

Researching First World War servicemen



Advice from the Essex Record Office

This advice sheet will help you get started on researching your First World War ancestors or names on your local war memorial. It focuses on people who were killed in the war, but much of the advice also applies to those who survived.

A few places to start...

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (www.cwgc.org) shows where servicemen and women killed in the war are commemorated. This should give details of their regiment, and also their age and possibly details of their family.

Using this information you can search the Medal Rolls Index cards on www.Ancestry.co.uk (available free of charge at any Essex Library or in the Essex Record Office), to see if the person was awarded a medal. More information about the medals awarded is available on The National Archives website www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

www.Ancestry.co.uk also has digital images of the surviving First World War service records. These provide details about when and where someone enlisted, and details of their military service. About 50% of these documents survive; the remainder were destroyed in air raids in the Second World War. You can also search surviving pension records.

If you know the details of the regiment in which someone served, you can search Google (www.google.co.uk) for a regimental museum or history website which will give details of the campaigns in which the regiment took part. You can also use details given in the records of a soldier's battalion to research war diaries which give details of the daily events of each battalion. These are available on The National Archives website.

Serving soldiers were given a form on which to write their will. These, with any accompanying letters, have been made available as digital images. They are available at <https://www.gov.uk/probate-search> although it costs £6 to download the will so you should be sure that you have the right person before you download the file.

If the person received a gallantry medal this would have been reported in the London Gazette which can be searched on their website www.thegazette.co.uk. The paper also reported any promotions.



A search of the 1901 and 1911 census returns will hopefully find the person with their family. This will give you details of parents and brothers and sisters or wife and children. You can also find out their address and see what work they did before joining the Armed Forces. The census returns are available to search online at www.Ancestry.co.uk which is available free of charge at any Essex Library and at Essex Record Office in Chelmsford.

You can also find information from parish registers, electoral registers and other records held at Essex Record Office.

Going further...

You can find much more information on First World War resources on the Essex Record Office blog at: www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk/category/first-world-war/

This includes source lists of material available at ERO and lots of resources elsewhere, including the National Archives and the Imperial War Museum. There are also worked through case studies showing what you might be able to find about men who served in the army, navy, and air force.

Get in touch with the Essex Record Office...

By post Essex Record Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford, CM2 6YT

On the telephone 01245 244644

By e-mail ero.enquiry@essex.gov.uk