



## Tracing Your Ancestry **ROYAL NAVY**

This free guide signposts key records that will help you trace an individual who served in the Royal Navy since 1914.

Find more information and links to the records at  
[iwm.org.uk/Research](http://iwm.org.uk/Research)

## You can research the experiences of an individual by looking at:

- **Service records** – administrative files may record dates and places of enlistment and demobilisation, postings and units, injuries or disciplinary action. Different records exist for airmen and officers
- **Casualty information** – sources recording those wounded or taken prisoner of war as well as the burial and commemoration of those who died
- **Medal records** – medal entitlements can indicate involvement in specific campaigns as well as awards for service or gallantry
- **Ship and operational histories** – resources describing the day to day operational activities of units
- **Social and local history** – church records, local newspapers, school and workplace registers may mention an individual

Start by gathering information from mementoes, medals, letters and documents that you or other family members may still have. Look for clues about which units the person served with, what ranks they held and their service number to help you find and search the right records.

Many records are only available online, sometimes on more than one site. We have listed the main sources but there may be others:

- [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk) – **A**
- [findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk) – **F**
- IWM's Lives of the First World War – [www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org](http://www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org) - **L**
- The National Archives – [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) – **T**
- Naval & Military Press - [www.nmarchive.com](http://www.nmarchive.com) – **N**
- National Museum Royal Navy - [www.nmrn.org.uk/research/finding-service-records](http://www.nmrn.org.uk/research/finding-service-records) - **NMRN**

Some records are free to view but others are available on a subscription or pay per view basis (£).

Find links to all the records listed in this leaflet at [www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history/tracing-your-navy-history](http://www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history/tracing-your-navy-history)

## IWM

Visit IWM London, IWM North, IWM Duxford, Churchill War Rooms and HMS Belfast and explore and research the wartime experiences of people from across Britain and the Commonwealth from 1914 to the present.

IWM collections include documents, art, photos, film, sound recordings, printed materials, publications, ephemera and objects ranging from badges, uniforms, equipment and weapons to ships, tanks and aircraft. IWM London has an outstanding research library including over 150,000 books and periodicals.

Research our collections using the online catalogue [www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search). Keep the initial search simple, and try a variety of terms. Results can be filtered, for example using 'Category' allows you to select different types of material.

Drop-in to Explore History at IWM London for free, where you can search the catalogues, and use other online resources and multimedia displays to discover treasures from our archives and the personal stories behind them. Appointments are available for you to do more in-depth investigation in our Research Room.

Check [www.iwm.org.uk/research/research-facilities](http://www.iwm.org.uk/research/research-facilities) for more information, opening times and to request an appointment.

Other free IWM signposting guides include:

- Tracing Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force Ancestry
- Tracing Royal Navy Ancestry
- Tracing Merchant Navy Ancestry
- Tracing Prisoners of War
- Tracing Home Front Ancestry 1939–1945



## This guide covers individuals who served in the:

- Royal Navy (RN)
- Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) – professional seafarers who served with the Merchant Navy and who could be called to serve in the event of war
- Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) – civilians who volunteered to train on shore based establishments and then at sea, who could be called to serve in the event of war (pre-war this was comparable to the Territorial Army). Sometimes called the 'Wavy Navy' because of the pattern of officers rank braid. Most officers recruited during wartime were granted temporary commissions in the RNVR.
- Royal Marines (RM) – naval infantry troops who served at sea and on land
- Royal Naval Division (RND) - during the First World War there were more recruits than were needed by the Navy and Army so they were formed into infantry brigades known as the Royal Naval Division. They served on land as soldiers.
- Fleet Air Arm - the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) merged with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in April 1918 to become the Royal Air Force (RAF) – see the RAF leaflet for further details. The Fleet Air Arm was formed on 1 April 1924 from RAF squadrons operating at sea.

Shore establishments (naval bases on land) as well as ships use the prefix HMS (His or Her Majesty's Ship).

Personnel who served in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts may still be alive so their records remain confidential. This can make it difficult to trace an individual but a variety of sources can provide clues.

## Royal Navy service records

The National Archives (TNA) holds most of the service records for men who served up to the 1920s. The National Museum of the Royal Navy holds some additional records at the Fleet Air Arm Museum. The arm of the navy that an individual served with, their rank, ship or shore establishment and dates of service determine which set of records you need. If an individual was commissioned from the ranks or moved between different services you may find service records in more than one set of files.

### Royal Navy (RN) ratings:

- The National Archives guide to Royal Navy Ratings service records, 1853-1928
- Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's services 1853-1924 (ADM 188) on T and A and for 1899-1924 F (£)
- Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's services 1925-1929 (ADM 362) on T (£)
- Royal Navy Seamen's services Continuous Record cards 1925-1939 (ADM 363) on T (£)

### RN officers commissioned up to 1917, Royal Marines (RM) officers commissioned up to 1925 and RN warrant officers who joined up to 1931

- The National Archives guide to RN officers' service records 1756-1931
- Service records (ADM 196) on T, for 1899 to 1919 on F and an index with links to TNA records on A (£)

### RN officers & ratings who served up to 1919 and who were awarded pensions after 20 years' service

- Officers and Ratings Service Records Series II (ADM 29) – on T and A (£)

### RN, Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) officers 1880 to 1960

- The National Archives guide to RN officers' service record cards 1840-1920
- Officers' Service Record Cards and Files (ADM 340) – on T (£)

### RNR officers and ratings

- The National Archives guide to Royal Naval Reserve service records 1860-1955
- Ratings' Records of Service (mainly First World War) (BT 377) on T and an index with links to T on A (£)
- Ratings' service cards (approximately A3 size) for 140,000 ratings at NMRN
- Officers' Service Records (First World War) (ADM 240) at T (£)
- Officers and ratings who served up to 1946 - sample of Record of Service cards (BT 164) - on T (£)

### Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR)

- The National Archives guide to Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve service records 1903-1922
- Officers who served 1914 to 1922 and ratings who served 1903 to 1919 Service Records (ADM 337) Not all records have survived – on T and an index with links to TNA records on A (£)
- RN and RNVR Ratings who served 1888 to 1923 - Engagement and Enrolment Papers at **NMRN**



### **Royal Marines:**

- The National Archives guide to Royal Marines' service records 1842-1925
- Registers of Service 1842 to 1936 (ADM159) on T, F(1899-1919) and an index with links to TNA records on A (£)
- Royal Marine Light Infantry (Plymouth, Chatham & Portsmouth Divisions and some other formations) - approx. 60,000 Royal Marine Attestation Packs at **NMRN**

### **Royal Naval Division (RND) officers and men who served during the First World War**

- The National Archives guide to Royal Naval Division service records 1914-1919
- Service records (ADM 339) on T, L and F (£)
- An index with links to TNA records on A (£)
- original service cards (approx. A5 size) approximately 50,000 at **NMRN**

The service records of those who served from the 1920s onwards are held by the Ministry of Defence (Naval Disclosure Cell). Full records will be released to proven next of kin. Only very basic information about deceased service personnel will be released to other enquirers, with slightly more detail made available 25 years after the date of death. The fee is currently £30. Download the application forms from [www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records](http://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records)

The careers of naval officers can be traced through their commissions and promotions listed in the regular official *Navy List*. These contain seniority lists of all officers, cross referred to individual ships. A full set of these publications is held by TNA, IWM holds an almost complete run from 1914 and some of those from 1888-1970 are on A (£)

*The London Gazette* also lists commissions and promotions up to the present day - [www.thegazette.co.uk](http://www.thegazette.co.uk)

## **Casualty records**

Casualty records may list those who were wounded, taken prisoner, killed in action or died as a result of their war service. Rolls of Honour can sometimes include those who served and returned. Nominal Rolls may occasionally be found in ship histories and periodicals – see [Ship and Operational Histories](#). For more information about prisoners of war see our [Tracing Prisoners of War](#) guide and The National Archives guide to tracing deaths during the First and Second World Wars.

**Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Marine (RM) officers and ratings who were discharged from the navy from 1914-1920 due to sickness or wounds** were issued with a badge to wear on their civilian clothing - the Silver War Badge Roll (ADM 171 183-187) on microform at T

**Men who had plastic surgery 1917-1925:** Information such as rank, tour dates, injuries, and admission and release from the hospital - The Harold Gillies Plastic Surgery Archives on L, F (£)

**Naval ratings who received a war service pension** – summary cards and ledgers held by the Western Front Association. Apply for a search at [www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com) (£)

**Officers deceased from 1916 to 1920** – pensions paid to relatives (PMG 44) at T

**Officers invalided from 1917 to 1920** – Officers' pension records (PMG 42) at T

**RN (including some Royal Marines and Naval Reserve) officers killed 1914-1920** - a card index (ADM 242/1-5) at T (Free) and on F (£)

**Royal Navy and Royal Marine officers and ratings who died during the First World War** - war graves roll 1914-1919 (ADM 242/7-10) at T and on F, A and N&MP (£)

**Royal Naval Reserve officers and ratings killed during the First World War** – War Casualties Death Register 1914-1919 (ADM 242/13-15) at T

**Royal Navy officers and ratings killed and wounded 1914-1929** - Registers of naval personnel killed and wounded arranged by date (1914-1929) (ADM 104/145-149) on T (Free). Indexes in (ADM 104/140-143) on T (Free)



## **Royal Naval Division Officers and ratings who died 1914-1919 and those who died after discharge up to 1926**

- Royal Naval Divisions Casualties of the Great War 1914-1924 database on A (£)
- An index to RND personnel compiled from a number of sources on F (£)

## **British and foreign subjects, passengers and seaman who died at sea and some seaman who died ashore** – Register of deaths at Sea 1891-1972 (BT 334) – on T (Free) and on F (£)

**Naval personnel missing during the Second World War** – Admiralty Casualty Branch enquiries 1939-1945 (ADM 358) – search online by name or ship then view the record at T

**Naval personnel who died during the Second World War** – General Register Office War Deaths Naval Officers and Indexes Naval Ratings Indexes 1939-1948 on F (£)

**Service personnel who died between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921 and between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947** - the Commonwealth War Graves Commission ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)) are responsible for the graves or official memorials to those with no known grave, including those buried at sea. Search the details under Find War Dead or Find a Cemetery. IWM has a complete set of the CWGC's original published memorial and cemetery registers.

### **British personnel who died in the:**

- Palestine Conflict 1945-1948 - on F (£)
- Malayan Emergency 1948-1960- on F (£)
- Korean War 1950-1953- on F (£)
- Cyprus Emergency 1955-1960 - on F (£)
- Aden 1955-1967- on F (£)
- Falklands War 1982 - on F (£)

**Military personnel who died in service after 1 January 1948** may have had either a private or a service funeral and headstone. Details of service personnel buried in 'non-World War' graves are available by writing to the Commemorations team at the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre.

**Personnel who have died whilst on duty or as the result of terrorist activity since 1 January 1948** are commemorated on the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Search the roll of honour at [www.gov.uk/search-armed-forces-memorial-roll-of-honour](http://www.gov.uk/search-armed-forces-memorial-roll-of-honour)

IWM's War Memorials Register records UK war memorials and the names of those they commemorate – search [www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search](http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search)

Rolls of Honour may list those who served as well as those who died or were killed in action. IWM holds a large collection of published rolls of honour for localities, schools, institutions and other organisations. Search our online catalogue [www.iwm.org.uk/collections](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections)

For digitised versions of published Rolls of Honour and recent rolls available online see [Tracing Your Army Ancestry](#)

## **Medals**

Many records are only available online, sometimes on more than one site. We have listed the main sources but there may be others. Some records are free to view but others are available on either a subscription or pay per view basis (£).

Eligibility for campaign and service medals is based on set criteria, usually being present in a particular theatre of war within given dates.

**Check which First World War service medals an individual may have qualified for:** the 1914 Star or 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal at [www.iwm.org.uk/history/british-first-world-war-service-medals](http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/british-first-world-war-service-medals). The qualification criteria for the British War Medal were slightly different for Army and Naval personnel. Members of the British Army had to have served overseas but the Admiralty granted the British War Medal to all ranks who had completed 28 days' mobilised service between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918.



The name, rank and number of the individual will appear on the medal. The Ministry of Defence is not able to issue or replace First World War medals under any circumstances.

**Second World War personnel may have qualified for the War Medal 1939 to 1945, 1939 to 1945 Star, Africa, Arctic, Atlantic, Burma, France and Germany, Italy and Pacific Stars and/or the Defence Medal: 1939 to 1945.** Second World War medals are not named.

**Check the official description of eligibility for each medal** on [www.gov.uk/guidance/medals-campaigns-descriptions-and-eligibility](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/medals-campaigns-descriptions-and-eligibility). The locations and dates of service recorded on an individual's service record will indicate if they are entitled to a particular medal.

The Ministry of Defence Medal Office can confirm if an individual is eligible to receive Second World War or post 1945 medals and issue those previously unclaimed to veterans or their next of kin.

The Admiralty compiled a series of Medal Rolls to record the medal entitlement of those who served with naval forces during different campaigns, those who received medals for long service or good conduct and those who were awarded medals for gallantry. There are separate ledgers for the different branches of the navy, each providing an alphabetical listing of those entitled to a specific medal. The National Archives guides on Campaign and Service Medals and Gallantry Medals provide more detailed information.

**The full collection of Naval Medal and Award Rolls covering campaign, service and gallantry medals for naval personnel 1793-1972**, held by TNA (ADM 171) are available to search on A (£)

Individual parts of the rolls are also available.

#### **The First World War service medal rolls 1914-1920**

- Royal Navy officers - (ADM 171/89-91) on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on L and F (£)
- Royal Navy ratings - (ADM 171/94-119) 25 parts arranged alphabetically on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free)
- Royal Marine Officers - (ADM 171/92-93) on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on L and F (£)
- Royal Marine NCOs and other ranks - (ADM 171/167-171) on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on L and F (£)
- Royal Naval Reserve Officers - ADM 171/92 and ADM 171/93) on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free)
- Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve ratings - (ADM 171/125) on T (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on L and F (£)
- Royal Naval Division personnel (Royal Navy, Royal Naval Reserve, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Royal Naval Air Service, Royal Naval Auxiliary Sick Berth Reserve, Royal Marine Light Infantry, Royal Marine Artillery, Royal Marine Band and civilian hospital staff and army officers who were associated or attached) - the 1914 Star Medal Roll 1914-1920 (ADM 171/139) on T (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on L and F (£)
- Royal Navy Officers, Royal Marines, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Royal Naval Air Service and Royal Naval Reserve who received foreign awards 1914-1922 - Foreign Awards To Naval Officers Index 1914-1922 (ADM 171/67) on TNA (digital microfilm available to download - Free) and on F (£)

Gallantry medals are awarded for an especially heroic deed or action. Announcements are listed in the official journal *The London Gazette*. For some but not all awards, there may also be a separate citation, which describes the action for which the award was made. See The National Archives guide to recommendations for military honours and awards. Operational records or a published ship or unit history might provide some details, although the individual may not be named. Newspapers may also include an account of the action although for security reasons key details such as locations and ship names are usually removed.

#### **Royal Navy and Royal Marine gallantry awards:**

- 1914-1919 - the 'honours sheets' (ADM 171/78-88) – on T (digital microfilm available to download - Free)
- surviving recommendations 1854-1982 (ADM 1 accessed by using the index in series ADM 12) and ADM 116 at T
- Victoria Cross citations on L F , A, Naval & Military Press (£)
- Published listings of medal awards for decorations such as the Victoria Cross, and Distinguished Service Medal at IWM - Search our online catalogue



- *Seedie's Roll of Naval Honours and Awards, 1939–1959* compiled by BC Dickson (Tisbury, Wiltshire: Ripley Registers, 1989) - at IWM

## Unit and operational histories

See The National Archives guides for Royal Navy operations during the First World War and the Second World War

**Trace the activities of specific ships** – use the index in the five volumes covering Naval Operations in The Official History of the Great War and in The War at Sea sections of the Official History of the Second World War – at IWM and TNA

Daily accounts including details of voyages, weather conditions and operations are recorded in the **Official log books for Royal Navy ships and submarines** or **Official War Diaries** for land based units serving with the army. See The National Archives guide to Royal Navy ships voyages log books.

- Royal Navy log books for ships (ADM 53) and submarines (ADM173) up to 1987 at TNA
- Ships log books for the First World War have been transcribed – view them online Old Weather project on [www.naval-history.net/OWShips-LogBooksWW1.htm](http://www.naval-history.net/OWShips-LogBooksWW1.htm)
- Royal Naval Division War Diaries 1914-1919 (WO 95) – at T and on A (Gallipoli and Dardanelles 1914-1916) and (France Belgium and Germany 1914-1920)(£)

**For vessels lost at sea**, see The National Archives guide to ships wrecked or sunk

**Royal Navy ships lost at sea during the First World War** – a card index 1914-1919 (ADM 242/6) at T, a list on Naval History [www.naval-history.net/WW1LossesaContents.htm](http://www.naval-history.net/WW1LossesaContents.htm) (Free) and with images of the cards on F (£)

*British vessels lost at sea 1914-1918 and 1939-45* (republished by Patrick Stephens, 1988) - Facsimile reprints of four HMSO official publications: Navy Losses and Merchant Shipping (Losses) published in 1919 and Ships of the Royal Navy: statement of losses during the Second World War and British Merchant vessels Lost or damaged by enemy action during Second World War, published in 1947 – at IWM

### Ship Histories

- IWM has an extensive collection of ship histories Search our online catalogue

**Searching for ships** - to locate references try searching by the name of the:

- ship or submarine for example, 'HMS Wanderer' or 'Wanderer')
- operation (for example 'Operation Neptune' or 'Neptune')
- battle (for example, 'Battle of the Java Sea' or 'Java Sea')
- theatre of operations (for example, 'Pacific' or 'Persian Gulf')
- convoy number (for example, 'HXF 1')
- date or month (for example, '27 February 1942' or 'February 1942')

## Other sources

**Service and ex-service periodicals and newspapers** can provide background information and may mention individuals:

- Current and archive editions back to the 1950s of the monthly newspaper *Navy News* on [www.navynews.co.uk](http://www.navynews.co.uk)
- IWM has an extensive collection of ship's newspapers and journals - Search [our online catalogue](#)

**Information on the organisation and units of the Royal Navy and naval forces:**

- Royal Navy website covering the structure and heritage of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Fleet Air Arm, Submarine Service and Royal Fleet Auxiliary [www.royalnavy.mod.uk](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk)
- Naval History website covering all aspects of naval history from 1815 to the 1980s [www.naval-history.net](http://www.naval-history.net)
- Uboat.net website proving details of both German u-boats from the First and Second World Wars as well as information on the Allied ships that opposed them. The site also includes lists of naval personnel and the names of casualties. [www.uboot.net/](http://www.uboot.net/)
- The Royal Navy Research Archive gives access to online material related to RN ships, establishments, units, and personnel, from the First World War to the present day. Content includes articles, short



histories and the reminiscences of the men and women who served.

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

- Admiralty and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Correspondence and Papers (ADM 1) – at T

#### Information on specific campaigns:

- Western Front Association furthers interest in the Great War 1914-1918  
[www.westernfrontassociation.com/](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/)
- Gallipoli Association raises public awareness of the Gallipoli Campaign 1915 [www.gallipoli-association.org](http://www.gallipoli-association.org)
- Salonika Campaign Society promotes interest in the Salonika campaign, fought in northern Greece, Serbia and Albania during 1915-1918 [www.salonikacampaignsociety.org.uk](http://www.salonikacampaignsociety.org.uk)

#### Other helpful sources:

- IWM's *Lives of the First World War* is a digital initiative to create the permanent digital memorial to those who served in uniform and worked on the home front
- *A Guide to the Naval Records in The National Archives of the UK* by Randolph Cock and NAM Rodger, 2nd edition (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2008)
- *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians* by Simon Fowler (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2011).
- *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors* by Bruno Pappalardo (Richmond, Surrey: PRO, 2003)
- The National Archive's 'Help with your research' guides cover a range of topics, explain how to find and use their records and signpost to other sources on [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research)
- For general information on government records for family history see [www.gov.uk/research-family-history](http://www.gov.uk/research-family-history)

## Contact addresses

### The National Archives

Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond,  
Surrey TW9 4DU  
020 8876 3444  
[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

**Naval Disclosure Cell**, Room 48,  
West Battery, Whale Island,  
Portsmouth,  
Hampshire  
PO2 8DX

[www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records](http://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records)

### Commonwealth War Graves Commission

2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX  
01628 507 200  
[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

### Ministry of Defence Medal Office

Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW  
[www.gov.uk/apply-medal-or-veterans-badge](http://www.gov.uk/apply-medal-or-veterans-badge)

### Defence Business Services JCCC (Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre)

Commemoration Team Room G35, Innsworth House, Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW

### Ministry of Defence,

**Naval Historical Branch**, 24 Store PP20,  
Main Road, HM Naval Base,  
Portsmouth PO1 3LU

### National Museum of the Royal Navy (Portsmouth)

HM Naval Base (PP66),  
Portsmouth  
PO1 3NH  
02392 727 582  
[www.nmrn-portsmouth.org.uk](http://www.nmrn-portsmouth.org.uk)

### Fleet Air Arm Museum,

RNAS Yeovilton,  
Ilchester,  
Somerset  
BA22 8HT  
01935 840565  
[www.fleetairarm.com](http://www.fleetairarm.com)

### The Royal Navy Submarine Museum

Haslar Jetty Road  
Gosport  
Hampshire PO12 2AS  
Tel: 023 9251 0354  
[www.submarine-museum.co.uk](http://www.submarine-museum.co.uk)

### Royal Marines Museum,

Eastney Esplanade,  
Southsea,  
Portsmouth,  
Hampshire PO4 9PX  
02392 819385  
[www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk](http://www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk)

### National Maritime Museum,

Romney Road, Greenwich,  
London SE10 9NF  
020 8858 4422  
[www.rmq.co.uk](http://www.rmq.co.uk)

