

HMAS Sydney 1937

CRUISERS FROM 'DOWN UNDER'

**Ian Whitehead describes
some variations on the
Airfix 'Ajax' kit**

THE 'Leander' class cruisers were the product of the 1929-31 Naval Estimates, and in 1932 three further ships, described as 'Modified Leanders' were ordered. These vessels were all completed for the Royal Navy by 1936, at a cost of one-and-a-half million pounds each. They were named *Apollo*, *Amphion* and *Phaeton*, but by the outbreak of war they had all been transferred to the Royal Australian Navy, and renamed *Hobart*, *Perth* and *Sydney*, respectively. They formed a squadron of modern, fast ships, ideally suited for the cruiser role of commerce protection, and served with distinction in the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres of war, acquiring new battle honours for this young, vigorous Navy.

Of the three, only HMAS *Hobart* survived the war, HMAS *Perth* being lost in March, 1942, in the Sunda Strait in action with Japanese warships. HMAS *Sydney* foundered in the Indian Ocean after a successful action with the German commerce raider, *Kormoran*, reminiscent of that of her predecessor and the *Emden* a quarter of a century earlier. HMAS *Hobart* was torpedoed off the New Hebrides in 1943, but survived the ordeal and was refitted to see the end of hostilities. In 1955, she was partially converted at Newcastle, NSW, to a Training Cruiser, put up for disposal in 1960, and finally scrapped, ironically, in Japan in 1963.

Although similarly armed and equipped to the 'Leanders', these ships presented a very different appearance, due

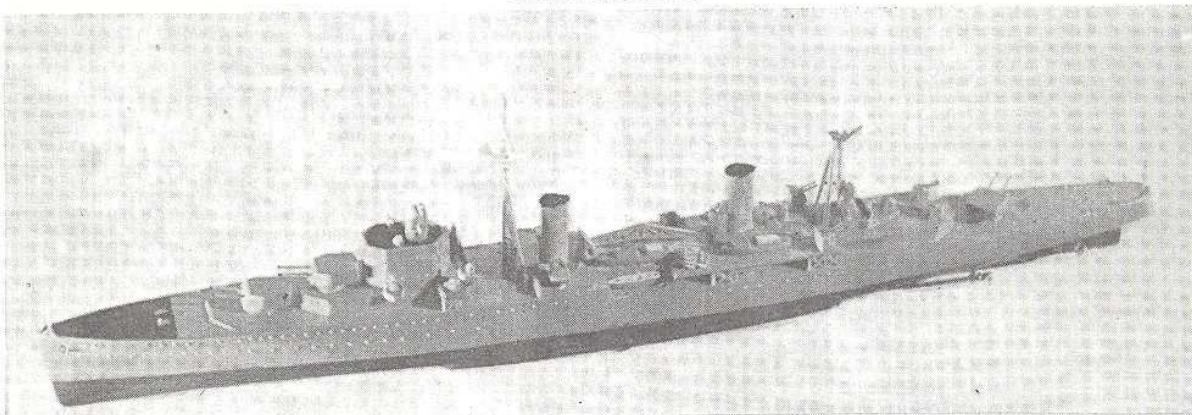
to the fact that their engine and boiler rooms were arranged alternately, necessitating two funnels, instead of the distinctive trunked uptake of the earlier ships. All three ships were of similar appearance, but HMAS *Hobart* underwent a substantial refit as previously noted, late in the war, and her appearance was again altered in 1955. It is thus possible to make several interesting variations of the *Ajax* kit, since both types used the same hull.

Fig 1 shows HMAS *Sydney* in pre-war days around 1937, and the necessary modifications are as follows. From the hull sides (Parts 1 and 2) remove the screens for the 4 inch guns, and also adjacent to the catapult on the starboard side. The 'step' from the fore-castle deck to the main deck is cut 9 mm further forward. Main deck

(Part 3) is now added and extended forward by 6 mm. Two holes are drilled for the torpedo tubes 3 mm inboard and 23 mm from the stern, and the tubes fitted. Part 4 (Bow Deck) is now cut as shown in Fig 2 and extended with card. It is necessary to add a card strip 3 mm wide to represent the bulkheads supporting this deck where it overlaps the aft deck. The 4 inch gun mountings and screens are removed, and the wider part of the supporting walls for Part 6 abaft the bridge, as shown. The aft end of this structure is plugged with card. Part 5 is cut as shown in Fig 3 and extended by 30 mm. This deck is supported on card strips, 3 mm wide, to represent bulkheads, and the officers' galley is reshaped as in Fig 3. Part 6 is cut off short to match the bow deck, and the hull and decks are assembled.

The bridge requires no modification and is built to instructions. A hole is now drilled to take the catapult, which at this period was mounted athwartships, and fixed. Immediately prior to the war, revolving catapults were fitted. If these are desired, Part 5 should be extended to meet Part 4, and Part 15 would be used, cut down above the level of the workshop. The funnels are made from sprue, or from HMS *Tiger* funnels. If the latter are used, the clinker screens and the small projections on these funnels are removed, and cappings made to templates. The larger piece is 20 thou thick and the smaller is 10 thou as shown, the larger piece goes on to the funnel with the smaller top. The aft

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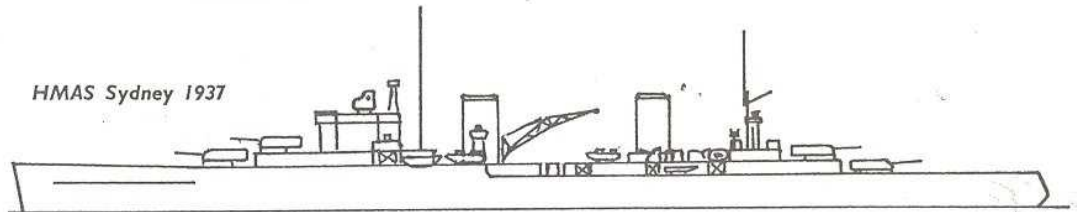


Fig 1

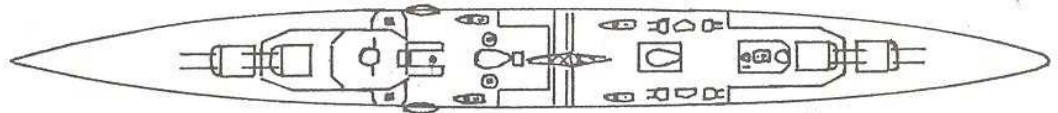
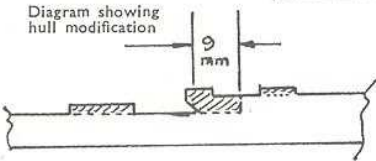


Fig 2



Diagram showing hull modification



funnel is sited on a piece of card—7 mm x 10 mm—and the fore funnel is similarly mounted. The crane is fitted aft of the fore funnel and is positioned where the funnel of the *Ajax* would normally be. The leading edge of the fore funnel is 16 mm aft of the fore mast, and there is 38 mm between the funnels.

The 4 inch guns are assembled and fitted as shown in Fig 1, the holes occupied by the 35 ft motor boats being used to accommodate the aft 4 inch guns. The forward 4 inch guns are fitted abeam of the aft funnel. The motor boats are fitted in the original holes for the forward 4 inch guns, and the whalers and davits slung as for the *Ajax*. The searchlight platform is fitted to the fore funnel as for the *Ajax*. The fore mast is the one from the kit with the tripod legs removed, as pole masts were fitted to this class at this period. The remaining detail is now added and, if you have a spare gig, a pair can be fitted to the aft deck abeam of the crane. The remaining motor boat is fitted on the centre line between the 4 inch guns.

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1955 modification showing lattice mast and radar

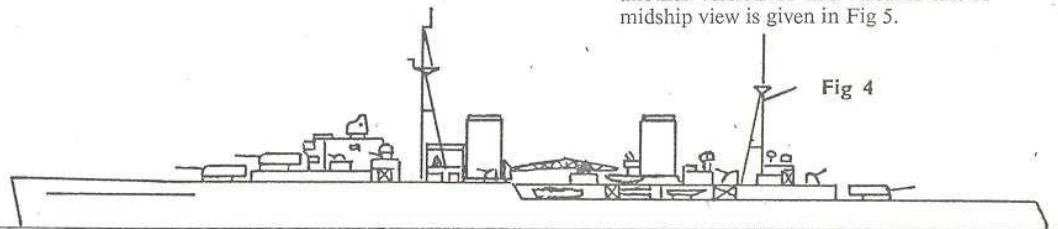
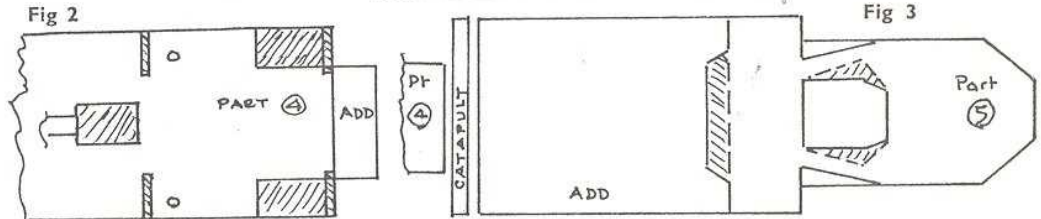
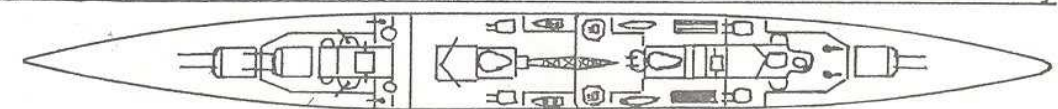


Fig 4



Full size templates for decks

During the war, in common with many British cruisers, *Hobart* was modified by the removal of 'X' turret, and AA guns substituted. The aircraft were removed and tripod masts added to support the increased weight of RDF gear carried aloft. This vessel is shown in Fig 4 and the construction is very similar to that of *Sydney*. 'X' turret barbette is removed from Part 5, the hole plugged with card, and two twin AA guns fitted in its place. I used those from a *Daring* kit. The aft superstructure deck is carried forward to meet the bow deck, as for the *Sydney* with the revolving catapult. It is supported again on 3 mm strips of card as for *Sydney*.

The bow deck is modified as for the *Sydney*, except that the forward 4 inch gun screens are left in place. The support for the rear end of the lower bridge deck is modified by removing the forward part in this vessel, leaving sufficient to make a base for Part 14, which is mounted on the top of this. The lower bridge deck itself is cut off to fit to the steps on the bow deck. The bridge is made as for *Ajax*, except that the rear rangefinder and support are removed. Funnels, crane and 6 inch guns are fitted as for *Sydney*. The 4 inch guns are disposed as in Fig 4, the holes in Parts 4 and 5 being utilised. Two pom-poms are

fitted, one on either beam between the funnels. These can be obtained from one of the big ship kits (*Ark Royal*, *Nelson*, *Warspite*), or the smaller version from *Cossack* will do.

The rear superstructure is now modelled, and I used a bridge top from a *Tiger* for this, but the outline is given in the diagram, and this could be made from blasa or scrap. Two directors are fitted on the rear superstructure, and a rangefinder just aft of the after funnel. The machine gun platform (Part 66) is cut back so that the base will fit against the front of the after funnel, and the M/Gs fitted. Two small directors are fitted on the bridge wings in place of the small searchlights (Parts 43, 44) and AA guns in shields in place of the machine guns. Screens made from 2 mm wide strips are fastened round the rear of the lower bridge deck. Light AA guns were added towards the front of the bridge; I used the searchlight platforms (Parts 33, 34) to mount these guns in. The tripod masts and radar gear were assembled and boats and final details added. These can be located from the photographs and drawings.

In 1955, the space between the bridge and forefunnel was built in and a lattice mast added on top of this structure, although the ship retained her after tripod, and this would give rise to yet another version of this versatile kit. A midship view is given in Fig 5.