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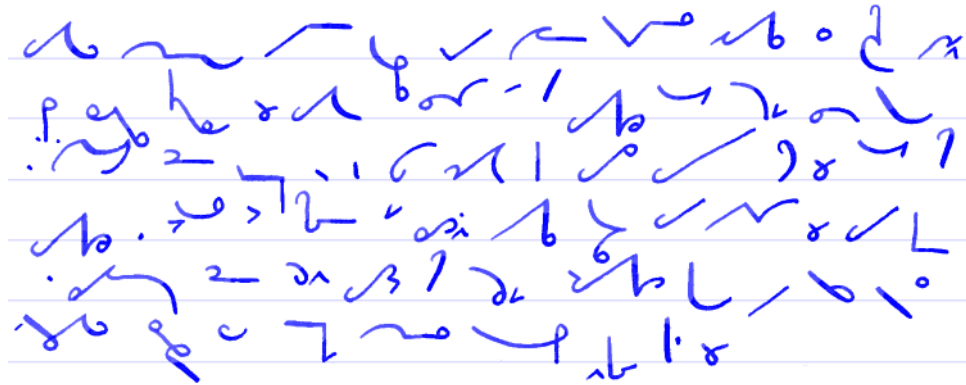
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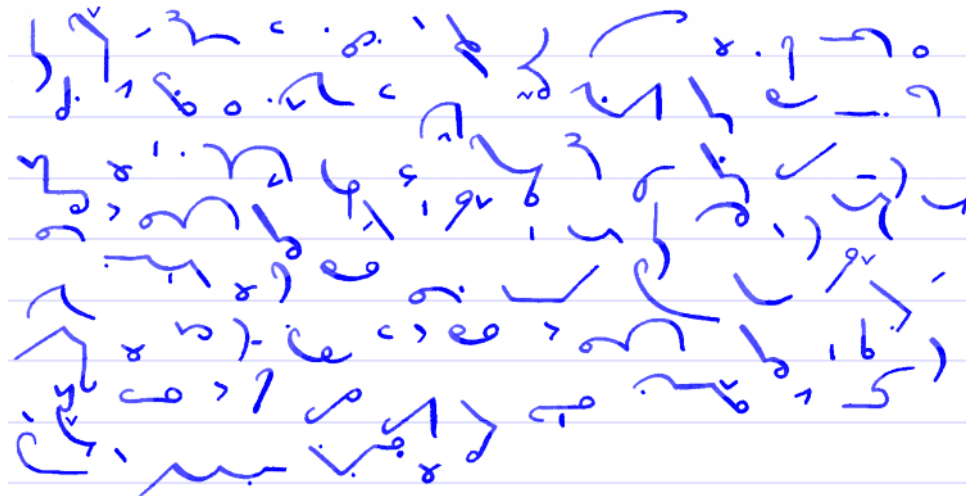


Wood Walk

We have been making regular visits to our local parks and woods as travel round the city is not possible* at present. We have small and large woodlands in the area, some being a longish walk to get to but well worth it once we are there. In the larger woodlands the noise of the traffic on

the surrounding roads falls away rapidly. We took a circular walk around one of the larger areas of woodland, doing our best to be as observant as possible in order to* get the maximum interest out of the day.

* Omission phrases "is not poss(ible)" "in ord(er to)"



Wood Walk

It was bright and warm with a hint of possible showers later on. The tree cover is dense and the place is alive with loud and varied bird song coming from all directions. On an earlier visit when the branches were still bare we could see some of the smaller birds up on high but now it was impossible

to see any of them in the leaf canopy. Their songs seem to carry further, being high pitched and repetitive. I am not so conversant with all the songs of the smaller birds but it is easy to identify the calls of the larger ones, wood pigeons, crows, magpies and the occasional flock of ring-necked parakeets.

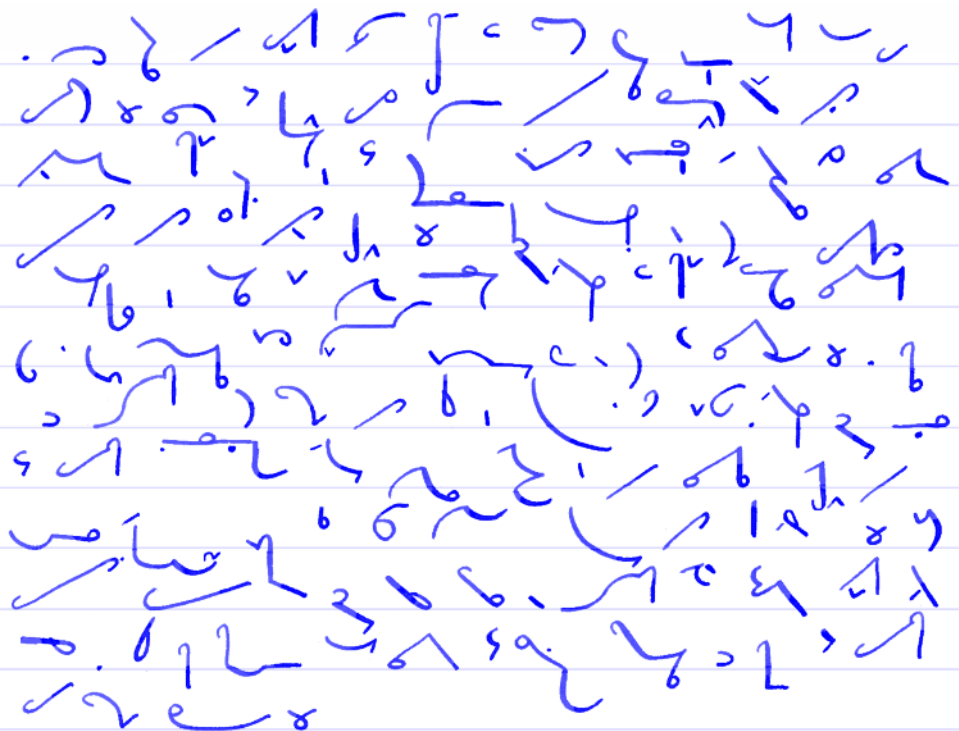


Wood Walk

Several small streams cross the woodland, some with gently* trickling water and some reduced to muddy channels, all with little wooden crossings over them. The most interesting bridge was a large fallen tree spanning the channel away from the main path, with its ragged roots up in the air and the trunk providing an ideal crossing for children who might prefer the adventurous route. In some places the path splits up, going round a tree, the direct route side being a muddy depression and the other

drier side being the detour round the sapling, producing a rather snaking path. Each time the sun came out the entire scene changed from uniform grey and green to dappled light on the paths and a greater variety of greens, almost yellow for the birch trees and new leaves, and the dark green of the holly, ivy, brambles and nettles.

* "gently" Insert the last vowel, as "gentle" would also make sense



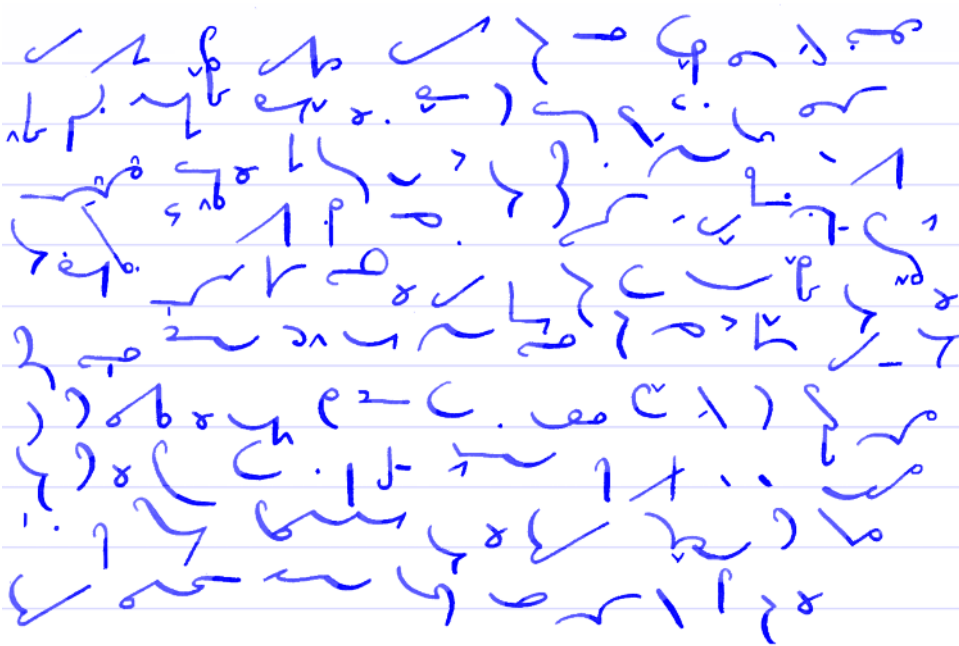
Wood Walk

The main paths are wide and well trodden, with grassy verges to go onto in wet weather. Some of the downhill ones look rather scoured by rain runoff, dry today but with the zigzag pattern of grooves* and pebbles, as the heavy winter rain has run down. It would be interesting to see the woodland in such conditions but unless I lived exactly opposite, with dry clothes handy within a few minutes, I am not likely to make the effort to see that happening. The trees would shelter us from the rain at first* but after a short while the opposite would be the case, with the water

cascading off the leaves and falling on our heads and down our necks, and continuing to drip on us as well, long after the rain had stopped. I was wondering where would be the best place to shelter and thought that would be right up against the largest tree trunk, in the hope that the spreading branches would direct all the water away from the centre.

* "grooves" Insert the vowel, as it is similar to "curves"

* Omission phrase "at (fir)st"



Wood Walk

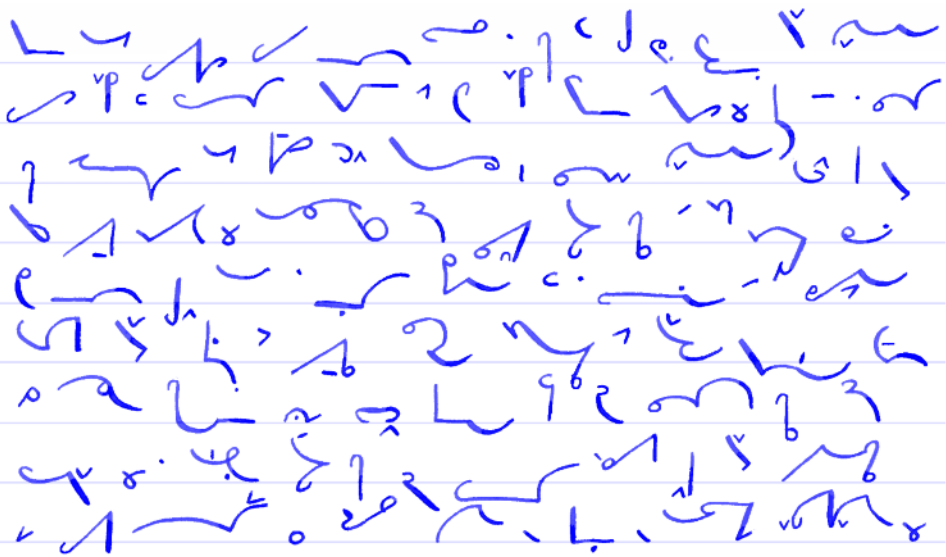
We reached the other side of the woodland where the path goes alongside some open grassland, out of the shade* and into the sunlight. The sky was clear blue with a few small cumulus clouds. At the far end of the field there was a long streak of red field poppies, with the red set against the yellow and white meadow flowers and the sandy coloured tall grasses. We took the path along another side of the field. There were* crows walking around in the long grass although most of the time we could* only see their heads. No doubt as they walk along the insects fly up so plenty of meals for them there. Further along a different

tone of cawing drew our attention to two young ones on a tree branch overhanging the field. They were reminding their parents they were hungry and calling for their next meal to be delivered to them.

* "shade" Always insert the second vowel in "shadow" to prevent misreading as "shade"

* Omission phrase "there (w)ere"

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

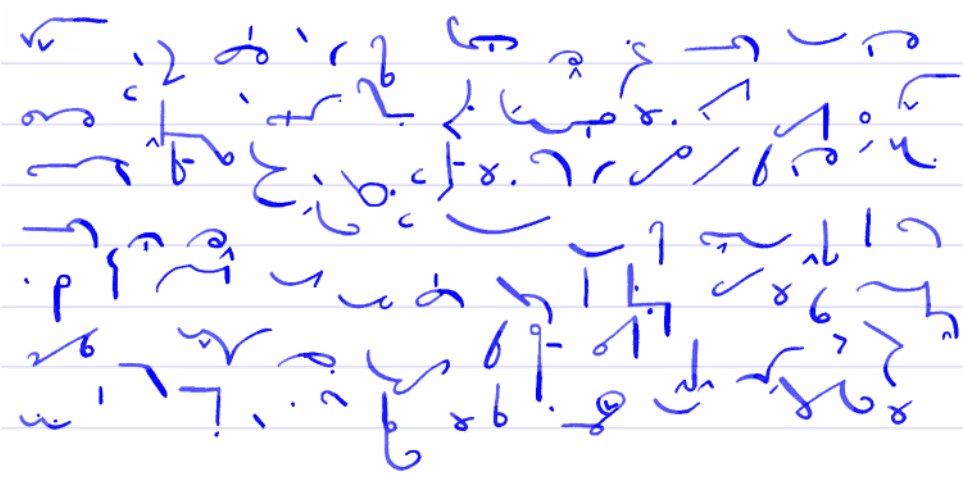


Wood Walk

Back in the woodland we came across a tree that had been split vertically by lightning, one side with normal bark and the other side black and burnt. It was quite a small tree and clearly not the tallest around by any means but somehow the lightning found it to be the best route to earth. In some places were huge fallen trees and I tried to imagine the scene as they came down in a gale, starting with a creaking* and swaying, followed by the

tearing of the roots, smashing of branches and the final booming thump as the massive trunk met the ground, taking with it whatever smaller trees were nearby. An unsafe fallen tree would be quickly sorted out by the rangers but the wood material is always left to decay to encourage the wildlife.

* "creaking" Insert the vowel, as "cracking" would also make sense in this context



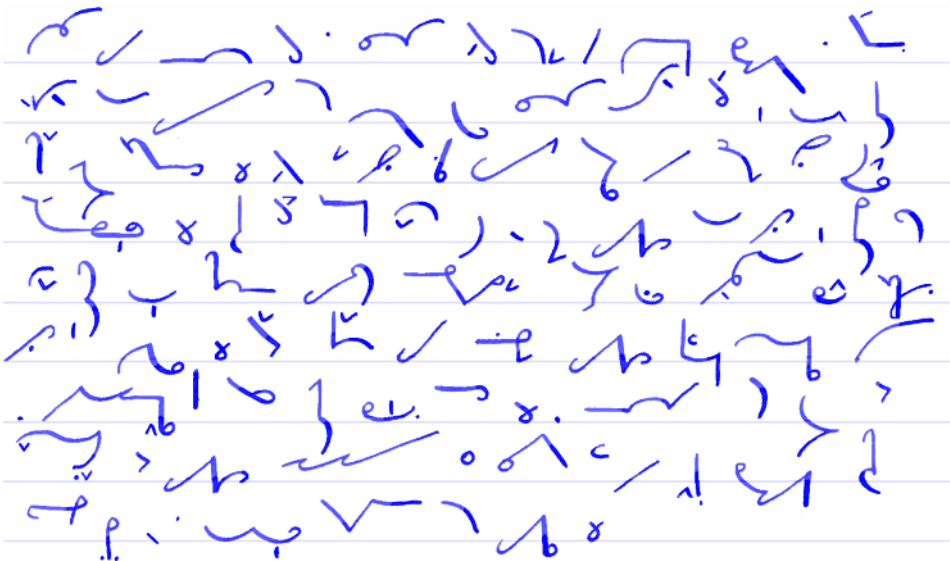
Wood Walk

I like to see the stumps* of old trees, overgrown* mounds completely covered in moss, sometimes with outcrops of curly bracket shaped fungus. The rotted wood is like crumbled toast, falling to pieces when touched. The very old ones are just moss and ivy covered mud mounds, often with another young tree growing out of it, from a seed that had landed in the new stump* before it decayed away. These miniature worlds could be entirely missed if one just

strode ahead down the middle of the path intent on getting to a particular destination. It is an exercise in observation.

* "overgrown" "evergreen" Helpful to put in the vowel, as they are similar and both refer to plants

* "stumps" Insert the vowel, so it is not misread as "stems"



Wood Walk

Lastly* we came upon a small open area which looked as if it would be a boggy hollow in winter or maybe even small shallow ponds but now it was dry and full of bracken. Up on the raised edges, where the paths are, were the last showings of foxgloves. At that point I got my wish to see the woodland in rain but as it was very light there was no dramatic weather experience, only the faint rustling sound of drizzly* rain on leaves. By the time we exited the woodland twenty minutes later the rainclouds had passed and it was sunny again. The camera was full of the minutiae*

of the woodland and we were as happy with our outing as if we had travelled across the city to an unknown park or woods. (1061 words)

* "lastly" Omits the lightly-sounded T

* "drizzly" Insert the last vowel, as "drizzle" would also make sense

* "minutiae" The final diphthong sound comes after the dot sound, therefore it is written separately, and not with a triphone sign



Rest Day

It was supposed to be a rest day. Walking exercise had been done for several days in a row, in parks and to get shopping. All the housework was up to date*, with dust, crumbs, washing up and laundry all sorted. I could* spend a goodly amount of time in the greenhouse with the shorthand books and Ipod*. But I did have one thing* to do that needed a warm dry day like today, which would not take long at all. I wanted to varnish an old wooden clothes horse,* which I had noticed was leaving faint marks on the white items from the original wood stain. A cursory sanding and an application of quick drying varnish solved the problem

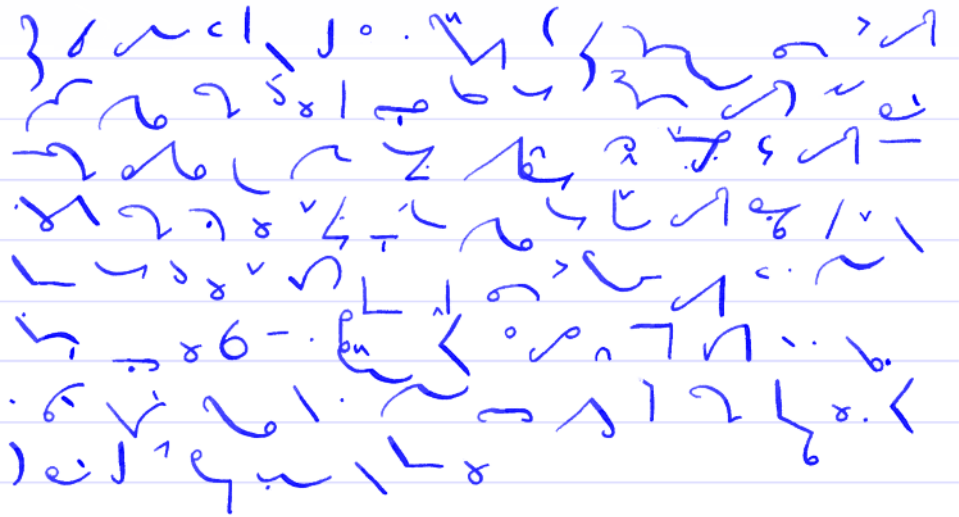
and it did not take long at all, leaving the rest of the day free.

* Omission phrases "up (to) date" "wu(n) thing"

* "I could" Not phrased, so as to distinguish from "I can"

* "Ipod" "Ipad" Always insert the second vowel in this

* "clothes horse" The large circle representing two circles, one being an S and one being the circle of the Hay



Rest Day

There was just one thing* that had to be done as a priority, though, which was removing some of the water lily leaves from the pond. It grows fast in the warm weather and would soon cover the surface if left unchecked, reducing the amount of oxygen that the water can absorb from the air. I checked the cut off leaves for the tiny water snails, which I put back in the pond.

I also took out some of the blanket weed with a long bamboo cane. This is quite a satisfying job, as once you get hold of a piece a slow pull brings up a long green ribbon of it from the depths. The job was soon done and the safety netting put back.

* Omission phrase "wu(n) thing"



Rest Day

Whilst doing all this, I noticed some weeds in the surrounding border, which had to come out before they seeded. A few pulls and the job was done, no need to spend too long on that. There were* a few other weeds behind me that needed to go in the rubbish bucket as well, as there was no point leaving them to take up valuable water from the already dry soil under the apple trees. There were* even one or two* old forget-me-nots left over from spring,

which had been purposely left at the back in order to seed for next year's show. It did not take long at all, just a quick scoot* round pulling up the dried out clumps.

* Omission phrases "there (w)ere" "one (or) two"

* "scoot" Insert the vowel, as "skate " has a similar meaning

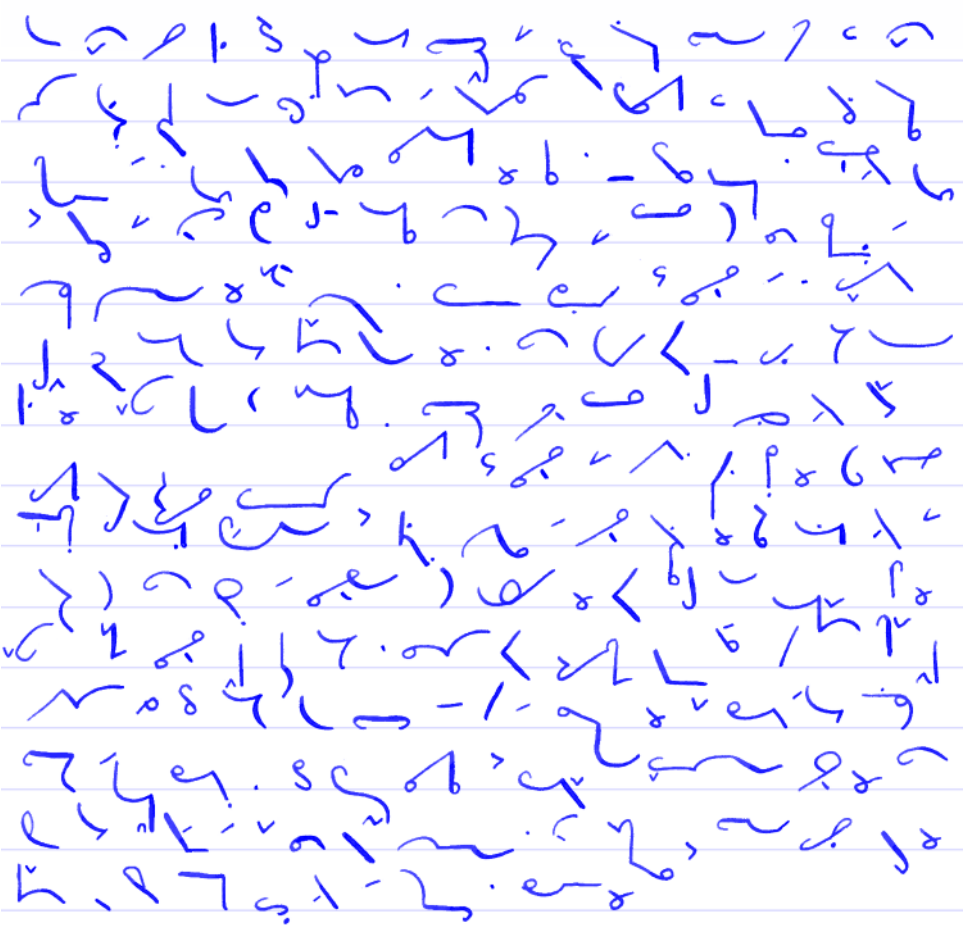


Rest Day

After that I noticed a bramble that had been hiding in the greenery, a long healthy green stem poking its unwelcome head out into the sunlight, with every intention of reaching for the sky and growing as fast as it could. I traced it back to the ground and snipped it off, plus a few more nearby trying the same trick. Brambles are lovely in the wild hedgerows, with flowers for the bees and fruits for the birds, and providing dense cover for safety, but they are not wanted in my garden. Unlike rose thorns, the bramble's tiny hairy barbs always break

off and stick, causing more pain and irritation than is reasonable for their tiny size. I picked up the stems and leaves with the secateurs*, and not with the hands. I had a quick hunt around and found a few more around the garden, snipped them all off and they went directly into the bucket, another quick job done in a jiffy.

* "secateurs" This French vowel is represented by a sideways dash, also used for the German ö sound



Rest Day

For my rest day I planned to sit in the greenhouse on the comfortable padded garden chair with my little folding table in front of me and a parasol overhead, with books, pens, pads, drink and a few bird pellets handy. It is a good place to get a close-up view of the birds on the lawn, as they don't notice me so much*, but the glass was somewhat streaky and misty looking. I thought maybe a quick squirt with the hose and a wipe down would be enough for the time being. A more thorough job could wait until another day. While doing that, I noticed the greenhouse roof glass had been messed up by the wood pigeon but that was quickly sorted

with the hose on the rapid jet setting. Then of course the guttering needed flushing of the debris, leaves and rose petals. All this ended up on the path so more sweeping and hosing was necessary. Job done in no time at all. While I had the hose out it was only a small job to water the big pots which dry out rapidly as the plants in them have grown quite large and spreading. I snipped off the excess growth and continued snipping the spent flower heads of the nearby climbing roses. More stuff for the bucket and I seemed to be making a lot of trips to the garden waste bin. Time to stop, get cleaned up and organise a snack.

* "so much" Includes the M in order to join the phrase

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, representing the first page of a document.

Rest Day

I finally got all my things together for some time in the greenhouse. I spread out the items I would occupy myself with but had to go back indoors for something. It was then I noticed several patches of little yellow buds on the lawn. These were the creeping buttercup that had been growing fast during the recent rainy weather and had decided to put out their flowers, now that it was dry and sunny. There was no point leaving any of them to seed, as my

ultimate intention is to eradicate them completely. Today I just took out the ones with the yellow dots. I spent a while cutting them out of the ground with a little serrated knife. Fortunately if the crown is removed, they have nothing to regrow from. Soon the garden path was littered with buttercup debris, all withering and shrinking in the sun. It did not take long at all, which was good as I had no intention of doing any major gardening today.

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, representing the second page of a document.

Rest Day

At last* I made it to my seat in the greenhouse, and pondered on why it had taken so long to get there. The sun was still shining, the windows were ever so slightly less misty, and, unsurprisingly, it was now mid-afternoon. I did not in the end spend the whole day on shorthand, but I had been doing in the garden what I had always done with the shorthand over the years, pulling out the shorthand weeds before they proliferate and taking care of the shorthand flowers. But I was also doing something that the shorthand writer* should resist at all times and that is to be distracted from the current task by other less pressing ones. Other than looking after the wellbeing of the goldfish, everything else could have waited or maybe saved for

those little breaks that are necessary from time to time*. There is one distraction that cannot be avoided whilst sitting outside and that is the little sparrows hopping about on the grass just in front of me. They always get a pellet or two. They quickly fly away to take it back to the nest, an urgent task of their own from which they never get distracted. (1165 words)

- * "At last" "at least" Always insert the vowel
- * Omission phrase "short(hand) writer"
- * "from time to time" Halving to represent the T of each "time"

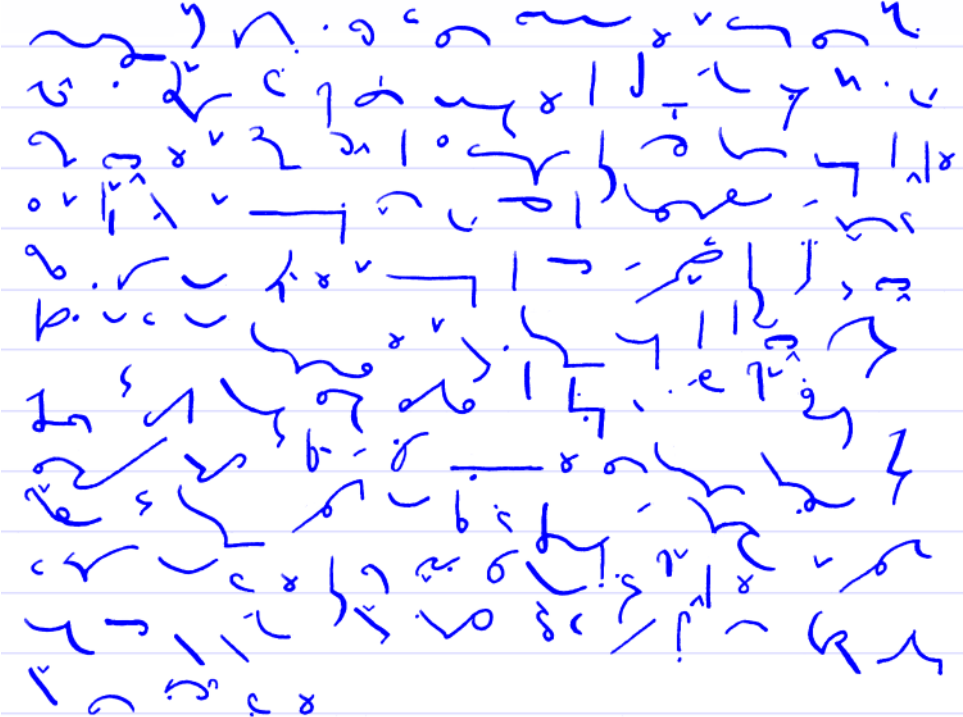


Impossible

I like things well-organised and predictable, comfortable, tidy, arrangements made, projects carried out, and journeys planned, taken and completed. Whilst all this is being done and sorted out, the impossible things don't have to be attempted just yet. They have, very conveniently, to wait until everything else is perfect. I am not tempted to take on any impossibilities for their own sake, there has to be some benefit at the end of it. I remember a few things that turned out to be not so impossible after all, despite all the circumstances telling me otherwise. Some

things are only called impossible because they take a long time, much effort and patience, in other words they are only impossible in the short term, and for the impatient* or pessimistic* person they are likely to remain impossible forever.

- * "impatient" The sound is "shent" so no Shun Hook
- * "pessimistic" "optimistic" These are somewhat similar, so helpful to insert the first vowel

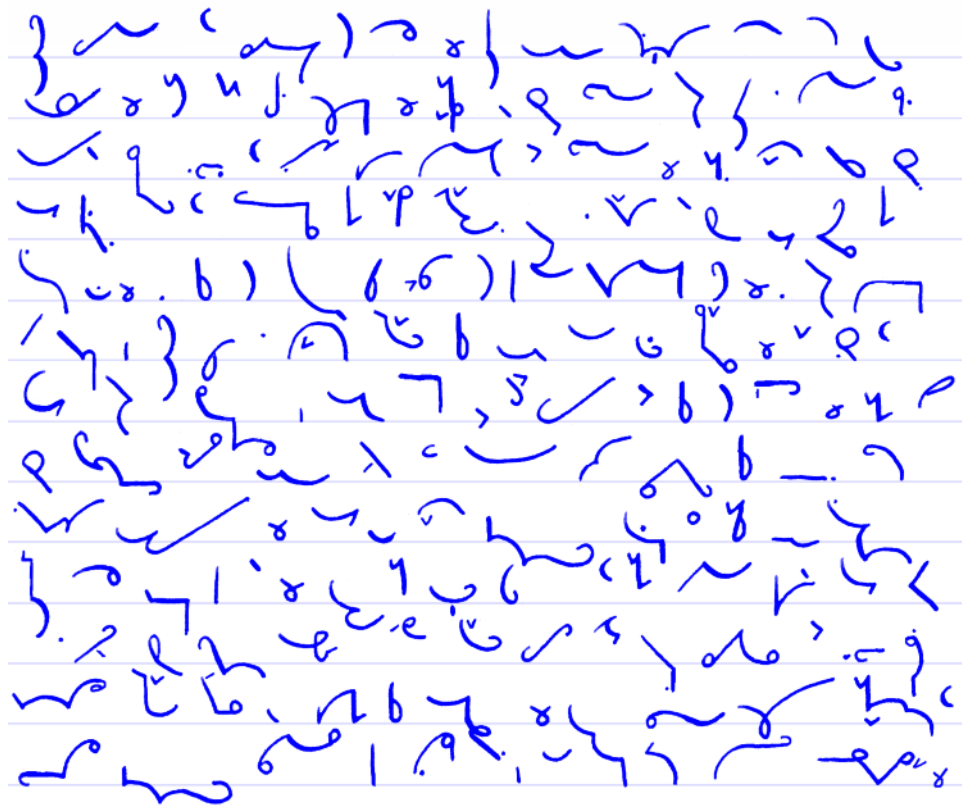


Impossible

Many years ago I was helping a friend with some gardening. I cleared some ivy and found a sizeable flat tree stump* underneath. It had been cut off neatly about a foot from the ground. I worked around it, as clearly it was impossible for me to get it out. As I tidied up, I kicked my foot against it for some reason and to my complete surprise the whole thing shuddered. I kicked it again and realised it was not attached to the ground, at least not with any firmness. I pushed the fork into it at ground level and discovered that the wood beneath the smooth surface had decayed to a soft dry consistency,

somewhere between toast and stale cake. Some firm piercing and gentle prising with the fork resulted in its complete dismantling and removal with hardly any effort. It was very lightweight as well, being completely dried out. I resolved never again to be put off by the appearances of plants that are telling me they will not be shifted by mere human* effort.

- * "human" Special outline, above the line to distinguish it from "humane", following its second vowel, similarly "woman" vs "women"



Impossible

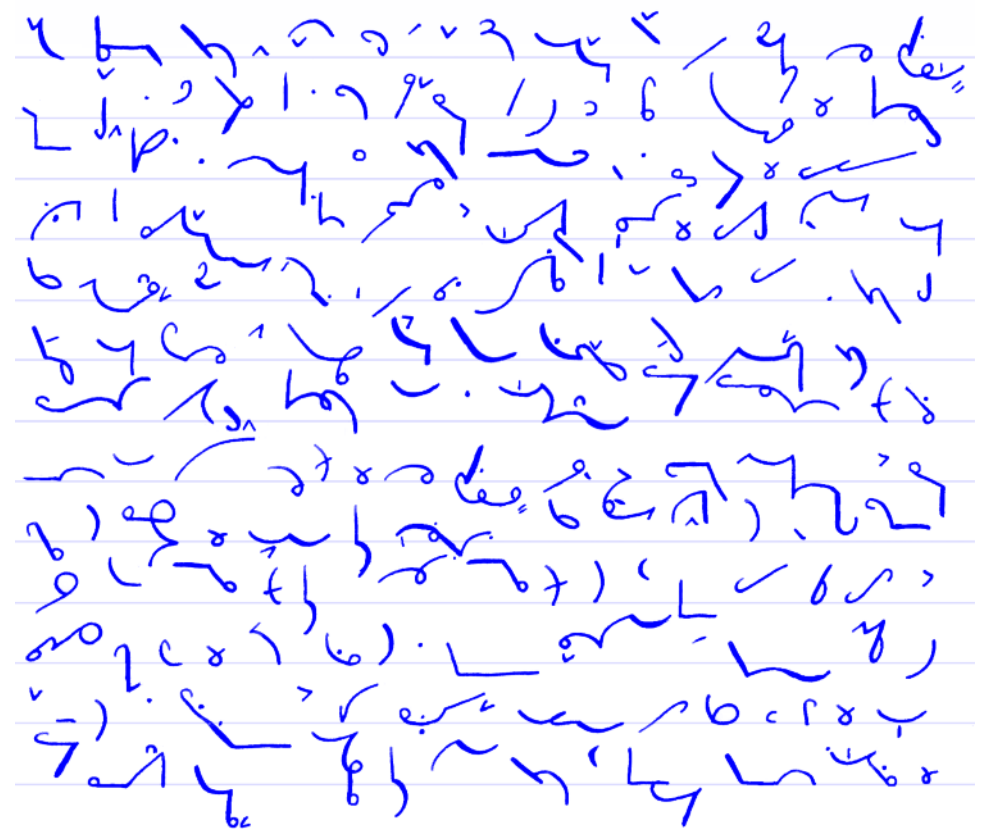
There was one thing* that certainly was impossible. It was nothing remotely important or even necessary. I was about ten years old*. I decided to sweep the garden path, which was a long straight narrow strip of concrete that ran the whole length of the garden. I did my best, sweeping in the debris that collects at the side, and finally pushing a pile of stuff under the shrubs at the far end. The dust was after all just soil, so it belonged* there. The path looked much better but there was still a layer of fine dust, now in faint stripes. I swept that along the path several times, but never got to the point where all the dust was gone. I did the "last sweep" over and over again*, always ending up with another little heap of dust, coming from apparently nowhere. In the end, my determination faded, as I just could not

fathom why it was impossible to get it all. If only I had known then that I had the wrong tool for the job, a rough stiff broom instead of a soft fine one, and that the pitted surface of the concrete consisted of millions of tiny pockets to hold the dust invisibly. Fifty-something years later I admire that girl's determination, as long as it lasted, but not her lack of experience.

* Omission phrases "wu(n) thing" "over (and) over again" The second "over" is reversed, in order to make a good join

* "years old" On its own, "old" is a halved Ld stroke

* "belonged" Stroke D because Ing cannot be halved

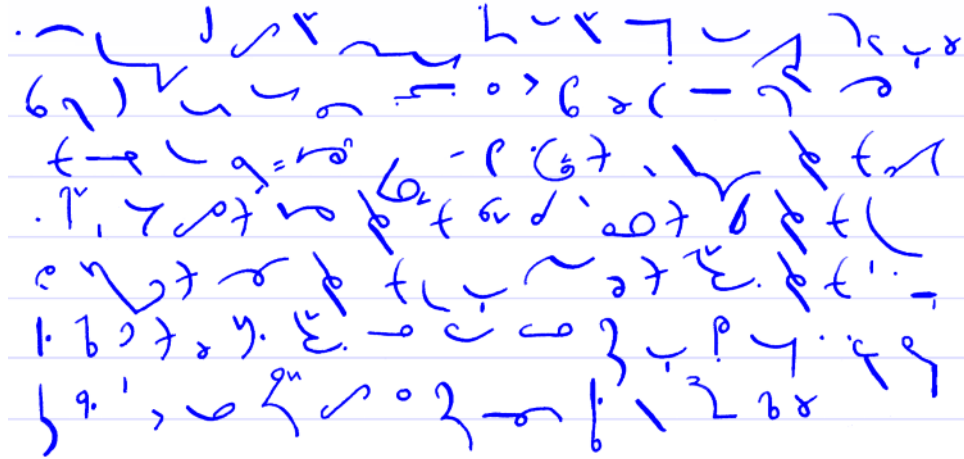


Impossible

I have described before* how my friend and I were invited by our shorthand teacher Miss Jefferson to take down a short passage at a very high speed, which she would tell us afterwards. It must have been at least a minute, as I remember going on to a second page. We were elated at surviving the attempt regardless of the unreadable scrawl. We had been launched into fast and furious shorthand orbit, but our heat shields had not burned away, the paper did not burst into flames and the pencils avoided being vaporised upon re-entry to their normal earthbound atmosphere in an unassuming college classroom (pens came in later years). Miss

Jefferson's ruse to loosen the grip and intimidation of the speed numbers was successful. Knowing it was impossibly fast allowed us to forgive ourselves for gaps (it was mostly gaps) so that took away just one of the hindrances during the effort. Her face was a picture, smiling and beaming and I just wish I could see a playback of the whole scenario, including our own faces when told. No college security videos in those days, it was long before that technology became commonplace.

* June 2014 Too Fast & February 2013 Just Do It

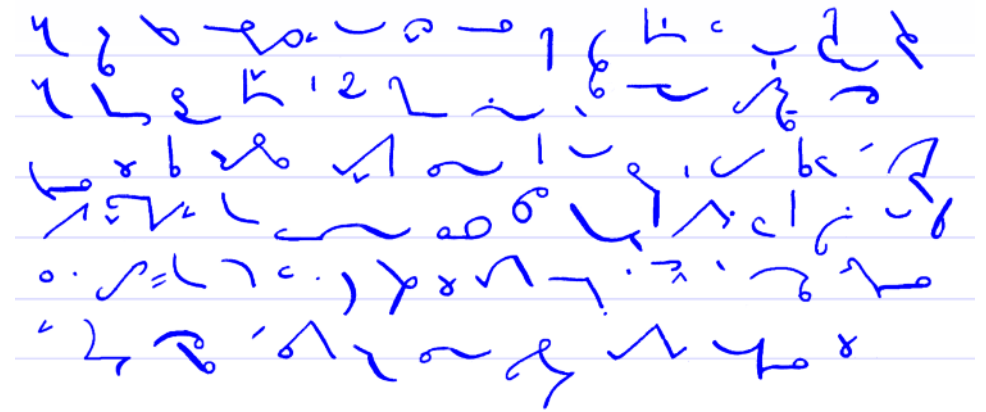


Impossible

An important victory had been won by making the attempt, not by getting any readable or complete note. This number was now in the same category as all the others. They go from impossible (except for super-humans, geniuses and other aliens) to barely possible (worth a try but only once), almost possible (slight chance of success), just possible (after lots of

preparation), mostly possible (if no long words), and finally possible (on a good day and it is short). I say finally, because in our class there was no settling into a comfortable speed, it was straight on to the next higher one, as there were* exam dates to be worked towards.

* Omission phrase "there (w)ere"



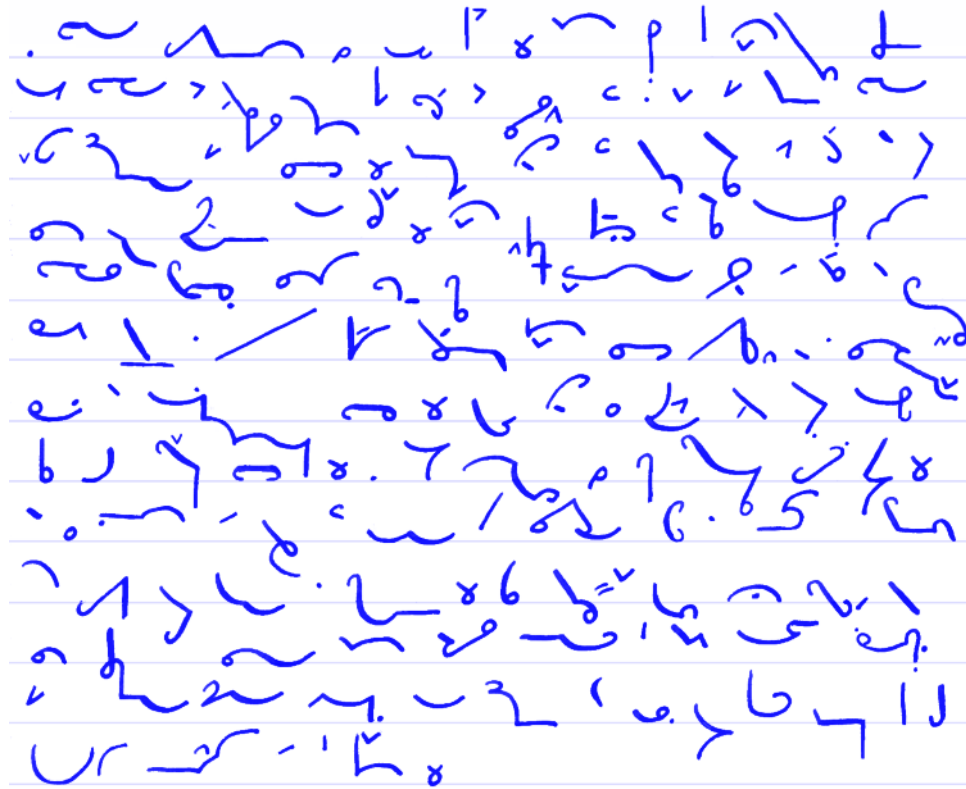
Impossible

I have all these past experiences in mind because, during these months* at home*, with no travelling possible, I have begun spending time on shorthand practice, aiming to conquer one of those* impossible figures. It is always possible* to write something at any speed, but whether it is complete and legible are the criteria for claiming success, as well as being able to repeat the effort at will, not just as a one-off or with an easy passage. I will be

keeping an account of methods and progress on the so-called impossibilities, and hope to have something useful to report in due course. (952 words)

* Omission phrases "at (h)ome" "always poss(ible)"

* "one of those" Insert the vowel, as "those" is out of position, likewise "one of these"



Garden Webcam

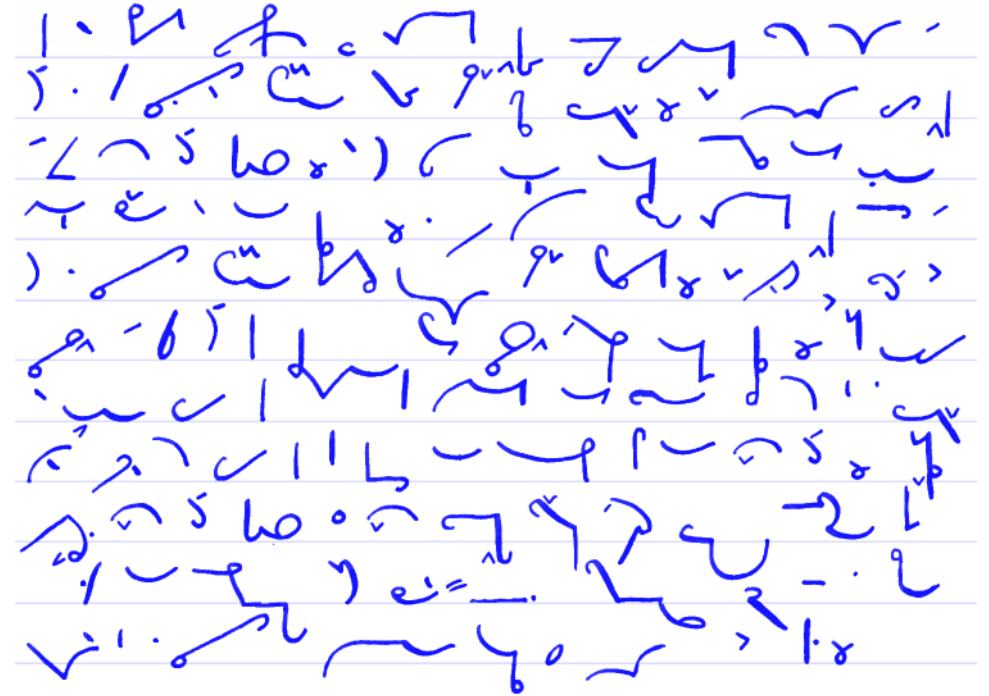
The garden webcam is the new toy. I am sitting at my computer desk in the corner of the upstairs room at the front of the house, with an eye on the back garden, while working on the screen. I can see the lawn with birdbaths, and the pond, all of which seem to have shrunk in size. My outdoor domain with all its interesting little corners, evergreens, small fruit trees, climbing roses and pots of flowers has now become a rather dull postcard* on my screen, reduced to a simplified scene of indeterminate greens. Even the lawn is showing up patchy instead of its usual bright green. The only movement is the tree branches waving gently. All is calm and peaceful, with nothing much happening other than an occasional blackbird or wood

pigeon having a drink. This bird's-eye view may prove to be somewhat distracting, something I am always going on about in regard to* concentrating on the shorthand writing*, and indeed any work that needs full attention to get it done efficiently*, accurately and on time.

* "postcard" Omits the lightly sounded T

* Omission phrases "in (re)gard (to)" "short(hand) writing"

* "efficiently" The contraction includes the "-ly" version, but an L should always be inserted for clarity and ease of reading if necessary



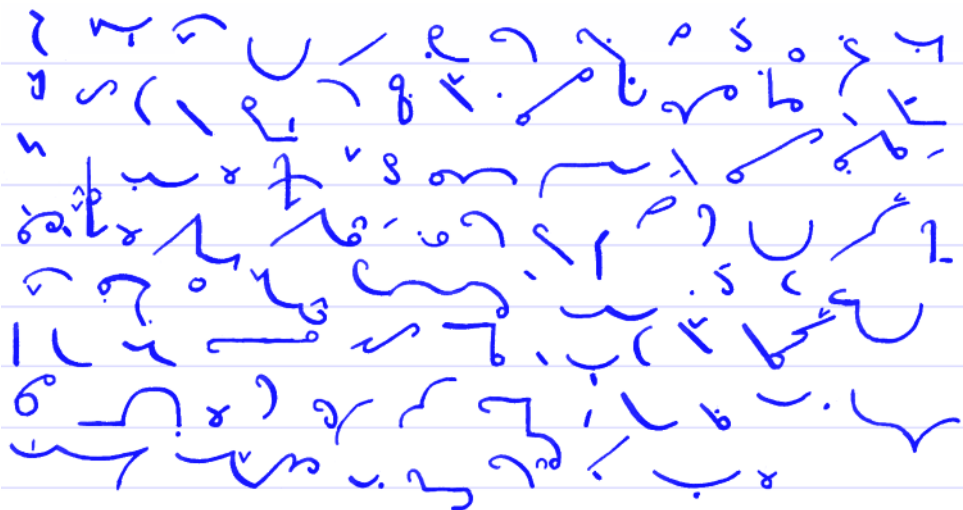
Garden Webcam

It all started yesterday morning when I looked out of the kitchen window very early and saw a large heron* flying above the high trees nearby. I immediately went out and checked my pond defences. All was well, no inadvertent gaps in the netting and no sign of any disturbance. An hour later, I looked out again and saw a heron flying fairly high overhead. I rushed to the front of the house and just saw it disappearing over the houses opposite, into the distance. I had no way of knowing whether it had landed in the garden or on a nearby low roof, or whether it had taken any interest

at all in my pond. I decided to reassess my pond defences, as my crowd of bright orange goldfish, gathering at the edge in expectation* of their soon-coming breakfast, would be quite a strong pull on a heron looking for its first meal of the day.

* "heron" This outline is the same as the doubled "hunter" therefore helpful to insert vowels on its first occurrence

* "expectation" This can also be an optional contraction that omits the T+Shun stroke



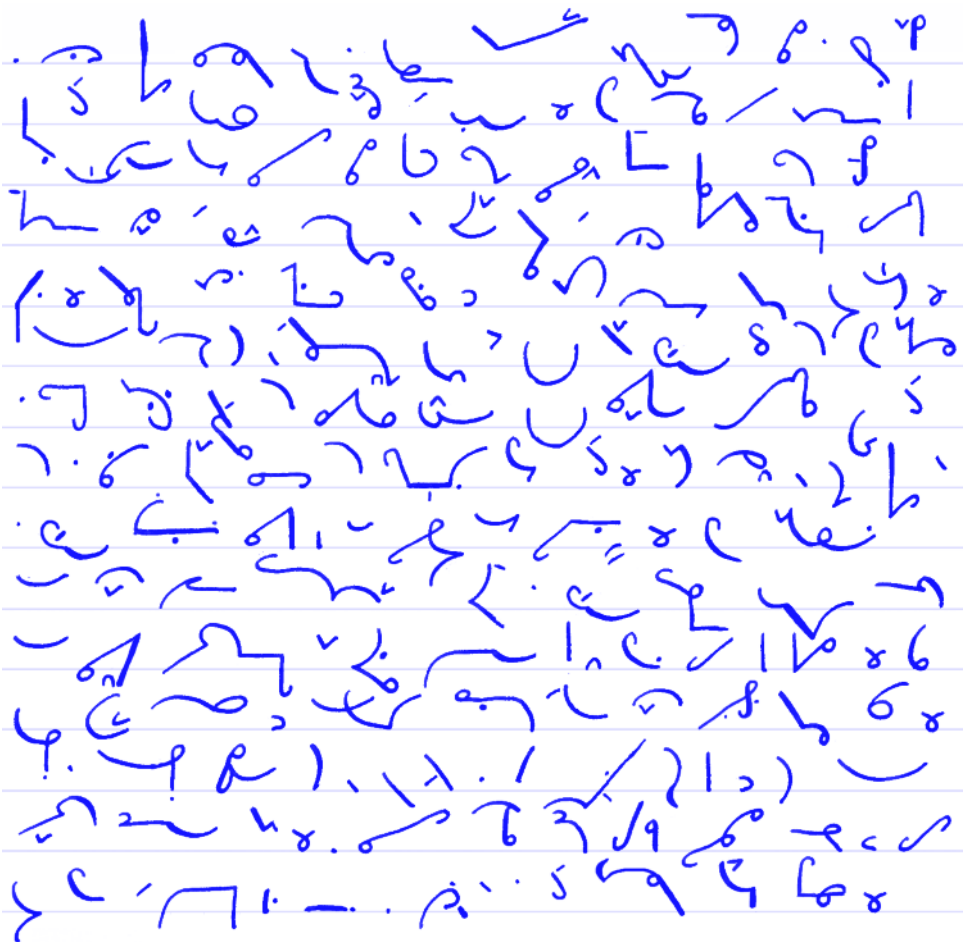
Garden Webcam

Although I know my fish are safe from predation, as the pond is completely netted, I do not want them to be spooked or stressed by a heron's fruitless attempts to poke about outside the netting. During the morning I spent some time* looking up heron habits and solutions. Reading the reviews and comments from people who had lost their fish really drew my sympathy, as I have found over many years* of owning a pond that goldfish do have individual characters, and one gets to know them by behaviour as well as colouring.

They are friendly little creatures who, being pets in a fairly unnatural environment, need protection from raw nature.

* "some time" Halving to represent the T of "time". These are separate words, although phrased, unlike the single word "sometimes".

* "over many years" Ensure the hook is clear, so it does not look like "for many years"

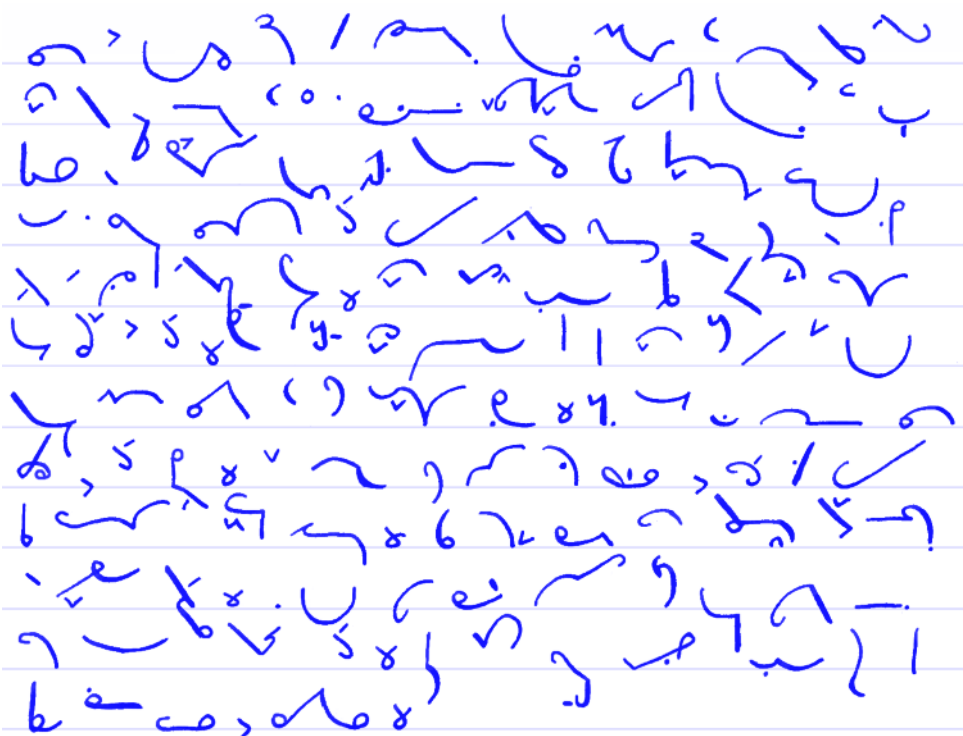


Garden Webcam

The main deterrent seems to be to have a physical barrier to prevent access, such as a steep sided deep pond, fences, wires and netting. Other methods are to make it unwelcoming for the heron, such as attention from the house dog, disturbance from sudden automatic lights and sound, movement of shiny objects, and motion activated water jet. Obstruction of landing and take-off space would also make the bird feel uneasy. Another method was to obscure the view of the fish by floating plants or other items, a curtain of aeration bubbles or surface fountain, fish hiding shelters within the pond, or a sail type

screen or pergola over the pond. I was amused* to see the deterrent of a floating alligator head, but not useful in the UK. However, I have seen in my local aquarium shop a floating plastic football covered in huge reflective eye shapes, looking at you every way it turns. This visiting alien monster would unfortunately scare off my resident birds as well. An interesting suggestion was to put up a large mirror, so that it would see another rival walking about. The heron models were generally considered useless, except when one fell over and looked dead, giving the illusion of a pond that must be avoided at all costs.

* "amused" "amazed"

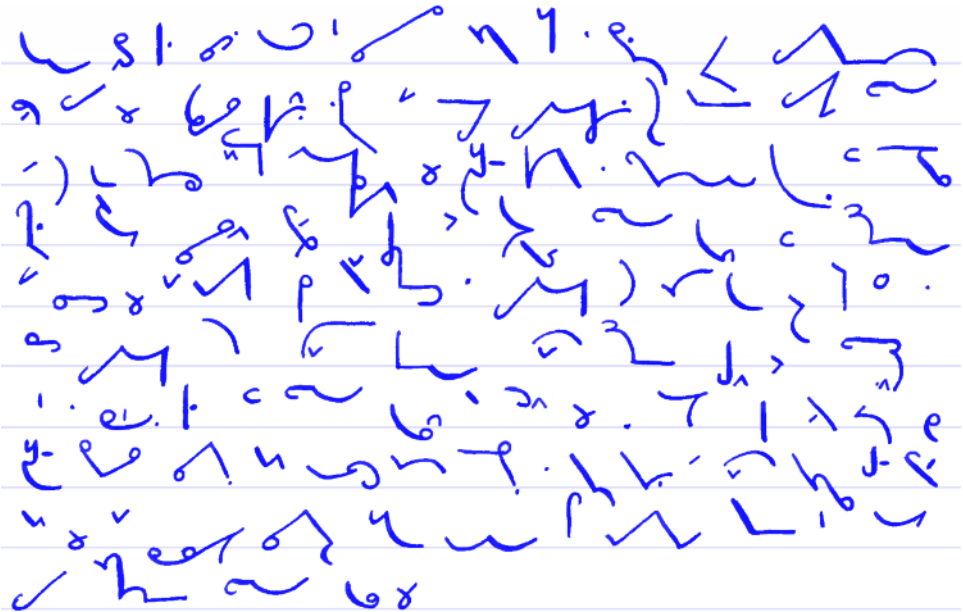


Garden Webcam

Some of the fish ponds were large landscaping features, and I felt that maybe the best option might be to just keep that as a scenic wildlife water feature, with no defences to spoil the view and dent the bank balance, and then admire the goldfish in a separate smaller pond, where robust protection would be easier to set up and less obtrusive overall*. My all round netting does the job very well*, for the size of the pond. I don't mind looking at it, my eyes are on the fish beneath and I am happy that they are entirely safe. I did in the end

make some adjustments to the pond setup. I moved three little air stones to the front edge, where it is normally quiet and clear. This area is now more obscured by the covering of rising bubbles. The fish will soon learn that their food will be coming from another part of the pond. It was also prudent to raise the netting, so that it does not sag close to the surface.

- * "overall" Not using the short form for "all"
- * Omission phrase "very (w)ell"



Garden Webcam

Having spent the day hunting information on herons, I remembered I had a spare cheap webcam stored away. This was duly set up on the kitchen windowsill, so that I can watch the garden and see if it remains quiet and undisturbed. I don't think it will be a permanent feature, with cables draped all over the house, plus the distraction of the availability of the garden view when working on the screen. I already sit by a window, so I will have to think of it as a

second window, or like taking my work down to the greenhouse on a sunny day with garden views all around. The only difference up here is that I don't have sparrows hopping about in front of me expecting a bird pellet, and my papers don't blow about. I sincerely hope that I have nothing at all to report back on in the way of dramatic garden events. (996 words)