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The Inspiration



was inspired to put this history together after seeing the restoration of an old Wyvern fountain pen on *The Repair Shop* TV programme. My researches revealed a wealth of interesting information. I hope you enjoy it.

The main flaw with quills and pens with no ink reservoir is that they must be constantly dipped in ink to write or draw. Because of that, they can very easily stain the surface on which they write. The fountain pen is the first solution for these problems. It has a reservoir in its body that holds water-based liquid ink for writing. This ink passes through a feed to the nib under the influence of gravity and capillary action. A fountain pen can be filled with ink in different ways, depending on how it is built: with a pipette or syringe, with its own filling mechanism that works like a piston or by placing a cartridge filled with ink inside its body. Some rare models hold ink tablets that are dissolved in water and then poured into the fountain pen.

Timeline

The earliest mention of a pen with an ink reservoir is from the year 973. Ma'ād al-Mu'izz, the caliph of the Maghreb region of Northwest Africa, asked for a pen that, when used, would keep his hands clean and would not leave as much mess as standard pens and quills of the day. His wish was fulfilled with a pen that held ink inside and which could be held upside-down without spilling, but we don't know precisely how this pen worked or even what it looked like.

There is some evidence that a working fountain pen was constructed and used during the Renaissance by artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci.



The next mention of a pen with an inner reservoir came from the 17th century when German inventor Daniel Schwenter invented a pen made from two quills: one quill was placed inside the other; it held the ink and was closed with a cork. Ink left the reservoir through a small hole which led to a nib.

Samuel Pepys (1633 - 1703) is famous for his diaries, but he also enjoyed a successful career as a naval administrator and member of parliament. He mentioned a metal pen "to carry ink" in his writings.

Close-up of traditional fountain pen with an iridium nib. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

Page URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fountain_pen_writing_(literacy).jpg
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In the 19th century, standard pens were improved with the mass production of cheap steel pen nibs. After centuries of writing with quills dipped in ink, people in the 1800s began embracing fountain pens with internal ink reservoirs filled using an eyedropper. In 1827, Romanian inventor Petrache Poenaru received a patent from the French government for a fountain pen with a barrel made from a large swan quill. In America in 1848, Azel Storrs Lyman patented a fountain pen with a 'method of supplying ink to pens from a reservoir in the handle'.

These were not the only patents for fountain pens of that time, but they needed three inventions to become popular: an iridium-tipped gold nib, hard rubber, and free-flowing ink (early fountain pens didn't understand the role that air pressure plays in the operation of pens). The first fountain pen to have all this was made in the 1850s.

By 1888, Waterman, a former insurance salesman, was selling 5,000 pens a year. Sales took off and climbed to 1,000 pens a day by the time of his death in 1901. In 1905, the company became the first pen manufacturer to rivet a clip onto its pen caps to be easily carried right side up in a pocket. Two years later, the Waterman company introduced a "safety" fountain pen that could be carried in any position, even upside down, without spilling any of its ink. Until 1908, fountain pens tended to leak because they didn't have an airtight cap. The Waterman safety pen, incorporating a screw-on cap and an inner cap providing a seal around the nib, neatly solved this problem.

The game-changer

Many fountain pen companies were doing reasonably well financially until 1938 when a Hungarian Laszlo Biro inventor introduced his solution to avoid messy hands: the biro. It had a profound effect on the fountain pen industry, such that today, fountain pens are often treated as luxury goods and sometimes as status symbols.

A Parker pen is one of the go-to brands when it comes to fountain pens, but they are not alone. The Swiss-made Caran d'Ache Ecridor takes some beating with its wow factor, amazing handling and characteristically Teutonic attention to detail. Another one to look out for is the Kingsman edition of Conway Stewart's Churchill pen.

There are numerous manufacturers to choose from. There now follows a brief storyline about a selection of British and foreign fountain pen companies. Some companies are not mentioned - such as Wordsworth & Black, Pelikan, Ingram, Aurora, Faber-Castell, and Visconti. I am sure there may be more, and I apologise for any omissions.

Conway Stewart

Conway Stewart & Company Ltd is a British former manufacturing company of writing implements, founded in 1905 by entrepreneurs Frank Jarvis and Thomas Garner in London. They took a great risk in leaving their secure jobs to start a new enterprise reselling fountain pens made by other manufacturers and imported pens from the United States. The company became notable for its fountain pens, although, later on, it also produced ballpoint pens. The 1950s provided the last of the great Conway Stewart models. The company stagnated through the 1960s as the market turned relentlessly towards the disposable ballpoint. The company persevered in trying to keep up with the market trends with their ballpoint pen and also by launching the 106, a cartridge pen mounted with a semi-hooded nib. In the 1960s, the company was sold and relocated to Wales, from where the last pen rolled off their production floor in 1975. Conway Stewart was placed in receivership in 2014, with its stocks and assets acquired by Bespoke British Pens Limited. Since then, it has owned the rights to the brand and now sells a wide range of fountain pens under the "Conway Stewart" name.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and The Duke of Edinburgh were presented with two Conway Stewart pens from "The Gold Collection" to mark their Golden Wedding Anniversary. British Prime Minister Tony Blair presented Russian President Putin with a Conway Stewart Churchill Burgundy Fountain pen on a state visit to Russia, and French President Jacques Chirac was given a Brown Marble Churchill to celebrate his 70th birthday in 2002. Conway Stewart was the official pen chosen by the British Government for the G8 Summit, at which Prime Minister Blair presented a Conway Stewart No 58 set to each of the G8 world leaders. President Bush and President Clinton both owned Conway Stewart pens.

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British Pens and Cumberland Pencils/Williams Mitchell

Joseph Gillott was a Sheffield-based working cutler. In 1821, he moved to Birmingham, where he found employment in the steel toy trade, the technical name for the manufacture of steel buckles, chains and light ornamental steel-work. In about 1830, he turned his attention to the manufacture of steel pens by machinery, and in 1831 patented a process for placing elongated points on pen nibs. He also devised improved modes of preparing the metal for the action of the press, tempering, cleansing, and polishing, and, in short, many little details of manufacture necessary to give them the required flexibility to enable them to compete with the quill pen.

In 1920, Hinks Wells & Co and William Mitchell came together at the Pedigree Works in Birmingham and founded a new company called *British Pens*, which added *Cumberland Pencils* in 1921. After World War II, they began to produce ballpoint pens. In 1961, British Pens acquired the pen businesses of Perry & Co. and other manufacturers like John Mitchell and Joseph Gillott. As part of the Twinlock Group, its name was changed to *Cumberland Graphics* in 1975. Byron Head, of William Mitchell, acquired British Pens in 1982, renaming it *William Mitchell Ltd.* The company still makes pens in the West Midlands and is now part of *The Rical Group*, a privately owned group of manufacturing companies specialising in the subcontract manufacture of pressed and die-casted metal components.

Wyvern Pen Company



The Wyvern Pen Company was named after the winged, two-legged dragon with a barbed tail that appears in the city's coat-of-arms. Production at the Vulcanite Works began as far back as 1896 and continued until the company's demise in 1955. Despite being one of the oldest British pen companies, and producing a variety of high-quality pens, Wyvern does not have a strong following these days. From the 1880s onwards, the company went through various stages of development, importing pens, buying them in from outside contractors, assembling pens from parts and finally going into full production. By the late 1920s, they had their own nib plant, and as well as producing their own-branded nibs bearing the Wyvern logo, they made nibs for other manufacturers.

You may have bought a Wyvern without realising it, as they made pens for other companies and produced a great many promotional pens.

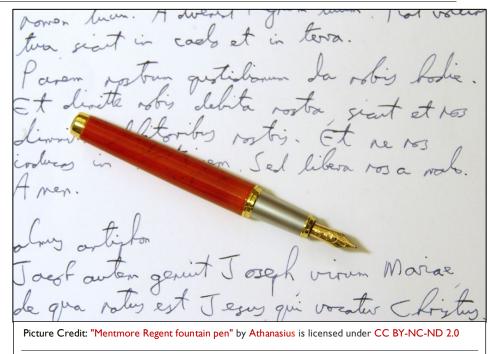
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Mentmore/Platignum

Mentmore pens were made in Hackney, in the east end of London, between the 1920s and the mid-1950s. They were attractive, exceptionally well-made, and were very popular, especially immediately post-war to the mid-1950s. Mentmore also manufactured for several other distributors using the brand name *Spot*.

Mentmore Manufacturing Company started life in 1919 and was named after its first premises in Mentmore Terrace, Hackney. The company was an innovator - it invented the first self-filling fountain pen, the retractable ballpoint pen, the felt tip pen and the spy pens in 1939. In 1925, the first replacement nib unit was developed - a revolution in pen design.

The Platignum name was introduced,



and the slogan 'As good as gold', reflecting the use of stainless steel for the first time, came into being. Around the same time, Mentmore started to use the name *Platignum Pen Company*, and products carrying the brand name *Platignum* were introduced. In 1981, the business changed its name to *Platignum*. After various acquisitions of its own, the business itself was acquired by Adare Printing Group in 1997. A British Classic, *Platignum* took a brief break from production but was relaunched in 2007 – to much applause from all.

Montblanc



Inspired by the mechanical innovations he witnessed during his travels to America, German technician August Eberstein teamed up with Hamburg merchant Alfred Nehemias and entrepreneur Claus Johannes Voss to bring his ideas to life. The business (initially trading as the Simplo Filler Pen Co) produced a line of writing instruments with non-leaking technology that would change writing history forever, thus laying the foundations for Montblanc, the internationally renowned luxury margue for fountain pens. The business created an early premium-quality writing instrument, with a sliding barrel filler named Rouge et Noir around 1909, followed by ten different safety pens between 1911 and 1916. In 1910. following changes to the team, the Montblanc name was adopted for the growing company, inspired by the highest mountain in Europe that would symbolise the founders' vision of excellence and their pursuit of performance, innovation and the finest craftsmanship. The six-point white star, representing the six snow-covered glaciers of the majestic mountain, would become the company's emblem and has been featured on every Montblanc writing instrument ever since.2

¹ Source: Graces Guide to British Industrial History, HERE.

² Source: Cult Pens, HERE.

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Onoto

Onoto is a British brand of luxury fountain pens and accessories. Initially manufactured by the printing giant De La Rue from 1905 until 1958, the brand was relaunched as "The Onoto Pen Company Limited", based in Coney Hall, London in 2005. De La Rue had manufactured fountain pens for most of the later part of the 19th century. In 1881, it produced the Anti-Stylograph, pre-dating Lewis Waterman's first pen by three years. The Onoto pen was invented in 1905 by George Sweetser, a mechanical engineer (as well as being a roller-skating champion and a famous female impersonator on the vaudeville circuit), who offered his invention to Evelyn De La Rue - the eldest son of Thomas De La Rue – who immediately accepted. Shortly afterwards, De La Rue launched a self-filling fountain pen that was guaranteed not to leak because it had a cut-off valve. The writing instrument, called the Onoto Patent Self-



filling Pen, also had a patented "plunger filler" system that drew ink into the pen using a vacuum created by the down-stroke of a piston. In 1915 De La Rue launched the Onoto Valveless. The Onoto ink pencil and the Onoto Safety 'Receder' (with retractable nib) followed in 1921.

While Sweetser carried on skating into his 80s, *Onoto the Pen* gradually developed from the original black chased vulcanite model into its stylish marbled acrylic and resin versions. By the 1920s, the range had grown into a vivid collection of distinct fountain pens with a global reputation. In 1958, pen production moved to Australia.

Since the closure of the original De la Rue factory, there has been a loyal following for Onoto pens among collectors and connoisseurs of fine writing instruments. Many original Onoto pens have been resold for many times their original price. In May 2005, a new company named The Onoto Pen Company was launched on the London Stock Exchange. It has introduced many limited-edition historical collections of fountain pens made in Britain. The company now exists to preserve the traditional craftsmanship techniques of pen-masters.

Numerous notable people have used Onoto pens throughout history, including Field Marshal Douglas Haig and Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Other famous names include Florence Nightingale, Edgar Wallace and Natsume Soseki, the foremost Japanese novelist of Emperor Meiji era (1868-1912).³

Parker Pen Company

The Parker Pen Company is an American manufacturer of luxury pens, founded in 1888 by George Safford Parker in Janesville, Wisconsin, United States. In 2011, the Parker factory at Newhaven, East Sussex, England, was closed, and its production was transferred to Nantes, France.

George Parker had previously been a John Holland Gold Pen Company sales agent. He received his first fountain pen-related patent in 1889. In 1894, Parker had received a patent on his *Lucky Curve* fountain pen feed, which was claimed to draw excess ink back into the pen barrel when the pen was not in use. The company's first successful pen, released in 1899, was the Parker *Jointless*. The *Lucky Curve* feed was used in various forms until 1928. From the 1920s to the 1960s, before the development of the ballpoint pen, Parker was either number one or number two in worldwide writing instrument sales. In 1931, Parker created *Quink* (quick drying ink), eliminating the necessity for blotting. In 1941, the company developed the most widely used model of fountain pen in history (over \$400 million worth of sales in its 30-year history), the Parker 51. In 1954, Parker released the *Jotter* ballpoint pen with its original nylon body and inverted "V" clip. The *Jotter* would sell over 750 million units during its history. In 1955, the company introduced its *Liquid Lead* pencil, which used liquid graphite to write like a pen.

³ The Onoto history is largely compiled from Wikipedia, HERE.

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Unfortunately, the Scripto company had introduced a similar product called Fluidlead a few months previously. To avoid a costly patent fight, the companies agreed to share their formulas. A management buyout in 1986 moved the company's headquarters to Newhaven, East Sussex, which was the original location of the Valentine Pen Company previously acquired by Parker. A succession of sales and purchases followed, culminating in Parker abandoning its traditional retail outlets in North America to move the Parker line to upscale "luxury" retailers.4

Sheaffer

today Sheaffer Pen Corporation is a manufacturer of writing instruments, particularly luxury fountain pens. The company was founded by Walter A. Sheaffer in Fort Madison, Iowa, USA and incorporated in 1913 to exploit his invention of a lever-filling fountain pen.

Starting as a backroom business with only seven employees, the company has grown into a top designer and manufacturer of writing instruments and creative tools. In 1907, Walter Sheaffer used his prior expertise as a jeweller and aimed to create a device that would allow users to fill a pen with ink much easier, cleaner and aesthetically pleasing than was then available. In 1912, he dedicated his life savings to his idea of a pen-filling apparatus that initiates a lever system. By the 1930s, Sheaffer pens had solidified itself as a leader in the luxury pen market. The fountain pens were advertised as the pen that "fills instantly from any ink-well, with one touch of a finger." In 2014, Sheaffer Pen Company was purchased by AT Cross, and it has continued to grow and adapt to the changing market while holding fast to the original principles of its founder.

When George H Walker Bush was inaugurated as the 41 st President of the United States, a friend presented him with a Sheaffer sterling silver Nostalgia fountain pen engraved with the initials GHWB.5

Picture Credit: "Sheaffer's Pen-Pencil, c. 1920s." by Halloween HJB is marked with CC0 1.0 $\,$

For Christmas?

—a Sheaffer Pen and Pencil

Sheaf Factor Sheaf Factor

⁴ The Parker Pen history is largely compiled from Wikipedia, HERE.

⁵ The Sheaffer Pen history is largely compiled from Sheaffer, HERE.

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Waterman

company of luxury fountain pens based in Paris. It was established in 1884 in New York by Lewis Edson Waterman and is one of the few remaining first-generation fountain pen companies. Since 2000, it has been owned by the American group Newell Brands subsidiary Sanford L.P. From the beginning, competition in the fountain pen industry was fierce, both in the marketplace and the courtroom. Despite later company literature that depicts Lewis E. Waterman as a golden-hearted innocent, all evidence indicates that he was a tough, savvy, and innovative businessman. In 1899, the L.E. Waterman Company developed the "spoon Feed" system, which prevented ink overflow. It led to the company receiving the gold medal of excellence at the "Exposition Universelle" in Paris in 1900.

The Waterman Pen Company is a major manufacturing



After L.E. Waterman's death in 1901, the company really took off. Under the leadership of Waterman's nephew, Frank D. Waterman, the Waterman Pen Company expanded aggressively worldwide. While Waterman introduced its share of innovations, the company's main selling point was always quality and reliability. In 1905, Waterman patented their first permanently attached pen clip, allowing a pen to be held directly in a pocket. In 1908, Waterman released their first retractable-nib "safety" pen.

As the 20th century wore on, Waterman's conservatism allowed its younger and more innovative competitors to gain market share—Parker, Sheaffer, and Wahl-Eversharp in particular. By the later 1920s, Waterman attempted to catch up; it continued to struggle through and beyond World War II before finally shutting down in 1954. Waterman's French subsidiary, Waterman-JIF (Jules-Isidore Fagard), later Waterman S.A., continued to prosper and eventually absorbed the remaining parts of the American company and its British arm. Early Waterman pens were made of hard rubber and were equipped with 14K gold nibs. From early on, precious metal trim and overlays were offered. Many are still in use today, and their nibs are prized for their smoothness and flexibility.6

Caran d'Ache



Caran d'Ache is Switzerland's sole manufacturer of pencils, fine-arts materials and luxury writing instruments, and the symbol of technical excellence, precision, reliability and innovation. Made in workshops in Geneva since 1915, each design combines expertise, superior quality and recognised know-how. Elegance, refinement and creativity for outstanding products to give you a unique drawing, painting and writing experience.

The company was established as "Fabrique Genevoise de Crayons" in Geneva in 1915 when Arnold Schweitzer purchased the Ecridor Pencil Factory. When Arnold Schweitzer took over the company in 1924, he renamed it after Caran d'Ache, the nickname of the French satiric political cartoonist Emmanuel Poiré (who in turn took his

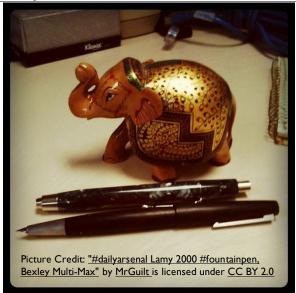
name from карандаш (karandash), the Russian word for pencil). In 1974, the company moved its production to Thonex, a municipality of the Canton of Geneva. The company has been known to include precious diamonds in the pens, and for that, in 1999, the *Modernista Diamonds* pen was included in the Guinness Book of Records as "the most expensive pen in the world".⁷

⁶ The Waterman Pen history is largely compiled from Wikipedia, HERE.

⁷ The Caren d'Ache Pen history is largely compiled from Wikipedia, HERE.

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Lamy



The family business of Lamy was started by C Joseph Lamy in Heidelberg (as the Orthos Fullfederhalter-Fabrik) in 1930 and is still operating as an independent family firm in Heidelberg today. Up until then, Lamy had worked as an export and branch manager for an American writing instrument manufacturer (Parker). Lamy was a pioneer in the use of moulded synthetic plastics to make their products.

The LAMY 27 fountain pen, which with its innovative *Tintomatik* system ensured a smooth, clean flow of ink, symbolised the birth of the Lamy writing instrument brand and achieved the firm's breakthrough on the market in 1952. In 1957, the company moved to its present location in the Heidelberg district of Wieblingen. In autumn 1966, the LAMY 2000 was launched. This new fountain pen is revolutionary in several respects: unlike writing instruments from other brands, it featured no material surplus or design gadgets. Based on the Bauhaus principle (*form follows function*) it focuses on practical

function and thus lays the foundation for the clear design language which still forms the basis for all Lamy writing instruments. The Lamy design ethos can be seen in all of their ranges, from the *abc* children's pencil through to the *dialog3*, the world's only retractable fountain pen with a retractable clip. Lamy has won more international design awards than any other writing instrument maker. Innovative design is matched by high production values, resulting in products which are a joy to own and use, year after year.⁸



Picture: Author: Ilkin Santak Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

From left to right: I. Pilot Justus 95 (14k gold F nib), 2. Pelikan Souverän M1000 (18k gold F nib), 3. Montblanc Meisterstück 149 (18k gold M nib), 4. Pilot Heritage 912 (14k gold FA nib), 5. Parker Duofold Centennial (18k gold F nib), 6. Sheaffer Snorkel Admiral (14k gold F nib), 7. Lamy Dialog 3 (14k gold F nib), 8. Welty (14k gold F nib), 9. Parker Sonnet (18k gold F nib), 10. Conway Stewart 55 (14k gold M Duro nib), 11. Waterman Thorobred (14k gold F nib), 12. Mabie Todd Swan 3220 (14k gold M nib)

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⁸ The Lamy Pen history is excerpted from Lamy, HERE and Wikipedia, HERE.

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Links to Further Information

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Samuel D. Wonders

Zebra (pen manufacturer)

Xezo

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Yard-O-Led