

John I. Jacobs & Co Ltd. – London.

Commentary by Geoff Walker

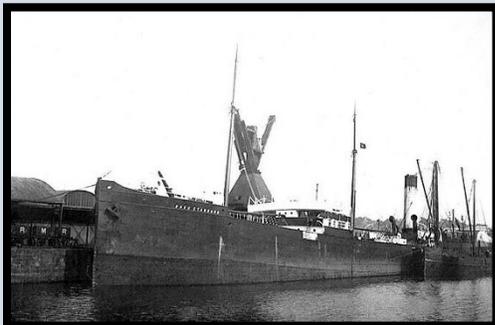


John I. Jacobs and Company belonged to a family from Swansea, of Jewish decent, hence the Star of David being very prominent in their house flag. In 1880 they relocated their seat of business to London but throughout their years in shipping the family always maintained a close connection with the Welsh coal port and registered many of their ships in Swansea. John I. Jacobs became a limited company in 1905.

Initially Jacobs had established himself with a fleet of barques, owning 12 vessels between 1880 and 1905. One of the main trades in which Jacobs involved his sailing vessels was to Argentina. The two largest barques were **“Magwen”** and **“Rollo”**, the latter built on the Clyde in 1876 and owned for twenty years from 1890 until sold as the last owned sailing ship in 1910. The **“Swansea Castle”** and her sister **“Windsor Castle”** built in 1874 and 1875 respectively, were two more members of his sailing ship fleet.

Jacobs’ first two steamships were acquired in 1905 and rapidly converted to tankers for carrying bulk Molasses, principally from Cuba. Both ships were Tyne-built, **“Oakwood”** coming from the Northumberland yard at Howdon, in 1903 and purchased from the Lingham Timber & Trading Co. Ltd. of London. The other was much older, having been built as **“Restitution”** in 1885 at the Neptune yard of Wigham Richardson Ltd. and was purchased from R. Conaway & Company, Liverpool.

A serious expansion of the molasses fleet took place during early 1911 when four tankers were purchased from the European Petroleum Company of London, namely, **“Batoum”**, **“Baku Standard”**, **“Broadmayne”** and **“Vedra”**. One of Jacobs’ original steamers **“Restitution”** was then sold to the Southern Sealing & Whaling Co. Ltd., for the carriage of Antarctic whale oil, but she foundered in 1916 during a passage from Liverpool to the southern whaling grounds.



The 3,708grt **“Baku Standard”** built in 1893 by Armstrong Mitchell at Low Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne. She was torpedoed and sunk in February 1918, by UC-58, 6 nautical miles south of Stonehaven with the loss of 24 crewmembers.

(Unknown photographer)

Progressively, over ensuing years, John I. Jacobs introduced a name convention for his ships, using **“Wood”** as a suffix Two new tanker companies were registered, Associated Oil Carriers Ltd. and Oil &

Molasses Tankers Ltd., the latter to own "**Weehawken**" of 1891, purchased in April 1911 from the Anglo-American Oil Co. Ltd. Another two tramps were converted into tankers during 1912, these were the Laing-built **Indradeo** completed in August 1902 and purchased as **Falls of Momess** and renamed "**Teakwood**" after conversion; and **Saint Dunstan** built by Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson Ltd. in 1900 for Saint Line Ltd. and renamed "**Beechwood**", following her conversion.

By this time the company had relocated to more appropriate offices at 10, Mark Lane, London EC. Their fleet of eight tankers was heavily occupied with carrying molasses cargoes, but the approach of WW1 was to see them used to carry fuel oil and gasoline. Sadly, half of the Jacobs' tanker fleet was lost during the war years., mostly to German U-boat torpedo attacks.

The dry-cargo tramp "**Tiverton**" was purchased during the war from Steel, Young & Company of London, and was converted into a tanker in 1920. Three dry-cargo tramps were managed during the war for the Page Shipping Co. Ltd. of Cardiff, as **Corinth**, **Mary Baird**, and **Carmelite**. The latter had been built on the Wear in 1892 as **Clan Macrae** for Clan Line, but unfortunately all three became war losses. **Vedra** stranded on Walney Island.

The interim years between WW1 and WW2 saw the tanker fleet was boosted, in 1927 by the delivery of the first purpose-built tanker "**Teakwood**" (2) of 9,500 dwt from the Armstrong yard on the Tyne.



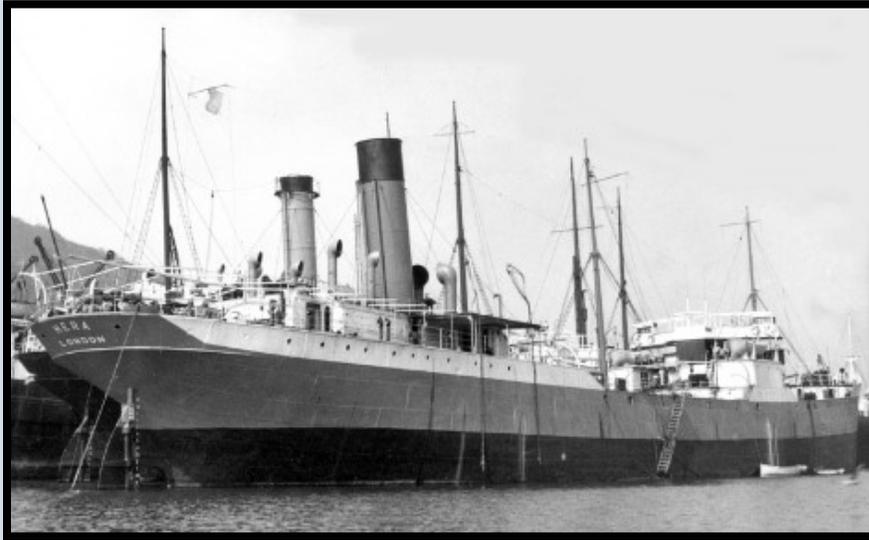
The 6,014grt "**Teakwood**" was built in 1927 by Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. She endured a long career for a tanker, finally going for demolition in September 1955, at Briton Ferry, by T.W. Ward,

(John B. Hill collection)

Two larger twin-screw motor tankers were then completed in 1929/30 as "**Laurelwood**" of 11,250 dwt from the Armstrong yard and the "**Longwood**" of greater length and 14,230 dwt from the Laing yard on the Wear. The ex-American tanker "**Hera**" built in 1912 at Greenock was purchased in 1927 and retained her name, having been built for the Deutsche-Amerika Petroleum Gas. and ceded in 1919 to the U.S.A. as war reparations.

A fleet of six tankers at the beginning of the 1930s Depression were split equally between the two companies, Oil & Molasses Tankers Ltd. and Molasses & General Transport Co. Ltd., the latter company set up in 1924. Some of the ships were used on the bulk petrol trade to Cape Town, but "**Hera**" was laid-up at Dartmouth in September 1930, until sold for scrap in June 1937 and others of the fleet had to be withdrawn from service.

The old, converted tankers "**Beechwood**" and "**Tiverton**" had been laid-up for years on the Tyne and were sent for scrap, The "**Beechwood**" being broken up at Rosyth in February 1934 while "**Tiverton**" was scrapped at Gateshead in early 1934.



The old Jacobs', ex-American tanker, "**Hera**", 4,705 GRT was built in 1912 by Grangemouth and Greenock Dockyard.

Following 7 years of layup, at Dartmouth, finally in June 1937 she was sent to Newport to be broken up.

(John B. Hill collection)



The 25,604dwt tanker "**Laurelwood**" was built in 1969 by Doxfords, Sunderland. In 1975 she joined Mobil Shipping and was renamed "**Saucon**" and in 1983 she became "**Seapride**". In 1986 she was sold and renamed "**Leonis**" and in 1992 she became the "**Tuscania**". In November 1999 she arrived at Alang for demolition.

(Chris Howell)



One of the last new buildings **MT "Hollywood"**, a products tanker, built for J.I. Jacobs in 1970, 15,098 GRT, 25,604 DWT. Pictured at speed, whilst transiting the very placid Malacca Straits.

(Chris Howell collection)

The vessel was under contract to Mobil Oil (Singapore) Pvt Ltd., at the time transporting marine and aviation spirits from the Gulf and taking it to Australia, New Zealand, South

Pacific, Guam, Aden, Port Sudan, Massawa, etc. 1977 sold to Elthaco Cia Nav, Panama renamed **Dafni C.** 1978 sold to Crestar Cia Maritima, Greece and renamed **Captain X. Kyriakou.** In 1980 again sold to Essar Shipping, India and renamed **Nand Kavita**, 1993 finally sent for demolition.

Ocean freight rates for oil and molasses improved prior to those for dry-cargoes, and the fleet of four new tankers were fully employed from 1934 onwards. During WW2 the four Jacobs tankers were requisitioned by the Admiralty and made important contributions to the war effort carrying fuel. **"Teakwood"** was hit by a torpedo near the Isles of Scilly, in September 1939 but was only slightly damaged, **"Longwood"** was damaged by a torpedo in January 1942, off Colombo, and the **"Rosewood"** was torpedoed in the Atlantic south of Iceland, in 1943 whilst in a in convoy, during a severe gale, sadly with the loss of all 33 lives on board.

Two new cargo tramps joined the fleet in 1940 from the Laing yard as **"Beechwood"** (2) and **"Glenwood"**, with the former becoming a war loss in August 1942 off West Africa while carrying general cargo from Haifa and Lourenco Marques, to the U.K. She had earlier been damaged by bombs and gunfire from aircraft three miles E of Smiths Knoll Light Vessel while on a voyage from the Tyne to Gibraltar with coal, fortunately being kept afloat solely by the use of the ship's pumps to stem the ingress of seawater, and was diverted to the Thames for discharge of her cargo, and for repairs.



The 18,045 DWT **"RFA Pearleaf"** was built in 1960 by Blythwood Shipbuilding at Scotstoun. In 1986 she was sold to Petrostar Ltd. of Saudi Arabia and renamed **"Nejmat El Petrol XIX"**. In 1993 she arrived at Gadani Beach for demolition by M. Nasir Trading Co.

(Chris Howell)

A sister of the designated 'Wave' class of Admiralty refueling tankers was completed in August 1945 for Oil & Molasses Tankers Ltd. as **"Beechwood"** (3) to give a fleet

of four tankers and two dry-cargo tramps in the early post-war years. The last dry-cargo tramp **"Valewood"** was sold in 1949, and the tanker fleet was then built up by the addition of eight new

tankers and one purchased tanker over the next decade. The new tankers were **"Rosewood"** built 1947, **"Hollywood"** built 1951, **"Sandalwood"** built 1952, **"Laurelwood"** built in 1953, and the **"Oakwood"** built in 1954, **"Beechwood"** (4) built in 1957, and **"Regent Falcon"** in 1959 for long-term charter to the Regent Petroleum Co. Ltd. Also, the **"Pearleaf"** built 1960, which was chartered to the Admiralty for 26 years, before being sold in 1986 to Saudi Arabian owners as a storage vessel. In 1959 the tanker **"Laurelwood"** was also chartered by Admiralty and renamed **"Cherryleaf"** and was sold at the end of her 7 years charter, to Greek interests.

By the early 1960s company tanker fleet had risen to 8 tankers, at which time 3 dry-cargo tramps and bulkers were ordered from the Laing yard in Sunderland. The tramp was the **"Teakwood"** (3) of 12,850 dwt, with the traditional 5 holds, was delivered in 1962. **"Rosewood"** (3) of 15,575 dwt joined in 1963 and a bulker **"Oakwood"** (3) of 35,000 dwt joined in 1965. J.I Jacobs had a close working relationship with Silver Line, through one of their directors, serving on both Company boards, hence the newly built chemical tanker **"Silvermerlin"** of 1,875 dwt was chartered to Silver Chemical Tankers Ltd. in 1968. The Doxford built tanker **"North Sands"** of 68,000 dwt completed in 1966 was managed from delivery on behalf of her new owners.



The sleek looking 10,694 GRT **"Rosewood"** was built in 1963 by Sir James Laing at Deptford Yard. In 1968 she was sold to Scindia SN Co. and renamed **"Jalagirija"**. In February 1985 she arrived at Calcutta for demolition by Chaudhary Shipbreaking Co.

(Malcolm Cranfield)

Mr. Harry Otto Kohl, a J.I. Jacobs director, was also a director of Silver Line, which was a wholly owned subsidiary of Dene Shipping Co. Ltd. They had constructed 4 ore-carriers during 1958/60 for its subsidiaries St. Helen's Shipping Co. Ltd. and Bishopsgate Shipping Co. Ltd., each with a 15-year, iron ore charter to BISCO. In 1969, two of these were transferred to the ownership of John I. Jacobs & Co. Ltd., with **"Silvercrag"** and **"Bishopsgate"** being renamed **"Cherrywood"** and **"Beechwood"**, respectively. Both retained their long-term charter to BISCO. In post-war years the company had expanded its traditional role as London tanker brokers, a role for which the company will be remembered, and which continued until the early 1980s.

Two new Wear-built tankers, **"Laurelwood"** (3) and **"Hollywood"** (2) of 25,200 dwt, joined the tanker fleet in 1970. The fleet in 1975 consisted of four tankers, one ore-carrier, the new Italian-built bulker **"Rosewood"** (4) of 25,500 dwt and a chemical tanker.

A very large tanker of 140,900 dwt was on order at the Gotaverken yard in Gothenburg and was given the traditional name of **"Teakwood"** (4) while building. However, due to the oil crisis in 1973 it soon became apparent she would be unprofitable to operate in her original role and she was sold to Algeria and completed as **"In Amenas"**. She was then converted to an F.P.S.O. in the Ruby offshore oilfield producing oil off Vietnam as **"Knock Davie"** owned by Fred. Olsen's Red Band Tankers. In 1998 she was sold to Nortrans Offshore Vietnam Ltd. as **"Ruby Princess"** and was broken up at Xinhui in 2010.

The tanker companies of the **John I. Jacobs Group** were then wound up in the period during 1975/77, with the 7-year-old tanker **"Hollywood"** (2) the last to go in 1977 when sold to Greek interests, having been laid-up at Tilbury since December 1976.

The long-serving RFA Tanker **"Pearleaf"** was able to continue her Admiralty charter by transferring her to a new company, Jacobs & Partners Ltd. Later, with the assistance of finance from Sven Salen of Sweden, a seventeen-strong fleet of coasters of up 1,500 dwt was then built up over the next decade commencing in 1983. All were given 'Hoo' prefixes to their names after the village near Rochester in Kent and were operated by R. Laphorn & Co. Ltd. of Rochester, who already had a fleet of similar gearless low air draft coasters and had been in the coastal trades business since 1963. There was also diversification into offshore work, as well as two passenger launches capable of carrying a maximum of 299 passengers and given the traditional names of Hollywood and Rosewood, for operating on the River Thames.

John H. Jacobs was the last family Chairman when he retired at the Annual General Meeting in 1994, and the coasters were sold to Laphorn and Company, during 1996.

The group did continue in different directions, under new leadership, but had withdrawn from ship owning and operating by 2006, when finally sold.



(Malcolm Cranfield)

John I.Jacobs & Co. Ltd.' s 1968 Lodose (Sweden) built chemical tanker **"Silvermerlin"** passing Portishead, inbound for Avonmouth in January 1970. In 1983 she went to Buries Markes Ltd. In 1988 she was renamed **"Sandmartin"**(of seamartin Tankers Ltd. I.O.M) and in 1992 reverted to **"Silvermerlin"**. During 1994 she became **"Arun"** and in 1996 **"Ferman Gold"** when sold to Turkish interests. Sent for demolition at Aliaga in February 2001.

End

References: J.I. Jacobs Corporate Archives, Silver Line and Dene Shipping Archives, ST&Y Archives, various online data available in the public Domain, from which additional information may have been sourced.

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