BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY II

The Sea

The maritime history of the United Kingdom involves events
including shipping, ports, navigation, and seamen, from the creation of the kingdom
of Great Britain as a united, sovereign state, on 1 May 1707 in accordance with
the Treaty of Union, signed on 22 July 1706. Until the advent of air transport and the
creation of the Channel Tunnel, marine transport was the only way of reaching
the British Isles. For this reason, maritime trade and naval power have always had great
importance.

The Royal Navy

Under the Acts of Union 1707 in 1707 the Royal Scots Navy merged with the English
navy and the British Royal Navy came into being. The early 18th century saw the Royal
Navy with more ships than other navies. Although it suffered severe financial problems
through the earlier part of this period, modern methods of financing government, and
in particular the Navy, were developed, This financing enabled the Navy to become the
most powerful force of the later 18th century without bankrupting the country. The
Napoleonic Wars saw the Royal Navy reach a peak of efficiency, dominating the navies
of all Britain's adversaries.

The Battle of Trafalgar

From the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 until the outbreak of the European War in 1914,
Britain had an almost uncontested power over the world's oceans, and it was said that
"Britannia ruled the waves". During the Napoleonic Wars, there was increasing tension
at sea between Britain and the United States, as American traders took advantage of
their country's neutrality to trade with the French-controlled parts of Europe as well as
with the British Isles. The Anglo-American War of 1812 was characterised by single-ship
actions and the disruption of merchant shipping.

HMS *Dreadnought*

The start of the 20th century saw structural changes in the Navy, making new funds and manpower available for newer ships. It saw the development of HMS *Dreadnought*, the first all-big-gun ship and one of the most influential ships in naval history. This ship rendered all other battleships then existing obsolete, and indeed lent her name to an entire class of battleships, the dreadnoughts. New programmes such a gunnery training and central fire control which greatly increased the effectiveness in battle of the Navy's ships, were introduced.

During the First World War the Royal Navy played a vital role in escorting convoys of food, arms and raw materials to Britain. It defeated the German campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare and prevented the breakout of the German High Seas Fleet. As well as tasks in the Atlantic it also carried out operations in the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Sea.

In the inter-war years the Royal Navy was stripped of much of its power. However, international tensions increased in the mid-thirties, while the Second London Naval Treaty of 1936 failed to halt the development of a naval arms race and by 1938 treaty limits were effectively ignored. The re-armament of the Royal Navy was well under way by this point; the Royal Navy had constructed the *King George V class* of 1936 and several aircraft carriers including *Ark Royal*. In addition to new construction, several existing battleships, battlecruisers and heavy cruisers were re-constructed and new anti-aircraft weaponry reinforced. Nevertheless, around this time the Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States Navy began to surpass the Royal Navy in power.

After the Second World War, the decline of the British Empire and economic hardships in Britain forced reduction in size and capability of the Royal Navy. The increasingly powerful United States Navy took on the former role of the Royal Navy as a means of keeping peace around the world. However, the threat of the Soviet Union created a new role for the Navy within NATO.

HMS *Ark Royal* in 1976.

The 1960s saw the peak of the Royal Navy's capabilities in the post-war era. The fleet carrier such as the Ark Royal, gave the Royal Navy the most powerful fleet outside the United States. At this time the Royal Navy received its first nuclear weapons and was to become responsible for the maintenance of the UK's nuclear deterrent.

However, a Labour government came into power and was determined to cut defence expenditure. After this the navy began to fall in size and by 1979 the last fleet carrier was scrapped. The navy was forced to make do with three much smaller *Invincible-class aircraft carriers* with Sea Harrier aircraft. The fleet was now centred around anti-submarine warfare in the North Atlantic.

Shipbuilding

At the time of the creation of the United Kingdom, England had important royal dockyards at Harwich, Sheerness and Plymouth. As shipbuilding centres in the north east of England expanded, those in East Anglia declined. Ship sizes increased in the 19th century due to the change from wood to iron and then steel. Yards in the north east and in Scotland became dominant. British yards produced the majority of the world's shipping at the end of the century, mostly tramp steamers.

In 1913 Britain had 61% of the world market, with 40% in 1920 and the boom lasted well beyond the second world war. According to consultancy IHS, 134 vessels – 1.47m

gross tonnes of shipping – were produced in the UK in 1976. But competition from Japan, South Korea and now China has taken its toll, with the industry producing just four ships in 2011. Even Royal Navy tankers are being built in the vast shipyards of South Korea now.

Ports & Harbours

Around the coast of Britain there are hundreds of ports and harbours, varying from the tiny to the large, such as the Port of Felixstowe. Ships were also simply drawn up on beaches. Over the centuries the relative importance of each port and harbour has changed due to such factors as silting and trade alterations. In later periods deep water access has been a major factor in determining a port's success.

In the 18th century there were major harbour improvements with dredging of channels and construction of piers. Wet docks were built at London, Liverpool, Hull and Bristol.

London was still the largest port in the 19th century when new docks were built. Cardiff became a major coal exporting port after a railway link was built, as did other South Wales ports. The railways were responsible for developing new ports such as Newhaven as ferry terminals and the Manchester Ship Canal enabled Manchester to become a significant port though far inland.

When oil replaced coal after the First World War, coal ports like Cardiff declined. London, Southampton, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow increased in trade during the inter-war years, and ferry ports such as Harwich and Dover grew. Oil terminals were built from the 1920s and the larger ships required new docks at existing ports. After the Second World War new cargo handling methods were introduced, but dockers at some ports resisted this change so leading to the development of new facilities at ports such as Felixstowe and Tilbury.

Older port facilities became redundant and were redeveloped, such as Canary Wharf in London. Many of the small ports were redeveloped as marinas, such as Watchet.

Trade – Goods

In the 17th century trade expanded with imports of fish and sugar. Exports were of corn and manufactured goods. Later a major part of this trade was in the "Triangular trade" which involved taking goods from Britain to West Africa, slaves from Africa to the West Indies and America, then sugar to Britain. The main ports involved were London, Bristol and Liverpool but there were many others, with a total of 11,615 sailings with 3.4 million slaves between 1662 and 1807. William Wilberforce and his supporters got the slave trade abolished in 1808 and subsequently the Royal Navy tried to suppress it.

The Industrial Revolution caused a large increase in shipping movements. Raw materials were imported and manufactured goods were exported. In addition, there

was a need for coal. In the 19th century Britain built up the largest merchant fleet in the world. Around half the ocean-going tonnage was under the Red Ensign.

In the First World War a fifth of Britain's pre-war merchant shipping had been sunk by 1917, including 1349 ships in August of that year. Most deep-water ships were sunk by torpedoes while most coastal ones hit mines. The fleets of neutral countries had expanded and in the 1920s there was a slump in shipping. Development of refrigerated ships allowed the importation of lamb and other meats from places such as New Zealand. A large number of merchant ships were sunk in the Second World War, but Britain's fleet had expanded by the end due to new construction. In the 1950s "flags of Convenience" were taking an increasing share of world trade but excluding tankers and the US War Reserve, Britain still had the world's largest merchant fleet in 1957. However, since then there has been a sharp decline, partly because of "re-flagging" to cut costs. Britain now the world's fifth largest trading nation, exports 26% of its gross domestic product with 95% of this trade going by sea.

Fishing

In the 19th and early 20th centuries herring fishing was a major activity in Britain. Herring fishing stopped in England and Wales during the 1960s but continued in Scotland until 1977/8.

Trawling has also been a major activity, with the use of radio navigation aids and echo sounders making life easier now. Fishing in waters off Iceland became important, which led to three "Cod Wars" from the 1950s to the 1970s. British boats were excluded from Icelandic waters in 1976. In 1977 a 200-mile (320 km) fishing limit was set up by the European Economic Community, and British waters were opened to other Community members. This led to overfishing. Landings decreased 28% between 1967 and 1997, with fishing now mainly off Scotland.

In 1890 it was estimated that there were 20,000 men on the North Sea. However, by 1981 only 27 of 130 deep sea trawlers were still going to sea. Many were converted to oil rig safety vessels yet the "inshore" boats landed a greater weight of fish even in 1973.

Other sorts of fishing also take place on a commercial basis such as for crab, lobster, shellfish and mackerel. Sport fishing is popular from coasts and boats, including for shark off south west England.

Vocabulary Check

Write the English meaning for the following words taken from the text:

a) merged _____
b) adversaries _____
c) disrupted _____
d) obsolete _____
e) tensions _____
f) surpassed _____
g) capability _____
h) determined _____
i) dredging _____
j) redundant _____
k) abolish _____
l) suppress _____
m) neutral _____
n) converted _____

Comprehension Questions
Write the answer to the following questions in your own with words with a sentence:

1) Why has maritime trade & naval power always been important to UK?

_____

2) What enabled the British Navy to become so powerful?

_____

3) What important role did the British Navy play during WWI?

_____

4) What 2 things forced Britain to reduce the size and power of its navy?

_____

5) What 2 important changes to the role of the British Navy happened after WWII?

_____

6) What caused the size of ships to change in the 19th century? What did this lead to?

_____

7) What was a major factor in a port's success?

_____

8) What enabled towns inland to become major 'ports'?

_____

9) What led to the development of new ports after WWII?

_____

10) What caused a large increase in shipping?

_____

11) What 2 developments made trawling easier?

_____

12) What led to over-fishing?

_____