



Low & High Relief Butterfly

Introduction:

I see this (double) project as a follow up to the [Beginners' Course](#) on Woodcarving Workshops, using the same tools (plus a couple more), the same grips and the same sorts of tool cuts.

I've taken a drawing from a simple butterfly I found on the internet and from this starting point we create a low and then high relief, step by step. But here's the thing: it could be *any* simple subject. In fact the [3 Simple Leaves](#) on the website is another, similar example of how to tackle low and high relief.

Get these basic techniques under your belt and you're well away into all sorts of carving, not just low and high relief!

BTW... What actually is 'Low' and 'High Relief' anyway?

Most people think a relief carving is anything with a background. However, *true relief carving happens when the depth dimension of a subject is compressed.*

That's it, really. It's not:

1. Cutting something in half and mounting it on a board. That's cutting something in half and mounting it on a board. To be a true relief you have to squash it.
2. A number. Like low relief is 1/8in. (3mm) and high is 1/4in. (6mm). It's a matter of the degree of squashing and as this is a sliding scale and carvings can be any size there are no fixed numbers. It's more a sense of the squashedness (if that's a word), of compression.

So by this definition, our butterflies and the [3 Simple Leaves](#) are not truly relief carvings! If you look at the head of a coin, or something like this:

- that's true relief. The real depth dimension has been compressed, and true relief carving is an art in itself.

However, I call these butterflies 'reliefs' because, to all intents and purposes, the techniques are the same.

And, anyway, it would be hard to make butterflies look flatter than they already do!



Wood:

I'm using Jelutong, but any carvable wood - Limewood (*Tilia* sp), basswood, butternut will do to begin with. Once you feel able to carve the butterfly, you might consider a more figured wood. After all, butterflies are known for their attractive patterns.

You might also consider 'book matching', where you mirror patterns on with wing with a join. This is a little problematic as the join passes into the background. You could cut out your book-matched butterfly and 'paper sandwich' it to a board (put 'paper sandwich' into the search on Woodcarving Workshops to see this technique in action).

You might also like to try carving butterflies in the round, as [here](#): It's pretty much the same as what you do here, just getting rid of that background all together. Seriously, do have a go. You'll be amazed.

Dimensions:

- My wood block was L: 9.5in x W: 6.7in x D 1in. (L250 x W170 x D25mm)
- **Low relief** surface to background: 3mm
- **High relief** surface to background: 15mm

Tools:

For the Beginners' Course I suggested the following common carving tools:

- Gouge #3 x 1/2in. (14mm)
- Gouge #6 x 1/2in. (14mm)
- 60° V tool x, 3/8in. (10mm)
- Skew chisel x, 3/8in. (10mm)

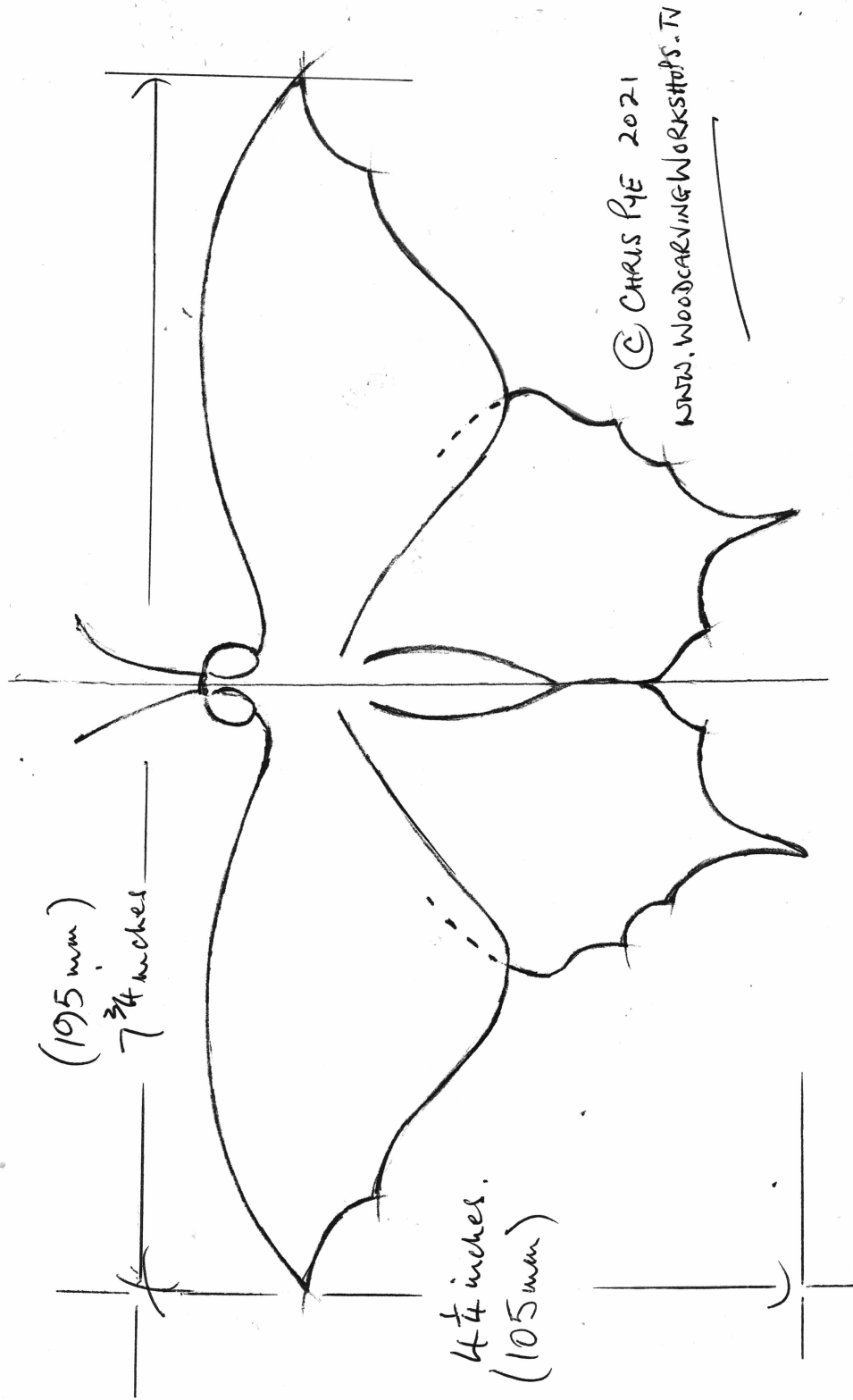
To these, for this project, I've added:

- Gouge #3 x 1/4in. (6mm)
- Gouge #6 x 1/4in. (6mm)
- Gouge #9 x 1/2in. (14mm)

And I'd also suggest for the future background levelling:

- Gouge #3 x 3/4in. (20mm)
- Gouge #6 x 1/2in. (14mm)

Working Drawing:



The finished carvings:

