

When the highly respected playwright George Bernard Shaw died in 1950 his will appointed the Public Trustee to be executor and trustee and contained provisions for a new 'Proposed British Alphabet'. The clause that was to cause the most concern was Shaw's desire to leave money to research the economic benefit of a revised alphabet. Arguing that the varied spelling of different sounds (tough, cough, plough, through, etc) in English, prevented people from learning to read and write, he also stated that a revised version would save paper because the words would be shorter.

Shaw imposed on his Trustee the duty of seeking and publishing a more efficient alphabet of at least forty letters.

In 1957 the Public Trustee announced that he would award a prize of £500 (nearly £8,000 today) for the design of a new alphabet, which most nearly met the provisions of Shaw's will.

In fact some 450 designs were submitted from all parts of the world, but none were seen as meeting the requirements of the will. However, four designs were judged of outstanding merit and the prize was divided between them. The design of Mr Kingsley Read was adopted and in due course the 40+8 characters of the new Shaw Alphabet were completed.

In 1961 Stephen Austin was commissioned to 'cut' the matrices for the Shaw Alphabet and subsequently required to print the work of Shaw, *Androcles and The Lion*, using the new alphabet alongside the normal alphabet. This was published in 1962, being dedicated to Sir James Pitman (the Public Trustee), *in grateful acknowledgement of his unstinted co-operation and continuous support over a period of nine years in carrying out Bernard Shaw's wishes.*

Our display shows the original die case containing the matrices used in casting the type for printing the book by letterpress. The reproduction of two pages of the book illustrate the economy of space in using the new alphabet exactly as required by Shaw in his will. The Alphabet Reading Key and the Alphabet for Writers was also enclosed in each copy sold.

*George Bernard Shaw lived in Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire from 1906 until his death in 1950. Today, the house 'Shaw's Corner' is run by the National Trust and open to the public, where there is a museum of his life and works.*