

Moments in Time # 4

Paddy Henderson's Burmese Venture

By Geoff Walker



The house flag of P. Henderson & Co., of Glasgow. A vertical red white and blue with a small Union Flag in the center. P. Henderson & Co, also known as Paddy Anderson & Co was a Scottish ship owning and management company. The company was founded in 1840 as a partnership between Patrick and George Henderson, who initially operated chartered vessels to Australia, then to New Zealand. Patrick Henderson was a merchant, who had three brothers, two also being merchants, working for an agent at the Italian port of Leghorn. The third brother, George, was a Sea Captain. Together, the brothers invested in a ship, the **Peter Senn**, and the business started to blossom, but tragedy struck when Patrick died in 1841, and the business was taken over by his brother, Captain George Henderson. In 1848, George went into partnership with a young man, James Galbraith. James showed outstanding abilities and successfully expanded the business from merchants, to become ship owners and ship managers, when in 1848 they established the **Albion Line**.

Their concept was to carry Scottish emigrants, cargo and Royal Mail to Australia and New Zealand on their outbound leg of the voyage, and to secure cargoes from Australia and New Zealand for the return voyage to the UK., but they encountered difficulties in attracting sufficient return cargoes. As a remedial action, and in attempts to fill their homebound ships, they decided to try calling at Rangoon, which was then the principal port of British colonial Burma, situated on the Irrawaddy River. So, during 1865, Henderson and Co established the Irrawaddy Flotilla & Burmese Steam Navigation Co in co-operation with the Denny companies, which provided a vast water transport network to the interior of Burma. There was an abundance of cargo from Burma which benefitted their ships considerably, so in 1870 P. Henderson & Co. inaugurated a steamship service between Glasgow, Liverpool and Burma. The incorporation of the British and Burmese Steam Navigation Co (BBSN) in 1874, followed the opening of the Suez Canal, and carried passengers direct to Burma. BBSN took over the fleet of steamships on the Burma route, and appointed P Henderson and Co., as managing agents. Meanwhile, the Albion shipping company, which Henderson's had earlier established became the dominant British company in the New Zealand trade, and holders of the lucrative mail contract. They also introduced the first refrigerated sailing ships between New Zealand and the UK. Sailing ships were used due to the limited number of coaling ports which were required by the newer steamships.



(unknown source)

Progressively, as more coaling ports became available, steamships increased trading potential but required high capital investment which were beyond the scope of P. Henderson or the Albion Shipping Company to meet in their own right, and so in 1882, the Albion Shipping Company amalgamated with Shaw, Savill and Company to form the Shaw, Savill and Albion Company Ltd. The death of James Galbraith in 1884, the driving force of P. Henderson & Co marked the end of an era of when private capital was the norm for shipowners.

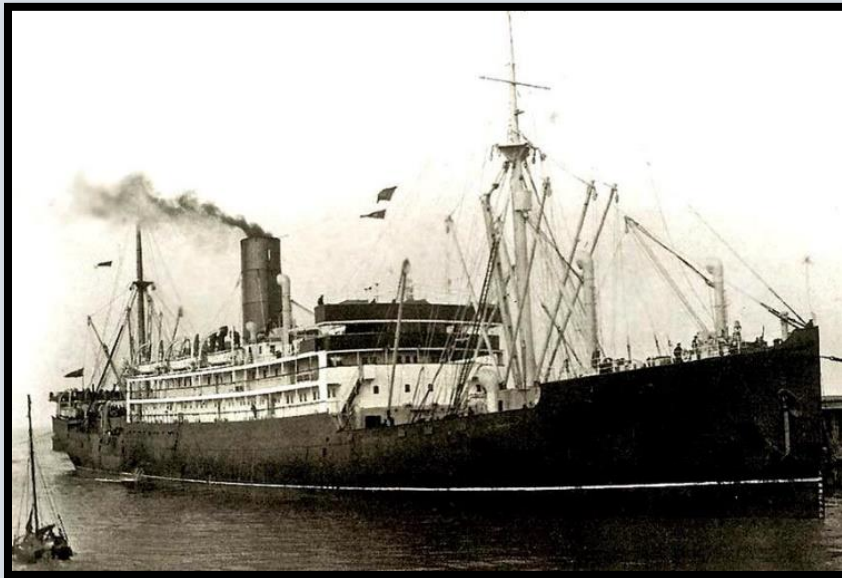
Left, the **Peter Denny** built in 1865 by Duthie of Aberdeen belonged to the Albion Shipping company. She operated the New Zealand route, mostly carrying emigrants from Scotland.



After the amalgamation, P. Henderson & Co remained as managers and loading brokers for the new company in Glasgow. British and Burmese Steam Navigation Company Ltd., remained as a ship owning company along with another member of the group, the Burma Steam Ship Company Ltd., both being managed by P. Henderson & Co. British colonial rule in Burma lasted from 1824 to 1948, which resulted from the successive three Anglo-Burmese wars through the creation of Burma as a Province of British India, known as British Burma, to the establishment of an independently administered colony. Final independence being granted in 1948.

Above, an early poster of Paddy Henderson promoting their UK to Rangoon service via the Suez Canal.

The post independent years saw a decline of the Burma trade, which was one of the factors why Elder, Dempster Lines chartered P Henderson's fleet from 1947 onwards and took over the company in 1952. Under Elder, Dempster stewardship and modernization, P Henderson fleet continued in service, with some new motor ships being delivered until the early 1960s. But due to the Suez crisis and nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1954, the trade between UK and Burma all but ceased causing a rapid decline in the company's fortunes over ensuing 8 years of disruption, as most cargo and mails were routed via India.

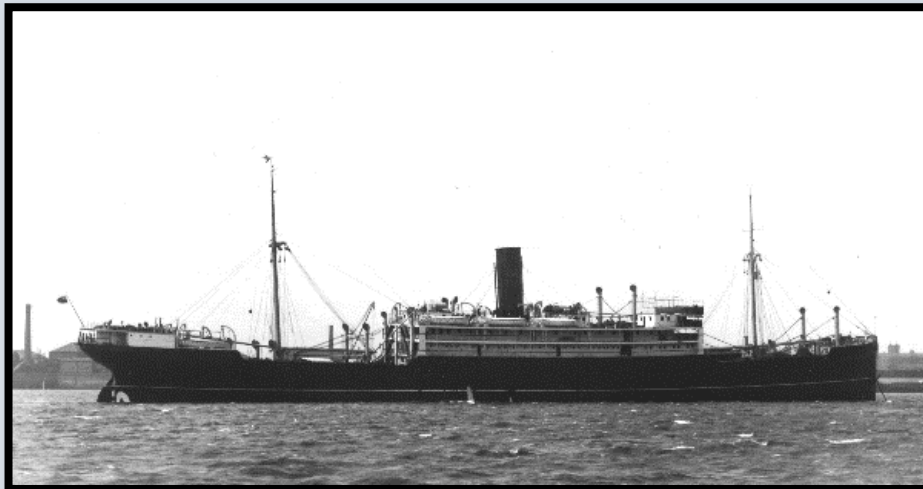


Left, the Paddy Henderson liner **"Amarapoora"**. She was built in 1920 for the Glasgow – Liverpool – Rangoon service. At the outbreak of WW 2 she was requisitioned by the British Admiralty for use as a hospital ship. She was purchased by the Ministry of Transport in 1946, became an emigrant ship in 1948, was renamed Captain Hobson in 1951, and eventually went for demolition in 1959.

(unknown source)

Right, another Paddy Henderson Poster advertising their freight and passenger service to Burma

The Paddy Henderson fleet suffered badly during both world wars with many ships lost. In 1905 a P Henderson steamship, the cargo ship **Ava**, ran aground and was wrecked 9 nautical miles off Maulmain in Burma. Henderson's quickly replaced the ship with a new Ava built the following year, but the new ship's career was cut short in the First World War, when she disappeared in January 1917 with the loss of all 92 persons aboard. She is presumed to have been sunk off the south coast of Ireland.

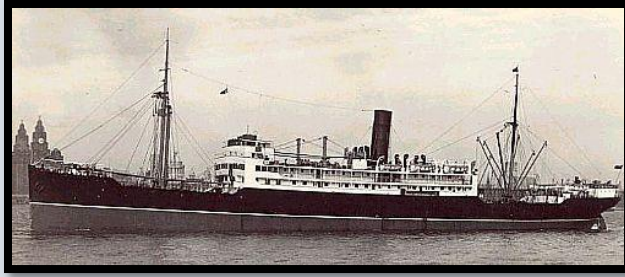


(unknown source)

That year P. Henderson lost one more ship to enemy action. On 8 July 1917, the U-boat U-57 torpedoed the passenger cargo ship **Pegu** off the south coast of Ireland. Fortunately, all but one of those aboard survived. A replacement **Pegu** was built in 1921.

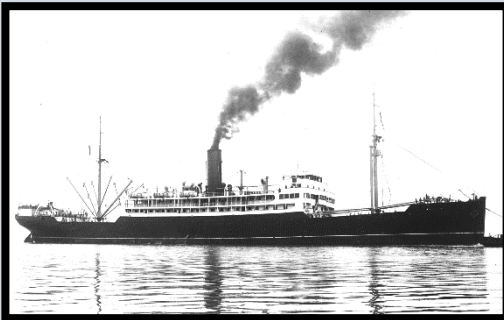
Just after the Armistice with Germany was declared, P Henderson lost yet another ship: on 19 December 1918, the passenger cargo ship **Tenasserim** was destroyed by fire in Rangoon.

P. Henderson also endured greater losses during the Second World War. On 24 November 1939, the **Pegu** ran around close to the Crosby Channel, off Liverpool. She broke her back and was wrecked, breaking into two sections.



On 13 July 1940, the German commerce raider and auxiliary cruiser **Atlantis** sank the British & Burmese SN Co. & Burmah SS Co. (P. Henderson as managers) passenger cargo liner **Kemmendine** by gunfire, in the Indian Ocean about 700 miles south of Ceylon whilst on a passage from the UK. to Rangoon via Cape Town. All the crew were taken prisoners and transported to Europe where they remained until the end of hostilities.

(unknown source)



On 9 April 1942, the passenger ship **Sagaing** – pictured left, was in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) at the port of Trincomalee, when aircraft from a Japanese aircraft carrier attacked her and set her on fire. Her crew abandoned ship but then she was sunk by gunfire. The wreck was later raised from where she lay in Malay Cove, relocated and deliberately re-sunk, to be used as a pier.

On 1 August 1942, the cargo ship **Kalewa** collided with the Dutch liner **Boringia** off the coast of South Africa. **Kalewa** sank but **Boringia** survived the collision and rescued everyone from the **Kalewa**.

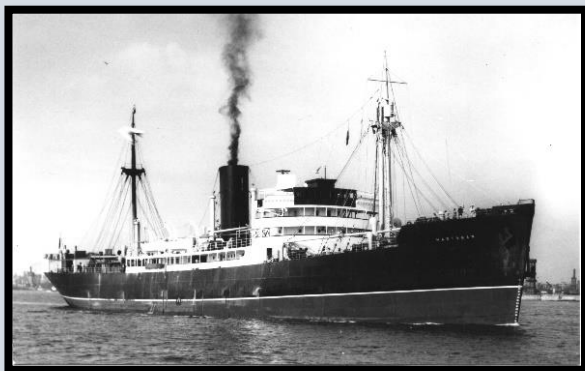
(unknown source)



P. Henderson's heaviest war losses were during 1943. On 2 April, the German submarine U-124 torpedoed the cargo ship **Katha** off the coast of Portugal, killing six of her crew. On 9 May U-123 sank the passenger cargo ship **Kanbe** by torpedo, off the coast of West Africa, killing all 66 people aboard. On 24 July, U-199 torpedoed the cargo ship **Henzada** off the coast of Brazil killing 2 crew members.

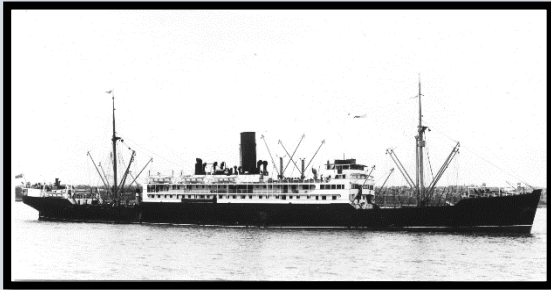
Left, the **MV Kadeik** built for Paddy Hendersons in 1952, Although part of the P. Henderson fleet she was mostly operated by Elder, Dempster Lines.

(unknown source)



Left, the British and Burmese SN Co's, 1950 built ship **Martaban**, under P. Henderson & Co management. She was sold for continued trading in 1964 to China Merchants' SN Co Ltd and renamed **Hai Ho**. She was then sold to shipbreakers in 1971 but gained a lastminute reprieve, and was resold as a going concern with a name change to **Ken Ho**. She was finally demolished in 1975 by Taiwanese breakers.

{unknown source}



Yet another war loss, on 17 June 1943, U-81 sank the passenger ship **Yoma** in the Mediterranean. **Yoma** had been converted into a troopship, and the sinking killed 484 troops and crew. The ship was owned by British & Burmese S.N. Co. Ltd. and Burmah S.S. Co. Ltd., under the management of Paddy Henderson & Co.

(unknown source)



The very elegant **Pegu**, built in 1961, for British & Burmese SN Co. (P. Henderson as managers) she was one of the last ships to be delivered under the Paddy Henderson banner. Between 1964 and 1975 she sailed for Elder, Dempster and Guinea Gulf as one of the group fleet ships, finally being sold for continued trading. She continued to serve various foreign owners, prior to being sold for scrap in 1982

In 1965 Ocean Steamship Co acquired control of the Elder, Dempster group. In 1967, following the Six-Day War, Egypt closed the Suez Canal, so Ocean SS Co discontinued the Burma route and transferred Henderson's last three ships to Elder, Dempster.

(unknown source)

By 1970, by this time all shareholdings had been transferred to Elder, Dempster and the Henderson name disappeared into obscurity with their last vessel being sold in the same year.

Since concept by the Henderson brothers in 1840, Paddy Henderson's ships frequent and became familiar sights in the Burmese, Indian Ocean, and African trades, before their eventual demise in 1970. Their presence in the Burmese trade, became iconic and indelibly stamped for over a Century. Their innovation, drive, and farsightedness as shipowners and managers is a matter worthy of great veneration.

End

Credits and References: Various P. Henderson archival sources.

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