

Royal Navy officers 1660-1945

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: officers' service records 1756-1931

This is a search in record series ADM 196. It covers both commissioned officers who joined the Royal Navy up until May 1917 and warrant officers who joined up until 1931. It consists of overlapping sets of service records and because of this it is sometimes possible to find more than one record per individual. The records cover the following commissioned and warrant ranks and can include confidential reports on an officer's conduct and suitability for promotion.

- Admirals
- Captains
- Commanders
- Lieutenants and Sub-Lieutenants
- Mates and Acting Mates
- Gunners
- Paymasters

A successful search will reveal all or some, of the following information regarding a Royal Navy officer:

- date and place of birth
- dates of commissions and promotion
- details of ships served on
- details of rewards or distinctions
- dates of retirement and death
- wife's name
- date and place of marriage
- father's name, occupation and address
- dates of promotion
- remarks on suitability for promotion

Service records were not kept for all officers. It was only from the 1840s that service records of Royal Navy officers began to be systematically kept. Before this, there were records only of officers still alive at this time, and a small number of records created for specific purposes.

Search 2: details of service for commissioned officers 1660-1746

This is a search for a commissioned officer's service record in record series ADM 10. A successful search will reveal all, or some, of the following information about the officer:

- names of ships served
- dates served on each ship
- age
- address

Service records were not kept for all officers in this period.

Search 3: details of service in officers' survey returns 1817-1861

This is a search in record series ADM6, ADM, ADM 11 and ADM 106 as appropriate, survey forms completed by officers regarding their service. A successful search will reveal all, or some, of the following information about the officer:

- names of ships served on
- dates served on each ship
- age
- address
- date of seniority
- time served

Some officers compiled their returns from memory, many years after they last served, and, therefore, they may not be entirely accurate. Surveys were taken for a specified rank at a specified date. If an officer was not serving at that rank at that date he would not have completed a form.

Not all officers returned their forms, some never received them, and some forms have been lost.

The National Archives does not hold confidential reports for every officer rank.

Search 4: details of officers in passing certificates

This is a search in record series ADM 6, ADM 13, ADM 106 and ADM 107, as appropriate for a passing certificate, issued to officers at the beginning of their careers when they passed a qualifying examination for their respective rank. The exam was to test that they had the relevant skills and experience to carry out the duties expected of them. The search covers the following ranks and dates:

- lieutenants 1691-1902
- boatswains 1810-13 and 1851-87
- carpenters 1856-87
- gunners 1731-1812 and 1856-87
- masters 1660-1830
- pursers, later known as paymasters, 1813-20 and 1851-89
- surgeons 1700-1800
- engineers 1863-1902

A successful search will reveal all, or some, of the following information about lieutenants:

- dates served on board ships
- names of ships and rank
- date they passed the exam
- baptismal certificates

Other officers' passing certificates may just indicate that the officer has been found suitable to undertake the duties required of that rank, and the date of examination.

Some series of passing certificates are not indexed by name and are therefore very difficult to find.

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.

Search 1, 2 and 4

Standard charge: £84.06

Search 3

Standard charge: £112.08

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 officer	ship(s) served on
their rank	
approximate dates of service	
date of promotion* (search 4 only)	
rank, and at least approximate date of examination (search 4 only)	

The date of promotion, known as the 'date of seniority', can be found in service records or in the published Navy List, available at The National Archives in Kew and other specialist archives and libraries.

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

[Royal Navy warrant officers](#)

[Royal Navy commissioned officers](#)

[Royal Navy officers' pensions](#)

