

Boat Register Report

Migrating from the old system

At last years ACM Julian demonstrated his prototype replacement for the online register and the ACM endorsed building this into a production system. The new system went live in April and has been improved since then and Julian continues to work on it.

We have added all the information from the old online database except the ownership information and the engine details. We have all this data safe and will be putting it back in with time.

The new system is currently only loosely integrated with the main OGA site and this results in some styling and navigation issues. We hope to address these in the coming months.

Problems

Apart from some minor teething troubles we think the new online register works well. Some of the more important issues we have addressed since we went live were:

Boats for sale

We created some confusion over boats for sale. It was not obvious to people visiting the site that the main boat register was the place to look and that the 'only boats for sale' switch was the way to see a view equivalent to the old 'for sale' section.

The new online register offers all the sorting and filtering options of the main register to be used to find the kind of boat someone is looking for. For example one can find all Heard 23s that are for sale in descending order of price.

We have now made it easier for people by providing a separate menu option on the main site to take you to the boat register with the "only boats for sale" option already selected. Once there you still have the full boat register experience.

Linking to directly to boat pages from other sites

The technologies used for the new online register initially made it hard to provide a URL which could be used to reach a specific boat. After some experimentation an initial way of doing this has been implemented. You can now get a link to a boat from the boat's detail page which can be used on Facebook or your own blog or a broker's site for example.

Occasional Rendering Failures

Now and then, clicking on the 'More' button for a boat resulted in an empty page. We believe we have now eliminated this problem but we want to hear if it recurs.

Curation

On the old site there were originally a limited number of people who could do anything to the boat register, and this meant that the progress of adding boats was very slow. We then tried to move to owners editing their own boat entries but the problem with this was that people tended to remove previous information to add their own. We have now moved to a hybrid scheme where it is possible for anyone to submit information using an online form, but this is not published without the editors input. We think this is now working well.

Because the new website only has logins for officers, we have removed all information from the boat register that is personal.

We have made some changes to builder, designers, and design classes. In the old register builders and designers were generally stored last name, first name, which sometimes looked odd. Strange Albert, and Last Alf anyone? Builders in particular, but sometimes designers, often had multiple entries, for example where an individual bought a hull and finished it themselves. There were also a lot of close duplicates where the same company was rendered multiple different ways, sometimes because names changed over time but often because different submissions used names differently. This could make it difficult to find all of the boats of a given class. We have made a lot of progress in improving the quality of this kind of data but there is still a lot more to do.

The complete electronic Lloyds register of Boats continues to be a wonderful resource for discovering the history of boats, and we are happy to look boats up for members as we do not own the rights to make this information available online.

Statistics

We want to share some numbers.

The previous online register had 3,555 boats on it of which 1,303 were visible on the website, the remaining 2,252 entries were 'waiting' to be reviewed.

The new online register takes a different approach and makes all boats visible, but defaults to showing only boats with pictures. We think this results in a good visitor experience, while making it easy to find all the boats, and provides a process where pictures can easily be added to boats without pictures.

So we now have 3,593 boats visible on the register, including the 38 boats added during the year. Of these, 913 have pictures, up from 774 on the old register and the total number of pictures is up from 1,764 to 2,140. Of these new pictures, around 180 were professionally digitised from the David Cade collection of transparencies and the remainder have been provided by members.

In terms of boats for sale, we carried over 49 for sale records from the old database although some of these had been sold without the OGA being informed. About ½ of these had been for sale in 2014 when the original database was created. Around ½ dozen of these sold during the year. Around 18 boats were put up for sale on the register during the year and we believe more than 20 OGA boats have been bought during the year, although not all of the sales were made through the register. We currently have 43 boats for sale. An unexpected benefit of not providing personal information has been that all for sale enquiries now come through the boat register editors. This enables the editors to stay involved and we get to hear much more often about boats being sold which keeps us up to date. We can also suggest other boats that people might be interested in.

Role of the Boat Register Editors

The matters around boats were previously shared between different officers of the Association. The membership secretary looked after whether boats were owned by members and this information was duplicated between the online register and the membership database. The online editor and boat register editor shared the updating of the online register with owners being encouraged to edit their own entries.

Boats for sale entries in Gaffer's Log were looked after by the Log Editor, co-ordinated with the for-sale section of the website by the online editor (which was OK when the same person did both).

We've changed things around so that the Boat Register editors now look after the ownership status and the for-sale status across all platforms. The membership secretary passes all member's boat information to us and we store anonymised ownership data in the online boat register. The Boat Register editors prepare the for-sale section of Gaffer's Log which is then sent directly to be professionally laid out for the printed page. All errors in this section of the Log are therefore down to us.

Yearbook

We want the next Yearbook to be more accurate and satisfying. In the membership database members have both a membership number and a unique ID. We now store the number of 64ths owned by members in the boat register. We have imported the data from the old online boat register and reconciled this against the membership database and are keeping it up-to-date as members leave and join and boats are bought and sold.

The intent is to create boat pages in the next Yearbook from this data, which will allow boats to be listed against all members owning shares in that boat.

Conclusion

It has been a busy year. I don't think either of us realised that the Boat Register Editors are a strange mixture of Naval Historians and Yacht Brokers! It is a fascinating passtime and we hope the work we do adds value to the membership.

Proposals

The main difference between the previous online register and the new one is that members could log-in to the old site and see information not visible to visitors.

The only category of data actually visible only to members was the ownership data. We have thought about this and we have a number of options

1. We could do nothing
2. We could duplicate the behaviour of the old site
3. We could enable everyone to see all ownership data (we don't think this is a good idea)
4. We could make 'historic ownership' publicly viewable but provide current ownership only to members
5. We could provide additional features to logged in members in addition to viewing current ownership

We would like feedback from the ACM on this matter. We currently intend to treat this activity as a low priority but if you think it is important we can try to prioritise it.

Julian and Alison Cable