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## Looking for records of a birth, marriage or death at sea or abroad

This is a brief guide to researching **records of births, marriages and deaths at sea (on British registered ships) or abroad**. These records were maintained by the General Register Office from the mid-19th century onwards, although their records and indexes are incomplete. Other records of British nationals overseas are held in many different places, so your search may be challenging.

### What do I need to know before I start?

Try to find out:

- the person's name (and name of their parents, spouse or next of kin, where applicable)
- the approximate date of the birth, marriage or death
- the area or ship where the event is likely to have taken place

### What records can I see online?

#### Indexes of General Register Office overseas records (1761-2005)

Search the indexes of General Register Office overseas records on [findmypast \(http://www.findmypast.co.uk/content/search-menu/life-events-bmds\)](http://www.findmypast.co.uk/content/search-menu/life-events-bmds) (£) or browse the indexes on [familyrelatives.com \(http://www.familyrelatives.com/post\\_search.php\)](http://www.familyrelatives.com/post_search.php). The related certificates can be obtained from the [General Register Office \(https://www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate\)](https://www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate).

#### Births, marriages and deaths at sea on British registered ships (1854-1891)

Search digitised images from [registers of births, marriages and deaths at sea \(http://www.bmdregisters.co.uk/\)](http://www.bmdregisters.co.uk/) on British registered ships (BT 158, BT 159 and BT 160) on BMDregisters (£).

#### Births, marriages and deaths on Royal Navy and merchant ships (1794-1972)

Search the registers of [maritime births \(http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-](http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-)

[world-records/births-at-sea-1854-1960](#)) (1854-1960), [marriages](#) (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/marriages-at-sea-1854-1972>) (1854-1972) and [deaths](#) (<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/deaths-at-sea-1781-1968>) (1781-1968) on findmypast (£), drawn from ten different record series (ADM 80/4-12, ADM 183/114-120, ADM 184/43-54, ADM 242/1-15, BT 153/1-22, BT 156/1-4, BT 157/1-9, BT 334/1-117, CO 386/170-172 and CUST 67/74). For some years within the ranges detailed above there are no records at all - use [our catalogue](#) (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>) to view descriptions of the ADM, BT, CO and CUST references listed for the precise breakdown of dates.

## Foreign registers and returns (1627-1960)

Search [foreign birth, marriage and death registers](#) (<http://www.bmdregisters.co.uk/>) (RG 32-RG 36) and download records on BMDregisters (£).

## What records can I find at The National Archives at Kew?

### Records of overseas births, marriages and deaths from the Foreign Office and Colonial Office (c.1820-c.1950)

Consult records of overseas births, marriages and deaths in various FO and CO [series](#).

These records are not searchable by name on our catalogue and are held in various record [series](#). Read *Tracing your Ancestors in The National Archives* by Amanda Bevan (The National Archives, 2006) to obtain a [record reference](#) from a comprehensive list arranged by country.

### Records of inquiries into deaths at sea (1939-1995)

Consult records of inquiries into deaths at sea in [BT 341](#) (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/displaycataloguedetails.asp?CATLN=3&CATID=1812&SearchInit=4&SearchType=6&CATREF=BT+341>) which include passengers of all nationalities on merchant ships.

### Births, marriages and deaths in the armed forces

See our separate guide on finding records of [births, marriages and deaths in the armed forces](#) (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/birthmarriagedeatharmedforces.htm>).

## What records can I find in other archives and organisations?

## British Library birth, marriage and death records for Indian subcontinent

Consult the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection at the [British Library](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/bldept/apac/index.html) (<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/bldept/apac/index.html>) for births or baptisms, marriages, and deaths or burials across the Indian subcontinent, including Burma and Aden.

## Bishop of London's registry records and the International Memoranda

Consult the Bishop of London's registry records and the International Memoranda at [London Metropolitan Archives](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/Pages/default.aspx) (<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/Pages/default.aspx>) for baptisms and burials registered abroad in an Anglican church. Read the London Metropolitan Archives leaflet on [Births, marriages and deaths overseas](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/Documents/visitor-information/08-births-marriages-and-deaths-overseas.pdf) (<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/Documents/visitor-information/08-births-marriages-and-deaths-overseas.pdf>) for more information.

## What other resources will help me find information?

### Books

Search [The National Archives' bookshop](http://bookshop.nationalarchives.gov.uk/) (<http://bookshop.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>) to see whether any of the publications below may be available to buy. Alternatively, look in [The National Archives' library catalogue](http://tna.koha-ptfs.co.uk/) (<http://tna.koha-ptfs.co.uk/>) to see what is available to consult at Kew.

The British overseas: A guide to records of their births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials available in the United Kingdom (Guildhall Library Publications, 1995)

Amanda Bevan, Tracing your ancestors in The National Archives (The National Archives, 2006)

**The National Archives is not responsible for the content of external websites.**

### Related guides

- Births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/birthmarriedeathenglandwales.htm>)
- Births, marriages and deaths in Scotland and Ireland (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/bmdscotlandandireland.htm>)

- Births, marriages and deaths in the armed forces (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/birthmarriagedeatharmedforces.htm>)

### Did you know?

There was no obligation to keep records of births, marriages or deaths at sea before the mid-19th century.

Any record made of a birth or death at sea from **1837** onwards was sent directly to the General Register Office and recorded in the Marine Register.

Statutory registration of marriages of English and Welsh people in other countries began in **1849**. Marriages were registered in the relevant country before notification was sent to the General Register Office, so local records of marriages may exist in some countries.

**No merchant ship has ever been approved for marriages**, although from 1854 any which took place had to be reported in the ship's log. Any marriage which took place on board a merchant vessel was not legally valid.

Details of births, marriages and deaths of Scottish and Irish people in another country will be in the relevant Irish or Scottish General Register Office.

Video guides (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/quick-animated-guides.htm>)