

## The Rectors Board

Back in 2019 I was asked to make a new Rectors Board for Stoke Damerel church in Plymouth as the old one had no space for additional names.

The church had been refurbished recently part of which involved the pews being removed and replaced by chairs. There was a good supply of oak pew wood so the new Rectors Board was to be made using some of that historic church timber. In addition there was a redundant kneeler that included carvings attributed to Violet Pinwill who, unusually for a woman in the early 1900s, ran a local wood carving business with her sisters. By the time plans were drawn and approval from the Diocese obtained the country was in lockdown due to Covid-19 so the start of construction was delayed until June 2020.

The old timber was delivered to the workshop so the process had begun.



The first job was to dismantle the pew and kneeler parts taking care not to damage the unique Pinwill carvings. This is always an interesting process. A bit of detective work to establish how the original was put together and then working out how to reverse the process while maximising the available timber for the new project. There were pegged mortice and tenon joints, dovetails, tongue and groove joints, screws hidden under wooden plugs as well as some that were visible and nails. Most of the joints had also been glued however over the 80-90 years since they were put together most had dried out so that did not present too much of a problem when dismantling.

Having dismantled the originals the timber selected for the new board was cut to size and planed. Over the years the pews and kneeler had acquired a coating of stains, polish and dirt but having removed that the timber beneath the top surface was like new, but much better seasoned! Wood is such a rewarding material to work with.



The two larger Pinwill carvings had been marked in pencil “Stoke rails”, presumably by the carver, which was an interesting discovery. This has been preserved in the new Rectors Board although the writing can't be seen.



Having machined the timber to size and made the joints I hand carved the legend “Rectors of Stoke Damerel” on the top piece of the frame before assembly.



To achieve the thickness of timber needed for the new board I made two outer frames and glued/screwed them together. This also formed the recess needed for the flat boards from the pew backs that would form the “writing” surface. In assembling the board I used all the types of joint used in the original pews and kneeler right down to the nails as, although not necessary, I thought it would be a nice homage to the original makers.



As the project was nearing completion the long uprights looked a little plain so I turned, carved and added two Celtic style crosses set into roundels. The new carvings are quite simple so as not to detract from the more intricate Pinwill carvings, they also form a link between the top and bottom carved elements. I thought this would help keep the craft alive and continue the tradition of ecclesiastical carvings.

The pews and kneeler had been stained to darken the wood. The original carvings incorporated into the new board were therefore a darker colour, in fact two different colours, to the planed timber. To remove the stain completely would have destroyed the carvings so the final job after sanding was to stain the planed timber to blend the colours.

So the new board is now ready for Steve the sign-writer to varnish before hand painting the required wording.



Eric Anning  
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