

Steam Shipping and the Beginnings of Overseas Tourism: British Travel to North-Western Europe, 1820-1850

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This article suggests that undue emphasis has been placed on the role of the railway in promoting large scale tourism in Europe. It argues that before the railway, from the 1820s, the steamboat facilitated tourist visits and was offering excursions to the near continent, especially to France, Belgium and The Netherlands. The steamer opened this new market by virtue of its speed and predictability, irrespective of wind strength and direction and tide or current. Using evidence gleaned from "The Times" it is calculated that the average journey occupied three days, and there is some indication of a long-term fall in prices. These visits gave birth to a range of tourist guidebooks, travel agents and even the proto-package holiday. In these ways the steamboat pioneered many aspects of the modern tourist industry.

1. Introduction

Today's global tourism is a development of the mass tourist industry that emerged in the 1960s. That, in turn, was the outcome, albeit over a much longer gestation period, of the growth of popular international tourism that had its origins in the nineteenth century. Popular tourism is to be interpreted in terms of a clientele which extended beyond an elite of the very rich who traditionally enjoyed the resources of time and money that enabled lengthy and expensive travel abroad. In each of these stages of the evolution of tourism there are market influences in common, namely those of improvements in transport which reduced the costs and time of travel alongside increases in living standards and the acquisition of more adventurous life styles which encouraged would-be travellers to venture further afield. Both demand and supply sides of the market, at all stages, were located in the most developed, industrial economies, where technological advances in modes of transport and the rise of incomes were first apparent. Hence, it is generally held that the beginnings of popular,

international tourism lie in Europe and particularly with British recreational travel to the Continent in the mid-nineteenth century.¹ In such analyses great weight is laid on the spread of railway construction in opening up Europe to the traveller and on the services of agents, notably Thomas Cook, in the organisation of tours.² Without doubt, railways were highly influential in the rapid upsurge of travel to and within the Continent during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In the case of Britain, the number of cross-Channel passengers in 1882 exceeded 500,000³, compared with an estimate (albeit we believe an under-estimate) of 100,000 some forty years earlier.⁴ Nor is Cook's business acumen in question; he conveyed 20,000 visitors to the Paris Exhibition of 1867 and some 75,000 to its counterpart in 1878.⁵ However, the beginnings of popular travel to north-western Europe pre-dated the railway and there is considerable evidence of entrepreneurial activity and organised tourism before Cook undertook his first continental venture in 1855.⁶ The stimulus to development was the steamboat – the contribution of which to popular tourism has been largely ignored in accounts of the growth of recreational travel to the Continent.

2. The introduction of steamship services to North-Western Europe

Tourism and any form of recreational travel activity requires time and money, hence, until modern times travel was the prerogative of the rich

¹ On the long-term development of tourism see J.A.R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday*, (London 1947); I.J. Lickerish, A.G. Kershaw, *The Travel Trade*, (London 1958); L. Turne, *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery*, (London 1975); A.J. Burkhart, S. Medik, *Tourism Past Present and Future*, (London 1981); B. Cormack, *A History of Holidays 1812-1990*, (London 1998); C.J. Holloway, *The Business of Tourism*, 5th. edn., (Harlow 1998); F. Inglis, *The Delicious History of the Holiday*, (London 2000).

² L. Tissot, 'How did the British conquer Switzerland? Guidebooks, railways and travel agencies, 1850-1914' *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd series, 16 (1995), pp. 21-54.

³ British Parliamentary Papers (hence forth BPP), *Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel*, 1883, XII, p. XI, clause 21.

⁴ J.A.R. Pimlott, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

⁶ J. Pudney, *The Thomas Cook Story*, (London 1953); E. Swinglehurst, *Cook's Tours. The Story of Popular Travel*, (Poole 1982), pp. 34-52; P. Brendon, *Thomas Cook. 150 Years of Popular Tourism*, (London 1991), pp. 65-80.

who alone commanded an abundance of these resources. In Britain, travel generally, and certainly abroad to Europe, was confined to "a distinctly narrow social stratum",⁷ that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries famously undertook expensive and extended "grand tours".⁸ Travel to the Continent underwent a revolution with the coming of the steamboat. This revolution lay not in the sense that the steamboat was able to undertake journeys that sailing vessels could not, but rather that it could perform transport functions much more efficiently. The steamboat's great virtue was that it was less dependent on wind and tide and could thus offer speedier and more reliable journey times. In addition, its greater carrying capacity enabled cheaper fares. Thus the traditional constraints of time and money were reduced and the scope for a widening of the market extended.

The first commercial steamboat service appeared on the Clyde in 1812.⁹ Within a very few years steamboats were operating on most of Britain's major rivers and providing services on short coastal routes.¹⁰ Steam appeared on the Thames in 1815 and soon took over, and rapidly promoted, down-river passenger traffic to Gravesend and Margate.¹¹ The first crossings to the Continent occurred as early as 1816.¹² Far more significantly, the first cross-Channel regular service commenced in 1821 when the *Rob Roy* undertook the Dover-Calais run. This vessel and its service was soon transferred to French ownership and renamed¹³, but in 1822 two Post Office steam packets began operating on the Dover-Calais route.¹⁴ In 1823 a service between Hull and Antwerp was introduced,¹⁵ and in 1824 a regular route between Southampton and Le Havre was

⁷ A. Burton, P. Burton, *The Green Bag Travellers. Britain's First Tourists*, (London 1978), p. 143.

⁸ E. Chancy, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, (London 1998); C. Hibbert, *The Grand Tour*, (London 1969); J. Black, *The British and the Grand Tour*, (London 1987); J.A.R. Pimlott, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-64.

⁹ B.D. Osborne, *The Ingenious Mr Bell*, (Glendarvel 1995).

¹⁰ W.T. Jackman, *The Development of Transportation in Modern England*, I, (Cambridge 1916), pp. 454-457.

¹¹ F. Burt, *Steamers of the Thames and Medway*, (London 1949), pp. 8-9.

¹² G. Body, *British Paddle Steamers*, (Newton Abbot 1971), pp. 23-24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24; C. Grasemann, G.W.P. McLachlan, *English Channel Packet Boats*, (London 1939), pp. 17-18.

¹⁴ C. Grasemann, G.W.P. McLachlan, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ F.H. Pearson, *The Early History of Hull Steam Shipping*, reprint of 1896 edn., (Goole 1984), pp. 5-6.

inaugurated.¹⁶ Many of these early services were of an experimental nature, often running only in summer months and sometimes being discontinued after a season. Of far more significance was the formation of the General Steam Navigation Company (GSN) in 1824. This company, which represented a combination of powerful London business interests, many already involved in steam, embodied a new commitment of capital and enterprise and soon came to play a major role in the operation of services to the Continent.¹⁷ In 1825 it introduced services to Dieppe, Dunkirk, Ostend and Hamburg and appointed agents in each of these ports and also in Calais.¹⁸

A full survey of the development of steamboat routes to the Continent is beyond the purpose of this study but a clear indication of the growth, routes and frequency of steamboat links to north-western Europe is apparent from *Table 1*.

Table 1 demonstrates a remarkable growth in the level of services over time. Data for 1825 suggest around 32 steamboat services per week to the Continent. By 1845 services had multiplied to over 60 per week. This trend reflects the rising tone of business in terms of provision of services by companies and their acceptance by the public. The level of services prevailing in 1825 was largely due to the entry of the GSN and that company continued to dominate services thereafter. Subsequently new companies entered the field including foreign operators; a Dutch concern, the Batavier Line, commenced a Rotterdam-London service in 1830.¹⁹ From the 1840s, as railway connections extended, railway companies began to operate services through steamship companies expressly created for the purpose.²⁰

¹⁶ C. Grasmann, G.W.P. McLachlan, *op.cit.*, , pp. 21-23.

¹⁷ S. Palmer, "The most indefatigable activity", *The General Steam Navigation Company, 1824-50*, *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. 1 (1982), pp.1-23.

¹⁸ Advertisement for General Steam Navigation Company services, *The Times*, 16 July, 1825, p.1, col. A.

¹⁹ C.L.D. Duckworth, G.E. Langmuir, *Railway and other Steamers*, 2nd.edn., (Prescot 1968), p. 319.

²⁰ Initially railway companies were not permitted to own steamers but they soon got round this restraint. For example the South Eastern Railway Company, on reaching the Channel ports formed the South-Eastern and Continental Steam Packet Company in 1844 to operate vessels from Dover and Folkestone to Calais, Boulogne and Ostend. See R. Bucknall, *Boat Trains and Channel Packets*, (London 1957), pp. 44-45; F. Burt, *Cross-Channel and Coastal Paddle Steamers*, (London 1937), pp. 110-15.

The changing routes and frequency of services reflect the development of transport linkages both within Britain and on the Continent. Within Britain, railway connections to Channel ports were significant. The London and Brighton Railway Company reached Brighton

**TABLE 1. Steamboat Services from British ports to North-Western Europe
indicating the weekly frequency of service in 1825, 1835 and 1845.**

Year	1825	1835	1845
Port and Destination	Frequency/week	Frequency/week	Frequency/week
London to Calais	6	3	2
London to Dunkirk	1	-	-
London to Ostend	2	1	2
London to Hamburg	0.5	2	2
London to Boulogne		3	3
London to Rotterdam		3	3
London to Antwerp		2	2
London to Havre			
Brighton/Newhaven to Dieppe	2	2	2
Brighton/Newhaven to Havre		2	7
Southampton to Havre	2	4	7
Southampton to St. Malo			2
Ramsgate to Calais	1	-	-
Ramsgate to Boulogne	1	-	-
Dover to Calais	6	6?	7
Dover to Boulogne	2	6?	7
Dover to Ostend	2	4?	7?
Folkestone to Boulogne	7	4?	7
Hull to Hamburg			2.5
Total	32.5	42	62.5

Notes:

a) For each year, the services listed are those pertaining in the month of July. On some routes, especially in the early years, services tended to be fuller in the summer than in the winter. This did not apply to mail contract routes where a full service was required throughout the year. The table reflects, as far as is possible, the operation of sustained regular services. At various times during the period covered by the table a variety of other routes were pioneered, notably from Hull to North Sea and Baltic ports, but such services tended to be intermittent. See F.H. Pearson, *The Early History of Hull Steam Shipping*, (reprint of 1896 edn., Goole, 1984). b) The symbol ? indicates that the figure is an estimate. We have been unable to ascertain precise figures for sailings from Dover. Our estimates are on the cautious side.

Sources: for 1825, 'Advertisement for General Steam Navigation Company services', *The Times*, 16 July, 1825, p. 1, col. A; C. Grasemann, G.W.P. McLachlan, *English Channel Packet Boats*, (London 1939); for 1835, 'Advertisements for General Steam Navigation Company and Southampton-Le Havre services', *The Times*, 11 July, 1835, p. 1, col. A; C.L.D. Duckworth, G.E. Langmuir, *Railway and other Steamers*, 2nd edn., (Prescot 1968); for 1845, *Monteith's Tourist's Hand Book and Monthly Guide to Continental Railways, Steam-Boats and Diligences*, No. 1. August, 1845, (London 1845); F.H. Pearson, *The Early History of Hull Steam Shipping*, reprint of 1896 edn., (Goole 1984).

in 1841;²¹ the South Eastern Railway Company's line to Folkestone was opened to the public in June 1843 and that to Dover a year later.²² On the Continent, Belgium led the way in railway building and a line from Brussels to Antwerp was opened in 1836. Connections between the capital and Ostend were soon to follow.²³ In France, where construction was delayed by financial restraints and debate over state involvement, the Northern Railway – Paris to Lille, the Channel ports and the Belgian frontier – opened in 1846 as did the Paris to Rouen.²⁴ Railway construction proceeded more rapidly in the German States, Cologne was linked to Aachen and a Belgian line to Antwerp by 1843; in the same year, Berlin was connected to the Baltic with a line to Stettin and in 1846 to the North Sea with a link to Hamburg.²⁵ However, before such railway connections, the development in the mid-1830s of steamship links from Hamburg to Scandinavia, the Baltic and Russia encouraged steamship services from Britain to Hamburg.²⁶ Likewise, the formation of the Lower & Middle Rhine Steamship Company encouraged more regular services to Antwerp and Rotterdam.²⁷

The introduction and extending provision of steamboat routes to the Continent clearly represented facilities for potential tourist traffic. But why might tourism develop and, if it did, how may this development be traced? These are the key questions that this study endeavours to address.

²¹ B.M.E. O'Mahoney, *Newhaven-Dieppe 1825-1840*, 2nd. edn., (Stowmarket 1981), pp. 3-5.

²² C.L.D. Duckworth, G. E. Langmuir, *op.cit.*, pp. 127-8; C.F. Dendy Marshall, *A History of the Southern Railway*, (London 1936).

²³ J.H. Clapham, *The Economic Development of France and Germany 1815-1915*, 4th. edn., (Cambridge 1955), pp. 140-43.

²⁴ W.O. Henderson, *The Industrial Revolution on the Continent*, (London 1961), pp. 111-115.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

²⁶ Some of these steamboat routes had been pioneered even earlier. Clapham notes: 'Before 1825 there were services across the Belt and across the Sound; from Stockholm to Petersburg; on the Rhine; and even on the Swiss lakes'. J.H. Clapham, *op.cit.*, pp. 110.

²⁷ Advertisements stressed these linkages. Sailings to Rotterdam, Antwerp and Ostend all noted Rhine connections and those to Hamburg listed the steamboat services from nearby Lubeck to St Petersburg, Copenhagen and Stockholm. See *The Times*, 11 July, 1835, p. 1. col. A.

3. Tourism and excursion trade

The potential market for continental tourist travel is likely to have increased with the growth of middle class incomes that occurred in the half-century or so before 1825.²⁶ That this group already had experience of travel and holidays is clear from the growth of seaside holiday resorts within Britain. Any chance of travel and holiday habits extending overseas in the final decades of the eighteenth century were curbed by the costs of going abroad and events in France, war and the generally unsettled state of Europe. Post-1815, peace and the return of relative stability on the Continent opened up the possibility of more daring ventures further afield. Even so, the excitement of a visit to Europe had to be balanced against the greater costs and time involved in overseas tourism together with perceived fears about the sea crossing and the real discomfort which might attend it. The steamboat did much to redress the negative aspects of this balance. The costs of travelling to Europe fell. In the case of the traditional route from London to the Continent – by coach to the Channel ports of Dover or Folkestone for embarkation – the combination of coach and ship fares far exceeded those charged on the new steamboat services sailing direct from London to the Continent. Cost apart, steamboat travel was attractive in other ways. A potentially shorter overall journey time made a brief trip to the Continent feasible, and more so since this was now possible as a result of scheduled, reliable services. Unlike the idle rich for whom the duration of a trip or holiday was of no consequence, middle-class travellers taking time off from employment or running their business needed assurance as to return dates and times. Finally, the steamboat offered a new travel experience: apart from the novelty of the steamboat itself, there was also that of being able to move about and take refreshment while travelling. Of course, there remained the possibility of a rough passage and the inherent dangers of any sea voyage, but the steamboat did serve to reduce some of the discomfort and uncertainties.

While it is clear that travel and tourism to the Continent developed in

²⁶ On the growth of the middle classes see H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*, (London 1969); R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class*, (Manchester 1990).

the post-Napoleonic period, charting its growth poses some problems. There are few statistics of passenger travel, let alone any breakdown of tourist numbers. Nor is primary material specifically associated with tourism readily available. Posters and brochures, being ephemeral, have a high destruction rate, and their survival in archives and libraries is rare and fortuitous. However, much information can be gained from press advertising and contemporary publications. Both direct and indirect evidence for the growth of tourism is available. There is material directly referring to recreational travel and tourism, most notably excursions to the Continent. Indirect evidence is in the form of the growth of extended steamboat provision and passenger numbers, and the appearance of guides and other literature aimed at travellers. There are also indications of the emergence of travel agency services. These areas will be examined in turn.

The most telling evidence of the growth of tourism is the organisation of excursions of varied length to continental destinations. The first appears to have taken place in 1825 in the form of an excursion to Calais.²⁹ However, a year earlier the proprietors of the steam packet *Union*, which normally ran between Brighton and Dieppe, advertised that it "may occasionally be hired either for the Continent or an excursion", showing awareness of continental pleasure trips.³⁰ The popular excursion, the practice of conveying, there and back, large numbers of people on a journey to a place or event, was the creation of the steamboat which was the first mode of transport that could provide mass transport and assured, scheduled travel times. The first steamboat excursion took place on the Clyde, birthplace of the steamboat, in 1816. On the Thames, the first recorded excursion occurred in 1822.³¹ Hence, in the context of excursion traffic generally and excursions from London, a trip to the Continent was early and ambitious. The following section is based on an analysis of advertisements in *The Times* between 1825 and 1850. In all, about three-dozen advertisements were found which offered excursion trips to the Continent. Not all carried the detail we might wish for and there may be others that we have overlooked. Moreover, there

²⁹ *The Times*, 16 July 1825, p. 1, col. A.

³⁰ *The Times*, 2 July 1824, p. 1, col. A.

³¹ University of London Library, Poster of the *London Engineer*, Margate steam yacht, (London 1822). This advertised an excursion to Sheerness.

may well have been excursions publicised by other means than advertisements in *The Times*, but our survey is full enough to give an indication of the shape and timing of excursions to the Continent.

4. Excursion destination and attractions

The earliest date of an advertised excursion to the Continent was 1825 with a trip to Calais. This set a pattern, for France was the country to which most excursions were directed, with well over half of all such trips destined there, but Calais itself did not prove an outstanding attraction. The two most popular French destinations were Dunkirk and Boulogne, with each attracting about one quarter of all excursions, whereas Calais attracted only ten per cent. The reasons for Boulogne and Dunkirk being more popular lie in part in the history of those ports and their attractions: Boulogne's walled city and cathedral and the beach and bathing facilities of Dunkirk. The other French "ports" to which steamboat excursions went were Le Havre and Paris, though it should be mentioned that these were late additions to the fold, both being advertised only in 1850. By then there was a rail link from the Channel ports to the French capital making it a mixed mode journey.

The second most visited country appears to have been The Netherlands, with Rotterdam attracting the lion's share and Leyden being a late addition. The first outing to Rotterdam was in August 1827, only a couple of years after the pioneering French trip.³² Belgium, represented by Antwerp, and much later Ostend, was a close competitor to The Netherlands with the first advertisement for an excursion here being in June 1833.³³ The attraction of such locations as destinations for pleasure voyages lay mostly in their being within a day's journey rather than any exotic or special interest. Only two years later, in 1835, a trip was being offered to the Rhine from London via the General Steam Navigation Co.'s ships to Rotterdam and Antwerp and thence up the river to Cologne, this though by a different vessel.³⁴ This was an unsurprising pattern of

³² *The Times*, 18 August 1827, p. 1, col. A.

³³ *The Times*, 18 June 1833, p. 1, col. A.

³⁴ *The Times*, 1 July 1835, p. 1, col. A.

destinations, chosen for their proximity and availability from London. In a decade, over ten destinations were offered to potential holidaymakers, allowing repeat customers who liked the formula but wished to vary the details a little. Thus a considerable market in overseas trips had developed before the advent of the railway.

Almost all early excursions had London as their departure point. This was because London largely monopolised steamboat services to the Continent until the mid-1840s before railway links to the Channel ports were opened. The metropolitan population also represented a huge and high-income market and Londoners had quickly become accustomed to steamboat services and recreational excursions down-river.³⁵ One thing to stress in this context is that excursions to the Continent represented large-scale travel.³⁶ Information on passenger numbers is not readily forthcoming but on an early excursion to Boulogne in 1828, the *Columbine* carried 270 passengers.³⁷ On Thomas Cook's famed first continental tour in 1855, the party comprised but 40, including family members.³⁸

As in pleasure trips around the English coastline, besides the enjoyment to be had in a sea voyage, fresh air and visiting a new location, there were certain attractions which took place at specific dates and times which could be accessed by steamboat because the steamer was much more predictable in its timings than a sailing vessel. This held true for continental excursions. In August 1825 an excursion to Boulogne Fair was advertised.³⁹ No details of the nature of the fair were given so it may be assumed either that it was well known or merely a good excuse for an outing. A couple of years later, the occasion was the Rotterdam Annual Fair which was being visited by the steam packets.⁴⁰ In 1835 the attraction

³⁵ See D.M. Williams, J. Armstrong, 'The Thames and Recreation, 1815-1840', *London Journal*, 30 (2005), pp. 25-39.

³⁶ A recent writer has noted that after 1830 "English tourists on the Continent increased in numbers but declined in social quality". See B. Cormack, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

³⁷ *The Times*, 20 September, 1828, p. 2, col. F. This excursion ended in disaster when the vessel, possibly due to the Captain's ignorance of the French coast, struck rocks and went aground. All passengers and crew were saved.

³⁸ P. Brendon, *op.cit.*, p. 66, fn. 47.

³⁹ *The Times*, 4 August 1825, p. 1, col. A.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 18 August 1827, p. 1, col. A.

was the Dunkirk Grand Musical Festival that “only takes place once in ten years” which stressed its rarity value.⁴¹ Just over a month later it was another town, this time “Festival Day at Calais” which was the special attraction.⁴² In June 1850 it was Leyden in The Netherlands which was holding a Grand Masquerade and Collegiate Fete, again a very special event for it occurred “every five years only”.⁴³ Thus there are a number of examples of the steamboat entrepreneurs using particular events to attract passengers on their excursions, not unlike modern day sporting or multi-cultural events.

5. Excursion duration and prices

Because foreign trips were to more distant destinations than riverine and coastal voyages, a return trip in one day was unlikely. Over half of the early continental trips, where the duration was specified, occupied three days. For instance, in July 1825, “second excursion to France and back in three days” appears⁴⁴ and four years later “the last excursion to France and back this season” left on a Saturday and returned on the Monday.⁴⁵ This was not an unusual pattern, popular presumably because it minimised the time absent from business. There was also at least one two-day excursion – to Dunkirk in 1832⁴⁶ and a couple of four-day outings, to Rotterdam in 1831 and Antwerp in 1834.⁴⁷ By 1843, thanks to the railway networks, of which more later, it was possible to do a return trip, via Folkestone, to Boulogne and back in one day, though only a minor portion was by ship.⁴⁸ At the other extreme, by 1850 some excursions lasting seven or fifteen days were being offered, though these had outgrown the “excursion” label and become fully-fledged holidays.⁴⁹

⁴¹ *The Times*, 16 July 1835, p. 1, col. A.

⁴² *The Times*, 25 July 1835, p. 1, col. A.

⁴³ *The Times*, 5 June 1850, p. 2, col. E.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 16 July 1825, p. 1, col. A.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 24 September 1829, p. 1, col. A.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 21 August 1832, p. 1, col. A.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 1 August 1831, p. 1, col. A and 19 August 1834, p. 1, col. A.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 26 June 1843, p. 2, col. E.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 19 March 1850, p. 1, col. D and 17 May 1850, p. 1, col. B.

Thus between 1825 and 1850 the modal trip by steamboat on a continental excursion was of three days' duration but there was some product variation to attract different market segments.

There is a little evidence to suggest that the price of these near-continental excursions fell over time. For most destinations we have insufficient observations to indicate any trend, but for Dunkirk we have a number over a fifteen-year period. In 1829 the return price was £1 7s,⁵⁰ in 1835 it was a guinea,⁵¹ in 1839 one pound,⁵² and in 1844 17s 6d.⁵³ This implies a significant reduction of about one-third, which would have had a market-expanding effect and encouraged more travellers. The fares to Calais and Boulogne were similar to those to Dunkirk and are likely to have fallen roughly in line with those to Dunkirk. All this would imply a general widening of the market. The fares to Antwerp and Rotterdam were more expensive than those to the French ports, at £3 and £2 10s respectively,⁵⁴ presumably because they were slightly further from London and perhaps considered a little more select.

One of the novelties of the steamboat was the ability to eat and drink while travelling, at least in calm weather, and this was another selling point. As a result, several of the excursions mentioned the availability of 'Refreshments and wines of every description on moderate terms',⁵⁵ or "Refreshments will be provided by the steward on board",⁵⁶ as one of the additional attractions. Another method of enhancing the appeal of a trip to the Continent of Europe was to provide music on board. As we have seen, musical events were the occasion for excursions, so why not tap this vein of interest by offering music during the journey? For instance, in August 1825 an excursion to Boulogne and back advertised "N.B. Professional singers and a band of music",⁵⁷ while a trip to Calais a month earlier went into more detail announcing "The amusements will consist

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 24 September 1829, p. 1, col. A.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 16 July 1835, p. 1, col. A.

⁵² *The Times*, 15 July 1839, p. 1, col. A.

⁵³ *The Times*, 2 September 1844, p. 1, col. B.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 1 August 1831, p. 1, col. A and 22 August 1834, p. 1, col. A.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 2 June 1829, p. 1, col. B.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 2 June 1832, p. 1, col. A.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 4 August 1825, p. 1, col. A.

of a superior Musical Melange” and then went on to mention some of the composers whose work would be played, which included Mozart, Rossini and Brahms.⁵⁸ There was also to be a vocal concert.

Steam-boat excursions thus offered a novel and different form of transport, and sometimes entertainment, besides a chance to visit foreign parts. Their success and popularity in providing for short visits was quickly recognised and copied by railway companies in the late 1840s. As early as 1848 the South Eastern Railway Co. was offering cheap weekend tickets to Boulogne, “valid Thursday to Monday”.⁵⁹ The development of such travel demonstrates the early and steady growth of tourism to the Continent. However, excursions represented but one facet of the new tourism. Besides those who enthusiastically partook of inexpensive, organised brief trips there were many others who independently made recreational visits for short or longer stays.

6. Passenger volumes

For researchers into the development of tourism in the nineteenth century and beyond, a major problem is the lack of specific statistics. Figures of the number of passengers are few and far between, and none exist of those who were travelling specifically for recreational purposes. For the 1820s and 1830s we have only some fragments gleaned from a Select Committee of 1883 to enquire into the proposed Channel Tunnel. The Committee was interested in the growth of cross-Channel traffic and sought figures for earlier periods. Lord R. Grosvenor estimated that the average number of passengers travelling from Dover to Calais and Boulogne between 1824 and 1830 was about 14,500 annually.⁶⁰ By 1840 he estimated about 73,000 passengers went through Calais and Boulogne [presumably to and from], though [again, presumably] from a variety of ports and not merely Dover. For 1831, Sir Edward Watkin, the railway magnate, estimated that about 80,000 persons travelled to and from England and the four French

* *The Times*, 16 July 1825, p. 1, col. A.

⁵⁹ R.J. Croft, ‘The Nature and Growth of Cross-channel Traffic through Calais and Boulogne 1840-70’, *Transport History*, 4, (1971), pp. 252-265.

⁶⁰ BPP, *Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel*, 1883, XII, p. 38, clause 306.

ports of Boulogne, Calais, Dieppe and Havre. These figures must be treated with a degree of scepticism given that there is no indication of their origin and that the occasion of their airing was to show the recent growth in passenger numbers. However, they represent all that can be found. Fortunately, there are more reliable statistics for the 1840s. In 1850 a Select Committee was appointed to look at Postal Communications between London and Paris.⁶¹ One witness, F. Birle of the Boulogne Chamber of Commerce, submitted figures of passengers through the ports of Calais, Boulogne, Dieppe and Havre for the period 1842 to 1849. Annual totals fluctuated, as did the share of individual ports but the average over the eight years was some 110,000 passengers for the four French ports. In addition, according to Birle, about 32,000 passengers travelled annually between England and the Belgian ports of Ostend and Antwerp during the period 1843 to 1849. These totals suggest a figure of approaching 150,000 travellers between England and France and England and Belgium in the 1840s and when combined with the earlier statistical fragments provide an indication of growing numbers of travellers in the era of increased steamship services. However, given that the range of services indicated in *Table 1* for 1845 embraces further ports in France and others in the Netherlands and Germany, the volume of passenger numbers is likely to have been greater. This is because steamship services were orientated towards passenger traffic.

The early steamboat had strengths and limitations. The steamboat brought relative independence of wind and tide and offered speed and scheduled services. These attributes were achieved only through higher capital costs as the steamboat was much more costly to build; it had higher operating costs (coal had to be purchased) and reduced cargo capacity through engine and boiler space and bunkers for coal. In consequence, early steamboats relied on certain types of traffic – passengers, mails and high value/low bulk freight.⁶² Some, but by no

⁶¹ BPP, *Select Committee on Postal Communications between London and Paris*, 1850 (cmd. 351), XIV, p. 167.

⁶² On the economics of early steamship operation see S. Palmer, "Experience, Experiment and Economics: Factors in the Construction of Early Merchant Steamships", in K. Matthews and G. Panting (eds), *Ships and Shipbuilding in the North Atlantic Region*, (St John's, Nfld. 1978), pp. 233-247.

means all, of the services listed in Table 1 enjoyed the advantage of mail contracts that provided a measure of guaranteed income. All carried some freight; but equally all were heavily reliant on growing passenger traffic. While the growth of Anglo-European trade and commerce promoted business travel, this can hardly account for the huge increase in passenger capacity represented by increasing routes and services. Tourism provided a new body of passengers, a fact recognised by steamboat proprietors. In 1834 the GSN reduced passenger fares on all its Continental services 'in order to encourage as much as possible the prevailing disposition to continental excursions'.⁶³ Most telling of all is the seasonal variation in passenger levels; figures at the mid-century suggest summer traffic in terms of passengers was some four times that of winter, suggesting that recreational travel was the major component of growing numbers.⁶⁴

7. Travel literature and guidebooks

Further evidence of increasing tourism can be gained from guides and handbooks for tourists. Such guides serve as an important index especially before 1850 for the expenses of printing and limits of the market are likely to have acted as restraints to speculative publishing. In England, guides for travellers to Europe first appeared in the eighteenth century, associated with the Grand Tour. Such tours effectively ceased with the French and Napoleonic wars. After 1815 there was a revival and indeed a mini-boom, occasioned partly by a rush to visit countries closed for over two decades and because, in the interim, French coaching services had greatly advanced.⁶⁵ Together with this growth of travel there appeared a number of guides aimed at the continental traveller, suggesting routes to follow and sights not to be missed, along with advice on customs, currency, coaching facilities and lodging. Most of these new guides were published between 1815 and the early 1820s.

The introduction of steam-driven transport services had a massive

⁶³ S. Palmer, 'The most indefatigable activity', p. 11. .

⁶⁴ J.B. Jones, *Annals of Dover*, 2nd edn., (Dover 1938), pp. 166-168.

⁶⁵ J. Simmons, "Introduction", in *Murray's Handbook for travellers in Switzerland 1838*, reprint, The Victorian Library series, (Leicester 1970), p. 10.

impact on the publication of guides. This was especially so after 1845 when railway construction was proceeding apace, but in the two decades before 1845, there was a noticeable increase in guide book publication and a recognition of the speedier and easier access to the Continent via the steamboats. Two features of this enhanced publication are worthy of note; first, growing numbers of general guides to European travel, both to particular countries and regions, and second, town guides covering the continental ports served by steamboats and the destination of many excursionists.

In the area of country and general guides, the earliest example of the impact of the steamboat is that of Francis Coghlan's *A guide to France* published in 1828.⁶⁶ Its lengthy full title, after listing a range of sailing routes from England also included the phrase "and by steam packets from London to Calais and Boulogne". The implications of the greater convenience of travelling direct from London to France as opposed to coaching to the Channel ports for embarkation was clearly apparent. Coghlan was an important travel writer and publisher in his time, prolific enough for a special catalogue of *Coghlan's Guides* to be published in 1838.⁶⁷ That he appreciated how the new steamboat services were opening up speedier and more convenient travel is evidenced by his *A guide to St Petersburg and Moscow, by Hamburg ..., and by steam-packet, across the Baltic to Cronstadt ...*, published in 1836⁶⁸ and his *A guide up the Rhine, from London, by Rotterdam* which appeared around the same time.⁶⁹ Similarly, in 1836, *A Practical Manual for steamboat travellers from London to Strasbourg*,⁷⁰ was published, being a translation from the

⁶⁶ F. Coghlan, *A guide to France: or, travellers their own commissioners: explaining every form and expense from London to Paris, by Dover and Calais, Brighton and Dieppe, Southampton and Havre, Margate and Ostend, and by steam packets from London to Calais and Boulogne*, (London 1828).

⁶⁷ *Catalogue of Coghlan's guides*, published for the author by A.H. Bailly and Co., (London 1838).

⁶⁸ F. Coghlan, *A guide to St Petersburg & Moscow, by Hamburg, Lubeck, Travemunde, and by steam-packet, across the Baltic to Cronstadt: fully detailing every form of expense from London Bridge*, (London 1836).

⁶⁹ F. Coghlan, *A guide up the Rhine, from London, by Rotterdam, the Hague, Amsterdam*, 2nd edn., (London, 1837).

⁷⁰ F. L. Lachenitz, *A Practical Manual for steamboat travellers from London to Strasbourg*, translated from German by J. Wilkinson, (Cologne 1836).

German. An even earlier Rhine guide appeared in 1830. Authored anonymously and entitled *The Steam-boat companion from Rotterdam to Mayence*, this was effectively a handbook for a Rhine cruise.⁷¹ Most of these guides advocated direct steam-boat routes to the Continent.

Amongst the many other travel guides produced by Coghlan a slightly later "railway and steamboat map of Central Europe" is worthy of note.⁷² An earlier such *Map of Steam Navigation* was published in 1835 by Edward Mogg, a long-time producer of maps and guides. This provided a 'water itinerary of Great Britain and Ireland and adjacent parts of the Continent ... exhibiting the tracks pursued by the Packets in their passage'.⁷³ Perhaps the most significant of the new guides to appear in the 1830s was Murray's, *A Handbook for Travellers on the Continent* published in 1836.⁷⁴ This covered Holland, Belgium, the Rhine and North Germany, those areas now served by the steamboat. A second volume published in the following year explored Central Europe. Murray's *Handbook* of 1836 represents a watershed in the publication of travel guides; Murray was the pioneer of the modern guide; he preceded Baedeker whose first guide appeared in 1839, and by the end of the nineteenth century Murray's guides were to run to over sixty volumes and many editions.⁷⁵

The increasing publication of guides is clear evidence of growing tourism to Europe but general guide-books to France and Europe were aimed at the wealthier traveller engaged on lengthy travels. However, now there was a new type of tourist, the excursionist or traveller making a short trip using the new steamship services. From an author and publishers' point of view, these new travellers' purses were too short to purchase large, expensive tourist guides, but their limited resources were more than compensated for by their numbers. In the 1830s and 1840s there appeared guides to individual coastal towns on the Continent. Guides to Paris had

⁷¹ *The Steam-boat companion from Rotterdam to Mayence, describing the principal places on the banks of the Rhine*, (London 1830).

⁷² F. Coghlan, *Coghlan's railway and steamboat map of Central Europe*, (London 1845).

⁷³ E. Mogg, *Mogg's Map of Steam Navigation*, (London 1834).

⁷⁴ J. Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent: being a guide through Holland, Belgium, Prussia and North Germany*, (London 1836).

⁷⁵ An account of the origins of the Handbooks written by John Murray III, pioneer of the series, appears in *Murray's Magazine*, VI, (1889).

long been available and most of these had included sections on lesser towns such as Dieppe, Boulogne, Calais but only in the sense of locations to pass through en route to greater things. Now, increasing visits via the steamship encouraged the publication of English-language town guides. The crucial feature here is the date of publication, in most cases before railway transport links to the English Channel ports and certainly before railway links within France. *A Guide to Dieppe*, by an English Gentleman appeared before 1832.⁷⁶ Boulogne was served by a guide, "Translated from the French", published in 1831⁷⁷, but perhaps more significantly four guides to Boulogne appeared between 1837 and 1840 and the designation of a "new" guide in two cases suggests there may have been earlier issues.⁷⁸ *An Englishman's Guide to Calais* appeared in 1829.⁷⁹ This probably reflected the grand tour era but later publications, while listing Paris as the ultimate destination, had a more popular emphasis on Calais. Dinan and St Malo were covered in guides published in 1843 and 1848,⁸⁰ while Rouen, close to the coast, had its own guide published in 1844.⁸¹ Besides short trip destinations in France, locations in Belgium were covered by guides to Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels.⁸² Such guides served both the excursionist and the more leisured traveller but some, being short (the designation "pocket book" is significant) and presumably relatively cheap, were clearly aimed at the day visitor. The growth of written aids for tourists to the

⁷⁶ *A sketch of the History of Dieppe ... to which is added a guide to that fashionable watering place ... By an English gentleman*, 2nd. edn., (London 1832).

⁷⁷ *Guide to Boulogne-sur-Mer and its environs*, translated from the French of Dr Bertrand, (Boulogne 1831).

⁷⁸ J. Brunet, *New Guide to Boulogne-sur-Mer*, 2nd. edn., (Boulogne 1837); W. Kidd, *Kidd's new guide to Boulogne. Boulogne in all its glory; a new pocket book guide for the use of strangers and visitors*, (London c. 1837); F. Coghlan, *Coghlan's new guide to Boulogne-sur-Mer*, (London 1838?); A.H. Monteith, *A Guide to Boulogne and its environs*, (London 1840?).

⁷⁹ J. Albany, *The Englishman's guide to Calais*, (London 1829); *Kidd's new and complete guide to London and Paris ... containing also a description of Calais and Boulogne*, (London 1837).

⁸⁰ H. T. Oxenham, *The Dinan and St Malo Guide*, (Paris 1843); W.G. Dumaresq, *The Stranger's Pocket Guide to St Malo, Servan and Dinan*, (St. Malo 1848).

⁸¹ A.H. Monteith, *Guide to Rouen and its environs*, (London 1844).

⁸² E. de Lacroix, *The Traveller's guide to Antwerp*, (Antwerp 1836). W. Dalrymple, *The Economist's New Brussels Guide, containing a short account of Antwerp, Malines, etc.*, (Brussels 1839); J. Bamford, *Ghent Guide, for the English Traveller*, (Ghent 1843).

Continent is a clear indication of a burgeoning market, one recognised and responded to by authors and publishers.

8. Promoters and travel agents

The development of steamship services and the provision of guides facilitated the passage of the tourist. Yet to leave one's home shores and visit the Continent in the 1820s, 30s and 40s was nevertheless something of an adventure involving schedules, tickets and much else. Today the stresses of travel are largely eased by the services of agents. The history of travel agency business is dominated by Cook's, in many respects rightly so, given the success and longevity of that company, but also through an array of published studies which laud the acumen and enterprise of the founder Thomas Cook and emphasise his role as a pioneer and initiator. Yet, was Cook the father of organised popular travel? Were there others who recognised such a market before him and were organisers of group travel? The answer is unequivocally yes, for it is implicit in the very concept of an excursion that by definition it is aimed at a party of travellers and requires organisation. But who did the organising, which institutions or individuals were responsible for promoting these continental excursion trips, having perceived the profit potential of "parties of pleasure?" The advertisements for excursions do not directly answer this question but offer some clues via the sources of tickets. The advertisements for trips in the 1820s name a variety of locations where tickets might be obtained, including coffee houses, taverns, a reading room and even a printer's premises. The absence of named individuals suggests a lack of any specialist operators and the most likely promoters of the journeys were the steamboat proprietors or perhaps a senior member of the steamboat's crew, possibly the steward.⁸³ In the 1830s, and certainly by the 1840s, the steam packet companies seem to have had a firmer grip on the trade with both the London and Edinburgh Steam Co. and the General Steam Navigation Co. advertising several excursions.⁸⁴ By the late 1840s the railway companies,

⁸³ See D.M. Williams, J. Armstrong, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 25 July 1835, p. 1, col. A and 24 June 1836, p. 1, col. A.

in the shape of the Norfolk Railway Co. and the South Eastern Railway Co., were offering mixed mode railway and steamboat excursions and appear to be the promoters of this activity. In addition, there appears to be a degree of specialism developing. In 1849, excursions of 15 days across the North Sea to Rotterdam and up the Rhine were advertised as arranged by a Mr Kleinmann, suggesting a German national with expertise on German destinations.⁸⁵ A year later, besides repeating his Rhine tours, Kleinmann was offering 11-day excursions to Holland and Belgium.⁸⁶ In this he had been preceded by a Mr Wilson of Shaftsbury Terrace who, via steamboat to Rotterdam and with guide/interpreter, undertook four such tours in 1849.⁸⁷ Also in 1849, an organisation describing itself as the Continental Railway Offices variously advertised "To Paris and Back for Eight Pounds"; "Visit of Pleasure to Paris" and "Pleasure Excursion to Paris". These delights were available to families, parties of friends and single travellers who were offered a choice of journey to Calais, direct by steamboat from London or by rail via Dover, and assured that at their hotel in Paris, "one of the best in Europe", they would be "lodged and boarded with profuse liberality".⁸⁸ Interestingly the steamboat route from London was 20 per cent cheaper than the rail link to Calais route. In 1850, one purveyor of tickets, Mr Crisp, had his address as Crisp's Excursion Office, 51 Bedford Street, Strand⁸⁹ and other ticket sellers by 1850 included Messrs Lee and Marcus.⁹⁰ Such examples would suggest that by the mid-century there were a number of specialist agencies arranging excursions by steamboat or steamboat combined with rail. It would appear also that some of these agencies had moved well beyond the mere organisation of excursions. There is clear evidence of the development of a proto-package holiday involving transport, hotel reservations, the services of a local guide, and entrance to local attractions. Crisp's promotions demonstrate this progression. In 1850, his Easter excursion

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 25 July 1849, p. 1, col. D; 18 May 1850, p. 1, col. D and 5 June 1850, p. 2, col. E.

⁸⁶ *The Times*, 18 May 1850, p. 1, col. D and 5 June 1850, p. 2, col. E.

⁸⁷ *The Times*, 25 July 1849, p. 1, col. A.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 25 July 1849, p. 1, col. A; 31 August 1844, p. 1, col. D and 18 September 1844, p. 1, col. D.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 19 March 1850, p. 1, col. D and 17 May 1850, p. 1, col. B.

⁹⁰ *The Times*, 17 May 1850, p. 1, col. B and 18 May 1850, p. 2, col. D.

to Havre included the steamboat fare and 'board and lodging for a week'.⁹¹ A little later that year he advertised a one-week excursion, this time to Paris, with the price including steamboat tickets, "bed and breakfast for a week" and "passports and breakfast at Havre".⁹² A month or so later an even more inclusive package was offered including "the services of an experienced guide".⁹³ Thus the steamboat excursion by 1850 had in some cases transmogrified into a full holiday and, to make it easy for the customer, various elements of the whole had been packaged together to give one inclusive price. Inasmuch as a necessary pre-condition for popular tourism was the availability of specialist agencies, the steamboat was clearly a contributor to such provision.

9. Conclusion

Transport and tourism are inextricably linked. Any improvement in transport that facilitates personal mobility is likely to encourage recreational travel. The steamboat represented a major transport breakthrough. Its enhanced efficiency, which reduced costs in terms of both time and money, widened the potential market for travel, in this context, from Britain to the Continent. That it led to a growth of tourism stemmed from the greater convenience and economy of the new form of travel, together with a growth in the numbers able and willing to undertake recreational travel and enterprising enough to venture overseas. Both sides of this market equation recognised the new opportunities and responded. The initiative of steamboat companies and others in organising continental excursions met with an enthusiastic take-up and besides these specific organised ventures, passenger numbers suggest an increasing flow of independent travellers availing themselves of the new steamboat services. Such growing numbers of recreational travellers were reflected in the

⁹¹ *The Times*, 19 March 1850, p. 1, col. D.

⁹² *The Times*, 17 May 1850, p. 1, col. B.

⁹³ *The Times*, 5 June 1850, p. 2, col. E. There is evidence of an earlier 'conducted tour' to France in 1844 undertaken by Henry Gaze, a travel agent who was to compete with Cook in the mid-nineteenth century. Interestingly, the tourists went by steamer from London to Boulogne. See B. Cormack, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

expansion of travel literature aimed at the new market. Moreover by the late 1840s, there were signs of specialist agencies developing to organise continental travel and holidays. All this was *before* the railway came to exert its powerful stimulus to continental tourism. The steamboat underlay early expansion and promoted the practice of popular continental travel. It was the starting point in developing tourism to nearby continental coastal areas; later, railway services relying on the steamboat for the scheduled arrival of passengers at continental terminals were to convey tourists to more distant European destinations. The resulting mid-nineteenth century explosion in tourism especially to Switzerland, Italy and the Mediterranean should not, however, serve to obscure or lessen the pioneering role and impetus of steamboat travel in initiating popular international travel.

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