



Jonathan Black

I left school in June 1996 and started an NVQ Level 2 in Wood Occupations as I had a passion for carpentry and joinery.

On completion of my Level 2 I decided to remain in training and commenced a Level 3 which I successfully completed in 1999. Whilst working towards my Level 3 I worked for a local Building Contractor and during this time I worked on Churches and rectories. Most of the work carried out was maintenance but in 2003 we started into a complete restoration of a former rectory. Windows were repaired and new floors installed. I was involved in restoring the panelling on sash windows and the reproduction of a glass screen, which was made from over 100 different hand worked pieces. I really enjoyed the restoration process and realised I was very passionate about this area of work.



When I heard about the Heritage Lottery Funded 'Heritage Specialist Apprenticeship Programme in Wood Occupations' in July 2014 and always retaining an interest in restoring old buildings, I decided to apply and was offered a bursary placement consisting of 11 months on site training with an experienced heritage contractor and a 4 week off-the-job training programme, delivered at CITB NI.

The aims of the programme are to equip a group of experienced Carpenters and Joiners with the skills and knowledge to be able to repair, restore and save our built heritage and to pass on these skills to a new generation of Carpenters and Joiners.

We commenced in September 2014 with two weeks practical off-the-job training. The off-the-job training was delivered by Martin Dixon and Alan Creasey, both very experienced heritage carpenters and joiners from the Traditional Building Skills Training Company, a Hereford based organisation. On the first day we were tasked to produce stools. This was to get us working together as a team and to get to know each other. Over the next few days we were instructed in the techniques and skills in green oak post and beam construction.

Post and beam construction dates from medieval time. The test structure was designed to teach us the different beams and posts, their names, their position, how to lay them out, cut and work the joints, shape each piece of the structure and erect the structure safely.

It was strange to me to work from layout lines, than from the face of the timber as that's what I am used to but I enjoyed the challenge of working in a different way. The layout lines are used as the timber was not perfectly straight as in medieval times the oak was hand cut, split, hewn using a hand axe. Each beam was laid level and the joint shoulder lines marked using a plumb bob.

The windows were intersecting lancet design. We hand cut and fitted each piece to match an existing window that we were producing, using the same joints and techniques that made up the original one.

After this training finished I spent the following six weeks on placement with Millar Woodcraft Specialist Joinery Limited, putting the theory in practice.

On the next session of the off-the-job training we learned about breathability, use of lime, insect and rot attack and how to prevent attack, minimum intervention/maximum retention during repairs, how to identify, sharpen, maintain and use hand tools and the effects of using modern materials on existing structures.

At the end of the 12 month training programme I will have gained an NVQ Level 3 in Heritage (Construction) – Wood Occupations. I want to use my experience gained as a stepping stone into furthering my education on heritage skills, maybe progressing onto becoming an NVQ assessor or teaching my knowledge and skills to the next generation of Carpenters and Joiners.