

CRUISE SHIP MAIL

by Dr David Watson

Mail from modern ships cruising on the Caribbean is, with few exceptions, scarce. Whilst most cruise ships have facilities for passengers to post mail on board, this is understandably not high on most customers' agendas. Indeed posting mail on board tends not to feature in sales pitches for cruises in the West Indies. But it is an important part of the modern maritime history of this area. Cruise ships feed mail into postal systems of the many islands they visit.

Caribbean cruises started to contribute an important part of shipping companies' income in the 1930's. Transatlantic passenger routes were starved of revenue after the Wall Street crash in 1929. For example, Cunard's luxuriously-appointed Aquitania probably spent less time in the 1930's on Europe-USA routes than on cruises (Fig. 1).

After World War II, airliners carrying both customers and mail started to take over from ships on trans-Atlantic routes. Several shipping lines started to move into the cruise market. Their ships generally didn't carry mail further than the next port. For example, in March and April 1957, Cunard's Mauretania liner landed mail at the Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and St. Lucia. Some of the postal markings applied to mail from these stops were quite unusual (Fig. 2), including a previously unrecorded paquebot mark. Paquebot marks, used by post offices on mail posted on board, were introduced by the UPU in 1894.

Dovey & Morris have provided a definitive source of information on modern cancels used on ships, in 'Paquebot Cancellations of the World and more...' published by the TPO & Seapost Society in 2010. They have continued Roger Hosking's original work on this. The definitive work on markings for individual vessels on the Caribbean is Michael Rego's 'Steamship Lines to the Caribbean (vols. 1-3), published by BWISC in 2005, 7 & 8.

Caribbean cruise ships' own markings have been mainly used for advertisement and to feed an historically-extensive collecting market. One for Cunard's Mauretania referred to the 'HIGH SEAS' (Fig. 2). The inverted commas had been removed by the time the ship made her final voyage in 1965. Perhaps this was because the increasing use of stabilisers on large ships had eased the effects of high seas on passengers! Certainly they were presented with wide-ranging menus (Fig. 3).

Cunard was not the only major shipping line to build up its Caribbean cruise business post-War. Fort Lauderdale in Florida became an important hub for fly-cruise holidays, with P&O's Oriana a favourite ship (Fig. 4). The depiction of P&O's Canberra by tourist destinations was sometimes inaccurate, despite her distinctive design (Fig. 5). Certainly there was no shortage of information from the extensive use of this ship's marks on mail for island post offices (Fig. 6). A niche luxury market using smaller ships has also developed (Fig. 7).

Well known liners have been increasingly deployed on the Caribbean, especially in the less hot winter months (Fig. 8). Accidents are thankfully rare and sometimes damaged ships are recoverable (Fig. 9). Shipping companies' purchasing power has extended to owning island resorts (Fig. 10).

Nowadays, the largest group, Carnival, has nearly half of the worldwide cruise market and more than 100 ships. From relatively humble early days (Fig. 11), Carnival now includes several famous, long-established brands in its nine lines:

Carnival Cruise Line (HQ: Miami); P&O Cruises & Cunard Line (both with HQ in Southampton); Holland America Group: Holland America Line (HQ: Seattle), Princess Cruises (HQ: Santa Clarita, California), Seabourn Cruise Line (HQ: Seattle), P&O Cruises Australia (HQ: Sydney, Australia); & Costa Group: Costa Cruises (HQ: Genoa), AIDA Cruises (HQ: Rostock, Germany). Ships move between these shipping lines (Fig. 12).

Cruise ships and their passengers make important contributions to the economies of the many island states across the Caribbean. Tourism is close to the top of many Caribbean economies.

To help promote research on this fascinating aspect of Caribbean maritime mail, Appendix 1 lists the ships and their respective shipping lines from which such mail has been discovered so far. For further information please consult the reference list @ <http://www.bwisc.org/Maritime/WestIndiesMaritimeMailSources.pdf>.

A fascinating account of the development of on board post facilities is kindly provided by a leading expert at Appendix 2.

This review is dedicated to Peter Longhurst, a humble and inspiring expert.

APPENDIX 1: MAIL FROM CARIBBEAN CRUISE SHIPS

Mail is known from the following ships:

Amerikanis [shipping line no..1, see below] 1967/2000, Aquitania [2] 1920-40, Astor [3,4,5] 1981-5, Atlantis [1] 1971-, Australis [1] 1964-78, Azerbaidzhan [6] 1986-96, Berlin [7] 1980-2,5-2004, 12-, Canberra [8] 1961-79, Carinthia [2] 1924-68, Carmania [2] 1954-73, Carnivale [9] 1976-94, Caronia [2] 1949-69, Carousel [10,11] 1994-2004, Celebration [9] 1987-, Century [12] 1995-, Crystal Harmony [13] 2012, Cunard Adventurer [2] 1971-7, 1977, Cunard Ambassador [2] 1972-4, Cunard Countess [2] 1977, Cunard Princess [2] 1977-95, Dawn Princess [14] 1999-, Doric [11] 1973-81, Emerald [Thom] 2000, Franconia [2] 1965-8, Ivernia [2] 1955, Mauretania [2] 1946-65, Mermoz [15] 1979, Nevasa [8] 1956-75, Norwegian Wind [16] 1998, Oceana [8] 2002-, Ocean Princess [17] 1967-93, Oriana [8] 1959-86, 95-, Pacific Princess [8] 1975-2002, Parthia [2] 1947-61, Queen Elizabeth [2] 1938-72, QE2 [2] 1969-2008, Queen Mary 2 [2] 2004, Regent Sea [18] 1984-95, Romanza [1] 1939-91, Royal Princess [8] 1984-2005, Royal Viking Sea [19] 1983, Royal Viking Sky [19] 1971-91, Royal Viking Star [19] 1972,4, Royal Viking Sun [2,19] 1989-99, Sagafjord [20] 1965,72,86, Seabourn Pride [21] 1997-, Sea Princess [8] 1983,95, Skyward [16] 1968-94, Song of Norway [16] 1974, Southern Cross [22] 1956-97, 1966-88, Stella Maris [23] 1966-98, Sundream [11] 1996-2004, Sun Princess [14] 1972-96, Sunward [16] 1978, Vaal [9] 1977-96, Vistafjord [18,20] 1973-.

Owned by the following shipping lines:

1. Chandris America; 2. Cunard; 3. Deutsche Seerederei; 4. HADAG; 5. Safmarine, 6. Black Sea Shipping Co.; 7. FTI Cruises, 8. P&O; 9. Carnival; 10. Airtours; 11. Sun Cruises; 12. Celebrity; 13. Crystal; 14. Princess; 15. Paquet; 16. Norwegian Caribbean; 17. Ocean Cruise; 18. Regency; 19. Royal Viking; 20. Norwegian-America; 21. Seabourn; 22. CTC Cruise Lines; 23 Sun Lines.

FORERUNNERS OF MODERN CRUISE SHIPS

Following the stock market crash of 1929, many ships were affected by the economic downturn and reduced traffic. Few could afford expensive trans-Atlantic travel on Aquitania, so Cunard sent her on cheap cruises



Real photo card by unknown publisher.

Hope you
will be able to
read this letter

Cunard White Star
R.M.S. "Aquitania"

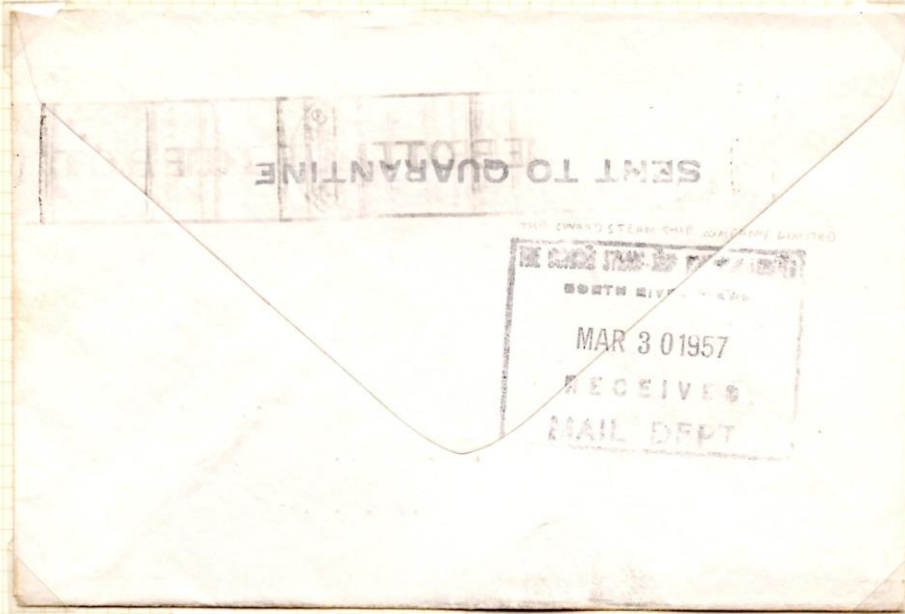
Monday, June 12/39

My dear Betty
was an error.
missing the end of the telegram.
it is 7-30 P.M. and we are



Fig. 1

1957 Posted on board *R.M.S. Mauretania*, paquebot applied at Kingston, Jamaica on 11th March, transported to New York, where the cover was 'SENT TO QUARANTINE' before delivery to the Cunard Steamship Co., North River Piers, on 30th March.



1957 Paquebot mark for Grenada unrecorded by Hosking

Not recorded by Dovey & Morris.



Grenada cds
Proud D40

Fig. 2

1959 (5th October) Luncheon menu for the *Mauretania*.

R.M.S. "MAURETANIA"

Juices: Chilled Blended and Tomato
Melon Ball Cocktail

HORS D'ŒUVRE

Smoked Irish Salmon with Capers Fonds d'Artichauts, Vinaigrette
Rollmops Sardines in Oil Pickled Lambs' Tongues
Salade Suédoise Gendarme Herrings Œufs, Tyrolienne
Potted Shrimps Salade Italienne Variantes Westphalia Ham
Saucisson. Liver, Lyon, Cervelas, Salami,
Olives: Green, Farcie, Californian Ripe Radishes Assorted Salted Nuts

SOUPS

Consommé San Remo Potage Queue de Bœuf
Cold: Crème Vichysoise

FISH

Baked Fresh Haddock, Claudine
Cold: Fresh Crab Salad, Mayonnaise Sauce

FARINACEOUS

Macaroni, Genoise

VEGETARIAN

Fresh Vegetable Platter, Grated Cheese

EGGS

(to order)

Mollet, Aurore Sur le plat, Turbigio
Omelettes: Mushroom and Ham

ENTREES

Sauté of Beef, Bourguignonne Fried Chicken, Southern Style
Pâte de Priay, St. Michel

GRILL (to order)

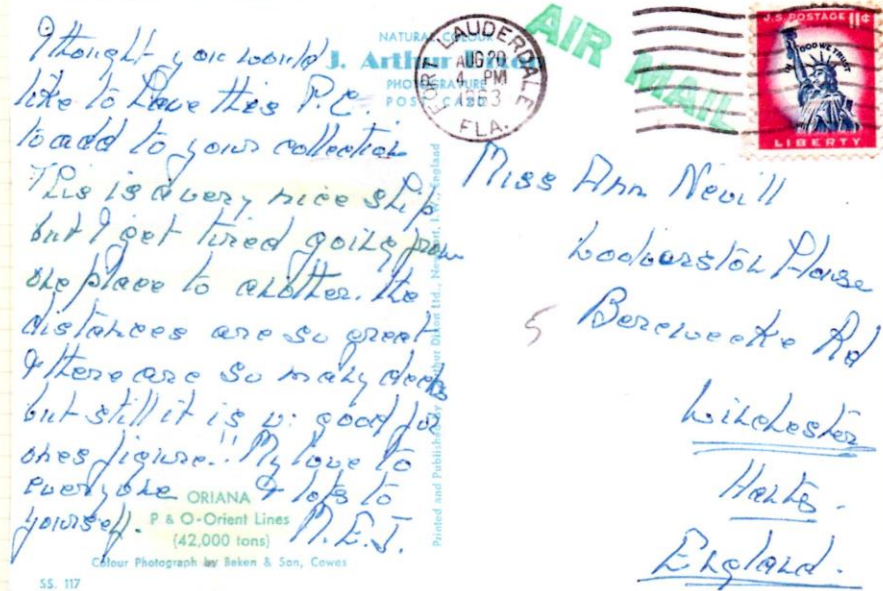
Lamb's Kidney, Maître d'Hôtel Sirloin Steak, Béarnaise
Spatchcock, Diable

JOINT

Roast Leg and Loin of Pork, Savoury and Apple Sauce

Fig. 3

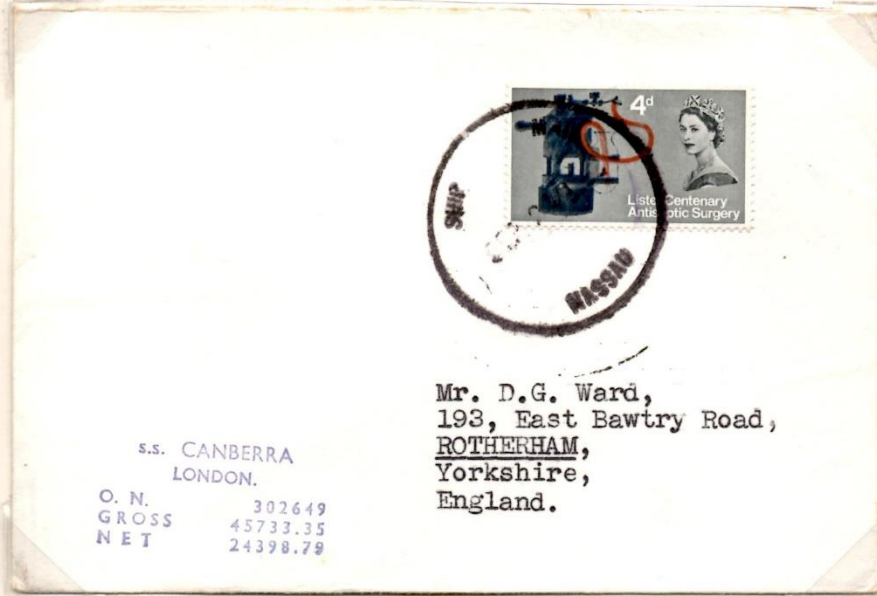
1963 Complementary comment about the *Oriana* from a tired traveller
 'AIR MAIL' handstamp not listed by McQueen.
 [McQueen, I. (2003) *Airmail Directional Handstamps*, publ. by the author.]



Postcard published by J. Arthur Dixon Ltd., Newport, Isle of Wight.

Fig. 4

1965 Posted on board the SS Canberra, with a Nassau (Bahamas) paquebot
 The Canberra served P&O for nearly 40 years, from 1961.
 She started life carrying emigrants, then became a cruise ship.
 In 1982 she transported troops to the Falklands war zone.



Canberra &
 the house flag of P&O.

*Nassau
 paquebot:
 Dovey & Morris
 no. 2427.*



S.S. Canberra in the Caribbean



*The hull and superstructure, but not the funnels,
 of the Canberra on a 1983 issue from the Bahamas.*

P&O
 CANBERRA

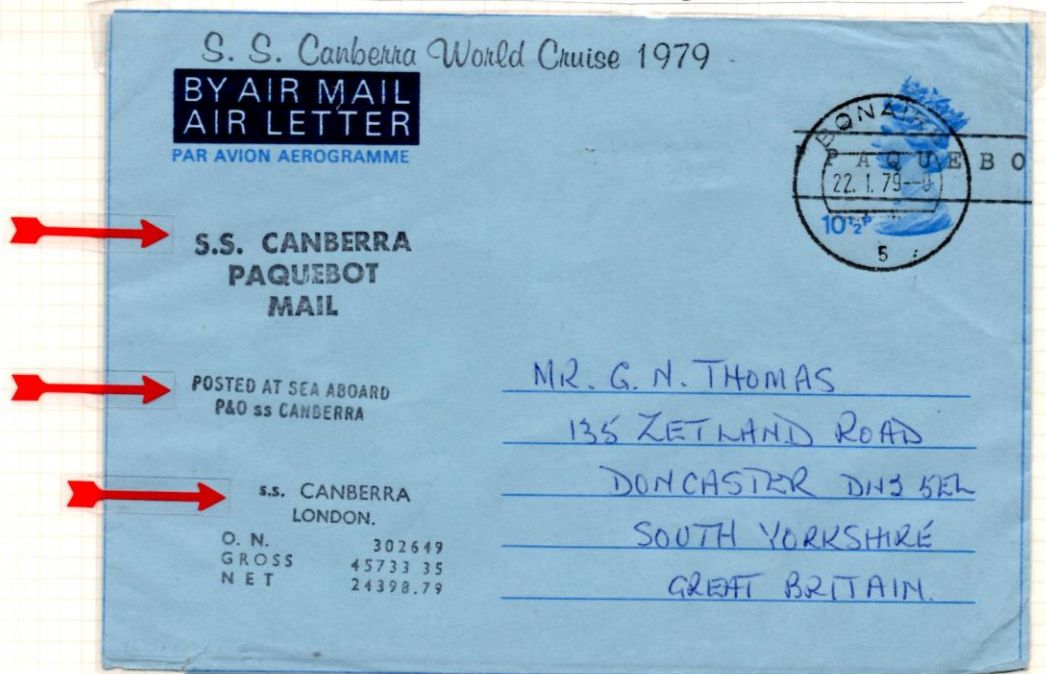


The design corrected.



Fig. 5

1979 Further mail posted on board the *Canberra* with 3 marks specific to the ship.
 Posted in Kralendijk, Bonaire (code 5 in steel cancel).
 Bonaire paquebot: Hosking 2631.



Paquebot:
 Dovey & Mor
 no. 2336.



FAMOUS LINERS
 number 9 in a limited edition set of 12.
 original paintings by Derek Stone.
 Derek Stone/Amber Postcards

CANBERRA (1961 -)

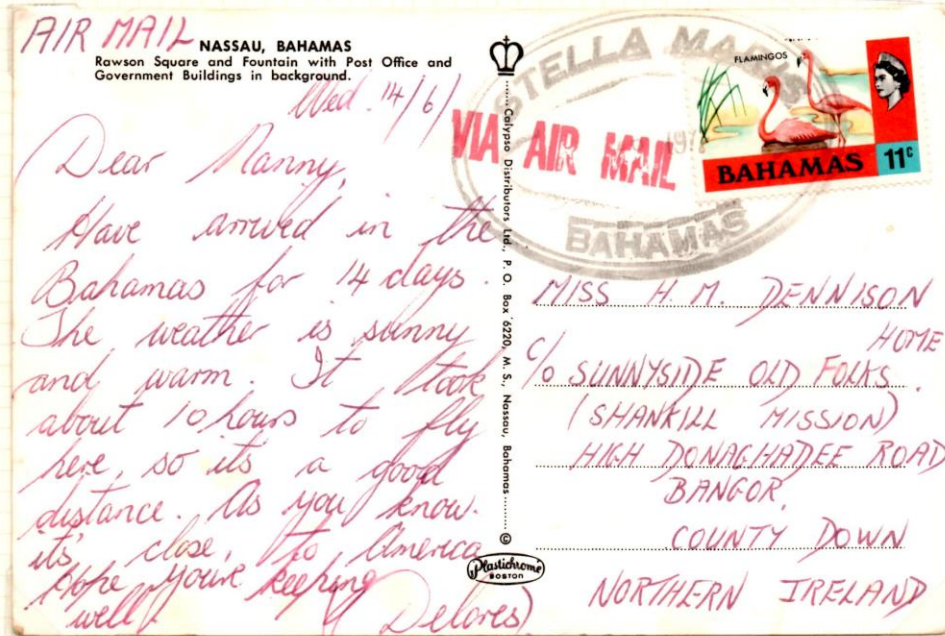
Built by Harland & Wolff Ltd. of Belfast, Canberra is a popular liner renowned for her 'round the world' cruises. The largest liner ever built for a service other than the North Atlantic, she also served with distinction as a troop ship during the Falklands War of 1982.

**Postcard published by
 Amber Postcards.**

Fig. 6

Sun Lines 1950's - 1996

Formed to provide luxury cruises on smaller ships, Sun Lines prospered. But when the cruise line market eventually declined, Sun Lines merged with Epirotiki, in 1996.



Stella Maris II was built as a North Sea ferry, the Bremerhaven, in 1960. Refloated after partially sinking in 1965, she was sold to the Sun Line in 1966 and refitted.



She was sold in 1998 after Sun Lines became part of Royal Olympic Cruises. Her new owners, Royal Viking Cruises, renamed her Viking Bordeaux. She was then sold on twice & scrapped in 2008.

Shipping line to be added to those listed in 'Check list of shipping lines that have carried Caribbean mail' by Dr David Watson in 2015. [\[www.bwisc.org/Maritime/CaribbeanShippingLines.pdf\]](http://www.bwisc.org/Maritime/CaribbeanShippingLines.pdf)

Fig. 7

1970/3 Different QEII handstamps for Caribbean cruises.
 Other cancels: Charlotte Amalie, USVI paquebot: Dovey & Morris 2360; &
 Willemstad, Curacao paquebot: Dovey & Morris 2520; cds: Julsen & Benders 32-3f-1.

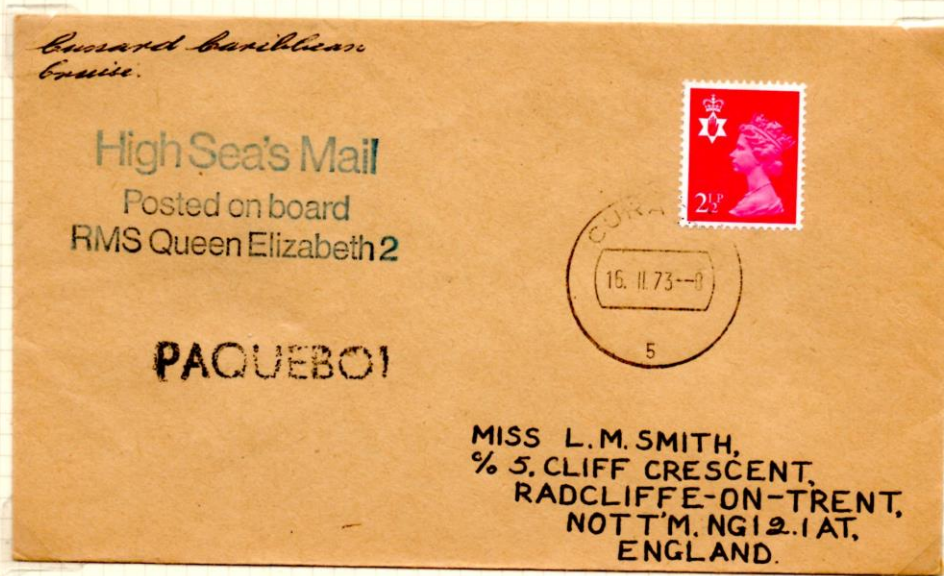
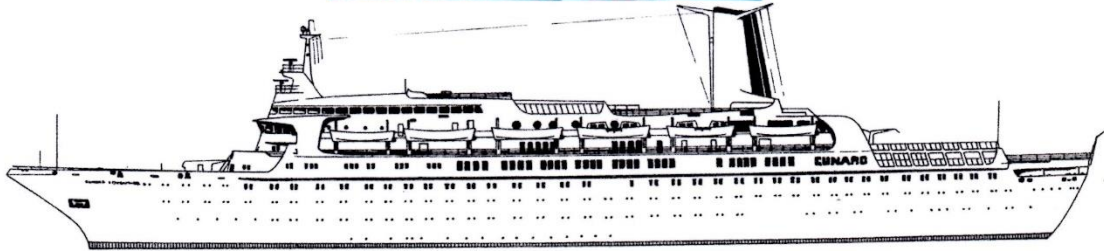


Fig. 8



CUNARD ADVENTURER/CUNARD AMBASSADOR of 1971/1972

*From W H Mitchell (1975) 'The Cunard Line a post war history'
publ. by W H Mitchell & N V Robinson.*

1972 Cunard Ambassador (14,155 t.) was planned for Overseas National Airways. Cunard took over, reducing the order to two ships - Cunard Adventurer (1971) and Cunard Ambassador (1972). But Cunard Adventurer was soon sold. Cunard Ambassador was withdrawn on 12/9/74 after a fire. Towed to Key West, the ship was declared a total loss. But she was bought as a gutted hull and refitted to become the Danish sheep carrier, Linda Clausen. She was sold on and became Procyn and, in 1983, Raslan. After another devastating fire in the Indian Ocean she was scrapped.

CUNARD AMBASSADOR



PAQUEBOT
POSTED AT SEA

V. Arbuckle
VICTOR K. ARBUCKLE
CAPTAIN R.D. R.N.R.

Gustav J. Lund
1029 Martin Road
HOUSTON, TX 77018
US AMERICA

*Signed by the Captain, Victor Arbuckle, a long-serving Cunard officer.
He also served on the Coronia as 1st Officer and captained Ocean Monarch.*

Fig. 9

2006 Promotional card for Princess Cruises posted at the British Virgin Islands.



15/1/06
PRINCESS CRUISES
escape completely

Hello Mum
Just a quick card to say got here safely & suited at 7pm local time last night. Today going to Princess Cays, an island 400 miles long but 2 miles wide. Hope you well. Izzy sends her love. Love Andrew x

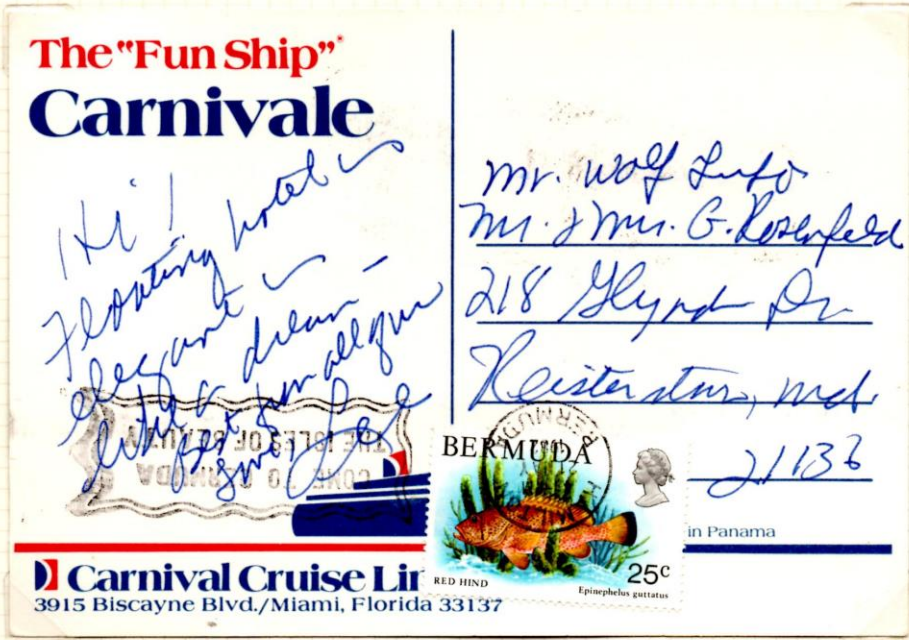
MRS R. O. BROOK
21 LANGFIELD ROAD
KNOXLE,
SOLIHULL,
WEST MIDLANDS
ENGLAND
B93 9PU

ROA
24 JA
06

50c
US cv
British Virgin Islands

Princess Cays is a tourist resort owned by Princess Cruises at the southern end of the island of Eleuthera, Bahamas.

Fig. 10



Postcard published by Carnivale.



Fig. 11

2007 *Paquebot* (too modern to be listed by Hosking) & *Oceana* cachet - the 2nd usage of that name by P&O. The previous *Oceana* sank in 1912 after colliding with a German barque. The new *Oceana* was bought in 2002 from Princess Cruises and recommissioned in 2003 with addition of another deck.

BY AIR MAIL
par avion
Royal Mail



Paquebot:
Dovey & Morris
no. 6315.



Mr. G.R. Ellerton,
Worlington,
Maybourne Rise,
Mayford, Woking,
Surrey GU22 0SH,
England.



2016 passengers, 875 officers and crew.

Fig. 12

APPENDIX 2: CARIBBEAN MAIL - CHANGES OVER THE YEARS
From Richard Bastow [<http://www.horizoncollection.com/>],
retired senior maritime manager.

Over the years, the ship's Purser's Office, which had responsibility for dealing with incoming and outgoing passenger and crew mail, amongst a huge number of other administrative tasks, has undergone a metamorphosis into a far more customer focussed operation usually under the label of Guest Services or something of that ilk.

In the past, ships like *Orsova* of Orient Line/P&O which traded from 1952 until 1974 often on the Australian run from Europe via the Caribbean and the Panama, had a designated Letter Bureau and Sorting Office area run by Purser Office staff, and passengers would have to seek out the appropriate kiosk or desk to mail their correspondence or collect any incoming mail, sent to the ship via its local port agent.

There would be a flat rate for UK Air Letter Forms which could be sent to any part of the world whilst on the High Seas and generally these had to be lodged with the Letter Bureau no later than the evening prior to arrival in the next port of call. Alternatively, passengers could obtain local stamps from the Bureau upon payment of the appropriate rate. These would invariably be more expensive. An example from *Orsova* from a 1956 voyage about to call in Panama, was 6d (2½p) for the UK Air Mail Form seemingly posted on the High Seas, but 1/7d (8p) per ½ oz for a letter with Canal Zone stamps, franked as posted ashore.

Of course, all the mail was handed over together to the representative of the ship's port agent and as far as the Purser's Office was concerned, that was the end of the matter. The agent was then supposed to batch up all the post collected from all the ships that he has handled that day and deliver it for despatch to his local post office. The perennial problem was that, once the mail was off the ship, and in the hands of third parties, there was no control over whether all, or indeed any, of the various bundles of letters and postcards actually made it to the first stage of their journey to their ultimate destinations. The operation of outgoing mail was seen very much as a service as there was no money in it for either the ship, who could not sell stamps above face value, or the port agent who was paid a fixed fee per call, irrespective of how much extra work he was required to put in on a particular day.

As ship-to-shore communications improved, other alternatives to mail for passengers and crew to keep in touch started to become apparent. An *Oriana* programme from 1981 prominently promotes Radio Telephone Calls, Radio Telegrams and Radio Telex services to "most countries of the world". It was perhaps no coincidence that all these facilities attracted charges and that the Radio Office on most passenger ships was regarded as a revenue producing area.

However, coming up to modern times, the Guest Services umbrella now encompasses many previously separate functions including the responsibility for incoming and outgoing mail. As part of the greater focus on being seen to provide a service, a 2005 *Aurora* cruise advised its passengers that any incoming mail to the ship would be delivered to cabins, rather than passengers having to continually check at a bureau whether they had any post. Also the daily programme informed that "*Outgoing mail bearing local postage stamps may be posted up to an hour before our departure. Stamps for a postcard to the UK are priced at 40p. In order to obtain stamps, the Reception Desk will accept cash, sterling cheques with a cheque guarantee card and travellers' cheques.*"

Interestingly, as shipping lines moved towards cashless systems where goods and services obtained on board are charged to a passengers account, against production of a personalised cruise ID card issued upon embarkation, and settled up in one transaction at the end of the cruise or voyage, postage was one of the few areas where cash was still accepted. However, this was generally regarded by the Ship's Accountants as a necessary evil as it was not looked upon as desirable to have Reception Desks, which are open 24 hours, with sizable amounts of cash in their tills.

The issue of undelivered mail posted on a cruise holiday is still one that concerns the customer relations departments of the cruise lines and operators. It remains very difficult to ascertain what actually happened to Aunt Jane's postcard from the Grenadines once it had been posted by a loving niece in the mail box at Reception on the ship. The reception staff affirm that the box had been fully emptied and a total of, say, 120 letters and cards were handed over to the port agent; whilst the agency representative confirms that he brought them all to his office and, the following day, his colleague took them to the local post office. Time-consuming Investigations have to be made but a letter of regret acknowledging disappointment is usually the outcome.

In January 2017 the *Marco Polo* of Cruise & Maritime Voyages visited several ports in the West Indies during her annual cruise to the Amazon and her passengers were told quite firmly in their pre-sailing information that *"If you wish to send post from a port of call, we kindly ask you to bring it to Reception at the latest 3 hours before a ship's departure. The mail given to reception is sent ashore with the local port agent for posting. Please note that this special service can be a little more expensive on board than posting mail ashore independently. If you wish to post yourself, please be aware that you must use the appropriate stamps. Postal services in some countries are very slow and we cannot guarantee delivery."* That is being as upfront as possible about the pitfalls of the operation and shows how little things have changed in reality from the 1950's.

The internet, social media and the mobile phone have all had an effect in diminishing the amount of mail now sent from ships and, indeed, overseas holidays in general. Nevertheless, even now, there is still a special thrill in finding an unexpected letter or postcard on your doormat with unfamiliar stamps that has made it through from a strange sounding port of call.