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# The Establishment and Activities of the Company “Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe S.A.” in Gdynia in the Interwar Period in the Light of Commercial Register Files

**Keywords:** Gdynia, shipping, Polish merchant navy, interwar period, state archives

The uniqueness of the archival team of the Municipal Court in Gdynia (ref. APG OG 149), stored in the State Archives in Gdańsk, Branch in Gdynia, lies in the registration files of local companies and partnerships. The Commercial Register was established by decree of the Head of State Józef Piłsudski on 7 February 1919 and by regulation of the Minister of Justice Leon Supiński on 22 April 1919. It was divided into three sections: general partnerships and limited partnerships were entered in the RHA, limited liability companies and joint-stock companies in the RHB, and capital companies with foreign participation in the RHC. For each registered commercial entity, books and appendices were kept in the form of registration files, i.e. documents related to proceedings before the registration court. The files of this type in Gdynia have been preserved in good condition, and although, as in the case of the vast majority of Polish archives that survived the war, it cannot be said that they are complete, they are one of the richest sources of historical information for research on the history of the Polish merchant navy in the Second Polish Republic. On their basis, the author of this article has already described the origins of the state-owned enterprise and joint-stock company “Żegluga Polska.”<sup>1</sup> This time, the analysis covers three volumes of registration files (RHB 58) of the “Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe S.A. w Gdyni”

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1 Jarosław Drozd, “Register Files of The State Enterprise and the Joint Stock Company «Żegluga Polska» in Gdynia as a Source in Research on the Polish Merchant Navy under the Second Polish Republic,” *Studia Maritima* 34 (2021): 87–101. DOI: 10.18276/sm.2021.34-04.

(hereinafter the PBTO) from 1929–1938. They are notable for their rich content, courtesy of the diligence of the company's Management Board, which systematically sent documents (mainly in the form of reports) to the Municipal Court concerning commercial and financial results, fleet and work organisation. Thanks to this, the registration files, unlike many articles published in the maritime press in the 1920s and 1930s, are a fully reliable, official, source material for the well-known "Polbryt" and, in the author's opinion, they contribute to the preparation of a more comprehensive monograph. The purpose of this article is to establish the most important events in the history of PBTO, from the establishment of the company until the end of 1938, i.e. the last period covered by the report. The author also focuses on the company's commercial and financial results, broken down into individual lines, and all statistics on which its reporting was based.

A detailed plan for establishing the first Polish shipping company financed from state funds was developed as early as 1920, but due to a change in the position of the Minister of the Treasury, it was not implemented. For the next six years, no initiative was taken to create a merchant fleet in the form of a state-owned enterprise. Its absence became more apparent in the Polish economy with each passing year, and sent a clear sign that without its own fleet, it would not be possible to solve the country's economic problems.<sup>2</sup> Changes came in the autumn of 1926, when it was decided to establish the state-owned company "Żegluga Polska." In January 1927, it launched its first cargo ships, which began to transport domestic export goods to Baltic and Western European ports under the Polish flag. The expansion of the port in Gdynia and the increase in its cargo turnover led to the development of regular shipping connections. A pioneer in this field was "Żegluga Polska," which gained extensive experience in tramp shipping in order to prepare for the launch of the first regular lines under the Polish flag. The establishment of regular transport required both experience and international contacts. This marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the Polish merchant navy. Developing it in accordance with the maritime programme of the Ministry of Industry and Trade (hereinafter MPiH), the Polish government, headed by Prime Minister Kazimierz Bartel, decided at the end of 1928 to establish partnerships with foreign shipping companies in order to take advantage of their commercial contacts and experience. First, it was decided to establish a partnership with Ellerman's Wilson Line Limited (hereinafter EWL) from Kingston near Hull.<sup>3</sup> The establishment of PBTO and the opening of shipping lines connecting the ports of Gdańsk and Gdynia with London and Hull, important centres of British trade, was one of the most important successes of the Polish government during the Second Polish Republic in the field of

2 Bogdan Dopierała, *Wokół polityki morskiej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1978), 232.

3 "Próba regularnego połączenia Gdyni z Anglią," *Morze 2* (1928): 25.

maritime trade development. "Polbryt" was established with the objective of facilitating the export of goods from Poland to Great Britain, strengthening trade relations with that country and taking over part of the emigration traffic, which had previously been carried out under foreign flags. The deed of company formation was signed on 21 December 1928 in Gdynia, at the premises of the state-owned company "Żegluga Polska." The Polish side owned 75% of the company (PLN 10,114,000), while EWL, owning 25% (PLN 3,371,000), contributed its experience, contact network on shipping markets, representative offices and four cargo and passenger ships.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with its articles of association, PBTO was to provide maritime transport services on its own or chartered ships, and more specifically: a) transport passengers, emigrants, immigrants and cargo by sea and land; b) perform commercial and financial activities related to this purpose and operate an industrial enterprise; c) sell ship tickets; d) issue transport documents for persons, luggage and goods in maritime and mixed, i.e. land and sea, transport; e) accept luggage, live cargo and goods for storage; f) insure luggage, live cargo and goods; g) perform customs, forwarding, brokerage and other activities related to the transport of passengers and the transport and storage of live cargo and goods; h) grant loans for goods accepted for storage and transport; i) build and maintain its own harbours and warehouses with technical equipment in the country and abroad; k) tow and bunker ships in port, in the roadstead and on the open sea; l) participate in other shipping or maritime-related enterprises in the country and abroad.<sup>5</sup>

The PBTO office was initially located on Portowa Street in Gdynia, and after two years it was moved to Dom Żeglugi (Shipping House) at 15 Waszyngtona Street. At the beginning of its activity, the company was headed by: Captain Stanisław Witkowski (head of the Merchant Navy Office in the Free City of Danzig, member of the Polish delegation of the Port and Waterways Council in the Free City of Danzig) as managing director and Cecil Harold Jeffrey from Sopot (later Vice-Consul of Great Britain in Gdynia)<sup>6</sup>

4 Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku Oddział w Gdyni (hereinafter APG OG), Sąd Grodzki w Gdyni (hereinafter SGG), Akta rejestrowe "Polsko-Brytyjskiego Towarzystwa Okrętowego S.A. w Gdyni" (hereinafter PBTO), vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Akt notarialny (rep. 1313/28) sporządzony przez notariusza Hilarego Ewerta-Krzemieniewskiego w Gdyni z umową spółki, 3–12. See also Władysław Gieysztor, "Bołączki żeglugowe," *Polska Gospodarcza* 46 (1930): 2009–2011; Wanda Czerwińska, *Rola państwa w polskiej gospodarce morskiej (1919–1939)*, (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie: 1975), 97; Zbigniew Machaliński, *Gospodarcza myśl morska II Rzeczypospolitej 1919–1939*, (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975), 241.

5 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol 1, File No. 149/455, Statut PBTO, 123–128. Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 1532/31) sporządzony przez Bronisława Okołowicza w Warszawie z protokołem z nadzwyczajnego walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 29.12.1931, 142. Ibidem, Postanowienie o wpisie do rejestru handlowego SGG, 11.02.1932, 150. Ibidem, Wpis do rejestru handlowego SGG, 11.02.1932, 151.

6 "1937 styczeń 3, Gdynia - Informacje Inspektoratu Straży Granicznej Gdynia dla Pomorskiego Inspektora Okręgowego Straży Granicznej w Bydgoszczy o firmie «Polbryt» Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe w Gdyni," in: *Wywiad gospodarczy Straży Granicznej wobec firm gdańsko-gdynińskich*

as a commercial director. The first Supervisory Board of the company consisted of: Teodozy Nosowicz (Director of the Maritime Department of the Ministry of Trade and Industry), Leon Barański (Director of the Monetary Transactions Department of the Ministry of the Treasury), Julian Rummel (Director of “Żegluga Polska”), Kazimierz Rothert (Deputy Director of “Żegluga Polska”), Włodzimierz Tokarski (proxy of “Żegluga Polska”), Captain Hugon Pistel (head of the Shipping Department at the Ministry of Maritime Affairs) and Bolesław Bator (lawyer), and on behalf of EWL: Lancelot Manby Metcalfe Ives (director of United Shipping Company Ltd. in London) and Henry Hoblyn Peter (accountant). Changes in the composition of the Supervisory Board took place on 30 May 1929 during the first general meeting of shareholders. J. Rummel became the president, and Hubert Stanley Holden (director of EWL) replaced Hoblyn as vice-president. Michał Beniślawski, MPiH delegate for “Polbryt,” also joined the Supervisory Board, while Bolesław Nakoniecznikoff (director of the Emigration Office at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare) became the emigration commissioner at the company’s Supervisory Board.<sup>7</sup>

The company’s first balance sheet, prepared on 31 December 1929, has been preserved in the registration files, showing a profit of PLN 182,763.21.<sup>8</sup> The report for the first year of work states that it has four passenger and cargo steamers with passenger cabins, rooms for emigrants, classic cargo holds and cold stores necessary for the transport of foodstuffs (butter, bacon, eggs, etc.). At the beginning of its operation, the fleet was British, but the flag, captains and crew were Polish. The PBTO ships were given new names: SS “Premier” (formerly “Tasso”), SS “Warszawa” (“Smolensk”), SS “Łódź” (“Kovno”) and SS “Rewa” (“Kolpino”) and during the first year they made 74 round trips, carrying 12,700 passengers and 42,621 tonnes of cargo. This was a promising result, as due to very difficult winter navigation conditions (especially in February and March 1929), the company did not start operations until April, when it inaugurated transport between Gdańsk and London and Hull and back.<sup>9</sup> “Polbryt’s” revenues in its first nine months amounted to PLN 2,893,000 (GBP 66,638) from freight for the transport of goods and PLN 2,496,000 (GBP 57,489) from passenger transport. In the year preceding the establishment of the company (1928), exports of foodstuffs and general cargo (excluding bulk goods) from Poland to England amounted to 42,543 tonnes.

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*w latach 1932–1938*, compiled by Piotr Kołakowski, Ryszard Techman (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej, 2010), 111.

7 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol 1, File No. 149/455, Akt notarialny (rep. 487/29) sporządzony przez Hilarego Ewerta-Krzemienieńskiego z protokołem z nadzwyczajnego walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 30.05.1929, 34–36; *Ibidem*, Postanowienie o wpisie do rejestru handlowego SGG, 29.12.1928, 38–39.

8 *Ibidem*, Bilans PBTO na dzień 31 grudnia 1929 r., 42; *Ibidem*, Sprawozdanie rewizorów z przeprowadzonej rewizji bilansu i rachunku strat i zysków za 1929 r., 49.

9 *Ibidem*, Sprawozdanie PBTO za 1929 r., 48.

Thanks to the work of the new shipping company, this figure increased to 49,814 tonnes in 1929. The growth of Polish exports to England in this short period is best illustrated by the following figures: 15,378 tonnes (6,835 tonnes in 1928) of bacon; 3,815 tonnes (1,645 tonnes) and 2,918 tonnes (2,329 tonnes) of eggs. Out of the 49,814 tonnes of total exports achieved in 1929, PBTO ships transported as much as 34,849 tonnes of goods worth approximately PLN 86,000,000 to England.<sup>10</sup> Passenger traffic statistics were less optimistic, as 1929 was marked by a decrease in emigration to Canada and the USA. In total, during the year, the company's ships carried 6,813 fewer passengers than in 1928 on the routes connecting the Port of Gdańsk with England. There were 1,561 passengers from London (1,633 in 1928), 72 fewer than the previous year, and 392 from Hull (571), a decrease of 179. A total of 14,988 passengers travelled to London (17,791 in 1928), 2,803 fewer than in the previous year, while 3,818 travelled to Hull (7,577), a decrease of 3,759. Statistics showed that PBTO accounted for approximately 60% of passenger traffic to London and 100% to Hull, which meant that, if emigration remained at the level of 1928, it would be possible to carry approx. 5,060 more passengers, and thus income from this source would increase to approx. PLN 1,215,000 (GBP 28,000) with a slight increase in expenditure. Taking into account the above circumstances, the Management and Supervisory Board of PBTO considered the first year of its operation to be "satisfactory." The report emphasised the desire to transfer ship traffic to Gdynia, where the Management Board had its registered office, as soon as possible. It was therefore announced that in the following year, the port of Gdynia would also be served, even if only sporadically, and that regular transport connections with London and Hull would be organised from there as soon as possible.

The first balance sheet, report and budget of PBTO were approved on 6 May 1930 during the Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders held at the Ministry of Industry and Trade building in Warsaw.<sup>11</sup> Two months later, the Management Board submitted an application to the Municipal Court in Gdynia for the entry of the Warsaw Branch in the commercial register, which took place on 22 July 1930.<sup>12</sup> Aleksander Romuald Leszczyński was appointed director of the branch, which was located in the company's

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10 See also "Polsko-Angielskie Towarzystwo Żegluga," *Przemysł i Handel* 48 (1928): 1966; "Polsko-Brytyjskie Tow. Okrętowe," *Polska Gospodarcza* 30 (1930): 1341–1342; Bolesław Kuźmiński, "Regularne połączenia żeglugowe portu gdyńskiego," *Morze* 8 (1930): 9; "Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe Spółka Akcyjna (Polish-British Steamship Company Limited)," *Flota Narodowa* 13 (1930): 8; "Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe (pierwszy rok eksploatacji)," *Flota Narodowa* 14 (1930): 11; "Sprawozdanie z działalności Polsko-Brytyjskiego T-wa Okrętowego w Gdyni," *Flota Narodowa* 21 (1930): 14–15.

11 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Akt notarialny (rep. 580/30) sporządzony przez B. Okołowicza z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 06.05.1930, 50–51.

12 Ibidem, Wniosek władz PBTO o wpisanie Oddziału w Warszawie do rejestru handlowego SGG, 11.07.1930, 64; Ibidem, Postanowienie SGG o wpisie do rejestru handlowego, 22.07.1930, 69.

Warsaw office at 116 Sienkiewicza Street, at the corner of Marszałkowska Street.<sup>13</sup> The second half of 1930 brought changes in the composition of the Management Board. By resolution of the Supervisory Board of 28 August 1930, Captain Witkowski's resignation from his duties was accepted. He was replaced as acting Chief Executive Officer by J. Rummel, while the position of Deputy Director was entrusted to Feliks Kollat, who, together with C. H. Jeffrey, formed a two-person Management Board from September 1930.<sup>14</sup>

In 1930, the company's ships made 95 round trips, maintaining regular weekly service on the following routes: from Gdynia and Gdańsk to London (with the SS "Premjer" and SS "Warszawa") and from Gdynia and Gdańsk to Hull (with the SS "Łódź" and SS "Rewa"). From June 1930, the ships also regularly called at Gdynia. The following goods were exported from Gdańsk: wood and wood products, paraffin and general cargo, while Gdynia mainly exported goods that required refrigeration (bacon, ham, butter, eggs) and, at the end of the year, small quantities of zinc. Gdynia was also the main centre of passenger traffic, mainly emigration.<sup>15</sup> Freight traffic in 1930 increased particularly in exports, by as much as 81.37%. A total of 50,546 tonnes of cargo was transported (26,597 tonnes to London and 23,949 tonnes to Hull). Unfortunately, the situation in imports did not improve so significantly, with an increase of only 10.94% compared to 1929. A total of 12,661 tonnes of cargo were imported to Polish ports (3,861 tonnes from London and 8,800 tonnes from Hull), which was justified by the difficult economic situation in the country and a general decrease in imports from England to Poland. Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, thanks to the establishment of regular connections and an effective freight policy, "Polbryt" began to play an important role in the development of Polish exports to England. As a result of this campaign, a new Polish industry developed – bacon production – and there was a rapid increase in the amount of bacon exported. In 1930, as much as 11,197 tonnes were exported, with almost 100% of exports coming from Gdynia. The first five months of 1931, during which 21,652 tonnes were exported, gave grounds for even greater optimism. In 1930, revenues from cargo transport on the company's ships amounted to PLN 3,326,245.48, while their value exceeded PLN 100,000,000.<sup>16</sup> Passenger transport, heavily dependent

13 "Ostatnie wiadomości z nad morza," *Polska Gospodarcza* 29 (1930): 1299.

14 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Uchwała Rady Nadzorczej, 28.08.1930, 77; Ibidem, Wniosek o dokonanie wpisu w rejestrze handlowym SGG, 23.09.1930, 76; Ibidem, Postanowienie SGG o wpisie do rejestru handlowego, 16.10.1930, 80. See also "Ostatnie wiadomości z nad morza," *Polska Gospodarcza* 39 (1930): 1741.

15 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Akt notarialny (rep. 678/31) sporządzony przez B. Okołowicza z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy oraz sprawozdaniem, 22.06.1931, 85. See also "Rozkład jazdy statków P.B.T.O.," *Morze* 2 (1931): 11.

16 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Akt notarialny (rep. 678/31) sporządzony przez B. Okołowicza z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 22.06.1931, 85–86.

on emigration, which had started successfully in the first months of 1930, collapsed in the second quarter and almost completely stopped at the end of the year due to restrictions on emigration to North America (PBTO ships transported emigrants to English ports, where they boarded ocean liners). Passenger traffic was also affected by a decree of the President of the Republic of Poland, which restricted the transport of emigrants to Polish ports and Polish shipping lines maintaining direct communication with the countries where the emigrants were settling. Despite the efforts of the Management Board, tourist traffic was low, with the company's ships carrying 12,213 people (7,552 to London, 3,137 to Hull, 1,251 from London and 273 from Hull), generating revenue of PLN 2,357,486.54 from ticket sales. The collapse of emigrant traffic and the inadequate adaptation of ships to cargo-only traffic prompted the Management Board to conclude an agreement with the "United Baltic Corporation" (hereinafter UBC) in October 1930. Under this agreement, joint operation of the line from Gdynia and Gdańsk to London was commenced, while regular traffic was reduced by 50%. In the weeks when PBTO ships did not sail, communication was maintained by UBD vessels, e.g. SS "Baltavia." Under this agreement, both companies withdrew one ship from the London line, allowing the remaining ships to carry full loads and larger numbers of passengers. They made a profit, covering part of the losses caused by the immobilisation of half of the fleet sailing to London and the uninterrupted work of the loss-making line to Hull. The agreement with UBC meant that SS "Warszawa," which was technically the least suited to the new requirements, was withdrawn from service. The SS "Rewa" also caused unexpected trouble when it ran aground in Friedrichsort (near Kiel) on 3 February 1930.<sup>17</sup> As the company's financial results were determined not so much by the transport of goods as by the transport of passengers, its balance sheet for 1930, submitted to the general meeting of shareholders, showed a loss of PLN 1,713,403.33. However, it did not include the depreciation of ships and other write-offs permitted by the applicable regulations. Therefore, guided by the rule of maximum savings in the administration and operation of ships, the Management Board of PBTO closed the Branch in Gdańsk, and moved its administration centre to Gdynia.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of 1930, economic journalists and economists noticed that the potential of Polish-English capital was not properly exploited. It was also evident that both sides had very different views on the most important issues related to "Polbryt's" activities. For the British, the very fact of concluding the agreement was a success, while for the Polish side, the real goal was a reasonable expansion of the company. In the long term, the partnership between the two capitals did not represent much value for Poland, and therefore in 1931, the State Treasury's share in the company was increased to 91%.

17 Ibidem, 87; "Ostatnie wiadomości z nad morza," *Polska Gospodarcza* 42 (1930): 1867.

18 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 1, File No. 149/455, Protokół z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 22.06.1931, 88.

This was achieved by reducing the share capital and taking into account changes in PBTO's accounting, which were caused by the crisis in global shipping. Therefore, on 22 June 1931, the general meeting of the company adopted a resolution to reduce the share capital from PLN 13,485,000 to PLN 3,643,000, of which PLN 2,732,000 was allocated to the Polish side and PLN 911,000 to the British side. The amount obtained in this way was written off to cover losses. In order to provide the company with working capital and obtain funds for the purchase of two new ships, it was decided to increase the reduced share capital by PLN 6,500,000, i.e. to PLN 10,143,000, by issuing a second issue of 6,500 registered shares with a par value of PLN 1,000 each. As EWL was unable to participate in the new share issue, with the consent of the parties, the entire issue was acquired by the Poles, while the British were given the possibility to purchase some of the new shares at the issue price (until 30 June 1932), but only up to such an amount that their share in the company, together with the shares already held, did not exceed 40% of the share capital. From that moment on, PBTO's capital amounted to PLN 10,143,000 and was divided as follows: "Żegluga Polska," representing the interests of the Polish State Treasury, held 9,232 shares (worth PLN 9,232,000) and EWL held 911 shares (PLN 911,000). During the general meeting, changes were also made to the composition of the Supervisory Board, which from then on was made up of Benisławski, Holden, Rothert and Metcalfe Ives, as well as Marian Turski, Stanisław Nowak and Witold Broniewski.<sup>19</sup>

PBTO's balance sheet for 1931 showed a gross profit of PLN 118,954.92.<sup>20</sup> During that year, the Company's freight traffic increased significantly, with exports amounting to 84,703 tonnes (36,860 tonnes to London and 47,843 tonnes to Hull), representing a 143% increase compared to 1929 and a 67.57% increase compared to 1930. The situation in imports improved slightly (compared to 1929, the increase was 19.18%, but compared to 1930, it increased by 3%). In 1931, 13,049 tonnes of cargo were imported to Gdańsk and Gdynia (5,497 tonnes from London and 7,552 tonnes from Hull). The trade in goods, especially the export of food products, clearly became the dominant activity of the port of Gdynia, thanks to lower costs of cargo handling and better cargo handling efficiency compared to Gdańsk. Revenues from the transport of goods amounted to PLN 5,521,896.23. Unfortunately, revenues from the transport of passengers and emigrants decreased significantly, amounting to only PLN 384,369.06.

19 Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 678/31) sporządzony przez B. Okołowicza z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 22.06.1931, 90–94; Ibidem, Wniosek do SGG ze zgłoszeniem obniżenia kapitału zakładowego, 28.12.1931, 101; Ibidem, Postanowienie o wpisie do rejestru handlowego SGG, 11.01.1932, 119; Ibidem, Wpis do rejestru handlowego SGG, 12.01.1932, 120. See also Stefan Szyszkowski, "Zmiany w strukturze polskich towarzystw żeglugowych," *Polska Gospodarcza* 23 (1932): 669–670.

20 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 2, File No. 149/456, Sprawozdanie Zarządu i Rady Nadzorczej za 1931 r., 25.05.1932, 5.

During 1931, 90 round trips were made with non-owned and chartered ships. Although PBTO vessels did not suffer any serious accidents and maintained their class in accordance with the requirements of cargo traffic, the Company had to charter three ships for 13 round trips. As the passenger certificate of SS "Rewa" was not renewed, it became necessary for the Company to purchase new ships. In accordance with a resolution of the Supervisory Board and in arrangement with the shareholders, the shipyards in Helsingør and Elsmore were urgently commissioned to build the steamers SS "Lublin" and SS "Lwów" for the transport of perishable foodstuffs (half of the ships' compartments were equipped with refrigeration equipment) They were small and fast enough to be operated more intensively and economically than SS "Łódź" and SS "Rewa," which had previously sailed to Hull. The new ships were to be ready by 15 May 1932.<sup>21</sup>

During the general meeting of shareholders held on 25 May 1932 in Gdynia, M. Beniśławski and K. Rothert resigned from the Supervisory Board. They were replaced by Dr Stanisław Wachowiak and Marian Węgrzynowski (head of the personnel office at the Ministry of the Treasury). However, the latter was not appointed until 4 October 1932, by virtue of a resolution of the next general meeting.<sup>22</sup>

The PBTO Management Board report for 1932 notes a worsening of the global economic crisis, which had a particularly severe impact on shipping. The previously unrecorded imbalance between supply and demand for tonnage, resulting from the decline in international trade, led to the immobilisation of a significant part of the merchant fleet. Nevertheless, "Polbryt" ships made 77 round trips, maintaining regular service on both lines. In terms of cargo traffic, the operating results were as follows: 72,130 tonnes of cargo were exported (29,804 tonnes to London and 42,326 tonnes to Hull), while 20,785 tonnes were imported (7,762 tonnes from London and 13,023 tonnes from Hull). (7,762 tonnes from London and 13,023 tonnes from Hull).<sup>23</sup> The company's proceeds amounted to PLN 4,645,181.95 (PLN 4,430,236.36 from the transport of goods and PLN 214,945.59 from passengers). Although the annual balance sheet of PBTO presented by the Management Board showed a gross loss of PLN 171,291.17, considering the poor economic situation and difficult working conditions, the balance sheet and results were considered "satisfactory." Changes in tonnage were reported. During the year, the construction of twin ships was completed: SS "Lublin" (launched on 19 March 1932)

21 Ibidem, 4–5; "Ostatnie wiadomości z nad morza," *Polska Gospodarcza* 39 (1931): 1386; "Nowe jednostki polskiej floty handlowej," *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 10 (1931): 18–19; "Dalszy rozwój polskiej floty handlowej," *Morze* 10-11 (1931): 27.

22 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 2, File No. 149/456, Akt notarialny (rep. 640/32) sporządzony przez H. Ewerta-Krzemieniewskiego z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 25.05.1932, 7–9; Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 1284/32) sporządzony przez H. Ewerta-Krzemieniewskiego z protokołem z nadzwyczajnego walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 04.10.1932, 32–33.

23 Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Zarządu i Rady Nadzorczej za 1932 r., 54.

and SS “Lwów” (launched on 1 May 1932), which were immediately put into service on the Hull line. In October 1932, SS “Łódź” was withdrawn from service and sold to the Navy Command, and from that moment on it sailed under the name ORP “Sławomir Czerwiński” as a submarine base.<sup>24</sup>

The general meeting of shareholders reconvened on 14 June 1933 in Warsaw to appoint a new Supervisory Board. Alongside Wachowiak, Holden, Nowak, Ives, Tur-ski and Węgrzynowski, Jan Tadeusz Lipka also joined the board.<sup>25</sup> The appointment was confirmed by the general meeting held on 30 April 1934 in Warsaw. The Polish State Treasury was represented by the director of the maritime department at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, engineer Leonard Możdżeński, while the British side was represented by Holden. After reviewing and approving the report and balance sheet, adopting depreciation write-offs for property, movable assets and ships, acknowledging the fulfilment of duties by the authorities and electing new ones, the agreement concluded on 11 August 1933 was approved. by resolution of the Extraordinary General Meeting of Shareholders of the company, with the shipyard “Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson Ltd.” of Newcastle-on-Tyne, for the construction of SS “Lech” (launched on 15 January 1934). The ship was to resemble SS “Lublin” and SS “Lwów” in appearance, although it was expected to be faster than them. It was to have a modern silhouette with a straight bow and a rounded full stern in the above-water section, as well as a double bottom. As it was assumed that it would be used in the future for shipping in the eastern Baltic Sea, it was also reinforced to withstand ice.<sup>26</sup>

In 1933, as a result of further import restrictions introduced in England, the volume of cargo transported by PBTO to English ports decreased. This decline was more than compensated for by an increase in the transport of imported goods. Although the economic crisis continued and global shipping was still in the grip of depression,

24 Ibidem, 60–61; See also Tadeusz Ocioszyński, “Polska marynarka handlowa w dobie kryzysu,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 44 (1931): 1501–1503; “Nowy statek Polbrytu,” *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 11 (12.05.1932): 17; “Nowy statek Polsko-Brytyjskiego Tow. Okrętowego,” *Morze* 5 (1932): 13; “Nowe polskie statki handlowe,” *Morze* 6 (1932): 13; “Nowy statek Polsko-Brytyjskiego Tow. Okrętowego,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 7 (1932): 21; “Statek «Łódź» pod banderą wojenną,” *Morze* 11 (1932): 18–19; “S/S «Łódź» w doku,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 2 (1933): 19.

25 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 2, File No. 149/456, Akt notarialny (rep. 866/33) sporządzony przez Mieczysława Jabłońskiego w Warszawie z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 14.06.1933, 63–64.

26 Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 1029/34) sporządzony przez Zygmunta Nowickiego w Warszawie z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 30.04.1934, 73–74. See also “Walne zgromadzenie S. A. «Żegluga Polska» oraz Polsko-Brytyjskiego T-wa Okrętowego,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 5 (1934): 39; “Budowa nowego statku dla Polsko-Brytyjskiego T-wa Okrętowego,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 33 (1933): 1023; Stanisław Kosko, “Rozwój polskiej marynarki handlowej,” *Morze* 8–9 (1933): 3–4; “Nowy parowiec polski,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 1 (1934): 31; “Roczne walne zgromadzenie Sp. Akc. «Żegluga Polska» i Polsko-Brytyjskiego Tow. Okr.,” *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 12 (05.05.1934): 10.

with some tonnage laid up, freight rates falling and fierce competition, PBTO ships made 83 round trips, maintaining service on both routes. Out of this number, 78 voyages were made by the company's own ships and 5 by the chartered SS "Chorzów." The company's annual balance sheet showed a gross profit of PLN 857,959.21.<sup>27</sup> Operational results in freight traffic showed that 68,551 tonnes of cargo were exported (28,655 tonnes to London and 39,896 tonnes to Hull), while 27,379 tonnes were imported (9,632 tonnes from London and 17,747 tonnes from Hull). A total of 1,627 passengers and emigrants sailed westward, and 871 eastward. Total revenue amounted to PLN 4,344,932.18 (PLN 4,086,250.41 from the transport of goods, but only PLN 258,681.77 from the transport of passengers).<sup>28</sup>

In 1934–1935, minor changes were made to the composition of the Supervisory Board. It was not until the general meeting of shareholders held on 4 November 1935 in Warsaw that Robert Ceceniowski, Tadeusz Ocioszyński and Kazimierz Stamirowski were appointed to the board. The following members remained from the previous board: Holden, Ives, Nowak, Turski and Węgrzynowski.<sup>29</sup>

The PBTO report on activities for 1934 took into account the unfavourable economic situation and increased competition in shipping, so the results achieved were again considered satisfactory. The company's ships maintained biweekly service to London and weekly service to Hull. They made 79 round trips (27 to London, of which SS "Lech" made 19, SS "Warszawa" made 7 and SS "Premjer" made 1, and 52 to Hull, of which SS "Lublin" made 26, SS "Lwów" made 24 and SS "Lech" made 2). The SS "Rimfrost" was chartered for this purpose and made four trips with a cargo of herring from Great Yarmouth to Gdynia between 10 September and 10 December. During the summer season (from May to September), SS "Warszawa" made 12 cruise voyages (to Copenhagen, Stockholm, Riga, Tallinn, Helsinki, Leningrad and Bornholm) on behalf of "Polbryt" and "Gdynia-Ameryka Linie Żeglugowe." In 1934, PBTO ships exported 61,016 tonnes of cargo (27,189 tonnes to London, 33,777 tonnes to Hull and 50 tonnes to Great Yarmouth), and imported 28,909 tonnes (from London 11,109 tonnes, from Hull 16,837 tonnes and from Great Yarmouth 963 tonnes). Passenger traffic was less successful, with 1,397 people travelling on PBTO ships (895 to England and 502 in the opposite direction). In total, the company recorded revenues of PLN 4,243,637.52 (from the transport of goods PLN 3,515,398.22, passengers PLN 130,187, warehouse operation and sales in ship canteens PLN 112,814.26, and PLN 485,238.04 from concluded agreements).<sup>30</sup>

27 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 2, File No. 149/456, Sprawozdanie z działalności towarzystwa za 1933 r., 78.

28 Ibidem, 76–77.

29 Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 1414/35) sporządzony przez Z. Nowickiego z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 04.11.1935, 137–138.

30 Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności towarzystwa za 1934 r., 142–143.

Its annual balance sheet showed a gross profit of PLN 1,097,276.76, and after deducting losses of PLN 239,131.47 (on the sale of SS “Rewa”), the gross profit amounted to PLN 858,145.29.<sup>31</sup> SS “Rewa,” withdrawn due to its age (26 years) and uneconomical operation, was sold for scrap to “Eisen-Union A. G.” in March 1934. Its place in the fleet was taken by SS “Lech,” launched in March 1934, which proved to be a valuable acquisition. At the beginning of 1934, PBTO began leasing a warehouse (hangar No. 3) in the port from the Maritime Office in Gdynia, with a usable area of 3,781 m<sup>2</sup>, in which 8,590 tonnes of cargo were stored during the first year. It also housed the Free Trade Department and the Transit Department, operating under a special concession from the Ministry of the Treasury.<sup>32</sup> The Management Board’s report for 1934 states that PBTO held shares in “Syndikat Emigracyjny Spółka z o.o.” in Warsaw and belonged to: the Polish Shipowners’ Association in Gdynia (from 1933, F. Kollat from PBTO served as President of the Management Board), the Polish Shipbrokers’ Association in Gdynia, the Association of Owners and Lessors of Port Warehouses in Gdynia, The Baltic & International Maritime Conference in Copenhagen, the Non-Federated Shipowners Dock Labour Committee in London, the Polish-British, Polish-Romanian and Polish-Hungarian Chambers of Commerce (it did not become a member of the Polish-French Chamber of Commerce until 1938) and the Polish-Czech Agreement. Like other shipping companies affiliated with the Polish Shipowners’ Association, on the initiative of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, PBTO concluded an agreement with “Towarzystwo Budowy Osiedli S.A.” w Gdyni (Housing Development Company in Gdynia), granting it an interest-free loan for a period of 18 years to the amount of PLN 11,500. Until it was mortgaged on houses built in the Witomino district, it was secured by a letter of guarantee from the municipality of Gdynia.<sup>33</sup>

In 1935, PBTO ships regularly sailed to English ports, making 78 round trips (26 to London, including 25 by SS “Lech” and 1 by SS “Warszawa,” and 52 to Hull, including 26 by SS “Lwów,” SS “Lublin” 25 and SS “Warszawa” 1). In addition, from April 1935, SS “Warszawa” sailed on a newly opened passenger and cargo line to Le Havre, calling at Cherbourg and Dover on the way. In total, the ship made 18 round trips, mainly transporting emigrants for transatlantic lines that maintained regular connections with

31 Ibidem, 146.

32 Ibidem, 144. See also “Zamówienie nowego statku,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 9 (1933): 39; “Zamówienie nowego statku dla «Polbrytu»,” *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 22 (15.08.1933): 24; Rowmund Piłsudski, “Odnawianie taboru polskiej floty handlowej,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 12 (1934): 382–383.

33 APG OG, SGG, “Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 2, File No. 149/456, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności towarzystwa za 1934 r., 145. In 1935, the construction of the seafarers’ housing estate in Witomino was completed, resulting in 10 double houses – 20 flats. See Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Rady Nadzorczej z działalności spółki w 1935 r., 186; Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności za 1935 r., 188–189.

North American ports. Despite best efforts it was not possible to obtain cargo for this line, which was explained by the low level of trade between Poland and France. Out of necessity the company chartered the SS "Leo," which made 10 round trips to English ports. In terms of exports, PBTO ships transported 61,741 tonnes of cargo to England (30,475 tonnes to London and 31,266 tonnes to Hull), 10,786 tonnes on the SS "Leo" and 61 tonnes from Gdynia to Le Havre, for a total of 72,588 tonnes. As usual imports were not particularly successful. The company's ships brought 29,468 tonnes of cargo to Polish ports (12,296 tonnes from London, 15,829 tonnes from Hull, 618 tonnes from Le Havre and 725 tonnes from Rotterdam). Thanks to the launch of the line to Le Havre, passenger transport statistics improved, as the number of passengers reached 4,692 people (to/from England 442/379, to/from Le Havre 3,796/75). The Company continued to operate a warehouse in the port, receiving 9,055 tonnes of cargo. Annual income from operations amounted to PLN 5,070,293.32 (from the transport of goods PLN 3,646,768.10, passenger transport PLN 425,245.06, warehouse operation and profits from shipboard canteens PLN 112,264.38, concluded agreements PLN 585,400 and other PLN 300,615.84). The profit and loss account showed a gross profit of PLN 1,483,324.05, but after deducting the loss on the sale of SS "Premjer" (PLN 715,944.27), it ultimately amounted to PLN 767,379.78.<sup>34</sup>

Thanks to the long-awaited improvement in economic conditions, in 1936 PBTO achieved better results than in previous years, which was reflected in an increase in freight and passenger traffic. On regular British lines, the company's ships made 77 ½ round trips (26 to London on the SS "Lech," 26 to Hull on the SS "Lwów" and 25 ½ on the SS "Lublin"). On the French line, SS "Warszawa" made 24 voyages, calling at Le Havre, London, Cherbourg, Dover, Dunkirk and Antwerp. Exports amounted to 108,260 tonnes of cargo and 639 mine and work horses (35,212 tonnes to London and 495 horses, to Hull 35,612 tonnes and 144 horses, and to Le Havre only 313 tonnes). Import statistics were less optimistic. PBTO ships transported 37,123 tonnes of cargo to Polish ports of cargo, including: from London (to Gdynia) 15,295 tonnes, from Hull 20,944 tonnes and from Le Havre (to Gdynia) 531 tonnes, Dunkirk 121 tonnes, Cherbourg 120 tonnes, Antwerp 112 tonnes, i.e. a total of 844 tonnes. Passenger and emigration traffic carried 5,159 people (4,680 westbound and 479 eastbound). The company's annual revenue amounted to PLN 5,773,617.58 grosz (from goods PLN 2,276,703.11, passengers PLN 469,732.56, warehouse operations PLN 195,394.88, concluded agreements PLN 386,125, other PLN 445,662.03).

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34 Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Rady Nadzorczej z działalności spółki w 1935 r., 184; Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności za 1935 r., 186–190. See also "Linia Gdynia – Havre," *Polska Gospodarcza* 19 (1935): 615. SS "Premjer" was purchased in November 1935 by the shipowner "Tirrenia Flotte Riunite Florio – CITRA" of Naples ("S/S «Premjer» sprzedany zagranicę," *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 11 (1935): 19; "S/S «Premjer» odpłynął z Gdyni pod włoską banderą," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 33 (25.11.1935): 14–15).

The annual lease of hangar No. 3 in the port cost PLN 26,142. In 1936, 18,263 tonnes of cargo were accepted for storage there, of which 17,540 tonnes were in transit and 723 tonnes were in free circulation. The total gross annual profit amounted to PLN 1,945,787.78.<sup>35</sup>

During the Management Board meeting held on 23 April 1937 in Warsaw, it was decided to liquidate the Warsaw Branch and revoke the power of attorney granted to A. R. Leszczyński. This decision was confirmed on 1 May 1937 in Warsaw by the General Meeting of Shareholders.<sup>36</sup>

The PBTO's report on activities in 1937 assessed its situation as roughly comparable to the previous year. Regular communication with London, Hull and Le Havre was maintained.<sup>37</sup> The company's ships made 99 round trips (25 to London on the SS "Lech," 24 to "Hull" on the SS "Lublin," 24 on the SS "Lwów," and 26 on the French route on the SS "Warszawa," calling not only at Le Havre, but also at London, Cherbourg and Dunkirk.<sup>38</sup> For the first time, tables were used in the annual report, which made it easier to analyse the company's operating and financial results in comparison with the previous year. The company's turnover also included the transport of chartered ships operating on British lines. In passenger and emigration traffic, PBTO ships carried 6,938 people (6,381 to British and French ports and 557 to Polish ports), which represented an increase of 1,779 people (34%) compared to the previous year. Expanding the scope of its activities, the company became interested in the trade of bulk goods, in particular the export of timber. In connection with this, tramp ships were chartered on its account, which carried 60,846 tonnes of cargo. The cargo handling warehouse in the port of Gdynia received 17,218 tonnes, which was a decrease of 5.8% compared to 1936. Annual proceeds amounted to PLN 7,007,343 (PLN 4,183,458.95 from the transport of goods by own ships, foreign ships PLN 1,554,985.93, passenger transport PLN 619,043.26, warehouse PLN 181,979.67, special proceeds PLN 112,200 and other PLN 355,675.19).<sup>39</sup> In connection with the above, a gross profit of PLN 1,165,516.63 was achieved.<sup>40</sup>

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35 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 3, File No. 149/457, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności za 1936 r., 4–7.

36 Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 817/37) sporządzony przez M. Jabłońskiego z protokołem z obrad Zarządu towarzystwa, 01.05.1937, 41–46; Ibidem, Wniosek o wpis do rejestru handlowego SGG, 08.06.1937, 17; Ibidem, Postanowienie o wpisie do rejestru handlowego SGG, 18.06.1937, 47.

37 Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności w 1937 r., 74.

38 Ibidem, 76–77.

39 Ibidem, 78–79.

40 Ibidem, Sprawozdanie Rady Nadzorczej za 1937 r., 81.

**Table 1.** PBT0 turnover in freight transport in 1936–1937

Port	Export			Import	Total	Increase in 1937
	Years	Tonnes	Horses			
London	1937	35,754	56	15,858	51,612	2.4%
	1936	35,062	495	15,295	50,357	
Hull	1937	42,481	250	19,372	61,853	9.4%
	1936	35,612	144	20,944	56,556	
French ports	1937	1,031	–	778	1,809	51.0%
	1936	313	–	884	1,197	
Total	1937	72,266	306	36,008	115,274	6.6%
	1936	70,987	639	37,133	108,110	

Source: APG OG File No. 149/457, 76–77.

During the general meeting of shareholders held on 30 May 1938 in Warsaw, the purchase of SS "Lida," a new cargo ship, was approved. Its construction had been commissioned on 22 December 1937 from the shipyard "Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson Ltd."<sup>41</sup> Launched on 27 August 1938, it was the thirteenth vessel built for Poland in British shipyards. Interestingly, the port of registry of SS "Lida" was Gdańsk (it was the seventh and largest seagoing vessel entered in the register of the local Merchant Navy Office).<sup>42</sup> During the general meeting of shareholders held on 18 July 1939 in Gdynia, the Management Board and Supervisory Board of the company approved the order (agreement with the shipyard "Werf De Noord Jan Ulrich Smit, Alblasserdam" concluded on 23 December 1938) for the passenger and cargo ship MS "Warszawa (II)" for service on the Gdynia–Le Havre–London route, which was to replace SS "Warszawa" after 15 March 1940.<sup>43</sup>

In international shipping, 1938 brought an economic slowdown. Freight rates for tramp ships were not much higher than in 1936, and in some months fell below that level. Operating costs (bunkers, insurance, port charges, crew wages, etc.) remained at the 1937 level, when the economic situation was considered favourable.

41 Ibidem, Akt notarialny (rep. 1328/38) sporządzony przez M. Jabłońskiego z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 30.05.1938, 63–67. See also "S/S «Lida»,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 46 (1938): 1673–1674; "Bilanse polskich towarzystw okrętowych,” *Wiadomości Portu Gdynińskiego* 6 (1938): 25.

42 "S/S «Lida» w porcie gdyńskim,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 45 (1938): 1551; "S/S «Lida» polski frachtowiec drzewny,” *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 20 (30.10.1938): 11.

43 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBT0, vol. 3, File No. 149/457, Akt notarialny (rep. 725/39) sporządzony przez H. Ewerta-Krzemieniewskiego z protokołem z walnego zgromadzenia akcjonariuszy, 18.07.1939, 108–113. See also "Zamówienie nowego statku pasażersko-towarowego,” *Polska Gospodarcza* 3 (1939): 92; "Nowe jednostki polskiej floty handlowej,” *Wiadomości Portowe* 1–2 (1939): 17–18; "Nowe zamówienie dla polskiej floty handlowej,” *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 2 (30.01.1939): 16.

This year was characterised by an increase in tonnage unemployment, which at the end of December 1938 was estimated to exceed 3.1 million GRT, without taking into account the large number of ships waiting in ports for cargo. It developed its activities in the area of maintaining existing shipping connections and continued the irregular service to the ports of western England, launched in 1937.<sup>44</sup> PBTO ships completed 104 ½ round trips (to London SS “Lech” 25, to Hull SS “Lublin” 25 ½ and SS “Lwów” 26; on the French line to Le Havre, calling at London SS “Warsaw” 26, and on the line to the ports of western England SS “Lida” 2 voyages).<sup>45</sup>

**Table 2.** PBTO turnover in goods transport in 1937–1938

Port	Export			Import	Total	Increase in 1938
	Years	Tonnes	Horses			
London	1937	35,754	56	15,858	51,612	-0.48%
	1938	36,435	54	14,931	51,366	
Hull	1937	42,481	250	19,372	61,853	-1.51%
	1938	39,349	212	21,574	60,923	
French ports	1937	1,031	–	778	1,809	64.1%
	1938	921	–	2,048	2,969	
Ports of western England	1937	–	–	–	–	100.0%
	1938	3,041	–	–	3,041	
Total	1937	72,266	306	36,008	115,274	4.4%
	1938	79,746	266	38,553	120,337	

Source: APG OG File No. 149/457, *passim*.

The company’s warehouse in the port of Gdynia received 19,153 tonnes of cargo, which was an increase of 1,935 tonnes (11.3%) compared to 1937. Passenger traffic improved, as PBTO ships carried 7,110 people (6,011 to British and French ports, 1,099 to Gdynia), which was an increase of 172 people (2.4%). Annual revenues amounted to PLN 273,288.20 (from the transport of goods by own ships PLN 4,817,720.84, by foreign ships PLN 879,009.41, passenger transport PLN 671,243.03, warehousing PLN 218,526.71, special income PLN 27,400), which represented an increase of PLN 686,000, despite the decline in the pound sterling exchange rate. The gross profit for 1938 amounted to PLN 1,532,443.52, which was PLN 366,926.89 more than in 1937.<sup>46</sup>

44 APG OG, SGG, Akta rejestrowe PBTO, vol. 3, File No. 149/457, Sprawozdanie Zarządu za 1938 r., 114.

45 Ibidem 117–118.

46 Ibidem, 119–120, 212.

The planned expansion of the Polish merchant fleet was one of the key factors in the development of the entire maritime economy, and PBTO, one of the most important domestic shipping companies of the Second Polish Republic, played a major role in this process. From 1929, it sent its ships to London and Hull, and from 1935 to Le Havre, Dover and Cherbourg, transporting goods and passengers (mainly emigrants). Despite the unfavourable economic situation in international shipping, the Polish merchant fleet, including PBTO, showed systematic growth in 1939. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of World War II, these advances were not reflected in the company's registration files, which means that historians researching the history of the Polish merchant navy during this period have to rely on unreliable (and often inaccurate) press reports. These sources provide PBTO's monthly and quarterly reports for the first half of 1939, but, unfortunately, we cannot verify this information and statistics using official records.<sup>47</sup> There is no doubt that in the period preceding the outbreak of World War II, issues related to shipping were at the forefront of the Polish maritime economy. The expansion of the merchant fleet and the creation of new shipping routes under the Polish flag were important elements of the maritime economy. Right before the war the development of the domestic merchant fleet, thanks to an increase in its tonnage, attracted the interest of broad economic circles. The expansion of the merchant navy followed a systematic plan. A four-year shipping investment plan, developed at the end of 1936, was implemented. It constituted the first stage of a 10-year plan, which envisaged the construction or purchase of 30 sea-going vessels with a deadweight of approx. 90,000 tonnes by 1941. Considering that by the outbreak of the war Poland had managed to acquire 22 ships with a carrying capacity of over 70,000 tonnes, most of this programme had been completed. According to statistics available in the press, the tonnage of the Polish merchant fleet as of 1 July 1939 was approx. 122,000 GRT (merchant and fishing vessels), and it was expected to increase by another 30% by the end of the year.<sup>48</sup> The PBTO's registration files show that its activities supported the development of economic relations between Poland and Great Britain and France.

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47 "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w styczniu," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 4 (28.2.1939): 20–21; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w lutym," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 6 (31.03.1939): 9–11; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w marcu," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 9 (15.05.1939): 11–12; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w marcu 1939 r.," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 10 (30.05.1939): 11–13; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w kwietniu," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 10 (30.05.1939): 13–14; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w maju," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 11 (15.06.1939): 10–11; "Działalność polskiej floty handlowej w czerwcu," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 14 (30.07.1939): 10–12; Jan Korolkiewicz, "Praca polskiej floty handlowej w I kwartale 1939 r.," *Polska Gospodarcza* 28 (1939): 1056–1057.

48 Edmund Urbański, "Programowa rozbudowa polskiej floty handlowej," *Biuletyn Izby Przemysłowo-Handlowej w Gdyni* 14 (30.07.1939): 3–5.

The launch and regular operation of a regular shipping line allowed for the systematic development of Polish exports to Britain, which was of particular importance in Polish trade as an export market for livestock products. The three volumes of PBTO registration files are an excellent source of information and a basis for detailed research on issues related to the Polish maritime economy. The documents contained in them concerning shareholders, changes in share capital, work organisation, tonnage characteristics, forms of activity, turnover and financial results reveal interesting aspects of the development of Polish shipping companies during the Second Polish Republic and should serve as a basis for the preparation of a more comprehensive monograph, something which these companies undoubtedly deserve.

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English version: Mark Atkinson

#### SUMMARY

Three volumes of register files of the "Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe S.A." from 1929–1938, which are part of the archival team of the Municipal Court in Gdynia, contain the most important documents (mainly in the form of reports and correspondence) related to the company's operational and financial results, fleet and work organisation. They are not only comprehensive and diverse in terms of content, but, above all, they are an official source of information on the history of the popular "Polbryt," created in its office. The information contained in them provides a basis for further research into the history of this shipping company, which had its most important period in the years 1929–1938. The company was established on 21 December 1928 after lengthy negotiations with Ellerman's Wilson Line Limited. The result was the purchase of four cargo and passenger ships, which ensured regular transport between Gdańsk and Gdynia and ports in England (London, Hull, Dover) and France (Le Havre, Cherbourg and Dunkirk). The main goal of PBTO was to transport butter, bacon and eggs, i.e. perishable goods, as well as passengers (mainly emigrants travelling via Britain and France to North America) and horses. The company was established at a particularly difficult time for the development of global shipping. From its very first year, it had to combat not only a disastrous freight market and poor emigration conditions, but also difficulties arising from its lack of experience. Nevertheless, PBTO played an important role in the development of Polish-English and Polish-French trade relations. This article, like the company's registration files, ends on 31 December 1938 due to the outbreak of World War II and the suspension of work by Polish courts keeping commercial records.

## Powstanie i działalność “Polsko-Brytyjskiego Towarzystwa Okrętowego S.A. w Gdyni” w okresie międzywojennym w świetle akt rejestru handlowego

**Słowa kluczowe:** Gdynia, żegluga, polska marynarka handlowa, okres międzywojenny, archiwum państwowe

### STRESZCZENIE

Trzy tomy akt rejestrowych “Polsko-Brytyjskiego Towarzystwa Okrętowego S.A. w Gdyni” z lat 1929–1938, wchodzących w skład zespołu archiwalnego Sądu Grodzkiego w Gdyni zawierają najważniejsze dokumenty (głównie w formie sprawozdań i korespondencji), związane z wynikami eksploatacyjnymi i finansowymi spółki, spraw taboru i organizacji pracy. Są nie tylko wszechstronnym i różnorodnym ze uwagi na treść, ale przede wszystkim oficjalnym materiałem źródłowym do dziejów popularnego “Polbrytu,” powstałym w jego kancelarii. Informacje w nich zawarte stanowią przyczynek do prowadzenia dalszych badań nad historią tego towarzystwa okrętowego, którego najważniejszy okres w historii przypadał na lata 1929–1938. Spółkę zawiązano 21 grudnia 1928 r. po długich pertraktacjach z firmą “Ellerman’s Wilson Line Limited.” W efekcie zakupiono 4 statki towarowo-pasażerskie, którymi utrzymywano regularną komunikację między Gdańskiem i Gdynią a portami Anglii (Londyn, Hull, Dover) i Francji (Le Havre, Cherbourg i Dunkierka). Celem utworzenia PBTO był przede wszystkim przewóz ładunków masła, bekonów i jaj, czyli towarów łatwo psujących się oraz pasażerów (głównie emigrantów, płynących via Anglia i Francja do krajów Ameryki Północnej) i koni. Spółkę zawiązano w okresie szczególnie trudnym dla rozwoju światowej żeglugi. Od pierwszego roku musiała walczyć nie tylko z katastrofalnym rynkiem frachtowym i złą koniunkturą emigracyjną, ale również z trudnościami, powstałymi wskutek jej niewielkiego doświadczenia. Mimo to PBTO spełniło ważną rolę w rozwoju kontaktów handlowych polsko-angielskich i polsko-francuskich. Niniejszy artykuł – podobnie jak akta rejestrowe spółki – chronologicznie zamyka się na 31 grudnia 1938 r. z uwagi na wybuch II wojny światowej, a w raz z nią zatrzymanie pracy polskich sądów, prowadzących rejestr handlowy.

### Citation

Drozd, Jarosław. “The Establishment and Activities of The Company “Polsko-Brytyjskie Towarzystwo Okrętowe S.A.” in Gdynia in The Interwar Period in The Light of Commercial Register Files.” *Studia Maritima* 38 (2025): 159–180. DOI: 10.18276/sm.2025.38-07.