

# National Army Museum Information Sheet 5: Researching Family History at the NAM



## Introduction

The National Army Museum holds one of the largest reference collections in the UK covering the operational and regimental history of the British Army. This leaflet describes some of the sources held by the Museum which may be of interest to family historians. It is not a comprehensive guide to researching military ancestors, and for further guidance on this subject, please refer to NAM Information Sheets, Numbers 1 to 4.

## The Templer Study Centre (TSC)

Researchers may obtain access to the Museum's collections in the Templer Study Centre ([www.nam.ac.uk/tsc](http://www.nam.ac.uk/tsc)). The TSC is open from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays, 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 a photograph and your name and address on it, such as a driving licence card, or a passport with an additional utility bill as proof of address.

The TSC has extensive runs of *Army Lists* (see below) and a wide range of military reference books on the open shelves. Most of the material listed below can be ordered from store by means of a request slip. It normally takes only a few minutes to produce a requested item.

Curatorial staff on duty in the TSC will be happy to assist you with finding relevant material, but they cannot undertake research on your behalf.

## Army Lists

The *Army List* will enable you to trace the outline service career of an individual Army officer. It also contains useful information on the whereabouts of military units. Publications such as the *Royal Military Calendar*, London (1820) may provide further details of an officer's actual service, but for this type of information you will usually need to consult a published regimental history.

## Regimental and campaign histories

The TSC holds not only an extensive collection of regimental histories covering the two World Wars, but also one of the largest collections of pre-1914 histories in this country. Between them they cover most of the units which have at some time been part of the British Army. The content of such histories varies considerably. Typically they mention officers by name, but rarely other ranks. Published histories tend to focus on a regiment's active service, and can provide frustratingly little information about lengthy periods of peacetime duty. However, they can provide an important context for the campaigns in which your ancestor may have served.

The following publications should enable you to identify the particular work that you need to consult.

*A S White, A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*, 2nd Edition, London (1988)

*Roger Perkins, Regiments: Regiments and Corps of the British Empire and Commonwealth 1758-1993: a critical bibliography of their published histories* (Newton Abbot, 1994)

## Memoirs

Apart from regimental histories, the TSC also contains a large range of military memoirs, from senior commanders to private soldiers, covering nearly all the major campaigns in which the British Army has fought. These eye-witness accounts

provide a unique flavour of the times through which their writers lived. Although the Museum may not hold a memoir written by your particular ancestor, it might have one written by someone in the same unit, or who served in the same campaign.

## Periodicals

The TSC holds runs of several hundred regimental and other military periodicals, many of them short-lived or no longer published and therefore very difficult to find elsewhere. Some of these started publication before 1914. They can provide a lot of information about the daily activities of a regiment, especially in peacetime, and frequently mention individual soldiers by name, particularly if they were expert marksmen or excelled at sports. In this respect they provide the perfect complement to regimental histories.

## Regulations and official reports

To understand the context in which a soldier lived his daily life, it can sometimes be helpful to examine regulations and official reports, especially if trying to decipher references in a soldier's service papers. The TSC holds copies of *King's / Queen's Regulations*, the *Manual of Military Law*, and the reports of numerous Royal Commissions and committees of enquiry.

## Casualty lists

Before the First World War, it can be difficult to establish whether or not a particular soldier became a casualty. Regimental histories may provide the names of officer casualties, but rarely those of NCOs and other ranks, although these are often reported in regimental periodicals. Officers' deaths may be also reported in the *Army List* and the *Annual Register*.

In addition, there are publications covering the casualties of particular wars, for example;

John A Hall, *A history of the Peninsular War : volume 8 : the biographical dictionary of British officers killed and wounded, 1808-1814*, London (1998)

Frank and Andrea Cook, *Casualty Roll for the Crimea*, London (1976)

*South African Field Force Casualty List 1899-1902*, London, (1972)

### Personal papers, letters and diaries

The Museum's collections contain the personal papers of hundreds of soldiers, ranging from senior commanders such as Lord Raglan, commander of the British Army in the Crimean War, to ordinary private soldiers, many of whom were eye-witnesses of some of the most significant events in British history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although you may not find your ancestor mentioned by name, you may well find letters or diaries written by someone in the same unit or who served in the same campaign.

### Enlistment and discharge books

The TSC holds enlistment and discharge books for the Buffs, the Middlesex Regiment, and the five Irish regiments disbanded in 1922. These contain attestation, next-of-kin, war service and discharge details. Because of the introduction of unique Army-wide numbers in 1920, all soldiers serving at that date were deemed to have re-enlisted. Enlistment books therefore contain the names of many individuals who in fact served during the First World War.

The years held are as follows:

	Enlistment	Discharge
Buffs (East Kent Regiment)	1920-45	1920-58
Middlesex Regiment	1919-45	1920-58
Royal Irish Regiment	1920-22	1921-30
Connaught Rangers	1920-22	1920-39

	Enlistment	Discharge
Leinster Regiment	1920-22	1920-39
Royal Munster Fusiliers	1920-22	1920-39
Royal Dublin Fusiliers	1920-22	1920-30

### Soldiers' effects records

These records relate to monies paid to the named relatives of deceased soldiers and those discharged insane. They do not give details of the personal possessions of dead personnel. Soldiers' effects records are not currently accessible in the TSC, but transcripts of records between 1901 and 1960 are available, for a charge of £10.25 per soldier, from the Department of Archives, Photographs, Film and Sound. The charge is levied as the records are stored off-site from the main museum.

### The Hodson Index

This index is available in the TSC. It contains genealogical, biographical and service information on approximately 70,000 men and women who served the British East India Company and the Government of India from the early eighteenth century until 1947. A leaflet which describes the Hodson Index in more detail is available.

### Photographs

The Museum holds many thousands of photographs of military subjects, ranging from the earliest years of photography in the mid-nineteenth century to the British Army's current campaigns. These include images of troops on active service and peacetime duties, portraits, landscapes, and also more informal scenes of military life. The collection includes many hundred of images of named individuals. Although the collection may not contain an image of the particular individual in whom you are interested, it is likely to hold images relating to the same unit or the same campaign.

### Identification and advice service

If you need advice on researching your military forebears, you may find it useful to come along to one of the Museum's regular Identification and Advice Sessions, when experts drawn from the Museum's curatorial team will be on hand to help you. Sessions are normally held between 2pm and 4.30pm on the first Monday of each month, except Bank Holidays.

This service is available to personal callers only. Please note that the Templer Study Centre will not be open for general research on those days.

### Useful books

J M Brereton, *A Guide to the Regiments and Corps of the British Army*, London (1985)

David Chandler, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, Oxford (1994)

Christopher Chant, *Handbook of British Regiments*, London (1988)

J B M Frederick, *Lineage Book of British Land Forces 1660-1978*, Wakefield (1984)

Ian S Hallows, *Regiments and Corps of the British Army*, London (1991)

Allan Ramsey Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*, London (1977)

Arthur Swinson, *A Register of the Regiments and Corps of the British Army*, London (1972)

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