

Hannah Hurford - February Update

It seems like a long time ago I wrote my last update. I stayed with the shipwrights for February. A lot of the projects at the moment are *Warrior* based because she's new to the collection and is a priority. However, this month has actually kept me away from *Warrior*! For the last few weeks I have been helping demolish an old exhibition and reinstating walls for a new one that is coming soon. Absolutely nothing to do with historic vessels, but incredibly useful in learning practical skills and how to work quickly!

There was a piece of planking at the bottom of a companionway on *Warrior* that needed to be replaced as it was damaged from years of wear and tear. So I assisted one of the shipwrights with planning how to tackle that. After being sidetracked into the demolition work we finally got back to it. The planking is incredibly thick on *Warrior* and as it was several decks down and in the centre of the ship it seemed unnecessary to remove the whole plank. Instead we decided to go with a graving piece. Because the planks are so thick the idea was to remove the damaged area and a bit under for support. Then it was a case of removing the wood with a chisel, glue the graving piece on and screw in to increase pressure while the glue sets, plane off so that the graving piece was flush with its surrounding (uneven!) planks, remove the screws and replace the holes with wooden plugs and finish off with caulking with oakum and pitch around the graving piece. Caulking was my favourite part. There's something almost sentimental about smelling oakum on your hands and hammering it in using traditional tools.

This month I also visited the submarine museum in Gosport. We were there to take out some ceiling to floor windows to allow for a new exhibit. I got to look around two of the submarines they have – the HMS *Alliance* and HMS *Holland I*. The latter is particularly interesting with regards to the conservation methods that were used to preserve her fabric. In the 1980's she was identified and brought up from the sea bed, she was cleaned and preserved with anti-corrosion chemicals and put on open-air display. However, the corrosion was so severe that in 1995 she underwent new scientific conservation methods and is now housed in a de-humidified gallery. All very interesting.

I was also lucky enough to see parts of HMS *Victory*'s original cradles being cut out and craned up. A part of her new conservation plan is to modernise her support system in the dry dock. The new system is regulated electronically and alert you of any dramatic movement. The old cradles have supported *Victory* since the 1920's when she was brought out of the water and are therefore a part of her history. People associate *Victory* with Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, but there is barely anything left from that period. We could see her as an object so monumental to British Naval History that thousands of people have taken care of her for over a century – should be perhaps celebrate that as well? This question came to mind as I wandered in the dry dock itself, looking at her magnificent hull from below. The concrete of the dry dock is from the early twentieth century put in by unknown dockyard workers and this month I have seen parts of being taken up in a crane to be transported and documented - we are making our mark on the *Victory*'s history. And that is a nice thought.

We got to visit Chatham Historic Dockyard and meet Tom Cunliffe as part of our first SHTP2 Masterclass! He's an incredibly knowledgeable person, with plenty of good stories to tell. His first class was on Traditional Rigs and second on Celestial Navigation. We got to have a look at some of the NMM's model ships as examples of rigs. The collection is vast and I must admit, I never really thought about the history of ships models themselves, but they are fascinating objects and

practiacally useful too! We also got a tour around the dockyard which included the internationally renowned Ropery. HMS *Victory's* keel was laid down in 1756 in Chatham so it was good to see where it had all begun for her. I would recommend going to historic dockyards, not only are the vessels incredibly interesting, but the buildings are beautiful too and all have a story to tell. The Ropery, for example dates back to the 18th century, although rope has been made at Chatham since 1618. There are now 5 people working there and you can see the vast amounts of rope they make. As the building is over 1,100 feet long and there are bicycles to help the rope makers get from one end to the other.

All varied work, and on Monday I get to start work with the riggers! A whole new chapter.