

## **Teymour**

### **First six weeks in Lowestoft Blog**

From the first year trainees – and a few others I've met since being accepted onto SHTP as a trainee – we were told a few horror stories about Lowestoft; a once-thriving fishing town with strong maritime and sailing roots, now a desolate dark and grey place with nothing to do but go to the pub and stay indoors, biding time until the spring, when the weather becomes acceptable for outdoors activity.

So, naturally, we were looking forward to our time at the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC). However, I think a few of us were quite sceptical at what living in Lowestoft was going to be like.

Day one, we started in the classroom with Rob, one of the instructors, learning the first and most important thing when joining a practical course: health and safety, and safe working practices. Some of us had already worked in workshops and boatyards before, and so a lot of it was familiar. But with information and instruction considering health and safety, you can never hear it enough. Different people and places always have good tips and things to keep in mind when working in environments such as boatyards and workshops.

Over the next few days we started to learn about timber technology, and boatbuilding terminology and technology. This was taught by Mike, who also runs the joinery course at the college. For this part of the week we were joined by the current full-time students who were doing their three months in joinery. They were a very intense few days crammed full of amazing information and knowledge, such as techniques to fell trees, how to cut and season them, the moisture content of wood, and ideal levels for painting, gluing and working with it. We went through all the different terms used in boatbuilding, most of which were new to us Shipshape lot. Also there are loads of bits within boats that are not seen after the vessel is built. We went through a few techniques for constructing wooden boats, such as making jigs etc to help support everything during construction. After that week, I think it is safe to say we all had a completely different understanding of wood and how to work with it. Next, we spent a few days learning about rope, doing lots of splicing and knot work, which was great fun.

Then it was our time to join the joinery workshop, learning how to work with wood intimately. Joinery was something I had no idea about at first, and was wondering why we were learning it; it didn't seem relevant to our course in my opinion. We started off with Mike, our instructor, first teaching us about our planes, taking them apart, cleaning them and sharpening the irons. To sharpen said irons, first you put an edge on it at 25 degrees using a bench grinder, then hone the edge on an oilstone at 30 degrees. This took a lot of practise to get right and to be able to put a nice edge on our planes and chisels. But the feeling of having a sharp plane blade is like no other.

The first thing we made were bench hooks, scarf joints, then went onto mallets, a joiners square, and then I did some dove tails. For most exercises we started off using pine wood to practise, then went onto mahogany. Pine is a soft wood with grain that's quite spread out, which means that when you're chiselling, chunks can chip off if you apply too much

pressure. So, being greedy and trying to take too much off with pine can often result in a very messy job. Therefore, if you want to attempt a perfect mortise and tenon joint with pine, it's very hard because it's so easy to take too much off. Although, on the flip side, the wood is so soft that if you push the pieces together hard enough the pine will squeeze through the gap and it will fit.

Making the mallet was one of my favourite parts of joinery. To make the mallet we were working with beech, a very hard wood. The grain is very close together and has a sort of beige/ pale cream colour to it. Working with beech was quite hard, and first we made the handle, then the head. The handle was the easy bit, a tapered stick for the most part. The mallet however was a little beastly.

The first part of any project in joinery was making a face and edge to the wood we were working with. Making the face is the process of planing one side completely flat and fair. Then using a set square you make an edge to the piece of wood, making sure that it is consistently 90 degrees. From there you use the set square to make all the sides of the block of wood square. That was the easy part. The next step was to make the hole for the handle. We got centre points by putting an X on the top and the bottom.

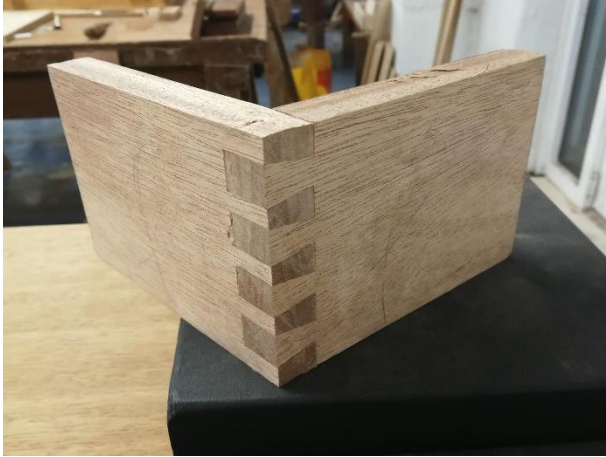
We then marked out dimensions of the handle on to the top, chiselled into the marked area, only about a mil or so, then used a drill with a big bit to make two relief holes within the marked area. That was all the preparation for the main event; chiselling out the marked area and creating the hole for the handle to fit into.



Once that was done, it was just shaping out the head of the mallet. We used a design that all students at IBTC use.

Once we had finished each practical we gave them a few coats of linseed oil to help preserve them, or boiled linseed for a varnish-like finish.

In the last few days of joinery we had time to learn whatever interested us, or to make anything we wanted to practise the skills we learned. I wanted to try dovetails, so I made a normal dovetail in one day,



Then during our last half day in joinery, I made a lapped dovetail, which definitely wasn't as good as the first, mostly due to me rushing it.



All great things do come to an end. Joinery was over, and our first six weeks at IBTC was also coming to a close.

But first we had a few more exciting things to learn.

To start our second-to-last week, we were with the most-knowledgeable Maynard to learn about caulking and, in general, working on hull seams. We started with pitch, firstly heating it, which takes a while, so we ripped out the old pitch and caulking and re-caulked the seams. When the pitch was ready, we all had practise at pouring it into the makeshift softwood seams, which was a lot trickier than I had thought it would be, especially to make a neat job of it. Maynard did laugh at us trying to do it neatly. He insisted that it's not possible, especially without years of practise. He was right, of course.

After learning about pitch, we started to do more caulking and trying out different ways to cover a deck or hull seam. Lead putty was first. A mix of lead powder, chalk powder and linseed oil is used to make a putty the consistency of playdough, maybe slightly harder. This is then applied into the seams using a putty knife. The next method we learned was the use of mastic, such as Sikaflex.

After the caulking we were split up, and some of us did wire splicing and some a three-day painting and varnishing course.

Alas, our first six weeks were up. We had a great Christmas party at IBTC and a farewell to the lovely Misha and Hannah, two of the SHTP2 trainees who, after Christmas, start on their placements in Portsmouth and Fife in Scotland respectively.