A Major Scottish Tramp Ship and Liner Company: Andrew Weir's Bank Line – 1875-2016. Part 2, 1970-2016.

Roy Fenton and Hugh Murphy

*Following on from Part 1, (*The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord*, 3 (2024)), Part 2 considers the later history of Andrew Weir's Bank Line and its subsidiary shipping companies from 1970 through changes in name of its shipping operation to dissolved company status in 2016. As in Part 1, in tandem we also trace the history of Bank Line's holding company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd.*

*Donnant suite à la première partie de l'article (*The Northern Mariner/Le marin du Nord*, 3 (2024)), cette deuxième partie traite de l'histoire récente de la Bank Line d'Andrew Weir et de ses sociétés filiales de transport maritime de 1970 jusqu'au changement de nom de la société et à sa dissolution en 2016. Tout comme dans la première partie, nous retraçons ici l'histoire de la société de portefeuille de Bank Line, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd.*

Challenging Times

During the 1960s there was much concern in government circles about the relative decline of the British-registered fleet and an acknowledgement that the British shipbuilding industry was in actual decline. In the latter case, a landmark Board of Trade sponsored report of 1965-1966 urged mergers of firms on river centres by specialisation, facilitated by government grants and

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Lloyd's Register for 1976 lists Bank Line Ltd. as owning 44 ships, with the oldest two, *Ashbank* (pictured) and *Pinebank*, built in 1959. They were typical of the fleet, built by one of Bank's traditional suppliers, Harland and Wolff Ltd.. They were modest-sized, shelter deck, motor ships equally suited to tramping or liner services. Both were sold to a London-Greek owner in 1976, who placed *Ashbank* under the Liberian flag as *Newcrest*. In 1983 she was sold to ship breakers at San Esteban de Pravia but whilst in tow to the yard she broke adrift in heavy weather and stranded near Gijon, where was broken up "as lies." *Roy Fenton collection*

loans.[1] A similar strategy of mergers of shipping companies was mooted in a later report on shipping; however, no grants or loans which might facilitate this aim were forthcoming.

The Rochdale Report

Originally set-up in 1967, a Board of Trade sponsored inquiry into the British shipping industry chaired by Viscount Rochdale finally reported in 1970. The report was largely uninspiring and left the British shipping industry virtually unscathed. Rochdale reported, *inter alia*, that British shipping firms should explore the possibility of further mergers in order to reduce the volume of smaller companies and develop more rational groupings to operate and market shipping services.[2] The Report referred to the Inverforth Group of

1 Shipbuilding Inquiry Report, 1965-1966, Cmnd. 2937 (London, HMSO, 1966).

2 Committee of Inquiry into Shipping Report, Cmnd. 4337 (London, HMSO, 1970), para., 1204. For a near contemporary academic appraisal of the report, see, D.H. Aldcroft, "Reflections on the Rochdale Inquiry into Shipping," *Maritime History* No.1 (1971), republished in D.H.

Despite concerns about the depressed state of shipping, Bank Line was receiving a steady flow of new ships in 1976. The *Cedarbank* was the fifth of 12 "River" class ships built by Doxford and its successor Sunderland Shipbuilders Ltd. With engines placed well aft, between the fourth and fifth hatch, they had the capability of carrying a modest deck cargo of containers. *Cedarbank* was sold to a Greek owner after just seven years' service. After carrying a variety of names under the flags of Greece and the Bahamas, she was up broken up as *Nini* at Alang, India in 1999. *Ships in Focus*

companies, which in addition to Bank Line, United Baltic Corporation (UBC) and MacAndrews, still contained Inver Tanker Co. Ltd., which by this stage had only one motor ship, which was transferred to Bank Line in 1964 and sold in 1974.[3] The rationale for this company remained to provide extra dividend income to the Weir and Morton families in addition to their holdings in Bank Line.

By the 1970s, the advent of containerisation posed a number of challenges for Bank Line's liner services. Far better capitalised competitors could potentially monopolise this growing trade, reaping economies of scale by building specialised container ships of increasing tonnage. Owing to high

Aldcroft, *Studies in British Transport History, 1870-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1974), 275-295.

3 *Laganbank* (1955), 5,671gt. From 1974 she had three owners, before being abandoned at sea after discovery of leaks in her hull and she is presumed to have sunk in February 1978. Inver previously had three other motor ships built for the company and managed by Andrew Weir and Company, *Eskbank* (1937), 5,137gt, sold 1961, *Ettrickbank* (1937), 5,138gt sold for scrap 1962 and *Teesbank* (1937), 5136gt, torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat on 5 December 1942.

building costs of these ships, British shipping firms had already formed container consortia relatively early, the two largest being Overseas Containers Ltd. (OCL) in 1965 and Associated Container Transport Services (ACTS) in 1966.[4] OCL chose a West German consortium consisting of Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft (HDW), who had merged their Hamburg and Kiel shipyards in 1968, and Bremer Vulkan at Bremen to build five container ships, and Fairfield at Govan on the Upper Clyde, to build one (*Jervis Bay*).[5] The likelihood was that any cargo which could be containerised would be, and this forced the general purpose tramp and liner firms such as Bank Line to rethink strategy. Nevertheless, although Weir's Bank Line had not been historically averse to join liner conferences it remained reluctant to join container consortia such as ACTS. The likelihood is that in doing so it would put its substantial liquid resources and investment portfolio at considerable risk, and its share of new build costs would be substantial in comparison to new construction of motor ships.

Viscount Rochdale noted that in gathering evidence it had been put to his committee that the day of the general purpose dry cargo tramp ship was over and that it had been increasingly superseded by the bulk carrier with engine and crew accommodation aft and wide cargo hatches to provide the maximum of space to load and unload commodities such as iron ore, grain, coal, bauxite and alumina, and phosphate rock. Indeed, by 1968, on a ton-mile basis, over 75 percent of seaborne trade in these major bulk commodities was carried in bulk carriers of over 18,000dwt. Moreover, the size of bulk carriers was increasing rapidly to mirror that of oil tankers, the largest on order in the region of 250,000dwt. By 1970 there were 25 bulk carriers of over 100,000dwt and over 60 of between 50,000dwt and 100,000dwt on order throughout the world.[6] The advantage of scale in the increasing tonnage of bulk carriers as was the case for oil tankers is that it made possible major reductions in the cost per ton mile of movement of commodities in bulk.

The increasing trend towards scale both in container vessels and bulk carriers had obvious implications for Bank Line; either it could run with it and order vessels of ever-increasing size, unlikely given its traditional markets, particularly in the Pacific islands trades and on cost grounds alone, or compromise by designing ships to part load, for example, containers on deck.

4 OCL comprised Ocean Transport and Trading, Peninsular and Oriental, Furness Withy and British and Commonwealth Shipping. ACTs comprised, Ben Line, Blue Star, Cunard, Ellerman and Harrison Lines.

5 For this, see, H. Murphy and I. Buxton, "A Liverpool Shipping Line: Ocean Steam Ship Company Limited's shipbuilding experience, 1962-1978," *The Mariner's Mirror* 107:2 (2021): 324-338, https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2021.1940522.

6 Committee of Inquiry into Shipping Report, para., 489.

Alternatively, Bank Line could join a bulk carrier consortia, as did six British dry bulk companies who joined the Seabridge Consortia earlier in 1965.[7] Bank Line's response to Rochdale was however to remain much as it had been beforehand. Rochdale noted that in 1968, Andrew Weir companies, excluding the fleets of oil majors Shell Transport and Trading and British Petroleum, comprised 56 ships of 478,000gt making them the sixth largest British flag group with Pacific & Oriental in first place with 121 ships of 2,296,000gt.[8] During 1970, Bank Line stuck to its business model and ordered six 15,500dwt cargo liners from Swan Hunter. However, in a departure from previous practice and in part its answer to containerisation, some Bank Line ships began to carry containers on deck. Bank Line had ordered from Sunderland Shipbuilders twelve 16,900dwt "River" class ships capable of carrying containers and each had one derrick designated as heavy-lift with 50-ton capacity. The first, *Fleetbank*, was completed in December 1973 and the last, *Fenbank*, in August 1978.

Ship Losses

In 1973 and in 1975 Bank Line suffered two losses at sea. *Levernbank* ran aground on a reef in fog one mile from Matarani on the Peruvian coast on 9 July 1973. She was re-floated but drifted ashore as the tow cable broke and sank. On the night of 16-17 August 1975 *Lindenbank*, which had sailed from Christmas Island on 14 August to Fanning Island to load Copra from surf boats, was drifting off English Harbour when she ran aground on coral and was stranded. Attempts by United States Navy tugs and a sister ship, *Elmbank*, to re-float her, despite the jettisoning of cargo, including coconut oil, were unsuccessful and she was abandoned on 15 September and later judged a constructive total loss. At a later three-day Wreck Inquiry Court hearing in London, *Lindenbank*'s Master and Third Mate were censured on 15 August 1977.[9]

Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Consequent upon the United States' and other nations' support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war of October 1973, OPEC imposed sanctions on crude oil exports to western nations. This drove up the price of a barrel of oil (24 US gallons), which quadrupled in price by 1974 to $12 inducing widespread

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7 Bibby, Bowring, H. Clarkson, Houlder Brothers (then part of Furness Withy), Hunting, and Silver Line. The Seabridge consortia also built and operated oil bulk ore carriers.

8 Committee of Inquiry into Shipping Report, table on p.295.

9 Wreck Report "Lindenbank," 1975, Report of Court No. 8065 (London, HMSO, 1977).

economic depression in western economies as a combination of scarcity of supply and high fuel costs took hold. This had a lag effect on British shipbuilding, but by 1975 its effects on oil tankers operating and under construction were evident leading to mass lay-up of tanker tonnage, widespread cancellation of orders, and slow steaming to conserve fuel. In the dry cargo sector, OPEC sanctions did increase fuel costs for operators including Bank Line, but in overall terms the embargo initially had less effect than that on oil tankers. However, tanker owners began to convert tankers into bulk carriers and over-supply relative to demand then began to effect freight rates, which like the oil tanker sector entered a downward spiral. This had had a lag effect on sales of second-hand dry cargo tonnage, and ship prices later plummeted.[10] However, Bank Line had in 1973 sold seven motor ships at the top of the market and four more in 1974. Any gain was somewhat ameliorated by orders for six motor ships under construction in 1973 and three in 1974 placed in an inflationary climate.[11]

Death and succession, 1975

On 17 September 1975, the second Lord Inverforth, Andrew Alexander Morton Weir died and was succeeded by his son, Andrew Charles Roy Weir (1932-1982) as the third Lord. Roy Weir would later chair the International Chamber of Shipping, become Vice Chairman of the Baltic Exchange and a member of the General Council of British Shipping.[12] Roy Weir faced mounting challenges to Bank Line's business model.

Post-OPEC, by 1976 there were clear signs of recession in the dry bulk trades. Bank Line, like other British shipping lines in the dry bulk trades, began to accumulate trading losses owing to plummeting freight rates and increased competition. Its parent company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., could for a time compensate for losses on shipping through its insurance (broking and underwriting) and investment vehicles, which provided the bulk of profits. Weir's turnover at the financial year ended 31 December 1976 amounted to £70,800,000 and profit before taxation was £12,400,000 with capital employed amounting to £147,000,000. Trading operations in Bank Line showed a profit

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10 For this period and its effects, see, H. Murphy and S. Tenold, "The effects of the Oil Price Shocks on Shipbuilders in the 1970s," in *Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Workers around the World: Case Studies, 1950-2010*, eds. R. Varela, H. Murphy and M. van der Linden (Amsterdam and Chicago, 2017), 665-674.

11 H. Appleyard, *Bank Line, 1885-1985* (Kendal, 1985), 105-114, extrapolated from Fleet Lists.

12 Ibid., 16.

of £1,398,000. Liquidity was aided by ship sales amounting to £3,511,000. Investments approached £87,000,000.[13]

Without ship sales the financial position would have been far worse, and recognising potential liquidity problems, the Directors of Andrew Weir in February 1976 decided to waive dividends on two classes of cumulative preference shares in Bank Line, and on one further class in July. By November it had been resolved that from 1 January 1977 and until further notice no remuneration should be payable to any Andrew Weir Director by any subsidiary company, and that Bank Line Director's fees should be consolidated into an individual's basic salary. In February 1977 the waiver of dividends on preference shares to 31 December 1977 was approved. However, the dividend on £1 Ordinary Shares which had been held for the year ending 31 December 1976 was 16.9 percent![14] By this stage the main business of Andrew Weir remained ownership and management of cargo vessels trading worldwide, insurance underwriting, insurance broking, and investment dealing and finance.

Recognising that its principal activity of shipping was cyclical, Andrew Weir had diversified, investing a limited part of its resources into other areas, such as country hotels, and curiously in a Rhodesian, later Zimbabwean, building society, a vintner and—more pertinent—a travel agency. In December 1977 the acquisition of Spink and Sons broadened the base of its operations with the aim of improving overall return on capital employed.[15] By the end the financial year 1977, Bank Line showed a trading loss of £2,526,000. Of voyages completed during the year, 52 percent were in liner trades and 48 percent on voyage and time charters, with the Bank Line fleet consisting of 44 vessels. Expenditure on new ships during 1977 totalled £26,512,000, financed partly from company resources and partly by government shipbuilding loans

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13 Andrew Weir and Company Reports and Accounts, 1977, B19/129/31-33, London Metropolitan Archives, Clerkenwell, London (LMA).

14 Minute Book Andrew Weir & Co., Meetings of Directors, 12 February and 11 November 1976, and 23 February and 14 June 1977, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

15 Spink and Sons was formed in London in 1666. Its business was in auction and private sales of stamps, coins, banknotes, share certificates, medals and works of art. During 1993 AWSL acquired from the parent company Andrew Weir the whole of the issued share capital group of Spink and Sons. It was reported that Spink had been sold to Christies International for £16,500,000 in April 1993. *The Independent*, 17 April 1993. "Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Report and Accounts, [year ended 31 December] 1992," https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00398297 (hereafter https://... gov.uk/company/0398297).The actual sale price was for a maximum consideration of £16,300,000. Of this sum, an initial payment of £6,900,000 was received and payment of £9,400,000 deferred, consideration dependent principally upon the level of Spink's sales in the two years following completion. Net assets of Spink on 31 December 1992 were £11,400,000 after bank borrowings.

of £17,770,000 in 1977 repayable every six months over seven years. By this stage, Bank Line had decided to lease for a ten-year period three ships which were on order. It was recognised that shipping was in a major recession and that surplus tonnage and increased competition had spread to the dry cargo trades.[16]

Given the high ordinary share dividend in 1976, the situation had changed markedly by September 1977 as both Bank Line's chairman Lord Inverforth and the Hon. John Vincent Weir waived dividends in respect of 200,000 ordinary shares in Bank Line whilst the waiver on preference share dividends continued until 31 December 1978.[17] Earlier, in February 1978, it had been decided to offer holders of Bank Line preference shares 65p in cash for each 6 percent "A" preference share of £1 each, 50p in cash for each 4 percent "B" preference share of £1 each, and 25p each for each 10 percent "C" preference share at par. By May acceptances had been received for 26 of 26 "A", 13 of 13 "B" and 38 out of 73 "C" preference shares.[18] In June 1976, *Cedarbank* had been completed by Sunderland Shipbuilders Ltd., the first vessel launched at their enclosed ship factory at Pallion on the River Wear.[19]

United Baltic Corporation Ltd. (UBC)

Bank Line had continued its long-term partnership with the East Asiatic Company of Copenhagen in the Baltic trades through UBC. On 29 September1977, UBC doubled its share capital to £8,000,000 via capitalisation of reserves and a rights issue prompting Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. to subscribe £1,000,000 in cash for the proposed new shares in UBC.[20]

Bank and Savill Line Ltd.

At the end of 1977, Bank Line's 45-year-old service to Australia and New Zealand was terminated. However, Bank Line and Shaw Savill and Albion had formed Bank and Savill Line Ltd. on 31 October 1977, and from 1 January 1978

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16 Andrew Weir and Company Reports and Accounts, 1977, B19/129.31033, LMA.

17 Minute Book of Andrew Weir & Co., Directors meeting 28 September 1977 and 24 January 1978, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

18 Directors Meetings 21 February and 23 May 1978, ibid.

19 H. Murphy and R. Blackman-Rogers, "Greenfield Shipyards and Modernisation in the British Shipbuilding Industry and Elsewhere, 1900-1977," *The Mariner's Mirror* 108:2 (2022): 209, https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2022.2009246. The Pallion Scheme was conceived as a totally enclosed ship factory, and when completed extended to 30,000 sq. metres with a building dock measuring 181 metres by 50 metres. Pallion was at this stage the largest enclosed ship factory in the world.

20 Minute Book of Andrew Weir & Co., Directors meeting 27 July 1977, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

it commenced a regular liner service between US Gulf ports and Australasia, with additional calls on the northbound leg at Central American and Caribbean ports. The BANDS (as it became known) service was container-orientated (200-300 TEUs) as well as carrying substantial break bulk cargo and oils in bulk. Vessels employed on the route were chartered in from Bank Line, Shaw Savill and other liner companies as required. The five Bank Line motor ships regularly employed were capable of carrying containers, supplemented as and when required by the company's other ships. During 1978 around 5,000 TEUs were carried from US Gulf ports as against 2,000 in 1977.[21]

Over-supply and increased competition in the dry bulk trades had serious implications for Bank Line's profitability and so it proved, as by the end of 1978 the trading loss had ballooned to £8,076,527. Thirteen ships had been sold and three new ships delivered, and a decision was taken to withdraw from the East and West Africa trades out of the Bay of Bengal. It was noted that during 1979 Bank Line would take delivery of six new ships whilst continuing to dispose of older vessels. Of the new builds it was considered financially advantageous to take the last three on order on demise charter from lessors who were the registered owners. As the Chairman noted, with no end of the shipping slump in sight, the overall prospects for 1979 were not good and he feared that almost certainly they would be no better than those from 1978.[22] Underpinning his remarks a new oil crisis of 1979-1980 consequent upon the Iranian Revolution prolonged the post-OPEC shipping depression, but did aid the bulk carrier sector transporting coal, at least until over-supply of bulk carriers began depressing freight rates for dry bulk commodities. Such was the situation that the third Lord Inverforth and the Hon. John Vincent Weir continued to waive their dividends on 200,000 ordinary shares of £1 each, (1978-18.59p dividend per share). Nonetheless, by way of compensation, the Chairman's remuneration was increased to £33,000 p.a. in March 1978 and to £45,000 p.a. in December 1980.[23]

Bank Line's trading loss for 1979 was worse at £10,182,799. During the year the UK-USA Gulf service which had commenced at the end of 1977 had been discontinued. The Bank Line fleet on 1 January 1980 comprised 25 ships with a total deadweight 419,037 tons, with one container ship due to be delivered in June 1980, which as *Willowbank* would prove to be last built under the Bank Line name. With the average age of the fleet now 4.3 years it was decided (wisely) to end the fleet replacement programme for the time being. To compound matters, the Bank Savill Line was causing "considerable

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21 *Bank Line Magazine*, April 1979.

22 Andrew Weir Reports and Accounts, 1978, B19/129/31-33, LMA.

23 Directors Meetings, 23 March 1978 and 18 December 1980, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

anxiety," but it was hoped that it would be more secure following the delivery of Bank Line's first, and as it would turn out, last container ship, *Willowbank*. Bank Line policy was to continue to replace open trades with closed liner trades. Despite this policy the company had benefited from an upturn in the tramp market although the main beneficiaries were shipowners with large bulk carriers and tankers, none of which Bank Line operated.[24]

The major import of sustained losses on trading was that Bank Line, on its own, was now under real pressure to sustain its business model. Its trade now centred on the US Gulf of Mexico, involving liner sailings from ports such as Houston and New Orleans to South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, the UK and the rest of Europe.

Challenging times

On the South Pacific islands routes in 1980, former competitors Bank Line and the Columbus Line of Hamburg agreed to rationalise their sailings, and five Bank Line ships were allocated to these services.[25] That year also saw the return of Bank Line to the USA-South Africa route with an inaugural round service in April between US Gulf and East Coast ports and Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. On 16 July, Bank Line took delivery from Smith's Dock, Tees, of the containership *Willowbank* (18,236gt) capable of carrying 768 TEUs. The construction and purchase of this ship and containers had been undertaken by Royal Bank Leasing Ltd., and she was demise chartered to Bank Line.[26] She was hired to Shaw Savill Line for an Australasia, Central America, Caribbean and US Gulf of Mexico round service along with two other non-Bank Line-owned ships.[27] Bank Line's trading loss for 1980 was £11,100,000 of which, not surprisingly, given the prolonged downturn in freight rates, £4,7000,000 was lost on sale of vessels. However, aided by ship sales of £9,100,000 to Greek and Liberian registered companies in 1981, shipping returned a profit of £8,800,000. A loss of £800,000 was incurred in closing the US Gulf-Europe Line, and with seven ships sold, 19 vessels remained in the Bank Line fleet. With the shipping depression continuing (15 percent of world shipping was

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24 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Report & Accounts, 1979, B19/129/31-33, LMA.

25 Columbus Line would provide two ships and Bank Line four to commit to maintain a regular service with sailings every 24 days. Ships on this route were capable of handling containers and break bulk cargo. Reefer space was available to carry vegetable oils and other bulk liquid cargoes. The joint service operated North European ports of Hull, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Dunkirk and Le Havre and numerous ports in the South Pacific with calls at other ports by arrangement.

26 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., Minute Book, Directors Meeting, 25 October 1978, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

27 Shaw Savill's *Dunedin* and the Shipping Corporation of New Zealand's *New Zealand Caribbean*.

laid up), Bank Line's tramp tonnage had been badly affected; it was noted that the Board could not see a positive trading result for 1982, which was prescient as that year's trading loss would amount to £6,500,000.[28]

UBC

Andrew Weir, through UBC, maintained an interest both in the Baltic trades, and through MacAndrews' interests in Spain which included a container terminal in Bilbao. However, by September 1982, East Asiatic decided it no longer wished to operate short sea shipping services and their 50 percent share in UBC was sold to Andrew Weir for £4,000,000. The deal led

Bank Line deserted their regular builders to order their only cellular container ship, which was completed by Smith's Dock Co. Ltd., Middlesbrough in July 1980. Bank Line's last new building was marked by her receiving the name *Willowbank* which had been carried by their very first purchase, in 1885. The fifth *Willowbank*, the container ship was sold in 1988, and after carrying a variety of names under the flags of Bahamas, Singapore, Panama and South Korea she was broken up as Golden Gate at Alang, India in 2009. *World Ship Society Ltd.*

to UBC's Danish service being closed immediately.[29] Andrew Weir's share of

[28] Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Report & Accounts, 1981 and 1982, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

[29] Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Minute Book, Directors meetings, 14 and 23 September 1982,

UBC losses in 1981 was £910,000 and in 1982 was £657,000. Despite this, Andrew Weir's Directors obviously saw added value in the acquisition as the Board were "delighted" at the purchase of the remaining 50 percent of UBC shares. However, Bank Line's South Africa to Far East Line had been a serious loss maker and was closed and the vessels operating that line sold. One part of Andrew Weir and Company's strategy of investing outside shipping, Spink and Sons, had for the first time in its history posted a loss, of £973,000.[30]

Death and succession, 1982

The third Lord Inverforth, Roy Weir died suddenly on 6 June 1982 on his fiftieth birthday and was succeeded as Chairman by his brother, the Hon. John Vincent Weir (1935-2014). Roy Weir's son, Andrew Peter Weir (1966-) succeeded his father as the fourth Lord Inverforth and would later pursue a medical career. He remained on the parent company Board as a Chairman (2006-2009), director and then as a non-executive director who notified Companies House that he had withdrawn as a person of significant control of the company on 15 December 2021.[31]

Despite the takeover of UBC, it was noted in November 1982 that the shipping scene was "generally disastrous and could reach panic proportions in some parts of the market." A Bank Line motor ship, *Firbank* was on the market for sale but had attracted very little interest. The budget for 1983 forecast a loss of £10,000,000, which was "unacceptable."[32] An impartial observer might wonder why a 40.88p ordinary share dividend declared on 4 April 1982 *was* acceptable.[33]

During 1983 the 1976/1977-built *Cedarbank*, *Firbank*, *Streambank* and *Riverbank* were sold to Greek principals and the 1979-built *Ruddbank* to Lamport and Holt.[34] More ship sales were authorised by the Board and by May 1984 two, *Crestbank* and *Fenbank*, had been sold at expected prices, leaving two others (*Corabank* and *Moraybank*) still to be sold.[35] On the bright side it

B15/149/11-15, LMA.

30 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Report and Accounts, 1982.

31 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Notice of a Person with Significant Control, 15 December 2021, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

32 Minute Book of Andrew Weir and Co., Directors meeting 4 November 1982, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

33 Directors Meeting 25 May 1982, ibid.

34 *Ruddbank* was sold in November for £5,000,000, £2,500,000 of which was used to repay the shipping loan on this vessel.

35 *Corabank* was sold to a Peruvian company in 1984 and *Moraybank* chartered and renamed *ToanaPapau* that year and again renamed *Moraybank* in 1986, again chartered as *Toana Papau* in 1987 and again reverting to *Moraybank* later in that year. She was re-registered to Douglas,

Corabank of 1973 represented a break with tradition, when orders for her and five sisters went to Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. of Newcastle. The combination of electric cranes, standard and heavy lift derricks was also a break with Bank Line's past. Alas, as described above, these fine ships did not last long in the fleet, with *Corabank* herself and *Moraybank* being sold in 1984. The former had a longer second career with Pacific International Lines of Singapore, and as *Kota Barani* was broken up during 1993 at Alang in India. *Roy Fenton collection*

was reported that South Pacific trade had produced a profit of £1,386,000 in 1983 and the profit for 1984 was forecasted at £2,500,000.[36] The Bank Savill (BANDS) service to the US Gulf had ceased to operate, with Bank Line's share of its losses during 1982 being £868,000.[37]

The last ship in Bank Line colours built in Britain, *Willowbank* was sold during 1985 and by 1987 its immediate predecessors, six ships of the Fish class, all built in 1979, had been sold. By this stage many British bulk shipping

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Isle of Man in 1991 and finally broken up at Alang, India on 31 March 1998.

36 Minute Book of Andrew Weir and Co., Directors Meeting, 3 May 1984, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

37 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Report and Accounts, 1982.

firms had been liquidated including the Cardiff-based Reardon Smith in 1985, and two Scottish firms, Hogarth Shipping and Lyle Shipping Plc in 1987. The Seabridge bulker consortium had been wound up in 1981, and a year earlier, the venerable Furness Withy, including its subsidiary Manchester Liners had been sold to Hong Kong's C.Y. Tung group. In 1986, the Overseas Container Line consortium had become solely owned by Peninsular and Oriental, and Ellerman Lines had been taken over by Cunard in 1987. By that year, flagging out of the British Register had become a reality, with many companies using British dependent territories as registries, enabling foreign crewing but with British officers. Indeed, from 1975 to the end of 1982 the British-owned and registered fleet halved in size from 50,000,000 dwt to 24,700,000 dwt (868 ships). In the latter year, 126 ships totalling 4,700,000 dwt left the UK-

Ruddbank of 1979 was the fourth of seven Fish class ships, all from Sunderland Shipbuilders Ltd. with Doxford engines, which were destined to be the last more-or-less conventional cargo liners delivered new to Bank Line. Unusually in 1983 *Ruddbank* found a British buyer in the shape of Lamport and Holt Line Ltd. who renamed her Romney. After further renamings, although still registered in the United Kingdom as *Global Mariner*, on 2 August 2000 she sank after a collision on the River Orinoco in Venezuela, although fortunately her crew including apprentices was safely evacuated. Removal operations were protracted, involving cutting her in two and lifting both parts on to the river bank where she was cut up for scrap. Immediately prior to the collision she was being towed away from a terminal where she had loaded steel products. *Roy Fenton collection* owned and registered fleet. And by March 1983, 88 ships (18 percent of the British registered fleet) totalling 5,800,000 dwt were laid up. As a trade journal noticed, this was the highest level since the Second World War.[38]

Centenary of Bank Line

To mark the centenary of Bank Line in 1985, a special bonus was paid during the year to all group employees and pensioners. The net cost of this paternalistic gesture charged as an extraordinary item in the accounts was £1,131,000 less tax of £429,000, leaving £702,000. Bank Line returned an operating profit of £520,000, but £6,500,000 was written off in the accounts, £1,500,000 was the anticipated loss from one specific sale (*Willowbank*). The remaining £5,000,000 charged as an extraordinary item to downgrade book values of the Fish class vessels in the Bank Line fleet, less deferred tax of £1,750,000, leaving £3,250,000. Bank Line's chairman, the Hon. John Vincent Weir waived his dividend on 500,000 £1 ordinary shares registered in his name. As to the parent Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., net investment income, interest and investment profits contributed £6,200,000. Bank Line in the 1986 financial year again made an operating profit of £1,298,000. It now had eleven ships owned or chartered whose average age was ten years.[39]

SafBank

On 30 November 1987 Safmarine (South African Marine Corporation) and Bank Line agreed to a joint venture which established SafBank as a company operating ships between South Africa and the USA. Safmarine had 45 percent of SafBank with 55 percent owned by Comeric Ltd., a company 63 percent owned by Bank Line and 37 percent indirectly owned by Safmarine. As a result, the parent company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., had voting control of SafBank.[40] As part of the agreement, both Bank Line and Safmarine agreed to withdraw from the trade served by SafBank. This led to the sale of the five remaining Fish class ships in 1987.[41] Completed in 1979 and each capable of carrying 306 TEUs, their lifespan with Bank had been just eight years, and only four in the case of *Ruddbank* which had been sold in 1983.

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38 *The Motor Ship*, July 1983.

39 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Report and Accounts, 1985, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

40 This information is from a legal case in the United States District Court, New York City 7 December 1992, Bowers v Andrew Weir Shipping Limited, 810 F. Supp. 522, https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/810/522/1500239/.

41 *Dacebank*, *Pikebank*, *Roachbank*, *Tenchbank* and *Troutbank*.

Bank Line reorganisation: Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd.

By February 1989, Bank Line and UBC-MacAndrews had been reorganised under the umbrella of Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd. (AWSL). According to AWSL Directors, all divisions were in place and functioning satisfactorily.[42] AWSL, barring chartering and ship management, remained in control of UBC-MacAndrews, SafBank, and the last two ships ordered for UBC from South Korean shipyards for completion in 1989. One, *Baltic Tern*, an ice-strengthened ro-ro vessel of 3,752dwt capable of carrying 357 TEUs and destined for the Felixstowe to Gdynia route was due for delivery in March. However, the other, *Baltic Eider*, a ro-ro cargo ship of 20,865gt destined for the Felixstowe to Finland route was 45 to 60 days behind schedule owing to strikes and a lockout of workers at Hyundai's giant shipyard at Ulsan.[43] The change of company name led to rebranding of its services, UBC becoming AWS Baltic services, and MacAndrews becoming AWS Iberian services. In 1989, earnings per share for shareholders of Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. of 169.3p were, in our opinion, excessive.[44]

Resignation

In a real break with the past, in November 1990, the chairman of Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., the Hon. John Vincent Weir, hugely compensated by the 1989 share dividend, intimated to the board that he wished to dispose of his then highly lucrative holding of 500,000 of the company's 2,500,000 Ordinary Shares of £1 each (20 percent of the issued share capital) at a price of £17.50 per share (£8,750,000), whereupon it was resolved that the Chair would resign from the Board and subsidiary companies and accept £30,000 for loss of office.[45] By December, the situation had been clarified as a consequence of a re-evaluation of the company and the Chairman indicated that he was willing to dispose of his interests in the company at a lower price of £16.54 per share (£8,270,000).[46] Weir duly resigned as Chairman on 8 January 1991 and left to pursue his interests in conservation charities, and was succeeded by the Third Viscount Runciman of Doxford, Walter Garrison Runciman (1934-2020), the first Chairman in the company's history from outside the founding

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[42] Minute Book of Andrew Weir and Company, Directors Meeting, 14 February 1989, B15/149 11-15, LMA.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Group profit and loss account year ended 31 December 1990, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

[45] Minute Book of Andrew Weir and Co., Directors Meeting, 5 November 1990, B15/149/11-15, LMA.

[46] Minute Book of Andrew Weir and Co., Directors Meeting, 6 December 1990, ibid.

family. Runciman, originally an academic sociologist and later chairman of his grandfather's and father's shipping line and management company, and also president of the General Council of British Shipping in the late 1980s, noted in his 1990 Chairman's report that overall results were unsatisfactory and a token final dividend of 2.5p per share was paid, which owing to the now reduced share capital of the company cost £50,000.[47] Runciman remained Chairman until November 2005.

Volatility

Spikes in oil prices had become apparent by 1990 leading to a sharp escalation in bunkering costs. Traditional UBC trade with Finland and Poland gave satisfactory results, but trade with the Soviet Union suffered from the reduction in the flow of cargo due to that country's severe shortage of foreign exchange. The SafBank service did well, and merited expansion with the acquisition of second-hand ships. A three-ship service between the Far East and the South Pacific was begun in conjunction with China Navigation Company.[48]

Andrew Weir Insurance Co. Ltd.

Since incorporation on 29 February 1940, Andrew Weir Insurance Co. Ltd. had concentrated on marine and aviation business and on reinsurance. During February 1990 it was disclosed that progress to dispose of the current business of Andrew Weir Insurance had encountered difficulty resulting from litigation concerning reinsurance placed with a company which had now gone into liquidation. During 1991 the Board reluctantly concluded that the company was too small to continue as an independent underwriting business and it voluntarily withdrew from underwriting activities on its own account and from all classes of business on 29 November 1991, with Provisional Liquidators appointed on 12 November 1992.[49] Subsequently, an arrangement with creditors was agreed, whereby a final distribution of 49.65 percent was made in March 2005 and a petition to wind up the company was made on 20 December 2005, with winding up on 10 January 2007.[50]

On 29 January 1990 Andrew Weir's head office since 1905 at 21 Bury Street, London EC3A had been relocated to Dexter House, Royal Mint Court,

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47 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Chairman's Statement and Review of Operations, 31 December 1990, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

48 Ibid.

49 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir Insurance Company Limited, 1991, https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00359580.

50 High Court of Justice, Chancery Division, Companies Court, Petition No. 8728 of 2006, https://www.thegazette.co.uk/company/AC000617/filing-history/MTc0NTkyMjYwYWRpcXprY3g.

opposite the Tower of London. A year later a provision of £3,200,000 had been made to cover the cost of restructuring and relocation from Dexter House, but it proved impossible to relocate on acceptable terms and it was decided to remain at Dexter House until "an onerous lease," expired in 2014.[51]

Ellerman

An old established English shipping line, Ellerman had combined its various shipping interests into one division in 1973. A decade later, and after sustaining heavy losses, the Ellerman group of companies which had large interests in brewing, printing and hotels was sold to the secretive and then Monaco-based Barclay Brothers for a knockdown price of £45,000,000.[52] In 1985 its shipping division, Ellerman Lines, was the subject of a management buy-out, but in 1987 was taken over by Cunard (parent company Trafalgar House plc), becoming Cunard-Ellerman Lines. Cunard then sold its cruise liners and container services to Peninsular and Oriental in 1991. In the autumn of the same year, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. acquired its Mediterranean shipping division, Cunard-Ellerman, comprising four 300 TEU container ships and some 8,000 owned containers. This was seen as an opportunity to expand AWSL's liner interests into new trades, whilst exploiting the benefits of integrating the Ellerman ships and services with the existing trades, and 110 Ellerman staff moved into Dexter House. Following the sale, the company was renamed Ellerman Container Lines.[53] One of the original ships purchased was sold in 1992 and another purchased in 1987 was sold in 1993.[54] By the 1992 reporting year the container fleets of MacAndrews, Bank Line and Ellerman had been integrated and costs accordingly reduced.

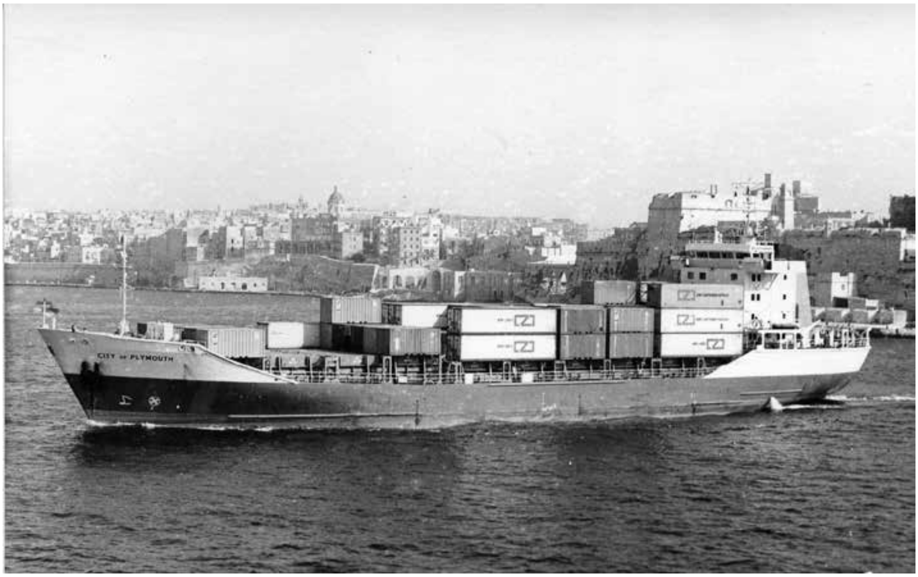
In 1991 it was decided to re-register all the Andrew Weir group UK-registered vessels to the Isle of Man registry ostensibly as a means of remaining competitive on costs whilst retaining technical supervision and responsibility for safety. This had consequent changes in fleet manning requirements and was completed in early 1992. The full cost of the resultant severance payments for

51 Report & Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 31 December 2006, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297. That year a provision was made in the accounts for the onerous lease despite successfully letting out two wings of the building.

52 Obituaries Sir David Barclay, *The Telegraph*, 12 January 2021 and *The Guardian*, 14 January 2021. The Barclay brothers subsequently moved to another tax haven in the Channel Islands.

53 *City of Plymouth* (3,992gt) completed 1979, Appledore Shipbuilders, Devon; *City of Manchester* (1,559gt) completed 1979, Appledore; *City of Ipswich* (1,599gt) completed 1979, Appledore. A fourth ship, *City of Oxford* (1,599gt) completed 1981, Appledore, was purchased by Andrew Weir in 1987.

54 Respectively, *City of Ipswich* in 1992 and *City of Oxford* in 1993.



Following acquisition of the Mediterranean services of Cunard-Ellerman, four container ships were ordered from Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd., beginning with *City of Plymouth*, delivered in 1978. Following integration of the Ellerman services with those of Macandrews, she also carried the names *Cervantes* and *Pacheco* with a short period as *City of Lisbon*. In 2003 the Macandrews business passed to CMA CGM U.K. Shipping Ltd. along with *Pacheco*. She was sold in 2007, but on 20 August 2009 as *Sarah Hanem* she foundered in heavy weather in the Gulf of Aden, with the loss of one member of her crew of 11. *Roy Fenton collection*

redundancy to seafarers amounted to £4,179,000, charged as an exceptional item in group accounts. However, trading conditions worsened still further in 1991, including for the newly acquired Ellerman trades. UBC's trades were further eroded, both by the break-up of the Soviet Union which brought about a virtual collapse in cargo movements, and deterioration in the Finnish and Polish economies. Services to Spain also suffered from the recession and South Pacific services were forced into a loss through aggressive rate cutting by competitors. Only the SafBank service thrived, with the recently acquired multi-purpose 24,270dwt vessel renamed *Olivebank* (4) trading profitably. During 1991 AWSL reported a loss of £4,674,000. Further losses on the insurance business meant the parent company, Andrew Weir, posted a huge loss of £19,345,000.[55]

A marked improvement was apparent from the 1992 results, particularly as the four Ellerman ships and their trades were successfully integrated with

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[55] Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 1991. *Olivebank* (ex-*Rickmers Nanjing*) was the fourth ship of that name in the Bank Line fleet and was registered in Panama.

Bank Line and MacAndrews' services, resulting in significant economies in staffing and operations. The South Pacific service returned to profit and those to Spain saw increased volumes of trade. AWSL reported a pre-tax profit of £2,585,000, but continuing provision for future liabilities resulted in the group recording a pre-tax loss of £771,000.[56]

The year 1993 saw the Group return to profit, with AWSL contributing £3,294,000 after tax. The improvement reflected benefits from the integration of Ellerman services with other activities of AWSL. Trades to the South Pacific, the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean all performed well. Although the SafBank service suffered from poor volumes early in the year, its results improved steadily over the year.[57]

Improvement continued into 1994, with higher volumes in most trades contributing to profits from AWSL improving to £5,720,000 before tax. That year saw the acquisition by the parent company of a hotel in Cardiff, which after refurbishment opened in April 1995 and another hotel acquisition in Bromsgrove earlier in January. The company had closed its wine distribution centre in Luton early in 1994 and merged Andrew Weir Vintners into the business of Edward Sheldon, its long established and well regarded Cotswolds wine merchant.[58]

Second-hand ships for the South Pacific

In 1995, Bank Line acquired four Russian-designed 18,663gt SA-15 type multi-purpose icebreaking cargo ships, built in Finland during 1983. They were intended for the westbound round-the-world liner service linking Europe to the South Pacific Islands and Papua New Guinea via the Panama and Suez Canals.[59] These ships, no longer required to operate in arctic conditions, were converted at Cammell Laird, Birkenhead and at Tyne Tees Dockyard to increase cargo capacity, largely by removal of icebreaking features and by fabricating a bulbous bow. The ships were renamed *Arunbank*, *Foylebank*, *Speybank* and *Teignbank*. All were capable of handling containers and break-bulk cargo, with reefer space and facilities for the carriage of bulk liquid cargoes. They were intended to displace vessels of the Corabank class which would be switched to other routes. However, delivery of the converted ships was late, the first entering service only in December 1995. This, together with technical problems with two existing ships, adversely affected earnings from South Pacific

56 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 1992, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.
57 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 1993, ibid.
58 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 1994, ibid.
59 *Nikei* and *Tiksi* built at Valmet Oy, Helsinki and *Bratsk* and *Okha* built at Wartsila Oy, Turku, Finland.

services. Nevertheless, other trades performed well, with higher volumes in most, although freight rates had remained static. SafBank operations had been split into two, with a weekly container service and a multipurpose service for break-bulk cargo and ports not served by the container service. The Iberian (MacAndrews) and Mediterranean (Ellerman) services also performed well, and UBC volumes were maintained at the previous year's level. The UBC Polish service which had begun in 1992 continued to make steady progress whilst Finland's accession to the European Union promised future growth. In

A unusual choice for Bank Line was the acquisition in 1995 of four Russian cargo ships equipped for work in the high Arctic. Much of their equipment was not needed and was removed during prolonged refits at Birkenhead and on Tees-side. Quite likely their ro-ro capability and their price appealed to Bank Line. This is *Arunbank* which began life in Finland during 1983 as *Bratsk* for the USSR. In 2006 after ten years' service she was dry-docked and extensively refitted in Singapore emerging with the new name *Tikeibank* under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda. This did not extend her life greatly and she was broken up at Chattogram in Bangladesh during 2009. *Roy Fenton collection*

July 1995, AWSL chartered two container ships for a five-ship express service from Thamesport to India/Pakistan in conjunction with a French (CMA) and a German line (DSR).[60] In addition to AWSL's ten owned vessels the number managed for third parties rose from four to six. AWSL's profit before interest

60 This service ran from Thamesport to Hamburg and Rotterdam to Piraeus, Aqaba, Jeddah, Hodeida, Karachi and Bombay with calls at Damietta and Valencia on the return voyage.

fell modestly to £5.060m in 1995 compared £5.72m in 1994.[61]

During 1996, late delivery of new ships combined with technical problems continued to a have an impact on the performance of South Pacific services. A major programme was begun to improve the reliability of these vessels, the benefit of which was not to be seen until later in 1997. Other services performed satisfactorily, with strong cargo volumes, although it was apparent that freight rates were declining owing to strong competition from existing and new competitors, and this downward pressure was particularly apparent in container trades. A new service under the "Bank Ellerman" name began in the Indian Ocean using two older Bank Line vessels no longer needed for the South Pacific services. Again, AWSL profits before interest declined somewhat, to £4.99m. Share dividends absorbed £473,000.[62]

In 1997, the EPIC (Europe, Pakistan, India Consortia), chartered containership service began, and the East African and Arabian Gulf services became known as AWS Deep-Sea services.[63] Later in that year the 2,000 TEU *City of London* was delivered from a Polish shipyard in December, her "City" name reflecting the goodwill attached to Ellerman Lines in her intended trades to India and Pakistan. However, in less than a year she was chartered out to the French company CMA-CGM and renamed *CGM Caravelle*. Services to the west coast of India and Pakistan were restructured to run weekly, using larger chartered vessels, and incorporating services to the Arabian Gulf. AWSL profits before interest fell to £1,040,000 for 1997, with parent Andrew Weir profits before tax also shrinking from £7,800,000 in 1996 to £5,700,000 with that company's share dividends absorbing £600,000.[64]

In 1998 UBC's *Baltic Eider* was sold and leased back on a long-term bareboat charter. AWSL showed a profit of just £857,000 and predictably worse was to come as the loss for 1999 totalled £4,140,000. The following year, after restatement, profit was a derisory £173,000. In 2001, a loss of £1,113,000 was posted and the MacAndrews container terminal in Bilbao had been sold. AWSL's longstanding ownership of hotels ended when the last were sold to Hanover International Plc in a deal which gave AWSL a 20 percent share in Hanover.[65]

A first for Bank Line occurred in 1999, when *Teignbank* called at Durban

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61 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., 1994.

62 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir Shipping Limited, 1996, https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/SC005991 (hereafter https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991).

63 EPIC provided a seven new 2,900 TEU chartered containership weekly service. The Consortia consisted of AWSL, CMA, P&O-Nedloyd, Safmarine and CMBT.

64 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Report and Accounts, 1997, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

65 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Report and Accounts, 1998,1999, 2000 and 2001, ibid.

on her return leg from the South Pacific rather than transiting the Suez Canal. This was the first westbound round-the-world voyage in Bank Line history. The effects of the Asian Financial Crisis and the collapse of the Russian economy continued to affect operating margins. The following year the last two ships of the Corabank class built in 1973/74 were sold.[66] And in 2001, owing to allegations of fraud by the previous managers, Curnow Shipping Ltd., of Porthleven, Cornwall, AWSL won the management contract from the British Overseas Territory of St. Helena to operate RMS *St. Helena*. This passenger-cargo liner which operated a shuttle service between Cape Town to St. Helena and to Ascension Island was taken over after voyage repairs at Falmouth.[67] The move by AWSL into ship management portended a major shift in strategy brought about by continuing losses in shipping and a desire to leave the market.

Losses by AWSL ballooned to £21,069,000 after tax in the year 2000. This was due to exceptional items such as writing off £10,000,000 to reduce the value of the company's four multi-purpose vessels in line with their long-term economic value, a loss provision of £3,700,000 against an onerous bareboat charter, and £1,814,000 written off the value of an investment in an associated undertaking, plus sundry reorganisation costs. This resulted with losses after tax reduced to £3,835,000 in 2001. No share dividends were paid. AWSL suffered, as did many other liner shipping companies, from a significant deterioration in market conditions affecting both container and conventional trades. The investment in MacAndrews container terminal in Bilbao had been sold for over £3,000,000 to a company (ATM / Abra Terminales Maritimas SA) formed to develop a container terminal in Bilbao's outer harbour. Andrew Weir purchased a stake in ATM in order to retain a dedicated berth for its MacPak services. These transactions reduced net borrowings by over £2,000,000.[68]

The tide ebbs

AWSL's parent, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., reported a huge loss after tax for the year 2002 amounting to £31,218,000. Unsurprisingly, no share dividend was paid for the year. This result reflected two decisions taken by the main Andrew Weir board. First, to dispose of its AWSL liner services, and second, to write down the value of its ships to reflect what the board believed

[66] Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd., Report and Accounts, 1998, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991. *Forthbank* (sold) and *Clydebank* (scrapped at Alang, India).

[67] RMS *St. Helena* (6,767grt) was the last ship built at the Hall Russell Shipyard in Aberdeen.

[68] Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Report and Accounts 2000, note 23, Chairman's statement 2001, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297 and AWSL Financial statements, same years, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991.

to be a permanent diminution in their value. Overall, group trading profit was £440,000 as against a trading loss of £3,800,000 in 2001. Net interest paid fell to £900,000 against £1,750,000 in 2001. Goodwill amounting to £3,840,000 was written off relating to the acquisition in 1991 of the Ellerman container service.[69] The total effect of these one-off charges including the disposal of the liner services was a loss before taxation for the year of £30,250,000 and a diminution in shareholders' funds from £58,689,000 to £25,890,000. However, despite this the Andrew Weir Board was satisfied that the aggregate value of its remaining assets was now significantly in excess of their book value.[70]

The decision to dispose of the liner services and associated agencies had been taken after a detailed review of operations. According to the Chairman, Viscount Runciman, the need to withdraw from liner shipping became ever more apparent as these trades continued to be consolidated in the hands of shrinking number of increasingly large participants. This no longer left a place for the small independent operator like AWSL offering specialized services in local niche areas. MacAndrews (AWS Iberian Services) was sold to the French company CMA-CGM with other services going to various buyers. All transactions were completed by 31 December 2002 with the exception of the disposal of the South Pacific service on which agreement in principle was reached in April 2003. The aggregate profits on disposal totalled £2,700,000 but after associated expenses and consequential restructuring costs, the net result was a loss of £1,760,000.[71]

During 2003 the disposal of AWSL's liner services and associated agencies was completed with the end of the South Pacific service. Accordingly, AWSL was now free to concentrate on ship ownership and management in sectors which continued to offer attractive opportunities to smaller companies with the ability and standing to profit from them. At the end of 2003 AWSL had 16 vessels under management. Charter of the AWSL-owned Bank-Ellerman *City of London* to P&O-Nedloyd expired in January 2004, but a three-year charter commencing in February 2004 to Japanese operators had been agreed at an attractive rate. Net indebtedness to banks had been significantly reduced by the disposal of ASWL's 20 percent interest in Hanover International plc.[72]

In 2003, the Swire group's China Navigation Co. Ltd. purchased the remaining Bank Line business from AWSL, but the time-chartered ships

69 Goodwill is an intangible asset. Writing off reduces the value of an asset to zero and negates any future value. Conversely, writing down reduces the book value of an asset because it is overvalued in comparison to its market value.
70 Andrew Weir & Co., Ltd., Report and Accounts, 2002, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.
71 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Report and Accounts, 2002, ibid.
72 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Report and Accounts, 2003, ibid.

remained under Bank Line management. Also in 2003, the Hamburg Sud Group acquired from AWSL the Ellerman services to the Mediterranean and to India/Pakistan. In 2004 Swire discontinued the Bank Line name, and the service became their westbound round-the-world service.[73]

AWSL's remaining interests other than ship management remained financial services with the Beverley Building Society of Zimbabwe, forestry with Loncala Inc. based in Florida, and the wine and spirits merchants Edward Sheldon Ltd. Significantly, the Andrew Weir Pension Scheme, a defined benefit contribution scheme, was closed to new entrants from 21 November 2003 and from future accrual from 31 January 2010.[74]

Prior to 2003 AWSL's impetus had gradually moved from ship ownership to ship management. In 2000 it had taken the lead under the Labour government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in bidding, as part of a four-member consortium, to build, crew and manage six ro-ro vessels for the British Ministry of Defence (MoD). Initially an off-the-shelf company, Bandsite Ltd. with £100 in share capital equally divided between the four companies was formed to pursue the bid but thereafter became dormant, and the preferred bidder became AWSR Shipping Ltd. which had been formed on 30 November 2000.[75]

AWSR Ltd and the Foreland Shipping Co. Ltd.

After competitive tenders were assessed, AWSR Ltd. in company with Bibby Line, Houlder Hadley, and James Fisher plc signed a 25 year PFI Concession Contract on 27 June 2002 with the British MoD to build, commission and operate a Strategic Sea Lift Service until 31 December 2024. This was to comprise six 23,225gt ro-ro cargo vessels for use as and when needed by the armed forces.[76] Loan finance agreements were signed on the same day with Lloyds Bank, TSB Bank plc, and the Alliance and Leicester Group. Shareholders provided finance for the project amounting to

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73 In the wake of the World Financial Crises of 2008 and subsequent prolonged economic downturn Swire's round the world cargo service was abandoned and charters ended. The four ships were returned to their original owners and eventually sold for scrap. The last, *Mahinabank* was beached for scrapping at Chittagong in 1998.

74 Andrew Weir Report and Accounts year ended 31 December 2021, Note 14, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

75 Company number 4117402, https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04117402.

76 Named after British Lighthouses, four (*Hurst Point*, *Beachy Head*, *Eddystone* and *Longstone*) were built at Flensburger Schiffbau, Flensburg, Germany, the first, *Hurst Point* completed in August 2002, and two at Harland and Wolff, Belfast, *Anvil Point* and *Harland Point*. Harland took longer to build than Flensburger, but all six ships were operational in 2003.

£13,300,000, which included £7,100,000 of unsecured subordinated loan notes issued by AWSR consortium members, and two letters of credit amounting to £6,200,000 issued directly to the lenders by two consortium's members. Ship construction was to be supervised by Houlder Offshore Engineering Ltd., with four ships built in Germany and two in Belfast. On completion the ships were to be managed by AWSL through Bibby Line's offices in the tax haven of the Isle of Man. The all-British crews on the ships comprised Sponsored Reserves provided under a contract with Bibby International Services (Isle of Man) Ltd. By prior agreement, four vessels were usually to work for the MoD and two were to be chartered out to commercial shipping companies. Despite their Isle of Man registry, they entered the British Tonnage Tax regime with effect from 16 August 2002 and consequently were liable to UK Corporation Tax based on their total net tonnage and not on their net earnings.[77] AWSR's profit after tax on 31 December 2002 of £1,200,000 was transferred to reserves. By 31 December 2003, profit after tax had jumped to £5,214,000 which was again transferred to reserves.[78] On 22 December 2004, AWSR changed its name to Foreland Shipping Ltd.[79] Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. had previously subscribed for 9,350,000 £1 Ordinary Shares at par and made a loan of £6,000,000 to AWSR Ltd.[80]

At the end of 2004, AWSL recorded a trading profit of £5,199,000. After interest costs, tax, and a write-back of £674,000 on the value of its ships, the retained profit was £2,129,000 which was transferred to reserves.[81] Clearly, the AWSR/Foreland Shipping endeavour was highly profitable. With a strong market for shipping continuing, the equivalent figures for 2005 were a trading profit of £4,499,000 and a profit after taxation of £2,074,000. From this, dividends on preference shares amounting to £486,000 were paid.[82]

During 2006, with the fourth Lord Inverforth now chairman of Andrew Weir, the four Finnish-built ships purchased in 1995 were renamed *Tikeibank*, *Gazellebank, Mahinabank* and *Boularibank* and were dry docked and extensively refitted in Singapore. At the end of the year, trading profits of AWSL in 2006 again increased, to £6,430,000, to which £494,000 was added

77 AWSR Shipping Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2002, https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/03725404.

78 AWSR Shipping Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2003, ibid.

79 Change of Company Name, 22 December 2004, and Financial Statements, Foreland Shipping Limited, 31 December 2004, ibid.

80 Report and Accounts of Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd., 2000, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991.

81 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2004, ibid.

82 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2005, ibid.

AWSL was a founding partner in Foreland Shipping Co. Ltd., set up to operate ro-ro ships mainly for the British Ministry of Defence, although two of their four ships were to be available for commercial charters. Delivered in 2002, *Hartland Point* was one of two to be completed by Harland and Wolff at Belfast. She was photographed during May 2021 in the Solent where she was based whilst working for the Ministry of Defence. *Roy Fenton*

by a reassessment of the value of the companies' ships, giving a profit after taxation of £4,085,000. Dividends were paid on both ordinary and preference shares, amounting to a total of £986,000.[83] This was somewhat surprising, as the company had a liability of £9,322,000 to the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund. The parent company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., provided for this liability by disposing of various assets, including part of Loncala's Florida land holdings at a profit of £11,800,000 reinvested in a forestry land purchase in Texas deferring liability for tax, and early in 2007 selling the Beverley Building Society to a bank in Zimbabwe for £3,750,000, a price regarded as satisfactory in the circumstances.[84]

Merchant Navy Officers Pension Fund (MNOPF)

In any pension fund actuarial gains and losses are ultimately determined

83 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2006, ibid.

84 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2006, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

by the value of the fund's investments in shares and bonds, on calculations of life expectancy of the scheme's pensioners, and by the rate of inflation in the economy. A major consideration is, are the current contributions of the workforce likely to cover future liabilities? Actuarial values are based on statistical inference and experienced judgement, and are projected long-term. These need to indicate that pension assets are sufficient to cover liabilities. Obligations are measured at present value (based on assumptions which may change year-on-year, in line with actuarial advice) and assets at fair value. In AWSL's case, the parent company continued to pay regular contributions in accordance with MNOPF requirements. However, both parties had to agree how deficits were to made up.

The company's shareholder funds would have increased substantially in 2006 were it not for the need to make a massive provision of £9,250,000 in the accounts for a deficit in annual contributions to the MNOPF.[85] In March 2009, an actuarial valuation of the MNOPF scheme was finalised showing a deficit of £390,000,000 and communicated to AWSL in May 2010. This deficit forced AWSL to provide for a further £10,000,000 liability to the scheme. There were discussions with MNOPF Trustees to agree on funding of the deficit, [86] but by 2013 these had yet to find a workable solution for AWSL. This put the future of AWSL in doubt if agreement was not reached, whilst in the interim, regular contributions were no longer being paid in accordance with current MNOPF demands.[87]

In 2007 trading profit fell to £4,443,000, which after interest charges and taxation amounted to just £682,000.[88] The reduction in the latter figure was blamed on higher interest rates and increased operating costs. Increasing costs of ships themselves, crews, spares and repairs were blamed, rather lamely on the growing numbers of ships being built worldwide. No dividends were paid.[89]

The year 2008 was a turbulent one for shipping, with inflationary pressures having a further impact on operating costs.[90] The economic decline due to the financial crash in the USA which set in worldwide in the final quarter led to sharp falls in demand for transportation, and with them sharp declines in charter rates. There were fewer sales and purchases of ships, the relatively few

85 Ibid.

86 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Chairman's Statement, 31 December 2006, and 31 December 2009, ibid.

87 Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd. Strategic Report, 2013, ibid.

88 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2007, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991.

89 Ibid.

90 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2008, ibid.

transactions often representing distressed sales, and this resulted in sharp falls in ship values. An operating profit of £1,090,000 was recorded, but this became a loss of £3,149,000 after interest charges and taxation. As some amelioration of the gloom, the directors could record that AWSL had won a further five-year contract to manage the Foreland ro-ro ships, plus a three-year contract to manage two Hebridean cruise ships.[91]

The worsening economic situation led to a loss on ordinary activities of £1,442,000 in 2009, which became a loss after taxation and interest of £4,431,000.[92] This was partly the result of a provision of £4,898,000 for writing down the value of one AWSL ship. Four of the River class ships, released from "loss-making onerous charters" were sold during the year, raising net proceeds of £6,700,000 which allowed associated debts of £2,200,000 to be extinguished from the Balance Sheet. The sale of these ships, and the failure to find a charter for *City of London*, led to a reduction in the workforce.[93] The wholesale and retail wine business of Edward Sheldon was unable to challenge major retailers in this market, and in November 2009 it was decided to sell the business, which incurred a loss. In contrast to this gloom, a strong performance was recorded by Foreland Shipping and by United Canal Agencies, the latter a remnant of the UBC business which provided agency services to ships transiting the Kiel Canal.[94]

A major restructuring of the AWSL business in 2009 to minimise losses and conserve cash flows resulted in a return to profitability in 2010, despite difficult trading conditions, with gross profits of £4,200,000, reduced to £1,527,000 after overheads, interest charges and taxation.[95] The last ship directly operated by AWSL, the *City of London* was sold in April 2010 following her continued inactivity.[96] This vessel was at a price in excess of an independent valuation of USD12,200,000 allowing an associated outstanding loan of USD10,200,000 to be repaid, freeing the shipping balance sheet from any debt.[97]

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[91] Ibid.

[92] AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2009, ibid.

[93] Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2009, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

[94] AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2009, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991.

[95] AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2010, ibid.

[96] Sold initially to a Singapore-based company with principals in the USA, the former *City of London* was still trading as *Surabaya Voyager* in 2022. However, a fire in a South Korean port on 16 October 2022, may seal the fate of this 25-year-old container ship. IHS-Markit b Sea-Web database, accessed 2 November 2022.

[97] Andrew Weir & Co. Ltd., Chairman's Statement, 31 December 2010, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

In April 2011, with N.J.C. Walters CA as Chairman of Andrew Weir from 2010, the sale of United Canal Agencies to that company's other shareholder raised £3,000,000, but £2,900,000 of this was used to clear a deficit of a subsidiary company owed to the MNOPF.[98] A loss on trading activities of £1,877,000 became £2,993,000 after interest and tax. AWSL was now involved solely in ship management services, whilst the parent company Andrew Weir retained its interest in its Loncala forestry operations in Florida and Texas.[99]

AWSL nevertheless made an operating loss of £1,480,000 during 2012.[100] However, thanks to a large contribution from profits made by Foreland Shipping and other joint ventures, this was turned into a modest profit after interest and taxation of £185,000. However, once again provision had to be made for a further shortfall of £3,330,000 in the company's liability to the MNOPF. In the 2013 annual report of Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., there was a renewed warning that failure to agree a settlement with the pension fund would put the future of AWSL's shipping business in jeopardy.[101]

This prediction proved true as the year 2014 saw the Andrew Weir companies no longer involved in the shipping industry, as AWSL's 25 percent share of Foreland Shipping Ltd. was sold in August for £8,300,000.[102] In October AWSL was put into administration, as was the inactive UBC. The business interest of the parent Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. with Ian D. MacRitchie succeeding N.J.C. Walters as Chairman was now confined to forestry in the USA.

With forestry the only remaining business activity of Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., profit before tax fluctuated considerably in the years 2017 to 2021. With a reduction in tax in the USA in 2017, profits peaked at £2,720,000,[103] and land sales in 2019 contributed to a figure of £2,300,000.[104] In 2020, however, profits dropped to £524,000[105] but rose significantly in 2021 to £1,244,000.[106]

98 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2011, https://... gov.uk/company/SC005991.

99 Ibid.

100 AWS Limited Financial Statements, 31 December 2012, ibid.

101 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2013, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

102 Ibid. Buyers of Foreland Shipping were the Hadley Shipping Group Ltd., London. Founded as the Hadley Shipping Company Ltd in 1926, this organisation is almost unique as perhaps the last British family shipping company, https://hadleyshipping.com/history/.

103 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2017, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

104 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2019, ibid.

105 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2020, ibid.

106 Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd. Financial Statements, 31 December 2022, ibid.

UBC and AWSL in administration

When in April 2011, UBC sold its one remaining investment in United Canal Agencies for £3,000,000, the proceeds were used to clear the current pension liability in the MNOPF of a wholly owned subsidiary. In March 2012, however, an actuarial valuation identified a future MNOPF shortfall of £120,000,000. In May 2013, UBC made a final settlement of £607,814 in respect of this but remained liable for any future shortfalls which were identified. UBC had ceased trading during 2012, and the company was wound up on 10 December 2014 and dissolved on 23 May 2015. UBC had book debts of £10,081,000 owed from Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd.. AWSL itself entered administration on 20 November 2014, therefore the recovery of UBC's debt would be limited to a dividend received from AWSL. In the event, the administrators received £1,004,696. There being no preferred or secured creditors, claims of unsecured creditors totalled £13,737,730 and a first and final dividend of 6.9p in the pound was declared on 25 October 2016. AWSL was dissolved on 5 December 2016.[107]

As was the case with UBC, there were no preferred or secured creditors of AWSL. And again, it was liable for pension contributions to the MNOPF.[108] The joint administrators' asset realisations since the onset of administration totalled £9,897,403 leaving a final settlement of 9.97p in the pound to unsecured creditors.[109]

Conclusions

In part 1 of this paper we stated that, alongside charting the history of Andrew Weir's shipping business, we would look at the factors accounting for its exceptionalism. These included its unusual policy of operating in both tramp and liner trades, its early embrace of the motor ship and of the tanker, Weir's connections in industry and government, and last but certainly not least the family orientation of the business as a private limited company.

Building ships capable of operating in both tramp and liner trades undoubtedly helped Bank Line to weather the interwar depression, and its fleet

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[107] United Baltic Corporation, Return of Final Meeting in Creditors Voluntary Winding Up, 23 February 2017, https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00155328.

[108] As discussed in Part 1, many of Bank Line ships carried Hong Kong Chinese and Lascar crews with British officers, the remaining British crew members and officers were paid severance in 1992 leaving the company liable only for the officers' pension fund.

[109] AWS Limited Administration Progress Report, 5 September 2016, https://... gov.uk/company/00398297.

of versatile ships was maintained, evidently profitably, through two post-war decades. But both areas of operation then changed quickly and radically. The tramp ship, which had evolved only modestly in capacity since the end of the Second World War, was replaced by bulk carriers of increasing size and economy.[110] The cargo liner was similarly displaced by the container ship. Bank Line never built a bulk carrier, and only one rather modest container ship, although its subsidiaries UBC and MacAndrews were more innovative.

Weir's enthusiasm for the motor ship would also have been a factor in Bank Line's survival through the 1930s, but then seemed to fade with steam and oil engine ships being ordered in parallel.[111] Nor did it stop Bank Line making good its heavy war losses with a dozen US-built Liberty type steamers, giving it the largest British fleet of these standard ships.[112] Postwar motorships coming in parallel streams from Harland and Wolff and from Doxford had eliminated steam from the fleet by 1960,[113] but by then the oil engine had become completely established and had comprehensively been embraced by the cargo shipping industry.

Similarly, early involvement with oil tankers helped diversify the fleet, and was an important part of Weir's involvement in the oil industry and gave substantial experience in tanker management. The considerable British-Mexican fleet may well have been sold to Anglo-American over Weir's head, and the fine motor ship fleet of Inver Tankers Ltd had difficulties, not the least being the complete loss of its fleet to enemy action. However, there was no attempt at revival of tanker owning post-1945 when oil production soared and with it a demand for tankers. Oil and dry bulk cargoes were the major growth sectors in international shipping in which Bank Line literally missed the boat. This may in part be explained by Weir stepping back from the business as advancing age took its toll and relying more on his only son to run it, or to risk aversion. However, why Bank Line failed to rise to these markets and stuck with multi-purpose vessels in trades and routes it knew well is again occluded by the paucity of records.

Andrew Weir was, to use a modern term, a self-made "entrepreneur" of considerable talent and influence. This was not only recognised in shipping

[110] See for instance, R. Fenton, *Evolution and significance of the powered bulk carrier. The Black Freighters*, Research in Maritime History, No. 56 (Liverpool, 2023), 199-216.

[111] The last orders placed before the Second World War comprised eight steamships and just seven motor ships. Appleyard, *Bank Line 1885-1985*, 95-91.

[112] Ibid., 95-101.

[113] Ibid., the last three Liberties, *Edenbank*, *Marabank* and *Tielbank* all went for further trading in the 1960s.

circles but at the highest levels of government and commerce internationally.[114] Weir's early commitment to the oil industry served him well when the many companies he acquired or had substantial stock in were sold profitably. Moreover, with his various directorships in other companies, particularly in Marconi Wireless and Telegraph up to and beyond its merger with Eastern Telegraph, Weir had a considerable impact on UK communications history. However, useful connections with government and business built up by Andrew Weir seem not to have survived the first Baron Inverforth.

We then come to the question of family ownership. Bank Line, in weighing the balance between the strengths and weaknesses of private ownership and control, had for most of its history prospered. Funds for replacement of ships were generated from retained profits in company reserves, investment income, ship sales, and profits from subsidiary companies engaged in insurance underwriting and broking. Share dividends paid to Weir family members to maintain personal consumption were on the whole high, but how far internally generated funds formed a brake on investment in preserving family control remains occluded by the paucity of records available to researchers, particularly up to the 1970s. With their large shareholdings, respective chairmen literally coined it in during good years, evidenced by the huge amount paid to the Hon. John Vincent Weir for his shareholding before he stepped down and thereby relinquished family control of the company. What is clear is that the preservation of family control through private limited company status precluded raising capital from outside investors.

Bank Line's traditional method of financing from reserves and ship sales came under great pressure from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards, as it took out bank loans to build ships on the security of first mortgages against ships. Bank Line engaged, as did many other British shipping firms, in leasing arrangements, and took advantage of Government loans and investment grants to build ships in Britain. In an inflationary climate post-OPEC, Bank Line's trading losses gathered pace. Competition intensified through the container

114 Of his high-level business connections, three individuals did not have exactly unblemished records in business. As discussed in Part 1, Lord Pirrie left Harland and Wolff in a parlous finance state on his death. Owen Cosby Phillips (Lord Kylsant) pursued an almost obsessive policy of acquisitions, leaving his Royal Mail Group too enfeebled to survive coming storms, and with such a complex web of financial connections between subsidiaries that sorting it out was described as like "unscrambling eggs." The later years of that magnate of Mexican oil Edward L. Doheny, were mired in controversy. See, E. Green and M. Moss, *A Business of National Importance*: *The Royal Mail Group, 1902-1937* (London, 1982), 165; M.L. Davis, *Dark Side of Fortune: Triumph and Scandal in Life of Edward L. Doheny* (Berkeley, 1998), 107-109.

and bulk carrier revolutions, neither of which Bank Line fully entered. The resale value of second-hand ships plummeted, leaving the parent company Andrew Weir to balance Bank Line's trading losses through investment income, profits of subsidiaries, and transfers from company reserves.

In the short term this was sustainable in the hope that an upturn in what had always been a cyclical industry would materialise. However, over the extended length of the shipping depression post-OPEC this approach was barely sustainable. Bank Line's hitherto successful business model was no longer fit for purpose, as its fleet continued to contract rapidly as established lines were closed under competitive pressure and ships servicing them sold off. The company also largely missed the boat on the container revolution, which in terms of technological development, port and multi-modal transportation came to dominate dry cargo liner shipping. The company's belated and piecemeal acceptance of containerisation came far too late, and the company no longer had sufficient impetus to continue in its traditional trades. The renaming of the Bank Line shipping business as Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd. in 1988 took place in an entirely different business climate.

Although not implicitly stated in accessible company minutes or in annual accounts of Andrew Weir group companies, it is clear that the final blow to its shipping business was the overwhelming liabilities, which, along with other British shipping companies, it owed to the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund. One after another, successful businesses were sold off to meet these liabilities. Particularly tragic was the case of Foreland Shipping Ltd., a company which it had successfully initiated, and which had links to the British Ministry of Defence which virtually guaranteed its continuing profitability, partly insulated as it was from the vicissitudes of commercial trading.

When we look to why Bank Line eventually imploded, we can point out that the company had lost any comparative advantage it once had in the dry bulk trades long beforehand. Attempts at diversification had not been entirely successful, and there is a case to be made that Bank Line's parent company, Andrew Weir and Co. Ltd., should have seen the writing on the wall long before they actually did. That they clung on as they did was not due to imperfect information, or some Micawberish hope that something would turn up. Family control tends to impose upon those family members chairing the company a desire not to be the first generation to implode the business. This tends to lead to conservatism in decision making or at worse inertia when the need for change is all too apparent. The demise of Bank Line was to a large extent a death foretold. Too small to effectively compete against larger better-financed competitors in the dry and liquid bulk trades, AWSL, before reverting to ship management, attempted to remain in the liner trades when the company had already outstayed its welcome. Just as in the supply side, shipbuilding, the academic consensus regarding British shipping is primarily one of management failure: an argument with a long lineage and one resisted by the industry through its organisations. As long ago as 1960, Stanley Sturmey had made himself deeply unpopular with British shipping interests by pointing out managerial failings in the industry.[115] Nonetheless, the industry's then trade organisation, the Chamber of Shipping, as Richard Goss much later pointed out, failed to attempt to refute any of Sturmey's arguments.[116] In 1970, the Rochdale Inquiry Report made largely circumspect observations of managerial inadequacy.[117] Goss, a former Board of Trade economist, in a note to a Department of Transport inquiry published in 1988, stated that the quality of management had been a major cause of decline in British shipping.[118] In a recent study of two famous Scottish tramp ship firms, Murphy came to the same conclusion.[119]

However, the demise of Bank Line, AWSL and the parent company Andrew Weir, was nonetheless protracted, as they battled on in the face of seemingly insuperable market and financial factors which increasingly hemmed in their ability to respond. That we, the authors, cannot be definitive in our observations in this study, largely due to the paucity of records, laying all blame on management, given external factor restraints, war, cyclical depressions, oversupply of tonnage and increasing competition during boom periods, is all too easy, but on the balance of evidence collected from diverse sources and presented here it is substantially true.

Roy Fenton is an independent researcher, author and publisher, who specialises in cargo ships of the steam and diesel era and those who built and operated them. In 2005 Roy was awarded a PhD for a thesis on the transition from sail to steam in the bulk trades. He is a trustee of the British Commission for Maritime History, and a director and trustee of the World Ship Society. His latest monograph is Evolution and Significance of the

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115 S.G. Sturmey, *British Shipping and World Competition* (London, 1962), 394-402.
116 R.O. Goss, "Strategies in British Shipping, 1945-1970," *The Mariner's Mirror, Centenary Issue*, 97:1 (2011), 249, https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2011.10709043
117 Rochdale Committee of Inquiry, 121, 128-9.
118 BPP, House of Commons Transport Committee, HC 303, First Report, "Decline of the UK-Registered Fleet," 1987-1988, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix 11, pp, 120-2.
119 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, 1960-1987," *International Journal of Maritime History* 34:4 (2022): 438-466, https://doi.org/10.1177/08438714221110335.

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Hugh Murphy is an Hon. Professor of Business History, University of Glasgow, and Visiting Reader in Maritime History, National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums, Greenwich, London.