

Union Castle Line

21st April 2009 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

This meeting was the Society's 10th anniversary of its formation and a packed audience came to listen to Captain Reg Kelso talk about the Union Castle Line and his life while working on their ships. Many of those attending had worked for the shipping line and at the end of the meeting they exchanged memories and it was like a company reunion.

Captain Kelso told of the company's origin in the mid 1800s and how the mail service to South Africa started. The Union Castle Line, famed for its lavender hull vessels, was formed in 1900 when the Union Line and the Castle Package Company merged.

Captain Kelso joined Union Castle as a cadet in 1946 when there were 8 ships based at Southampton and one left at 4.00 pm every Thursday for Cape Town.

He told of his later Christmas voyage on the Edinburgh Castle, in the 1960s, when she was involved with another ship, first with a mix up of baggage and eventually communicating with it as a disastrous fire took place.

Subsequently he was involved in studying the Union Castle Line's safety and emergency standards and was promoted to a Captain in 1967. Initially he was appointed to captain some of the company's cargo vessels but then moved on to complete his ambition of commanding some of their passenger ships, including the Edinburgh Castle.

With the introduction of container ships and Jumbo jet airliners, shipping as it had been known changed forever and by 1977 the last Union Castle ship left to close the historic service from Southampton to Cape Town.