

SHTP December Blog – Hannah Fraser

After finishing in the workshop I moved on to caulking and pitching, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I was shown the different types of caulking irons and their uses, and the traditional materials used for caulking, such as oakum. I practised the caulking method of planks being fitted together, then putting oakum between the seams and sealing with a putty, such as red lead.



The various caulking tools that are used in traditional boat building and what I used while at International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC).



Caulking on the practise wall, where I was caulking oakum into the deck seams.

I also had the opportunity to do the traditional method of pitching. The pitch was made from coal and resin that had been heated on a constant flame to ensure it stays in liquid form. Once the pitch was at boiling point I poured it into the deck beams. The pitch starts to harden as soon as it is poured. And then using a small rounded tool, I used it across the seam to even out the pitch and achieve a smooth finish.



The traditional pitching method being demonstrated.



I then went back to the practise wall where I added oakum into the deck seams using the caulking mallet. I then taped around the seam areas and used mastic to fill the seams.

Practising using the mastic to fill the deck seams.

The practise piece shows how by simply taking the time to tape the seams before filling achieves a better finish.

I then moved on to making a decking piece. I was shown the way in which different planks are fixed down, such as the king plank being the piece in the middle and the main planks that surround it. I made a decking piece that was fitted to a triangular template.

I used the band saw to cut down the angles of the planks and the block plane to plane down the edges of each plank. I enjoyed the method of making the decking beams and felt my confidence was growing with woodwork. Each step I completed was rewarding as I felt a sense of achievement, compared to a few weeks ago when I started joinery.



The decking piece after I had cut the planks down to size. I then went on to make another two pieces to fill the gaps and glued down each piece. Finally I filled the seams with mastic.



The finished decking piece

Overall I feel that my time at IBTC has been such a big learning curve for me. Completing different sections of the course like joinery that I really struggled with to then caulking and pitching deck seams which I felt came much more natural to me, I learnt a range of skills that I would never have been able to achieve without completing the course at IBTC.

From someone who had not even picked up a hammer to then feeling confident using power tools and machinery really brought me a lot of confidence and skills which I am looking forward to bringing to the Scottish Fisheries Museum. I have enjoyed learning about the more traditional boat building skills and it has opened me up to want to further these skills.