



A postcard of Red Star Line's *Belgenland*, superbly depicted by Charles Dixon. £8-£10.



An excellent postcard study of the *Lusitania* by Odin Rosenvinge, £10-£12.



Second Class passenger list from Cunard's *Mauretania* dated 1922. £20-£25.



Attractive luggage label from the 1950s, 7in wide. £5-£8.



Wooden jigsaw of *Caronia*, nicknamed 'the Green Goddess', c1950-60s, 12in x 9in, £10-£12. See also feature on Jigsaws.

ocean liner collectables

by Heidi Melhuish Photographs by Geoff Powell

The image of the ocean liner never fails to inspire feelings of romance, and a longing for a golden age lost in the past. Each ship has a varied, often dramatic history. Some sank on their maiden voyages, others enjoyed a career lasting nearly fifty years. Some disappeared without trace whilst at sea, and some were victims of terrible storms. Most of the ships, however, ended their days in a scrap yard, history and a part of life dismantled piece by piece. Enthusiasm for these great ships has never waned and there is a good selection of material available to those interested in collecting ocean liner souvenirs and keeping their memory alive.

The first liners were built in the nineteenth century, perhaps the best known being the *Great Western* of 1837 and *Great Britain* of 1843, but the dawn of the truly great and famous liner began in the 1900s. The large shipping lines, most notably Cunard and White Star, were in great competition to provide the biggest, fastest, most luxurious ships. The first class lounges, smoking rooms and ballrooms were compared to those of palaces. There were well-equipped gymnasias, and restaurants with exotic menus. Of course the comfort and grandeur aboard was reserved for those with the means to pay, and the majority of passengers carried were in third class. These people were usually emigrants, on their way to a hopefully better life. Most of them headed for the United States.

By the end of the First World War the major shipping lines had been heavily depleted, with many ships sunk, including Cunard's *Lusitania* and *Carpathia*, the ship which collected the survivors from *Titanic* in 1912. Several German liners were taken as war prizes, amongst them *Columbus*, which went to *White Star* and was renamed *Homeric*. Cunard purchased *Imperator* from Germany, which became *Berengaria*, their flagship until the maiden voyage of *Queen Mary* in 1936.

The twenties and thirties were the grand decades of the ocean liner. Millions of people travelled aboard, many of them in grand style. Passengers visited the gift shops on these ships and bought souvenirs to remind them of a happy trip, or as gifts for people back home. It was customary to send postcards with a picture of the ship on them. It was exciting for relatives to receive a card posted from a foreign location. The age of the powder compact had begun and lady passengers could treat themselves to a compact with, amongst other designs, the image of their ship on a shimmering blue butterfly wing background. There were packs of playing cards, jigsaw puzzles, cigarette cases and teaspoons to buy and quite a few of these items have survived to find homes with ocean liner collectors.

White Star's fortunes had never properly recovered after the *Titanic* disaster and the last two ships to be built for them, *Britannic* and *Georgic*, were completed in 1930. In 1934 Cunard and White Star merged and the company was known as Cunard White Star. Cunard's *Queen Mary*, launched in 1936, became one of the best-loved liners and there is a wealth of souvenir material relating to her. Her image was used on many postcards, biscuit tins, china pin trays, games, and anything of great size or bulk came to be described as 'as big as the *Queen Mary*.' In 1938 *Queen Elizabeth* was launched, the largest liner afloat at that time.

During the Second World War liners were as in the First World War used as troop carriers and hospital ships and again there were losses. Anchor-Donaldson's *Athenia* was the first ship to be torpedoed, and when the war ended it was several years before some ships took up their pre-war duties once more.

New ships were built to replace those lost. Some were greatly innovative, such as Orient Line's *Orcades* of 1948 and Shaw Savill Line's *Southern Cross*, launched in 1954.

People travelling on these new liners and those that had survived the war bought yet more souvenirs. Stratton made attractive compacts for many lines, and handbells, small lifebelts and flags were available. *Caronia*, a purely first-class ship, with a distinctive green hull, was one of the most popular cruisers. Some of her passengers liked her so much they lived on board for several years.

But the era of the great liners was nearly over. Cheaper and safer air travel became more popular and the ships began to lose money. Many were scrapped in the 1960s and others decommissioned. Some were sold to foreign shipping lines and became pleasure cruisers. In the late 1960s both Queens made their last sailings as Cunarders and were sold. *Queen Mary* became a stationary hotel and museum at Long Beach, California, and is still there today, but *Queen Elizabeth* had a sad fate. She was sold in 1970 and was converted into a university and cruise-ship at Hong Kong, but tragically caught fire and capsized, a total wreck. An era had ended, and ports that had once received these vast ships and seen the happy departure and arrival of so many travellers were quiet and empty.

Collecting

Value and desirability of shipping collectables largely depends on the ship and shipping line they come from. An older, famous ship such as *Berengaria* or *Aquitania* is more popular than a motor vessel from a small line operating in the 1960s. Collectors are particularly seeking White Star and Cunard mementoes. Ships involved in well-known tragedies are especially sought after, such as *Lusitania* and of course, *Titanic*. Some disasters are less well-known than others, such as *Empress of Ireland*, which sank in 1914 with the loss of over 1,000 lives; *Waratah*, which vanished without trace in 1909; and *Morro Castle*, which caught fire, exploded and sank in 1934.

Shipping souvenir collectors will sometimes devote their attention to one area of collecting, such as postcards or teaspoons. Building a collection need not be expensive, as good postcards may be purchased from as little as £2 each, and nice pieces like teaspoons do turn up in unlikely places. A collection of powder compacts will be more costly and much slower to build. Of course it is possible to find items of tea and dinnerware, not to mention cutlery, that were used onboard ship which were 'borrowed' by passengers! These were not, of course, official souvenirs!

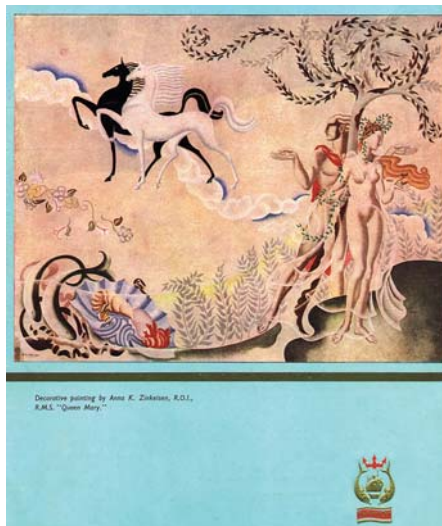
Once a collection begins to build collectors will naturally want to learn more about the ships they have items relating to. Whilst there is a wealth of information (some of it unreliable) on *Titanic*, other ships are more obscure. Reference libraries will have books giving information on launching dates, changes of ownership and/or names, and a date for the end of the ship's sailing days.



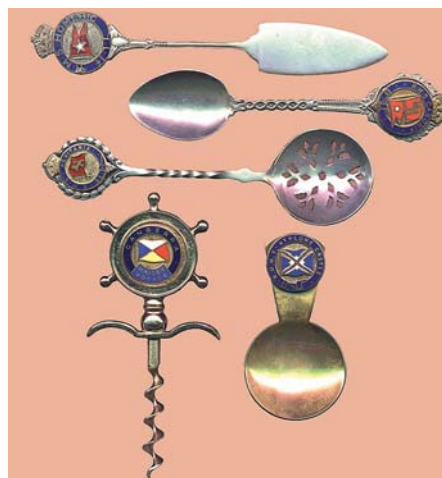
Enameled teaspoon commemorating the maiden voyage of *Queen Mary*, £40-£50.



Top. Sterling silver butterfly wing brooch depicting Cunard's *Carinthia* c1950s, £20-25. Left. Canadian Pacific's *Empress of Great Britain* c1950s, £10-15. Right. Stratton *Queen Mary* Brooch c1930s, £10-15.



Menu from *Queen Mary*, June 1936. £8-£10.



From top, *White Star*, *Homeric*, £15-£20. *Cunard*, *Caronia*, £20-£25. *Cunard*, *Aquitania* £30-£35. *P&O*, *Canberra* corkscrew from maiden voyage 1961, £5-£10 and *Union Castle* Line, *Athlone Castle*, £15-£20. Top three silver-plated, the others brass.



Small lifebelt memento from a Cunarder, c1950-60s, £5-£8, 4.5in across.



Small dishes, top left *Orient Line*, *Orion*. Top right *Cunard Line*, *Aquitania*. Bottom *White Star Line*, *Majestic*. Top dishes are brass, the bottom dish is EPNS, £10-£15 each.



Top right. Stratton powder compact, *Fred Olsen Line*, *MS Braemar*, c1960s, £20-£25. Bottom left. Stratton powder compact, *Union Castle Line*, *Warwick Castle*, c1950s, £35-£40. Bottom right. Unmarked white metal cigarette case, *Cunard Line*, *Berengaria*, c1920-30s, £25-£30.