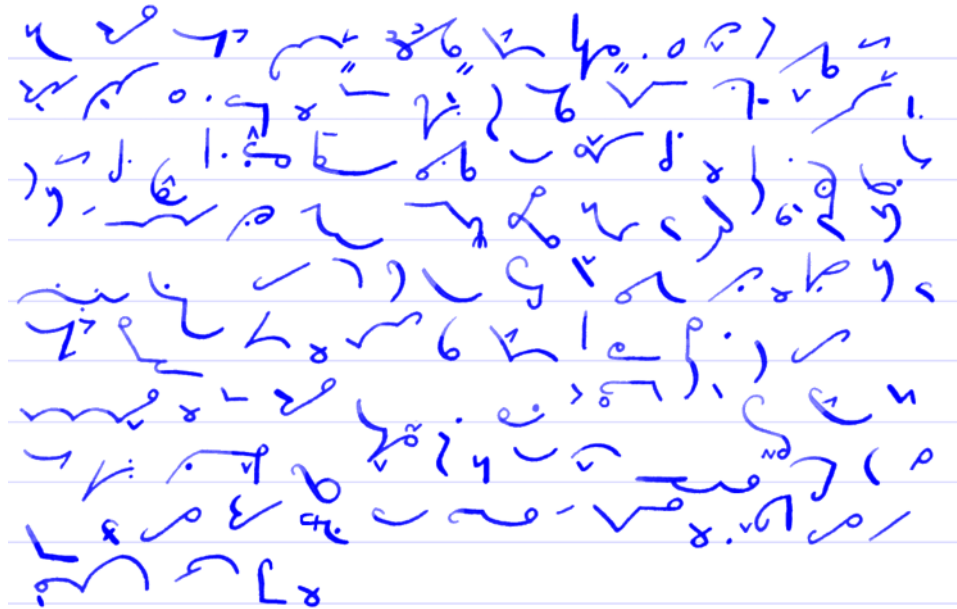
Daffodils

I do make efforts to look for the very small flowers as well as the big shows, and there is definitely something of interest happening all year. In spring, the first tiny arrivals just need a close-up picture taken, to isolate them from the barer scenery all around and convince me that the garden really is blooming. Even in the depths of winter, there are enough evergreens and berrying bushes to prevent the garden looking entirely dead and empty. I like to

leave seed heads on wherever they will provide some interest. At the moment, there are bunches of large brilliant red rose hips that I am hesitating to prune back, although I know I will have to do it quite soon, in order to* get the best from the roses this year. The colourful prunings will be tucked in somewhere and will eventually feed the birds.

* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

Blank lined writing area for notes.



Daffodils

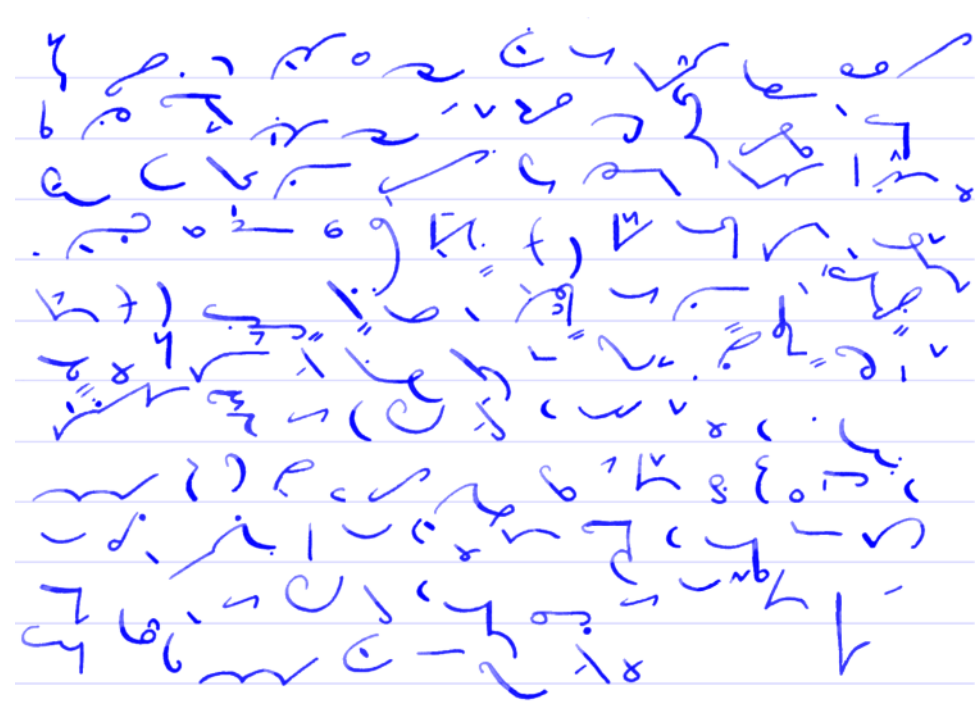
I have always enjoyed William Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils" the first line of which reads "I wandered lonely as a cloud." I can truly say that in this park meadow I really did see "ten thousand at a glance*", tossing their* heads in sprightly* dance." It was an irresistible feast for the eyes and camera lens, and having captured as much as possible, I felt able to banish thoughts of their imminent fading away, or their being flattened by heavy rain. At last I was able to enjoy the spectacle much more. I learned this poem at school, as it was an easy one to memorise. I could always visualise the scene of the carpet of flowers, blowing about in the chilly lakeside breezes,

although I did, in my ignorance, imagine them as the big bold ones that we cultivate in our gardens and parks. The wild ones are smaller and more delicate.

* "at (a) glance" would normally be an omission phrase, but in poetry it is preferable to write a fully as possible

* "tossing their" Doubling to represent "their"

* "sprightly" Insert the diphthong, as this outline written on the line would be "spiritual"



Daffodils

I think he used the word lonely as meaning alone in the purely physical sense, rather than its less agreeable emotional meaning, and I always imagined that there were wisps of cloud floating along above the lake, wandering over the landscape apparently at random. The location of his walk with his sister Dorothy (whose diary entry helped to inspire the poem) was Glencoyne Bay next to Ullswater in the Lake District of North West England. I had to look up "pensive" before I could appreciate the last verse, but I whole-heartedly agreed with the fact*

that "they flash upon that inward eye". Without a vivid memory of them, they are lost when one leaves the place, and the time spent with them is gone, without any chance to relive it in thought. I am grateful that nowadays I can also get the views to "flash upon that indoor screen", in much more detail and quantity than memory alone can bring up. (1075 words)

* Omission phrase "agreed with the (f)act that"
