

National Waterways Museum BOAT MAINTENANCE TEAM

The Boat Maintenance team assists the Boat Maintenance Officer in the general maintenance and restoration of the historic fleet at Ellesmere Port.

We have a large number of different boats, some are all wood construction and others metal. They are historical craft and form part of the national historical fleet. Each of them in their own way are important and by looking after them we are conserving our heritage and giving future generations the chance to see these boats. It doesn't matter how good the computer is you can never replicate the sight, sound and smell of boats, their engines thumping away.

Being a volunteer in this group is essentially a practical task. You will be called upon to use a range of everyday tools and equipment and occasionally something unusual that you might not have had the chance to use before. There will be plenty of opportunities to learn and apply traditional boat building techniques and to get involved in boat handling and engine operation.

The duties include inspection of boats and the engine and involve a wide range of tasks from the simple removal of rainwater from the hull, general preparation and painting of woodwork and minor engine maintenance. This is mainly an outdoor job and can involve physical work. Safety is very important, as is being able to work in a team. Ideally, the volunteer will have trades background or be a competent at DIY.

“Last weekend we worked on the Chalk barge. It had been leaking badly for years. Some of the planks were replaced but mostly we just caulked the gaps with oakum and then covered the gaps with tar and pitch.

It was amazing to be using the same techniques as the old time boat builders – why not they knew it was the best way.

When we finished the leaks had stopped and the boat should float for another 10 years. It was hard work but we felt really proud of what we had achieved.”

Reg (volunteer for 10 years)