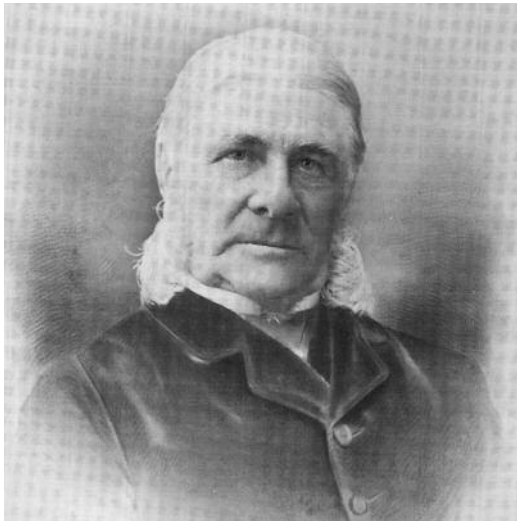


A SOUTHAMPTON SHIP BUILDING DYNASTY

James Day

When my great great grandfather, Charles Day (1772-1849), retired from the East India Company in 1816, aged 44, he settled in the up and coming industrial port of Southampton. He had made his money trading in spices whilst working for the East India Company in Sumatra and had somehow managed to survive the rigours of the Sumatran climate, which was notorious for ill health and early death.

Southampton had always been an area of small scale wooden ship and yacht building serving the local community. In the 1830s it began to change from a small seaside town, popular with elegant society, into a thriving industrial and commercial town that strove to become the Liverpool of the south. This was as a result of a series of changes in the ship building industry which saw the introduction of the use of iron and the marine steam engine.



Charles Arthur Day.

In 1834, William Allcroft Summers, who owned a small engineering business in Southampton

involved in marine and locomotive steam engineering, was in need of an injection of capital and the local banking firm of Grant and Maddison introduced him to Charles Day. This was the start of a partnership which was to become the ship building company of Day Summers and Co. and which lasted until 1929.

The start of shipbuilding

Although the firm was still involved in the manufacture of land carriages, it is clear that the ever increasing dominance of railway steam traction was making itself felt in Southampton and it is known that the firm built at least four engines between 1837 and 1839. However, the main emphasis was to become the construction of paddle steamers for the local ferry services and in 1836 the first steamer, the *Forester*, was launched for the Southampton-Hythe service. This has been claimed to be the first iron steamer to be built south of the Thames. This was followed in 1839 by the *Virago*, 120 tons, driven by a 25 horsepower engine and destined for ferry service on the river Tagus. In May of the same year the *Rio Doce* was launched for a sawmill owner in Brazil.

Around this time, Charles Day's eldest son, Charles Arthur Day (1813-1892), joined Summers as a partner in the firm together with a third short-lived partner, John Groves, and the firm moved to a more suitable site on the river Itchen near Northam Bridge. The river Itchen flows into Southampton Water on the east side near the entrance to the Solent. It was here that the firm was to build ships for almost a hundred years, - ranging from tug boats to passenger liners and luxury steam yachts, for such exalted customers as the King of Siam. It was under this partnership that the firm inserted the following advertisement in the Liverpool Mercury of 22 June 1838:

‘Wanted, in the South of England, an Engineer capable of Superintending a manufactory of Land, Marine and Locomotive Engines. As liberal Wages will be given none need apply who cannot produce the strictest testimonials and general character. - Apply (post paid) to Summers, Groves and Day, Engineers, Southampton’.

This was before the introduction of Penny Postage in 1840 when the recipient of a letter or package still had to pay for the postage.

Throughout the 1840s the business gathered momentum. The growing trade in local excursion and ferry services and the consequent demand for steamers provided the firm with a good start in their new premises. On 14 October 1840 the launching of the paddle steamer *The Pride of the Water*, 49.5 tons (later renamed *Ruby*) was announced. She was built for the South-Western and Isle of Wight Steam Navigation Company.

Another Day Summers local ferry steamer about which some details survive is the *Emerald* (the second local steamer with this name), launched from the yard on 22 July 1857. She was sent on her way by Miss Elizabeth Lamb, the daughter of Andrew Lamb, the engineer superintendent of the P&O Company in Southampton. *Emerald* was described as an ‘elegant and clipper looking paddle steamer’ fitted with a single mast, smack-rigged and with a straight stem and an unadorned semi-elliptical counter. *Emerald* went into service with the Isle of Wight Steam Packet Company with which she served until she was sold in 1871 to a firm in Spain.

Day and Summers’ involvement with the construction of local steamers continued until the eventual closure of the yard in 1929. The last ship constructed by the firm being the *PS Princess Elizabeth* launched in 1927. The *PS Princess Elizabeth*, the only ship still existing built by Day and Summers, is now a ‘hospitality vessel’ at Dunkirk. She took part in the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk during the war whilst in the service of the Red Funnel line. She evacuated over 1,600 personnel in four trips and survived relatively unscathed.

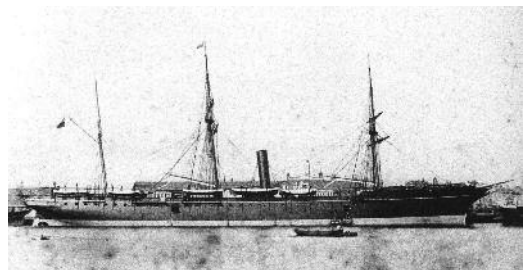


Paddle steamer Princess Elizabeth.

Links with the P&O Line

The launching of *Emerald* by Miss Lamb was particularly significant in the history of the firm. The presence of the P&O Line in the port was of major importance to the history of the town and particularly to the fortunes of the shipbuilding and ship repairing industries.

Day and Summers lost no time in acquiring orders from the new shipping lines using the rapidly expanding port facilities in Southampton. The first P&O ship constructed by the firm was the *Aden* launched in 1856. She was only of 812 tons gross and was followed by the *Northam* of 1,330 tons built for the same line. More orders for P&O followed with the paddle steamer *Syria* being constructed in 1863 and the *Surat*, screw steamer, of 2,578 tons in 1866 (a half-model of which is in the Science Museum). The year 1869 saw the construction of the *Hindostan*, the second P&O ship of that name, and at 3,113 tons she was the largest ship yet launched from the Northam yard.



P&O SS Hindostan, 3,113 tons. Built by Day Summers in 1869.

The Royal Mail Company also chose the port of Southampton as its headquarters for the Mail Service and on 7 September 1869 Day Summers launched the *RMS Nile*. She was of 3,021 tons and

during her trials attained the speed of 15.5 knots. She was the last vessel built with the old type single expansion engine and was acquired by the Union Mail Company in 1890 to be renamed *Roman*. She lasted only a year in this service and was scrapped in 1891.

The Union and Castle Lines have a connection with Southampton that goes back some 120 years. In 1863 Day Summers completed the liner *Saxon* for the Union Line, the second ship of that name owned by the company. Her maiden voyage to the Cape set a new record of 31 days which she lowered two years later to the new record of 28 days.

In 1864, the firm constructed the *Holstein* for the Hamburg America Line which a year later was followed by an even larger ship, the *Allemania* of 2,665 gross tons. The *Allemania* left Southampton on her maiden voyage on 20 September 1865, reaching New York on 1st October. She left New York again on 14 October, reaching Southampton on 25 October. On board was a passenger who was to become the guiding light steering the fortunes of the firm for the next 60 years. His name was Arthur James Day (1847-1923), and at 18 years old he had just completed his first year working in the yard.

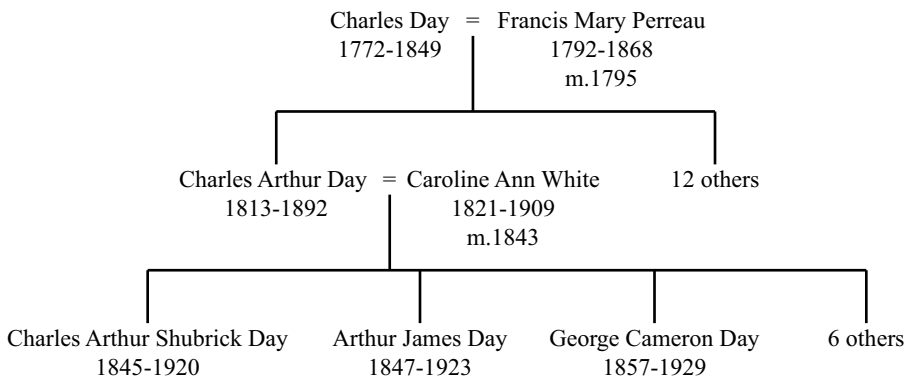
Arthur James was the second son of Charles Arthur Day's nine children, and of the three - Arthur James, Charles, his elder brother, and George, my grandfather, - who were introduced to the family business, he was the one who made the major contribution. George was elected a member of the

Institution of Naval Architects in July 1894. In 1871 Charles Arthur retired from the firm giving it over to Arthur James, Charles and Tom Summers with the name reverting back to its old form of Day, Summers & Co. He died in 1892 and with the retirement from the firm of Charles in 1898, Arthur James was left as the senior partner of the firm.

Arthur James Day kept a diary in which he recorded family events such as births, marriages and deaths, his election as a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1882 and a few of the more dramatic events at the yard. There is a rare insight into the relationship between owner and worker in a typically Victorian paternalistic business. On 1 January 1872, the firm introduced the 9 hour working day, and two weeks later the family were 'Intertained (*sic*) at a banquet in the Philharmonic Rooms by the Employees (*sic*) of our factory to celebrate the concession of the 9 hours'.

A certain amount of information can be obtained about the facilities and structures at the Northam yard during the last years of the 19th century from a report by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers when it visited the yard in July 1892. Amongst other things it noted that one of the largest buildings was the turnery and erecting shop built in the 1890s. It was 200 feet long, 50 feet wide and 50 feet high with a 50 ton overhead crane.

The construction of steam engines was an important part of the work carried out at the Northam Ironworks. Around 1890 the firm is



Family members who worked for Day Summers and Co.

recorded as having just completed the tripling of the Royal Mail Steamship Co's ship *Para* installing engines of 5,000 horsepower. Naval contracts included the construction of paddle engines of 1,200 horsepower for *HMS Restless*. In later years the firm built Parsons marine engines under licence, and during the First World War the firm manufactured under licence the semi-diesel British Kromhout Marine Oil Engine.

Less successful was the construction between 1889 and 1890 of the submarine *Incognita*. The submarine was financed by a number of American millionaires and its principle features included the use of oil burning boilers to raise steam. The design was the syndicate's own, and the fact that Arthur Day insisted on a clause in the contract to the effect that the company would work on their plans and specifications but would not guarantee the result, suggests that Day Summers were not convinced of the project's practicality. In the event the *Incognita* was launched at Northam on 31 January 1889. When she was handed over the following March, Arthur Day ordered his men ashore as he would not trust the submerging gear. The inadequacy of the oil burners furthermore resulted in clouds of black smoke and no head of steam. The next morning the *Incognita* sank in the Itchen due to a faulty valve, and in the ensuing law suit Day Summers were cleared of all responsibility.

Work on the *R Y Victoria and Albert* and the *Great Eastern*

The ship repairing side of the business is largely unrecorded although one or two of the more outstanding jobs may be identified from various company records and local newspapers. One worth mention is the fact that the yard undertook the construction of the dual funnels on the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert* when it was discovered that the original single funnel made the ship top heavy.

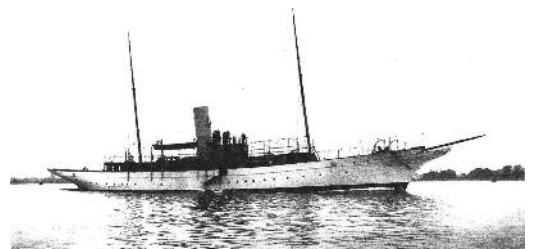
In 1860 the *Great Eastern* was in Southampton being fitted out for her first transatlantic voyage. The quarrels between Brunel and Scott-Russell had ended the latter's contracts and the completion of engineering works was undertaken by Day Summers. This was work necessary for a Board of Trade certificate. The screw and paddle engines

were re-fitted with feed pumps. Originally the supply to the boilers relied solely on a donkey pump, a state of affairs which caused a boiler explosion on her maiden voyage from the Thames and caused her to have to put in to Southampton.. In addition alterations to the slide valves of the paddle engines were made - thus adding an extra 500 hp to their output - and the piston rods were strengthened.

Limitations of the Northam Site

A major limitation of the Northam site was that it precluded the construction and launching of really large vessels. The result of this was that as the requirements of the large shipping lines turned more and more towards ships of 10,000 tons and over, the yard had to rely more and more on the construction of smaller vessels such as ferry and excursion steamers, tugs and what was to become a major speciality of the firm, steam yachts.

Day Summers started building steam yachts as early as 1864. The latter years of the 19th century and the halcyon days of the Edwardian era saw a dramatic upsurge in the demand for luxury steam yachts which had become the ultimate token of social prestige and wealth. Day Summers was particularly well suited to take advantage of this demand in that not only did they have the facilities to build and fit out these marvellous extravaganzas but they could do it on the doorstep, as it were, of the most popular playground, the Solent. By 1892 the firm had already built 27 steam yachts. One of the more notable was the *SY Vesatri*, 275 tons, launched in January 1878 for the King of Siam.



SY Medusa. 638 tons. Built 1905.

Many of the most graceful yachts of the steam era were built by Day Summers at their Northam yard. The steam yachts *Lantana*, *Seahorse*, *Titania*,

Elsie, Cynara, Medusa, Vanessa, Palaise, Morona and *Assegai* are but some of the many names with which the firm is associated.

The First World War

The First World War brought a spate of Admiralty work for the yard. During the war the yard built shipping to a total of 9,500 tons and machinery to a total of 11,500 horse-power. Among the larger ships was the tug *HMT Retort* with a displacement of 1,400 tons. Its twin screws gave it a speed of 14 knots. Other vessels were minesweepers, boom defence vessels, troop barges and refrigerated lighters.

Work during the war was not entirely military. In 1916 the yard launched the tug *Sir Bevois*, named after Southampton's legendary hero. She met her end in another war when she was sunk at Plymouth during an air raid on the port on 20 March 1941. There were numerous other vessels and types of ship built which included small coastal trading vessels and floating bridges for the Itchen chain ferry just downstream from the yard.

Arthur James Day died aged 75 in 1923. He had retained active control of the firm right up until the very last. Due to death duties and settlement of his will the company went into receivership and struggled on for another four years. The end finally came in March 1929 when it was taken over by Thorneycroft, afterwards to become Vosper Thorneycroft, thus preserving the continuity of the company's contribution to ship building in Southampton.

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to the Southampton Archives and Mr Adrian B Rance's book, *Shipbuilding in Victorian Southampton*, (published by the Southampton University Industrial Archaeology Group - July 1981), for much of the information in this article.

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