

Archive Services: partnerships with businesses to explore their heritage

Thales UK - customer relations

Thales UK is the second largest defence electronics supplier in the country with 8,500 staff in 40 locations across the nation. The Thales Glasgow site is the oldest site in the wider group. It was founded in 1912 as Barr & Stroud Ltd by two University Professors, Archibald Barr and William Stroud, who had been working together since 1888 when they spotted an advertisement in the journal *Engineering* placed by the War Office inviting inventors to submit designs for a military rangefinder suitable for service with the British Army.

Since then, Barr & Stroud has grown from the initial rangefinder designs drafted in Professor Barr's home through an expansive facility in Anniesland with 3,000 workers to the site in Linthouse today which forms a core part of the Thales UK portfolio. The development and success of the firm as pioneers in optical engineering was synonymous with the industrial expansion of Glasgow in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Barr & Stroud played a key role in securing Glasgow's place as the "Second city of the Empire", supplying rangefinders, periscopes and other optical devices to nations all over the globe.

Barr & Stroud has an extensive archive, maintained since 1991 by University of Glasgow Archive Services as part of the Scottish Business Archive. Consisting of over 120 linear metres of records dating from the 1850s to the 1990s, the archive demonstrates the technical achievements of the company. Patents from 1860 are accompanied by series of technical specifications, plans and drawings, and product photographs. Alongside these are extensive order records which provide evidence of the company's worldwide markets, financial records and the papers of Professors Barr and Stroud. The archive was brought together as a single managed resource at the University to support the writing of the company history, *Range and Vision: the first 100 years of Barr & Stroud* (1988, Edinburgh). It has been available to the company and researchers since that time.

The archive is a rich resource for industrial, economic, business and social history at local, national and international levels. The archive has supported research into Scottish world wide trade links; the application of optical engineering for the military; and the links between Scotland and Japan dating from the nineteenth century. Of ongoing value to Thales UK, the archive also supports its current business objectives. Selections from the archive have been displayed at the Linthouse site and it often proves vital in marketing activities, allowing Thales to demonstrate its longevity globally through the strong historical links Barr & Stroud have had with most of the developed nations since the early 20th century.

Barr & Stroud's archives were instrumental in a recent project to further strengthen Thales UK's links in Japan, regarded as a key export market. Japan is one of the firm's first export customers, ordering hundreds of rangefinders and accompanying electronic fire control systems in the 1890s. In particular, Barr & Stroud equipment was fitted onto the Japanese flagship *Mikasa*, which went on to lead the victorious fleet at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 against the Russian Navy. A US Navy report on the battle noted that: "The Navy Department has been informed that the superiority of the Japanese gunners' long range in the Battle of Tsushima was due the (Barr & Stroud) rangefinders in the Japanese ships."

The Mikasa today rests in Yokosuka, Japan as a museum ship. Thales UK donated an original optical rangefinder from the 19th Century to the Mikasa Trust in 2008. In 2010, in the absence of a surviving example of the fire control equipment, Thales UK was able to construct a plan of the equipment by using references in various pieces of correspondence, advertisements and specifications stored within the archive to construct a model of the system to be installed onboard the Mikasa. Through making such contributions to Japanese cultural heritage, Thales UK is demonstrating its long-term commitment to their Japanese customers. It assists in developing strong links with the Japanese industrial community and provides marketing support to develop the Thales brand within Japan.

Today, Thales have a division based in Japan and the Glasgow facility is currently engaged in supplying Optronic periscopes for the submarines of the Japanese Self-Defence Force. This proves that the Glasgow site remains a vital source of manufacturing expertise within Scotland, as it was in the days of Professors Barr & Stroud.