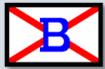
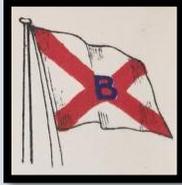


Booth Steamship Co Ltd.

Liverpool

by Geoff Walker

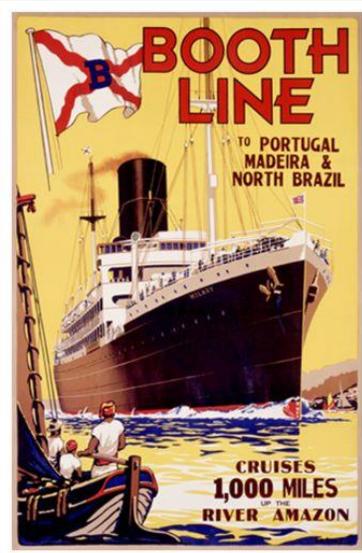


Alfred Booth and Company was a British trading and shipping company which was established in Liverpool, England by, Alfred and Charles Booth, in 1866 with the initial concept of exporting English light leather to North America, which was in the midst of its civil war. Eventually the company was to become a significant shipping company, retaining its head office in Liverpool, also with an office in New York, and which traded for more than a century. The company also held business interests in both, the United States and South America.



A painting by Tony Westmore, from the Author's collection, depicting the Booth Line Steamer "**Hilary**" on the River Mersey ca 1950s with her recently acquired white hull. The "**Hilary**" was a familiar sight on the River Mersey with her white hull and conspicuous Red, White, and Blue, Booth Line House flag atop her black funnel. On 12th September 1959, the Hilary departed from the River Mersey for the last time, under her own steam, bound for the Firth of Forth, where she had been sold for demolition.

Together with their shipping partners and relatives, Alfred, and Philip Holt; the Booth brothers ordered two new ships in 1865. These ships were named **Augustine** and **Jerome** after St Augustine of Hippo and St Jerome. It later became a company tradition to name ships after notable bishops and other historic figures. As intended, the ships carried English leather, both tanned and untanned, to North America. In 1866 Booths commenced a regular steamship service between Liverpool and ports in northern Brazil and on the Amazon River and by 1881 the steamship line had become a limited company, **Booth Steamship Co Ltd.**



A Booth Line Poster advertising their Portugal, Madeira, North Brazil, and Amazon services. The Amazon services, apart from being a passenger and tourist draw card was instigated by the importation of natural rubber which was in high demand in the United Kingdom due to the invention of the pneumatic tyre, by John Boyd Dunlop in 1888. Trade was booming and by 1900 Booth Line was operating 14 ships.

However, Booth Line was not without their competitors, one of which was the Red Cross Iquitos Steamship Co., which operated ships up the Amazon River to Iquitos in Peru. Another was the Maranham Steamship Co.

Robert Singlehurst, was the founder of the “Red Cross” shipping concern, and upon his retirement in 1901 Red Cross and Booths merged to form the **Booth Steamship Co (1901) Ltd.** This merger and pooling of resources enabled Booths' fleet to develop and to include

substantial passenger ships and in 1903 the company started carrying tourists to and from Lisbon and Madeira.

In 1912 Charles Booth retired and passed the chairmanship of the company to his nephew, Charles Booth, but in 1915 Charles senior returned from retirement to help the company during the First World War, despite suffering from worsening ill health. He unfortunately died in November 1916. At the outbreak of the First World War the company was operating more than 30 ships, of which 11 were requisitioned for war service and enemy action sank 9, including two ocean liners, the sister ships Antony and Lanfranc. By 1919 the fleet had been reduced to only 18 ships in the fleet, mainly resulting from the First World War losses.



Booths lost one ship in peacetime between the two World Wars, when the **Gregory** ran aground and was wrecked. The company modernised its fleet with new ships in the 1920s and 30s.

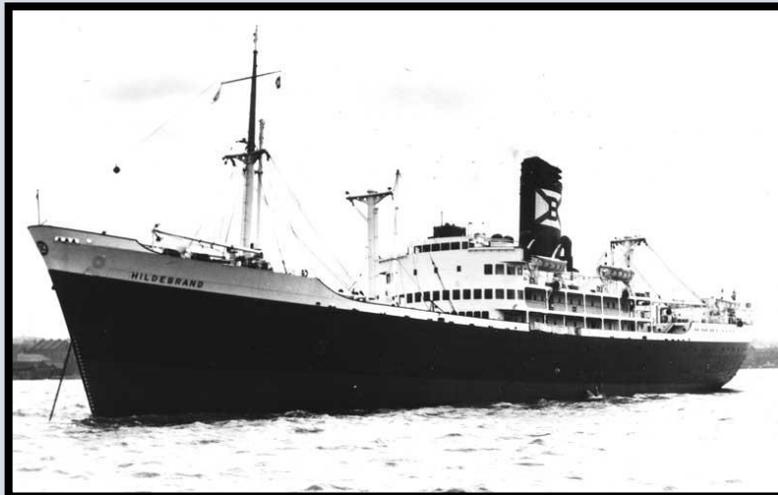
Booth Line's cargo steamer **Clement**, 5,051 GRT, built by Cammell, Laird & Co of Birkenhead in 1934. She was sunk by the German cruiser **Graf Spee** on 30 September 1939. (image State Library of Queensland)



(Image Paul Johnson Collection)

The Booth's passenger liner "**Anselm**", 5954 GRT, built in 1935 for Booth Line by Wm.Denny & Bros Ltd at Dumbarton, was requisitioned by the Admiralty as a troopship in 1940, and was sunk by torpedo in July 1941 with the loss of 254 lives. After the Second World War, the company again modernized with new ships, and from 1955 it diversified its naming policy with Spanish names as well as early church ones.

In 1946 Alfred Booth & Co sold Booth Steamship Co Ltd., business to the Vestey group of companies. Vestey already had its own shipping subsidiary, Blue Star Line, which was founded in 1911. Under Vestey's management, in 1955 Booth Steamship Co started trading in the Caribbean with a service between Brazil and Canada via the West Indies. Between the 1940s and 60s Vestey's transferred various ships between Booth's, Lamport & Holt and Blue Star Line. Each company had a different naming tradition, so ship transfers generally involved a change of name to comply with the house traditions of each company. In 1975, Vestey finally absorbed all the ships and placed them under Blue Star Line management, and Booth Line ceased to exist.

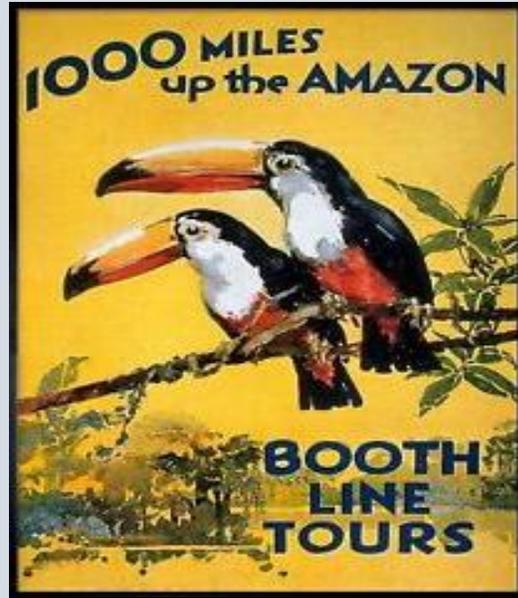
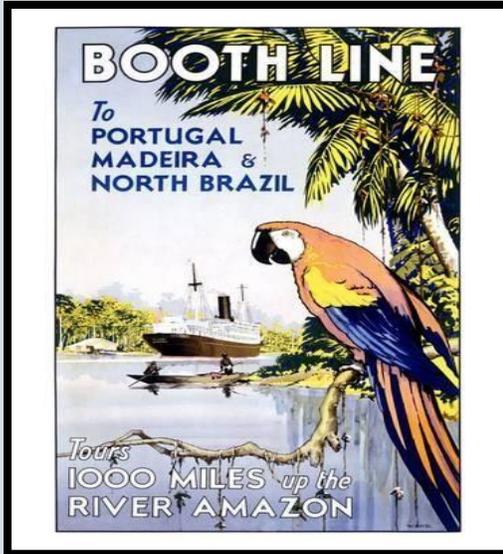


(Image Allen Collection)

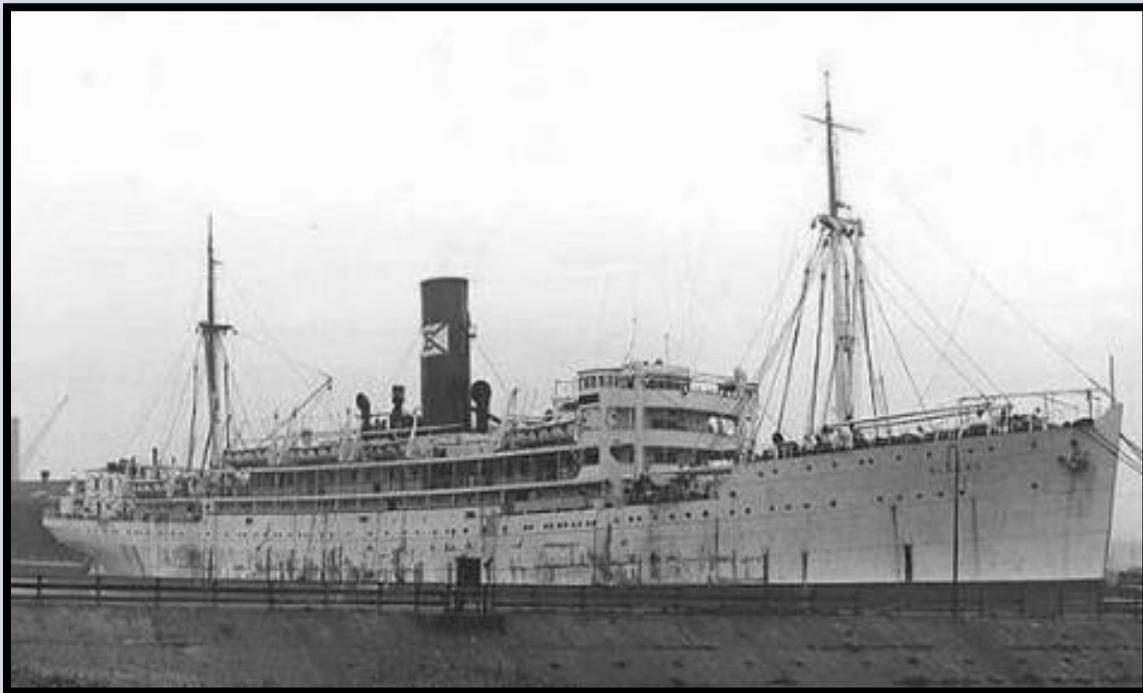
In 1957 Booths again suffered a peacetime loss, when the liner "**Hildebrand**" 7734 GRT, built for Booth Line in 1951 by Cammell, Laird & Co Ltd., ran aground. in September 1957, bound from Liverpool to Lisbon with 164 passengers onboard.

"**Hildebrand**" ran aground in thick fog, on Cascais Point outside Lisbon, where she was scheduled to disembark 17 passengers. Tugs

attempted to refloat her, but she was declared a total constructive loss the following month. A BOT Court of Enquiry concluded that "the stranding and subsequent total loss of the said vessel were caused by the wrongful act of her Master, in the navigation of the vessel" and subsequently suspended his Certificate of Competency as Master, for a period of twelve months.

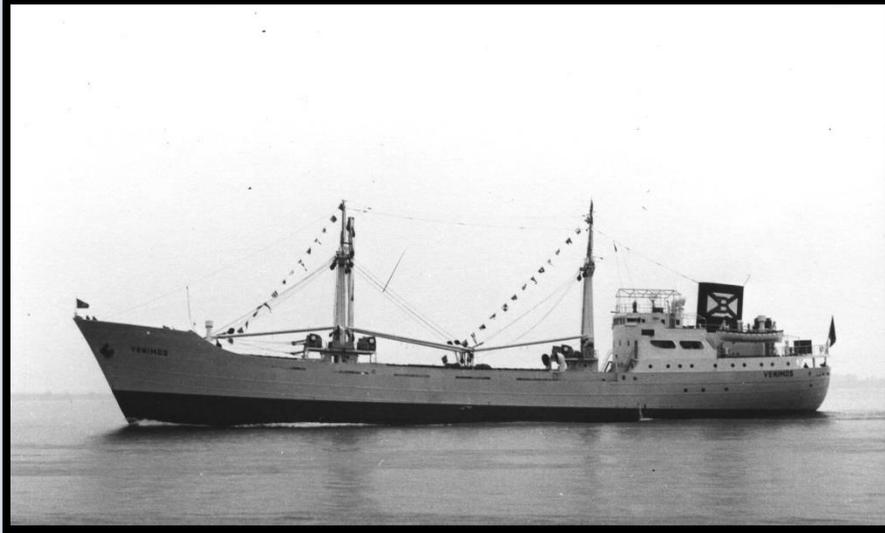


Two Booth Line Posters, popular during the Line's heyday, advertising its popular Amazon, Portugal and Madeira tours and cruises.



(unknown photographer)

An actual image of the popular Booth Line passenger ship "Hilary". Photographed shortly prior to her last departure from the River Mersey, where she is seen looking very tired, waiting to depart on her final trip to Inverkeithing, where she was to be scrapped.



(Allen Collection)

Built in Germany in 1956, the short sea trader **Venimos** of 1309 GRT (later increased to 1607 GRT). Owned by Salient Shipping Company (Bermuda) Ltd., but under bareboat charter to Booth Line. The vessel had large reefer capacity for her size and acted as a feeder vessel. The BB charter was terminated in 1975 upon the demise of Booth Line. Interesting to note that Blue Star also operated two similar coastal vessels in a feeder capacity, during the same period.

-End-

References: Allan Collection archives, Sunderlandships.com., State Library of Queensland, Paul Johnson collection.

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