

Tracing family history in the Port and River Archives



'Barge Family' in Millwall Docks, c.1930 PLA neg ref.0704

The **Port of London Authority (PLA)** archives comprise records from the private companies (1800 – 1909) who founded and ran the docks, and those from when the PLA took over in 1909.

As many of our fragile records are heavily used, the archivist will search them on your behalf and let you know if we hold any information about your ancestor.

The holdings of staff records are incomplete as for some staff records were never kept; some may have been routinely destroyed, or been lost through enemy action during the war.

We do not hold information on any individual described as a **'dock labourer'** or **'docker'** in census or other records– these terms usually indicate that the person was employed on a casual basis, being called on twice or 4 times a day, and working on a job-and-finish basis. This type of employment was common between the early 1800s – 1967, when men might move from dock to dock or wharf, looking for work. It's estimated that 30,000 casual dockers were seeking work in the Port of London in the 1920s. As they worked a few hours and were paid off, there was no need to create any record about the individual. We do hold some records for the **'permanent' staff** of the private dock companies, but **do not have staff records for businesses other than the dock companies, e.g. river wharves.**

We receive a high volume of enquiries and aim to answer them within 20 working days; however this may increase if the service is particularly busy. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause to you.

Please email portriverarchive@museumoflondon.org.uk (or write to Port and River Archives, Museum of London Docklands, West India Quay, London E14 4AL) with the full name, full dates of birth / death and estimated dates of employment of the person you are looking for, as well as any

documentary evidence that the person worked for the PLA or private dock company. Please note that the person about whom you are asking for information must be deceased in order for us to assist you. Otherwise, the person in question or their legal guardian must submit a subject access request form under the Data Protection Act 1998. A subject access request costs £10; forms may be requested from: info@museumoflondon.org.uk .

Records held elsewhere:

The **Port of London Authority** holds **pension records**, mainly for those born after 1890. If you are interested in finding out more, please write to Pensions Department, PLA, London River House, Royal Pier Road, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2BG.

The **National Dock Labour Board Scheme** was introduced shortly after the Second World War, and meant that all dockers in London were given a unique registration number. When the scheme was abolished in 1988, the records of the London Dock Labour Board were passed to the **National Archives in Kew** (The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU; +44 (0) 20 8876 3444).

Watermen and Lightermen - Records of Watermen (who carried people on the Thames) and Lightermen (who transported cargo on the river and in the docks), are held by the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, going back to the 1660s. The Company have some 20th century records (see <http://www.watermenshall.org/ancestors.html>); earlier records are held at the Guildhall Library (Aldermanbury, EC2V 7HH, 020 7332 1868/1870, guildhall.library@cityoflondon.gov.uk)

Thames Pilots - Records of pilots were held by the Corporation of Trinity House, and surviving records are now held by the London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, London, EC1R 0HB. It should be noted that many records were destroyed by fires in 1666, 1714 and 1940 (see also http://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/news_info/genealogy.html).

Shipwrights - We do not hold employment records for the private shipyards, but any that survive may be found via AIM25 <http://www.aim25.ac.uk/index.stm>, the National Archives' Discovery catalogue <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> , or the Archives Hub <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/>. The Royal Museums Greenwich Archive and Library (The Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London SE10 9NF; tel: +44 (0)20 8312 6516; **email:** library@rmg.co.uk) holds records for some shipyards specialising in concrete boats.

Royal Dockyards and Merchant Seamen - The best place to look for these records is the National Archives (see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/navy.htm> or <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/merchantseaman1858-1917.htm>)

Local history - Although we do hold records that reflect the changes to the docks and river area over the years, it is often best to start your research into local history at the relevant borough library, archive or heritage centre. These will often have local newspapers, maps and business records, as well as parish registers, rate books or electoral registers and census returns. You can search for the relevant office here: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>