

Crew Research Guide



P&O Ships' Movements

Introduction

Records of ships' movements belonging to either The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company or any of its subsidiary company are far from complete. For P&O specifically, consistent files do not exist through the whole of the company's existence. What is available in the P&O Archive falls into two categories:

- Records of general sailing schedules (from which an enquirer can establish what ship sailed on a particular date)
- Records of the movements made by an individual vessel



The P&O Archive is on permanent loan to the [National Maritime Museum](#), Greenwich and can be searched via their online [catalogue](#).

Pre-1847

There are no P&O timetables before 1847, but extensive research by the postal historian Reg Kirk produced three books which show more or less the pattern of P&O's mail sailings during the two decades beginning in the mid-1830s as follows:

Kirk, Reginald, *The Postal History of the P&O Service to the Peninsula* (Royal Philatelic Society, London, 1987)

Kirk, Reginald, *British Maritime Postal History: The P&O Bombay and Australian Lines 1852-1914*. Vol 1 (PHEAS/Postal History International, 1981)

Kirk, Reginald, *British Maritime Postal History: The P&O Lines to the Far East*. Vol 2 (Proud-Bailey Publishers, 1982)

Although Kirk's publications run up to the First World War, he does not cover **non-mail** sailings nor the parts of voyages when mails were not carried. In addition there are more detailed Company records after 1847 which are accessible in the P&O Archive.

1847 - 1884

For the period 1847 to 1884 a retired P&O Marine Superintendent, Captain J C Ablewhite, researched and compiled two volumes of P&O sailings Out and Home from the Company's Nautical Reports (see below).

From Captain Ablewhite's tables one can establish not merely which ship was where and when, but how the complex web of P&O sailings interconnected, especially during the years before the opening of the Suez Canal. For all ships, not merely those on scheduled mail services, Captain Ablewhite also produced a third volume giving each ship's individual movements in brief. These volumes are available in the P&O Archive housed at the [National Maritime Museum](#) in [P&O/41](#) series.

1884 - 1929

For this period the P&O Archive contains a series of pasted-up copies of the proposed sailings for one year (for some earlier years separated into Outward and Homeward sailings) which have been amended by hand to show which ships actually took which sailings, and how they differed, if at all, from the intended details. For some years there are supplementary pages giving details of cargo sailings, trooping and the emigrant Branch Line from 1910 onwards. These are available in the P&O Archive housed at the [National Maritime Museum](#). Additional details regarding specific manuscript numbers can be found in the [P&O Archives at National Maritime Museum](#) research guide.

1929 - 1960

From 1929 the pasted-up and amended sailing schedule are supplanted by a series of foolscap notebooks detailing sailings and the different routes operated by the company, although in some years some files have not been completed. Records of cruises and pleasure voyages are in the form of pasted-in itineraries from brochures and with handwritten amendments as necessary. During the Second World War there are extensive records of trooping voyages operated by the company, using its own or other companies' vessels. These are available in the P&O Archive housed at the [National Maritime Museum](#). Additional details regarding specific manuscript numbers can be found in the [P&O Archives at National Maritime Museum](#) research guide.



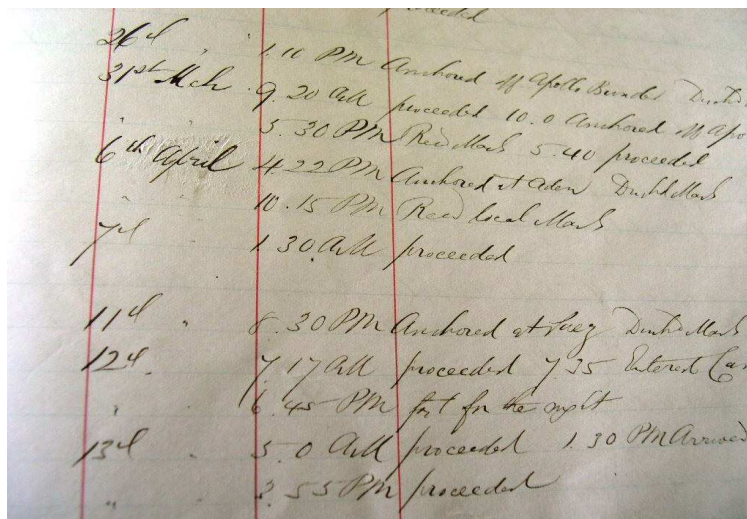
1960 - 1985

After 1959 the P&O and Orient Line operations were completely merged. Although sailing schedules continued to be produced, the file copies have been lost. Some schedules relating to the UK/Australia services have been reconstructed by Mr Rob Henderson in Australia. P&O Cruises is now owned by Carnival plc and you are requested to please contact them directly for further information. There are broken files of sailing schedules for P&O's General Cargo ships in the 1970s and full details of sailing by its Bulk Ships (tankers, bulk carriers and gas carriers) in the early 1980s giving in each case the last port of call and the intended future movements.

Nautical Reports

The P&O Archives include what are called 'Nautical Reports' which are digests of ships' logs, the latter of which were not retained by the company. (For more information about ships' log books, please refer to the [Crew Agreements, Lists and Official Logs](#) research guide). Nautical Reports exist for the period 1847 to 1957, however there are substantial gaps between 1916 and 1939, broken by only a few records in the mid-1920s. For most voyages over this period the Nautical Reports give dates and ports of call, the identities of the Master and Chief Officer (or equivalent), and noteworthy events such as births and deaths on board and incidents such as groundings,

collisions or wrecks. Additional details regarding specific manuscript numbers can be found in the [P&O Archives at National Maritime Museum](#) research guide.



P&O/40 - Nautical Reports. © P&O Heritage Collection

Other Voyage Records

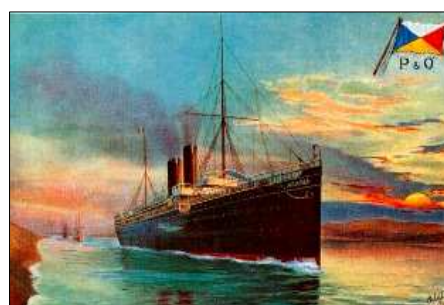
Between 1920 and 1960 the financial records of ships' voyages do include details of ports of call as well as including data on cargo carried, stores commuted and so on.

For the period 1950s to the early 1960s, the P&O Archives includes some files of completed itineraries, i.e. printed forms showing where a voyage was expected to go and how it differed in reality. A continuation of this file is held by P&O Cruises in Southampton, although only relating to passenger voyages. P&O Cruises are now owned by Carnival UK and you are requested to contact them directly.

Although they would once have existed, very few reports of individual voyages survive. Although they were submitted, presumably the quantity of files involved will have led to wholesale disposal at one or more of the several reorganisations that took place in the 20th century.

Other Group Companies

Orient Line records in P&O Archives include some voyage reports covering 1940 to 1963 and copies of timetables between 1946 and 1949. Sample voyage files exist for British India Steam Navigation Company voyages ending or beginning in 1963, for Strick Line voyages in 1970 to 1971 and for New Zealand Shipping Company/Federal Steam voyages ending or beginning in 1965.



In addition, New Zealand Steam Company files also include extensive movement books, mostly organised on a timetable basis but some dealing with ships individually.

Useful Contact Information

The P&O Archive is on permanent loan to the [National Maritime Museum](#), Greenwich, UK and their [archive catalogue](#) is available online. Should you wish to consult the archive in person, please contact the museum directly to make an appointment and order documents in advance.

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