



Flagships of imperialism (Studies in Imperialism)

Freda Harcourt, Sarah Palmer

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Flagships of Imperialism is the first scholarly monograph on the history of the P&O shipping company, and the first history of P&O to pay due attention to the context of nineteenth century imperial politics which so significantly shaped the company's development. Based chiefly on unpublished material from the P&O archives and the National Archives, and on contemporary official publications, the book covers the crucial period from the company's origins to 1867. After presenting new findings about the company's origins in the Irish transport industry, the book charts the extension of the founders' interests from the Iberian peninsula to the Mediterranean, India, China and Australia. In so doing it deals with the development of the necessary financial infrastructure for P&O's operations; the founders' attitudes to technical advances; the shareholding base; the company's involvement in the opium trade, and with its acquisition of mail, Admiralty and other government contracts. It was the P&O's status as a government contractor which, above all else, implicated its fortunes in the wider politics of empire, as illustrated by the book's concluding account of the company's rescue from the edge of a financial precipice by the award of a new government mail contract prompted, among other things, by the Abyssinian expedition of 1867. Flagships of Imperialism will be of interest to transport and company historians and to historians of the British empire alike, as well as to anyone interested in the history of British ships and shipping in the nineteenth century.

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