

# **World War I Australian Military Service Research Guide**



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Cover photo is from the documentary film *They Shall Not Grow Old* (2018) by Peter Jackson.

More about the film:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/12/peter-jackson-they-shall-not-grow-old-world-war-i-documentary/578542/>

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## **National Archives of Australia: military service records**

As the Australian Government controls Australia's defence service, a military record is a government record. This is why a personal military record is not held at the Australian War Memorial (which is a museum) as is often assumed, but rather in the National Archives of Australia as the repository for Australian Government records.

The National Archives of Australia holds the service records of every Australian who served in World War I and these records have been digitised. They are available as a free download from their website. At the Archives home page, [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au), choose 'explore the collection', 'record search', 'name search'. Then choose from the drop down 'category of records' option 'Australian Defence Forces Personnel Records'. You can also further refine by conflict, i.e. World War I.

Personal service records include family details and next of kin, enlistment and postings, leave taken, injuries and illnesses and any military awards received. It can also contain correspondence from the serviceman or woman's family to the military. This factsheet has been prepared to assist you with your research:

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs177.aspx>

National Archives of Australia keep different types of military records, in addition to personal service records.

## **National Archives of Australia: repatriation records**

The National Archives holds all the personal service records of Australians who served during World War I. Of those who returned, they hold extensive records relating to their post-war rehabilitation, pensions and medical care.

Once discharged from the AIF, rehabilitation and re-establishment into civilian life were the responsibility of the Repatriation Department. Servicemen and women were eligible for pensions, medical treatment, disability benefits, various training schemes, and further education for themselves and their dependants. Service records and repatriation records, when viewed together, can provide a rich resource of information on the service and post-war lives of many Australians.

## **National Archives of Australia: Discovering ANZACs**

<https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au>

This website has a wealth of information about military service and is veteran orientated. At the home page choose 'World War I' to open up the resources related to this conflict. It includes hot-to videos which show how to explore World War I records.

## **Australian War Memorial**

To understand the Australian War Memorial collection, begin with this overview of how to research an individual in their collection:

[www.awm.gov.au/collection/understanding-the-memorials-collection/researching-a-person](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/understanding-the-memorials-collection/researching-a-person)

This guide has lots of links to different aspects of service during World War 1. It is worth taking the time to work through the multiple links provided. There are lots of important military records here, which will be essential for your research: unit embarkation nominal rolls, military honours and awards, specific unit histories, photographs and the roll of honour.

## **Australian War Memorial: Red Cross records**

The Australian Red Cross Society (ARC) created records relating to their work during World War I and those relating to Australian service personnel are held in the Australian War Memorial. The ARC records are of three types: general administration files; the Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau and the Prisoner of War Department. There is a wealth of first-hand accounts in these records.

The Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau records contain 32,000 case files on missing and wounded Australian military personnel. The Prisoner of War Department records contain investigations into Australians held as prisoners of war, their location and health status.

## **The Department of Veterans Affairs**

This Australian Government department has a great deal of information online to help with researching an individual's military record: war cemeteries, multiple military history publications, a link to the Office of Australian War Graves ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)) and information on commemoration standards. Start here and work through the links provided: [www.dva.gov.au/commemorations-memorials-and-war-graves](http://www.dva.gov.au/commemorations-memorials-and-war-graves)

## **NSW War Memorials Register**

The NSW War Memorials Register records memorial locations and the names of veterans listed on each memorial. It is possible to search by suburb or by name. As the documenting has been done by volunteers not all areas are complete.

Volunteers have completed all memorials in the Cessnock Local Government Area.

[www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au](http://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au)

## **Trove, National Library of Australia**

Trove is the National Library of Australia's search engine. Trove gives access to an extensive digitised newspaper collection covering many decades. Searching these newspapers for your local area is a good way to find death notices and obituaries

At the National Library of Australia home page choose 'Trove' and if you are new to using Trove look at the online tutorials as these will help you get the most out of using the collection [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au) and <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

## State Library of NSW

The State Library of NSW [www.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au) has an extensive collection of World War I material, with a particularly large number of wartime diaries created by Australian World War I servicemen and women <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/wwi>. These have now been transcribed and are available on the Library website.

Here is an example, the World War I diary of Thomas Ray Crooks of Newcastle: [http://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110319574?\\_ga=2.140079797.785403256.1603775700-1182213213.1562308424](http://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110319574?_ga=2.140079797.785403256.1603775700-1182213213.1562308424)

These diaries are so rich in social and military history that in 2015 the diaries were added to the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

## Your local public library

Your local public library and specifically the Local Studies collection is a great starting point for research into local servicemen and women. Individuals may be identified in local publications about the impact of World War I on regional communities. Many of these records are not held anywhere else. Contact the Local Studies Librarian to see what resources your library holds.

Adjoining Local Government Area libraries:

- Maitland Library, 285-287 High Street, Maitland. Phone: (02) 4934 9707
- Singleton Library, 8-10 Queen Street, Singleton. Phone: (02) 6578-7500
- Newcastle Library, Laman Street, Newcastle. Phone: (02) 4974 5330

## Cemetery records

Cemetery records are usually held at a Local Government Level, so access the local Council, or Library, in the LGA where the serviceman or woman was buried, or where they lived.

Sometimes an individual's service record will be referenced on their headstone. This might be the first clue to an otherwise unknown service history. Some sources for cemetery research are the Australian Cemeteries Index:

<https://austcemindex.com> and Find a Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com>

Death and funeral notices in Australian newspapers can be searched using the Ryerson Index: [www.ryersonindex.org](http://www.ryersonindex.org) not all newspaper death and funeral notices have been indexed, but the *Advertiser*, *Maitland Mercury*, *Singleton Argus*, *Newcastle Star*, *Newcastle Post* and *Newcastle Herald* are available online.

The *Cessnock Eagle* newspaper has not been indexed. This indexing is being done by volunteers, so it is not a complete record of notices, nevertheless it's a valuable resource. The National Library of Australia has a good cemetery research guide:

[www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/cemetery-records](http://www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/cemetery-records)

## Local RSLs, Ex-Service organisations and clubs

Contact any existing RSL clubs, or Ex-Service organisations, in your local area to check what information they hold. Often there are local military enthusiasts who have

collected paper records, objects and photographs which may have relevance to your research. Frequently this material is on display in cases in the clubs' foyers.

## Facebook

A great number of groups called 'You Know You Are From [insert name of suburb]' have Facebook pages, along with groups called 'Lost [insert name of suburb]'. Many of these sites have a closed or private status, but you are still usually able to send a private message to the page's Administrator. Ask them if you can post to their site.

Posting requests for information on individual service men or women can be a good way to connect with people who have a keen interest in, or a generational knowledge of, a certain area and the families who lived there. It is worth posting to see if anyone comes forward with information which can help you with your research.

## Historical societies

Many historical societies become the recipients of an individual's personal war memorabilia, often donated by a family after an individual's death. So it is worth contacting your local historical society to see what they hold.

Few historical societies have digitised their collections, so it will most likely be necessary to visit in person, or write to them asking for assistance with your research. Local historical societies in the Cessnock and surrounding areas:

The Coalfields Local History Association, c/- Abermain School of Arts, 209 Cessnock Road, Abermain. [coalfieldshistory@gmail.com](mailto:coalfieldshistory@gmail.com) Open Tuesdays, Thursdays, Sundays. 10.00am-2.00pm.

Cessnock Historical Society c/- the Endeavour Museum, 2896 Wollombi Road, Wollombi. (02) 4998 3375. Open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 11.00am-1.30pm, Friday 11.00am-3.00pm, Saturday and Sunday 11.00am-4.00pm.

Greta Museum, Old Greta Council Chambers, 96 High Street, Greta. 0427 657 150. Open Wednesday and Saturday 11.00am-3.00pm.

Maitland Historical Society, 3 Cathedral St, Maitland. 0468 438 990.  
[www.maitlandhistorical.org](http://www.maitlandhistorical.org) and [maitlandhistorical@gmail.com](mailto:maitlandhistorical@gmail.com)

Morpeth Museum, 123 Swan Street, Morpeth. (02) 4934 4301. Open Thursday to Sunday 11.00am-2.00pm.

Singleton Historical Society and Museum, Burdekin Park, 76 Bourke Street, Singleton. (02) 6571 1895. Open Tuesday, Saturday, Sunday, public holidays.

Singleton Family History Society, 51 William Street, Singleton. (02) 6572 2235. [www.family-history-society-singleton-inc.org](http://www.family-history-society-singleton-inc.org) and [famhissocsinginc@yahoo.com](mailto:famhissocsinginc@yahoo.com)

Cultural collections, University of Newcastle, Level 2 Auchmuty Library, Academic Division, University of Newcastle. Phone: (02) 4921 5354 or (02) 4921 5819  
[www.newcastle.edu.au/library/access/places-and-spaces/special-collections](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/library/access/places-and-spaces/special-collections)