



Press release

16th of February 2022

THE WATCH LIBRARY A CHARITABLE FOUNDATION COMMITTED TO PRESERVING GLOBAL WATCHMAKING HERITAGE

**WATCHMAKING: AT THE INTERSECTION OF HERITAGE AND INNOVATION.
A CONSTANTLY EVOLVING GLOBAL LEGACY, WITH A WEALTH OF ARCHIVES TO BE DISCOVERED**

Watchmaking, a constantly evolving, living tradition, grew out of the transmission of know-how through the generations, thus constituting an unparalleled intangible heritage.

Today, more than ever before, owning a watch is about owning a cultural artifact, a piece of craftsmanship, and a tangible aesthetic.

Much of this global heritage has not yet been explored. Centuries of watchmaking history remain largely inaccessible today, despite the best efforts of museums and watchmaking companies around the world. Hundreds of thousands of papers, documents and archives remain unopened on library shelves, forgotten in drawers, or discarded in the attics of watchmaking families. This incredible global resource is waiting to be discovered, to be shared, to be brought to light and preserved for posterity.

HERITAGE MUST EMBRACE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF WATCHMAKING

The mission of the Foundation, which has been recognised as a charitable body by the Swiss Confederation, and has the support of the State of Geneva, is to preserve and promote watchmaking heritage through the latest digital technology.

The creation of a “big data” repository for watchmaking resources will provide professionals and interested amateurs alike with the ability to consult documents that are currently difficult to access, have been forgotten or are completely unknown. Through digitization, the platform will link the public with a multitude of documentary resources, providing a research experience focused on the needs of users. The documents will be converted to digital format by Arkhênum, a company dedicated to the preservation and digitization of documentary heritage, and which is currently involved in the colossal project of digitizing the archives of the League of Nations in Geneva.

The Watch Library will offer a totally user-centric cultural experience, enabling users to immerse themselves in the wealth of watchmaking knowledge, and find the most targeted answers to their searches. The platform will be continually enriched with new content through the addition of new archives, as well as through the consolidation of data across its holdings.

A close eye will be kept on the evolution of technology, to ensure that the most advanced search technologies are made available for navigation on the platform.



A MAJOR INITIATIVE FOR THE ENTIRE WATCH INDUSTRY, IN LINE WITH UNESCO'S RECOGNITION OF WATCHMAKING

The goal of the Foundation, which has its headquarters in Geneva and which has been recognised as a charitable body by the Swiss Confederation, is to preserve and promote worldwide watchmaking heritage through the creation of a digital platform that provides access to a repository of documentation on watchmaking that is unprecedented in its scale.

The Watch Library Foundation is supported by a number of public institutions, including the State of Geneva, and has been backed by a group of French parliamentarians, who submitted the project to France's Ministry for Culture, Ministry for the Economy and the Luxury goods industry select committee of the French National Assembly.

The Foundation also enjoys the patronage of a growing number of key actors in the watchmaking community. Among the main patrons, Audemars Piguet, whose attention to watchmaking heritage is well known, has supported the project since the beginning. Other patrons have joined the foundation's circle of major sponsors (some of whom wish to remain anonymous), including Richard Mille, whose history is more recent but for whom watchmaking heritage is also part of the collective asset of the watchmaking sector, to be preserved and enhanced.

Alongside the private sponsorships of the watchmaking industry, sponsors who have ties to the watchmaking industry through their business and whose clients are great watch enthusiasts are also committed. They are determined to act as part of their corporate social responsibility and see their support for The Watch Library Foundation as a way of strengthening their positive impact on the watchmaking ecosystem.

UNESCO recognition represents a starting point for work to begin on preserving and promoting horology heritage. One of the major challenges we face, if the future of watchmaking is to be guaranteed, is in reconciling the physical legacy with the digital world. Access to historical sources is proving increasingly vital for amateurs and professionals alike. The ongoing fascination with vintage timepieces and watchmaking history provides potent evidence of this.

Exchanges between the UNESCO project leaders (Arc Horloger) and The Watch Library Foundation have naturally been established and will intensify in the future. One of the representatives of the Arc Horloger structure already sits on the board of directors of The Watch Library Foundation.

The work of the Foundation is based on the expertise acquired by publishing house Europa Star, one of the project's originators, in the preservation and promotion of its own heritage. Founded in Geneva in 1927, the multi-generational family firm began digitizing its own archives four years ago, and now provides access to almost 200,000 pages, representing almost a century of watch industry sources.

This experience generated a desire to bring together a growing number of diverse sources, with the aim of safeguarding the documentary heritage of watchmaking, making it available to the public and nurturing the passion for watchmaking that exists across the globe.

Over the course of a year and a half, this desire was transformed into an ambitious project spearheaded by a charitable foundation, in the service of the entire watchmaking ecosystem and the general public. In March 2020 Martine Depresle, founder of The Talented consulting practice, who is widely respected for her experience in accelerating digital transition in high-added-value industries, and for her knowledge of the watch industry, was approached to lead the project.



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PATRONAGE: BRINGING TOGETHER PEOPLE COMMITTED TO THE PRESERVATION OF WATCHMAKING HERITAGE AND ITS SAFEGUARDING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Public and private patronage of the Foundation generates the resources required to digitize and catalogue the watchmaking documentation collected from various sources including watch museums (Musée international d'horlogerie, Musée du Temps) art museums (Le Louvre in Paris, Art and history Museum in Geneva, British Museum in London to name some of them) watch industry institutions (Horological Society of New York), universities and technology institutes (MIT in Boston and EPFL in Switzerland), publishing houses and publications, auction houses, national libraries and private collections all over the world.

The study phase of the project allowed a dialogue with many organizations in order to identify sources, digitization needs and for some to already start a partnership.

The first circle of major patrons brings together members of the watch community around the Foundation's philanthropic mission. The patrons share an understanding of the significance of horology heritage, and an awareness of the vital importance of ensuring that watchmaking knowledge can be passed on.

The Watch Library shares the values of our time. It is inclusive and welcoming of the entire horological community. Its Foundation Board comprises Swiss and international experts from the worlds of watchmaking, innovation, education and art. Members of the Foundation Board include Serge Maillard, Publisher, Europa Star (Chair of the Foundation Board); Nicholas Manousos, Executive Director, Horological Society of New York (HSNY); Régis Huguenin-Dumittan, Curator, International Museum of Horology; Nathalie Tissot, an intellectual property lawyer and professor at the University of Neuchâtel; Ellan Spero, co-founder of the Station 1 non-profit educational institution and lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Agi Musset, project manager of Watchmaking Arc/ Arc Jurassien, an organization in charge of the initiatives related to Unesco inscription. The Foundation Board is supported in its role by a Scientific Committee which acts in an advisory capacity.

The Watch Library Foundation, a unique bridge heritage and digital technologies, is committed to ensuring that everyone, and future generations, can access this precious heritage, passed down to us by masters through centuries. ●

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