

World War One Soldiers

Background

Between 1914 and 1919 over 5 million men served in armed forces during World War One. 1.6 million soldiers were wounded and 673,375 had died or were missing by September 1919. Recruitment began on the day after war was declared, with 30,000 men joining up on that one day alone. By January 1916, 2.6 million men had volunteered. Conscription was introduced in March 1916. Single and then married men aged 18-45 were called up for active service. Some men were in reserved occupations, such as mining and manufacturing, so were not asked to fight. Due to the high number of men who fought, most families, communities, businesses and societies have links with world war one soldiers.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Service Records and Pension Records:

Unfortunately, few service records for World War One soldiers have survived. This is because they were stored in a warehouse in London that was bombed in 1940. Those that have survived are held by the National Archives. They have been digitised and can be searched and viewed online through www.ancestry.co.uk. Service records of Officers were kept separately. These are held at the National Archives (Ref: WO 339 and WO 374). A service record will give you information about the battalions/companies the soldier served in, where he served, information about his appearance (e.g. height), personal details, offences, injuries and much more. The actual amount of paperwork available varies depending on the career of the soldier.

Pension records have a higher survival rate as they were kept separate to the service records. But these were not issued for every soldier. Generally, a pension file was only created for soldiers who survived the war or were invalided out of service. They usually contain similar information to the soldier's service record.

If a soldier served after 1920, either in the Regular Army, in the Reserves, or possibly in the Home Guard, their records might still be held by the Ministry of Defence. See the gov.uk website for more information.

Medal Roll Index Cards (WO 372):

Every soldier who fought between 1914 and 1918 should have received at least one of the following medals: the 1914-1915 Star, Victory Medal, British Medal. The name of each soldier who was issued with a medal was recorded in a regimental medal roll. These were then indexed by name on Medal Roll Index Cards. The cards will contain a reference to the roll(s) the soldier appears in, the medals they were awarded, their regiment and service number. Sometimes their home address is noted on the card, along with other details. It is also usually noted whether the soldier was killed in action (KIA), discharged or demobbed, the theatre of war they first served in (France, Egypt etc) and the date they arrived on the front lines. Medal Roll Index Cards can be searched and downloaded from the National Archives website for a fee. Alternatively, they can be viewed on www.ancestry.co.uk on site for free with the Gloucestershire Family History Society.

Rolls of Honour:

A large number of different Rolls of Honour have been produced. Some were produced by the Army, Navy or Air Force, others by volunteers or individuals. Most are based on information inscribed on a headstone or memorial. A large number of local Rolls of Honour have been produced for places in Gloucestershire. These can be identified using our online catalogue. Try searching for “roll of honour” and the name of the village/parish/place you are interested in.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

The CWGC has over 1.7 million names in their database. This can easily be searched on their website available here: [The Commonwealth War Graves Commission | CWGC](#). The index will tell you their rank, regiment, date of death, area of death and the cemetery/memorial where the name is listed. Servicemen who died in the UK are also listed. Sometimes the age and next of kin is listed, but this is not always the case.

Databases of deceased soldiers:

If the soldier died during WW1, they should appear in several databases. First, try the “UK Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1918”. which you can search via Ancestry or Find my Past. This database is based on a register created by the Government in 1921. It does not cover officers. For each soldier it usually gives their birthplace or where enlisted, service number, rank, regiment and battalion, type of casualty, death date (and possibly place), theatre of war.

Unit War Diaries (WO 95):

Each unit or battalion within a regiment kept diaries during the First World War. Most unit diaries do not refer to individual soldiers. They describe troop movements, battles, incidents and may refer to the number of men who died rather than naming individuals. But they can be useful to find out what a battalion was doing when a soldier was serving or was wounded or killed.

Most of these diaries are held at the National Archives under the reference WO 95. The easiest way to find them is to search the National Archives catalogue using a keyword from the regiment name e.g. Gloucestershire. You can then narrow the result, e.g. Reference WO 95. Be aware of abbreviations e.g. Glos could be used instead of Gloucestershire. The diaries are not sorted in the catalogue by regiment. They are sorted by Theatre of War (e.g. Europe, North Africa), Division, Brigade, Corps/Regiment and finally Battalion. You will often find that different battalions of the same regiment are in different brigades and divisions and therefore have very different reference numbers.

Newspapers:

Local newspapers often ran rolls of honour of local men who died, were injured, missing or received medals. These were usually based on information and photographs sent in by relatives. A good place to start for Gloucestershire men is the Gloucester Graphic, which was a weekly pictorial supplement to the Cheltenham Chronicle. These are available onsite in the Searchroom. Digital copies are also available via the Cheltenham Local History Website available here: [Newspapers – Cheltenham Local History Society](#)

Otherwise, you can also try the Gloucester Journal or Citizen. For a full list of Gloucestershire newspapers and where they are held, please see the Newspaper Guide (Handlist), available from our website. The Cheltenham Chronicle is indexed up to 1950 on the British Newspaper

Archive website. You can access the Gloucester Journal and Citizen via the Find My Past website, which as well as the British Newspaper Archive Website is available at the Gloucestershire Family History Society.

Documents held at Gloucestershire Archives:

We hold the Gloucestershire Hussars archive (Ref: **D4920**). This collection does not include service records for individual soldiers, but it does include copies of war diaries, personal diaries, biographies, photographs, correspondence, reports, news cuttings and articles. We also hold other records which have been deposited by individuals, families and businesses which relate to WW1 soldiers. This includes some who fought in one of the Gloucestershire Regiments, lived in Gloucestershire or the family had connections with Gloucestershire. These can be found by searching our online catalogue for the name of a soldier, the regiment name or other keywords.

Other Repositories:

Some personal diaries and papers (particularly those of officers) and other regimental records might be held at the Imperial War Museum or Regiment Museums. The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum (<https://soldiersofglos.com/>), in Gloucester holds records relating to the Gloucestershire Regiment and other Gloucestershire soldiers.

How to Find the Records

To view the records and documents we hold at Gloucestershire Archives, use our online catalogue which can be found on our website at: <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/> Use the references and search terms listed above if you are trying to locate these examples or explore these collections further. You can also refine or sort your search by other search categories, such as date created.

For more guidance on using our online catalogue please see the Help page and FAQs or watch our YouTube tutorial.

Further reading

Our dedicated “WW1 in Gloucestershire” pages on our website (available here [Gloucestershire remembers WW1 | Gloucestershire Archives](#)) also provide information, research toolkits and much more.