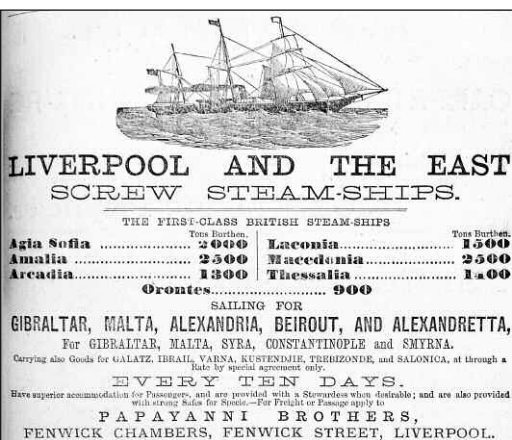


## WALKING ON WATER STREET

Graham Jones explores the histories of various buildings in the Water Street area.

### Part 1 – TOWER BUILDING AND THE ELLERMAN AND PAPAYANNI LINE <sup>1, 2</sup>



Advertisement in Gore's 1865 directory showing the firm as Papayanni Brothers.

George Papayanni, a Greek emigre merchant, and Pierre Mussabini, his Turkish partner, moved from London to Liverpool in 1844, considering it to be a better centre for the Mediterranean trade.<sup>3</sup> From an office in Fenwick Chambers (where the PSNC and Lamport & Holt had also begun life, and where for a period the Turkish Consul and subsequently the Greek Consul also had offices) the firm traded to the Levant, later extending to the whole of the eastern Mediterranean. They chartered steamers from 1846 and began owning them from 1855 under the guidance of George's brother, Basilio. By the early 1860's the firm had become Papayanni Brothers, later becoming Papayanni & Co.

When the American Civil War stopped grain imports from the United States, the company supplied the deficiency by building up a big business in grain from south-eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Although their ships were small, they were as big as the Danube and Black Sea ports could accommodate and each carried 30-40 passengers. Between the grain seasons they brought cotton from Egypt. Papayanni and Mussabini's first steamship was the *Arcadia* of 1855 which sailed until 1898. The *Amalia* sank in the Bay of Biscay in 1866.

Papayanni & Co enjoyed a privileged position amongst Liverpool merchants owing to their directors' personal connections in the Mediterranean. The firm was incorporated as Papayanni Steamship Co Ltd in 1897 with the original family still in control. 1900 saw them continuing to be listed at Fenwick Chambers, but the company lacked the capital to modernise their fleet, and in 1901 the Papayanni family accepted John Reeves Ellerman's offer to purchase the business. In 1892 John Ellerman (1862-1933), one of the most successful entrepreneurs in British history, made his first move into shipping by leading a consortium which purchased the interests of Frederick Leyland, one of the largest shipowners in Britain. In 1901 he sold this business to J P Morgan and then immediately began buying other shipping lines including several of Papayanni Line's rival companies such as City Line Ltd and Hall Line Ltd.

The Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead, has an attractive wall display of several dozen house flags and funnels, including the twin flags for the Ellerman & Papayanni Line superimposed upon the Ellerman funnel colours of buff with a white band beneath a black top. Ogdén's was a Liverpool branch of Imperial Tobacco and in 1906 issued a series of cigarette cards of shipping lines including many of the famous Liverpool lines of the period.



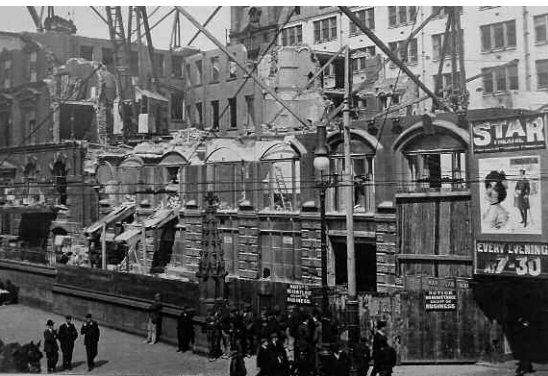
Coming together under the Ellerman flag and adopting the Ellerman funnel, the companies which had previously been competitors now worked together. The change of ownership prompted a change of office location to Tower Buildings, and in 1906 the Papayanni Steamship Co Ltd became Ellerman & Papayanni Lines Ltd.



The Prison Weint frontage of Tower Buildings (1848-1907), taken by the City Engineer's Dept., October 1906. Courtesy of Liverpool Record Office.<sup>7</sup>

Around this time the line was offering a two-month Mediterranean cruise for £33, and in the selective enlargement a clerk stands in the entrance to the 'Ellerman Line and Papayanni Line Forwarding Dept.', whilst a wall poster advertises one of their cruises to Egypt.

The stay was somewhat brief however for in 1907 their home was demolished to make way for an even grander replacement. By May 1908 a new Tower Building (lacking



Above: Demolition of Tower Buildings, June 1907 and construction of new Tower Building, May 1908.<sup>7</sup>

a plural ‘s’) was almost complete, shown above photographed from the bridge over George’s Dock which had become an extension to Water Street.<sup>7</sup>

The government requisitioned a large part of the Ellerman fleet in the 1914-18 war for use as troop carriers and munition carriers or for conversion into armed merchantmen to augment the Royal Navy. Heavy losses were suffered by the Ellerman Group, with 103 ocean vessels having a total cargo capacity of some 700,000 tons being destroyed, and the fleet was rebuilt when the war ended.<sup>5</sup>

John Ellerman died in 1933 with a fortune of £37 million and, by 1939, the fleet had grown to 105 ships with a capacity of over 900,000 tons making it one of the biggest fleets in the world. Losses during the Second World War were again heavy, 41 of the 60 ships destroyed being sunk by the U-boat fleet. Over 75% of Ellerman and Papayanni Line ships were lost.<sup>6</sup>

Leaving school in the summer of 1944, a young man, Harold Dove, applied to a number of shipping companies regarding his becoming a Cadet / Apprentice Deck Officer in the Merchant Service. Receiving a favourable reply from Ellerman and Papayanni Line, he was requested to attend at their offices. Tower Building had survived the 1941 May Blitz, despite a bomb having fallen through one of its light wells, and in 2011 Harold recalled that the building appeared to be extremely dirty and quite poorly maintained. Ellerman’s Papayanni Line, City Line and Hall Line had occupied almost the whole of the first floor offices, and Harold remembered that the names of the lines stood out from the exterior of the building in large letters above the first floor windows.

Entering that building in 1944, on the site of which the Tower of Liverpool had once stood, and stepping out of the lift towards two wood and glass doors with the Company’s name written in gold, Harold’s memories over half a century later took on a Kafkaesque feel as he recalled seeking admission to this apparent Castle of Control Officials:



A pristine Tower Building in October 1908 with the Royal Liver Building construction under way.<sup>7</sup> 1948, and a railway enthusiast captures a Mersey Docks & Harbour Board locomotive passing Tower Building, still wearing the wartime grime that Harold Dove remembered. Over the first floor offices, Ellerman’s Hall Line advertises destinations to India and South Africa. Photograph by ‘Livesey’, Southport’, 9th Sept., 1948.

*“Once actually inside the office entrance, I faced a dark wooden barricade about six feet high; I could not look over it and there were no windows in it. It appeared quite formidable, divided into panels about 18 inches wide, the upper portions of which could be opened from the inside only. Brief informative signs were over various panels – Inward Freight, Outward Freight, Crew, etc. One knocked on the selected panel and waited for a clerk to open it, and business was then transacted. Looking through the open panel, clerks were perched on high stools, working at high desks. Presenting oneself at the Marine panel, after knocking it was opened. The nature of the business having been stated, the clerk would then take the appropriate action. On this occasion it entailed being allowed ‘inside’...”*

Harold’s interview having had a successful outcome, the General Manager’s subsequent letter (to be included in the expanded LRO article) illustrates the wartime requirements to be available to report at very short notice and to follow correspondence regulations. After the war, as an officer with Ellerman & Papayanni, Harold was in and out of Tower Building on many occasions until 1952 when he resigned to join Cunard Line. Now living in the USA, he regularly visits the UK.

The early advertisements for the Papayanni Line show that many of the ships’ names ended in ‘ian’. George Chandler, detailing the Papayanni’s fleet list in 1958 in his book *Liverpool Shipping*, observed that the adoption of the characteristic ‘ian’ ending (*Almerian, Grecian, Ionian, Pandorian*, etc) was a reflection of a similar ending to the names of the early ships of the Bibby Line, taken over by Leyland and subsequently by Ellerman. Harold Dove remembers sailing in both the *Corinthian* and the *Destro* (renamed the *Destrian* in 1946), recalling them as being two of only four Papayanni ships which survived the war.



*Harold Dove served on the 'Corinthian', a typical Ellerman & Papayanni cargo ship.*

In 1993, Ellerman & Papayanni Lines Ltd became Papayanni Lines Ltd, only finally to be dissolved in 1996. And with that ending, the historic links - to George and Basilio Papayanni, to their early partner Pierre Mussabini, to John Ellerman, to Fenwick Chambers, and to the two buildings at the junction of Water Street and George's Dock Gates which were the Papayanni Line's successive homes - were also finally broken.

### **Sources and notes**

<sup>1</sup> An expanded version of this article, including Ellerman & Papayanni's letter to Harold Dove, will form part of a growing series entitled *'Walking on Water Street'* which will be made available in pdf form to the Liverpool Record Office (LRO) when it reopens in 2013.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to personal communication with Harold Dove, at various points the narrative has made use of the following, each referenced by superscript once only at the end of the sentence in which the information is first used:-

<sup>3</sup> National Museums Liverpool, Archives & Library information sheet 16 Ellerman Line, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/info-sheet.aspx?sheetId=23>

<sup>4</sup> [www.oceanlinermuseum.co.uk/Ellerman%20Group%20history.html](http://www.oceanlinermuseum.co.uk/Ellerman%20Group%20history.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ellerman Lines in wikipedia.

<sup>6</sup> Chandler G., *Liverpool Shipping: A Short History* (LRO ref. 387.2 CHA).

<sup>7</sup> The City Engineer's Department photographs come from the LRO's collection under the reference *Photographs & Small Prints: Commerce & Industry: Firms: Tower Building(s)*.