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## What is Pepys's diary and why is it special?

Samuel Pepys is best known for his diary. A diary is a book that you write in about what you've been doing each day.

Many people in the 17th century could not write, and only some people who did kept diaries. Pepys's diary is unusually long and full of unusual detail about everyday life. Samuel Pepys kept his diary for nine years, starting in January 1660. The diary was in six volumes. He stopped in May 1669, because he worried he was going blind and that writing the diary was making things worse. He wrote his diary in shorthand.

Pepys's diary is also unusual because it survived until today – most diaries didn't. He made special arrangements in his will for it to be kept with his other books in Magdalene College, Cambridge. The golden crest on the volumes is his coat of arms and motto. He added this to many of his books, to make them look impressive.



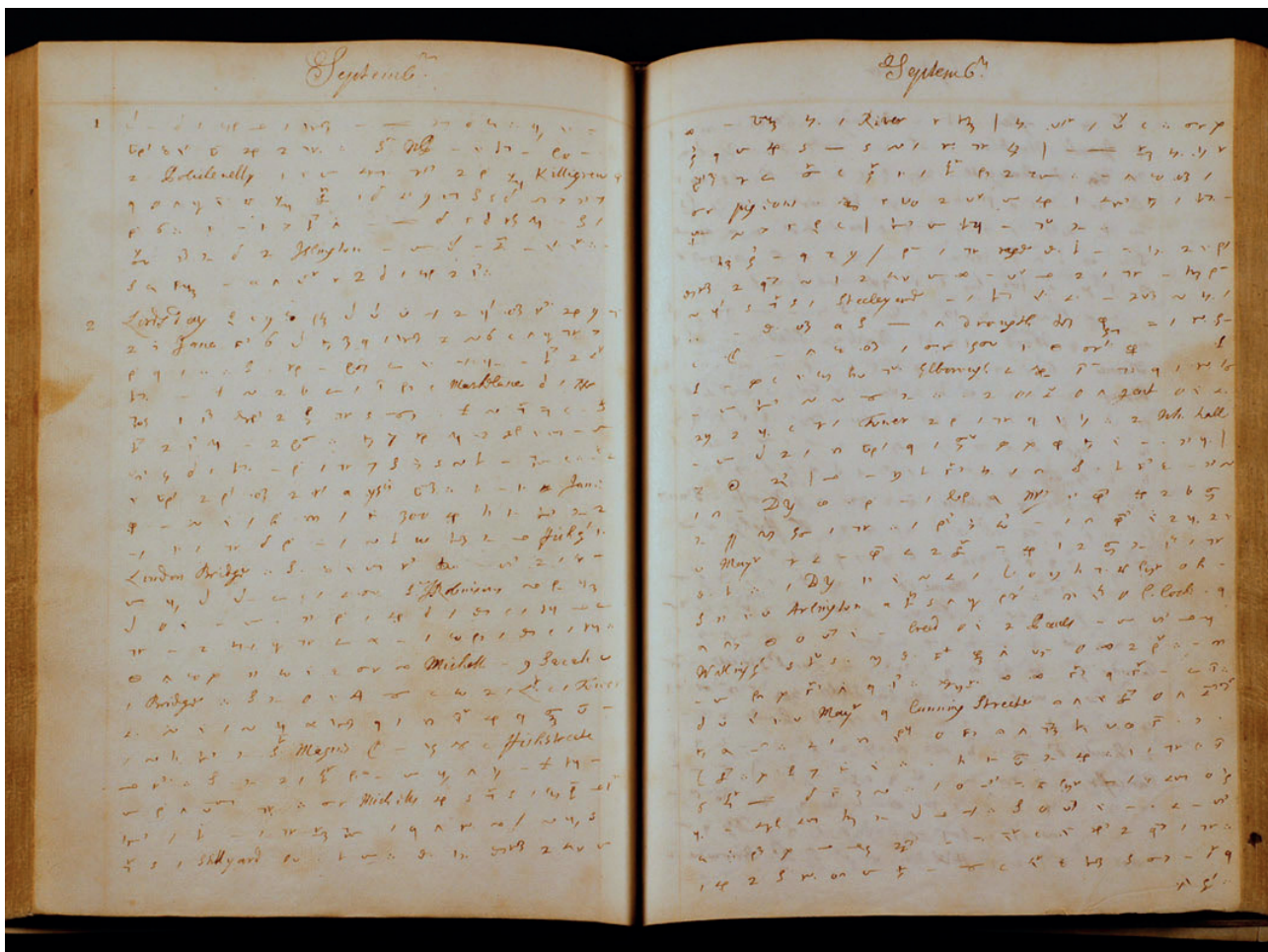


## How do we know the diary isn't made up?

Many events that Pepys wrote about were events he saw himself, first-hand. This makes his diary more likely to be an accurate report of what happened than if he had heard about events from someone else. We can check the details of what he says against other evidence, like artefacts, newspaper reports, and other people's diaries. When these sources agree on points – like how big the Great Fire was – it makes that version more likely to be right. However, it is worth remembering that Pepys writes about what he thought and felt, so the other people who were there might understand things differently and feel differently about events.

## How did Pepys write his diary?

Pepys wrote a diary entry describing every day. Sometimes he wrote on the day itself, and sometimes a few days later. Pepys wrote his diary using shorthand.



Samuel Pepys's diary, entry dated 2 September 1666, by permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge



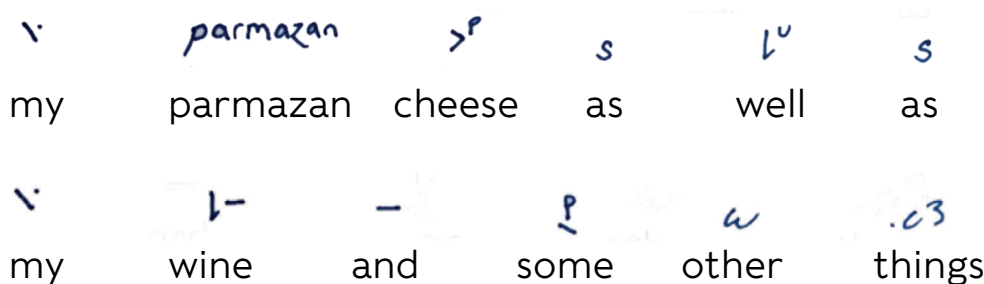
## What is shorthand?

Shorthand replaces letters with symbols that are quicker and easier to write. It also makes words very difficult to read for anyone who doesn't know that particular shorthand. Here is Pepys's entry in shorthand for 2 September 1666, the start of the Great Fire of London:

Pepys used a shorthand system called Tachygraphy (meaning 'quick writing'), which was invented by Thomas Shelton in the 1620s. It was not a secret code: this was one of the most popular shorthand systems and you could buy manuals on how to read it. However, writing in shorthand did help keep Pepys's diary entries secret from people who might come across the diary – especially his wife Elizabeth and his servants. He was often writing about things he did not want them to find out.

Writing in Shelton's system also meant that, after Pepys left his library to Magdalene College, it took over a hundred years for the diary to be read and finally published.

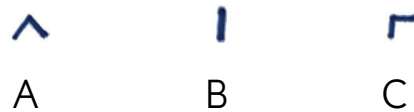
Here is the shorthand for the famous part of the diary where Pepys buries his cheese in the garden to protect it from the Great Fire (4 September 1666). He dug a hole and put in:



This might sound daft, but it was a sensible thing to do. Parmesan cheese was expensive and doing this also helped occupy Pepys's time while he waited to see if the fire would reach his house.

## How does shorthand work?

Shelton's system has a symbol for each letter of the alphabet. For example:



Unfortunately, it's a bit more complicated than that. Read on if you want more detail. Otherwise, see page 4 for an image and transcription of Pepys's shorthand used in the classroom activity.

First, some of the symbols are also used to stand for words, or clusters of letters. For example, the symbol – (a line which looks like a dash) means 'n' but also 'and' (like a sign that says 'Fish N Chips').

There are more symbols to learn for common words and also for common clusters of letters, like '-ing', which has a symbol that looks like the number 3.



To show vowels that come in the middle of words, you don't normally write the symbol for A, E, I, O, or U, but instead show the vowel by where you place the symbol for the letter that comes after it. Here are the vowel positions shown around the shorthand symbol for b:

a  
|  
e  
|  
i  
|  
o  
|  
u

This means that the same symbols mean different words depending on how they're positioned. For example, the symbol for 'h' is < and the symbol for 't' is <. So these combinations mean:

<      <<      <  
hat      hit      hut

Finally, Shelton's system involves cutting out letters that aren't sounded, or aren't strongly sounded, especially when two vowels are together. So in shorthand, 'book' would be spelt 'bok'; 'hate' would be spelt 'hat'; and 'noise' might be spelt 'nose'.

## Deciphering Pepys's shorthand: Passage from 'How did Samuel Pepys write his diary?'

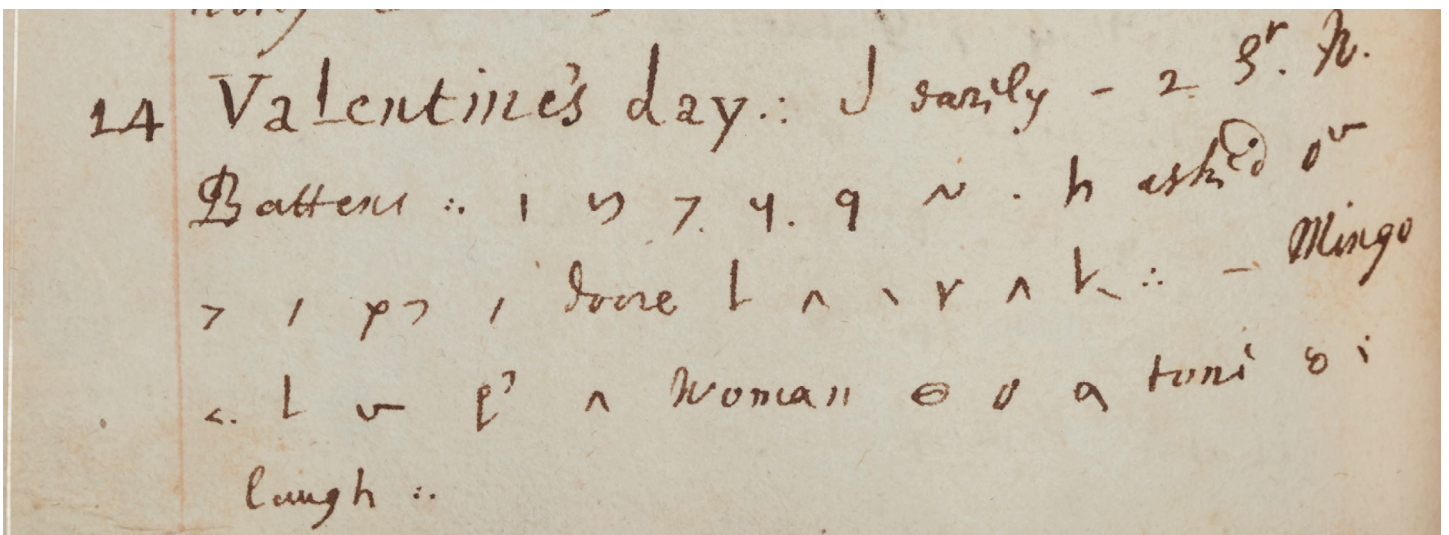
On 14 February 1661, Pepys wrote about a joke that was played on him.

On Valentine's day, there was a tradition that the first woman that a man saw became his valentine, and then he owed her a present. Men and women were very careful about who they saw first – they wanted a suitable valentine and/or a good present! Early that day, Pepys went next door to visit his neighbour, Sir William Batten. The person who let him in was an enslaved young man called Mingo (you can read more about him in the Teachers' guide to 1660s London). Mingo either had a deep voice or did a special squeaky one.

Pepys wrote:

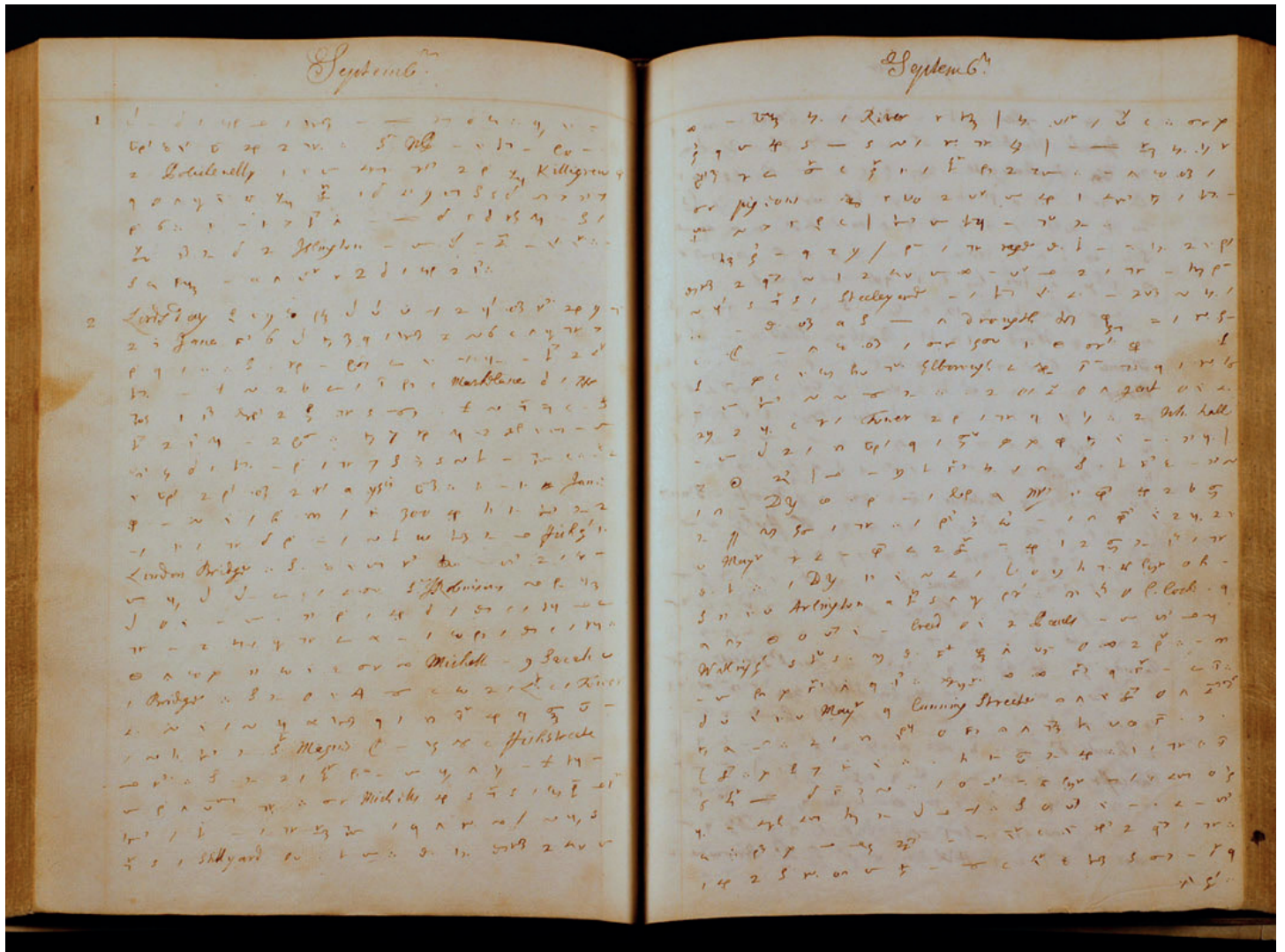
"14 **Valentine's day**. Up **eaerly** and to **Sir W. Battens**. But would not go in until I had **asked** whether they that opened the **doore** was a man or a woman. And **Mingo**, who was there, answered "A **Woman**", which with his **tone** made me **laugh**."

Here is what Pepys's shorthand looks like. In this diary entry, there is a lot of 'longhand' (normal English). In the copy above, those longhand words are typed in bold.

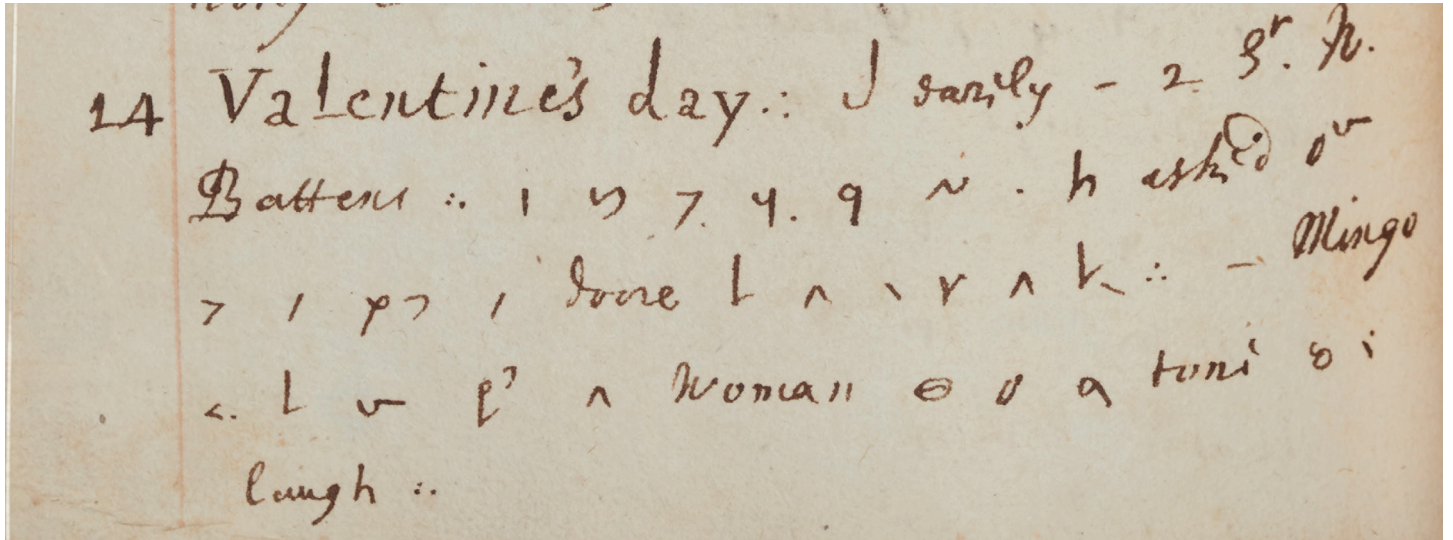




Samuel Pepys's diary, by permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge



Samuel Pepys's diary, entry dated 2 September 1666, by permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge



Samuel Pepys's diary, entry dated 14 February 1661, by permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge