

# readers' letters

## Mailship was the subject of early Marconi wireless demonstration

Sir,

A glance along the shelves of the staff library will often reveal books on maritime or South African subjects which yield information about one of the shipping companies within the group. Recently I discovered a book about the development of wireless at sea which contained the following account.

Apparently, John Brinton "a director of the Donald Currie Line" attended an early demonstration of wireless at the offices of the Marconi Company. This so impressed Brinton that he asked if one of the company's vessels could be reported to him when passing a Marconi station. Thus it was that *Carisbrook Castle*, on her maiden voyage, was signalled from the Alum Bay station and a wireless message was then sent from there to Bournemouth which in turn was telegraphed to Brinton by land line. The message read "Steamship *Carisbrook Castle*, Donald Currie Line, outward bound passed the Needles at five minutes past six" and it is said that Brinton was so delighted that he offered to help the Marconi Company in any way he could.

*Carisbrook Castle* was a mail steamer built in 1898 for the Castle Line which was managed by Donald Currie and Company.

Although she was one of the first vessels to be associated with an early wireless demonstration it was not until 1910 that the Union Castle Line began to provide its vessels with wireless, the first being *Balmoral Castle*. At this time wireless stations were being built along the South African coast and by the end of 1911 all mail vessels were equipped with Marconi apparatus.

In his book "The White Whirlwind", T.V. Bulpin describes the visit to London of the well known frontiersman Johan Colenbrander who was escorting envoys from the Matabele King, Lobengula, to Queen Victoria. They returned from Plymouth in *Grantully Castle* at the end of March, 1889, and broke their journey at Madeira to await the arrival of a colleague who was travelling out the following week. The story of plot and double cross is well told and need not concern us here but Bulpin does not mention the name of the mail vessel following *Grantully Castle* to the Cape. I imagine it would have been a Union Line ship and I am wondering whether any of your readers can supply the answer.

G. R. WISEMAN,  
Greenly House,  
London.

## Family met again after 35 years

Sir,

I am writing in appreciation of the post-retirement trip to Durban and back, recently granted me.

The voyage—southbound in *Windsor Castle*, returning in *Pendennis Castle*—was most relaxing and greatly enjoyed. My wife and I made many friends.

The holiday was enhanced by the reunion between my wife and her two brothers, who live in Durban, married to South African wives. One of them she had not seen for 35 years and the other for 15 years.

An excellent itinerary had been prepared for our visit, which included a safari through a game reserve and a 3,000-mile tour.

E. H. G. WEST,  
60 Granby Grove,  
Highfield,  
Southampton.

## Canute Road history continued

Sir,

When my notes on the origins of Southampton's Canute Road office were printed in issue No. 11 together with photographs, I had not been able to assess precisely the date of the building and I guessed 1843. Sometime later, the London customs confirmed that it was 1847.

The Southampton public reference library were most helpful and allowed me to photograph a print of the building as it was in the year 1852. Note the wooden palliade on the left, showing the type of fencing then employed, the strucco low railings reaching from the corner of the building to its portico. This must have remained until 1911 when the neo-Georgian front was built.

The cupola is absent too and may have been erected later to enable the customs to sight arrival of ships. A similar cupola existed in the roof of another customs building, I believe at berth 29, now demolished.

To the right of the building the scene is sylvan and from the windows of the Georgian houses erected when the city's spa was at the height of its fame, the view across the wide Test must have been superb.

A. J. WENT,  
Graystoke, Saxon Rd.,  
Freemantle, Southampton.

■ Below: an old print shows B&C's Canute Road office as it was in 1852. See letter in column three. Picture: Southampton Public Libraries.

