

Army Records

Introduction

Although this guide is primarily concerned with the Army, records relating to the Navy and R.A.F. may be found by checking the North Devon Record Office indexes under ARMED FORCES and WAR, and by consulting The National Archives information sheets on its website at nationalarchives.gov.uk.

The Militia

Under the Anglo-Saxon fyrd, every able-bodied man in a given county was liable for local military service. This type of comprehensive military service lapsed somewhat after the Norman Conquest, but was revived in the 13th century. From the 16th century trained bands (more fully proficient in soldiering than the average militia) were established by individual parishes. Lists of men in each locality liable for military service are called muster rolls.

After the Restoration in 1660, a dispute between King and Parliament over control of the militia resulted in the formation of a standing army. Both the county militia and trained bands therefore declined during the early 18th century. However, with the standing army increasingly fighting wars abroad, the need for civil defence led to the re-establishment of local militia in the 1750s. As part of this trend, levee en masse lists were specially compiled in 1803 by parish constables as a form of census listing all males eligible to provide military service; where they survive, they provide a greater wealth of information than muster rolls, often including details such as age, occupation, infirmity and marital status.

The militia as a compulsory force ended in 1829 but continued to the 1910s in a voluntary capacity. It was then converted into the Territorial Force or Army.

Relevant North Devon Record Office holdings include papers relating to provisions to be made in the event of a French invasion, 1798 - 1799 (ref. 520addA/PM1); and a levee en masse list for Barnstaple, 1803 (ref. 3054A/PC1 - transcript available). Pages 331-332 of the list of Barnstaple Borough records (ref. B1) give details of correspondence, lists of muskets and pikes, a 14th century muster roll, etc., all relating to Barnstaple's own militia.

Another important source is parish records, which may include the accounts of parish constables who were responsible for the parish armour and militia; churchwardens' or overseers' accounts, which may list relief payments to travelling soldiers; and papers relating directly to the parish militia, such as muster rolls.

Other papers held include documents relating to commissions and promotions, and the selected records of various 19th century volunteer forces. For further information, check the North Devon Record Office subject indexes for ARMED FORCES and WAR.

The Devon Record Office in Exeter holds military surveys for Littleham, Landcross, Meeth, Little Torrington, Newton St. Petrock, Beaford, Alwington, Petrockstowe, Shebbear, Buckland Filleigh, Weare Gifford, Merton and Peters Marland, 1522 (ref. 1148Madd/18/5); muster rolls for Roborough hundred, 1715 (ref. Z1/43/5/1-12); a return of officers, N.C.O.s and privates, Barnstaple, 1792 (ref. QS/292(g)); also various 19th century county muster rolls (ref. QS/279).

The National Archives holds muster rolls for Roborough hundred, 1539 (ref. SP1/145). Further details can be found by consulting The National Archives information sheets on its website.

Standing Army

The North Devon Record Office holds no standing army records, though the subject indexes for ARMED FORCES and WAR may reveal some correspondence, etc. indirectly relating to the regular army. The North Devon Athenaeum, however, holds selected editions of the printed *Army Lists*, 1802-1994.

The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey holds various operational records for the Army, 1660 - 1914, including the military correspondence of the Secretaries of State and some private papers of army officers. Records relating to individual soldiers are rare till the middle of the 18th century. For ordinary soldiers these records include admission and discharge papers, 1756 - 1913 and description books (listing physical description, age, birthplace, trade and service), 1756 - 1900. For officers it holds similar systematic records from the early 19th century. Further details can be found by consulting The National Archives information sheets on its website.

Further Reading on the Militia and Standing Army before 1914

- *Tudor and Stuart Muster Rolls*, Jeremy Gibson and Alan Dell (1989)
- *Militia Lists and Musters 1757-1876*, Jeremy Gibson and Mervyn Medlycott (1989)
- *Devon Soldiers*, John Rowe (1992)
- *The Devon Muster Roll for 1569*, A J Howard and T L Stoaite (1977)

The Local Studies Library and the North Devon Athenaeum also hold various books relating to particular Devon regiments, including:

- *The Yeomanry of Devon 1794 - 1927*, Engineer-Com. Benson Freeman, R.N. (1927)
- *The Bloody Eleventh: History of The Devonshire Regiment*, R E R Robinson (1988)

Other Sources and Repositories

The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, The Square, Barnstaple has a large collection of material relating to the North Devon Yeomanry.

The Records of the Devonshire Regiment are held at The Keep Military Museum, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset.

The National Register of Archives holds indexes which may show the whereabouts of records relating to army and militia. The National Register of Archives can be consulted at the National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey.

Southampton University Library, Highfield, Southampton, holds the 1st Duke of Wellington's military correspondence. It also, in conjunction with the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College, London, maintains a database surveying the papers of senior commanders and defence staff, 1793 - 1970.

The Army Museums Ogilby Trust, 2 St Thomas Centre, Southgate Street, Winchester, Hants, holds over 1000 boxes of papers arranged by regiment.

The National Army Museum, Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London, holds papers relating to the British Army and its predecessors from the 15th century onwards.

The Military Heraldry Society, 12 Glen Terrace, Clover Hill, Halifax, may be able to trace unit emblems if requested.

Archives are also held by corps museums such as the Royal Artillery Institute Library, Old Military Academy, Woolwich Common, London; Royal Engineers Corps Museum and Library, Brompton Barracks, Chatham, Kent; and the Royal Signals Museum, Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, Dorset.

Army Records 1914 - 1939

North Devon Record Office holdings include the letters of Charles and Henry Gribble, who both served and died on the Western Front (ref. B262); Christmas letters sent to the parishioners of Northam by serving soldiers, 1917 - 1919 (ref. 1843A/PM1-2); a letter concerning a conscientious objector, 1917 (ref. B93add/5); a letter describing conditions in a German concentration camp at the end of the Second World War (ref. B681/1) and various topical magazines, 1914 - 1916 (ref. B200/3, 4 & 25). It also holds rolls of honour compiled by local parishes and some schools. Lists of soldiers serving in both World Wars may also be found in some parish magazines. Further details of holdings can be found by consulting the North Devon Record subject index under ARMED FORCES and WAR.

Casualty lists for both World Wars will be found in local newspapers, which are held at the Local Studies Centre on microfilm, although these are not indexed. See also **Soldiers of the Great War** - biographical notes on individual soldiers from North Devon parishes compiled by Brian Barrow and held by the Local Studies Library.

The Beaford Archive of old photographs of north Devon holds a number of prints showing individual soldiers or entire sections. An index to the Archive and a selection of photographs is available online <http://www.beaford-arts.org.uk/index>.

The Devon Record Office, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter, Devon, EX2 7NL holds the minutes of the Devon Territorial Force Association, 1907 - 1968 (ref. 1715C/TA2-5).

In terms of operational records, the extensive holdings of The National Archives include Cabinet committee minutes and files, War Council minutes, War Office files and daily diaries of units and battalions. In terms of personnel records, its papers include medical records, medal rolls and soldiers' service records. Further information can be obtained by consulting The National Archives information leaflets on its website.

Further Reading on Army Records 1914 - 1939

- *World War 1 Army Ancestry and More Sources of World War 1 Army Ancestry*, Norman Holding, (1982, 1986)
- *The Location of British Army Records 1914 - 1918*, Norman Holding (1984)
- *Army Records for Family Historians*, Simon Fowler and William Spencer (1998)
- *Army Service Records of the First World War*, Simon Fowler, William Spencer and Stuart Tamblin (1996)

See also the books on Devon regiments as mentioned under Militia and Standing Army.

Other Sources and Repositories

The Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, Lambeth Road, London; this is home to the personal papers of over 5000 individuals from both World Wars.

Information on records of service of a proven next of kin may be obtained from the Ministry of Defence, Army Search CS[R]2b, Bourne Avenue, Hayes, Middlesex if the regiment, corps, regimental number, pension book number and soldier's name are known.

Soldiers Died in The Great World War 1914 - 19, a CD Rom compiled by The Naval and Military Press, PO Box 61, Dallington, Heathfield, East Sussex: a complete and comprehensive list.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains an extensive website containing a huge database of information on those who died in the two World Wars at www.cwgc.org.

See also the same section under Militia and Standing Army above.

Army Records 1939 to Present

The North Devon Record Office's holdings include Bideford Wartime Committee papers, 1939 - 1945 (ref. 2379A/Z28-36); North Devon Home Guard records (ref. B570); and photographs of soldiers training at Bideford, 1940s (ref. B107/1-2). Parish magazines, school records and newspapers may also contain useful information (see Army Records 1914-1939 above). For further details look under ARMED FORCES and WAR in the Record Office subject index.

Army personnel records tend to be subject to a 75 year closure period. These include papers relating to prisoners of war and courts martial. The National Archives therefore holds only operational records relating to the Second World War, etc. These include War Cabinet minutes and memoranda, records of the Cabinet committees concerned with defence, War Office Council and Army Council papers, War Office directories, war diaries, and reports of the Directorate of Army Psychiatry. For further information see The National Archives information sheets on its website.

Further Reading on Army Records 1939 to Present

- *Devon at War 1939-1945*, Gerald Wasley (1994)
- *North Devon at War*, The Joint Social History Project (1995) (Oral History)
- *Spirits of the Sand: The History of the U.S Army Assault Training Centre, Woolacombe*, Richard T Bass (1991)
- *History of the 5th (Bideford) Battalion Devon Home Guard 1940-1945*, Colonel D C Crombie, CBE. (1964)

See also any regimental histories as mentioned under Militia and Standing Army above.

Other Sources and Repositories

The Tank Museum, Bovington Camp, Wareham, Dorset holds manuscripts relating to the history of mechanical warfare on land.

The Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, 183 Euston Road, London holds private journals and papers of various army surgeons.

See also the lists of alternative sources and repositories under Militia and Standing Army and Army Records 1914 - 1939 above.

Footnote: It is also worth searching for more information about the history of the Army on the Internet

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Library and Record Office
Tuly Street
Barnstaple
EX31 1EL

Tel: 01271 318792

Email: northdevon@swheritage.org.uk

Website: www.swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives

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