**The Central Index Register of Merchant Seamen 1918-1941, Southampton Archives Services**

A Central Index of Merchant Seamen was introduced in October 1913 and continued in use until 1941. The Register takes the form of a number of card indexes, including in total over a million and a quarter cards. There are four main series of cards: two arranged alphabetically and two arranged by the number of the individual’s discharge book.

**CR1 Series**

This is the main series of alphabetically arranged cards. Although CR1s began to be kept from 1913, the majority of pre-1921 cards were weeded out and destroyed during the 1960s.

The front of a CR1 card for an individual often includes: name, birth year and place, Dis.A. No. (Discharge number), R.V.2 No. (Royal Naval Reserve No.), grade and number of certificates held, health and unemployment insurances, and physical description.

The back of the card gives the name or official number of the ship from which the seaman was discharged when the card was created; a declaration the seafarer was not already in possession of an unfilled Continuous Certificate of Discharge, and the signature of the seaman.

**CR2 Series**

The series of CR2 cards runs alongside the CR1s, and has the same covering dates. CR2s and are arranged in order of the individual’s discharge number rather than by name.

The front of a CR2 card gives the name, place and year of birth, discharge number, rank or rating of a seaman, along with the name or official number of the vessel and date of engagement (usually in the form of Mercantile Marine Office stamp).

The back of the card often gives a list of ships (usually by official number) alongside dates of engagement on board the vessel.

**CR10 Series**

This alphabetical series covers the years 1918-1921, partly filling the gap caused by the destruction of earlier cards from the two main series of CR1s and CR2s. The CR10s were created for a very particular purpose: to issue merchant seamen with identity certificates during World War One. For this reason, women are not usually included (although there are a few exceptions); neither does this part of the index cover seamen engaged on home trade.

The CR10 card usually gives the number of a seaman’s identity certificate, name, rating, RNR (Royal Naval Reserve) no., details of Board of Trade certificates, date and place of birth, nationality, physical description, discharge no., health insurance details, and name and address of next of kin.

The back of the CR10 card usually has a photograph of their individual, alongside a list of vessels (generally by official number) with dates of engagement on board these.

**The Combined Series**

The final series in the Register was created (for reasons unknown) by pulling together the cards from the other three series for some individuals. At present, the series is arranged by discharge number; therefore it is less accessible to search than the others. Cards are sometimes included which fall outside the 1918-1941 time period; some have entries as late as the 1950s.

**FAQs:**

***How can I search for a seafarer in the Register?***

You can go and search the Register free of charge at Southampton Archives. They are open to the public Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10.00am – 4.00 pm, no appointment necessary. [Note that they advise arriving between 12.30 – 1.30 on both days as they will be unable to produce documents from the strong rooms during that period.] The National Archives at Kew also hold a copy of the Register on Microfiche, which is freely accessible t view there.

If you do not wish to, or cannot, come in person to search the index, Southampton Archives Services offer a research service. A search of the register costs £15 per surname (with a maximum of three individuals of that surname included in the price). Requests can be sent via post with a postal order or cheque payable to ‘Southampton City Council’ to:

Southampton Archive Services, Civic Centre, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 7LY

To pay by Credit/Debit Card you are advised to phone the Reading Room (023 8083 2251) during opening times.

***How do I find a seafarer before 1918?***

There was no central registration for merchant seamen until the Central Index Register began. For information on an individual’s service before the central register you are dependent on crew lists. Before 1913 they are normally kept by the local record office where the ship was registered.

***Where do I go for records of seafarers after 1941?***

You need the 5th Register of Merchant Seamen, it runs until 1972, and is held by the National Archives at Kew.

***How do I find a ship’s name from its official number?***

You can find this information at the National Archives there are also two very useful internet sites on which you can find a ship;s name from its number:

<http://www.mariners-l.co.uk/> and <http://gsn.ncl.ac.uk/>

***Where can I trace further details of service?***

You need to look at crew lists. The National Archives and the National Maritime Museum hold some, but the bulk of crew lists 1913-1938 are at the Maritime History Archive, Newfoundland, Canada.

***Why can’t I find a seafarer in the Central index Register?***

Most common explanations for this are:

* If a seaman continued to serve after 1941 his records are most likely transferred to the 5th Series, which is held by the National Archives at Kew.
* The seaman’s record were among the CR1 and CR2 cards weeded out an destroyed in the 1960s.
* Records may be in the Combined Series, which is only accessible if you know the Discharge Number.

**Useful contacts**

Southampton Archive Services, Civic Centre, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 7LY

Tel. 023 8083 2251

Email [city.archives@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:city.archives@southampton.gov.uk)

The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, TW9 4DU

Email <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Registry of Shipping, PO Box 165, Cardiff, Wales, CF4 5JA

Tel. 029 20448839

Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John’s. NL Canada AIC 5S7

Email <https://www.mun.ca/mha/>