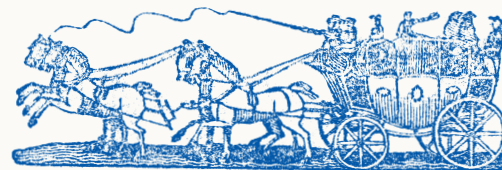




Living Letters

Correspondence then and now



Letters at work



↑ Illustration of female typist from product brochure for the Imperial 66 typewriter (in production 1954 to late 1960s). Trent River Authority Archive, RE/F/G&M/C10/2

Letters play important roles in public and professional communication and also reveal significant developments in the workplace and in technology.

Business, legal and other non-personal letters evidence the gradual shift that saw male scribes replaced by male secretaries, and male secretaries and clerks with female typists. They make it possible to map the impact of broader technological developments on human communication. They track the move from quills to pens, pens to typewriters (manual and then electronic), and typewriters to word processors and computers. Faxes and e-mails reveal a further transition to our current hybridised culture in which correspondence can take many forms, including hard copy and digital.

Sending and receiving letters is itself a business. The eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries saw the development of national, commercial postal routes and the fast mail coaches and other infrastructure (roads and services, including inns and other hostleries) required to support them. In the mid-nineteenth century roads and coaches were replaced themselves by the railways. Other key changes of this period included who actually paid for postage. The introduction of a uniform Penny Post in 1840 (accompanied by the first adhesive postage stamps) put an end to a complex system in which postage was usually paid by the receiver.

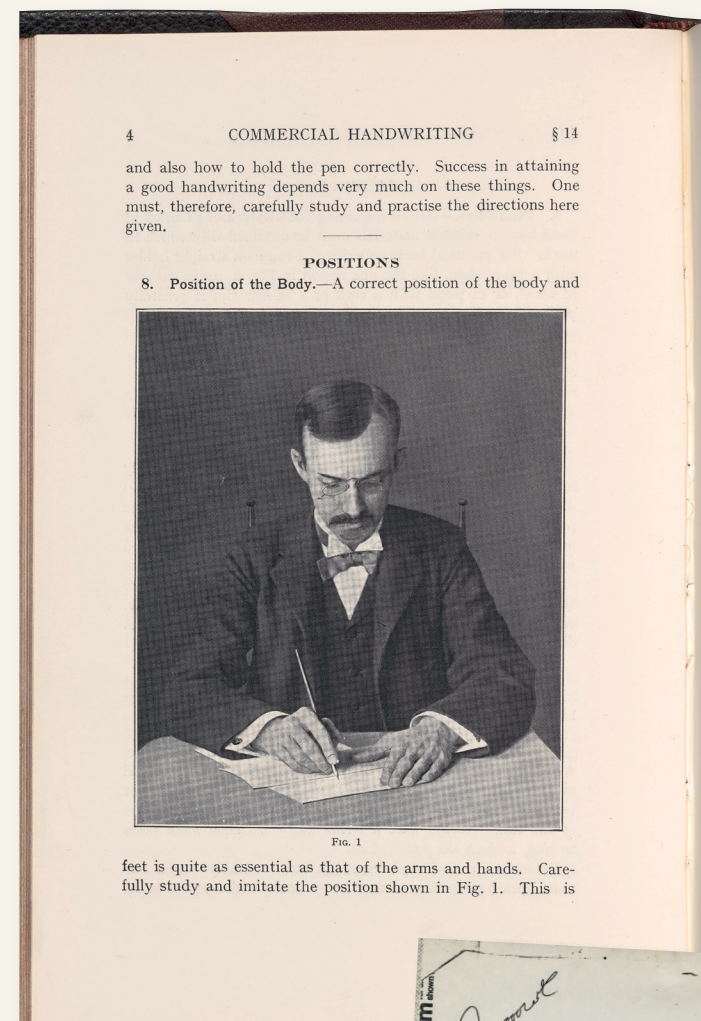
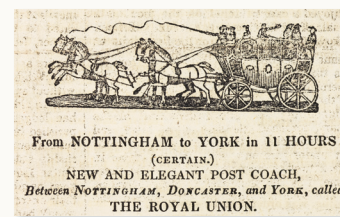
However, between 1652 and 1840, some individuals (for example, Members of Parliament) benefited from a franking system which allowed them to send and receive mail free of charge. The system was widely abused, with those with franking privileges allowing their family, friends and other contacts to take advantage of it.



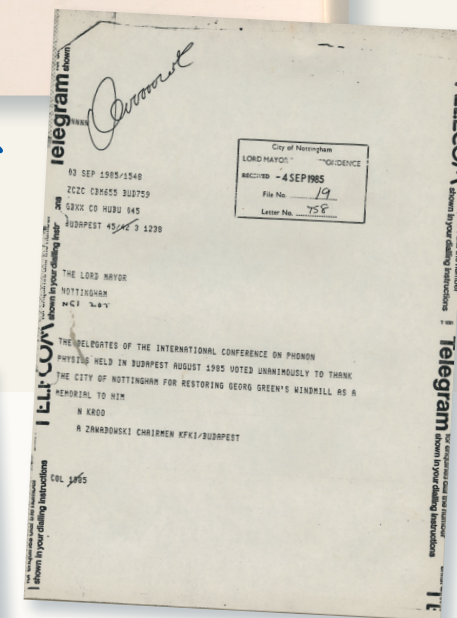
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Advertisement for post coach, from the *Nottingham Journal*, 24 April 1830. East Midlands Special Collection
Periodicals: Not



↑ Illustration of a clerk, from *International Correspondence Schools, Spelling, handwriting, commercial handwriting, elements of English, punctuation, business correspondence* (London, 1905). Briggs Collection LT310.PE /16



↑ Fax sent from Budapest to the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, 4 September 1985. George Green Collection, GG 5/27

← Letter from J. Bolton, using Lord Halifax's frank, c.1770s. Portland (Welbeck) Collection, Pw E 5