

I SEE NO FLAGS



The Port of Liverpool and some of its now vanished Shipping Companies

Why have the title "I See No Flags"?"

It is the Shipping Companies – signified by the House Flag – that are central to this story and as so many are no longer seen on the Mersey it seemed appropriate to adapt Admiral Nelson's statement.



House Flag

Most shipping companies have their own flag to aid in the identification of ownership of their ships.

Additionally, the vessel's funnels are usually distinctively painted.

Just a few examples:



1. **Booth** 2. New Zealand Shipping Company 3. **Canadian Pacific** 4. Donaldson
 5. Blue Star 6. **Elder Dempster** 7. **British & African Steam Navigation Co**
 8. Aberdeen & Commonwealth 9. **Blue Funnel** 10. British India Steam Navigation Co
 11. **Bibby** 12. Glen Line 13. Orient 14. **Cunard White Star – Cunard Ships**
 15. **Cunard White Star – White Star Ships** 16. P&O (Buff funnels for Passenger Ships)
 17. **Anchor** 18. **Royal Mail Lines** 19. General Steam Navigation Co
 20. **Houlder** 21. Elder & Fyffe 22. **Lampart & Holt** 23. Manchester Line
 24. **Ellerman** 25. Union Castle 26. **Clan** 27. Shaw, Savill & Albion Line
 28. **Harrison Line**

(The ones in **bold** were Liverpool based companies)

There are three other types of flags flown on ships:

Registration Flag

This shows the nationality of the port where the ship is registered; A vessel registered in Liverpool would use the Red Ensign (British registered merchant vessels);



A ship registered in Calais would fly the French flag.



Registration provides a ship with nationality and makes her subject to the laws of the country (known as the flag state) in which she is registered. The name of the ship and the port of registry are on the ship's stern.

Courtesy Flag

A flag of the nationality of the port a ship is entering and is separate from a vessel's flag of registry,

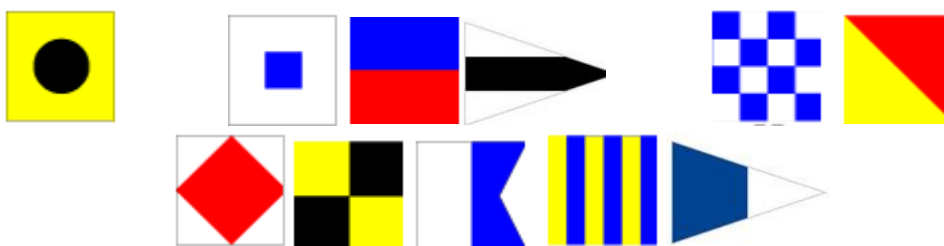
for instance, a British flagged vessel entering the port of Calais would also display the French national flag.

As a matter of interest, the courtesy ensign for foreign ships visiting British ports is the Red Ensign, not the Union Jack as is so often displayed.

Code or Signal Flags

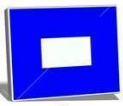
A set of flags (a separate one for each letter of the alphabet and for the digits 0 – 9, plus flags used as duplicates) used in conjunction with an international code of phrases and words, each of which is allocated one, two, three or four letters of the alphabet, and used to send a message between ships or to land.

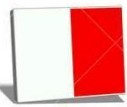
The code, formalised in 1931, is published in several languages which means, for instance, a British ship can send a message to a Brazilian ship without either crew knowing a word of each other's language. With the advent of radio (VHF) and other modern communications the use of both the morse lamp and signal flags has become almost redundant. However, ships are still required to carry a full set of Code Flags in addition to the book of International Code Flag Signals.




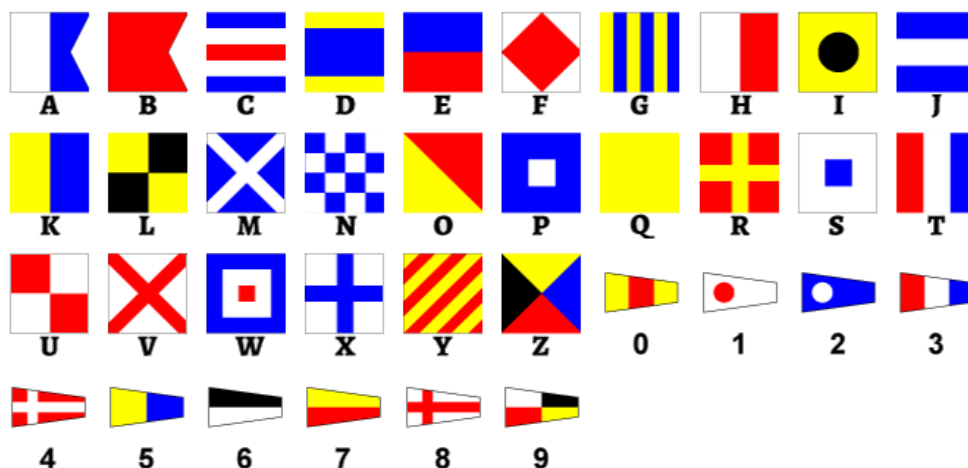
I See No Flags

The most used 'single hoist' codes are:

'P'  (known as the "Blue Peter") signifies that the vessel is about to sail.

'H'  shows that there is a pilot onboard.

'Q'  flown by a ship that requires free pratique, i.e., Customs clearance.



Examples of ships "dressed overall", (usually for celebrations, festivals, cruise ships about to commence a cruise etc) using signal flags....following one of the guides for the order in which the flags are displayed so as to avoid "false" messages.



The starting point of our story is 1958 – the centenary of the formation of Mersey Docks and Harbour Board.

In the Board's overview of its activities for 1957/8 twenty-eight shipping companies which provided regular deep-sea services from Liverpool were listed –

Anchor Line (1856)	Harrison Line (1853)
Bibby Line (1807)	Houlder Brothers & Co Ltd (1849)
Blue Funnel Line (1852)	Houston Line (1880)
Booker Line (1835)	Johnson Warren Lines Ltd (1844)
Booth Line (1866)	Lamport & Holt Line (1845)
Brocklebank Line (1770)	Larrinaga Line (1863)
Canadian Pacific (1884)	MacAndrew Line (1857)
Clan Line (1877)	Marwood & Robertson Ltd (1871)
Cunard Steamship Company Ltd (1840)	Moss Hutchinson Line Ltd (1815)
James Dowie & Co Ltd (1855)	The Pacific Steam Navigation Company (1840)
Elder Dempster Lines Ltd (1868)	Royal Mail Lines Ltd (1839)
Ellerman Lines (1901)	Svea-Coker Line (1898)
Furness Withy & Co Ltd (1878)	Yeoward Line (1894)
Glynn Line (1811)	
The Guinea Gulf Line Ltd (1868)	

A further fourteen companies providing regular coastal & short sea services were also listed -

Coast Lines Ltd (1830)	The Belfast, Mersey & Manchester S S Company Ltd (1929)
British and Irish Steam Packet Co Ltd * (1836)	Clyde Shipping Company Ltd (1815)
The City of Cork Steam Packet Co Ltd * (1823)	The Thorn Line
The Belfast Steamship Company Ltd * (1852)	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company (1830)
Burns & Laird Line Ltd (1842)	The Liverpool & North Wales Steamship Company (1890)
Irish & Mersey Steamship Co Ltd ((1901)	The Beacon Line (1868)
	British & Continental Steamship Co Ltd (1906)

* Coast Lines Ltd, Agents

The bracketed date is the earliest date to which a company can trace its roots, mainly in the 19th century, although in many cases the company name in the 1950s is not the original name with which the company or its predecessor was founded.

This is not an exhaustive list of all the shipping companies operating from Liverpool over the last 400 years...just a snapshot of those operating in 1957/8.

This study has been unable to establish any details for one company in the list – The Thorn Line – or to identify it as a subsidiary of any other company, other than that in the 1950s it was maintaining a weekly service from Liverpool to Coleraine and Westport.



Thos. & Jno Brocklebank can claim to be one of the oldest merchant shipping companies as its roots go back to Captain Daniel Brocklebank, a shipmaster and shipbuilder, whose shipbuilding enterprise was first established at Sheepscutt (near Portland, Maine) in 1770. Its first operations in Britain were based at Whitehaven from 1785. The company moved to Liverpool in 1819.

Where are those companies today?

From the 1957/8 list of companies only five appear as members of the UK Chamber of Shipping in 2021 –

Bibby Line (as Bibby Line Group)

Cunard Steamship Company Ltd (as part of Carnival UK)

Coast Lines Ltd (as P&O Ferries)

British and Irish Steam Packet Co Ltd (as Irish Ferries)

Isle of Man Steam Packet Company

So, what happened?

But first, we backtrack a few centuries.

The Mersey is not a natural harbour, such as Southampton or Rio de Janeiro. It is an estuary, often shallow in parts and subject to extremely high tides: with tides between four and ten metres, running at up to six knots, it has the second highest tidal range in Britain. At New Brighton the river mouth is 1525 metres wide, narrows to half that opposite Pier Head, widening again to reach its maximum width of 4875 metres at Ellesmere Port.

In the Annals of Liverpool, published in Gore's Directory of 1895 the port is described as:

“The boundary of the Port of Liverpool, as fixed by the Commissioners named in the commission of the 10th George I., in their certificate to the Exchequer, dated 28th Nov. 1728, is as follows:- From the Red Stones, in Hoylake. on the Point of Wirral, southerly, to the foot of the river called Ribblewater, in a direct line northerly, and so upon the south side of the said river to Hesketh Bank, easterly, and to the river Astland and Douglas shore. and so all along the sea coast of Meols and Formby into the River Mersey, and all over the rivers Mersey, Irwell and Weaver. The same boundaries had been previously defined by the Commissioners on 1st Nov. 1680.”

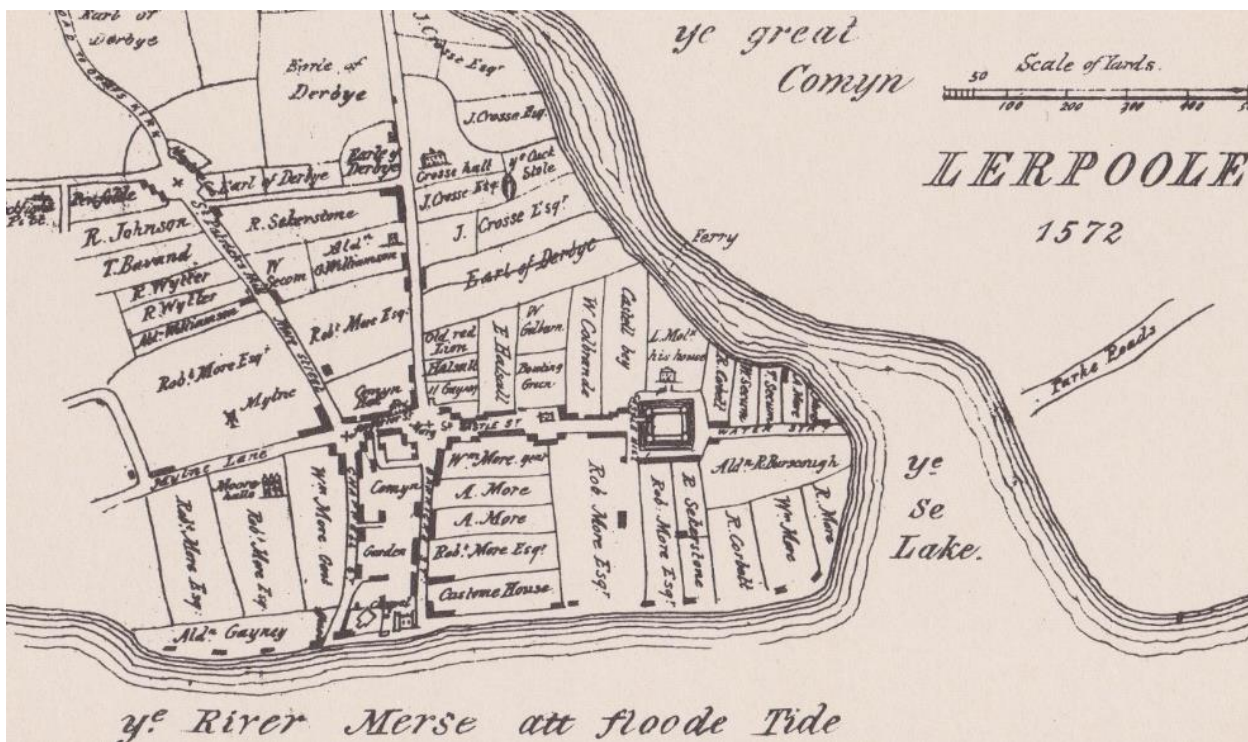
A considerably greater area than is now recognised as the Port of Liverpool!

From the 12th century Liverpool has been a trading port, although in a petition to Elizabeth I in 1571, it was described as "her majesty's poor decayed town of Liverpool", somewhat at variance with what the English antiquary, John Leland (c.1506-52) found when he visited Liverpool in about 1533, as reported in his Itinerary -

'LYRPOLE, alias Lyverpoole, a pavid [*paved*] towne, hath but a chapel...The king hath a castelet [*castle*] there, and the Earl of Darbe [*Derby*] hath a stone howse [*house*] there. Irisch [*Irish*] merchants cum much thither, as to a good haven... At Lyrpole is smaull [*small*] custom payed, that causith marchantes [*causes merchants*] to resorte thither. Good marchandis [*merchandise*] at Lyrpole, and much Irish yarrn [*yarn*] that Manchester men do buy there...'

Low customs dues were already making the port attractive.

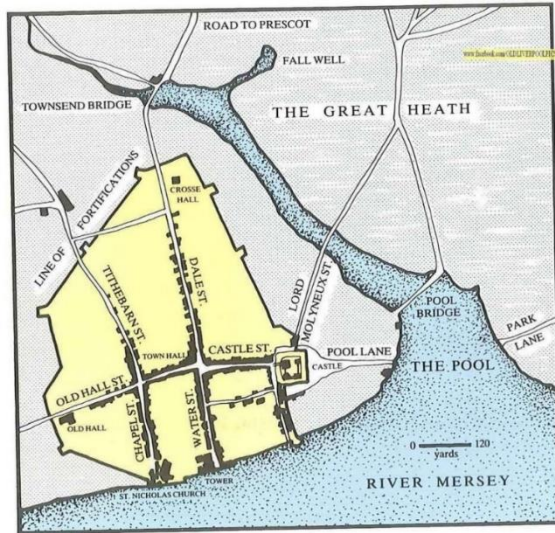
In 1555 the total shipping registered at Liverpool was 222 tons for 12 ships.



The 1572 map shows there were no docks as such, but within a century, breakwaters and "havens" had been constructed.

But for successful commercial operations docks were necessary to cope with such tidal conditions...a simple question of supply and demand...the merchants and shipowners required docks...the town and port must therefore provide them to attract and retain trade.

By the late 1600s trade was increasing significantly, and in 1715 the world's first enclosed commercial wet dock was opened.



A tidal inlet, the Lyver Pool, was converted to form the Old Dock which, with the dock gates open for three hours each tide, could accommodate 100 ships.



In 1826 the dock was filled in, a custom house constructed (bomb damaged in WWII, and later demolished) and the site is now largely under the Liverpool ONE shopping centre.



The Custom House



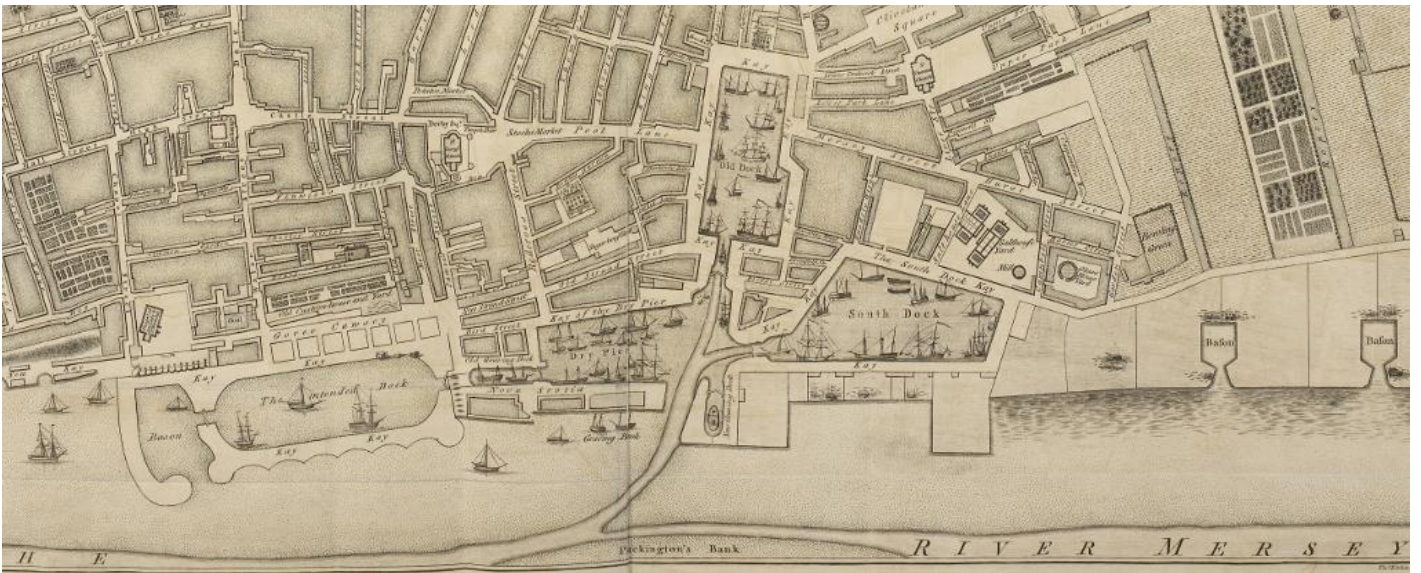
[1]



[2]

Part of the Old Dock can be seen through this inspection chamber [1] in Liverpool ONE. Tours of part of the Old Dock, revealed by archaeological excavations in 2001, [2] are arranged by National Museums Liverpool (Merseyside Maritime Museum)

Expansion moved rapidly with a series of Acts of Parliament for the construction of further docks.



Extract of plan showing John Tarleton (1718 – 73) as Mayor. He was a ship owner and slave trader and was Mayor in 1764. His son, also John (1755 – 1841) and a ship owner and slave trader, became MP for Seaford, Sussex, and opposed the abolition of slavery in Parliament.

In 1773 a History of Liverpool was published

AN ESSAY TOWARDS THE
H I S T O R Y
O F
L E V E R P O O L,

DRAWN UP FROM PAPERS LEFT BY THE LATE MR. GEORGE PERRY,

AND FROM OTHER MATERIALS SINCE COLLECTED,

BY WILLIAM ENFIELD.

WITH VIEWS OF THE
PRINCIPAL PUBLIC STRUCTURES, A CHART OF THE HARBOUR,
AND A MAP OF THE ENVIRONS.

Miratur molem Æneas, magalia quondam;
Miratur portus, strepitumque, et strata viarum:
Infant ardentem Tyrii.

VIRGIL.

E. Atkis,

WARRINGTON PRINTED MDCCLXXIII.

Reproduction edition (limited to 250 copies), 1972.

and showed that by 1764, Liverpool had overtaken Bristol in the number of ships to and from each of the two ports. The table also shows where the ships were trading to ~

A LIST of AFRICAN SHIPS for the Year 1771.

When clear'd	Ships.	Where bound.	No. of Slaves.	When clear'd	Ships.	Where bound.	No. of Slaves.
January	17. Agnes, -	-Windward Coast,	200.	July	4. Ellis, -	-Bonny, -	500.
	19. Nancy, -	-Gold Coast,	300.		--- Charlotte, -	-Gold Coast,	100.
	22. Corfican Hero, -	- Do.	300.		--- Juba, -	-Old Callabar,	400.
	24. John, -	-Windward Coast,	200.		6. Plumper, -	-Bonny, -	450.
	25. Violet, -	- Do.	300.		8. Harriett, -	-Windward Coast,	200.
February	6. Lord Caffills,	-Old Callabar,	400.		9. Corker, -	- Do.	300.
	9. Industry, -	-Windward Coast,	200.		12. Carrick, -	- Do.	100.
	15. Friendship,	-Gambia, -	200.		--- Ann, -	-Bonny, -	350.
	--- Lively, -	- Do.	200.		13. Little Ben, -	-Windward Coast,	100.
	--- Jelliwar, -	- Do.	100.		19. Rofe, -	- Do.	250.
	28. Lark, -	-Windward Coast,	100.		23. Jack, -	-Gold Coast,	250.
March	6. Providence,	-Bonny, -	350.		24. Nancy, -	-Bonny, -	400.
	--- Two Brothers,	-Gambia, -	300.		31. Hannah, -	-Gold Coast,	300.
	7. Juno, -	-Senegal, -	100.	August	3. Peggy, -	- Do.	100.
	--- Dove, -	-Windward Coast,	100.		7. Sifters, -	- Do.	100.
	9. Warren, -	- Do.	150.		13. Society, -	- Do.	300.
	20. Hare, -	-Benin, -	400.		--- Unity, -	- Do.	300.
	21. Sam, -	-Senegal, -	100.		14. Liberty, -	-Bonny, -	400.
	26. Peggy, -	-Windward Coast,	250.		15. Lord North, -	- Do.	400.
	--- Benin, -	-Benin, -	450.		--- Barbadoes Packet,	Windward Coast,	200.
	28. Hector, -	-Old Callabar,	400.		16. Mentor, -	-Gold Coast,	300.
April	6. Hawk, -	-Windward Coast,	300.		--- Townside, -	-Windward Coast,	200.
	9. Ferret, -	- Do.	250.		22. Union, -	-Gold Coast,	300.
	15. May, -	-Old Callabar,	200.		23. Captain, -	-Windward Coast,	300.
	18. Tom, -	-Bonny, -	450.		26. Befs, -	-Gold Coast,	250.
	20. Mary, -	-Sirralone, -	300.		27. Pearle, -	-Windward Coast,	200.
	26. Polly, -	-New Callabar,	350.		28. Swift, -	-Old Callabar,	200.
	29. Gregfon, -	-Bonny, -	500.		30. Prefident, -	- Do.	200.
May	3. Edgar, -	- Do.	400.	September	4. Fox, -	-Cammeroons,	200.
	--- Elizabeth, -	-New Callabar,	350.		5. Prince of Wales,	-Bonny, -	600.
	7. King of Pruffia,	-Cammeroons,	250.		--- Patty, -	-Windward Coast,	250.
	13. St. John, -	-Gambia, -	300.		13. Renown, -	- Do.	200.
	15. Betty, -	-Bonny, -	450.		17. Nancy, -	- Do.	200.
	16. Whim, -	-Cammeroons,	200.		18. Myrtle, -	- Do.	300.
	--- John, -	-Windward Coast,	250.		23. Molly, -	-Gambia, -	300.
	22. Effex, -	- Do.	200.		27. Merideth, -	-Sirralone, -	250.
	24. Mercury, -	-Gold Coast,	200.		--- Portland, -	-Windward Coast,	250.
	--- Jenny, -	-Windward Coast,	100.		28. Marcia, -	-Old Callabar,	200.
June	1. Dalrymple, -	-Old Callabar,	400.		--- John, -	-Gold Coast,	300.
	6. Rumbold, -	-Bonny, -	450.	October	1. William, -	-Windward Coast,	150.
	8. Tom, -	-Windward Coast,	250.		17. Matty, -	- Do.	250.
	13. Lancashire Witch,	- Do.	300.		--- Hannah, -	-Angola, (wood)	---
	15. Prince George, -	- Do.	200.		20. Integrity, -	-Old Callabar,	250.
	17. Little Will, -	- Do.	300.	November	2. Aufin, -	-Bonny, -	350.
	--- Andromache,	-Old Callabar,	200.		8. Saville, -	-Windward Coast,	250.
	18. Hazard, -	-Windward Coast,	200.		--- Camaranca, -	- Do.	200.
	--- Nancy, -	-Bonny, -	350.		20. Dispatch, -	-Gold Coast,	300.
	19. Molly, -	-Windward Coast,	200.		21. Ferrett, -	-Windward Coast,	150.
	20. Sportfman, -	-Old Callabar,	400.		23. Sally, -	- Do.	300.
	21. Afton, -	-Gambia, -	300.		25. Lilly, -	- Do.	200.
	25. Apollo, -	-Windward Coast,	200.	December	9. Mars, -	- Do.	250.
	29. Jenny, -	-New Callabar,	350.		19. Bella, -	-Cameroon, -	250.
July	2. Nanny, -	-Bonny, -	450.				

Total 28200

In that single year 105 voyages from Liverpool had carried 28,200 slaves from Africa, mainly to the Caribbean.

Between 1699, when the first known slave ship (*Liverpool Merchant*) left Liverpool, and 1807, when the trade was abolished, it is estimated that Liverpool ships carried some one and half million Africans into slavery.

In the last half of the 18th century something like a third to a half of Liverpool's trade was with Arica and the Caribbean, providing much of the port and town's wealth and fuelling the expansion of the dock system and the town.

"At the end of 1792 Liverpool had acquired an ascendancy in Maritime commerce that the clearance tonnage of the port amounted to one fifth of that of all other ports in the empire"

History of Liverpool Docks, The Northern Daily Times, June 5th, 1855

The population of Liverpool had grown from about 2,000 in 1600 ~

By 1750 it had reached about 20,000

In 1801, 85,627

In 1851, 340,907

In 1901, 662,267

In 1951, 765,641 (although it had peaked at over 800,000 in the preceding 20 years)

The docks continued to grow in the century from 1750. Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*, first went to sea in May 1839 on a voyage to Liverpool. He used his impressions of the port in his novel "*Redburn - his first voyage*", 1849 ~

'For more than six weeks, the ship Highlander lay in Prince's Dock; and during that time, besides making observations upon things immediately around me, I made sundry excursions to the neighbouring docks, for I never tired of admiring them.

Previous to this, having only seen the miserable wooden wharves, and slip-shod, shambling piers of New York, the sight of these mighty docks filled my young mind with wonder and delight...

In Liverpool, I beheld long China walls of masonry; vast piers of stone; and a succession of granite-rimmed docks, completely inclosed, and many of them communicating, which almost recalled to mind the great American chain of lakes: Ontario, Erie, St. Clair, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. The extent and solidity of these structures, seemed equal to what I had read of the old Pyramids of Egypt...

For miles you may walk along that river-side, passing dock after dock, like a chain of immense fortresses:—Prince's, George's, Salt-House, Clarence, Brunswick, Trafalgar, King's, Queen's, and many more.'

Docks had been developed on both sides of the Mersey as this 1849 map, with its emphasis on Birkenhead, shows



1859: Liverpool, part of Birkenhead, the docks and Cheshire Coast
This picture by John R Isaac was supposedly drawn from a tethered balloon.

But go back a year....

Until 1858 the management of the docks was in the hands of the Liverpool Common Council's Dock Committee, but complaints from merchants and especially from those in Manchester that the Council was exploiting the port dues to the town's benefit were growing.

Following an 1857 Act of Parliament, The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board was formed, holding its first meeting on January 5th, 1858, and taking over the responsibility

“for the harbourage, conservancy and allied arts of the Mersey and its sea approaches, and the control of the long line of docks at Liverpool and the smaller area at Birkenhead”

(Business in Great Waters, MD&HB, 1958).



There was indeed an extensive dock area of some 1,186 acres, comprising 15 miles of quays.



1866: Borough of Liverpool Mortality Map of Cholera

Shipowners and merchants were demanding more accommodation for their ships, which in the age of steam and iron were increasing in length and draught and rapidly replacing sailing ships.

In some cases, vessels were being delayed for an average of thirty days before being able to enter certain docks...there was just not enough space.

The Board embarked on ambitious plans to extend the dock estate and infrastructure.

Over the course of the following century ~

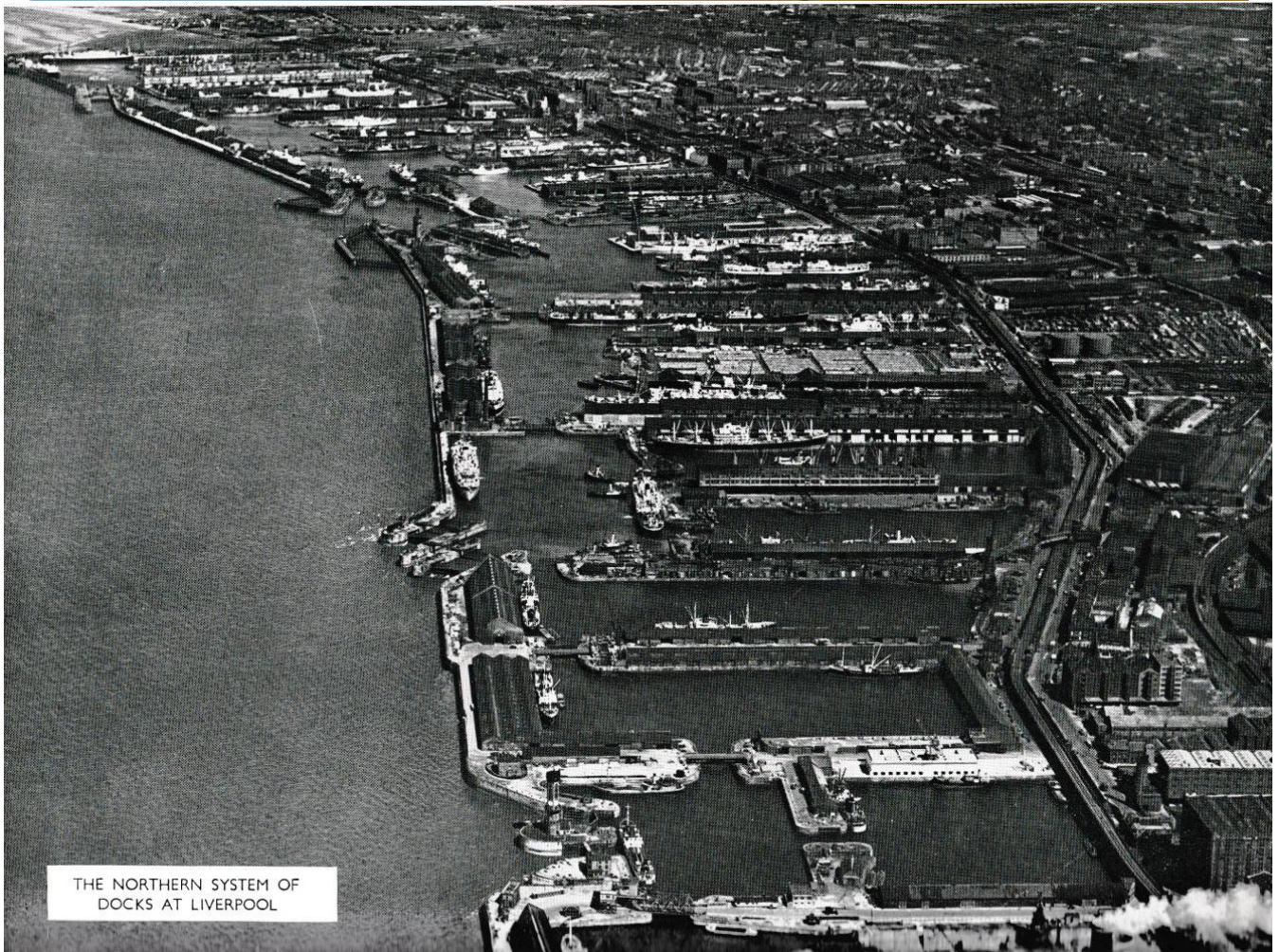
The dock estate almost doubled to 2037 acres, with a water area of 638 acres and over 37 miles of quays, stretching over seven miles alongside the river.

An interconnected dock system was created which was the most advanced port system in the world at that time, allowing ship movements 24/7 ship movements unimpeded by the high tides of the Mersey.

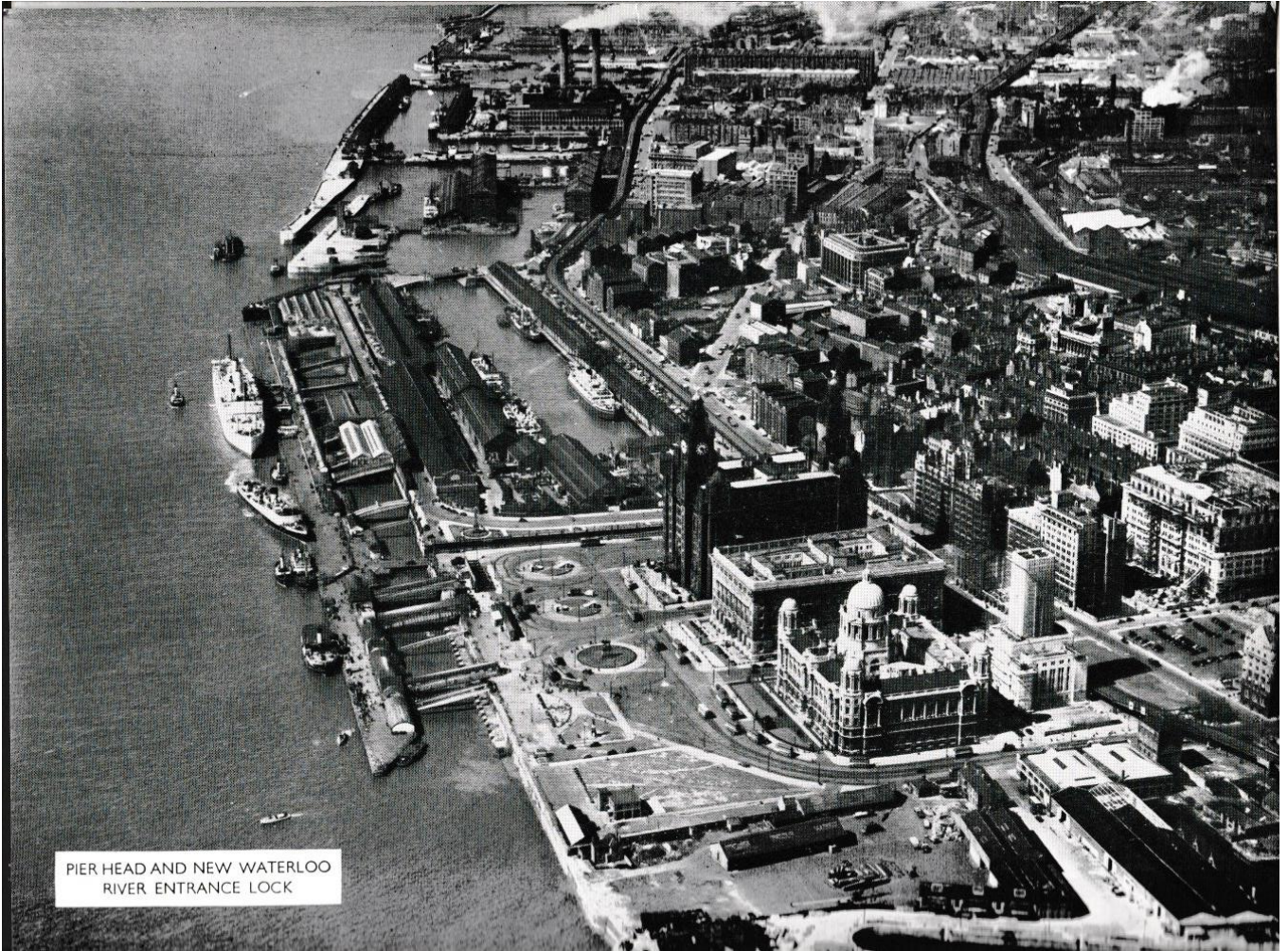
To widen and protect the channel it was dredged and protected with stone barriers.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board railway totalled 104 miles of line.

Tonnage entering the docks rose from just over 4 million tons to over 18 million tons.



This, and the next two photographs, are from 1956/7 and show the development of the docks on the Liverpool side of the river.



PIER HEAD AND NEW WATERLOO
RIVER ENTRANCE LOCK



This growth had supported (and been supported) and generated by the increase in trade in the port ~

In 1858 the tonnage entering the docks was 4,005,016; by 1958 it was 8,542,548.

Over the same period the value of trade (both imports and exports) had risen from £162 million to £1.5 billion

In 1751 there were 220 ships crewed by 3,319 men.

Liverpool's population at the time was approx. 20,000.

It is estimated that between 1900 and 1950 over 50% of Liverpool's population derived its employment from shipping and the port.

1955 – Elder Dempster alone employed 1,500 seafarers, 250 office staff (not all in Liverpool and 2,400 staff in West Africa

1913 – 31,000 dock labourers (approx. 4% of the population)

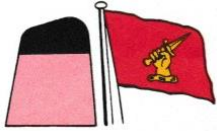
Where did Liverpool shipping companies sail to?

..... Just a sample....and the routes shown are not an exhaustive list.

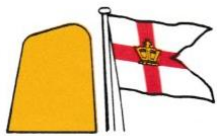


(1852)

The Far East: China, Japan, Singapore, and later, Australia – Blue Funnel



Egypt, Columbo, Rangoon, Burma, Ceylon – Bibby Line (1807)



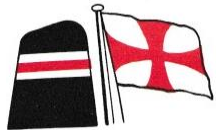
West Africa – Elder Dempster (1868)



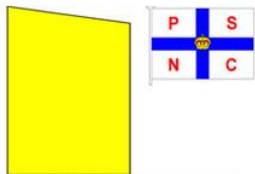
America – Cunard (1840)



India, South America, China – Brocklebank (1707)



France (brandy was its first trade), Mediterranean fruit trade, Brazil, India, New Orleans, - Harrison Line (1853)



Chile, Peru, Argentina, Panama – The Pacific Steam Navigation Company



Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Boston USA – Furness Withy (1878)

It was no accident that the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine – the first institution in the world dedicated to the research and teaching in tropical medicine – was founded in Liverpool in 1898.

So, what happened to all those companies in the over the course of, and especially in the second half, of the 20th century?

Mergers and acquisitions

Competition

Loss of trade routes and the establishment of national shipping lines

Two World Wars

Amalgamations

Changes in ownership

Company name changes

Diversification

Containerisation

.....and even fraud and scandal!

It is impossible to give other than a very broad brush approach but suffice to say that the history of many of the companies in the 1957/8 list are intertwined. And as a sample, a brief history of just three companies is given below.

CUNARD

Originally the **British and North American Royal Mail Steam-Packet Company** and made its first transatlantic sailing in 1840.

1879 - Name changed to **Cunard Steamship Company**

1912 – took controlling interest in *Brocklebank* (through *Anchor Line*, a Cunard subsidiary)

1916 – Cunard Building in Liverpool opened. Remained as Cunard offices for 50 years. This “statement building” gives some idea of the status of the company. Other companies built prestigious offices as their headquarters in Liverpool.



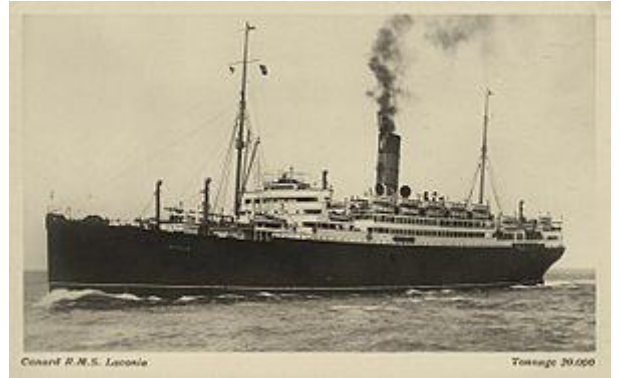


With the Royal Liver Building to its right, and the Port of Liverpool Building to its left, it now forms part of the "Three Graces" and is a World Heritage Site. The Custom House can be seen towards the top right hand corner of the photograph. Almost directly above the Cunard Building is the White Star Building. White Star Line was the owner of Titanic.



The White Star Building

1919 – Purchase of Brocklebank and Bates family shares



1923 – First around the world voyage, RMS Laconia

1934 - Merged with the failing White Star Line to form **Cunard-White Star**. The merger was a condition of government support for the building of new tonnage.

Liverpool had tried very hard to accommodate Cunard, even altering docks and dock entrances, but gradually Cunard moved its centre of operations from Liverpool to Southampton.

1940 – Acquisition of final Brocklebank shares

1950 – Name reverted to **Cunard Line**

1950s – In an endeavour to counter the growing threat to its passenger business from the growth in trans-Atlantic airlines it ventured into the air travel business with *Cunard Eagle Airways* (closed 1966)

1967 – *Cunard-Brocklebank* formed to handle cargo interests (the last Brocklebank ship was sold in 1983)

1983 – Acquired *Norwegian America Line*

1998 – Acquired *Ellerman Lines*, formed *Cunard-Ellerman*

1971 – Acquired by Trafalgar House (Construction, Engineering, Property conglomerate)

1991 – Ellerman Sold (two subsequent owners. Ellerman ceased to exist in 2004)

1996 – Trafalgar House acquired by Norwegian company Kværner

1998 – Acquired by the American company Carnival Corporation & plc



The traditional picture of Cunard

THE OCEAN STEAMSHIP COMPANY

1865 – Company founded by Alfred and Philip Holt to provide a steamship service to China. Three iron-hulled vessels were built, powered by an engine designed by Alfred Holt and the first sailing was in 1866 to Shanghai.

The Company was known as **Alfred Holt & Company**, **Blue Funnel Line**, or simply as “Holts”

1891 – A Dutch company, *Nederlandsche Stoomvaart Maatschappij Oceaan* with Blue Funnel ships under the Dutch flag, and the *East India Ocean Steam Ship Company* (in conjunction with other parties) were both formed.

1899 - the *East India Ocean Steam Ship Company* sold

1901 – UK to Australia direct service started with refrigerated vessels

1902 – Purchased controlling interest in *China Mutual Steam Navigation Company Ltd.*

1905 – Purchase of land at Kowloon and Shanghai for warehouse and wharves construction

By 1914 the company owned 69 ships

1915 – Acquired *Indra Line*

1917 – Acquired *Knight Line*

1924/32 – Construction of India Buildings in Liverpool

In May 1941 the building was largely destroyed by German bombing, with the loss of many company records. The building was rebuilt in 1953.



1935 – Acquired Glen Line (including *Shire Line*)

1936 – Major shareholder in *Elder Dempster*

1939 – Fleet had 76 Blue Funnel and 11 Glen Line ships

1943 – Ceased management of *Elder Dempster*

By the end of World War II 52 ships had been lost

1950 – Australian passenger service ceased after 40 years

1965 – Acquired *Liner Holdings* (included *Elder Dempster* and other companies)

Ocean and Elder Dempster together carried a third of all Liverpool tonnage during the 1960s.

1966 – **Ocean** joined *British and Commonwealth Shipping Group*, *Furness Withy Group*, and the *P&O Group* in a consortium to form *Overseas Containers Ltd (OCL)*

1972 – Acquired **William Cory & Son** (a transport and distribution company)

1973 – Name changed to **Ocean Transport & Trading Ltd**

1986 – all the OCL partners were bought out by P&O and the company renamed *P&O Containers* (in 1996 merged with *Nedlloyd Line* and formed *P&O Nedlloyd*, bought by *Maersk Line* in 2005)

1988 – The sale of the last *Blue Funnel* ship

1989 – *Elder Dempster* sold – **Ocean** withdrew from deep-sea shipping

1990 - Renamed as **Ocean Group plc.**

2000 – Merged with *National Freight Corporation* to form the logistics group *Exel plc*.
And the name **Ocean Group** disappeared.

2005 - *Exel plc* was taken over by *DHL* and now operates as *DHL Exel Supply Chain*.

ROYAL MAIL LINE

1839 – Royal Charter granted to **Royal Mail Steam Packet Company**

1842 – First mail service to the Caribbean
Services within the West Indies, to New York, Nova Scotia, South America

1884 onwards – progressive decline, poor safety record with 21 ships lost by 1899 and gradual loss of mail contracts.

1903 – the ailing company acquired by Owen and John Phillipps and used as base for a series of shipping company acquisitions -

1910 - *Pacific Steam Navigation Co, Elder Dempster, Union-Castle Line*

1911 - *Lamport & Holt*

1912 - *Glen & Shire Lines*

1913 – *Nelson*

1917 - *Coast Lines, MacAndrews*

1918 - *Harland & Wolff*

1923 – Owen Cosby Phillipps becomes Lord Kylsant

1927 - *White Star Line* purchased with a British Government loan

1928 - *Aberdeen & Commonwealth* purchased by using the loan repayments.

Loan repayment deferred for a year

£2 million debenture loan raised and used to purchase *Shaw Savill & Albion*.

1929 – Unable to meet government loan repayment

Investigations showed that ~

- The debenture prospectus details were fraudulent.
- Lord Kylsant had not consulted his directors about the *Shaw Savill* purchase.

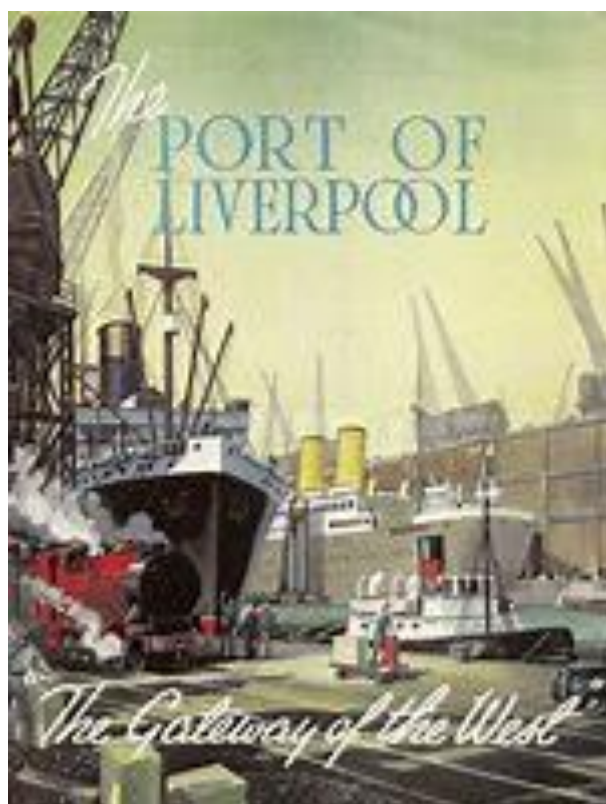
He served ten months in Wormwood Scrubs

1930 – **Royal Mail Steam Packet Company** broken up. Viable companies floated or sold off.

1932 – **Royal Mail Lines Ltd** formed with the remaining assets of the **Royal Mail Steam Packet Company** - *RMSP Meat Transports Ltd, Nelson Steam Navigation Co Ltd and David MacIver & Co Ltd.*

1965 – Acquired by *Furness Withy & Company*, which was later purchased by *Orient Overseas Container Line* (which also purchased *Houlder Brothers*, [Manchester Liners](#), [Shaw Savill](#), [Pacific Steam Navigation Company](#), *Prince Line* and *Alexander Shipping Company*).

1990 - *Furness Withy* was finally acquired by the *Oetker Group* of Germany (better known in the UK for its baking products).



Apart from the Shipping Companies' Management and Staff many other businesses were associated with the trade of the port -

- Ships' Agents
- Ship and Insurance Brokers
- Freight Forwarders
- Insurance Companies
- Ship Building and Maintenance
- Ships' Chandlers and Suppliers
- Transport Companies
- Dockers and Stevedores
- Harbour Masters
- The Cotton Exchange
- The Corn Exchange
- The Fruit Exchange
- The Produce Exchange
- The Liverpool Underwriters' Association
- The Sugar Association of Lancashire Ltd
- The Liverpool Wool Brokers' Association
- The Liverpool Timber Trade Association Ltd
- The Liverpool Steamship Owners' Association
- Seafarers' Joint Committee of the Employers' Association of the Port of Liverpool
- The Liverpool Sailing Ship Owners' Mutual Indemnity Association
- The Cotton Exchange
- The Corn Exchange
- The Fruit Exchange

- The Produce Exchange
- The Liverpool Underwriters' Association
- The Sugar Association of Lancashire Ltd
- The Liverpool Wool Brokers' Association
- The Liverpool Timber Trade Association Ltd
- The Liverpool Steamship Owners' Association
- Seafarers' Joint Committee of the Employers' Association of the Port of Liverpool
- The Liverpool Sailing Ship Owners' Mutual Indemnity Association

.....the list goes on.....



Somebody in MD&HB had a sense of (Liverpool) humour...this is a genuine sign.

During the first hundred years of the of Mersey Docks and Harbour Board
several generations of the Bibby, Brocklebank, Holt families have served on the Board.

In 1907 Mersey Docks and Harbour Board Offices (now the Port of Liverpool Building) was completed



Pre 1914, showing a gap on the left, where the Cunard Building is now located.

In the central hall, the frieze between the ground and first floor is adorned with the words of psalm 107:

"They that go down to the sea in ships
that do business in great waters
these see the works of the Lord
and his wonders of the deep.
Anno Domini MCMVII"



But by the late 1960s the Board was in financial difficulty, not least due to the huge cost of the reconstruction of the docks following the Second World War when the docks suffered severe damage, especially in the air raids of May 1941. The shipping companies had also suffered the loss of many ships and their crews.

This coupled by the fact that trade and the type of ships to be handled by the port were changing led in 1972 to the Board being reconstituted as Mersey Docks and Harbour Company to allow it to raise money for new building initiatives and projects, including the new container dock at Seaforth.

MORE INFORMATION

National Archives www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk

National Museums Liverpool Maritime Archives and Library www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk
Information Sheet Number:

- 3 – Liverpool and the transatlantic slave trade
- 7 – Customs Bills of Entry; sources guide for researchers
- 11 - Alfred Holt and Co Ltd / Blue Funnel Line / Ocean Steam Ship Co Ltd
- 14 - Pacific Steam
- 15 - Elder Dempster Lines Ltd
- 16 – Ellerman
- 17 – Cunard
- 18 – T & J Brocklebank
- 22 – Liverpool and Canada’s maritime Links
- 23 – Lamport & Holt
- 34 - Port of Liverpool
- 35 - Port of Liverpool Building
- 47 – Holdings of Lloyd’s Register of Shipping and Lloyd’s List
- 50 - Liverpool Registers of Merchant Ships
- 51 – Liverpool Steamship Owners Association
- 53 - Mersey Docks & Harbour Board Collection (not fully catalogued)
- 58 – Useful addresses for Maritime Research
- 69 – T & J Harrison

The Information Sheets give a brief history of the subject and details of the records held, not all of which are fully catalogued. Bear in mind that the records do not cover seafaring staff, records for which are held elsewhere.

Records of Coast Lines, formerly part of P&O Heritage Collection at the National Maritime Museum, are held by the National Museums Liverpool

The International Museum of Slavery, Royal Albert Dock, Liverpool
<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum>

Liverpool Library www.liverpool.gov.uk

http://www.oceanlinermuseum.co.uk/Ocean_Steamship_Company_history.html

The Ocean Steamship Company (Alfred Holt Group) history

University of Liverpool Cunard Archive
<https://libguides.liverpool.ac.uk/library/sca/cunardarchive>

The archive of the Cunard Steamship Co Ltd held by the University of Liverpool contains most of the surviving business records produced by Cunard since it became a limited company in 1878. (Not fully catalogued)

Liverpool John Moores University www.ljmu.ac.uk (Elder Dempster records)

Useful Websites

A Liverpool Timeline http://home.clara.net/ronsmith/liverpool/timeline_1500.htm

www.historic-liverpool.co.uk

www.liverpoolpicturebook.com

www.old-merseytimes.co.uk

www.mariner-list.com

Lloyds Register of Shipping www.heclrfoundation.org.uk

Brief histories of companies, routes served and a list of the company's vessels

www.theshipslist.com

www.crewflags.com

www.british-history.ac.uk

www.oceanlinermuseum.co.uk

<https://manuscriptsandmore.liverpool.ac.uk/?cat=77>

www.rakaia.com

www.archeosousmarine.net

Bibliography

The Port of Liverpool, Mersey Docks & Harbour Board, Fifteenth Edition, 1958

Business in Great Waters, Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, 1958

An Essay Towards The History of Liverpool drawn up from papers left by the late Mr. George Perry, and from other materials since collected by William Enfield 1773 (A facsimile edition limited to 250 copies published by Rondo Publications 1972)

An Everyday History of Liverpool. A Concise Chronicle of Everyday Events on Merseyside from the Earliest Days to the end of the 19th Century in a Facsimile Reprint from Gore's Directory 1895. Published by Scouse Press, Liverpool

Liverpool and Slavery – An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade by a Genuine "Dicky Sam", Published by A Bowker & Son, Liverpool 1884 (A Scouse Press Reprint)

Reeds House Flags and Funnels of English and Foreign Steamship Companies and Private Firms containing 648 different flags with alphabetical index. Fourth Edition Revised & Enlarged - Published by Thomas Reed & Co Ltd, 184 High Street West Sunderland 1912

Sea Breezes – a monthly magazine devoted to the worldwide shipping industry. First published in 1919 initially as the in-house organ of the Liverpool shipping firm, Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC) <https://seabreezes.co.im/>

Ships Monthly - UK published specialist shipping magazine for enthusiasts and maritime professionals. www.shipsmonthly.com

Lancashire Brief Historical and Descriptive Notes by Leo H Grindon, 1892; available as a free ebook on - <http://www.mirror-service.org/sites/gutenberg.org/4/0/5/8/40584/40584-h/40584-h.htm>

The Liverpool Dock Strike of 1890, by R Bean www.cambridge.org

Working Practices in the ports of Liverpool, London and New York, with special reference to the period 1945 – 1972, by David Critchley, October 2003, 362 pages www.researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk

Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. (Journals of the Society since 1849) www.hslc.org.uk

- Dock Labour at Liverpool: Occupational Structure and Working Conditions in the late Nineteen Century, by E L Taplin, MA BSc (Econ), 1977, (Volume 27), 22 pages.
- The Liverpool Dock Battalion: Military Intervention in the Mersey Docks 1915 – 1918, by R Grieves BEd, 1981 (Volume 131), 20 pages.
- Trade and Politics in 19th Century Liverpool: The Tobin and Horsfall Families and Liverpool's African Trade, by Martin Lynn, 1992 (Volume 142), 22 pages

Bernard Cliffe / 20 May 2021

