

Cunard 175 – a voyage through history with the Cunard Archive

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In 1839 Samuel Cunard (1787–1865) a ship-owner from Nova Scotia, founded the *British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company*. Its purpose was to provide a scheduled steamship service to carry mail across the Atlantic – the first of its kind. On 4 July 1840 the *Britannia* left Liverpool for Halifax and Boston, marking the company's beginnings in transatlantic travel. Cunard went on to change the face of ocean travel forever.

Now in its 175th year, Cunard is one of the longest-serving names in shipping history. Its story is one of success, although it is also an eventful and complex one. Recognised throughout the world, the name Cunard is associated with luxury and an exemplary safety record.

This anniversary presented a fantastic opportunity for the University of Liverpool Library, Special Collections & Archives (SCA), to showcase the Cunard Archive. Occupying over four hundred linear metres, the archive contains most of the surviving business records produced by Cunard since it became a limited company in 1878. As a dynamic corporate memory the archive gives rich insight into the company's history and is a unique resource for researching Cunard's growth and development as a business.



Throughout its history, Cunard has held a particularly strong affinity with the people of Great Britain – but nowhere more so than in its spiritual home of Liverpool, 'where everyone knew somebody who worked for Cunard'. Cunard's long and proud association with Liverpool continues to this day, as the city became a focal point for the company's 175th anniversary celebrations.



In view of this, SCA worked closely with Culture Liverpool (Liverpool City Council's cultural service) on the 'One Magnificent City' (OMC) seven-week programme of events. These events were built around the arrival of Cunard's Three Queens (*Queen Mary 2*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Victoria*) on 25 May 2015. Such was the public's enthusiasm that over one million people lined the River Mersey to witness this historic event.

Culture Liverpool acted as an umbrella organisation that enabled a network of institutions across Liverpool to work in partnership. The work focused on celebrating Cunard's 175th anniversary by engaging with the public and

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opening up new opportunities and experiences to a wide audience.

Some examples of the collaborative events and resources that used the Cunard Archive included:

- *Light Night* – Liverpool’s one-night arts and culture festival which takes place annually in May
- Culture Liverpool’s OMC *Learning Links* – an online learning resource for school children, produced in partnership with Liverpool School Improvement Services
- *The Crossing* installation within the Liverpool ONE shopping complex, which used 3D sound techniques and images to explore the relationship between Liverpool and New York
- Community writing workshops
- Cunard poster exhibition and public lecture at the University of Liverpool’s Victoria Gallery & Museum.

These partnerships allowed SCA to present the Cunard Archive imaginatively in different institutions across Liverpool. These partnerships have been crucial in providing an innovative network that has facilitated the promotion of the Cunard Archive at large and prestigious events.



A new exhibition was also launched by SCA to coincide with Cunard’s anniversary celebrations. The exhibition, *Cunard 175 – a voyage through history*, was the first to occupy the full extent of SCA’s newly-expanded exhibition area. It attracted many visitors, particularly those from outside the university. Its aim was to represent Cunard’s rich heritage through the presentation and interpretation of original documents and photographs.

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Visitors were introduced to the history of the Cunard Company through themes such as 'Life on Board' and 'Serving the Country'. Some of the highlights included the passenger list which records Charles Dickens travelling on board the Britannia in 1842, and photographs depicting Cunard's service during the Second World War.

There has been a great media interest in Cunard's anniversary celebrations. Articles featuring the Cunard Archive have been published in both local and national newspapers. TV coverage has included news reports and a BBC Inside Out Cunard special. The media interest has helped to raise the profile of SCA and the University Library and enabled the Cunard Archive to reach a large popular audience. Feedback from members of the public and university staff has also been very positive.

Cunard's anniversary year has been an enthralling and exciting one for SCA. Both the exhibition and the partnership work have allowed SCA to create stronger links within the university – particularly with the Victoria Gallery & Museum and the University's Corporate Communications department. Externally SCA has improved networking with other academic institutions and cultural organisations more widely across the city. It is anticipated that this dynamic and forward-looking network will be highly beneficial to future projects.

Further information about the Cunard Archive can be found on the SC&A website:

<http://www.liv.ac.uk/library/sca/colldescs/cunard.html>

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