

February blog post - Matt Gregory

Twelve weeks at the International Boatbuilding Training College absolutely flew by, and I hope this month won't be the last I see of some amazing people I met at the college.

Before leaving, we had the opportunity to learn welding. We practised with sticks (arc) and wire (MIG) welders. By the end of the day I felt pretty confident with the MIG welder, not so much with the stick.



Dave taught us about plumbing systems on boats and went over some types of seacocks and how to clear a blocked heads.

Driving away from Oulton Broad waiting for the road bridge to close.

After packing up and leaving our accommodation, and a quick cup of tea on board *Excelsior*, I drove back to my parents in the Midlands and spent a couple of days starting to fit the van out as a camper. A lot of stuff I'd learnt at the IBTC came in handy.



Completely stripped out and making some patterns out of cardboard to fit insulation RHS. I marked out some 'stations' on the floor and took some measurements off those to help with planning the layout.

After two days work: Liquid petroleum gas removed, engine serviced, half of cage removed, some insulation finished, folding bed built. The rug just happened to fit perfectly and was only £12 Bonza!

Soon it was time to start my placement on the South Coast. I loaded the bare essentials (including two crates of books) and set off. It's a strange feeling, upending your life so many times in the space of four months. By now I had started to get used to it, but there is always the excitement of the unknown and the unfamiliar.



I soon learned that Hamble is some kind of boating Mecca; there are more than 5,000 boats on the river. The pubs are nice, the people friendly, and you have the choice of Southampton or Portsmouth pretty close by if the traffic allows. Its official title is Hamble-le-rice, which is French for Hamble the Rice. Apparently the Kray twins used to have a cottage here. This is the second time I saw *Jolie Brise*; the first was when we sailed by her on the *Orwell* on *SB Centaur*.

I feel very lucky to have Adam as a mentor during refit. He is an excellent shipwright - a very practical man, and instils a sense of vigour and zeal into the endeavour. Both he and Toby have made me feel part of the team and right at home.

On my first day working in the yard, I removed an edging plank on the coach roof to try and find the source of a leak that was rotting its way into the aft cabin. The coach roof was added when the boat was in Palma some 30 years ago and apparently has always been a bit pants.

I started by digging out the plugs after finding they were too shallow to be pulled out by driving a self-tapping screw into them. Next, removing the bronze screws, most of which the heads snapped off or had to be drilled out. Some had to be cut through with the oscillator as we wedged the plank out, which turned out to have been stepped into the members behind it. The rot was mostly in the coaming and the beam, and seemed to stop after a couple of inches. I cut a hole for a graving piece into the coaming and most of the beam rot could be dug out using your finger until you found some good wood underneath, which we then treated with wood sealer as a temporary fix.



We had the engine craned back into place and bolted it down. One of the coach bolts wouldn't screw down as the wood below it was rotten, so we doweled the hole with some iroko and epoxy to drill a new screw hole later.



Next, I tried for half a day to remove a seized anchor chain roller on the stem head. The thing was precision engineered to 1/1000th of an inch and must have got some grit or some salt build-up in it as it was solid as a rock. I even tried turning the sheave over with some synthetic line and the windlass, but I don't think there was enough leverage.

Defeated, I gave it a good soaking with some WD40 and left it to think about how stubborn it was being and to reconsider its life choices, while I raked out some problem hull seams and chalked and red leaded them back up. A good tip Adam gave me was to burn off the wispy bits of oakum with a butane torch before leading. But it did feel a bit nerve-wracking holding a naked flame to a 106-year-old wooden boat.



Jolie Brise has a cast iron keel, acting as external ballast. I gave this a going-over with an electric wire brush. There was some bad pitting where the water had got behind the paint. The whole thing was then cleaned off and treated with two coats of Primocon.

For two days we had glorious record-breaking weather, which we took advantage of to do some varnishing of the spars, while Adam painted the topsides and cove stripe.

The boat has speakers both on deck and down below, and there is a selection of dodgy CDs – which is quite useful while working that doesn't require a lot of mental energy.



The next day the weather took a turn for the worse; so I holed up in the forward cabin, stringing blocks up and varnishing them. Fun fact: the bit of the block that the fall reeves through is called 'the arse'!