

NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL
MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 39

**RESEARCHING YOUR SEAFARING ANCESTORS
IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR
A BRIEF GUIDE TO BIOGRAPHICAL RECORDS**

The main sources of information are the records held at the National Archives at Kew. The series relating to Merchant Navy are normally prefixed with the abbreviation BT (Board of Trade) whilst Royal Navy records are denoted by the prefix ADM (Admiralty). It is possible to use these abbreviations together with the series number to find further information via the National Archives Discovery catalogue <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI>

MERCHANT NAVY

Registers of Merchant Seamen's Service

The centralised registration of merchant seamen began in 1835 but was abandoned in 1857. Reintroduced in 1913, most of the records up until 1920 were mistakenly destroyed in 1969. This Central Indexed Register (also known as the Fourth Register of Seamen) consists of:

- The Register of Seamen, Numerical Series, 1921-1941 (CR2), arranged by discharge number, and containing a brief record of ships on which seamen served and dates of signing on (BT348).
- The Register of Seamen, Alphabetical Series, 1921-1941 (CR1), arranged by surname only, contains date and place of birth, discharge number, rating and sometimes a photograph (BT349).

The Register for 1913-1920 was destroyed in 1969, but there does survive the Special Index, Alphabetical Series, 1918-1921 (BT350), which includes similar information to the Alphabetical List (CR1) and photographs. Records of 23,000 Irish born and 1000 Canadian born seamen from these records have been transcribed and are available on the following database <http://www.irishmariners.ie/searchdatabase.php>

The above Registers cover all categories of seafarers, not just ordinary seamen, including details of mates, engineers, trimmers, cooks, stewards, etc., but not masters. The original index cards, over 300,000, are held at the Southampton City Archives. Microfiche copies are held at the National Archives and digital copies of the records are searchable and downloadable on *Find My Past* <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-Records/britain-merchant-seamen-1918-1941>

Apprenticeship Records

From 1823 masters of ships greater than 80 tons were required to carry a quota of indentured apprentices. The indentures had to be filed with the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen, who compiled an Index of Apprentices (BT150). These cover the years 1824-1953, but the actual indentures have only been kept in batches of every 5th year for 1845-1950. Some apprenticeship indentures may have survived in private hands, for example, in shipping company archives.

Agreements and Crew Lists

Following the passing of the 1835 Merchant Shipping Act, masters of any ships belonging to UK subjects undertaking a foreign voyage, and masters of any British registered ships of 80 tons or more employed in the coastal trade or fisheries, were required to carry on board a written agreement with every seaman employed including those joining at any intermediate ports.

These agreements contain details of wage rate, capacity served in and nature of the voyage. On return to the home port the master delivered to the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen, both the original agreements and a list of all seamen who served in the ship during any part of the voyage.

Whilst the National Archives hold all the crew agreements for the Second World War this is unfortunately not the case for the First World War. From 1861-1938 the location of these lists may be anywhere from Greenwich to Newfoundland. The Crew List Index Project website has the most comprehensive selection of finding aids together with a details explanation as to the whereabouts of records <http://www.crewlist.org.uk>

The National Archives holds a 10% sample of the Agreements and Crew Lists of each year from 1861-1938 (BT99) and those for celebrated vessels such as *Great Britain* and *Titanic* (BT100). Also retained was a 10% sample for fishing vessels of less than 80 tons, 1884-1929 (BT144).

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, holds the remaining 90% for the years 1861, 1862, 1865 and every ten years up to 1975 (except 1945). The records for 1915 are currently being listed at the National Archives as series BT400 to be transcribed along with the remaining 1915 crew records held at Kew in series BT99 and BT100. They consist of approximately 39,000 British merchant navy crew lists. The transcriptions will be fully searchable for family historians via the online catalogues of both these institutions. The joint project aims to have all these lists online by 2014.

Local Record Offices often hold crew lists for up to 1913 for ships with ports of registry within their area. <http://www.crewlist.org.uk>

The Maritime History Group at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, holds the remaining majority of the agreements and crew lists for 1861-1938 and 1951-1976 <http://www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/searchcombinedcrews.php>

Crew lists from all the sources above have been indexed on *Find My Past* for the years 1861-1913 http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-united-kingdom-records-in-education-and-work/and_merchant-navy-and-maritime

Official Logs

The Mercantile Marine Act of 1850 required masters to keep a ship's Official Log, recording illnesses, births and deaths on board, misconduct, desertion and punishment, and a description of each man's conduct. All surviving logs for the period 1914-1919 are held at the National Archives (BT165). From 1920 onward surviving logs are usually with Crew Lists.

Certificate of Discharge Book

A bound volume, known as a Continuous Certificate of Discharge Book, was introduced in 1900 in which details of each foreign voyage was entered. Each book had a unique identifying number (discharge number) usually prefixed with the letter R denoting a British seaman. As well as a personal description, it would include foreign voyage details, the name and/or the official number of the ship and a stamp indicating the seafarers character (the initials VG indicated they were of good character, anything else indicated they were not). By 1918 the Board of Trade added a passport style photograph to the book to aid identification. If lost or full a replacement book was issued. Discharge books contain information not held elsewhere and are an invaluable aid to the researcher. As these books were held by the seafarer they mostly survive in personal or family collections.

Registers of Certificates of Competency and Service

An order of 1845 authorised the institution of a system of voluntary examinations of competency for those intending to become masters or mates of foreign-going British merchant ships. The Mercantile Marine Act of 1850 made the system compulsory and the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 extended it to masters and mates of home trade vessels. The certificates were entered into registers arranged in numerical order and provide: name, place and date of birth, Register Ticket number (if any), rank examined for or served in, and date and place of issue of certificate.

Those without sufficient service, or wishing to rise in rank, were granted Certificates of Competency on passing formal examinations. The Registers of Certificates of Competency for Masters and Mates are arranged into 6 series covering the years 1845-1921 (BT122-128) and are accessed by Indexes to the Registers, which give the date and place of birth and certificate number. Examinations of competency were extended to engineers in 1862.

Medals

Records of the following medals to Merchant seamen are held at the National Archives:

British War Medal and the Mercantile Marine Medal to merchant seamen and officers in the First World War, searchable online <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/merchant-seamen-medals-ww1.htm>

Campaign medals (1914-1918) for the British War Medal, Victory Medal and 1914-1915 Star awarded to men of the Mercantile Marine Reserve and officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve (ADM171/131-134)

Awards of campaign, long service and good conduct medals in the Royal Navy medal roll (ADM171) are searchable online <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1687>

A detailed guide can be found on the National Archives website <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/merchant-seamen-medals-honours.htm>

Deaths at Sea

There is no statutory single register of deaths at sea. Some records of deaths at sea were deposited with the General Register Office, some with The National Archives, and others elsewhere. The National Archives series (BT334) contains registers and indexes of births, deaths and marriages at sea maintained by the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen. For the period 1910-1918 there are also registers recording events specifically reported to one of the national Registrars General of births and deaths. The registers include UK and

foreign subjects, passengers and seamen. The registers contain some entries related to the deaths of seamen ashore. They can be searched as part of the largest database relating to maritime deaths on *Find My Past* <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/deaths-at-sea-1781-1968>

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission casualty database lists the names and place of commemoration of the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died during the two world wars including Merchant and Royal Navy.

<http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead.aspx>

The Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum holds a copy of the Register from the Mercantile Marine Memorial Tower Hill, London which commemorates Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet casualties, it often contains additional information not found on the CWGC database.

Other Sources of Information

Lloyd's Marine Records

Underwriters at Lloyd's of London have been undertaking marine insurance for nearly 300 years. The publications and records arising from this business are potentially of great interest to the family historian. The Lloyd's collection is deposited at the Guildhall Library, London, but many record offices, especially those based at ports, have their own copies of the publications. The Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum has hard copy or microfilms of many Lloyd's publications.

Lloyd's Register of Shipping has been published annually since 1764. It was primarily concerned with a ship's seaworthiness and records information about each vessel in alphabetical order, including its port of registry, builders, owners and masters names, and destined voyage.

Lloyd's Lists were daily newspapers published by Lloyd's from c.1741, which contained general commercial information and shipping intelligence. It gives details of vessel sailings and arrivals at ports around the world and also reports on ships lost or damaged. Lloyd's Weekly Lists also provide similar information arranged by name of vessel.

Lloyd's Captains' Registers contain details of master mariners active between 1869 and 1948, arranged alphabetically, and list all holders of Master's Certificates. For each man they give his full name, date and place of birth, as well as certificate number, the date and place of examination. Included is a complete history of his career, giving vessels in which he served, in what capacity (master or mate) and general area of voyaging. Casualties to vessels are given as are any suspensions of his certificate. The registers are held at the London Metropolitan Archive. A partially transcribed index of the register up to 1911 is available on the Guildhall Library website <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/capintro.htm>

The Lloyd's collection at the Guildhall Library includes records relating to mishaps to ships: Missing Vessels Books (1873-1954), the Lloyd's Loss and Casualty Books (1837-1972), War Casualty Books (1917-1922) and First World War Loss Books. The latter can also be found at the Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum.

Shipping Company Records

Where they survive, these are a major source of information on the career of late 19th and 20th century merchant seamen, as they often contain staff records such as apprentice and officer registers, wage books, as well as operational and fleet records such as logs and photographs. The Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum, holds records of several major shipping companies operating from Liverpool. These include

Ocean Transport & Trading (Blue Funnel Line), Elder Dempster, Bibby Line, T. & J. Brocklebank, Harrison Line, and Pacific Steam Navigation Company.

Educational Training Establishments

The Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum, holds the records of two of the training ships which were moored on the Mersey in the latter half of the 19th century. HMS *Conway*, which became a national institution for the training of future officers of the Merchant Navy, and TS *Indefatigable*, founded to give sea training to poor boys. Both of these collections contain records of the cadets who trained on them.

Photographs

Photographs of Merchant Navy vessels can be found amongst shipping company archives and also in shipping photographic collections, such as those held at the Maritime Archives & Library, Merseyside Maritime Museum or the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

Further Reference: *Records of Merchant Shipping and Seamen*, by Kelvin Smith, Christopher T. Watts and Michael J. Watts, produced by the Public Record Office, 1998.

ROYAL NAVY

The records of the Royal Navy are to be found in the Admiralty records held at the National Archives. These records are described in detail in the National Archives guide *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors* by Bruno Pappalardo, 2003.

Published Sources

The Navy List contains details of commissioned officers and or occasionally a warrant officer (heads of specialised technical branches of the ship's company). Published from 1782 onward, it names the ships of the Royal Navy and seniority lists of officers by rank. From 1810 it lists the ships with the names of the officers serving on them.

During the two World Wars much of the usual information was omitted from the published editions of the Navy List and confined to the Confidential Editions, now held in the National Archives (ADM177). Confidential reports on officers who served during World War One, and who in some cases continued serving beyond World War Two, can be found in Officers' Service Records (ADM196).

Service Records

Before 1972 all Royal Navy personnel were given their records when they left the service. The surviving records until that date only contain basic service details and lists of postings, However they often cover the entire career from entry to retirement and death. Some volumes in the later period are subject to extended closure.

Service records of officers who joined the Royal Navy between 1756 and 1931 are searchable online. These records (ADM196) include service records for commissioned officers joining the Navy up to 1917 and warrant officers joining up to 1931
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/royal-naval-officers-service-records.htm>

Other service registers can be found for Engineers, Boatswains and Carpenters (ADM339), Surgeons (ADM104), and for Royal Naval Reserve Officers (ADM240).

Registers for ratings enlisted in the period 1873 to 1923 are in the National Archives. These records can now be accessed online via the National Archives website:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/royal-navy-service.asp>.

Royal Naval Air Service 1906-1018

Service records of officers who served in the Royal Naval Air Service during the First World War are held at the National Archives (ADM273) and contain the records of approximately 7,500 men many of whom transferred from the Royal Navy. The records are searchable online <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/rnas-service-records.htm>

Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve 1903-1922

National Archives series ADM337. They include the service records of ratings joining the RNVN between 1903 and 1919, and officers who joined between 1914 and 1922. The records are searchable online <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/royal-naval-volunteer-reserve-service-records.htm>

Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS)

At the National Archives Women's Royal Naval service records are in series ADM318 for officers and ADM336 for ratings or other ranks. These records have been digitised and can be downloaded from the National Archives using their Discovery catalogue <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI>

The main source for information about the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) is the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth.

Records of Marriage and Death

No systematic records of marriage were kept until the mid-19th century. Names of wives and dates of marriage were usually recorded in the Service Registers. The name and address of next of kin of all officers and ratings who died from any cause 1914-1920, can be found in ADM242/7-10. For officers there is also a card index giving the date, place and cause of death of all officers who died during the First World War, 1914-1920 (ADM242/1-5). This last index has been digitised and been incorporated into the Maritime Deaths database on *Find my Past* <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/deaths-at-sea-1781-1968>

Details of other ranks who died whilst serving during the years 1914-1919 can be found in the War Graves Roll (ADM242/7-10). Arranged alphabetically, they include rank, service number, name of the ship on which they served, the date and place of birth, the date and cause of their death, the location of their grave and address of their next of kin. Registers of those killed and wounded 1854-1919 are to be found in the Medical Departmental Registers (ADM104).

Medal Rolls

Medal Rolls (1793-1966) record the names of officers and men who were awarded or claimed medals or clasps issued for gallantry or service in particular actions or campaigns. They are available on microfilm at the National Archives (ADM171).

Enquiries about entitlement to medals, should be directed to Medal Section, Centurion Building, NPP(Acs)1(f), Grange Road, Gosport, Hants PO13 9XA.

RECORDS OF ROYAL NAVY RESERVE (RNR) SERVICE

A reserve force of volunteer seamen was established under the Naval Reserve Act of 1859. The Admiralty controlled the reserve and was responsible for its training. Merchant seamen and fishermen were recruited through the shipping offices at ports in the UK. The Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen maintained the central records. Initially the reserve comprised solely of ratings, officers were admitted in 1862.

The National Archives holds service records of ratings who served between 1860 and 1913 (BT164). Each page covers a period of 5 years, as it was necessary to apply for re-entry every 5 years. Officers were Merchant seamen who held master's or mate's certificates. In 1864 engineers were also eligible to enter the RNR as officers. Also available are records of officers who served between 1862-1960 (ADM240) and War Casualties Death Registers for 1914-1920 (ADM242/13-15)

Officers of the RNR are also listed in the printed Royal Navy list, giving name, rank in reserve, date of commission and seniority.

The **Royal Naval Division**, formed in September 1914, fought on land alongside the Army in the First World War. It consisted of personnel brought together from the Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Fleet Reserve, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, a brigade of Royal Marines, Royal Navy and Army personnel. All surviving service records (ADM 339) of ratings and officers for the Division are searchable online

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/royal-naval-division.htm>.

Medals

Records relating to the award of the RNR Long Service Medal are in ADM171/70-72. Honours and awards for the RNR during the First World War are in ADM171/77. The Roll of the Naval War Medals also contain entries for the RNR (ADM171).

Other Admiralty Records at the National Archives

Operational records used in preparation of the Official Histories of the War such as War Diaries of the Royal Naval Division (ADM137), which include reports of action and logs of most HM ships.

Reference: *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors*, by Bruno Pappalardo, produced by the National Archives, 2003.

Useful Addresses

<p>Maritime Archives & Library Merseyside Maritime Museum Albert Dock Liverpool L3 4AQ Tel: 0151 478 4424 Email: maritime.archives@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk Website: liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archives</p>	<p>The National Archives (PRO) Ruskin Avenue Kew, Richmond Surrey TW9 4DU Tel: 020 8876 3444 Email: enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk</p>
<p>Imperial War Museum Department of Documents Lambeth Road London SE1 6HZ Tel: 020 7416 5000 Email: docs@iwm.org.uk Website: http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections-research</p>	<p>Registry of Shipping and Seamen MCA, Cardiff Anchor Court Ocean Way Cardiff CF24 5JW Tel: 02920 448800 Email: seafarers_registry@mcga.gov.uk Website: www.mcga.gov.uk</p>
<p>The Archivist Maritime History Archive Memorial University of Newfoundland St. John's Newfoundland Canada A1C 5S7 Tel: 709 737 8428/9 Fax: 709 737 3123 Email: mha@mun.ca Website: www.mun.ca/mha</p>	<p>Archives and Library Royal Naval Museum HM Naval Base Portsmouth Hampshire PO1 3NH Tel: 02392 723795 Email: library@nmrn.org.uk Website: www.nmrn-portsmouth.org.uk/</p>
<p>National Maritime Museum Romney Road Greenwich London SE10 9NF Tel: Caird Library – 0208 3126516 Email: General/donations etc – rmgenquiries@rmg.co.uk Caird Library – library@rmg.co.uk Website: www.rmg.co.uk</p>	<p>Southampton City Archives Southampton City Council Civic Centre Civic Centre Road Southampton SO14 7LY Tel: 023 8083 2251 Email: city.archives@southampton.gov.uk Website: http://www.southampton.gov.uk/libraries-museums/local-family-history/southampton-archives</p>
<p>London Metropolitan Archives (for Lloyd's) 40 Northampton Road London EC1R 0HB Tel: 020 7332 3820 Email: ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk Website: https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives</p>	