

WOOD CARVING

PETER BENSON GUEST EDITOR

- Introduces the issue
- Profiles carver Steve Smart
- Carves a carousel horse



PROJECTS TO CARVE Baroque swirl • Halloween biscuit moulds
• Gnocchi paddles • Celtic triquetra pattern • Meerkats • Rabbit
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Guest editor's letter

Peter Benson



For some years after my retirement, I was fortunate enough to get the chance to travel around the world meeting other carvers.

While doing this I discovered that, although we all have the same passion for our hobby, we follow that passion in very different ways.

The Australians have to use very hard timber so will generally carve on custom-made benches with gouges and mallets, or even power tools. A similar process has traditionally been followed in the UK, with the result that it can be very difficult for a would-be carver to find somewhere local to learn the craft.

As a contrast, in the United States I have found that wherever you go you can find small groups of enthusiasts working in home workshops or garages, as well as larger groups in clubs and senior centres. It seems that senior citizens find it much easier to get together and follow a wide range of activities there than in the UK.

As a result of this way of meeting, the carvers are predominantly using knives and small palm tools instead of gouges and mallets. This is helped by the fact that the timber they use is much softer than elsewhere. They also have many more outlets for purchasing tools and materials, as well as fairly frequent carving shows – which are not easy to find here.

I think this is where a magazine like this can make a valuable contribution, not only by making the reader aware of what is available, but by promoting the various styles of working and

giving attainable examples for carvers at all levels of ability to attempt.

At one time, all the people who came to me for help or instruction were interested in traditional styles. That has changed over recent years and the focus has moved towards knife carving – hence the great increase in the number of whittling books that can be found today.

Not only does the prospective carver need considerably fewer tools, meaning less expense, but also the carving can be done in the kitchen (if allowed by other members of the household), the garden or on holiday on the beach. The focus also changes. Most carvers build up a collection of 'masterpieces' that take sometimes hundreds of hours and then sit on shelves, go into the loft or, occasionally, get sold. Few people actually get any pleasure from the carver's efforts. Knife carvings, however, take very little time in comparison, and can be readily given to friends and family who will get a great deal of pleasure from the effort that has been put in.

I must admit that I have obtained far more pleasure and satisfaction from the pieces that have been distributed in this way than from any of my more traditional pieces – not as much achievement, admittedly, but joy, yes.

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Carousel horse

Peter Benson carves an elegant equine

If you are someone who takes up a creative hobby, you can choose to keep what you do to yourself or share it with others. There are many who produce wonderful work that nobody else ever sees, other than members of the family, and those who exhibit their work or sell it at craft fairs. I fall into the latter group and am always willing to show others what I have done. This may be seen as showing off but I see it as being proud of my efforts, rightly or wrongly, and a way of encouraging others to try for themselves and enjoy their successes and learn from their failures.

It is quite surprising what can develop from someone seeing your work. It was as a result of a visit from our boiler maintenance man that I set about carving this project – he saw some of my work and asked if I could carve the horse as a present for his father. The pattern he wanted was inspired by a tattoo he had on his arm. I felt it would be an interesting project to try so, here goes.

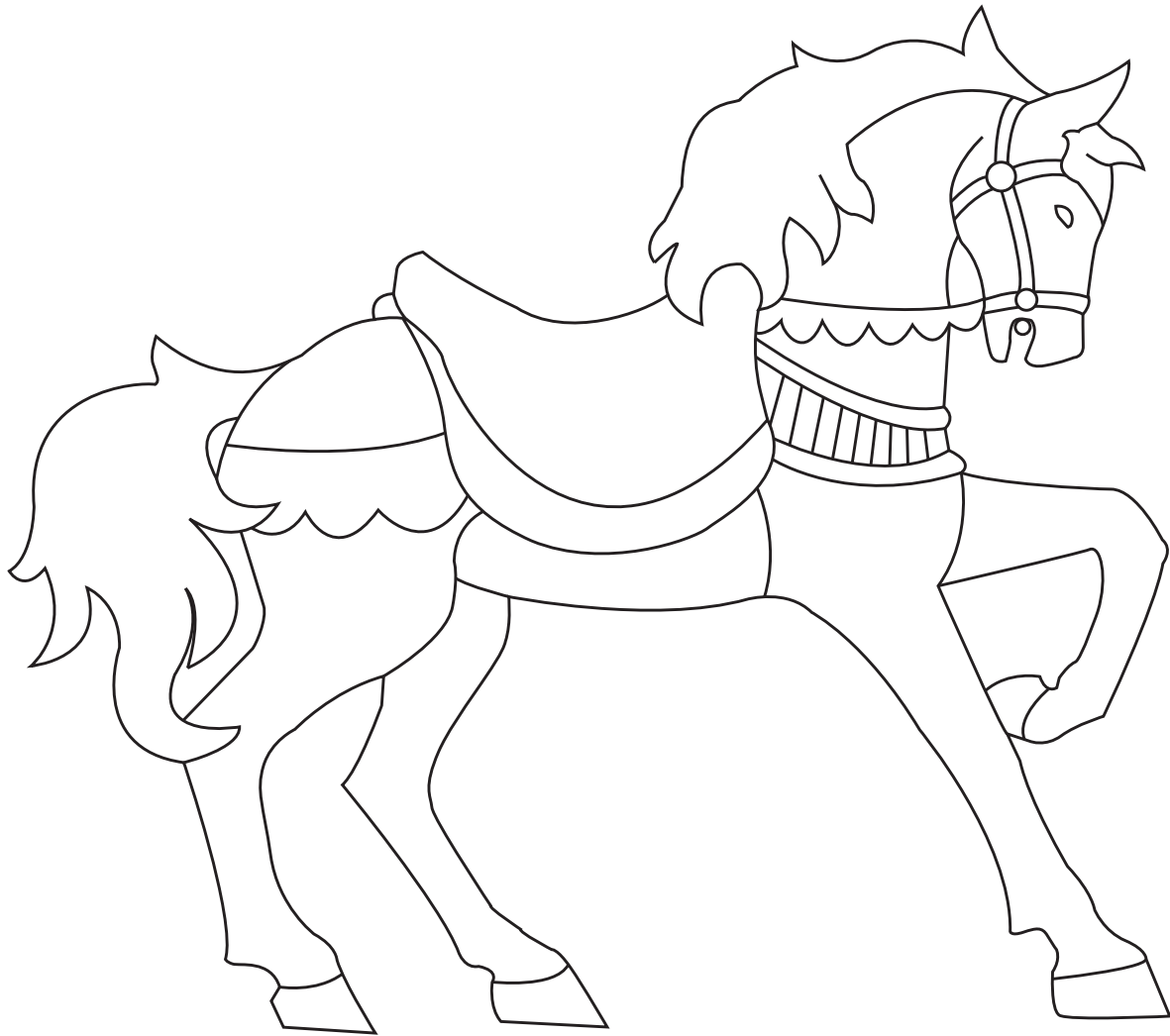
I had a piece of nice lime, 3in thick, so drew up the pattern to fit the wood available. This would make a horse about 10in tall, which seemed about right.

Pattern

When drawing out a horse, or any similar animal, there is always the problem of which way to have the grain. Usually, I have it running along the legs to make them less likely to break but, in this case there were some areas where I wasn't too sure about the grain, so decided to have it running along the body of the horse. This isn't a problem but means that I will have to be a bit more careful when shaping the legs – no hard hitting with a mallet.

After drawing the pattern on to the wood I cut it out on the bandsaw, leaving a large piece of wood under the body to which I can attach a carving clamp or hold in a bench vice.





PHOTOGRAPHS BY EM BENSON



1 If you are going to use a bench vice I would suggest you leave some wood connecting the four feet together and drill out the area between this and the underside of the body as shown in picture 1 of a horse I carved previously (shown mounted on a clamp). This is a bit more work but will prevent any accidental crushing of the legs in the vice.

2 If you don't have a bandsaw, remove as much of the waste wood as you can with whatever saws you have available and then chisel to the outline you have drawn. There is a temptation to leave extra wood outside your drawn lines but I would advise against this as

you will nearly always end up with a fat horse with short, stumpy legs. Be bold and cut to the lines. If you wish to turn the head, you will need to allow extra wood, especially around the ears, when cutting out the head – see instructions later on in the article.

Once you have the outline cut out, take a little time to identify exactly where you are definitely going to need to remove waste wood around the legs– don't even think about any detail at this point. Mark the areas to be removed and carefully remove the waste, holding the block in a bench vice to minimise any movement. Be aware of the grain direction at all times.



3 & 4 If you are using a carving clamp, attach this to the wood under the body.

5 The horse should now be firmly fixed for the rest of the carving process.

Having drawn the pattern on to both sides of the cut-out shape you can remove the rest of the obvious waste wood.

6 & 7 Don't think about any rounding off until you have a clear outline of the horse on both sides, because once you start to round off the shape you will lose all your reference lines and you will be working from guesswork.

At this point I would normally recommend that you set the position of the head and neck to get the angles right, but in this case I was a little concerned that there were delicate parts that might prove to be a problem, so I decided to tackle the rest of the body first and leave the head and neck until later – you may like to approach it differently.

Leaving the saddle area for the time being, you can start to shape the rump, body and upper part of the legs, without touching the lower leg areas. These can be left until the end for safety reasons. Don't remove any wood from between the legs as not only does this wood add to the strength of the legs but, once removed, you will not have the opportunity to make adjustments to the shape.

8 At this point I noticed that the wood was moving as a result of changes in the weather and temperature and I was a little concerned that the cut behind the front leg was opening and closing. I decided to increase the gap to avoid any pressure on the leg.





9, 10 & 11 Remember that the belly on a horse is quite a bit fatter than the rest of the body, so don't be tempted to thin it down. You can always make adjustments later on. As this is a carousel horse, it can be slim or heavy, but remember, you can always take off more wood. It is much more difficult to put it back on.

Now you need to decide if you want to keep the head facing straight ahead or if you want to turn it slightly. A small amount of turn does add life to the carving, but if it has been bandsawn out all cuts are at right angles to the surface of the wood and any big turn of the head can result in the ears not being at the right angle. You will get away with a small amount of turn, but take care with the ears.

Draw a centreline at the angle you want and remove the waste wood, leaving about an inch of wood either side of this line. This should give you plenty of material from which to carve the head.

12, 13a & 13b Going back to your original pattern, redraw the head, neck and mane detail on to each side of the neck area. There was a possible problem with the grain around the centre of the tree that fell in the head and ear area. Small cracks were already beginning to appear so I decided to remove this, meaning that I had no choice but to turn the head.

Remove as much wood as you can (or feel confident in doing so) remembering to allow for the harness but not going into fine detail.



14

14 I suggest you now start to reduce the amount of wood you have for the mane and tail. You have a lot of freedom here and can be as simple or complicated with your design as you wish. Don't forget to leave a few parts of the tail attached to the body or legs to give it strength. The mane can be whatever you wish. It will help to draw what you intend to carve as you add the basic detail. You will need to allow for adjustments later when you finish the legs and neck. You might like to get some basic shape into the head at this point.

15 & 16 This is also the time that you can start to make some holes. The main ones are between the horse's chin and neck and between the tail and the hind quarters. This will make sure that whatever you do on one side will match up with the other side. While you can use a drill to make these I recommend that you use hand tools as there is a tendency for drill holes to come out in the wrong place.

The important thing with these holes is that they are placed in such a way that they help you to access areas you may want to carve. In the case of the tail it is best to make the holes and fit the sweep of the tail to what has been done. Don't forget where the hair of the tail originates when drawing up the various sweeps. Leave the tail in clumps at this stage – you can add the fine detail when the rest is complete.

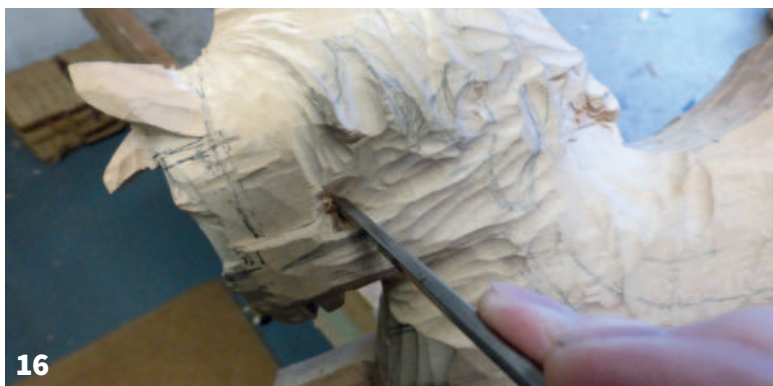
Useful tips & advice

When cutting the sweeps of hair or fur with a gouge, try to twist the gouge, as you cut, in the direction of the curve. This will produce a smooth curve rather than one with kinks in it. You twist anti-clockwise if the curve is to the left and clockwise if it is to the right. The deeper the gouge the tighter will be the curve.

17 & 18 Once the tail is roughly carved with the various sections defined you can slim down the top of the hind legs and rump. I have carved the hind feet before touching the legs to avoid breakage, and suggest you do the same. I drew each hoof in what I thought was the right position and carved it as far as I could, checking that both were the same size.



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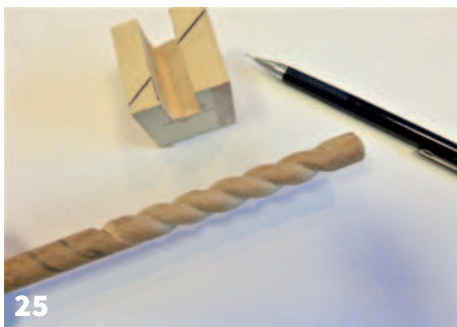
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19 & 20 When you are happy with the result, draw a line through the centre of the hoof and up the leg as a guide to the correct line you need to carve when slimming down the legs – you might be advised to wait until later before final slimming and detailing. You are now almost at the point where you need to remove the wood you have left attached under the body so that you can carve the legs and underside of the horse. Before you do this, I would advise that you drill the pilot hole through the body for the upright pole. The pole I have prepared is from a length of 12mm dowel, but you may have your own ideas of what sort of pole is best suited. Preparation and fitting will be shown a little later. For the moment, the hole I drilled was 6mm and, after marking out a centreline in the mane, I enlisted the aid of an enthusiastic helper to hold the horse firmly while I drilled the hole. The use of a tri-square here to ensure that the drill remained vertical was useful but, again, you may have your own methods. There is still a danger that the drill bit may not come out in the centre of the underside of the body but this can be remedied in the fitting. You could, of course, drill a small hole down from the top and another up from the bottom if you are sure you can line them up.

21 I was keen to get the pole made and roughly fitted before finishing off the horse, so set about the process at this stage. I made a small block to house the dowel and marked it at the angle I wanted the spirals to be.

22 I then marked a piece of dowel all the way along its length to give a continuous spiral about 25mm apart.

23 In the centre of this line I repeated the process, ending up with a double spiral.

24 With a knife I carefully carved a groove along the lines I had carved to a depth of around 2mm.

25 The wood in between the grooves was rounded and sanded to give a smooth, continuous spiral along the whole length of the piece of dowel used.

26 I intended to gold leaf the pole if possible and, therefore, would fit it in two halves rather than try to push it all the way through the hole. As I had more than enough rod I would experiment with the fitting until I was happy with the result.

I now felt happy to remove the waste wood from underneath so that I could carry on with the fitting and detailing the rest of the figure.

In the next issue I will show you how I completed the horse, carving in my lap, as it is no longer safe or practical to hold the carving in a clamp or vice. You may feel that you want to do more while it is secure and that, of course, is up to you and is fine. ●

Steve Smart

Guest editor Peter Benson introduces us to his carving friend, Steve Smart

I first met Steve many years ago at an annual general meeting of the British Woodcarvers Association held at the University in Canterbury, Kent. Despite his moves around the country we have kept in touch and, since he settled in Felixstowe some while ago, he has become a regular visitor to my carving sessions in spite of having to travel for around 90 minutes each way (shows some dedication). We share a love of carving in miniature and have exchanged ideas and skills willingly and, I hope, with some success. His attention to detail and getting a superb finish on his work has been a lesson to many carvers who have worked with him, myself included. In spite of his obvious ability, he has never shown any reluctance to accept ideas and suggestions from other carvers as well as sharing his own. I envy his eye for pleasing lines and shapes in his abstract work – something I have struggled with for years. Each time he turns up with a new piece gives a boost to the creative process.

Tell us how you became a carver?

When I left school, I started an apprenticeship with Rolls Royce in Bristol and ended up as one of hundreds of draughtsmen working on the engines for Concorde and the Harrier. Shortly after finishing my apprenticeship, I felt like a change. As it was during a period that you could easily change jobs, I became a service engineer working on mainly domestic oil-fired boilers. One of the houses that I visited belonged to a fireman who, in his spare time, produced outlines of birds and animals cut out of timber and mounted in a picture frame. As I showed an interest, he gave me some outline drawings, so after the purchase of a fretsaw and some 20mm piranha pine I was ready to go. The first carving/fretsaw outline was going to be of a stylised deer for my daughter who was about two at the time. I decided to make it more three-dimensional by lowering two of the legs and then putting depth in the body and head. Because of other commitments and interests, I finished the carving and presented it to my daughter about a year before she got married. In my defence I did produce other carvings between starting and finishing the deer.





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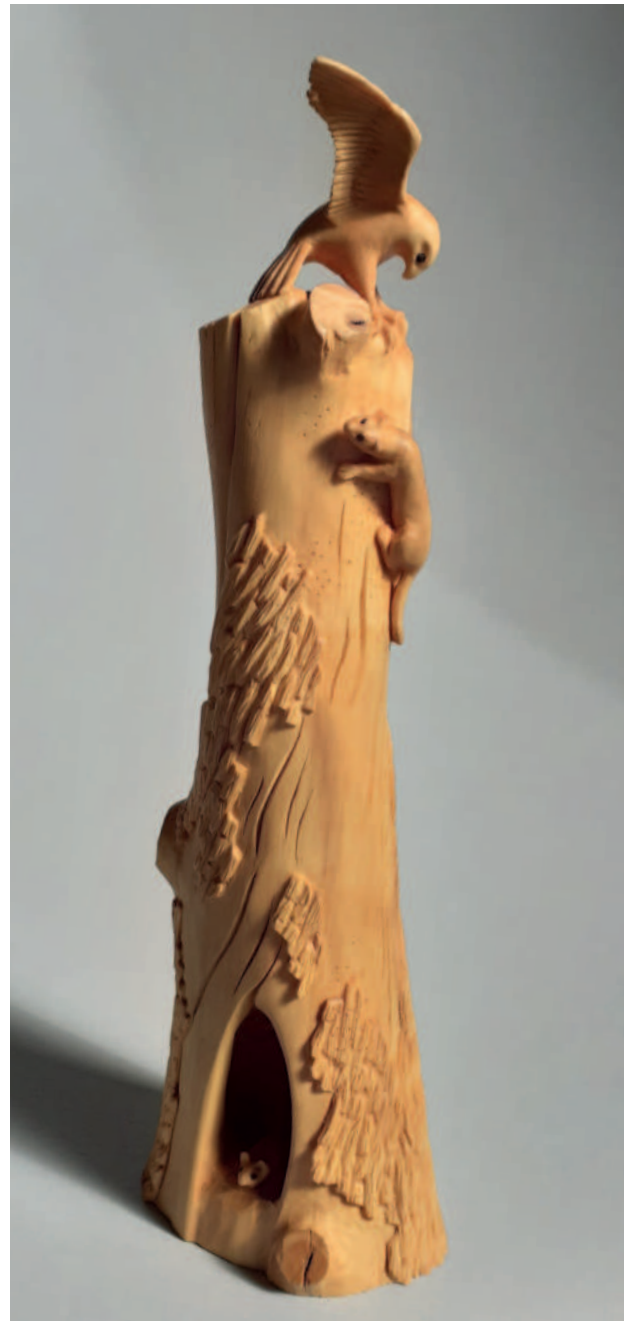


**What are your favourite pieces of your own carving?
What do they mean to you?**

Not something I've really considered before. I think all of my carvings have given something back, either with enjoyment in producing them or seeing the reaction to people looking at them. At one time I was only producing carvings that were a challenge and trying to push the boundary of my ability. Then one day a wise old carver asked me why I carved wood, as my carving is a hobby and not a career. I said I carve for fun. He then said: 'Well, do you always get fun from trying to produce a masterpiece with every carving?' To be honest, the answer is not all the time. He then introduced me to producing small, fun carvings that don't take more than a few hours to make that can be given away as gifts quite freely. I now find that by mixing up both types of carving, depending on how I feel or where I'm carving. I enjoy my carving even more. When carving with a group, it's much more relaxing to sit back and carve with a knife and small piece of wood rather than frantically hammer away with a mallet and gouge. With my larger carvings I sometime get a 'wow', but with the fun carvings I often get a smile. Which is worth more?

Describe your design process. What are your considerations when you set out to carve a piece?

When I have an idea that I would like to carve I will research online and in books all I can about the subject. Books on how to draw animals and birds I have found particularly useful; you can also learn interesting facts about your subject. I carved an elephant for my son and, reading about elephants, discovered that they can only walk, but if required can walk at 30 miles an hour. I will then produce a



pencil outline of one view only of the pose I have in mind. I will then search through my stock of wood for the most suitable piece of timber. I will quite possibly have to resize or modify the design to suit the block of wood as I don't have an unlimited supply and lack the patience to wait before I start. As I am not a professional, I do not have to worry about speed of manufacture, so I use methods that I enjoy rather than the quickest way. Hence, I will use a bandsaw initially but then only hand tools and a Dremel or a drill where I have to. I'm probably not spending much more time than I would if I used power tools if you take into account the time clearing up all dust afterwards and I have the benefit of not needing to wear a face mask or ear defenders. Once I start carving from the one sketch, I will gradually pull the shape in from all directions using the research material as a guide and producing the design directly into the wood as I carve.

Name some of the influences and inspirations behind your carving style

I've always liked simple, flowing lines and most of my earlier carvings reflect this style. My inspiration comes from many sources. It could be from seeing a fox in the

wild, a kestrel hunting or buzzards soaring when I'm out walking. It could even be seeing an ornament in the background when watching television. A book that I have found very inspirational is *Parables – wood sculptures* by J. Christopher White.

Inspiration and ideas can also come from fellow woodcarvers and from books. These have led me away from highly stylised work at times and into other areas of carving, i.e., netsuke, realistic miniatures, hiking sticks, cooking spoons with a twist and pure fun carvings.

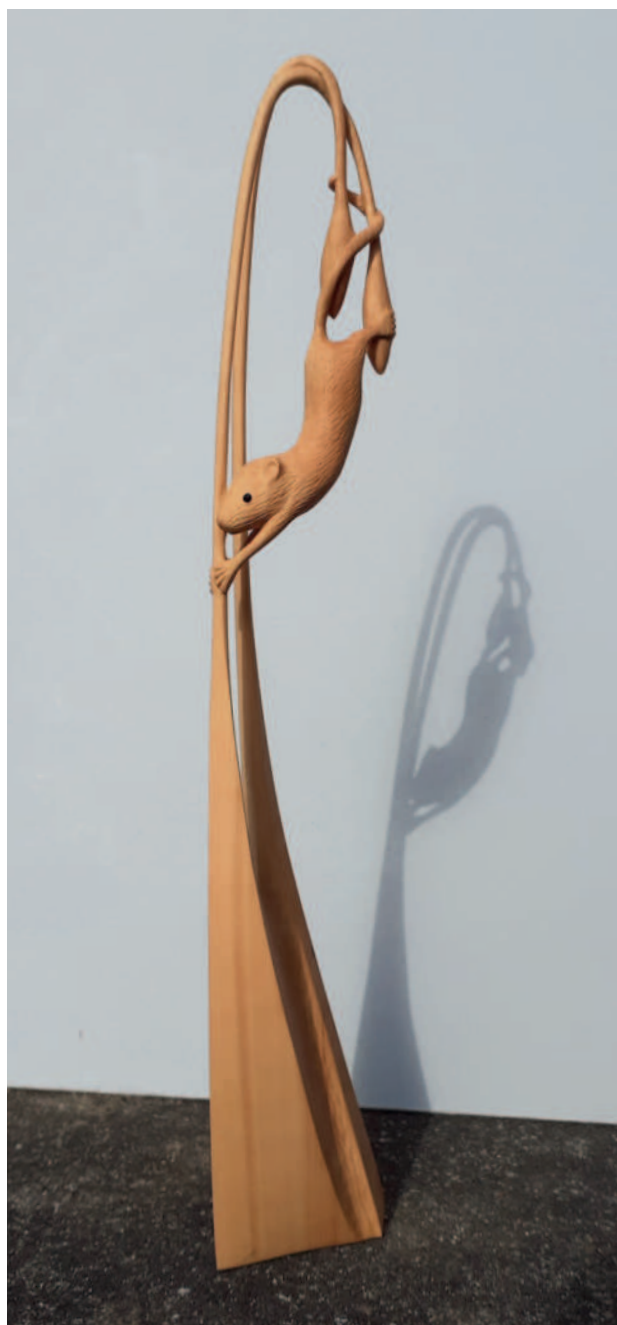
What are your favourite types of wood and why?

The type of wood that I prefer to carve is very much dictated by the subject and style of carving. If I'm carving either a netsuke or a harvest mouse on stalks of corn that require a fair amount of structural strength, then I would always go for box that has a lovely buttery yellow finish. When I'm carving a highly stylised subject with flowing lines and very little detail, I prefer a timber like black walnut or one of the fruit woods such as cherry or plum. I find that highly figured woods can greatly enhance a fairly simple shape, whereas this can distort detailed work such as on face. Having said that, I will frequently

use walnut and fruitwoods for detailed miniature carvings but have to be aware of the position of any highly figured areas at the planning stage. If I'm going to use a knife on a carving, I prefer to use jelutong, basswood or lime as these will cut fairly easily without having to use undue force. I've very recently been introduced to greenwood carving by a stick-making friend. He'd already introduced me to stick-making, and I've carved a kuksa and several spoons in silver birch, which cuts very well when wet with both gouges and a knife.

What sort of finishes do you prefer and why?

Nearly all of my carvings, with the exception of walking sticks, are finished with Danish oil, I find it is easy to apply. I usually dilute the first coat with white spirit then full strength for subsequent coats. The more coats you apply the more of a shine you get, I usually stop when I have a sheen rather than a hard shine so the resulting finish is not harmed by the carving being handled and finger marks do not show. If for any reason you



wish to remove it, white spirit and elbow grease will do the job, no need to sand off. One of the reasons I first started to use it was, if you find a blemish or minor fault, which may not show until you apply the first coat, the fault can be rectified and then re-oiled without any evidence of rework. Some other finishes have to be totally removed from the carving or a join line will show where you have reworked. With the walking sticks I give one coat of Danish oil then several coats of Satin Yacht varnish.

**What sort of projects are in store for the future?
What are you working on/where do you see your work headed?**

I've just counted, and at the moment I have 16 projects on the go, some of them have been on the go for years and will probably never be finished. But with others I can go into the workshop for an hour and work on up to three different carvings. Whenever I finish one project, I seem to start two more. It's probably for this reason my daughter didn't get her deer while she was still a baby.

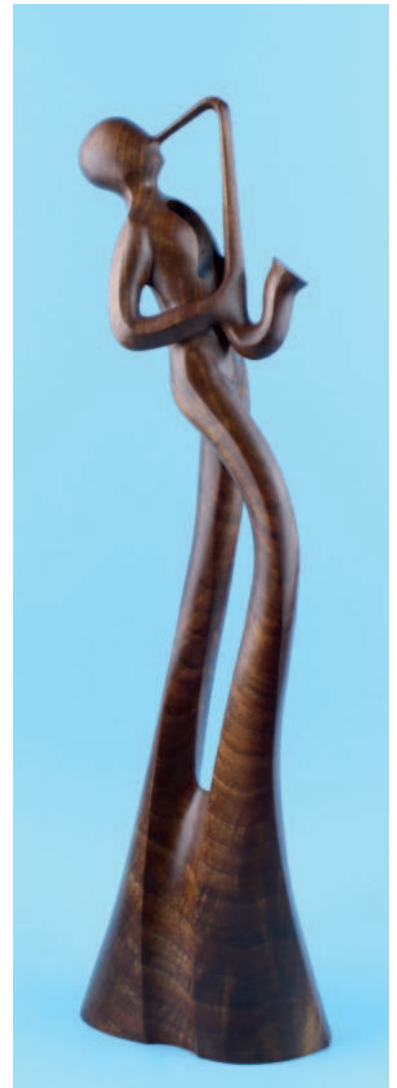
Every year I carve a figure or something simple for my great nephews at Christmas and last year, when Max rang to thank me, he asked if I had ever carved a car. I said 'no'. He then asked if I would consider it. I said: 'No not really possible.' So, I am obviously carving a car for him and his younger brother. I based them on a Lotus/Ferrari type with modifications to make them practical. Not something I'd ever thought I would carve but it's interesting and I'm fairly sure they will receive a smile. In the future, who knows which direction I'll go in? Because I'm a hobby carver I can have a go at anything I fancy. Anything I don't enjoy, such as letter carving (I tried it a couple of times), I feel no need to repeat the experience.

What do you do when you're not carving?

Up until last summer we always kept dogs as pets, so since retiring I have walked for an hour or so every day. Since the loss of my last dog I have continued walking out in the country or along the coast. It seemed strange walking without a dog but, if my wife was not with me, I started walking with a stick – not for the company. I think to see a man walking in the country could look a little odd, but if he is carrying a stick it looks more as if he belongs. It also saved me from a nasty fall on one occasion. I'm a member of the National Coastwatch Institution, which basically involves being the eyes around the coast for the coastguard. Most Tuesday mornings I'm 'on watch' at Felixstowe Watch Tower ensuring all is well on and around the water, using binoculars, radar, controlled cameras and listening to various radio channels for anyone in distress. One of the cameras often has a bird's eye view of a kestrel hovering within a few feet of the lens.

Ramblings of a simple wood cutter

Many years ago, I was told of a man who really wanted to take up carving as a hobby. He asked a friend, who was a professional carver, if he thought he would be able to learn to carve. The carver gave him a pencil and some paper and asked him to go and draw a tree. He did his best and showed his efforts to his friend. His friend looked at it and announced that he would never be a carver and to give up on the idea. I thought this is so sad and incorrect and, to my mind, if you can sharpen a pencil with a knife, you have proved that you can whittle wood. You don't have to be an expert with the pencil and most carvings can be seen as advanced pencil sharpening. My advice to novice carvers would be carve what you enjoy, try new styles, don't carve what you don't enjoy and, lastly, find a wise old carver friend like I have who will sharpen your 1mm v-tool for you when you get stuck.



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Gilded Baroque swirl

Steve Bisco demonstrates how to carve and gild an elaborate showpiece



The Baroque style (see box) came at a point in history when the royalty, nobility, and even the gentry and merchants of Britain and Europe had become rich and confident and wanted to show off their wealth. They took to wearing huge wigs and elaborate silk garments with lace trimmings – and that was just the men. The ladies had huge balloon skirts so wide that doorways had to be widened for them to get through. They built magnificent new houses and decorated them in the taste we now refer to as Baroque. The soundtrack to this gilded magnificence was the music of Bach, Handel and Vivaldi, and the monarchs of Britain in this period were William & Mary, Queen Anne, and George I.

In the history of carved ornament, the Baroque style was one of the high points. The wood and stone carving that decorated the grand palaces and stately mansions was notable for the richness and three-dimensional depth of its carved elements. And, of course, it all glittered with gold leaf to reflect the candlelight of the sparkling chandeliers.

So, as you will have gathered, a Baroque carving is all about show, which makes it ideal if you feel you are ready to tackle a piece that will show off the skills you have acquired as a carver. I have put together this design to encapsulate the essence of the style with a medley of the curly-swirly elements typically found in Baroque carvings. It consists of a series of swirls and scrolls curling around and under a large central acanthus leaf. It is not only ‘pierced’ from the front but is also deeply excavated and hollowed to expose the sub-structure of the scrolls and swirls. Forming the relative depths of the elements is a significant part of the project, and will test your skill at thinking in three dimensions.

I have used limewood for the carving, which is appropriate for the period and style, and for the gilding I used imitation gold leaf, which is much easier and cheaper than real gold for carvers who are not trained gilders. For quite a small sum you can create a piece of Baroque splendour to enjoy in your own humble palace – but don’t get carried away and start wearing the big wigs, silk and lace.

Things you will need

Tools

Gouges:

- No.2, 25mm
- No.3, 10mm, 5mm bent
- No.3 fishtail, 18mm, 10mm
- No.4 fishtail, 6mm
- No.5, 7mm, 5mm, 13mm curved
- No.7, 10mm
- No.8, 8mm, 8mm curved
- No.9, 20mm, 3mm, 16mm curved
- Short bent, 10mm
- Skewed spoon, 10mm L&R,
- Back-bent, 12mm
- V-tool, 6mm straight, 2mm straight, 4mm curved

Chisels:

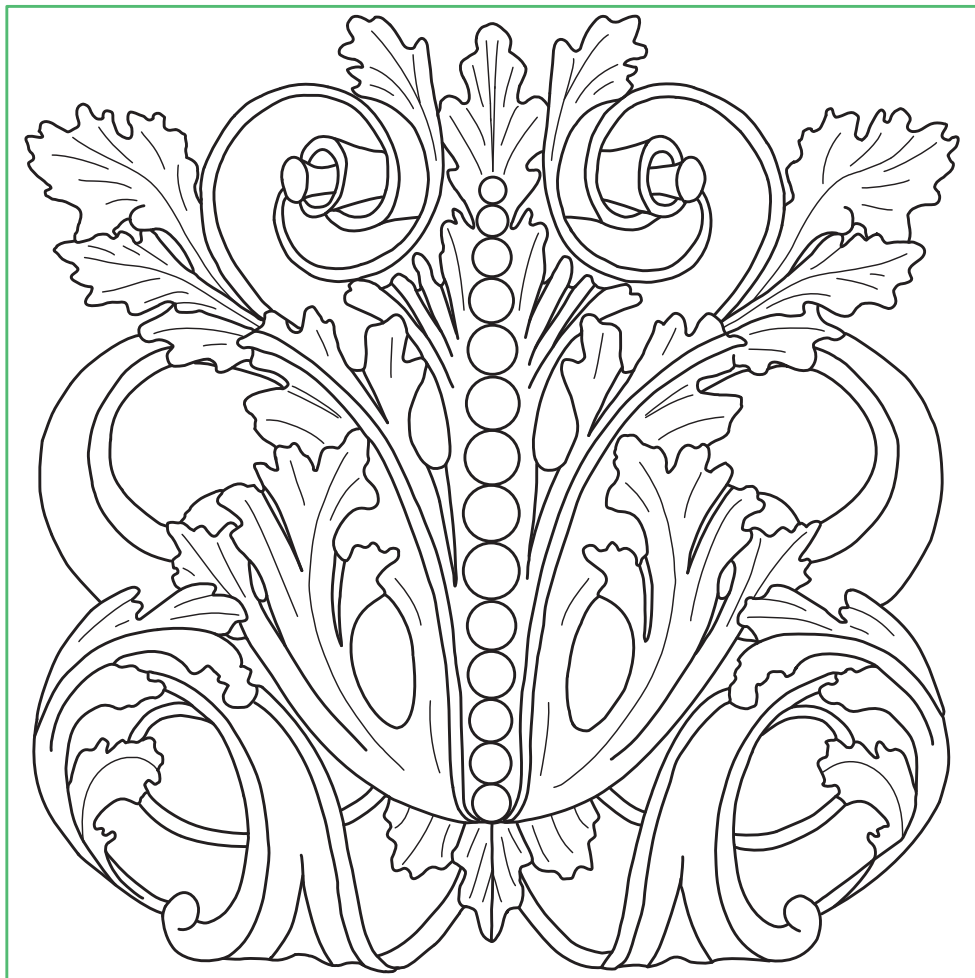
- Flat, 20mm, 6.5mm, 3mm, 2mm
- Bent, 5mm
- Skew chisel, 10mm
- Hooked skew chisel, 16mm

Other:

- Jigsaw
- Bandsaw
- Padsaw

Materials

- Lime, 300 x 300 x 75mm
- Sanding-sealer
- Gold lacquer
- Gilding size
- Imitation gold leaf
- French polish



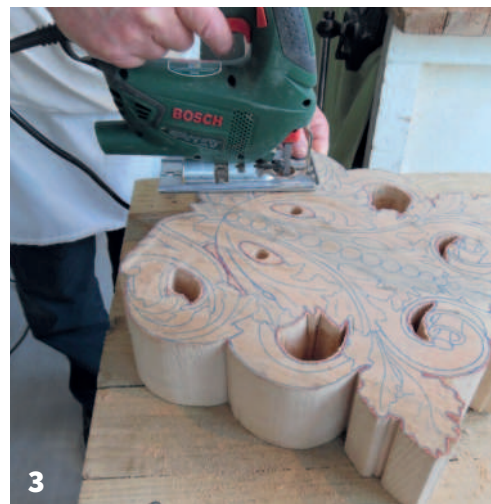
Baroque style

The Baroque style was one of the high points in the history of carved ornament, notable for the richness and depth of its carved elements. It dominated art and architecture in Europe throughout the 17th century, but started slightly later in Britain and was dominant in the period from about 1680 to about 1720, coinciding with Wren's rebuilding of London after the Great Fire. It was derived from Roman Classicism, but in a highly ornate and exaggerated form that was intended to show off. Carved ornament abounded in wood and stone. It made much use of the classical acanthus swirl, which in its Baroque form not only curled and swirled from top to bottom and side to side, but also from background to foreground. The style reached its zenith in Britain in the early 1700s with grand buildings such as Blenheim Palace and Castle Howard.



Preparations

1 Get a piece of lime 300 x 300 x 75mm, and make a copy of the drawing to fit it. Trace the full pattern on the front of the block, and trace the outline of the cutting lines on to the back, taking care to line them up exactly.



2 Cut round the outside with a bandsaw. If you don't have a bandsaw, either make friends with someone who does, or use whatever saws and chisels you have to shape the vertical edges.

3 To cut out the larger internal voids, drill through then use a jigsaw to cut out the unwanted wood. Your jigsaw may not have a blade long enough to go right through the 75mm thickness (neither does mine) but if you cut from the front and then from the back, you should be able to get out most of the material.

◀ Roughing out

4 Set up the piece on your bench using blocks of wood to hold it still. Start the roughing out by shaping the C-scrolls that come out in the middle of each side. Cut the level down so they are about 25-30mm thick from the back of the carving. You can saw down first at the ends, then chisel out the surplus wood, and cut down vertically around the ends of the adjacent acanthus leaves.

5 Move down to the complex 'ribbon' swirls at the lower end, which come out from under the central acanthus leaf at background level, then curl out, up, and over on themselves like a breaking wave. Cut around the edges of the acanthus leaves, and leave plenty of wood to refine the details later.

6 Rough out the leaves that flow outwards in the top corners and slope down towards the C-scrolls.

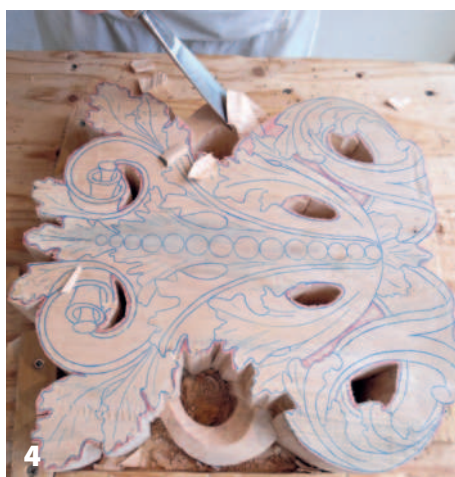
7 Now form the shape of the lower half of the central acanthus leaf, which is rounded over at the bottom end. Separate the individual leaves and slope them down to the sides, reaching down to the level of the C-scrolls. Note how they flow around the two large 'eyes'.

8 Form the outline shape of the two volutes at the top, and the flow of the spiral as it drops anti-clockwise on the left-hand side and clockwise on the right-hand side, flowing underneath the adjoining leaves. The leaves in the top centre should come about 25mm down from the top surface, and the vertical row of 'pellets' should also slope down between the spirals.

Carving the detail

9 Carve the central row of 'pellets' that runs vertically up the middle of the central leaf, and the small leaves that run off it at the top. The pellets sit in a shallow V with the largest pellets at 18mm diameter, reducing to 8mm at the top end, so use a range of gouges to form the different size circles. Round over the top surface with the gouges and use a hooked skew chisel to cut out the little triangular gaps where the circles meet.

10 Carve the detail on the two volutes at the top, and the acanthus leaves that flow between them in the top centre. To carve the centre of the volutes you have to imagine the spiral working its way around from the outside, getting smaller and descending at an angle of about 45° until it wraps around the 'reel' in the middle.





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11 Carve the leaves in each top corner so they spring out from between the volute scrolls and the middle C-scrolls, sloping sideways with plenty of curl. Their stems disappear under the big main acanthus leaf.

12 Carve the acanthus detail on the large central leaves that splay outwards from the row of 'pellets'. They slope sideways as they go up from the two oval 'eyes' and have a pronounced ridge up the middle.

13 Repeat the process on the two large side leaves. These splay out from the base and wrap around the sides to meet the C-scrolls at the outer edges. They have some pronounced V-grooves separating the sections of the leaf.

14 Carve the C-scrolls to spring out from under the upper leaves and curl around and back under the side leaves, ending in a 'reel' that is partly hidden under the leaves. Carve a concave hollow on the inside of the curve and a convex curve on the outside. Undercut the overlapping central leaves to continue the curl all the way around, and create a small background leaf at a lower level.

15 Carve the forward part of the 'ribbon' scroll in the bottom corners so it curves up from the background, over the top, and back to the background, like a breaking wave. Create a smooth surface and carve a border along each side of the ribbon. Create a 'split end' effect at the bottom end.

16 Carve the acanthus leaves on the ribbon scrolls. Follow them round to the back of the scroll and make them connect with the C-scrolls and the side leaf for support.

17 The ribbons have to be undercut from the back so the top part can 'fly' over the space behind. Lay the carving face down with lots of padding to protect the carved detail, and screw a batten across the back to hold it still. Carve away the surplus wood so none of it will be visible on the finished carving.

18 Complete the ribbon detail from the front by hollowing through under the 'flying' section, and carve the border lines on the lower face of the scroll. Refine the exposed sides of the big central leaf and carve the small leaf at the bottom end.



Undercutting

19 Place the carving face down on a soft surface, with a batten to secure it as before, and carve away the surplus wood from behind the upper leaves and inside the internal voids. Undercut behind the upper volutes so they are about 30mm thick. Hang the carving up at eye level to make sure everything looks light and natural from the angles at which it will be viewed.

20 Photos 20a-c show the finished carving from the front, back, and side angle. Give it a coat of sander-sealer, and use fine abrasives to smooth the surfaces that should be smooth, but don't dull the details that should be sharp.

Gilding

21 Prepare the carving for gilding by giving it a coat of a good-quality metallic gold lacquer as an undercoat for the gold leaf. Put it on thinly so you don't clog the detail.

22 Get a pack of imitation gold leaf and some gilding size (available quite cheaply from most art stores and online). Apply some gilding size thinly with a brush to a section of the carving. Leave it for about 5-10 minutes until it is dry but slightly tacky to the touch. Take a sheet of gold leaf and cut it into pieces about 25 x 50mm with clean scissors. Fold a small piece of paper and use it to pick up a piece of leaf, then slowly and carefully place it on the sized area. Press it down gently with a soft brush, then brush away any loose pieces of leaf. Go over any gaps with more leaf.

23 Imitation gold leaf needs a sealer to stop it tarnishing. I use French polish (shellac) to 'antique' it and seal it at the same time. Apply the French polish thinly by brush and avoid going over the same bit twice. Work quickly as it dries very fast.

24 Here is the finished carving, looking suitably Baroque with its 'antique' gilded finish. Hang it where the soft light of a nearby lamp will reflect a golden glow.



Useful tips & advice

- On a symmetrical carving, carve the elements on both sides together before moving on to other elements. That way it is easier to get both sides the same.
- Make a hanging hole or fixing in the back of the carving at an early stage so you can keep hanging it up in the workshop at head height. Keep checking the appearance of each three-dimensional feature from all the angles it will be seen at. ●

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Halloween funeral biscuits

Dave Western gets his teeth into a tasty project for the spooky season



While researching carved wooden objects, I accidentally discovered some interesting embossed wooden moulds that had been used in the old tradition of baking funeral biscuits (cookies, for our North American readers). These unique, decorated treats were given as an edible memorial token at funerals and wakes. The tradition may have developed from the ancient practice of hiring 'sin eaters', who would attend the funeral to consume a ritual meal and thus spiritually take on the sins of the deceased. The dearly departed would then be free to ascend Heaven's heights unencumbered by any transgressions committed during his or her lifetime. These funeral biscuits would frequently be wrapped in paper printed with a eulogy or dramatic quotations and then sealed closed with stamped wax. The cookies themselves were generally embossed with a stamped image that would rise when the dough was baked.

In Victorian times, these images tended toward the maudlin or macabre, but it occurred to me they would be easily adaptable for modern use at Halloween. With 31 October not so very far away,

carving these moulds now will give you a chance to run a few batches of cookies for sharing at your office Halloween party, for eating while you guard the sweet bowl on the big night, or just for testing purposes.

I have carved a couple of simple designs that I think would be applicable to the Halloween celebration. The skull and crossbones is always popular with children (and more than a few adults) and the carved pumpkin is, without doubt, the most famous modern symbol of All Hallows' Eve.

These little cookie stamps are fairly straightforward to make and can be crafted from small scraps of whatever close-grained, food-safe wood are available to you. Very few tools are needed and the designs can easily be modified to suit your carving abilities or design tastes.

At the end of the article, I have included a tradition funeral biscuit recipe, as well as some advice for ways to make them slightly more appealing to modern palates. I hope you will be encouraged in some pre-Halloween baking experimentation to supplement and sustain your carving.

Things you will need

Tools

- Patterns and glue
- No.1, $\frac{1}{2}$ in flat gouge
- No.10, $\frac{1}{8}$ in, gouge
- No.10, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge
- No.7, $\frac{1}{8}$ in (14mm) gouge
- No.9, $\frac{3}{8}$ in (10mm) gouge
- $\frac{1}{8}$ in chisel
- $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel
- 1in straight knife
- Fine sandpaper
- Salad bowl oil or similar (optional)



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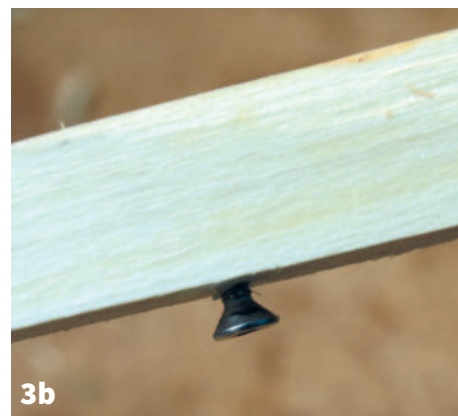
1 Begin by marking out a suitable block of wood. I used a piece of lime (basswood/linden), $4\frac{1}{2}$ in long, $2\frac{5}{8}$ in wide and $\frac{3}{4}$ in thick for the skull and crossbones. I also used lime for the pumpkin Jack-o'-lantern that measured 3 in long by 3 in wide and $\frac{3}{4}$ in thick. For the skull pattern I decided to mark out a border approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ in wide that ran around all four edges of the carving block.

2 I levelled the interior space within the four border lines down about $\frac{1}{4}$ in deep. I used a 1 in straight knife to carefully scribe the four lines of the border to a depth of approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ in, then used a No.1 flat gouge to remove the stock from this area. In retrospect, it became apparent that $\frac{1}{4}$ in was too deep, so I later planed the border down to approx. $\frac{1}{8}$ in and that seemed to work much better. My revised recommendation is to level to $\frac{1}{8}$ in deep and ignore the deeper cut you see shown in the photo.

3a & 3b You may naturally be blessed with a good eye for level and with a steady hand to cut it, but if not, you may find a simple levelling device made out of a wood screw centred in a straight piece of wood and which has been left protruding your desired depth (in this case $\frac{1}{8}$ in) is very handy for measuring your progress. Simply place the stick on the face edges of your borders, then pass the screw back and forth in the hollowed out area to quickly find any high or low spots. The closer you can get this area to smooth and level, the better the flat face areas of your finished biscuits will be when you stamp and bake them.

4 At this point, you could free-hand sketch or trace the drawing into the mould, but I find the simplest method is to glue a photocopy on to the workpiece with a regular glue stick or some diluted carpenter's glue. You might have to play around a bit to get a nice 'centred' look and feel (unless you are smarter than me and just measure it). It's worth putting in a bit of effort to ensure it doesn't get off centre or out of square or you'll have a finished product that looks wonky and a bit amateur. No need to ask how I know this.

5 Begin shaping the skull and crossbones pattern by removing the material in the bones. Carving a mould pattern is much trickier than it might appear at first blush, so be sure to take your time and remember that everything you do now will be reversed completely on the face of your biscuit. Use small gouges – I used a No.10, $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge to shape the shafts of the bones and a No.10, $\frac{1}{4}$ in to clear the material for the heads of each, keeping them very sharp. As you cut the trough for the bone shaft, keep in mind that as one side of the gouge follows the grain, the other tears against it. A sharp blade should help avoid tear-out, but even so, I found it best to make two cuts along each shaft (turning the piece 180° between each cut) so I could follow the grain in both directions. The result was a slightly wider bone shaft than I had originally planned which, through blind good fortune, actually resulted in a perfect size for the bone after I'd stamped the dough. With the bones completed, move to the top of the skull where a No.7, 14mm (approx. $\frac{1}{2}$ in) gouge is perfect for creating a smooth and fair curve where the dome of the skull will appear.



6 With the cuts made for the dome of the skull, I used a tin straight knife and a No.10, $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel to clear the material around the eye and nasal holes. I marked these areas in black to help remind me that they need to protrude from the carving. This is an easy time to forget that everything has to happen backwards and accidentally cut the eyes as you would a regular carving. Avoid that urge and make sure you leave them sticking up above the rest of the carving.



7 Use the same No.7 gouge to clear the area above the eyes and work the 'dome' into the forehead area of the skull. The goal is to work so the deepest point of the curve falls in the centre of the skull, tapering with a nice, fair curve up toward the outer pencil line edges of the face. Because you will want the image on the biscuit to appear rounded higher in the skull's mid point than at the outer edges, your carving has to occur in reverse. Thus your deepest point is the centre point just above the eyes.

Use the smaller gouge and your straight knife to clear material in the more difficult to reach areas just below the eyes and nose. Take your time and work to achieve a nice symmetrical curve either side of the nasal area.





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8 To get in between the eyes and the nasal area, I made use of an $\frac{1}{8}$ in chisel and the No. 10, $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge I used on the crossbones. I also made sure to thoroughly clean up

around each eye so that the edges were as crisp and vertical as I could make them. The goal is to make sure there are no ragged edges for the biscuit dough to stick against when the mould is being pressed. This picture shows how the doming in the forehead area is taking shape. I would suggest making the curve at the crown of the skull a touch deeper than you see it here. This curve will work fine, but having the curve gain some depth closer to the pencil line will help make the crown area of the finished biscuit a bit more defined and noticeable than on the ones I made for the article.

9 I used a No.1, $\frac{1}{2}$ in flat gouge to gently taper the eyes and nose area to follow the curve of the gouged-out area a bit better. I was careful not to remove too much material though, as I wanted the eye and nose sockets on the biscuits to be as deep as possible. I also used the No.7, 14mm gouge and a No.9, 10mm gouge to clear some of the material at the chin and jaw area. I suggest real caution in this area as there are several 'gappy' teeth and the space between the side of the teeth and the cheek that must remain protruding as you carve the jaw area out.

Again, mark the gapped areas in black so you remember to leave them as proud as possible in the carving. Work around them with the straight knife and small chisels until you have a nice, fair, curved cut-out section that flows from the chin to the bottom of the nose where it should match with the curve coming from the crown of the skull and the eyes.

10 With the hollowing of the chin and the areas around the protruding teeth completed, use a sharp $\frac{1}{16}$ in straight knife to clean up any rough spots and more clearly delineate the rest of the teeth. Mark between each tooth fairly distinctly as too fine an etched line will not allow the dough to be pressed between the teeth and will render this whole section a bit shapeless. It's important to ensure as symmetrical a curve through the jaw and forehead areas as possible, so spend as much time as is necessary to ensure these sections are as fair as possible. Use the straight knife to clean the sides of any protruding areas so that they are crisp and as vertical as possible. You want to make sure you leave no areas that can catch or deform the biscuit dough.

11 Spend as much time as is necessary to clean up the carving as thoroughly as possible. Search for fuzzy areas, uneven cuts, tapering edges or overhanging sections and repair them before you get to the point where you are pressing the mould into the dough. It can be difficult to get some of the tight curves (such as the heads of the bones) really clean and perfect, but do what you can.

I have heard some mould carvers finish their blocks with a few coats of salad bowl oil, walnut oil or mineral oil before using them. Apparently, once a light coating of oil finish has thoroughly dried, it helps prevent the dough sticking to the mould in use. I left mine unsealed and simply sprinkled a bit of icing sugar on them before use. Afterward, I used a soft brush to clean off any residual dough or sugar before putting them away.

12 For those going on to carve the Jack-o'-lantern mould as well, the procedure is similar to that used for the skull and crossbones. Begin by gluing the pattern to the work surface. For this mould I eliminated the border area and carved straight into the flat face of the wood block. Use the tip of the $\frac{1}{16}$ in straight knife to scribe vertical lines delineating the eyes and the mouth area. These sections will remain protruding after the pumpkin body is carved to depth. Note: I later discovered that, when being used on dough, the mould with a border tended to press more evenly and without sliding. Were I to carve this pumpkin mould again, I would definitely incorporate a border into the design.



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13 Use the No.7, 14mm gouge and/or whatever gouges you have on hand that match the segment curves and begin shaping the pumpkin's body toward the mouth and eyes. I screwed a block of scrap to the workbench to push against, then carved from both ends toward the centre, rotating the workpiece as I went. Remember to make the central segments slightly deeper than the side segments so that your baked cookie has a domed appearance rather than being flat across the biscuit's face surface.

14 Use a variety of gouges, chisels and knives to tidy up around the eyes and mouth. Aim to have a crisp junction where the body segment hollows meet the vertical edges of the eye and mouth protrusions. As with the skull and crossbones, keep the protruding sections as cleanly cut and vertical as possible. Overhangs and jagged edges are likely to grab the dough when you are pressing the moulds and will result in a less defined biscuit.

15 I gave both moulds a light wipe of water with a damp rag to draw up the grain, and then spent some time tidying up scruffy edges, fuzzy cuts etc. I probably could have continued perfecting the cuts, but I was too excited about the baking and got straight to that instead.

16 Just before use, I realised that the sharp edges of the moulds were a bit uncomfortable in the hand, so I spent a bit of time with the 11in straight knife and chamfered an edge all around both front and back faces. I used a $\frac{1}{16}$ in chamfer on the front (which I very lightly sanded to finish) and a slightly more generous $\frac{3}{16}$ in chamfer on the back face. If you don't feel like bothering, a quick pass with some very fine sandpaper would probably be sufficient to round the edges enough for comfort. ●



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Biscuit recipe

Finally, here is the recipe for making your own funeral biscuits. Now, I confess that I have never made biscuits prior to this adventure, so don't expect instructions of Delia Smith quality, but if you'd like to have a bash at it, here's the traditional recipe, along with some suggestions for making it taste a bit less Victorian. I've scaled it down by a third from most of the traditional recipes... so feel free to boost it back up if you have more baking confidence than me.

Funeral biscuits for woodcarvers

- Thoroughly mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of soft butter/margarine, an egg and a teaspoon of vanilla.
- Gradually add wet ingredients into a mixing bowl containing a cup of sifted flour and a pinch of salt.
- Mix together* until a stout dough is formed (add more flour if it seems a bit wet), then cool in fridge for a couple of hours before rolling out to approximately $\frac{3}{8}$ in thick.

*Traditional recipes call for a teaspoon of toasted caraway seeds during mixing. Other more modern recipes replace caraway with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of cardamom or $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of orange zest.

- Lightly dust the mould with icing (confectioner's) sugar, press the mould (or pound it down once) vigorously into the dough then gently remove. It should come away from the dough cleanly, but if not, gently peel the dough off the mould. Cut the cookies to shape with a thin, sharp knife. I simply followed the outline of the mould.
 - Lay the biscuits on a baking tray and bake at 175°C (350°F) for between 12 and 20 minutes (depending how crispy you like them). They stay fairly light-coloured until they start to burn... again, don't ask me how I know that.
 - For an All Hallows' celebration, the biscuits would probably look good with a bit of decorative black and/or orange icing piped around the edge.
- Happy Halloween.



Carving with Toby

Guest editor Peter Benson recounts his first carving lesson with a star pupil



Some years ago, I had an enquiry from a lady about coming for an introductory woodcarving lesson. This was arranged with two other prospective carvers and they came to me for the day.

I hadn't intended for the day to involve knife carving but, when they saw some of the pieces I had in the classroom, they all decided to give it a try and each more or less completed a simple small piece.

A short time ago I had a call from the same lady mentioning that her son of 13 had shown an interest in working with wood. This may have had something to do with the fact that both his father and grandfather are woodworkers.

Anyway, the upshot of this was that she was wondering whether it would be possible for him to come to me after his birthday for a lesson if, in fact, I accepted children as students.

Since the start of lockdown I had stopped all teaching as there was no way that I felt I could teach carving and maintain social distancing – it is something that is, after all, very much hands on.

We agreed that we would give it a go and, in spite of no lockdown at the moment, they would test and bring masks if we felt more comfortable doing so. I felt this was safer as I am still recuperating and my immune system is still dubious after my period in hospital.

The birthday duly arrived and Toby and his mum turned up prepared for the lesson. As he is only 13 his mum and I agreed that, first of all, she would need to remain and take part as boys of that age have a somewhat limited attention span, and, if he or I showed that we had had enough, we would stop, even if it meant coming back another day.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMMA BENSON

It is not easy catering for young children with something like this as the average child has the attention span of, as I would say, a gnat. And there is a danger of a tutor ending up baby-sitting a bored child until a parent turns up. I am very happy teaching children of any age, as long as they can manage the tools, but I had a lifetime of disciplining children in school and don't wish to be the bad guy in my own classroom.

I welcome all children as long as a parent is present and takes part in some way, with the proviso that the lesson ends if the child loses interest.

Fortunately, there was no such problem with Toby. He decided that he would like to carve a heron, which is one of the projects in my next book, and came armed with a knife and pair of safety gloves. After sharpening his knife and cutting out the rough outlines on the bandsaw, we got underway in the garden as it was a lovely day. We were using basswood, so it was soft enough not to cause any real problems. His mum worked on the piece from her last lesson.

Although he had not worked with a knife before, he obviously had been made aware of the dangers of sharp tools and worked very safely and confidently throughout – a credit to the help he had from dad and grandad.

Contrary to my expectations, I ran out of puff before Toby did but, as we had agreed, we stopped and packed up our tools. There was no complaint from Toby and we agreed to fix up another session when he was available.

Apparently, when he got home, he was pretty soon straight out to the shed to finish off his heron and sort out what tools he could buy with his birthday money. Needless to say, this resulted in another meeting to sort out some suitable tools from my hoard of old and secondhand tools that clutter up my classroom. I also managed to find some in very good condition from my personal toolbox that I didn't expect to use any more. All in all, he left with around eight useable, and very sharp, tools and a few wood blanks to go on with.

I suspect that he is hooked and that I will see quite a lot of him in the future but, even if not, he has a chance, and I think it is our responsibility to give a boy like Toby every opportunity to follow an activity that gives us so much pleasure. It is not always this easy, but we should try.

I've included two pictures – one of my original carving that Toby only saw for a short while and his attempt that he finished at home. You can make your own judgement. ●



Planning a project

There are plenty of lessons to be learned in the process, finds John Samworth



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN SAMWORTH

I am frequently asked where I get my ideas from. Like so many of us new to carving, my first projects came from this very magazine. Even now, it is a constant source of inspiration, along with a wide collection of books. And not to forget talking to fellow carvers and seeing other carvers' work, both new and old.

A few months ago, I was asked to carve an otter for a birthday present. Quite an innocent request, but the more I inquired the more complex it became. This is my account of the journey from initial request to completion. I hope you will find lessons and appreciate that anywhere and anything can inspire an original project. Keep looking and listening about you.

I arranged to meet the client, who lived 47 miles away, to expand further on her requirement. There I learned that the present was for her son's birthday and, in part, in memory of her late husband. She wanted the carving from a piece of fallen tree out of her garden. Her husband had previously used part of the same tree to carve a bear for her. She presented me with a log 30in long by 14in diameter, and its mass was at the limit of my ability to lift safely. To help, she offered to lend me a small, electric chainsaw for

the carving. I eagerly accepted her kind offer and the saw proved invaluable, roughing out the larger sections of wasted wood. Note to self: carving for a birthday present puts a fixed timescale to the project. I cannot move a birthday.

Over a cup of tea, we discussed what the carving's appearance might be. She had no firm image in mind, except that it should be native and life size. For inspiration, we planned in the following week a visit to the local Tamar Otter & Wildlife Centre*. A mere 66 miles away. In the meantime, I began my own research on otters. There are a number of resources available; back issues of *Woodcarving*; Google images; Pinterest and nature books to name a few.

None of my research had prepared me for the charm and character of these wonderful creatures at the Wildlife Centre. There is no substitute for seeing a subject with your own eyes. We began our tour with a study of a family of Asian otters, but we both agreed their behaviour was quite different from our native otter. My client's son was working as a wildlife consultant for a local authority. I expect he would know a lot more about otters than me.



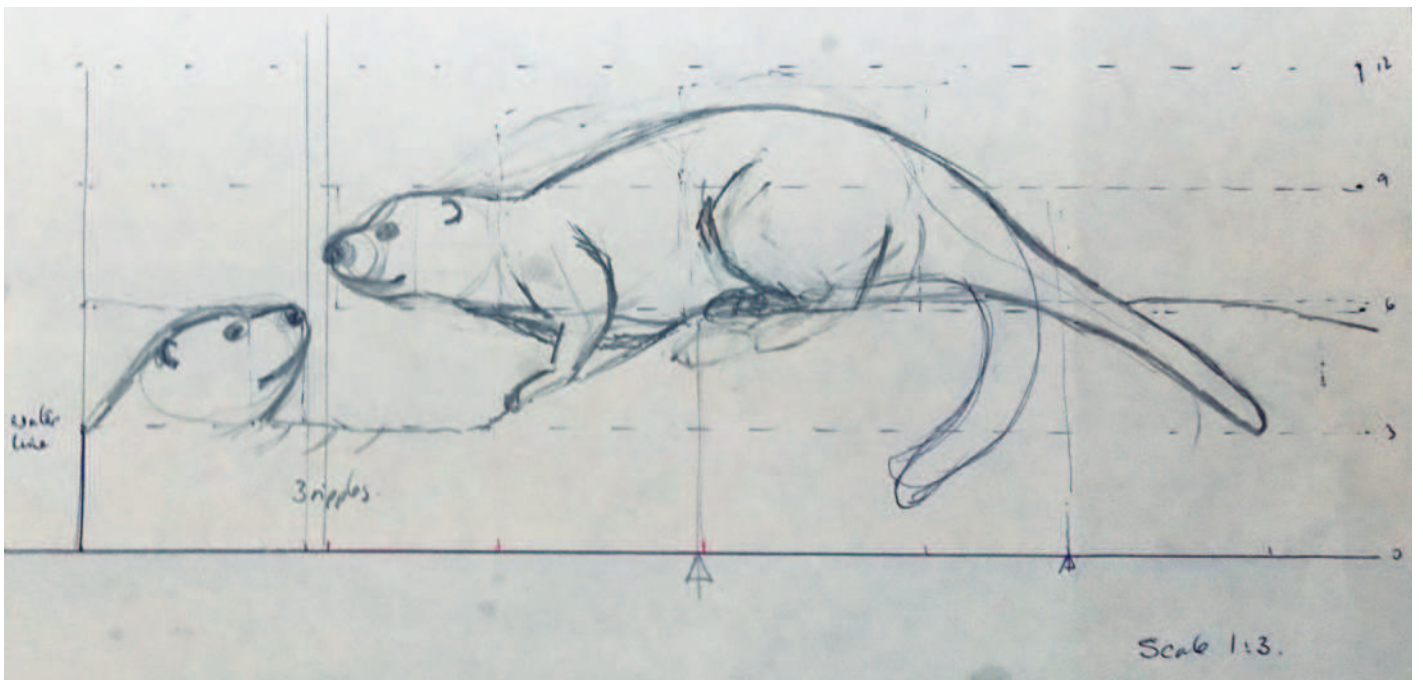
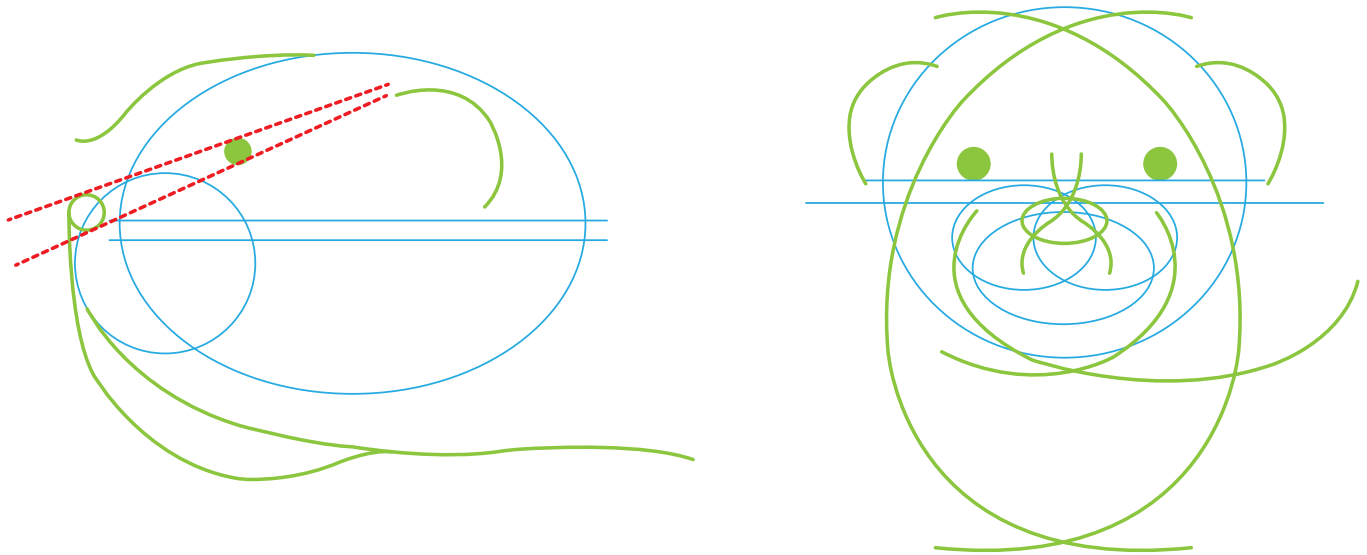
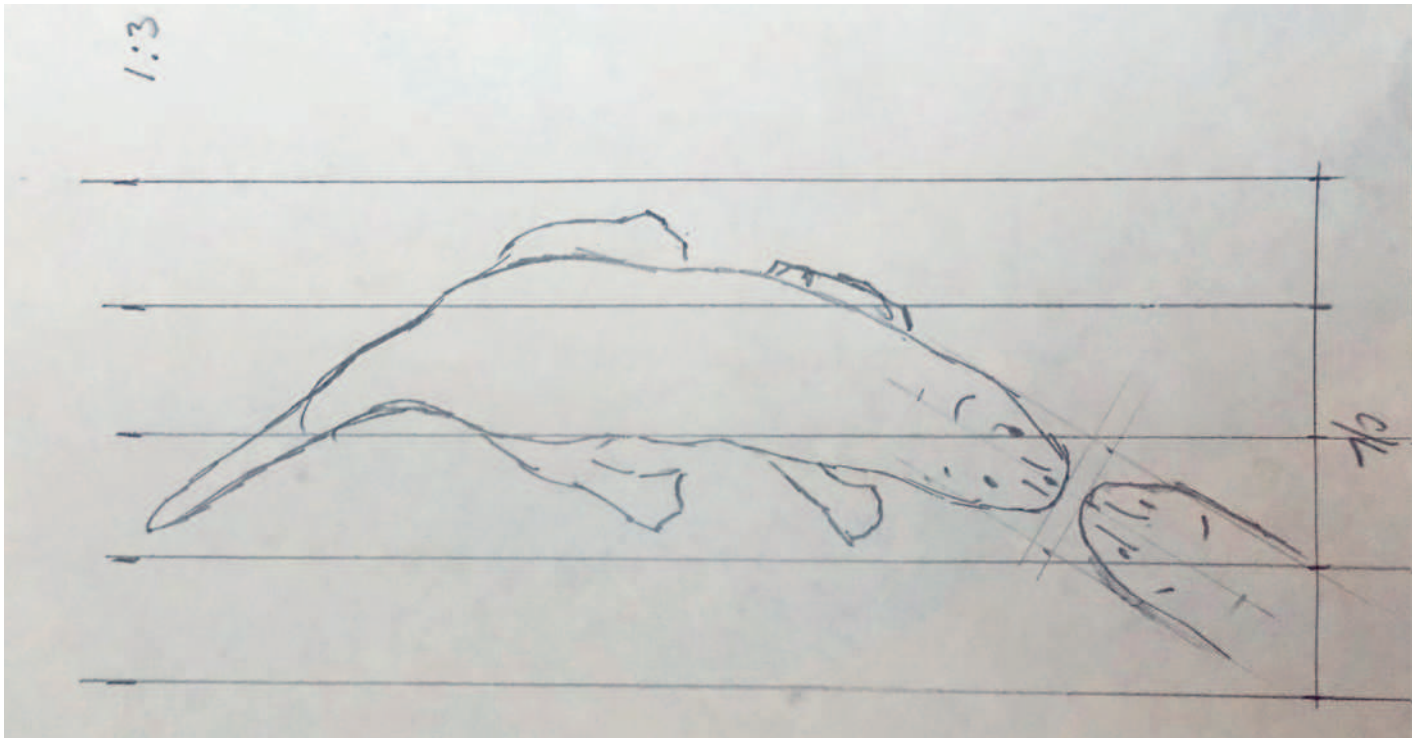
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

European otter on the bank



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

European otter in water





Study the movement

Our next enclosure was our native otter. The guide was extremely informative and explained the life cycle of our otter as follows. A male otter has a territory of up to 25 miles of river bank and ponds. Although he lives a solitary life for most of the year, along the river bank may also live up to five females. The male spends his time patrolling his territory, driving rival males away and visiting the females. Quite an idyllic lifestyle! However, the otters have a matriarchal society and all is not quiet on the river bank. Male otters are larger and stronger than the females and able to dominate females on land; but the females entice the males into the water where the females are faster, agile swimmers and dominate the males. Once in the water, a female attacks the male, scratching at his face and eyes to subdue him. Once pups are born, the female will drive the male away, he has served his purpose, she is confident that she alone can raise her pups and before the male eats them. The male moves on and the cycle begins again, leaving a male scared and often blind within four years.

Choosing the subject

The story of the otter's life fascinated me, I wanted this to be the subject of the carving. There were no resources which would capture this tale. I needed to design my own image. Producing a working drawing for carving is not the same as drawing for a picture. You do not need to be an artist, but you do need an idea. Here the male is on land, the female is in water (look for the wet fur and dry fur in the finished carving), this is their first encounter where she is enticing him into the water.



He is unsure – remember what happened last time – his body weight is balanced away from the female as he considers his fate. Note also the care and emphasis on the gap between the two, reminiscent of others' work. This gap represents the male's decision; to enter the water or not.

The drawing of two tails is because the log was not long enough to carve the tail straight as originally planned. Once the drawing was offered up to the log, it was apparent that there was a hollowing to one side of the log and the whole image required inverting. By placing the drawing on my workshop's window, with the light shining through, I was able to trace the reverse image on the back of the paper. My final carving is shown below. I hope you have learned something about otters, planning a carving and been inspired to try your hand at planning. From experience, the thrills and rewards of carving your own ideas cannot be surpassed.

* The Tamar Otter & Wildlife Centre has now permanently closed due to the pandemic restrictions 2021

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The triquetra

Zoë Gertner carves an easy Celtic pattern and uses this design to decorate the lid of a box

The ancient Celtic symbol of the trefoil knot is known as a triquetra, tri being 'three' and quetrus meaning 'cornered' in Latin. Originally meaning a triangle or a three-angled shape it is believed to be the oldest symbol of spirituality. Appearing in the 9th-century Irish *Book of Kells* and other illuminated manuscripts, it has also been found in Norwegian churches dating from the 11th century, and even on early Germanic coins.

Symbolising everlasting love and an eternal spiritual life with no end, the interlacing of the single continuous line of the triquetra with its romantic associations is a much-favoured design in jewellery and other creative arts.

Preparation

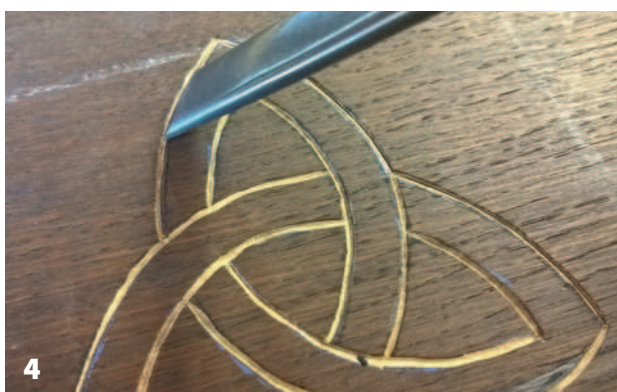
For the carving I used a short length of oak approximately 5in wide with depth 1/4in, part of an old oak drawer front, dark unwanted furniture being out of fashion at the moment and a good source of timber for relief carving. Alternatives could be beech, lime or sycamore though any other straight-grained and knot-free hardwoods could be suitable, too.

Starting the carving

1 Using tracing paper and a pencil, copy the drawing of the Celtic motif known as a triquetra. (Diagrams 1 & 2)

2 On your wood, with grain direction horizontal, fasten the drawing in place with masking tape. Slip the transfer paper beneath your tracing and copy the design on the surface of the wood using a biro or different coloured pencil to ensure you do not miss any lines. If it is difficult to see the tracing over the transfer paper, slip a piece of white paper between to show it more clearly. If the transferred outline is faint, go over it with a pencil so it can be seen clearly.

3 Having removed your tracing use the No.39, 1/4in V-tool with a mallet and cut round the outline, cutting in the correct direction according to the curves and their alignment with the horizontal grain of the wood. Notice how the directions of your cuts should change at the top and bottom of a curve; and along opposite sides of a strap they are made in the opposite direction to each other. (Diagram 1)

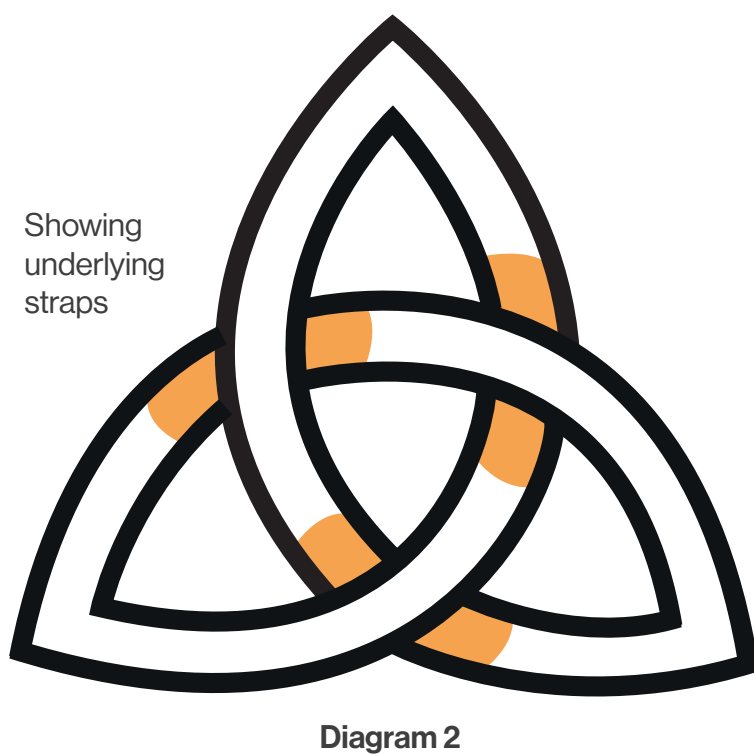
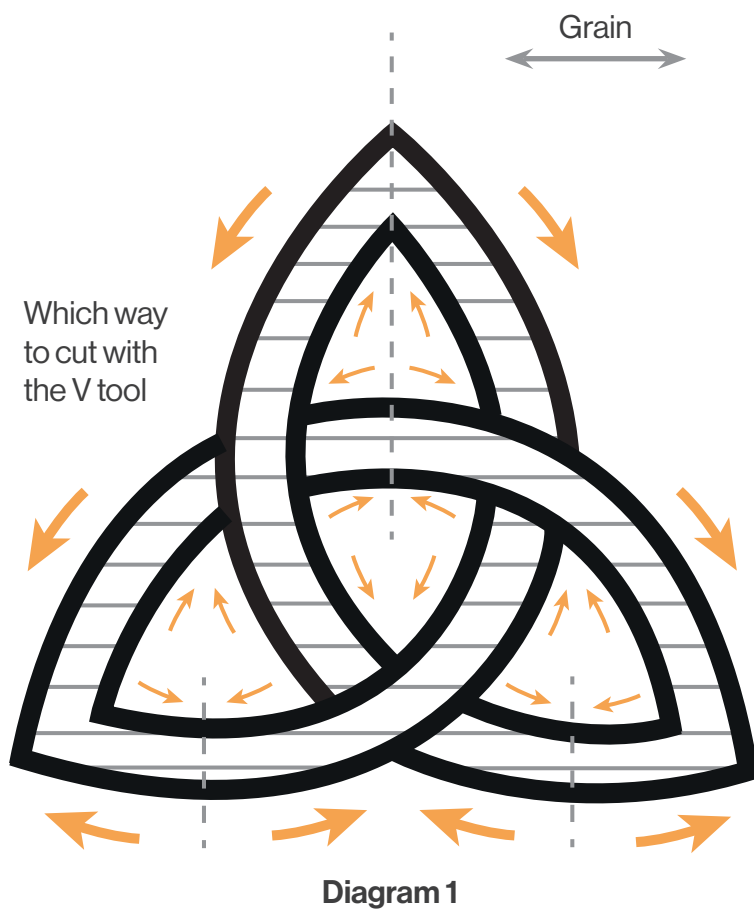


4 Now the V-tool channels around the outline are enlarged in the usual way by using sets of opposing cuts with the No.3, ½in gouge. Start at the outer side of the design, invert the gouge and set it against the side of the V-tool lying around it. Cut downwards, following the angle of the side of the V tool, away from the outline, and with continuous cuts work around the whole pattern. Then in the same way, where you must turn your gouge cutting edge according to their convex and concave shapes, repeat the cuts around the inner edges of each of the four areas within the triquetra.

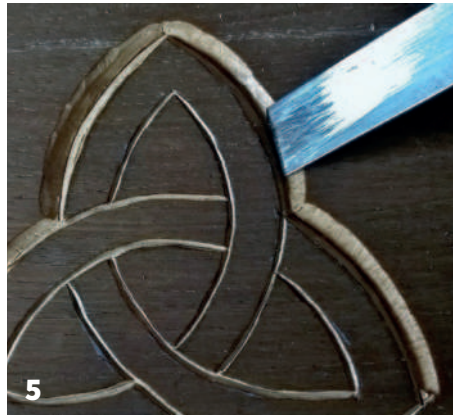
Things you will need

Tools

- No.3, ½in and ¼in gouges
- No.39, ¼in V-tool
- ¼in skew chisel



5 To make the opposing cuts use the No.3 gouge with its bevel underneath it and start about 3mm from the outline, having completed the first set of cuts around it beforehand. Cutting downwards and angling them towards the first cuts around the outline, meet up these cuts up at the same depth as the first ones, releasing chips to enlarge and deepen the original V-tooled channel around the triquetra's outline. At a convex curve swing the gouge cutting edge slightly sideways so that its full width connects with the outward cuts along the edge and the chip should be released cleanly.



6 Within the inside of the triquetra, repeat the opposing cuts in the same way using the No.3 1/4in gouge. If you find your cuts do not meet accurately it may be that you have inadvertently inverted the gouge – for these cuts its bevel must be underneath – or that the angle of your approaching cuts is too steep. Now repeat the two sets of cuts until the whole outline is cleanly defined on its adjacent background.



The background

7 Using chalk or pencil mark the extent of the background around the outline of the triquetra, then with the No.3, 1/2in gouge start your cuts on the outer edge of the enlarged V-channel, dropping your hand and scooping out the chips along its outer edge.



8 Make second longer rows that overlap your first ones, forming a gentle slope towards the triquetra from its background adjacent. Taking care not to slip forwards and damage the outline as you approach it, continue with further overlapping rows until you reach the outer extent of the background so that it smoothly slopes downwards from there, with the triquetra standing proud. While cutting, ensure that both upper corners of the gouge, known as the horns, are always above the surface of the wood, to avoid splitting the wood or damaging the tool.



9 As before, with the No.3, 1/4in gouge reduce the background within the inner areas starting at the V-channels, the inner edges of the straps, and cutting from each side of the area working back to the middle of the area between them. Smooth the surface with the gouge, taking care at the middle area as this is where the grain could lift. Next, mark both adjacent parts of each lower strap as shown before starting to reduce it to beneath the one above it. (Diagram 2)

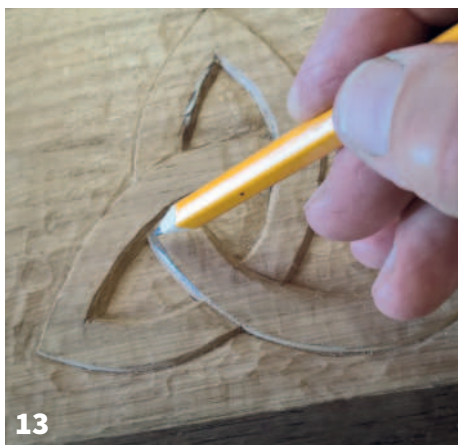


10 With the No.3, 1/2in gouge first make a cut downwards across the underlying strap both sides of the upper strap, turning the gouge to match the convex and concave edges which are opposite to each other.

11 At each side of the upper strap carefully reduce both adjacent surfaces of the underlying strap, removing their markings each side.

12 Gradually extend with shallow cuts, making an imperceptible slope and working over the full surface of all the straps. Near to the edges of the strap crossing over it, the shape of the lower strap will be widened as it was reduced, and the curve of its outer edge will need to be adjusted.

13 Check that all the straps of the triquetra are uniform in width and, where needed, redraw their edges using pencil.



13



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14 Using the $\frac{1}{2}$ in or $\frac{1}{4}$ in No.3 gouge and cutting shallow slivers, carefully pare downwards back to the pencil line in the areas where the edges need attention.

15 Then cutting from the background towards the edge, work with shallow cuts to meet cleanly at the bottom of the strap edge and smooth the adjacent surface of the background.

16 Finally, where the inner edges of two straps meet sharply at an angle or 'point', use the $\frac{1}{4}$ in skew chisel to mitre them, starting with a central cut as shown, then by paring the adjacent edges of both straps with the tip of the tool (either towards, or away from the centre depending on their grain direction), making a clean mitred angle from the edge each side.

Finishing

Check that all edges are cleanly cut and meet the background neatly, and carefully paring, remove any errant deep cuts or digs. Although there are several alternatives, I finished my triquetra carving by applying a coat of wax polish with a redundant toothbrush and buffing it with a lint-free duster. Now you will be ready to carve a more intricate Celtic design.

Celtic decoration



If you have worked through the previous project carving the triquetra, you should find you have now mastered the techniques that are needed for a more intricate Celtic pattern carving. It is slightly different in that the decoration is set into the surface of the box lid rather than being fully relieved, otherwise you will find it is very similar to carving the triquetra.

Things you will need

Tools

- No.1, $\frac{1}{2}$ in & $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel
- No.39, $\frac{1}{4}$ in or $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool
- No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in & $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge
- No.2, $\frac{1}{4}$ in skew chisel
- Froster punch and light hammer

Preparation

I acquired a small box with a lid of approximately 6 x 4 x $\frac{1}{4}$ in thickness made from an unidentifiable white wood, possibly poplar – unless you are adept at making your own box, any other ready-made box of any size could be suitable, as would be alternative timbers such as cherry, lime, sycamore or beech.

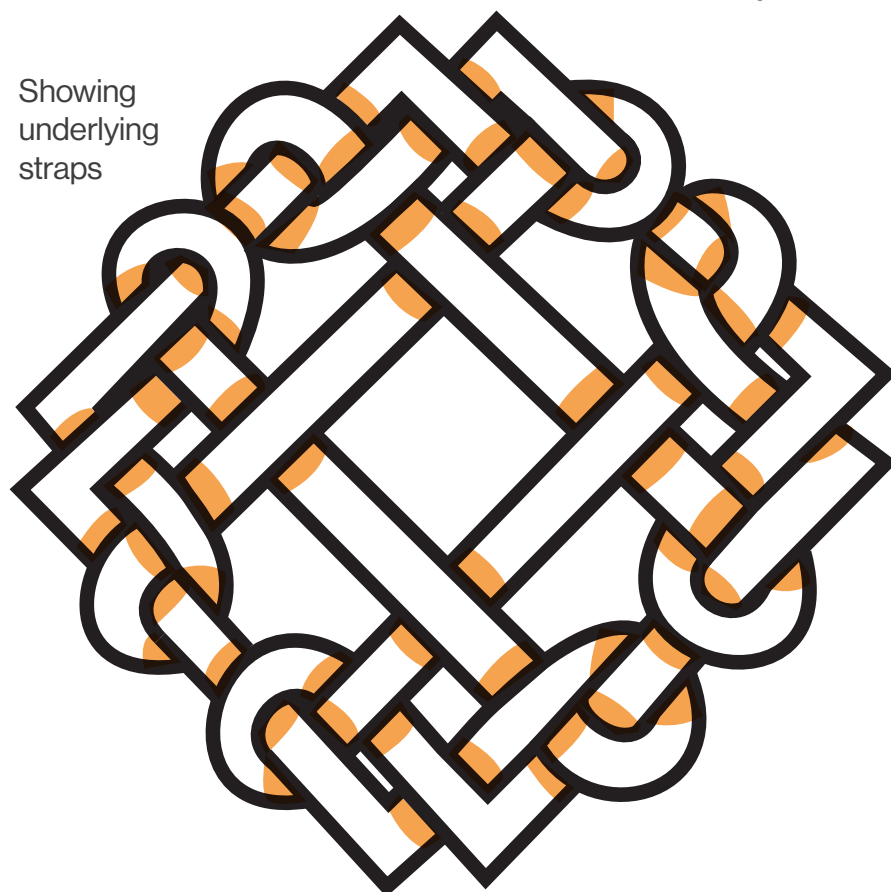
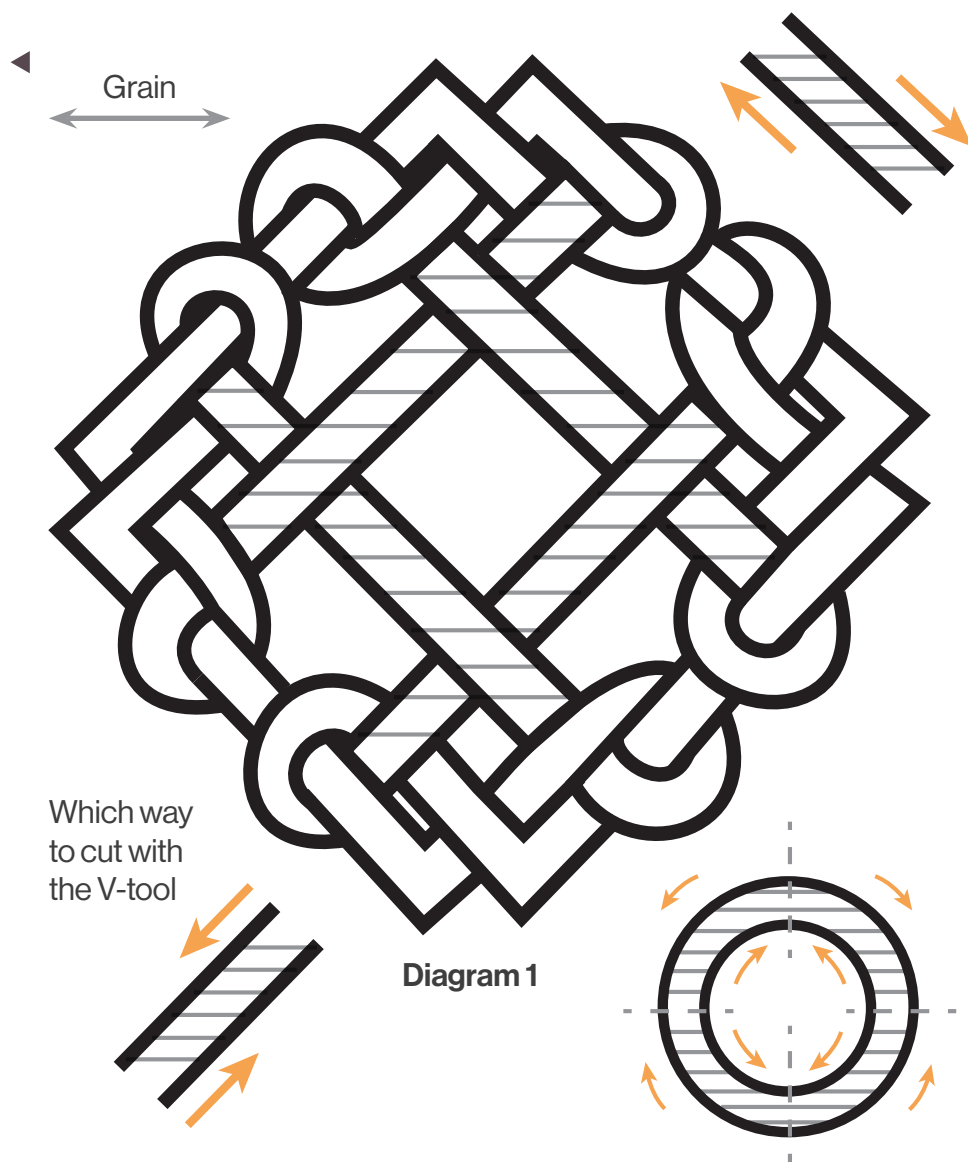
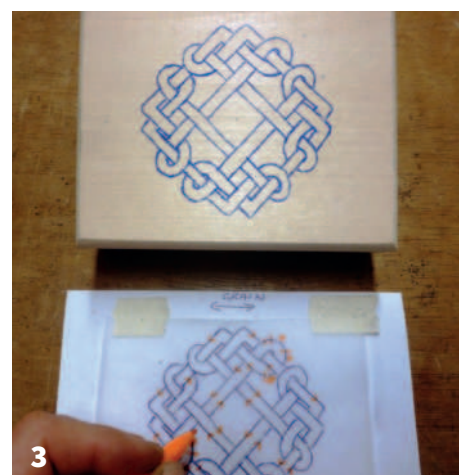
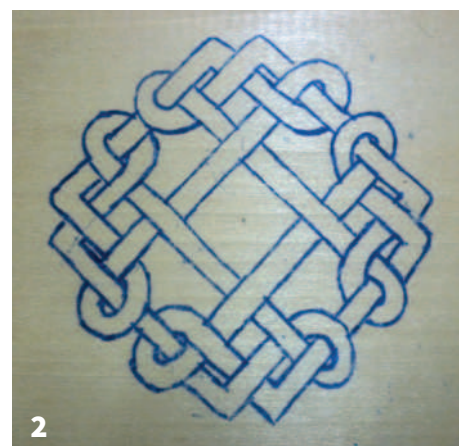
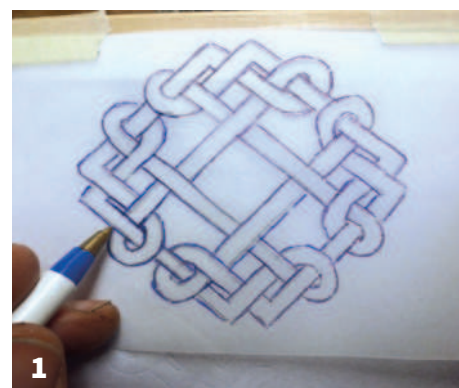
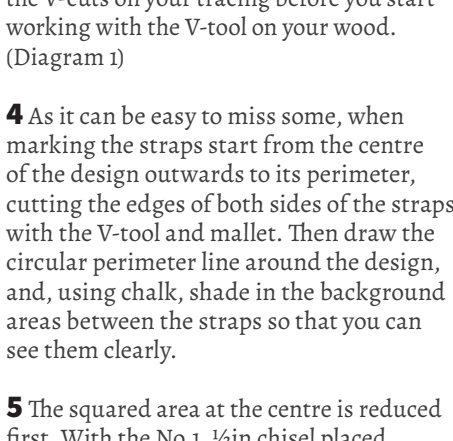
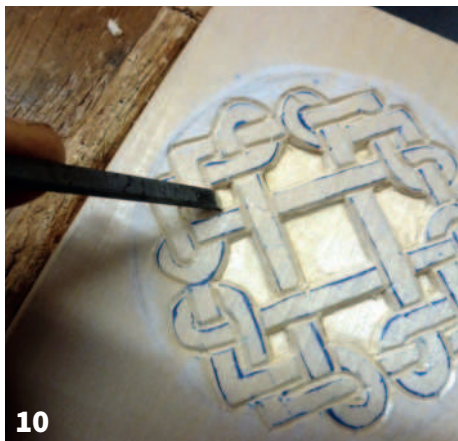
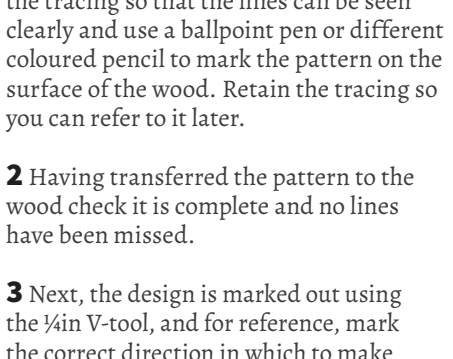
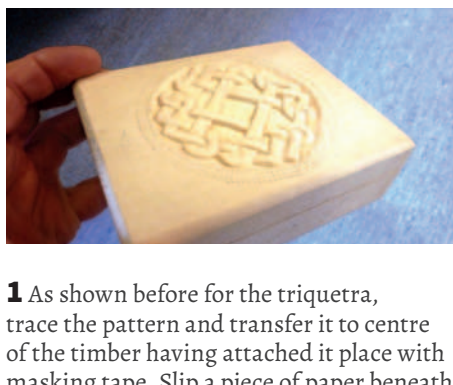
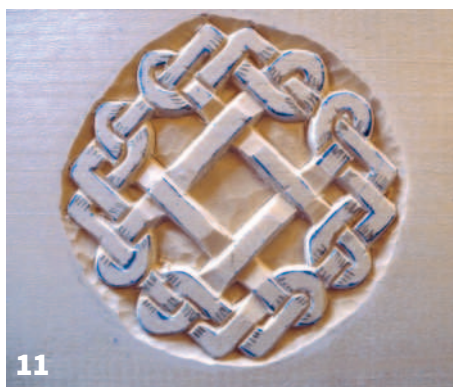


Diagram 2





within the V-tooled channel marking it, cut downwards following the angle of the V alongside the strap and away from the edge of it towards the middle of the square. Repeat for the other three sides of the square.

6 With the chisel cut downwards, angling the cut towards each of the inner four edges of the straps and enlarge the V-channel around their edges.

7 Reduce and flatten the square area using the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge. Start the cuts at the enlarged V-channel and, working towards it, extend your cuts to the middle of the area, then repeat the procedure opposite this as shown, and smooth the surface within.

8 Now reduce the background between the curved outer straps and straight edges of the straps around the centre as described before, using the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in or $\frac{1}{2}$ in gouges inverted at convex curves and the No.1, $\frac{1}{2}$ in and $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisels along the straight lines. Then smooth those areas to match the square in the middle.

9 Cut the four inner edges of the small squares using the No.1, $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel as above.

10 In the confined space between them, carefully reduce and flatten between the straps, working away from the middle of the area towards the previous cuts. Then with the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, remove the 16 small three-sided background areas around the perimeter, forming a steep slope towards the outer straps and where necessary, adjust its shape to a circle around the design.

11 Mark both adjacent parts of each lower strap as shown (Diagram 2) before starting to reduce it to lower than the one above it. As described previously, use opposing cuts with the No.1, $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel or No.3 gouge, first cutting downwards and across the underlying strap both sides of the upper strap, followed by carefully reducing both adjacent surfaces of the underlying strap and removing your markings as you work. As before, gradually extend along the straps with shallow cuts, working along each, removing their original surfaces and making their widths uniform. Finally, check all meeting edges and corners, making sure they are cut cleanly, the $\frac{1}{4}$ in skew chisel may be helpful to tidy corners between the straps. If you wish to remove your tool marks the straps could be scraped smooth using a spare No.3 gouge honed, with the subsequent burr retained, avoiding sandpaper or other abrasives.

12 On the surface of the lid around the design you may like to use a froster punch with a light hammer as a border to complete the carving. ●

1 As shown before for the triquetra, trace the pattern and transfer it to centre of the timber having attached it place with masking tape. Slip a piece of paper beneath the tracing so that the lines can be seen clearly and use a ballpoint pen or different coloured pencil to mark the pattern on the surface of the wood. Retain the tracing so you can refer to it later.

2 Having transferred the pattern to the wood check it is complete and no lines have been missed.

3 Next, the design is marked out using the $\frac{1}{4}$ in V-tool, and for reference, mark the correct direction in which to make the V-cuts on your tracing before you start working with the V-tool on your wood. (Diagram 1)

4 As it can be easy to miss some, when marking the straps start from the centre of the design outwards to its perimeter, cutting the edges of both sides of the straps with the V-tool and mallet. Then draw the circular perimeter line around the design, and, using chalk, shade in the background areas between the straps so that you can see them clearly.

5 The squared area at the centre is reduced first. With the No.1, $\frac{1}{2}$ in chisel placed

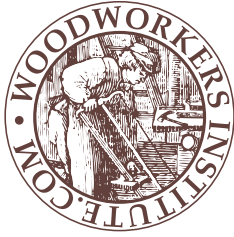


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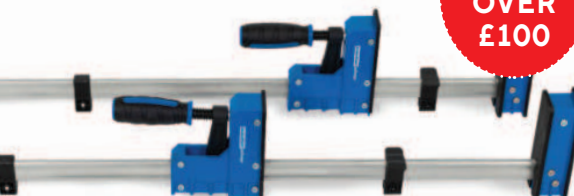
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Lop-eared rabbit

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*Cynthia Rogers carves
an English lop rabbit
in mahogany*

Things you will need

Materials

- For the rabbit: mahogany, 203 x 280mm x 50mm thick
- For the backing: colonial pine, 273 x 330mm x 12mm thick
- Modelling clay
- Acrylic paint for eyes (optional)
- Nails, flap hangers, picture wire

Tools

Gouges:

- 3/5, 5/3, 8/7, 9/10, 5F/14 fishtail

Other:

- Skewer
- Spoon or blunt knife
- Bandsaw
- Drill
- V-tool
- Carver's mallet
- Carving knife



For this carving of an English lop-eared rabbit sitting in a crate of straw we will be using mahogany and colonial pine. Mahogany is a dense timber that cuts cleanly; this will allow us to leave some of the surfaces of this carving with an unsanded 'chisel' finish, and also to obtain a higher finish on the areas we do sand. Although this wood requires a little effort, it is not difficult to cut. I would recommend it to a carver of any level of expertise.

'Colonial pine' is a colloquial name for Australian kauri. This timber cuts cleanly and is very strong. Care needs to be taken when working against the grain, as the chisel can tend to dig in and cause splitting or lifting of fibres.

This is the kind of project where making a clay model first is really helpful. By making a full model of the project first, any problems with perspective and depth can be solved quickly and simply. The model allows you to become familiar with the shape of the subject without ruining the timber.

The subject is an English lop rabbit with exceptionally long ears. Besides learning how to handle the perspective, there is a variety of textures to practise with. The crate that the rabbit is on will be chisel-finished, and the straw also will be left unsanded. The bunny will be sanded to a smooth finish, which will contrast well with the other textures.

Please note that where I refer to the

left side I mean your left as you are looking at the design, not the left side of the rabbit.

The clay model

Ensure that the finished model is the same thickness as the timber you intend to use for the carving; this will be crucial when we start measuring from the model.

Lay heavy plastic on a piece of chipboard and tape it in place. Build up the thickness of clay as you did for the smaller models; the only difference here is that you will require more clay. Use offcuts of the carving timber to test the thickness (by placing a piece either side as we did before), and bash it flat until it reaches the same thickness as the timber you are about to carve.



Making the model

1 Copy and cut out the design, then place it on top of the clay block and cut away the excess from around it. Leave the pattern on the clay and use a sharp nail or skewer to prick along the inner lines of the drawing, so that the dots will be left when the paper design is removed.

2 Carefully remove the design and use the skewer to join up the dots, leaving clearly drawn lines on the clay.

3 Mark a line in the clay 18mm down around the outside edges of the crate. Use a spoon or a blunt knife to lower the clay to this depth all the way to the edge of the ears. The ears are now standing above the level of the crate, and the straw is hanging over. Scrape the straw back away from the edge of the ears to leave the line clear, and clean the clay from under the rabbit's chin and along the inside of the right ear. Do not worry about the detail of the right foot at this stage.

4 The inside of the left ear is hollowed by scraping with a spoon and smoothing over with the fingers; the flat part where it hangs over the crate has been left at 6mm thick. Notice that it has been left quite thick along the line of the straw at the top of the crate: this will give the impression of the thin ear being distorted by the straw. The outer left edge of the ear is left higher to allow for the curve. The deeper hollow where it is level with the eye has been cut to 12mm depth. Do the same with the right ear, leaving a curve in the ear with the inner edge slightly higher. To separate the line of the ears and head from the body, cut a 12mm trench around the line at the back of the ears into the body and hind leg. This allows access to the curve of the ears, and gives a clear line to mark the body.

5 Shape the rabbit's back by sloping the clay sharply to the hump of the shoulders and then rounding it to the back wall for the bulge of the belly and the back. The rear leg is cut back to an elongated oval with a sharp hollow between it and the body. The whole shape of the body has to be fitted into this area from behind the head, or else there will not be enough room in the material for the head itself.

6 The sharp square edges are removed from the outer edges of the ears, rounding them and giving them fullness. The flat section on the top of the head is sloped by removing the front corner and flattening it across the brow.

7 Remove 3mm of clay from the inner edges of the ears to make them curl or flop inwards a little. The bridge of the nose is the closest part of the head, so all the rest must be shaped back or away from this point and made to fit to the ears. Shape the fullness of the area round the mouth. Slope from where the ears join down along the sides of the face, working the hollow below the eyes.

8 Cut a V in the centre of the head to mark the depth of the skull, then take a wedge from the ear line and the top of the brow to round the head. Scrape a groove down to the centre point between the eyes, slope the clay away from this point and round it off. From above the pad of the nose, cut a small slice and scrape the clay up to the bridge to leave a hump or 'Roman' look. Deepen the hollow along the sides of the central ridge of the face.

9 With the skewer, mark in the position of the eyes and the mouth. Cut in where the heavy muscle of the ears fits in at the top and side of the head, remove some of the clay from the top flat part of the skull, and smooth it with the fingers. Use the handle of the spoon to scrape some clay from the mouth/chin area and from the side of the nostrils, reducing the full part of the cheeks.



Carving

Bandsaw the profile of the rabbit with the two tabs intact. Turn it over and drill the three 6mm holes, 12mm deep, as marked on the drawing; these will be used later to dowel the bunny to the backing. Make a template of the dowel holes, ready for attaching him to the backing. (Please note that in the following photographs clamps have been removed for clarity.)





10



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10 Holding the work by the tabs, mark a line 15mm down around the outside of the crate; this is the level to which the surface of the crate needs to be reduced. With the V-tool or either of the gouges, cut a trench outside the line of the ears and the straw into the timber of the crate. This trench does not have to be tidy or fussy; it is to stop the chisels running into the ears and to stop the timber splitting while we are removing waste from the crate. Cut a line also between the tabs and the crate, for the same reason.

11 Use the 9/10 or the fishtail to lower the level of the crate to the bottom of the trench. Re-cut the trench and again lower the level of the box until the pencil line has almost been reached; then finish by working lightly over with the fishtail to remove the worst of the humps. Tidy the edges of the right ear by stab-cutting gently around the design; repeat along the edge of the straw and the left ear. Do not tap with the mallet when stab-cutting – push the chisel gently but firmly with the hand only, so as not to mark the lower level. Choose the chisel that matches the curve you are cutting.

12 Before any further shaping can be started, you must decide what type of finish will be used. I have chosen to give the crate a tooled finish; this means that it will not be sanded, but left as is after the chisel has been used. Lightly redraw the planks on the front of the crate as a guide, deciding on their width and number. Working each board separately, so that chisel marks do not cross from one board to the next, will prevent the crate looking like one large slab. Use the 8/7 to work from the bottom of the crate up towards the rabbit in short strokes – or reverse the direction if you find this gives a cleaner cut. By varying the length of the cuts – some short, some long – you can give a convincingly rough, uneven look to the boards. Some alteration in the depth of the cuts can also be used, but take care not to snap the timber off.

When the ears are reached, just leave the last cut undone; this will be finished when we undercut them later.

Separation of the boards is achieved by dragging the carving knife down firmly along the pencil lines; repeating the cut on the same mark with the blade very slightly angled will leave the tiniest sliver to be picked out. Wavy lines or odd gaps only serve to make it more interesting, so don't wrestle to get it too even.

Mark holes for nails. This can be done by tapping a nail punch into the timber, or by cutting the tip from a 50mm nail and tapping it gently with a small tack hammer where needed. The overhanging straw will hide the top row of nails.

13 Carefully stab cut around the lines of the ears and face, using the carving knife or whichever chisel fits the curves. From here on is where our model proves its worth. You can push a skewer all the way through the clay to the backing board and mark the depth of the clay on it, as shown. Alternatively, mark the depth with your thumbnail and then measure the length of the skewer when it is withdrawn. This measurement gives us the required depth needed at that place on the timber – all we have to do is keep testing the depth as we work around the profile. Depths must be tested often and related to the timber. So as not to get lost when working, it is best to work small areas at a time.



12



13

14 Test the depth of the clay representing the straw in front of the bunny's chin. By laying a flat offcut on the uncut surface, the depth can be repeatedly checked as the straw is cut back. Repeat this procedure to cut back the straw either side of the ears, and roughly shape under the face.

15 Working from the tip of the left ear, test the depths in the clay and cut the timber back to match, making sure that the ridge is kept where the ear hangs over the protruding straw. Showing the contour of the surface underneath it gives the impression that the ear is very thin and delicate – which it is. Use the 9/10 to remove larger amounts of timber and the fishtail to level the surface. When working along the inner line of the ear, use either gouge and cut parallel to the line; this will leave a slight curve on the lower level. Measure frequently and compare with the clay model. For tight curves use the 8/7. Do not try to finish the top inside of the ear next to face now – this will be done when the face is profiled. Sand the ear with 180 or 240 grit to give a clearer view of the work, rolling the paper for the curves. Final sanding will be done later.

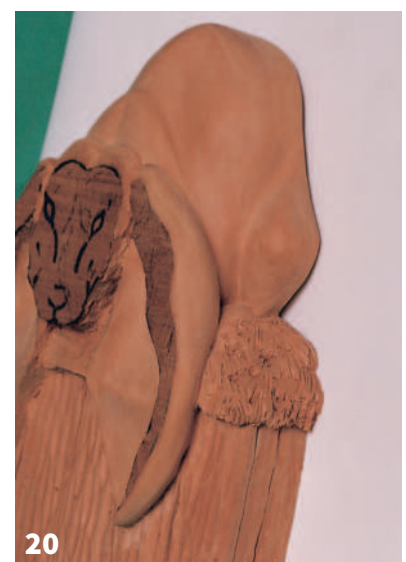
16 Reduce the waste with the 3/5 next to the right cheek between the head and ear. The photograph shows the right ear carved but not sanded. Use the same method of testing the clay first and then cutting to match. No undercutting of the ears will be undertaken yet. From here on it will be assumed that the clay is tested for depth before cutting the timber, even though it is not stated every time.

17 Sand the right ear, then cut a trench behind the head and ears as we did in the clay. Remove the bulk of the waste from the rabbit's back with the 9/10, and finish off with the fishtail. Use the 9/10 for the depression behind the shoulder blades, and the 8/7 for the tight curve behind the head and between the shoulders at the neck. The ridge of the backbone is left prominent. Cut the deeper groove where the hind leg joins the body, and sand the back all over with 180 or 240 grit.

18 Use the fishtail to cut in at the top of the ears as shown, and slope the flat part of the head to match the model, keeping the central depression. A blue pencil mark has been drawn to show where the rounding of the back of the ears will begin.

19 Use the fishtail to round the back of the ears to the blue pencil mark, checking the contours against the model. With the V-tool, cut a groove between the ears and the top of the head, rounding the top of the head to make it fit if needed. Notice that at the top and back of the ears the V has been cut a little sharper; use the 3/5 to do this, as it helps to give more depth.

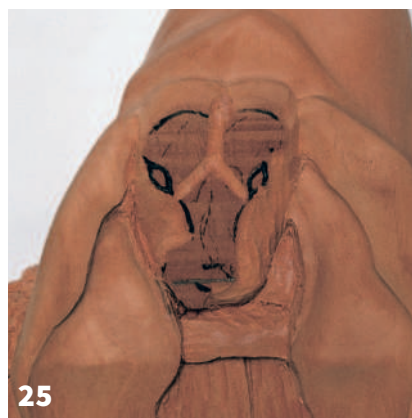
20 Now that the shape of the ears has been set, the back of the ears and the area behind them can be worked. Starting at the top edge, mark with a pencil where the back curve of the ear will sweep round to where it touches the bedding. Slope the back of the ear down to the body, removing the waste with short strokes of the 8/7 for ease. At the base of the hind leg a bump has been left which we will use later to indicate the hind foot. The straw has been roughly stepped to shape. The back of the hind leg has been rounded back a little to give depth, and make it seem fuller. Sand with 180 grit.





21 To give a rough, crosshatched appearance to the straw, use the V-tool. All the cuts are done in random short blocks on the uneven surface that we left for this job. Broken ends, uneven bits and pieces, odd levels, and lines going every which way will make the straw look real. This is the one place where all those 'accidents' should happen on purpose.

Mark the continuation of the back of the ear and cut the undercut with the fishtail or the carving knife. Where the crate grooves meet up with the ear, use the 3/5 and the 5/3 to continue the grooves under the edge of the ear, then sand. The right side of the crate can now be patterned to match the front as far as the tab: cut in the boards and undercut the straw. The undercutting of the rabbit and the straw is no different from the work already done on the flowers and leaves; the principle is the same regardless of the design.



22 The left side is shaped by continuing the body down to meet the straw. The back of the ear is pencilled in first and then shaped with the fishtail, leaving the straw rough. Pattern the straw and the side of the crate as far as the tab, undercutting the straw, as for the right side. Undercut the back of the ear, keeping the sweep full and soft. Continue the grooves on the crate to match. Leave the straw below the rabbit's face until later.

23 Sand over the entire back part of the rabbit, working back from the top of the head, progressing through the grades of paper for a fine finish. Do not sand the straw or the box.

24 The flat area of the right ear that so far has not been carved is now shaped back to the skull at the top; check the model for the finished depth. Then shape the front edge of the ear; carve dips in it to create interest and contour, as well as rolling the edge in places. Sand it over to see how it looks, but do not undercut the flaps as they may get leant on and broken. Carve the left ear in the same manner as the right, and sand over for clarity. Look closely at the left side of the face in the photograph: you can see that the waste from that side has been cut away, using the 3/5. The edge of the ear can now be seen, making the face more even.

On the right side of the cheek the 8/7 has been used to angle the face on a slope – check your model for the correct shape. Do not fuss over the section where the ear joins to the head – the detail of the ears will be the last thing to finish. With the 9/10, cut a depression from between the eyes to the V at the top of the skull.

25 Carve the left side of the face in the same manner as the right side. Using the 8/7, cut a groove from below each eye to join into the line in the brow; it will look a bit like an upside-down Y. Draw a pencil line through the pad of the nose as a centreline; from this, cut under the nose pad and round the lower cheeks and mouth area. Blend the shaping into the side of the face which you have already cut.

26 Work the left side of the face to match the right; take special care when carving near the edge of the left ear. Use the fishtail to soften or round over the edge of the Y, blending the hard edge away. The right side of the face has been sanded for a better view and an oval has been drawn in blue pencil on the bridge of the nose: this marks the highest part of the face.

27 Sand the left side of the face to match the right, and sand the top of the skull above the eyes and the hard edge of the flat area. If there is a corner at the front edge of the skull, carve it away gently with the fishtail, then sand. At the apex of the head – in the V at the back of the skull – use the 3/5 to cut a depression to give more shadow, then sand. Clearly mark in pencil the top line of the eyes, and with the fishtail cut an angle to remove the jutting ledge where the bottom of the eye will be. What we have done is to flatten the area that the eye sits in, sloping it down to meet the face.

From the blue oval, use the 9/10 to round the sharp ridge, as shown on the right side of the face. There is now a groove running down the right side to the nose pad. Use the 9/10 on the left side of the blue oval, and cut it to match the right side so that the face is even. Trim the hard ridge under the left eye as for the right, using the fishtail as before. Look at the nose pad: at the moment there is an angle that juts out just below the line of the drawing. With the fishtail, slice off the angle so that the pad is slightly rounded (convex), from below the pencil mark.

28 Sand over the entire face to get a clearer view of the timber and the shape. Draw in the nose pad and the line underneath to the mouth line. From the corners of the nose draw an arc along the bridge, across the brow to where the ears join the face. This ensures that we can get the face even and the eyes level – any unevenness will be seen and can be adjusted now. Pencil in the eyes clearly, making sure that they are level and the same size.

29 Use the V-tool to cut a V along both lines of the nose pad and down the division of the upper lip and mouth. This is no different from cutting a vein in a leaf. When cutting in the eyes, use a chisel that matches the curve of the eye; it is not only the size of the chisel that matters, but the shape of the curve. In the photograph you can see that the 3/5 fits the curve and that it is being held at an angle to the timber while it is pushed in by hand.

30 When cutting the bottom eyelid the handle is held raised; when cutting the top eyelid the handle is lowered. This is so that the cuts are angled to give more depth, and the eyeball will sit behind the lids, not just poke out from them. Work slowly; steady the hand holding the chisel against the timber for stability, and try to keep the pressure of the cuts at an even depth as you move along. Cut the full length of one lid before moving to the other. Use the 5/3 at the very tips of the corners, if needed, to remove any small specks that are hard to reach. To show you what we are aiming for, the right eye has been fully shaped with the chisels but not sanded. Shave away any ridge left from the V-tool under the nose pad and sand the area. If the mouth has not yet been cut in, draw it in before cutting to make sure it ends up the shape you want.

31 The left eye has had the cuts made along the pencil lines, as for the right eye. Now the 3/5 is being used to make the first cuts up under the lid. The hand is held slightly down – not straight on – so that the blade cuts up at an angle to the carving; this is done all along the line.

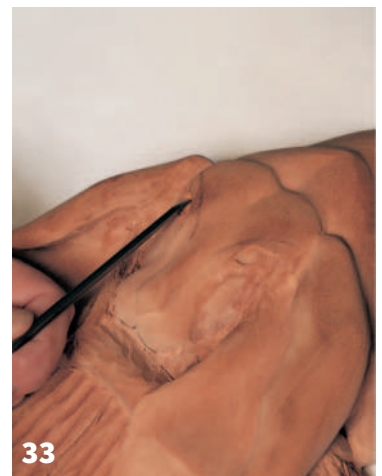
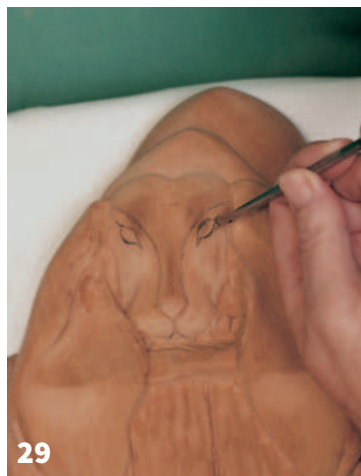
32 When forming the bottom undercut, the handle of the chisel is lifted. If it is easier for you, turn the carving upside down to cut the bottom line.

33 Follow the curve of the eyeball, using the 3/5 upside down, to shape the arc of the eye. Work slowly and gently, pushing only with the hand – do not use the mallet here, as the chisel may go too far. Work over the entire surface of the eye in this way.

34 Cut a groove from the back of the eye with the 8/7, down the cheek to match the chalk mark visible on the right side of the face, and cut the groove that runs under the eye and down the face. Taking the 3/5, carefully trim along the lower ridge of the eyelid to remove the sharp edge and match the right eye.

35 Cut the shape of the lip and mouth, using the 3/5 at an angle as we did when undercutting the eyelid. Remove a small amount from under the lip so the mouth sets back a little, and cut the curve of the chin. Sand the face all over. Remove excess from along the side of the face, deepening the gap at the left to form a shadow.

The right side is also cut back, and can either be carved to show a foot and leg as shown, or simply patterned as straw. The right ear is slightly undercut to give depth to this area. The recess is firstly stab cut with the 3/5, and then the waste removed with either the 3/5 or the 8/7. The leg, if carved, is left chisel-finished. The straw at the front is cut in around the mouth and 'rough-cut' as before. The part that overhangs the crate can now be undercut and shaped.





36 Deepen the undercut of the roll or curve of the right ear, the entire ear can then be cleaned, finished and sanded. The left ear has already been trimmed, undercut and sanded. Sand the rabbit all over to a fine finish and remove the tabs.

Two ways to remove the tabs

1 If you have access to a bandsaw and are proficient in its use, you may saw one tab off just outside the line of the carving (making the cut in the waste). Holding the carving by the remaining tab, the corner of the crate can then be tooled and punched to match its surroundings. Saw the last tab in the same manner, then place a thick piece of leather under a clamp to secure and protect the crate while the last end is carved.

2 If a bandsaw is unavailable or you are concerned about damage, then use this method. Clamp at the left tab and use the fishtail to carefully lower the level of the right tab to the face of the carving. Cut a trench with the V-tool or a gouge and lower the level once again to the bottom of the cut. Keep working in this manner until half the thickness of the tab has been removed, leaving the level flat enough for the clamp to hold. Swap the clamp to the right tab and repeat the procedure on the left tab, this time working to a quarter of the original depth. Move the clamp back to the left tab; this time remove the last of the right tab and tool the end of the crate. Place a piece of heavy leather under the clamp to hold the crate while removing the last of the left tab and tooling the surface to match.

Colouring the eyes

It is a matter of preference whether you paint the eyes or leave them plain; I opted to paint them on this rabbit. I first rubbed one coat of oil over the entire carving to seal the surface. This will stop any bleeding of paint or absorption of moisture where it is not wanted.

Study the line drawing of the rabbit and take notice of the eyes and the shape of the iris. If the iris is drawn too small, the bunny will end up with little 'piggy' eyes and will look very mean. Try colouring copies of the drawing first, to see what looks good on your rabbit before you start on the carving itself.

I used an artists' acrylic paint that comes ready to use in tube form; I find that woodstains in such small areas tend to bleed too much and there is not enough control.

37 For the large iris I have used burnt umber (dark brown), with Mars black for the centres. A small sable or other soft brush works well. Make sure that each coat is thoroughly dry before painting the next colour on. The difference in colour is hard to see before the oil is applied over the paint, but shows up quite well when it is finished. Ensure that the paint has been allowed to harden before continuing with the oiling.



Oiling

I applied oil all over the project with a soft brush and then used a tightly rolled cloth to remove it from the crate and the straw. I applied two coats in this way, rubbing off both coats from the surface of the crate while still wet.

Carving the background

38 The backing is planed, cut to size, sanded and the 6mm dowel holes drilled to a depth of 9mm, using the template made earlier.

The backing board is carved in the same way as the crate. The rabbit is laid on the backing and a light pencil line drawn around him; with the rabbit removed, the lines are drawn for the boards and the tooling started. Each cut must pass beyond the outline of the rabbit, but there is no need to work the entire surface behind him. Finish with three coats of oil, brushed on and rubbed off as before.

Fix two triangular flap hangers 75mm down from the top edge and 25mm in from the sides. Attach picture wire so that it comes 25mm below the edge of the backing. After checking the carving for fit, apply suitable glue to dowels and faces, position with care, place a weight on the project, and leave for 24 hours. ●



BDWCA news & events

Fish? In a Decoy Competition? Why?

We have often been asked by people looking at carved fish on our stand at the Birdfair, or by visitors to our annual show, why fish are included, and here's the answer.

In just the same way as wildfowl decoys have been used in the United States and Canada for centuries, so too have fish decoys, and there is good reason to believe that they were originally introduced by American Indians or Eskimos. It is a fact that fish decoys were, and still are, used extensively in those areas of America and Canada where the lakes freeze over in winter, and where local regulations permit spear fishing.

The spearman will cut a hole in the ice, drop his fish decoys into the water below, and erect a shanty hut in which he will sit, staring down through the hole in the ice patiently watching his decoys. When a fish swims near them he will use a spear to 'catch it'. Because the fish can see the whole of the decoy, while a duck will only see that part of a decoy duck that is above the water line, the lead weights – which are, of course, required to ensure the decoy sinks to the required depth – are carefully countersunk into the belly of the fish decoy and painted over so that they cannot be seen. Each working fish decoy will have a hook screwed into its back and a string attached, which is manipulated by the spearman to emulate a swimming motion.

The painting of working fish decoys can be varied and may well be a stylised pattern, in bright colours, aimed at attracting inquisitive fish in deep, ice-covered water rather than looking exactly like a specific variety of fish. This is where exhibition and competition fish differ, as in competition the requirement is to emulate the actual fish in mannerisms, size and colouring, as can be seen in the pictures of prize-winning fish accompanying this explanation.

This edition of the magazine will be published shortly before our annual show in Bakewell, Derbyshire, on 10 and 11 September, so if you can come along you will be able to see examples of the carved fish, together with all the different categories of birds that will be on display. There will also be stocks of wood for carving, carving supplies, equipment and paints for sale.



Pumpkinseed by Steve Toher, 2021



Juvenile Mirror Carp by Bosse Wessman, 2017



Grayling by Peter Scott, 2014



Brown Trout by Steve Toher, 2015



Three Rainbow Trout – male chasing females, by Tom Fitzpatrick, 2019



Gudgeon by Steve Toher, 2018

Diary dates

Saturday and Sunday, 10 and 11 September 2022

**The National Bird Carving Championships,
The Festival of Bird Art in Bakewell, Derbyshire.**

Featuring the BDWCA Annual Competitions for members and the British Bird Carving Championship 2022, which is open to all.

A wide variety of bird and wildfowl carvings at Youth, Novice, Intermediate and Advanced levels.

Demonstrations of wildfowl carving, painting, stick-making, and decorative techniques will take place during the weekend.

Stockists of carving supplies, books, equipment, paints and wood for carving will also be present.

See www.bdwca.org.uk for more details.



John Dory by Steve Toher, 2016

For further information...

...on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk. Membership includes three issues of the full-colour magazine, *Wingspan*.

Or contact the membership secretary:
Mrs Janet Nash, 26 Shendish Edge,
Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9SZ, Tel: 01442 247610
Alternatively, please email:
pam.wilson@bdwca.org.uk

Community news

A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community



Commemorating the Queen's Jubilee

Shropshire woodcarvers were busy in April, having been challenged to carve a spoon to commemorate the Queen's 70 years on the throne. Once again, the members pulled out all the stops, especially when our chairman organised a visit from the Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire to view the spoons and convey our good wishes to the Queen.

It never ceases to amaze me how many ways people chose to interpret a challenge – even a simple spoon can spawn a whole raft of inspirational ideas and the members came up with plenty, as usual. We decided that once the spoons were finished, we would like to display them in a portable box to take to events and shows that we attend throughout the year.

Step forward our resident retired carpenter Arthur, who came up with a royal red box to fit the spoons safely and securely, which has been used for display twice already.

Finally, the spoons were finished, and a good turnout of members were in attendance for the visit of the Lord Lieutenant Mrs Anna Turner on 10 May. Our chairman Stewart Tilly introduced the Lord Lieutenant to all and proceeded to show her the carvings. She was impressed by the skill and craft on display and was very happy to chat to everyone and talk about her role. She enjoyed the visit and thanked everyone for the invitation. We thanked her for the commitment to the 60-mile round trip to view the spoons. What a lovely lady.

*Mick Price
Shropshire Woodcarvers*





Collie carving

Here are some photos of my latest carving. I hope you like it. *Oliver Richardson*



Letter for Kevin Alviti

Dear Kevin,
greetings from Ireland!
I found your article on the Gardener's Trug and made one for my mother. I decided to colour in the poppies and carved a fairy door on the other side. I also joined the ends with wooden pegs.

*Kind regards,
Gordon Osborne*



Blood Bike

The North Wales & Borders Woodcarvers meet at Johnstown, Wrexham, and each year identify a charity to support. We donate any monies received from members of the public when presenting exhibitions. This year, the Blood Bikes charity was chosen. This charity conveys urgent supplies of plasma between NHS locations by motorcycle, hence 'blood bikes'.

Our initial contribution was a carved representation of a Blood Bike, a photo of which is attached. The carving was completed by Terry Wynne after many hours of skilled work. The carving has working suspension and steering.

The presentation took place on 5 March at one of our fortnightly meetings.

The work is to be sold to raise money for the charity.

Geoff Williams, secretary

What have you been carving? Please email your images to WCEditorial@thegmcgroup.com

The Wellington Heath Jubilee Sculpture

Chainsaw carver Simon O'Rourke tells us the story behind his latest work

We first met chainsaw carver and environmental artist Simon O'Rourke in *Woodcarving 181*, where he told us how he creates his large-scale sculptures. One of his latest creations was recently unveiled in the Herefordshire village of Wellington Heath. Here, Simon tells us more about the piece and how it commemorates not one, but two royal Jubilees.





PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON O'ROURKE

Background to the Wellington Heath Jubilee Sculpture

The oak tree the sculpture is made from was originally planted in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Sadly, the tree died about two years ago. The parish council wanted to turn it into something meaningful rather than just destroying it, and suggested something to mark Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee. The villagers of Wellington Heath jumped at the suggestion, and so the idea was born. When they contacted me, the story and history behind the tree captured my attention – as well as the chance to create a large public piece in a lovely village.

Design details

The sculpture is one of my Wildlife Pillars, tall sculptures decorated with animal carvings, which have been proving popular recently with my followers on social media. In fact, wildlife has been one of my most requested subjects, whether individual animals, pillars like this one, or my sculpture trails at Meadow Park, Fforest Fawr, Page's Wood and Picton. There's no room for boredom though. Wildlife is an infinitely varied, beautiful theme and I love to explore the textures and shapes that make up the forms of animals.

For this pillar, my brief was to include animals from the local area. In particular, the client wanted a large bird of prey at the top, which they decided would be a red kite. The only anomaly in this theme is a small monkey. The story behind this is that Wellington Heath is (perhaps a little bizarrely!) known locally as 'monkey island'. Once you know that, the monkey makes much more sense.

As well as the wildlife, the sculpture features a scroll. This gives the piece a more regal feel, and its text, VR 1897 – EIIR 2022, reminds people of the occasion behind the sculpture.

Creating the sculpture

The Wellington Heath Jubilee sculpture took about five days to create, including assembling and taking down the scaffolding. As is typical of using a natural material, the tree threw me some surprises.

There was a surprising patch of rot in the top section which I had to work around. That meant changing the position of the kite, and adding the second wing rather than using two existing branch stubs as planned.

There were also pockets of rot in old branch wounds around the tree. I was able to hollow those out though to leave nesting spaces for birds and bats in the hope that the local wildlife will still find the tree a useful place.

Finally, another challenge was the number of nails I hit during the carving process. Over the years the tree had been used as a local place for nailing notices. Metal fragments are not a chainsaw's friend, so this meant I spent a lot of time sharpening the chainsaws.

The finished piece

The final sculpture stands around 5m tall and is hopefully something people will enjoy for many more years. I'm sure that when the tree was planted, nobody envisioned that one day it would become this sculpture (after all, chainsaws at the time were very basic and only used for surgery) but it's nice to think they would also be proud of it.



Gnocchi paddles

Kevin Alviti adds to his collection of kitchen gadgets by making and carving a pair of patterned paddles for gnocchi or pasta



When you've been a woodworker for most of your life it's inevitable that you leave your mark on where you live. That is certainly true in our house – I hate buying anything in wood, much preferring to make it.

The one room I'm especially guilty of this in is the kitchen. As well as making every unit and cupboard door from scratch, the dining table we enjoy every meal at, I also have made many of the implements that we use to cook with. Everything from spoons, spurtles, rolling pins, trivets, the list goes on. And because we love to cook so much that list is quite long...

My wife must hate it when I see something new and I get that look in my eye for something else I'm going to make. I'm especially keen when I have to try to figure out how they were made in the past. That look in my eye happened when I was watching someone make gnocchi on YouTube and I saw the grooved boards they roll the dough on, much like butter paddles which I had always fancied making. I wondered how I'd make the grooves without the use of routers, especially as I'd never seen a wooden plane that had that profile (although they may be out there).

That was it, another project was decided on! But of course, what's the point in making it if you can't make it beautiful. Adding a simple carving to an everyday item is one of my real joys in life. I love that little bit of extra effort in a project that you then get to enjoy that beauty every time you use it. I also love the reactions that people have when they see carving like this – it's our little secret that it's so enjoyable to do!

To make gnocchi or to make the rolled grooved pasta garganelli, you only really need to make one board, but a pair means they can be used to squeeze the whey from freshly made butter and they work well together displayed on a kitchen shelf.

Choice of wood

Lately, I've been using quite a bit of sycamore for different projects. It's food-safe, holds detail well and is great for carving or turning. I've kind of been slowly falling in love with it [cue romantic music in the background]. Considering I've been working wood for 20 years and only just realised how great it is, I feel like I've been missing out!

Things you will need

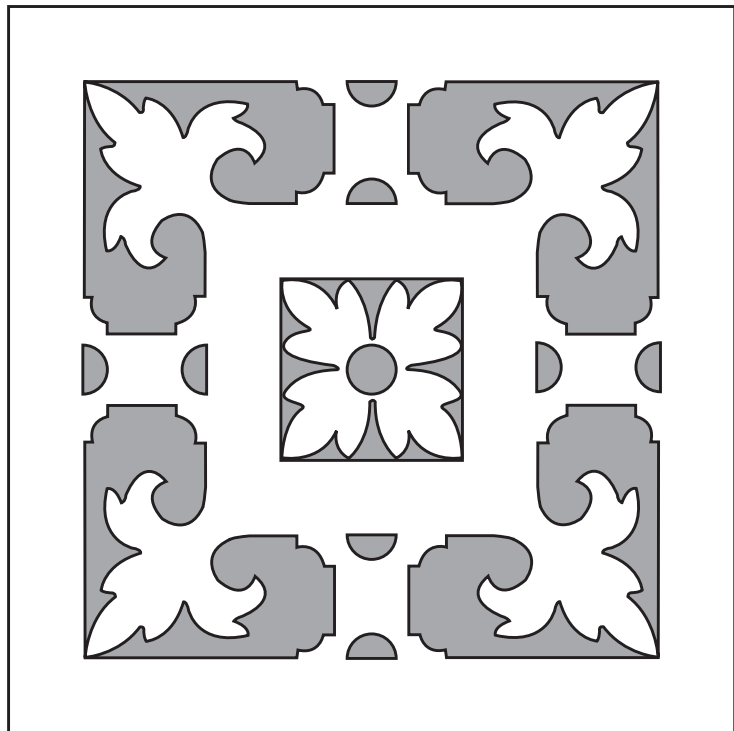
Materials

- 2 sycamore blanks
300 x 100mm x 18mm
- Offcuts of ply or MDF
to make the template and jig

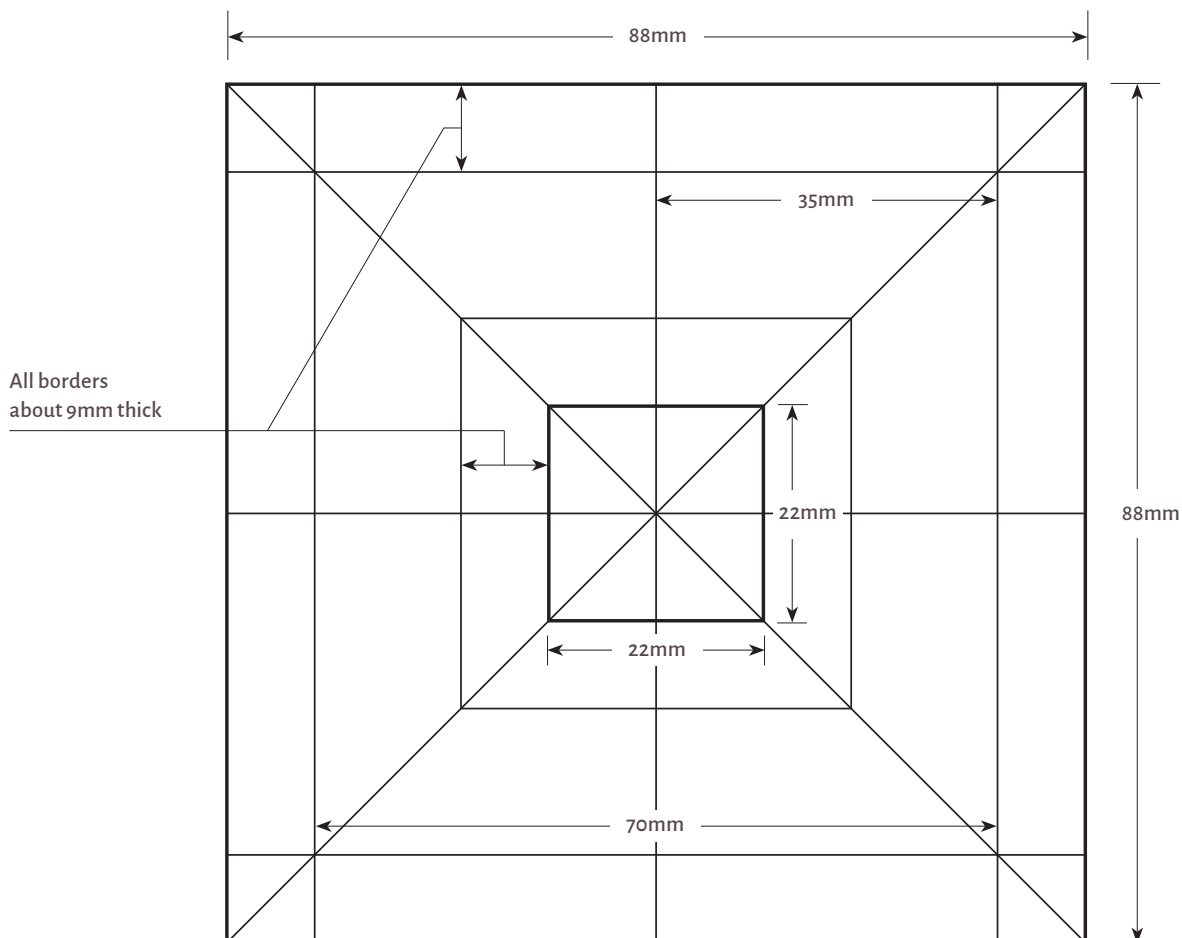
Tools & equipment

- Bandsaw or jigsaw
- Planer
- Sander
- Router – bearing guided copy bit (optional)
- Router – 1/4in round-over bit
- Carving tools
- Small carving mallet
- 45 degree V tool
- 60 degree V tool
- 20mm straight double bevelled elgonnee-style chisel
- 6mm straight double bevelled elgonnee-style chisel
- 3mm straight chisel
- No.6, 9mm gouge
- No.4, 6mm gouge

CARVING DESIGN



CARVING LAYOUT



◀ Making the paddles

1 Select your wood for the project. I bought some wood from a mill a while ago where they had milled it too thin for normal sale, as it finished about 17mm. But it was a large plank for £15 so I bought it with the thought of some projects later on. It wasn't a great board but I selected a few good places down it that were straight-grained and free from knots.

2 To make these paddles, I wanted them to be a good shape to hold. I'm a firm believer in not trying to reinvent the wheel, so I thought of something I use every day – the hairbrush I drag (with much protest) through my daughter's long hair. I used this to mark a template on a scrap piece of plywood, although if you're only making two then it's easy just to mark it straight out onto the wood itself.

3 Cut the template out as carefully as possible on the bandsaw. Alternatively, cut the shapes out directly on the sycamore and skip to step 8.

4 Sand the template to get it as perfect as possible. It's worth spending time on a template if you're to use it to replicate something or create a pair.

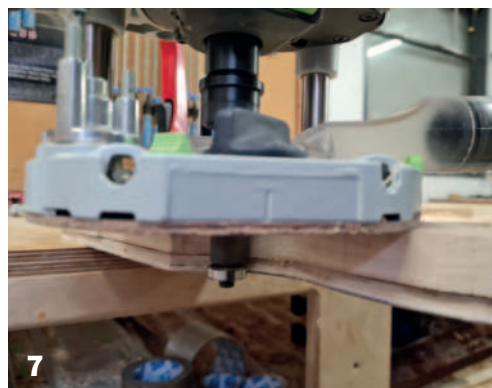
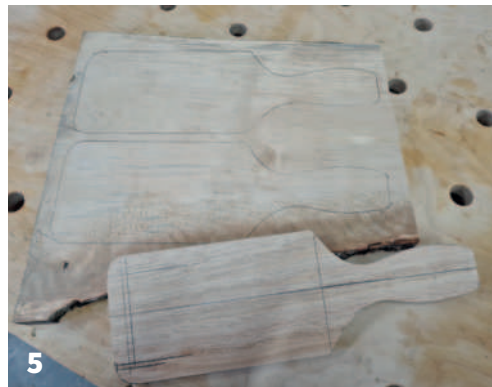
5 Use the template to mark out your timber. I had planed this timber down to the required thickness (about 15mm) before this step.

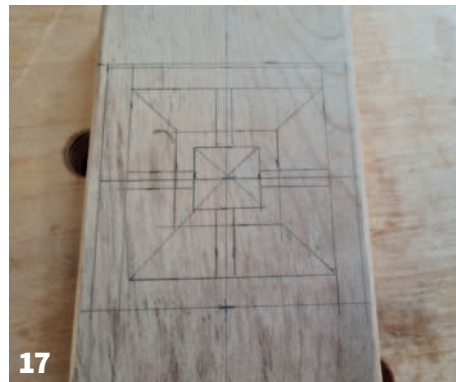
6 No need to be too fussy when cutting them out, so long as it's bigger, not smaller (leave at least the pencil mark as waste) as it will be trimmed off with the router.

7 Clamp the template to the blank, and using a bearing guided copying bit work your way around the piece. You will have to stop and move the workpiece, so make sure this template doesn't move as you work.

8 Using a ¼in bearing guided round-over bit, soften all the edges of the workpiece and give it a final sand to about 220 grit.

9 Now the trickiest bit of the whole project – to make the grooves in the paddles. Potentially the easiest way to do this is to use a V-groove cutter in a router table and move the fence in increments as you work your way across the paddle so the template doesn't move as you work.





10 I decided to do this by hand using my V-tool as I figure it's a tool most carvers reading this will have. To start with, I made a very simple jig, taking an offcut of the sycamore I'm working and a scrap of 9mm plywood. I fixed these perpendicular to each other to act as a simple fence.

Carving the grooves

11 Using the V-tool as a guide, I then fixed a second piece of ply to the wood acting as a fence, the exact width of my 45° V-tool. I tested this out and the V-tool slides easily up and down the slot, giving me a straight groove on the paddle.

12 Ideally, find a way to clamp this down, but I used my less dominant hand to hold the jig and keep it always behind the cutting edge. Then with slow and steady motions up and down, used the V-tool

much like you'd use a wooden moulding plane, never trying to take a full swipe, but short movements all the way back up the paddle.

13 When you have reached the depth you require (about 3mm) then move the jig over by eye. You should have carved slightly into the end of the jig as you completed your cut, so it should be easy to see how much to move it. As you get near the ends, use the second paddle to support the jig to stop it from rocking.

14 Don't try to do this all at once. It's surprising how quickly you can work across the board but it is quite tiring. You're not aiming for perfect, we're not machines after all. Instead, it wants to be just as uniform as you can make it.

Carving a pattern on the reverse

15 Now for the embellishment on the other side, something to make it stand out. I found a strapwork design I liked in an old book first published in 1892, and with a bit of alteration I thought it would work perfectly on the back of these paddles. It also helps justify the book purchase, which may have been more expensive than I care to admit.

16 This style of carving is quite busy, and because of that it always looks far harder to carve than it actually is. In all honesty, the hardest bit is in the setting out. Start by marking out where you want the design, drawing centre lines and the outside frame.

17 Then the angled lines and other frames that are to be carved.

18 Use the V-tool to mark a groove to form the outside border. Take this slowly and make sure you get straight lines. It's surprisingly easy to do but might be worth practising on a scrap piece of wood first if you're unsure.

19 It doesn't matter too much in which order you make the cuts, but it matters that you're methodical. When there are multiple cuts all around the pattern it's easiest to make these at the same time. I started with the central box, marked the outside with a 20mm straight chisel (double-bevelled chisel rather than carpenter's) and the central divot which I made by striking and turning a No.6, 9mm gouge and removing the waste.

20 Then using the same No.6, 9mm gouge, I made the semicircular D shapes. These were made with one light strike on the gouge, doing each one in turn, then changing to a small straight chisel, strike and remove the waste chip, being careful not to flick up the chip as it's easy to catch the grain and remove wood you hadn't been planning to.

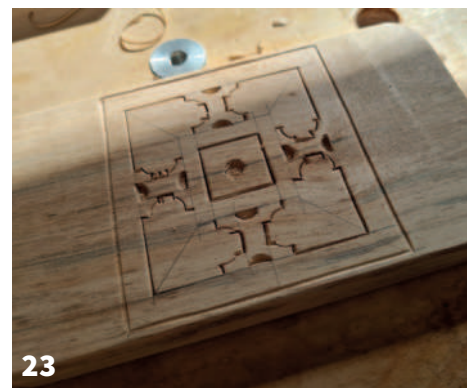
21 For these spacings for the scotia-type shape, I used my 6mm straight chisel as a spacing guide the first few times then just did it by eye for the rest. The eye is pretty forgiving when there is lots of detail in a piece. I then struck either side of this shape with my 3mm straight chisel, a tool that doesn't get much use but is handy when I need it.

22 With these marks made, it's time to connect them up with a softly sweeping chisel. I used a No.4, 6mm gouge.

23 Connect the two scotia up on each plane. I hate this bit as everything looks quite messy, but honestly, by the end you won't be able to tell.

24 Now work on the fleur de lyse part of the design. Start a little way off the diagonal line with the No.6 gouge we were using before, mark and sweep it around a little to make the impression larger. Then lift and mark back toward the centre, creating the bottom part of the leaf.

25 Using the No.4 gouge again, make two cuts on either side, one from the top of the cut in step 24 and one from the top downwards. Then use the same chisel to connect them. Chances are it'll be too big, but you will only be cutting into the waste.





26 Using the No.4 gouge again, work on the centre flower, making a simple series of cuts away from the centre. Try to make sure the chisel doesn't connect up to the centre.

27 Connect up any last straight line using as big a chisel as you can. Take your time here as it's easy to accidentally strike the wrong part of the design, especially when there are lots of layout lines.

28 Then remove the waste. I used the No.4 gouge and left it with a heavily tooled background, reducing it down by a few millimetres, but leaving the gouge marks. This gives it texture and is far easier than trying to get it flat in such a small space.

29 The use of a carver's punch can really help simple designs like this. I struck this star pattern in each corner as a finishing flourish. Use a small hammer here rather than your mallet to strike it with.

30

30 With the carving complete, give it a quick sand to remove any pencil marks then treat it with your chosen finish. I used a pure tung oil that is food-safe, using a cotton rag and an old toothbrush to get into the detailed areas.

Now go make some food! ●



A whittle at sea

Cedric Boyns whiles away some time on the ocean waves with this meerkat project

After two long years of being very careful about where we went and what we did, we finally felt confident enough to book a short cruise to the Canary Islands to hopefully get a bit of winter sun. As I always do on a cruise with a few days at sea, I prepared a few whittling projects to keep me amused when there was nothing better to do. A dolphin is my usual choice, but this time I decided to have a go at a stylised meerkat as well. The design was inspired by a visit to Walvis Bay in Namibia a few years ago, and I had not yet got around to attempting the carving.

Things you will need

Materials

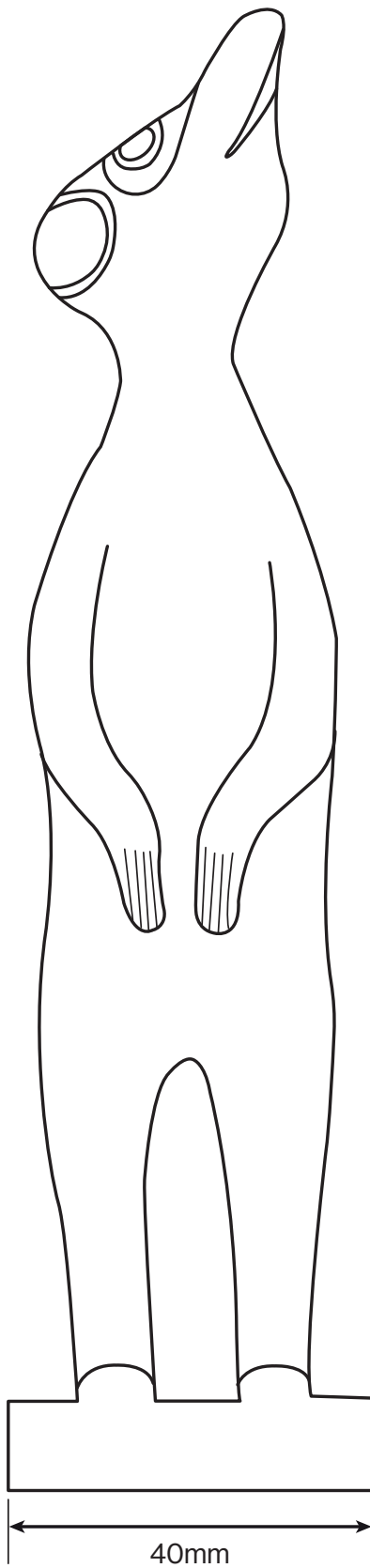
- Square block of lime (or other wood) 180 x 45 x 50mm cut out and ready to go – see preparation
- Templates from the drawings
- Bandsaw
- Hot-melt glue gun
- Drill and small twist drill bit (5mm)
- Black and brown acrylic ink
- No.11, 0.5mm veiner
- Large, strong plastic bag
- Suitable finish

Whittling kit – mine comprised of:

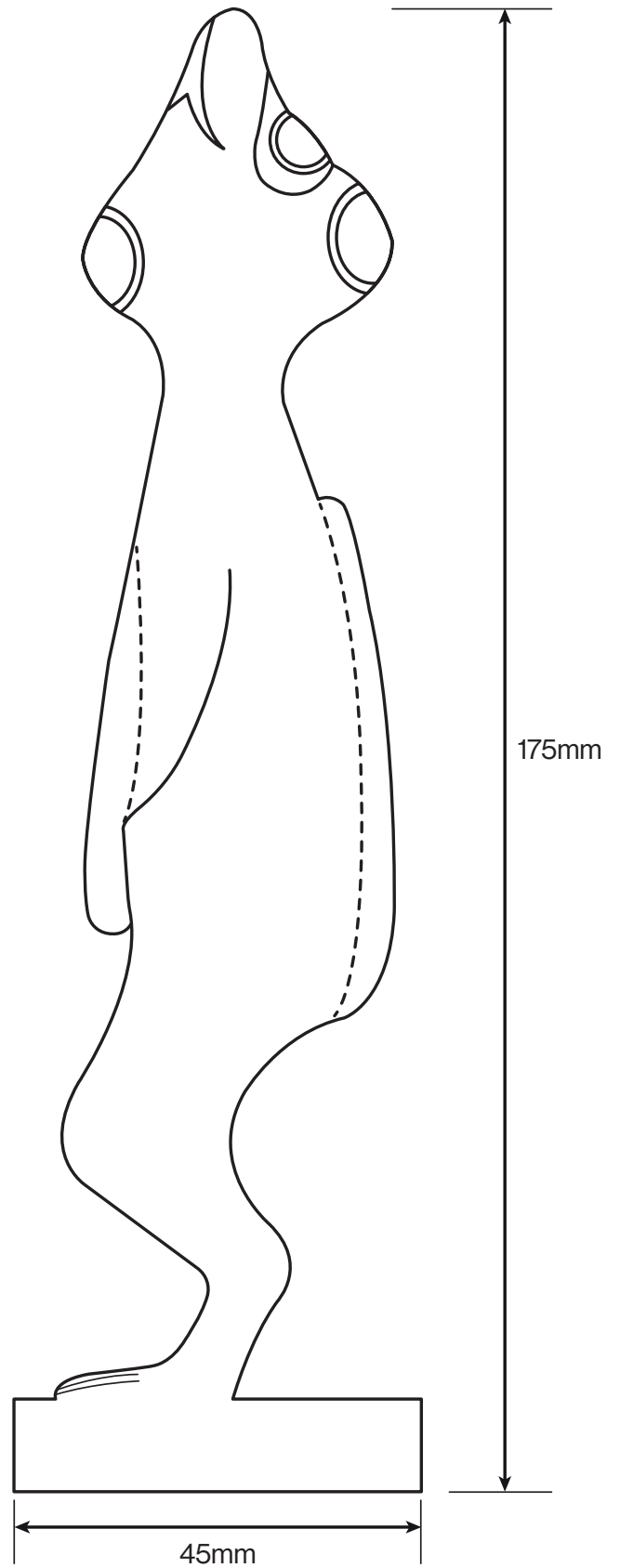
- Flexcut carving jack (6 blades/tools)
- Slipstrop honing block and polishing compound for above
- Superglue
- Small abrasive sheets 150-400 grit
- Small piece of leather
- Pencil and rubber
- Small pair of scissors
- Flexcut 4mm scorp
- Flexcut mini detail knife



FRONT PROFILE



SIDE PROFILE





Preparation of the block before departing

1 Make a copy of the front and side profile templates from the drawings. Use these to draw the profiles on to the block.

2 Cut out the front profile first using the bandsaw with a suitable narrow blade. Glue back the waste with small blobs of hot-melt glue, and then cut out the side profile.

3 Gently prise off all the waste wood and you can then sketch back the main features of the meerkat on to the block.

4 To make life a little easier I chose to roughly drill out the wood between the legs.



5 & 6 The block could then be packed in the bottom of my suitcase along with my whittling kit, most of which fitted neatly into a small plastic box as shown. I also made sure I had a large, strong plastic bag in which the chippings could be caught during the carving process.

The whittling process

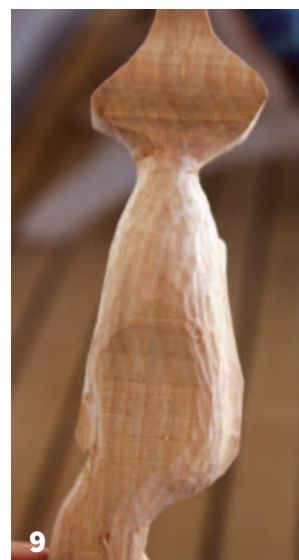
7 This photo shows the block ready to start with some detail of the front profile pencilled back onto it.

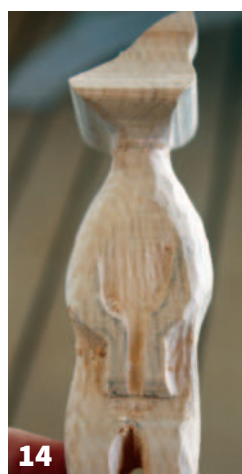
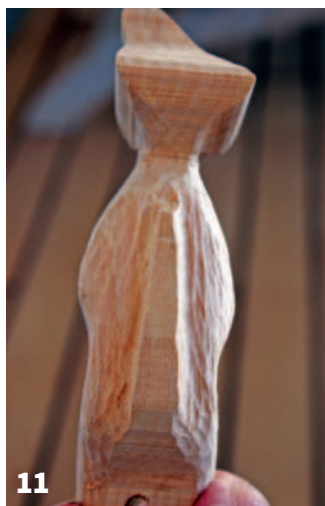


8 I started shaping the upper body, rounding the square edges up towards the head. For this I used the detail knife blade on the carving jack.

9 A similar approach was made towards the lower part of the body, rounding over the area of the backside and the top of the legs, and blending in the base of the tail.

10 This photo shows the shaping of the body using the detail knife of the carving jack and catching the chippings in the plastic bag.





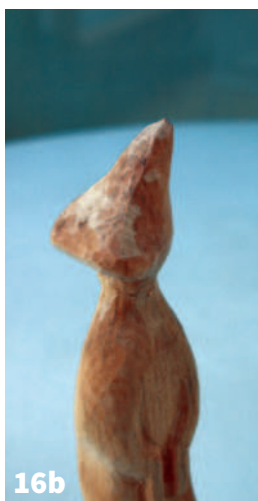
11 & 12 To create the tail, which stretches up the back, I made use of the small scorp to remove wood down both sides of the back. This has quite a deep sweep and allowed me to isolate the tail as shown in the photo. The scorp blade of the carving jack has a much shallower sweep and would have made achieving the near 90° angle between the body and the side of the tail much more difficult.

13 The same small scorp was also used to shape the front paws in the manner shown.

14 & 15 I then turned my attention to the lower part of the body, paring down all the square edges with the detail knife, and blending the lower part of the abdomen into the thighs. I then shaped the lower part of the limbs and the feet on the base. The idea here was to get the meerkat standing on its toes, which involved reducing the length of the feet to achieve this effect. Again, I used the detail knife for this shaping.



16 a & b Moving on to the head, this design has the head pointing at 45° to the left (when viewed from the front), with the snout pointing almost vertically upwards. It is necessary to round over the side processes which will become the ears, and also balance up the front surface of the face. This was achieved with the detail knife.



17 The back of the head needs to be balanced up in a similar fashion, and the base of the head is blended into the neck so that it forms a smooth transition between the head and the body of the meerkat. Be aware of potential problems with the opposing grain at the narrowest part of the neck. By removing very thin slivers from each side in turn you should achieve a smooth transition from body to head that can be sanded smooth later.





18 At some stage the base can be rounded at its corners.

19 I chose to give the base a textured finish created using the small scorp, and the small straight gouge from the carving jack to access the region between the feet.

20 Ready for sanding.

21 The detail of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose and toes can be added at this stage as shown. The ears and eyes were cut in with the mini detail knife, the mouth and nose with the small scorp and I decided to leave the fingers and toes until I got home in order to use a No.11, 0.5mm veiner, which enabled finer detail to be achieved.

22 I then sanded the whole carving through the grits to 400 grit.



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23 a & b Any adjustment to the shaping of the body can be made at this stage.

24 It should look like this at this stage.

25 The fingers and toes being completed.

26 I decided to add some colour, and chose to leave this colouring

of the ears, mouth, nose, eye surrounds and the divisions between toes and fingers (black), until I got home, as well as the final coat of wax polish finish.

27 The final carving should look something like this.

28 The dolphin, which was also whittled on this trip. ●



Losing my temper

Nic Westermann offers tips on sharpening tool edges and shares lessons from his mistakes

In an earlier article I touched on my disastrous attempt at sharpening a spoon bent V-gouge. I tried to analyse why it went so badly wrong and put some of the lessons learned into practice when teaching the one-to-one session I wrote about last month. These are my top tips for sharpening, interspersed with some pictures of the doomed gouge.



Although these are sharpening tips, much of what I am saying relates to anything you do in the workshop, including carving.

- Be clear about what you want to achieve – if you don't know exactly what you are aiming for you can't evaluate your progress. In sharpening terms this means deciding what bevel form and angle you are trying to achieve; it may well not be a question of just following the existing grinds.
- Repeatability – approach your sharpening in a way that means as you work down through the grits you will not have any difficulty keeping the same angles in place. This usually means a jig or some form of register (see inset over).
- Don't rush – if you are in a hurry, and let's be honest we often are, you are not likely to be prepared to stop and objectively check your progress.
- Focus – I mean this literally. Make sure you can see clearly what you are doing. This may mean a good light, reading glasses or dedicated magnification.
- Pride – be prepared to stop if it's not working, admit it's gone wrong and start over. It's a fine line between persevering when things get difficult and not stopping when it starts going wrong, but try not to reach the point you are doing irreversible damage.
- Be very careful of overheating or 'bluing' an edge – overheating is only really a problem with machine sharpening, but it is easy to do and not practically fixable. Grinding all the affected metal away is the only solution. Overheating is often caused by abrasives that aren't cutting freely, meaning you have to apply more pressure to make the cut – the resulting friction producing the heat that does the damage. In the case of a wheel this can be a glazed surface which can be redressed; in the case of a belt there is no real fix, a new one is much better. A new, more aggressive belt will cut flatter and truer in all planes. The old adage, much loved by belt manufacturers, that you should 'treat belts like they are free' is worth listening to.
- Be comfortable – both in terms of temperature and working height. During the last lesson I taught the student insisted on sharpening standing up as he had read that this was the best way to do it. That might have been the case with a bench at a good working height, but it was obvious that the low trestle tables we were sitting out weren't suitable. If you have to strain to reach a too low or too high working height it will be much harder to offer up and maintain the tool at the correct angle.
- Keep calm and carry on – if you can't, stop. Sharpening can be difficult. If you are using a system that is only minimally jugged or registered then you will be relying on the feedback you are getting while sharpening to control the cut. This feedback will be visual or aural – when I am polishing on a bench grinder, I can hear the note change when I reach the edge. But most often it will be feedback through your hands. If I am frustrated, I get tense and lose the subtlety of grip required to do a good job. I will force the bevel into the abrasive rather than let it ride smoothly, as it should. This can result in an inaccurately ground blade, or in the case of power sharpening an overheated edge. When I am teaching, I specifically look out for students getting overly stressed when sharpening, advising them to take a short break and come back to it with a clear head and steady hands.

Applying this to the gouge I ruined, first I'll set the scene. It was late on a Sunday night in the middle of winter, my workshop was freezing, I was in a hurry to get home, and the article deadline was looming. Not exactly a good start.

However, earlier in the week I had made up a tool to grind the inside of the V. I was very proud of it, and grinding the outside bevels looked to be simple on the angled table of the Sorby ProEdge. I did, therefore, have a clear idea of what I wanted to do. I thought I had repeatable systems in place



1 Spoon bent gouge as I received it **2** Cleaning up the inside with a custom-made tool, both bevel angle and diameter matched the gouge **3** Grinding the outside bevels, very poorly. Notice the limited contact between the tool and table

for the outside and inside bevels. I was, though, unashamedly rushing – after all, I make tools for a living so resharpening one after hours shouldn't take long. At this point it all went wrong. I had underestimated just how small this tool was. I hadn't got high enough magnification glasses to really see what was going on in the root of the V, but the tool I had made should follow the V accurately, so I went by feel – I now think this was the cause of my problems.

When I came to grind the outside of the tool it was impossible to get the bevel lengths even on each wing of the tool. By the time I had worked out that the V wasn't ground centrally in the tool I had removed a lot of steel trying to correct this, and a spoon bent gouge such as this is a short life tool and has a very short range of useable length. With hindsight, power sharpening on a small, short-life tool is not a good idea. The other issue was that the gouge provided a very small register to locate on the table of the ProEdge, something I wasn't aware of until I was committed. I should have stopped and either tried to make a better support or decided to sharpen freehand. Sharpening freehand is something I tend to avoid in these articles as it is difficult, every tool will be different and it is very hard to explain well. The theory is easy, but in practice it is all about touch. However, in instances like this where the jig or register can hinder rather than help the ability to account for inconsistencies in the original forging by grinding, freehand is invaluable. However, it goes against everything I have been talking about for the past few years in these articles, so I was invested in carrying on.

And no, I didn't keep calm. However, I got to a point where although I had ground the wings back on the gouge a lot more than I would have liked I was relieved that finally I had what looked like a sharp gouge. When I tried it though, it was obvious that all wasn't well. Looking closer I could see a strange notch in the edge near the root of the V – it seems like the only way this can be caused is if the V itself was out of shape, most likely caused by not using my special tool accurately. However, examining the inside of the V under magnification I couldn't see any obvious trace of this. It's not fixable without grinding back even further. When I finally realised what had happened, I did joint the edge to show how badly off-centre the V was, and not a trace of the proposed W notch could be found, but it was too late to save the tool.

Hopefully you can learn by my mistakes. It's not realistic to assume everything will go to plan, but analysing where it went wrong may teach you more than succeeding every time. Failing that I'm happy to offer my misfortunes for your amusement. I used to demonstrate blacksmithing at craft shows, and eventually I developed a spiel that would just about guarantee a smattering of polite applause at the end of the demo. However, my biggest round of applause was on a blustery day in Leeds – I was forging on coal fire and the wind blew the flame so much my hair caught fire, not something you can easily hide in front of a crowd of people, but that turned out to be actually what they wanted to see!



4 The notch **5** Top view of the off-centre V **6** Jointed edge showing the difference in thickness of the wings **7** Blueed, overheated and ruined edge **8** A jig that sets the edge angle regardless of the previous bevel form

Overheating and blueing

A vital stage in the heat treatment of tool steel is tempering. After the steel is hardened it is left on a brittle state, so it is tempered to increase the toughness of the steel, but this a balance – the more the steel is reheated the softer it becomes as well. Typical tempering temperatures are in the 180-250°C range. If your sharpening heats the steel up to but not higher than the initial tempering temperature of the steel, there will be no effect. If you get it hotter than the tempering temperature the steel and resulting edge will be softer at this point in the tool, and rapid blunting and even rolling can result at this point.

When steel gets hot a very thin oxide layer forms. This layer is so thin that light is diffracted through it and changes colour. The thickest layer that still produces this effect is blue, this roughly related to 250°C, but it is absolutely not universal – different steel compositions will turn blue at different temperatures. In general terms though, if your edge turns blue you will have detrimentally softened the steel.

Obviously, the side you are grinding is less likely to turn blue as you are constantly removing this microscopically thin oxide layer. However, the heat produced by grinding will travel through the steel and produce the oxide layer on the other side.

You can see that the affected area of steel is likely to be larger than the blue patch you see on the other side of the edge. Removing this thin oxide layer as I have read in some articles in the past will obviously not fix the problem. It's not practical to heat treat the steel, so removing the affected spot and then jointing back the edge to reach this low point is the only answer – it's so much better to avoid overheating. On a wider note though, this is where we get the term losing your temper from – you get overheated and lose your edge.

Jigged or registered

By this I mean that there is a predetermined angle you will be sharpening to, and it is controlled by either a tool – a jig – or the geometry of the edge you are sharpening has a geometry that allows it to register with the sharpening medium. For example, sharpening the back of a carpentry chisel on a whetstone is, although tedious and slow, not that difficult. The whole plane is flat and is itself the guide you are sharpening to. However, in some cases it can become rounded and once rocking starts it is very hard to correct. This is true of any edge profile that is meant to be flat that is sharpened using the bevel itself as the guide. When it works well it is easy, but the further out the geometry gets, the less support it provides and the harder it gets to correct it.

In contrast, a system that is jigged sets the angle you will abrade the steel at regardless of the bevel angle so is easier to use in this scenario. There may be difficulties setting this up and adjusting the angle to be similar to the actual bevel of the tool so you are not removing steel unnecessarily, but my advice for the beginner or anyone experiencing difficulties with sharpening is to try jigs. Some carvers look down on jigs, and I think this is unfair. It is true that with experience you will find them less necessary, but even if you just use a jig to set the bevels correctly to use as a register for the next sharpening they are a very useful tool to have and can be incredibly simple.



THE SHARPENING CLINIC IS OPEN

As the name suggests, I would like to help carvers with sharpening problems – this will allow me to focus my articles on tools that are relevant to you, the readership.

I am looking for readers to send a brief email with a description of the tool, the sharpening equipment they are using and problems they are having. Please do not send images at this stage as it clogs up my email system far too quickly.

I will try to answer all emails but will only be selecting one tool per article. You would then send the tool to me at your expense, I will sharpen it and make it the subject of the article and send it

back to you at my expense. Turnaround will be up to a month as I will need to get the tool well before the deadline to be certain I can fulfil my obligation to WC of turning in a quality article each issue. If not selected, please do not send me your tools. I don't have time to sharpen them in my day-to-day business, and I don't have the budget to return them to you if you do. Also, due to the time scales involved with overseas post, currently this is only open to carvers in the UK.

If you are interested, and I hope you are, then please email me at nic.westermann@btconnect.com



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A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright yellow jacket and blue jeans, is kneeling on the floor of a workshop. She is smiling at the camera. The workshop is filled with numerous wooden carvings, including masks, statues, and other decorative items, displayed on shelves and hanging from the walls. A red stool is visible in the foreground.

Carving Countries

Will Barsley journeys to the carving villages of Vietnam

In this series, William Barsley looks back on the journey that inspired his career change to becoming a professional woodcarver. William crosses over from Laos into Vietnam, cycling down its coast to meet woodcarvers and discovering a small island dedicated to carpentry and the arts.



The journey

After a long and somewhat traumatic bus journey from Laos to Vietnam, during which our bikes were damaged and we lost a few bags, we finally arrived in Huế, a city in central Vietnam. It was exciting to be in a new country again and, from first impressions, Vietnam was very different to Laos.

Huế used to be the capital city of Vietnam and was the seat of the Nguyen Dynasty. As such, it has a vast and beautiful citadel housing the Imperial City with temples, palaces, offices, gardens, and residences. The Imperial City, surrounded by a large moat, displays in abundance the traditional architecture of the time, with building facades adorned with decorative carvings. I was told that only the finest craftsmen were employed to build and decorate these buildings. It was fascinating wandering around the old Citadel and imagining what life would have been like back then.

Notable woodcarvers

Du Dihn

After coming across a number of dead ends while searching for woodcarving in Huế, I once again discovered the Backstreet Academy (an innovative project connecting travellers with meaningful local experiences) and set up a morning session with a local woodcarver called Du Dihn. The next day I was met by a Backstreet Academy translator and staff member, Chau, who was friendly and extremely helpful. It turned out to be Du Dihn's first time teaching via Backstreet Academy so I was somewhat of a guinea pig this time.

Du Dihn's shop was located on a busy tourist street, right opposite a popular backpacker hostel. A tiny shop, the three of us just managed to sit on the floor cross legged surrounded by his carvings. Aged 44, Du Dihn began carving 20 years ago. Like many, he started out working on sanding and waxing carvings. Now, he says he focuses predominately on carving small items for the tourist market.

I was excited to carve my first Buddha, having seen them everywhere in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. We decide to carve a laughing Buddha head, which I noticed hanging all around Du Dihn's shop. We used jackfruit wood, which is bright yellow in colour and fairly hard to carve. Unfortunately for me, we hadn't cycled in a few weeks, and I seemed to have lost whatever flexibility I had previously gained. As in Bali, I had to carve cross legged using my feet to hold the wood. Try as I may, the Buddha just wouldn't stay still. Slowly it developed, but it was as if he was laughing at my inability to keep him in place!

Du Dihn has an apprentice who joined us on the floor, carving a project of his own, every now and again receiving guidance from his teacher. In Vietnam, apprenticeships like this are the most common way in which carvers learn the trade. Apprentices usually stay with their teacher for three years. For the first six months they pay for their own food, but after they have proven themselves to be committed, the teacher pays for their food. At the end of the three years, the apprentice will often be employed by the carver and begin receiving a salary.



1 Du Dinh teaching me to carve **2** Du Dinh's workshop **3** Roughing out the laughing Buddha with Du Dinh **4** The laughing Buddha of Du Dinh **5** The laughing Buddha to be carved on the course



6 Adding the final details to bring this piece to life. Notice the block of wood being used as a mallet **7** An assistant carving in Dat Ma Su's workshop **8** Laughing Buddha by Dat Ma Su **9** A carver applying the finishes touches to this Buddha in Ngu Du Phi's workshop **10** A carver carefully applying the finishing touches in Thanh's workshop **11** Close-up of Ngu Du Phi carving a Buddha's face

After my course, Chau took me to see another carver near her home, inside the walls of the Imperial City. Dat Ma Su had been carving for 10 years in Ho Chi Minh and Cambodia before returning to his home in Huế and using the small entrance to his house as a workshop, hidden away down a side street. Without a guide, you would have no idea it was there. It made me think how many other tiny workshops I may have walked past unknowingly.

Lang My Xuyen carving villages

While I was visiting carvers in Huế, many people told me of a carving village 40km north of the city. After much asking around, I found a translator and guide for the day and set off. After a hectic and dusty motorbike ride north, we arrived in My Xuyen, which is said to have started as a carving village some 200 years ago. The economy is primarily based on woodcarving, and I was told that there were around 1,000 carvers in the area, which seemed extraordinary to me.

We heard the first workshop before we saw it thanks to what sounded like hundreds of chisels hammering away at once. The workshop and adjoining home were owned by Thanh, who moved back to the village four years ago after working as a carver in Laos and Cambodia. Thanh now employs up to 15 carvers, ranging from 17-45 years old. His work is predominately commission-based, with some of his larger commissions taking four people to carve. It was amazing to see so many carvers working in one place. It felt like a factory production line, but with quality items being produced by hand with great skill.

After lunch we visited another workshop in the village, this one owned and run by Ngu Du Phi, a fourth-generation woodcarver. He is now 56 and has been carving for 36 years. Ngu Du Phi tells us he loves to try to push the boundaries of his carving, always thinking of new ideas and adopting influences from China, Taiwan and Korea. A total of 22 carvers worked in his workshop, all from the village. The carvers went through a similar three-year apprenticeship as those I met in Huế. Ngu Du Phi says that 80% of his apprentices stay working for him after the three years. Again, it was amazing to see so many carvers working away, some in pairs, others working on solo projects.

It was a very special village and unique in being purely focused on woodcarving. Not being on any tourist trail, it was particularly quiet and a very different experience for me. Besides the occasional customers arriving to discuss business, the village seemed cut off from the busy city of Huế.





12



13



14

12 A masterpiece by Huynh Suong, for which he won many awards 13 Mr Huynh Suong in his workshop 14 Ferry over to the arts island off Hoi An

Kim Bong carpentry village

Leaving Huế, we cycled south along the coast to a quieter town called Hoi An. Although quite touristy, it had a slower pace of life and a fascinating carpentry village on a small island just off the town that I had to visit.

A short but busy boat ride later, I arrived on the island and found an abundance of decorative carving. I learnt there were four different types of woodwork in the village – traditional houses, boats, souvenirs and furniture.

I spent most of my day with master craftsman Huynh Suong who, incredibly, is a 14th-generation woodcarver who started carving when he was just five! He proudly showed me his family tree that goes back 500 years and explained that his son has also started to learn to carve. He said that the peak of carving and carpentry in the village was around the 16th-17th century

when more than 85% of the village were carvers, many of whom helped to create the Imperial Palace in Huế in the 18th century.

When the global economic crash happened in 2008, international exports decreased and Suong turned to furniture making for more domestic markets. He recently received a huge commission for the whole interior of a new hotel, work that he shared with the other carvers in the village. He expects the project to take around a year to complete. It was a fascinating experience wandering the small and beautiful streets of the island, sneaking glimpses through doorways and windows into bustling workshops.

Next time, William crosses over into Cambodia, the last country of this Southeast Asia section of the trip, before later heading to India. ●

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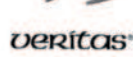
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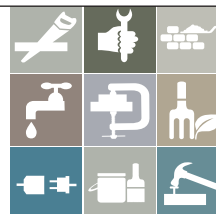


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WC190 on sale 20th October 2022

Guest editor John Samworth begins a new series about strapwork by carving a border for a toy box

Alan Denham makes a mirror, complete with carved schooner, and Mark Fortune creates a beautiful double oak and laurel patterned photo frame



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Phu Chau Temple

We take a closer look at Vietnam's Floating Temple



Floating markets, comprised of dozens of small river boats, are a familiar sight in Vietnam, but Ho Chi Minh City also has a floating temple. The spectacular Phu Chau Temple is located on an islet of the Vam Thuat River; it covers around 2,500 square metres and is accessed by boat. The temple was originally built in the late 18th century; its founding legend is that a local fisherman found the body of a dead woman in the river and built a bamboo temple on the spot to commemorate her soul. The fisherman's luck improved after this and word spread that prayers made at the temple would be fulfilled. The site attracted pilgrims from

across the city and expanded over the years as it became a popular place of worship.

The temple's architecture is influenced by Chinese Buddhist design and is dominated by hundreds of intricate carvings of dragons in various poses; the rooftop is decorated with two dragon figures competing to reach an emerald stone. Other decorations include mosaics and sculptures of tigers, phoenixes, mountains, clouds and Buddhist gods and goddesses. The temple underwent an extensive renovation in 1989 and provides an oasis of calm in the modern city.



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