

GEORGE NODWELL

1890-1949



MERCHANT NAVY

EXTENDED SERVICE RECONSTRUCTION

Date of birth: 1st April 1890

Place of birth: Liverpool

Merchant Navy rating: Stoker (Fireman)

Known service dates: March 1915 - February 1921

Known discharge number / CDC number: 750784

WWI Wartime status: Merchant Navy

This research confirms that George Nodwell served continuously as an engine-room rating in the British Merchant Navy during and after the First World War.

Surviving crew lists and CR10 records demonstrate hazardous wartime service in 1915, followed by sustained post-war employment aboard cargo ships, tankers, and passenger vessels until at least 1921.

HOW THIS REPORT IS STRUCTURED:

This report alternates between documented evidence about George and historical context explaining the conditions in which he served.

Where George is named explicitly, the information is drawn from surviving primary records, including crew lists and Merchant Navy identity documents.

Where wider maritime or wartime conditions are discussed, this material is used to explain the circumstances of his service during periods where individual voyage records do not survive.

This approach allows George's service to be understood accurately, while clearly distinguishing between confirmed evidence and historical context.

Merchant Navy service differs from military service in that individuals were employed on a voyage-by-voyage basis, and no single continuous service record exists for most seamen.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW:

This report examines the Merchant Navy service of George Nodwell during the First World War, using surviving crew lists and identity records.

This research aimed to reconstruct George Nodwell's Merchant Navy service by identifying confirmed ships, service dates, and engine-room roles, and by assessing the reliability and limitations of surviving records.

KEY IDENTIFYING DETAILS:

Name: George Nodwell

Birthplace: Liverpool

Year of birth: 1890

Nationality: British

Occupation: Merchant seaman (engine-room department).

The identity of George Nodwell is confirmed through consistent personal details across multiple crew lists and his surviving Merchant Navy identity certificate (CR10), which includes his photograph.

GEORGE'S LIFE BEFORE THE MERCHANT NAVY:

As a Trimmer, his duties involved supplying coal to the ship's boilers, a physically demanding role carried out below decks.

RMS Empress of Britain

Official Number: 120940

Service dates: 23 May 1915 – 18 August 1915

Role: Fireman

Age recorded: 25

Birthplace recorded: Liverpool

Following his service on Hesperian, George Nodwell served aboard the Empress of Britain as a Fireman. At this time, the Empress of Britain was recommissioned as troop transport.

This role placed him directly at the ship's furnaces, maintaining steam pressure and engine efficiency during wartime operations.

SERVICE PROGRESSION:

The records show a clear and logical progression from Trimmer to Fireman, both engine-room roles commonly held by experienced merchant seamen.

The service dates are sequential and non-overlapping, supporting the conclusion that these entries relate to the same individual.

This pattern of employment reflects the experience of skilled engine-room ratings who were in constant demand during the height of submarine warfare.

POST-WAR TIMELINE:

The following vessels are recorded on George's Merchant Navy identity certificate (CR10) following the end of the First World War.

A CR10 is a historical identity card called a "central index card" introduced in 1918 to keep track of merchant seamen and their voyages.

Post-war CR10 entries help demonstrate continuity of service, skill retention, and long-term maritime employment beyond the Armistice.

These entries document his continued employment at sea during the immediate post-war transition period, when many wartime vessels were repurposed for commercial, supply, and reconstruction work.

C.R. 10. No. of Identity Certificate. *366129*
M.N.S. Region *NW* Regional No. *A207828x*
Surname *nodwell*
Christian Name *Geo*
Rating *Am N* B.N.R. No.
No. and Grade of B/T Certificate.
Date and Place of Birth *14.9.1890 Liverpool Eng*
Nationality *Brit* Father *Brit*
Height..... Colour Hair..... Eyes.....
Tattoo Marks.....
Dis. A No. *750784* N.H. Insurance No.....
Name and Address of Next of Kin.....
(32251) Wt. 20167-23. 100m. 8/18. Av. P. (503).
(43839) Wt. 28652-32. Rpt. 25m. 10/18. Av. P. (893).

366129

<i>142428</i>	<i>29.11.18</i>
<i>124981</i>	<i>10.12.18</i>
<i>120940</i>	<i>10.1.19</i>
	<i>13.2.19</i>
<i>Persann</i>	<i>3.4.19</i>
<i>142621</i>	<i>9.19</i>
<i>147575</i>	<i>6.20</i>
<i>136686</i>	<i>4.20</i>
<i>129291</i>	<i>11.20</i>
<i>136364</i>	<i>2.21</i>



SS WAR BUFFALO

Official Number: 142428

Later name: SS Persier

Type: Cargo ship

Built: 1918

Builder: Northumberland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd

CR10 entry date: 9 November 1918

War Buffalo was a standard wartime cargo vessel constructed late in the conflict.

Service aboard this ship reflects the rapid redeployment of merchant seamen from wartime supply work into post-Armistice commercial operations.

SS MINHLA

Official Number: 124981

Type: Tanker

Builder: Wallsend Slipway & Engineering Co. Ltd, Wallsend

CR10 entry date: 10 December 1918

Tankers played a vital role in supplying fuel during and immediately after the war.

George's presence aboard Minhla indicates continued employment in essential maritime supply work during the demobilisation period.

RMS EMPRESS OF BRITAIN

Official Number: 120940

Type: Passenger ship

Builder: Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company

CR10 entry dates:

10 January 1919

13 February 1919

Following the end of hostilities, the Empress of Britain was refitted and briefly operated on the Liverpool–New York route.

SS PENTAUR

Official Number: 120381

Type: Steam ship

CR10 entry date: 1919.

SS WAR BEACH

Official Number: 142621

Later names: Reindeer (from 1919), later called Sunwood.

Type: Cargo vessel

Builder: Tyne Iron Shipbuilding Company

28 August 1918: Requisitioned for service as a collier.

Also transported wheat and materiel for the Royal Air Force.

CR10 entry date: November 1919.

War Beach represents the continued use of wartime-built ships in logistical and reconstruction roles well into the post-war period.

Records show he is listed as arriving in New York on December 1919.

NAOMH NICOLAS

Type: Sailing vessel

Built: Baltimore, United States

Owner: Michael Cahalane, Heir Island

CR10 entry date: June 1920

This entry indicates service aboard a sail-powered vessel, highlighting the continued coexistence of traditional sailing ships alongside steam vessels in the early 1920s.

SS RICARDO A MESTRES

Official Number: 136686

CR10 entry date: July 1920

Limited surviving detail is recorded on the CR10 beyond the vessel name and official number, which nevertheless confirms active service during mid-1920.

SS COMO

Official Number: 129291

CR10 entry date: November 1920

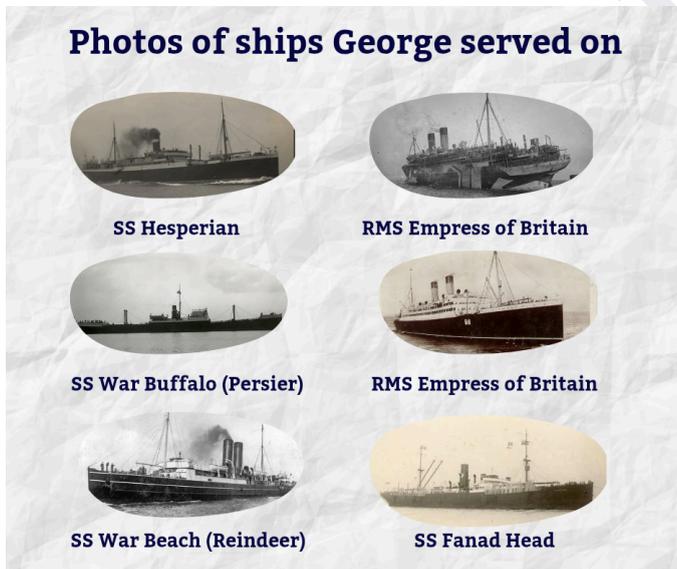
Service aboard SS Como falls within a period of steady post-war maritime employment as global trade routes stabilised.

SS FANAD HEAD

Official Number: 136364

CR10 entry date: February 1921

This entry represents one of the later ships recorded on George Nodwell's CR10, marking continued Merchant Navy service into the early 1920s.



RECORD GAPS AND WHAT THEY MEAN:

Merchant Navy service records are inherently fragmented. Crew lists only survive for certain voyages, and identity certificates confirm employment rather than continuous service.

The absence of George Nodwell from crew lists outside the dates identified in this report does not indicate absence from service.

Instead, it reflects the survival patterns of maritime records from this period.

Where service has been described as “confirmed,” multiple matching data points support it.

Where records are silent, this report avoids speculation and clearly distinguishes between evidence and likelihood.

WHAT THE RECORDS REVEAL ABOUT GEORGE:

The records indicate that George Nodwell was accustomed to hard physical labour before going to sea, having worked as a labourer in a sugar refinery before the war.

This background would have made him well-suited to engine-room work, which required strength, endurance, and resilience.

His repeated employment in engine-room roles, both during and after the war, indicates long-term maritime experience rather than short-term or casual service.

The range of vessels he served on - from passenger liners to cargo ships and tankers - suggests adaptability and a sustained working life at sea.

They also highlight both his experience as a seaman and the rapidly changing nature of post-war maritime work.

Working as a Fireman (a stoker) in the Merchant Navy meant exposure to extreme temperatures, at times exceeding 38 Celsius.

There was a risk of heat stroke, burns, and machine accidents.

In addition, the men who worked in the engine room had a low chance of survival should a merchant vessel be torpedoed by a U-Boat - and George would have been one of those men at risk.



(Photo of a fire room from Wikipedia - representative engine-room conditions, not a photograph of George Nodwell).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

George Nodwell's service in 1915 took place during one of the most dangerous periods of the war for merchant shipping, when German submarine activity posed a constant threat to unarmed vessels.

Britain depended heavily on its merchant shipping.

The British Merchant Navy (formally recognised by that title after the war) acted as the country's lifeline, keeping food, fuel, raw materials, and troops moving at a time when Britain could not survive without imports.

Merchant ships carried essential supplies such as grain, coal, iron, and munitions, preventing shortages at home and allowing factories and shipyards to maintain operations.

They also transported large numbers of troops to overseas theatres of war, often sailing through waters heavily patrolled by German submarines.

Beyond commercial shipping, many merchant vessels and crews supported the Royal Navy directly. Ships were taken up for auxiliary duties, including patrol work, minesweeping, and coastal defence.

The dangers faced by merchant seamen were severe. German U-boat warfare posed a constant threat, especially after the introduction of unrestricted submarine attacks. Merchant ships were often unarmed or only lightly defended, making them vulnerable to torpedoes and mines. As a result, losses were heavy. Germany had a policy to sink Merchant vessels on sight.

Like their Royal Navy colleagues, many Merchant Navy crew had to deal with the constant threat of an attack from U-boats.

More than 14,000 merchant seafarers lost their lives during the war, many of whom have no known grave and are commemorated on the Tower Hill Memorial in London.

In recognition of this sacrifice, King George V formally granted the title "Merchant Navy" to the Mercantile Marine after the war. Merchant seamen were also entitled to campaign medals for their wartime service, although surviving records are often incomplete, making individual entitlement difficult to trace.

CONCLUSIONS:

The surviving records confirm that George Nodwell served as an engine-room merchant seaman during the First World War, with documented service aboard two major vessels in 1915.

The evidence strongly supports continuous wartime service under hazardous conditions.

The CR10 entries demonstrate that George Nodwell remained continuously employed in the Merchant Navy following the First World War.

PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT:

Based on the surviving evidence, George Nodwell can be confidently identified as an experienced engine-room rating who was employed during one of the most dangerous phases of the First World War for merchant shipping.

His progression from Trimmer to Fireman reflects skill development and reliability in roles that were physically demanding and essential to ship operations. Engine-room

ratings were in constant demand during this period, and George's continued employment suggests he was considered competent and dependable.

Although Merchant Navy records do not allow for a complete reconstruction of every voyage, the available documentation supports the conclusion that George served under hazardous wartime conditions and remained at sea during the critical supply years of the conflict.

Chloë Anthony



GEORGE NODWELL MERCHANT NAVY

A timeline of George's service in the Merchant Navy during WWI based on archival research and available CR10 records.

1915

SS Hesperian
(Mar - Apr 1915)

Official Number: 124266
Service dates: 10 March 1915 - 3 April 1915
Role: Trimmer
Age recorded: 24
Birthplace recorded: Liverpool



SS Empress of Britain
(May - Aug 1915)

Official Number: 120940
Service dates: 23 May 1915 - 18 August 1915
Role: Fireman
Age recorded: 25
Birthplace recorded: Liverpool



1918

SS War Buffalo
(Nov 1918)

Official Number: 142428
Later name: SS Persier
Type: Cargo ship
Built: 1918
Builder: Northumberland Shipbuilding Co. Ltd
CR10 entry date: 9 November 1918

SS Empress of Britain
(Jan and Feb 1919)

SS Minhla (Dec 1918)

Official Number: 124981
Type: Tanker
Builder: Wallsend Slipway & Engineering Co. Ltd, Wallsend
CR10 entry date: 10 December 1918

1919

SS Pentaur (Apr 1919)

Official Number: 120381
Type: Steam ship
CR10 entry date: April 1919

Official Number: 120940
Type: Passenger ship
Builder: Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company
CR10 entry dates:
10 January 1919
13 February 1919

SS Reindeer (Nov 1919)

Official Number: 142621
Later names: later called Sunwood.
Type: Cargo vessel
Builder: Tyne Iron Shipbuilding Company
CR10 entry date: November 1919.

Naomh Nicholas
(June 1920)

Type: Sailing vessel
Built: Baltimore, United States
Owner: Michael Cahalane, Heir Island
CR10 entry date: June 1920

1920

SS Ricardo a Mestres
(July 1920)

Official Number: 136686
CR10 entry date: July 1920

SS Como

Official Number: 129291
CR10 entry date: November 1920

SS Fanad Head

Official Number: 136364
CR10 entry date: February 1921



SOURCES CONSULTED:

Board of Trade. Merchant Navy Crew Lists. Held at the National Maritime Museum and The National Archives, United Kingdom.

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The National Archives (TNA). Merchant Navy Service Records and Related Board of Trade Material. Kew, United Kingdom.

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This research is based on original Board of Trade crew lists and Merchant Navy identity records held by the National Maritime Museum and The National Archives.

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