

Useful Information

General Information about the Great War

www.ukmfh.org.uk

www.longlongtrail.co.uk

Service Records

www.ancestry.co.uk

www.findmypast.co.uk

Medal Cards

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm

www.ancestry.com

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

www.cwgc.org

Civil Registration of Military Deaths

www.findmypast.co.uk

National Roll of the Great War

www.ancestry.co.uk

www.findmypast.co.uk

War Memorial Register

www.iwm.org.uk/memorials

Gallantry Award Citations and Officer Appointments

www.london-gazette.co.uk

Campaign and Gallantry Medals (about)

www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-british-medals.htm

Cap Badges

www.angelfire.com/mi2/angela764/military/british_cap_badges.html



For more detailed information:

mlfhs.uk/research/getting-help/research-guides

Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society

3rd Floor, Manchester Central Library,

St Peters Square, Manchester, M2 5PD

Email: office@mlfhs.org.uk

Archives +



Researching WW1 Soldiers

Such were the numbers of soldiers who enlisted during the four years of the Great War that most families will have at least one member who served in the army. Researching an ancestor who served during this conflict is usually fairly straightforward but a distinctive name and a measure of good luck will help. It is a sad fact that in most cases you are likely to discover more information in official records about a soldier who died than one who survived.

Regiment, Rank and Number

It is important, as early as possible in your research, to establish the regiment in which your ancestor served, his rank and his service number. These will ensure that he is correctly identified in the several official records in which he may appear. You may be fortunate enough to have his campaign medals or documents such as his discharge papers and these will provide this information directly. In many families, his regiment may be known, even if his service number is not. If you have no information, then it may be possible to identify him from personal details which appear in one of the sources discussed below and find his regiment rank and number from this source. This will then assist in checking other possible sources.

Note: Service numbers are not unique. They are only unique within any given regiment

Medal Cards

Every soldier who served in a theatre of war was entitled to anything up to three campaign medals. Records of those who received these medals were recorded on cards. The cards will typically record the soldier's name, regiment, rank and number and the medals which they received as well as the theatre of war in which they served. The cards may also record the date when he entered the theatre of war and the date of his death or discharge. The medal cards will also record any awards of medals for gallantry (see also 'Awards for Gallantry' below). The medal cards can be found online on the Ancestry.co.uk and National Archives web sites.

Soldiers' Records

Records were kept of every soldier and typically include his enlistment and discharge documents and details of milestones in his service, promotions, training, postings etc. Unfortunately, the building where these were stored was hit by incendiary bombs in WW2 and 60% of the documents were destroyed. The surviving documents can be viewed online on the Ancestry.co.uk website or at The National Archives, Kew.

About 10% of soldiers who survived the war were entitled to a pension after discharge and copies were made of their records. These were kept at a different location and therefore survived the later fire. These also have been digitised and can be seen on the Ancestry.co.uk web site.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

After the war, the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission collected records of the burial places of British and Commonwealth soldiers. These record where each soldier was buried or on which memorial his name is recorded if no body was found. The records may also include the name and address of his next of kin, usually parents or a wife. The records are available online on the CWGC web site.

Soldiers Died in the Great War

A listing was compiled of all British soldiers believed to have died. The information is generally limited to the date and place of enlistment and the date and place of death. It will also include whether killed in action or died of wounds. This was originally published in eighteen books but more recently has been published as a CDROM. Copies of this may be found in Local Studies Libraries. MLFHS has a copy.

Civil Death Registration

Soldiers' deaths were registered by the General Register Office. There are separate registers for officers and other ranks. The information given is very limited and usually little more than you will find in other sources. The indexes are available on the findmypast web site.

National Roll of the Great War

This series of books was a commercial publication which recorded brief details of each soldier, including battles in which he fought and gallantry medals awarded. Only 14 volumes were published but these include Manchester and Salford. There was a charge for inclusion so participation was far from complete. Digitised versions of the books are available on the Ancestry.com and findmypast.co.uk web sites.

Awards for Gallantry

Non-commissioned soldiers who displayed outstanding courage could be recognised either by being mentioned in despatches or for more conspicuous acts by being awarded the Military Medal. Officers could be awarded the Military Cross. The Victoria Cross could be awarded to any soldier for the most conspicuous acts of gallantry. Citations for all gallantry medals and for some mentions in despatches were published in the London Gazette, which can be found on the internet.

War Memorials

A considerable number of war memorials were established by local communities, churches, companies and other groups. The National Inventory of War Memorials web site has details of many of the memorials, though not all. MLFHS has an ongoing project to transcribe the names from war memorials in the Greater Manchester area. This is available on the Society's web site.

Note: Details on war memorials may be as scant as a surname and initial or as wide as name, regiment, rank, number and gallantry medals awarded.

Other Sources

While the above sources reflect organised efforts to record names and details, there are many sources which might contain information about specific WW1 soldiers.

- Local newspapers, school or church magazines may feature soldiers from their area.
- Soldiers are frequently mentioned on family gravestones, even though the soldier was buried elsewhere or his body never found. The name of his regiment is often included.
- Published regimental, personal and local histories may contain considerable detail about individual soldiers.
- If a soldier married or registered the birth of a child during his term of service, the certificate may identify his regiment.
- Photographs of soldiers may give clues to his regiment, particularly if the cap badge is identifiable.