

Benji

About me

Even after growing up in a city right on the coastline, the maritime heritage sector was not a career avenue I had even considered to be a possibility until after leaving fulltime education. I knew that I wanted to do something practical, like mechanics or carpentry, yet I struggled finding a feasible way to retrain after only just leaving college. It wasn't until after my first sail on a wooden boat that I was told that some people do this for a living.

So for the next few years after that sail, I worked for months so that I could sail for weeks. Some jobs less glamorous than others and constantly changing workplaces through the agency I worked for. This eventually grew quite tiresome and I had no clear path. Even though I had racked up some impressive trips in my log, I couldn't quite seem to make any sort of jump into the industry.

My next decision after that was to find work in boatyards with the little knowledge I had on refit work. Here I worked with one of the local sailing associations working on their traditional vessels, and then I worked for a general yacht repair company. This work was substantially more fulfilling than most of my previous jobs, and during this time my boss tipped me off about this course.

Introduction:

Teeing off at Boathouse 4 worked for me. Without seeing a place like this first hand, it is hard to imagine such an establishment existing. The only way I could describe the place is as a jigsaw puzzle of the largest range of small vessels I had yet seen. Amongst the grand setting of Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard, this was really quite a spectacular way to get started and meet everybody. It was good to touch base with the previous year's intake of trainees and meet some of the partners to gauge what their roles are.

Falmouth:

We first took a trip to the Maritime Museum's boat storage facility. This was a dry stick facility with boats from all continents and eras under 25ft. Naturally, I had loads of questions. However, I came to realise that most of the answers applied generally, and that knowledge of sea-going vessels does not come from individual facts, but a greater understanding of construction principles and environmental characteristics.

Following on at Working Sail Ltd Boatyard: This yard is home to the construction of *Pellew* (right). She is set to be the oldest design of pilot cutter on the water once finished. Constructed of pieces of wood which I would sooner call slabs than planks and spars with unholy girth, she will be huge. The most valuable thing I took from this was a discussion we had on sourcing material for boatbuilding. It seems hard to get much right when it comes to constructing anything in our current global situation. All materials have pro's and con's; however most alarming for me was the amount of trees that need cutting to cover our demand for wood. Working Sail took us through their views on this topic, discussing the difference of good and bad forestry, also discussing how sourcing your timber from the right place matters. There are enlightened opinions on this topic, and I would like to focus more on this in the future.



Lynher:

Being very local to the Lynher, I had actually met the two who run this Tamar barge previously, though I had never been able to become fully acquainted. Still, I knew what the *Lynher* was all about, so I looked forward to spending a week on board.

The *Lynher* is a barge named after a beautiful river that spears right into Cornwall; the same river she was built to sail on. The people behind the rebuild of the *Lynher* made me aware of the amount of wrecks along the rivers and their significance. It is strange to know that a wreck that I cycled past on my way towards work every morning was once one of the largest pilot cutters in the country and that one wreck I saw on the bus to school was a fishing lugger of some significance before being deserted. I found out about some of this through a book that was on board, *Lost Ships of the West Country*.

Amongst learning to scull a rowing boat, dingy sailing, knot tying and daily chores on the boat – we had discussions more about this history of some of the vessels in Plymouth and, furthermore, the rebuild of a vessel that now operated from the neighbouring River Plym. The people behind the *Lynher* were heavily, if not entirely, responsible for *Moosk's* rebuild. So it was interesting to hear the reasoning, compromises and joys of rebuilding her into what she is now.

Brixham:

Regardless of the fact that I grew up in the next harbour along to Brixham, I had no idea that this was a choice stop for many historic vessels. As goes the story for most of the world: you only hear the worst of your neighbouring towns.

What impressed me most about Brixham was to see that the town's keenness on harbouring historic vessels (particularly the Brixham trawlers), seemed a direct precursor to their stout fishing industry. Brixham has made exclusive room for their heritage vessels, so that people can come and view them from the pontoon freely and allow passing historic vessels to feel welcome. It was a pleasure to stay on-board one of the Brixham trawlers and even to sail one in the weather they were built to be sailed in. I had never sailed on a boat with such a heavy construction before. It was an incredible feeling to have so much canvas up in the given conditions and to power through the waves in such a way. Nearly all my sailing beforehand had been on yachts, generally built with a much lighter construction. A trawler is much more comfortable in those sorts of conditions.