

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 Cape-Town 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.

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. These 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 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 diesel, 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 Penderis 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 increasingly 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 Penderis 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 arched, with the Lounge forward, and farther aft a Lido, with windows opening on to the first class swimming pool, which was now in the open on the promenade deck.



Farwick Castle in her wartime role as Aircraft Carrier

Sir Vernon Thomson



The First Lord Rotherwick

Penderis Castle Smoke Room

