

Institution: University of Sunderland		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: “ <i>The success of ‘Writing: Making Your Mark’ was due in large part to Professor Ewan Clayton</i> ”		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2014		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ewan Clayton	Professor of Design	2006-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: April 2017-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The British Library appointed Prof. Ewan Clayton as sole expert advisor to their major 2019 exhibition 'Writing: Making Your Mark' on the strength of his archival research on the history of writing and practice-based calligraphy research. His input fundamentally shaped the exhibition storyline, choice of exhibits and their interpretation, exhibition-related event programme and accompanying book. It was a critical and commercial success; more than 35,000 people visited the main exhibition in London, generating revenue of over £270,000, and 678,000 people visited satellite exhibitions across the UK. Critical response included 4-star reviews in <i>The Times</i>, <i>The Telegraph</i>, and <i>Time Out</i>. The Lead Curator says that “<i>In my view, the success of ‘Writing: Making Your Mark’ was due in large part to Professor Ewan Clayton.</i>”</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Ewan Clayton’s work at the University of Sunderland envisions one unified field of research for the study of physical writing where previously it has been split into the separate disciplines of palaeography, epigraphy, calligraphy, typography, document history, digital media and design. Clayton’s research, captured in written [R1] and artistic outputs [R2, R3] asks powerful questions about the past and future of writing. It earned him a role as consultant on the craft of writing in the Systems Science Laboratory at Xerox’s Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC), known for inventions like the concept of Windows, the Ethernet, and the graphical user interface underlying Apple products. His experience at PARC, particularly working with ethnologists, informed the approach he took in ‘Workspaces for Writing’ [R4], which explored the contribution that a craft perspective can make to historical palaeography.</p> <p>Involvement with technological, historical and craft perspectives on writing led to <i>The Golden Thread</i> [R1], a history of writing. <i>The Golden Thread</i> was the first comprehensive account to be written since the arrival of the world wide web. The book focuses primarily on the Roman alphabet and presents writing as a multi-modal ecology of forms and documents, co-evolving with social organisations, material culture and technology. It demonstrates that today’s understanding of the use of the written word should be historically grounded, with a wide sociocultural perspective beyond more limited perspectives such as ‘the history of the book’ or a ‘style history of letterforms’. This work tracks the course of writing from the collapse of classical antiquity into the high middle ages, through the Enlightenment, the Romantic movement and then the industrial revolution. It explores how artists in the twentieth century made substantial contributions to the physical representation of the written word and how the computer became transformed from a calculating device into a new writing tool in succession to the quill pen, the typewriter and the printing press. The work poses questions about the nature of literacy and the role played by material artefacts in the long human search to transform information into more lasting embodied wisdom, with the aim of contributing to shifting our cultural understanding of handwriting, particularly amongst the many who use new communication technologies, helping us understand their limitations as well as their possibilities.</p>		

Clayton also explores the position of calligraphy between the visual arts and writing. His three calligraphic works, *La Poetica Della Spazio Scritto – The Poetics of Written Space* [R2], aimed to find two different ways of creating space in getting space into calligraphic work using purely calligraphic means – the line and gesture. Two pieces asked how the writing line could be used; the third captured movement and space around writing when Clayton intervened into the wet ink with the palms and fingers of both hands as he wrote. This curiosity about the relationships between calligraphy, writing and visual arts continued in his illustrations for a new edition of *In Parenthesis* [R3]. This work explored how illustrations can reflect text, how calligraphic forms can be arranged on the page to reflect the sentiment of that text, and how the organisation of illustrations through a text can echo its imagery.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 Clayton, Ewan (2013) *The Golden Thread: The Story of Writing*. Atlantic Books, London.

R2 Clayton, Ewan (2010) *La Poetica Dello Spazio Scritto -The Poetics of Written Space*.

R3 Clayton, Ewan (2014) [Illustrations for In Parenthesis](#). The Folio Society, London.

R4 Clayton, Ewan (2006) Workspaces for Writing. In Gullick, M. *Pen in Hand: Medieval Scribal Portraits, Colophons and Tools*. Red Gull Press, Walkern.

Quality indicators

R1 received positive reviews. *The Paris Review* said: "Clayton writes with ingenuous charm and contagious enthusiasm, often illustrating his points with "calligraphic studies" of his own...he turns a line of type into an object of contemplation and makes it okay to be curious, all over again, about the ancient symbols we all spent so long learning to use, and to ignore." *Publisher's Weekly* gave it a Starred Review, saying "Clayton reawakens readers to the versatility and nuances of something so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible." It has been published in the UK (2013), USA (2014), and was translated into Italian in 2014 and Spanish in 2015. The rights for a Chinese translation were sold in 2020.

R3 was a finalist in the book illustration category of the V&A Illustration Awards 2015.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Clayton was appointed as sole expert advisor to **Writing: Making Your Mark**, the British Library's major spring/summer 2019 exhibition running from 26 April to 27 August 2019 in the main Library gallery. His appointment, according to the exhibition's Lead Curator, was due to a unique combination of factors: his research takes a worldwide view of writing in all its forms, which comes to the fore in *The Golden Thread* [R1]; he is both a practitioner and researcher, with decades of experience in calligraphy; and because his research activities have given him significant familiarity the British Library's collection. On the overall impact of Clayton's involvement, the Lead Curator says "***In my view, the success of 'Writing: Making Your Mark' was due in large part to Professor Ewan Clayton***" [S1].

As the sole expert advisor, Clayton was actively involved in every aspect of the event, from the early planning stages in 2017 through the exhibition itself to creating legacy materials. The Lead Curator says **Clayton's participation was "essential for us: the British Library curators are experts in relatively narrow fields of interest, and needed help to place objects and stories into their wider context". His involvement ensured the integrity and accuracy of the exhibition:** "*The fact that Ewan had advised on the storylines covered, the choice of exhibits and the interpretation contained within panel and label texts, means that we could be confident about our approach and choice of content – particularly when responding to queries and challenges from commentators and the general public*" [S1].

Clayton joined the curatorial team in development meetings to discuss and agree the exhibition storylines and suggest which objects to display (including items being shown in public for the first time). His involvement extended to the design of interactive content (in particular 'Guess the Script' and 'What Your Handwriting Says About You', both of which were identified by visitors as particularly impressive) and he played a key role in developing

the audio-visual elements. The latter included the film 'Writing Technologies', which showed Clayton creating a piece of calligraphy in his studio. AV elements were praised by visitors, who said that their informative, engaging and thought-provoking nature enhanced the overall experience [S2].

He acted as expert reviewer for all gallery texts written by the curators, including the introduction, five section panels, and approximately 120 object labels. The curatorial team **"relied on [Clayton's] broad background knowledge to ensure that the texts were factually correct and unambiguous, and he also helped make sure that they were interesting to read"** [S1]. Visitors commended the labels and panels; 96% found them easy to understand, and 86% said they featured the right amount of detail [S2].

Clayton contributed objects from his own collection to the exhibition: two reed pens, stages of a quill pen being cut, an historic photograph of a typist at work, and a Japanese writing set. The Lead Curator acknowledges that *"none of the exhibition curators would claim to be an expert in the act of writing itself."* His expert oversight was both useful and reassuring: **"The curatorial team would have struggled without the expert guidance of someone who can think about 5,000 years of writing in all its formats, from all parts of the globe. Experience still suggests that Ewan is one of the few people who has this expertise. The fact that he is a calligrapher also means that he can examine historical examples of handwriting in a practical light, providing an insight into the materials, tools and techniques that were used. None of the exhibition curators would claim to be an expert in the act of writing itself"** [S1]. Visitors particularly praised the exhibits and interactive materials about handwriting [S2].

During the exhibition itself, Clayton participated in promotional events (including the Cultural Preview and a 'Writing' show for key library benefactors, giving calligraphy demonstrations and answering questions about the exhibition) and contributed two talks to the wider events programme: 'Writing: Humanity's Greatest Invention', and 'Handwriting: Then and Now' [S1].

The success of the exhibition

The exhibition was **commercially successful and received critical acclaim**. Over 35,000 people visited the main exhibition and 1,675 learners and teachers had an educational visit, generating a **total revenue of £273,992** [S3, S4]. Visitors commended the exhibition, and particularly praised exhibits based on Clayton's research on the future of writing, handwriting, and scripts [S2]. In addition to the main exhibition, 21 libraries in the UK Living Knowledge Network hosted smaller exhibitions of British Library artefacts and panels [S3], attracting 678,000 visitors. The exhibition gained **4-star reviews from *The Telegraph*, *The Times* and *Time Out*** [S5, S6, S7]. British Library exhibitions are not usually reviewed by the national media, and the library is delighted with this outcome [S1]. It received substantial media coverage, with commentators praising the intellectual and structural elements of the show, both of which are a reflection of Clayton's research. *The Telegraph* described it as *"an intellectually demanding exhibition with a strong sense of humour"* [S5]. Stephen Fry commended the exhibition, saying *"it will wake you up to the excitement of something you can do that you've never really celebrated, which is to write."* [S8]

The legacy of the exhibition

The exhibition will make a lasting mark on the British Library. **90% of visitors said it inspired them to visit future British Library exhibitions, and 10% said it prompted them to become a member, generating approximately £282,000 per year**. Likewise, it has sparked interest in the subject: 95% said they learned something new, and 67% plan to research the history of writing further. The exhibition's impact on understanding goes beyond the history of writing; it also prompted visitors to think about geographical differences, with 34% of visitors planning to learn more about writing across the globe. As one visitor said, *"It's just really nice to see, obviously we're aware of linguistic diversity but seeing it on paper, it really shows you how big the world is...an appreciation of language and communication"* [S2]. The Library developed a suite of legacy educational materials related to the exhibition,

to contribute to its online learning resources. Clayton was commissioned to write eight of the sixteen articles included [S9].

On the Lead Curator's recommendation, Clayton was commissioned to edit the accompanying exhibition book, published in hardback and paperback. He contributed four chapters himself, and his role as editor granted the British Library access to his expert contacts: Angela Webb (Chair of the National Handwriting Association), Stan Knight (internationally-renowned calligrapher) and Andrew Robinson (author of *The Story of Writing*) wrote chapters.

The exhibition will tour to China in 2022-3. It will be the opening exhibition of the new Shanghai Library East before travelling to Chengdu Museum.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

S1 Written statement of support from Lead Curator, British Library

S2 External evaluation of exhibition

S3 British Library Annual Report, 2019-20

S4 Emails from School Programmes Manager and Marketing Manager, British Library

S5 Review, *The Telegraph* 24/4/19 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/writing-making-mark-review-british-library-intellectually-demanding/>

S6 Review, *The Times* 29/4/19 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/writing-making-your-mark-at-the-british-library-review-the-mark-that-maketh-the-man-s0p9m92lj>

S7 Review, *Time Out* <https://www.timeout.com/london/museums/writing-making-your-mark-review>

S8 Comment by Stephen Fry at exhibition opening event

<https://twitter.com/britishlibrary/status/1123189494172327936>

S9 Legacy materials written by Ewan Clayton, British Library website

https://www.bl.uk/history-of-writing/articles?authors_sorted=Ewan%2AClayton