

Making the Dundry Pens



The Church of St Michael the Archangel sits in the small village of Dundry in Somerset, England, and serves the local parish. The tower was built in 1484 with the rest added in 1861.



In 2016 the church was closed for renovations. The roof needed repairing and new facilities were required for the church to fulfil modern requirements. The church needed to raise £500,000 to complete this work.



Since the work has been completed the church has found new community uses, such as coffee mornings and host shows such as 'Tess' from the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



As part of the internal alterations around a dozen pews were no longer required, and the church made the brave decision to auction them to raise further funds for improvements.



As it was incomplete the church kindly gave me the end of nave pew seven to turn into small gift items. The exact wood and age are unknown, but the best estimate is late Victorian and Pine. The wood has been treated with oils and varnishes.



The first stage was to cut the pew into suitable sections, called blanks, for all the different items that could be created e.g. pens, festive tree decorations, corkscrew handles, bottle stoppers, and bottle openers.



The soft wood and wide grain of the pew wood meant that it split and fractured easily when turned. So, every blank has been treated in a wood stabilisation process. The wood is submerged in a special liquid resin and placed under a vacuum where the all air in the wood is removed.



After 12-24 hours the vacuum is released, and the wood is left for a few days to continue to draw up the resin. Then the wood is removed, wrapped in foil, and baked to cure (set) the resin. The blank can double in weight through this process and is much harder afterwards.



Once the blanks have been stabilised, they are cut into the required lengths, drilled and have the brass tubes fitted which form the backbone of the pen. The pens are now ready to be turned to their final shape.



They are placed onto a tool called a mandrel with bushes that define the required sizes required at each end that connect to the nib and the top. Once the pen has been shaped it can be finished.



The pen blanks are sanded down with increasingly fine grit. They are finished in a Cyanoacrylate (CA) finish that is built up in layers. Over 20 thin layers will be applied to the pen before cutting back with micro grits and buffing compounds before a final application of polish and wax.



With the pen blanks finished the pen is assembled using a special press. The twist mechanism is inserted to the correct depth so that the pen nib can be retracted and extended perfectly.