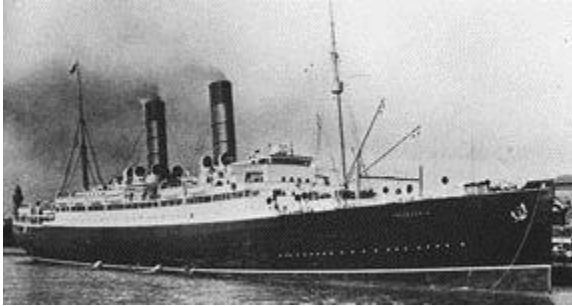


Franconia (I)

1911 – 1916

In the year 1900, Cunard commissioned the first of the two sister ships *Saxonia* and *Ivernia*. They were intended to run out from Liverpool and to the Americas, and at over 14,000 tons they were the largest ships in Cunard service. The ships were not fast, but still managed to gain a good reputation on the North Atlantic. The slightly smaller *Carpathia* made the duo into a trio when she entered service in 1903.

However, Cunard was not satisfied with only operating the *Saxonia*, *Ivernia* and *Carpathia* as their largest ships. By 1905, plans of building two vessels that would beat all competition advanced. The project of building the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* was finally made into reality



The classic look of the first Franconia.

when both ships were commissioned in 1907. With this, Cunard had succeeded in the plans of having the largest and fastest liners on the North Atlantic – and anywhere else for that matter.

When the 1910s approached, the *Saxonia*-class was showing slight signs of age, and Cunard wanted to replace the two larger ships with a new pair for the Atlantic run. Added to this, two new ships of distinction needed to fill the gap of the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, should these be refitted or something of the kind. The decision of building two new ships called *Franconia* and *Laconia* was taken in late 1909.

Lady Forwood, wife of one of the Cunard-directors launched the *Franconia* on July 23, 1910 at the Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson shipyard in Newcastle, England. The new ship would have steam

quadruple expansion engines geared to two propellers, which drove the ship to a service speed of 17 knots. When completed, the liners would replace the *Saxonia* and *Ivernia* on the Liverpool to Boston service and cover for the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* on the New York run if the larger ships were temporarily out of service.

The *Franconia* set out on her maiden voyage between Liverpool, Queenstown and New York on February 25, 1911. After having established herself on the seas, she went out on a Mediterranean cruise between March 10 and April 9. Her ports of call were Gibraltar, Algiers, Naples, Alexandria and Liverpool. This was the first in a long row of cruises for the *Franconia*, as she made one such voyage every year from then on.

The exterior look of the *Franconia* was classic. The two well-proportioned funnels blended well in with the sleek, black hull. Obviously, Cunard had adopted some of the beauty from the *Caronia* and *Carmania*, who still went under the nickname 'The Pretty Sisters'.

The interiors were indeed some of the best on the North Atlantic. The three hundred first class passengers could certainly enjoy every inch of their accommodations. The most spectacular feature on board the *Franconia* was her gymnasium. This 'health centre' was the first of its kind on the seas. The White Star liner *Olympic* could also boast to have a gymnasium, but she entered service a few months after the *Franconia*.

After a few years in Atlantic service, with spectacular rivals or running mates such as *Olympic*, *Imperator* and *Mauretania*, the *Franconia* was taken out of service. The reason was that the First World War had erupted and some of the most prestigious liners were called in by the British Government for troop ship service. In early 1915, the Dardanelles campaign in the Mediterranean was in need of a fresh troop ship to help carry wounded soldiers from Gallipoli to Alexandria. Being familiar with the area, the *Franconia* was the perfect choice. Her trooping capacity was set to 2,700 people.

The *Franconia* continued in the Mediterranean for nearly two years, carrying out trooping duties for the British Government. On October 4, 1916, she was on route for Salonika, under the command of Captain DS Miller, when a violent blast was heard. It was the German U-boat *UB47* who had sent one of her torpedoes into the British ship. Within short, the crew of the *Franconia* realised what had happened and that the ship was sinking fast. Fortunately, the *Franconia* was not carrying troops at the time, so evacuation could be gone through at a rapid pace. Of the 314 on board, only 12 were lost.

The poor *Franconia* only saw somewhat more than five years of service. Like so many other great liners – for example *Lusitania* and *Titanic* – her life had ended abruptly. Until this day, the *Franconia* rests 195 miles east of Malta, the spot where she was once sunk.



The handsome Franconia depicted on a colour postcard.

The Franconia - Specifications:

Length:	625 feet (190.9 m)
Beam:	71 feet (21.7 m)
Tonnage:	18,150 gross tons
Engines:	Quadruple expansion engines powering two propellers.
Service speed:	17 knots
Passengers:	2,850 people

Source: <http://www.thegreatoceanliners.com>