Tracing your wartime ancestor

Local Studies Genealogy Guide No. 23

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Newcastle Libraries

Newcastle City Council

The aim of this guide is provide suggestions of sources of information on wartime ancestors.

Starting Point
Before you start looking for your ancestor it is best to have the following to hand;

Full name – middle name is a bonus
Date of birth
Service in which they served
Rank and regiment or ship or squadron
When they served
Significant events (enlistment, demobilisation, injury, etc)

British Army
Records before 1921 are held by the National Archives at Kew and can be viewed online by using Ancestry or Find My Past. The microfilm can be viewed at Kew.

National Archives
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DY

Tel: 020 8876 3444
Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Records after 1921 are held by the Ministry of Defence and can only be viewed by a member of the next of kin if a service person is deceased. The following address should be used for family members wishing to access records of deceased soldiers

Army Personnel Centre,
Historical Disclosures,
Mail Point 555,
Kentigern House,
65 Brown Street,
Glasgow,
G2 8EX

Royal Air Force
Records before 1924 are held by The National Archives as above and can be viewed online using Ancestry or Find My Past.

Records after 1924 are held by the RAF and can be contacted at the following address;

RAF Disclosures
Room 221B
Trenchard Hall
RAF Cranwell
Sleaford
Lincolnshire
Telephone: 01400 261201 ext 8176, 8172, 8173

Royal Navy
Records before 1924 are held by The National Archives as above and are available online by using Ancestry or Find My Past.

Until 1972 records were given to the individual on discharge. The Royal Navy can be contacted at;

Fleet DN Pers Disclosure Cell
MP G2
Room 48
West Battery
Whale Island
Portsmouth
PO2 8SX

Medals
Medal rolls can be searched online using Ancestry or Find My Past. Historical medal rolls are held by The National Archives. Medal were announced in the London Gazette, which can be searched online at www.london-gazette.co.uk and Newcastle City Library has copies which can be viewed on request.

Further information about medals can be found by contacting the MOD Medal Office.

MOD Medal Office
Building 250
Imjin Barracks
Gloucester
GL3 1HW

Telephone: 0800 085 3600

War Graves
You can trace graves and resting places online at www.cwgc.org . The website also has information about each cemetery and may also have an image of the grave you are looking for. The organisation can also be contacted at:

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission
2 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 7DX
Telephone: 01628 634221

War memorials
The North East War Memorials Project can be found at www.newmp.org.uk . You can search by name or town. Similar projects exist across the country and are useful for tracing memorials in less obvious locations such as schools and workplaces.

Prisoners of War
Records are available on Ancestry and Find My Past, the First World War records only list officers.

The Swiss Red Cross hold records on where prisoners were held as part of their role in forwarding mail and parcels. They can be contacted and there is a charge for searches.

Archives Division and Research Service
International Committee of the Red Cross
19 Avenue de la Paix
Geneva CH-1202
Switzerland.

Website: www.icrc.org/eng (click on Info Resource, and then ICRC Information Sources – an electronic application form can be found under Archives)

Regimental records
The regiments have a variety of records and memorabilia including war diaries and photos. Consult a regiment's website to find where the records are kept and how you can gain access.

Durham Light Infantry
Durham Record Office
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UL

Website: www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk
Email: record.office@durham.gov.uk
Telephone: 0191 383 3253

Northumberland Fusiliers
The Fusiliers Museum of Northumberland
Abbots Tower
Alnwick Castle
Alnwick
Northumberland
NE66 1NG

Website: www.northumberlandfusiliers.org.uk
Email: fusnorthld@aol.com
Telephone: 01665 602 152

The Imperial War Museum
Lambeth Road
London
SE1 6HZ

Website: www.iwm.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7416 5000

Regimental Museums
For details of regimental museums and archives view www.armymuseums.org.uk .

Newspapers
The Illustrated Chronicle published photographs of servicemen who were in the news usually for being wounded, killed, promoted or awarded medals for gallantry. At times of heavy casualties there may be a time lag of 6-8 weeks for a photograph to appear. All local newspapers may carry news of significant events involving individuals and relatives or friends may have placed a death notice. Reporting restrictions often meant that reports on the sinking of ships or military operations were deliberately vague and would be unable to report the name of a stricken vessel or be specific about troops' locations. Newspapers would often carry articles about evacuees (again they would be vague about locations) and stories about the home front featuring the likes of munitions workers, women volunteers and the home guard.

A list of the newspapers held by Newcastle City Library can be found at http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries/local-studies-and-family-history#factsheets or we have a fact sheet to consult on Level 6 of the City Library. Newspapers can be search online at the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) that can be searched for free, but there is a charge for viewing articles.

National Archives
The National Archives have vast holdings and it is worth consulting their website to see what records are held. The website also has a number of interesting podcasts and explanations of abbreviations used in documents.

National Archives
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DY

Telephone: 020 8876 3444
Website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Tyne and Wear Archives
Useful for information about the home front, civil defence and non military operations.

Tyne & Wear Archives
Discovery Museum
Blandford Square
Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear
NE1 4JA

Telephone: (0191) 277 2248
Website: http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/tyne-and-wear-archives.html
Email: info@twarchives.org.uk

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Email: information@newcastle.gov.uk