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Blogs - 2016 - December

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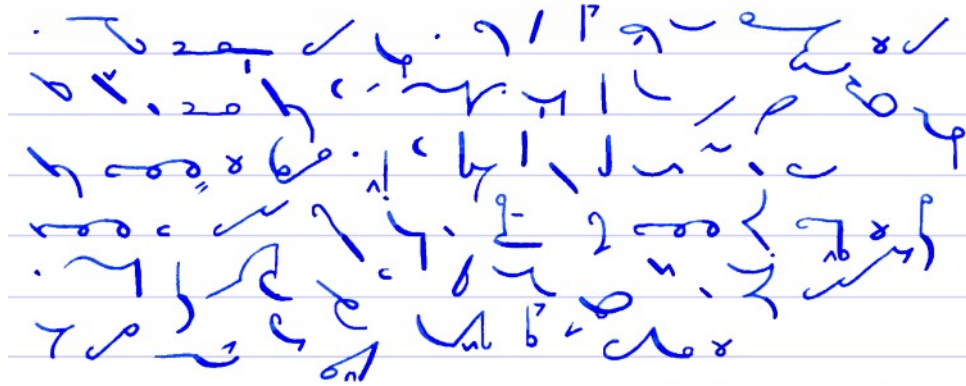
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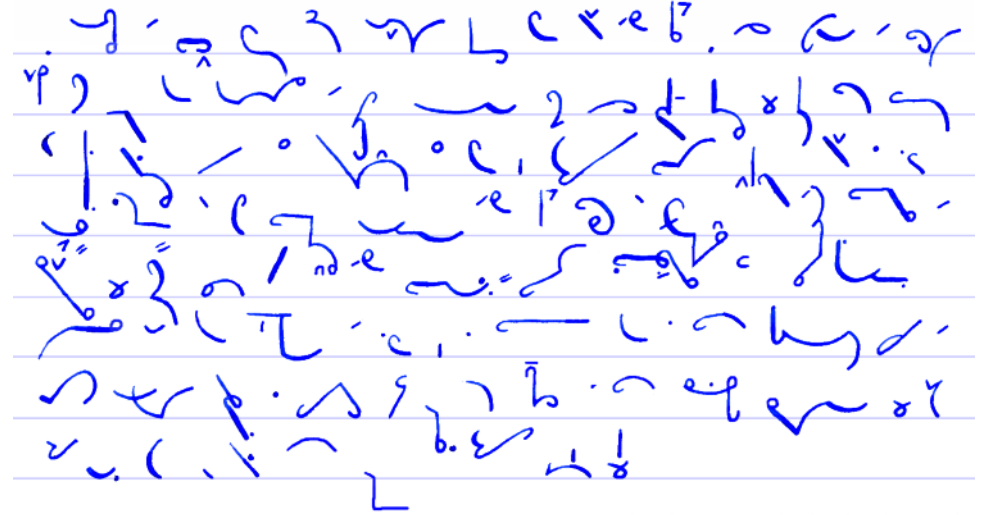
PDF Date: 26 December 2020



Toys

A couple of weeks ago we visited a very large toy store in Central London. We passed by two weeks before that, and mentally noted it for our list of places to visit before Christmas. This was an outing that definitely had to be done now and not too near to Christmas, when we would

probably have had to struggle through the Christmas shopping crowds. As it was a Monday, it was relatively peaceful, with just enough youngsters about to ensure we were not the only ones cooing over the huge variety of toys on the shelves.



Toys

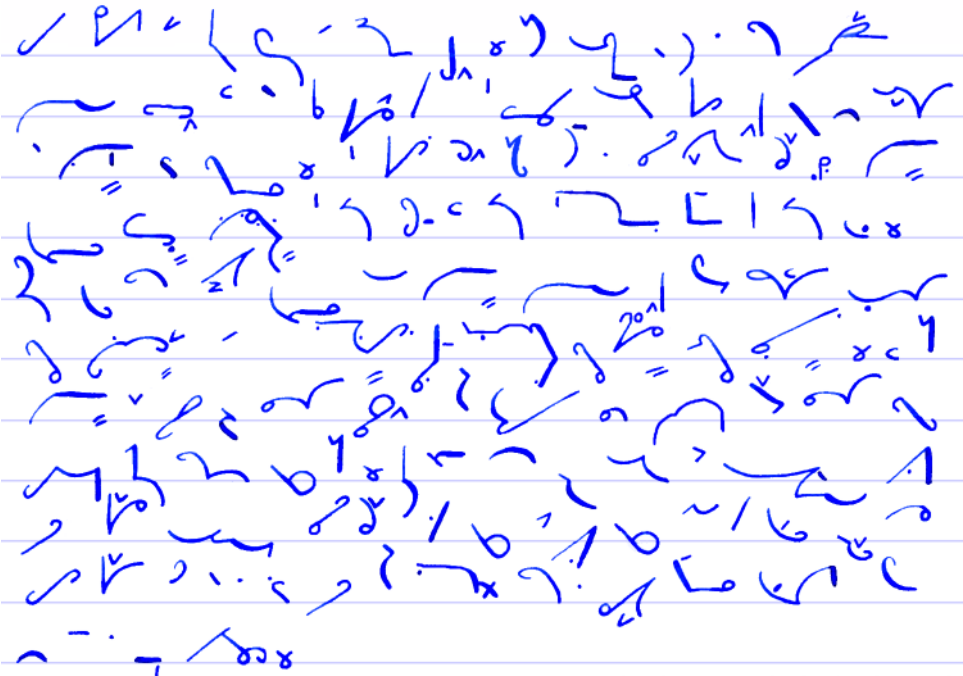
The entrance and ground floor were entirely taken over by soft toys, the most welcoming and friendly sight there could be* for families and children entering through the main double doors. It was very clear that teddy bears are as popular as ever but they were greatly outnumbered by a complete Noah's Ark of other creatures, including soft toy versions of vultures, ostriches, crabs and spiders. There were* some large soft greeny yellow grasshoppers* with dangly legs, not for cuddling and comfort, but a character for a more adventurous story and also,

unfortunately*, possibly a weapon with which to tease or torment a more sensitive sibling. I think I would need them to pay me to take that one home!

* "could be" The short form "could" is best not placed in the middle or end of a phrase, where it would be out of position and therefore may be misread as "can"

(* grasshoppers - I'm being kind, they might have been locusts!)

- * "unfortunately" Optional contraction



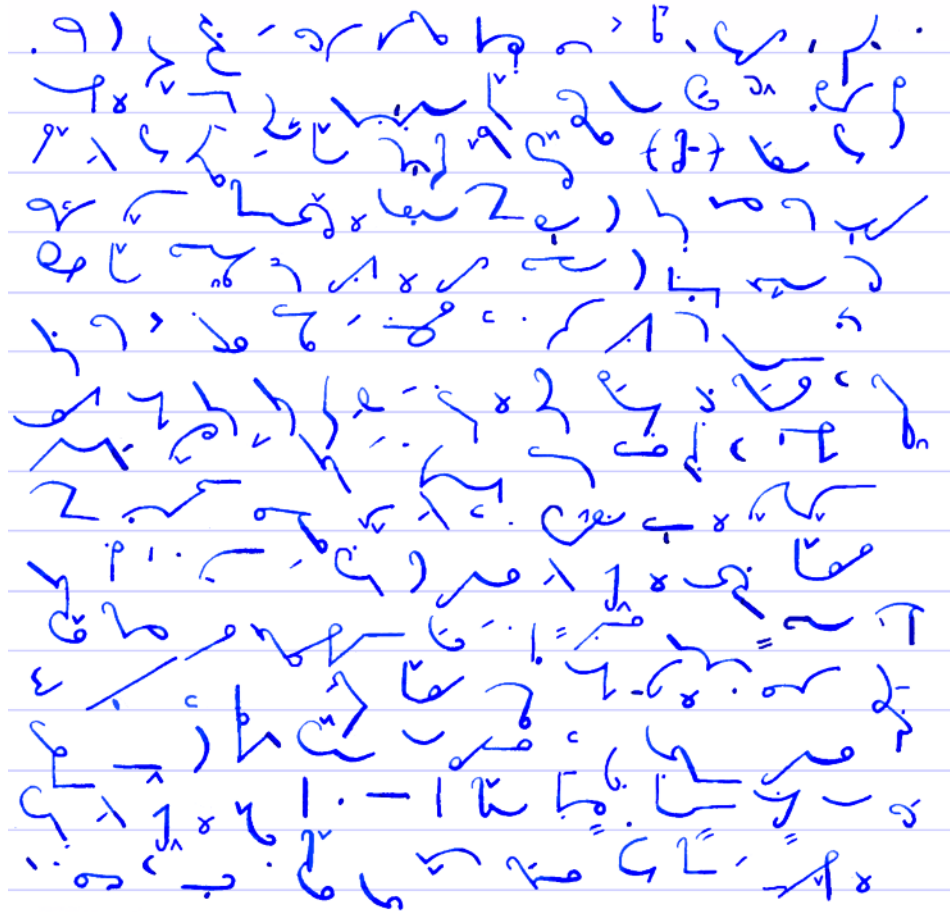
Toys

We started on the top floor and worked down. I was intrigued to see a very realistic looking crown, with all its jewels, which on closer inspection turned out to be made entirely of Lego building bricks. On turning around, I then saw a half life-size seated Lego figure of Queen Elizabeth on her throne, with her corgi dog at her feet. There were* even more royal figures in Lego looking out over the stairwell, namely Prince William and Catherine Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Charles and Prince

Harry. When I had Lego I used to build small houses, although they were somewhat limited by the small number of window and door frame pieces I had. It was of great importance to have enough of the interlocking red roof tiles, including the half size edge pieces and the ridge pieces, and not much fun to find myself one tile short of a complete roof, although cardboard from a cereal box folded over made quite a good replacement.

* Omission phrase "there (w)ere"

A series of horizontal lines for writing, spanning the width of the page. The lines are horizontal and blue.



Toys

The store was full of playful and friendly helpers demonstrating* some of the toys to everyone who showed an interest. I kept seeing boomerang type Frisbees being flown around, safely as it was high up over the shoppers, and tiny remote controlled cyber flyers (drones) buzzing* over the stairwell like dragonflies*. Fascinating magic snow was appearing almost from nowhere as soon as the tiny granules were wetted. One corner was dedicated to creating your own bear from all the components, clothes and accessories, with a little red or pink heart inserted into the bear before it was stuffed and completed. There were* spongy* paintbrushes that produced rainbow lines on the paper, and an illuminated clear glass tablet* that caused* the magic marker scribbles to light up with a fluorescent* glow. Lifelike butterflies sat on a log and flapped their wings up and down. Inflatable* dinosaurs promised hours of prehistoric fun and a T-Rex bedroom guarding model that would roar when disturbed and project dinosaur images onto the wall. A small suspended plastic cow was flying in circles with thin fabric wings flapping up and down. I even

had a go at driving Thomas the Tank Engine, in front of a screen that gave a driver's view of my progress along the track and countryside.

* "demonstrating" Omits the R

* "buzzing" Same outline as "bussing"

* "dragonflies" The FL stroke is never reversed for vowel indication. It is only reversed in the middle or end of an outline to enable a join (also in "inflatable" below).

* Omission phrase "there (w)ere"

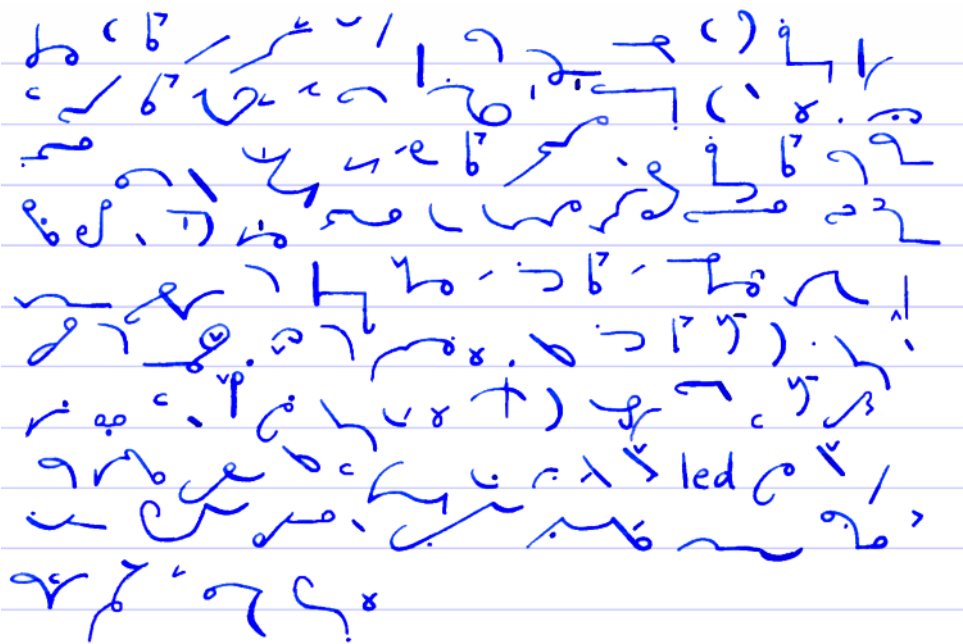
* "spongy" Insert the last dot vowel, as "sponge" could also make sense

* "tablet" Insert the last dot vowel, as "table" could also make sense

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

* "fluorescent" Insert the last dot vowel, as "fluorescing" has a similar meaning

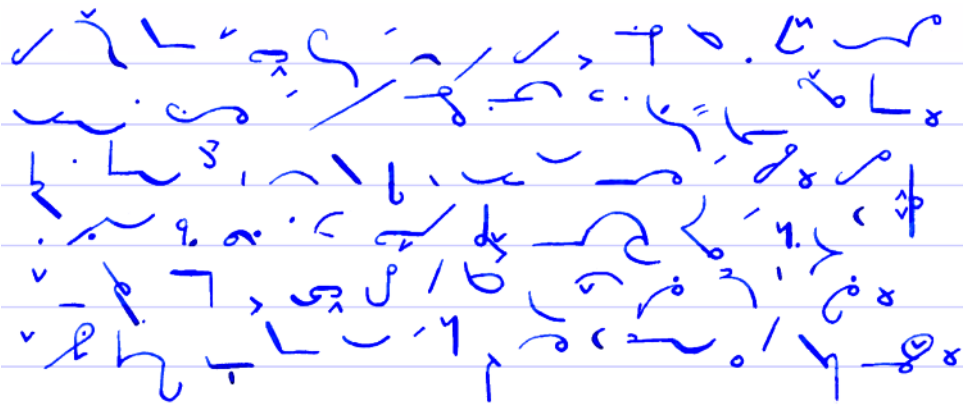
* "inflatable" It is the FL stroke that is in position on the line, being the first up or downstroke



Toys

It seems that toys are really not much different from years ago, except that they are constructed differently, with greater choice and variation, and with more emphasis on "collecting them all". The main categories seem to be unchanged: soft toys regardless of species, construction toys from stark space stations to cosy homes and gardens for families of little characters, craft work to make usable or decorative

items, and action toys and costumes to live out stories or exercise the mind or limbs. The best action toy I saw was a pair of heel skates, with two side wheels per foot. My attention was instantly grabbed when I saw one of the store helpers whizzing past with illuminated feet, lit up by the LED wheels by each ankle, flashing circles of whirring rainbows, making circuits of the stairwell endlessly on the smooth flooring.



Toys

We arrived back on the ground floor and made our way to the exit, past the giant animals, including an enormous and rather expensive camel with a four-figure price tag. It would be a talking point but may be* difficult to include in games and stories. Once outside, the rainy street seemed a lot greyer, despite the colourful shops, and I did feel that I could* possibly get to the underground station much faster if my heels were on wheels. I resisted the temptation to go back in and I had to tell

myself that walking is much better exercise. (839 words)

* "may be" Use separate words in your transcription if these are used as a verb, and joined for the adverb "maybe". It seems unlikely one would hear the difference in dictation, but the grammar should clear this up during transcription.

* "I could" Not phrased, so it does not look like "I can"



Winter Wonderland

If I say that winter wonderland has arrived in the UK, you might think that we have had heavy snowfalls that have frozen* on the trees, turning into a glittering* gleaming landscape* on the next sunny* day. Well, it has actually arrived but without the snow. It is a Winter Wonderland with initial capitals, and is made up entirely of fairground rides, and food and souvenir stalls. Winter Wonderland in London's Hyde Park is a giant Christmas funfair, with the usual Santas, reindeer, snow effect decorations, Christmas trees and stars. The ornate bandstand* has been turned into the centrepiece of a big circular ice rink and that is the only place where you can see real snow, in the form of* churned* up ice.

* "frozen" and "freezing" Always put in the first vowel, as they are similar in outline and meaning

* "glittering" Ensure the Ing Dot is central and not appearing to be in 3rd position after the T which would be "glittery"

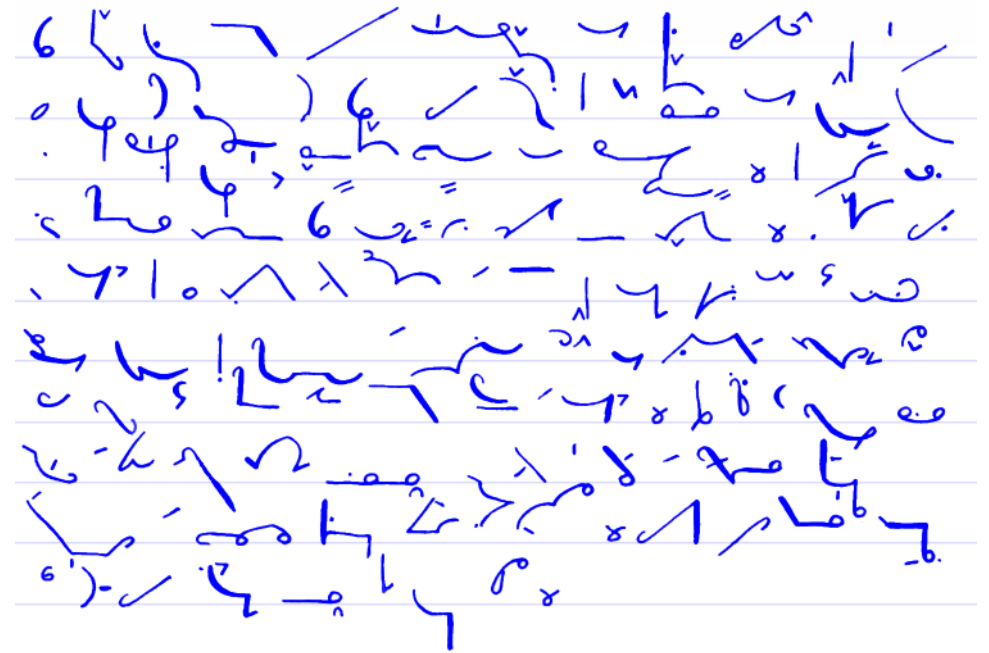
* "landscape" It is the L which is in position, it does not matter where the P stroke ends up

* "sun/sunny" "snow/snowy" Always vocalise

* "ba(n)dstand" Alternative outline which omits the first N. Can also be written normally in two halves = band + stand.

* Omission phrase "in (the) f(orm of)"

* "churned" Keep the Chay well sloped, so it does not look like "turned" which would also make sense



Winter Wonderland

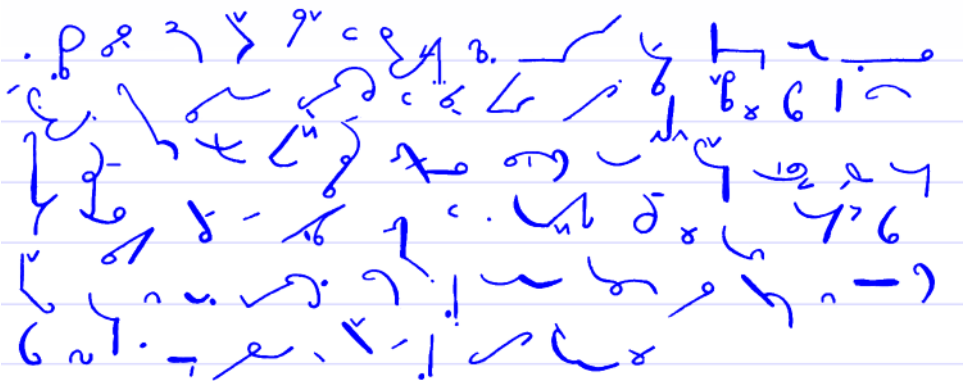
This type of fair can be rather uninspiring in the daytime, as we found out on our first visit there two years ago, so this time we arrived at about six in the evening, after a sunset visit to the Sky Garden in central London. It really needs complete darkness to make this neon-lit world come to life. The ideal way to enjoy it is to wrap up warm and go out into the chilly night, with the intention of spending the evening eating, drinking and milling around under the rainbow of brilliant lights, in order to* prove that the dark and cold can be overcome and enjoyed. It is the contrast that brings the sense of fun

and achievement, and probably also the excuse to fill up on buns and burgers, doughnuts, popcorn and Christmas decorated chocolate lollies. We had our own bags* of goodies with us, so we avoided* the queues at the food stalls.

* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

* "bags" "box" "pockets" "buckets" All these are best vocalised, as they are similar in outline and meaning

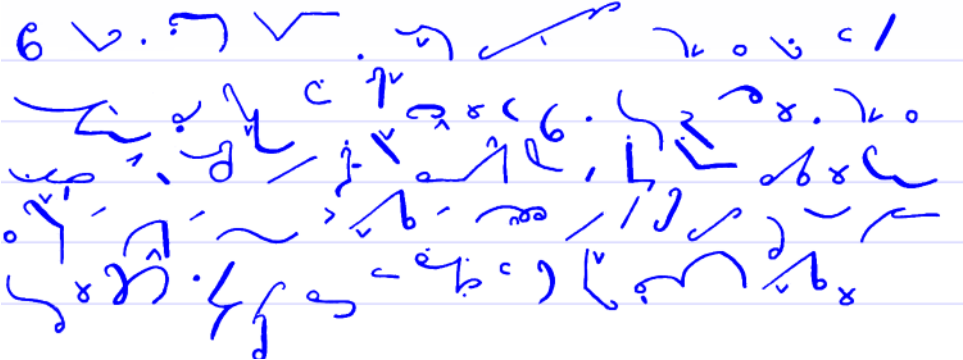
* "avoided" Insert the diphthong, and the second vowel in "evaded", as they are similar in outline and meaning



Winter Wonderland

The sweets huts were piled high with speciality* treats, coloured fudges, decorated individual cakes* and freshly* prepared honey waffles with hot chocolate running down the sides. Others had more traditional sustenance in the form of* giant sausages and burgers smothered in fried onions, stuffed into huge buns and rolls, and dripping with a variety of sauces. If you enjoy this type of food, you need to refrain from eating anything for some hours before you go there, then you have a good reason to buy and eat one of everything.

- * "speciality" Insert the intervening diphthong, and/or the dot before the T, to differentiate this outline from "specialty"
- * "cakes" and "cookies" Insert the vowels to differentiate these
- * "freshly" The Fr stroke is a left version, in order to be able to join the Shel stroke
- * Omission phrase "in (the) f(orm of)"



Winter Wonderland

As this is part of a grassy park, the entire Wonderland area is paved with large interlocking sheets, providing flat and dry ground. Without these the fair would be impossible. The area is enclosed and the two entrances are controlled by security staff who conduct the bag* searches. Everything is bright and loud, and many of the rides and amusements are much larger

than one sees in local fairs. There is also* a gentler children's section called Santa Land, with their type of smaller rides.

- * "bag" "pocket" "bucket" Vocalise these as they are similar in outline and meaning
- * "there is also" The joined vowel of "also" can be omitted in phrases



Winter Wonderland

The crowds on our evening were not so thick as on previous visits, as this was the end of November, but this did mean I got clear photos of the rides, but I think having more crowds does make a better atmosphere. It is definitely a place to wear a light-coloured item of clothing, so that those you are with can see you if you get separated in some of the darker* areas. The best experience is had by the children who are being carried on shoulders, with

maximum view and minimum effort, and it is certainly* one way of keeping them happy whilst making sure they cannot possibly get lost.

* "darker" Ensure the hook on the Kay is clear, as "dark" would also make sense

* "it is certainly" The Ses circle represents the "is" and the S sound of the next word



Winter Wonderland

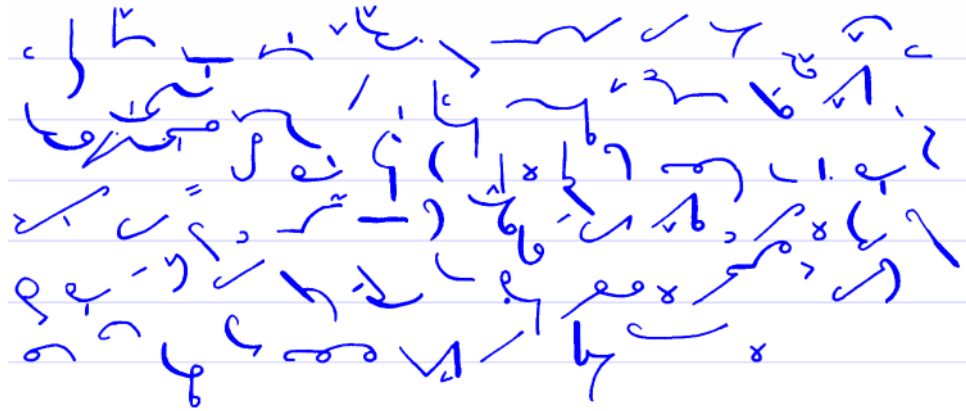
We ended up at the ice rink, which I think is the best one in London at Christmas, as it is the largest and the most decorative, with all the strings of white lights radiating from the central bandstand*. There are two items that make an ice rink extra special and that is someone wearing a bright red coat, or someone wearing an illuminated Christmas jumper, and both were present on this evening. It also* needs one or two* experienced skaters to do their stuff,

for added interest, and these are generally the ice marshals, who are there to help those who get into difficulties.

* "ba(n)dstand" Alternative outline which omits the first N. Can also be written normally in two halves = band + stand.

* "It also" The joined vowel of "also" is omitted in phrases

* Omission phrase "one (or) two"

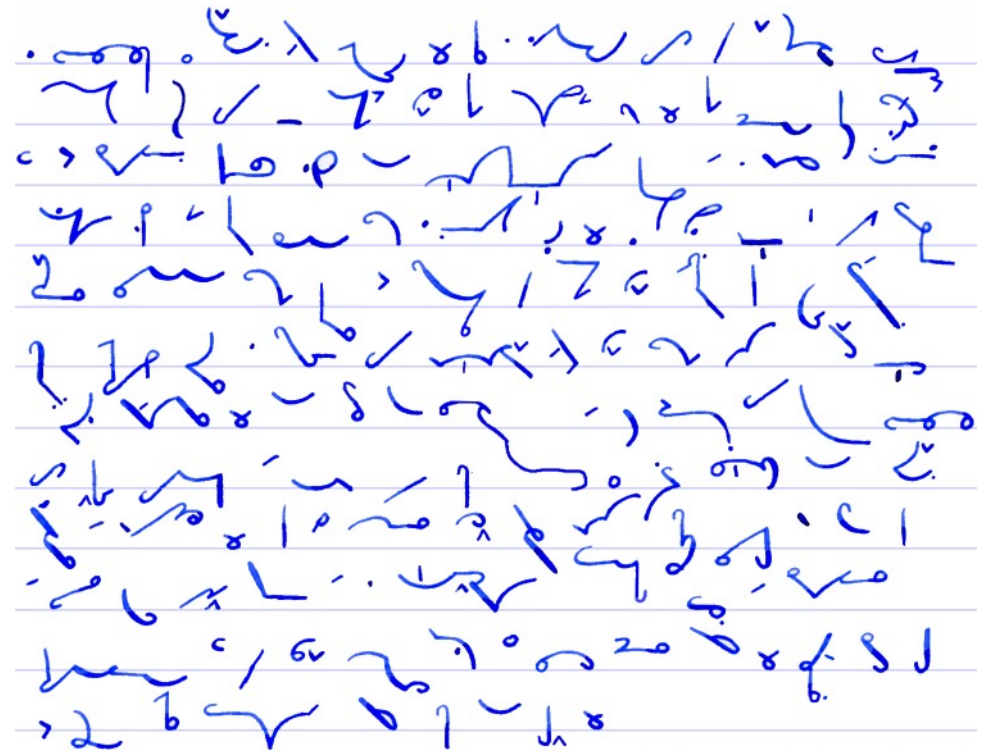


Winter Wonderland

When it was time to go home, I finally put the camera away, only to find my cold fingers unwilling to move much, but twenty minutes on the warm bus ride to Charing Cross Station soon thawed them out. It would be very Christmassy if it did snow, although I wonder whether people would actually go there in those conditions and whether the rides would run. They would

probably sweep the snow and ice away before opening, for safety reasons. Regardless of the weather, some more visits over the Christmas period are definitely in order*. (767 words)

* "in order" Add "that" to this outline for the phrase "in order that", but use a halved N for the omission phrase "in ord(er to)"



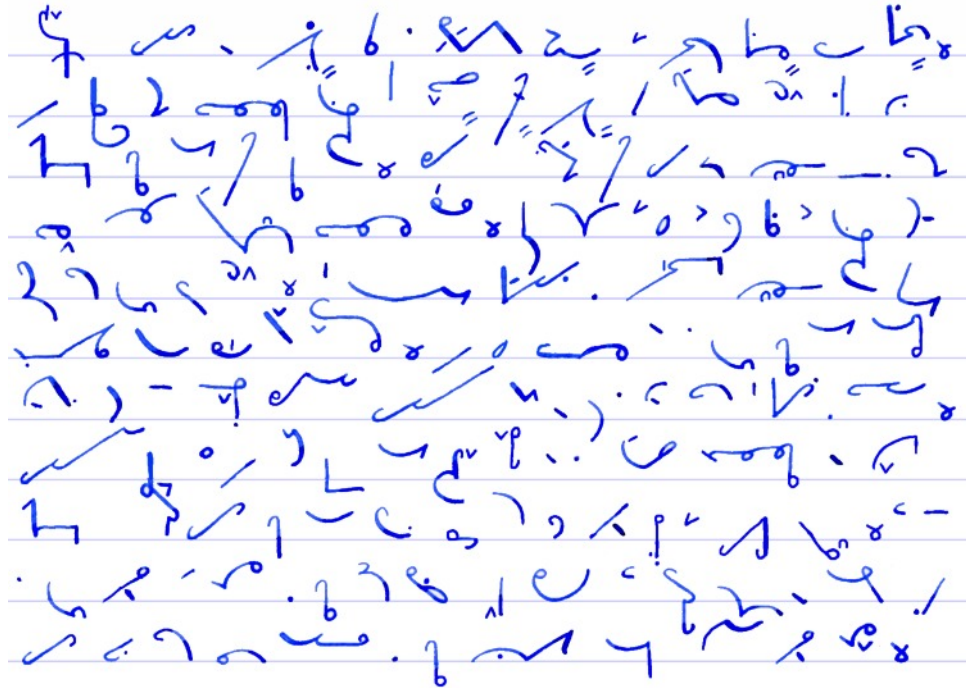
Christmas Tree Festival

The Christmas tree is finally up and finished. It is an artificial one which I assembled near the beginning of the* month, so that we could* enjoy the lights at the earliest opportunity. At the weekend it was furnished with all the sparkly decorations, swathed in multi-coloured tinsel, and an almost-antique angel set on the top singing from a carol sheet. The last to go on are the plastic icicles hanging from the tips of the branches, which catch the light and trap it within the blobby, drippy and twisted shapes, a perfect way to multiply up the light from the little pine cone shaped bulbs. Any plans for simplification and ease of clearing away after Christmas went out of the window and now our tree is completely smothered in shiny baubles and ornaments. It has the maximum amount possible of

little treasures hidden all over it, and, yes, even round the back, and an uncountable quantity of glints and sparkles, twinkling with each slight movement of air as someone walks past. Justice has been done to the season and it is clearly the best tree in town.

* "beginning of the" This intersection can also be written close up to the preceding outline where necessary. Ensure it is tucked in close, so it is not mistaken as belonging to the line below.

* "we could" Only join the outline "could" into a phrase where it is able to keep its own position, so that it is never be misread as "can"



Christmas Tree Festival

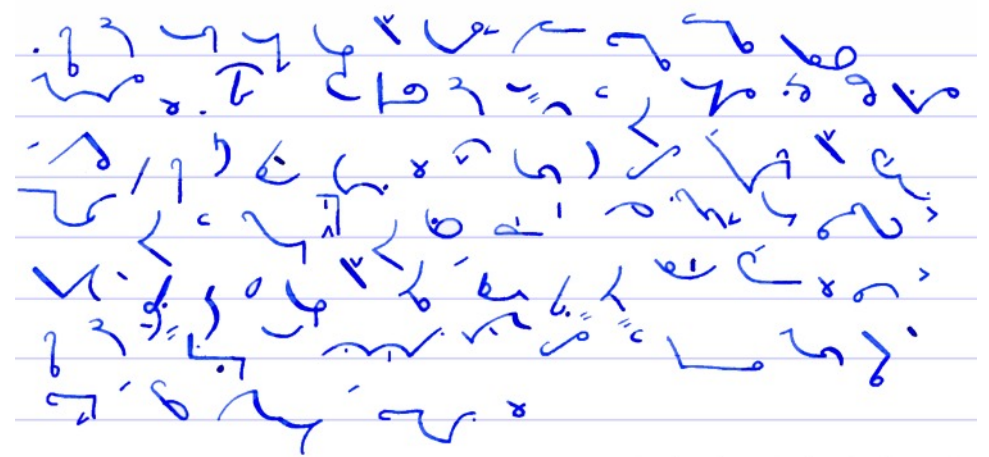
On Friday morning we went to Erith* which is a suburb of London, on the river Thames near Dartford. Our destination was the Christmas Tree Festival at Christ Church Erith, which promised around 80* lit and decorated trees in the church itself. As we approached the church, we heard music coming from the grounds, mostly* popular Christmas songs. It was early on the first of the three days of the Festival, so there were very few people around. On entering the doorway, the recorded music changed to carols being sung by choirs. Our first glimpse of a few trees in the entrance lobby was quite exciting, as we knew we were about to see a lot more on turning the corner. We were not disappointed as our

eyes took in the delightful sight of a forest of Christmas trees all lighted and decorated, one tree in every second or third row, sitting on the wooden pews. With quite a few rows and aisles, the trees were spaced out sufficiently with plenty of room to inspect each one yet from some angles the tree

* "Erith" is pronounced "ear-rith", located in north Kent (there is a different town spelled "Earith" in Cambridgeshire)

* "80" Always insert all the vowels in this outline and in "eight"

* "mostly" Omits the T



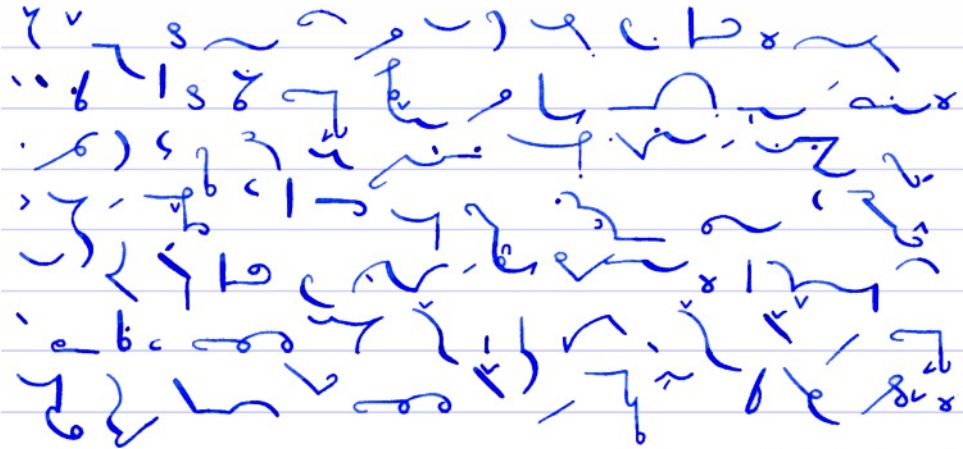
Christmas Tree Festival

The trees were entered into the Festival by various local groups, clubs, businesses and families. The majority of the decorations were hand-made, with sheep, angels, hearts, stars, bells and robins, each tree on their chosen theme. My favourite was one populated by fluffy cotton-wool* sheep with printed cut-out sheep faces stuck on, most appropriate* for the celebration of the birth of Jesus who was first visited by shepherds, and who is now Chief Shepherd of His own

flock. Some of the trees were dedicated in memory of loved ones, with pictures and favourite objects, all created and placed lovingly and carefully.

* * "cotton-wool" On its own "cotton" has N Hook

* "appropriate" Insert the diphthong, and the first vowel in "proper", as these are similar in outline and meaning

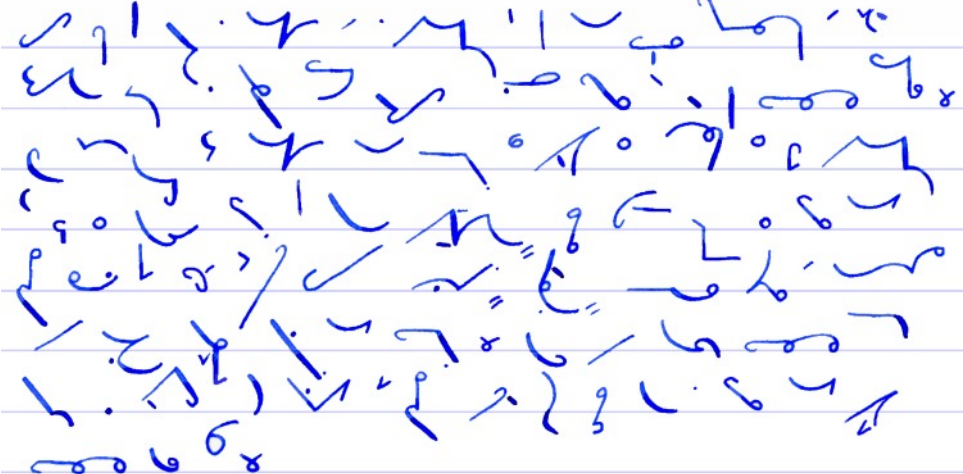


Christmas Tree Festival

I think I could* have spent many more hours in there, inspecting every decoration. Many people of all ages had spent endless creative and satisfying hours doing the colouring, cutting and sticking. The result was that the trees were individual, unique, interesting, appealing and engaging, proof of the enthusiasm and excitement that had gone into producing the artwork, something that cannot be found in shop bought decorations, however lovely and sparkling.

It reminded me of school days when Christmas not only arrived, but it was helped to arrive by our creative endeavours, so that we became part of Christmas by our activities, and not just passive recipients.

* "could have" Only join the outline "could" into a phrase where it is able to keep its own position, so that it is never be misread as "can"

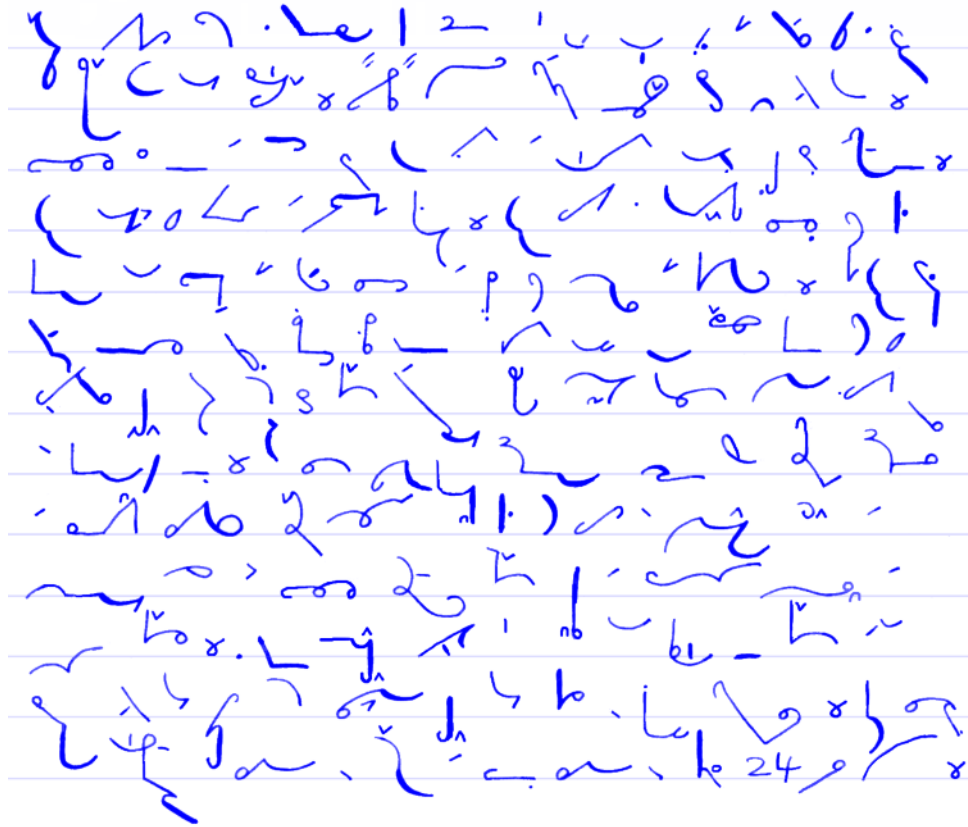


Christmas Tree Festival

One tree had both an angel and a reindeer on it in close proximity, and I thought that we have here a possible clash between cast members of two different Christmas narratives. However, I am confident that the angel, in keeping with his role as messenger, has told the reindeer that when he is* finished playing at being Rudolf, he is welcome to take his place in the stable scene at the front of the church, where

Mary, Joseph, kings, shepherds and animals are kneeling beside the baby in the crib. Even our favourite Christmas card bird, the robin, was perched on the stable roof, so that he would have a place in the real Christmas events as well. (704 words)

* "when he is" Write the "is" separately, so it is not misread as "when he has" which also makes sense here



Boxing Day

I have just returned from a Boxing Day walk, on foot, no cheating on the bus, just a comfortable striding along in the sunshine. Yesterday's lack of proper* exercise has been made up for. Christmas has come and gone, people have wrapped and unwrapped, nibbled, eaten, sipped and drunk. They have enjoyed the first chocolate and regretted the tenth*. They have watched a variety of screens throughout the day, taking in greetings on the phone screen and sitting through movies on the television. They have played board games, pieced construction sets together, helped new young cyclists take their first wobbles down the path, or spent time pondering the instruction manual for some long-awaited piece of technological kit. Although some will have continued working, medical staff, transport* workers and security services, I suspect mostly* the day was one of

lounging* around and making the most of the Christmas suspension of time, duties and normal menus and meal times. The big countdown rolled on in its own good time, not speeding up for the children, or slowing down for the adults to continue preparations. It was simply unstoppable, certain to arrive and equally certain to depart 24 hours later.

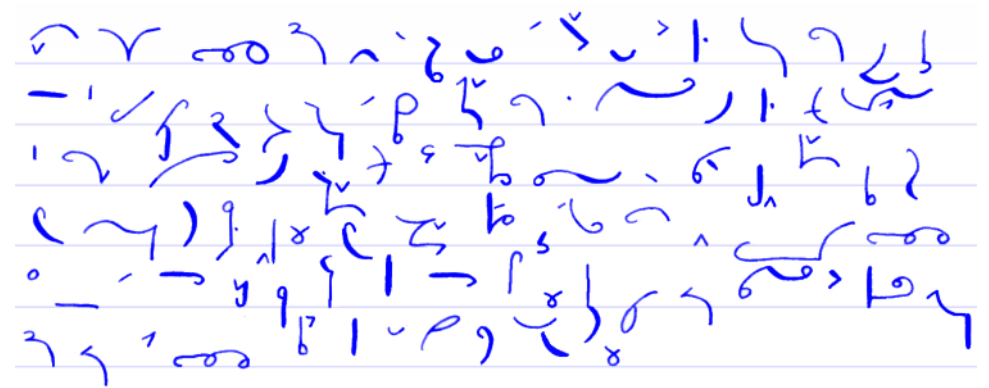
* "proper" Insert the first vowel, and the diphthong in "appropriate", as these are similar in outline and meaning

* "tenth" Always insert the vowels in this and "eighteenth"

* "transport" Omits the N

* "mostly" Omits the T

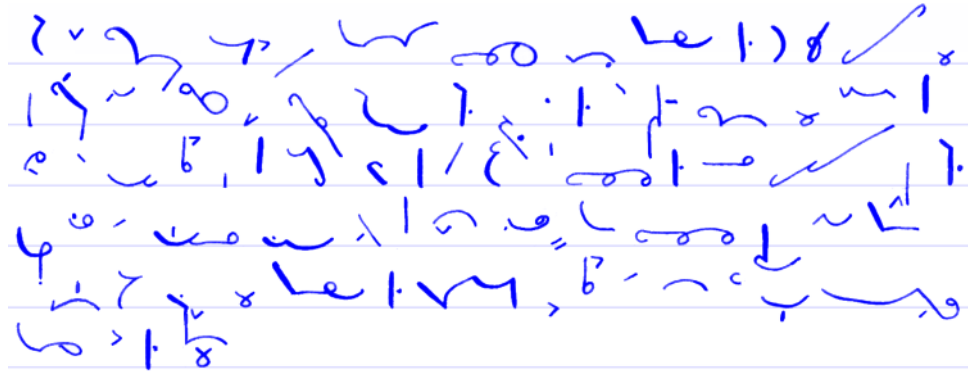
* "lounging" Helpful to insert the diphthong, as lounge/lunch can be misread for each other in some contexts



Boxing Day

My early Christmases were made of all these things and by the end of the day, far from wishing it would go on, we children would be full of food and sweets, and tired from a longer than usual day (following on from the later than usual bedtime), with the excitement seeming to slow down time itself, so that every minute was stretched

out. However, unlike the adults who would often remark how quickly Christmas has "come and gone" I did not consider that it had gone at all. It was still here as long as all the decorations and food were here and the Christmas toys had not lost their novelty.

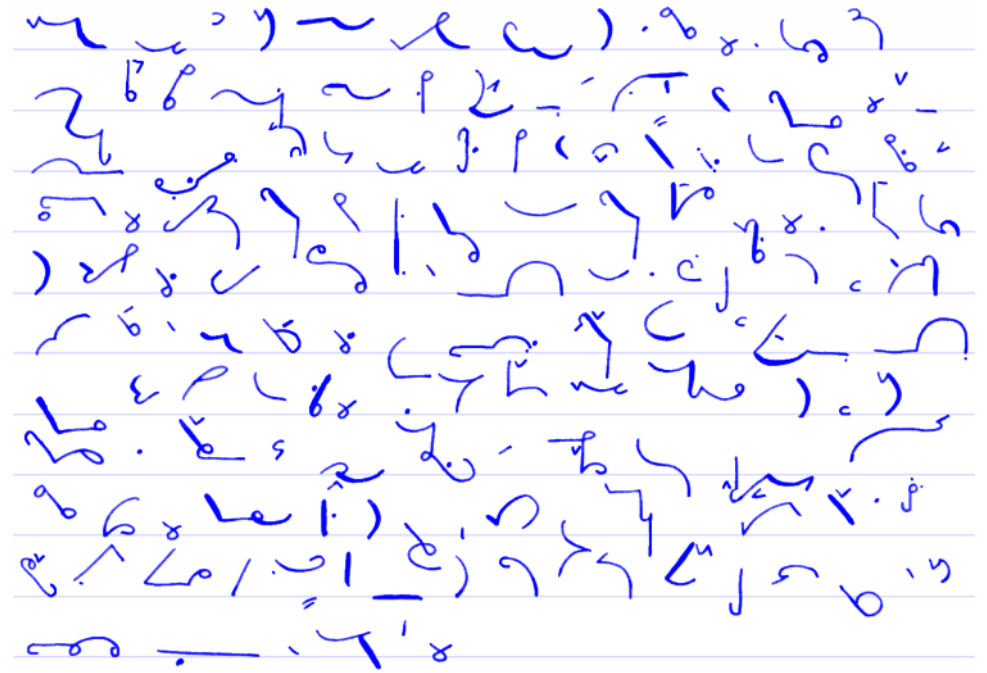


Boxing Day

Although I very much enjoyed our family Christmases, to me Boxing Day was just as wonderful. It brought not surprises but the prospect of having all day to play, a day of total freedom. I now had lots of new toys but had not been able to do much with them on Christmas Day, because we were

out all day visiting aunts and uncles, ending up at my Nan's for Christmas dinner, and not back home until bedtime. Boxing Day belonged* to the toys and me, with no interruptions for most of the day.

* "belonged" Ing cannot be halved



Boxing Day

I never knew what I was going to receive, everything was a surprise. The favourites were imaginative toys, such as miniature garden set, sewing kit and Lego building bricks. I could* make sceneries for the new train set that might be competing for floor space on the carpet. One year brought special teddy bears, another brought dolls to dress. The top favourite was always the paints, whether squares of colour in a flat tin or, when older, little pots of individual poster paints, thick creamy and bright, along with chunky colouring books that would last for ages. The only time I knew in advance was when I was promised a

bicycle, with the mounting anticipation and excitement far outweighing the lack of the surprise element. Boxing Day was peaceful but also full of activity, helped by a constant supply of wrapped chocolates which Nan had given us from her giant tin, and more pieces of iced Christmas cake* to nibble on.

* "I could" Written separately, so it is not misread as the phrase "I can"

* "cake" and "cookie" Insert the vowels in order to differentiate



Boxing Day

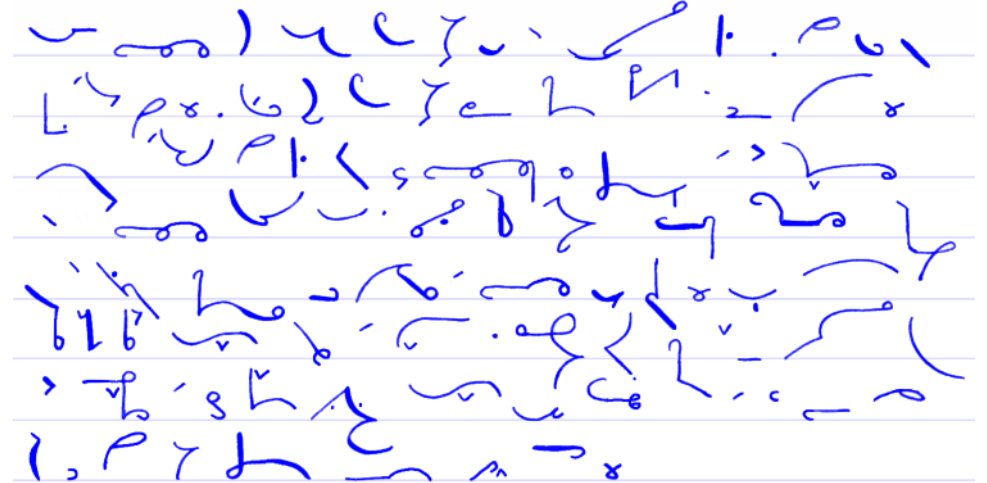
Boxing Day evening found us back at Nan's house for a huge party. All my aunts and uncles on that side of the family were there, crammed into a small apartment, with a long table under the window loaded with plates of food. It was all noise, jokes, chatter and clinking of glasses. The formal Christmas Day celebrations had taken place* in their separate houses, but this party was everyone together. It ended after midnight, but before then I would have had to give in to drooping eyelids, and go and lie down on Nan's bed. I think I mostly* slept through the journey home. In later years, we walked home with more

chocolates in our pockets and then the fun was watching our shadows shorten and lengthen as we passed each lamp-post*. Even better when you had two shadows from separate lamp-posts and a third if a car headlight went past.

* "taken place" Omits the L. Compare with the phrase "take/took place" where the L hook is included

* "mostly" Omits the T

* "lamp-post" The Imp does duty for the two P's



Boxing Day

In fact* Christmas was never over until the end of New Year's Day, the last event to be ticked* off the list. The fun was not over until the school term started a week later. Maybe the official* "Last Day" ought to be when the Christmas tree is dismantled and all the reminders* of Christmas vanish in a haze of dust and fallen glitter, fragments of tinsel, bits of paper, trimmings, gift labels and crumbs under the table. No matter, I had the toys in my possession and, like a successful shopping trip, I could relax after all the excitement and spend time revelling in my new acquisitions and, with care, most

of them would last until December came round again. (837 words)

* Omission phrase "in (f)act"

* "ticked" Helpful to insert the vowel, as "took" could also make sense in some contexts

* "official" Keep the Ish clearly rising, so it does not look like "final". Helpful to insert the first vowel, and the diphthong in "final".

* "reminders" Insert the diphthong, as "remains" would also make sense