

## January 2019 – Sean Chilton

The main focus of this month has been to find my feet within the Scottish Fisheries Museum (SFM), and to work on my time management skills so that I can balance the wonderful new opportunities the museum has to offer with study and coursework time for the historic vessel conservation course. It has been a great month, with lots of exciting things to talk about!

### Scottish Fisheries Museum – Curatorial

It has been a great start here in Anstruther. First, I was given a tour of the museum by the curator, Linda Fitzpatrick. The museum has a wonderful and diverse collection of objects relating to Scotland's fishing history, and it's clear when you look at the displays that the staff here are passionate about the museum, with a keen eye on presentation. Everything is organised to perfection – even in the extensive storage facilities.

I've been lucky to experience the range of tasks carried out by the curatorial staff, ranging from cataloguing and accession work with the incoming items, to formulating a damage survey of one of the vessels in the museum's fleet. Each day of the week has a different focus. For example, Wednesdays will look at accession tasks and social media engagement, and Fridays are spent focusing on maintaining the museum's collection and personal research time. This routine is not set in stone, as the role requires me to adapt and assist where I can with different projects.

My first task was to create a report for the museum's new interactive app. This was valuable for me to do as a new member of the team, as I would essentially be experiencing the app from a visitor's point of view. It also gave me an opportunity to learn about a lot of the source material.

Every Wednesday morning, I am working with Mel Oakley and Thomas Gourlay to assist with accession work. A very important delicate task, and a taster of the 'behind the scenes' work that leads to this museum being so well organised. It seems daunting at first; however, being allowed to be a part of the process is an eye-opener.

I have also been entrusted with the task of managing the social media outreach, through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Online engagement is important to museums as it gives us the opportunity to engage with past or future visitors who will appreciate an active online presence.

I have been working closely with Mel through the collections project to take the reins for creating a damage survey of *Jubilee* – one of the vessels in the Scottish Fisheries Museum's fleet. The boat has experienced quite a lot of rot, damage and woodworm, so a survey will help me in the future where I will be tackling these issues and cleaning her up.

If I were to pick a favourite task, it would definitely be my involvement with *Silver Spray*, another member of the fleet. She is an important vessel for demonstrating the engineering feats reached within the fishing industry, showcasing the art of balancing lightness and maneuverability with strength and power. I am lucky to be doing some research on her, with the aim of having a condition survey report written up about her

for potential future loan opportunities. I have chosen her to be the vessel I work closely with to assist in my learning approach to the historic vessel conservation course.

### **Scottish Fisheries Museum – Boatyard**

The boatyard facilities at SFM are fantastic, with the only notable issue being workspace. There is a new workspace currently under development which will be excellent. I feel lucky to have spent some time at the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC) in Lowestoft, as I feel that it has prepared me for a lot of the work I will be undertaking here. That said, Leonardo Bortolami – my supervisor in the boatyard – is a fantastic fountain of knowledge, and most of all, patient. I was worried about my lack of shipwright experience at first; however, I feel comfortable Leo will be pushing me in the right direction. For the first couple of months, I will be in the boatyard Mondays and Thursdays, allowing me time to get involved with many projects, such as the Zulu *Research*, the historically mysterious *Athene*, and the conservation of *Shirley II*. Sadly, *Reaper* is not here as she is in Rosyth undertaking some important work. I will get the chance to visit her later, and to be a part of her return in the summer.

This month, I have been assisting with building a cradle to display *Shirley II* in the museum, with sympathy to her deteriorated structure. The cradle itself is innovative, and has given me the chance to apply some IBTC skills. I have also assisted with cleaning out the interior of *Shirley*, and which still has a while to go before she will be able to be displayed properly. This work has been done in the new Empire (previously the Empire Cinema) building.

We have been working on *Athene* within the boatyard with the hope of making her suitable and attractive to sell. This will clear space in the workshop for other, more 'important' projects. The information we have on her history is not extensive. Still, I have found it great working on her as a learning experience, observing inlay reparations and assisting Leo with some red oxide work on her interior before it can be painted.

### **Historic vessels conservation course**

My supervisors here have been great in allowing me the time to do the coursework and research for the course. And even when I'm doing other things around the museum, the experiences and information I am learning will be valuable for my work on the course. For example, I have completed a Statement of Significance for *Silver Spray*, which fortunately ties in with unit one. I have received my feedback from Victoria and Linda, and am currently in the process of finalising this. Ultimately, I feel very fortunate to be in an environment where I can work and learn simultaneously, and apply my knowledge to my coursework.

### **Conclusion**

I am extremely happy with my first month here. I received a very warm welcome into the team, and feel that this is an area where I can grow. At the moment, I feel like a sponge, soaking up as much as I can. The idea is that in the next few months I will become more and more independent in my work.