

A Moment in Time # 8

North Shipping Co. Ltd. (aka Hugh Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 1874 - 1964

Compiled and edited by Geoff Walker



An image of North Shipping Co. Ltd's "**North Devon**" built in 1924, depicted at anchor in the Thames, about 1935. A traditional British tramp steamer of the era with rigid lines, counter stern and tall cigar like fu

(A painting by Tony Westmore from the Author's private collection)

The company was initially established by Hugh Roberts, who originated from the Portmadoc area of North Wales. Having relocated to Newcastle in 1874 he established a minor ship owning firm, designated, Hugh Roberts & Son., operating smaller sailing vessels.

The first new ship he acquired was the Brig, **Hugh Roberts** which was completed in 1875 and built by the Williams shipyard in Portmadoc. Shortly after, the fully rigged ship **North Wales** was completed at Hull by the Humphrey yard. It was around this time that Hugh Roberts established the North Shipping Co, Ltd., which would go on to operate his entire fleet in the years ahead, under his management.

Hugh Roberts obtained his first steamship in 1877 and named her **North Britain**, built by the Palmers shipyard and remained with the fleet until 1896 when sold to foreign interests for further trading. In 1880 the **North Durham** (sister ship to North Britain) was launched, also completed by the same yard of Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow. Unfortunately, this vessel went missing without trace in 1893. The third new building was delivered around the same time, and not in keeping with recent

traditions did not bear the name “North”, instead she had originally been built for other owners under the name of **Orinso**, but Hugh Roberts retained the vessel’s name.

In keeping with fleet expansion, there soon followed three more new ships, namely, North Cambria, North Anglia, and North Erin. All three being built by the Palmers Shipbuilding and Iron Co. Ltd in Jarrow in 1883. However, the freight and shipping market had become overtonnaged at this point, so the last three vessels spent time in lay-up on the Tyne, at various times, between 1883 – 1886

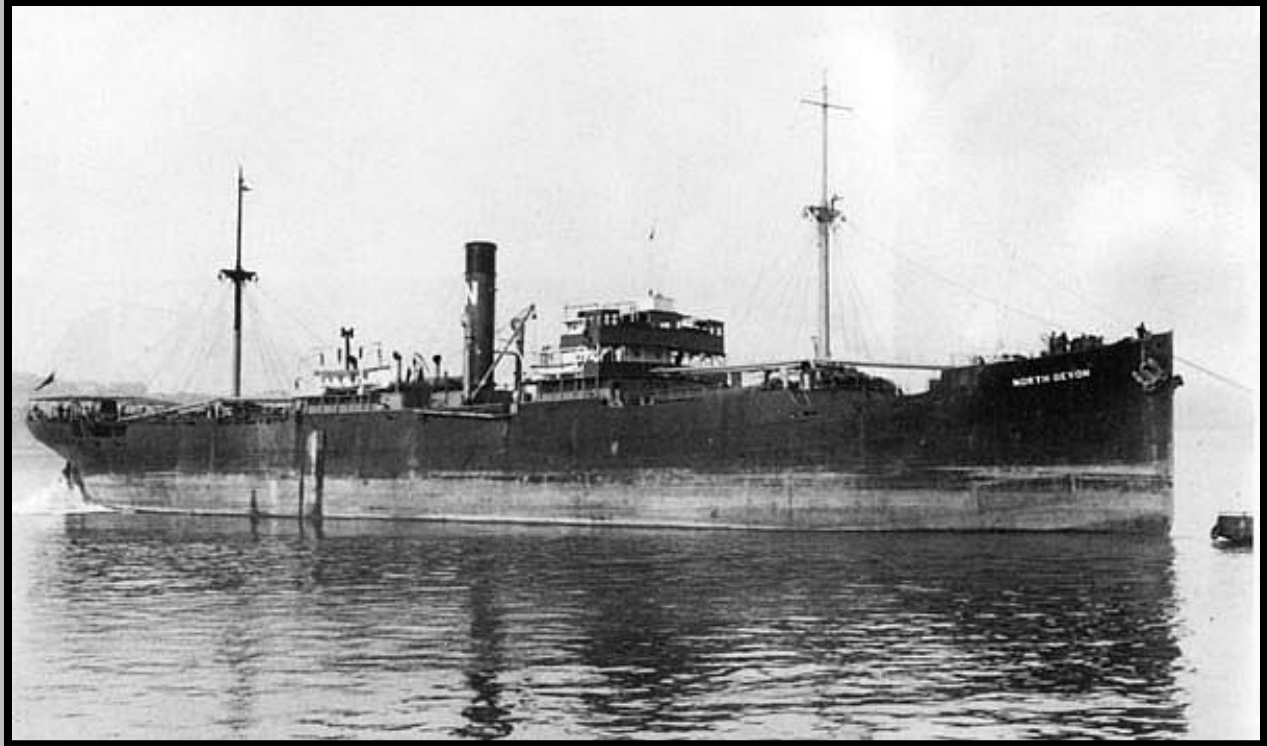
With the Company’s move into steamships, the earlier sailing vessels had been disposed of and it was not long before trade became revitalized, at which time a further two steam tramp ships were ordered from the Readhead yard in South Shields. These ships were fitted with triple expansion steam engines and were named **North Flint** and **North Gwalia** during 1888. By this time, the fleet numbered some 8 steam ships.

North Shipping was not without its casualties; in 1893 the **North Durham** was lost in the Bay of Biscay. This was due to the shifting of her cargo of Barley whilst on passage from Fiume to Grimsby. Similarly, the **Orsino** was wrecked at Grampileri in Italy, whilst on a trip from Straton to Philadelphia, in early 1898. Further adjustments to the fleet took place around the same time with the ships North Britain being sold to Italian owners, North Erin to Austria and North Cambria to French owners. Hence by 1900 the North Shipping fleet had been reduced to just three ships, namely, **North Anglia**, **North Flint** and **North Gwalia**. In 1904, the fleet size was further reduced due to the sale of the North Anglia to Japan, leaving only two ships in North’s fleet.

However, whilst freight rates remained low the company retained its faith in tramp shipping with the expectation of future rises. It was based on this assumption that he ordered a 5000 dwt, steam tramp from Readheads which was delivered in mid-1905 and was named **North Gwalia** but she was sold to B.J.Sutherland, retaining her name of North Gwalia until she was lost in 1909, due to a collision off Great Yarmouth.

By this time freight rates had started to increase and profits could be expected so a 5,000 dwt, tramp was purchased from London owners in 1908 and renamed **North Britain**, the second North vessel to bear this name. The old **North Flint** was disposed to Greek interests in 1910, leaving Hugh Roberts to concentrate on two larger tramps **North Wales** and **North Britain**, both of which yielded good returns until the outbreak of WW1.

In November 1914, following the outbreak of WW1, the North Wales was steaming on her way to Valparaso with a cargo of coal which she had loaded in Cardiff, encountered the German cruiser Dresden on 15th November, about 300 miles South West of Valparaso. The German warship engaged the North Wales with gun fire, quickly sinking her. The company replaced the ship with another which was renamed **North Cambria** and a further steam tramp which bore the name of **North Wales**. Sadly, both these vessels became marine casualties and were lost. The **North Wales** being torpedoed and sunk off the Scilly Isles with the loss of 30 lives, in October 1916 and the **North Cambria** sunk as a consequence of a collision in August 1918, 75 miles west of Ushant, whilst on a voyage from New York to Pallice (the French port for the City of La Rochelle) , carrying a cargo of steel railway lines.



An early image of the **North Devon** showing her classic tramp ship profile. (unknown source)

At the conclusion of WW 1 the sole remaining ship in the fleet was **North Britain** but the fleet was brought back to strength by the purchase of a vessel from Tatem's, the Cardiff ship owners in 1919, and renamed **North Anglia**, in 1921. During 1923 orders were placed with Readheads, of South Shields, for two new vessels of larger tonnage and differing design, but both ships had forward well decks. The first of this duo to be completed was the **North Cornwall** in March 1924, and the **North Devon** following in October 1924.

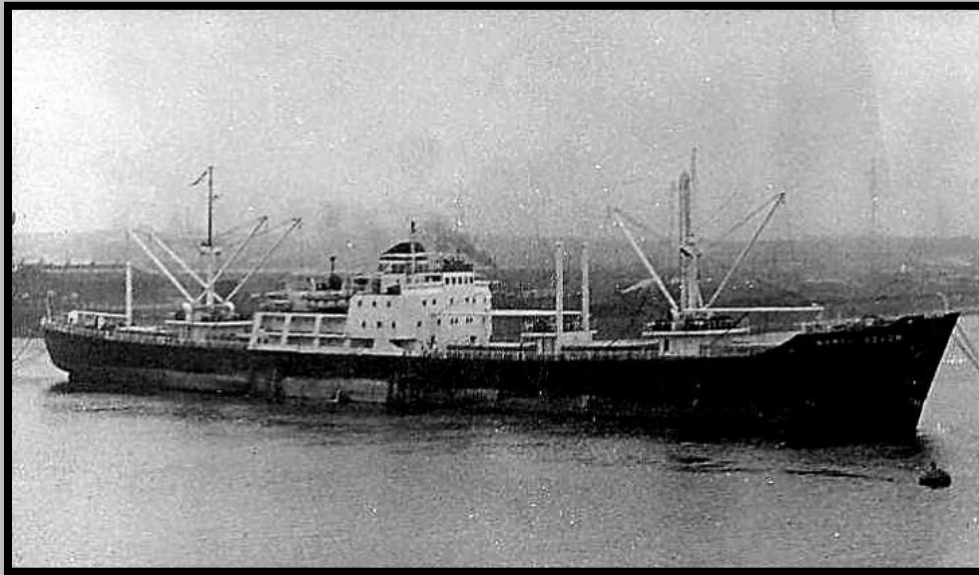
The fleet of four ships traded throughout the 1920s but the onset of the great depression of the 1930s proved the downfall of the older two vessels, **North Britain** (1907) and **North Anglia** (1910), both ships spending considerable time laid - up on the Tyne, before being sold to Latvian and Greek interests respectively. The two newer vessels continued successful trading, throughout the poor market period until freight rates recovered.

An order for a new 7000 dwt tramp was placed with Readhead in 1939, but did not complete building until December 1940, when she was named **North Britain** (the third ship to bear the name). In the interim the **North Cornwall** had sailed to Narvik to load a cargo of Iron but was scuttled when the Germans occupied Norway in April 1940.

Sadly, the newer **North Britain** was torpedoed and sunk by U.707 on 5th May, 1943 in the North Atlantic in convoy from Glasgow to Halifax. The **North Britain** became a straggler after the convoy scattered and met her demise when attempting to rejoin the convoy. The prevailing weather was terrible, resulting in only 11 of the 42 crew members surviving. Only the **North Devon** lasted the war years, but the fleet had

been boosted with vessels EMPIRE WYCLIF and EMPIRE ENVOY in 1942, managed on behalf of the Ministry of War Transport. with the former being purchased in 1946 and renamed North Anglia (3rd).

The warbuilt FORT ALBANY and EMPIRE CYPRUS were managed between 1946/48 and then the latter was purchased and renamed **North Britain** (4th). The ageing vessel **North Devon** of 1924 vintage was sold to Greeks in 1950 and finally went to the breakers at Yawata in Japan during 1960. The FORT BELL was purchased in 1950 and renamed North Cambria but did not last long in the fleet, being sold to Japan a year later.



The last ship built for Hugh Roberts' North Shipping Company Ltd., was the "**North Devon**", Built by Bartrams of Sunderland which they delivered in 1958.

(unknown source)

The two EMPIRE ships were joined by the new 10,121 dwt **North Cornwall** in 1954 from Bartrams of Sunderland. The ship was equipped with telescopic topmasts for the Manchester Ship Canal and had a Doxford type diesel engine giving a speed of 12.5 knots. A larger 11,450 dwt tramp was ordered from the same shipyard and was completed as **North Devon** (2nd) in May, 1958. Her hull had been redesigned to maximize the power/speed ratio, and resulting from extensive tank testing, with only a third more power than her earlier sister ship she achieved 15.65 knots on acceptance trials. However, this was not achieved without additional building cost.

The 1954 built **North Cornwall** was sold to Nigerian Green Line in 1959 and replaced by SCOTTISH TRADER from Trader Navigation Co. Ltd in 1960, being renamed **North Cambria** (4th). This tramp did not prove successful and caused the company numerous difficulties, so was sold out of the fleet after only three years of service.

The 'EMPIRE' ships were disposed of in 1960 and 1962, and in 1964 when only **North Devon** (2nd) remained in the fleet, North Shipping was taken over by fellow Newcastle shipowners Common Brothers. The white "N" on the funnel being replaced with a white "C". In 1964, the owners, Common Brothers, placed their DAGHESTAN (Blt 1957) temporarily under North Shipping Co. Ltd. and in 1967 the DAGHESTAN (Blt 1960). The name of the North Shipping Co. Ltd. was formally changed to the Hindustan Steam Shipping Co in 1968, which brought about the demise of another Tyne Side tramp ship operator.

North Shipping Company Ltd., Fleet List



Steam & Motor ships

NORTH BRITAIN (1) (1877-1896)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 77061 1,729gt 80.8 x 10.4 meters

C.2 Cyl

21.11.1877 launched, 1877 completed by Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow on Tyne Yard No. 356 as NORTH BRITAIN for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 1896 sold to C. Raggio renamed CHECCHINA. 1899 sold to Commerciale Italiana renamed DIANA. 1910 sold to A. Parodi renamed AVANTI. 22.12.1916 missing probably torpedoed and sunk north off Corunna.

NORTH DURHAM (1880-1893)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 82782 1,890gt 80.9 x 10.8 metres

C.2 Cyl.

14.7.1880 launched, 8.1880 completed by Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow on Tyne Yard No. 419 as NORTH DURHAM for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 17.12.1893 passed Peniche and went missing.

ORSINO (1880-1898)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 82797 2,048gt 86.6 x 10.7 metres

C.2 Cyl.

10.7.1880 launched, 10.1880 completed by R. Thompson & Sons, Southwick Yard No. 103 as ORSINO for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 7.3.1898 wrecked at Grampilieri, Sicily.

NORTH CAMBRIA (1) (1882-1899)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 85100 1,969gt

C.2 Cyl

6.12.1881 launched, 1.1882 completed by Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow on Tyne Yard No. 465 as NORTH CAMBRIA for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 1899 sold to E. Hulin renamed SAINT WANDRILLE 1908 sold to Blas de Otero & Co. renamed GIPUZKOA. 25.1.1910 wrecked Algorta.

NORTH ANGLIA (1) (1883-1905)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 87148 2,081gt

C.2 Cyl.

9.7.1883 launched, 8.1883 completed by Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow on Tyne Yard No. 506 as NORTH ANGLIA for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 1905 sold renamed KINJIO MARU. 23.8.1905 sunk in collision off Himejima.

NORTH ERIN (1883-1897)

Iron single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 89505 2,078gt

C.2 Cyl

3.11.1883 launched, 12.1883 completed by Palmers Shipbuilding & Iron Co. Ltd., Jarrow on Tyne Yard No. 520 as NORTH ERIN for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 19.6.1897 damaged by fire 178nm from Tarento and scuttled 20.6.1897.

NORTH FLINT (1888-1910)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 95499 2,171gt, 3,408dwt 88.4x 11.9 metres

T.3 Cyl.

22.10.1888 launched, 12.1888 completed by John Readhead and Sons, South Shields Yard No. 242 as NORTH FLINT for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 1910 sold to T. Pangalos renamed THEODOROS. 1915 sold to N.K. Stroyberg renamed PAUL PAGH. 1916 sold to V. Egenfeldt Nielsen renamed DANEBROG. 1923 sold to C.E.G. Faber renamed DANIA. 2.1936 broken up at Copenhagen.

NORTH GWALIA (1888-1909)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 95516 2,233gt, 3,408dwt 88.4 x 11.9 metres

T.3 Cyl.

20.10.1888 launched, 12.1888 completed by John Readhead and Sons, South Shields Yard No. 243 as NORTH GWALIA for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 25.4.1909 sunk in collision off Great Yarmouth.

NORTH WALES (2) (1905-1914)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 122825 3,691gt, 6,268dwt 105.8 x 15.0 metres

T.3 Cyl.

19.6.1905 launched, 8.1905 completed by John Readhead and Sons, South Shields Yard No. 386 as NORTH WALES for H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle. 16.11.1914 sunk by German cruiser Dresden 360nm SWx 0.25W from Valparaiso.

NORTH BRITAIN (2) (1909-1932)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 125631 3,676gt 105.6 x 15.5 metres

T.3 Cyl.

24.9.1907 launched, 10.1907 completed by Bartram & Sons Ltd., Sunderland Yard No. 209 as BALTIC EXCHANGE for A. Low, Son & Carter, London. 1909 sold to H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle renamed NORTH BRITAIN. 1932 sold to Latvian Shipping Co. renamed ARIJA. 1941 seized by Germans renamed WARTHELAND. 12.12.1944 bombed and sunk at Daviken, Nordfjord.

NORTH CAMBRIA (2) (1915-1918)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 125636 3,577gt 348.5 x 49.5 feet (106.2 x 15.1 metres)

T.3 Cyl. by Richardson Westgarth & Company, Middleton, Hartlepool

28.8.1907 launched, 10.1907 completed by Furness, Withy & Co. Ltd., Middleton, West Hartlepool Yard No. 305 as CALCUTTA for s.s. Calcutta Co. Ltd. (Nelson, Donkin & Co.), London. 1915 sold to H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle renamed NORTH CAMBRIA. 1.8.1918 sunk in collision on passage New York for La Pallice with railway material.

NORTH WALES (3) (1915-1916)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 129056 4,072gt 96.2 x 15.5 metres

T.3 Cyl.

27.10.1909 launched, 12.1909 completed by J.L. Thompson & Sons, Sunderland Yard No. 469 as WAKEFIELD for Harris & Dixon, London. 1915 sold to H. Roberts & Son, Newcastle renamed NORTH WALES. 26.10.1916 torpedoed and sunk by German submarine off Scilly Isles, 30 lives lost.

NORTH ANGLIA (2) (1922-1933)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 128512 3,562gt 362.3 x 51 feet (110.4 x 15.5 metres)

T.3 Cyl. by North East Marine Engineering, Sunderland

24.5.1910 launched, 7.1910 completed by Craig, Taylor & Co., Stockton on Tees Yard No. 135 as BIDEFORD for Tatem Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. (W. J. Tatem & Co.), Cardiff. 1918 transferred to Atlantic Shipping & Trading Co. Ltd. (W. J. Tatem & Co.), Cardiff. 1922 sold to North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle renamed NORTH ANGLIA. 1933 sold to M. A. Embiricos, Andros, Greece renamed CORINTHIAKOS. 20.11.1942 torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U.181 when 56 miles ESE of Inhace Light (25.42S 33.27E) on passage Lourenço Marques for Aden with coal.

NORTH CORNWALL (1) (1924-1940)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 148058 4,304gt, 7,710dwt 116.1 x 15.9 metres

T.3 Cyl. by John Readhead and Sons Ltd., South Shields

21.2.1924 launched, 3.1924 completed by John Readhead and Sons Ltd., South Shields Yard No. 474 as NORTH CORNWALL for North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 15.4.1940 scuttled at Narvik.

NORTH DEVON (1) (1924-1950)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 148096 3,658gt, 6,510dwt 109.7 x 15.2 metres

T.3 Cyl. by John Readhead and Sons Ltd., South Shields

1.9.1924 launched, 10.1924 completed by John Readhead and Sons Ltd., South Shields Yard No. 477 as NORTH DEVON for North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 1950 sold to G.D. Chalkias renamed AGHIOS SPYRIDON. 1952 sold to Apostolpaul renamed THEOFOROS. 1956 sold to Potamianos Bros renamed LENKO. 1958 sold to Sapap renamed AIS GIANNIS. 15.5.1960 broken up at Yawata.

NORTH BRITAIN (3) (1940-1943)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 165801 4,635gt 123.6 x 16.3 metres

T.3 Cyl. by North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. Ltd., Newcastle

16.9.1940 launched, 11.1940 completed by John Readhead and Sons Ltd., South Shields Yard No. 519 as NORTH BRITAIN for North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 5.5.1943 torpedoed and sunk by German submarine U.707 on voyage Glasgow to Halifax with firebricks and fireclay, 34 lives lost.

NORTH ANGLIA (3) (1946-1960)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 168923 6,966gt, 10,214dwt 134.1 x 17.4 metres

T.3 Cyl. by North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. Ltd., Newcastle

28.7.1941 launched, 9.1941 completed by Short Bros., Sunderland Yard No. 467 as EMPIRE WYCLIF for Ministry of War Transport, managed by Dene Shipping Co. 1942 managed by Hugh Roberts & Son. 1946 sold to North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle renamed NORTH ANGLIA. 1960 sold to Mariner Shipping Co., Hong Kong renamed HAPPY MARINER. 1962 sold to Ideal Shipping Co, Hong Kong. 1965 sold to Isis Shipping Co., Nassau. 1966 sold to Vanguard Shipping Co., Hong Kong. 1.2.1967 broken up at Hirohata.

NORTH BRITAIN (4) (1948-1962)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 169523 7,200gt, 10,000dwt 136.5 x 17.1 metres

T.3 Cyl. by Duncan Stewart & Co. Ltd., Glasgow

18.4.1945 launched, 18.6.1945 completed by Lithgows Ltd., Port Glasgow Yard No. 1005 as EMPIRE CYPRUS for Ministry of War Transport (managed by Charlton, McAllum & Co.). 1947 managed by Hugh Roberts & Son. 1948 sold to North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle renamed NORTH BRITAIN. 1962 sold to United China Shipping, Hong Kong renamed JESSELTON BAY. 2.4.196 broken up at Kaohsiung.

NORTH CAMBRIA (3) (1950-1951)

Steel single screw cargo steam ship

O.N. 169580 7,127gt, 10.330dwt 134.6 x 17.4 metres

T.3 Cyl. by John Inglis Co. Ltd., Toronto

8.6.1943 completed by Burrard Dry Dock Co. Ltd., North Vancouver, BC Yard No. 148 as FORT BELL for Canadian Government transferred to Ministry of War Transport manager Dene Shipping Co. Ltd., London. 1950 sold to North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle renamed NORTH CAMBRIA. 1951 sold to Nihonkai Kisen K.K., Tokyo renamed CANADA MARU. 1965 sold to T. Takebayashi, Tokyo renamed TENYO MARU. 1965 sold to Asahi Kaiun KK, Osaka renamed ASAHI MARU. 2.1969 broken up at Sakaide.

NORTH CORNWALL (2) (1954-1959)

Steel single screw cargo motor ship

O.N. 169264 5,571gt 138.5 x 17.9 metres

Oil engine by North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. Ltd., Newcastle

18.5.1954 launched, 9.1954 completed by Bartram & Sons Ltd., Sunderland Yard No. 344 as NORTH CORNWALL for North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 1959 sold to Nigerian National Line Ltd., Lagos renamed ODUDUWA. 1974 sold to Castrenza Cia Naviera SA renamed NANINA. 1977 sold to Stravon Cia Naviera SA renamed ANASTASIA V. 28.4.1979 broken up at Sevilla.

NORTH DEVON (2) (1958-1967)

Steel single screw cargo motor ship

O.N. 186875 IMO 5256862 7,905gt, 11,450dwt 140.2 x 18.3 metres

Oil engine by North Eastern Marine Engineering Co. Ltd., Newcastle

21.1.1958 launched, 13.5.1958 completed by Bartram & Sons Ltd., Sunderland Yard No. 367 as NORTH DEVON for North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle. 1964 company sold to Common Bros. 1967 sold to Argo Cia Naviera SA, Monrovia, Liberia renamed ARMONIKOS. 1971 sold to Armonikos Shipping Co. Ltd., Famagusta, Cyprus. 1977 sold to Dashwood Shipping Co. SA, Piraeus, Greece renamed PANAGIS S. 11.10.1978 damaged by fire at Drapetzona. 19.6.1979 broken up at Split.

NORTH CAMBRIA (4) (1960-1963)

Steel single screw cargo motor ship

182924 7,328gt 10,300dwt 454 x 58.3 x 25.5 feet (138.6 x 17.8 metres)

4 Cyl. Doxford Oil 2SA by D. Rowan & Co. Ltd., Glasgow

21.10.1948 launched, 12.1948 completed by Lithgows Ltd., Port Glasgow Yard No. 1038 as SCOTTISH TRADER for Trader Navigation Company (Bunge & Co), London. 1960 sold to North Shipping Co. Ltd. (H. Roberts & Son), Newcastle renamed NORTH CAMBRIA. 1963 sold to A. Vergottis renamed BANNERCLIFF. 1970 sold to S.A. Daifas renamed SILVER COAST. 1973 sold to D. Kalkassinas renamed GRANIKOS. 13.10.1973 damaged by fire and explosion at Nuevitas, beached and scrapped at Santand

End

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References: Various North Shipping Company archival literature / Miramar / Travel of the Tramps, twenty Tramp fleets Vol. II - N.L. Middlemiss, Shield Publication