

TRAINEE BLOG: BELINDA CREE

MARCH 2020

REFIT CONTINUES

It's all hands on deck (literally) as we prepare *Excelsior* for her survey and the start of the season!

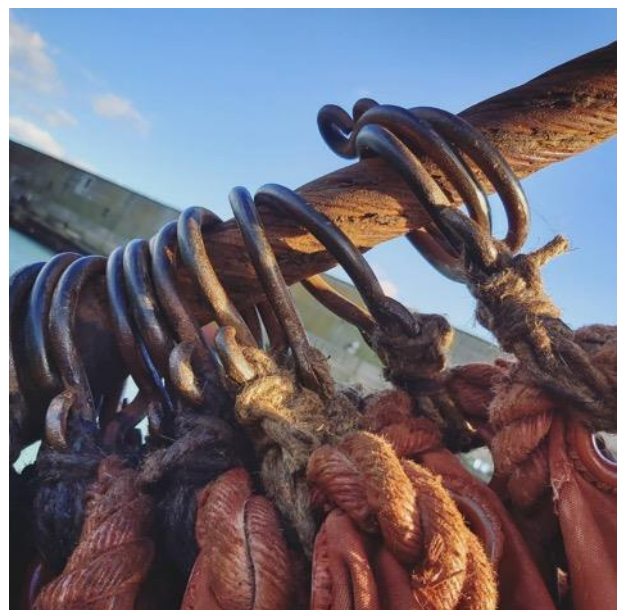
We were expecting to come out of the water towards the end of the month, but then the plan changed and instead we sailed to Grimsby on the 14th March in order to use the dry dock there. Once out of the water, the essential external survey could be completed, and this would allow us to do important work like maintain the seacocks. And the good news was, we passed the survey with only minor things to tweak or change – so we are going to get recertified no problem.

But before we could set sail to get to the survey there was plenty to do to get *Excelsior* ready to move. We had no topmast, no sails, and were missing quite a bit of the rig – so our to-do list drastically changed priorities as we pulled focus to these essentials.

This was an excellent learning opportunity for me. I'd been on the easier jobs for the previous week, like painting and sanding below deck. That's because I'd managed to dislocate my kneecap by falling over and hitting it on a rock (so not even like a cool injury). I was incredibly keen to get more involved again, and this was the perfect opportunity. After being shown how to do a clove hitch and square seizing I was able to bend the mainsail to the mast hoops and the staysail to its rings ready to be hoisted. I was really happy with this. I'd said the day before I was nervous that I wouldn't remember my knots etc. after falling out of practice since the beginning of the traineeship – but I managed to tie a bowline no problem when asked for the staysail eyelets. That gave me a little boost, even if the freezing cold wind was there to keep me a little miserable!



Stowing the mainsail we'd just attached



My handiwork on the staysail

Also, being a part of the team there for the survey was pretty educational. I was interested in what was going on, and what the surveyor would be looking at. Obviously, I have a decent sense of what is right and wrong in terms of a ship's seaworthiness but there were lots of specifics I hadn't thought of before, like having certain tools on board or having duplicates of some basics for different parts of the ship.

Plus, seeing *Excelsior* out of the water was so cool! She's huge! I had a proper look round the hull, at the anodes and the grids, the rudder and propeller. It's somehow different to look at a ship out of the water when it's the ship you yourself where just sailing in the water. She's in cracking good nick for a lady who will be 100 years old next year.

Our crew got bigger this month too! With the arrival of our new Skipper for the season, Nick. It's been very exciting having the skipper who will be sailing with us on board. With Nick being new to *Excelsior* he has lots of questions about her – but at the same time he's the one with all the sailing and leadership experience so I have lots of questions for him!



Me and George – one of our regular volunteers.



Unfortunately, with the developing COVID-19 pandemic, the immediate future is looking uncertain. Once we knew for sure that we wouldn't be in a position to be welcoming guests in the short term, we've started to look at other activities we can do in the meantime to take care of the boat – but also to raise her profile online. That way once things return to normal, we could be in a strong position to make up for lost or delayed income. I have an honours degree in Filmmaking and Screenwriting so I'm ready and waiting to get my teeth stuck into some short films illustrating the historical significance of our vessel and showcasing the traditional skills we employ in this operation. Apart from that, we'll be continuing the refit as normal, giving *Excelsior* some well-deserved TLC!