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New Year, New Skills



Alanna
Cameron

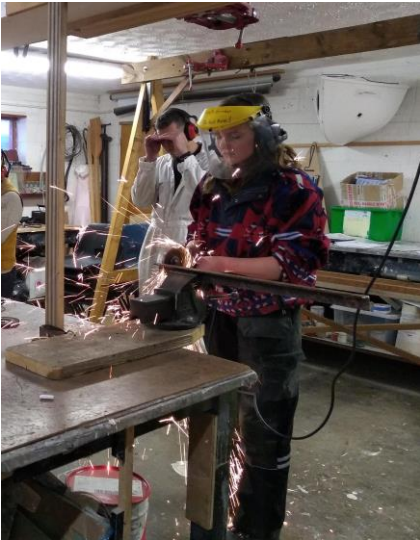


After Christmas, I was well rested and excited to begin again at the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC). Our first week back was fun and games with spar making. We started out with a long cuboid of pine and took off the corners with a draw knife to give eight equal sides. A draw knife is not an easy tool to master. It's a long blade with a handle at each end that is drawn towards you across the surface of the wood. Getting the angle just right so that it takes off material but doesn't dig into the wood is really difficult.

I love the wide variety of tools and methods we get to experiment with at IBTC. Soon, we had all produced stumpy, fat spars. I am not one who likes to waste anything, so yet another side project was born. By attaching it to the decking piece I made last month, and adding some legs for support, I had a rough and ready coffee table. With a few coats of paint and varnish it'll fit right into anywhere I live: creative, but a bit thrown together.



For our finished spar-making project, each of us produced a boat hook. It was a lovely process and I love my... elaborate back scratcher – as I don't have a boat for it to fulfil its intended purpose.



Week two was a power tool course, or ‘how to keep all your extremities where they belong’, course. As you can see from the photo, Rob can’t bear to watch while I use the grinder. Power tools came in handy for the next few days of pattern making where our lives would have been much more difficult without a jigsaw. For pattern making, we brought a dishevelled dingy into the training cabin to fit some bilges in it. It was quite exciting to finally have a boat in front of us to learn on. I found it fascinating. Pattern making is the process used to fit

certain parts of the boat. It is straightforward and practical; you don’t need anything but scraps of plywood, a hot glue gun, a few nails and a spirit level. We then got a chance to work with an adze. An adze is like a curved axe blade mounted on a curved handle at a 90° angle. It is often used to shape the keel of a boat. It was great fun to learn that traditional skill; however I couldn’t help thinking about all those wonderful power tools earlier in the week. Next was roving, to attach the steamed timbers into a dingy. It’s a two-man job, one on the outside of the hull hammering a nail through, the other ‘backing up’ or supporting the other side. Then the rove gets put on the inside, the excess bronze nail is snipped away and then bashed down to create a little cap holding the rove in place.



On Friday, we had a day to catch up on any projects we might have been behind on, but as we were up to date, our wonderful instructor took us on Maynard’s Magical Mystery Tour of Norfolk. We met at one of the oldest bridges in Britain for a tasty breakfast bap. It was in a place called Potter Heigham, which I understand is pronounced Po’rhamm.



We saw the popular store, Lathams, then it was off to the Norfolk Wherry Trust to see their incredible vessels.

Our plan to visit the seals changed, and we went to see a ruined church instead. Legend has it that a witch was buried there and her wooden leg grew up as a great tree in the centre of the ruin.

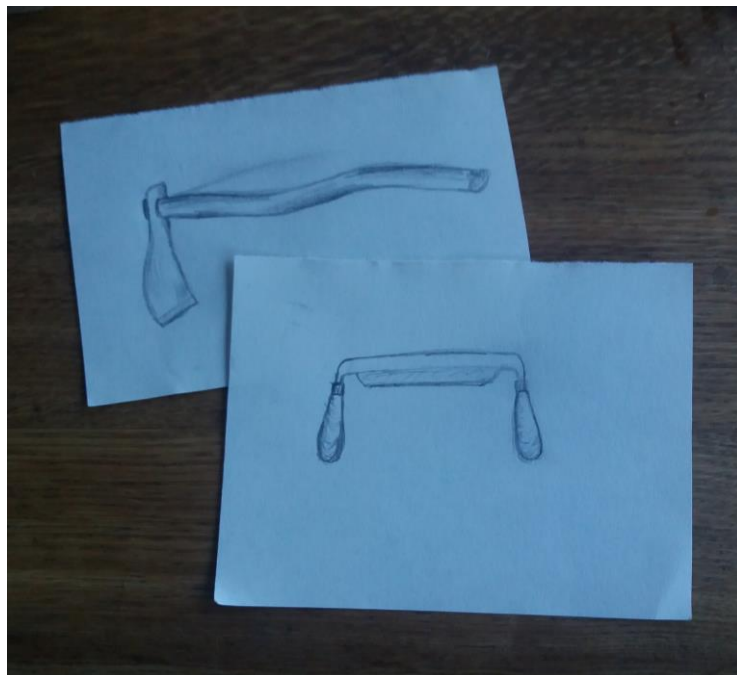


This month we also spent a week learning about boat electrics, plumbing and diesel engines. It was brilliant fun learning these vital things about life onboard. No one had ever explained to me how an engine worked before. I now know it's not just a magic box that makes the boat go, "brum brum". We got a chance to do engine checks and repairs (impellers are fiddly wee buggers, aren't they). I was amazed how simple and ingenious the systems were, in theory anyway. I am sure it's a much different story when a problem occurs.

The Shipshape trainees had a chance to attend the Association of Sail Training Organisations conference in Southampton. It was a brilliant opportunity to learn more about the sail training industry, meet old friends and make new ones. The

equality and diversity talk was engaging and opened up important conversations. The next day, we went on a visit to Buckler's Hard. It is an interactive, family-friendly museum and in a beautiful location. Definitely worth a visit if you are down that part of the country.

With only a couple of weeks to go before finishing up at IBTC, anticipation is building to start work at our placements. I am looking forward to putting the skills I've learned to use at Pioneer.



Sketch of an adze and a drawknife