The 20th century has indeed seen a remarkable revival in Western calligraphy: exhibitions, publications (books and journals), the foundation of professional societies, teaching courses at Polytechnics and Art Schools, and a widening circle of sometimes highly gifted amateurs and fine professional scribes engaged in practising the craft. The motivation for this new trend goes back to a number of movements and sentiments which made themselves felt during the last century. A decisive factor was without doubt the growing reaction against certain negative aspects of the Industrial Revolution such as the domination of everyday life by shoddy, machine-made and mass-produced objects without any inherent value. This engendered a nostalgic yearning for the past which in turn promoted an interest in medieval art and craftsmanship — sentiments intellectually underwritten by the philosophy of John Ruskin (1819–1900) and artistic movements such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Twentieth-century calligraphy emerged, rooted in the stimuli generated by the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 1880s and 1890s, and the individual work of William Morris and, most of all, Edward Johnston.

After around 1870 the poet and artist William Morris (1834–1896) — until then much occupied with creating designs for wallpapers, glass, textiles, tapestries and print — began to write and illuminate medieval and humanistic-style manuscripts. Over much of the next decade he experimented with various scripts, studying scribal techniques and using quill and parchment to achieve results. His calligraphy showed good rhythmic quality
but less understanding of the shapes of letters and their inner relationship. Nevertheless his manuscripts [134], and the research and patronage connected with his work, created much interest and opened the way to the calligraphic reforms of the 20th century, and with it a general revival of the craft. In 1899 Morris founded the Kelmscott Press and successfully tried his hand at engraving, type designing and high-quality printing. In the course he became one of the moving spirits behind the foundation of the Central School of Arts and Crafts (originally founded by the architect, designer and educationalist William Richard Lethaby) where eventually Sir Sydney Caryl Cokeleer (1867–1962), once Morris's secretary, taught lettering and calligraphy. But the person most decisively responsible for the revival of

Western calligraphy was Edward Johnston (1872–1944) who, impressed by Morris's ideas, abandoned his study of medicine to become a scribe and in the process rediscovered the lost technique of writing. Johnston realised that the nature and form of script were determined by the way the pen was held [135], and that the proportions of a letter were in direct ratio to the breadth of the pen's edge which, if trimmed chisel-wise, could produce that range of gradation from the thickest of strokes to the finest of hairlines which characterize the best medieval works he had so carefully studied in the British Museum Library (now The British Library). In 1899 Johnston began to teach in London, first at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and, later, at the Royal College of Art. As a teacher, Johnston had a decisive influence on 20th-century...
calligraphy and typography, particularly in England and Germany. His pupils included Anna Simons (who was to introduce his method in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands; see p.65), Eric Gill [136], Noel Rooke, William Graily Hewitt, Percy J. Delf-Smith (who became the honorary Secretary of a short-lived Society of Calligraphers) and T.J. Cobden-Sanderson (who founded the Doves Press which together with Morris’s Kelmscott Press greatly increased the status of book production by commissioning calligraphers to design the type).

Other art schools followed the example of the Royal College of Art and offered courses in lettering and writing. The first was Birmingham, Leicester College of Art was the next and eventually the subject became part of the curriculum in art schools throughout the country. Type design (for long in the control of engineers) passed into the hands of artists and calligraphic scholars such as, for example, Stanley Morison, Jan van Krimpen, Bruce Rogers, Victor Hammer and others. By selecting fine alphabets for font material, they ensured that those alphabets were used not only for books (printed as well as manuscript) and book covers, but also in the sphere of the private market. Indeed Johnston himself did some of his best work — church service books, wedding gifts, presentation addresses and the like — in the course of commissions from private patrons and public bodies. Calligraphy had indeed always been in demand for this type of work but now it received a new impetus and in the hands of the most talented scribes, a new quality. Johnston’s first book, Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering published in 1906, consisted of 500 pages illustrated with his own and Rooke’s drawings and reproductions from historic manuscripts. It was instructive, stimulating, technically helpful, and in due course it became an important handbook for calligraphers not only in Great Britain but also in Germany, America and in places as far afield as Australia. Other writing manuals followed: in 1909 Johnston’s other major work, a portfolio Manuscript and Inscription Letters, then Graily Hewitt’s Handwriting Manual (1916); eventually (in 1932) Alfred Fairbank’s A Handwriting Manual and (in 1955) J.H. Benson’s The First Writing Book: Arrighi’s La Operaia, both going back to the early copy-books of the Italian masters. Although America was in general about a decade behind Britain in organizing an effective arts and crafts movement, it had developed its own tradition of writing manuals (see p.199); for example, Frank Chouteau Brown’s Letters and Lettering: A Treatise with 200 Examples, a highly sophisticated work, had appeared in Boston four years before Johnston’s first book.

The manipulation of letterforms has always been at the heart of Western calligraphy and the 20th-century revival of the craft was closely connected with a reform of letter carving (see p.302). In England this reform, largely promoted by Eric Gill (who provided plates for Johnston’s second book), based itself to a considerable extent on the Roman lettering on Trajan’s column; analysed in detail, such letters were soon taught in every art school and became models for sign writing, street names, memorials, foundation stones, and so on.

This newly conscious use of letterforms touched other aspects of life too. On the continent of Europe graphic artists, painters and, after the destructive violence of the First World War which put into question the optimism of previous experiments, politically-motivated groups of artists such as, for example, the Dadaists, the Constructivists, and eventually also the more positive Bauhaus, began to make use of lettering. The aim of the Dadaists, a nihilistic group of artists, founded in 1917 in Zurich, was to demolish current aesthetic standards which they linked with bourgeois values, and seeing letters as the normal expression of a conventional society, they began to turn them into instruments of attack: the chaos of typefaces used for their magazine Dada illustrates the message. The Constructivists on the other hand used the disposition, the size and the weight of the components of individual letters to create unique abstract patterns which they saw as a representation of the contemporary machine age and the new revolutionary order in Russia which had replaced the decadence of the past. Their work embraced posters,
advertisements, letter and newspaper headings; their preferred letterform was sans serif, a functional letterform without historical commitment. The most important focal centre for such new experiments was, however, the Bauhaus which flourished in Germany between 1919 and 1933. Its aim was to end the schism between art and technically-expert craftsmanship, mainly within the environment of architecture, but also by teaching typography in order to find new and positive letterforms. Among the best results were a practical machine alphabet typeface called Universal (Herbert Bayer, 1925) and Paul Renner’s Futura Sanserif.

Painters too began to treat letters as an important part of their visual vocabulary. Cubists, Surrealists and the then fashionable Collagistes began to include single letters or fragments of newspaper in their paintings. The “secret writing” pictures of Paul Klee (1878–1940) and Max Ernst (born 1891) employed the principle notion of (still legible) writing which turned towards more abstract brush movements in the hands of such artists as Mark Tobey (see p.216) and Hans Hartung (born 1904). Letters in a painting were used to underline a theme, add a message and with it become an integral part of a picture itself; or they could simply provide a visual effect by using the idea of layout linked to meaning. A good many artists have used (and are using) lettering in this way, from Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Joan Miro (born 1893) to Franz Kline (1910–1962), who under De Kooning’s influence developed his characteristic action paintings of slashing black and white calligraphy, and eventually Andy Warhol (1928–1987) and the Pop Art movement. Pop Art, which emerged in the 1950s, set out to challenge conventional ideas of good taste and the hermetic inviolability of art itself; the use of letters is often in the form of advertisements and billboards, reminiscent, at times, of the early Constructivists.

In 1915 the London Transport Services commissioned Johnston to design a new alphabet for its publicity and signs. The result was his sans serif block-letter alphabet based on classical Roman proportions which became the inspiration for many such types [137]. By reaching commerce, calligraphy and lettering began to play an important role in everyday life and in the everyday business of people. Newspapers, journals and magazines began increasingly to display more lavish and in many cases well-written and composed advertisements [138]. It is in the field of commercial advertising that some modern scribes have found a lucrative outlet. There are shop signs, billboards, house signs, cards marking various occasions [139], menus, invitations, tombstones, posters, record sleeves, book jackets [140], wrapping paper [141], shopping bags, T-shirts [142], corporate logos, specially designed initials [143], TV-titles and the wide variety of neon signs illuminating our cities at night – the examples are more or less endless.
A single-colour birthday card using different styles of script, in different sizes, and an imaginative layout to much effect.

Reproduced with permission from Rosemary Sassoon's, The Practical Guide to Calligraphy

Book jackets offer a wide range of possibilities for the use of a variety of scripts, colours and layouts.

Photographed 1984

Fine writing, calligraphy and pen-drawn pictures have been used widely and effectively for advertising. Design for a wrapping paper.

Reproduced with permission from Rosemary Sassoon's, The Practical Guide to Calligraphy

Decorating T-shirts with words or short messages has become more and more popular over the years. In fact the practice follows well-established traditions; for example, the garments used by Christian priests during mass, coronation robes, and the shirts inscribed with messages of the Koran.

Photographed by Hilary Benson and Richard Kennedy
On the whole the successful revival of calligraphy during the first half of the 20th century was based on three inter-related factors: the teaching of lettering and calligraphy in art schools and polytechnics; the growing number of exhibitions which introduced the subject to a much wider audience and by doing so created further interest; and the various societies, journals and books which encouraged standards and invited active practice.

In 1921 Edward Johnston’s pupils and successors working at the Central School of Arts and Crafts founded the Society of Scribes and Illuminators which produced an excellent and still active journal (144) of worldwide distribution; a year later the Society held its first public exhibition. This was soon followed by the creation of smaller research groups to study particular problems and techniques related to calligraphy, such as writing on skins, preparation of inks, methods of gilding, or styles of cursive handwriting. The findings of these groups eventually provided the basis for the compilation of the first Calligrapher’s Handbook during the 1950s (ibid p.31). Several members of the Society (such as Alfred Fairbank and Joan Kingsford) wrote manuscripts for private patrons, some of which can now be seen in national museums and libraries. In 1931 the Society arranged, in cooperation with the Victoria and Albert Museum, an exhibition of ‘Three Centuries of Illuminated Addresses, Diplomas and Honorary Freedom Scrolls’ with contributions by Edward Johnston, Graih Hewitt, Ida Henstock, Laurence Christie, Daisy Alcock and other contemporary scribes. Further exhibitions followed, a good many of which were subsequently taken to America (New York, Boston, Chicago) and the continent of Europe (Paris, Copenhagen, etc.). The end of the Second World War created demand for Rolls of Honour for the Services which lasted well into the 1960s. In 1951 the Society, together with four other major crafts societies, and aided by a small Government grant, founded the British Crafts Centre under the chairmanship of John Farleigh. The Centre provided stability and, over the next decade, launched a series of major exhibitions.

Had Sidney Cockerell’s forecast, made so confidently in 1914, been fulfilled? Yes and no. The middle of the 20th century did indeed see a general revival of all major crafts, art schools expanded, but (an uneasy coincidence) almost simultaneously, calligraphy as a subject was dropped from the curriculum, since it was thought to have no useful role to play in industry; indeed, within a decade, very few art schools taught it as a subject. But by then a large number of professional, and some of the amateur, scribes were producing very good work. In addition, several calligraphic societies flourished, the most important one being the Society for Italic Handwriting founded in 1953 under the direction of Alfred Fairbank. The year 1971 saw the establishment of the Government-funded Crafts Council which provided grants and bursaries. Calligraphy was also flourishing in other European countries and, even more so, in America. The exchange of exhibitions and teachers encouraged new ideas and provided additional stimulus.
What did not materialize was the general improvement in everybody’s handwriting, incidentally also one of the declared aims of Fairbank’s Society for Italic Handwriting. Despite much individual effort, such as Rosemary Sassoon’s Johnston-based Foundational Hand, and, most recently and perhaps most promising, the attention given to the subject in Britain by the New National Curriculum, standards have, if anything, declined. The tools used for writing (biro, ball point, and so on) and the inroads into everyday life made by computers, telex, fax, and telephone have not helped. In fact, in many cases, typeface seems to be the only acceptable form of formal writing, handwriting itself becoming all too often an ill-defined, ill-disciplined ‘cursive’ which hardly serves the purpose of communication. But then Cockerell’s forecast and the optimism of the largely politically-thinking early reformers (who believed that it was human nature to improve, that people, once shown a particular way and encouraged to move into a particular direction, will eventually do so of their own accord) had always been based on a misunderstanding. Good handwriting is not the same as calligraphy, but even good handwriting had in the past been a necessity only for the copyists/Clarks and the need for good copyists (and even clarks) has long since gone. Calligraphy is also not an accomplishment that can simply be taught to willing adults and less willing schoolchildren; it requires talent, originality and dedication. In addition, though we still need good and legible handwriting, we no longer need it in quite the same way as in the days when thousands of diligent clarks laboured in commercial houses and Government offices. In fact, handwriting has ceased to be the most essential means of communication and information storage. But this should in no way blind us to the real achievements of contemporary calligraphers and the fact that modern calligraphy, especially work produced after the 1930s (see p.216) has remained alive to contemporary streams of thinking and reflects much of our attitude to life and society.

Continental Europe

The 20th-century revival in the art of writing and lettering was not restricted to Great Britain. Parallel (and not always unconnected) movements occurred in other parts of Europe, most notably Austria and Germany.

In Austria the main exponent of this new trend was Rudolf von Larisch (1856–1934) whose work in the Imperial Chancery in Vienna had given him ample opportunity to study historic manuscripts and compare the various hands he found there with (less impressive) contemporary standards. His pamphlet Zierschreiben im Dienst der Kunst (‘Decorative lettering and writing in the service of art’), published in 1899, led, three years later, to a teaching appointment in lettering at the Vienna School of Art and, with it, to a position
of influence [145]. His most important work Unterricht in Ornamentaler Schrift (‘Instructions in decorative writing and lettering’), published in 1906, further extended the scope of his studies and had considerable influence in German-speaking countries. Historically and geographically Vienna has always stood at the border between East and West and von Larisch’s approach reflected this duality; unlike most Western scribes who concentrate on the outward manipulation of letterforms, he held that the calligrapher should express intuitive feelings in his work and that the pattern of letters on a page should be in harmony with the rhythm of writing and also with the material used (von Larisch encouraged the use of glass, metal, textiles, wood, and pottery).

In Germany the revival of calligraphy was largely based on the work of Rudolf Koch (1874–1934) and on the teaching of Johnston’s star pupil, Anna Simmons (see p.65). Koch combined tradition and inventiveness in the use of Gothic letterforms (always a German favourite, though by then Roman types too were coming into regular use); he was an excellent teacher, creating a highly successful and influential Workshop Community in his native Offenbach, but reserved his best work for type designs. Whereas Johnston had seen writing as the central discipline of his craft, Koch gave this place to lettering in the broadest sense. Koch inspired a whole generation of art teachers, type
American calligraphy, at first largely based on practical considerations, goes back to a desire for improved handwriting and the availability of imported English manuals such as William Mather’s *Young Man’s Companion* (London, 1601) which taught an English version of Italian Humanistic mixed with remnants of the older Gothic Secretary hand. Edward Cocker’s (see p. 173) books were well known, though it seems those of John Ayres (see p. 176) less so. The first known American-printed manual for handwriting appeared in Philadelphia in 1748 under the imprint of Franklin & Hall. This was George Fisher’s *The Instructor, or American Young Man’s Best Companion, containing Instructions in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and many other Things by which the Art of Writing will be improved and a great many others made use of in writing*. This book was quite frank about the fact that most of the book (except for the writing models) had been pirated from an early (1725) well-known English work, declaring somewhat loftily, that the “British edition contained many things of no interest to those living in these parts of the world,” therefore “in their place I have inserted other matters more immediately useful to us Americans,” (See p. 18).

Pride of place among American copy-books is usually given to the work of Abiah Hooke (1718–1769) who also trained a group of young Bostonians in his South Writing School which appeared under the title The *Writing Master’s Amusement. A New Alphabet in Knot-Work: adorned with a Variety of Scripture-Pieces*, written in all the Hands of Great Britain, and embellished with Borders, the Whole performed with the Pen (1767), propagating basically a fine version of English copperplate. Other copy-books (or treaties on handwriting) followed, such as for example W. Davenport’s *The Youth’s Entertaining Amusement* (Philadelphia 1754); Christopher Sower’s *Nicht-Deutsch Americaische Calender* (Philadelphia 1755); Thomas Powell’s *The Writing Master’s Assistant* (1764); and (most important) the first extant purely American-designed, made and produced copy-book, namely John Jenkins’s *The Art of Writing, reduced to a Plain and Easy System, On a Plan entirely New* (Boston, 1791). Jenkins’s (1846) book taught an orthodox version of the English unlooped Round Hand to the “Gentlemen and Ladies and to the Young Masters and Misses throughout the United States” (See p. 19).

During the 19th century attempts to improve handwriting led to the creation of several systems (that is, methods of teaching) and ‘colleges’ where they could be taught. In fact, during the first half of the century, over 100 writing masters were distributing copy-books which taught rapid writing (a ‘Running Hand’) to men of business (See p. 142). After the 1960s these were distributed by mail order and in the form of self-instructors. Among the first
 manuals to propagate this style were Henry Dean's *Analytical Guide to the Art of Penmanship* (Salem, 1894) and Benjamin Howard Rand's *A New and Complete System of Mercantile Penmanship* (Philadelphia, 1814). Other writing masters followed suit, some enjoying an exceedingly wide readership. In 1830 Benjamin Franklin Foster published his *Practical Penmanship being a Development of the Carstairian System* which sold some two million examples in America, England and France. Strangely enough, in Europe Foster's script became known as the 'American system' though it was in fact heavily influenced by the Englishman Joseph Carstairs's invention of the 'talanto-

graph' (a method by which a ribbon was tied around the thumb and the first and second fingers to force the unfortunate pupil to use his whole forearm and not just his hand).

Well known and commercially successful was the Spencerian College of Penmanship and Business which dominated the market for some 35 years. Founded by Platt Roger Spencer (1800–1864) in Ohio it propagated a sloping, semi-angular style, which was rapid and legible while at the same time lending itself quite easily to embellishments [149]. Spencer himself had begun to teach handwriting at the age of 15 (having become dissatisfied with
the scripts he saw on village notices) and he and his five sons ran the college (and eventually a chain of such colleges in 44 cities) from a log cabin at the family farm while at the same time travelling around the country to teach at various academies. Beside his regular style, Spencer offered a reduced version which he called ‘ladies’ hand’ and in 1848 published *Spencer and Rice’s System of Ladies’ Epitaphic and Ornamental Penmanship, carefully prepared for the Use of Public and Private Schools and Seminaries*. Loops and flourishes and an extended slant were gradually considered more suitable for the female sex (see p.64), a concept successfully exploited by Jenkins and later used by Benjamin Foster who in 1829 became Master of the Art of Writing at the Female Academy at Albany, NY. As the 19th century progressed competition mounted between those who emphasised a plain practical business hand and others who delighted in flourishes which could occasionally lead to such extravagance as quill-written pen pictures of animals, humans and the portraits of national heroes; as time passed the ‘flourishers’ grew however increasingly more defensive. Another successful 19th-century writer/entrepreneur was Charles Paxton Zaner who in 1886 founded the Zanerian College of Penmanship, also in Ohio (Columbus). He abandoned the shading of letters altogether and taught a uniform thickness of line to encourage speed; this eventually produced a ‘cursive’ or ‘business hand’, which, like copperplate in the ‘Old Country’, soon found favour amongst those anxious to advance their career prospects. Other such colleges, for example the Iowa Corporation, founded by Austin N. Palmer in 1884, promoting a good and legible handwriting ‘among the Youth of our Country’, followed.

Modern American handwriting derives thus largely from the teachings of H. Dean, B.F. Foster, P.R. Spencer and A.R. Dunton (who was involved in a lengthy dispute with Spencer – American writing masters being often as quarrelsome as their European counterparts). At the beginning of the 20th century the Italic style and the use of the broad-edged pen were greatly advanced by Frances M. Moore, who after having studied in London under G. Hewitt, published her manual in 1926. Since then it has been mainly the formal and semi-formal Italic hand that has made headway in the United States (ibid p.103), finding favour not only as a model for everyday handwriting but also amongst those actively engaged in the pursuit of calligraphy. In the beginning it took some effort to convert teachers and pupils to this style; more recently such books as Fred Eager’s *Italic Way to Beautiful Writing* (1974) have given further impetus in this direction.

Apart from English copy-books individual immigrant groups brought their own styles which were often cherished together with other forms of folk art by their descendants as part of their ethnic identity. The Pilgrim Fathers had brought contemporary English scripts (Gothic Secretary and a mixed Secretary/Italian hand), and trade between the two continents introduced in due course contemporary French and Dutch styles. Under the influence of visions, the Shakers, believers in Christ’s Second Appearance, who had come to America in 1774, produced elaborate spiritual manuscripts. Another interesting example is a style generally referred to as Fraktur which originated amongst the Moravian and Mennonite settlers in Pennsylvania. Used mainly for certificates (baptism, marriage, birth), house blessings (Hausseggen) and as examples of fine penmanship (Vorschript) it based itself on the fairly austere contemporary German Gothic hand but acquired an appealing element of naivety by combining lettering with bold, colourful and often symbolic designs. In vogue between the mid-18th and the mid-19th century it also became an inspiration for wall decorations in Pennsylvania farmhouses.

At the beginning of the 20th century, several attempts were made to reform not only handwriting but also lettering and type design. Such reforms centred mainly around men like Frederic W. Goudy (1865–1945), Bruce Rogers (1870–1957) and, most important of all, William A. Dwiggins (1880–1956), a well-known type-designer whose calligraphy owed little to European influence but showed great gaiety, character and originality. In 1935