

CHEAP  
HOLIDAY TICKETS  
to the  
CONTINENT

HOLLAND  
BELGIUM  
GERMANY

VIA HARWICH  
GRIMSBY OR HULL

1933

Zeeland Day Line  
London & North Eastern Railway

ABOVE: RE-STYLED L.N.E.R. BOOKLET COVER. BELOW: THE SUPERSEDED DESIGN

Still  
Cheaper  
Holiday Tickets  
for  
Holland & Belgium

Optional Routes  
via  
HARWICH

and for  
Hamburg and Antwerp  
via Grimsby  
Rotterdam via Hull



THIS ARTICLE deals with an example of genuine typographic modernity: a reform which is radical (i.e. root-deep in economic fact) and far-reaching in

its effect. It is not an article for typographic artists, because it describes a new phenomenon in typography which to a great extent leaves the artist out of the picture.

There may be, among the readers of this number, certain professional typographers who have from time to time undertaken to "modernize" a piece of printed matter. If they went about it in the most enjoyable way; if by slanted settings, clever photomontage or superposed colour they exercised the finest discrimination, so that the work would look crisp and clean without being dull or vulgar; then they may well be under the false impression that they are dealing with typography in a XXth century fashion. If so, they are deceived by the superficial appearance of the type faces and materials they use.

Exercising nice judgement and good taste in regard to a particular printed job is a very ancient exercise. There is no such great difference between a copper-engraved illustration and a half-tone on celophane as there is between the thought-out, specially *designed*, job and the one which has been put together on for-

mula of mass production.

Nothing that happens to one booklet, or even to 20 booklets each specially designed by an adroit typographer, can be of much economic and practical significance to the printing craft to-day. But when a vast railway system contrives that 10,000 different booklets, leaflets, and other pieces should be almost automatically designed (or say constructed) well and in a recognizable unity, over many successive years; when basic rules of type logic are thought out by one of the largest print-buying Companies in the Kingdom in order that no time need be spent on special planning to get an efficient and even beautiful result; then the result is extraordinarily significant.

The fact is that to-day the majority of printed pieces are either not specially designed at all, or are laid out by people who have no time to stop and reason about the purpose of a job and what will or will not be perfectly suitable and perfectly in taste, in a decade of changing tastes. And another fact is that most modern businesses give out work to a number of different printers, and find it valuable to make every one of their printed representatives so consistent in style with every other one that the whole collection builds up a concrete image in the consumer's mind.

In short, it is not a particularly "Modern" thing to entrust a piece of printing to a reliable printer designer. It is sensible, but there is nothing new about it. The new thing is as recent as the emergence of the modern business organiza-

tion—that highly departmentalized, impersonal machine for producing and distributing goods or services which has in many cases replaced the old idea of a business as trade carried on by one responsible man at his own private risk.

It must be remembered that the large, highly mechanized businesses are not, numerically, in anything like a majority to-day. Neither are the large contract printers typical of most printing offices. If the bulk of printing orders came from vast organizations using many printers; if the average printer dealt with hundred-thousand runs; then the article on "Printers and Experts" on page 21 of this number would be a waste of words. Fortunately for the craft, there is and will always be a chance for the printer to help guide most of his customers in matters of design—and to exercise his creative impulse in doing it. But if there were only half-a-dozen firms in England big enough to be forced to impose standard rules on their printers, a study of one such firm's methods would still be

particularly appropriate to a "Twentieth Century Printing Number".

## AN ACCOUNT OF THE

# L·N·E·R

## TYPE STANDARDIZATION

◀ **WHY TYPOGRAPHIC REFORM** ▶ In the old days, when a printer had one face of type in the various sizes, and very few varieties of printing to do, the tradition of the conventions was strong enough to give any job decency; or at least one could say that a thousand temptations to typographic vulgarity had not appeared. To-day that is not the case. There are very many brand-new ways of doing the wrong thing typographically. There has been a serious and widespread arts and crafts revival, which in its first ten years did more harm than good to machine-produced commercial printing.

Looking at the rows and rows of docile machines in any modern factory, one is reminded of the sombre and





use on such a vast scale. The decision would have been much easier, and far less justifiable, had the current jargon about "sans serif for a machine age" been given consideration. Fortunately no such poetical arguments arose. What did arise was the mental picture of a passenger being jostled on a crowded platform on a winter evening, and trying with one eye on the station clock to verify the connections of a given train; a picture of another passenger running his eye over fifteen excursion leaflets that are printed perhaps by fifteen different printers; glancing from them to the station announcement, to the destination board of the train, to a 16-sheet poster issued by the company, and being given in every case a sense of continuity and consistency, a sense that something had been said to him with as little fuss and distraction as possible. As we pointed out in our previous issue, it is not *ipso facto* true to say that the simplest thing will be the most beautiful in every case; but it is obvious that the simpler a thing is, (*i.e.*, the less it is designed for *one special* effect or for *only a few* purposes), the more generally applicable is it going to be. There are at least ten ways of treating serifs and stroke-thickening which will give the same set of letters entirely different personalities. The thin, sharply undercut serif and the heavily stressed down stroke will give one special result, and demand one special kind of paper, treatment in printing, and so on. A sans serif, with no noticeably thickened strokes, will therefore always have a double advantage as a standard type for many different varieties of commercial printing, and many different paper surfaces. It asks for less personal consideration, less exercise of discrimination. And it is so "stripped for action" that as far as *glance* reading goes, it is the most efficient conveyor of thought.

Here it may be added that when the "many varieties of commercial printing" include books, or booklets which have the same continuous "reading interest" as a book, sans serif has to be supplemented by a secondary face which has serifs. In the case of the L.N.E.R., "Monotype" Baskerville is chosen to substitute for Gill Sans in travel booklets, etc.; but the text of the Holiday Handbook is set in Plantin to overcome the ocular handicaps of offset printing, and a number of the new "Rambles"

FROM "RAMBLES IN ESSEX", ONE OF A SERIES OF L.N.E.R. BOOKLETS. THE ORIGINAL IS IN GREEN AND BLACK.

series of booklets (their copy interspersed with pictures) successfully treat Gill 262 as a text face.

**WHY GILL SANS** ▶ A great deal of confused thinking about sans serif has arisen from incomplete definition of the term itself. Strictly speaking, a sans serif is any letter which does not have serifs. Figure 1 shows what Bodoni and Plantin would look like without serifs.

**Printer and Printer**  
BODONI BOLD "SANS" and PLANTIN "SANS". FIG. 1

It will be noted that Plantin 110 survives the test better because there is less contrast between thin and thick stroke. It is the convention in type design to abolish any difference of weight between different parts of the letter when serifs are omitted. Mr. Eric Gill did not consider himself slavishly bound to that convention. Had he designed, for example, a lower-case g which might have been made of copper wire of uniform thickness, the five small curves of the normal shape of that letter would have taken up altogether too much room. Confronted with the same problem, the German designers had airily abandoned the classic shape of lower case g in favour of one which would be better adapted to a uniformly thick stroke. In other words, they were after a "monotone" letter first, and only secondarily after a serif-less roman. That is natural, as we have pointed out before; the Germans have only recently

No 8. UPS AND DOWNS IN ESSEX  
HAROLD WOOD to BRENTWOOD

Harold Wood, though it has no pretensions to antiquity or interest, at present forms a very convenient jumping-off point for interesting and hilly country to the north and east.

Stapleford Abbots Church (just south of Watsons Green on the map), although prettily situated, is of no particular interest, but that of Navestock, a mile and a half north of the Common, has several features worthy of note. The tower archway and north doorway are Norman, and the ironwork on the door is good, while within are to be seen a wooden chancel arch and a low-side window. As is often the case in Essex, where wood is plentiful and stone scarce, its tower is supported by massive beams.

South Weald Park is a fine domain with many old trees and browsing deer. The mansion, which has been much restored, was once the home of Mary Tudor before she ascended the throne. On the southern edge of the Park stands the Church, a fine structure largely rebuilt in the last century. The tower, however, dates from 1505; the south doorway is Norman, and the chancel has a low-side window.

Brentwood, nominally in the parish of South Weald, is a town which has grown up on the Colchester turnpike (in the same way as Epping on the Newmarket Road) at the point where it is crossed by the road from Tilbury to the north. It saw its most prosperous days in the last few years of the coaching era, when forty coaches a day traversed its wide main street. The White Hart, the most important of the coaching inns, is an interesting structure of 1480, with the remains of a galleried courtyard and a low arched entrance. Opposite are the ruins of an old chapel erected in 1221. There are two good

modern churches: St. Thomas the Martyr, and the Cathedral, Brentwood being a Roman Catholic see. The town provided a Protestant martyr in the Marian Persecution when William Hunter, aged 20, was burned at the stake. There is a memorial at the cross-roads.

At the station can be seen the beginnings of the deep cutting through the gravel which extends to Shenfield station, an engineering work which is surely a sufficient refutation of the charge of "flatness" often levelled against the county. As a matter of fact, the G.E. main line is the hardest of all those leading out of the metropolis! And yet Essex, "flat-as-a-pancake Essex," remains an article of wide belief with most of those who have not rambled over it.



NAVESTOCK CHURCH

taken up "Antiqua" as a more or less exotic form of letter; their normal reading face is a strikingly calligraphic baroque-gothic.

So Mr. Gill, like Mr. Johnston before him, manipulated the letters in order that they should seem to be monotone in weight whilst remaining true roman in form. A comparison of lower case letters, enlarged from photographs of 12 point, was one of the directions along which the L.N.E.R. investigated the various sans serif alphabets. Many students who undertake this comparison have said that the question "Why Gill Sans?" is already sufficiently answered in this way. It must not be forgotten, however, that the railway uses capitals alone in a variety of instances; on station signs, destination boards, etc.; and that the monumental effect of the Gill Sans capitals, with the famous capital R, is peculiarly attractive.

**The first practical trials** of the letter were in the form of announcements, including small time-tables, for the newspapers. This was in itself a severe test of printing quality and legibility. Next came the gradual standardization of the hundreds of special excursion handbills, cheap return leaflets, etc. There had been a confusing variety of ornamental borders or line-blocks used in these cases, sometimes with a wasteful use of second colour. Graduated rules, cast on the "Monotype" machine, began to replace these irrelevancies, and it was soon seen that Gill Sans capitals would lend a sort of automatic dignity to a handbill as long as they were "left alone," i.e., grouped in words in a logical order without any straining after decorative effect.

It was then time to consider the gigantic task of standardizing all the time-tables (see pp. 8-9). In some cases contracts would not run out for several years, and consideration had to be given to printers whose estimates had counted upon the existence of standing formes. It is never pleasant to insist that a printer put in any new composition series in many sizes; one's only justification is the fact that the new face will be actually necessary to his equipment, in the *general public demand*, for many years to come. We can now see why so much thought and preparation had to precede the L.N.E.R. standardization. It was a matter of promising ninety or more printers that no chopping and changing would be done for years ahead; a matter of assuring them that a huge public service company had a real conviction, a real enthusiasm, for the face. Once that was made known, it was obvious that other companies and individuals would

follow suit, and that the letter so chosen would go straight out of the "fashion" category and would become a permanent part of the modern printer's type repertory.

With the time-tables standardized in the five local sections of the great net-work it was time to turn, first, to the great mass of smaller pieces that range from dining car menus and hotel stationery to announcements in steamer cabins and company reports. Also there was the difficult matter of educating a generation of letterers to use the Gill Sans alphabet on station signs, hand painted special train posters, etc., and to create bronze or enamel letters in the same design for a thousand outdoor uses. The first step was taken when Mr. Eric Gill himself was commissioned to paint the name plate of the most famous of all crack trains, the Flying Scotsman. We understand that the artist's fee in this case included a ride on the footplate non-stop to Edinburgh!

The work still goes on; even those temperamental brethren, the poster artists, are learning that the neutral Gill Sans is safe to use as lettering with almost any pictorial effect.\*

But the main object of Mr. Dandridge's work of typographic reform has been accomplished. The traveller entering King's Cross or any one of the other stations of the line, or boarding the *Vienna* or the other L.N.E.R. passenger or freight vessels, is able as it were to "hear the Company talking" in one recognizable voice. It is a crisp, unsentimental voice that can be raised or softened by the weight of the letter. But above all it is recurrent. It sets up a rhythm in the mind. One rap of the knuckles on a table may be accidental, two raps are significant; three or more raps with equal intervals between them, or in recognizable groups, do what no confused collection of noises could do; they set up a rhythm. In standardizing its typography, the London and North Eastern Railway has not only made possible a number of economies, but also has given the public at large a visual image of one "group personality" which is even more valuable than the emerald green livery borne Northward by the iron dragons of King's Cross.

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\* For the benefit of our readers abroad we may say that the yearly exhibition of L.N.E.R. posters at the Burlington Galleries represents one of the liveliest and most vigorous manifestations of modern art, and that a collection of these posters (which rapidly go out of print) would be of the greatest aesthetic interest and decided financial value in the future.