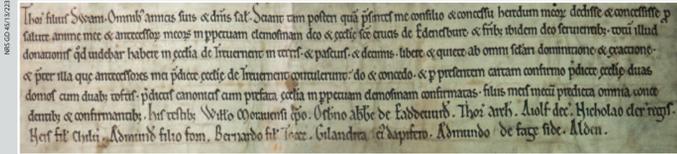


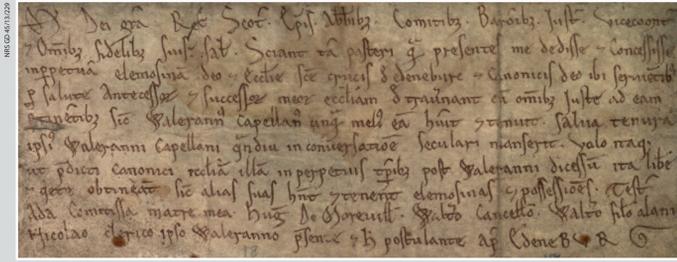
# How to write quickly

The norm was for scribes to cut their quill to a broad nib. The aim was to produce neat and regular handwriting, with the contrasting width of pen strokes providing an opportunity for scribes to add a stylistic element to their work. This was effective for most purposes, in particular for copying books. If you were a scribe whose main task was writing documents on a single sheet, however, you might need to write quickly. This was easier if the nib was narrower.

In twelfth-century Scotland, the main scribes whose specific job was to write documents were in the king's household. Speed was especially important for communicating the king's wishes and instructions in writing.



This charter of Thor, son of Swain, was written sometime between 1153 and 1159. The scribe belonged to the beneficiary (Holyrood Abbey), not Thor. The scribe has used neat and regular handwriting that would be normal to use in a book in this period.

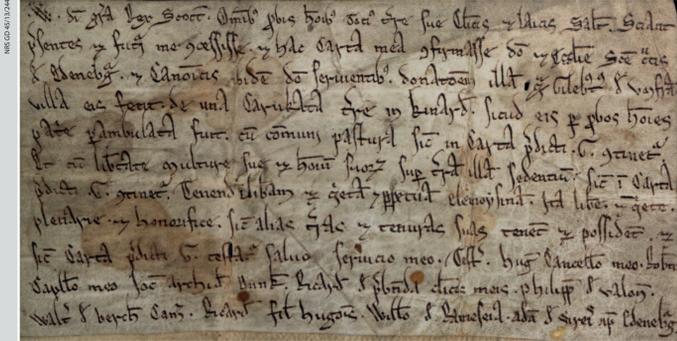


This charter of King Malcolm IV was written by a royal scribe sometime between 1153 and 1159. A simple way to write faster was to make the bodies of letters smaller but to keep the height of tall strokes.

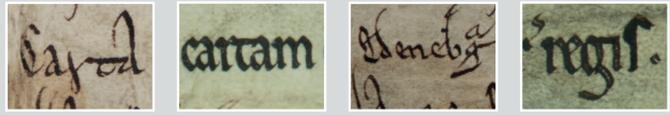


Look at how the tall strokes in this charter are elongated compared to Thor's charter. The word is *dedisse* (Latin for 'to have given').

This charter of King William was written by a royal scribe sometime between 1189 and 1193. He was clearly writing quickly and so was more likely to keep his pen touching the parchment when moving from one stroke to another. This mode of writing eventually led to cursive writing.



Here are two comparisons with Thor's charter.



Compare the letter r in the word *carta/cartam* (charter): the first example was made in a single fluid stroke; in the second, the scribe has used two strokes, one for the vertical and one for the horizontal.

Compare the letter g in the words *Edeneburg* ('Edinburgh') and *regis* ('of the king'): one is hurried, the other is neat and deliberate.



This charter of King Alexander II was written by a royal scribe on 28 November 1247. He writes in a fully developed cursive way that is both quick and elegant. This had become a specialist skill by the mid-thirteenth century.

