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Portholes, hull in primer, choice of control gear

This document was written by Paul Naylor and is published here for FMES online viewing, and was written during 2025.

Sundowner – 4



The real naval pinnace did not have portholes: these were added when the boat was converted to Sundowner, whose cabins were below the old deck level, and in an extension towards the aft of the boat...which looks like a rectification of an error in cutting down the hull at the rear too much. I later found however that the original as-converted boat had a continuous cabin, and also later photos showed that the diagonal planking above the rubbing strake along the whole length was replaced with horizontal planks, possibly owing to rot, however, there is an account where, in the 1930's, the boat got smashed up a lot in a storm and had to be substantially repaired. So, the present iteration of the shape is after numerous repairs and other changes. This means that I needed to add the extension to the cabin, and then drill the sides of the planked hull and the extension to fit portholes. At this scale, these need to be effectively working in the sense that they are glazed and see through to some extent, rather than stuck onto the hull as simulations. You can buy finished portholes out of brass but this size is expensive and not matched to the prototype, so I had to make them. Fortunately, on the prototype, these are externally simple and painted black and so I need not make them from 32mm diameter brass (all 24 of them). After some thought, I decided to make them from black PVC rod by turning them to size with a rebate internally to fit circular bits of Perspex held in with cemented rings of more turned PVC. This has the advantage that they were already self-coloured, were easy to make and cement up and I could buy laser cut discs of Perspex 1mm thick cheaply (sold as transparent bases for model soldiers!). After some thought, I needed to drill 27mm diameter holes in the hull (gulp). At the time of writing, I have yet to make the portholes (that can be done later and then added after painting the side finish to avoid having to mask the portholes) but I acquired the materials to be sure I had them, and also a 27mm diameter good quality and sharp hole saw.

Where to locate them was another challenge. On the real photo above, you will note that the front eight are in pairs, all regularly spaced and the aft four equally spaced. Less obviously, is that the portholes cannot be in the same place as the main internal frames, and this caused some head scratching and was a test as to how close the naval pinnace drawings I had were to Sundowner itself. I had to employ some licence, so the spacings are not exactly per prototype as far as I can tell by

measuring photos, but they do miss (just) all of the internal frames. I think that they meet the 6 foot rule (see earlier). I will not be able to model the interior (at any rate to see through the portholes: there is too much stuff like RC gear and batteries etc to get in the way of bunks and tables!) so I will see what is visible through them and do something about this (like stick darkened film to the porthole insides) if there is a problem. On the prototype at the time of the photo (above, but on the port side) one porthole had a teddy bear sitting in it blocking the view!

One day, I thought I had to get on with it, so I marked the holes out in the hull side (I fitted the rubbing strake along the hull first to get that in the right place: more steaming ash and gluing it to the planked hull) and drilled little holes first as guides and as a check. This seemed OK and after practising drilling neat holes with the hole saw in some scrap 1.5mm ply, I set to....

They all went well and none of the planks split, shifted, sprung or any of the other failings that I dreamed about. It all started to look like Sundowner now!



The hull is also now mounted on a stand. I intend eventually to display the model, so a 'posh' stand is a good idea, and rather than make two, I made up this (unfinished) stand from old bits of mahogany (hence a few 'features' like plugged holes as yet undyed) to hold the boat upright and steady while working on it. I still have the frame extensions attached (albeit partially sawn) as I need to upend it easily at the moment. These frame extensions will be cut off is when there is no choice, and when I have mainly finished the underside.

I have some work to do underneath (primer paint, rudder bracketry etc), but my thoughts are turning to the detail of the upperworks, and the start of making this into a glued-up box, so I have to get it right. I have already decided how the big bits like the wheelhouse will fit (and be removable) but the devil is in the detail elsewhere.

In particular, I now need to get the details of the radio control installation and electric motor sorted. I was tempted to fit a four stroke IC engine, but convenience and small size won the day: the prototype was fitted with a relatively small IC engine although originally the naval pinnacle was steam powered. The RC servo position for the rudder is quite problematic (see space in photo) - I don't want to have obvious RC linkage 'on deck' or piercing the small and low to the water transom - as there is not much space under the deck at the



rear and it would be easy to make an impossible to assemble (or service) device! There will need to be a purchase at least of a suitable servo soon to decide this. More on this later.

I also decided to finish fill the hull and prime it to see the finish to be gained. After a skim of filler over the hull and much sanding, more thinner coats and more sanding, the hull, I think is in an acceptable state. I did not want to finish the surface fully though because there are some additional features to be included that may risk any finish.

I also have not primed yet the area above the rubbing strake as I need to fit the upper and decorative (ie varnished dark wood) strake after fitting the deck and need to glue it to raw timber for strength (watch this space!). The finish thus far is pleasing as you can see a witness of the planking, just like the prototype!



The other features to be done include holes for an anchor chain on each side of the bow, but I had already located these on the bow sides and added a shaped 'reinforcement' as per prototype with the hole location at least marked. I intend to fit a pair of anchors made to match from brass and so the piping of the anchor chain

through the hull and deck needs to be made. I know where on the hull the holes need to be, and also on the deck when fitted (not yet though). The route of the holes will be luck and guesswork though when I get the drills out.

There are some other features including bracketry for the rudder and 'skeg' to mount the lower pivot of the rudder in line with the keel bottom, but these are add-ons. I will no doubt find a few others as time wears on...