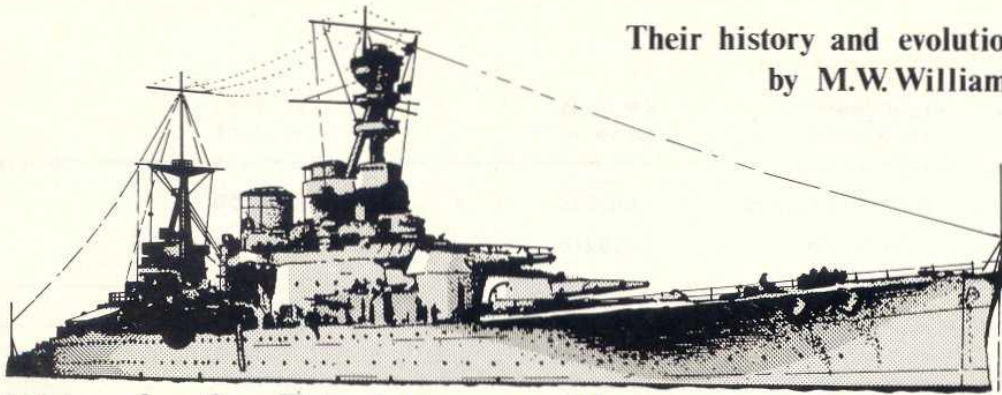


Their history and evolution  
by M.W. Williams.



# British Battlecruisers Part 3

## Renown

The *Renown* joined the Grand Fleet in September 1916. By then the Battle of Jutland had been fought but the high losses amongst the battlecruisers in this action had greatly affected fleet confidence in their type. After she joined the 1st BCS in September, further armour protection was worked into her design to improve her staying power, however, she saw no action during the First World War.

Soon after the war she was called upon to convey the *Prince of Wales* on two cruises; the first to America and Australia in 1920-21, the second to India and Japan, in 1921-22. Afterwards she was taken in hand for an extensive refit from 1923-26, and this was followed by another cruise in 1927, this time taking the Duke of York to Australia.

Upon her return, she joined the BCS of the Atlantic Fleet, staying there until 1936. Only one minor incident occurred during this period; early in 1935 while in company off Gibraltar, she had a minor collision with the *Hood*, but her damaged bows were quickly repaired in March 1935.

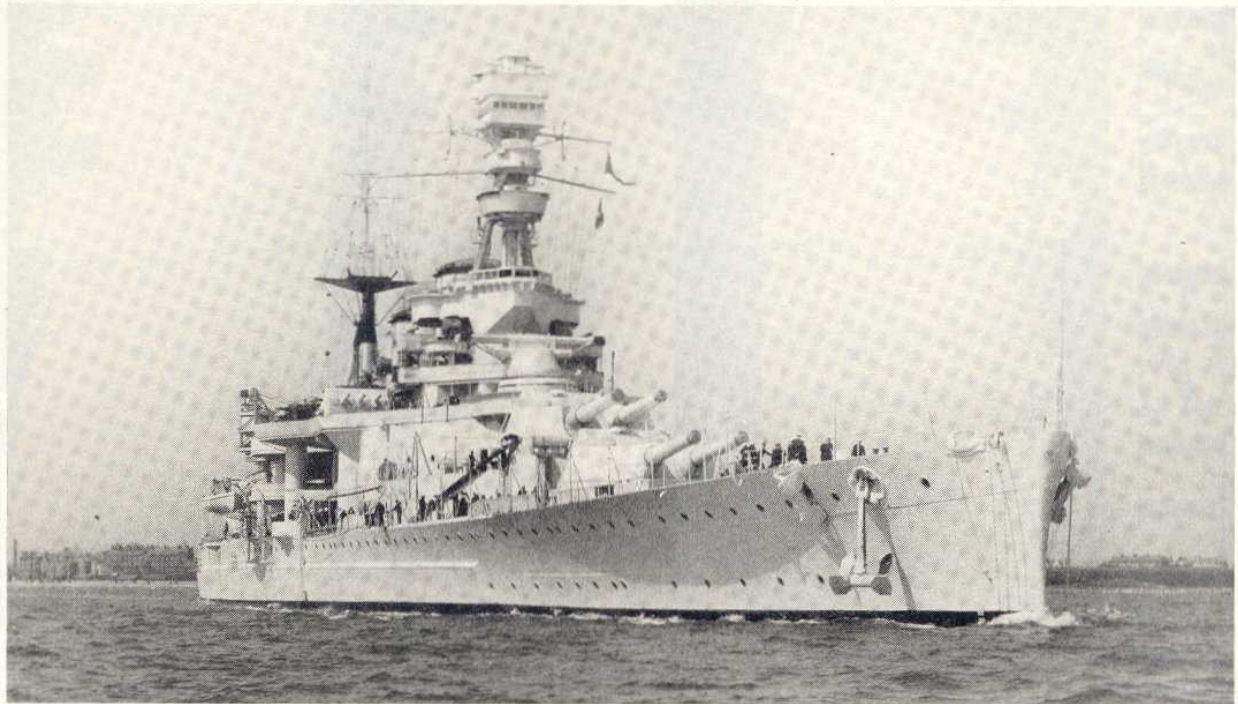
By the mid-thirties there was a belated attempt to try and modernise the fleet, so it was decided to take the *Renown* along with three of the 'Queen Elizabeth' class of battleships, and give them all an extensive refit, to improve their protection and equipment. The *Renown* was in dockyard hands from 1936-39, and when she emerged she was virtually a new ship, as one look at her silhouette will show.

She formed part of the Home Fleet upon completion in 1939, and went on to have a

very active war. She started off by encountering the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* off Norway in a very obscure brief action on 8 April 1940. She then joined Force H at Gibraltar in August of that year and went on to help sweep the Italian Battlefleet from the Mediterranean, participating in numerous convoy protection duties. She was on the fringe of the *Bismark* chase when she accompanied the *Ark Royal* on her vital interception of that ship in late May 1941; she bombarded the Italian city of Genoa in August, helped to fight supplies to Malta and covered the Allied landings in North Africa in October 1942.

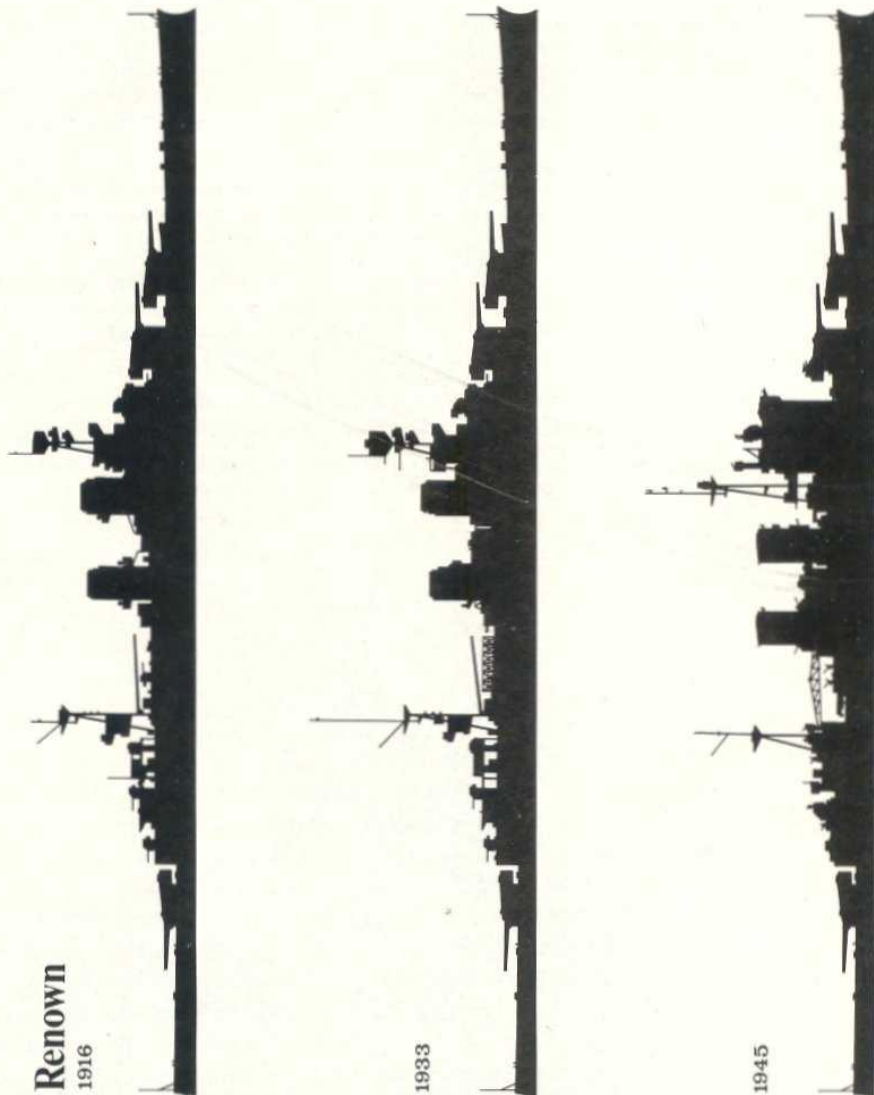
The *Renown* then returned to home waters in early 1943 for a refit at Rosyth, and eventually, was sent to join the rapidly growing British fleet confronting the

Symbolising Britain's great naval power between the wars — a magnificent shot of *HMS Repulse* leaving Portsmouth.



# BRITISH BATTLECRUISERS 3

## THE RENOWN CLASS



laid down	25 1 15		
completed	20 9 16		
fate			→ scrapped 1948
deep load, tons	30,835	37,000	37,411
max knots	32.6	30.0	29.0
belt, inches	6	9	
main guns, No & inches	6-15		
sec, guns . . .	17-4	12-4	20-4.5
torp, tubes . . .	2-21		4-18
aircraft		2	
feet overall	794		



25 1 15  
18 8 16

lost 10 12 41

31,448

37,400

31.7

30.0

28.5

6

9

6 - 15

17 - 4

2 - 21

15 - 4

8 - 21

2

4

794

Repulse

1916



1922



1941







*HMS Repulse* about to anchor, is manoeuvring with its screws; the cranes being topped up preparatory to hoisting boats. Picture dates from around 1939-40.

Japanese in the Indian Ocean. She did not take part in any action against enemy surface units, but did perform valuable shore bombardment duties on a number of occasions. She was ordered home late in 1944, refitting at Durban in South Africa in December before returning. This move was intended to provide the Home Fleet with a fast heavy unit to counter the possibility of a last stand by the remains of the German Fleet, but as it turned out, there was to be no further fleet action in European waters.

She became the flagship of the Home Fleet in April 1945, but soon afterwards with the victory in Europe complete, and a great numerical superiority against the Japanese in the Far East, the need for an old battlecruiser in the fleet no longer existed. Her company was, therefore, gradually reduced and she was eventually placed in reserve where she was finally sold for scrapping in 1948 — the last of the battlecruisers to go.

## Repulse

Completed in August 1916 the *Repulse* entered the 1st BCS in September, where she served until 1919. During this time she had had the rare opportunity of actually engaging enemy surface units, as on 17 November 1917 she was in a squadron that engaged a force of German light cruisers in the Heligoland Bight.

From 1919-22 she was refitted, which tremendously increased her staying power, enabling her to join the BCS of the Atlantic Fleet where she remained until 1932. As with the *Renown* she was called upon to show the flag after the war with a number of



A view of *HMS Repulse* in the 1920s before the small AA guns and hangers were fitted, and with flying-off platform on the after-turret.

world cruises. The first was a visit to Brazil with the *Hood* in 1922, followed by an extensive world cruise from November 1923 until September 1924. She then took the *Prince of Wales* to South Africa and South America in 1925, and continued doing minor cruises until 1932, when she was taken in hand for yet another refit and partial modernisation which lasted until 1936. After this she was stationed in the Mediterranean until 1938, and was returned to the Home Fleet in August 1938.

With the arrival of the Second World War, the *Renown's* duties were to act as escort for a number of valuable convoys. In 1940 she carried out sweeps off Norway during the German invasion and later participated in the raid on the German radio station on Jan Mayen Island as well as covering a minelaying operation off the Icelandic coast.

1941 proved to be the last year of the *Renown's* life. After performing more protection duties and sweeps, she found herself

in October at Cape Town, from where she sailed to Colombo to join the battleship *Prince of Wales* to form the main part of force Z. The objective of this rather isolated fleet was to act as a deterrent to Japanese ambitions in the area, but, unfortunately, the Japanese were undismayed by its presence in Malaya, and as well as striking at Pearl Harbour, they also carried out landings at Kota Bharu in Northern Malaya.

With the Army and Air Force already hard pressed in the defence of Malaya, Force Z could only react in one way, and that was to attack the Japanese landing forces and convoys to the North. On 8 December she sailed from Singapore with the rest of Force Z to try and intercept and disrupt the Japanese landings, but the Japanese had been forewarned and had managed to disperse all their vulnerable convoys, so no surface action took place.

It was soon realised that the main objective of the fleet could no longer be achieved, so Force Z decided to return to Singapore. By now, however, their position was known to the Japanese, who on the 10th launched a massive air attack on the Force. The *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were both hit but not before *Repulse* had put up a magnificent fight. Although 25 years old and equipped with an antiquated anti-aircraft installation, she still evaded numerous attacks and managed to shoot down and damage many of her attackers before receiving fatal damage late in the action. She was hit by five torpedoes in quick succession, and sunk rapidly in ten minutes.