



Section of 'The Post Boy.' - 1866 print engraving by Edward Coodall, from a painting by Frederick Goodall.



Sans serif Bishop Marks 1673–1787

Jon Melton

Original type specimen delivered by emfoundry.com

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This research article *San serif Bishop Marks from 1673* was originally published as *ETRVSCA–Bishop Sans* in the book: *Ways of Thinking*. pp.31–34, from the Ruskin Arts Publications, Cambridge.

ISBN:978-1-912319-02-2

<https://ruskin-arts.co.uk/2020/02/25/ways-of-thinking-book-launch-on-5-march/>

Set throughout in emfoundry ETRVSCA Sans.



San serif Bishop Marks from 1673

Date Stamps on posted letters were first introduced in April of 1661 by Britain's first Postmaster-General Henry Bishop to counteract accusations of corruption, unwarranted delays and profiteering by unscrupulous employees of the postal service belonging to The Crown. All letters in England and Wales were locally town-stamped and were sent, sometimes 'post-haste', via London, or Edinburgh in Scotland and Dublin in Ireland; ready for distribution via the 'post roads' throughout the provinces.

In 1673 the fourth postmaster-general Henry Bennet the 1st Earl of Arlington, introduced a new London date stamp of **serif-less letterforms** which proliferated for the next one hundred or so years.

The forerunner of our postmark franking system, and the reason our self-adhesive labels are called 'stamps' – these ink-stampers appear to have been originally made from metal. But were later cut from end grain wood by craftsmen of varying ability and as such differ widely. The vast majority of date stamps, utilised a sans serif Latin Roman alphabet with I for J and V as U. Bishop Marks as they are known mirror Roman ceramic seals, legionnaire's signet rings and document lead bullae which guaranteed authenticity and the un-tampered arrival of correspondence and goods. This method of safe-guarding contents continued through the Byzantine period into the medieval, with merchants stamps and lead cloth bale seals used into the nineteenth-century. Many of these are dated with the year and utilise sans serif typography to denote the producer.

Edinburgh bishop marks retained serif letterforms, and the canny Scots devised an ingenious double headed month stampers so that the dates were interchangeable, thus reducing the numbers of ink stamps purchased. The double letter month abbreviations continued right up to the late twentieth-century using movable metal type head franking stampers for regional post collection offices. Countless numbers of stamped letters would have been sent, and serif-less letterforms were common-place throughout the eighteenth century – yet type historians have seemingly overlooked this classically informed stamped face which likely left its mark on the first letterpress metal types of the nineteenth century.

Jon Melton of emfoundry.com gathers historical research and ephemeral examples of sans serif bishop marks to inform the design of the regular weight of his **ETRVSCA Sans** family. This typeface, destined for commercial release, represents the primal serif-less letterforms of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century – and is therefore the original sans serif font.



IA FE MR AP

MA IV IY AV

SE OC NO DE

I 1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 8 9 0

A B C D E F

G H I J K L

M N O P Q

R S T W U

V X Y Z .

DV 72 HB 73 ED 93 I9 EM

BISHOP · SANS
ETRVSCA

- 1 Engraved portrait frontispiece of Henry Bennet produced for the book of his Letters to Sir W. Temple, Bar. 1665–1670. Published by Thomas Bevington in 1701. Author's own collection. Photo © Jon Melton, emfoundry.com
- 2 Emperor Nero Lead Bulla 'AVC N' (Augustus Nero) in typical Roman flared vestigial serif letterform. Author's own collection. Photo © Jon Melton, emfoundry.com
- 3 Merchant's Mark: embossed seal using the mystical stamp of '4' or 'Staff of Mercury'. Redrawn by the author. © Jon Melton, emfoundry.com
- 4 1758 Letter with serif-less Bishop Mark, date-stamped 9th of August, with 4d to be charged for delivery over 80 miles from Pembroke to London. Author's own collection. Photo © Jon Melton, emfoundry.com