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‘A Feminine Touch’¹: Gender, Design and the Ocean Liner

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Abstract

This article offers an interdisciplinary account of gender in relation to ocean liner interior design. It outlines a case study of what the discipline of design history can bring to gender and maritime history. A historiography of the subject is followed by an analysis of the ways in which the spaces on board British ocean liners were conceived of, designed and used in terms of gender. Some spaces on board were designated as female only and other spaces understood to be male only – particularly the smoking room. The concluding part of the article considers the role of women designers within the patriarchal world of ship design and construction, by investigating the contributions of Elsie Mackay at P & O and the Zinkeisen sisters on the *Queen Mary*. Using primary sources, including visual evidence, the article considers a range of liners, from the *Hindustan* (1842) through to the *Orontes* (1929; refitted 1948). This bridges the gap between design history, gender and maritime history and adds to debates around gender and maritime history with a consideration of the overlooked area of design and its histories.

Keywords

Ocean liner design history

Interior design

Gender

Space

Women designers

Introduction

This article presents an inter-disciplinary account of the gendered demarcation of space on board the British ocean liner and the role of women designers of these spaces. Connections are made between the separate disciplines of design history, gender and maritime history by taking into account the ways in which the spaces on board ship were conceived of, designed and used. An important facet in the consideration of gender and maritime history is the ways in which gender norms were articulated and reinforced using design on board ship. The use made of female designers within the patriarchal world of shipbuilding, is also analysed. Employing the methods and approaches of design history, this article presents new ways of thinking about the feminine touch at sea. It draws upon archival research in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich; the University of Liverpool Cunard Steam-Ship Company Archives and the Harland & Wolff Archives in Belfast. The initial research for this article was undertaken during an AHRC funded project on *Designing Ocean Liners: A History of Interior Design Afloat*. This project interrogated the maritime archive in a new way, by seeking out information about how and why ships were designed the way they were. The professional designer is frequently left out of accounts of ocean liners, and the project sought to insert their presence and importance within maritime history. The research therefore cut across the categories of board minutes, directors' correspondence files, ship plans, and ship photographs and suggested a different interpretation of these rich sources, which asked who was responsible for the appearance of the interiors of the passenger liners? This article builds upon this work further, by exploring the material from the point of view of gender history.

The female presence on board ship was not a new phenomenon, but the visible acknowledgement of this presence in the form of the design of special layouts and interiors was. 'A feminine touch' is brought into inter-disciplinary focus, whether drawing a temporary curtain between bunks, using a private passageway or a Louis XIV revival interior for a female sitting room or as a designer of ship-based public and private rooms. This special issue has opened up the opportunity to look back at extensive archival research through the lens of gender history. It allows a different way of thinking about the subject, to offer up a new reading of gender and space on board the ocean liner.

Gender, Design and the Ocean Liner: Historiography

In writing this inter-disciplinary account, it is important to examine the historiography of gender, design and the ocean liner to establish what design history may offer the gender and maritime historian. Design history is a comparatively new discipline, established during the late 1970s, and had considerations of gender issues at its core from the very beginning.² The discipline seeks to account for the production and consumption of design over time. As this is an industrially based process, born of the age of modernity, the chronological span of design history conventionally starts with the Industrial Revolution and ends with the contemporary, or even runs into the future. General accounts of ships from a design history perspective have been published recently. Greg Votolato's book, *Ship*³ comprises a unique analysis of the design history, technology and representation of a comprehensive range of sea-going vessels. The question of gender and its relationship to spatial design was not the book's main focus, although it is included in terms of the passenger experience. Similarly, Peter Quartermaine's *Building on the Sea: Form and Meaning in Modern Ship Architecture*⁴ considers ships as buildings, and examples of modern architecture *par excellence*. Again, the issue of gender and spatial design is not the central concern of the work, the exteriors of the ships and their structures being the main focus.

Considerations of gender and spatial design can be found in the more specific study of the interior, rather than design in general. There is a rich seam of work from the beginning of design history on gender and the demarcation of space. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham's (Eds) 1989 collection, *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* considered the role of gender in relation to design history, both in terms of representation and of women as designers and makers, and women in relation to the interior.⁵ It is interesting to note, in the context of this article, that the consideration of space focuses entirely on the domestic interior and women's place within it. This focus on women, housing and the interior was a feature of early design history, and was an invaluable corrective to the existing discourses of the time. But little consideration was given to the public or commercial interior from a gender perspective in these early years. There was work on the gendering of taste, particularly by Adrian Forty in his 1986 book, *Objects of Desire*⁶ and Penny Sparke's *As Long As It's Pink: the Sexual Politics of Taste*⁷, and extensive work on women as overlooked design practitioners, particularly by Cheryl Buckley.⁸ However, the role of gender in relation to

public spaces remained comparatively overlooked, when compared to the rich seam of material related to gender and the home. This, it could be argued, replicates the troubled boundaries between the so-called, 'twin spheres' of male/public and female/private. The permeable quality of the 'twin spheres' was explored by Penny Sparke in *The Modern Interior*⁹, which did include material on the commercial interior, and on gender, but this did not include the ocean liner.

Turning to design history research and writing on the ocean liner interior in particular, there has been a spate of useful publications recently. One article to consider the ocean liner is by Italian design historian, Francesca Lanz, published in 2012, which considered 'The Interior Decoration of Ocean Liners: A Chapter in Italian Design History.'¹⁰ This is an invaluable account of the contribution of Italian modern designers to the development of Italian ocean liners, but again with no inclusion of gender as a consideration. A key text which did place gender at the centre of its considerations of the public interior is Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke's *Interior Design and Identity*¹¹, a collection of essays which included Quintin Colville's investigation of class and status at the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and Fiona Walmsley's work on the design of the *Queen Mary*. This seminal edited volume built on the existing scholarship in design history, and reflected new work in critical theory in unpacking the formation of identity in relation to design. In 2006, Anne Wealleans' monograph, *Designing Liners: A History of Interior Design Afloat*¹² was the first book length account of the ocean liner from this design history and interiors perspective. This book did not have gender history as a central concern, but used the tracking of named designers as a device for constructing a narrative of this particular history of design. It brought to the fore, for the first time, the overlooked role of the professional architect and designer in the shaping of the ocean liner interior. Therefore, this historiography details the existence of published work within the discipline of design history on gender and the interior and the ocean liner and design, but nothing to date has explored the two themes of gender and the ocean liner interior specifically. This article will now consider the gendering of space as a fixed entity, or as represented in terms of style, materials and function on board ship, usually conceived of by male naval architects or designers. Moreover, the hegemony of the male designer was challenged by a handful of female designers. These two themes will be explored in turn.

Ocean Liner Design History: The Gendered Demarcation of Space

In investigating gender and space on board the passenger ship, the interiors were frequently designed to reinforce and promote accepted hierarchies of power. The very process of designing reinforced existing hierarchies, with the commissioner of the ships, the shipping lines, employing the naval architect at the early stages of the process with the designers brought onto the project at the very last stages. Therefore, decisions about the division of the public and private spaces, circulation routes and their dimensions would usually have been taken, leaving the designer with the task of specifying wall, floor and ceiling coverings, lighting and furniture. Therefore, innovative approaches to interior design in terms of the layout and ordering of passenger ships could not be incorporated, and accepted forms and ways of doing things were often replicated. For instance, the *Mauretania* was first discussed by the Cunard Board in May 1901, the shipbuilder, Swan Hunter & Wigham appointed in May 1903, in August 1904 the keel was laid, in January 1905 work began on erecting the frames and the architect for the interiors was agreed as late as September 1905.¹³ The designers' starting point was an existing structure to decorate. As Sir Colin Anderson, a Director of P & O declared in his lecture to the Royal Society of Arts in 1966:

Of course the designers should be brought into planning discussions at the earliest possible moment, but they should realize that, where the basic design of the vessel is concerned, the Naval Architect must come a very long way before them. Before aesthetics can be considered, his design for the ship must satisfy the stringent safety requirements of the Board of Trade, governing such things as watertight subdivision, stability, freeboard, loadline and fire protection. There are also the rules of Lloyd Register concerning the strength of the ship and the quality of the materials used in the hull and the machinery. They have immense influence upon the interior design.¹⁴

In the early years of ocean liner construction, from the 1840s to the 1880s, interior design as a profession did not exist and the fitting out of the ships was tasked to the ship fitters and local suppliers. Given that this was the advent of mass passenger travel by means of steam powered vessels, there was little in the designs of the ships to signal novelty or innovation. It was tradition which was the more reassuring visual trope.

With the dawning age of modernity, the associated technological innovations, mass production and mass transport triggered uncertainty and insecurity. Building on the work of Eric Hobsbawm around the invention of tradition, Richard Crownshaw has argued: ‘Tradition was invented to regenerate a sense of social belonging in light of change, by at least appearing to bridge the gap between old and the new. However, it was the rise of the nation state during the course of the long nineteenth century that emphasized that sense of belonging in terms of identification with the nation and citizenship.’¹⁵ The ocean liners drew on the invention of tradition for the stories the interior spaces told to the passengers and crew on board. The pervading ideology of tradition was conflated with an identification in nineteenth century culture with women and the home. The public sphere was a masculine place, and the domestic interior the realm of the feminine in terms of the design and theories of interiors. This has become known as the ‘separate spheres’. As the leading Victorian writer and art critic John Ruskin proclaimed in his text, *On Sesamies and Lillies* in 1865:

The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial;—to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and ALWAYS hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love

And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her.¹⁶

And this division on the basis of gender was a cornerstone of modern society as it developed in the nineteenth century. Social historian, Amanda Vickery has argued that: ‘...separate spheres’ was a projection of an idealised society rather than a reflection of concrete realities.’¹⁷ What must be remembered when analysing the interior, is that it is the idealised which is often being researched. It is the ruling ideology made visible and tangible which is

frequently the concern of the design historian interested in the interior space. The visible ideology made manifest with the interior is one of the main focuses of research in this area. As Penny Sparke argued in the introduction to *Interior Design and Identity*:

Central to the scholarly endeavor that fills these pages lies an interest in the relationship between gender and material culture. Much of the current enthusiasm for the interior has grown from work undertaken by social and cultural historians on the problematical nineteenth-century notion of the ‘separate spheres’, the idea, that is, that with the advent of industrialization middle-class men and women came to inhabit distinct environments – the public sphere of work and the private sphere of home. These spheres, in turn, were imbued with different gendered, value systems which extended to the aesthetic languages used within them. The strict polarity of these worlds has been rightly questioned, but it remains the case that discussions of the domestic interior retain a strongly gendered (primarily feminine) dimension to them.¹⁸

The physical demarcation on board the passenger ship was apparent from the very beginning, and this mirrored existing divisions in other types of public interiors. Even before the advent of the ocean liner, trains had separate women’s first and second class carriages from the 1840s and hotels, also a result of ease and frequency of mass transport, had separate entrances for men and women with delineated public spaces. Respectable women did not enter the main entrance of the hotel lobby unaccompanied.

The layout of ocean liners mirrored this cultural norm, with effort invested in the respectable distancing of men from unaccompanied women. On the American river steamers, often cited as precursors of the ocean liner, for example, the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne commented as early as 1846:

With the crimson curtain being let down between the ladies and the gentlemen...the sexual division of the boat...the cabin became a bedchamber for twenty persons, who were laid on shelves one above another...Forgetting that my berth was hardly so wide as a coffin, I turned suddenly over, and fell like an avalanche on the floor.¹⁹

The colonizers and the empire builders, the civil servants and the immigrants were all transported by means of ocean liners. And the millions of passengers who made their way between Europe and the USA, Asia and Australasia travelled on board these vessels. These were specialist passenger ships, that travelled on strictly delineated lines on trans-national routes between various ports as the lifeline of empires. This demand for the transport of people and goods took place at a time of rapidly developing technology and the growth of a consumer culture. The journey on board the ocean liner became a commodified experience, which could be advertised to be alluring, and made as comfortable and luxurious as possible, within certain limits, as described by Anderson. This was a narrative space which reinforced existing hierarchies and social norms.

Evidence of the arrangement and appearance of the ocean liners can be gleaned from ship plans, photographs, publicity material, drawings and published accounts. The illustrations and published accounts which frequently accompanied the launch of new ships were a public relations exercise, and present a vision of the ship prior to sailing in pristine, unoccupied ideal space. One such account of an early P & O ship, *Bentick* (1843) includes a description of a separate sitting room for female passengers: ‘The ladies’ saloon is quite an unique apartment. It is entered by the side of the staircase, and presents a quiet, pleasing contrast to the more brilliant decorations of the grand saloon. This room, and the range of cabins adjoining it, are appropriated to the use of ladies exclusively.’²⁰ Part of the same fleet was the *Hindustan* (1846). The actual use of the space on route to India is graphically described by ‘A Madras Officer’ in 1846, and demonstrates transgressions in the use of the space, beyond the idealized ‘quiet, pleasing’ of the *Illustrated London News* :

There is a place, called the *ladies’ saloon*: intended, I believe, for the fairer portion of the passengers to sit in during the day—a comfortable resort in rough, rainy, or hot weather, well ventilated and lighted, and altogether a very desirable lounge. But this said saloon was, during *our* voyage, converted into a nursery; and several of the ladies, whose cabins were in the neighborhood, made use of it as a sleeping apartment, as well as a toilet-room; to the discomfort, and consequent exclusion therefrom, of those whose dormitories were in other parts of the ship, and who would have been glad to come there, when in any way indisposed, for the purpose of taking their breakfasts, or of lying down on the sofas; but which, they could not do, owing to the presence of dressers and washers, children crying, and servants scolding; a basin

full of dirty water in one place, a wet towel in another; articles of night as well as day dress, strewed on the floor, and combs and brushes, curl-papers and slop-water, bedecking the table; so much for the ladies' saloon.²¹

A separate space for female passengers was also designed into Brunel's *Great Britain*. The first ship to be constructed from iron rather than wood, and driven by screw propeller, it was built for sailing the Atlantic to north America. The ship was a potent symbol of the achievements of modernity and the Industrial Revolution, and was celebrated as such during its first five years of existence.

The 322 foot long ship was divided into five decks, with the upper deck carrying the six, towering masts. The powerful engines and boilers were situated right at the heart of the ship. Contemporary accounts described, in glowing terms, the appearance and layout of this space, which concealed more than it revealed, reinforcing the 'separate spheres' notion that the private was associated with the feminine and public with the masculine: 'The door to each state room is carved and gilded, it is also surmounted with carved work, and the whole of the fittings present a most elegant and luxurious appearance. In this part of the ship there are twenty eight state bedrooms, all single, and these possess an advantage over those in any other vessel inasmuch as ladies pass from their own private saloon to their bedrooms without passing through the promenade, or being seen by those who are there.'²² The promenade saloon was where saloon or first-class passengers strolled when rough weather precluded the upper deck. The Ladies' Saloons were just off the promenade deck, two tiny rooms, one of which has been recreated, with two sofas and one table for women wishing to exclude themselves from male company.

The decoration of these early passenger liners took their inspiration from upper middle class, public spaces, in the case of the grand saloon, it was compared to a ballroom – the correlation with hotels came later, as this building type had not developed to any great extent by the mid nineteenth century in the UK. So, directly beneath the promenade saloon was the 100 foot long first-class saloon or dining room, which was 50 foot wide and 8 foot high and lit by skylights from the promenade saloon. This was the most decorative of the ship's interiors; the space has now been restored to its original state, with help from the original decorating firm, Jacksons. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal records his impressions: 'The principle saloon is a noble apartment upwards 100 ft. in length looking in fact like a slice cut out of a ballroom.

Three rows of pillars with gilded capitals support the overlying door, and the appearance of the whole viewed through the vistas of white and gold columns, with side doors covered with carving, and the whole brilliantly adorned with white and gold is both chaste and magnificent.' (Farley 22 July 1843) 300 passengers could dine simultaneously in the space, at three lines of tables and upholstered bench seating. Gilt framed mirrors at either end of the room enhanced the sensation of spaciousness, and suggests the influence of ballroom design, alluded to in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal. A variety of single and family cabins flanked the first-class saloon, with narrow corridors dividing the cabins to ensure privacy.

Occupying the lower levels of the *Great Britain* were the less prestigious accommodation and storage. Beneath the first class saloon was the cargo deck which lay next to the fresh water tanks. On the other side of the boilers and engines were situated the fore or second-class accommodation. The crew's accommodation was situated at the bow of the ship, the most uncomfortable during heavy weather, with officers placed on the top deck, the sailors' mess room beneath and the crew's quarters on the deck beneath that. Hence, the desire to keep various classes and genders separate, and the location of first class passenger accommodation nearest the captain's cabin, had been established by this early stage.

The stimulus for the provision of more ships and more lines came from increased trade and communication globally. With the growth of the imperial powers of Britain, Germany, Holland, Italy and France came the need to support this with speedy and efficient transport for passengers, mail and cargo. Coupled with this was the burgeoning need to express competing national identities as part of the interior design of the ships. The need to attract passengers was also paramount, particularly on the trans-Atlantic route and the emigrant trade. As the status and prestige of the ships grew, so the interiors of the ships were left less and less to the joiner or local shop, and more and more to decorating firms, designers and architects, but the most status derived from using professional architects, who were all men at that point. As ships became larger and more commodious in the internal spaces created, so the differentiation of these spaces became more multifarious.

The market leader in terms of providing luscious interiors for Atlantic travel by the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the White Star Line which used the Arts and Crafts architect, Richard Norman Shaw for the first class interiors of the *Oceanic* (1899). He had designed Dawpool Manor, for Thomas and Margaret Ismay, owners of the White Star Line.

And in 1896 Shaw was commissioned to design the new headquarters for the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company which ran the White Star Line. In 1897 Ismay invited Shaw to design the interior of the new ship, *Oceanic*. Shaw acted as consultant designer for the dining saloon, library, smoking-rooms, drawing-room and other spaces for the first-class passengers. In terms of gender divisions, there was a distinction made between the first class smoke room with its conventionally dark panelled walls, boldly patterned wall covering, heavily carved columns and leather covered settees and chairs. This is in direct contrast to the Library, which the White Star Line publicity discussed thus:

We almost feel inclined to call the Library the Ladies' Room, as everything calculated to conduce to their comfort appears to have been provided' here -- a book case containing a well-selected assortment of books -- elegant and completely equipped writing tables, and comfortable settees. The parquetry floor is covered with a rich pile carpet, and the large square windows are fitted with stained glass draw panels and jalousies.²³

The Library on *Oceanic* could be classified as 'feminine' as it was panelled in reproduction Louis XIV, rococo style wood with a white and gold ceiling and upholstered furniture. This was in contrast to the dark and hazy male preserve of the after dinner haunt of the Smoking Room.

White Star made a point of including Richard Norman Shaw's name in their publicity materials, and as competition increased to attract wealthy passengers for the trans-Atlantic route, Cunard appointed country house designer, Harold A Peto to design the interiors of the *Mauretania* (1907). Peto chose from a range of historic French style for the interiors of the First Class rooms, as was fashionable in the early 20th century in Britain and North America. He worked with the decorating firm of Turner Lord & Co on the majority of his designs, with the exception of the Lounge and Library, which were undertaken by Charles Mellier & Co. The First Class accommodation was situated amid ship and spanned five decks, from A to E, or Boat to Main decks and built to accommodate 560 passengers in a familiar layout, with the first class passengers enjoying the superior location.

The main public rooms for the first class passengers were situated on the top deck, or boat deck. The Italian Smoke Room was again a male space. Based on a heavy, baroque sixteenth century, style the walls were faced in dark wood panelling with prominent fireplace. A complete vista of almost 350 feet was created through the public rooms, because Peto chose to use glazed doors to inter-connect the rooms. Leading from the Smoke Room was the Lounge and then the Music Room, which were more feminine spaces for women or couples. The Lounge was decorated in Louis XVI style, with *acajou mouchete* mahogany panelling, peach coloured marble and ormolu was used for the sixteen pilasters and chimneypiece. Three large, French Aubusson tapestries depicting flowers decorated the walls. The room was lit by a wrought-iron, oval skylight and electric chandeliers. The spaces designed by Peto succeeded in creating a fantasy of travel in time rather than space, back to the female dominated salons of eighteenth-century France, As the commentator for *Engineering* observed in 1907:

The lounge and the library have been decorated by Messrs. Ch. Mellier and Co., Albermarle-street, London, and upon entering them one is transported in a moment from the cold realities of a modern steamship to the exquisite taste of a French *salon* of the eighteenth century. Thick carpets, comfortable chairs, soft colourings, and bright, but carefully shaded, electric lights, all combine to give an atmosphere of luxury and beauty hitherto considered impossible even in modern steamships. The style is influenced by the revived appreciation of the beauties of the Louis Seize period, but the colouring is original in its charming blending of harmonising tints.²⁴

Therefore, by the early twentieth century gender divisions were mapped out on board ocean liners by means of the designation of activity and interior design, particularly in terms of style, colour and materials. Demarcations were also made in terms of timed entries. On board *Titanic* (1912) for instance, the elaborate Turkish Baths and Steam Rooms were segregated with women only sessions in the morning and male in the afternoon and early evening.

In the later part of the twentieth-century, gender divisions in terms of style and representation remained an identifiable strand. For example, the post second world war refit of the Orient Line's *Orontes* in 1948, following the ship's demobilisation in 1947, gave the line the opportunity to market the ship to British immigrants bound for Australia under the 'Ten Pound Pom' scheme. It is of interest in the context of this article, that the refit restored the

ship to its pre-war style (Fig 1). The Lounge was described as: ‘A room of noble pillars, soft lighting and real comfort, it has the restful air of a good club...’²⁵ and the club was understood at that time to signal a male only space. This prompted the line to add an image of two women being served tea, with the qualifier: ‘...but it has something else besides – a feminine touch which adds colour to its comfort.’²⁶ The substantial reconditioning of the ship at Southampton by John L Thornycroft & Company had seen the addition of light coloured upholstery for the chairs and oriental rugs laid on the parquet floor. It was this addition of polychromatic textiles which was understood to add the feminine touch, as well as the deliberate inclusion of the women themselves.

But what of women as designers of the space on board the ocean liners?

Women Designers

Throughout the design history of ocean liners, women acting as the architects of these spaces were notable by their absence. Research to date has not uncovered any female naval architects during the period under scrutiny. And although the profession of interior decoration had been established, largely by women, from the early twentieth century onwards, there is no evidence of this in the realm of the design of British ocean liners²⁷. This was a patriarchal world. As late as 1966 Colin Anderson, in his article on ‘The Interior Design of Passenger Ships’ referred to the designers of ships as male: ‘If the ship is a large one by to-day’s standards, there will be more designing to be done than could be undertaken by any one man. A design team will be needed. ...For instance, a designer may unconsciously start trying to make his rooms more memorable than those of the next man.’²⁸

But there were exceptions. Women designers were commissioned from 1925 onwards to contribute to the interior design of P & O and Cunard Liners. P & O used Lady Inchcape, Elsie Mackay and Lady Margaret Shaw as design consultants from 1925 onwards. Cunard employed decorative artists and designers, Doris and Anna Zinkeisen; and designers Betty Joel, Marion Dorn and Vanessa Bell from 1935 onwards. The very first women to be involved in the design of the interiors of British ocean liners that this research project has located was by Lady Inchcape and Elsie Mackay, who designed the interiors of the P & O liners, *Razmak* (1925). *The Times* reported on February 28th 1925 that: ‘The decorative and colour schemes of the *Razmak*’s public rooms have been designed from suggestions by Lady

Inchcape and the Hon. Elsie Mackay and carried out under their supervision.²⁹ Lady Inchcape was the wife of P & O's Chairman, Lord Inchcape and Mackay was their daughter. Lord Inchcape must have been impressed by his daughter's contribution to the design of the *Razmak* as he paid her £600 pa, on a quarterly basis from April 1925 onwards.³⁰ Lord Inchcape noted:

My wife, my daughter and I have been travelling a good deal by the P & O steamers lately and my life has been made a burden by their scathing criticisms.... Gradually my daughter has more or less become the advisor of our technical staff as regards the passenger accommodation and arrangements and I am told she is proving of material help. Mr Richie lately suggested she should join the repairs committee with a view to assisting in improving the older ships as they come up for overhaul and this has she has done.³¹

Mackay was a glamorous figure, and had starred on the Broadway stage, in early films and had been married twice. Her parents rather despaired of her as an independent, 'modern girl'.

She designed the much maligned Smoking Room on board the *Viceroy of India* (1929) which she based on the State Room of the Old Palace, Bromley-by-Bow Court, 1606 created for James I and subsequently preserved at the V & A. This reinforced the conventional traditions of the dark panelled smoking room, but the added flourish of the crossed swords, suits of armour and a baronial fire place added to the theatrical flair of the space. Mackay also designed the Swimming Pool, closely modelled on the Mewes and Davies Pompeian example at the RAC club in Pall Mall of 1911 as well as first class cabin-de-luxes and Adam style writing and reading rooms. Tragically, Mackay's design career was cut short as she died whilst attempting to be the first woman to fly the Atlantic from east to west on March 13th 1928, before the *Viceroy of India* entered P & O's service. Her input to the designs of these interiors is rarely acknowledged, apart from a mention in the P & O in-house magazine, *The Blue Peter*:

Inside her deck-houses are rooms which, for furnishings and craftsmanship, rival the best art in English houses of varying periods... These rooms have a peculiar interest in that they were the last upon which Lord Inchcape's daughter, the late Miss Elsie Mackay, exercised her taste for interior decoration.³²

P & O and Lord Inchcape continued to use his wife and other daughter, Lady Margaret Shaw for the interiors of the *Strathnaver* and *Strathaird* in 1931 and 1932 respectively, but not in the applied way in which Elsie Mackay approached the *Viceroy of India*. Mackay was an exception, and following her death, women were used as consultants for the finishing touches of the ship interiors, rather than entire room designs. As the design critic John de la Valette commented in his 1936 Royal Society of Arts lecture:

At this point you may ask: “But if such beautiful effects can be obtained by copying, or adapting, the finest examples of interior decoration on land for use in ships, why should not it be done? Provided it be done with good taste, and executed with skill, what is there against the idea?”...Or again, you may wish to quote the argument which we have all heard shipowners bring forward, and which has been an instruction to many ship decorators: “The ladies want to forget that they are on board a ship – make them forget it!”³³

The focus of de la Valette’s lecture and article was the newly launched Cunard liner, *Queen Mary*. He was the Organizing Secretary of the Royal Society of Arts exhibition, *British Art in Industry* in 1935, which featured the glamorous figure of artist Anna Zinkeisen on the exhibition catalogue cover. It is therefore not surprising that he commented favourably on the work of Anna and her sister Doris Clare Zinkeisen on the *Queen Mary*³⁴. Anna decorated the small ballroom and the Doris the verandah restaurant. Doris had been suggested to work on the ship by the American co-architect of the interiors, Benjamin Morris, in 1935:

I believe for business reasons it is highly desirable that cultivated feminine thought should have expression, if it can be done in a practical way. For example, it would seem that Miss Doris Zinkeisen...[has]...many of the desired qualifications. ...Such a person would make valuable contributions to the desired result.³⁵

Doris painted a 30 foot mural for the Verandah Grill on the theme of ‘Entertainment’ and also specified much of the interior decoration of the space. She specified the flooring, dark Wilton carpet with a small dance floor in light sycamore parquet. The ceiling and the pilasters were silver etched I gold and the lighting for the room changed with the rhythm of the music. The tables were dressed in white linen with white furniture and the main colour accents came from the dark red, tasseled curtains which echoed the circus theme. This was an intimate and

fun room which had a unified aesthetic, missing from most of the rest of the ship which was designed by committee comprising Cunard employees in conflict with architects Arthur E Davies and Benjamin Morris. Anna Zinkeisen was commissioned to paint six panels for the ballroom, two of them measured 11 feet by 9 feet which took the artist six months. The painting was based on the four seasons featuring mythological figures, animals and Adam and Eve.

Other women to work on the interiors of the *Queen Mary* include the painter Vanessa Bell, who provided colour schemes for the Special Staterooms, for which she was paid £33.11.2 and Betty Joel for rugs for which she was paid £52.10.00.³⁶ However, these were small touches added to a ship built and conceived of by male naval architects and interior designers. The same scenario followed for Cunard's next ship, the *Queen Elizabeth* (1940) overseen by the architect, Grey Wornum. Anna Zinkeisen was given the modest fee of £50 for acting as a consultant for the Tea and Dance room in relation to the curtains and lighting, whilst Betty Joel was paid 50 guineas for advising on the First Class State Rooms.³⁷

Conclusion

This article has explored the history of gender and design in the interiors of ocean liners between the 1840s and 1948. It reveals a growing body of work in the discipline of design history which adds to gender and maritime history. This interdisciplinary study reveals the complex ways in which design was used to reinforce existing hierarchies of gender in terms of the demarcation of space, with separated male and female spaces, reinforcing the 'separate spheres' motif. The role of the designer is usually overlooked when the history of the ocean liner is analysed. This is further impacted when the designers are female. There were only a handful of women working on British ocean liners during the period studied, and their contribution towards creating conducive passenger public and private spaces on board ship deserves greater recognition. They were women working within a patriarchal world.

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- ¹⁹ N. Hawthorne 'Sketches from Memory' in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, New York, 1846, as quoted in G. Votolato, *Transport Design: A Travel History*, (London, Reaktion, 2007) p103
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- ³² *The Blue Peter*, May 1929, page e.
- ³³ Jon de la Valette, 'The Fitment and Decorations of Ships From the Great Britain to the Queen Mary', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, May 22 1936, pp714-715
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³⁶ D42/C3/190/B6, University of Liverpool Cunard Steam-Ship Company Archives.

³⁷ Ibid

Figure 1

Page from Orient Line Brochure, c1948. *Orontes*, p5