



Tracing Your Ancestry **BRITISH ARMY**

This free guide signposts key records that will help you trace an individual who served in the British Army since 1914.

Find more information and links to the records at
iwm.org.uk/Research

Company Sergeant Major John W Odham, killed in action during the First World War.
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You can research the experiences of an individual by looking at:

- **Service records** – administrative files may record dates and places of enlistment and demobilisation, postings and units, injuries or disciplinary action. Different records exist for airmen and officers
- **Casualty information** – sources recording those wounded or taken prisoner of war as well as the burial and commemoration of those who died
- **Medal records** – medal entitlements can indicate involvement in specific campaigns as well as awards for service or gallantry
- **Unit and operational histories** – resources describing the day to day operational activities of units
- **Social and local history** – church records, local newspapers, school and workplace registers may mention an individual

Start by gathering information from mementoes, medals, letters and documents that you or other family members may still have. Look for clues about which units the person served with, what ranks they held and their service number to help you find and search the right records.

Many records are only available online, sometimes on more than one site. We have listed the main sources but there may be others:

- Ancestry.co.uk – **A**
- findmypast.co.uk – **F**
- IWM's Lives of the First World War – www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org - **L**
- The National Archives – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk – **T**
- Naval & Military Press - www.nmarchive.com - **N**

Some records are free to view but others are available on a subscription or pay per view basis (£).

Find links to all the records listed in this leaflet at www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history/tracing-your-army-history

IWM

Visit IWM London, IWM North, IWM Duxford, Churchill War Rooms and HMS Belfast and explore and research the wartime experiences of people from across Britain and the Commonwealth from 1914 to the present.

IWM collections include documents, art, photos, film, sound recordings, printed materials, publications, ephemera and objects ranging from badges, uniforms, equipment and weapons to ships, tanks and aircraft. IWM London has an outstanding research library including over 150,000 books and periodicals.

Research our collections using the online catalogue www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search. Keep the initial search simple, and try a variety of terms. Results can be filtered, for example using 'Category' allows you to select different types of material.

Drop-in to Explore History at IWM London for free, where you can search the catalogues, and use other online resources and multimedia displays to discover treasures from our archives and the personal stories behind them. Appointments are available for you to do more in-depth investigation in our Research Room.

Check www.iwm.org.uk/research/research-facilities for more information, opening times and to request an appointment.

Other free IWM signposting guides include:

- Tracing Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force Ancestry
- Tracing Royal Navy Ancestry
- Tracing Merchant Navy Ancestry
- Tracing Prisoners of War
- Tracing Home Front Ancestry 1939–1945



The British Army has undergone a number of re-organisations throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, with units expanding, disbanding, merging or being re-named. Many personnel records from the First World War were destroyed or damaged during the Second World War. Personnel who served in subsequent conflicts may still be alive so their records remain confidential. This can make it difficult to trace an individual but a variety of sources can provide clues.

British Army service records

The individuals' rank, regiment and dates of service determine which set of records you need. If an individual was commissioned from the ranks, moved from the Household Cavalry or Guards to another regiment or served more than once, you may find service records in more than one set of files.

- **Other ranks who were killed in action, died or left the British army before 1920** (including the British West Indies Regiment, the West India Regiment and European non-commissioned officers of the West African Field Force, but not those of Commonwealth armies such as Canada). Approximately half the records were destroyed during the Second World War. British Army service (WO 363) and pension (WO 364) records on **L, F, A (WO 363) / A (WO 364) (£)**
- **Non-commissioned officers and other ranks who were discharged from the Life Guards, Royal Horse Guards and Household Battalion between 1799 and 1920** - Household Cavalry Service records (WO 400) on **T (£)**
- **British Army officers who served up to 1922**. Many files were destroyed during the Second World War. Officers did not have service numbers. Commissioned officers service records 1914-1922 (WO 339 and 374) - at **T**
- **Other ranks who served after 1920, officers who served after 1922 including those who served during the Second World War and members of the Home Guard (except Durham)** – service records are held by the Army Historical Disclosures Team. Full records will be released to proven next of kin. Only very basic information about deceased service personnel will be released to other enquirers, with slightly more detail made available 25 years after the date of death. The fee is currently £30 and there may be a lengthy wait for this service. Download the application forms from www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records
- **All personnel who have served with The Brigade of Guards** (The Grenadier, Coldstream, Scots, Irish and Welsh Guards) **up to the present day** – records are held by their Regimental Headquarters. Written applications can be made to the Regimental Headquarters. Fees and restrictions apply.
- **Other ranks who served with the Royal Artillery 1883-1942** – Royal Artillery Attestations on **L, F (£)**
- **Other ranks who served with the Royal Tank Corps 1919-1934** - Royal Tank Corps Enlistment Records on **L, F (£)**
- **County Durham Home Guard** - Records for over 80,000 members (WO 409) (Files for those born less than 100 years ago cannot be downloaded) – on **T (£)**
- **Army officers'** careers can be traced through their commissions and promotions. IWM holds an extensive set of the regular *Army List* publication from 1914. *The London Gazette* includes information up to the present day, available online at www.thegazette.co.uk
- **Staff records and information on officer cadets at the Royal Military College Sandhurst (up to 1946) and Royal Military Academy Woolwich (up to 1939)** – on www.sandhurstcollection.co.uk (**£**)
- Various **courts martial** records are held at **T**



Casualty records

Casualty records may list those missing, taken prisoner, wounded, killed in action or who died as a result of their war service. Rolls of Honour can include those who served and returned. Nominal Rolls of those who served at specific times, died or received awards may occasionally also be found in Unit and Operational histories. See also - Tracing Prisoners of War guide.

- **Officers and other ranks who were discharged from the British army from 1914-1920 due to sickness or wounds** were issued with a badge to wear on their civilian clothing - the Silver War Badge Roll on **L, F, A, N (£)**
- **Plastic surgery patients 1917-1925** - rank, tour dates, injuries, and admission/release from hospital, with information on plastic surgery - The Harold Gillies Plastic Surgery Archives on **L, F (£)**
- **Officers and other ranks casualties - war service pension** summary cards and ledgers held by the Western Front Association. Download application forms www.westernfrontassociation.com (**£**)
- **Officers deceased from 1916 to 1920** – pensions paid to relatives (PMG 44) at **T**
- **Officers invalided from 1917 to 1920** – Officers' pension records (PMG 42) at **T**
- **Other ranks who died between 4 August 1914 and 11 November 1918** (in some cases up to 25 March 1921) whilst serving with the British army. The official list of First World War casualties in 80 volumes by regiment published by HMSO in 1921 – *Soldiers Died in the Great War and Army officers who died between 4 August 1914 and 11 November 1918* (in some cases up to 26 September 1919) Published in one volume in 1919 (less detailed information than for other ranks) – *Officers' Died in the Great War* – both on **L, F, A, N (£)**
- **Officers and other ranks who died whilst serving 1901-1929**- money owed to them and paid to their next of kin by the Government - Army Register of Soldier's Effects - on **A (£)**

Some other ranks serving with the British armed forces in conflicts:

- 1850 to 1986: wills with probate in England – apply at **Probate Search (£)**
<https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/#wills>
- 1857-1965: wills with probate in Scotland – search **Scotland's People (free with registration)** at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/Search/SoldiersWills/index.aspx
- 1914-1918, wills with probate in Ireland – search **The National Archives of Ireland**
soldierswills.nationalarchives.ie/search/sw/home.jsp and **F**
- **Service personnel who died between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921 and between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947** - the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) are responsible for the graves or official memorials to those with no known grave. Search under Find War Dead or Find a Cemetery. IWM has a complete set of the CWGC's original published memorial and cemetery registers.
- **Officers and other ranks serving with the British Army during the Second World War 1939-1945 – casualties:** killed, wounded, missing or prisoner of war – daily casualty lists (WO 417) – at **T** and those who **died** – *War Office: Roll of Honour, Second World War* (WO 304) – on **F, A, N (£)**
- **Other ranks who served with the Royal Artillery 1939-1947:** Casualty Cards on **F (£)**
- **Officers who died whilst serving with the Royal Artillery 1850-2011** – on **F (£)**

British personnel who died in the:

- Palestine Conflict 1945-1948 - on **F (£)**
- Malayan Emergency 1948-1960 - on **F (£)**
- Korean War 1950-1953 (includes those wounded) - on **F (£)**
- Cyprus Emergency 1955-1960 - on **F (£)**
- Aden 1955-1967- on **F (£)**
- Falklands War 1982 - on **F (£)**



Military personnel who died in service after 1 January 1948 may have had either a private or a service funeral and headstone. Details of service personnel buried in 'non-World War' graves are available by writing to the Commemorations team at the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre.

Personnel who have died whilst on duty or as the result of terrorist activity since 1 January 1948 are commemorated on the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. Search the roll of honour on www.gov.uk/search-armed-forces-memorial-roll-of-honour

Individuals commemorated on war memorials in the UK - search IWM's War Memorials Register at www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search

Rolls of Honour may list those who served, in addition to casualties. IWM holds a large collection of published rolls of honour for localities, schools, institutions and organisations - **Search our online catalogue** or see those available online:

- Abingdon, Berkshire 1914-1920 on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- *Activities of the British Community in Argentina During the Great War 1914-1919* – lists British volunteers from Argentina who served during the First World War on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Birmingham Employers Roll of Honour 1914-1918 on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- *The Bond of Sacrifice* - biographies and photographs of officers who died from the beginning of the war in 1914 until 1916 on **IWM** and **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Bromsgrove School, Birmingham, England Deaths 1899-1945 on **F (£)**
- Clacton, Essex Roll Of Honour 1914-1918 – The men of the town who died 1914-1918 on **F (£)**
- *Craven's Part In The Great War* -produced by a local newspaper to commemorate the men of Craven in Yorkshire who had died for their country on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- *Croydon and the Second World War: Roll of Honour* on **A (£)** and at **IWM**
- *De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, 1914-1919* - biographies of over 26,000 casualties from the British Army, Navy, and Air Force, with 7,000 photographs on **F, A, N (£)** and at **IWM**
- Electrical Engineers Rolls of Honour First World War (1924) and Second World War (1949) – biographies of members who died in World War I or World War II with some photos on **A (£)**
- Epsom College, Surrey England Deaths 1899-1945 on **F (£)**
- Gateshead, Durham, England War Honours Scrapbook, 1914-1920 - newspaper clippings of photos and names of soldiers from the Gateshead area during the First World War on **A (£)**
- *Ireland's Memorial Records* - information on 49,000 Irish men and women who died in the Great War compiled by The Committee of the Irish National War Memorial, 1923 **A, N (£)** and at **IWM**
- Ireland, National Roll Of Honour 1914-1921 – Various sources on Irish casualties on **L, F (£)**
- *British Jewry Book Of Honour, 1914-1920* - 50,000 Jewish men who served with British and Colonial forces during the First World War, with some photos on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Kempston, Bedfordshire - Servicemen 1914-1920 on **L, F (£)**
- Leicestershire and Rutland, Soldiers Died 1914-1920 on **L, F (£)**
- Lloyd's of London employees who died 1914-1918 – biographies and some photos on **F (£)**
- *London County Council - Record of service in the Great War 1914-18* – on **L, F, A (£)** and at **IWM**
- London Stock Exchange Memorial Roll 1914-1918 on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Manchester Employers' Roll Of Honour 1914-1916 - more than 63,000 names from Manchester companies of men who served in some capacity during the First World War on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Midland Bank Roll of Honour – bank employees who served in the First World War – on **L (free)**
- *The National Roll of the Great War* - compiled by subscription with information submitted by individuals or their families, limited coverage – on **L, F, A, N (£)** and at **IWM**
- *The Oldham Battalion of Comrades: Book of Honour* in 1920 on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Plymouth Roll Of Honour 1914-1919 on **L, F (£)**
- Plymouth Second World War Records 1939-1945 on **F (£)**
- Royal Artillery War Commemoration Book- 3,000 officers who died 1914-1918 - on **F (£)** & at **IWM**
- Trade Union Members, Service & Casualties 1914-1918 - Trade Union members from branches across Great Britain and Ireland, recorded in the union's newsletter on **F (£)**
- *University of London Officers Training Corps Roll of War Service 1914-1919* - on **A (£)** and at **IWM**
- Universities of Aberdeen, London, Oxford, Manchester, Durham, Edinburgh and St Andrews and Eton Memorial Rolls 1914-1918 - 58,520 names on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Wyggston Grammar School England Deaths 1939-1945 on **F (£)**



Medals

Eligibility for campaign and service medals is based on set criteria, usually being present in a particular theatre of war within given dates.

First World War personnel may have qualified for the 1914 Star or 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Territorial Force War Medal. The name, rank and number of the individual will appear on the medal. The Ministry of Defence is not able to issue or replace First World War medals under any circumstances.

- Officers and other ranks who served overseas 1914-1918: More than 4 million index cards, created in various formats by the Army records office in the 1920's to record medal entitlement, provide the most complete listing of those who served with the British army during the First World War. However, those who served on the Home Front or officers who did not apply for their medals are not included. In addition to name, rank, unit, medals and service number (other ranks), some cards show the first date of entry to a Theatre of War (if pre-1916) or casualty information – Medal Index Cards (WO 372) on **T** and **L (£)** and both the front and reverse of the cards on **A (free)**
- The cards are an index to almost 3,000 ledgers, organised by regiment with a separate series for each medal. Occasionally they contain further information such as the dates of service with a unit - The Medal Rolls on **A, N (£)**

Personnel who served in the British Army prior to or after the First World War or immediately after the Second World War may have been awarded other campaign medals - Campaign Medals Award Rolls 1793-1949 (WO 100). Digital microfilm copies of all the rolls can be downloaded from **T** for free and searched on **A (£)**

Second World War personnel may have qualified for the War Medal 1939 to 1945, 1939 to 1945 Star, Africa, Atlantic, Burma, France and Germany, Italy and Pacific Stars and/or the Defence Medal: 1939 to 1945. Second World War medals are not named.

The eligibility for each medal is described on www.gov.uk under *Medals: campaigns, descriptions and eligibility*. The locations and dates of service recorded on an individual's service record will indicate if they are entitled to a particular medal. The Ministry of Defence Medal Office can confirm if an individual is eligible to receive Second World War or post 1945 medals and issue those previously unclaimed to veterans or their next of kin.

Warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks awarded Long Service and Good Conduct Medals up to 1975 (not related to active service) – Long Service and Good Conduct Registers (WO 102). Digital microfilm copies of these rolls up to 1953 can be downloaded from **T**

Gallantry medals are awarded for an especially heroic deed or action. Announcements are listed in the official journal *The London Gazette*. For some awards there may also be a separate citation, describing the action for which the award was made. There are no citations for awards of the Military Medal or Mentions in Despatches. Operational records or a published regimental history might provide some details, although the individual may not be named. Newspapers may also include an account of the action although for security reasons key details such as locations and unit names are usually removed.

- Recommendations for some honours and awards between 1935 and 1990 (WO 373) – Digital microfilm copies of all these rolls can be downloaded from **T**
- Officers and other ranks who served with the Royal Artillery 1886-2013 - Honours & Awards on **F (£)**
- Victoria Cross and Distinguished Conduct Medal citations on **L, F, A, N (£)**
- Michael Maton's series of 'Honour' books (Token Publishing) - listing military recipients, including those of Mentions in Despatches in the First and Second World Wars and foreign awards from 1914-1968 at **IWM - Search our online catalogue**



Unit and operational histories

Official unit war diaries, reports and records - daily accounts of units on active service

- British Army War Diaries 1914-1922 (WO 95) are held at The National Archives (on going digitisation programme) - on **T (£)**, and for France, Belgium and Germany 1914-1920 on **A, N (£)** and for Gallipoli and Dardanelles 1914-1916 **A (£)** Accompanying trench maps (WO 153) – at **T**
- *Operation War Diary* is a project to 'tag' these diaries so that they can be searched by name
- British Army War Diaries 1939-1945 (WO 165-179, 215, 218) – at **T**
- British Army Quarterly Historical reports 1946-1950 and Unit Historical Records from 1951-1967 (WO 261-271, 281 and 288) – at **T**

Unit histories

Search for books including Regimental histories on The Army Museums Ogilby Trust website or in *A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army* compiled by Arthur S White (Uckfield, East Sussex; Naval and Military Press, 2001).

IWM has an extensive collection of regimental, divisional and official histories. Nominal Rolls naming those who served at specific times, died or received awards may occasionally be included. **Search our online catalogue** or see some examples available online:

- Birmingham Pals 1914-1918: 14th, 15th and 16th Battalions (Birmingham City Battalions) Royal Warwickshire Regiment on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Bradford Pals 1914-1918: 16th and 18th Battalions West Yorkshire Regiment on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Edinburgh Pals 1914-1918: 15th and 16th Battalions Royal Scots on **L, F (£)**
- Glasgow Pals 1914-1918: 15th, 16th and 17th Battalions Highland Light Infantry on **L, F (£)**
- Honourable Artillery Company collection - a selection of rare photographs of the HAC from the First World War, full admission and regimental records 1848 to 1922 – on **L, F (£)**
- Liverpool Pals 1914-1918: 17th- 20th Battalions King's (Liverpool Regiment) on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- London Volunteer Soldiers 1859-1955 – men who served with 11th and 20th Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps; 3rd Volunteer Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 3rd (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers); 10th (3rd City of London) Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers (69th Searchlight Regiment); 625th London Anti-Aircraft Regiment on **L, F (£)**
- Manchester Pals 1914-16: 16th (Service)-23rd (Service) Battalions, the Manchester Regiment on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Northumberland Fusiliers 1881-1920: a compilation of 70 sources for the 'Fighting Fifth' – on **F (£)**
- Oldham Pals 1914-1918: 24th Battalion Manchester Regiment on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
- 80th Field Regiment Royal Artillery, Second World War on **F (£)**
- Salford Pals 1914-18: 15th, 16th, 19th & 20th Battalions Lancashire Fusiliers on **L, F (£)** & at **IWM**
- Southdown Pals: 11th, 12th and 13th Battalions Royal Sussex Regiment 1914-1918 on **L, F (£)**
- 1st Sportsman's Battalion: 23rd (Service) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers 1914-1918 on **L, F (£)** & at **IWM**
- Stockbrokers' Battalion 1914-1918: 10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers – on **L, F (£)**
- Surrey Recruitment Registers 1908-1933 cover a variety of Surrey regiments - on **L, F (£)**
- Surrey Regimental Rolls, 1914-1947 cover a variety of Surrey regiments – on **A (£)**
- Swansea Pals: 4th (Service) Battalion Welsh Regiment initial recruits on **F (£)** and at **IWM**
- Welsh Guards 1915-1918 on **L, F (£)** and at **IWM**
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Other sources

Specific campaigns:

- Battlefield guide books covering different battles and fronts are available
- Western Front Association furthers interest in the Great War 1914-1918
- Gallipoli Association raises public awareness of the Gallipoli Campaign 1915
- Salonika Campaign Society promotes interest in the Salonika campaign, fought in northern Greece, Serbia and Albania during 1915-1918
- Great War in Africa Association raises awareness of all the military campaigns in Africa 1914-1918



Service and ex-service periodicals and newspapers can provide background information:

- IWM has an extensive collection of Regimental journals - **Search our online catalogue**
- Regimental journals may be available at Regimental Museums – check the Army Museums Ogilby Trust for museum information
- Magazines including: the British Army magazine *Soldier*, ABF The Soldiers' Charity magazine *FrontLine* and the Royal British Legion magazine *Live On*.
- *Trench Journals and Unit Magazines of the First World War* – includes items from the IWM collection. Available to view at academic institutions with a subscription

Information on the organisation and units of the British Army:

- www.army.mod.uk includes information on the structure and heritage of the British Army on
- www.longlongtrail.co.uk provides information about the soldiers, units, regiments and battles of the British Army of the First World War, and how to research and understand them.
- Work out where a unit fitted into the higher chain of command by using Orders of Battle: *Order of Battle of Divisions (Part of History of the Great War: Based on Official Documents)* [4 volumes] compiled by Major AF Becke by direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (London: HMSO, 1935)
Orders of Battle: United Kingdom and Colonial Formations and Units in the Second World War, 1939-1945 [two volumes] prepared for the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office by H F Joslen (London: HMSO, 1960)
- www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk covers the British Army and British Indian Army 1930-1956, providing an overview of units and formations, key events, personnel and some unit histories.
- www.armymuseums.org.uk The Army Museums Ogilby Trust provides information on regimental museums across the UK and can also help you trace the history of regiments which may have been re-named or amalgamated during re-organisations of the British Army

Other helpful sources

- British Army, Deserters and Absentees 1914-1919 - the *Police Gazette* published regular lists with birth year, occupation, last known address and distinguishing physical characteristics - on **F (£)**
- Military personnel entitled to vote but serving away from home could register as an Absent Voter - lists 1918-1921 on **F (£)** and at local archives
- IWM's Lives of the First World War is a digital initiative to create the permanent digital memorial to those who served in uniform and worked on the home front – www.livesofthefirstworldwar.org
- *Army Records: A Guide for Family Historians* by William Spencer (Richmond, Surrey: The National Archives, 2008). Army material now held by The National Archives and British Library
- *Tracing Your Army Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians* by Simon Fowler (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2013)

TNA '**Help with your research**' guides cover a range of topics, explain how to find and use TNA records and signpost other sources www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/

Contact addresses

The National Archives

Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond,
Surrey TW9 4DU
020 8876 3444
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

National Army Museum (Closed until late 2016)

Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3 4HT
020 7730 0717
www.nam.ac.uk

Army Personnel Centre

MS Support Unit, P&D Branch,
Historical Disclosures, MP 555
Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street,
Glasgow G2 8EX
www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7DX
01628 507 200
www.cwgc.org

Ministry of Defence Medal Office

Imjin Barracks, Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW
www.gov.uk/apply-medal-or-veterans-badge

Regimental Headquarters

The Grenadier/Coldstream/Scots/Irish/Welsh
Guards (*delete as appropriate*)
Wellington Barracks, Birdcage Walk,
London SW1E 6HQ

Defence Business Services JCCC (Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre)

Commemoration Team Room G35, Innsworth
House, Imjin Barracks,
Innsworth, Gloucester GL3 1HW

