

C&W UPDATE: PROGRESS ON THE ELEPHANT VAN/PLAY CARRIAGE

Work on the scenery/elephant van No. 4601, which is currently undergoing restoration in the carriage works courtesy of a Museum Resilience Fund provided by Arts Council England (ACE), is progressing apace. The project started in April last year, and we have just two years to complete it.

The van suffered somewhat as a store for the S&T Department, sitting in the elements since 1981. After it was identified as the most suitable candidate for a play carriage, the cable drums it contained were removed and it was shunted into the work area of the carriage shed.



After stripping components, apart from the floor, the metal frame was grit-blasted down the yard. Once back in the shed, the old double-planked floor was removed and the lower thick floorboards replaced with new softwood ones, painted for protection. The side planking was originally a mixture of hardwood and softwood boards, but it is being completely replaced with hardwood (utile) planks, apart from some original hardwood ones which span the whole length between the double doors on each side, which have been repaired as it is nearly impossible to obtain timber of this length now.

Where long boards have been replaced with new, two boards have been half-lapped to make boards of the correct length. The use of hardwood for the exterior should mean that the van will last a good few years before having to have any attention as it will be living outside.



The side planking is trial-fitted and then removed section by section to allow the painting to top coat of the outer faces and edges. The sections are then reassembled on the van for the final time. New sidelight frames are being produced and fitted as well.

The roof has posed the biggest challenge, and we haven't tackled anything quite like this before in the C&W. The original mild steel roof sheets were cut into pieces and removed prior to grit-blasting and have been replaced by zintec sheets which had to be cut and rolled by a contractor due to their size. Originally, these sheets were riveted together with cover straps above and below the sheet joins.

After some discussion, it was decided to use stainless steel button head socket bolts and nylon insert nuts as fixings. Half of the cover straps were drilled by the contractor so that they could be used as templates for drilling the sheets and the lower straps. The drilling was done at floor level using a couple of jigs to support the sheets side by side. The sheets were then lifted on to the roof of the van and checked for fit. Only the centre sheet has been drilled to locate it on to the wooden roof sticks, which are all new utile ones. The sheets have been marked for position of the screws for the roof sticks, then moved to one side to allow them to be drilled from underneath.



The roof sheets are being removed a couple at a time for countersinking of the fixing down screw holes and for a rigorous system of painting of the zintec including etching with mordant solution which will hopefully ensure that the paint stays on them. The same painting regime is being applied to the cover straps. One set of end and one set of side double doors have been kept intact as patterns, and work progresses on the production of the first two sets of each. Once again, the planking for these is the hardwood utile.

Many thanks are due to the many hours which have been put in by our volunteers so far. There has been an enormous amount of work recorded on the ledger (kept for ACE reference purposes). Apart from the metal and wood work which has had to be done, there has been a marathon painting exercise! Work also continues in the background on the design of the interior as this van is destined to earn its keep as an attraction for our family visitors. I would like to record my grateful thanks for the sheer energy and enthusiasm which has been applied to this exciting project so far.

By Sheina Foulkes, C&W Supervisor