



Research Toolkit 1: First steps in tracing Servicemen in World War 1

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This Research Toolkit has been developed by Gloucestershire Archives (www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives). It will help you take the first steps in tracing information regarding servicemen in WW1. It will help you to:

- identify the range of records that survive for servicemen in WW1
- identify where these records may be found and consulted
- appreciate the wide variety of information that these records can provide to researchers interested in family, local, and social history
- share and preserve material about servicemen from Gloucestershire or who served in the Gloucestershire Regiments
- understand the data protection constraints that apply to records less than 100 years old

Through this and other toolkits available to download at

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/WW1/resources, the Gloucestershire

Remembers WW1 Project (www.glosremembers.co.uk) is enabling people to learn more about soldiers from the county who served in WW1 and the impact that the war had on local areas throughout the county. If you or an organisation in your area are undertaking research or any other commemorative activities for WW1 please let us know. If you would like to develop your research into a larger project see the **Next Steps** section on **page 9**.

Share what you find

The Gloucestershire Remembers WW1 Project is committed to sharing information commemorating any aspect of the impact of WW1 in the county. You can share what you've found with us by adding it directly to the Glos Remembers Facebook (www.facebook.com/GlosWWI), Twitter page (<https://twitter.com/GlosWWI>), or send it to us at archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk or Gloucestershire Archives, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester, GL1 3DW.

Preserve what you find

As part of the Gloucestershire Remembers WW1 Project, Gloucestershire Archives would like to preserve original material and information about any aspect of WW1 and Gloucestershire as a legacy for future generations. Please contact archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk or write to Gloucestershire Archives, Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester, GL1 3DW if you have original documents concerning WW1 or research or research notes that you would like to donate to the archives.

Background

Between 1914 and 1919 over 5 million men served in the armed forces. 1.6 million soldiers were wounded and 673,375 had died or were missing by September 1919. War was declared on 4 August 1914 and recruitment began the next day: 30,000 men joined up on that 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 who worked in 'reserved occupations', such as mining and manufacturing, were not asked to fight. Due to the high number of men who fought, most families, communities, businesses and societies have links with WW1 soldiers.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Service Records and Pension Records

Service records

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.

Unfortunately few service records for WW1 soldiers have survived. This is because they were stored in a warehouse in London that was bombed in 1941. What has survived is held at the [National Archives](#) at Kew. These records have been digitised and can be searched and viewed online through [www.ancestry.co.uk](#). Service records of officers were kept separately, but are also held at the National Archives (Ref: [WO339](#) and [WO374](#)). Both the Ancestry ([www.ancestry.co.uk](#)) and Find My Past ([www.findmypast.co.uk](#)) websites can be accessed for free at Gloucestershire Archives and at libraries around the county.

Pension records

Pension records usually contain much the same information about the soldier as the service record. However, pension records have a higher survival rate than service records because they were kept separately. Pension records were not issued for every soldier. They were only created for soldiers who survived the war or were invalidated out of service.

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 [www.gov.uk/requests-for-personal-data-and-service-record](#) for more information.

Database of deceased soldiers

If a soldier died during WW1 information about them should appear in the database “UK Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1918”. This is based on a register created by the Government in 1921. It does not cover officers. You can search it via www.ancestry.co.uk or www.findmypast.co.uk which can both be accessed for free at Gloucestershire Archives and at libraries around the county. For each soldier it usually gives:

- Name
- Birthplace
- Enlistment place/Residence
- Service Number
- Rank
- Regiment and Battalion
- Type of casualty
- Date of Death (and possibly the place)
- Theatre of war

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)

The CWGC was set up in 1915 to ensure that the dead found a suitable resting place and that these places were maintained and well recorded. It helped to organise cemeteries and memorials in Europe for Commonwealth soldiers who fought in the First and Second World Wars. The CWGC lists over 1.7 million names in their database, which can easily be searched on their website: www.cwgc.org. The index tells you the rank, regiment, date of death, area of death and the cemetery/memorial where the deceased's name is listed. Servicemen who died in the UK are also listed. Sometimes the age and next of kin is given, but not always.

Newspapers

Local Newspapers often published Rolls of Honour of local men who died, were injured, missing or received medals (see below). 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 on the open shelves in the searchroom at Gloucestershire Archives. The *Gloucester Journal* or *Citizen* might also be worth looking at. For a full list of Gloucestershire Newspapers and where they are held please see Gloucestershire Archives' Newspaper Handlist, which is available to download at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/109056/Newspapers.

Rolls of Honour

Rolls of Honour are lists of men died, were injured, missing or received medals. A large number of Rolls of Honour have been produced for places in Gloucestershire. Some were created by the Army, Navy or Air Force, and others by volunteers or individuals. Some rolls were drawn up by the local parish church; others are Rolls of Honour for employees of a business, members of society or ex-pupils of a school.

There are also some Rolls of Honour which were created recently based on research conducted by local volunteers. Most are based on information inscribed on a headstone or memorial. Some just record deceased soldiers, whilst others record all the soldiers who fought. A downloadable list of the Rolls of Honour deposited at Gloucestershire Archives can be found at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/WW1/resources.

Family History Information

If you are researching a particular soldier or group of soldiers you may wish to find out more about his/their life and family before and after the war. The sources you can use will depend on where they lived, their occupation and age. But you should be able to use the following resources for all WW1 soldiers:

Census

All WW1 soldiers (unless they lied about their age) should have been born by 1901. Therefore you should be able to find them in the 1901 and 1911 censuses. Older soldiers will also appear in earlier census returns (e.g. 1881 and 1891). The census will let you know where they were living, where they were born, their age, and occupation (if relevant). It will also tell you the names of the people they were living with, probably their parents and siblings. For more information, download Gloucestershire Archives' Census Research Guide at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/114368/Archives-research-guides.

Birth, Marriage, and Death Certificates

A certificate should have been created for the birth and marriage of any soldier. Death certificates were made for soldiers who died in service. However these generally only contain their service number, name, age, rank, place of death and cause of death. It is unlikely any further information will be given. To view the information on a certificate you will need to order a copy, which costs £10.00. You can order certificates issued in Gloucestershire through the Gloucestershire Registration service (www.goucestershire.gov.uk/certificates). For certificates relating to births, marriages, and deaths elsewhere in England and Wales you can order them through the General Register Office (www.gro.gov.uk). Scottish records can be searched and downloaded for a fee via (www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). Irish records can be ordered through the General Register Office, Ireland (www.groireland.ie).

Parish Registers

An alternative to ordering a certificate is to look for an entry of baptism, marriage, or burial in the church records. A marriage entry in a register will give you much the same information as a marriage certificate. However a baptism register will usually not give you a date and place of birth, nor the mother's maiden name, which are on a birth certificate.

Gloucestershire Archives holds registers of baptisms, marriages, and burial for the parishes in the Diocese of Gloucester. Most of these records are available to view on self-service microfiche in the public searchroom at Gloucestershire Archives. For a full list of registers held by Gloucestershire Archives and how to access them, see our Parish Register Guide (www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/parishes).

School Records

If you know where the soldier grew up, it is possible that the records of the local school have survived. Gloucestershire Archives holds records for many schools in Gloucestershire. These include admission registers and school log books (which are like diaries of events at the school). For more information about school records, download Gloucestershire Archives' School Records Research Guide (www.glooucestershire.gov.uk/archives/article/114368/Archives-research-guides).

Reminiscence and oral history

Memories and stories that have been passed down in families and communities are powerful and important sources of information about our past. As such, they are valuable sources of information about WW1. Although memories of WW1 are now almost out of living memory, many still alive today will have grown up knowing parents and grandparents who lived through it. Speaking to people about memories that they may have heard about wartime (and its aftermath) is a valuable way of gathering information about the period. Such memories are usually unique insights and impressions into the wartime experience, even if they are by their very nature partial and short. If no one asks about memories and stories that may have been passed down then these unique impressions will be lost with the passage of time. When memories and stories can be told, they should be recorded (by whatever means possible), preserved, and shared.

How can I access the resources mentioned in this toolkit?

The online resources listed above are all available to view. Searches of the databases on the Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk) and Find My Past (www.findmypast.co.uk) are free, however if you access the websites from home you may be asked to pay a fee or set up a free trial with them in order to view their images of original records. However, if you access the Ancestry and Find My Past websites from Gloucestershire Archives or libraries around the county you will be able to view the images of original documents on them for free.

Access to Gloucestershire Archives is free but please note that there is a charge for using the onsite car park. Access to the Ancestry and Find My Past websites is also free at the [Gloucestershire Family History Society Resource Centre](#), although the same car parking charge applies.

Some of the original resources at Gloucestershire Archives have access restrictions for data protection reasons. It will usually be possible for you to see these items, but you may be asked to sign an agreement about sharing information from them.

Further Reading

There are a number of related research guides available on the National Archives' website:

Soldiers after 1913: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/britisharmysoldierafter1913.htm>

Officers after 1913: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/officerbritisharmyafter1913.htm>

British Army operations of WW1:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/british-army-war-diaries-1914-1918.htm>

British Army deaths in WW1 and WW2:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/war-deaths.htm>

<http://www.1914-1918.net> contains good advice for researchers as well as general information about regiments and battalions.

There are many other websites with message boards about research issues regarding WW1 soldiers and records. A Google search should find any related threads on a message board.

WW1 Books held at Gloucestershire Archives (GA) or at the County's local studies centres

Family history

Tracing your First World War Ancestors; A Guide for Family Historians – Simon Fowler (available at [Cheltenham Local & Family History Centre](#))

First World War; essential guide to sources in the UK National Archives – Ian Beckett (GA reference GAL/E3/52206)

Army Service Records of the First World War – William Spencer (GA reference GAL/H1)

Tracing your prisoner of war ancestors: the first world war – Sarah Paterson (GA reference GAL/H1/55519)

Great war handbook; a guide for family historians and students of the conflict – Geoff Bridger (GA reference GAL/H1/51806)

War memorials

Leaving all that was dear; Cheltenham and the Great War – Joseph Devereux (GA reference GAL/L3/48210)

Gloucestershire Village In The Great War; the Story Of Aupperley And Deerhurst 1914 -1918 – Steve Miller (GA reference GAL/L3/49055)

Lost generations; Old Cryptians killed during the Great War and Second World War – Simon & Sarah Birch & Ray Pocock (GA reference GAL/L3/49969)

Stow on the Wold War memorial – Susan Brattin (GA reference GAL/L3/50058)

Campden 1914–18; a tribute to the 487 men and women from Campden who served during the Great War, 1914–18 – Paul R. Hughes (GA reference GAL/L3/51125)

Have many gone from here?; Pauntley's first world war memorial (GA reference R230.3)

Lechlade and the Great War 1914-18; an account of the village during the first World War and the stories behind the names on the war memorial – Paul & Tessa Cobb (GA reference RR183.22)

Mickleton soldiers of the Great War – Neville Mellon (GA reference GAL/L3/49801)

Officers died in the Great War 1914-1919 (Gloucestershire Regiment) (GA reference GAL/E3/47674)

Soldiers died in the Great War, 1914-19 (Gloucestershire Regiment) (GA reference GAL/E3/45570)

Lest ye forget, Stroud District and its part in the Great War 1914-1919 (GA reference GAL/L3/53802)

Records of Upton St. Leonard's; containing Parish gleanings in Upton St. Leonard's and Letters from Upton St. Leonard's, together with other records of the parish (Include lists of Upton men who served in the Great War) – A J Brewster (GA reference P347b PC 41/3)

Remembering the Great War in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire – Ray Westlake (GA reference B424/49293)

Rural sacrifice; the war dead of Bisley, Eastcombe and Oakridge (1914-1919) – Nick Thornicroft (GA reference R46.13)

VC's of Gloucestershire and North Bristol – Nick Thornicroft (GA reference GAL/G4/50020)

Gloucestershire and North Bristol Soldiers on the Somme – Nick Thornicroft (GA reference GAL/E3/50157)

Far from his native land he lies; the story of the men from Amberley, Box and Woodchester who gave their lives in two world wars – Nick Thornicroft (GA reference B547/49414)

Be proud that you're fighting for England!; Dursley: a study of a small town at war 1914 – 1918 – David Evans (GA reference GAL/D2/50551)

Lest we forget; World war 1, 1914-1918, book of remembrance – Stonehouse Royal British Legion (GA reference B151/54525)

They played for Gloucester and fought for their country: Gloucester Rugby Football Club a place in military history – Martin Davies (GA reference GAL/L3/55654)

First world war heroes of Wotton-under-Edge – Bill Griffiths (GA reference GAL/L3/55700)

'Til the boys come home, Great Rissington soldiers – Clare Mayo (GA reference GAL/L3/55691)

Next steps

Find out more about servicemen from your area using our supplementary toolkit “Research Toolkit 2: Discover more about Servicemen in World War One” available to download for free from www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/WW1/resources.

There are many other resources available to download for free at the above address that may help with your research into WW1.

Want to develop your research into a larger project?

If you are considering your own WW1 project, why not take advantage of the Gloucestershire Archives’ Project Advisory Service? We can provide you with advice about how to proceed, including how to apply for funding. We can also help to broker joint bids from a number of organisations (e.g. a group of parish councils, a local heritage group or a school) for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund’s [First World War: Then and Now](#) programme

(www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/FirstWorldWarThenandNow.aspx#_UtAEUjiYbIU). More information can be found at about the project advisory service can be found at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/communityheritage or contact Gloucestershire Archives on archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk.