

## Infosheet No. 2 Registry of Shipping

### The Registry of Shipping

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### Merchant Navy Seaman's Sea Service Records

The Registry of Shipping holds current Merchant Navy seamen's sea service records dating from 1994 to 2001. These records of individual merchant seamen's sea service are held in alphabetical order of surname. Details include name of seaman, date and place of birth, discharge (seaman's) book number and rank. The details of ships served on are also shown, including name of ship, official number, date of engagement (joining the ship), date of discharge (leaving the ship), whether it was a foreign or home trade vessel and, in some cases, national insurance contributions.

Merchant Navy Seamen's records dating from 1973 to 1993 are also held by the Registry of Shipping, but these are not the full service records of individual seamen, just registration forms for seamen's documents. Consequently the Registry of Shipping is unable to provide information on the sea service of individual seamen from 1973 to 1993.

### Log books and crew agreements

Log books are the record of a period of time in the life of a vessel and usually cover a period of one year to eighteen months.

The crew agreement is a legal document. It is the agreement between the crew of a vessel and the owners, listing the crew by name, their signatures and the last ship that they sailed on.

The Registry of Shipping holds log books and crew agreements dating 1995 to date.

It also holds Allied Crew List 1939 to 1945, which contains return of British members of crew on foreign ships requisitioned or chartered on behalf of HM Government; agreement and crew list of foreign going ships, including allied vessels lost at sea; records of British seamen serving on Dutch and Norwegian vessels.

### Deaths at Sea: Merchant Seamen and Passengers

The registers of deaths at sea are public documents and are open for inspection. They are a source of the name; rank and occupation; age and date of birth; address; date, cause and place of death; name, official number and port of registry of ship.

The Registry of Shipping currently holds registers of Births and Deaths at Sea dating from 1965 to present day.

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## RS Records held by the National Archives:

### National Archives

Ruskin Avenue  
Kew  
Surrey  
TW9 4DU  
T +44 (0)20 8876 3444  
E [enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk)  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

The National Archives (incorporating the Public Record Office and National Register of Archives) holds the majority of the early records of the Registry of Shipping. These records are detailed below with class references (where known).

### First Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1835 – 1844

The registration of seamen was introduced by the Merchant Shipping Act 1835.

- BT 120: Register of Seamen, Series 1 (1835 - 1836).
- BT 112: Register of Seamen, Series 11 (1835-1844).
- BT 119: Alphabetical Index to Seamen.

### Second Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1845 - 1854

The Merchant Shipping Act 1844 stipulated that every British seaman should have a register ticket. The details given when applying for a ticket were: name, date and place of birth, date and capacity of first going to sea, capacity since, any service to the Royal Navy and capacity, employment at sea and home address.

- BT 113: Registers of Seaman's Tickets (1845 – 1853).
- BT 114: Alphabetical Index to Registers of Seaman's Tickets.
- BT 115: Alphabetical Register of Masters' Tickets.

### Third Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1854 – 1856

This register of merchant seamen's service was opened in 1854. Arranged in alphabetical order of surname, it records the age, place of birth, voyage details (ship name and port of departure) for individual seamen. In 1856 it was considered that the obligation to maintain a register of seamen was satisfied by the crew list and the register was closed.

- BT 116: Register of Seamen: Series 111.

### Fourth Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1913 - 1940

- BT 364: Register of Seamen, Combined Numerical Index (CR1, CR2 and CR10).
- BT 348: Register of Seamen, Central Index, Numerical Series (CR 2, microfilm).
- BT 349: Register of Seamen, Central Index, Alphabetical Series (CR 1, microfilm).
- BT 350: Register of Seamen, Special Index, Alphabetical Series (CR 10, microfilm).
- *The original record cards that make up the Fourth Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1913 to 1940 are currently held by **Southampton Archive Services** (see address below).*

### Fifth Register of Merchant Seaman's Service 1941 - 1972.

- BT 382.

### Merchant Seaman's Pouches 1913 – 1940

These pouches were a central repository for seamen's documents; comprising many documents that a seaman would have had to submit to the Registry of Shipping during his career and copies of documents issued to him. The documents would include applications for discharge books

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# Infosheet

(including photographs of the seaman), Sea Service Records, records of certificates issued, etc. The Pouches sometimes contain record cards extracted from the Fourth Register of Seaman's Service.

- BT 372: Central Register of Seamen's Records ("Pouches").

## Certificates of Competency

From 1845 masters and mates of foreign going vessels took voluntary examinations of competency. These exams became compulsory in 1850 and from 1854 masters and mates of home trade vessels were also required to take these examinations.

The certificates show place & date of birth; register ticket number; rank; and date of issue. May also show details or previous ships, injuries or death.

The registers are held under the following Board of Trade references:

- BT 122: Certificates of Competency Masters and Mates Foreign Trade (1845-1900).
- BT 124: Certificates of Service Masters and Mates Foreign Trade (1850-1888).
- BT 125: Certificates of Competency Masters and Mates Home Trade (1855-1921).
- BT 123: Registers of Certificates of Competency Masters and Mates of Steamships Foreign Trade (1881-1906).
- BT 126: Registers of Certificates of Service Masters and Mates Home Trade (1855-1888).
- BT 115: Alphabetical List of Masters (1845-1854).
- BT 128: Colonial Competency Certificates.
- BT 139-142: Competency Certificates Engineers.
- BT 143: Misc. Competency Certificates.
- BT 317/1-7: Re-issues Competency Certificates.

- BT 352: Competency All.

Additional records relating to officers of the Merchant Marine include:

- BT 129-130: Fishing Skippers and Mates (1880-1921).
- BT 138: Fishing Skippers and Mates (1880-1917).
- BT 336: Changes of Master (1893-1948).
- CUST 70/188: Bristol Transfer of Ships or Changes of Master (1842-1854).

## Log books and crew agreements

- For 1861 - 1938 and 1951 - 1990, a 10% sample of all log books are held at the National Archives. Ref. BT 99: Agreements and Crew Lists, Series 11.

### The National Maritime Museum

(see address below) holds the remaining 90 per cent of crew lists for 1861, 1862 and all years ending in 5 (except 1945). Various county record offices, libraries and archives hold those crew lists not held by the NMM or TNA for the period 1863-1912 (see attached list). **The Maritime History Archive** (MHA), Memorial University of Newfoundland, holds all of the crew lists not taken by other institutions for the years 1863 – 1976.

- The Registry of Shipping is currently in the process of transferring all Second World War official log books and crew agreements to The National Archives, these date 1939 to 1946 (NB log books started in 1945 run into 1946). They will be held under class reference BT 381: Second World War Log Books and Crew Agreements. The transfer should be completed in Autumn 2002.
- Ships' Log Books and Crew Lists 1747 - 1860 are held under BT 98: Agreement and Crew Lists, Series I.

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- 'Special Ships', also known as celebrated ships, (1861 onwards). A selection was made of log books and crew agreements from famous ships, such as the *Titanic* and *Great Britain*. These are held under BT 100: Agreements and Crew Lists, Series III.
- BT 144: Agreement and Crew Lists, Series IV holds a 10% sample of fishing vessels of less than 80 gross tons for the period 1884 - 1919. Later records are held in BT 99 (as above).
- BT 165: Agreements and Crew Lists holds log books and crew agreements for 1914-1918.
- BT 165: Ship's Official Log Books. These contain entries of births and deaths at sea 1902-1938.

## Births, deaths and marriages at sea: merchant seamen & passengers

- BT 334: Registers and Indexes of Births, Deaths and Marriages at sea. These records span 1891 to 1964 and include the death registers of passengers and crew lost on the *Titanic* and *Lusitania*.
- BT 158: Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Passengers at Sea (1854 - 1890).
- BT 160: Registers of Births of British Nationals at Sea and BT 159: Registers of Deaths at Sea of British Nationals (from 1874).
- BT 153: Registers of Wages and Effects of Deceased Seamen.
- BT 154: Indexes to Seaman's Names and Indexes to Ships' Names.
- BT 156: Monthly Lists of Deaths of Seamen.
- BT 157: Registers of Seaman's Death Classified by Cause.
- BT 341: Inquiries into Deaths at Sea, Papers and Reports. Covers years 1939 to 1946 and 1964.
- BT 347: Daily Casualty Registers, 1939 - 1945.
- RG 32: Foreign returns.
- CUST 67/74: Falmouth register of deaths and births.

## Rolls of Honour, First and Second World Wars

- BT 339: Registers of Certificates of Competency and Service

## Transcripts and transactions

Under the 1786 Merchant Shipping Act, all British ships with a deck of more than 15 tons burden had to be registered at their home port. Customs officers issued numbered certificates and then sent copies, in book form, to Custom House in London or Edinburgh. These were called transcripts. From 1825 more detailed information on ownership was recorded. Ships were divided into 64 shares and the changes to the ownership of those shares, transactions, were recorded also. Changes of masters (who usually held shares) are shown. The information available includes:

- name and home port
- date of registration
- name, address and occupation of owner(s)
- master
- place and date of construction (or capture)
- vessel characteristics such as masts, dimensions, type, decks, whether it has a figurehead and/or galley.

Unfortunately a fire in 1814 at the London Custom House destroyed all earlier records, so the series begins in that year. However, the Port of London Registration Books 1786-1814 have been added; these are excellent references and contain details of many of the finest merchant ships of that period, including the East Indiamen.

Scottish custom houses sent their transcriptions to Edinburgh, and Edinburgh then sent a copy to London; hence the Edinburgh records cover Scotland only, but London records cover the whole United Kingdom. The local customs houses retained their own register, of course, so that these generally pre-dated 1814 and may go

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back as far as 1768. Records are held under reference: BT 107: Series I

The Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 consolidated the administration of the British Merchant Fleet and the Transcripts in Series II (BT 108) contain additional information, such as the builder's name, official number (assigned to newly-registered ships after 1854) and, where applicable, engine details.

Indexes to Transcripts (BT 111). There are four indexes to the records as described above.

From 1854 copies of transactions (the sale of shares etc) were submitted on a separate form to the transcripts and are found under the reference BT 109. Until 1889, however a dual system was in operation, so transactions are also mentioned in the transcripts.

From 1889 all papers relating to a ship were kept together and filed away only when the ship registry was closed. These are now held under reference: BT 110, Series IV (Closed Registries). In order to search through this series it is necessary to know when the Registry was closed. This would happen when a ship was lost, broken up or sold into foreign ownership, and the date can usually be found from the *Lloyd's Register of Ships* or the *Mercantile Navy List*. Failing this, the General Register and Record Office of Shipping and Seamen.

## Other relevant addresses:

### **The National Maritime Museum**

Greenwich  
London  
SE10 9NF  
T +44 (0)20 8858 4422  
F +44 (0)20 8312 6632  
[www.nmm.ac.uk](http://www.nmm.ac.uk)

### **The Archivist Maritime History Archive**

Memorial University of  
Newfoundland  
St. John  
Newfoundland  
A1C 5S7  
T +1 709 737 8428  
F +1 709 737 3123  
[www.mun.ca/mha](http://www.mun.ca/mha)

### **Southampton Archive Services**

Southampton City Council  
South Block  
Civic Centre  
Southampton  
SO14 7LY  
T + 44 (0)23 8083 2251  
F + 44 (0)023 8083 2156  
E [city.archives@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:city.archives@southampton.gov.uk)

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## Reference publications:

Smith, Watt and Watt *Records of Merchant Shipping and Seamen* (PRO Publications, Kew: 1998)

W J Killingback *The Work of the Registry of Shipping & Seamen, and Merchant Marine Offices* (1945). Held in TNA Library reference 387.20216.

**Researchers should check availability, accessibility and opening times with the repositories listed before making a personal visit.**

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