

Shipping and Canal Boat Records

Background

Gloucester has been a port since before Roman times. In 1580, Queen Elizabeth established it formally and the customs house in Gloucester was set up. This meant that international ships could dock at Gloucester without having to stop elsewhere. However the river was tidal and difficult to navigate, so few large ships made it up to Gloucester.

Work on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, originally called the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal, began in 1793. Lack of funds delayed the project, but the canal finally opened in 1827. As the network of canals grew, boats could continue up the river into the Midlands. Commercial traffic up the canal stopped in the 1980s.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Port Books 1575-1765

The Gloucester Port Books database can be searched by merchant name, cargo type, home port and vessel name. The database is held on an onsite computer at the Heritage Hub.

Port of Gloucester (D3080) 1853-1913

Crew lists, agreements and log books 1853-1913 of ships. Records are organised by name of ship, and are searchable by the name of the ship on the online catalogue.

The crew lists are six-monthly returns giving: official number; name of ship; port of registry; date of registration; tonnage; name and address of owner; name and address of master; details of crew (including name, age, place of birth, date and place of joining ship, date and place of discharge, and rank); list of voyages made during the 6 months; cargo - not always given; and births, deaths and marriages on board during the 6 months.

Where a "log book" is included this is often no more than a crew list, occasionally giving details of occurrences on board.

N.B. Some sample years are retained by the National Archives.

Registers of ships 1824-1992

D4292 HM Customs and Excise; Port of Gloucester

D4292/1/1-12: provide information on the ownership of each vessel and its dimensions. Other information includes: name of ship and master, when and where built, name of surveying officer, and sometimes a note as to the eventual fate of the ship. Many ships were built in Gloucestershire and Shropshire, but other counties feature too, with some ships originating from abroad.

Canal Boat Registers

Q/RR1 – 1795

Register of boats, barges & other vessels, giving name abode & occupation of master & owner, name, type & tonnage of vessel, number & status of crew, line & extent of navigation.

GBR/L6/13/3- 1879-1952

A typescript index to these records is available in the GBR catalogue. This is also searchable through the online catalogue.

There are also some uncatalogued canal boat registers under the reference GBR/L12 accession 5234: register of canal boats 1910-20; canal boats report books 1893-1902, 1902-08, 1908-20, 1920-52; registers of ship inspections 1925-54 and more.

Other Ships Logs and Registers

Some records relating to ships are held in other collections, such as family and solicitors' collections. Try searching the online catalogue for "ship's registers", "ship log" or by name of ship if known. For more guidance on how to use our online catalogue please see the Help page and FAQs. Or you can watch our YouTube tutorial.

Further Reading

For more information about the Gloucester Docks and the Canal see

<http://www.gloucesterdocks.me.uk/>

The National Archives:

[Merchant Navy ships' records: registration of merchant ships - The National Archives](#) – *explains some of the background behind the records.*

[Merchant Navy ships' records: crew lists, musters and log books - The National Archives](#) – *lists what records have survived, and lists other record offices and what they hold.*

[Records of Merchant Shipping and Seaman](#), Kelvin Smith, Christopher T Watts and Michael J Watts (PRO, 1998)

Lloyds Register

- [Infosheet Number 1: Addresses for further research:](#)
<https://heritage.lrfoundation.org.uk/addresses-for-further-research>
- [Infosheet Number 2: Registry of Shipping:](#) <https://heritage.lrfoundation.org.uk/registry-of-seamen-and-shipping> – *second page lists records held at The National Archives*
- [Infosheet Number 3: Lloyds Marine Collection:](#) <https://heritage.lrfoundation.org.uk/lloyds-marine-collection> – *lists what records are held by the register.*
- See [Information Sheets | Archive & Library | Heritage & Education Centre \(lrfoundation.org.uk\)](#)
- For more info on Lloyd's Register please see the Lloyds website