



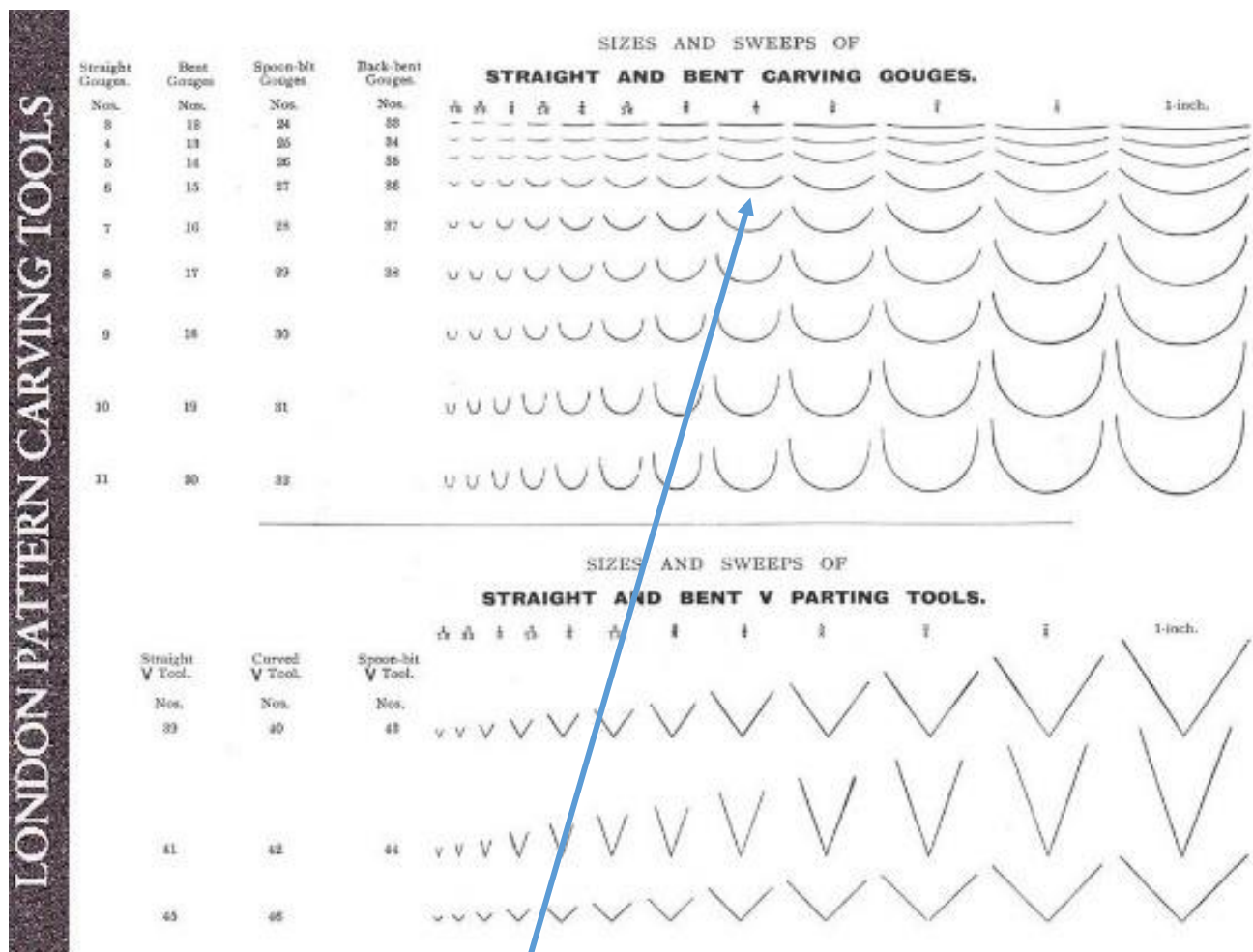
# CORNWALL WOODCARVERS

## Chisels / Gouges

*An introduction to chisel nomenclature by John Samworth.*

The name chisel or gouge may be interchanged, although it is unlikely that a carpenter would use the work gouge when referring to a tool.

When describing the tool there are two key descriptors (sometimes more) these being the width of the tool's cut and the shape of the cutting edge (the sweep).



The standard tool is straight, ambidextrous, with the same sweep it's entire length. The cutting edge is ground with a bevel on the outside and flat on the inside. The first part of the description is the width of the cutting edge e.g. ½ inch or 13mm. The second part being the shape of the cutting edge, known as the sweep, e.g. No.6; see arrow. Typically the numbering starts at No. 1 for a flat chisel, No. 2 for a flat but skew chisel (see skews) then No.3 for the faintest of curves up to No.11 for the deepest of curves. The very deep curves as also known as veiners. Other countries have different variations but similar systems to describing their chisels.

Straight, deep chisels e.g. 13mm No. 11 are used for removing large amounts of wood quickly; the narrower chisels for more delicate work. When used on its side these chisels act similar to a less deep chisel e.g. No. 5. This can make roughing out work very quick. When different veiners are uses cutting layers on top of each other they



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create complex shadows ideal for fur and hair. Straight, shallow chisels e.g. 13mm No.3 are used for smoothing out the surface, finishing the surface or definition work. Here is a explanation of the more common chisels, but many more specialised tools are available.



The flat No.1 chisels is ground with a bevel on both sides, and is used centrally to the body. Their sharp, square corners catch on the woodgrain and make it unsuited for finishing. It is particularly useful in lettering. Like most chisels they come in various widths and styles. In the picture, from the top, there is a bull nose chisel, a straight chisel and a fishtail chisel.



The flat No.2 skew chisels is used to cut into acute corners.



The No.3 & 4 chisels are the first chisels to have any curve to their edge, this lifts the corners off the face of work allowing the smoothing and finishing of surfaces. They may also be used inverted to make convex cuts.



The No. 5, 6 & 7 chisels have progressively deeper curves and can be used in a wide variety of work. By applying a slight twist as you cut the shape of the curves can be tightened or opened slightly converting the cut from a No. 5 into a No.6; this speeds up work and allows for smoother, changing curves.



The No.8 chisel is special. All the sweeps are taken from arcs of various circles but with the No.8 the centre of the circle is concurrent with the central axis of the chisel. This means that if you rotate the chisel it will cut a circle. This is particularly useful for carving a sphere e.g. berries and animal eyes.



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No. 9, 10 & 11 chisels are also called flutters. The very fine chisels are also called veiners. As mentioned above these gouges are the work horse removing most of the waste wood without splitting the wood as well as for detail work such as hair.



The V tool, named after the 'V' shaped cutting edges, or parting chisel is made by forging two straight carpenter chisels together to form an angle. The angles vary typically 45°, 60° and 90°. There are two styles of parting chisels those with a rounded heel and those with a sharp heel. The latter are more expensive to manufacture and are becoming less common.



Many of the Sweeps No.1, 3-8 above are also available in the fishtail style. These chisels with their narrow shanks allow access into awkward corner of work. But due to their design with the short body of their cutting section, their useful working life is short lived and where possible I recommend using a normal chisel when access is not restricted.



The hooked-skew chisel is in effect the missing number from the fishtail style; being a 'fishtail' for the No.2 chisel. When first used many carver get small cuts until they become familiar with the tool. Handle with care.



The spoon chisel as they have become to be called, where originally intended for chasing out tracery work e.g. in screen work. Commonly used today for scooping out spoons and bowls. The design is such that the curve in the shank mimics the curve in the final piece. The top design is more versatile being able to access a wide range of curves. The lower design is more limited in its use, but has a longer working life and is cheaper to manufacture. The shape of the cutting edge comes in a wide range of sweeps and widths.



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The back-bent chisel is an inverted spoon chisel used in tracery work, and flower stems. Just as the spoon chisel they too are available in a wide range of sweeps and widths.



The foot chisel is designed to finish the flat, awkward to access areas of the work. I have recently purchased this tool and yet to try it. Watch this blog for further updates!



The grounding chisel is also designed to finish the flat, awkward area of the work. Popular for relief carvings. Unlike the foot chisel above the grounding chisels cut at a steep angle allowing access into tighter corners. They also come in a range of sweeps; these are No. 3.



A starter set of five chisels can make an excellent gift for anyone starting wood carving, but choose carefully. When designing a starter set the manufacturer has no idea about the project you are about begin with. Their set must allow anybody to get going. With any set there will always be a couple of tools you will uses and a couple of tools you will not. These chisels would be used by another person on another project. In effect, quite wasteful. Note also that this set has only a short working life when compared with the professional tools illustrated above.

Warning: woodcarving in its very nature has inherent risks of minor cuts and minor injuries. Always handle chisels with care in the manner intended by the manufacturer.

Next article: Cutting Edge – Keeping the tools sharp.

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