

Pens and Trends



Pens with Purpose

Paleontological evidence would suggest that the development of the first writing instruments coincided with the development of tools used to hunt. It is understood that a sharp tool used for skinning and cutting animal flesh would also be used to etch the cave walls which were the centre of the early hunter gatherer communities.

One of the most famous collections of cave paintings is located in Lascaux, France. It is estimated that this vast collection could be up to 20,000 years old. They were discovered in September 1940 and contain nearly 2,000 figures in several separate sections. Animals, human figures and abstract signs were made mostly by mineral based inks with some patterns etched into the stone.



These prehistoric writing implements together with their descendants, the stylus and clay tablets which were used for the first writing systems dating from approximately 3500 BC, precluded any individual style either in terms of handwriting or designs on the implements themselves. Their primary purpose was to reproduce shapes that would communicate information to others and in the case of the tools, used in the cave paintings, they also had additional uses.

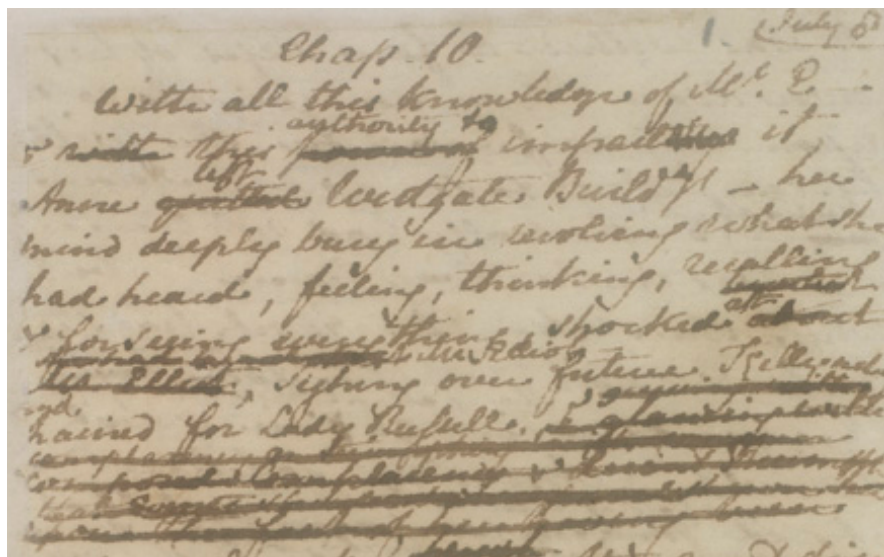
A Google search today of the term 'pen' returns more than 29 million web pages in less than one third of a second; before even considering the plethora of other writing implements available. The story of the growth and diversification of the pen from prehistoric stick to a sophisticated instrument of self-expression is fascinating.

Quill Pens – The first design with flexibility

The use of bird feathers as a vehicle for ink on to a page began in the 8th century AD and remained the primary writing implement in the western world for more than a thousand years. Each quill feather would last for about a week and the strongest quills came from living birds and were most commonly goose feathers. Additionally, the feathers of swans, turkeys, crows, eagles and hawks could be used. It is here that perhaps the first element of personal taste is seen in the selection of a suitable quill, as different birds' feathers would produce a finer or thicker script. Jane Austen favoured a crow's feather as it

produced the finest work whereas American president Thomas Jefferson was such a prolific writer that he bred his own flock of geese for their quill feathers.

an extract of *Persuasion* by Jane Austen



The Dip Pen – The first design with style

The 19th century brought about the beginning of the transition from quill pens to steel dip pens. Many of the first dip pen manufacturers were based in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham with John Mitchell being credited with the introduction of mass production of steel pens in 1822. The Jewellery Quarter today boasts the Pen Museum dedicated to the history and legacy of the city's steel pen industry.

"During the 19th Century, 75% of everything written in the world was with a 'Birmingham' pen. Birmingham was at the forefront of this trade until it declined in the 1950s with the invention of the biro and fountain pen. At one time, there were around 100 factories in the Jewelry Quarter area. The development of the steel pen reduced the cost of writing and enabled the spread of literacy throughout the world."



The dip pen proved to be a longer lasting alternative to the quill pen and their introduction saw the birth of the pen as a fashion accessory.

Dip pens were intricately decorated and their holders could be made from a wide range of materials including turned wood, carved bone or even glass which meant that the writer could choose a nib and holder that would suit not only his writing style but also his own personal fashion tastes.

The development of versatile writing implements understandably mirrors the development of more individual writing styles. With more reliable, finer and varied nibs that would last for more than a week, a writer could begin to develop a signature writing style and where there is the luxury of individuality there is the potential for fashion and trends.

Fountain Pens and Fashion

Whilst fountain pens began their development at the end of the 18th century, the first commercially successful pens which held their own ink supply were designed in the latter decades of the 19th century. When Lewis Waterman's first fountain pens entered the market they were sold for \$2 each which was the equivalent of a day's wages for a skilled tradesman. Waterman's pens became very popular and by 1901 the Waterman Pen Company was selling 350,000 pens a year with an annual turnover equivalent to in excess of \$17.5 million today.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Waterman had been joined by a number of other highly successful fountain pen manufacturers including Parker and Schaeffer. The roaring twenties saw fierce competition between these companies with extravagant advertising campaigns seeking to sell a lifestyle alongside a pen. An example of this was seen with The Parker Duofold that was launched in 1921 with a \$7 price tag (equivalent to \$90 today). Within four years of its launch the Duofold had helped to quadruple company sales.

Advertisements at this time targeted both men and women to choose a pen that would make a statement, whether for themselves or as a gift for a loved one. One Parker Duofold



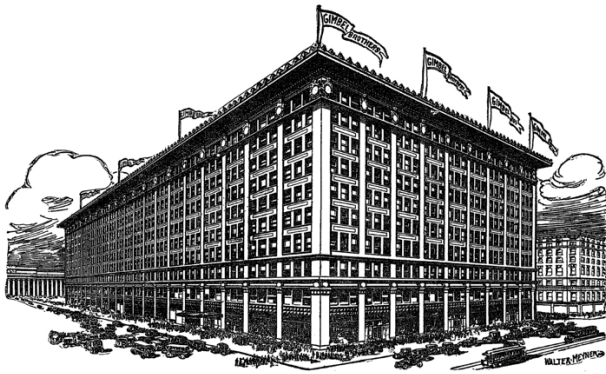
advertisement from the early 1930s shows an early attempt at 'pester power' with a child asking her mother for a new Parker pen for her brother;

The Waterman Pen Company made use of world events as a marketing tool after it was reported that the Treaty of Versailles that signalled the end of the First World War had been signed with a gold Waterman pen;

If the success of an advertising campaign lies in enabling the consumer to believe that they will adopt the characteristics of those featured in the campaign, who better to associate oneself with than those who brought peace to Europe?

The Frenzy and Flamboyance of the Ball Point

Perhaps the most flamboyant of marketing campaigns was witnessed at the launch of the ball point pen in the 1940s. As a born salesman, Milton Reynolds, who was responsible for bringing the ball point to the United States, recognised that Americans were ready for a new miracle in writing instruments. The war had enabled many workers to save money but luxury products were in short supply and Americans wanted to treat themselves to something new.



(image of Gimbels Department store)

The New York Times ran a huge advertisement on Sunday 28th October 1945, the day before the pen was due to go on sale at Gimbels Department Store. In daring marketing promises, Reynolds assured the public that his pen would write for two years without refilling. He calculated that 5 grams of his ink could produce a line 21 miles long, the equivalent of 3000 pages of writing, far more than the average person would produce in two years.

Just a month after securing his patent, the Reynolds International pen went on sale for the sum of \$12.50, despite production costs of only 80 cents. On the first day of sales, more than 8000 pens were purchased, bringing in \$100,000 for Reynolds' company – close to \$1 million today. Reynolds held the entire American market for 6 months and by February of 1946, four months after the launch of the first Reynolds ball point pen, he had made a profit of \$1.5 million.

Whilst Reynolds' marketing strategy was very successful, his pens were not. By early 1947, there were more than 150 ball point pen manufacturers in North America but poor quality and a flooded market had driven the price down to less than a dollar. Just a year later, Milton Reynolds admitted defeat and retreated from the ball point business. Despite making a \$5 million profit, faulty pens and stiff competition together with consumer apathy with the ball point pen had finally caught up with him.

Consumers became wise to empty promises about expensive products that simply failed to deliver. An interest in labour saving devices coupled with the earliest references to the 'throwaway society' in Life Magazine in 1951ⁱⁱ set the scene for the launch of the Bic Cristal disposable ball point pen. The fashion in pens seemed to shift away from the expensive and the ornate and towards the low cost and practical. The Bic Cristal was launched in 1959 at just 19 cents and in less than ten years was selling more than 500 million pens a year, equal to 60% of the ball point pen market.

Pens for Him and for Her

The Bic Corporation found themselves making headlines once again after ironic reviews were left on the Amazon website for their range of *Bic Pens for Her*, causing a stir amongst social media sites in 2012ⁱⁱⁱ. Women on both sides of the Atlantic were outraged at the suggestion that their gender should dictate the weight and colour of pens that they should use;



“Ask your husband for some extra pocket money so you can buy one today.”

“The delicate shape and pretty pastel colors make it perfect for writing recipes cards, checks to my psychologist (I’m seeing one for a case of the hysterics), and tracking my monthly cycle.”^{iv}

Whilst this suggests that women do not appreciate gender modified writing instruments this practice was very common in the early days of the fountain pen and the ball point pen. Pens designed specifically for women tended to be smaller and lighter for carrying in a handbag in addition to being available in a range of colours. Whilst many manufacturers are not as blatant as Bic in their targeted marketing, it is still common to find ranges of fountain pens that are available in a range of weights and sizes. As an example of this, the Parker Pen Company website has designated sections of pens ‘for him’ and ‘for her’.^v

Pen Trends in the Digital Age

The development of an increasingly throwaway society married to the ever expanding digital age has resulted in a surprising turn of events for the popularity of pens. Whilst there may be an enormous range of writing implements available for those who do not rely solely on e-communication, the fountain pen is making a comeback.

It may not be surprising to discover that there is a lack of scientific data and research available of the psychology of pen selection, but one career advice website recommends that prospective job candidates select their writing instrument carefully, suggesting that a good quality pen speaks volumes to potential employers;

“First and foremost, having a high-quality pen tells someone that you actually care about the quality of the work you’re producing with it. Even if you’re only signing your name, you show that you care about



the quality of your signature..... Having a good pen also says that you won't settle for mediocre.... Bosses appreciate this quality."^{vi}

Lord Sugar's trusted adviser, Nick Hewer makes the same point in a newspaper interview;

"I'm not one for ostentatious treaty-signing type pens but I do think in business making an effort with the little things sends out a signal that you are serious about what you are doing."^{vii}

The president and CEO of Montblanc North America, Jan-Patrick Schmitz, suggests that a fountain pen is one of the few items that business executives can use to convey their personality and style.

"...there can be a limited ways to express yourself – is your suit gray or dark blue? Stripes or no stripes... Accessories are where you can express yourself – ties, watches and pens."^{viii}

Whilst Mr Schmitz has more than 100 pens in his personal collection, he favours a fountain pen for all important written communication;

"A fountain pen slows you down... you have to unscrew the cap, the ink needs to dry, and just the fact of handwriting with it makes you think longer and more intensely because you can't conveniently delete."^{ix}

This notion of the advantage of slowing down to consider the importance of the words chosen for written communication is echoed by some authors who find the use of a fountain pen highly beneficial to their creative process. Stephen King explains this in the author's note of his 2001 novel, *Dreamcatcher*,

"This book was written with the world's finest word processor, a Waterman cartridge fountain pen. To write the first draft of such a long book by hand put me in touch with the language as I haven't been in years... one rarely finds such opportunities in the twenty-first century, and they are to be savored."^x

It is not just amongst authors and business giants that the fountain pen is making a comeback; rising sales have been reported by many retailers and manufacturers. Lamy, the German pen manufacturer (and personal favourite of Nick Hewer) reported a 5% increase in turnover in 2011 and the online retailer Amazon reported fountain pen sales in 2012 to be double those of 2011 and four times the volume sold in 2010.

When the Daily Telegraph printed a reader's letter asking for people's experiences of recent fountain pen use in May 2012, more than 100 written responses were received within a matter of days. Readers commented that the fountain pen improved their writing and many suggested they could never imagine using anything else;

“When I joined the Army, officers were expected to sign all correspondence using a fountain pen as a sign of mutual respect, not unlike the principle behind saluting. Most of us still do.”^{xi}

Martin Roberts, from *The Writing Desk*, an online fountain pen specialist suggests the unwavering success of the fountain pen is due in part because they are ‘simple and honest’;^{xii}

“There is a McDonald’s on every High Street but it does not prevent people from enjoying good, simple, home-cooked food.”^{xiii}

What about ink colour?

The first inks were made from a range of materials including soot and donkey gelatine with Indian ink dating from more than 5000 years ago in China, not India. By 1200 BC, the ink recipe included different natural colorants to allow the writer to highlight significant parts of the text.

It is likely that blue or black inks are our default colour choices as these were the first colours available. By 400 AD, the ink recipe had changed to a composite of gum, iron-salts and nutgalls (a growth caused by wasps on oak trees). This stable form of ink continued to be used for many centuries and the colour of this ink turned from a bluish-black to a dull brown colour that can be observed on many old documents. These iron gall traditional inks are still used and preferred by some who opt for a traditional dip pen although they are unsuited to a fountain pen due to their thickness and corrosive impact on the finer workings of a fountain pen.

Whichever grade of ink is selected, there are those in the world of handwriting analysis who would argue that the colour choice of ink reveals something of the personality of the writer;^{xiv}

Red ink – some would argue that unless you are marking school books (and even then it is frowned upon in some educational circles) there is no place for red ink. Analysts suggest that red ink suggests a writer’s need for danger and their inner passionate self who may secretly enjoy causing alarm in others.

Black ink – writers who favour black ink convey a sense of power and seriousness with their written words. It could also indicate a desire to dominate others or place demands upon those around them.

Light Blue ink – imaginative and creative writers may choose to use a light blue ink that indicates an interest in spiritual awareness and an enthusiastic personality. Light blue ink suggests a person who is loyal and able to plan for the future.

Dark Blue ink – perhaps the most commonly selected ink colour, dark blue is associated with having a good intellect and an interest in getting results. Whilst writers using dark blue ink may be more materialistic than their light blue counterparts they are still identified as imaginative.

And what about the humble pencil? Lisa Schuetz, a certified handwriting examiner suggests that those who choose to use a pencil in place of a pen tend to be cautious individuals who like the opportunity to make changes as well as experiencing the need to feel in control. ^{xv}

Whilst the era of lengthy handwritten letters may have passed, the increase in sales of quality pens is encouraging confirmation of the truth that many graphophiles have long since known. Digital forms of communication may attempt to convey the personality of the writer with the selection of particular fonts or the use of emoticons but true individual expression relies upon the handwritten word and the carefully selected writing implement appropriate to act as the vehicle for this self-expression.

ⁱ Quotation taken from <http://www.jewelleryquarter.net/visit/museums/the-pen-museum/>

ⁱⁱ Details of this edition of Life Magazine can be located at: <http://www.lifemagazineconnection.com/LIFE-Magazines-1950s/LIFE-Magazines-1955/1955-August-1-LIFE-Magazine-Dodgers-Paris-Geneva>

ⁱⁱⁱ As reported in the Daily Mail, August 2012 located online at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2194496/BIC-pens-sarcastically-reviewed-product-Amazon.html>

^{iv} Reviews taken from www.amazon.com quoted in the article cited in endnote i

^v <http://www.parkerpen.com/en-GB/find-a-pen>

^{vi} Quotation taken from *Career Quiz: What Does Your Pen Say About You?* Located at <http://www.careerealism.com/career-quiz-pen/>

^{vii} Quotation taken from L Benyon, *Nick Hower: Five things I can't live without*, published June 2011 in the Express newspaper located at : <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/250421/Nick-Hower-Five-things-I-can-t-live-without>

^{viii} J P Schmitz quoted in article by C Lu-Lien Tan, *The Power of the Pen with Some Personality* published online in April 2013 for the Wall Street Journal located at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324449104578314771838771496>

^{ix} See endnote vi

^x S King, Author's note to *Dreamcatcher*, p694, 2001, Hodder & Stoughton

^{xi} Reader comment taken from J Hall's article *Fountain Pen Sales Double* published in May 2012 in the Daily Telegraph and located online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/9283229/Fountain-pen-sales-double.html>

^{xii} Quotation taken from S Brocklehurst, *Why are fountain pen sales rising?* published online in May 2012 for the BBC News website and located at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18071830>

^{xiii} See endnote xi

^{xiv} <http://readinggestures.com/meaning-of-ink-color-and-prefence-for-writing-with-pencils-in-handwriting-analysis/>

^{xv} L Schuetz, *The Meaning of Ink Color and Preference for Using Pencils in Handwriting Analysis*, Jan 2012, located at: <http://readinggestures.com/meaning-of-ink-color-and-prefence-for-writing-with-pencils-in-handwriting-analysis/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[H Gostony & S Schneider – *The Incredible Ball Point Pen – A Comprehensive History and Price Guide*, Published by Schiffer Publishing, 1998.](#)

<http://www.jewelleryquarter.net/visit/museums/the-pen-museum/>
<http://www.lifemagazineconnection.com/LIFE-Magazines-1950s/LIFE-Magazines-1955/1955-August-1-LIFE-Magazine-Dodgers-Paris-Geneva>
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2194496/BIC-pens-sarcastically-reviewed-product-Amazon.html>
<http://www.parkerpen.com/en-GB/find-a-pen>
<http://www.careerealism.com/career-quiz-pen/>
<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/250421/Nick-Hewer-Five-things-I-can-t-live-without>
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324449104578314771838771496>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/9283229/Fountain-pen-sales-double.html>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18071830>
<http://readinggestures.com/meaning-of-ink-color-and-prefence-for-writing-with-pencils-in-handwriting-analysis/>
<http://readinggestures.com/meaning-of-ink-color-and-prefence-for-writing-with-pencils-in-handwriting-analysis/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dip_pen
<http://www.theguardian.com/money/2007/jul/22/alternativeinvestment.personaleffects/print>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/9255054/Why-a-fountain-pen-has-long-lasting-appeal.html>
http://www.thewire.com/business/2013/04/what-does-your-writing-implement-say-about-you/63869/#disqus_thread
<http://www.fuelyourwriting.com/what-is-your-pen-personality/>

IMAGE CREDITS

image of Lascaux cave paintings
<http://deitchman.com/mcneillslides/images/lascaux-hunters.jpg>
Image of extract of *Persuasion* by Jane Austen
<http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/images/full/homepage.jpg>
Image of selection of dip pens
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nibs_various.jpg
Image of 1924 Parker Duofold Advertisement
http://www.pendemonium.com/images/advertisements/pkr_708.jpg
Image of Waterman Advertisement
<http://store.tidbitstrinkets.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/1919-PortePlumeIdeal-Waterman-LC-USZC2-4110-cropped.jpg>
image of Gimbels Department store
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9K-hGR_A4g/T1RLktQoPAI/AAAAAAAAAYTc/VGEhSdYfnDc/s1600/gimbels+bway+1.jpg
image of bic pens for her
http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2012/08/27/article-0-14B6FB39000005DC-709_306x545.jpg
Image of Nick Hewer
<http://bleistift.memmm.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/apprentices8e02lamy.jpg>