

West Sussex Record Office



Searchroom Leaflet No 11:

Tracing military ancestors

This leaflet highlights some of the main sources available at WSRO. You may also need to use sources at The National Archives (TNA) at Kew and at a relevant regimental museum.

The principal military collection at WSRO is that of the Royal Sussex Regiment (RSR). For more information on tracing a soldier who served with the RSR, please see Searchroom Leaflet No 13.

Printed sources

Army Lists: Annual lists of officers dating back to 1740. We only have a selection, but complete series can be seen at TNA and the British Library and there are many volumes on the National Library of Scotland's website.

Newspapers: These date from the mid-18th century. For WW1, they are a rich source for photographs, letters home, casualty lists, reports of honours and awards. Many local titles can be viewed on the British Newspaper Archive website (free access at WSRO).

Published books on military history: There are over 1,000 volumes in the library of The Royal Sussex Regiment, particularly good on the two world wars. In the Searchroom, many books relating to military research are also available.

Original records

Royal Sussex Regiment Archives: A large collection of official records such as battalion orders, unit war diaries and muster rolls, plus photographs and personal papers of former soldiers including letters, personal diaries and service papers.

Parish records: These contain a variety of sources including rolls of honour, parish magazines and militia papers.

Census returns: Include details of soldiers and ex-soldiers. Soldiers in barracks are also listed. The returns (1841-1921) are on the Ancestry and Find My Past websites, with free access available at WSRO.

Quarter Sessions records: The baggage returns in QS rolls can help track the movement of regiments in the 18th and 19th

centuries. Lieutenancy records for Sussex (at The Keep, East Sussex) include militia records for the Napoleonic period and later.

Absent Voters Lists: These are found with electoral registers and are a godsend for tracing servicemen abroad. For West Sussex, lists for 1918 to 1959 (incomplete series) are available on the Ancestry website, with free access on the Searchroom computers.

Other records: School admission registers, school magazines, Home Guard muster rolls, trade directories, hospital records and family papers are all possible sources for tracing military ancestors.

Online records

Those listed below can all be accessed free of charge at WSRO.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website has a searchable database of those who died in the two world wars.

Soldiers Died in the First World War and Second World War is searchable on the Find My Past website, with free access on the public access computers in the Searchroom. They include place of birth and enlistment, regiment, battalion, rank and date of death.

British Army medal cards and rolls, service and pension records can be viewed on the Ancestry website. This is an outstanding resource for family history, especially for WW1, and is available free on the public access computers at WSRO.

Soldiers' documents 1760-1939 can be viewed on the Find My Past website, with free access on the public access computers in the Searchroom.

The **London Gazette** website enables you to search to see if an individual was awarded civilian or military medals between 1914-1920 and 1939-1948.

The War Graves Photographic Project website has photographs of war graves and memorials for soldiers who died during WW1 and later.

Records held elsewhere

TNA holds official records relating to the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Regimental museums hold collections of regimental archives (as do some local record offices).

Other museums include the Imperial War Museum, The National Army Museum, The National Maritime Museum and The RAF Museum.

Libraries have collections of newspapers, local history material, and digital resources.

Consult our staff

At WSRO we deal with thousands of military history and family history enquiries every year. Members of staff are experienced in dealing with queries and problems in research. Do please email, write, telephone or visit us for advice.

West Sussex Record Office
County Hall
Chichester
PO19 1RN
E-mail: record.office@westsussex.gov.uk
Phone: 01243 753602

A large-print version of this leaflet is available in a special folder in the Searchroom.