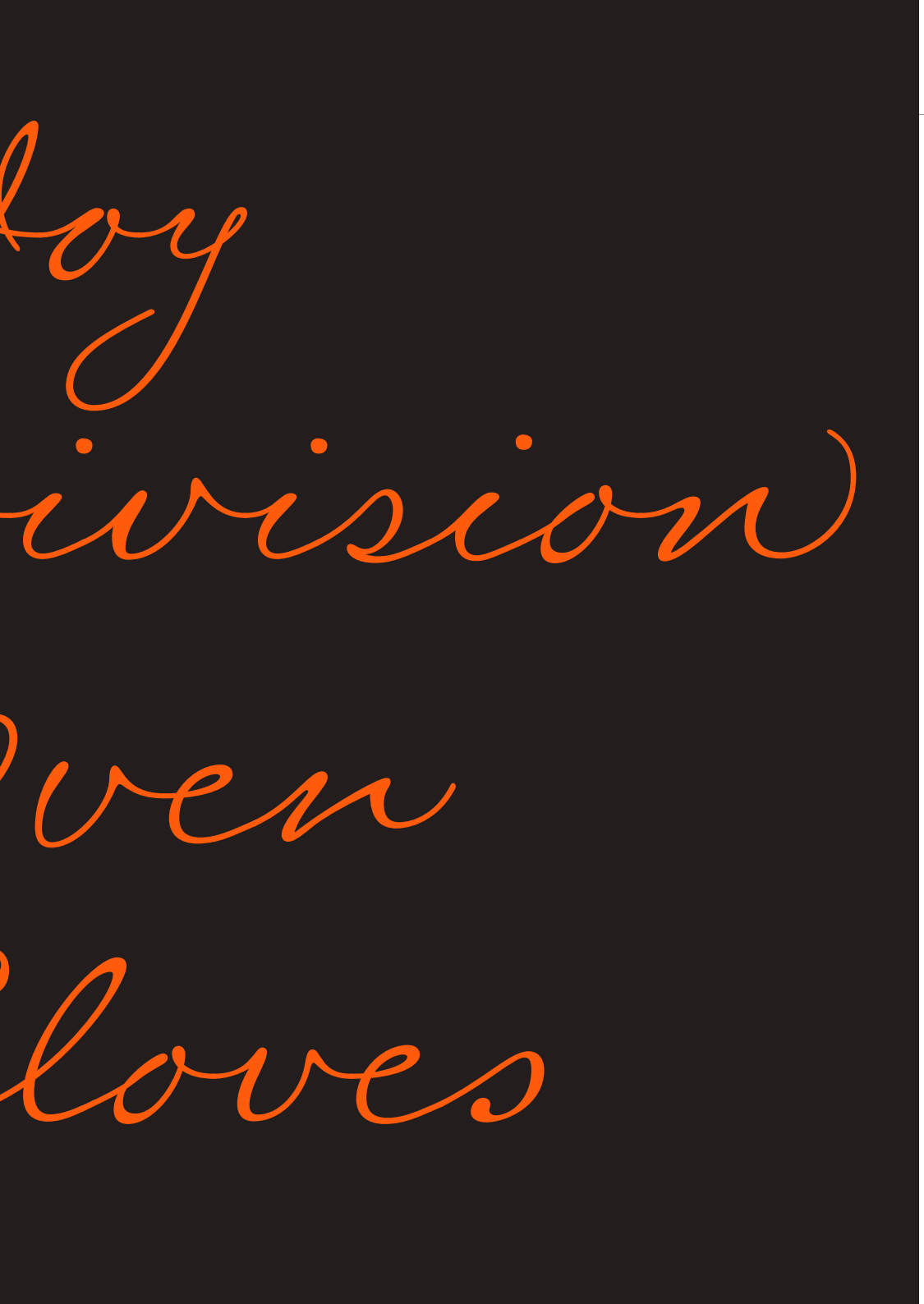
PROTIMIENT

A Type Specimin and Really Rather Long Account of the Creation of a Handwriting Font Called ...

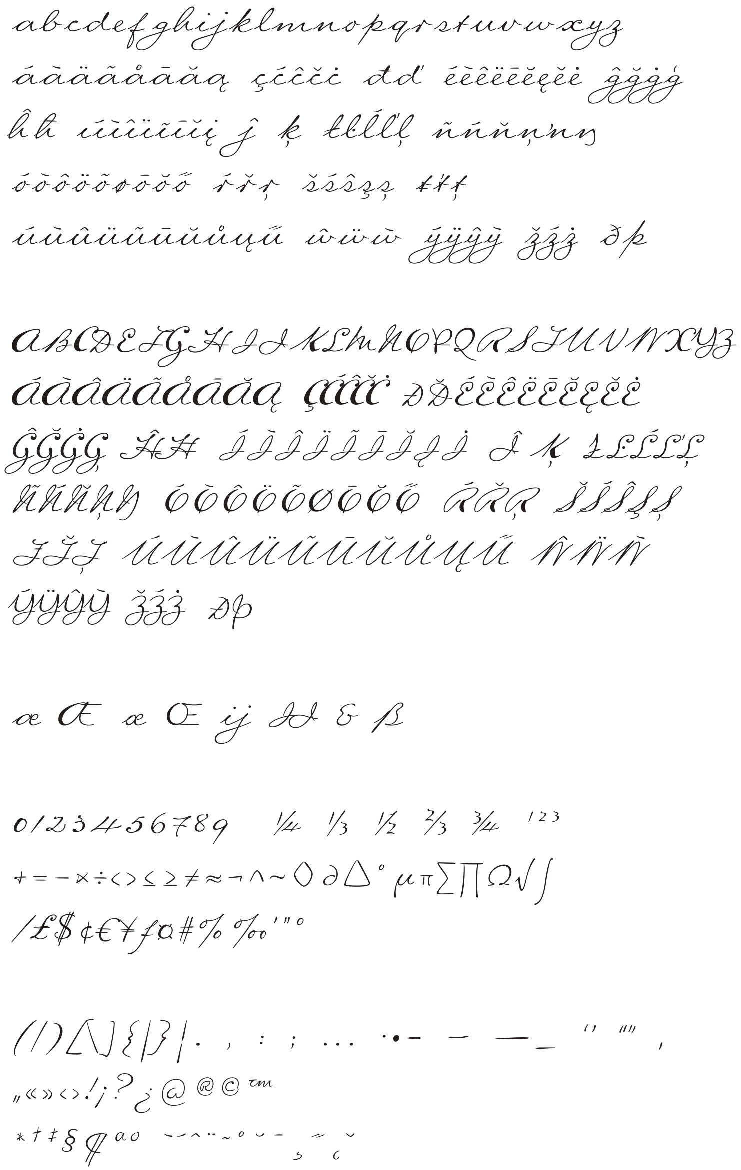
Stobart



Introduction

Stobart is a script font based on the characters written in a letter by Mr Henry Stobart, dated 1899. It is an exclusively OpenType font because of the complex contextual substitution needed to make the font appear as genuine as possible. It should be said that the font will work (as in function) in any application on any operating system that supports the OpenType font format. However, the font is intended for use in an application that has advanced OpenType support, and specifically support for the contextual alternate feature, such as Adobe's InDesign or Photoshop.

The Basic Character Set

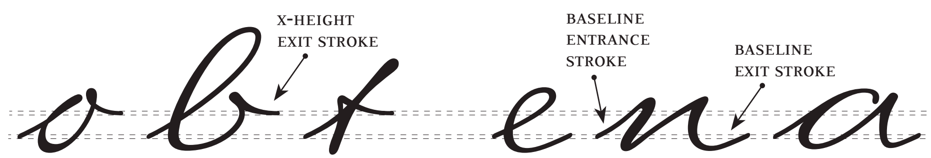


The Background

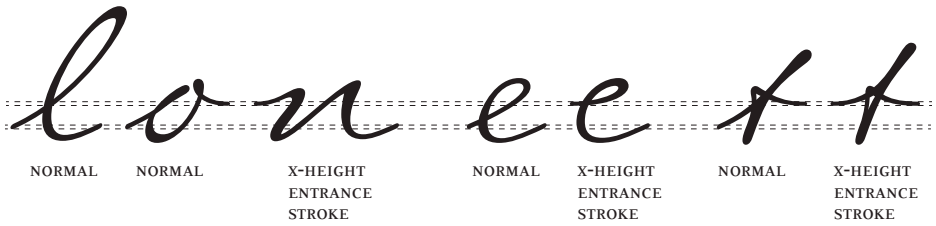
The first task was to digitise the basic upper and lower case alphabets. Fortunately, Mr Stobart had quite helpfully provided at least one instance of almost all of the lower case characters through out his letter, requiring very little of the logical extrapolation needed to work out the absent forms. The uppercase, as is to be expected, was not nearly as complete and required a lot more deduction (although Mr Stobart was considerate enough to provide many of the key letters needed to approximate the shape of their related forms).

While the uppercase may have been more demanding in terms of staying true to the authenticity of the script, the lowercase did produce an issue that would prove to be far more exacting in terms of the size of the font. During the digitisation of the script, it became apparent that the connection of certain letters to the following letter only ever occurred at the x-height.

Most of the lowercase had an exit stroke at or near the baseline and all of the letters had their entrance stoke at or near the baseline, but the exit stroke of the letters b, o, r, t, v and w always occurred at the x-height.



This meant that, for the letters to appear joined together, an additional set of the lowercase alphabet had to be created where the entrance strokes where all at the x-height and OpenType would be needed to swap a normal lowercase letter that had a low entrance stroke for one of the ones with a high entrance stroke.



Once the uppercase and the two lowercase alphabets were complete, it became time to create yet more sets of the lowercase alphabet to account for various contextual situations that required it. The first additional lowercase alphabet to be made was a set for letters to be inserted at the start of each word to create a more natural look and take away the prominent entrance stroke that does not normally occur in handwriting. Mr Stobart, being an obliging chap, made this one of the easier lowercase sets.

The next lowercase set to be made was one that would be used to substitute the letters at the end of a word,

again removing the prominent exit stroke of the last character in a word and make the word as a whole look more natural. This raised the issue of the letters with the high exits strokes again. Because the entrance stroke of each end-of-word letter had to connect to the second to last letter in the word, this meant that, in fact, two sets of letters had to be created: one with low entrance strokes at the baseline and one with high entrance strokes at the x-height to account for the letters b, o, r, t, v and w that only ever had high exit strokes.

There were now a total of five lowercase alphabets within the font: the “normal” one with low entrance strokes and low and high exit strokes; one with all high entrance strokes; one for the beginning of words with no entrance strokes and high and low exit strokes; one for the end of words with low entrance strokes and no exit strokes; and one with high entrance strokes with no exit strokes.

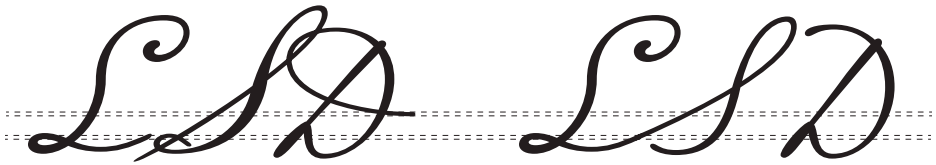
With the addition of the numerals, some mathematical operators, the punctuation and the other marks, the font was now practically complete but, after testing, several issues presented themselves. The first was the problem of two instances of the same letter appearing next to each other in a word (because the letters were identical, which, with the exception of impeccably neat handwriting, does not happen). This required the creation of yet another lowercase alphabet that would be used to replace the second letter in the pair.

NORMAL NORMAL NORMAL ALTERNATIVE

Another problem was with the uppercase. In original, Mr Stobart created several of the uppercase characters with extremely thick stems and these were appearing to be too heavy when the font was used in a titling or display situation. A second, partial set of uppercase letters were created with greatly slimmed stems to substitute the fat stemmed letters and better balance with the lowercase.

NORMAL TITLING ALTERNATE

The final issue to be addressed was that of the all uppercase setting. Because Mr Stobart had been writing a letter, and hence using normal prose, the uppercase forms worked perfectly with the lowercase but, when used together, such as when setting an acronym, they clashed horrendously with each other. This meant another uppercase alphabet had to be made containing far more subdued, conservative forms.



NORMAL ALL-CAP CONTEXTUAL ALTERNATES

The font now contained three different uppercase alphabets and six different lowercase totalling about 220 different letters. Then it came time to create the accented characters which, with the inclusion of the extended Latin character set, pushed the total number of glyphs in the font to over 1250. Quite a lot really.
And thus ends my part in the adventures of a set of letters originally created over a hundred years ago and a process and result that would almost certainly cause Mr Stobart to raise an eyebrow, if not completely freak him out. Enjoy.