

Ships, Masters & Mates: Sounding the depths of Merchant Marine Records
Barbara Tose, BIFHSGO Conference, 18 September 2011

MERCHANT SEAMEN SERVICE RECORDS

1999 - 2002 Sea Service Records - available from RSS; extracted from logbooks and crew agreements at cost of £11.00 per logbook/crew agreement.

1973 to 1999 Sea Service Records - not available; the Registrar General was not required by legislation to keep these records.

1941 to 1972 Fifth Register of Merchant Seaman's Service - filed in alphabetical surname order; includes: Name of seaman, Date and place of birth, Discharge (Seaman's) book number, Rank, Details of the ships on which he served including: Name of ship and official number, date of engagement (Joining ship), Date of discharge (Leaving ship), whether ship was a foreign going or home trade vessel, and possibly National Insurance contributions.

1913 to 1940 Fourth Register of Merchant Seaman's service - TNA on microfiche as BT 348 (Central Index, Numerical Series), 349 (Central Index, Alphabetical Series), 350 (Special Index, Alphabetical Series), 364 (Combined Numerical Index). Original records for the above available at: Southampton Archives, Southampton City Council, South Block, Civic Centre, Southampton, SO14 7LY; open for free in-person searches; charges will be made for requests by post, e-mail or fax.

1913 to 1940 Merchant Seaman's Pouches - TNA, BT 372; numerical order by seaman's discharge book number; may include Applications for Discharge Books (including photographs of the seaman), Sea Service records, records of certificates issued, and other documents submitted or issued to the seaman over his career.

1857 - 1913 - no Register of Merchant Seaman's Service kept for these years

1854 - 1856 Third Register of Merchant Seaman's service- TNA, BT116; alphabetical order; included: age, place of birth, details of voyage, including name of ship and port of departure.

1845 - 1854 Second Register of Merchant Seaman's Service - TNA, BT 113 (Certificate number order), BT 114 (Alphabetical Index), BT 115 (Alphabetical Register); details include: Name, Date and place of birth, Date and capacity of first going to sea, Capacity since; any Royal Navy ship served in, and capacity; Present employment at sea, home address.

1835 to 1844 First Register of Merchant Seaman's service - TNA, BT120 (Series I - 1835-1936, arranged alphabetically), BT 112 (Series II - 1835-1844), BT 119 (Alphabetical index to Seamen; provides the Registration Number of the seaman)

CREW AGREEMENTS and LOG BOOKS

Crew Agreements - legal agreement between the crew of a vessel and the master/owners; describes the voyage, giving a general idea of where they were going, where they would be discharged and how long they might be away; laid out the provisions that could be expected per day; spelled out the rules & regulations of engagement; lists the crew including signature when signing on, age, birthplace/nationality if not British, port of engagement, home address, last ship served on and date discharged or date of death if applicable, date & place of engagement, capacity (position), certificate number if applicable, date & hour to be on board, wages, wages advanced on signing, amount of weekly or monthly allotment, date, place and cause of leaving the ship, wages due on discharge, signature of crew member at discharge; Consul stamps from ports entered including notes of any desertions, hirings, deaths or other noteworthy events.

Logbooks - record of a specific period of time in the life of a vessel; divided into 2 sections, tabular and narrative; tabular section includes list of ports docked at, births and deaths & other routine information; narrative section contains entries

regarding notable events during the voyage, disciplinary action, illness among the crew and accidents; post 1852 logbooks were kept with crew agreements.

Crew Agreements & Log Books 2000 to 2002 - RSS, certificate of sea service obtained from these records

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1996 to 1999 - no records retained

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1977 to 1995 - TNA - 10% sample, BT 99

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1951 to 1976 - TNA - 10% sample, BT 99; MHA - 80% of records; NMM - remaining 10% for years ending in '5', i.e. 1955, 1965, 1975

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1947 to 1950 - TNA - all records, Merchant & Fishing vessels, BT 99

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1939 to 1946 - TNA, BT 385 - an alphabetical index of ship's names to records filed by ship's number in BT 381

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1861 to 1938 - TNA - 10% sample, BT 99; MHA - 80% of records; NMM - remaining 10% for years ending in '5', i.e. 1865, 1875, 1885, etc.; some records have been maintained by local records offices, RSS will provide list of locations upon request

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1835 to 1860 - TNA, BT 98, for foreign going vessels over 80 tons, includes: name, wage, capacity (position), nature of voyage; pre-1854 arranged by Port of Registry numbers; post-1854 arranged by official ship's number;

Crew Agreements & Log Books 1747 to 1851 - TNA, BT 98, muster rolls kept including names, home address, date of engagement, last ship served on

Special Ships 1861 onwards - TNA, BT 100, selection of crew agreements & logbooks from famous ships, e.g. Titanic

Fishing Vessels of less than 80 tons 1884 to 1919 - TNA, BT 144, 10% sample; post 1919 found in BT 99 (see above)

Crew Agreements & Log Books WW1 1914 to 1918 - TNA, BT 165

Log Books containing Births and Deaths at Sea 1902 to 1938 - TNA, BT 165

REGISTERS OF CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCY AND SERVICE - Masters, Mates & Engineers

1845 to 1850 - voluntary examinations of competency for masters & mates of foreign going vessels

1850 - examinations mandatory for masters & mates of foreign going vessels

1854 - examinations compulsory for masters & mates of home trade vessels

Certificates of Service: seamen deemed to have sufficient experience as a master or mate and men retiring from the Royal Navy were eligible, without formal examination, for certificates of service.

Certificates of Competency - granted upon passing examinations

Certificates entered in Registers arranged numerically and include: certificate number, name, place & date of birth, register ticket if any, rank examined for or served in, date of issue of certificate; may include additional information about seaman.

Registers arranged in 12 series according to type of certificate and type of trade - all held at TNA

BT 115 (1845-1854) Alphabetical Register of Masters

BT 122 (1845-1900) Certificates of Competency: Masters and Mates Foreign Trade

BT 123 (1881 - 1921) Certificates of Competency: Masters and Mates of Steamships: Foreign Trade

BT 124 (1850-1888) Certificates of Service: Masters and Mates: Foreign Trade.

BT 125 (1854-1921) Certificates of Competency: Masters and Mates: Home Trade

BT 126 (1855-1888) Certificates of Service: Masters and Mates: Home Trade

BT 128 (1870-1921) Certificates of Competency, Master and Mates: Colonial

BT 129 (1880-1921) Certificates of Competency, Skippers & Mates of Fishing Boats

BT 130 (1883-1917) Certificates of Service, Skippers & Mates of Fishing Boats

BT 139 (1861-1921) Certificates of Competency, Engineers

BT 140 (1862-1921) Certificates of Competency, Engineers, Colonial

BT 142 (1862-1921) Certificates of Service, Engineers

BT 143 (1845-1849) Certificates of Competency & Service, Miscellaneous

Indexes to above:

BT 127 (1845-1894) Index to Certificates of Competency & Service, Masters & Mates, Home & Foreign Trade; Note: does not contain details of those who obtained voluntary certificates (1845-1850)

BT 138 (1880-1917) Index to Certificates of Competency & Service, Skippers & Mates of Fishing Boats

BT 141 (1861-1921) Index to Certificates of Competency & Service, Engineers

BT 352 (1910-1930) Index to Certificates of Competency, Masters & Mates, Engineers, & Fishing Officers, Home & Foreign Trade: cards arranged alphabetically by seaman's name listing certificates issued with relevant Certificate number

Application Forms for Certificates (1845-1927) - held at NMM, arranged numerically by Certificate number, provides personal details and list of vessels served on with relevant dates of service; NMM also holds office copies of certificates issued.

Notes on Indexes: Names beginning with 'Mc' or 'Mac' are usually found under the letter following the prefix, e.g. McLintock will appear under 'L'. Indexes provide: name, place & date of birth, certificate number. Certificate numbers generally remain the same as that given with the first certificate obtained; new numbers were occasionally allocated when replacement certificates were issued.

APPRENTICES - TNA, BT 150 (1824-1953) indexes for all apprentices whose indentures were registered; BT 151 (Indentures 1845-1962) & BT 152 (Indentures for Fishing 1895 to 1935) specimens taken at five-yearly intervals of the copy indentures.

LLOYD'S MARINE COLLECTION - Guildhall Library

Lloyd's Registers (from 1764): for insurance purposes; notes ship's number, ship name and type of vessel, Master, size, where and when built, owners, port belonging to, destined voyage, classification (as surveyed by Lloyd's)

Lloyd's List (from 1740) - newspaper reporting shipping movements and casualties; published weekly or twice weekly

Lloyd's Captains Register (from 1851) - alphabetical listing of masters holding Certificates of Competency or Service; gives name; place & year of birth; date, number & place of issue of master's certificate; other special qualifications (e.g. steam); name & official number of each ship, date of engagement & discharge as master or mate; destination of each voyage; casualties to vessels; any awards (e.g. war service)

Mercantile Navy List (1850-1976) - published by the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen, the official list of British registered ships; gives official ship number, name, port of registry, tonnage, horsepower for steam, name & address of owner, and later date & place built. Guildhall holds 1857-1976; NMM holds 1857-1976; TNA holds various years.

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES CANADA - Lloyd's Captains Registers 1851-1947 (microform); Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping 1852-1899 (microform).

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES:

RSS - Registry of Shipping and Seamen, P.O. Box 420, Cardiff, CF24 5JW; Tel: 029 2044 8800; e-mail rss@mcga.gov.uk

TNA - The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU; Tel: 020 8392 5200; website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

NMM - National Maritime Museum, Romney Road, Greenwich, London SE10 9NF; website: <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/researchers/family-history-research/>

MHA - Maritime History Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, A1C 5S7; Tel:

709-864-8428; Fax: 709-864-3123; E-mail: mha@mun.ca; website: <http://www.mun.ca/mha/>

Guildhall Library, Lloyd's Marine Collection, Aldermanbury, London, EC2P 2EJ; Tel: 020 7332 1868; website:

http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Leisure_and_culture/Libraries/City_of_London_libraries/guildhall_lib.htm

lecture on records: <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/lloydtalk.htm>

partial index to Captains Register 1869-1911: <http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/capintro.htm>

Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ; website: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.6>

Websites:

British Merchant Navy - Old Friends Plus: Complete Guide to Merchant Navy Records - a 12 page guide to records from 1747 to 2002; <http://www.merchant-navy.net/forum/f119/complete-guide-merchant-navy-records-part-i-1795/>

London Metropolitan Archives - Information Leaflet No. 50 - Lloyd's of London "Captains Registers" and Related Sources: <http://217.154.230.218/NR/rdonlyres/52B4EE6E-839D-49C3-9E98-6979248D6FBF/0/50LLOYDSOFLONDONCAPTAINREGISTERSANDRELATEDSOURCES.pdf>

National Museums Liverpool - Maritime Archives & Library, Information Sheet 52, Lloyd's Marine Insurance Records: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/pdf/Maritime%20Commerce-Lloyds%20Marine%20Insurance%20Records%20on052.pdf>

The Sunderland Site: <http://www.searlecana.org/sunderland/sunderland001.html>

PortCities Southampton: <http://www.plimsoll.org/Southampton/default.asp>;

Wreck Reports: <http://www.plimsoll.org/WrecksAndAccidents/wreckreports/default.asp>

also available for Bristol, Hartlepool, Liverpool, London and UK, link at above site

CLIP - Crew List Index Project <http://www.crewlist.org.uk/>; CLIP was set up to improve access to the records of British merchant seafarers of the late 19th century and has gathered the largest database of entries from crew lists. Available online at FindMyPast

BOOKS:

Christopher T. and Michael J. Watts, *My Ancestor was a Merchant Seaman* (2nd edition, London: Society of Genealogists) 2004.

Kelvin Smith, Christopher T. Watts and Michael J. Watts, *PRO Guide No. 20: Records of Merchant Shipping and Seamen* (Richmond: PRO Publications) 1998.

D.T. Barriskill, *A Guide to the Lloyd's Marine Collection at Guildhall Library* (2nd edition, London: Guildhall Library) 1994.

Tracing your Family History: Merchant Navy (London: Imperial War Museum) 2000.

Peter L. Hogg, *Basic Facts About...Using Merchant Ship Records for Family Historians*, (Birmingham: FFHS), 1997.

Peter L. Hogg, *The Furness Legacy to the Hartlepoons 1895-1995* (Hartlepool) 1995.

Mariner's Mirror (Society for Nautical Research) published quarterly since 1911.

Richard Weatherill, *The Ancient Port of Whitby and its Shipping: With Some Subjects of Interest Connected Therewith* (Whitby) 1908; now available as a reprint from Kessinger Legacy Reprints

Alfred Lund, *The Red Duster* (Whitby) 1989

Alfred Lund, *Home Port: Outline of Shipping Activities in Whitby from Monastic Times to the Late 1980s* (Whitby) 1992

Ronald Hope, *Poor Jack: The Perilous History of the Merchant Seaman* (London: Chatham Publishing) 2001