

*Investigating*

# Merchant Navy Ancestors



East Yorkshire  
Family History Society

## Crew Agreements

The contract between seamen and their employer(s), known as Crew Agreements, continued after 1857. They contain much more information than Muster Rolls and include details of voyages, apprentices, crews and ships. Coasters (engaged in trading the UK coastal waters and Baltic ports) submitted their crew agreements twice a year and frequently include a list of all departures (sailings) and arrivals (landings). Deep water vessels (trading with foreign ports) submitted their less-detailed returns at the end of each voyage. This will affect the year in which such records are filed.

## Crew Lists (Muster Rolls)

Crew Lists, originally Muster Rolls and/or Muster Books, began in the 18th century as a way of gathering a 'levy' from seamen's wages for a relief fund. They recorded the seafarer's name, rating, date of entry and final discharge date for everyone serving on board. The 1835 introduction of the Shipping Act was intended to create a central register of all seamen who might be called upon by the Royal Navy in times of war. This central registration ended in 1857 and restarted in 1914, in response to the First World War.

### ***1747–1860***

The National Archives hold all surviving muster rolls and crew agreements, but the only records in existence before 1800 are those of Dartmouth, Liverpool, Plymouth, Shields and Scarborough. Prior to 1854, these are filed in port/registry number order, while post 1854 by the ship's official number.

### ***1861–1938***

The National Archives holds a 10% random sample of each year's crew agreements, together with those of famous ships such as the SS Great Britain and Cutty Sark. For years ending in '5', 1861 and 1862; the remaining 90% are held at the National Maritime Museum. Approximately 70% were acquired for the Memorial University of Newfoundland's Maritime History Research Collection when the UK archives were planning to have them destroyed as surplus to requirements. Others are scattered around the UK, having been acquired by interested local city and county archives at around the same time.

A description of the National Archives holding, and that of local archive centres, are described at:

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=129](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=129)

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, provides a web page providing brief details of their holdings at [www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlist.php](http://www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlist.php). Unfortunately, there are no online search facilities but numerous research guides are available for free download.

The Newfoundland Archive offers a service whereby researchers may request copies of documents subject to the payment of the appropriate fee. Coasters and fishing vessels submitted bi-annual returns while sea-going vessels submit at the end of each voyage; effecting the year in which such records are filed.

[www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlist.php](http://www.mun.ca/mha/holdings/crewlist.php)

## **1939–1950**

The National Archives holds all surviving crew lists and log books for this period.

## **1951–1977**

A 10% sample is held at the National Archives. The remaining 90% for years ending in '5' (1955/65/75/85) are held at the National Maritime Museum, although it should be noted that these are not filed in ship order. All others are held by the Canadian Maritime History Archive. Access details for all three collections are given above.

## **1978 onwards**

Both the National Archives and the National Maritime Museum each hold a 10% sample of crew agreements but the remainder for this period have been destroyed. Crew agreements from 1999 are held by the Registry of Shipping & Seamen where access may be restricted.

[www.mcqa.gov.uk/c4mca/mcqa-seafarer\\_information/mcqa-rss-home.htm](http://www.mcqa.gov.uk/c4mca/mcqa-seafarer_information/mcqa-rss-home.htm)

## **Masters, Mates, Engineers and Fishing Officers (1845-1968)**

The following Registers of Certificates of Competency or Service, and certificates issued for length of service are held in The National Archives:

- Masters and mates: 1845 onwards
- Engineers: 1862 onwards
- Skippers and mates of fishing boats: 1882 onwards

They provide a record of the mariner's name, place and year of birth, date and place of issue of certificate, ships served in (up to 1888), and occasionally provide details of injuries and death.

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/militaryhistory/merchant](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/militaryhistory/merchant)

## **Official Logs**

For merchant vessels, official logs are often a disappointment to those researching the history of a vessel. Generally, they are not a diary of movements but have been regularly described as a ship's parish register. Where they have been maintained, they can offer the family historian quite a selection of valuable information about the crew and passengers, but were only kept if there were any significant events; births, deaths, marriages and crew members being disciplined, joining the ship or signing off at intermediary ports on the voyage. The ship's position would usually only be entered in the official log when births or deaths were being recorded.

## **Medals and Honours**

Rewards for service and acts of gallantry were first given in the mid-nineteenth century. The system was administered on behalf of the Government by the Marine Department of the Board of Trade. Types of award ranged from formal thanks to gifts (such as a gold chronometer) to medals.

By the time of the Second World War there were six medals granted for gallantry at sea;

- Albert Medal (Gold and Bronze)
- Board of Trade Medal (Gold and Bronze) for Gallantry in saving life at sea
- Board of Trade Medal (Gold and Bronze) for Foreign Service

Records relating to honours and awards are held at the National Archives in the following series:

- BT 97: Albert Medal Register
- BT 261: Marine Division - Gallantry at Sea Awards
- BT 238: Registered Files - Marine Crews (MC Series)
- MT 9: Papers relating to the award of the Albert Medal from 1903 to 1950
- HO 45 Home Office: Papers relating to awards for heroism on land.

### ***Pre-First World War***

The Egyptian Medal was awarded to some Masters at Alexandria, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1882, and at Tel-El-Kebir, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1882.

The Sea Transport Medal was awarded to senior (and selected other) officers who were serving with the Mercantile Marine transporting troops to serve in the South African War (1899 to 1902) and the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900).

Records relating to all of these awards is held at the National Archives in ADM 171/52 with additional information on the Egyptian Medal available in ADM 171/41 and ADM 116/711.

### ***The First World War***

Four medals awarded to merchant seamen during the First World War:

- The 1914-1915 Star
- The British War Medal
- The Victory Medal
- The Mercantile Marine Medal

Details of these awards are held at the National Archives, with awards of the British War Medal, Victory Medal and 1914-1915 Star to men of the Mercantile Marine Reserve and to officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve available on microfilm and in ADM 171 .

The Mercantile Marine Medal was available to those with not less than six months of sea-going service, between 4 August 1914 and 11 November 1918, who served on at least one voyage through a danger zone. Records are available at the National Archive, on microfiche, in BT 351. All recipients were automatically entitled to the British War Medal, the details of which are also in BT 351 .

Many merchant navy officers and men received naval gallantry awards during the First World War. Records of these can be found in ADM 116 , code 85. Lists and indexes to these records are in Admiralty and Secretariat: Indexes and Compilations Series III (ADM 12). Further material may be found in ADM 137.

1914-1918 Rolls of Honour from the ranks of the merchant marine fleet are in BT 339.

## *The Second World War*

Records of applications for campaign medals to merchant seamen during the Second World War are with the Registry of Shipping and Seamen, Cardiff. Entitlement enquiries should always be made to Cardiff, in the first instance. If they are unable to trace an entitlement and you wish to investigate this further, they will advise you on what evidence they will require.

The National Archives has a copy of the applications made for medals in BT 395. It does not have the entitlement list, hence the need to contact Cardiff first. To prove an entitlement you would normally have to;

- show that a man was in service for the prescribe period of time
- show that the vessel on which he served entered the related theatre of war.

Seamen's sea service records are held at the National Archive in BT 382, BT 372 and, occasionally, in BT 348, BT 349 and BT 364. Copies of ships' movement are held in BT 389 and show where a given vessel was on any particular date. Movement cards often provide more information than the Ship's Agreement, Crew List and Log as Admiralty orders frequently prohibited the Masters of vessels listing their ports of departure or arrival.

1939-1945 Rolls of Honour from the ranks of the merchant marine fleet are in BT 339.

MT 9 contains files relating to various awards, including the Board of Trade Medal for Gallantry in Saving Life at Sea, the Sea Transport Medal, the George Medal, the Lloyd's Medal for Gallantry at Sea and the Polish Cross of Valour.

Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen: Royal Naval Reserve: Representative Records of Service (BT 164 ) - BT 164/23 contains papers on awards to RNR officers.

Most of the files in the 'Awards' section of HO 45 relate to the award of the Albert Medal for heroism on land.

The Lloyd's Medal for Gallantry at Sea, introduced in December 1940, was awarded by Lloyd's to officers and men of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet in cases of exceptional gallantry at sea in time of war. A published list and history of the medal is available in The National Archives Library.

Merchant Navy officers and seamen receiving naval gallantry awards during the Second World may be found in the series Admiralty and Secretariat Papers, ADM 1, code 85. Lists and indexes to these records are in ADM 12.

ADM 199, War History Cases and Papers, may also contain further relevant materials.

## Passenger Lists

Migration and emigration records, or Passenger Lists as they are popularly known, are occasionally helpful in tracing ancestors in transit from port to port. There are numerous sites dedicated to recording passenger lists on the Internet, including Joe Beine's popular listings at:

<http://home.att.net/~wee-monster/onlinelists.html>

## ***Outward Bound***

Board of Trade Passenger Lists for the period 1890-1960 are held at the National Archive in BT 27. The lists contain the names of people leaving ports in the United Kingdom and Ireland for final destinations outside Europe and the Mediterranean. Many seamen seeking a new life in the colonies may be discovered here.

Ancestors Onboard is a commercial website run in conjunction with the National Archives. Here you can search (free of charge) for passenger list records of individuals or groups of people leaving for destinations including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and USA featuring ports such as Boston, Philadelphia and New York. Passengers include not only immigrants and emigrants, but also businessmen, diplomats and tourists. Images of the passenger lists are available to download, view, save and print (fee payable).

[www.ancestorsonboard.com](http://www.ancestorsonboard.com)

## ***Moving Here***


A consortium of 30 archives, libraries and museums, led by the National Archives, have contributed to a catalogue of 200,000 items on the Moving Here website. The site is particularly useful to family historians researching ancestors who have migrated to England and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, over the past 200 years or so. Large numbers of foreign seaman eventually settled in the UK, seeking better pay and conditions.


[www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)

## Useful Contacts

### **Maritime History Archive**


Henrietta Harvey Building  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's,  
NL A1C 5S7  
Canada

 +1 709-737-8428

 +1 709-737-3123

### **National Archives**


Ruskin Avenue  
Kew  
Richmond  
Surrey  
TW9 4DU  
United Kingdom


 +44 (0)20 8876 3444



### **National Maritime Museum**

Greenwich  
London  
SE10 9NF  
United Kingdom

 +44 (0)20 8858 4422

 +44 (0)20 8312 6632

### **Registry of Shipping & Seamen**

MCA Cardiff  
Anchor Court, Ocean Way  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW  
United Kingdom

 +44 (0)29 20448800

 +44 (0)29 20448820

### **East Yorkshire Family History Publications**

Mrs J Bangs  
5 Curlew Close  
Beverley  
HU17 7 QN

[www.eyfhs.org.uk](http://www.eyfhs.org.uk)

### **Heroes of Hull**

Submissions Centre  
86 Rokeby Park  
Kingston upon Hull  
HU4 7QF

[www.heroesofhull.co.uk](http://www.heroesofhull.co.uk)

## Merchant Navy Association Branches

<p><b>Axe Vale</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Tuesday                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Pole Arms Hotel, Fore Street, Seaton. Devon.                      Contact: Len Walton                      Tel: 01297 552661</p>	<p><b>Head Office</b>                      The Merchant Navy Association                      National Office, 9 Saxon Way,                      Caistor, , LN7 6SG, UK                      Tel/Fax: 01472 851130</p>	<p><b>Suffolk</b>                      Meetings: Bi-Monthly, 2nd Wednesday.                      Time: 1930hrs for 2000hrs                      Place: Seafarers Centre, Felixstowe .                      Contact: Terry Coles                      Tel: 01473 410110</p>
<p><b>Belfast</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday except July and August                      Time: 1900 hrs                      Place: Mission to Seafarers, Princess Dock Street, Belfast                      Contact: John Coulter                      Tel: 02890 832353</p>	<p><b>Holyhead</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 3rd Thursday.                      Time: 1900hrs                      Place: Royal British Legion Club Holyhead                      Contact: Eric Clarke                      Tel: 01407 768769</p>	<p><b>Tamworth</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday.                      Time: 1030hrs                      Place: Tamworth RNA.                      Contact: Frank Belcher.                      Tel: 0121 7042132</p>
<p><b>Bolton</b>                      Meetings: Advised each month                      Time: Advised each month                      Place: Unknown                      Contact: Don Gabbott                      Tel: 01942 817081</p>	<p><b>Immingham</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Sunday.                      Time: 1430hrs.                      Place: Immingham Seafarer's Centre, Lockside Road, Immingham Dock.                      Contact: David Knighton.                      Tel: 01469 518688</p>	<p><b>Taunton</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Royal British Legion Club, Taunton                      Contact: Bill Duff                      Tel: 01984 623752</p>
<p><b>Boston &amp; South Lincolnshire</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2nd Saturday                      Time: 1200hrs.                      Place: Black Bull, Donington                      Contact: Capt W Smedley                      Tel: 01778 426687</p>	<p><b>Kent</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday.                      Time: 1430hrs                      Place: BISS, Snargate Street, Dover                      Contact: Don Hunter                      Tel: 01233 503365</p>	<p><b>Tilbury</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday                      Time: 1300hrs                      Place: Tilbury Community Association, The Civic Square, Tilbury.                      Contact: LenMeredith                      Tel: 01375 842023</p>
<p><b>Bristol</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2nd Wednesday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Railway Club, Temple Meads                      Contact: Shirley Edwards                      Tel: 01275 837578</p>	<p><b>Medway</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 1st Tuesday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Army, Navy &amp; Air Force Club, Marlborough Road, Gillingham.                      Contact: Brian Packham (Secretary)                      Tel: 01634 570848</p>	<p><b>Torbay</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: Preston Conservative Club, Torquay Road, Paignton.                      Contact: Margaret Andrews                      Tel: 01813 856363</p>
<p><b>Caithness</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Thursday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: Alternates - Wick &amp; Thurso.                      Contact: David Sellers                      Tel: 01847 893857</p>	<p><b>Midlands</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, Last Wednesday                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The United Services Club, Gough St, Birmingham.                      Contact: Alan Phipps.                      Tel: 01905 794850</p>	<p><b>Walton on the Naze And District</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday.                      Time: 2000hrs                      Place: 36 Connaught Street, Frinton on Sea.                      Contact: Anne Gray                      Tel: 01255 851919</p>
<p><b>Crawley</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Monday.                      Time: 2100hrs                      Place: Royal British Legion, Old Horsham Road, Crawley                      Contact: Harry Hilton                      Tel: 01293 515288</p>	<p><b>Newport</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Tuesday                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Docks Conservative Club.                      Contact: Bert Bale                      Tel: 01633-676987</p>	<p><b>Western Isles</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday.                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Royal British Legion, Stornoway.                      Contact: Willie Macfarlane                      Tel: 01851 703557</p>
<p><b>Dormanstown &amp; Redcar</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 2nd Wednesday.                      Time: 2000hrs                      Place: Ennis Square Social Club, Dormanstown.                      Contact: David Buckworth                      Tel: 01642 471897</p>	<p><b>Pill &amp; North Somerset</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday.                      Time: 2000hrs                      Place: Pill Memorial Club, Lodway, Nr Bristol.                      Contact: Tim Bull                      Tel: 01275 372569</p>	<p><b>Wolverhampton</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: Electric Club, Marks Lane, Wolverhampton.                      Contact: Clarissa Booth.                      Tel: 01902 894901</p>
<p><b>Exeter</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, last Thursday                      Time: 1930hrs                      Place: The Royal British Legion Club, Legion Way, Alphington.                      Contact: Gordon White                      Tel: 01392-219574</p>	<p><b>Ribble Valley</b>                      Meetings: Monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month.                      Time: 1900hrs                      Place: New Inn, Parson Lane, Clitheroe, Lancs                      Contact: Peter Sutcliffe                      Tel: 01200 443073</p>	<p><b>Malta</b>                      Meetings: When Required.                      Place: The British Legion, 111 Melita Street, Valletta.                      Contact: John Thompson                      Telephone: +44 356 2138 5135</p>

**EYFHS Publications** also produce a wide range of;

- Monumental Inscriptions (headstone transcriptions).
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5 Curlew Close  
Beverley  
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No. N002 in the Investigating Series

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