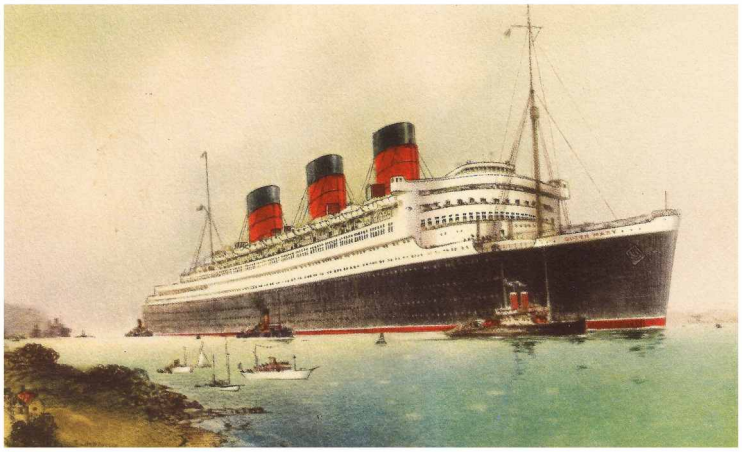
The Telephones On The

Construction on the ship, "**Hull Number 534**", as it was then known, began in December 1930 on the River Clyde at the shipyard of **John Brown & Company**, Clydebank in Scotland. Work was halted in December 1931 due to the Great Depression and Cunard, then separate from competitor White Star, applied to the British Government for a loan to complete 534. The loan was granted, with enough money to complete the unfinished ship, and to build a second ship later to become **Queen Elizabeth**. The intention was to provide a two ship weekly service across the Atlantic.



One major condition of the loan was that Cunard merge with the White Star Line, another struggling British shipping company and Cunard's chief British rival for the Atlantic run. Agreement was reached and the merger was completed on 10th May 1934. Work on **534** resumed immediately and she was launched on 26 September 1934 as the **Queen Mary** named after Mary of Teck, consort of King George V. Completion ultimately took 3½ years and cost £3,000,000.

Although launched as the **SS Queen Mary** (*Steam Ship*), once in service she became **RMS Queen Mary** (*Royal Mail Ship sometimes Steam-ship or Steamer*), used for seagoing vessels that carry mail under contract to the British Royal Mail.

From the start, the main focus of the on board arrangements was to minister to the needs of passengers and this was a keynote of the **Cunard-White Star** Company's policy. From the start, the plan was to enable passengers to easily make contact with the right member of the crew who could best satisfy their needs. To this end, the Company, and the builders, liaised with the **General Electric Company** to design and supply all the telephone equipment for the vessel.

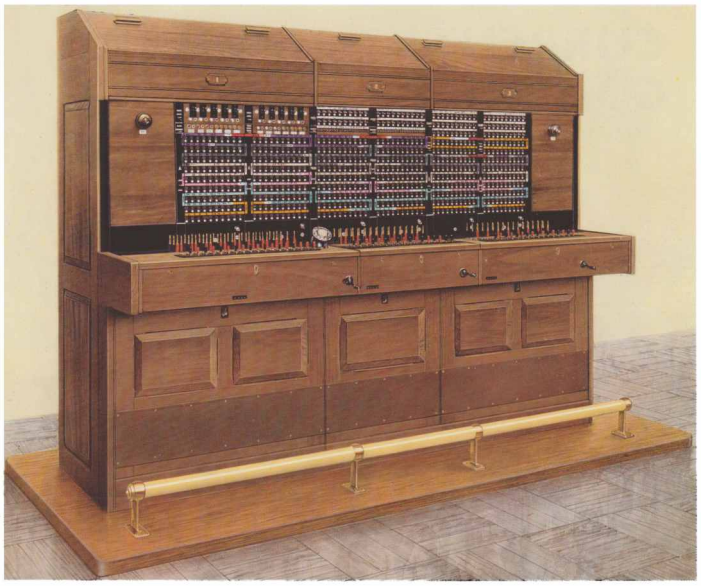


Fig. 1 C.B. Lamp Signalling Switchboard specially designed for the Queen Mary

Personal service was the key so there was no new fangled automatic telephone system for the Queen Mary. Human operators were the way to go so a 3 position **CB lamp signalling**

First Class passenger on the Telephone

switchboard was specially built for the ship (*fig. 1*). On the various decks, 430 cabins were equipped with a modern self-contained ivory telephone (*often referred to as the Gecophone*). A silk covered cord with a small plug attached allowed the phone to be positioned around the cabin to suit the passenger. The dummy dial centre was gold rimmed and the label denotes the chief reason for the instrument - "**Telephone your requirements for room service**" (*see fig. 2*). Later pictures of phones from the Queen Mary have a different message in red "**You can telephone to any part of the world whilst at sea**" (*fig. 3*).

Fig. 2 Cabin Telephone

Fig. 3

Cabin telephones were fitted with buzzers rather than bells, giving a subdued but effective calling signal and any telephones in corridors were fitted with lamps to avoid disturbing passengers.

In addition to those in cabins, telephones were provided for the use of passengers in public places such as the Main Hall, Tourist Entrance, Squash Court, etc. The service staff used telephones in corridors and pantries whilst other members of the crew used a total of 135 instruments in such locations as Wheel House, Purser's Office, Engineer's Workshop, Hospital, Engine Room, etc. A typical instrument for the Engine Rooms and Boiler Rooms is shown in fig. 4. These were for very noisy locations and were fitted with 2 receivers.

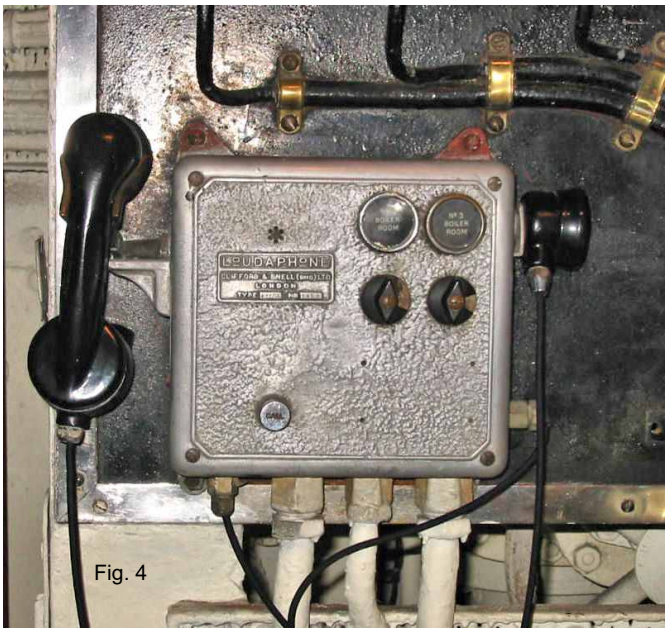
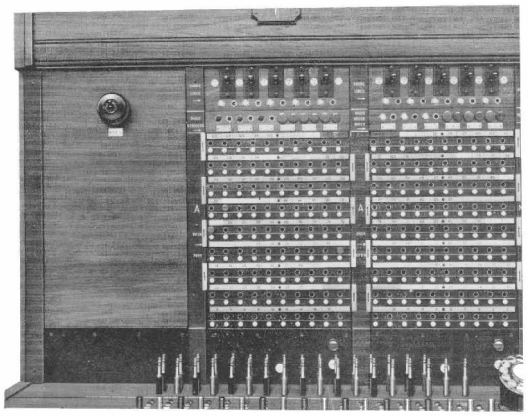


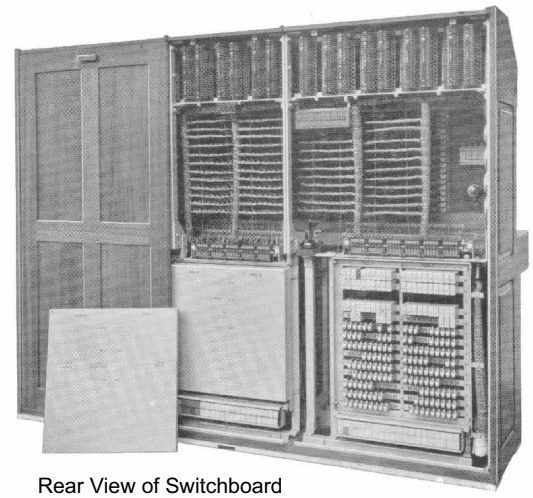
Fig. 4

A total of 585 lines terminated on the 3 position switchboard which included 10 lines for connections when in port. The operator could call automatic, CB, or magneto to suit the available lines on shore. There were 3 lines to the radio room and 3 order wires to allow radio calls to be set up for passengers. The operator positions were numbered 1, 2 and 3 from the left and served "A" Deck, Main Deck and "B" and "Sun" Decks respectively. The operators faced towards the bow of the ship so the left or operator 1 was port side and the wiring of the board reflected the cabin positions regarding their position on the ship.



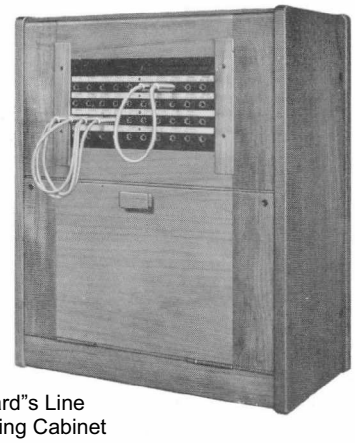
Operator's Position No. 1

On the switchboard, each group of jacks had a coloured strip beneath. When a call was made requesting the steward for the area, the operator moved her plug to the end of the coloured strip where the jack for the appropriate steward's telephone was located. Similarly a call for food could be forwarded to the pantry who separately placed the order with the kitchens and made arrangements for the waiter to collect the order and deliver it to the cabin.



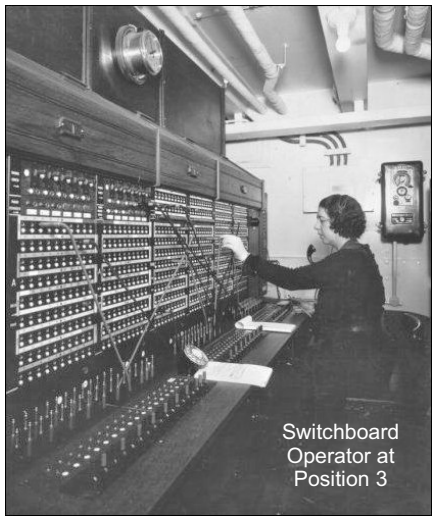
Rear View of Switchboard

The switchboard was designed to save space and accommodated everything necessary without the need for an equipment rack (except power equipment). The use of BPO 600 type relays considerably contributed to economise in space. The switchboard cords were fitted with spring-controlled pulleys with individual vertical guide wires in place of weights to avoid swinging and bumping when the ship rolled.



Steward"s Line Coupling Cabinet

A small Steward's Line Coupling Cabinet was provided to allow Steward's telephones to be coupled together during quiet times so that one steward could handle several areas no matter where he be when the call came in.



Switchboard Operator at Position 3

The **Queen Mary** sailed primarily on the North Atlantic Ocean with her maiden voyage on 27th May 1936. She won the coveted Blue Riband in that August, losing it in 1937 and regaining it in 1938, holding it until 1952. With the outbreak of the Second World War, she was converted into a troopship and ferried Allied soldiers during the conflict. Following the war, the **Queen Mary** was refitted for passenger service and, along with the **Queen Elizabeth,** re-commenced the two-ship transatlantic passenger service for which the two ships were initially built.

She was officially retired from service in 1967 and left Southampton for the last time on 31 October 1967 sailing to the port of Long Beach, California in the United States, where she remains permanently moored as a tourist attraction featuring restaurants, a museum and a hotel. The ship is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

References: *"Current Comments" Volume 6, No. 2, 1936 from The General Electric Company Ltd, Coventry England and Wikipedia.*