



# Ship Fact Sheet



## BRITANNIA (1887)

Base data at 16 October 1887. Last amended November 2008

\* indicates entries changed during P&O Group service.

Type	Passenger liner
P&O Group service	1887-1909
P&O Group status	Owned by parent company
Former name(s)	
Registered owners, managers and operators	The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
Builders	Caird & Co Ltd
Yard	Greenock
Country	UK
Yard number	246
Registry	Greenock, UK
Official number	93196
Signal letters	KNWB
Classification society	Lloyd's Register
Gross tonnage	6,061 grt
Net tonnage	2,949 nrt
Deadweight	4,900 tons
Length	141.93m (465.8ft)
Breadth	15.84m (52.0ft)
Depth	5.70m (18.7ft)
Draught	7.922m (26ft 0in)
Engines	Triple-expansion steam engine
Engine builders	Caird & Co Ltd
Works	Greenock
Country	UK
Power	7,000 ihp
Propulsion	Single screw
Speed	16.5 knots
Passenger capacity	230 first class, 157 second class
Cargo capacity*	5,111 cubic metres (180,512 cubic feet)
Crew	
Employment	UK/Australia service. Also to India and the Far East

**Career**

- 18.08.1887: Launched.
- 11.10.1887: Registered.
- 15.10.1887: Ran trials. Fuel consumption 110 tons per day.
- 16.10.1887: Delivered as *Britannia* for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company at a cost of £187,278. A sister to the earlier *Victoria* and very similar to the later *Oceana* and *Arcadia* which together made up P&O's Jubilee Class to mark Queen Victoria's (and the Company's) Golden Jubilee. Fitted with unsubsidised gun platforms in case of auxiliary cruiser duties. Her name is a poetic one for Britain, or Britain personified, taken from the Latin name for the Roman province covering most of England.
- 18.10.1887: Aground for 12 hours on the Goodwin Sands.
- 05.11.1887: Maiden sailing established a new Brindisi/Adelaide mail record of 23 days 10 hours, at an average of 16 knots as against 14.5 knots required by the mail contract.
- 26.07.1889: Arrived at Sydney from Melbourne during which passage she was overhauled by the clipper *Cutty Sark* when she (*Britannia*) was making 16 knots.
- 07.01.1890: Cargo capacity 4,406 cubic metres (155,612 cubic feet).
- 13.11.1891: Collided with the steamer *Knight of Sir John* in the Suez Canal.
- 1894: Ran aground in the Suez Canal.
- 1894/1895: Experimental six-month charter (with *Victoria*) for Indian trooping carrying 1,200 men (she could carry 2,700 in emergency). Contract repeated in 1895/96 and 1896/97. This was the first time that commercial ships had been hired for trooping for many years, and improved the situation substantially.
- 26.07.1898: Cargo capacity 4,308 cubic metres (152,131 cubic feet).
- 05.1899: Deadweight 4,988 tons. Draught 8.062m (26ft 5½in). Cargo capacity 3,990 cubic metres (140,915 cubic feet).
- 02.1902: Cargo capacity 3,911 cubic metres (138,137 cubic feet).
- 1904: Refitted and modernised for revised mail contracts starting in 1905.
- 1907: Carried Prince Fushimi of Japan on a state visit to London.
- n.d.: Laid up in London.
- 08.1909: Sold for £11,520 to Fratelli Cerruti fu Allesandra, Italy to be broken up.
- 22.08.1909: Arrived at Genoa under the name *Britanni*. Scrapped alongside her sister *Victoria*.

## LIFE ON AN OCEAN STEAMER

*An article from the "Scarborough Gazette" 9 February 1888, originally published in the "Sydney Herald"*

The marked advance in naval architecture which has been made during the last few years has tended, not only to an enormous saving of time on the voyage, but also to an immense improvement in the passenger accommodation, until the conditions of life upon a modern ocean going steamer, such as we have in the *Britannia*, the latest addition to the P&O fleet, have become almost too luxurious. In the old days it was very different. Then a sea voyage was always accompanied with a certain amount of hardship, which was looked upon as unavoidable, but now the hardship commences when the voyage is ended, and the passenger steps ashore to face the miseries of strange hotels, or the discomforts which often accompany home life. We are aware that it has been of late customary to call these steamers floating hotels; but the words hardly convey meaning enough, and to call the *Britannia* a floating hotel is to do her but scant justice, for none of the hotels with which we are familiar on this side of the world even approach her in convenience of accommodation and luxury of appointment. In fact, some enterprising speculator might render an important service to humanity, and constitute himself a public benefactor, by setting some of our Sydney "hotels" afloat on the stormy ocean, and substituting in their place a few *Britannias*.

As there are probably many of our readers who have had no opportunity of forming an idea of what a passenger's life on board one of these modern steamers is, we will endeavour to briefly describe the accommodation provided for passengers and the routine of the daily life. In the first place, it must be understood that when a passenger takes his ticket, he practically pays in advance for his board and lodging during a period regulated by the length of the voyage, and fares have now been cut so low that it is almost, if not quite as cheap, to live on board a steamer as in a first-class hotel ashore. In other words, the company, in addition to conveying a passenger from one port to another, contracts to board and lodge him during the period on the most elaborate and extensive scale. The passenger list on board the *Britannia* is divided into two classes, first and second, no third class being carried at present, and each class has its separate dining saloon, promenade deck, &c., so that as far as their daily life is concerned, the two classes might as well be on separate steamers. The chief difference between the two classes now lies in the amount of the passage money; but of course the extra money paid for a first-class berth is to a certain extent compensated for by the greater luxury of the saloon and state-room fittings, the superiority of the table, and the high-toned exclusiveness of the society. However, in the real essentials and comforts of life there is not much difference, and consequently many people now travel second-class who in former days would have gone first. On the passage out the *Britannia* carried 185 first and 112 second-class passengers, a total of 297, all of whom had to be daily provided with three excellent meals, and have their every other want attended to. To look after these passengers a small army of cooks, stewards, bakers, butchers, scullery men, numbering 97 in all were needed. It may be mentioned incidentally that all the stewards on P&O boats trading to Australia are Europeans, Indians being only employed in subordinate capacities. In addition, the officers and crew numbered 158, making a total of 546, all told, on board.

The daily life on a passenger steamer commences with, or even before, the dawn, for the bakers are the first to rouse out at 4 o'clock, followed by the stewards and cooks at 5 o'clock. Tea and coffee are provided for early rising passengers at 6 o'clock, when the day's life may be said to commence. The first consideration on rising is, of course, the morning bath, and the passenger finds a number of most luxurious marble baths convenient for his morning plunge. A separate suite of bathrooms is provided for the ladies and children, fitted in the most elaborate style. The bath having been duly enjoyed and lingered over until the next in turn becomes frantic with impatience, the passenger naturally turns his attention to breakfast, for it is a curious fact that one is always hungry at sea, in spite of the frequent recurrence of meals. On well-managed steamships this fact is always recognised, and a quantity and profusion of food supplied, which on shore would appear to be reckless waste.

It will readily be imagined that to feed over 500 persons for a period of five or six weeks requires a vast stock of provisions, and as no live stock is kept, all the perishable stores are carried in the refrigerating chambers, of which the *Britannia* has several. For the outward trip only, 30,000lb of fresh meat were taken into store, also 3,000 head of poultry, 5,000lb fresh fish, 500lb fresh butter, 850lb Danish butter, 800 gallons fresh milk, and 2,000 tins condensed milk. The fresh milk is taken on board in tins, and on being frozen in the refrigerating chamber will keep as long as required; 40,000 eggs were used, the daily consumption averaging from 1,000 to 1,200. Other stores, which are not of a perishable character, are carried in the storeroom, a spacious compartment resembling a large grocer's shop. A sufficient quantity of these stores is laid in to last the round voyage, the following being some of the principal items: - flour, 120 barrels; coffee, half-ton; tea, 800lb; sugar, 7,000lb; jams, 2,000; besides an enormous quantity of stores of a miscellaneous character.

The figures given us with regard to the consumption of alcoholic liquors will no doubt prove a shock to many of our temperance friends; and it is evident that local option, as applied to passenger steamships, is yet a far away dream of the future. For the voyage 5,000 quarts and 8,000 pints of English beer were provided, 1,000 quarts and 5,000 pints of stout, 1,500 quarts lager beer, 1,500 bottles of whisky, 3,800 bottles of various kinds of wines, and 10,000 aerated waters. Owing to their freedom from duties, liquors are sold at a very low rate at sea, the best brands of champagne being only charged 8s. per bottle, and this, no doubt, accounts in part for the large consumption. Ice is to be had *ad libitum* on board, and whilst on this subject it is worth while paying a visit to the refrigerating chambers, especially if the day is sultry. The visitor who penetrates to these frozen recesses steps at once, by the process of passing through a doorway, from the atmosphere of a Sydney summer afternoon into a region of frost and snow, where the thermometer registers anything between freezing point and zero; it was 20° Fahrenheit on our visit. All this is brought about by one of Haslam's refrigerators, which works by the simple process of compressing air, cooling it, and allowing it to expand. On a well-known scientific principle, the expansion of air or any other gas, causes a reduction in the temperature, and thus the freezing rooms can be kept as cold as required. When ice is required all that is necessary is to place cans of water in the freezing room, and allow them to remain until congealed.

The sleeping berths on the *Britannia* are remarkable for their airiness and comfort, both in the first and second classes. They are arranged in two rows, the outer ones, next the skin of the vessel, being, of course, the better lighted, as a large porthole opens into each one. The fittings are simple but elegant, consisting of spring mattresses, patent folding washstands, and a chest of drawers. The latter introduction is a welcome novelty, and very convenient, as each passenger is provided with a drawer, numbered to correspond with his berth.

Life on board a steamer is not, however, all eating, drinking, and sleeping, for there are many other means of amusement and recreation available. A well-stocked library of light literature is to be found in each saloon, and music also forms an exhaustless field of enjoyment. The music-room of the *Britannia* is a special feature, being a spacious apartment on the hurricane deck. From a decorative point of view, it is a symphony in white and gold, this style of treatment giving the room a wonderfully light and airy appearance, which is enhanced by a charming glimpse of a miniature conservatory, visible through the jalousies which open on the skylight well of the main saloon below. The chief attraction of the place is, however, a splendid Brinsmead grand piano, all white and gilt, which stands in the centre. A curious notice posted in the room provides that the piano is to have an absolute rest between the hours of 1 and 4pm, and those who have lived near a music teacher's residence will appreciate at once the kindly thoughtfulness which puts this closure on the much-abused instrument during certain hours. Other amusements there are in plenty, as deck games, cards, &c., and in addition the passengers organise concerts, and amateur theatricals, which, although they may not prove up to the shore standard, provide a very agreeable means of passing the time. A very successful fancy dress ball was held on the *Britannia* during the passage out, the ladies in particular extemporising some wonderful costumes from the scanty means at their disposal. Many other ways of whiling away the spare time might be mentioned, one infallible source of amusement, specially recommended to passengers making their first voyage, being to accost the captain, and to inquire how the ship is heading, or what the day's run is likely to be. The result is usually more fully enjoyed by the spectators than by the querist, for the captain of a P&O liner, be it marked, is an exalted individual, and belongeth not to the common herd. A visit to the engine-rooms and other more hidden portions of the great ship proves both interesting and instructive, for in this department mechanical ingenuity attains its highest triumph of construction. The enormous engines, with their three cylinders on the triple expansion system, revolve as smoothly and steadily as the wheels of a watch, although the screw may be making over 60 revolutions a minute.

Whilst the primary object of a steamer is to convey her passengers as quickly as possible from one port to another, a secondary, but none the less important consideration is to secure the ultimate safety of everyone in the event of any accident happening. In this respect the *Britannia* is remarkably well fitted, for she has accommodation in her boats for everyone on board. She carries 12 ordinary boats in the davits, which will hold 425 persons, four of the boats being lifeboats of the most improved construction. There are also four collapsible boats, which will hold 30 persons each, making the total capacity of the boats 545 persons, or about the number, all told, on board during the last voyage. In the berths are cork life-belts for each passenger, and a number of the ordinary life buoys are carried on deck. Every member of the crew is told off to a particular boat, and boat drill is carried out once every week.

The arrangements in case of fire are equally complete, and this drill is also performed weekly, in order that each member of crew shall know his station, and be familiar with the duties which he has to perform in such an emergency. The watertight doors, between every compartment, are also kept closed at sea, with the exception of those on the main deck and between the stokehole and engine-room compartments, which are, however, arranged so that they can be immediately closed in the event of any danger arising.

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