Eric the Viking – a restoration in many parts – April 2020

Spend since last report: £316. Total hours labour since last report: 80.6

What a difference two months can make! Last write up, I had just put Eric on his side to look underneath, had made very little progress since Christmas, the front chassis was wrecked and the committee were very active on last minute plans for the 2020 events. We were looking forward to our Easter club camp in Cheddar and talking about the Isle of Wight Solstice camp after the May fun at the BBQ and AGM camp in Bicester.

You may have heard a little something about Corona Virus, it might have made the news in your area. Not only multiple cancelled camps but also family events, seeing friends and commuting all stopped. The huge plus side of this has meant that instead of two hours in the car each day going to work and back, I spent around an hour in the garage each night, yay!

The front chassis on a split screen or an early Bay is two big steel boxes. The late Bay has another two, one on each side, going forwards to the new deformation panel that arrived in 1973 providing improved crash protection. Eric, bless him, had not fared well with the passage of time.

His passenger side pair were rotten on the bottom two inches of both chassis boxes that form most of the strength at the front. The picture shows a very badly patched inner box and where they join together had been patched without cutting out the previous rot and even that patch was rusted. Anything forward of the middle of the front wheels was pretty much toast. The outer of the two passenger side boxes can be purchased from the normal suppliers, but the inner one with the big circular hole in the “before” photos is not available – according to one supplier because “late Bays do not rot in that area”. Trust me, they do! I bought a straight box section from the same supplier, even though the original is shaped, and made a plan to chop it around to make my own.

First job – chop out all of the rotten stuff. Remember that Eric is on his side, so access to the underside is as easy as sitting on a little stool.

Straddling the two box sections on the passenger side over the top of the Y is a 2mm triangular plate of steel providing strength and rigidity to where the passenger puts their feet. That is visible with some rotten pieces taken out and the remainder now purple in the second photo where the Kerrust has done its magic. With the old chassis rails out and the whole area primed, it was time to start building up the new rails.

Here the box section bends under the floor from inclined by your toes (right of picture) to flat (under the seat). This was tacked in place and the join filled in.

Then the new outer chassis rail could be tacked into place, joining the first one at the base of the Y.

Once both of the 3 sided boxes were in, the 4th closing side could be cut and welded into place and the box closed next to the beam at the top left of picture.

Some anti-rust and primer was painted inside all boxes prior to welding closed to give them maximum protection ahead of waxoyl going in there after the top coat.

Similarly on the driver's side (Eric is right hand drive), the 2 chassis box sections were poor, although the one that takes the steering box was salvageable. The steering box and pedal assemblies had to come out and this took an awfully long time to figure out the dismantling, plus of course it was all corroded making every Haynes manual sentence "remove the 17mm bolt" into a movie length battle with some choice language! The outermost rail was stripped back to just the top piece directly under the floor, but since the new one had that, the decision to loose the lot was made as more efficient use of time and energy.

Lots of repairs later, the steering box chassis rail was repaired, anti-rust painted and primed both inside and out and looked rather better. For both sides, where the two front ones join and start heading backwards, it was all manually built up with 2mm sheet steel to close the box. Once the beam comes out, I can neaten up in the areas that cannot be accessed since the bus is on its side using the beam.

With all of the box in place apart from the last couple, I snapped a quick shot.

I even saved the original towing eye that was chopped off, mounted onto new metal in the same place and is now nice and strong. Hopefully it will not be needed!

Next up – the rear chassis rail needs some attention where my early attempt at repair looked pretty ropey and was nearly half an inch off position, the heater tubes need sorting and the inner rear wheel arch needs more work. More next time. If you have a bus, get those niggly jobs done because soon we hope to be out in them, renewing old friendships and making new ones in a field somewhere.