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The Use of Shorthand by Women and Girls in Early Modern England

Abstract: Early modern women and girls have been conspicuous by their near absence from English shorthand studies hitherto. This survey's underlying argument is that automatic presumptions of male scribal identity are to be guarded against when it comes to examining anonymous shorthand of the time. It is offered as a starting point towards the further manuscript-centred exploration needed to establish how and why women and girls deployed shorthand in times long before they came to dominate office-centred shorthand in the twentieth century. As well as considering their use of print manuals, it contextualises a range of written examples, from the calligraphic (in the case of a fine presentation manuscript of 1588) to the more cacographic (in exercises penned by an 8-year-old girl in a notebook in 1730), and includes a case study of the shorthand used by Mary Hawker within a book of recipes in the early 1690s. A conclusion points to the necessity for further work in the area to be a collaborative endeavour.

1 Introduction

'Future research needs to continue to investigate the varied handwritten worlds of early modern England that are revealed through material analysis and to situate women in those worlds.'¹ So ran a call nearly two decades ago for more heed to be paid to the physical characteristics of seventeenth-century English women's manuscripts, one made by a co-founder of the Perdita Project which has brought so many of them into prominence. The so-called 'material turn' within early modern literary scholarship has considerably aided the endeavour, anticipating even 'a third wave of early modern marginalia studies' to increase our knowledge of women's reading practices and their ownership of handwritten and printed books.² Yet the overlapping, but far larger, field of early modern shorthand studies remains one in comparative infancy, despite the prominent role shorthand once played in writing cultures.³ Here is a highly significant 'handwritten world',

1 Burke 2007, 1677.

2 Stewart 2019, 264.

3 See e.g. McCay 2021; Underhill forthcoming.

of which we are still in a first wave of study, with relatively little explored beyond isolated manuscripts of some individual users, still less the extent to which women and girls contributed to it.

Recent work on early modern women's literacy and readership has moved away from conceptions of their being isolated and passive, cowed and defined by cultural constraints, to understand them more as 'collaborative agents': 'we see in their bookscapes [...] networked patterns and habits of reading, linking them with family, community, and the world of ideas'.⁴ To this we must add active habits of *writing* too. The account which follows is prompted by a conviction that shorthand was a far from insignificant part of that activity.

2 'Her Booke': Evidence from manuals

Women were using shorthand centuries before it became an important skill for office workers, by which time a presumption of a *female* scribal identity came to be the default for most shorthand-bearing documents – a time within living memory, if recalled by an ever dwindling few.⁵ Until new archaeological evidence emerges, Hapate (before fifth century CE), 'notaria Graeca', a probable (freed) slave, is the first female stenographer for whom we have a named identity.⁶ But women have been almost invisible in traditional 'inventor'-centred and print-based scholarship on early modern English shorthand history, which presents near total male hegemony.⁷ Before the nineteenth century, the sole known exception is Bathsua Reginald, later Makin (1600–1681?) who as a teenager devised or was involved with an 'Index Radiographia', dedicated to Anne of Denmark, queen consort. Next to nothing is known of this 'Invention of Radiography [...] a speedy and short writing wth great facility to be practised in any languag, in far less tyme, than the learning of the two first Secretary le[tte]rs do require'. Some 'MS lines of hers [...] of dots, commas and curves. Dated 1617' were recorded in the late nineteenth century, but if they have survived, their present whereabouts is not known.⁸ All

4 Ezell 2018, 276, 278.

5 For more on shorthand and gender in the rise of women's professional life in secretarial office culture see Davy 1986; Gardey 2001; and Srole 2009.

6 Orlandi 2016, with an image of her memorial tablet.

7 Carlton 1940; Alston 1966.

8 Westby-Gibson 1887, 188.

we have of the 'Index' is a simple diagram adjoining its description on an ornately engraved card plate, showing it to be a rudimentary 'stave' system.⁹

But in a newer, more 'open, multiple and heuristically volatile' model of book history, the privileged (and perhaps too automatically assumed singular) inventor is merely one feature of the shorthand bookscape.¹⁰ By bringing extra-authorial functions such as patronage and marketing more into view, women start to become more visible – even if, to give examples linked to four significant systems, much remains to be established about the role of the printer Mary Simmons (née Symons) (d. 1686/7) in Thomas Shelton's posthumous success; the significance of Mary Rich (née Boyle), countess of Warwick (1625–1678) as patron to Jeremiah Rich; or, in the next century, the labours of female Byroms and Gurneys in informing and promulgating their better-known relatives' products. Besides, the market for these manuals and for shorthand tuition was hardly a male preserve.

If it was to the 'Sager sort of Men' that the stationer Thomas Heath looked for encouraging shorthand's wider flourishing, when it came to a new manual of his system he hoped 'by little Industry a Man, or Youth, yea Women and Children may (if but able to Read) in a short time need no further help'.¹¹ Simon West, 'professor' of shorthand, observed that the burden on the memory of arbitrary symbols in rival manuals meant that 'not one man or woman of many attain unto it', suggesting that he found nothing unusual about female use of shorthand (and ready abandonment of it) in the 1640s.¹² The better-known Theophilus Metcalfe claimed that his *Short-Writing* allowed the recording of 'any Sermons or Speech being treatably spoken, word for word, as many hundred men, and women, in this City of London, which have learned onely by the booke can worthily manifest'. Compositorial updating at some stage between 1645 and 1652 adjusted this to 'as many hundred Men and Women, [...] Which have learned onely by the Booke, worthily manifest'.¹³ Deliberated or not, that act of repunctuating makes the fact of women's stenography no longer parenthetical and ancillary, nor unusual; rather, it is just in the normal course of things.

9 Reginalda [1616?], surviving in William J. Carlton's collection, London, Senate House Library, [C.S.C.] 1615 [Reginald] SR (Box 3). It was very likely connected with a method taught at her father Henry's grammar school in London for taking sermon notes, bringing the young Reginald, better known for publications under her married name, into contact with a wider intellectual world of educational reform: see Malcolm and Stedall 2005, 37–38. See also Alston 1966, 5; Teague 1998, 35–38; Pal 2017, 183–184.

10 Pender and Smith 2014, 3.

11 Heath 1664, 5.

12 West 1647, sig. A4^r.

13 Metcalfe 1645/1652, 6 (i.e. sigs A3^r/A2^r).

The idea of women learning shorthand became more embedded in its marketing by the turn of the century. In the 1690s, William Mason taught ‘All young Gentlemen, or Ladies that desire to Learn the most Exact and Shortest *Shorthand* ever before Invented [...] on Reasonable Terms’ at his London writing-school, as well as at ‘their own Habitations’.¹⁴ Appropriating Metcalfe’s alphabet at the same time as claiming the mantle of stenographic prominence from Mason in the 1720s, the combative shorthand ‘master’ James Weston made it clear from the outset of a protracted press campaign that women were amongst his clientele. He recycled his promotional copy on the very title page of his revamped *New Method* of 1746, claiming that ‘any Gentleman, or Lady may Learn the art perfectly by this Book alone’.¹⁵ A simultaneous campaign for the ‘anodyne necklace’ (a teething ring), one probably aimed more at women than men, became linked with the shorthand inventor and teacher Francis Tanner, who seems to have written copy for spin-off pamphlets distributed with it as a purchase incentive. Reworked versions of Tanner’s 1712 *Method* were provided gratis to those who bought his nostrums, and an abridgement was dispensed to general enquirers. In the early 1750s a new promoter of the necklace revived this shorthand incentive:

This PRETTY ART, which is so highly Usefull, for | GENTLEMEN AND LADIES | MEMORANDUM BOOKS | LADIES, Will PRESENTLY Learn it, It being made Here on Purpose, so Particularly EASY for THEM to Learn, for *Their* Use, and very Useful They will Daily Find it.¹⁶

Finely-dressed (though by the 1740s hardly à la mode) women can be glimpsed in two of the plates by John Cole within Weston’s manuals, illustrating stenographers at work in law court and church settings, but those women are mere spectators to the acts of writing, outnumbered by the men around them. By contrast, the less ornate frontispiece of the manual of one of Weston’s competitors, Aulay Macaulay’s *Polygraphy* (1747), makes the marketing of shorthand to women central. In this engraving, a woman in a congregation takes notes as the preacher delivers his sermon. A man seated near her does the same, while a younger man gazes over her shoulder to inspect her notebook.

¹⁴ Mason 1693.

¹⁵ Weston 1746, title page. Title pages were sometimes distributed in advance or displayed separately as advertisements.

¹⁶ Doherty 1992, 79, quoting *The Penny London Post*, 9–11 January 1751.



Fig. 1: Sermon-taking in church, frontispiece to Aulay Macaulay, *Polygraphy* (1747); author's collection.

Rather than a depiction of stenographic rivalry, we might see this as a scene of collaborative transcription in action.¹⁷ That using shorthand might facilitate more secretive, secular collaborations is hinted at in Macaulay's later advertising: by using *Polygraphy* 'Gentlemen and Ladies may, in the size of a Card, communicate their thoughts to each other in a very extensive Manner'.¹⁸

Examining published manuals is not to stray unduly from a manuscript studies focus. The shorthand characters within both the main body text and illustrative tables of a number of published systems of the era were often painstakingly supplied in pen rather than by engraving or woodblock, a practice persisting long into the eighteenth century. It rendered manuals in effect letterpress-manuscript hybrids; any subsequent annotation is a further dimension of the manuscriptal, with the published print book functioning as substrate. But what of their actual use? Can we look to them as sites of evidence of shorthand's take-up by women? Ownership marks certainly seem one source of evidence of female interest, even if it is impossible to establish much, if anything, about a writer's identity beyond her name, when spelled out. By themselves, however, they seldom prove that a manual was actually studied by those owners. Even when accompanied by underlinings, marginalia, or scribbles that indicate some degree of learner engagement, we should not assume that these annotations belong to the same hand as the signatory. Unless connected to a reasonable amount of longhand, such signs of active readership, especially when in lead rather than ink, can seldom be linked so conclusively. Furthermore, in the course of its working life a manual might pass through several owners' hands, male and female, in and outside the family. Take the example of one Marie Blackbeard's copy of a 1645 imprint of Shelton's *Tachygraphy*: her inscription bears a date of 1658, so she probably acquired it second-hand or from old bookseller's stock; a marginal annotation dated 1688 shows it subsequently belonged to one Ralph Dixson. We cannot be confident in attributing its assorted traces of learner practice to either, and the presence of a '{Thomas Straker grocer}', in beginner's unconnected tachygraphy on another page, only adds to the mix.¹⁹ Here Blackbeard and Dixson clearly indicate their respective ownerships, but in other cases a name on its own within a book may not actually do that, given the widespread practice of utilising blank areas in books for pen trials and doodles by their multiple handlers, often down the gen-

¹⁷ It was made a point of pride and reliability when published sermons claimed to be derived from a comparison and conflation of multiple shorthand transcriptions.

¹⁸ Macaulay 1756a, 4. Cf. Macaulay 1756b, XXII.

¹⁹ London, Senate House Library, Graveley 20. My transcriptions from shorthand in this article are presented in {angled braces}.

erations.²⁰ The ‘Fany James’ in a copy of one slightly earlier *Tachygraphy* imprint may have had absolutely nothing to do with the practice annotations, or indeed the book.²¹ On the rear endpaper of another copy, below scrawled practice of the system, the inscription of ‘Mary Holdernes’ is clearly in the same neat print-hand as an annotation on its title page saying the system was endorsed ‘Espesially by Cambridge’.²² I once assumed that here was an intriguing instance of a woman’s recognition of seventeenth-century university usage of shorthand (by men). But consideration of a similarly neat print-hand inscription appearing in a later manual now makes me reticent about making such a claim in the absence of clear evidence of Holdernes’s hand elsewhere. The ‘Hepzibah Hervey | Underbarrow | 8 ber 1784’ on the front endpaper of a copy of Thomas Hervey’s *The Writer’s Time Redeemed and Speaker’s Words Recalled* (1784), turns out not to have been written in the hand of Hervey’s daughter Hepzibah (b. 1771) herself, as might be assumed from the manual alone, but by one Thomas Lowry of Underbarrow, where the Herveys lived, on the basis of evidence of the same hand used in separate manuscript dictionaries of this complex system.²³ Mary’s name might similarly have been written by someone else. Rather than a signature of ownership, the appearance of ‘Lidia Bouden’ twice inside a 1660 copy of Metcalfe’s *Short-Writing* might constitute nothing more than a daydreaming linking of first name (written a third time as ‘Lydia’) with another’s surname.²⁴ Even where a clear female ownership marking does survive, it tells us little in itself about the use of shorthand beyond

20 Perceptions of such annotations as annoying, embarrassing or even compromising defacements must have caused the destruction of many manuals.

21 London, Senate House Library, C.S.C. 1642 [Shelton] (10) Copy 1 (*pace* the current cataloguing as ‘Jany Tomes’).

22 London, Senate House Library, C.S.C. 1642 [Shelton] (1). Her identity has not been established, but there are Lincolnshire baptism records for this name in 1624 and 1635. It seems likely she was connected with or knew one William Hickman whose name also appears twice.

23 Cambridge, author’s collection (acquired from John Drury Rare Books in 2012 [stock no. 23569]). The extent to which Hepzibah herself was involved in scribal promulgation of her father’s system needs further investigation.

24 London, British Library, 1043.b.53, on reverse of engraved blank facing p. 21. Cf. Puxley 2022, responding to the discovery (Hodgkinson and Barret 2022) of eighth-century scratchings of the name ‘Eadburg’. The positioning – and handwriting – in the Bouden instance is at a clear remove from the female ownership inscriptions shown in e.g. Pearson 2021, 44–50. Pearson 2021, 49 shows a coded writing technique by Joyce Swingfield c. 1654. This strongly resembles one used in correspondence c. 1668 by Mary Butler (née Stuart), countess of Arran (1651–1668): Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.b.333 (29). Such cases should not be seen as shorthand, but they are similarly relevant to further study of manuscript evidence of early modern women’s secret writing practices.

the rudimentary stage: Jane Sampson's ornately flourished announcement in her copy of a third edition of Nathaniell Stringer's *Rich Redivivus* that she 'Began The 13th 9^{br} 1689'²⁵ implies she was a student with worthy intentions to proceed. But whether she went on to deploy the system after working through 'Her Booke' we do not (yet) know.

A census of surviving early modern manuals recording such annotations is still a desideratum, and when we have it more will emerge than the examples noticed above.²⁶ But any insight into usage that a census affords will remain inevitably limited, given the low survival rates of all manner of publications known to be highly popular in the early hand press period. As *manuals* – publications designed for regular handling – shorthand books were especially vulnerable, with many 'literally thumbed out of existence'.²⁷ Fundamental methodological problems besetting provenance-based work are raised by the fact that many (most?) people never wrote in books they owned. And in many cases where they did, subsequent ruthless removal of boards, ploughing of pages, and replacement of endpapers in the course of rebinding will have destroyed much of the evidence.²⁸

3 'Let [...] your girle learne Short-hand': Some pious practices

One reason for acquiring a manual was to become more skilled in taking sermon notes. A 1641 report by Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) has become a *locus classicus* on the popularity in England of sermon-taking by 'Juvenum & Virorum bona pars' ('a good part of the youngsters and men') assisted by '*Tachygraphiae ars, quam ille Steganographiam vocant*' ('the art of tachygraphy, which they call steganography'). It seems worthy of remark that in his Latin the 'youngsters' who

25 New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 2004 544 (not handled); inscription digitised at <<https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2011367>>. One 'A.G.', who came to own this copy in 1721, emulated Sampson's inscription ('began y^e') but did not insert a date thereafter, perhaps an indication of an intention to learn never put into practice.

26 Hence McCay forthcoming is keenly awaited.

27 Carlton 1948, 408. On survival rates cf. Barnard 1999 and Farmer 2016.

28 Cf. McElligott 2019. On women's book ownership and provenance evidence see also Hackel 2005, 138–141, 204; Pearson 2021, 35–66. See Satterley 2023 on a copy of Sidney's *Arcadia* (London, Middle Temple Library, shelf L[C]) with an interesting page busy with pen trials, multiple female and male names, and John Willis's shorthand alphabet. It is conceivable, but not readily provable, that the latter was penned by – or for – one Dorothy Greaves in the 1650s.

used it to do so are not of a specified gender.²⁹ Better known for her manuscript 'My Booke of Rembraunce', Elizabeth Isham (1607/8–1654) recorded in rough personal memoranda that she 'proposed to take more heed to remember sermons' in 1639, and the following year she began 'to wrigh[t] what I could at Church of the sermon in my [tablets?]' and so since and to writ it better out the weeke after'. Three years after Comenius's comment she mentions 'r[?] B[ook?] of Characters', conceivably a manual acquired to enhance her practice.³⁰ Isham's shorthand can be glimpsed in an annotation by her to a letter the same year, and more extensively, if intermittently, in the course of devotional and penitential notes she made around the same time. Shorthand appears to have been used here for convenience of speed and space-saving, rather than for any added secrecy it might have afforded.³¹

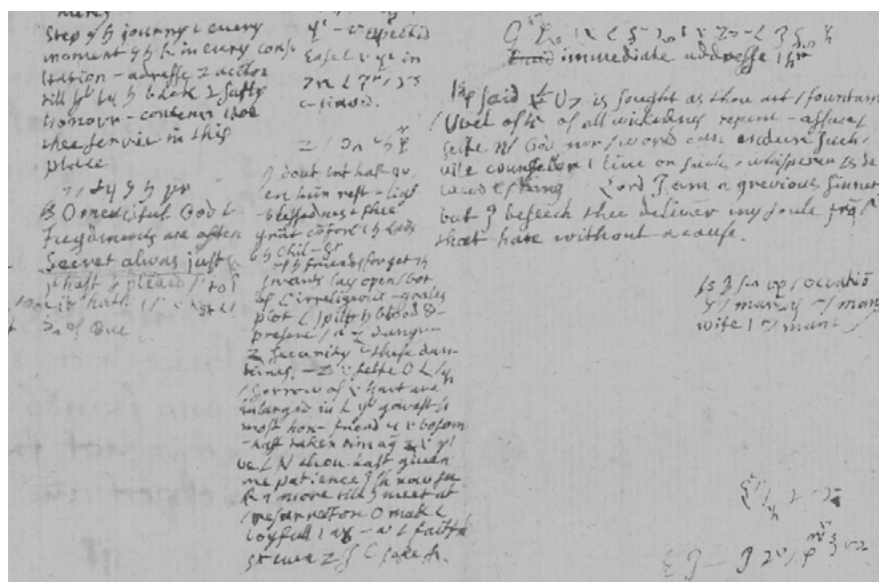


Fig. 2: Devotional note-taking by Elizabeth Isham (c. 1644–), Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage, IC/249/2, detail; by permission of Northamptonshire Archives Service.

²⁹ Comenius 1641, sig. A2^r (italic/Roman reversed). The inclusion of Comenian material in Latin editions of Shelton's *Tachygraphy* published in 1660 and 1671 is highly significant.

³⁰ Quotations are as presented in Millman 2007.

³¹ Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage, IC/4336 and IC/249.

A reference to ‘great Ladies’³² who used shorthand in church in the early 1640s might function partly as sarcasm at youthful insubordination just as much as it gestures to the higher status background of the women in question. Whatever the case, it is one against which we might read the politician Sir Ralph Verney’s injunction in a letter to the father of Ann Denton (later Nicholas) (1641–1700):

Let not your girle learne [...] Short hand [...] the easinesse [...] may be a prejudice to her; for the pride of taking Sermon noates, hath made multitudes of woeman most unfortunate.

Verney’s sexism is all the more pronounced in light of his family having around this time acquired ‘1 Shelton in blew paper to teach y^e boyes to write short hand’, the boys in question being Nancy’s cousins, destined for legal training.³³ The date of Verney’s letter is unclear, but Nancy, his god-daughter, seems to have been 9 or 10 at the time. The idea of learning shorthand at such a young age was not unknown: Katherine Fowler (later Philips) (1631–1664), famed as the ‘matchless Orinda’, was said to have been ‘very religiously devoted when she was young ^little^, and tooke Sermons verbatim when she was but ten yeares old’.³⁴ Compounding Verney’s scripturally-justified patriarchalism – ‘Had St. Paul lived in our Times [...] hee would have fixt a *Shame* upon our woemen for writing (as well as for their speaking) in the Church’ – were a raft of religio-political outlooks and prejudices lasting long after civil war sectarianism.³⁵ It is fear of nonconforming factionalism that underpins Sir Roger L’Estrange’s depiction of sanctimonious ‘Revelation-girle’ Peggy, ‘[a] *Shorthand-Book* still at her *Girdle*, and a *Crumms of Comfort* at her *Bed’s Head*’.³⁶ His mocking prose was turned to verse by a High Church Tory the following decade in ridicule of ‘The Female Hypocrite: or a Girl for the Times’: ‘A Friday-Face for ev’ry Day she wore, | A Short-Hand Book still at her Girdle bore’.³⁷ Girdle books were (usually) small manuscripts attached by a chain to the waist, and if we take them as more utilitarian (e.g. notebooks or tablets) than ornamental (e.g. a jewelled Book of Hours) then ‘Peggy’ is a threat to misogynists. Her book shows she is a writer, every bit as much as a reader, one with the

32 Quoted in McCay 2021, 32, n. 74, also citing the hostility of ‘water poet’ John Taylor.

33 Quoted in Verney 1894, 72, 69 (I have not been successful in tracing the originals in the Verney papers at Claydon House, Buckinghamshire). Having close kin studying at an Inn of Court would likely have exposed the women in the family to shorthand, as well. Isham’s family had strong links to the legal world. The web of personal connections linking the Denton family, the Ishams, and the Reginalds might not be irrelevant.

34 Aubrey 2015, vol. 1, 602.

35 Quoted in Verney 1894, 72.

36 L’Estrange 1699, 87.

37 Pittis 1708, 21. Cf. the bawd Mother Griffin’s sarcasm in Bullock 1715, 14.

power of being able to capture men's words.³⁸ Alternatively, should we imagine Peggy's 'Short-Hand Book' more as an *objet de vertu*, the couplet furnishes a context for thinking about some of the calligraphed manuscripts discussed below, with Peggy ostentatiously displaying the fruit of her writing talents.

Two Whig commentators were more sympathetic to the stenography used by actual 'great Ladies' of the time. Anne Greville (later Hoby, née Dodington) (1642–1691) was praised for having 'used her short-hand in taking the edifying Parts of Sermons, which she went over in private afterwards with her Children'.³⁹ The skill ran in the family: her granddaughter Elizabeth North (née Greville) (1669–1699)

having the advantage of a Tenacious Memory [...] could easily Command, not only the general Heads, but likewise all the material Passages in a *Sermon*, which she committed to Short-Hand before Dinner, and afterwards digested more Regularly, in order to ruminate on them the succeeding Week.⁴⁰

These references highlight that shorthand sermon-taking is not to be equated with verbatim transcription, and furthermore that North's stenography was not conducted at the same time as actual sermon delivery. They appear within eulogies of female piety, in which shorthand, a tool for greater spiritual good, is used for privacy, as distinct from secrecy.

Shorthand occurred in other 'interior' forms of women's religious writing too, in manuscripts long vanished. Started the year before she died, the '*pondering and meditation*' of Mary Bewley (d. 1653) 'being in short-hand writing can hardly be read, some of the Characters being of her own invention'. It was not just those materials which her shorthand rendered elusive: 'sundry other Manuscripts she hath left, which could they be read, might be proposed as a spurre to Gentlewomen, how to improve their much spare time'.⁴¹ As Sara Heller Mendelson observes, 'there is no knowing how many female diaries may be lost to us because family members were unable to break the code', citing the example of Elizabeth Lawrence (later Lloyd, then Bury) (1644–1720), who started a spiritual diary in shorthand aged 20.⁴² According to her second husband, she 'conceal'd her Accounts in *Short Hand*, which cannot be recovered by me, nor, I believe, by any other, be-

³⁸ Cf. Steele 1712, 286 on reactions to the 'Readiness in Writing' by 'the *Phantom*' at church. On girdle books see Smith 2017.

³⁹ Burnet 1691, 24.

⁴⁰ Horneck 1699, 19–20.

⁴¹ Reynolds 1659, 9.

⁴² Mendelson 1985, 183–184. Mendelson also mentions the example of Sarah Henry (later Savage) (1664–1745) whose lack of ability to write shorthand, and hence keep material private, discouraged her for a while from keeping a spiritual diary.

cause of many peculiar Characters and Abbreviations of her own'.⁴³ Her wide-ranging learning and accomplishments were acquired largely through self-tuition, but in the case of shorthand may very well link to her family's clerical and dissenting connections. Similar contacts likely led to early acquaintance with shorthand by her contemporary Elizabeth Dunton (née Annesley) (d. 1697), who requested her manuscript journals be 'burnt, though [...] much of what she writ was in a *Short-hand* of her own Invention'.⁴⁴ It is at least conceivable that the 'invention' was connected with the still undeciphered shorthand symbols in manuscript meditations by her younger sister Susanna Annesley (later Wesley) (1669–1742), subsequently famed as mother to two founders of Methodism.⁴⁵ At the end of the century, another Methodist figure, Hannah Kilham (née Spurr) (1774–1832) missionary, linguist and anti-slavery campaigner, deployed a 'a short-hand of her own' to record 'thoughts and feelings'. But without the 'loose papers' on which she did so, we cannot know what she removed, embellished, or rewrote during her subsequent transcription of this shorthand into longhand. This process was in turn exacerbated by her stepdaughter's editorial mediation in transforming that longhand into print.⁴⁶

These examples of disappearance (and destruction) highlight fundamental obstacles for evidence-gathering within shorthand studies. Fortunately we have more in the way of surviving evidence for the phenomenon of another type of religious manuscript of which some women were active makers: testaments, psalters, and prayer books copied into shorthand. These belonged to a calligraphic tradition sometimes used as a promotional tool by system-makers, and one influencing and influenced by engraved shorthand psalms and Bibles published in the second half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth.⁴⁷ This still under-investigated specialist category within devotional manuscriptology can be broadened to embrace the likes of hymn collections transcribed in shorthand in the eighteenth century and beyond. While their degree of calligraphic, and sometimes micrographic, accomplishment varies widely, such manuscripts are achievements of sustained, meticulous acts of piety, and it is easy to understand why some came to be preserved in bindings that were above standard quality.

⁴³ Bury 1720, 11.

⁴⁴ Rogers 1697, sig. e5^r (italic/Roman reversed).

⁴⁵ Wallace 1997, 320, 323, 331, 353 (and respectively 333, n. 2, 335, n. 24, 337, n. 72, 362, n. 108). Shorthand use was sometimes inter-generational in clerical families of the era; it is tempting to speculate that as well as a spiritual influence, she exerted a stenographic one on her sons, as well as influencing the short-writing of her daughter Kezia Wesley (1709–1741); see Underhill 2015, 30.

⁴⁶ Biller 1837, 29.

⁴⁷ For a little more on this see Underhill 2013, 46–48.

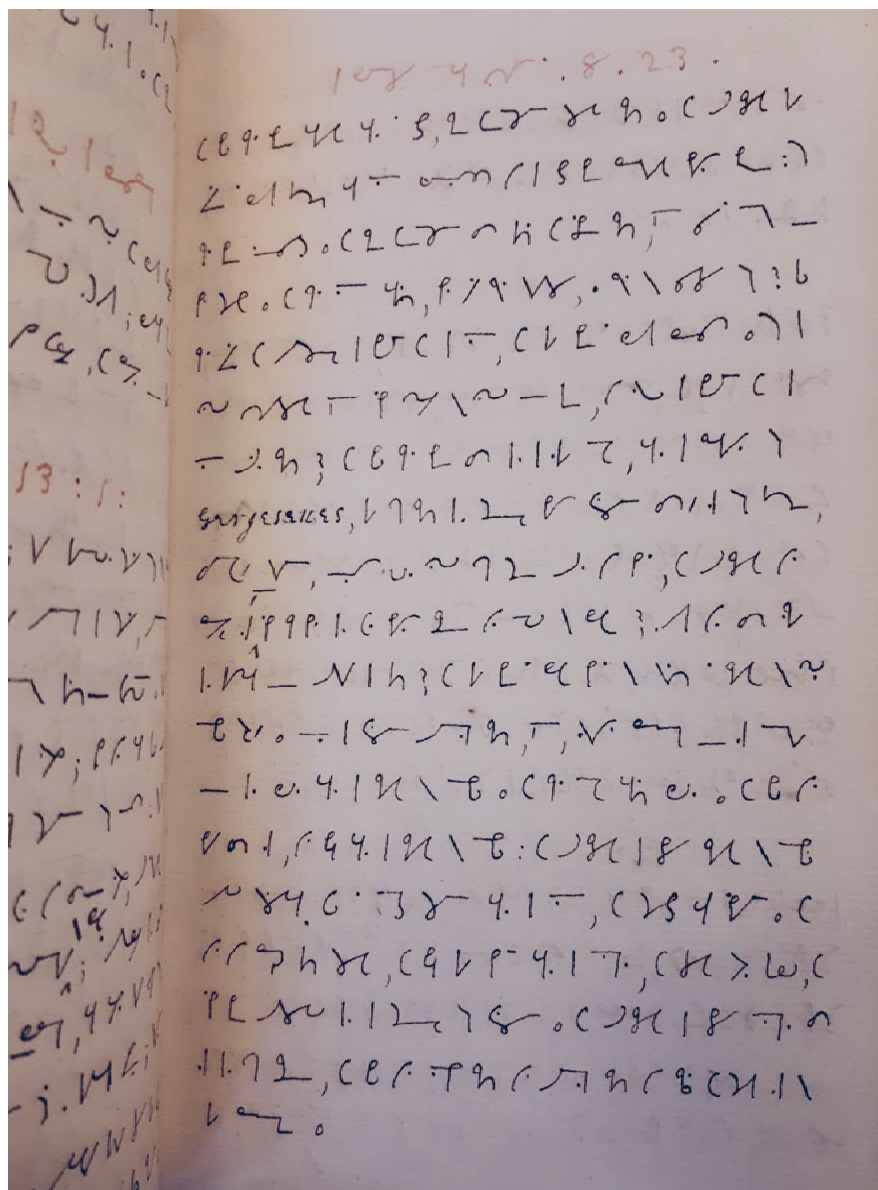


Fig. 3: The gospel for the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, transcribed by Isabella Aspen (c. 1755), London, Senate House Library, Carlton 11/5; by permission.

One example by a woman is a never-finished book of devotional content, scribed in black and red ink using Addy's method (which helps to date it to probably the early eighteenth century); her identity emerges only in a marginal longhand inscription 'Elizabeth Hitchcock her Hand'.⁴⁸ That Hitchcock (as yet unidentified) had planned to write more than she did here is shown by the continuation of her rubricated margins on subsequent pages that are otherwise blank. A fine and more accomplished example is a pair of Books of Common Prayer transcribed by Isabella Aspin (née L'Estrange) (1709/10–1790), preserved in red goatskin Harleian-style tooled bindings, again neatly scribed in red and black ink, this time in John Byrom's shorthand.⁴⁹

At the time she created them, Byrom's system was still unpublished and its circulation largely controlled by its inventor. Using it effectively made Aspin part of a wider scribal community,⁵⁰ her manuscripts linked to a wider network. Each book has a front page inscription of '{Isabella Aspin her book | written by herself}'. She presented one copy to a female relative '{in 1755}'. The other copy, which is fuller in its content coverage and more considered in the planning and conception of its page layouts, was probably written earlier and for her own use. It is a pleasing irony that the writer was the great-niece of the aforementioned Sir Roger, mocker of Peggy with her shorthand girdle book.

The full semantic content of such manuscripts should not be assumed to reflect merely laborious copying, and my suspicion is that there is far more to uncover in a closer internal study of them than might be assumed: choice of source text, principles of selection, indeed any omissions or variations might yield insight into religio-political sympathies, for example, with seemingly bland transcription potentially tantamount to a statement of subversion⁵¹ (it should be noted, however, that this is not the case with Aspin's loyally Hanoverian Books of Common Prayer). I suspect too that women's contribution to the tradition is a significant one, but as yet no comprehensive census of examples has been undertaken to establish its size. However, such a census would not surmount the difficulty of establishing that a manuscript is written by a woman if it is not clearly signed or if there are no clues outside the shorthand, or indeed beyond the manuscript itself. Generally, the presence of particular longhand handwriting styles more associat-

⁴⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng.e.2775, fol. 13^v. In the nineteenth century this was owned by the bibliophile Thomas Weld (who possessed the Luttrell Psalter), but I have not established any family connection.

⁴⁹ London, Senate House Library, Carlton 11/5 and 11/8.

⁵⁰ On this term see Love 1993, 180.

⁵¹ Cf. Cooke 2021, item 36 (recently acquired by John Rylands Library, Manchester), drawing on my work on Charles Goodier's shorthand Books of Common Prayer.

ed with women might offer some good pointers, particularly in earlier seventeenth-century cases,⁵² but this is evidence that needs handling with particular caution since there is no intrinsic distinction between male and female hands, notwithstanding misguided over-reading or fundamentally graphological descriptions sometimes made to the contrary (as opposed to appropriately palaeographical ones).⁵³ We could not know, for example, whether the ‘A. Perry’ who carefully stenographed Isaac Watts’s *Hymns and Spiritual Songs In Three Books*, was a man or a woman, were it not for a letter from the writer’s descendant to its twentieth-century purchaser identifying her as Ann Perry (*fl.* 1785–1799), a Baptist apparently once noted for her lacework.⁵⁴ Stamped with just her initials, its binding, along with the labour and neatness of the shorthand within, probably accounts for how it came to be preserved, and the writer’s accomplishments remembered, within the family down the generations.



Fig. 4: Decorated cover of Jane Segar’s ‘*Treatis*’, presented to Queen Elizabeth (c. 1589), London, British Library, Add. MS 10037; by permission.

⁵² See Wolfe 2009.

⁵³ How we might best distinguish and describe differences in the ways individual writers deploy the same system raises numerous technical issues for future shorthand palaeography to establish.

⁵⁴ London, Senate House Library, Carlton 15/1 and accompanying letter.

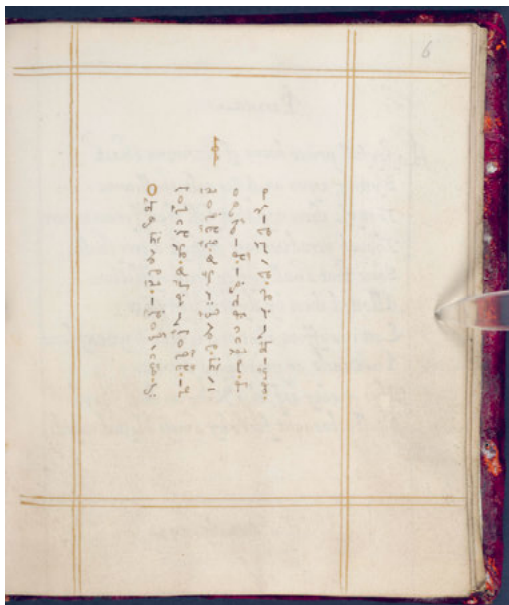


Fig. 5: Prophecy of Europæa written by Jane Segar (c. 1589), London, British Library, Add. MS 10037, fol. 6r; by permission.

The finest examples of these religious manuscripts possess jewel-book qualities, almost like *objets de vertu* to be gazed at rather than handled. In certain respects the same might be said of the second most famous of all surviving early modern English shorthand manuscripts (the first being Samuel Pepys's 1660s journal volumes), though its semantic content is not scriptural. Created by Jane Segar/Seagar (fl. 1589) at what is conventionally claimed as the start of English shorthand history, this was a gift book presented to Queen Elizabeth in the form of a 'Treatis' of 'the divine propheties of the ten Sibills (Virgyns) upon the birth of our Sauour Christ'.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ London, British Library, Add. MS 10037, fol. 1r. To the bibliography of secondary work accompanying the British Library's digitisation of this must be added those who explore Segar's Character in its own right: Carlton 1911, 94–98, deciphering the mottoes, and Kraner 1931, treating Segar's deviations from Bright.

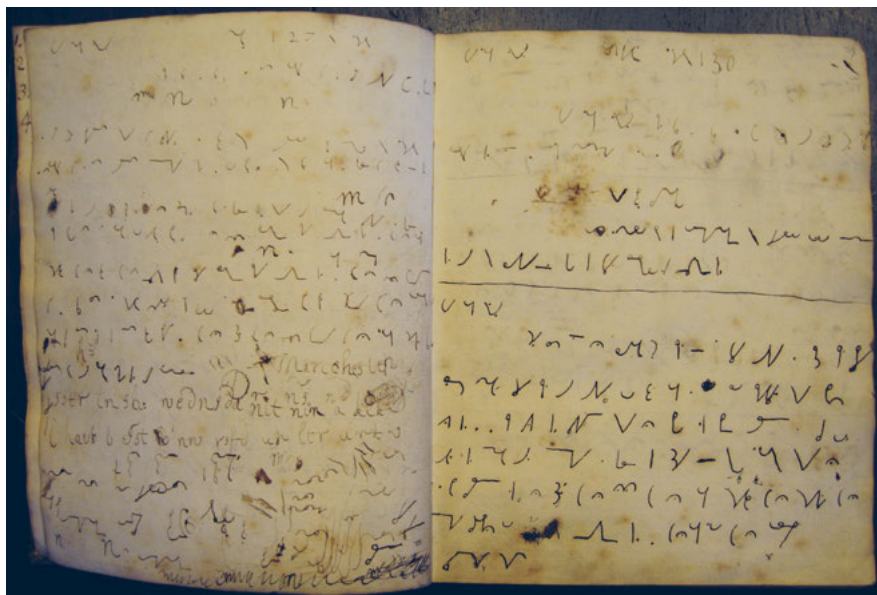


Fig. 6: Elizabeth Byrom's practice letters to her aunt (1730), Manchester, Chetham's Library, Mun.A.2.167, fols 14^v–15^r; by permission.

Each of its ten dizain/octet 'prophesies', together with a final poem in Segar's own voice, is scribed in a formal italic on a verso page, with even more remarkable five- and four-columned transformations of them on the facing rectos, '[g]laced both with my pen and pencell, and late practise in that rare Arte of Charactery' (fol. 1^r). The 'art' in question is that of Timothy Bright's *Characterie* (1588), traditionally regarded as the first English shorthand system, though it could never have been remotely quick to write, whether on a parchment substrate like Segar's or on paper. Here is high quality, luxury craft: within gilt bordering on each page, the calligraphy of both long-hand and shorthand commences in gold illumination too. Segar's work as 'Characteres' (fol. 11^v) must have extended to the royal mottoes prominently centred on the front board of the fine red velvet and gold lace-embroidered binding, set under enamelled and gilt glass.⁵⁶ While there is no evidence to my knowledge that Elizabeth herself ever touched it, the manuscript's key purpose was to promote Bright's method at her court soon after its printing. 'The Treatise' is a superlative exemplification of

⁵⁶ Only part of a matching cartouche on the back board survives, with merely a small fragment of a character visible, but just enough to show it bore a different meaning to the Characterie of the front.

why a manuscript is far more than a vehicle for semantic content. This should be remembered when it comes to other far less aesthetically accomplished shorthand documents that have survived, because, as Mark Bland puts it, ‘manuscripts are always witnesses to something other than the texts they preserve’.⁵⁷ In the perfectly understandable impetus to prioritise shorthand’s deciphering over all else, we must never lose sight of the fact that conversion from shorthand to longhand and print is even more of a remediating process than that effected by any digitisation.

An example to illustrate this is a notebook used mainly by the stenographer John Byrom to make jottings from patristic and devotional texts, in which 8-year-old Elizabeth Byrom (1722–1801) also practised reading and writing shorthand under his supervision.⁵⁸ Her father was no Verney when it came to girls and young women learning shorthand. That is emphasised by records within this notebook of several women outside the family paying him shorthand tuition fees; in some cases this tuition was delivered by Elizabeth’s aunt, Phebe Byrom (1697–1785).⁵⁹ Once she had got to a reasonably (and perhaps, given her age, remarkably) proficient stage in the course of her instruction, Elizabeth attempted shorthand copies of collects from the Book of Common Prayer, probably from dictation or from memory, along with drafts of simple letters to female relatives more adept in the system. No standard transcription can adequately capture the manifold jottings surrounding her shorthand outlines, nor all the slips and malformation of her characters, nor, conversely, the progress in her writing as she gains confidence in sizing and shaping and starts to adopt more advanced abbreviations. Nor can it convey the sense of slow enunciation (spoken or internal) as she writes, nor the hand-to-hand dialogue with her father – the ‘orality’ of the manuscript pages. These are all things we can truly appreciate only by learning the system ourselves. Of course, the significant distancing of today’s reader from the experience of writing-in-action (and reading-in-action too) affected by transcription into print text applies to all editions of manuscripts, whatever the hand. But in the case of shorthand, even more distancing arises than it does with a longhand equivalent – for, at least with a system such as Byrom’s, the editorial work of transcription/expansion begins to move into areas more akin to translation than transliteration. For example, the system’s quasi-phonetic basis, omission of internal vowel dots,

⁵⁷ Bland 2010, 9.

⁵⁸ Manchester, Chetham’s Library, Mun.A.2.167, fols 10^r–17^r, 23^r. For transcriptions of parts see Bailey 1882 and Ward 1895, but they contain numerous slips and errors, not to mention silently interpolated punctuation, often misleading. I am preparing a fuller edition of this and related manuscripts.

⁵⁹ In this respect he had far more in common with Cotton Mather, to give an example from New England (see Mather 1912, 153). Two other prominent eighteenth-century male enthusiasts for young women’s learning of shorthand were Charles Wesley (see Underhill 2015, 50–51) and Erasmus Darwin (see Darwin 1797, 44, 125). For more on Byrom’s system and its users see Underhill 2008.

and principles of truncation dictate that sometimes there is no choice but to employ a consistent, standardised orthography that, certainly in Elizabeth's case, is not borne out by her inconsistent longhand.

4 'Attain this art': Contextualising Mary Hawker's receipt-book shorthand 1691/2

In the mid seventeenth century, a Hartlibian educational reformer recommended that the curriculum of the ideal academy for gentle youth should include 'the best and most perfect way of short writing' for males and 'especially the best and most exact way of Short-writing' for females.⁶⁰ Whether this is akin to a 'Pitmans for the girls and Gregg for the boys' demarcation in a less idealised twentieth-century learning centre seems unlikely, but differentiated purposes for shorthand on gender lines do seem envisaged: for boys it was 'to take out sermons', whereas for girls – and note the 'especially' in their case – it is linked to a domestic setting of household accounts and so forth, a setting to which we now turn.⁶¹

Verney asserted that his god-daughter's needs – perhaps thinking more of her future husband's – were better served by concentrating on the Bible, Book of Common Prayer and French books (rather than the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to which she aspired), and 'Stories of illustrious (not learned) Woemen, receipts for preserving, makinge creames and all sorts of cookeryes, [...] in Breif all manner of good housewifery'.⁶² He might just have reconsidered his strictures about girls learning shorthand had it occurred to him that it might have applications in 'housewifery'. London, Wellcome Collection, MS.9304 features shorthand in just such a context.⁶³ Signed twice, the second time fairly ornately, 'Mary Hawker | Her Book | Ano Dom | 1691', the manuscript has a title/section heading in neat block hand, 'Instructions for Pastery and Cookerry'; and on pages starting at the back, Hawker began, but never got far with, a non-culinary section, with tips about treating fabric stains. So far nothing has been established about the writer's identity beyond the evidence of the manu-

⁶⁰ Speed 1650, 11, 12. The recommendations for the male youth, but *not* female, appear in [Hartlib] 1652.

⁶¹ Coe 2004, 52, quoting the novelist B. S. Johnson recalling his time at Kingston Day Commercial School aged 14.

⁶² Quoted in Verney 1894, 74.

⁶³ Acquired by donation in 2019, it is now digitised at <<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vwwqzc5n>>. For a transcription of its shorthand see Underhill 2021.

script itself, but it seems at least possible that she was the Mary Hawker (1670–1760) whose husband was one Richard Hawker, perhaps connected with a dynasty of dyers and clothiers in the Stroud area of Gloucestershire.

What survives of this manuscript (several pages were at some stage ripped out) contains over 140 concise sets of instructions for preparing a wide variety of fare. While more modest in content and appearance than better-known examples, it is fairly typical of household receipt (recipe) books assembling culinary and medical instructions and advice that were kept at that time in higher status families. These often turned into accretive, collaborative productions, with multiple subsequent hands evincing passage through wider circles of kin and acquaintance down the generations.⁶⁴ Unprepossessing in its limp stab-stitched cover, pierced by pinned-in material and containing looser inserts, it carries the evidence of much handling over many years. Several longhands feature in it: Hawker's own maturer hand(s), and, later on in the manuscript, those of others, assumed to be her descendants. Hence, like the notebook in which Elizabeth Byrom wrote, it fits into a broad category of manuscripts which Margaret Ezell usefully terms 'messy'.⁶⁵ Its originator would have resented such a categorisation: the flourishing of her title page along with the deployment of scribal longhand abbreviation indicate a striving towards what writing masters termed 'command of hand'. Recipe compilation manuscripts 'sometimes served as draft pads where rudimentary writing skills could be tested, perfected, and/or exhibited', to quote one authority on them.⁶⁶ What distinguishes Hawker's compilation from most that have survived is the fact that the pad contains shorthand.

The system she used was a long-established one: Metcalfe's Short-Writing. Metcalfe was long deceased, but his system's popularity is reflected by his manual having gone through over ten editions/reprintings by this time; it continued through more editions into the second decade of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ The vast majority of Metcalfe users would have been quite unfamiliar with its origins, very likely seeing the system as synonymous with an essentialised 'shorthand'.⁶⁸ Conceivably, Hawker learned the system by consulting just such a manual, of which the most recent 'last Edition' had appeared in 1690; as noted earlier, its publishers aimed it at female as well as male learners.

⁶⁴ See Field 2007; Kowalchuk 2017; Leong 2018; and Wall 2016.

⁶⁵ Ezell 2009, 55.

⁶⁶ Wall 2016, 126.

⁶⁷ Carlton 1940, 48–55. The complex bibliography of early shorthand manuals, particularly those of Thomas Shelton, highlights why 'edition' is a term to be treated with caution.

⁶⁸ There are parallels to be drawn here with, say, the longevity of 'Pitman' as a brand name well into the twentieth century.

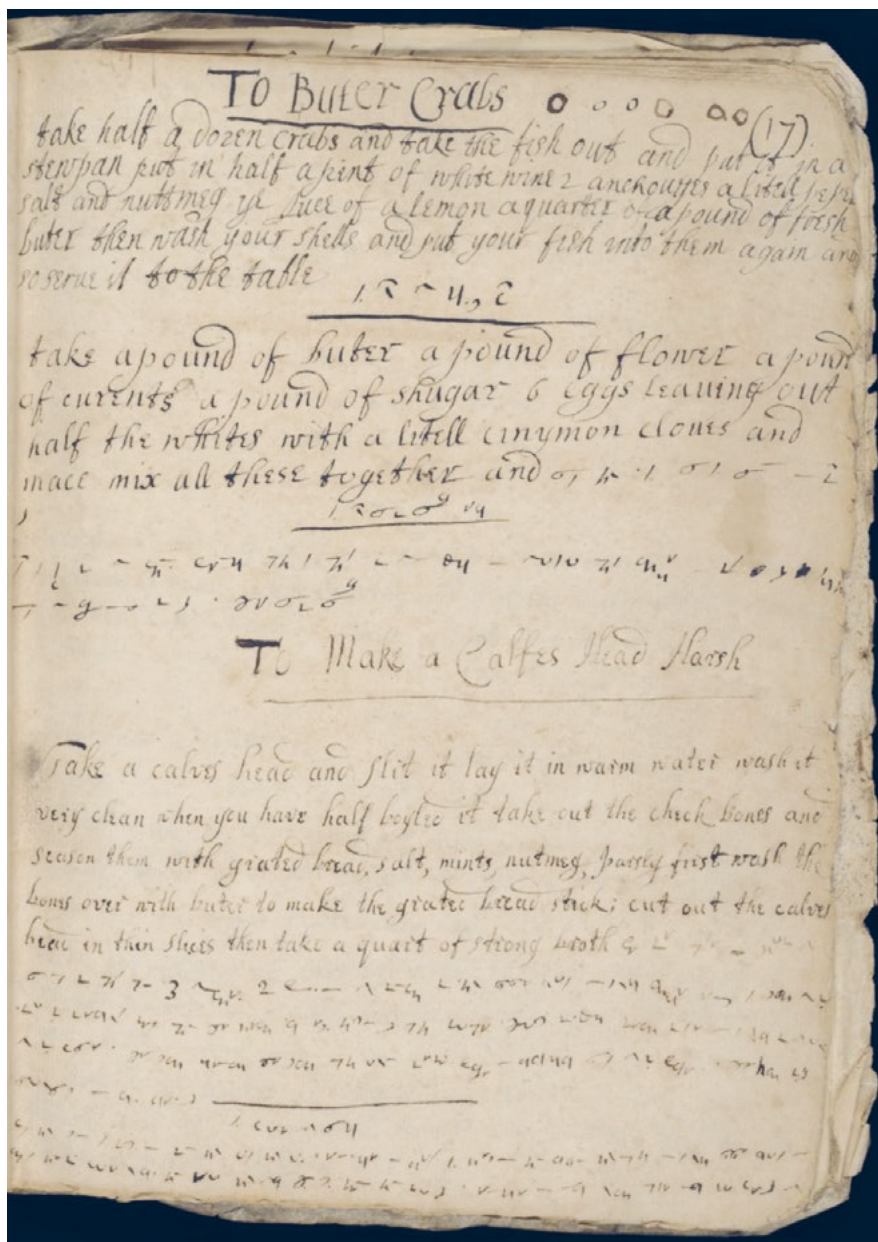


Fig. 7: Extract from Mary Hawker's recipe book (1691/2), London, Wellcome Collection, MS.9304, p. 17; by permission.

Within her recipes, shorthand first occurs in a centred heading – ‘{to make a god’s cake}’ – below which are four lines in her longhand, detailing the ingredients and quantities needed to prepare what turns out to be a basic, if rich, currant-filled confection. This recipe concludes in shorthand, but for anyone hoping that might conceal something remarkable or private, this comes as disappointing bathos: a mundane instruction, ‘{put them into [a] patty-pan and bake it}’. The entirety of the following simple recipe ‘{to make puff pastries}’ – more accurately, a filling for one – is in shorthand. Below that comes one for a fancier ‘Calfes Head Harsh’, begun in longhand, but completed with two half-lines and four full lines of shorthand concerning the composition of a broth in which the ‘harsh’ (i.e. hash) is cooked, its subsequent thickening, and the dish’s garnishing. The next three recipes are briefer – headings followed by two or three lines of writing under each – and completely in shorthand: ‘{to collar a pig}’, ‘{sauce for a hare}’, and ‘{sauce for a roast pig}’. The final appearance of shorthand is merely the heading – ‘{a plum cake}’ – for the longhand below it.

To those used to more cursive stenography, gaps between many of the characters makes Hawker’s appear rather slow in its formation, though there is nothing to indicate that was any more so than her longhand. A superficial glance gives the impression of an almost ‘naïve’ letter-by-letter transliterator at work. In this regard it is a little reminiscent of the way that Katherine Packer (later Gell) (c. 1624–1671) wrote unconnected characters within a far more extensive manuscript compilation started in 1639 or 1640. This book, which Packer began as a teenager, bears the title, ‘A Boocke of Very Good medicines for seuerall diseases wounds and sores both new and olde’ and a subsequent section headed ‘Preservueing and Coockery | Katherine Packer | her boocke’.⁶⁹ Packer later married into a prominent Derbyshire parliamentary gentry family; other manuscript evidence shows her strong links with the culture of Richard Baxter’s puritan circle. The vast majority of this manuscript’s entries are in longhand, but shorthand is used to record eleven remedies for a range of ailments of varying degrees of complexity and severity, as well as for a quince marmalade and quince paste in the culinary section. Others’ hands feature in Packer’s ‘Boocke’ too, but consideration of matters such as ductus and aspect, as well as the placing of these sections within a sequence, establishes that the shorthand was written by Packer herself, and in tandem with her longhand. The same is the case with Hawker’s. From an attribution perspective, these are fortunate contrasts with a manuscript receipt book inscribed by Elizabeth

⁶⁹ Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.387 (digitised at <<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/7nzq1i>>), [iii], 176. The main title page also bears the details ‘Katherine Packer | anno 1639 Domine’ (which could be an old style dating).

Lindsey, né Northey (baptised 1648), in which Zeiglographia, the second, now lesser-known shorthand system of Thomas Shelton, is used to record the making of a type of cheese. This manuscript was compiled over decades, and its multiple longhands complicate any attempt to identify the stenographer.⁷⁰ Similarly, in a domestic notebook from the 1650s compiled by members of the Cartwright family of Aynho, Northamptonshire, a 'Katherin Cartwright' is one of the ownership signatories and contributors, but it is difficult to establish whether the shorthand, which appears sporadically amongst its miscellaneous longhand content of recipes, poems and other texts, is hers or that of a male relation.⁷¹ Even if such instances were not written or read by these women, both manuscripts at least afford evidence that a woman saw shorthand in use. Moreover, the use of shorthand in such domestic contexts could be more typical than we might suppose in the light of a turn-of-the-century reference by Daniel Williams to 'the very Girls and Cook-maids, that have learned to write Short hand without Vowels'.⁷² The 'serviceable' assistance for which Ann(e) Downer (later Greenwell, then Whitehead) (1624–1688) was summoned by the gaoled founder of the Quakers George Fox, wasn't just to do with preparing food, but the fact she could 'take things well in *Short-hand*'.⁷³

Identical and near-identical alphabet symbols used across several early-seventeenth-century published manuals are one headache for anyone now attempting to identify the use of a specific system from the period. Several of Packer's symbols accord with those used in two or more of those manuals, but closer examination soon shows that other symbols (notably those for what turn out to be used for the letters *p* and *s*) bear little or no relation to anything in either of them. Overall, Metcalfe's comes closest (or is the closest known): half of his alphabet is identical or near-identical to Packer's.⁷⁴ This can hardly be mere coincidence. Conceivably Packer had misremembered some rudimentary learning of Metcalfe, or maybe just borrowed from it, deliberately introducing some of her own variants. Alternatively, her alphabet may even be evidence of a circulating system distinct from Metcalfe which never reached print. But her deployment of these symbols resembles a rudimentary substitution cipher, one soon decrypted, as the

70 Saffron Walden, Gibson Library, MS H269. As well as for the cheese recipe (fol. 67^v), some shorthand, as yet undeciphered, occurs on fol. 1^r; it is written vertically to the right of the signatures of Elizabeth Lindsey, from a London gentry family, and Jabez Wyatt, an unrelated Quaker maltster of Saffron Walden, and at a different time and with a different pen to those signatures.

71 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Don.e.6.

72 Cooper 1700, sig. B3^r.

73 Fox 1694, 187.

74 For a key to Packer's alphabet see Thompson and Winard 2017.

letters in each word are merely converted *literatim* into the corresponding letters in the shorthand alphabet. There is next to nothing by way of further contraction, the symbols are not joined together, and the writing's size exhibits none of the space-saving advantages that shorthand normally bestows. For these reasons, some might not even count it as a shorthand at all. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the symbols, especially in comparison with a secretary hand equivalent, might well have made writing somewhat faster (and saved ink too), and arguably makes it a contender to be classed at the very least a type of 'speed hand'. From the reader's perspective (and Packer herself would be one of those readers), the cipher, once mastered, arguably has the advantage of being even more legible than the manuscript's longhand.

Hawker's shorthand, by contrast, represents a more than rudimentary grasp of Metcalfe. To a modern viewer of the manuscript not familiar with the conventions of such systems, a lack of connectedness and lack of cursivity in her writing might seem to indicate the complete beginner's slowness. However, much of that stems from the practice of indicating internal vowels by means of relative positioning of consonant characters. Hawker's observation of this, together with deployment of some more advanced features of Metcalfe – such as using suffix symbols rather than spelling-out those suffixes *literatim* – indicates that by the time she wrote her recipes she had more than a beginner's level of shorthand proficiency. She also adopted some personal variations, such as using the character for *f* on its own to indicate the word 'of'. Analogies arise with personal tweaks made to 'given' recipes: how far does the writer/cook need to go with any such adaptations before the result effectively constitutes a new system/recipe?

The juxtaposition of shorthand and longhand within the same recipe text is intriguing: looking at Hawker's manuscript today, it is tempting to infer *something* is being deliberately kept from prying eyes, but, as noted above, the content is quite mundane: no advanced techniques, no fine precision of quantities, no unusual ingredients the cook might prefer to keep to herself are being guarded here. In fact, content-wise there is nothing distinguishing this material from countless equivalents in longhand and print receipt books of the era. I have not yet established if any of her recipes directly match anything in those. But some bear close or loose resemblances to many in part or whole, inevitably so given their relative simplicity. Maybe, though, matters are less a matter of our contemporary inference, and more to with her deliberate implication: using shorthand as a ruse to pretend to family and friends there was more to her recipes than was actually the case. Keeping a receipt book was an opportunity not just to practise a recently acquired skill in stenography, but to draw attention to it. The downside was that, in a domestic context, if it could not be read by later family members it would

soon be seen as unusable, and hence discardable. In its earlier life at least, it was Hawker's longhand, not her shorthand, that secured its retention.

Similar juxtapositions of shorthand and longhand within an individual text occur in an earlier 'little manuscript recipe book' of over three hundred recipes kept by Hester Fleetwood (née Smyth) (d. 1714), wife of the regicide George Fleetwood,⁷⁵ and in a collection of household remedies and recipes, mainly for sauces, compiled slightly later by Jane Mosley (later Soresby) (1669–1712), daughter of a prosperous Derbyshire farmer.⁷⁶ Mosley used Metcalfe's system too, but it seems easier to establish why she was doing so. She used it mainly for high-frequency words, incorporating Metcalfe's inclined downward stroke for 'the' and horizontal stroke for 'and' into her handwriting, instances of easily and rapidly formed time-savers for which countless (longhand) writers over the years have adopted equivalents. When used for a heading, Mosley's shorthand was conceivably designed to conceal the nature of what her ingredients were intended for, even if this turns out to be nothing particularly remarkable: '{To whiten the face}', '{To make the hands white and soft}'.⁷⁷ Other examples of shorthand's deployment within prevailing longhand contexts appear in medical receipt books compiled by Margaret Boscawen (née Clinton) (d. 1688) and her daughter Bridget Fortescue (1666–1708), members of a gentry family in Cornwall and wives of MPs.⁷⁸ These have not yet been fully deciphered but are noteworthy because they are clearly linked to both these women's first-hand observations of the role of plants in health and their gathering of others' knowledge; one purpose of this shorthand seems to have been to do with cross-referencing the receipts to the work of the herbalist Nicholas Culpeper.⁷⁹

For shorthand studies, perhaps the most interesting passage in Hawker's manuscript is one which has proved far more challenging and elusive to decipher than her recipes. As it occurs directly below a longhand 'Bill of Fare', anyone looking at this page unable to read Metcalfe might reasonably assume that the content has a direct culinary relation to this 'Bill'. But this micro-text⁸⁰ turns out to be an

75 Lewin 2004, who observes 'She was adept at shorthand, which she occasionally used to complete a recipe'. I have not inspected this manuscript, which is in private ownership.

76 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D770/C/E2/394. See [Sinar] 1979, with the plate on Z showing some of the shorthand.

77 These are my corrections to Sinar's transcriptions 'To [?clean] the [?silver]' and 'To [?keep] the hands [white] and [?] like' ([Sinar] 1979, P).

78 Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre, 1260/M/0/FC/6, 1260/M/0/FC/7.

79 See Leong 2014, 568–573.

80 On this term, which I find usefully applicable to pieces of shorthand occurring in larger macrotexts (whether manuscript or print books), see Kornexl and Lenker 2019. A longer example is

expression of more general pious sentiment. It is not in prose, as the layout implies, but in loosely iambic verse: either a couplet followed by what seems to be an abab-rhymed stanza, or perhaps a single piece. My tentative transcription (spelling modernised) is as follows, with assumed line breaks indicated |:

{attain this art and you shall find | it will enrich your righteous mind
continue in religious ways | all times to walk therein | depend[?] [*two(+) words unclear*] God
all your days | do you refrain from Eve's sin}

It has not been subjected to any forensic scrutiny, but this shorthand passage appears to have been written with a sharper quill point. Some more complex formations and shaping render it more assured and accomplished than that elsewhere in the manuscript. The possibility arises that it was penned by a different person altogether, somebody who taught Hawker her shorthand in the first place. For the 'art' to be attained in this injunction is, surely, not the art of cookery but the art of shorthand itself. Whoever the writer was, its presence epitomises how, for all the secular, culinary content of Hawker's macrotext, when it comes to the world of early modern women's shorthand, a context of godly living never seems far away.

5 In(-)conclusion

The foregoing survey is hardly comprehensive or conclusive. If it has an underlying argument, though, it is this: when faced with shorthand in an early modern English document of whose writer's identity we have no clue, we cannot assume a male hand. The once default position of 'the presumption of male scribal identity', criticised by a scholar of centuries-earlier manuscript copying by women, is something to be guarded against.⁸¹ But for shorthand to be more securely incorporated within scholarly understanding of post-medieval script systems, 'only a laborious prosopographical approach will be proof against misleading generalisations'.⁸² As well as a palaeographical endeavour, uncovering the place of women and girls in such prosopography might be seen as a fundamentally archaeological one – and a great deal more spadework remains to be done. It is especially Margaret Ezell's

the eight lines of Rich's shorthand on fol. 1 (and other pieces on fol. 3^r) of London, British Library, Harleian MS 2031, a devotional miscellany by Anna Cromwell (later Williams) (1623–1687/8); see Ezell 2012, 285–287, 298.

⁸¹ Beach 2004, 5.

⁸² Brown 1963, 377–378.

category of ‘messy’ manuscripts – and ones even messier than those – that we need to quarry in order to explore more about the quotidian nature of shorthand use in early modern England. It is splendid that Jane Segar’s presentation volume will receive wider appreciation and examination following its recent digitisation by the British Library, even if such essentially two-dimensional remediation cannot adequately replicate the experience of handling and turning its binding and its leaves. But such treasure is far from typical or representative, and the fate of far less obviously attractive ephemeral scraps has rarely been as privileged. Fortunately, the move to adoption of lighter-touch conservation practice in many archives and libraries means that now ‘Cinderella keeps her rags even when she is rehoused in the palace’, but there is still more to do to understand and put such rags on show.⁸³

Until relatively recently, the shorthand within manuscripts and printed books in many institutional hands (not to mention private ones) has seldom been fully or adequately described in cataloguing, if noticed at all. One key reason is the difficulty of ready recognition of the system used, and thereafter the complex, onerous, and often thankless task of actually deciphering it.⁸⁴ Sometimes the seeming impossibility of starting, let alone accomplishing, this task has been deterrent enough. But the hurdles need not be as insurmountable as they once might have seemed, in view of developments in digital technologies which are making group transcription projects ever more viable and productive.⁸⁵ Even if, or when, significantly more material becomes discovered and duly transcribed, the evidentiary value from it will of course remain only partial, and the conclusions reached tentative, given inevitable losses, sometimes even wilful destruction, of shorthand-bearing manuscripts, as well as the necessarily conjectural aspects to the decipherment of those which have survived. But all this hardly negates the value of such an endeavour, and it will only be through attempting it that we can move beyond print-source dependent accounts, or those concentrating on isolated transcribed texts, and towards more informed conclusions about what manuscripts might teach us in the aggregate about how and why shorthand was used in early modern writing culture by women, men and children alike.

⁸³ Sutherland 2022, 45.

⁸⁴ Women’s unsung role in the history of shorthand deciphering merits full treatment in a study of its own.

⁸⁵ The burgeoning of academic attention to receipt books owes much to collaborative initiatives such as the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective <<https://emroc.hypotheses.org>>. The longhand sections of Mary Hawker’s manuscript were subject to an EMROC ‘transcribathon’ in November 2022. The Dickens Code project <<https://dickenscode.org>> is one encouraging model of the sort of collaborative work to which we need to look when it comes to future work on shorthand in this period.

Acknowledgements

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Manuscripts

Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre, 1260/M/0/FC/6 and 1260/M/0/FC/7, notebooks of Margaret Boscawen and Bridget Fortescue, late seventeenth century.

London, British Library, Harleian MS 2031, Anna Cromwell/Williams, 'A Booke of seuerall deuotions collected from good men by the worst of siners', late 1650s.

London, British Library, Add. MS 10037, Jane Segar, book presented to Queen Elizabeth containing 'the divine prophecies of the ten Sibills (Virgins) upon the birthe of our Sauioir Christ' (digitised at <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Add_MS_10037>).

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London, Wellcome Collection, MS.9304, recipe book begun by Mary Hawker 1691/2 and continued by others (digitised at <<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vwwqzc5n>>).

Manchester, Chetham's Library, Mun.A.2.167, notebook used by John Byrom 1728–1732, containing shorthand by Elizabeth Byrom, 1730.

Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D770/C/E2/394, receipt book compiled by Jane Mosley, late seventeenth century.

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