

# THE MONOTYPE RECORDER

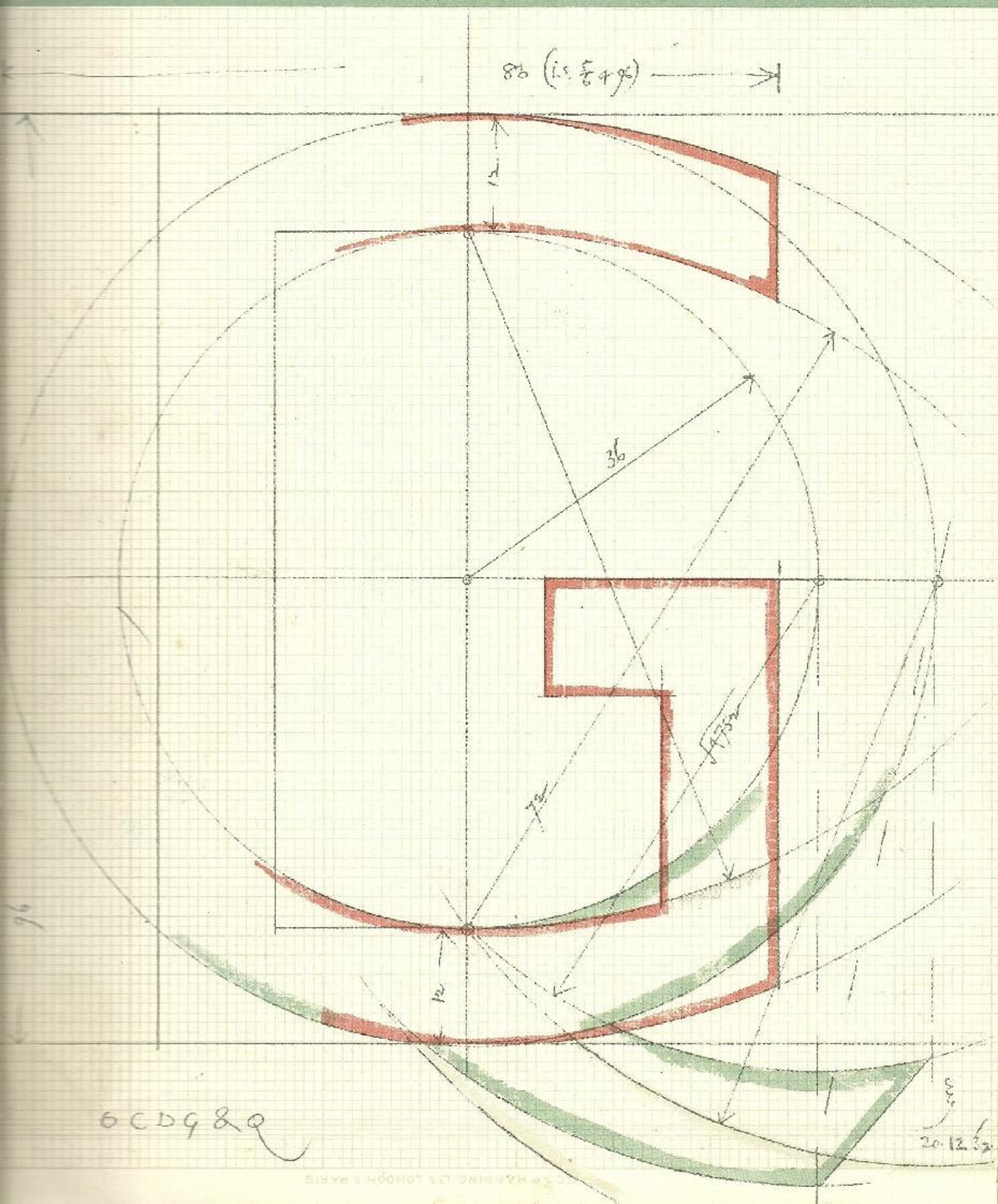
COMMEMORATING THE EXHIBITION  
HELD AT MONOTYPE HOUSE OF  
LETTERING AND TYPE DESIGNS BY

## Eric Gill

Vol. 41

No. 3

1958



This number of the Monotype Recorder is set in 'Monotype' Joanna, Series 478, and constitutes the first showing of the series. The text and gravure illustrations have been printed by Sun Printers Ltd., Watford and London; the cover has been printed by photo-lithography by Balding and Mansell Ltd., Wisbech. The line plates were made by W. G. Briggs Ltd., using the powderless etching process.

Illustrations on the cover pages:

- Front: Part of a drawing for Gill Sans C D G O Q dated 20.12.32. The original is in pencil and colour wash on graph paper and measures 11" wide by 14½" high.
- Back: Template for 12" letters made for King's College inscription, 1915. Original in pencil and red chalk on cream cartridge paper.
- Inside back: Eric Gill's drawing for Gill Sans italic lower-case, slightly reduced. (From the original in The Monotype Corporation's Type Drawing Office.)

May we remind our friends and the trade generally that the word 'Monotype' is our Registered Trade Mark and indicates that the goods to which it is applied are of our manufacture or merchandise.

VOLUME XII No. 3

THE

AUTUMN 1958

# MONOTYPE RECORDER

COMMEMORATING AN EXHIBITION OF  
LETTERING AND TYPE DESIGNS BY

ERIC  
GILL

HELD AT MONOTYPE HOUSE, LONDON  
IN OCTOBER

1958

THE MONOTYPE CORPORATION LIMITED

REGISTERED MONOTYPE TRADE MARK



①

R. V. Hornsby

# ERIC GILL: MASTER OF LETTERING

## I: THE MAN AS WE KNEW HIM

EIGHTEEN into thirty-five won't go. The people who were under twenty in 1940, the year of Eric Gill's death, will never have the right answer to the question, "Did you ever meet him?" They can never even fully realize how much that question asks. To have met and spoken with Eric Gill, or even to have caught a glimpse of that bearded figure striding up Fetter Lane in his leather-belted work-frock, is not an experience that anyone is likely to have forgotten: but it is not easy to convey the quality of that encounter. It cannot be done by saying what he was "like". It was by what he seemed un-like, that one could measure the depth of the impression that he made on those who knew him in life.

In manner and garb he was unlike anything that one would have expected to see in the City of London two hundred years after Mrs. Watt's tea-kettle blew off its lid. But where Gill capped and crowned his own unexpectedness was by making it clear at first glance that he was as far removed from mental likeness to any crank as he was from sartorial likeness to any bowler-hatted business man.

Witness to that fact can come most convincingly from the recollections of those who were serving The Monotype Corporation in relatively humble capacities in 1927, when Gill, already a renowned sculptor, first visited Fetter Lane to discuss with his friend Stanley Morison the possibilities of a new sans-serif type face. A mechanical engineer says: "What surprises me most when I look back to that first impression of him is just the fact that there didn't seem to be anything 'peculiar' about the man. You'd never have put him down as a famous Artist. You'd sooner have said he was a good mechanic—or anyway some good workman who knew his job". And from the clerical side: "I remember he

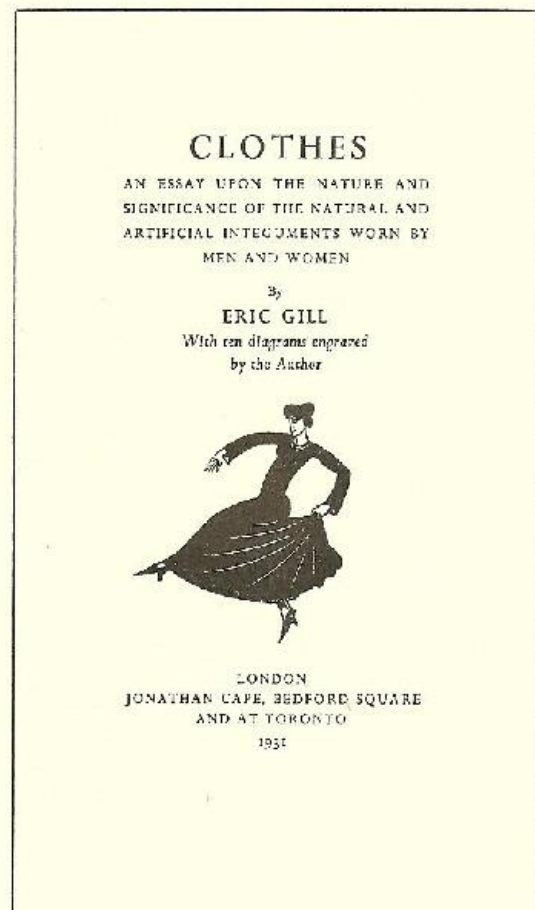


Fig. 1: Reduced from a trial-page measuring  $7\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{3}{4}''$ .

wasn't a bit what I'd expected. Somehow he didn't look at all like a celebrity. There was nothing stand-offish about him". On minds well accustomed to spotting unconventionality, the man's costume had left no more than a vague impression of comfortable appropriateness.

Such naïve reports may be of some value to those whose notion of the living man has been built only upon inferences from his writings – which were profoundly revolutionary – and from a study of his work as a sculptor: work which in its way was no less revolutionary, in that it rejected the whole modern convention of building up the image by plastic modelling and reverted to that direct attack upon the stone which is implied in the very word "sculpture". To one of us, Gill merrily described that process as "gradually chipping away what doesn't belong to whatever's waiting to be revealed inside the block of stone or log of wood". The very first misconception that would have to be chipped away from the image of the man himself, would be any notion that he must have seemed odd or eccentric, coming with such ideas and in such a costume into the staid City of London. The very opposite was the case. What is first remembered of him there is the curiously "commonsensical" twinkle in the alert grey eyes behind their thick-rimmed glasses. Laughter-lines were etched at the corners of those eyes: the light, matter-of-fact voice dropped memorable, homely phrases over the edge of a chuckle. He had that one quality by which the same man is most surely distinguished from any sort of crank, namely Humility – in the old and vigorous sense of the word. Once that fact is established, it is easier to get down to the nature of Eric Gill's profound and refreshing "unlikeness" to anyone who could have been ticketed and pigeon-holed as he came past Temple Bar.

Gill's beard, though not of patriarchal amplitude, was long and thick enough to obscure that region at the base of the neck to which the modern Englishman looks for information, at twenty yards' distance, as to a stranger's affiliations; in other words, to what "bunch" he has tried to "tie" himself. The interesting thing, however, was that one's glance never travelled downwards from that point to the homespun tunic and golf-stockings; it was drawn straight up to the man's quizzical, penetrating, unforgettable eyes. It was there that one found the reason why Gill could never be sorted into any recognizable "bunch", whether of the soap-box or of the studio. It may be that our own under-twenties, whose imaginations have been stretched by science fiction, could best say what the look in his eyes was most nearly like.

Imagine a man who has landed on another planet: one to which a section of the human race was rocketed-off,

some generations ago, in a frantic and foredoomed effort to colonize an unsuitable globe. But say that the exiles have temporarily contrived, by a thousand artifices, to build their civilization entirely on synthetic substitutes for natural things: so that when the visitor offers them a way of getting back to Earth, and describes the pleasures of the home-planet, they only reply smugly: "Ah, but we've come a long way from all that sort of thing". The unconscious irony of that remark would bring a look of compassionate amusement into the puzzled eyes that were taking in every detail of that quaint and unreal landscape. It was with just such a look that Gill mysteriously conveyed to even the most unimaginative of bystanders the fact that he belonged, not merely to some different "section" of modern civilization, but to an entirely different world.


#### THE RADICAL REJECTION

This was literally true: for the word "world" is older than Columbus's sphere and primarily refers to the whole vast cluster of things-known and things-taken-for-granted that make up a lifetime of human experience. When we speak of "the world today" we are referring to a civilization in which nearly all the physical objects which we still call man-made are, in fact, made by machines with as little guidance from men and women as still remains to be eliminated by the experts in automation. With his whole heart Gill had dissociated himself from such a "world". What most distinguished him was that wholeheartedness. All systems of social reform and all concepts of progress stem down to some basic assumption as to the nature of man and his real wants and needs; and it was on that level that Gill said No to the world of the Industrial Revolution. As a result he had got away whole: and it was the wholeness, health, of the man's personality that had so curiously reassuring an effect upon those who met him for the first time.

Admittedly every "artist", in the broad sense of "skilled hand-maker", is nowadays morally bound to make some gesture of dissociation from an industrialized civilization which has tossed-out nine tenths of his tribe as obsolete – and is all too ready to tolerate the surviving few as decorative anarchists, peacocks-in-the-henrun, human anachronisms who for some quaint reason still think it necessary to make whole objects, one by one, by hand. From such insulting tolerance, any modern practitioner of the "fine" arts can be expected to turn away and stalk out on his own feet, in all the ostentation of offended dignity. But Gill's rejection of industrialism had gone too deep to leave him at all content to make a mere side-slip from the heresy of Industry for Money's Sake into the



MARY BEATRICE

only daughter  
of Walter Consitt Boulter  
Vicar of this Parish, died 12 Mar.  
1902, in her 21st year. 

She was a student of the  
Royal Academy of Arts  
& Organist of this Church.

This window, patterned on  
one formerly existing here,  
together with the glass show-  
ing what things she loved.

was dedicated  
in memory of her  
24 Feb. 1906.





Arctostaphylos

A.E.P. 64

to Mrs. Charles L. Campbell, June 1890  
Guthrie, Idaho

Get rid



minutes of 1800

Whitaker

of a little

three. 7

12

parallel heresy of Art for Art's Sake. No wonder "you couldn't put him down as [the conventional image of] a famous Artist" – complete with the flowing tie of the Old School of Bohemianism. He could see, as anyone could, that "the artists" had fallen upon evil times in this century of the scientist and technologist. But to Gill that was no matter of merely grieving for a handful of painters in oil and modellers of clay. To him, all men were artists, potentially at least. It was the human race on which the disaster had fallen; and the last thing he wanted was to single out, as alone worth rescuing, those rarely-talented few who were already able to earn a living by the full enjoyment of their creative faculties. It was to the man in the street, the girl on the assembly-line, the bored youth at the Fun Fair pin-table, that Gill wanted to restore the dignity and responsibility which, to him, arose only out of the opportunity to practise creative skill under the spur of material poverty. He wanted all the sons of Adam to head back to their native planet: he did not want to see the exceptional genius rocketing only as far as the rarified upper-atmosphere, there to flash as a satellite – remote indeed from the sordid sphere of the money-makers but kept well in orbit to it by the gravitational pull of the art dealers, the art critics, and the wealthy art collectors.

A similar impatience with half-measures kept Gill out of the ranks of militant socialism and even broke him away from the Fabianism of his youth. He could hardly have been expected to shed any blood to decide which "class" should own and exploit the factories and cinema palaces and juke-boxes.

This journal is, as they say, "no place" in which to discuss the rights and wrongs of Gill's economic and religious principles. If ever a man put himself on record Eric Gill did – in his essays,\* in his correspondence,† and in that vehement summary of his inner life and escapes which he uttered almost literally on his dying breath.‡ The documents are there, and the literature of his appraisal is large and still growing.\*\* What matters here is that the nature and strength of those convictions should be known to any student of Gill's work as a type

\*Essays by Eric Gill. London, Jonathan Cape, 1947. For a full list of his published works, see Bibliography.

†Letters of Eric Gill, edited by Walter Shewring. Cape 1947.

‡Autobiography by Eric Gill. Cape. First published in December 1940, the month following his death after an operation for lung cancer, the book is now in its 12th edition. He described it as an "autopsychography, a record of mental experience".

\*\*Bibliography of Eric Gill by Ivan R. Gill. Cassell & Co., London, 1953, a record of all Eric Gill's writings and illustrations, with a list of major criticisms of his work and 96 facsimiles of title-pages.



Fig. 2: From a drawing 1"×4", dated May 17th, 1907, and inscribed in Gill's hand "Name plate to be etched in white metal and letters filled in with Blackwax" and "N.B. No reduction".

designer. Such study would be useless and misleading unless it started from the fact that he was a man who entirely meant what he said and consistently did what he believed. One could disagree with him; in a way it was a pleasure to do so, for he was the most chivalrous and amusing of debaters. But one could never suspect him of cynicism, and there could never be the slightest doubt of his integrity.

Integrity: it was a word that Gill loved and traced back to the roots at which it is joined to "integer", whole. So close-knit was his pattern of conviction and action, work and life, that it is impossible to tear off a section of his output for separate examination under the critical microscope. Either the whole comes up with the part, or else the tweezers slip and he is lost to comprehension. Fortunately for the graphic artists, however, his work with the Alphabet was that "part" by which his entire significance can most surely be grasped. For it was no mere side-excursion by a celebrated sculptor into the humbler realm of lettering. On the contrary, it was the sculptor – and the essayist, for that matter – who had developed out of the stone-mason who had found his vocation, and achieved international fame, by carving letters. When one has said that Gill showed the serenity and authority of a man who lives according to his convictions, one still has to ask what kind of livelihood kept him free enough from spiritual embarrassment and compromise long enough to form and test those convictions. The answer is in Gill's letters\* and in his Autobiography, from that point when the young man who was in his uncomfortable third year of apprenticeship to an architect was offered by Edward Prior the job of cutting some inscriptions on the new Medical Schools which he was building at Cambridge. "My acceptance of this job depended upon my being able to leave the architect's office . . . I had to decide for myself and that

\*Cf. letter to William Rothenstein from Ditchling, 1912: "I have got the flywheel and safety-valve of letter-cutting to hearten me . . ."

11: Above Gill's drawing for the Common Seal of King's College, London, dated 1908.

Below Die-stamping of the Seal with Gill's corrections.

¶ Legibility, in practice, amounts simply to what one is accustomed to. But this is not to say that because we have got used to something demonstrably less legible than something else would be if we could get used to it, we should make no effort to scrap the existing thing. ¶ Goodwill may be thought to be more or less evenly spread out, like margarine or even butter, over the mass of the population, but good sense, i.e. intelligence, critical ability, and that passionate concentration upon precise perfection which is a kind of genius, is not so common. Goodwill comes from below & occasionally penetrates into studios and cabinets. Good sense comes from above & percolates thro' the mass of the people. Everybody thinks that he knows an A when he sees it; but only the few extraordinarily rational minds can distinguish between a good one & a bad one, or can demonstrate precisely what constitutes A-ness. When is an A not an A? Or when is an R not an R? It is clear that in any letter there is some sort of norm. The discovery of this norm is obviously the first thing to be done.

¶ The first notable attempt to work out the norm for plain letters was made by Mr. Edward Johnston

when he designed the sans-serif letter for the London Underground Railways. Some of the letters are not entirely satisfactory, especially when it is remembered that, for such a purpose, an alphabet should be as near as possible 'fool-proof', i.e. the forms should be measurable, patient of dialectical exposition, as the philosophers would say - nothing should be left to the imagination of the signwriter or the enamel plate-maker. In this quality of 'fool-proofness' the Monotype sans-serif fount (fig. 30)

A B C D E F G H I J K  
M N O P Q R R S T U  
V W X Y Z Æ Æ  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Figure 30 - Monotype Gill sans-serif

is perhaps an improvement. The letters are more strictly normal - freed from forms depending upon the appreciation and critical ability of the workman who has to reproduce them.

¶ But, as there is a norm of letter form - the bare

wasn't difficult. It's not that I'm rash and adventurous; but I know a good thing when I see it. And this was a superlatively good thing. A real job of work and no more sitting on an office stool drawing things for other people to do . . . Henceforward I gave up all idea of being an architect and became a letter-cutter and monumental mason."\*

And but for one crucial event, that might have been little more than it seemed at the time, an "escape down" from a gentlemanly profession to the rank of skilled artisan. But . . .

"I went to Edward Johnston's class of writing and lettering at the Central School. It was through Edward Johnston that I finally threw off the art nonsense of the Chichester art-school and got away, though of course not immediately, from the amateurishness of my efforts as an architect's pupil . . . But this event was much more than that. I won't say that I owe everything I know about lettering to him . . . but I owe everything to the foundation which he laid. And his influence was much more than that of a teacher of lettering. He profoundly altered the whole course of my life and all my ways of thinking."\*

#### "THE FOUNDATION"

As pupil, then as assistant to Johnston and sharer of his rooms in Lincoln's Inn, Gill mounted to a position of unique eminence as a carver of letters in stone. In that field he stood alone, and he was resorted to as Johnston's only peer in pen lettering by the cognoscenti – Count Harry Kessler, for whom Gill produced the free and delicate title lettering of the Insel Verlag editions; St. John Hornby, for whom he painted a distinguished facia for Smith & Son in 1903. But this was more than a case of acquiring the assurance that comes from doing any job superlatively well and receiving due recognition for it.

The things that he was making, letters of the Alphabet, gave him one immense advantage over the pictorial artist. They were the only kind of thing, save possibly geometrical ornament, that can be carved and painted gloriously without ever raising the question with which Philistines have been infuriating the painters-in-oil ever since the arrival of Daguerre's little one-eyed machine for making pictures: the question "What's that supposed to represent?" Rather than condone the misapprehension behind that question, the modern painter will fling half a pot of ochre on the canvas and run a bicycle over it, in a desperate attempt to show the public that he is not primarily trying to portray objects, he is trying to make something out of paint.† But the letters of the Alphabet do not abide that question; they are free. They are the



Fig. 4: Pasted-up drawings of alphabets for Count Kessler, 1905.

true "abstracts". There are those of us at Fetter Lane who remember the swift, sure pencil-strokes on the back of some tea-shop menu with which Gill illustrated his point that "This isn't just a picture of an A, this IS an A – isn't it?"

In the Alphabet, Gill had been fortunate enough to find what may be the only strong bridge on which a man can stand, over the gulf which now separates the "fine" from the "applied" arts. Noble lettering still spans that chasm, and the man who does it supremely well can see, on the one hand, some of his masterpieces performing a useful service to society at large in the open-air of the street, and on the other hand, similar slighter works being lovingly examined "not for what they say but for what they are", in the air-conditioned museums of art. One may say indeed that Gill's Stations of the Cross for Westminster Cathedral, the first great works to bring him fame as a sculptor, were primarily objects made to be used (as aids to recollection). But the public at large is by no means as unanimous in accepting that kind of "usefulness" (with or without reference to the "beauty" of the work) as it is in the case of public lettering. It was in the latter field that Gill acquired his two-fold confidence, as an artist (he would have said, good workman), and as one whom even the art-haters could see as a "useful member of society". In that confidence, Gill would reach again for the pencil to show that "whatever handwriting may tell you about a man's temperament, you can tell more about his character by the way he draws his cap N's and R's".



Fig. 5 (actual size): From proofs in the Collection of initials sketched by Aristide Maillol and cut by Eric Gill.

\*Autobiography, p. 118 et seqq. See also text of specimen p. 13.

†Gill often quoted with relish Maurice Denis' "What I ask of a painting is that it shall look like paint".



Fig. 6: Reduced from a trial-proofing of the wood-block, 1909.

#### THE GILL COLLECTION

In 1954 The Monotype Corporation Ltd., acquired from Eric Gill's widow the entire collection of drawings, rubbings, templates, proofs and sketches for lettering, in the Roman and some other alphabets, that Gill left behind him when he died at the age of 58. This collection numbers nearly 2,500 items, of which 643 are rubbings of stone inscriptions, and over 1,000 are drawings or other items throwing light upon his work as a type designer. Mr. Evan Gill, his brother and bibliographer, has devoted much of his time for the past two years to the identification and collation of the collection, and to establishing dates by reference to Eric's work-diaries. From this rich store of source material his friends at the Corporation have singled out representative pieces to form the first Exhibition ever held to illustrate the man's life and personality as a "sculptor of letters"\* – and designer of type. From the strong-room of the Corporation's Works at Salfords, precious original drawings signed by E. G. have been brought to supplement the exhibition, and the Cambridge University Press, Mr. Douglas Cleverdon, Mr. Ernest Ingham, Sir John Rothenstein, Mr. Evan Gill and others have lent unique items through the mediation of Mr. John Dreyfus.

This number of the Monotype Recorder affords, in its illustrations, some glimpse of the variety and documentary interest of the material which will be on view in the Lecture Hall at Monotype House until November. Our editorial commentary cannot do critical justice to the artist's whole achievement; but it can and should speak at first hand of the man as we knew him and worked with him at Fetter Lane throughout the '30's. From the art-historian's point of view, there is a larger significance than might be imagined, in the warm friendship which marked that collaboration between Gill and "the cor-

porate entity" of Fetter Lane and Salfords. It resulted in two families of type faces – those of Gill Sans and Perpetua – which have literally gone round the world and been accepted as classics of modern typography; and in the less-known but valuable Solus; and it is even now bearing new fruit in 'Monotype' Joanna, of which this issue constitutes the First Showing. But the friendliness of that relationship has a wider symbolic importance in view of Gill's announced opinions on that whole industrial system which has substituted "plant" (e.g. the composing machine, the property of the employer) for the tool (e.g. the composing stick) which the skilled artisan owns and can take with him from job to job. Theoretically, it was indeed a "long way" from the court-yard of Pigotts farmhouse on a Buckinghamshire hilltop, round which Gill and his family had grouped their workshops, simple living quarters and chapel, to the factory at Salfords which is world famous for its technological ingenuity. But when Eric Gill noted in a private letter to the Rev. Desmond Chute "Item: I'm now a salaried official of The Lauston Monotype Corp'n. What ho! This means advice in 'type faces'. Salary v. handsome too. & I like typography don't you know", there was nothing forced or ironic in that chuckling comment. His two "worlds" remained as distinct as ever in his mind, and as clearly opposed as any two enemy camps. But men of goodwill had solid common ground on which to stand between them in fruitful parley. Had Gill ever been conscious of having compromised, he could not have written with such serenity, in his Autobiography, of his first visit to Fetter Lane. "This was in 1927 and that led to lots of other typographical and type-designing business. And I must say, and I hope this is a proper and seemly way to do it, that few associations can have been either more honourable or more pleasant – or, from my point of view, more helpful."\*

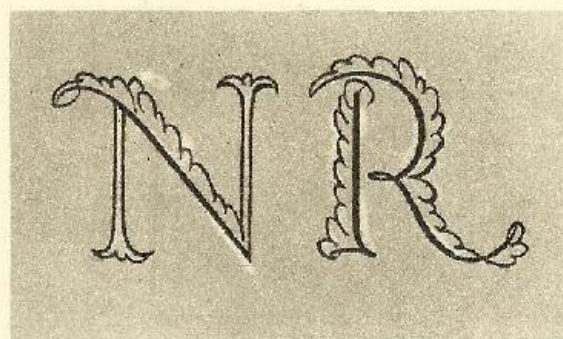
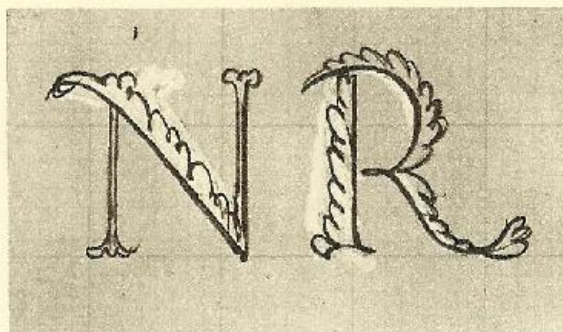
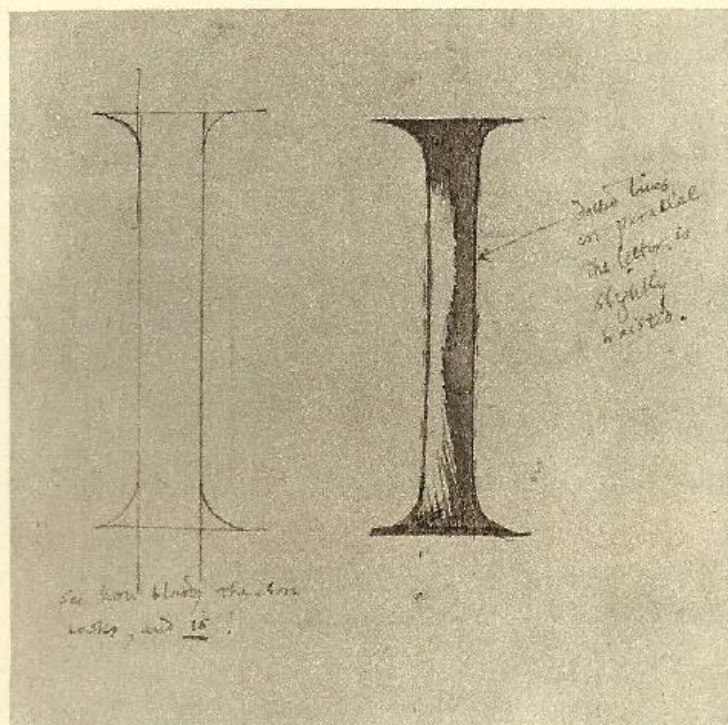
It was the initiation of a one-man creative artist into the essentially team-spirited work of typography, and it began at the point where Gill could most confidently feel that he was handing over to the Industrialists something as aesthetically becoming to that camp as the clean lines of the Forth Bridge: the Gill Sans face, supreme in its field for unpretentious legibility. The adoption of that face for the great London and North Eastern Railway standardization (of station lettering as well as timetables and other typography) called for more and more variants of the basic design; for each of them Gill produced his own drawings after realistic consultations with

\*Autobiography, p. 220.

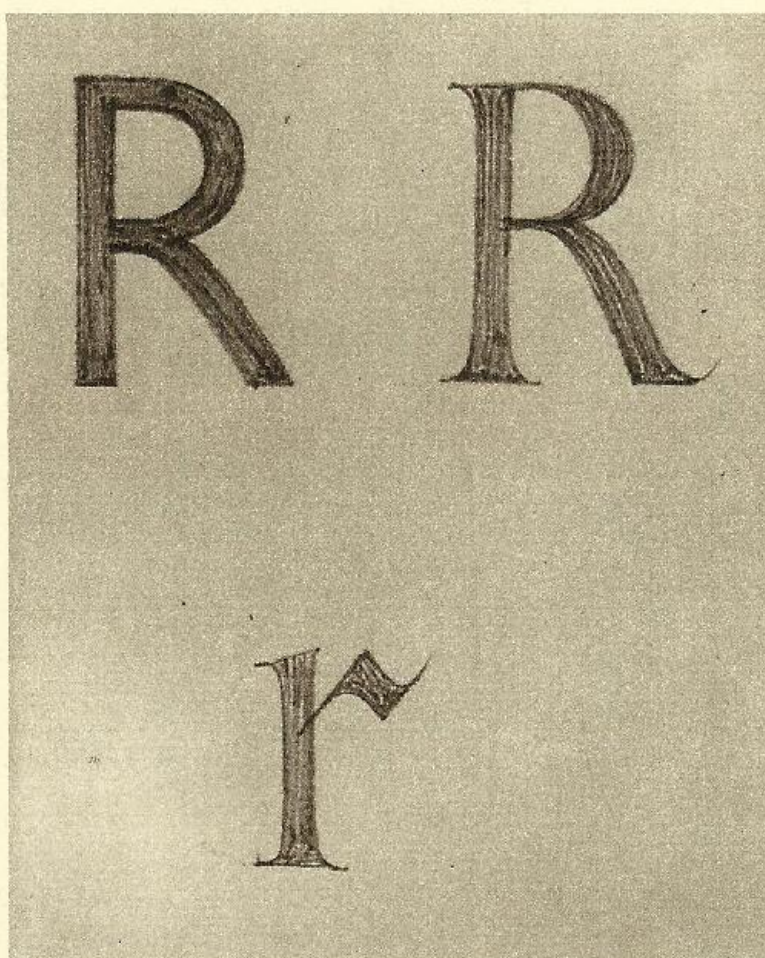
III: Above left From a letter to Stanley Morison dated 31.11.26. Above right Early drawings for Gill's Floriated initials dated 19.7.28.

1. Freehand sketch. 2. Formalized tracing.

Below Parts of two pages from the book of alphabets made for Douglas Cleverdon, 1926 (see pp. 15 and 18).



ALPHABETS  
for Douglas Cleverdon  
'Block' letters  
'Roman Capitals' &  
'Lowercase' & numerals  
ERICG. OCT. 30 '26



abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz &

AND T  
WALTER

AMOVABLE  
TYPE IS THE

for "proportion thin" setting

thin in the setting

8.12.37

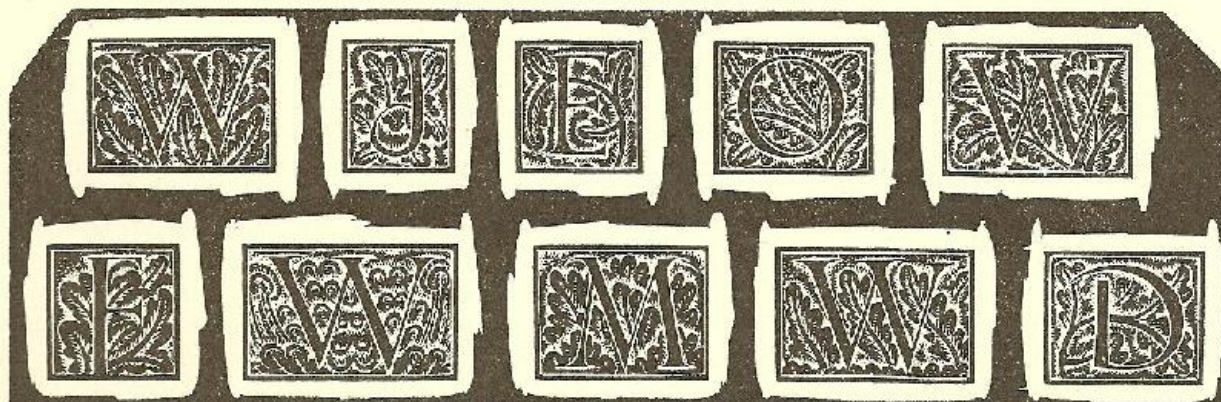


Fig. 7: From a proof in the Collection — an early state of initials cut for the Cranach Press.

the technicians of the Type Drawing Office, based on knowledge of the user's special need for distinction by weight, etc., with consistency of effect. The experience thus gained doubtless made it easier for Gill to turn in due course to the very different problem which he had discussed with Mr. Morison as early as 1925 — the translation of "his own" characteristic style of letter-cutting into the terms of a type face suitable for the printed book. That involved far more of a concession, and, as it turned out, far more give-and-take of special knowledge and skill, than the deliberately mechanistic sans-serif had demanded.

It was not without a certain startled respect that Gill acknowledged the value of the advice and suggestions from Fetter Lane and Salfords which in his opinion had made all the difference between what Perpetua might have been — a mere imitation in type metal of shapes evolved in stone — and what it became in the course of that collaboration between artist and technician: a spirited but properly disciplined type face for continuous reading. In the reassurance derived from his ability to see in 'Monotype' Perpetua a fair-playing paraphrase of what his chisel and mallet had written large on Hoptonwood stone, Gill returned, with fresh eyes, to the possibility of designing a face — and this time a book face — for mechanized production.

"My 'Joanna' type was not designed," he wrote,\* "to facilitate machine punch-cutting. Not at all. Machines can do practically anything. The question isn't what they can but what they should. It is clear that machine products

are best when they are plain. Machine-made ornament is nauseating. Assuming that the serif is not an ornamental but a useful addition to letters (especially) in book faces, the Joanna is an attempt to design a book face free from all fancy business . . . I only claim that it is on the right lines for machine production."

It was not to mindless machines but to the minds of their human owners and users that Gill was addressing the bold word "should". It is a word which either jars or stimulates the hearer according to what he thinks of the speaker's motives. Is he genuinely out to help, or is he merely standing up to preach? To those who ever met him, that question answered itself by the infallible, intuitive judgment of ear and eye. He was one who was out to help. He wanted the Opposite Side to do things that he could honestly admire as genuine. One felt in conversation with him, that he was offering a prescription to a sick world when he reiterated his basic advice:

'Look after GOOD-  
NESS and TRUTH,  
and BEAUTY will  
look after herself.'

Set as a specimen of 36-point 'Monotype' Joanna

\*In a letter to the Publishers' Circular, 6th April, 1935, in reply to Mr. Pat V. Daley's critical comments entitled "Who is a Typographical Artist?"

IV: Above An early drawing for the Perpetua lower-case alphabet (from The Monotype Corporation's Type Drawing Office).

Centre Drawing for cutting on stone Walter Hines Page Memorial Tablet, Westminster Abbey Cloisters, June, 1923.

Below Gill's design for Perpetua Light Titling made by working in ink and white paint over a printed specimen of the 60 point, normal weight Titling.

## II: HIS HUMANISTIC LETTER

Although it was with a consciously mechanistic sans-serif that Eric Gill made his first impression upon the printing trade, it would be the worst possible service to his memory to let him be thought of as one who "believed" in sans-serif in the sense in which some devoted modernists have in fact been known to express faith in it: not just as a thing good-for-its-purpose but as something good, intrinsically preferable to seriffed faces, purer perhaps – or, better because more representative of "our own period" (on the assumption that "we" have been getting better and better as we went along). Gill's own belief with regard to sans-serif went no further than a cheerful admission that there was something appropriate, to the modern world, in the kind of wrong-headedness that can so disregard human psychology and so sacrifice comfort to consistency, as to rob even the lower-case alphabet of its practical and æsthetic advantages of serif and curve swelling.\* Like any good debater, Gill wanted the opposition to be consistent – to stick to its own ground and not to "borrow". But unlike any merely malicious debater, he was not concerned to trick the other side into accepting something obviously "grotesque", in any sense of the word. He was willing to explore any possibility of redeeming sans-serif from the charge of quaintness and queerness – to which it is always open in so far as its designers have despaired of bending an iron-tube (uniform thickness of stroke) into such complex curves as those of the normal a and g. Gill Sans was first conceived as a capital alphabet, where such problems scarcely arise;† but when they did arise, with the demand for a lower-case, Gill faced them with an honest ingenuity which is the main secret of the æsthetic success of Gill Sans. It is beyond doubt the most pleasant set of shapes that has been presented under the handicap of apparent uniform-thickness: one has only to compare the cap G with the Germanic forms that shoot out their lower jaws, to see what is gained by sober adherence to classic forms. As a free Present to the Enemy, Gill Sans shows not the slightest sign of tongue-in-the-cheek; on the contrary it is a chivalrous suggestion, from a conscientious master, of ways in which that sort of thing can be done without looking ridiculous. The ways had been thought-out, or at least sought, as much earlier as the year 1915, under the disciplinary guidance of Edward Johnston – as will be shown on a later page.

\*"The sans-serif is rightly named; it is a letter without something which a letter normally has". *Specimen of three book types* '34. Hague & Gill.

†Save in the case of the cap M which if it is to seem "monotone" in thickness must either straddle wide or else shorten its middle v to avoid too acute angles.

Here we are referring to Gill's best-known and most widely-used type, his sans-serif, only as one more indication of what the man himself was "not like", what he fundamentally did not like, namely the sort of civilization that is fairly symbolized by monotone-lettering. But in order to realize why he was able to contrive for it a type so distinctly likeable (to all who genuinely like that sort of thing) one must look to the classic alphabets with which he was startling connoisseurs, in the early years of this century, into the realization that a living man was producing letters of a quality that had not been seen on public buildings since the days of ancient Rome – save for some rare masterpieces of the early renaissance. It is there that one finds the carved characters which did most truly characterize the man – from which his style emerged even as the letters were emerging under his chisel, and even as his "whole way of thinking" was being cooled and tempered under the tutoring of Johnston.

Had our illustrations been arranged in strict chronological order, page 1 would have had to be defaced by our fig. 8, one of the most interesting personal documents in the collection. It is one of two remaining examples of what young Arthur Eric Rowton Gill\* was striving to produce in the way of inscriptional lettering "in 1901, before attending L.C.C. [Central School] – [i.e.] before E. J.'s teaching" – as the sheet is punctiliously inscribed on the back in Gill's handwriting. Without



Fig. 8

some remembrance of what he was having to strive against, this greatly-reduced illustration might be misleading. An architect's office was in those days, and until recently remained, a school of bad manners for any friend of the Alphabet. To this day one can see on quite respectable blueprints and elevations the distorted Walter-Cranish letter forms that have made "architect's

\*He was born in 1882 in Brighton, Sussex, the second of thirteen children. He went to London in 1899, and met Johnston in 1902.

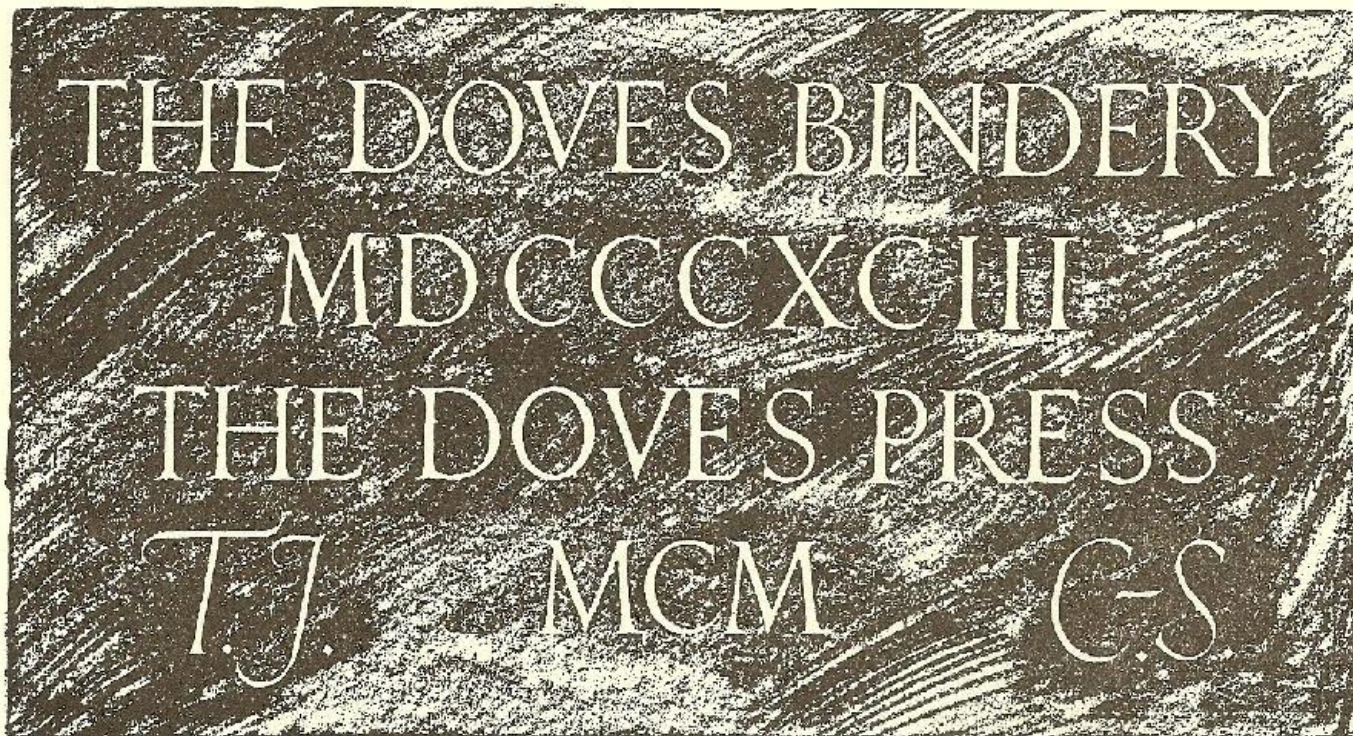


Fig. 11: From the artist's own rubbing of his stone-cut inscription, actual size  $22\frac{1}{2} \times 12$ ".

#### GENESIS OF PERPETUA

Eric Gill's diary for the year 1925 notes: (Nov. 25) "Drawing Alphabets for Stanley Morison in aft. & eve." and (Nov. 26) ditto, "all day long".

The next relevant entries are dated June and July, 1929, and the latter records two days' drawing work on "'Monotype' Perpetua Bold". In the interval the new type face had appeared and had received the Trade's most practical tribute, namely a demand for a related bold. What happened in between those two dates is of extraordinary interest to the student of type design, in that it involved so much more than the usual direct passage of the artist's drawings to the projection-room where a ten-inch tracing starts the train of operations for mechanical punch-cutting. For Mr. Morison took to Paris the model alphabets of 1925, and commissioned a series of hand-cut punches (starting with 14-point) from the late Charles Malin, the last of the exquisitely-skilled artisans whose trade had been doomed by the Benton punch-cutting machine.\*


There was no question of striking 'Monotype' matrices from hand-cut punches; that is impossible for technical reasons. But there were prudent æsthetic reasons behind the decision to resort to Malin. There had been, since the beginning of the century, far too much hurrying of

two-inch "originals" to the terribly obedient punch-cutting machine, in the hope of producing a twentieth-century book face of permanent value; and every such attempt had ended-up in the Limbo of the jobbing cases. In this instance The Monotype Corporation could not afford to go wrong. On Mr. Morison's advice it had held back for six years from the temptation to snatch for the laurels that were awaiting the cutters of the first new design of type (not a revival) to be accepted for the book printer's repertory. It had scored indubitable successes meanwhile by type faces which restored to use the masterpieces of the centuries when type punches were whittled and filed by disciplined hands. If the new Perpetua was to be as book-worthy as the roman that Martin cut for John Bell, it might as well have its trial cutting by the same arduous technique.

In a series of letters from Malin to S. M., now deposited at the Cambridge University Press, there is evidence enough of the excited interest with which the old craftsman studied, through the lunette mounted over his leather graving-pad, every last detail of the characters that were emerging as his file and burin coaxed at the little bars of soft steel.

"Monsieur: I have the honour to send you the smoke-proofs of the new punches that I have engraved in the 12-point size of the roman . . . as well as those of the 14-point which you have already seen, so that you may

\*Malin's last work before his death in 1955 was the cutting, to the designs of Dr. Giovanni Mardersteig, of the Dante roman and italic for the Bodoni Press. 'Monotype' Dante, Series 592, a faithful recutting, made its first appearance this year.



THE DOVES BINDERY  
MDCCCXCIII

Fig. 12: Part of Eric Gill's drawing for the stone inscription opposite.

appreciate the difference. I have followed the indications that you gave me and I think the work will give you every satisfaction. I have given the whole fount a slightly darker tone [une couleur plus noire] and have enlarged the counter-punches of the h and m . . . " [May 13th, 1926]

"Monsieur: I have pleasure in enclosing the smoke-proofs [fumé] of the Roman Capitals and Numerals of [the letters drawn by Eric] Gill, 12-point – all that have been cut to date. The lower-case is in hand . . . I hope that the work will give you satisfaction – you will have a beautiful letter there." [July 28th, 1926]

"I have composed [i.e. by stamping smoked punches] quite a long text so that you may have an idea of the effect that the characters will have when they are cast and printed – taking into account of course the differences that are due to inking, presswork and kind of paper used. I took great pains over this work and I hope it is satisfactory . . . " [Please confirm instructions regarding accented characters, etc., because] "I must soon undertake the cutting of an Arabic, and if I put aside the Gill characters for too long I would be running the risk of no longer having them in my mind's eye [les 'formes dans l'œil'] . . . " [September 4th, 1926] (See fig. 13).

"Monsieur: . . . As for the cutting of a set of 22 point Initials, it is understood that I am entirely at your disposal. I take pleasure in working for you. The jobs you are ordering from me have an artistic side, which cannot be said of the work I do for other clients – replacing broken punches, or cutting special signs for various directories, or letters with which I am not acquainted." – Such as the impending Arabic, no doubt.

Malin's punches were in due course struck and fitted by the Fonderie Ribadieu Dumas, and were recently presented to the Cambridge University Press by Mr. Ernest Ingham. Along with Gill's drawings, they provided the starting-point from which 'Monotype' Perpetua gradually emerged through successive trial cuttings and discussions at the Type Drawing Office in

Salfords. Gill had taken only a mild interest in the Paris smoke-proofs and saw the hand-cut founts for what they were – an astonishing feat of dexterity which had succeeded all too well in reproducing, on the tiny scale of type, the shapes and details of a stone-cutter's model letters. From the Drawing Office at Salfords, however, Gill knew that he had something to learn: not how to cut punches skilfully, but how to put critical intelligence

Fig. 13: Facsimile of Malin's hand-stamped proof from the smoked punches mentioned in his letter.

The Heroic Age is well typified for us in Achilles, in the early doom that hangs over him, and the great renown

of generations it would last. The richest hoped it might last for ten. Our traditions say, in the second generation after Agamemnon the deluge came.

It came, the ancients said, in the form of the avenging Heraclids, come back to regain the heri-

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Æ Œ Ç Qu

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

fi ff fl fm & ç

1234567890

. , ; : - ' ! ? ( ) " "

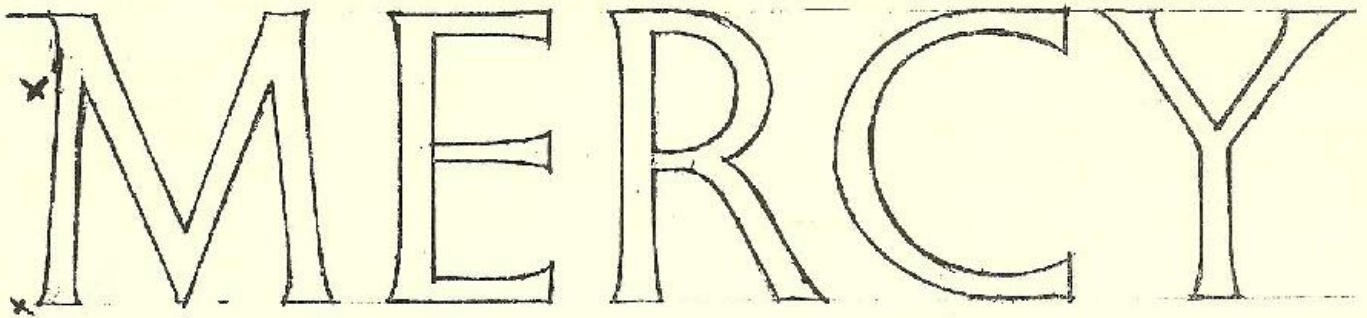


Fig. 14 (actual size): Gill's drawing (1925) for letters to be cut to that size in granite.

and technical precision to the normalizing of a type face by making sure that it would not distract the armchair reader by any detail that would look fussy and arbitrary on the printed book page.

His debt on that score was handsomely acknowledged at the time when 'Monotype' Perpetua made its first public appearance in the incomparable inset to the *Fleurbaey* No. VII. The preliminary note reads: "The 'Perpetua' type, in which this translation of the *Passio* is printed as the first specimen, was cut by The Lanston Monotype Corporation\* from drawings of alphabets made by me. These drawings were not made with special reference to typography — they were simply letters, drawn with brush and ink. For the typographical quality of the fount, as also for the remarkably fine and precise cutting of the punches, The Monotype Corporation is to be praised. In my opinion 'Perpetua' is commendable in that, in spite of many distinctive characters, it retains that commonplaceness and normality which is essential to a good book-type". [1929]

By that time the original italic, which was to have been called *Felicity*, had undergone considerable modification from its first version.

\*The name was changed in 1931 to The Monotype Corporation Limited.

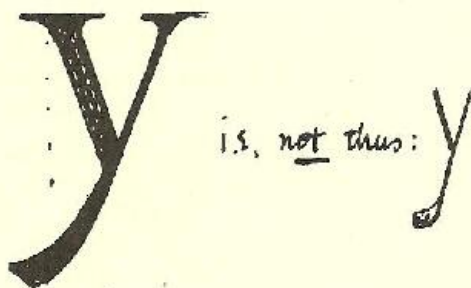


Fig. 15: Note pinned to an early specimen of 'Monotype' Perpetua.

The suitability of the capitals of Perpetua for a titling fount was evident from the start, and cutting began on that further series (No. 258) in 1928. As the successive display sizes appeared they were immediately made available in the Display Matrix Lending Library. Leading printers and publishers saw in them a singularly authoritative, classic "Roman" letter for title-pages, dropped initials, and such letter-heads and ephemeral printing as required the look of chaste elegance. The first broadsheet specimen of the Titling Series 258 showed the large sizes from 72 and 60 point (made possible by the newly marketed 'Monotype' Super Casters), set forth in a text specially written to display the easy dignity and quiet nobility of these inscriptional capitals — and to give the recipients of the broadsheet some special reason for hanging it up on their walls. "This is a printing office," it said; "Crossroads of Civilization . . ."

By the end of the Second World War, Perpetua Titling had attained such prestige among the architects and town-planners that The Monotype Corporation's stock of specimen sheets of that series was in danger of becoming exhausted by the extra demand for copies to be used as models for war-memorial and other public lettering; and it was to meet that demand in the exigencies of the

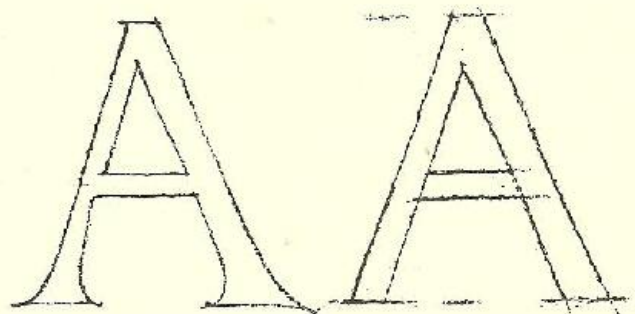


Fig. 16: Drawing for incised and raised letters of an alphabet for the Victoria & Albert Museum.

paper shortage that the Corporation issued the first of its "alphabet tracing sheets". Gill had soon been asked for a Bold (Series 200) and a Light (Series 480) variant of this brilliant Titling, and the originals in the Exhibition (and the reproduction in plate IV) show the care with which he worked, with ink and with Chinese white, over printed proofs of Series 258.

But meanwhile he was gaining experience, on a much larger scale, of the problems of weight variation and

change of proportionment that can arise as a basic design develops into a "type family". For before Perpetua was ready for the Trade, another and very different commission had come from The Monotype Corporation. It was for a set of titling capitals in sans-serif style. That seemed an interesting challenge, and a proper one to come from the machine-makers' camp. With some amusement he cordially agreed to Mr. Morison's suggestions that the new series should be named "Gill Sans".

A PASSAGE FROM ERIC GILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY SET IN 18, 14, 24, 12 PT. 'MONOTYPE' PERPETUA

SO I WENT REGULARLY TO LEARN WRITING AND TO learn about the Roman Alphabet. And I fell in love with Edward Johnston and physically trembled at the thought of seeing him. But he kept me severely in my place and I trembled under his rebukes. I fell

in love with him—but don't make any mistake as to my meaning. I fell in love with him as I might, and indeed did, with Socrates. It was a joyful passage. Life was full of physical excitement and the excite-

ment was as of the intelligence discovering the good. It is very well to know the logical truth, but fancy knowing the truth and finding it desirable. More and more desirable and more and more the truth.

And lettering has this very great advantage over other arts; at its very base conjoined and inseparable, are the fair and the fit—most obviously useful and depending for its beauty upon nothing but man's musical sense.

The shapes of letters do not derive their beauty from any sensual or sentimental reminiscence. No one can say that the o's roundness appeals to us only because it is like that of an apple . . . We like the circle because such liking is connatural to the human mind. And no one can say lettering is not a useful trade by which you can honestly serve your fellow men and earn an honest living. Of what other trade or art are these things so palpably true? Moreover it is a precise art. You don't draw an A

and then stand back and say: there, that gives you a good idea of an A as seen through an autumn mist, or: that's not a real A but gives you a good effect of one. Letters are things, not pictures of things . . . Lettering is a precise art and strictly subject to tradition. The 'New Art' notion that you can make letters whatever shapes you like, is as foolish as the notion, if anyone has such a notion, that you can make houses any shapes you like. You can't, unless you live all by yourself on a desert island . . .

*These extracts from pp. 120-121 of the English edition are made by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape*

### III: HIS MECHANISTIC LETTER

In Eric Gill's work-diary for the year 1915, when he was living in Ditchling, Sussex (in a community of craft-worker members of the Third Order of S. Dominic), there are the following entries:

Oct. 29: "To G[erard] M[eynell] with him to meet H[unter] re L1 note design. Lunch with E. J[ohnston] and G. M. after. To see Pick (Undergrd. Rly.) with E. J. and G. M. re new alphabets, etc., 2.30".

Nov. 7: "E. J. came to tea (also H. D. C. P[lepler]) to discuss Pick (Undergrd. Rly.) lettering".

Nov. 17: "To Ditchling in eve. to see E. J. re Block letter alphabet".

What was afoot was the first "standardization" of letter forms for systematic use by a large organization in signs, posters and printed matter – and the designing, for the needs of a modern transport system, of the first twentieth-century sans serif of aesthetic merit. There is no reason to assume that Eric Gill played a creative part

in the design of the famous "London Underground" letter. But there is every reason to note that he was drawn-in upon what must have been memorable conversations. The late Frank Pick was another one whose words and personality could strike "as by lightning"; and Gerard Meynell of the Westminster Press was then one of the few living master printers who could have held his own in conversation with two such mind-shakers as Johnston and Pick. From that day onwards, Gill was at least aware of the possibilities of a well-designed sans-serif – and more conscious of the needless ineptitude of the "block letters" of commerce. Twenty years later, when "Gill Sans" had become a household word to so many thousands of printing offices, Eric Gill wrote to his brother Evan (Letters, March 11th, 1936): "... as you like to have the details correct I may say that Douglas Cleverdon's shop-sign was not the first public exhibition of that [sans-serif] style of lettering, for we painted letters in that style at Capel-y-felin saying 'This way to the Church', and so forth. And these were done some time before the Bristol sign". The Gill family, and a few other members of the Ditchling community, had moved in 1925 to a former monastery building in Wales. Remote as it was from the nearest railway station, it was too often invaded by curious trippers; the choice of so brusque a style as sans-serif for the guide-posts (which were painted by Laurence Cribb) may have been felt suitable for addressing unwelcome visitors who might otherwise burst in upon the workshop or bedrooms with enquiries as to where they could "see a Monk". At all events, the situation called for simple painted letters of decent but unambitious shape, and block-letter is the easiest to paint. The Letters, p. 188, cast additional light.

"Item: I'm doing a set of alphabets for the Army & Navy Stores – for them to use for all their notices & signs: This is an interesting job – for it is: how to do 1, good letters; 2, absolutely legible-to-the-last-degree letters; 3, letters which any fool can copy accurately and easily. So I'm doing them simple block letters. It's rather fun cutting great big letters out of white paper & sticking them on big black sheets – they don't half stare at you – fine test for astigmatism..." (To Fr. Desmond Chute, May 23rd, 1925).

It is undoubtedly to these that Gill's diary refers in April 27-8th, 1925: "Made experiments with block letters (advertisements)".

For October 30th, 1926, the diary notes: "Began drawing D. Cleverdon's sign board in m(orning)". And on

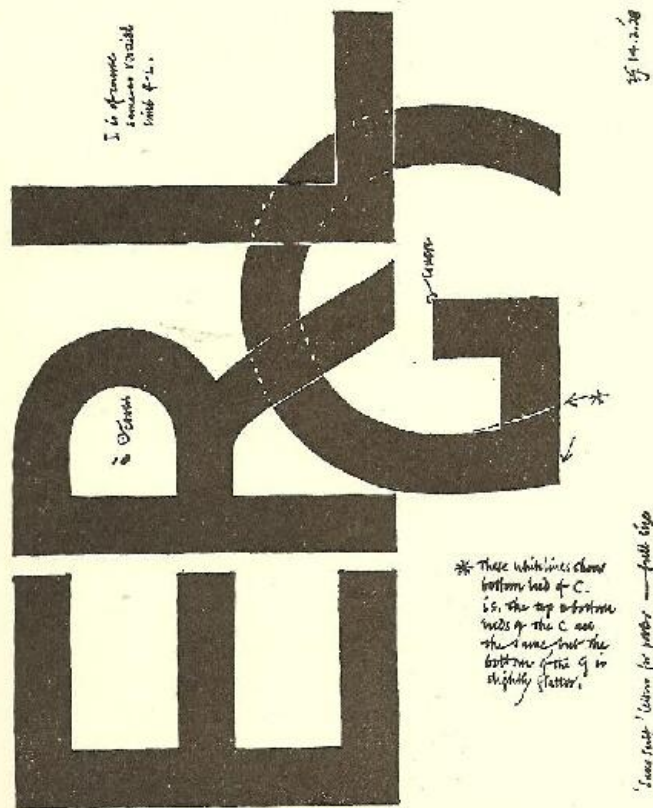
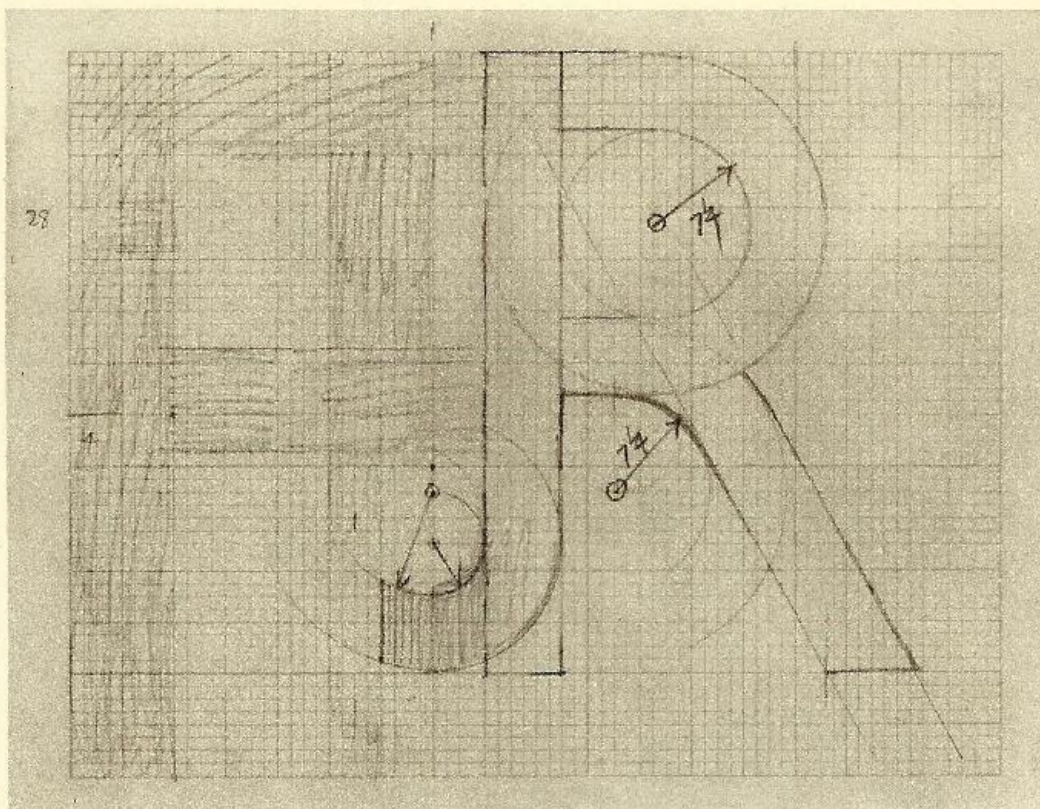


Fig. 17: From a drawing  $10\frac{1}{2}'' \times 8\frac{1}{2}''$  in the Collection.

V: Above Drawing in pencil on graph paper for Gill Sans. Below Early drawing for Gill Sans italic caps.



A B C D E F G  
H I J K L M N N  
O P Q R S T Y  
U V W X Z &

THE FLEURON  
A JOURNAL OF TYPOGRAPHY  
from the Editor  
27 FITZROY SQUARE, W.  
LONDON

12th July, 1928.

Dear Gill,

Is it your wish  
that I work on  
these photos at all?  
I don't think there  
is much to do -  
shaded & a few  
typical letters &  
then send it to  
you to do the rest.  
Then you can if  
youque, and it  
back for my  
scribbling.

I think a very  
nice face can be  
made on this  
model. G.Y.

Thus:

ai

I think you will be  
interested to see the enlarged  
photograph of the alphabet from  
Cleverdon's book, which I asked  
the Monotype Company to send you  
yesterday. You will remember that  
I had the notion that it would  
make a very good fount. I still  
think so. We agreed to experiment  
with the design: I was to have  
the enlargement made; have it  
worked over; and submit to you for  
criticism. I am now a little  
nervous about the serifs. I like  
them very much indeed, and would  
propose having entirely flat,  
unbracketed terminations, very  
much in the style of the accompanying  
proof of series 135; but as far as  
the ascenders are concerned, I think  
a simple, and not a double serif  
would be best. Subject to your  
approval, I should make the fount of  
a definitely light, blonde colour;  
the kind of letter which should look  
exceedingly well with Intaglio plates.

yes.  
V. much so.

I agree

yes, but  
not quite  
certainly.

Please do not trouble to  
write at length about the matter.  
You can scribble in shorthand in the  
margin of this letter, which is left  
purposely wide.

I am attending to the  
question of the new lower case y with  
a straight stroke for the book-face,  
and a new capital Y for the 30 point  
capitals.

Yours,

J.M.

ai



Fig. 18: E. G.'s rubbing of name-plate designed for D. C.

June 4th of the following year one finds: "S. Morison alphabet drawing begun in afternoon".

Gill's Autobiography refers (p. 219) to the warning-off signs at Capel as having been painted in "a sort of free sans-serif lettering more or less derived from the type designed for the London Underground Railways by Edward Johnston. We were rather justifiably pleased with these", he continues, "and so when Douglas Cleverdon, a forward-minded bookseller of Bristol, asked me to paint his shop fascia, I did it in sans-serif letters. It was as a consequence of his seeing these letters that Stanley Morison, the typographical adviser to the \*Monotype mechanical type-composing-machine people, asked me to draw an alphabet of sans-serif letters for The Monotype Corporation".

When the name of Douglas Cleverdon was thus blazoned to the world, the young owner of that name, recently down from Oxford, had established his new book-and-print shop in an old building near Bristol University, one which boasted two different well-authenticated ghosts and a large, comfortably furnished living-room adjoining the photographic studio of the late G. Methven Brownlee. Mr. Cleverdon today can undoubtedly claim the gratitude of more than a million unknown friends, for his work as a producer on the B.B.C.'s Third Programme: but to be one of young "Douglas's friends" in those days was a privilege which famous and yet-unknown friends of the arts remember with no less gratitude. It was as a revered house-guest that Gill had come to paint the fascia of the little shop in Charlotte Street. For such a modern-world occupation as Buying and Selling Things (instead of making them), the impersonal sans seemed apt; but personal regard and affection went to the painting. This was no such occasion as sent Laurie Cribb to warn-off trippers, nor did it involve a call upon a member of the peerage to discuss the lettering for a big departmental store. Gill's interest in sans-serif had been quickened by pleasant human associations, and

\*The word Monotype is a Registered Trade Mark. Ed.

his eyes rested thereafter more intently upon its geometrical problems.

An attack of influenza kept Gill house-bound in Bristol, and he gladly fell in with the suggestion that he should while away his convalescence by sketching into a pleasantly bound blank-book of hand-made paper, model letters for the many kinds of counter-placards, shelf-labels, etc., with which a good bookseller tells his customers where to look or to browse. The resulting book, of which two pages are reproduced in plate III, was kindly lent by Mr. Cleverdon to form a pivotal item in the Gill Exhibition. The pencilled letter-forms are not of course designs for type; they are models for the guidance of amateur letterers. But the juxtaposition of normal and monotone forms would alone indicate that Eric Gill was putting the leisure of those days of convalescence to a comparative study which would confirm in his own mind principles of aptness, fitness-for-purpose, that underlie all sound arguments about type design.

Typography, in the late '20's, was being "discovered" by the intelligents, and each lavish number of the *Fleurbaey* had been revealing how much more there was to it than the private-press collectors had realized. Mr. Morison, Editor of the *Fleurbaey*, was already negotiating with Gill for the purchase of the latter's woodcuts done for the Ditchling Press. The sight of Cleverdon's fascia, and the metal door-plate which Gill had designed (fig. 18) opened up new possibilities. German typesetters had been quicker than the English to see the point of Johnston's Underground letter: now 'Monotype' machines, newly invading the display field, needed a sans-serif of at least equal merit, and Johnston's disciple was at hand, ready to prove that a closer fidelity to normal roman letter-forms would be more agreeable, at least to English-reading eyes.

The titling capitals (Series 231) which were the first members of the Gill Sans family made their stormy debut

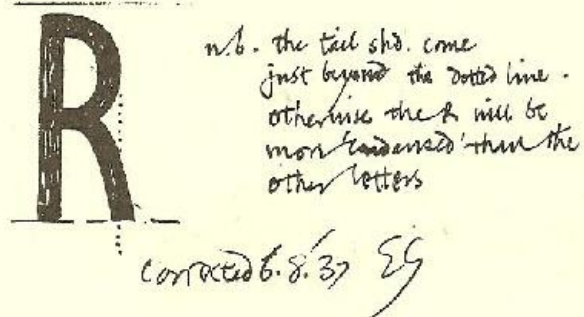


Fig. 19: Corrections for Gill Sans Condensed.

VI: Gill's comments on a letter from Stanley Morison. The "blonde" type referred to eventually appeared as 'Monotype' Solus. (See plate VII for the page of Cleverdon's book here referred to.)

in print at the Annual Conference of the British Federation of Master Printers at Blackpool, on a striking pamphlet printed for distribution to the audience at the Publicity and Selling session where Mr. Morison uttered his momentous warning as to the danger to the trade of allowing responsibility for typographic design to pass into the hands of the print-buyer and his agents. Almost at the same moment the first three sizes of the roman of Gill Sans upper and lower-case Series 262 were being examined by the newly appointed Publicity Manager of the great London & North-Eastern Railway system as the possible basis for a standardization of sign-lettering, time-tables, and other printed matter, greatly exceeding in scale and complexity anything which had been done before.\* To Mr. C. G. G. Dandridge the simplicity and

logic of the letter made an immediate appeal. It combined an impersonal elegance with the "fool-proof" simplicity that would be required for shapes that would have to be handed over to scores of local sign-painters and printers – with instructions from the London layout staff that brooked no argument but said in effect "simply do as you are told". As that standardization proceeded the Gill Sans family proliferated to meet the special demands of time-table and similar typography for "significant variation". The story of that vast-scale typographic reform has had the attention that it deserves from students of type design, but one fairly common misapprehension will be corrected by the material in the current exhibition – namely that Gill was merely asked to provide basic alphabets from which the Type Drawing Office could "derive" (by mechanical logic) whatever bolder, narrower or lighter version would be required. As will now appear, Gill welcomed each successive test of the adaptability of his basic design, and the signed and annotated drawings of which figs. 19 and 20 are miniature reproductions are among many which show the care with which he thought-out the optical consequence of condensation, all-over thinning or thickening, etc. This particular job-of-work had brought him into the most fascinating and purely-characteristic region (to the letterer) of the Other Planet – that in which a set of directions made hundreds of miles away, and passed-down through a score of grades in the industrial hierarchy, eventually came into the hands of a skilled artisan who, being human, might want to "fool" with his job. If that was the game, Gill was prepared to play it without malice. The anonymous local sign-painter or compositor must at least have sensible instructions, and the stripped, monotone, fool-proofed letters must be worthy of the authority with which the Specifier was saying "Never mind what you think, do precisely as you are told". Gill's intellectual space-ship had, by visitor's luck, indeed brought him "a long way" from the studio at Pigotts where wise men brought only the texts of proposed inscriptions to a master-carver saying "You will know how this should be made to look". The traveller across that astronomic distance was now keeping his eyes open and making sure that his presence in that alien but exciting world should be justified by honest evidence that he was Out to Help.

What has been most difficult for the trade to accept is the notion that Eric Gill could have been responsible for that Series 442 in which the object was to show how far

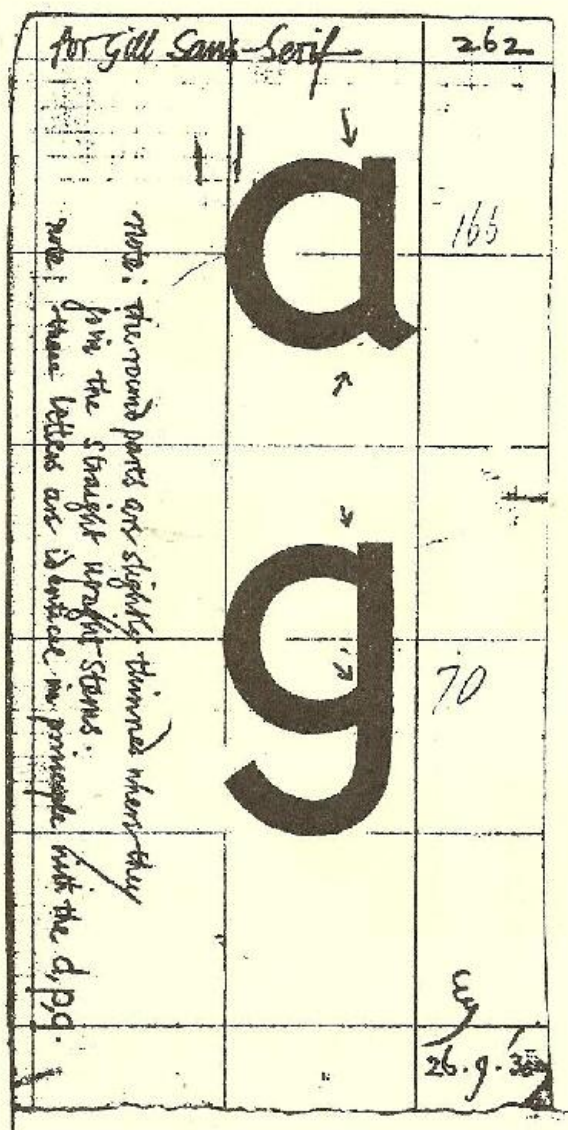


Fig. 20: Drawing for alternative sorts for 262.

\*A wood-letter fount was advertised by Messrs. H. M. Sellers & Co. of Sheffield in 1931 as "Gill" Sans [their quotes] with the claim that it had been made "from the original drawing" (presumably by Gill) as early as November 1921. Enquiries made of Messrs. Sellers drew the information that the type was made for Waterlow & Sons – whose records were destroyed in the blitz.

the device of all-over thickening (for which monotone letters are uniquely suitable) could be pushed without actually eliminating the "counters" (enclosed or semi-enclosed whites of the letters). But this was in fact one of the challenges which particularly interested the designer; it seemed to call for precisely that imaginative intervention by which the artist can reveal something beyond the scope of the pantograph or mechanical distorter. His drawings for the series which is now known as Gill Ultra Bold show brilliant ingenuity in avoiding such penalties of consistency as would result if the i's dot had been fattened to the width of its vertical. There is less than a half-truth in the remark, by one scandalized member of the trade, that "If Gill did that, he did it with his tongue in his cheek". There was indeed a satirical gleam in the eye which Eric Gill cast over the wording he had chosen for the particular trial-drawing shown in our fig. 21. But at no time did he ever stoop to "make fun" of the civilization that he saw as revolving around bankers and branded with currency signs. In no sense

at all was he "making faces" at the money-loaded world. He was exercising that sweet reasonableness which is the essence of any successful satire. If the bankers, in the Psalmist's phrase, "waxed fat and kicked", then their symbolic £-sign must achieve, when necessary, the maximum fatness and kick that a good lettering-artist could reconcile with his aesthetic conscience.

And if any proof were needed of the mathematical delight with which Eric Gill explored the sans-serif, it would be found in such drawings as the one which appears on our front cover. The practical purpose of those particular diagrams (the originals of which are 14½ inches tall and worked in six colours) was that of enforcing something good and desirable on that notoriously wayward and stubborn "fooler", the journeyman Exhibition Sign-Painter. But to the perceptive eye these particular drawings have the look of work enjoyed for its own sake, and in the spirit of persuasiveness. The hack sign-writer would be told, not simply "do precisely this", but "see how delightful this will be to do".

**I O U f 25**

**BANKER**

*note: the counters of O, B, A, R, S, I etc. are circular (same size circles) for letter of this 'fatness' the Δ or D etc. come so small as not to be worth printing to light radiation mounds them off in any case.*

**STAMP**

*"Sans double-elegans"*

*width of stem 4  
height 9*

*(n.b. in series 321  
the proportion is 4 to 11)*

*Σ  
23.9.32*

Fig. 21: Gill's first project for a maximum fattening of Gill Sans.

F G H

Fig. 22: From an experimental line-block made for Gill during the discussion of Solus.

F G H

Fig. 23: From the artist's final drawings for Solus, now in the Type Drawing Office.

#### IV: SOLUS AND OTHER EXPERIMENTS

"Cleverdon's book", to which Mr. Morison referred in the letter to E. G. reproduced as plate VI, was the album of model alphabets mentioned on p. 15 (see also plate III). The facing plate shows (top) the alphabet referred to. "Gent's Pref." as it was merrily styled, was envisaged as a "light Egyptian"—in other words a relatively blonde member of a tribe of type faces that the Victorians originally named "Egyptian" on account of their swarthinness.

Gill first drew trial letters freehand on the scale of 18-point. What had been tested on that realistic scale was then worked out precisely over the enlarged photographs of the pencilled alphabet; first on two letters that would exemplify treatment of verticals, serifs and curve-stress. This was in February, 1929. In March he was "correcting drawings" and visiting Fetter Lane for further discussions. The Corporation had agreed to co-operate with an official project which, if political events had not supervened, would

have called for the special type face that was the object of the experiments. The four sizes of Solus roman remain as the nucleus of a legible and unsentimental type face for a Department of State.

Gill's Perpetua Greek is another experiment of considerable interest to students. He wanted not merely to harmonize but so far as possible to integrate the alphabets of the two languages as one basic græco-roman fount with special characters as required but with common forms wherever possible. Accents were to be eliminated as a late accretion from the scholiasts. This functional approach to an alphabet which is traditionally cut "in italic" found no favour in academic circles, but its aesthetic success is unquestionable.

The collection also contains evidence of Gill's interest in Hebrew and Arabic letter-forms, of which trial letters were cut, and in the possibilities of a conventionalized Shorthand.

This line is set in 14 point 'Monotype' SOLUS Series 276. Above: Solus 12 point solid.

Fig. 24 (below): Part of E. G.'s drawing for Perpetua Greek on a printed specimen of the roman. Fig. 25 (right): Part of the first trial proof.

Γ Δ Θ Λ Ξ Π Σ Φ Ψ Ω  
Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ  
α β γ δ ε ζ η θ κ λ μ ξ η ρ σ

iustus. Simile quid inuenies iam apud Pythagoræos (Hierocles de Prouid. III, 10, ed. Needham, p. 278; in aur. carn. 70, ib. p. 229). Cfr. et Platonis Phædonem, LXII, 113D: "Ἐπὶ τούτων ἀφικροῦνται εἰς τὴν λίμνην (sc. ad Acherontem), καὶ οἰκοῦσι τε καὶ καθεσθαιμένοι τῶν τ' ἀδικημάτων δίδοντες δίκας ἀπολύονται εἰ τις τι ἠδίκηκε τῶν τ' ἐρεργεσιῶν τῆρας φέρονται κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἕκαστος. οἱ δ' ἀν' ὁδῶσιν ἀνίσταται ἐκεῖν δια τα μέγεθος τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων...τούτους δ' ἡ προσήκουσα ποίρα ρίπτει εἰς τὸν τάρταρον, οὐδὲν οὐποτ' ἐκβαλεῖουσιν." Id. Phædon. LXIII, 114D; Gorg. LXXXI, 525B; LXXXII, 527A. Aen. VI, 739—751.

VII: Above Part of the page of the Book of Alphabets referred to in the letter shown in plate VI.

Below Gill's first experimental drawing for Solus, made over an enlarged photograph of the page shown above. (From The Monotype Corporation's Type Drawing Office.)

A B C D E F G H I  
J K L M N O P Q  
R S T U V W M  
X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o  
p q r s t u v w x y z &

a b c d e f g h

ogaqbed  
stwxvz

Joanna Italic  
ahv  
3.8.31

hmnijkp ouhv  
æ æ & coe flr  
3.8.31

## V: JOANNA: GILL'S "OWN" TYPE

In August, 1928, Gill was writing: "Dear S. M. . . . I am much pleased by what you say re my visit to Horley. I enjoyed it very much indeed. I want to go again and spend longer in the 'pattern shop' - where they photograph & enlarge & draw & trace & cut wax. It wd. certainly be an admirable thing if I had an 'experimental station' there. We shall see. Meanwhile I have about 16½ tons of work on hand . . ."

Much of it was work for the late Robert Gibbings and his Golden Cockerel Press; and it involved not only the wood-engraving of the illustrations and superb decorative initials for those limited editions but also designing new types as required, to be cut by the Caslon foundry. Both by his own doctrine and by circumstances Gill was forced to look realistically into the question of what is really meant by "designing type". It meant more than drawing alphabets:

"You will remember that when I made you those drawings of alphabets", he wrote to S. M., "I expressly

disclaimed the suggestion that I was type designing. I did not and do not even now profess to know enough about it (i.e. typographical exigencies). The same applies to the Sans-Serif alphabet I drew. You remember my surprise when you showed me the pages of the Sans-Serif. I was v. pleased because I thought such a good thing had been made & it was an honour to me".

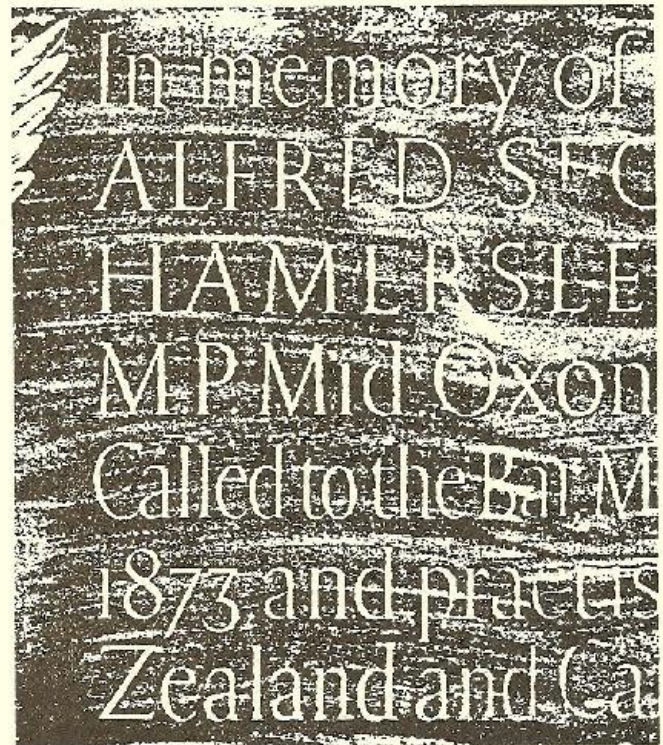
But having split that hair, Gill threw it away. In the certainty of being able to bring about a friendly agreement between two such warm friends of his, as to his respective obligations, the same letter to S. M. ends cheerfully: "However I am coming round by degrees to consider myself capable of designing a fount of type, so it's all right and all difficulties can be got over".

On the one hand, work to be done "exclusively" for one man and his "limited" editions. On the other hand, the possibility of starting-off letter-forms on journeys into a thousand or more unknown printing houses and into the common stock of typographers of the western

Fig. 26: From a "rough" proof of the first cutting of Joanna.

WHEN in the chronicle of wasted time,  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautifull old rime,  
In praise of Ladies dead, & lovely Knights,  
Then in the blazon of sweet beautie's best,  
Of hand, of foote, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have exprest,  
Even such a beauty as you maister now.  
So all their praises are but prophesies  
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,  
And for they look'd but with devining eyes,  
They had not still enough your worth to sing:  
For we which now behold these present days,  
Have eyes to wonder, but lack touns to praise.

Fig. 27: Part of a rubbing of an inscription cut at approximately the same period (1930).



VIII: Early designs for Joanna Italic. (Above left September, 1930. Above right and below January, 1931.) (From The Monotype Corporation's Type Drawing Office.)

world. It was with relief that Gill found that the exciting demands which limited-edition work makes for high artistry would not have to cut him off from the creative and advisory work he was doing for The Monotype Corporation.

During his visits to Fetter Lane in June, 1929, in connection with the Perpetua Greek (see figs. 24 and 25), Gill put forward, in rough sketches, his own suggestion for a type face without "frills" which would represent the kind of thing that a type composing machine not merely could but "should" do. The face, which was to be known as Joanna, was duly commissioned. But meanwhile an event had occurred which led Gill to want that face for his own exclusive use.

Mr. René Hague, (whose vivid translation of the Song of Roland electrified Third Programme listeners some years ago), married Eric Gill's youngest daughter Joanna in



Fig. 28: Stamp for League of Nations, 1939.

1930, and another young family became part of the Pigotts household. René Hague wanted to practise as a printer, and his father-in-law, who had become fascinated with "typographical exigencies", entered enthusiastically into the project. A former barn at the back of the Pigotts quadrangle was converted into the printing-office of Hague & Gill.

Some readers may remember the friendly protest which its senior partner wrote to the Editor of this journal, regarding a reference to that firm as a "private" press. It was reprinted in Gill's Letters, from our issue of Autumn 1933, but deserves to be quoted here for the bearing which one sentence (here italicized) has upon the design of the Joanna face. A "private" press, Gill pointed out, "prints solely what it chooses to print, whereas a 'public' press prints what its customers demand of it". Admittedly the former is able to pay more attention to typography, while the latter is "very often at the mercy of his customers". On the other hand, "... it is obvious that private presses suffer from their very freedom, and in many cases have been conspicuous for the worst kind of self-conscious artistic eccentricity. While the public press in spite of its financial obsession — the tyranny of auditors and shareholders — often achieves a good reasonable commonplace and therefore pleasant standard of excellence".



Fig. 29: Bookplate 1929.

There speaks the man who can be remembered, by those who ever met him, as the very last person they would have called "eccentric". He was on the contrary, as "concentric" a personality as they had ever encountered. It had really worried Gill to think that anyone might imagine him as having set up a typographic playpen for his "private" hobby-horses. He had already reached out for that battered word "commonplace" and tried to restore dignity to it, when he spoke of his satisfaction with 'Monotype' Perpetua. He was using it now again, in defence of all good printers. This man who would not be called an artist unless all men could be seen as potential or actual artists ("even if it's making a good rabbit-hutch") would not be called a printer in any sense which would cut him off from the main body of what is essentially a service industry.

Hague & Gill had indeed been established on a hilltop, and had every intention of engaging in the great adventure of persuading the customer to want the sensible thing, the genuine thing, the job that could be shown to the world with pride. Like Harold Curwen and D. B. Updike in the previous generation, the partners were

¶There are, then, two principles, as there are two worlds. There is the principle of best possible quality & the principle of greatest possible profit. And there is every sort of compromise between the two. Whether, as seems probable, Industrialism win a complete victory, or human nature so far reassert itself as to overthrow Industrialism, is not here our concern. For the present we hold simply to the conviction that the two principles and the two worlds can exist side by side, Industrialism becoming more strictly and nobly utilitarian as it recognizes its inherent limitations, and the world of human labour, ceasing any longer to compete with it, becoming more strictly and soberly humane.

The last paragraph of Eric Gill's Essay on Typography.

working to pay the price of a high reputation by eliminating the unpersuadably-wrong-headed customer from their order books — on the assumption that there were enough reasonable people in the world, or persons open to reason, to fill the resulting vacuum. But unless the adventure could be grounded on the idea of delivering fair value to any member of the public who wanted a decent job and was prepared to pay a fair price for it, there would be no merit in embarking upon it. The author who had opened his *Essay on Typography* with observations on "Time and Place" could not afford to let any misuse of terms lead anyone into imagining that he had begged the primary question which confronted the western world, and its servants the printers, in the depression year 1931.

For March 22nd, 1930, the diary notes: "Began drawing of new type for Pigotts Press in morning", and on April 30th the completed drawings were "sent to Caslon". The first specimen pages from the new fount were printed in September of that year. The first important job was the little book on typography. Our fig. 3 is a line reproduction of a trial proof of two pages, from the Collection.

When the Press was facing financial difficulties, Messrs. J. M. Dent acquired possession of the Joanna founts cut by Caslon, and commissioned matrices of the face from The Monotype Corporation on the understanding that the design could be made available to the Trade after a period of years. That interval of "restricted use" having ended, Joanna roman and italic enter at last into the realm for which they were originally designed. The

roman was cut at Salford's directly from Caslon's punches; the italic, which Gill began in 1930 (see fig. 26, a line reproduction of a proof in the Collection) was redesigned

by him and cut at Salfords from his drawings (see plate VIII). Joanna, in its 11-point size, was chosen for this Number which celebrates the revelation to the public of a Collection of rare interest in itself and of incalculable value to students of the work of a man whose stature, both in the visual and the verbal arts, looms ever higher as the years pass.

To the social historian of our century Eric Gill must needs appear a significant figure. In his life-long battle against "aesthetic snobbery" he found plenty of ammunition ready to hand from such pioneers of Ruskin's inspiration as W. J. Lethaby, and he lived to see the battle nearly won in the fields of architecture and industrial design: so much so that

many deliberately explosive epigrams of his early letters would seem like familiar truths to the present-day reader. But where he stood most ahead of his time was in his ability to see the difference between Reconciliation and its grimy sister Compromise. His "concentric" spirit cried out in the title of one of his most characteristic essays: *IT ALL GOES TOGETHER*. And his testament to the printing trade, his *Essay on Typography*, significantly ends with the paragraph which we have set forth on the facing page, in his own house style, in the 12-point size of the Joanna type with which The Monotype Corporation honours the memory of a great man who meant what he said.



# EXPLICIT



Fig. 30: Tail-piece for the Fleuron, No. VII, by E. G.

# The Monotype Corporation Limited

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**Head Office and Works** Salfords, Redhill, Surrey, England. Redhill 4641

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Four Series in the family of 'Monotype' Gilt Slugs are shown above: 321 (Extra Bold), 275 (Bold), 262 (the 'medium' u. and l.c.) and 362 (Light)  
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THE ADDRESS OF  
SIR JOHN ROTHENSTEIN  
DIRECTOR OF THE TATE GALLERY  
AT THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION  
AT MONOTYPE HOUSE  
OF THE WORK OF ERIC GILL, MASTER OF LETTERING

I feel deeply privileged at having been invited to open this exhibition. I feel privileged because Eric Gill was someone for whom I have the greatest admiration and affection.

Eric Gill is already well under the peculiar shadow which so often obscures achievements for several decades after their death. This exhibition is, therefore, to be particularly welcomed as an impressive reminder of what a very remarkable man Eric Gill was.

I cannot help being surprised at being invited to open an exhibition of his lettering, when there are so very many people who know so much more about lettering than I do. The invitation gives me a special pleasure because, however little qualified I am to express an opinion, I believe that of all the manifold achievements of Eric Gill, his lettering, in which I include his printing, was the most outstanding. I myself would rate it well above his sculpture. There were, I think, two reasons for the superiority of his lettering. One had to do with his physical make-up, the other with his intellectual convictions.

Gill's most conspicuous defect as a sculptor was that he never naturally saw anything fully in the round. So much of his sculpture is therefore little more than a projection of a flat design. It is no accident, therefore, that his most successful sculpture was in low relief, such as his "Stations of the Cross" in Westminster Cathedral, perhaps his finest sculptural achievement. The nearest he got to realizing something fully in the round was in the splendid torso "Mankind" in the Tate Gallery.

His inability to see in the round did not matter in the essentially two-dimensional world of lettering. He also felt certain doubts, I fancy, about the validity of sculpture in the modern world. He was painfully conscious that it had become, since the

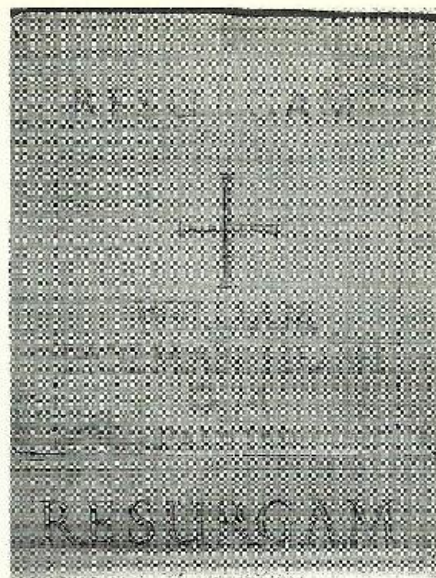
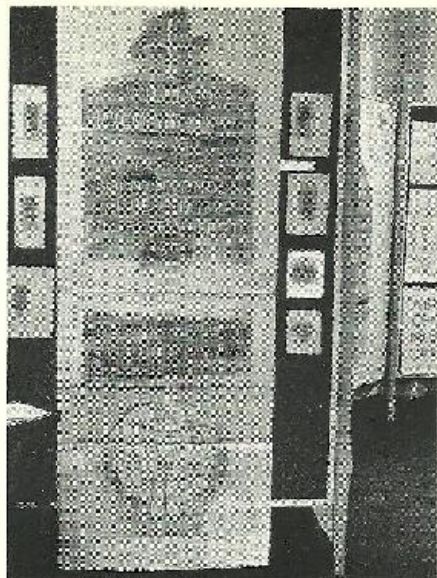
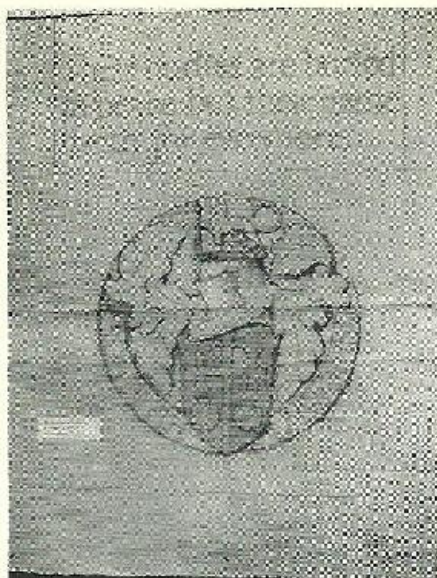
Renaissance, an activity progressively removed from the life of the ordinary man — by his own day it had become an activity without any generally recognized function; it had become an exotic, a luxury. Therefore Eric Gill never felt completely at ease at the thought of doing sculpture at all. Now and then a touch of the "artiness" that he despised and hated even obtrudes itself in his own sculpture. But there is never, that I know of, a trace of it anywhere in his lettering, either engraved or typographic. He was always happy in his lettering through feeling it to be not an "art" but an ordinary, necessary "job". What deep satisfaction he would have derived from the knowledge that certain of his types had become part of the very texture of English life.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity of expressing the admiration I feel for Eric Gill as Letterer and Typographer. He was surely among the very greatest that this age has produced.

But of course his achievement as a letterer was only one expression of a rich and varied personality. One of the many remarkable things about Eric Gill was the sort of sublime literalness with which he carried out his ideas. If we are completely honest and search our own hearts, most of us are compelled regretfully to admit that our ideas are one thing and our actions another. With Eric Gill it was otherwise. I never knew a man who attempted, so consistently, to live what he believed. Of course he sometimes did act the eccentric and at others the pedant. But Eric Gill was neither an eccentric nor a pedant; he was one of the most remarkable personalities of his time, able to express what was in him as a carver, engraver, typographer and writer, and above all, perhaps, as a courageous, clear-sighted and particularly lovable human being.



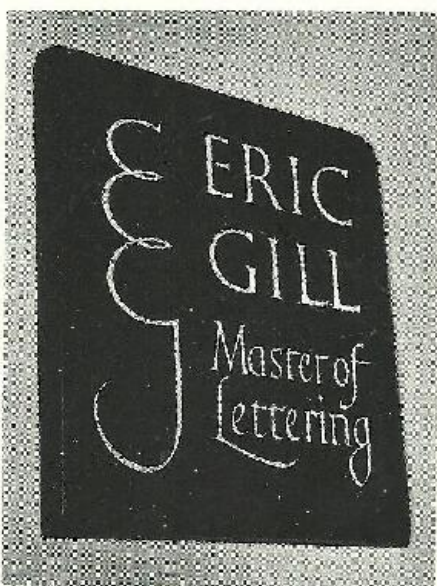
1929: ERIC GILL GUIDING THE HAND OF W. I. BURCH, LATE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE MONOTYPE CORPORATION LTD



## PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE GILL EXHIBITION AT MONOTYPE HOUSE

The Exhibition of the work of Eric Gill as a Master of Lettering closed on November 7th, 1958, having attracted over 6,000 visitors. It was, so far as we know, the first exhibition of its kind ever held. Among the 600 items, only one represented this renowned sculptor's statuary work; what was here being documented was his supremacy as a carver and draughtsman of the Roman Alphabet and as a designer of type. The art which fascinated Dürer and his contemporaries, the "just shaping of letters," was Gill's earliest and life-long vocation.

From a complete photographic record of the Exhibition we have selected these 32 views of typical panels and display cases as they appeared in the Lecture Hall of Monotype House. It will be shown at the Art Centre, Hay Hill, London, in January, and thereafter, it is hoped, in a number of centres outside London and on the Continent.

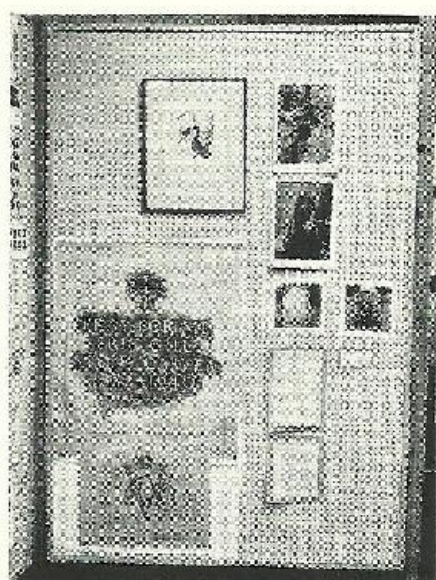
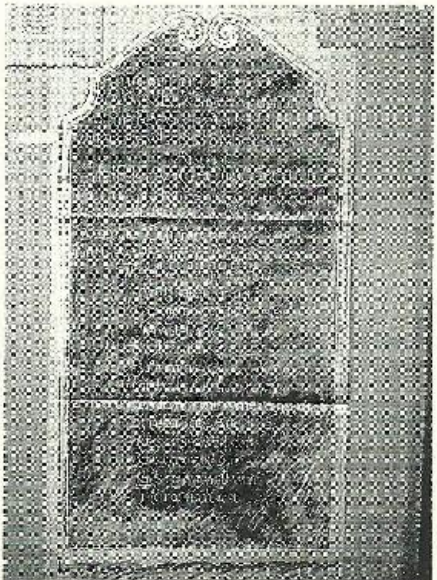
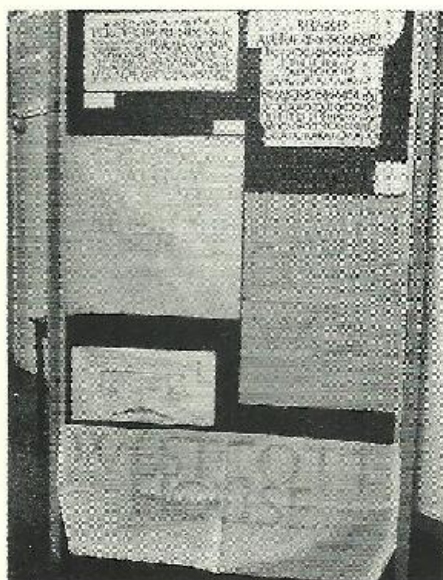


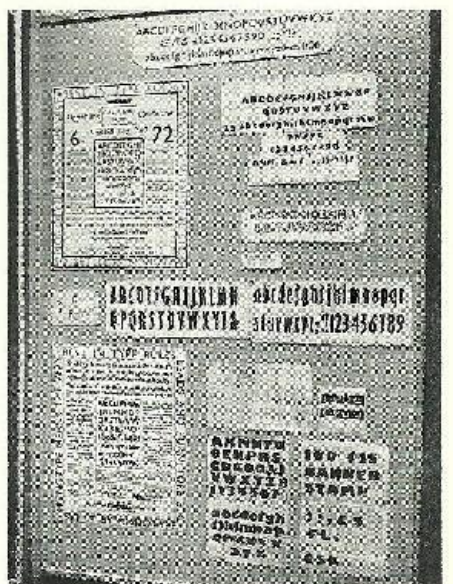
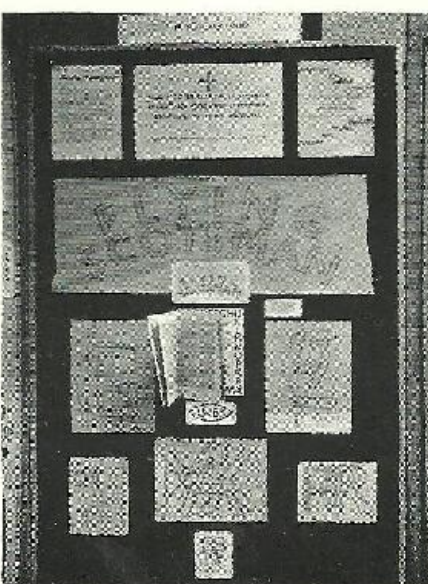
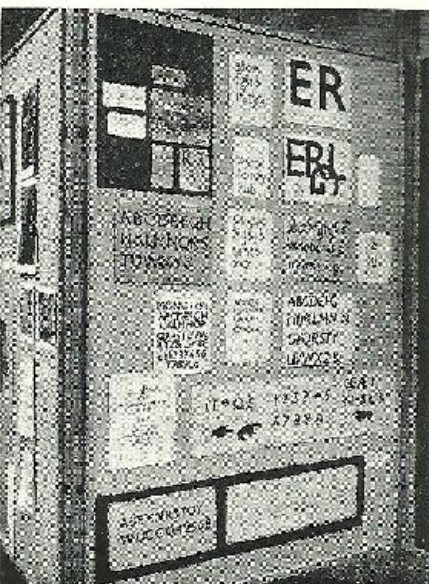
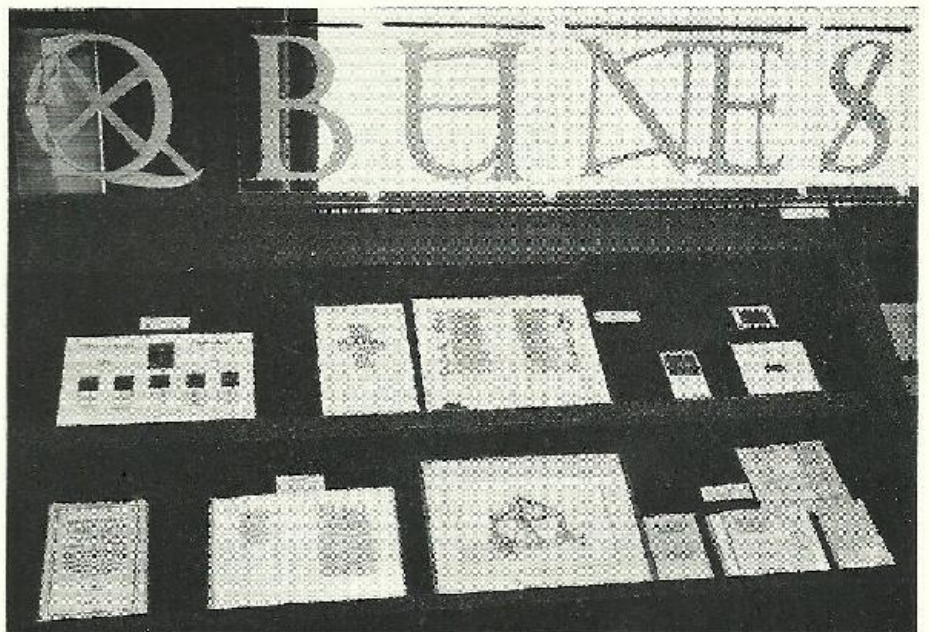
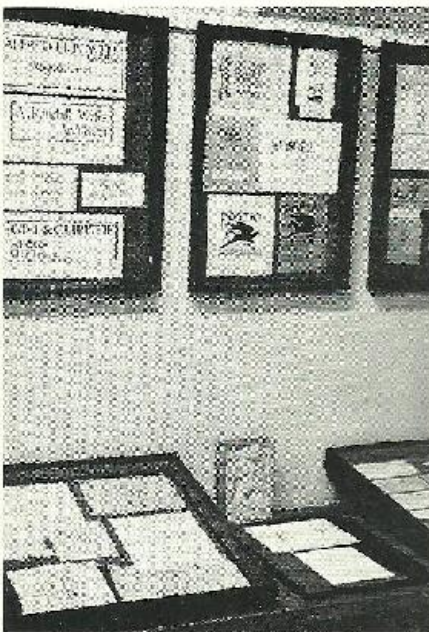
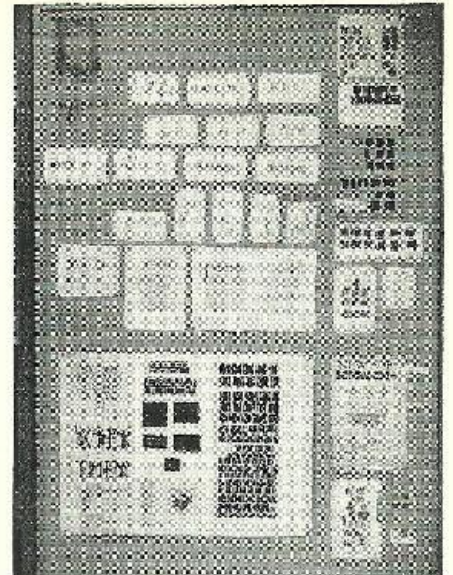
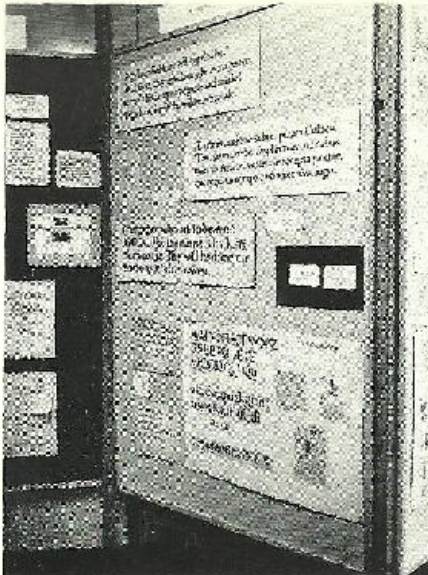
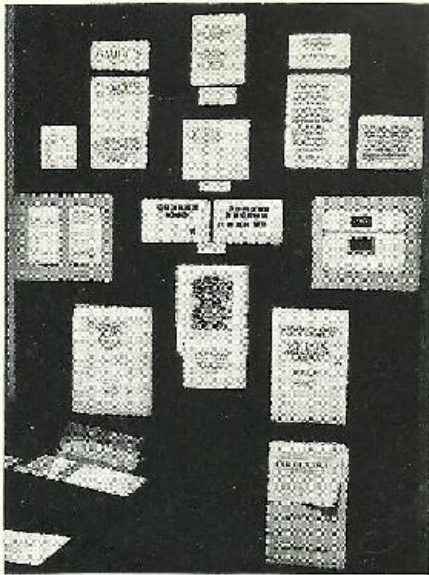
The carved slate of which a photograph is shown on the left faced the visitor as he was entering the room. It is the work of Mr. John Skelton, Eric Gill's nephew and last pupil, and was presented to us by the artist as a gesture of homage to his late master.

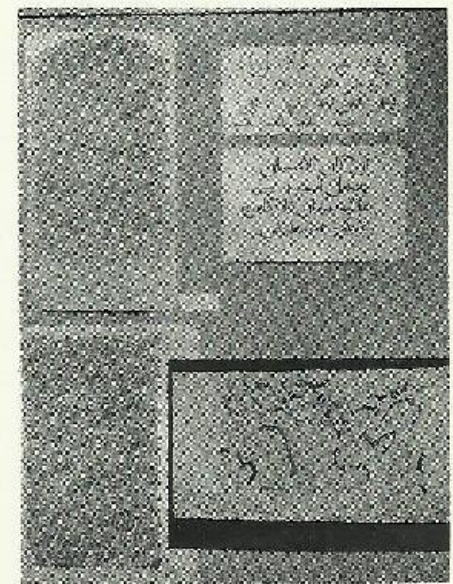
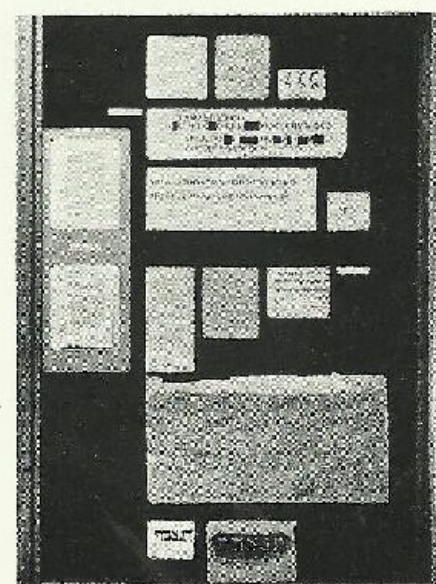
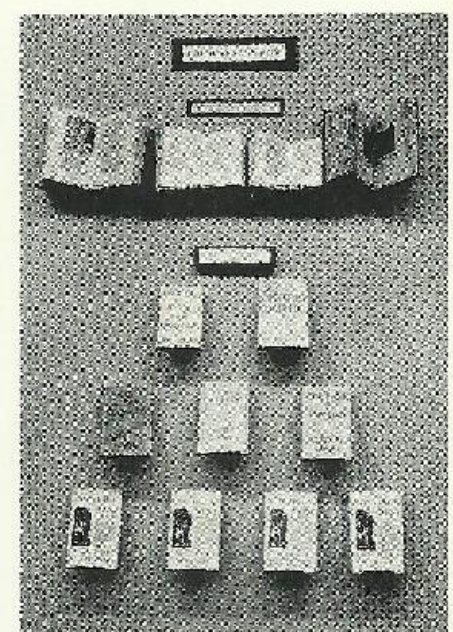
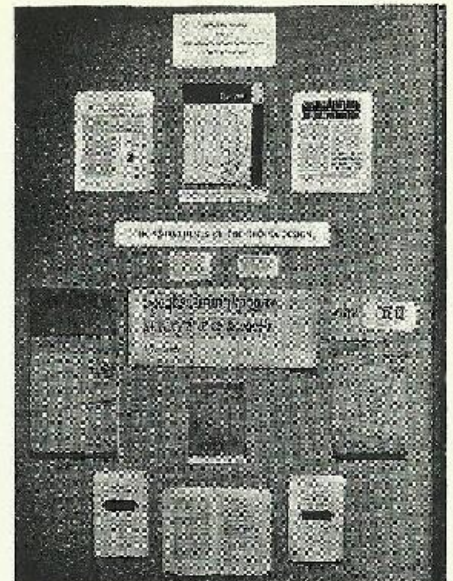
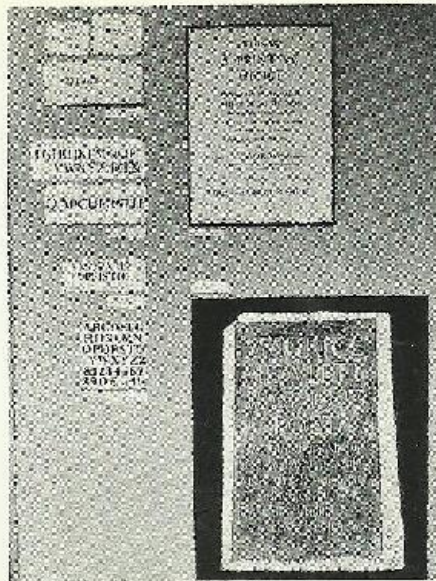
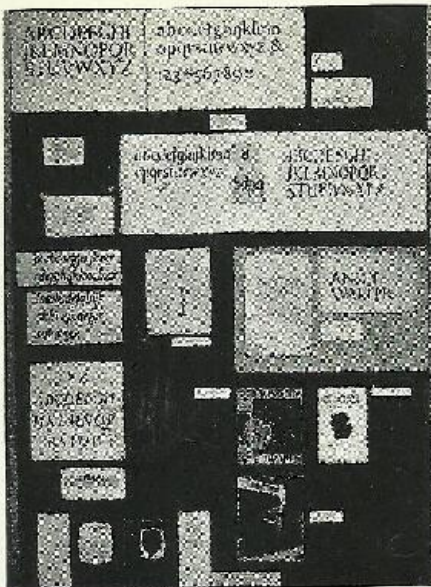
Every Art School in the London area, and many at greater distances, sent parties of senior students to the Exhibition. Interest aroused by notices in the national press made it necessary to postpone the closing date for a week.

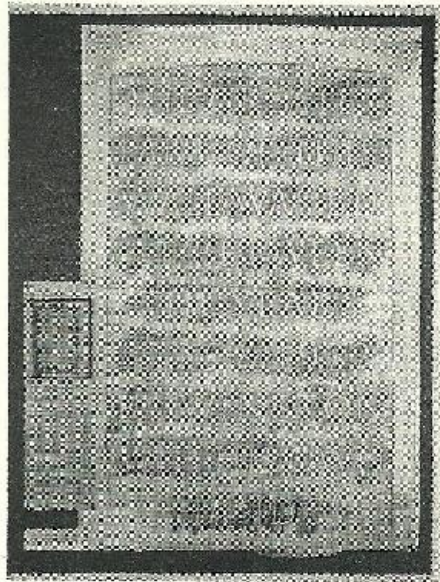
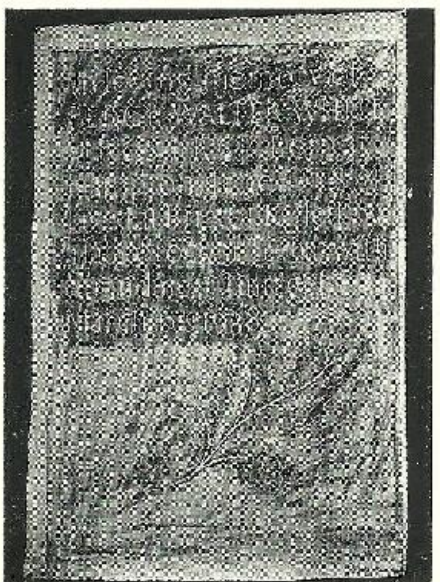
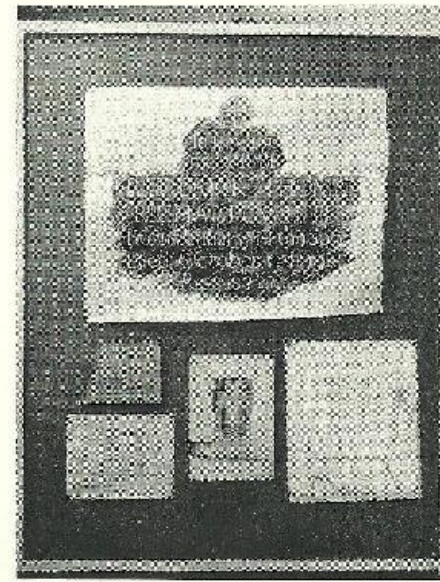
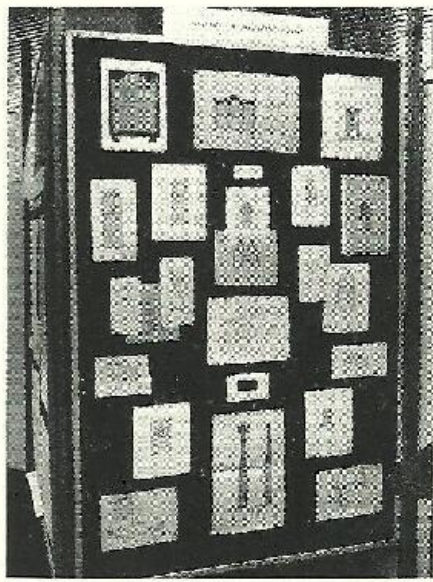
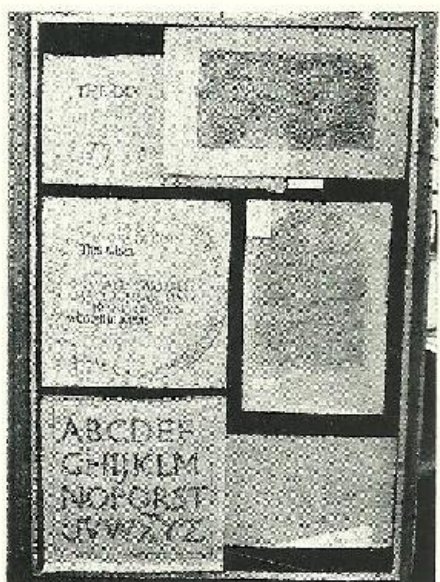
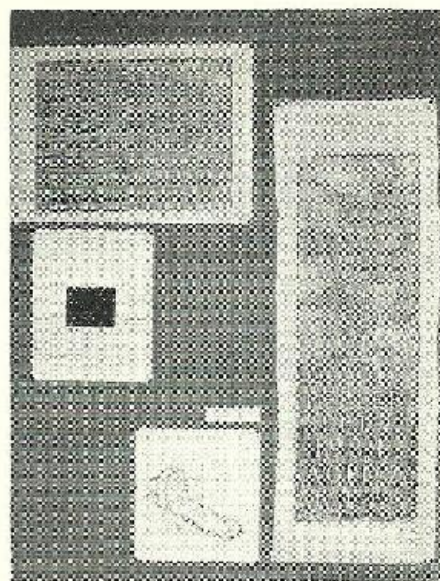
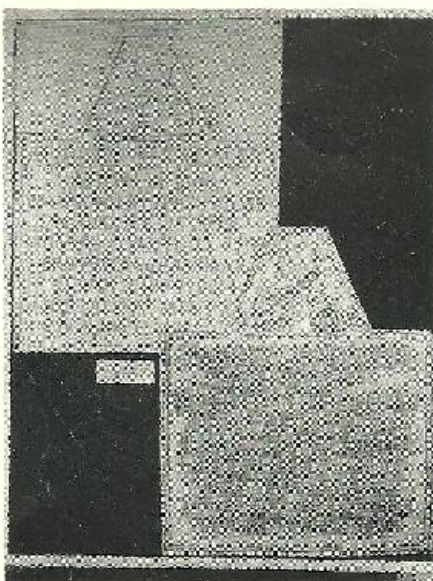
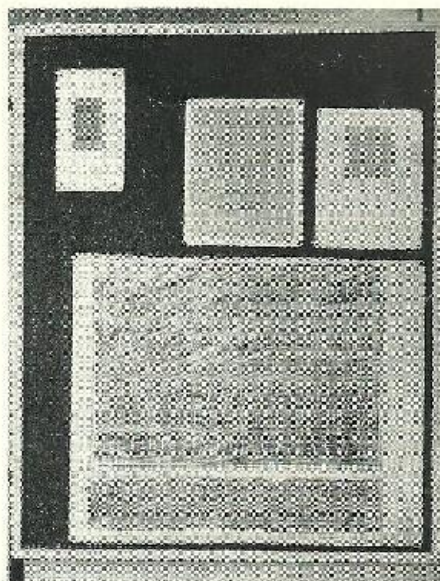
"What is so thrilling about it", said one visitor, "is that so few of the exhibits are objects meant to be shown to the public. These are glimpses behind the scenes, of a dedicated mind at work."

Most of these illustrations are self explanatory. In the panel below-left, the "Hiscock" drawing is inscribed by E. G.: "1901 ... before Edward Johnston's teaching."

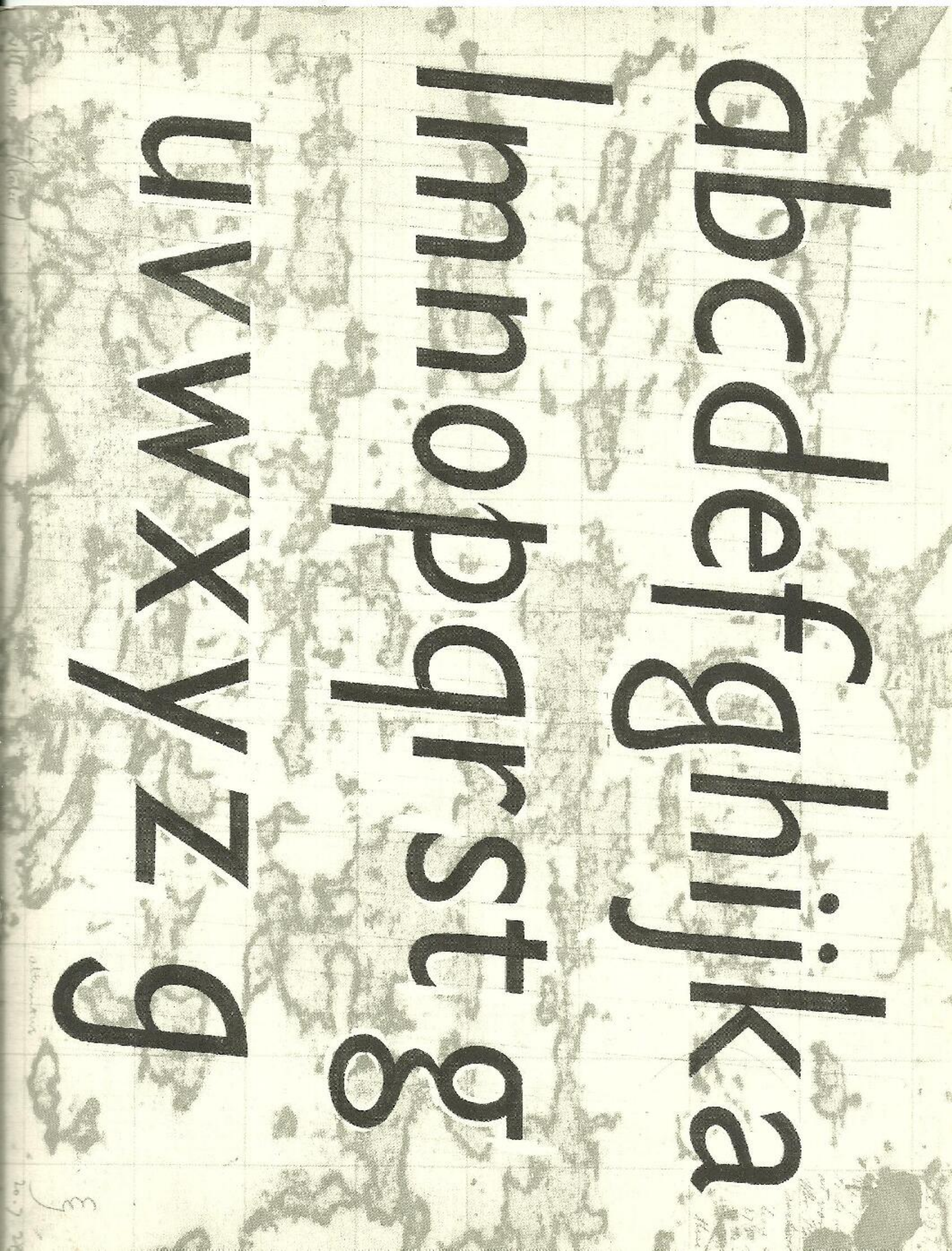








a b c d e f g h i j k  
l m n o p q r s t  
u v x y z



off an (left)

abundant

20.7.20

3

