

G.L. Watson & Co. Ltd

G.L. Watson & Co. was established in Glasgow in 1873 as the first dedicated yacht design office in the world. It rose to prominence designing yachts for the local mercantile elite and built on this to become a world leader whose client base included every European royal house and prominent international families such as the Vanderbilts and Rothschilds. Many of the firm's projects and the personalities involved have become stuff of legends.

The bulk of the archive has always remained in company's ownership, but some significant elements (including a large part of the photograph collection, library and models) had been sold off. In recent years all known company material has been re-acquired and this process will continue as opportunities present themselves. The current archive includes a very significant collection of historic yacht designs, associated technical and financial data, a very extensive collection of photographs and significant ephemera as well as a small number of paintings. As such the archive holds unique material on the evolution of yacht design, the America's Cup, many famous yachts, their Owners, Crew and Builders. Noting the importance of the collection the company committed to its conservation and cataloguing. This has made it possible to house the entire archive within the firm's Liverpool offices in an accessible manner.

The day to day business of G. L. Watson & Co. includes significant work on the restoration of historic yachts designed by the company. There is also significant interest in building replicas of yachts designed by the firm which no longer exist. In both these contexts the archive is invaluable. It is also an invaluable marketing tool for displaying the firm's heritage and knowledge base. Containing some truly iconic imagery associated with the world of yachting the collection exemplifies the firm's ongoing tradition of excellence. The archive is also consulted by third parties who have particular interests in individual vessels or themes covered by the archive. A major recent project has been collaborating with the author of a biography of George Lennox Watson which will be published in 2011.

The archive has practical business value with regard to restoration and replica projects. Engagement with the archive allows staff members to see firsthand how success was achieved in the past and use this experience in their day to day work. "Working with the archive was a fantastic experience of discovery and conservation, safeguarding a future for these important articles. Now conservation is complete it is an absolute pleasure to be using the material with confidence and ease in a business environment, there is always something new to learn from the past." ~ Jack Gifford, Naval Architect, G.L. Watson & Co. Ltd.

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The archive collection is also key to the company's brand values and selective use of archive material supports this. "Conserving and cataloguing the archive has been a very stimulating journey of discovery that has created a great deal of pride within the company and interest from the wider world. It has assisted our business directly and allowed us to present archival information in new and exciting ways which reinforce our brand values. Making the archive accessible thanks to conservation has also provided many PR opportunities." ~ Dr. William Collier, Managing Director, G.L. Watson & Co. Ltd.

As well as contacts from individuals with specific interest the archive attracts significant interest from organisations such as the Association of Yachting Historians who based a recent meeting around it and individuals such as King Harald V of Norway who took an interest in its conservation and opened the conserved archive in May 2010. Today, G. L. Watson & Co. is in a privileged situation where the archives form not only a link with the past but a key to its future.

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G.L. WATSON
YACHTS SINCE 1873

