

A REDUNDANT TOOL? THE PEN THROUGH HISTORY

Introduction

How many of us write much by hand these days? A note scribbled by ballpoint pen perhaps, but rarely anything substantial, produced with care. But there was a time when good handwriting was valued, and like most skills it required the right tools for the job. While many Eastern cultures used a brush, in the West we used a pen, and this is its story.

The Quill Pen

An ideal choice for writing on vellum or parchment, they were made from the primary flight feathers of a large bird, usually goose or swan.



Whole libraries of books were written by monastic or lay scribes

After the invention of printing quills were still used for letter-writing



The Dip Pen

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of dip pens. Nibs were normally made of steel, but there was no ink reservoir, so it required regularly dipping into ink.



The Fountain Pen

Its great advantage over the dip pen was its internal ink reservoir. By the twentieth century the quality of the nib, tipped with a wear-resistant alloy, made it ideal for calligraphy.



GB 1935 booklet



The beginning of the end?
The throwaway ballpoint pen.

