

The Union Castle Line

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Early in 1900 the two well-known steamship companies, the Union Steamship Co. Ltd., and the Castle Mail Packets Co. Ltd., were formally amalgamated under the title of the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Co. Ltd., the joined concern being managed by Messrs. Donald, Currie and Co., who were the managers of the Castle Line.

The Union Steamship Company came into existence in 1853 as the Union Steam Collier Company. It commenced business with capital of £60,000 and a fleet of five small steamers. They began running a line between Southampton, Constantinople, and Smyrna, and a service between Southampton and Brazil with cargo, which was not a qualified success. In 1858 a Government contract was obtained extending for a period of five years, with an annual subsidy of £30,000, for a monthly boat service to the Cape of Good Hope. The first boat to leave Southampton with the mails was the *Dane*; she sailed on 15th September of that year. After the first contract had expired, it was renewed for a period of five years, followed by a further seven years.

In October 1876 a new mail contract with the Cape of Good Hope Government was entered into for a fortnightly service between Plymouth and Table Bay, and in this contract it was stipulated that the time occupied on the voyage must not exceed 26 days. In 1888 new contracts with the Colonial Governments were made, and the Company substituted Southampton for Plymouth as the outward mail port, and in the following year as the homeward mail port.

In 1889 the famous *Scot* was built, and six years later, Harland and Wolff Ltd., her builders, accomplished successfully at Belfast the task of lengthening the vessel by 54 ft. and adding 1,000 tons to her tonnage. Between 1893 and 1900 Harland and Wolff built no less than 10 vessels for this company, practically sister ships, for the intermediate trade. The last steamers to be built by the Union Steamship Company were the *Normand*, the *Briton* and the *Saxon*, all of over 12,000 tons, and with a length of about 570 ft. At the time of its absorption the fleet consisted of 20 vessels, of which nine were over 6,000 tons.

The Castle Line began its career in 1872 with just two small vessels. At this time the postage to the Cape was one shilling per half-ounce, and the contract time for delivery was 37 days.

The first allowance made to the Castle Line for the conveyance of letters was in 1876, when the Cape Parliament divided the subsidy between the Union and the Castle Lines. The Castle Line did great service in carrying troops and stores during the Anglo Zulu War and the South African War.

The ships used throughout the Zulu campaign included the *Walmer Castle*, *Dublin Castle* and the *Dunrobin Castle*. When the amalgamation with the Castle Line took place, the fleet had grown from two ships in 1876 to 20 ships in 1900, and from a tonnage of 2,800 to 110,000. The result of the fusing of these two lines was that the Royal Mail steamships of the Union-Castle Line, under contract with the South African Government, sailed from Southampton every Saturday for the Cape of Good Hope and Natal, calling at Madeira.