

The Union Line were not to be outdone. In 1890 they launched the ship that was to be the answer to Dunottar Castle. This was the Scot, a ship of 6,884 tons, and truly remarkable she turned out to be. She had twin screws and accommodation for 408 passengers. On her maiden voyage she lowered the record of her rival by more than a day. Her greatest triumph was in 1893 when she arrived at Cape Town two days before her expected time. The voyage from England had been completed in 14 days 18 hours 57 minutes, a time that was not to be bettered for more than forty years. But in spite of her sensational performances, with her insatiable appetite for coal she was losing the company money. In 1896 she was lengthened and remodelled to increase her earning capacity.

In an endeavour to secure for themselves the best service by allowing the two companies to remain in competition, the Cape Government had included in successive mail contracts a clause forbidding them to amalgamate. A new contract was due in 1900. This time the Government announced the contract would be awarded to one company only and invited tenders.

Both the Union and Castle Companies failed to submit proposals; they declined to compete against each other. No tender was received. The Government had to turn to the two companies that had served the country so well. Once again the contract was divided between them, but this time there was no clause barring amalgamation.

The initiative came from Sir Donald Currie. In December 1899 the public learnt the two companies had agreed on terms to come together. On March 8th 1900 the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Co Ltd came into being.

## Union-Castle Line

With the merger there disappeared much of the excitement that had come from the keen rivalry of the two companies but in its place there came something that was of far greater value to those using the service, whether as passengers or for the shipment of cargo. Now that there was no longer any need to outdo the rival company regular schedules could be fixed and maintained. Passengers knew when their ship would arrive and could make their arrangements accordingly. Those who shipped or received cargo knew just when it would arrive, and all this was far more satisfactory to everyone. Now there were established mail days, and anyone expecting a letter knew on which day it would be there. No longer did the shipping companies have to face the cost of the very fast passages, which were a great boost for prestige but did not help the balance sheet.

Right from the very start after the merger the South African Mail service began to establish itself as a service without parallel on the ocean-going routes of the world. There was a saying in Cape Town that people set their watches by the arrival of the mailship. The time taken on the route was progressively reduced, but the meticulous punctuality remained.

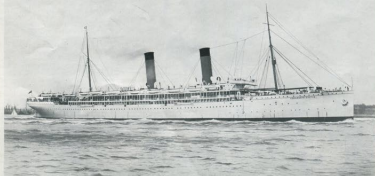
Two years after the merger the first mailships were ordered in the name of the Union-Castle Line. These were Armadale Castle and Kenilworth Castle, both of 13,000 tons, the largest ships yet to be ordered for the route. A later ship, the Balmoral Castle, figures in a noted historical occasion. In May 1910 the self-governing colonies of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange River, were formally united and the Union of South Africa came into being. To mark the occasion the Prince of Wales was to travel to South Africa to open Parliament, but before this occurred King Edward VII died and the Prince of Wales succeeded to the throne as King George V. In his place, the late King's brother the Duke of Connaught, was chosen to carry out this ceremony. The Balmoral Castle was taken over by the Admiralty, special accommodation was arranged for the royal passengers, the white ensign was run up and Balmoral Castle was commissioned with a naval crew.

Sir Donald Currie, who had done so much for the fortunes of the Castle Line and later the Union-Castle Line, died in 1909. Three years later, on April 18th 1912, the control of the company passed to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Co, and Elder Dempster Co., with Sir Owen Philipps becoming Chairman.

## The New Chairman

One of the earliest acts of the new chairman was to negotiate a new mail contract. In the past the mail contracts had been concerned with little more than the carriage of mail, but the new agreement was far more comprehensive. Sir Owen Philipps saw in South Africa a country of infinite possibilities, and it was his ambition that the Union-Castle Co. should play a worthy part in helping to build up the fortunes of this young country. Agreements were made to charge special rates on produce exported from South Africa. Pedigree stock from Europe was to be carried to South Africa free of freight, in an endeavour to build up the quality of the South African herds. To help the infant fruit industry 18,000 cubic feet of cold or cool chamber space was to be installed in every mailship.

In 1914 came the first world war, and for four years the ships of the Company were engaged in the heroic struggles of keeping open the lifelines of this country and of the empire.



Kenilworth Castle 12,875 tons 1894