

PERFECT *St Patrick*

The smaller the boat, the easier
an authentic restoration, as
Jack Gifford of GL Watson
& Co, working with Fairlie
Restorations, discovered



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Restoring classic yachts is one of the core activities at GL Watson & Co. The office has a remarkable knowledge of most of the surviving fleet as well as those now lost. Our archives give us inspiration for what might be re-created, but the discovery of an intact classic of a type never yet seen offered an opportunity too exciting to be turned down.

None of the lightly-built Raters of the 1890s, whose designs were so influential in the development of yacht design, has survived in anything like original condition. Successive rule changes saw the type banished from yachting, except for a brief comeback in the years just following World War I. One design of four identical

boats launched in 1919 had long intrigued us to the extent that our director, Dr William Collier, once commented when we had been working together in the archive: "If you can find one of these I'd certainly restore it." The challenge was set, and following a chain of phone calls starting with Peter Wilson in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, and ending with David Wheatley in Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland, one of the four identical boats built to the admired design was found: *St Patrick*.

A small group from the Watson office headed to Scotland to take a look. We were amply rewarded. Partly concealed under a cherry tree in the corner of David Wheatley's garden lay *St Patrick*. With the exception of the boom, which no longer existed, and a few additions,

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the original yacht as designed by our office and built by the Fife yard survived in apparently remarkable condition. Removing the tarpaulin that covered her quickly revealed the familiar Fife style builder's plate, but unlike any we had previously seen this one was engraved 'Designed by GL Watson & Co'.

With only 3/8in thick close-seamed planking and steamed 1in by 1/2in timbers, the hull gave us a first opportunity to explore the intricacies of ultra-light yacht building in timber. The structure had certainly been helped by the later installation of two bulkheads, and the excellent quality of the original workmanship had ensured that the yacht, carefully laid-up and covered, retained a great deal of her original strength.

Sensing that we were indeed serious about doing justice to *St Patrick*, her guardian of many years allowed us to take on the pleasure and burden of the restoration.

ORIGINAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

With a small yacht many of the agonising debates over the use of systems and modern equipment are sidestepped – nevertheless, there are decisions to be made. We valued what we had discovered and wanted to restore *St Patrick* using the same materials and techniques as when she was first built. We also wanted to retain as much of the original materials and as many of the original fittings as possible. There was no interest in trying to enhance the design, but rather a conviction that the simple high-quality design and craftsmanship of the original should shine through.

This meant that we would replicate the full-length planking and the close-seaming technique that Fife had pioneered in the 1890s, that the deck would be canvassed, and that the same attention would be paid to hull weight as had been originally. Also key were the elegantly simple yet advanced sail handling systems, evidenced by archival sketches and the boat's many remaining fittings. Consistent with this philosophy, other details such as the original pattern cleats in their original positions, plated metalwork, and galvanised rig fittings had to be maintained.

The rig itself was as intriguing as the hull construction – an early example of bermudan rig with a single set of spreaders and in effect an unstayed topmast supported solely by jumpers. In short, it is the evolutionary stage between the Marconi gaff rigs that dominated racing immediately prior to World War I and the more conventional bermudan rigs of the 1920s.

After numerous consultations with some of the UK's leading boat builders, Fairlie Restorations was chosen to take on the project, based on a long history of successful collaborations with Watsons and confidence in their ability to meet the high standards required.

Once collected, *Patrick* was stored at the West Kirby Sailing Club, where we were able to carry out some yachting archaeology to determine original deck fitting positions, amongst other things.

A month later *St Patrick* was collected again and taken to Fairlie Restorations for work to begin in earnest. She was set up under a mezzanine floor at the side of the large shed in Port Hamble and Kevin Jepp, lead shipwright on the project, set up a number of mould stations within the hull. On carefully removing the deck, he was able to gradually create a building jig in preparation for careful dismantling. At the low ebb of this process the yacht was just beam shelf, deck beams, wood keel and a transom surrounded by chipboard mould stations and ribbands. The whole assembly was tied into the floor girder above it for rigidity and to act as a datum for the reconstruction.

PLANKING

The key challenge to the authentic restoration we were determined to achieve was the planking. Initially we had hoped to save the white pine (*Pinus strobus*) originally used, but it proved to be too dry and brittle after 90 years, and despite experimenting with soaking it in oils it was not possible to restore it to a usable condition. White pine in the lengths required is almost impossible to obtain, so we opted to use Alaskan yellow cedar. *St Patrick's* original planks were full-length and notable for

Below left: Launching at Fairlie Restorations, Hamble
Below right: Showing her paces

Previous spread:
The newly-restored *St Patrick* under sail



LEFT: GL WATSON & CO LTD RIGHT: WATERLINE



ABOVE PHOTOS: BY WATERLINE MEDIA

being entirely knot-free. Thanks to supplier Touchwood BV, Fairlie was able to match this impressive feat of timber selection and faithfully preserve the original construction method.

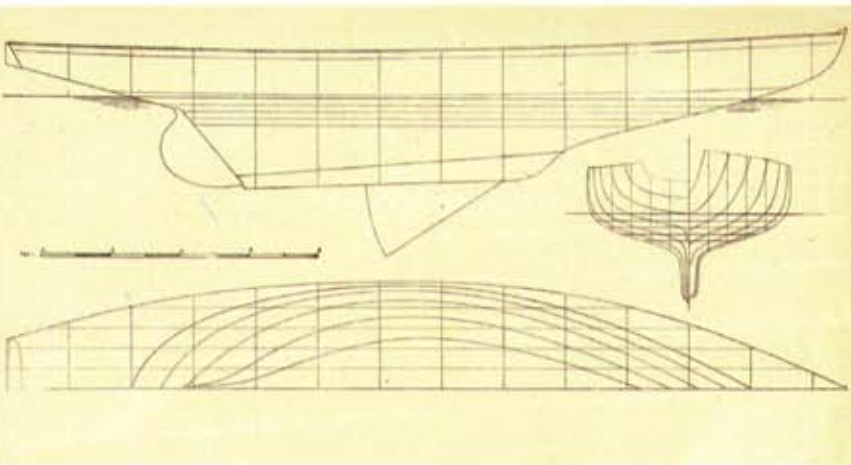
Other timbers used as per the original were ash for the steamed timbers, Douglas fir for the deck beams and oak for the stem head. The sheerstrake, margin planks and cockpit coamings are in the original teak.

Attention to detail was paid in every aspect of the yacht. Thanks to the Watson and Fife archives we could research the few missing fittings prior to making custom replicas. Many items survived and required only cleaning and regalvanising. The original rudder stock cap was a delight to find on our first inspection of the boat. After

many years of abrasion by the tiller yoke it had become terminally worn, but fortunately retained its features. The period typeface of the name was carefully copied, and after tidying and transfer using CAD, the outline was laser-etched onto a new brass stock cap and hand-finished. The original builder's plate, however, along with other items such as the deck fairleads, mast collar and spreader brackets, were cleaned up and reused.

Evidence of nickel plating on original metalwork led us to do the same with both new and reconditioned metalwork, allowing a very pleasing continuity. The effect of weathering on nickel turns it a beautifully soft silver colour not at all like stainless steel, and through our sailing experiences so far the plating shows no sign

*Top: Taking measurements
Above, left to right: Grooving, tight seaming, and decking*



Far left:
St Patrick's lines,
as published in
Yachting Monthly
Left: As she was
found under a
cherry tree

ST PATRICK

LOA
24ft 6in (7.5m)

LWL
18ft (5.5m)

BEAM
5ft 11in (1.8m)

DRAUGHT CB UP
2ft 6in (0.8m)

DRAUGHT CB DOWN
5ft (1.5m)

MAXIMUM SAIL AREA
317.5sqft
(29.5m²)

DISPLACEMENT
1.28ton (1,300kg)

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of the excessive wear or flaking predicted by many. The decision taken to replate all metalwork which was not galvanised recreates the modern look that *St Patrick's* original crew must have enjoyed in the 1920s.

The rig is simple but elegantly conceived. In recreating it, all standing rigging is of unpolished stainless wire traditionally served. The running rigging is of traditional three-strand rope or, where steel wire was originally used, Spectra has been adopted to reduce wear and tear.

While all the halyards benefit from purchases and the mainsheet has both fast and slow ends, rig loads are generally low. The running backstays act more like preventers than modern running backstays and simple 2:1 unwinched purchases suffice.

The sails were a highly successful collaboration with Andy Cassell of Ratsey & Laphorn in Cowes, the original suppliers. It was a pleasure to work with Andy, discussing archive photos of the yachts and carefully selecting the right weight of Clipper Canvas which, although of synthetic fibres, makes for a suit of sails with an authentic look and feel without the harsh snap of Dacron or the added labour required to maintain a cotton suit. The sail plan matches the original exactly: three reefs in the cross-cut mainsail and a mitre-cut blade jib. Ratseys also produced a vertical-cut traditional balloon jib, this time in modern spinnaker material.

ACCELERATION LIKE A MODERN DINGHY

As soon as *St Patrick's* new mainsail was bent on, the urge to sail was too great to resist. Off the Hamble *St Patrick* was revealed to be a real delight under sail. The helm is surprisingly light across the wind range and, unsurprisingly, the boat is most sensitive to the mainsail trim, especially while sailing upwind. Highly reactive, *St Patrick* accelerates like a modern dinghy thanks to the incredible lightness of construction. The hull shape gives good form stability, but the centreboard, which doubles the draught to 5ft (1.5m), provides a very noticeable advantage to windward and, conversely, a positive acceleration when lifted to go downwind.

The BRA rule

Rating in feet = $(L+\sqrt{S})/4 + (L \times \sqrt{S})/3 \times \sqrt{W}$
L = length (ft), S = sail area (sqft), W = weight (lbs)

The Boat Racing Association was founded in 1912 and its rule devised at a time when discontent with the Yacht Racing Association was widespread among small yacht owners.

Supported by influential designers, the BRA rule became the chief subject of enthusiasm during the war years when sailing was relegated to a series of proposed designs for BRA rule yachts in the pages of yachting magazines. After World War I, when the First International Rule had expired, the then editor of *Yachting Monthly*, HL Reich, led a movement for change, declaring the new BRA rule was "the only asset before us".

In fact *St Patrick* and her three sister ships were the first yachts to be ordered in the UK after the return of peace. Initially the rule prospered and the 18ft class gained in popularity, but with the introduction of the Second International Rule in 1920 they were gradually overtaken by a new generation of 6-Metres. The BRA rule itself went on to become the basis for the first RORC rule and later inspired the 5.5-Metre Class.

In the blustery conditions of the Panerai British Classic Yachts Challenge, *St Patrick* more than held her own against many larger yachts in conditions that often required a reef or more. After winning the BCYC's *Je ne sais quoi* award, *St Patrick's* attributes as a trailer sailer were proven in a road trip to Largs on the Clyde. Re-rigged in a couple of hours, she then took to the waters of the Clyde, made a slight detour to salute the old Fife yard at Fairlie, and later that day arrived in the Kyles of Bute, which are to be her home waters.