

Illuminated Letters

'Illuminate' means to 'light up'. An illuminated manuscript is a handwritten book or document which has been decorated. Over a thousand years ago, there were many workshops throughout Europe.



The decorations included designs of initial letters, borders (called marginalia) and tiny pictures.

This manuscript is written in Latin. More than 2000 years ago, Latin was spoken by people in Rome and it spread with the growth of the Roman Empire. It continued after the Roman Empire collapsed in 500 and continued to be used through the Middle Ages (500 to 1400-1500). The text would be written by a **scribe**, usually a monk who lived in a monastery. He would leave gaps for the artist to add decoration using bright colours and often gold and silver.

Rich people wanted beautiful books for their libraries.

These activities are designed to be used in conjunction with The Arts Society's Birmingham Faith Visits resources. See:

<https://birmingham-faith-visits.theartssociety.org/>



Classroom Activity: Decorating a letter

This activity requires only plain paper and colour pens including 'gold' and 'silver' if available.

Some examples, created by an artist who is 95, are given for inspiration. There is also a wealth of material on line.

Children can see that this ancient craft is still fresh today and can be carried out through a lifetime.



Although illuminated manuscripts were common in the Christian religion in Europe, they were also to be found in Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Sikh faiths.

This is a handwritten and illuminated Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikhs' holy book.

National Sikh Museum Derby.

www.sikhmuseum.com

Illuminated Letters An illuminated letter was usually the first Initial letter of a page.

Decorating letters is an activity which has been enjoyed for thousands of years. Beautiful examples are in our libraries and museums and can be seen on line.



15th century Historia Naturalis Pliny 1476 Bodleian Library



12th century English Bodleian Library

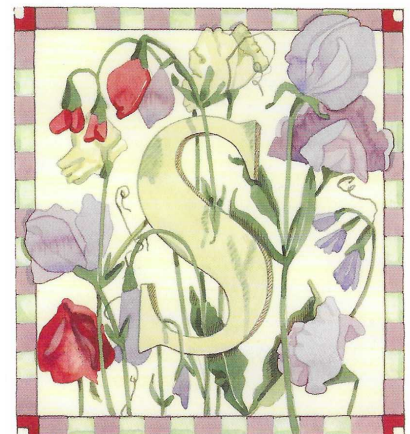
Bodleian Library www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

V and A Museum www.vam.ac.uk

British Library www.bl.uk/

English Heritage www.englishheritage.org.uk

Design your own illuminated initials



And today: Illuminated letter cards by Lesley Buckingham. Published by Cherry Picked for You.

A is for Anne :

Art is a hobby which can last a lifetime. Anne Crews VPRBSA, ATD,NDD illuminated the initials of her name especially for this Arts Society activity. Ann is 95 years old.



A professional printmaker, Anne has recently had an exhibition in Birmingham called 'Getting On'.

After leaving school, Anne worked on the original films of Oliver Twist and Red Shoes at Pinewoods studios in 1948. She won a scholarship and trained at Central St Martins in Fine Arts. In `London.

As a parent, she taught art and developed her printing skills, taking a leading role in Birmingham Printmakers.

At 95, Anne is still supporting and inspiring others. Her letter cards are always popular at community sales.

Handmade initial letter cards make beautiful presents.



njoy!



The alphabet helps us to communicate, to convey thoughts and ideas via the written word. A system for writing has developed over the past 5000 years.

The English alphabet was developed from Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. The word 'alphabet' comes from the first two words of the Greek 'alpha' and 'beta'. The modern English alphabet consists of two sets of 26 letters (Capitals or upper case and lower case.) The small letters (known as 'miniscule') developed from scribes wanting to speed up their writing by not removing the pen from the paper so H became h.

H → h

Activity Have a go at illuminating a letter. You could make cards for your friends and family.



Your starting point is to make the outline of a letter. You can use other styles. Templates are available on line or copy the examples given.

Watch: You Tube: [Beginner Guide on How to Create Illuminated Letters](#).

Design team: Archer Olive: Mark

Homemade letter cards make lovely presents for birthdays.