

Princes Landing Stage at the Pier Head in Liverpool

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I joined the Waterguard at the Landing Stage in 1955 and became very familiar with the Baggage operations there - mainly on exit duty in those early days.

I can identify some of the officers in the above picture - Alan Reid in the right foreground talking to a group. To the right of the photo at the desk where detentions etc were dealt with, the CPO is Tony McCarthy, talking to WSO - the only one in the port - Molly Montgomery, who married Dave Couch PO, later a CPO who transferred to Southampton.

As for the movement itself the absence of large packing cases and heavy luggage and non European passengers would suggest that it is not a transatlantic - West African or Far Eastern arrival. I would hazard a guess at passengers from one of the Monte boats which sailed to the Canary Islands with about 150 or so passengers on a 14 day or so round trip. The ships docked in West Kings Dock - very near the the sight of the present VAT HQ which was built over King's Dock - and passengers and baggage were transferred to the Landing Stage for clearance. One of the more exciting jobs for we new APO's was to accompany the coaches of uncleared passengers from the dock to the Landing Stage - Flying APO's before their time.

The Princes Landing Stage at the Pier Head in Liverpool was the point of arrival and departure for the the large number of Liners that then used the Port. Transatlantic - Cunard & Canadian Pacific, West Africa - Elder Dempster, India - Anchor Line,

South America - PSNC, and assorted troopships and assisted passage emigration ships. These large ships came alongside the Stage which was a floating berth in the river itself. After passenger landing the ships then docked to their various berths to discharge cargo and load before returning to the stage to embark outgoing passengers. Some other ships, eg Furness Withey from Canada or Booth Line from S America and the Monte boats mentioned above, which carried about 150 passengers docked directly and the passengers and their baggage were transported to the baggage hall at the Landing Stage for clearance. In some cases where the number of passengers was say, less than 100, clearance would take place on the quayside in temporarily created facilities which, what with pigeons and the general dockside environment, would be not be acceptable today either to the travellers or the staff.

At the Stage itself baggage was offloaded by crane and then wheeled to the hall where it was laid out alphabetically as the picture shows. When the passengers arrived, Officers circulated - complete with Notice No 2 and the appropriate colour chalk - clearing passengers, who could then leave making their own way or using the linked London train from the adjacent railway platform. With the demise of the Liner traffic these facilities were all demolished as the decline of the port accelerated.

Were they still to exist - modernised - there is little doubt that Liverpool would have been able to take advantage of the boom in cruising as an arrival and departure point. As it is, Cruise liners call only for short visits as no baggage handling facilities exist. A great shame.

The offices for Waterguard staff were over and alongside the Baggage halls - referred to, politically incorrectly, as "Belsen", but it was the 1950's. Sub offices also existed in the "Pig and Whistle" and in "The Old Fort" but that is another story.

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