

Army Records

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the county of Somerset had links with a number of army groups:

- the Somerset Light Infantry, (from 1959 to 1968, the Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry);
- the Yeomanry brigades, including the West Somerset Yeomanry and the North Somerset Yeomanry; and
- the militia units, including the Somerset Rifle Volunteers and later the territorial units.

The records

All official army records, such as service records, pension records, medal rolls, records of court martial and casualty returns are at The National Archives. Their website, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, contains several guides about researching the British Army.

Surviving service records (1914-1920) can also be viewed on www.ancestry.com. This can be done free of charge from all Somerset public libraries and the searchroom at the Somerset Heritage Centre, and from many other local libraries around the country.

The Ministry of Defence still holds service records after 1922. The next-of-kin can purchase them (or someone else with permission from the next-of-kin) for a fee of £30, by application to:

The Army Personnel Centre,
MS Support Unit,
P and D Branch Historical Disclosures,
MP 555,
Kentigern House,
65 Brown Street,
Glasgow,
G2 8EX

There are specific application forms, which are available by post from the same address or from <http://www.veterans-uk.info/>. Applications should be supported by proof of death and kinship.

The Records of the Somerset Light Infantry, 1706 to 2005 (DD/SLI)

This contains the material collected by the regiment during its lifetime. It does not contain service records, and so there is little information about the individual men who served with the regiment. However, it does include rich and varied material on the regiment's history and background, the conflicts it served in and information about its successor and affiliated regiments. It also contains a large photographic record of the regiment from the 1860s through to the present day.

Notable and useful classes of records are:

- **Digests of Service** (DD\SLI/1) and **War Diaries** (DD\SLI/2). The Digests of Service record operations during peacetime and often include details on the movements of the battalion, changes in senior personnel, deaths of officers and visits by noteworthy officials. The War Diaries record the events of the battalion on active service, including details about daily operations, numbers of casualties, acts of recommendation or bravery and the deaths of senior personnel. War Diaries for all battalions on active service are also held at The National Archives.
- **Militia Rolls** (DD\SLI/3) We have a small selection of militia returns covering limited parts of the county, 1758 to 1878.
- **Medal Rolls** (DD\SLI/5) A select number of copies taken from ones held at The National Archives, these include rolls for most of the nineteenth century conflicts the regiment served in, gallantry awards and the General Service Medal.
- **Army Issue Maps and Plans** (DD\SLI/14) These include operational maps for the Crimea, the First World War, Monte Cassino during the Second World War and the Malayan Emergency of the 1950s.
- **Photographs** (DD\SLI/15) This is a collection of over 2,000 photographs of the regiment and its activities. The series includes many formal group shots, along with some individuals, locations and personal photograph albums.
- **Soldiers' Personal Papers** (DD\SLI/17) A small selection of personal documents collected by the regiment, alongside a number of personal diaries and correspondence.
- **The Light Bob Gazette and The Silver Bugle** (DD\SLI/18/1). This is the Regimental Journal, which has details about sporting events, social events and changes of senior personnel. It is a very good source of informal background information for the period 1893 to 1973.

A full list of all classes of records, along with a brief history of the regiment is included in the introduction to both the paper and online catalogues.

The Records of the North Somerset Yeomanry, 1790 to 2000 (DD\NSY)

This is a smaller collection of records collected by the North Somerset Yeomanry, which includes:

- **First World War casualty lists** (DD\NSY/3/1) These volumes provide details of the soldier's name, number, rank, date of injury, type of injury or illness and other remarks. They cover the whole period of the War. There are also field service records for soldiers who died on active service during First World War (DD\NSY/3/2).
- **Correspondence**, 1804 to 2001 (DD\NSY/5) This details the actions of the Regiment, and is especially detailed for the early nineteenth century.
- **Photographs** (DD\NSY/9) This is a small selection of images, mainly showing the life of the Regiment during the early to mid-twentieth century.
- **Regimental Histories** (DD\NSY/11) These are mainly research notes used to compile a Regimental History.

A full list of all classes of records, along with a brief history of the regiment is included in the introduction to both the paper and online catalogues.

Army Records in other collections

There is a considerable amount of army related material in other private collections, especially concerning the militia and yeomanry forces. Private gentlemen who raised militia units often kept their own records and you can find these in family collections, such as the Malet family (DD\MAL), Sanford family (DD\SF), Phelps family (DD\PH) and the Trevelyan family (DD\WO). Parish collections also often have details about the upkeep and raising of parish militia units.

We have a growing number of personal papers and memoirs, especially for the Second World War.

Unfortunately we do not hold the regimental papers of the West Somerset Yeomanry, although a number of items are included in the Somerset Light Infantry papers and other private collections.

Somerset Military Museum

The Somerset Military Museum features objects relating to Somerset's military past, especially the Somerset Light Infantry. This is part of the Museum of Somerset at Taunton Castle.

Further reading

- Boyle, Capt. R. (1922) *A record of the West Somerset Yeomanry 1914 to 1919*
- Everett, H. (1934) *The History of the Somerset Light Infantry 1685 to 1914*
- Fisher, G. (1924) *The History of Somerset Yeomanry, Volunteer and Territorial units*
- Fowler, S. and Spencer, W. (1998, reprinted in 2000) *Army Records for Family Historians*
- Gibson, J. (1994) *Militia lists and musters 1757 to 1876*
- Grant, L. (2004) *The Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's) 1685 to 1959*
- Hamilton-Edwards, G. (1977) *In Search of Army Ancestry*
- Molesworth, G. (1951) *The History of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's) 1919 to 1945*
- Whitehead, K. (1961) *History of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's) 1946 to 1960*
- Wilkinson, F. (1980) *Badges of the British army, 1820 to 1960*
- Wyrall, E. (1927) *The History of the Somerset Light Infantry 1914 to 1919*

Somerset Archives & Local Studies
Somerset Heritage Centre
Brunel Way
Norton Fitzwarren
Taunton
Somerset
TA2 6SF

Tel: 01823 278805 (enquiries)

Tel: 01823 337600 (appointments)

Email: somersetarchives@swheritage.org.uk

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

South West Heritage Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England.

Registered office: Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6SF

Company number: 09053532 Charity Number: 1158791 VAT Registration Number: 197221592

