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Swan Hunter's giant cranes have sailed from the Tyne taking with them the last hope of one of the world's most famous shipyards. More than 1,600 ships were built at the Wallsend yard, including around 400 Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels. The long tradition of fine workmanship dates back to 1841 and the company also built up a worldwide reputation for equipping foreign navies. But Swan's last order for two RFA troopships ended in humiliation three years ago. The £160 million contract for the Largs Bay and the Lyme Bay was announced in 2000 and heralded the return of shipbuilding to Swan Hunter's.

Five years earlier, the company had gone into receivership before being rescued by multi-millionaire Dutchman Jaap Kroese. But the return of shipbuilding was short-lived. The cost of the Largs Bay and Lyme Bay rapidly spiralled to £309 (\$618) million and, in 2006, the Ministry of Defence finally pulled the plug resulting in 800 workers losing their jobs.

While the Largs Bay had already been finished, the Lyme Bay was towed out of the Tyne and taken up to the BAE Systems yard on the Clyde for completion. Unable to find fresh orders, Mr Kroese was forced to sell the yard's cranes to Indian shipbuilders Bharati. The five cranes included the 90-year-old Titan 111. Weighing a total of 12,000 tonnes, they were loaded onto a specialist heavy-lifting vessel, the Osprey, in a complex operation which took months of planning and required dredging the river bed.

The Osprey's middle section was submerged 50 feet so the floating dry dock and cranes could be loaded on to it at the Port of Tyne's Riverside Quay. Mike Nicholson, harbour master at the Port of Tyne, said: "It has a complex operation but the considerable time and effort expended in planning was well rewarded as the move went off without a hitch. As far as we are aware another Tyne record was broken on the day of the load out, in that at some 15.6m or more than 50ft draft, the Osprey was the deepest vessel we have ever had on the Tyne. This was only possible due to recent investment in deepening our existing facilities to handle the increasing volumes of cargo at the port."

Tom Brennan, regional secretary of the GMB union, who also worked at the yard for more than 20 years, said: "It's the final nail in the coffin. This is the end of a fabulous facility and it is a massive loss to the area. I'm devastated. There is a romantic connection to shipbuilding on the Tyne. Most families will have a member who used to work in the shipyards, everyone will know someone who worked in the ships. This is a very emotional time for people on Tyneside. The ships which were built at Swan Hunter, for the MoD, were some of the best ever built."

Ships built at Swan Hunter included:

The RMS Carpathia.

When the Carpathia was built at Swan Hunter, the workers could have no idea of the part she would play in one of history's most tragic events. The transatlantic passenger steamship was built for Cunard and was launched at the Wallsend yard on 6 August, 1902. The Carpathia weighed 8,600 tons and was 541ft long and 64.5ft in breadth. She set out on her maiden Atlantic voyage from Liverpool to Boston on 5 May, 1903, before beginning a regular service between New York and various Mediterranean ports.

The Carpathia was not a luxury vessel, instead being built to carry 200 second and 1,500 third class passengers. Some of the passengers were accommodated in cabins but the majority slept in dormitories. And so the Carpathia would have remained a relatively unremarkable liner, had it not been the events of the night of 14 April, 1912. She was sailing East from New York bound for Gibraltar when her wireless operator received a distress call from the Titanic.

It was 4am before the Carpathia reached the survivors but crew members were able to rescue 705 people from the waters. Incredibly, that was not to be the end of the drama for the vessel. During the First World War, she was used as a troopship, carrying American soldiers across the Atlantic. On the morning of 17 July,

1918, while returning to America, she was torpedoed off the West coast of Ireland. Five crewmen were killed but the remaining 218 passengers and crew managed to escape in lifeboats and were rescued by the Royal Navy corvette HMS Snowdrop later that day. The wreck of the Carpathia was discovered in 500ft of water in 1999.

The Mauretania.  
The Mauretania was built for the Cunard Line, whose owners were keen to boast the world's fastest liner. The company had lost the Blue Riband to the German liner Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse in 1897. The British government was also concerned by the German's growing naval threat and lent Cunard £2.6 million to build the Mauretania and her sister ship the Lusitania.

The liner took two years to build and huge crowds lined the banks of the Tyne to see the Duchess of Roxburgh launch the Mauretania on 20 September, 1906. The liner's four steam turbines made by Parsons engineering plant in Newcastle - were hailed as a revolutionary development and were capable of generating 68,000 horsepower, later increased to 90,000. The Mauretania had a crew of 938 and was capable of carrying 2,165 passengers, split between first, second and third class.

She commenced her maiden voyage on 16 November 1934, sailing from Liverpool to New York. In September, 1909, the Mauretania captured the Blue Riband for the fastest westbound crossing - a record that was to stand for more than 20 years. During the First World War, the liner was used to carry troops. She also served as a hospital ship. In 1934, Cunard withdrew the Mauretania from service. Her last voyage was from New York to Plymouth, Cherbourg and Southampton on 26 September. The next year, she was scrapped at Rosyth, in Scotland.

The Franconia and Laconia.  
In 1909, Cunard placed an order with Swan Hunter for two liners. The 18,150-ton Franconia was launched on 23 July, 1910. She set out on her maiden voyage between Liverpool, Queenstown and New York on 25 February, 1911. The 18,099-ton Laconia was launched six months later. Her maiden voyage began on 20 January, 1912 and took her from Liverpool to Boston and New York.

Both ships had twin-screw, eight cylinder quadruple expansion engines and were capable of reaching 17 knots. They were used to carry emigrants across the Atlantic, mainly from the Mediterranean to New York. Both vessels were capable of carrying 2,850 passengers.

Both the Franconia and the Laconia were used as troopships during the First World War. The Franconia was based in the Mediterranean, where was used as a hospital ship, treating soldiers wounded in the Gallipoli campaign. On 14 October, 1916, the Franconia was around 200 miles East of Malta on route for Salonica, when she was torpedoed and sunk. Of the 314 people on board, 12 were killed. Meanwhile, the Laconia had been turned into an armed merchant cruiser. She was based at Simons Town in South Africa and used as a headquarters ship for the operations to capture German East Africa, now known as Tanzania.

The Laconia was handed back to Cunard in July 1916 and she resumed her Liverpool to New York service. On 25 February, 1917, she was torpedoed by the German U-50 six miles northwest by west of Fastnet. Of the 292 passengers and crew, 12 were killed. The victims included American citizens and the tragedy was one of a number of factors which helped persuade the United States to enter the war.

HMS Edinburgh.  
One of the best-known warships built at Swan Hunter was the Town-class light cruiser HMS Edinburgh. Her sinking on 2 May 1942 would make history, due to a huge amount of gold she was carrying when she went to the bottom of the ice-cold Barents Sea. HMS Edinburgh was ordered in 1936 and launched on 31 March, 1938, with the workers managing to finish the order on 6 July 1938.

Her armour was fairly light, measuring less than five inches on the main belt and just one and a half inches at its thinnest point. Light cruisers were intended to be fast enough to avoid being hit, negating the need for immensely

thick armour like that found on the battleships of the day. HMS Edinburgh had a standard weight of 10,635 tons and a fully-loaded weight of 13,175 tons and was 613ft long, with a beam of 63ft. She had a crew of 750 and was capable of a top speed of 33 knots. With a fuel capacity of 2,375 tons, she was capable of traveling 9,800 nautical miles at a speed of 15 knots. Her Parsons- geared turbines and four shafts were capable of generating 75,000 horsepower. HMS Edinburgh was armed with 12 six-inch guns in triple turrets, as well as 12 four-inch guns and two octuple-mount two-pounder guns, eight half-inch Vickers machine guns and six 21-inch torpedo tubes. She also carried two Supermarine Walrus amphibian biplanes, which were used for reconnaissance.

After serving in the North Atlantic and taking part in the Arctic Convoys, she was torpedoed by a German u-boat near Bear Island on 30 April, 1942. She was seriously damaged and 58 crew members were killed. She attempted to limp back to Murmask but was harried by German torpedo bombers over the next two days. HMS Edinburgh was carrying four and a half tons of gold which was payment from the Russians for American weapons. Her crew were scared the cargo might fall into the hands of the Germans and, on May 2, with the crew safely evacuated, orders were given for the minesweeper HMS Harrier to shell the cruiser, sending her 800ft to the bottom. The gold she was carrying was believed to be worth around £1.5 million at the time.

Attempts to salvage the cargo after the war were hindered by the fact that HMS Edinburgh had been designated a war grave. In 1981, a company called Jessop Marine, run by seasoned diver Keith Jessop, won the contract for the salvage rights to the wreck of the Edinburgh. Jessop won the contract because his methods, involving complex cutting machinery and divers, were deemed more appropriate for a war grave, compared to the explosives-oriented methods of other companies. Using the survey ship Dammtor, the team was able to locate the wreck and recover most of the gold ingots which were then valued at £43 million.

**HMS Anson.**

HMS Anson, which was launched at Swan Hunter on 24 February, 1940, was one of five King George V Class battleships built to fight the Germans.

As extra equipment was fitted, HMS Anson eventually reached 45,360 tons which was 160 tons heavier than HMS Hood. HMS Anson measured 744ft in length, with a beam of 103ft and was incredibly well-protected, with her main belt armour measuring 14.7 inches deep. She was capable of a speed of nearly 28 knots. With a fuel oil capacity of 4, 210 tons, HMS Anson was capable of sailing 6,100 nautical miles at 10 knots. The battleship was powered by four sets of Parsons geared turbines and four three-bladed propellers, capable of generating 110,300 horsepower. She was equipped with 10 14-inch guns, split between a twin-turret forward and two quadruple turrets, one forward and one aft. The battleship was also armed with 16 five-and-a-quarter inch guns in eight mountings amidships, with four on each side.

HMS Anson became operational in 1942. Her first task was to provide distant cover for the Arctic Convoys, which continued through to mid-1943, when she mainly involved in moves against the Tirpitz in Norway and to deceive the Germans into believing that there would be landings in Scandinavia. On 25 April 1945, she was dispatched to join the British Pacific Fleet. Incredibly, she was the only one of the five King George V Class battleships never to fire her guns in anger. On 29 August, she arrived in Hong Kong, where her crew accepted the Japanese surrender and helped mop up resistance and restore order. She was finally paid off in November 1949, being towed to the Gareloch in Scotland, where she was mothballed. In April 1957 it was decreed that all four surviving KGV battleships would be scrapped and Anson was towed the short distance to Faslane, and broken up.

**The Supertankers.**

Swan Hunter was the first shipyard in the world to construct vessels weighing more than 250,000 tons on a slipway. The Esso Northumbria was

the first of seven super-tankers designed to carry huge quantities of oil The famous photographs of the gigantic structures dwarfing neighbouring terraced houses went all around the world and added to the company's reputation for taking on huge challenges. The 253,000 ton Esso Northumbria measured 1,143ft in length and 170ft in width. She cost £6.5 million to build.  
She was launched on 2 May, 1969, with the ceremony performed by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne. Tens of thousands of people lined the banks of the Tyne to see the 1,143ft-long vessel sail out of the River on 8 February, 1970. She was powered by geared turbines connected to a single screw and she was capable of carrying 250,000 tonnes of oil at a speed of 15 knots from the Persian Gulf to the UK. Meanwhile, her sister ship Esso Hibernia was launched on 6 April, 1970. One of the Hibernia's claims to fame is a brief appearance in the cult movie Get Carter. The giant super-tanker can be seen in the background as Michael Caine gets caught up in a gun battle with gangsters.  
In 1973, Swan Hunter took over Palmers Dock at Hebburn. By now, the workforce was around 11,500. Other supertankers followed, in the shape of the London Lion, World Unicorn and Windsor Pride and all around the 250,000 ton mark. But the biggest was yet to come. On 6 October, 1975, the Tyne Pride, Swan's seventh super-tanker was launched. At 262,222 tones, she was the largest vessel ever made on the Tyne. The Tyne Pride was 1,127 feet in length and 86ft in depth with a beam of 170ft. But a global slump in demand for oil in the mid 70s, combined with fears of a major disaster due to the vessels being single-hulled led to a fall-off in demand for the supertankers and, by the early 1980s, most of them had been scrapped.  
HMS Illustrious and Ark Royal.  
HMS Illustrious and Ark Royal are Illustrious-class carriers and were both built at Swan Hunter. HMS Illustrious was ordered on May 14, 1976 and launched on December 1, 1981. With a displacement of 20,600 tons, it is 194 metres long, with a beam of 36 metres and a draught of 7.5 metres. HMS Illustrious is powered by four Rolls Royce Olympus TM3B gas turbines and is capable of sailing at 28 knots. The vessel has a crew of 685. It carries two Sea Harrier FA2 and two Harrier GR7 aircraft, as well as a Sea King helicopter and Merlin helicopter. The Ark Royal was ordered on December 14, 1978 and launched on June 2, 1981.