

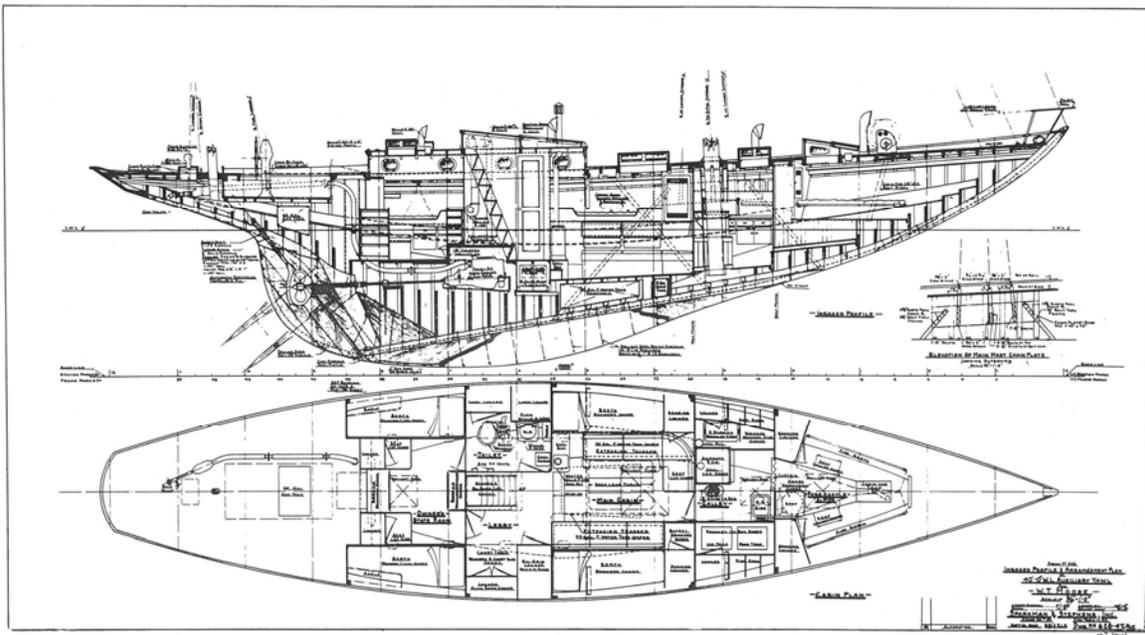
THE RESTORATION OF ARGYLL

By

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The text below is an account of my own involvement in the rebuild of ARGYLL. Well built boats can have long lifespans, and there are others who are better qualified than I to recount the earlier history of the boat.

ARGYLL was design no. 628 from the S&S office, described on her lines plan as a '40ft 0in LWL Aux. Yawl for W.T. Moore'. The drawing is dated 2/13/46. In terms of hull form and proportions, she is similar to BOLERO (designed in the same year) but carries slightly more beam and displacement relative to her length as one would expect for a smaller vessel. She is 57' 4½" overall, with a beam of 12'9" and draught of 8'0".



I first came across ARGYLL in a shed in Portishead near Bristol (U.K). At that point the rebuild of her hull was complete, and her then owner Ken Briggs was considering the options for her interior. The hull rebuild work had been carried out by Blake Brothers to a very high standard and had been extensive. Practically none of the original framing remained, and 80% of the external Mahogany planking had been replaced. The inner planking (of Cedar) had fared better over the years and only 10% of this had required replacement. She had been given an entirely new deck and deck frame, along with all new deck joinery. Various elements of the backbone had required attention or outright replacement, as had the floors and mast step.

Shortly after I saw her in Portishead, ARGYLL changed hands and I was asked by her new owner to consult on the interior layout and other remaining areas of the restoration work. At that point, the new owner had entrusted the completion of the refit to Brian Pope of The Ocean Yacht Company at their yard in Penpol on the Fal estuary in Cornwall. The boat was moved in the autumn of 2002, with a tight schedule for completion of the work.



ARGYLL's new owner had very definite plans for the boat. Born the year she was launched, he had sailed and raced in the Mediterranean in his youth, and wanted her to be a comfortable cruising home in those same waters. Some of the features that were acceptable in an ocean racing yacht of the 40's and 50's were less than compatible with her new role, and after looking at a few options it was decided to fit a new interior in a very different configuration to the original layout. Departing from the original layout of a boat such as this is always a difficult decision. Although it is wonderful to have a yacht restored in a truly 'authentic' manner, one must consider that a good boat will pass through many hands in the course of her life and no two owners have exactly the same balance of priorities. Given that none of ARGYLL's previous interior remained, and thus no original materials would be lost, it was felt that a new layout would make the boat no less recoverable for a future owner who might wish to have her in a more original configuration.

Work was begun on the new interior, however as time passed it became clear that all was not well. The agreed delivery date was approaching rather more rapidly than the completion of the project and there were serious concerns about the quality of materials and workmanship that were going into the boat. On top of this, Argyll's owner began to feel the original estimate of the cost of the work was looking increasingly unreliable and that his money was not being spent with the care and respect that was expected. By early April of 2003 he had lost confidence in the management at the Ocean Yacht Company and gave instructions for the work to stop. At the same time, he asked this office to make arrangements for the boat to be removed from the yard.

This was obviously something of a low point in the roller coaster ride that any such project can become, however with the boat and all her gear safely extracted there was time to take stock and consider the best way forward. A completion spec. was produced and put out to tender, with MB Yachts of Shillingstone in Dorset emerging as the successful bidders. ARGYLL was loaded onto a lorry once more for the two hundred mile journey East. By now, the original project timescale had been completely lost, and given the new schedule and MB Yachts' other work commitments, little was done to ARGYLL for the remaining months of 2003. While ARGYLL waited, her owner commissioned the design of a 32' power launch from this office, and over the winter of 2004 this boat was built by Dave Cockwell and his team in Falmouth. It should be mentioned that Dave had been particularly helpful in providing a secure space for ARGYLL for the weeks following her removal from Penpol.

Following the disappointments with the ARGYLL project, the success of the power launch led the owner and his wife to re-examine their requirements. It became clear that whatever her configuration, ARGYLL was not best suited to their needs and the decision was taken to place her up for sale on completion of the refit. With this major change of plans, the whole focus of the restoration was re-examined as it was now essential that the boat appeal to prospective new owners.

After due consideration, the decision was taken to rebuild the interior in a configuration much closer to the original layout. Some adjustments were made to make the arrangements more practical in the context of the expectations of modern yachtsmen, however from this point on the emphasis was placed on refitting the yacht to a far more original condition. In the style of her original interior (of which some photographs were found to supplement the original drawings), the finish below is simple and clean with white painted bulkheads and Mahogany trim. In certain areas, showpiece items of joinery are placed to enhance the interior, however the atmosphere is predominantly light and honest. Throughout, the beautifully executed work of Martyn Brake and his team goes to show that one need not be blatant to demonstrate quality and craftsmanship.



Saloon starboard looking forward



Saloon port looking forward

As with most restorations, beneath the original face of the boat modern systems are fitted to provide the facilities that are expected in this day and age. ARGYLL is not overloaded with kit, but still has rather more plumbing and wiring on board than she would have had when she was first launched in 1948.



The traditional chart table for use standing



The amidships galley – bliss for the cook!



The owner's aft cabin

On deck and in the rig, the intention had always been to retain the original sail plan and this is one area where many original fittings had survived. New masts and spars had been built by Nobles of Bristol whilst the boat was owned by Ken Briggs, and significant original items of deck gear such as the anchor windlass and coffee grinder (on the aft deck) had already been refurbished under his direction.

Continuing this approach, this office produced drawings for replacement gear where necessary, incorporating components from the original deck gear where possible. In some cases, it was obvious that the original gear had not been up to the task, and new fittings were designed and built in keeping with the originals but of increased strength. ARGYLL's original main outhaul fitting was evidently too small for her, but was straightened out and donated to COMETA.

With the exception of the coffee grinder aft, ARGYLL has all new Lewmar winches. These were bought early on in the project whilst the focus had been on ease of handling for a light crew and as such they are generously sized and, in the case of the primary cockpit winches and main halyard winch, powered when desired by the 12V electrical system. As part of the same push for easy working of the boat, the original (and magnificent) bronze anchor windlass had a gearbox fitted to allow it to be driven by an under deck electric motor. This in itself was a fun project and a fabulous piece of engineering executed by Hercules CSMD in Dartmouth, who were also responsible for the fabrication of all the new bronze deck gear designed by this office.

Hoods in Lymington made ARGYLL's new sails from their own high tenacity polyester cloth, a thoroughly considered compromise being found between the look of her original suit and the advances in sail making since 1948.

In April of this year, ARGYLL emerged from the workshops of MB Yachts and was loaded onto a lorry one last time. As on the two previous occasions, Percy and his team from Elvy Marine and Heavy Haulage exercised the utmost care in transporting her and she was launched in Plymouth without incident. A week later her masts were stepped and rigging work was completed by Allspars.

Having been through the ups and downs of a protracted restoration project, sailing on ARGYLL for the first time was a good moment for all involved. Throughout May, we conducted sail trials out of Plymouth Yacht Haven, with the delivery of the yacht to her new home mooring in the Helford river taking place towards the end of the month.

ARGYLL is as much a joy to sail as we had all been anticipating. Her power and balance give her a long and easy stride and we have yet to find a reasonable sail combination that disturbs her poise. Despite the change of plans, ARGYLL's owner has maintained a high quality approach to the project. His willingness to sponsor the time, effort and craftsmanship that has gone into the rebuild enables us to be confident that she will offer her next owner some exciting racing amongst her peers, as well as comfortable cruising in a vessel of the highest pedigree.

