

Alfred Booth Trading Company & Booth Steamship Lines
Charles & Alfred Booth
Tenth Cousins to Richard Booth

Charles James Booth (30 March 1840 – 23 November 1916) was an English philanthropist and social researcher. He is most famed for his innovative work on documenting working class life in London at the end of the 19th century, work that along with that of Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree influenced government intervention against poverty in the early 20th century and led to the founding of Old Age pensions and free school meals for the poorest children.

Charles Booth was born in Liverpool, Lancashire on 30 March 1840 to Charles Booth and Emily Fletcher. His father, a scion of the ancient Cheshire family, was a wealthy shipowner and corn merchant as well as being a prominent Unitarian.

He attended the Royal Institution School in Liverpool before being apprenticed in the family business at the age of sixteen.

Booth's father died in 1860, leaving him in control of the family company to which he added a successful glove manufacturing business. Booth entered the skins and leather business with his elder brother Alfred, and they set up Alfred Booth and Company with offices in Liverpool and New York City using a £20,000 inheritance.

After learning shipping trades, Booth was able to persuade Alfred and his sister Emily to invest in steamships and established a service to Pará, Maranhão and Ceará in Brazil. Booth himself went on the first voyage to Brazil on 14 February 1866. He was also involved in the building of a harbor at Manaus which overcame seasonal fluctuations in water levels. Booth described this as his "monument" (to shipping) when he visited Manaus for the last time in 1912.

Alfred Booth and Company was established as a British trading and shipping company founded in 1866 and traded for more than a century. It was founded in Liverpool, England, by brothers Alfred and Charles Booth. It grew into a significant merchant shipping company with its head office in Liverpool and interests in the USA and South America. The group was broken up in 1964 and the last Booth company from the group was sold in 1986.

Alfred and Charles Booth were cousins of William James Lamport, co-founder of the Liverpool shipping company Lamport and Holt, and worked in the company's office. In 1851 Lamport transferred minority shareholdings in a cargo steamship, the Nile, to several associates including Charles Booth and George Holt. In 1854 Lamport, Holt, Booth and Holt's father George Holt, Sr. all took minority shares in a new ship, the Orontes. At the time it was common for a merchant ship to be in 64 shares held by a number of owners. Charles Booth had two shares in the Nile and one in the Orontes.

In 1863 the Booth brothers founded a partnership, Alfred Booth and Company, to export English light leather to the USA, which was in the midst of its civil war. The company had headquarters in Liverpool and a US office in New York City.

In February 1865 the Booth brothers ordered two new ships. Once again they were part-owners; relatives including Alfred Holt and his brother Philip held most of the remaining 64 shares in each ship. The ships were named Augustine and Jerome after St Augustine of Hippo and St Jerome, two of the great Doctors of the Church. It became a company tradition

to name ships after notable bishops and other historic figures. The ships carried English leather, both tanned and untanned, to the USA. In 1866 Booths started a regular steamship service between Liverpool and ports in northern Brazil and on the Amazon River. In 1881 the shipping line became a limited company, Booth Steamship Co Ltd.

After the pneumatic tire was developed in 1888, the trade in natural rubber from Brazil increased, and by 1900 Booth's had 14 ships. Booths had competitors on the Brazilian route including the Red Cross Iquitos Steamship Co, which operated up the Amazon to Iquitos in Peru, and the Maranham Steamship Co. In 1901 Red Cross's founder, Robert Singlehurst, retired and his company merged with Booths to form the Booth Steamship Co (1901) Ltd.

Booths' fleet developed to include substantial passenger liners. In 1903 the company started carrying tourists to and from Lisbon and Madeira.



Lanfranc, launched in 1906, was a hospital ship from 1915 and sunk in 1917

In 1912 Charles Booth retired and passed the chairmanship to his nephew, Charles Booth (1868–1938). In 1915 Charles senior returned from retirement to help the company in the First World War, despite suffering from worsening heart disease. He died of a stroke on 23 November 1916. In 1914 the fleet had more than 30 ships. 11 were requisitioned for war service and enemy action sank nine including two ocean liners, the sister ships Antony and Lanfranc. By 1919 only 18 ships remained in the fleet.



The cargo steamship Clement was launched in 1934 and sunk in 1939

Alfred Booth & Co diversified into civil engineering, and in 1919 it bought the Unit Construction Company from Crittall. Booths lost one ship in peacetime between the two World Wars, when the Gregory ran aground and was wrecked. The company introduced passenger cruises, advertising "1,000 miles up the Amazon" and modernised its fleet with new ships in the 1920s and 30s.

Booth lost several ships in the Second World War. The cargo steamship Clement was launched in 1934 and sunk by the German cruiser Admiral Graf Spee in September 1939. The passenger liner Anselm, which was requisitioned as a troopship in 1940, was sunk by torpedo in July 1941 with the loss of 254 lives.

After the war the company again modernised with new ships, and from 1955 it diversified its naming policy with Spanish names as well as early church ones. In 1957 Booths again suffered a peacetime loss, when the liner Hildebrand ran aground.



Anselm, launched in 1935, was a troopship from 1940 and sunk in 1941

In 1946 Alfred Booth & Co sold Booth Steamship Co business to the Vestey group of companies. Vestey already had its own shipping subsidiary, Blue Star Line, founded in 1911. Under Vestey's in 1955 Booth Steamship Co started trading in the Caribbean with a service between Brazil and Canada via the West Indies. Through the 1940s, 50s and 60s Vestey's transferred numerous ships between Booth's, Lamport & Holt and Blue Star. Each company had a different naming tradition, so ship transfers generally involved a change of name to accord with the house style of each company. In 1975 Vestey's absorbed the two fleets into Blue Star Line.

In 1964 after a Booth family split the leather business was separated as Booth and Company (International) Ltd. It was made a public company in 1974 and bought by Garnar-Scotblair in 1981. In that period the Managing Director was John Sebastian Macaulay Booth, a grandson of co-founder Charles Booth.

Alfred Booth & Co was sold in 1986 to the construction company Mowlem. The chairman at the time of its sale was Richard Amis CBE, a grandson of Alfred Allen Booth.