

Five minute INTERVIEW

NICK FARROW is director of the design agency Farrows, based in Norwich, which is the only firm of commercial artists to hold the Royal Warrant.



What is your idea of perfect happiness in Norfolk?

Norfolk is absolutely beautiful at the time of harvest, especially if you are out in the countryside. A sunny evening walking in the stubble field with our dogs would be perfect. As a designer, I like the low gold sun that highlights everything.

How do you relax in the country?

I do loads of mountain bike riding particularly around the UEA lake. I love the mixture between lawns, lake and the architecture. I have photographed it lots of times. We used one of the photographs for the recent re-branding of the UEA's Conference division.

With which Norfolk character do you most identify?

Ted Ellis – he was a lovely old character and it would be nice to have met him. He's one of my first memories of Norfolk.

If you weren't talking to us now, what would you be doing?

Having a coffee and a piece of toast in the garden. I have a lovely garden but it tends to be trashed a bit by the dogs.

What do you miss when you leave Norfolk?

I love going away but I'm always pleased to come back to Norwich. I love it and its atmosphere. And I always miss my home and my family – my wife Mandy, and my children Heather 27, Roger who is 29 and William who is 24.

How would you spend your ideal day in Norfolk?

I start off with a cooked family breakfast in the garden, a long walk – mainly around Cringleford where we live. And then probably go for a swim with my daughter.

What's your earliest Norfolk memory?

It is holidays on the Broads with my family when I was about eight. After these holidays I realised what a lovely place it was and snapped up the chance of a job here.

In moments of weakness...

A whisky and a pipe of tobacco – it really is a weakness, the pipe anyway. I smoke a pipe about once every six months.

What would your motto be?

My belief is that you travel through life carefully, treating others, and your surroundings, the way you would like to be treated. That's how we run our business and our lives.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

My very first accountant said never sell yourself too cheaply as you'll never catch up and be able to charge a living rate.

If you change one thing about yourself what would it be?

I can't really tell you. It's a secret.

What item could you not live without?

Music. It changes all the time. At the moment I'm listening to Tindersticks and Sigur Ros who are Icelandic and I have just seen them both at Latitude.

A font created by a dyslexic graphic designer from Norwich is helping people with the condition to read more easily. **KEIRON PIM** spoke to Rob Hillier to find out more about Sylexiad.

A font of knowledge

Picture: SONYA DUNCAN

WHEN ROB HILLIER FOUND OUT THAT HE WAS DYSLEXIC, he set about putting his skills as a graphic designer to good use.

The result is Sylexiad, a typeface that he has designed to cater specifically to the needs of dyslexic people.

Designed to accentuate the characteristics that help dyslexics to distinguish between letters, it is being hailed as a potential breakthrough in enabling people with the condition to read more easily.

"In 2000 there was a great interest in the Higher Education sector, and particularly art and design, in dyslexia," he says. "As a result I started to question my own reading difficulties and found that I was dyslexic myself."

So the Norwich School of Art & Design lecturer decided to identify the factors that have a bearing on how easily dyslexics can read different fonts, and then create a new typeface countering these factors.

For instance, it is common for dyslexics to see mirror images of letters, therefore confusing d and b, or p and q. They also often have trouble with a lack of spacing between letters.

He designed Sylexiad so that none of the letters is a mirror image of another – for instance, the p has a circular shape whereas the q is closer to a teardrop.

He adds: "What I discovered was a distinct preference of dyslexic readers for handwritten-style fonts in upper case forms rather than lower case forms, with long ascenders and descenders, light weights, uniform strokes, a perpendicular design and generous inter-word spacing."

In the process of developing it he gained his PhD, he explains.

"What I started to do as a PhD was develop a series of fonts and test them against a dyslexic readership and develop them from there. I set up a control group as well.

"The outcome of seven years' research was that for the control the favourite font was Times New Roman, with Sylexiad being the median font, and for the dyslexic readership the favourite was Sylexiad Serif.

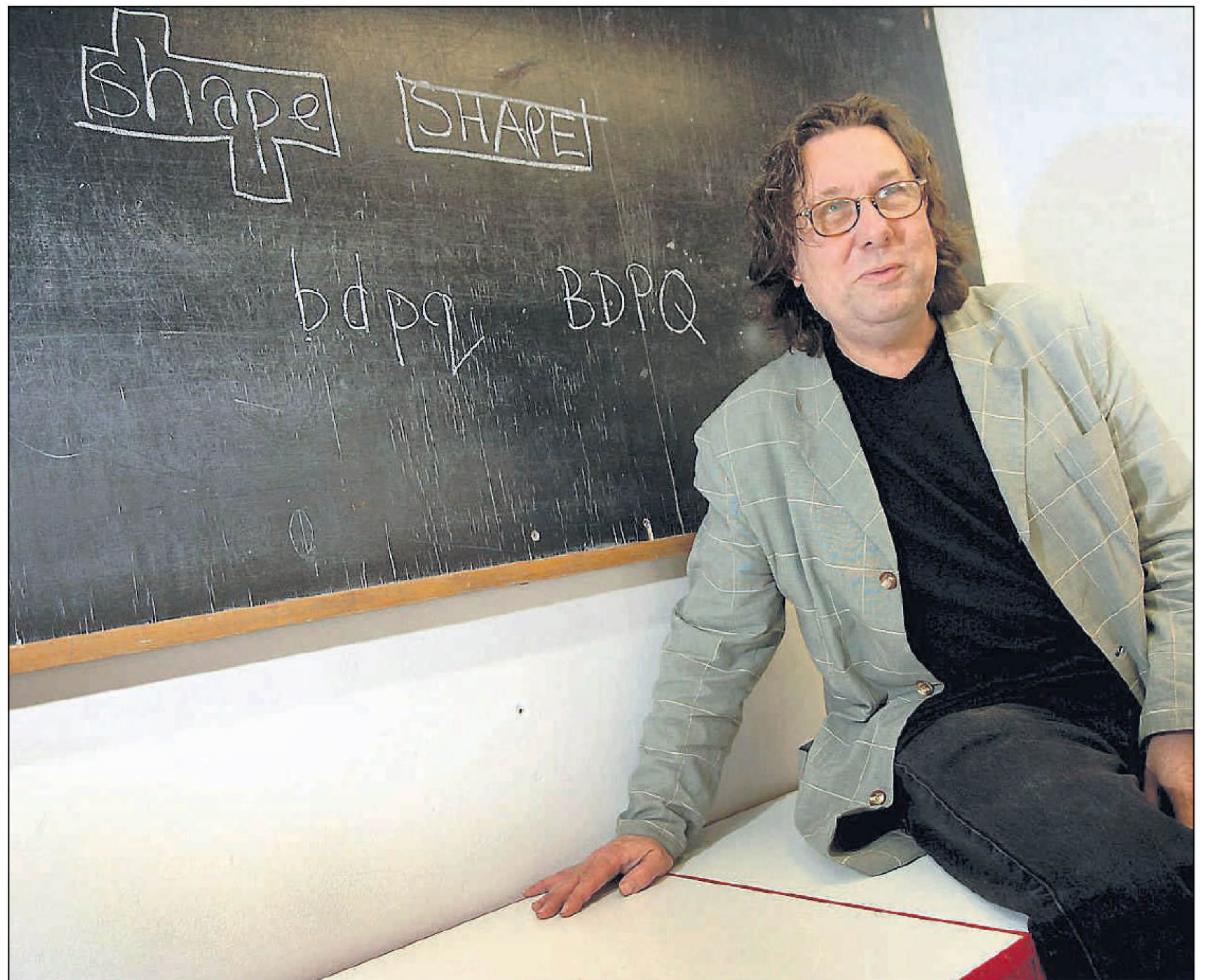
"Then it was developed further with the help of Adrian Williams, quite a famous type designer, who put it into italics and different weights."

Now Dr Hillier is hoping to find as wide a readership as possible for the font. It has already been taken on as the art school's official font, used in all communication with its students – which is useful given the higher than average

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- *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens



THE RIGHT TYPE: Rob Hillier has discovered a font which he believes will help people with dyslexia to read more easily.

In our illustrations, the Sylexiad font is the second example.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.

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- *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by George Orwell

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- *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen

incidence of dyslexia among art students. Some estimates suggest that 15pc have the condition whereas nationwide it is believed that 4pc of people have severe dyslexia and a further 6pc have mild dyslexia.

Dr Hillier's work is now winning support in artistic and academic institutions and has been welcomed by one of the UK's leading academics.

Prof John Stein, a physiologist at Oxford University who specialises in the neurological causes of dyslexia, said: "All power to his elbow – he has done a really good job. Years ago we showed that proper spacing of letters allowed dyslexics to read more easily. This Sylexiad font has plenty of space between the letters and that is important."

As well as the art school, Sylexiad is being used by the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design.

Dr Hillier, who lives in Norwich, believes that it is his personal insight

into the condition that sets his work apart from previous attempts at creating dyslexia-friendly fonts.

"As a dyslexic I hold an understanding of the difficulties faced by many other dyslexics, particularly in terms of reading," he says. "I realised that despite recent interest in the development of dyslexic typefaces, most typographic rules and principles have been framed from a literate, non-dyslexic viewpoint."

The British Dyslexia Association continues to recommend the existing preferred typefaces but a spokeswoman said that she would follow Dr Hillier's work with interest.

Sue Flohr, the charity's helpline manager, said: "We welcome this research and investigation into a font which might help dyslexic people to be able to read more easily, especially as it appears to be designed for PCs as well as publishers. It will be interesting to see how well it is received."

QUOTES OF THE DAY

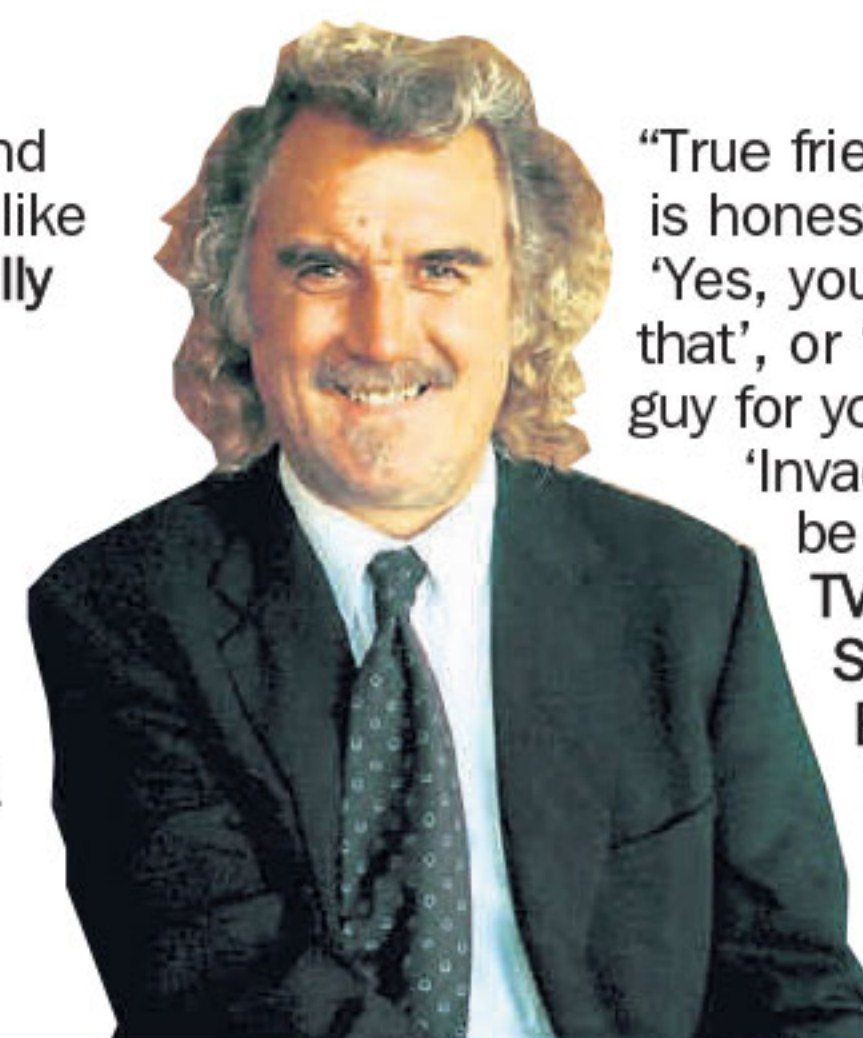
"No stickiness of any significance" – What a Downing Street spokesman said after a protester tried to glue himself to prime minister Gordon Brown.

"This combination of charm, along with his ability to cook, rather left me swooning and unable to stop myself salivating" – Supermodel Erin O'Connor on TV chef Gordon Ramsay.

"I look like a wino with this bushy white hair and beard. I have to go

around looking weird and unpleasant and I don't like it at all" – Comedian Billy Connolly, right.

"She was a practising Catholic. She has not practised very hard, has she?" – Margaret Burns, aunt of back-from-the-dead canoeist John Darwin, after his wife, Anne, was convicted of fraud.



"True friendship is a friend who is honest enough to tell you 'Yes, your bum looks big in that', or 'No, he's not the right guy for you' or, maybe,

'Invading Iraq might not be such a good idea' – TV presenter June Sarpong discussing Britain's special relationship with the United States.

"Dr Radovan

Karadzic is a gambler, who played at the tables as well as gambling with the lives of others.

His bitten-down nails revealed an inner tension, masked by his apparent self-confidence" – Lord (David) Owen, former foreign secretary and ex-EU co-chairman of the Conference for the Former Yugoslavia.

"Dear Earlperson" – The opening words of a letter sent by a land agent to the Earl of Harewood.