

Sails and Tales

29 September 2023, issue 26



The newsletter for volunteers and Friends of

Welcome to issue 26 of Sails and Tales

As another busy summer draws to a close we've got lots of stories to share in this issue about all aspects of the Blyth Tall Ship project.

I am well on the road to recovery after my knee replacement. It's taking a bit longer than the other knee but (as my friends take delight in reminding me) I was eight years younger when I had the first knee done!

Thank you for all your thoughts and get well messages. They are very much appreciated. Thank you also to people who've ferried me here, there and everywhere as I'm not driving yet.

Sue Hall
Trustee and chair of Friends of Blyth Tall Ship



Sending our love to Des

Volunteers and friends of Blyth Tall Ship are sending their love to Des O'Meara who has been in hospital. Des chaired Friends of Blyth Tall Ship and he co-leads the *Learn the Ropes* shanty groups with Astrid Adams.

Des could regularly be found at the wheel of the *Williams II* and was one of the crew which brought vessel (then the *Haabet*) over from Denmark.

He also sings with BTS Shanty Singers, leads the folk night on the LV50 and of course is heavily involved with the Old Gaffers Association. We're sending our love to Des and Anthea.



If you have any stories or news to share please send it, with a photo if you have one, to claire.sailsandtales@yahoo.com

Artist captures BTS in one image

BTS chief executive Clive Gray is delighted with an image which encapsulates all aspects of the Blyth Tall Ship project.

Clive said: “Sometimes it’s difficult to explain all that Blyth Tall Ship does with its volunteers, staff and the community.

“After a volunteer suggestion, we asked Sarah Farooqi, a prominent Northumbrian artist, to visit us and then develop a piece of her unique, unusual and inspiring art to encapsulate all that we are doing at the moment.

“As you can see it’s incredibly busy but somehow captures it all in one clever and engaging piece.

“We are getting a large version of the image for the 79 Bridge Street (the old harbour commissioner’s building) and exploring licensing the image for cards and T-shirts that we can sell to help support the BTS project.

“Thank you for your interpretation Sarah. We are delighted with it.”

You can find out more about the artist at <https://www.sarahfarooqi.co.uk/>



Energy Central Learning Hub taking shape

Energy Central Learning Hub, the new building near the BTS workshop, is taking shape.

The learning hub will provide a range of state of the art industrial training, education and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) related skills facilities.

The £70m hub is funded by Northumberland County Council, HM government's towns fund and the North of Tyne Combined Authority

The top floor will be a visitor centre to inform and educate local people and visitors about the revolution in green technologies in and around Blyth.



Stunning night time shot of our beautiful ship

A big thank you to Mark Treacher for this stunning shot of the *Williams II* at night.

It's not a view most of us see, which makes it an even more interesting image.

Thanks Mark!

Stevedores on the *Williams II*

Susan Gebbels, who co-skipped and provided training on this trip, writes...

Ten stevedores from the ports of Bristol and Boston spent a week on board the *Williams II* recently. The young men are undertaking a three year apprenticeship in the art of being a modern dock worker. Their course trains them to become skilled in loading and unloading

They had a lesson on how to secure a line to a pin, coil a rope and how to sweat a line before moving on to a halyard and sheet identifying session. The art of mooring lines came next and how to tie six basic knots.



ships using a range of equipment from fork lifts to cranes. As part of their daily work the stevedores have to communicate with the merchant sailors who work on the commercial vessels, often with very little understanding of what hardships and difficulties those sailors have experienced during their time at sea.

Port Training Services (PTS) decided to bridge this gap by taking the young men away from their home ports for a week to sail on the *Williams II*. For five days the apprentices lived, worked and slept on the ship.

The week started with an introduction to the *Williams II* and her emergency equipment. The apprentices learned what to do in the event of a fire, flood and a man overboard situation. They climbed the ratlines and went out into the net (and removed the ever present fish lines).

Living on board means participating in every aspect of the running of the ship, we were very fortunate to have Judith on board to prepare three meals a day, but the young men had to wash up and put everything away in the galley. Sleeping arrangements were the thing that most of the visitors were most concerned about, but they were surprised at how comfortable the berths were and how well they slept on the first night.

On day two we left the safety of the pontoon and travelled up the river to the turning circle so the stevedores could see a different port at work before heading out to sea towards the wind turbines. The conditions were lumpy after a strong northerly wind and all bar one of the new crew were sea sick so we sailed with just the mizzen and staysail. *Cont/d...*

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This gave us an opportunity to hoist the mainsail and run down to the Tyne where we anchored off South Shields beach for lunch.



The young men followed The *Williams II* Competent Crew Course while on board and one of the skills they had to master is how to row the ship's tender. As only a few of the stevedores had rowed before it took some time for everyone to complete a circuit of the ship. The people who weren't rowing entertained themselves by jumping off the ship and having a swim. We berthed in North Shields Fish Quay for the night which provided a good exercise in line management on a tidal wall. The lads were also interested to see the vessels that come and go on the Tyne.

On Thursday, before we sailed back to Blyth, the lads had a lesson on the art of navigation and weather and learnt about the use of flares. The westerly wind was perfect for a fantastic trip north under full sail. The boat romped

along; easily making six knots (in the right direction!). We were all having such a great time that we actually sailed up to Newbiggin before tacking and returning to our berth. All the stevedores helmed the boat under sail and engine and agreed that it was much easier under sail. Friday arrived with heavy rain which made packing and cleaning slightly trickier.



Colin Bassam from PTS came back to the boat and interviewed the stevedores about their experience. Most agreed they had had a much better time than they anticipated beforehand, they had enjoyed the whole experience and perhaps, most importantly, they gained a first-hand experience of what it is like to go sea and an appreciation and insight into the working lives of merchant seamen.

A big thank you those on board; Mark Treacher as skipper, Judith Brown who did the cooking and deckhand Becky Walker.

Zulu planks a labour of love



After seeing the skeleton of the Zulu for almost two years it's wonderful to see the vessel getting her planks on.

Jonny Bell from the BTS workshop said: " Each plank has to be cut and steam-shaped. We start off with a template. It can be confusing because a curve which looks like it's pointing upwards when it's on the vessel is actually pointing downwards when it's being cut."

Martin Haigh added: "Below left we can see the port side foreword plank #4 resting in place after having a 45 minute 'Turkish Bath'!"



Martin Haigh and Nik Hawthorne from the workshop have been busy getting the planks cut and dried out ready for the Zulu.

The planks are as heavy as they look!

Skipper Liz calls it a day

Liz King, who has been skipper on the *Williams II* for five years, is calling it a day. She writes...



It has been a huge honour to have sailed as skipper of *Williams II* for the past five years.

Over that time, I have sailed with some dedicated volunteer seastaff, met some inspirational people and made many friends for life, on board the boat and ashore. Together the *Williams II*, Cuthbert (the ship's feline mascot) and I have sailed the North Sea, the Irish Sea, the English Channel and we have even dipped our bowsprit into the North Atlantic; a combined distance over the years of around 3,000 nautical miles.

During that time, we have faced and overcome adverse weather and engineering challenges and it has been a privilege to work with the shore-based team as they have worked through freezing winter temperatures to prepare the boat for each sailing season.

Highs, lows and scary bits? Well one of the major high points has to be taking the boat to the Shetlands in June 2023. Having been to the South Shetland Islands in 2020, it was very important to me to visit the Shetlands and close the William Smith circle.

Thank you for your amazing contribution to Blyth Tall Ship Liz!

Lows – we won't dwell too much on them. Having said that, clotted cream oil will be forever deep in my memory!

Scary bits? Some of the worst weather conditions in the past five years have been during our pilgrimages down to Grimsby. I am not sure whether it is worse to bury the bowsprit into oncoming waves, or be chased by an enormous following sea, charging along riding a 100 ton surfboard.

Both voyages brought out the best in the seastaff who battled through sea sickness to remain at their posts.

Anyway, enough of this. It is time for me to hand over the helm of *Williams II* to someone else, hopefully someone who will care for the boat as much as me.



Descendent of Zulu inventor calls in at the workshop



The great great grand daughter of William (Dad) Campbell called in to see the progress on the Zulu.

Denise Campbell's great great granddad invented a type of fishing boat which he named a Zulu.

Denise said: "I had a brilliant visit to the BTS workshop in Blyth to see the new Zulu they are building.

"I felt quite emotional. Jonny, Martin and Nik generously gave us their time and answered our many questions.

I'm looking forward to seeing the boat when it is finished."

Skinny dip skiver!

Skipper Liz was due to join MIND's North East Skinny Dip on Blyth Beach but when her alarm went off at 03.45am and the rain was hammering on her bedroom windows she turned over and went back to sleep! Never mind, she said, at least MIND have received the fee!

Judith Brown, who did brave the dip in the nip, replied to Liz's Facebook post saying: "Never mind Liz, the weather and sunrise were great, no rain by then. The beach saunas this year were a great addition and it was a great morning."



Well done Judith!

Claire's cute kittens

Sails and Tales editor Claire has two new feline additions to her family.

She said: "When we lost our old cat Sid we thought we would like to have two cats and we were delighted when we saw these tabby sisters.

"They weighed half a kilogram each when we got them and they've both tipped 1kg now.



"They have very different personalities. Nancy on the left is a bit of mischief and Eliza on the right is very chilled.

"They're very entertaining."

Shanty singers out and about

Blyth Tall Ship Shanty Singers have been in demand again. They performed shanties and popular Geordie songs at Magic Moments, a club for couples where one of the partners is affected by memory problems. They were also asked to sing at Cramlington House Care Home where many of the residents are affected by dementia. Astrid Adams said: "The people we sang to enjoyed the songs and many of them joined in. It was lovely to see."

The shanty singers also sang at St Mary's Church at a Harvest Festival event.



Dates for your diary

Christmas Craft Day

Following the success of the Christmas Craft Day last year we're holding another one this year. It's an all day event at 79 Bridge Street.

People will be able to make three Christmas items to decorate their homes including a Christmas wreath and a driftwood Christmas tree.

There will be three separate workshops with room for eight people in each so there are 24 spaces altogether; a perfect early Christmas present for a friend or family member!

The £30 charge will also include tea and coffee throughout the day and a light lunch.

Christmas Party

The annual BTS Christmas party will be in the workshop on Saturday 25 November. Entertainment will once again be provided by The Klassix. Tickets will be £20.

Learn the Ropes course in full swing

The *Learn the Ropes* wellbeing courses are now in full swing.

Volunteer co-ordinator Nik Hawthorne said: "We're on week three of the woodworking course and it's great to see people who thought they'd never be able to make anything out of wood master the skill and get to work on their chosen item."



BTS archive team take in Gordon Smith's historic



Many will remember Gordon Smith, a Blyth historian who has amassed a huge collection of archive materials over his life. He has visited us many times but is now poorly as he moves into his 80's and is hanging up his research magnifying glass. He couldn't think of a better place to donate his archives to than our team at 79 Bridge Street as we explore what it means to be Blyth's maritime flagship. We're sure we will put it to good use as we bring the stories contained within to life. The photo shows his daughter Vickie (left) handing over the archive to Jane Stewart. Thank you Gordon, we will do you proud.

A special sailing season, writes BTS CEO Clive Gray...

As we conduct future crew training over the next week and hang up our lifejackets and blue ganseys for 2023, I have been reflecting on the wider implications and impact of what we have done this year. We rightly celebrated the ship getting to the Shetlands back at the end of June, skippered by Liz King, for the big leg. This was a charity ambition given they are the same latitude north as the Southern Shetland Islands discovered by William Smith from Blyth in 1819. Getting there involved a big winter refit by the workshop team and volunteers, including re-coding the vessel for the next five years. It required commercial bookings managed by Cole to pay for it and experienced volunteer crew.

From my perspective sailing the *Williams II* is significantly more than this one moment in time though. It represents the combined care of our community of volunteers for others, the life changing experience that those who would never get the opportunity to sail otherwise, the chance to sustain our charity through commercial sailing where those paying understand the positive social impact they make by sailing with us and the sense of community pride and hope that is created by the ship being in Blyth.

Love comes from so many quarters. From the volunteers who support the engineering (we are looking for another engine specialist to help with the Gardner if you know anyone?) to the gansey knitters who provide blue ganseys (200 hours of knitting!) as uniform for regular crew. From the sea shanty singers who sing on her for open days, to the trained volunteer crew who ensure efficient and safe sailing whether for paying guests or community sails. From marketing and administration by Cole to fill berths through to our three cooks who run the galley and those who regularly take photos that

go viral, make models or paint pictures. The list could go on. Ultimately every time we leave the side is an act of love and an expression of hope for the future of our community and that of BTS.

This season has been marked by some great strides. We had our first all women sailing day, we had our first focused community wellbeing sails including some with significant disabilities

and many with great anxieties. Gansey knitted blankets and hot water bottle covers, deck blankets and nice thermal mugs contributed to paying guest comfort, all knitted or donated by the Friends of Blyth Tall Ship. We had a number of significant private donations from clients who loved what we do. We, for the first time, covered the essential costs of running the vessel through commercial revenue (a massive well done to Cole Kelly!). We had our first corporate team building events and private charter day sail. We are in the process of training 18

new sea staff for next season, who otherwise would never have sailed and are looking for new ships cooks to bolster the team of Sue Hall, Judith Brown and Jane Stewart.

So we have our sails well set for next year. We will be focussing on experiencing heritage sailing around our beautiful east coast, sailing out of Blyth between Whitby and Berwick to consolidate all our learning but also reduce our exposure to massive transport, fuel, repair and restocking costs.

A huge thank you must go to all involved. It is a massive achievement when most historic vessels in the UK are up for sale by their owning companies. There is hope in this year's sailing that we can keep afloat and serving our community through the choppy waters post lockdown.

