

## CHAPTER 4

### LUTE SCRIBES AND HANDWRITING

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Before one plays of the lute he must have his lute well strung and well tuned[,] as it behoveth to get good ink good paper and a good pen before one undertakes to write well[.]

*Mary Burwell.*<sup>1</sup>

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LITERACY

LEARNING TO WRITE

TOOLS

TYPES OF SCRIPT

EXAMINING LUTE SCRIBES

TABLE

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PROBABLY THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ISSUE in describing the contents and compilation of lute manuscripts is that of the identity of scribes and scribal concordances. This is because there is fundamentally no absolute way of proving identity of one un-named scribe with another.

When examining a lute manuscript, there is rarely any information immediately apparent to identify either the provenance or the date. A knowledge of the identity of the scribe can reverse this situation. In tablature, the task of identifying hands is made considerably easier than for scribes using mensural notation, since lute scribes use a system of letters for their notation. By identifying a scribe, or by simply pinpointing two separate occurrences of the same hand, information can be brought to bear on a manuscript which may either illuminate the date at which it may have been written, or offer clues as to its provenance. Needless to say, the instances where this does take place in reality are very few, but even these few 'successes' are worth the time spent in looking closely at each scribe at work in the period.

The following discussion is concerned with the early modern scribe, his materials and attitude to the practice of writing, and the modern approach to the examination of the skills of the scribe writing music in French lute tablature. The application of the resulting methodology is relevant to any sample of French lute tablature in the period 1530-1630, and also more generally to scribes active outside that period. It is limited to French tablature because of the particular system of letters rather than numbers that it uses, and the discussion below concentrates on English scribes because of the predominance of certain styles of handwriting in use in England at the time.

Literary palaeographers have attempted for many years to develop a standardized terminology for describing handwriting, but it is still subject to idiosyncrasies. For this reason, no one text was sufficient for all the needs that became apparent when describing lute scribes, and a specialized vocabulary had to be defined, set out in the glossary of terms above.

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<sup>1</sup> *Burwell*, 7.

Although handwriting varied considerably between scribes at any one time, it is sometimes possible to date samples with some accuracy, as the development of any script is documented through dated letters and writings as well as printed writing tutors. During the period 1550-1650, although printing was becoming more widely used, hand-written books and documents were still the norm, and so handwriting had a far more fundamental position in terms of both social status and the power structures surrounding local and national government than it did by 1750. Particularly in the late sixteenth century, anyone who could read and write was instantly more powerful and influential than someone from the same class who could not.

Handwriting styles changed with fashion and necessity, and some features can make dating possible simply by examination of the state of evolution of the script. Quite apart from a generalized aid in dating, a more fundamental use of the study of scribal hands in the lute repertory is the identification of their appearance in more than one manuscript. The existence of a large number of basic models can cause hands to seem similar at first glance, though closer study has proved that some of those scribes originally believed to be concordant are not.<sup>2</sup>

The study of graphology has furnished some technical background, although the science was originally intended as a way of codifying areas of handwriting analysis unrelated to music hands. Specifically, it was directed towards the examination of modern hands, and the literature is concentrated in two areas: the study of a hand for character analysis, and the discovery of forgery. Both of these approaches were concerned entirely with modern handwriting, particularly as it appears in the construction of words, but it required little adaptation in order to use its systems for examining and identifying renaissance tablature hands.

On the whole, much of the literature relating to character analysis can be discarded as it does not deal with the purely technical matter of the construction of a use-hand, though it does give some insights into the importance of habit in the formation of a hand. The forgery literature is more specific, and these techniques are also documented in more detail through police and law journals, though the finished product is discussed more than the process of creation itself. This literature is almost solely concerned with the efforts of the scribe to disguise the characteristics of his own handwriting, a matter largely irrelevant when applied to the lutenists. Most of the scribes were writing music for their own use, and neither possessed nor required secretaries because their status did not require it. Lord Herbert is an exception in that he was in a socially higher stratum than the other scribes and owners of the lute manuscripts. He certainly employed a secretary, and it is interesting to note that among the responsibilities of a good secretary, apart from mastery of both italic and secretary hands, would have been the production of a reasonable imitation of his employer's hand.<sup>3</sup> The similarities between Herbert's autograph hand in *Herbert* and that of the principal scribe of the book suggests that the principal may have been Herbert's secretary, copying out Herbert's loose-leaf

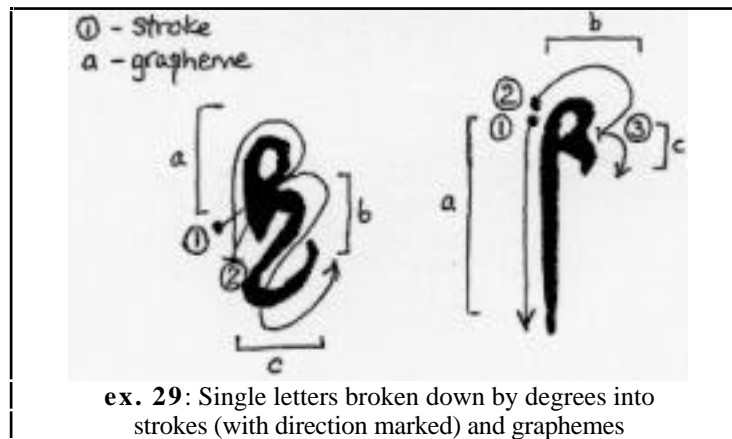
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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> See Love 1993, 99.

collection in his counterfeit of Herbert's hand which, due to his occupation, is quite likely to have been better formed than Herbert's own.

Much of the terminology used to describe handwriting relies heavily on the paleography of medieval literature:<sup>4</sup> the only term added from graphology is the 'grapheme', describing the smallest possible constituent part of a single letter. Until recently, analysts had concentrated on the minim—the part of the letter that excluded any ascender or descender—as the smallest reference point, but the grapheme has steered analysis into a far more detailed channel, and put each pen-stroke under the microscope instead of just the magnifying glass. Close examination of the movements which were used to execute letters shows conclusively that, though the final results may look different in two samples, the grapheme will always be the same if the scribe is the same.



## §LITERACY

Estimating the level of literacy of any group in a society as diverse as that in Elizabethan England, or even of the whole society in a 30-50 year period, seems to be a matter charged with controversy and fraught with misleading clues. Among the most relevant questions emerging regarding literacy were, firstly, who in Elizabeth's England learned to write, who was able and was expected (socially) to write, how well did they write, and what specific skills would each type of pupil have been required to learn; then, who from this fairly elite cross-class group would have been the sort of person to compile a lute book? Obviously there are exceptions to any overall picture, and it seems that music and musicians may not have conformed entirely in this respect. This begs further questions of how well those who were not formally taught could have written, how they might have obtained the skill, how they would have used it, and whether these would be the sort of people to write a lute book. The simple and indirect evidence ranges widely. The number of schools may be important, though this is clearly not consistently representative of any particular level of literacy. The production and sale of books could be more significant, though reasons for buying books ranged from the desire to read and acquire knowledge to the simple pretensions of ownership; and some sources were bought even by the illiterate because everybody else had one. Inventories left in wills or in the appraisal of an estate that list books

<sup>4</sup> Particularly Parkes 1969.

are equally problematic, since they are indicators of ownership, not literacy: just because someone is leaving books to another, it did not mean that either recipient or donor could read. These types of evidence, then, are all considered highly ambiguous as indicators of literacy levels:

There is usually a relationship between abundant schooling and widespread literacy but this link is neither precise nor consistent over time between countries: Sweden offers the example of a country with high levels of reading ability and very few schools. ... The number of school places might grow but they might be filled mainly by boys from the middling ranks of society, leaving the lower orders and girls little affected.<sup>5</sup>

... that a man or woman did not own a book did not prevent them borrowing one, and the simple fact of possession does not prove that a volume was read or consulted very often. Books might be bought for show.<sup>6</sup>

Book ownership around 1550 was largely limited to the upper classes in England, and ownership by artisans was almost unknown except among printers. By 1600, 25% of craftsmen owned on average three books, but these were almost always the same type of book—the Bible, and various ephemeral almanac-type publications.<sup>7</sup> The rise in book ownership does not, however, appear to have been straightforward, as by 1700, nearly 30% of merchants' inventories contained no books at all. Ownership around 1600 was entirely dependent on wealth and social standing, and the contents of those libraries was severely limited by both the cost of the books and social expectations:

Full and wide-ranging [personal] libraries were very rare at any social level before the eighteenth century, and collections were dominated by religious works and/or reference books.<sup>8</sup>

It wasn't until the mid seventeenth century that reading tastes saw an increase in historical, scientific and fictional titles at the expense of religious works. Books of music or musical origin seem to have made such a small impact on the statistics that they are not even considered worth mentioning.

Houston is wary of observations of literacy made by contemporary analysts, which may simply be chance comments rather than researched and accurate evaluations. The almost complete absence of standardised long-distance widespread communication at this time made the type of literacy evaluations now obtained through census-type studies impossible, and so any estimate, no matter how scholarly, is likely to be based on a tiny regional sampling, and could thus be completely unrepresentative of any country or class. Houston does however allow that some of these ambiguous, indirect sources of information, can be corroborated by sources which he classifies as direct:

we possess such corroborative evidence in the form of the subscriptions made on documents by everyone from princes to paupers. During the late medieval period, the keeping of written records became much more common for the state, the church and the individual. ... Many of these documents had to be subscribed by the person

<sup>5</sup> Houston 1988, 117. Two problems arise in the use of Houston's work. The first is that his study embraces the whole of Europe, and in this sense is over-diversified. Secondly, there is a tendency to treat the period 1500-1800 as a whole, with the result that he does not define clearly the date boundaries of some generalisations that are clearly directed at a shorter period within those parameters. The text overall has a tendency to describe the changes that took place from the state of literacy in 1500 to its state in 1800, without identifying exact points at which certain factors emerged or changed.

<sup>6</sup> Houston 1988, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Houston (p.188) cites the example of a Parisian woman who died leaving a Book of Hours, a Lancelot and a book on how to make jam.

<sup>8</sup> Houston 1988, 188.

involved, of which the most important are petitions, contracts, wills, testimonies of witnesses before secular and ecclesiastical courts, and marriage registers.<sup>9</sup>

All literacy commentators concur in an essential tripartite division among those who may be described as literate. Reading and writing were not conjunct skills; a significant minority of the population could write, while a far larger number could read but not write apart from their names. The fact that someone could read did not, however, mean that they did so. That 'reading took from one to three years to learn, writing the same again'<sup>10</sup> explains the existence of one skill without the other. An even larger proportion could neither read nor write, but were able to sign their names. This last group are not considered strictly 'literate'. Thus the Protestation Oath cited by Houston as subscribed by all adult males in England during 1641-2 as a good indicator of a definable cross-section of a population is a problematic source for an estimate, since the fact that a man could sign his name would not indicate whether or not he could also read or write. This source also does not encompass the literacy levels among women, whose ability to write is probably the most significant factor in the emergent literate status of any social group or nation, and whose position is of particular interest in the lute repertory where a significant proportion of the sources were copied and/or owned by women. Houston comments that 'One of the great constants of early modern literacy is that men were far superior to women'.<sup>11</sup> The situation in Spain between 1580 and 1650 would not have been unlike that in England, though literacy rates may have been slightly lower in certain areas of the socio-political structure in relation to differing practices between the two countries.

All clergymen could sign their names as could the *letrados* (qualified bureaucrats), merchant elite and most of the upper nobility, but not the poorer *Hidalgos* or lesser nobles. Between one-third and one-half of artisans, shopkeepers and the better-off farmers could sign. Among employees, the nature of employment and the status of the employer were important. Servant retainers of noble households were usually literate but humble tavern staff or journeymen were largely illiterate, as were virtually all the day labourers.<sup>12</sup>

Women would have been the last social group to have been offered this rarefied skill, and so any indications that significant numbers of women had writing skills would indicate either an important step forward in overall literacy, or a particularly enlightened controlling medium. In the sixteenth century, most literate women came from the social elite, though even the lowest classes had some literate members. Women did not work as professional scribes, for obvious reasons, and one commentator estimated that only 10% of women could even write their names.<sup>13</sup> However, a very high proportion of this percentage would have come from the higher classes and those living in London. There is scattered evidence to suggest that women who could write may have undertaken the functions of secretaries in a household, but in general teaching a woman to read and write was an

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<sup>9</sup> Houston 1988, 120.

<sup>10</sup> Houston 1988, 130.

<sup>11</sup> 'One man in three and two out of every three women could not sign the parish register when they married at Amsterdam in 1630. ... For rural France in the 1740s, just one woman in eight was literate compared with one male in three.' Houston 1988, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Houston 1988, 131, citing statistics of B. Benassar: *Un siècle d'or Espagnol, 1525-1648* (Paris, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Cressy 1980, 128-9.

advertisement of leisure, rank and wealth rather than a means to an end, and this is certainly true of teaching women to play a musical instrument.

It appears that those responsible for the body of lute literature from 1530-1630, among them a large number of women, would have been those who were educated not in the various types of school run by church or state, but by private writing and music masters at home. This represents a significant minority of the population. Significantly, the purpose of a school during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period was the education of boys in elementary arithmetic, religious instruction and reading (in that order of importance). Although numbers of 'free' schools had been established, in practice education was hardly ever free, since a child occupied at school was not able to contribute to the family income by working. Thus, the real section of society who could attend even free schools was limited to only those families who could afford to lose the part of their income that would have been generated by the child, and the length of time they attended was similarly proscribed by financial constraints. Among the poorer classes, it would have been considerably more desirable to apprentice a child to a trade (including musical work ranging from singing in church to the skills of city waits) than to waste his time sending him to school, while other children of his age were well on the way to earning a living, and thus financially and socially advantaged. Writing was frequently not taught at all, and only a very exceptional school might employ a writing master. On the other hand, there were specific writing schools, but their establishment seems to have been only intermittent during Elizabeth's reign, as the classes who attended school were not those of the bourgeoisie who may have required writing skills as was the case by 1700.

Among lower-class writers of autobiographies, most had received very little formal education but had sought out reading and writing in their own way later in life. ... Some ordinary people never attended a school and had to rely on their own efforts or the help of friends if they were to master the basics of literacy.<sup>14</sup>

Those who learned to write as children in England were almost exclusively from the wealthy merchant classes upwards, who employed a writing master to attend the pupil personally. It was not uncommon among the lower levels of this category for families to have shared the cost of teachers, and an impromptu 'class' of up to five children of very mixed ages from about 12 upwards for writing, and seven upwards for other subjects might have been expected. In this environment, a parent may have taken advantage of the presence of a teacher to educate his daughters as well as his sons.

The renaissance aristocracy seems to have been the most prolific employer of home tuition, as by 1650 literacy levels had conspired to bring the public school into being, requiring a concomitant 're-arrangement' of the social status of those who went to school. By this time, literacy levels among women had declined slightly with the decline in home tuition, but among men had improved with the expectation that all young men from the lesser gentry up attended school.

For the lesser gentry and for the daughters of the nobility, a stay in another gentle household could provide a similar training at less cost ... The resort to private tutors

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<sup>14</sup> Houston 1988, 94-5

declined after the sixteenth century as landowning families began increasingly to send their sons to urban grammar schools and then university.<sup>15</sup>

In general, higher education was the province of those young men who could already read, if not write as well, and involved direct financial commitment. According to Houston, the late 1620s saw as many as 52% of the students coming from plebeian stock, but this was because universities were considered the major way for boys of humble background to enter the clergy. Apart from this type of preferment, university would not have been a means of social mobility, as the nobility tended not to attend.

Patterns of attendance at institutions of higher learning were, not surprisingly, dictated by the same social and economic forces which determined who might go to school. University attendance was largely the province of the middling and upper [middle] classes while the nature of the course studied and the general experience of university were dictated by social origins.<sup>16</sup>

A musician such as Matthew Holmes would have been doubly fortunate in being able to use his musical status in the church as an excuse to acquire or peddle scribal skills, and his proximity to the University of Oxford would also have afforded him the opportunity to obtain further education while earning his living. Dallis's pupil may have been in a similar position in Cambridge, and the state of his handwriting may be an indication of the uses to which he put it.

Throughout the renaissance, a situation of learning existed that was only faintly mirrored in the movement of migrant populations between Europe and the Americas in the early nineteenth century. With the rise in expectations of children, it was not unusual for parents to be illiterate but for their children to be able to read and sometimes to write, and to pass their skills on to the older generation rather than *vice versa*. Among the many characteristics of the renaissance was not simply a desire for learning, but also the desire to pass it on, giving rise to the publications of tutors of a wide variety of skills, some more obtuse than others, and ranging from dancing to writing.<sup>17</sup>

Broadly speaking, reading skills were the province of those who went to school (boys) and the addition of writing was limited to those who learned in the home, allowing the inclusion of girls. Though boys would have been taught from the age of seven, and would have started writing from 12, the age at which the girls learned would have been dependent on the age of the boys. Elizabethan home instruction favoured reading, religious instruction<sup>18</sup> and writing before geometry, languages or accounting. The polarity of wealth and land ownership is reflected in the polarity of literacy. Literacy was intimately linked with social position and, unlike attendance at university, could be used to advance one's position, either socially or financially, and there were no barriers to learning the requisite skills at any time of life. The education of valued (or potentially valuable) retainers might be seen as an investment by an employer, and some servants may have attended classes with the children of the

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<sup>15</sup> Houston 1988, 92.

<sup>16</sup> Houston 1988, 83.

<sup>17</sup> The earliest ABC primers were published in Strasbourg in 1480.

<sup>18</sup> Home tuition was particularly necessary in families of minority or oppressed religions. Thus for English Catholics, this form of schooling was the only one available to them.

household (where they would have had to learn without the attention the youngsters received) or have been educated separately in a more elementary manner.

Occupation is usually a reliable indicator of social position in the early modern period ... In the sixteenth century ... virtually all those who could read and write came from the landlord, mercantile or professional classes. The occupations and status groupings ... are based on the main divisions in economic function and wealth.<sup>19</sup>

It seems likely that musicians were uniquely privileged in their access to the skills of writing; it would certainly have benefited an employer to furnish a household servant who was also a musician with the necessary basic skills to write out music for other members of the family or household, just as a musician who could notate his music would have been a more employable artisan. There was also the advantage to the employer that a certain degree of loyalty could reasonably be expected of a retainer educated at their employer's expense that would not be expected of one who already had those skills, or who never acquired them.

The compilers of the lute books were for the most part from the upper classes and nobility if they were women, but from a slightly larger social range if they were men. Indubitably the better hands would have been written by those from a higher social class, though it is clear that it was not impossible for a professional musician to learn to write. Ultimately, though, the social class of the professional musician as a servant would preclude advanced writing skills, although those who raised their status either through the church or through having been 'gentlemen' to start with (rather than apprenticed artisans) could be expected to acquire a more respectable hand.

### §LEARNING TO WRITE

With a large group of hands, the question of coincidental similarities arises. It is commonly—and not unreasonably—assumed that those hands that survive are only a tiny percentage of the tablature hands that were in use at the time; but even if this is the case, over 200 samples of scribes writing in French tablature are extant. All of these show well-defined and individual characteristics and even where isolated features match those in another hand, they are nearly all easily distinguished. One step in assessing how likely coincidental similarity might be, is an understanding of the manner of teaching handwriting to children or potential scribes, and what the likelihood was of two or more very similar hands evolving independently or deliberately.

In the twentieth century writing is a necessity and taken for granted despite relatively high levels of illiteracy in some areas. Very few of the literate population look closely at their use-hand as a work of art or real expression of their personality or moral outlook. The attitude is summed-up by Osley:

... handwriting - a subject much neglected, badly taught, badly practised. Some people regard it at best with polite toleration. For the late Richard Crossman, it was 'a useful method of taking notes or communicating and all I want for my children is

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<sup>19</sup> Houston 1988, 132-3.



that they are able to do it competently and clearly before they learn to type'. Others consider that it is already obsolete, superseded by the tape-recorder and typewriter ...<sup>20</sup>

Nothing could be further from the ideal of renaissance man. To him, handwriting was a highly specialized tool, and one which he was proud and privileged to possess, as so few people did in any great degree. Despite the fact that throughout Elizabeth's and subsequent reigns literacy outside the church grew astonishingly fast, as late as 1650 handwriting was still mainly practised only by the professional classes and the nobility. On the whole, the surviving lutebooks written by women do not seem to originate with the nobility, and do not suggest any obvious connection with London, where literacy among women from classes below the nobility was highest. *Board* was probably partly written by Margaret during one of her family's stays there.

A child who showed particular aptitude in the skill of writing would have been treated much as an artistically gifted child would be today—he would, if possible, be sent to study further with a reputable writing master, with an eye to a career as a secretary—at that time a post which could become a stepping-stone to diplomatic or courtier status.

Giovan Francesco Cresci describes in detail how he considers a master should teach a pupil to write, and ends up giving a fairly comprehensive demonstration of teaching techniques.<sup>21</sup> His pupils learned to write in a standing position, and were expected not only to be able to demonstrate the shapes of the letters on paper, but also to describe the formation of the letter verbally. In extremis, he suggests that the master should take the hand of the pupil and move it himself to form a letter that was causing problems. Cresci advocates a form of intensive personal tuition, though he notes in passing that some masters simply write out a model script and leave their pupils to copy it. Even with his concentrated attention to a single pupil, he considered that it took about 6 months of daily lessons before the student should be allowed even to dispense with ruled paper.

In reality, the practicalities of teaching meant that writing as a skill took considerably longer to acquire—sometimes up to three years, as it would most usually have been taught in groups. As it was a skill that had only recently become the province of the laity, and one acquired not only at considerable expense but also only after a great deal of effort on the part of the pupil, the ability to write was viewed as an art, and was treated as such. The rare servant who may have been taught to write would not have been offered the level of tuition of his master's wife or children, and would not have been expected to produce a hand with anything like their final polish. Even so, there were clearly distinctions between the various uses to which a pen could be put, dividing embellishment within the script from extraneous decoration:

... we are sometimes compelled to draw with our pens rather than write—for example, when we make the initial letters of the gothic scripts ...<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Osley 1980, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Giovan Francesco Cresci: *Il Perfetto Scrittore* (Venice, 1569).

<sup>22</sup> From Christopher Plantin: *La première et la seconde partie des dialogues françois pour les jeunes enfants*, Part II, Dialogue 9 (Antwerp, 1567) trans. Osley 1980, 223.

Here the implication is that although it was clearly appropriate and expected to spend time and energy in embellishing an already ornate formal script like gothic, it was probably not so usual in other scripts. Gothic hands have a strong tendency to be formalized and are rarely characterized in the same way as more personal hands such as secretary and italic. The difference between formal and other hands was clearly recognised by sixteenth-century teachers and scribes, and some of the modern terminologies are based on this division, rather than distinctions between the numerous scripts that would fall under either heading: for many paleographers, the term 'cursive' refers to any hand that is not 'formal', thus secretary is a cursive hand. This is not the case in the present discussion, where cursive is given its more modern meaning, applied to a particular script, and types of scripts are categorized as either formal or current.

Handwriting tutors stress not only the basic formation of letters, but also the philosophical necessity to develop an individual style and to make one's handwriting an expression of, not only good breeding, but also taste and elegance. Just as *Burwell* insists that 'it were better never to play of the lute than to play with an ugly hand',<sup>23</sup> many of today's slapdash hands would have remained unused rather than run the risk of being seen to the detriment of their writer. Cresci pens a diatribe against bad writing masters who, when they write,

... reveal to anyone who is watching them letters which are ragged, uneven, and shaky ... If they had any sense at all, it would be their duty not only to run away and hide themselves because of these faults and never let themselves be seen in the act of writing ...<sup>24</sup>

He was not alone in his views. The following extract is taken from a printed French writing tutor of 1567:

... there are so many scrawlers about, who are only fit to cross out or scratch out what they have written. ... A good teacher, when handing out copies to his pupils, should ensure that they serve as examples not only of good handwriting, but also of learning to live a decent life. ... He starts with the letters of the alphabet and shows how to make the correct shapes for each of them ... We teach the pupil to make words from them, and then a whole line, and then two, three, four lines and more, according to the child's ability. ... [They shall learn to decorate and draw letters well] by copying the model which is given to them. They can ... teach themselves to make vigorous flourishes after they have mastered everything else and have acquired a light touch.<sup>25</sup>

The same source lists 17 different named hands,<sup>26</sup> adding that there are 'a host of others' that it does not name, and indicating quite categorically that there are yet 'others that you can invent at will and name as you please'.<sup>27</sup> Even before attempting to teach 'vigorous flourishes', the tendency to elaborate is seen even in the model tables of John de Beaufort, one of which is given as example 32

<sup>23</sup> *Burwell*, 36v. The full passage is cited in Chapter 1, p.29.

<sup>24</sup> Cresci op.cit. trans. Osley 1980, 123.

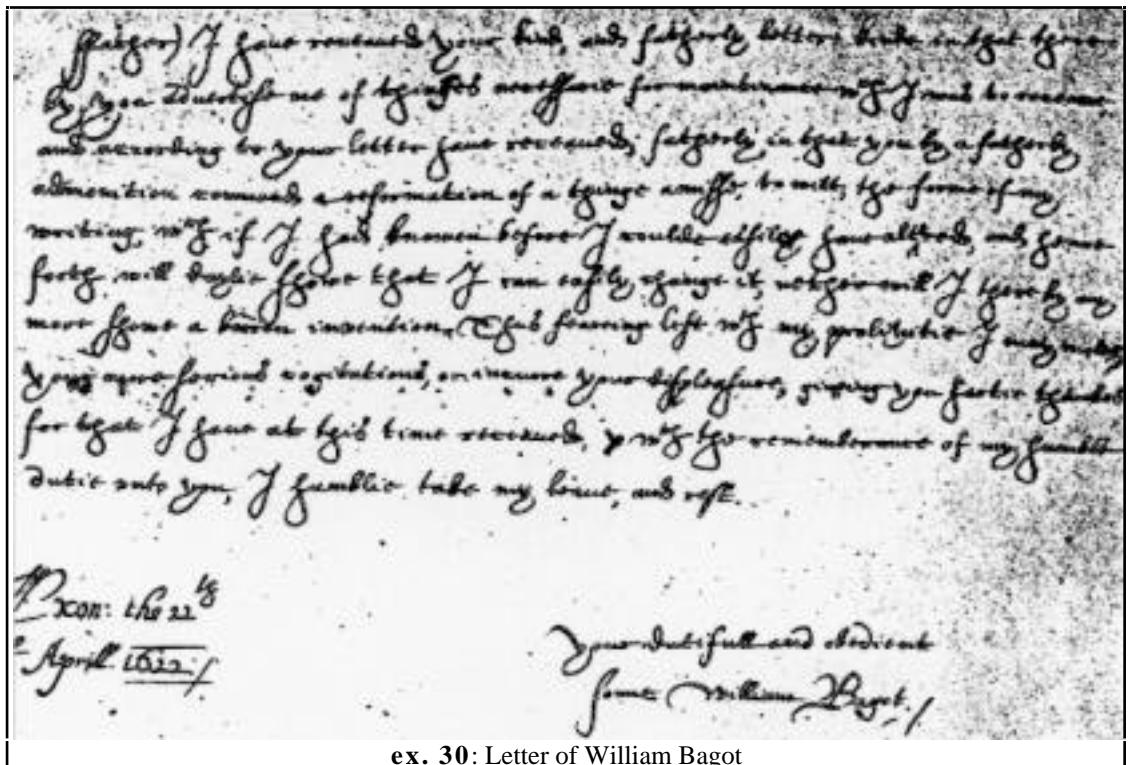
<sup>25</sup> Plantin op.cit. trans. Osley 1980, 224.

<sup>26</sup> *Lettre carrée, lettre ancienne, lettre d'état, lettre ronde, lettre de comptes, lettre de finances, lettre italique commune or ronde or d'exercice, lettre venecienne ronde or carrée, lettre pattée et droicte*, chancery letter, left handed [mirror writing], forward-sloping, bisected [cut horizontally by a white line running through the middle], backward-sloping and dog-toothed.

<sup>27</sup> Plantin op.cit. trans. Osley 1980, 224-5.

below. Despite the fact that the tables are intended to show only the basic letters, the 'g' at the beginning of the third line shows some of the initial stages of elaboration.

The importance placed on the individuality of the appearance of a current hand is illustrated by an extract from a letter written in 1622 by William Bagot, an Oxford student, to his father who had evidently complained that his handwriting lacked elegance and personality:



... according to your letter [I] haue receaued; fatherly in that you by a fatherly admonition command a reformation of a thinge amisse, to witt, the forme of my writing, which if I had knowen before I could e easily haue altered, and hence forth will daylie shoue that I can easily change it, ne[i]ther will I thereby any more shoue a barren invention.

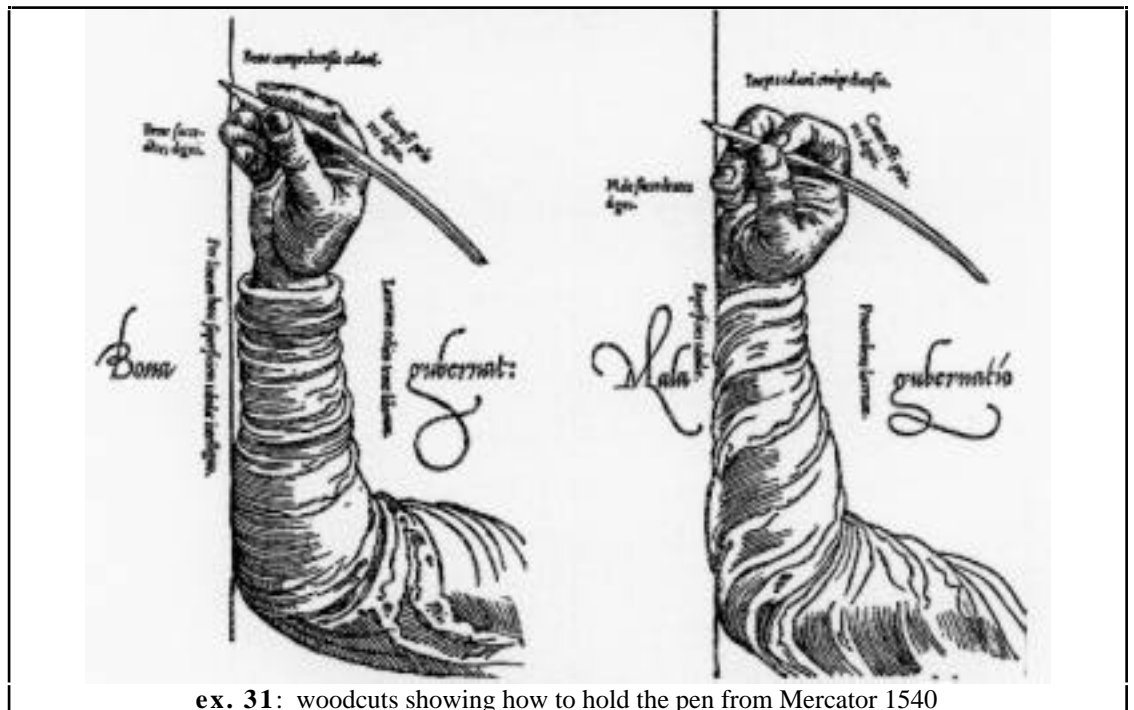
The importance the writer and his reader place on the appearance of the hand is emphasized in the desire to show innovation and originality, and the harsh description of William's invention as 'barren' gives some indication of how necessary his father considered it to be. Some secretary hands depart so far from the original model that they are almost impossible to decipher, though still somehow pleasing to the eye. As well as providing samples of fairly florid secretary hands from the beginning of the seventeenth century, letters written by members of the Bagot family also show that similarities in the writing of siblings was just as unusual as in any other circumstance.<sup>28</sup>

The art of handwriting was in a dramatic state of flux in the years leading up to 1600. In many ways this reflected the growing desire for change, and the advances in modern thinking which characterize what has come to be known as the renaissance or the early days of modern history. From about 1620, it is possible to see in some English secretary hands a growing pretence for humanistic

<sup>28</sup> Dawson/Skipton 1981, 95 and 103.

simplicity and clarity which was not only effecting the gradual overall shift in preference among scribes from the secretary to the italic hand, but was also in turn influenced by it. Exaggerated ascenders and descenders begin to disappear, and shading becomes less pronounced partly due to the scribes now cutting a much narrower italic style nib.

Most of the writing tutors from this period are not in English, and those current in England usually came from Italy or France. The first printed one to be published in England was written by a Frenchman, John de Beauchesne, who had settled here in 1565.<sup>29</sup> Beauchesne's tutor appeared in 1570, but does not seem to have sparked off any rush of similar works. Self-education was becoming common in other fields, but the first truly native writing tutor to appear in England was Edmund Coote's *The Schoolmaster* (1596), from which the industrious student might teach himself both to read and write. Around 1585 the new chancery or Italian hand, now called italic, started insinuating itself noticeably into English scripts, heralding a gradual but eventually cataclysmic change in current and formal hands. At no point during the period 1550-1700 did handwriting cease to evolve, though the 30 years before and after 1600 seem to have been the most energetic.



ex. 31: woodcuts showing how to hold the pen from Mercator 1540

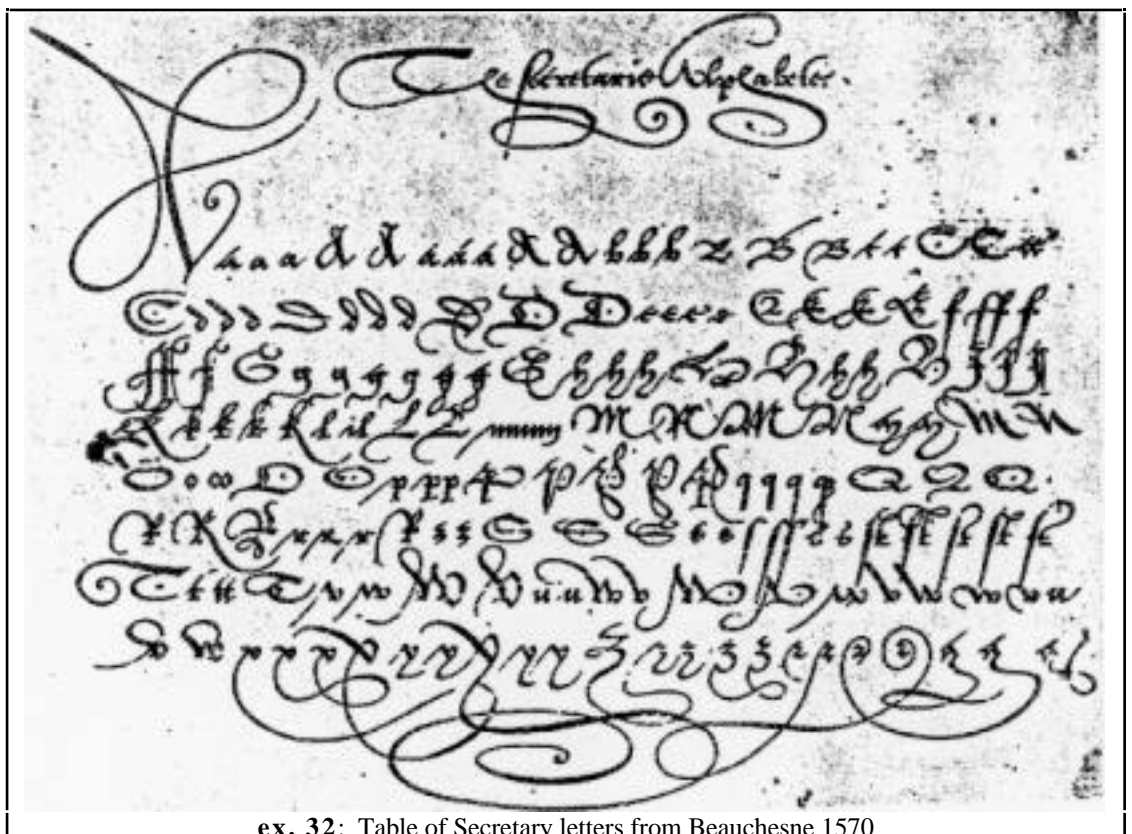
Tutors in any subject, and from virtually any period up to the 1800s, emphasized the philosophical aspect of their subject above all. In purely quantitative terms, the largest portion of any treatise was usually devoted to discussion of the importance of becoming proficient in the skill that was being offered, and of the admirable qualities of any person possessing it. In handwriting tutors, having provided the student with a model alphabet to copy and told him how to hold his pen, there was little else to do beyond exhorting him to cultivate originality, consistency, fluency and elegance.

<sup>29</sup> John de Beauchesne: *A Booke containing divers sortes of handes* (London, 1570)—Beauchesne 1570.

Originality was more than simply an idea. It was an ideal that seems to have been one of the most important, and closest to the heart of renaissance as opposed to medieval man. Cohen summarizes prevailing attitudes in France in the two decades before 1550 in his commentary on Rabelais, attitudes which must have been visibly more concrete by 1600 in England, despite the time-lag between emergent philosophy on the continent and its repercussions in England.

Rabelais is not concerned with individuals; he is not sufficient of a Renaissance man for that. What he draws is the picture of an age or, to be more exact, of a time when two ages overlapped, the new age of research and individualism, with which he was in intellectual sympathy, and the age of the fixed world-order, to which he owed emotional loyalty.<sup>30</sup>

Individualism was a practice which had evolved around, and ideally suited the secretary hand rather than the increasingly popular italic, though some commentators have seen italic as equally suitable for embellishment. Example 32 illustrates the table of secretary letters from Beauchesne's book showing the very basic form of the alphabet. Example 33, from Gerardus Mercator, illustrates the italic hand, also called humanist or chancery, though chancery was a particular office hand and should more accurately be described as a form of italic.

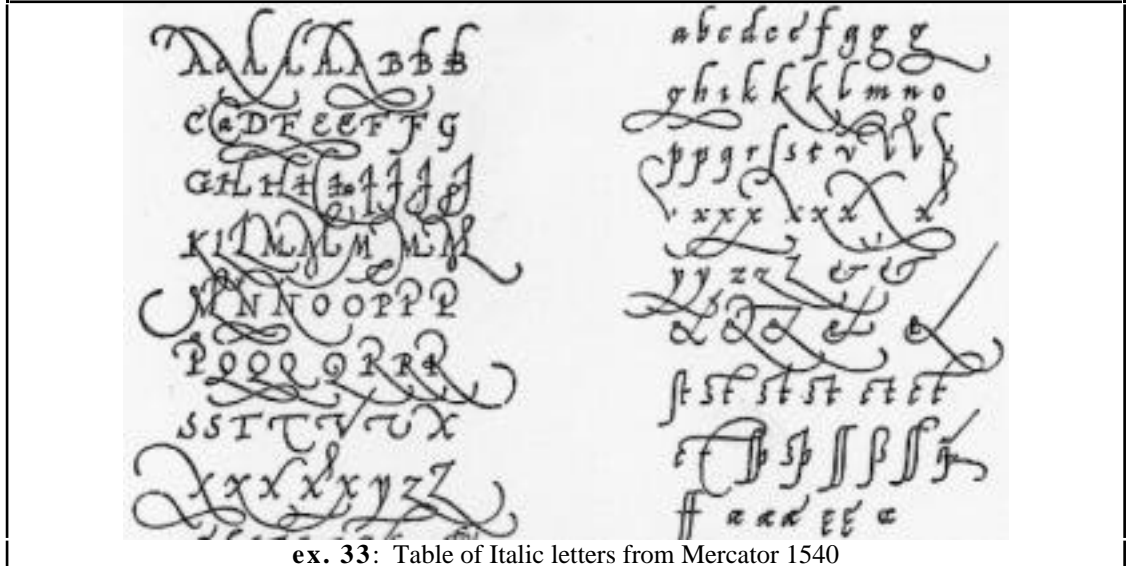


ex. 32: Table of Secretary letters from Beauchesne 1570

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that most scribes who wrote a secretary hand also practised italic, and both forms could be equally elegant or decorative. In the lute sources, italic was increasingly adopted as the tablature hand, being simpler in form, and therefore easier to read and

<sup>30</sup> François Rabelais, trans. J. M. Cohen: *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (London, 1955) translator's introduction, p.21.

quicker to write than secretary. Where the scribe had a command of both types of script, it is not unusual to find them employed for contrasting purposes: the tablature may be written in italic while the titles are in secretary, or *vice versa*.



ex. 33: Table of Italic letters from Mercator 1540

Richard Mynshall and Matthew Holmes are lute scribes who used italic or a hybrid italic for tablature, italic for titling, but also wrote a masterful secretary, demonstrated by Mynshall in scattered titles and in his index, and by Holmes in formal legal documents, but also—and perhaps more significantly—when he was taking quick notes. Obviously his secretary hand was more fluent and comfortable for quick work, and the more uniform practised hand when it came to formal work.

In the early years of the [seventeenth] century a professional scribe would be expected to write at least two hands, the native secretary and the imported italic. ... Those who used it [secretary] as their regular hand would often use italic for proper names and headings or interpolated passages that required to be distinguished in some way.<sup>31</sup>

An example of a literary scribe writing both hands equally well is seen in example 1 (p.xiii); the scribe—Thomas More—is offsetting text, translation and commentary, and exhibits an immaculate and elegant mastery of both hands, as well as an 'engrossing' hand (the large black script). The practice of more than one script was not unusual among professional scribes or those who spent some time writing as part of their work, since the need to offset different parts of a text from each other was often essential, regardless of its decorative aspects.

In order to learn to write a pupil, sometimes in a class of as many as 10, but just as frequently privately taught, was provided with a pen, ink and a model script to copy. His tutor also immediately began to instruct him in the technical aspects of the craft, namely preparing the paper, mixing ink and cutting his pen. In exceptional circumstances, a few tutors advocated allowing the student to write over letters if he was unable to master their formation in any other way. As well as his florid current hand, the writing master wrote an immaculate and largely featureless model hand from which the student learned his alphabet. Elegance and lightness of touch were also considered highly desirable traits:

<sup>31</sup> Love 1993, 108.

lightness particularly was necessary, since a flowing script would not be possible if the pen was unable to move freely across the paper. Once these had been accomplished, a student was encouraged to develop individuality and add ornament, finally developing his own personal script.

There seems to be a certain amount of disagreement concerning the desirability of individuality that probably stemmed from the late impact of renaissance ideas in England. Although the Italian tutors emphasise its desirability, Martin Billingsley seems to dislike it, though this may have more to do with an antipathy toward the integration of separate scripts resulting in bastard forms. The difficulties in assessing the situation are summarised by Love:

The seventeenth century gave birth to a bewildering variety of hands. There is a widely accepted belief that the overall movement across the period was in this, as in other things (including upper-class dress), one from variety to conformity; but such a view is at best a half-truth. A more accurate model (again as in other things) would be one of repeated attempts to impose conformity subverted by new assertions of diversity.<sup>32</sup>

In this subject at least, imitation was not the sincerest form of flattery. Rather, the sign of a good master was a group of students who showed diversity and individuality. Thus it seems that where there is a very close similarity between scribes, though it may be coincidental it is substantially more likely that it is not a coincidence at all, but a concordance.

## §TOOLS

Just as a man who wishes to learn to play a musical instrument must also know how to tune it ... so for many reasons the student who aims to learn handwriting must know how to cut quills.  
Ludovico Vincentino: *Il modo di Temperare le Penne*<sup>33</sup>

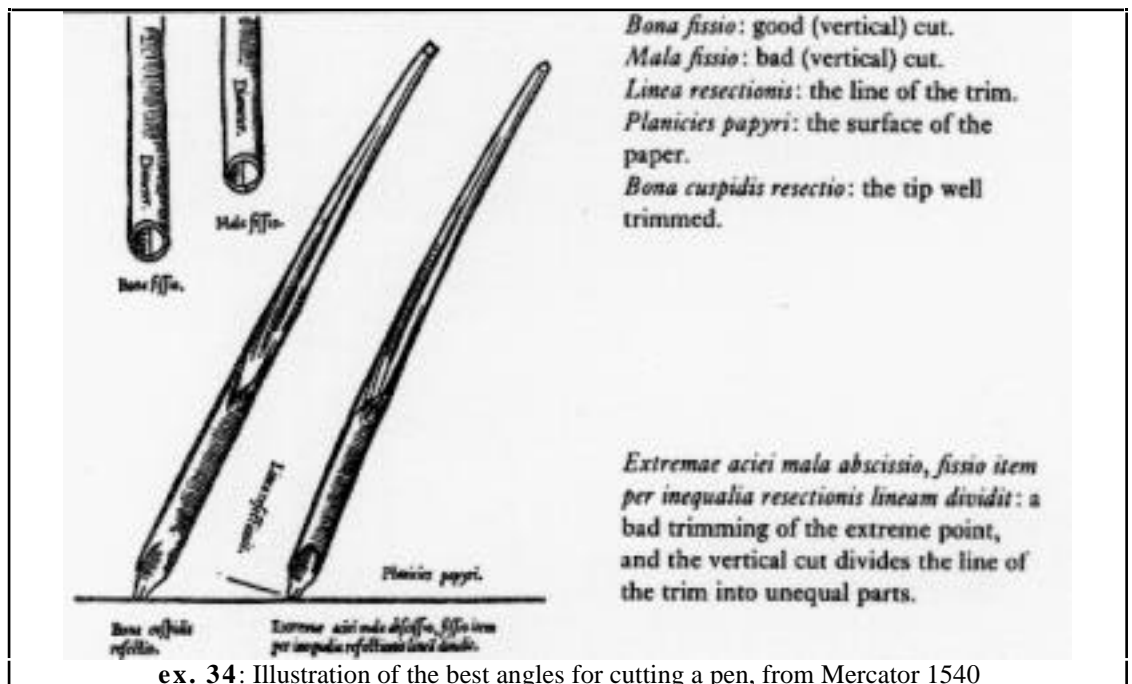
One of the factors which makes the identification of modern hands difficult, apart from the invention of the biro, is the invariability of mass-produced nibs. A modern steel nib lasts for many years, and is one of a batch of thousands. This problem does not exist when examining lute hands, since early modern scribes wrote with a quill, usually from a goose, and writers prepared their own quills in the same way as modern reed players will make their own reeds. Quills, being made from a fairly soft material, lose their hardness quite quickly, and can be easily damaged. The modern steel nib wears down very slowly to an angled tip which relates to the angle of the grip used by the writer. Modern nibs are always produced (except in the case of left-hand nibs) with a square tip, to which the writer has to accommodate his hand. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scribes cut and balanced their own pens specifically to suit their own hand, usually using a goose quill. Thus the width of the writing edge and its angle were cut to the degree which the scribe knew best suited the angle at which he held the pen, and would write most smoothly without catching on the fibres of the paper, obviating the necessity for any compromise in his hand. Whereas the steel nib is resilient enough to last some years, the quill, if even moderately well-used, would have to be replaced frequently—usually daily if it was heavily used—as its softening would affect the appearance of the hand, and gradually make it less usable, and less

<sup>32</sup> Love 1993, 108.

<sup>33</sup> (Venice, c1525) trans. Osley 1980, 79.

reliable in holding the ink and facilitating an even flow. It was possible to buy bundles of ready-cut quills that could either be used as they were or adjusted to suit the scribe's hand.

If the writer tended to lean heavily he would be unlikely to want a very hard quill which would catch on the fibres of the paper and damage the writing surface as he wrote, hampering the fluency of the hand. Quills were hardened in hot sand, and the length of time they spent being heated and the number of times the process was repeated affected their hardness, as did the thickness of the original membrane. Apart from this, the shape of the writing point and the type, if any, of the ink reservoir was entirely up to the prospective writer, who would cut a nib which best suited his hand and the available quill.



ex. 34: Illustration of the best angles for cutting a pen, from Mercator 1540

Writers like Jane Pickeringe, Margaret Board, Henry Sampson and Margaret L. had clearly been carefully taught to a significant level of mastery in writing, and would certainly have taken sufficient pride in their hand to eschew the use of off-the-peg pens, considering the correct cutting of the nib integral to their script. Ready-made pens required additional work to ensure their suitability for the scribe, and these were the type of people who would have had time to embrace the niceties of writing. On the other hand, scribes like Richard Mynshall, Richard Allison<sup>34</sup> and John Dowland, from a lower class—and working people—would probably have had little time to spare for the fiddly business of trimming nibs; they would have bought their pens in standard bundles and used them just as they came. This would be apparent from the scripts these two classes of lute scribes wrote: the first group (cutting their own pens) display elegant and highly consistent hands, while the hands of the second group (using rough-cut pens) are rarely consistent, and often so irregular as to make them difficult to identify even within a single source.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 7 §Mynshall and Swarland and §Richard Allison.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 7 §Richard Allison.



The contemporary experts seem to differ in the amount of instruction they consider necessary to give a pupil to enable him to cut a good pen for himself, but all agree as to the necessity of a pupil learning this skill, and the fact that it was an intimate part of writing, not a peripheral option. Ludovico Vincentino considered it 'an essential part of ... handwriting' and important enough to devote an entire booklet to the subject.<sup>36</sup> He describes in precise detail how to prepare the feather, on which plane to cut, the angles of the various cuts and the precise length of each, concluding with a discussion on the merits and effects of dividing the tip to suit the touch of the writer.

Since professional scribes, or those who spent much of their time writing, would usually have more than one use hand, a different type of nib would be required for the different scripts. Italic required a narrower and more flexible nib than secretary, and some italic hands written with a secretary pen can look clumsy and childish despite the more experienced appearance of the scribe's other scripts.<sup>37</sup> It was not uncommon for adults to learn a new hand, as a new job might require the incumbent to practise a particular office hand. If a scribe changed the type of pen he was using, then although the duct and unconscious features would remain essentially the same, his actual surface style could look radically different.<sup>38</sup>

Modern pens generally provide an internal reservoir of ink which ensures an even flow for many lines of writing. The early modern scribe would have had to dip every few words, more or less frequently as his size of writing and pen demanded. The frequency of dip would become habitual so that the pen did not dry out unexpectedly, and this is the type of unconscious factor that very rarely alters in the hand of a scribe, even when that writer is taking deliberate pains to alter his hand.

### §TYPES OF SCRIPT

The scripts common between about 1550 and 1650 are listed in the glossary of terms<sup>39</sup> with examples of each hand in current and tablature use. Although the terminology is basically drawn from medieval paleography, the titles given to each script are particular to this study, since scholars in different areas of this discipline take different meanings from terms such as cursive, secretary or gothic.

The ubiquitous medieval English script was the gothic book hand.<sup>40</sup> It was a square and ornate hand resembling the script which developed from handwriting used about 1200 for glossing (writing commentaries in the margins of texts), and was characterized by distinct and strong shading, numerous small otiose strokes on the corners of the lobes, and by the angular basic shape of lobe and minim. Texts written in this script are often highly compressed, closely spaced and full of abbreviations, giving little scope for personal style. The similarities between gothic hands bear witness to this effect. In lute tablature, which evolved more than 100 years after the gothic book hand, and where spacing between

<sup>36</sup> Vincentino op.cit.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Mynshall used an Italic hand for the ascriptions to his lute pieces and a secretary for the index to the book. The secretary shows a neat and well-formed hand, while the Italic, probably written at the same time, looks considerably more clumsy, possibly because it appears to have been written with the same pen.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 7, §Richard Allison.

<sup>39</sup> See Glossary, pp.vx-xviii.

<sup>40</sup> See Glossary, p.xvii.

letters is much greater than when the script is used in a text, the scope for ornamentation and personal style is greatly increased. By the middle of the sixteenth century, though, the hand is more precisely a secretary with strong gothic overtones. Gothic scripts always use the old form of the letter 'e' with two strokes, one above the other, and both curving in the same direction, similar to a modern letter 't'. Although the 'e' survived long after the rest of the script, gothic hands had all but disappeared by 1600.

The commonest Elizabethan current hand was the secretary.<sup>41</sup> It developed from Gothic script and was well established by 1525. In 1618, Martin Billingsley wrote that:

the *Secretary* ... is so tearmed ... partly because it is the Secretaries common hand; and partly also, because it is the onely vsuall hand of England, for dispatching of all manner of bu[si]nesses of the most part, whatsoeuer.<sup>42</sup>

By 1650 it was well on the way to extinction, and by 1700 it had vanished altogether as a distinct hand. Secretary had far more scope for idiosyncrasies than other scripts, though it can be highly formalized in the uniformity of the letter shapes. Its extinction was due to contamination from more fluid and less complex hands. Early forms of the secretary use versions of the gothic 'e', and this is the correct form for a pure secretary, but by 1600 most were making use of the italic form.

Italic script had predominantly oval shaped letters.<sup>43</sup> One of the characteristics of the hand is the distinctive shading caused by using a wide nib. The hand frequently develops a slant to the right, and the rounded arches of minim shapes such as 'm' and 'n' have a tendency to become pointed, the upstroke becoming a diagonal connecting stroke. Its simplicity and the resulting speed of writing make it usual for all the letters to be formed with the absence of pen-lifts, and the result is always neat and elegant. It was the most important of the hands that existed side by side with the Secretary, gaining increasing popularity from 1580, and many lute scribes seem to have been equally skilled in either. Martin Billingsley, as late as 1618, described it rather disparagingly in the following way:

it is conceiued to be the easiest hand that is written with the Pen, and to be taught in the shortest time: Therefore it is vsually taught to women, for as much as they (hauing not the patience to take any great paines, besides phantasticall and humorsome) must be taught that which they may instantly learne<sup>44</sup>

Italic was considered a prestigious hand from the time it was introduced into England, and was used for many documents presented to royalty or the nobility. But its use seems to have been double-edged, since its legibility and simplicity made it the preferred hand of the semi-literate and functionaries.

Court hands<sup>45</sup> were usually cursive, having grown out of a need for speed in the business of court and government, and tend to date from later in the seventeenth century than most of the hands under discussion. The Common Pleas, Exchequer and Pipe Office hands grew from this root, developed by those offices, and were required to be learned by their clerks. Flowing, joined and often inclined to the right, the emphasis is on fluidity of motion.

<sup>41</sup> See Glossary, p.xv.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Billingsley: *The Pens Excellencie* [1618] cited in Dawson/Skipton 1981, 8.

<sup>43</sup> See Glossary, pp.xv-xvi.

<sup>44</sup> cited in Dawson/Skipton 1981, 10.

<sup>45</sup> See Glossary, pp.xvi-xvii.

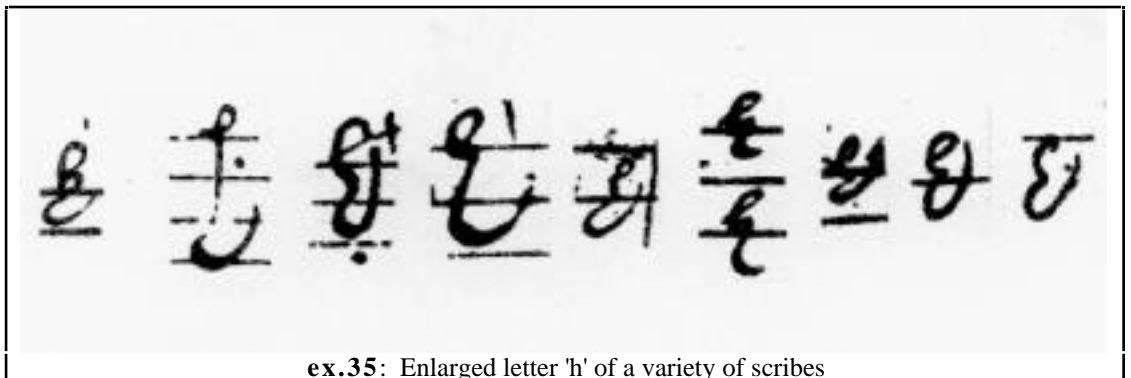
Pure scripts in lute tablatures are fairly unusual, since by this time pure scripts were fairly unusual in any situation, and a scribe would often simply take the quickest or most comfortable version of each letter. Thus one script became contaminated by another and a 'bastard' form resulted. Lute scribes who write a secretary tablature hand frequently use the italic form of the letters 'e' and 'c', and pure secretary hands in tablatures are very rare.

In lute manuscripts samples of current writing can appear to differ widely from either the tablature hand or the hand the scribe uses for ascriptions because the scribe may use a formal hand for titles which is completely different from that employed as his current hand.

### §EXAMINING LUTE SCRIBES

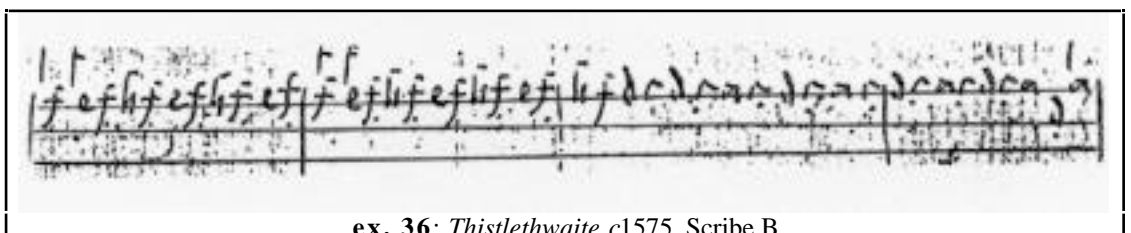
There are five main areas that come under consideration when examining the handwriting of lute scribes: the type of pen and nib, the shapes of the flags, the shapes of the letters, the hand used for titles or ascriptions, and the intended purpose of the preserved repertory. To these are added information regarding the paper or papers on which the scribe is known to have written and a probable or even precise date for any of the sources in which his activity is evident. The reliability of information concerned with the dating of manuscripts is discussed in the following chapters.

Magnification of single letters or chords has proved in many cases the final arbiter where two scribes cannot be separated, or where a concordance remains in doubt. Example 35 shows letters from several scribes that have been magnified a number of times, thus making the peculiarities of each hand more pronounced.



ex.35: Enlarged letter 'h' of a variety of scribes

As well as examining the slant, shape, width and composition of individual letters, flags and bar-lines, the weight of the scribe's hand is usually evident through various contributing factors that are visible in the finished writing. Example 36 is by a scribe who uses heavy pressure with a hard nib, often causing the fibres of the paper to be lifted:

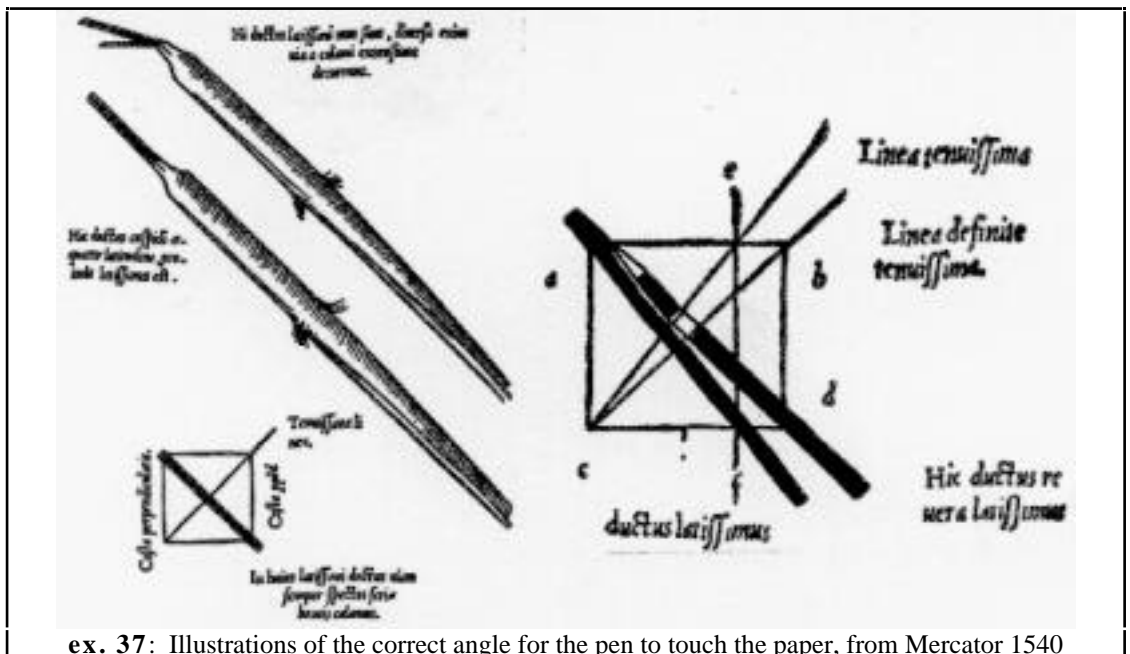


ex. 36: *Thistlethwaite* c1575, Scribe B

Apart from making the paper appear ragged, this also prevents Scribe B from forming evenly curved strokes, and the result here is letters composed of very straight strokes which do not join up because they have become fouled by scraped-up paper fibres. The letters are thus not only square, but also 'open' in forms where they should ideally be closed (for example: a, b and d).<sup>46</sup>

As well as damage to paper fibres, pressure can be calculated by the density of ink in the writing, and can be discerned by examining the width of the line, whether the nib splays, how pronounced the shading is if there is any. Paper quality is also a factor in judging the weight of a hand, as fibres may be scraped up with the lightest of touches if the surface has not been properly finished.

Placing heavy pressure on a soft nib causes the two sides of the nib to splay through a stroke, so that each grapheme has a bulbous shape, narrowing at the beginning and end of the stroke, and widening—sometimes dramatically—in the middle. Splaying of the nib also prevents rounded strokes in a way that is facilitated by an un-splayed nib, so the overall letters will again appear 'square' although the strokes are more likely to join up than in a heavy hand with a hard nib.



ex. 37: Illustrations of the correct angle for the pen to touch the paper, from Mercator 1540

The ideal slant of the pen advocated by the treatises places the thickest and thinnest stroke at opposite angles of 45° to the horizontal.

These variations are added to the basic differences in the model of each scribe, and the results are usually easily distinguishable from one another. It is almost unknown in this period to find two different scribes with exactly similar hands: I have not been satisfactorily able to do so, and among literary paleographers, the usual and safer course is to assume that hands which are extremely similar belong to the same scribe.

<sup>46</sup> Many of John Ward's discussions of handwriting seem to be based on the erroneous premise that the neater and more fluent a hand looked, the more likely it was to have belonged to a professional lutenist. As can be seen from the comparison of young amateurs such as the group including Margaret Board and Jane Pickering with hands by professionals like John Dowland and Matthew Holmes, both concerned more with speed than with elegance, the opposite is far more likely to be the case.

The systems of flagging in lute sources are also described in the glossary, and the terminology is clarified by making use of Fuhrmann's description of tablature flagging in his *Testudo Gallo-Germanica* (1615). Infrequently, scribes use two types of flagging, but this is rare. A possible explanation for a scribe changing between *mensura gallica* and *germanica*, such as is seen in *Board* and *Sampson*, is that the scribe may be copying from an exemplar which uses a different flagging system from his own. In *Sampson*, Scribe B changes from a system of rhythm-change flagging<sup>47</sup> to one of continuous flagging on f.11r, for no immediately apparent reason. It may be that the scribe found the rhythm more complicated here, and put in continuous flags to ensure that he played it correctly.

Bar-lines are a habitual part of a hand, and a scribe rarely thinks about how he draws them. The stroke used for straight vertical lines within the script frequently does not match the downward stroke of the bar-lines, which often employs a new grip to the one used for the script, and frequently will also show a slight bowing of the stroke caused by the way the scribe supports his hand when writing. The way one scribe re-aligns his pen for drawing bar-lines is very rarely repeated by another scribe, and the combination of the angle of the pen used for the script and its subsequent re-alignment are as distinctive as a signature. Hold signs are also habitual and seem to be an integral part of the duct that is not changed by influence or experience. Either the scribe always uses them, or never. Even if a secondary scribe with influence over the primary such as a teacher who uses hold signs habitually, adds them to a pupil's copying, the pupil does not take up the practice of using them himself, nor does there seem to be evidence that he may add them to his battery of signs. The same is not true of grace signs, whose use can vary from piece to piece.<sup>48</sup> It is possible that hold signs were more often used by teachers than pupils, though the evidence of the books does not give any clear support to the idea.

In examining a pair of scribes the comparison of identical chords is far more revealing than single letters, since the way a scribe writes groups of letters will be far more idiosyncratic than the way he handles single ones. In a simple text hand a parallel to this practice would be in comparing words common to both samples, and the equivalent in tablature is the recurrence of specific chords.

Some scribes always use the same terminations for the end of a piece, and some, quite clearly, do not. Some on the other hand use the same termination for one period of their copying, and then change to another style. This is one of the few purely decorative aspects of the scribe's work, and can sometimes almost become a paraph. Terminal flags or fermate may also become something of a 'signature' but are more difficult to prove as fermate do not offer a great deal of scope for scribal idiosyncrasies. Repeat marks were also less formalized than they have become today, and can have quite a large range of types from the simple line with dots, to a more decorative pattern, sometimes including the word *bis* or a figure '2'.

Highly idiosyncratic hands such as the scribe in example 38 are very rare before about 1640. This scribe has developed a distinctive 'e', though a similar form appears in some late seventeenth-century French manuscripts.

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<sup>47</sup> See Glossary, p.xxv.


<sup>48</sup> See *Myntshall*, *Board*, *Ballet*, *Hirsch* and other sources.

ex. 38: Scribe of the Hender Roberts lute book

The overall layout or duct is the most important aspect of any hand—the complete appearance and the habits of the scribe are far more revealing than isolated letters: letters that look similar at first often prove not to be so when the examination steps back from details. A scribe has a certain expectation of how a page of tablature should look—he may prefer to have the page looking clean, uniform and spacious as in the work of Henry Sampson in example 39.

ex. 39: From the hand of Henry Sampson, c1610.  
Note the white space between the bottom of the stave and the top of the flags

or he may prefer to cover the paper, leaving no obvious white space as in example 40.

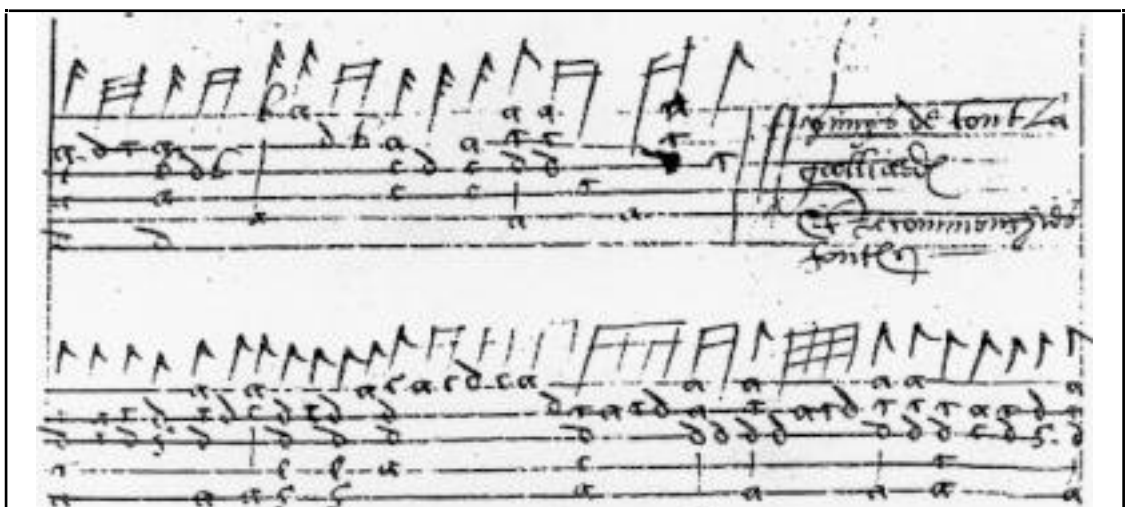


**ex. 40:** from the hand of Margaret Board. The scribe not only fills the white space, but also allows the flags to overlap the stave above

Margins may be important to the scribe and carefully observed by keeping extraneous matter such as titles within the confines of a self-imposed block as the scribe of example 41 has done by confining the title within the margins of the staves, leaving a clean border around each page of music.

How each piece is displayed on the page, whether the last bar would be squeezed in or put on a new line, what line-extensions look like if they are used, whether lines always end with a complete bar or not, whether extra staves have been drawn in at the foot of the page, and how a scribe corrects his own mistakes have their own place in a hierarchy when examining a hand.

The examination of the slant of the hand applies not simply to the overall duct, but to each separate component which comprises the hand. The barlines, for instance, may show a different slant from the tablature letters, and the titles may have a different slant again.



**ex. 41:** *Stowe389*, the hand of Raphe Bowle, 1558. The title on the first line remains within the hand-drawn margins here, though other scribes do not always define their limits so clearly.

A hand can change with the age of the scribe, and may be affected by the onset of arthritis or failing eyesight, or may become more mature if the original sample was written by a young scribe.

The speed at which a sample is written can affect—sometimes drastically—the overall duct, and angulation particularly becomes more pronounced as the speed of writing increases. Jane Pickeringe's hand slants increasingly to the right as the book (*Pickeringe*) progresses and she writes faster. For the most part in these manuscripts, the music is written by amateur scribes, often petty gentry or their sons and daughters. They are not concerned with speed as were the scribes of professionally copied texts such as biblical commentaries, but are copying music for their own use and have a different set of priorities in copying. Most amateur scribes take a great deal of care when copying, since they had the leisure time to do so, and they may have wanted to display their ability to write just as much as to make a book which would be pleasing to own and use, though even the neatest copying can be corrected by the master who set the work.<sup>49</sup> Care in preparation is typical of many forms of pastime practised by the leisured classes, and is reflected in many forms of surviving literature and handcraft, such as quilting or the sewing of samplers. On the other hand, the occurrence of a professional scribe who takes particular care with the appearance of his book is fairly rare.

The assumption is very common that a neat and uniform hand must have been written by a master, even though there are numerous examples available to disprove this theory. Many scholars still advance this theory,<sup>50</sup> despite samples of John Dowland's hand and that of Richard Mynshall, both professional musicians, whose tablature hands are two of the untidiest in the repertory.

Fingering indications vary far less than grace signs during this period, and can generally be described very simply. Usually a scribe either uses all the fingering signs available to him, or none at all. Scribes who use only one sign are relatively rare. Graces on the other hand are usually the province of a single scribe who has invented or devised them to represent the embellishments that they commonly use. There are only three or four commonly used signs that appear in lute tablature, and a veritable cornucopia of others that were only used by single scribes. These are discussed in Chapter 6. Graces are by no means reliable as a means of identifying scribes. Most copying is precisely that: the exact reproduction of an exemplar and no more. Graces and other performing indications are added by the scribe or teacher at the playing stage, and if they appear in the exemplar they are likely to be transmitted intact by a future copyist. A scribe who normally heavily graces his music will not necessarily grace every source in which he copies, but is likely to do so only in sources from which he expects to play.

Secondary scribes may provide a further source of information to link or disprove apparent links between two manuscripts. If the compilation of a manuscript is shared in any way by more than one scribe, then none of those scribes can be considered in isolation.

Table 16 provides an outline methodology for examining scribes. Apart from minutiae, the overall duct remains the most important single aspect of scribal identification, since many of these minor features can change or be changed by the scribe.

<sup>49</sup> e.g. in *Sampson* : Scribe A corrected by scribe B (?Richard Allison), and *Board* : corrected by John Dowland.

<sup>50</sup> e.g. Arthur Ness in the preface to Ward/Ness 1989.



**TABLE 16**  
IDENTIFYING LUTE SCRIBES

## General:

The identity of the scribe and his/her dates of birth and activity where known are all taken into account in addition to the foregoing material, as is any dating available for the manuscript(s) in question. Information regarding the binding, paper and ruling or printing of the staves with their measurements may also be relevant where this affects the scribe's hand or duct. A scribe may also habitually use one type of ruling.

## PEN:

- i Width of nib.
- ii Flow of ink, blotting.
- iii Hardness of nib.
- iv Angle of grip.
- v Pressure of writing.
- vi Overall consistency in type of nib.
- vii Ink: colour and consistency, any impurities.

## FLAGS:

- i Flagging System: *mensura germanica* or *gallica*, single flags or continuous, internal consistency.
- ii Shape of note heads, white and black notes where used.
- iii Where on the stems the single stroke beams come.
- iv Slant.
- v Multiple Strokes: group and single. Where on the stems do the beams start, and are they single or joined? Do the beams cross the stems, or are they neater? Is the whole flag drawn in one pen-stroke?
- vi Do the stems extend upwards or downwards into the staves, or are they confined to the white space between them?
- vii Dots: where are they in relation to the flags—any distinguishing features in placing or drawing?
- viii Are the flags all on one level, or do they dip up and down with the tablature notes?
- ix Distinguishing features: shape of the top of the flag, terminal flourishes, shape of joins if multiple strokes are joined. Does the multiple beam stroke return to the stem with each extra beam?
- x Speed of drawing stroke: fast/medium/slow.
- xi Rhythmic accuracy.

## Bar-Lines:

- i Slant—and comparison to flags and letters.
- ii Are the strokes within the system or overlapping?
- iii Are the strokes straight and consistent?
- iv Speed of drawing stroke.
- v Insertions—what method does the scribe use to indicate and insert missing notes or whole bars?

## Terminal Bars

- i Is the scribe using a single style of double bar?
- ii Is there a habitual sign for section ends as well as full closes?
- iii Use of a distinctive fermata.

## LETTERS:

- i Style model (ie: Italic/Secretary/Court)—are there exceptions or contaminations to this model, are the forms internally consistent within the sample?
- ii Position in relation to system lines.
- iii Slant—and comparison to bar-lines and flags.
- iv Distinctive flourishes or particular letters which are a feature of the hand.
- v Corrections.
- vi Pitch and placing of letters in relation to other letters and bar-lines.
- vii Do all letters have the same minim size?
- viii Do higher letters lose consistency in size and shape?
- ix Descenders on h and g—where do they curve towards at termination?
- x k—direction of terminal stroke.
- xi Does the f resemble the flag shape for a semiquaver?
- xii Do all the letters close round where they are meant to?
- xiii Deviations from model formation: a b f h k l m—all one stroke. c d e g i—two strokes.
- xiv Possible occupation or age of the scribe, based on the overall appearance and speed/accuracy of writing. (i.e.: does the copyist appear to be a professional scribe, is the hand very immature, could problems in letter formation be due to age or an unfamiliar script, could the scribe be using the source as a notebook to jot down ideas, as in the case of some fragments (see Chapter 3)?)
- xv Added text—Additions made to the work of one scribe by another, such as corrections, hold signs, and graces. Also considered here are any intrusions which the scribe under examination may have made into the work of another scribe.

xvi	Alignment strokes—lines drawn to align simultaneous notes which are separated by several lines on the tablature.
TITLES:	
i	Model script.
ii	Neatness and consistency.
iii	Quantity and accuracy of information.
iv	Same hand as music/corrections/graces.
v	Scribal paraphs, colophons, and holographs.
PLAYER/SCRIBE:	
Lute:	
i	Number of courses.
ii	Tuning(s) used.
iii	Bass course tunings if used.
Graces:	
i	Which ones are used, and is their interpretation clear, are they graces in use by other scribes?
ii	Neatness, accuracy of placing.
iii	Consistency of usage.
iv	Written in the same hand as music/titles or not.
Fingering	
i	How much is indicated.
ii	Is it consistently indicated in the same situations?
Overall Information:	
i	Quantity and reliability in either the accuracy of the music or the ascriptions.
ii	Does the type and quality of the information reflect the purpose of the source?
iii	Anything extraneous to the basic understanding of the music.
iv	His reasons for writing.
Overall hand or duct:	
i	The weight of the writing.
ii	Paper quality related to hand weight—whether fibres have been lifted by the nib.
iii	Overall appearance—shake/wobble, consistency in formation/size.
iv	Consistency in slant.
v	General size in relation to other hands.
vi	Hold signs—these are not ornaments, but part of the duct of the hand.
vii	Do lines always end with a full bar?
viii	Does the scribe write within a notional block, or does he write right to the edges of the page?
ix	Does he always remain within the confines of the ruled staff, or does he extend lines to complete bars?
x	Does he calculate the space required for each piece accurately?
xi	Display: are there any purely decorative elements?
Slant or angulation	
i	Overall direction of slant.
ii	Exceptions to the overall slant
SECONDARY SCRIBES:	
i	Information provided about the primary scribe by the presence of a known secondary hand. (John Dowland appears to have taught Margaret Board, as he wrote one piece into the Margaret Board Lute Book, and corrected her copying.)
ii	When comparing two hands, do any of the secondary scribes associated with the hand under consideration appear in other sources, associated in the same way?