Edward James Reed (1830–1906) was a leading naval architect who built ships for the Japanese Imperial Navy in the Meiji period. He became an advocate of revision of the unequal treaties with Japan and quarrelled with Sir Harry Parkes, the British Minister to Japan from 1865–83.

EDWARD REED’ S CAREER

Reed was born at Sheerness on 20 December 1830. He became an apprentice at Sheerness Dockyard and in 1849 was selected as a student for the Central School of Mathematics and Naval Architecture at Portsmouth. In 1851 he married Rosetta Barnaby.

Following his graduation in 1852 he was appointed a supernumerary draughtsman, but found the work frustrating. In 1853 he became editor of the Mechanic’s Magazine and in 1854 he offered the Admiralty a design for an armoured frigate, but ’the concept was ahead of its time’ and the Admiralty, preoccupied by the Crimean War, saw no requirement for such a ship. The Institute of Naval Architects was formed in 1859 and in 1860 Reed became its secretary and editor of the institute’s transactions. In 1863 Reed was appointed chief naval constructor. When his appointment was criticized in
parliament because of his lack of experience, he defended himself so vigorously that he was forced to apologize for his language.

As chief naval constructor Reed was involved in the revolutionary changes which took place at this time in the design of warships. Ships required more armour and better guns. Scientific methods and careful experiments were needed. Reed was responsible for persuading the Admiralty to build the first ship model test tank at Torquay. Reed who was responsible to Spencer Robinson, the Controller of the Navy, proved himself a good team leader. In 1869 he was responsible for the design of HMS *Devastation*, the first battleship for the Royal Navy designed without sailing rig which became the prototype for later battleships. Reed and Spencer Robinson both warned that HMS *Captain*, a fully rigged sailing battleship, was potentially unstable. She capsized in September 1870 with the loss of nearly 500 men. By this time Reed had resigned as a result of quarrels with ministers over the design of the *Captain* and other technical issues.

In 1871 he became chairman of Earle’s shipyard in Hull and established his own naval architecture consultancy in London. Reed had supported the establishment of the Royal School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering in 1864 and continued to contribute to the work of the college. From 1872 to 1875 he was proprietor and editor of *Naval Science*, an influential technical quarterly. He wrote a number of books and articles about naval architecture including *Ironclad Ships* (1869). He also published some poems and travel books.

He unsuccessfully sought election to parliament for Hull in 1873, but was elected for Pembroke in 1874. He represented Cardiff from 1880 to 1895 and again from 1900 to 1906. He served briefly as a Lord of the Treasury in 1886. He was a Liberal until 1905 when he joined the Liberal Unionists.

He was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society in 1876, created a Companion of the Bath (CB) in 1868 and was advanced to KCB in 1880.

Reed designed warships for India, Victoria (in Australia), as well as a number of foreign countries including Germany, Brazil, Chile and Japan.

The Japanese government which looked to Britain for help in the development of the Japanese Imperial Navy regarded Reed as an influential and valuable friend and in 1879 he was invited to Japan as the guest of Admiral Kawamura, then Minister of Marine. He was treated as an honoured guest and looked after royally.

**REED’S PERSONALITY**

It is clear from Reed’s comments as reported in the press and in his writings that he had a high opinion of his own abilities and of the