



The National Archives

Using the Catalogue

There are 11 million publicly available documents held by The National Archives and they are arranged by the government department or court that created the original document.

If you want to find a document you will need to start by looking in the Catalogue, which you can find on our website, [here](#).

There are two ways of using the Catalogue: browsing or searching. If you aren't sure how a document is described, you can browse through the Catalogue by department and series. Using search will show a list of documents which have your search term in the description.

As only a few catalogue summary descriptions are detailed enough to list things like the names of individuals, there are more effective ways to search than entering a name and searching the entire catalogue.

Here are some ideas for achieving better search results:

Try to make your search terms relevant. And, whilst keeping search terms short can often help, simply entering 'Caledonia' when you are looking for the ship's log of that name will throw up too many results to look at.

You could use established search conventions if you are familiar with them. This can help to narrow search results and get over problems with misspelling.

Entering specific dates into the year range filters allows you to concentrate on specific periods.

As each government department has its own code, entering this code will allow you to limit your search to that department. For example, if you're looking for ships' logs, these are likely to be in the Admiralty series, so entering 'ADM' as the departmental code will help.

Your search results are shown in a list. Clicking on an item on the list will give you more information. As the catalogue doesn't contain images of the documents themselves, you will need to 'request' the document to order a copy, or view it if it's available online.