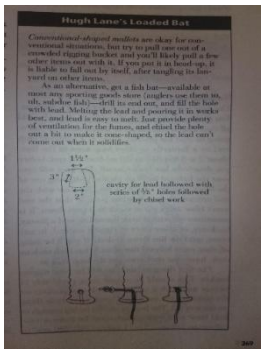
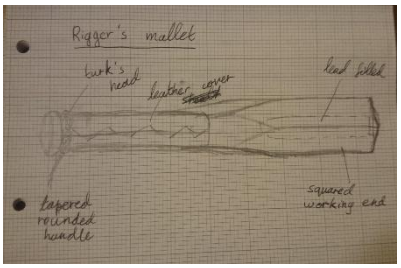
The Rigger's Mallet

By Alanna Cameron

Reading through The Rigger's Apprentice I came across a paragraph about the impracticalities of bringing a traditional mallet up the rig. Keeping it in a bosun's bag, handle down, and it easily topples out because of the weighted head. Storing it the other way around means dragging lots of other items out with it when you need it. Brian Toss suggested the solution of using a fish bat instead and if it wasn't heavy enough, to drill a hole from the top of the head and fill it with lead. I started sketching out some ideas for a purpose made rigger's mallet.

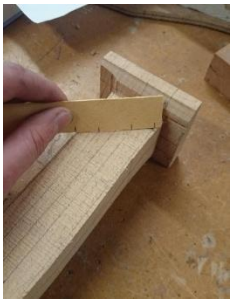


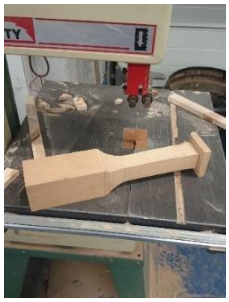
The plan was to have a cuboid head with a taper down to the handle, like something resembling a stonemason's mallet. It would be made in beech for weight and durability. If the mallet wasn't well balanced by the time I had shaped it, I could always use a little lead to help it along.



The first step was planing, planing, planing. I dimensioned the beech down to 350mm x 70mm x 70mm. Then it was drawing on the shapes of the final piece before I lost the face edge to measure from. A French curve came in handy to draw to curve of the tapered handle on the piece. The circumference of the handle was drawn onto the base of the mallet. I would have had quite a long job without the joy of power tools. It was rough cut on a band saw, each edge being taped back on to use the curves drawn on it.

The handle was done the same way a spar would be made, taking off each corner of the square to get 8 equal sides then repeating to get 16 sides until it is round enough to smooth out the rest with a belt of sandpaper. As the handle was too small to use a spar gauge, a scrap of wood with two pencil marks did the same job. Using a spoke-shave and chisel I brought the handle down to size leaving extra at the end of the handle to fashion into a lip. Then the belt of sandpaper, the back reinforced with good, old gaffer tape, came into use. By holding it at each end and pulling it quickly back and forth around the handle, it was soon smoothed out. It was around this time that my clumsiness kicked in and I dropped it, breaking off the lip at the bottom and a new learning opportunity presented itself! With the help of some epoxy, wood filler and a clamp it was returned to its previous state.





Now with the mallet looking like a medieval club it was time to work on its aesthetics. The circular sanding machine and rasping file gave it some softer curves. A chamfer around the edges made the corners less prone to splitting and sandpaper had it ready to be oiled with boiled linseed oil. I decided it was quite well weighted without the need for any lead. As a finishing touch I added a lanyard hole and dressed it up a little. I was quite pleased with the final piece, it didn't look nearly as much like a weapon as I worried it would.

It was a lot of fun planning this out, making it, using new tools and problem solving along the way. It was a great way to learn and to make the most of my time in college. Although, I suppose I'll have to wait to start my placement at Pioneer in February for it to prove or disprove its usefulness.