

by Victoria Moore

**O**N A miserable, drizzly day in Birmingham, I am standing in a shopping centre staring very hard at a gold pin. According to Graham Short, if I look at it through a microscope, I will see it in a unique way.

Because, etched in tiny, neat script across the 2mm head are the words of the Lord's Prayer, engraved with such minuscule, infinitesimally delicate strokes that it seems to be the work of an insect rather than a wrinkled but agile 64-year-old man who's looking forward to going swimming in Lanzarote for a week and drives round Birmingham in a Mercedes saloon.

It's an incredible piece of work, a feat requiring astonishing skill. So, how did Graham manage it, how long does something like this take? And why on earth would anyone do that?

'I've always tried to engrave things smaller and smaller,' he says. 'I try to test myself. And doing the Lord's Prayer in miniature is a very traditional thing, which is how I thought of it.'

Graham is a copper and steel engraver by profession — one, he thinks, of only two such tradesmen left in the country.

He makes the steel dies that are used to print the green portcullis on House of Commons headed paper. He also does the letterheads for the royal residences — Sandringham, Balmoral and Windsor Castle.

He is currently working on some prints for a set of Royal Mail first edition stamps. Over the years he's made the 10 'impressing' of the business cards of letterheads of Andrew Lloyd Webber and a block called Roland who had a castle in Ireland and wanted a picture of the castle on the letterhead. We had a long chat on the phone about it.

'Afterwards I discovered it was the pop star Ronan Keating, and I'd been calling him Roland all the time we talked.'

Graham says it's impossible to give an estimate for how much your own hand-engraved plate might cost.

'I have to do it job by job — each one is completely different and it depends so much on the amount of work involved.'

In almost half a century of work, he says, only one person has ever complained and asked for it to be done again: Mrs Weakest Link herself, Anne Robinson.

'I couldn't see anything wrong with it at all, unless perhaps the printers had messed it up,' sniffs Graham. 'But I did it again anyway and she was happy the second time.'

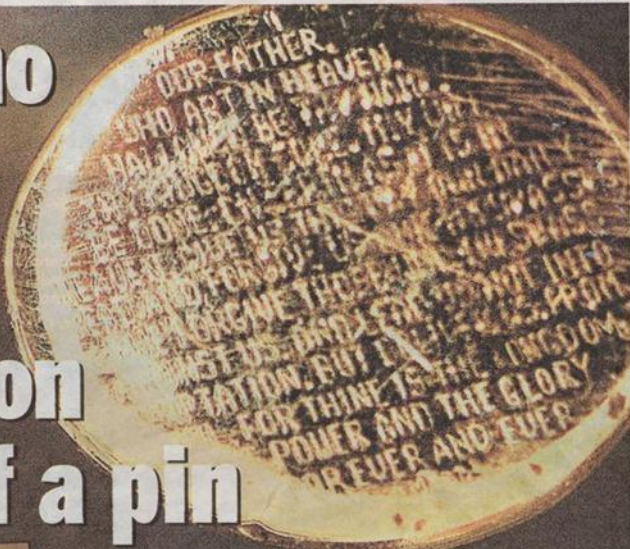
Hand-engraving is known as the 'Rolls-Royce' of printing. The deeper the engraver cuts, the higher the embossed ink stands out on the paper, making you want to run your fingers over its smooth contours.

**G**RAHAM nods. 'A few years ago I did the gold crest on the front of a fashion catalogue for a show in Paris. I remember watching the news and seeing Christina Onassis sitting in the front row holding it, stroking the raised ink. She had no idea it was done by me in a grubby little workshop in Birmingham.'

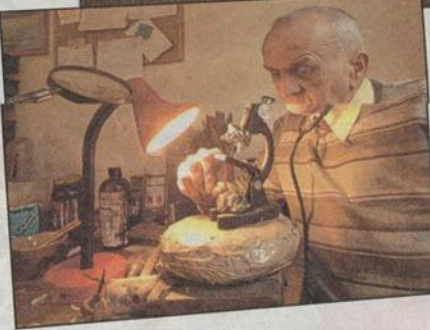
He's not joking when he talks about a grubby workshop. He's now working in a room in his mother's house. She died last year, aged 101.

Spread out on a wooden work table are the tools of his trade plus bottles and jars. There's meths, used for cleaning the metal surface before it is engraved; something called

# Man who carved Lord's Prayer on head of a pin



Picture: BRIAN BOULD



Pin king: Graham at work, above, and the Lord's Prayer, top

'etching ground' which smells like Victory V throat lozenges and is an 'acid resist' which is spread across the plate to guard parts of it that are not part of the pattern; sharp tools for engraving; and acid in jars which is poured over the letters Graham scratches into the surface so they can eat away at the metal.

There's also a pot of soft pigeon feathers used gently to brush the residue out of the engraved letters as the acid bites into them, and an assortment of mucky brushes, cloths and dusters.

Plus, there's a microscope, under which there's another pin on which Graham is working another Lord's Prayer. I take a squint. It's slightly marred by fine scratches through the letters.

I make the mistake of mentioning this. Graham

looks miserable. 'Yes, it's because I show it to people and they can't see the engraving so they wipe it with their fingertips and even that gentle movement scratches it.'

The engravings that Graham does on the head of a pin are tiny scratches, made using the fine tip of a needle. He works on miniatures only at night. 'It's no good during the day because the traffic going past vibrates too much.'

This intense expression of his art requires such precision that for the first hour of his engraving session he does nothing. Literally. 'I sit still until my pulse goes really low.'

A mad keen swimmer who in 2001 was a European Masters Champion for the 200 metres butterfly, Graham says he now swims 'only' 4,000 metres five times a week. No doubt this is why his heart rate is so

low that when he's calm, he's almost flatlining.

'My resting heart rate is 30,' he says. 'So when I'm working I get it down to that. I put the pin under the microscope, strap my arm to restrict its movement and I'll get the movement of the needle across the surface of the pin head.'

He estimates the Lord's Prayer took him 300 hours in total. 'Some nights I might get three letters done, on others nothing at all.'

Now he intends to engrave a pinhead with part of the first chapter of the Koran in Arabic, and to write the Second Amendment to the U.S. constitution, protecting an American's rights to bear arms, on a silver bullet. He has one more ambition: 'I'd love to engrave the name of the Wimbledon champion on the cup.'

**A**ND a couple of regrets: he yearns to have a royal warrant for his work, but says: 'No one knows I do it. My dies and copper plates aren't ordered directly by the Royal Household, but through whichever printer the stationery is ordered from, so the rules state it must go to them.'

And he wishes his was not a dying trade. In the Sixties, he took on the job for £2.75 a week, and wasn't daunted by the prospect of a six-year apprenticeship. Today's youth tend to seek rather more instant gratification.

And, sadly, we are increasingly less disposed to pay for the time and decades of skill of craftsmen such as Graham Short.

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## Whatever next? SCOTCH EASTER EGGS

LENT might just have begun, but we can call off the search for the oddest Easter egg. L'Artisan du Chocolat has produced this marvel (or monstrosity, depending on your viewpoint) — a chocolate confection resembling a Scotch egg.



The outside has a rough texture thanks to dark chocolate shavings, while the 'meat' is made of marshmallow and puffed rice. The egg bit, meanwhile, is a delicious mix of vanilla and passionfruit ganache. At £14.99 from [artisanduchocolat.com](http://artisanduchocolat.com), it's guaranteed to provoke a reaction.