

Online sources for WWI British Army Servicemen

Searching for servicemen's records is a task that can be made much easier if (at the very least) the regiment he served in is known. Identification is most accurate when the service number is available. This number along with the name will uniquely identify the soldier.

The Commonwealth War Graves Database

If the serviceman was killed in action, or died of wounds at any time from 1914 to 1920 his details will be recorded, and "Commemorated in Perpetuity", by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission who were originally tasked with the recovery of remains after World War I (and indeed still do so to this day when remains are found in former battlefields). Nowadays they are tasked with the maintenance of Commonwealth graveyards and individual graves in civilian cemeteries in the UK and overseas.

Availability:

Access to the database is free. In the case of soldiers who have a known grave, it gives the name of the graveyard and the plot number. Those soldiers whose bodies were never recovered are commemorated on the many memorials to the missing in France, Belgium and elsewhere. In the latter case the database will give the location and panel number of the memorial where the soldier's name is inscribed.

When a soldier was killed, the next of kin were invited to give the Commission additional details about their relationship to the deceased (For instance "Son of Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Main Street Newcastle") These additional details (where provided) are included in the online record. For a small fee the family could have an additional personal inscription added to the tombstone.

Location:

The Commonwealth War Graves site is located at <http://www.cwgc.org/>

Medal Index Cards

Soldiers' entitlements to medals were recorded and filed on handwritten cards. These cards are the most common form of record surviving (around 5 million exist) as they were not stored with the service records - 60 percent of which were destroyed in a Luftwaffe bombing raid on the War Office in London in September 1940. These are searchable at the National Archives using the link below. When you've found the record you want, a black-and-white copy may be ordered at a cost of £3.00 (at the time of writing) for each copy.

More information here:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/medals.asp>

Records formerly held in the War Office

Because so many service records were destroyed, in the majority of cases no service records will exist, only the Medal Index Card. If the soldier's records have survived, they will be either **British Army WWI Service Records 1914-1920**, or **British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920**. These records are available through Ancestry.co.uk which is normally a subscription service. However they offer free access on a trial basis which expires after 14 days. This gives access to all Ancestry facilities including military records, and is available here:

<http://landing.ancestry.co.uk/offers/uk/learn/trial.aspx>