

A personal touch

This month, Longthorne explain why, where and how they engrave and recount some of the more unusual requests they have received over the years...

Beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder and this, of course, applies to the intricate engraving designs found on shotguns. Engraving is a very subjective issue and at Longthorne, we try to have a cross section in our standard guns to suit everyone's taste from the heavily engraved Rutland, Deluxe and Celtic designs to the more subtle Rose and Scroll and Hesketh, but some clients want a little bit more to make their guns that little bit more special.

If you are going to have your gun customised, no matter where, it is always worth thinking

carefully about the design because it can affect the re-sale value in the future if you or a family member may want to sell it. That said, we are quite often asked to personalise guns for clients for all sorts of reasons, and with very personal aspects we try to be as subtle and/or classical as possible. Although, we concede that this concept did not apply to a certain coal miner from Wales with a Purdey gun embellished with the portrait of Margaret Thatcher, so there are exceptions!

It is worth thinking about where on the gun you would like personalisation, for example on one occasion we inserted a message on the inside of the lock plate of the gun so that the owner knew it was there but it remained subtle. Under the top lever is also a good place and on a trigger guard, which could be exchanged for a replacement, if required. We receive some interesting enquiries. We once had a gentleman farmer enquire about having his cows put onto a gun and on the underside of one of our guns. Currently residing in the Antipodes, we have an engraving of a crocodile with a duck in its mouth, an interesting commission for our artist. Family crests can look very pleasing and quite regal.

Irrespective of how the engraving is going to be applied to your gun, it must first be designed. We are very lucky to be able to utilise the talents of Artistic Director and family member, Chloe Stewart who is able to work with clients if they

have something specific in mind.

There are other considerations though. For example, although it is possible to create a drawing from a photograph, the final interpretation will never be identical to the photograph because for best results the finished piece has to be recreated using vectors (lines) and pixels (dots), whether it is done by mechanical means or by hand. It is possible to scan a photograph into a laser machine and reproduce this, however it can result in something which looks like a photocopy, lacking detail and looking 'flat'. Some manufacturers do use this method as it cuts corners; it takes a great deal of time to recreate a photograph by drawing it.

Gun manufacturers use many methods, or indeed combinations of methods, to apply engraving. These include:

Rolling, pressing and stamping

This is a quick and easy way of achieving a repeated design, but doesn't always maintain detail or consistency as the rollers eventually wear and have to be replaced or recut. It tends to be used on less expensive guns.

Acid etching

Simplified, this involves marking out the pattern which you do not want to remove and then applying – sometimes by spraying or agitating in



A preliminary drawing of a client's dog by Chloe Stewart

PICTURES: LONGTHORNE



The final engraving of a pheasant scene

Longthorne's engravings are a culmination of hundreds of hours of artistic design and refinement of detail.



An example of personalised vignettes for an Australian client. Australian birds adorn the side plates and on the underside is a crocodile with a duck in its mouth

PICTURES: MATTHEW BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY

‘A coal miner from Wales has a Purdey gun embellished with the portrait of Margaret Thatcher’

– an acid solution. It is good for cutting deep reliefs prior to final engraving.

Photo etching

This is similar to chemical etching and can achieve a high level of accuracy and has few burrs. It can look a bit ‘flat’, but can work well when used in conjunction with other methods.

Machining

This method has become more popular in recent years due to the advent of high-speed, highly accurate machines and micro cutters which can maintain excellent detail. The drawback is the time it takes to generate the initial program; this can often take longer than hand engraving, so not such a cost effective method for small batches.

Laser

Advances in this technology over recent years has led to some outstanding and very detailed

results dependent on the type of laser used, some are better than others.

Hand

Hand engravers also sometimes use mechanical means to assist them including acid/photo etching for some applications, although of course a high percentage is done by hand using either an electronic graver or a manual implement. Manufacturers also sometimes use a laser to lay out the design initially onto the metal, which the engraver can then follow by hand. Hand engraving takes great skill and artistic interpretation to achieve the best results.

We start off with a drawing and then use a number of different mechanical methods, depending on the design in question, and finally hand finish to ensure the final finish has a high level of detail, bearing in mind that the material we use for our guns is extremely hard in its raw state and would be very arduous, but not

impossible, to manipulate completely by hand. We also do all our gold inlaying by hand. It is our intention in the not too distant future to take on a hand engraving apprentice.

The human race have been engraving in one form or another since occupying the earth and have always used the tools available to them. As gun manufacturers we make no apologies for the technology we use, it is technically advanced, produces excellent results and takes great artistic flare and skill to utilise its potential and achieve the best results. ■

CONTACT DETAILS

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The Rutland guns bear the peacock, the symbol of Belvoir Castle, and also have the family crest on the fore-end metalwork.