

Spanish Cruisers, Balears and Canarias

Ian M. Fleming describes how to convert the Airfix
HMS Suffolk into either of two Spanish Cruisers.

Being an incorrigibly insular Briton I was unaware, when I wrote an article on modelling the 'County' class cruisers which was published in the June 1978 issue of this journal, that the Spanish Navy possessed two vessels whose design was based on the *Kent* group. I am indebted to my colleague Mr Kenneth Fraser of St Andrew's University Library for drawing my attention to the pair. One, the *Canarias*, survived as flagship of the Spanish Navy until quite recently. Both saw plenty of action in that nation's tragic Civil War, in which they were seized while still incomplete and hastily brought into service by the Nationalist side. They are interesting, too, in the extent to which they differ from our own 'Counties', for their appearance is utterly un-British and will certainly raise eyebrows at any club meeting. They can be modelled using the Airfix *Suffolk* at either 1:600 or 1:1200 scale; with their unique upperworks some scratch-building will be necessary, involving techniques that may be unfamiliar to most warship modellers, but which I

in armour belt was added over a substantial part of the waterline, and the horsepower increased from 80,000 to 90,000 to produce a designed speed of 33 knots. The displacement was kept within the Washington Treaty limits despite these additions, by cutting out 600 tons of fuel: the resulting loss of range was no serious drawback for a navy which would not expect to operate on a world-wide scale.

In appearance, the two Spanish ships, laid down in 1928, differed markedly from their prototype: the bridge structure was of a modern tower shape with a semi-circular fore end, and the two funnel uptakes were combined into one large casing reminiscent of the first modification to the *Queen Elizabeth* class.

Though scheduled to enter service in 1932, the cruisers, named *Balears* and *Canarias* after Spain's two main island groups, were long delayed, and before they were ready civil war had broken out in Spain. Ferrol, where they were completing, was one of the first places captured by the

Republican battleship *Jaime I* but with little damage on either side.

The *Balears* was even less advanced than her sister ship: in December, mounting only her two forward turrets, she proceeded to Cadiz, where 'X' turret was fitted, but neither 'Y' turret nor the secondary armament was available. At this time both ships were mainly used in the Mediterranean, sinking or capturing several Republican merchant ships, and engaging in coastal bombardment.

Generally, the Nationalist fleet was showing much more initiative than its opponents, but the exception was the tiny navy of the Basque Nationalists. In a celebrated engagement in March 1937, in foggy weather off the approaches to Bilbao, one of their converted trawlers, the *Nabarra*, carrying only two 4 in guns, fought the *Canarias* for eight hours before finally being sunk, most of her crew having perished by this time.

In September, the *Canarias*, in an action with two Republican light cruisers which



hope to illuminate below.

Mr Fraser has kindly written the historical section of this article, which follows. We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Spanish Naval Museum in Madrid who provided photographs and information.

THE HISTORY

In the 1920's the Spanish Navy required replacements for its elderly armoured cruisers, some of which dated from before the turn of the century. Sir Philip Watts was entrusted with the design, and produced a plan based on the 'County' class. The same main armament was mounted, but the secondary armament (only four 4 in guns at this stage) was increased to eight 4.7s of the type used in HMS *Nelson*. There were six fixed torpedo tubes on each beam. A 2

Nationalist forces of General Franco (who in fact was born in the town): this occurred on July 19th, 1936, two days after the outbreak of the revolt. The new cruisers were a considerable prize for the Nationalists, being more powerful than any other Spanish warships with the exception of the two old battleships of the *España* class, one of which had fallen to each side.

The *Canarias* was rushed into service in September, but without many projected features. The catapult and aircraft were not available, nor were most of the gun directors, and for secondary armament all that could be found were four 4 in guns from the *España*. Nevertheless within a few days of completion the new cruiser was in action, and sank a Republican destroyer off Gibraltar. A month later she engaged the

were protecting a convoy, narrowly escaped destruction through the bravery of one of her crew, who removed the shells from an ammunition locker which was threatened by fire, but was killed in the attempt.

Next month, the last Republican territory in the North fell to the Nationalists, and the naval war became concentrated in the Mediterranean. The two heavy cruisers continued their career of convoy escort, blockade and coastal bombardment, based on Palma in Majorca. By now the *Balears* had received her full armament.

On the night of 5-6 March 1938, both ships, along with the light cruiser *Almirante Cervera*, were spotted by aircraft off Cape Palos, and the Republican fleet was at once ordered to sea from Cartagena: it consisted

of the light cruisers *Libertad* and *Mendez Nuñez* and the destroyers *Almirante Antequera*, *Lepanto* and *Sanchez Barcáiztegui*. In the resulting battle, the *Baleares* was struck by three torpedoes from one of the destroyers (it is not known which) and sank rapidly with the loss of two thirds of her crew of 1,200. Most of the survivors were picked up by the British destroyers *Boreas* and *Kempenfelt*, which were on non-intervention patrol.

There was comparatively little naval activity after this, although in August the *Canarias* engaged a Republican destroyer off Gibraltar. The Nationalists appeared to have complete command of the seas, and when in March 1939, at the end of the war, the Republican fleet came out again, it was only to sail off to internment in Bizerta (whence the ships were eventually returned to Spain).

Although the *Canarias* was never to see action again, she was now the flagship of the Spanish fleet, the two battleships having been sunk. In 1952-3 she was extensively refitted, the single funnel being divided into two again for reasons which we have not been able to discover. Like most other warships of the period, she acquired modern accessories in the way of radar and light AA guns, but lost her torpedo tubes. Only in 1975 was she removed from the Navy list, and in September 1977 she was sold for scrap, fifty years after being designed, and nearly twenty years after the disposal of the last of Britain's 'County' class cruisers.

The Modelling

Either of the two construction kits made by Airfix under the name *HMS Suffolk* can be converted to represent the Spanish pair, having the same hull and main armament. Much of the superstructure, and various fittings, will have to be made.

The older kit, in 1:600 scale, is a moderately well detailed and accurate portrayal of its subject; and as it has already been considered in these pages for conversion to represent several ships of the RN 'County' classes, little further need be said of it here.

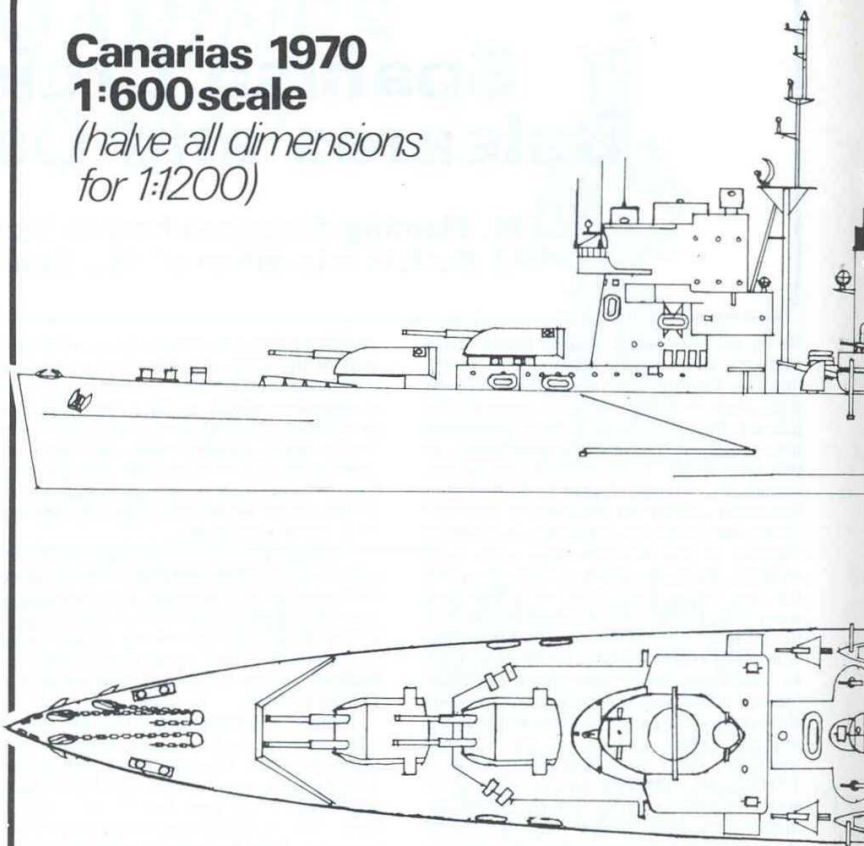
In 1978 Airfix released a kit of the same ship in 1:1200 scale, in their clip-together waterline series. In most ways it appears to be simply a reduction of the larger kit, preserving much of the fine detail incorporated in the 1:600 scale version. The screens at the edge of the flag deck, for example, are very fine and realistic; while the presentation of web stiffeners on the roofs of the 4 in gun crews' shelters, the anchor chains, 8 in guns, and especially the lattice crane-jibs, are equally commendable. Nonetheless one may wish to make improvements, notably to the 4 in and smaller guns, the Walrus aircraft's wing struts and propeller, and the masts and their tripods.

The clip-together nature of this kit, although an excellent idea for the young modeller for whom it is no doubt intended, has unfortunately necessitated the production of the hull in one piece; and it is here — whatever cruiser the model is ultimately going to represent — that the greatest need for improvement occurs.

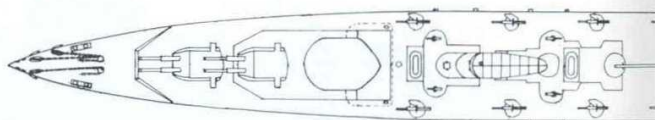
No detail is given on the hull sides other than that portion of the anti-torpedo bulges which appears above the waterline, and an insufficient attempt at the 'knuckle' in the plating of the bows. The latter deficiency is also found in the larger kit; on both, careful filling, with plastic card or putty, is required to build up the knuckle to its proper shape.

Canarias 1970 1:600 scale

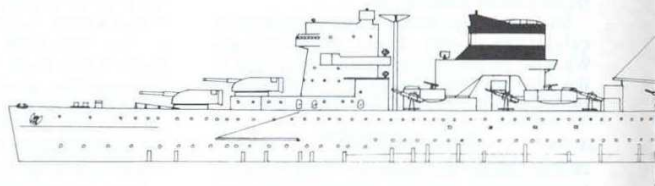
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for 1:1200)*

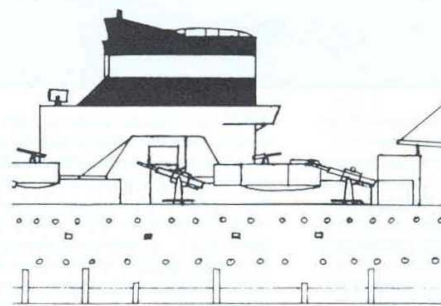
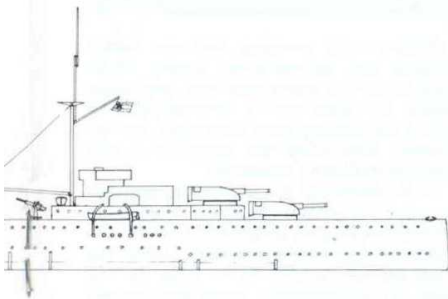
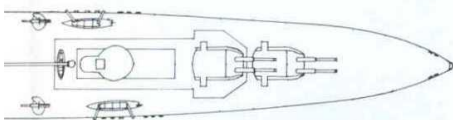
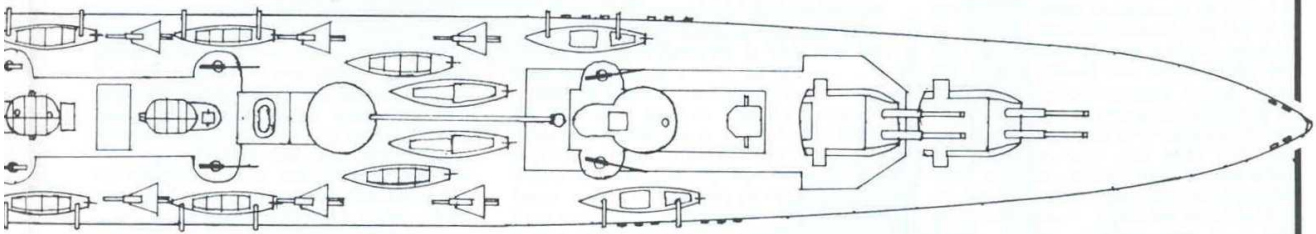
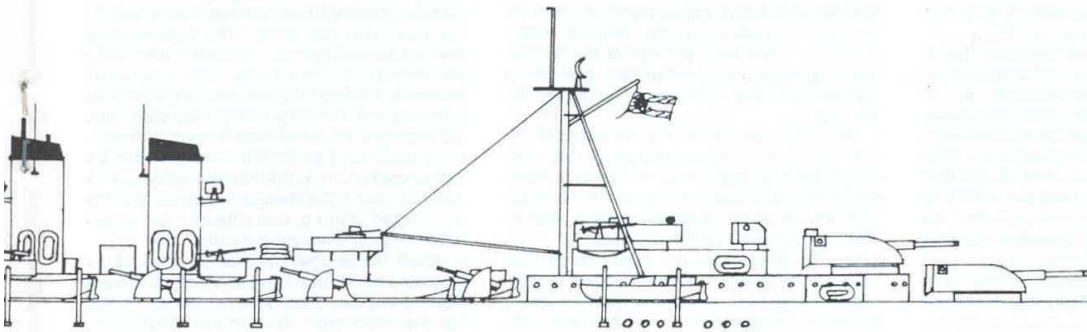


Baleares 1938 1:1200 scale



Funnel plan





*Funnel section
1:600 scale*

There should be a sharp corner along its outer edge, running along the line shown on the drawing below and abaft the anchors. Both kits also require the addition of ribs at several points along the top edge of the bulges, as drawn, if an early configuration is being represented. These ribs were absent from *Canarias* by 1970.

The smaller kit has no scuttles (port-holes) in the side. These really should be added, as the lack of them would be too obvious on such a large light grey area. They can either be drilled, or marked with Indian ink over the hull paintwork. Care and concentration are needed in placing them in line: an aid here is to put a strip of adhesive tape along the hull such that its upper edge provides a datum for marking or drilling. Anchors also have to be provided, one to port and two to starboard, and can be made from Microstrip and plastic rod.

In both kits the upper deck incorporates parts of the superstructure. This unsatisfactory practice makes access difficult for detailing and painting, although it does obviate troublesome joint lines; but for this conversion some of it has to be removed, which again requires care, to avoid damaging the fine deck detail. The unwanted

(notwithstanding it was a Briton who designed them) in their streamlined bridgework and enormous funnel. Some rather difficult shapes are involved here, which, if modelled in plastic, will require some knowledge of the more advanced techniques of working with plastic card: or, at least, a willingness to acquire these. After all, if the first attempt is unsatisfactory, nothing is wasted but time and cheap plastic card, and something is learned for the next.

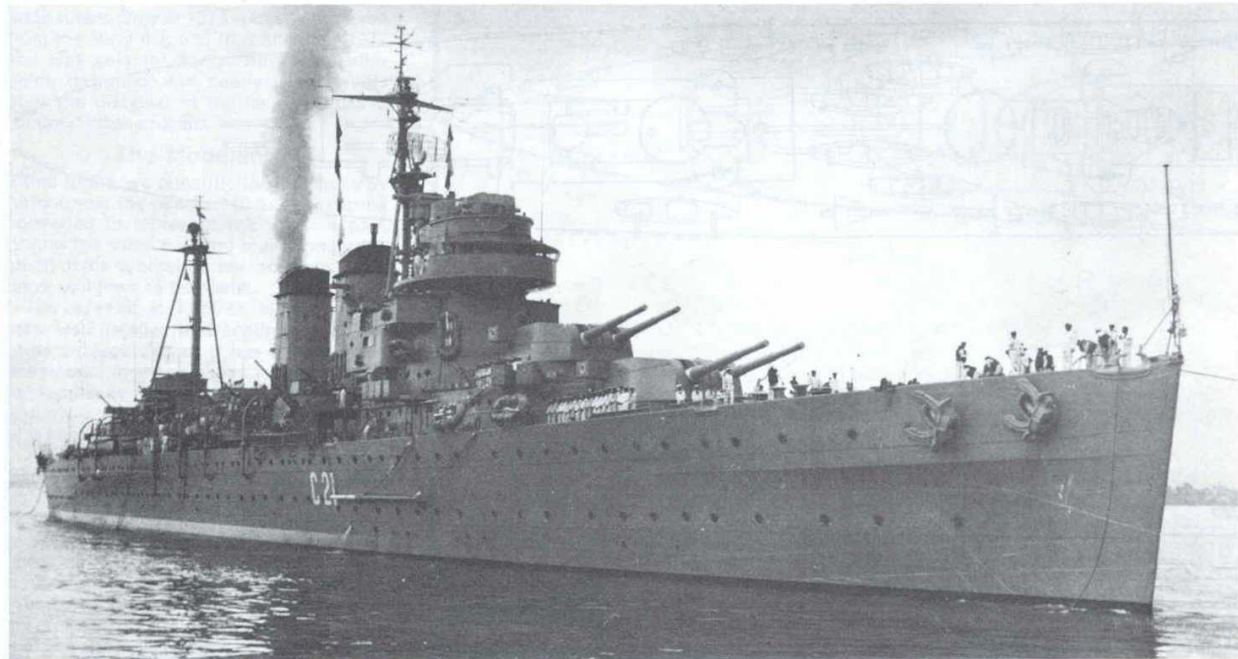
The deck on which the bridge and 'B' gun stand is moulded integrally with the main deck in both kits. It needs a card extension to re-shape its after end, and the addition of such detailing in the way of scuttles and doors as is desired.

On the plan drawing of *Baleares*, the base of the bridge tower is marked in outline on this deck, while the profiles and a separate bridge plan should make the shape clear. Basically, this structure is pear-shaped in plan; its after face is vertical, the front and sides tapered upwards.

The best plan here is to carve and sand a balsa or obechi former, with its horizontal dimensions slightly less than those drawn, in order to allow for the thickness of plastic card to be used. 20 thou (0.5 mm) is sug-

either inked or drilled. Slots are cut to receive the two decks which extend from its side and after faces, this method being easier than trying to butt the decks against a rounded surface; the decks and their screens are made from plastic card, and require careful fitting so that they are symmetrical and horizontal. The overhanging part of the bridge has varied considerably in form at different times; with due reference to the appropriate photograph and drawing for the ship being depicted, this part should be constructed from transparent plastic card so that the windows can be left unpainted. Except for the *Canarias* in her final form, the overhang was supported by angled plating underneath, for which filler may be used on a model.

Abaft the bridge, the heavy shelter deck prominent on the British ships is absent from these two. Both kits depict the casing on the main deck around the trunking of the funnels; slight adjustment is needed here, with reference to the plan drawing. A small deck should be added, whose sides project outwards as platforms for light AA guns. Depending on period, low curved screens may need to be added to their edges, made from paper or thin plastic card.



items are the hangar and catapult base, and the ladders serving 'X' gundeck.

Like all of the British 'Counties' except *Suffolk* and *Cumberland*, *Canarias* and *Baleares* were flush-decked. The cut-down quarterdeck of either kit must, therefore, be cut off and raised and the hull sides built up to meet it. The deck should rise very slightly towards the stern; and at the higher level the stern itself should be rather narrower.

The deck's joint with the hull leaves an unsightly gap which has to be filled, and rubbed down flush when dry. This is, it seems, yet another necessary evil inherent in the design of a snap-together kit. However, with this done, both hull and deck can be finished off and painted, and attention turned to the superstructure.

As is obvious from the drawings and photographs, the two Spanish cruisers differed most from their British counterparts

gested for this purpose in 1:600 scale, 10 or 15 thou for the smaller scale. A convenient handle should be attached to the top of the former. Next, a piece of stiff paper is wrapped around the former; it is most convenient to arrange the join to occur on its after face. The paper is then cut to form a template, leaving a little margin at the top edge. Plastic card shaped by the template is positioned on the former, held by rubber bands or waterproof tape, and the whole immersed in boiling water — hence the handle! On emerging from this, the plastic will be found to have set in position, having lost most of its tendency to spring outwards. The former is now withdrawn, and the joint cemented. A plastic card bridge deck will make the structure rigid and secure; and the top edge can be trimmed to the outline shown on the profile drawing.

All the various portholes and square windows in the tower are marked and

Baleares and *Canarias* had two funnel uptakes but, as remarked above, these were originally combined into one large funnel. On *Canarias* as reconstructed in 1952-3 the uptakes were separated into two funnels, improving her appearance and probably reducing topweight.

To the modeller, the earlier arrangement provides the greater challenge. Here again a wooden former is employed, made to the shape of the whole structure minus the thickness of material to be used for the shell. I contemplated using the boiling water method again for this part, but found that although it is quite feasible the assembly of a number of fiddly pieces would be required: not a pleasant thought in 1:1200 scale! In this case the moulding technique is to be preferred.

Now moulding, to an aircraft modeller of any accomplishment, is more or less routine. But its employment is so rarely

required for a ship model, in which the superstructure can normally be expected to consist of flat surfaces and simple curves, that some explanation is in order here.

One mould, the wooden former, has already been made. The other consists of a piece of plywood, to which the outline in profile of the funnel is transferred; this area is then cut out. On both sides of the ply the edges must be sharp; and the former must be able to pass through the hole with a little clearance all round, but not too much. On these points the sharpness and accuracy of the part will depend: my first attempt was poor because I had made too great a clearance between the two moulds and one of them had to be replaced.

Now pin or clip a piece of plastic card securely to the ply. For the larger scale 30 thou is best in this case, as this process makes the card thinner; 15 thou should suffice in the smaller scale. The pins should be well clear of the cut-out. The next step uses the grill, but be assured it is quite safe! Place the ply, plastic uppermost, under the heat for a few seconds, until the plastic starts to distort. Remove from heat, and press the former into the cut-out with the plastic between. The plastic will assume the shape of the former; within seconds it will have cooled and set, and can simply be cut out and trimmed. A second piece of plastic card pinned to the other side of the ply and treated in exactly the same way gives the other half of the funnel. In trimming, be careful to cut away just that amount which will give the funnel its correct shape in plan view; and remember to cut away the top of the funnel and of the forward searchlight position. The latter had a tiny deck below the outer level, which must be inserted; the after searchlight platform is of course constructed separately, as is the cowl which *Baleares*, but not her sister, carried. The lower part of the funnel should be carefully shaped at the joint of the moulded halves, so as to form a base on each uptake similar to the plan view of the later *Canarias*; the horizontal part of the junction of the two uptakes is a flat surface, whereas all other faces on the centre line are rounded.

In general, the boiling water method such as was used for the bridge of this model is applicable when the shape required involves simple but not compound curvature, of a wide enough radius for the plastic card to be bent to shape in the first place without being heated. Moulding is preferable when compound curves (or, as in the case of this funnel, simple curves in more than one plane) or sharp corners are in question. Both processes are quite easy with a little practice; in my experience moulding is more versatile but makes for tricky and sometimes weak joints, and involves more labour at each stage. In particular, the former must be shaped to a much higher standard: preferably in a harder wood than balsa, such as obechi.

The funnel top is so large that it is worth while (in 1:600 scale) constructing a grille for it, using fuse-wire or Microstrip. Its enormity is also the reason for making the funnel hollow, by the procedure described. A solid wooden part would not look right, nor would it satisfy competition rules, such as those of IPMS, which stipulate all-plastic construction.

The drawing of *Baleares* shows the remaining items of her superstructure and fittings. Two decks extend from the sides and rear of the bridge; the lower, which

had a screen on *Canarias* but only a guard-rail on *Baleares*, is shown in dotted outline on the main plan, while the upper is drawn on the bridge plan. Both had a signalling-lamp on each side. On top of the tower is a compass, and a pair of gun directors. These seem to be all the directors *Baleares* had; *Canarias* also carried two further aft at that time.

Around the funnel are four single 2 pdr pom-poms, and on the main deck eight 4.7 in AA guns. These are fairly simple to make, although it will not be so easy to produce several identical mounts.

On the fore side of the funnel itself a searchlight is carried, and the twin waste steam outlets. A second searchlight platform appears on the after side of the funnel, but no light was actually fitted on it in *Baleares*.

Between the funnel and the main mast is the base of an aircraft catapult. The aircraft and catapult were not in the event installed in either ship.

The shape of the after superstructure in plan should be clear from the drawing. On the two highest decks, the deck level is about 4 ft (2 mm in 1:600) below the top of the screens as drawn in profile. Under the second (just above the after boat davit) is a recessed area, with slightly arched top. In *Canarias*, a director stood at the after end of each of these two decks; the only other difference from *Baleares* in 1938 was the absence of a cowl on the funnel.

Abreast the after superstructure, below the main deck, were six fixed 21 in torpedo tubes each side, those to starboard being slightly further forward. Their ends protruded a little from the hull sides. Above these, a lifeboat was sited on the main deck each side, its davits mounted on brackets level with the torpedo tubes. Apart from a dinghy (probably carried on the deck above, by the main mast), no other boats were carried, although there were brackets for two further pairs of davits each side. A few liferafts were stowed before and abaft the funnel, and are said to have been sufficient for all the crew.

The model can now be completed with masts and spars. The lower masts were quite heavily built; the main had a light topmast and topgallant and a gaff, but no topmast was fitted to the fore although there seems to have been provision for one. A heavy boom was mounted low on the main mast and would have been intended for hoisting the aircraft, if that had ever been carried. Boat booms appear on the hull sides below the bridge.

Drawings and a photograph are also given of *Canarias* as she appeared in about 1970. Her bridgework, funnels, masts, armament and directors underwent a good deal of change over the years, as can be traced through successive issues of *Jane's Fighting Ships*. It is a pity that, in the case of this particular ship, the drawings in *Jane's* before 1970 are very poor and inaccurate; and reliance can only be placed on the photographs with the caution that their dates relate to their acquisition by *Jane's*, which may be several years after they were taken.

The form described here is her final one, which shows a considerable contrast with the *Baleares*; it is also interesting to compare her with HMS *London* as reconstructed in 1941 (see June 1978 issue).

On the forward superstructure, it will be seen that the lower signal deck has been enclosed, becoming continuous in profile with the upper one. The bridge front has been enlarged, with a semi-circular plat-

form at its base reaching half-way round the tower. It has a wider and more angled roof, above which a bracket carries a small loop aerial; and there are several whip aerials here and on the funnels. Three directors are mounted on the bridge roof, and another on the after superstructure. Possibly the fitting on the roof of 'X' turret is also some kind of director, similar to that in the British *Fiji* class.

The central superstructure has been altered in plan and has become continuous between the funnels, where previously there was a break. The big single funnel has been divided into two. For one of these the kit's second funnel will serve, if suitably trimmed so as to stand vertically. The other can be made by turning the two halves of the first or third funnel through ninety degrees, cementing them in place slightly apart, and filling in the sides with vertical strips of plastic card. If there is not sufficient height the cowls can be added separately; a thin strip of card should be cemented around the base of the cowls.

Shields have been added to the 4.7 in guns, as was done in *Rodney*, making it simpler to model them; the rear of each shield would probably be left open, or shut off by a heavy curtain.

Of the smaller weapons, the old 2 pdrs still remain, listed by *Jane's* as 38 mm or 1.5 in AA. They were first mounted as four singles, later as twins in a vertical arrangement, but finally placed on side-by-side twin mountings by the forward funnel. Long-barrelled single 37 mm guns appear by the after funnel and on platforms built out from the superstructure just abaft the main mast; and the catapult base carries a twin 20 mm mounting. The exact arrangement and composition of the AA armament on *Canarias* changed often; that given here was the final configuration. About 1970 it was proposed to modernise the ship, fitting American 'Terrier' AA missiles, and it would have been interesting to see what further alterations this would have entailed; but the scheme was never carried out, as the ship was considered too old for further service.

The torpedo tubes were removed in 1960, but the protrusions from the hull sides were left. Many more boats were carried, disposed as drawn, and several rafts on the superstructure and funnels. Finally, the masts have been given tripod legs, while the fore topmast bears a goodly array of radar and other aerials.

Both these cruisers were painted light grey, the same tone as was used by the RN before the Second World War. The main deck and 'B' and 'X' gun decks were teak-covered, while other decks would probably have been mid- or dark grey. Funnel cowls and small guns were black. During the Civil War both ships, and *Canarias* until 1952, bore the Nationalist marking of two black bands of unequal width on the funnel, as drawn for *Baleares*. From the mid-1960s *Canarias* had the pendant number C21 painted on each side in white. The Spanish naval ensign (originally the Nationalist one from 1937) is a broad yellow horizontal band between two narrow red ones, bearing a coat of arms — basically a black-winged shield — whose details will not matter in our small scales.

For further reading, a brief account of the naval side of the Spanish Civil War, in Spanish but with a few illustrations, may be found in the *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada: Suplemento 1936-1939, segunda parte*, page 1537-1551. This is held in most large libraries.