

**MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY****INFORMATION SHEET 17****CUNARD LINE**

In 1838 the British government, impressed by the advantages of steam over sail for making regular passages, invited tenders to carry the transatlantic mails by steamer. The contract, which carried a subsidy, was won by Samuel Cunard, a prominent merchant and shipowner of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and an advocate of steam. With the help of Robert Napier, the Clyde shipbuilder, and his partners George Burns and David McIver, who already owned a coastal steamer business, he set up the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. The service started with four wooden paddle steamers in 1840. In 1847 the service was increased to a weekly sailing in each direction. In 1852 the firm introduced screw-propelled ships on its Mediterranean service but, with its emphasis on reliability and safety, retained paddlers for its main service until the mid-1860s. By this decade iron hulls became standard too. It was also a period of reduced subsidies and increased competition from lines such as Inman, National and White Star. In 1878 it was reinvigorated as the Cunard Steam Ship Co., Ltd., and the fleet modernised. The 14,000 ton twin-screw liners, *Campania* and *Lucania* (1893) were milestones in terms of both size and speed. But by 1902 with the formation of the American combine, the International Mercantile Marine and German competition, it was under threat. In 1904 it took the bold step of building the steam turbine-powered 20,000 ton *Carmania*. Its success led to the building (with government assistance) of two 32,000 ton express liners, *Mauretania* and *Lusitania* (1907) which captured the Blue Riband.

The line had contributed to naval campaigns from the Crimean War onwards and in the First World War it lost thirteen of its twenty-six ships, including *Lusitania*, which was torpedoed in 1915. *Carmania* fought a notable action as an armed merchant cruiser and other vessels were used as transporters, hospital ships, armed cruisers and a seaplane carrier.

After the War the fleet was rebuilt and included the ex-German liner, *Berengaria* (formerly *Imperator*). The express service was moved from Liverpool to Southampton in 1919 and eventually two large liners, *Queen Mary* (1936) and *Queen Elizabeth* (1940) were built with government assistance. Both played vital roles as troopships in the Second World War. The White Star Line was acquired in 1934.

The line prospered after the War, but passenger traffic declined in the 1960s, leading to a change from regular transatlantic services to cruising only, and to entry into the Atlantic Cruiser Lines consortium for cargo services in 1966. In 1971 it was taken over by Trafalgar House Investments Ltd., which continue to run cruise ships, including *Queen Elizabeth 2* (1969) and the container ship, *Atlantic Conveyor* (a replacement for the ship of the same name sunk in the Falklands War in 1982). The rest of the cargo shipping (Cunard-Brocklebank) was merged with Ellerman's remaining shipping interests and sold to Andrew Weir Shipping in 1991. Cunard owned a number of important subsidiaries, Anchor, Brocklebank and White Star.

The Merseyside Maritime Museum's holdings consist mainly of plans and records from the naval architect's office and a rich collection of printed ephemera in the SAS and DX miscellaneous collections, including menus, postcards and souvenir brochures. There is a

fine collection of models including a twenty-foot model of *Berengaria*, paintings, uniforms and other relics. Administrative records, including passenger lists (1840-1853) are held at Liverpool University's Archives and its catalogue is in the Maritime Archives & Library Searchroom.

## **Records**

### **Naval Architect's Department**

Technical Committee Minutes, 1921 - 1927, 1937 (fragile).  
Supporting Papers, 1927 - 1930.  
Miscellaneous Papers, 1916 - 1963.  
Correspondence Files, 1914 - 1916, 1935 - 1959.  
Letter Books, 1935 - 1959.  
Instruction Book, 1911 - 1939.  
Blacklist Book, 1929 - 1935.  
Newscuttings Books, 1919 - 1938.  
Box Files on new steamers, c.1920 - c.1930.  
Sets of Cunard general arrangements for c.fifteen liners, including *Mauretania 1* and *Queen Mary*.  
Ships Plans, approximately ninety vessels, 1840 - c.1970 (four vessels).  
Ships Specifications, 1898 - 1962.

### **Marine Engineer's Department**

General Abstracts of Logs, 1858 - 1897.  
Abstracts of Logs, particular vessels, 1893 - 1930.  
Voyage Data Books, 1874 - 1886; 1904 - 1933 (Atlantic); 1932 - 1949 (general).  
Coal Consumption, 1907 - 1913.  
Oil Consumption, 1908 - 1931.

### **Additional Material**

Articles of Association, 1912.  
Reports and Accounts, 1954 - 1969.  
Embarkation Notices, 1963.  
Ephemera, 1960 - 1965.  
Brochures, 1908 - 1939.  
Postcards, including sinking of *Campania* (1918).  
Photographs, a large collection including some very large and fine interiors, some by Bedford Le Mere, c.1910 - 1970.  
Volume of Certificates of British Registry of Cunard Vessels, 1936 - 1966.  
Brochures on the opening of Cunard Offices, Pier Head. c.1919.  
Freight Rate Schedules, 1878 - 1921.  
Atlantic Container Line Timetable, 1988.  
B/CUN, 1840 - 1988, ninety-three boxes, c.fifty volumes, c.fifty rolls of plans.

### **Ephemera and Stray Material**

There is much in the SAS and DX series. Because of the Bates connection, there is Cunard ephemera in the Brocklebank Archive, and some Brocklebank ships specifications (1918 - 1958) in the Cunard material. Of particular interest in the SAS series are the verbatim reports of general meetings, 1882 - 1889.

### **Select Bibliography**

DODMAN, F.E. *Ships of the Cunard Line*. London: Harrap, 1955.

HAWS, Duncan. *Merchant Fleets 12: Cunard Line*. Hereford: T. & C. Publications, 1987.

HYDE, F.E. *Cunard and the Atlantic, 1840-1973*. London: MacMillan Press, 1975.

JOHNSON, H. *The Cunard Story*. London: Whitter Books, 1987.

MAXTONE-GRAHAM, John. *Cunard 150 Glorious Years*. London: David and Charles, 1989.

RENTELL, P. *Historic Cunard Liners*. Cornwall: Atlantic Transport Publishers, 1986.