



'Is it essential that a steamship company's posters must have a ship?' The shortcomings of British shipping posters c.1840 to c.1970.

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Introduction

By the mid-nineteenth-century, the British merchant marine 'ruled the waves' – a position of dominance which continued to the First World War. In 1913, UK shipping companies still owned 42.4 per cent of global tonnage. But, by 1939, British tonnage slumped to 27.9 per cent of world merchant fleets and to a mere 9.6 per cent of the global total by 1975 (Davies, 2000, p. 28). This long decline is usually explained by a combination of British industrial decay, labour unrest, inconsistent government policy and poor government-business relations, entrepreneurial and organisational weakness, and economic nationalism overseas (combined with the more recent phenomena of flags of convenience and air transport) (Clydesdale, 2008; Clydesdale, 2012; Hope, 1990; Davies 2000; Jamieson, 1995; Jamieson, 2003; Palmer, 2012; Sturmey, 1962; Sturmey, 1991; Woodman, 2010). There remains, however, a lack of detailed and comparative study of how British shipping lines marketed their services, and the extent to which the manner and mode of self-promotion reflected the entrepreneurial and organisational shortcomings which underpinned or exacerbated decline (an exception is Gladden's (2014) recent article, the findings of which are integrated into the present paper. But Gladden focusses on Cunard White Star over a relatively short 30-year period of the twentieth century, and does not explicitly address how marketing strategies contribute to the 'decline-ology' of British merchant shipping). We fill this historiographical void through a wide-ranging survey of shipping posters from roughly 1840 to 1970. The poster was a key marketing medium universally utilised over a century-and-a-half by UK ocean-going lines. As posters were generally targeted at the passenger market, our focus is on the human-cargo side of the Merchant Navy's operations. This British shipping material is compared with equivalent continental European advertising, as well as with the marketing strategies of the embryonic UK airlines from the 1930s to the 1950s. The argument is sustained by textual analysis of promotional literature, triangulated with discussions of approaches to marketing in company correspondence and boardroom discussions 'behind closed doors', on top of the critiques of advertising professionals in the contemporary trade press.

Using consumer-focussed posters as an outward expression of a progressive and forward looking company, we argue that leading UK shipping providers whilst generally responsive to the need for new products (such as tourist third cabin) failed to fully reposition their companies in their communications strategy. Instead they remained wedded to traditional representations of "what they did", rather than

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3 focused on the customer experience and emotional attachments at an experiential level. Indeed, by the
4 beginning of the twentieth century, British maritime marketing messages were out of kilter with prevailing
5 trends, and were subject to considerable criticism from informed creatives (as detailed in the fourth and
6 fifth sections of our discussion). This became a particular problem during the inter-war shipping crisis of
7 the 1920s and 1930s, and continued into increasingly competitive environments and crowded markets in
8 the 1950s and 1960s. The collapse of the mass trans-Atlantic emigrant market, as a consequence of the
9 tightening of US immigration controls after 1924 (and in which a revived emphasis on cheap passages to
10 the 'White' Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa proved a poor substitute) was
11 exacerbated by the global economic downturn post-1929 (Gladden, 2014, p. 60). To fill redundant
12 shipping space, ocean travel needed to be promoted, not merely as a means of transportation - of getting
13 relatively quickly, cheaply, safely and comfortably from A to B - but as a luxurious and exciting holiday
14 experience. This was particularly prevalent in the selling of cruising. Writing contemporaneously in his
15 classic study of the Merchant Navy, Roland Thornton, noted that the cruise concept was hardly new. But,
16 as the Far Eastern shipping baron went on to recognise, the on-board tourist experience had become
17 central to the survival of transnational shipping businesses during the 1920s and 1930s in the face of the
18 'acutest and most persistent depression' the sector had previously known (Thornton, 1939, p. 209). For
19 the most part, when it came to these British shipping lines presenting their businesses to the public via
20 posters, proclaiming what they offered, there was a tendency to persist in their graphic representations of
21 ships rather than reflecting the potential customer and what it was they might *experience*.

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41 Central to the argument of this article is that whilst shipping lines may have developed new
42 propositions and repositioned their products to satisfy new markets, the manner in which they
43 represented their businesses, interpreting what it was that they offered and what they *meant*, failed to
44 keep pace and instead relied on traditional images out-of-step with the market they were trying to speak
45 to. It is acknowledged that these lines adapted to market conditions, most notably in the face of the falling
46 away of the steerage market in the mid-1920s consequent upon tightening immigration rules in the USA,
47 and, on this level, this aspect of marketing was satisfied: steerage was replaced by "tourist third cabin"
48 which appealed to an entirely new market. Moreover, as new habits of sailing were inculcated in an
49 increasingly wealthy (American) middle class, pleasure cruising developed with some success. However,
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3 such actions were frequently reactionary, forced onto these typically unimaginative organisations as they
4 responded to 'the needs of the moment in order to survive' (Coon and Varias, 2003, p. 62). Further, they
5 never lost hope or let go of that impression that they were masters of the high seas and that the simple
6 grandeur and magnificence of their vessels would be sufficient to woo customers. As shipping companies
7 persisted in representations of big ships in their posters, big ships were considered to be the core of their
8 business: an increasingly outdated proposition. Indeed, at a time when the last traditional liners entered
9 service in the mid-1960s they were already anachronistic as they were eclipsed by air travel. Many
10 shipping lines persisted in offering their services out of obligation to loyal clients rather than out of a more
11 commercial, realist consideration. This article reinforces the historiographical critique that shipping lines
12 were ultimately non-adaptive to changing market conditions, a phenomenon that was particularly British.
13 For example, Maxtone-Graham notes:

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26 despite an apparently endless demand for space on winter cruises, a peculiarly obstinate
27 [Cunard] Company policy prevailed: obsessed with an outdated need to "show the flag", Cunard
28 pulled the *Elizabeth* north four times each winter throughout the lucrative cruise season [of the
29 mid-1950s], so that she could make expensive North Atlantic crossings carrying only a handful of
30 clients (1972, p. 409).

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37 The pride of these British shipping lines persisted well beyond the moment where they could
38 financially sustain such posturing perhaps by virtue of the heritage within those organisations. Following
39 Chandler's lead on the limitations of UK industrial capitalism vis-à-vis the US variety, Clydesdale argues
40 that this stasis had much to do with the tradition of family control, resulting in a 'conservative managerial
41 culture which slowed growth, placed stability ahead of growth and resisted institutional overhauls'
42 (Clydesdale 2012, p. 19). Family-ownership became less prevalent in the twentieth century as mergers
43 and the demands of long-term financing for fleet-renewal led (reluctantly) to stock-exchange listings and
44 the creeping participation of the merchant bankers of the City of London (for the Liverpool-based Ocean
45 Steam Ship Company, or Blue Funnel Line, in the Far Eastern and West African trades see Falkus, 1990,
46 p. 4, p. 187, p. 231, p. 335; White, 2008, pp. 169-70; White, 2011, p. 195; White and Evans, 2015, p.
47 222). Nevertheless, into the 1960s, there usually remained one dominant family occupying key executive
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3 roles in the leading 'Big Five' groups – for example, the Bates dynasty at Cunard, the Andersons at P&O,
4 the Holts at Blue Funnel, the Ellermans at Ellermans, and the Cayzers at Clan/British & Commonwealth.
5 Senior decision-making positions continued to be inherited by scions of these houses. If managers were
6 sought from outside the immediate gene pool they were often recruited via existing social networks. Thus,
7 Sir John Nicholson (head of Blue Funnel from 1957-71) was provided an entrée into the Liverpool-based
8 firm by his step-father, Lord Mottistone, a parliamentary colleague and close friend of Sir Richard Durning
9 Holt (senior partner at Blue Funnel from 1904-41) (Falkus, 1990, p. 289). 'Familianness' was not necessarily
10 dichotomous with dynamic capability, illustrated by the experience of Derek Bibby in the 1970s and
11 1980s, the sixth generation of his family to manage the Bibby Line. Sir Derek engineered a radical and
12 largely successful diversification of the Liverpool firm's core business from ship-owning to financial
13 services, land-based distribution and retail, while also solidifying family-ownership just before his
14 retirement in 1985 (Jones *et al*, 2013). Nevertheless, family dominance tended to embed a sense of
15 tradition, and an instinctive reaction against deviation from established norms. This extended into
16 marketing communications which seem to have been very closely governed by the board of directors
17 within these organisations rather than being devolved to external "experts". This was especially the case
18 when it came to the poster. At the heart of these designs was the renowned and much vaunted marine
19 artist whose primary brief was generally to capture the most realistic impression of new ships as they
20 came into service. Indeed, certain artists were wedded to certain shipping lines (for example, Odin
21 Rosenvinge (1880 – 1957) and Cunard) and effectively determined the public face of those lines. This
22 research has found little or no evidence of the involvement of outside agencies in these communications
23 which further supports the impression of a top-down, didactic management structure, further reinforcing a
24 staid and outmoded approach. By the 1960s, Richard Woodman, a former master mariner, notes that
25 throughout the UK shipping industry 'excessive emphasis was laid upon traditional norms... Everything
26 was out of date, from its training methods, its regulation, its ship-design and building, its management and
27 its distance in psychological terms from Government' (Woodman, 2010, pp. 390 – 1). What was also
28 antiquated was the merchant marine's communications strategy. A 'natural conservatism' confirmed by a
29 BBC journalist in the late-1960s after interviewing leading ship-owners, proved particularly problematic in
30 dealing with the dramatic shifts that occurred from the early-twentieth century in both the means and
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3 methods through which companies conversed with their customers (as elaborated in part two of this
4 article) (Turner, 1971, p. 312). This article does not suggest that posters were the only means of
5 conversing with potential customers but rather the lack of innovation in this medium reflects on the
6 conservative, traditional orthodoxy which it is argued was typical of British shipping lines and which
7 ultimately led to their demise. It is acknowledged that a variety of other channels were drawn on to
8 communicate with the public, and some of these might be considered more effective in respect to moving
9 with the times in speaking to new markets. Thus, extravagant brochures produced by these concerns
10 were rich and evocative in their descriptions of the experience of travelling by sea. Further, by the mid-
11 twentieth century at least some press campaigns appear to be more in line with what may have been
12 required in converting customers. Notable here was Cunard's "Getting There Is Half The Fun" campaign
13 of the 1950s/1960s. However, at other times press advertisements were lacking in creativity and
14 imagination, tending towards the functional in providing sailing times, tariffs and where tickets might be
15 acquired. All this speaks to the observations of Marshall Meek, destined to become one of Britain's
16 leading naval architects. On joining Blue Funnel in 1953, Meek discovered an, 'ultra-conservative state of
17 affairs' epitomised by the continued hiring of Oxbridge graduates with limited technical knowledge as
18 junior managers (Meek, 1972, pp. 95 – 104). One of the long-established capabilities recognised by
19 Jones et al in explaining the survival of the Bibby Line was its "conservative" financial approach', noting
20 also that the 'idea of "patient capital" is a well-established attribute of family firms' (2013, p. 922). But,
21 patience in marketing and advertising, especially in the context of rapidly changing consumer aspiration,
22 was not a virtue. There was a weakness within British liner companies – particularly from the 1920s to
23 the 1970s – in not keeping in-step with changing markets, in not ensuring that they were speaking
24 appropriately and effectively to consumers, and in not being customer-focussed. We begin, therefore, by
25 demonstrating the remarkably static nature of maritime marketing practices and imagery.

50 **Research Methodology and Results**

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53 To gain as comprehensive and representative a coverage as possible of extant shipping posters, from the
54 mid-nineteenth century (when they first survive) to the early-1970s (when the UK maritime industries were
55 well into their decline), we accessed collections at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Glasgow University

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3 Archives & Business Records Centre, the Mariners' Museum, Virginia, the University of Liverpool Cunard
4 Archive, and P&O Heritage online. There were also incidental images captured via auction catalogues
5 and the contemporary trade press. The result was a population of 456 posters which were subjected to a
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7 comprehensive survey with particular reference to what dominated the frame of the poster.
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11 Out of the total collection of 456 posters, 264 (58 per cent) used a ship in order to sell their
12 proposition as opposed to images not related to the voyage itself, for example an impression of the
13 destination. In these instances, 232 posters (88 per cent) exclusively portrayed the exterior of the ship;
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15 only two (0.8 per cent) offered a representation of the interior of the vessel and in only 30 instances (11
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17 per cent) was an impression conveyed of the type of experiences and activities that passengers might
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19 enjoy on board, as set out in table 1.
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27 Despite some slight changes, this trend persisted across the entire timeframe. Using Branchik's (2013)
28 model of periodisation it is demonstrated how the ship as representing the proposition is a constant.
29 Thus, the ships exterior is dominant in 100 per cent of the posters produced from the nineteenth century
30 through to 1914; in 87 per cent of cases between 1918 and 1939; and, 72 per cent of cases between
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32 1945 and 1970.
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36 This serves to highlight a product-orientated response on behalf of the UK lines. It would appear
37 that they were committed to stressing the core, *actual* characteristics of what was being offered rather
38 than any more creative or imaginative images and connotations which might have expanded the market
39 by cultivating *wants* rather than merely satisfying *needs*. This became more and more problematic as the
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41 twentieth century wore on and the 'Big Ship' became less and less consumption-worthy in itself.
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48 **The changing nature of marketing communications** 49

50 The basis of all marketing is brands communicating with consumers and, in the course of the nineteenth
51 and twentieth centuries, and especially from the early part of the latter, there were significant shifts in how
52 that worked most effectively. The foundation of modern advertising was best captured in 1903 when John
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54 E. Kennedy described it to Albert Lasker, of the advertising agency Lord and Thomas, as 'salesmanship'
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3 in print' (Heath and Feldwick, 2008, p. 34). In its earliest forms, this was a means of bringing products
4 and services to the widest possible audience and encouraging consumers to complete a simple
5 transaction. Generally, this material lacked sparkle, setting out instead a rational, fact-based discourse.
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7 Blending with the new practice of marketing, which first took on a distinct form at the beginning of the
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9 twentieth-century as a discipline, this approach coalesced with the hierarchical, top-down model of
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11 corporate management. The fact-based approach underscored efficient management and appropriate
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13 business activities. In firms where order and control were perceived to be core competencies, it is easy to
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15 imagine how this translated into communications to consumers.
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19 Our research findings suggest, therefore, that shipping lines neglected to embrace the modern
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21 idiom. Apparently isolated from cultural shifts, or perhaps simply unwilling to 'move with the times',
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23 shipping posters stalled at the level of 'fact'. Shipping companies, from the Victorian era, approached their
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25 customers as rational, intelligent beings as illustrated in Fig. 1 from the Inman Line of 1874. The basic
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27 logistics of shipping services were detailed, and customers could rationally choose if those schedules met
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29 with their requirements. During the nineteenth-century, shipping companies focussed on their 'product',
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31 and more specifically on their ships. But this approach persisted long into the twentieth century, even as
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33 customers changed their preferences, and were no longer enamoured with the size or magnificence of
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35 the vessels put at their disposal. This is compounded by Nevett's observation that the 1920s were a key
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37 decade in the evolution of modern marketing, underpinned by the realisation amongst producers that 'the
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39 product they were selling was more than the sum of the ingredients plus performance' (1982, p. 152).
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45 [INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

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48 Figure 1. Unknown designer, *From LIVERPOOL via QUEENSTOWN to NEW YORK*, Inman Line, 1874.

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50 Source: Merseyside Maritime Museum (hereafter MMM), MMM.458.
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55 But maritime marketing ossified in a mid-nineteenth-century model, and shipping companies were
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57 apparently incapable of developing promotional material in tune with wider developments. They lacked
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3 market awareness and remained introspective in their commercial vision, very much in accord with
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5 Levitt's classic picture of 'marketing myopia'. When the market was buoyant, from the nineteenth-century
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7 through to the mid-1920s, this mattered little. However, with the dramatic changes in the interwar market,
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9 coupled with significant shifts in the nature and practice of marketing, then British shipping was especially
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11 exposed. This incapacity to follow such trends mirrors the managerial complacency stressed in Sturmeys
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13 study of the British merchant marine's decline in the 'critical' period after 1920 – epitomised by neglect of
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15 the tanker, the diesel engine, and faster ships (bar on the North Atlantic) (and a concomitant failure to
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17 standardize tramps, bulk carriers and tankers), reliance on uncompetitive British shipyards, and a general
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19 lack of self-reflection (Sturmeys, 1962; Sturmeys, 1991, pp. 277 – 8).

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21 Shipping lines were unable to acknowledge the point at which the simple, utilitarian concentration
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23 on the product, getting from A to B effectively, was eclipsed by a falling away of demand and, at the same
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25 time, an alternative in air travel (with which the liners could not compete on the former basis of either
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27 timeliness or security). British shipping lines had their eyes so focussed on their own product that they
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29 could not envisage how it was being superseded (Levitt, 1975, p. 39). In the period between 1926 and
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31 1939, and more so after the Second World War, customers were no longer buying ships, they were
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33 consuming holidays and travel experiences instead.

34 35 36 37 **The role of narrative**

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39 To intensify the competition for passengers, the new airline companies appeared to be much more
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41 market aware and determined to take an active approach to the wooing of travellers. Anthony and Green
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43 note that between 1931 and 1938 the Imperial Airways annual publicity budget nearly doubled from
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45 £35,000 to £66,000 (2012, p. 66). If the shipping lines were burdened by longevity and tradition, the
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47 opposite was the case for the fledgling airlines. The latter had little to lose. Where companies were
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49 operating air mail-services on Empire-Commonwealth routes, the carrying of passengers was a lucrative
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51 side-line to government subsidies. This was most pronounced in the case of Imperial which had no
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53 existing public to pander to and little pressure to fill seats. Imperial concentrated on selling the concept, if
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55 not the dream, of air travel. The airlines imagined their potential customers and how they might
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57 encourage them to fly. In the 1930s, airlines faced significant resistance from travellers who were terrified
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3 by flight. Steph Cavallero's poster for Imperial sought to allay fears through stressing the airplane's
4 amenities (Fig. 2).
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15 Figure 2. Steph Cavallero, *Imperial Airways: By Air in Comfort*, c.1937.
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17 Source: Crouse. *Art Deco*, p. 23.
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21 Contrasting with comparable shipping posters, the 'vessel' was conspicuous by its absence, and an
22 impression was conveyed of relaxed comfort and leisure. The passenger appeared more likely on a train
23 than suspended in the air, a much more reassuring prospect.
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27 While shipping lines operated a monopoly on international travel, the short-comings of their
28 approach to marketing was unproblematic. As travel by air became a viable alternative, however, a more
29 up-to-date and sophisticated approach to marketing was required that acknowledged the shifting
30 perspectives of consumers. Heath and Feldwick note that decision-making is 'driven as much by
31 emotions as by knowledge and reasoning' (2008, p. 45). Even if the operators of British shipping lines
32 were slow to come around to this realisation, a good number of British entrepreneurs understood the
33 need to differentiate their product from others that were on offer, a development endorsed and
34 encouraged by the Merchandise Marks and the Trade Marks Registration Acts of 1862 and 1875
35 respectively. Food producers began using distinctive packaging rather than selling loose as had been the
36 custom in grocers' stores. John Horniman introduced the branded tea packet initiating the great rivalry
37 between suppliers such as Brooke Bond, Lipton and the Co-Operative Wholesale Society. Of even
38 greater genius was soap-making where, from the late-1880s, UK industrialists bastardized fine paintings
39 in their advertising posters to create sentimental and idyllic childhood scenes where the specific toiletry
40 on sale had a minimal presence. Pears's *Bubbles* (1888) and Lever Brothers's *New Frock* (1889) were
41 early exemplars. Indeed, in an infamous adage Thomas J. Barratt, the chairman of Pears allegedly and
42 telling quipped: 'Any fool can make soap, it takes a clever man to sell it' (Lewis, 2008, pp. 56 – 65).
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3 William Hesketh Lever, similarly, was renowned for his proclamations that his business was built on a
4 determined approach to sales rather than the manufacture of a distinct product. A more innovative
5 approach to marketing was required from the late-nineteenth century onwards for individual firms to be
6 heard amidst this cacophony of marketing communications which increasingly overwhelmed British
7 society, well-illustrated in Fig. 3 in the example of a street display in Margate, Kent (c.1908). Here a
8 number of shipping posters fight for attention in the bottom, left-hand corner.
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19 [INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

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21 Figure 3, Posters on display, Margate, Kent, c.1908.

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23 Source: John Barnicoat, *A Concise History of Posters*, p. 218.
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27 With the shift in marketing by the early-twentieth century, which dispensed with the notion of presenting a
28 rational, fact-based sales proposition, shipping lines did not develop a more elaborate discourse which
29 would bring inanimate objects to life and 'de-commodify' them. Like the soap-boilers, the ship-owners
30 seized opportunities provided by the technology of offset lithography from the 1880s and 1890s to
31 produce glossy, aesthetically pleasing full-colour posters, as illustrated in the Cunard poster in Fig. 4 .
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42 [INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

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44 Figure 4. R. H. Neville-Cumming, 'SS Lucania under tug escort in Liverpool Harbour', c. 1900.

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46 Source: LP3244, Mariners' Museum, Virginia (hereafter MMV).
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51 But, in contrast to toiletry manufacturers, for example, UK maritime promotions generally did not weave a
52 story around the product, and avoided centre-grounding the customer in the realisation of aspirations,
53 dreams or fantasies. The establishment of relationships was key: the notion that customers could relate to
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3 a product and imagine how it fitted into their lives. Hence, communications were concerned with how the
4 rational might be suspended in the hope of drawing customers into an association with the product.
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9 **The culture of British shipping lines**

10 The historiography of British shipping lines suggests they were unlikely to innovate and take risks in their
11 outward-facing presentation. Contemporary commentators certainly argued that the liner companies were
12 falling behind. For example, in 1927, Percy V. Bradshaw (artist and educator) decried the emphasis in
13 posters on the journey rather than the destination (1927, p. 84). In this manner, the product was the end
14 point rather than merely the beginning of a story with the customer at its heart. Across the nineteenth and
15 twentieth centuries, British shipping lines persisted in filling their posters with pictures of big ships as per
16 three examples from 1920-35 on the North Atlantic run (Fig. 5a-c):
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29 [INSERT FIGURES 5A, 5B, 5C HERE]
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31 Figure 5a. Walter Thomas, *White Star Line*, c.1920.

32 Source: www.christies.com, accessed 20 Feb. 2013, 16:27.
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34 Figure 5b. Kenneth D. Shoemith, *Anchor Line Glasgow-New York*, S.S. Transylvania, 1926.

35 Source: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Anchor Line collection, GB 248
36 UGD255/1/22/23
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38 Figure 5c. C. E. Turner, *The Liverpool route to U.S.A. and Canada*, R.M.S. *Britannic*, 1935.

39 Source: www.christies.com, accessed 20 Feb. 2013, 16:27.
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42 Shipping companies neglected to animate the product beyond a functional means of transportation. There
43 was no shortage of fine reproductions of imposing ships, triumphing over the natural environment. But
44 these maritime mammoths appeared as lifeless objects in which the consumer was absent, provoking a
45 frequent contributor to the advertising press, T. P. Hamilton, to ask in 1927, 'Is it good advertising?'
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3 Until quite recently ocean travel advertisers appeared to have only one idea – the big ship – and
4 for years steamship companies have continued to vie with one another in producing realistic
5 drawings of their vessels. Very little has yet been done to exploit the adventurous appeal of
6 foreign travel, to which every landsman is keenly susceptible (1927, pp. 224 – 5).
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13 The proverbial ‘sausage’ was being sold without its ‘sizzle’. The mantra stressing the effectiveness of the
14 ship rather than the delights of the on-board experience, let alone the overseas destination, did not
15 advance from the Edwardian era (and notwithstanding the trans-Atlantic shipping disasters of the 1910s).
16 A Cunard brochure promoting the 1908 schedules for newly-launched *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, although
17 going on to reveal the sumptuous surroundings and dazzling décor of ship interiors, chose to commence
18 by detailing measurements and then moved on to safety features:
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27 Limitation of language makes adequate word description of these mammoth Cunarders
28 impossible. Of special design, in equipment and passenger accommodation they are
29 constructed on similar lines. The following figures show their immense dimensions: Length,
30 790 feet; breadth, 88 feet; depth, to boat deck, 80 feet; draught, fully loaded, 37 feet 6
31 inches; displacement on load line, 45,000 tons; height to top of funnels, 155 feet; height to
32 mastheads, 216 feet. The hulls below draught line are divided into 175 watertight
33 compartments, which make them unsinkable. With complete safety device equipment,
34 including wireless telegraph, Mundy-Gray improved method of submarine signalling and with
35 officers and crews all trained and reliable men, they are unexcelled from a standpoint of
36 safety as in all other respects (*Lusitania and Mauretania I*, 1908).
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49 British shipping lines were left on the allegorical quayside through failing to develop narratives around
50 their voyages, which could have assisted in the establishment of new markets (as indeed the trade
51 publication, *Commercial Art*, keenly pointed out). Significant here was the foresight displayed by the
52 marketing professionals given that, to the early-twentieth century at least, vessel-centric posters and
53 brochures might actually have been effective advertising. They stressed a sense of speed and stability,
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3 suggested by the sleek lines, number of funnels and overall size. However, this was a short-term
4 approach which did not enunciate stories around the consumption of the service and, as such, the
5 approach of Cunard et al was out-of-touch and insular. An exception amongst British lines, which was
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9 praised for its poster artwork by the advertising gurus, was Canadian Pacific (which despite its moniker
10 was British-manned, -flagged and -registered). A prime example was a poster of 1938 (Fig. 6):
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17 [INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]
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20 Figure 6. Tom Purvis, *Canada for Holidays*, 1938.

21 Source: Choko and Jones. Posters of the *Canadian Pacific*, p. 113.
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24 C. W. Stokes, London director of publicity at Canadian Pacific, explained a year earlier why his firm's
25 advertising had changed tack:
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30 Travel – or at least, holiday travel – is a suave and urbane thing. It is colourful, recuperative, and
31 an object of joyful anticipation. Otherwise, why should anyone indulge in it at all? The blueness of
32 skies, the greenness of trees, the yellowness of sands, the crimson of stained glass, the
33 quaintness of “characters”, the whiteness of snow, the deep shadows of African sunshine, the
34 terrific height of high buildings – the artist's purpose is to make the customer want these, not to
35 avoid them. When you are painting a ship, please remember it is a beautiful object, not something
36 the dustmen forgot to remove last week (1937, p. 238).
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46 As Stokes suggested, the means of getting there was of minor consideration to the holiday or destination
47 because modern consumers were not buying the product but what the product facilitated. Hence, by the
48 inter-war years, even though travel on the great liners was still the definitive mode of transport, the selling
49 messages were becoming outmoded with important implications for the longer-term sustenance of ocean-
50 going passenger traffic. British shipping companies generally overlooked the need to challenge
51 customers to *actively* engage with marketing messages which moved the proposition on.
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3 A fundamental objective of the poster, and one that became increasingly important as promotions
4 became both more pervasive and sophisticated, was to capture the imagination of the passer-by, to
5 encourage further enquiry and engagement. Posters needed to have eye-catching impact and this could
6 best be achieved through incongruous arrangements or representations. If a poster presented a realistic
7 impression of a ship it could be taken as merely that, and the viewer could simply move on unimpressed.
8 In shifting away from realism, a more productive result could be achieved. Cassandre's poster for Italy's
9 Cosulich Line, c. 1936 likely caused a greater reaction (Fig. 7).
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21 [INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]
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25 Figure 7. A. M. Cassandre, *Italia-Cosulich: Italian Lines To All Continents*, c.1936.

26 Source: Crouse. *Art Deco Poster*, p. 243.
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31 The viewer was first of all called upon to establish whether or not these were ocean-going
32 vessels, apparently about to plunge over the edge of the globe. There was a feeling of giddiness, even
33 vertigo, and viewers might suspend belief as they gradually came to understand the metaphor implied.
34 Given that the products on sale were not immediately obvious, consumers had to become engaged in the
35 image and devise their own meaning. Attention was attracted by being distinctive, an additional problem
36 for British shipping lines given the extraordinary similarity of their posters (a point also brought out in Fig.
37 5a-c above). This was emphasised in *The Advertising World* in 1909:
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46 Each advertiser, when he is deciding upon his next poster, should make a point of examining all
47 that others in the same line of business have produced, and then go and do something altogether
48 different. Why do shipping companies all do exactly the same thing in exactly the same way?
49 (“The Poster and the Public”, 1909, pp. 700 – 2).
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3 Similarity was a particular issue in British shipping posters given their commitment to realism particularly
4 in the inter-war period. Graphic design and advertising embraced the Art Deco movement because it
5 served both professions so well. Following an Art Deco image immediately jarred with what had come
6 before, but it also created a distance from the realistic and faithful portrayal of what was being advertised.
7
8 The unpleasantness was compensated by grabbing the attention of the passer-by: the merit of posters as
9 pieces of art or faithful reproductions was of secondary importance. The essence of 1920s promotional
10 art was the stripping back and simplification of poster design, reducing representations to the essentials
11 of product and brand name. Alastair Duncan notes:

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21 Reduction was key: saying more with less became the goal. Sharp linear compositions floating on
22 flat areas of background colour quickly drew the eye of passersby in busy twentieth-century
23 cityscapes (2013, p. 10).
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29 The viewer should have been presented with a challenge, an image less ordinary. The best of travel
30 advertising – such as pieces by Cassandre for continental European lines - piqued the viewer's interest
31 without directly depicting the mode of transport, and through taking the viewer's attention away from the
32 big ship/s. The use of abstract design also served the purposes of the advertiser in the ability to suggest
33 something more ethereal. Occasionally, even the most traditionalist of British shipping companies did
34 show themselves capable of embracing such 'radical' approaches. This is suggested in Alexey
35 Brodovitch's poster, *Cunard Line: États-Unis et Canada* (1929), pitched at the French-speaking trans-
36 Atlantic traveller (Fig. 8). Brodovitch's portrayal of travel by a Cunarder was an unrealistic and unlikely
37 vision. *Mauretania* was in a highly-stylised form, offset by the soft curve of the clouds and neat symmetry
38 of the composition. As Crouse observed, this would have conjured up 'an atmosphere that [was] both
39 soothing and irresistible' (2013, p. 239). But there were hints of a more advanced approach to
40 advertising, tending toward suggestion over reliable representation. The viewer was being led into
41 temptation, being sucked in, and being forced to engage with the image (via a degree of deciphering and
42 interpretation).
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[INSERT FIGURE 8 HERE]

Figure 8. Alexey Brodovitch, *Cunard Line: Etats-Unis et Canada*, 1929.

Source: Crouse, *Art Deco*, p. 238.

Potential passengers could develop a sense of connection through projecting themselves into the scene. A promise was being presented not a pre-determined experience. In setting sail from Cherbourg to New York, passengers would reach the stated destination within a pre-determined timescale. However, the illusion of marketing enticed the traveller to achieve something above and beyond a simple transaction. There was the romance of travel, at the liberty of the tentative sojourner's imagination. The means of transport was of secondary importance and it was hardly disastrous if the ship did not feature in the poster at all, a point made by *The Advertising World* as early as June 1902:

[O]f what interest is it to the passenger to see the engine and train which he is likely to travel by. Both South Eastern and the Great Northern have produced a poster which is nothing more than a photographic reproduction, in colour, of the train by which they invite me to travel. Now the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, have certainly filled me with an unconquerable envy to take a trip to Dieppe, and make the acquaintance of that charming lady who is in the right hand corner of their poster, so admirably depicted by Toussaint... The boat is sufficiently illustrated, without being obtrusive, and the line, *via* Newhaven and Dieppe, tells me all I want to know ("Outdoor Publicity. On the Hoardings", 1902, p. 98).

There was a danger of complacency, especially in transnational shipping where there was little or no competition and passengers would elect to travel by a particular line's ships because there was no alternative. This inculcated a lack of imagination in the communications strategy and, as tougher market conditions were faced as the twentieth-century wore on, a failure to maximise returns. Maritime advertising increasingly needed to be designed not purely for those already pre-disposed to travel but to

entice others who had not considered such a possibility before. Yet, the shipping lines seem to have been generally unconcerned with the latter. Moreover, being too realistic about sea-travel could have distinct disadvantages, as 'a naval officer' appreciated in *The Advertising World* in January 1905:

... [I]t is quite time that the attention of shipping company directors was drawn to the ill-designed, unattractive representations of steamships which for many years past have disfigured the waiting-rooms of railway stations and other places of public resort. If the object had been to discourage traffic, nothing could have been better calculated to do so than the turbulent seas and tossing ships which are invariably represented on these advertisements (p. 176).

That the mighty, handsome-looking vessel was defying the sea in the quality of its engineering and design was lost on consumers in this seafarer's view, especially for those who had not previously experienced an ocean-going voyage.

The interwar period was a key moment when poster design, fused with the Art Deco movement, achieved much in shocking and drawing in an audience. However, British shipping posters instead concentrated on the detailed and realistic representation of the vessel. For Cunard White Star, Gladden demonstrates how the trans-Atlantic group adjusted its marketing in the inter-war period to try and attract passengers amongst the emerging and aspiring middle classes to its newly invented Tourist Third Class category (and so compensate for the disappearance of the mass steerage market with the advent of US immigration controls in the 1920s). This was reflected in a more imaginative use of brochures, magazine articles and films, and even in the interior design of the vessels themselves. But as Gladden notes, Cunard could not stop itself from continuing to 'use images in advertisements, posters and films to show mighty, powerful ships' (2014, pp. 60 – 66). There was an enduring concentration on the vessel rather than the delights and delectations of the holiday or destination. An imaginative cut-away poster for *Aquitania* (c.1914) showing interior design did emphasise the fashionable notion of the liner as a luxury floating 'Palace' or 'Hotel'. Here was a reassurance to the new Tourist Third Class consumer previously unfamiliar with ocean travel. But 'might and power' imagery remained in full evidence in the 'powerful engines and double hulled bottom', and huge funnels, with the latter emphasised in 'two tiny figures [of

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3 the crew] tucked away on the ship's bridge' (Gladden 2014, p. 66). Despite a brief flirtation with the
4 surreal in the 1920s, Cunard's poster enticements for the 1930s, on its Anglo-American routes, remained
5 stubbornly stuck in a *réaliste* groove, continuing to stress ship-size and -aesthetic, and with an added
6 patriotic twist in the case of the *Queen Mary* (Fig. 9-10).
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18 Figure 9. Odin Rosenvinge, *Cunard – Europe America*, 1914.

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20 Source: MMV, LP3146.
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25 [INSERT FIGURE 10 HERE]
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28 Figure 10. Unknown artist, "BRITAIN'S MASTERPIECE", Cunard White Star Line, April 1936.

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30 Source: MMV, LP4506.
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34 A fixation with impressive-looking vessels, both stylish and solid, in poster artwork paralleled the attitudes
35 of British ship-owners to the real thing, explaining a reluctance throughout the twentieth-century to
36 abandon their multi-purpose ships for specialised carriers. The liner companies 'were entrapped by an
37 aesthetic of what constituted a good ship'. Oil tankers though undoubtedly profitable were dismissed as
38 'nothing more than floating pieces of pipeline' (Clydesdale, 2012, p. 16). This pride in the quality and look
39 of the ship's design and engineering, rather than its efficacy or functionality, was unwittingly emphasised
40 by Sir John Hobhouse, a Blue Funnel executive, when he lambasted the behaviour of the Ben Line in
41 1950. The latter's unwelcome competition in the Far East trade had been facilitated by a rapid post-war
42 building programme of fast but low-cost vessels. If this was to be emulated by the other British lines,
43 Hobhouse believed it would 'land us in a position in which none of us would be able to operate the class
44 of ship which is a credit to the nation and of inestimable value in war' (1950). Irrespective of the changing
45 market the legendary '[f]ast and fine lined' British ship design was persisted with even when the container
46 revolution of the 1960s made such vessels 'barely fit-for-purpose' (Woodman, 2010, 342).
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3 Traditionalism in ship-building and the promotion of the product became out-moded as growing
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5 competition was faced from foreign-owned liners (which by the 1930s for Germany, Italy, France and
6
7 Japan were often government-subsidised) and air transit. Beyond a predisposition towards shipping and
8
9 the sea, there was little in British shipping posters to excite the viewer. In embracing the romantic,
10
11 advertising breathed life into inanimate objects, to give them character, make them distinctive and
12
13 establish a scenario where customers could readily differentiate between one brand and another. Yet, to
14
15 the untrained eye, these ships must have appeared much the same, as illustrated in Fig. 11a-b for two
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17 British services on South and North American routes, and which also emphasise the stasis in advertising
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19 practice from the Edwardian era to the inter-war years.
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27 [INSERT FIGURES 11A AND 11B HERE]
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30 Figure 11a. Sam J. M. Brown, *Lampport & Holt Line*, 1910.

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32 Source: MMV, LP2270a.
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35 Figure 11b. Unknown artist, *Anchor Line Glasgow & New York*, S.S. Transylvania, 1927.

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37 Source: University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Anchor Line collection, GB 248
38 UGD255/1/40/19.
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42 Shipping posters could have been less obvious and less about ships. Given what they promoted was so
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44 'real' there was no need for the customer to become engaged in what was on offer.
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48 **Customer interaction and brand-building** 49

50 By the 1920s and 1930s, effective advertising and marketing depended on drawing the viewer into an
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52 interactive experience with the presentation. The best effects were achieved when the potential customer
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54 played a part in creating meaning and imagined a role within the scenario. For Davidson:
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3 Advertising turns our products into adjectives and metamorphoses those adjectives into
4 stories. This allows us to interact with the world in two ways; tangibly with our tools and
5 products and, intangibly, with their connotations (1992, p. 15).
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11 Where denotation overwhelmed connotation in the creative execution, consumer engagement was lost
12 and with it the impact and effectiveness of the marketing. As Lannon and Cooper identified, the building
13 of brands was dependent on the symbolic rather than the practical (1983). Though these observations
14 and appraisals of advertising by marketing theorists date from outside the time-scale of this study, they
15 would have made sense to contemporary observers. As Hamilton opined in 1927 (illustrated in Fig. 12a-
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25 In the White Star invitation to “See America”, there is nothing to intrigue the imagination into
26 desiring a pleasure trip to that country. The drawing of people leaning over the taffrail is certainly
27 suggestive of ocean travel, but does it make the most of the possibilities? Contrast this with the
28 inviting impression of Norwegian scenery in the Royal Mail Line advertisement – a design which
29 plainly says “Come and see it” (pp. 224 – 5).
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39 [INSERT FIGURES 12A AND 12B HERE]
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41 Figure 12a. *See America* – THIS YEAR, White Star Line press advertisement, 1927.

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43 Source: *Commercial Art* (May 1927), p. 224.
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45

46 Figure 12b. ‘HOLIDAY CRUISES TO NORWAY AND THE BALTIC’, Royal Mail Line press advertisement,
47 1927.
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49 Source: *Commercial Art* (May 1927), p. 225.
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53 The significant phrase used by Hamilton here was ‘intrigues the imagination’. This was key in setting up
54 of the entire communications strategy: encouraging customers to take an active part in the creation of
55 meaning and significance, precisely in step with the twentieth-century trend towards abstraction, and the
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3 widespread tendency in poster design to escape from the fixation with naturalism. But this shift from the
4 practical/literal to the symbolic for the most part passed the shipping companies by. Despite a few
5 significant outliers, the design of British shipping posters remained wedded to the conventional. This
6 mirrored interior design on the ocean liners themselves. As Cunard's head of furnishings put it in 1930,
7 his philosophy was a 'foundation of conservatism' (Gladden 2014, p. 69). On the *Queen Mary* after 1936,
8 Art Deco styling was in evidence in the ship's public zones, but an avant-garde painting by Duncan Grant,
9 for example, was removed at the insistence of Cunard's chairman. And paralleling the critiques of the
10 marketing press of Cunard's advertising designs, an architectural magazine declared *Queen Mary*
11 'testimony to indifferent taste and feeble imagination' (Gladden 2014, p. 69).
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21 Moreover, these posters reflected corporate cultures in the avoidance of risk, or, in failing to think
22 more creatively about end users. Instead, the shipping poster remained dominated by what was at the
23 heart of the business: ships. For an extended period of time, this approach worked well given that
24 customers were buying these impressive vessels. The quality of poster design lay in pieces of fine marine
25 art rather than effective marketing communications. In this, they were not taking account of purpose and
26 effect, or of the surrounding environment in which the poster was liable to appear. C. W. Stokes of
27 Canadian Pacific went on in 1937:
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37 The poster you paint, Young Mr Artist, is not of Switzerland, but of yourself (although outside
38 the canvas) looking at Switzerland. Your ship at sea is not so much a ship as yourself, a tiny
39 dot on the sports deck, enjoying the voyage. Your poster girl, besides being lovely, must
40 have, definitely, a vacant seat next to her. Your job is not to create glamour, but to interpret it
41 – to explain it not as a dream or vision coldly objective and unattainable, but as a warm and
42 highly appealing possibility which may, by the exercise of so much money, time and effort,
43 become a technical probability (p. 240).
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52 For Stokes, then, objectivity could be abandoned in favour of a more subjective, emotive approach where
53 fantasy allusions could be played out. These allusions might extend beyond the simple notion of
54 imagining oneself sat in the vacant seat next to the 'poster girl' but even in fantastical representations of
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3 “reality”. On the whole, the artistic output from British ocean-going shipping was statically realist and
4 committed to selling the product, not the experience or the myth. The shipping poster would sink from
5 view, as the critic G. S. Sandilands forcefully argued in *Commercial Art* in 1927:
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11 If you go on showing perfect likenesses of things to a man day in, day out, in the end he will
12 fail to notice them at all. It is only when the imagination is stirred by something in the picture
13 (or by something not in the picture) that people begin to notice. The wholly gratuitous
14 passion for solving crossword puzzles in these days is an indication of this mentality. “Filling
15 in the blanks” does two things for the solvers: it completes a scheme and it elucidates a
16 mystery.
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25 The successful commercial artist must excite the imagination in the same way...What is
26 meant is simply this: there must be something in a picture or a design that stirs up a
27 challenge in the mind of the onlooker (pp. 175 – 6).
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33 The approach advocated by Sandilands positioned the consumer as an active constituent in the making
34 of the corporate brand. As such, a degree of flexibility was required by the brand owner (Lannon and
35 Cooper, 1983). British shipping companies were unwilling or unable to relax their degree of control,
36 embrace change or truly recognise the empowerment of the consumer. They were talking at customers
37 rather than being in dialogue *with* them. This mirrored a classical interpretation of brand communication
38 as ‘transmission from a sender (the brand) to a receiver (the consumer)’ (Barnham, 2008, p. 204). That
39 approach was based on a belief in the rational decision-making process and Victorian marketing
40 communications were constructed on the logical premise of informing and educating the customer to
41 reach the ‘right’ decision. But, by the twentieth century, there was a need in advertising to move away
42 from the product. *Commercial Art* painted the canvas in 1924:
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54 For years the one idea of the artist who designed a poster for a shipping concern was to show a
55 ship. It had one or more funnels, with rings or stars or other distinguishing marks; sometimes the
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3 ship pointed one way, sometimes the other. When this had been done, the Company's name and
4 services were added, and the poster was complete.
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9 The article goes on to suggest that in such cases what mattered was,
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12 her size; those in charge of the passenger departments always seem to have had a finger in the
13 pie, with the result that as time went on the poster ship swelled to such proportions that it finally
14 and naturally blew itself to bits – and then we got the ship shown very small in a large expanse of
15 sea.
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23 But the ship was still there, and this raises the question to be considered. Is it essential that a
24 steamship company's poster *must* have a ship? ("The Shipping Poster", p. 380).
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29 Such an approach was not confined to the key, interwar period but carried through to the end of the
30 1940s and beyond. The minute book of the advertising committee of the British India Steam Navigation
31 Company Limited records for 22 March 1949,
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37 The question of producing a poster was raised and it was decided that we should endeavour to
38 find something for suitable use in the near future. Mr Allen said that he was endeavouring to
39 obtain an Artists' impression of one of the new East African vessels and it was thought that we
40 might be able to produce a poster along these lines, when this was available (BIS/36/12).
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46 A 'big ship' was obviously what the company thought represented it best, and there was evident pride in
47 the commissioning and coming into service of new vessels. The thrill that this gave to those at the heart
48 of these organisations was believed to be transferable to their prospective customers with little
49 consideration of how passengers might go about reaching a decision to set sail as opposed, especially in
50 the postwar period, to adopting an alternative mode of transport. Further, the British India advertising
51 committee recorded on 20 April 1949 how it 'would like to see Posters depicting vessels' (BIS/36/12).
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3 One campaign which might be said to buck this trend was Cunard's "Getting There Is Half The Fun" which
4 ran from the 1950s through to the 1960s. As was typical in the communication strategy of shipping lines
5 throughout this period, a variety of media were used in order to reach this important market. The shipping
6 lines clearly had airlines in their sights at this time and their chief selling point in countering their
7 encroachment was selling the voyage itself as part of the holiday. In a variety of executions which
8 appeared in the press, this campaign did a good job at selling the experience of being on board, the rich
9 variety of activities, and the fun that could be had in transit denied within the confines of the jet airliner.
10 However, when it came to representing Cunard more boldly in the posters "supporting" this campaign, the
11 on-board experience was sacrificed in favour of showing big ships. In this example of the late 1950s/early
12 1960s two vessels, the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary*, are portrayed in typical, traditional style with
13 no suggestion whatsoever of the "fun" to be had on-board:
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27 [INSERT FIGURE 13 HERE]
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30 Figure 13. 'Getting There Is Half The Fun! Go Cunard', c.1960.

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32 Source: Quartermaine and Peter. *Cruise*, p. 43.
33

34
35 In the UK-West Africa trade, marketing myopia persisted into the 1960s, despite the increasing
36 encroachments of air travel for passengers. Elder Dempster, the leading British line between Europe and
37 West Africa, commissioned a new calendar in 1963 to be provided *gratis* to prospective and existing
38 customers. It was appreciated that the on-board experience needed greater emphasis to bring out 'some
39 of the attractions of sea travel' but there was still a lingering obsession with focussing on the efficacy and
40 magnificence of Elders' vessels. In turning to their long-established marine artist, John Stobart (b. 1929),
41 Elders wanted:
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50 ... a calendar which will show the "AUREOL" [the Elders flag mail ship from 1951]... For this
51 purpose we suggest an aerial view from quarter astern which shows passengers round the
52 pool, basking in deck chairs etc. It is realised that details will not be visible – this is quite
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3 satisfactory. Background scenery is not important, but an 'F' ship could well be included if it
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5 worked in with the composition... (Cotton, 1963).
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8 The glorious result reproduced in Fig. 14 offered not just one but two ships and true to form no indication
9
10 of the on-board experience.
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14 [INSERT FIGURE 14 HERE]
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17 Figure 14. Elder Dempster calendar, 1965.


18 Source: MMM, OA/26/7.
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21 Shipping posters (and other advertising ephemera) remained product-centred, pointing to the didactic
22 nature of organisation and management in the companies themselves. Posters were less to do with the
23 customer and more a manifestation of organisational culture and belief. Creativity took second place to
24 the presentation of rationality – the production of images which the company's management thought
25 represented it best.
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31 Despite the consumer confidence of the 'never-had-it-so-good' era, shipping companies remained
32 wedded in the 1950s and 1960s to emphasising the mode of transport which eclipsed the destination, or
33 places that might be visited as part of a cruise, by continuing to place the ship at the centre of the poster.
34 This is illustrated in Fig. 15a-b in the case of P&O (at a time when the Group's chief executives were
35 complaining of serious competition in its Australasian passenger services from both the 'big jets' and
36 Italian sea-based liners) (Turner, 1971, p. 314).
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47 [INSERT FIGURES 15A AND 15B HERE]
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50 Figure 15a. *England Via Suez by P&O*, 1950s.

51
52 Source: P&O Heritage. © P&O Heritage Collection www.poheritage.com 

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55 Figure 15b. *P&O U.S.A. Canada South Africa Australia*, S.S. Oriana, 1966.
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4 Source: P&O Heritage. © P&O Heritage Collection www.poheritage.com



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7 Ship-owners continued to believe that the thrill of new ships coming into service, and the commissioning
8 of new images to depict them, would easily transfer to customers without considering how that would
9 influence decisions to sail and *not* to opt for an alternative mode of transport. Indeed, Boyce has identified
10 an Ostrich-like reaction within UK shipping circles towards air travel. Rather than acknowledging the
11 threat, it was believed that air travel would co-exist with the ocean voyage in a complementary
12 relationship. Thus, Sir Thomas Brocklebank, director of Cunard White Star, looking forward to the Peace,
13 reckoned in 1941 that there would be 'a large number of travellers who for reasons of time will have to go
14 one way by air but for reasons of comfort will prefer to go the other way by sea' (Boyce, 2001, pp. 7 – 8).
15 In response, Cunard focussed its proposition on its heritage as a tried and tested undertaking, and indeed
16 the premier North Atlantic line had an 'established policy of being cautiously enterprising in order to
17 protect its reputation as a safe and reliable carrier' (Boyce, 2001, p. 12).
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28 A similar complacency, infused additionally with colonial inertia, pervaded the thinking of Elder
29 Dempster managers at the end of the Second World War when contemplating the future of the West
30 African passenger trade:
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36 ... [B]usy business executives, would doubtless wish to travel expeditiously, both out and
37 home by air, but others, that is those who earn their daily bread in West Africa, might have
38 varying wishes according to whether they were embarking on a new tour or coming home for
39 that much needed and longed for leave. Whereas many would be content to use air for the
40 outward voyage they would not look with equanimity upon a swift transition from tropical heat
41 to the unkind English climate, particularly in the midst of winter... [A]s most Coasters know
42 full well, the homeward voyage does so much to bring them round to a better state of health
43 than that in which they usually leave the Coast for home after a strenuous tour in the humid
44 energy-absorbing climate of West Africa (Bateman Jones 1945, pp. 5 – 6).
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3 Consequently, three new mail ships for the post-war trade were delivered to Elders between 1947 and
4 1951, including the celebrated 14,000 ton *Aureol* (Davies, 1973, p. 319).
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7 By the mid-1960s, however, outside consultants recognised that a much more dynamic and
8 imaginative marketing strategy was required in the face of increasingly cheap airfares. In June 1966, the
9 London division of the celebrated J. Walter Thompson (JWT) advertising agency won the account for the
10 Union-Castle line, part of the giant Britain & Commonwealth group and Cayzer family empire. JWT
11 undertook a review of the business and its marketing strategy. But in presenting its findings to the client in
12 June 1966, JWT met with resistance. Concern was expressed regarding the new campaign for the Union-
13 Castle Mail service to South Africa which, Union-Castle believed, was not adequately targeting
14 businessmen who were currently travelling that way by air. The private client/agency files suggest a
15 genuine belief on the part of the shipping line that they could compete with the airlines in this trade and
16 win passengers from them. The team at JWT felt otherwise, arguing that many businessmen simply could
17 not spare the time to travel by sea. Instead, the agents recommended that advertising should be focussed
18 on 'looking for a new market of people from a holiday aspect' ("Report of a meeting held at 40 Berkeley
19 Square, 1966, pp. 2 – 3). Faced with a similar falling away of passenger traffic on its West African routes,
20 Elder Dempster called in a team of tourism and transport consultants. *Inter alia*, the report in 1972
21 emphasised the importance of the on-board experience in the so-called the 'fun' ship concept, focussing
22 upon the holidaying and cruising businesses (including to the Canaries, a long-established refuelling base
23 for Elder's vessels). A new marketing department was also recommended which would concentrate upon
24 direct mailings and presentations to replace staid and misdirected press advertising. This was captured in
25 the poster in Fig. 16, a likely outcome of those initiatives ("Elder Dempster Lines and the West African
26 Passenger Trades", 1972).
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51 [INSERT FIGURE 16 HERE]
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53 Figure 16. 'TRAVEL IN COMFORT, TRAVEL IN STYLE, TRAVEL BETTER, TRAVEL ELDERS, 1970s.
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55 Source: MMM 1991.20.1492.2.
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3 But this cultural shift came too little, too late: in 1974 Elders withdrew from the passenger trade altogether
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5 (Davies, 2000, p. 377).
6

7 Indeed, compounding the competition from the skies, the airline companies took a more informed
8
9 approach to their marketing which demonstrated an understanding of their customers which the shipping
10
11 companies lacked (until the later-1960s at least). The airlines appreciated that the vision of an aircraft
12
13 held little appeal, indeed this might prove counter-productive – as noted for the inter-war years, over-
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15 concentration on the flight heightened existing anxieties. Post-1945, the airlines understood that they
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17 needed to focus instead on reassuring potential customers by featuring the friendly and professional
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19 pilots that would fly the craft, the equally congenial and professional stewards that would serve on board,
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21 and/or the comfortable cabin in which passengers would be seated. This was encapsulated in a
22
23 disarming cartoon by David Langdon on behalf of BOAC from c. 1946 (Fig. 17).
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29 [INSERT FIGURE 17 HERE]

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31 Figure 17. David Langdon, *The Mayflower to Britain*, BOAC, c. 1946.

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33 Source: Anthony and Green. *Aviation*, p. 140.
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37 Moreover, as the air passenger market expanded in the 1950s, there was a shift towards brighter, bolder
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39 and more attention-seeking poster design. Once more, the mode of transport was not an end in itself but
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41 rather a means to an ends. Airlines targeted the selling of the destination, as is demonstrated in an
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43 example from BEA c. 1950 (Fig. 18).
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47 [INSERT FIGURE 18 HERE]

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49 Figure 18. Unknown designer, *Fly to Europe This Summer - BEA*, c.1950.

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51 Source: Anthony and Green, *Aviation*, p. 162.
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3 The picturing of the aircraft, vaguely present in the top left-hand corner of the poster, was incidental: the
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5 main focus was on the relaxation and bright sunshine to be enjoyed at the end point. But there was little
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7 or no comparative effort on the part of the shipping lines to build a brand identity or to weave narratives
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9 which inserted these brands into the lives of consumers.
10

11 12 13 **Conclusion**

14
15 Jamieson has argued that the decline of the British merchant marine in the twentieth-century should not
16
17 be merely put down to entrepreneurial weaknesses and organisational failings (particularly in the inter-
18
19 war years when the principal problem facing Britain's 'first mover' status was the decline in world trade).
20
21 Moreover, inconsistent and ambivalent government policy from the 1930s to the 1990s did not help
22
23 Britain's ship-owners (Jamieson, 2003, pp. 158 – 62). Nevertheless, the 'conservatism and complacency'
24
25 identified here in their communication strategies does chime with other entrepreneurial infirmities stressed
26
27 in the existing literature. This included, for example, the reluctant and piece-meal take-up of the diesel-
28
29 engine ship and the tanker in the inter-war period. Meanwhile, there was an ongoing lack of newcomers
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31 in a business dominated by the 'Big Five', reinforced by the conference system, for much of the twentieth
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33 century. At the same time, family-dominated 'Victorian' business structures, inculcated a conservatism
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35 which shunned risky investment, diversification and outside finance (the latter an especial problem post-
36
37 1945 when injections of capital were desperately needed to modernise and replenish fleets). There was
38
39 an additional hesitancy (also after the Second World War) to take up the tanker and the bulk carrier, or
40
41 design specialist cruising vessels (notwithstanding a swift adaptation to containers in the 1960s)
42
43 (Jamieson, 2003, pp. .16 – 50; Clydesdale, 2008; Clydesdale, 2012). On top of this was an imperial,
44
45 'gentlemanly-capitalist' culture, intensified by Empire-Commonwealth trade preferences after 1931, which
46
47 made it difficult to adjust to decolonisation (White, 2008; White, 2011, pp. 194 – 6; White and Evans,
48
49 2015, pp. 221 – 2; Jamieson, 2003, pp. 160 – 1).

50
51 This maritime inertia contrasts with one of the most creative and dynamic features of twentieth-
52
53 century Britain, the growth of marketing in an increasingly congested marketplace where a growing
54
55 number of products and services competed to hold the gaze of customers across a proliferating media.
56
57 Where in the late-nineteenth-century a realistic drawing of a vessel and a detailed schedule may have
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3 been sufficient to win custom, with the turn of the century, consumers became less motivated by practical
4 and literal appeals, and more moved by emotive evocations. In the twentieth century, poster design in
5 other commercial sectors moved away from literal interpretations in favour of exciting new artistic
6 techniques based on an impressionistic response rather than a realistic representation of the product. But
7 the shipping poster did not, and when the liner companies were required to reposition their products in
8 response to declining demand, particularly in the trans-Atlantic passenger market from the 1920s, and
9 develop a market for cruising, this atavistic approach was misplaced. Subsequently, with the post-World
10 War Two advent of air travel, sea voyages were simply unable to compete on the basis of 'Effectiveness'
11 and notably journey time. British shipping posters remained firmly product-focussed and, where some
12 courageous parties shocked the public by taking radical new approaches, the staid, old-fashioned and
13 risk-averse shipping enterprises persisted in filling their canvases with big ships.

14
15 Without suggesting that poor poster design played a determining role in the decline of British
16 shipping, this article does provide further insight into company cultures which were poorly placed to cope
17 with changing competitive environments. Long into the twentieth century, 'British shippers persisted with
18 the industry norms that had carried them to global leadership'; 'as elsewhere in Britain's traditional
19 industries, her mercantile marine had become complacent, a victim of its own success' (Woodman, 2010,
20 p. 390). Even Conservative party politicians, inclined to be sympathetic towards big British business,
21 identified these managerial defects at the time. Minister of Transport Ernest Marples reported to his
22 cabinet colleagues in July 1962 that 'the industry as a whole tends to be old-fashioned' (Palmer, 2012, p.
23 129). Marketing strategies in the Merchant Navy echoed the ossification in the adoption of new
24 technologies, the acceptance of financing and management from beyond the founding family, or, the
25 adaption to imperial disintegration. Where 'modernisation' did occur in the 1960s and 1970s it was 'at
26 least ten years too late' (Jamieson, 2003, p. 161).

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INMAN ROYAL MAIL STEAMERS,
Forwarding Passengers to every Station in the UNITED STATES and CANADA.



The LIVERPOOL, NEW YORK & PHILADELPHIA COMPANY'S STEAMERS—

CITY OF BRISTOL Captain Lush	CITY OF CHESTER Captain Kennedy	CITY OF MONTREAL Captain Kirkwood
CITY OF ANTWERP Captain Lister	CITY OF QUEENSTOWN Captain Strickland	CITY OF NEW YORK Captain Lockard
CITY OF BOSTON Captain Elliott	CITY OF LONDON Captain Jackson	CITY OF PARIS Captain Thorne
CITY OF BROOKLYN Captain Murray	CITY OF BRUSSELS Captain Ryan	CITY OF RICHMOND Captain Brooks

Are intended to Sail as under—

FROM LIVERPOOL VIA QUEENSTOWN, TO NEW YORK,

CITY OF CHESTER Thursday Sept. 17	CITY OF NEW YORK Tuesday Oct. 8	CITY OF BRISTOL Tuesday Oct. 20
CITY OF BROOKLYN Tuesday Sept. 22	CITY OF MONTREAL Thursday Oct. 8	CITY OF CHESTER Thursday Oct. 22
CITY OF RICHMOND Thursday Sept. 24	CITY OF LONDON Tuesday Oct. 13	CITY OF BROOKLYN Tuesday Oct. 27
CITY OF ANTWERP Tuesday Sept. 29	CITY OF BRUSSELS Thursday Oct. 15	CITY OF RICHMOND Thursday Oct. 29
CITY OF PARIS Thursday Oct. 1		

RATES OF PASSAGE FROM LIVERPOOL OR QUEENSTOWN:
First Cabin, Second Cabin, and Passage (including each berth) all having equal Saloon privileges. Children under twelve years half-price, and infants free.
These rates include a Liberal Table and Stewards' Fees, but without Wine or Liquors, which can be obtained on board.
Five Pounds deposit is required to secure a Cabin berth, the balance to be paid the day before sailing.
Language of which 20 feet for each child is allowed free) will go on board with the Passengers, in the Tender that leaves the Landing Stage for the Steamer on the morning of sailing.—The Cargo Wharves in Liverpool are at the North side of the Dock, No. 2, Broad Dock, and at the Canada Dock.

RETURN TICKETS issued at REDUCED RATES.

STEERAGE PASSAGE TO NEW YORK—At greatly Reduced Rates, including a plentiful supply of cooked Provisions. Children under Twelve years of age Half Price, and Infants under Twelve months 10/6.

Steerage Passengers holding Through Tickets are forwarded to **BOSTON** and **PHILADELPHIA** without extra charge.

These Steamers run in connection with the Erie Railway Company from New York, having the shortest route to the West and South-Western States. Passengers may be registered by a deposit of Two Pounds on each berth. Post-office Orders to be made payable to the undersigned, with particulars of Name, Age and Occupation of each Passenger.

Passengers booked to any part of the United States and the Dominion of Canada at Special rates. Passengers can also be forwarded to San Francisco (California), China and Japan, by Pacific Railway and Mail Steam-ship Company, at Through Rates.

Steerage Passengers on their arrival at New York will be landed at the Government Depot, Castle Garden, where they can buy Tickets for, and receive every information respecting the departure of Trains, Steam-boats, &c.

Passengers will be provided by the Steamer with berths to sleep in, each given person having a separate berth; but they will have to provide themselves with a Pillow, Mat, Kettle, Fork, Spoon, and Water Can, as also Bedding, all of which can be bought by them for ten shillings or less. Dolly's Water-can and Life-buoy combined is mentioned in the Bill of Fare.

BILL OF FARE.—Each Passenger will be supplied with three quarts of Water daily, and with as much Provisions as they can eat, which are all of the best quality, and which are consumed and put on board under the inspection of her Majesty's Emigration Officers, and carried and served out by the Company's Servants.

Breakfast at Eight o'clock.—Coffee, Sugar, and fresh Bread and Butter, or Biscuit and Butter, or Oatmeal Porridge and Milk.

Dinner at One o'clock.—Beef or Pork and Sheep, with Potatoes, or Fish and Potatoes, according to the day of the week, and on Sunday, Pudding will be added.

Supper at Six o'clock.—Tea, Sugar, Biscuit and Butter.

Ten shillings will be allowed for luggage for each adult, for all over that quantity a charge of 1s. 6d. for each cubic foot will be made, and this class of Passengers must have their luggage ready to go on board the Steamer early on the morning of sailing. Females will be placed in rooms by themselves.

Five Pounds of required on the voyage should not exceed twenty inches in height.

Male Passengers or Widows with Children cannot be taken, nor Loose Persons, unless full security be given for the bonds to be entered into by the Steamer to the United States Government that the Parties shall not become chargeable to the State.

All Steerage Passengers embarking at Liverpool must be at the Office of the Agent, No. 62 and 63, Tower Buildings South, 22, Water Street, Liverpool, not later than Six o'clock p.m. of the day before the advertised day of sailing, before which time the balance of the Passage Money must be paid, or the deposit forfeited.

All Steerage Passengers embarking at Queenstown must be at the Office of the Agent, at Queenstown, Cork, not later than Six o'clock p.m., of the day before sailing, when the balance of the Passage Money must be paid, or the deposit forfeited, and all passengers will have strictly to conform to the rules laid down by the Company.

In order to meet the requirements of the Government Emigration Office, the Contract Ticket will be issued for seven of the day previous to the advertised day of sailing.

AN EXPERIENCED SURGEON IS ATTACHED TO EACH STEAMER.

Freight payable here or in New York, at the current rate of Exchange for Bankers' Bills on the date of arrival of the respective Steamers. Passes Five Shillings and upwards, according to size and value.
Dolls not taken on and below.

Apply in New York to JOHN G. DALE, at the Company's Offices, 15, Broadway; in Boston, to M. S. CREAGH, at the Company's Office, 102, State Street; in Philadelphia, to JOHN G. DALE, at the Company's Offices, 411, Chestnut Street; in Queenstown, to C. & W. D. REYNOLDS & CO.; in London, to ELVES & ALLEN, 61, King William Street; in Manchester, to A. W. WILSON, Briton Buildings, 18, Fountain Street; AT ANY OF THE PRINCIPAL STATIONS OF THE LONDON AND NORTH WESTERN, THE MANCHESTER SHEFFIELD AND LINCOLNSHIRE, GREAT NORTHERN AND MIDLAND, LANCASTHIRE AND YORKSHIRE, or GREAT WESTERN RAILWAYS; or to

WILLIAM INMAN
Liverpool, 15th September, 1874. 62 and 63, Tower Buildings South, 22, Water Street, Liverpool.

Figure 1: Unknown designer, From LIVERPOOL via QUEENSTOWN to NEW YORK, Inman Line, 1874. Source: Merseyside Maritime Museum (hereafter MMM), MMM.458.

160x234mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 2: Steph Cavallero, Imperial Airways: By Air in Comfort, c.1937. Source: Crouse. Art Deco, 23.

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Figure 3: Posters on display, Margate, Kent, c.1908. Source: Barnicoat, Posters, 218.

347x351mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 4: R. H. Neville-Cumming, 'SS Lucania under tug escort in Liverpool Harbour', c. 1900. Source: LP3244, Mariners' Museum, Virginia (hereafter MMV).

391x566mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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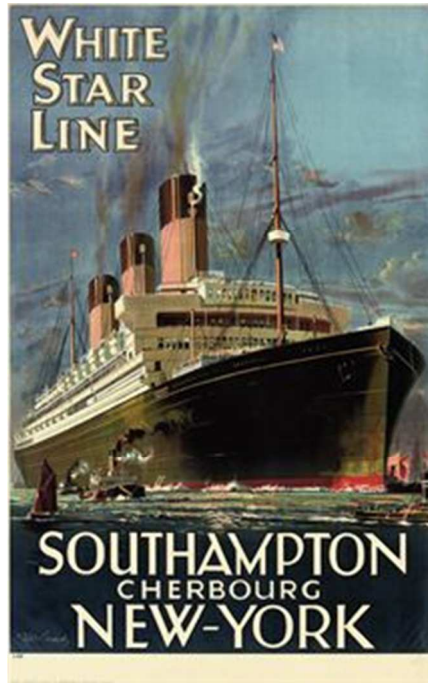


Figure 5a: Walter Thomas, White Star Line, c.1920. Source: www.christies.com, accessed 20 Feb. 2013, 16:27.

56x89mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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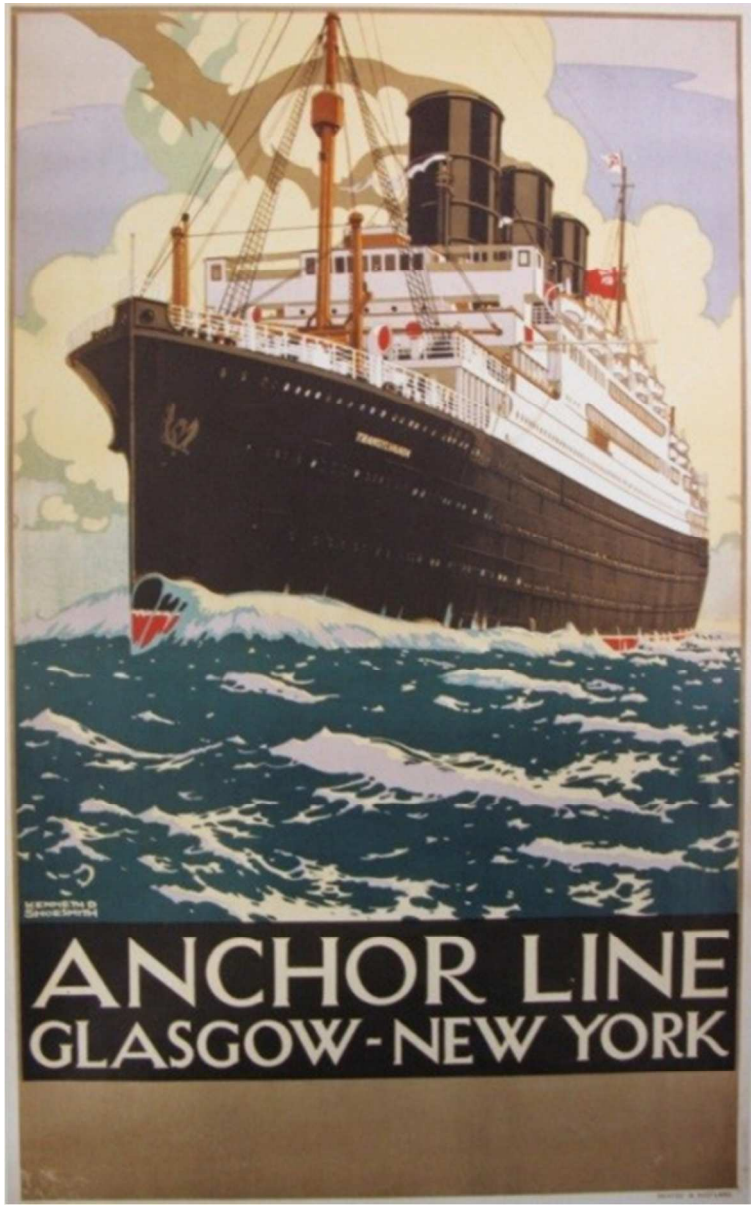


Figure 5b: Kenneth D. Shoemith, Anchor Line Glasgow-New York, S.S. Transylvania, 1926. Source: UGD255 1 22 23, Glasgow University Archives and Business Records Centre.

78x125mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Marketing

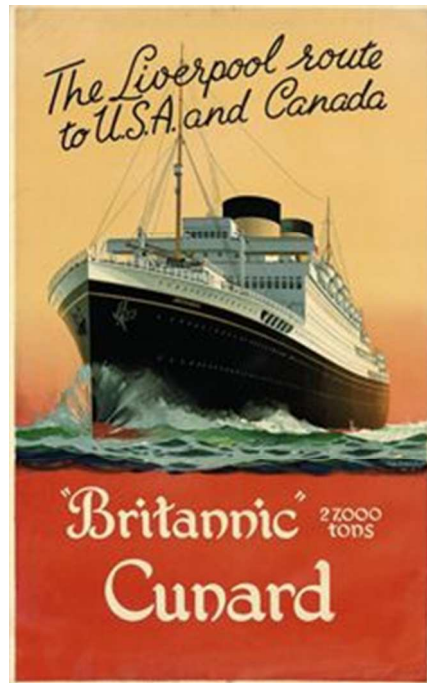


Figure 5c: C. E. Turner, The Liverpool route to U.S.A. and Canada, R.M.S. Britannic, 1935. Source: www.christies.com, accessed 20 Feb. 2013, 16:27.

56x89mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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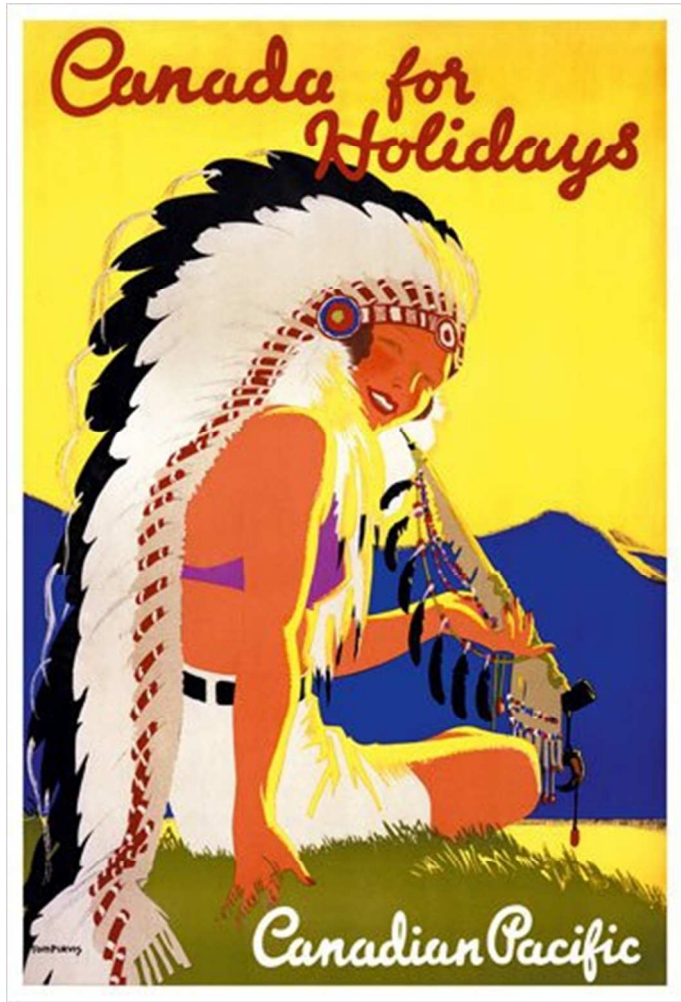


Figure 6: Tom Purvis, Canada for Holidays, 1938. Source: Choko and Jones. Canadian, 113.

119x176mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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Figure 7: A. M. Cassandre, Italia-Cosulich: Italian Lines To All Continents, c.1936. Source: Crouse. Art Deco Poster, 243.

109x169mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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Figure 8: Alexey Brodovitch, Cunard Line: Etats-Unis et Canada, 1929. Source: Crouse, Art Deco, 238.

62x89mm (96 x 96 DPI)

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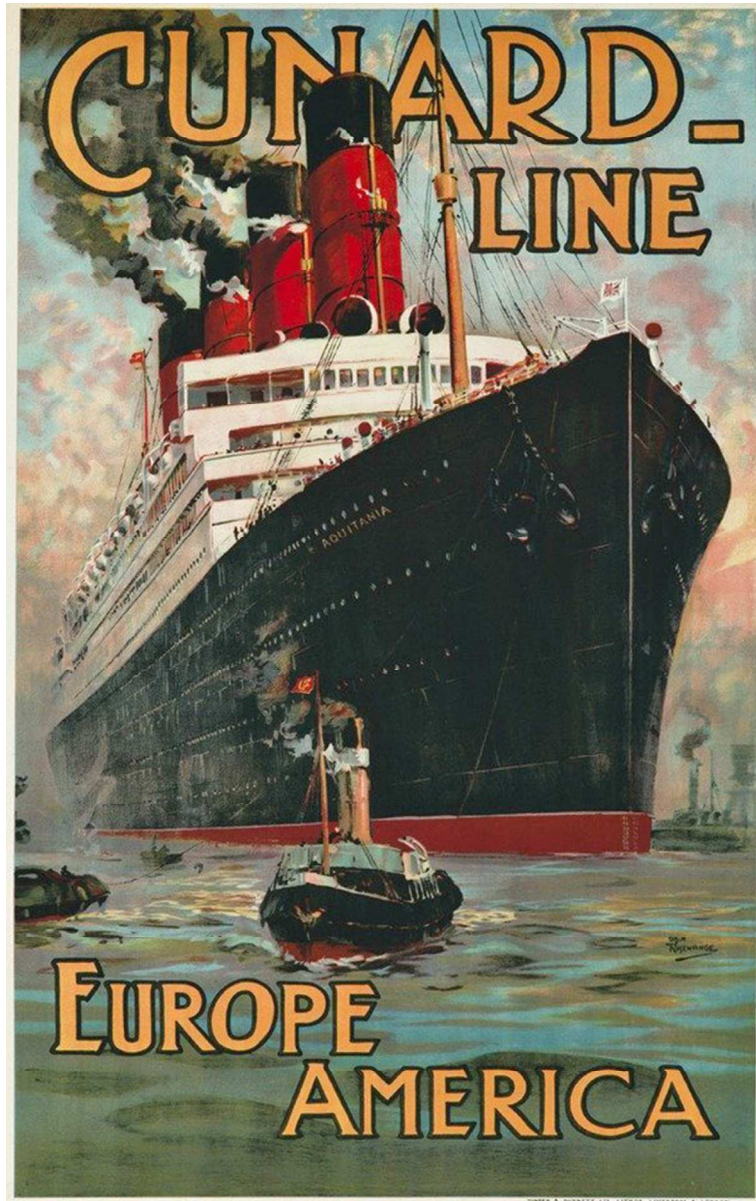


Figure 9: Odin Rosenvinge, Cunard – Europe America, 1914. Source: MMV, LP3146.

213x336mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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Figure 10: Unknown artist, "BRITAIN'S MASTERPIECE", Cunard White Star Line, April 1936. Source: MMV, LP4506.

216x117mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 11a: Lamport & Holt Line, 1910. Source: MMV, LP2270a.

408x640mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 11b: Anchor Line Glasgow & New York, S.S. Transylvania, 1927. Source: Glasgow University Archives and Business Records Centre, UGD255 1 40 19.

104x164mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 12a: Source: Commercial Art (May 1927), 224.

87x210mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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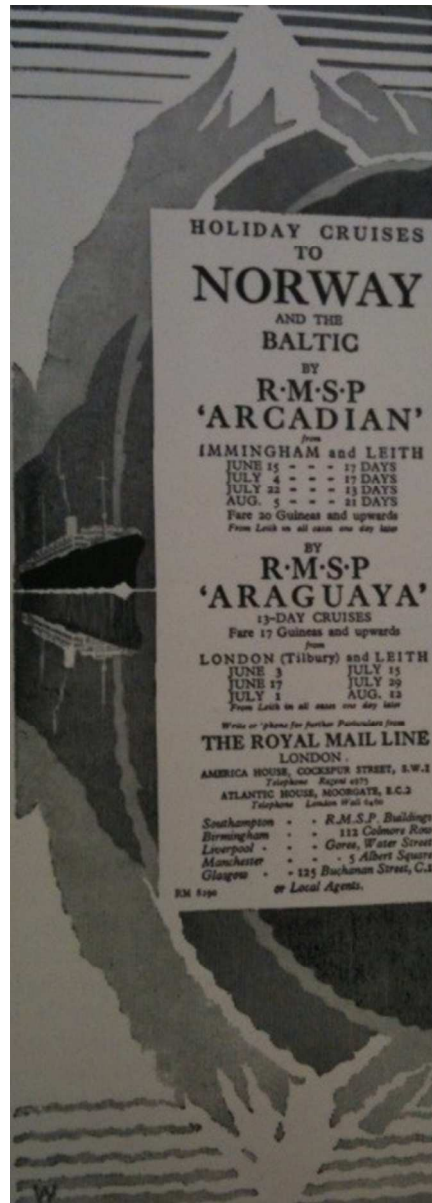


Figure 12b: Source: Commercial Art (May 1927), 225.

87x242mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 13: 'Getting There Is Half The Fun! Go Cunard', c.1960. Source: Quartermaine and Peter. Cruise, 43.

47x33mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 14: Elder Dempster calendar, 1965. Source: MMM, OA/26/7.

1210x857mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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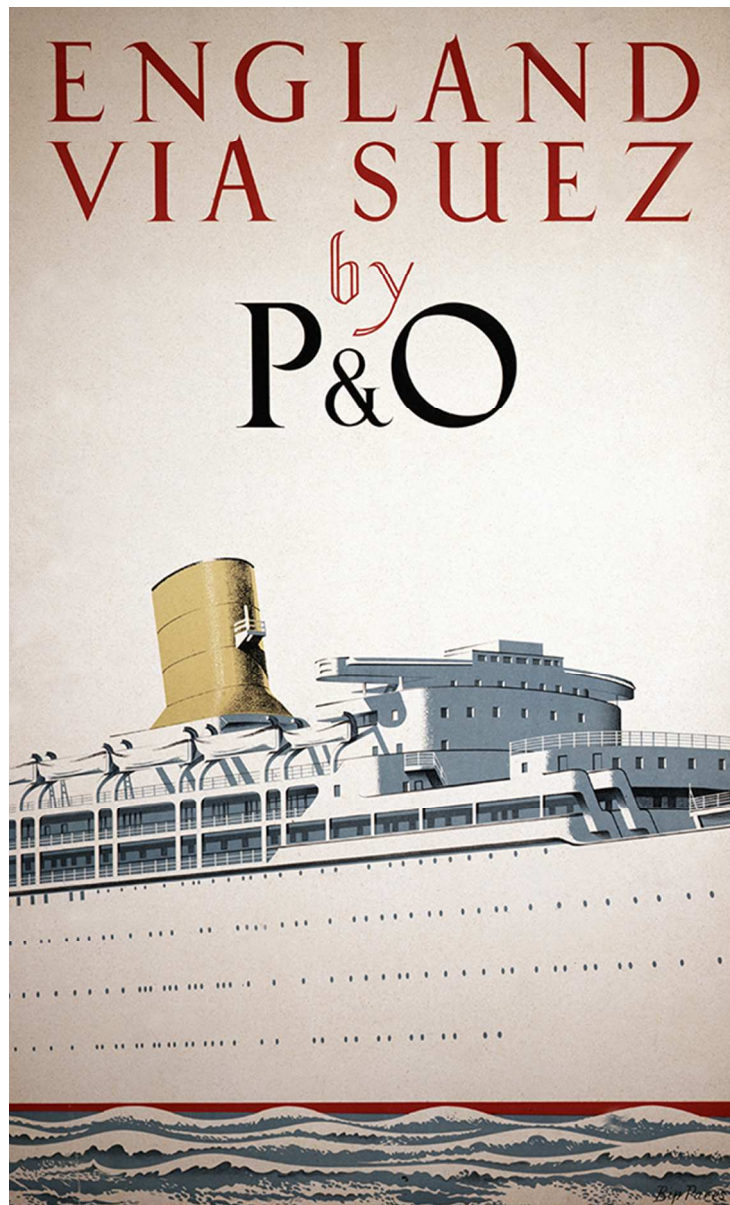


Figure 15a: England Via Suez by P&O, 1950s. Source: P&O Heritage, www.poheritage.com, accessed 20 Feb 2013.

211x348mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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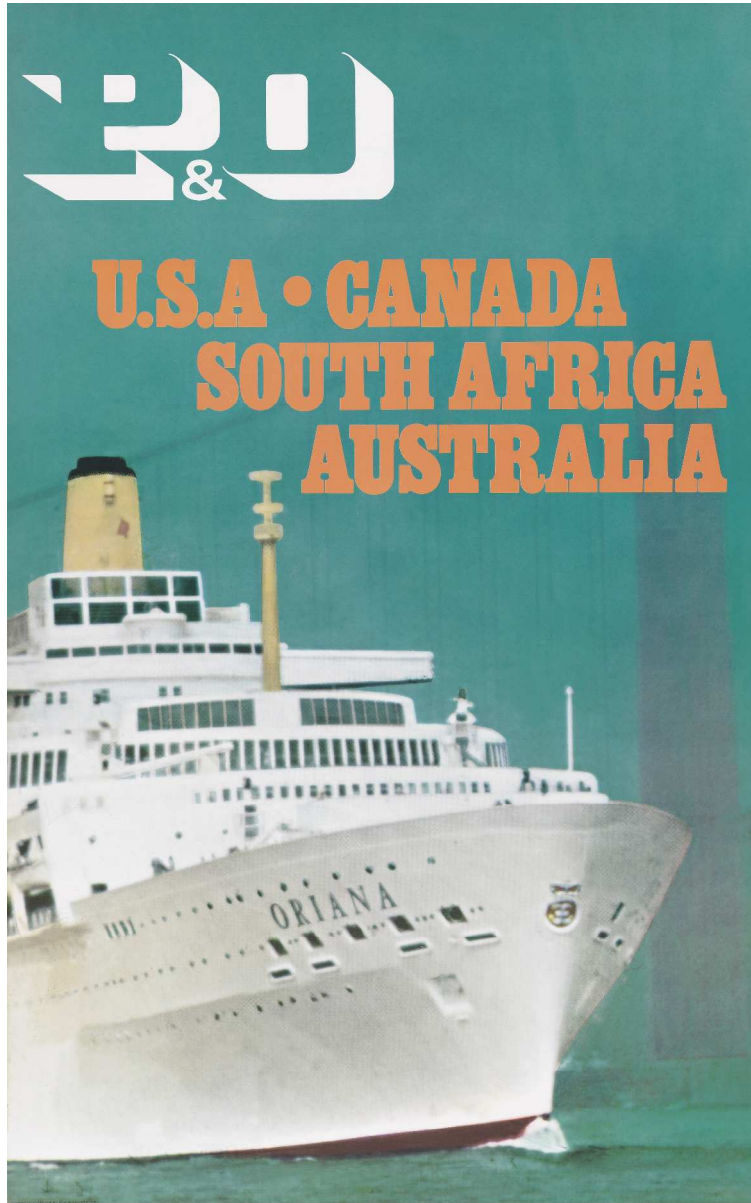


Figure 15b: P&O U.S.A. Canada South Africa Australia, S.S. Oriana, 1966. Source: P&O Heritage, www.poheritage.com, accessed 20 Feb 2013.

573x915mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Marketing

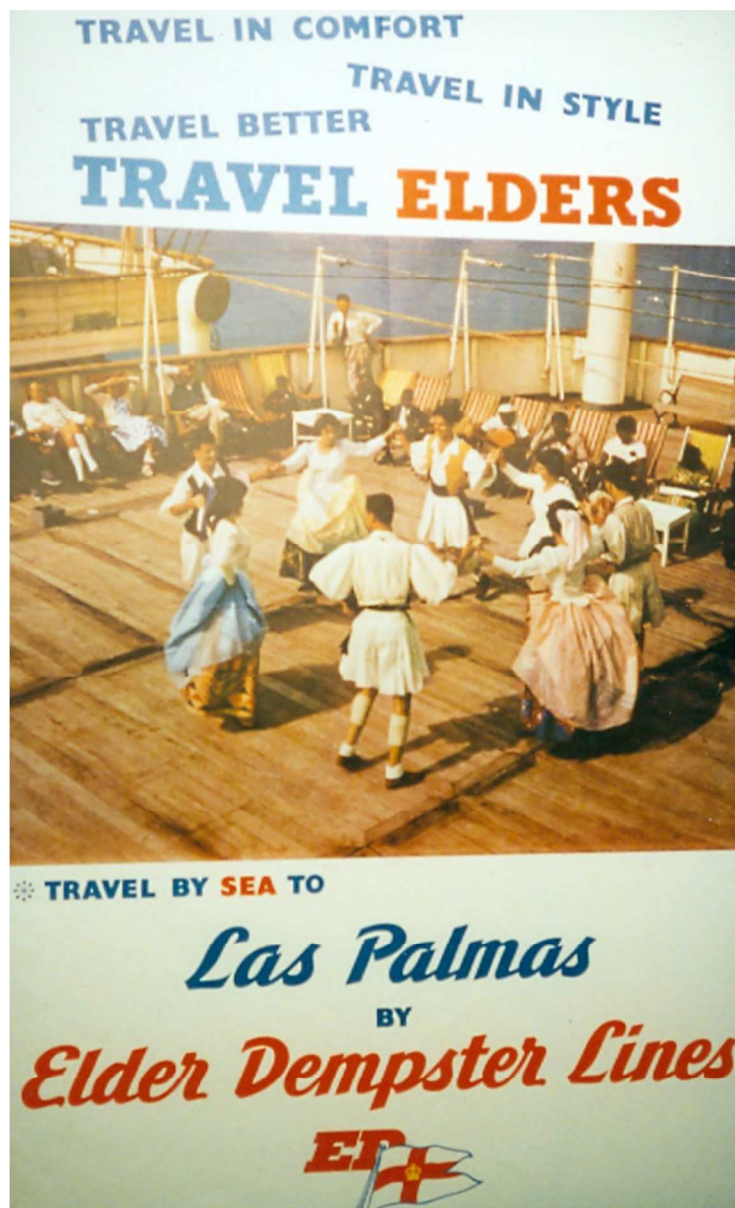


Figure 16: 'TRAVEL IN COMFORT, TRAVEL IN STYLE, TRAVEL BETTER, TRAVEL ELDERS. Source: MMM 1991.20.1492.2.

119x195mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 17: David Langdon, The Mayflower to Britain, BOAC, c. 1946. Source: Anthony and Green. Aviation, 140.

346x515mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Marketing



Figure 18: Unknown designer, Fly to Europe This Summer - BEA, c.1950. Source: Anthony and Green, Aviation, 162.

317x317mm (72 x 72 DPI)

	Total no. of posters in sample	Ship exterior dominant	Ship interior	Passenger experience and activities on-board
19 th century - 1914	88	88	0	0
1918 – 1939	116	101	1	14
1945 - 1970	60	43	1	16
Total	264	232	2	30

Table 1. Count of dominant image within sample of 456 British shipping posters versus periodisation.