

## The Stories of shipping lines Elder, Dempster and Elders & Fyffes

by Kelvin Holmes

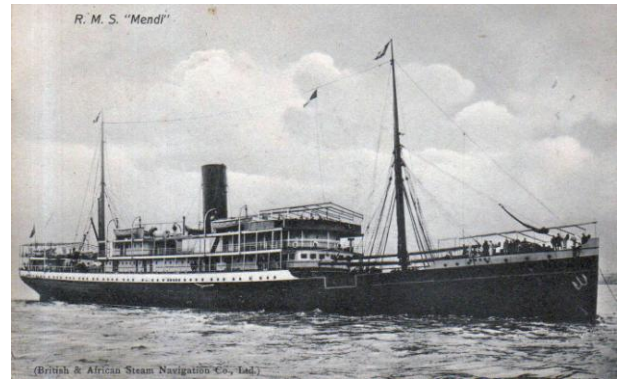
(as published in the 1/1200-1250 'Waterlines' column in Marine Modelling International magazine February/March 2017)

This month and next we return to a 'merchant' theme with a look at two associated British shipping lines namely Elder Dempster and offshoot Elders & Fyffes. In 1852 the award of a government mail contract for the UK to West Africa to one McGregor Laird led to the formation of the African Steam Ship Company. The route was to be London, Plymouth and onwards to West Africa and of course return. In 1856 the initial UK point of departure was moved to Liverpool and this was re-enforced by a new seven year contract in 1858. The Company's agents in Liverpool were W&H Laird but by 1863 changes in personnel and ownership caused the firm to become known as Fletcher and Parr. Working in the offices at this time were four individuals key to this story namely John Dempster, John Holt, Alfred Jones and Alexander Elder although the latter left in 1866 to join the Board of Trade.



Sobo 1899 operated by the African SS Co

In 1868 a competing concern, the British & African Steam Navigation Company, was established with the intention of running from Glasgow, via Liverpool to West Africa. Needing an agency in Liverpool the new company appointed John Dempster who in turn recruited Alexander Elder from the Board of Trade setting up Elder, Dempster & Co. By 1877 the fleet strengths of the two companies were eight for African and twelve for British & African. The following year Alfred Jones set up his own company in competition with the two lines. After a short two years Jones his company merged with Elder, Dempster & Co who in 1880 became the managers (rather than just agents) of the British & African with an eighteen strong fleet. In 1884 messrs Elder and Dempster retired leaving Alfred Jones at the helm. At this time it was decided that Elder, Dempster & Co should enter into ship ownership and the first vessel, the Clare, was purchased. She operated within the schedules of British & African and in full co-operation with the African SS Co in which Alfred Jones had become a major shareholder. In 1891 the latter company appointed Elder, Dempster & Co as their agents at which time ED's ships were transferred to British & African.



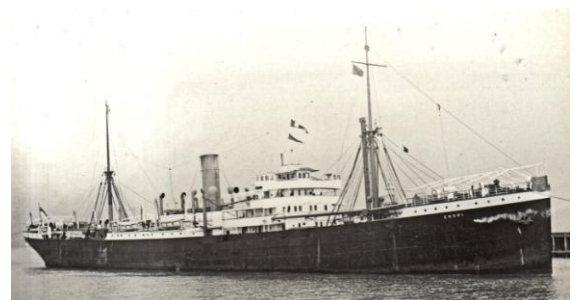
Mendi, 1905 of the British & African SN Co.

In 1899 Elder, Dempster Shipping Limited was established to operate a triangular route from New York to Liverpool then on to West Africa returning thereafter to New York. In May 1901 Elders and Fyffes Ltd was created and we will return to this story below. Another new route was to the West Indies and in 1901 the company were awarded the related mail contract to the disappointment of the Royal Mail Line and Owen Phillips. For the mail run the Imperial Direct West India Mail Service company was formed. In 1909 Alfred Jones died; this extraordinary man had been part owner of Elder, Dempster & Co, Elders & Fyffes, Harland & Wolff and manager of Ocean Transport Co. Ltd. His other business interests included banking, mining, ship building and even hotels. With no obvious successor it was decided to offer the whole empire for sale and the new owners were to be Owen Phillips (Royal Mail) and Lord Pirrie (of Harland & Wolff) who was also current chairman of the African SS Co. In 1910 the company was re-named Elder, Dempster & Co Ltd and comprised the African SS Co (with 24 ships),



Elder Dempster's Benue, 1905

British & African SN Co (36), Elder, Dempster & Co (15). Elder Dempster Shipping Ltd (26), Imperial Direct West India (5) and Cie Belge Maritime du Congo (3) giving a fleet total of 109. The West India mail company was wound up in 1912 when the contract was lost. World War One broke out in 1914 and by war's end twenty nine ships had been lost. Perhaps the oddest event was the capture of the Appam in January 1916 by the German raider Möwe; she was sailed to the US by a prize crew but subsequently returned to Elder, Dempster in 1917 becoming the Mandingo. Post-war the Möwe was handed over to Elders & Fyffes as the Greenbrier. The ED fleet was brought up to strength by the acquisition of wartime 'standard' ships such as the 'B's (of which there were 13) and N's (8). Perhaps the most unusual purchase was the former Glenapp which had been laid down in 1916 for the Imperial Russian Government; as Elder, Dempster's Aba the ship had a long and distinguished career until 1947.

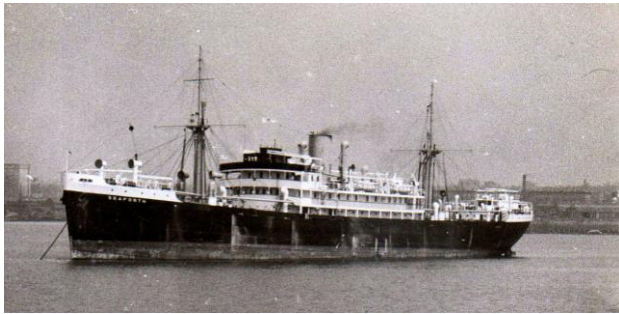


Egori, 1914, British & African African SN Co.



Elder Dempster's *Aba* serving as a hospital ship

By 1929 the Royal Mail Group which included Elder, Dempster was experiencing severe financial difficulties and in 1931 the Group collapsed. Out of the ruins a new Elder Dempster Lines Limited was established with Richard Holt as chairman and which by 1933 had shipping assets of 46 hulls, 15 of which were laid up and for sale. By 1936 the company was re-organised again as Elder Dempster Lines Holding Ltd and finally clear of all debts became a viable going concern. This was due in no small part to a majority share purchase by the Ocean Steam Ship Company (i.e. Holt's Blue Funnel) from when Holts became the managers. By 1939 the fleet comprised five small liners and 36 freighters plus four coasters which operated off West Africa. At war's end half the fleet had gone including all the liners although the elderly *Aba*, which even as a hospital ship had been twice bombed, managed to survive.



Elder Dempster's *Seaforth* of 1937

The post-war re-building programme included the liners *Accra* & *Apapa*, six S class, three ex Liberty ships and five former Canadian Park type. In 1947 the final ED liner, the *Aureol*, was ordered from Alex Stephen & Sons, Glasgow; completed in 1951 she served until 1974. 1952 brought the purchase of the British & Burmese SN Co adding ten ships plus five under construction to the fleet. In 1953 the company name was changed to Liner Holdings. The Ocean Steam Ship Company bought all remaining ED shares in January 1965 and in March acquired the Guinea Gulf Line. Although the latter's four ships were not wanted (and were sold) this acquisition gave the company a share in the West Africa Lines Conference together with Palm Line, Black Star

Line of Ghana, Nigerian National Shipping Line and Hoegh Line of Norway. Various Ocean SS Co. ships were given Guinea Gulf Line colours to participate in the Conference including six of the S class plus the more modern *Bhamo* (1957) and *Daru* (1958). The mid-60s saw the formation of African Container Express Ltd with ED part owners and the small Seaway Car Transportation Ltd subsidiary with its four vessels (latter sold off in the 1973). In 1967 Elder Dempster was fully integrated into a new company called Ocean Fleets Ltd which operated with two divisions known as Blue Funnel Line Ltd and Elder Dempster Lines Ltd.



Six ships of the S class were competed for ED in 1947/48



ED's *Accra* as completed in 1947 with a black hull

In 1972 the main company name was changed to the Ocean Transport and Trading Co Ltd and between 1973 and 1980 six small Polish built container ships entered EDL Ltd service as part of the Company's Specialised Shipping Division. Of these the *Sapele* was called up during the Falklands War of 1982. The Liner Shipping Division operated with the conventional non-containerised vessels of Blue Funnel, Elder Dempster and Glen which included eighteen Blue Funnel ships passed to Elder Dempster but retaining their original names, colours and indeed routes.

All had gone by 1978 but do provide scope for increasing the waterline model fleet. By 1986 the once substantial West African run was being serviced by just four Menelaus class heavy freighters in ED colours but with Blue Funnel names. Then in 1989 ED along with the Palm Line and Guinea Gulf Lines was sold to the French firm Société Navale Chargeurs Delmas-Vieljeux, although the ships were sold off separately. Thus ended Ocean Transport and Trading Co Ltd's involvement in ocean shipping.



ED's *Accra* in late 1949 with the grey hull



Elder Dempster/related Company 1/1200-1250 Models (see Part 2 next month for more information on the various manufacturers)

Ship	Built (depicted)	Model(s)	Notes
Aba	1918 (1921)	Nelson (NE) 25	black hull, 25a with grey hull; sold 1947, scrapped 1948
New Georgia	1919	Rhenania 63a	63b in British & African colours; Standard N type (class of 8); 4 sunk WW2, others scrapped by 1959
Accra	1926	NE-23 (LE re-issue)	Black hull, 23a with grey hull; sunk 1940 by U34
Apapa	1927	NE-24 (LE re-issue)	Black hull, 24a with grey hull; sunk 1940 by aircraft
David Livingstone	1930	Len Jordan (LJ) M81)	Class of 7, 5 sunk WW2, other 2 sold 1953
Mary Kingsley	1930	LJ M-108	Near sister of the above completed for heavy lift, sold 1954
Abosso	1935	AL-193a	Sunk 1942 by U575
Seaforth	1939	AL-192	Class of 3, 2 sunk WW2, Sobo scrapped 1963
Empire Ability	1931 (1941)	Hein Muck (HM) 48	ex Uhenfels (Hansa Line) captured 1939, sunk by U69 in 1941
Zungeru	1942 (1947)	LJ M-47	Ex Liberty ship, class of 3, sold 1958/59
Accra	1947	AL-261	Model with grey hull; sold and scrapped 1967
Apapa	1948	AL-261a	Also grey hull, AL-261b with black hull; sold 1968, scrapped 1975
Aureol	1951	LJ L-15	Sold 1974 becoming Marianna VI, laid up 1990 Piraeus
Eboe	1952	LJ M-61	Sister ship Ebani, Eboe sold as Giorgios in 1977, pair scrapped 77/78
Kentung	1954	WMS 16	British & Burmese SN Co (owned by ED), sold 1966, scrapped 1980
Calabar	1936 (1957)	LJ L-32	ex-Umtali of Bullard King bought by ED 1957; sold 1962, scrapped 1963
Daru	1958	LJ M-107	Sold 1979, scrapped 1982 (class of 6)
Clearway	1968 (1970)	Lynn 94	Ex Sealord Challenger, served 1969 to 1973, last heard off Manila 1989
Titan	1971	Lynn KS 2007	special model for 2007 Kassel event; ex Blue Funnel, served 1971-75
Autolycus	1949 (1975)	LJ M-93	ex Blue Funnel, served 1974/75, sold 1976, scrapped 1978
Obuasi	1957 (1977)	LJ M-33	ex Blue Funnel, served 1977-78, scrapped 1979 (class of 6)

I would like to thank Nigel Robinson for providing pictures of his beautifully assembled and painted Len Jordan (LJ) and Wirral Miniature Ships (WMS) models.

#### 1/1200-1250 Model Gallery (Elder Dempster)



Albatros (AL) model of Abosso, 1935 (KH collection)



Accra of 1947; another AL (KH collection)



Seaforth of 1939 by Albatros (KH collection)



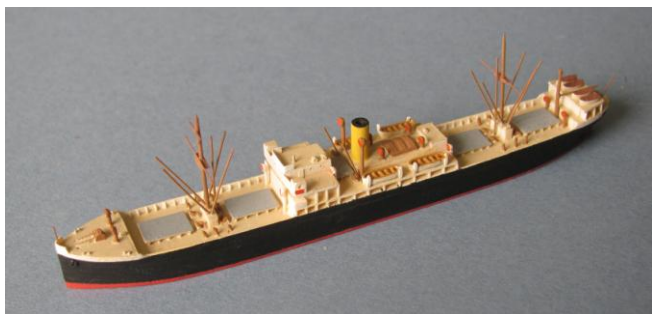
Clearway, circa 1968 - Lynn 94 (Nigel Robinson)



Calabar built 1936 but depicted as in 1957



Daru (1958) was an ED ship although she wears the colours of the Guinea Gulf Line  
(LJ models assembled & painted by Nigel Robinson)



David Livingstone, 1930

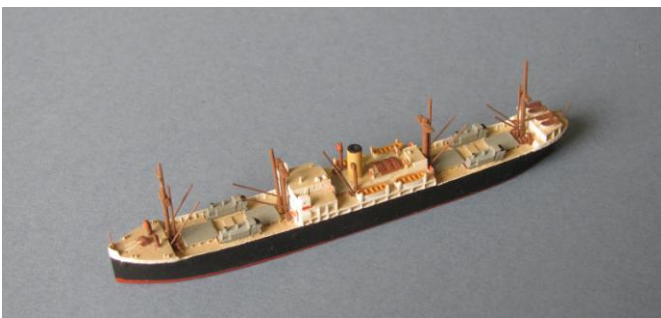
(more LJ models assembled & painted by Nigel Robinson)



Eboe 1952



Kentung 1954 operated by Elder Dempster subsidiary British & Burmese SN Co (WMS model by Nigel Robinson)



Mary Kingsley 1930, British & Burmese SN Co (LJ model by Nigel Robinson)



Elder Dempster's 1951 Aureol (LJ model by Nigel Robinson)



## Part 2 Elders & Fyffes and more models

Continuing from February, this month we describe the formation and history of Elders & Fyffes and list the rather few 1/1200-1250 models. As early as 1880 Elder, Dempster & Co ships returning to the UK from West Africa would pick up cargoes of bananas from the Canaries and Madeira, an activity later duplicated by London firm E.W. Fyffe & Co. The latter teamed with Hudson Bros who were fruit distributors to form Fyffe, Hudson & Co in 1896. In the face of potential competition from the newly established Jamaica Fruit Importing & Trading Co, Messrs Fyffe and Hudson sold out to the growers on the islands who modified the name slightly adding a Ltd. In 1901 Elder, Dempster with the award of a ten year mail contract (see last month) agreed at the request of the Colonial Secretary to transport bananas in quantity from the West Indies. These came into Avonmouth where the local ED manager Arthur Stockley decided to seek help from Fyffe, Hudson & Co Ltd in handling the distribution. So came about the creation of Elders & Fyffes with Alfred Jones as chairman and three directors coming from Fyffe, Hudson & Co Ltd. With the five (eventually six) ships of the Imperial Direct West India Mail Service providing a fortnightly service Elders & Fyffes decided that weekly was needed; thus Elders & Fyffes Shipping Ltd was formed with four aging but serviceable ships bought from Furness, Withy. With this investment there was always the concern that any problems with the Jamaica banana crop would be a financial disaster so in 1902 Stockley began to explore alternative sources of supply. Discussions with the Boston based United Fruit Company saw the latter acquire 45% in E & Fs in return for access to growers throughout the Caribbean and in Central America. This was just as well because the following year the Jamaica crop was ruined by a hurricane and the deal allowed bananas from Costa Rica to be shipped. Between 1905 and 1911 twelve new purpose built ships were brought into service the last nine of which also had accommodation for 12 passengers.



This Chirripo was the third to carry the name; she was with the group from 1957 to 1972



Rio Cobre was built in 1945 and served Elder & Fyffes from 1969 to 1975; pictured here operating for United Fruit's Chiquita brand (Kelvin Davies)

was put up for sale and in 1910. To the disappointment of its current ex-Fyffe, Hudson & Co Ltd directors, the Elders & Fyffes business with its current fleet of ten ships was sold to United Fruit. At least the UK based management team was retained although further change was afoot. With the mail contract ending Imperial Direct (always loss making) was closed leaving Elders & Fyffes to provide a weekly service which at least was achievable with the existing fleet. In fact the most successful aspect of Imperial Direct's operations had been passengers so four new ships of the Chagres class able to carry 50 were ordered entering service in 1912-1913. In 1913 a pair of ships being built by Swan Hunters for the Hamburg America Fruit Line were bought by United Fruit and on completion the following year were allocated to Elders & Fyffes giving a fleet strength of 16 on the outbreak of war.

By 1918 just six of these remained although four new builds of the Camito class joined in 1915 (one, the Cavina was lost in 1917). War reparations provided two ex German ships including the former Mowe as described above. The bulk of the post-war fleet comprised the nineteen ships of the Chirripo class completed between 1919 and 1930 when the fleet reached its maximum of 36. By 1939 transfers and disposals had reduced this to twenty one of which seven survived the war joined soon by the Chirripo which had been one of four ships transferred to a German subsidiary back in 1935; via internment in 1939 and five years with United Fruit's Mayan SS Co she returned to the colours in 1946 serving for a further six years. Four ex-German ships plus Manistee (built 1932) and Matina (1946) brought the fleet up to fourteen.



Chuscal was operated by Elder & Fyffes 1961 to 1972



Matina was completed in 1969 for Elder & Fyffes; she was sold in 1982 and scrapped in 1993

the shipping division and in 1970, when the American company became the United Brands Corporation of New York, the decision was taken that the nine ships being operated by Fyffes should adopt United's livery. During the 1970s further progress was made with moving out of ship owning into bare boat charter (i.e. the ship without crew, fuel or provisions).

In 1950 the handsome Golfito entered service followed by a sistership Camito six years later. In 1969 United Fruit set up Fyffes Group Ltd within which Elders & Fyffes Ltd were running

From 1981 all the corporation's shipping was being managed by Fyffes Line Ltd (based at Southampton) and in 1986 Carl Libner of United Brands put the company up for sale. Fruit Importers of Ireland Ltd became the new owners with the holding company called FII-Fyffes Plc, a nice touch being the return of traditional E&F livery with a banana (rather than Chiquita) logo on the hulls. In 1990 the company name was shortened to Fyffes Plc and in 1996 the banana business of Geest was acquired. At this time Fyffes were only operating small chartered ships although the new Geest Plc subsidiary possessed two 13,000 tonners. Referring now to Ocean Ships, Fyffes in 2000 were chartering four 10,000 ton ships from Star Reefers whilst the



Camito laid up in 1971 in United Fruit funnel colours



Star Prima under charter to Elder & Fyffes

Geest fleet had been supplemented by four on charter.

In 2002 Geest

moved to Portsmouth although no longer importing bananas. From 2004 onwards Ocean Fleets lists no ships at all for either company indicating that vessels are chartered, for example Timor Stream seen on Geest's website is owned by Triton Schiffahrts GmbH Germany whose entry notes that hulls are white with charterer's name. In 2015, the same German company was also chartering Agulhas Stream to Geest. Similarly Star Reefer's Star Prima and Star Quality are (or have been) on charter to Fyffes. So really in terms of ship owning this complicated story has come to an end.

Ship	Built	Model(s)	Notes
Chirripo	1919	LJ M-96	(class of 19), served as Wesermunde 1935-39, scrapped 1952
Greenbrier	1914	NM81 as Möwe	ex German Pungo, raider Möwe, ceded to GB in 1920
Cavina	1924	Albatros (AL) 38	1957 sold to Cia.Naviera Lanena, renamed Catusha. 1958 scrapped
Pucuaré/Nicoya	1935	AL 60	Acquired 1946, ex Pelikan & Pontos (AL 60 Pontos)
Golfito/Camito	1950	AL-186, LJ L-33	1971 scrapped / 1973 scrapped
Chirripo	1957	SOM 06	1969 transferred to Empresa Hondurena de Vapores S.A., Puerto Cortez renamed Olancho, 1972 sold to Greece, 1974 scrapped.
Chiquita Bremen	1992	Bille 105	United Fruit Co. funnel colours; traded for Chiquita Brands Inc. USA

#### Elders & Fyffes and related Company 1/1200-1250 models

##### Notes on the 1/1200-1250 Models

Featured this time are UK manufacturers Solent Model Ships (SOM), Wirral Miniature Ships (WMS), Lynn and Nelson. The latter two are discontinued although NE 23/24 has been re-issued in kit form (see [www.limitededitions.co.uk](http://www.limitededitions.co.uk)). SOM is an excellent little range the most recent of which are the 1947 ferry Falaise (09), coaster Grebe (11) with Normannia (12) due this Spring – all vessels which have visited the Solent; for more information contact [somods51@gmail.com](mailto:somods51@gmail.com). Continental 1/1250s comprise Albatros (AL), Bille and Hein Muck (HM) although again the latter two are discontinued. Fortunately AH Models (24 Broadland Road, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port CH66 2JS) who manufacture the WMS series have come to the rescue with an extensive re-issue programme of Len Jordan L & M series and HM models, all resin kits. All the LJs listed above are available although disappointingly, in the context of this article, neither WMS 16 or HM 48 currently feature. A Limited Editions re-issue of the old Aba would be good. We can hope. I would like to thank stalwarts Nigel Robinson and Peter Anthony for yet again providing pictures of models in their impressive fleets. Nigel does provide an assembly/painting service if required and can obtain most of the Len Jordan models (e-mail [khwaterlines@btinternet.com](mailto:khwaterlines@btinternet.com) to contact Nigel).

##### References and Further Reading

'The Elder Dempster Line Fleet History 1852 -1985' by James Cowden and John Duffy (published 1986), Duncan Haws' 'Merchant Fleets Nos 20 Elder Dempster Lines' (1990) and '31 Elders & Fyffes and Geest' (1996), 'Fyffes and the Banana: Musa Sapientum - A Centenary History, 1888-1988' by Peter Davies (1990), 'Elders and Fyffes: A Photographic History' by Campbell McCutcheon (2010) and 'Yes! We Have Some: The Story of Fyffes' by Patrick Beaver (1976).

Note: on the MMI website ([www.marinemodelmagazine.com](http://www.marinemodelmagazine.com)) may be found pdf downloads of previous 'Waterlines' articles including many British shipping company histories plus a 120 page 'Guide to Waterline Model Ships'. All for free.



1/1200-1250 Model Gallery (Elder & Fyffes)



Cavina of 1924 depicted by Albatros (KH collection)



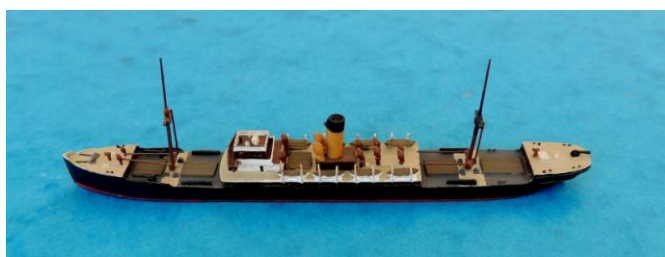
LJ version of Camito in her original Elder & Fyffes scheme; she was later given United Fruit Co funnel colours (Nigel Robinson)



Corrales of the 1919-1930 Chirripo class, model is M96 (Nigel Robinson)



Chiquita Bremen of the United Fruit Co 1992  
Bille 1/1250 cat. #105 (Peter Anthony)



Navis model of the raider Möwe, later to become the Greenbrier (KH collection)



Golfito (by Albatros) and Chirripo (by Solent) (Peter Anthony)