

# EVERYONE HAS ROOTS

## No. 8 The Military Connection

Military records are a source for adding more than just names and dates to your tree particularly around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Military research can be complex but very rewarding.

First clues about an ancestor serving in the military or navy will come from certificates which might just state “soldier” or “sailor” suggesting Royal Navy service, or “Seaman” suggesting Merchant Navy service. If you are really lucky, information on a certificate could include rank, service number, regiment or ship. You may also have a pay book, or medals with your family archive but this is just the beginning. You may also have a photograph of an ancestor in uniform which you cannot easily identify.

### ***Army service***

Most families will have ancestors who served in either the First or Second World War, or both. Service records post-1922 are still held by the Ministry of Defence but can be requested by next of kin upon application to the record department of whichever service they served in. Forms and addresses for submission together with a statutory search fee payable are available online at the veterans Agency website.

Only about 40% of First World War army service records survived enemy bombing in the Blitz, but those that are available can be found online at Ancestry or Findmypast.

Findmypast has digitised pension and attestation papers of men who served in the army before 1913 and would have seen service in prominent wars such as the Anglo-Boer and Crimean wars.

There is a difficult period between 1892 and 1913 when undertaking army research because of certain administrative restraints within the War Office. There are no Pay Lists and Musters for this period. Fewer than 30 % of soldiers actually received a pension so may not have attestation and discharge papers. Those who served in the Boer War 1899-1902 did so usually just for that period but many career soldiers who served in the Boer War continued service into the First World War so the record would have been continuous but could have been lost in the bombing. Those who re-enlisted for the First World war would have separate records.

Army research can be divided into four categories:

Operational records - War diaries, Regimental Histories etc.

Officers records - Commissions, Service Histories, Half & Full Pay Registers

Records of other ranks - Attestations, Discharges, Pensions, Musters

Miscellaneous sources - Medal Rolls, Courts Martial, Citations, POWs etc.

During World War Two there were thousands of soldiers who were prisoners of war. Sometimes the plight is not known within a family as stories are not handed down. Information on POWs can be located on [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk) which will give military service information and

also tell you the camp number and location and also indicate the record office which holds the information.

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Liste Nr. 330 <small>(Nr. des Lagers)</small>	<b>Gefangeneliste</b>	Liste Nr. 343 57 <small>(Nr. des Abtransportlagers)</small>			
<b>des Lagers WORMS a/Rh.</b>					
abgeführt vom Tag. am 1. VIII. 18.	eingegangen beim Nr.-Min. am 5. 8. 18	abgeführt vom Nr.-Min. (U.S.) am 14. 8. 18			
Staatsangehörigkeit: Engländer					
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	a) Familienname	Straf- grad	a)   Truppe	a)   Gefangennahme (Ort und Tag)	a) Geburtstag u. -Ort
	b) Vorname (nur bei Rufname)		b)		
2	c) nur bei Russen Vorname des Vaters	Gemein	c)   Comp.	c)   vorhergehender Aufenthaltsort	c)
a)	Rattley		Machine	Oranien	8. 1. 98. Buriton, Hampshire
b)	Percy		25	27. 5. 18.	Mutter: 68 Sunny Bank, Buriton, Petersfield Hampshire
c)	William		Genl. Corps. B.		
a)	Glashan	"	York St.	"	25. 5. 82. Chesire, Lancashire
b)	Thomas		5	27. 5. 18.	vrau: 25 Day Street
c)	William		A.		Old Eades-Liverpool

Records of both wars POWs are mainly held by the International Red Cross [www.ircrc.org](http://www.ircrc.org). Repatriation records for World War Two soldiers are also available on [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk) but it is also worth trying the archives of the Imperial War Museum as they may hold a diary giving personal information and feelings written by your ancestor. Similarly, regimental museums often have artefacts and reports of individual repatriation.

The Red Cross archive for First World War POW records covers Britain and India at the moment. However, records also exist for other commonwealth countries. Records can be searched at <https://grandeguerre.ircrc.org/>

There are around 5 million individual records. Maybe your ancestor is amongst them. The archive also includes records of death in captivity, rescue attempts etc. The full record will give personal details, which camp/s held at, conduct & treatment and next of kin.

For those who served in World War One you can expect to find various information outside of a service record including campaign and gallantry medal rolls. Information retained for any soldier may vary.

If you cannot locate personal service details then you can use the campaign medal rolls to establish the battalion in which he served and then locate the regimental war diaries.

The medal roll and page number on the medal roll card will lead you to the actual roll which is organised by battalion. You may be lucky enough to find the battalion listed on the card. Sometimes you will find more than one regiment shown on the medal roll card with different service numbers given. When more than one regiment is shown it is because the soldier was



army organisation, battlefield details, the battles fought and general information to flesh out the bones of your soldier ancestor.

Began	Ended	Name		Context
23 Aug 1914	24 Aug 1914	The Battle of Mons	<a href="#">More</a>	A very small part of the initial clashes between the German and French Armies, often known as the Battle of the Frontiers. BEF begins lengthy <i>Retreat from Mons</i> which only ends in early September.
26 Aug 1914	1 Sept 1914	The Battle of Le Cateau	<a href="#">More</a>	British II Corps fights a holding action during the Retreat from Mons. "More" also includes details of other smaller rearguard actions during the continuing retreat.

By clicking on "more" full details of the battle, a battle plan and regiments involved is shown.

Completely different sets of records exist for those ancestors who were officers, including those who received temporary commissions, and the best record to start to trace an officer is the annual Army Lists. These can be searched on Ancestry.

For research guidance on army service records I suggest you refer to the research guides produced by the National Archives because military research can become complex but very rewarding.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/#find-a-research-guide>

### Naval service

For Royal Navy service the continuous service records are a complete but brief history of a sailor's career. They exist for all Royal Navy ratings from 1873 up to 1923.

They cover ratings who signed up for 10 years if over 18yrs old and give a CS number (continuous service number). This was used throughout their career. After 1894 they were assigned to either Chatham, (C) Portsmouth (P) or Devonport (Plymouth) (D).

Portsmouth 361422

Name in full } William Edward Heasman

Date of Birth } 1 June 1884

Place of Birth } Worthing Sussex

Occupation } Porter

Date and Period of C. S. Engagements.	Age	Height in	Hair	Eyes	Complexion	Wounds, Scars, Marks, etc.
8 June 06 - 12 years	58	5 1/2	Brown	Blue	Fresh	
12 March 1918 - 12 months		5 1/2	Brown	Blue	Fresh	

361422



Naval Brigade  
Royal Naval Division  
Royal Naval Air Service  
Royal Naval Submarine Division  
Royal Naval Aviation (Fleet Air Arm)  
Womens Royal Naval Service  
Queen Alexandra's Royal naval Nursing Service  
Royal Fleet Auxiliary  
Royal Marines.

As for army research I suggest that you refer to the various research guides issued by the National Archives.

### ***Royal Air Force service***

If your ancestor was an airman you need to remember that the Royal Air Force was not formed until 1 April 1918 and prior to this date the personnel were part of the Royal Flying Corp under army administration or the Royal Naval Air Service under the administration of the Admiralty.

Royal Air Force airmans' service records are available on FindmyPast. These are records of airmen covering the period 1918 – 1939 for those with service numbers up to 562875. Some may contain information relating to the Second World War but service records generally for the Second World War and later are still held by the RAF.

Airman service numbers between 313001 and 316000 indicate that they previously served with the Royal Navy or the Royal Naval Air Service.

Because so many air crew were shot down, missing or killed in World War Two you can also search for missing RAF airmen records using the following criteria:

surname

location of the incident in which air crew went missing

date of the incident

type of aircraft from which air crew went missing (for example, Lancaster, Spitfire, Blenheim etc).

The contents of these files may vary but should contain missing person and casualty action sheets, death certificates, personal letters and correspondence, exhumation reports, investigation reports, questionnaires by repatriated personnel and personal effects of prisoners of war. It is believed that the collection is still incomplete.

If your ancestor was an RAF officer then begin your research using the Air Force List. Another very useful reference tool is the initial 1 April 1918 RAF muster which contains details of all the personnel which were in the RAF at its formation. This can also be searched on FindmyPast.

## Merchant Navy Service

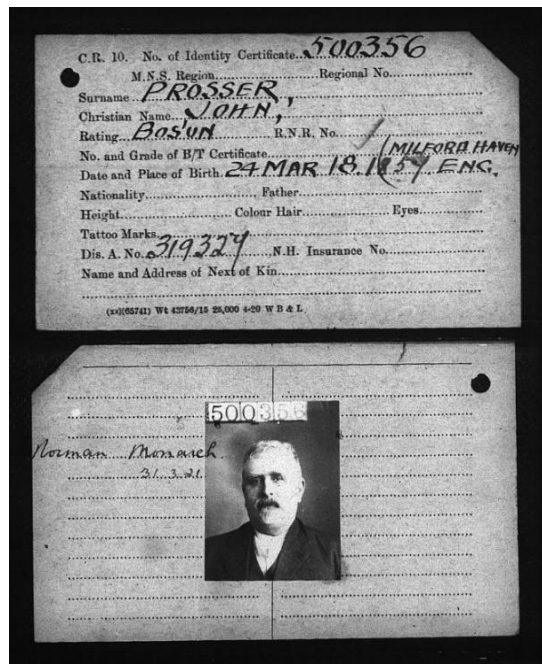
It is very difficult to find information about a particular merchant seaman between 1858 and 1917 because the Merchant Navy did not register its seaman during this period. From 1918 up to 1941 the registration cards for merchant seamen can be searched on FindmyPast. The original records are held at Southampton Archives.

The records contain such information as:

- discharge number
- certificate of competency number
- name of seaman
- year and place of birth
- rank or rating
- name and/or official number of ships
- date of engagement of service.

Some also give a physical description and other important information and include a photograph.

Seamen's Pouches existed between 1941 and 1972 although not all have survived. The system was introduced in 1913 but most early ones were destroyed. They are particularly useful for World War Two service. They contain a photograph, national insurance number, fingerprints as well as physical description. Some redaction of sensitive information may occur when researching.



If a registration card or pouch does not exist then you can search the crew lists for the period 1851 – 1911 using The Genealogist website. The collection available on this site includes

lists and agreements for those involved in merchant shipping and ship crews for those at home ports, sea and abroad.

Details of crew members may include age, place of birth, rank and ticket number, previous and current ship with ports of registration, dates, place and reason for joining and leaving.

Not all crew lists and agreements can be found on TheGenealogist nor have survived but for the period 1939-1950 they are complete. They are also held at various repositories including the National Archive, the National Maritime Museum and the Maritime History Archive in Newfoundland.

In most instances you will need to know the official number of the ship on which your ancestor served which may of course be on the registration card. If not refer to the Crew List Index project <http://www.crewlist.org.uk> You cannot search by ships name because there may have been more than one ship with the same name.

Again, it is recommended that you refer to the various research guides provided by the National Archives before embarking on research.

## **EVERYONE HAS ROOTS (a series of helpful research guides)**

*No. 1 It starts with you*

*No. 2 Ready to begin your research*

*No. 3 Birth, marriage & death certificates*

*No. 4 Grow your tree with census returns*

*No. 5 Baptism, marriage & burial registers*

*No. 6 Records created after death*

*No. 7 Discovering more about your ancestors*

***No. 8 The military connection***

*No. 9 Tracing your ancestors when they moved*

*No. 10 Proving your research is correct*