

The Historical Archives in Muggiano: The Fincantieri Military Shipyards

The premise for the preservation of the Muggiano-Fincantieri shipyards

Since 2005, noteworthy efforts have been made to rescue and preserve historical records of the Muggiano-Fincantieri shipyard whose building of military and civil ships began at the end of the nineteenth century. These records, officially declared to be of great historical interest, are classified according to Italian Law 490, 29 October 1999 (Cultural and Environmental Assets) and were certified by the Archival Superintendence of Liguria on 5 December 2002.

The reorganization and inventory is part of a larger more complex project for the safeguarding of business archives undertaken by the Direction for Archival Assets, in the person of Doctor Maurizio Fallace, formalized with an agreement signed on December 2005 between the Department for Cultural Assets and the Ansaldo Foundation.

The actual operation of reorganization was given to the Ansaldo Foundation in Genoa, which has worked for many years in the field of rescue and preservation of business and industrial archives. The supervisors are Susanna Ognibene and Alessandra Vesco, coordinated by the Archival Superintendence of Liguria.

A feasibility study was carried out, commissioned by Fincantieri S.p.A, in order to have an idea of the quantities, the typologies and the location of all the records in the different warehouses of the shipyard.

The mass of records, made up of different fonds, is estimated to consist of about 60,000 items with a majority being technical drafts or blueprints of the ships. However, the photographic fond and the books concerning treaties on planning and construction techniques are also highly interesting.

It is possible to divide and synthesize the considerable volume of records into the following categories:

- Technical plans of the ships (1885-1960). About 160,000 items
- Plans of submarines. About 350,000 items
- Various records. About 100,000 items
- Photos. About 12,000 items
- Negatives on glass plates. About 5,000 items
- Plans of the shipyard. About 3,000 items
- Books. About 5,000 items

It should be pointed out that the work of valorization of the historical archives already existed through participation in two important cultural initiatives promoted by the Department of Cultural Assets in collaboration with the Italian Navy.

The first, in 2003 on the occasion of the centenary of the launching of the “Classe Glauco”, took place along with other celebrations for the launching of the submarine “Todaro” from the Muggiano shipyard.

The second was in concurrence with the initiative “Un Mare di Archivi” which included two exhibitions: one on the training sail ship “Palinuro” and the other one in the Museo Tecnico Navale in La Spezia with the title “Navi, Cantieri e Armamenti in Liguria” (Ships, Shipyards and Armaments in Liguria). This last exhibition was dedicated to the life, the culture and the economy of the coastlines and seas was coordinated by the Archival Superintendence of Liguria with the cooperation of the State Archives in Genoa and La Spezia and the Ansaldo Foundation.

Graziano Tonelli (Soprintendenza Archivistica per la Liguria)

Setting up the archival work

At the beginning of the archiving process, the mass of material posed several complex problems for its reorganization: first of all, the records had not been previously categorized according to typology. In fact, there seemed to be no logical order at all. What is more, the material had been stored under very poor conditions. As a first step, we identified the material which could not be classified according to specific categories; for example, records without job numbers, names, or reference lists. Continuing this first step, we then looked at the material impossible to identify (with no chronological or nominal element); and finally we considered the material that could not be evaluated or even touched due to its severely deteriorated condition.

This first step allowed us to work out an archiving system on a quantitative basis for which we created a specific Access database aimed at the creation of a Consistency Inventory that corresponds to all the material analyzed. Moreover, using this software, we can register the information according to preset parameters, making it possible to introduce fundamental data, and carry out cross-referenced research based on standard subjects; for example, the job number or the name of the ship, or finding the new collocation of the material archived in the various warehouses soon to be created.

The completion of the reorganization work made it possible to divide the material into different typologies: bundles for the technical plans on folding paper, both copied and original; tubes for rolled plans, both copied and original as well as original technical registers. In addition to these records, we found sheets of paper in boxes, folders for plans, and books.

The photographic material is also particularly important and it is preserved in an independent fond, made up of 2,500 plates and negatives and 2,500 positives. We hope this special fond, given its unique content and particular historical value, will be catalogued according to the ministerial standard used in the multimedia archives of Liguria.

Why a reorganization?

The work of reorganization and inventory has many objectives: first, to prevent the dispersion of a valuable heritage through the creation of a permanent archives; second, to collect records coming from different repositories into one archives with the development of a reference database; third, to add value to the collected and preserved records by opening the doors to study, research and exhibition of the material.

The archives continuously documents the activity of one of the most important Italian shipyards that began in 1883 and continues even now to operate in the field of naval construction, in particular of war ships and submarines. The program of the retrieval of these records is sustained by, Fincantieri, who has dedicated precious resources to a unique project. The archives retrieval project not only

offers an opportunity learn about the history of the shipbuilding industry, but also provides a new means for interpreting the social and economic history La Spezia, home of the Fincantieri Shipyards. The reorganization of the Fincantieri historical material and the creation of a descriptive inventory has led to the basis for an efficient program of preservation and safekeeping. The records, once entered into the software program, have acquired official status as protected documents. The records themselves are stored in a repository equipped with a surveillance system. However, it should not be forgotten that a certain number of records require not only surveillance and protection, but also restoration, given their remarkable historical and artistic value.

Cultural Valorization

During the reorganization of the material preserved in the different repositories of Muggiano shipyard, our team came across various records of great historical value that proved to be useful for consultation.

Because of their unique features, these records represent an important vehicle for passing on the historical legacy and the cultural identity of both the shipyard and the Fincantieri company.

In particular, the plans of the Cargo Ship “G. Accame”, built in 1899 for the moment, represent the oldest finding of the archiving project.

A further example of findings of notable historical relevance are the plans of the submarine “Argonauta”, built in 1915 and designed by Laurenti, a renowned Italian engineer, and is one of the earliest submarines built in this shipyard.

The naval constructions represented by the greatest number of blueprints are the cruisers “Zara” (1931), “Diaz” (1933) and “Duca degli Abruzzi” (1937). The submarines “Classe Perla”, “Tritone” and “Nuova Perla”, built during the Second World War, are also very well documented. Finally, it is important to mention the drafts of the Motorship “Arborea” (1929), in which the ornamental details of the interiors and the furniture are particularly relevant.

Among the different fonds found in the Muggiano Historical Archives, it is necessary to underline the presence of the U.T.O. (Technical Office of Workshops) Archives that collects all the records concerning the enlargements and the state concessions negotiated between the factory and the various territorial properties dated between 1887 and 1947. This material, besides documenting the evolution in the dimension of the shipyard, gives extremely interesting historical information on the adjacent territory and testifies, through the signature of the designers, the presence in the Muggiano shipyard of highly prestigious technicians.

Particularly relevant are the general plans signed by renowned engineers Mauro Mariano (1913) and those of Cesare Laurenti (1915 and 1916) already famous for the construction of submarines. Through a careful analysis of the fond, we discovered unexpected records that provide evidence of the activity of the engineer Giacomo Mattè Trucco, well-known designer of the FIAT factory in Turin Lingotto from 1916 to 1926. These records refer to plans and projects for the construction of workshops and warehouses.

Mattè Trucco’s activity in the Muggiano factory dated between 1913 and 1918, years during which the shipyard was a FIAT-San Giorgio property. His presence was completely unknown until today and provides a new interpretation of the history of shipbuilding and its attainment of high technical quality.

The changing of the shipyard over the years has inevitably resulted in the destruction of the buildings projected by Trucco; these were replaced by more modern constructions, thus erasing all

physical traces of the famous engineer's work. The discovery of his plans highlights the historical value of the material preserved in this archives, confirming the importance of this rescue project. Part of this material has been employed in the preparation of exhibitions and other important cultural initiatives on sea history and shipbuilding.

Susanna Ognibene, Alessandra Vesco (Archivio Storico del Muggiano – Fincantieri)