Rhodeans' Favourite Shipping line
Union-Castle Line 1900 to 1977

This exhibit shows the ships in chronological production order - on postcards, stamps issued and some ephemera of the
Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company,
which served the UK-Southern Africa Route.

Formed 1900 by the merger of Union Steamship Co. and Donald Curry's Castle Mail Packet Co.

For many years it was the preferred shipping line, transporting Rhodesian settlers, holiday makers and mail to the country. Likewise it took Rhodesians “home” for a holiday and transported the country’s gold and other exports to England.

The two original companies from 1876 shared the Royal Mail contract from the UK to South Africa until the 1900 merger.

Over 77 years the Union-Castle line took out passengers and mail serving to open up Southern Africa. It always contributed ships in times of war, suffering losses.

With the jet age and cargo containers, the days of the scheduled passenger ship became untenable and sadly, the last ship sailed in 1977.

References
Mailships of the Union-Castle Line Harris and Ingpen Fleetwood Press South Africa 1994

The Ships List www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/ucastle.html
The Company Flag

The flag was made up from the red cross on white of the Union Line and the St Andrew’s type cross of the Castle Line.

The Union-Castle line with lavender coloured hulls was considered by those living in Southern Africa to be the life line “Home” for their travel and mail. It had also brought most of the immigrants out although it only had a monopoly on the mail. The Royal Mail Steamers (RMS) ran the UK Cape Town route. Smaller vessels, Intermediate ships, served Atlantic islands and other African ports. Most vessels constructed by Harland and Wolff, Belfast partly owned by Union-Castle interests.

Greek 4757 tons. Built 1893 for the Union Line, Sold in 1906 to Royal Mail SP Co and renamed Segura
Card maker not stated
Boer War period, ship construction

Card maker not stated

RMS Briton 10,248 tons. Built 1897. On maiden voyage she was one of the largest ship serving any British colony. Also the first ship to sail under the Union-Castle flag. A Royal Mail Steamer on UK Cape Town run. Troop ship in the war. Scrapped 1926.
Card maker not stated
Cape Town was the destination for all the mail, which bordered trains and sorted en route down to street level for S. African towns. Also for all passengers and mail for the Rhodesias and beyond.

Glencorm Castle, 6769 tons. Built 1898 formally the German for the Union line. Note overprint of name on the card. Scrapped 1930. Card maker not stated.
RMS Carisbrook Castle 7626 tons. Built 1898 for Castle line. 1st class was amidships 2nd class aft and 3rd class forward. Last ship to leave London as a mail ship as Southampton became the terminal port. 1912 transferred to East African intermediate route. Hospital ship 1914. Scrapped 1922.
Card maker not stated

S S Saxon 12,385 tons. Built 1900 for the Union line but handed over to the Union-Castle line while being fitted out. An RMS ship. Last ship given a Union line name. Troopship in war. 1931 laid up as a reserve vessel scrapped 1935
Tuck's Post Card
Pre WWI Union-Castle built Royal Mail steamers

RMS Walmer Castle 12,546 tons. Built in 1902. Laid down as a Union line ship just before the merger but commissioned a Union-Castle line ship. Carried the first Governor General to South Africa in 1910. Troopship in war, laid up for reserve 1930, scrapped 1932. Real photo card, no maker stated.

Durham Castle 8219 tons. Built 1904 Intermediate ship. In 1939 acquired by the Admiralty for accommodation ship, 1940 mined and sunk off Cromarty. Card maker not stated

Baggage Label

The Primary home port was Southampton. London and some other ports were used for smaller ships. The baggage label could be used for any English port.
Durham Castle, an Intermediate liner and not a Mail ship. Generally smaller ships called at intermediate ports and the East African Route and carried less passengers and more cargo.

An early In House Union-Castle produced sepia card

RMS Kenilworth Castle 12,975 tons. Built 1904. Used as a troop ship in 1914. In 1919 with troops heading for Australia she was quarantined in Table Bay with the Great Influenza outbreak. Scrapped 1936.

G.S.J. Durban SA card
The Routes

RMS *Walmer Castle* in Durban, the terminus. The Mail Ship route was Southampton, Madeira, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban and return.
A Valentine Post Card

*Dunluce Castle* 8144 ton. Built 1904 for Intermediate service that was the Round Africa service: London, Southampton, Gibraltar, Tangie (occasional), Palma de Majorca (occasional), Marseilles, Genoa/Naples, Tunis (occasional), Suez, Port Sudan (occasional), Aden, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Dar-es-Salaam, Beira, Lourenco Marques, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth Cape Town Southampton. In 1939 to be scrapped but bought by Admiralty for accommodation.
Card maker not stated
RMS **Edinburgh Castle** 13,326 tons. Built 1910. Became an armed merchant cruiser during WWI, taken out of service in 1938, taken over by the Admiralty as accommodation in Free Town. Too expensive to tow for scrapping so taken out to sea and sunk by naval gunfire.

F.G.O. Stuart Post Card


Card maker not stated
Valentine Real Photo Card

In House sepia Post Card
Royal Mail Motor Vessels RMMV, were constructed onwards using diesel engines to maintain speed to keep the mail contract. Funnels became shorter.

RMMV Carnarvon Castle 20,063 tons. Built 1926. The first motor ship. Modified in 1938 and given one funnel as shown. 1939 converted as an armed merchant cruiser. After war, immigrant ship, refurbished into mail service. 1950 Sold to Japanese shipbreakers in 1962. In House sepias Post Card

Other Carnarvon Castle or sister ship Winchester Castle in two funnel state.

Robert Opie reproduction of a contemporary poster
RMMV Athlone Castle 25,567 tons. Built 1936 (your exhibitor sailed on her three times). Equipped with ten cylinder Burmeister-Wain engines at 20 knots she made the first 14 day UK-Cape Town regular mail run. Troop ship in WWII including visits to New Zealand. Retuned to mail route in 1947 until broken up in 1965.

In House sepia Post Card

RMMV Cape Town Castle 27,002 tons. Built 1938. First ship to have a Southern African name and largest motor driven ship and longest motor ship in the world when first sailed. Wartime troopship. First to re enter service after war. Your exhibitor sailed in her. Scrapped in 1967.

In House sepia Post Card
Post WWII to the end

Air Transport and political tension between the UK and SA started to impact on the line.

RMS Pretoria Castle 28,705 tons. Built 1948. Steam reintroduced for the first post war Mail ship built. Named to placate SA Government who wanted to take over the mail contract with their own Safmarine fleet but did not have suitable ships. 1966 ship transferred to Safmarine, renamed SA Orange. Colour changed but crewed by Union-Castle. Scrapped 1972.
In House sepia Post Card

In House rare black and white Post Card
RMS Winchester Castle
20,109 tons. Built 1930. Sunk in war 1942

RMMV Southampton Castle 10,538 tons. Built 1965. Very fast. First all cargo Royal Mail carrier until 1977 when sold

Southampton Castle serving Atlantic Ocean Islands.


In House sepia Post Card

Pint-ad Products Post Card


Arthur English Colour Prints Post Card