Methods of Stenography and Shorthand Writing

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Timeline

CREATION OF CHINESE SHORTHAND
Chinese Grass Script (caoshu) and Running Script (xigshu) invented.

63 BC

ABOLITION OF SHORTHAND
Shorthand seen as Cryptography, Black Magic and a symbol of witchcraft and therefore abolished by Emperor Justinian I in Rome.

1588 AD

CREATION OF PITMAN SHORTHAND
Sir Isaac Pitman becomes the founding father of modern shorthand. First in a wave of new age shorthand systems.

1877 AD

CREATION OF GREGG SHORTHAND
John Robert Gregg created his own system of shorthand, inspired by Pitman, which was widely adopted and became the prevailing system in the US.

1970 AD

206 BC

CREATION OF ROMAN SHORTHAND
'Tironian Notes' (Notae tironianae) created for Cicero, Orator and Statesman of Rome, by his slave, Marcus Tillius Tiro.

534 AD

CREATION OF TIMOTHE BRIGHT'S SHORTHAND
Invention of first English-language method. His book was called 'Characterie: The art of short, swift and secret writing by character.'

1837 AD

CREATION OF THE FIRST STENOGRAPH MACHINE
Miles Bartholomew created and patented the first ever machine that could be used for writing shorthand.

1888 AD

COMPUTER-AIDED TRANSCRIPTION
System created which enabled court reporters' notes to be transcribed instantly using computer software.
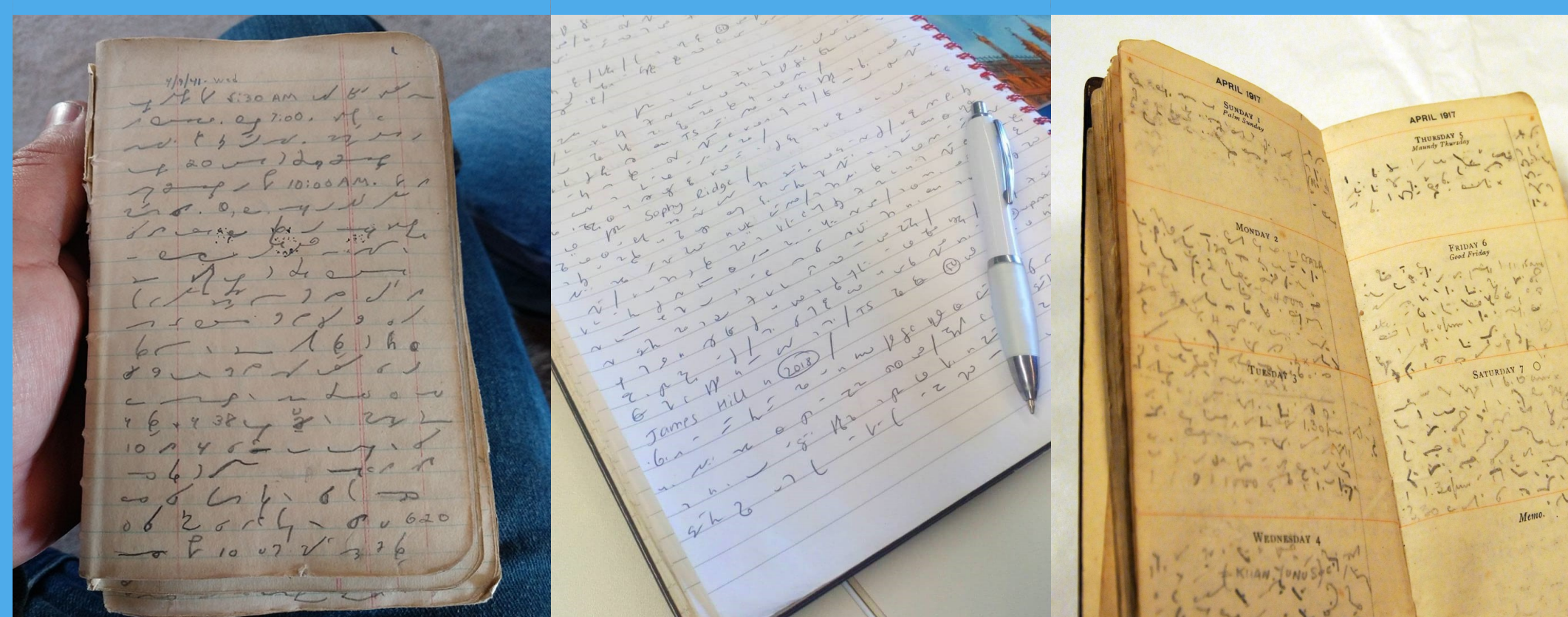
Uses of Shorthand

Secrecy: Many of the earlier systems of shorthand actually put more of an emphasis on secrecy in their design, rather than speed. Later though, secrecy became more of a byproduct of shorthand than a focus. However, this aspect is increasingly more significant, now that shorthand has faded in prevalence.

Speed: The immediately evident use of shorthand is speed. According to the Secretary of the British Institute of Verbatim Reporters, Mary Sorene, it is three times quicker to type out shorthand notes than to listen back to audio recordings.

Learning and Comprehension: In the modern day, shorthand is a useful method of learning and taking notes. Although most people can take faster typed notes than longhand notes, studies have shown that people are more likely to retain information if written by hand and so shorthand is a useful method for matching typed speeds while still learning the information.

Preservation of Information: As well as the above factors, shorthand can be useful as a method of simply preserving information that would otherwise be lost. Most obviously this is used in court reporting, but also historically for religious sermons, political speeches, and many more.

Shorthand in Historical and Modern Context

The development of shorthand throughout history has been closely connected to the historical settings and backgrounds in which each method was created. In Ancient Rome, shorthand was devised as a method of rapidly recording the oration of Cicero but subsequently, in the medieval period, it was banned due to connotations with witchcraft, secrecy and black magic. It wasn't until the turn of the 12th century that interest in shorthand picked up again, in part due to its utility as a tool for recording sermons and religious teachings.

When comparing shorthand to other writing systems, it is interesting to note that many shorthand systems can actually be viewed as an amalgamation of the features of different scripts. For example, the omission of vowels mirrors Egyptian Hieroglyphic writing and the long, thin strokes in some ways reflect those of Arabic and South Asian scripts. In fact, South Asia (specifically India) is one of the biggest areas in which shorthand is still used and taught - both the Pitman English language method as well as Hindi and other variations.

Sadly, in the modern world shorthand writing is being made increasingly obsolete by the development of technologies which allow notes to be taken quickly and audio to be recorded.

However, in certain industries, like journalism, it remains a constant and it is unlikely that shorthand writing will ever be made completely redundant.

Methods of Shorthand

Since Timothe Brighte's invention of the first English language system of shorthand, there have been a variety of methods created.

Pitman: The foundation of modern shorthand. Pitman is a phonetic system which uses symbols which represent sounds rather than letters. It also used varying thickness of strokes to distinguish between sounds.

Gregg: Another phonetic system but it used only thin strokes and therefore did not require a fountain or brush pen in order to be practiced. It was an extremely fast method and became the dominant system in the U.S.

Speedwriting: This system is alphabetic in contrast to most of the other systems and uses basically the Latin alphabet as its basis. It was designed to aid students who struggled with learning symbol based systems and relied on abbreviations to shorten words. It was also usable alongside typewriters and stenograph machines.

Teeline: Also an alphabetic system but using symbols to enable ease of writing. This system claims to be the quickest and easiest to learn, and is also the system used most frequently in modern British journalism.

Pitman	Gregg	Pitman	Gregg
K		TH	
G		CH	
M		J	
N		Z	
NG		Z	
P		SH	
B		ZH	
T		H	
D		H	
S		R	
S		R	
F		L	
V		W	
TH		Y	