

# CLASSIC INTERNATIONAL 6M CLASS YACHT SONOMA

1924

**Designer: G L Watson & Co      Built: McGruers & Co**



## WHY

The moment we saw 'Sonoma' appear for sale we fell in love with her stunning lines, not realizing what her provenance really was, we just loved the traditional gentleman's racing yacht good looks. I traveled from Poole Dorset to Clynder on the Clyde, and haggled only a bit before the deal was done and she came to Poole in Dorset

We have uncovered some interesting facts about her design and her history and the times within which she was born on the banks of the Clyde in 1924 Registered to the Port of Greenock



Original FOR SALE photo in Classic Boat Magazine

SONOMA is purported to be the American Indian word for 'Valley of the Moon' the first record of this name was in 1823, one hundred years before her when a mission was formed in the area and was later taken to name one of the new counties of California in 1850. But it is doubtful that the Spanish understood the dialects and merely interpreted it with a form more familiar! But we like this one.

## WHAT TYPE OF BOAT IS SONOMA?

Sonoma. Design by G L Watson & Co we believe the only 6M to be penned by the oldest most famous of Scotland's many ship & yacht design Companies. George Lennox Watson 1851-1904

In 1873 George Lennox Watson established the first yacht design office in the world. Ambitious, erudite, and cultured, Watson was an enormously gifted designer. Working at the cutting edge of technology he became one of greatest designers of all time. Link - <http://www.glwatson.com>

In his time he produced four Americas Cup Yachts, along with presidential yachts and Royal Yachts. He was born the very year the 'Americas Cup' began.

'Britannia' was built for Edward the VII in 1893 and it won more than 200 Prizes by 1934. 'Britannia' passed to George V, and on his death the yacht was scuttled.

King George V's dying wish was for his beloved yacht to follow him to the grave. On 10 July 1936, after the *Britannia* had been stripped of her [spars](#) and fittings, her hull was towed out to St Catherine Deep near the [Isle of Wight](#), and she was sunk by [HMS Winchester \(L55\)](#), commanded by Captain [W.N.T. Beckett](#) RN

He designed 'Meteor II' for William II German Emperor of Prussia, who described G L Watson as "One of the most prominent Yacht designers in the world.

For 20 years G L Watson was the consulting architect for the RNLi

McGruers, one of the most eminent yards in Scotland, who also designed 6m yachts and many other classes, built 'Sonoma' for G L Watson & Co, and built for other important designers. They had a very long history of boat building over a large number of years even before forming their own company in 1897.

McGruers were the innovators of the hollow spar, both in Mast and boom technology this innovation had other more serious roles to play -The McGruer Hollow Spar Company in Lambeth made rolled hollow spars for the wing struts of British fighter planes during World War I and for the struts and fuselage booms of later bombers. Alcock and Brown made the first transatlantic flight in 1919 in a Vickers Vimy with McGruer struts and the Everest expeditions of 1924 and 1933 carried hollow McGruer ice axe handles.

King George V's yacht Britannia had a McGruer rolled hollow boom 84 feet long and 17 inches in diameter with a 3 inch wall thickness.

Also hollow lightweight oars for the polar expeditions .

Clynder's only lady boat builder, 94-year-old Lizzie Todrick, in 1939 she became the only female shipwright at the McGruers yard at the mouth of Loch Long and she employed the skills she learned at the shipyard over many years. From 1937 until 1977, Liz was a regular sight sailing on the Clyde and to the Western Isles, and locals still talk of seeing her with the tiller wedged under her arm, knitting as she sailed.

Link:- <http://www.mcgruer-boats.co.uk/html/company.html>

Sonoma was launched in 1924 and modified to suit her rating class in 1925. Owned by two brothers Claud & James Allen, she was sailed and raced on the Clyde for a number of years. Copies of the original build drawings are available for reference in our rebuild and the originals are held by G L Watson & co. who still enjoy a thriving business to this day.

In 1932 she was Owned by James and Willie McGruer and converted to a cruiser race with the addition of a smart little doghouse and a couple of bunks for their own use and copy drawings of this conversion are also in our hands as the originals are held by McGruers descendants .

We believe she then went to Sunderland and was owned in 1936 by Mr H Lambert Esq. of Sunderland Yacht club, a painting of Sonoma in 1937, artist was Winston Megoran, is owned by Diana Ridley.



'Sonoma' in 1936/7 33'7"LOD x 6'7" beam, a Fractional Bermudan rig was fitted.

I wanted a yacht that was pretty to look at with no complicated electrics, engines, toilets, bunks etc. Just somewhere to sit out of the weather, hanging off the anchor in a bay. To ghost around the harbour and the bay in the sun, in all weathers really as Poole Harbour is perfect for that with a little attention to the tides and the sandbanks, and the Sunseekers! Perhaps join in a bit of Class racing in the Solent.

Actually the only time I was nearly run over was by a yacht the three men on-board all enjoying a cup of tea and a chat, I had to utter the embarrassing words 'Ahoy there'! To which they altered course slightly without even acknowledging our presence

I could sail her even if no-one else was available and sometimes on my own just for the joy of it, you have to have had some time handling a yacht of this size with no engine in Poole Harbour, with the tides and sandbanks, but using the tides to move her in and out of the channels and to sidewalk across the harbour was 'very interesting'. To be frank it only happened once as I didn't own her long before the amount of water coming in was faster than that going out! So I decide to start work on her. With best intention I decided to 'do her up' a bit.

After a LOT of mucking about by other shipwrights and boat yards, my god they make the world a difficult place. If anyone ever criticises wooden boats realize that it's not the boat it's the ruddy people.

I finally settled on Lee Woodford who was at the time engaged on the Ex 12M Royal racing Yacht (The Queen and Prince Philip) 'Bloodhound' , as the chief shipwright under the eye of the owner and Yacht Surveyor Tony McGrail, I had to wait almost two years in the end for him to be set free.

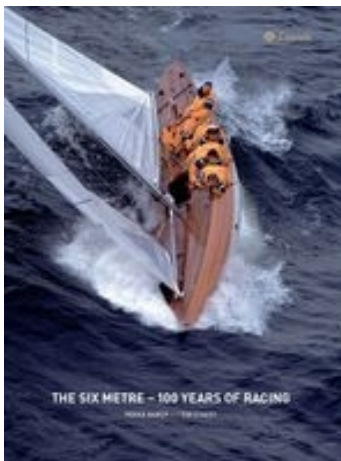
Lee set about the work on Sonoma in short 'Trenchers' to help me with cost and we completed a lot of the work in a shed shared with the Poole Redwing fleet until Lee obtained his own shed.

Link: <http://www.woodfordyachtrestitutions.co.uk/restoration-sonoma.html>

We transferred 'Sonoma' there and proceeded in earnest, and with much of the restoration done I decided to have her surveyed formally both for Lee and me and for Insurance. The Survey highlighted matters we were sort of avoiding, but we were convinced that despite the additional costs and time it was the right thing to do. All of the work in the survey is now completed. We decided to do everything we could as this was the best chance to get it right once and for all before the deck went on. The surveyor made the following note.

Intense media interest, and an active world wide racing association, organizes regular regattas and events where these fine historic yachts are exhibited. Because “Sonoma” is believed to be the only G L Watson six meter design, she is already creating interest within the “meter” community so it is important to complete this restoration to a high standard so she can compete with her contemporaries. My client and his shipwright L Woodford (who was the chief shipwright on the renowned “Bloodhound” restoration) are progressing along this path steadily and we are anticipating no less than an A1 / concourse result.

Over the recent years a huge interest has grown in the 6M Class all over the world with many regattas and formal racing being held in some of the more prestigious yacht clubs around the world. Recently a large format and stunning book on the **6M** has been published, by Tim Street & Pekka Barck. This book schedules the history of the class and lists every known 6m yacht in the world with wonderful photographs. Go to 'The Yachting Studio' link - [www.theyachtingstudio.com](http://www.theyachtingstudio.com)



I just love the idea of going sailing with a pair of flannel trousers and a blazer and plimsolls and a collapsed peaked cap with an anchor on it! In the UK & Scandinavia they were all barking mad.



ON THE DECK OF 'BRITANNIA' With Edward the V11



'BRITANNIA'

## 'SONOMA'

### THE TRANSFORMATION;



Entering the shed after the Emsworth debacle.



### THE MOVE

She is carvel, constructed of Honduras Mahogany on White Oak and American rock elm structure. Originally she was painted topsides with a mahogany deck.

We have kept all original timbers wherever possible except for the top sides as I just loved the mahogany when it was exposed so we replaced all that was not sound , but later we ended up replacing all the boards above the waterline as fixings and re-fixing, along with digging them out as well as oil and life had marked, stained or spoilt her looks, new and old would always have looked like a patchwork quilt after a season or so, once you start to see all that wonderful hardwood why paint over it.

The boards have been replaced with some of the last old stock of Mahogany, being all from the same batch she will look amazing, although they have been fitted at different times and will take a while to settle in to a matching colour.

She has been refastened throughout below the waterline above. Any new oak has been fastened with bronze screws or roves. New Oak frames where fitted have been green Oak steamed in. All the timber and connections below the waterline were checked and all fixings replaced, any timber not in absolutely sound condition was replaced.

The Iron keel and deadwood were dropped and the jointing material cut out cleaned off and replaced with new this also allowed us to check the keel bolts which were 50/50, we removed most but retained enough to keep the keel and hull in line temporarily, all are being replaced with 'malleable iron' resourced from a 'proper' blacksmith, this is ideal for a cast iron keel.

The condition of the original timbers and fixings are a testament to the quality of the originals, and the lack of stray electrical currents from ancillaries found on cruising boats has kept her relatively sound.

#### GENERAL FACTS ABOUT 1924

1924 was a leap year

Ramsey MacDonald was 1<sup>st</sup> Labour prime minister 22<sup>nd</sup> January

William Watson (no relative) made Lord Advocate of Scotland

Frederick William Wallace wrote 'Wooden ships and Iron men'

An Olympic year opening in Paris on May the 4<sup>th</sup>

Eric Little won Gold in the 400m and bronze in the 200m (Chariots of Fire)

British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley and the stamps to commemorate were issued 23<sup>rd</sup> April

Gleneagles opened with its own railway station

U S bootleggers first used the Thompson machine gun

Oxford Bags style originated on the ban of wearing knickers by under graduates at lectures, the bagginess allowed the knickers hidden, the style invented by Harold Acton of Christ church.

Benny Hill was born.

#### SONOMAS present history.

- 2001 Purchased Sonoma and delivered from Scotland to England
- 2002 Moved Sonoma from Poole to Emsworth by sea, where a friend of mines father owned and rented out a boat yard, she felt that they would be ok as they mostly dealt with older wooden boats. after a long wait she was stripped of all fixtures and fittings, mast, boom etc, the cabin was removed along with engine, false bulkheads and I was told she would be ready by next April, came back to England in March and went to find nothing had been done, the original McGruers hollow spar had been dropped on the concrete and the top 6ft knocked off. I'm told that I'm lucky as it had "shown up some faults in the scarf joints" I'll bet it did!!!
- 2003 Sonoma removed from Emsworth yard and returned to Poole for safety, to be stored in redwings shed. She was returned without any of her fittings, mast, boom, bronze roller furling gear, standing rigging, winches, sails etc etc. I returned to ask where they were, and was told they were in 'safe keeping' all carefully stored away until I was ready to start work, and a bit buried in the shed as lots of boats out for the winter.
- 2004 After a long wait she was further stripped of the primer coat applied in Emsworth and a survey of her carried out by myself and the proposed shipwright Lee Woodford and a pro gramme of work evolved.
- 2007 Lee commenced work and the hull was raised off the keel, she was in surprisingly good condition. I returned to Emsworth embarrassed at the time lapse and expected to get hit with a storage bill. What I got was "we've lost them, you shouldn't have left it so long." More to that story but another time perhaps Everything below the waterline was inspected and replacement areas can clearly be seen in the photographs, On 280 you can see just above the rudder location, the staining that started to leech out of the wood and could not be resolved without replacing those boards. Another colour change occurred after a light sanding this showed that rubbing strakes had been fitted and removed a long time ago and left a line both sides that could not be sanded out either. Probably at that time I should have seen the cost involved, and resorted to painting her. Lee Leaves to do 3 months on another job.
- 2008 Lost Lee to another job which took almost a year and re commenced work in September, but only on 2 week stints to spread the cost and enable him to keep in touch with other clients. We move Sonoma to Lees own shed. Decide at that point to replace all remaining boards above the waterline for all sorts of reasons and especially as at the transom, many of the boards were thin and the fixings impossibly close together with the board ends were frayed and split. This coinciding with the other marks ,stains, fixings etc convinced me.
- 2009 Completed replacement of all the topsides boards and had her surveyed for Insurance as her value was now building fast. The survey highlighted some damage or split floors and beams which could have been repair but we replace them, We think this only showed up later after a couple of crane lifts while she was dry and loose

made her creak and groan. Also evident were some bastardised frames around the chain plate area and we decided to replace rather than scarf on bits, those, and any others identified towards the bows and the transom so that all was perfect inside, this was the time to do all and everything before it was under the deck. The frames were replaced with green Oak steamed in.

The detail of the survey has all now been completed. The top sides fixings are checked over as they have now been in some time and all the holes are plugged and fairing off, ready for splining in the new year and the final sanding and fairing of the hull

2010 We are considering the remaining work listed below.

Replacing all keel bolts in Malleable Iron

Replace the chain plates

Construct new rudder to old pattern in Pitch pine

Re construct cockpit carlins to the original cockpit layout and therefore replace deck beams to suit

Re build mast foot step in Oak

Re fix all existing deck beam and knees etc ready for new deck

Form new support framing in Oak for the Mast and a forward hatch.



280



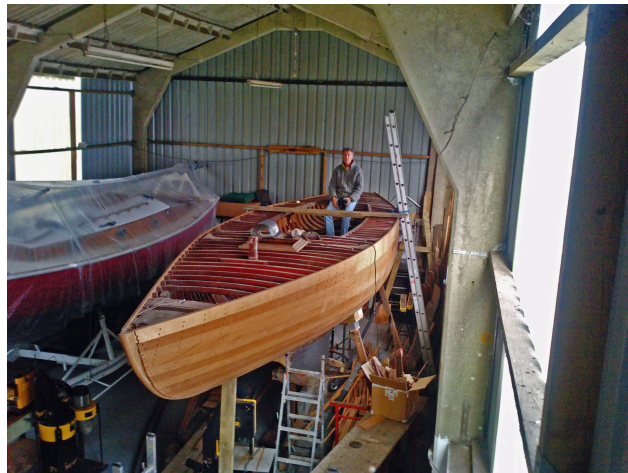
281



**Under going the restoration below the waterline completed and topsides commenced**



**The top sides continued to full replacement of boards**



**The topsides prior to plugging splining and fairing off**