



Tracing Royal Navy Ancestry

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide guidance on tracing Royal Navy personnel. More detailed information can be found in our publication *Tracing Your Family History: Royal Navy* – this can be purchased from the Imperial War Museum online, through mail order or the shop. The Museum does not hold any personal service records or official documentation, but can help the enquirer as long as some basic facts are known. The Department of Printed Books welcomes visitors by appointment and is able to provide useful reading material and advice for finding out more about those who served. Other reference departments in the Museum – Art, Documents, Exhibits and Firearms, Film and Photograph Archives, and the Sound Archive – may also be able to assist.

Department of Printed Books, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ

Tel: (+44) 020 7416 5342

Fax: (+44) 020 7416 5246

Website: www.iwm.org.uk

Email: collections@iwm.org.uk

Where to Find Royal Navy Service Records

The Imperial War Museum only covers the period from the First World War onwards. Most of the relevant records relating to naval genealogical research are either still held by **Ministry of Defence** agencies or **The National Archives** (formerly the **Public Record Office**). Genealogical enquiries to the various Ministry of Defence agencies must be made in writing, but do not receive priority as their principal concern is to respond to official enquiries concerning welfare, pensions and other legal matters. The basic search fee, if levied, is currently £30.

Personnel records available to the public are now held by **The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU (Tel: 020 8876 3444; Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)**. For anyone intending to do their own research The National Archives (TNA) has produced invaluable guides to their holdings; of particular importance are *Tracing Your Ancestors in The National Archives*, 7th revised edition edited by Amanda Bevan (Richmond, Surrey: TNA, 2006), *A Guide to the Naval Records in The National Archives of the UK* by Randolph Cock and NAM Rodger (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2006) and *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors* by Bruno Pappalardo (Richmond, Surrey: PRO, 2003).

Pre-First World War service records, and ratings' personnel files and officers' records dating to 1923, are now held at TNA. Records for ratings who were regular servicemen between 1873 and 1923 are now available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline For service records dating from 1924 onwards, please write to **Director of Naval Personnel, Naval Disclosure Cell, Mailpoint G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8DX**.

First World War **Royal Naval Division** (RND) records of service are now at TNA. Service records for men of the RND can now be found online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

Records of **Royal Marines** officers and men in service up to 1925 are at TNA. Subsequent records are held by **Director of Naval Personnel, Naval Disclosure Cell, Mailpoint G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8DX**. Service records for men of the Royal Marines serving between 1842 and 1936 can now be found online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

Records of those who served in the **Royal Naval Air Service** can be found at TNA. Records from the mid-1920s and later **Fleet Air Arm** records are held at **Director of Naval Personnel, Naval Disclosure Cell, Mailpoint G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8DX**.

TNA holds the records for the **Women's Royal Naval Service** (WRNS), 1917-1919. Records of WRNS from 1939 are held by **Director of Naval Personnel, Naval Disclosure Cell, Mailpoint G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8DX**.

Pre-1929 **Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service** records are held at TNA. For subsequent records please contact **Director of Naval Personnel, Naval Disclosure Cell, Mailpoint G-2, Room 48, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8DX**.

The careers of naval officers can be traced through the **Navy List**, a regular official publication. (No such listing exists for other ranks). These contain seniority lists of all officers, cross referred to individual ships. A full set is held by TNA but the Department of Printed Books (DPB) holds a near complete run from 1914 to date.

Casualty Records

Casualty records are available for consultation at TNA. In addition, the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX (Tel: 01628 507200; Website: www.cwgc.org)** holds details of the burial place or commemoration site for all those who died in service between the years 1914-1921 and 1939-1947. A search fee may be levied but their website provides free access to the **Debt of Honour** database. Details of naval personnel who were buried at sea are contained in memorial registers produced by the Commission. The DPB holds a complete set of memorial and cemetery registers, together with various operational and unit histories, some of which may make reference to casualties, and many published rolls of honour.

Details of service personnel buried in 'non-World War' graves are available from the **Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW**. Please mark your enquiry 'Memorials and Graves'.

Medal Records

Records of **campaign medals** for the period up to 1921 are lodged with TNA. For awards after that date write to the **Ministry of Defence Medal Office, Building 250, Innsworth Station, Gloucester GL3 1HW**.

Records of **gallantry medals** and citations are held by TNA, which also holds a full set of the **London Gazette**. This publication contains details of awards and citations, and is now also available online at www.gazettes-online.co.uk For possible information on the recommendation that led to an award, write to the **Naval Secretary (Honours and Awards), Room G10 (MPG2), Fleet Headquarters, West Battery, Whale Island, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO2 8BY**.

The DPB holds published sources only, the most useful of which is **Seedie's Roll of Naval Honour and Awards, 1939-1959** compiled by BC Dickson (Tisbury, Wiltshire: Ripley Registers, 1989).

Other Sources

The monthly newspaper **Navy News (Leviathan Block, HMS Nelson, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 3HH Tel: 023 9229 4228; Website: www.navynews.co.uk)** carries a column for contacting and tracing ex-servicemen. Details of other publications and associations, which offer a similar service, are available from the DPB. Researchers will also find operational accounts, unit and ship histories held by the Department, invaluable for background detail. Official documentation such as operational records, unit diaries and ships' logs are now with TNA.

Once the recommended archives have been approached, researchers are welcome to forward their findings to the DPB for advice on other relevant works and addresses. The Reading Room is open to the public, by prior appointment, from Monday to Saturday between 10.00am and 5.00pm.

Other museums that might be able to offer further assistance are listed below:

Royal Naval Museum, HM Naval Base (PP66), Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 3NH
Tel: 023 9272 7562
Website: www.royalnavalmuseum.org

Fleet Air Arm Museum, Box D6, RNAS Yeovilton, Yeovil, near Ilchester, Somerset BA22 8HT
Tel: 01935 840565
Website: www.fleetairarm.com

Royal Marines Museum, Southsea, Hampshire PO4 9PX
Tel: 023 9281 9385
Website: www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk

Royal Navy Submarine Museum, HMS Dolphin, Haslar Jetty Road, Gosport, Hampshire PO12 2AS
Tel: 023 9252 9217
Website: www.rnsubmus.co.uk

National Maritime Museum, Romney Road, Greenwich, London SE10 9NF
Tel: 020 8312 6516
Website: www.nmm.ac.uk