



A Guide
to
Tracing Family Members
who
Served in the Great War
1914-1918

by
The Wartime Memories Project

This booklet provides an outline of useful resources to assist in discovering more about those who served in the Great War and provides a record sheet for compiling information as you discover it.

www.wartimememories.co.uk



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Family Records

Do you have any photographs, documents, medals or mementos?

A photograph of your family member in uniform can be a good starting point. The type of uniform will reveal if they served in the Army, Navy, Air Force or other service and often the badges will reveal a Regiment and other clues, which will help build the story. Check the backs of photos if at all possible, often they are sent as postcards and may offer additional clues.

If you have their medals, these will be engraved with name, rank, number and regiment.

Documents such as a paybook or discharge book, certificates, letters and postcards are also a good starting place, read through them carefully and make a note of any information they reveal.

Other members of your family are a great source of information, sometimes the smallest fragment of information will offer a clue, ask if they remember any stories, do they have any photos or documents?

To commemorate the centenary of the Great War, The Wartime Memories Project have developed an online archive to enable sharing of photographs, documents and images of memorabilia and places connected with the war on the Home Front.

www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/homefront/

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the archive aims to enable people to learn more about their own families and local area during the Great War.

We hope you will add images of any items you may have at home to help build this archive. If you can add any information to any of the items already on display, please leave a comment and help others to learn.

This developing section of our website also contains information relating to the British Home Front and provides opportunity to add any information you may have.

Census, Parish, Birth, Marriage and Death Records

It can be useful to check the census and parish records for your family, although these provide little information about the war service, creating a family tree is a good starting place.

The census of 1891, 1901 and 1911 will provide a snapshot of those members of your family who are in the age range for military service, (very useful if you are not sure who served) occupations, home addresses, names of parents and siblings are useful to cross reference with details on service records.

Marriage Certificates during the war often give the regiment of those serving as their occupation, likewise Birth Certificates and Baptism records of any children born may reveal their father's service details. Remember that during the war people did not always return to their home town to get married, <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com/> allows you to search for marriages by names of those married, but the index is not yet complete. Your local library service may have the Marriage Index on microfilm, likewise for the Birth and Death Index.

Those killed in action abroad are not listed in the Death Index, the absence of a death record can be an indicator that they died whilst serving.

Medal Cards (1914 - 1918)

The Medal Cards are a record of medals awarded for service during the war, the 1914 Star, 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Territorial Force War Medal. As well as the list of medal entitlement, the card may also tell you which theatre of war a person served and the date they first went overseas, a date of discharge or death, units in which they served and occasionally a home address.

The cards are held at the National Archives at Kew but can be obtained online. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/>

Records of Service (1914 - 1918)

Over seven million people served in the British Army during the Great War, but less than half of the service records survived the Blitz of 1940, of those which do survive many are difficult to read due to water damage. The records are held at the National Archives and most are available online.

Records for those serving in the Royal Navy and Flying Corps are also available via the National Archives.

Many British men also served in the Armies of the Commonwealth, having emigrated in the years preceding the war or having travelled abroad specifically to enlist. This is especially common in the Canadian Army as the rates of pay were higher than in the British Army, a number of men from port towns such as Liverpool and Glasgow, crossed the Atlantic to enlist.

Records for Australian and Canadian Forces survive and are available online.

Royal Navy Records 1914-1918

Records of those who served in the Royal Navy are held at the National Archives at Kew but can be obtained online.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/>

Royal Flying Corps & Royal Air Force Records 1914-1918

Records of those who served in the Royal Navy are held at the National Archives at Kew but can be obtained online.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/>

Those Who Died (1914 - 1918)

Soldiers of the British Army who were killed in action or died of wounds, accident or disease can be found in the books 'Soldiers Died in the Great War. 1914-19', which are available online.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website: <http://www.cwgc.org/> provides a search facility to locate the grave or memorial to, those killed whilst serving with the Commonwealth Forces.

Local War Memorials list those killed, sometimes giving regimental details, some churches created "Roll's of Honour" listing all those from the congregation who served, likewise many schools and other large establishments have lists of pupils or employees. Many of these rolls are available online.

The Silver War Badge

The Silver War Badge ('For King and Empire: Services Rendered') was issued from 1916 to soldiers discharged for disablement, ill-health or if their skills were required for the war effort at home, e.g. shipbuilding or steel working. Each badge has a unique number on the back, which may be looked up in the Rolls, these records provide a soldier's date of enlistment and discharge and the cause of discharge (wounds, gas, sickness, etc). Currently the Rolls are only accessible at The National Archives at Kew.

Prisoners of War

The records of the International Red Cross for Prisoners of War are now available online <http://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Search>

Newspapers

The London Gazette www.london-gazette.co.uk lists new commissions and promotions of officers as well as awards of gallantry medals for all ranks and ratings.

Local newspapers often printed articles about servicemen including obituaries, medal awards, citations, letters home and sometimes photographs of local soldiers. Record Offices and Libraries often hold copies of newspapers on microfiche, which are available to view with an appointment, check with your local service to see what is available

Some papers available in the North East include:

At Durham County Record Office (0191 3864411) :- Auckland Chronicle, Consett Guardian, Durham Chronicle and County Gazette, Durham County Advertiser.

At Newcastle Central Library (0191 2610691) :- Evening Chronicle, Newcastle Daily Chronicle, Newcastle Journal, North Mail.

At Darlington Library (01325 469858) :- Darlington and Stockton Times, North Star, Northern Echo.

At The Bowes Museum (01833 690 606):- Teesdale Mercury

At Hartlepool Library (01429 263778):- Northern Daily Mail and South Durham Herald.

Absent Voters' Lists (1918)

For the British General Election in 1918, lists of Absent Voters, (people living away from their home address) were compiled. These include servicemen in the Army and usually record the man's regiment, number and rank at the time and his home address. The lists are arranged by Division, Polling Districts and then Parishes, so if you know where your relatives were living and the list survives, it may be worth checking the lists, which are usually held in Local Record Offices or Libraries

Some of the lists for Durham, including Bishop Auckland and Barnard Castle are held at

Durham County Record Office,
County Hall,
Aykley Heads,
Durham (0191 3833253)

and are available on microfilm to researchers, by appointment only.

Other Co. Durham lists still in existence include:-

Darlington (Darlington Town Hall)
Gateshead (Gateshead Library)
Hartlepool (Hartlepool Library)
Newcastle upon Tyne (Newcastle Central Library).

Don't forget to do a search online, many personal and history group web pages have details of individuals.

The Wartime Memories Project

The Wartime Memories Project is a non profit community organisation dedicated to collecting, preserving and researching memories and photographs of the Great War 1914-1918 and the Second World War 1939-1945 before they are lost forever.

We hope you will find this leaflet useful, further help, information and links can be found at

www.wartimememories.co.uk/help

It would greatly assist the Project if you could add details of the person you are researching at:

www.wartimememories.co.uk/form.php