



Merchant Navy Service, Officers and Seamen, 1913-1972

The crucial information needed for a search in the archives

The National Archives holds records which might contain the information you require (but please note that access to full details of seamen born less than 100 years ago may be restricted).

We can either:

- search for the information on payment of a fee and supply you with the information (if found).
- or**
- enable you to search for the information in other ways.

Please send as much information as you can. The following details are particularly important:

- The full name of the person*
- The date and place of birth of the person*
- In what capacity did the person serve?*
- Between which years (approximately) did the person serve?*
- Names and dates of any ships in which the person was known to have served.....
- The person's Discharge Book (Dis. A.) Number and/or officer's certificate numbers.....

If you have all the information marked with an asterisk*, the standard charges for our searches will apply and these are shown on this leaflet. If you do not have this information, the standard charges will not apply, as the search time will increase by a large amount, and therefore the search will require a very high fee to be paid. Please contact us if you still want to proceed:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact/form/generalcontactform.asp?id=1&action=1>

1. Central Indexed (Fourth) Register of Seamen, 1918-1941

Standard charge: £45

Catalogue references: BT 350, BT 349, BT 348 and BT 364

This register consists of four inter-related series:

BT 350 recording the issue of seamen's identity cards during the First World War; covers the period 1918-1921. The cards are arranged alphabetically by seamen's name. [This series is known to Southampton Archives Services as CR 10 Cards]

BT 349 is an alphabetically arranged set of cards covering the period 1921-1941. [This series is known to Southampton Archives Services as CR 1 Cards]

BT 348 is a set of cards, arranged numerically by Discharge Book (Dis.A.) number, covering the period 1921-1941. [This series is known to Southampton Archives Services as CR 2 Cards]

BT 349 and BT 350 provide an alphabetical index to the above series.

BT 364 is a collection of cards extracted from the above three series and arranged according to Dis.A. number. [This series is known to Southampton Archives Services as the Mixed series]

A search will be made in series BT 350, BT 349, BT 348 and BT 364 as appropriate.

Information that this source should reveal:

CR10 cards normally record:

- Full name of individual
- Date and place of birth
- Physical description and photograph
- Dis.A. No
- Rating
- Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) No
- Number and grade of any Board of Trade Certificate
- Name and address of next of kin
- Voyage details – ship's official number and date of signing on

CR 1 cards normally record:

- Full name of individual

- Year and place of birth
- Physical description
- Dis.A. No
- Rating
- Number and grade of any Board of Trade Certificate
- Voyage details for one ship only – ship's official number and date of signing on
- Possibly a signature

CR 2 cards normally record:

- Dis.A. No
- Full name of individual
- Year and place of birth
- Rank or rating

- Number and grade of any Board of Trade Certificate
- Voyage details – ship's official number and date of signing on

Not all the information is always recorded.

Factors affecting success of a search:

The first name and surname is essential to make a search feasible (ideally any 'middle names' should be included).

For anything except very uncommon names, it is essential to have both their age and place of birth to distinguish between possible candidates.

For very common names there may be several possibilities, and it may not be possible to distinguish between them.

2. Fifth Register of Merchant Seamen (Central Register of Seamen), 1942-1972

Standard charge: £45

Catalogue references: BT 382, BT 372, BT 390, BT 391 and BT 364

In 1941, a Merchant Navy reserve pool was created to ensure that seamen would always be available to man vessels. The Government paid them to remain in the reserve pool when they were ashore. Thus continuous paid employment instead of casual employment was available to all seamen, and comprehensive and effective registration became possible.

All those who had served at sea during the previous five years were required to register and a new Central Register of Seamen (sometimes referred to as the Fifth Register of Seamen) was established. CR 1 and CR 2 cards of seamen who were still serving in 1941 were removed from the old Central Index Register and placed in the new Central Register of Seamen (CRS 10), index. The Central Register of Seamen was maintained until 1972.

The register now consists of two parts:

Docket Books: These are to be found in series BT 382. These are the main component of the register, containing an entry for each seafarer. They are arranged

alphabetically within a number of groupings.

Pouches: These are to be found in the series BT 372, BT 390 and BT 391. These contain supplementary

information. Often included are a British Seamen's Identity Card (BSIC) with a photograph and fingerprints. Cards extracted from the Central Indexed Register (see above) may also be included here.

Pouches only now exist for approximately 50% of seafarers.

Pouches were not raised for all seafarers and those for individuals with Dis.A. numbers below approximately 95,000 were destroyed long ago.

Some cards that were originally destined for inclusion in pouches are to be found in BT 364.

A search will be made of series BT 382, the three series of seamen's pouches (BT 372, BT 390 and BT 391) and BT 364 as appropriate.

Information that this source should reveal:

The main section of the Docket Books normally include the following information:

- Full name of individual
- Place and date of birth
- Discharge book (Dis.A.) number [any initial letter indicates the seaman's nationality or country of origin - individuals have been found with the same number but with differing initial letters]
- Rank or rating, with certificate numbers for officers
- Details of any other qualifications

- A list of ships, with date and place of joining, rank or rating, F or H (for Foreign or Home trade voyage), with date and place of discharge, and character. When ashore the sheet will bear the entry MNRP (Merchant Navy Reserve Pool) with date and place.

It is not possible to generalise on the likely contents of a pouch, but they do often contain photographs and a British Seamen's Identity Card (BSIC) bearing a photograph and fingerprints.

Factors affecting success of a search:

The first name and surname is essential to make a search feasible (ideally any 'middle names' should be included).

For anything except very uncommon names, it is essential to have age and place of birth to distinguish between possible candidates.

For very common names there may be several possibilities, and it may not be possible to distinguish between them.

3. Service on Cable Ships, 1940-1947

Standard charge: £30

Catalogue references: BT 99/7694 and BT 99/7695-7751

These records relate to the crews of communications vessels that were usually at anchor on the high seas.

Information that this source should reveal:

Each file contains a range of miscellaneous documents related to the individual. One might expect to find:

- Name
 - Rating
 - CSP No.
 - Date of birth
 - Next of kin
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Factors affecting success of a search:

The first name and surname is essential to make a search feasible (ideally any 'middle names' should be included).

For anything except very uncommon names, it is essential to have age and place of birth to distinguish between possible candidates.

For very common names there may be several possibilities, and it may not be possible to distinguish between them.

4. Index to Officer's Certificates of Competency, 1910-1930

Standard charge: £30

Catalogue reference: BT 352

This consists of copies, on microfiche, of cards recording the issuing of certificates of competency to masters, mates, engineers and fishing officers in the home and foreign trades. Information as late as 1965 is often included.

Information that this source should reveal:

These cards normally record:

- Name
- Date and place of birth
- Certificate number
- Grade of certificate
- Date of passing
- Port of examination

Also recorded are any reissues of certificates and any formal notations on a man's record. Voyage details are not given.

The arrangement is alphabetic by officers' names.

Factors affecting success of a search:

The first name and surname is essential to make a search feasible (ideally any 'middle names' should be included).

For anything except very uncommon names, it is essential to have age and place of birth to distinguish between possible candidates.

For very common names there may be several possibilities, and it may not be possible to distinguish between them.

5. Index to Register of Cooks, 1913-1956

Standard charge: £30

Catalogue reference: BT 319

Registration of Cooks began on 30 June 1908. Registers for the period 1915-1958 are held at the National Maritime Museum. The National Archives holds indexes covering the period 1913-1956.

Information that this source should reveal:

This index normally records:

- Full name (surnames beginning with Mac/Mc are under the letter M)
 - Year and place of birth
 - Discharge Book (Dis.A) number if any
 - Certificate number
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Factors affecting success of a search:

Entries are arranged alphabetically by name.

6. First World War Campaign Medals

Standard charge: £30

Catalogue references: BT 351 and ADM 171/130-133

Merchant seamen were entitled to the following medals for service during the First World War, namely:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• British War Medal, for over 6 months sea service between 4 August 1914 and 11 Nov 1918. Recorded in BT 351 and ADM 171.• Mercantile Marine Medal, awarded to those who qualified for the British War Medal and made a voyage through a danger zone. Recorded in BT 351.• 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. Those for awards to members of the Mercantile Marine Reserve are | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• recorded in ADM 171/130-133 – these will be searched. If the award was related to service in the Royal Naval Reserve please see separate enquiry form.• Silver War Badge awarded for wounds. These may be recorded in MT code 6 but would require a significant search to locate details. This search will not be undertaken as part of this request – please make separate enquiry. |
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Information that this source should reveal:

The medal cards in BT 352 card should record:

- Full name of individual
- Year and place of birth
- Date and place of issue of ribbons, medals and any clasps related to British War Medal and Mercantile Marine Medal.

The roll in ADM 171 should record:

- Name and forename
- Rank
- Ship's name or official number
 - Medals awarded:
 - St = 1914-15 Star
 - V = Victory medal
 - B = British War medal
- How issued or disposed of (in abbreviated form).

These records do not provide any information about the circumstances surrounding any award.

Factors affecting success of a search:
None.

7. Second World War Campaign Medals

Standard charge: £30

Catalogue reference: BT 395

Merchant seamen serving during the Second World War were eligible for the following campaign medals:

1939	1939-1945 Star	FR	France and Germany Star
AT	Atlantic Star	WM	War Medal
AF	Africa Star	IT	Italy Star
PA	Pacific Star	OLE	Oak Leaf Emblem
BU	Burma Star	CL	Clasp

These medals were not issued automatically and individuals had to apply for them. This series records the outcome of these applications.

Enquiries about the issue of medals not previously applied for should be directed initially to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Registry of Shipping and Seamen (RSS).

Information that this source should reveal:

This series records the outcome of any application for medals recording, if successful:

- Name, together with some, but rarely all of: Discharge Book (Dis.A) number, date and place of birth – all of this is in the right-hand column.
- Details of the ribbons, medals and clasps actually issued.

In the right-hand column is given the reference to the medal papers file still held by Maritime and Coastguard Agency (Registry of Shipping and Seamen). No information is given as to the circumstances surrounding the application or its outcome.

Factors affecting success of a search

Applications for medals are still being received by the RSS and these records are updated accordingly. RSS hold the definitive set of records and the copy held by The National Archives is not fully up-to-date.
