

# Black Jack

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH  
WORLD SHIP SOCIETY  
[www.sotonwss.org.uk](http://www.sotonwss.org.uk)



Issue No: 217

Winter 2025/26

*@ Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year to all our Readers*



*This quarters' cover features the **Athlone Castle** 25,567g of 1936*

## Black Jack – Winter 2025/26 No.217

### Editorial team

Nigel Robinson, David Hornsby & Andrew McAlpine.  
Website – Neil Richardson

***Black Jack is the quarterly magazine of the  
Southampton Branch of the World Ship Society.***

## Branch Meetings

### Venue:

#### St James Road Methodist Church

St James Road  
Shirley

Southampton, SO15 5HE

All meetings commence at 19.30 and the meeting room is to be vacated by 21.30. Meetings are on the second Tuesday of each month.

### Honorary Branch Secretary

#### Dr Mervyn Rowlinson

80 Manor Farm Road  
Bitterne Park

Southampton

SO18 1NT

Email: mervmarin@gmail.com

07960278411

### Chairman

#### Neil Richardson

email: g4emm2024@outlook.com

07484807756

### Treasurer

#### Andrew Hogg

“Debanker”

Lyburn Road

Hamptworth

Salisbury

SP5 2DP

07495 774268

### Visits Organiser

#### Adrian Tennet

34 New Road

Fair Oak

SO50 8EN

023 8060 0197

Full details of all committee members can be found on the Southampton WSS website at

[www.sotonwss.org.uk](http://www.sotonwss.org.uk)

### Editorial contact:

Nigel Robinson

2 Glencarron Way

Bassett

Southampton

SO16 7EF

023 8079 0876

email: [nigelvrobinson@gmail.com](mailto:nigelvrobinson@gmail.com)

### Next Meeting

December 9th

Dec 1981 Orpheus Med Cruise

Bill Mayes

## 2026 Branch Programme

January 13th	Queens at War	David Hutchings
February 10th	Falklands Revisited	
March 10th	Manchester Ship Canal Traffic	Jim Charnock
April 14th	Paul's Shipping Miscellany	Paul Gosling
May 12th		Krispen Atkinson
June 9th	The Early RFA.	John Hoar, HCMM
July 8th	Coastal Shipping Diary	Iain McCall
August 11th	Arctic Circle Bound	Capt Robin Plumley
September 8th	British-India at War	Merv Rowlinson
October 13th	John and Pat Havers on Board	
November 10th	AGM and photographic competition	
December 8th	British Cargo Liners	

**Saturday July 4<sup>th</sup> Southampton Branch annual Solent Cruise**

---

### Articles please!!

Your editor would as always be delighted to receive any articles for inclusion in Black Jack and also any snippets and photos for possible inclusion,

---

# Andrew's Note Book

From the port of Southampton by Andrew McAlpine

Welcome to the latest notebook from the Port of Southampton.

As the summer cruise season has ended many of the ships that homeported in Southampton this year have now sailed for distant sunnier shores.

On 30th August we had an unusual visit from Royal Caribbean Brilliance of the Seas, the visit was a stop over and start of a sold out transatlantic cruise to Boston via Greenland.



Brilliance of the Seas built 2002 seen arriving 30 th August.

On the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> October *MSC Virtuosa* sailed bound for Rotterdam for her first mandatory drydocking. Following 23 day stay she returned late in November at the start of a transatlantic cruise to the Caribbean which will be her home for the Winter season.



*MSC Virtuosa* built 2021



On the container side the majority of ad hoc calls have now ceased, and the port now has 22 regular container services each week. Until early 2026 we will continue to get calls from larger Maersk vessels deployed on the South American SAMBA service which usually calls at London Gateway.  
The first of these calls was my *Maersk Lanco* 31<sup>st</sup> August.



*Maersk Lanco* 8,700TEU built 2013 seen sailing 31<sup>st</sup> August

The two reefer services (CLX & COEX) operated by Maersk Line have been phased out and replaced by one new service (CAX). The new service sees larger 5600TEU vessels deployed many of which are ex Hamburg Sud ships, and the small, geared vessels transferred to other services.

The first call on the CAX service was made by *Maersk Monte Linzor* 14<sup>th</sup> October



(above left) *Maersk Monte Linzor* (ex *Monte Cervantes*) seen sailing 14<sup>th</sup> October.

(above right) The last call on the CRX was made by *Margarete Schult* 4<sup>th</sup> October.

All photos Andrew McAlpine

until next time wishing you Happy ship spotting  
Andrew

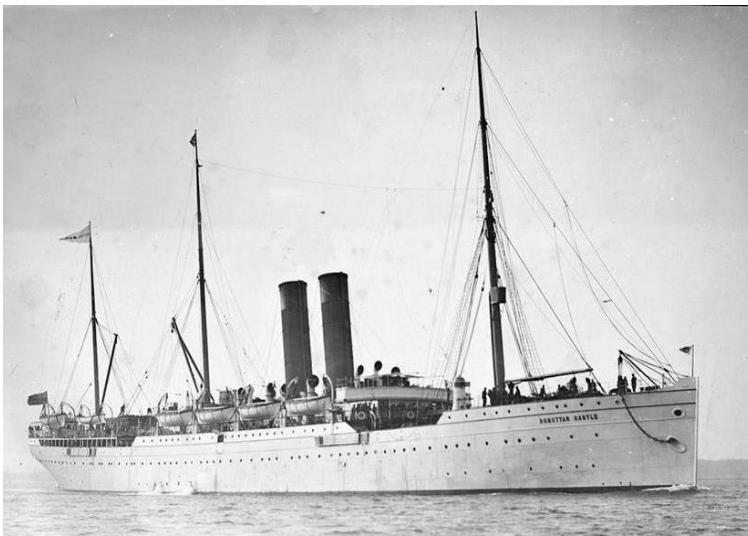
# UNION-CASTLE MAIL SHIPS

## formed 125 years ago .....

by David Hornsby

On 8<sup>th</sup> March 1900, the **Union-Castle Mail Steamship Co. Ltd.** was formed, initially against the wishes of the Cape Government, who after many years encouraging competition between two operators, had decided that only a single Mail contract would be awarded from 1900. Neither the Union nor the Castle companies wanted to compete, so neither submitted tenders for the Mail Contract and as a result, in December 1899 terms were agreed to merge the two companies.

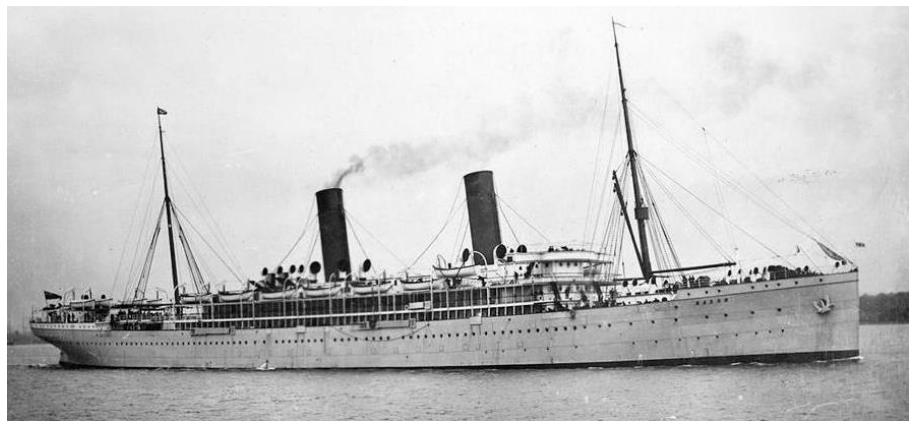
At the time of the 1900 merger, the Mail steamship fleet comprised the Union Line's twin-funnelled **MOOR** (1882-01), **SCOT** (1891-05), **NORMAN** (1894-26) and **BRITON** (1897-26) and two twin-funnelled ships building **SAXON** (1900-35) and **CELT** completed as **WALMER CASTLE** (1902-32). The Castle Line comprised **GARTH CASTLE** (1881-01), **HAWARDEN CASTLE** (1883-04), **NORHAM CASTLE** (1883-03), **ROSLIN CASTLE** (1883-05), **PEMBROKE CASTLE** (1883-06), **TANTALLON CASTLE** (1894-01), **DUNVEGAN CASTLE** (1896-23), **CARISBROOK CASTLE** (1898-22) and twin-funnelled **DUNOTTAR CASTLE** (1890-13), **KINFAUNS CASTLE** (1899-27) and **KILDONAN CASTLE** (1899-31).



The **Union Line** had originally been formed in 1853 as the **Union Steam Collier Co**, to bring coal to Southampton, but even before they entered service, their five vessels were taken over for Crimean War duties. By the end of the War in 1856, they were no longer needed as colliers and the company was renamed **Union Steam Ship Co Ltd** with plans made for the vessels to operate to South America. This was soon abandoned and a successful tender was submitted to the British Admiralty for a mail service to South Africa. The first sailing under the monthly contract for 42-day voyages from Southampton was by ss **DANE** on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1857, followed by the **CELT** and the chartered **PHOEBE**, then the first purpose-built Cape mailships **CAMBRIAN** (1860), **BRITON** (1861), the Day, Summers built **SAXON** (1863) and **ROMAN** (1863), all with machinery by Day, Summers & Co, Southampton.

above: Day, Summers built **Saxon**  
right: **Dunottar Castle**

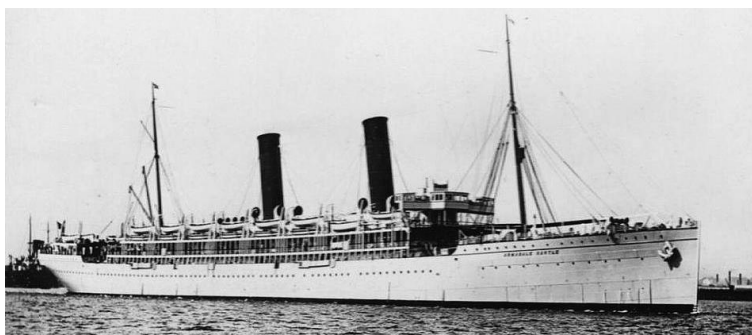
In 1872, Donald Currie entered the South African service as the **Colonial Mail Line** (or "**London Line**") with the **WALMER CASTLE**, which had been originally launched for the London-Calcutta service. The following year she was joined by the Napier-built sisters **EDINBURGH CASTLE** and **WINDSOR CASTLE**.



When the Mail contract came up for renewal in 1876, the contract was shared between the **Union Line** and the newly renamed **Castle Packets Co**, which in 1881 was again renamed **Castle Mail Packets Co Ltd**. The companies first purpose-built Cape mailships were the Napier-built **DUNROBIN CASTLE** and **BALMORAL CASTLE** (both 1876) followed by the **DUBLIN CASTLE**, **WARWICK CASTLE** and **CONWAY CASTLE** (all 1877). These were followed by **PEMBROKE CASTLE** (1883-06), **GRANTULLY CASTLE** (1880-96), **KINFAUNS CASTLE** (1879-??), **DRUMMOND CASTLE** (1881-94) AND **GARTH CASTLE** (1880-90), then the **HAWARDEN CASTLE** (1883-04) and **NORHAM CASTLE** (1883-03) Fairfield-built **DUNOTTAR CASTLE** (1890-04) and **TANTALLON CASTLE** (1894-01).

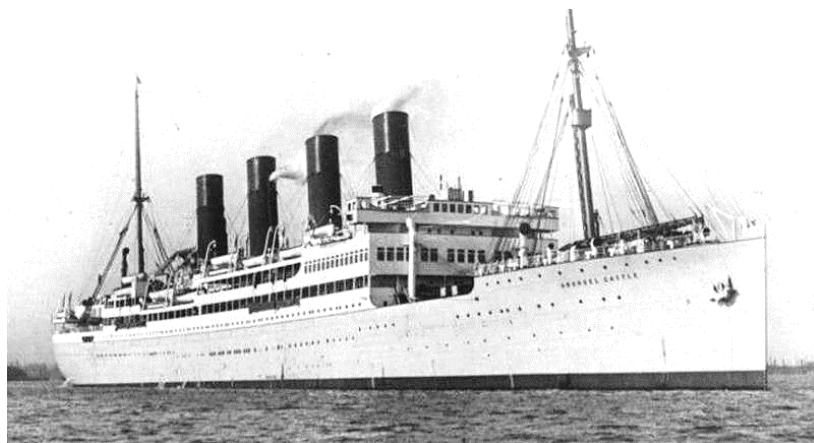
After the merger, two twin-funnelled sisters of **WALMER CASTLE** were ordered, **ARMADALE CASTLE** (1903-36) and **KENILWORTH CASTLE** (1904-36), followed by two larger versions **BALMORAL CASTLE** (1910-39) and **EDINBURGH CASTLE** (1910-41).

*right: Armadale Castle*



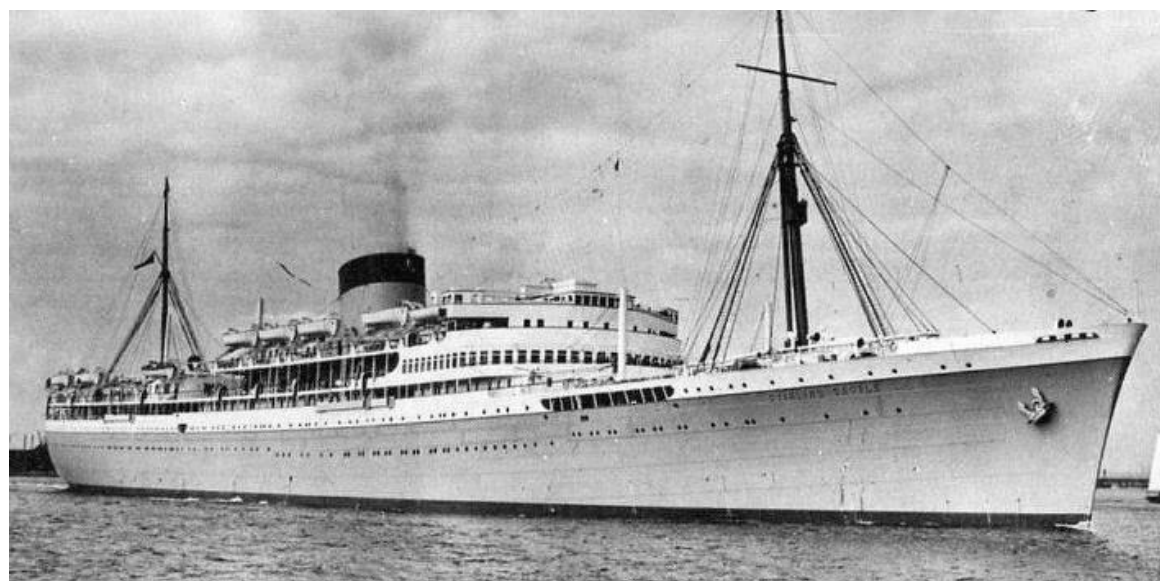
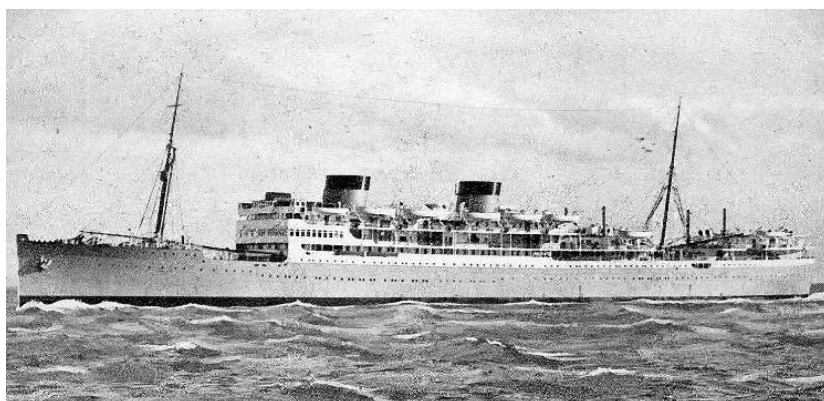
In 1913, two four-funnelled sisters were ordered, the last four funnel ship ever built. Construction was delayed by the start of The Great War, the ships not being completed until 1921/2 as **ARUNDEL CASTLE** (1921-58) and **WINDSOR CASTLE** (1922-41), both later being converted to twin funnels.

*left: Arundel Castle as built with four funnels*



*below: Winchester Castle as built with twin funnels, later with single funnel.*

The Harland & Wolff motorship years followed with **CARNARVON CASTLE** (1926-62), the improved sister **WINCHESTER CASTLE** (1930-60) and 20ft longer sister **WARWICK CASTLE** (1931-42), then the larger sisters **STIRLING CASTLE** (1936-66) and **ATHLONE CASTLE** (1936-65), and the enlarged sister **CAPETOWN CASTLE** (1938-67).



*left:  
1936-built Mailship  
Stirling Castle*





To replace WWII losses, steam-turbine powered sisters were ordered **PRETORIA CASTLE** (1948-65) later **S.A. ORANJE** (1965-75) and **EDINBURGH CASTLE** (1948-76).

*left: **Edinburgh Castle***

Ten years later followed **PENDENNIS CASTLE** (1958-76) the last U-C liner to be built by Harland & Wolff, followed two years later by the Cammell Laird-built and largest ever U-C Mailship **WINDSOR CASTLE** (1960-77)

*below left: **Pendennis Castle***



*below right: **Windsor Castle***



The final passenger Mailship was the John Brown-built **TRANSVAAL CASTLE** (1962-66) later **S.A. VAAL** (1966-77).

*Left: **Transvaal Castle***

In 1965/6, with passenger numbers falling, the three older passenger vessels on the Mail service were replaced by two new fast cargo liner Mailships, with the service reduced to seven vessels. The new ships were built by Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson at Wallsend, firstly the **SOUTHAMPTON CASTLE** (1965-77) followed by **GOOD HOPE CASTLE** (1966-77), the former vessel completing the final Mail contract sailing when she arrived at Southampton on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1977.

*right: **Southampton Castle***





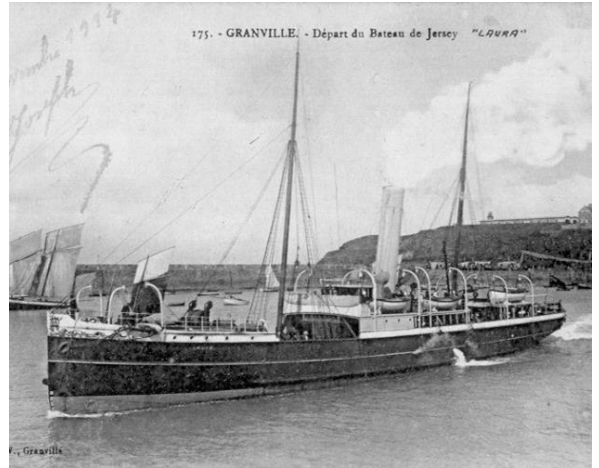
### Girls in trouble – 1910 collision between LAURA and SOPHIE

On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1910, the London & South-Western Railway cross-channel steam ferry **LAURA** was about 21 miles south of the Needles Lighthouse, when she was in collision with the starboard stern quarter of the Norwegian full-rigged sailing ship **SOPHIE**, owned by Chr. Nielsen & Co of Larvik under Captain Chr. Farup, which was on a voyage from Caleta Buena in Chile to Hamburg with a 2,550 ton cargo of nitrate. After the collision, the **SOPHIE** started to flood, so she was taken in tow to Southampton, arriving on the 11<sup>th</sup> April for repairs. Interestingly, both ships had originally been built in the 1880's on the River Clyde.

The passenger/cargo steamer **LAURA** (right) was the railway company's first steel hulled vessel completed in May 1885 by Aitken & Mansel at their Jordanvale/ Whiteinch yard in Glasgow (y/n 132).

She was a versatile vessel and operated on all cross-channel routes from Southampton, but principally to St Malo. She was 641 gross tons with an overall length of 207ft and a beam of 26.8ft, carrying up to 400 passengers in three classes, propelled by a single screw and 180nhp 2-cylinder Thomson machinery. In 1922 she was reduced to cargo-only, then in 1923 ownership was transferred to the Southern Railway.

Four years later, **LAURA** was sold to the Bahamas Shipping Co at Nassau, but their plans failed to materialise and in 1928 she was resold to the Florida Inter-Island Steam Shipping Company and renamed **CITY OF NASSAU**, eventually being scrapped in 1937.



The three-masted **SOPHIE** was the last vessel built by Robert Steele & Co at their Cartsburn yard in Greenock (y/n 130) before the builders became part of Scotts. She was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1883 as **INVERUGLAS** for J. MacGregor & Son, Greenock and registered in October the same year.

Iron hull of 1,748 gross tons with 260.4ft overall and a beam of 39ft.

In 1887, she was sold to Sierra Shipping Co (Thomson, Anderson & Co, Liverpool) and renamed **SIERRA LUCENA**, then in November 1906 was sold to A/S Sophie (Chr. Nielsen & Co., Larvik) renamed **SOPHIE**.



In 1916, she was sold to Wegger & Ohre of Sandefjord, then in 1923 renamed **TUSITALA** after her sale to a group of New York artists and writers. The following year her owners were Argonaut Line (James A. Farrell of US Steel Co,) and by 1931 "ship Tusitala", being laid up 1933 at New York, the last American full-rigged merchant ship operating deep-sea; sold for scrap in 1938, but taken over by US Coast Guard as a barracks ship in Connecticut and Florida, until finally being broken up at the end of 1947 by Alabama SB & Drydock Co in Mobile.



Above and right: **SOPHIE** under repair at Southampton and collision damage (ringed)  
Pictures from collection late Rod Baker