

Merchant Navy seamen and officers 1913-1972

This paid search guide will help you to decide whether to use The National Archives' paid search service.

What information can you find out?

We will always carry out a search of our records to a high standard based on our expertise and professionalism. With any search, there is never a guarantee that you will find the information you are looking for. There are often a number of possible reasons for an unsuccessful search, including the possibility that records were destroyed or lost, or that there are multiple records for individuals with identical names and we have insufficient information to distinguish between them.

Under the terms of the Data Protection Act, access to full details of seamen born less than 100 years ago may be restricted.

Search 1: merchant seamen 1918-1941

This is a search in a set of records known as the Fourth Register of Seamen found in record series [BT 348](#), [BT 349](#), [BT 350](#) and [BT 364](#). The records feature documents known as CR 1, CR 2 and CR 10 cards and can all be accessed on the findmypast website at: <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>. The standard search will initially be of the digitised records on the findmypast website. If no record is found the appropriate microfiche copies of the original records will be checked, based on the information supplied. The following information can be found on these cards:

- full name of individual (CR 1, CR 2, CR 10)
- year and place of birth (CR 1, CR 2, CR 10)
- exact date of birth (CR 10)
- rank or rating (CR 1, CR 2, CR 10)
- physical description (CR 2, CR 10)
- photograph (CR 10)
- Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) number (CR 10)
- number and grade of any Board of Trade Certificate (CR 1, CR 2, CR 10)
- name and address of next of kin (CR 10)
- voyage details featuring ship's official number and date of signing on (CR 1 [one ship only], CR 2, CR 10)
- signature (CR 1)
- Dis. A. number (CR 1, CR 2, CR 10)

Search 2: merchant seamen 1942-1972

This is a search in record series BT 382, BT 372, BT 390, BT 391 and BT 364, a set of records known as the Fifth Register of Seamen, also referred to as the Central Register of Seamen. The register consists of docket books and seamen's pouches.

The docket books normally include the following information:

- full name of individual
- place and date of birth
- discharge book (Dis.A.) number
- seaman's nationality or country of origin
- rank or rating, with certificate numbers for officers
- details of any other qualifications
- 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

Pouches are less consistent in their contents but they can contain:

- photographs
- a British Seamen's Identity Card (BSIC)

Pouches only now exist for approximately 50% of seafarers. Pouches were not created for all merchant seamen. Many for individuals with Dis.A. numbers below approximately 95,000 were destroyed.

Search 3: merchant seamen on cable ships 1940-1947

This is a search in BT 99/7694 and BT 99/7695-7751, records that relate to the crews of communications vessels which were usually at anchor on the high seas. The information they record includes:

- name
- next of kin
- rating
- date of birth

Search 4: service details of officers 1910-1930

This is a search in record series BT 352, recording the issuing of Certificates of Competency to masters, mates, engineers and fishing officers. It includes officers in both home trade and foreign going vessels. In some cases, information included can date from as late as 1965.

Information that a successful search may reveal includes:

- name
- date and place of birth
- grade of certificate
- certificate number
- date of passing
- port of examination
- reissues of certificates
- any formal notations on a man's record

Voyage details are not given.

Search 5: service details of Merchant Navy cooks 1913-1956

This is a search in record series BT 319. Registration of cooks in the Merchant Navy began on 30 June 1908. The National Archives holds indexes to the registers covering the period 1913-1956 (the registers themselves, for 1915-1958, are held at the National Maritime Museum). These indexes normally record the following information:

- full name
- year and place of birth
- discharge book (Dis.A) number if any
- certificate number

Search 6: details of First World War campaign medals

This is a search in BT 351 and ADM 171/130-133, medals records revealing which campaign medals, if any, a merchant seaman received for service in the First World War. However, these records do not provide any information about the circumstances surrounding any award.

A successful search will reveal whether a seaman was granted any of the following medals:

- British War Medal
- Mercantile Marine Medal

- 1914-15 Star
- British War Medal
- Victory Medal

The information revealed by this search can also include the following information:

- 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
- name and forename
- rank
- ship's name or official number on which seaman served

See the Royal Navy ratings paid search guide for records of medals issued to Royal Naval Reserve personnel.

Search 7: details of Second World War campaign medals

This is a search in BT 395, the medal records revealing which campaign medals, if any, a merchant seamen received for service in the Second World War. However, these records do not provide any information about the circumstances surrounding any award.

A successful search will reveal whether a seaman was granted any of the following medals:

- 1939-1945 Star
- Africa Star
- Pacific Star
- Burma Star
- France and Germany Star
- Atlantic Star

These medals were not issued automatically and individuals had to apply for them. 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).

The information revealed by this search can also include the following information:

- Name
- Discharge Book (Dis.A) number
- date and place of birth
- details of the ribbons, medals and clasps actually issued

Search 8: Second World War Shipping Movement cards 1939 - 1946

This is a search in the Second World War shipping movement cards held in BT 389, all of which can be accessed online using Discovery.

A successful search will reveal the movements of a ship on which a seaman was serving between the date that he joined her and his discharge. This information is required when making a claim for the Arctic Star or other Second World War campaign medals not already claimed.

The information revealed by this search can also include the following information:

- name of the ship
- former name/s of the ship (if any)
- size (tonnage) of ship
- to whom ship was registered

- ship's destination
- date of arrival at destination
- ports of call
- any cargo carried on board
- if the ship was torpedoed, mined, damaged or sunk.

The cards record the movements of both British-registered and Allied vessels engaged in the war effort. They do not contain details of any passengers or crew.

What are the charges?

Listed below are our standard charges for each search. However, the fee is likely to be higher than our standard charge if:

- you do not provide us with the essential information we need for a search
- the individual has a very common surname
- you want us to search on a variation of the individual's name (such as with or without middle names, or middle names used as first names)

We will only search for a name as you provide it to us. If you ask us to search for a Charles Marshall Burr, we will not search for Charles Burr. Similarly, if you ask us to search for a Fred Cheeseman, we will not search for Frederick Cheeseman.

Searches 1

Standard charge: £84.06

The standard search will initially be of the digitised records on the findmypast website. If no record is found the appropriate microfiche copies of the original records will be checked, based on the information supplied.

Search 2

Standard charge: £84.06

If service covers the Second World War the standard charge will be £112.08 as we will need to search the records in BT 390 and BT 391 in addition to those in BT 382 and BT 372.

Search 3

Standard charge: £84.06

Searches 4, 5, 6 and 7

Standard charge: £56.04 each

Search 8

Standard charge for movement cards for three ships: £84.06

Charge for 3 additional ships: £56.04

What information do we need for a search?

Please send as much information as you can. The following details are either essential or desirable for a search at our standard charge:

Essential	Desirable
full name of the person, ideally including any middle names	names and dates of any ships in which the person was known to have served
date/year and place of birth of the person	the person's Discharge Book (Dis. A.) number and/or officer's certificate numbers
rank or rating of the person	
range of years (approximately) in	

which the person served	
for search 8 the name of each ship served on, and the dates of joining and discharge for each voyage	Any former name/s of the ship if known

If you would like to request any of the paid searches listed in this guide, please contact us either by completing our [online enquiries form](#) or by completing one of our paper response forms.

You may decide, instead, to do the research yourself. For advice on conducting your own research you should consult the relevant research guides, accessible through our online [guidance index](#).

Research guidance

[Merchant seamen serving after 1917](#)

[Merchant seamen serving after 1913: further research](#)

[Merchant seamen's medals and honours](#)

[Officers in the Merchant Navy](#)