

THE AGE OF THE DREADNOUGHTS

When any revolution takes place, it brings with it an immediate state of change from all that has gone before. For the Royal Navy, revolution came in February 1906 with the launching of H.M.S. Dreadnought. This was the brainchild of Admiral Lord John 'Jackie' Fisher. His vision of future big ship actions was that they would be fought at long range, with the secondary armament being superfluous. The revolutionary design of the Dreadnought was to make all other battleships obsolete.

She was 527 feet long and displaced 21,845 tons when fully loaded. A good long range armament of 10 - 12inch guns, with 24 - 12pounder guns and 5 - 18inch torpedo tubes. The new Parsons turbine engines drove 4 propellers, giving a top speed of 21 knots. These fundamental changes were to influence the design of battleships for the next 50 years.

As in all revolution designs, Dreadnought had her flaws. The most obvious was the mainmast, which was built behind the forward funnel, making life difficult for the lookout crew. Two of her 12 inch gun turrets were placed on each side of the superstructure, making one turret isolated when a full salvo was fired broadside.

With such a large ship, the crew's accommodation was reversed, the crew aft and the officers forward, so as to be near their duties.

From this time on, all battleships around the world would be classed as 'Dreadnoughts' or pre-'Dreadnoughts' – no other distinction mattered.

It is ironic that H.M.S Dreadnought did not join fellow Dreadnoughts of the Grand Fleet at the battle of Jutland in 1916, as she was the flagship of the third battle squadron in home waters.

She was broken up in 1920 – the super-Dreadnoughts had arrived and the Dreadnought revolution would continue.

