

# **A Major Scottish Tramp Ship and Cargo Liner Company: Andrew Weir's Bank Line-1875-2016. Part 1, 1875-1970.**

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*This article in two parts, the first from 1885 to 1970 and the second from 1970 to 2016 covers the history of a major Scottish tramp ship and cargo liner company, Andrew Weir's Bank Line through the era of sail and steam and the early adoption of the motor ship in the interwar period and beyond to an all-motor ship fleet. Beginning as a tramp sailing ship venture, Bank Line is notable in that it also embraced liner shipping relatively early in its existence. This dual character, plus early enthusiasm for motor vessels and oil tankers in tandem with family ownership, sets it apart from many British shipping firms and makes it worthy of extended study. We also cover the many associated companies of Bank Line's parent company, Andrew Weir Ltd., to give the reader a fuller perspective of where Bank Line stood relative to it. Owing to the paucity of extant records, we cover the financial aspects of the company during the Second World War and from the late 1970s onwards up to the renaming of the company as Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd. in 1988 to dissolved company status in 2016.*

*Le présent article est divisé en deux parties, la première allant de 1885 à 1970 et la seconde de 1970 à 2016. Il retrace l'histoire de la Bank Line d'Andrew Weir, une importante compagnie écossaise de navires de tramping et de charge à l'époque de la voile et de la vapeur, ainsi que l'adoption précoce du navire à moteur dans l'entre-deux-guerres et par après, jusqu'à la flotte de navires entièrement motorisés. Ayant*

*débuté comme entreprise de voiliers de tramping, la Bank Line se distingue par le fait qu'elle a adopté le transport maritime de ligne dès le début de son existence. Cette dualité, ainsi que l'enthousiasme précoce à l'égard des navires à moteur et des pétroliers, conjointement avec la propriété familiale, la distinguent de nombreuses compagnies de transport maritime britanniques et la rendent digne d'une étude approfondie. Le présent article aborde également les nombreuses compagnies associées à Andrew Weir Ltd., la société mère de Bank Line, pour donner au lecteur une perspective plus complète de la position de Bank Line par rapport à celle-ci. En raison de la rareté des mentions existantes, l'article traite des aspects financiers de la compagnie pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale et à partir de la fin des années 1970 jusqu'au changement de nom de la compagnie à Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd. en 1988 et à sa dissolution en 2016.*

## **Introduction**

This two-part article charts the history of a major Scottish tramp ship and cargo liner company, Andrew Weir's Bank Line, from its origins in 1875, through its numerous associated companies; its 1988 renaming as Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd., to its dissolved company status in 2016. By most measures, Andrew Weir's shipping ventures were remarkably successful. Bank Line had its origins in a single, 24-year-old iron barque purchased in 1885 yet grew to become a substantial fleet with some 275 sail, steam and motor ship vessels passing through its ownership, plus many in associated fleets. This was despite numerous departures from conventional British shipping industry practices, most notably in owning and operating a fleet of similar vessels interchangeable between tramp and dry cargo liner trades and also available for chartering to other companies. In addition, a considerable number of oil tankers were owned or managed, although these activities were curtailed after exceptionally heavy losses during the Second World War. Bank Line were early adopters of the motor ship, although for business reasons it operated a mix of steam and motor ships until the 1960s. The parent company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., through various iterations remained in essence a family firm. Up to the 1990s, the company never ordered ships from abroad, although some were purchased or built in other countries for subsidiary companies. As well as being a successful businessman, Andrew Weir became very well connected to, and highly respected by, figures in government and in industries beyond

shipping, including oil and communications.

In this study we aim to explore the history of the Andrew Weir group, and in particular to ask if and how the above factors contributed to its success. We also assess the organisation's significance in the context of British shipping history. The activities of its many associated companies are considered relative to those of the core shipping enterprise, Bank Line.

In pursuing this course, numerous challenges have been faced. Most significant is the paucity of surviving official records of the company. A continuing problem for the maritime economic or business historian is what happens to a shipping company's records when it enters liquidation, as did most British shipping firms by the 1980s and 1990s. Company liquidators are, by law, fixated on returning some compensation to creditors using the company's realisable assets, but do little or nothing to preserve the bulk of extant records. In the case of private limited companies such as Bank Line, what records remain open to the public, lodged at the London Metropolitan Archives in Clerkenwell, are largely disappointing; and the contents of boxes are uncatalogued.<sup>1</sup> This has been partly compensated for by reference to many diverse published<sup>2</sup> and unpublished sources.

As the academic maritime historians, Harlaftis, Tenold and Valdaliso noted in 2012, shipping has been the "invisible industry" in mainstream economic history and economics despite its crucial role in opening up markets and in the march to a global economy.<sup>3</sup> What they did not acknowledge was that, beyond academia, there exists a sizeable cohort of independent scholars who have enhanced our knowledge of British shipping firms and to whom academic historians owe a great deal. There are numerous short books and pamphlets on British shipping firms, many of which are publications on the long-established

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<sup>1</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, Clerkenwell, London (hereafter, LMA B15 and B19). The extant records which survive in these two classifications are a disparate collection composed mainly of ship photographs, containing nothing on the founding of the firm and associated companies, no reports or accounts save for the years 1977-1979, and a small tranche of Directors Minutes of Andrew Weir Shipping in a Minute Book post 1970. We thank the three anonymous referees and the Editor for their helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The published sources include *Seventy Adventurous Years: The Story of Bank Line, 1885-1955* (Liverpool, 1956; repr., *Journal of Commerce and Shipping Telegraph*), a company-penned celebration of its achievements. H.S. Appleyard, *Bank Line and Andrew Weir and Company, 1885-1985* (Kendal, 1985), ten pages of text the rest fleet lists. D. Haws, *Andrew Weir Shipping (AWS). Merchant Fleets in Profile No.41* (Cambridge, 2002). These books are very strong on describing the ships of the fleet but have little to offer on financial results or strategic decisions. There is also a self-published book by Captain Alistair MacNab, *The Shipping Wizard of Kirkcaldy: Andrew Weir's Bank Line* (Bookbaby, USA, 2018), 252 pages unencumbered by footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> G. Harlaftis, S. Tenold and J. Valdaliso (eds.), *The World's Key Industry. History and Economics of International Shipping* (London, 2012), 263-272.

World Ship Society model consisting of a brief history of the firm and a full list with constructional and career details of ships, whether owned, managed, operated in wartime, or chartered by the firm. There are also a number of more substantial and detailed company histories.<sup>4</sup>

Fleet lists are invaluable to shipping historians as they contain information on allegiance or otherwise to individual shipbuilders and engine builders, plus the age, size, type and longevity of ships operated. Patterns of purchase and sale are readily apparent from fleet lists and reveal strategies in relation to opportunities or difficulties in the market for shipping or wider historical events including wars. There are also a number of company-sponsored histories giving a fuller, if sometimes rose-tinted, history of the firm plus substantial works of individual or joint scholarship.<sup>5</sup> At another level are general histories of British shipping, all of which, with the possible exception of the re-publication of Sturmeay, are somewhat dated.<sup>6</sup> By using these sources, this article, attempts to give a fuller history of Andrew Weir's Bank Line than previous publications, and fills a lacuna in British shipping history on which others can build.

### **Context: The British shipping industry**

In classic shipping history, the British Mercantile Marine, the world's largest registered merchant shipping fleet until the mid-1960s, was historically broadly divided into cargo liner and tramp shipping sectors with the latter accounting for some sixty per cent of British tonnage prior to the First World War.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Britain entered that war with almost half of world steam tonnage.

<sup>4</sup> Of the former (short books and pamphlets), see for example: L. Gray, *The Ropner Fleet, 1874-1974* (Kendal, 1975); G. Somner, *Ben Line: Fleet and Short History* (Kendal, 1980); S. Rabson and K. O'Donoghue, *P & O: A Fleet History* (Kendal, 1988). And of the latter (substantial company histories): D. Burrell, *Furness Withy, 1891-1991* (Kendal, 1992), 248 pp.; and J. Clarkson, R. Fenton and A. Munro, *Clan Line: Illustrated Fleet History* (Preston, 2007), 344 pp.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: W. Vamplew, *Salvesen of Leith* (Edinburgh, 1975); D. Howarth and S. Howarth, *The Story of P & O. Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (London, 1986). Examples of individual or joint scholarship are: G.H. Boyce, *Information, Mediation and Institutional Development: The Rise of Large-Scale Enterprise in British Shipping, 1870-1919* (Manchester, 1995); S. Jones, *Two Centuries of Overseas Trading: The origins and growth of the Inchcape Group* (London, 1986); M. Falkus, *The Blue Funnel Legend: A History of the Ocean Steamship Company, 1865-1973* (London, 1990); and E. Green and M. Moss, *A Business of National Importance: The Royal Mail Shipping Group, 1902-1937* (London, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> A.W. Kirkcaldy, *British Shipping* (London, 1914); R.H. Thornton, *British Shipping* (Cambridge, 1959); S.G. Sturmeay, *British Shipping and World Competition* (1962; repr. with new introduction, University of Liverpool Press, 2010) and R. Hope, *A New History of British Shipping* (London, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Excluding the largely moribund US Reserve Fleet, the British registered fleet remained the world's largest until 1967 when relegated to second place behind the flag of convenience

Not only was Britain's Mercantile Marine the largest in the world (four times larger than that of its nearest rival, Germany), but it was also the most modern and efficient fleet.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, eighty-five per cent of British registered tonnage had been built since 1895 and in excess of two-thirds of the mercantile fleet since 1900.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, and pertinent to Bank Line, nearly ninety per cent of British registered tonnage traded overseas.<sup>10</sup>

Cargo liner owners undertake to run vessels to a fixed, advertised schedule. Their ships normally carried a wide range of relatively high value goods and had limited passenger accommodation. Tramp shipping invariably involved the carriage of a single commodity in bulk, mainly low-value raw materials, typically, coal, grain, nitrates, ore and timber. They operated to no fixed schedule, the rationale being to pick up cargoes when and where available to avoid voyages in ballast.<sup>11</sup> It was not uncommon for crews of tramp ships to not see their home port for a number of years.

Tramping, not least due to the large numbers of companies vying for trade, was an inherently risky occupation financially as freight rates, in particular their volatility, determined profitability after all operational costs were accounted for. Short-lived boom periods when freight rates were high often led to protracted periods of freight market depressions. Voyage costs had to be covered to continue trading until freight rates improved, thus the accumulation of adequate reserves and realistic straight-line depreciation policies marked out those companies such as Bank Line who could survive prolonged depressions

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Liberian-registered fleet.

<sup>8</sup> British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter BPP), Vol., XIII (1918), 473. Report of the Departmental Committee (Booth Committee) appointed by the Board of Trade to consider the position of the Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries after the War.

<sup>9</sup> D.H. Aldcroft, "British Shipping and Foreign Competition: The Anglo-German Rivalry, 1890-1914," in D.H. Aldcroft, *Studies in British Transport History, 1870-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1974), 53.

<sup>10</sup> H. Murphy, "The British Shipbuilding Industry during the Great War: A Contextual Overview incorporating Standardization and the National Shipyards, 1916-1920," *International Journal of Maritime History* 24:2 (2012): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/084387141202400203>.

<sup>11</sup> Originating in British shipyards in the latter half of the nineteenth century, tramp steamers had all but finished off their sailing ship forerunners by the advent of the First World War. Increasing in size and efficiency during the interwar period, the standard tramp steamer tonnage rose incrementally to around 5,000grt and post-1945 to 7,500grt and over, by which stage most were oil engined. For tramp ships generally, see: H. Gripiaios, *Tramp Shipping* (London, 1959); A.G. Course, *The Deep Sea Tramp* (London, 1960); B.N. Metaxas, *The Economics of Tramp Shipping* (London, 1971); P.N. Thomas, *British Ocean Tramps*, 2 vols (Albrighton, 1992, 1994); R. Craig, *The Ship: Steam Tramps and Cargo Liners, 1850-1950* (London, HMSO, 1980); and R. Fenton, *The Evolution and Significance of the Powered Bulk Carrier*, Research in Maritime History No. 56 (Liverpool, 2023).

in trade.<sup>12</sup>

Up to the mid-1960s the vast majority of British ship owners, cargo liner and tramp, remained loyal to the British shipbuilding industry, and most owners had bespoke linkages with individual shipyards. “Bespoke” often conjures up an image of a one-off product, be it a Saville Row suit made to measure, or luxurious furniture made to order. In terms of linkages, we can term the relationships between British ship owners and shipbuilders as bespoke due to the overall lack of widespread standardisation of product, which, barring the two world wars, was largely absent.<sup>13</sup>

In shipbuilding, the bespoke or high end of the market was undoubtedly passenger liners, particularly in the fitting out of the ship by an army of sub-contractors, architects, designers and various artisans. In terms of luxury, for the first-class passenger, the great passenger liners resembled grand hotels at sea. However, at the more prosaic working level of the typical nine-knot tramp ship, function, economy of operation, and carrying capacity trumped any pretension to luxury for these workhorses of the sea. Crew quarters were rudimentary, and conditions of work often dangerous and onerous in terms of long hours, monotony of diet and basic hygiene facilities. Conditions on long sea passages on Bank Line steamships were somewhat spartan as it was essential to preserve water for boilers. On one voyage in 1949 it was noted that water was strictly rationed for crew members to one bucket per day for ablutions drawn from the deck pump at 07:00 hrs each morning. At all other times, the pump was securely locked.<sup>14</sup> Not for nothing were two other Scottish tramp ship lines, Lyle Shipping and Hugh Hogarth & Sons universally known by seafarers as “Lousy Lyles” and “Hungry Hogarth’s”!<sup>15</sup> Cargo liners were a

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<sup>12</sup> Straight line depreciation is worked out by the original cost of the ship divided by the number of years of its useful life. For example, if the ship cost £100,000 and its useful life was determined as 20 years, then annual depreciation would be £5,000, which would appear as a cost on a firm’s profit and loss account.

<sup>13</sup> Standardisation during the Great War was rather late in the day but was more widespread during the Second World War, particularly in the United States’ Liberty Ship effort. See, for example: Murphy, “A Contextual Overview of the British Shipbuilding Industry,” 19-68; P. Elphick, *Liberty: The Ships that won the War* (Annapolis, 2006); and N. Robins, *Wartime Standard Ships* (Barnsley, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> “Profile, Captain A. Osborne,” *Bank Line Magazine*, clipping, misc. box, B15, LMA. Osborne’s first captaincy was as Master of the steamer *Garrybank* in September 1962 on Bank Line’s Oriental and African Line with a Chinese crew who signed on and off at Hong Kong.

<sup>15</sup> For Lyle Shipping, see, J. Orbell with E. Green and M. Moss, *From Cape to Cape: The History of the Lyle Shipping Company* (Edinburgh, 1978). There is no company history of Hogarth save a pamphlet version and fleet list, see, A.A. McAlister and Leonard Gray, *H. Hogarth & Sons Limited: A Short History and Fleet List* (Kendal, 1976), 56 pp., 11pp. of text, rest fleet list. See, also, H. Murphy, “The Bridge or Someplace Later! The demise of two Scottish deep-sea tramp ship firms, Hogarth Shipping Co. Ltd., and Lyle Shipping Plc,



The Doxford “Economy” type did much to convince British tramp ship owners of the advantages of motor ships. Although built round the builder’s highly successful three-cylinder opposed-piston oil engine, the majority of Andrew Weir’s orders for the type specified a conventional four-cylinder oil engine, as was the case with *Ettrickbank* of 1937. After 25 years in the fleet she was broken up in Hong Kong in 1963. *Ships in Focus*

notch up in the comfort scale and often took a limited number of passengers in cabins far removed from those who crewed the ship.<sup>16</sup>

Some standardisations in design and function did exist through series production of builders’ standard designs of tramp ships throughout the twentieth century. Good examples are the 182 “Turret” ships completed between by the River Wear shipbuilders, William Doxford and Sons and their licensees.<sup>17</sup> This builder also produced from 1935 their “Economy” shelter-decker based round their own three-cylinder, opposed-piston oil engine. Also built in the interwar period was the another “Economy” ship, this time a steamer sold on its fuel economy by the Burntisland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd., on the northern Forth estuary in Fife. Post-1945, the best example remains the Sunderland shipbuilder, Austin and Pickersgill’s so-called “Liberty Ship replacement,” the very successful SD14.<sup>18</sup>

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1960-1987,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, 34:3 (2022): 438-466, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08438714221110335>.

<sup>16</sup> No more than twelve passengers owing to British Board of Trade regulations.

<sup>17</sup> L. Gray, and J. Lingwood, *The Doxford Turret Ships* (Kendal, 1975).

<sup>18</sup> For Doxford, see, P. Richardson, *Wm. Doxford and Sons Limited, Shipbuilders and Engineers, Sunderland* (Aldington, 2019), and for Burntisland, see, Sir W. Ayre, *A Shipbuilder’s*

Standard or non-standard, British shipbuilding remained an atomistic industry: demand came from ship owners' and the builders supplied. Customers such as Andrew Weir's Bank Line could and did insist on certain design characteristics such as the internal layout of the ship to maximise carrying capacity, particularly important in the tramp trades if specialising in transporting one particular commodity. In many cases, bespoke linkages between owner and shipbuilder tended to be longstanding. Good examples from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are: Bank Line with Russell and Company of Port Glasgow; Peninsular & Oriental (P&O) with Caird of Greenock; Cunard with John Brown and predecessors at Clydebank; Ben Line and Charles Connell at Scotstoun; Edward Hain with John Readhead and Sons at South Shields; and White Star Line with Harland and Wolff at Belfast.<sup>19</sup> This was particularly the case when shipping lines owned shipyards: two examples being British and Commonwealth (a merger of Clan Line and Union Castle Line in 1956) building their Clan Line cargo liner and reefer fleet at the Greenock Dockyard on the lower Clyde, and Basil Mavroleon's London and Overseas Freighters who owned the Wear shipyards of Austin and Pickersgill and Bartrams.<sup>20</sup>

On the whole, personal relationships between ship owners and the managing directors of shipbuilding firms were crucial, not least because they were longstanding, but also timing of orders often coincided with economic realities. During upturns in demand, shipbuilders benefited in higher prices, but in downturns, although prices usually slumped to the benefit of a ship owner engaging in contra-cyclical ordering, they were also of some benefit to shipbuilders in keeping their respective workforces together and in spreading fixed overhead costs. Andrew Weir was particularly skilled in ordering to his

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*Yesterdays* (Aberdour, 1956). For the SD14, see J. Lingwood, *The SD14: The Full Story* (Preston, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> A prime example is the linkages between Alfred Holt and Company (Blue Funnel Line) and John Swire (China Navigation) with Scott's Shipbuilding and Engineering Co. Ltd. of Greenock. In 1917, Holt purchased one-third of Scott's ordinary shares at a cost of £366,640. Scott's had earlier designed Swire's Taikoo Dockyard in Hong Kong, completed in 1909 at a cost of c. £250,000 and secured on a 999-year lease. From 1868 to 1920, Holt ordered 57 ships and Swire 81, 41 percent of all contracts. Although Swire then built most of its ships at Taikoo, it still built at Scott's as did Holt (44 percent of all contracts during the interwar period) and thereafter. Holt's shares passed to Swire in 1953. Scott's last ship for Swire, its 99<sup>th</sup>, the bulk carrier *Eriskay* was completed in 1969. L. Johnman and H. Murphy, *Scott Lithgow: Déjà vu all again! The Rise and Fall of a Shipbuilding Company* (Liverpool, 2005), 5, 15, 89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619460601065867>.

<sup>20</sup> British and Commonwealth disposed of its last ship in 1986 and liquidated in 1990. London and Overseas Freighters gained compensation on the nationalisation of British shipbuilding firms in July 1977.



advantage in the mainly depressed interwar period at Harland and Wolff at Belfast and on the Clyde.

### Beginning in ship owning

Andrew Weir (1865-1955) was born in Kirkcaldy, Fife, the son of a cork merchant.<sup>21</sup> On leaving Kirkcaldy High School in 1880, he entered the banking profession with the Commercial Bank of Scotland. However, aged 19 years, he decided on a change of career and moved to Glasgow where he gained employment in a ship owner's office to give him some experience of the business. In 1885, Weir opened his own ship owner's office in Glasgow, as a partnership, Andrew Weir and Company, and began buying ships, first with the fourth-hand, iron three-masted barque *Willowbank* of 882 gross tons (gt), which remained in his control for a decade before being sunk in a collision at sea.<sup>22</sup> The name of the ship, given by its previous owner, inspired a naming scheme used by Weir and his successors for well over a century. (The name *Willowbank* was used four more times, the last for the final ship built for Bank Line in 1980.) Weir then built up a substantial tramp sailing ship fleet by ordering new vessels or purchasing through profits second - or third-hand, three-masted iron and later steel barques.



The steel four-masted barque *Beechbank* was completed by Russell and Company, Port Glasgow for Andrew Weir and Company in March 1892. She was sold to Norway in 1913, and was broken up in 1924.  
*Author's collection*

The majority of these new builds were from Russell and Company, Port Glasgow, a firm that regularly topped the Clyde tonnage output table.<sup>23</sup> Weir's orders moved from

<sup>21</sup> From the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and for a substantial part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kirkcaldy was known as the Linoleum Capital of the World. Cork was an essential part of the linoleum process. Kirkcaldy was also the birthplace of the noted moral philosopher and economist, Adam Smith (1723-1790), whose *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (London, 1776) remains a seminal text.

<sup>22</sup> *Willowbank* had been launched for Liverpool owners in 1871 by Wigham Richardson, Newcastle-upon-Tyne as *Ambrose*. She was lost as a result of a collision off Portland in December 1895 whilst carrying nitrates from Caleta Buena via Falmouth to Hamburg.

<sup>23</sup> *Glasgow Herald Shipbuilding and Engineering Supplements*, December 1885 to December 1918. In the years 1885 to 1918, Russell's headed Clyde tonnage output table on 30 occasions

iron to steel shipbuilding in 1889 with the completion of a three-masted barque *Hawthornbank* at Russell and Company, but he continued to purchase second-hand iron barques. Beginning with *Hawthornbank*, Weir contributed to what Robin Craig termed “the last great revival in sail” between 1890 and 1892,<sup>24</sup> with 12 three- and four-masted steel barques built in Clyde shipyards. Generally, these barques were built for long distance trades, such as the North American timber trade where cargo capacity was more important than speed. As a substantial ship owner, Weir, not uncommonly, lost several sailing ships in his fleet, abandoned at sea, disappeared or wrecked.<sup>25</sup>

Analysis of ownership patterns amongst the 45 sailing ships operated by Weir reveals that 42 were initially owned under the traditional 64<sup>th</sup> share system, with Andrew Weir identified as the managing owner, who had legal responsibilities for the ship. Two were originally owned by single-ship, limited liability companies, which Weir acquired along with the ships in question.<sup>26</sup> The third exception was the second-hand iron barque *Ellisland* bought in 1905 in the name of Bank Line Ltd.

Weir’s first acquisition, the barque *Willowbank*, was bought jointly with a Robert Barr of Pollokshields, Glasgow, himself a minor ship owner.<sup>27</sup> Registered in Glasgow on 27 June 1885, shares were sold quickly, and by the end of November there were at least 14 subscribers, and by the time of the ship’s loss in 1895, there were 40 shareholders, with six shares the largest number owned by one individual.<sup>28</sup> Andrew Weir and his father William Weir were left with just four shares each.<sup>29</sup> This pattern was followed in the case

and were second in two. And in 1890 and 1904 the firm headed the British tonnage output table.

<sup>24</sup> R. Craig, “William Gray and Company: A West Hartlepool Shipbuilding Enterprise, 1864-1913,” in P.L. Cottrell and D.M. Aldcroft (eds.), *Shipping, Trade and Commerce: Essays in Memory of Ralph Davis* (Leicester, 1981), 172.

<sup>25</sup> Of many examples, *Gowanbank*: 17 April 1896, abandoned off Cape Horn whilst on a voyage from Barry, South Wales to Iquique with a cargo of coal. *Heathbank*: 28 April 1900, sailed from Rio de Janeiro bound for Newcastle, New South Wales in ballast and disappeared. *Collessie*: 2 September 1901, wrecked on Coicoi Point, two miles north of Itata River, Chile whilst on a voyage from Newcastle, NSW to Valparaiso with a cargo of coal.

<sup>26</sup> These were *Isle of Arran* of the Isle of Arran Shipping Co. Ltd., bought in 1895, and *Gifford* of the Gifford Trading Co. Ltd., acquired in 1898.

<sup>27</sup> According to *Lloyd’s Register* for 1886 Captain Robert Barr owned the iron barque *Francis Thorpe*, 1,257gt, so had more experience of ship owning than Weir. In 1886 they shared an office address at 71 Waterloo Street, Glasgow.

<sup>28</sup> Although *Lloyd’s Register* refers to the owners of *Willowbank* and later Weir sailing ships as “Andrew Weir and Company,” British ship registration authorities did not recognise such unincorporated bodies as owners and would only record individuals or limited companies. Ownership details of *Willowbank* are from The National Archives (Hereafter, TNA) Kew, England in the classifications BT108/264 and BT110/86/91.

<sup>29</sup> It is surprising that William Weir took a shareholding in *Willowbank* relatively late, as he

of the first newbuild, *Thornliebank*, registered on 23 December 1886 with Weir and Barr originally holding all 64 shares but quickly selling these, so that shortly before her February 1891 fire in an Australian port there were 45 individual shareholders.<sup>30</sup> A later newbuild, *Comliebank*, registered 29 October 1890, was financed by Weir alone, but with the help of a mortgage from the National Bank of Scotland.<sup>31</sup> Just six months after her registration, 37 sales of shares had been recorded.<sup>32</sup>

Weir's preferred ownership model on the basis of 64<sup>th</sup> shares did not suit building of steam ships, where their considerably higher prices meant that the cost of a single share was beyond the reach of all but affluent individuals. Ownership by a limited liability company however, offered the opportunity to price shares more affordably, albeit with the need to sell more of them to provide sufficient capital. By the time Weir ordered his first steamer, *Dunerie* in 1896, the single-ship company was well established amongst tramp ship owners. The advantage of this method being that the company's liability was limited to its paid-up capital, which usually amounted to no more than the value of its only asset, its ship, which absolved its shareholders from any financial claims above this figure. From 1896 to 1905, all but one of the 13 new steamers for Weir were built for single-ship companies, the exception being the *Jeseric* of 1902 which was financed on the 64<sup>th</sup> share model.<sup>33</sup>

In his first move away from single-ship companies, Weir floated a limited liability company, the Ocean Navigation Co. Ltd., in 1899 as a vehicle to provide earnings for Weir's extended family through share dividends. Its four steel steamers built between 1899 and 1901 appear to have operated alongside the other ships which Weir controlled. In 1913 Ocean Navigation Co. was wound up<sup>34</sup> and its ships transferred to Bank Line Ltd.<sup>35</sup>

Weir ordered his first steel steam ship from the Campbeltown Shipbuilding Company: *Dunerie* (1,878gt), completed in 1896, with an engine built by Rankin and Blackmore, Greenock. Her crew, excluding the Master, First and Second Mates, and First, Second and Third Engineers and one rating all of

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might have been expected to have helped his son to purchase his first ship.

<sup>30</sup> BT108/265, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> BT110/277/45, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1855-1985*, Fleet List, 34-45. BT 110/545/14, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> *Edinburgh Gazette*, 30 May 1913, Ocean Navigation Company Limited. Petition to wind up and amalgamate with Bank Line Limited, 547. See also, BT2/4342, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, Dissolved Company Files.

<sup>35</sup> *Adato*, wrecked on Oshima in January 1909 on a voyage between Yokohama and Kobe. *Quito*, sold 1915, *Oceano*, wrecked off Kandafuri Island in July 1917 on voyage from Port Said to Calcutta with a cargo of salt. *Yeddo*, captured and sunk by U-boat on route from Calcutta to New York with general cargo.

whom were British, also comprised 46 Hong Kong Chinese seafarers.<sup>36</sup> Weir, as another Scottish tramp ship owner William Burrell did, would continue to crew his ships with Chinese seafarers, as in the latter case it saved about twenty-five percent in wages compared to their British counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the use of Chinese seafarers was widespread in the British shipping industry.<sup>38</sup> In June 1887, Weir's first steam ship ordered from Russell and Co. was completed as *Elleric* (3,570gt) and remained in the Bank Line fleet until 1916 when she was sold.<sup>39</sup>

Before he moved the head office of Andrew Weir and Company in 1905 from 102 Hope Street, Glasgow to 21 Bury Street, London, close to the Baltic Exchange (with the registered office remaining in Glasgow), Weir had opened a branch office at Royal Exchange, Middlesbrough in 1898.<sup>40</sup> During that year, in what was probably Weir's first experience of operating a regular or liner service, he had purchased the Dundee Shipping Company and renamed it the Forth Shipping Company. Neither of these were limited liability concerns, and ships were registered in the ownership of Andrew Weir and Company. Small, second-hand steamers provided a weekly service between Dundee and Middlesbrough, calling at Kirkcaldy, Grangemouth and Leith, and vice versa.<sup>41</sup> The last was sold in 1915, when the service was abandoned due to war conditions in the North Sea and not reinstated.<sup>42</sup>

From 1896 onwards Weir steadily built up his steamship fleet by second-hand purchases and by new builds with the suffix "eric," all owned by single ship companies under his management. Unusually for a tramp ship firm, from 1904 onwards Weir began regular liner routes when he joined the UK-Calcutta Shipping Conference (est.1875).<sup>43</sup> Weir later began non-homeward liner

<sup>36</sup> Steel Steamer *Dunerica*, BT400/3531/3,TNA.

<sup>37</sup> M. Bellamy and I MacDonald, *William Burrell. A Collector's Life* (Edinburgh, 2022), 79.

<sup>38</sup> R. Robinson, "The Introduction of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1906," *The Mariner's Mirror*, 95:3 (2009), 306, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2009.10657106>. Robinson cites the parliamentary record that as of November 1906, Alfred Holt's Liverpool-based Blue Funnel Line employed around 2,000 Chinese seafarers.

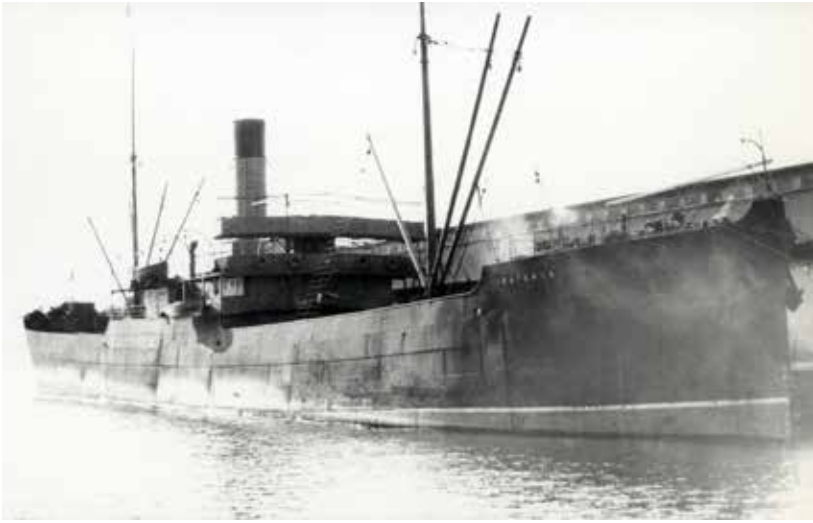
<sup>39</sup> Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1885-1985*, Fleet List, 36.

<sup>40</sup> The Baltic Exchange with its roots in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, provided the most important market for both charter and sale of ships. It dealt with charters for all types of cargo on any route worldwide.

<sup>41</sup> Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1885-1985*, Fleet list. Four small, second-hand steamers bought between 1898 and 1900 for this service have been identified as *Alert* (327gt), *Ruby* (481gt), *Burnock* (425gt) and *Perseverance* (253gt).

<sup>42</sup> MacNab, *The Shipping Wizard of Kirkcaldy*, 204.

<sup>43</sup> Original members were, Peninsular and Oriental, British India, City Line, Clan Line, Anchor Line and T. and J. Harrison (from 1884, the Charente Steam-Ship Co. Ltd.). Under Conference rules, Harrisons (outward and homeward members) were permitted to send a ship to Calcutta every 12 days, an aggregate of 30 voyages a year. F.E. Hyde with J.R. Harris and A.M



One of the earliest steamers in Weir's fleet, *Katanga* was built in 1901 by Russell and Company, who had completed many large sailing ships for the company. Photographed in December 1910, she was sold in 1916 and had two British and one Greek owner before being sold to Italian breakers in 1932. *Author's collection*

services from Calcutta to East Africa, South Africa, the River Plate and the west coast of South America. The South American liner services from Calcutta began in 1904. As a latecomer to the Calcutta conference, Weir's membership was in all probability due to his ships undercutting conference rates, meaning Weir was better in than out. Conference membership meant regularity of sailings and liner shipping was on the whole less volatile than tramp shipping, particularly if a member of a conference.

### **Bank Line Ltd.**

Conference membership may have encouraged Weir to form Bank Line Ltd. on 20 October 1905, with the first vessel registered under its ownership being the *Aymeric* (5,196gt), a steel steamship completed in November by Russell and Co. Many existing members of the fleet, both sail and steam, were transferred to Bank Line Ltd. ownership, as were the majority of further newbuilds and acquisitions.<sup>44</sup>

This private limited company was registered with Andrew Weir as

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Bourne, *Shipping Enterprise and Management, 1830-1939. Harrisons of Liverpool* (Liverpool University Press, 1967), 69.

<sup>44</sup> Although the late Harold Appleyard was a careful compiler of ship histories, his fleet list in *Bank Line, 1885-1985* does not always record such transfers.

Chairman, and Andrew Weir and Company as managers and principal shareholders.<sup>45</sup> Bank Line was therefore a family firm, and private limited liability status meant the company was treated as a stand-alone legal entity. Owners' liabilities are limited to their shares, and profits are shared between shareholders as dividends proportionate to their shareholding. Such a company is also precluded from offering an equity interest in shares traded on a public stock exchange, and investors' and owners' private assets, unlike in a partnership, are not at risk if the company fails.

From 1886 to 1912 when he purchased the second-hand three-masted barque, *Philadelphia*, a total of 45 vessels had passed through Weir's sailing ship fleet. By 1917, however, Weir had sold his last sailing ship, *Trongate*, which by then had been reduced to a hulk at Valparaiso.<sup>46</sup> The balance of Weir's



Bank Line's second investment in tanker tonnage, *Oyletic* was delivered by Hawthorn, Leslie and Co. Ltd. in February 1914. She remained in the fleet until 1937, when sold to Italy. In June 1940 she took refuge in Tampico, but was taken over by the Mexican Government a year later, only to be torpedoed and sunk in May 1942 whilst on a voyage from Philadelphia to Tampico. *Ships in Focus*

<sup>45</sup> Authorised share capital was £400,000 consisting of 200,000 £1 ordinary shares, 100,000 "A" preference shares and 100,000 "B" preference shares of £1 each. This was increased to £550,000 by the creation of 100,000 additional "A" preference shares of £1 each and 50,000 ordinary shares of £1 each on 15 May 1913. Company Registrar, Edinburgh. Information from Memorandum of Association as altered by Special Resolution passed on 30 November 1988, Bank Line Ltd. registered in Scotland.

<sup>46</sup> Iron barque of 987gt launched in April 1878 by Dobie and Company, Glasgow. Purchased by Weir in 1891, reduced to a hulk in 1909.

sailing fleet tilted towards acquisitions (24) against new builds (21). The last newbuild was the second *Thornliebank* in 1896, and the last acquisition being an iron barque, *Ellisland* in 1908, both of which met untimely ends.<sup>47</sup>

Aided by telegraphic communication, in addition to a network of agents, Bank Line branch offices were opened in San Francisco, New York, Buenos Aires and Hong Kong. Weir's tramping operation was worldwide and his head office's closeness to the Baltic Exchange aided his pursuit of commodity transportation. Nitrates from Chile, Argentinian grain, and sugar from Queensland became regular cargoes for his expanding fleet. By the outbreak of the First World War, Bank Line had an extensive network of services, and Weir had added to Bank Line's routes the American and Oriental Line with services between New York, the Straits Settlements, Hong Kong, Philippines, China and Japan.

In November 1913, Weir saw his first steam-powered tanker, *Desabla* (6,047gt), delivered from the Tyne shipbuilders and engineers, Hawthorn, Leslie and assigned to the American General Petroleum Company to carry oil on the US Pacific coast. She was later requisitioned for war service by the British government and was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat in June 1915. The First World War temporarily curtailed Weir's ambitions, but Bank Line continued to sell, build or purchase tankers and dry cargo steamers during the war years. From 1918 to 1921 Andrew Weir and Company also managed five steam tankers and four steamships on behalf of the British Government.<sup>48</sup>

### The First World War

During the war, Weir lost five ships to enemy action beginning with *Tymeric* captured and sunk by the German cruiser *Emden* on 25 September 1914 near Colombo and ending with *Aymeric* torpedoed by a U-boat on 3 May 1918 in the Mediterranean Sea. Weir sold two steel sailing ships and two steamships on a rising sales market in 1915 and in the following year sold a further seven steamships, including his first, *Duneric*, substantially aiding the firm's liquidity. This pre-empted general requisitioning of ships by the British government following the formation of a new Ministry of Shipping in December 1916, whose Controller of Shipping was a Glasgow ship owner, Joseph Paton Maclay (1857-1951).<sup>49</sup>

By this stage a ship owner of substance and considerable influence,

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<sup>47</sup> *Ellisland* sailed from Newcastle, New South Wales on 9 July 1910 bound for Caldera with a cargo of coal and disappeared. *Thornliebank* was wrecked on Crim Rock, Scilly Isles on 28 November 1913 on route from Pisagua to Falmouth (for orders) with a cargo of nitrates.

<sup>48</sup> Appleyard, Bank Line, 1855-1985, 164-167.

<sup>49</sup> Maclay was chairman of Maclay and Mcintyre shipowners, Glasgow.

Andrew Weir then served his country as Surveyor General of Supply at the War Office (stores and equipment, but not guns or munitions), as a member of the Army Council from 1917 to 1919, when as a result of his war work he became Lord Inverforth of Southgate. From January 1919 he served as Minister of Munitions in David Lloyd George's coalition government and as first Chairman of the Liquidation Disposals Commission to 1921 to run down that giant state undertaking and sell off surplus materiel. As Lloyd George later commented, somewhat archly, regarding his promotion of businessmen to high office, "these were men who possessed organising brains of the first order and whose services to the nation during the War have never been fully appreciated."<sup>50</sup>

Although Weir sold eleven ships on a rising market in 1915 and 1916, he did not sell the bulk of his Bank Line fleet at prices inflated by a scarcity of tonnage and worries over excess profit taxation. This was in contrast to two other Scottish ship owners, Sir James Caird (1864-1954) who owned the Scottish Shire Line and Sir William Burrell (1861-1958) of Burrell and Son who prefixed his ships by "Strath." Between 1915 and 1916 Burrell had sold 20 ships with the total revenue on their sale in excess of £2,500,000.<sup>51</sup> Between 1915 and 1918 Caird liquidated his assets in shipping and shipbuilding at an estimated sum of £1,500,000.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, Andrew Weir had also made substantial sums during the war, but remained an active shipowner.

## Oil

Along with his close associate, Lord Pirrie,<sup>53</sup> Weir recognised early the long-term potential of the motor ship, and with it the need to secure adequate supplies of bulk oil for his Bank Line fleet, both at terminal ports and for worldwide bunkering. Although the second ocean-going motor ship in the world, *Jutlandia* (4,874gt), had been completed in 1912 for the East Asiatic Company of Copenhagen at the Clydeholm, Glasgow shipyard of Barclay Curle, the development of the motor ship in Britain was a prolonged affair.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. 1 (London, 1938), 623.

<sup>51</sup> Bellamy and MacDonald, *William Burrell. A Collector's Life*, 92.

<sup>52</sup> H. Murphy and D.J. Oddy, "The Business interests of Sir James Caird of Glenfarquhar, Bt. (1864-1954)," *The Mariner's Mirror*, Centenary Issue, 97:1 (2011): 28 and 35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2011.10709030>.

<sup>53</sup> Pirrie's Harland and Wolff took out a licence in May 1912 to build Burmeister and Wain's pioneering marine oil engine. M. Moss and J. Hume, *Shipbuilders to the World, 125 Years of Harland & Wolff, Belfast* (Belfast, 1986), 156.

<sup>54</sup> Her sister ship, *Selandia* had been completed a few weeks earlier at Burmeister & Wain's Copenhagen shipyard. *Jutlandia's* Burmeister & Wain oil engines manufactured under licence by Barclay Curle ran on Scottish shale oil. She carried enough fuel in her double bottom to cover



Tramp ship and tanker owners largely remained wedded to steam propulsion, not least because of copious supplies of cheaper South Wales steam coal and a long established worldwide network of coal bunkering stations, but also the efficiency and economy of operation of the classic British tramp ship combination of the triple-expansion steam engine and the double-ended cylindrical Scotch Boiler which became ubiquitous from the 1880s.<sup>55</sup> Although the obvious benefits of the motor ship became generally well known, including lower fuel consumption in weight and space in comparison to coal, and saving on crew costs with no need for stokers, firemen and trimmers, and enhanced speed and convenience in bunkering, the high prime cost of oil engines compared to steam proved a deterrent, as did the lack of engineers with experience of oil engines. Moreover, steam powered tramp ships initially had a superior power to weight ratio in comparison to oil-engined ships. These factors plus the initial high price of oil and sketchy distribution of the product meant most British tramp ship owners happily stayed with coal. Weir, however, soon became involved in the oil trade through the vehicle of the British Union Oil Co. Ltd.

### **British Union Oil Co. Ltd.**

Weir, with Lord Pirrie (1847-1924) Chairman of Harland and Wolff, Owen Cosby Phillips of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and P.N. Anderson of the East Asiatic Company of Copenhagen were enthusiastic promoters of the motor ship.<sup>56</sup> Weir was also a major shareholder in two United States oil companies, Lyman Stewart's Union Oil Company of California and the General Petroleum Company of California, the latter in which he gained a controlling interest in 1913.<sup>57</sup> With Lord Pirrie, Weir also entered negotiations to purchase an option of a controlling interest on stock of the Union Oil Company of California, and to facilitate this outcome he formed the British Union Oil Co. Ltd. on 27 July 1914, with Pirrie, Lyman Stewart, P.N. Anderson, Earl Grey and Thomas Royden (of Port Line). A share prospectus issued at the end of

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30,000 miles at a speed of 11 knots. For the prolonged acceptance of the motor ship, see, G.R. Henning and K. Trace, "Britain and the Motor Ship: A Case of the Delayed Adoption of New Technology?," *Journal of Economic History*, 35:2 (1975): 353-385, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050700075094>.

<sup>55</sup> Designed and patented by two Scots marine engineers, Alexander Carnegie Kirk (1830-1892) and James Howden (1832-1913) respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Anderson's company ordered *Jutlandia* and two sister ships from the Burmeister and Wain shipyard in Copenhagen, one of which, *Selandia* has the honour of being the first ocean-going motor ship in the world.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, 15 November 1913. General Petroleum had an authorised capital of USD 50,000,000, with issued capital of nearly USD 35,000,000.

July explained that the rationale was to purchase a controlling interest, but also to supply, Union Oil of California with up to £2,500,000 in “cash capital” to allow expansion of its operations.<sup>58</sup> It was also noted that the completion of the Panama Canal created new marketing opportunities for Union Oil.<sup>59</sup> However, the outbreak of the First World War prevented a successful issue of shares to finance this and the option to purchase was abandoned leaving its promoters considerably out of pocket.<sup>60</sup>

Weir remained as Chairman of British Union Oil with Thomas Royden as his deputy. By 1918, the company’s authorised capital was £6,000,000, although actual £1 shares fully paid up amounted only to £700,515. Six per cent debentures of £900,000 were privately held by Bank Line and by other Weir companies.<sup>61</sup> Weir stepped down as Chairman of British Union Oil in 1919 owing to government responsibilities but in January 1924 again took the chair of the company. Although a share dividend of 7.5 per cent was declared in 1917, no further dividends were paid during Weir’s absence.<sup>62</sup> Although Andrew Weir retained control of Bank Line, he left the day-to-day running of the company to his only son, Andrew Alexander Morton Weir (1897-1975).

British Union Oil later invested substantially in exploration work in Trinidad and Barbados. In 1950, the company was assured that, by giving up the leases it already held it would gain a monopoly of deep drilling for oil within the offshore territorial limits of the colony. However, the Barbadian Executive Council then nationalised oil, and later natural gas exploration. The Executive Council thought differently and gave British Union 55 per cent and the US Gulf Oil Corporation 45 per cent of drilling rights, and with no compensation to British Union for their substantial previous investment. Conversely, under nationalisation of natural gas, they were entitled to compensation for two wells and a pipeline.<sup>63</sup> British Union’s Trinidadian and Barbadian interests ended

<sup>58</sup> Incorporated 1914-Dissolved 1957, BT31/37274/137202, TNA.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> H. Jefferson, *Viscount Pirrie of Belfast* (Belfast, 1948), 144-45. MacNab, *Shipping Wizard of Kirkcaldy*, alluding to a contemporary U.S. newspaper report, states that British Union gained control of Union Oil of California by purchasing 3,000,000 new shares in the latter and must pay for them in cash in the next two years. This was in fact an option, which was not taken up.

<sup>61</sup> BT 31/37274/137202, TNA. Debentures (in essence, an interest-paying loan) amounting to £300,000 in value were paid back in 1926 and the remaining debentures paid back in 1956.

<sup>62</sup> *Stock Exchange Official Intelligence*, various years. Before Weir returned as Chairman of British Union, the company’s debit balance on Profit and Loss account on 30 December 1923 after charging £332,927 (Oilfields Development Account) was £138,115. Its Suspense Account (Credit Balance) was £490,891. Loan (Liability) was £274,049 (secured by deposit of investments). Discounts on debentures of £300,000 and investments (at cost), of £904,513.

<sup>63</sup> Chairman’s Statement, AGM of British Union Oil Co. Ltd, 28 June 1951, BT 31/37274/137202, TNA. For a fuller explanation, see, BPP HL Deb Vol., 171, cc. 376-404, 18



The first ship owned by the United Baltic Corporation Ltd. was the *Baltabor*, built 1911 and bought from the Estonian Government in 1920. She went ashore on Boxing Day 1929 on Nargen Island in the Baltic Sea and, although refloated, was subsequently declared a constructive total loss and broken up. *B. & A. Feilden*

with the company being wound up in July 1957.<sup>64</sup> Weir's interest in oil would continue during the interwar period, but in 1919 he accepted part-control of another shipping venture.

### **United Baltic Corporation Ltd.**

In the aftermath of the First World War there was no direct shipping link between London and Poland and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Subsequently, Andrew Weir was invited by the British government to provide such passenger and cargo services. Accordingly, the United Baltic Corporation (UBC) was registered in London on 20 May 1919 following a joint partnership agreement between the East Asiatic Company of Copenhagen and Andrew Weir and Company, each of whom held 50 per cent of the shares in the new company with Andrew Weir as Chairman. Two East Asiatic directors were also appointed. Authorised share capital consisted of 2,000,000 ordinary shares of £1 each. Paid up share capital amounted to £1,250,000. Initially, chartered tonnage was used but UBC purchased its first passenger steamship, *Baltabor* (ex-*Libau*) in June 1920. She carried mostly emigrants to the USA who disembarked at East India Dock in London for onward passage to New

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April 1951.

<sup>64</sup> Notice of British Union Oil Company Ltd. final wind-up meeting, 5 July 1957, BT 31/37274/137202, TNA.

York. Much later on, 17 December 1937, three new shipping companies were formed, Anglo-Estonian Shipping Co. Ltd., Anglo-Latvian, and Anglo-Lithuanian with Weir as director and UBC as principal shareholders.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, by this stage, it was generally acknowledged that Andrew Weir was a ship owner of substance who had a considerable network of friends in high places. We now turn to the many connections in his social circle and important directorships.

## Connections

During his service at the War Office, in 1918 Weir moved home from 57 Holland Park to Arnos Grove House, located in substantial grounds in Southgate, London. He had a long friendship with a fellow Scot and tea magnate, Sir Thomas Johnstone Lipton (1848-1931). Lipton, a consummate salesman, was famous in yachting circles for his doomed attempts over three decades to win the Americas Cup with various versions of his yacht, *Shamrock*, on which Weir would accompany him in racing at the Cowes Regatta.<sup>66</sup> In his will, Lipton appointed Weir as an executor of his estate and President of Thomas J. Lipton and Company in the United States, a private company that Lipton retained after his British-based company went public in 1927.<sup>67</sup>

Weir's connection with William Hesketh Lever (Viscount Leverhulme, 1851-1925) began when soap makers Lever Brothers chartered Weir's ships to transport copra from the Solomon Islands, and had an unusual ending.<sup>68</sup> In 1926, Weir purchased Leverhulme's main residence, the Hill, on Hampstead Heath, North London one year after the latter's death. Weir lived there until

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<sup>65</sup> Paid up capital of all three companies was £120,000 of £1 ordinary shares, of which UBC held £119,600 in each company.

<sup>66</sup> The New York Yacht Club had held the Americas Cup since 1851, when the schooner *America* won the £100 Cup in a race against British yachts around the Isle of Wight. Between 1870 and 1980 it was successfully defended 24 times by American yachts until an Australian yacht triumphed in 1983. For Lipton, see, J. Mackay, *Sir Thomas Lipton: The Man who Invented Himself* (Edinburgh, 1998). *Venetia* (2) was built at Ramage and Ferguson, Leith in 1905. She had several owners and changes of name before Lord Inverforth purchased her in 1934. He handed her over to the Admiralty for war service in 1939 as HMS *Altair*, an anti-submarine training vessel operating out of Liverpool. For her service during the Great War, see, I. Beckwith, "HM Steam Yacht *Venetia*: A luxury yacht in Royal Navy service, 1914-1919," *The Mariner's Mirror*, 104:3 (2018): 302-317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2018.1487675>.

<sup>67</sup> MacNab, *Shipping Wizard of Kirkcaldy*, 96. *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 December 1931. Lipton Incorporated, Hoboken, New Jersey.

<sup>68</sup> For the establishment of Lever's Solomon Island Copra plantations, see, C. Wilson, *The History of Unilever*, vol. 1 (London, 1954), 160-165. These comprised 51,000 acres of land in which to plant coconut palms. Lever also had extensive interests in the Belgian Congo and West Africa through the United Africa Company.

his death at the age of 91 on 17 September 1955 and in his will bequeathed his home to Manor House Hospital in Golders Green for use as a women's hospital and a nurses' home. In his honour, the house was renamed Inverforth House.<sup>69</sup>

Weir also had a long relationship with the Belfast shipbuilder, Viscount Pirrie, whom he considered a personal friend. Pirrie had been knighted in 1906 and became a viscount in 1921, and also served in Lloyd George's coalition government in 1918 with responsibility for merchant ship construction.<sup>70</sup> In June 1924, Weir was in New York when news came of Pirrie's death from bronchial pneumonia. Weir arranged for Pirrie's body to be embalmed and transferred to the White Star liner, *Olympic*, then the largest ship built at Harland and Wolff, and Pirrie's favourite, sailing from New York to Southampton. Weir and his wife accompanied Lady Pirrie onboard *Olympic* and arranged to take the coffin to Pirrie's huge estate near Godalming, Surrey prior to a public funeral service.<sup>71</sup>

On their voyage home on the *Olympic*, Lady Pirrie offered Weir the chairmanship of Harland & Wolff in the mistaken belief that, as a trustee of her husband's estate, she automatically had voting control. Pirrie was later buried in Belfast City Cemetery with Weir and his wife in attendance on 23 June 1924.<sup>72</sup> Sixty-two years after Pirrie first joined Harland & Wolff, control passed to its major shareholder, the chairman of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, Owen Cosby Phillips, from 1923 Lord Kysant, who later found that Pirrie's extravagant and indebted lifestyle had left his wife nearly destitute, with Harland and Wolff in a dire financial state due to his dictatorial management.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Historic England. National Heritage List, The Hill (Inverforth House) Entry No. 1000244. Grade II first listed, 1 October 1987.

<sup>70</sup> Pirrie, in addition to Harland and Wolff, had been a former Lord Mayor of Belfast, was Chairman of the African Steamship Company, The Oceanic Steamship Company, and the African Oil Mills Co. Ltd., and a director of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. (White Star Line), the International Mercantile Marine Co. Ltd., and the London City and Midland Bank, among many other directorships.

<sup>71</sup> *New York Times*, 14 June 1924. According to *The Times* newspaper of 8 May 1909 Pirrie purchased Witley Park for "a sum not far short of £200,000."

<sup>72</sup> Green and Moss, *A Business of National Importance*, 62-3. Under the terms of Lord Pirrie's will his executors were mandated to pay Lady Pirrie an annuity of £10,000 per annum. Witley Park, on which Pirrie had lavished large amounts of money, was later sold and a trust was formed in 1926 to hold Pirrie's shares in Harland & Wolff and Royal Mail Group companies. The trust took over Pirrie's Belfast home, paid Lady Pirrie a sum of £40,000, and continued to pay her an annuity of £10,000.

<sup>73</sup> M. Moss and J.R. Hume, *Shipbuilders to the World. 125 years of Harland and Wolff, Belfast, 1861-1986*, (Belfast, 1986), 245-249. Jefferson, *Viscount Pirrie of Belfast*, 216-217, in addition to Witley Park, Pirrie owned two other substantial homes, "Ormiston" in Belfast built in the

In the wider business world, Weir maintained many directorships including those of Lloyd's Bank and Cable and Wireless, and later built up a substantial business in underwriting and insurance broking. Weir became a Vice President of the Institute of Shipbrokers in 1914, and in 1925 was elected President of the Institute of Marine Engineers. From 1931 to 1947 Weir was President of the Baltic Benevolent Society and was also elected as one of the few Honorary Members of the Baltic Exchange.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps Andrew Weir's greatest contribution to British industrial communications history was as Chairman of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co. Ltd., when in April 1929 he agreed a merger with Sir John Denison-Pender of the Eastern Telegraph Group of its submarine cable and radio transmission activities. This created two new companies, Imperial and International Communications Ltd., and Cable and Wireless. The merger talks were initiated by Weir to prepare a joint response prior to an Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference in January 1928. By March, Weir and Dennison-Pender proposed a merged holding company to have the communications methods of the British Empire vested in one company, which the Conference accepted. By 1934, with Weir as sole President, both companies came under the Cable and Wireless brand name.<sup>75</sup> Clearly, Weir through the protracted nature of these merger negotiations left much of the day-to-day running of Bank Line to Andrew Morton Weir.

## **The Interwar Period**

### ***The first motor ships***

The post-1918 shipbuilding boom reached its zenith in 1920, a year of all-time record launching output for the British shipbuilding industry (688 vessels totalling 2,055,624gt), which was never again surpassed.<sup>76</sup> After freight rates collapsed post-March 1920, a spate of cancellations ensued and, taking the lag effect of completing ships under construction into account, launching output by 1923 had slumped to 222 vessels totalling 645,671grt. With freight rates remaining depressed throughout 1922 and 1923, any order at this stage was

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austere Scottish Baronial Style, and a large home, Downshire House in fashionable Belgrave Square in London, later to become the Embassy of Spain. Pirrie also owned a twin-screw 307 ft long steam yacht, *Valiant*, two decks, brig-rigged, crewed by 40 to 50 personnel.

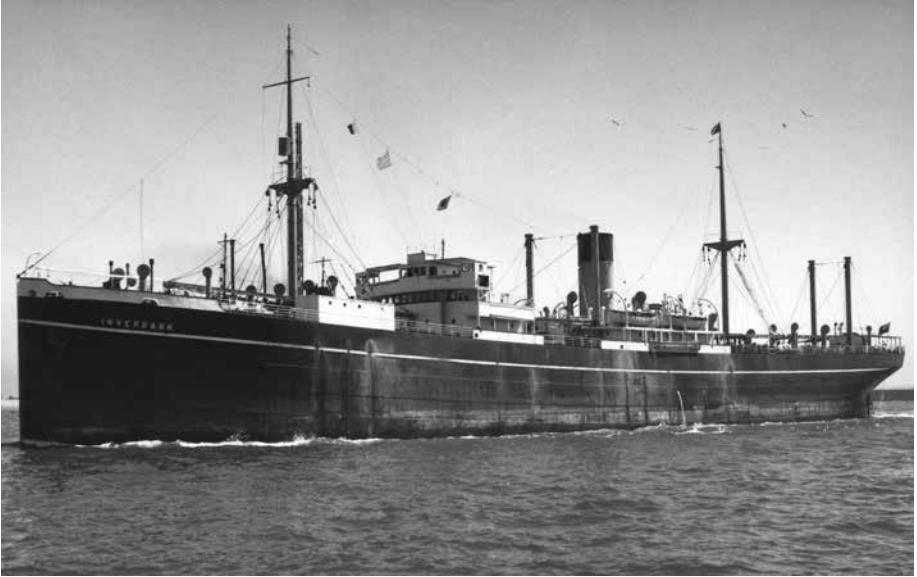
<sup>74</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 16-17.

<sup>75</sup> For Cable and Wireless, see, H. Barty-King, *Girdle around the Earth: History of "Cable and Wireless"* (London, 1980).

<sup>76</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all output figures are taken from *Lloyd's Register of Shipping Annual Returns*, various years.

welcome, but an order for 21 (three single-screw, 18 twin-screw) motor ships by Bank Line to be built by Harland and Wolff at Govan was unprecedented. Clearly, Weir's friendship with Viscount Pirrie was germane, but it is also likely that Weir's hard-headed business acumen led him to strike a hard bargain. Weir instinctively knew the value of contra-cyclical ship ordering. This is evidenced in that only later would Lord Kysant discover that the Bank Line order was projected to result in a huge loss of £750,000 at the Harland and Wolff Govan shipyard.<sup>77</sup>

The 18 twin-screw ship order was confirmed in December 1923 and was



A part of the 18 twin-screw motor ship order which went to Harland and Wolff Ltd., this is *Inverbank* of 1924. She proved an excellent investment for Bank Line, giving 24 years' service before being sold to Italy in 1958 and broken up one year later. *Ships in Focus*

facilitated through The Trade Facilities and Loan Guarantees Act of 1922, which allowed Weir to bolster his Bank Line fleet through a £1,800,000 guarantee for a public issue of capital.<sup>78</sup> The Trade Facilities Acts, which ended in 1927, enabled companies to borrow money, with the principal and interest guaranteed by the government, for projects which would create employment. British shipbuilding firms would be the largest beneficiaries of TFA Loan Guarantees and by May 1927, of nearly £75m pledged, shipbuilding's

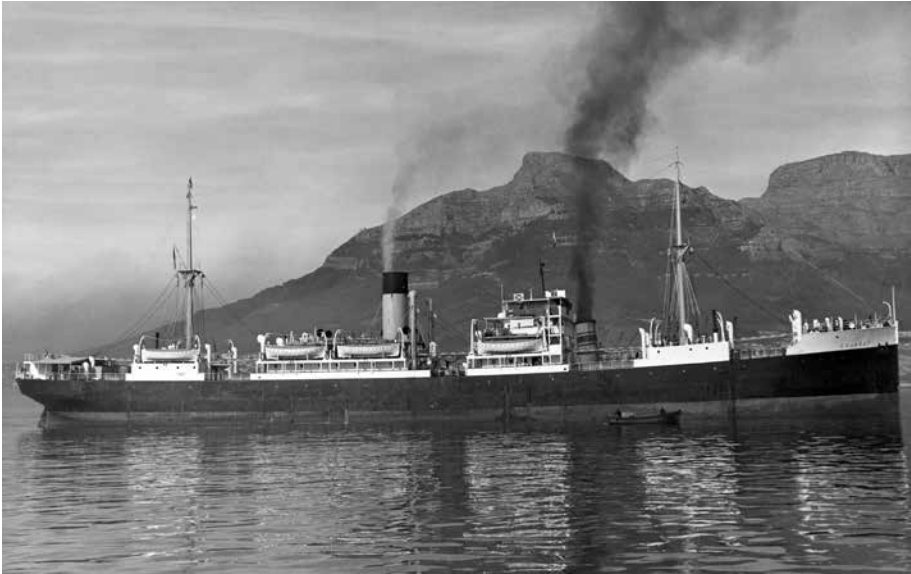
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<sup>77</sup> Moss and Hume, *Shipbuilders to the World*, 249. Moss and Hume erroneously describe it as a 12-ship order.

<sup>78</sup> *Trade Facilities Acts Statements of Guarantees* (London: HMSO, 1927), 529.

percentage was 29.1 per cent, £21,640,585.<sup>79</sup>

Contemporary with confirming the 18-ship order, in December 1923 the first single screw motor ship ordered for Bank Line, *Gujarat* (4,320gt), was completed at the Govan shipyard. She was followed by two sister ships in February and March 1924, respectively *Kathiawar* (4,150gt), and *Luxmi* (4,148gt). All three were for the Bank Line's Rangoon-South Africa passenger-cargo service.<sup>80</sup> By 1956, *Gujarat* had completed 32 years in service and sailed upwards of 1,750,000 nautical miles. She had a continuous record of achieving 10 knots at sea, carrying 6,500 tons cargo on a daily fuel consumption of



First of a three-ship order for Bank Line's Rangoon to South Africa service, *Gujarat* was also the first single-screw motor ship built for the company. Completed by Harland and Wolff Ltd in December 1923, she gave the company 34 years' service, and had one further owner before being broken up at Hong Kong in 1961. *Ships in Focus*

<sup>79</sup> L. Johnman and H. Murphy, "Subsidy and Treasury: The Trade Facilities Acts and the UK Shipbuilding Industry in the 1920s," *Contemporary British History* 22:1 (2008): 102. BPP, HC Deb, vol., 206, 16 May 1927: c. 918.

<sup>80</sup> The ships had accommodation for 12 first class and 20 second class passengers and 400 emigrants. Although *Gujarat* has been given credit as the first motor ship owned by Andrew Weir, strictly speaking the first was *Palmol* (1,444gt), a former Admiralty oiler completed in May 1918 by Wm. Gray at West Hartlepool and propelled by two four-cylinder single-acting two-stroke oil engines of Swedish design. Renamed *Invercorrie*, she was listed in Lloyd's Register as being owned by Andrew Weir & Company and on other occasions by British Mexican Petroleum Co. Ltd., with Andrew Weir as managers. She was re-engined with triple expansion steam reciprocating machinery by McKie and Baxter, Glasgow in 1923.



7.5 tons.<sup>81</sup> The first of the 18 motor ships to be built and engined at Govan, *Inverbank* (5,149gt), was completed in May 1924 and the last, *Springbank* (5,155gt), in May 1926.<sup>82</sup>

The second plank of Weir's venture in oil, alike that of the British Union Oil Company, had begun during the First World War, and it is to this venture we now turn.

### **British Mexican Petroleum Co. Ltd.**

The American oil magnate, Edward L. Doheny (1856-1935), now becomes an important player in the Weir story. He had first discovered oil in California during 1892 and quickly recognised the oil-producing potential of Mexico, registering the Mexican Petroleum Company of California on 20 December 1900 and purchasing land in the Mexican states of San Luis Potosi and Vera Cruz. His Cerro Azul No.4 Well in the latter state struck oil in February 1916 and became the world's biggest oil well, producing 57,000,000 barrels up to 1930.<sup>83</sup>

With Weir's oil ambitions rekindled, on 15 July 1919 he agreed with Lord Pirrie and Doheny to form the British Mexican Petroleum Co. Ltd. with an authorized share capital of £2,000,000. British Mexican's agreement with Doheny's Hausteca Petroleum Company covered the buying, selling, refining, and shipping of oil in western Europe over a period of twenty years. Voting power was split between Andrew Weir and Company and Hausteca, who each held one-half of the new company's "B" shares. It was agreed that all British Mexican tankers and barges would be ordered from Lord Pirrie's Harland and Wolff's yards at Belfast and at Govan on a ten per cent commission basis<sup>84</sup> with Andrew Weir and Company managing this fleet. However, by the time these negotiations took place the spectacular levels of production in Mexican oilfields seen since 1911 had begun to decline.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 60-61.

<sup>82</sup> Moss and Hume, *Shipbuilders to the World*, 248, note that losses on *Kathiawat* and *Inverbank* amounted to over £160,000.

<sup>83</sup> M.L. Davis, *Dark Side of Fortune: Triumph and Scandal in Life of Edward L. Doheny* (Berkeley, 1998), 107-109.

<sup>84</sup> Jefferson, *Viscount Pirrie of Belfast*, 145-46. M.S. Vassiliou, *The A to Z of Petroleum* (Plymouth, 2009), 160-1. By 1921 Pan-American Petroleum and Transport owned 31 tankers, and in 1925 Standard Oil of Indiana (later Amoco), acquired a controlling interest in Pan-American valued at nearly \$38,600,000. Doheny retained his California interest in a new company, Pan-American Western Corporation. Considered one of America's richest men, Doheny unsuccessfully ran for the Democratic Party's vice-presidential nomination in 1924. His later years were mired in controversy.

<sup>85</sup> M.R. Ansell, *Oil Baron of the Southwest, Edward L. Doheny and the development of the petroleum industry in California and Mexico* (Ohio State University Press, 1998), 211-212.



The second purchase by British Mexican Petroleum was the *Inverharder*, an engine-amidships steamer built for the Shipping Controller in 1919 as *War Hagara*. Weir relinquished management in 1930, but she continued under British Mexican ownership until torpedoed in a North Atlantic convoy during February 1942. *Ships in Focus*

British Mexican's first motor tanker, the twin-screw *Invercorrie* (1,144gt), was purchased in 1920. Tank depots were built in major ports, including a large oil storage and bunkering depot at Dingle on the River Mersey. Depots followed in London, Avonmouth, Belfast, Hull and Newcastle. In 1923 British Mexican acquired the oil refinery at Fawley near Southampton which had been built in 1921 for the Atlantic Gulf and West Indies Company.<sup>86</sup> However, in August 1925 Doheny's ultimate holding company, Pan American Petroleum and Transport, formed on 2 February 1916, sold its stock in British Mexican to the Anglo-American Oil Company along with its network of depots and a road tanker fleet.<sup>87</sup> Anglo-American also took over British Mexican's oil importing organisation and the distributing business for their "Redline" petrol. The sale also included the British Mexican shipping fleet, but not British Mexican's holdings of stock in United States companies, which included the Lago Petroleum Company and Lago Oil and Transport Corporation, which had

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<sup>86</sup> Atlantic Gulf and West Indies comprised four New York-based shipping lines, Clyde Steamship, Mallory Steamship, New York and Cuba Mail Steamship (Ward Line) and New York and Porto Rico Steamship.

<sup>87</sup> Anglo-American was formed in London by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey in 1888. Sale to Anglo-American is noted in *Stock Exchange Official Intelligence*, 1926.

interests in Venezuela.<sup>88</sup>

By 1926, under Andrew Weir management, the British-Mexican fleet had totalled 27 tankers and bunkering barges.<sup>89</sup> Of this total, Weir took over seven ships in 1919, four of which were prefabricated N-type war standard steamers under construction by Harland and Wolff. They were converted into tankers by installing six vertical cylindrical tanks in their holds,<sup>90</sup> and could also carry oil in their double bottoms.<sup>91</sup>

With British-Mexican tankers acquired, Anglo-American and its subsidiaries now owned or managed 37 tankers totalling 336,781 dwt.<sup>92</sup> Weir continued to manage the British-Mexican fleet until 1930, when management was transferred to Anglo-American Oil.<sup>93</sup> Anglo-American had been acquired by Jersey Standard (formerly Standard Oil of New Jersey) in 1930, which became known in the United Kingdom from 1951 as Esso Petroleum.<sup>94</sup> As part of his venture in oil, Weir formed one other company, and took a large shareholding in another which was intended to exploit oil in Venezuela. It is to these two companies we now turn.

### Compagnie Venture-Weir S.A. Paris

This subsidiary company was established in 1921 to provide oil storage and bunkering facilities in France. In 1925, Bank Line transferred three aging steamers to Compagnie Venture-Weir S.A. which by then operated a regular steamer service between Antwerp, Dunkirk, Havre, Bordeaux, Canary Islands and West African ports.<sup>95</sup> However, by 1928 all three steamers had been sold and the company reverted to oil distribution, purchasing two bunkering barges in 1928 and 1932, and oil depot ships in 1933 and in 1935, both being sold to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> This total included 10 steam-turbine powered tankers and 11 bunkering barges all built by Harland and Wolff at Belfast and Glasgow, two steam-turbine tankers purchased in 1920, two steam-turbine tankers built by Henry Scarr at Hessle in 1920, one steam-turbine tanker built by John Brown at Clydebank in 1923, plus one small steam tanker, built in 1904 by William Beardmore which was transferred to Andrew Weir management in 1926.

<sup>90</sup> Harland and Wolff Ship List, Ship Nos. (589) *Inverleith*, (590) *Inverurie*, (591) *Inveravon*, and (609) *Invergarry*.

<sup>91</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 66.

<sup>92</sup> *Stock Exchange Official Intelligence*, 1926.

<sup>93</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 67.

<sup>94</sup> British-Mexican remained in existence until 31 December 1981 when it was renamed Esso Property Management Co. Ltd. Companies House No. 00157038.

<sup>95</sup> *Capafric* (ex-*Madawaska*, completed J.L. Thompson, Sunderland, 1902), *Rivafric* (ex-*Jeseric*, completed by Wm. Hamilton, Port Glasgow, 1902), and *Monafric* (ex-*Monadock*), completed by C.S. Swan Hunter, Wallsend, 1902).

Italian ship breakers in 1949.<sup>96</sup>

### **Lago Shipping Co. Ltd.**

The Lago Petroleum Corporation was incorporated in the State of Delaware on 12 April 1923, with Sir James Thomson Currie (1866-1943) as President with London-based directors including Andrew Weir. It was formed, *inter alia*, to acquire (for 1,399,970 shares) oil drilling rights through 116 concessions over an area of approximately 1,159,000 hectares under Lake Maracaibo. In February 1924 the company acquired the entire holdings in Venezuela of the British Equatorial Oil Company Ltd. Lago Petroleum Corporation's authorised capital was USD 4,000,000, with 2,552,500 shares issued. A further 1,247,500 shares were sold to the British-Mexican Petroleum Co. Ltd., and other interests for USD 3,215,000 for delivery on payment up to 1 October 1926.<sup>97</sup> Lago Petroleum Corporation began to export oil from the Maracaibo basin in the latter part of 1924.

Edward L. Doheny incorporated the Lago Oil and Transport Corporation (a subsidiary of his Pan American Petroleum and Transport Company) in Delaware on 10 November 1925. Its purpose was to acquire a controlling interest in the Lago Petroleum Corporation, which by this stage included the British Zulia Oil Company and Lago Oil and Transport Company (of Canada) and the Lago Shipping Co. Ltd.<sup>98</sup> In December 1925 Lago Petroleum Corporation's stockholders were given an option of exchanging their shares for shares in Lago Oil and Transport Corporation on the basis of one "A" share of that corporation for every two shares held. On 27 January 1926 about 91 per cent of these shares had been acquired by Lago Oil and Transport Corporation.<sup>99</sup>

Earlier, on 27 February 1925, the Lago Shipping Co. Ltd. had been formed with Andrew Weir and Company as managers.<sup>100</sup> Lago Oil and Transport contracted with Harland and Wolff, Belfast to build 21 shallow-draft, twin-screw, steam-powered, trunk-deck tankers designed for service on Lake Maracaibo, the first four of which were completed in 1925. Shallow draft was required to transit the bar at high water. The tankers steamed through a narrow 16-mile-long channel to the Gulf of Venezuela and from there to the

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<sup>96</sup> Appleyard, *Bank Line 1885-1985*, 155.

<sup>97</sup> *Stock Exchange Official Intelligence*, 1925.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*, 1925. These were known as the Delfino Concessions.

<sup>99</sup> *Stock Exchange Official Intelligence*, 1925, 1926.

<sup>100</sup> The Canadian registered company's paid-up capital was £800,000 in £1 ordinary shares, and the principal shareholder was Lago Oil and Transport Co Ltd, Room 801, Dominion Bank Building, Toronto, Canada who held 799,998 ordinary shares.

Dutch colony of Aruba. Initially the crude oil was transhipped to the USA for refining, but in 1928 Standard Oil of Indiana acquired Lago's transshipment facility in Aruba and in 1929 built a refinery at St. Nicholas, in which Weir held an interest. The last of these vessels, *Maracay*, was completed at Belfast during the worldwide depression in 1931. She was to be the last vessel under Andrew Weir management built by Harland and Wolff until November 1936 when *Ernebank* (5,388gt) was launched. Lago remained under Andrew Weir management until 1937 when it was transferred to Anglo-American Oil.<sup>101</sup>

### Bank Line's services in 1926

If we can apply a modern term to Weir, then his "business model" was entirely consistent throughout, namely Bank Line ships should be interchangeable, capable of moving from tramping to a liner service. A large fleet allowed ships to be chartered at short notice anywhere in the world. Weir's worldwide services in 1926 are outlined below. It remained the case that Weir had no regular liner service to and from the United Kingdom so that maintenance and supervision abroad was left to foreign-based marine superintendents and engineers, working closely with the wide network of Bank Line agents.

Bank Line required multi-purpose vessels carrying various cargoes, cubic and deadweight, designed and built to high standards. Large Bank Line orders offered shipbuilders the benefits of building ships in series and offered Weir economies in price and convenience in timing of delivery. Bank Line, in common with other British shipping firms, employed their own superintendents in the shipyard to monitor performance and quality during building and fitting out. Having hull and engine superintendents meant that problems or delays arising, particularly with sub-contractors, could be dealt with immediately, and progress or the lack of it reported to head office. Equally important, building in UK shipyards meant no language or foreign exchange difficulties as sterling was the method of payment, although price inflation and under-estimation of costs could be problematic to the shipbuilder if fixed-price contracts had been negotiated as was the case with Weir's 18-ship order of December 1923 with Harland and Wolff, Govan. Weir sensibly avoided ordering from abroad owing to appreciation of foreign currencies against sterling, dealing with the devils he knew.<sup>102</sup> Standardisation in motive power, if not dimensions, meant that, with similar engines, spares could easily be transferred throughout the company's

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<sup>101</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 67.

<sup>102</sup> This would become a major problem for other British shipping companies servicing loans in various currencies in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Murphy, "The Bridge or someplace later," 454-465.

**Table 1: Bank Line's services in July 1926.**

**American and Indian Line:** Calcutta, Chittagong, Rangoon, Columbo to Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

**American and Indian Branch Service:** Rangoon, Chittagong, Madras, Madras Coast, Columbo and Malabar Coast (filling up, if necessary, at Aden and Port Sudan) to Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

**American and Oriental Line:** New York to the Straits Settlements, Hong Kong, Philippines, China and Japan, and vice versa.

**American and Rio Plata Line:** New York to Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Rosario and Bahia Blanca.

**Bombay American Line:** Bombay to New York and Philadelphia.

**Calcutta to River Plate Ports:** Calcutta to Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Rosario and Bahia Blanca.

**Indian African Line:** Carrying passengers and cargo: including in its itinerary, Rangoon, Calcutta, Colombo, Beira, Delagoa Bay, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth, Mossel Bay and Cape Town.

**Indian Chilean Line:** Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore to west coast of South America Ports.

**Oriental African Line:** Carrying passengers and cargo from Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore to Mauritius, Delagoa Bay, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth, Mossel Bay and Cape Town, and vice versa. Taking cargo on through bill of lading from Japan and China.

**Persian Gulf:** General merchants, export and import. Frequent sailings from Busreh (Basra) and Bushire (Bushehr) to UK and Continent.

**Regular river service** between Baghdad and Busreh (Basra).

**Regular sailings** from Australia to Chile.

**Regular sailings** from Australia to Java.

**Regular sailings** from Australia to Peru.

**For freight and particulars** apply to Andrew Weir & Co., Baltic Exchange Buildings, 19-21 Bury Street, London EC also at: **Hong Kong**-the Bank Line Ltd, **San Francisco**-Bank Line Transport and Trading Co. **New York**-Boyd, Weir & Sewell, Inc. **Buenos Aires**-Chadwick, Weir & Co., **Paris**-Cie Venture SA, **Algiers**-Cie Venture SA, **Calcutta**-Andrew Weir & Co, **Sydney**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Valparaiso**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Durban**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Busreh**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Baghdad**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Middlesbro'**-Andrew Weir & Co., **Glasgow**-Andrew Weir & Co.

fleet of ships and stored in its various agencies worldwide.

Table 1 above, in terms of routes and competitiveness with other shipping lines, placed a premium on crewing ships with Lascar and Hong Kong Chinese seafarers on Lascar and Asiatic Crew Agreements on lower wages than their British counterparts. “Lascar” did not refer to ethnicity, but to the contract of employment, as laid out in Lascar Articles, listing their wages and areas of work, normally below deck on steam-powered vessels as firemen and trimmers, and later as deckhands. Lascars comprised men of differing religious backgrounds, though the majority were Muslims. They were traditionally recruited from Gujarat, the Malabar Coast and East Bengal, and later from the Punjab, Bengal and Assam, and Aden. Most signed on in the major port cities of Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>103</sup>

### **Workman Clark (1928) Ltd., Belfast**

In 1928, Andrew Weir contracted to build eight ships with Workman Clark at Belfast, known in Belfast as “the wee yard,” in unfair comparison to that city’s largest shipyard, Harland and Wolff. Workman Clark had employed around 12,000 men at its North and South yards during the First World War. By 1920 it had been taken over by the Northumberland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. of Howdon-on-Tyne, the acquisition vehicle of the speculative Sperling combine.<sup>104</sup> On Sperling’s implosion in 1926, the yard was closed but reopened in 1928 under the former Secretary of the old company, William Strachan, as Chairman. That year, with a series of tankers for British-Mexican building at Harland and Wolff, Bank Line ordered four steamships, four twin-screw motor ships, and a motor tanker from Workman Clark.<sup>105</sup> Again, in 1934, Bank Line returned to Workman Clark to build three twin-screw motor ships as a consequence of taking over in 1933 Bullard King and Company’s service between Calcutta, Rangoon, Colombo and South Africa. However, with no further orders, Workman Clark went into receivership in May 1935. The North yard was purchased and later dismantled by the British shipbuilding industry’s rationalisation vehicle, National Shipbuilders Security Ltd. (NSS). However,

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<sup>103</sup> For an impressive account of Lascar seafarers, see, G. Balachandran, *Globalising Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> For Sperling, see: S. Daiper, “The Sperling Combine and the Shipbuilding Industry: Merchant banking and industrial finance in the 1920s,” in J. Van Helten and Y. Cassis (eds.), *Capitalism in a Mature Economy: Financial Institutions, Capital Exports and British Exports, 1870-1939* (Aldershot, 1990), 71-94; and H. Murphy, “An Anatomy of Speculative Failure: Wm. Doxford and Sons Ltd., Sunderland and the Northumberland Shipbuilding Company of Howdon on Tyne, 1919-1945,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 104:1 (2018): 58-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2018.1411101>.

<sup>105</sup> The tanker was *Corabank* (8,898gt) which was sold to Japanese owners in 1937.



One of Bank Line's few forays into passenger-cargo ships resulted from the take-over in 1933 of Bullard, King and Company's service between Calcutta, Rangoon, Colombo and South Africa. *Inchange* of 1934 was the second of three twin-screw motor ships ordered from Workman, Clark of Belfast. She remained with Bank Line until broken up at Ghent in 1964.

*Author's collection*

after a complicated deal, which included selling the Harland and Wolff-owned Meadowside yard of D. and W. Henderson in Glasgow and the Greenock yard of Caird to NSS, the South yard became Harland and Wolff's Victoria yard in June 1935 with William Strachan junior a director of Harland and Wolff.<sup>106</sup>

### **Diversification, share capital and more shipping lines**

How far Weir decided to diversify from his core interests in shipping is open to question. In addition to his considerable interests in shipping and oil, by the 1930s he had developed various other businesses including insurance broking and investment companies linked to his shipping business. However, a Burmese rice mill, a phosphate, forestry and farming property in Florida, a date-producing co-operative, a small airline in Iraq, and a building society in Rhodesia/Nyasaland probably reflected an interest in diverse projects. Nonetheless, only the Florida property and the building society remained with the company throughout the century.<sup>107</sup>

### **Share capital increases**

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<sup>106</sup> Green and Moss, *A Business of National Importance*, 192. The sales to NSS of the Meadowside and Greenock yards were completed during 1936, for £176,681 and £99,442, respectively. Moss and Hume, *Shipbuilders to the World*, 307.

<sup>107</sup> These were the Loncala Incorporated of Florida and Beverley Building Society of Zimbabwe.



On 24 March 1930, Bank Line's authorised share capital was increased to £700,000 by the creation of 150,000 new shares of £1 each to be called "C" preference shares, and on 28 December 1938 authorised share capital was increased to £1,000,000 by the creation of 300,000 ordinary shares of £1 each. Share capital was now divided into 200,000 "A" preference shares, 150,000 "B" preference shares, 150,000 "C" preference shares, and 500,000 ordinary shares.<sup>108</sup>

### **India Natal Line**

In 1933 at the nadir of the interwar depression, Bank Line took over the Bullard, King and Company interest in the trade between Calcutta, Rangoon, Colombo and South African ports and renamed the service the India Natal Line. The steamer *Surat* set out from Rangoon to Natal on 1 February and four Bank Line motor ships joined the Line. Prior to the Second World War these motor ships operated a monthly service between Bay of Bengal ports and East African and South African ports.<sup>109</sup>

### **United Baltic Corporation Ltd. – MacAndrews and Co. Ltd.**

In 1935, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. acquired through United Baltic Corporation the share capital of MacAndrews and Co. Ltd. for £350,000.<sup>110</sup> MacAndrews had its origins in Liverpool in 1770 when a William MacAndrews began selling fruit imported from Spain in chartered ships. Subsequently, MacAndrews' ships operated under both British and Spanish flags, with occasional transfers between registries. MacAndrews was acquired in 1916 by the later doomed Royal Mail Steam Packet Company group and registered as MacAndrews and Co. Ltd. on 17 April 1917 with a share capital of £400,000.<sup>111</sup> UBC purchased MacAndrews from government-appointed trustees who had run the company since the Royal Mail group's spectacular collapse in 1930. MacAndrews' 21 small ships operated mainly in the Spanish fruit trade from London and Liverpool. A year earlier, another former Royal Mail Group company, James Moss and Co. Ltd., and its subsidiary J. and P. Hutchinson, had

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<sup>108</sup> Company Registrar, Edinburgh. Information from Memorandum of Association as altered by Special Resolution, passed on 30 November 1988. Bank Line Ltd., registered in Scotland.

<sup>109</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> Green and Moss, *A Business of National Importance*, 183.

<sup>111</sup> Data on file on MacAndrews deposited in the Chatham Archive and Library of World Ship Society Ltd. See also, N.L. Middlemiss, *Andrew Weir Shipping (AWS)* (Newcastle, 2002). The company received its first two motor ships in 1922, delivered by the Upper Clyde shipyard and engine works of Wm. Beardmore, with Beardmore-Tosi oil engines. With one exception, all other subsequent additions to the MacAndrews fleet were motor ships.

been put up for sale. With services to the eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Bordeaux, Ireland and north Germany, UBC made a bid for Moss Hutchinson as did General Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. The latter's bid of £388,859 was accepted in October 1934.<sup>112</sup> For UBC, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 impacted on its trade, as did the German occupation of Denmark during the Second World War when several of East Asiatic's ships not impounded in Danish ports were placed under the management of UBC.

We now turn to Weir's renewed interest in oil transportation.

### **Inver Tanker and Trading Co. Ltd.**

The Inver Tanker and Trading Co. Ltd. was registered on 3 April 1936



*Inversuir* of 1938 was one of seven motor tankers building for an Irish company in Germany which were taken over by Inver Tankers Ltd., managed by Andrew Weir and Company. All seven were war losses, *Inversuir* being torpedoed in June 1941. *Ships in Focus*

with Andrew Weir as Chairman and Andrew Weir and Company as managers. Authorised share capital was £100,000 in £1 ordinary shares, fully paid up. In 1937, three motor ships were delivered from William Doxford and Sons' Pallion shipyard in Sunderland and registered to the company, unencumbered by mortgages.<sup>113</sup> Another company, Inver Tankers Ltd. was registered on 16 November 1937 with Andrew Alexander Morton Weir as Chairman. Share capital was £10,000 in £1 ordinary shares fully paid up.<sup>114</sup> As with the Ocean

<sup>112</sup> Figure quoted in Green and Moss, *A Business of National Importance*, 176-77.

<sup>113</sup> The three motor ships were *Eskbank* (5,137gt), *Teesbank* (5,136gt) and *Tielbank* (5,083gt), which as their names suggest were employed alongside Bank Line ships.

<sup>114</sup> The trade magazine *Fairplay* is a good source to determine shipping firms' capitalisation,

Navigation Co. Ltd. in 1899, this company was set up to provide dividend income to the wider Weir family.

In 1936 seven motor tankers had been ordered from two German shipyards by an Irish company, Crusader Petroleum Industries Ltd., to supply a planned Irish National Oil Refinery in Dublin. The oil refinery contract was subsequently cancelled after the seven vessels to be registered in Dublin had begun building at Deutsche Werft and Bremen Vulkan, Vegesack. They were launched for the Liffey Transport and Trading Company and completed in 1938 for Inver Tankers and Trading Co. Ltd., and managed by Andrew Weir and Company.<sup>115</sup> All seven ships were laid up on the River Fal in Cornwall during periods of poor trading conditions from July 1938 to March 1939. Demand picked up in the run-up to the Second World War, where Weir remained concerned about Government requisition, which, despite a purchase offer from Japanese interests for his tankers in July 1939, occurred in August 1939.<sup>116</sup> Subsequently, all seven were sunk by enemy action, the first, *Inverliffey* (9,456gt) torpedoed and shelled by a U-boat on 11 September 1939, and the last, *Inverilen* (9,456gt) sunk by torpedo on 3 February 1943.<sup>117</sup>

### **Insurance, Investment, Share Dividends, and the Second World War**

Bank Line's parent company, Andrew Weir, had long been involved in insurance broking, and on 16 November 1936 Andrew Weir Investment Ltd. was formed. Broking and investment income would thereafter alleviate the cyclical nature of shipping and substantially bolster the firm's reserves. On 29 February 1940 Andrew Weir Insurance Co. Ltd. was incorporated as a wholly owned subsidiary of Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. It wrote general and aviation business on both a direct and reinsurance basis.<sup>118</sup>

### **Share Dividends**

At the nadir of the interwar depression in 1932 Bank Line paid an extraordinary dividend on its ordinary shares of 60 per cent less tax; no ordinary dividend in the subsequent four years, and 12.5 per cent in 1937, 15

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but full runs of this information are rare as the magazine's emphasis changed over time.

<sup>115</sup> Four from Deutsche Werft, each 14,000dwt and three from Bremer Vulkan of Vegesack, each 13,700dwt. Service speed was 13 knots.

<sup>116</sup> Letter on possible Japanese sale, 8 September 1939, MT 59/2006, TN, noted that Inverforth had received a very good offer from Japan.

<sup>117</sup> *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 67-68.

<sup>118</sup> Price Waterhouse Cooper, Insolvency Notes beginning 12 November 1992, and Companies House, Co., No. 0036980, Andrew Weir Shipping Co. Ltd., in Administration 20 November 2014, <https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/business-restructuring/insights/brs-uk-ins-assignments-andrew-weir-insurance-company-limited.html>.

per cent in 1938, 10 per cent in 1939, and 20 per cent in 1940, and no ordinary dividend for the subsequent four years. However, dividends were paid on all three preference classes from 1932 to 1945.<sup>119</sup>

## The Second World War

From 1920 to 1938 the majority of Bank Line's motor ships were built at Belfast and Govan. Harland and Wolff built and engined 24 ships (at Govan 21), with 12 ships built by Workman Clark (1928) Ltd. at Belfast. Harland and Wolff at Belfast completed the last two Bank Line motor ships ordered pre-war in 1940, the first vessels completed there since *Ernebank* in February 1937.<sup>120</sup> During the Second World War, Bank Line's losses due to enemy action were far greater than in the First World War. In one day, 31 January 1941, two ships, one bombed and sunk (*Speybank*) and the other captured (*Rowanbank*), were lost. Andrew Weir managed 25 ships on behalf of the British Government between 1930 and 1948.<sup>121</sup> By 1945, the Bank Line fleet consisted of 31 motor ships and 13 steamships totalling 230,149 gross tons, averaging 13 years of age.<sup>122</sup> Table 2 below shows Bank Line's balance sheets during the Second World War.

Profit figures in Bank Line's account exceeded £100,000 in only two years, 1940 and 1944. Clearly, Weir's policy during the war years, owing to (from 1941 onwards) Excess Profit Tax, was to build up reserves for general purposes, tonnage replacement, deferred repairs and taxation. Debentures had been paid off by 1943, and cash on deposit on 31 December 1945 was £500,000. A year later this had risen fivefold to £2,540,000. There were no mortgages on the Bank Line fleet. Of the 500,000 ordinary shares of £1 each fully paid up, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. held 499,993.

## Post-1945

Weir incorporated Andrew Weir Shipping and Trading Company Limited on 4 September 1945 as the parent company of Bank Line with Andrew Weir as President, and his son and heir to the baronetcy Andrew Alexander Morton Weir as the governing director. By 1946, the Bank Line fleet consisted of 21 motor ships and four steamships totalling 164,835gt, with ships averaging 13 years of age. Faced with attempting to replace the Bank Line fleet's substantial

<sup>119</sup> "The Bank Line Limited," *Fairplay's Annual Summary of British Shipping Finance*, 1945-51 (London: Fairplay Shipping Journal, 1945-51).

<sup>120</sup> *Araybank* and *Shirrabank*. *Araybank*, considered a total loss after being bombed on 16 May 1941 was later salvaged and resumed service under Italian ownership as *Napoli* in 1948.

<sup>121</sup> Bank Line Fleet Lists.

<sup>122</sup> Lloyd's Register of Shipping Annual Summaries.

**Table 2: Bank Line Ltd., Balance Sheets 31  
December 1940 to 31 December 1945 £ sterling**

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
PUC						
Pref A	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Pref B	123,319	123,319	123,319	123,319	123,319	123,319
Pref C	78,785	78,785	78,785	78,785	78,785	78,785
Ord S.	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
Deb	421,967	283,729	144,253	1,460		
SC	1,740,645	1,184,495	1,233,127	598,574	392,587	196,161
GRF	1,400,000	1,400,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
FRR	272,187	577,065	1,097,686	1,900,009	1,904,084	2,108,159
RDR	65,000	185,000	335,000	365,000	637,000	697,000
RFT						329,104
P/L	121,932	60,603	59,859	60,507	107,638	48,977
	4,923,835	4,592,966	5,772,029	5,827,654	5,943,413	6,281,505
Fleet	1,574,839	591,192	942,091	659,091	1,074,046	1,430,333
Inv	437,892	427,892	427,892	410,923	400,837	384,098
ISC	460,000	460,000	460,000	460,100	460,100	460,100
GTR	172,187	365,861	479,341	697,590	697,590	426,174
GS	-	745,000	1,719,604	2,000,251	2,325,000	1,823,938
DSC	236,957	142,500	142,500	-		
SD	1,052,579	874,688	644,594	683,601	396,262	210,350
TRC	-	-	-	219,350	150,000	406,850
SCD	-	6,094	-	-		
BDM	989,381	979,769	956,007	696,748	439,578	639,662
CAB					500,000	500,000
	4,923,835	4,592,966	5,772,029	5,827,654	5,943,413	6,281,505

**Key:**

PUC-Paid up Capital. Pref A: 200,000 preference shares "A" 6 per cent cumulative of £1 each-fully paid up. Pref B: 150,000 preference shares "B" 4 per cent cumulative of £1 each - 123,319 fully paid up. Pref C: 150,000 Preference Shares "C" 7 per cent cumulative of £1 each - 78,785 fully paid up. Ord S: 500,000 ordinary shares of £1 each-fully paid up. Authorised capital - £5,500,000. Deb: Debentures 2.5 per cent. SC - sundry creditors, including provision for taxation etc. GRF - General Reserve Fund. FRR-Fleet Replacement Reserve. RDR-Reserve for Deferred Repairs. RFT - Reserve for Taxation. P/L - Profit and Loss Account. Fleet. INV - Investments. ISC - Investments in Subsidiary Companies. GTR - Government Tonnage Replacement Account. GS - Government Securities. SD - Sundry Debtors. TRC - Tax Reserve Certificates. BDM - Balance due by Managers. CAB - Cash at Bank.

Source: "The Bank Line Limited," *"Fairplay's" Annual Summary of British Shipping Finance, 1945-51.*

war losses of 12 motorships and 11 steamships<sup>123</sup> when the British shipbuilding industry was mainly engaged on reconversion work, in 1947 Bank Line purchased 12 former Liberty Ships previously under its management for government account. All were steamships, continuing a dual ordering and purchasing policy in combination with motor ships that pertained throughout the interwar period. However, in 1947, Bank Line had taken ownership of its first post-1945 built motor ship, *Eastbank* from Wm. Doxford at Sunderland, followed by two others from that company in 1948.<sup>124</sup> In addition, in that year three war-built Empire steamships managed by Andrew Weir were purchased.<sup>125</sup> By this stage, Bank Line's cash at banks position on 31 December 1948 stood



Faced with rebuilding the fleet post-Second World War, Bank Line bought no fewer than 12 "Liberty" types, giving it the largest number of these standard ships under the British flag. *Tielbank* built 1943 was bought in 1947 and sold in 1960, finding first Italian and later Liberian-flag owners until broken up in 1969. *Ships in Focus*

at £4,166,915, its fleet replacement reserve at £4,715,215, its general reserve fund at £2,000,000, and no ship mortgages.<sup>126</sup> Clearly, the war years and their

<sup>123</sup> Two motorships are omitted from the total. *Alynbank* (completed 1925) requisitioned by the Ministry of Shipping as an auxiliary anti-aircraft ship on 12 October 1939 was compulsory purchased by the Ministry of War Transport on 30 October 1940 and on 9 June 1944 sunk as part of the Gooseberry No.3 harbour off Normandy; in December 1945 she was raised and sold to a West of Scotland shipbreaker. *Speybank* (completed 1926) was captured as a prize on 31 January 1941 by a German auxiliary cruiser in the North Atlantic; under German colours she was sunk in error by a U-boat on 3 March 1943.

<sup>124</sup> *Southbank* and *Westbank*.

<sup>125</sup> Formerly *Empire Aden*, *Empire Honduras* and *Empire Takoradi*. Renamed *Etivebank*, *Lochybank* and *Shielbank*.

<sup>126</sup> "The Bank Line, Limited," *"Fairplay's" Annual Summary of British Shipping Finance*, 1950, 1.

immediate aftermath had been good to the company.

In a break from the past, in April 1948 the original (1875) partnership of Andrew Weir and Company was finally dissolved. Bank Line only returned to Harland and Wolff's Belfast shipyard in 1953 when three motor ships were completed and another three in 1955.<sup>127</sup> With the fleet of Inver Tankers destroyed during the war hastening the withdrawal of Andrew Weir & Company from the sole transport of oil, no records exist as to why the decision not to renew its tanker fleet was taken, effectively missing out on the post-war boom in seaborne oil transportation. On 4 May 1954 Bank Line's authorised share capital had increased to £5,500,000 by the creation of 4,000,000 ordinary



Bank Line's first post-war building was *Eastbank* from Doxford's Pallion Yard at Sunderland in 1947. She was sold in 1965, but managed another 15 years' work under flags-of-convenience or Greek registry before demolition at La Spezia in 1980. *Ships in Focus*

shares of £1 each, and on 30 June 1959 each of the "C" preference shares of £1 each were subdivided in four preference shares of 5s (25 pence) each and authorised capital increased to £5,600,000 by creation of 400,000 "C" preference shares of 5s each.<sup>128</sup>

## Death

On Andrew Weir's death aged 91 years on 17 September 1955, he was succeeded by Andrew Alexander Morton Weir as the second Lord Inverforth. Shortly afterwards the company marked its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a series of eleven articles in the *Journal of Commerce and Shipping Telegraph* of 14

<sup>127</sup> In 1953 *Beaverbank* (1), *Nessbank* (1) and *Fleetbank* (1); and in 1955 *Cedarbank* (2), *Foylebank* (2) and *Laganbank* (2).

<sup>128</sup> Information from Memorandum of Association as altered by special resolution passed on 30 November 1988. Bank Line Ltd., registered in Scotland.

October 1955, two of which were by shipbuilders: J. Ramsay Gebbie (1889-1968), then managing director of Wm. Doxford & Sons Ltd., Sunderland; and Denis Rebbeck (1914-1994), then deputy managing director at Harland & Wolff, Belfast, whose firms had built the majority of Bank Line ships in the interwar period and post-1945.<sup>129</sup> Up to 1955, the Bank Line steamship fleet, as was the case with its earlier sailing fleet, tilted towards acquisitions (46) against newbuilds (43), the last acquired in 1948 and the last newbuild in 1940.<sup>130</sup> However, motor ships in the Bank Line fleet were heavily tilted towards newbuilds (51) against acquisitions (6). The extant Bank Line fleet on Andrew Weir's death consisted of 29 motor ships and 14 steamships. This total does not include four steamships sold in 1955.<sup>131</sup> At Weir's death, of the steamships, 12 were built under the US Emergency Ship Programme in various United States shipyards, and two Empire ships were built in British yards. In addition, Inver Tankers and Trading continued to own two motor ships.<sup>132</sup>

Newbuilding continued for the Bank Line fleet with six motor ships on order from Harland & Wolff at Belfast and eight from Wm. Doxford at Sunderland. During 1957, Bank Line's parent (holding) company Andrew Weir Transport and Trading Co. Ltd. was renamed Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. The longevity of Bank Line motorships and the likelihood of age related incidents occurring is exemplified by *Forresbank*, completed at Harland and Wolff, Belfast in June 1925. She finally succumbed to an engine room explosion and fire on 10 November 1958, 150 miles south of Durban, and was duly abandoned before drifting ashore and constituting a total loss.<sup>133</sup> In the following year, Bank Line sold two motorships to Japanese and Hong Kong shipbreakers.<sup>134</sup>

Having since its inception exclusively operated foreign-based services, only in December 1960 did Bank Line inaugurate a home-based outward monthly liner service from Britain/Continent to Northern Australia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and French western Pacific dependencies. Bank Line

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<sup>129</sup> Respectively, "Wear Yard's Orders" and "Built at Belfast," both reprinted in *Seventy Adventurous Years*, 54-58 and 59-64.

<sup>130</sup> *Sheilbank*, completed in March 1945 by Wm. Gray, West Hartlepool as *Empire Takoradi* for the Ministry of War Transport and purchased by Bank Line in 1948, who had chartered and managed the ship since May 1946. *Thursobank* was completed by J. Readhead of South Shields for Bank Line in October 1940 and sunk by U-boat on 22 March 1942 whilst on a voyage from New York to Alexandria via Cape Town.

<sup>131</sup> Appleyard, Bank Line, 1855-1985, Fleet Lists, these were, *Deebank*, *Tynebank*, *Teviotbank* and *Etivebank*.

<sup>132</sup> Figures extrapolated from Fleet lists in Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1885-1985*, 57-106.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>134</sup> *Comliebank*, completed at Harland & Wolff, Govan in December 1924 to Japanese shipbreakers, and *Clydebank*, completed January 1925 at Harland & Wolff, Govan to Hong Kong shipbreakers.



continued to order new tonnage to replace its pre-war motor ships and war-built steamships, the last of which was sold in 1960, with modern motor ships from Sunderland and Belfast. From 1960 to 1962 five Bank Line motorships, all completed by Workman Clark, Belfast in 1930 were sent to Japanese and Hong Kong shipbreakers.<sup>135</sup> Despite the drive to relatively modern ships, the dangers inherent in ocean-going shipping were ever present. On 26 December 1964, *Southbank*, completed by Wm. Doxford in 1948, ran aground on Washington Island on route from Port Pirrie to the United Kingdom with general cargo. Five days later she broke in two and was declared a constructive total loss. Earlier in July and August 1964 Bank Line's last two passenger motor ships, *Ispingo* and *Inchanga*, were sent to shipbreakers.<sup>136</sup> From 1964 to 1967 twelve newbuild motorships were added to the Bank Line fleet.<sup>137</sup>

By April 1967, *Teviotbank* had been completed at Wm. Doxford, the 30<sup>th</sup> ship built from the Sunderland yard for Bank Line since the war. In January 1968 with the completion of *Gowanbank*, Harland & Wolff had completed 28 motor ships for the company since the war, with a further two coming from Swan Hunter and Wigham Richardson at Wallsend on the River Tyne. Details of how Bank Line financed these 60 ships are unknown. However, from 1966



Post-war, orders went almost alternately to Doxford at Sunderland or Harland and Wolff at Belfast, the latter culminating in *Gowanbank* of 1968. She was sold to a Greek owner in 1979, and after stranding at Port Louis, Mauritius in February 1982 was broken up in India. *Author's collection*

<sup>135</sup> Myrtlebank and *Tweedbank* in 1960 and *Taybank* to Hong Kong shipbreakers in 1961 respectively, and *Irisbank* and *Lossiebank* to Japanese shipbreakers in 1961 and 1962 respectively.

<sup>136</sup> Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1885-1985*, Fleet Lists, 102.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-130.

to 1970 it is likely that Bank Line took advantage of a government investment grant scheme of 25 per cent reduced to 20 per cent of the cost of a ship if built in a UK shipyard, and a government guarantee scheme in respect of loans made by banks to UK ship-owners, normally over an eight to ten year period at 5.5 percent interest for up to 80 percent of the cost of the ship.<sup>138</sup> Completed in January 1968, *Gowanbank* proved to be the last motor ship built for Bank Line by Harland & Wolff at Belfast. Thereafter, all future Bank Line ships were built in English North East Coast yards.

### **MacAndrews and Co. Ltd.**

In 1967, under the MacPak name, MacAndrews began its first container service from British to Spanish ports. Initially, chartered tonnage was used, but in 1968 two ships with capacity for refrigerated containers were delivered by the Grangemouth Dockyard Company, each capable of carrying 100 refrigerated containers. In 1970, both ships were lengthened by 20 feet and converted to fixed-guide containers vessels.<sup>139</sup>

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**Part two of this article will cover the history of Bank Line in the post-1970 period.**

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<sup>138</sup> H. Murphy, *Shipbuilding in the United Kingdom. A History of the British Shipbuilders Corporation* (London, 2021), 23-27.

<sup>139</sup> file on MacAndrews, World Ship Society Ltd., Chatham Dockyard Archive and Library. The ships were *Cervantes* and *Churucca*.