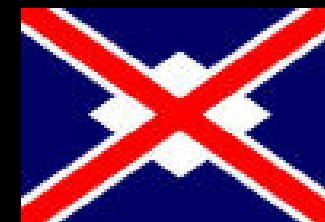


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The History of The Mail Service to South Africa



The Story of The Mail Ships

To the early history of the Mailships there are two very distinct parts. The first tells of the growth of two companies and of the keen rivalry that existed between them. This was the time when the entrepreneur really held the stage, and each company strove perpetually to find ways in which to outdo its rival. The second part of the story tells how they came together and prospered. This was a time of consolidation and development of a unique service.

Union Line

The story began in 1853 with the formation of the Union Steam Collier Co. The purpose of the company was to establish a line of steamers to bring coal to Southampton for the liners which sailed from there. Orders were placed for five ships—Union, Briton, Saxon, Norman and Dane—the largest of which were the Norman and the Dane of 530 tons. Before the intended service could begin operating war in the Crimea completely changed the situation. The exigencies of war provided work for the ships, but not as colliers. When in 1856 the war came to an end the ships were no longer needed for their original purpose as arrangements made during the war had eliminated the need for the collier service to Southampton.

The stipulated time of the voyage was not to be reduced from 42 days until 1863, but by 1859 the company was giving such satisfaction that the Cape Legislative Assembly decided to pay a bonus of £250 for every day by which a mail steamer completed the voyage in less than 35 days. Already five such voyages had been made and in his report the Postmaster General was able to say “The packets which made their voyage most frequently in less than the contract time were those . . . belonging to the Union Steam Ship Co.”

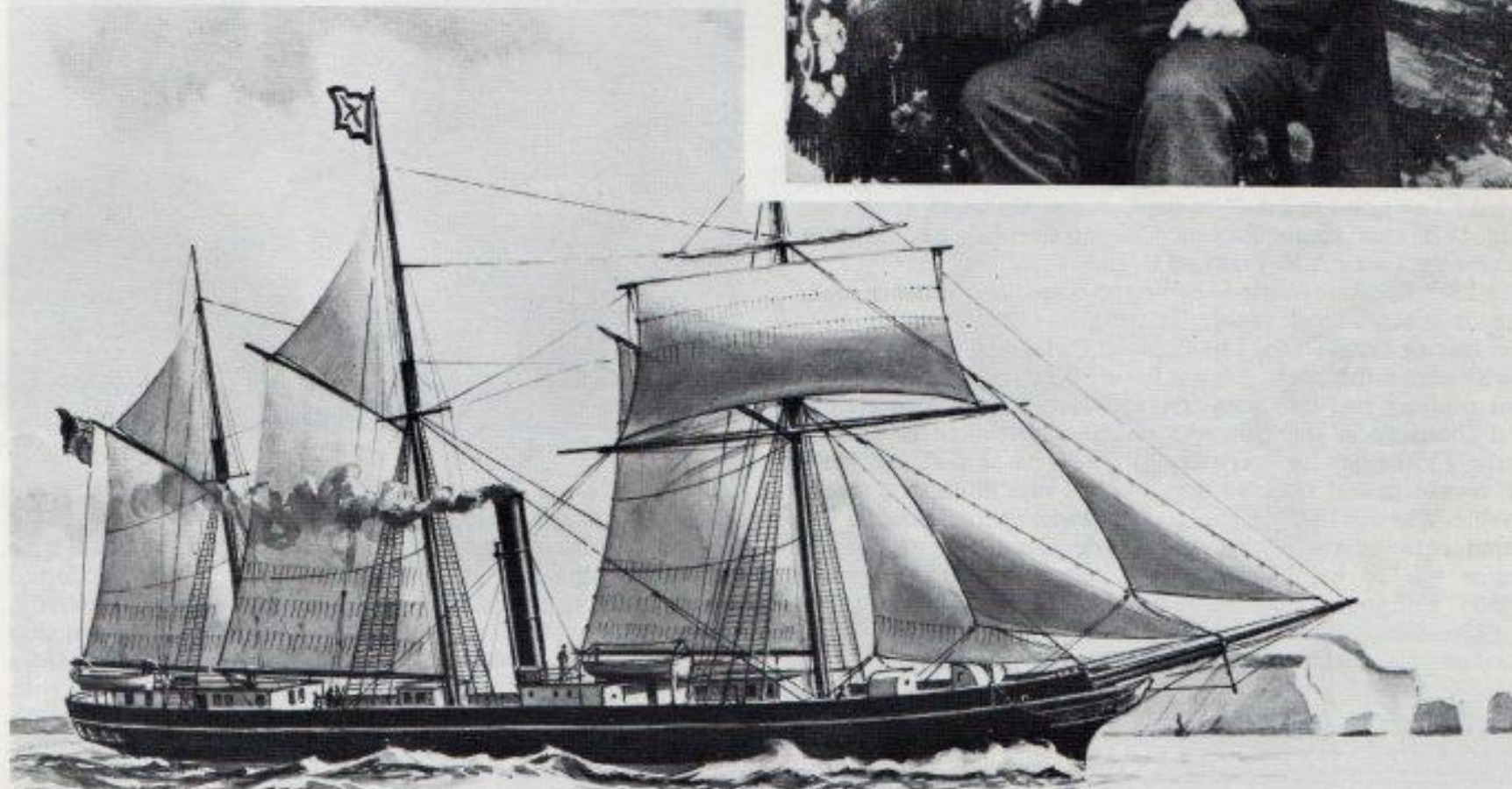
Captain Strutt, Commander of the Dane 1857

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By then the company had been renamed the Union Steam Ship Co. At the end of the Crimean War a decision was made to sail to Brazil, but this proved a costly venture and was abandoned the following year. The company had no employment for its ships. While they were facing this problem, in the summer of 1857 the British Admiralty invited tenders for a mail service to South Africa. The Union Co. submitted a tender and in September were informed that this had been accepted.

It was on 15th September 1857 that the *Dane* left from Southampton on the very first voyage to inaugurate this South African Mail Service. The Mail contract required a voyage time of 42 days and there was to be a monthly service. There had been little time to advertise the sailing, and the cargo she carried brought in only £102. Six passengers occupied the cabins.

Dane 530 tons 1857



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The year 1860 marked a further stage in the progress of the company for the Cambrian, delivered that year, was the first of their ships to exceed 1,000 tons. In 1863 a new mail contract was awarded, with the time of passage reduced to 38 days, but the following year saw competition on the route with the entry of the Diamond Line. Their Eastern Province, on the pioneer voyage, made a record passage of 32½ days, but this record did not stand for long as in the following year the Saxon reduced this to 28 days. The Diamond Line did not live up to its early promise and soon lost its reputation for punctuality. By 1867 their sailings had ceased.

In 1867 diamonds were first found in South Africa. When two years later the "Star of South Africa" was found and sold for £11,000 there was a rush from emigrants, eager to seek their fortunes in the diamond fields of South Africa.



Cambrian 1,055 tons 1860



Saxon 1,142 tons 1863

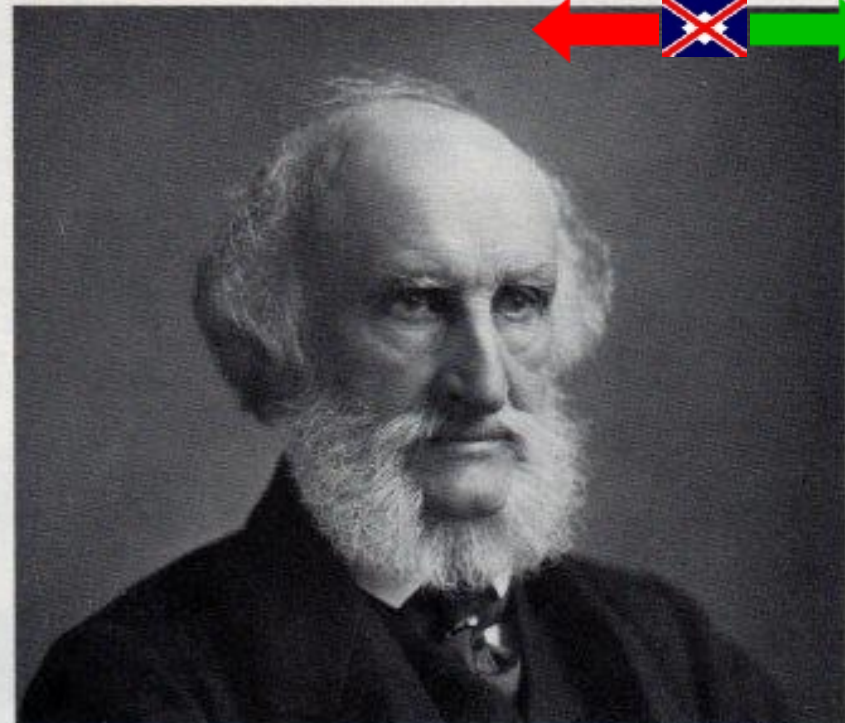
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Castle Line

It was in 1872 that there came on the scene the company that for nearly thirty years was to provide the Union Line with the fiercest competition. Donald Currie, whose ships were engaged in the Indian trade, had been instrumental in arranging the charter to George H. Payne of two ships for the South African service, but only two weeks had passed since the sailing of the ships when Payne called on Currie to say his company could continue no longer. Currie had to take on himself the risk of the voyages; at the same time shippers urged him to place his own ships on the route. The momentous decision was made, and in 1872 Donald Currie's ships entered the South African trade. His company was not at that time known as the Castle Line. It was styled "The London Line" or the Colonial Mail Ltd. It was not until 1876 that Castle Packets Co. was formed, and in 1881 became the Castle Mail Packets Co. Ltd.

In 1873 Windsor Castle—the first to bear that illustrious name—made a sensational voyage, arriving in Cape Town 23 days after leaving Dartmouth. The Colonial Parliament in Cape Town—who were rather piqued at not having been consulted when the mail contract had last been renewed—were eager to keep this rival company in the field and unanimously voted to Donald Currie £150 a day for every day by which his ship should make the voyage in less than 30 days, with a maximum of £12,000 payable. When in 1876 the mail contract came up for renewal it was shared between the Union and Castle Companies. A weekly service was to be provided, each company taking alternate sailings. The voyage time was reduced to 26 days, with premiums of £100 a day offered for voyages completed in less than the specified time. If the time was less than 23 days the premium was increased to £150.

In those years of intense rivalry Donald Currie, who had a flair for publicity and was intensely aware of the value in business of knowing the right people, visited South Africa and there came to know the Prime Ministers in the Cape and in the Transvaal. At home Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, was a friend of his, and later he entered Parliament as a member for West Perthshire.

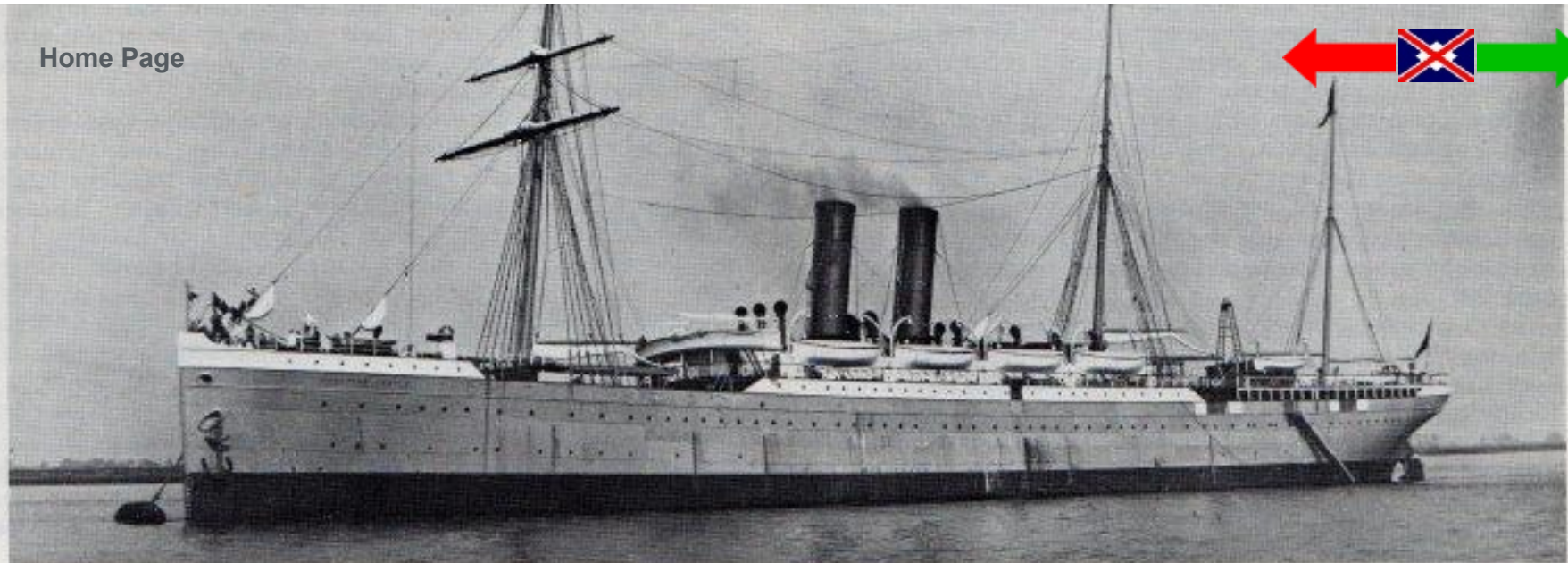


Sir Donald Currie

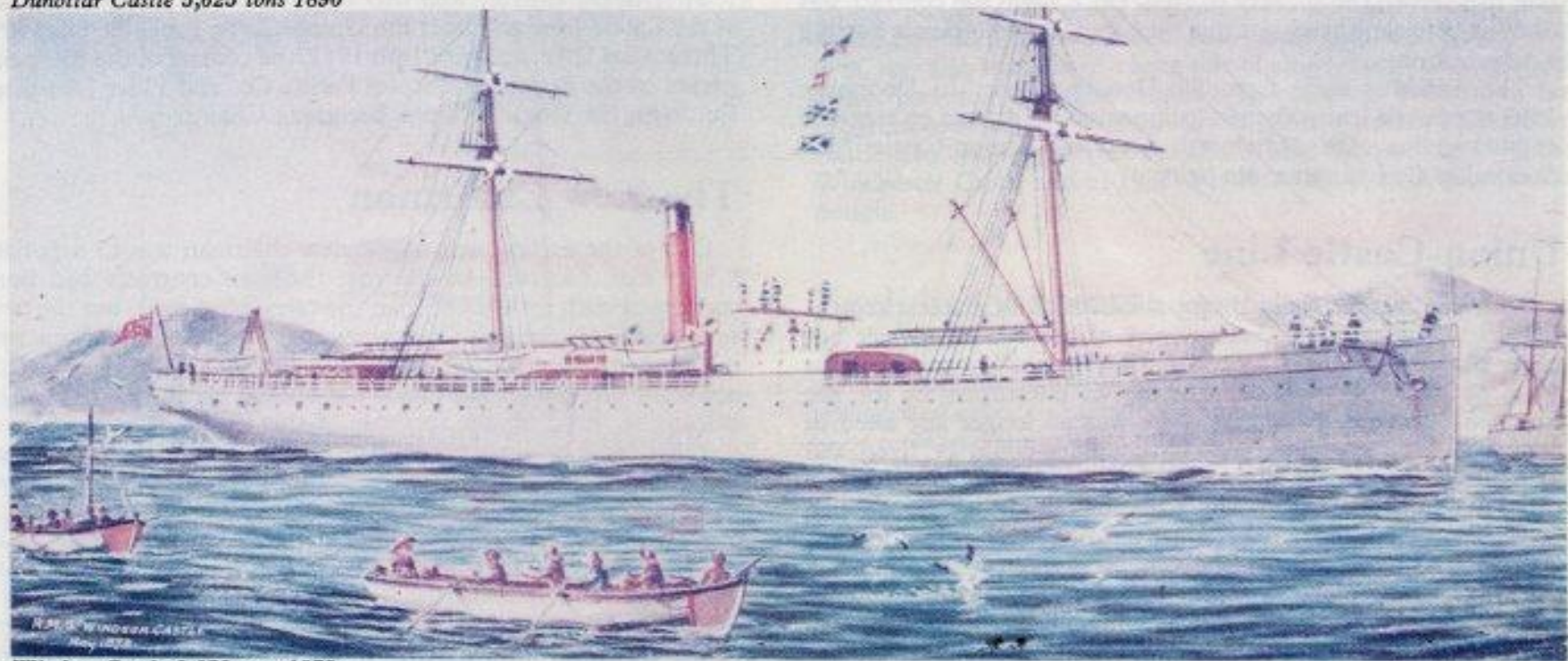
The discovery of gold on the Rand made a great stir in England and many prospectors made the voyage to South Africa to seek their fortunes. So great was the demand for passages at that time that it was quite a common thing for passages to be endorsed "To sleep where any place can be found by the Chief Steward".

In 1890 Donald Currie put into service by far the largest ship on the route. Up to that time the largest ship was the Mexican of 4,600 tons. The Dunottar Castle was of 5,600 tons, with accommodation for 360 passengers which could be increased by a further 150 in "open berth" accommodation. On her trials she reached a speed of 17½ knots, and on her maiden voyage to Cape Town broke the existing record by completing the voyage in 17 days 20 hours. The homeward voyage was even faster, taking only 16 days 14 hours. The following year she reduced these times by nearly a day in each direction.

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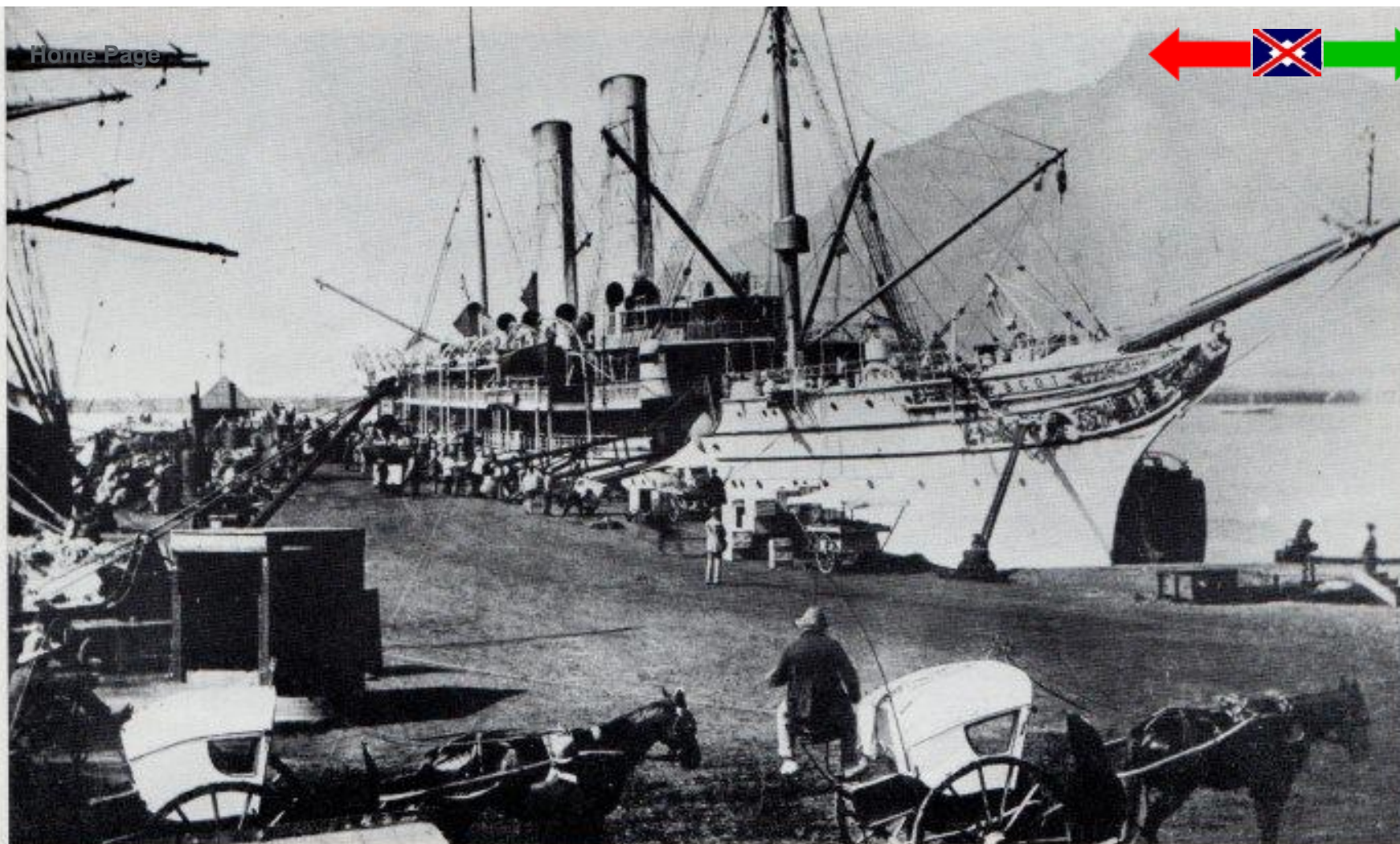


Dunottar Castle 5,625 tons 1890



Windsor Castle 2,672 tons 1873

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Scot 6844 tons 1891

The Union Line were not to be outdone. In 1890 they launched the ship that was to be the answer to Dunottar Castle. This was the Scot, a ship of 6,884 tons, and truly remarkable she turned out to be. She had twin screws and accommodation for 408 passengers. On her maiden voyage she lowered the record of her rival by more than a day. Her greatest triumph was in 1893 when she arrived at Cape Town two days before her expected time. The voyage from England had been completed in 14 days 18 hours 57 minutes, a time that was not to be bettered for more than forty

Right from the very start after the merger the South African Mail service began to establish itself as a service without parallel on the ocean-going routes of the world. There was a saying in Cape Town that people set their watches by the arrival of the mailship. The time taken on the route was progressively reduced, but the meticulous punctuality remained.

Two years after the merger the first mailships were ordered in the name of the Union-Castle Line. These were Armadale Castle and Kenilworth Castle, both of 13,000 tons, the largest

years. But in spite of her sensational performances, with her insatiable appetite for coal she was losing the company money. In 1896 she was lengthened and remodelled to increase her earning capacity.

In an endeavour to secure for themselves the best service by allowing the two companies to remain in competition, the Cape Government had included in successive mail contracts a clause forbidding them to amalgamate. A new contract was due in 1900. This time the Government announced the contract would be awarded to one company only and invited tenders.

Both the Union and Castle Companies failed to submit proposals; they declined to compete against each other. No tender was received. The Government had to turn to the two companies that had served the country so well. Once again the contract was divided between them, but this time there was no clause barring amalgamation.

The initiative came from Sir Donald Currie. In December 1899 the public learnt the two companies had agreed on terms to come together. On March 8th 1900 the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Co Ltd came into being.

Union-Castle Line

With the merger there disappeared much of the excitement that had come from the keen rivalry of the two companies but in its place there came something that was of far greater value to those using the service, whether as passengers or for the shipment of cargo. Now that there was no longer any need to outdo the rival company regular schedules could be fixed and maintained. Passengers knew when their ship would arrive and could make their arrangements accordingly. Those who shipped or received cargo knew just when it would arrive, and all this was far more satisfactory to everyone. Now there were established mail days, and anyone expecting a letter knew on which day it would be there. No longer did the shipping companies have to face the cost of the very fast passages, which were a great boost for prestige but did not help the balance sheet.

ships yet to be ordered for the route. A later ship, the Balmoral Castle, figures in a noted historical occasion. The self-governing colonies of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange River, were formally united and the Union of South Africa came into being. To mark the occasion the Prince of Wales was to travel to South Africa to open Parliament, but before this occurred King Edward VII died and the Prince of Wales succeeded to the throne as King George V. In his place, the late King's brother the Duke of Connaught, was chosen to carry out this ceremony. The Balmoral Castle was taken over by the Admiralty, special accommodation was arranged for the royal passengers, the white ensign was run up and Balmoral Castle was commissioned with a naval crew.

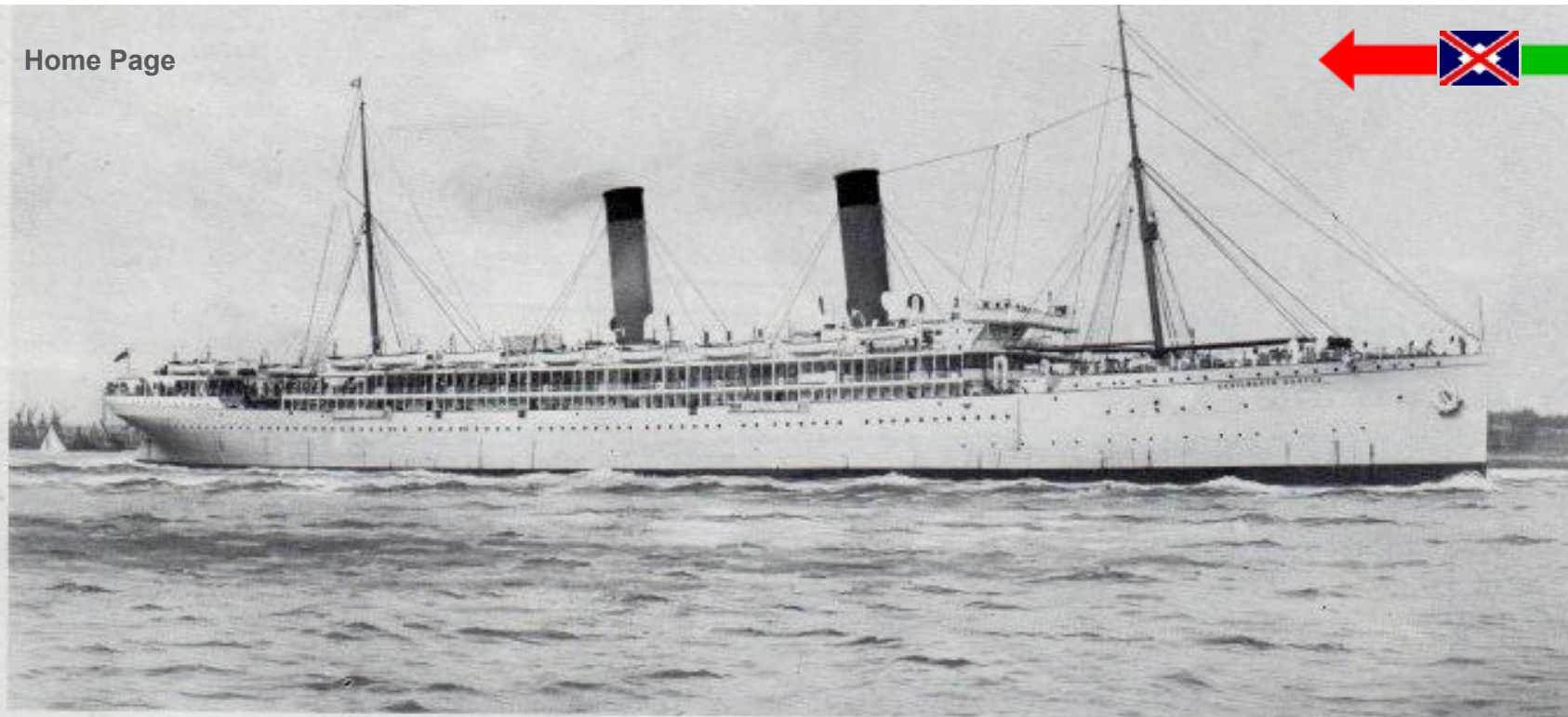
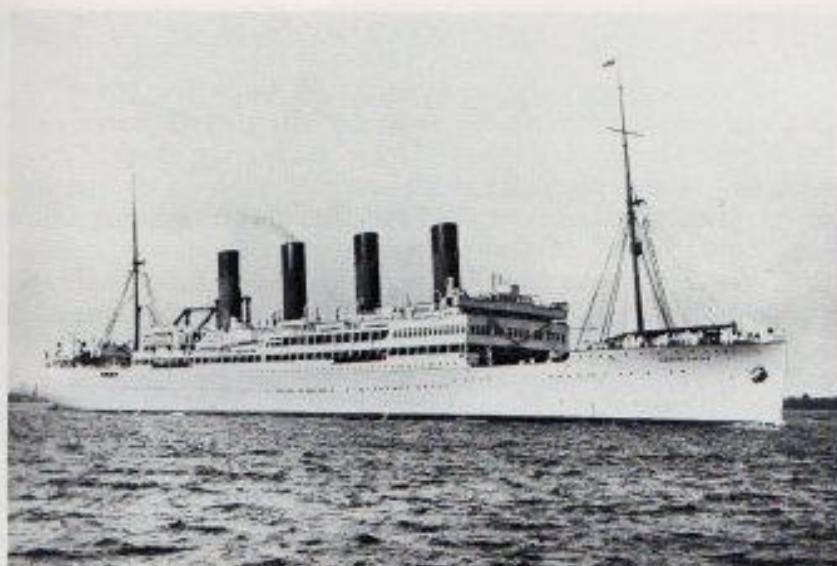
Sir Donald Currie, who had done so much for the fortunes of the Castle Line and later the Union-Castle Line, died in 1909. Three years later, on April 18th 1912, the control of the company passed to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. and Elder Dempster Co., with Sir Owen Philipps becoming Chairman.

The New Chairman

One of the earliest acts of the new chairman was to negotiate a new mail contract. In the past the mail contracts had been concerned with little more than the carriage of mail, but the new agreement was far more comprehensive. Sir Owen Philipps saw in South Africa a country of infinite possibilities, and it was his ambition that the Union-Castle Co. should play a worthy part in helping to build up the fortunes of this young country. Agreements were made to charge special rates on produce exported from South Africa. Pedigree stock from Europe was to be carried to South Africa free of freight, in an endeavour to build up the quality of the South African herds. To help the infant fruit industry 18,000 cubic feet of cold or cool chamber space was to be installed in every mailship.

In 1914 came the first world war, and for four years the ships of the Company were engaged in the heroic struggles of keeping open the lifelines of this country and of the empire.

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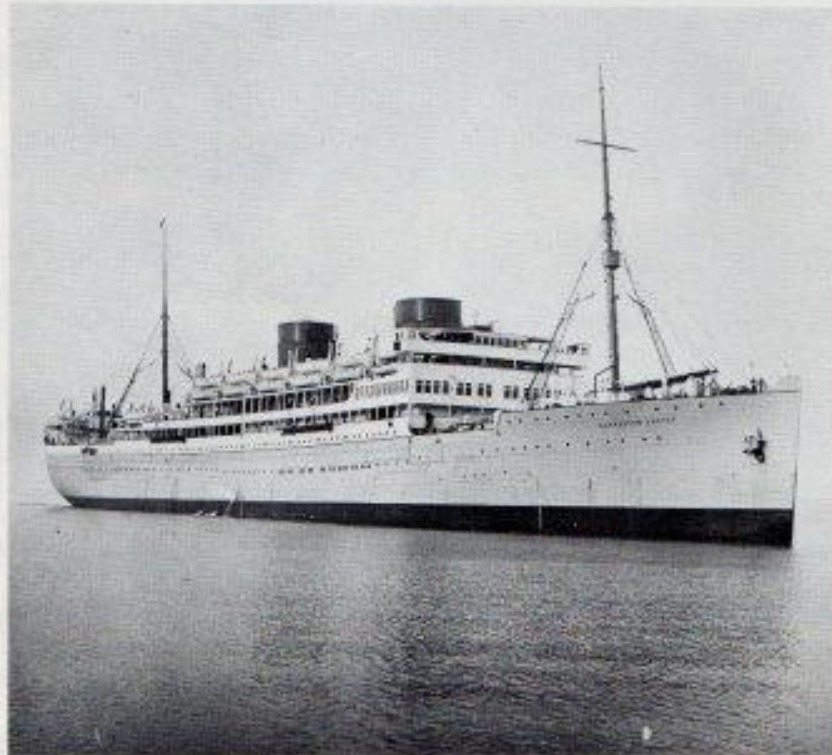
*Kenilworth Castle 12,975 tons 1904*

After the War

With the war over and a resumption made towards normal life, delivery of two new mailships, Arundel Castle and Windsor Castle was taken in 1921 and 1922. At 19,000 tons they were already half as large again as the pre-war Balmoral Castle, and were larger than any ships that had served on the route before. They were also of a very new design. It has been said that this might be called the multiple funnel period, and certainly the two new Castles well fitted the description for they flaunted four smoke stacks, one of them in reality being a dummy. These ships provided many amenities not hitherto thought of, including a permanent swimming pool for first class passengers. When the Arundel Castle arrived back from South Africa on her maiden voyage she was crowded to capacity carrying many distinguished passengers, including General Smuts and members of his Cabinet on their way to England for the Imperial Conference of 1921.

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Windsor Castle 18,967 tons 1922



Carnarvon Castle 20,141 tons 1926

New Design



It was in 1926 that Union-Castle introduced another complete change in ship design. The ship was the Carnarvon Castle, which besides being the first Union-Castle ship to exceed 20,000 tons, was also the first of a long line of ships, both passenger and cargo, powered by diesel engines. In complete contrast to her predecessors with their four tall slender funnels, Carnarvon Castle had two large squat funnels. There followed in 1930 the Winchester Castle and in 1931 Warwick Castle, both of a similar design.

Freight Contracts

In 1928 a new freight contract was signed. Under the terms of this contract Union-Castle Line agreed to provide extra refrigerated space for deciduous and citrus fruit. This space was to be increased annually so that by 1933 5,000 tons for deciduous and 7,000 tons for citrus fruit would be provided if required.

Five years later a further freight agreement was concluded, this time for ten years. In order that the provisions of this agreement might satisfactorily be carried out orders were placed for the building of two new mailships, each of 25,000 tons, to be named Stirling Castle and Athlone Castle. This agreement was followed two years later by a new mail contract. This was for ten

Athlone Castle 25,567 tons 1936

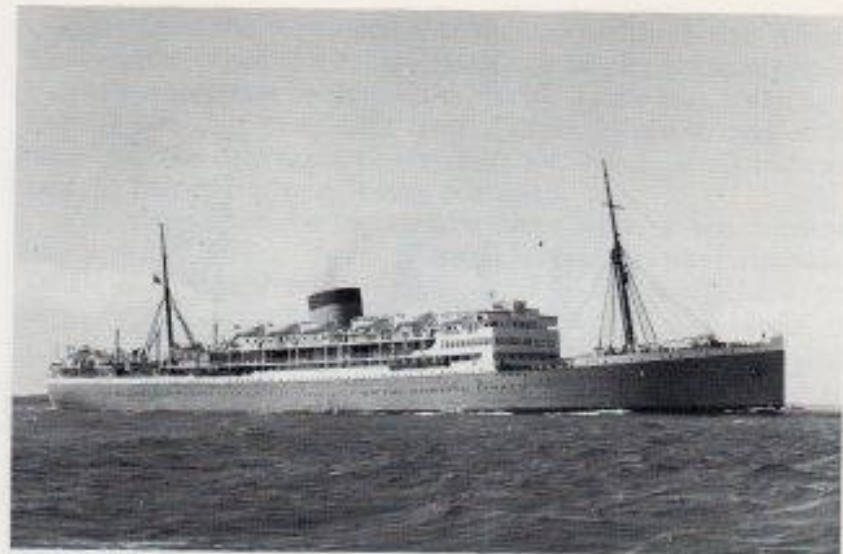


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years from 1st January 1937, and the most significant part was an agreement to reduce, from the end of 1938, the contract time of the voyage from 16 days 15 hours to not more than 14 days. This called for bold measures. The two new ships ordered and due to enter service in 1936 would be the only ships in the fleet capable of accomplishing the voyage in this fast time. Eight ships were required for the service in place of the nine needed under the old timing. In March an order was placed for a further but larger ship of the Stirling Castle type, and a contract was entered into for the re-engining and partial reconstruction of five mailships—Arundel Castle, Windsor Castle, Carnarvon Castle, Winchester Castle and Warwick Castle. Service speed was to be increased by over three knots, which required something of the order of doubling the original engine power. With the three older ships, too, it was found necessary to lengthen the bow.

One by one the ships went over to Belfast for these changes. As they emerged when the work was completed they had undergone a complete transformation. For Arundel Castle and Windsor Castle their four slender funnels had been replaced by two larger but shorter funnels. For the three motorships, the two funnels had been replaced by a single funnel, gracefully raked.

With the launching in 1937 of the newest mailship came a further break in tradition. Hitherto the ships had been named after castles in the British Isles. As a gesture to South Africa, with whose prosperity the fortunes of the company were so intimately bound up, she was named *Cape Town Castle*.



Winchester Castle 20,001 tons 1930

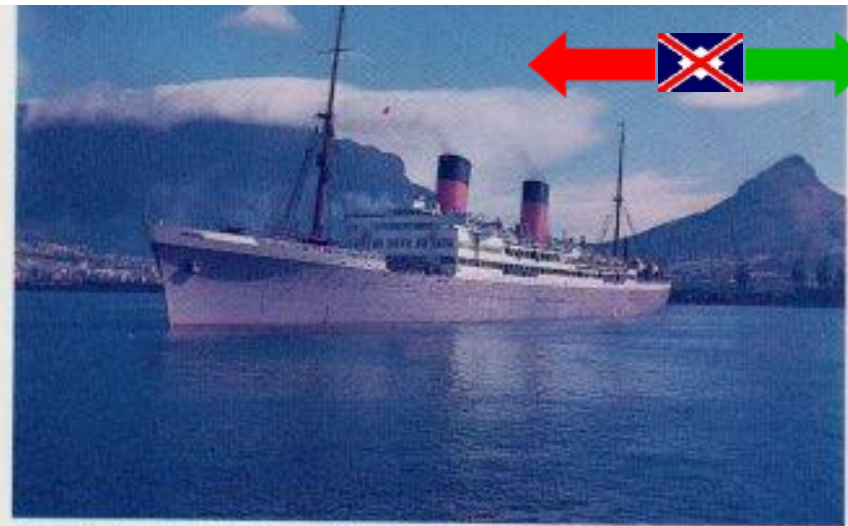


bound up, she was named Capetown Castle.

Home Page Accelerated Service

In August 1936 the Stirling Castle made history by accomplishing the voyage to Cape Town in 13 days 9 hours, breaking the sensational record set up by the Scot as far back as 1893. But this was no mere flash in the pan for the sake of breaking a record—it was the start of a new and faster service which would be maintained with the same regularity as the former schedule. The Stirling Castle and Athlone Castle maintained this schedule from then on, while other mailships, as they were returned from the shipbuilders, also undertook the faster passage. Capetown Castle came into service in 1938, and by the end of the year the new schedule was in full operation.

In 1939 came the second world war, and for seven years there was a break in the mail service.



Arundel Castle 19,216 tons 1921



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Capetown Castle 27,002 tons 1938

Post War Reconstruction

With the war at an end, there came the task of restoring the mail service. During the war years all the company's ships had served in many parts of the world, mainly as troop carriers. Much work had to be done to make them ready once more for their civilian passengers. January 2nd 1947 was to see the mail service restarted, but this was by a cargo vessel. On January 9th Capetown Castle returned to the route, restored to pre-war standards of elegance and comfort.

The South African Government at that time were recruiting skilled immigrants and to provide sufficient transport for this influx of men and their families the company decided to postpone the refitting of three mailships—Carnarvon Castle, Winchester Castle and Arundel Castle—for about a year. For this reason it was near the end of 1950 when the last of the refitted ships, the Arundel Castle, took her place in the mail service, which was now once again served by eight passenger ships.

*Warwick Castle in her wartime role as Aircraft Carrier*

New Mail Contract

With the war in its closing stages in 1945, Sir Vernon Thomson, Chairman of the Union-Castle Co., had flown to South Africa to negotiate a new mail contract. This took effect from 1st January 1947, and was for a period of ten years. There followed an announcement that an order had been placed for the building of two 28,000 ton ships, to replace the mailships sunk during the

Sir Vernon Thomson

war.

The first of these new ships, Pretoria Castle, was launched in Belfast in August 1947, and she had the distinction of having the ceremony performed by radio telephone by Mrs. Smuts from her home at Doornkloof, near Pretoria, some 5,000 miles away. Two months later the sister ship, Edinburgh Castle, was launched at Belfast by HRH Princess Margaret. This was the first major public function the Princess had performed on her own.

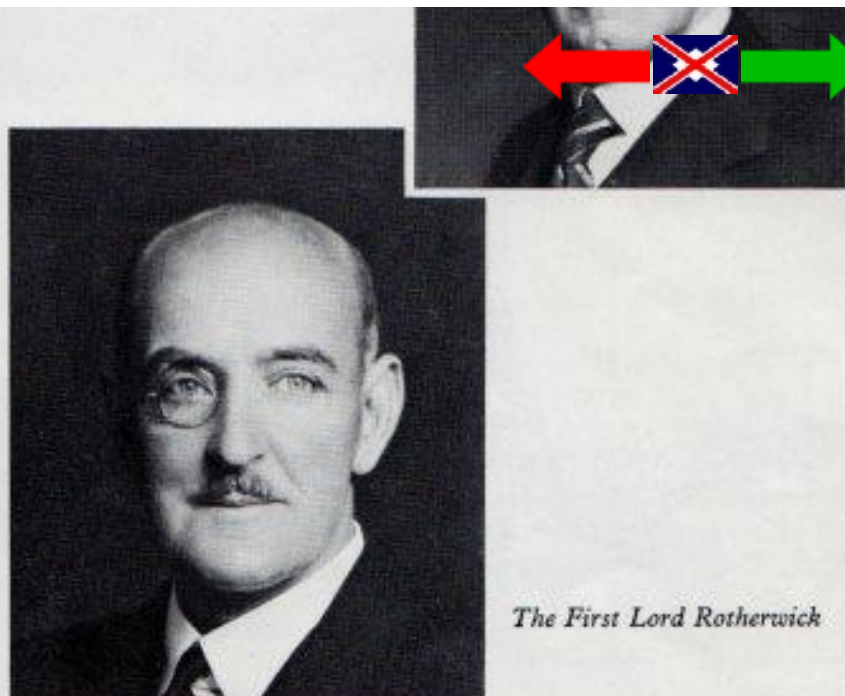
The two ships came into service the following year. While in many ways they followed the design of earlier mailships they differed from them in that they were not diesels, but were powered by oil-fired steam turbines.

To replace Arundel Castle, which was now over 30 years old, an order was given to Harland and Wolff in 1955 for a new mailship, to be named Pendennis Castle. She was to be similar in size to the two ships delivered in 1948. However, before the building of the ship was far advanced there came a dramatic development in the Company's history.

British & Commonwealth Shipping

In 1956 the Union-Castle Line and Clan Line Steamers, the long established Cayzer family shipping business, agreed to merge their interests and formed the present major shipping group—The British & Commonwealth Shipping Co. Ltd. The Chairman of the new company was the first Lord Rotherwick, and in the developments that followed the Cayzer family became intimately involved with the Mail Service. The present Chairman, Sir Nicholas Cayzer, has headed the company since the death of his uncle, Lord Rotherwick in March 1958.

One of the earliest acts of the new regime was to lengthen Pendennis Castle for stabilisers to be fitted—the first of the Company's ships to be so equipped. When at the end of 1958 the ship was completed, in her interior layout and in her decor she presented a very different appearance from the old Union-Castle ships. Miss Jean Munro had been brought in to advise on decor and a far greater use of colour had been made. The Long Gallery, linking the first class Lounge with the Smoke Room, which for so long had been a familiar part of the mailship layout, had disappeared. Instead the large Smoke Room was amidships, with the Lounge forward, and further aft a Lido, with windows



The First Lord Rotherwick

Pendennis Castle Smoke Room



opening on to the first class swimming pool, which was now in the optimum ~~flag~~ promenade deck.



Plans for faster service

Shortly after the merger further orders for new mailships were placed. There had also appeared in the journal *South Africa*—little noticed at the time—a very interesting interview with Lord Rotherwick. In the course of the interview Lord Rotherwick revealed that the company were planning a further reduction in the time taken for the voyage between Southampton and Cape Town. This was to be reduced to 11½ days, and only seven ships would be required to operate the service. It would not be put into effect until all seven ships were able to do the faster passage, which required a service speed of 22½ knots. Of the older ships, only Edinburgh Castle and Pretoria Castle were capable of this speed. Pendennis Castle could meet the requirements and the two ships on order—Windsor Castle and Transvaal Castle—were of course being designed for the new service. Two further ships were still needed.

In 1960 Windsor Castle—the third of that name in the fleet—came on the scene. In some respects her entry was inauspicious for she came at a time of industrial unrest. A major five-day shakedown cruise from the yard at Birkenhead was cancelled at the last moment by threat of a seamen's strike. A similar threat caused the ship to sail from Southampton an hour before her scheduled time, disrupting the elaborate preparations which had been made to give her a royal send-off.

But inauspicious beginning or no, Windsor Castle soon established her pride of place on the South African route. She was by far the largest ship to have a regular place on the route. Her interior design was a complete departure from anything that had gone before. Jean Munro had once again been responsible for decor, and she brought together a team of designers to assist her, Felix Kelly, Sidney Smith, Trewin Copplestone, all contributed murals, while Michael Inchbald, designer of the River Room at the Savoy Hotel, was responsible for the tourist class Smoke Room. Everywhere Windsor Castle was received with acclaim, and soon during the peak booking period her passenger lists began to read like extracts from Debrett or Who's Who.

Eighteen months after Windsor Castle joined the fleet there came Transvaal Castle from the yards of John Brown, where the great Queens were built. Transvaal Castle was to introduce an entirely new concept, and for her the description "Hotel Ship" was coined. There were no class barriers, but she differed from other one-class ships in that there was a full range of cabin accommodation as wide as on any two-class ship. As at a hotel you may book a suite on the first floor, or a very humble room at the back of the building, but still have the use of all the other amenities the hotel offers, so it was with Transvaal Castle. For this ship the decor had been shared between Jean Munro and Tom Parr. An innovation was the introduction of stewardettes to serve in the dining room.



Windsor Castle Drawing Room

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S.A. Vaal Orangery



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Southampton Castle 10,538 tons 1965

Departure from tradition

In 1963 the company announced a departure from all established traditions. To complete the seven ships required for the faster mail service tenders were invited for two fast cargo liners without any passenger accommodation. It was considered that berths offered in the five passenger ships were adequate to meet the existing demand. They were to be the first mailships ever

The Last Chapter

In December 1973 oil prices rocketed and shipping companies were forced to look at ways of economising on the amount of fuel consumed and increasing their revenue. Union-Castle announced that the mailships would slow down, taking an extra day on the voyage to and from Cape Town. At the same time fares had to be increased more frequently and steeply than hitherto.

Late in 1974 it was announced that cargo operations on the Europe-South Africa route were to become containerised during 1977-78. Union-Castle's interests, together with those of the Clan Line, were to be handled by Overseas Containers Ltd. About this time Union-Castle and Safmarine were looking at the

to be built without passenger accommodation. The two ships were renamed Southampton Castle and Good Hope Castle. The first of these ships came into service in May 1965. In July of the same year the new faster mail schedule was introduced, appropriately enough the first sailing being taken by Windsor Castle, on 16th July.

South African participation

Towards the end of 1965 another announcement was made which created considerable interest, particularly in South Africa. An agreement had been made with the South African Marine Corporation to give that company a participation in the mail service. Two ships were sold to them—Transvaal Castle and Pretoria Castle, and the next mailship replacement would be for Safmarine to provide, thus making that company's share in the service three ships out of seven. Transvaal Castle and Pretoria Castle were renamed SA Vaal and SA Oranje, and they sailed in Safmarine colours. They remained part of the mail service and the ships continued to be managed by Union-Castle.

In 1967 when other passenger ships which had been calling at St. Helena and Ascension were withdrawn, it was decided to add accommodation for 12 passengers to Southampton Castle and Good Hope Castle, and to arrange for these ships to make regular calls at the islands.

The late sixties and early seventies witnessed the final flourish of the big passenger mail ships. In spite of growing competition from faster and cheaper air travel the sea passage to South Africa remained a great attraction for the luxury holidaymaker as much as for the young families still emigrating in substantial numbers.

About this time Union-Castle and Safmarine were looking at the future of the two oldest mailships—Edinburgh Castle and SA Oranje. Due to the forthcoming plans for  as for economic reasons, no plans were made for building replacement passenger ships. SA Oranje was withdrawn in September 1975 and went to Taiwan for breaking up. Edinburgh Castle made her last passenger voyage to Durban in March 1976 and was subsequently sold to breakers.

The high cost of wages and the heavy fuel bills led to the withdrawal of Pendennis Castle rather sooner than expected and she sailed on her last mailship voyage from Southampton on May 7, 1976. The advent of the container ship era, coupled with the fact that the mail ships were built for a specialised trade and could not operate profitably on cruising or any other trade without prohibitive capital expenditure, spelt the end of the remaining mailship fleet.

Windsor Castle, the last Union-Castle passenger mailship, returned to Southampton on September 19, 1977—120 years and 4 days after the 530 ton Dane sailed down Southampton Water on the first epic voyage to South Africa. Good Hope Castle completed her final voyage in the mail service on September 26, and SA Vaal on October 10.

It fell to the Southampton Castle to make the last ever mailship voyage between the UK and South Africa and her return to her home port on October 24 marked the end of a long tradition of service carrying mails, passengers and cargo on this route. There will no longer be any regular passenger service between the UK and South Africa, but cargo and mails will be provided for by the new container ship service in which Union-Castle (through Overseas Containers Ltd.) and Safmarine will be participating. Union-Castle will also be managing the OCL container ship Table Bay.

100 Years of The Weekly Mail Service 1876 - 1976

In September 1857 RMS *Dane* inaugurated the monthly mail service for the Union Line. This service continued for a little over 10 years until January 1868 when the company increased sailings to two a month. Since 1857 Union Line had had a virtual monopoly

whereby in any way competition may be prevented between the said companies". Currie would not agree to these restrictive clauses as it was his ambition to absorb the Union Line.

In an effort to reach agreement the Prime

of this lucrative trade but in 1872 Donald Currie's Castle Line switched its interests from the Indian trade to South Africa. In May 1873 the Castle Line became firmly established in the trade when *Windsor Castle* reached Cape Town from Dartmouth in 23 days—two days inside Union Line's record.

Donald Currie wasted little time in gaining advantage with his faster ships and the Colonial Parliament in Cape Town paid bonuses to the Castle ships for each voyage completed in under 29 days. At this time negotiations were in progress for a new mail contract. The Cape Government, under Prime Minister Molteno, wanted keen competition and was loath to give either company a monopoly.

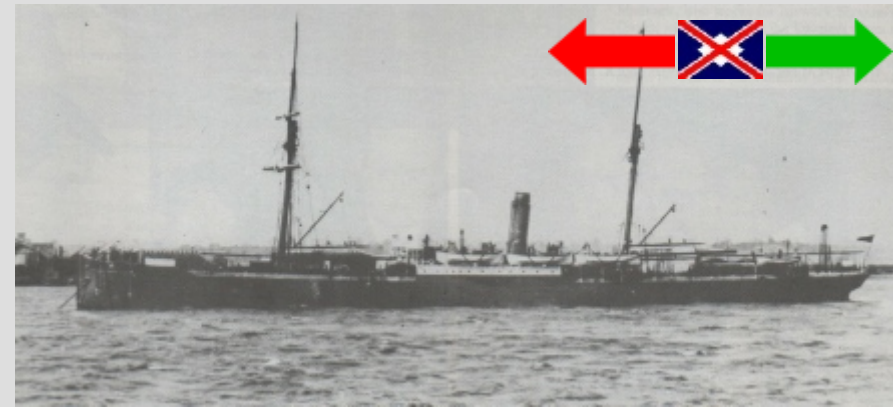
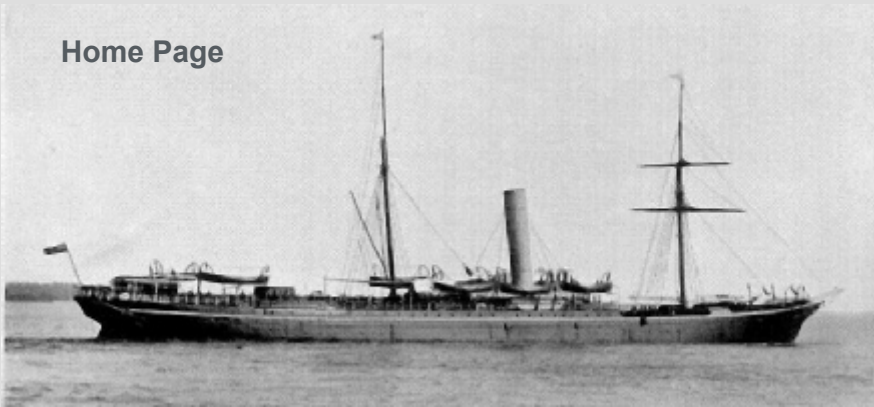
Although Currie was the chief negotiator with the Cape Government a degree of mutual understanding now existed between the two lines. The proposals for the new contract included the provision of a weekly mail service with alternate sailings by each company. Currie was forbidden to amalgamate with the Union Line or "to come to any understanding or agreement, direct or indirect, with the Union company, or with any other person or company, as aforesaid, to charge the same fares for freight or goods

Minister, Molteno, went to England for discussions with the British  Britain refused to get involved. The new agreement was therefore settled by Molteno and Currie, the Union Line agreeing to their terms. The restrictive clauses were omitted but a new clause was added to the effect that the Union and Castle Lines could not amalgamate during the validity of the contract except with the approval of the Cape Government.

The contract was signed in October 1876, providing a weekly mail service with alternate sailings by each company. The length of passage was to be 26 days (or 27 if a call was made at St. Helena). Subsidies were done away with but the companies were given all the postage money on the mails carried. Postage was reduced from one shilling to sixpence for the standard $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. letter. Speed premiums of £100 were to be paid and this was increased to £150 per day if the journey was made in less than 23 days.

The contract was effective from July 1, 1876 and was inaugurated six days later by the sailing of *Dunrobin Castle* from Cape Town. In 1877 the Union Liner *German* earned a premium of £830 by reaching Cape Town in a record-breaking 19 days.

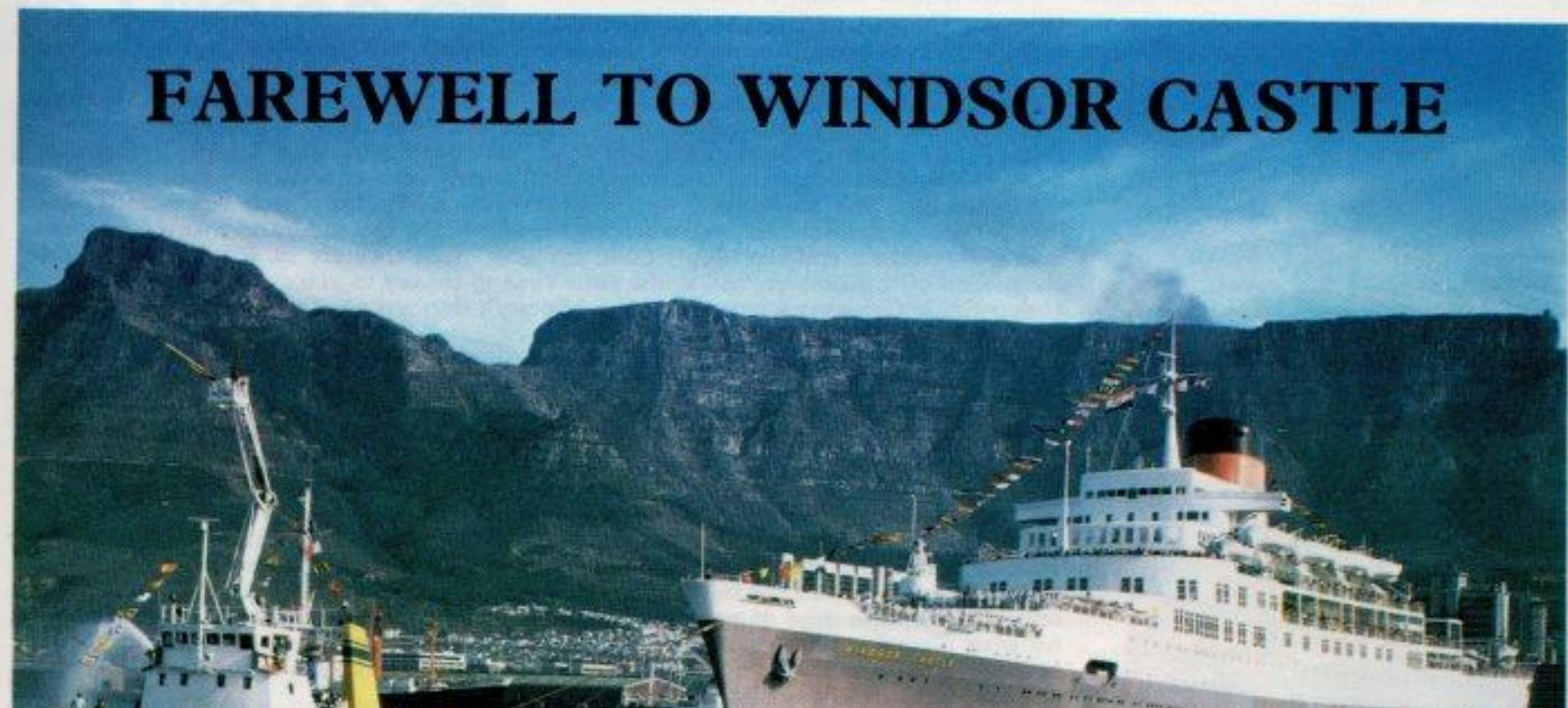
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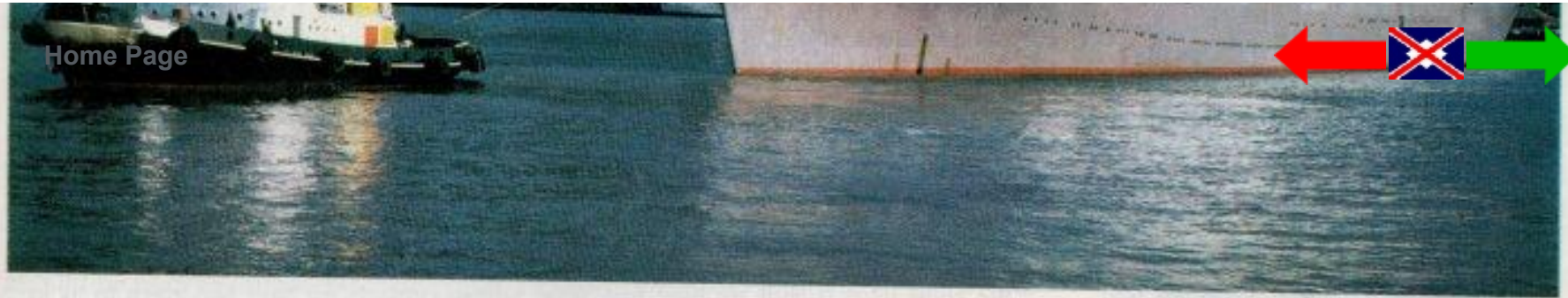


The two vessels that inaugurated the weekly mail service

Left: RMS Nubian of The Union Line Right: RMS Dunrobin Castle of The Castle Line

The End of The Line - 1977



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Picture: A. J. Musgrave-Newton

Windsor Castle sailed for the last time from Table Bay Harbour exactly at 4 p.m. on September 6. For many thousands of travellers, enthusiasts and staff this was the most poignant goodbye to a gracious ship.

For those not fortunate in witnessing this moment in history, these are some of the random impressions gathered on that lovely Cape spring evening.

Four tugs surrounded Windsor Castle, dressed overall and flying a 17-yard paying-off pennant. Fountains of water sprayed fore and aft. All ships, tugs, boats, tankers and power stations blasted off their whistles in a long crescendo of noise. Yachts, launches and rescue craft gathered at her stern as she slowly moved out of Duncan Dock to the strains of Auld Lang Syne played by the Cape Field Artillery Band and Pipers, accompanied by the thousands of people "seeing her off."

Escorted by the South African Navy frigate, SAS President Pretorius, she slowly moved into Table Bay. The frigate fired a shot across the bows of Windsor Castle and ordered her to heave-to. A party of 'pirates' from the frigate boarded Windsor Castle and dashed up to the bridge to present to Captain Beadon an embroidered commemorative mailbag.

As a finale to the farewell Albatross aircraft from Maritime Command flew overhead.

For all those on board and on the quayside there was an emotional atmosphere which will long be remembered.

Two tugs give water-cannon salutes as Windsor Castle leaves Cape Town.



SAS President Pretorius escorts Windsor Castle out of Table Bay.



The party of 'pirates' from the frigate dash up to the bridge on Windsor Castle.





1

Picture: June Foster



Windsor Castle was launched by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in June 1959. Whilst the ship was on her last voyage Sir Nicholas Cayzer received the following message from Her Majesty:

"Queen Elizabeth is extremely sad to know that Windsor Castle, which she had been so proud to launch and in which The Queen Mother has always taken such a keen interest, is making her final voyage on the Passenger Mail Service to South Africa, thereby bringing to and end a wonderful tradition of a hundred and twenty years of service by your Company.

"Queen Elizabeth knows well with what distinction Windsor Castle represented your line and what acclaim she received wherever she sailed. The Queen Mother asks if you would inform the Master and the Ship's Company how much they are in her thoughts at the completion of this passage, and at the same time to convey to you and to all those in the Union-Castle Company a message of Her Majesty's warmest good wishes."

Colonel Laurens van der Post travelled on the last voyage of Windsor Castle. At the Farewell Dance held on board on September 17, Colonel van der Post made a speech on behalf of the passengers, extracts from which we publish:

"I'm reminded of a famous English 19th Century Peer, of whom it was said that he was always dreaming he was addressing the House of Lords and one day woke up and found he was. Now, I feel not so much that I've been dreaming that for some years I have had a nightmare. A nightmare that this kind of travel, this kind of ship we are sailing in might be abolished, and I've just since Las Palmas woken-up and found that indeed this is so, and I wonder if we realise what precisely is being taken away from us. If we realise what these ships and the men who sail in them have given us—though not just in my lifetime, and I sailed first in these ships 65 years ago, but in what they have given us over the centuries—for what is coming to an end is not just the Union-Castle Line, but a great era in human history which started with the Renaissance—which started in an age to go out and discover and adventure, find new nations and new lands."

"We in South Africa, in Southern Africa I should say, because I think it holds good for Rhodesia as much as it does South Africa, we owe our existence to these ships. There is no country which has ever been so unique in the creation of ships, because ships gave us our *raison d'être*. We came to the Cape of Good Hope as a halfway-house to India as suppliers of food, vegetables and fresh meat to ships of precisely this kind, and in return the ships and the traffic they engendered made us grow and grow comparatively great."

"I was heartened by our departure from Cape Town, by the farewell we got—by the little ships that followed us out to sea and the huge port of screaming 'Don't go! The little

2 *Picture: Cruiseship Pictures*

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3 *Picture: June Foster*4 *Picture: Cruiseship Pictures*

little ships that followed us out to sea and the tugs sort of screaming 'Don't go'. The little mirrors flashing from Signal Hill and Sea Point—not in great big establishments but tiny little houses tucked in all over the hills, as if the whole nation felt taken away from us.”

“We know what friends we have had, what human contacts we have had given to us in the world with ships of this kind. Every year some 3,000 officers and sailors and men of these ships took something of Europe and brought it to us, and as friends took something of us and gave it to Europe.”

“Captain Beadon and all his staff and every member of his crew have taught me in this voyage how little the dividing lines in the ship matter. How little it matters whether you are on deck, between decks or in the engine room. Where there is a world all at one doing a great human service for us all. I would like to say to them thank you. I would like to use the words which Africans in the interior in my part of Africa use when they see someone truly great. They say ‘We have seen you, we praise you, and we thank you’. Captain Beadon, we would like to say to you and all your staff and men ‘We have seen you, we thank you, and we praise you’—but we thank and praise you, not you only, but we thank you all in this ship as plenipotentiaries of 500 years of sailors and ships that have made us what we are. And we hope that somewhere, in some dimension, this praise and this thank you will get through and make life respond to make this end not an end, but the beginning of something new. And if that something new is half as good as what these ships have given us through history, I myself shall have renewed hope for the future.”

1 The last passengers versus officers' cricket match played on Windsor Castle. The officers upheld the honour of the ship by winning both matches.

2 Children's Fancy Dress Parade.

3 A record £1600 was raised for the Sir Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children at the children's fair held during the homeward voyage. Our picture shows Cruise Purser Robbie Rutt counting the proceeds with (left to right) Children's Hostess Carole Amis and children's stewardesses Sylvia Merriott and Ann Macdonald.

4 Staff Commander Arthur Wigham, Captain Patrick Beadon and Chief Purser John Dimmock judge the fancy dress parade, the theme was

120 years of mail service. Escorting the contestant is Andrew Whitehouse, third purser.

5 The Windsor Castle formation dance team: from left John Wootton, Derek Mason, Robbie Rutt, and Peter Glenn, Ann Lewis, Carol Pringle, Pamela Steele and Carole Amis.

6 SA Vaal received tremendous farewells all along the South African coast. At Durban the Publicity Association arranged a spectacular send-off, with the Caledonian Pipers, the Durban Men's Choir and the Cabana Beach Zulu Dancers on the quayside. At Cape Town tens of thousands of people saw SA Vaal leave Table Bay for the last time.



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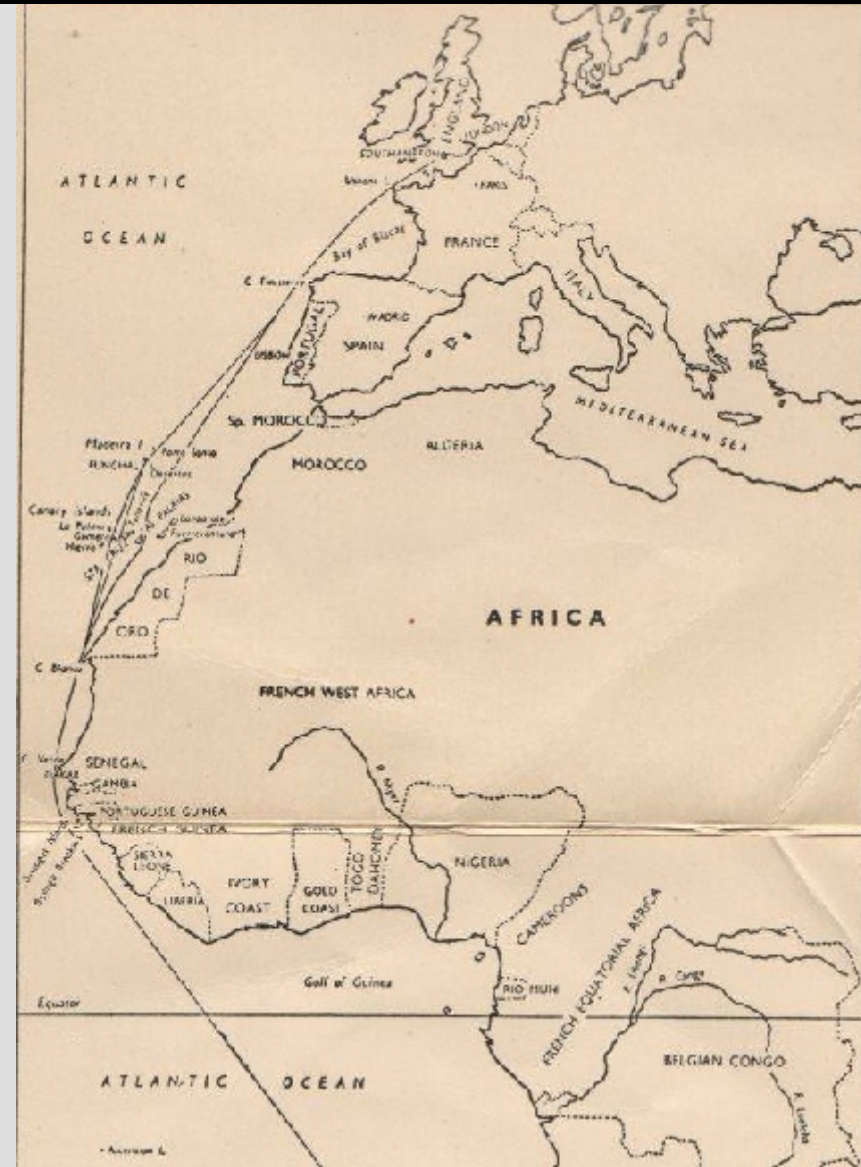
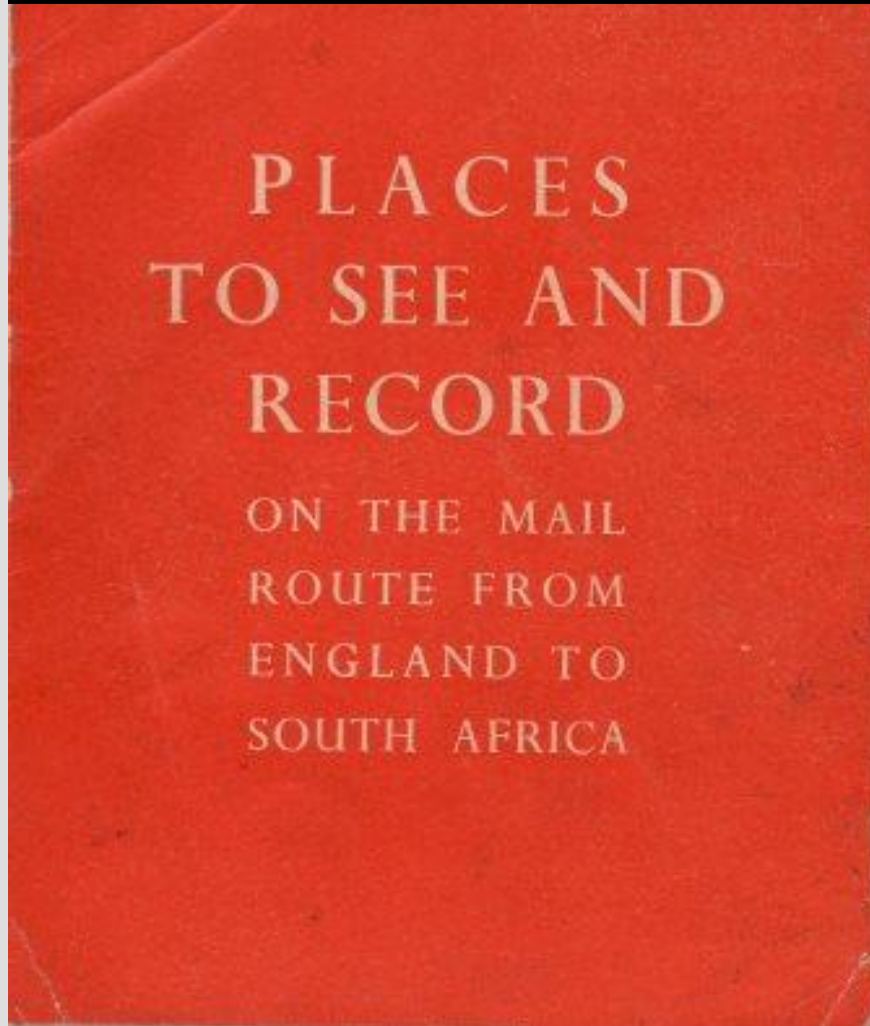


Picture: June Foster 5



6 Picture: Cape Times

The Voyage to The Cape

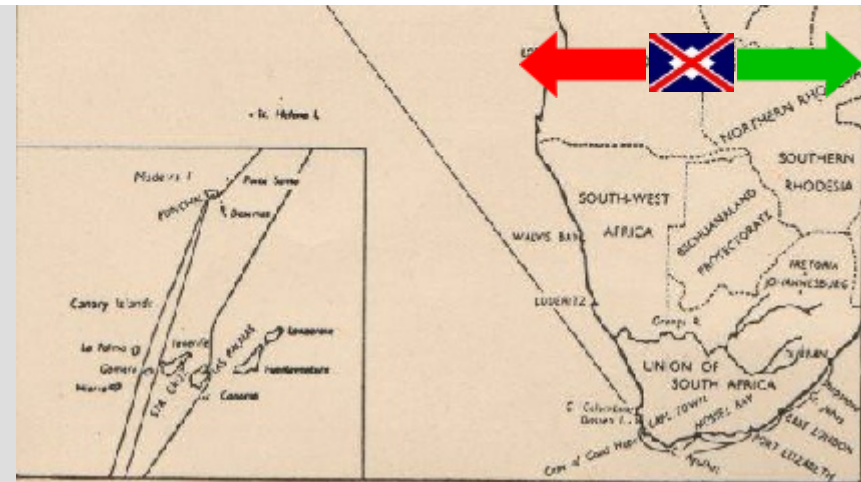


This narrative is taken from the descriptive notices which the Purser exhibits on the ship's notice board on the voyage to Durban as the vessel approaches the port of call or point of interest concerned.

.A table of sea distances in nautical miles between the ports of call on the voyage to Durban at each port.

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Passengers could also obtain from the Bureau a copy of our Folder Map of Africa showing Routes of the Company's Services, together with booklets giving details of the itineraries and cost of shore excursions at principal ports of call.



Transvaal Castle at Southampton

Southampton to Las Palmas via Madeira

Southampton

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Nautical Miles to Cape Town 6008

Eighty miles by rail from London, Southampton ranks as Britain's largest seaport after London and Liverpool.

After undocking, our vessel passes down Southampton Water with Hythe on the starboard side, and the domed tower of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley is seen to port.

We pass Calshot Light Vessel and swing eastwards with the green park-like hills of the Isle of Wight to starboard and the Hampshire coast to port.

Our course lies past Spithead and the Naval Base of Portsmouth and between the two circular forst that jut out of the water to guard the entrance.

On rounding the Nab Tower (light) we enter the Channel and sail for some miles along the south-east coast of the Isle of Wight until the light on St Catherine's Point drops astern.



Ushant



Nautical Miles from Southampton 233

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 5775

This french island, two miles by four, marks the northern limit of the Bay of Biscay. Dangerous reefs stretch out from Ushant and in hazy weather we give the place a wide berth.

Cape Finisterre

[Home Page](#)**Nautical Miles from Southampton 614****Nautical Miles to Cape Town 5394**

After crossing the Bay of Biscay we sight the north-east corner of Spain, passing Cape Villano, Cape Torinana and finally Cape Finisterre, after which we leave land behind.

Spanish fishing vessels are frequently seen in this vicinity.



Capetown Castle at Funchal

Funchal - Madeira

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Guide to Madeira, available at the shop on board.

Nautical Miles from Southampton 1331

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 4677



Shortly before we sight Madeira, we pass Cima Island off the larger island of Porto Santo. Christopher Columbus lived for a time on Porto Santo and married the daughter of the Governor.

At the eastern tip of Madeira we pass a lighthouse on a rocky islet (Ilheu de Flora) and thenceforward, until we anchor in Funchal Bay about an hour later, we have a good view of the coast of this beautiful Portuguese island and can form some idea of its rugged grandeur.

Madeira is only about 35 miles by 13 miles but it is extremely mountainous and has one peak of over 6000 ft. The population is about 270,000.

Hardly is the anchor down before anxious dealers in local embroidery, wickerwork, etc., swarm on board; and boats and diving boys cluster round the ship's sides.

Passengers usually have the opportunity of going ashore for about three hours. Suggestions for using their time to best advantage will be found in the up-to-date



[Home Page](#)
[Carnarvon Castle](#)


Puerto de la Luz - Las Palmas - Gran Canaria



Nautical Miles from Southampton 1612

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 4396

Some Mail Vessels call at Las Palmas instead of Madeira. They sail down the eastern side of Grand Canary, affording a good view of the many villages scattered along its rugged coastline.

The area of Grand Canary is 634 sq miles and its highest peak is over 6400 ft. The population is over 300,000.

The ships berth at Puerto de la Luz at the north east corner of the island, the most important port belonging to Spain. Las Palmas, capital of the island, lies four miles away and the best way of spending a short stay is by taking a drive into the country, preferably to the Caldera Bandama an extinct volcano, returning by way of Las Palmas.

A party of folk dancers in picturesque costumes usually comes on board here to entertain the passengers.





Pendennis Castle

Las Palmas to Cape Town

Teneriffe and Gomera



Nautical Miles from Southampton 1592

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 4416

The Mail Route for ships calling Madeira passes between the Spanish islands of Teneriffe and Gomera, belonging to the Canary Island group.

As we sail between Teno Point on Teneriffe (port side) and Cristobel Point on Gomera we have a good view of both islands.

Teneriffe is of considerable commercial importance and supports a population of 430,000. Its famous peak, 12,152 ft is sometimes visible from over 100 miles.

Gomera is smaller and has only 30,000 inhabitants.

An alternative and more westerly route is sometimes followed by the Mail Vessels and in this event, if the weather is clear, we may have distant views of the islands of La Palma (starboard), Gomera (port) and Hierro (starboard).



*Edinburgh Castle*

Cape Verde



Nautical Miles from Southampton 2407

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 3601

The cape, which is in French Senegal, is the most westerly point of Africa.

Above the Cape are two hills which, in the rainy season, are covered with vegetation and on a spit of land which runs out the the Almadies Lighthouse may be seen the wrecks of vessels that have gone ashore on the dangerous reef.

Cape Verde is on the peninsula forming the west side of Goree Bay and in which the large port of Dakar (population 150,000), capital of French West Africa.

Dakar is usually visible soon after rounding Cape Verde.



[Home Page](#)*Arundel Castle*

Bijouga Breakers

Nautical Miles from Southampton 2610

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 3398

We pass 20 miles west-south-west of these breakers, which are of the coast of Portuguese Guinea, but are not visible. From here our course is set for 10 miles south-west of Dassen Island, and remains unaltered for over 3,300 miles.

*Athlone Castle*

Passing at Sea

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The Equator

The Mail Service

Approximately every 3½ days a mail ship would pass one of her sisters proceeding in the opposite direction.



On April 1st 1965 Windsor Castle (southbound) passed close to Pendennis Castle (northbound) at 1444, the log notes that "The usual courtesies were exchanged"

Windsor Castle was on a course of 142° T at a speed of 20.8 knots. Pendennis Castle would have been on a reciprocal course and roughly the same speed.

Later in 1965 the mail service was reduced from 8 vessels to 7 with the withdrawal of Athlone, Stirling and Capetown Castles and the introduction of Southampton and Good Hope Castles.

The ships would then have to maintain an average speed of 22.5 knots.

[Capt Alec Hort](#) can be seen on the bridge wing of Windsor Castle

[Capt Robert Cambridge](#) was in command of Pendennis Castle

I am grateful to Richard Masters (Alec Hort's Tiger) for the photographs and log extracts.





Nautical Miles from Southampton 3446

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 2562



The Equator is a great circle of the Earth equidistant from the poles, or more simply, the line that divides the Northern Hemisphere from the Southern. Tropical rains, very heavy at times, are experienced here.

The Crossing the Line Ceremony, which used always to be associated with this latitude, dates back for hundreds of years and has been a custom with sailors of many nations.

Originally the idea behind the ceremony was always the collection of fines from those crossing the line for the first time, to be converted by King Neptune and his retainers into drink.

In the vicinity of the Equator we pass through the Doldrums, a belt of calms, which lies between the equatorial limits of the NE and SE trade winds.

The position and extent of the Doldrums vary according to season.



[Home Page](#)*SA Oranje ex Pretoria Castle*

Cape Columbine



Nautical Miles from Southampton 5939

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 69

Cape Columbine lies a few miles north of Saldanha Bay.

Its powerful light which flashes every 15 seconds will be our first glimpse of South Africa



[Home Page](#)*Winchester Castle*

Dassen Island



Nautical Miles from Southampton 5976

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 32

The lighthouse on this 200 acre islet gives a group of two flashes every 30 seconds.

Dassen Island lies five miles off the coast and is home to countless seabirds.

From here come the penguin eggs sometimes offered for sale in South Africa





Southampton Castle

Robben Island



Nautical Miles from Southampton 6001

Nautical Miles to Cape Town 7

This has an area of three square miles and lies in the entrance to Table Bay.

During its long and interesting history it has been used mainly as a prison and as a place of detention for lunatics and lepers but the last of these was removed in 1931 and the island is now fortified.

The light on Robben Island is occulting and is obscured every seven seconds



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Stirling Castle

Table Bay Docks and Cape Town



Nautical Miles from Southampton 6008

Here our vessel berths alongside a modern quay not far from the centre of Cape Town and most of our passengers disembark.

Table Mountain (3549 feet) with Devil's Peak to the left and Signal Hill and Lion's Head to the right, when seen on a sunny morning from Table Bay, is one of the world's finest views and never fails to make a deep impression on the traveller, whether he be a South African returning home or a newcomer to these shores.

Cape Town, the Mother City and Parliamentary Capital of the Union of South Africa, was founded by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. The population is 650,000 or whom about 275,000 are Europeans.

It is 956 miles by rail from Johannesburg and 1355 miles from Bulawayo.

[Home Page](#)
*Good Hope Castle*

The Coastal Passage from Cape Town to Durban

Cape Town to Port Elizabeth

Nautical Miles to Durban 810

On leaving Cape Town we proceed along the coast of the Cape Peninsula past Sea Point, Camps Bay, the Twelve Apostles and Slangkop Lighthouse, until after covering some 40 miles we round the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Point and leave the Atlantic for the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean. So we travel eastwards passing Cape Hangklip on the far side of False Bay, Danger Point, Cape Agulhas (the most southerly point of Africa) and past the port of Mossel Bay to Port Elizabeth

Port Elizabeth



Johannesburg.

own takes its name.



In 1820 Port Elizabeth was the landing place of more than 3000 British settlers.



SA Vaal

East London



The vessel is berthed alongside a quay on the East Bank near the city.



On the way to Durban we pass the Bashee River mouth, Port St Johns and a few miles before Port Shepstone we reach the boundary between Natal and Natal.



[Home Page](#)*Windsor Castle at East London*

Durban



Nautical Miles from Cape Town 810

Here our vessel enters Durban Bay at the end of her 6818 mile voyage from Southampton and berths at the passenger terminal, where she disembarks the last of her passengers and cargo.

Durban was founded in 1824 and is the port and largest city of Natal. It is an important industrial centre and holiday resort, 494 miles by rail from Johannesburg.

The population of over 450,00 includes 140,000 Europeans and 160,000 Asiatics

This is the terminus of the outward route. The last of the outward bound cargo is discharged and the holds cleaned and prepared for the loading of refrigerated fruit.

It is in Durban that gold bullion would be loaded just prior to departure. It always amused me to see the high level of security that was put in place when loading the bullion. Armed guards on the quay. On deck and in the cargo hold. This contrasted with the security provided in Southampton for discharge. One policeman with a

dog and if it was raining the dog would stay in the police van. The bullion was loaded onto an open truck and then onto the boat train.