



Research Toolkit 2: Discover more about Servicemen in World War One

Research Toolkit 2: Discover more about Servicemen in World War 1 (WW1)

This toolkit has been developed by Gloucestershire Archives (www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives). It is intended to supplement “Research Toolkit 1: First Steps in tracing Servicemen in World War One” (available to download at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/WW1/resources). It will help you:

- find out about additional resources to discover more about Servicemen in WW1
- search Gloucestershire Archives’ online catalogue to find relevant documents from our holdings
- find out about sources for Conscientious Objectors
- share and preserve material about servicemen from Gloucestershire or who served in the Gloucestershire Regiments

Through this and other toolkits available to download at www.goucestershire.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 8.

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@goucestershire.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@goucestershire.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.

What additional records can I use to extend my research?

Medal Roll Index Cards ([WO372](#))

Every soldier who fought between 1914 and 1918 should have received at least one of these medals: The 1914-1915 Star, Victory Medal, or British Medal. The name of each soldier issued with a medal was recorded in a regimental medal roll. These rolls were then indexed by name on the Medal Roll Index Cards. The cards 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. They also usually note 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.

The Medal Roll Index Cards should survive for each soldier. Sometimes the full name is given, but in others only the initial is given. In some cases the soldier's middle name is not recorded at all.

Medal Roll Index Cards can be searched and downloaded from the National Archives' website (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) for a fee. Alternatively, they can be viewed on www.ancestry.co.uk. 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.

For further help interpreting Medal Roll Index Cards see:
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm

Unit War Diaries

Each unit or battalion within a regiment kept diaries during WW1. Most Unit Diaries do not refer to individual soldiers. They will 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 when they were killed.

Most of these diaries are held at the National Archives under the reference [WO95](#). 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. Occasionally some diaries or copies of the diaries are held at the Regimental Museum (as is the case for the Regiments of the Guards).

The easiest way to find a Unit Diary is to search the National Archives' online catalogue using a keyword from the regiment name e.g. "Gloucestershire". You can then narrow the result, e.g. Reference WO95. Be aware of abbreviations, e.g. "Glos" could be used instead of "Gloucestershire". Some WW1 Unit Diaries have been digitised and can be viewed for a fee on the National Archives' website.

See: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/war-diaries-ww1.htm>

Documents held at Gloucestershire Archives

Gloucestershire Archives holds the archive of the Gloucestershire Hussars (reference number [D4920](#)). Although this collection does not include individual soldiers' service records, it does include copies of war diaries, personal diaries, biographies, photographs, correspondence, reports, news cuttings and articles about the Hussars.

We also hold other records deposited by individuals, families and businesses which relate to WW1 soldiers. This includes material on people who fought in one of the Gloucestershire Regiments, lived in Gloucestershire, or who had family connections with Gloucestershire. These can be found by searching for the name of a soldier, the regiment name, or other keywords, Gloucestershire Archives' online catalogue (<http://ww3.goucestershire.gov.uk/DServe/DServe.exe?dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=Index.tcl>).

Material concerning the Gloucestershire War Poets

These include letters from the trenches written by Ivor Gurney ([SR8/34](#)); typescripts of war letters of Edward Thomas ([D10828/8/13/1](#)); and a memoir written by F W Harvey describing his experiences in seven German prisoner of war camps ([B143/15592](#)).

Large collections of material concerning Ivor Gurney ([D10500](#)) and F W Harvey (D12912 – catalogue in progress) are held at the Archives, but please note that these are subject to access restrictions and prior application should be made to archives@goucestershire.gov.uk to view items from these collections.

Correspondence, diaries and reminiscence

These include diaries of soldiers who fought in the War (Gloucestershire Archives Reference Numbers: [D3435/3](#); [D7889/1/2](#); and [GAL/L2/47616](#)).

Amongst letters held, there are several from Michael Hugh Hicks-Beach to a variety of correspondents before his death in April 1916 ([D2455/F3/7/1/2/7](#); [D2455/F3/7/1/2/9](#); [D2455/F3/8/8](#); [D2455/F3/10/1/11](#); and [D2455/F3/10/1/12](#)). His sisters, Lady Susan and Lady Victoria Hicks-Beach, helped to run a Red Cross coffee stall in Rouen during 1915, and their letters to their mother mention several servicemen ([D2455/F3/7/1/3/20](#)).

The Archives also holds letters and pamphlets from James and Frances Berry while they were running an Anglo-Serbian hospital and later from the Russian/Rumanian front ([D6/F175/16](#)). Other letters from or to servicemen during the War include: [D2455/F3/10/1/17](#); [D3398/1/12/20](#); [D3549/27/3/25](#); [D3549/31/1/10](#); and [D3549/33/4/5](#).

More general collections of material that may combine letters and diaries with photographs and reminiscences, include: [D2431](#); [D3398/2/2/32](#); [D3549/34/1/3](#); [D4920/2/2/2/30](#); [D4920/2/2/3/9](#); [D9846/7/1](#); and [DP1/41300.1](#). There is also lots of detailed comment on the War in the correspondence of Maynard W Colchester-Wemyss ([D37](#)).

The documents mentioned above are just examples of the many materials held at Gloucestershire Archives. You can find further material by checking the online catalogue via www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives.

Other Repositories

Some personal diaries and papers (particularly those of officers) and other regimental records might be held elsewhere and not at the National Archives. They could be held at:

[Imperial War Museum](#), Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ (Telephone 0171 416 5221
Email: docs@iwm.org.uk)

Regiment Museums, e.g. [Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum](#), Custom House, The Docks, Gloucester, GL1 2HE (Tel No: 01452 522682 E-mail: Curator@sogm.co.uk), which holds records relating to the Gloucestershire Regiment and other Gloucestershire soldiers.

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 do I find out about Conscientious Objectors?

The conscription legislation of March 1916 introduced the right of the individual to refuse military service, allowing men to be exempted from combat with the option of performing alternative civilian service or serving as non-combatants in the army.

There were several reasons why a man could ask for an exemption, including:

- Moral grounds – if they were a Conscientious Objector
- Medical grounds – if they had a disability
- Family grounds – if they were looking after dependents
- Economic grounds – if they were the sole proprietor of a business

Applications for exemptions were decided locally by Military Service Tribunals, which were the responsibility of the Local Government Board. The Board requested that Borough and District Councils set up tribunals to handle applicants in their own areas. Each tribunal comprised four local men of good standing (often councillors) and a Military Representative. The latter's job was to advocate for the military – to argue that each man that appeared in front of the tribunal should be conscripted.

There was no appeal system.

Around 16,500 men were recorded as Conscientious Objectors. Quakers, who were traditionally pacifists, made up the largest proportion of this group. Of the 16,500 Conscientious Objectors

- around 4,500 were sent to work on farms (deemed 'work of national importance')
- 6,000 undertook non-combatant military duties (e.g. stretcher bearers)
- the remaining 6,000 were forced into army service.

Once in the army, if they refused to obey orders they were subject to King's Regulations and liable to military courts martial where, if found guilty, they could be imprisoned or sentenced to death. A total of 35 men were condemned in this way but they were all given sentences of 10 years penal servitude instead. In 1919, all those who received imprisonment had their sentences revoked and were released. Conscientious objectors who were deemed not to have made any useful contribution to the war effort were disenfranchised for five years after the war, so do not appear on the electoral registers.

At the end of the war, instructions were issued to the Local Government Boards that all tribunal material should be destroyed, except for a select few areas which were to have their records preserved as examples (not for posterity, but for possible future use). The select survivors are the Middlesex Appeal records and the Lothian and Peebles Appeal in Scotland. However despite this, isolated examples escaped the systematic destruction and survive today, including some from Gloucestershire.

Where can I find out more information?

Records relating to conscientious objectors and recruitment can be found in a wide range of sources, especially published sources, such as newspapers. There are also good sources at local archives, such as local government records (i.e. Gloucester Borough Records), Quarter Sessions records, Parish Records and personal diaries and papers. In addition, there are a few Military Tribunal records surviving at Gloucestershire Archives (see in particular Gloucestershire Archives Reference Numbers [D1340/C3/Z1](#), [D1578/8/9](#), and [D3789](#)).

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

The following books are all held at Gloucestershire Archives. Gloucestershire Archives Reference Numbers are given for the source in brackets.

Memoirs – front line

Comrades in captivity; a record of life in seven German prison camps – F.W.Harvey (B143/15592)

Life of one's own – Gerald Brenan [memoirs of the author's service with the 5th Gloucestershire in the First World War] (B141/47186)

Trenches to trams, the life of a Bristol tommy – Clive Burlton [Life story of George Pine, 1891-1972, who served with the Gloucestershire Regiment during the First World War] (B146/54884)

Laughter goes from life, in the trenches of the First World War – Thomas Penrose Marks (B341/45899)

The Fifth Gloster Gazette - A Trench Magazine of the First World War (B406/47632)

Ultra spy – F.W. Winterbotham [Autobiography of Frederick W. Winterbotham, born at Stroud, and his role in the First World War] (B672/41449)

Mespot letters of a Cotswold soldier [As well as describing the life of a Glos soldier at war, there is interesting material in Mespot Letters about Upper Slaughter village life at the same time, and indeed immediately after WW1] – Frederick Witts (GAL/L3/51687)

A Tommy's sketchbook; writings and drawings from the trenches - Lance Corporal Henry Buckle (GAL/E3/54883)

Poetry and Poets

Severn and Somme – Ivor Gurney (B521/47060)

War's embers – Ivor Gurney (B243/15434)

Gloucestershire friends; poems from a German prison camp – F.W Harvey (B203/14892)

F W Harvey, selected poems – F W Harvey, ed. Anthony Boden & R K R Thornton (GAL/L1/54464)

Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott, Song of pain and beauty – Pamela Blevins (B521/55697)

Ivor Gurney, collected letters – ed. R K R Thornton (GAL/L1/45954)

Stars in a Dark Night, the letters of Ivor Gurney to the Chapman family – Anthony Boden (GAL/L1//45337)

Ivor Gurney's Gloucestershire, exploring poetry and place – Eleanor M Rawling (GAL/L1/55389)

Marginal men; Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney, J. R. Ackerley – Piers Gray [considers the impact of the First World War on the writing of the three men] (B521/47079)

First World War poets [Includes Gurney] – Alan Judd (B533/48598)

English poets of the First World War [includes Gurney and Harvey] – John Lehmann (B655/40333)

Anthem for doomed youth; twelve soldier poets of the First World War – Jon Stallworthy (B541/49211)

F W Harvey, Soldier, Poet – Anthony Boden (GAL/L1/54103)

Regimental history

Royal Gloucestershire Hussars – Rollo Clifford (GAL/E3)

Cap of Honour; 300 years of the Gloucestershire Regiment – David Scott Daniell (GAL/E3/49985)

Next steps

Why not find out more about how WW1 affected your local area or the areas from which the servicemen you have been looking into came from? Download our free “Research Toolkit 3: Researching the Home Front in WW1” from www.glos.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/WW1/resources. There are many other resources available to download for free at this address that may help with your research into WW1 too.

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](http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/FirstWorldWarThenandNow.aspx#_UtAEUjiYbIU) 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.glos.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/communityheritage or contact Gloucestershire Archives on archives@glos.gloucestershire.gov.uk.