# PORTCITIES Southampton

## Shell

### An innovative tanker company

One of the world`s major oil company, Shell is also one of the most-respected names in tankers. It has often been in the forefront of technical innovations. Indeed, it was such innovations that originally established the company in the face of strong competition from the US.

The company was founded by Marcus Samuel who had a business in the east end of London. He combined importing goods from the Far East (including boxes studded with shells) with selling paraffin. Visiting the Russian oil fields on the Black Sea, Samuel realised the potential of selling paraffin from these fields in the Far East, where his family had extensive interests.

### A secret design

The US giant Standard Oil had a virtual monopoly of paraffin sales. However, the output of the Black Sea fields meant Samuel could undercut them, if only he could ship the paraffin in bulk via the Suez Canal. The canal authorities refused to allow tankers to use the canal, because of the dangers of fire. However, Samuel had a tanker secretly designed that would satisfy their stringent safety requirements. To minimise chances of spills or fires, it featured cofferdams [definition] placed at either end of the cargo tanks, and an oil-tight bulkhead running along its middle. It also had water ballast tanks which could be emptied in the event of a grounding. The plans were approved, and Samuel ordered no fewer than 14 tankers from English shipyards.



*Shell tanker* Volsella *at Southampton*

### The shell tradition

When the first of his tankers was completed in 1892 Samuel named it after a shellfish, *Murex*. From his collection, he gave her captain a Murex shell to be displayed on board. Despite enormous expansion of the Shell fleet, this tradition has been maintained. A merger in 1908 with a major competitor in the far east produced the Royal Dutch Shell Group, and the company has continued to grow as a joint Dutch and British operation.