

Alaric Jäger's Green Man Stone Carving

The Subject:

The Green Man, the Legendary Man of the Wood. A popular figure in Folklore, and carved often during the Gothic period. I learned that the Green Man has legendary roots as: Al-Khidr a Spirit guide In the Sufi tradition, The Green Knight from the Arthurian legends, Jack in the Green, or may even be representative of the fae folk. In any case, it is an immortal image that evokes the spring, and new beginnings, and as such, I thought it a fitting image as a first piece.

Materials:

Soapstone, Steel Chisels, Steel Rifflers (Files), Sand, Brace and Bit (Drill), Saw, Oil, Wax, Round Hammer

Technique:

The Stone is cut roughly into shape. Then the design is scratched onto the stone. I have found it easiest to draw the image on paper, then transfer it to the stone by tapping a pointed chisel along the drawn lines. This leaves a series of dots, that can be connected after the paper is removed, by scratching the stone's surface. The pointed chisel is then used to start cutting grooves in the material to be removed. A flat toothed chisel then clears away the excess. This gives you a basic relief. The main figure is then worked to varying depths to bring it into a true relief. Flat or curved chisels then help to gain greater detail in the overall image. Eventually you carefully begin to undercut the image for further detail. When you reach a level where using chisels threatens to damage the piece, the Rifflers (files) come into use. Using these variously shaped and toothed files, you continue to refine the work. Followed with rubbing sand or using sandpaper on the surface to smooth out the figure where it needs it, then finally rubbing it down with oil to bring out the stone's color and wax to give it a shine.

What I Learned:

Patience, patience, patience. It is a very slow process. It is a labor that only begins to come together near the end. Even so far as half way through the piece I thought that it wouldn't be worthy of showing. You must develop a rhythm to your work, because there is a tendency to speed up as you are near to completing a step. This speeding up tends to put the work at risk. Remember, this isn't clay. You can't smooth over an error.

Through practice (and many mistakes) I learned it is possible to hear and feel the differences in angle that one must hold the chisels at. Some angles are safe, others will damage the stone. As well, never begin to undercut the stone until the latter phases of the sculpture, as it allows a greater chance for cracking raised areas.

It is nearly impossible to find tools that are 100% period, but the current ones have only changed in their materials and durability, not shape, or means of use.

Following Period Cultural Etiquette:

As a sculptor, to free my time to devote to my art, I sought a patron (Baron Guillermo Bardicci) to handle the presentation of my pieces, and to put it before the eyes of those both Royal and Masterful. In payment for his kind indulgence in this manner, I have promised to carve for him 1 sculpture per year for three years. It is in this way that I show him thanks for his support. Normally such a thing would have been arranged by the stonemasons guild, however without a Known World equivalent I was forced to petition him myself. He accepted my petition and became my patron at Pennsic 32. He has graciously allowed me to enter this piece in competition before I formally present it to him. This is the first of the three pieces I have sculpted for his patronage.

Deviations from Period Technique:

I chose to wear goggles through certain parts of the process for safety reasons, as well as a filter over my mouth. Flying stone chips can injure the eye, and trapped gas in the stone can cause inflamed lungs. The bit and brace I used was modern (although still a manual drill) as it is nearly impossible to find one nowadays that would be considered period. As well the chisels and files I used were of a far better grade of steel than the mild steel or even iron one would have had to use during the Middle Ages. This meant considerably less sharpening was necessary. Also, at one point there was a catastrophic break in the stone. (Due to a friend that couldn't handle his mead) So I had to resort to the use of epoxy to effect repairs. While a medieval stonemason would have needed to begin from scratch.

Source Material:

Much of the information about the Green Man was gained from internet resources. Information about the process and techniques of stone carving were generously provided by Joe Chiffreller of the New York Carver. A stonemason that devotes much attention to the medieval time period



Alaric Jäger's Bardicci Lintel Stone Carving

The Subject:

This piece was done in the form of a lintel stone or lintel cap. A lintel is the stone that lays across the top of a doorway or window. The piece was done with the Lyre-Bee crest of house Bardicci, surmounted by his initials GB, with a floral motif supporting it on either side. This is more indicative of the early Italian Renaissance than any other time period, but is a unique design that I created.

Materials:

Limestone, Round Hammer, Steel Chisels, Steel Rifflers (Files), Sand, Brace and Bit (Drill), Saw, Oil

Technique:

I was lucky enough to be in possession of a stone of the approximate shape and size I wanted. In fact I might even say that the piece was inspired by the original shape of the stone as I received it. I then sketched the design, and transferred it to the stone in a method similar to 'Pouncing'. In pouncing you trace an image with pinholes, then hang the image upon the surface you want to transfer it to, and charcoal dust is tapped on the paper to leave a light tracing on the surface. Instead, I laid the paper on the surface, then tapped a pointed chisel along the lines to make a tracing directly on the stone.

I then started drilling holes in the stone to be removed. A flat toothed chisel and then a flat chisel were used to cut away excess stone down to the depth that I wanted to achieve.

I began to shape the (now raised) surface to give depth to the images (Flowers and central motif). As well I left a raised edge around the perimeter of the piece to help protect what would eventually become the more delicate inner design. I continued the process until I was satisfied with the detail. Then, bringing files to bear, I began the slow process of refining the carving. The final steps will involve sandpaper to smooth the finish a bit, and then oil to bring out the color of the stone. I have decided to leave the stone a little rough, to allow a slightly weathered look.

What I Learned:

I learned that there are many tricks one has to use to fool the eye when carving an image in relief. I had always believed that reliefs were easier than carving an image in the round. (completely 3-dimensional) Not any longer. There is an art involved in creating angles that fool the eye into perceiving greater depth than is actually there. I am further humbled by the difficulty in achieving intricate patterns with such crude tools. It takes a gentle hand and much patience to carve the curl of a leaf in such a way that it doesn't break. I am also learning the differences between types of stone. While my first carving was soapstone, this was limestone. It is both harder, and more brittle. I was able to get more detail out of the stone but had to work much more slowly. I plan for my next project to be in that most noble of stones, Marble.

Period Cultural Etiquette:

My patron, Baron Guillermo Bardicci has been kind enough to allow me a freedom with my subjects that is very flattering. Without the support of a Stonecarvers guild I could have ended up working for a patron that stunted my artistry by demanding that I carve pieces to his specifications, whether or not they were inspiring or even artistic. The guild structure would have given me support even if I were to leave the Baron's employ. Without their support I could be forced to do mediocre work or starve. The Baron has graciously allowed me to enter this piece in competition before I formally present it to him. This is the second of the three pieces I have sculpted in return for his patronage.

Deviations from Period Technique:

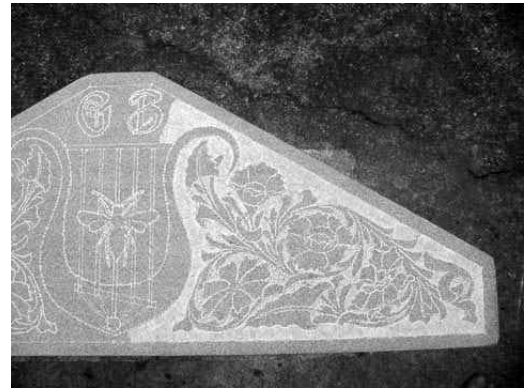
I had to wear goggles through certain parts of the process for safety reasons, as well as a filter over my mouth. Flying stone chips can injure the eye, and trapped gas in the stone can cause inflamed lungs. The bit and brace I used was modern (although still a manual drill) as it is nearly impossible to find one nowadays that would be considered period. As well the chisels and files I used were of a far better grade of steel than the mild steel or even iron one would have had to use during the Middle Ages. This meant considerably less sharpening was necessary.

Source Material:

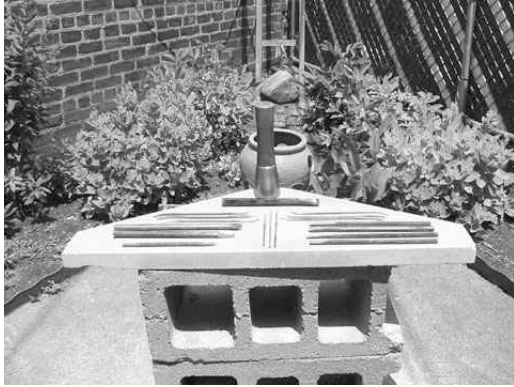
Information about the process and techniques of stone carving were generously provided by Joe Chiffreller of the New York Carver. A stonecarver that devotes much attention to the medieval time period, The subject is not a copy of an already created piece, but is an original work of art.



The Blank Stone
Sanded Smooth

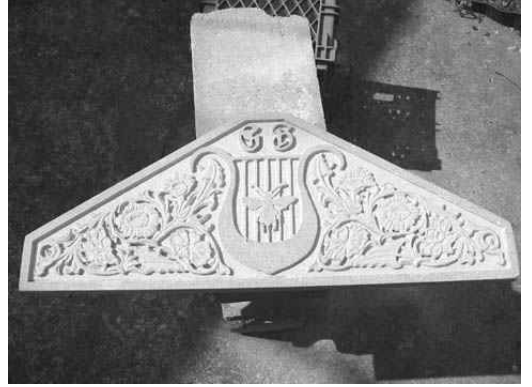


Step 2
After
roughing
the surface

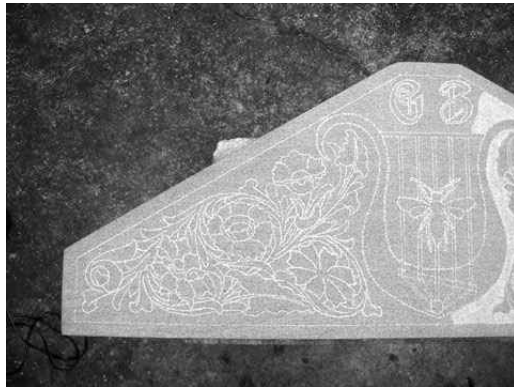


The Tools
Chisels
Files
Hammer

(Not Shown)
Bit & Brace
Sandpaper
Ruler
Compass



Step 3
After drilling
/ chipping out
the sunken areas.
As well as
Starting
the shaping



Step 1
How the
lines look after
transferring
them from
paper



Step 4
After shaping
the whole
surface and
beveling
the edges.

Here is a series of images that show some of the process I went through, and some of the tools I used.

In the first image you can see the already shaped stone. I was lucky enough to come across this piece at an ornamental stonecarving place right near Cooper's Lake camp ground. (Thanx to Baron Braun)

The second shows you some of the tools I used to complete this project. The Round hammer, Chisels and Rifflers (Files) have been the stone carver's tools since antiquity. The cinder block pedastal I worked on is a recent invention though. :)

The third image shows what the patterns look like on the stonedirectly after it has been transferred via the 'pouncing' like technique.

The fourth image is what the stone looks like after parts of the stone have been roughed. What this means is that I used the chisel on the surface (lightly, without digging in) to cause the pattern to become more prominent. I do this so that I don't drill into an area that I want to keep raised, as the pattern is complex.

The photo I took of the surface as I was in the drilling stage didn't come out. But the process involves marking a drillbit at a certain depth, drilling hundreds (or thousands) of holes to that depth. Then using a chisel to break the spaces between the holes, creating an effect similar to that of a modern day router.

The fifth image shows the floral areas already shaped, and in some cases slightly undercut. This adds greater depth to the piece and changes the way it looks in different lighting.

The last image shows the piece nearing completion, the centerpiece carved to near it's finish, and the edges were bevelled to give them a more interesting look. The final work will be getting done at Pennsic.

Alaric Jäger's Unicorn Rampant Stone Carving

The Subject:

The Unicorn is, as most know, a mythological beast that has represented beauty, purity and freedom since the earliest times. A perfect and unattainable ideal. Here it is portrayed as it might have been found in medieval heraldry. This particular piece was based off a design found in the Arthur Charles Fox Davies book of heraldry and is often referred to as a Unicorn Rampant. Rampant referring to its specific position and the angle at which it is drawn.

Materials:

Green Slate, Steel Chisels, Steel Rifflers (Files), Sandpaper, Saw, Oil, Round Hammer

Technique:

The stone was first cut into shape. I decided to make this a sort of plaque, the type that might have been fitted into a panel of a door, or part of an arrangement on the wall of some noble's drawing room. In this case I was able to draw the image directly onto the stone, then trace the lines with a sharp chisel to engrave the outline onto the stone. The pointed chisel was then used to start clearly delineate the areas to be removed from the area to remain. Since I was working with slate, I chose to dig a relatively deep channel around the unicorn's outline to help prevent chipping the stone. A flat toothed chisel then cleared away the excess, giving me a basic relief. The main figure was then worked to varying depths to bring it into a true relief. I began with the files much earlier than I normally would have to refine the work. Followed with rubbing sand or using sandpaper on the surface to smooth out the figure where it needs it, then finally rubbing it down with oil to bring out the stone's color and shine.

What I Learned:

Slate is a very difficult and frustrating type of stone to work in. It has a tendency to fracture off in thin sheets, possibly removing large areas of already worked stone. Some of the tricks I learned involve the direction that you angle the chisels, as well as much more extensive use of the files. Unlike other stones, it is almost impossible to undercut the stone safely. This also makes it difficult to create a really deep relief. The deeper a relief is to be the more you have a need to undercut to preserve the illusion of depth.

Following Period Cultural Etiquette:

Baron Guglielmo was kind enough to encourage me to work on several pieces that would allow me to expand on my meager skills before planning my third creation for him. I continue to marvel that he is so kind as to allow me this leeway.

To bring together others of like mind, I have begun preliminary work on creating a Guild of Stone Carvers, and during my carving of this piece I began to contact people that might be interested. Perhaps by doing so, I will help them avoid the difficulties I encountered in finding a patron to guide them on their way. We will see.

Deviations and Safety Concerns:

Goggles were absolutely necessary for the creation of this project. The stone chips created from the slate had a wide range in size, but all had a tendency to be razor sharp. Some small slivers embedded themselves in the skin of my hands (just deep enough to stick like darts in a target) just from the small force I used with the chisels. I tried to use gloves, but quickly found that to work that way was ungainly, and made it far more dangerous to the stone. Material I have read on the subject says that stone splinters were an accepted part of the job. I found it wasn't necessary to wear a mask as the pieces shattered too large to be breathed in, but there might still have been some residual gas trapped in the stone. Unlike other pieces I have done there was no noticeable methane smell coming from the stone as I carved.

Source Material:

The sources where information can be found about Unicorns are extant. The particulars of its position and the heraldic significance thereof are clearly detailed in many books on heraldry. The book I used was the Arthur Charles Fox Davies. A book most heralds are familiar with. The details of carving in slate were all self taught, in small initial test pieces, as well as while working this project. I gained the idea to create it as a door or wall panel from many images of castle walls and doors I have seen in various sources. The stone itself was a gift of a non-SCA carver that gifted me too generously in exchange for some advice I freely offered him on the carving of slate.



Alaric Jäger's Royal Arms of the East Stone Carvings

The Subject:

The Royal Arms of the King and Queen of the East Kingdom of the SCA. Created as a gift for their Majesties with the hope that they will be received into the Regalia of the East. To enhance the halls of my King and Queen.

Materials:

Purple Slate, Steel Chisels, Steel Riffers (Files), Sandpaper, Saw, Oil, Round Hammer

Technique:

I was inspired to carve these as a gift mostly from two particular truths. First, the stone itself was a gift to me, from a good gentle in exchange for some advise I offered him. Second, the stone he gave me was a relatively rare (in my experience) Purple slate. I decided to use it for the arms of the East which lie on purple fields, I decided to make them gifts to pass on the good gentle's generosity. I was able to draw the image directly onto the stone, then trace the lines with a sharp chisel to engrave the outline onto the stone. The pointed chisel was then used to start clearly delineate the areas to be removed from the area to remain. Since I was working very thin pieces of slate, I had to be very cautious and to work town through the layers a little at a time. The main images were worked primarily with the files as a safety (to the stone) measure. Followed with rubbing sandpaper on the surface to smooth out the figure where it needs it, then finally rubbing it down with oil to bring out the stone's color and shine.

What I Learned:

Slate is a very difficult and frustrating type of stone to work in. It has a tendancy to fracture off in thin sheets, possibly removing large areas of already worked stone. Many of the tricks I used on the previous slate pieces would not apply here, as these pieces are exceedingly thin. After I dug thin channels in the stone (not deep) I would flake off a safe area, then dig the channels a little deeper and continually repeat the process.

Following Period Cultural Ettiquette:

Part of why I am carving these pieces as a gift to their Majesties, is to gain their attention, so I might importune them at a later date to endorse the beginning of the Guild I am seeking to form. I am only beginning to learn the difficulties in forming a guild, and drawing royal attention would have helped in the real Middle Ages as much as it might in the Current Middle Ages. In presenting these, I made certain to have a representative of Baron Guglielmo (my Patron) with me. To show that the project was undertaken with his blessing, as well as to convey his generosity in allowing me to carve a gift for my Sovereigns even though he is of a different Kingdom.

Deviations and Safety Concerns:

Goggles were absolutely necessary for the creation of this project. The stone chips created from the slate had a wide range in size, but all had a tendancy to be razor sharp. I used a filter mask through a lot of this project as it involved serious amounts of filing. Unlike other pieces I have done there was no noticeable methane smell coming from the stone as I carved, but the fine dust created might have posed a health risk. I have been told that it works very much like sandpaper in the lungs and sinuses. I had noticed from previous carvings that I may have done some damage to my sinuses from inadequate protection. A mistake I have been trying not to compound.

Source Material:

The images are inspired by the Royal Arms of the King and Queen of the East Kingdom. Many more puissant than I can inform you better of the heraldic significance of these Arms. I direct you to seek a herald and ask them for specifics. The stone itself was a gift of a non-SCA carver that gifted me too generously in exchange for some advise I freely offered him on the carving of slate.



Initial preparation of the plates:

I began by cutting two equal sized plates of slate from the same piece of stone. I considered the symbolic nature of doing so. As the King and Queen are of one mind and one heart, so, I felt, should these two pieces be.

I sanded the plates smooth, to give me an even surface to work upon. Also, as the Queen's arms have the heraldic roses over the laurel wreath, it would need to have a greater overall thickness to allow that plate to have a somewhat layered effect. I took this into account as I prepared these pieces.



Transferring the images:

To begin, the images were drawn on paper a few times to get a feel for the project, and to get an idea of the level of detail that might be needed. These are to date, the most delicate and fine detailed of the pieces I have done.

I then drew them onto the stone plates using a pencil. Medievally it would have been done with charcoal, or a lead or maybe even silver pen, for something this detailed. I admit I was glad of the use of an eraser as I worked the images to be as symmetrical as possible.

Finally I took a fine pointed chisel, and scratched the images onto the plates. This makes the image immune to smudging, or being rubbed completely off as you work the stone. While wet the lines disappear, but they come back clearly as the stone dries.

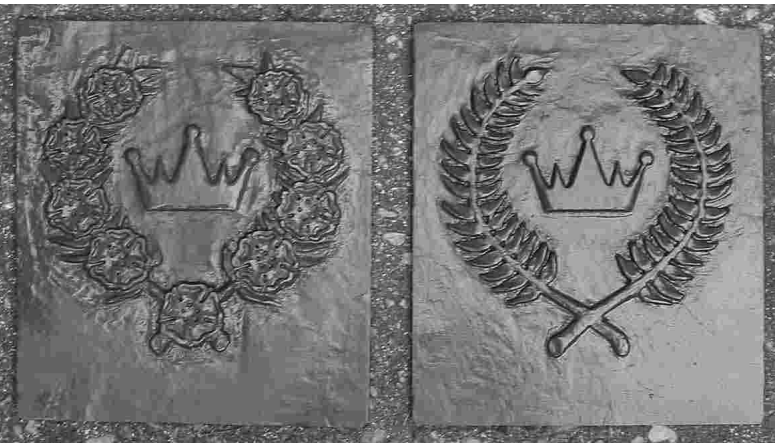


Carving down the outlying areas:

Michelangelo Buonarroti noted that sculpting is "the removing of stone to reveal what lies beneath", and this is the phase of carving where that is most evident. Digging narrow channels along the outlines of the image, I was able to safely chip away the rest of the background. I had to do so carefully, layer by layer, to prevent a catastrophic break in the stone.

Eventually I had to alternate between the finest of my chisels, and my files to clear away the background. Usually the files don't come to bear until much later in a carving. Usually stock removal, then shaping are done with chisels. Even many of the details are roughed out before a file is touched.

Files were used to do almost all of the fine removal between the leaves, and inside the tines of the crowns, where a single misplaced stroke with the chisel would ruin the piece, and leave the stone too thin to work further into.



Finishing up:

Once all the stock removal is done, all the details are carved into the images. On the crown it was the rounding of the pearls, as well as the slight curvature of the edges to make it appear more dimensional. For the laurel leaves, they had to be filed to look like they curved into the surface instead of lying flat upon it. And, of course, each rose needed as much detail work as the rest of the plates combined, to follow all the complex curvature.

Finally the details were polished with fine sandpaper, and oiled to bring out the colors and shine of the stone.