

As we had taken both *Blue Mermaid* and *Sallie* back to their moorings we we're able to continue working on them over several nights, albeit at a slower pace. Spending a few nights on board the *Blue Mermaid* was actually a highly pleasant way to work. Aside from the obvious limitations of working away from land and the battering heat we were up against, we got quite a lot done during the days. Painting the bottoms of the hatch boards and making use of the perfect varnishing temperature. The evenings were of course pleasant. The Blackwater is an incredibly peaceful place to be in the evenings when all traffic is stopped by a low tide.



On top of work on board, I have also been attending various lectures and digital masterclasses including a session with Tom Cunliffe on the theory of sail and traditional rigs, a lecture in vessel management and a navigation theory.

Tom's session was a really good introduction for some of us who don't have much sailing experience, and a chance for the rest of us to learn from someone who with so much experience! One thing I took from the session was how to use sail twist to your advantage. It was great to talk about how to get the most out of your vessel and to hear about different rigs.

We also had a session on the operation and management of vessels. The class talked about safety management systems and how they are used. This included understanding risk and writing up risk assessment sheets which grade the danger and likelihood of that danger actually happening. And we were also reminded of our rights to work safely and steps in place to ensure that.

The skipper of *Jolie Brise*, the famous pilot cutter, took us through a navigation theory class and taught us the key points of passage planning. This was incredibly useful because my mind always jumbles when I write a passage plan and I've learned the importance of having an ordered list to help!

In between the boat work, zoom calls and masterclasses, I bit the bullet and asked the foreman of the yard to have my mast lifted by the end of the month. This led me to become well acquainted with the riggers in the yard. After reading through all of the old surveys and receipts kept with my boats folder, it became apparent that my stainless standing rigging was likely to be over 12 years old. On top of that, there was a horrendous collage of bottle screws and shackles, none of which were symmetrical or made much sense and kinks along most of the wires. I asked if it would be possible

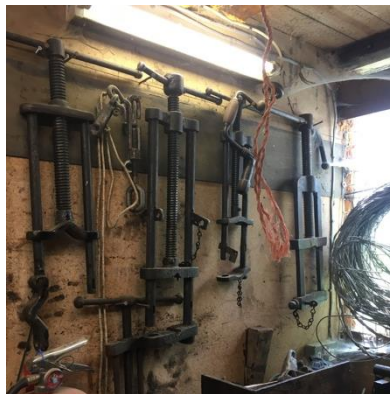
to replace the rig and go through the measuring and making with the rigger. This was a good decision.

I was surprised by how fast it was to measure and make up a new rig. The first step was to stand the mast upright to see if it holds right. After checking this, we stripped off all the rigging, labelling each individual wire to its exact position. Then we took the rigging back to the shop and one by one, measured the old and started making the new. To measure, it was a case of simply fixing one end of the rigging to the shop, stretching the wire across and hammering it into the floor by the bottle screw, with the new bottle screws hammered in with the same spike. Then we laid the new wire out and cut it in-line with the new bottle screw. Simple as that. After successfully measuring up a new stay or shroud, it was then a case of using a Swage machine to clamp the bottle screws to the new stainless wire.

This was a huge milestone event of my chapter in *Cresta's* [my boats] life. Since I took down the mast around 14 months ago, the mast is now as good as new. I also made two new diamond spreaders made from White Oak, using my fathers lathe. All fittings painted properly. New VHF antenna. Now with brand new standing rigging.

Before the mast was stood back up, it was only right that I found a coin of the year she was built to stick underneath.

A humble Half-Penny now sat under my mast to help keep luck on my side



Clamps used for wiresplicing

Old mismatched bottle screws from the shrouds

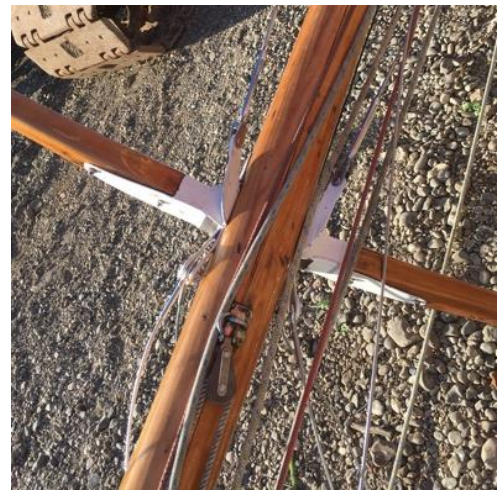
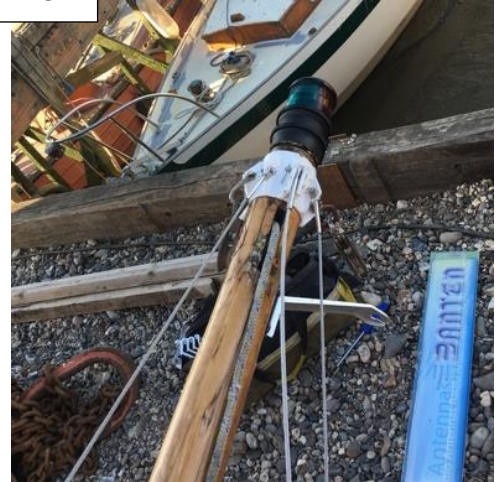


Benji Steward Shirley May Blog Update

Old



New



Before leaving *Blue Mermaid* at the start of the month, we dismantled the wheelbox, which hides all of the steering gear to the rudder. This was a moment I had been looking forward to since before Christmas in Lowestoft, when I had been asked if I felt confident to try my hand at letter carving. This led me to look for some extra-curricular learning at the college. It turned out that one of the commercial employees in the college did have an interest in letter carving. He was also kind enough to teach me the basic angles of attack out of his own time and let me borrow his chisels to practise with.



It did occur to me that this work would be seen by lots and lots of people as soon as the season starts and may well outlive me. Because of this, I thought it wise to go down to the quay and see what I'm up against.



The technique I adopted was to print out the outline of the desired font in the correct size for the task. Conveniently, there was a glue line which made the lettering right about central on the board for me to work with.

I then proceeded by cutting through the middle of the lettering to prevent the wood breaking out further than the letters and used my old chisels and mallet to chip away at the wood.

The work took me 16 hours to complete over 4 days.

