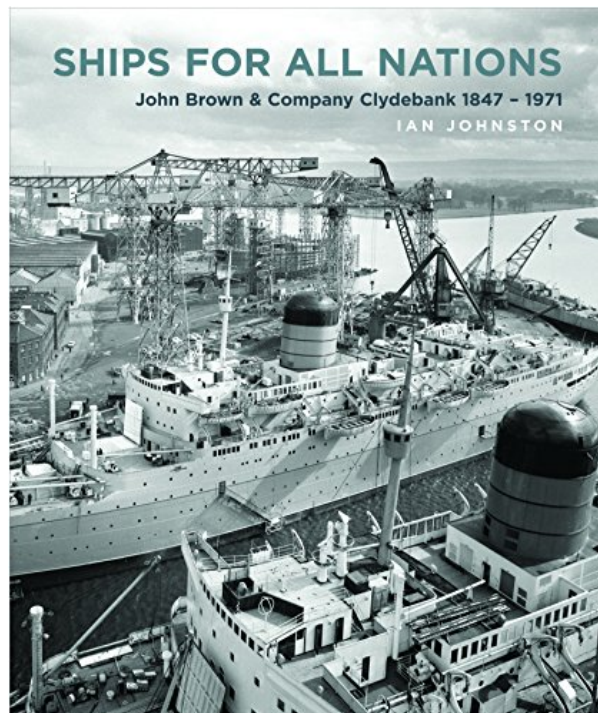
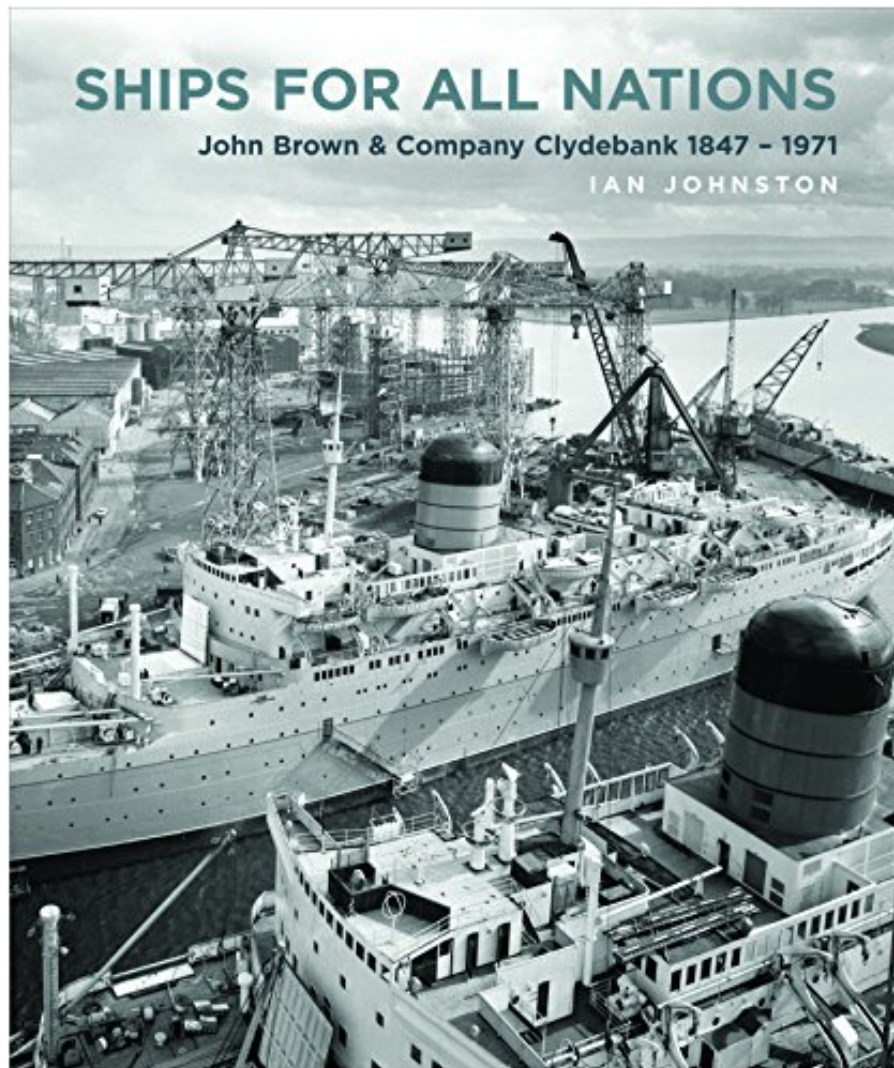


SHIPS FOR ALL NATIONS: JOHN BROWN & COMPANY CLYDEBANK, 1847-1971 BY IAN JOHNSTON



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About the Author

IAN JOHNSTON was brought up in a shipbuilding family, although he has made his career in graphic design. A lifetime's interest in ships and shipbuilding has borne fruit in a number of publications, most recently Clydebank Battlecruisers and A Shipyard at War.

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The Clydebank shipyard built some of the most famous vessels in maritime history. Its heritage boasts of great transatlantic liners like Lusitania, Queen Mary, and QE2, as well as iconic warships like the battlecruiser Hood, and Britain's last battleship, HMS Vanguard. Beginning as J & G Thomson in 1847, the business acquired its more famous persona when Sheffield-based steelmaker John Brown & Co took over in 1899. As a result, the yard became known for turning out first-class products, both naval and mercantile.

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About the Author

IAN JOHNSTON was brought up in a shipbuilding family, although he has made his career in graphic design. A lifetime's interest in ships and shipbuilding has borne fruit in a number of publications, most recently Clydebank Battlecruisers and A Shipyard at War.

Most helpful customer reviews

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Ian Johnston does it again!

By Daryl Carpenter

Originally published in 2000 as "Ships for A Nation," this revised edition forms part of a trilogy of books on the former Clydebank shipyard by Ian Johnston, which also includes A Shipyard at War and Clydebank Battlecruisers. Taking advantage of the massive number of preserved photographs and internal documents preserved by the Scottish National Archives, this book presents an in-depth history of the yard's life. From the formation of J&G Thomson in 1847, to the opening of the Clydebank yard in 1871, acquisition by John Brown & Co in 1899, the triumphs of the 20th century, to the yard's demise in 1972, this book is epic in scope. Although it focuses on a single shipyard, it essentially depicts the rise and fall of British heavy industry through the lens of Clydebank.

Although the previous reviewer bemoaned the lack of ocean liner coverage, I think this book does a good job providing all of the yard's most famous ships a fairly equitable amount of space. The three Cunard Queens receive a good chunk of space, as do the Lusitania, Aquitania, and many of the more famous warships built there. Along with liners and battlecruisers, we also get plenty of material on the yard's more mundane output, including paddle steamers, cargo ships, destroyers, oil tankers, and yachts. The financial, managerial, and manpower issues which plagued the yard even in the best of times are also front and center, along with the

yard's machinery output, and the impact of local and national politics. This book isn't just about big ships and big machines; rather, it puts Clydebank in the context of a complex and constantly involving political, industrial, and economic situation.

The photographs and illustrations, once again, are a highlight. Like Johnston's other works, many of them are scanned directly from the original glass plate negatives, and are so sharp you can count the rivets on ships' hulls. I've always loved shots of shipyards "in action," and some of the shots here are so vivid you can almost hear the pounding of riveting guns. There's also a large number of period engravings, paintings, maps, and diagrams, along with photographs of key personalities. Ian Johnston has provided a number of crisp layout plans, showing the yard's evolution and some of the aborted plans put forward in the 50s and 60s. There's also nine very useful appendixes. These include biographies of yard managers, a list of every ship built at the yard with basic specifications, a list of the emergency repairs and conversions carried out during WWII, scale profile views of famous Clydebank ships, and profit and loss statistics.

Although it's exceptionally ambitious and wonderfully illustrated, "Ships for All Nations" isn't perfect. The writing is rather dry and gets bogged down by minute financial and managerial asides, although it's probably my fault for being more interested in shipbuilding. The editing could have used a bit of polishing; many direct quotations aren't properly indented, making it difficult to tell exactly where they begin and end. Ships' names are frequently not italicized (a pet peeve of mine.) Most of the photographs are excellently reproduced, but some of them appear to have gone through a de-graining process which has left them soft and muddy looking.

Although you need to have a serious interest in bulkheads, steam turbines, and floppy-hatted foremen to really appreciate it, this is yet another excellent book by Ian Johnston. I'm sure serious maritime buffs will love it, flaws and all. If Mr. Johnston is reading this, I'm still game for a photographic scrapbook focusing on the construction of the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Definitely recommended

By John Nambu

A spectacularly interesting history.

Some have complained how much of the book is about business and not about ships, and I can sympathize. And yet it is exactly this sort of information--who were the Thomson brothers, exactly, what were their fiscal attitudes, how did the banks and shareholders respond--that is likely not to appear in histories aimed at "buffs"; whereas the history of capital investment, of corporate planning, of labor disputes, of government and macropolitical and macroeconomic factors, really are needed to understand the rise and the fall of the British shipbuilding industry.

Although James Thomson was quite prodigal in personality, and led his firm into many deficit years, it seems clear that without his foresight, his ambitious expansion of yard capacity, quite contrary to common stereotypes of the Scots personality, that John Brown & Company could not possibly have achieved what they later did.

The absolutely stunning archival photographs are the complementary bedrock on which this book is built. Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, QEII, Hood, Aquitania, were all built at Clydebank!

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

For me, a disappointment!

By TomEnroute

I guess it depends on what you are looking for. After seeing the stunning photo of Carmania and Franconia under reconstruction on the cover, I had expected a lot more information and photos of ocean liners under construction at the famous Clydebank yards of John Brown & Co. The book is large and many of the photos are quite impressive but it will leave the ocean liner aficionado wanting.

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