

British Military Records to 1919

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OVERVIEW

This workshop will be divided into two sections focusing on how to research before 1914 and then during WWI as the tools available and the methodologies are very different.

GETTING STARTED

British Military research is a very big and potentially complicated subject with lots of different records available, but some might only exist for a short period. Use guidance provided by TNA research guides - www.nationalarchives.gov.uk and look for how to books in the bibliography.

ARMY ORGANIZATION

Before 1660
1660-1750
1750-1870
1870-1945

TRACING A BRITISH OFFICER

To get a broad outline of an officers career use the Annual Army Lists (1754-1879), which are available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk. The lists are arranged by regiment for the regular army only, but are indexed from 1766. Engineer and artillery officers are not included in the index until 1803. Search Discovery - the catalog using the term Army List, limiting your search to WO 65, will provide a complete listing of all available. There are quarterly (1879-1922) and monthly lists (1798-1940). The unofficial Hart's New Army Lists are issued quarterly (1839-1915) - look especially at the footnotes which often provide details of service and campaign awards, though the information should be used carefully as it was often provided by the officer. Many of Hart's lists are available online at <https://archive.org/details/nationallibraryofscotland>.

Army Lists

Annual 1754-1879
Monthly 1798- Jun. 1940

Quarterly 1879-1922

Half Yearly 1923- Feb. 1950

Hart's Army Lists 1839-1915 (unofficial)

Records of Commissions, Transfers and Promotions

Search for gazetting of promotions at www.london-gazette.co.uk. Search for letters regarding events.

A detailed outline of the officers early career may also be contained in *Royal Military Calendar or Army Service and Commission Book*. 5 vols. 1820. Available www.archive.org

Seek Regimental Service records, often in WO 25 and WO 76.

Records of Service

War Office Returns (WO 25)

1 st series, 1809-1810

2 nd series, 1828

3 rd series, 1829

4 th series, 1847

5 th series, 1870-1872

Regimental Records

1755-1954 (WO 76)

Half-Pay and Pensions

Half Pay

Ledgers (PMG 4)

1737-1841 by Regiment

1841-1921 alphabetical

Lists (WO 24, WO 25)

1713-1809 by Regiment

1783-1813 British American forces

Retired Full Pay

Registers (WO 23)

Ledgers, 1813-1896 (PMG 3)

Widows Pensions

Children / Dependent Relatives' Allowances

Pensions for Wounds

Seek regimental histories, see White, *Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*, as officers are often named and careers described. Many histories are online at www.archive.org.

TRACING A BRITISH SOLDIER

The easiest starting point for records of a soldier's career is the incomplete collection of Royal Hospital Chelsea Soldiers' documents (attestation and discharge papers) in WO 97. These records can be searched by name and downloaded on www.findmypast.com. An index to the records can also be searched in the National Archives catalog up to 1854, this index allows some additional searches so it can be beneficial to use both indexes.

For men awarded out-pensions by the Board of Kilmainham Hospital, there are certificates of service, 1783-1822, in WO 119, searchable by name in the National Archives catalog at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Note that a soldier described as a pensioner usually means that he was receiving an out-pension from either Chelsea or Kilmainham, not that he was an in-pensioner living in one of these institutions.

To be an in-pensioner, a man was a life pensioner of the army (in receipt of a service or disability pension), aged 55 or more (unless with a disability pension) and free from the responsibility of supporting a wife or children. There are no records for Chelsea for the period 1813 to 1824. For 1824-1917 there are admission books and rolls in WO 23/162, and an alphabetical register for 1837-1872 in WO 23/146. For Kilmainham there are admission books 1704-1922 in WO 188 and a sample of pensioners' certificates 1798-1817 in WO 900/39-42.

Most soldiers are out-pensioners and their records consist of: admission books; regimental registers; pension returns, none of which are available online. Soldiers not usually found in WO 97 include:

- Soldiers who died in service
- Documents of soldiers discharged by purchase prior to 1883 (these have not survived)

Registers of next of kin - If family tradition suggests your soldier died in service, try these records relating to payments to next of kin. There are gaps in the records, but they are arranged alphabetically and are name indexed. The registers covering the

period 1810-1822 are in WO 25/2966-2971. They are searchable by name in the National Archives catalog. The records provide the name of soldier, the regiment, period of death, amount of effects and credits, date of order to agent, agent's name, person applying (usually next of kin) and his or her address. The records have not been scanned or microfilmed.

Royal Artillery soldiers

Artillery pensions prior to 1834 were paid by the Ordnance Office, later by the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Registers of Ordnance Pensions (1816-1844) are in WO 54/338-493. There are also pension minutes for 1808-1834 in WO 47/2760-2851 and for 1822-1855 in WO 55/540-572.

Supplementary records of Royal Artillery service are preserved, 1791-1855, and for the Royal Horse Artillery, 1803-1863 in WO 69.

Other Army Sources

- Campaign Medals, 1793-1912
- Meritorious Service Awards, 1846-1919
- Long Service & Good Conduct Medals, 1855-1909
- Distinguished Conduct Medal, 1855-1909
- Service Returns No.3, Discharges, 1783-1810
- Service Returns No.1, 1806
- Muster Master Generals' Index of Casualties, 1797-1817
- Casualty Returns, 1810-1840
- Index to Casualty Returns, 1810-1840
- Chelsea Pension Returns, 1842-1862
- Chelsea Registers of Out-Pensioners, 1820-1875
- Soldiers Documents, 1873-1882, 1883-1913

Records of Service (WO 97)

- Soldiers Documents 1756-1913
 - Discharged to pensions
 - 1 st series, 1756-1872, alpha by regiment
 - 2 nd series, 1873-1882, alpha for cavalry, artillery, infantry and corps.
 - 3 rd series, 1883-1913, alpha
- Description Books 1756-1900 (WO 25)
- Returns of Service 1793-1810 (WO 25)
- Pay Lists and Muster Rolls
- Casualty Lists (WO 25)

Pension Records (WO 97)
Out Pensioners- Main Series
Admission Books (WO 116 / 117 / 118)
Regimental Registers (WO 120 / 23)
Pension Returns (WO 22)
Special Series
In-Pensioners (WO 23)

You can ask your questions about the British Army in: britregiments@egroups.com

MILITIA

The militia were reorganized by the Militia Act of 1757. The militia consisted of one or more infantry regiments for each county, raised from volunteers and conscripts chosen by ballot from each parish (or substitutes purchased by the latter). The officers were responsible to and appointed by the Lords Lieutenant. In wartime they came under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief and were liable to serve anywhere in the British Isles, but not overseas.

After the reorganization of the Army in 1882, the county militia regiments became the third battalions and the volunteers units the fourth.

In 1906 the Militia was renamed the Special Reserve. The Volunteers and Yeomanry were renamed the Territorials.

Records of Militia Officers (HO 50)
Other Ranks (WO 13 / 96 / 128)
Miscellaneous Records (WO 68)

The records of militia soldiers discharged to pension in WO 96 for 1806-1915, are included in British Army Service Records 1760-1915 dataset on www.findmypast.com

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA - www.collectionscanada.gc.ca

Until 1871 the defense of Canada was primarily the responsibility of British military and naval forces. When the British forces left in 1871 many documents were transferred to England and are now in the National Archives at Kew. Many documents were left in Canada and have been gathered by

Library and Archives Canada and regrouped in one major fonds, RG 8. This fonds covers a wide variety of subjects such as British Regiments in Canada, the Canadian Militia, the War of 1812, ordnance, fortifications, management of Indian affairs and much more. There is much correspondence relating to appointments and promotions, claims for losses, rations for military widows, deserters, settlers, etc. It includes muster rolls and pay lists for militia units and British regiments.

How to find the records. On the bottom of the home page choose "Browse by Product Type: Databases". From the long list, select: Microform Digitization. This will highlight the most recent collection. Choose: Browse by Title. Choose: British Military and Naval Records (RG 8, C Series - Index only or after searching the index then Documents. Select the Title. This will take you to a list of microfilms numbers for the index (82 reels) and the documents (484 reels). Before starting consult the Help option which will explain how to use and decode the index cards to access these important records.

For an overview of this collection read the Preliminary Inventory, available as a pdf on the help page.

Archived Guide to Canadian Military History
In the Discover the collections section, select Military and Peacekeeping. Then under Research Aids, select From Colony to Country: A Readers Guide to Canadian Military History, the War of 1812. This is an archived, not updated part of the collection.

Sections provided for:
General References
Government and the Military
Troops and Traditions
Personal Stories
Aboriginal People
Art, Music and Literature
Web Research

Other Record Groups

Record groups which may be of interest to War of 1812 researchers:

RG 7 Governor General's Office

RG 8 British Military and Naval Records
RG 9 Department of Militia and Defence
RG 10 Indian Affairs

INTERNET AIDS

War of 1812 Website - www.warof1812.ca

Articles by Category
Resources
Activities
Featured Products

Resources includes:

- Chronology of Events - good description of political and military events in North America, plus what was happening in Europe at the time
- Chart of British Regiments. Arranged by: cavalry; infantry; foreign & fencible units; Board of Ordnance and other corps. For each regiment it identifies engagements, years in the war, facing colors, coat color, lace, and comments

War of 1812 Casualty Database -

www.1812casualties.org. Goal is to include the names of all soldiers in the British Regiments of Foot that were killed, died or deserted during the War of 1812. Use the pull down menu on the search screen to show which regiments have been included to date. Ignore the opening page it is being actively updated.

Cyndi's List has a whole section for UK Military at www.cyndislist.com/miluk.htm.

National Army Museum - www.nam.ac.uk.

Primary military museum in England for pre-WWI period. Helpful research guides and extensive bookstore.

Mailing Lists - To get answers to your questions there are mailing list for many of the wars in which the British Army was involved. Start with *Cyndi's List* under *UK- Military*, then under *Mailing Lists, Newsgroups & Chat Groups*. One especially useful list is: britregiments@yahoo.com

RESOURCES

Identifies resources explaining how to do research and to how find resources, their bibliographies will guide you to many other resources.

1. Bevan, Amanda, ed. *Tracing your Ancestors in The National Archives*. Kew, Surrey: The National Archives. 7th ed. 2007.
2. Chandler, David and Ian Becket. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994
3. Crowder, Norman K. *British Army Pensioners Abroad, 1772-1899*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publ. Co. 1995
4. Fortescue, Sir John William. *History of the British Army*. London: Macmillan. 13 volumes 1910-1935. Available www.archive.org
5. Fowler, Simon. *Army Records for Family Historians. Public Record Office Readers' Guide No. 2*. London, England: PRO Publications 2nd ed. 1998.
6. Fowler, Simon. *Tracing Your Army Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians, Second Edition*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2013.
7. Gibson, Jeremy and Mervyn Medlycott. *Militia Lists and Musters 1757-1876: A Directory of Holdings in the British Isles*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publ. Co. 2nd ed. 1990
8. Hayward, John, Diana Birch and Richard Bishop. *British Battles and Medals, seventh edition*. London: Spink. 2006
9. Higham, Robin. *A Guide to the Sources of British Military History*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1971
10. Irving, L. Homfray. *Officers of the British Forces in Canada During the War of 1812-1815*. Welland Tribune Print. 1908. Available www.archive.org.
11. Jordan, Gerald. ed. *British Military History: A Supplement to Robert Higham's Guide to Sources*. New York. Garland Publishing. 1988.
12. Kitzmiller, John M. *In Search of the "Forlorn Hope": A Comprehensive Guide to Locating British Regiments and Their Records (1640-WWI)*. Salt Lake City, UT: Manuscript Publ. Foundation. 3 vols. 1988

13. Laws, MES. *Battery Records of the Royal Artillery, 1716-1877*. Woolwich, 1952-1970
14. Milner, Paul. "New Online British Military Index at Public Record Office" in *BIGWILL* (Newsletter of British Interest Group of Wisconsin and Illinois) vol. 9, No. 2, May 2002
15. Spencer, William. *Records of the Militia and Volunteer Forces*. Kew, Surrey: Public Record Office. 1997
16. Spencer, William. *Army Records: A Guide for Family Historians*. Kew, Surrey: The National Archives. 2008
17. Thomas, Garth. *Records of the Royal Marines. Public Record Office Readers' Guide No. 10*. London, England: PRO Publications 1994
18. Watts, Michael J. and Christopher T. Watts. *My Ancestor was in the British Army: How can I find out more about him?* London, England: Society of Genealogists. 1992
19. White, Arthur S. *A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*. Dallington, East Sussex: The Naval & Military Press. 1965
20. Wise, Terence and Shirley. *A Guide to Military Museums and other Places of Military Interest*. Knighton, Powys, Wales: Imperial Press. 9th ed. 1999.

WORLD WAR ONE

Context

The statistics vary by source on how many served during WWI with totals of 9,296,691 for all services with

- 7,712,772 enlisted in the Army
- 293,552 enlisted in the RFC and RAF
- 407,360 enlisted in the Navy

However, the records that survived the fire on 8 September 1940 at the Arnside War Office records repository does not come close to this total.

SOLDIERS WHO DIED

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission at www.cwgc.org ensures that the 1.7 million people

who died in the two world wars will not be forgotten. There are 1,059,642 names from WWI covering 4 Aug 1914 to 31 Aug 1921. The standard datafields are: name; rank; service number; date of death; age; regiment/service; grave reference; and the cemetery where buried or the memorial where his name is inscribed. There may be additional comments from the soldiers paperwork such as name and address of next of kin, which can be very helpful as many of the soldiers documents have not survived.

Soldiers Died in the Great War

This series included one volume for officers and 80 volumes for all other ranks was published in 1921 using regimental records. They list only those who died between 4 Aug 1914 and 11 Nov 1918. The published books have been digitized and made available on CD-ROM from The Naval & Military Press and is available at www.findmypast.com and www.ancestry.com with 703,811 names.

Information often includes: name, rank, number, regiment, date of death, cause of death, theater of war; place of birth; place of residence, and place of enlistment. There are errors of fact and transcription so verify where possible.

Other Sources to confirm Death

Death Certificates - from General Registry Office
 Index to Overseas Deaths - www.findmypast.com
 Official Casualty Lists - *Times*, *Scotsman*, *Irish Times*

Local newspapers - often include photographs
 War Memorials - every community has them
 Rolls of Honor

ALL SOLDIERS

Soldiers Personal Files

Every soldier who served during the war had a personal file. Unfortunately many were destroyed, singed or sustained water damage from the Arnside fire of 8 Sept 1940.

The records that do survive are in WO 363 - the so called 'Burnt Records'. These records are for men

who completed their service between 1914 and 1920 and include men who survived the war, died of wounds or disease or were killed in action, and even men executed.

The 'Unburnt Records' in WO364 was created by the War Office recovering documents at the end of WWII. The majority of the records are from the Ministry of Pensions, and primarily focus on soldiers discharged on account of sickness or wounds suffered between 1914 and 1920. A large number of records are for soldiers who were discharged before the war, but after re-enlisting needed their pensions adjusted because of additional service. Many of the files contain documentation relating to enlistment, conduct and overseas service, but also detailed medical reports. Soldiers may be found in both record groups.

Royal Naval Division Service Records 1914-20 formed in 1914 from a surplus of 30,000 sailors for whom no ships were available. They were renamed the 63rd (RN) Division in 1916 and came under the control of the War Office. The records from ADM339 are available on www.findmypast.com and online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Women's Auxiliary Army Corps - WAAC. 57,000 women served but only 7,000 service records survive in WO398. Records online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service has over 15,000 records from WO399, with records online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

PIN26 - War Pension files have been indexed and are searchable by name in Discovery - TNA catalog, but the records have not been digitized. Provides the regiment and the nature of the disability.

PIN82 - WWI Widows' Pension Forms for 9,800 recipients indexed and are searchable by name in Discovery - TNA catalog, but the records have not been digitized. Provides the regiment and the nature of the disability.

Officers

Officer records have the same survival issues that the other ranks do. There are 139,906 records in WO339 consisting of officers who were in the regular army before the war, were given temporary commission, or commissioned into the Special Reserve of officers. In addition there is another 80,000 in WO374 from the Territorial Army or with temporary commissions. These records have been indexed and are in Discovery - TNA catalog, but have not been digitized yet.

Check the Army Lists for details of a soldiers promotions.

Prisoners of War

A list of British officers taken prisoner during the war is available at both www.findmypast.com and www.ancestry.com

Over 3,000 prisoner of war reports from British and Commonwealth troops, including officers, other ranks and seamen, from WO161 are digitally available at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Medal Index Cards

Records from WO364

Medal	Awarded for
1914 Star	Service under fire in France and Belgium, 5 Aug-22 Nov 1914, includes sailors serving ashore
1914-1915 Star	Service in all other war theaters, 5 Aug 1914-31 Dec 1915, and for France and Belgium 23 Nov 1914-31Dec 1915
British War Medal	Service abroad (including India) 5 Aug 1914-11Nov 1918, or 1919-1920 in Russia
Silver War Badge	For retirement, or discharge due to sickness or wounds caused by war service, at home or abroad after 4 Aug 1914

Victory Medal	For military and civilian personnel who served in a war theater.
Territorial Force War Medal	To members of the Territorial Forces enlisting before 30 Sep 1914 and who served in a war theater between 5 Aug 1914-11 Nov 1918

A transcription of the records are available at www.findmypast.com and www.ancestry.com, while images of the medal cards are available at www.ancestry.com in color, and at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk in b&w.

Other Medals and Citations

During the war numerous other medals and awards were granted for gallantry and service, often citations and announcements were made in the *London Gazette*. These included the:

- Victoria Cross
- Distinguished Service Order
- Military Cross
- Distinguished Conduct Medal
- Military Medal
- Meritorious Service Medal
- Mentioned in Despatches
- Royal Red Cross
- Order of the British Empire
- Indian Order of merit
- Indian Distinguished Service Medal
- Orders of Chivalry
- various foreign awards

Putting the Soldier into Context

Army Hierarchy

- Army - Numbered I-V
- Corps - numbered using Roman numerals
- Division - arabic numbers 1-75
- Brigade - arabic numbers
- Battalion - arabic numbers

WO95 contains over 10,000 individual unit diaries arranged by operational theater and then in hierarchical order. Search Discovery - TNA catalog on WO95 for diary of interest, most of which have

been digitized and can be purchased.

Many of the war diaries and operation records were used by the Cabinet Historical Section to produce the *Official History* some of which were not published until recently. The full series has been released on two DVD-Rom entitled *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918* published by Naval & Military Press, 2010 and 2011.

See Becke for Order of Battles and how they changed over time.

Maps and Trench Maps.

You will need maps showing the big picture of the battle fronts and how they changed over time, and during the battles in which your ancestors were involved. Look for Atlases e.g Nieberg.

For a detailed examination of the events of the battlefield with many maps, photographs (then and now), and a detailed analysis of what happened, see the *Battleground Europe* series published by Leo Cooper Publishing.

A number of WWI trench maps along with a good explanation of how to read, use and interpret the maps are available online at McMaster University <http://library.mcmaster.ca/maps/ww1/home.htm>. The maps are available for download as medium and high resolution files.

Bibliographic guides

When possible use bibliographic guides to find the material you are seeking whether that is on a particular battle, campaign, or an aspect of army life. See White, Lengel, Hartesveldt and Enser.

Websites

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

Western Front Association - www.westernfrontassociation.com

See books by Blank and Fowler

RESOURCES

Identifies resources explaining how to do research and to how find resources, their bibliographies will guide you to many other resources.

21. Becke, Major A.F. *Order of Battle of Divisions. Pt. 1 - Regular British Divisions; Pt 2a - Territorial Force Mounted Divisions and 1st Line Territorial Force Divisions; Pt 2b - 2nd Line Territorial Force Divisions, Home-Service Divisions and 74th and 75th Divisions; Pt 3 - New Army Divisions; Pt 4 - Army Council, G.H.Q.s, Armies and Corps 1914-1918*. Reprinted Naval & Military Press. 2007. Index by Ray Westlake 2008
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24. Bridger, Geoff. *The Great War handbook: A Guide for Family Historians and Students of the Conflict*. Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2009.
25. Enser, A.G.S. *A Subject Bibliography of The First World War. 2nd edition Books in English 1914-1987*. Aldershot, Hants: Gower. 1990.
26. Evans, Martin Marix. *Battles of WWI: AN Illustrated Account of Warfare along the Western Front and the Gallipoli Peninsula*. London: Arcturus. 2008.
27. Fowler, Simon. *Tracing Your First World War Ancestors*. Newbury, Berkshire: Countryside Books. 2003.
28. Fowler, Simon. *A Guide to Military History on the Internet: A Comprehensive Introduction for Genealogists and Military Historians*. Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2007.
29. Hartesveldt, Fred R. van. *The Battles of the Somme, 1916: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 1996.
30. Hartesveldt, Fred R. van. *The Dardanelles Campaign, 1915: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 1997.
31. Hartesveldt, Fred R. van. *The Battles of the British Expeditionary Forces, 1914-1915: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 2005.
32. Holding, Norman. *World War I Army Ancestry*. Plymouth, Devon: FFHS. 1982
33. Holding, Norman. *The Location of British Army Records 1914-1918*. Fourth Ed. Bury, Lancashire: FFHS. 1999
34. Lengel, Edward G. *World War I Memories: An Annotated Bibliography of Personal Accounts Published in English since 1919*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. 2004.
35. Neiberg, Michael. *The Military Atlas of World War I*. London: Amber Books. 2014
36. Reed, Paul. *How Your Ancestors Lived: Great War Lives - A Guide for Family Historians*. Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2010.
37. Spencer, William. *First World War Army Service Records: A Guide for Family Historians, Fourth Edition*. Kew, Surrey: The National Archives. 2008.
38. Storey, Neil. *Military Photographs & How to Date Them*. Newbury, Berkshire: Countryside 2009.
39. Swinnerton, Iain. *Identifying Your World War I Soldiers from Badges and Photographs*. Bury, Lancashire: FFHS. 2006.
40. Ward, G. Kingsley and Major Edwin Gibson. *Courage Remembered: The story behind the construction and maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945*. London: HMSO. 1989.
41. Westlake, Ray. *Tracing British Battalions on the Somme*. 1994, reprinted Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2009.
42. Westlake, Ray. *Tracing the Rifle Volunteers: A Guide for Military and Family Historians*. Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2010.
43. Westlake, Ray. *The Territorials 1908-1914: A Guide for Military and Family Historians*. Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword. 2010.
44. Williamson, Howard. *The Great War Medal Collectors Companion*. Harwich, Essex: author. 2011.
45. Zapletal, Edward (ed). *Tracing Your WWI Military Ancestors*. Toronto: Moorshead Magazines. 2014.