

On Saturday 10 February 1923, the *Berengaria* set sail from Southampton for New York carrying an entirely new cargo; the machinery, materials and men to create a daily edition of the *Daily Mail* for the ship's passengers.

What made this so revolutionary was that the day's news would be transmitted to the ship wirelessly from Britain and America, wherever it was in the Atlantic. The newspaper's on-board staff would then work through the night to write-up the stories, typeset and print them, so a crisp edition of the *Daily Mail* Atlantic Edition could be waiting at passengers' breakfast tables.

This occasion was trumpeted with much fanfare. As described in an article from the 6 February 1923 edition of the *Daily Mail*, entitled 'How Ocean Newspaper Will Be Produced With Your Breakfast', 'from next Saturday The *Daily Mail* will be published daily in London, Manchester, Paris AND ON THE ATLANTIC' (their caps).¹ One can almost hear the enthusiastic expletives before the word 'Atlantic'.

Origins

First announced in the London edition of the *Daily Mail* on 12 January 1923, the Atlantic Edition was described as helping to 'foster and maintain cordiality between the United States and Great Britain in international commercial social relations'. Behind this grandiose post-war rhetoric lay thinking that was pure Lord Northcliffe.

Northcliffe had already established the *Daily Mail* Continental Edition, printed in Paris. Ostensibly aimed at the British ex-pat community, this had arguably been set up so that Northcliffe himself could get a copy of his own paper when holidaying in France. The Atlantic Edition no doubt equally stemmed from a similar frustration about the absence of news during the five-day voyage across the Atlantic - for business and political leaders of the day, the lack of detailed news must have been agonizing. Northcliffe saw a gap in the market.

In the 1920s, what made a newspaper a commercial success was the ability to attract advertisers. The five-day voyage provided a captive audience for a newspaper, and as one of the *Daily Mail*'s own correspondents put it, 'a specially promising character was given to the venture by the fact that among these were many wealthy Americans on their first visit to Europe.'² For 'wealthy', read 'millionaires'. It is noticeable that in all the early press releases, the availability of stock exchange data is highlighted as a key selling point:

Important British and American market prices and exchange rates will be quoted each day, a feature which will be of special value to business men.³

In addition to the ordinary events of the day, The *Daily Mail* Atlantic Edition gives a comprehensive list of movements in the most important sections of the British, American and European markets as well as the daily fluctuations in the world's exchanges. Men of affairs in these floating cities find themselves under no

handicap when transacting urgent business by wireless with the help of the world's commercial news supplied each morning.⁴

For the boutiques of Paris, the tailors of Savile Row and hotels as far away as Norway, this Atlantic readership was a dream, and they quickly signed up to advertise in the paper. By striking an exclusive deal with the Cunard Line, and its sister company the Anchor Line from 1924, the *Daily Mail* had managed to corner a niche but extremely lucrative pocket of the industry.

An Instant Success

Northcliffe died in 1922, before he could see his great plan enacted. However, it was an instant success, with issues usually selling out. Perhaps the genius lay in the deliberate restriction on circulation. The larger liners (the *Berengaria*, the *Aquitania* and the *Mauretania*) typically had 3000 passengers each, but the print run of the Atlantic Edition was 600 copies daily. This made the paper an instant sell-out, as illustrated by the *Straits Times*:

For a subscription of 1s 3d passengers can reserve a copy each morning during the whole voyage. Those who neglect to take subscriptions may buy it from ship's news boys for 3d., but they run the risk of finding it 'sold out'. The usual experience is to find it sold out each day. The demand, in fact, has been greater than could have been predicted, and, accordingly, new printing presses, running at a higher speed, will be installed.⁵

The venture was initially restricted to nine ships; the three large liners mentioned above and six smaller ships: *Caronia*, *Scythia*, *Carmania*, *Laconia*, *Samaria*

and *Tyrrhenia* (later renamed the *Lancastria*). Success encouraged expansion, and the Atlantic Edition was later published on two additional Cunard ships and seven ships from the Anchor Line.⁶

Printing on board Ships

Before getting caught up in the *Daily Mail*'s own hyperbole, it is worth noting that printing on board ships was, in of itself, nothing new. Presses had been installed on ships during the American War of Independence, primarily to produce notices.

Even the process of transmitting news to a ship by radio or wireless was not a novel concept by 1923. In 1899 Guglielmo Marconi, the pioneer of wireless telegraphy, was on the *SS St Paul*, travelling from North America to England. He made preparations in advance to receive news of the Boer War, via the Marconi Company in London, before the ship docked in Southampton. As the *St Paul* approached the Isle of Wight, news of the war was communicated by wireless. It was apparently the Captain's idea that the messages be preserved and printed in the first edition of a new ship's paper. The result was the *Transatlantic Times*, a single-page newspaper sold on board for a dollar and autographed by Marconi himself.⁷

Other ships followed suit, and by 1903 the Cunard liners were publishing the *Cunard Daily Bulletin*, initially once per voyage and between four and twelve pages in size.

So what made the *Daily Mail* Atlantic Edition special? The on-board newspapers up to 1923 had contained little more than advertising and bulleted news updates from the wireless operator. These were not 'newspapers' in the modern sense. So while the concept of receiving wireless news in the Atlantic was not new at this point, typesetting it and arranging it in the layout of a modern paper certainly was. Added to this was the large amount of feature content that each issue of the Atlantic Edition would contain, including special cartoons by 'Poy' and 'articles of distinctive interest to a floating cosmopolitan public.'⁸ In the words of a *Daily Mail* journalist, 'newspapers need more than a supply of "hot news" if they are to be complete. Such elements as "features" and "background stuff" are necessary as constituent parts of a modern daily paper.'⁹

The Editor in Chief of the Atlantic Edition was in charge of supplying this advance feature material to fill up the space that would not contain wireless news. When heading to Britain, this advance matter consisted of general articles, entertainment, leader articles, fashion, and news stories taken from recent issues of the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening News* and the *Sunday Dispatch*. Heading in the other direction, much of the news would be culled from the New York press, especially the Sunday editions. In either direction, the skill of the editors lay in selecting stories that readers were unlikely to have seen before, and that would not be embarrassingly out-of-date before being read at a mid-Atlantic breakfast table.

The Process

Wireless news was transmitted to the ships four or five times during the day and night from wireless stations in Leaffield (Oxfordshire), Chatham (Massachusetts), and from the Foreign Office. These messages were received by an operator on the ship, who would then pass them on to the entrenched Atlantic Edition editor. Weather could interfere with communications, causing bad static, and messages from the wireless room could sometimes be infuriating:

Premier made important statement regarding ... QRM ... in Commons today ... QRM ... deeply regret to announce death of ... QRM ... [QRM being radio-speak for interference.]¹⁰

Operators would contact other ships outside the storm area to see if they could fill in gaps, but sometimes this was not possible, and issues of the Atlantic Edition therefore occasionally have a blank column or two explaining that weather had halted the news.

The installation of linotype machines on the ships was the technical innovation that made the Atlantic Edition possible. Whereas traditionally typesetters would have to set the text by hand, letter by letter, a linotype machine allowed the operator to use a keyboard that mechanically selected the letters for him. After each line of text was assembled, a metal cast of the line, known as a 'slug', would be taken and was then used to compose the columns and pages in readiness for printing.¹¹

Linotype machines had never been used on board a liner before, and before launching the Atlantic Edition

ingenious tests were conducted on land to replicate conditions at sea, to ensure the technology would function adequately. As reported in the *Straits Times*:

A working linotype machine was placed on rollers with the operator lashed to his chair, and four men gave a vigorous imitation of a ship pitching. Then it was slewed around and a rolling test applied. As the operator still kept control of his keyboard and levers, and as the molten metal stayed in its steel pot without splashing, the test was held to be successful.¹²

History does not record whether the operator successfully kept control of his lunch as well.

News at Sea

Sometimes news could travel in the other direction, with the liners themselves providing stories to London. For example, in August 1924 the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) travelled on the *Berengaria* with his cousin Lord Louis Mountbatten. It was reported in the *Daily Mail* of 27 August 1924 that he 'danced for more than 2 hours', the story having been sent to London by wireless.

Other royal guests were equally feted on the liners, including Queen Marie of Romania. In a 29 November 1926 issue of the *Daily Mail*, it was reported she was having 'a wonderful experience on the Atlantic' and 'expressed astonishment at the perfect arrangements for publishing a complete, daily newspaper in mid ocean'. The same issue contained a reporting that the queen had received a message from her cancer-stricken husband, King Ferdinand, and that she was to

be named regent in the event of his death.¹³ Atlantic life itself could be the source of a global news agenda.

Prohibition

The convergence of the Atlantic Edition and the era of Prohibition in the US brought occasional culture clashes to the front pages. Unlike US-registered ships, the British liners could not be considered an extension of US territory, and could therefore be 'wet' ships. However, following new liquor regulations on 10 June 1923, once ships were within 3 miles of the US (and therefore no longer in international waters), they were expected to abide by US law, including the prohibition of alcohol. This was rather problematic for a business that was expected to provide liquid refreshment to thirsty guests on round-trip voyages. Five days on the return leg to Britain without a decent gin and tonic was something many passengers and crew could not countenance. A test case of the new laws took place on 23 June 1923, when the *Berengaria* docked at New York. Alcohol for the return voyage had been put in storage and under the seal of British Customs and Excise. In an article headlined 'Sealed Liquor on Two British Liners to be Seized Today', the *New York Times* reported that when the US customs officials boarded the ship, they found '101 3- 5 gallons of wine, 101 1- 6 gallons of spirits and 3888 bottles of ale, stout and lager beer' all sealed and intended for the return voyage. In addition, in a fine testament to British healthcare, they found 'a surplus medical supply consisting of 47 1- 6 gallons of wine, 29 5- 6 gallons of spirits and 150 bottles of ale and stout for the voyage back to Southampton'. What had happened to all the liquor designated for the outward journey to New York? According to the purser, it had all been consumed, 'and

the last bottle of champagne vanished at midnight when the *Berengaria* was approaching the American coast."¹⁴

As the force of the dry ship laws was felt, the ships responded accordingly. Ships travelling to New York had to use up their booze supplies before reaching US waters, although they could retain a small amount for medicinal purposes. For the captain of the *Aquitania*, according to the *Daily Mail* on 2 July 1923, this meant breaking open the return liquor supplies and distributing free beer and whisky to all passengers. However, the article goes on to lament that another liner was struggling to satisfy the new regulations, with the captain writing: 'We are doing the best we can ... A thousand passengers are drinking beer as fast as they can, but their capacity is unequal to the supply and so we are throwing overboard 20 barrels.'¹⁵

And what of the *Berengaria*, with its return journey supplies seized by customs? Evidently, in the face of crisis, the spirit of defiance could be found. The *Daily Mail* reported gleefully that although the ship left New York with only medicinal liquor on board, passengers brought their own, 'one man having 40 bottles of whisky in his luggage ... the result is the holding of cabin cocktail parties.'¹⁶

The End of the Atlantic Edition

As a symbol of the cultural dynamism, mania for travel and sheer extravagance of the Roaring Twenties, the fortunes of the Atlantic Edition were always bound up with those of the wealthy. So when things started to go badly wrong on Wall Street in October 1929, the demise

was inevitable. The Newspaper World of 14 November 1931 reported that 'due mainly to the slump in passenger traffic, the *Daily Mail* Atlantic Edition is to be discontinued from the end of the year'.¹⁷ In truth, the paper had been struggling for over a year, and what had once been a tidily profitable enterprise had quickly become a loss-making liability. American tourist-traffic had been decimated by the Crash, and European advertisers no longer found it advantageous to appeal to the few business leaders who were surviving the Depression.

By the time the world economy recovered after the Second World War, the great age of transatlantic cruises was at an end, with a new era of air travel making swifter journeys available to those who could afford to travel. No longer was a globe-trotting businessman at risk of living in a five-day current affairs black hole, and so the very need for the Atlantic Edition vanished.

In 1944 the *Daily Mail* tried a different strategy to capture American hearts and wallets, founding the Transatlantic *Daily Mail*, a digest of the London edition that was printed in New York for circulation in the United States. Although it claimed to be read by the 'influential section of the population' including President Truman, and with extracts syndicated to major papers such as the *New York Post*, it never achieved the same commercial success as the Atlantic Edition, and was quietly shelved in 1947.¹⁸

The Atlantic Edition has been largely forgotten to history, barely receiving a footnote in most accounts of

interwar journalism. Doubtless, this is because of a lack of accessibility; the issues are not held in any major library, including the British Library's newspaper repository. Indeed, the only known 'complete' set is held by the *Daily Mail* itself, and even this lay forgotten and water-damaged for several decades. By returning these remarkable issues to the world in digital format, it will finally be possible to appreciate this extraordinary enterprise once again.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Daily Mail* [London, England] 6 Feb 1923
- ² G Ward Price. *History of the Daily Mail*. 1946. Associated Newspapers. Unpublished typescript.
- ³ *Daily Mail* 6 Feb 1923
- ⁴ *The Straits Times* [Singapore] 29 May 1923: 3. Newspaper SG 8 Oct. 2012
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ *Daily Mail* 7 July 1924
- ⁷ "Wireless Telegraphy." *Times* [London, England] 16 Nov. 1899
- ⁸ *Daily Mail* 7 July 1924
- ⁹ Ward Price
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*
- ¹¹ Captain E. G. Diggle. *The Romance of a Modern Liner*. Sampson, Low, Marston & Co: London, 1938.
- ¹² *Straits Times* 29 May 1923: 3
- ¹³ *Daily Mail* 29 Nov 1926
- ¹⁴ *New York Times* 23 June 1923
- ¹⁵ *Daily Mail* 2 July 1923
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *The Newspaper World* [London, England] 14 Nov 1931: 14
- ¹⁸ Ward Price
- ¹⁹ "A 'Floating Town' with 'Flats'." *Illustrated London News*. 2 Feb. 1929

APPENDIX A: EDITORS OF THE ATLANTIC EDITION

William Caird	1923 - 1928
D Newall	1928
J H Edge	1928 - 1931
R H Morrison	1931

APPENDIX B: BIOGRAPHIES OF THE MAJOR LINERS

Aquitania

Launched on 21 April 1913 and sailed on her maiden voyage to New York on 30 May 1914. Aquitania was the third in Cunard Line's 'grand trio' of express liners, preceded by the Mauretania and Lusitania, and was the last surviving four-funnelled ocean liner. Widely considered one of the most attractive ships of her time, Aquitania earned the nickname 'Ship Beautiful'. The interiors were designed by the architect of the Ritz Hotel, Arthur Joseph Davis. The *Illustrated London News* described it as 'a floating town, for she is self-contained, and has her own hospitals, recreation spaces, police, bank, post-office, shops, libraries, swimming-bath, orchestra, and concert hall, with a host of other amenities'¹⁹

The ship saw service in the First World War as a troop ship and a hospital ship, and later in the Second World War as a troop ship.

Following the stock market crash of 1929, the Aquitania found herself in a tough position. Only a few could afford expensive passage on her now, so Cunard after 1932 sent the Aquitania on cheap cruises to the Mediterranean. These were successful, especially for Americans who went on 'booze cruises'. Scrapped in 1950, the Aquitania was the longest serving express liner of the 20th century, and the only major liner to serve in both World Wars.

Berengaria

Built as *Imperator* for the Hamburg-Amerika Line, its maiden voyage from Cuxhaven to New York was on the 20th June 1913.

The ship remained at Hamburg harbour for the duration of the war. On 5 May 1919 she was seized by the US navy as a troop transport and in February 1920 she was handed over to the Shipping Controller,

London as reparation for the sinking of the Lusitania and sold to the Cunard Line, where she became the company's flagship.

The liner was renamed Berengaria after Queen Berengaria, the wife of Richard the Lionheart, the resonance being that the queen never set foot on the land she ruled, just as the renamed ship never returned to the country where it was built. This was the first Cunard ship not to carry the name of a Roman province; the name still stayed with the tradition, however, of ships that ended with 'ia'. She entered service with Cunard in May 1922.

In August 1922 the liner struck a submerged object which damaged one of her propellers. Later the same year she lost 36 feet of guard rail in the Atlantic during heavy weather. For the next 6 years, however, the ship operated successfully on Cunard's express service in conjunction with the Mauretania and Aquitania, even featuring in the 'Beautiful and the Damned' by F Scott Fitzgerald (1922).

In later years, she was used for cheap prohibition-dodging cruises, which earned her the unfortunate nickname "Bargain-area".

On 3 March 1938 the Berengaria caught fire in New York harbour, and 4 days later she was sold for scrap.

Mauretania

Launched on 20 September 1906, the Mauretania broke several transatlantic speed records between 1907 and 1924.

She was designed to suit Edwardian tastes, with 28 different types of wood used in her public rooms, along with marble, tapestries, and other furnishings. Wood panelling for her first class public rooms was meticulously carved by 300 craftsmen from Palestine. The multi-level first class dining saloon was decorated in Francis I style and topped by a large dome skylight. A series of elevators, then a rare new feature for liners, was installed next to the Mauretania's grand staircase. A new feature was the Verandah Cafe on the boat deck, where passengers were served beverages in a weather-protected environment

Between 1915 and 1919, she was converted to a troopship and hospital ship. Damaged by fire at Southampton in 1921, she was rebuilt to 30,696 tons, converted from coal to oil fuel, and refitted to carry 589 first class, 400 second class and 767 third class passengers.

She was scrapped in 1935, but the demise of the beloved Mauretania was protested by many of her loyal passengers, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who wrote a private letter to argue against the destruction of the ship.

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