

# **Royal Dockyard Apprenticeships & Careers**

## **The Dockyard Trades (Craftspersons)**

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1. This article attempts to briefly define the various Trades & work involved. It is not comprehensive as the range of work for most Trades was vast.
2. Over the Centuries, specifically the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changes in technology with computers, automated controlled machinery & numerous other innovations, required modern Shipbuilding, Repair, Maintenance & Upkeep to advance rapidly.
3. Trades have diminished dramatically with amalgamation of many & loss of identification with the past. The past should not be forgotten, our forbearers undertook work in a manner under extremely difficult conditions that persons today would not even contemplate thinking about. Knowledge of the past is fading fast, but those persons remembering their own lifetime careers whose marvellous memories, written articles, taped interviews and hard work are prepared to record & retain this valuable asset are to be commended. Historically the derivation of current work will always require the 'hands on skills' of a craftsperson. After all, even the machines & computers etc that are now controlling work practices require design, manufacture, installation, repair & upkeep by craftspersons to achieve the end product of the ships. It is an ever evolving cycle requiring skills, training & people.
4. The Royal Dockyards had buildings, locks, docks, basins, slipways, cranes, transport, ships, machinery, plant, tools, all the utilities, power, water, electricity, generating stations, policing, fire, victualling stores, etc, all inside their walls and generally maintained by their own craftsmen. Indeed too much to define in this article other than 'the Dockyard comprised a 'Town' in its own right'
5. An Indentured apprentice became a 'Journeyman' after successfully completing the full term of training years (originally 7 years but reduced to 5 years in the 1930's and subsequently to 4 years in 1967), including all associated Trade lectures. Test pieces had to be manufactured to exacting standards (repeats were common), workshop & shipboard learning skills attained on large variety of different work with mentor skilled tradesmen. Personal standards had to be maintained throughout in accord with Rules & Regulations. College academic attendance & examinations had to be passed, drawing office training (for some) satisfactorily undertaken. Finally, apprenticeship ending with a 'final year test piece' embracing a multitude of skills associated with the Trade of the apprentice.
6. Indentured Apprentices on successful completion of their training were encouraged to continue in employment in the Dockyard Service worldwide. Many craftspersons remained working at their skills with their tools. This aspect for many was the pride & enjoyment to work with 'hands on' experience. A policy of promoting the Dockyard trained craftspersons into Management posts worldwide giving opportunities for personal advancement in a Dockyard Managerial career that was very rewarding & ensured employees remained loyal to Dockyard Service throughout their working lifetime. (*Note: The Career progression subject will be explained in a*

*future article*). In 1969 female apprentices were allowed to be trained in selective Craft Trades although females had worked in an Industrial capacity for centuries & particularly during the war periods. Hence, the term 'Craftspersons' that is now in use.

7. The Craft Trades included initially, **Student Apprentices** who were mainly academic trained for Management roles but if academically unsuccessful in gaining professional qualifications or otherwise unsuitable, they were not employed as Craftsperson due to insufficient craft training, but discharged from service. The Student apprentice scheme discontinued in 1961 as it was not possible to recruit enough high calibre people.

8. The introduction of **Technician Apprentices** scheme recruitment into a major Specialisation of Mechanical, Constructive or Electrical replaced the Student scheme in 1962. The Technician Apprentice followed the standard 5 year general specialisation 'craft trade' training, drawing office techniques and Management training in their studies for appointment into Draughtsman & Technical Grade Officers. The Technician scheme was discontinued in 1981 as it blocked promotion of Craft apprentices into Management roles.

9. In 1981 intake of apprentices ceased with the final Craftspersons completing apprenticeships in 1983. However, in 1984 Dockyard apprentice recruitment recommenced on the very limited basis of a single stream of Craft trade entry with initial 'off job training' & Academic studies undertaken at external Colleges. Progression to higher posts within Dockyard Service is open to all based on qualifications & calibre of each individual.

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