

In response to David Lowe's letter in the last issue:

Beryl McDowall writes

MAKING A TRAD BOAT MOP

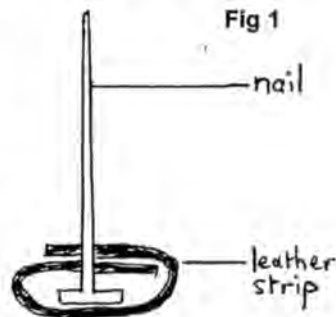
This 'recipe' for making your mop uses the old traditional techniques, but some parts have been modified slightly to take account of the materials currently available.

Traditionally, the handle or stale of a boat mop was of sufficient length for the user to stand on the cabin top and dip the mop in the canal with ease, without having to crouch down, as is so often the case with modern short handled mops, which often seem to be based on a broom handle! The handle also needs to be of a larger diameter than a broom handle. Some people use a section of cut down boat shaft, but I prefer to use a pitchfork handle. This is not only fatter than the broom handle, but can be obtained with the top end (i.e. away from the mop head) elegantly shaped to give a good grip. It also helps prevent a wet mop handle from slipping through your hands. The best place to find a pitch fork handle is a large agricultural merchant, or an old fashioned ironmongers shop, although it is a sad fact of modern life that these are becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Having obtained a stale, you now need an old donkey jacket - the heavy generally navy blue woollen Melton cloth is very absorbent and it's felt-like qualities mean it is less prone to fraying than a (grey) blanket. Cut the cloth into strips all the same size, approx. 14"x3". Depending on how thick (and heavy) you want your mop to be, and on the thickness of the fabric, about 12-15 strips will probably suffice. Remember that a wet mop weighs a lot more than a dry one!

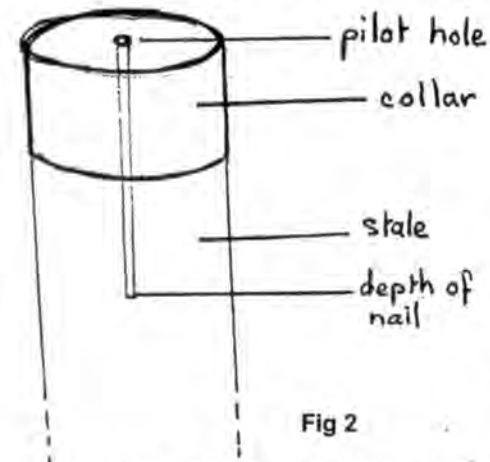
The next item to hunt for is a piece of steel pipe about 1" - 1.5" long, of just the right internal diameter to fit tightly on to the mophead end of the stale. If you have access to a solid fuel fire (or a blow torch) and a pair of tongs, heating this collar will make fitting slightly easier. Clamp the stale vertically, mophead end uppermost, where you can reach the top of it. Heat the collar in the fire then, holding the hot collar in the tongs, ease it on to the end of the stale far enough to allow you to let go with the tongs, without the collar falling off. Hold a piece of timber across the top of the pipe (to prevent burring) and hit it with a lump hammer, several times. You will probably need to work your way round the collar to avoid one side digging into the stale. The top of the collar should then be flush with the end of the stale. This collar will help prevent the stale from splitting when you attach the mophead.

Next you need, ideally, a heavy tapered nail of rectangular cross-section 3" long. You could acquire one from a local blacksmith, or you may need to be inventive - find a large diameter nail and grind flats on 4 sides. If you try using a round nail, you will find that your mophead begins to rotate after a little use, making it impossible to spin it dry. Having located



your nail, cut a piece of supple leather (a bit of old boot is ideal) about 2" in diameter, punch a hole in the centre, then force this leather washer onto your nail. This will stop the fabric pulling off. Some boatmen also liked to use a strip of leather 4" long x 1.5" wide, with a hole 1" from each end. This formed into a loop and threaded onto the nail. See fig. 1. The loop is then manoeuvred into place so that it covers the nail head, thereby reducing the risk of scratching the paintwork when mopping off. If you decide to do this, fit the loop first, followed by the circular washer.

Now find the centre of each strip of fabric and push it onto the nail, on top of the leather washer. Continue adding strips, arranging them like spokes of a wheel. On completing one round, start going round again until you have used up all the strips. Push them down hard. Clamp the stale vertically as before. Offer the mop head up beside the stale and mark the depth of the nail. Drill a pilot hole down the centre of the stale, then open it out with a larger drill, remembering that when you hammer the mophead into place, the nail should be a tight fit. See fig. 2. Before hammering the nail home, make sure the pieces of fabric are still arranged in a spiral.



Traditionally, a boat mop was used to wet the boat to clean it (and to help prevent the wood from drying out in hot weather), and to soak up the water, so that no unsightly water marks remained after cleaning. To dry the mop out, hold it between your hands, one hand either side of the point of balance, and twist the mop by drawing your left hand towards you and pushing your right hand away from you, see fig 3. Each time you get to the end of a stroke, jump your hands back on to the mopstick. Repeat until all the water is spun out. This gives you the opportunity to show off your mop handling skills. Remember a soggy mophead sitting on the cabin top can cause long term damage to the paintwork.

A word of advice to the novice mop spinner, it's a good idea to practice on land, as a mop in inexperienced hands on a cabin top has been known to launch itself into the canal, whereupon the head end sinks and you are left with a only few inches of stale above the surface to aid the retrieval process!

Good mopping.

Handwritten text: "HAND-SPUN 'MOP-HEADS'"

