



CHELTHENHAM

One of the most controversial typefaces designed in America.

By Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, Ingalls Kimball & Morris Fuller Benton

Cheltenham is an old style serif typeface, designed in 1896 by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and Ingalls Kimball for Cheltenham Press, a New York publisher. “Chelt,” as practicing typographers often called it, is probably one of the most widely known typefaces designed in the United States. One of the reasons for Cheltenham’s fame—or notoriety—is the fact that for more than a half a century, it has been one of the most controversial typefaces. In the post World-War II era, when its use declined, it became subject of numerous articles in printing-trade periodicals, most expressing divided opinions on its pedigree as a good letter form or its usefulness as a typeface. Daniel Berkeley Updike, an American printer and historian of typography, wrote: “Owing to certain eccentricities of form, it cannot be read comfortably for any length of time. It is, however, an exceedingly handsome letter for ephemeral printing.”¹



BERTRAM G. GOODHUE
* April 28, 1869 † April 23, 1924

LETTER FORM DESIGN

It was Goodhue’s intent to create a book type in which legibility would be the dominant element. He therefore designed an alphabet of rather monotonous construction, including serifs similar to the Clarendon styles of fifty years later. It was in the treatment of ascenders and descenders that Goodhue’s premise was most evident. Believing the upper half of a line of type is more important for recognition, he lengthened the ascenders and shortened the descenders of the letters. This feature also allowed for economical composition, since leading could be dispensed with, even in longer-than-average lines. Goodhue’s theory came out of more recent studies of typographic legibility, but Cheltenham nevertheless was not to become a popular typeface for straight-matter composition as employed in books and periodicals. Showing influences from the Arts & Crafts Movement, it was a display type that would eventually develop its reputation through the large number of variants that appeared in the next two decades.

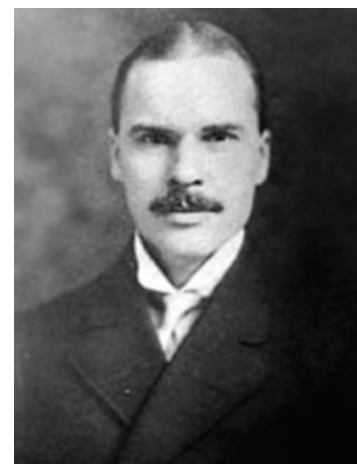
THE CHELTEN
It is in characters not material item from the trusts) that this new

THE CHELTEN
Quaint enough will be t exactly what chiefly gi qualities of dash & zip;

Original sketches of Cheltenham by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue.

CHELTHENHAM’S FAME

After Goodhue sold the design to the Mergenthaler firm, while retaining his right to the single-type version, nearly all typeface suppliers followed. In 1902, American Type Founders (ATF) purchased the design and ATF’s chief type designer, Morris Fuller Benton, developed it into its final design. By 1915, Benton had cut twenty-one variations of the original Cheltenham, making its name almost a household word, reaching far beyond the confines of the nation’s composing rooms. Starting in 1904, the Linotype firm eventually brought out ten Cheltenham variants, plus special advertising figures. The Monotype company followed with fifteen variants, Ludow Typograph Company produced thirteen, and a dozen variations were marketed by the Intertype Corporation. By 1920, every American supplier of printing types was producing Cheltenham. It was inevitable that its style would dominate the period’s typography. Foreign typefounders quickly followed suit, selling Cheltenham under several different names. The English firm Stephenson, Blake & Company called it Winchester; English Monotype listed it as Gloucester; and a Dresden foundry named it Pfeil Antiqua.



MORRIS FULLER BENTON
* Nov. 30, 1872 † June 30, 1948

In 1975, Tony Stan of the International Typeface Corporation (ITC), completed a variant of the typeface, which featured a larger x-height and improved italic details. In 1993, ITC invited Edward Benguiat to produce ITC Cheltenham Handtooled, a set of three special display versions in bold weight in regular width with distinctive highlight engraved or “tooled” into the left side of the character strokes. Lending a completely new personality to the typeface design, Benguiat manually created a perfectly proportioned incision into the character strokes of every character.²



NOTABLE USES

One of the famous first uses of Cheltenham occurred in 1906, when *The New York Times* used it for the front-page headlines about the great San Francisco earthquake. However, Cheltenham was only one of several types in the Victorian-looking mix of headline faces. In 2003 *The New York Times* introduced a more unified Cheltenham typographic palette for its headlines in the print edition. Tom Bodkin, assistant managing editor and design director of *The Times*, who oversaw the changes, engaged typeface designer Matthew Carter to create multiple weights and a heavily condensed width of Cheltenham.³ A series of series of how-to books ...for *Dummies* are set in ITC Cheltenham.

**After 60 Years
HIGHER TOLL
OBAMA WINS
Hard New Test
For President
Disaster at Home Adds
To Challenges of Iraq**

Sample *The New York Times* headlines.

¹ Text based on “Cheltenham” chapter in Alexander Lawson’s *Anatomy of a Typeface*, 253-261. Boston: Godine, 1990.

² International Typeface Corporation, ITC Cheltenham Handtooled Volume, <http://www.itcfonts.com/Fonts/Detail.htm?pid=242932>

Photo Credits: Bertram Goodhue: San Diego Historical Society; Morris Fuller Benton: American Type Founders (ATF)

³ Bitstream Fonts, Cheltenham Font, <http://www.paratype.com/btstore/fonts/Cheltenham.html> (November 2009).

³ “A Face Lift for *The Times*, Typographically, That Is,” *The New York Times*, 21 October, 2003.

Image Credits: Original Sketch: Alexander Lawson’s *Anatomy of a Typeface*, *The New York Times* headlines: Neuseum Archive