

Merchant Navy seamen 1835-1857 and officers 1835-1913

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.

Search 1: seamen 1835-1857 and officers 1835-1844

This is a search in record series [BT 112](#), [BT 113](#), [BT 114](#), [BT 116](#), [BT 119](#) and [BT 120](#). The records held in all the above record series can be accessed on the findmypast website at: <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>. Please note that this is a search of the digitised records on the findmypast website. It does not include a search in the original documents. A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about a seaman:

- number in one or more of the Registers of Seamen
- age at time of registration (not always accurate)
- date or year of birth
- place of birth
- rank
- ships (including ships' names and ports of registry with date of registration for the ships on which the individual served)
- voyages
- date and rank at time of registration and subsequent ranks
- physical description
- previous service, including service in the Royal Navy, if any, and his rank

These records do not cover every merchant seaman that served during these years.

Some men preferred not to register and chose to work illegally without the necessary paperwork.

Records between February 1840 and December 1841 do not exist.

There are missing records for names beginning with 'A' and 'K' so a search for these names can sometimes be problematic.

Search 2: masters 1845-1854

This is a search in record series BT 115, the alphabetical register of masters. A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about a seaman:

- age (at the time of the first recorded voyage)
- place of birth
- voyages (ships' names are not included)

Search 3: masters 1845-1850

This is a search in BT 143/1 and BT 6/218-219, the register of men who passed the Board of Trade voluntary examinations of competency. The register only covers certificates granted for masters to 1 January 1849 and mates to 9 May 1850.

A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about a seaman:

- date of certification
- year and place of birth
- surname and forename
- number of register ticket
- class of certificate
- remarks
- examining board

Search 4: masters and mates 1845-1925

This is a search in record series BT 122-128, registers recording seamen who passed, or were granted exemption from, the compulsory examinations for masters and mates that were progressively introduced from 1845. They do not include details of those who passed the voluntary examinations (see Search 3).

A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about a seaman:

- year and place of birth of seaman
- type of certificate issued to seaman (whether master or mate) with date and place of issue
- certificate number
- seaman's ticket number
- voyages (up to and including 1888)
- remarks (for example, date of death if died in service or details of an alternative certificate number)

Search 5: engineers 1861-1921

This is a search in record series BT 139-142, the three registers recording seaman who passed, or were granted exemption from, the compulsory examinations for engineers introduced in 1861.

A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about a seaman:

- year and place of birth of engineer
- type of certificate issued to engineer, with date and place of issue
- certificate number
- reference to voyages (up to and including 1888)

Search 6: fishing boat officers 1880-1921

This is a search in record series BT 129, BT 130 and BT 138, covering two registers that recorded seaman who passed, or were granted exemption from, the compulsory examinations for skippers and mates of fishing vessels introduced in 1880.

A successful search will reveal some or all of the following about an officer:

- year and place of birth of officer
- type of certificate issued to officer with date and place of issue
- certificate number
- pilotage certificate number (for example, seamen's ticket number)
- voyages (up to and including 1888)

What are the charges?

Search 1

Standard charge: £84.06. This charge is for a search of the digitised records on the findmypast website. It does not include a search in the original documents

Searches 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Standard charge: £84.06.

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)
- for Search 1, we need to consult original records (the standard charge is based on an online search)

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.

Search 2 can be combined with Search 1, 3 or 4 at no additional charge.

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	names and dates of any ships on which the person was known to have served
date (even if approximate) and place of birth of the person	certificate number (if already known)
range of years (approximately) during which the person served	name of the colony where the certificate was issued (if it was issued in a British colony)
person's rank (for example, seaman, master, mate, engineer, skipper, mate or second mate)	

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 1858-1917](#)

[Merchant seamen serving up to 1857](#)

[Crew lists, agreements and log books of merchant ships 1747-1860](#)

[Crew lists, agreements and log books of merchant ships after 1861](#)

