

TRAINEE BLOG: BELINDA CREE

MAY 2021

3, 2, 1... READY FOR LAUNCH

Right at the end of April there, just after my last blog – we were due to launch Pioneer and get her back in the water ready to go for the season ahead. There was one major job left to do before heading out to the mooring, and that was reattaching the rudder during a reasonably high tide. An extremely heavy, chunky and overall fairly unweildy object, it has to be **PRECISELY** lined up with the vessel to be properly connected, so this was a slow process (lots of *to-me, to-you!*) but ultimately a successful one!

That finished off most of the work that needed to be done out of the water, Caroline had helped me to change the anodes on the hull that were a bit too worn away, and Alanna and I greased up the propellers and seacocks too.

So with the spars back on board and the main & mizzen sails hanked on – she was ready to head out to her usual spot in the river.



Success! Heading back to the yard after launching Pioneer to her mooring.

It was very cool to be on Pioneer as she was floated backwards and off the concrete. This had be scheduled weeks in advance to fall on the highest possible spring tide in the general time frame between the work finishing and the season beginning. This part of Essex is *extremely* tidal – I'm still a bit wow'ed by just how much mud disappears and reappears throughout the day!

One of the Skippers that works regularly with Pioneer Sailing Trust came down for the occasion, he would bring us out of the (very tight) berth and navigate down the river and then around the lateral buoyage to the mooring. It was so cool to be onboard AND on the water haha! Not quite sailing yet, we were motoring but it was still so exciting, and a big moment after the few weeks I'd spent with her and the MONTHS these guys had been taking care of her on land!

Once we arrived at the mooring we secured Pioneer with a temporary mooring line (as a new one was due to arrive very soon – a massive 8-plait line). Then we began work on upgrading the mooring slightly – one of the apprentices had made a metal and leather buffer for the top of the mooring to stop the top of the chain damaging the buoy. So it was necessary to actually lift the end of the chain UP and out of the way to add this. The mooring chain would have been far too heavy for humans to lift out of the water like that – so we used Pioneer's windlass (similar to a winch, except the line goes in the front and out the back, as opposed to being wrapped around a cylinder sideways) to accomplish this. It was quite the full-body work out for me regardless!

SURVEY SAYS...

Pioneer had to be ready for her survey before the season started – this is when an MCA surveyor comes down and visits the vessel to check she meets the safety, technical and structural standards for her class. The first part of the survey happened on the hard, when Pioneer was out of the water so the surveyor can easily see the entire hull, and get up close and personal with the anodes, rudder and propellers too. So that was at the end of April, and now that Pioneer was back in the water – we could invite the surveyor back to take another look, as we'd put a lot more of the necessary kit back onboard since her launch.



We lifted the other spars (boom & gaff) on board with many helpful hands – but I was pleased to see a big forklift turn up to give us a hand with the bowsprit! It's been freshly painted, tallowed and oiled.



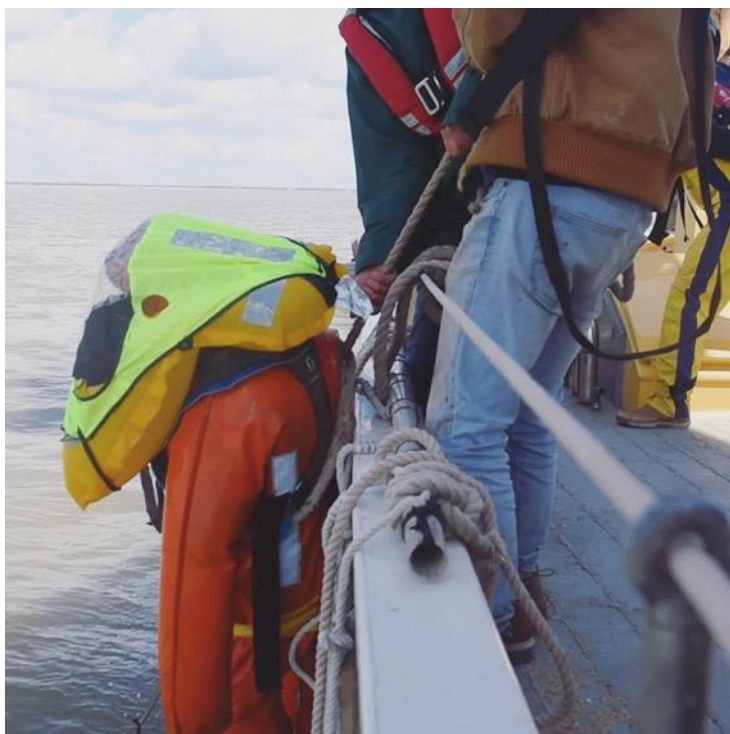
Here I'm oiling some of Priscilla's shrouds, with a fun mix of Stockholm tar, raw linseed oil, and genuine turpentine – known as 'jollop'. It smells.... quite bad?!

I've spent time out on the mooring and in the yard with Tom and Alanna doing bits and bobs to get Pioneer ready for the survey and also ready for the start of the season. Jobs such as:

- Scrubbing and rinsing out the bilges
- Emptying out each bilge compartment with the pump
- Re-organising the chart table and storage
- Putting covering boards back on the engine/batteries/hydraulics
- Cleaning the galley, heads, companion ways
- Testing fire and carbon monoxide alarms, changing batteries as required
- Checking seacocks, first-aid kits, fire blankets and fire extinguishers
- Swabbing the deck (cleaning it with water and a very stiff brush!)
- Tallowing the bowsprit and the roller
- Brushing neatsfoot oil on to the leather covering on spars
- Treating the shrouds with linseed oil
- Servicing the marlin seizings on the shrouds with 'jollop'
- Tidying the deck and the deck box, sorting out the lines and removing rubbish
- Making sure the maintenance essentials are on board like: the rigging box (containing tarred marlin, pliers, whipping twine, seizing wire, marlin spikes, fids, and knives); tapes/brushes/oils/greases; domestic supplies for cleaning; and the climbing gear (bosun's chair, harness, safety line, fall arrest system)

Also, on one particularly wet and windy day – I got to give some of Priscilla's rigging some TLC in the yard. I sanded back all the blocks and once cleaned, treated them with some D1 oil. Then did the same for 2 small tillers (who were looking rather grey...) It was great to put to use some of the "block party" skills I picked up in Portugal over the winter with Maybe Sailing.

STAFF TRAINING



Recovering 'BOB' the dummy during a MOB drill. *Weird the way he kept falling in, over and over again...* You'll notice the lifejacket covering the whole head – that's a spray hood, it deploys with the jacket and then you pull it down over your face.



Here Felicity & Oli are re-hoisting the jib after a successful MOB recovery. The crew member at the helm will have asked for this sail to be dropped on approach to the casualty in the water, to help slow the boat down.

On Friday 8th & Saturday 9th May, Pioneer Sailing Trust hosted their pre-season staff training. A similar set up to what I took part in at Jolie Brise last month, this included the current crew for the year, and possible relief crew/Skippers with some key staff members too. I was very excited for this training – this was going to be my first time sailing on Pioneer!

The first day, as everyone I arrived I took their temperatures and provided them with a quick Covid test, and then we all met in the largest room, all spaced out, upstairs for a quick chat before heading out to Pioneer. It was good to meet some of the folks I might get to sail with later in the season, and the atmosphere was very positive from the get go. I think everyone was keen for a day on the water with other like-minded folk!

So we took the ferry over – that's run by Brightlingsea harbour – to get 7 of us out to the boat in one go while Tom & Alanna took Charles the tender over with some supplies. Once onboard, I got some domestics set up below deck and very shortly we were ready to start setting sails! We were sitting head to wind, and the tide was keeping us sitting steady on the mooring – so Skipper Robin had us raise the main there, and then once off the mooring we began to raise the foresails (a staysail and a jib). We had the mizzen main up to but I must have missed that one – I volunteered as coffee-maker in chief... I just thought it made more sense for one person to go below and sort that all out rather than everyone having to make their own. We'd been so careful covid wise thus far so it would seem silly to then leave a bottle of milk on deck for everyone to pick up! Gave me a chance to use the gas and some of the pumps and seacocks for myself, and I take crew morale very seriously haha so making *smoko* happen was a pleasure...

The day was just beautiful, the water was a flat calm but there was still enough wind to keep us going. While underway, we had a closer look at some of the ship's systems to help familiarise ourselves with the important bits, such as on the engine, like where to find the: coolant level; oil dip stick; fuel primer; bilge/fire house seacock; isolator switches; and the ON/OFF button!

But the main event HAD to be the MOB (Man Over Board) drills we did that day. It was very much all in the spirit of learning and co-operation, there was de-briefs after most recoveries to discuss: what folks thought went well; what they would have done differently with hindsight; and finding general areas of improvement for the ship's casualty recovery hardware.

My absolute personal highlight though – would have to be when I was on the helm for a MOB. I was initially VERY hesitant to be on the helm for an exercise like this, it just felt way beyond anything I'd done previously, I hadn't even helmed Excelsior OR Pioneer in a "normal" situation before... but with some light encouragement, and a reminder that this was a very supportive environment, everyone onboard was there to practice afterall – I relented. Besides, Skipper Robin was gonna help me out, so he stood aft with me to supervise and I found his guidance extremely valuable.

He was asking me questions to help lead me to figuring out where I wanted to put the boat myself like: *where was the wind coming from now; what would doing a tack involve; if we were currently on a beam-reach and wanted to reach the casualty on the water on a close-reach what would I need to do?* That might sound very basic but – I'm just not used to being asked those kind of questions...

I can understand what other crew are saying about the point of sail or a planned manoeuvre but that's not the same as coming up with that answer myself – and especially not while I'm actually the one holding the tiller! I was nervous at first but I realised after we'd recovered the dummy, I had actually felt really calm once I got into it – because the questions Robin was asking me were helping me break up the task in my head. While 'get the boat back to the casualty in the water' might have felt like too big of an ask – breaking it up into a tack, then dropping the peak, then the foresails, and settling on an approach, using the wind and tide to slow down – I then found that actually, those are all steps I can do! I think that's really gonna stick with me for a long time.

I've made a very short little video to show off what these MOB drills looked like on Pioneer, which you'll find below.

[CLICK THE PICTURE BELOW TO WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)



Link not working? Try here: https://youtu.be/Yr7Hbs0_pXM

TIME OUT

I then spent a week in my native Northern Ireland – not technically a holiday, I had one appointment to attend but which the travel options being as they were and the need to arrive early in order to self-isolate, I ended up having to spend a whole week away. So I made the best of this, worked on this blog, did some crafting and drawing, and also starting brainstorming for some potential social media craic I think might be helpful in the near future.



I am fascinated by both sailing and flying! Sails and airplane wings are the same thing in my brain.

TRINITY

While Pioneer has it's own launch, "Charles" – there's actually another, larger boat used to transport whole groups over to Pioneer at a time, and that is "Trinity". One of our main jobs this month was to get her ready to go back in the water ready for the season. Even for the staff training where there was only 9 people there, there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing trying to get all those adults AND the kit we needed on board into Charles. Fresh water and kedge anchors and nav light boxes are heavy!

One job I wasn't expecting was to re-attach the rope fender which goes around the boat from the transom, around the bow, and back down the other side to the transom again. I just hadn't seen a fender like this before that was solid the whole way round – it looks fantastic when it's on! But it is extremely heavy – so with the forklift holding the bulk of the weight – I used some marlin to lash it on the the bow, and then we secured the ends to the transom with some shackles and shiny new bottle crews (they look like mini turn-buckles).

Once we were ready to go, all that was left to do was get Trinity into the water. But it was going to take more than some strops on the forklift... So we had the cradle in from Morgan Marine next door, they drove around the corner to pick her up, and then it was a very short walk to the slipway in their yard – we were expecting to keep Trinity in the cradle for maybe even an hour while she took up water – but we actually managed to get straight in and motoring round to a berth while I pumped out the bilge.

Also, in the pictures below you'll see Alanna touching up the anti-foul on the bottom of the boat – that's where Trinity was resting on some wooden chocks. So these patches could only be accessed once she was floating in the air. It was weird being able to go underneath...



SHINY SPARS



From L to R: Priscilla's bowsprit, gaff and boom.

Now that Pioneer is ready to go, we could focus on getting Priscilla ready to go too. Her usual spot is on a pontoondown river and opposite the main part of the harbour.

So Tom and Alanna went out one morning to bring her up here and onto the grid. While I stayed and finished off these spars. They have a coat of D1 oil, followed by multiple coats of D2 varnish oil.

And then on the ends, I've patched repaired the paintwork with primer, undercoat and topcoat – feathered into to the rest of the surface.

ANTI-FOULING PRISCILLA'S HULL



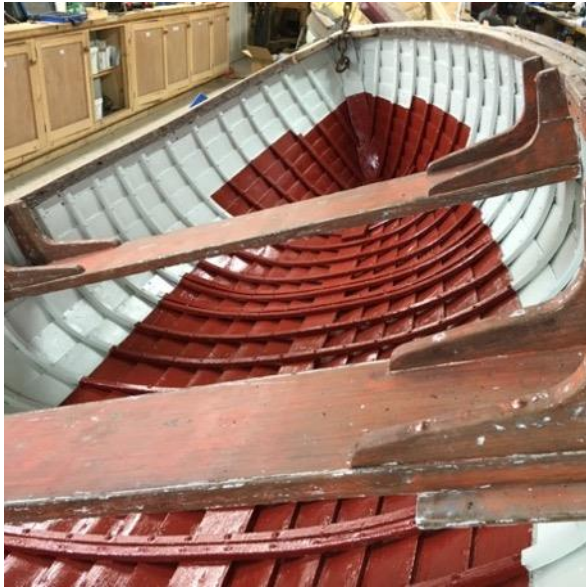
I'm just saving that paint on my face for later.

While Priscilla was on the grid, and Alanna was up on the mast putting on the shrouds – I was down on the (newly cleaned of mud) slipway in some waders giving her hull some well needed TLC.

I power washed the hull to remove any barnacles, algae, seaweed and general aquatic life attached to the keel... and then I taped up the waterline with some painters tape.

Then it was just a matter of brushing and rolling on the anti-foul before the tide came back in!

THALATTA'S DINGHIES



It's fidgety getting paint under those frames...



I like this work-in-progress shot, that's what I've been up to on the topsides

We were meant to have our first group in on the Saturday 22nd May – but unfortunately they had to cancel last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. I really hope we can rearrange with them so they can get the benefit of the workshops we had planned – activities like rowing, making a bosun's chair (joinery + splicing), crabbing and the like.

So as there was no need to prep for the Saturday anymore, I spent Friday working on one of the wee dinghies we have in the workshop at the moment. They are with us from the sail training Thames barge, '*Thalatta*'. That's bilge paint I've put on the bottom in that picture above on the left, and then the pale grey bulwarks are done with this very nice water-based paint from Sadolin.

Next week I hope to be doing a little more work on these – there's a whole second dinghy of the same size to do as well, and I love scraping, sanding and painting! So I'm well up for giving these wee boats lots of attention. I may even be in over the bank holiday weekend to supervise some volunteers who might come down to give us a hand!

WHAT'S NEXT?

Well the end of May is fast approaching, which means our first day sail of the season draws ever closer! As far as I know, this will be on the first weekend in June – so watch this space!

