THE COMMERCIAL & TECHNICAL EVOLUTION OF THE FERRY INDUSTRY 1948-1987

By

William (Bill) Moses M.B.E.

A thesis presented to the University of Greenwich
in fulfilment of the thesis requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2010

DECLARATION

"I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently being submitted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy being studied at the University of Greenwich. I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise identified by references and that I have not plagiarised another's work".

…….

William Trevor Moses

Date: …….

……

Professor Sarah Palmer

Date: …….

……

Professor Alastair Couper

Date:…….

Acknowledgements

There are a number of individuals that I am indebted to for their support and encouragement, but before mentioning some by name I would like to acknowledge and indeed dedicate this thesis to my late Mother and Father. Coming from a seafaring tradition it was perhaps no wonder that I would follow but not without hardship on the part of my parents as they struggled to raise the necessary funds for my books and officer cadet uniform. Their confidence and encouragement has since allowed me to achieve a great deal and I am only saddened by the fact that they are not here to share this latest and arguably most prestigious attainment.

It is also appropriate to mention the ferry industry, made up on an intrepid band of individuals that I have been proud and privileged to work alongside for as many decades as covered by this thesis. As depicted herein, the industry itself has rarely been without challenge, a state of affairs that continues to this day, and indeed would seem destined to never change. Nonetheless as an island nation we surely owe a debt of gratitude to those who populate our coastline with what are in effect lifeline ferry services and without which the country, its tourism and trade would surely grind to a halt.

To my family and friends who have had to contend with a great deal during the tenure of this thesis ranging from a house full of books, and paper miscellany to mood swings, particularly when the research was proving difficult. To them all, my thanks and apologies in equal measure.

To the Greenwich campus, a remarkable piece of history that it has been a pleasure to be associated with and without which I am confident in my own mind that I could not have achieved this thesis. Last but by no means least, a special thank you to my supervisors, Professor Sarah Palmer and Professor Alastair Couper who have successfully piloted me through uncharted waters that I had no idea existed. Their patience and perseverance deserves special mention.

The acknowledgements mentioned here summarise the industry, environment and individuals that have contributed either knowingly or otherwise, directly or indirectly to this thesis. In truth I could not have achieved this work without every one of these valuable components. The words I have used here seem altogether brief and largely inadequate to illustrate the relevance and esteem, nevertheless they are all I have at my disposal and are heartfelt.

Bill Moses

Abstract

The thesis sets out the political, economic and social forces and the parallel institutional and technical factors that shaped the development of the ferry sector between 1948 and 1987. It provides as full an account as the available record permits of an important shipping industry sector that previously has received little serious historical consideration.

Most of the ferry industry, dominated by its railway industry parent and ravaged by war losses, came into public ownership in 1948 as a consequence of railway nationalisation followed by a decade of under-investment. The period ended with a loss of supremacy for the railway-owned shipping sector, privatisation, increased competition, the 1987 *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster – *in no small part exacerbated by the drive through vehicle deck which had done so much to facilitate the ease of passenger car and freight movement* - and the certainty of the Channel Tunnel, which spelt the end of sea transport primacy on its most important routes. The era saw ferries transformed in terms of design and capability from being largely tied to rail-connected passenger traffic, there came the innovation of roll-on**,** roll-off and the hovercraft, with ports undergoing change scarcely less extensive.

The thesis examines the basic structural changes that affected the industry, specifically the process that resulted in the establishment of privately-owned firms *in situ*, the bureaucratic problems that beset British Railways and which hampered its formulation of a coherent response to the varied challenges it faced in the Fifties and Sixties. It shows how the growth in private motor car ownership proved a catalyst for change in a conservative industry and explores the way in which the introduction of newcomers and the hovercraft drove the development of competition, transforming the ferry business but ultimately leading to the government decision to construct a fixed link between the United Kingdom and France.

The thesis concludes that the drive and entrepreneurial flair of three private ferry operators, Townsend, Bustard and Thoresen, was largely responsible for the

transformation of the industry and argues that the new and growing market created by motor transport would not have been exploited at such a rate or with the same degree of forethought and innovation without their involvement.

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1:
Introduction

This thesis, *The Commercial and Technical Evolution of the Ferry Industry 1948 – 1987,* sets out the major events and developments that shaped the ferry industry during four decades of unprecedented political, economic, social and technological change within the United Kingdom, and in so doing it provides an account of proceedings that is unprecedented and for one reason. The ferry industry within the United Kingdom developed under the mantle of various railway companies and so has never been afforded the academic or literary attention that other independent modes of transport have received. The result has been a lack of empirical coverage of this sector of transport, which this student, with more than three decades of senior management experience in the period, has sought to begin to remedy through a thesis that sets out a comprehensive chronological account of proceedings alongside an examination of the major factors - whether political, economic and financial, technological and scientific, and the influence of certain individuals - that together, and in various imperfect ways, shaped developments. In so doing, this student would submit that this thesis would provide the reader with a basis of knowledge with reference to such contentious matters as the relative performance of publicly- and privately-owned industries and perhaps, some years down the road, may provide a future student with a possible basis of examination and assessment that is presently impossible, given the closeness of events.

Over the years the ferry industry, its companies, ships and services have commanded little in the way of British public or academic interest and attention. The various publishing houses, devoted to such matters as train- and ship-spotting, have records that would fill many library shelves and indeed could provide for specialist libraries. Yet, for the most part, the ferry industry has been afforded only postscript status when set alongside stories of the ocean-going merchant marine, the coastal marine, two world wars and the railway industry. Even Ronald Hope's highly regarded book, *A New History of British Shipping*, first published in 1990, has only six references to ferries, each less than a page, in its 484 pages of text. Given the importance to the United Kingdom of shipping services in general and the ferry industry in particular, it

is perhaps surprising to note two matters, that there is such a dearth of information and material available to the researcher and student and that little has been written about the ferry industry in terms of overall perspective.

Such a state of affairs does beggar the imagination, and for obvious reason. The ferry industry, even when a sector of the railway system, represented the equivalent of what would be one of the largest, if not the largest, ferry industry of modern times, both in terms of fleet number and passenger carryings, representing a dimension of daily travel and trade that was crucially important in terms of Britain's development at a time when there was no alternative means of overseas movement.[1] Herein is reason enough for proper consideration and examination of this subject, but the fact remains that in terms of literary perspective and presentation this one sector of a wider rail industry has been completely overshadowed by its parent organisation. A single thesis cannot undo decades of relative neglect any more than a single volume thesis can provide a full, complete and wholly authoritative account of the ferry industry's operations over four decades, but hopefully this thesis may represent a start line in a process of proper, dispassionate and objective examination and analysis of the ferry industry, its commissions and omissions, its achievements and failures.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Primary Sources

The primary-source records held by the National Archives, Lloyds Register Fairplay, Lloyds List, *The Times* newspaper as well as the British Library have been the most important sources consulted in the preparation of this thesis. The fact that during the first half of the period covered by this thesis the ferry industry was dominated by a public-sector railway company has meant that these sources, and specifically the National Archives, hold quite extensive records that include, particularly in respect of the nationalised businesses, minutes of internal meetings and inter-company correspondence and dealings. The information gleaned has been patchy in nature ranging from high importance to sketchy detail although most has been usable in

[1]With due allowance for literary economy at the expense of historical accuracy but the ferry industry evolved as part of the rail industry over a century, and by 1948, and the start of this thesis, the only alternative, air travel, remained in its infancy.

mapping and developing this thesis. This is also the case with aspects associated with the proposed construction of the Channel Tunnel where the recordings of Hansard and the records held by The National Archives are wide-ranging. Conversely, the period characterised by the advent of private, commercial enterprise, where much material is considered commercially sensitive, is somewhat under-invested in terms of papers available to the public, but this student was able to piece together a considerable part of this particular account as a result of contacts developed over a life-time of work in the industry**.**

The detailed archives of daily shipping publications (such as Lloyds List, LR Fairplay and also *The Times* newspaper) yielded extensive, though not necessarily original, material but nevertheless were important in terms of detail as well as confirming the accuracy (or otherwise) of information drawn from other sources. Statistical data, which it is suggested would seem to be less than accurate with reference to the immediate post-war period until circa 1956, in the main has been drawn from The Department of Transport and The Office for National Statistics sources. With few exceptions, financial information has been obtained from The National Archives and checked against reports and publications of the day for legitimacy.

Of particular relevance is the work carried out by the Monopolies Commission into alleged price fixing and a proposal to merge two large ferry operators on the cross-Channel routes. Their own research has provided useful data although the accuracy and relative circumstance of some of the material has in places been misplaced or misinterpreted in its analysis.[2] One clear example is the protest lodged by Brittany Ferries and SNCF regarding alleged subsidised operation of Sealink when they themselves were, and still are, highly subsidised, a point missed by the Commission.

1.1.2 Secondary Sources

There are inevitably a number of secondary sources that concern themselves with business history, and most noticeably in the context of this work, analysis and discussion about the railways set against the backdrop of nationalised industry that

[2]The Monopolies Commission, *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services A Report on the supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services,* Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 Ordered by The House of Commons, printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, p.17.

has been one of the most enduring problems of the British economy since the Second World War. This backdrop is clearly important in considering the management, motivation and funding of the subsidiary ferry sector, and which is regrettably absent from these same publications.

One of the most prominent overviews of the industry, albeit confined to the cross-Channel sector, is *Kent in the Twentieth Century* edited by Nigel Yates[3] where the region and its performance is summarised succinctly. In particular the marine and transport aspects are well described by Gerald Crompton in his 'Transport' section of the book although he confuses the prominence and importance of ferry ports with coastal and short sea trades which results in a lost opportunity to highlight and defend the prominence and importance of the ferry sector in a Kent perspective.[4] At least ferries are mentioned.[5]

Other literature is less fulsome in content providing only vague or passing reference to the ferry industry. Although there are a number of publications that deal specifically with the nationalised industries and in this context the railway companies, there is only rare reference to the shipping division. This is particularly true of publications such as *The Nationalised Railway* by Jack Simmons and George Biddle[6], *All Change; A History of British Rail Privatisation* by Roger Freeman and Jon Shaw[7]; *The Nationalisation of British Industry* by Sir Norman Chester[8] and *The Nationalisation of British Transport* by Michael R. Bonavia[9] with reference to the pace of change and the disagreements between the British Transport Commission (BTC) and the professional managers that comprised the Railway Executive.[10] From all these important references however the reader is left to his own devices in considering the impact or indeed deliberation afforded to the ferry sector. In contrast reference material found in Simmons and Biddle's *The Oxford Companion to British*

[3]Yates, N (2001) *Kent in the Twentieth Century.* Woodbridge: Boydell Press.
[4]ibid pp.117-118.
[5]ibid pp.117-153.
[6]Simmonds, J and Biddle, G (1997) *British Railway History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Simmonds, J and Biddle, G (1999) *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History: from 1603 to the 1990s.* Oxford: Oxford University Press
[7]Freeman, R and Shaw, J (2000) *All Change: British Railway Privatisation*. McGraw Hill, London.
[8]Chester, Sir Norman (1975) *The Nationalisation of British Industry.* London: HMSO
[9]Bonavia, R. M (1987) *The Nationalisation of British Transport; The History of the British Transport Commission 1948-1953.* London: Macmillan
[10]Indeed it was the Commission's failures that led to the Stedeford Committee report in 1960 and ultimately the Beeching report of 1963.

Railway History,[11] which suggests that of all aspects of the industrial revolution nothing left its mark on the landscape of Britain, or changed the British people's lives more than the railway, has been useful in placing in context the various facets of the railway industry crucial to an understanding of its internal workings and decision-making processes. The management and control of the parent railway company and its interaction with the government has been a clear consequence from the variety of secondary source publications although it has been necessary to look closer in order to assess the innermost workings of the shipping division, most of which are to be found in the National Archives. The infamous book by Gerald Fiennes entitled *I Tried to Run a Railway* is amusing and particularly valuable in attempting to understand the "behind the scenes" internal workings of the operating unit, but again there is no reference to the marine subsidiary which was fundamental in broadening the catchment of the railway system. Nevertheless Fiennes makes one interesting observation which epitomises the near constant re-organisation within the rail sector – "When you re-organise you bleed," a statement that to some extent was to follow Sealink into the private sector in 1984. *British Railways 1948-73* by T. R. Gourvish presents an interesting business history of the first twenty-five years of nationalised railways in Britain and in particular the complex relationship between British Railways and government, but makes no reference to the ferry industry despite its being a critical part of the overall transport system. Any early reference to the undoubted intermodalism[12] that gave rise to an expanding rail network encompassing mainland Europe and Ireland is totally lost amid the challenge of nationalisation and more specifically its attempt to organise and manage an efficient system that for many years during this period represented the only means of moving people and goods. The marine subsidiary, conspicuous by its absence in most accounts, was nonetheless a fundamental part of the system.

It has been necessary to understand the socio-economic, macro-economic (dealing with the performance, structure, and behavior of a national or regional economy as a whole) and political "drivers" that have fuelled the ferry industry since the Second World War. Political reading and by implication an understanding of Europe-wide, national and localised economic influences have therefore been essential in order to

[11]Simmons and Biddle. *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History: from 1603 to the 1990s.*
[12]Intermodal transportation is the expression used to describe the movement of passengers or freight from one mode of transport to another, a process that often takes place at a terminal designed for the purpose.

understand the issues that have influenced growth and particularly the way in which the United Kingdom recovered from the devastating effects of the war years. This emergence of the population from the restraints imposed by war and its clear determination to advance in terms of ownership of homes and possession of automobiles had a positive influence on the development of the United Kingdom's transport system in terms of the replacement, over time, of the train as a primary means of conveyance. Independence, the progressive march of technological change and increasing disposable income encouraged the motor car and travel to the point that ferry operators were surprised if not overwhelmed by the voracity of a changing market and at times powerless, at least in the short-term, to satisfy demand.

In researching GDP growth, disposable income and employment in the context of the United Kingdom's recovery post-war a variety of publications have been consulted ranging from *Britain in the World Economy Since 1880* by Bernard Alford[13] to *The Audit of War* by Correlli Barnett[14] and *Economic Policy and the Great Stagflation* by Alan Blinder.[15] In addition and on a more socio-economic plane,[16] *British Economy and Society 1870-1970* by Curwen[17] has been of great assistance in attempting to understand the various forces at work that culminate in the country's economic status. One area of criticism is that different measurement criteria are used in these publications resulting, for example in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)[18], Gross Domestic Income (GDI), Gross Output (GO) and the modern day equivalent of Gross National Product (GNP), all of which are difficult to inter-relate. Of general value were *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Volume III Structural Change and Growth, 1939-2000* by Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson[19] and *The Economic History of Britain since 1700 – Volume 3: 1939-1992* by Floud and Deirdre N. McCloskey.[20] The latter publication analyses the war-time economy[21] and the economic policy and performance between 1945 and 1964.[22] The section on industrial

[13]Alford, B.W.E (1996) *Britain in the World Economy Since 1880.* New York: Longman.
[14]Barnett, C (1986) *The Audit of War.* London: Macmillan.
[15]Blinder, A.S (1981) *Economic Policy and the Great Stagflation*. New York: Academic Press.
[16]Relating to social or economic factors or to a combination of both social and economic factors.
[17]Curwen, P (1997) *Understanding The UK Economy*. London: Macmillan
[18]GDP = C + I + G + (X-M) equals: GDP = private consumption + gross investment + government spending + (exports – imports); London: ONS
[19]Floud, R and Johnson, P (2004) *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Volume III Structural Change and Growth.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[20]Floud, R and McCloskey, D (1994) *The Economic History of Britain since 1700 – Volume 3: 1939-1992.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[21]ibid p.1.
[22]p.32.

and commercial performance since 1950 was also of relevance even if the shipping industry in general and ferry sector in particular were absent. The authors are to be commended for the style in which the books are written making them particularly easy to read and understand.

From a purely political standpoint *Economic Policy under the Conservatives, 1951-64* by Astrid Ringe[23]*, The Labour Government 1964–1970* by Harold Wilson[24], *Labour and the British State* by J. Barry Jones and Michael Keating[25] and *The Rise of Labour* by Keith Laybourn[26] were informative. They provided insight and helped to appreciate the partisan context to politics and the way in which economic logic did not necessarily apply particularly when it came to the operation of a nationalised industry.

Technological developments and relationships and trends within the shipping industry were researched from the point of view of design and engineering. The railway companies were traditional with their trade contacts preferring to form firm, trust-based relationships with companies that would supply them quality products into the future. This was true of their relationship with United Kingdom-based shipyards where different regional railways would each have their own 'tame' builder. In the need to understand how this worked W. Paul Clegg and John Styring's *British Nationalised Shipping*[27] was found invaluable as was Lewis Johnman and Hugh Murphy's *British Shipbuilding and the State*[28]; Ian Buxton's *Ship Design and Construction* in *Conway's History of the Ship* and *The Golden Age of Shipping* by Robert Gardner (editor), although devoid of ferry-related reference, helped in understanding the evolution of design and building contracts within the shipping sector particularly considering the eventual power-plant conversion and replacement and the change from riveted to welded vessel construction.[29]

[23]Ringe, A, et al (2004) *Economic Policy under the Conservatives, 1951-64.* London: Institute of Historical Research.
[24]Wilson, H (1971) *The Labour Government 1964–1970.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
[25]Jones, B and Keating, M (1985) *Labour and the British State.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[26]Laybourn, K (1988) *The Rise of Labour.* London: Edward Arnold.
[27]Clegg, W P. and Styring, J S (1969) *British Nationalised Shipping.* Newton Abbot: David and Charles.
[28]Johnman, L and Murphy, H (2002) *British Shipbuilding and the State.* Ithaca, NY: Regatta Press.
[29]Gardiner, R and Greenway, A (2000) *Conway's History of the Ship: The Golden Age of Shipping: The Classic Merchant Ship 1900-1960.* London: Conway Maritime Press.

From a commercial and operational perspective *Boat Trains and Channel Packets* by Rixon Bucknall[30] has been necessary in order to determine the disposition of the various fleets during the course of the 50-year period and in particular the competitive landscape. This, in conjunction with largely reference publications such as *Railway and Other Steamers* by Christian Duckworth and Graham Langmuir,[31] *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles* by Nick Robin[32], *Steamers of British Railways* by W. Paul Clegg and John Styring[33] and *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships* by John Winser[34] has also helped in understanding the technological changes that were important in developing a sustainable, lifeline industry. The conversion of slender steam turbine liner vessels to diesel power was fundamental in reducing cost and manpower and these publications present proven factual data in a way that can easily be understood by the reader. Without doubt they have been invaluable in the compilation of this thesis.

In the generic sense there are a number of enthusiast soft and hard back books published by Ferry Publications which could certainly not be left out of a comprehensive Literature review despite occasional inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Nevertheless they represent a valuable record of routes and ships without which a researcher would be lost.

An extensive research of secondary source material, and in this context its dearth, has provided endorsement of the need for an analysis of the ferry sector since reference to it is near non-existent, shrouded in the early half of the period by the overarching needs and challenges of its parent railway sector. Furthermore the subsequent commercialisation of the sector in the second half of the period has seen no business related study or analysis carried out despite the clear and commercially vital role played by lifeline passenger and freight services facilitating travel and trade to and from an island community. It would be interesting to challenge those eminent authors with the facts surrounding the true value of the ferry industry in order to adjudge their view on why this important industry was orphaned from these otherwise learned and highly respected publications.

[30]Bucknall, R (1957) *Boat Trains and Channel Packets.* London: Vincent Stuart.
[31]Duckworth, C. and Langmuir, G (1968) [1948] *Railway and Other Steamers.* (2nd edition)Preston: T Stephenson & Sons.
[32]Robins, N (1999) *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles.* Newtonards: Colourpoint Books.
[33]Clegg, W P and Styring, J S (1962) *Steamers of British Railways.* Prescot: T Stephenson & Sons.
[34]Winser, J de S (1994) *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships.* Yeovil: Patrick Stevens.

1.2 Development of the Ferry Industry

Between 1846 and 1984 a total of sixty companies, primarily railway companies, owned and operated a wide variety of ships ultimately numbering 1,250 vessels. In their first fifty years the railway companies were responsible for the construction of railway lines and related ferry facilities in a number of ports that resulted in the development of a sophisticated communications system that linked Great Britain with Ireland and mainland Europe. The ferry system that was put into place had three parts:

- The local ferry services that linked the islands off western and northern Scotland with the mainland.
- The routes between western Britain and Ireland and between southern Britain and the continental mainland, primarily Belgium, the Netherlands and France.
- The routes to more distant destinations such as Spain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

The railway companies set in place a rail system, port facilities and ferries to such effect that most of the network that was established exists to this day, a lasting testimony to those responsible for this development not least because these individuals, drawn from a variety of totally different industries, had to work *de novo*. Moreover, the railway companies achieved this even in the midst of substantial changes that by January 1923 had resulted in most of them merging or ceasing to exist, their numbers reduced to just four – the Great Western Railway, London Midland and Scottish Railway, London and North Eastern Railway and Southern Railway[35] - and by 1945 these were like condemned men, awaiting sentence. The Thirties, the Great Depression and then the years of war resulted in major under-investment in the railways and its related ferry sector for an entire generation. For example, there had been 93 cross-Channel ferries in 1939 but by 1945, having lost 35 ships during the war and with limited new construction, there were seventy ships with

[35]There were other companies, such as the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway which at the time of nationalisation had some 183 miles of track, its own locomotives and rolling stock and was run jointly by LMS and LNE. Its area of operation was between Norwich and Peterborough, which provided the links to the Midlands and to London. There seems to have been nineteen such joint companies in Britain and one in Northern Ireland. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_railway

an average age in excess of nineteen years. Such a situation bordered on the desperate; the companies simply did not have the necessary funding to undertake a long-term programme of investment and modernisation of rolling stock, rail facilities and shipping. Even the nationalisation of the railway companies on 1 January 1948 could not satisfy the need. The Transport Act of 1947 that set up, via the BTC, the state-owned organisation British Railways – renamed British Rail in 1965[36] - vested control and ownership of 19,639 miles of railway, 20,023 steam locomotives, 36,033 locomotive-hauled passenger vehicles, 4,184 electric multiple-unit vehicles, and 1,223,634 wagons (half of which had been compulsorily acquired from private owners) in this new organisation. While the relationship between the State and British Railways presented many problems, especially in the early years, the fundamental problem centred on the need for a long-term programme of major investment for both railways and ferries, seen in the context of major change in two industries that had been overshadowed by the Second World War and that would have a lasting impact on the ferry industry, namely the automobile and the aircraft industries, and their relation to public expectation and demand.

1.3 Post-War Conditions followed by Economic Growth and Rising Standards of Living

In the post-war period the problems confronting the ferry industry included a lack of financial resources, which called for the raising of funds for urgently-needed investment programmes, and the definition of the relationship between the rail and ferry sectors of the industry. Stringent foreign currency and customs and excise regulations had limited foreign travel and there was growing public expectation for what had previously been beyond the reach of most people in terms of home ownership, automobile ownership, foreign travel and the occasional luxury item. In the second half of the Fifties aspiration of travel and holidays grew – the "no-passport day excursion" was sanctioned by the Home Office in 1957 on certain ferry routes and was extended to air routes in 1959 by which time the continental coach tour holiday was in its (fast-growing) infancy. This combination of developments in effect broke the ferry service monopoly. Aircraft provided greater freedom of movement to

[36]The shorter term was introduced for the '*corporate identity*' campaign of the 1960s.

a variety of destinations while the emerging car industry offered the growing car-owning population a new-found level of mobility, independence and expectation. Thus the ferry industry was obliged to operate in a market that progressively became more dynamic and that was subject to increasing technological change and in two obvious matters, namely the switch from predominantly passenger ferries to those that transported drive-on, drive-off vehicles and the conversion of ships from steam power to diesel propulsion. And these changes, plus the challenge presented by new competitors in each of Britain's three major ferry sectors, went alongside the loss of mail revenues to the aircraft industry. This combined with constantly rising costs left the industry badly placed in terms of its ability to anticipate or respond to new developments. Inevitably, this was a very unbalanced state of affairs. The main area of change manifested itself on the cross-Channel routes, most obviously at Dover, which saw the arrival and subsequent growth in popularity of Townsend and the end of the rail-ferry monopoly. In other areas such as in the Irish Sea and the western Channel, the rail companies continued to hold regional- and route-monopolies and in these latter areas change was slower to manifest itself than on the major routes. But if the rail management, whether private or public, can be criticised in this aspect of its operations then one matter needs to be noted as an example of both management's imagination and problems – the development of the Golden Arrow and the Paris overnight train, the very epitome of luxury travel. The first Pullman express service between London and Dover had been instituted in May 1929. In 1931, and primarily as a result of competition from airlines, this service was extended to include second- and third-class travel and together with its French connection was re-introduced in April 1946 and was extensively modernised as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations in 1951. The electrification of the line in Kent followed in 1961 but such was the decline of rail travel in the course of the Sixties, as car ownership became commonplace, that the last Golden Arrow ran the route between London and Dover on 30 September 1972.[37]

The rail industry, both before and after 1948 was the butt of much criticism and humour, and most certainly it took criticism on the grounds that it was an inward-

[37]Henderson, R (1994) *Crossing the Channel*. Peterborough: Maritime Heritage.

looking closed order[38] that was subject to government interference. There is ample evidence to support the view that rail management, whether public or private, was very conservative in its thinking and practices, that it adhered to the tried and tested rather than risk innovation. This meant that the industry developed a safe, workable system, which included a very reliable ferry service with good-quality ships and impressive safety and sound time-keeping operational records. These qualities rendered the industry very predictable as far as competition was concerned and competition began to emerge, on a significant scale, in the Fifties at the very time when the railway industry, for the first time, moved into deficit. Railway companies and then British Railways operated at a profit until 1953 but even as early as this the rail and ferry services faced mounting difficulties, specifically with reference to the cross-Channel ferries and port facilities which, in short, by this stage belonged to a bygone age, a more leisured and sumptuous past.[39] The combination of narrow, pier berths and the need to get trains as close to the ships as possible in order to ensure ease of transfer imposed a pattern upon ports that in some places can still be seen to this day, but by the early Fifties the need to provide for lorries and for cars spelt a need for new terminals. Indeed when Dover opened its new Eastern Docks terminal in 1953 there was considerable criticism on the grounds that it was already too small to be able to service the shipping operated by Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Français (the French National Railway Company), Belgian Railways, Townsend and British Railways Southern Region, and for good measure a number of the vessels attracted criticism as ageing, obsolescent and in need of immediate replacement. The point of crucial relevance at this time was that as Britain as a nation slowly recovered from the effects of war, and the ferry industry tried to deal with the myriad problems that beset it, so roll-on, roll-off, the concept which enabled cars, vans, cars and caravans and motorbikes to be driven on and off ships by their owners, crept onto the stage with two immediate implications. Very few of the ferries then in service could adapt to the drive-on drive-off requirement. Most of the ferries were designed for foot passengers with hand luggage and more substantial loading was by crane while the need for much wider roadways, parking and terminals provided any number of

[38]Gerard Fiennes (7 June 1906-25 May 1985) was a famous British railway manager who rose through the ranks of the London and North Eastern Railway and later British Rail following graduation from Oxford University. He was famously fired from British Rail in 1967 for writing the book *I Tried to Run a Railway*, which was severely critical of the way in which the then Labour government interfered in the management of Britain's nationalised railways. The then-Transport Minister, Barbara Castle, was not amused and demanded Fiennes' removal.

[39]Greenway, A (1981a) *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*. London: Ian Allen.

problems, particularly in very small and restricted ports such as Holyhead, Fishguard, Folkestone and Dover. With respect to the latter port, British Railways' problems were compounded by the fact that it was obliged to pick up the cost for major reconstruction of terminal and berthing facilities that were to be used by a competitor. By this time competition had emerged in three separate areas in the form of Townsend on the cross-Channel routes, Thoresen on the Western Channel routes and Bustard[40] in the northwest, but the division of competition certainly provided a respite for British Railways. As a result of a convoluted and protracted process these three companies ultimately came together under the European Ferries banner[41]; had they been able to organise themselves earlier as a single competitor to the state-run monopoly it is quite possible that British Railways would have been very hard pressed to have maintained its primacy in the industry for as long as it did.

Increasing prosperity within Britain in the Fifties and Sixties meant that households with access to one car increased from 14% in 1951 to 45% in 1970 and this created unprecedented demand for cross-Channel travel. This period was also a troubled time for the ferry industry, which could not match the demand for space on ships resulting in delays, often hours and occasionally days, for travellers.[42] As it was the contrast between cross-Channel and other services, particularly those in the Irish Sea, was most marked, in part because the areas involved were less prosperous than across the Channel. In one matter relating to the Irish Sea, however, there was a double irony, and that was that the *Princess Victoria* foundered in one of the worst storms in living

[40]Lt. Col. Frank Bustard, who began his career with the transatlantic White Star Line and rose to become passenger traffic manager before leaving in 1934 to establish the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Ltd. (ASN), became a pioneer of RoRo transport through the charter of Landing Ship Tanks (LST's) from the British government operating a route network which developed to include Preston-Larne, Tilbury-Antwerp/Rotterdam and later Felixstowe-Rotterdam. In 1954 ASN was nationalised by the Labour government and ceded to the British Transport Commission (BTC). The company acquired its first purpose-built ships in 1957 and during the 1960s purchased a pier at Cairnryan on Loch Ryan for £60,000 from which it operated successfully. The European Ferries Group (EFG), holding company of Townsend Thoresen acquired ASN for £5.5 million in November 1971. The company under the management of Frank Bustard & Sons was also variously known as the Transport Ferry Service (TFS) and Continental Line. Frank Bustard retired in November 1956.

[41]European Ferries Ltd (European Ferries) was registered in 1935 as Monument Securities Ltd, a private company converted into a public company in 1949, ten years before the name was changed to George Nott Industries Ltd and subsequently to European Ferries Ltd in 1968 with an authorised capital of £3,250,000 and issued capital of £2,009,181. Monument Securities Ltd (as European Ferries Ltd then was) bought a 51% interest in Townsend Car Ferries Ltd (Townsend) in 1957 acquiring the balance of the capital of Townsend in 1959. Furthermore in 1968 European Ferries acquired Otto Thoresen Shipping Co followed in 1971 by the entire share capital of Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd. Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974 (ref:14C809004).

[42]The unshakable image, perhaps unfairly, was that of the cattle-boat with passengers crowded aboard ships that were ageing and were themselves (and the services they provided) increasingly the targets of denigrating comment. Some of Bucknall's comment were political; making comparisons with what was supposedly the standards of 1914, the comment that "*on every hand were seen and heard evidence of 'dirt, dishonesty, discourtesy and delay,' which beggared description*" placed responsibility for the state of the ferry industry on nationalisation, and perhaps predictably '*within Southern Region conditions were by far, and by very far, the best of all*,' clearly as a result of the intense competition on the routes worked by Southern Region. Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets.* p.153.

memory on 31 January 1953 with the loss of 133 of her 177 passengers and crew.[43] The subsequent enquiry concluded that the cause of the loss was the poor design of the doors.[44] The corollary is perhaps an interesting comment on the state of ferry service at this time and concern over the application of drive-on, drive-off on Irish Sea routes since the *Princess Victoria* was not replaced for six years. Almost a quarter of a century was to elapse before there was a comparable disaster, the 7,951-ton Townsend Thoresen ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* being lost off Zeebrugge on 6 March 1987 with the loss of 193 lives.

1.4 Major Developments and their impact on the Ferry Industry

Four major developments that affected the ferry industry were:

- The development and entry into service of the hovercraft. The first passenger-carrying hovercraft to enter service was the Vickers VA-3, which in the summer of 1962 carried passengers regularly along the North Wales Coast from Moreton, Merseyside to Rhyl. In the same year hovercraft worked the Isle of Wight routes, and in 1966 two Cross Channel passenger hovercraft services were inaugurated, one by the Swedish-owned Hoverlloyd which ran a service from Ramsgate Harbour (later Pegwell Bay) to Calais and British Rail subsidiary, Seaspeed, which also started a service from Dover to Calais.

- The British accession to the European Economic Community, subsequently the European Union, on 10 January 1972, effective 1 January 1973.

- Renewed interest in the construction of the Channel Tunnel. Work began on this project in 1974 but was abandoned because of the financial crisis that gripped Britain in the following year. With the

[43]The *Princess Victoria*, a 2,694-ton ferry launched in 1947 that worked the route between Stranraer and Larne, and arguably the first drive-on drive-off ferry, was lost as a result of her stern gates to the car deck being forced open by the sea causing water to rush into the ship and her cargo to shift; she listed, capsized and sank. Her sinking represented the greatest single loss of life in a series of hurricane-force storms that claimed 531 lives in Britain on 31 January-1 February 1953: Only 10 crewmembers and 34 passengers survived, all male. All the women and children on board were lost along with all the senior officers. Cameron, S (2002) *Death in the North Channel: The loss of the Princess Victoria January 1953.* Newtonards: Colourpoint Books.
[44]Available at: news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/31/newsid_2505000/2505913.stm

signing of the Canterbury Treaty on 12 February 1986 Britain and France were committed to the construction of the tunnel. The treaty was ratified in 1987 and work began that year. After seven years under construction the tunnel was officially opened on 6 May 1994. The shuttle train service, Le Shuttle, opened to lorries in May 1994 and to cars in December 1994. The tunnel's high-speed train service, Eurostar, linking London to Paris and Brussels opened in November 1994. The opening of the tunnel presented the ferry industry with what amounted to a poisoned chalice. Another thirteen years were to pass before a full express route from Dover to London was opened but the tunnel with its rail traffic clearly marking out an area in which primacy of operations was assured effectively reduced the ferry service to third place in the pecking order.

- The election to office in 1979 of a Conservative government that was committed to the privatisation of nationalised industries. British Rail's turn was to be one of the last and it was not until 1994-1996 that the state-owned organisation was stripped of assets and operations and the industry sold to a number of private companies. That was really the end of the process of dismantling the industry that in fact had begun in the early Eighties with British Rail being forced to sell many of its 'fringe' holdings including hotels and, for our purposes most significantly, the ferry services.[45]

In terms of the ferry industry this period was significant in two respects:

- The privatisation process went hand-in-hand with the inability of the Channel Tunnel to attract the traffic that had been expected with the

[45]British Railways had gathered the various railway ferries together under one subsidiary company and in 1968 an Act of Parliament separated the shipping interests from the rest of British Rail. The new organisation was named Sealink in 1970. This subsidiary was responsible for operating the ferry services that linked Britain with Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands and with the Channel Islands and Isle of Wight. The ports served by the company included Southampton, Newhaven, Folkestone, Dover and Harwich, which had the main continental links, Stranraer, Holyhead and Fishguard. These were the main ports for Ireland, and Weymouth, which was the main port for the Channel Islands. Sealink underwent a number of changes that reflected the industry's relative decline until all parts were incorporated within Sealink (United Kingdom) Limited in 1979 in preparation for denationalisation. It was this company that was sold by the Conservative administration to a Bermuda-registered company Sea Containers Limited in 1984. In 1990 the Swedish Stena Line completed a long difficult but ultimately successful take-over battle. The new company was named Stena Sealink until 1995 when the company renamed itself Stena Line.

result that the ferries, which could have been driven out of business by the Tunnel, survived.

- New low-cost airlines began to make fresh inroads on ferry traffic.

Fires and other accidents notwithstanding, the new high-speed rail services that were opened in November 2007 may yet redeem the fortunes of the Tunnel and railways at the expense of the ferries. But that, if indeed it proves to be the case, is another question....

1.5 Summary

This Introduction has placed before the reader an outline of the major events and developments that have shaped the ferry industry leading to and during the period 1948 to 1987. It has sought to integrate diverse events into a comprehensive chronological account of a hitherto neglected field of study. Proper examination of the developments in the second half of the twentieth century is provided in the chapters that together form the body of this thesis. When combined, these matters represent original research and examination. A number of topics lend themselves to such treatment, and the main ones that have been considered in these pages are:

1.5.1 The Commercial Context

The position of dominance that the railway companies secured for themselves, and subsequently for British Railways, on account of their having established, developed and then maintained major ferry routes from Great Britain to Ireland and mainland Europe. Post-war conditions followed by economic growth were major factors in these developments as well as the resultant rising standards of living which inevitably affected demand for passenger travel fuelled also by European integration which encouraged an increase in commercial trade with continental Europe in turn influencing the extended use of ferry services;

The nature and impact of competition primarily involving private companies during and after the Fifties as well as in the broader trading context the developments in transport modes including but not limited to the increase in motor transport, air transport and the fixed link;

The various political and economic changes in public policy with a movement first to nationalisation and later privatisation both of which impacted on the ferry industry. As a partial consequence the changes that were related to the decline of the rail-based ferry and the emergence of drive-on, drive-off services that, along with increased competitiveness in the movement of freight, resulted in a major expansion of ferry operations around the United Kingdom from the early Fifties.[46]

What might be described as factors external to the conventional ferry industry such as frequent attempts to build the Channel Tunnel and the advent and demise of the hovercraft, the British industrial management culture that reflected in business behaviour in the ferry sector, the changing role and influence of trade unions and the Anglo-Irish conflict that indirectly affected demand for cargo and passenger ferry services on the Irish Sea;

1.5.2 The Technological Context

From a technological perspective the inter-war and wartime legacy of underinvestment in fixed capital, the changing availability of investment funds over the period and the varying patterns of demand leading to new types of vessel design and the effects of the modal shift from foot passengers (rail) to vehicular traffic on terminal configuration; and the influence of ferry safety requirements on the industry and on vessel design following the two significant tragedies to which reference has been made in this introduction.

The forty years covered by the subsequent chapters was a period characterised by massive political and economic changes within the United Kingdom as well as issues associated with nationalisation and de-nationalisation, railway dominance in terms of

[46]Drive-on, drive-off facilities were installed in eastern docks Dover in 1953, but similar facilities on the Irish Sea were slow to follow apart from the freight-only Bustard services in the northern corridor.

passenger travel and the movement of freight and the subsequent influence of road-based transport that transformed the ferry industry. The emergence of independent companies, with the resultant competition was no less important, and these various changes represent the subjects that form the stepping stones along the path that is the history of the industry. Inevitably, however, there are matters that cannot be addressed in these pages, perhaps the most obvious being any consideration of duty-free status, which was a major source of income for the ferries until its eventual loss in July 1999.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will consist of the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction. The Introduction reviews the reasons for writing the thesis followed by the Literature Review and a brief overview of the content of the thesis.

Chapter 2: The British Economy and a Period of Transition 1948 – 1950. This chapter provides an assessment of a period of transition when viewed in the context of the state of the British economy and the immediate post-war years; and the nationalisation of the railways and the influence on the ferry sub-sector. Until the end of the Second World War the railway companies owned and operated the ferries and had been successful in developing an extensive service around the British Isles, although their position was not without challenge. The chapter considers the aftermath of war, which witnessed the railway companies with a depleted and outmoded fleet that was in need of investment for upgrade and replacement. The railway-based ownership of the ferry services, which were of secondary importance to the parent organisation, coupled with the aftermath of war-time losses, are properly considered in these pages.

Chapter 3: The Mapping of United Kingdom Dominated Ferry Services Operating in 1950. This chapter identifies the various Ferry Services operating during 1950 and reveals that it was railway-owned United Kingdom ferry services that were dominant during this time.

Chapter 4: Rail, Government and New Entrants 1951 – 1961. Chapter 4 provides an appraisal of the British owned railways and other largely private companies that were operating around the coast of the United Kingdom in the period from 1951 to 1961. Of specific note are post war issues such as the increased ownership and use of the automobile, the consequent advent of the drive-on, drive-off concept in Dover in 1953 and the attempts at re-organisation and replacement of the railway fleet. In addition to this was the relative prominence and competitive effects of Townsend's operation from Dover and Bustard's conversion of war-built landing craft[47] in what was to become a significant step in the progression of the Roll-on, Roll-off concept.

Chapter 5: The Growing Success of the Car Ferry Concept 1962 – 1972. Chapter 5 reviews the period 1962 to 1972 during which time the resurrection of plans to construct a Channel Tunnel occurred. Despite this potential threat to the ferry companies, this period witnesses the fulfilment of Townsend's ambitious plans to construct new and largely more appropriate vessels for their Dover-based services and British Railways' move in tandem with Swedish Lloyd (Hoverlloyd) to introduce the new and untried hovercraft concept on Channel routes. In addition, developments on the Irish Sea included the privatisation of the Irish government-run B&I Line, whilst on the western Channel the emergence of Thoresen and its ultimate takeover by Townsend,[48] formed a significant alliance that was to cause British Railways to take the strategic importance of their services and the gradual yet unstoppable change of emphasis from foot passenger to wheeled traffic more seriously.

Chapter 6: Economic change, Innovation, Growth and Acquisition, Disaster and a Fixed Link. This chapter focuses on the ferry industry between 1973 and 1987, a period of massive upheaval and change in the industry, as indeed it was for the country. A case study considers the hovercraft's potential to challenge conventional ferry tonnage and in particular Hoverlloyd's position and its direct competitor, Seaspeed. The British Government's decision not to proceed with the Channel Tunnel project enabled the ferry industry to develop more rapidly despite the British Rail administration losing ground against aggressive marketing and the decisive actions of

[47]LCT's (Landing Craft Tank)

[48]Townsend operated from Dover to Calais and Zeebrugge and was owned by George Nott Industries Ltd of Coventry. In July 1968 the company made an offer for the shares of Thoresen which was accepted and in 1969 the two entities produced a joint brochure under the name of The European Ferries Group even though to outward appearances the ships did not change. Available at: http://www.merchantnavy officers.com.

competitors. The growth in traffic volumes and inevitable signs of jostling for position evidenced by the European Ferries Group acquisition of relative newcomer P&O Normandy Ferries (1985) and the more significant privatisation of Sealink (1984), both events dampening profitability through the advent of increased competition and a price war. Exceptional Channel traffic buoyancy in all market segments was punctuated by the tragic loss of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* in 1987, the industry at large ending up somewhat stained by the so-called '*disease of sloppiness'*[49]. The chapter highlights the renewed work on the Channel Tunnel and its opening to traffic, the co-operation and in certain cases consolidation of routes and operators in an attempt to compete more effectively, the significant loss of duty-free retailing in June 1999 and the ultimate demise of Olau Line and Sally Line. The chapter also considers the technological aspects that were prevalent in the period including the introduction of new stability regulations following the loss of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* culminating in the so-called Stockholm Agreement and the way in which the market embraced the RoPax vessel design, a hybrid version of the conventional ferry able to accommodate more vehicular traffic thus catering for the swing of emphasis from passenger-based traffic to freight.

Chapter 7: Conclusion. The conclusion focuses upon the propensity or otherwise of the railway management towards risk and the resultant influence that their action or inaction had upon the development of the industry and their own dominant position given the arrival on the scene of private companies and competition that wrought fundamental changes in the industry. Conclusion will also be drawn on the evolution of the fleet and terminals that were faced with a radical change in emphasis that moved the industry from rail foot passenger to car-based traffic and from lift-on, lift-off passenger cars and freight to roll-on, roll-off, drive-through vessel technology.

Such are the matters with which this thesis will concern itself. This is the account of the shaping of the ferry industry, the changes and problems that emerged at different times to mould an industry that had existed for a century. These changes were diverse and numerous and each and every one is worthy of full and proper consideration in its own right, and no doubt future students will afford them such treatment and, in setting

[49]BBC. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/8/newsid_2626000/2626265.stm

out these accounts and their conclusions, force revision of this thesis. But that is a matter for the future, and it is with the formation of the industry and its development that *The Commercial & Technical Evolution of the Ferry Industry 1948-1987* now concerns itself.

Chapter 2:
The British Economy and a Period of Transition 1948-1950

2.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the starting point of the thesis in that it describes the political, economic, commercial and technical operation of ferry services linking the United Kingdom with mainland Europe, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man during the year 1950. It sets out the background to the process whereby much of the ferry industry came into public ownership and then reviews the organisation and structure of the industry and certain of the challenges and problems it faced at this time.

Where one starts this examination of subjects that defy easy and ready definition is a matter of personal persuasion, but as obvious and as relevant a matter as the election of a Labour government in July 1945 is difficult to dispute, the point being that the Second World War, in terms of the role of an interventionalist state and the determination to address and defeat the pre-war scourges of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness, unleashed forces of unprecedented change, witness the first Labour government to command a majority in the House of Commons.

The Labour government came to power with commitment to take into public ownership various industries, most obviously electricity, gas, coal and steel. In addition, the Labour government was committed to the nationalisation of the railways which, by an accident of historical development, included within themselves the greater part of the British ferry industry. Prior to nationalisation there were four large railway companies, each dominating its own distinct geographic area: these were the Great Western Railway (GWR), the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), The London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) and Southern Railway (SR).[50] In the

[50]The mission of the British Transport Commission was interpreted as follows: *'For efficiency, the system must be reliable, speedy and safe; for adequacy, it must eventually provide in some form (but not necessarily every form) in every place sufficient means of conveyance to cover peak loads, seasonal demands and special occasions; and for economy it must offer the maximum of service that can be provided from its share of the national resources and labour and materials the lowest cost which is compatible with reasonable conditions of employment and with the duty of the Commission to meet all their costs, including depreciation and the amortisation of capital.'* Danielson, R (2007) *Railway Ships & Packet Ports*; Twelveheads Press; Truro, Cornwall. P.16.

immediate aftermath of the Second World War these companies, individually and collectively, were in effect bankrupt, and nationalisation in the form of the 1947 Transport Act largely relieved the industry of a well-nigh impossible financial burden. British Railways came into existence as the business name of the Railway Executive of the British Transport Commission (BTC) on 1 January 1948 when it took over the assets of the Big Four. Although British Railways was a single entity it was divided into six, later reduced to five, regional authorities.[51]

Given Britain's fragile economic state in this period it was not possible for the Labour government to purchase the Railway companies outright. Accordingly it was decided to compensate the shareholders of the private companies over the period of time with guaranteed fixed interest payments, paid from British Railways' income.[52] The government based the level of this compensation on the value of the railway companies in 1946, a time when the various companies were doing well because of the large amount of wartime traffic still being carried. Given the run-down state of the railway network, however, the level of compensation represented over-payment, British Railways being saddled with unnecessarily high debt repayments which in later years would cripple its finances and investment programmes.[53]

British Railways thus was caught with not one but two major problems: the raising of capital to pay off the cost of nationalisation went alongside the need for major re-investment programmes to make good more than a decade of chronic under-investment in all areas of activity. This included the ferry sector and for one reason. The Labour government's nationalisation programmes did not include shipping but the railway industry was the major ferry operator and the railway companies' assets which passed into public ownership included its shipping.[54] In this way a part, but not the whole, of Britain's ferry industry became state-owned.[55]

---

[51]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways,* p.1.
[52]This was to be achieved primarily by means of fare and rate adjustments. Gourvish, T. R (1986) *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.17-18.
[53]Gourvish, *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73*, pp.17-18.
[54]Chester, *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-1951,* pp.262-274.
[55]Labour's 1950 Manifesto expressed it, '*Britain's public transport system, as road and rail services are increasingly unified, will bring an ever better service to industry and passengers*'. The 1950 Labour Party Election Manifesto was entitled: *Let Us Win Through Together: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation*. Labour Party (2008) Available at: http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1950/1950-labour-manifesto.shtml
(Accessed 31 December 2004)
Political Science Resources (2010) Available at: http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/area/uk/man/lab50.htm (Accessed 2 October 2010)

There were a number of ferry companies that had been and which remained outside the railway network, and, of course, British Railways ferry service necessarily worked with its French, Belgian and Dutch counterparts.[56] For the most part the companies outside the railway net worked the Irish Sea and North Sea, the operators and routes they served in 1950 being as follows:

[56]Although it would not be until 1970 that the relationship would be more formally branded Sealink, there was nevertheless a strong and mutually beneficial relationship between British Railways and its overseas neighbours, the French Chemins de Fer de l'Etat, the Belgian Regie voor Maritiem Transport (RMT) and the Zeeland Steamship Company: Stoomvaart Maatschappij "Zeeland" (SMZ), rail operators connected by a network of vessels that plied the English and Western Channel and the North Sea with rail passengers accessing the United Kingdom and mainland Europe.

Table 2.1 Routes by destination and operator

Route			
From	**To**	**Owner/operator**	**Remarks**
Dover	Ostend	Regie voor Maritiem Transport (RMT)	The Belgian state-owned ferry service operating on the Ostend-Dover route under the name Oostende Lines until its demise after 151 years in February 1997. The company moved its UK operation from Dover to Ramsgate in the early nineties in an attempt to combat the opening in 1994 of the Channel Tunnel.
Dover	Dunkerque	British Railways (Southern Railway)	Established in 1923, the Southern Railway (SR) was a British railway company grouping that linked London with the English Channel ports, Kent and the South West of England. Formed as the amalgamation of several smaller railway companies, the largest of which was the London & South Western Railway (LSWR), the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSC), and the South Eastern and Chatham Railway (SECR), the construction of what was to become the Southern Railway began in 1838 with the opening of the London and Southampton Railway. The services commenced in 1853 as the South Eastern Railway, then became the London, Chatham & Dover Railway in 1864, South Eastern & Chatham Railway in 1899 and Southern Railway in 1923 until its takeover by BTC in 1948.
Dover	Calais	British Railways (Southern Railway)	
Dover	Boulogne	British Railways (Southern Railway)	
Folkestone	Calais	British Railways (Southern Railway)	
Folkestone	Boulogne	British Railways (Southern Railway)	
Dover	Calais	Townsend Brothers	Established in 1929, Townsend Brothers Ferries commenced the first cross channel accompanied car service between Dover and Calais in 1930. The company's first vessel was a converted minesweeper, the *Forde* from 1930 to 1949, replaced by a converted frigate, the *Halladale* which was superseded by their first purpose built roll-on, roll-off passenger and vehicle ferry which entered service in 1962.
Newhaven	Dieppe	SNCF (Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest)	Established in May 1878, the company subsumed more than ten small failing railway companies operating between the rivers Loire and Garonne. The État absorbed the Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest in 1908 and in 1934 took over the Paris-Orléans company's lines in southern Brittany and at one stage its operating area stretched all of the territory west of a line extending from Dieppe via Paris to Bordeaux. The État merged with all the other railway companies in France in 1938 to form the Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Français (SNCF), becoming that company's Région Ouest. In a strange arrangement, the service was joint, 37/56ths by the French and 19/56ths by Southern Region at nationalisation.[57]

[57]The division was based on the length of the rail journey from the ports to the respective capitals. Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries,* p.57.

Southampton	Le Havre, Channel Islands & St Malo	British Railways (Southern Railway)	The London & South Western Railway was established in 1862 and became Southern Railway in 1923, a name that it maintained until nationalisation in 1948. LSWR is famed for being the first company to replace paddle propulsion with the screw.
Weymouth	Channel Islands	British Railways (Great Western Railway)	GWR obtained Parliamentary permission to operate its own steamers although it was not until 1889 that the company decided to run a service from Weymouth to the Channel Islands. In order to facilitate this move GWR took over the Weymouth & Channel Islands Steam Packet Company at the same time as ordering two new twin screw vessels.[58]
Fishguard	Cork, Waterford & Rosslare	British Railways (Great Western Railway)	
Holyhead	Dun Laoghaire & Greenore	British Railways (London, Midland & Scottish)	The London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), the largest of the Big Four railway companies, was the only one to operate in all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, representing a grouping of over 120 separate railway companies into just four which made the integrated business unwieldy. It was also the largest commercial undertaking in the British Empire and the United Kingdom's second largest employer, after the Post Office.
Liverpool	Douglas	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company	The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company is the oldest continuously operating passenger shipping company in the world, celebrating its 180th anniversary in 2010. The company provides freight, passenger and vehicle services between the Isle of Man Sea Terminal, in Douglas, Isle of Man and five ports in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.
Liverpool	Dun Laoghaire & Belfast	British & Irish Steam Packet Company (B&I Line)	The British and Irish Steam Packet Company operated between ports in Ireland and Great Britain between 1836 and 1992. In later years it was popularly known as the B&I, and branded as B + I line.
Preston	Larne	Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (ASN)	Incorporated in 1936, the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company was set up to operate a moderately priced trans-Atlantic passenger service; because of the advent of the Second World War this plan did not come to fruition, and instead a freight only roll-on, roll-off service began between Tilbury and Rotterdam In 1946 using converted tank carriers (LCT).
Fleetwood	Douglas	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company	A number of different shipping companies served the Isle of Man prior to IOMSPC being formed in 1830 and due largely to unreliability the islanders demanded their own service resulting in the creation on 30 June 1830 of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company when the newly acquired *Mona's Isle*, built at a cost of £7,250, sailed on its first crossing from Douglas to Liverpool. During the Second World War, 11 out of a total 15 IOMSPC ships were requisitioned by the Admiralty and four were lost in enemy action. IOMSPC holds the distinction of being the oldest passenger shipping company in the world.
Heysham	Belfast	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company	

[58] Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries,* p.109.

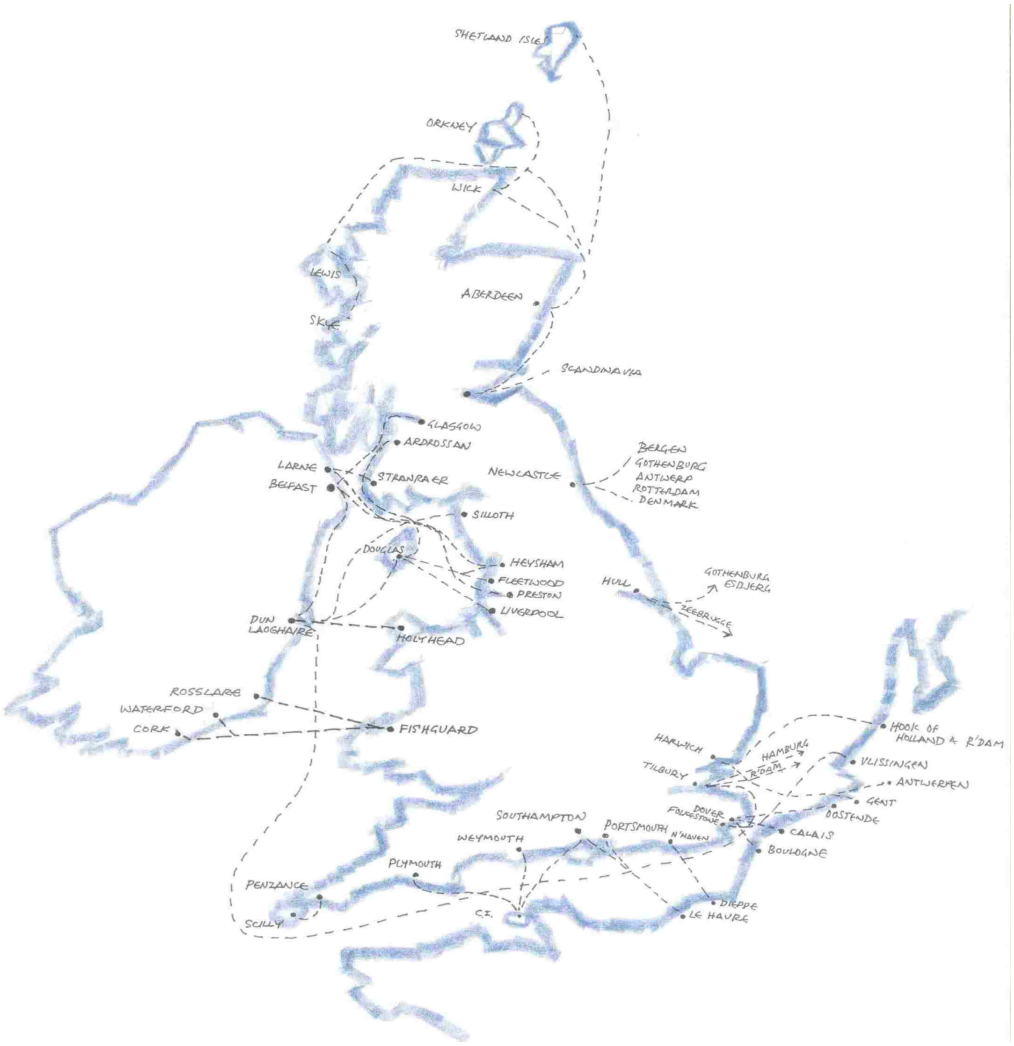
Heysham	Belfast	British Railways (London, Midland & Scottish)	See entry under Holyhead above.
Stranraer	Larne	British Railways (London, Midland & Scottish)	
Ardrossan	Douglas	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company	See entry under Liverpool above.
Glasgow	Dublin	Coast Lines	Formed in 1913 from the merger of three Liverpool coaster companies, Coast Lines grew to become the largest coastal shipping company in the world. The company was principally based around and dominated West Coast of Britain until post war expansion took the operating region further afield. The company strayed into the ferry sector running a number of the Irish Seas ferry routes and was second only to the then powerful railway companies.
Leith	Hamburg, Copenhagen & Kristiansand	Currie Line	Created in 1836 as the Hull & Leith Steam Packet Company, it became Currie Line in 1913 as a result of the merger of three Liverpool based companies and was a subsidiary of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Group from 1917 becoming independent again in 1930 when the Royal Mail group broke up. The business declined post war and was purchased by the Anchor Line in 1969.
Leith & Grangemouth	Antwerp & Rotterdam	George Gibson & Co., Ltd	Established in 1797, the company absorbed Rankine Ltd., in 1920 and became Gibson Rankine Line. The company is still in existence as ship's agents based in Edinburgh.
Newcastle	Bergen	Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab - Bergen Steamship or Bergen Line	The Bergen Steamship Company or Bergenske Dampskibsselskab (BDS), was founded in 1851 to operate a shipping service between the Norwegian ports of Bergen, Stavanger, and Kristiansand and the German port of Hamburg, cruise liners having been added to the fleet from 1921 until 1971 when Bergen Steamship partnered with Nordenfjeldske Dampskibsselskab in setting up the Royal Viking Line. In 1931 under the name Bergen Line the company operated between Newcastle, Bergen and Stavanger, services that continued after 1984 when the company was taken over by Kosmos Line. The company was sold again in 1988 and lost its original identity.
Newcastle, Hull, Grimsby & London	Copenhagen, Esbjerg, Antwerp & Dunkerque	DFDS: Det Forenede Dampskibsselskab A/S / (The United Steamship Company)	Det Forenede Dampskibs-Selskab was formed in 1866 as a merger of various minor shipping companies that operated fifteen small steamers. The company's main routes were from Denmark to Norway and the United Kingdom, with ships carrying both freight and passengers. As the company grew, new connections were opened to Sweden, Iceland, France, the Mediterranean and Black Sea, as well as further afield to North and South America.
Newcastle	Oslo	Fred Olsen	Formed in 1886, the Fred. Olsen Lines fleet was scattered when Norway was attacked 9 April 1940 and by the end of the conflict 28 ships had been lost representing half of

			the fleet. After the war active fleet reconstruction period followed. Newbuildings were added to the North Sea fleet complete with fully mechanised handling for palletised general cargo by means of side ports and the so-called "truck to truck" system as well as conventional deck cranes and heavy-lift derricks. This was followed in the seventies by the introduction of roll-on, roll-off vessels which increased productivity still further.
Newcastle	Bergen & Trondheim	Det Nordenfjeldske Dampskibsselskab	Established in 1857 the company ceased passenger operations in October 1921 in order to concentrate on cargo services and its Coastal Express service. Also known as Northern Steamship Company.
Newcastle	Hamburg & Rotterdam	Tyne Tees Steam Shipping Company	The company was established in 1864 as the Tyne Steam Shipping Company.
Goole	Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Copenhagen & Bremen	Associated Humber Lines	The Associated Humber Lines were formed in 1935 to manage the fleets of Goole Steam Shipping Company, Hull & Netherlands Steam Ship Company, London & North Eastern Railway (Great Central section), London Midland & Scottish Railway (Goole services) and Wilson's & NER Shipping Company (Wilson Line). In this way the Humber shipping interests of the LMS and LNER were combined into Associated Humber Lines in 1935.
Hull	Amsterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Antwerp Rotterdam Esbjerg & Zeebrugge	Associated Humber Lines	
Hull	Trondheim, Bergen, Oslo, Gothenburg & Hamburg	Ellerman's Wilson Line	Established in 1822 as Beckington, Wilson & Company, later becoming Wilson, Hudson & Company, Thomas Wilson & Company and Thomas Wilson Sons & Company. The company ceased operation in 1973.
Grimsby	Hamburg, Antwerp & Rotterdam	Associated Humber Lines	See entry under Goole & Hull above.
Harwich	Hook van Holland	British Railways (London & North Eastern)	Dating from 1862, the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) was the second-largest of the "Big Four" railway companies created by the Railways Act 1921. LNER existed from 1 January 1923 until nationalisation in 1948, when it was divided between the new British Railways' Eastern Region, North Eastern Region and the Scottish Region. It is slightly ironical that on privatisation of British Rail in 1996, the franchise to run long distance express trains on the East Coast Main Line was won by Sea Containers Ltd, who had taken over Sealink in 1984. Sea Containers renamed the service Great North Eastern Railway (GNER).
Harwich	Hook van Holland	Zeeland Steamship Company: Stoomvaart Maatschappij "Zeeland" (SMZ)	A service said to have been encouraged by Prins Hendrik of the Netherlands, the company was formed in June 1875 with a service linking Flushing (Vlissingen) with Sheerness. In 1927, following agreement with LNER, the UK terminal was moved to Harwich. During the war the Flushing terminal was destroyed and post war night services were established

			from the Hook of Holland. In 1949 daytime services were established from Folkestone to Flushing but ceased three years later.
Harwich & Tilbury	Antwerp, Hamburg & Rotterdam	Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (ASN)	See entry under Preston above.
Harwich	Ghent	British Railways (London & North Eastern)	See entry under Harwich above.
Harwich	Zeebrugge	British Railways (London & North Eastern)	
Tilbury & Folkestone	Dunkerque	Société Anonyme de Navigation	Also known as 'Angleterre-Lorraine-Alsace' or ALA, the company was formed in 1927.
Tilbury, Harwich & Granton	Gothenburg	Fornyade Angfartygs Aktiebolaget: Swedish Lloyd or Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd	Swedish Lloyd dates back to 1869, although it was not until the company purchased Thule Line in 1916 that it entered the North Sea passenger market. The quality turbine powered ferries, the *Britannia* and *Suecia* were delivered in 1929 for the London service, maintaining the route until 1966 despite the addition of two new diesel ferries, the equally impressive *Patricia* and *Saga* that were delivered after the war. Designed for summer service between Gothenburg-London only, the vessels were designed to undertake cruising in the winter.
London	Rotterdam	Batavier Line	The company was originally formed in 1823 as the Netherlands Steamship Company.
London & Harwich	Hamburg	General Steam Navigation Company (GSNC)	Established in 1824, GSNC had the distinction of being the oldest company in the P&O Group, lasting until its demise in 1972.
London & Hull	Bremen & Hamburg	Argo Reederei	Also known as Richard Adler AG, or Adler & Sohnen the company was started in 1857 as Norddeutscher Lloyd AG.
London & Hull	Amsterdam	Hollandsche Stoomboot Maatschappij	Formed in 1885 with the express purpose of running a shipping service between Amsterdam & London. Passenger carriage was intermittent between the wars and ceased after the war. The company ceased trading in 1974.

Source: Cowsill, M and Hendy, J (1999) *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*. Narberth: Ferry Publications. pp.13-28, 30-55, 62-85 & 140-150.; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*. pp.147,152 & 153-159; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*. pp.7,28,52,57,84 & 109; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships.* pp.7-8; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*; The National Archives, *NRA 20946 Archives of Ellerman's Wilson Line (1825-1972) Ellerman's; 1914-1972: minutes, correspondence, memoranda, war losses records, new ship specifications*; *GB/NNAF/C103256.*

Figure 2.1 Map of United Kingdom based ferry services in 1950 depicting the primary activity in the short sea, western Channel and Irish Sea



Source: Ossie Jones

As part of its plan to create a comprehensive publicly-owned transport system the Labour government nationalised not just the railways with their attendant ferries and hotels but ports, canals, bus services and lastly, and against considerable opposition, the road haulage industry. The latter was to be denationalised after the Conservative victory at the general election of October 1951, but in the period 1948-1950 the significance of shipping and ferry earnings to the overall state of BTC finances can be

gauged by reference to the operating margins of the various networks in public ownership:[59]

Table 2.2 Operating Margins of BTC businesses 1948-1950

Activity	1948	1949	1950
Carrying	£m	£m	£m
British Railways Passenger & Freight	26.3	12.7	26.3
British Railways C&D Road[60]	-3.9	-3.7	-2.8
British Road Services (BRS) Road	1.1	1.4	-1.1
Provincial & Scottish bus	4.2	4.3	3.4
London Transport (Road)	4.3	2.9	1.1
London Transport (Rail)	1.5	0.8	0.7
Ships	7.4	3.1	2.9
Canals	-0.6	-0.1	-0.1
Other			
Ports	-1.3	-0.8	-0.1
Refreshment Rooms	0.4	0.3	0.2
Hotels	0.1	0.0	-0.2
Commercial Advertising	2.2	2.3	2.1
Restaurant Cars	-0.1	-0.5	-0.6
Canals: (tolls etc)	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2
Letting of Property etc	1.0	1.2	1.3

Source: Bonavia [61]

Shipping and ferry turnover and earnings in this period slipped from a very strong second place behind British Railways' passenger and freight services to a third place not greatly superior to commercial advertising, but the importance of these developments lay in the fact that in the tradition of the pre-nationalised railway companies shipping was deemed to be an extension of the railway network and not a business in its own right. Whether this view had an adverse impact on the development of British Railways' ferry interests will be the subject of examination

[59]In 1951 Attlee's government was faltering, and the Conservatives under the leadership of Winston Churchill gained power. Road haulage, iron and steel were promptly denationalised by the new government but the remaining nationalised sectors were left untouched, a strategy which was to be known as the *'post war settlement'*. Hugh Gaitskell became leader of the Labour party spending the next decade in opposition, preoccupied by the direction that the party should adopt. The highly regulated Railways and buses were left under the control of the BTC, but the Labour ideal of an integrated transport system was dead. Bonavia, *The Nationalisation of British Transport; The Early History of the British Transport Commission 1948-1953,* pp.97&134.

[60]*Railway owned trunk road haulage, consisting of Hays Wharf, Carter Paterson and Pickfords, was transferred to British Road Services (BRS) on the day of nationalisation. Road hauliers in the new guise of BRS did not 'take on Collection & Delivery for British Railways in 1953.' In excess of 12,000 C&D vehicles were passed to British Railways in 1948, retaining control until 1968 when NCL (National Carriers Limited) was created to take over the road freight interests of British Railways and BRS. As an aside, British Railways also inherited 8,793 horses from privately owned railways, of which 97% were involved in town C&D plus 238 shunting wagons in small goods depots. Vaughan, A (2003) Railway Blunders. London: Ian Allen. P.60. Many businesses used horse drawn vehicles in the 1940s & early 1950s.* BTC Accounts, 1948, Table VII-7. *Wolmar, C (2004) On the wrong line. London: Aurum Press.*

[61]Bonavia, *The Nationalisation of British Transport; The Early History of the British Transport Commission 1948-1953*, p148. See also: Gourvish, *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73*.

later in this thesis but it did mean that vessels belonging to British Railways occupied a somewhat different position from those owned by private steamship companies. In the case of the latter the fleets were the principal assets whereas with British Railways the fleets were classified under the heading "ancillary business." Undoubtedly this was one factor that accounted for difference in management and strategy between the public and private sectors of the British ferry industry.

Other matters served to accentuate difference between the two parts of the British ferry industry and probably chief among these was the fact that the status of the ferry service within British Railways meant that the ferries themselves were primarily passenger vessels whereas the private operators were increasingly committed to vehicular traffic. Moreover, the latter were not saddled with the responsibilities that inflicted themselves on British Railways, the most obvious of which was the legacy of deferred maintenance for rolling stock and infrastructure that was largely attributable to the demands of war and pre-war neglect.[62] In the immediate post-war period most of the money expended on the railways was spent on clearing the enormous maintenance backlog inherited from the war, following which there was little left over for modernisation.[63] This combination was to have a result that was elusive, but by the start of the 1950s Britain had fallen well behind the rest of Europe in terms of replacing steam locomotives with diesel power and the electrification of the rail network: the widespread destruction of the Second World War made it easier to effect change, and the French, who had seen some 90% of their rail system destroyed during the war, were in the process of putting in place a rail system considerably superior to that of the British. As it was, for the British there was genuine incentive to avoid modernisation because such a course would have meant reduced demand for coal which, given the virtual collapse of the coal export trade and the much reduced demand for coal on the part of British merchant shipping, could only have serious political and economic consequences. In addition to these matters, the bureaucratic committee structure of the BTC and British Railways did not help matters as it slowed

[62]At the time of nationalisation, the Railway rolling stock and infrastructure were suffering acutely from an acute lack of maintenance, something that was not only attributable to the war years and pre-war neglect. Bonavia, *The Nationalisation of British Transport; The Early History of the British Transport Commission 1948-1953*, p.83.

[63]The United Kingdom economy failed to realise its full potential in the post-war period because of a combination of market and government failures which had adverse effects on investment, innovation and policy-making. The country's industrial policy focused on excessive interventionism such as nationalisation rather than improving the competitive environment, but in addition, a lack of competition in the labour market and the state of industrial relations were key weaknesses in the economy. Kitson, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*; Volume III *Structural Change and Growth*, 1939-2000, p.44.

the decision-making process and with it progress toward modernisation to a crawl.[64] Again, this is part of the context within which the ferry sector of British Railways operated.[65]

Overall the Railway-owned ferries and their associated companies constituted the largest combined fleet of vessels serving the most important and voluminous passenger corridors around the coast. In 1950 these owned 73 vessels of 144,642 tons compared to the 33 vessels of 118,682 tons owned by other operators.

Table 2.3 shows the service operated by British Railways, their carrying capability and crossing times on a route basis as these existed in 1950. The services were comprehensive and well planned to provide the most convenient means of linking ports and railway centres on both sides of the respective divide. Capacity and service frequency were largely tailored to demand and were seasonal in nature, allowing for vessels to be laid up and well maintained over the winter period.

[64]Despite this it was the policy of the BTC, which dominated ferry services in the post-war period around the United Kingdom coast to expand the reach of the Railway network into mainland Europe and Ireland forming trading relationships with other foreign rail and sometimes shipping service providers. In this way the rail '*offer*' was truly trans-national, a feature that helped to maintain the competitive position for longer than might otherwise have been the case. The Victorian railway companies saw the sea crossings as extensions to the railway lines that were associated with many of the earliest regular short sea crossings: Cowsill, M and Hendy, J (1992) *Sealink Stena Line – The Fleet*, Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. pp.2-3.
[65]Chester, *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-1951*, pp.610-613.

Table 2.3 Services operated by British Railways 1950

Service	Traffic	Frequency	Crossing time
Dover-Calais 'Golden Arrow'	Passengers	Daily throughout the year	1 hour 20 mins
Dover-Boulogne	Passengers & Cars	Daily during summer	1 hour 45 mins
Folkestone-Calais	Passengers	Daily throughout the year	1 hour 30 mins
Folkestone-Calais	Cargo	Three times weekly	Variable
Folkestone-Calais	Passengers & Cars	Daily during summer	1 hour 30 mins
Folkestone-Boulogne	Passengers	Daily during summer	1 hour 30 mins
Folkestone-Boulogne	Cargo	Three times weekly	Variable
Dover-Dunkerque Train Ferry – Night	Sleeping Cars & freight wagons	Daily throughout the year	4 hours
Dover-Dunkerque Train Ferry – Day	Passengers & freight wagons	Daily throughout the year	4 hours
Newhaven-Dieppe	Passengers & cargo	Daily throughout the year. Additional sailings in summer	3 hours 30 mins
Newhaven-Dieppe	Motor cars & cargo	Weekdays during summer. Thrice weekly during winter	3 hours 30 mins
Southampton-Le Havre	Passengers & cargo	Three times weekly in summer. Once weekly in winter	7 hours
Southampton-Le Havre	Cargo	As required	Variable
Southampton-St Malo	Passengers & cargo	Twice weekly during summer	9 hours
Southampton-St Malo	Cargo	As required	9 hours
Southampton-Guernsey & Jersey	Passengers & cargo	Daily during summer. Thrice weekly during winter	Variable
Southampton-Guernsey & Jersey	Cargo	As required	Variable
Weymouth-Guernsey & Jersey	Passengers & cargo	Daily during summer. Thrice weekly during winter	Variable
Weymouth-Guernsey & Jersey	Cargo	As required	Variable
Heysham-Belfast	Passengers & cargo	Daily during summer. Thrice weekly during winter	7 hours 30 mins
Heysham-Belfast	Cargo	As required	Variable
Holyhead-Kingstown	Passengers & cargo	Nightly throughout the year. Additional daily sailings during summer	3 hours 15 mins

Holyhead-Dublin-Greenore	Cargo & livestock	As required	Variable
Stranraer-Larne	Passengers & cargo	Daily service except Saturdays during winter	2 hours 15 mins
Fishguard-Rosslare	Passengers & cargo	Daily in summer and thrice weekly in winter	3 hours 15 mins
Fishguard-Waterford	Passengers, cargo & livestock	Three times weekly	8 hours
Harwich-Hook of Holland	Passengers & cargo	Daily except Sundays	8 hours
Harwich-Antwerp	Passengers & cargo	Three times weekly	14 hours 30 mins
Harwich-Rotterdam	Cargo	Twice weekly	Variable
Harwich-Zeebrugge Train Ferry	Freight wagons	Regular sailings throughout the year	Variable
Humber-Continent	Passengers & cargo	Regular sailings between Hull/Goole & Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, Copenhagen, Dunkerque, Ghent, Hamburg & Rotterdam	Variable

Source: The National Archives [66]

As Table 2.3 indicates, 1950 British Railways ferry operations were largely limited to liner services, capable of handling cargo and motor vehicles via lift-on lift off (Lo Lo) methods, but primarily geared to carry passengers on major routes.[67] The ferries operated services as an extension of the railways, and indeed the passenger certification of individual ferries was often directly related to the carrying capacity of the relevant rail service.[68] In general the ferries were fast and commodious with accommodation that often stretched to more than a single class of cabin. There was at this time some limited car carrying capacity though car shipments on English Channel routes had increased from 31,922 in 1937 to 37,955 in 1947 and to 44,636 in 1948 while by 1950 the total number of all types of motor vehicles shipped was approaching the 100,000 mark.[69] With post-war recovery, lifestyles underwent radical changes: cars became affordable, new roads were built. The desire and ability to travel fuelled by the advent of the car and increased earnings became more prominent and accessible after the war, people being unable to move around freely during the war

[66]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.(ii).
[67]Lift-on, Lift-off or LoLo refers to the loading and discharging operations of a vessel that are carried out by cranes and derricks.
[68]Multiple unit trains are formed into "units" or "sets" of two or more each with a capacity of 700 passengers and hence a number of vessels had a passenger certificate sufficient to carry two trains i.e. 1,400 passengers.
[69]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, Jan 1949-June 1953. Memorandum from the Chief Secretary's office of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; p.8. Source: Dover Harbour Board. Danielson, *Railway Ships & Packet Ports*, Introduction.

and its immediate aftermath. Consumer products were also in greater demand placing a mixture of strain and opportunity on the country's transport and distribution infrastructure. As an extension of the railway system within the United Kingdom the ferries provided a comprehensive network which facilitated travel between Britain, Ireland and mainland Europe, linking as it did with rail facilities abroad.

But the British Railways ferry service, even though its facilities were in demand, was necessarily beset by two problems, namely the recovery from wartime losses and the process of rationalisation that had started two years previously. More than a third of the railways' fleet had been lost during the war. In an internal memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive, Sir Eustace Missenden[70] to the BTC in January 1949 information was provided as support for what was seen as the requirements of the next five years:

> *'Serious wastage in the fleets of the various railways has taken place since 1939, due mainly to war casualties, and this has only partially been made good. Briefly the position is as follows*:

Table 2.4 Wartime vessel casualties

Tonnage Analysis	Cross-Channel Ships	Coastal Waters & Lakes
Number of ships in 1939	93	71
War loss & disposal	35	16
New vessels added	12	6
In service 1948	70	61

Source: The National Archives [71]

> *The second factor to be taken in account is obsolescence. The age of many vessels in the fleet is considerably in excess of 25 years which has hitherto been regarded as the normal life of a cross-Channel ship*.'

[70]Sir Eustace Missenden (1886-1973) was the last General Manager of Southern Railways and the first to become Chairman of the Railway Executive.
[71]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, Jan 1949-June 1953. Memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; 14 January 1949; p.3.

Table 2.5 Average vessel age[72]

Average Age	Cross-Channel Ships	Coastal Waters & Lakes
1939	15.7 years	19.5 years
1948	19.0 years	24.0 years

Source: The National Archives [73]

In addition to losing 38% of the combined cross-Channel fleet during the war, those vessels that remained in service were characterised by an average age that was close to obsolescence whilst the average age of the non-British Railways fleet was a more reasonable 12 years. The Railway Executive recognised the importance of inter-changeability of vessels between routes although from the tone of its internal correspondence it is clear that members refrained from any attempt to forecast demand and as a result fleet disposition was sketchy and characterised by short-term expediency at best. As far as tonnage replacement was concerned one of the major problems facing the ferry industry was the simple fact that British shipyards were working at capacity with obvious implications for new orders, stable prices and realistic delivery schedules.[74]

Nevertheless the coming together of all the regional railways under the banner of the British Transport Commission resulted in the opportunity to adjust the disposition of ferries, something that had not been possible before nationalisation. During the first year of operations after nationalisation the BTC stated in its 1948 annual report that:

> '*Unification of the former railway-owned fleet made it possible to inter-change ships between the various routes more freely than*

[72]Other operators included the Railway companies of foreign flag origin. The National Archives, *AN83/12 Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping 1948. Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; pp.(ii)-31.
[73]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme*, Jan 1949-June 1953. *Memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; 14 January 1949; p.4.
[74]*In 1950 Britain took 37% market share of ordered tonnage by GT remaining the world's biggest producer until late 1955. Glynn, S and Booth, A (1966)* Modern Britain: An Economic and Social History. *London: Routledge. p.252. Due to the increasing cost of steel shipyards were not prepared to quote a fixed price for a vessel. Accordingly there was a guaranteed overrun, albeit difficult to define, in the price of any ordered vessel.* The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme*, Jan 1949-June 1953. *It was not until the early part of 1960 that steel prices showed signs of easing at a time when shipyards were suffering from squeezed margins; a slight reduction in steel prices, born of production efficiency was therefore appreciated. In February 1960 the steel price was £40/7s for heavy steel plate and £38/1s/6d for sections representing a reduction of 10s and £1 respectively. The marginal reduction in the price of steel heartened shipbuilders even though it was of more psychological benefit than 'hardly practical'. Editorial comment*. Fairplay; No:3,991; 18 February 1960; p.27.

before, and the maximum use, within the limits of the characteristics of the ships, was made of this facility.'[75]

But the problem of seeking to recover from the effect of wartime losses and the problems associated with an ageing fleet was compounded by the difficulty of determining the nature of a response. Those responsible for operations had noted the change in traffic patterns that involved the increasing use of vehicular traffic, mainly in the form of cars and trucks. An internal Executive Memorandum in 1949 in seeking to justify further substantial investment noted the steady increase of motor cars on the Channel routes and noted:

'*It has to be born in mind that the 5-year programme does not, in effect, postulate more than a partial replacement of wartime losses. The Railway Executive hopes that the international situation, both fiscally and politically, will be such that the efforts to develop traffic will render the programme inadequate: the necessity for adjusting it periodically to keep a step ahead of the like trend of traffic is emphasised.'*[76]

The so-called five year shipbuilding programme was not straight-forward for the respective boards of the Railway Executive and the BTC. Apart from the problems of justifying the total overall programme and each and every vessel in turn:

'At the present time there are two elements of uncertainty which render difficult the formulation of a shipbuilding programme, namely:

(a) *The effect of the present drastic currency restriction and its probable duration*

[75]The National Archives, *AN11/1, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: Annual Reports and Accounts, 1948; Subheading: Ships.* p.92.
[76]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme*, Jan 1949-June 1953. *The Trend of Receipts & Expenditure for Principal Routes;* p.8.

(b) *The development of air transport for passengers and cars and in particular the likely introduction into service of helicopter aircraft capable of economic operation.'*[77]

As a precursor to its five-year shipbuilding programme and in an attempt to convince BTC and the government of the need to replace tonnage, the Railway Executive commented that the numerous routes on which railway ships are engaged are,

> *'for the most part, essential transport links either in the chain of services internal to the British Isles or in the chain of internal services between England and the continent. The operation of these routes at present is performed by 131 ships – a considerable fleet, the current replacement cost of which is estimated at £33 millions. It is a profitable activity of the British Railways, as shown by the following figures of receipts and expenditures*:

Table 2.6 Railway shipping receipts and expenditure 1937-1947

Railway shipping receipts and expenditure (£000s)	1937	1938	1947
Receipts	4,500	4,500	9,400
Expenditure	3,800	3,900	6,600
Net Receipts	700	600	2,800

Source: The National Archives [78]

> *These only relate to the shipping operations. Over and above these receipts, there is a very considerable contributory earning in respect of passengers and freight conveyed by rail in connection with the marine services.'*[79]

This statement represents a rare admission that there was a Railways-derived advantage to come from the shipping services because rail benefited considerably from end-to-end travel that included a sea crossing.

[77]ibid
[78]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme*, Jan 1949-June 1953. *Memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; 14 January 1949; p.2.
[79]ibid

The recommendations of Sir Eustace Missenden, the Railway Executive's Chairman dated 14 January 1949 with reference to the five-year shipbuilding programme accounted for over £7 millions in expenditure, an interesting comment in the context of a total fleet replacement estimate of £33 millions. In his concluding remarks the Chairman noted that:

> '*The programme...represents what is considered in the light of present-day conditions, to be the minimum necessary to keep the fleet at an economic level, capable of carrying efficiently the volume of traffic which may be expected to be available, with due regard to progress and development'.*

He continued:

> '*It should be emphasised that, taken as a whole, the various cross-channel services operated previously by the four companies, and now by Railway Executive, showed a substantial profit on the capital employed. This profit can only be secured in the future if the equipment is kept abreast of modern requirements, in place of air competition by foreign as well as British-owned corporations. The various Continental, Irish and internal links are part and parcel of the British Railways system, and any signs of lessening of interest and, consequently, of capital expenditure, will not only jeopardise the capacity to earn profits, but will attract outside interests who are always on the fringe of these activities and would take immediate advantage of such a situation.'*[80]

This last statement is significant in the sense that it shows that the Railway Executive was aware of the risk of falling behind potential competition and also the sound business and profit contribution that the shipping services were making in terms of travel and transport in general and British Railways in particular. In response to questions raised by the BTC Chairman the Railway Executive further clarified the rate

[80]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme*, Jan 1949-June 1953. *Memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; 14 January 1949; p.13.

of return for shipping assets, the opportunity to make good use of changing vessels between services and the difference between Net Registered Tonnage and Gross Registered Tonnage. The memorandum culminated with the expression of the view that the request for capital expenditure for the five-year programme was not excessive given '*losses and age*'.[81]

Leaving to one side the inland, estuarial and Isle of Wight services, the shipbuilding programme report proposal summarised the costs as follows:

Table 2.7 British Railways' ship building programme and costs

Year Ordered	Route	Number of Ships	Type	Gross tons	Estimated Cost
1949	Harwich/Hook	1	Passenger	5,000	£855,000
1949	Harwich/Zeebrugge	1	Train ferry	3,150	£440,000
1949	Southampton & Weymouth to Channel Islands & France	1	Passenger	3,700	£650,000
1950	Dover & Folkestone to Calais & Boulogne	1	Motorcar carrier	3,000	£450,000
1950	Associated Humber Lines	2	Cargo	850 1,000	£275,000
1951	Dover & Folkestone to Calais & Boulogne	1	Passenger	4,000	£700,000
1951	Southampton & Weymouth to Channel Islands & France	1	Passenger	3,500	£650,000
1951	Associated Humber Lines	2	Cargo	1,000 & 1,000	£300,000
1952	Southampton & Weymouth to Channel Islands & France	1	Cargo	1,100	£180,000
1953	Southampton & Weymouth to Channel Islands & France	1	Cargo	1,100	£180,000
1953	Holyhead/Dublin	1	Cargo	1,500	£260,000
Total					**£4,940,000**

Source:The National Archives[82]

The comparison of building costs is interesting since it shows that a typical cargo vessel cost around £150,000, a train ferry £440,000, a day steamer £650,000-£700,000 and a 5,000-ton night steamer (with the addition of cabin accommodation) £855,000, i.e. almost six times the cost of a 1,000-ton cargo vessel. In total therefore

[81]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, Jan 1949-June 1953. Memorandum to the Commission: The Railway Executive Five Year Shipbuilding Programme 25 May 1949 from Principal Works and Development Officer for Chief Secretary.*
[82]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, Jan 1949-June 1953. Memorandum from the Chairman of the Railway Executive to the BTC*; 14 January 1949; pp.10-11.

the Five Year shipbuilding programme submission involved an anticipated capital expenditure of £4,940,000 representing the major share of fleet replacement which, for the total organisation (the difference between £5,860,000 and £4,940,000 was for vessels constructed for inland lakes and other domestic areas i.e. those not relevant to this thesis).

The Railway companies had always demonstrated loyalty towards certain ship builders, a feature that could enable most vessels to be identified from a distance. But post-war there was a shortage of yards and therefore a lack of choice as the country started to replace the merchant and naval tonnage lost during the conflict, as a consequence of which prices were high and delivery dates were often vague as yards attempted to undertake more work than they were capable of handling.[83] In 1950 the Railway Executive highlighted progress that had been made with the implementation of the five-year shipbuilding programme and in particular the introduction of two new vessels, namely the *Amsterdam*[84] for the Harwich-Hook of Holland service and the jointly-owned *Brighton*[85] for the Newhaven-Dieppe operation as well as the fact that four further vessels were scheduled to be launched in 1951.[86]

There were a number of ferry companies that had been and which remained outside the railway network, but in the immediate post-war period the ferry services were mainly dominated by the railways and were 'liner' in nature, operating as part of a largely reliable route network determined by train arrival and departure times. Various terms describe vessels often referred to as 'steamers', 'paquet boats' or 'steam packets' but rarely by the term 'ferry'. It is also worth noting that most routes were referred to as 'cross channel' regardless of their operating area: this was to change and over time this terminology was destined to refer to only one geographical area. There

[83]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, pp.133-136.
[84]The *Amsterdam* was capable of carrying 557 passengers, 321 of which were first class with facilities akin to liner standards. Cargo capacity of the ship was described as 24,285 ft^3 of which 13,330 was allocated to '*motor-car space*' and 8,465 for '*baggage and mails*'. At the launch ceremony lunch, Mr V.M. Barrington-Ward, a member of the Railway Executive responded to a speech by Lord Aberconway, chairman of John Brown, the builders by saying that although '*the railways were not doing very well*', one '*bright spot on the horizon was the marine department*'. The *Amsterdam* was the first ship to be launched at a time when '*the Executive were completely responsible*'. As well as mentioning, clearly with pride that '*the Executive was still run by six railwaymen, and not by six civil servants*', Barrington-Ward made reference to the high cost of ships, describing prices as a 'nasty obstacle'. Editorial comment. *Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3,479; 26 January 1960; p.361
[85]The *Brighton* was built by William Denny and Brothers Limited at Dumbarton for Soc. Nationale des Chemins de Fer Francais and British Railways and operated by the Railway Executive and manned by a British crew. She was a turbine steamer (2 x Pametrada) and 311 feet in length, 40 feet 6 inches beam and 16 feet 9 inches moulded depth. The arrival of stern loading ferries in 1964 sealed her fate and she was laid up in Newhaven after only 16 years service in 1966 when she was sold to Jersey Lines Limited and renamed *La Duchesse de Bretagne*. Danielson, *Railway Ships & Packet Ports*, p.28.
[86]The National Archives, *AN11/3, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: 1950;* paragraph 371, p.128.

were early signs of RoRo ferry capacity around the coast of the United Kingdom typified by limited car carrying capability on rail ferries and as an evolution for estuarial tonnage where the concept had been used for many years in moving vehicles across rivers.[87]

Traffic with the Continent, the Channel Islands and Ireland was said to be '*very heavy*' during the summer months of 1950 although the Railway Executive went on to report that advanced arrangements had helped services to meet demand. There was some adjustment to services such as the transfer of the *Duke of York* from Harwich to a seasonal Southampton-Cherbourg routing although it would appear that this change in tonnage disposition was partially experimental as the Railway Executive subsequently referred to this particular operation being '*useful*'[88]. In addition, the three Dover-based train ferries were further adapted to carry more private cars and a new summer service was also added to enable more passenger capacity on the Folkestone-Boulogne route.

The comparison between sea and air transport on the Irish Sea in 1945 and 1950 clearly illustrates what the Railway Executive described as '*steady and progressive increases*' in [*passenger*] traffic since the war, a growth that was more than matched by the increasing influence of competition principally from air transport. The Irish Sea was an important stronghold for the Railways and the advancement of air competition was largely unnoticed or even disregarded on the basis that there was a belief that the higher price charged at that time for the quicker transit for air travel would surely limit its growth and market penetration:

Table 2.8 Growth in Republic of Ireland passenger volumes, air versus sea

Year	Sea	Air	Total	Air Percentage
1945	521,000	28,000	549,000	5.1%
1950	1,285,000	234,000	1,519,000	15.4%

Source: The National Archives [89]

[87]Robins, N (1995) *The Evolution of the British Ferry,* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. pp.5-11.
[88]The Southern Region of British Railways announced in February 1950 that it was providing two new services for motorists travelling abroad between July and September 1950. The *Duke of York* with a carrying capacity of 30 cars would operate the Southampton-Cherbourg route while a mid-day service was planned for motorists only between Dover and Dunkerque. The Dover-based *Hampton Ferry* and *Shepperton Ferry* were also to be fitted with additional flooring on the train deck enabling them to carry nearly 100 cars at a time. Editorial. *Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3,482; 16 February 1950; pp.49-50.
[89]The National Archives, *MT124/904, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements; 1963-1967*; *Table 1: Passenger Traffic – Great Britain/Republic of Ireland 1927-1962.*

Overall Irish Sea traffic during 1950 was said to be down on the previous year. Services conveyed 4% less passengers to and from Northern Ireland when compared to 1949 and 0.3% less to and from Eire. Illustrating the trend of independence amongst travellers, motor cars were reported as increasing from 5,800 to 8,100 and from 6,200 to 7,800 respectively. These figures are a clear example of the relative pressure that services were under in order to cope with this fast developing sector, particularly as services were operated on a lift-on, lift-off basis. The end of petrol rationing, also referred to in the report had obviously helped in increasing the use of the motor car.[90]

The Railway Executive also refers to increasing container traffic on the Irish Sea and the '*close attention*' that was given to the resulting problems of capacity supply, thereby illustrating the growth of freight shipments whilst masking early concerns regarding competition. These were early signs that the Executive was taking note of emerging traffic patterns even though it was effectively powerless to react fast enough in terms of vessel procurement let alone any technological changes in design. This factor was to represent the ultimate loss of prominence for the Railway Executive not only in the Irish Sea but elsewhere. This was a dominant industry player, political in parentage with national as opposed to regional responsibilities, having to concentrate its attention on the problems of rebuilding its fleet to pre-war levels without necessarily being able to anticipate future demand or become involved in strategic directional change.

Nevertheless, despite the after-effects of war, economic pressures and the various difficulties experienced by the many and varied Railway companies and their differing styles, the Railway Executive made reference to a 27% return (£2,871,000) on a capital base of £10,799,000 in 1947.[91] As previously noted, as part of the Five Year shipbuilding programme submission this was only a small part of the total picture, the Railways themselves being the primary focus.

---

[90]The Government announced its decision to end petrol rationing on Friday 26 May, 1950, a decision that came as a pleasant surprise to the motorist. It was made possible partly by the restraint on demand through the price increase, partly by the easing of the dollar shortage, but was been brought to a head by an Agreement with the two oil companies, Standard and Californian Texas. In brief, they agreed to sell the UK oil for sterling instead of dollars and spend the proceeds on building refineries and tankers in Britain. *The Guardian newspaper; Petrol Rationing Dies Unlamented*; Saturday, 27 May 1950.

[91]The National Archives, *AN13/391, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, January 1949-June 1953*. Section (10). p.2.

Shipping had rarely seen such returns although it is also worth pointing out that this level of surplus was before the allocation of central administrative overheads that were significant and comprised a somewhat arbitrary exercise that had little to do with actual costs as many central functions were shared with rail. The financials were also based upon an aged fleet that comprised assets that were largely written down in the organisations books of accounts with consequent low depreciation and an arbitrary split or allocation of end-to-end rail journey fares that sought to apportion revenue to the rail and sea portion of the end-to-end journey, a complex process that externally involved annual discussions with overseas rail partners.

Even so the financial returns were impressive bearing in mind that the country was in the throes of recovering from rationing and a level of austerity that would be expected to depress rather than enhance travel. For those who found travel a necessity, the continuation of petrol rationing until the end of May 1950 certainly underpinned the use of the railways and therefore indirectly the ferries.

The shipping services of British Railways were nevertheless gifted in one way in that they needed to do little to generate their own traffic, coming as it did as a natural consequence of the marketing and the then popularity of the Railway system. There was some port-to-port traffic, a feature that was growing because of the independence associated with the motorcar, a means of transport that was considered even during these early stages of development as an evolving enemy of the rail system and a concept of travel that was therefore difficult for the Railway Executive to grasp with enthusiasm when it came to the prospect of moving motor cars on their vessels.

In its annual report for 1950 the Railway Executive made reference to a number of issues affecting a business that at the beginning of 1950 involved a total of 125 ships totalling 63,359 Net Registered Tons (NRT) of which 61 vessels of 52,917 NRT were employed on the Continental, Channel Islands and Irish Sea services. In addition to the 61 vessels there were nine vessels totalling 5,668 NRT that were jointly owned and a further six vessels of 5,785 NRT that were '*operated but not owned*' during 1950.[92]

[92]The Railway Executive annual report for 1950. The National Archives, *AN11/3, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: 1950; Operational fleet. p.348.*

Control of and responsibility for certain ports was transferred from the Railways Executive to the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive in 1950, a change that enabled the Executive to concentrate time and attention on its ferry operations, and in a clear reference to the changing trade pattern the Railway Executive reported in the same year that a new motorcar examination hall had been opened in Dover, which had greatly facilitated the handling of the '*heavy traffic*'. Furthermore the Executive reported in its annual report that passengers and freight carried by their shipping services showed further increase although weather, increased fuel and general stores costs and harbour dues[93] had beset operations and consequently reduced anticipated earnings and profitability - burdened the organisation and, as a consequence its results.

2.2 Summary

This was indeed a period of transition for the ferry sector. Industry demand, coupled with financial and political challenges associated with fleet regeneration that followed significant wartime fleet losses was tempered by a debt-laden British Railways who itself had issues to contend with. In addition, early signs of a more mobile public were starting to emerge although the absence of competition and therefore alternative means of transport meant that this aspect was largely ignored.

[93]The Railway Executive annual report for 1950. The National Archives, *AN11/3, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: 1950. Increases in third party port charges or 'harbour dues' referred to those rendered by Dover.*

Chapter 3:
The Mapping of United Kingdom Dominated Ferry Services Operating in 1950

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 consideration was given to Britain in a post-war "Age of Austerity"[94] in addition to which the basic structure of the ferry industry was outlined. In this early period however dominance was very clearly in the hands of the ferry division of British Railways, itself a 2-year old fledgling organisation in 1950 made up of some impressive and hitherto proud and famous constituent railway businesses.

There can be no doubt that the route structure and ferry services operated by this segment of the ferry industry in 1950 were by any standards impressive. There were sins of omission and commission, not least those that were the result of wartime losses and lack of investment and building that reached back the best part of a generation, but the fact remained that British Railways provided a comprehensive rail system within the United Kingdom and the basis of travel with Ireland and mainland Europe in terms of its ferries and its links with its foreign counterparts.

The management of the so-called Big Four railway companies had worked together during the Second World War acting and operating as one organisation in support of Britain's war effort, although it was not until sometime after 1945 that the government decided to bring the rail service into public ownership. The regional players were therefore no strangers when they joined together under the British Railways brand on 1 January 1948 even though a considerable amount of time was to pass before the individual businesses were to lose the identity of their famous constituent parts.

Chapter 3 examines the ferry industry in more detail, highlighting the competitive landscape and in particular those players that were to make a difference to the industry in future years. Nevertheless the grouping together of so many vessels under

[94]Sissons, M and French, P (1963) *Age of Austerity: 1945 – 1951.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

one banner serves to highlight the monopoly position, if not in vessel number then by sheer market supremacy controlling as it did the end-to-end journey of its travelling public.

There existed two practical parts or groupings to the collection of disparate ferry services operated around the United Kingdom coast under the control of the British Transport Commission (BTC). The two sectors were referred to as '*Continental & Channel Islands*' and '*Irish Services*', and the relative importance of these sectored operations can be seen by the carryings itemised in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 British Railways: Traffic volume and financial performance by sector (1950)

Sector	Passengers	Motor Vehicles	Cargo (tons)	Receipts (£)	Expenditure (£)	Margin (£)
Continental & Channel Islands	2,161,351	99,663	939,272	7,533,309	5,267,669	2,265,640
Irish Services	1,393,215	15,951	458,432	2,867,912	2,222,357	645,555
Total	**3,554,566**	**115,614**	**1,397,704**	**10,401,221**	**7,490,026**	**2,911,195**

Source: The National Archives [95]

The figures demonstrate a margin of 30% for the Continental and Channel Islands services whilst the Irish operation contributed 23%, both respectable results which were difficult if not impossible to compare with any other operation since nothing of this scale existed anywhere else in Europe in 1950. As earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) results they nevertheless represented what could only be considered a good return on both turnover and capital employed. The Railway routes were strategically placed around the United Kingdom and based upon the intention of moving rail passengers as quickly as possible between two or more points. Where possible the routes also took advantage of a short sea crossing in order to cut down the end-to-end time taken for a specific journey, rail miles being covered more quickly than sea miles. Service and standards were, however, not homogeneous around the United Kingdom coast.

[95]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*

In his book entitled *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, Rixon Bucknall illustrates his own view on the varying standards and principles that had resulted from nationalisation of the Railway system.[96]

> '*Compared with the standards of 1914, the result [when compared with the Big Four] beggared description: on every hand were seen and heard evidence of 'dirt, dishonesty, discourtesy and delay'. Here and there were small but refreshing exceptions, such as the restored 'Golden Arrow'; while afloat, and with all praise and credit to the previous Marine Department, the former standards of general excellence and efficiency, never fell.*'

The Southern Region is however singled out for specific praise '*….within the Southern Region conditions were by far, and by very far, the best of all*'[97] in no small part due to Sir Eustace Missenden's involvement. Bucknall went on to describe the initial change (referring to the grouping of Railway companies) and the final outcome with reference to nationalisation as something akin to the transition from a regimented system with embedded principles and traditions to that of a '*….corps of infantry which accepted and tolerated both the unclean and the uninspired.*'[98] His summary ended on a more positive note as he made reference to British Railways considerable modernisation programme which he had no doubt would see it emerge triumphant in order to face what was seen as great opportunities.[99]

Despite the fact that in 1950 routes from the United Kingdom to Ireland and mainland Europe were dominated by the Railway companies there were signs of emerging operators who were attempting to fill a gap in service that the Railways were unable or unwilling to consider, either as a result of the bureaucratic system that they worked within or a shortage of investment.

---

[96]Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, p.153.
[97]The Southern Region was more prone to competition whereas the Irish Sea services suffered from the arrogance of a monopoly system, one that was to result in new, external forces that were to challenge this supremacy from sea and air.
[98]Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, p.157.
[99]ibid p.159.

3.2 Ferry Services provided by British Railways

The following tables demonstrate the rich nature of the key ferry services by destination and operator, some services such as Humber Lines being BTC-controlled despite the absence of a more familiar name. It is interesting to note that services were neatly spread around the coast at this stage in the evolution of the ferry network, something that was to become short lived as competition evolved.

The North Eastern Region of British Railways covered an area roughly bordered by the Humber, the North Sea, the Border and the Pennines, with its headquarters at York. From 1948, when the BTC took control, Goole came within the sphere of the London Midland Region, while the vessels that operated from Hull were still technically owned by the two companies. Regular liner services were operated in 1950 by the Associated Humber Lines Limited (Goole Steam Shipping) from Goole to Amsterdam, Antwerp, Copenhagen, Ghent, Rotterdam, Bremen, Hamburg and Dunkerque, and although primarily freight, limited passenger accommodation was provided. Services were operated from Grimsby to Hamburg and Rotterdam and from Hull to Rotterdam, with capacity for up to 450 passengers.

With effect from 1935 all Humber services operated under Associated Humber Lines management, a company with the distinction of the longest passage being served by any railway associated company: the 12-passenger routing from Goole to Copenhagen accomplished in 2½ days.[100]

[100]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, p.229.

Table 3.2 Associated Humber Lines

Associate Humber Lines					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route base**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Aire	1931	Goole to Amsterdam, Antwerp, Copenhagen, Ghent, Rotterdam, Bremen, Hamburg and Dunkerque	1,108	Reciprocating – coal	13.5
Alt	1911	Goole	1,004	Reciprocating – coal	13.0
Blyth	1931	Goole	1,107	Reciprocating – coal	13.5
Dearne	1924	Goole	1,043	Reciprocating – coal	13.0
Don	1924	Goole	1,038	Reciprocating – coal	13.0
Hebble	1924	Goole	1,040	Reciprocating – coal	13.0
Hodder	1910	Goole	1,016	Reciprocating – coal	13.5
Irwell	1906	Goole	1,040	Reciprocating – coal	14.5
Rother	1914	Goole	986	Reciprocating – coal	13.0
Bury	1911	Hull to Rotterdam	1,634	Steam – coal	13.0
Harrogate	1925	Hull	1,029	Triple expansion – coal	11.5
Melrose Abbey	1929	Hull	1,908	Triple expansion – coal	14.5
Selby	1922	Hull	1,039	Triple expansion – coal	10.0
Macclesfield	1914	Grimsby to Hamburg & Rotterdam	1,099	Steam - coal	13.0

Source: The National Archives [101]

The frequency of Associated Humber Lines' services and the distribution of tonnage changed during the period under consideration although this was more for reasons of efficiency than for anything emanating from change of structure or ownership.[102]

Further down the east coast, services from Harwich were covered by the Eastern Region, North Eastern Region and the Scottish Region (formerly London & North Eastern Railway Company) (see table 3.3). When BTC took over the London and North Eastern Railway Company its only port with cross-Channel ferries was

[101]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; pp.15,16 & 22.
[102]AHL ceased operations in 1971 when the remaining service from Hull to Rotterdam fell victim to the North Sea Ferries service which had offered roll-on, roll-off and superior passenger facilities on the same route since 1965; Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, pp.229-30.

Harwich. As a consequence, this area of British Railways was in terms of ferry services, the smallest of BR's regional authorities and had suffered most from the war-time need to requisition much of the Railway steamer fleet, suffering total losses of five out of eight passenger steamers and making it necessary for BTC to begin the process of replacing tonnage.[103]

Table 3.3 British Railways: Eastern Region, North Eastern Region and Scottish Region in 1950

Eastern Region, North Eastern Region and Scottish Region					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Amsterdam (2)[104]	1950	Harwich-Hook of Holland	5,092	Steam turbine - oil	21.0
Arnhem	1947	Harwich-Hook of Holland	4,891	Steam turbine - oil	21.0
Suffolk Ferry	1947	Harwich-Zeebrugge	3,134	Motor - diesel	14.0
Vienna	1929	Harwich-Hook of Holland	4,227	Steam turbine - coal	19.0

Source: The National Archives [105]

Services were being run from Harwich to Antwerp and the Hook of Holland for passengers, to Rotterdam for cargo only and to Zeebrugge for rail-borne cargo. The London & North Eastern region also operated the 1917-built train ferry *Essex Ferry* and 1947-built *Suffolk Ferry* between Harwich and Zeebrugge.[106]

[103]The following steamers were either lost or damaged during the war years: *St. Denis* ex *Munich* b.1908, scuttled at Amsterdam but later raised and operated as a minelayer by Germans; *Archangel* built.1910, bombed and sunk East Coast of Scotland 1941; *Antwerp* b.1920, requisitioned 1940-1945 and scrapped in 1951; *Bruges* b.1920, bombed and sunk near Le Havre while trooping 1940; *Malines* b.1921, requisitioned 1940-1945, scrapped 1948; *Vienna* b.1929, sold to Ministry of War Transport as troopship; *Prague* b.1930, requisitioned 1939-1945, bombed and sunk 1947; *Amsterdam* b.1930, sold to Ministry of War Transport 1941, mined and sunk Normandy 1944: Cowsill M et al (1993) *Harwich-Hoek Van Holland – A 100 Years of Service*; Ferry Publications Kilgetty. p.63. Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.89.
The short sea services of British Railways Southern Region lost the *Maid of Kent*, bombed at Dieppe in 1940, and the *Maid of Orleans*, which was mined when returning from the Normandy beaches in June 1944: Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.33.

[104]As testament to the way in which the Railways had not recognised the onslaught of the motor car the 1947-built *Arnhem* and the 1950-built *Amsterdam* (the second vessel to bear the name) were rendered redundant in 1968 along with their two Dutch running mates, the 1939-built *Prinses Beatrix* and *Koningin Emma* as a result of the delivery of multipurpose vessels. Danielson, *Railway Ships and Packet Ports*, p.27.

[105]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.21.

[106]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, p.12.

Table 3.4 North Sea carryings 1950

North Sea carryings 1950			
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo (tons)**
Humber-Continent	15,344	-	340,986
Harwich-Hook of Holland	220,569	2,934	19,994
Harwich-Rotterdam	-	1,350	16,289
Harwich-Antwerp	-	1,086	16,774
Harwich-Zeebrugge	-	2,778	98,947
Total	**235,913**	**8,148**	**492,990**

Source: The National Archives [107]

The Harwich-based route network of services had developed well although on a relatively small scale. The Hook of Holland was a popular destination for rail passengers with regular train connections from London and an ongoing pan-European rail network from the Dutch port. On the other side of the Thames Estuary, and in tune with other BR-based operations, the Southern Railway Company had been formed in 1923 having inherited thirteen elderly vessels from the South Eastern and Chatham Railway Company.[108]

Despite Bucknall's relative praise the standards of the vessels and the prevailing service had been allowed to slip to the extent that it was deemed necessary for the company to agree to fund the building of one vessel per year over a twelve-year period in order to improve the quality of the fleet. In the early stages of this fleet replacement strategy the motorist was largely ignored, a decision that in concert with the other Railway regions was to cement the gradual competitive demise of Railway company services.[109] The fleet at that time was old, averaging 17-years, yet serviceable although a fleet replacement programme that allowed for three vessels per year to be constructed would have been more appropriate to needs. The *Maid of Orleans* was introduced in 1949, following which no more passenger-only cross-Channel steamers were built for British Railways' Dover Strait routes, a feature that effectively heralded the arrival of the drive-on concept on the Southern Region.[110] Something else that was notable at the time was that these new car ferries were being

[107]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*
[108]In 1922, there were some 120 different railways in Britain, many of them being far too poor to operate ships even if their lines terminated anywhere near the sea: Cowsill and Hendy, *Sealink Stena Line – The Fleet*, pp.2-3.
[109]Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*, pp.85-102.
[110]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.88-89 & 109.

introduced with single class status as distinct from the 'Classic' mail-ships or packet boats that had carried on a Channel tradition of two-class accommodation up until their demise.

Table 3.5 British Railways: Southern Region (SR) fleet in 1950 (west to east)

Southern Region (SR) fleet in 1950 (west to east)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Brittany	1933	Jersey-St.Malo	1,445	Steam turbine - oil	16.0
Isle of Guernsey	1930	Southampton-Channel Islands	2,143	Steam turbine - oil	19.5
Isle of Jersey	1930	Southampton-Channel Islands	2,143	Steam turbine - oil	19.5
Isle of Sark	1931	Southampton-Channel Islands	2,211	Steam turbine - oil	19.5
Dinard	1924	Southampton-Channel Islands	2,291	Steam turbine - oil	19.5
Deal	1928	Channel to Channel Islands & France	832	Reciprocating - coal	15.0
Maidstone	1926	Channel to Channel Islands & France	844	Reciprocating - coal	15.0
Whitstable	1925	Channel to Channel Islands & France	832	Reciprocating - coal	15.0
Hythe	1925	Channel to Channel Islands & France	700	Reciprocating - coal	15.0
Winchester	1947	Southampton-Channel Islands	1,149	Motor - diesel	15.0
Falaise	1946	Southampton-St.Malo	3,710	Steam turbine - oil	20.5
Brighton (2)	1950	Newhaven-Dieppe	2,875	Steam turbine - oil	24.0
Worthing	1928	Newhaven-Dieppe	2,288	Steam turbine - oil	24.0
Maid of Orleans	1949	Folkestone-Boulogne	3,776	Steam turbine - oil	22.0
Canterbury	1929	Folkestone-Calais/Boulogne	2,912	Steam turbine - oil	22.0
Isle of Thanet	1925	Dover/Folkestone - Calais/Boulogne	2,701	Steam turbine - oil	22.0
Autocarrier	1931	Dover-Calais	822	Reciprocating - coal	15.0
Invicta	1939	Dover-Calais	4,178	Steam turbine - oil	22.0
Hampton Ferry	1934	Dover-Dunkerque	2,839	Steam turbine - oil	16.5
Shepperton Ferry	1935	Dover-Dunkerque	2,839	Steam turbine - oil	16.5
Twickenham Ferry[111]	1934	Dover-Dunkerque	2,839	Steam turbine - oil	16.5

Source: The National Archives [112]

Southern Region services operated from Dover, Folkestone, Newhaven and Southampton[113] as well as services to the Isle of Wight, although the latter along with Caledonian MacBrayne to the Western Isles are not covered by this thesis. The

[111]Vessel was French flagged in 1939.

[112]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.1-4. Fleet list excludes the domestic services to the Isle of Wight.

[113]The British Transport Commission announced in July 1950 that as from 1 September that year the management and operation of Southampton Docks was to be transferred from the Railway Executive to the Inland Waterways Executive as a 'self-contained' organisation. The marine services of the Southern Region were to remain, with its staff under the management and control of the Railway Executive at Southampton. *Fairplay*; No:3,502; 6 July 1950; p.1448.

Weymouth 'station'[114], originally part of the Western Region was transferred to the Southern Region on 1 November 1948 with the result that all south coast cross-Channel services came under the auspices of the Southern Region.[115] It is interesting to note that apart from the *Brighton*, *Falaise* and *Maid of Orleans* the age profile of Southern Region vessels as depicted in table 3.5 is high, including the balance of tonnage that was devoted to the Western Channel.

The Ostend route, operated by Belgian Marine, Ostend Line or Regie voor Maritiem Transport (RMT) was in a loose 'pool' partnership with Southern Region as was the French Railway company SAGA. The Southern Region also had a close trading relationship with Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest (SNCF), which went so far as to involve joint ownership of certain vessels operated between Newhaven and Dieppe.[116]

Table 3.6 British Railways: Short Sea carryings 1950

Short Sea Carryings 1950			
Route	**Passenger volume**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo (Tons)**
Dover-Calais	358,625	3,703	1,834
Folkestone-Calais	317,017	5,888	6,658
Folkestone-Boulogne	152,408	1,104	11,599
Dover-Boulogne	76,917	22,364	-
Dover-Dunkerque	166,052	33,543	204,489
Total	**1,071,019**	**66,602**	**224,580**

Source: The National Archives [117]

In many respects the wartime losses experienced by the Railway regions had removed much old tonnage and consequently presented the business with the opportunity of designing and building more appropriate vessels having due regard to the changing market, albeit at a not inconsiderable price. As mentioned earlier, the BTC had been presented with a Five Year proposal for fleet replacement and as this re-tonnaging programme unravelled there was more sign of an understanding that the concept of travel was changing to a large extent prompted by competitive forces.

[114]Railway port locations were always described as 'stations'
[115]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, pp.44-83.
[116]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, pp.33-34.
[117]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*

Even within the regional Railway structure there were strategic or conceptual differences in approach. In 1950 the 3,333 Gross ton car ferry *Lord Warden* was under construction for the Dover-Boulogne service. Her one-class passenger certificate at 700 was less than half that of the 2,875-ton *Brighton* delivered in 1950 for the Newhaven-Dieppe service with its two-class, 1,450 capacity. Although the *Lord Warden* was to set the pace of a new era with the ability to accommodate 120 cars[118] she became a compromise in that passenger accommodation was removed in order to accommodate car traffic. British Railways realised later that it was neither necessary nor desirable to reduce the passenger capacity when converting a vessel to carry car traffic especially as it prevented vessels from being deployed on various routes. Although Newhaven-Dieppe was heralded as the shortest rail route from London to Paris, the service carried a respectable number of cars (see table 3.7) and management should therefore have considered a more flexible design than the 1950-delivered *Brighton* thereby catering for a full complement of passengers as well as potential to satisfy the growing car market. Further round the coast at Southampton services were offered to the Channel Islands, St Malo and Le Havre with the steamers, *Normannia*, *Isle of Guernsey* and the latest addition, the *Falaise*.[119]

Like the *Brighton*, and a near sister to the *Falaise*, the *Normannia* at 2,217 Gross tons was also under construction in 1950 and was designed to carry 1,450 passengers in two classes for introduction onto the overnight Southampton-Le Havre route.[120] Although the vessel was built at the same time and in the same shipyard (William Denny & Bros Ltd., Dumbarton) as the *Lord Warden* her ability to carry cars was restricted to 12, which were destined to be loaded and discharged by crane.[121] This was a clear mistake on the part of the Railway Executive and was brought about by basing her design on a blueprint of a vessel that was to have been ordered before the start of the Second World War. As can be seen in table 3.7 the Newhaven-Dieppe route[122] was extremely popular carrying twice the passenger volume of Harwich-Hook of Holland and more than any of the individual Southern Region services.

[118]ibid
[119]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, pp.65&79; Cowsill, M (1995) *Ferries of Portsmouth and the Solent.* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.14.
[120]Cowsill and Hendy, *Sealink Stena Line – The Fleet*, p.4.
[121]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, p.79.
[122]The Newhaven-Dieppe route was heralded as the shortest (and therefore fastest) route linking London and Paris.

Moreover, it only lagged behind Dover-Boulogne and Dover-Dunkerque in respect of motor vehicles.

Table 3.7 British Railways: Western Channel carryings 1950

Western Channel Carryings 1950			
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo (tons)**
Newhaven-Dieppe	426,950	16,339	44,671
Southampton-Channel Isles	201,655	2,378	91,349
Southampton-Jersey/St Malo	65,838	1,201	4,335
Southampton-Le Havre	28,833	1,212	8,467
Southampton-Cherbourg	11,732	1,920	93
Weymouth-Channel Isles	119,411	1,863	72,787
Total	**854,419**	**24,913**	**221,702**

Source: The National Archives [123]

On the Irish Sea a combination of services represented a virtual monopoly for the regionalised Railway system resulting in a mixture of tonnage, complacency and lack of dynamism. As an illustration it was to be 1964 before cars could be loaded and discharged by means other than crane in Fishguard and Rosslare.[124]

The Irish Sea routes were based upon the ports of Fishguard, Holyhead and Stranraer that were linked respectively to Rosslare, Waterford/Dun Laoghaire and Larne. These services are often defined as the southern, central and northern corridors of the Irish Sea, areas where the rail ferries exercised near total dominance.[125]

Services operated by the former Great Western Railway became the Western Region upon nationalisation in 1948. The only issue of note was the already mentioned transfer of the Weymouth-Channel Islands service to the Southern Region, which took place on 1 November 1948.[126] After this the only vessel remaining, the 1934-built *Great Western*, a 14-knot coal burner, operated night sailings between Fishguard and Waterford and provided accommodation for 450 passengers, general cargo and cattle.[127]

[123]The National Archives, *AN 83/1; Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*
[124]Some 11 years after RoRo had been introduced and was commonplace at Dover.
[125]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, pp.104-128.
[126]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, p.123.
[127]ibid pp.123,131-136,147,151 & 60.

Table 3.8 British Railways: Western Region

Western Region (formerly Great Western Railway Company)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Great Western (3)	1934	Fishguard-Waterford	1,659	Triple expansion - oil	14.0
Roebuck (2)	1925	Weymouth-Channel Islands	776	Triple expansion - oil	12.5
St. Helier	1925	Weymouth-Channel Islands	1,885	Steam turbine - oil	18.0
St. Julien	1925	Weymouth-Channel Islands	1,885	Steam turbine - oil	18.0

Source: The National Archives [128]

The Great Western Railway built the earlier *St. Patrick* for its Fishguard-Rosslare route where she was inaugurated in 1932. Her presence on the southern corridor became the stuff of legend because she was lost to enemy action on 13 June 1941.[129] Following her loss the service was closed until 1947. Two new sister ships, the *St David* and *St. Patrick*, came into service in 1948, the latter vessel being transferred to the Weymouth station in 1949.[130]

Table 3.9 British Railways: Western Region

Western Region (formerly Fishguard and Rosslare Railway Company)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
St. David (3)	1947	Fishguard-Rosslare	3,352	Steam turbine - oil	20.75
St. Patrick (3)	1947	Weymouth-Channel Islands	3,482	Steam turbine - oil	20.0

Source: The National Archives [131]

[128]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.8.

[129]Cowsill, M (1985) *Ferries from Pembrokeshire*, Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. pp.9-12. Cowsill, M (1990) *Fishguard-Rosslare*. Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.12. '*The St. Patrick was sunk by the German Air Force on 13 June 1941, a day described by one maritime historian as 'one of the blackest days in the history of the port of Fishguard'. St. Patrick had left Rosslare for north Pembrokeshire early that morning and was about 12 miles from Strumble Head when struck by Luftwaffe bombers. The first bomb struck her between the bridge and the funnel, penetrating the oil tanks and setting them on fire. When the Fishguard Lifeboat arrived on the scene some hours later, all she found were oil bubbles coming to the surface. Seventeen of her crew, a gunner and twelve passengers were lost - the ferry having sunk within five minutes of the attack.*' Goddard, T (1983) *Pembrokeshire Shipwrecks.* Sketty: Hughes and Son Publishers Ltd. pp.119-20. See also: Pembrokeshire Record Office (Item reference: HDX/151/1).

[130]Cowsill and Hendy, *Sealink Stena Line – The Fleet*, pp.2-3.

[131]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.(ii). Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*

British Railways had only been in existence for one month when it took delivery of its first new ferry, the 20-knot, 1,300 passenger capacity *St. Patrick* for the Fishguard-Rosslare route. She served as a seasonal vessel and as relief for the Channel Islands route where Classic steamers[132] operated services from the port of Weymouth and where the tourist trade was increasing considerably in the early Fifties. The *St. Patrick* and her sister ship were capable of accommodating fifty cars, although the relative comfort of air travel to the Islands was to give rise to complaints in the early Fifties that sea travel was '*outmoded*'.[133] The *St. David* was partnered on the night sailing schedule linking Fishguard and Rosslare by the 1,050 passenger capacity *St. Andrew*,[134] which had been built in 1932.

In 1950 Fishguard was a prominent passenger service on the Southern Corridor of the Irish Sea, but this service ran alongside a largely freight-orientated operation that linked the port with Waterford in Ireland. Its passenger throughput accounted for only one-tenth of Irish Sea traffic but its market share of motor cars stood at 37%.

Table 3.10 British Railways: Irish Sea carryings 1950 – Southern Corridor

Irish Sea Carryings 1950 – Southern Corridor			
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo (tons)**
Fishguard-Rosslare	121,376	5,230	29,498
Fishguard-Waterford	23,831	666	12,431
Total	**145,207**	**5,896**	**41,929**

Source: The National Archives [135]

Table 3.11 illustrates that the largest throughput on the Irish Sea was at Holyhead where a total of 49% of the passengers yet only 12% of motor cars were handled between the United Kingdom and Ireland. The lower proportion of cars even during this early post war period was a reflection of available capacity rather than of demand whilst the higher number of cars than passengers on the Holyhead-Dublin route is a reflection of the unaccompanied movement of cars by freight vessel, passengers

[132]Passenger-only.
[133]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.76.
[134]ibid p.112.
[135]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*

travelling on the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire service and collecting their vehicles in Dublin.

Table 3.11 British Railways: Irish Sea carryings 1950 – Central Corridor

Irish Sea Carryings 1950 – Central Corridor			
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo (tons)**
Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire	679,385	-	9,497
Holyhead-Greenore	-	-	10,108
Holyhead-Dublin	1,000	1,918	98,342
Total	**680,385**	**1,918**	**117,947**

Source: The National Archives [136]

The ports of Stranraer and Belfast handled 41% of the Irish Sea passenger traffic and 51% of the car throughput. It is no coincidence that this, the most voluminous route in respect of cars, was adapted for RoRo in July 1939 for the arrival of the *Princess Victoria* even though the relative success of this service in volume terms did not result in the best margin. Heysham in Lancashire was second only to Holyhead in terms of passenger carryings, its primary importance stemming from its handling of 53% of the Irish Sea's freight traffic.

Table 3.12 British Railways: Irish Sea carryings 1950 – Northern Corridor

Irish Sea Carryings 1950 - Northern Corridor			
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo**
Stranraer-Larne	197,526	6,334	33,870
Heysham-Belfast	370,097	1,803	240,695
Barrow-Belfast	-	-	23,991
Total	**567,623**	**8,137**	**298,556**

Source: The National Archives [137]

The Holyhead route to Dun Laoghaire was capacity constrained having been maintained during the war by the 1920-built *Hibernia* and the 1921-built *Cambria*, although the latter was ultimately transferred to Heysham to cover the Belfast service. When built these vessels, two of a class of four, had the distinction of being the longest passenger steamers of their type in the world.

[136] ibid.
[137] ibid

A sister, the *Scotia* was lost in the war and hence by 1945 and the return to a more normal service, the route was under pressure despite the transfer in from the Stranraer service of the 1934 William Denny-built *Princess Maud*. Meanwhile, the LMS ordered two 4,900-ton motor ships from Harland & Wolff resulting in the arrival of the 21-knot *Hibernia* and *Cambria* delivered just a month apart in 1949.[138]

Table 3.13 British Railways: London Midland Region

London Midland Region (formerly London Midland & Scottish Railway)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Cambria	1949	Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire	4,972	Motor - diesel	21.0
Duke of Argyll (1)	1928	Heysham-Belfast	3,604	Steam turbine - coal	21.0
Duke of Lancaster	1928	Heysham-Belfast	3,608	Steam turbine - coal	21.0
Duke of Rothesay	1928	Heysham-Belfast	3,606	Steam turbine - coal	21.0
Duke of York	1935	Heysham-Belfast then Harwich-Hook of Holland (1948)	3,743	Steam turbine - coal	21.0
Hibernia (2)	1949	Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire	4,973	Motor - diesel	21.0
Slieve Bloom	1930	Holyhead-Greenore	1,297	Steam turbine - coal	16.0
Slieve More	1932	Holyhead-Greenore	1,370	Steam turbine - coal	16.0
Slieve League	1935	Holyhead-Greenore/Dublin	1,369	Steam turbine - coal	17.0
Slieve Bawn	1937	Heysham-Belfast	1,573	Steam turbine - coal	17.0
Slieve Bearnagh	1936	All above routes	1,485	Steam turbine - coal	17.0

Source: The National Archives [139]

These two new motor ships were to have been ordered in 1939 from Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited of Glasgow but with the outbreak of war their orders had been cancelled. They were finally built, by Harland & Wolff, and to their original design with the result that they were dated by the time they were delivered. It was originally intended that the new ships should carry cargo, and there was talk that they might serve Dublin (North Wall) as opposed to Dun Laoghaire. If the war had not intervened therefore it is reasonable to suppose that services from Holyhead could have altered considerably.

The vessels were large in that they were designed to carry 2,360 passengers in two classes with sleeping accommodation comprising two-berth *de luxe* (with toilet and

[138]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shippin*g, pp.140-141,149-150 & 290.
[139]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.15-16.

bath), one and two berth first class cabins and two, four and six-berth second-class cabins and open berths.[140]

Table 3.14 British Railways: Railway Executive (Scottish Region)

Railway Executive (Scottish Region)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Princess Margaret[141]	1931	Stranraer-Larne	2,552	Steam turbine – coal	20.5
Princess Victoria	1947	Stranraer-Larne	2,694	Motor – diesel	19.0
Mowbray Road	1943	Stranraer-Larne	3,595	Motor - diesel	12.0

Source: The National Archives [142]

The first port to boast roll-on, roll-off facilities was Stranraer where the London Midland & Scottish Railway introduced its car ferry *Princess Victoria* onto the Larne link shortly before the outbreak of war in July 1939. In contrast to routes further south, the vessel was revolutionary in that she had a capacity of up to 80 cars that could all be driven on and off the vessel, local press referring to her as a '*floating garage*'.[143]

The vessel was ordered as a result of exceptional traffic growth during the period 1930-1938 which had seen carryings on the two-vessel service rise to 219,000 passengers, 20,000 tons of cargo, 75,000 livestock and somewhat surprisingly for this early period, 5,450 motor cars. In what was clearly a piecemeal approach to developing traffic it was the latter statistic that had gave rise to the need for the 1939-built *Princess Victoria* with her RoRo capability.[144]

The *Princess Victoria* and her sister ship, *Princess Maud*, were requisitioned by the Admiralty at the outbreak of war, the former vessel falling victim to a mine off the Humber in May 1940. At the end of the war the London Midland & Scottish Railway

[140]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, p.101.
[141]The *Princess Margaret* was introduced in 1931. In 1939 the *Princess Victoria*, with Sulzer engines was introduced as a stern-loading road vehicle carrier but she was sunk in 1940. A vessel of the same name was introduced in 1947 but tragically sank in the ferocious storm of 31 January 1953. The Court of Enquiry into the sinking found that the *Princess Victoria* was lost due to a combination of factors, not least of which was that the stern doors were not sufficiently robust and that scuppers designed to clear water from the car deck were inadequate.
Available at: http://www.steamindex.com/backtrak/bt12.htm 30 June 2007.
[142]The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.31.
[143]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.124.
[144]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.70.

lost no time in ordering a replacement vessel to bear the same name, but this ship was to achieve notoriety when she too was lost, albeit in commercial service and while on passage to Larne, with the loss of 134 passengers and crew as a result of her stern door being stove in by heavy seas off Stranraer on 31 January 1953.[145]

On nationalisation the Railway Executive (Scottish Region) assumed control of the former LMS ships operating from Stranraer, those on the Kyle run, the former LNER Clyde ships and the LMS-LNER jointly owned Loch Lomond fleet. The Caledonian Steam Packet Company continued to own and operate its fleet from Gourock under the BTC as it had done under the LMS.[146]

As well as the earlier mentioned Goole services, operations from Holyhead, Heysham, Lake Windermere and the Tilbury-Gravesend ferry, all previously operated by the LMS were taken over by the London Midland Region on 1 January 1948. Soon afterwards the Goole section was transferred to the North Eastern Region, and the Tilbury operation to the Eastern Region.[147]

In many respects the decisions taken by the nationalised British Railways management were at best hesitant, at worst slow and ponderous, but with one result. The tentative caution of British Railways provided the initiative to newcomers such as Townsend and Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation Company, particularly as both of these companies were to champion the cause of RoRo and act as a catalyst for change and reform on the English Channel and northwest sector of the Irish Sea.

3.3 Ferry Services provided by Private Operators and those controlled by Foreign Railway Companies

Independent operators, that is to say those that had not evolved from, or been financially supported by, a railway company were somewhat sparse and operated niche services with one exception, namely the collection of operators on the Irish Sea that traded under the Coast Lines banner. Those that did exist were largely

[145]This was a major tragedy and the first in the history of RoRo vessels. It is likely that the event also slowed any internal anxiety to develop the RoRo concept particularly on the Irish Sea. Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.70, 92&98.
[146]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, p.170.
[147]ibid p.139.

experienced, well-established operators such as Fred Olsen who operated from the Tyne to Norway and their competitor, the Bergen Steamship Company (see table 3.15) which ran regular passenger services under the trading style of The Bergen Line. Their service opened in 1890 and operated between Bergen, Haugesund, and Stavanger, and Newcastle.[148]

Table 3.15 The Bergen Line

The Bergen Line					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Astrea [149]	1941	Bergen-Newcastle	3,190	Steam	14.0
Jupiter [150]	1915	Bergen-Newcastle	2,625	Steam	15.5
Venus (2)[151]	1931	Bergen-Newcastle	5,406	Steam	19.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [152]

Wartime losses and a disparate range of services from east coast ports resulted in the loss of much of Associated Humber Lines business to the Danish DFDS organisation (Det Forenede Dampskibs-Selskab A/S or The United Steamship Company) and it was to be ultimately finished by the arrival of North Sea Ferries in the mid-Seventies.[153] DFDS operated two traditional passenger-only vessels, *Kronprins Frederik* and her sister ship, *Kronprinsesse Ingrid*, which had entered service on the Harwich to Esbjerg route in 1946 and 1949 respectively.[154]

[148]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, pp.14-15.
[149]Purchased from Stockholms Rederi Svea 1945, 1967 sold to P/f Skipafelagid Foroyar, Thorshavn renamed *Tjaldur.*
[150]Sold to Epirotiki SS Co, Greece in 1955 renamed *Hermes*, converted to cruise ship.
[151]Seized by Germany1941, 1945 sunk by Allied bombers at Hamburg, salved and repaired, returned to Bergen Line, 1968 scrapped.
[152]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, Boat Trains and Channel Packets; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.
[153]The National Archives, *AN 83/1; Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*
[154]Cowsill, M and Hendy, J (1998) *DFDS The Fleet.* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.5.

Table 3.16 Det Forenede Dampskibs-Selskab A/S (DFDS)

DFDS					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Kronprins Frederik[155]	1940	Harwich-Esbjerg	3,895	Diesel	20.0
Kronprinsesse Ingrid[156]	1949	Harwich-Esbjerg	3,895	Diesel	20.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [157]

Another operator that used Harwich, the Zeeland Steamship Company, or Zeeland Line (see table 3.17) was formed in 1875 in Holland to operate a Sheerness-Vlissingen service[158]. In 1911 the United Kingdom terminal moved to Folkestone and in 1914 to Tilbury / Gravesend. The service was transferred to Harwich in 1927 and the destination port changed from Vlissingen to the Hook of Holland in 1946.[159]

In 1950 Zeeland Line was operating the 1939-built motor ships *Koningin Emma* and *Prinses Beatrix* delivered shortly before the outbreak of the war by De Schelde shipyard in Vlissingen. Operating the day sailings between Harwich and Hook of Holland meant that these ships had no need for cabins, the result being a capacity for 1,800 passengers, an exceptionally high number for east coast services at that time.[160]

Table 3.17 Zeeland Line: Stoommvaart Maatschappij Zeeland (SMZ)

Zeeland Line - Stoommvaart Maatschappij Zeeland (SMZ)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Koningen Emma[161]	1939	Harwich-Hook of Holland	4,353	Diesel	22.0
Prinses Beatrix[162]	1939	Harwich-Hook of Holland	4,353	Diesel	22.0
Mecklenburg[163]	1922	Harwich & Folkestone to Vlissingen	2,907	Steam - coal	21.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [164]

[155]Built in 1940 but did not enter service until 1946: Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.18.
[156]Sold to Neleman, Copenhagen, 1969 and renamed *Copenhagen.*
[157]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[158]The Folkestone-Flushing service was resumed with a summer only operation between 7 July and 18 September 1950 ex Folkestone on Mondays and Fridays and ex Flushing (Vlissingen) on Fridays and Sundays. *Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3,482; 16 February 1950; p.312.
[159]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.18.
[160]The ships were fast and commodious, passengers enjoying their daytime journey which represented an event in itself. The concept of making good use of night time travel was yet to emerge. Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.18.
[161]Admiralty service 1940-1946 as *Queen Emma*, 1948 Harwich-Hook, 1968 scrapped.
[162]Admiralty service 1940-1946, 1948 Harwich-Hook, 1968 scrapped.
[163]The *Mecklenburg* was scrapped in 1960.

Swedish Lloyd or Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd dated back to 1869, but it was only with the purchase of Thule Line in 1916 that it entered the North Sea passenger market. The Thule Steamship Company had been formed in Gothenburg in 1870 and traded between Gothenburg and Granton (near Edinburgh) in Scotland, chosen because the Wilson Line (Thomas Wilson & Son) was already dominant in Hull, and London was already served by the London Line of a different Wilson, namely J. W. Wilson, an Englishman based in Gothenburg. In 1950 Swedish Lloyd operated the 1946-built *Saga* alongside the 1929-built sisters *Suecia* and *Britannia* between Gothenburg and Tilbury Landing Stage whilst freight was discharged and loaded further up the River Thames at Millwall Dock. In 1950 Swedish Lloyd was awaiting the arrival of the vessel's sister, *Patricia*, a diesel powered sister to *Saga* to be delivered the following year.[165]

Table 3.18 Swedish Lloyd - Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd

Swedish Lloyd - Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Suecia[166]	1929	Tilbury-Gothenburg	4,216	Steam - coal	17.5
Britannia[167]	1929	Tilbury-Gothenburg	4,216	Steam - coal	17.5
Saga[168]	1946	Tilbury-Gothenburg	6,458	Diesel	18.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [169]

The Batavier Line (see table 3.19), which also traded under the names of Wm. H. Muller & Company's General Steamship Company, Netherlands Steamship Company and Netherlands Cargo & Passenger Steamship Company, was a Dutch based organisation that ran a London-Rotterdam freight and passenger service. Only one ship in the company's ownership survived the Second World War, the 1,573-ton *Batavier II* that had been built in 1921, and the service ceased on 5 April 1958 as a result of what the company referred to as 'changed travel conditions'.[170]

---

[164]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packet;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[165]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.22.
[166]Sold to Greece 1966, renamed *Isthmia.*
[167]Sold to Greece 1966, renamed *Cynthia.*
[168]Sold to French Line 1956, renamed *Ville de Bordeaux.*
[169]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[170]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.22. *The Times*, Thursday, 3 April 1958; p.6.

Table 3.19 Batavier Line - Wm. H. Muller & Company's General Steamship Company

Batavier Line - Wm. H. Muller & Company's General Steamship Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Batavier II[171]	1921	Gravesend-Rotterdam	1,573	Steam – coal	14.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [172]

The Frank Bustard-owned Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (see table 3.20) had developed a freight RoRo operation centred on converted surplus war landing ship tonnage, so called Landing Ships Tank, or LSTs, that operated from the Essex port of Tilbury. A route from Tilbury to Rotterdam was inaugurated on 11 September 1946 followed soon afterwards by departures every other day to Hamburg with a base cargo comprised of vehicles for the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR).[173]

Table 3.20 Atlantic Steam Navigation Company

Atlantic Steam Navigation Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Empire Baltic	1945	Tilbury-Rotterdam	4,158	Reciprocating steam	10.5
Empire Celtic	1945	Tilbury-Hamburg	4,291	Reciprocating steam	10.5
Empire Doric	1945	Tilbury-Hamburg	4,291	Reciprocating steam	10.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [174]

Of relevance to the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company is the fact that in this post-war period British licensing restrictions inhibited access to the continent by commercial vehicles, and this, coupled with which British Road Services had no wish to venture overseas, provoked debate at high level the outcome of which was to influence the growth of routes. South of the Thames in the area known as the short sea, Belgian Marine, Ostend Line or Regie voor Maritiem Transport (RMT) (see table 3.21) had been plying their trade from Ostend in Belgium to the United Kingdom for

[171]Built by NV Maatschappij voor Scheeps- en Werktuigbouw Fijenoord., Rotterdam (292); 1940-1946 UK coasting services and Netherlands-based accommodation ship, 1946 returned to service, 1959 scrapped at Hendrik Ido Ambacht, The Netherlands. Available at: http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/batavier.htm
[172]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.
[173]Robins, *The Evolution of the British Ferry*, pp.29-30.
[174]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.

more than a century, having commenced operations in 1846. By 1950 the company operated the *Prince Charles* (2,938 gross tons), the *Prinses Josephine Charlotte* (2,938 gross tons), the *Prince Baudouin* (3,120 gross tons), the *Prince Albert* (2,944 gross tons), the *Koning Albert* (3,710 gross tons) and the *Car Ferry* (2,646 gross tons) on the single route to Dover[175]. All were diesel-powered, *Prince Baudouin* having the distinction of being the fastest diesel ship afloat when completed,[176] her new machinery producing considerable savings.[177]

In a career that was to last 151 years the company operated a total of 57 vessels including two chartered from Stena Line and two Jetfoils. Of the remaining 53 conventional ships in company ownership only 12 were built outside Cockerill's yard in Belgium. Belgian Marine introduced their first purpose built drive-through vessel, the *Car Ferry* in 1949, the vessel having capacity for 100 cars and 700 passengers in one class.[178]

Table 3.21 Belgian Marine - Regie Voor Maritiem Transport Belge

Belgian Marine - Regie Voor Maritiem Transport Belge (RMT)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed Knots**
Prince Baudouin	1934	Dover-Ostend	3,120	Diesel	25.0
Prins Albert	1937	Dover-Ostend	2,944	Diesel	25.0
Koning Albert	1947	Dover-Ostend	3,710	Diesel	24.0
Prince Phillipe	1948	Dover-Ostend	3,710	Diesel	25.0
Car Ferry[179]	1949	Dover-Ostend	2,646	Diesel	24.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [180]

A relative newcomer to the Channel, Townsend Brothers Shipping Limited had been formed in 1889 as a ship delivery, management and forwarding enterprise. From the

[175]To obviate delays to their intense schedule a small, 300-ton cargo vessel was built and added to the Dover-Ostend route in order to exclusively carry general cargo. Plans for the vessel, which was to cost 24 million Belgian francs were completed during the early part of 1950. *Fairplay*; No:3,490; 13 April 1950; p.924.
[176]The vessel attained 25.25 knots during trials in August 1934.
[177]Hendy, J (1999) *The Dover-Ostend Line*, Staplehurst: Ferry Publications. p.28. The vessel saved around BFr100,000 per year in fuel costs (equivalent to U.S.$2,000 in 1950 or around $50,000 today).
[178]The *Car Ferry* was renamed *Prinses Josephine Charlotte* in 1952:
Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.34; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*, p.320; Henderson, *Crossing the Channel*, p.51.
[179]In 1971 the Belgian Marine Administration (BMA) changed its name to Regie des Transports Maritimes (RTM). It was BMA that had started the concept of drive-on Dover-Ostend car ferry services with the *Car Ferry*, later renamed *Prinses Josephine Charlotte,* in the early 1950's. The vessel replaced the *Prinses Astrid* that sank off Dunkerque after hitting a mine on 21 June 1949. *The Times*, Wednesday, 22 June 1949; p.4.
[180]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*

experience he had gained from continental motoring tours, Captain Stuart Townsend, a descendant of the founder of the company, was unimpressed with the service offered by the Southern Railway, believing that it charged an unreasonably high tariff for the shipment of cars that were frequently damaged and mishandled. In 1927 Townsend Brothers Ferries Limited started a conventional lift-on, lift-off service from a Camber berth in the Eastern Docks at Dover to the Quai Paul Devot in Calais utilising the coastal collier *Artificer*, a vessel of only 386 gross tons.[181] Captain Townsend was allegedly heard to say, in relation to the shipment of cars across the Dover Strait, that '*We'll have a go. And even if I have to give up after three months I shall have done something for the motoring community'*.[182]

Townsend had only chartered the 15-car capacity vessel for one month with a further option period since he believed that the ship's brief appearance would have the desired effect of seeing the Southern Railway reduce its fares and improve service standards. He fully expected to withdraw his service once this objective had been achieved, although full loads and a positive response from the travelling public caused the service to continue with encouragement received from Sir William Crundall, Dover Harbour Board's chairman and the Mayor of Calais, M. Leon Vincent, who were keen to see overall growth and in particular competition for the Railway company.[183]

The move had prompted the Railways to introduce its own car-carrying vessels with a tariff that either matched or undercut Townsend, something that was sufficient to force the latter company to suspend winter services. Without doubt competition on the Channel at its narrowest point was a factor in accelerating the growth in passenger car carryings. In addition the rivalry expanded the route network and timetable on offer to positive effect while the competition brought the travelling public a positive influence on pricing.[184]

---

[181]Cowsill, M and Hendy, J (1988) *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.3. The *Artificer* could only accommodate twelve passengers meaning that any additional customers had to be taken by bus to the Admiralty Pier in Dover so that they could cross on the Southern Railway's mail steamer. The year after the service was inaugurated (1929), the *Artificer* was replaced with the larger *Royal Firth*, a vessel of 411 gross tons and a new standalone company was formed called Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited.
[182]Cowsill and Hendy, *The Townsend Thoresen Years*, p.3.
[183]ibid p.4.
[184]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.86.

Table 3.22 Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited

Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed Knots**
Halladale[185]	1948	Dover-Calais	1,370	Steam - oil	17.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [186]

The Townsend operation continued to take market share from its sizeable competitor utilising a variety of vessels, which culminated in the *Forde* being finally sold in 1949 and replaced by the larger *Halladale*, a converted frigate built on the Clyde towards the end of the war.[187] She took up service in April 1950 and in the following June opened the drive-on, drive-off ramp at Calais although it was not until April 1953 that similar facilities were available at Dover.[188]

In June 1950, following the *Halladale's* introduction, a Bailey bridge that Townsend had purchased in 1946 in order to promote the drive-on, drive-off principle was finally adapted for use in Calais. The ramp came into regular use four days later and the drive-on, drive-off concept[189] was duly inaugurated.[190] The Southern Region of British Railways was no longer able to ignore the march of change characterised by Townsend's introduction of the RoRo principle which represented a major transformation in terms of customer acceptability and trading perspective.

With the exception of the relatively diminutive Townsend on the Dover service and the longer distance operations of Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation Co., British Railways were largely unhindered in the early Fifties in terms of competition on any of their routes. However the fact that Townsend shared the same basic facilities in

[185]Sold to *W. Rostedt of Turku, Finland* 1962 and renamed *Norden* for employment on a ferry service across the mouth of the Gulf of Bothnia between Turku and Norrtelje, Sweden.
[186]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.
[187]Although prior to the period under consideration, there is relevance in understanding that Townsend had introduced a vessel called *Forde* in April 1930, a vessel rescued from a scrap yard and converted to a 168-passenger car ferry incorporating a stern gate. When, in June 1936, a French General Strike paralysed the cranes at Calais, the vessel simply presented her stern to the quay and allowed cars to drive off directly onto French soil. It is doubtful if the true significance was realised at the time but in reality the foundations had been laid for the marine transport revolution called drive-on, drive-off or RoRo, which was to lead to improved standards of car ferry travel.
[188]Available at:
http://www.seaview.co.uk/cruiselines/pando/PandO_EuroFerries_History.htmln; 15 July 2004 Henderson, *Crossing the Channel*. p.53.
[189]Roll-on, roll-off (RoRo).
[190]Cowsill and Hendy, *The Townsend Thoresen Years*, pp.7-8.

Dover displeased the Railway Company, a factor that was ultimately destined to lead to conflict between British Railways and the Dover Harbour Board.[191]

The fact that Calais had proved that the roll-on, roll-off concept could work and that car traffic was already building in volume prompted DHB to talk to British Railways and Townsend regarding improved, more appropriate facilities for the Eastern Docks at Dover. In a memorandum sent from the Docks and Marine Manager of Southern Region to the Chief Regional Officer date 8 February 1950 entitled *Receipts from Motor Car Traffic – Dover & Folkestone*, the communication makes reference to ….'*The capacity of the new Terminal* [referring to the new roll-on roll-off terminal that was to be constructed in Eastern Docks Dover] *is limited, and it is doubtful if many more ships can be accommodated.'* The communication continued *'….it seems important that we should have priority or an assurance in regard to use of the limited space available, in order to provide accommodation for new vessels which may be built in the future to cope with increased traffic. You will appreciate that if, for instance, Messrs Townsend ordered one or two ships quickly, and the overall capacity of the Terminal was limited to, say, six vessels, then it follows that new traffic would be automatically diverted to the Townsend interests.*'[192] The same document went on to detail the receipts from car traffic as £369,178 for '*Southern Region & Interests*' and '*£86,035 for Townsend Limited*.', providing a relative view of the way in which Townsend from its early beginnings with a 12-car capacity vessel was starting to seriously challenge British Railways operation.[193]

It was clearly a dilemma for the Southern Region that the new terminal at Eastern Docks Dover was either destined to be too small in which case Southern Region could be squeezed by the more adventurous Townsend, or if enlarged would provide Townsend (and perhaps others) with an opportunity to steal traffic. Either way the communication is evidence of the fact that British Railways Southern Region thinking was defensive: there seems to have been no realisation that in taking the initiative in

[191]The National Archives, *AN157/591, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1952 Jan 01 – 1952 Dec 31. *Minutes of meeting with Dover Harbour Board regarding Car Ferry Terminal, Eastern Docks, Dover; Meeting to discuss preliminary schedules for 1953 season held at Harbour Board House, October 9th 1952.*
[192]The National Archives, *AN157/590 Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1949 Jan 01 - 1952 Dec 31; *British Railways internal correspondence from Docks & Marine Manager to Chief Regional Officer dated 8 February 1950.*
[193]ibid

this and other matters Southern Region might have been able to reverse matters and squeeze Townsend.

Further round the coast into Sussex, a joint venture service between British Railways and SNCF (Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest), linking Newhaven with Dieppe provided the most direct service between London and Paris enabling the connecting railways to market a direct and timely service whilst providing lift-on, lift-off service for the motorist during the summer of 1950.

Table 3.23 SNCF (Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest)

SNCF (Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest)					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Londres[194]	1940	Newhaven-Dieppe	2,434	Steam - oil	24.0
Arromanches[195]	1940	Newhaven-Dieppe	2,600	Steam - oil	24.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [196]

The British flag, 24-knot, 1,450 passenger capacity, *Brighton* was brought into service on the Newhaven-Dieppe route in 1950 linking the two ports in a crossing time of 3½ hours. The operation was seasonal between March and October whilst a French cargo vessel provided car capacity from mid-July to mid-September, the passengers making the crossing simultaneously onboard the *Brighton* or one of her consorts.[197]

Other than Townsend there were no competing services for British Railways Southern Railway along the south coast of the United Kingdom although in the Irish Sea things were slightly different with competition emanating from the long-established Coast Lines and a relative newcomer, the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company. The City of Cork Steam Packet Company's *Innisfallen* was built in 1948 for the British & Irish Steam Packet Company of Dublin but unlike other similar Coast Lines motor ships, she was built at William Denny of Dumbarton, not Harland & Wolff, Belfast. The vessel operated in City of Cork Steam Packet colours between Fishguard and Cork.

[194]Taken over by Germans renamed *Lothringen*; 1946 reverted to *Londres*, Newhaven-Dieppe, 1963 sold to Greece, renamed *Ionion II*.
[195]Taken over by Germans renamed *Vichy;* 1947 reverted to *Arromanches*, Newhaven-Dieppe, 1965 sold to Greece, renamed *Leto*.
[196]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[197]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.13,90-91,107&119.

Table 3.24 City of Cork Steam Packet Company

City of Cork Steam Packet Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed Knots**
Innisfallen[198]	1948	Fishguard-Cork	3,705	Diesel	15.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [199]

The British & Irish Steam Packet Company's *Leinster* and *Munster* were sister vessels that had the classic Harland & Wolff design. Built for a company that intended to use them for night sailings and with extra daylight sailings during the summer, they were similar to the London Midland & Scottish Railway's twin-screw 9,600 horsepower *Hibernia* and *Cambria* that had been delivered by the same builder.[200] These vessels, like those they replaced, also had the distinction of being the largest of the British ferries.

Table 3.25 British & Irish Steam Packet Company

British & Irish Steam Packet Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Leinster	1948	Liverpool-Dublin	4,100	Diesel	15.5
Munster[201]	1948	Liverpool-Dublin	4,100	Diesel	15.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy[202]

The British & Irish Steam Packet Company or B&I Line as it was to be better known, was part of Lord Kylsant's Royal Mail Steam Packet group, and one of a number of acquisitions made prior to its collapse which included Coast Lines, the Belfast Steam Ship Company, Burns & Laird and a half interest in David MacBrayne.[203] During this period Coast Lines received the first of thirteen passenger motor ships, which shared the 'standard' Kylsant outline with two small funnels. This outline was applied to

[198]The third *Innisfallen* was launched in 1948 by B&I who adopted the advertising slogan: "*Travel the Innisfallen Way*". She was sold in 1967, to Hellenic Maritime Lines and renamed *Poseidonia.* She was broken up at Brindisi in 1985.
[199]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[200]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.32.
[201]The vessel cost £650,000 to construct in 1948. Source: Seanad Éireann - Volume 58 - 10 March, 1965; *British and Irish Steam Packet Company Limited (Acquisition) Bill*, 1965—Second Stage.
[202]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[203]British & Irish Steam Packet Company (including the associated City of Cork Company) was purchased by the Irish Government in 1965, whereas the other parts of Coast Lines was purchased by P&O in 1971, which was already in possession of the dominant East Coast equivalent, the General Steam Navigation Company (GSNC), since the 1920s: Available at: http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/ 15 July 2004.

ships varying in size from the 696-ton *Lochfyne* (David MacBrayne) to the 27,000-ton White Star Liner, *Britannic*.

There were few vessel operators who could stand up to the might of the railway companies although some, including Lord Kylsant had tried. Whilst pioneering unit load traffic in the post-war period, Coast Lines failed to develop cargo handling to the point of embracing the concept of RoRo and as a result went into a steady decline as developments took place around them.[204] On the northern routes served by the Coast Lines organisation and in tune with the southern corridor, it was not until 1964 that due account was taken of the development of car traffic.

The Belfast Steamship Company had operated a stranglehold, near monopoly service between Liverpool and Belfast with the 3,851 Gross ton, 1929-built *Ulster Monarch* and her two 1930-built sisters, *Ulster Prince* and *Ulster Queen*. In a way that illustrates the effect that war had on United Kingdom based ferry operations, the *Ulster Monarch* was requisitioned for troop carrying and narrowly escaped destruction unlike her sister, the *Ulster Prince*, which was bombed and sunk off Crete in April 1941. The other sister, *Ulster Queen* was so radically altered to accomplish a new military role that she never returned to the company after hostilities ended.

Table 3.26 Belfast Steamship Company

Belfast Steamship Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Ulster Monarch[205]	1929	Liverpool-Belfast	3,851	Diesel	16.0
Ulster Prince[206]	1937	Liverpool-Belfast	4,307	Diesel	16.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [207]

[204] At their 37th Annual General meeting in October 1950, the chairman, Captain A.R.S. Nutting OBE, MC declared the results of Coast Lines for 1949 as a profit of £684,616, down £170,000 on the previous year. Of this decline £75,000 was put down to increased depreciation and nearly £100,000 to increased '*costs and charges faced by the shipping industry*'. At that stage the fleet consisted of 114 vessels made up of 17 passenger ships, 14 cattle carriers, and 83 steamships and motorships. The chairman explained that '*the business of the Group is conducted on a very slender margin of profit, in which there is no room for recurring increases in the cost of wages, salaries and materials consumed, which do not result in higher production and efficiency*'. He also welcomed the appointment by the Minister of Transport of the Coastal Shipping Advisory Committee on which two of Coast Lines directors were to serve. He referred to useful work that the committee was tasked with under the chair of Lord Rusholme in looking at the problems of coastal shipping. He also paid tribute to the cordial relations the company had with the officials of the Ministry, the British Transport Commission and British Railways. *Fairplay*; No:3,520; 9 November 1950; p.592.

[205] *Ulster Monarch* was the only one of the initial trio that returned to Belfast SS service after WW2. She was scrapped in 1966.

[206] This ship was built as the *Leinster* in 1937 and was refitted and transferred to the Belfast Steamship Company after WW2 (1946) to run the service alongside *Ulster Monarch*, the only survivor of the original trio. The vessel was the second to bear the name *Ulster Prince.*

The 16-knot *Ulster Monarch* was the first large diesel Irish Sea-based vessel, powered by two 10-cylinder Harland-B&W oil engines driving twin screws. The three sisters could each provide 401 first- and 493 third-class accommodation and facilities.[208] As a feature of the Irish Sea trades, there was no second-class provision.

The service was operated in 1950 by the *Ulster Monarch* and the 1937-built, 4,307 gross ton *Leinster*, which became the *Ulster Prince* for Belfast Steam Packet Company. The *Leinster*'s sister, the 1938-built *Munster* had been lost to enemy action. Two new sisters, the fourth to bear the names *Leinster* and *Munster*, were built in 1948 for service between Liverpool and Dublin both being slightly smaller at 4,100 gross tons but in all other respects very similar to their predecessors.[209] A service had existed between Glasgow and Dublin since John Gremmill inaugurated it in 1826. By 1900 the service had been absorbed by C. J. Burns and by 1950 the new operator, Coast Lines was in a position to order two new vessels, the 1952-built *Irish Coast* to be followed later by the *Scottish Coast*, a vessel used as a relief on the route.[210]

The independent, privately owned Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (see table 3.27) had originally shown interest in starting a service between Liverpool and Larne in Northern Ireland but opposition from other operators in Liverpool prevented this from becoming a reality. As a result the company focused its attention on Preston in Lancashire and following a period of construction in both Preston and Larne the service started in May 1948 with the converted tank-landing ship *Empire Cedric*, a LST(3) built in Canada, offering two departures per week.[211] In 1950 the service was expanded to include a Belfast call with the *Empire Cedric* sister ship, *Empire Gaelic*.[212]

---

[207]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets;* Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers.*
[208]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.9,10&98.
[209]ibid p.32.
[210]ibid p.95.
[211]The *Empire Cedric* was scrapped in Ghent in September 1960.
[212]Atlantic Steam Navigation Company's use of Preston was a key benefit in terms of its future success since it could uphold the principal of independence. The Atlantic Steam Navigation company commenced operations with the chartered tank landing craft *Empire Cedric* between the Lancashire port of Preston and Larne in May 1948. Her success saw the further charters of the *Empire Cymric*, *Empire Doric* and *Empire Gaelic* and the opening of a second link to Belfast by the '*Gaelic*' in 1950. During 1956 the entire fleet of LSTs (Landing Ship (Tank)) was requisitioned by the Government during the Suez Crisis and chartered German ships were hastily introduced to keep the services going while in the following year the company acquired their first purpose-built ships. See also footnote 40.

Table 3.27 Atlantic Steam Navigation Company

Atlantic Steam Navigation Company					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Empire Cedric	1945	Preston-Larne	4,291	Reciprocating steam	10.5
Empire Gaelic	1945	Preston-Belfast	4,291	Reciprocating steam	10.5

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [213]

The Atlantic Steam Navigation Company with its near 'pure' RoRo services was clearly making its presence felt in competitive terms on the Irish Sea. The Divisional Manager of the North Western Division of the Road Haulage Executive had voiced his concerns over the growth of trailer services to Northern Ireland in a letter dated 14 July 1949 to his Chairman. The North Western Region was instructed to develop its own container-based services despite being outstripped by competition from Ferry Trailers Limited which was developing at a considerable pace. In summary, W.E. Macve, the Divisional Manager detailed the debating points as follows:

1. *The Ferry [Ferry Trailers Limited] is established*
2. *It is efficient*
3. *Trade and Industry desire to use it*
4. *If we do not go in, somebody else will*
5. *We are working the Ferry [Ferry Trailers Limited] to the extent of five thousand odd pounds per month and unless we go forward, that trade will obviously die*
6. *I think the serious political issue which could be raised is a matter for prime consideration*

Macve went on to say '*This ferry Service has established itself very securely and I cannot help but feel that an effort to throttle its growth by the Commission could become a serious public scandal and much political capital could be made of the Commission's desire to stop its progress*.' It is however unclear and difficult to

[213]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships;* Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.

imagine how the Commission in its wisdom could have stopped a service that was making significant progress.[214]

The various divisions of the Commission were clearly getting worried about the advent of Bustard's Atlantic Steam[215] which was making clear inroads into the freight market because of the relative ease of using the roll-on, roll-off method of loading and discharging which speeded the end-to-end transit. In an internal memorandum from C.K. Sandilands to the Railway Executive the position was summed up by saying '*It serves to illustrate the lack of enterprise in meeting modern conditions, because, it meant diversion of traffic from rail to road, and, as steamship owners, they* [the Commission] *throttled their own Ferry Service because of their monopoly. This obviously has its own reward these days, by the continuous development of ideas, in this case, as coupled with modern transport, can unfetter trade from monopoly of old methods and ideas.*'[216] This was an admission on the part of the Railway Executive that its own monopoly had worked against its longer term interests in that it had stifled the development of trade and had therefore left the market wide open for a newcomer.

Yet another competitor of the railways on the Irish Sea was G & J Burns, part of the Coast Lines group having been amalgamated with Laird Line earlier in order to form Burns and Laird Lines Limited (see table 3.28). Burns and Laird with the 18-knot *Royal Ulsterman* and *Royal Scotsman*, both distinctive in appearance being from the Harland & Wolff stable, operated the Glasgow-Belfast service, which was ultimately to suffer from strong competition resulting from investment made in Ardrossan.[217] The Ardrossan to Belfast link was maintained by the 1911-built *Laird's Isle*, an ex Southern Railway steamer *Riviera*, purchased in 1932 that was to serve the route until 1957.

[214]The National Archives, *AN 13/1805, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence & papers, August-1948 to July 1950; Extract from a letter addressed by the Divisional Manager North Western Division R.H.E., to the Chairman R.H.E., dated 14 July 1949 headed Northern Ireland Ferry Service.*
[215]Also known as Continental Line.
[216]The National Archives, *AN 13/1805, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence & papers, August-1948 to July 1950.*
[217]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.23.

The *Lairds Isle* was powered by three sets of Parsons geared turbines developing 8,100 indicated horse power (ihp),[218] and at 23 knots she was the fastest cross-Channel steamer between Scotland and Ireland and operated day sailings that linked Glasgow and Belfast via Ardrossan. She had been built by William Denny of Dunbarton for the South Eastern & Chatham Railway's Folkestone-Boulogne service. Although the war provided reason for some vessels remaining in service long after their anticipated passing from the scene, this diminutive steamer, converted to burn oil in 1932, lasted for 46 years before being withdrawn from commercial service.[219]

Table 3.28 Burns & Laird

Burns & Laird					
Vessel	**Built**	**Route**	**Tons**	**Machinery**	**Speed knots**
Royal Scotsman[220]	1936	Glasgow-Belfast	3,000	Diesel	18.0
Royal Ulsterman	1936	Glasgow-Belfast	3,000	Diesel	18.0
Laird's Isle[221]	1911	Ardrossan-Belfast	1,676	Steam – oil	23.0

Source: Cowsill and Hendy [222]

[218] *Indicated horsepower is the theoretical power of a reciprocating engine if it is completely efficient in converting the energy contained in the expanding gases in the cylinders. It is calculated from the pressures developed in the cylinders, measured by a device called an engine indicator - hence indicated horsepower. It was the figure normally used for steam engines in the 19th century but is misleading because the mechanical efficiency of an engine means that the actual power output may only be 70% to 90% of the indicated horsepower.*
Available at: http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Horsepower

[219] Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*, p.43.

[220] In 1936, two new Coast Lines standard ships, *Royal Scotsman* and *Royal Ulsterman* were built for the Burns & Laird Glasgow-Belfast service with a different, more modern appearance created by having only one funnel. The vessels were not intended to replace the initial three Belfast S.S. ships on the Liverpool service as they would not fit the Liverpool locks. Both ships survived WW2, and ran on their intended route until the 1960s.

[221] G&J Burns and Laird Line were purchased by Coast Lines in 1919. Coast Lines amalgamated the two in 1922 to form Burns and Laird Lines Ltd and in 1932 it was decided to reintroduce the fast daytime Ardrossan-Belfast service, and the 1911-built Southern Railway turbine *Riviera* was purchased and renamed *Lairds Isle*. Built by William Denny of Dumbarton for the South Eastern & Chatham Railway's Folkestone-Boulogne service she was capable of 23 knots. She returned to service after the war, and was not retired until 1957. Source: Various. The ship was built as a so-called awning-deck packet, the boat deck extending amidships. Propulsion was provided by three Parsons Turbines, each driving an independent shaft and propeller and, which, with the bow rudder, produced excellent manoeuvrability. Steam was provided by six coal-fired water-tube boilers plus a spare or relief boiler. The ship's trials took place on the 7 June 1911, three years before her requisition by the Royal Navy. On the four-hour trial, 21.99 knots was attained with only four boilers connected and a moderate steam pressure. On the measured mile the turbines were opened out and the highest mean speed achieved was 23.07 knots. Several astern runs were made and the maximum speed of 15.15 knots was attained, an unusually high figure. Available at: http://www.threetowners.com/ 30 June 2007.

[222] Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*; Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*; Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.

3.4 British Railways:
Financial Performance and Competitive Landscape

British Railways had commercial dominance around Britain's coast operating from prime locations, and although tonnage was not optimum in meeting market needs, the fleet and operation were nevertheless impressive in scale. In the more vibrant and competitive southeast corner of the United Kingdom traffic volumes on the pioneering short sea in 1950 emphasised the part played in the carriage of cars by the train ferries.

Table 3.29 indicates that 66,602 cars were carried on the cross-Channel routes from Dover and Folkestone, with Boulogne and Dunkerque the most popular destinations, handling 35.24% and 50.36% of the short sea traffic respectively. According to the editor of *Autocar Magazine*, in September 1954 Ostend was a popular entry point for a variety of destinations within mainland Europe including Scandinavia for the more adventurous motorist, Germany, the Netherlands and even Italy.[223] The services that linked the United Kingdom with Dieppe, the Channel Islands and Dunkerque were all significant cargo movers even though their combined volume only just surpassed that of the small coasters that served the Humber.

[223]The National Archives, *AN 157/592, Letter from Michael Brown, Assistant Editor Autocar Magazine to Dudley Noble dated 16 September 1954.*

Table 3.29 Carryings, receipts, expenditure & net receipts on British Railways Continental & Channel Isles marine services 1950

Carryings, Receipts, Expenditure & Net Receipts on British Railways marine services 1950						
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo**	**Receipts**	**Expenditure**	**Margin**
Continental & Channel Isles	**No.**	**No.**	**Tons**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Harwich- Zeebrugge	-	2,778	98,947	372,707	309,165	63,542
Harwich-Rotterdam	-	1,350	16,289	84,149	87,803	-3,654
Harwich-Antwerp	-	1,086	16,774	94,772	107,898	-13,126
Harwich-Hook of Holland	220,569	2,934	19,994	1,152,052	529,901	622,151
Humber-Continent	15,344	-	340,986	1,119,430	1,020,919	98,511
Dover-Calais	358,625	3,703	1,834	{1,889,980	927,637	962,343
Folkestone-Calais	317,017	5,888	6,658			
Folkestone-Boulogne	152,408	1,104	11,599			
Dover-Boulogne	76,917	22,364	-			
Dover-Dunkerque	166,052	33,543	204,489	763,300	529,063	234,237
Southampton-Channel Isles	201,655	2,378	91,349	779,792	732,602	47,190
Weymouth-Channel Isles	119,411	1,863	72,787	482,106	443,061	39,045
Southampton-Jersey/St Malo	65,838	1,201	4,335	{	351,333	78,233
Southampton-Le Havre	28,833	1,212	8,467	{ 429,566		
Southampton-Cherbourg	11,732	1,920	93	{		
Newhaven-Dieppe	426,950	16,339	44,671	365,455	228,287	137,168
Total	**2,161,351**	**99,663**	**939,272**	**7,533,309**	**5,267,669**	**2,265,640**

Source: The National Archives [224]

In terms of contribution, the short sea services from Dover and Folkestone to Boulogne, Calais and Dunkerque represented 53% of the total margin for all of the Continental and Channel Islands services while Harwich-based operations represented 27% of the total. Harwich freight services to Antwerp and Rotterdam were hampered by poor utilisation of the assets caused by the longer crossings although they were still worthwhile in that they supported the end-to-end rail services. Traffic continued to grow, particularly on these prime routes and by 1950, despite austerity and rationing, cross-Channel car traffic was said to be '*considerable*'.[225] The margins were impressive in overall terms, a feature that gave rise to support and encouragement for fresh construction. Arguably more investment should have been made into vessel research and trade development, an area where the British Railways management were lacking in forward thinking and dynamism. In their defence however British Railways management were expected to operate some services even though they

[224]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*
[225]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.76.

made no contribution and at times did not even meet operating costs. This was succinctly summed up by the BTC:

> *'In any nation-wide transport undertaking covering the various forms of transport, different services and different methods of transport will show unequal degrees of profitability and will be unable to contribute at a uniform rate to overhead charges. Nor indeed is it possible in such an undertaking to avoid the provision of some services which are unremunerative even perhaps in the sense that they do not support their own direct costs of operation. There is nothing new in the acceptance of the principle.....The degree to which one form of transport or one service can and should be called upon to support another will vary from time to time but, within reasonable limits, bold application of the principle may be essential to any adequate system of facilities for the country as a whole.'*

The BTC Annual Report goes on to talk about how '*individual activities*' '*...should be regarded as for the common good*.' This blurring of what might be regarded as commercial principles rendered it difficult for British Railways management to compete in the environment that was yet to fully develop.[226]

In summary, a total of 18 vessels were newly constructed and entered service between 1947 and 1950 of which 13 were for railway related businesses totalling 46,826 tons, some 22.8% of the total tonnage operating at the time. Of the total fleet operating around the U.K. coastline in 1950, 25.2% were non railway vessels comprising 34.1% of the total tonnage.

Spurred on by the competitive pressure of Townsend and his single vessel, British Railways promoted '*Continental Motoring*' on the five routes that it operated from Dover and Folkestone. The Dover to Boulogne route boasted the *Dinard*, promoted as the largest car carrying vessel in the Southern Region fleet, Folkestone-Calais was operated by the *Autocarrier*, having space for 25 cars, Dover-Dunkerque utilised

[226]The National Archives, *AN11/1, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: Annual Reports and Accounts; 1948. Chapter 5, page 41, paragraph 65.*

capacity on three train ferries, and Newhaven to Dieppe provided the *Nantes* and *Rennes*, jointly owned by British Railways and French National Railways. Dover-Ostend was also offered with '*…the introduction of a new Belgian Motor Car Carrier*'…..'*operating three times weekly in each direction*'….[227]

Complicated seasonal scheduling arrangements prevailed at that time doing little to harmonise Railway services or make them user-friendly. In an effort to match capacity with demand the *Dinard* and *Autocarrier* operated from 27 May through to the end of October and from 15 July to 30 September on the cross-Channel services from Dover and Folkestone and the Newhaven route from 1 April to 31 October, and the Dover-Ostend service from 4 June to 14 September.

British Railways '*Continental Motoring*' message for the 1950 season mentions that the '*Rates for the conveyance of cars by these special vessels will be……*'. Single-journey rates ranged from £4/5s/0d for a car of 8 foot 6 inches in length to £12/10s/0d for vehicles longer than 10 foot 6 inches, the charges being entirely related to the amount of space the vehicle took up in the vessels hold or in some cases on the vehicle deck. Potential travellers were urged to book their passage at the motorcar booking office on Platform 9 Victoria Station or via the A.A. or R.A.C., clear reference to the fact that the advent of travel agencies or direct booking had not yet occurred.[228] Seasonal differences in ticket price and schedule meant that the system was considered complicated for the customer to readily understand.

In the early Fifties the quest for travel was not limited to ferries however and neither was it seen to be restricted to surface carriers as air services were also growing by '*leaps and bounds*'. In a context that was to change more than 50 years later, air was

[227]The National Archives, MT24/4, *British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station dated 16 March 1949. Featured in a press release dated 16 March 1949 from British Railways Southern Region entitled: Continental Motoring Special Motor Car Vessels.* The Dover to Boulogne route boasted the *Dinard*, promoted as the largest car carrying vessel in the Southern Region fleet (70-80 car capacity), Folkestone-Calais was operated by the *Autocarrier*, having space for 25 cars, Dover-Dunkerque utilised capacity on three train ferries, and Newhaven to Dieppe provided the *Nantes* and *Rennes*, jointly owned by British Railways and French National Railways. The Belgian vessel was named in the release as the '*Car Ferry*'.
[228]The National Archives, *MT/24/4, British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station dated 16 March 1949.* An improved schedule was introduced during November 1950 with two rail connected services daily on the Dover-Ostend route. This was in contrast to a reduction in winter services and vessels connected with departures from Victoria at 09.00 hrs and 13.00 hrs. Return fares from London to Ostend were: First Class £8/5s/4d and Third Class £5/5s/2d. *Fairplay*; No:3,520; 9 November 1950; p.618.

seen in 1950 as being expensive and less reliable due to '*mist and other meteorological influences*'.[229]

Table 3.30 Carryings, receipts, expenditure & net receipts on British Railways Irish marine services 1950

Carryings, Receipts, Expenditure & Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950						
Route	**Passengers**	**Motor Vehicles**	**Cargo**	**Receipts**	**Expenditure**	**Margin**
Irish Services	**No.**	**No.**	**Tons**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Heysham-Belfast	370,097	1,803	240,695	1,257,185	811,400	445,785
Barrow-Belfast	-	-	23,991	34,677	78,801	-44,124
Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire	679,385	-	9,497	653,522	430,239	223,283
Fishguard-Rosslare	121,376	5,230	29,498	218,532	227,286	-8,754
Fishguard-Waterford	23,831	666	12,431	81,771	108,220	-26,449
Stranraer-Larne	197,526	6,334	33,870	277,233	226,348	50,885
Holyhead-Greenore	-	-	10,108	28,257	30,395	-2,138
Holyhead-Dublin	1,000	1,918	98,342	316,735	309,668	7,067
Total	**1,393,215**	**15,951**	**458,432**	**2,867,912**	**2,222,357**	**645,555**

Source: The National Archives [230]

The total passenger traffic passing between Great Britain and Ireland showed that carryings by sea had increased from 521,000 in 1945 to 1,285,000 (147%) in 1950 whereas air traffic, in its infancy, grew from 28,000 to 234,000 (736%) between the same dates. Of these total Irish destination volumes a total of nearly 680,000 passengers travelled on the Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire route in 1950, a high figure considering that car carryings, even on a lift-on, lift-off basis was capacity constrained at that time.[231]

It is interesting to note from table 3.30 that the diminutive port of Heysham produced the major return (69%) in respect of Irish Sea services, buoyed up by freight traffic, with Holyhead only contributing half of that figure. This follows BR thinking at that time which as far as possible segregated freight and passenger carryings on to separate vessels that often berthed in different areas of the same port. Passenger vessels were often fully committed from a capacity viewpoint with mail, luggage and cars.

[229]Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, pp.157-158.
[230]The National Archives, *AN 83/1, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics 1950-1951. Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Statement 'A' Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951.*
[231]The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, British Railways internal correspondence dated 24 April 1963. Traffic Appreciation Irish Services; Appendix 1A.*

Stranraer-Larne, the biggest contender in terms of car traffic and the route that had developed ferry travel with the more efficient RoRo concept, only produced a return of £50,885 suggesting that something was wrong with the cost or revenue base, or both. Other marginal or loss making services were convenient in terms of berthing capacity and storage space ashore, particularly in terms of freight operations where cargo and livestock clearly did not mix with the logistics associated with train and ship passenger services. The ports of Stranraer and Larne were to provide useful 'flank' protection for the stronger routes in that they effectively blocked out potential competition.

In a Memorandum entitled '*Traffic Appreciation – Irish Services*' and dated 1962, the British Railways Board analysed the Irish Sea traffic. Since the end of the war, the total passenger traffic passing between Great Britain and the Ireland was in the process of steady and progressive increase. The business on the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire route was deemed the most important passenger link between Great Britain and Ireland and had shown considerable expansion as demonstrated in table 3.31.[232]

Table 3.31 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire passenger carryings 1938, 1948 and 1950

Year	Passengers
1938	555,000
1948	688,000
1950	681,000

Source: The National Archives [233]

The Railway companies were efficient in their ability to move people. Whilst often maligned, their attempts to achieve 'on time' departures of trains were earnest. With shipping services effectively sandwiched between two train operations it followed that the entire end-to-end, train-ship-train interchange experience needed to be efficient in its timeliness in order for the entire system to work. There was, however, a growing requirement to supply passengers with quay-to-quay tickets to satisfy those who wanted to take their car abroad.

[232]The slight downturn between 1948 and 1950 was due largely to capacity constraint.
[233]The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, British Railways internal correspondence dated 1962. Document entitled Traffic Appreciation Irish Services Appendix A,* p.1.

It was in 1948 that the BTC brought in the opportunity for passengers to buy their tickets abroad in local currency through British Railways agents abroad, something that was heralded as somewhat of a revolution in its 1948 Annual Report. It did help in enlarging the catchment area whilst making the whole process of arranging a journey somewhat easier than had previously been the case.[234]

By 1950 the entire Railway-owned operation was moving over 3,500,000 passengers by sea and experiencing growth in all sectors. Whilst the English Channel services were carrying well in excess of the number of cars that were being transported on the Irish Sea, the trend was nevertheless a precursor of what should have been anticipated in all sectors of the market. It was in this area that the BTC was remiss.

The influence of freight cannot be ignored during this period even if the transition from break-bulk to containers and road trailers was somewhat patchy and largely promoted by Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation Company as a natural extension to his ferry routes. In a document entitled '*General Transport Problems*', the British National Committee for the International Chamber of Commerce stated in connection with the free movement of international traffic:

> '*It is more than a year since transport facilities in Western Europe ceased to constitute a barrier to the free movement of international traffic. This is because of the determined steps taken by the States concerned, with valuable help from outside, to rebuild their transport systems, so seriously damaged during the war. The obstacles are now primarily currency restrictions, quotas and customs formalities. The I.C.C. is working, with other interested bodies, for a simplification of the complex and diverse regulations governing customs formalities, for the free international movement of traffic generally, and for the introduction of a through waybill for road transport.*'[235]

[234]The National Archives, *AN11/1, British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: Annual Reports and Accounts; 1948.* Chapter 5 Finance, page 91, paragraph 180.
[235]The National Archives, *AN 13/2031, International Chamber of Commerce: report on barriers to international transport and travel 1950.*

Freedom of cargo movement was but one aspect however, the other being the ability to compete with others who were equally keen to gain a share. From the notes of a meeting between the British Transport Commission and the Railway Executive in early 1950 it was clear that Irish Sea ferry services, and particularly those in the north, were coming under competitive pressure and the BTC Chairman was keen to know what could be done to augment capacity particularly in an effort to compete with '*the Bustard services*'. A combination of an Irish dock strike, and the resultant effect on railway services that were under pressure anyway, were blamed for freight delays although additional sailings were to be considered in order to help traffic to flow once again. It is ironical that the issue of labour difficulties and escalating cost was already showing signs of fuelling the move from break-bulk to containers and trailers, in effect playing into the hands of the roll-on, roll-off concept and thereby taking work away from Irish dockworkers. In terms of the reaction, critics of the Railway Executive believed that it was necessary for it to be pressured into business decisions that in the commercial sector would have been more naturally or routinely recognised, analysed and acted upon.

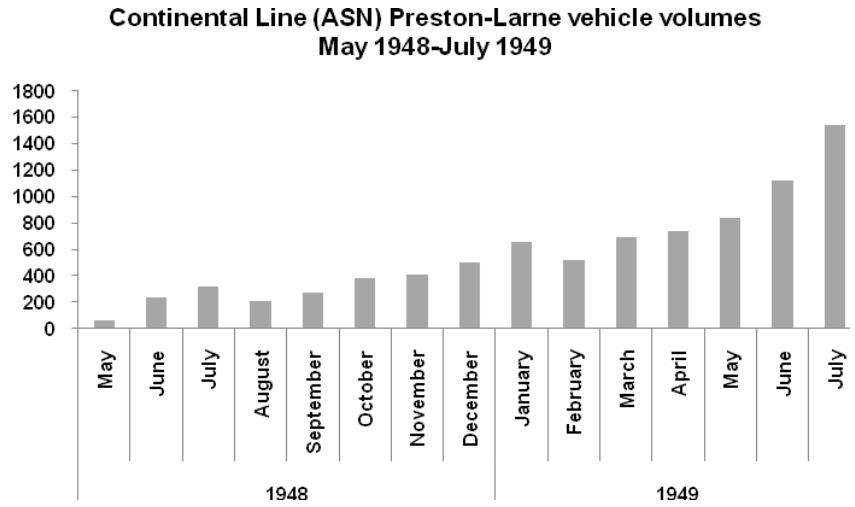
The Railway Executive responded, citing two main reasons why this situation had come about, first, the Irish Dock strike had in effect played into Bustard's hands, and second, the demand for BR services had in the main exceeded capacity. The Chairman asked if the *Princess Victoria* could make more voyages in order to compete with Atlantic Steam Navigation Company/Continental Line since due to her speed she had the ability to make an extra round voyage. The reaction was negative and unconvincing and certainly provided Bustard with the opportunity to become more established with a more proficient and popular service from Preston to Larne.[236] In essence Bustard was providing a service that the trade needed, unhindered by Railway connections and passengers, and offering the expedience of door-to-door freight transport.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the growth in freight vehicle shipments on Bustard's service from Preston to Larne, which not only reflected an increase in manufacturing output

[236]The National Archives, *AN13/1805, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and papers; August 1948-July 1950. Extract from notes of meeting between the British Transport Commission and the Railway Executive held on Thursday 20th April 1950: Northern Ireland Services.*

after the war years, but was also symptomatic of the move away from the Railway's conventional shipping operations to a competitive service that enabled a faster RoRo-based handling method. Bustard's service was also far less influenced by industrial action since most of the traffic was self-propelled and did not therefore require dock workers to discharge and load the vessels.

Figure 3.1 Continental Line (ASN) Preston-Larne vehicle volumes May 1948-July 1949



Source: The National Archives [237]

A number of BR reports were commissioned as a result of fear of competition from Bustard's services, exacerbated by the fact that the British Railways Executive believed that the establishment and resultant profitability of its competitor was effectively derived from the fact that the landing craft being operated had been '*hired from the Government on specially favourable terms*'. As can be clearly seen from Figure 3.1 the growth in Bustard's carryings was considerable and it was not surprising therefore that the incumbent and long standing operators were becoming concerned.[238]

In contrast the Railways were bound to accept all traffic tendered to them for conveyance as they were seen as a public service. In a report dated June 1950 the

[237]Ibid. Continental Line (Transport Ferry Service) memorandum entitled *Traffic Carried by Preston – Larne Service*; dated 1st August 1949.
[238]The National Archives, *AN88/93, British Transport Commission: Railway Executive: Reports: Freight traffic between Great Britain and Ireland: report of ad-hoc committee; August 1950.*

Railway Executive made reference to building a vessel for the Northern Corridor, Irish Sea operation with the express purpose of carrying '….*general merchandise, containers, other deck traffic, and possibly livestock, and be equipped for ramp loading through the stern, so as to be able to deal, if necessary, with wheeled traffic.*'[239] It is clear from this that even though the Railway Executive had studied the Bustard operation it had still not grasped or simply did not believe the sustainability of the trend towards wheeled traffic, the underlined comment '*if necessary*' being of great and potentially damaging significance. In overall terms the report recommended that no provision should be made in Heysham for RoRo since:

> a). *Road connections were less than suitable*
> b). *There were vehicle licensing issues in Northern Ireland that the Railway Executive felt would limit through-wheeled traffic*
> c). *The cost of providing ramp access to the vessels would be 'very heavy' at an estimated £250,000 for Heysham alone.*[240]

As far as the Railway-owned vessels themselves were concerned they comprised mainly Classic steam paquets capable of upwards of 20 knots and having comfortable facilities in 1st and 2nd class accommodation for foot or 'Classic' passengers.

3.5 Technological Development

Criticism existed over crossing times achieved by different services. In his book, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, Rixon Bucknall points out that the average passenger could be forgiven for believing that Railway-shipping services were going backwards.

> '*…while air travel has forged ahead, even to the point of being considerably cheaper for really de luxe services. It does indeed seem staggering that the much vaunted 'sea passage one hour' of the South Eastern and Chatham Railway in the pre-1914 era, should now have been increased by 50% on the principal outward service. Logically*

[239]The National Archives, *AN13/1997, British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and papers: Fishguard and Rosslare; Jan-June 1948.*
[240]The National Archives, *AN88/93, British Transport Commission: Railway Executive: Reports: Freight traffic between Great Britain and Ireland: report of ad-hoc committee; August 1950.*

with air competition to be faced, rail and sea journeys ought to have shown an improvement.'[241]

The speed of crossing was not to become such an important issue as timetabled frequency of service, and although it is true that United Kingdom ferry design was advanced, other nations were watching the evolution carefully in order to replicate its more important developments. Authors Duckworth and Langmuir described the pre-eminence of the cross-Channel steamer as follows:

'In proportion to her size this type of ship is a triumph of skill in design, having regard to accommodation, draught and speed, and is a peculiarly British triumph at that, as no other country in the world has had such problems to solve. Belgium, France and Japan have some experience in this direction, but we can pride ourselves on great marine achievements in the high speed craft which have maintained our Continental and Irish services for a century.'[242]

In addition to the passenger-only aspects of the cross-Channel steamer there had been early signs of roll-on, roll-off development pre-war although this took a backward step post-war particularly as the industry attempted to recover from the effects of war time losses coupled with the need to convert vessels used in the conflict back to their original purpose. Table 3.32 provides a summary of vessels owned and/or operated by British Railways showing the number of ships split by region and their gross tonnage.

Table 3.32 British Railways ships by region 1950

Group	Number of ships	Gross tons
Southern Region	28	53,745
Western Region	8	17,108
London Midland Region	22	42,705
Eastern Region	10	21,846
North Eastern Region	3	3,992
Scottish Region	2	5,236
Total	**73**	**144,642**

Source: The National Archives [243]

[241] Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, p.159.
[242] Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers,* p.186.
[243] The National Archives, AN83/12, *Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948. *Summary of Vessels owned and operated by British Railways showing number and gross tonnage: Approximate crossing times of principal passenger services*; p.(iii).

The vessels operated in 1950 were largely 'Classic' or passenger only, and as a consequence 'narrow gutted', that is to say built long and slender in order to improve sea keeping, speed and manoeuvrability. In the main their relatively long, slender shape meant that they were not able to be converted to 'drive-on' vehicle carrying. The ratio of length to beam was to change considerably with new construction in the need for the increased internal capacity required for vehicle-carrying. Speed was to ultimately play a part in crossings between continents although not to the degree that was being highlighted by Bucknall.[244] One feature that capped any debate over faster vessels was the price of fuel especially as it was often seen as a double penalty since most vessels needed to be converted from coal to oil burners. As vessels became larger, and the block coefficient increased[245] as well as the need for increased vehicle carrying capacity, so too the consumption of fuel soared, yet another factor that ensured a cautious view on the enhancement of speed and yet another deliberation over vessel design and cost. Ratios, defined as overall length divided by beam, increased from the pre-war 5.4 of the *Isle of Thanet* to 6.48 for the *Normannia,* 6.82 for the *Maid of Orleans*, and 7.58 for the *Brighton*: in short, ferries were becoming less slender and slightly slower than their predecessors that were altogether leaner and meaner.

The first half of the Twentieth Century had witnessed a number of advancements in terms of mechanical power and propulsion. In 1950 most cross-Channel steamers were powered by steam turbines, a machinery layout that provided maximum speed on minimum power because they were so much more efficient ton for ton than reciprocating engines, and so much easier to work. Steam turbines had developed from so-called direct drive to single reduction, geared turbines, which were able to develop more efficiency especially during a period where scale and therefore gross tonnage and block coefficient were increasing. Table 3.33 provides an indication of the number of direct drive steamers that were in operation during 1950. It is interesting to note the lifespan of these vessels despite technological advancements within the industry and evolutionary movement within the respective markets.[246]

[244]Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, p.159.
[245]An increase in the underwater hull form in terms of beam created more resistance in pushing the vessel through the water.
[246]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.5-6.

Table 3.33 Direct drive steamers

Direct drive steamers				
Vessel	**Dates**	**Gross tons**	**Engine Power (kW)**	**Speed knots**
South Eastern & Chatham Railway				
Victoria	1906-1957	1,689	5,600	21.0
Riviera	1911-1957	1,674	6,000	20.0
Isle of Man Steam Packet Company				
Viking	1905-1954	1,957	8,200	22.0
Great Eastern Railway				
Munich	1907-1950	2,570	7,500	20.0
London & South Western Railway				
Caesarea	1910-1950	1,505	4,500	20.0

Source: Robins [247]

Turbine propulsion was being further developed during the late 1940s such that double-reduction, geared steamers were already being designed during the period under review.[248] The move to single reduction, geared turbines was however gradual as indicated in table 3.34, but when linked to market growth and the demand for new tonnage it was clear that the further refinement offered by the design of the Parson's engine would steadily take over from the direct drive version. The power requirement for new vessels capable of carrying vehicles with the broader beam and higher block coefficient is evident when comparing the *Worthing* and the *Brighton* in the table below.

[247] ibid pp.115-116.
[248] ibid p.120.

Table 3.34 Single reduction geared turbines

Single reduction geared turbines				
Vessel	**Dates**	**Gross tons**	**Engine Power (kW)**	**Speed knots**
London & South Western Railway				
Hantonia	1911-1952	1,560	3,700	19.0
Isle of Man Steam Packet Company				
Ben-my-Chree	1927-1965	2,586	7,700	24.0
Lady of Mann	1930-1971	3,104	8,600	23.0
Mona's Queen	1946-1981	2,485	6,300	21.0
King Orry	1946-1979	2,485	6,300	21.0
Tynwald	1947-1975	2,493	6,300	21.0
Snaefell	1948-1978	2,489	6,300	21.0
Great Eastern Railway				
Antwerp	1920-1951	2,957		21.0
Southern Railway				
Dinard	1924-1970	2,291	3,900	18.0
Isle of Thanet	1925-1964	2,701	7,000	22.0
Worthing	1928-1965	2,288	11,000	24.0
Canterbury	1929-1965	2,912	7,000	23.0
Isle of Guernsey	1930-1961	2,145	4,000	19.0
Isle of Jersey	1930-1963	2,143	4,000	19.0
Isle of Sark	1932-1960	2,211	4,000	19.0
Brittany	1933-1972	1,445	1,900	14.0
Shepperton Ferry	1934-1972	2,839	3,300	16.0
Hampton Ferry	1934-1973	2,839	3,300	16.0
Twickenham Ferry	1934-1974	2,839	3,300	16.0
Invicta	1940-1972	4,178	8,200	22.0
Falaise	1946-1974	3,710	6,300	20.0
London, Midland & Scottish				
Duke of Rothesay	1928-1956	3,606	6,000	22.0
Duke of Lancaster	1928-1956	3,608	6,000	20.0
Duke of Argyll	1928-1956	3,604	6,000	21.0
Slieve Bloom	1930-1965	1,279	2,100	16.0
Princess Margaret	1931-1975	2,523	5,600	20.0
Slieve More	1932-1965	1,397	2,100	17.0
Princess Maud	1933-1969	2,886	5,600	20.0
Slieve League	1935-1967	1,342	2,100	17.0
Duke of York	1935-1975	3,743	6,000	20.0
Slieve Bearnagh	1936-1972	1,450	2,100	17.0
Slieve Bawn	1936-1972	1,447	2,100	17.0
Great Western Railway				
St. Julien	1925-1961	1,885	3,200	18.0
St. Helier	1925-1960	1,885	3,200	18.0
London & North Eastern Railway				
Vienna	1929-1960	4,227	7,500	21.0
Arnhem	1947-1969	4,891	9,000	21.0
Fishguard & Rosslare Railway and Harbour Company				
St. Andrew	1932-1967	2,702	5,000	22.0

St. Patrick	1947-1980	3,482	6,300	20.0
St. David	1947-1980	3,482	6,300	20.0
French State Railways				
Londres	1940-1966	2,404	16,000	24.0
British Transport Commission				
Maid of Orleans	1949-1975	3,776	7,500	22.0
Brighton	1950-1970	2,875	14,000	24.0
Amsterdam	1950-1981	5,092	9,300	21.0

Source: Robins [249]

In a process that saw the industry move from coal to heavy oil, pioneers of cleaner and more efficient machinery were designing ships with main engines supplied by the principals invented by Dr Rudolph Diesel.[250] Early protagonists of this new power plant were DFDS in 1925, the Belfast Steamship Company in 1929 and Belgian Marine in 1934 although early diesel-driven ships were slow to develop because of a mixture of costly installation, noise and vibration.[251]

The Belfast Steamship Company had their diesel trio comprising *Ulster Monarch*, *Ulster Queen* and *Ulster Prince* delivered as early as 1929 and 1930. The vessels were fitted with twin 10 cylinder Harland B&W oil engines which provided them with a service speed of 18 knots on the overnight passage from Liverpool to Belfast. In order to illustrate the influence of tradition, it is notable that all three vessels were built with two funnels, the forward one being a dummy that was purely for show.

Proof that the diesel engine could produce sufficient power to maintain fast channel crossings came in 1934 when the Belgian Government introduced the *Prince Baudouin* with twin sets of 12 cylinder two-stroke Sulzer Diesels. At over 25 knots the vessel became the fastest motor ship afloat. The Dutch commissioned their first motor ships in 1939 with the introduction of the *Koningen Emma* and *Prinses Beatrix*.[252]

[249]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, pp.117-119.
[250]Available at:
http://members.shaw.ca/diesel-duck/library/articles/rudolph_diesel.htm; July 15, 2004
[251]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.18.
[252]The vessels were requisitioned for Admiralty service 1940-1946 as *Queen Emma* and *Princess Beatrix* where they served as so-called LSI(M) Landing Ship Infantry (Medium). They were said to be particularly useful given their relatively small engine space and economical operation. The vessels returned to Harwich-Hook in 1948 and were scrapped in 1968. Bishop, C (2002) *The Encyclopaedia of Weapons of World War II.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. p.531.
[252]Admiralty service 1940-1946, 1948 Harwich-Hook, 1968 scrapped.

The first British Railway owned cross-channel motor ships were the *Princess Victoria* of 1946 and her near identical namesake of 1939, *Princess Maud*. These were followed by the *Cambria* and *Hibernia* in 1948, although there were no further diesels until 1967 when the *Antrim Princess* was inaugurated on the Stranraer-Larne service.[253]

Fuel costs for the Classic passenger-only vessels with their low resistance through the water had been relatively low and therefore economy of operation was not uppermost in the minds of owners. As will be seen the conversion from coal to oil consumption was however an issue for most vessel owners during the post-war period because of a number of operational reasons.

Most vessels were twin screw with coal-fired steam turbine propulsion in 1950 and as part of the necessary process of updating the fleet, the Marine Committee of the Railway Executive had analysed the conversion of vessels from coal to oil consumption. In basic terms oil was considered cleaner and took fewer personnel to manage, both on shore and on board and by 1950, 33 out of the fleet of 73 vessels were oil fired.

In an example that involves the 1931-built *Princess Margaret*, in a memorandum dated 28 March 1949 the conversion costs were defined to be £40,000, a figure that did not allow for any repairs that might have been necessary in terms of new oil tanks, re-tubing of boilers etc. The age of the vessel was another consideration as the capital investment had to be written off during the anticipated balance of the ship's life resulting in high depreciation if this period was short. The *Princess Margaret* was 18 years into what was forecast to be a 33-year life and this was therefore considered to be a reasonable term. Annual costs were analysed as illustrated in table 3.35.

[253]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.98.

Table 3.35 *Princess Margaret* annual costs

Annual costs	Coal	Oil	Variance
Fuel	£19,043	£22,672	+ £3,629
Wages	£3,840	£2,482	- £1,358
Increased cost	-	-	+ £2,271

Source: The National Archives [254]

To this sum was added the cost of servicing a debt of £40,000 over a 15-year term, being £2,666 per year before interest charges, resulting in a total of £4,937 on an annualised basis. Fuel consumption was considered and the results of the investigation are shown in 3.36 illustrating the immediate penalty derived from the cost of oil as opposed to coal although cost was not the only aspect to take into consideration:

Table 3.36 *Princess Margaret* fuel consumption

Fuel consumption	Coal	Oil
Annual consumption	7,740 tons	4,085 tons
Cost per ton	49 shillings 2 pence	111 shillings

Source: The National Archives [255]

Many deep-sea shipping companies converted vessel engines to diesel in the mid-1920s[256] although the debate on preferred propulsion was to continue for some time partly complicated by the fact that diesel engines need oil whereas turbines could run on coal or oil, and which could therefore provide a potential hedge against fluctuating energy prices. Britain had an abundance of coal that was favoured by shipowners for its superior output as well as the country's longstanding tradition in the design and construction of steam turbine machinery which along with the implications of the war years further delayed the process of converting vessels firstly to oil burners and ultimately to diesel power.[257] There were the unmistakable signs however that oil was more appropriate for ferry trades. Oil could be stowed in parts of the vessel that did not conflict with cargo, passengers or deadweight carrying capacity; it had a greater caloric density resulting in less refuelling which in turn aided the need to turn ships

[254]The National Archives, *AN157/77, British Railways: Southern Region: Chief Regional Officer's Files: Train Ferry Vessels: Conversion to oil fuel 1948-1952. Memorandum to the Railway Executive from the Marine Committee entitled Conversion of Ships from Coal to Oil Fuel; Appendix A dated 28 March 1949.*
[255]ibid
[256]Examples are P&O, British India, Glen Line.
[257]Coal was widely available in Britain. Cardiff coal was preferred by the navies of the world. Dahl, J (2000) *From Coal to Oil.* Joint Forces Quarterly: National Defence University. p.50.

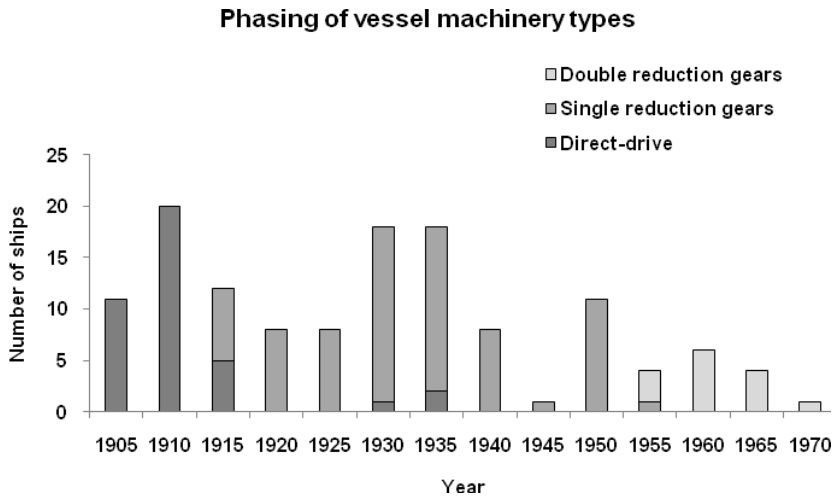
around faster. On the other hand, and in the more demanding post-war economy, motor ships were to become increasingly popular especially as coal was dirty and labour intensive[258] and as oil supplies became more plentiful around Britain's coastline the decision for ferry operators was to become an easy one to make.[259]

Figure 3.2 demonstrates the move from direct drive steamers to single reduction and double reduction illustrating the progression, moves that coincided with the influence of war and the need for greater efficiency and improved costs. The BR - Railway Executive was also obliged to take into account bunkering points since coal supply was already in place whereas a number of non-mainstream ferry ports had no facility for oil and the cost of installing such facilities, even if it were possible, was sometime prohibitive.[260]

A number of the vessels had a bow rudder fitted to aid manoeuvrability when travelling astern particularly into the narrow and long approaches, a feature that typified Railway-built and -owned ports. Most vessels had sculptured cruiser sterns, which facilitated movement astern and enabled these highly agile vessels to reach speeds of 10-15 knots when reversing into a berth.

[258]The Royal Navy was partially responsible for the transition of merchant vessels from coal to oil since oil fuel provided addition speed which was necessary to outrun the enemy. In addition Winston Churchill was reported to note that '*…the ordeal of coaling ship exhausted the whole ship's company. In wartime it robbed them of their brief period of rest; it subjected everyone to extreme discomfort.*'. Dahl, J; Article: *Naval Innovation: From Coal to Oil.* pp.50-52.
[259]Headrick, D (1988) *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940.* New York: Oxford University Press. pp.29-31.
[260]The National Archives, *AN157/77, British Railways: Southern Region: Chief Regional Officer's Files: Train Ferry Vessels: Conversion to oil fuel 1948-1952. Memorandum from Marine Committee to Railway Executive entitled: Conversion of Ships from Coal to Oil Fuel dated 28th March 1949.*

Figure 3.2 Phasing of vessel machinery types



Source: Robins [261]

A number of design principles were present in vessels of the day including straight stems with sterns that were sculptured in order to reduce resistance and aid steering and overall manoeuvrability when coming astern. The Classic steamer had evolved from the paddle steamer era with low superstructure designed to reduce the centre of gravity and windage[262], thereby aiding the vessel's sea kindliness. In the main these vessels were not fitted with stabilisers and could therefore be uncomfortable in a seaway, an issue that was generally improved by post war designs that were larger and broader in the beam with a raked stem and generally more comfortable proportions. The early 1950s saw the gradual introduction of stabilisers.[263]

Prior to the introduction of RoRo steamers, paquets required no more than a sheltered berth often provided by a single quay wall and a gangway. Luggage and cargo, including cars were loaded into the vessels forward hold by a quayside crane.

Shipbuilders played a significant part in the creation of the steamer image. After the war German and Japanese yards were in ruins and others closer to the United Kingdom were still in the process of recovery. The only two countries that were

[261]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.14.
[262]Windage is the air draft of a vessel that acts as a sail area in high winds thereby influencing manoeuvrability.
[263]Denny-Brown stabilisers were first fitted to the 2,233 gross tons *Isle of Sark* as an experiment in 1932: Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, p.70.

capable of building vessels in any quantity within Europe were Sweden and the United Kingdom. Wartime inflation resulted in a near doubling of shipbuilding prices and with the uncertainty that surrounded material and labour costs there was an absence of any British builder who was prepared to quote on the basis of fixed price contracts. Instead yards opted for 'cost plus' contracts usually on the basis of payment for actual materials and labour plus a fixed sum for overheads and profit. Vessel owners had little choice but to accept yard space, assuming it was available, on these terms. Moreover, at the Labour Party Conference in October 1960 there was much concern over the state of the shipbuilding and ship-repair industries. Due to the recession in world shipping and the continual redundancy in repair yards '*This conference believes that all British-owned ships should be compelled to be repaired and overhauled in British yards*'. The conference pressed for the Parliamentary Labour Party to enact legislation to ensure that repairs or building for any British Company shall be carried out in the United Kingdom under penalty of loss of shipping subsidies paid to such firms (the subsidies were not specified). Apart from this and the planned modernisation of the British Transport system there was nothing else of significance on the conference agenda.[264]

In general, research and development were given a priority post-war with shipbuilders forming the British Shipbuilders Research Association. Engine builders were also active in setting up the Parsons and Marine Engineering Turbine Research and Development Association, an organisation that was abbreviated to PAMETRADA. The former organisation concerned itself with hydrodynamic research, which resulted in a range of model tests on differing hull forms whilst PAMETRADA worked on improving steam turbine designs with a view to increasing steam pressures and temperatures mirroring those used in U.S. machinery.[265]

The characteristic design of a steam paquet was derived from a combination of port and route trading conditions and the builder's influence. The Railway companies that came together to form the regional components of BTC in 1948 were loyal to relatively few shipbuilders, the names of whom appear repeatedly in the context of cross-Channel steamers accentuated by the necessary design progression that involved

[264] *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,021; 15 September 1960; p.13.
[265] Buxton, I (2000) *Ship Design and Construction*; Gardner and Greenway, *Conway's History of the Ship, The Golden Age of Shipping: The Classic Merchant Ship 1900-1960*, p.149.

aspects as diverse as propulsion power and vessel carrying capacity. Prominent builders of the time and their clear railway sector following are clearly illustrated in the following tables:

- William Denny and Brothers Limited of Dumbarton was a capable yard that had built many hundreds of ships. In terms of the Railway organisation they accounted for 60% of the Southern region fleet of 20 vessels in 1950. Table 3.37 illustrates all passenger steamers constructed for the Railway services by them up to 1950.

Table 3.37 William Denny and Brothers Limited, Dumbarton[266]

William Denny and Brothers Limited, Dumbarton		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Biarritz	1915	Southern Railway
Hibernia	1920	London Midland
Cambria	1921	London Midland
Dinard	1924	Southern Railway
Isle of Thanet	1925	Southern Railway
Duke of Argyll	1928	London, Midland and Scottish
Duke of Lancaster	1928	London, Midland and Scottish
Duke of Rothesay	1928	London, Midland and Scottish
Worthing	1928	Southern Railway
Isle of Guernsey	1930	Southern Railway
Isle of Jersey	1930	Southern Railway
Isle of Sark	1930	Southern Railway
Slieve Bloom	1930	London, Midland and Scottish
Princess Margaret	1931	London, Midland and Scottish
Slieve More	1932	London, Midland and Scottish
Brittany	1933	Southern Railway
Princess Maud	1934	London, Midland and Scottish
Slieve League	1935	London, Midland and Scottish
Slieve Bearnagh	1936	London, Midland and Scottish
Slieve Bawn	1937	London, Midland and Scottish
Invicta	1940	Southern Railway
Princess Victoria	1946	London, Midland and Scottish
Winchester	1947	Southern Railway
Falaise	1947	Southern Railway
Maid of Orleans	1949	Southern Railway
Brighton	1950	Southern Railway

Source: Clegg and Styring [267]

As if to support the pre-eminent position held by the cross-Channel turbine steamer, Duckworth and Langmuir, distinguished authors on vessels of the day, commented that no small part of their triumph of design was due to shipbuilder's Messrs Denny of Dumbarton.[268]

- John Brown and Co Limited of Clydebank accounted for the entire North Eastern region fleet as well as the *St Helier* and *St Julien*, both

[266]In a frank speech given at the launch of a vessel, Mr Edward L Denny, chairman of William Denny and Brothers Limited, Dumbarton said that shipbuilder speeches often fall into one of two categories. They either suggest that labour relations are good at that particular yard and that they were able to cope with foreign competition or that in contrast shipyard executives would sometimes drop their guard and blame the unions for the industry's difficulties. He referred to this as 'annoying' and futile in that it only put peoples backs up. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,002; 5 May 1960; p.450.
[267]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*,. pp.133-136.
[268]Robins, *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles*, p.112.

of which were built for the Great Western Railway Company but were subsequently transferred to the Southern Region on 1 November 1948.

Table 3.38 John Brown and Company Limited, Clydebank

John Brown and Company Limited, Clydebank		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Antwerp	1920	London and North Eastern Railway
St. Helier	1925	Great Western Railway
St. Julien	1925	Great Western Railway
Vienna	1929	London and North Eastern Railway
Prague	1929	London and North Eastern Railway
Arnhem	1947	London and North Eastern Railway
Suffolk Ferry	1947	London and North Eastern Railway
Amsterdam	1950	London and North Eastern Railway

Source: Clegg and Styring [269]

- D and W Henderson Limited of Glasgow and Swan, Hunter and Wigham Richardson Limited of Tyneside accounted between them for the freight only and train ferry tonnage consisting of 13 vessels.

Table 3.39 D and W Henderson Limited, Glasgow

D and W Henderson Limited, Glasgow		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Haslemere	1925	Southern Railway
Hythe	1925	Southern Railway
Whitstable	1925	Southern Railway
Maidstone	1926	Southern Railway
Ringwood	1926	Southern Railway
Deal	1928	Southern Railway
Autocarrier	1931	Southern Railway

Source: Clegg and Styring [270]

[269]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, pp.133-136.
[270]ibid pp.133-136.

Table 3.40 Swan, Hunter and Wingham Richardson Limited, Tyneside

Swan, Hunter and Wingham Richardson Limited, Tyneside		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Irwell	1906	Associated Humber Lines
Macclesfield	1914	Associated Humber Lines
Roebuck	1925	Great Western Railway
Sambur	1925	Great Western Railway
Hampton Ferry	1934	Southern Railway
Shepperton Ferry	1935	Southern Railway

Source: Clegg and Styring [271]

- The Western region comprised the balance of vessels constructed by Cammell Laird and Co Limited of Birkenhead and includes a diverse range of vessel which includes train ferries, night ferries and freight only vessels.[272]

Table 3.41 Cammell Laird and Company Limited, Birkenhead[273]

Cammell Laird and Company Limited, Birkenhead		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Aire	1931	Associated Humber Lines
Blyth	1931	Associated Humber Lines
St. Andrew	1932	Great Western Railway
Great Western	1934	Great Western Railway
St. Patrick	1946	Great Western Railway
St. David	1947	Great Western Railway

Source: Clegg and Styring [274]

- Coast Line and British & Irish Steam Packet vessels were constructed by Harland and Wolff and had a distinctive, sturdy appearance with a 'well' fore and aft of the accommodation.

[271]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, pp.133-136.
[272]ibid pp.129-136.
[273]Mr R.W. Johnson, chairman and managing director of Cammell Laird and Company (Shipbuilders and Engineers) Limited said at the launch of the *Bidford Priory* that '*at the present time our shipowner friends are having difficult times…..so are we*'. He made specific reference to foreign yards, clearly an area of growing concern. Referring to labour productivity Mr Johnson said that Continental countries seemed to be able to achieve a greater quantity of work from their labour forces than was possible in this country [United Kingdom]. In a fairly weak manner he explained that this might be due to demarcation problems and that any such disputes should be settled around a table and without resort to stoppages. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,002; 5 May 1960; p.50. Cammell Laird declared a net profit of £272,391 for the year 1959 as compared with £689,775 for 1958 underlining the way in which shipbuilding margins were coming under increasing pressure. The company was also forced to plough profits back into the business in order to modernise production facilities and techniques in order to compete with foreign yards. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,005; 26 May 1960; p.29.
[274]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, pp.133-136.

Table 3.42 Harland and Wolff Limited, Belfast and Govan[275]

Harland and Wolff Limited, Belfast and Govan		
Vessel	**Year**	**Authority**
Duke of York	1935	London, Midland and Scottish
Cambria	1949	London, Midland and Scottish
Hibernia	1949	London, Midland and Scottish

Source: Clegg and Styring [276]

Vessels were not at that time fitted with bow thrusters. In exposed ports, such as Dover Western Docks and Folkestone, hanging-off wires were provided such that vessels could pull themselves off a quay wall when pinned on to it by adverse winds. As a back-up towing facilities were often available.

It was in 1949 that SNCF ordered a new, fast turbine driven steamer to replace two SAGA ships which had been lost during the War.[277] The 4,037-gross ton *Cote d'Azur*, heralded on her arrival as the most powerful steamer ever built for the short sea, was delivered in 1950 for operation on the Folkestone-Calais service. The vessel had three decks with considerable sheer and flair forward and was fitted with a streamlined funnel that ensured the efficient dispersal of exhaust gases. Aluminium was used for the first time in the construction of her superstructure and bridge and her oil burning machinery space differed from the two-compartment arrangement favoured in the British ships in that it had an additional compartment for the diesel generators. Two sets of Parsons SR Geared Turbines developed a maximum of 22,000 ship horsepower (shp) and a more normal 16,000 shp for her service speed of 21.5 knots.[278] The ship was capable of 25.5 knots and was therefore the fastest vessel of her day on the short sea routes.[279] So far uncharacteristic innovation was also evident in the British Transport Commission Southern Region's vessel *Brighton*, which benefited from single cylinder double-casing impulse turbines, which developed 19,000 shp and a speed of 24 knots. As testimony to the need to manoeuvre astern in

[275]As one of the most prominent shipbuilders of their time, Harland and Wolff declared a profit after charges and taxation of £514,462 for the year 1959. The previous year had shown a profit of £695,588. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,000; 21 April 1960; p.49.
[276]Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*, pp.133-136.
[277]ibid pp.48&64.
[278]Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*, p.55.
[279]Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, p.158.

an efficient way, the vessel could develop 16,150 shp when coming astern into the ports she served.[280]

Vessel alterations were not only confined to the mechanical, structural or technological areas. As an illustration of the way in which vessels were cosmetically altered in order to conceal their age - and therefore maintain a longer service before being replaced - the 520-passenger capacity *Duke of York*, built by Harland and Wolff in 1935 as a two-funnelled steamer for the LMS Railway's Heysham-Belfast service, was rebuilt with a single funnel after the war before transfer to the Harwich-Hook of Holland route in January 1949 to stand in for the *Prague* which had caught fire at her builders in March 1948.[281] Most of the vessels were so-called day-ferries, that is to say they were not fitted with overnight sleeping accommodation whilst others such as the 1928 William Denny-built trio on the Heysham-Belfast service, the *Duke of Argyll*, *Duke of Lancaster* and *Duke of Rothesay*, were all capable of carrying 1,500 passengers with overnight sleeping accommodation for 450. As testament to the way in which they were ably constructed these three vessels operated the service from 1928 through to the mid-fifties.[282]

From an operational perspective the BR-owned services were in a prime position in 1950 in that they not only had more than half of the services operating from the United Kingdom, but also controlled those routes that were prominent in terms of demand and growth. This prime advantage was somewhat overshadowed by the organisation's slowness to make decisions and to recognise the forthcoming importance of vehicle traffic, an anathema to railways, which conspired to allow a delay in the transition from Classic, passenger-only steamer to RoRo vehicle ferry.[283] There is evidence that the monopolistic position actually caused complacency through the ranks of the various political and commercial layers of the Railway system. This was not all, since the lack of serious competition in 1950 and the time taken to design new vessels and place orders resulted in a distinct lack of timely response. Once competition appeared, largely as a result of the perceived intransigence and lack of dynamism amongst the Railway regions, the monopoly status had all but been lost,

[280]Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*, p.70.
[281]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, pp.27-30.
[282]ibid pp.155-158.
[283]1950 witnessed some 40 routes operating to mainland Europe and Ireland from the United Kingdom.

since others, and particularly those in the private sector, were more capable of reacting to market trends with a necessary level of urgency that was absent in the bureaucratic Railway system. This was also true of the ports where an inconsistent approach prevailed. For example, the side-loading drive-on, drive-off facilities provided for the Dover-Dunkerque train ferries as early as 1936 witnessed the concept of RoRo in its truly commercial sense and was followed in 1939 by the stern loading *Princess Victoria* that served the Stranraer-Larne route. The concept in both locations was a winner and became a pioneer in the process of developing improved methods of loading and discharging for an increasing market in both passenger cars and freight vehicles but was not however resurrected until sometime after the war.[284]

Certain landmarks epitomise the importance of the 1950s. Post-nationalisation, the newest passenger-only ferry was the *Maid of Orleans* built in 1949 and after which no more passenger-only cross-Channel steamers were built for British Railways' Dover Strait routes although the *Brighton* made an appearance on the Newhaven-Dieppe route in 1950 whilst the *Normannia* was introduced on the overnight Southampton-Le Havre route in 1952.[285]

Rail-based services linked London and Paris via Dover and Newhaven with the *Golden Arrow*, the Night Ferry and other famous names.[286] It was in 1936 that Southern Railway had commenced its cross-Channel train ferry service linking Dover with the French port of Dunkerque with the purpose of carrying trains of sleeping cars that were *en route* from Victoria (London) to Paris Nord. The 'Night Ferry' was also able to carry cars that were driven on to the vessel via side ramps into a small garage at the end of the vessel's boat deck.[287] Post-war traffic patterns were changing to the extent that more people wanted to travel with their vehicle and the United Kingdom was on the brink of continental touring. There was a growing sense of adventure, but vehicle volume remained low along with expectations although despite this it was becoming increasingly necessary for the Railways to take note of the changing structure and modal complexity of the market.

[284]Clegg and Styring, *British Nationalised Shipping*, pp.171,174.
[285]Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*, p.107.
[286]The Newhaven-Dieppe route was a true joint venture dating back to 1863. Danielson, *Railway Ships and Packet Ports*, p.28.
[287]Henderson, *Crossing the Channel*, pp.26-28&34.

The principle of LoLo for the loading and discharging of vehicles in volume often resulted in delay and damage to the cargo. The advent of RoRo, as already experienced in a limited way on the train ferries as well as pre-War during the Calais strike was deemed to be the solution in that it provided quick and easy loading and discharge of a sector of the market that was increasing. RoRo avoided damage to vehicles that had been previously loaded by crane, whilst allowing freight to move expeditiously on vehicles rather than in break-bulk form. Vessel turnarounds improved greatly which was to the benefit of the vessel operator in making maximum use of the asset. As a concept there was also the benefit of being better able to maintain pace with the changes in land based transport. Vehicles from motorbikes to coaches could suddenly be accommodated, thus opening up a whole new market. Allowing the customer to drive his own vehicle on board eliminated the need for stevedores and in effect transferred responsibility back to the owner or driver. RoRo took the ferry operator further from the position of very considerable power demonstrated by the crane driver and his union.

Train ferries and estuarial and river services had largely stumbled across the concept of RoRo for ease of turnaround and in order to keep up with the car. The loading and discharging of cars was somewhat simplified because the principle of the train ferry was that vessels were loaded and discharged via a level 'span' enabled by operation within an enclosed dock.[288]

In yet another landmark, it was the French General Strike in June 1936 that had allowed Townsend's vessel *Forde* to demonstrate the value of her ramp access by turning her stern onto the quayside thus enabling vehicles to be driven straight onto the ship at the appropriate point. Had it not been for the war, large fleet losses and resultant difficulties it is likely that the concept of RoRo would have taken hold much sooner. Either way, in this case the principles associated with, and the need for RoRo circumvented strike-bound cranes and the concept was born.

The opportunity to improve not only the loading and discharging through this new concept but also the ability to greatly reduce shore side costs was to follow, further

[288]Cowsill and Hendy, *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000*, p.176-178.

motivating a move towards the drive-on, drive-off principle. It is also worth emphasising that in 1950 large investment was not an essential criterion for entry into the ferry business as evidenced by Townsend's replacement of the *Forde* with the two-year old River-class frigate HMS *Halladale*, purchased for £15,000 in 1948.[289]

Of all the Railway-owned ports Stranraer provided and proved the RoRo example pre war in contrast to Dover whose port authority took a long time to recognise the benefits that could be derived from the concept and the direction in which the market was moving. Dover's Eastern Docks' linkspans were inaugurated in 1953.[290] Nonetheless the roll-on, roll-off concept had been conceived even though car volumes in 1950 had not reached the level of demand that required a new and altogether more efficient system than the lift-on, lift-off method that those wishing to travel abroad had been used to.

3.6 Summary

British Railways, operating a mainline route structure around the United Kingdom coastline represented mature dominance supported by a parent company that generated its revenue. Other operators from the private sector were mainly involved in longer distance routings and therefore of little concern to a business that was more preoccupied with challenges associated with the advent of RoRo at Dover and the need to accommodate vehicles on an ageing fleet.

[289]Henderson, *Crossing the Channel*, pp.50-51.
[290]ibid p.53.

Chapter 4:
Rail, Government and New Entrants 1951-1961

4.1 Introduction

A chapter in a thesis that relates to the British ferry industry between 1948 and 1987 inevitably must concern itself with the opening phase which, with an element of artistic licence, can be dubbed The Fifties. In reality this phase can be said to have begun in 1947 with the nationalisation of the rail industry and to have ended in 1961 with the reorganisation and re-tonnaging of the British Railways fleet and the relative prominence and competitive effects of Townsend Brothers Car Ferries and a relative newcomer, Colonel Bustard's Transport Ferry Service (a subsidiary of the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company)[291] in the progression of roll-on, roll-off. But the 1950 point of departure does reach back to 1947 because in 1950 the ferry industry was still coming to terms with the changes that flowed in the wake of nationalisation. As it was, this was but one of many changes each of which possessed major significance and which together resulted in the industry by 1961 standing on the brink of transformation. This was a period that began with the political uncertainties brought about by the decline of the Labour government and its replacement in October 1951 by a Conservative government that initiated a policy of denationalisation of the road traffic industry, as well as the coming to centre stage of the first serious competition in the form of Townsend and Bustard. It was a period that saw, with this new competition, the first drive-on drive-off service in 1953, a development that pointed clearly in the direction the industry would have to follow in future but which presented an entirely new problem for a ferry service that, as part of British Railways, was beset by two basic difficulties that indeed had been there since 1947 but which had assumed added significance by this time. The Great Depression of the Thirties and then the demands of war had resulted in losses and, perhaps more serious, major under-investment with the result that by this time the ferry industry had ageing ships

[291]Colonel Bustard had the idea of using tank landing craft (LST's) while serving as an assistant director of transportation during the war and after demobilisation he approached the Admiralty to buy or charter several vessels for a new kind of freight service between Britain and Europe. Negotiations were difficult and prolonged. Established shipping lines said '……*they could see no future in the commercial employment of these naval ships*'. After discussions with the Admiralty and Ministry of War Transport Bustard chartered a number of LST's for three year periods. '*We had a Labour government in 1946 and but for the vision and assistance of the then minister of War Transport, Mr Alfred Barnes and the Parliamentary Secretaries, Mr Alfred Robens and Mr James Callaghan, I am satisfied my plans for a roll-on, roll-off cross-Channel service would never have been realised.*' *The Times*, 31 October 1964; p.6.

that stood in increasingly urgent need of replacement, but by 1953 the rail industry was moving into deficit, with all that that implied for investment programmes. As it was, the ferry service was the only part of British Railways that was profitable, but the industry as a whole stood in need of massive investment that was not available. And, of course, by the end of the Fifties, by which time the British and European economies were pulling themselves clear of the effects of war and there was in place a European Community, there existed new public expectations and demands not least in terms of overseas travel, and there was a fledging air industry in place, with all the elements of competition that this development implied for a British Railways the losses of which had assumed such major proportions that fundamental change, in the form of the Beeching Axe, was in the offing.

By the end of the Forties, the end of the immediate post-war period, British Railways put in hand various measures, specifically reduction of rates in order to encourage trade. This promoted opposition from some who firmly believed that British Railways were unfairly taking advantage of their position. Mr. R. E. Peasegood, chairman of the Humber District Association of the Chartered Shipbrokers declared at a meeting in March 1950 that it was 'galling' to shipbrokers and ship-owners to find that in spite of British Railways financial deficit, it was cutting rates in order to secure coastal trade. He accused British Railways of being more interested in boosting statistics than sound economics. He went on to say that '*We must hope that in their appraisal of the functions of the railways and the roads the Government will have in mind that coastal shipping, measured in ton-miles, represents 20% of the country's transport system, and we shipbrokers urge the Minister of Transport to curb the uneconomic infiltration of jealous competitors so that the percentage shall not be further reduced*'.[292] British Railways increased freight charges soon afterwards.

After a very difficult period in the years immediately after the end of the Second World War that was noted for the sterling crisis of 1947 and 1949 and then (after brief recovery) the disastrous impact of the Korean War, the Fifties heralded early signs of major improvement in the United Kingdom's economy. This improvement, coupled with a freedom to travel, created a phenomenon that benefited British Railways,

[292]Gourvish, T.R (1986) *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.94-95.

fledgling airlines and shipping services alike. The transport of goods by road started to open up new horizons that would bring an opportunity for choice and independence, something that had never been on offer as long as British Railways dominated the movement of freight. But toward the end of the period under review shipping, in general terms, was experiencing major difficulties on a global scale. Ernest Marples MP,[293] Minister of Transport (14 October 1959 – 16 October 1964), went on record with the distinctly unhelpful observation that 'Shipping must move with the times,' but he added that he was aware that it had been a particularly difficult period for British shipping as it had been for world shipping generally, most obviously in terms of depressed freight rates and a major increase in the number of laid-up vessels. In a tone that was to become increasingly familiar, Sir Nicholas Cazer, President of the Chamber of Shipping referred in January 1960 to a struggle that will be long and hard for British shipping and calling upon the government of the day to provide assistance in the form of reduced taxation.[294] These were factors that mainly affected ocean-going shipping although trade with the Continent had likewise been affected not least by the fact that military shipments were lower than at any time since 1945. Equally export trade had not recovered to previous levels which in turn contributed to surplus shipping capacity that further depressed rates.

But with reference to the British ferry industry, the next development was less to do with shipping but more to do with a railway industry that by the end of the Fifties was in deepening crisis, and which was primarily financial. In April 1960 Marples set up a four-man committee to examine the state of the industry and in March 1961 appointed its chairman, Dr. Richard Beeching, as chairman of the British Transport Commission. On 27 March 1963 Beeching published a report proposing the closure of some 6,000 miles, about one-third, of the existing British rail network. The recommendations, approval and resultant closures, most of which were carried out

[293]Ernest Marples, later Baron Marples (9 December 1907 – 6 July 1978) was a British politician born in Manchester, and succeeded to become Postmaster General and Minister of Transport during his time as a member of the Conservative Government. He became a Captain in the Territorial Army and by 1945 he was a prospective Conservative candidate, ultimately elected to Parliament for Wallasey, as well as setting up his own company of Civil Engineers (Marples, Ridgeway & Partners) in road construction, his two-thirds shareholding divested to his wife to avoid any conflict of interest. Marples retired from the House of Commons in February 1974 and in May that year he was made a life peer as Baron Marples, of Wallasey. It was said that he hastily left the country to live in Monaco after allegations of tax fraud. He died in 1978.

[294]*Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3, p. 986; 15 January 1960; pp.49-50. There was later (1960) questioning as to whether the interests of British shipping were receiving sufficient attention and sympathy from the Government. It had only been a few months since a ministerial reorganisation split up the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation into two bodies. The Merchant Navy Journal of the day referred to the Minister of Transport as a '*jack of all trades*'. As well as shipping and shipbuilding which was transferred to him from the Admiralty he has to look after road transport, railways and canals even though, the article points out, these interests often clash. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,001; 7 July 1960; p.35.

under the Labour Government of 1964–1970, were assigned to history under the name of the Beeching Axe.

4.2 The Competitive Market and Infrastructure

To return to the first years of this period, as early as 1950, and as a direct result of an unprecedented growth of passenger and car traffic and also competition, Dover Harbour Board applied to the relevant government department for permission to '*….construct, maintain and operate a new car ferry terminal in the part of Dover Harbour known as the Eastern Docks with attendant facilities for the reception and accommodation of passengers and motor vehicles….*' The submission described the need based upon '*….an increasing tendency for tourist passengers to take motor cars to and from the Continent by means of vessels engaged in cross-channel services from and to Dover….*'[295]

Approval was given in March 1951 for the Harbour Board to construct the facility and work began in October 1951, and with one future problem in the wings: British Railways was obliged to provide funds for the project but Townsend's full access and use of the facility was something that was to become contentious given its lack of any on-going liability with regard to the construction.

According to the minutes of a '*Meeting to discuss preliminary schedules for 1953 season*,' held in January 1952 by Dover Harbour Board, British Railways and Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited, the representatives of these three organisations expressed serious concern and on two separate matters. British Railways and Townsend expressed certain nervousness about the scheduling arrangement for the new facilities and whether the ramps would be ready in time for what would clearly be "the busy season." Moreover, both operators harboured doubts about the new-found roll-on, roll-off system, and specifically if the proposed procedure of driving vehicles on and off vessels via a linkspan ramp or bridge that allowed for the rise and fall of tides would work.

[295]DHB Minutes: The National Archives, *AN157/590, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1949 Jan 01 - 1952 Dec 31. *Dover Harbour Board Bill 1949-50: Proposed Motor Car Terminal at Eastern Docks; Memorandum 16th February 1950.*

The Harbour Board personnel attempted to reassure the ferry operators with the estimate of completion of the first berth by March 1953 with the second berth being ready for use in the following June. The first two months of operating the new facilities would be considered 'experimental', something that was clearly a risk given the likelihood of delays and the anticipated busy season ahead but under the circumstances, such '*best guesses*' probably represented a reasoned and reasonable assessment of options and timings.[296]

But if schedules and differing estimates of port capacity represented one set of difficulties, then British Railways' mounting financial problems and the difficulty of securing the investment for rebuilding gave rise to the second set of difficulties, a factor that had raised concerns with the British Transport Commission who in 1953 was clearly nervous about its five-year shipbuilding programme.[297] The BTC missed no opportunity to remind the Railway Executive that the latter's proposals would need to be analysed in great detail, that the programme should not therefore be taken as settled and that it should not assume that the requested vessels would indeed be built. In August 1952, Mr. Blee, Acting Chairman of the Railway Executive sent a revised report to the Commission stating:

> '*….the proposals are only intended to serve as a forecast of likely recommendations on the information, at present available….each definite order will require justification in the light of detailed investigations undertaken at the time….*'[298]

Obviously the caution highlighted by the BTC had been heeded.

In the event, however, delays in the construction at Dover ensued and it was not until 30 June 1953 that the port matched the ability of Calais with the official opening of the port's two new linkspan berths at the Eastern Docks, an event commemorated by an official ceremony attended by Mr A.T. Lennox-Boyd, Minister of Transport.

---

[296]Meeting to discuss preliminary schedules for 1953 season: The National Archives, *AN157/591, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1952 Jan 01 – 1952 Dec 31. [Minutes of] *Meeting to discuss preliminary schedules for 1953 season held at Harbour House, October 9th 1952.*

[297]The National Archives, *AN13/391, Five year shipbuilding programme, 1949 Jan - 1953 June. Memorandum to the Chief Secretary of the Railway Executive from BTC dated 21st February 1953 entitled: Railway Executive Shipbuilding Programme and a reply dated 8th June 1953.*

[298]ibid

Townsend stole another 'first' from the Southern Railway as the *Halladale* used the facilities before any of its vessels.

Until June 1953, cars and even coaches entering or leaving the port of Dover had been lifted on and off ferries by crane. In the first year that the new linkspan berths were inaugurated, and at a total cost of £240,000, it was anticipated by DHB and the vessel operators that the port would handle about 10,000 vehicles.[299] In reality more than 100,000 cars, coaches and motorcycles presented themselves for sea-crossings during the inaugural year, stretching the system to its limits and illustrating how Dover Harbour Board and operators alike had seriously underestimated demand and the support facilities required to handle this level of traffic.[300] But despite being presented with ten times the volume of traffic that had been anticipated, harbour and operators coped and were left in no doubt as to the merits and demand associated with the drive-on drive-off concept.

The growth of capacity caused certain organisational stresses that are evident in internal British Railways correspondence as well as letters between British Railways and Dover Harbour Board much of which surrounded the vexed question of berthing slots. With reference to the latter, there was supposed to be a close working relationship between the French, Belgian, Dutch and British Railways although an internal Southern Region memorandum dated 19 January 1956 suggests that this may not have been the case between British and Belgian companies.[301]

It was not until an Anglo-French conference held in Torquay in May 1956 that the plans for vessels that had already been ordered were exchanged between British Railways and SNCF representatives. British Railways unveiled plans for the replacement of the 1924-built *Dinard*, which would be constructed at the William Denny & Brothers Ltd[302] Dumbarton shipyard with delivery scheduled for May 1958.

---

[299]The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31.

[300]Available at: http:www.doverport.co.uk/portofdover/companyinformation/port_history.htm 31 November 2010.

[301]The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. *Internal memorandum to the Continental Superintendent from D. McKenna, Assistant General Manager for British Railways at Dover on behalf of C.P. Hopkins, General Manager dated 19 January 1956*.

[302]William Denny and Brothers Limited, often referred to simply as Denny, were a Scottish shipbuilding company founded in 1840 and based in Dumbarton, on the River Clyde. They had the highest output of any Clyde shipbuilder in terms of numbers of vessels built (over 1,500 of a total in excess of 22,000). Denny built all types of ships but were particularly well known as producers of fine cross-channel steamships and ferries. Denny were pioneers in development of the ship's stabiliser in conjunction with Edinburgh-based Brown Brothers & Company. Denny also undertook pioneering experimental work in

SNCF announced its recently placed order for a ferry that could carry '*1,000 passenger and 400 tons of motor vehicles, the latter being carried on two decks*' and which would be built by Société des Chantiers Réunis Loire-Normandie, with delivery anticipated for March 1958.[303] In addition to news that SNCF was to commission a new ferry, rumours were rife that the Belgians were about to do the same for the 1958 season. This in turn gave rise to concern over berth capacity and the 19 January 1956 memorandum went on to enquire whether the Harbour Board could introduce more berth capacity, specifically whether a third berth could be readied for the 1958 season.[304]

The May 1956 conference discussed the all-important issue of scheduling, and quite clearly British Railways and SNCF worked together with one another in dealing with the Dover Harbour Board, the minutes noting that:

> '*…..in the summer of 1958, the running of two British Railway Car Carriers between and Boulogne, the new SNCF Carrier and Townsend's vessel between Dover and Calais, plus the Belgian Marine service between Dover and Ostend (which incidentally will introduce a second carrier in 1958) will test severely the capacity of the existing installations at Dover, which are served by two ramps only. M. Goursat [SNCF] asked that Mr. Hopkins [BR] consider representation to the Dover Harbour Board in an effort to support the building of the third berth at Dover.*'[305]

It was to be sometime later in 1958 that Dover Harbour Board was for the first time concerned about 'roll-on, roll-off goods traffic', a developing sector of the ferry market that was destined to require extensive parking areas whilst causing yet more pressure on ferry capacity which was already finding difficulty to cope at peak times.

---

hovercraft and helicopter-type aircraft. Available at: http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/archives/news/scottishbusinessarchive/williamdennybrothersltdarchivesonshow/. 10 February 2011.

[303]SNCF commenced its car ferry service between Dover and Calais in 1958 with the *Compiegne* constructed by Chargeurs Reunis Loire-Normandie, the first French Dover-Calais ferry capablre of carrying cars. The original owner was recorded as Société Anonym de Gérance et d'Armement (SAGA). *Compiegne* was also to spend brief periods on the Boulogne-Dover and Dieppe-Newhaven routes. Available at: http:www.competition-commission.org.uk/rep_pub/reports/1970_1975/fulltext/075c01.pdf

[304]The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. *Internal memorandum to the Continental Superintendent from D. McKenna, Assistant General Manager for British Railways at Dover on behalf of C.P. Hopkins, General Manager dated 19 January 1956.*

[305]ibid

The Board nevertheless recognised that it would have to come to terms with freight in the same way that it had attempted to provide facilities for car traffic, especially as Townsend Car Ferries Limited subsidiary, European Ferries Limited, was anxious to press on with purpose-built facilities in the Eastern Docks despite the fact that the Dover Harbour Board had sounded caution. The Dover Harbour Board's condition was that Townsend would pay cash for the facilities, estimated to be £22,000 at that time, with ownership of the freight inspection facility reverting to the Board. [306]

Exercising its authority and landlord's rights, the Dover Harbour Board had refused to allow Townsend Car Ferries Limited to build a shed, preferring to build something larger that '*could be used well if the project failed*.' The year 1958 was important for other reasons as described in a file note of a conversation, held after a meeting of operators at the Dover Harbour Board of July 1958, which noted, '*The BTC*[307] *representatives on the Board accepted their responsibilities as representing DHB, but insisted quietly that Townsend Brothers Car Ferries must not be encouraged to the detriment of existing services*.'[308]

In emphasising that the BTC representatives were not prepared to see large sections of the Eastern Docks (already a relatively small area of land) '*sterilised*' by the introduction of a new facility which would compete with their own operation, it was pointed out….

> '*When the Chairman and General Manager of the Board mentioned that nothing more will be given to others than was given to the BTC (or more specifically its subsidiary) by way of priority, the point was made that this hardly went far enough. Other interests had certainly not undertaken financial responsibilities in the matter of supporting the Board's Debentures such as the BTC had undertaken*.'[309]

[306]The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. *File note of a conversation at meeting of Dover Harbour Board:* 7 July 1958. p.1.
[307]The British Transport Commission (BTC) was represented on the board of the Dover Harbour Board.
[308]The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. *File note of a conversation at meeting of Dover Harbour Board:* 7 July 1958. p.1.
[309]ibid

Matters were exacerbated by SNCF's initiative in attempting to arrange its own timetable in Eastern Docks for what it described as its cross-Channel motor-car carriers. The Continental Superintendent of Southern Region, based in Victoria station, had always co-ordinated the train and vessel timetables and in his internal Memorandum dated 16 December 1958 he clearly expressed his dissatisfaction with SNCF's move to make separate arrangements.[310] But despite this 'British Railways Southern News', a communication channel set up to deal with the press announced on 31 December 1958 that:

> '*The Southern Region of British Railways announced today that more people than ever took their cars to France by sea in 1958. British Railways cross channel steamers carried 155,000 cars – an increase of 11.5% over the figure of 138,966 for 1957. The number of passengers on these services rose by 6%, from 2,022,000 to 2,150,000.*'[311]

4.3 Fleet Disposition

It is important to note at this juncture that the Dover fleet composition was lacking in both qualitative and quantitative terms. In 1958 there were four car ferries on the Dover Straits, somewhat less capacity than was required to satisfy demand and perhaps most surprisingly the four operating companies each possessed just one car ferry at this time. The vessels represented a disparate collection. One was a converted frigate, another a converted passenger-only vessel and two were very different ships but both designed and built specifically to carry car traffic. The other vessels in the fleet comprised so-called Classic or passenger only ferries that served Calais and Boulogne in France and Ostend in Belgium:

[310] Ibid
[311] The National Archives, *MT/24/4, British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station, entitled Southern Shipped More Cars, dated 16th March 1949*

Table 4.1 The Dover Straits car ferries 1958 (beginning of season)

Car Ferry	Year	Owner	Gross Tons	Passengers	Cars	Speed knots
Halladale	1944	Townsend	1,370	350	55	20
Prinses Josephine Charlotte[312]	1949	Belgian Marine	2,950	1,425	100	23.5
Dinard	1924	British Railways	2,291	1,300	80	20
Lord Warden	1952	British Railways	3,333	700	120	20

Source: Hendy [313]

The *Halladale* was a former Royal Naval "River" class frigate built by A. & J. Inglis Ltd., Pointhouse, Glasgow and launched on 28 January 1944. She was powered by four Parson's steam turbines, single reduction gearing, each set of turbines connected to two screw shafts which developed a total of 6,500 shp, giving the vessel a speed of 20 knots. She was purchased in 1949 by Townsend Brothers Ferries Limited for £15,000 as a replacement for the *Forde*, and was converted into a car ferry by the Cork Dockyard Company at Rushbrooke (Cork Harbour), Eire.

The *Dinard* served on the night route between Southampton and St. Malo, and had been at both at Dunkerque and Normandy during the war. She required major refurbishment after returning to civilian service and with increasing demand for car space the *Dinard* was rebuilt as a car-ferry: with a capacity of 363 passengers and 70 cars, she returned to service in June 1947 between Dover (and Folkestone) and Boulogne. She passed to the nationalised British Railways in 1948. At this stage cars were still crane-loaded aboard, but in 1953 she received modifications to the stern, allowing cars to be loaded over a ramp, thereby inaugurating the drive-on, drive-off service between Dover and Boulogne. The *Dinard* remained in service on this route until 1958.[314]

The *Prinses Josephine Charlotte* was built as the *Car Ferry*, and as the original name suggests, was the first public statement by Belgian Marine that it had a vessel capable of carrying cars by means other than lift-on, lift-off. This was a significant departure

[312]Built as the *Car Ferry* she was more elegantly re-named *Prinses Josephine Charlotte* in 1952. In 1976 she was sold to Panamanian owners and renamed as *Leto and* later *Athens Express*. She was finally broken up in Greece in 1984.
[313]Hendy, J (1983) *Dover & Folkestone*. London: Ian Allan. p.3.
[314]The *Dinard* was sold to Baltic-based, Åland owners Viking Line as the first vessel in its fleet. The vessel, renamed *Viking*, began operations on 1 June 1959 between Gräddö and Korppoo following modifications to her car capacity and appearance. Scandinavians have long claimed the origin of RoRo although this transaction suggests otherwise.

for a company that had prided itself in a long slender passenger-only fleet built for speed.

The *Lord Warden* was the third ship of that name to ply the short sea routes from Dover. Launched in December 1951 she was designed for the Dover-Boulogne run and could carry 120 cars. Her passenger capacity was reduced to 600 in May 1978 when she was transferred to the Irish Sea.

4.4 Townsend Brothers Ferries

The success of the *Halladale* notwithstanding, not all was plain sailing for Townsend Brothers Ferries. In 1956 a combination of continued traffic growth and the need to provide for death duties prompted the board to go public. In what was an unfortunate piece of timing, the share issue was launched on the same day as President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, as a result of which trade on the Stock Exchange in July 1956 slumped and very few of Townsend Brothers Ferries shares were sold.[315]

The head of the firm, Captain Stuart Townsend, hoped that small businessmen would find the investment proposal attractive and would leave him and his fellow directors in charge of the new public company, but it fell to an electrical and building contractor, George Nott of Monument Securities Limited,[316] to buy sufficient shares to gain control of Townsend in 1957. At an extraordinary meeting of the shareholders in April 1957, Captain Townsend and his fellow directors were voted off the board[317], a move that provided Nott with total control of the business. George Nott Industries took over the balance of the company's share capital in 1959.[318]

Townsend's departure ended a distinguished presence in the cross-Channel ferry business that spanned nearly 30 years though the name was to live on as Townsend

[315]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.10. The share offer for Townsend Ferries and Shipping Limited, a company formed on 13 July 1956 for the specific purpose of buying the shares in Townsend Brothers Ferries Limited, was advertised in *The Times* newspaper of 23 July 1956. *The Times*, Monday, 23 July 1956; p.14.
[316]Monument Securities entered into an agreement in December to buy 1,200,000 4s Townsend Shipping & Ferries Limited shares for £395,000; *The Times*, Tuesday, 24 December 1957; p.11.
[317]*The Times*, Thursday, 18 April 1957; p.6.
[318]Available at: http:
www.competition-commission.org.uk/rep_pub/reports/1986/fulltext/208c04.pdf

Car Ferries Limited.[319] Fears that the company might be stripped of its assets were ill-founded and instead the company, with a very determined board, was destined to develop with a period of sustained and major investment, and in a move that helped to prove that the company's long-term interests in the business were honourable, the board of Townsend Car Ferries Limited chartered, on extended lease, the 1945-built *Empire Shearwater* from the Ministry of Transport.[320] This freight-only vessel was to offer a cut-rate alternative to the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company's service from Tilbury, Townsend Car Ferries Limited forming a separate company, European Ferries Limited to handle her.[321]

This newcomer was allocated a new berth in the camber, at the base of the Eastern breakwater arm in Dover, and the new freight service started on 10 January 1959 amid much optimism. The 4,262-ton *Empire Shearwater*[322] was of significant proportion for her day and carried American army lorries and antiques but an over-officious customs regime in Calais caused such delays and ill-feeling among clientele to the extent that the service stopped operating in June, the vessel being laid up in the Medway in September 1959.[323] She was scrapped at Ghent in 1962.

It was testimony to the massive growth in traffic that despite their ordering of new ships the British, French and Belgian operators were feeling the pressure of increased demand less than three years after the inauguration of the roll-on, roll-off facility at Dover. Relations between operators and Dover Harbour Board in this period were difficult, and in these years there were indications that the various companies had not come to terms with the needs that increased road freight traffic would entail. Discussions between the railway-based operators eventually considered the prospect of carrying commercial vehicles on the new French vessel, the *Compiègne*, which started operating the short route between France and Dover during mid-season 1958.[324]

---

[319]Captain Stuart Morse Townsend died on 7 April 1969 at the age of 81. *The Times* newspaper; *Captain Stuart Morse Townsend*; Obituaries; 8 April 1969. Cowsill & Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*, p10.
[320]*Empire Shearwater*, an LST (3) was a sister vessel to the *Empire Doric.*
[321]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.10.
[322]Ex *LST 3033* built 1945; GT 4,262; length 330 feet; beam 55 feet. Available at: http:www.mariners-l.co.uk/EmpireS.html
[323]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.11.
[324]*Compiegne*, built at Chargeurs Reunis Loire-Normandie, was the first vessel of its type to be built in France and one of the first anywhere to be equipped with what was to become the standard issue variable-pitch propellers and bow thrusters directly controlled from the bridge. *Compiegne* had the usual complement of passenger amenities, including bar, snack bar, restaurant and

4.5 Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited

At the other end of the country in the North West, another operator, the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (ASN) was becoming more prominent in facilitating Irish Sea trade between Preston and Larne, somewhat faster and without the fierce competition experienced in the southeast by Townsend.[325] Like Townsend, Bustard, the head of and mastermind behind ASN, was a man of drive and imagination, being at the right place at the right time in 1946 when Alfred Barnes[326], the then Minister of Transport, was sympathetic to Bustard's ideas in the knowledge that the Admiralty was keen to find employment for the LSTs. It could not have escaped the Government's attention that a resultant ferry service that Bustard set up to Germany from Tilbury would also help to repatriate military equipment in an uncomplicated way. Colonel Bustard's concept of utilising LSTs was innovative and seems to have bypassed the imagination of Coast Lines and British Railways, an omission that they would learn to regret.[327]

As individuals however, Bustard and Townsend were driven by differing values although both were determined to succeed in their respective ventures. Townsend had been frustrated with the treatment of cars and their passengers when travelling with his Father on French touring holidays, whereas Bustard on the other had been a deep-sea man thwarted in his efforts to get a new, innovative trans-Atlantic liner operation up and running because of the advent of war.[328]

ASN was firmly under the control of the British Transport Commission[329], an unusual state of affairs given the fact that a Conservative government was in office but a sign that ministers and the Commission had come to acknowledge the emergence of the roll-on, roll off concept and, perhaps more importantly, the impact of the concept in

---

duty free shop. The cost of lunch in the restaurant was 7s 6d (9 shillings if pâté de fois gras was included). Afternoon tea could be taken on board for 2s 6d, served on a white-linen-covered table.

[325]ASN's only Channel link had been the charter of the MOD owned, ASN managed *Empire Shearwater* to European Ferries Limited in 1956; Landing Ship (Tank) 1945 - LST 3033; 1956 *Empire Shearwater* (2), MOT managed by Atlantic Steam Navigation Company; Chartered to European Ferries Ltd (Townsend Bros) 1958. Scrapped Ghent 1962; GT 4,262 tons, Length 330 feet, beam 55 feet; Cowsill, M (1990) *By Road Across the Sea*. Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. pp.3&39.

[326]Alfred John Barnes (1887 – 26 November 1974), a British Labour Co-operative politician who in 1945 was a Privy Counsellor followed by the Minister of War Transport and ultimately, Minister of Transport until Labour lost power in 1951. Furthermore he resigned as a Member of Parliament at the 1955 general election.

[327]Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea*. p.22.

[328]ibid p.3.

[329]The takeover of the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited by BTC occurred in April 1954. See also footnote 40.

terms of competition and other operators. Most certainly had ASN been left in place then the balance between operators on the central and northern corridors across the Irish Sea would have been seriously affected by the competition. Soon after the take-over the Hamburg service from Tilbury was switched to Antwerp. By this time the needs of the British military in Germany had long since passed their peak, and the switch to the shorter route to the Scheldt estuary clearly pointed to future patterns of trade.

The company continued to operate with a fleet of tank landing craft adapted for their commercial trade until 1957 when the British Transport Commission ordered its first purpose-built ship for the Preston-based operation and only nine years after ASN's first vessel had sailed down the Ribble with a cargo bound for Larne[330]. The *Bardic Ferry* (2,563 gross tons) was to be followed a year later by the *Ionic Ferry* (2,548 gross tons).[331] The company took delivery of the *Cerdic Ferry* (2,563 gross tons) in 1961 and the *Doric Ferry* (2,573 gross tons) a year later, following which the tank landing craft were gradually withdrawn from service.[332] Ironically these vessels, designed and built for wartime service, embraced the commercial RoRo concept, an innovation that was still only cautiously followed by sister company, British Railways. It is likely that the BTC were aware of ASN's plans to build new vessels prior to its takeover of the business.

ASN revolutionised Irish Sea shipping and boosted annual trade through the port of Larne from £4,000,000 in 1948 to £104,000,000 within the decade. The service offered a great deal of independence and security to hauliers and shippers, the likes of which had never been seen. Shippers could not only dispatch goods utilising their own vehicles, but they could determine time of deliveries and without the damage or pilferage all too often experienced when sending freight by rail and/or break-bulk.[333]

The Coast Line board were concerned at ASN's traffic growth and in order to ensure the reliability of its own routes it had long deliberated over the need for a relief vessel in order that services could be maintained at high quality in all group companies. The

[330]ASN inaugurated its new service when LST *Empire Cymric* sailed down the Ribble bound for Larne on 20 May 1948
[331]Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea.* p.45.
[332]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. pp.39-40.
[333]Break bulk is the term related to loose cargo that needs to be loaded individually, that is to say not in containers or in bulk; Sinclair, R (1990) *Across the Irish Sea.* London: Conway Maritime Press. p.124.

Irish Coast was the result, launched on 8 May 1952 at the Harland & Wolff Queen's Island yard and costing £816,000, a factor that necessitated an increase in Coast Lines indebtedness to £2,000,000.[334] Entering service in 1953 she was however to become something of a nomad during her career, initially spending October and November running from Belfast to Liverpool; December, Cork to Fishguard; January and February Dublin to Liverpool; March and April, Glasgow to Belfast; May on her own overhaul – an extensive and thorough engineering affair – whilst the summer and autumn were spent on the Glasgow to Dublin service.[335] Coast Lines could easily have considered a new concept at this juncture but clearly the opportunity was either ignored or overlooked. The wisdom of building a conventional 'liner', and a spare one at that was highly questionable especially as it was becoming increasingly clear that the future of Irish Sea trade lay in the direction of roll-on, roll-off, a change in vessel design and operation that was to make the *Irish Coast* redundant within 10 years.[336]

The Coast Lines board was also somewhat preoccupied with Colonel Bustard's arrival as a competitor from Preston.[337] Following a failed attempt to develop cheap trans-Atlantic passenger travel Bustard had developed a new idea which led to the formation of a profitable freight trade business based upon the conversion of naval tank landing ships (LSTs) which had made such a significant contribution to the Allied invasion of Europe. He discovered that these could be adapted to carry cargo driven onboard and in simple form, the RoRo revolution began. Bustard chartered three LST vehicles and formed the Transport Ferry Service (ASN) which established a service between Preston and Larne in 1948. The service began paying its way in 1952.

Coast Lines was, however, conservative in its outlook, preferring to concentrate on maintaining high standards. Its view may also have been influenced by the Belfast

[334]Vessels were financed internally hence leading to an increase in the company's balance sheet. Sinclair. *Across the Irish Sea.* p.132.
[335]Sinclair, *Across the Irish Sea*, p.133.
[336]ibid p.135.
[337]Bustard's attempt to introduce a cheap trans-Atlantic passenger service in competition with Cunard Line failed to attract supporters due to the government's negative attitude. Overtaken by the Second World War he developed the concept of RoRo utilising converted ex navy tank landing vessels (LSTs) which made a valiant contribution to the Allied invasion of Europe. Discovering that they could be used to carry cargo driven onboard, the revolution that we now know as RoRo had began. Bustard chartered three LST vehicles and inaugurated the Transport Ferry Service which started a freight only service between Preston and Larne in 1948. The service began paying its way in 1952. Bustard was also an influence in the post-war development of Larne. Source: Port of Larne.

Steamship Company, part of the group that had experienced difficulties with its attempt to introduce container traffic in 1948 resulting in what were described as alarming losses caused by poor loads, and problems with returning empty containers and additional cartage and harbour dues. British Railways did not share this concern, and its lack of support for Coast Lines and its Belfast Steamship subsidiary suggests that the latter was less than enthusiastic when it came to new technology and change.[338]

It is surprising that Coast Lines and British Railways failed to recognise the changes and potential developments in cargo handling that were happening around them. Albeit gradual, there was at the time a move towards roll-on, roll-off as witnessed by the efficient use of LSTs[339] (Landing Ship Tanks) by Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation Co and developments at Dover which were not only reacting to demand, but actually fuelling it with the new drive-on concept.[340]

Coast Lines did have the sense to maintain surveillance on the Bustard operation although the spies were soon uncovered. Nevertheless J Hughes, Coast Lines traffic manager at Liverpool recommended to his board that the roll-on, roll-off principle be adopted as the best way of meeting competition, but this perceptive suggestion foundered for reasons that are not altogether clear.[341] Coast Lines was the company that arguably had most to lose from a competitor such as Bustard, but it may very well be that personal antipathy may have played a part: Sir Alfred Read, chairman of Coast Lines, resented Bustard and his intrusion into his company's trading territory, and Read had also served his time with Anchor Line and may well have disliked Bustard for his pre-war plans to aggressively compete by cutting the cost of trans-Atlantic passenger travel.[342] But there were also other issues that may have made for misjudgement on this score. Read was incensed that the British government was subsidising his competitor with cheap LST charters whilst at the same time refusing to adequately compensate existing shipowners for their wartime tonnage losses. In addition Bustard had lost £52,874 in his first year of operation and it is likely that his

[338]Sinclair, *Across the Irish Sea*, p.136.
[339]During the war the military had used the LST concept successfully, and particularly during the invasion of mainland Europe. Indeed between July 1944 and May 1945, LSTs carried a high proportion of all United Kingdom and United States vehicles that crossed the Channel.
[340]Sinclair, *Across the Irish Sea*, p.124.
[341]ibid p.126.
[342]Cowsill, *By Road Across the Sea,* p.3.

lack of financial backing and a strong asset base may well have created a degree of complacency on the part of Read,[343] and most certainly there had been a failure to appreciate the determination of the ports of Preston and Larne to make a success of this fledgling service.[344] On the other side of the argument there was a good level of return that Coast Lines was making for its shareholders, and it was not therefore a good time to expect these same shareholders to subscribe to a radical change in a direction that would involve significant investment and lower returns at least in the short term. Coast Lines dividend increased from 7½% in 1953 to a steady 10% in 1955 and 1956.[345]

Sir Alfred Read eventually realised that he needed to play Bustard at his own game and in 1953 approached British Railways with a proposal to run a joint service, utilising LSTs that would link an unspecified Lancashire port with another in Northern Ireland. It is unclear whether or not Read was aware that the comptroller of the British Transport Commission, Sir Reginald Wilson, was having discussions with Bustard which ultimately paved the way to the BTC's purchase of the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company in 1954. This ultimate coup on the part of the BTC did nothing to impress the Coast Lines board since it seems likely that it was misled or misinformed by Wilson.[346]

Bustard and Townsend, two newcomers to the United Kingdom ferry-based shipping scene effectively drove the development of the roll-on, roll-off concept having identified the vision, opportunity, need and growth. They had both approached the market from a vehicle-based concept, Bustard looking at freight (even though he came from a passenger background) and Townsend who viewed cross-Channel travel through the eyes of a car driver. British Railways clearly had a stranglehold on passenger traffic based on the ticketing concept which maintained a captive audience

[343]Sinclair, *Across the Irish Sea*, p.125.
[344]ibid pp.124-126.
[345]ibid p.141. In a circular to stockholders in 1960 Coast Lines Limited pointed out that they were faced with a considerable fleet replacement programme and constantly rising prices. The company also needed two additional cargo vessels of about 1,500 tons for their unit load services and were also in need of increasing their road haulage fleet. Coast Lines were unable to meet these necessary commitments and as a result needed to raise additional 'permanent capital' of £1,000,000 through a share issue. Fairplay; Volume 195 No:4,007; 9 June 1960; p11. In a subsequent statement The company announced a consolidated net profit of £871,508 for the trading year 1959 against £662,794 for the previous year. The chairman, Captain A.R.S. Nutting made reference to the trading recession in the first half of 1959 although there had been a 'marked improvement' in the second half. Air services had eroded some of the passenger business but he took comfort in the belief that there was room for both modes of transport. Unit load and conventional cargo had improved in volume terms and the recently purchase Northern Ireland Trailers purchased in 1959 made steady progress. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No: 4,020; 8 September 1960; p7.
[346]Sinclair, *Across the Irish Sea*, p.130. The takeover was confirmed on 2 June 1954. *The Times* newspaper; 3 June 1954.

from railway station to railway station. Bustard and Townsend were more interested in wheeled traffic, an area that British Railways was less able to influence because of a lack of capacity for the developing car, coach and freight sector, a factor that highlighted the differing business models between British Railways, Townsend and Bustard.[347]

The Northern Ireland Development Council in association with the Northern Ireland Ministry of Commerce issued a publication at the end of 1959 entitled '*Freight Services to and from Northern Ireland*' in which it referred to facilities that were available on fast passenger ships operating from Londonderry, Larne and Belfast to Glasgow, Stranraer, Heysham and Liverpool together with details of container services. The Council went on to point out that specially constructed container ships '*….transport goods safely and economically from Northern Ireland to destinations within 150 miles of British ports in less than 24 hours*'. Although not specifically named, the services referred to were Coast Lines, British Railways and the Transport Ferry Service (ASN).[348]

4.6 RoRo Development on the Irish Sea

In analysing the lack of progress in embracing the roll-on, roll-off concept on the Irish Sea there can be little doubt that there was one single event that succeeded in damping the ardour of those willing to consider new concepts. The fourth British Railways vessel to bear the name *Princess Victoria* entered service at Stranraer in March 1947 and a little over 6 years later was lost on 31 January 1953 when a heavy sea breached her half-height stern gate in a violent storm.[349]

Her sinking along with significant loss of life shook the ferry community to the core and no doubt had some influence on the less than rapid transfer to roll-on, roll-off on the Irish Sea. Speaking of the vessel's loss the Court of Enquiry[350] declared that as

[347]Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea.* p.3.
[348]*Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3,986; 15 January 1960. p.59.
[349]The *Princess Victoria* was one of the earliest roll-on, roll-off ferries, and was employed by British Railways on the crossing from Stranraer in Scotland to Larne in Northern Ireland.
[350]The inquiry into the loss of the *Princess Victoria* found the superintendence of the ship by the owners and managers to be inadequate. British Rail, the owners of the *Princess Victoria*, and the manager, Capt. J. D. Reed, appealed this finding to the High Court in Belfast. Capt. Reed's appeal was allowed but that of British Rail was dismissed, the Court finding that they had failed to ensure that water could be drained from the car deck and that the stern doors were strong enough; Capt. Perry, the previous

she was, to some degree, experimental and that it was incumbent upon the owners to keep her design and construction under constant review as experience was gained. It was concluded that the owner's failure to do so was a contribution to the disaster.[351]

British Railways' answer to the tragic loss was simple and cheap, yet effective. The train ferry *Hampton Ferry* was sent north from the Channel to Stranraer for the summer season of 1953. Whilst debate on a true fleet replacement programme continued, it is conceivable that this seasonal arrangement was seen as a sound solution. The *Hampton Ferry* was to continue her northbound pilgrimage each summer until the delivery of the 1,400-passenger, 103-car capacity *Caledonian Princess* in December 1961.[352] The new vessel was an instant success with the travelling public in respect of her ability to load and discharge cars with ease but it was to be a further four years before the roll-on, roll-off experience at Stranraer was to be reprinted elsewhere on the Irish Sea.[353]

As a basic rule the development of ferry services in the Irish Sea followed and did not lead, resulting in the region being a poor relation, a position that was going to take time to change for the better. A further example was the introduction onto the cross-Channel services of the purpose-built 1,000-passenger, 120-car capacity car ferry *Lord Warden* in 1952, followed in 1959 by the 1,000-passenger, 180-car capacity *Maid of Kent*.[354] In contrast Holyhead, on the Central Corridor of the Irish Sea received its first car ferry, the 1,000-passenger, 153-car capacity *Holyhead Ferry I* in 1965 followed two years later by the conversion of the 1956-built sisters, *Duke of Argyll* and *Duke of Lancaster* for the Heysham to Belfast operation. Each vessel was capable of accommodating 1,400 passengers and 105 cars.[355]

---

manager was also criticised. Only 10 crewmembers and 44 passengers survived, all male. All the women and children on board were lost, and all the senior officers were lost. Cameron, S. *Death in the North Channel: The loss of the Princess Victoria January 1953*.

[351]Merrigan, J (2004) *Car Ferries of the Irish Sea 1954-2004*. Newtownards: Colourpoint Books. p.5.

[352]The *Caledonian Princess* was the last vessel supplied to the Railways before Wm. Denny & Bros went out of business. She was ordered as a replacement for the ill-fated *Princess Victoria* that sank some 8 years previous to her inauguration. Danielson. *Railway Ships and Packet Ports*. p.30.

[353]Merrigan. *Car Ferries of the Irish Sea 1954-2004*. pp.5&157.

[354]ibid pp.5&160.

[355]ibid pp.6&158.

4.7 British Railways Traffic Growth and Financial Returns

Despite British Railways' slow reaction to the changing traffic needs of the Irish Sea and Continental and Channel Island services, the two main sectors of British Railways' operations, were consistently profitable though it should be noted that overall profitability served to mask year-on-year losses on the Channel Islands run (see table 4.2).[356] The competitive effects of other services were nevertheless taking their toll of British Railways' results, the growth in vehicle carryings being mirrored by the increasing cost of adding new roll-on, roll-off tonnage and matching port facilities. This resulted in a margin that failed to keep pace with the opportunity posed by a broadening market that included wheeled traffic. Despite a significant fleet of vessels comprising 25 cross-Channel ferries operating in 1959, the Townsend fleet comprised the *Halladale* whilst British Railways accounted for ten vessels, Belgian Maritime eleven, and SNCF, French Railways, three, most were passenger-only and therefore unable to take full advantage of the burgeoning market in vehicles in addition to which some were freight-only whilst some passenger vessels only operated a seasonal schedule.[357]

Table 4.2 British Railways Continental & Channel Islands services 1950-1960

Year	Passengers	Motor Vehicles	Cargo (tons)	Receipts (£)	Expenditure (£)	Margin (£)	Margin %
1950	2,161,351	99,663	939,272	7,533,309	5,267,669	2,265,640	30.07%
1951	2,345,180	115,334	1,177,226	8,318,359	6,100,943	2,217,416	26.66%
1952	2,234,599	89,301	1,031,981	7,657,951	6,464,530	1,193,421	15.58%
1953	2,199,000	100,000	1,039,000	7,727,531	6,866,742	860,789	11.14%
1954	2,383,000	126,000	1,053,000	8,291,243	7,123,129	1,168,114	14.09%
1955	2,881,000	153,000	1,210,000	9,237,297	7,549,146	1,688,151	18.28%
1956	2,772,000	154,000	1,320,000	9,855,869	8,499,593	1,356,276	13.76%
1957	2,777,000	159,000	1,230,000	10,775,202	9,163,278	1,611,924	14.96%
1958	2,904,000	177,000	1,192,000	10,484,229	8,822,669	1,661,560	15.85%
1959	3,226,000	223,000	1,244,000	11,608,276	8,868,550	2,739,726	23.60%
1960	3,103,000	234,000	1,428,000	12,152,146	9,517,444	2,634,702	21.68%

Source: The National Archives [358]

[356]The first of two passenger vessels for British Railways' Channel Islands service, the *Caesarea* was launched at the beginning of 1960 at the Isle of Wight yard of J. Samuel White and Company Ltd. Along with her sister *Samaria* these were steam turbine steamers without RoRo capability, a distinct disadvantage even for the Channel Islands route. The vessels cost £1,500,000 each and at 3,800 Gross tons had a capacity of 1,400 passengers. *Fairplay*; No: 3,990; 11 February 1960; p.35.

[357]Roche, T.W.E., (ed) (1959) *Ships of Dover Folkestone Deal and Thanet.* Southampton: Adlard Coles. p.6. Hendy, J., *Ferries of Dover* (1993), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications. pp.71-74.

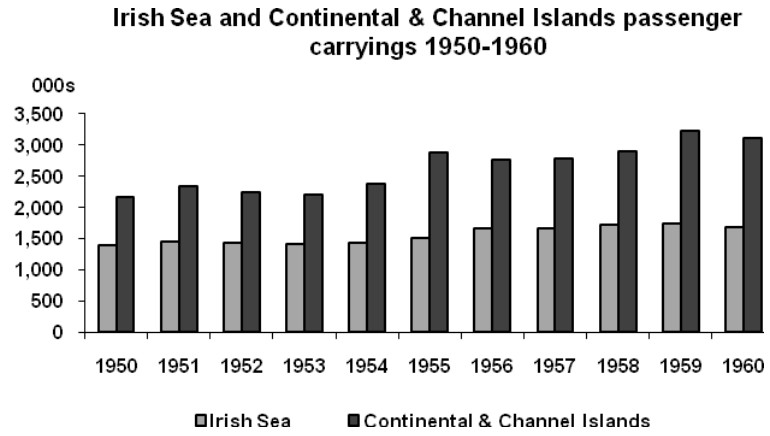
[358]The National Archives:
AN83/1 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951.
AN83/2 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1951-1952.

As is clearly demonstrated in table 4.2 and 4.3, in contrast to its Irish Sea services, British Railways Continental & Channel Islands services fared better in terms of margin although, as typified by the Irish routes, car carryings only increased from a relatively low base of 16,000 to 37,000 (131%) in the period from 1950 to 1960 in contrast with the more voluminous growth from 100,000 to 234,000 (134%) across the Channel, this being the result of capacity constraint. The improved comparative result was partly the effect of geographic issues, there being more vehicle traffic demand destined to a variety of Continental destinations as opposed to Ireland. The frequency of services and the shorter, less expensive crossings provided by the Continental & Channel Islands services also helped considerably despite many vessels being less than suitable for the developing trade.

As can be seen in figure 4.1 below, British Railways Irish Sea routes were also flat in terms of passenger carryings in a category that came surprisingly close to Continental & Channel Islands services, reflecting a higher utilisation factor on the Irish Sea. As if to clearly illustrate the suppression of car traffic on the Irish Sea, figure 4.2 illustrates the significant difference in car carryings between the two British Railways sectors. Despite certain fluctuations during the early Fifties, the underlying growth is seen to be more marked on the Continental & Channel Islands sector than the Irish Sea.

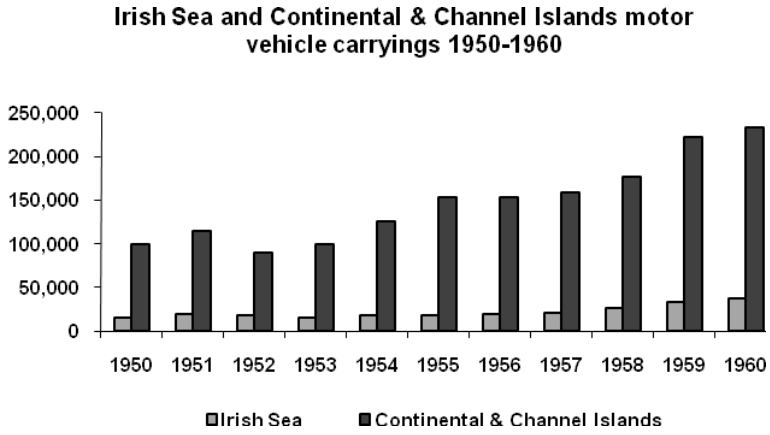
AN83/3 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1952-1953.
AN83/4 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1953-1954.
AN83/5 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1954-1955.
AN83/6 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1955-1956.
AN83/7 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1956-1957.
AN83/8 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1957-1958.
AN83/9 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1958-1959.
AN83/10 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1959-1960.

Figure 4.1 British Railways Irish Sea and Continental & Channel Islands services – passenger carryings 1950-1960



Source: National Archives [359]

Figure 4.2 British Railways Irish Sea and Continental & Channel Islands services – Motor Vehicle carryings 1950-1960



Source: National Archives [360]

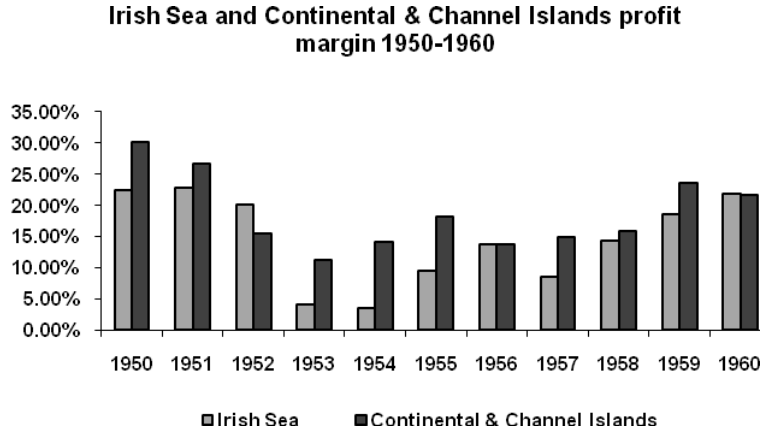
Despite more intense competition on the Continental routes and the need to operate more services in order to satisfy demand, the profit margin was higher than that of British Railways Irish Sea services. The dip in carryings and profitability during the early part of the Fifties can be put down to the post war conversion of vessels and fleet upgrades that were necessary but nevertheless reduced capacity. The relative

[359] ibid
[360] ibid

increase in 1955 reflected the start of no-Passport day excursion trips during that year between selected English ports[361] and France.

The respective margins (see figure 4.3) will have given the British Railways board reason to believe that competition and the changing dynamics of trade that was moving away from train to road travel was not a major concern. It should also be borne in mind that the proportion of rail revenue allocated to the sea crossing was arbitrary and could therefore be used to massage route results. This was different for Messrs Townsend and Bustard where the commercial dynamics were those of the market place and had to be justified directly with the client whether passenger or haulier.

Figure 4.3 British Railways Irish Sea and Continental & Channel Islands services – Profit margin 1950-1960



Source: National Archives [362]

[361] Southend, Gravesend, Folkestone, Eastbourne and Newhaven. *The Times*, 23 May 1955; p.6.
[362] The National Archives:
AN83/1 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951.
AN83/2 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1951-1952.
AN83/3 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1952-1953.
AN83/4 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1953-1954.
AN83/5 British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1954-1955.
AN83/6 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1955-1956.
AN83/7 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1956-1957.
AN83/8 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1957-1958.
AN83/9 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1958-1959.
AN83/10 Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1959-1960.

Table 4.3 British Railways Irish Sea services 1950-1960

Year	Passengers	Motor Vehicles	Cargo (tons)	Receipts (£)	Expenditure (£)	Margin (£)	Margin %
1950	1,393,215	15,951	458,432	2,867,912	2,222,357	645,555	22.51%
1951	1,442,333	18,979	509,143	3,143,311	2,427,477	715,834	22.77%
1952	1,440,608	18,514	451,300	3,345,221	2,674,148	671,073	20.06%
1953	1,414,000	15,000	479,000	3,248,168	3,116,313	131,855	4.06%
1954	1,438,000	18,000	515,000	3,471,948	3,351,408	120,540	3.47%
1955	1,511,000	18,000	490,000	3,617,217	3,272,433	344,784	9.53%
1956	1,655,000	20,000	477,000	4,007,244	3,442,771	564,473	13.76%
1957	1,669,000	21,000	470,000	4,179,293	3,826,504	352,789	8.44%
1958	1,718,000	26,000	480,000	4,368,533	3,741,235	627,298	14.36%
1959	1,732,000	34,000	540,000	4,696,043	3,822,180	873,863	18.61%
1960	1,690,000	37,000	608,000	4,955,348	3,876,512	1,078,836	21.77%

Source: The National Archives [363]

4.8 British Railways Fleet Replacement Programme and its Justification

One of the aspects that lay firmly behind the income and expenditure statement of British Railways was the necessary re-tonnaging of the British Railways fleet, a subject that was always likely to become an issue of importance and debate. Not only was traffic growing rapidly in the early Fifties, but there was also a modal shift requiring not only a need for new ships, but in addition a need for different ships and indeed port facilities. There was a need to constantly update the Five Year Shipbuilding Programme and in August 1952, Mr David Blee, Acting Chairman of the Railway Executive sent a revised report to the Commission stating '….*the proposals are only intended to serve as a forecast of likely recommendations on the information, at present available….each definite order will require justification in the light of detailed investigations undertaken at the time*….'[364]

The Commission was clearly nervous and missed no opportunity in reminding the Executive that the proposals would need to be analysed in great detail and that the Five Year Shipbuilding Programme should not therefore be taken as conclusive that the vessels requested would be built. In summary the Commission reminded the

[363]ibid
[364]The original '*Five Year Shipbuilding Programme*' was submitted to the Commission in January 1949 followed by correspondence, which sought to clarify the terms of any future proposals. The National Archives, *AN13/391, Five year shipbuilding programme, 1949 Jan - 1953 June*.

Railway Executive that it would be looking to discuss the following points as outlined in a Memorandum from the Chief Secretary dated 21 February 1953:

(a) *Type of ship required and particularly the distribution of space between different categories of passenger*;

(b) *The relation between greatly increased capital cost and probable earning power under conditions of intensified competition*;

(c) *Whether a new passenger boat can be provided for as little as £800,000*;

(d) *The question of whether we should withdraw from particular routes*.[365]

The Memorandum showed concern at the likely competition from air travel as a result of which '*….a Committee has been set up to consider the future demands of the Continental shipping services and the development of the types of service likely to be required, having due regard to air competition now and in the future….*'[366] But the memorandum made little reference to the growth in vehicular traffic however, a sector of tourism and trade in which the airlines could not compete directly but in which the ferries were assured of a position of predominance with all that that might entail in terms of profitability and rates of returns, albeit at a certain cost. Nevertheless, about 3,000 cars, or almost 15% of all cars crossing the English Channel went by air during the summer of 1950 carried by Silver City Airways from Lympne to Le Touquet. Air travel was to grow in prominence with an increase of 13% in 1959 over 1958, with Continental and Channel Islands routes in contrast increasing by 6% and 2% respectively. In overall terms 1959 was to prove a record-breaking year for passenger traffic according to the Board of Trade Journal. A total of 12,340,000 passengers travelled to and from the United Kingdom – 890,000 more than in 1958. Of this increase over half was accounted for by visits abroad by residents of the United Kingdom, chiefly to the Continent. One fifth was an increase of traffic to the Irish Republic and the remainder represented a sharp rise in the number of passengers in transit by air.[367]

[365] ibid
[366] ibid
[367] *Fairplay*; No:3,514; 28 September 1950; p.600. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,004; 19 May 1960; p.9.

On the Irish Sea, Ministers, the BTC and the Railway Executive all feared that competition particularly from the air would blight the progress of any move towards innovation. Many studies were carried out in an effort to analyse the onward march of airline traffic, the most feared of competitors, and one that was common in the minds of Railway executives in both main sectors of their business.[368]

In May of 1953, John Elliot,[369] Chairman of the Railway Executive wrote to the Commission requesting approval to replace the 1917-built train ferry *Essex Ferry* with a sister to her two running mates on the Harwich to Zeebrugge service, the motor ships *Suffolk Ferry* and *Norfolk Ferry* having been built in 1947 and 1951 respectively. The issues mentioned were clearly still current since Elliot makes reference to '*….valuable traffic conveyed by the Harwich-Zeebrugge route is not subject to air competition…*'[370] In a more positive vein reference was made to the government's lifting of certain import restrictions as well as the '*economic recovery*' of Europe. The paper suggested that an increase in annual costs of £22,800 could be anticipated for the new vessel and described the relative profitability of the current operation as shown in table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Harwich-Zeebrugge operational costs

Harwich-Zeebrugge	Receipts	Expenditure	Margin	Margin %
1951	£490,602	£391,872	£98,730	20.12%
1952	£505,660	£407,644	£98,016	19.38%

Source: The National Archives [371]

The replacement of the train ferry *Essex Ferry* required more in depth consideration particularly as unlike the Channel Islands, the route was subject to competition and train ferry capacity was also in demand at Dover. With a hint of urgency the paper

[368]Railway management feared airline competition most because it competed with rail and the shipping divisions.
[369]Sir John Elliot (1898 – 1988) was a British transport and railway manager who started with Southern Railway as a public relations assistant in 1925 and held various posts within the company until nationalisation in 1947. He continued to work for British Railways, rising to Chairman of the Railway Executive. John Elliot's biography, "*On and off the Rails*," was published by George Allen & Unwin in 1982. The National Archives, *AN13/391, Five year shipbuilding programme, 1949 Jan - 1953 June.*
[370]Despite the submission that '*valuable traffic*' was carried between Harwich and Belgium, inbound freight consisted mainly of timber, steel, fruit and other perishable cargo. *Fairplay*; Volume 194 No:3,486; 2 February 1960;
[371]The National Archives:
AN13/391, Five year shipbuilding programme, 1949 Jan - 1953 June. Memorandum from the Railway Executive to the British Transport Commission entitled Harwich-Zeebrugge Service. New Train Ferry to replace the "Essex Ferry" dated May 1953. p.2.
AN83/1 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951. AN83/2 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1951 & 1952.

concluded by asking for permission to bypass the normal tendering process by ordering the new vessel from John Brown & Company, the firm that had built the two earlier vessels. It also attempted to head-off an earlier aspect that was claimed as an advantage when nationalisation took place that vessels could transfer between '*stations*' or ports. Three reasons were cited for not transferring a vessel from Dover (the only other location that supported a train ferry network). In summary these were:

(i) Withdrawal of a British flag vessel '….*would put the French flag in the ascendancy*…., resulting in a loss of employment for British seafarers and '…*certain Parliamentary repercussions*…'

(ii) Dover vessels had a passenger carrying capability which was not required for the Harwich service. The passenger capability of a Dover vessel would therefore be lost unless demands from the National Union of Seaman (NUS) insisted that the space be given over to crew along with the attendant cost of conversion. Plus the cost of operating a 16½-knot steam turbine vessel as opposed to a diesel version that is identical to the other two based at Harwich.

(iii) The fact that although carryings on the Dover to Dunkerque service were clearly below par, the lifting of certain import restrictions and a general economic recovery will ensure that Dover's capacity is fully justified.[372]

The justification for a new vessel for the Harwich-Zeebrugge train ferry operation was not a difficult decision in commercial terms since the route returned a consistent 20% margin, a sum that was impressive and compared favourably with the averages returned by the two main regions as detailed in table 4.5 where the effects of competition and higher investment can clearly be seen. The Irish Sea routes were producing a consistent return because of their stable position and significant demand resulting in capacity constrained vessels. On the Continental & Channel Islands sector the slippage was more a result of fierce competition on the short sea, the expense associated with tonnage replacement and disappointing returns from the Western Channel and Channel Islands routes.

[372]The National Archives, *AN13/384, Construction of new cross Channel steamers: includes information on various ships,* 1948 June - 1953 *Oct. Memorandum to British Transport Commission from John Elliot* [Sir John Elliot (6 May 1898 – 18 September 1988)], *The Railway Executive entitled: Harwich-Zeebrugge Service. New Train Ferry to replace the "Essex Ferry". p.3.*

Table 4.5 Regional average margins

Region	1950	1960
Continental & Channel Islands	30.1%	21.7%
Irish Sea	22.5%	21.8%

Source: The National Archives [373]

There were other calls for funding as evidenced by British Railways plan to remodel their Channel Islands service in 1960 with the object of cutting down heavy losses on the operation at the same time as improving standards. British Railways expected to save £200,000 a year in a programme of changes that included:

- *Using fewer but bigger ships to run the service*
- *Concentrating all ships on the shortest sea route and using only one mainland port, Weymouth*
- *Introducing a one-class comfortable standard on all services*

The plan involved the construction of two new 'super ferries' which would run with one other modern vessel, the three ships replacing five that were being operated at that time.[374]

The changes in traffic composition and demand and the number of funding requests from the British Railways Executive were intensifying at this stage and fuelled a number of studies designed to consider future market dynamics. One of the studies resulted in a BTC internal review in 1961 that attempted to examine the industry and draw conclusions from the volume of trade in each sector of traffic. The Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire route, identified as '*…still the most important passenger link between Great Britain and Ireland, has shown a very considerable expansion since the end of the war as follows*'[375]

[373] *AN83/1 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1950 & 1951. AN83/10 Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, Marine Services: Traffic, Receipts, Expenditure and Net Receipts on British Railways Marine Services 1959 & 1960.*
[374] *The Times* 7 June 1960. Services were previously operated from Weymouth and Southampton although under the new plan freight would still be shipped into the latter port.
[375] The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements, 1963-1967. Appendix A to internal memorandum entitled Traffic Appreciation Irish Services.* p.1.

Table 4.6 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire passenger volumes 1938-1961

Year	Passengers	Growth
1938	555,000	-
1948	688,000	23.90%
1950	681,000	-1.02%
1953	691,000	1.47%
1956	852,000	23.30%
1959	870,000	2.10%
1960	894,000	2.76%
1961	849,000	5.03%

Source: The National Archives [376]

These figures were fairly remarkable since in the period, and given a lack of facilities, the increase represented a mirror of rail traffic, the growth from 1950 to 1956 amounting to nearly 25%. Growth slowed in the period from 1956 to 1961 primarily as a result of capacity constraints. In analysing future growth potential it was necessary to break the volumes down into traffic segments that resulted in the following analysis for those passengers carried in 1961:

Table 4.7 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire passengers: purpose of travel

Purpose of travel	1961
Visiting Friends & Relatives	43%
Business	12%
Tourist	32%
Others	12%
Emigrants	1%

Source: The National Archives [377]

As can be seen the VFR traffic (Visiting Friends & Relations) formed the majority of the traffic whilst the paper went on to highlight the advancement of car traffic (see table 4.8) and identified the increases experienced in all routes to the Republic of Ireland.

[376] ibid
[377] ibid

Table 4.8 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire car volumes growth 1957-1961

Year	Increase
1957-58	25%
1958-59	20%
1959-60	15%
1960-61	30%

Source: The National Archives [378]

Daring to forecast future carryings the paper firstly attempted to classify passengers by type for 1970 in comparison to the actual statistics assembled for 1961 as indicated in table 4.9. As can be clearly seen VFR traffic was forecast to decline whereas the Railways clearly believed that business passengers would grow despite the advent of more airline services. Not unsurprisingly the tourist-related trade was considered to be the biggest in terms of growth potential increasing from 32% to 42%.

Table 4.9 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire passengers: purpose of travel 1961 & 1970

Purpose of travel	1961 (actual)	1970 (estimated)
Visiting Friends & Relatives	43%	32%
Business	12%	15%
Tourist	32%	42%
Others	12%	10%
Emigrants	1%	1%

Source: The National Archives [379]

Based upon this categorisation the following passenger volumes, as illustrated in table 4.10, were forecast for 1965 and 1970 for the Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire route representing moderate growth based upon the then current process of traffic handling.

Table 4.10 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire passenger volumes 1961-1970

1961 (actual)	1965 (estimated)	1970 (estimated)
849,000	882,000	978,000

Source: The National Archives [380]

[378]The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements, 1963-1967. Appendix A to internal memorandum entitled Traffic Appreciation Irish Services.* p.2.
[379]ibid
[380]ibid

The document concludes that '*The lack of car ferry services to the Republic of Ireland is stifling the present strong demand vouched for by the travel agents and motoring organisations. This well exceeds the shipping capacity*.' It is worth remembering that this is some eight years after Dover had supplied their ferry operator clients with purpose built linkspan facilities, which had already been surpassed in terms of their capability to handle the number of ship calls and their traffic.

There are two main reasons why Irish Sea traffic was less fortunate in getting improved roll-on, roll-off vessels and facilities, namely the fact that Ireland was viewed by the Railway Executive as a poorer, near monopoly market, which was strategically covered in the north, south and central corridors. The second reason is that the services had been built upon a foundation of rail connections. In all cases these were British Railway ports with ships timed to coincide with trains, and with the Executive under pressure to justify any and every expense, the Irish Sea was therefore not seen as a priority for tonnage replacement. Dover on the other hand, which was not a British Railway-owned port, was a high volume route where decisions were largely prescribed by the traffic itself. Competition abounded and if any one of the operators failed to keep up with their offering they would very soon be left behind. Until the advent of Bustard it was also true to say that because of its three strategic corridors, the Irish Sea was a virtual monopoly. Coast Lines were seen as pedestrian by the BTC and in the early stages of Atlantic Steam Navigation Co., this fledgling operator was viewed with a degree of novelty as opposed to being seen as a serious competitor. There is reason to believe that British Railways management were happy to have Coast Lines as a competitor given its less than dynamic or challenging performance.

The Railway Executive believed that Holyhead would command carryings of 50,000 cars per annum and that these vehicles and their passengers '….*would be drawn from all parts of Great Britain south of a line drawn between Preston and Newcastle. Traffic….north of this line would…..cross by the Stranraer-Larne car ferry*.' It is also

interesting to note one of the earliest signs of the word '*ferry*', something that did not become part of Railway terminology until the early Sixties.[381]

The paper again addressed the well known concerns regarding air traffic citing that there is '*…little time advantage to the air operator as compared with the modern Holyhead car ferry when consideration is given to the transit time to and from points of origin and from and to the airport.*' The paper goes on to suggest that the airlines would only affect the '*orthodox*' sea routes, defined as those operated by lift-on lift-off ships.[382]

In a bold statement that talks of allowing '*…the proposed car ferry to counter the weight of competition….*' the following features were highlighted: [383]

(a) Large capacity

(b) Drive-on drive-off facilities appeal to the car owner

(c) Competitive charges

(d) Daylight crossing facilities

(e) Short sea passage

(f) Quicker handling and generally shorter transit period as compared with other sea routes

(g) Easy road access through attractive scenic regions

(h) Shorter period between alongside and sailing times

(i) Carriage at Company's risk

(j) Strong support from the Motoring Organisations and Bord Failte[384]

(k) One-class travel facilities

The Shipping Managers' Committee of the British Transport Commission cited in 1959 certain issues that had contributed to a '*substantial improvement*' in working results with net receipts '*amounting to £3,881,800 as compared with £2,344,734*'.[385]

---

[381]The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements, 1963-1967. Appendix A to internal memorandum entitled Traffic Appreciation Irish Services.* p.3.
[382]ibid
[383]ibid
[384]Irish Tourist Board.
[385]The National Archives, *AN83/9, Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1958-1959. Internal memorandum from British Transport Commission Shipping Services Managers' Committee; Records and Statistics 1959.* p.1.

The group's shipping activity was a net contributor to this improvement, with the Continental routes delivering an increase of 312,000 passengers (12.25%) and 45,000 vehicles (22.25%) aided by the arrival of the *Maid of Kent,* which replaced the substantially smaller *Dinard*. Of the eleven factors that were identified by the Committee (see above) as being net contributors to the result, the following are deemed to be the most significant, and described as '*Exceptional Features'*: [386]

(a) An increase of 12% in tourists visiting Great Britain from Europe

(b) Suspension of winter services on the Newhaven-Dieppe route [387]

(g) The refusal of the Dublin dockers to handle containers other than those carrying fresh meat, building materials and household removals, which started in February 1956, in general continued throughout 1959. The Holyhead-Dublin cargo service was cancelled between 23 February and 14 March, owing to a further labour dispute in Dublin and thereby saved expenses

(h) Passenger accommodation between Fishguard and Waterford was withdrawn from 29 June 1959

(i) For the first time facilities were available for the conveyance of motor cars between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire

(j) Increased facilities were provided for drive-on drive-off commercial road vehicles via Dover-Dunkerque

The end of the 1950s and early 1960s brought new challenges for the southeast coast of the United Kingdom, and particularly the Railway Executive when talk of a need for a fixed-link Channel crossing was on the agenda. This was not the first talk of a man-made Channel crossing, but the subject was resurrected. The feeling of the day was epitomised by an article that appeared in *The Times* newspaper on 7 September 1959. *The Times* shipping correspondent had very little that was complimentary to say about crossing the Channel by ship, putting up a good case in favour of what he saw as a viable fixed link. International finance, led by the Suez Canal Company, had once again made the prospect '*a real possibility – a probability some would say*'. Its

[386] ibid

[387] Suspension of the Newhaven-Dieppe service in the winter had been proposed in 1958 due to '*…serious need for economies…*' British Railways Southern Region said that this was being proposed '*…reluctantly and with regret…*' *The Times* newspaper 5 June 1958.

competitive implication was clear. Typical ferry ticket prices were approximately £2 per passenger and £7 per car in 1959, the author of the article suggesting that £130 million of investment could be repaid over 100 years by charging rates equivalent to £1 per passenger, £4 per car and £2 per ton for freight, yielding a 7¾% return.[388]

The article referred to the dichotomy that faced British Railways expressing the view that they '*who carry the bulk of the cross-channel traffic now, are hesitating perceptibly in their re-equipment programmes in the expectation of an early decision. Their interest is understandable. They would be the biggest losers, in the immediate sense, if a tunnel were built.*'

There is no reason to dispute the conclusion that British Railways could only stand to gain by the construction of a rail tunnel even if it was presented in the meantime with the problem of what investment should be directed to the ferry industry, both short- and long-term.[389] On the one hand a tunnel could only work to British Railways long-term interest but short-term presented the problem of what funding should be made available for its ferry subsidiary and specifically the cross-Channel routes from Dover and Folkestone. This point was to become fundamental in the Railways providing their competitors with the opportunity to take the lead, and although there was reason why the tunnel would once again be shelved on this occasion, the cautiousness over funding for the undisputable need for new vessels was palpable.[390]

In summary therefore British Railways was under pressure from new forms of competition ranging from RoRo, promoted by two relative newcomers, to air travel. RoRo or roll-on, roll-off stood for the efficient loading and discharge of vehicles

[388]The National Archives, *MT118/15, Channel Tunnel Study Group: studies by engineering consultants; bridge over the channel or alternative tunnel system, 1957-1968.* After taking 2½ years to complete their report the Channel Tunnel Study Group declared in April 1960 that '*Technically and financially a Channel Tunnel is now a practical proposition*'. The report suggested that within the framework of private financing the most realistic approach would be twin rail tunnels comprising a shuttle service to give '*rapid transit for cars*'. The tunnels would be 32 miles long and at peak times cars would be able to cross in 35 minutes at a rate of 1,800 per hour. At the same time passenger trains would make the journey from London to Paris in 4 hours 20 minutes. The cost of construction was estimated at £109,000,000 with a timescale of 5 years. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,001; 28 April 1960; p.195.

[389]The National Archives, *MT118/15, Channel Tunnel Study Group: studies by engineering consultants; bridge over the channel or alternative tunnel system, 1957-1968.*

[390]Mr Hugh Hogarth, president of the Chamber of Shipping made reference to the Channel Tunnel in a speech he gave in July 1960. He said that as far as freight traffic was concerned there was no justification for the construction of a tunnel between England and France. He went on to say that the independent shipping lines together with services operated by the BTC and tramp shipping already provided adequate services including road and rail vehicle-ferry facilities to cater for all current and potential freight traffic moving between the United Kingdom and the Continent. He went on to warn that the resultant effect was likely to be that excess capacity would be created at considerable expense and that the tunnel itself would not generate additional freight traffic on its own. *Fairplay*; Volume 196 No: 4,014; 28 July 1960; p.1.

whereas British Railway's core business centred on the movement of rail-based passengers, still a substantial trade and one that was all but wholly within their control. The Railway Executive was not entirely convinced, however, that the application of RoRo was the concept of the future. Government spending cuts and the culture within this nationalised industry did not make for radical innovation and as a result a number of replacement vessels such as the *Normannia* (1952), *Brighton* (1950), *Caesarea* (1960) and *Sarnia* (1961) continued the previous so-called 'Classic' or passenger-only theme with little more than lip service paid to the advancement of wheeled traffic.

One other aspect that benefited competitors of British Railways was that much of the discussion regarding funding for fleet replacement and even some strategic considerations was held and reported in public since these were matters that involved public spending. Clearly the private commercial interests of Townsend or Bustard or indeed any other competitors of British Railways were not subject to any such scrutiny.

Chapter 5:
Rail, Government and New Entrants 1962-1972

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter examines the period 1962 to 1972, which saw plans to construct a Channel Tunnel, the fulfilment of Townsend's ambitious plans to construct new vessels for its Dover-based services and the advent of the hovercraft. Developments on the Irish Sea routes at the time included the privatisation of B&I Line, while on the Western Channel first the inauguration of Thoresen as a new player and then its ultimate take-over by Townsend formed a strong alliance that was to cause British Railways to take the strategic importance of its services more seriously.

Whereas the Fifties was a period of an industry trying to cope with change in the form of nationalisation of the British rail industry, the emergence of competition on routes, the impact of air travel and the challenge represented by roll-on, roll-off, the Sixties saw change of a very different order. The 'Age of Austerity'[391] had passed and in contrast the early Sixties represented an age of economic affluence and continued full employment, the standard of living having improved steadily throughout the decade as the global economy enjoyed boom conditions. From a political perspective the Conservative government seems to have lost its way by the early Sixties and Hugh Gaitskell (1906 – 1963) consolidated his position as Labour leader and the party achieved a new solidarity.[392]

After the electoral disasters of the Fifties, this was a period of recovery for Labour that witnessed the return to office in October 1964, albeit with a majority of just four, but astute and very effective leadership, plus the problems of the Conservative opposition, paved the way for the major electoral victory of March 1966. But in real terms the period of the Labour government, between October 1964 and June 1970, was marked by mounting problems. The Labour government inherited the greatest peace-time trading deficit in British history and its period in power was characterised

[391] French and Sissons. *The Age of Austerity 1945-1951.*
[392] Labour did not come into office until October 1964.

by a perceived decline in Britain's international position, both political and economic, and a worsening of terms of trade and finance that stifled innovative reform and resulted in the significant devaluation of the pound in November 1967.

Thus the middle part of the Sixties was a period of mounting financial and industrial problems, a time of very considerable uncertainties and mounting labour unrest that rendered investment and long-term planning difficult. The position of the ferry industry had shown improvement but when devaluation came in 1967, sharp deflation and public spending cuts, both of which caused economic uncertainty, accompanied it. This was particularly relevant in the context of the industry covered here as the situation served to destabilise the nationalised ferry sector at a crucial stage given that the travel market had been making considerable progress. The United Kingdom's fastest period of sustained growth was from the end of World War II up to the early Seventies, a period that has been described as the 'golden age of capitalism' with rates of economic growth that were much higher than previous or subsequent periods.[393]

5.2 The Ferry Sector

From a marine perspective the international shipping industry in general continued to return poor results. The British Empire had given way to the Commonwealth[394], affecting the relationship with certain trading nations but by the early Sixties Europe had basically pulled itself clear of the effects of war and recovery was in place although the continuing surplus of shipping and the inability of Britain to compete with heavily subsidised lines, such as the Norwegians or the various Greek lines, meant that British shipping was in a bind and increasingly less able to compete and the period saw many lines going abroad.

There is little if any reference in the political records of the day to underline the importance of the ferry industry, which, as a subsidiary of British Railways, was

[393]Despite this the United Kingdom's growth rate of 3% during the 'golden age' compares with an average growth rate of 4.6% achieved by the other leading capitalist countries. Floud and Johnson. *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain – Volume III Structural Change and Growth 1939-2000.*

[394]The British Empire was gradually reduced in size after World War II, partly due to the desire for independence in the territories and partly as a result of the British Government's own circumstances and in particular those relating to the cost of the war. "British" was eliminated in 1949 from the title of the Commonwealth to acknowledge the change. In contrast, the Commonwealth is an international organisation through which member states with diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds are able to co-operate within a framework of common values and goals. Available at: http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Commonwealth_of_Nations. 10 February 2011.

considered secondary to the railway industry *per se* in terms of status, operations, ethics and ideas. The ferry services around the United Kingdom coast, still mainly nationalised at the beginning of this period, were largely an adjunct to a British Railways more concerned with 'internal' service than the introduction of measures that would ensure increased numbers and returns on routes to and from Ireland and mainland Europe. This was perhaps an unsurprising consequence of a business that had wide-ranging responsibilities and was financed by national government. As will be seen the true recognition of trade and tourism growth was the entrepreneurial newcomer which in effect filled the gaps around the United Kingdom coastline with services that in time would better satisfy the movement of passengers and goods when and where opportunity existed.

The roll-on, roll-off practice was in place and never going to be reversed, and if British Railways was slow to embrace a practice that struck at the fundamental core of a rail-based industry ultimately it did seem to come to terms with the change that this practice represented. In the meantime, however, the backdrop of a proposed Channel fixed link represented yet another political and commercial hurdle for the nationalised service to overcome, and with one important consequence. The Channel tunnel project was reason for British Railways to pause as it considered the implications for its future investment programmes, and in a sense this pause, with competitors not necessarily so affected, represented a period of debilitation, of lost leadership, from which BR never fully recovered - while others were free to take advantage of the pause in nationalised industry investment that this created.

A new development took place in 1966 when BR Hovercraft Ltd, operating under the trading name, Seaspeed, was introduced. This was a major departure for the Railways which was straying into the area of a new design concept and, to mix metaphors, largely uncharted waters. Against this Seaspeed was concentrating on the busiest sector of the market where frequency and speed were deemed to be priorities for the customer and also for asset utilisation. This was also an expedient to counter the prospects of the Channel tunnel which had caused British Railways to hesitate with respect to the building of new vessels for its Dover- and Folkestone-based services. The first "hovercraft" service commenced between the mainland and the Isle of Wight, and in August 1968, when British Rail ran its last steam locomotive, the

world's largest Hovercraft, the SRN4 *Princess Margaret*, came into service on the Dover-Boulogne route. British Rail's Shipping and International Services Division was established in 1968 and became fully operational in August the following year.

The general public was starting to look for alternative means of travel. It had been given a taste of what was possible in terms of foreign or even cross-Irish Sea travel and they were not keen to go backwards or to tolerate poor service or unacceptable delays. The concept of roll-on, roll-off, even in its crudest early stages, had been established and if British Railways could achieve the foray into this new operating territory, albeit in a piecemeal way, then other, more dynamic, truly commercial organisations could surely react more quickly and achieve better results. The period was therefore a cross between the *evolution* of roll-on, roll-off and the *revolution* stemming from a combination of the needs of a discerning client base and the inventiveness of the non-Railway shipping fraternity. The Sixties represented significant growth and competition that was getting stronger in nearly every corner of the United Kingdom as witnessed by newcomers with improved scale and customer comfort.

5.3 The Changing Market

The psychology of the private ferry operators and new entrants was interesting. The pale green hulls of Townsend's vessels and the orange hulls of Thoresen contrasted greatly with the rather dowdy, more traditional view of the Railway ships of the day, which were already of above average age and largely outmoded, many still having either lift-on, lift-off car capacity or at best limited vehicle decks. Passenger capacity at around 1,400 was based entirely on train capacity[395] and although there were clear indications that the growth of motor car shipments showed no signs of slowing, the focus of British Railways, indeed its whole *raison d'être*, was the rail sector, and this, necessarily, was at the expense of the ferries.

In 1959 the Government was reluctant to authorise major expenditure on the Southern Region fleet when there seemed every likelihood of the Channel tunnel being

[395] 1,400 passenger capacity equated to two trainloads or 'sets'

authorised, but it was not just British Railways and its ferry subsidiary that were frustrated in this matter. Dover Harbour Board, undaunted by the Tunnel discussion, in July 1959 had suggested to operators a major increase of roll-on, roll-off berth capacity in the Eastern Docks.[396] Some two years later the plans and model tests for new berths in the port were still not complete, but the Harbour Board was not prepared to make any decision until the result of the fixed link debate was known. To this extent talk of a possible Channel Tunnel had thwarted necessary investment in facilities that were required in order to cope with the existing, still less future, demand. This was to set the port and its operators back even further in their attempts to efficiently accommodate increased traffic flows.[397]

In traffic terms none of the existing operators could or should have been under any illusion that patterns were changing with car traffic increasing rapidly and wheeled freight developing steadily from a low base. Decision-making and a forward strategy still came less than easily to British Railways and its French and Belgian counterparts although there was an awareness that the market was changing and that competitive forces were increasing. There were thoughts at the time amongst those in British Railways management that the growth would slow and stabilise with a resultant balance between rail and road-based traffic.

Nevertheless there were significant commercial trends, all of which would have an influence on operational scale, vessel and terminal size and corresponding investment that would be increasingly difficult to ignore. The Statistics Division of British Railways studied what was happening with European trade and concluded that growth in imports and exports was forecast as steady and given that the tonnage was significant there were clear signs that the movement of freight was likely to influence the nature and composition of future ferry services.[398]

---

[396]The Divisional Shipping Manager of British Railways, Southern Region, R.P.M. Walsh was outspoken in an internal memorandum to his Chief Shipping & Continental Manager in Victoria. He had '*elicited*' information from DHB's Harbour Master, and understood that it was their intention to provide terminal reception facilities for foot, car and coach passengers, which would suddenly allow Townsend to compete at the interface. It was even suggested that under the new arrangements foot passengers could actually travel with Townsend and still connect with a train at the out-port:
The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motorcar ferry operating arrangements*; 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. *Internal British Railways correspondence from Divisional Shipping Manager, Dover to Chief Shipping & Continental Manager dated 8 June 1961.*

[397]ibid

[398]The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*

5.4 The Developing Cross Channel Market

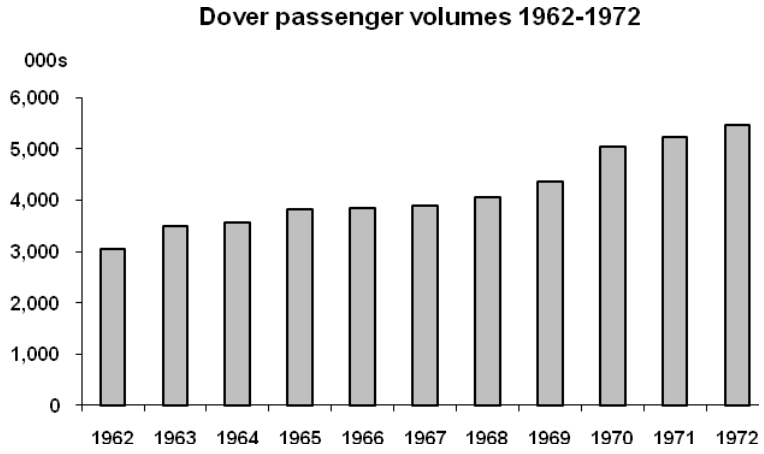
Dover-based traffic had always been seen as a barometer of the fortunes of and developments within the ferry industry. Table 5.1 illustrates that growth in all traffic segments was constant, the slight slowing in carryings in 1966 and 1967 reflecting a period of economic uncertainty in the United Kingdom that preceded devaluation. Despite this the growth in the ten-year period was 80% for passenger throughput, 128% for cars and 7,530% for freight traffic, the latter being an increase for which the operators were particularly unprepared given that vehicles required space and clear headroom in vessels that was not always available. In vessels where limited space was allocated to freight, heavy vehicles were, by implication taking capacity away from the shipment of passenger cars, and such a state of affairs heralded the start of an internal conflict between the two sectors that was to cause problems well in to the future.

Table 5.1 Dover traffic volumes 1962-1972

Year	Passengers	Tourist Cars	Freight
1962	3,047,435	440,112	2,052
1963	3,497,867	543,322	3,925
1964	3,569,114	558,359	5,039
1965	3,818,575	615,608	6,236
1966	3,853,837	677,226	10,556
1967	3,893,422	680,838	21,777
1968	4,058,645	716,354	38,081
1969	4,373,226	752,223	54,270
1970	5,051,751	865,091	83,277
1971	5,240,279	920,613	109,139
1972	5,476,269	1,003,453	156,581

Source: Dover Harbour Board

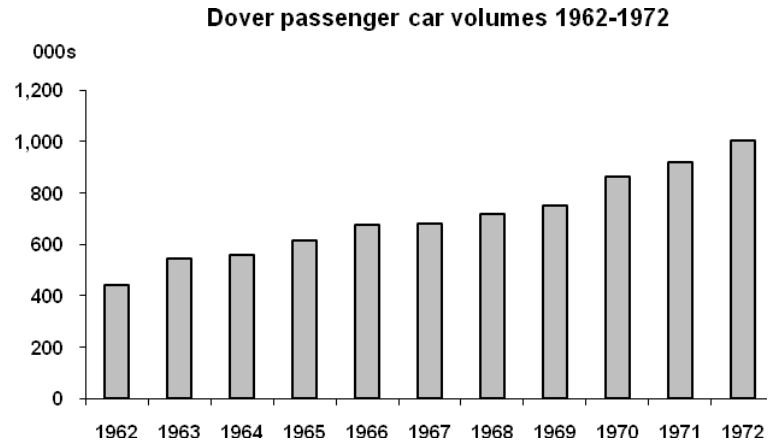
Figure 5.1 Dover passenger volumes (including rail passengers) 1962-1972



Source: Dover Harbour Board

Car traffic with a passenger average of 3 per vehicle accounted for exponential passenger growth thereby relegating rail traffic volume to a constant level through the period which had very little influence therefore on the growing car segment (see figure 5.2). This factor represented a comfort to the Southern Region and justified its reasons for a lack of innovation although the advent of its hovercraft subsidiary Seaspeed in 1966, which was predicated on the growth in car traffic to 1965, did enable it to manage the car-carrying concept in a way that eased the operational and investment pressure on its conventional ferry services. Figure 5.2 reflects the growth in tourist car traffic through the port of Dover:

Figure 5.2 Dover car volumes 1962 – 1972

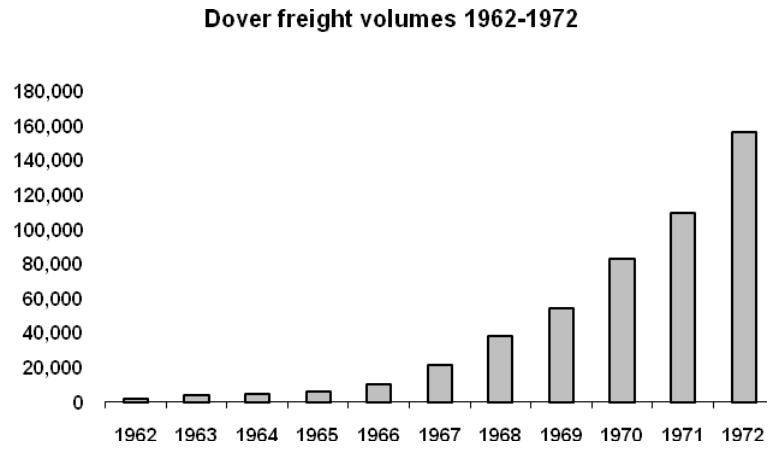


Source: Dover Harbour Board

The important growth of passenger and car numbers was not only a reflection of general trading conditions, but also a transfer from conventional to roll-on, roll-off shipping methods. In addition, and as can be seen in the following graph the international road haulage industry faced exponential growth in freight following the liberalisation of the sector. This trend was set to continue and was to fuel demand for services elsewhere around the coast of the United Kingdom to the point that freight revenue would ultimately eclipse passenger revenue and in doing so determine vessel proportions once more out of balance. The Newhaven-Dieppe service was one such example, British Railways announcing in 1963 the conversion of the *Normannia* and *Falaise* into car ferries at a cost of £800,000 to include a shore ramp to facilitate the loading and discharge of cars at Newhaven. A British Railways statement pointed out that the conversion of these Southampton-based vessels did not imply the Minister of Transport's agreement to the closure of the Southampton-Le Havre service although there is a clear implication that it did.[399]

[399] *The Times* newspaper 28 September 1963.

Figure 5.3 Dover freight vehicle volumes 1962-1972



Source: Dover Harbour Board

Although capacity was an issue at that time, towards the end of the period covered by this study there was further evidence that replacement vessels were not necessarily the solution to the problem.[400] An altogether more radical approach to vessel design and scale was needed such that future growth could be properly sustained.

The following indexed cargo tonnage figures were contained in an internal memorandum dated 25 November 1964 demonstrating that in comparison to 1950 near European trade was developing at a faster rate than the wider and more conventional nature of imports and exports:

[400]The National Archives, MT157/36, *Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC*; 1963-1968. *Loose Minute from C.W.Payne, Statistics Division*; 25 November 1964.

Table 5.2 U.K. Trades with Near Europe compared with total trade 1964 (index numbers are based on values)

Trade with Europe tons '000 (1950 = 100)	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964e*
United Kingdom Imports	205	208	216	239	280
	100	101	106	116	137
United Kingdom Exports	198	223	259	289	309
	100	113	131	146	156
Total	**202**	**215**	**235**	**261**	**293**
	100	106	117	130	145
Trade with all other areas					
United Kingdom Imports	174	169	172	185	210
	100	97	99	106	121
United Kingdom Exports	164	170	175	188	193
	100	104	107	115	118
Total	**169**	**169**	**173**	**186**	**202**
	100	100	102	110	119

* Estimate

Source: The National Archives [401]

A great deal of attention was on the cross-Channel routes because this was the sector where unprecedented levels of demand were allied with competitive forces that were unmatched elsewhere. There was clear evidence of the popularity of foreign travel as well as customer acceptance and appreciation of the ease of 'drive-on' arrangements at Dover in particular even though during peak periods the system was clearly under acute pressure.

It was also clear that Dover Harbour Board was attempting to control shipping arrangements as well as the port infrastructure, showing concern in the early 1960s that motorists, perhaps not unreasonably, were arriving at terminals '*unbooked*'.[402] Nothing had fundamentally changed, however, since as late as 1966 the issue of supply and demand was still firmly on the agenda and by then had the added dimension of a Channel Tunnel debate which certain sources believed was the

[401]Europe is taken to cover France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany and Denmark. The value of United Kingdom trade for 1964 is assumed to be one and one-third times the value for the first nine months of 1964: The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968. Loose Minute from C.W.Payne, Statistics Division*; 25 November 1964.

[402]An internal note of a discussion held at Dover Harbour Board on 4 January 1960 raised two interesting issues of note. On an operational level it made reference to the fact that certain motorists were turning up [to Eastern Docks Dover] '*unbooked*' and '*…coming two days ahead and still expect conveyance.*' Cecil Byford O.B.E., who was General Manager at DHB was adamant '*….that Dover might have to say that additional ships could not be accepted because of the limitations of terminal capacity. He insists that Terminal Authority must have a voice in the number of sailings that can be considered and hence in the number of ships that can be accommodated in the service as a whole.*' Dover had always taken more than a port-related interest in what went on in the port, an attitude that was to develop as the year's progressed: The National Archives, *AN157/592, Dover Harbour Board: motorcar ferry operating arrangements; 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31. Note of a discussion at Dover Harbour Board 4 January 1960: Work Study Report.*

solution to congestion on the cross-Channel routes from Dover, indeed as early as 1960, and in the same file note, DHB's General Manager made reference to '*The Channel Tunnel of course continues to raise its ugly head.*' The hovercraft operators comprising Seaspeed and their Swedish-owned competitor Hoverlloyd believed that they were capable of making the difference by providing quick and relatively easy changes in their timetable to cope with such demand. Speaking at a press conference in London, Mr Leslie Colquhoun, managing director of Hoverlloyd, said that the Channel Tunnel would need a subsidy to compete with surface cross-Channel systems of the future and that '*Its capital cost would be so tremendous that it was doubtful if it would be viable at the likely fare levels of hovercraft and other surface systems.*[403] The reality was that shipping capacity, berth availability and vessel design were not evolving sufficiently or fast enough to satisfy increased demand, resulting in frustration for passengers and freight alike at peak times.[404]

Whilst the Irish Sea with its structure of more diverse and mainly weaker competition seemed content to simply and slowly evolve despite the competitive irritation caused by Bustard's Preston-based operation, the cross-Channel routes were a strange mixture of threat and opportunity. The threats encompassed first the sector's increasing inability to satisfy the market, second, the resultant interest that suddenly surrounded the possible construction of a fixed-link Channel crossing and, third, the serious competitive strategy displayed by Townsend. Conversely the opportunity comprised the escalating volume of traffic that showed no signs of slowing. From the operator's viewpoint prices improved particularly in the summer months when demand exceeded the sector's ability to supply. This was satisfying to the operators although there was growing realisation that the sector needed to match capacity more closely with demand if it was to construct a sound, profitable, yet competitive base upon which to build the future.[405]

---

[403]Hoverlloyd's press conference was to announce new fare levels for their £5,000,000 service. Cars were to be charged more than on conventional ferries i.e. £17-£20 for a Morris 1800 although up to 7 passengers would travel free with each car. In addition off-peak rates could reduce fares by between 10% and 15%. This tactical move addressed the imbalance between passenger and car capacity of the SRN 4 craft. *The Times*, Thursday, 19 December 1968; p.3. Seaspeed followed suit with similar strategic reductions announced on 23 December 1968. *The Times*, Tuesday, 24 December 1968; p.2.

[404]In a letter dated 13 February 1966 from Dover Harbour Board to the Channel Tunnel Division of the Ministry of Transport the Operational Research Officer admitted that '*It is true to say that at present the peak level of traffic at Dover is a problem.*' The correspondence went on to qualify the statement insofar as the possibility of a fixed link was concerned…'*It is not true to imply that this position will be alleviated with the tunnel.*'
The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*

[405]Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea.* pp.2-132.

5.5 Townsend Expansion

The early 1960s were notable on the English Channel routes in the sense that it witnessed a significant change in the strategy displayed by Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited. Despite the legacy of Townsend's entrepreneurship, the company had until this time always made use of second-hand, converted tonnage. This was now to change with the departure of the stalwart *Halladale*, which was decommissioned on 5 November 1961 after 12-years in service.[406]

The company needed to expand and unlike Southern Region, which had the ability to switch vessels between routes, Townsend had no spare tonnage to call upon when needed to move ships to alternative routes or to support partners. The only solution was to build a fleet of new ships of its own, an innovative and bold strategy that would nevertheless help to provide a competitive edge relative to British Railways.[407]

Townsends retained a naval architect and the shipyard N.V. Werf Gusto of Schiedam in the Netherlands was duly contracted to build the £1 million *Free Enterprise* which entered service from Dover to Calais on 22 April 1962, having taken only 8 months to construct. The vessel had some innovative features, such as diesel engines, twin funnels, open plan lounges and 14 feet of vehicle deck headroom in anticipation of an expected freight boom.[408] The vessel created the intended impact with a clean, fresh image and was successful in her first year of operation, carrying 250,000 passengers and 83,545 cars. In her first season alone *Free Enterprise* carried 55,000 cars, an increase of 100% on the 27,487 cars carried in the equivalent period the year before by the *Halladale*.[409] This move by Townsend represented a serious challenge to Southern Railways' supremacy on the southeast coast of the United Kingdom. Until the early sixties the nationalised ferry operations accounted for a virtual monopoly on the cross-Channel routes from Dover and Folkestone where the greater part of resources and attention were concentrated.

---

[406] Cowsill and Hendy, *The Townsend Thoresen Year.* p.12.
[407] ibid p.12.
[408] Townsend's retained naval architect, Norman Dewar died and the company contracted Burness Corlett & Co to act on its behalf. Prior to the firm's takeover by George Nott Industries, they had drawn up plans for a newbuilding although a falling out with their representative Carew Robinson caused George Nott to look elsewhere for support. Burness Corlett had a relatively inexperienced naval architect, James Ayres who was not only to design the first vessel, but every subsequent newbuilding for Townsend: Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.12.
[409] *Halladale* carried 86,744 passengers during the same period. Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. pp.12&14.

5.6 The Irish Sea Sector

On the Irish Sea routes there was less competition but with continued labour unrest in Irish ports there was renewed interest for any concept that would help to reduce the dockers' stranglehold on the operators. Until this point all Irish Sea operators, with the exception of Bustard, were reluctant to become involved in the new roll-on, roll-off concept despite clear signs of stagnation and an increasing threat from the airlines. Table 5.3 shows the effect of the airlines on the sector in the five years immediately preceding this period. Airline travel to and from Ireland was accelerating and had reached almost 40% of the total market by the start of the period under consideration. Despite this shipping services did well to maintain and in certain cases improve their carryings year-on-year, also having the benefit of charging fares that reflected extremely high capacity utilisation levels.[410]

Table 5.3 Irish Sea passenger carryings by sector 1957-1961

Year	Sea	Air	Total	Air Percentage
1957	1,513,500	496,000	2,009,500	24.7%
1958	1,534,500	556,500	2,091,000	26.6%
1959	1,534,500	630,000	2,164,500	29.1%
1960	1,493,500	807,500	2,301,000	35.3%
1961	1,516,500	944,500	2,461,000	38.4%

Source: The National Archives [411]

The stagnation or lack of growth in the Irish Sea ferry sector was attributed to a reduction in emigrant traffic that had as a consequence the number of those visiting relatives and friends was also down. It was more likely, however, that capacity constraints, the inability of vessels to accommodate wheeled traffic and the advance of air travel were the real causes. Lack of evidence and relevant statistical data preclude definitive judgement on this matter, but it may well be that the ferry service encouraged air transport by not acceding to what was a clear customer-led requirement for 'alternative' car capacity, many customers flying and then hiring a car at their destination instead of travelling on the ferry routes.

[410]Irish Dockers were militant during the period and were still largely handling break-bulk conventional cargoes:
The National Archives, *MT124/904, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements; 1963-1967. Table 1 of internal memorandum entitled Passenger Traffic – Great Britain/Republic of Ireland 1927-1961.*
[411]ibid

British Railways was not convincing in its reasoning or arguments, suggesting that for the most part the operator did not truly know the reasons for fluctuations in their traffic, much of the information coming from the Irish Tourist Board in the absence of British Railways' own research data.[412] Passenger traffic for the ferry sector had levelled out after 1956 and British Railways was content with traffic demand exceeding ferry capacity, a factor that helped to maintain high prices. The increased significance of competition from the air resulted in a letter from British Railways to the BTC proposing combative investment for the central corridor (routes from Holyhead to Dublin and Dun Laoghaire) by seeking approval to proceed with an investment of £2,171,000 for improvements, including the construction of a new vessel, for the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire service,[413] thereby underlining the fact that the British Railways Board wished to improve the '*steamship services*' between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire in order to cater for the growing demand for car ferry facilities. Briefly its proposals involved:

- Construction at a cost of £1,500,000 a one-class car ferry of some 3,000 g.r.t. to carry 1,000 passengers and 130 cars;

- Modernisation of the passenger accommodation in the passenger/cargo motor vessels *Cambria* and *Hibernia* at a cost of £400,000;

- Provision at a cost of £303,000 drive-off and loading shore facilities with car parks and custom examination facilities at Holyhead; and withdrawal and disposal of the *Princess Maud* for a credit of £32,000.

Justification for the investment was fairly concise, the main grounds on which the Railways Board based its proposals being as follows:

> *'That the present service and accommodation provided falls short of modern requirements;*

[412]ibid
[413]The National Archives, RA29/17/02, *Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements 1963-1967. BTC memorandum entitled British Railways Investment: Proposed new ferry and other improvements for Holyhead/Dun Laoghaire shipping services dated June 1963.*

> *There is substantial and growing demand for car ferry facilities to Eire. All traffic offering [turning up at the terminals] cannot at present be accepted owing to lack of carrying capacity particularly in summer; The Princess Maud in becoming increasingly costly to maintain.'*[414]

This was significant as the British Railways Board was admitting that its services were not only being overtaken by the more modern facilities and concepts provided by competitors but that it was waking up to market growth, a phenomenon that was previously thought to be less than sustainable. In addition the fact that the 1934-built *Princess Maud* was becoming costly to maintain should have come as no surprise since the vessel was 30 years old and clearly built in the days of very limited motor car travel.

With increased disposable income, customers wanted to take their cars with them on continental journeys, and similarly hauliers, on behalf of their import/export clients, wanted the option of circumventing labour restrictions at the ports by taking their vehicles door-to-door.[415] There was no direct reference to surface or air competition suggesting either a 'head in the sand' or perhaps an arrogant approach by the Board.

The fact that demand was outpacing capacity (the two passenger vessels, *Cambria* and her sister, *Hibernia* could only carry 20 cars) is indicated by the evidence of long quayside delays and the fact that cars were sometimes carried on cargo vessels to Dublin North Wall. For their accompanying passengers, this meant an additional 8-mile trip to collect their cars. The growth had been achieved despite what was described as '*uncomfortable travelling conditions*', necessitating car owners waiting on the quay for long periods. It was self-evident, however, that more suitable tonnage

---

[414] ibid

[415] Indeed, the letter asserted that '*The time has come for replacement of the Princess Maud which has a capacity of 1,458 passengers but cannot carry motor vehicles; she will be life-expired in 1964. The Railways Board are averse to keeping her in service as she is unsuitable for present-day requirements and is becoming increasingly costly to maintain; some people are known to avoid using the service in peak periods for fear that they may have to travel by the Princess Maud.*': The National Archives, *RA29/17/02; Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements 1963-1967. Internal memorandum from Railways A Division entitled British Railways Investment: Proposed new ferry and other improvements for Holyhead/Dun Laoghaire shipping services dated June 1963. p.2.*

was required, the Railways' slowness to act yet again providing the opportunity for others to take advantage of market growth.[416]

Even this poor level of service which had managed to demonstrate car traffic growth on the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire route (including Dublin North Wall) of 25% in 1958, 20% in 1959, 15% in 1960 and 30% the following year was becoming increasingly difficult to offer as freight shipments into Dublin North Wall were also taking up valuable space.[417] The financial justification alone, and before any perhaps less tangible, service-related, reasons were taken into account, provided an inevitable decision for the main board that it needed to invest in new, more suitable tonnage. The following figures show that the estimated return could improve considerably if additional capacity was devoted to the route:

Table 5.4 Financial considerations of replacement tonnage

Financial Considerations	Present conditions but after renewal of *Princess Maud* on simplest lines £000	Estimated conditions £000	Increase 1970 over present conditions £000
Gross Receipts	1,213	1,914	701
Costs	1,056	1,211	155
Net Receipts	157	703	546

Source: The National Archives [418]

The investment was forecast to make a return of 23% on £2,170,000 of new capital, with an increased annual return anticipated to be in the region of £500,000 based upon on historic net receipts for the Railway Board's ships, which for the period 1959-1961 had been fairly static at around £3,900,000.[419] The conclusion was that the project to replace tonnage on the central corridor of the Irish Sea was something of a '*gamble*' and that under normal circumstances the Railways Board was discouraged from

[416]This classic illustration represents one further remark in the letter, which states: '*Accommodation for cars in the Board's ships on the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire service is so limited that it is necessary to make ad hoc arrangements for the carrying of cars in cargo vessels to Dublin North Wall; passengers then have to travel to Dun Laoghaire and make their own way 8 miles to Dublin North Wall to collect their cars.*':
The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements 1963-1967. Internal memorandum from Railways A Division entitled British Railways Investment: Proposed new ferry and other improvements for Holyhead/Dun Laoghaire shipping services dated June 1963.* p.4.
[417]ibid
[418]ibid
[419]1959 £3,881,800; 1960 £3,914,045; 1961 £3,873,443:
The National Archives, *RA29/17/02, Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements 1963-1967. Internal memorandum from Railways A Division entitled British Railways Investment: Proposed new ferry and other improvements for Holyhead/Dun Laoghaire shipping services dated June 1963.* p.7.

taking on schemes where the pay-off was doubtful. But the submission went on to suggest that the Board's shipping services fell into a different category from the rail operations since they were in the main '*extremely profitable*'.[420] Net receipts of about £3,900,000 annually from shipping services in the three years 1959/1961, increased to £4,300,000 in 1962 and the document went on to conclude that if the Board's estimates of car and passenger carryings by 1970 were to prove correct, the return on total capital investment of 23% would be '*handsome*' by any standards and a 15% return would be assured if car carryings were one-third less than estimated.[421]

The scheme was subsequently approved by the British Transport Commission and an article published in the *Railway Gazette* on 12 July 1963 confirmed the detail of what was to be done to the *Cambria* and *Hibernia* in bringing them up to a more acceptable standard. It also referred to the key dimensions of the vessel to be ordered, the details of which were as follows:[422]

Table 5.5 Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire Newbuilding dimensions

Holyhead Ferry I	
Gross registered tons	3,000
Length	368 feet
Overall breadth	57 feet 2 inches
Mean draught	12 feet 9 inches
Passengers	1,000
Sleeping accommodation	80 berths
Cars	155
Machinery	Oil
Speed	19.5 knots
Cost	£1,500,000
Anticipated introduction	1965

Source: The National Archives [423]

The delay in transition from 'Classic' or passenger-only steamer to 'car ferry' had resulted in inconvenience for the passenger and/or freight forwarder as well as the operational staff at the terminals who frequently had to turn traffic away from the route because of the unavailability of capacity. This restriction on capacity in a growing market had caused traffic to use other travel options, such as air as well as

[420] ibid
[421] ibid
[422] ibid
[423] ibid

other surface routes on the Irish Sea especially because on other routes, and principally those run by competitors of the Railway services such as Coast Lines, adaption to passenger and freight requirements were being made more decisively and with clearer outcome.

In an article entitled '*Railways sail to success on cars*' that appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper on 26 October 1965 there was a review of the new car ferry *Holyhead Ferry I* that entered into service on 19 July that year. The vessel was said to have performed well following '*teething troubles*' and was especially comfortable in a seaway with stabiliser fins that resulted in '*smooth riding*'.[424]

In the period from 19 July to 31 December 1965 the ship had carried 26,000 vehicles and 85,000 passengers for with 42,000 vehicles forecast at that time for 1966[425], a true endorsement of demand and the need for a drive-through vessel on the Holyhead route. Despite the nervousness shown in approving the capital expenditure, the investment was declared a success by British Rail[426], the vessel near doubling traffic carryings for the port in her first year of operation. Slower than predecessors of the same name, the vessel was nevertheless far more economical burning 9 tons of fuel oil per round trip as opposed to the 70 tons of coal consumed by the vessel replaced.[427]

British Railways seemed keen to react to increasing public criticism and announced in the spring of 1964 that under a plan that it had put before the Minister of Transport its services were to be completely reorganised in time for the 1964 holiday season and with provision whereby '*….ships are to be switched to the most popular routes and to provide more accommodation for motorists*.' The British Railways Board referred to the underlying problem being the delay of '*…any modernisation programme…. [because of] the uncertainty about the Channel tunnel project….*' The company had therefore decided that the next best thing would be to redeploy tonnage in order to attempt to satisfy demand in a more scientific and practical way. The board did not make it clear, however, why it had not already taken this obvious step. In the

[424]ibid
[425]*Modern Transport Magazine,* 21 May 1966.
[426]Britain's state railways underwent a corporate identity change in 1965 with the introduction of the system-wide name "British Rail", the double-arrow symbol and a "Rail Blue" livery. Available at:
http://www.wordiq.com/definition/British_Rail_brand_names. 10 February 2011.
[427]The vessels could achieve 21 knots although they ran at 18 knots with sufficient timetable-ease. In contrast the previous vessels were capable of 25 knots. Danielson. *Railway Ships and Packet Ports.* p.32.

meantime more emphasis and investment was put into the Newhaven-Dieppe route since this was seen to be far enough away from any would-be Tunnel competition.[428]

5.7 Thoresen and the Western Channel

In the Western Channel the economics of Southern Region's piecemeal, part seasonal, services from Weymouth and Southampton was also exercising the minds of British Railways management at the time, a state of affairs that was to lead to the creation of a newfound entrepreneurial presence on the Western Channel.[429] The opportunity of an increasing tourist market to the western part of France had caught the attention of Otto Thoresen, a Norwegian who for a number of years had been employed by Fred Olsen as a manager on its Mediterranean service.[430] In January 1963 he entered into negotiations with the Port Authorities of Southampton, Weymouth and Cherbourg, helped by shipbrokers James Burness & Sons Ltd, with a view to starting a new, privately funded, ferry service.

Thoresen's first encounter with the Channel was in the 1950s when despite inclement weather and ill health he had been unable to travel by air and instead attempted to get from Dunkerque to Dover. The route was closed so he travelled to Dieppe and caught a different SNCF ferry only to suffer what he was later to describe as a '*…a very indifferent breakfast…*' arriving extremely late for his meeting in London. Whilst on board he observed what he described as the appalling conditions and service which passengers were subjected to and was allegedly heard to say, *'You needn't be a genius to do better than this*'.[431] Thoresen was of a similar temperament to Stuart Townsend and soon recognised the need for a service that would be better tailored to the needs of the increasing car and roll-on, roll-off traffic that was, on their own admission, being neglected by British Railways and SNCF.[432]

---

[428]The National Archives, *MT24/4, London & North Eastern Railway Company: British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station and Loose minute from A. Flexman (RA1) to Mr Steele (GSP) entitled Cross Channel Car Traffic dated 27 November 1964.*
[429]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. pp.12&14.
[430]Fred. Olsen & Co. lost 23 of their 44 ships during the First World War, but the fleet was rapidly rebuilt. The activities expanded and in 1921, with the absorption of Otto Thoresen's Line which included services to the Mediterranean and Canary Islands with a fleet of 15 ships. Source: Fred. Olsen & Co. Available at: www.fredolsen.com
[431]Cowsill and Hendy, *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.32.
[432]ibid p.32.

The port negotiations resulted in Southampton being chosen in preference to Weymouth because it was able to guarantee a berth and facilities from 1964 onwards, something that Weymouth was unable to do. In April 1963 shipyards in Britain, France, Germany and Scandinavia were invited to tender for the building of the first ship, a contest that resulted in a contract being awarded to Kaldnes Mekaniske Verksted A/S, Tönsberg in Norway. Otto Thoresen Shipping Company A/S placed the order and the service was to be known as the 'Southampton-Cherbourg Car Ferry Service'.[433]

British Railways played into the hands of Thoresen when in September 1963 it finally announced its intention to close its Southampton operations preferring instead to concentrate on its services that were operating from Dover and Newhaven. This caused an outcry from the public and local authorities that claimed that British interests were being overridden, thus allowing foreign-owned companies to fill the void. A public enquiry followed in November 1963 when the newly renamed British Rail declared that it could not continue to lose public money and therefore reasoned that there was no other alternative but to concentrate its services from Newhaven where a better return could be sought. After over thirty objections were heard from local authorities and the public, the then Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples ruled in British Rail's favour but only on the understanding that it maintained the service until Thoresen's company was ready to take over.[434]

Allegedly spurred on by Marples' announcement Thoresen ordered a second vessel while negotiations for the Le Havre and St Malo routes proceeded, although the latter was never realised. The second vessel was not ordered simply as a result of the public announcement or the second route negotiations, but rather based upon advanced bookings for the first ship and eagerness for the service displayed on both sides of the Channel as well as support from Norway.[435]

---

[433]ibid p.32.

[434]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.32. *The Times* reported on 16 November 1955 that British Railways Southampton-Le Havre night boat service was losing money at the rate of £2 per passenger and that it had lost £107,000 in 1954. A further report on 12 November 1963 quoted Mr R.E. Sinfield, Chief Shipping and Continental Manager, Southern Region as saying '*Parliament expects British Railways to pay their way and we feel that as custodians of national money we should economise*.' The service had been losing money for years and British Railways had lost £1,000,000 since they last tried to withdraw it in 1955. There was criticism from Dr Horace King, Labour MP for Itchen that '*…Southampton was being written off in favour of Dover*.' Danielson. *Railway Ships and Packet Ports*. p.22.

[435]To raise the required capital to finance the newbuildings it was necessary for the Company to raise its share capital from 7 to 12.5 million Krone:

By the end of September 1963 the first details were given of Thoresen's two ferries that were designed to make an appreciable difference to operations in the Western Channel. At a shareholder meeting on 25 September 1963 in Oslo, it was announced that the new ships, which were financed over an eight year period, would be the first drive-through[436] or roll-on, roll-off vessels to serve on the Channel, each having capacity to carry 180 cars, 940 passengers and with sleeping accommodation for 300.[437] The first of the orange hulled vessels was to be delivered on 2 April 1964, but an announcement in November 1963 declared that the Company anticipated that the service would commence on 11 May with the second vessel starting operations on 1 August.

The two ships, named *Viking I* and *Viking II*[438], represented massive change because they came complete with vehicle decks that would enable unloading in less than fifteen minutes, in stark comparison with the somewhat pedestrian operation displayed by the Railway companies.[439] During the first three weeks of operation in May 1964 Thoresen Car Ferries carried 13,000 passengers and 3,500 cars on the Southampton-Cherbourg route.[440] In contrast, British Railways only handled 72,200 passengers and 2,640 cars during the entire 12 months of 1962.[441] *Viking II* arrived and entered service on the Southampton-Cherbourg route on 19 July 1964, and the following day the *Viking I* formally inaugurated a new routing that linked Southampton and Le Havre.

The British Railways steamer *St. Patrick* left Southampton for her final crossing to St Malo on 25 April 1964, thereby ending the Railway's marine connection with the south coast port,[442] and by the end of that year Thoresen Car Ferries had carried

---

Available at: http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/vik63.html. 4 February 2005. Although denied by those allegedly in discussion, *The Times* newspaper reported on 5 September 1963 that Thoresen was '….*in close touch*..' with British Railways giving rise to the thought that Thoresen was being encouraged to take over the route in order to ease British Railways' demise from the Western Channel.

[436]Drive-through is an expression often used to describe vessels that have bow and stern openings whereas the term roll-on, roll-off can be used in reference to the same concept or to describe vessels with a single opening.

[437]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.33.

[438]*Viking I*'s keel had been laid in the October and the vessel was launched by Otto Thoresen's wife three months later on 29 April. *Viking I* maintained over 20 knots on trials and entered service on 11 May 1964 followed by *Viking II* on 19 July when *Viking I* was transferred to the new Southampton-Le Havre service: Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.33.

[439]Fares were to be £2/17s/6d adult single, a car £4/10s single, and a cycle 10s single:
Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.33. The *Viking I* left Southampton at 10.30 hrs on 11 May 1964 as planned and carried 170 cars bound for Cherbourg on her maiden voyage, a crossing that took 5 hours. The vessel had a 60-minute turnaround and sailed for Southampton at 16.30 hrs. Night sailings were introduced in mid-May.

[440]Bookings were said to be encouraging to the extent that even at this early stage the service could be reasonable assured of viability.

[441]Cowsill and Hendy, *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.33.

[442]ibid p.33. *The Times*, Tuesday, 7 July 1964; p.6.

192,274 passengers, 166% more than British Railways Southern Region and more than twenty times the number of cars carried two years previously.[443] Thoresen put its success down to the following: [444]

> *'(1) The attractiveness of the new vessels*
> *The vessels were distinctive even to the untrained eye. They appeared futuristic and with orange hulls contrasting with the black hulls and rather dowdy appearance of the Southern Region vessels*
>
> *(2) Service frequency*
> *The service provided timely departures that were closely allied to the timings that would suit the motorist as distinct from the need to meet train paths*
>
> *(3) Competitive fare structure*
> *Fares were understandable and clearly presented in the company's marketing material, a feature that British Railways rarely achieved*
>
> *(4) The reluctance of Midlands and West Country motorists to pass through London on their way to Dover*
>
> *(5) Thoresen concentrated on geographic regions of the United Kingdom in its marketing material, specifically targeting certain areas where growth could be encouraged'*

Thoresen ordered a third vessel some two months after British Railways' withdrawal. Thoresen was quoted at the time as saying: '*Our decision to build a third ferry after only two months of operation has been taken because of the tremendous demand for our service. The third vessel will give us greater flexibility in 1965 and will enable us*

[443]British Railways Southern Region had carried 2,640 cars.
[444]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years*. p.33.

to cope with the expected increase in traffic. Our third ship will be in operation for the summer season next year.'[445]

As a newcomer, Thoresen had created a new focus on the south coast services in the Western Channel and had done well to raise significant funding despite British Railways loss-making experience on the route from Southampton to St Malo. The clear difference was not only in the ownership and dynamic approach, but primarily the 'new' drive-on, drive-off (roll-on, roll-off) concept which was providing the motorist with what was needed to facilitate ease of movement to and from the Continent. One result of the Thoresen's activities was that the Oslo-based shipping company Klosters Rederi announced in 1964 that it was to inaugurate a weekly service from Southampton to Vigo in northern Spain and Gibraltar from spring 1966 with a newly constructed 20-knot vessel of 7,000 tons gross capable of carrying 150 cars and 500 passengers. In addition the Israeli firm, Somerfin announced a weekly service to Algeciras utilising the Fairfield-built 7,800 ton *Nili* carrying 120 cars and 500 passengers. Both vessels were said to have '*…a higher standard than the British motorist has been accustomed to…*'[446] clear reference to the less than required standard offered at that time by the railway tonnage.

Thoresen was to strike up a relationship with Bustard's Transport Ferry Service (Atlantic Steam Navigation Company) by chartering one of its *Vikings* to relieve two of TFS's vessels on the Tilbury to Antwerp and Rotterdam routes during their annual dry docking. This was to '*…pave the way for a continuing relationship…*'[447] which would allow the two organisations to co-operate and develop so-called land-bridge traffic whereby freight could travel on two services from Ireland through to France. Until 1962 Transport Ferry Service was part of the British Transport Commission along with British Railways, but under the 1962 Act it became part of the Transport Holding Company together with British Road Services and at that time was the biggest competitor of British Rail's cross-Channel freight services.

[445] *The Times*, Tuesday, 7 July 1964; p.6.
[446] *The Times*, Tuesday, 29 September 1964; p.6.
[447] *The Times*, Thursday, 11 February 1965; p.8.

5.8 North Sea Advancement

Further round the coast in the North Sea there was not much in the way of Railway-related or other 'liner' business other than the co-operation with the Dutch railways on the Harwich-Hook of Holland service and the freight-only conventional vessel operation from the Humber. This was to change, however, when in September 1964 the National Ports Council was asked to comment on a scheme that proposed the construction of two new berths at No. 5 Quay, King George Dock in Hull, for the support of roll-on, roll-off and passenger services from Hull to Rotterdam and from Hull to Gothenburg. This was to herald an opening up of the ferry route network from the United Kingdom and the British Transport Docks Board (BTDB) duly sought Government funding for a total of £1,348,000 after charging depreciation but before interest on a business plan that represented a forecast 24% return on capital.[448]

The forecast net effect of the scheme was highly positive, in fact almost too positive as can be seen in table 5.6. There existed a shortage of berths around the coast of the United Kingdom at this time, a 'barrier-to-entry' factor that produced comfort for existing operators because new facilities were impossible to create overnight. This produced a severe limitation for any potential new entrant as well as ample warning of possible competition to existing operators.

Table 5.6 Estimated cost of proposed construction of two new RoRo berths No: 5 Quay, King George Dock, Hull

Proposed construction of two new RoRo berths (£)	1965	1966	1967
Increased Revenue	85,400	340,000	385,000
Increased Expenses:			
Working Expenses	700	3,875	5,000
Maintenance	6,700	8,807	8,807
Depreciation	3,120	25,680	33,209
Interest	9,120	68,460	84,306
Total Increase Expenses	19,640	106,822	131,322
Net Increase in profit	**65,760**	**233,178**	**253,678**

Source: The National Archives [449]

[448]The National Archives, *DK1/318, Grimsby and Immingham: proposed terminal for Immingham; Gothenburg Goods and Passenger Ferry Services 1964. File note of the Chairman and Director-General of the British Transport Docks Board dated 17 September 1964.*
During the first half of 1960 over 1,500,000 tons more traffic was dealt with at British Transport Docks than in the corresponding period of 1959. The total traffic of 22,423,000 tons represents an increase of 8%. Imports rose by 1,566,000 tons to 12,543,000 tons and exports by 128,000 tons to 9,879,000 tons. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,019; 1 September 1960; p.11.
[449]The National Archives, *DK1/318*, *Grimsby and Immingham: proposed terminal for Immingham; Gothenburg Goods and Passenger Ferry Services 1964. File note of the Chairman and Director-General of the British Transport Docks Board dated 17 September 1964.*

Following a request from the Ministry of Transport for '*...comments and advice...*', the Chairman and Director-General of the British Transport Docks Board made clear in a file note dated 17 September 1964 that approval was '*very urgently needed*' since ships were already the subject of a letter of intent[450] for the Hull service, and the Rex Line of Sweden were holding a berth in a German shipyard so that an order for a vessel could be placed as soon as the terminal at Immingham had been agreed. The conclusion was that the scheme should be approved under Section 9 of the Harbours Act and the Ministry was duly informed although attention was called to the following three points:

> *'The net rate of return might be exaggerated because while expenses would increase through inflation a large proportion of the revenue, i.e., the rent, was fixed.*
>
> *The possibility of dust from the adjacent mineral terminal, making facilities unpopular with car owners.*
>
> *The need to warn the local highway authority of the heavy traffic, which might be engendered.*
>
> *We concluded, however, by informing the Ministry that the return on the scheme appeared satisfactory and we had no objection to the proposal going forward.*'[451]

By the end of December 1964 details were being released about this new player entering the fray. *The Financial Times* published an article entitled '*New Roll-on Roll-off ship plan by P&O*' which explained that the General Steam Navigation Company, the oldest company within the P&O Group[452] was '*actively investigating*' the potential market for a roll-on, roll-off car and passenger service from the south of England to the near Continent and also as far afield as Spain and the Mediterranean. The article stressed that '*The company is already involved in North Sea Ferries,*

[450]A letter of intent, sometimes referred to as a LOI, is a document that outlines an agreement between two or more parties before the agreement is finalised.
[451]ibid
[452]The General Steam Navigation Company was established in 1824.

London, and Noordzee Veerdienst, Rotterdam; these two companies are the operating subsidiaries of an international consortium consisting of General Steam Navigation, the Tyne Tees Shipping Company[453] *and two Dutch companies and a German concern*.'

Two roll-on, roll-off vessels were subsequently ordered in Germany and the service was to start from Hull to Rotterdam in the autumn of 1965. General Steam's investment at that stage totalled £1,000,000.[454] The partners in the new operation were described as the General Steam Navigation Company Ltd, Tyne Tees Shipping Company Ltd of Newcastle upon Tyne, the West German Argo Reederei Richard Adler & Sohne of Bremen, NV Hollandsche Stoomboot Maatschappij, Amsterdam, A. Kirsten of Hamburg and Phs van Ommeren NV, Rotterdam.[455]

The first of the two ships, the British-flagged *Norwave*, was launched at the Bremerhaven yard of A.G. Weser on 2 July 1965 and was followed a few months later by a sister ship under the Dutch flag. Each was 3,950 gross tons and capable carrying 240 passengers as well as 65 lorries plus 25 cars or a full load of 200 cars. The 15-knot ships were built to '*….the highest international standards with air-conditioning and stabilisers….*' The service was pitched at being slightly more expensive than the southern routes whilst its attractiveness came from the overnight passage, direct and quicker journey from the Midlands, the North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, providing an important alternative route for passengers and British exports.[456] There are a number of reasons why in logistical terms the service was ahead of its time, the attitude towards heavy traffic (freight) component of capacity being

[453] A member of the Coast Lines Group.
[454] The National Archives, *DK1/318 Grimsby and Immingham: proposed terminal for Immingham; Gothenburg Goods and Passenger Ferry Services 1964; Memorandum from Director-General of National Ports Council re Investment Proposals of the British Transport Docks Board dated 17th September 1964.*
[455] By July 1965 further details of the service had been announced. *Modern Transport* magazine published an article on 31 July 1965.
[456] A total of 191 berths were provided in standard class 2 and 4 berth cabins. The passenger fare was £6/10s single, £12 return (children £4/15s) and unusually the price included an evening meal, cabin, morning tea and breakfast. Rates for accompanied motor cars ranged from £4 single at 11 feet in length through £7/10s at 14 feet to £13 for cars over 16 feet 6 inches in length. Return fares were slightly less than twice the single rate whilst coach fares were typically £34 for a 30-foot vehicle: *Financial Times article entitled: New Roll-on, Roll-off Ship Plan by P&O dated 28 December 1964 by Our Shipping Correspondent. Also: Modern Transport Magazine article entitled Roll-on at Hull: Valuable North Sea Ferries venture;* dated 31 July 1965. p.7.

somewhat forward thinking at what was still an early stage in the east coast movement of freight.[457]

This was innovative thinking for the period and showed great forethought as to what the market required, even though there is ample evidence that at that stage the passengers and hauliers were not wholely aware of what they wanted. The sector was in its infancy and for their day these ships were as large as the commitment in building them - and indeed the risk associated with their operation.

5.9 The Atlantic Steam Navigation Company

Townsend and Thoresen had also been breaking new ground with the concept of roll-on, roll-off ferry design and they were not alone. The 1960s were also buoyant for Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation Co with the advent of four newbuildings, the *Cerdic Ferry* (entered service: 1961 2,563 tons); *Doric Ferry* (1962 2,573 tons); *Gaelic Ferry* (1963 3,316 tons) and the *Europic Ferry* (1967 4,190 tons). The increase in tonnage during a relatively short period is indicative of the unprecedented growth in freight shipments. In contrast to the loyalty of the Railway companies to what amounted to one main shipbuilder per sector, Bustard's company played the field, the first two vessels having been constructed by Ailsa Shipbuilding Co Ltd and the latter by Swan Hunter Ltd at their Tyneside and Walsend yards respectively.[458] Unlike the railway companies Bustard was prepared to go to the shipyards that could produce the best design on a timely basis and at a competitive price. In contrast both Townsend and Thoresen went to mainland Europe in order to have their new vessels constructed, a sea change from the Railways and their predictable loyalty to specific shipyards within the United Kingdom. Bustard was keen to support the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry, but was also anxious to obtain the best deal - a factor that had surprisingly eluded the nationalised industry. British shipbuilding was going through difficult times during the early 1960s. A number of vessels were still laid up and foreign trade was becoming more competitive as well as the impact of foreign shipbuilding. During a 4 day tour of Clydeside and North East coast shipbuilders Mr

[457] An article in *The Times* newspaper suggested it seemed clear that North Sea Ferries was following the '*pattern*' set by Transport Ferry Service (ASN), pioneers in the shipment of RoRo freight. The article goes on to describe Bustard's venture as a '*runaway success*'. *The Times* newspaper; *German Ships for Roll-on Ferries*; 9 June 1964.
[458] Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea.* p.71.

Ernest Marples, the Minister of Transport denied that the Government had plans for rationalisation in the shipbuilding industry which would mean the closing down of small yards. Mr Marples said that he had been impressed by the individuality of the yards on the Tyne and Wear which he thought was a good thing. He pointed out that the Shipbuilding Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Sir James Dunnett, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Transport was seeking ways to help the industry. He was pleased that relations between management and workers were good despite current unemployment problems. He went on to express the view that he envisaged a big future for the hovercraft and that it was possible that such craft could be built in shipyards.[459]

It was in January of 1963 that the Transport Holding Company, the parent of the Atlantic Steam Navigation Limited put proposals forward in order to extend its activities. The company described the latter as '*…mainly engaged in road freight shipping (Roll-on*, *Roll-off and containers) to Rotterdam and Antwerp, and across the Irish Channel*.' In essence the company was seeking to secure a second operating base at Felixstowe and set out two proposals for extending its operations from and to that port.[460] The first proposal was to participate in a joint venture with James Fisher and Sons Limited in a lift-on, lift-off container service between Felixstowe and Rotterdam. The second proposal was '*….to secure a Roll-on*, *Roll-off berth at Felixstowe as an operational alternative and supplement to their Tilbury roll-on, roll-off base.*'[461] A number of interesting aspects can be derived from the British Transport Commission correspondence such as the fact that Atlantic Steam Navigation Limited was returning 12% on capital employed and that its trade, not surprisingly, was expanding.[462]

An article published in *The Transport Management* magazine dated January 1964 confirmed that Bustard's operation was to expand into Felixstowe with a start date of early 1965. Described as '*the first of its kind*', the service would capitalise on the vast increase that the company had witnessed in unit loads (trailers loaded with goods).

[459] *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,009; 23 June 1960; p.25.
[460] The company's base at that time for its continental services was Tilbury.
[461] The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968. BTC internal Correspondence: Transport Holding Company: Atlantic Steam Navigation Limited: Proposals to extend activities;* p.1-8 & Annexe.
[462] ibid

These had increased in 1963 by 65% over the preceding year and represented a good sign that the new route would do well.[463] The Felixstowe move was interesting from a strategic perspective and demonstrated innovative, forward thinking in that it filled a geographic need for the movement of freight at last without enduring the estuarial and river passage to Tilbury where valuable time was lost in transit. This resulted in better utilisation of what was rapidly becoming a modern and effective fleet. Felixstowe was also sufficiently removed from the epicentre of competition and debate further south surrounding the Channel Tunnel.[464] The interest in Felixstowe was strategic in that the company saw it as being of

> '*….great advantage in [having] a new Roll-on Roll-off berth at Felixstowe as an operational alternative and a supplement to their existing facilities at Tilbury. Felixstowe is very well placed for the Low Countries, particularly Rotterdam, and operating costs, including the cost of terminal facilities, would be lower at Felixstowe than at Tilbury, which is part of the Port of London and a comparatively expensive base*.'

The purpose of raising the two issues formally, and in advance, was made clear in the reply correspondence. The board of BTC felt it prudent to keep the Ministry informed so as not to cause '*…issues of policy of concern to the Minister*.' The remarks become praiseworthy indeed when in point 23 the Transport Holding Company is referred to as '*…a pioneer in the roll-on, roll-off and container trade, [that] is vigorously and efficiently managed, and has a good trading record*.'

In conclusion the paper closed by stating that '*…the Minister should be advised:*

> *'To concur in the proposal that Atlantic Steam shall participate with James Fisher & Sons Ltd., in the new company on the lines set out, i.e. on the understanding that the Minister's consent will be required to the taking of any additional shares in the future or the making of any loan to the new company as the service develops; to agree that the*

[463] ibid
[464] The Channel Tunnel

Holding Company should be informed that the Minister sees no objection to Atlantic Steam giving an assurance to the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company that they would give evidence in support of the amendment to the Felixstowe Bill provided that it is made clear that no firm financial commitment has been entered into and that Atlantic Steam's use of the new berth ('The berth would cost some £450,000 to construct….') would depend entirely on whether, at the material time, acceptable commercial terms were settled.'

A subsequent article in *The Times* dated 4 March 1964 announced the £600,000 extension scheme for Felixstowe, which included the reclamation of 6¼ acres of the foreshore for marshalling plus a 308-foot quay and floating pontoon. The report made passing reference to the fact that the project was proceeding despite '*Current proposals to go ahead with the construction of a Channel Tunnel [which] has done little to dampen enthusiasm….*'[465]

In 1964 Bustard's Irish Sea services consisted of container operations from Ardrossan to Larne and from Preston to Larne, to Drogheda (a shared service with Coast Lines) and to Dublin: in addition the company operated roll-on, roll-off ferry services from Preston to Larne and to Belfast. In an internal British Railways memorandum that sought to analyse the competition from the Transport Holding Company's operation, the growth in trade in the preceding four years was emphasised in that 42,000 units had been carried in 1965 as distinct from 14,800 in 1962. As important was the fact that the growth was set to continue with a forecast of 74,000 units expected for 1970. At the end of 1964 Transport Holdings '*….had five ferry ships (all fairly new and suitable for Roll-on, Roll-off services) and eleven other ships suitable for container traffic or charter.*'[466]

An article in *Modern Transport* magazine dated 6 March 1965 underlined the reasons for Bustard's success as well as the advancement in the roll-on, roll-off concept. The

[465]The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968; Correspondence from the BTC to the Minister of Transport dated July 1963 entitled: Transport Holding Company: Atlantic Steam Navigation Limited: Proposals to Extend Activities.* pp.1-8 plus Annexe. *The Times*, Wednesday, 4 March 1964; p.17.
[466]The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968. Notes on the Transport Holding Company's Irish Shipping Services dated July 1965.*

article compared the shipment of a large consignment of building materials that had to be moved from Belgium to the United Kingdom for treatment and modification and then back to Belgium again. Delay and damage were features all too familiar to a client when moving product on conventional ships by lift-on, lift-off means. In addition conventional consignments had to be large, something that caused '*acute embarrassment*' at the consignee's address in that it required a vast storage area.[467] Cost was yet another deciding factor. Conventionally the shipment for the Antwerp area to United Kingdom factory was '180 shillings' (*£9*) per ton, whereas by trailer the figure was a more reasonable '150 shillings' (*£7 10 shillings*) per ton.[468]

The Atlantic Steam Navigation Company was keen on forecasting its growth and profitability preferring to take a mid-to long-term view of its business. An analysis carried out in August 1965 attempted to project carryings and costs forward to 1970 based upon the 74,000 units as detailed above. The analysis showed that a total of 624 round voyages resulted in gross receipts of £2,710 and working expenses of £2,040 leading to a profit before tax figure of £670 per voyage. The return of 30% was good when expressed as a percentage of capital employed and was an exceptional result not only because it was based entirely upon freight-only cargoes but also because it was considerably better than the Railways were achieving at that time with their multi-purpose services. By May 1966 the Transport Holding Company, as a parent to Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited and Associated Humber Lines Limited, was providing 15 services around the United Kingdom coastline with a combined fleet of 25 vessels[469] with a pooled gross tonnage of 37,300 tons. The Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited was referred to as '…..*a very profitable and expanding undertaking. It was first in the field of roll-on, roll-off services which, despite the possible construction of the Channel Tunnel, is a rapidly expanding business*.'[470] The figures relating to the total traffic carried in 1965 by Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited for Anglo-Continental Container Services Limited and British Road Ferry Services Limited shown below stress the importance of the road haulage sector to ASN's services:

[467]Shipments via trailer could be staggered thus resulting in a more convenient reception at the consignee's premises.
[468]The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968.*
[469]ASN having 18 vessels and AHL 7.
[470]In an internal BTC memorandum: The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on/roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC*; *1963-1968*.

Table 5.7 In-house and Third Party Traffic carried by Atlantic Steam Navigation Company in 1965

Traffic Carried by ASN	ACCS/BRFS*	Others
Continental services of ASN	8%	92%
Ireland services of ASN	71%	29%

*ACCS/BRFS represented catchment or 'in-house' traffic for Atlantic Steam Navigation Company Limited, the table demonstrating the differing reliance on third-part traffic between the east and west coasts of Britain.

Source: The National Archives [471]

ASN's share of the total Continental and Irish services roll-on, roll-off traffic can be expressed in two ways (see table 5.8), figures that must surely have been of concern to Atlantic Steam Navigation's competitors since they were clearly making significant headway in converting break-bulk cargoes to roll-on, roll-off.

Table 5.8 Share of Continental and Irish services 1965

Share of Continental and Irish services	Continental	Irish
ASN's percentage of total roll-on, roll-off traffic on roll-on, roll-off services	65%	73%
ASN's percentage of total roll-on, roll-off and unitised (trailer) traffic on roll-on, roll-off services	44%	41%

Source: The National Archives [472]

In 1967 Transport Holding Company was keen to move its Rotterdam terminal to Europoort in the Netherlands as part of a developing trend on the part of a number of operators to reduce the length of the ferry crossing and delays caused by transiting rivers and estuaries. It was clearly necessary for the company to justify the expenditure of £545,000 for terminal equipment, which was to be balanced against forecast profitability of £300,000 per annum or 15% on capital employed. There is a hint of frustration in a letter to central government by Transport Holding Company tending to suggest that there was a move to squeeze the company and its future investments.[473]

[471] From a letter from the Finance Officer of the Transport Holding Company to I. T. Lorman of the Ministry of Transport dated 29 June 1966: The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968*.
[472] ibid
[473] As witnessed by a letter dated 28 July 1967 addressed to the Ministry of Transport. The letter also quotes the following paragraphs from Volume 3 – '*A programme for Action*' as published by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI):
'*44. Britain's position on the periphery of the enlarged Community will add further emphasis to the need for fast, cheap transport if British exporters are to compete effectively in cost and delivery times with Continental firms. This must be a principal pre-occupation of the present review of transport policy at both national and regional level.*

5.10 Fleet Disposition, Capacity Issues and the Advance of RoRo

Similarly at Dover there were growing pains as the introduction of new vessels was not in step with berth construction, the season of 1963 being particularly troublesome as poorly forecasted passenger and vehicle traffic was frustrated because of insufficient vessel capacity which resulted in short-shipments[474], booked traffic frequently being left on the quay.[475]

From an overall market perspective a press article published in the Evening Standard painted a bleak picture without a Tunnel or alternative capacity. It also pointed to the age of the ferries that were operated then, the *Invicta* being 24 years old, the *Maid of Orleans* 14 years of age and the *Normannia* and the *Falaise* at 12 years of age. The *Canterbury* came in for specific mention as she had been in service for more than 30 years. Interestingly the article was bold enough to say that '*Relief could come from privately operated companies which are ready to move in as the railway steamers move out. For one of these, the new foreign-backed Southampton-Cherbourg*[476] *car ferry service, British Transport Docks is building a £200,000 terminal.*'[477] The criticism was factual and illustrated the way in which the Railways had allowed asset replacement to slip, a factor not so important on its own, but when taken in the context that competitors were having new, up-to-date tonnage delivered and facilities built, the position became more serious. The Railway fleet was not only getting older, it was becoming outmoded in that vehicle capacity was poor. Competitors were building larger, beamier (wider) ships that had a much greater vehicle capacity, which

---

45. The prospect of EEC membership adds urgency to the task of putting into effect the findings of THROUGH TRANSPORT TO EUROPE, the report of the EDC for the Movement of Exports. In particular, the 'through transport' concept, with the minimum of handling between producer and customer, needs to be widely understood and acted on.
48. Great as the benefit of the Channel Tunnel to industry can be, the need will remain for the continued development of sea ferries for Roll-on Roll-off services, catering for exporters in their penetration of markets in Benelux, the Ruhr and further North in Europe.':
The National Archives, *MT157/36, Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968.*

[474]Instances where space on a vessel was used up and thus vehicles had to be left behind. Often caused by overbooking.

[475]The issue was severe enough to become public, the *Daily Herald* of 3 September 1963 publishing an article entitled '*Car tide that will flood the Channel – Behind the queues at the French ports – A taste of holiday jams to come*.' In describing the problem of 500 motorists who were stranded in France during the past weekend, the article cites that '*…in about 10 years, the numbers going abroad by car has shot up from one in ten to one in three*' and that '*Within five years…..three quarters of us will be trying to go abroad by car.*' Disappointingly from a ferry industry standpoint the article went on to urge the establishment of more '*long-distance air car ferries*' and '*The ultimate answer, of course, is a Channel tunnel*.' The National Archives, *MT24/4, British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station; Article entitled Car Tide that will flood the Channel dated 3 September 1963 by Arthur Eperon.*

[476]See Thoresen above.

[477]A later article appeared in the Evening Standard on 1 October of 1963 headed '*Cars and passengers choke Channel ships*' by Gordon Holman. The National Archives, *MT24/4, British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station dated 1 October 1963.*

in turn provided these companies with the opportunity to offer lower rates based on economy of scale.

Criticism over insufficient capacity causing out-shipment even for booked traffic and resultant delay inevitably led to the general public and hauliers alike questioning the price that they are expected to pay for what was seen as a lack-lustre service.[478] Sir John Arbuthnot, MP for Dover, raised the issue of pricing with the Dover Harbour Board. The General Manager of DHB responded on 12 August 1963 outlining the then current cost components. At that stage the single rate for an average sized car was £5-10s-0d (*£5.50*) and £4-5s-0d (*£4.25*) out of season. In addition the single fare for a driver was £2-1s-0d (*£2.05*) and children (3-14 years) were £1-3s-0d (*£1.15*) each.[479]

DHB was clearly under some pressure to justify the costs since its letter goes on to consider the various port charges that need to be paid by the ferry operators. A Poll Tax[480] charge of 2s/9d (*£0.14*) applied to Adults and 1s/6d (*£0.07.5*) to children. A Wharfage charge[481] on a car of less than 13'6" in length was 5s/-d (*£0.25*), whilst a longer car was charged at 8s/-d (*£0.40*). The letter also suggests that the mainland European ports involved in the cross-Channel trade were more expensive to use.[482] It is necessary to note at this point that the facilities did not come cheap albeit that the general public saw the Channel in particular as an expensive crossing especially when not honoured. As late as 27 November 1964 British Railways was sceptically analysing its cross-Channel car traffic. In the internal memorandum reference was made to a slowing of traffic growth from 18% in 1963 over 1962 to 10% in 1964.

British Railways and SNCF carried 3,000 cars fewer in 1964 than in 1963 and Townsend was down 7,000 cars for the same period. Newhaven-Dieppe was up by 21,000 (up 200%) principally as a result of the focus that had been placed on that route and the introduction of the *Falaise*. The numbers below are illustrative of the volume of cars carried on various routes during the period 1962-1964 with

[478]Out-shipment or short-shipment refers to 'booked' traffic being left on the quayside when the vessel is full.
[479]In 1963 a farm labourer was earning an average of £9/1s/9d for a 46-hour week.
[480]A per head charge rendered by the port to the ferry operator.
[481]A charge rendered by the port per vehicle for crossing the linkspan.
[482]Unadjusted 2005 equivalent prices shown in brackets:
The National Archives, *MT24/4, Applications for valuation of railway and canal securities under section 17 of the transport act, 1947.*

fluctuations in traffic levels that had much to do with constraints on vessel and berth capacity. Southern Region was keen to promote its entire route network since its principal competitor, Townsend, only had one route at this time and could therefore be marketed with a different message and increased vigour.[483]

There existed a simple dynamic in the early yet interesting days of development in the drive-on sector of ferries. In essence it was possible to fill more or less any capacity on the more volume-related routes such as the cross-Channel region where competition, although a frustration to individual operators, actually aided growth through choice of routes and services and sheer capacity.

Table 5.9 Cross-Channel car volumes 1962-1964

Cross-Channel Car Traffic (car units '000)	1962	1963	Growth %	1964	Growth %
Total Traffic (including air)	568	667	17.4%	736	10.3%
Dover-Boulogne	166	189	13.9%	193	2.1%
Dover-Calais	76	93	22.4%	86	-7.5%
Townsend	53	88	66.0%	81	-7.9%
Total for Dover-Boulogne/Calais	295	370	25.4%	360	-2.7%
Newhaven-Dieppe	9	11	22.2%	32	190.1%
Air	264	286	8.3%	344	20.3%

Source: The National Archives [484]

There was a period of cooling imminent at this time largely exacerbated by the inability of the ferry companies to recognise and react to growing volume and the needs and wants of a discerning market. Cross-Channel car traffic had peaked in 1963, the above figures showing that subsequent market growth had favoured the airlines, one player, Silver City, carrying around 90,000 vehicles and 220,000 passengers alone on an annual basis in the early Sixties.[485] The services from Newhaven to Dieppe did well particularly, and as predicted, following the closure of the Southampton-St Malo service even though the new found improvement in carryings was from a low base. Townsend Car Ferries had maintained strong pressure on British Rail, SNCF and the Belgian Marine with two new vessels delivered during

[483]The National Archives, *MT24/4, Applications for valuation of railway and canal securities under section 17 of the transport act, 1947. Internal file note entitled Cross-Channel Car Traffic.*
[484]ibid.
[485]Silver City Airways. Available from: http://www.silvercityairways.com/the_company.htm

the mid-1960s, the *Free Enterprise II*, which was introduced in 1965 as the first British-owned drive-through ferry at a cost of £1,300,000, and the *Free Enterprise III* introduced for the season of 1966, the year when Townsend extended its route network on the Channel to include a service from Dover to Zeebrugge.[486]

Ironically the *Free Enterprise III* was soon to be outmoded and become the least successful in the *Free Enterprise* series because of the fact that she had been constructed with a lower than usual vehicle deck height. At the time she was ordered the company had clearly not experienced or anticipated the boom in freight traffic, which of necessity required increased vehicle headroom.[487]

In what *The Times* newspaper referred to as 'unprecedented expansion', it highlighted a number of vessels that were in the process of being constructed. The 1,200-passenger, 150-car capacity, £1,600,000 *Valençay* of French Railways was launched in February 1965 for the Newhaven-Dieppe service to be followed by another five new 'drive-on' car ferries for the cross-Channel routes, amounting to a capacity increase of no less than 50%. This followed a long bout of indecision induced by the prospect of a long-awaited Channel Tunnel, operators suddenly deciding to have at least one more ship regardless of the prospect. Demand was growing fast with advanced bookings for 1965 up 17% and enquiries up 60% on the previous year. Given that cross-Channel operators believed that the opening of any potential fixed link was at least 7 years away they calculated that they could make a return during that period based on the increased demand alone.

A sister ship to the *Valençay*, the *Villandry* was already fitting out and expected to enter service on the Newhaven-Dieppe service in May 1965 whereas British Rail was building the car ferry *Dover* for the Dover-Boulogne route. Townsend were expecting delivery of a vessel and so were Thoresen and Belgian Marine. The general manager

[486]In March 1966 Townsend expanded services by the introduction of a car ferry service between Dover and Zeebrugge. Vessel disposition meant that tonnage was deployed on the Belgium and French routes as necessary. Source: The Monopolies Commission; *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973; Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

[487]The *Free Enterprise III* operated her inaugural crossing to Zeebrugge from Dover on 1 February 1966 an event that preceded a build up in freight throughput. The vessel had capacity for 1,200 passengers and 221 cars or 14 freight vehicles and 102 cars. In 1966 the three Townsend vessels carried 2,687 freight vehicles in contrast to the 17,250 freight vehicles in the following year, a 600% increase, three-quarters of which were carried from Dover to Zeebrugge. Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* pp.14&16.

of British Rail Southern Region, Mr David McKenna, said at the launching of the *Valençay* that the growth in capacity meant that the motorist 'should be spared undue frustration'. He went on to say that apart from a few days during the peak season there should be no queuing for places on the car ferries and that in theory motorists could turn up at Dover and Newhaven at any time and be confident of 'quick dispatch'. Newhaven was to have the biggest concentration of capacity expansion as British Rail believed that traffic would grow on the route to Dieppe regardless of a Channel Tunnel. British Rail was also converting the *Falaise* to a car ferry at the same time at a cost of £350,000 and another £350,000 was being spent on terminals at Newhaven and Dieppe. The increase in capacity was forecast to take the Newhaven-based route from 60 cars per day in 1963 to 700 cars per day for the summer of 1965.[488]

British Rail clearly had an opportunity to reinvent itself on the back of this unique initiative and the Shipping and International Services Division was established in 1968 becoming fully operational in August the following year.[489] Its assets embraced the considerable fleet of British Railway's vessels and harbours and shortly afterwards the Shipping Division joined a consortium of shipping companies owned by the French Railways, the Belgian Marine and the Dutch Zeeland Steamship Company, to be marketed under the common brand name, Sealink.[490] This move alone spread the railway net still wider and enabled a rationalisation of tonnage and services that had hitherto competed with one another.

In the northwest, the British & Irish Steam Packet Company, along with other components of the substantial Coast Lines group, allowed their passenger services to stagnate in the 1960s to a point where they could no longer compete with adversaries that embraced the roll-on, roll-off concept. The Irish Government acquired British & Irish in 1965, and it did so with two intentions. It sought to update the services and the executive management was strengthened to reflect new decision-making powers. As a

[488] *The Times*, 8 February 1965; p.8.
[489] The separate railway regions lost control of shipping operations when the Shipping & International Services Division was formed. BRB, the forerunner of Sealink UK Limited took over a year later. The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*
[490] Cowsill and Hendy. *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000.* p.39;

result the company decided to intensify the conversion of the fleet from loose or 'conventional' stow to container stowage.[491]

The new board was well aware that elsewhere in Europe car ferries had made their mark and intensive evaluations and feasibility studies resulted in the ordering of three new car ferries to replace the conventional passenger/cargo vessels built in 1946. As a direct consequence three new car ferries, the *Innisfallen*, *Leinster* and *Munster* arrived in 1968 and 1969, marketed at the time as the B&I Motorway. B&I suffered during the troubles in Ireland, when tourist traffic declined sharply, and they were ultimately taken over in 1992 by Irish Continental Line, services that were later amalgamated under the Irish Ferries banner.[492]

Table 5.10 The B&I Line fleet at the time shares passed to the Irish Government in February 1965[493]

Vessel	Built	GRT
Glanmire	Belfast 1936	789
Kilkenny	Dublin 1937	1,320
Wicklow	Grovingen 1938	586
Dundalk	Ardrossan 1939	710
Munster	Belfast 1948	4,142
Leinster	Belfast 1948	4,115
Innisfallen	Dumbarton 1948	3,742
Meath	Dublin 1960	1,558

Source: Various

One of the reasons why roll-on, roll-off had a delayed introduction into the Irish market was trade union opposition. In fact, a RoRo ramp was installed in Dublin in 1956, but opposition from dockworkers prevented it from going into service. The trade unions were militant in their opposition to any change that would reduce their numbers and hence roll-on, roll-off was frowned upon and it was therefore groundbreaking when B&I Line established an industrial relations policy to tackle the issue positively[494]. Various initiatives resulted in a works council, an investment scheme for the dockers whereby they could contribute towards the charter of the

[491]The first container carrying vessel, the *Kildare* commenced service on the Dublin-Liverpool route in December 1968 following which a 28-acre site was reclaimed by the Dublin port; a similar terminal was constructed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company in Liverpool by 1972. Smyth, H.P *The B&I* Line (1984) Dublin**:** Gill and MacMillan. p.223.
[492]Greenway, *A Century of Cross Channel Passenger Ferries*; Clegg and Styring, *Steamers of British Railways*; Winser, *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships*; Duckworth and Langmuir, *Railway and Other Steamers*.
[493]Smyth, H.P., *The B&I Line* (1984) Dublin: Gill and MacMillan. p.222.
[494]ibid p.225.

Tipperary in 1979, and a pension scheme[495]. It was not until March 1973, however, that the ramp at Ocean Pier was first used when Morland Navigation Company established a short-lived roll-on, roll-off service between Dublin and Barry in Wales. The exception to opposition was the new B&I service in 1968 for two reasons:

- The new ferry terminal, built on reclaimed land east of then eastern breakwater, was set apart from the main docks area.

- There was a growing acceptance among the dock's labour force that the introduction of roll-on, roll-off was inevitable.

The impact of roll-on, roll-off and containerisation on the fortunes of Dublin Port as well as the general Irish economy cannot be overstated. Roll-on, roll-off made travel and trade cheaper and faster. It could take over a day to unload a conventional ship with non-containerised cargo using a team of 40 stevedores working at each hatch, but a roll-on, roll-off vessel could be unloaded and re-loaded in less than two hours requiring only a small team of men to operate equipment, as customers driving their vehicles out the ship's bow or stern doors in effect do most of the loading and unloading themselves.

As increased trade as a result of roll-on, roll-off and lift-on, lift-off services helped fuel the booming economy and in turn led to a subsequent increase in trade that resulted in 4.42 million tonnes of freight passing through Dublin Port in 1969. Equally impressive, the introduction of the new *Munster* in 1969 had an immediate effect on tourism generally, and on B&I specifically, the number of cars carried more than doubling from 18,500 in 1967 to 42,400 in 1969.[496]

The *Munster* was ordered by Lion Ferry Ab of Sweden as one of a series of ships built by Werft Nobiskrug GmbH in Rendsburg. The other ships in the series were *Prins Bertil, Gustav Vasa* and *Kronprins Karl Gustav* of Lion Ferry, and the *Innisfallen* of

[495]The same positive effort and reaction was not however mirrored in Liverpool where militant attitudes prevailed during the early 1970s. Liverpool, once the second most important port in the United Kingdom soon became a vast area of derelict and redundant dock land, militancy at Liverpool resulting in B&I Line opening a roll-on, roll-off service between Dublin and Fleetwood during 1974 in conjunction with P&O. Two specialised vessels, the *Tipperary* and *Ibex* were constructed and introduced in 1979. Smyth. *The B&I Line*. pp.225-6.
[496]Cowsill and Hendy. *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000.* pp.104-106.

B&I, although a further B&I ship, the *Leinster*, was built by Verolme Cork Dockyards Ltd. The *Munster* was sold to the B&I Steam Packet Co before she was delivered in 1969, entering service between Dublin and Liverpool.[497]

From a vessel disposition perspective 1968 represented the year that Britain's car ferry market really started to make serious progress, the previous year witnessing 62 ferry services with carryings of 400,000 cars on the south coast.[498] In a further, significant development, George Nott Industries, parent company of Townsend Car Ferries, announced that talks were taking place which might lead to it acquiring Thoresen's capital with a view to merging their cross-Channel ferry interests. At the time Thoresen had four ships operating between Southampton and Cherbourg and Le Havre whilst Townsend had three car ferries and a freighter sailing from Dover to Calais and Zeebrugge. Townsend had a fourth car ferry under construction at the time. When Thoresen was acquired in 1968 by European Ferries Ltd, the former company was put into liquidation. In order to obtain the consent of the Norwegian Government to the acquisition of Thoresen by European Ferries Ltd the latter had to undertake that the ships acquired would remain under the Norwegian flag. To honour this undertaking and overcome the difficulty caused by a Norwegian law forbidding the holding by non-Norwegians of more than a small percentage of the shares in a Norwegian shipping company, a new Norwegian company, Thoresen Car Ferries A/S, was formed with the whole of its share capital owned by Norwegians. This company bought the Viking ships from Thoresen and time chartered them to Thoresen Car Ferries Ltd (Thoresen) which, with effect from August 1968, became the operator of the Southampton services. In order to protect the position of European Ferries Ltd that company was given an option to buy the assets of Thoresen Car Ferries A/S. Thus effectively, though not legally, this latter company was a subsidiary of European Ferries Ltd and is so treated in the consolidated accounts of the latter company.[499] The deal went through and Townsend Thoresen was formed as part of its holding called

[497] ibid. The *Munster* could be distinguished from her "sisters" as she did not have a sky lounge above the bridge.
[498] Swedish Lloyd announced that it was doubling capacity on its Southampton-Bilbao service with the arrival of the 8,500-ton, £4,000,000 *Hispania* to run alongside the *Patricia* offering a total of three sailings per week and a capacity of 225,000 passengers and 60,000 cars per annum. During the first two years of operation the service carried 144,000 passengers and 42,000 cars. *The Times* newspaper 15 April 1969.
[499] *The Times*, Monday, 10 June 1968; p.24. Source: The Monopolies Commission; *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973; Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

European Ferries Limited.[500] In its interim report for the six months ended 31 October 1968 European Ferries produced the following result:

Table 5.11 European Ferries Limited Interim Report [501]

Interim Report	Six months ended 31.10.1967	Six months ended 31.10.1968
Group profit (unaudited)	£785,143	£1,092,764
Less minority interests	£8,912	£1,691
Total	**£776,231**	**£1,091,073**

Source: *The Times* [502]

The financial result included the first contribution from Thoresen which clearly boosted the group's profitability. In the same announcement European Ferries suggested that their full year results to 30 April 1969 would...

> '*…amount to not less than £1,550,000 as against £1,133,471 for the year ended 30 April 1968.*' In the event European Ferries produced a result of £1,622,726 in the year to 30 April 1969.[503] The Chairman highlighted a number of aspects in his address at the Annual General Meeting on 30 December 1969:
>
> *Townsend Thoresen is the biggest British car ferry operator involved in the Continental trade and we are determined to improve our efforts to increase the overall traffic and our share of it.*
>
> *Without disturbing the basic concept of the separate trading identities of Townsend and Thoresen Car Ferries we are preparing for 1970 to promote these services jointly.*

[500] '*European Ferries Ltd was originally registered in 1935 as a private company with the name Monument Securities Ltd. It was converted into a public company in 1949. Its name was changed to George Nott Industries Ltd in 1959 and finally to European Ferries Ltd in 1968. European Ferries Ltd had an authorised capital of £3,250,000 and issued capital of £2,009,181. In 1957 Monument Securities Ltd (as European Ferries Ltd then was) bought a 51% interest in Townsend Car Ferries Ltd (Townsend). European Ferries Ltd acquired the rest of the capital of Townsend in 1959 and in 1968 acquired Otto Thoresen Shipping Co and in 1971 Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd. In addition to subsidiaries concerned with the operation of car ferries European Ferries Ltd has several subsidiaries concerned with the design and installation of complete electrical systems, the design and manufacture of electric motors, generators, alternators and associated equipment, with equipment leasing and general finance, and with residential property development*.' Source: The Monopolies Commission.

[501] *The Times* Wednesday, 21 May 1969; p.23.

[502] ibid

[503] In the period to 30 April 1967 European Ferries Limited produced a group profit of £904,596. *The Times* Tuesday, 31 December 1968; p.18.

During the 1969 summer all routes have achieved healthy increases of traffic over the previous year.

There is still much to be done to increase ferry traffic. Only about 4% of private cars in this country go to the Continent in any one year and less than 1% of the private cars registered in adjacent Continental countries come to the UK.

Another new ship, Free Enterprise V will be delivered in May for service on the fast growing Zeebrugge route. Free Enterprise II will be transferred to Southampton to provide much needed additional capacity on routes operated from that port.

The Stockholders' Concession Fare Scheme on our Dover and Southampton routes will continue in 1970.'[504]

The newly formed venture had thrown the gauntlet down to the railway companies. This was the beginning of the major offensive that would see the railways lose out to private enterprise. Not only was there modal shift from rail to road but also the standards were changing. Both Townsend and Thoresen were offering a new experience on purpose-built vessels. They were different, efficient and exciting, aspects that were underlined in marketing and advertising everywhere. At this important threshold it is interesting to note the progress that had been made in terms of European Ferries Limited traffic carryings as defined in an advertisement that appeared in *The Times* newspaper 31 December 1968 illustrating that in 1961 the company had one vessel and carryings of 75,000 passengers and 25,000 tourist vehicles. In contrast the 1969 anticipated traffic levels for a new total of 9 newly constructed ships would be 1,250,000 passengers, 300,000 tourist vehicles and 65,000 freight vehicles.[505]

Building upon its newfound partnership with Townsend, Thoresen announced that with effect from 1 April 1969 its freight operations would be joined with Normandy

[504] *The Times* Wednesday, 31 December 1969; p.15.
[505] Source: European Ferries Limited.

Ferries between Southampton and Le Havre thus providing up to 52 sailings per week. Normandy Ferries *Dragon* and *Leopard* became part of a service with four 'Vikings'.[506] The newly merged Townsend Thoresen was keen to remain ahead of the competition and wasted no time in announcing an order of five new vessels costing more than £20,000,000, representing a massive rise of cost. Two of the vessels were ordered from Werf Gusto yard of I.H.C. of Schiedam in the Netherlands and the others from the Aalborg Vaerftas yard at Aalborg in Denmark. The first of the vessels was scheduled for delivery in April 1972, the next in February 1973 and the rest in 1974. The two Dutch-built vessels were the largest at 1,200 passenger and 320 car-capacity, while the others could accommodate 1,200 passengers and 260 cars. The opportunity to use the vessels in other ports had been designed with built-in flexibility such that all five vessels could be used on either the Dover or Southampton routes.[507]

In 1972 the seeds for what was to become the Larne to Fleetwood service were sown within the P&O Group when Ferrymasters (Ireland) Limited, was created. The company started small but had big aspirations and a long-standing pedigree since it was an offshoot of the original Ferrymasters Limited of Felixstowe. It was formed within the P&O group in 1956 and offered what was at the time an unprecedented service to shippers. It simply undertook the complete door-to-door shipment of goods including the necessary customs clearance and documentation using an extensive lorry fleet operating to and from dedicated ferry facilities strategically situated in England and the near continent.[508]

This was in effect a new approach. Previous attempts at haulage by operators like Bustard had been an add-on to the primary ferry business. The advent of Ferrymasters in Ireland changed the emphasis to that of the haulier, the ferry operation being only a part of the end-to-end journey. There is an irony here since this was in effect the same philosophy or operating model as adopted by the Railways with passengers whereby the ferry journey was invariably a small part of the end-to-end train station to train station experience.

[506] *The Times*, Wednesday, 26 March 1969; p.24.
[507] *The Times*, Monday, 7 December 1970; p.21.
[508] Cowsill and Hendy. *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000* pp.118-119.

The Ferrymasters model had its disadvantages, however, because it was not seen as a common-user facility in the same way as other lines. There was a concern amongst other hauliers, for example, that the details of their cargo might be copied or stolen by Ferrymasters which was in effect a competitor from a haulage perspective. The concept therefore held back this development.

There was one single feature of strategy that helped newcomers. Against the background of a fixed Channel crossing in the southeast corner of the United Kingdom British Railways thinking was paralysed. Any potential or indeed necessary investment was delayed and any changes to timetabled services were achieved only on a 'without cost' basis. The Channel Study Group had sent its report to the Government for a statement of policy in March 1960. The report referred to firm proposals that had been submitted to the study group by an affiliation of British, American and French contractors as well as a more recent bid that had been received for a rival bridge construction. This latter group, also consisting of British, American and French contractors estimated that the bridge would cost £200,000,000 and take 5 years to construct whilst employing 5,000 men. It was said that ships the size of the *Queen Mary* would be able to pass underneath the bridge which would consist of a 49ft, 5 lane highway with two railway tracks and two 13ft sidewalks for cycle and motor cycle traffic.[509]

Referring to the fact that one of the cross-Channel operators had branded the project as 'commercial folly' Mr Leo d'Erlanger, chairman of the Channel Tunnel Strategy Group said at the Annual General Meeting held in June 1960 that perhaps he did not realise that the Tunnel could transport as many cars in 12 days as his service had carried in 12 years, and at a fraction of the cost. Looking into the future it had also been suggested that the hovercraft could make the Tunnel obsolete within 5 years although d'Erlanger dismissed this saying that although the technology was very interesting he hoped that it would find extensive use in countries where there are no roads.[510]

[509] *Fairplay*; No: 3,998; 7 April 1960; p.50. *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,010; 30 June 1960; p.9.
[510] *Fairplay*; Volume 195 No:4,010; 30 June 1960; p.9.

5.11 The Advancing Channel Tunnel Debate

Traffic on the cross-Channel routes was growing at a significant rate towards the end of the Sixties and so it was not entirely surprising that the commercial and political lobbies were constantly fuelling the Tunnel debate. Table 5.12 demonstrates the number of vessel entries and the Net Registered tonnage of shipping (the vast majority of which is ferry) traffic recorded into the port of Dover for the period 1966 to 1970. The year-on-year increase is more or less consistent with the growth in traffic although small ships working harder with increased scheduling brought about much of the additional activity.

Table 5.12 Dover vessel entries 1966-1970

Year	Number of entries	Growth %	Net Registered Tons	Growth %
1966	8,836	-	10,173,509	-
1967	9,832	11.27%	11,699,555	15.00%
1968	10,075	2.47%	11,887,830	1.61%
1969	10,778	6.98%	12,802,516	7.69%
1970	11,668	8.26%	14,241,147	11.24%

Source: The National Archives [511]

Passenger volumes transiting the port of Dover were equally impressive as can be seen in table 5.13. The growth in carryings was attributable to the increasing proportion of customers who were taking their car abroad with them as distinct from travelling by train, the uncharacteristic slow rate of growth in 1968 reflected devaluation and hence resulted in lower volumes. The advance in accompanied motor vehicles carried through Dover was impressive with a growth of 34.3% in the period 1966 to 1970. Even more impressive is the rate of acceleration in the growth, which witnessed a 15.51% increase in passengers and a 15% increase in car carryings from 1969 to 1970.

[511]The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*

Table 5.13 Dover passenger and car volumes 1966-1970

Year	Passengers	Growth %	Cars	Growth %
1966	3,853,837	-	644,226	-
1967	3,893,422	1.03%	680,838	5.68%
1968	4,058,645	5.22%	716,354	5.21%
1969	4,373,226	5.01%	752,223	5.00%
1970	5,051,751	15.52%	865,091	15.00%

Source: The National Archives [512]

Commercial road haulage freight vehicle shipments were in their relative infancy but the figures were nevertheless noteworthy. The growth from 1966 to 1970, albeit from a low base, reflected a 689% increase while the increase in 1970 over 1969 was 53.4%. This aspect of roll-on, roll-off was clearly set to rise although operators, and principally the Railways, believed that a levelling would take place at some stage and that the exceptional growth witnessed in the second half of the decade was therefore unsustainable. In the same way that car carryings had taken all operators by surprise, so there was a second wave of capacity demand with the advent of significant freight growth.

Table 5.14 Dover freight volumes 1966-1970

Year	Freight	Growth %	Import/Export Cars	Growth %
1966	10,556	-	24,096	-
1967	21,777	106.30%	32,323	34.14%
1968	38,081	74.87%	56,583	75.05%
1969	54,270	42.51%	58,276	2.99%
1970	83,277	53.45%	63,562	9.07%

Source: The National Archives [513]

The shipments of so-called export and import motor vehicles through the port of Dover (see table 5.14) referred mainly to unaccompanied trade cars and trucks, an example of the degree to which vehicle usage in the United Kingdom was increasing by seeking foreign car and truck products. The category was significant also in the sense that it was yet another gauge of the way in which demand was being placed upon vessel vehicle decks. Of great advantage to the ferry operators was the fact that

[512] ibid
[513] The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*

most shipments in this category were not time sensitive and could often therefore be relegated to the less popular sailings thereby increasing overall load factors.

The concept of a fixed-link Channel crossing had been witness to some amazing history, not least on account of the fact that between 1882 and 1950 the British Parliament rejected ten Channel Tunnel bills, mostly for national security reasons.[514] Tunnelling was revived in 1922 but soon abandoned again. The ultimate Tunnel design was based on a scheme drawn up in 1960 by the Channel Tunnel Study Group, an alliance of British and French companies.[515]

In 1966 the British and French governments announced that rail tunnels would be bored, but the project was a victim of British political volatility in the early 1970s and to concern about the high cost of a rail link to London, which the state would need to cover.[516] Dover Harbour Board attempted in 1968 to forecast the diminution in cross-Channel traffic applicable to the surface operators based at Dover. Of particular interest is its assumption that in areas other than passenger volume, where trains were destined to go through the tunnel rather than the disjointed route via surface operators, and freight, which was a relatively new business sector, it expected to maintain superiority in the all important and developing car traffic segment where market growth was high. [517] The ships and the contrast between companies and their marketing, overlaid with the advent of the hovercraft and talk of a fixed link were all to fuel a debate which was destined to be maintained for some considerable time.

[514]Gourvish, T.R. *The Official History of Britain and the Channel Tunnel* (2006), London: Routledge; *Beginnings 1802-1945*, p.1.
[515]Ibid. *Another false start 1964-70*; p.46
[516]ibid
[517]One that they would gradually win back.

Table 5.15 Channel Tunnel forecast 1967-1990

Tunnel Forecast	1967	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
Total accompanied cars between Britain & the Continent by sea	912,000	1,212,000	1,712,000	2,212,000	2,712,000	3,212,000
Dover						
Accompanied cars	657,000	824,000	596,000	757,000	928,000	1,099,000
Coaches	8,800	13,900	13,200	18,200	23,200	28,200
Motor cycles	10,600	10,200	-	-	-	-
Passengers	2,241,500	2,914,000	2,217,000	2,869,000	3,550,000	4,230,000
Eastern Docks Freight						
Road haulage vehicles	11,800	23,000	35,000	65,000	88,000	117,000
Import/Export cars	1,723	2,000	-	-	-	-
Agricultural machinery	800	1,500	1,500	2,000	2,800	3,700
Admiralty Pier & Train Ferry						
Train passengers	1,613,000	1,403,000	-	-	-	-
Road haulage vehicles	7,000	7,000	-	-	-	-
Import/Export cars	41,000	41,000	-	-	-	-
Diversions [518]						
Accompanied cars	-	48,500	222,500	310,000	380,000	450,000
Passengers	-	349,000	853,000	1,107,000	1,310,000	1,513,000
Diversions To Tunnel ex Dover [519]						
Accompanied cars	-	-	414,000	526,000	645,000	764,000
Motor cycles	-	-	9,800	9,400	9,000	8,600
Coaches	-	-	9,200	12,700	16,200	19,700
Passengers	-	-	1,550,000	2,005,000	2,479,000	2,953,000
Train passengers	-	-	1,403,000	1,403,000	1,403,000	1,403,000
Road haulage vehicles	-	-	42,000	72,000	95,000	124,000
Import/Export cars	-	-	44,000	44,000	45,000	46,000
Agricultural machinery	-	-	500	800	1,100	1,300

Source: The National Archives [520]

[518]Diversions to other ports – shows the cumulative diversions in any one year compared with 1967.
[519]Shows the cumulative diversions in any one year compared with 1967.

Note 1: The forecast is based on current trends and no account is taken of further economic restrictions which we hope will be transitory.

Note 2: The total accompanied car traffic to and from the Continent takes no account of traffic generated by the tunnel.

The period under review represents the true turning point for the United Kingdom-based ferry industry since it heralded the beginning of the end of the Railway monopoly as far as ferry transport was concerned. It is true that Bustard and Townsend had been around for sometime, but their respective forays into the ferry sector had hitherto been less than convincing in terms of investment. Bustard had made impressive strides with his converted LST strategy, and similarly Townsend had shown innovation in his conversion of a collier and a frigate for the carriage of cars and passenger use respectively. But it was not until the early 1960s that true investment was seen, Townsend introducing a total of three new vessels in 1962, 1965 and 1966, while Bustard embarked on a four-vessel building programme, which saw entry into service of smart, effective roll-on, roll-off tonnage in 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1967.

The running was not only left to those who were considered experienced in their respective markets. The unknown Thoresen entered the fray in 1964 with two newbuildings, the *Viking I* and *Viking II*, a considerable risk but one that was to see a near instant payback despite Southern Railway's earlier decline on the same route. The new growth in investment was seemingly only visible to those with entrepreneurial spirit and not the long established Railway companies.

5.12 The Economy and Development of a Discerning Market

In essence the 'driver' was the economy, set to rise nearly 126% in GDP in the ten years from 1962 to 1972 (see table 5.16) and with this degree of new prosperity came the desire to travel, an opportunity conveniently sated by the growth in customer attraction of the motor car. It is questionable therefore if developments should be attributed to the economy or the growth in ownership and independence afforded by

[520]The National Archives, *MT144/116, Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971.*

the motorcar. Either way the effect on the ferry industry was to be dramatic and ultimately sustainable.

Table 5.16 GDP expenditure 1962-1972

National accounts: GDP: expenditure at current market prices 1962-1972		
Year	**GDP (£000)[521]**	**% Increase**
1962	28,482	-
1963	30,343	6.5%
1964	33,122	9.2%
1965	35,781	8.0%
1966	38,079	6.4%
1967	40,175	5.5%
1968	43,519	8.3%
1969	46,860	7.7%
1970	51,515	9.9%
1971	57,448	11.5%
1972	64,316	12.0%

Source: Office for National Statistics [522]

Of specific relevance to the Railway companies was the relationship between GGE (General Government Expenditure) and GDP since this determined government investment relative to the buoyancy or otherwise of the market. The ratio fell to around 35% in the 1950s preceding an upward trend in the 1960s and 1970s partly reflecting the growing welfare state. Regardless of what may have been at the back of minds of those running the Railways, and there is no evidence to suggest that there was very much thinking about their marine interests, times were changing.

The motorcar had provided United Kingdom residents with a newfound freedom witness the fact that car ownership increased from 14% of households in 1951 to over 30% in 1962 and 45% by the end of 1972. The age of continental touring had arrived in this period and with improving prospects generally and a higher disposable income, an increasing proportion of the United Kingdom population was ready to explore new horizons.

[521]Estimates are rounded to the nearest million.
[522]Office for National Statistics: datasheet name: *natpc1*

Table 5.17 Passenger transport: by mode: 1962-1972: Billion passenger kilometres/percentage

Year	Buses & coaches		Cars, vans & taxis		Motor cycles		Pedal cycles		All road		Rail		Air (UK)		All modes	
1962	74	*25*	171	*57*	10	*3*	9	*3*	264	*87*	37	*12*	1.1	*0.4*	302	*100*
1963	73	*23*	185	*59*	8	*3*	8	*3*	274	*88*	36	*12*	1.3	*0.4*	312	*100*
1964	71	*21*	214	*63*	8	*2*	8	*2*	301	*89*	37	*11*	1.5	*0.4*	340	*100*
1965	67	*19*	231	*66*	7	*2*	7	*2*	312	*89*	35	*10*	1.7	*0.5*	349	*100*
1966	67	*18*	252	*68*	7	*2*	6	*2*	332	*90*	35	*9*	1.8	*0.5*	369	*100*
1967	66	*17*	267	*70*	6	*2*	6	*2*	345	*91*	34	*9*	1.9	*0.5*	381	*100*
1968	64	*16*	279	*72*	5	*1*	5	*1*	353	*91*	33	*9*	1.9	*0.5*	389	*100*
1969	63	*16*	286	*72*	5	*1*	5	*1*	359	*91*	35	*9*	1.9	*0.5*	395	*100*
1970	60	*15*	297	*74*	4	*1*	4	*1*	365	*91*	36	*9*	2.0	*0.5*	403	*100*
1971	60	*14*	313	*75*	4	*1*	4	*1*	381	*91*	35	*9*	2.0	*0.5*	419	*100*
1972	60	*14*	327	*76*	4	*1*	4	*1*	395	*91*	34	*8*	2.2	*0.5*	431	*100*

1: Financial years. National Rail, urban metros and modern trams
2: Excluding travel by water
3: Percentages in italics

Source: Department for Transport [523]

Table 5.17 illustrates the comparative movement of road and rail traffic in the period 1962-1972 and unsurprisingly shows that vehicular traffic increased in usage by a third whilst the distance travelled on rail decreased by the same amount. These swings are very significant and underline what was a sea change in a railway system that had struggled for a number of years to recover from the effects of war at a time when it was clearly becoming a less popular means of travel given the ascent and added convenience of road transport and a changing road pattern.

The switch from public to private passenger transport in the United Kingdom was not new however even though it was more prominent during the period under review. The move from rail to road had started during the 1950s and 1960s, a shift that had already put great pressure on roads, health and the environment as well as adversely affecting the results of the Railway companies. The comparison in table 5.18 measured in billion passenger kilometres is illustrative in that it shows how rapidly the railway system lost market share to the roads:

[523]Department for Transport: Transport Statistics Publications: *Transport Statistics Great Britain 2008 Edition*; DfT London 2008.

Table 5.18 Transport modal share between rail, bus & coach and cars & vans 1952-1972

Transport modal share (billion passenger kilometres)	1952	1962	1972
Rail	19	8	9
Bus & Coach	41	23	15
Cars & Vans	13	56	74

Source: Department for Transport [524]

This again illustrates that usage in the period increased by around 32%, and whilst rail traffic still showed modest improvement over the period the system was clearly struggling to maintain headway. The steep change from the halcyon days of the previous decade reflected the fact that the car had come within reach thereby changing public perception of rail and bus and coach travel.

By the Sixties the British rail system was caught in a situation that mainland Europe had confronted since the end of the Second World War: the steady closure of railways and specifically because the latter could not match deregulated freight and in rural areas with good roads the railway was no match for the car, bus, or lorry, either in cost or convenience. The result in Europe had been a steady closure of local railways since World War II, executed more drastically than elsewhere in Britain. In general the survival of railway routes depended on their being treated by national or local government as an essential social service that must be subsidised with public money, but the United Kingdom government were struggling to embrace this concept.

The overwhelming desire for profitability led to major reductions in the Railway network during the period from 1960 to 1969 after the Stedeford Committee, chaired by Dr Richard Beeching,[525] reviewed the railway network. He had been invited in 1960 by the Government to become a member of the Advisory Group set up to review the state of British transport and clashed with Sir Ivan Stedeford on a number of issues connected with the proposal to drastically prune Britain's rail infrastructure. A set of proposals for the future of the railways that came to be known as the 'Beeching Plan' was adopted by the Government resulting in the closure of a third of the rail

[524]Department for Transport (DfT): Transport Statistics Publications Transport Statistics Great Britain 2008 Edition; 1.1 *Passenger transport: by mode: 1952-2007.* p.14.
[525]Richard Beeching, Baron Beeching (21 April 1913 - 23 March 1985), commonly known as Doctor Beeching, was chairman of British Railways, a physicist and an engineer and became infamous in Britain in the early 1960s for his role in masterminding the Beeching Axe railway closures. Dudley G and Richardson J; *Why Does Policy Change?*; Routledge, London; various. Hardy, R (1989) *Beeching - Champion of the Railway.* Shepperton: Ian Allen. various.

network and the scrapping of a third of a million freight wagons, much as Stedeford had foreseen and opposed. In 1961 Beeching was appointed chairman of the British Transport Commission and later of the British Railways Board. At that time the Government was seeking an external expert with little or no experience in railway management. There was widespread concern at the time that, despite huge amounts of taxpayers' funds allocated to the railways under the 1955 Modernisation Plan, railway deficits were mounting. The evidence is that both passenger and freight traffic were abandoning the railways, particularly in country districts where road transport had provided a steadily more attractive alternative since before the Second World War. During his tenure, Beeching became a hugely controversial figure when he recommended a massive programme of railway closures to cut the cost of running the railway system. These were, in most respects, a continuation of closures which had been occurring since the 1920s (or earlier in some isolated cases). He was also instrumental in modernising many aspects of the railway system, particularly a greater emphasis on block trains which did not require expensive and time-consuming shunting en route. It is highly likely that without this aspect of the Beeching Plan, Britain's railways would have lost freight to a much higher extent than occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. The intentions of the Beeching Report were to remove unprofitable branch lines while keeping the highly profitable main lines, using the money saved to update the system and speed the progress of the Modernisation Plan. Unfortunately, the Treasury decided that since the money was no longer needed for the support of branch lines it could be spent elsewhere, making the plans futile. Another mistake in the plan was the assumption that if a branch line closed, passengers would use alternative means - buses being suggested in many cases - to access the nearest railhead and then use the railway for the rest of their journey. Instead, the public tended to find it more convenient and cheaper to use their car for the entire journey.

The closure of stations serving rural communities removed much feeder traffic from the main line passenger services and the closure of many freight depots that had been used by larger industries resulted in almost all freight transferring to road haulage. Understandably this neutralised any savings made by the closures, and the network began to decline again. The closures which witnessed the Railway system in the United Kingdom fall by 35% from around 16,800 to 10,900 miles of rail track, were

also extremely unpopular with the general public at that time.[526] The various closures and adverse publicity further accelerated the move to the relative independence of road transport.

By the 1970s, the glamour of steam and the supposedly glorious days of pre-World War II rail transport were long gone with changes in technology somewhat isolated from out of date working practices and labour relations that appeared problematic at best. New demand and more particularly that in respect of car and freight meant that British Rail were increasingly under pressure from passengers and hauliers alike to supply more capacity. With demand increasing and many ferry routes still offering outdated lift-on, lift-off facilities or limited roll-on, roll-off, the pressure was on turn-round times for the ships, terminal space and general facilities hitherto designed for the convenience of rail passengers. Nationalisation had been thought by many to offer a solution to the operating and commercial problems that had beset the industry, but it had instead left the railways and management with a poor reputation.[527]

British Railways were instead caught between the Government's desire to rationalise services and the commercial reality of their outmoded shipping services. The railway ferries were, in the final analysis, after all an extension of the railway system and as such the movement of wheeled traffic in the form of cars, vans, buses and freight were of secondary concern and any thought of major investment was unrealistic.

Comfort came from the fact that Bustard, Townsend and Thoresen were unable to match their services with the railway timetables for their routes and neither did they want to be tied in this way. The rail passenger market was essentially a monopoly controlled entirely by the Railway sector including its foreign partners. The market was still fairly lucrative despite the general move towards road transport and the thinking within the individual regions was that they were in effect insulated from the vagaries of this newfound burgeoning, market.

Nonetheless the Railway management found it difficult to ignore the competitive effects on some routes. For example, not to have kept up with market by providing

[526]Gourvish. *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73.*
Department of Transport: *Transport Statistics* (1989 and DETR, 1998).
[527]Gourvish. *British Railways A Business History 1948-73.*

vehicle deck capacity on the southeast coast would have been commercial suicide although this did not stop the Railways board trying an alternate strategy in order to separate the Railway traffic component from the wheeled market. This was done by investing in hovercraft technology, a strategy that was designed to support the existing infrastructure whilst injecting a more modern image. One advantage was that the hovercraft could easily be moved elsewhere if the Channel Tunnel was to go ahead as was then planned. There was therefore a level of cautious optimism contained within the plan linked to a fear that airline connections between the United Kingdom and France would sooner or later have an adverse effect on the total market, the speed aspect of the hovercraft offering some comfort that they may be in a position to maintain competitiveness. It was also necessary to counter the influence of Ramsgate-based hovercraft operator, Hoverspeed which, it was thought, was in danger of taking traffic away from the Dover and Folkestone-based operators. The Railways even branded the operation differently as Seaspeed to enable the company to be sold, moved or liquidated as necessary without too much reflection, be it good or bad, on the parent company. In 1972 and despite continuous heavy financial losses tempered by management optimism, Seaspeed was confident of the future and talking to the British Hovercraft Corporation about an enlarged SRN4 hovercraft which it said would likely operate from Foulness to Belgium where traffic would be less affected by the Channel Tunnel.[528]

The management and staff of the various Railway businesses were keen observers of market trends and could see for themselves what was happening. The process was so protracted in the company, however, that innovation, inventiveness and simple good ideas were either squashed by one of the many management tiers or alternatively, and more likely, did not surface in the first instance. In this way the company developed into little more than a safe place to work, in reality, a job for life.

The Southern Region was still at this stage run from Euston Station in London with middle management involvement from Victoria Station and several grades of intermediary management and supervision at Dover and Folkestone. Local

[528]Foulness was at that time designated as the site for the new London Airport. Seaspeed's announcement coincided with the government's grant of £1,500,000 for the hovercraft industry and the overturning of a SRN6 craft on Seaspeed's Portsmouth route leading to concern as to the safety of hovercraft in general. *The Times* newspaper; Michael Bailey, Transport Correspondent; Friday, 24 March 1972; p.2.

management was ineffective and lacked respect as all employees were aware that decisions were made, even on the simplest of issue, in London and even then after some considerable time had elapsed. On the positive side however most procedures within the organisation, despite being pedantic, worked well and the various port-based units ran a reliable and safe fleet.[529]

The industry itself was showing some encouraging signs even if these were not totally grasped or adopted by the Railway organisations despite some good results delivered by the shipping division.[530] In the five years since 1964 the industry had expended a total of £90,000,000 and in early 1969 it was clear that the rate of investment was growing considerably with a further £19,000,000 of newbuildings to add. Townsend was adding a further vessel to its fleet at a value of £2,000,000 whilst B&I Line were introducing two ships at a total value of £5,000,000. There was the Hoverlloyd investment, French Railways foray into hovercraft with the N500 and British Railways intention to tender for two, £2,000,000 vessels for the Stranraer-Larne route and the Dover fleet in addition to the remnants of vessel conversions from passenger-only to car-carrying as depicted in table 5.19 below. In addition Seaspeed was contemplating the addition of a second and possibly third £1,750,000 Mountbatten hovercraft for its Dover base.[531]

Table 5.19 Railway 'Classic' or passenger-only steamers converted to drive-on

Vessel	Built	Converted	Region	GRT	Pax	Pax/Cars
Falaise	1947	1964	Southern	3,710	1,461	700/100
Normannia	1952	1964	Southern	3,543	1,400	500/111
St. David	1947	1964	Western	3,352	1,300	1200/73
Duke of Argyll	1956	1970	London Midland	4,797	1,800	1,200/105
Duke of Lancaster	1956	1970	London Midland	4,797	1,800	1,200/105
Duke of Rothesay	1956	1967	London Midland	4,780	1,800	1,200/100
Avalon [532]	1963	1975	LNER	6,720	750	1,200/200

Source: Danielson [533]

[529]When the author of this thesis took over the running of the Sealink fleet on cross-Channel routes in May 1987, the then Shipping and Port Manager, the local person in charge, was only entitled to spend £50 without recourse to his head office, Eversholt House in London. This was despite the fact that he signed off many invoices for fuel, port dues and wages running into tens of thousands of pounds.
[530]The British Railways fleet made a return of £4,500,000 in 1968. *The Times*, Monday, 13 January 1969; p.15.
[531]*The Times*, Monday, 13 January 1969; p.15.
[532]The *Avalon* was the last vessel to be converted from a Classic passenger-only steamer to a car ferry. The vessel was again built on traditional lines and largely outmoded when originally delivered. After her conversion she served at Fishguard (where a linkspan had been in existence since 1972) and later at Holyhead. After only 17 years service, less than 5 years of which was post conversion to a car ferry, she was scrapped. Danielson. *Railway Ships and Packet Ports*. p.22.
[533]Danielson. *Railway Ships & Packet Ports*; Merrigan. *Car Ferries of the Irish Sea 1954-2004*. pp. 25,39-40,41-42,100,121.

But not all was plain sailing for the commercial aspects of the various business units. The government decided in 1972 to make certain references to the Monopolies Commission, namely British Rail's shipping interests, Townsend Thoresen and Southern Ferries, a P&O subsidiary. All three were alleged to be part of an international price-fixing agreement involving car ferry and hovercraft services. Hoverlloyd would have been another referral but for the fact that it was a foreign registered company and the government were therefore unsure as to how it should deal with it. The reference was restricted to cars, caravans and their accompanying passengers. Heavy vehicles and passengers without vehicles were excluded.[534]

5.13 Summary

The period of ten years from 1962 to 1972 was therefore fundamental and shaped not only the true advent of the drive-on, drive-off concept but also determined future competition since the Railways did little to upgrade their fleet whilst others forged ahead unfettered by government, tradition or a parent focused on a different transport industry. The arrival of Thoresen on the Western Channel, the continuing success of Bustard and the decision by Townsend to construct new vessels were to be fundamental in the loss of railway supremacy, the die having been cast.

[534]The Monopolies Commission; *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973; Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. *The Times* newspaper; *Three new studies for board*; Hugh Clayton; Business Diary; 9 August 1972.

Chapter 6:
Economic Change, Innovation, Growth and Acquisition, Disaster and a Fixed Link 1973-1987

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ferry industry between 1973 and 1987, a period of massive upheaval and change in the industry, as indeed it was for the country. The 1970s was the only decade in British history that saw four general elections. The first, in June 1970, resulted in a somewhat unexpected Conservative victory while the last, in May 1979, saw a more predictable Conservative victory that inaugurated eighteen years of one-party rule. Throughout the 1970s, however, governments were beset by increasingly difficult financial circumstances, in large measure the product of the massive devaluation of the U.S. dollar and the collapse of the Bretton Woods trading system that had been set in place after the Second World War.[535] These developments were related to the Vietnam War and the Arab-Israeli conflict of October 1973. The weakening of the U.S. dollar was a major factor that led to an unprecedented rise in the price of oil.[536] The resultant world-wide financial disorder represented the real start of global inflation. Perhaps the most important national change in this period was Britain's accession to the European Economic Community (E.E.C) as a result of the treaty signed in Brussels on 22 January 1972, effective 1 January 1973, but mounting economic and financial problems and the enforced three-day working week in December 1973 induced the crisis that returned a minority Labour administration in the March 1974 election.

6.2 Political Developments

The election in October 1974 saw the return of the Labour administration, with an overall majority of just three seats in the Commons, but in real terms the Labour administrations of 1974-1979 held office and responsibility but not power. That is perhaps an over-simplification but not by much, and the fact was that after March

[535] *The Times*, Friday, 8 March 1946; p.3: *Mr. Clayton's Plea For The Loan Dire Alternative;* News.
[536] Gourvish, *British Railways A Business History 1948-73.* p.514.

1977 the Callaghan administration was dependent upon Liberal support – the somewhat strange and definitely notorious Lib-Lab Pact - that lasted two years until the Commons defeat in the no-confidence vote of 28 March 1979.[537] The new Conservative government, with a majority of 43 seats over all other parties, commanded a level of public and parliamentary support that had been unknown in the previous ten years, but it came to power with an acerbic divisiveness that saw many of the social and economic problems of the 1970s reach into the first half of the next decade. In terms of the ferry industry, however, the crucial development came on 14 July 1980 with the announcement that it was the Government's intention to sell Sealink and British Rail's hotels. The extent of the denationalisation programme became obvious in February 1981 with the announcement of the sale of half of the State's holdings in British Aerospace as the first part of a wider programme that embraced British Electric, British Gas, British Telecommunications and the Trustee Savings Bank.[538] The changes set in place under the Margaret Thatcher administration had implications for a ferry industry in which British Rail, in the form of Sealink UK, remained the largest single operator using British waters.

Political developments went alongside other developments specific to the ferry industry, although the 1970s was a period of relative calm compared to the previous two decades, which had seen such developments as drive-on, drive-off and the hovercraft. There was one political development, or perhaps more accurately one non-development, that seemed to be very significant. This was that in the aftermath of Britain's accession to the E.E.C., a move that had considerable implications in terms of commercial practices and law, the Channel Tunnel idea came to the fore once again and as a result of joint deliberations between May 1973 and April 1974 the British and French governments agreed to undertake preliminary drillings. The intention was to have twin tunnels, each capable of handling a car-shuttle rail service, on either side of a service tunnel.[539] Work was initiated but after the two tunnels had been bored to a distance of some 2,430-ft./740-m. the Labour government, on 20

[537]Wilson announced his intention to step down as Prime Minister and party leader on 16 March 1974: after having won the subsequent leadership election, Callaghan was appointed prime minister on 5 April.
[538]*The Times*, Tuesday, 15 July 1980; p.1: *British Rail to sell off its ferries and hotels.*
[539]The National Archives, *MT 144/437; Ministry of Transport and successors, Channel Tunnel Division: Registered Files (CT file series); Channel Tunnel Working Group on Preliminary Phase results: copy of Channel Tunnel 1972 Studies Report; consideration of the report by the Channel Tunnel Studies Unit; notes of meeting*; 1972 Jan 01-1972 Dec 31. *The Times*, Monday, 25 June, 1973; p.2: *Consent given for Channel tunnel shaft*; Our Correspondent.

January 1975, abandoned the project.[540] The reasons for this decision related to certain doubts about Britain's continued membership of the E.E.C., fears provoked by a doubling of costs even after the short period of work, and mounting financial problems in Britain that left the Harold Wilson administration in a desperate search for economies at a time when wage inflation had reached 28.5%.[541] The consequence of this decision to stop the construction of the Channel Tunnel was to place increased importance upon existing port facilities and ferry services as the various operators, free from the threat of tunnel competition for the foreseeable future, looked to investment programmes that would provide for new port facilities, ships and hovercraft. This resultant period of consolidation ensured growth that saw an increase of passengers, vehicles and revenue.

The problems that beset the devising of investment programmes in this period were less severe than those of the previous decade because by the Seventies the motor car's primacy was assured and ferries were not caught with a choice between passenger and vehicle. This did not mean that there were no 'areas of uncertainty,' and indeed one of the least edifying episodes in this period was British Rail's mishandling of a programme of new construction that resulted in the acquisition of four passenger-only ferries, a state of affairs that stretches the limits of credulity, but for the most part the changes that were in place related to other matters, of which three need be noted at this stage of proceedings:

- First, the period between 1973 and 1987, was one noted for a major increase of traffic using ferries but at the same time unprecedented rise in costs that severely reduced profit margins and in certain cases resulted in operators running into very considerable debt.

- Second, and in part because of this latter development, the Seventies was witness to various mergers and changes, the most prominent being that between Townsend and Thoresen as the largest single operator on cross-Channel routes. Of further significance was the emergence of what was termed at the time a 'pool partnership,' in which British

[540]Gourvish, *British Railways A Business History 1948-73*. p.514; *The Times*, Saturday, 18 January 1975; p.1: *Cabinet decides to abandon Channel Tunnel project*; Staff Reporters.
[541]Floud and McCloskey. *The Economic History of Britain since 1700 – Volume 3*: 1939-1992. pp.53,163&241.

Rail's Shipping and International Services Division joined a consortium that included French Railways, the Belgian Marine and the Dutch Zeeland Steamship Company in which means and end were shared and on the basis of relative contributions.

- The third matter concerned the hovercraft. While the formation of consortiums was the most important occurrence in terms of the organisation and functioning of the ferry industry in the Seventies, it was eclipsed by the high-profile hovercraft.

6.3 The Hovercraft

The Sixties had closed with two operators firmly established on the cross-Channel routes, Seaspeed, a subsidiary of British Rail, which operated from Dover, and Hoverlloyd, a subsidiary of two Swedish companies, which operated from Ramsgate.[542] In the second half of the Sixties, however, Hoverlloyd began to experience increasing difficulty on account of the increasing size of hovercraft, specifically the SRN4, which could accommodate 34 cars and a maximum of 250 passengers, and accordingly sought to develop a larger terminal at Pegwell Bay, some two miles south of Ramsgate.[543] Their effort provoked immediate protests from Cliffsend villagers and was met by a public enquiry, ordered by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government that was to examine the relative advantages of using Dover harbour compared to Pegwell Bay. Hoverlloyd went on record with its considered view that the decision to conduct such an enquiry was 'astonishing,' the clear implication, if stated *sotto voce*, that the Ministry's action was a delaying tactic designed to benefit the state-owned Seaspeed.[544] After two public enquiries, the Pegwell Bay enterprise was approved and work began in July 1968[545]. The new

[542]Hoverlloyd Limited was registered in 1965 under the trading style Cross-Channel Hover Services Limited, and altered its name to Hoverlloyd Limited in 1966. The company was owned in equal proportions by Aktiebolaget Svenska Amerika Linien (Swedish American Line) and Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd (Swedish Lloyd). Swedish American Line was itself a subsidiary of the Swedish company Brostroms Rederi Aktiebolag (Brostroms) who held a 27% interest in Swedish Lloyd. Brostroms acquired all the shares in Swedish American Line and Swedish Lloyd in 1976 and consequently Hoverlloyd became and was to remain a wholly owned subsidiary of Brostroms.

[543]*The Times*; Tuesday, 6 June 1967; p.2: *Reopening of hoverport inquiry*; News.

[544]As early as October 1967 the Swedish Lloyds chairman, Mr Karl Bokman described the delay in approving the Pegwell site as '*scandalous*'. He believed that the alternative suggestion of Dover was unworkable and that if necessary they would take the hovercraft overseas. *The Times*; 27 October 1967; p.20; col. A; *'Scandalous delay over hoverport'*; Michael Baily. Work started on the £1,000,000, 12.5 acre Pegwell Bay Hoverport in July 1968. *The Times*, Thursday, 18 July 18 1968; p.2: *Ocean Hovercraft 'In 20 Years' From Our Correspondent-Ramsgate, July 17*

[545]The early Seventies brought concerns about the survivability of the hovercraft concept. In a *Times* article entitled '*Hover men seek aid now*' both the British Hovercraft Corporation (BHC) and Hoverlloyd called for state aid for the hovercraft industry in

hoverport was completed and opened in 1969. In the same year a hoverport was completed at Calais by the local Chambre de Commerce et Industrie.

In 1969 Hoverlloyd carried some 275,000 passengers and 36,000 motor vehicles, but no doubt its million pound investment in the Pegwell Bay facility accounted at least in part to losses of £164,000 in that financial year. This, however, was less than the previous year when losses had reached £250,000. Its rival, Seaspeed, incurred a loss of £229,000 in 1968.[546] In 1971 Hoverlloyd ordered a third SRN4 and four years later, in December 1975, a fourth. The two craft were delivered in 1972 and 1977 respectively. With Seaspeed having ordered the other hovercraft that were being built by British Hovercraft Corporation, the two operators, by creating in effect a so-called 'Barrier to Entry,' precluded the arrival on the scene of a third operator. By 1971 hovercraft had registered returns that accounted for a 15% share of passenger and a 13% share of car traffic on the cross-Channel routes, and Hoverlloyd's various activities had even included an arrangement that represented, *mutatis mutandis*, a return to the golden days of the railway: it developed a coach service between London and Ramsgate and between Calais and Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris and various other cities on the continental mainland and with special provision for discounted fares for as many as 120,000 passengers per annum. These arrangements represented end-to-end travel hitherto provided by British Rail and at a rate of travel faster across the Channel itself. With reference to the latter, Hoverlloyd operated seven daily return flights in winter and a maximum of 27 return flights, with four hovercraft at peak demand, in summer - that conventional ferry services simply could not match. By 1974, with hovercraft running overall at an impressive 62% of passenger and 75% of vehicle capacity, Hoverlloyd's annual returns embraced 925,000 passengers and 150,000 cars.[547]

---

order to underpin development. With some frustration Mr Leslie Colquhoun, managing director of Hoverlloyd said '*We get a big start; something goes wrong, people get worried, and our competitors ride in and capture the market we have created.*' Ironically there was no similar cry for state aid from Seaspeed although perhaps Colquhoun's point was more about Seaspeed's 'public purse' backing than anything else. *The Times* Friday, 3 April 1970; p.18: *Hover men seek aid now*; (Business and Finance) By Michael Baily.

[546]Despite a disappointing financial result Hoverlloyd had done particularly well during their first season having carried 275,000 passengers and 36,000 cars. *The Times*, Tuesday, 19 August 1969; p.21: *Business diary Trinity talks to Trinity*; Business diary.

[547]The company was forecasting a surplus of £150,000 on a turnover of £4,000,000 during 1973 and £300,000 on a turnover of £4,750,000 in 1974. A statement by Mr James Hodgson, executive vice chairman of Hoverlloyd in *The Times* newspaper of 10 May 1973 suggested that by 1977 the company hoped to make a 12-14% return on capital and by 1980, with the craft written off and several year's life still ahead, a '*better return than shipping*.' On the subject of the Channel Tunnel, Mr Hodgson said: '*We think it will probably be built but it will be an absolute bottleneck*.' At the time Seaspeed had lost nearly £200,000 in 1972 and £330,000 in 1971. *The Times*; Thursday, 10 May 1973; p.22: *BR and Hoverlloyd may combine Channel hovercraft operations*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

As part of its arrangements Hoverlloyd deliberately lowered charges in an attempt to increase custom, and in this matter it was assisted by an arrangement whereby it could provide duty-free goods in stores ashore rather than seek to raise revenue by sales onboard the hovercraft, which, given constraints of space, were necessarily limited.[548] The result of these and other arrangements made for a comfortable margin of profitability as reflected in Table 6.1 below of 14.96% in 1976, 15.33% in 1977 and 12.58% in 1978.[549]

Table 6.1 Hoverlloyd Margin of Profit

Year	Turnover (£)	Profit (£)	Margin of Profit (%)
1976	10,501,000	1,571,000	14.96
1977	14,628,000	2,242,000	15.33
1978	16,728,000	2,105,000	12.58

Source: Monopolies and Mergers Commission [550]

The evidence of major growth of traffic presented both Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed with the problem of how to meet increased expectation and demand, and the reaction of the two organisations differed markèdly. Hoverlloyd took the decision to acquire two new SR-N4s whereas Seaspeed took the decision to stretch two of its existing hovercraft by the insertion of a 55-ft. central section that would result in increased capacity from 254 passengers and thirty cars to 418 passengers and sixty cars. In many ways the Seaspeed decision was probably the better of the two but events conspired against it. Seaspeed operated in association with its French counterpart, which would provide the cover with its new Sedam N500 Naviplane when the SR-N4s were not in service.[551] However, in 1977 the first N500 was destroyed by fire without ever having entered service and the second was not available in the 1977 season, with positive financial implications for Hoverlloyd and the Ramsgate route. After a year of losses, Seaspeed took delivery of the newly-stretched SR-N4 *Princess Anne* and on 25 May 1978 conducted a trial run between Dover and Ostend, which

[548]This was a unique concession for the hovercraft operators who claimed that they were penalised by having sufficient space on board. In this way they were treated more like the airline industry where at that time duty-free purchases could be made in airport terminals as well as a limited selection of goods 'in-flight'.
[549]In 1976 two Seaspeed hovercraft operating from Dover and three from Ramsgate under the Hoverlloyd banner accounted for 30% of all cross-Channel tourist traffic. *The Times*; Monday, 16 May 1977; p.18: *Hovercraft delay puts Seaspeed out of race*; Patricia Tisdall.
[550]Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *British Rail Hovercraft Ltd & Hoverlloyd Ltd - Proposed Merger* (1981), London: H.M.S.O. (ref:HC374) ISBN 10 237681 3. Chapter 4, p.29.
[551]The N500 Naviplane was built in France by SEDAM (*Société d'Etude et de Développement des Aéroglisseurs Marins*) in Pauillac, Gironde. The N500 weighed 260 tons and was 50m long and 23m wide with capacity for 400 passengers, 56 cars and five coaches.

took some ninety minutes. This promising development was counter-balanced by the technical problems affecting the stability and steerage of the newly introduced N500, *Ingenieur Jean Bertin*, which performed badly in anything other than a calm, flat sea. She entered service on 5 July 1978, inaugurating the new Dover hoverport but worked well below capacity in terms of number of crossings and numbers of passengers and vehicles embarked because of mechanical and hydraulic difficulties. She was beached at Boulogne in November and was never returned to service with one obvious and immediate result:[552] the problems of the N500 in effect ended any possibility of French competition on the Calais and Boulogne routes.[553] By this time the two companies seemed on the edge of better things – in 1976 Seaspeed had carried 710,875 passengers and 100,638 cars, increases of 19% and 23% respectively over 1975, while in 1977 Hoverlloyd carried more than 1,100,000 passengers and 200,000 cars. Together the two commanded some three-tenths of all cross-Channel traffic. Outward appearance was deceptive, however, as by this time both Seaspeed and Hoverlloyd were moving into serious difficulty on a very different front.

The new hovercraft that Hoverlloyd ordered in the early Seventies cost about £2,000,000 each, a sum almost equivalent to annual profits at their greatest in the Seventies, but by July 1978, when Hoverlloyd announced its intention to order two new hovercraft from France the cost was some £40,000,000, and this was but one area of operations in which costs had spiralled beyond control.[554] Fuel and labour costs likewise saw massive increases in the Seventies but no less serious were changing patterns of industry that had major implications for the ferry industry. Overheads were always more demanding for the hovercraft than for ferries primarily because hovercraft were classed as aircraft and bound by stringent and costly Civil Aviation Authority safety regulations, particularly with reference to the rubber skirt that facilitated the cushion of air on which the craft rode and which was invariably damaged as the craft moved from water to land, but by the end of the Seventies the many unique components that went together to constitute a hovercraft, such as Rolls-Royce Proteus gas turbine engines and variable pitch propellers, were also becoming prohibitively expensive. But these problems went alongside an increasingly difficult

[552] *The Times*; Tuesday, 23 August 1977; p.12: *Dover gets ready for expansion*; Geoffrey Browning.
[553] *The Times*; Monday, 28 July 1980; p.15: *French may buy Hoverlloyd to compete for Channel trade*; Michael Baily Transport Correspondent.
[554] *The Times*; Tuesday, 11 July 1978; p.18: *£40m ferry order is likely to go to France*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

situation presented by debt. For example, in order to pay for the stretching of its hovercraft, British Rail had been obliged to borrow £5,000,000 from the European Investment Bank, the terms being a ten-year loan with an interest rate of 9% per annum. The operating profit of Seaspeed remained, despite the increase of traffic, between 5.3% in 1973 and 5.5% in 1979, but increasingly the servicing of debt presented major problems: indeed, whereas this charge had accounted for about a third of Hoverlloyd's operating profit in both 1976 and 1977 and two-fifths of the 1978 figure, in 1979 the figure had risen almost to four-fifths and in 1980 was almost four times the figure and placed the company in debt to the tune of £686,000.[555] In this year the Hoverlloyd share of the market and traffic volume both declined, and for the first time between 1976 and 1980 the company faced a doubling of debt as operating profits declined to less than one-sixth of the 1976 returns. This was despite the fact that between them Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed carried about a quarter of all cross-Channel traffic which had grown at a rate of between 5% and 10% each year. In 1980 Seaspeed recorded a pre-tax loss of £2,900,000 compared to Hoverlloyd's £686,000.

Table 6.2 Hoverlloyd Accounts for the Period 1976-1980

Income and Indices	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Turnover	£10,501,000	£14,628,000	£16,728,000	£18,621,000	£17,242,000
Index relative to 1976	100.0	139.3	159.3	177.3	164.2
Operating profit	£1,571,000	£2,242,000	£2,105,000	£1,130,000	£240,000
Index relative to 1976	100.0	142.7	134.0	71.9	15.3
Margin of Profit	14.96%	15.33%	12.58%	6.06%	1.39%
Interest	£464,000	£772,000	£922,000	£887,000	£926,000
Index relative to 1976	100	166.4	198.7	191.2	199.6
Net profit (loss) before tax	£1,107,000	£1,470,000	£1,183,000	£243,000	-£686,000
Index relative to 1976	100.0	132.8	106.9	22.0	-62.0
Return on capital	17.6%	14.2%	15.1%	8.4%	1.9%

Source: Monopolies and Mergers Commission [556]

[555]Hoverlloyd had been put on the market for sale in 1979. The French had long been unhappy about Britain's dominance in marine hovercraft and had spent large sums in an effort to rival the SRN 4 design. The French had been criticised for ignoring the lessons and experience gained in operating the British built craft. In separate discussions it was believed that the amalgamation of Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed could save as much as £1,000,000 per annum in operating costs. *The Times*; Monday, 28 July 1980; p.15: *French may buy Hoverlloyd to compete for Channel trade*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent: *The Times*; Thursday, 20 November 1980; p.19; col. D; *Hovercraft merger discussions*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

[556]Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *British Rail Hovercraft Ltd & Hoverlloyd Ltd - Proposed Merger* (1981), London: H.M.S.O. (ref:HC374) ISBN 10 237681 3. Chapter 4, p.29.

Part of the problem that confronted the two hovercraft companies was an increasing competitiveness on the part of all operators on cross-Channel services, the paradox being that as costs rose operators cut rates in an attempt to increase their share of the market, to an all-too-predictable-end. This was particularly notable with respect to one operator, Townsend Thoresen, that most definitely searched hard for a high profile, but the new decade saw a new fast ferry operator in the Channel: Belgian Marine, under the trading brand Sealink,[557] opened service with its Boeing Jetfoils on the Dover-Ostend route on 31 May 1981, and with a capacity of 316 passengers on this hundred-minute crossing it clearly presented an obvious threat to Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed: in effect, the two operators had pioneered the problems and introduced the concept of speed, and the very real possibility existed that third parties stood to benefit accordingly.[558]

With these and mounting problems caused by increased costs and debt, confidence in the future went alongside a very different reality and, at the end of the Seventies, there were the first tentative moves that ultimately were to result in Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed merging, perhaps appropriately, on 25 October 1981 into a single consortium, *Hoverspeed*. Such a development was perhaps remarkable given the operating success of the hovercraft over the previous decade, but the merger contained an irony and a problem. The irony was that back in 1972 the two operators had been involved in negotiations for a partnership and for reasons that were not too dissimilar from those that made for agreement in 1980-1981. However, Hoverlloyd's move into profit around 1972, when combined with the belief that no British government was likely to sanction some form of arrangement between Seaspeed and a foreign company, had served to ensure that Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed went their separate ways. The problem was that when it became public knowledge that the two operators had been in talks to see if there was a future for a single hovercraft consortium instead of two companies, the result was perhaps predictable.[559] The chairman of European Ferries, Keith Wickenden, made representation that resulted in the proposed merger being referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in

[557] *The Times*; Monday, 1 June 1981; p.4: *100 Minutes To Ostend By Jetfoil*; Staff Reporter.
[558] *The Times*; Friday, 29 February 1980; p.4: *Cross-channel operators pull out the stops*; News correspondent.
[559] *The Times*; Thursday, 10 May 1973; p.22: *BR and Hoverlloyd may combine Channel hovercraft operations;* Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

March 1981[560] - and this referral went alongside the parallel suggestion that the close interest shown at this time by European Ferries in the privatisation of Sealink should also be handled in the same way given the fact that a combined European Ferries-Sealink undertaking would account for three-fifths of cross-Channel business. P&O similarly complained that there was no guarantee that taxpayer's money would not subsidise Hoverspeed operations in the future.[561] In the event the Monopolies Commission approved the hovercraft merger in June 1981, concluding that '…..*the merger was not expected to operate against the public interest.*'[562] Prompted by the merger, the French were ready to vacate their position as a contender in hovercraft design and operations even though they were offered a 15% share of the newly formed Hoverspeed venture on the proviso that the N500 hovercraft was brought up to standard. The N500 technical problems were estimated to cost £3,000,000 to put right and French staff went on strike in September 1981 in order to bring pressure on the French government and French Railways to put up the money for the N500 but neither showed much inclination to do so. [563] The French government was far from convinced that the investment was warranted especially given the difficulties that had been encountered to date with the entire project and in early 1982 it decided that further investment was not warranted.

6.4 Services on the Irish Sea Sector

Consideration of European Ferries, mergers, the Monopolies Commission and 1981 naturally points in the direction of operators and conventional ferry service on the Channel routes as the subject of the second part of this chapter, but in fact such logic will be set aside on one count. Reference has been made to the first crossing of the Channel by a hydrofoil, the *Princess Paola,* but she was not the first hydrofoil to work from and to a British port. The first hydrofoil to do so began services on the Dublin-Liverpool route in June 1980 and this serves as introduction to an

[560]*The Times*; Friday, 6 March 1981; p.15: *Monopolies referral for ferry and hovercraft mergers*; Peter Wilson-Smith.
[561]Nevertheless there was a compelling case to save 850 jobs even though as a result of the merger some 250 would be lost in rationalisation.
[562]Seaspeed had recorded a pre-tax loss of £2,900,000 in 1980 as compared with Hoverlloyd's £686,000. The combined operation was likely to result in the loss of 250 jobs although under the proposal some 850 would be saved. *The Times*; Saturday, 27 June 1981; p.17: *Merger of hovercraft operators approved*; Peter Hill, Industrial Editor.
[563]*The Times*; Saturday, 26 September 1981; p.2: *France ready to opt out of hovercraft service*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

examination, in this second section, of developments in the Irish Sea sector during this period.

The Irish dimension in this period saw a number of developments although only two were crucially important. The Seventies saw the first direct ferry services between Ireland and the continental mainland, the newly-built *St. Patrick* first plying the Rosslare-Le Havre route in June 1973. The service, which soon proved profitable, represented good value for hauliers who were able to avoid transit across the United Kingdom and the need to utilise a second ferry crossing. The decade also saw the descent of Northern Ireland into civil war, with implications for both trade and commercial traffic between Ireland and Britain, most immediately being with regard to tourism. In the event, the two were inter-related in one sense: the inauguration of the Rosslare-Le Havre service in effect provided Ireland with a hitherto-untapped market which represented a counter-balance to the negative impact of developments in Northern Ireland.

Interestingly this service was inaugurated by a new operating company, Irish Continental Line, which was formed in 1973 as a joint venture between Irish Shipping, Fearnley & Eger of Oslo and the Swedish company Lion Ferry. Scandinavians were thus prominently involved from the outset in this unprecedented Ireland-continental Europe development.[564] In the previous year another company had been formed and its impact was no less significant. Ferrymasters (Ireland) Limited was a subsidiary of Ferrymasters Felixstowe, which was a subsidiary of P&O, and it was created with the deliberate intention of providing door-to-door shipment. At this time there was extensive freight traffic between Britain and Ireland in which P&O, involved in this trade for many decades, also owned Northern Ireland Trailers and Ulster Ferry Transport. In addition, P&O had acquired Coast Lines in 1971, which consisted of the Belfast Steamship Company, the British & Irish Steam Packet Company, the City of Cork Steam Packet Company, the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company and Burns & Laird Lines. But what made for difference at this time was the fact that Ferrymasters (Ireland) Limited sought to set in place a container service between Larne and Preston. Tidal constraints caused the service to be moved from

[564]When Irish Shipping went into liquidation in 1984, Irish Continental Lines was subjected to a management buy-out and was renamed Irish Ferries, which name it retains at the present time. Cowsill and Hendy. *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000.* p.130.

Preston to Fleetwood in 1973, with two immediate consequences. The facilities at Fleetwood had to undergo major re-development in terms of the necessary roll-on, roll-off (RoRo) ramp and related amenities and services, and the harbour authority obtained the necessary authorisation to undertake work that began in November 1973. By this time, however, the parent company, P&O, had decided upon expansion of its operations and set aside £8,000,000 for two ships and £1,250,000 for lorries and containers for working on this route.

At this time Ferrymasters and its associates were playing a game of musical chairs with reference to containers and ships. The original service, undertaken by Ferrymasters and Preston in 1972, involved the *Embdena*, and the Fleetwood service in 1973 the *Amuthon*. Both of these ships were lift-on, lift-off for containers, the *Embdena* being fated to be passed first to the Belfast Steamship Company for work on the Belfast-Liverpool route as the *Ulster Merchant* and then replacing the *Amuthon* in 1974. She was the last container ship to serve the route before being converted to full RoRo capacity in 1975. By the time she was taken in hand, P&O operations on this route had already acquired such capability in the form of the first of its two ships, the *Bison*, which was delivered on 12 February 1975. The second ship, the *Buffalo,* entered service in the spring of 1976. These two ships, designed by Knud Hansen of Copenhagen and built at the J. J. Sietas yard in Hamburg, could handle RoRo cargo on three freight decks. Cargo was loaded through a stern door with a fixed internal ramp between the main and upper decks and which was open at the stern in order to allow hazardous cargoes to be carried: a 32-ton lift gave access between the main and lower decks.

In the same year that the *Bison* became operational P&O re-constituted Ferrymasters (Ireland), Northern Ireland Trailers and Ulster Ferry Transport as Pandoro, which, with one deletion, was an acronym for P&O RoRo. By this time a whole series of changes were being set in place, many of which were directly related to British Rail operations across the Irish Sea. Prior to P&O take-overs, Coast Lines had been somewhat staid and conservative and much the same could be said about British Rail management and operations in the Irish Sea sector at this time, but most certainly by the period 1973-1975 things were changing for British Rail and on two very separate counts:

- First, the political situation in Northern Ireland and inflationary pressure that increased significantly as a result of the Irish Republic's membership of the European Economic Community combined to have an adverse effect on the results for British Rail's Heysham-Belfast route, which returned a loss of £800,000. The result was a management request in 1973 to the North-West Transport User's Consultative Committee (TUCC) to close the service, although in the event this request was refused, if only for the moment.[565] It was industrial action on the part of Scottish lorry drivers that adversely affected freight traffic on the northern corridor, and this, coupled with losses on the shipments of livestock, compounded problems and made for "serious" loss for British Rail.[566]

- Second, and also in the northwest, the Transport Ferry Service, the trading name of the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company (ASN), inaugurated a new service between Larne and Cairnryan in July 1973 on Loch Ryan below Stranraer. ASN had bought a small part of the Cairnryan breakers yard and had rebuilt the pier to accommodate RoRo ferries with a view to transferring its Larne-Preston service to the new port. In the end it was ASN's sister company, Townsend Thoresen that opened the route on 10 July 1973, the Preston run having been closed in March 1973.

The position of British Rail was very different and by the mid-Seventies the combination of domestic inflation and the devaluation of the pound led to an increase of overall losses, on all services, from £1,800,000 in 1974 to £5,200,000 in 1975. The immediate consequence manifested itself on the Heysham-Belfast route, which was closed in April 1975, and the Dublin-Holyhead route with its cattle and general cargo service, which was closed the following November. Oddly, the volume of passenger and vehicle services remained high. The Stranraer route showed a growth of almost one third between 1973 and 1974, but no less significant in retrospect, were two actions on the part of British Rail that most definitely represented clear breaks with

[565] *The Times*; Monday, 24 September, 1973; p.III: *Eire: inflation rate erodes new-found prosperity.* Richard Keatinge.
[566] *The Times*; Thursday, 24 October, 1974; p.2: *Scots lorry strikers reject pay package.* Glasgow Correspondent.

the past.[567] In 1975, for the first time in its history, British Rail purchased a second hand vessel, the *Svea Drott*, which was renamed the *Earl Godwin*, for the Channel Islands; and placed an order in a foreign yard, at a cost of £16,000,000, for a ferry from the Danish yard Aalborg Vaerft A/S of Aalborg.[568] The *St. Columba* entered service in May 1977 on the Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire route. She had a displacement of 9,000 tons and a carrying capacity for 2,200 passengers and represented a stark contrast to two 1949-built passenger-only 'mail ships,' the *Cambria* and *Hibernia*, and a car ferry that worked this route.[569] With the arrival of the *St. Columba* the position of Holyhead was transformed. The *St. Columba* was the largest vessel in the Sealink fleet, and her arrival in service represented a massive shot in the arm for a port that over the previous decades had most definitely slipped into secondary, perhaps even tertiary, status. Table 6.3 demonstrates the growth in Irish Sea carryings largely supported by the additional capacity that *St. Columba* contributed. Using passenger carryings as a benchmark, it had taken 15 years to increase throughput by 13.6%, whereas in the period 1976 – 1980, growth of 53.8% has been experienced, a figure that underlined the substantial demand that had been suppressed due to a lack of suitable capacity in previous years.

Table 6.3 Irish Sea Traffic Comparisons 1976 versus 1977 and 1978 versus 1980[570]

Irish Sea	1976	1977	% change 1976 v. 1977	1978	1980	% change 1978 v. 1980
Passengers	1,723,000	2,063,000	19.73	2,414,000	2,651,000	9.82
Accompanied vehicles	251,000	297,000	18.32	361,000	406,000	12.47
Unaccompanied vehicles	24,000	30,000	25.00	29,000	25,000	-13.79
RoRo Freight vehicles	141,000	160,000	13.48	176,000	216,000	22.73
Containers	69,000	71,000	2.90	52,000	59,580	14.58

Source: The National Archives [571]

[567]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1974*, 1975 July, pp.16-17.
[568]The 1966-built *Svea Drott* was owned by Stockholms Rederi AB Svea, Stockholm (builders: Ab Öresundvarvet, Landskrona). The vessel served the Trave-Line service between Helsingborg and Travemünde and later operated the route Helsingborg (Sweden)-Copenhagen (Denmark)-Travemünde (Germany). The vessel was bareboat chartered in 1974 to Rederi Ab Gotland, Visby, for their Visby-Oskarshamn service and then sub-chartered to British Rail/Sealink for the Weymouth-Channel Islands route. Subsequently purchased in 1975, she was renamed *Earl Godwin* operating from Weymouth and Portsmouth to the Channel Islands, Weymouth to the French port of Cherbourg and Heysham-Belfast. The *Earl Godwin* was sold to Nav. Arcipelago Maddalenino Spa, Naples, Italy (Moby Line) and renamed *Moby Baby* operating between Piombino-Portoferraio (Elba).
[569]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1975*, 1976 July, pp.16-17.
[570]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1977*, 1978 July, pp.32&33. The National Archives, *European Ferries Limited Sealink Limited: A Report on the Proposed Merger*; 8 December 1981; p.17.
[571]The National Archives,AN19/16 *British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1978,* pp.34-35.

The *St. Columba*, however, did not represent commensurate improvement for British Rail. Despite their very real differences British Rail's Shipping Services Division and P&O undertook a joint venture in the form of RoRo operations between Heysham and Belfast. This lasted until December 1978 when P&O ended its commitment on this route. British Rail was left to operate this service until 1980 when mounting losses finally forced closure. The freight-only vessel *Darnia* was then switched to the Stranraer-Larne route where and at which time traffic was in need for her extra capacity. At this same time Shipping Services Division undertook a fresh commitment in the central sector in the form of a joint venture with James Fisher & Sons Limited in providing a service to the Isle of Man under the Manx Line label.

In the Seventies the Irish Sea and its ferries provide a very uneven picture. It was the one sector where passenger service remained very important with what can only be described as 'third-class' travel facilities on many of the ferries, yet inevitably this was one area increasingly and seriously affected by cut-price fares offered by the Aer Lingus airline. To an extent this was balanced by increased freight traffic though the rate of growth seems to have slowed in the latter part of the decade. By its end British Rail's operations were in some difficulty. Such was the context of the decision in 1978 by British & Irish (B&I) Steam Packet to purchase a £6,600,000 Boeing Jetfoil to operate between Liverpool and Dublin in the 1980 season. The service was budgeted to carry 150,000 passengers based upon two round trips per day in the summer and one round trip per day in the winter months. The B&I Line accordingly established a subsidiary called Irish Sea Hovercraft Limited and in June 1980 a vessel named *Cú na Mara* commenced a 3-hour 10-minute service between newly constructed terminals in Dublin and Liverpool charging £28 for a round trip as opposed to the standard £22 on a conventional ferry.[572]

By the time '*The Hound of the Sea'* began operations the overall situation in the Irish Sea sector had deteriorated considerably, primarily because of the onset of recession but also because of such matters as the prolonged breakdown of the chartered *Stena Normandica*, which severely affected capacity on the otherwise expanding Fishguard-Rosslare route. In addition, capacity was further affected by the late delivery of a new

[572]Passengers were to be charged £28 return as compared with £22 on the company's conventional vessels; *The Times*; Friday 2 June 1978; p.4: *Jetfoil will cut Irish Sea crossing by half*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.

vessel for the Stranraer-Larne route. Another dimension that was largely to be lost in other sectors around this time was union militancy. P&O Ferries, by then Britain's third largest ferry operator, took the decision to withdraw its Liverpool to Belfast service after industrial action taken by the National Union of Seamen in pursuit of a pay claim.[573] P&O announced its decision after a 48-hour stoppage at the beginning of January 1981 and blamed the dispute as '*the final straw*,' though in truth as P&O itself admitted, at base was a recession that had adversely affected its operations and trade. This came on top of '*steadily worsening problems as a result of considerable difficulties in Northern Ireland*,' but one year later industrial action was directed against the B&I Line's *Munster* after her arrival at Holyhead necessitated the vessel's return to Dublin.[574] The *Munster*'s crew were sufficiently incensed by the action that they blocked the mouth of Dun Laoghaire harbour preventing the British Rail vessel *St David* from entering the port. This was, perhaps, inadvertent comment on the state of Anglo-Irish relations at this time.

6.5 Services in the Channel Sector

Most of the developments within and the problems of the Irish Sea sector were duplicated in the cross-Channel sector during this period, the impact of civil strife and the events in Northern Ireland excepted. Just as the Irish Sea sector in the Seventies saw the emergence of new companies (complete with any number of subsidiaries), new port facilities and belatedly an alternative to the ship enter into service, so the Channel sector saw re-alignments primarily in the form of European Ferries and an international Sealink consortium. The cross-Channel services saw two new operators – Olau and Sally Lines in 1972 and 1981 respectively – and it witnessed massive change in the emergence of European Ferries as the major operator by the late Seventies, British Rail being ousted from the position of dominance that it and its predecessors had held for some 120 years.[575] But just as the Olau line disappeared from the scene in the early Eighties, so, very oddly, did both European Ferries and British Rail: neither survived their change of status and position. European Ferries was subjected to take-over on the part of P&O while British Rail in effect was

[573] *The Times*; Friday, 2 January 1981; p.2: *P&O to end its Ulster ferry service*; David Felton Labour Reporter.
[574] Smyth. *The B&I Line.* p.227.
[575] Ogilvie, A (1994) *Inside Olau – The Life and Death of a Ferry Company Sheerness-Vlissingen 1974 to 1994.* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.3.

progressively dismantled during the course of the Eighties. This latter development was set in place prior to denationalisation enacted by the Major administration in the aftermath of the Conservative victory in the general election of April 1992. But that, with the last trains ever operated by British Rail running on 31 March - 1 April 1997 and British Rail divested of all rail operations in November 1997, is another story.

6.6 Innovation, Growth and Acquisition

The various paving stones that make up the pathway that traces its way through events between 1950 and 1987 can be arranged in any number of ways and to very different ends. Over a period of between twenty and thirty years it is very easy to lose sight of the fact that the Conservative policy of returning of State-owned industries and companies to private ownership was not patented by Margaret Thatcher. If the end of this journey is the process whereby British Rail was stripped of its ferry services before itself being consigned to the rubbish bin of history then, by the same token and in a very real sense, one of the most important single developments in the Seventies was the denationalisation of Atlantic Steam Navigation (ASN), which had been taken into public ownership in 1954.[576]

6.7 Denationalisation of Atlantic Steam Navigation

In February 1971 John Peyton, the Transport Minister in the Heath government, announced the latter's intention to sell off ASN and Associated Humber Lines. The significance of this development lay in the fact that at this time there were two possible contenders for buying these companies, and most certainly ASN, at a sale price that initially was set between £5,000,000 and £10,000,000, seemed a most attractive proposition: in 1948, in its first trading year, it had transported some 5,000 trailers but by 1970 this number had increased twenty-fold. In 1969 ASN had made a profit of some £205,000 and this was doubled in 1970. Associated Humber Lines represented a somewhat different probability: its losses would have balanced the

[576]In 1954, the ASN was taken over under the Labour Governments nationalisation policy by the British Transport Commission (BTC).

profits of ASN and with ageing ships this company stood in need of substantial capital investment.[577]

6.8 Acquisition and Competitive Advantage

The two companies that were at the forefront of interest of acquisition were P&O and European Ferries, the latter, as noted previously, having been formed in 1968 when in effect Townsend took over Thoresen. In November 1971 Townsend Thoresen bought the entire share capital of ASN and its subsidiaries, the Transport Ferry Service (Nederland) NV and Frank Bustard and Sons Limited, for £5,500,000, a figure that was considered to be a knock-down price. In the spring of 1973 Townsend Thoresen acquired a half-share in the former naval dockyard at Harwich with a view to developing a service from Harwich to Antwerp.[578] These two developments proved to be so important in shaping subsequent events because they brought into existence a new company that matched British Rail in terms of national status. The new European Ferries embraced three very different organisations – ASN in the central and northern sectors of the Irish Sea; the multipurpose services operated by Thoresen in the western Channel and Townsend on the Channel routes from Dover; and the ASN services from Felixstowe to Rotterdam and Antwerp – with two immediate implications. European Ferries was possessed of sufficient numbers of ferries to enable switches between sectors in order to meet changes and increased demand, and it set in place a competitor and rival to British Rail, one that matched its ferry service in terms of virtually every aspect of operations. Townsend and Thoresen, in the years before their amalgamation, were organisations that quite deliberately sought to distinguish themselves from British Rail. The black, rather staid, design of British Rail vessels contrasted sharply with the orange hulls of Thoresen and the light green hulls of Townsend's new vessels. In fact Townsend Thoresen had a number of different liveries during the period before 1974 when a combination of greenish blue and white was used for virtually all ships: the better-known orange livery was introduced for all the company's ships in 1976. By way of contrast, British Rail was

[577]In contrast to ASN, Associated Humber Lines had five 'older' ships and had recorded a loss of £350,000 in 1970, similar to its 1969 result. The company was described '*….as a much less attractive proposition* [than ASN] *needing substantial capital investment*'. *The Times* newspaper; 17 February 1971; *NFC Shipping Companies will be sold to Private Industry*. A total of 9% of the equity in Associated Humber Lines was owned by Ellerman.

[578]Cowsill. *By Road Across the Sea.* p.21. The Monopolies Commission; *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973; Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

only just ridding itself of the classic two-class passenger concept on certain of its routes. The contrast between the two operators, Townsend Thoresen with up-to-date vehicle ferries that looked new and innovative and British Rail with ageing ships that by the mid-Seventies stood in increasingly urgent need of replacement, was very marked indeed.

6.9 Spiralling Inflation, New Market Entrants and Sealink

For much of the Seventies, however, the worst aspects of rivalry and competition were muted and for one very simple reason: the growth of traffic meant that there was business enough for both European Ferries and British Rail, for both ships and hovercraft. Inevitably, however, this came with associated problems, and in three forms:

- First, the Seventies was a decade of massive, spiralling inflation that affected costs of ships, fuel, labour and profits. To cite but one example of this, the operating costs of British Rail ships, the cost of ship maintenance, miscellaneous traffic expenses, general expenses and overall costs all but doubled between 1973 and 1975 and all but tripled between 1973 and 1978, and in one single year, between 1978 and 1979 rose by 43.06% with operating costs increasing by 78.56%: in this single period, between 1973 and 1979 the latter rose five-fold. This is illustrated in Table 6.4.[579]

[579]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts* for 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979: July 1975 and successive years, pp.9,16-17,22-23,32-33,34-35 & 30-31.

Table 6.4 British Rail Ships: Profit/Loss 1973-1979

Income	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Passengers	£22,082,000	£27,077,000	£36,505,000	£42,603,000	£53,436,000	£63,970,000	£96,298,000
Freight	£14,802,000	£18,878,000	£24,118,000	£29,643,000	£40,774,000	£45,222,000	£56,992,000
Miscellaneous	£2,409,000	£2,624,000	£4,241,000	£7,208,000	£8,962,000	£14,466,000	£20,208,000
Gross Income	£39,293,000	£49,579,000	£64,864,000	£79,454,000	£103,172,000	£123,658,000	£173,498,000
Expenditure							
Operations	£14,175,000	£21,022,000	£26,169,000	£29,843,000	£34,453,000	£41,399,000	£73,921,000
Ship maintenance	£5,099,000	£6,054,000	£8,032,000	£10,486,000	£12,007,000	£14,525,000	£18,180,000
Miscellaneous	£14,790,000	£18,689,000	£29,365,000	£33,872,000	£42,854,000	£49,802,000	£61,715,000
General	£3,162,000	£4,639,000	£6,525,000	£7,491,000	£7,380,000	£8,839,000	£10,092,000
Gross expenses	£37,226,000	£50,404,000	£70,091,000	£81,692,000	£96,694,000	£114,565,000	£163,908,000
Rates of increase of individual sources of income:							
Passengers	100.00	122.62	165.32	192.93	241.99	289.70	436.09
Freight	100.00	127.54	162.94	200.26	275.46	305.51	385.03
Miscellaneous	100.00	108.92	176.05	299.21	372.02	600.50	838.85
Gross Income	100.00	123.63	165.08	202.21	262.57	314.71	441.55
Relative share of individual sources of income:							
Passengers	56.20%	55.74%	56.28%	53.62%	51.79%	51.73%	55.50%
Freight	37.67%	38.86%	37.18%	37.31%	39.52%	36.57%	32.85%
Miscellaneous	6.13%	5.40%	6.54%	9.07%	8.69%	11.70%	11.65%
Profit & Loss	100.00	-88.29	-252.88	-108.27	313.40	439.91	463.95
Rates of increase of individual sources of expenditure:							
Operations	100.00	148.30	184.61	210.53	243.05	292.06	521.49
Ship maintenance	100.00	118.73	157.52	205.65	235.48	284.86	356.54
Miscellaneous	100.00	126.36	198.55	229.02	289.75	336.73	417.28
General	100.00	146.71	206.36	236.91	233.40	279.54	319.17
Gross expenses	100.00	135.40	188.29	219.45	259.75	307.76	440.31
Relative share of individual expenditure commitments:							
Operations	38.08%	41.71%	37.34%	36.53%	35.63%	36.14%	45.10%
Ship maintenance	13.70%	12.01%	11.46%	12.84%	12.42%	12.68%	11.09%
Miscellaneous	39.73%	37.08%	41.90%	41.46%	44.32%	43.47%	37.65%
General	8.49%	9.20%	9.31%	9.17%	7.63%	7.71%	6.16%
Profit	£2,067,000				£6,478,000	£9,093,000	£9,590,000
Loss		-£1,825,000	-£5,227,000	-£2,238,000			
As share of income:	5.26%	-3.62%	-7.46%	-2.74%	6.28%	7.35%	5.52%

Source: The National Archives [580]

Commensurate increase in prices and revenue, from duty free sales, kept pace with the aforementioned increases and British Rail profits rose to unprecedented levels in 1978 and 1979. This was a state of affairs that was, in many ways, a surprising turn-round from the

[580]The National Archives, AN19/12 *British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts* for 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979: July 1975 and successive years, pp. 9, 16-17, 22-23, 32-33, 34-35 and 30-31.

situation between 1974 and 1976 when British Rail shipping saw deficits, particularly in 1975. British Rail's problems in these years were not unrelated to the fact that the largest ship it ever ordered, the 9,000-ton general-purpose *St. Edmund,* which was to work the route between Harwich and the Hook of Holland, was some seven months late in delivery. British Rail was saddled with costs but without the vessel in service at peak time. The results were immediate and savings had to be made, hence the closures of the Heysham-Belfast and Holyhead-Dublin routes in 1975. But these problems notwithstanding, the ferry service generally showed very marked increases in passenger and car traffic at this time. In 1974 continental services had presented an increase of 12% in cars and 13% in passengers over the previous year while on the Channel Islands route earnings increased some 16% while on the Stranraer-Larne route some 30%.

- The second development became visible over a period of thirty years with "mixed messages" exchanged with regards to inflation and massive increases in operating costs but such matters were not obvious at the time, and the generally buoyant state of the British ferry industry served as encouragement to outsiders to try to break into the market. The attractiveness of the British ferry industry to outsiders resulted in the arrival on the scene of two operators, Olau Line and Sally Line, and the initial results of the former were indeed salutary. The Olau Line initiated a Sheerness-Vlissingen (Flushing) service with a single freight vessel, *Basto V*, on 20 November 1974 and introduced two sister passenger vessels, the *Olau West* and *Olau East*, on 19 January and 16 March 1975 respectively.[581] The vessels had been built in 1964 for the Grenå-Hundested Lines that operated the Danish domestic service between Jütland and Zeeland and although diminutive by later standards the vessels proved their worth in conditions that were very different from those anticipated when designed.

[581]Ogilvie. *Inside Olau – The Life and Death of a Ferry Company Sheerness-Vlissingen 1974 to 1994.* pp.7-9.

In very large measure the initial success of Olau Line, which came in very sharp contrast to the problems that Channel Bridge Line and the newly-formed Thanet Line experienced in this same sector between 1972 and 1974, stemmed from a very aggressive representation and image. Growth of traffic and profits had been accompanied on the part of many operators by certain contentment; some would assert complacency, to the point where ferries operating the Dover routes had acquired a certain reputation as "cattle boats." The clean-cut Baltic, Scandinavian, image, with its emphasis upon proper service, provided the newcomer with immediate opportunity and success. But there was to be a world of difference between initial and long-term achievement, and the Olau Line was to pass from the scene even as Sally Line encroached upon proceedings. The company, Olau Line, budgeted to carry 20,000 passengers in 1975 and surprised the owner, managers, staff and, most significantly its competitors, by carrying 228,000 passengers in its first year of operations: its passenger numbers reached seven figures in 1977, a little over thirty months after it began operations.[582] Table 6.5 represents a comparison of fees between the Short Sea and Western channel Ferry Service in 1977.

[582]Olau Line transported its millionth passenger in 1977. A considerable achievement considering that the milestone was reached in only 2.5 years. Ogilvie. *Inside Olau – The Life and Death of a Ferry Company Sheerness-Vlissingen 1974 to 1994.* p.102.

Table 6.5 Short Sea and Western Channel Ferry Fares Comparison 1977

Route	Carrier	Duration	(14ft) Car fare (single) summer rate	Adult passenger (single)	Total for car plus 2 adults plus 2 minors (single fare)
Sheerness-Dunkerque	Olau Line	4½ hours	£19.00	£ 7.80	£42.40
Ramsgate-Calais	Hoverlloyd	40 minutes	£42.00 -£30.50	Free	£42.00 (£30.50)
Dover-Dunkerque Ouest	Sealink	2¼ hours	£19.20	£ 7.60	£42.00
Dover-Calais	Sealink	1 hour 40 minutes	£19.20	£ 7.60	£42.00
Dover-Calais	Seaspeed	30 minutes	£20.20	£ 8.10	£42.00
Dover-Calais	Townsend Thoresen	1½ hours	£19.20	£ 7.60	£36.00
Dover-Boulogne	P&O Normandy Ferries	1¾ hours	£26.00	£ 7.00	£40.00
Dover-Boulogne	Sealink	1¾ hours	£19.20	£ 5.60	£36.00
Dover-Boulogne	Seaspeed	40 minutes	£20.20	£ 8.10	£44.50
Folkestone-Calais	Sealink	1¾ hours	£19.20	£ 7.60	£42.00
Folkestone-Boulogne	Sealink	1¾ hours	£19.20	£ 5.60	£36.00
Newhaven-Dieppe	Sealink	3¾ hours	£20.50	£10.40	£51.70
Portsmouth-Le Havre	Townsend Thoresen	5½ hours	£22.00	£10.70	£54.10
Portsmouth-Cherbourg	Townsend Thoresen	4 or 7 hours*	£22.00	£10.70	£54.10
Portsmouth-St. Malo	Brittany Ferries	9½ hours	£28.00	£12.00	£64.00
Southampton-Le Havre	P&O Normandy Ferries	7 or 8 hours*	£35.00 (n) £33.50 (d)	£11.50 (n) £10.00 (d)	£58.50 (n) £54.00 (d)
Southampton-Le Havre	Townsend Thoresen	6½ or 8 hours*	£23.50	£11.00	£56.50
Southampton-Cherbourg	Townsend Thoresen	5 hours	£23.50	£11.00	£56.50
Weymouth-Cherbourg	Sealink	4 hours	£21.00	£10.70	£53.10
Plymouth-St Malo	Brittany Ferries	8½ hours	£28.00	£12.00	£64.00
Plymouth-Roscoff	Brittany Ferries	7 hours	£28.00	£12.00	£64.00

Source: *The Times* newspaper [583]

[583] *The Times* newspaper in May 1977 characterised the many ways to cross the Channel as expensive citing that '*….there were few stretches of water in the world where the traveller is asked to pay so much to span 21 miles and never be out of sight of land*.' It was even suggested that potential ferry travellers would need a slide-rule to unravel the fare structure of most operators and that tariffs were '*bewildering*'. The article mentioned the 'harmonisation' between Townsend and Sealink whereby passenger tickets were interchangeable, referring to it impolitely as '*price-fixing*'. *The Times*, Saturday, 28 May 1977; p.17: *Talking shop Cross-Channel numbers game*; Patricia Tisdall.

The longer crossings required a different vessel configuration, so-called night ferries that had cabins and sleep-seats, aircraft seats or Pullman seats for passengers to rest on overnight journeys. Typically these vessels (such as those operated by Townsend Thoresen and P&O Normandy Ferries) took longer to cross by night so as to give passengers a reasonable rest period. Each vessel only accomplished one round trip in 24-hours and therefore during daylight hours each vessel would complete the crossing faster thereby also relieving the boredom of a day crossing.

- The third development, which ran parallel to the passing of the Olau Line and which was accompanied by a series of take-overs, amalgamations and mergers, was Sealink. Note has already been made of the fact that at the end of the Sixties a number of changes were put in place in terms of British Rail and its ferry services. The latter, stripped from the regional boards, were gathered together in the Shipping and International Services Division, which was established in 1968 and which became fully operational in August 1969.[584] Subsequently, in 1969, Shipping Services Division joined a consortium of shipping companies owned by the French Railways, the Belgian Marine and the Dutch Zeeland Steamship Company, to be marketed under the brand "Sealink".[585] At the end of the Seventies, and after Shipping Services Division had been in business for just nine years, this organisation was dissolved and its assets and responsibilities vested, with effect from 1 January 1979, in a wholly-owned subsidiary company of the British Rail Board that was to operate under the "Sealink UK" label. [586] This organisation was one of the largest shipping lines in the world, but from the beginning of the decade the international consortium, with no fewer than 72 ships working 28 routes, represented something new, namely pooled resources. Responsibilities, profits and

[584]*The Times*, Monday, 10 July 1967; p.VI: *There's money in channel ships*; Michael Baily, Transport Correspondent.
[585]The Monopolies Commission; *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973; Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10 April 1974, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. pp.3,7-9.
[586]In 1979 the Shipping and International Services Division was reconstituted as a wholly-owned subsidiary company of BRB under the name of Sealink UK. The company has a paid-up share capital of £34,000,000. *The Times*, Saturday 18 May 1968; p.13: *Rail Board to have shipping subsidiary*; *George Clark*; Political Staff.

> losses were pooled and then divided on the basis of contribution, the sharing of obligations and services being both sensible and economical – before any consideration of anti-trust issues.

There were in place four elements that were to shape the course of events in the Seventies, namely the emergence of an international consortium that consisted of the major rail networks in four countries; the entry on the scene of a syndicate of private operators that by the end of the Seventies was certainly abreast of Sealink UK in terms of standing and authority; new additions to the scene in the form of Olau and Sally Lines and to which should be added the continuing hovercraft operations; and the onset of increasingly difficult times reference costs, inflation and profitability.[587]

6.10 Influence of Private Car Ownership on Ferry Design: Promise and Problems

It is very difficult to recall, over a period of almost forty years, a time without cars. To remember that it was really not until the Seventies that the family car, now so common with two or more to many households, had truly arrived. In Britain the car was the occasional means of travel throughout the Fifties[588], and if the opening of the Preston by-pass in December 1958 and the M.1 motorway in March 1959 pointed in the direction of future developments, it was not until the Sixties that the car first began to become a family item although throughout this decade public transport in terms of railways, underground services and bus and coach companies remained firmly established: it was not until the Seventies that the automobile presented itself as a genuine alternative to public services.

The single most important development in the period 1973-1986 was the increasing number of privately owned motor cars and the increasing taste for holidays abroad. This was the massive increase in traffic in these years. Between 1974 and 1981 the number of passengers carried by ferries doubled, from about five millions to ten millions, and over the next five years increased by almost the same numbers, to just fewer than fifteen

[587]The 'Sealink' consortium consisted of 28 shipping routes and 72 ships operated in conjunction with French Railways (SNCF), the Belgium Maritime Transport Authority (RTM), and the Dutch Zeeland Steamship Company (SMZ). The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1977*, 1978 July, pp.32-33.
[588]The Austin Mini was unveiled in August 1959 at a cost of £500 including purchase tax.

million. What had been by comparison a modest if steady growth of passenger numbers over the previous two decades was transformed into major increases of traffic in the second half of the Seventies, and it was this fact of life that set in place two realities. By the Seventies arguments about design of ferries were all but consigned to history: the drive-on drive-off concept was in place, and with the collapse of the Channel Tunnel project the ferry's place seemed secure. Herein was the basis of the second reality, growth of traffic that seemed to carry the certainty of increased profitability. In 1973 alone drive-on drive-off traffic showed an increase of 38% over the previous year while in 1976 the number of vehicles handled by Dover alone reached seven figures: by the following year Dover was handling 60,000 passengers and 12,000 cars on various single days at peak holiday time. Such numbers most certainly seemed to offer commercial promise: a growing and assured market, with assured profitability, was positive incitement for new companies and increased competitiveness in terms of services and facilities. But, inevitably, promise came complete with problems, and most certainly in the first part of the Seventies the latter came in threes:

6.11 Short-Term Profit

First, by this time various changes that had been set in place by the Labour government before June 1970 were manifesting themselves in full, and with results that were somewhat uneven, and especially so for British Rail. The Transport Act of 25 October 1968 wrote off the £1,200,000,000 debt with which the nationalised railways had been saddled since 1948 and which had been compounded by losses after 1955. As an immediate, short-term, consequence the British Rail Board was able to announce profits of £14,700,000 in 1969 and £9,500,000 in 1970, but on 1 January 1969 when the Transport Act came into force, the National Freight Corporation (NFC) which consisted of Freightliners Limited, in operation since 1965, and National Carriers Limited (NCL), took over the total assets of British Rail's collection and delivery service, the subsidiary companies within the Transport Holding Company, and British Road Services. By 1975 the new grouping controlled some sixty companies, owned nearly a thousand depots and 25,000 vehicles, and possessed a work force of some 60,000 employees and was the largest company of its type in Europe. In the second part of the Seventies a long-overdue re-structuring of NFC and NCL, and specifically

the latter, resulted in major cuts with the resultant problems that one naturally associates with a discontented and demoralised work force. In the wider context these developments had a double impact: British Rail, at the very time when its service finally lost its position of primacy in terms of non-passenger traffic, was left in the position of trying to obtain traffic without the ability to control initial collection and final delivery service, while for all ferry companies, across the whole of the United Kingdom, the main publicly-owned freight companies were in direct competition with one another, a point of obvious contrast to the previous situation in which there had developed a co-ordinated freight transport system.[589]

6.12 Public Facilities and Public Attitudes

The fragmentation of the transport system, which would seem to have been unintended under the terms of the 1968 Act, went hand-in-hand with another point of fundamental change – the second of the three problems - that concerned public facilities and attitudes. By this period, the middle and late Seventies, the facilities of the major ferry ports were, for the most part, a generation old and beginning to fray around the edges. The major changes that had been put in place in the Fifties, seemed by the Seventies to belong to another age, an age in which the individual, with no alternative to the ferry, had to accept what was available. This is not to suggest that there was no proper investment at this time, but so much of this investment was concerned with berths, with loading and unloading facilities, parking spaces and access points. By the Seventies it had become necessary to modernise and improve these facilities but there was an obvious and growing need to meet unprecedented levels of public expectation, the latter having horizons that had been pushed back over the intervening years by television and air travel. In 1976 a report by the Automobile Association (AA) into the conditions and facilities of ten major terminals was decidedly uncomplimentary. That the best of these was Southend Airport in Essex, of all places, really does suggest that the general situation must have been all but beyond recall. The report stated that port reception

[589]The late Sixties and early Seventies witnessed a number of changes in the composition and competitiveness of the United Kingdom's many and varied transport undertakings. Other sectors of transport were also being reorganised such as the publicly-owned bus undertakings in England and Wales which came under the control of the National Bus Company, while in Scotland all the nationalised road and shipping services came under the Scottish Transport Group. Reorganisation of the country bus division of London Transport, which covered the Greater London area and nine counties, resulted in the transfer of 1,300 buses to London Country Bus Services Limited, which itself became a subsidiary of the National Bus Company on 1 January 1970. The London Transport Board was abolished and its property passed to the London Transport Executive (LTE), which was responsible to the Greater London Council.

areas lacked basic comforts, had low standards of hygiene, offered poor choice of food, ignored groups such as the disabled or nursing mothers, offered virtually no welcome to visitors and rarely offered on-the-spot tourist information. A rather weak and poorly thought-through response from British Rail made the point that it was wrong to compare Southend Airport with a ferry terminal, especially in view of the number and type of people that were handled. Such a view may well have caused a number of eyebrows to be raised but British Rail then picked up the point of criticism, noting that as plans for the Channel Tunnel had been cancelled it was "on the cards" that improvements would be made.[590] It may be noted, if only *en passant*, that with reference to the AA report the facilities at Eastern Docks at Dover and the Dover hovercraft service were rated superior to those of Townsend Thoresen at Southampton. The railway ports of Newhaven and Folkestone were at the bottom of the list and herein were British Rail's immediate option of difficulties.[591] The ports they owned had for the most part been built, and at this time still reflected their origins, as railway ports, and such ports as Heysham, Holyhead, Fishguard, Newhaven, Folkestone and Harwich were in need of major investment and building to provide for drive-on, drive-off facilities. Even in the Seventies trains ran alongside many ferries, with implications in terms of vehicle parking and access. In 1974 British Rail set in place a £60,000,000 investment programme, but with two ferries – the *Hengist* and *Horsa* - each costing £4,000,000 and Folkestone alone allotted £9,000,000 of new facilities; improved provision for individual passengers was necessarily third or fourth in the pecking order of priorities, as the Dover Harbour Board 1977 investment programme would seem to indicate. This programme provided for £8,000,000 on a new Western Docks hoverport facility, £12,000,000 for the reclamation of ten acres for expanded parking facilities in the Eastern Docks,[592] and just one-twelfth of the latter amount for expansion of the passenger lounge and an administration building, also in the Eastern Docks.[593]

---

[590]*The Times*, Thursday, 4 March 1976; p.5: *'Inadequate' Channel ports criticized*; Staff Reporter.
[591]In 1949 the number of cars shipped to the Continent from all United Kingdom ports totalled 45,120, equivalent to four days throughput in 1977. *The Times*, Tuesday, 14 February 1956; p.7: *Continental Holidays By Car Increasing Number of Vehicles Crossing By Sea And Air Every Year*; Motoring Correspondent.
[592]The Dover Harbour Board talked at the time of '*strong competition*' on Continental roll-on, roll-off routes, traffic volumes increasing from 176,000 '*lorry movements*' in 1975 to 183,000 in 1976. The pricing policy for freight also came under intense pressure at this point. *The Times*, Tuesday, 14 February 1956; p.7: *Continental holidays by car*; Motoring Correspondent. *The Times*, Tuesday 23 August 1977; p.12: *Dover gets ready for expansion*; Geoffrey Browning. The National Archives, AN 179/140; British Railways Board: British Rail Hovercraft Limited: *Records; Dover Harbour Board agreement for proposed hoverport terminal: buildings, repairs to hoverports and delays with development of hoverport*; 1975 Feb 01 - 1977 Jun 30.
[593]*The Times*; Tuesday, 23 August 1977; p.12: *Dover gets ready for expansion*; By Geoffrey Browning.

6.13 Economic Decline

The third problem was the changing and worsening economic terms of reference of the ferry industry relating to both Britain's domestic circumstances and the international situation, but these matters form part and parcel of the running of services and cannot be divorced from them, suffice it to note one point reference the period 1973-1987. This period was the swan song of the ferry industry, and in two very different contexts. It was to prove the final phase of British Rail operations and thus forms the finale of a relationship between railways, rail ports and ferries that went back at least to 1843 and 1844 when first Folkestone and then Dover were reached by the advancing railway. Moreover it proved to be the swan song of the ferry industry *per se*, reference the blighted record that followed in the wake of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster,[594] the opening of the Channel Tunnel, and mergers.

To gather together the various, disparate, strands of this research presents any number of problems, not least in terms of reconciling the immediate and conflicting claims of operators and in seeking to establish the exact relationship between cause and effect, but may be attempted in the form of one very simple and basic statement: the early part of the Seventies was one of major growth in traffic but this growth was not the preserve of long-established operators. Reference has been made to developments in the Irish Sea sector, to the fortunes, or perhaps more accurately the fluctuating fortunes and misfortunes, of the hovercraft and their operators, and to the initial results obtained by the Olau Line but the thread of continuity in the account of the ferry industry in this period is really provided by the position of Sealink UK and Townsend Thoresen relative to one another and the impact of international and domestic economic and financial developments.

[594]The *Herald of Free Enterprise* capsized on the night of 6 March 1987 with the loss of 193 passengers and crew.

6.14 The Impact of International and Domestic Economic and Financial Developments

6.14.1 The International Dimension

With reference to the form of the examination of British Rail ferry returns in the Seventies, the international dimension is always associated with increased price of oil and the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973. The two were associated but briefly and the fact was that the first major increases in oil prices came before and straddled this war; what can only be described as punitive price rises came in 1979-1980 and were not related to the Arab-Israeli dispute. The first price increases were those of 1 April and 1 June 1973 when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C.) increased the price of a barrel of crude oil by 5.7% and 11.9% respectively, from c. $2.59 to $2.75 to $3.12, and the reason for this was the declining value of the U.S. dollar: at very best, these increases provided O.P.E.C. members with greater returns but in real terms petrol probably cost less in 1973 than in 1947. On 16 October 1973 the Gulf Six - Abu Dhabi, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia - raised price by 17% from $3.12 to $3.65 and set in place an embargo on sales to states supportive of Israel, and on 5 November made provision for a 25% reduction of output. This latter provision was cancelled within two weeks, but on 22 December the same states made provision for the price of oil, then at $5.12 a barrel, to be increased to $11.65 with effect from 1 January 1974. While not disputing the fact that the price of oil doubled between April and December 1973 the real increase, in one single move, was in December 1973, after the October 1973 war was over, but thereafter there was a period of relative calm: in the first six months of 1977 the price of oil varied between $12.09 and $13.66 a barrel, and on 26 March 1979 was $14.56 a barrel. On 13 December 1979, however, Saudi Arabia was instrumental in forcing through an increase to $24.00 a barrel and within a year the price had increased by 28 May 1980 to $36.00, i.e. an increase of almost 150% in some 21 months.[595]

[595] Available at: http//en.wikipedia.or/wiki/Chronology_of_world_oil_market_events_%281970-2005%29. Retrieved 16 May 2008.

6.14.2 The Domestic Dimension

For the ferry industry such rises in the price of oil were very serious indeed. The operating cost of the British Rail fleet tripled in the twelve months between April 1973 and April 1974, and a flurry of activity saw the *Ailsa Princess*, *Antrim Princess*, *Hengist*, *Horsa*, *Senlac*, *Vortigern* and the newly constructed *St. Edmund* converted to burn heavy oil as opposed to marine diesel, a move that was intended to save perhaps as much as one-tenth of fuel costs.[596] But for British Rail at the very start of this period the more immediate problem was domestic inflation, and specifically but not solely major increased costs of labour, that effectively meant a devaluation of sterling on routes operated in association with continental counterparts, with results that were unprecedented for railway shipping. In 1974 the Shipping Services Division recorded losses of £1,800,000, a total that included shipping and harbours, and in 1975 losses all but tripled to £5,200,000. Losses in 1976 totalled £2,200,000 but in 1977 an operating surplus of £6,500,000 was recorded as a result of major increase of traffic, though oddly there was very little increase in overall passenger numbers. Table 6.6 reflects the British Rail Shipping Services Division carryings of 1976 and 1977 and the relative position of the two years as a percentage.

Table 6.6 British Rail Shipping Services Division carryings 1976 & 1977[597]

Traffic category	1976	1977	Relative position
Passengers	11,041,000	11,367,000	102.96 %
Motorists	5,409,000	5,997,000	110.87 %
Accompanied vehicles	1,793,000	1,968,000	109.76 %
Freight on trains (tons)	671,000	867,000	129.21 %
Containers	170,000	153,000	90.00 %
Roll-on, roll-off freight vehicles	404,000	471,000	111.04 %

Source: The National Archives

The British Rail Board, with justifiable pride, announced in its 1977 Board Report and Accounts for the Ships and Harbours Division that:

[596]Fuel costs rose from £2,000,000 to £6,000,000 per annum as a result of the price increases and the savings that were expected as a result of the conversions were in the order of £640,000 in a full year. At today's prices (16 May 2008) heavy oil (IFO 380) is half the price of Marine Diesel Oil (MDO) - $541.50c. to $1,083 - and one can assume that the figures for the Seventies would have not been dissimilar. During this period some ships manoeuvred on Marine Diesel Oil (MDO) and once clear of the berth fuel supply to the main engines was changed over to heavy oil (IFO 380) although subsequent changes to the design ad capability of main engine fuel injectors meant that this transfer was not necessary.

[597]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1976*, 1977 July, pp.22-23,32-33.

'Determined efforts by Shipping Division management and staff at all levels were rewarded in 1977 with a record operating surplus of £9m. The combined ships and harbours result represents an improvement of £10m on 1976 and of £15m on 1975. In aiming to increase the profitability of the business in a growth market, the Shipping Division has invested in new tonnage and improved terminals to offer a better service to the customer.

The successes of 1977 are an encouragement to press ahead with an accelerated programme of investment. Government approval to the ordering of new ships for the Stranraer-Larne and Dover-Calais routes is an expression of its confidence, shared by the Board, in the future prosperity of the business. Plans are being progressed for improved port facilities, and for further new tonnage which will provide opportunities for UK shipyards.'[598]

The Board reported that the continental services had produced significant improvement over the previous year with growth in nearly every traffic segment. In fact one largely unforeseen matter may have been at work in producing this massive turn-round of fortunes: the various economic and financial problems of the country might well have limited to some degree the number of passengers and vehicles leaving Britain for holidaying on the continent, but Jubilee year and favourable exchange rates brought more visitors to the United Kingdom from mainland Europe, and in particular from West Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. As it was, in order to provide a better working margin two more vessels were to be taken in hand and converted to take more vehicular traffic at Newhaven, but the highlight of the Board's report was the turn-around in fortunes for the Irish Sea. The Report awarded a degree of the success to aggressive marketing policies and new investment in increased capacity. The Board was able to show positive growth in nearly every category of traffic on almost every route around the coast and in a very obvious sense British Rail, the Shipping Services Division and their ports and ferries registered impressive results, specifically in turning round what had been in 1975 a somewhat

[598]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1977*, 1978 July, pp.32-33.

dire situation. With the Channel Tunnel no longer a threat, there was every reason to assume that at very best British Rail was keeping pace with both increased demand and competition. But the success registered by one ferry service perhaps should have induced a certain caution.

The new Danish-built *St. Columba* had been introduced on the Holyhead service in May 1977 and by the end of the year that service was showing increases of 27% in passenger carryings, 35% in accompanied vehicles, and 150% in roll-on, roll-off vehicles. With the *St. Columba* was evidence of what might be achieved on the basis of "right concept, right tonnage." The fact was, however, that the ship met a demand that was already there, and the British Rail provision could be portrayed as reaction to rather than anticipation of developments. This was most certainly the case with reference to a major increase in rail freight, from 603,000 to 671,000 tons, on the Dover and Harwich routes between 1975 and 1976. Two ferries were withdrawn from service in order that they were refitted in order to provide greater RoRo capacity. The *Holyhead Ferry I*, renamed *Earl Leofric*, was refitted at Swan Hunter, at a cost of £1,850,000, and arrived at Dover, complete with a carrying capacity of 205 cars and 725 passengers, on 23 September 1976: she entered service two days later: the second ferry, the *Dover*, renamed the *Earl Siward*, did not return to service until the following year[599]. The ungenerous would deem such provision as belated and somewhat less than adequate, involving as it did reduction on the Irish Sea route and late delivery that precluded service at the peak of the 1976 season, and most certainly something was amiss with the *Earl Leofric*: seemingly even after refit she had hopelessly out-dated machinery and, at something like fifteen years of age, was withdrawn from service in December 1980 and sold for scrap in May 1981. However, criticism could certainly not be levelled against British Rail and its Shipping Service Division on one other matter. The entry into service in 1976 of a new port at Dunkerque, Dunkerque Ouest, provided massive improvement in handling facilities and turn-round times, and with two ferries operating on a 140-minute as opposed to the previous four-hour schedule, British Rail and Shipping Services Division was able

[599]The National Archives, *AN 129/36, British Railways: Chief Civil Engineer's Department: Correspondence and Papers; Dover to Calais and Boulogne: conversion of Holyhead Ferry I to increase commercial road vehicle capacity*; 1975; also: The National Archives, *MT 146/193; Board of Trade and Ministry of Transport and Successors: Consultative Marine (CM Series) Files*; *TSS Earl Siward ex Dover O.N.307813, passenger and vehicle ferry for British Railways Board: watertight subdivision; drainage, scuppers and discharges, including comments on modifications following conversion to accommodate Ro-Ro (roll-on, roll-off) container traffic*; CM 14981/13/05; 1964-1977

to provide six sailings in both directions on any given day in this middle part of the Seventies. This was a very credible provision, and the fact is that in 1977-1978 the British Rail shipping and ferry divisions were, literally, riding high and received two awards in recognition of their part in encouraging and increasing tourism to Ireland and Wales.[600]

6.14.3 Financial Developments

The second half of the Seventies saw steady growth in all market sectors, passenger, car, coach and freight, and most certainly there was before 1979 a general confidence on the part of all operators that with this growth revenue and profits would increase. The Shipping Services Division of British Rail recorded a surplus of £9,200,000 in 1978 compared to the surplus of £6,500,000 in 1977, but while such returns were very respectable the major increase in profit in 1978 over 1977 sat ill alongside one fact, that other than the total number of passengers growth in all sectors in 1978 compared to 1977 was lower than it had been in 1977 compared to 1976:

Table 6.7 British Rail Shipping Services Division carryings 1977 & 1978[601]

Traffic category	1977	1978	Relative position	Difference[602] 1977/1978 : 1976/1977
Passengers	11,367,000	11,859,000	104.33%	1.38%
Motorists	5,997,000	6,432,000	107.25%	-3.62%
Accompanied vehicles	1,968,000	2,130,000	108.23%	-1.53%
Freight on trains (tons)	867,000	902,000	104.04%	-25.17%
Containers	153,000	135,000	88.24%	-1.76%
Roll-on, roll-off freight vehicles	471,000	523,000	111.04%	-5.54%

Source: The National Archives

Increased earnings and profits were in some measure the result of inflation, and an indication of change in terms of the impact of inflationary pressures is perhaps best provided by an examination of costs of ships under construction at this time. In 1978 Shipping Services Division had three ferries being built at Harland and Wolff, namely the 6,630-ton *Galloway Princess*, which was to operate on the Larne-Stranraer route,

[600]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1977*, 1978 July. pp.32-33.
[601]The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1976*, 1977 July, pp.22-23.
The National Archives, *AN19/12, British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1977*, 1978 July, pp.32-33.
[602]Difference between Relative Position of Table 7.6 and Relative Position of Table 7.7

and the 7,399-ton *St. Anselm* and 7,319-ton *St. Christopher* on the Dover-Calais route: a fourth ship, the 7,196-ton *St. David*, had yet to be authorised at this time but she was subsequently ordered and brought into service on the Fishguard-Rosslare route after 1981. This programme clearly showed that Shipping Services Division was trying to sort out long-standing problems in the Irish Sea sector, but these four ships and associated harbour works represented a £68,000,000 commitment, and this amount of money represented but one part of British Rail's problem: this sum did not include investment in areas other than these three routes and inevitably the sum had to represent the immediate short-term rather than long-term investment: advanced planning had already been undertaken reference the level of investment these ships and routes would require in the five years after these present commitments had been met.[603]

The amount of money involved in this project contrasts starkly with the cost of ships and hovercraft just ten years previously, and most definitely puts the level of the 1977 and 1978 surpluses into some sort of perspective, but the immediate fact was that as 1978 drew to a close Shipping Services Division, which had been in the business of managing British Rail's harbours and ferries for just nine years, was preparing for a re-organisation that was to take effect from 1 January 1979. It was to be a wholly-owned subsidiary company known as Sealink U.K. Limited, and it was to be heralded as one of the largest shipping companies in the world. In its first year of operations, Sealink UK registered an operating surplus of £13,700,000, but while this seemed most promising the fact was that this total represented a very modest 7.06% return on a turn-over of £194,000,000. This compared to a return of £12,200,000 on a turn-over of £159,000,000 by Shipping Services Division in its last year of existence, hence relative decline – from a 7.67% return – even as gross income increased by 22.01%.

[603]The National Archives, *AN 179/39, British Railways Board: British Rail Hovercraft Limited: Records, Development of Seaspeed if Channel Tunnel is not constructed: investment proposals; suggested new harbour and facilities*; development of new craft and effect on Shipping and International Services Division; 1975 Jan 01 - 1976 Nov 30

6.15 Commercial Expansion

6.15.1 Mergers in the Industry

The returns of Sealink U.K. in its first year of operations present themselves for favourable interpretation on a number of counts. The increase of profits came in spite of the fact that the organisation's operations in the Irish Sea sector were adversely affected by the prolonged break-down[604] of the *Stena Normandica*, a ferry chartered from Stena Line, that reduced capacity on the otherwise expanding Fishguard-Rosslare route, and by the late delivery of the *Galloway Princess*, and to these problems were added such small matters as a major and prolonged road haulage strike and successive rises in oil prices. But these matters may well have served to deflect attention from a very real problem, which was that the relative stability of returns and of traffic at a time of a major increase in income pointed to the impact of inflation with obvious implications for the real value of profits, and to another associated – and more serious long-term - problem. The various arrivals of new companies and ships over the previous decade pointed to major increase of capacity on virtually all routes but with every indication of a slowing of growth of traffic by the end of the Seventies there emerged on centre stage an increasingly divisive competitive ethic that embraced a holding of prices, in an attempt to attract extra custom, at the very time when increased labour and oil costs ate into operational margins.

One immediate result of the difficulties thus created was the start of the negotiations between Hoverlloyd and Seaspeed that were to result in their merger in October 1981, but inevitably this development and attendant problems were never going to be addressed by a single merger and they reached beyond the fortunes or misfortunes of single operators or services. 1979 in effect was the first year in a period when even the most successful of operators over the previous decade, such as European Ferries, encountered very real difficulties in terms of year-on-year losses because the arrival on centre stage of problems at this time spelt the end of assured profitability that had persisted over the previous two or three decades, and these problems most certainly

[604] *Stena Normandica* was chartered to Sealink UK Ltd., London on 3 March 1979 and took up service on the Fishguard - Rosslare route on 4 March 1979. Following technical problems, the ship was out of service from June 1976 to 23 September 1976.

spelt an end to innovation. The B&I jetfoil service between Dublin and Liverpool was closed after the 1981 season, and R.M.T. abandoned its intention, first mooted in 1978, to secure two 400-seat Super 4 hovercraft in order to operate on the Dover-Ostend route either in 1981 or 1982: it was to have operated in partnership with Sealink and in the event R.M.T., despite its various problems and the uncertainties that had to attend any jetfoil service, went ahead and inaugurated a 100-minute jetfoil service between Dover and Ostend on 31 May 1981: its commitment really was one based on faith and hope rather than calculation.

Inevitably there was an immediate consequence of this changing situation, and it manifested itself openly, in 1981 in the form of a denunciation on the part of European Ferries which alleged that:

> *'Sealink and Seaspeed are continuing to provide subsidised competition...by maintaining...uneconomic pricing policies which in 1980 left them with a smaller share of the market and a reported loss.*[605] *Tax payers are footing the bill for this.'*

If indeed the two nationalised operators attracted a decreasing share of the market and both were incurring losses despite their undercutting competition then clearly "other factors" were at work in producing such a situation, and it is difficult to believe that access to public funds possessed the importance alleged by European Ferries.[606] There may well have been an element of truth underpinning this allegation but it is suspected that it was paraded, by the European Ferries management, as a means of diverting attention from certain other matters. In 1979 European Ferries made pre-tax profits of £16,700,000 but while this had risen (via £27,000,000 in 1980) to £30,500,000 in 1981 almost half of this was the result of the sale of Holborn

[605]European Ferries Limited, parent of Townsend Thoresen were quick to react to the government announcement suggesting that it would bid for the share capital of their main competitor, Sealink which at that stage held 51% of the passenger market and 38% of freight traffic on the cross-Channel routes. It was inconceivable that Keith Wickenden, European Ferries chairman believed that he would be able to takeover Sealink without significant competition-related difficulty. The timing of the announcement was far from perfect from Sealink's perspective. A heavy promotional campaign launched in 1979 backfired when two new vessels were delivered late, thereby missing the bulk of summer trade. The press were quick to compare Sealink with European Ferries pointing out that '*The difference between the two companies is staggering. European Ferries is not as top heavy*.' *The Times newspaper*, 24 February 1981; p.19: *Ferries chief unworried by monopolies call*; *David Hewson.* Referral to the Competition Commission of a possible merger between EFL and Sealink resulted in the conclusion that '*8.47. The merger might be expected to have the particular effects adverse to the public interest specified in paragraph 8.45. Since we have not been able to find any remedy by which these adverse effects could be avoided, we conclude that the merger may be expected to operate against the public interest. We accordingly recommend that the merger be not allowed*.' Competition Commission.

[606]The National Archives, *AN 18/180, British Railways Board: Members' Papers Proposed take-over of Sealink UK Ltd by European Ferries Ltd*; 1980 Nov 01 - 1982 Jun 30

properties and shipping profits had slumped from £16,700,000 to £9,750,000. At the time of the denunciation of Sealink and Seaspeed in May 1981 the chairman of European Ferries had to ask shareholders for £36,400,000 of new funds in order to provide for non-shipping investments, and in September 1981 European Ferries had to admit to losses of £2,300,000 in the first six months of the year.[607] In fact this was an improvement over the corresponding period in 1980 when losses of £3,750,000 had been incurred, and even though the shipping sector of the company registered an operational surplus of £1,390,000 in the first six months 1981 its losses totalled some £9,300,000. Severe competition on cross-Channel routes was undoubtedly the major factor in accounting for such losses, but whether Seaspeed and Sealink and the use of public funds to run cut-price tickets were responsible for European Ferries shipping losses would seem to be quite another matter. But, of course, the point would have been lost upon a Conservative administration committed to denationalisation and which in 1979 set in place massive reductions of public spending and its first administrative arrangements – such as the separation of the General Post Office and its telephone service – that foreshadowed privatisation across the board, and which very soon embraced British Rail: the separation of British Rail Hovercraft, British Rail Property Holdings, British Transport Hotels and Sealink UK from British Rail was announced in July 1980.[608]

6.15.2 New Entrants

These were increasingly competitive times particularly for the Anglo-French routes, a factor that was not helped by the addition of a newcomer on the scene, Sally Line, that inaugurated its Ramsgate-Dunkerque route utilising *The Viking*, a spare vessel seconded from parent company Rederi AB Sally, on 15 June 1981.[609] Although exposed to the elements and constrained by shallow draft, Ramsgate was in fact no stranger to ferry services;[610] paddle steamers used to bring Londoners to the seaside towns of Margate and Ramsgate around the turn of the century, subsequent to which the General Steam Navigation Company plied foot passenger day excursion services

[607] *The Times*; Tuesday, 12 May 1981; p.15: *Wickenden seeks £36.4m funds*; (Business and Finance) By Richard Allen.
[608] *The Times*; Tuesday, 15 July 1980; p.1: *British Rail to sell off its ferries and hotels*; *By George Clark Political Correspondent. The Times*; Tuesday 15 July 1980; p.2: *Single holding company for subsidiaries of British Rail*; By Michael Baily Transport Correspondent.
[609] At that time Rederi AB Sally was the largest privately-owned shipping company in Finland.
[610] Breeze, G and Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Sally Line - The Complete Story* (2001), Ramsey: Ferry Publications.

from Ramsgate to France with its *Royal Daffodil* and *Queen of the Channel* until 1966. The Sally Line story incorporates more than the arrival of yet another entrant on to the ferry scene as its inauguration, prominence and ultimate decline involved not only its ships and people, but also the gradual creation of a new port facility at Ramsgate which had been initiated by Olé Lauritzen with the £1,000,000 proceeds he received from the sale of his half share in Sheerness-based Olau Line and with which he inaugurated a ferry service from Ramsgate to Dunkerque in the summer of 1980 under the trading name of Dunkerque Ramsgate Ferries (DRF). The port was less easy to drive to and once there the ferry route represented a longer passage punctuated with relatively few sailings, indeed a small scale inferior harbour and facilities that at that stage was no competition for Dover or even Folkestone despite the congestion that those ports, and more particularly their customers, were suffering. Regrettably for DRF the fact that the port at that stage consisted of little more than mooring dolphins, a linkspan and some hard standing did not help the reliability of this weather-exposed operation, compounded by a vessel that was incapable of manoeuvring in anything but the best conditions, the service soon gained a poor reputation that even a tactical marketing campaign offering day return passenger tickets for £1 could do little to influence.

Nevertheless Lauritzen's loss was to be Sally Line's gain when in 1981 the service was re-started with a red-hulled vessel from the Baltic that provided what was advertised as and soon to be renowned widely as offering cut-price crossings linked to a bright and clean Scandinavian style and standards. Thanet District Council, the port landlords had already sunk £6,250,000 into land reclamation and terminal facilities ostensibly to support the DRF service although in truth some of this was necessary as sea defence and to protect the Western undercliff to the immediate south of the Royal Harbour. Many Thanet District councillors, who had been unsure about the potential of the DRF service and had been proved right, were keen to ensure that no more ratepayers' money was wasted on the provision of facilities for yet another entrant, a factor that was eased by the new operator's assurance that it would invest £5,000,000 of its own capital.[611]

[611] *The Times*; Friday, 15 July 1983; p.3: *Sally ferry line invests £15m to turn Ramsgate into port to rival Dover*; By Michael Baily, Transport Editor.

By this time the cross Channel or so-called short sea routes were busy and highly competitive although Dover was clearly reaching saturation point, a state of affairs that placed the new terminal facility at Ramsgate in a good position to provide an alternative proposition for passengers and freight. A twice-daily service departed from Ramsgate at 10.00 and 22.00-hrs and from Dunkerque at 07.00- and 19.00-hrs every day until 25 October 1981 when the service was suspended until the spring of 1982. The local Council was keen to see the service continue but uncertainty amongst the board of Sally Line's parent company made the future less than certain. A prank arranged by the leader of the local Council involving a person dressed in Arab costume parading along the cliffs while showing interest in developments at the Ramsgate ferry terminal backfired although not long afterwards Sally Line provided the necessary commitment to continue services from the port.[612] Following a number of operational difficulties that included poor weather protection at Ramsgate, dredging requirements and mechanical breakdown, considerable investment resulted in the service becoming established utilising a variety of chartered vessels.[613] The Sally Line operation was to continue past the period covered by this thesis but the fact remains that new service standards had been introduced to entice the general public and freight trade alike away from the mainstream port of Dover.[614]

6.15.3 Sealink Denationalisation Process

During the same period, and in a process that attempted to sharpen the appeal of Sealink to would-be purchasers, a firm called H&P Associates were employed in 1983 to create a new image for the company resulting in a step change to white-hulled vessels with a new company logo that the consultants described as conveying:

> *'……authority and professionalism through its association with the badge of a naval officer. Use of an italicised letter form for the Sealink name combined with a strong horizontal stripe gives the impression of power and of purposeful direction. The corners of the*

[612] *The Times*; Thursday, 18 March 1982; p.4: *'Fake shaikh' council chief resigns*; Category: Official Appointments and Notices.
[613] *The Times*; Friday, 15 July 1983; p.3: *Sally ferry line invests £15m to turn Ramsgate into port to rival Dover*; By Michael Baily, Transport Editor. *The Times*; Wednesday, 20 March 1985; p.3: *News in Brief.*
[614] The service was terminated at the end of 1998 as a result of the combination of renewed competition brought about by the advent of the Channel Tunnel and the financial weakness of the then parent company, Silja Line, but it had made its mark and provided a necessary lesson in customer service to the Dover-based ferry operators. Breeze, Cowsill and Hendy. *Sally Line - The Complete Story*.

lettering are softened to reduce the aggressiveness of the styling. White makes the vessel look larger, white offers greater visibility, white is associated with cleanliness, care and reliability, white doesn't show accumulated salt, white is suggestive of yachts and leisure, white projects a holiday atmosphere.'[615]

As part of the British government's intention to dispose of the shipping subsidiary of British Rail, the external perspective of Sealink UK Limited had changed immeasurably although much of the brand development was late in the company's development and could equally be described as superficial as nothing else in terms of customer service or personnel attitude had been similarly subjected to change. Structurally the company had been prepared for disposal following the establishment of a separate limited company on 1 January 1979 under a Labour administration and the transfer of certain harbour assets from Sealink UK Limited to a new subsidiary, Sealink Harbours Limited in 1982.[616] A considerable challenge which influenced the timetable of disposal was that the accounts process needed to be extricated from British Rail in order to allow the shipping business to stand alone, in addition to which Sealink's current results were poor, largely as a result of industrial action by the National Union of Seafarers (N.U.S.) which had protested over privatisation plans.[617] Despite these difficulties and setbacks, the business was deemed by the Conservative government and industry in general as 'ripe for privatisation,' and for one reason. Its present state was reasoned to be the direct result of its being part of a nationalised concern, the main focus of which was elsewhere, or, as *The Times* newspaper indicated, the combination of poor profitability, lacklustre productivity and inferior customer service rendered the business in need of a private hand at the helm in delivering it from 'being a neglected outpost of a huge corporate empire whose predominant interest has lain elsewhere, in the mainland rail service.'[618]

---

[615] *The Times*; Thursday, 5 April 1984; p.24: *Sealink prepares to set sail under private flag*; (Business and Finance) Jonathan Davis.
[616] *The Times*; Thursday, 5 April 1984; p.24; col A; *Sealink prepares to set sail under private flag*; (Business and Finance) Jonathan Davis.
[617] Sealink had made a profit in 1983 of £4,100,000 up from a loss of £6,400,000 the previous year. The industrial action and a general slowdown in sales was thought likely to reduce proceeds from the sale of Sealink by as much as 50%. *The Times*; Tuesday, 12 June 1984; p.21: *Profit slump at Sealink likely to halve selloff proceeds*; (Business and Finance) Jonathan Davis.
[618] *The Times*; Tuesday, 1 May 1984; col A; p.13; *Selling Sealink Short*; Editorials /Leaders.

The denationalisation sale process started in early 1984 and resulted in interest from a number of disparate groups which included the National Freight Corporation, James Fisher & Sons Limited and Sealink management and excluded two groups, namely, P&O and European Ferries which were barred from the bidding process[619]. In July 1984 the contest saw Bermudan-based Sea Containers take the company comprising 37 ships, ten harbours and 24 routes for an agreed price of £66,000,000[620]. The sale excluded one 'golden' preference share that was to be held by the Secretary of State, thereby protecting national defence interests.[621]

Initially the mood within the company, renamed Sealink British Ferries (SBF), was one of cautious optimism, in no small measure as a result of a very positive promotion of the company and new routes, new ships and new opportunity on the part of a high-profile PR campaign by the Sea Containers American president, James Sherwood. But painting ships a different colour was somewhat easier than changing a system and culture that had existed over many decades, and in the event two matters were at work in producing profound and wholly unintended change. Union activists saw in the change of company the opportunity to ensure that new ownership and investment should be directed to terms and conditions of the work force and not just hardware, and this intention hardened when, in the aftermath of various strikes, Sherwood's much-vaunted investment was not forthcoming, or at least not forthcoming on the scale that had been indicated. Sherwood was determined to cut costs, and this despite the obvious dangers presented by strikes and loss of revenue, and most certainly tried to reach the travelling public through re-training programmes and related measures, but the fact was that while results gradually improved – and in part because of judicious cost-cutting - the process of disillusionment and demoralisation on the part of management and work force alike with Sherwood and Sea Containers were quickly set in place.

As indicative of this process, the style - or its absence - of the new owners was made patently obvious in one episode in 1985. Belgian operator R.M.T. remained part of the Sealink consortium until the denationalisation of Sealink UK Limited when Sealink British Ferries attempted to take a bigger than 15% share in the Dover-Ostend

[619] *The Times*; Wednesday, 16 May 1984; p.15: *Two groups barred from Sealink bid*; By Jeremy Warner.
[620] Cowsill, M and Hendy, J (1996) *The Sealink Years 1970-1995.* Kilgetty: Ferry Publications. p.54.
[621] *The Times*; Friday, 3 February 1984; p.21: *Sealink prospectus order;* (Business and Finance) By John Petty.

traffic by switching its *St. David* from the Irish Sea in March 1985. The move was accompanied by a demand from SBF for a 50% share in the joint venture despite the fact that R.M.T., had considerably more vessels, and therefore capacity on the route. R.M.T. was not prepared to accept such demands but with relatively few options and no sales, marketing and ground staff in the United Kingdom it was obliged to enter into negotiations with SBF competitor Townsend Thoresen in October 1985, reaching a new partnership agreement that effectively left Sealink British Ferries and the remnants of the Sealink consortia without a Belgian partner. The new agreement, which saw the Belgian conventional ferry fleet plus two Jetfoils painted with orange hulls and the UK-partners name on the sides of the vessels, provided for a 63% share of freight in favour of Townsend Thoresen with the same percentage going to R.M.T., in respect of coaches, coach passengers rail passengers and all other non-accompanied passengers, all other traffic being marketed on behalf of Townsend Thoresen.[622] In the event, however, Townsend Thoresen had very real problems of its own.

6.15.4 Economic Challenge and Change in Management Style

As previously noted, Townsend Thoresen's parent company, European Ferries, in the early Seventies diversified into property, starting with the acquisition of Larne Harbour in 1973 and the Felixstowe Dock & Railway Company (1976) and culminating in 1979 with the purchase of substantial holdings in Denver, Houston and Atlanta in the United States as well as leisure-related developments in Spain and Germany. But in 1986, following increased competition on its ferry routes and falling fortunes for the company's United States investments, the European Ferries Group itself was the subject of unwanted attention, the thrust of criticism on the part of financial analysts being that the company, bereft of proper leadership after the untimely death of its managing director in 1983, had over-reached itself to the point that it both needed and was vulnerable to take-over in order that its fortunes be revived. It was against such a background that P&O acquired a 21% holding in

[622]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* pp.46-7.

European Ferries,[623] and it has been suggested that at this time the European Ferries board begged Sir Jeffrey Stirling, P&O's chairman, to '…act as their life raft.'[624]

Stirling had successfully engineered the sale of his Group's £4,000,000-loss-making P&O Normandy Ferries subsidiary to the European Ferries Group in January 1985 for £12,500,000, the company comprising three vessels operating between Dover and Boulogne which had commenced operation in April 1976 based upon a low-cost tariff.[625] In the meantime, and in an effort to address the company's poor results Stirling had been co-opted on to the European Ferries Group board to rescue the company from its declining position[626]. Trading in both European Ferries and the P&O Group was suspended on 5 December 1986 in order to allow the takeover and European Ferries Group shareholders were offered four new P&O shares for every seventeen they then owned. At the time European Ferries was said to be worth £280,000,000 with a reported profit of £17,000,000 declared by the company for the trading year 1985 although strikes that had cost it £10,000,000 had severely weakened its overall trading position[627].

The arrival on the scene of Sherwood and Stirling witnessed a significant change in the management, control and style of the two largest United Kingdom-based ferry operators. Both were serious businessmen that had built significant, well-respected and diverse groups. Both entrepreneurs displayed a strong and determined character. The P&O Group was significant in stature and brand image, maintaining the most prominent position in the ferry sector. On the other hand Sherwood was more charismatic, but no less determined and although Sealink was not without its difficulties, the company had been purchased cheaply and, with a suitable influx of dynamic management, could only improve in its share of the market and profitability. The two companies represented by Stirling and Sherwood controlled approximately 85% of the ferry related business operating around the United Kingdom coastline, a near-duopoly position that in commercial terms should have resulted in a firm pricing

[623]Part of the fall in Denver and Houston property asset values was attributed to a fall in oil prices. Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.48.
[624]Ibid p.48.
[625]Normandy Ferries operated the 1967-built *Lion* (3,987 GT) and the sister vessels, 1972-built *Tiger* (3,960 GT) and 1972-built *Panther* (3,960 GT). Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.25.
[626]*The Times*, Saturday, 5 January 1985; p.2: *European Ferries to buy P & O's cross-Channel service in £12.5m deal*; By Jonathan Davis, Business Correspondent.
[627]Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.48.

policy designed to enable maximum returns. This, however, was not the case as both companies were more interested in supremacy measured not in currency but by market share, a policy that resulted in exceptional levels of price competitiveness, benefiting volume but not the bottom line profitability of either business. Although the ferry industry had matured, new entrants were largely dissuaded from entering the battle that was being fought on major routes between P&O and Sealink. Instead smaller operators colonised secondary, niche routes around the coast that were sandwiched between, and therefore largely unnoticed by, the two largest companies.

6.16 Disaster

6.16.1 Loss of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*

In hindsight, and from an operational and image perspective, it is difficult to know whether the P&O Group would have intended to brand the company differently, perhaps as P&O, or leave its ferry interests trading under the well-recognised and largely respected name of Townsend Thoresen, but the decision was largely taken from their hands when on Friday 6 March 1987 one of its three flagships, the *Herald of Free Enterprise* when bound for Dover from Zeebrugge capsized and sank in shallow water with the loss of 193 passengers and crew.[628] This was a tragedy of immense proportion and for a number of reasons, but in large part because it happened in calm shallow water and was on the United Kingdom's doorstep. It is somewhat difficult to resist the notion, however, that in no small measure public perception was related to name and to the reality of government policy, and in this respect there was an additional dimension provided by the fact that the Townsend Thoresen service to Zeebrugge had been unusually boosted in its carryings by a so-called newspaper offer which provided for cheaper passenger tickets once the reader had cut out a certain number of vouchers from the arch-conservative *Sun* newspaper.[629]

[628]The death toll was made up of 38 crew and 155 passengers out of a total compliment on board at that time of 543. Cowsill and Hendy. *The Townsend Thoresen Years.* p.49.
[629]There had been other ferry disasters, and there were to be still more with the sinking of the *Estonia* in the Baltic Sea on 28 September 1994, which claimed 852 lives, and the *Scandinavian Star* that caught fire when bound from Oslo to Frederikshavn in Denmark, claiming the lives of 158 people on-board.

Unlike the other disasters, although with distinct similarity to the *Princess Victoria* sinking in 1953, the Zeebrugge ferry disaster, as it was to become known, was to shake the travelling public's confidence in ferry services and their operators, but in the event the public's short memory and travelling needs meant that trade soon recovered.[630] But the geographical prominence of the disaster off the south coast of the United Kingdom, coupled with the name Townsend Thoresen and its purchase by P&O a matter of days before the accident, was to result in a longer lasting legacy that centred on the principle of roll-on, roll-off and specifically the safety risks that were evident when water ingress was allowed on to the vessel's vehicle deck. The episode unquestionably lead to a protracted process of examination of causes and possible safety measures and resultant legislation as well as a prosecution mounted against P&O under the old common law crime of manslaughter which failed in 1990 on the grounds that it was difficult to find one senior person in the company who knew enough to be incriminated.[631]

The so-called free surface effect of water moving un-checked from one side of the vessel to the other resulted in a serious lack of stability, something that could easily be exacerbated by a consequential shift in cargo and ultimately in the vessel's capsize as had clearly occurred in the case of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*. The design integrity of roll-on, roll-off vessels was particularly suspect in circumstances where water was able to enter the vehicle deck, the resultant free-surface effect of the water causing the vessel to list and, in extreme conditions, capsize. Investigators took several years assessing ways in which the influence of water on the vehicle deck could be reduced to a point where sufficient stability remained intact, and the setting in place of the necessary legislation proved an equally long and difficult process.

Over a period of years a plethora of simple and potentially complex rules and regulations ranging from green and red lights to indicate to the vessel's bridge whether an opening (i.e. bow door) was open or closed to necessary stability calculations that were the result of the so-called Stockholm Agreement (AA Max). On every voyage, calculations were required on passenger carrying vessels to

[630]The *Princess Victoria* sank on 31 January 1953 in the Northern Corridor (North Channel) of the Irish Sea with the loss of 133 lives and was dubbed the worst maritime disaster in United Kingdom waters since World War II.
[631]There were also unsubstantiated suggestions at the time that the Conservative government had let P&O off the hook after a major donation of funds to the Party.

determine a vessels stability using a calculation that involved the light weight of the ship, the weight of the cargo loaded and the draft. These calculations enabled the GM - the height between the centre of gravity (G) of the vessel and its height of metacentre (M) - to be assessed in order to ensure that the stability was within acceptable limits before the vessel left port.

Vessels that did not have residual buoyancy sufficient to ensure that they remained afloat even if water had entered the vehicle deck were either withdrawn from service or had so-called 'sponsons' fitted, in the main width extensions (or external tanks) to the vessel which provided a 'lifebelt' of buoyancy at the waterline level. All vessels capable of carrying over 12 passengers and therefore classified as passenger ships were subjected to stability analysis and those that had sufficient damage stability or were converted by the addition of sponsons were able to remain in service. Other vessels that were deemed inadequate under the new calculations and were not able to benefit from conversion were given a final date by which they would have to be withdrawn from active service.

Although a tragedy, the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* would be a fitting place to terminate this thesis and its overview and analysis of the ferry sector, primarily because it marks a point in the development not only of the industry but also of the concept of RoRo being relatively slow to progress in the early half of the period yet thereafter gaining momentum perhaps without sufficient thought to safety or the consequence of a loading and discharging process that unlike other ship forms has its drawback. Ship names such as *Herald of Free Enterprise* and the earlier catastrophe surrounding the loss of the *Princess Victoria* will remain in the annals of history, as will risks, which grow ever larger with scale. In the meantime safety committees abound, but if nothing else the word 'safety' has been placed as a discussion point on boardroom agendas.[632]

[632]There are telling statistics which might better illustrate the devastation that was caused on Friday 6 March 1987:
- Thirty eight members of the crew died
- Half of the local football team perished
- Fifty children were orphaned
- Starboard side passengers fared better than those on the port side
- Those who were small, weak or disabled did not make it
- The powerful *camaraderie* that existed between seafarers did not overcome their overwhelming feelings of anger, fear, guilt and loss
- However heroic they can still think of a person they might have saved but could not or did not
- Only one surviving seafarer remained at sea following the disaster

It is not fashionable to criticise safety legislation. Moreover, despite the serious efforts of legislators, marine accidents such as the *Herald of Free Enterprise* owe their cause in large measure to human error, something which is impossible to eliminate. As an outcome of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster and for a number of years after the legislation was introduced freight vehicles were religiously weighed leaving the United Kingdom but there was no corresponding requirement to do so in the reverse direction from mainland Europe - cold comfort given that the *Herald of Free Enterprise* capsized on her way to Dover from a Belgian port.[633]

6.17 Summary

Political and economic changes within the period were noteworthy with four general elections and devaluation having their influence on travel, trade and investment. Nevertheless consolidation resulted in the coming together of Townsend and Thoresen, and a closer working relationship between the railway companies, changes that were further motivated by more serious discussions about a fixed link. Further challenge in the form of two newcomers, Olau and Sally and the increased prominence and attraction of the hovercraft were somewhat tempered by increased traffic and improved returns in all sectors which, towards the end of the period considered, culminated in the right environment to dispose of Sealink to a supposedly more commercial private sector. The period concludes with an industry punctuated by the tragic loss of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, a wake-up call and one that was to have sobering effect.

Source: Dover Counselling Centre: A registered charity set up as the Herald Assistance Unit in order to deal with the aftermath of the ferry disaster and its affect on survivors and relatives of those lost in the tragedy.

[633] Average freight vehicle weights are also higher from mainland Europe to the United Kingdom than they are in the opposite direction.

Chapter 7:
Conclusion

The *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster represented a serious setback for the ferry industry. As well as damaging publicity which affected all operators, the entire principle of roll-on, roll-off that had done so much to streamline passenger travel and the carriage of freight was called into question. Relatively few vessels were ordered in the five years that followed the tragedy as ferry owners and operators feared that the rule book might be altered during the period of construction, a distinct possibility that could only result in the need for expensive refitting.[634] But this matter was but one of two affecting the ferry industry in terms of investment and construction at this time, and if the *Herald of Free Enterprise* episode can be said to represent a closing of the circle that had been opened with the *Princess Victoria* episode, the second, likewise, can be represented as a closing of a second circle, and one that was in the long term infinitely more important in terms of the ferry industry and its operations.

For the best part of nearly two hundred years there had been various proposals to link Britain and France by means of a tunnel, the most obvious being the abortive attempts of the 1960s and 1970s. But the proposed link between Britain and mainland Europe took an unprecedented step toward reality on 12 February 1986 when the Anglo-French Treaty of Canterbury was signed, the process of boring starting on 15 December 1987 on the part of the successful tender, Eurotunnel Group. Ferry operators, and the key ports of Dover and Calais in particular were understandably nervous and without exception attempted to assess the impact that a fixed link would have on surface travel. Many studies ensued on an individual company basis and jointly under the lobbying organisation banner of Flexilink. Many private appraisals were also undertaken, most coming to the same, what might seem obvious conclusion as Flexilink that roughly 50% of cross-Channel wheeled traffic, comprising cars, coaches and freight vehicles would be lost to the Tunnel.[635]

---

[634]This delay in the development of the conventional ferries did however create subsidiary interest in the car carrying fast ferry sector as catamarans were not influenced by the circumstances or resultant rule changes that emanated from the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster.

[635]Kay, J and Manning, A and Szymanski, S (1989) *The Economic Benefits of the Channel Tunnel.* Economic policy, 4 (8). Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, Centre for Economic Studies and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. pp. 211-234.

Originally planning had envisaged the construction of both road and rail tunnels but in the event only the latter was authorised, but while the first passenger cars were not carried on a shuttle through the Tunnel until 22 December 1994 from the time of the signing of the Treaty, the Tunnel, with its shift back to rail, represented profound change. It most certainly represented a modal shift in terms of a return to the primacy of rail, but more immediately it represented assured loss of future earnings for ferry operators with obvious implications for investment programmes and new construction. In an obvious sense the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster compounded the hesitation induced by the reality of a Channel tunnel.

The *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, the Channel Tunnel and the end of duty-free together represent ferry sector punctuation, and properly mark the end of a thesis that has concerned itself primarily with the conflicting forces of continuity and change. This is not to demean individuals or to represent them as merely mouthpieces of otherwise faceless or secretive organisations, but such individuals, while their importance and significance at various times and for differing reasons cannot be denied, have been worsted in these pages and for reasons that need no elaboration. The thesis covers a period of almost four decades, from 1948 to 1987, and this was a period of massive political, economic, social and technological change, the most obvious and significant being Britain's changed status and standing. In 1948 Britain was the third most powerful nation in the world and stood, with a largely intact colonial empire, opposite a war-ravaged Europe: in 1987 Britain was third in the western European pecking order. In 1948 Britain lived by manufacture and trade and it was a country complete with comprehensive public transport systems: by 1987 manufacturing industry was in decline, Britain was *en route* to a service economy and the aircraft and the automobile were increasingly important in terms of movement and foreign travel.

In terms of the ferry industry this latter development probably represents the most important single change of this period. The shift of priority from passenger to vehicle manifested itself in a series of changes, the most obvious being the ferries *per se* and the ports from which they operated. Riveted ship construction gave way to welded, steam propulsion to diesel and slender, liner vessels capable of speeds that exceed today's capability to broader vessels with significantly higher deadweight carrying

capacity that enabled the carriage of cars and freight vehicles. Shore side the evolution, or perhaps revolution, was no less severe. Slender port facilities that needed to accommodate a vessel and parallel rail track gave way to an entirely new configuration which allowed for the parking of unprecedented numbers of automobiles and trucks.

This is not to suggest uniformity of development or that change manifested itself across the whole of the ferry industry at the same time. The Irish Sea sector was largely shielded from such changes in the 1950s and 1960s primarily because of the Railways stranglehold on the northern, central and southern Corridors, but elsewhere the situation was different; the change to vehicular traffic was accompanied by the emergence of new operators that spelt the end of primacy of the railways in the ferry industry. The most obvious and immediate of these developments came as early as 1953 at which time Dover's Eastern Docks had been developed principally for vehicular traffic and where Southern Region was thrown into immediate conflict with Townsend.

In a very obvious sense the vehicle revolution brought an end to what had been probably the most stable period of the ferry industry, an era when ship scheduling was dictated by train timetables. But the arrival of new operators and impressive passenger and freight growth during the 1960s and 1970s ushered in a period of rising operating costs and an increased competitive edge that placed market share ahead of profitability. In this process the rail sector did not fare well, and in many ways its failure to properly anticipate the change that the automobile was to bring about was a major factor in handing the baton to Messrs. Townsend and Thoresen who came complete with working practices and marketing techniques that emphasised the differences between their companies and what the Railway had to offer. In no case were the differences between the new operators and British Railway more evident than with vessel livery or, more evidently, their respective workforces where the lower average age of employees with the newcomers played a large part in progress and resultant delivery of an altogether new style of service delivery. The Railway workforce was older and considered a job for life with promotion based on seniority rather than ability. Townsend and Thoresen avoided historic baggage and were able to

employ the best at pay rates that engendered commitment and rewarded a vastly improved work ethic.

Hindsight is an exact science but it is difficult to understand why the concept of roll-on, roll-off was not fully recognised by the Railway hierarchy before Bustard's Atlantic Steam Navigation (ASN) was privatised in the mid-1950s. Had the company been retained as part of the nationalised family the development of freight movements could have been somewhat different especially as in the fullness of time it was soon proven that car ferries could not survive without vehicle deck accommodation for freight, but in one aspect of operations the Railway proved the equal of private competition. The foray into new technology in the form of the hovercraft was adventurous, some might even say high risk or foolhardy even though in the final analysis the hovercraft concept turned out to be an interesting and customer friendly use of capital. Furthermore, the fact that Seaspeed made the decision to stretch two hovercraft in contrast to the private Hoverlloyd, which instead ordered two new vessels, enabled this novel, closest competitor to the Channel Tunnel to continue for nearly two decades after the amalgamation of the two organisations.[636]

As noted elsewhere, the hovercraft sector was eventually closed primarily as a result of the competition of the Channel Tunnel, but it was not the only victim of the newcomer. Folkestone, which preceded Dover in terms of being a railway town and packet port, along with Sally Line at Ramsgate, ceased to operate ferries in 1998 while Dover lost its P&O Ferries service to and from Boulogne in 1993. S.N.C.F. ended its services after the Channel Tunnel was opened in 1994 in which year Regie voor Maritiem Transport moved its Ostend service to Ramsgate: in 1998 Stena Line and P&O merged their Calais services, and four years later P&O closed down its Zeebrugge service.

From the time that work on the Channel Tunnel began in December 1987, the ferry industry as a whole, and specifically the short sea routes and the smaller of their operators, were no more than the convicted man awaiting sentence. As it was, the Channel Tunnel marks a point in time of definite and definitive change. The ferry

[636]Seaspeed and Hoverlloyd were merged in 1981 under the trading style: Hoverspeed.

industry had started life as an extension to the United Kingdom's railway system developing in scale and capability to a point where by the mid-Eighties it had come of age, a position dampened by disaster and latterly the construction of yet another, but this time more permanent transport system, the Channel Tunnel. Virtually overnight, the Channel Tunnel and Le Shuttle accounted for half of cross-Channel traffic. Clearly, in one respect at least, the rail and ferry industry had all but come round in a circle although it is interesting to note that in part rail had the last word given that cars, coaches and freight, the very traffic that was the downfall of rail ferries, transit the tunnel on rails.

This thesis appropriately commenced with an overview of ferry services operating in 1950 and it is fitting therefore to conclude with a comparison of how the route structure had changed some 37-years later. There were of course changes, but not only to routes. Contrasting starkly with 1950, by 1987 foot passengers had become a hindrance to Sealink in that the business carried with it the remnants of contractual train connected obligations which on some routes conflicted heavily with the needs and relative impatience of ever growing vehicular traffic. From a route perspective little had altered on key pathways and credit must go to the early railway pioneers who very clearly selected port locations well. As testimony, Dover, Harwich, Stranraer, Heysham, Holyhead and Fishguard remain as key ferry ports while Western Channel routes and ports were long since assumed by others.

From a technological perspective the main challenge of fleet underfunding remained, a crucial aspect that allowed Sealink competitors in the form of Townsend Thoresen[637] to achieve primacy and along with others to encroach, a situation that hardly improved when Sealink reached private hands in 1984. Consolidation, company name and stakeholder changes occurred to varying degree throughout the period, a trend that was destined to continue as industry challenges grew ever stronger in tandem with a egotistical dimension which witnessed the importance of market share to the near exclusion of income and profitability.

>>>>>>>>><<<<<<<<<

[637] P&O from March 1987.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Manuscript Sources

The National Archives (formerly Public Record Office):

NRA 20946	*1914-1972: minutes, correspondence, memoranda, miscellaneous accounts, war losses records, new ship specifications*
AN83/12	*Railway Executive: Steamship Services and Register of Shipping*, 1948
AN13/391	*British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and Papers: Five Year shipbuilding programme, Jan 1949-June 1953*
AN11/1	*British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: Annual Reports and Accounts, 1948*
AN11/3	*British Transport Commission: Statutory Annual Reports and Accounts: 1950*
RA29/17/02	*British Transport Commission: Railway Executive*: Internal Correspondence, 1962
AN83/1	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951*
AN157/592	*Dover Harbour Board/British Railways internal correspondence dated 1October 1954*
RA29/17/02	*British Railways internal correspondence dated 8 February 1950*
AN13/1805	*British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence & papers, August-1948 to July 1950*
AN157/592	*Letter from Michael Brown, Assistant Editor Autocar Magazine to Dudley Noble dated 16 September 1954*
MT/24/4	*British Railways Press Release from Press Information Bureau, Waterloo Station dated 16 March 1949*
AN13/2031	*International Chamber of Commerce: report on barriers to international transport and travel 1950*
AN88/93	*British Transport Commission: Railway Executive: Reports: Freight traffic between Great Britain and Ireland: report of ad-hoc committee; Aug 1950*
AN13/1997	*British Transport Commission: Chief Secretary's Office: Correspondence and papers: Fishguard and Rosslare; Jan-June 1948*
AN157/77	*British Railways: Southern Region: Chief Regional Officer's Files: Train Ferry Vessels: Conversion to oil fuel 1948-1952*
AN83/1	*Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1950-1951*
AN83/2	*Railway Executive: Marine Committee records and statistics, 1951-1952*
AN83/3	*British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1952-1953*
AN83/4	*British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1953-1954*
AN83/5	*British Transport Commission: Marine Committee records and statistics,1954-1955*
AN83/6	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1955-1956*
AN83/7	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1956-1957*
AN83/8	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1957-1958*
AN83/9	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1958-1959*
AN83/10	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1959-1960*
RA29/17/02	*Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements, 1963-1967*
AN83/9	*Shipping Services Managers' Committee records and statistics, 1958-1959*
AN13/384	*Construction of new cross Channel steamers: includes information on various ships, 1948 June - 1953 Oct*
MT118/15	*Channel Tunnel Study Group: studies by engineering consultants; bridge over the channel or alternative tunnel system, 1957-1968*
AN157/590	*Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1949 Jan 01 - 1952 Dec 31
AN157/591	*Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry; legal and financial matters*, 1952 Jan 01 - 1952 Dec 31
AN157/592	*Dover Harbour Board: motor car ferry operating arrangements*, 1954 Jan 01 - 1964 Dec 31
MT/24/4	*London & North Eastern Railway Company. (V.S.06) - 9.1.48,* 13.2.48

MT24/4 *Applications for valuation of railway and canal securities under section 17 of the transport act, 1947*

MT157/36 *Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968*

MT144/116 *Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971*

MT124/904 *Shipping services: Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire; new ferry and other improvements; 1963-1967*

DK1/318 *Grimsby and Immingham: proposed terminal for Immingham; Gothenburg Goods and Passenger Ferry Services 1964*

MT157/36 *Atlantic Steam Navigation Co Ltd expansion into roll-on, roll-off ferries: discussion of effect on the parent company THC; 1963-1968*

MT144/116 *Dover Harbour Board: the Channel Tunnel and the port of Dover; diversion of traffic from ferry services 1967-1971*

MT144/437 *Ministry of Transport and successors, Channel Tunnel Division: Registered Files (CT file series); Channel Tunnel Working Group on Preliminary Phase results: copy of Channel Tunnel 1972 Studies Report; consideration of the report by the Channel Tunnel Studies Unit; notes of meeting*; 1972 Jan 01-1972 Dec 31

AN19/12 *British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1974*, 1975 July, pp16-17

AN19/12 *British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts* for 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979: July 1975 and successive years, pp. 9, 16-17, 22-23, 32-33, 34-35 and 30-31

AN19/16 *British Railways Board Annual Report and Accounts for 1978,* pp.34-35 and 73-78

AN179/140 British Railways Board: British Rail Hovercraft Limited: *Records; Dover Harbour Board agreement for proposed hoverport terminal: buildings, repairs to hoverports and delays with development of hoverport*; 1975 Feb 01 - 1977 Jun 30.

AN129/36 *British Railways: Chief Civil Engineer's Department: Correspondence and Papers; Dover to Calais and Boulogne: conversion of Holyhead Ferry I to increase commercial road vehicle capacity*; 1975

MT146/193 Board of Trade and Ministry of Transport and Successors: Consultative Marine (CM Series) Files; *TSS `Earl Siward' ex `Dover' O.N.307813, passenger and vehicle ferry for British Railways Board: watertight subdivision; drainage, scuppers and discharges, including comments on modifications following conversion to accommodate Ro-Ro (roll-on roll-off) container traffic*; CM 14981/13/05; 1964-1977

AN179/39 *British Railways Board: British Rail Hovercraft Limited: Records, Development of Seaspeed if Channel Tunnel is not constructed: investment proposals; suggested new harbour and facilities*; development of new craft and effect on Shipping and International Services Division; 1975 Jan 01 - 1976 Nov 30

CAB/129/110 *Report of the Rochdale Committee: Memorandum by the Minister of Transport*; 27 July 1962.

Contemporary Newspapers and Periodicals

Cruise & Ferry Info, ShipPax Information
European Ferry Scene, Ferry Publications, Narberth
Fairplay, Lloyd's Register - Fairplay Limited (transferred to IHS Global Limited May 2010)
Fairplay Solutions, Lloyd's Register - Fairplay Limited (transferred to IHS Global Limited May 2010)
Fast Ferry International, Fast Ferry Information Ltd. Winchester
Ferry World, Informa UK Limited
The Guardian, Guardian Media Group
International Freighting Weekly, Informa UK Limited
Lloyds List, Informa UK Limited
Maritime reporter and Engineering News, John E. O'Malley
The Motor Ship, Cumulus Business Media
Ships Monthly, IPC Country & Leisure Media Limited
The Sun, News Group Newspapers (News International)
The Times, Times Newspapers Limited
Seatrade, Seatrade Communications Limited

Parliamentary Papers

Record of Parliamentary Debate, *British and Irish Steam Packet Company Limited (Acquisition) Bill, 1965—Second Stage*, Seanad Éireann - Volume 58 - 10 March, 1965.
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *British Rail Hovercraft Ltd & Hoverlloyd Ltd - Proposed Merger* (1981), London: H.M.S.O. (ref:HC374) ISBN 10 237681 3.
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *European Ferries Ltd, Sealink Ltd - Report on Proposed Merger* (1981), London: H.M.S.O. (ref:65) ISBN 0 10 206582 9.
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, *Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services - A Report on the Supply of certain Cross-Channel Car Ferry Services*; Presented to Parliament in pursuance of Section 83 of the Fair Trading Act 1973. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 10th April 1974 (ref:14C809004)

Hansard

Channel Tunnel:
HL Deb vol 103 cc695-9 (9 December 1936)
HC Deb vol 356 c1299W (1 February 1940)
HC Deb vol 657 cc1319-20 (11 April 1962)
HL Deb vol 354 cc694-702 (12 November 1974)
HC Deb vol 98 cc1185-94 (5 June 1986)
Herald of Free Enterprise:
HC Deb vol 120 cc678-95 (24 July 1987)
Ports (Rochdale Committee's Report):
HC Deb vol 680 cc1297-372 (10 July 1963)
HC Deb vol 689 cc71-2W (12 February 1964)
Seafreight Freeway (fire):
HC Deb vol 134 cc197-200 (24 May 1988)
Sealink UK Limited:
HC Deb vol 64 cc313-20 (18 July 1984)

Published Primary and Contemporary Sources

Department of the Environment, *Transport and the Regions* Cross Channel Passenger *Traffic - Transport Statistics*, DeTR. London 1999
Drewry Shipping Consultants, *Cruise Ship & Ferry Costs in the 1990s - Impact of Safety (1993)*, London: Drewry Shipping Consultants
Drewry Shipping Consultants, *Feeder and Short Sea Container Shipping (1993)* London: Drewry Shipping Consultants
British Railways, *Sealink International Car Ferries - Advance Information 1973* Departments of State & Official Bodies. London 1972
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Transport Statistics*, DeTR. London 1989 & 1998
Department for Transport: Transport Statistics Publications: *Transport Statistics Great Britain 2008 Edition*; DfT London 2008.

Books

Alford, B.W.E., *Britain in the World Economy Since 1880 (1996), New York: Longman*
Anderson, G and Roskrow, B., *The Channel Tunnel Story* (1994), London: E & FN Spon
Barnett, C., *The Audit of War* (1986), London: Macmillan
Basnett, S., *Ferries of The Isle of Man - Past & Present* (1995), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Behrend, G and Buchanan, G., *Night Ferry - A Tribute to Britain's only International Through Train 1936-1980* (1985), St Martin: Jersey Artists
Bishop, C., *The Encyclopaedia of Weapons of World War II* (1998), New York: Metro Books
Blinder, A.S., *Economic Policy and the Great Stagflation* (1981), New York: Academic Press
Blue, A., *Norwegian Ferry Experience and Development* (1976), Oslo: Blue, A; s.l.s.n

Bonavia, N., *The Nationalisation of British Transport; The Early History of the British Transport Commission 1948-1953* (1987), London: Macmillan
Branch, A., *Elements of Shipping* (1996), London: Chapman & Hall
Breeze, G., *The Papenburg Sisters* (1998), London: Kingfisher Railway Productions
Breeze, G and Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Sally Line - The Complete Story* (2001), Ramsey: Ferry Publications
Bucknall, R., *Boat Trains and Channel Packets* (1957), London: Vincent Stuart
Butler, R., *Richborough Port,* Published on behalf of the East Kent Maritime Trust by Ramsgate Maritime Museum
Cameron, S., *Death in the North Channel: The loss of the Princess Victoria January 1953* (2002), Newtonards: Colourpoint Books
Chester, N., *The Nationalisation of British Industry 1945-1951* (1975), London: HMSO
Clegg, W., *European Ferry Fleets* (1976), Sandwich: Marinar
Clegg, W and Styring J., British Nationalised Shipping (1969), Newton Abbot: David and Charles
Clegg, W and Styring, J., *Steamers of British Railways* (1962), Prescot: T Stephenson & Sons
Cowsill, M., *Brittany Ferries - From the Land to the Sea* (1993), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *By Road Across the Sea - The History of Atlantic Steam Navigation* (1990), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Earl William - Classic Car Ferry 1964-1990* (1990), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries from Pembrokeshire* (1993), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries of The British Isles* (1983), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries of The Channel Islands - Past & Present* (1997), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries of The English Channel - Past & Present* (1998), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries of The Irish Sea - Past & Present* (1998), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Ferries of Portsmouth & The Solent* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M., *Fishguard-Rosslare* (1990), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Dyfed, J and Hendy, J., *The Fleet* (2009), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *A Century of North West European Ferries 1900-2000 (1999)*, Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Caledonian MacBrayne - The Fleet* (1999) Second Edition, Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *DFDS - The Fleet* (1998), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire - From Car Ferry to HSS* (1996), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Newhaven-Dieppe - The Car Ferry Era* (1994), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *North Sea Ferries - Across Three Decades* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Olau* (1990), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *P&O - The Fleet* (2000), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Sealink Stena Line - The Fleet* (1992), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Stranraer-Larne 1872-1995* (1993), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *Stena Line - The Fleet* (1997), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *The Hoverspeed Story* (1993) Second Edition, Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *The Sealink Years 1970-1995* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J., *The Townsend Thoresen Years* (1988), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and Hendy, J and Haalmeijer, F., *Harwich-Hook van Holland - A 100 Years of Service* (1993), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Cowsill, M and May, J and Mayes, W and Punter, M., *Ferries 2003 - Southern Europe Edition* (2002), Ramsey: Ferry Publications
Curwen, P., *Understanding The UK Economy* (1997), London: Macmillan
Danielson, R., *Railway Ships & Packet Ports* (2007), Truro, Cornwall: Twelveheads Press
D'Orley, A., *The Humber Ferries* (1968), Knaresborough: Nidd Valley Narrow Gauge Railways
Duckworth, C and Langmuir, G., *Railway and Other Steamers* (2nd edition)(1968)[1948], Preston: T Stephenson & Sons
Dudley, G. & Richardson, J., *Why Does Policy Change? Lessons from British transport policy 1945-99* (2000), London: Routledge
Floud, R and Johnson, P., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain; Volume III Structural Change and Growth, 1939-2000* (2004), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Floud, R and McCloskey, D., T*he Economic History of Britain since 1700 – Volume 3: 1939-1992* (1994), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Freeman, R and Shaw, J., All Change: *British Railway Privatisation* (2000), McGraw Hill, London
Gardiner, R and Greenway, A. (ed), *Conway's History of the Ship, The Golden Age of Shipping: The Classic Merchant Ship 1900-1960* (2000), London: Conway Maritime Press
Garrett, R., *Cross Channel* (1972), London: Hutchinson
Glynn, S and Booth, A., *Modern Britain: An Economic and Social History* (1966), London: Routledge
Goddard, T., *Pembrokeshire Shipwrecks* (1983), Sketty: Hughes and Son Publishers
Gourvish, T.R., *British Rail 1974-1997* (2002), Oxford: Oxford University Press
Gourvish, T.R., *British Railways: A Business History 1948-73* (1986), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Gourvish, T.R. *The Official History of Britain and the Channel Tunnel* (2006), London: Routledge
Grammenos, C. (ed), *The Handbook of Maritime Economics & Business* (2002), London: Informa Professional
Greenway, A., *A Century of Cross-Channel Passenger Ferries* (1981a), London: Ian Allen
Greenway, A., *A Century of Cross-Channel Passenger Ferries* (1981b) Second Edition
Greenway, A., *A Century of North Sea Passenger Steamers* (1986), London: Ian Allen
Hardy, R., *Beeching - Champion of the Railway* (1989), Shepperton: Ian Allen
Headrick, D., *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (1988), New York: Oxford University Press
Henderson, R., *Crossing the Channel* (1997), Peterborough: Maritime Heritage
Hendy, J., *Dover & Folkestone* (1983), London: Ian Allan
Hendy, J., *Fantasia* (1990), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Ferries Around Britain* (1985), London: Ian Allen
Hendy, J., *Ferries of Scotland* (1998) Volume Two, Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Ferries of Dover* (1993), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Ferry Port Dover* (1998), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Folkestone Boulogne 1843-1991* (1993) Third Edition, Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Lady of Mann - Last of the Line* (1990) Second Edition, Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *Sealink - Dover - Calais* (1989), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hendy, J., *The Dover - Ostend Line* (1991), Staplehurst: Ferry Publications
Hornsby, D., *Coastal Ships & Ferries* (1999), Hersham: Ian Allan Publishing
House, D., *Marine Ferry Transports* (2002), London: Witherbys Publishing
Hynds, P., *Fast Ferries* (1996), London: Lloyd's Business Intelligence Centre
Hynds, P., *Worldwide High Speed Ferries* (1992), London: Conway Maritime
Ikeda, Y and Takeda, T., *Car Ferries of the World '88* (1988), Osaka, Japan: Ships & Ports
Johnman, L and Murphy, H., *British Shipbuilding and the State* (2002), Ithaca, NY: Regatta Press
Jones, B and Keating, M., *Labour and the British State* (1985), Oxford: Clarendon Press
Lane, A., *Maritime Kent* (2000), Stroud: Tempus
Laybourn, K., *The Rise of Labour* (1988), London: Edward Arnold
Martin, N., *River Ferries* (1980), Lavenham: Terence Dalton
Maxwell, H., *The Canterbury Remembered* (1970), London: Spottiswode
May, J., *Greek Ferries* (1999), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Merrigan, J., *Car Ferries of the Irish Sea 1954-2004* (2004), Newtownards: Colourpoint Books
Mitchell, B., *North Sea Ferries - Ships of the Night* (1991), Beverley: Hutton Press
Mitchell, B., *North Sea Ferries* (1995), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Mitchell, B., *Superferries* (1987), London: Coastline
No Acknowledgement, *Ship Recognition, Dover Strait, The Ship Recognition Corps*
Ogilvie, A., *Inside Olau - The Life & Death of a Ferry Company 1974-1994* (1994), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
O'Mahoney, B., *Newhaven-Dieppe 1825-1980 - History of Anglo-French jv* (1981), Stowmarket: Cappella
Phillips, S., *Market Forecast for High-Speed Marine Craft* (2000), Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group
Plummer, R., *Super Ferries of Britain, Europe & Scandinavia* (1988), Wellingborough: Patrick Stevens
Ringe, A et al, *Economic Policy under the Conservatives, 1951-64* (2004), London: Institute of Historical Research
Ripley, D and Rogan, T., *Designing Ships For Sealink* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Robbins, N., *Evolution of the British Ferry* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Robins, N., *The Evolution of The British Ferry* (1995), Kilgetty: Ferry Publications
Robins, N., *Turbine Steamers of the British Isles* (1999), Newtonards: Colourpoint Books
Roche, T., *Ships of Dover Folkestone Deal & Thanet* (1959), Southampton: Adlard Coles

Simmonds, J and Biddle, G., *British Railway History* (1997), Oxford: Oxford University Press
Simmonds, J and Biddle, G., *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History: from 1603 to the 1990s* (1997)
Sinclair, R., *Across the Irish Sea* (1990), London: Conway Maritime Press
Sissons, M and French, P., *Age of Austerity: 1945 - 1951* (1963), London: Hodder and Stoughton
Smith, C., *In Fair Weather and in Foul - 30 Years of Scottish Passenger Ships* (1999), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Smyth, H., *The B&I Line* (1984), Dublin: Gill and MacMillan
Stopford, M., *Maritime Economics* (1997) Reprinted 1999, London: Routledge
Streater, R., *Cross Channel Ferries From Kent* (1978), Sandwich: Marinart
The Board, T*he Norse Way - A study of Norwegian Ferry Operations* (1997), Highlands & Islands Development Board - Policy & Research Division
Vaughan, A., *Railway Blunders* (2003), London: Ian Allen
Widdows, N., *Car Ferries from Great Britain and Ireland '85* (1985), Whitstable: Nick Widdows
Widdows, N., *Ferries of The British Isles & Northern Europe* (1999), Narbeth: Ferry Publications
Wild, G., *An Overview of International Ferry Operations* (1993), Haywards Heath: G.P. Wild (International)
Wilson, H., *The Labour Government 1964–1970* (1971), London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson
Winser, J de S., *British Cross-Channel Railway Passenger Ships* (1994), Yeovil: Patrick Stevens
Wolmar, C., *On the Wrong Line* (2004), London: Aurum Press
Yates, N., *Kent in the Twentieth Century* (2001), Woodbridge: Boydell Press
Yercan, F., *Ferry Services in Europe* (1999), Aldershot: Ashgate

Articles

Dahl, E., "*Naval innovation: from Coal to Oil*" (2000), Joint Forces Quarterly, National Defence University
Kay, J and Manning, A and Szymanski, S (1989) *The Economic Benefits of the Channel Tunnel*. Economic policy, 4 (8). Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, Centre for Economic Studies and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. pp. 211-234.
Stigler, J., "*The Development of Utility Theory*" The Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 58, No. 5 (Oct., 1950), Columbia: Columbia University

Reference Material - Published Annually

House, D., *Marine Ferry Transports* (2002), London: Witherbys
Brogren, K., *ShipPax Finance* (2000-2009), ShipPax Information/Supplement to Statistics
Brogren, K., *ShipPax Guide* (2000-2009), ShipPax Information
Brogren, K., *ShipPax Highspeed* (2000-2009), ShipPax Information
Brogren, K., *ShipPax Statistics* (2000-2009), ShipPax Information

Glossary of Terms

AA Max	A calculated percentage value placed on ferry residual stability in the event of water on the vehicle deck
Aft	The rear part of the ship
AHL	Associated Humber Lines
ALA	Angleterre-Lorraine-Alsace or more correctly: Société Anonyme de Navigation
ASN	Atlantic Steam Navigation Company
Astern	Towards the rear of the ship or 'going astern', to go backwards
B&I Line	British & Irish Steam Packet Company
Beam	The width of the ship
Belgian Marine	Regie Voor Maritiem Transport Belge
Bow	The front of the ship
Bow rudder	Used to steer ships when approaching a berth stern first
Bow thruster	A transverse mounted propeller in the fore part that enables the ship's bow to move sideways
Bow visor	The bow profile that covers the forward vehicle deck opening
BR	British Railways, restyled British Rail from the early Sixties
BTC	British Transport Commission
Camber	The corner of Eastern Docks, Dover where the Eastern Arm (breakwater) meets the hard standing area
Central Corridor	The central Irish Sea region normally associated with the route Holyhead-Dublin and Holyhead-Dun Laoghaire
Clam doors	The bow closure used on some RoRo and RoPax vessels and notably on Townsend Thoresen ships such as the *Herald of Free Enterprise*
Classic passenger	A foot or rail based passenger
Cross Channel	An expression to describe route transit, although latterly the phrase that epitomises the short routes from the Southeast coast of the United Kingdom
DCC	Dover Counselling Centre
DFDS	Det Forenede Dampskibs-Selskab A/S
DHB	Dover Harbour Board
Drive-on, drive-off	Another description of the RoRo method of loading and discharge of a ships vehicle deck; sometimes referred to as ‘Drive through’
EFL	European Ferries Limited., the holding company of Townsend Thoresen
Executive (The)	Railway Executive
FE	The shortened name for Townsend's newly constructed ships meaning '*Free Enterprise*'
For'ard	The forward part of the ship
Free Surface Effect	The destabilising influence of water ingress on a RoRo vessel’s vehicle deck
GSNC	General Steam Navigation Company
GT	Gross tons or Gross tonnage
GRT or G.R.T.	Gross registered tons or Gross registered tonnage

GWR	Great Western Railway
Hanging off wire	A wire used to pull vessels off the quay when pinned on by the wind and before bow thrusters were invented
Hoek van Holland	Hook of Holland
Hovercraft	A highly manoeuvrable and amphibious vessel used for the transportation of passengers and cargo that rides on a cushion of air
Hydrofoil	A craft that uses acceleration to rises above the water on legs thereby reducing friction
Intermodal	The concept of door-to-door transportation that utilises different modes of transport service
IoMSPC	Isle of Man Steam Packet Company
Knot	Nautical measurement of speed. One knot or nautical mile is 6,080 feet
Letter of Intent	A document that outlines an agreement between two or more parties before the agreement is finalised
Lift-on, lift-off	See LoLo
Linkspan	The bridge between ship and shore that allows drive-on, drive-off
LMR	London Midland Region
LoLo	The method of loading or discharging a ship by means of a crane
LSWR	London & South Western Region
M.S.	Motor ship
M.V.	Motor vessel
N.U.S.	National Union of Seamen
Nautical mile	6,080 feet or 1,852 metres. Abbreviated as NM or Nm
NER	North Eastern Region
Northern Corridor	The Irish Sea region normally associated with ferry routes to Northern Ireland from Stranraer and Heysham
Oostende Lines	See Belgian Marine
P&O	P&O Ferries Limited, latterly P&O European Ferries Limited
Paquet or Packet	A ship that carried mail or post
Pax	Shortened version of the word passenger
RE	Railway Executive
RoRo	Roll-on, roll-off, the method by which vehicles are embarked and disembarked
Screw	Propeller
Set	Train capacity equal to 700, hence most railway ships were capable of carrying two 'sets' or 1,400 passengers
Short Sea	An expression to describe a short crossing, more latterly the Dover Straits
SMZ	Stoommvaart Maatschappij Zeeland or Zeeland Line
SNCF or S.N.C.F.	Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Français. Chemins de Fer de l'Ouest (operators of Newhaven-Dieppe) were a constituent part of the original State Railway
Southern Corridor	The southern Irish Sea region normally associated with ferry services from Fishguard to Rosslare and those to Cork
SR	Southern Region or Scottish Region
S.S.	Steamship

Stockholm Agreement	The culmination of years of discussion and calculation appertaining to RoRo vessel stability following the *Herald* disaster
Swedish Lloyd	Rederiaktiebolaget Svenska Lloyd
Townsend	Townsend Brothers Car Ferries Limited formerly Townsend Brothers Shipping Limited (formed 1889)
T.S.	Turbine steamship or Turbine steamer
TT	Townsend Thoresen Car Ferries Limited
Windage	Windage is the air draft of a vessel that acts as a sail area in high winds thereby influencing manoeuvrability