

# Royal Navy

Being an Island Nation, Britain's sea defences have always been paramount and many of our ancestors have served amongst the ranks of the Royal Navy in defending her shores.

## A Bit of History

The first recorded sea battle in British waters took place in 719 between factions of the Dalriata, the people who provided the rulers of modern-day Scotland. Over the years, many of the Kings had their own fleets but it was a rather hit and miss affair, with no formal sustained Navy. This was the case until Henry VIII created the first permanent administration for the Navy in 1546. Gradually, the Royal Navy grew in strength until, at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, numbers stood at over 150,000.

From wooden hulled ships through to iron armour-plating, our ancestors served on many different types of ships. Were yours amongst the last to fire canons from the decks or were they one of the first to serve on board a submarine? I am sure that there is a fascinating story just waiting to be told.

## Navy Ranks

Whatever your ancestor did in the Royal Navy, understanding the rank in which they served will help. The ranks have changed somewhat over history and you will need to bear this in mind when researching.

### **Crew from the Napoleonic Era**

- Admiral
- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Midshipman
- Purser
- Bosun's Mate
- Cook
- Carpenter
- Sailor
- Cabin Boy

### **Today's Ranks**

#### **Officers**

- Admiral of the Fleet
- Admiral
- Vice Admiral
- Rear Admiral
- Commodore
- Captain
- Commander
- Lieutenant-Commander
- Lieutenant
- Sub-Lieutenant

### Other Ranks

Warrant Officer  
Chief Petty Officer  
Petty Officer  
Leading Hand  
Rating

## Where are the Royal Navy records?

Whilst some records are held on various pay per view websites, the National Archives at Kew hold Royal Navy ratings' service records from 1853 to 1923. They also hold Royal Navy officers' service record cards and files from about 1840 to 1920 as well as the service records from 1756 to 1931 for Navy officers. For the service records of those who served in the Second World War, you will need to visit the Veterans Agency website and download the appropriate forms.

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If you are having problems in finding a particular Royal Navy record or are too far away to pop in to Kew and have a look, someone else might be able to help you. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and post details of your ancestor. The members will be delighted to try to help. Also, if you have a Royal Navy record of your ancestor and have problems either reading the writing or understanding abbreviations and initials, post the details so that others can see if they can assist.

If you would like to discover additional information about the Royal Navy and the conflicts in which they fought, listed below are some products that will certainly help you to learn more, and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details.

- Active Officers, Royal Navy & Royal Marines -alphabetical Ref: MMP-MF4780a
- Jutland - New Perspectives Ref: FHI-CDJNP
- Military History Sources for Family Historians: Nelson's Navy 1793-1815 Ref: NWA-OHM31
- Nelson's Navy 1793-1815 Ref: FHP-053
- The Royal Navy: An Illustrated History Ref: MJB-CB275
- Tracing Your Second World War Ancestors Ref: CSB-60
- 1806-1866 Royal Navy Marriage Certificates Ref: FHI-CDNM1
- 1914 From Peace to War & Our Army and Navy Ref: YBM-SKU11211

Parish Chest has a complete section that is dedicated to **Armed Forces** where you will find everything from Navy Lists to WW1 Volunteers. Don't forget to use the website search box as well and pop in words such as **Navy** or **Sailor**.