

On Monday morning, the 18th of February, I rushed out the front door, past the communal Wivenhoe chickens, into my little van. It was my first day of work at the Pioneer Sailing Trust. I was nervous and excited to start this new chapter of my Shipshape career. After Tom Cunliffe's masterclass, the yearning to go sailing had intensified. I was eager to feel the wind on my face again!

But first, winter maintenance!

I had visited the yard before on a weekend, so I knew that Pioneer lay under a cover and wasn't ready to go sailing yet. The season would only start in May so we had quite some time to get her into shipshape. I was given a tour by Felicity, Operations Manager, of the boat and the yard and was introduced to everyone. Mick and Caroline are the two shipwrights who are in charge of gig building and boat restoration projects in the yard. Josh and Tariq sail Pioneer and Priscilla during the season and work on them and other projects during winter. There are three apprentices: Tom, Frazer and Madi, who are following a 4-year boatbuilding apprenticeship. In the office, there is Nina and Tina, who help Felicity with the administration and marketing.

In my first week, I worked both in the yard on Hyacinth (a Smack owned by Rupert, chairman of the Pioneer Sailing Trust) and outside on Pioneer. I shaped and installed the knees on the aft deck of Hyacinth, and replaced parts of a thwart where rot had eaten into the wood. To install the knees I had to clean up the old bronze bolts, nuts and washers, to reuse. They had become very green and corroded. I also made a strangely shaped block to sit on top of the new port side cavil rail, out of a thick piece of old oak. It was great to do these little woodworking projects on my own and it made me feel proud that I could actually pull it off! It was also good because different disciplines came together for the first time;



- woodworking - shaping pieces of wood from rough sawn timbers. Using machinery: big and small band saw, planer thicknesser, bobbin sander, drill press. Using hand tools: plane, spokeshave, chisels, etc.
- metal working - cleaning up bronze bolts. Using drill with metal brush and sandpaper. They shone as new!
- painting - priming knees before installing.
- glueing - epoxy-ing in new wood pieces and mastic-ing knees when installing.
- drilling - drilling holes in new knees and reusing holes where the old knee was fitted, so making sure they line up (but not being able to drill from the side of the old hole). Using a long, 10mm drill bit. Counter bore holes to fit big nut with spade bit. Learned a technique to keep the spade bit central using a sacrificial softwood bung.

It was all very exciting and everything was happening for real!



And then there was also painting Pioneer's topsides on a scaffolding tower. This was my first introduction to the Essex mud and also to working with the tides! We had to move the scaffolding around the boat and the easiest way was to do this by walking them around while the tide was out. But this meant definite mud! On my first day of painting, I became so muddy (luckily I had my wellies). Before the first coat, we sanded with orbital sanders and then used a thinned down version of the paint. The second coat, we sanded by hand and used a less thinned down version of paint. Same for the third coat with even less thinner. The fourth coat, we also sanded by hand and then put the topcoat of paint on without any thinners. We painted everything with brushes.



On Friday after work, I went to visit Jenna in Maldon. We went to a fundraiser for a local steam tug at the town hall with Richard, who had invited me to come along. It was a great evening and we shared 9th place with the other Maldon-based sailing barge trust. The next day, we walked along the river to Jenna's new work place. She showed me around SeaChange and TS rigging and I saw Blue Mermaid, the new barge that Richard is building. I love the way the barges stow their sails and would very much like to go sailing on one this coming season.



In my second week, I did more painting on Pioneer's topsides. I also worked together with Madi to create runners for Charles, tender to Pioneer. The runners are the rails on the bottom of the boat, to prevent chafe. The old runners had to be replaced so Caroline had given us the task to create new ones while she was on holiday. We had been given a long piece of iroko that was high enough to saw out a curved rail. We used the old ones to give us the rough shape and then a batten to fair out the line. Once we had our shape, we cut the iroko to approximate length first with a circular saw. We then had to saw the curved lines on the big bandsaw, because we wanted both runners to have the same curve (we had enough thickness to get two runners out of one piece of wood). When we finally had the two runners, we rounded the tops with a small router and sanded them.



We also made the two feet that the runners rest on, as well as the three little blocks that support it in the middle. To fit the new runners, we wanted to reuse the existing holes as much as possible. We still had to fill quite a few old holes, so we learned how to cut splines to fill the holes. We also had to make little wooden beddings for on the inside of the hull to prevent leaks. All in all, it was quite the process to fit them, bend them around, glue them, drill them, fasten them, i.e. to think out all the steps you are going to take, but

it was a great learning experience.

In the meantime, Madi and I also made fiddly bits and pieces for Priscilla, namely a soap shelf behind the sink and a toilet roll holder. Because they are small pieces and because they had to be fitted in awkward and difficult-to-get-to places, it is a challenge to do a neat and tidy job. However, we managed by working together well and having fun while doing.

That week we also had a Youth Mental Health First Aid course. We talked about the significance of mental health and were made aware that it is the largest medical issue in the UK at the moment. We went into depression, anxiety, psychosis, self-harm, suicide and eating disorders. At the end, we discussed situations that might occur on board and ways in which we could deal with them. It was a very helpful course. It also made me sad to think that children experience so much suffering. Yet, this course gave me more insight in how to help them so that is a good thing.

In week three, Madi and I fitted the runners on Charles. I made brass strips to protect the breast hook from rubbing away. That was a very fun job and something I had never done before. Shaping the brass was easy using a belt sander, though the metal became very hot, of course. In honour of Shrove Tuesday, we made pancakes on a camping stove during lunch time. Caroline taught me to eat them with lemon and fine golden caster sugar, which was delicious! The rest of the week I painted Charles topcoats and woodwork, and also inside.



Because we couldn't get a consensus about the inside colour, Josh let me decide. I chose buff... a sort of custard yellow, very traditional and beautiful. It complimented the paint that was on there perfectly! Apparently, this was a very controversial topic at Harker's Yard as there has been a constant war between the pro-buffs and the anti-buffs. Well, there was nothing more to say about it because it was going to go on, whether you liked it or not! Go buff or go home. But we did both, because it was Friday. We went buff and then had a pint at the pub and went home.