

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



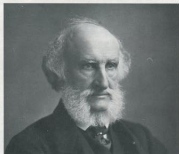
Saxon 1,142 tons 1863

Enter the 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 *Windser 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.