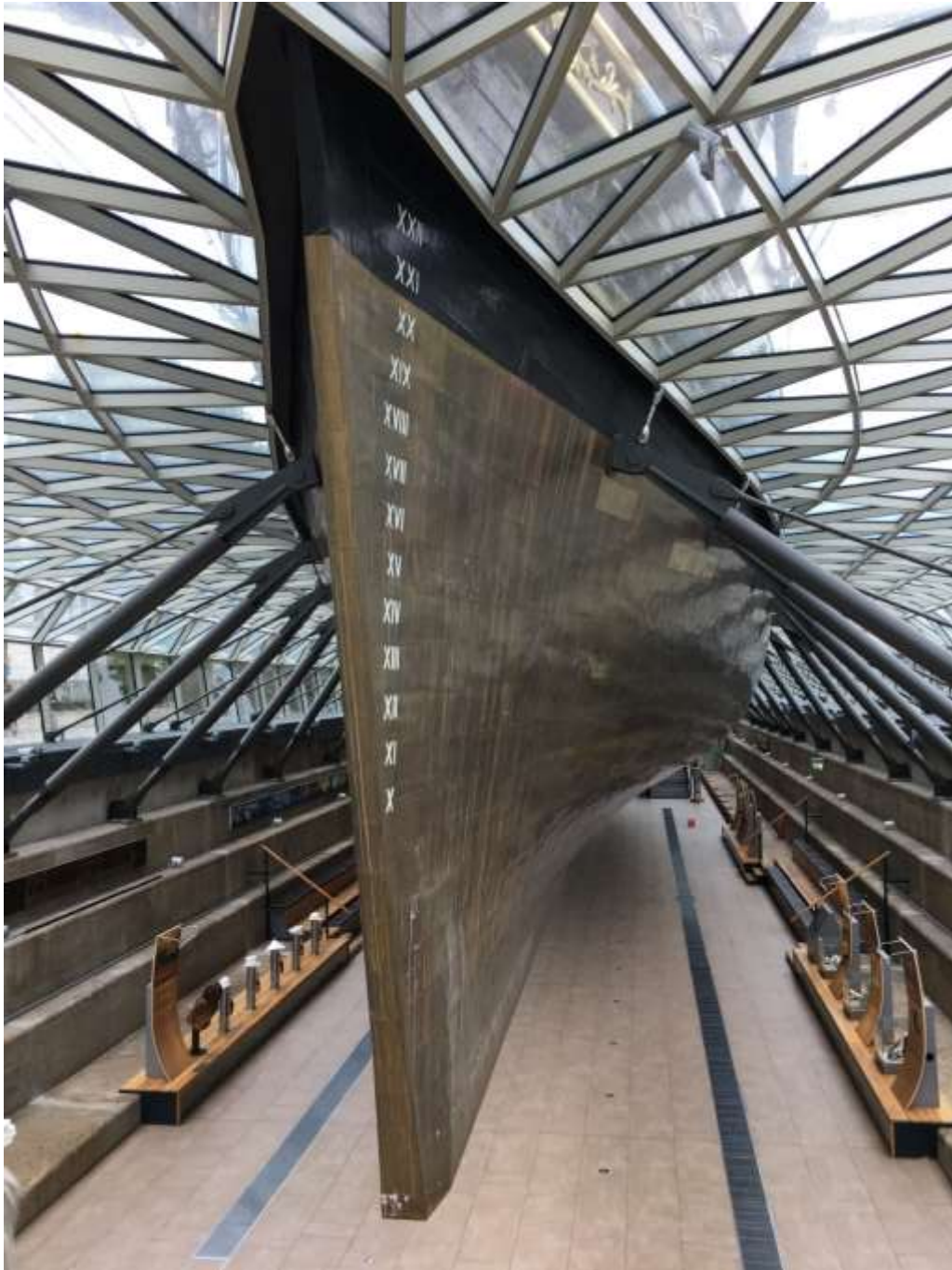


Blog for June and to the start of July 2020

Preparations for the return of the public



For the last few weeks, we have been working as quickly as possible to get as much done in time for the public's arrival. We have been given a set date of the 20th of July as our deadline. Once that time arrives, with social distancing and more people on the ship we will be limited with the work that we can do on the ship.

Work on deck- sanding, sanding and sanding

A large focus for the last few weeks has been the five fife rails. There are three large ones on the main deck and two smaller but more intricate ones on the poop deck. These need to be done as the public will inevitably be walking past them and as it is a tight space, we will not have an opportunity to work on them. This gave me a good chance to improve my sanding skills. I implemented what I have learnt so far about sanding, with the different grades and knowing when to use them. I have also noticed that from improving my skills and the speed at which I work, I am now trusted to work more on my own, for example working on my own fife rail. Being able to keep up with the team for once is a great feeling and makes me feel like I am contributing to the good work that is done on the Cutty Sark rather than just taking part as a trainee.

Although, this does not make the jobs any less fiddly. With the mizzen fife rail having lots of small curves and tight lines, makes for difficult sanding and sore fingers. This was then followed by a quick de-greasing wipe down with white spirit, which inevitably revealed some missed spots of varnish and so back to sanding I went. Once all the varnish was gone and the wood looked nice and fresh all the way round, then we could varnish the wood. I learnt that it is best to use a rag for applying the first coat of varnish. We did this two to three times and then applied the following half-dozen coats with a brush.



I also learnt about the two different ways that wood is sawn to make planks for something such as a deck. There is sawn 'through and through', which gives a maximum number of planks from a log, but variable directions of grain, which can lead to difficulty as the wood dries out. Or there is 'quarter sawn' which gives the best quality and more stable grain but is comparatively wasteful.

Moving aft.

The stern of the ship became the new priority for us, it is an area that is confined and often gets the most attention from tourists. Once the ship is open to the public, we will likely not have a chance to do any work there. The steering wheel is a favourite for photos and apparently even the occasional wedding, so it was clear that they had to be brought into shape as soon as possible.

We started with the wheel and the 'breadbox' casing, an area that had not been touched since the restoration some years ago. However, with uncertain weather that week we carefully removed the wheel and placed it down below on the tween deck. There we could sand it come rain or shine. What started as quite a pleasant job of sanding the wheel, quickly became a slow grind to scratch and sand every tiny detail of the wheel. But looking at our hard work afterwards was truly rewarding. I also learnt about how the detailed parts of the wheel were made, by a lathe which works by spinning the wood so fast that it can be easily shaped and moulded to the desired design.



When the weather was good, we focused on the breadbox still on the poop deck. This involved taking it apart, which again had not been done since the conservation, and meant that we could much more easily access and work on the different parts. These parts being the two detached lids, the upper and then lower main body and base. We sanded, de-greased and only the other day got round to varnishing the first coat. While sanding I was told how to spot the difference between bleached wood and wood that has some stuck varnish on it. Again, we oiled with rags to push the varnish into the wood. With the hot weather the wood drank up the varnish so quickly that within an hour or two a second coat was ready to be applied.



Up the mast

I also finally had the opportunity to go up the mast for the first time with T.S Rigging. After an introduction to the gear and a safety talk, I went up the mast with the riggers who took me all the way to the top of the foremast. The view is breath-taking and not only because you get away from the hot London air below but 150 or so feet up you can see for some distance. I then spent the next three days with the riggers learning what they do and how they do it. This went from tarring shrouds and the main topmast stay (being lowered while on the bosons chair was an experience in itself) to oiling the wood on the foretop.

As one of the riggers said it's one thing to go up there and another to do the job while you're up there. Certainly it was difficult doing certain tasks such as trying to carefully pour tar from a bottle on to my rag without letting a single drop go, and not to mention that your body is almost tensing the whole time your up there which can be for a few hours at a time, but either from the adrenaline or the fear you just keep going (probably both).

Working with T.S helped improve my knowledge of how the rig on the Cutty Sark works, what lines led to where and what their role was. However, a light waggle often was enough to find out which rope goes where and what it does. Although, I still have a lot to learn I am keen to get back up there and do what I can. It was a fantastic experience that I hope to do more of.

