

MODELLING 'COUNTY' CLASS CRUISERS



Airfix kit conversions
from **Ian M. Fleming**

THE FAMOUS, and beautifully elegant 'County' Class cruisers were built in the late 1920s, and apart from their smaller half-sisters *Exeter* and *York* were the only heavy cruisers available to the British and Australian navies in World War 2. By that time their design was showing its age; in particular, their anti-aircraft armament — as with so many RN warships — was inadequate as defence against the new Luftwaffe; and their total lack of side armour was a cause for some alarm. Some work was done, particularly on the oldest of the group, to improve these deficiencies; as this differed among the individual ships, a considerable variety of appearance was created which adds to their interest for the modeller. At its most extreme, the drastic reconstruction of *London* illustrates the transformation that can be achieved — with money and time, both of which were scarce at that period — by modernisation.

Like the ships themselves, the Airfix kit of *Suffolk* is an old offering in need of some improvement, principally to the small AA armament and to the lower bridge structure, this is quite straightforward. *Suffolk* belonged to the 'Kent' class, the first of the three groups of ships which made up the 'County' Class, comprising *Berwick*, *Cornwall*, *Cumberland*, *Kent* and *Suffolk* (all RN), and *Australia* and *Canberra* for the RAN, all completed in 1928. In 1936-37 the five British ships were given some waterline belt armour; their four single 4-inch guns were doubled-up, and supplemented by quadruple 2 pdr pom-poms; and a large aircraft hangar was added, except to *Kent*. To reduce topweight, the quarterdeck on *Suffolk* and *Cumberland* was made lower; this alteration was not carried out on any other member of the class.

Thus, the first job in modelling any of the ships detailed in this article, other than *Suffolk*, is to raise the quarterdeck of the *Suffolk* kit to the level of the main deck. Strips of plastic card are used to build up the hull sides aft; note that the top edge should rise just a little approaching the stern. Do not attempt to bend the card around the stern itself; that is better filled with a few small pieces of card which can be filed down when dry. With a razor-saw, remove the quarterdeck from the main deck part, and cement it back on in its new position, minus its ladders. Cement the whole deck into the hull, fill any gaps around the quarterdeck-edge, and leave to dry. There are plenty of small jobs to be done in the meanwhile, so there is no excuse for impatience over drying time! When dry, smooth down the modified area, add the anchors, and paint the hull and deck.

For *HMS Kent*, some alterations are necessary to the aft superstructure, since she had no hangar; refer to drawing A. This



Heading photo opposite *Old hull, new ship: HMS London in 1944. Above Aerial view of HMS Berwick. Foot of page HMS Sussex after her final refit (IWM).*

also shows the pylon structure on which were carried two searchlights on a platform similar to Part 107; late in 1942 one of these was replaced by Type 273 (surface warning) radar.

Part 83 should be modified by the removal of the circular gun-platforms. The angled wings of this part should overhang the side-walls beneath them, which should therefore be cut away and replaced to lie along the fore-and-aft line; compare the boxlid artwork. Finally, extend the sides and ends of this part downwards so that this deck lies 2 mm higher, for correct appearance. Parts 82, 84 and 93 should be omitted, and Parts 87 and 88 replaced by HACS (High-Angle Control System) directors, with Type 285 'fishbone'-style radar aerials, to the pattern shown on the drawing. Further radar aerials are carried on the top and front of the main director, Part 94; and at the mastheads, for air warning.

Kent's light AA armament consisted of a pair of single 20 mm guns on each of 'B' and 'X' turrets, and an eight-barrelled pom-pom each side on platforms abaft the catapult. All of these must be made up with fine rod and card, and again patience is recommended, unless your spares box contains the requisite items.

In mid-1942 *Kent* wore a camouflage of four shades: on the photograph, the darkest colour is dark grey; next is a darkish blue, under the light area amidships, and also the darker patch aft; then light grey, applied from 'X' turret aft, to the upper portions of the funnels, to the forward and after ends of the bridge, and to 'B' turret; the lightest tone is a very pale blue, almost white. The camouflage pattern for the port side is marked on the drawing. All decks were dark grey. If the Walrus aircraft is included, its colours should be: pale blue underneath; dark slate grey and extra-dark sea grey on upper and side surfaces; 'B' type roundels.

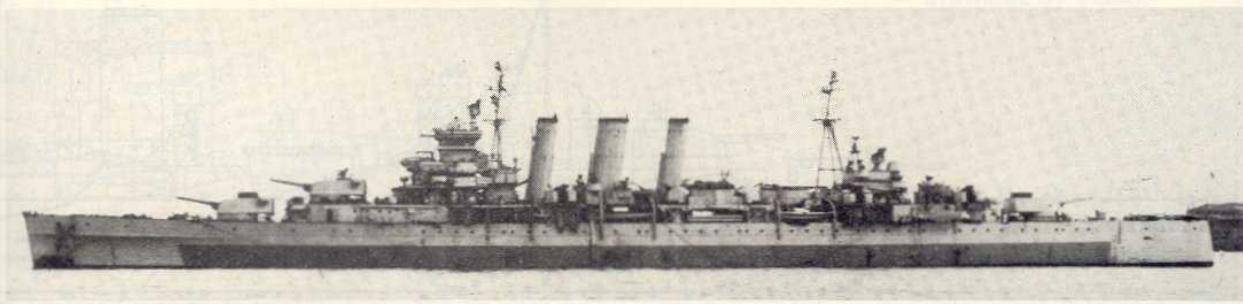
A rather simpler variant in the same class is provided by *HMS Berwick*. Here, the modifications are somewhat fewer. Cut away the square projections on the main

deck part beneath the forward 4-inch gun position; with a little trimming, these can be used for the engine-room ventilators mounted on Part 63 between the funnels. Note that the boats are differently sited, Parts 29 and 30 being one deck higher by the second funnel. The areas on Part 63 outboard of these between the 4-inch guns should be cut away. Apart from retaining the circular gun-platforms, on which a pair of quadruple pom-poms made from rod and card are mounted, Part 83 is modified as for *Kent*, and Part 93 omitted. Otherwise follow the kit instructions for all superstructure. Add a circular screen to the crown of 'B' and 'X' turrets, and to each side of the hangar roof; the single 20 mm guns for which these were intended had evidently not been mounted at the time of the photograph. Finally, the radar aerials on the main director and at the mastheads should be fitted as for *Kent*.

Berwick's unique colour scheme was the same both sides, and the colours used were probably (it is hardly ever possible to achieve complete certainty where such unusual schemes are concerned) a mid-blue, very pale blue and light grey at bow and stern; decks and aircraft as for *Kent*.

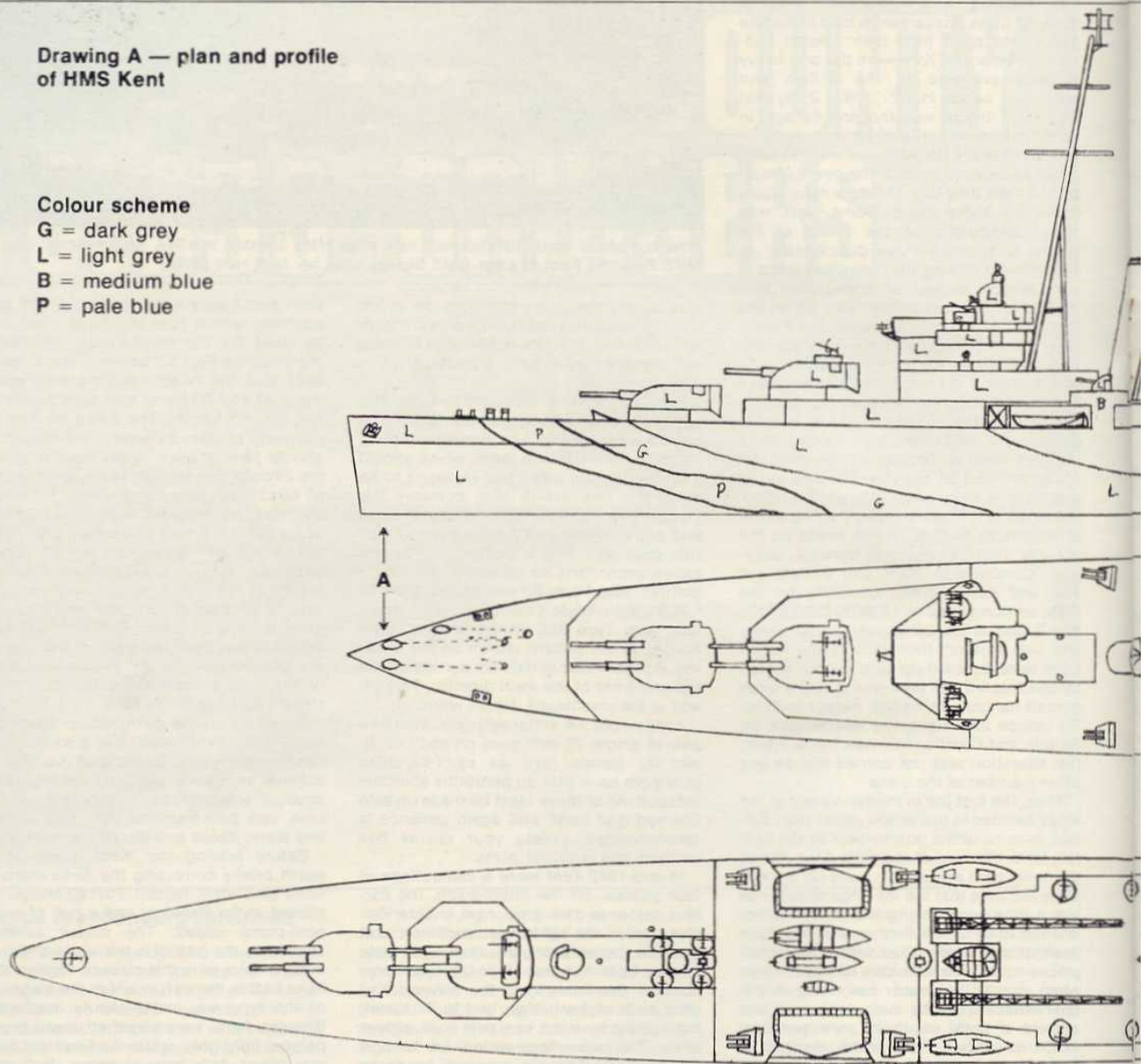
Before leaving the 'Kent' Class, it is worth briefly correcting the Airfix instructions for *Suffolk* herself. Part 83 should be altered as for *Berwick*, and a pair of quad pom-poms added. The colour scheme shown on the boxlid is the white-and-buff livery employed in this class on foreign stations before the war, in which the elegance of the type was most clearly displayed. Wooden decks were bleached, metal decks painted light grey, while the foremost area was either dark grey or green. Hull and upperworks were white; and it is well worth picking out the portholes with thinned light grey paint and a lot of patient care. The funnels, masts and yards were painted buff, and the aircraft pale grey with 'A' type roundels. As the boxlid artwork suggests, a careful reproduction of this scheme will produce a splendid model.

The 'London' Class comprised a further

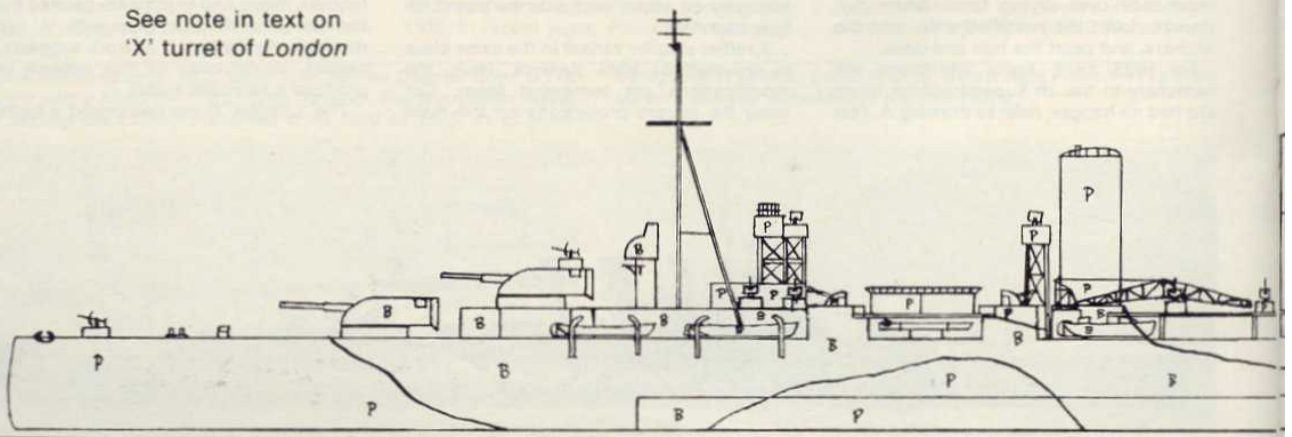


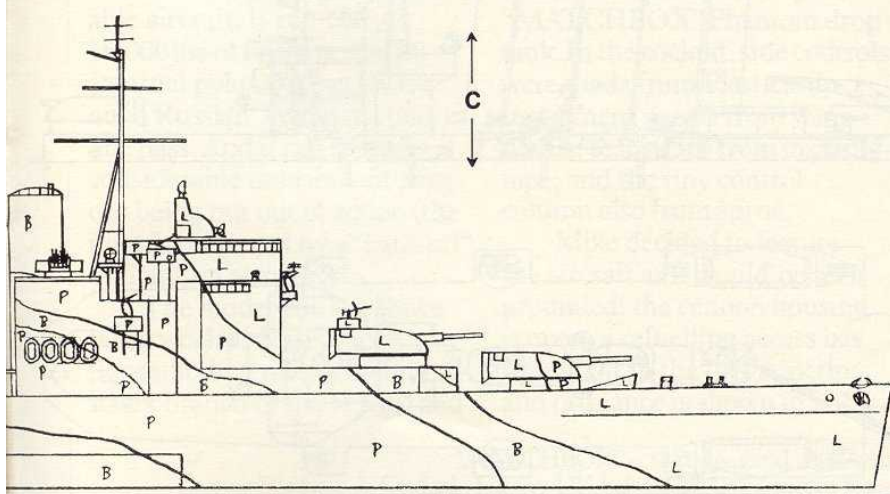
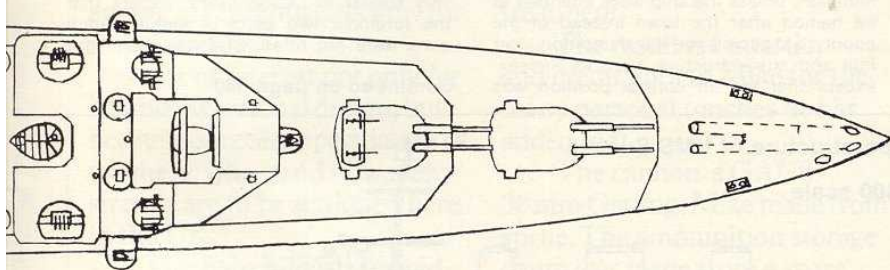
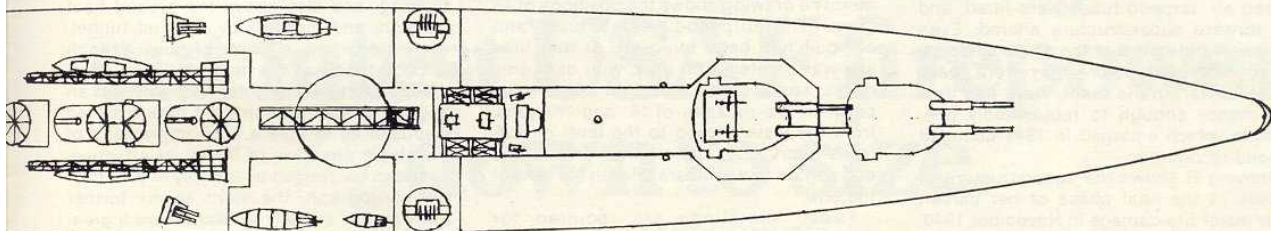
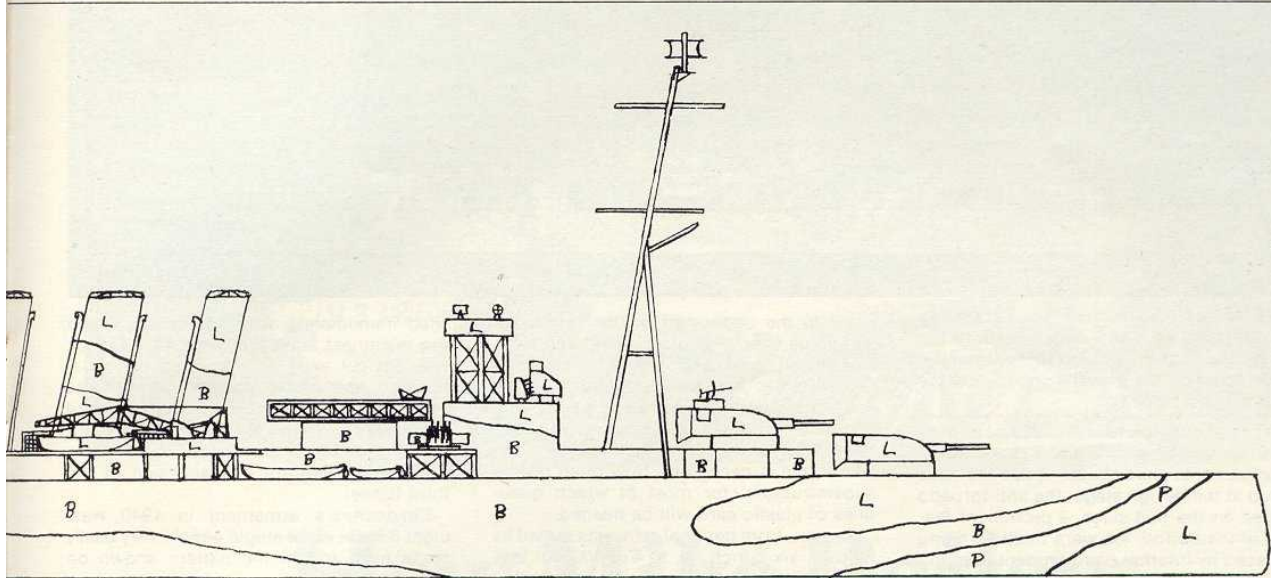
Drawing A — plan and profile of HMS Kent

Colour scheme
G = dark grey
L = light grey
B = medium blue
P = pale blue



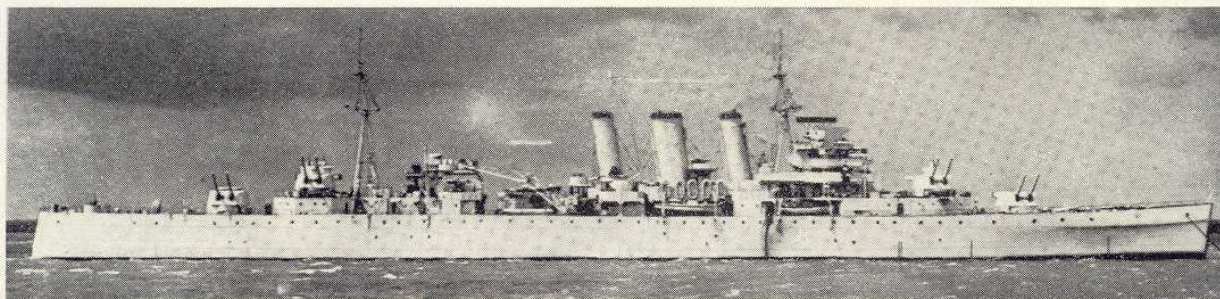
See note in text on 'X' turret of London





1:600 scale
Drawings by author

Drawing C — plan and profile of HMS London



HMS Norfolk. A wartime censor has tried to obliterate the aft HACS director (above the tip of the crane jib) and the 'fishbone' radar aerial on the forward one (below the main director) (IWM).

four ships completed in 1929: *London*, *Devonshire*, *Shropshire* and *Sussex*. Some improvements had been made to this group at the design stage: the anti-torpedo bulges on the hull sides, a prominent feature of the *Suffolk* kit, were omitted, being replaced by internal compartments serving the same purpose; also, the catapult was made to rotate, the 4-inch guns were moved aft, torpedo tubes were fitted, and the forward superstructure altered. Even so, it was thought that the ships could be further improved before they were really ready for war; in the event, there was time and money enough to rebuild only one, *London*, which emerged in 1941 changed beyond recognition.

Drawing B shows the superstructure of *Sussex* in the final phase of her career. After major fire-damage in November 1940, the opportunity was taken to increase her AA armament in a refit lasting until August 1942; a further nine-month refit from June 1944 gave her the appearance shown.

To make a model of *Sussex*, the quarter-deck must be raised as before, and the bulges removed from the hull sides with saw and file. If this operation leaves any

holes in the under-part of the hull, these should be filled with plastic card and filler, smoothed down and painted when dry. Certain holes and raised locations on the main deck part will not be required, and should be filled or cut away as appropriate. Reference to the drawing will determine where this is necessary. Now build up the superstructure, for most of which quantities of plastic card will be needed.

Sussex, from her final refit, was armed as follows: six 8-inch (ie, as *Suffolk*, but less 'X' turret); eight 4-inch; six eight-barrelled pom-poms; four twin 20 mm; six single 20 mm. The drawing shows the positions of all guns. The torpedo-tubes, aircraft and catapult had been removed. At that time she was painted light grey, with dark grey decks, and a blue panel on the hull sides between the muzzles of 'A' and 'Y' guns, from the waterline up to the level of *Suffolk's* quarterdeck, its aft end vertical, fore end angled forward parallel with the rake of the bow.

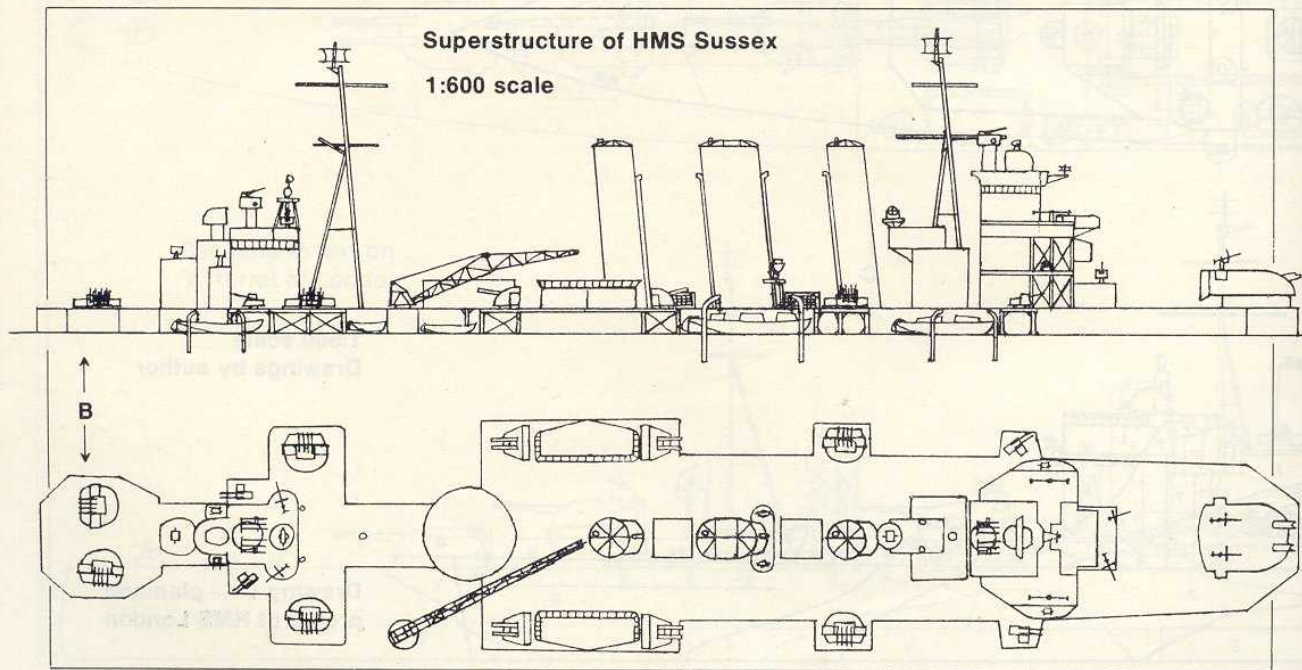
Fewer alterations are required for *Devonshire*. (Incidentally, as with *Dorsetshire*, her name is strictly incorrect: neither county has the '-shire' suffix. *Berwick*, on the other hand, should have had that termination, unless the ship were intended to be named after the town instead of the county; but such is the Naval tradition.) Her hull and superstructure were as *Sussex*, except that the aft control position was

sited immediately abaft the catapult, and the mainmast abaft that. The AA gundeck was not cut away above the second boat position, as it was in *Sussex*. No radar was fitted at the time of the photograph; and there were no tripod legs on the masts, nor HACS director on the bridge. There was a searchlight platform on each side of the third funnel.

Devonshire's armament in 1940 was: eight 8-inch; eight single 4-inch, very easily made from rod to the pattern shown on drawing D; these were sited in the four positions of the twin 4-inch on the *Sussex* drawing, and also above the second boat position, and close in by the first funnel, each side; and a bank of four 21-inch torpedo-tubes on the main deck just abaft the third funnel. The colour scheme was an angular pattern of light and dark grey, so disposed as to give a false impression of the ship's direction of travel; its effectiveness can be gauged by the way in which, in the photograph, the stern seems further away than it actually is. Were there a greater contrast between the two tones, this effect would be heightened. The pattern is the same on the port side.

London's appearance in the 1930s was very similar to *Devonshire's*, except that the foremost two pairs of single 4-inch guns were not fitted. She was then light

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Above HMS Devonshire in August 1940. Below Starboard side of HMS Kent, showing the camouflage pattern clearly (IWM).



grey overall, except for wooden decks, which were bleached, and her catapult, which was black. Again, with a light scheme such as this, it is worth touching in the double row of scuttles with a darker grey.

Drawing C shows the same ship as she appeared in 1944, after a reconstruction lasting from late in 1938 to mid-1941. New machinery of considerably less weight than the old had been installed, and the weight margin taken up by the addition of 5-inch (in this scale, 10 thou) armour to the hull sides. The drawing shows the rest; and

since virtually all of the new superstructure consists of flat surfaces, it is a nice quick job with plastic card. The girder construction of the searchlight platforms is the only task that need tax the modeller's patience. In fact, the rebuilt *London* provides a straightforward, yet highly effective conversion project. The drawing should be found to be self-explanatory.

London changed her colour scheme frequently, but the pattern shown on the drawing for the starboard side is contemporary with the port side as seen in the photograph. The colours were: dark blue; very

pale blue; and light grey, which was applied only to the foremost patch on the starboard side and to the next-to-foremost (below 'A' gun barrels) on the port. Also, the starboard side of 'X' turret (only) was painted a greenish-grey. Decks were dark grey.

It remains to deal with the last, or 'Norfolk', group of the 'County' Class. This was to have comprised *Dorsetshire*, *Norfolk*, *Northumberland* and *Surrey*, but the last two were never built; the others were completed in 1930. Drawing D shows the superstructure of *Dorsetshire* as built, with single 4-inch guns mounted further forward than in the 'London' Class, with which she was otherwise almost identical. Two single 2 pdr pom-poms were carried each side on platforms extended from 'B' gundeck to overhang the ship's sides abreast the foremast; there was no other AA armament. *Dorsetshire's* colour scheme at that period was as described for the early *London*.

Finally, the 1944 photograph of *Norfolk* shows that her aircraft and catapult had by then been removed, and much-needed improvements made to her armament. This consisted of: eight 8-inch; four twin 4-inch, now sited abreast the first and third funnels; two single 40 mm side by side on a new platform before the second funnel; and single 20 mm, mounted, two on 'X' turret, one each side on the roof of the aft control position, one on 'B' turret, and one on the quarterdeck; also eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes. Note also the tripod masts, motor-boats on the former catapult-turntable, and the radar aerials on the main director and at the mastheads. *Norfolk* at that time was light grey, with dark grey decks. □

