

# Yeoward Line Ltd.

by Geoff Walker



The **Yeoward Line**, was established by the Yeoward Brothers in Liverpool in 1894, inaugurating their first service in 1899, which offered regular passenger and cargo services from Liverpool., to Lisbon, Madeira, and the Canary Islands. and became renowned world-wide, for their superb passenger service. Their company expanded rapidly, and they built a reputation for comfortable travel and good accommodation for passengers on their ships. The Company was initially known as Yeoward Bros & Bonny (hence the house flag). In 1920 they changed the company name to **Yeoward Line Ltd.**, and the company is a good example of enterprise and entrepreneurship in Liverpool during the early twentieth century.

Yeoward Bros., of Liverpool, owned a fleet of several steamers that sailed every Wednesday from Liverpool for the Canaries. The outward route was by way of Lisbon, Santa Cruz de Teneriffe, or Las Palmas, and the trip was of about eight or nine days, duration. The homeward passage was direct to Liverpool and took only six or seven days. The company was also known for their cargoes of Bananas and Tomatoes from the Canary Islands. Imported fresh produce became a popular novelty during the era. Bananas were still regarded as an exotic tropical fruit in those times.

The most popular ships with passengers was the **S.S. Ardeola, Avetoro**, and the **Avoceta** .

From its concept Yeoward Shipping always had a close association with Spain, Portugal, and the Canary Islands, stemming from their fresh produce trading origins.

Richard Joseph Yeoward and Luis Herbert Yeoward initially formed the company **Yeoward Brothers**, at 24 James Street, Liverpool, on 1st January 1894. Their business experience was primarily in shipping, but they also had experience in fresh fruit and vegetable merchants and distributors.

The following year, Richard visited Las Palmas and Tenerife and realized the great untapped potential for the exportation of fresh fruit and vegetables, since there was only one company, Elder Dempster & Co. Ltd., engaged in ex-ported bananas from the Canaries to England at that time, who held a monopoly on the trade.

Meanwhile, in England, Luis had opened a second office situated in London's Haymarket. Here he forged relationships with other companies, already involved in the Canary Island trade, and established agencies at the islands' principal shipping ports.

Their first agents in Tenerife were Hijos de Juan Yanes who covered the ports of Puerto de la Cruz and Santa Cruz. The other was the English trading house of Miller & Company in Las Palmas. Initially, the

brothers carried their fruit on the steamships of Elder Dempster Line, who were also a Liverpool-based line, and were the only shipping option available at that time.

In 1900, Richard decided to become a permanent resident in Tenerife and in the same year Yeoward Bros., acquired their first ship. This was **Avocet**, built in 1885, and purchased from The Cork Steamship Corporation Ltd.

The following year, 1901, a second ship was bought, the 1888-built **SS Ardeola**. Unfortunately, she was sunk in the River Mersey, resulting from a collision with the **SS Herschel**, two years later. In 1903, they purchased the 1890-built **SS Avertoro** and in 1904, the **SS Ardeola II** was built for them. In the same year, **SS Alca** became the latest addition to the Yeoward fleet.

By 1910, Yeowards had developed into the main operators in the Canary Island shipping trade. The same year, carrying over 2,000 tons of British manufactured goods, they also bought tourists, in droves, to the islands and exported thousands of consignments of bananas and other island produce such as tomatoes which were the main exports at that juncture. Nowadays, the range of exports has grown to include avocado, papaya, mango, custard apple, lychee, carambola (star fruit) pineapple and oranges

They prided themselves on the high standard of accommodation and service which was provided to passengers on their "Banana Boat Cruises" and it soon became obvious additional tonnage was required if they were to fully exploit shipping opportunities. So, between 1911 and 1915, the **SS Andorinha**, the **SS Aguila** and the **SS Alondra** were obtained to augment the company's shipping capacity.

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the Admiralty ordered all British merchant ships to give the Canaries a wide berth, for fear of enemy submarine activity in the area. This directive dealt a devastating blow to the islands' economy, both in terms of the tourist and agricultural sectors. In February 1916, the British Consul wrote to the Foreign Office pleading that the boycott of the islands' ports be lifted. This request was relayed to the Lords of The Admiralty, but they refused to lift the embargo, despite there being no evidence of any abnormal risk

In July the same year, a further representation to the Consul was made by the major British trading concerns, such as the British West Africa Bank, the Tenerife Coaling Co., Hamilton & Co., Elder Dempster Lines, Cory Bros., Fyffe's and Yeoward Bros., but the requests were again rejected by the Admiralty. Consequently, all the commercial interests in the Canary Islands had no alternative but to live with the situation and absorb the corresponding financial losses.

In 1915, the **SS Avetoro** was listed as missing in St George's Channel, (between Ireland and England) presumably sunk due to enemy action. The **SS Alondro** (which had been purchased from Rio Tinto Zinc) was shipwrecked in 1916. The **SS Avocet** was sunk in the Atlantic in April 1917 100 miles WNW from Fastnet, following a German submarine attack, the **SS Averoto II** was also torpedoed in the English Channel. The **SS Acla** was sold to Spain, in 1917. Heavy shipping losses were sustained throughout the period of hostilities.

So, despite wartime restrictions placed on the islands by the Admiralty, island trade was resumed; within one month of the Armistice being signed, the **SS Andorinha** was back in port and became the first foreign ship to visit Puerto de la Cruz for more than four years.

As mentioned previously, 1920 brought about a name change for Yeowards which was registered as Yeoward Line Ltd. In 1922, and in 1923 the **SS Alondra II** was built and bought into service along with the **Avoceta II**. The year 1927 saw the **SS Alca II** joining the fleet.

By 1911, the first stone had been laid for the new port facility at Puerto del la Cruz. The war had interrupted the works and in 1922, Richard Yeoward's lawyers requested permission for a steam-crane to be installed on the quayside. Up to this point, all loading and unloading had been carried out by barge with ships at offshore anchorages. This was the last chance for the port to retain any chance of competing with Santa Cruz as by now a main road had been constructed linking the two ports. Fruit was, however, still loaded onto the company's smaller vessels at the port of Garachico.

The new quay (El Penitente) was finally opened in August 1929 but by this time the bulk of trade, bar the loading of bananas, had shifted to Santa Cruz where the company's enterprises continued for the next decade. In 1930, the **SS Andorinha** was sold off to **The Pacific Steam Navigation Co.**, and in 1938 the **SS Alondra II** was bought by Chilean State Railways.

The outbreak of war in 1939 saw further disruptions to trade as the company's vessels were involved in priority work for the UK government's Ministry of War Transport. Once again, the fleet suffered at the hands of German submarines and in 1941 the **SS Avoceta** was torpedoed and sunk by German Submarine in the Atlantic off the Azores, with the loss of 123 lives. Additionally, the **SS Aguila II** was torpedoed, by U 201, in the Irish Sea with the loss of 156 persons, including 21 Wrens, whilst en route to Gibraltar.

Worse was yet to come, in 1943 the **SS Ardeola III** (referred to earlier) was captured by the Vichy French and handed over to the Italian Navy. The ship, a passenger/cargo steamer was detected by a searchlight at Bizerta on 9th November 1942 and ordered to stop. She was boarded by a French naval party and taken into Bizerta. The crew were sent to a prison camp at Sfax. The prisoners left there with other ships' crews on November 24th for Algiers. The captured ship's name was changed to **SS ADERNO**, and she left Bizerta in January 1943, with an Italian crew. Eventually, she was torpedoed and sunk by a British submarine HMS Torbay on the 23rd July 1943, about 2 miles from Civitavecchia, west coast of Italy. On July 23, 1943, shortly before the overthrow of Mussolini, the **SS Aderno** sailed from Naples escorted by two destroyers. At 19:45 she was in view of the port of Civitavecchia when Lt. Robert Clutterbuck, commanding officer of HMS Torbay spotted the convoy through the submarine's periscope. It seems incredible that an English submarine could approach, undetected, to within only two miles off Civitavecchia, but by then **SS Aderno's** fate was sealed; three torpedoes struck the ship before the escort vessels could react, and the ship quickly sank.

In 1945, the company once again resumed its normal activities but never fully recovered from the losses sustained, and with the sinking in 1955 of the **Alca II**, the company lost its last vessel. It continued for a further ten years, shipping with the Spanish owned Aznar Line but, by the mid-60s, had all but wound up its shipping interests and activities.

**Yeoward Shipping Ltd.** continues to trade as freight forwarders to this day from their Liverpool base, but the name will always be associated with the early development of foreign trade and tourism to Portugal and the Canary Islands, as well as the comfortable passenger ships they operated.



Passenger Lists **SS Andorinha** 1924 and **SS Avoceta** 1936



The **SS Aguila** Wrens Memorial. A tribute to the 21 lost Wrens.

When, in 1941, the Royal Navy permitted members of the WRNS to serve overseas for the first time, the initial assignment of 21 Wrens was sent to Gibraltar for cypher and wireless duties. They embarked at Liverpool on the **SS Aguila** the passenger ship owned by Yeoward Line Ltd. She sailed from Liverpool on 13 August 1941 with Convoy OG71 as the Commodore ship, bound for Gibraltar.

The convoy was attacked by U-boats on 19 August and the **SS Aguila** was hit by a torpedo from U-201 and sank within two minutes, taking with her 152 passengers and crew, amongst whom were most of the Wrens. There were only 16 survivors, 10 were picked up by HMS Wallflower and 6, including the surviving Wrens, were picked up by the Empire Oak, a steam tug.

Three days later, on 22 August, the Empire Oak itself was torpedoed and sunk by U-564 with the loss of 19 lives, among whom were the Wrens. In all, eight ships from convoy OG71 were sunk and sadly none of the 21 Wrens survived.

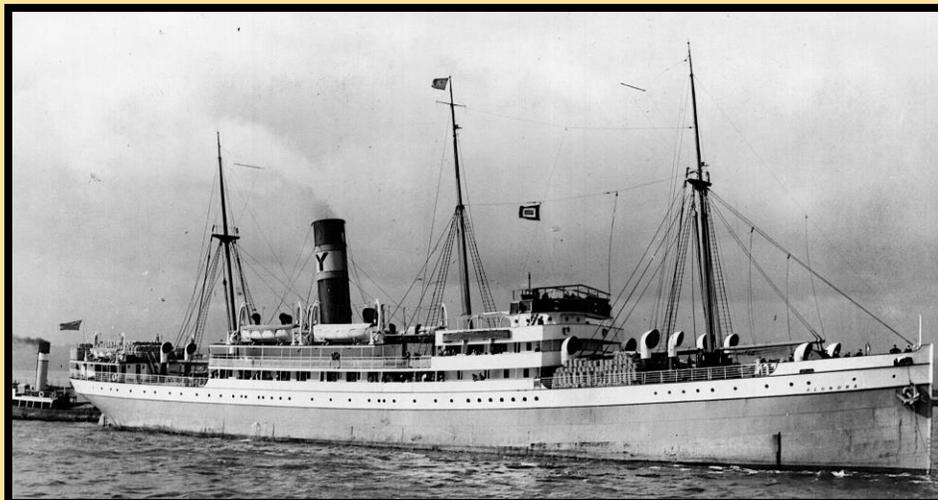
In 1951 the R.N.L.I. built a "Liverpool-Class" lifeboat christened the "**Aguila Wren**" in honor of this contingent of the Women's Royal Naval Service.

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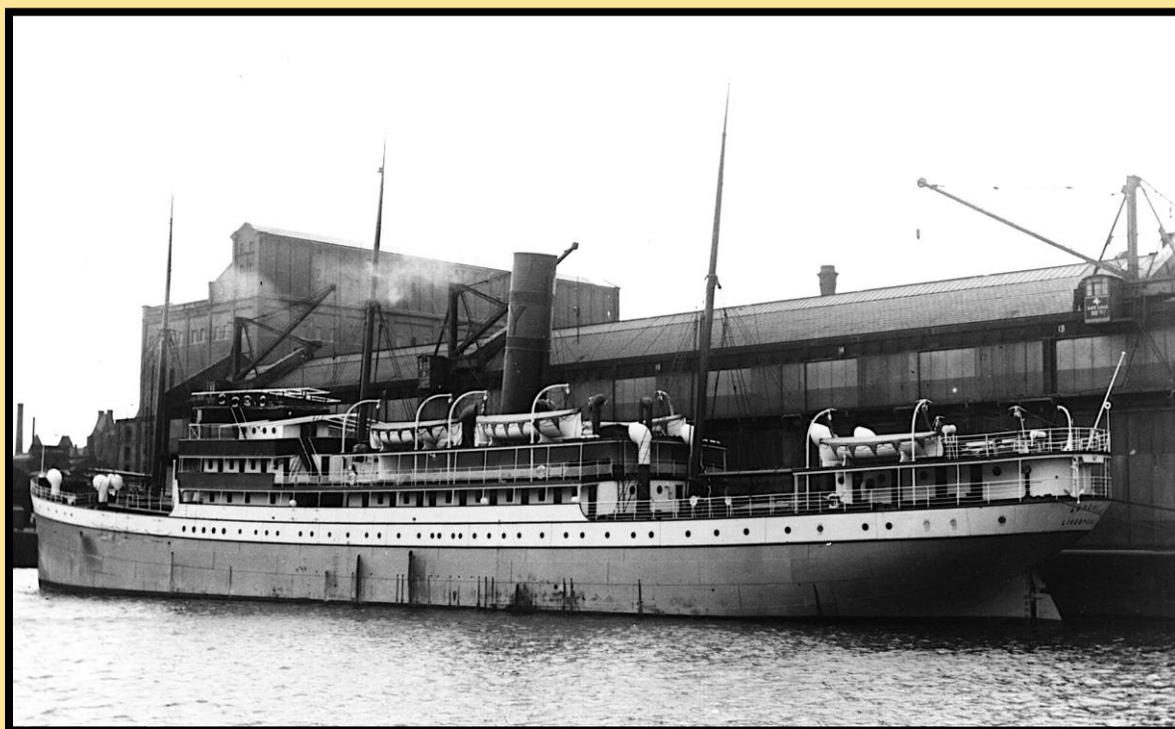
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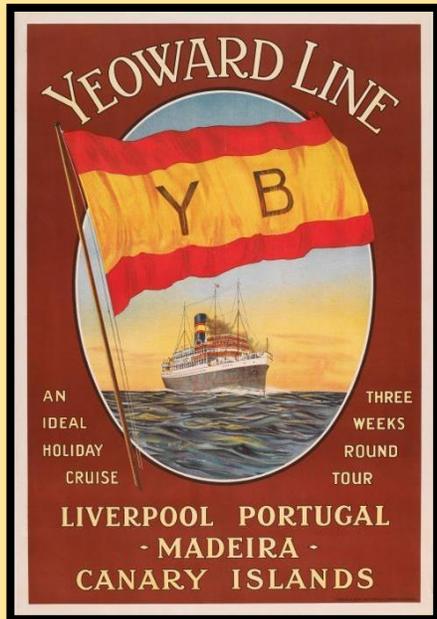
**SS Avoceta** on the River Mersey. A painting by the renowned maritime artist Tony Westmore from the author's private collection.



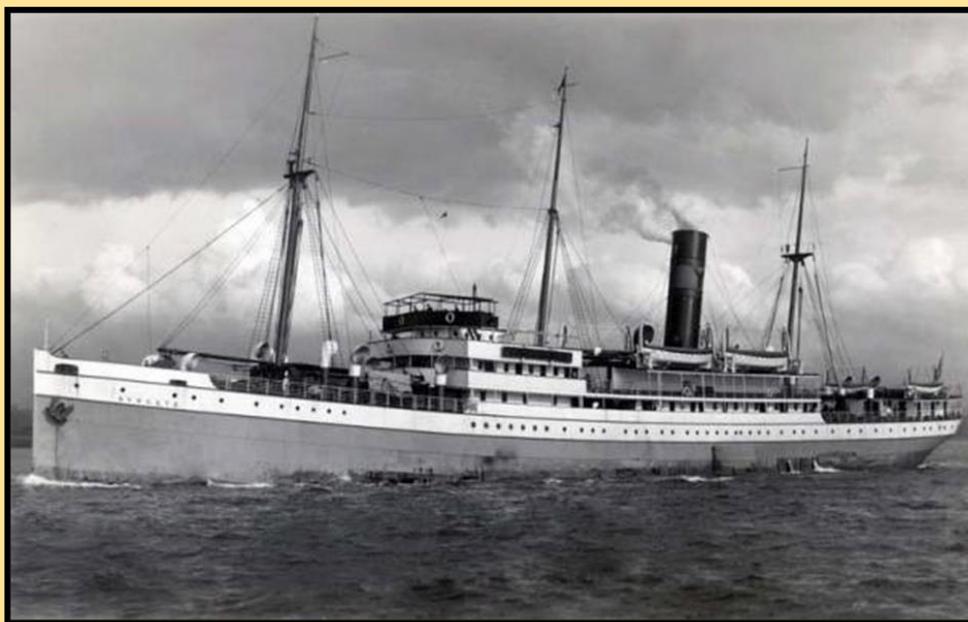
The **SS Alondra** built in the UK in 1922. Sister vessel to the SS Avoceta. Sold to Chilean State Railways in 1938, change of owner to Empresa Maritima del Estado 1954. Broken up at Valparaiso March 1960 by Gabriel Kanak. Almost 40 years of illustrious service.



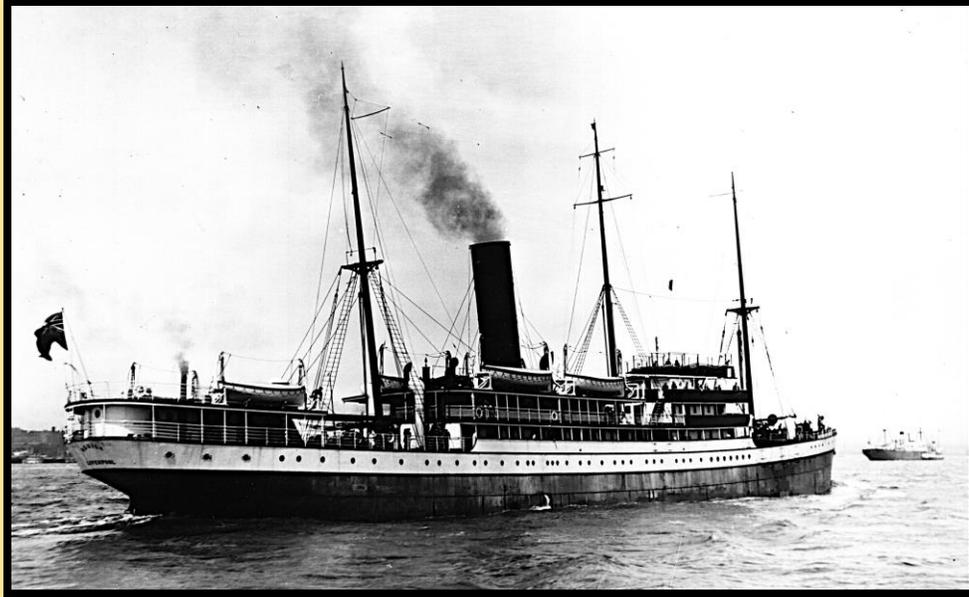
The **SS Ardeola**. A fine looking, passenger vessel of the era and one of Yeoward Line's trio of top line passenger ships. Bought by Yeoward Line Ltd 1920. She was captured by Vichy French forces on 9 November 1942 whilst attempting to deliver stores to Malta. The ship was handed over in turn to the German forces and the Italian Government who changed her name to Aderno. She was sunk by British submarine Torbay at position 42° 04" N, 11° 47" E on 23 July 1943.



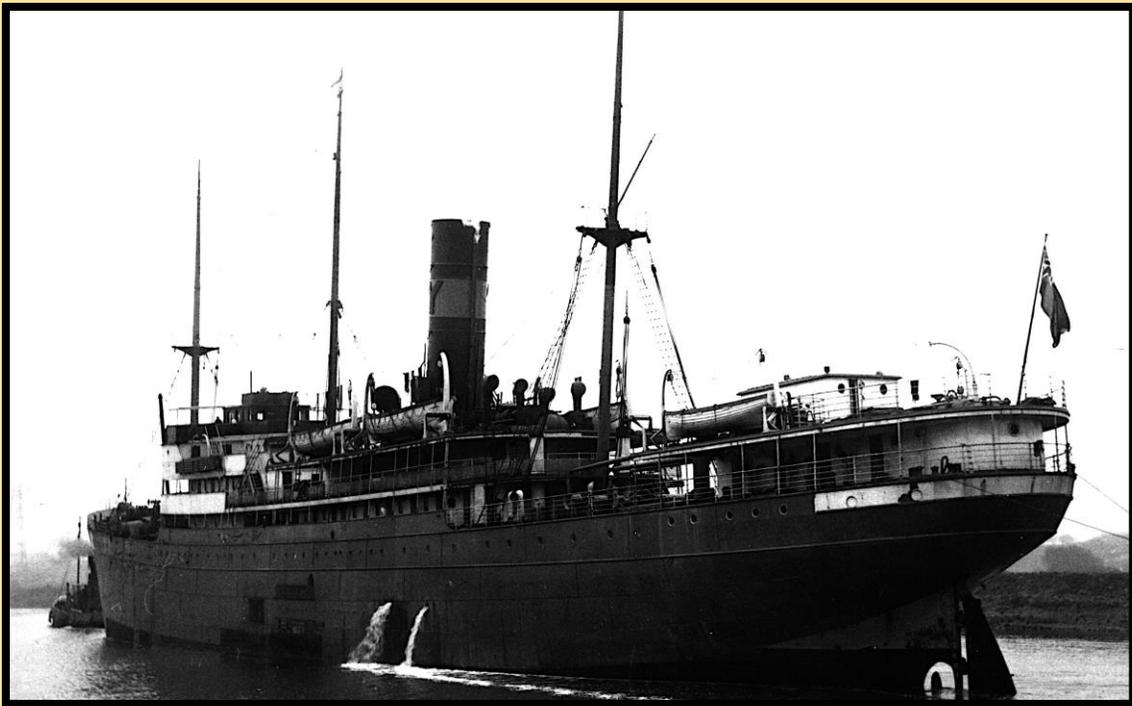
Yeoward Line Posters advertising their sailings from Liverpool.



An actual photo of the **SS Avoceta** sailing from Liverpool ca 1930. Built 1922 she was sunk on 25 September 1941 by a torpedo fired by German submarine U-203 at position 47° 57' N 24° 05' W. The survivors of the attack were taken on board **Cervantes** which was also torpedoed at position 47° 57' N 24° 05' W (Allen Collection)



The **SS Aquila**. Built 1917 and owned by Yeoward Line Ltd from 1920 onwards. The vessel was sunk on 19 August 1941 by torpedo fired by German submarine U-201 at position 49° 23" N, 17° 56" W with the loss of 157 lives. She was sailing from Liverpool to Gibraltar in convoy carrying passengers and a general cargo.



The **SS Alca** built 1927 and lasted with the fleet until 1955 when she went for demolition at Preston. (Allen Collection).

Yeoward Line ceased their ship owning around the mid - 1950s when their last ship was scrapped but continued in the fruit trade using the Aznar Line of Spain as their principal carriers. In the late 1960s The Puerto de a Cruz recognized the contribution made by the Yeoward Brothers to the Canary Islands, by naming a school and road in their honor. The company still exists today, as **Yeoward (Shipping) Ltd**, a member of the Yeoward Group, in Liverpool, and is registered as ship agents and forwarding agents. Between 1972-1982 the company operated **Yeoward Line Aviation** from Liverpool and later Chester airports. Flights were mainly of an executive nature in connection with Yeoward's shipping business, but charter flights were also operated.

### **Yeoward Line Ltd. - Fleet List:**

<b>Vessel</b>	<b>Built</b>	<b>Years in Service</b>
<b>Aguila (1)</b>	1909	1915 sunk by German submarine in St. George's Channel.
<b>Aguila (2)</b>	1917	1941 sunk by German submarine in Atlantic; loss of 156 lives.
<b>Alca (1)</b>	1898	ex- Stefanie, 1904 purchased from Heyne & Hessenmuller, Hamburg renamed <b>Alca</b> for Canary Islands inter-island services, 1916 sold to Spain renamed Laida.
<b>Alca (2)</b>	1927	1955 scrapped.
<b>Alondra (1)</b>	1899	ex- Don Hugo, 1915 purchased from Rio Tinto Co. renamed Alondra, 1916 wrecked.
<b>Alondra (2)</b>	1922	1938 sold to Chilean State Railways.
<b>Andorinha</b>	1911	1930 sold to Pacific Steam Navigation Co. renamed Champerico.
<b>Ardeola (1)</b>	1888	ex- Fulmar, 1901 purchased from Cork SS Co. renamed Ardeola, 1903 sunk in collision.
<b>Ardeola (2)</b>	1904	1911 sold to St. Lawrence SS Co. renamed Morwenna.
<b>Ardeola (3)</b>	1912	1942 captured by Vichy French, passed to Italy renamed Aderno, 1943 sunk by Royal Navy.
<b>Avetoro (1)</b>	1890	ex- Egret, 1903 purchased from Cork SS Co. renamed Avetoro, 1915 missing, presumed lost by enemy action.
<b>Avetoro (2)</b>	1914	ex- Valdes, 1916 purchased from MacAndrews & Co. renamed Avetoro, 1917 sunk by German submarine in English Channel.
<b>Avocet 1885</b>	1900	purchased from Cork SS Co., 1917 sunk by German submarine in Atlantic.
<b>Avoceta</b>	1923	1941 sunk by German submarine off Azores; loss of 123 lives.

## A Typical itinerary of Yeoward Line Ltd.

### Sailings for February-September 1933

Vessel(s)	Ports of call
<b>Alca</b>	
<b>Avoceta</b>	
<b>Alondra</b>	
<b>Aguila</b>	
<b>Ardeola</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Liverpool, Lisbon, Madeira, Santa Cruz, Las Palmas.</li><li>2) Liverpool, Lisbon, Santa Cruz, Las Palmas.</li><li>3) Liverpool, Madeira, Las Palmas, Santa Cruz, Orotava.</li><li>4) Liverpool, Corunna, Lisbon, Casablanca, Madeira, Las Palmas, Santa Cruz, Las Palmas.</li></ol> <p>All return voyages directly to Liverpool.</p>
<b>Alca</b>	
<b>Aguila</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Liverpool, Santander, Lisbon. Return voyages via Corunna to Liverpool.</li><li>2) Liverpool, Corunna, Lisbon. Return voyages via Santander to Liverpool.</li></ol>
<b>Alca</b>	
<b>Avoceta</b>	Glasgow, Vigo, Madeira, Santa Cruz, Las Palmas (occasional voyages to/from Glasgow). Return voyages directly to Glasgow.
<b>Alca</b>	Southampton, Santander, Gartbrattan, Liverpool, Lisbon, Madeira (one voyage only), Santa Cruz, Las Palmas. Return voyages directly to Liverpool.

End

References; Yeoward Line Ltd archives, The Allan Collection, WRNS Memorial, RNLI

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