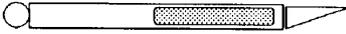


# NEWS

# THE BLAST SHOP



## Christmas 2014 Edition

- Automation
- Sand Anchors
- Speed vs Quality
- Help for Masons
- Local Authorities

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VOLUME 24 ISSUE 4

NEWS FOR THE MEMORIAL INDUSTRY

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### WHY AUTOMATE?

People often ask us how long it takes for our automatic cabinet to sandblast a headstone. Obviously the answer varies from stone to stone but ultimately I don't care! If you were running at the machines capacity then you probably need to know how many jobs you can do a day (the answer is 40+ for those that are interested) but for the majority of masons it's what you do whilst the machine is working rather than how long it takes that's important. Rather than standing in front of a sandblasting cabinet our masons can start laying up the next memorial, paint or gild the most recently blasted stone or just make themselves a cup of tea. The key thing is - they are not stood in front of the sandblaster.

### SPEED vs QUALITY

The same principle applies to the other automatic processes we use - our impact engraver is a prime example. I don't produce 40 photographic stencils a week (I could if I wanted to) but what I do produce is high quality results. If



the machine was running all day every day then I could afford to buy another one because the quality of the completed designs is exceptional and can command a higher price than PhotoBlast designs. With an average etch taking around one hour I often set the machine running as I leave work so that when I return in the morning it's all done and ready to paint. Other machines and techniques such as PhotoBlasting are potentially quicker but, for me, the unique selling feature of the etching machine is the quality of the finished designs.



The final automatic process for this newsletter is one that you probably wouldn't have thought of as an automatic one but, in the past, people used letter presses or cut rubber stencil by hand. How often do you sit and watch your plotter cutting stencils out? You may have done when you first got the machine but I doubt many will sit for 5-10 minutes watching the plotter now! So would it matter if the plotter ran 10% slower? How about if the quality of the cut was better when the machine was running slower? It may come as a surprise to you to know that cutters can cut more accurately the slower they run. We recently used our Graphtec cutter to cut 228 lines 2.5m long, 1mm apart. Run at the

normal speed the plotter failed to produce parallel lines but when we decreased the speed it cut all 228 without deviation. Admittedly I then started running the plotter overnight but the quality of the finished product was not achievable running at full speed. Is it worth spending a few more minutes doing something else whilst your plotter cuts the inscription? Maybe not if you are watching it but if you are busy doing something else instead then it is certainly worth considering, all the letters will be properly formed and fully cut which will make the manual weeding out process quicker and easier and also improve the quality of the finished work.

Automation is not about speed, automation is about quality and time: time to do something else, maybe those items that are at the end of your todo list; don't forget, time is money.

### MASONS NEED YOUR HELP

There is seemingly nothing we can do to stop Local Authorities selling memorials given the current legal situation but there are things that we can do to try and get the Localism Act that allows it amended. The act, introduced in 2011, allows cemeteries to sell memorials direct to the public providing they meet a few criteria. Local Authorities are struggling to balance their budgets so any way to generate additional revenue is being investigated. In order to try

and highlight the impact this will have on small businesses NAMM have written a letter that you can send to your local MP asking them to look into the possible unintentional effects of the Act. They are also planning an email petition, in order for this to work they need 100,000 signatures. Please support this cause, it **will** affect your business in the future. More details can be found at [www.namm.org.uk](http://www.namm.org.uk).

## SAND ANCHORS

The more observant reader will recognise the picture as one we have already used in the Blast Shop newsletters. It was over two



years ago that we first mentioned that ground anchors may have to be tested in a sand gravel mix rather than soil. At the time we carried out tests on our own range of anchors in a sand gravel mix and found that their resistance was only marginally down on the official NAMM tests carried at Northampton. As far as we were concerned the difference wasn't worth worrying about.

Recently one of our competitors invited organisations with an interest in memorial safety, including British Standards to a pull test on a memorial fixed with a standard "NAMM rod" accredited for a 28 mm diameter hole. The test was carried out in a test pit filled with sharp sand. Not surprisingly, the ground anchor failed to meet the required safety

standard. However, British Standards expressed their concern about the failure and, as a result, the goal posts may now move even further and the spectre of all ground anchors having to work in sand in order to meet BS 8415 is looming. A YouTube video of the test has been posted on the internet.

We have always said that if you are having to fix a memorial on sandy ground it may be necessary to amend the way you use our anchors. If you are using either our Peg and Tube or LockDown system based on 28mm tubes you may have to drill extra holes in your foundation to take a further one or two tubes. If you don't want to use extra tubes you could use one of our 38mm systems as an alternative.

When the same competitor first raised the subject of changing the test requirements two years ago we suggested creating a separate test specifically for poor soil conditions. We have different tests for different height memorials so why not different soil conditions?

We understand the need to ensure that we have safe memorials throughout the country no matter what the soil conditions are. However, if you look at the construction industry, you don't have the same specification for foundations when building on sand and clay, so why should we have the same requirements for memorials? A separate accreditation for sand anchors would ensure that when sandy conditions were encountered a mason could simply fix with another technique. Cemeteries which have a problem with sandy soil could insist that masons use a sand accredited anchor.

If we were just ground anchor manufacturers we'd probably be more than happy to support our competitor's idea of everybody having to use a more expensive, one size fits all, ground anchor system, but we're not. We are practical memorial masons fixing memorials safely with, in 99.5% of the time, current accredited 28mm ground anchor systems. For the

other 0.5% we add extra stability. Why should our customers be forced to buy something which, in the vast majority of cases, they simply don't need?

The fundamental aim of BS 8415 is to ensure that memorials are fixed so that nobody should be injured should a memorial accidentally fail. For the vast majority of memorials fixed today with 28 mm based ground anchor systems this will be the case. For some memorials which are fixed on sandy soil additional resistance will probably be needed. This could take many forms, longer or thicker anchors, multiple anchors, concrete piles, etc. etc. We believe that the BS 8415 committee should be encouraging ground anchor manufacturers to develop new systems to meet a new ground anchor category for sandy soils, **not** listening to one voice with a vested interest in completely changing the accreditation system to suit his own purse.

## PRESIDENT CALLS FOR HELP

We often get calls from masons when they are struggling to achieve perfect results and this year has been no exception. We've been burning the midnight oil finishing those "difficult to do" designs for a number of our customers, including the current NAMM president. Struggling to perfect some very small lettering the NAMM president contacted us and asked if there was a way he could blast the lettering rather than just scratching it in. At 2.5mm high, the letters were pretty small but perfectly formed using a Rayzist PhotoBlast stencil. Measuring just 10mm x 24mm, it might have been one of the smallest stencils we've created but it finished off the crest and the stone was shipped to Cyprus 3 days after Keith called us.

## AND FINALLY...

All of us at The Blast Shop wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.