

Infosheet No. 40 Turret Ships

Turret ships were designed to lessen tonnage and therefore tonnage dues under the Suez Canal system of tonnage measurement.

The first turret steamer was built in 1892, by William Doxford & Sons Ltd, at Pallion Shipyard in Sunderland. The last was completed in 1911. In total 177 turret ships were built, the majority by Doxford, but 6 others were built under license by other yards in Great Britain, and one more built in Spain.

The turret design was a development from the whaleback steamer, the first of which to visit Britain was the *Charles W Wetmore*. The turret steamers had one long turret, which was half the width of the ship. They usually measured 300-400 feet in length and their cellular double bottom gave the turret design strength. The net tonnage of the vessel was low in relation to its deadweight.

It was claimed that the turrets were economical to build and combined strength with lightness, using less steel than conventional vessels. The later turrets were "beamless", meaning that through the substitution of deep for ordinary frames, all internal supports, beams and girders, were dispensed with, leaving a clear hold. Full cargoes of grain could be loaded in bulk saving costs and loss of time using bags. Discharging of grain and other cargoes was much quicker. In 1911 the construction of turret steamers came to an end due to amended regulations that rectified Suez Canal dues.

The first Lloyd's Register classed turret steamer was the *Bencliff*, built by William Doxford & Sons Ltd. in 1894 for G. Horsley & Son, West Hartlepool.

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