

National Army Museum Information Sheet 3: Soldiers' Records 1914–c1920



Introduction

There are a number of different places where you can find information on soldiers who served in the British Army during the First World War. This guide is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to help you to start in the right place.

In 1914, the British Army was a small professional, volunteer army, supported by part-time Territorials. To furnish the needs of a World War, the Army grew in the subsequent years of the war to an enormous size through volunteers and, from 1916, conscription. Most official Army records for the period 1914–1920, which survive, are held by the National Archives. Most of them were generated by the War Office and therefore carry a 'WO' reference. An essential guide to these records is William Spencer, *First World War Army Service Records*, Kew (2008).

Research at the National Army Museum: the Templer Study Centre (TSC)

Researchers who wish to view material held by the National Army Museum may do so in the Templer Study Centre (www.nam.ac.uk/tsc). This contains one of the largest collections of books and archives relating to the pre-1914 Army in this country, including all the published works mentioned in this leaflet. The TSC is open from 10.00am to 5.00pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and the first and third Saturdays of each month. It is closed from Sunday to Tuesday. If you do not already hold a Reader's Ticket, please bring with you some form of identification which has your name and address on it, such as a driving licence card, or a passport with an additional utilities bill as proof of address.

Service records: Officers

The Service Records of Officers who served up to 1920 are held at the National Archives under the class WO 338. In order to consult these records you need to use an alphabetical name index, which is held under the class WO 339. Further records can also be found under WO 374 for officers who do not appear in the other classes. If an officer served at any time after 1920, the records will be held by the Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow. A more basic source of information about the career of a commissioned officer is the *Army List*, published monthly and quarterly. The Templer Study Centre holds a virtually complete run of these.

The *Army List* will tell you the name of the regiment in which an officer served, and the dates of his various promotions. From this information you can construct a broad outline of his military career. Promotions, resignations, and changes of regiment were also published in the War Office sections of the *London Gazette*. The TSC holds indexed copies of these from the period 1914–1920.

Service records: NCOs and Other Ranks

The surviving service records for non-officers are held by the National Archives for this period. A considerable proportion were destroyed or badly damaged by German bombing during the Second World War. They are therefore often referred to as the Burnt Records. They are chiefly held under the classes WO 363 on microfilm, in alphabetical order, although some can be found in WO 364, which were not damaged by bombing. These records are in the process of being digitised. Records of soldiers who served at any time after 1920 are held by the Army Personnel Centre, Glasgow.

Women's Records

Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) records for non-officers can be found at the National Archives

under WO 398, or downloaded online. Some of these women transferred to the new Women's Royal Air Force in 1918 and their records were transferred to AIR 80.

Royal Flying Corps Personnel

RFC personnel were transferred automatically to the new Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918. Other ranks and non-commissioned officers are listed in the RAF Muster Roll, arranged by service RFC number, which gives some service details and is held at the National Archives and RAF Museum, Hendon. They can also often be found in AIR 76. Casualty and medical records for officers are also held by the RAF Museum.

Casualties

During the First World War, the system of recording and commemorating the war dead was formalised by the creation of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (CWGC). A database of war dead can be found on their website at www.cwgc.org/

Other publications also list casualties:

Soldiers died in the Great War: a multi volume work listing casualties by Regiment and then battalion (also available as a CD)

Regimental periodicals (if publication continued during the war) also often report lists of casualties. Runs of these can be found in the Templer Study Centre and British Library.

Pensions

Disability Pension records for officers are held by the National Archives under PIN 26/19924-19954 and 21066 arranged in alphabetical order. Widows' pension records can be found under PIN 82 and PIN 26/17179-19720, whilst dependants' records are under PIN 26/19821-19853.

Medals and Awards

Campaign medal entitlement can be found as index cards on microfilm at the National Archives. These are held under WO 372, now available online. From these index cards, medal rolls can be accessed as WO 329.

Gallantry awards can be found in the *London Gazette*, however, few have citations quoted.

Going further: researching a soldier's regiment

For those who wish to dig deeper into a soldier's career, the next step is to study a published history of his regiment. The TSC holds one of the largest collections of Great War regimental histories in this country.

The National Archives holds the original War Diaries of units kept during the war under the class WO 95. These give basic details of daily activities, but seldom mention ordinary soldiers by name.

The TSC also holds a large collection of regimental periodicals, although some of these ceased publication between 1914–1918. They can provide some information about the operational activities of a regiment, but were subject to censorship during wartime.

Regimental Collections at the National Army Museum

The NAM holds several former regimental museum collections in its archives. These include the Middlesex Regiment, East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) and Women's Royal Army Corps. The NAM also holds enlistment and discharge books for the period c1919 to c1945 for the Middlesex and Buffs Regiments and similar records for the Irish Regiments disbanded in 1922 (Royal Irish Regiment, Connaught Rangers, Leinster Regiment Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Royal Munster Fusiliers).

Regimental Museums

Regimental Museums may hold interesting background information on the battalion or regiment in which you are interested, but they are unlikely to hold detailed information on individual soldiers. An essential guide to regimental museums is *The AMOT Guide to Military Museums*, London (2007). Information is also available at www.armymuseums.org.uk.

Soldier's Effects Records

The National Army Museum holds an extensive set of records relating to monies paid to the named relatives of deceased soldiers and those discharged insane. They do not give details of personal possessions of dead personnel. These are not currently available in the TSC, but a transcript is available for a charge of £10.25 from the Department of Archives, Photographs, Film and Sound. The charge is levied as they are stored off site from the main museum.

Local Newspapers

Local newspapers reported the events of the Great War extensively. They also published lists of local people killed, wounded, taken prisoner or decorated for bravery. County Record Offices may hold copies of local newspapers; the British Library newspaper collection holds an extensive collection of newspapers for this period.

Other Useful Books

Andrew Rawson, *The British Army Handbook, 1914–1918*, Stroud (2006)

Ian S Hallows, *Regiments and Corps of the British Army*, London (1994)

Philip J Haythornthwaite, *The World War One Sourcebook*, London (2002)

Useful Addresses

The National Archives,
Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Army Personnel Centre HQ, Secretariat Historical Enclosures, Mailpoint 400, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow, G2 8EX

Commonwealth War Grave Commission,
2 Marlow Road Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 7DX
www.cwgc.org

British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
www.bl.uk

British Library Newspapers, Colindale Avenue,
London NW9 5HE
www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html

Royal Air Force Museum, Grahame Park Way,
Hendon, London, NW9 5LL
www.rafmuseum.org.uk

Useful Great War Websites

Western Front Association
www.westernfrontassociation.com

The Long Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War www.1914-1918.net

University of Birmingham:
Centre for First World War Studies
www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk

Templer Study Centre, National Army Museum

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