

CHAPTER SEVEN

CARE OF WOODCARVING TOOLS

AIMS

- To consider how best to preserve carving tools from damage and deterioration
- To describe appropriate and convenient ways of storing carving tools

Carving tools need looking after:

- when you get them
- as they are being used
- during the times they are idle.

This is most simply achieved by cultivating good habits. Before dealing with specific ways of storing and looking after carving tools, a few more general thoughts might be useful.

Deal with mechanical faults and problems with your carving tools straight away

Rather than let a lot of small concerns build up, deal with each problem as and when it is noticed if at all possible. The object is to get your tools feeling so comfortable and working so well that you need hardly give them a thought. This includes making a habit of sharpening your carving tools as you buy them, so that they are ready for use whenever the need arises.

Maintain a good level of sharpness

The emphasis here is on *maintenance*. Aim for the best level of sharpness you can achieve, then maintain or improve this level, rather than oscillating between good and bad conditions.

Put the tools away in the state in which you would like to get them out

It is frustrating to get out a carving tool only to find that it needs sharpening – or dealing with in some way – before it can be used. Far better to have tools sharp, working well and ready for immediate use. So have a rule: tools are not to be put away unless they are as sharp as you would like them to be when you next pick them up – this will save more effort than it creates.

Protect the carving tools properly at all times

Essentially this means respect: respect for the carving tools and what they can do. Protection applies to mechanical damage, especially to the cutting edges,

The handles support the blades and edges and, when rolled up, the tools nestle together and are prevented from knocking against each other. The material itself can help protect the tools from damp; good choices include felt, or canvas or linen which have been washed to remove any dressing.

Some measurements for an average roll are given in Fig 7.2, but consideration could be given to having larger or smaller rolls with dimensions appropriate to your own tool sizes. You might try lining up a few sample tools and gauging the pocket sizes with a flexible tape measure.

Tool rolls are easily made with a sewing machine (Fig 7.3). Use baize for the inner pockets, with an outer piece of tough material such as canvas. This should fold over the ends of the blades for additional protection, as well as strengthening the outside of the tool roll. Sewn-on tapes are used to tie the rolls up when not in use.

A good, manageable size might take between 24 and 30 tools. With larger numbers, the rolls start becoming a bit cumbersome; several smaller rolls are a better option. These tool rolls need replacing every so often, as, with the best will in the world, the sharp tools will cut them.

Without good organization, you will be continually opening and closing your tool rolls to put tools away or get them out. One idea is to fill the rolls according to the frequency with which the tools are used. A roll can be left open on the bench, but then a lot of bench space is being taken up by tools that are not in use. It is better to leave the tool roll open somewhere away from the bench, but close by.

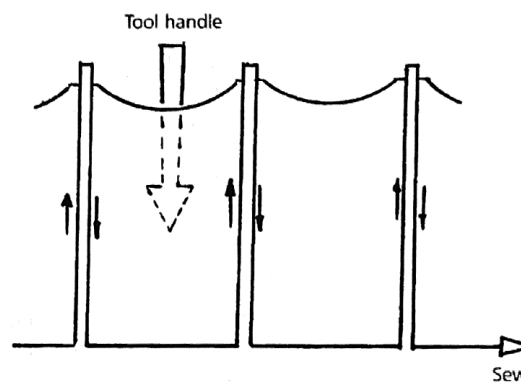


Fig 7.3 Making a tool roll: for more strength, sew a double line that crosses the edge of the pockets

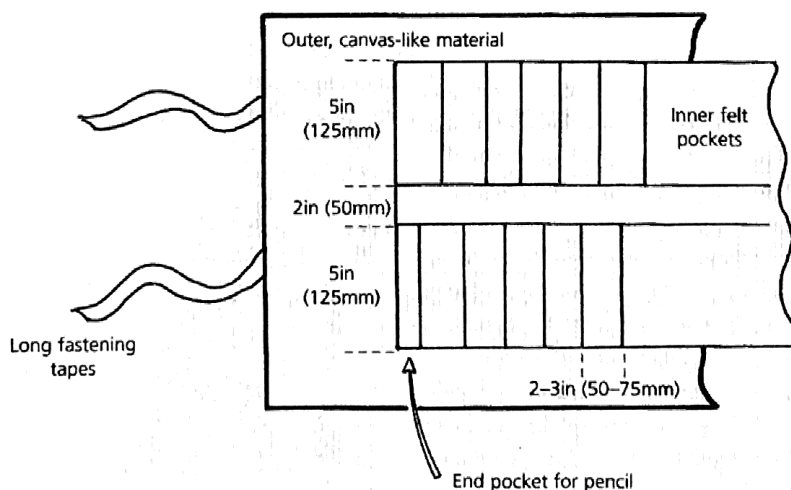


Fig 7.2 Basic plan of a tool roll

WOODEN SHELF

An alternative to loops is a rack made by boring and cutting various-sized holes and notches into a shelf of wood (Fig 7.6). The holes take tools where the blade is smaller than the handle, the notches where the opposite is the case, normally gripping the blade by the shank.

This is a firmer, safer arrangement than the loop method of holding tools, but not so easy to adjust. To begin with, guesses have to be made as to what tools you may eventually have, and the holes, notches and necessary clearance between blades need to be estimated. A more elaborate solution would be a shallow wall-mounted cupboard with racks inside and on the insides of the doors.

DRAWERS

This works very well as a storage method, especially if the drawers are part of the carving bench or close at hand. Use different drawers, or parts of drawers, for particular sweeps or shapes of tools. Home-made drawers can be shallow boxes made with simple butt joints and plywood bases; they do not need to be elaborate. Making the bases wider than the boxes, so they can run in grooves in the sides of the carcass, is easier than making conventional drawer runners.

Metal multi-drawer cabinets which are sold for office filing are exactly the right size for storing woodcarving tools. These units are available with 5, 6, 9, 10 or 15 drawers and can be bought second-hand. The drawers can be easily labelled and, being metal,

they will last indefinitely. Such drawers will need lining to protect the edges of the tools. Self-adhesive cork floor tiles are useful for this; the unvarnished ones are better for protecting the contents of the drawer from damp.

If all the tools are laid out neatly pointing in one direction, there is little danger of the blades clashing against each other when the drawer is slid open or closed. Alternatively, you can fit more tools in by laying them in opposite directions (Fig 7.7), though in this case you may have to take a little more care to avoid cutting yourself as you take them out. The smallest tools, especially those with round handles, may roll a little, but a few wooden dividing strips, acting as racks, will prevent this.

A traditional alternative to drawers is a lockable wooden box, with trays fitted in one above the other in the manner of a needlework box. This would be easier to make than a set of drawers, though perhaps less convenient to use. You would need to keep your favourite tools in the top layer.

LONG-TERM STORAGE

There may be an occasion when carving tools have to be stored for a length of time, perhaps several months. Above all, protect them from damp: wipe the blades with the same sort of oil used for sharpening, or better still wrap them in oily rags. Protect them from damage by rolling them up in rags or in their own tool rolls. Finally, keep them in a polythene bag in a dry place.

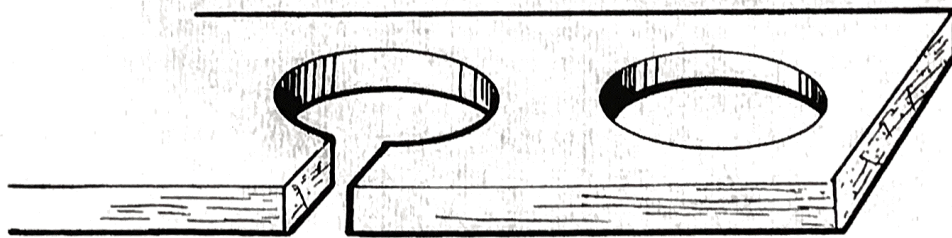


Fig 7.6 A simple rack with holes and notches for storing tools



Fig 7.8 Lining up the tools in use keeps their edges from knocking against each other and makes them easier to recognize

carving process and adds enormously to the overall awareness and 'flow' of what you are doing.

Try not to have too many tools on the bench

If a lot of carving tools are needed on a particular job, try to organize them so that the tools that are least frequently used are out of the way and lined up towards the back of the bench. Bring forward the ones needed for the immediate tasks.

Periodically clear the bench

Repeating a point made above: make a habit of clearing the work area of surplus tools and putting them away, after first making sure they are sharp. Also clear the bench of wood chips and other bits and pieces occasionally – this can coincide well with natural breaks for brewing up.

Keep tool edges away from anything metal

Quite a few metal objects can be on the bench: clamps, holdfast heads, compasses, metal rulers and so on (Fig 7.10). The sharpened edges of woodcarving tools only have to touch these things, or each other, to damage the edge sufficiently to leave scratch lines. A wooden block placed beneath the jaw of a clamp will help to prevent contact with the cutting edge, as well as protecting the work or the bench top from bruising. Don't forget any metal objects embedded in the wood itself, such as carvers' screws.

Beware of the dangers to carving tools when moving around and adjusting work

This is the time when – because the attention is elsewhere – tools can be rolled about against each other, or knocked to the floor.