

The Men of the Blue Funnel Line

Alfred and Phillip Holt founded the company in 1865 in Liverpool. They saw this as the greatest adventure of their lives and because 'Homer's Odyssey' was for them the finest adventure story ever written, they would give 'Homeric' names to all of their ships - such names as Agamemnon, Agapenor, Ajax, Hector, Helenus, Perseus and many more.

Alfred and Phillip were, by all accounts, good men who ran the company with good powers of leadership and dealt in justice and kindness. These characteristics would set their seal on the Blue Funnel Line until the end of the Holt's era in 1966.

In 1895, Alfred's son George and his nephew Richard started managing the company. Richard won a wide circle of respect in the international shipping world. George on the other hand was of a more quiet and shy disposition, who ran the company's general policy.

In 1908, Robert Holt's (brother to Alfred and Phillip) youngest son Lawrence, joined the company and saw the company weather the two world wars and a depression, before retiring in 1953.

Lawrence Holt was not possessed with his brother Richard's commercial acumen or his grasp of shipping politics, though he did have a good eye for a good ship and all things seamanlike. The non-conformist conscience, which burned intermittently in families like the Holt's, illuminated his life with a steady glow. He dealt with social problems and with the struggles of seamen and dockers to obtain just rewards for their labours. However, Lawrence Holt's great memorial must lie in those links of affection and trust, annealed by a common aim which, in peace and war, he forged with the officers and crews of the fleet. Indeed there is a figure of 'Mr Lawrence' which exists and endures as a beloved memory in Blue Funnel Line hearts, ashore as well as afloat.

The last Holt to manage the company was George Holt, appointed in 1950. A fourth Holt generation, George was to see the company go through major changes and then its eventual demise as an independently owned shipping company. In 1964 the last true Holt vessel set sail from Liverpool - the passenger cargo liner 'Centaur' which was to join the Australian service to Singapore.

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