

SCOTTISH HANDWRITING
in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

A CONCISE GUIDE

Compiled by
Kenneth Veitch



THE EUROPEAN
ETHNOLOGICAL
RESEARCH CENTRE

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Letter Forms	4
Abbreviations	41
Punctuation	60
Other Marks	73
Further Resources	78

INTRODUCTION

It has been estimated that at the beginning of the eighteenth century about 75 per cent of men and between 25 and 30 per cent of women were able to sign their names. The documents used to arrive at these figures indicate that being able to write was influenced not just by gender, but also by social status and occupation. They also reveal strong regional differences, notably between the Highlands and the Lowlands, but also between urban and rural areas in the Lowlands. These distinctions steadily eroded over the following two hundred years or so: by the 1860s about 89 per cent of men and 79 per cent of women were able to sign their names, and by the opening decades of the twentieth century the ability to write among Scots was more or less universal.

This expansion in the ability to write was accompanied by equally significant developments in Scottish handwriting. Most notably, the various styles that had characterised it for three hundred years or so were gradually replaced during the eighteenth century by a style known as English Roundhand. Created primarily to meet the needs of British commerce, it was relatively easy to learn and could be written quickly and with clarity. A distinctive form known as Copperplate had developed by the end of the eighteenth century and was widely taught in schools until the mid nineteenth century, when a simplified form known as Civil Service Hand became popular.

The letter forms of both Copperplate and Civil Service Hand are instantly recognisable as they are either the same or very similar to modern forms. This does not necessarily make eighteenth- and nineteenth-century handwriting easy to read, however. Some hands are excessively cursive, resulting in badly formed, ligatured or missing letters. In other hands, confusing idiosyncrasies reduce legibility. Sometimes the handwriting is simply bad. This need not always indicate a low level of schooling. Some people were not in the habit of writing, and lost competence through lack of practice. Poor quality writing materials, from shoddily cut quills and badly mixed inks to inferior paper, also contributed to bad handwriting. Importantly, handwriting quality also depended on the purpose and likely audience of the document. For informal documents or ones that were intended primarily for personal reference, people often employed a hand that was more cursive, irregular, inconsistent and abbreviated than the one they used for more formal or public documents.

With this in mind, it was decided that a brief guide to some of the basic aspects of Scottish handwriting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be useful for those engaged in transcribing documents for the Sources in Local History series. As will be seen, the focus is on writing in English and Scots.

Kenneth Veitch
European Ethnological Research Centre

Letter forms

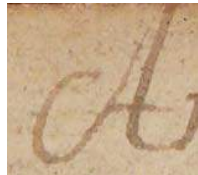
Being able to recognise standard letter forms and their variants is an essential skill for transcribers of historical documents.

The great majority of letter forms encountered in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish documents belong to English Roundhand and its successor scripts, and examples of both capital and small forms are given here for each letter of the alphabet. Although the use of Secretary Hand was in decline by the beginning of the period, some of its letter forms survived in hybrid hands well into the eighteenth century and examples of these are also given.

A

Two forms of capital letter *A* can commonly be found in documents from the period.

One is angular and became the standard Copperplate form:



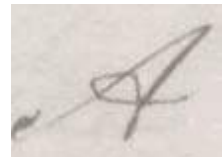
(c. 1704)



(1742)



(1799)



(1842)

The other looks like a larger version of the small letter *a*:



(1726)



(1801)



(1834)



(1848)



(1897)

a

The small letter *a* looks very much like its modern form:



(c. 1704)



(1743)



(1792)



(1799)



(1842)



(1847)



(1848)

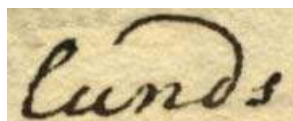


(1873)



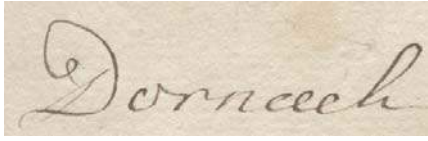
(1900)

In some hands, the lobe is not closed and it can consequently look similar to a small letter *u*, as shown here:



lands (1799)

When an open lobe is combined with a looped stem it can sometimes look similar to *æ*, as shown here:



Dornach (1757)

B The lower lobe of the capital letter *B* is generally open and in eighteenth-century hands does not always sit immediately under the upper lobe:



(1716)



(1721)



(1743)



(1768)



(1810)



(1825)



(1834)

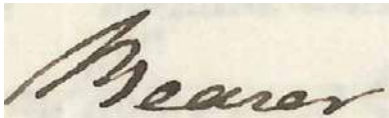


(1842)



(1897)

In some hands, it can look like a collapsed capital letter *M*:



Bearer (1792)

b The lobe of the small letter *b* was written anti-clockwise and was usually left open, especially in Copperplate hands:



(1700)



(c. 1704)



(1742)



(1799)



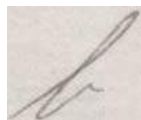
(1801)



(1834)



(1842)

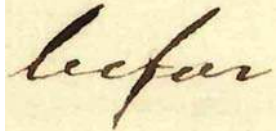


(c. 1870)



(1897)

In some hands, the combination of a very open lobe and a low joining stroke (or 'link') can make the letter difficult to distinguish, as shown here:



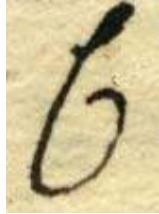
before[e] (1799)

C

The capital letter C is often looped at the top or bottom or both:



(1701)



(1742)



(1799)



(1834)



(1838)



(1842)

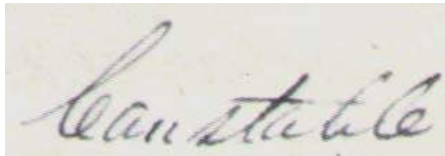


(1867)



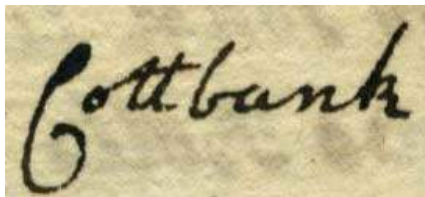
(1897)

When excessively looped, it can look similar to *le*, as shown here:

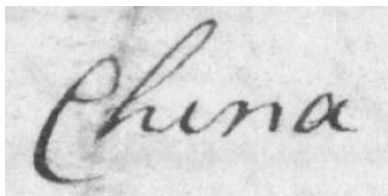


Constable (1849)

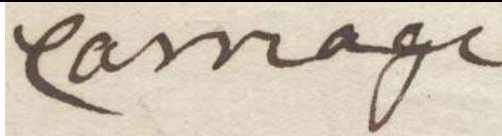
In some hands, it goes below the line:



Cottbank (1768)



China (c. 1790)



Carriage (1793)

C

The Secretary Hand small letter *c* can still be found in some hands of the early eighteenth century:



(1700)



(1706)



(1716)

While it can look similar to the later, Copperplate small letter *r*, the two letters usually have distinct forms in such hands, as this example shows:



concern (1716)

The Copperplate version is very similar to the modern form:



(c. 1704)



(1743)



(1799)



(1838)



(1842)



(1848)



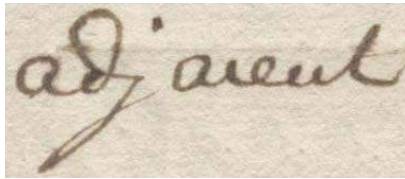
(1873)

When looped, this form can look similar to the letter *e*, as this example shows:



deck (1900)

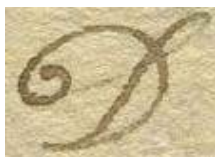
In some hands, the top curve of the letter is missing, as shown here:



adjacent (1721)

D

The capital letter *D* usually has a flourish:



(1732)



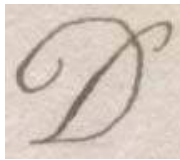
(1791)



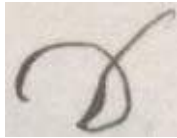
(1801)



(1834)



(1842)



(1868)



(1897)



(1899)

d

Both Secretary Hand and Italic forms of the small letter *d* can be found in documents of the eighteenth century. An Italic influence can also be seen in some nineteenth-century hands. In both forms, the ascender has a prominent leftward curl:



(1701)



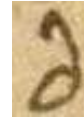
(c. 1704)



(1709)



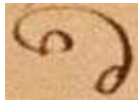
(1716)



(1730)



(1745)



(1747)



(1748)



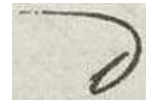
(1791)



(1829)



(1830)



(1868)

A form with a straight, slightly right-leaning ascender was in use at the beginning of the period and became the norm in Copperplate hands:



(1706)



(1746)



(1748)



(1751)



(1781)



(1791)



(1801)



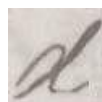
(1834)



(1838)



(1848)



(c. 1870)

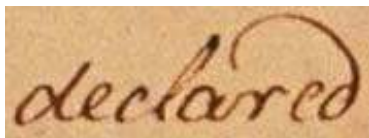


(1878)

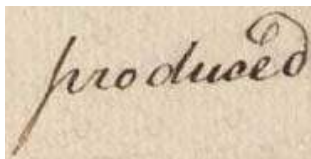


(1897)

Both forms can be found in some hands. In such cases, the form used was often determined by the letter's position in the word, with the looped *d* most commonly being used terminally, as these examples show:

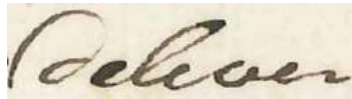


declared (1747)



produced (1791)

In some hands, however, there is no consistency, as these two examples of the same word from a letter of 1792 show:



deliver



deliver

E

A capital letter *E* with curled arms became the standard Copperplate form:



(1703)



(1743)



(1762)



(1799)



(1835)



(1850)



(1897)

A variation looks like a larger version of the small letter *e*:



(1709)



(1727)



(1844)

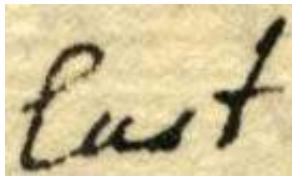


(1848)



(1859)

The latter can sometimes look similar to a capital letter *C* or a small letter *l*, as shown here:



East (1768)

e

The Secretary Hand small letter *e* survived into the eighteenth century:



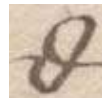
(c. 1700)



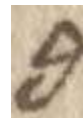
(c. 1704)



(c. 1704)

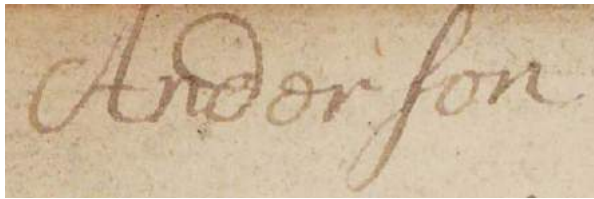


(1757)



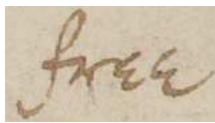
(1759)

Its upper lobe (or ‘eye’) distinguishes it from the similar-looking small letter *o*, as shown here:



Anderson (c. 1704)

A smaller version of the curled capital letter *E* can also be found in documents of the early eighteenth century, as shown here:

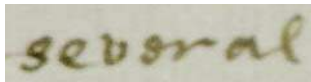


free (c. 1704)

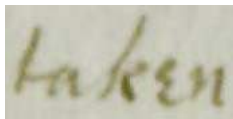
A form similar to the modern small letter *e* gradually gained prominence and became the norm in Copperplate hands:



All three forms can sometimes be found in the same document, as shown in these examples from a letter of 1700:

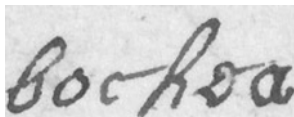


several



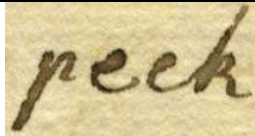
taken

In the following example, two forms of the letter are given ‘attacking strokes’, an earlier handwriting practice that survived in some hands of the eighteenth century:



boeha (1715)

When the eye of a small letter *e* is closed, it can look similar to a letter *c*, as shown here:



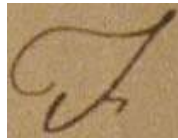
peck (1742)

F

The upper arm of the capital letter *F* is to the left of the vertical stroke and often has a flourish:



(1745)



(1748)



(1792)



(1838)



(1842)



(1854)

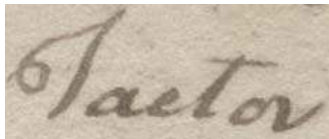


(1867)

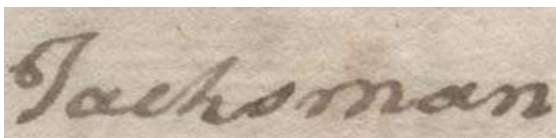


(1892)

Without its lower arm, it can look similar to a capital letter *T*, as shown in the following examples taken, firstly, from a letter of 1769:

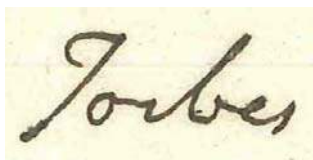


Factor

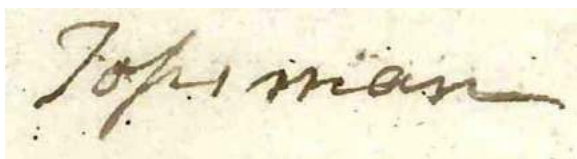


Tacksman

and, secondly, from a letter of 1801:

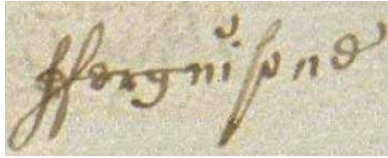


Forbes

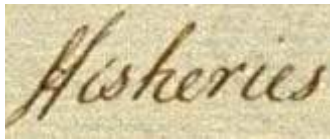


Topsman

The earlier custom of indicating a capital letter *F* with a double small letter *f* persisted into the eighteenth century, as shown by these examples:



Fergusone (1716)



Fisheries (1746)

f

The small letter *f* is often looped at both top and bottom, and the cross-stroke does not always pass through the letter:



(1700)



(c. 1704)



(1747)



(1784)



(1799)



(1842)



(1843)



(1866)

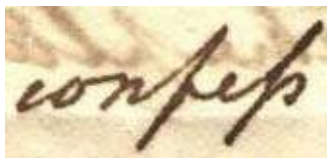


(c. 1870)



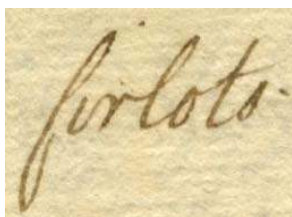
(1898)

Without its cross-stroke, it can look similar to a long *s*, as shown here:

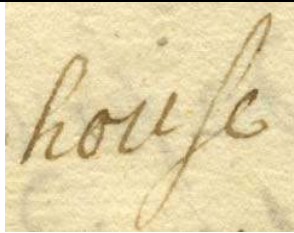


confess (1796)

In most hands, however, these two letters can be distinguished from each other by the direction of the tail, as shown by these examples from a document of 1745:

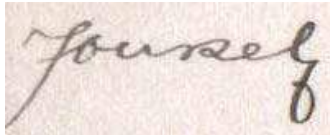


firlots



house

As with other letters written in a strongly cursive hand, the form of the small letter *f* can change according to its position in a word, as these examples from a letter of 1900 show:



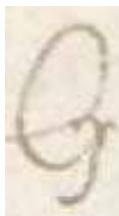
yourself



few

G

The capital letter *G* is generally looped at the top and has a tale, the length of which varies between hands:



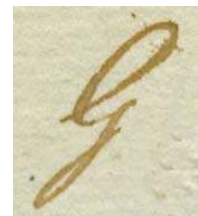
(1701)



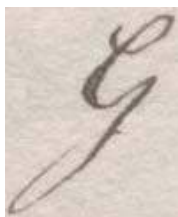
(1736)



(1799)



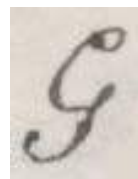
(1801)



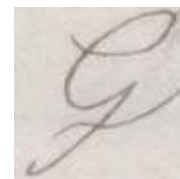
(1842)



(1848)



(1868)



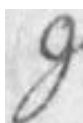
(c. 1870)

g

The small letter *g* looks similar to the modern form, although in some hands the lobe is on the right of the descender:



(c. 1704)



(1716)



(1743)



(1784)



(1792)



(1799)



(1801)



(1838)



(1842)



(1847)

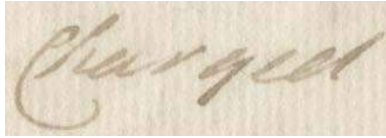


(c. 1870)



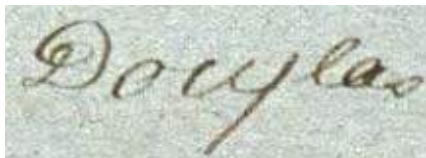
(1898)

In some hands, it has a short tail, as shown here:

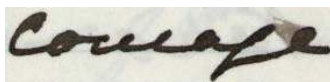


Charged (1757)

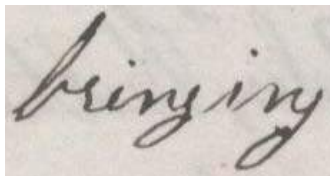
In some cursive hands, the lobe of the letter *g* is omitted or merged with the preceding letter, as shown here:



Douglas (1847)



courage (1866)



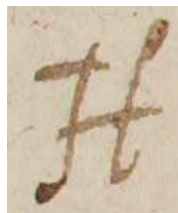
bringing (1867)

H

The uprights of the capital letter *H* often have pronounced loops:



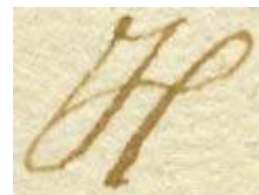
(c. 1700)



(c. 1704)



(1783)



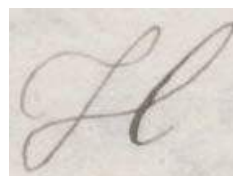
(1794)



(1799)



(1838)




(1868)




(1880)

Depending on the angle of the bar, it can look similar to either a capital letter *N* or *M*, as shown here:




Hay (1831)

h The small letter *h* looks similar to its modern form:

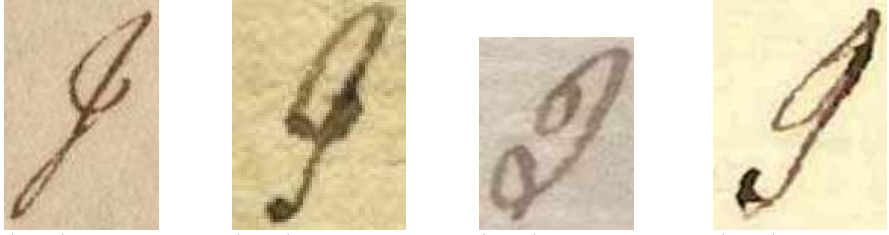


(c. 1704) (c. 1704) (1742) (1799) (1832) (1834)

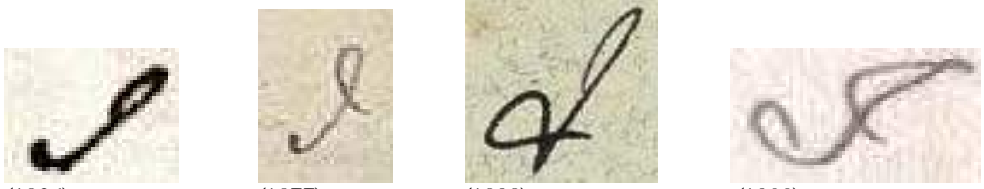


(1838) (1842) (c. 1870) (1896)

I The capital letter *I* is generally looped at the top and sometimes at the bottom as well:




(1719) (1742) (1784) (1799)

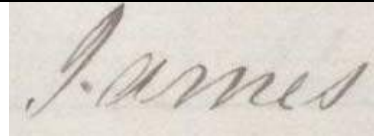


(1836) (1877) (1898) (1900)

In some hands, it can look similar to the capital letter *J*, as shown by these examples from the same document of 1868:

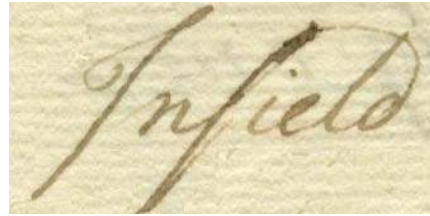


I saw

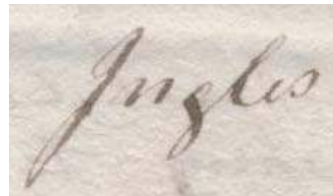


James

In some hands, it goes below the line, as shown by these examples:



Infield (1733)



Ingles (1847)

i

The small letter *i* looks similar to its modern form:



(c. 1704)



(1768)



(1786)



(1822)



(1838)

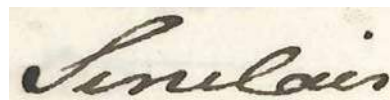


(1842)



(1873)

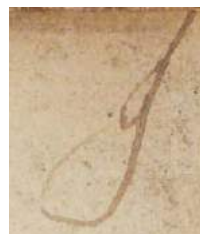
Confusion can arise when it is not dotted, as it can then look similar to the letter *c* or an *e* with a closed eye. Compare, for example, the first letter *i* and the letter *c* in the following word:



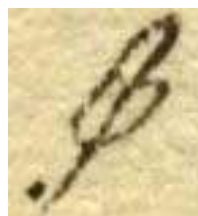
Sinclair (1792)

J

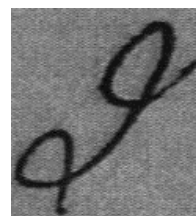
The capital *J* is usually topped by a loop rather than a head-stroke:



(c. 1704)



(1744)



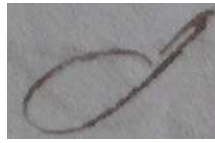
(1786)



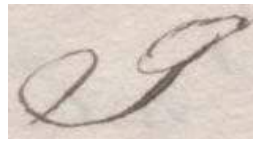
(1794)



(1801)



(1832)



(1842)

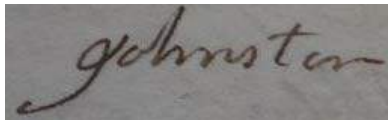


(1897)

It often goes below the line, as shown by these examples:



July (1733)



Johnston (1840)

j

The small letter *j* looks similar to its modern form:



(1734)



(1745)



(1792)



(1817)



(1829)



(1849)

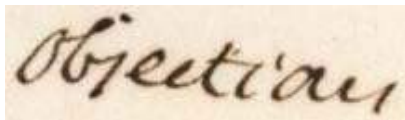


(1878)



(1899)

In some hands, it does not have a tail, as shown here:



objections (1850)

K

The capital letter *K* usually has curled arms and sometimes a flourish, although plainer forms are also to be found:



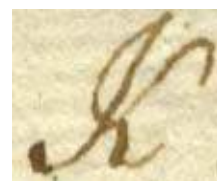
(1701)



(1744)



(1757)



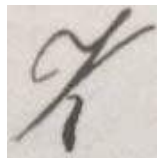
(1794)



(1834)



(1838)

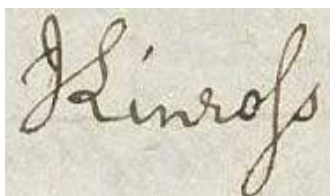


(1868)



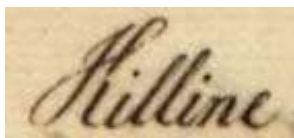
(1896)

In some hands, the letter is broken, as shown here:



Kinross (1850)

In others, it can look similar to a capital letter *H*, as shown by these two examples from a document of 1755:



Killine



Highland

k

The small letter *k* looks like the modern form:



(c. 1704)



(1732)



(1785)



(1799)



(1799)



(1834)



(1847)



(1847)

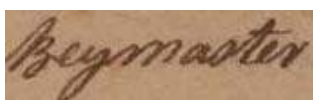


(1859)



(c. 1870)

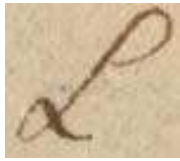
In some hands, it can look like a capital letter *B*, for example:



keymaster (1789)

L

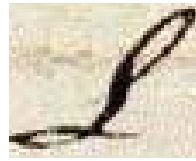
The capital letter *L* is often looped at both top and bottom:



(1719)



(c. 1730)



(1781)



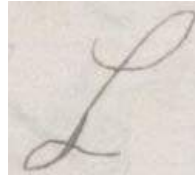
(1794)



(1801)



(1850)



(1868)

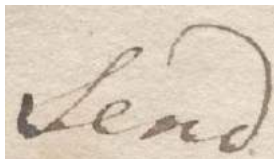


(1900)

In some hands, the looped form can look similar to other hands' capital letter *S*, for example:



Larbart (1799)



Send (1757)

l

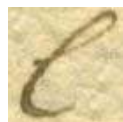
The small letter *l* is often looped at the top:



(c. 1704)



(1721)



(1744)



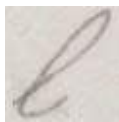
(1781)



(1834)



(1848)



(c. 1870)



(1877)



(1897)

M

Two forms of the capital letter *M* can be found in documents from the period.

One is angular in appearance. It was written like the modern form, that is starting at the bottom of the first of four ascenders. It became the standard Copperplate form, the entry stroke of which was exaggerated in some hands:



(1734)



(1776)



(1791)



(1800)



(1829)

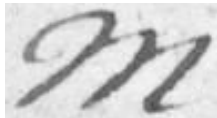


(1845)

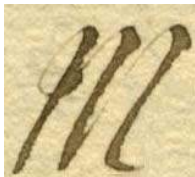


(1859)

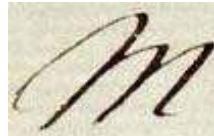
The other was written starting with an entry stroke at the top of the first of three ascenders. The ascenders are joined by arches, making it look like a larger version of the small letter *m*.



(1734)



(1744)



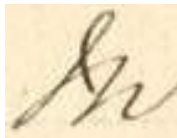
(1782)



(1792)



(1868)



(1875)

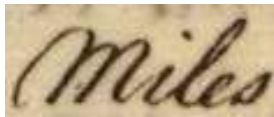


(1878)

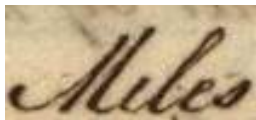


(1899)

Both forms can be found in some hands, as these examples from a letter of 1755 show:



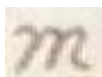
Miles



Miles

m

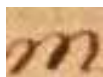
The small letter *m* looks similar to its modern form:



(1701)



(c. 1704)



(1747)



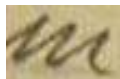
(1792)



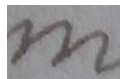
(1799)



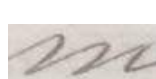
(1801)



(1822)



(1843)

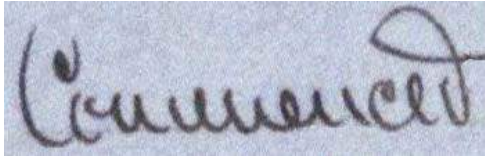


(c. 1870)



(1877)

Depending on how the three minims of the letter *n* are joined, it can sometimes look similar to the letter *m*, as shown here:



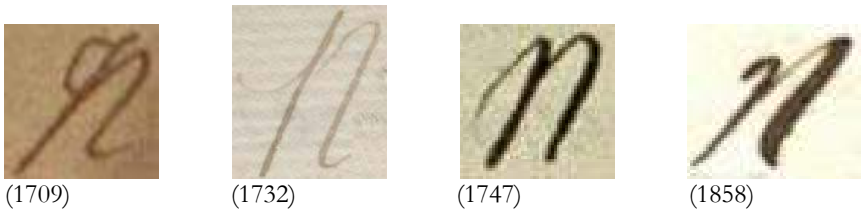
Commenced (1897)

N Two forms of the capital letter *N* can be found in documents from the period.

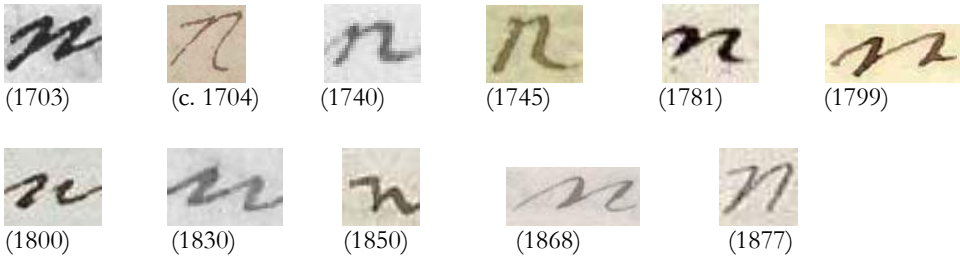
One is angular in appearance. It was written like the modern form, that is starting at the bottom of the first of three ascenders. It became the standard Copperplate form:



The other was written starting with an entry stroke at the top of the first of two ascenders. The ascenders are joined by an arch, making it look like a larger version of the small letter *n*:



n The small letter *n* looks similar to its modern form:



Depending on how its two minims are joined, it can look similar to the small letter *m*, as shown here :

Dunbar

Dunbar (1873)

Bank

Bank (1900)

A number of minims together, such as a double *n*, can also be confusing:

flannel

flannel (1791)

O

The capital letter *O* looks similar to its modern form:

O

(1701)

O

(1743)

O

(1799)

O

(1842)

O

(1897)

O

The small letter *o* looks similar to its modern form:

o

(1721)

o

(1745)

o

(1799)

o

(1801)

o

(1825)

o

(1842)

o

(1870)

o

(1897)

In some cursive hands, it merges with the following letter, making it difficult to distinguish, as shown here:

Victoria

Victoria (1893)

In others, the link comes from near the bottom rather than the top of the letter, making it look similar to the small letter *a*, as shown here:

thrown

thrown (1849)

While in others, the link comes before the letter is closed, making it look similar to a small letter *e*, as shown here:



Crop (1831)

P

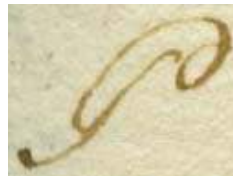
The ascender and lobe of the capital letter *P* were usually written separately in eighteenth-century hands. By the nineteenth century, the habit of writing them both with one pen stroke had become the norm, with the chamber often remaining open:



(1743)



(1747)



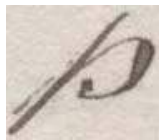
(1796)



(1800)



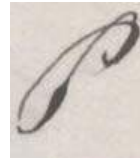
(1814)



(1842)



(1850)

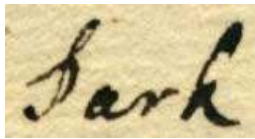


(1867)



(1897)

In some hands of the eighteenth century, the ascender is looped, giving the letter an unusual appearance, as shown here:



Park (1768)

p

The small letter *p* can be found with a closed or an open lobe, the latter becoming the standard Copperplate form:



(1701)



(c. 1704)



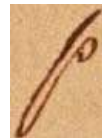
(1709)



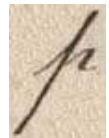
(1727)



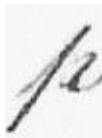
(1745)



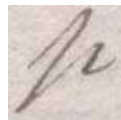
(1747)



(1791)



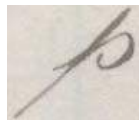
(1820)



(1842)



(1850)



(c. 1870)

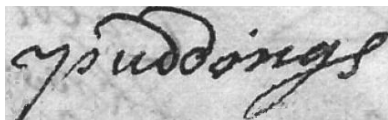


(1878)



(1900)

In some early hands, the lobe is detached from the descender, as shown here:

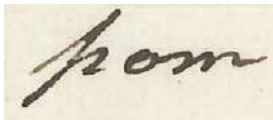


puddings (1703)

The open lobe of the Copperplate small letter *p* can lead to confusion. Compare, for example, these two words from a letter of 1792, where the *p* of *upon* looks similar to the *fr* of *from*:

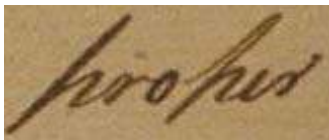


upon

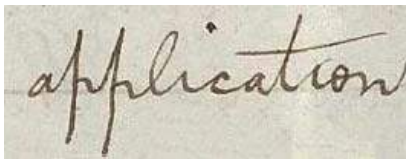


from

In some hands, the descender extends well above the line, as shown by these two examples:

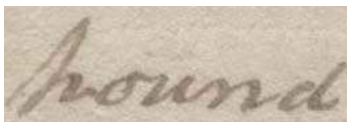


proper (1712)



application (1850)

In others, it is truncated, as shown here:



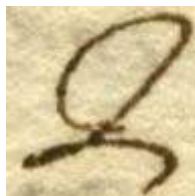
pound (1769)

Q

The capital letter *Q* looks similar to its modern form, although in Copperplate hands the circle was finished with a curl and often left open:



(1709)



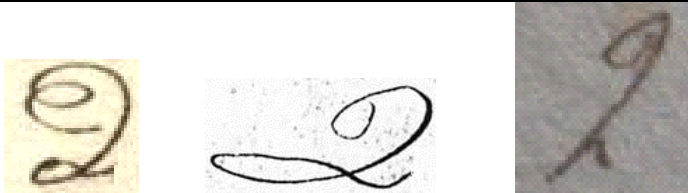
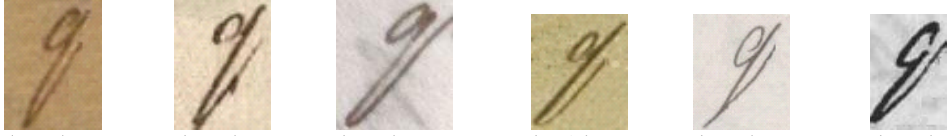
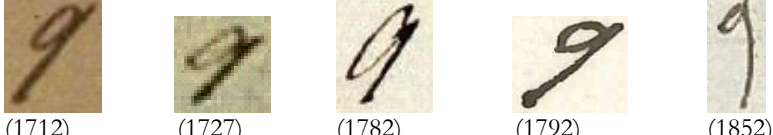
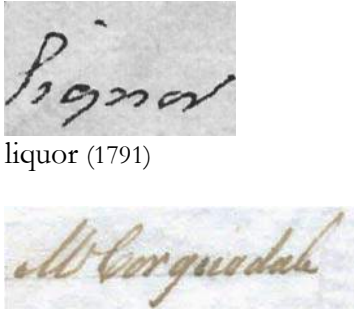

(1725)



(1727)



(1752)

	 <p>(1829) (1838) (1850)</p>
q	<p>Two forms of the small letter <i>q</i> are commonly found in documents of the period.</p> <p>One has a looped tail:</p>
	 <p>(1709) (1791) (1842) (1859) (1878) (1898)</p> <p>The other has a straight tail:</p>  <p>(1712) (1727) (1782) (1792) (1852)</p> <p>The latter can sometimes look similar to a straight-tailed small letter <i>g</i>, as the following examples show:</p>  <p>liquor (1791)</p> <p>McCorquodale (1834)</p>
R	<p>The capital letter <i>R</i> was formally written with two separate strokes: one forming the lobe and the leg; the other the ascender. In more informal, cursive hands, it was written with a single stroke, often resulting in idiosyncratic forms. Examples of both approaches are given here:</p>
	 <p>(1721) (1742) (1794) (1799)</p>



(1842)



(1850)

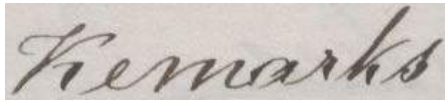


(1866)

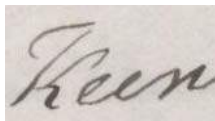


(1897)

When the lobe is not closed, it can look similar to a capital letter *K*, as shown by these two examples from the same document of 1867:



Remarks



Keen

r

The Secretary Hand small letter *r* is still to be seen in documents of the early eighteenth century, albeit rarely:



(1701)



(c. 1704)



(1716)

Two other forms of the small letter *r* are more likely to be encountered.

One combines a down-stroke with an up-stroke, which is often curled:



(c. 1704)



(1732)



(1791)



(1799)



(1842)

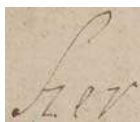


(1850)



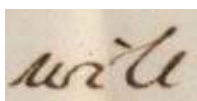
(1877)

When the down-stroke and the up-stroke of this form do not overlap, it can look similar to a small letter *v*, as shown here:



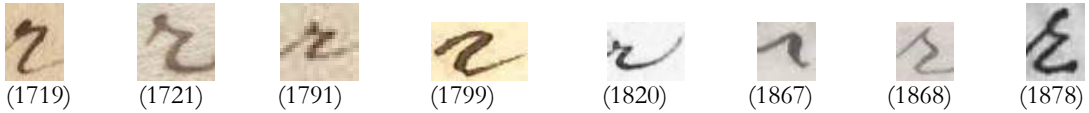
her (c. 1704)

In some hands, it merges with the preceding letter, as shown here:

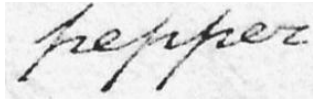


write (1850)

The other form is known as the *descending r*.

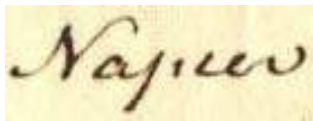


This form can occasionally look like the modern small letter *ꝛ*, as shown here:



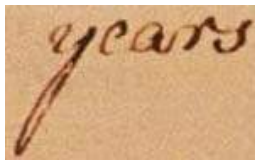
pepper (c. 1710)

In some hands, the terminal *descending r* has a curled finial, as shown here:

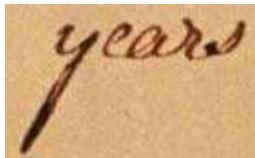


Napier (1775)

Both forms can often be found in the same hand, the form used being determined by the letter's place in the word. In some hands, however, the two forms were used interchangeably, as shown by these examples from a document of 1747:



years



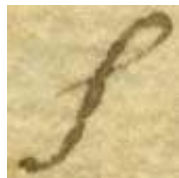
years

S

The capital letter *S* is often sloping and can be looped at the top or the bottom or both:



(1740)



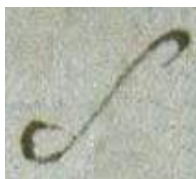
(1742)



(1799)



(1801)



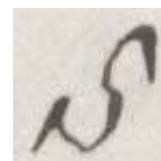
(1825)



(1842)

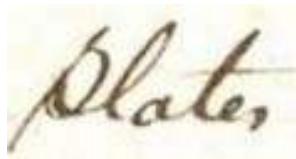


(1848)



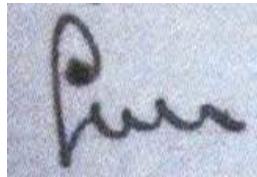
(1867)

In some hands, an entry stroke that descends below the line combined with a truncated upper curve can make it look similar to a letter *p*, as shown here:



Slates (1858)

In some hands, it is the lower curve that is truncated, as shown here:



Sun[day] (1897)

S

Two main forms of the small letter *s* can be found in documents from the period.

The short *s*, which sits on the line:



(c. 1704)



(c. 1730)



(1740)



(1742)



(1834)



(1850)



(c. 1870)



(1898)

And the long *s*, which descends below the line:



(1701)



(c. 1704)



(1740)

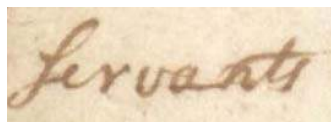


(1829)

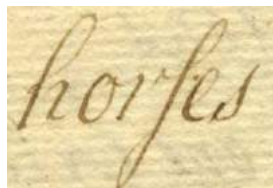


(1859)

A long *s* tends to be found at the start of a word or within it, and the short *s* at the end, as shown here:



servants (1709)

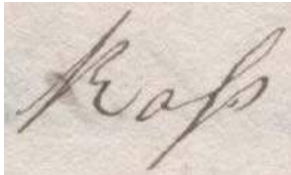


horses (1745)

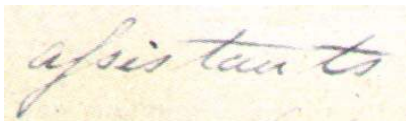
The use of the long *s* gradually declined during the period, although the habit of combining it with a short *s* when writing a double *s* continued through the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, as these examples show:



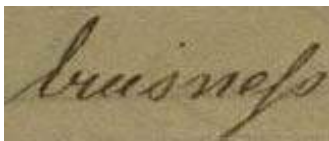
Grass (1799)



Ross (1842)

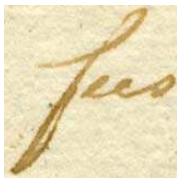


assistants (1849)

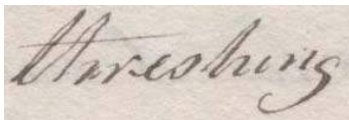


business (1859)

The upper curve of the short *s* is often missing in cursive hands:



fees (1801)

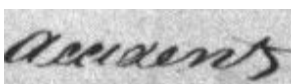


threshing (1842)



she (1899)

In some hands, the terminal short *s* merges with its preceding letter:



accidents (1794)

T

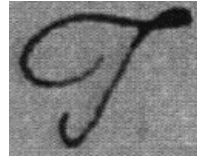
The head-stroke of the capital letter *T* is usually to the left of the ascender, and both are often curled:



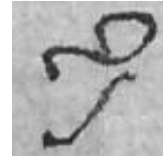
(1747)



(1784)



(1786)



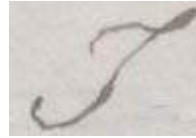
(1791)



(1834)



(1859)

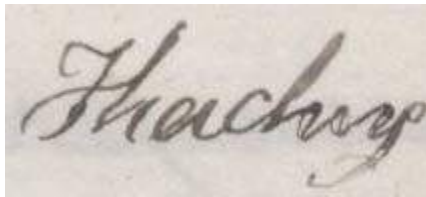


(c. 1870)

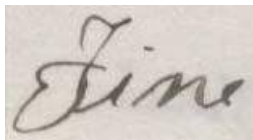


(1899)

When the bottom loop is carried on to connect with the following letter, it can sometimes look similar to a capital letter *F*, as shown by these examples from the same document of 1867:



Tha[t]ching



Fine

t

A variety of forms of the small letter *t* can be found in documents from the period:



(c. 1704)



(1713)



(1726)



(1742)



(1747)



(1748)



(1799)



(c. 1820)



(1836)



(1842)



(1850)

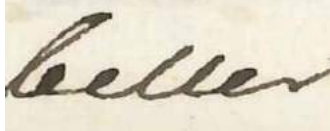


(c. 1870)

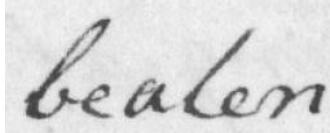


(1898)

The cross-stroke is sometimes missing, as in these two examples from the 1790s:



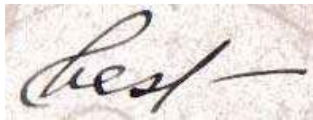
better



beaten

This need not always indicate a hasty or slovenly hand. In some cases, the cross-stroke was applied but with such little pressure that the ink has now faded.

In some hands, the cross-stroke is separate from the shaft and can consequently look like a punctuation mark, as these examples from a document of 1899 show:



best



that

U

In earlier periods, the letters *u* and *v* were used interchangeably, with it being the custom in some hands to use the latter initially. By the eighteenth century, however, a distinct capital letter *U* had developed:



(1712)



(1746)



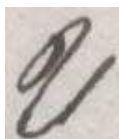
(1761)



(1822)



(1859)

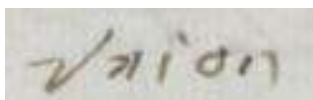


(1865)

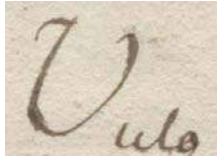


(1880)

In some hands of the early eighteenth century, however, the practice continued, as these examples shows:



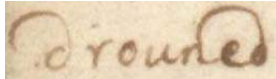
Union (1706)



Unto (1721)

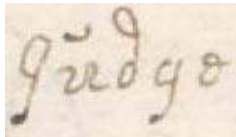
u

In earlier periods, the small letter *u* was sometimes used interchangeably with the small letter *n*, and this practice is still evident in some hands of the early eighteenth century, as shown here:

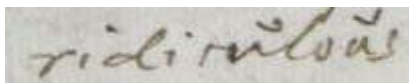


drowned (1706)

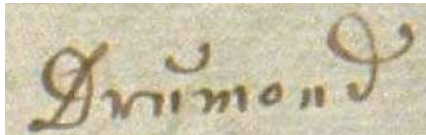
The earlier practice of adding a 'cup mark' above the small letter *u* to distinguish it from the similar-looking small letter *n* can also still be seen in documents of the early eighteenth century, as the following examples show:



Judge (c. 1700)

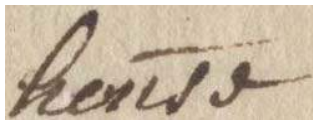


ridiculous (1706)



Drumond (1716)

Examples can be found in later documents as well, although in more cursive hands the cup mark is often reduced to a much less precise dash, as shown here:



house (1759)

In most documents from the period, though, the small letter *u* looks similar to its modern form:



(c. 1704)



(1747)



(1799)



(1800)



(1801)



(1825)



(1834)



(c. 1870)

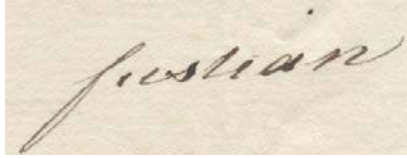


(1880)



(1897)

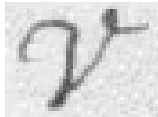
Sometimes the upstroke connecting the two minims was so fine that it has now faded, as shown here:



fustian (1753)

V

Both the Secretary Hand and the Copperplate capital letter *V* look more or less similar to the modern form:



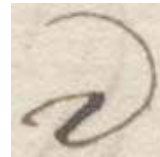
(1713)



(1727)



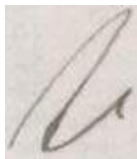
(1747)



(1753)



(1796)



(1847)



(1866)



(1893)

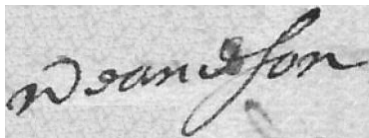


(1897)



(1900)

When the arm of the Secretary Hand form is exaggerated, however, it can look similar to a capital letter *W*, as shown here:



Veaneson (1703)

V

Forms of the Secretary Hand small letter *v* can be found in documents of the early eighteenth century:



(1701)



(1702)

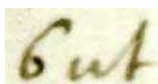


(c. 1704)

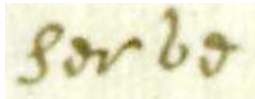


(1706)

At first, it can look similar to the Secretary Hand letter *b*, but as these two examples from a letter of 1700 show, the *v* usually curls to the left and the *b* to the right:



but



serve

A form similar to that of the modern small letter *v* became the norm:



(1733)



(1740)



(1747)



(1785)



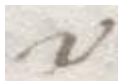
(1792)



(1799)



(1834)



(1842)



(1847)



(1850)



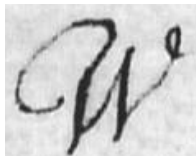
(c. 1870)



(1897)

W

The capital letter *W* often has an entry stroke, which is sometimes curled:



(1722)



(1742)



(1795)



(c. 1830)



(1842)



(1868)

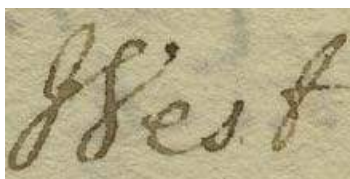


(1897)



(1899)

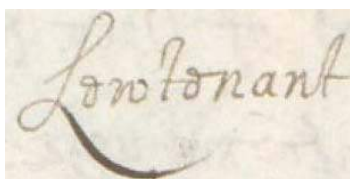
In some eighteenth-century hands, it can look like two letters combined:



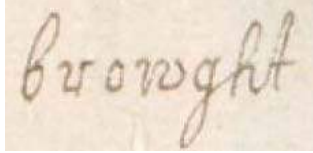
West (1743)

W

In earlier periods, the small letter *w* was sometimes used interchangeably with the small letter *u*, and this practice is still evident in some hands of the early eighteenth century, as these examples from a letter of c. 1700 show:



Lewtenant



brought

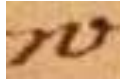
Early forms of the letter persisted into the eighteenth century, before one similar to the modern letter became the norm:



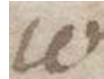
(c. 1704)



(1746)



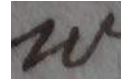
(1747)



(1785)



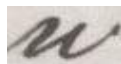
(1799)



(1843)



(1850)



(1868)



(c. 1870)

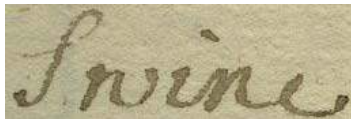


(1895)



(1897)

The early form can look similar to a letter *n*, for example:



Swine (1743)

X

The capital letter X is not commonly found in documents of the period, but generally looks like a larger version of the small letter:



(1746)

X

The Secretary Hand form of the small letter *x* survived into the eighteenth century:

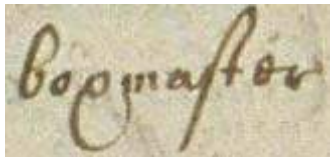


(1716)



(1799)

As this example shows, it goes below the line:



boxmaster (1716)

From the early eighteenth century onwards, a form similar to the modern small letter *x* became the norm:



(1716)



(1733)



(1743)



(1792)



(1847)

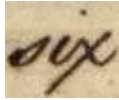


(c. 1870)



(1897)

In some hands, the right-to-left stroke goes below the line, as shown here:



six (1757)



expected (1839)

Y

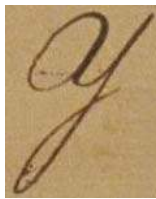
The capital letter Y often has an entry stroke, which in some hands is sufficiently curled to form a lobe:



(c. 1704)



(1728)



(1748)



(1751)



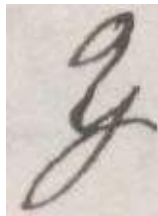
(1775)



(1815)

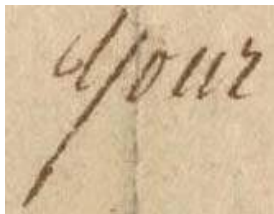


(1836)

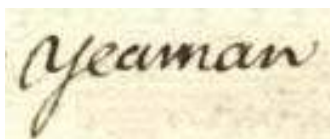


(1867)

The letter usually goes below the line, as shown here:



Your (1719)



Yeaman (1792)

y

Two forms of the small letter *y* can be found in documents of the period.

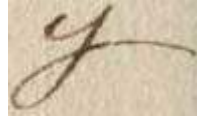
One has a looped tail:



(c. 1704)



(1745)



(1791)



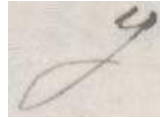
(1799)



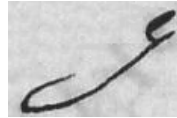
(1800)



(1829)



(c. 1870)



(1878)



(1898)

The other has a straight tail:



(c. 1704)



(1719)



(1792)



(1799)

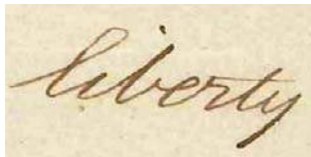


(1802)



(1897)

The former lent itself to cursive writing and so became the standard Copperplate form. Both forms continued to be used and can even be seen in the same hand, as shown by these examples from a letter of 1799:

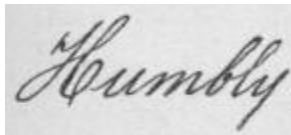


liberty

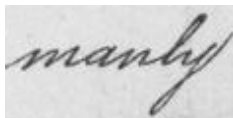


you

and from a letter of 1880:

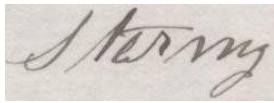


Humbly



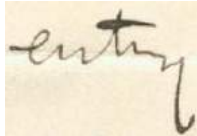
manly

In some cursive hands, the open lobe is omitted or merged with the joining stroke of the preceding letter, as shown here:



stormy (1868)

In others, the tail goes to the right, for example:



entry (1885)

Z

The capital letter Z generally looks similar to the modern form, but with added loops:



(1704)

In some hands, it looks like a larger version of the small letter z:



(1727)

z

The small letter z usually has a tail that goes below the line, a feature that is looped in Copperplate:



(1716)



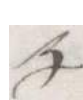
(1742)



(1753)



(1798)

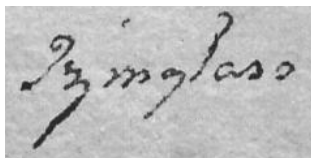


(1842)

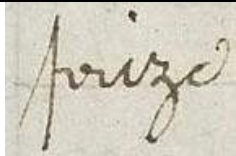


(1868)

In some hands, the tail can be quite lengthy:



Izinglass (1791)



Prize (1850)

þ

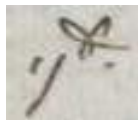
3

The Scots language included two letter-symbols that are now obsolete.

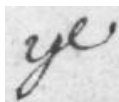
One was known as ‘thorn’, and represented the letter formation *th*. Originally written as *þ*, by the eighteenth century it had become indistinguishable from the small letter *y*. It appears increasingly rarely during the period, and is most likely to be found in documents of the early eighteenth century:



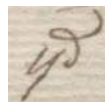
that (c. 1700)



that (1706)



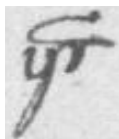
the (1716)



the (1726)

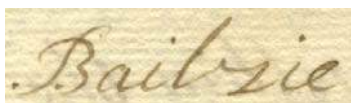


the (1784)

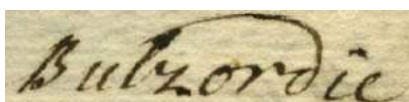


their (1713)

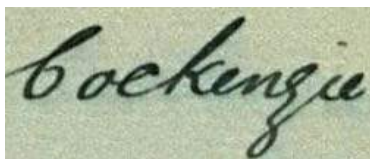
The other, known as ‘yogh’, was used as an equivalent for the consonantal *y*. Written as 3, it became confused with the similar-looking cursive *z*. It had fallen out of use by the eighteenth century, although its influence on the spelling of some words is apparent in documents from the period, as these examples show:



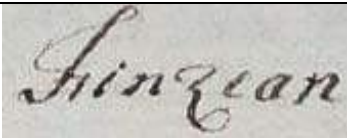
Bailzie (1733)



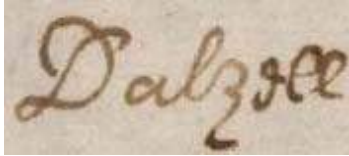
Bulzordie (1727)



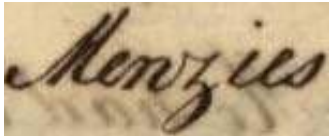
Cockenzie (1892)

A rectangular image showing the handwritten name 'Finzean' in a dark ink cursive script on a light-colored background.

Finzean (1752)

A rectangular image showing the handwritten name 'Dalzell' in a brownish cursive script on a light-colored background.

Dalzell (1712)

A rectangular image showing the handwritten name 'Menzies' in a dark ink cursive script on a light-colored background.

Menzies (1755)

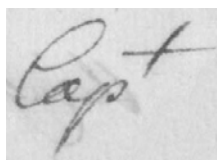
Abbreviations

Abbreviated words are common in documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They saved not only time, but (at a time when paper was expensive) money as well. The extent to which they were employed depended on the habits of the writer and on the purpose and intended audience of the document. Day books and other documents recording daily working tasks, for example, tend to contain more abbreviated words than formal letters.

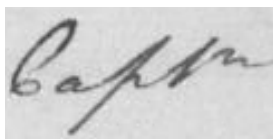
While in theory any word could be abbreviated, in practice it was usually restricted to certain well-known and frequently used words. Examples of some of these are listed here in broad categories.

Titles and ranks

Titles and ranks were frequently abbreviated. A small sample is given here:



Captain (1728)



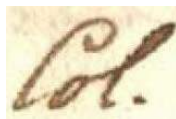
Captain (1780)



Captain (1838)



Colonel (1762)



Colonel (1794)



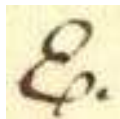
Doctor (1754)



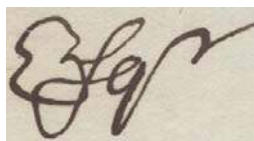
Doctor (1818)



Doctor (1835)



Earl (1775)



Esquire (1793)



Esquire (1846)



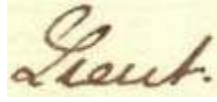
Esquire (1850)



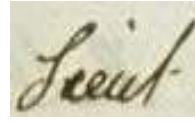
Laird (1702)



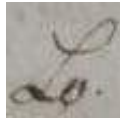
Lieutenant (1795)



Lieutenant (1801)



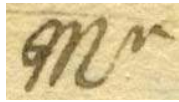
Lieutenant (1875)



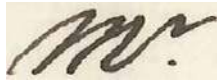
Lord (1707)



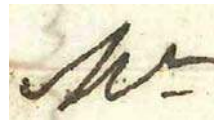
Lord (1754)



Mister (1743)



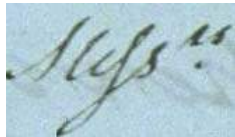
Mister (1791)



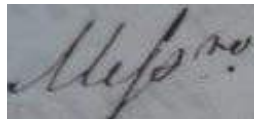
Mister (1801)



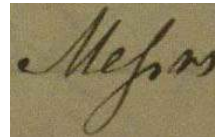
Mister (1880)



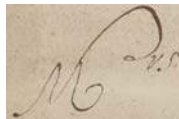
Misters (1829)



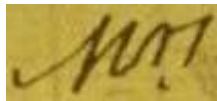
Misters (1841)



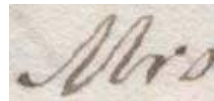
Misters (1859)



Mistress (1704)



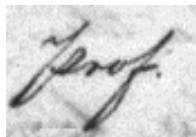
Mistress (1782)



Mistress (1842)



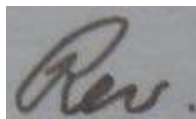
Mistress (1854)



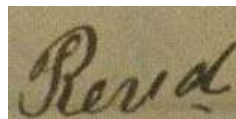
professor (1818)



Professor (1875)



Reverend (1836)



Reverend (1859)



Reverend (1881)



Reverend Doctor (1815)



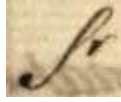
Reverend Doctor (1845)



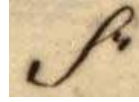
Sergeant (1863)



Sir (c. 1730)



Sir (1747)

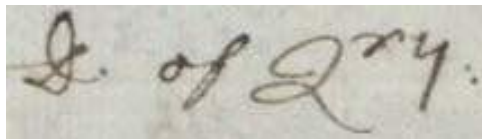


Sir (1755)



Sir (1875)

The full titles of well-known nobles and royalty were also sometimes abbreviated, as the following examples show:



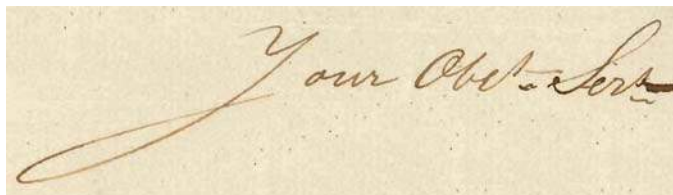
Duke of Queensberry (1706)



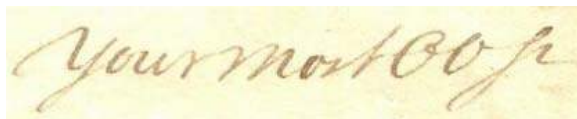
Queen Anne (1712)

Valedictions

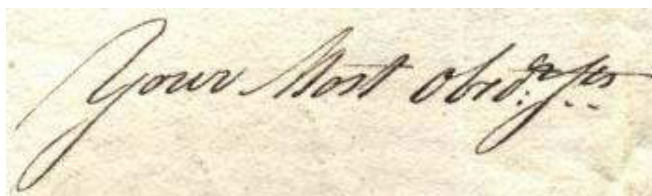
The valediction 'your obedient servant' was commonly used in letters of the period, and can often be found in its abbreviated form. Some examples, along with variants, are given here:




Your Obedient Servant (1799)



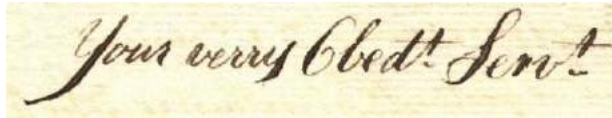
Your Most Obedient Servant (1799)



Your Most Obedient Servants (1800)

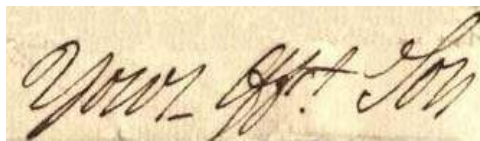


your Obedient Servant (1801)

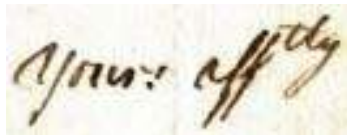


Your verry Obedient Servant (1812)

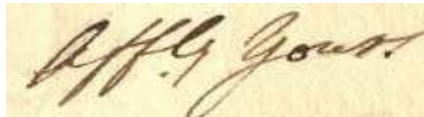
In correspondence between friends or relatives, the word 'affectionate' or 'affectionately' was commonly used in valedictions, as shown in their abbreviated forms here:



Your Affectionate Son (1794)



Yours affectionately (1798)

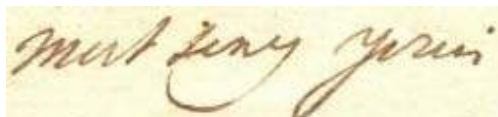


Affectionately Yours (1802)



Your most affectionate Brother (1840)

Occasionally, other forms of valediction were abbreviated:



most sincerely yours (1795)

Occupations and offices

Job titles and offices were sometimes abbreviated. A small selection is given here:

Clerk (1822)

Collector (1709)

Collector (1813)

Comptroller (1749)

Merchant (1733)

Merchant (1749)

Merchant (1760)

Minister (1794)

Minister (1797)

Servant (1716)

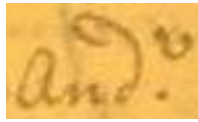
Treasurer (1782)

First Names


First names were often abbreviated. Two main approaches are evident in documents from the period. In one, the opening letters of the name are followed by a double dot, much like the modern colon. In the other, the opening letters are followed by the terminal letter of the name in superscript. Both approaches are shown here, along with some individual forms:

Alexander (1743)

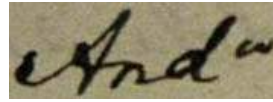
Alexander (1747)



Andrew (1740)



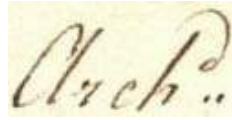
Andrew (1794)



Andrew (1799)



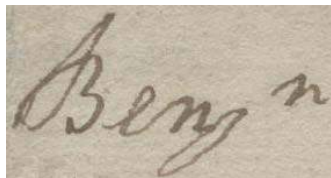
Archibald (1792)



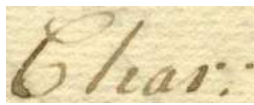
Archibald (1795)



Bartholomew (1759)



Benjamin (1788)



Charles (1732)



Charles (1794)




Charles (1810)



David (1733)



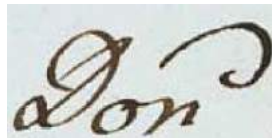
David (1795)



David (1873)



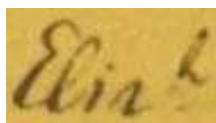
Donald (1834)



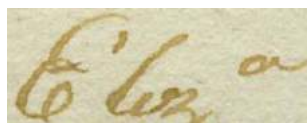
Donald (1849)



Duncan (1834)



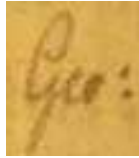
Elizabeth (1736)



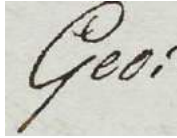
Elizabeth (1801)



Elisabeth (1849)



George (1740)



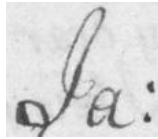
George (1800)



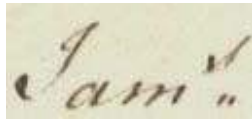
George (1815)



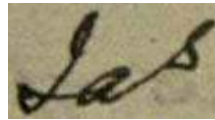
Gilbert (1777)



James (1716)



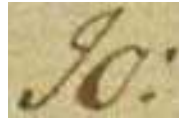
James (1795)



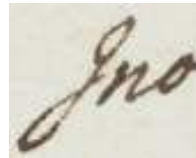
James (1799)



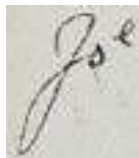
Johnathan (1740)



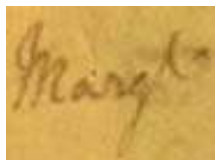
John[athan] (1796)



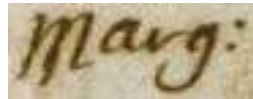
Johnathan (1810)



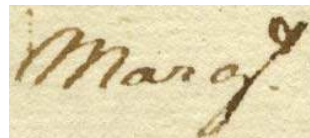
Josephine (1777)



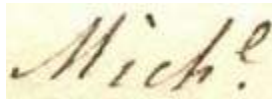
Margaret (1740)



Margaret (1750)



Margaret (1784)



Michael (1795)



Nathaniel (1817)



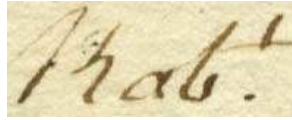
Patrick (1733)



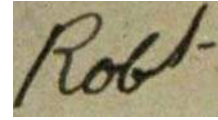
Phillip (1794)



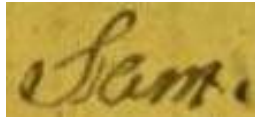
Robert (1734)



Robert (1784)



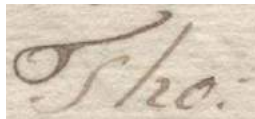
Robert (1799)



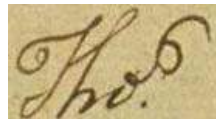
Samuel (1782)



Samuel (1830)



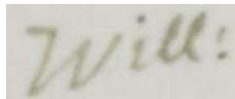
Thomas (1734)



Thomas (1796)



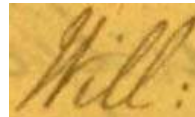
Thomas (1848)



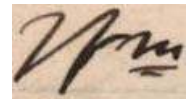
William (1700)



William (1742)



William (1814)

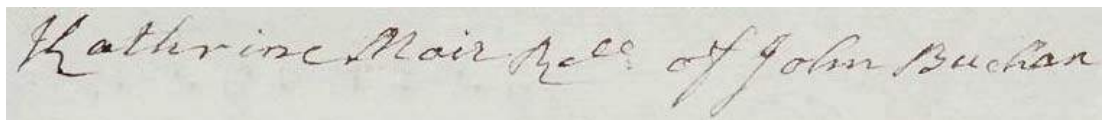


William (1872)

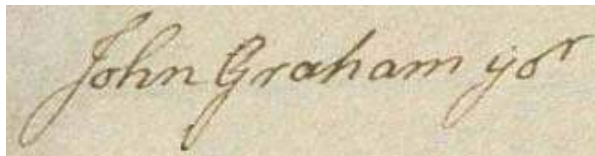
An abbreviated word was sometimes appended to a personal name to indicate the individual's place in a family and so aid identification, as shown by these examples:



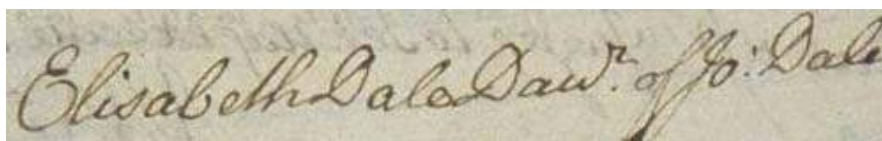
James Steven younger (1715)



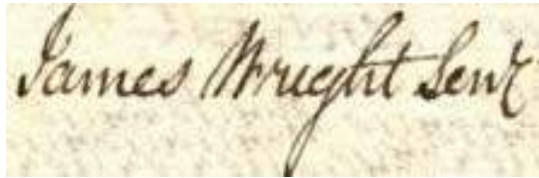
Kathrine Mair Relict of John Buchan (1751)



John Graham younger (1769)



Elizabeth Dale Daughter of John Dale (1769)



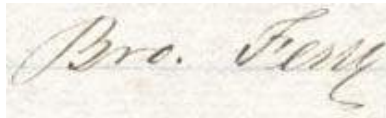
James Wright Senior (1792)



Robert Marr Senior (1796)

Place Names

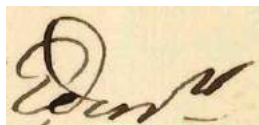
Place-names were sometimes abbreviated, especially when they were likely to be known to the intended audience of the document. Accordingly, Edinburgh is often found in an abbreviated form. Some less common examples are given here too:



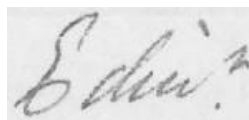
Broughty Ferry (1848)




Castle Douglas (1838)



Edinburgh (1799)



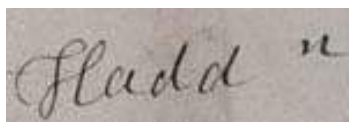
Edinburgh (1835)



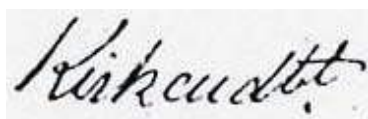
Edinburgh (1850)



Glasgow (1826)



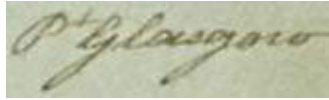
Haddington (1852)



Kirkcudbright (1835)



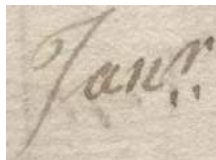
North Berwick (1749)



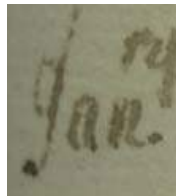
Port Glasgow (1825)

Dates

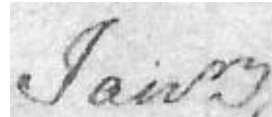
With the exception of May, June and July, month names were frequently abbreviated. A small sample is given here:



January (1732)



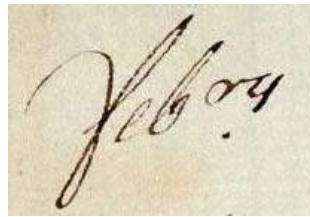
January (1743)



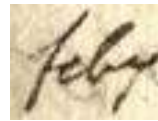
January (1752)



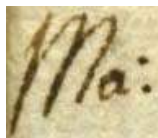
February (1780)



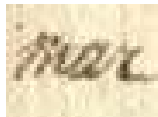
February (1782)



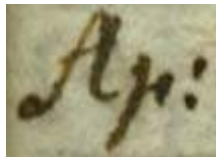
February (1814)



March (1725)



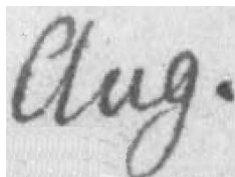
March (1814)



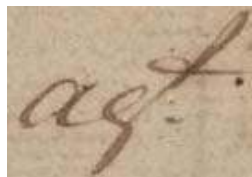
April (1725)



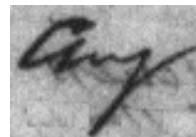
April (1814)



August (1782)



August (1797)



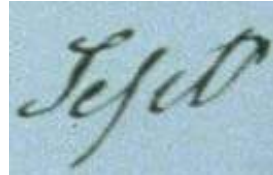
August (1876)



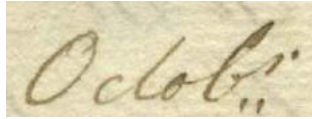
September (1773)



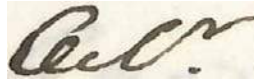
September (1799)



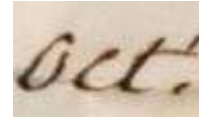
September (1839)



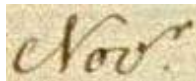
October (1743)



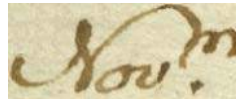
October (1792)



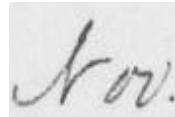
October (1850)



November (1746)



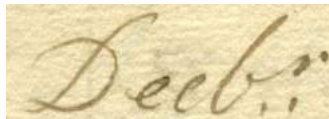
November (1784)



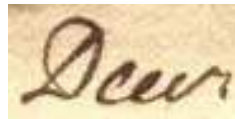
November (1835)



November (1872)



December (1733)

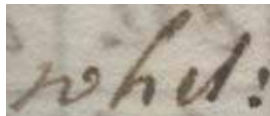


December (1802)

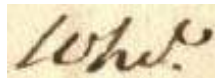


December (1834)

Abbreviations for the main term days (when servants were hired and rent, wages, loans etc. were payable) can also be found in documents from the period. Some examples are given here:



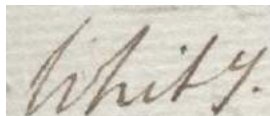
Whitsunday (1727)



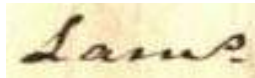
Whitsunday (1775)



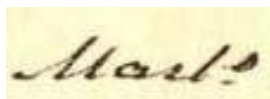
Whitsunday (1802)



Whitsunday (1803)



Lammas (1775)



Martinmas (1775)

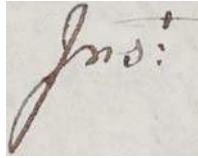


Martinmas (1795)



Martinmas (1884)

The word 'instant' was sometimes used in letters and other documents to denote the current month or year. Two abbreviated forms are shown here:



Instant (1776)



Instant (1864)

Money

Amounts of money in pounds, shillings and pence were indicated in various ways.

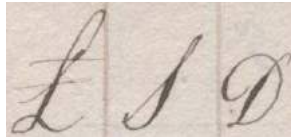
One method was to use the symbols L, s, and d. Typically, they are to be found heading columns in cash books and similar records, as shown here:



(1794)

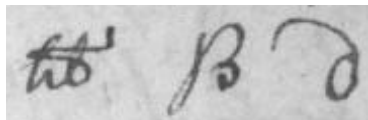


(1840)



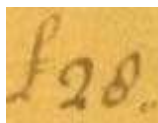
(1842)

The pound symbol was derived from the Latin word *librae*, and the earlier habit of using its first three letters can still be seen in documents of the early eighteenth century:

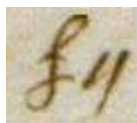


(1713)

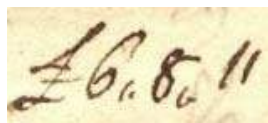
The use of the initial letter alone became the norm, however. A small sample is given here:



£28 (1740)



£4 (1751)



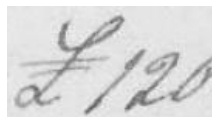
£6.8.11 (1776)



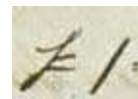
£2 (1793)



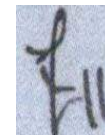
£121 (1810)



£120 (1835)

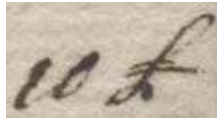


£1 (1875)

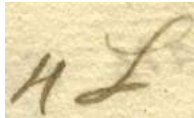


£11 (1897)

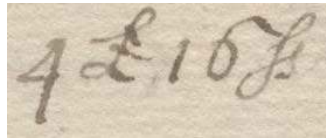
The earlier habit of placing the capital letter *L* after the amount persisted into the eighteenth century, as shown by these examples:



£10 (1725)

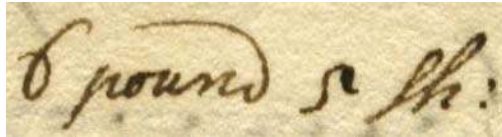


£4 (1733)



£4 and 16 shillings (1743)

In this example, the word pound is written in full while the word shillings is abbreviated:

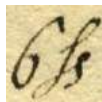


£6 and 5 shillings (1726)

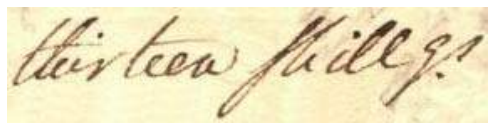
The abbreviation of the word shillings varied according to the style of the writer:



10 shillings (1733)

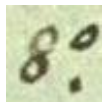


6 shillings (1744)



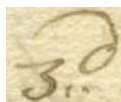
thirteen shillings (1776)

In hands that omit the top curl of the letter *s*, the shilling sign can be difficult to identify, as shown here:

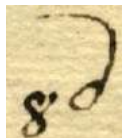


8 shillings (1811)

The abbreviation for the word pence remained more or less constant throughout the period, the letter *d* deriving from the Latin word *denarii*:



3 pence (1732)



8 pence (1744)



2 pence (1802)

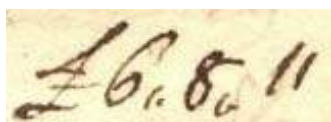


6 pence (1812)

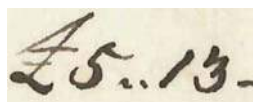


1 pence (1841)

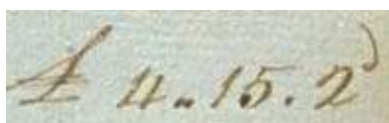
An increasingly popular method for representing amounts in pounds, shillings and pence was to separate the figures by punctuation marks, omitting the abbreviation for shillings and often also for pence, as shown here:



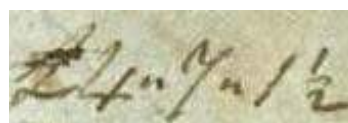
£6, 8 shillings and 11 pence (1776)



£5 and 13 shillings (1792)



£4, 15 shillings and 2 pence (1802)



£4, 7 shillings and 1½ pence (1828)

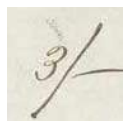
In this style, the letter symbol denoting shillings was often replaced by an oblique stroke, for example:



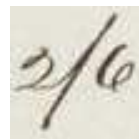
11 shillings (1719)



8 shillings (1832)

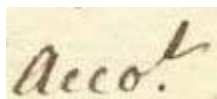


3 shillings (1848)

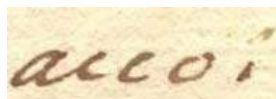


2 shillings and 6 pence (1863)

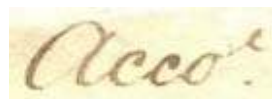
A selection of further abbreviations to be found in cash books and similar documents from the period are given here:



Account (1776)



account (1796)



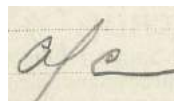
Account (1799)



Accounts (1802)



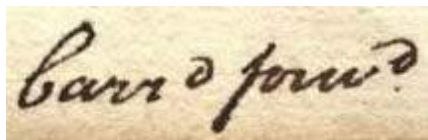
account (1822)



account (1896)



Amount (1819)



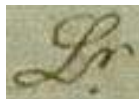
Carried forward (1810)



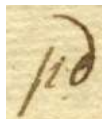
Interest (1775)



Interest (1789)



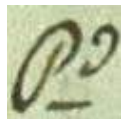
Ledger (1710)



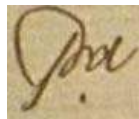
paid (1745)



paid (1749)



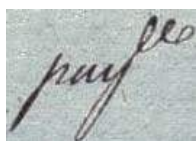
paid (1811)



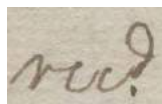
paid (1819)



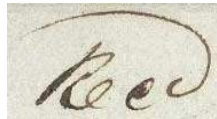
paid (1842)



payable (1747)



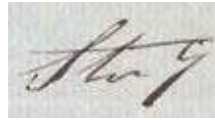
received (1788)



Received (1821)



Sterling (1766)



Sterling (1825)



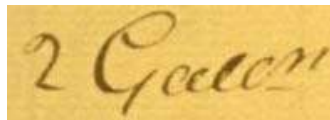
Sterling (1858)

Weights and measures

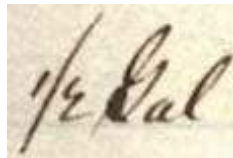
Units of measure were often abbreviated. Readers familiar with the pre-metric system will recognise many of the examples below:



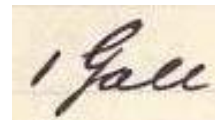
5 feet (1859)



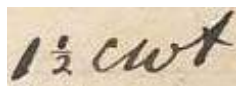
2 Gallons (1851)



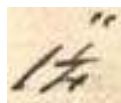
1/2 Gallon (1858)



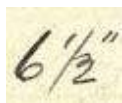
1 Gallon (1885)



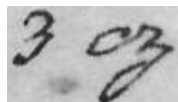
1 1/2 hundredweight (1876)



1 1/4 inch (1878)



6 1/2 inches (1888)



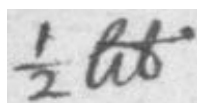
3 ounces (1790)



1 ounce (1821)



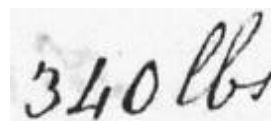
4 ounces (1874)



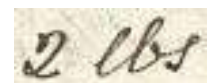
1/2 pound (1713)



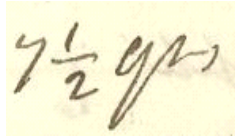
2 pounds (1747)



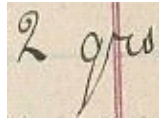
340 pounds (1820)



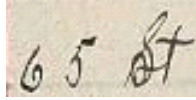
2 pounds (1864)



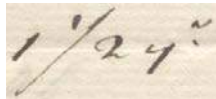
7½ quarts (1831)



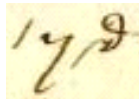
2 quarts (1884)



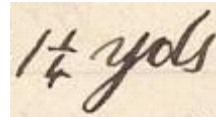
65 stone (1884)



1½ yards (1753)

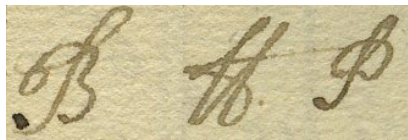


1 yard (1824)

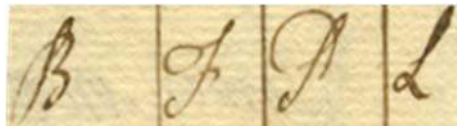


1¼ yards (1876)

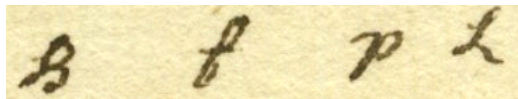
Perhaps less well known today are some of the dry measures that were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as bolls, firlots, pecks and lippies. Their abbreviations can often be found in their initial form at the head of columns recording grain stocks:



Bolls, Firlots, Pecks (1743)

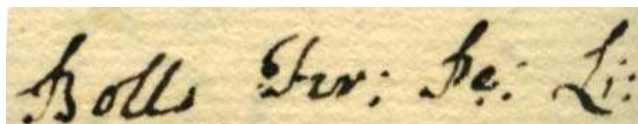


Bolls, Firlots, Pecks, Lippies (1745)



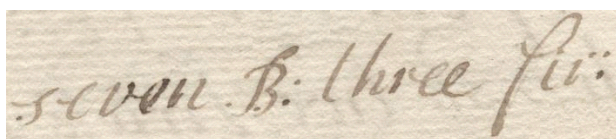
Bolls, Firlots, Pecks, Lippies (1748)

Longer abbreviated forms were also sometimes used to head columns, for example:

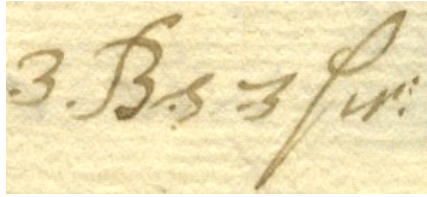


Bolls, Firlots, Pecks, Lippies (1768)

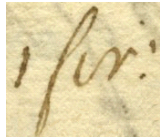
Abbreviated forms were also used in the general text of farm records, for example:



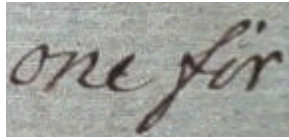
seven Bolls three firlots (1732)



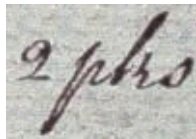
3 Bolls 3 firlots (1742)



1 firlot (1745)

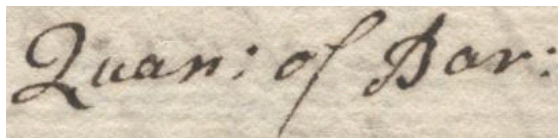


one firlot (1747)

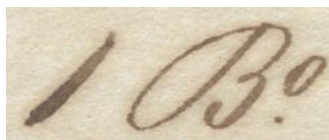


2 pecks (1747)

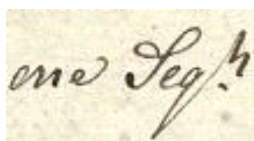
In addition to words indicating specific amounts, some indefinite terms of measure were occasionally abbreviated, for example:



Quantity of Barley (1726)



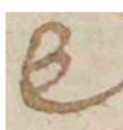
1 Bottle (1793)



one Segment (1863)

Ampersand

The ampersand was widely used in documents during the period. It took a number of idiosyncratic forms, as this small sample shows:



(c. 1704)



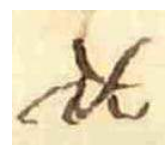
(1736)



(1742)



(1794)



(1799)



(1799)



(1836)



(1847)



(1863)

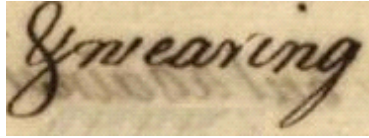


(1878)



(1872)

In some hands, the ampersand is sometimes joined to the following word, as shown here:



and wearing (1755)



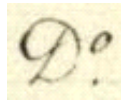
and Ladles (1793)

Miscellaneous

Some words during the period were rarely written out in full. The following are among the most common that have not already been listed:



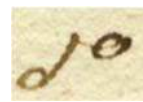
ditto (1719)



Ditto (1749)



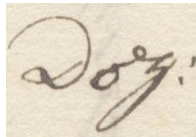
Ditto (1768)



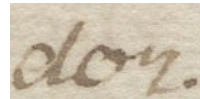
ditto (1801)



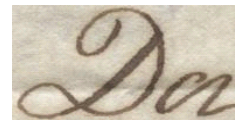
ditto (1834)



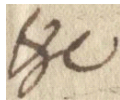
Dozen (1753)



dozen (1785)



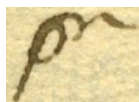
Dozen (1793)



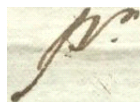
et cetera (1759)



et cetera (1784)



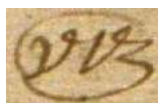
per (1743)



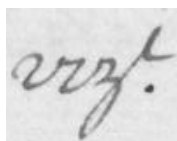
per (1754)



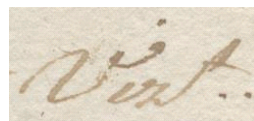
per (1794)



videlicet (1716)

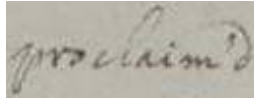


videlicet (c. 1740)

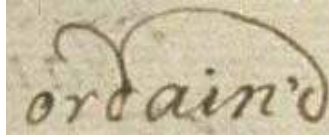


videlicet (1749)

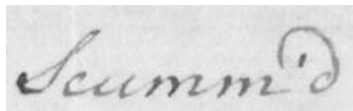
Another form of abbreviation, which is to be found in documents of the eighteenth century in particular, is the omission of the letter *e* in the ending *-ed*, for example:



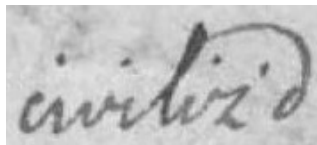
proclaimed (1706)



ordained (c. 1730)



Scummed (c. 1740)



civilized (1761)

Punctuation

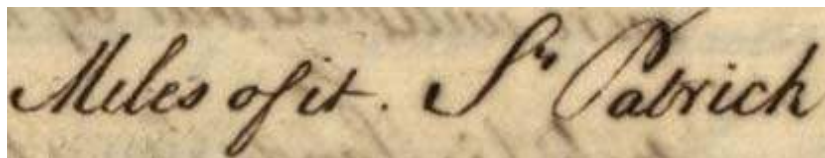
English punctuation in print had been regularised by the end of the seventeenth century. In everyday handwriting, however, it continued to be determined by the educational attainment, personal preference and purpose of the writer.

Although the resulting range of individualistic approaches can seem bewildering, the main variations revolve around the use of pauses and the marks that denote them. They are, in order of length of pause: the full stop; the colon; the semi-colon; and the comma. Fortunately, they were written much as they are now and in most hands are easy to identify. Examples of each are given here along with smaller samples of some of the other punctuation marks most likely to be found in documents from the period.

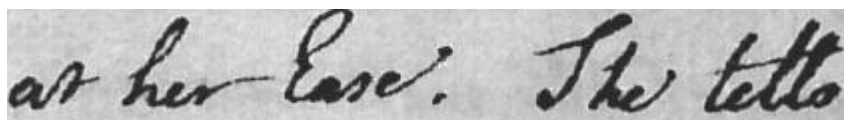
(It should be noted that in many documents no punctuation marks will be visible. This is sometimes because they were applied lightly and have since faded. Often, however, they never existed: some writers preferred to use spaces to indicate pauses in the text, while others simply wrote in a continuous flow.)

Full stop

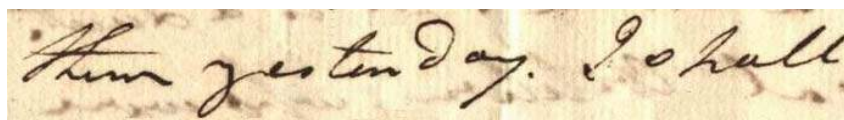
The full stop was used, as it is today, to terminate a sentence:



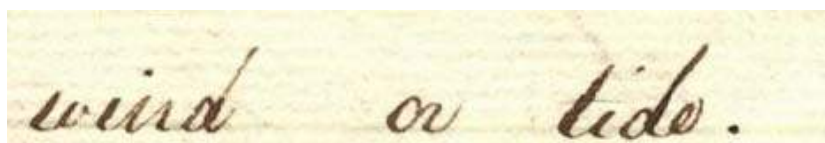
Miles of it. Sir Patrick (1755)



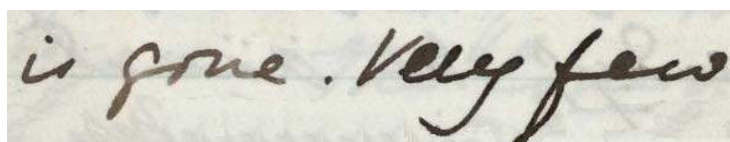
at here Ease. She tells (1763)



them yesterday. I shall (1794)



wind or tide. (1820)



is gone. Very few (1866)

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a wide space and then the start of a new sentence.

of a dish. On this (1878)

In some hands, the pause denoted by the full stop is emphasised by a widened space, as shown here:

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a wide space and then the start of a new sentence.

appearances. The Premiums (1759)

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a wide space and then the start of a new sentence.

pleasure. He says, (1870)

In other hands, it is emphasised by the inclusion of a dash, as shown here:

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a dash and then the start of a new sentence.

as possible. They likewise (1755)

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a dash and then the start of a new sentence.

of worms. Mary (1762)

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a dash and then the start of a new sentence.

in. My stable (1793)

The word following a full stop does not always have a capital letter, as these two examples show:

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a lowercase letter.

not speed. he only (1706)

A snippet of handwritten cursive text showing a full stop followed by a lowercase letter.

eighteen years. they next gave (1820)

Full stops can be found punctuating lists, where nowadays commas or semi-colons would be preferred, as the following extract from a list of names shows:

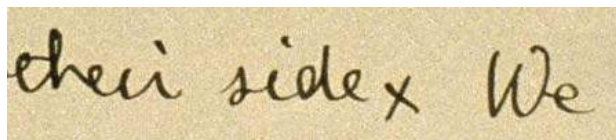


James Grieve. David Lawson. James Vietch. (1820)

The following examples show how idiosyncratic forms of punctuation could develop:



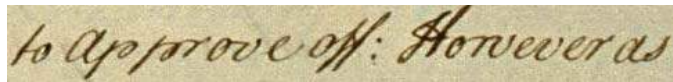
8 feet square. The country (1834)



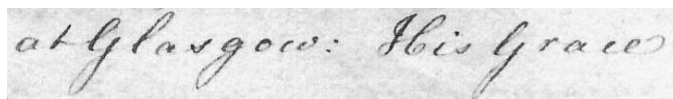
their side. We (c. 1900)

Colon

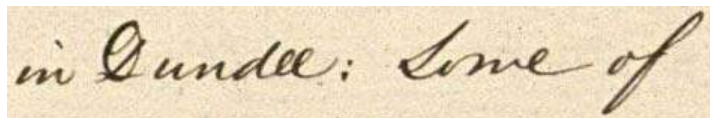
The colon was often used to denote a long pause, where nowadays a full-stop or a semi-colon would be preferred:



to approve off: However as (1746)

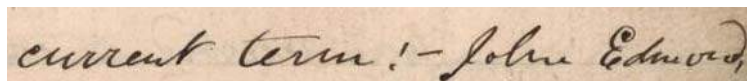


at Glasgow: His Grace (1752)

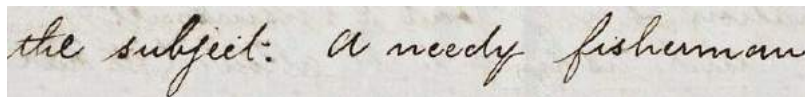


in Dundee: Some of (1875)

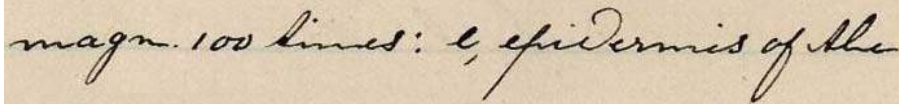
It was also used, as nowadays, to indicate the start of an enumeration. As can be seen from the following examples, colons used in this way were sometimes differentiated by the addition of a dash:



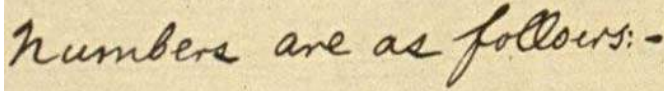
current term: John Edmond, (1872)



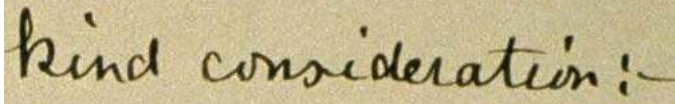
the subject: a needy fisherman (1879)



magn. 100 times: e, epidermis of the (1881)



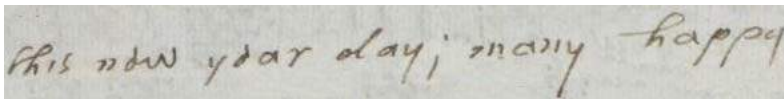
Numbers are as follows: (1884)



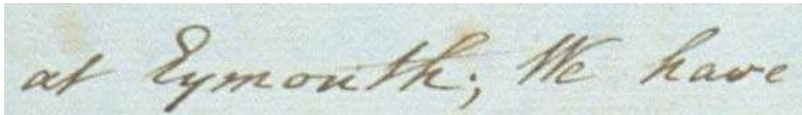
kind consideration: (c. 1900)

Semi-colon

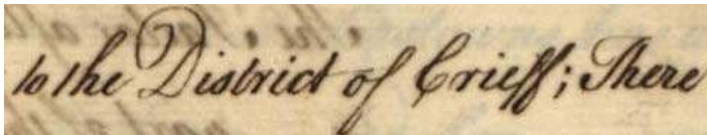
The semi-colon was used to denote a length of pause between a comma and a full-stop. As these examples show, the word following it was occasionally given a capital letter:



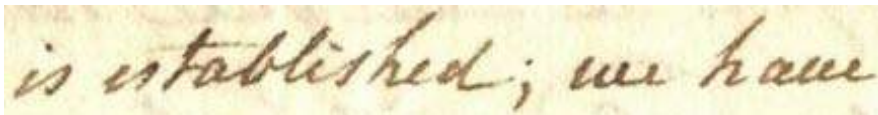
this new year day; many happy (1702)



at Ey[e]mouth; We have (1754)

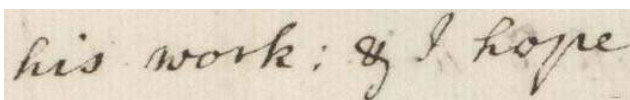


to the District of Crieff; There (1755)

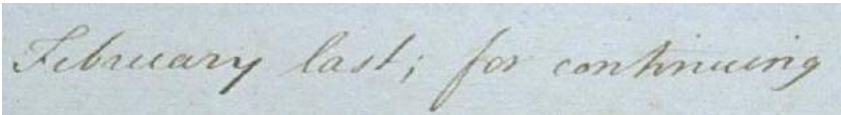


is established; we have (1794)

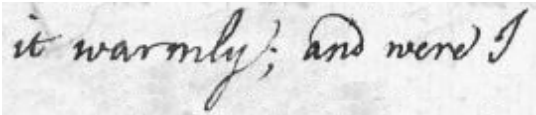
It appears more frequently than in modern writing. It was widely used before conjunctions, for instance, as shown here:



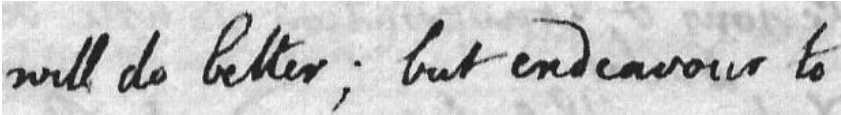
his work; & I hope (1748)



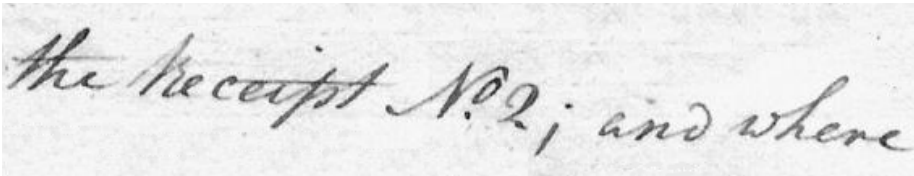
February last; for continuing (1755)



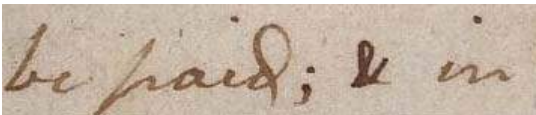
it warmly; and were I (1759)



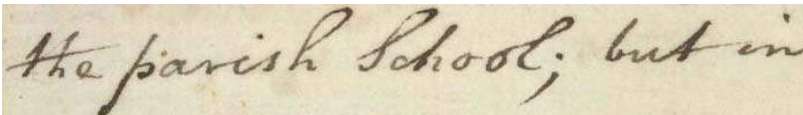
will do better; but endeavour to (1763)



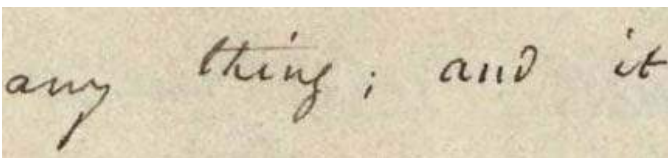
the Receipt No. 2; and where (1790)



be paid; & in (1793)



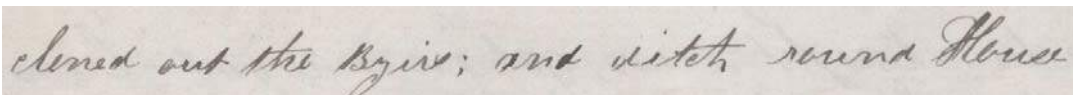
the parish School; but in (1816)



any thing; and it (1821)



in debt; for after (1835)

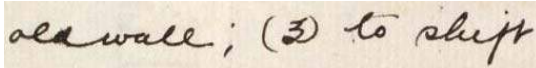


cle[a]ned out the Byre; and ditch round House (1876)

Semi-colons were also used, as today, to punctuate lists, as shown here:



John Edmond, 31; Peter Ronald, 22; David (1872)

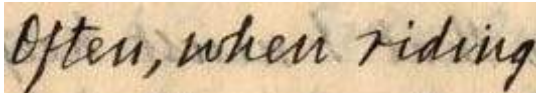


old wall; (3) to shift (1893)

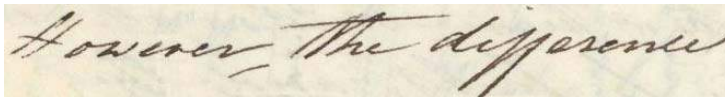
Comma

As nowadays, the comma was used to denote a short pause and performed a number of functions:

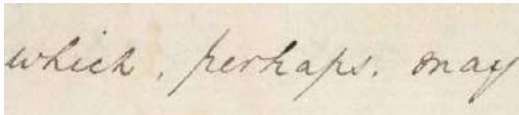
To offset adverbs:



Often, when riding (1834)

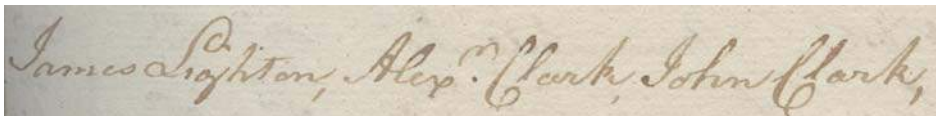


However, the difference (1836)

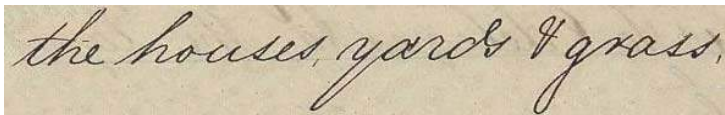


which, perhaps, may (1870)

To separate items in a list:

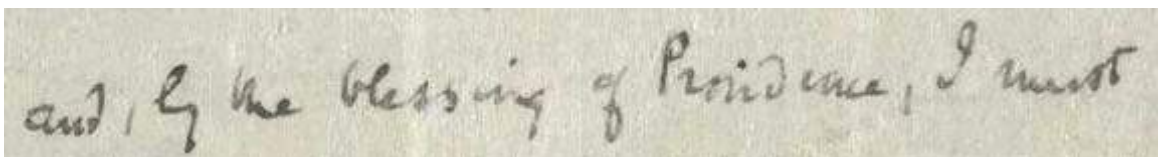


James Lighton, Alexander Clark, John Clark, (1795)



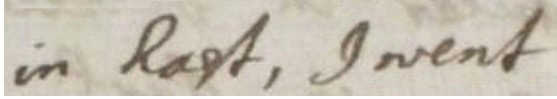
the houses, yards and grass, (1837)

To isolate a parenthesis:

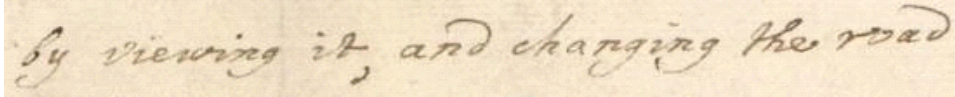


and, by the blessing of Providence, I must (1835)

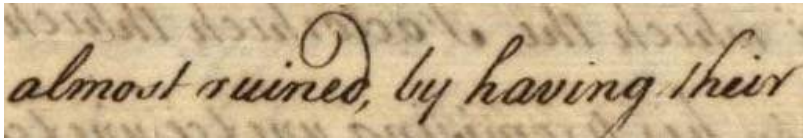
As well as, in general, to enclose clauses or phrases within a sentence:



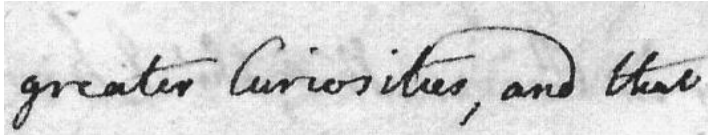
in hast[e], I went (1706)



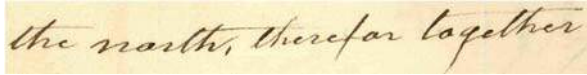
by viewing it, and changing the road (1752)



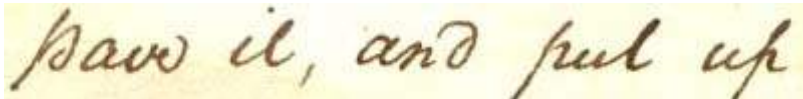
almost ruined, by having their (1755)



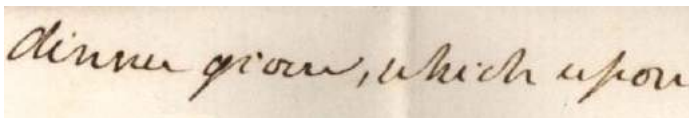
greater Curiosities, and that (1763)



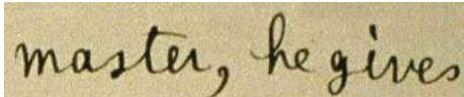
the north, therefor together (1799)



Pave it, and put up (1802)

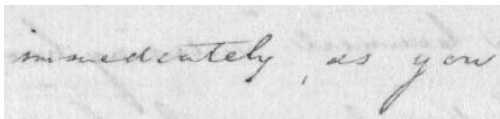


dinner gown, which upon (1850)



master, he gives (c. 1900)

In some hands, the comma sits between the words it separates, as shown here:



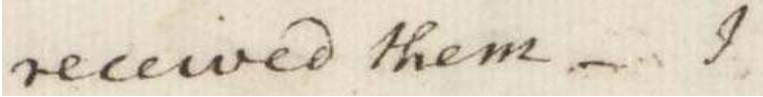
immediatly, as you (1810)



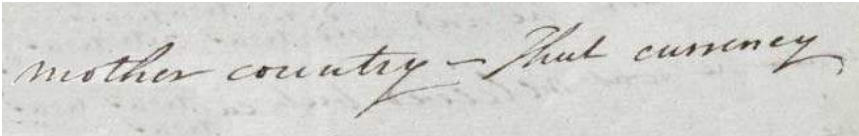
oak, and (1810)

Dash

The dash was widely used to denote a long pause, where nowadays a full-stop would be preferred. Some examples are given here:



received them – I (1748)



mother country – That currency (1776)



I gave you – Be pleased to (1792)



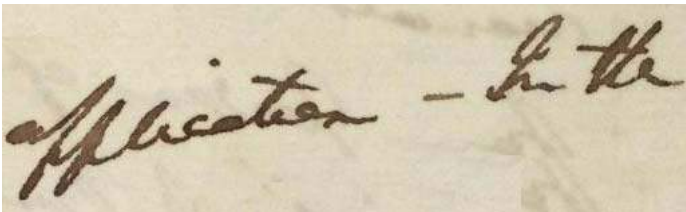
priced – If they do (1799)



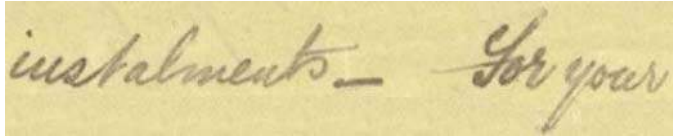
the Bill – It is necessary (1799)



the chair – After the (1821)

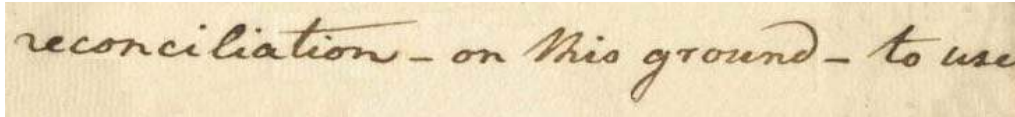


applications – In the (1834)



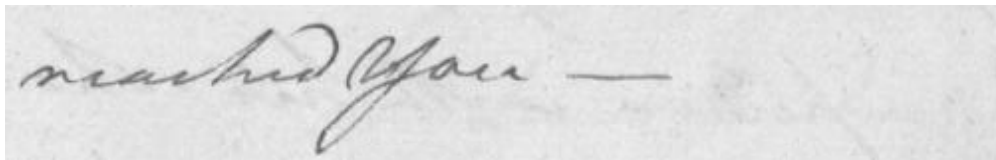
instalments – For your (1889)

Some writers used dashes to isolate parenthesis, as shown here:



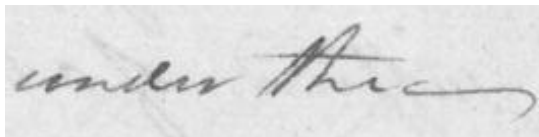
reconciliation – on this ground – to use (1794)

Dashes were also used to indicate the end of a paragraph. As the following examples from a letter of 1780 show, they can usually be distinguished from similar-looking space fillers by two features. Firstly, paragraph dashes generally do not fill the whole space:



reached you –

Secondly, the writer often had a different style for space fillers:



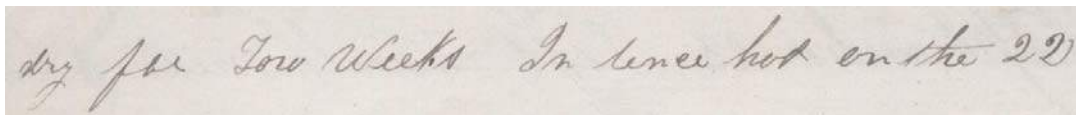
under the

Spaces

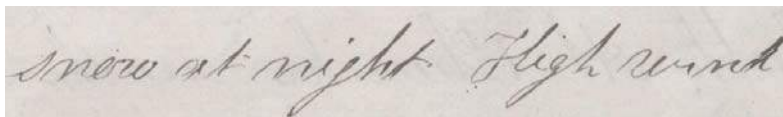
A combination of spaces and capital letters were used by some writers to indicate long pauses. The following examples all come from the same day-book:



of the day Monday began (1868)



dry for Tow [Two] Weeks In tence [Intense] hot on the 22 (1869)

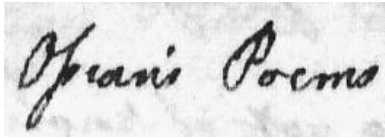


snow at night High wind (1876)

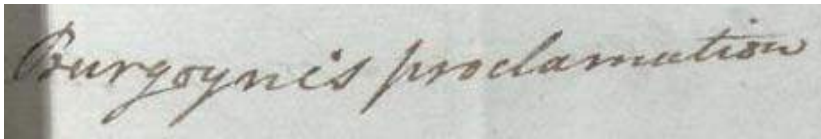
Apostrophe

For much of the period, apostrophes were used as they are nowadays.

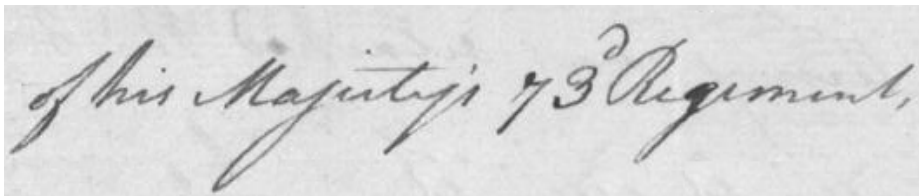
Firstly, to indicate the possessive case of a noun:



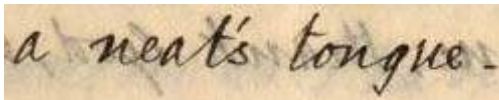
Ossian's Poems (1763)



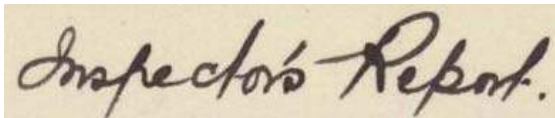
Burgoyne's proclamation (1776)



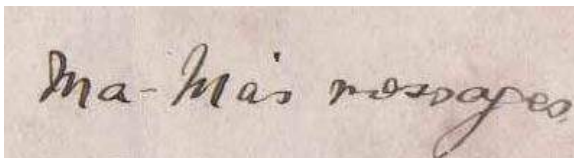
of his Majesty's 73rd Regiment, (1780)



a neat's tongue. (1835)

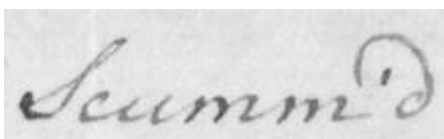


Inspector's Report (1899)



Ma-Ma's messages, (c. 1900)

Secondly, to indicate the omission of one or more letters (for further instances, see the section on abbreviations):



Scumm'd (c. 1740)

A small, dark, handwritten cursive word, appearing to be 'he's', on a light-colored background.

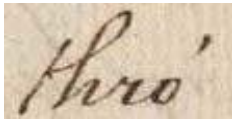
he's (1773)

A small, light-colored handwritten word, appearing to be 'wi', on a light-colored background.

wi' (1790)

A small, light-colored handwritten word, appearing to be 'o', on a light-colored background.

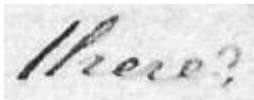
o' (1790)

A small, light-colored handwritten word, appearing to be 'thro', on a light-colored background.

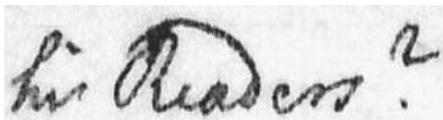
thro' (1791)

Question mark

Despite some idiosyncratic forms, questions marks can be readily identified. A small sample is given here:

A handwritten word 'there?' in a cursive script, with a question mark at the end, on a light-colored background.


there? (1752)

A handwritten phrase 'his Readers?' in a cursive script, with a question mark at the end, on a light-colored background.

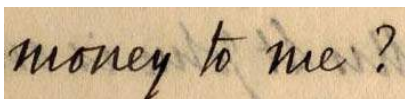
his Readers? (1755)

A handwritten phrase 'say to you?' in a cursive script, with a question mark at the end, on a light-colored background.

say to you? (1823)

A handwritten phrase 'say to this?' in a cursive script, with a question mark at the end, on a light-colored background.

say to this? (1825)

A handwritten phrase 'money to me?' in a cursive script, with a question mark at the end, on a light-colored background.

money to me? (1835)



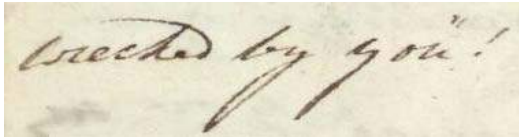
do you? (c. 1900)

Exclamation mark

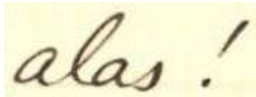
The exclamation mark looks similar to the modern form, as this small sample demonstrates:



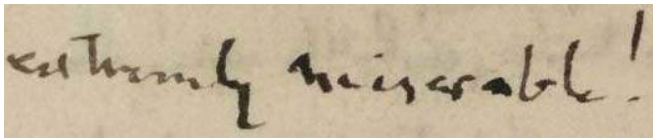
behold! (1755)



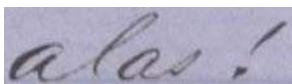
wrecked by you?! (1823)



alas! (1852)



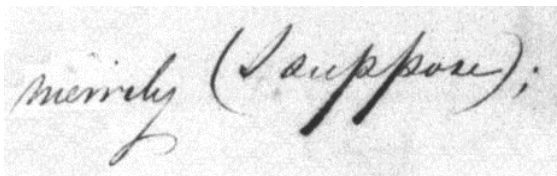
extrem[e]ly miserable! (1856)



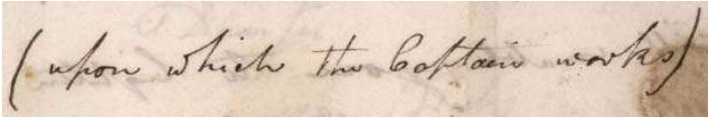
alas! (1867)

Brackets

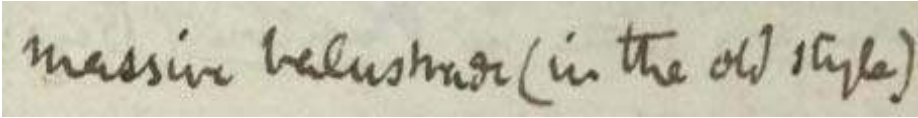
Brackets were used to set apart or interject text, much as today:



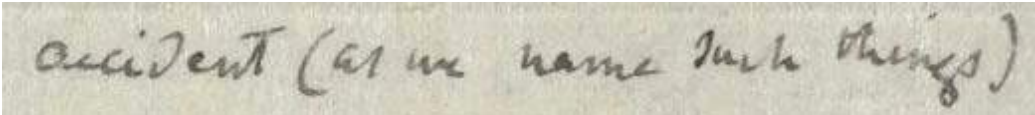
merrily (I suppose); (1817)



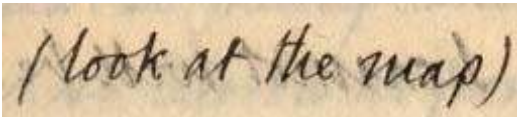
(upon which the Captain works) (1827)



massive balustrade (in the old style) (1834)



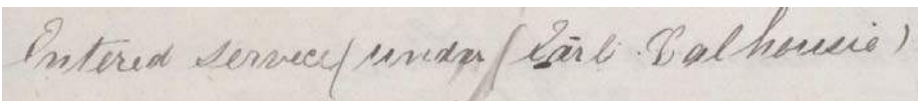
accident (as we name such things) (1835)



(look at the map) (1835)

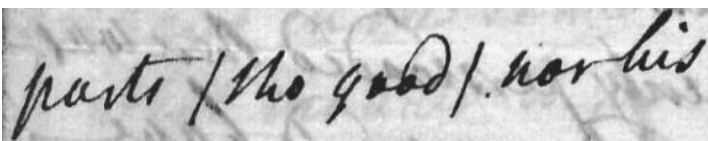


Laurencekirk (Mr George Lyall) (1869)

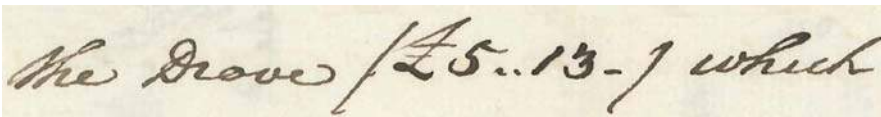


Entered service (under Earl Dalhousie) (1876)

In some hands, brackets take the form of two oblique strokes, as shown by the following examples:



parts (tho good) nor his (1763)



the Drove (£5..13-) which (1792)



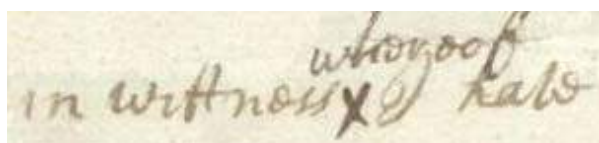
for (you know) after (1826)

Other marks

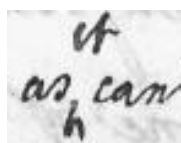
Three other marks are commonly found in documents from the period, all of which will be familiar to the modern reader.

Caret

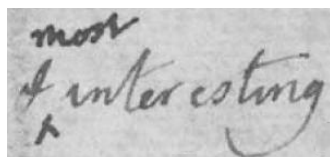
The caret had the same function as it does today: to indicate that something has been omitted from that place in the text. The mark usually appears below the line with the omitted text written either above it or in the margin. As this small sample shows, in some hands it looks like a small letter *x*, while in others it is similar to the modern caret:



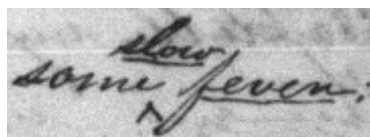
in wittness whereof I have (1709)



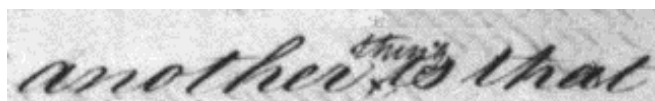
as it can (1759)



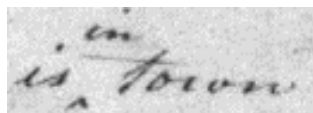
and most interesting (1761)



some slow fever (1818)



another thing is that (1826)



is in town (1835)

Funeral of Mary Calder afternoon (1867)

in case the lothian (1899)

Hyphen

The hyphen had the same two main functions as it does today.

Firstly, to indicate that two or more words are to be read together as a single word with its own meaning. As the following examples show, both a single and a double form were in use during the period:

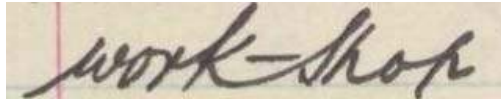
Dairy-maid (1740)

broad-leaved (1829)

Flag-Quarry (1863)

to-night (1873)

To-day (1885)



work-shop (1899)

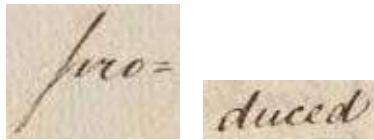
Secondly, to indicate when a word has been divided at the end of a line. As the following examples show, the hyphen was often written both at the end of the first part of the word and at the beginning of the second:



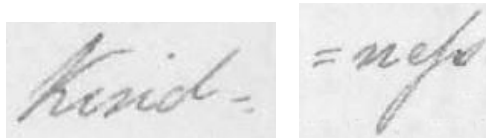
eightien (1736)



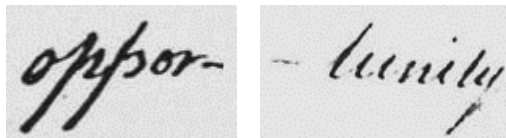
Galloway (1792)



produced (1794)



Kindness (1830)

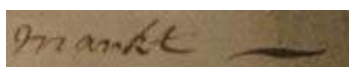


opportunity (1834)

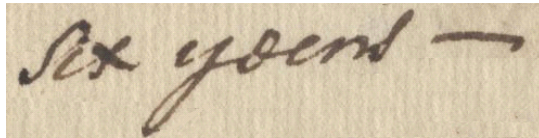
Space fillers

The habit of filling gaps in the text with pen strokes (especially at the end of a line) survived into the eighteenth century and beyond.

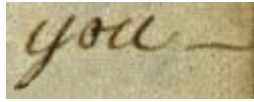
In some hands, it takes the form of a distinct dash, as shown here:



markt – (1712)



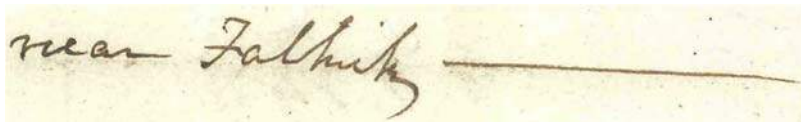
six years – (1763)



you – (1755)

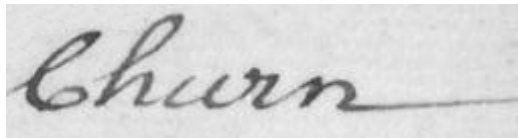


near (1780)



near Falkirk – (1801)

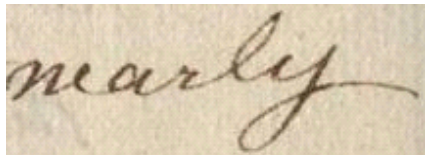
In other hands, a stroke of the last letter in the line is extended, as shown here:



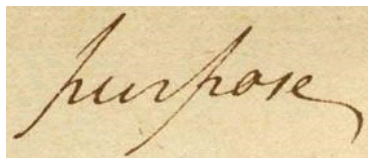
Churn (c. 1740)



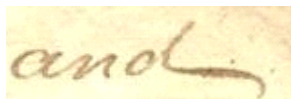
with (1762)



nearly (1791)



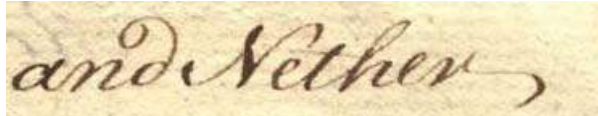
purpose (1794)



and (1799)

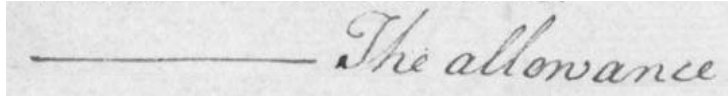


and (1799)

A close-up of a handwritten cursive phrase "and Nether" on aged, yellowish paper. The word "and" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Nether" is larger and more decorative, ending with a long, sweeping flourish that extends to the right.

and Nether (1801)

In some hands, paragraph indents are also filled with an elongated dash , as shown here:

A close-up of a handwritten cursive phrase "The allowance" on a light-colored background. The word "The" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "allowance" is larger and more decorative, ending with a long, sweeping flourish that extends to the right.

The allowance (1760)

FURTHER RESOURCES

'Scottish Handwriting' is an online resource maintained by the National Records of Scotland. It offers practical guidance to those whose research involves reading Scottish historical documents. There are online tutorials in palaeography (reading old handwriting), and a coaching manual that contains a range of useful information including advice on the best working conditions, lists of letter forms, and a problem solver. The site is aimed mainly at those whose research involves reading Scottish historical records of the period 1500-1750, although some assistance is given with nineteenth-century writing too. See www.scottishhandwriting.com

'Palaeography: reading old handwriting 1500-1800: a practical online tutorial' is a similar resource provided by the National Archives. It can be consulted at:
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography

Useful tips and information can also be found on the websites of other transcription projects, such as Transcribe Bentham (<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham>) and Transcribe ScotlandsPlaces (www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/transcribe).

The website of the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (www.scran.ac.uk) contains zoomable images of a wide range of documents from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is an excellent resource for studying Scottish handwriting.