

Surrey Heritage

Guide to tracing sources for the Indian Army

Indian Army servicemen are notoriously difficult to research, mainly because the personnel files and service records rarely survive. It is not possible to list all the online guides and published works here in full but the following information gives a brief guide to tracing Indian servicemen ancestors and the Indian Army, with special reference to the First World War. Sources held at Surrey History Centre are listed at the end of this guide.

Where to start?

The online medal index cards held at The National Archives at Kew <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/medal-index-cards-ww1.htm> do not necessarily contain Indian Army soldiers, which makes the search more challenging.

If a soldier was killed during active service he should be commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission online searchable database at <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead.aspx>.



Online family history websites such as <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> and <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> have digitised and indexed millions of military records and are definitely worth searching. They are available free of charge to Surrey library members in all Surrey Libraries and in Surrey History Centre. For a full list of Family History resources listed on the Surrey History centre website, see <http://new.surreycc.gov.uk/heritage-culture-and-recreation/archives-and-history/local-and-family-history-links/family-history-websites>.

Click here to see the military records research guide  (pdf) "Tracing military records at Surrey History Centre":

http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/170761/Military-Records-at-Surrey-History-Centre,-Apr-09.pdf.

General sources for the Indian Army

One of the best sources for tracing Indian servicemen of any rank and service (RAF, Army, Navy etc) is the Moving Here website

<http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asian/servicerecords/servicerecords.htm>

A list of all the South Asian regiments can be found at

<http://web.archive.org/web/20060110124913/www.regiments.org/regiments/index.htm>

Surviving records for Indian military forces, including material relating to the military forces of the Honourable East India Company, as well as the British army in India, prior to 1947, are held at the British Library as part of their Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections. You will find A Farrington's *Guide to the records of the India Office Military Department* (India Office Library, 1982) essential in understanding these records.

The British Library

The British Library has a new online guide to researching Indian soldiers during the First World War, including suggested reading material, at

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpsubject/history/history/asiansinbritain/indiansoldiersinworldwars/indiansoldiers.html>

They can be contacted at:

Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections (previously Oriental and India Office Library)

British Library

96 Euston Road

London

NW1 2DB

Tel: 020 7412 7873

Email: apac-enquiries@bl.uk

Website: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/>

Both the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the National Army Museum hold Indian Army material but this relates to campaigns, rather than to individual servicemen. Their contact details are:

Imperial War Museum

Lambeth Road

London SE1 6HZ

Telephone: 020-7416 5000

Fax: 020-7416 5374

Email: docs@iwm.org.uk

Website: <http://www.iwm.org.uk>



National Army Museum

Royal Hospital Road

Chelsea

London

SW3 4HT

Telephone: 020 7730 0717

Email: info@national-army-museum.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.nam.ac.uk/>

Another source for tracing Indian Army troops is the **Indian Army List**. It lists all the names of the following:

Indian Army regiments

Honorary Officers

Subadar-Major

Subadars

Risaldar-Majors

Risaldars

Jemadars

Medical Officers



Another excellent source is **The India and Burma Office list**, which includes an alphabetical honours list that gives the names of all persons appointed to the Orders of the Star of India and Indian Empire and to the Imperial Order of the Crown of India.

It also includes a record of services of troops of the following:

All-Indian services

Indian Political Service

Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment

Burma Class I services

Burma Ecclesiastical Establishment

Other civil employees in India or in Burma whose substantive pay is at least 1,000 rupees a month

Asiatic Colonial Units

Records of Indian soldiers who served outside India in the Asiatic Colonial Units, such as the Bengal Fusiliers, China Gun Lascars, Ceylon Rifles and Gun Lascars, include service records, muster books and pay lists and some pension records. Further details can be found on the **Moving Here** website **Asiatic Colonial Unit Information**:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asia/n/servicerecords/colonial.htm>

Royal Indian Navy

Until 1928, all the officers of the Royal Indian Navy service were Europeans; since that date an increasing number of Indian officers have been recruited. In 1939 the ratings numbered 1,475 and expanded to 21,831 in October 1943. Until 1939, the ratings were almost all Muslims, mostly drawn from Ratnagiri (south of Bombay) and were chiefly Konkanis. Read more about the **Royal Indian Navy**:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asia/n/servicerecords/rin.htm>

Royal Navy

Under King's Regulations and AI Articles 356 and 365, entry to the Navy was barred to any person except the sons of British-born subjects, a measure introduced during the First World War (Admiralty, 18 September 1915).

This decision, however, was not strictly adhered to because of the necessity to admit Goans and Chinese men as officers' stewards and cooks on the East Indies and China Stations. Details are given in the National Archives reference ADM 1/8643/158.

Subsequently, the regulations were amended to permit entry of British subjects irrespective of their parents' nationality on the Africa, East Indies and China stations. Read more about **Goans in the Royal Navy**:

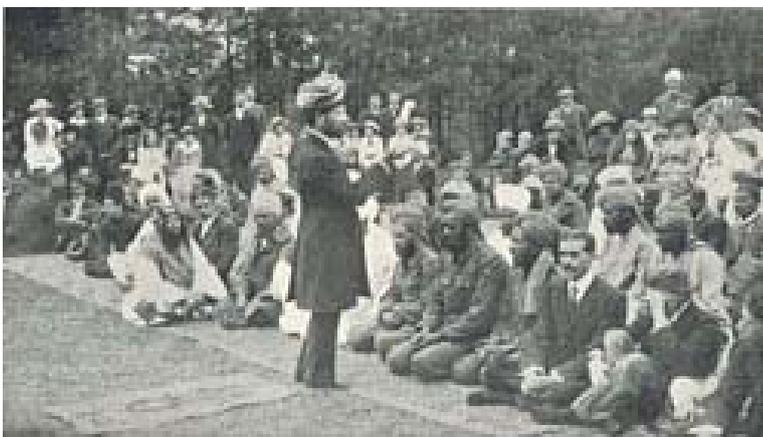
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asia/n/servicerecords/goanese.htm>

Royal Air Force

Some Indian Army and Indian army reserve officers were attached to the RAF, and subsequently transferred their service on 1 April 1918. They were mainly serving in India, Aden or Mesopotamia (National Archives reference AIR 10/136). Follow the link for more details of the **Service Records of South Asian RAF Officers and Airmen**:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asia/n/servicerecords/raf.htm>

First World War specific sources



The National Archives is digitising the First World War diaries of the Indian infantry units deployed to the Western Front. They are available online to download via the **First World War 100 portal** <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war/>. The records are free to view at The National Archives but require 'pay per view' if viewed remotely. The war diaries have been added to **Operation War Diary**:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/war-diaries-ww1.htm> the online crowdsourcing project to index them. The diaries cover the entire period of the units' involvement in the war, including their journey by sea from India and the reception they received on arrival in Marseilles, with the first two brigades docking on 26 September 1914.

Highlights include:

- their long journey across the seas to what was an unknown destination at the time (**WO 95/3926/1**: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14056389>). Many men experienced sea-sickness and weather they had never encountered before. One diary even includes reports of a shark swimming around the ship on 1 September 1914 (**WO 95/3920/1**: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7356063>)

- the 'magnificent reception' they received from the French upon their arrival in Marseilles where crowds greeted them with fruit, coffee, biscuits, flags and flowers (WO 95/3926/1: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14056389>)
- how religious requirements were accommodated. One diary notes how Indian troops were allowed to go up to the promenade deck of the ship to pray, facing east towards Mecca (WO 95/3920/1: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7356063>)

Indian servicemen are featured in the new First World War Galleries at the Imperial War Museum <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/12-photos-of-the-indian-army-in-the-first-world-war>. The Imperial War Museum have also produced a **Guide to Researching the British Empire in the First World War** this can be downloaded as a PDF from [http://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/public-document/Researching the British Empire resource guide.pdf](http://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/public-document/Researching%20the%20British%20Empire%20resource%20guide.pdf)

For Indian soldiers wounded and treated at Brighton Pavilion Indian Army Hospital during the First World War, see <http://www.sikhmuseum.com/brighton/remembrance/honour/muslim.html>



The **Exploring Surrey's Past** website hosts a number of useful pages for researching the Indian Army and local connections with the Muslim Burial Ground and Shah Jahan Mosque. These include a list (compiled by English Heritage), of Indian soldiers who died at other British war hospitals (Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley; Indian General Hospital, Mount Dore, Bournemouth; Meerut Hospital, Brockenhurst; and Lady Hardinge Hospital, Brockenhurst) and a list of names taken from the British Library India Office Records 'Nominal Roll of deaths of Indian Officers, N.C.O's and Men (at the Indian Hospitals in England and hospital ships unloading there), Ref.IOR/L/MIL/195-8, see <http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Rachel-Hasted-Indian-Army-WWI-deaths-in-England-2014-Edited.pdf>

Further sources for researching the Indian Army during the First World War and the Muslim Burial Ground can be found at

<http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/india-woking/sources/>

The *Islamic Review*, 1913-1971, which records some Muslim troops during the First and Second World Wars has mostly been digitised by The Woking Muslim Mission and is available online at <http://www.wokingmuslim.org>

For an online version of the display 'The Great War: From India to Woking', which includes statistics and facts about the Indian Army in the First World War, and a bibliography, please see <http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/india-woking/>

The Western Front Association promotes research into the Great War, including Indian soldiers and hosts a wide variety of information and links <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com>

Online articles specifically about Indian troops in the Great War include Dr David Omissi, *India and the Western Front*

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/india_wwone_01.shtml and Dr Santanu Das, *The Indian sepoy in the First World War* (British Library extract <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/the-indian-sepoy-in-the-first-world-war>)

There are two 30 minute Radio 4 programmes by Dr Santanu Das about the Indian Army in World War One available on the BBC i-Player for a few weeks. See

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04m9rxg/episodes/guide>



Many military experts and enthusiasts contribute to the The Great War Forum <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/> and *The Long, Long Trail* First World War website <http://www.1914-1918.net/index.htm> Further details about the various Indian Divisions can also be found at <http://www.1914-1918.net/indivs.htm>. There is a section for the Indian Army and they also run a research service.

There are some wonderful newsreels about the Indian Army on the Pathé News website too, especially relating to soldiers who were wounded and treated at Brighton Pavilion after it was turned into an Indian Army hospital. The link for their website is <http://www.britishpathe.com/> and you can search using the term 'Indian Army'. There is also an excellent website, run by the online Sikh Museum, about the soldiers treated at Brighton <http://www.sikhmuseum.com/brighton/>

Published works for the Indian Army and the First World War

Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (Bloomsbury, 2014)

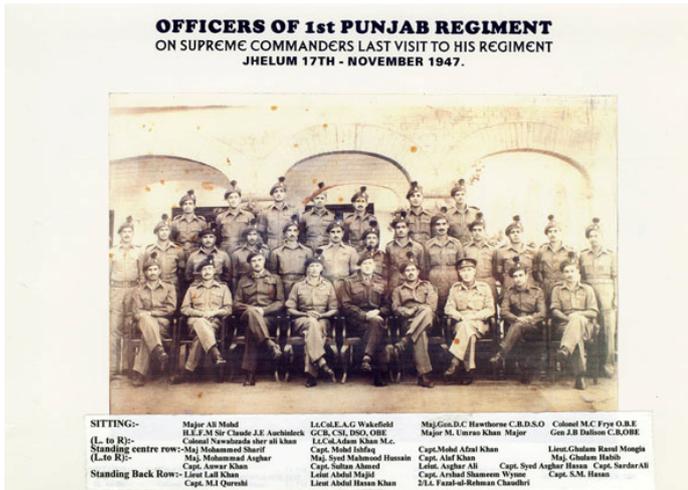
Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the trenches: the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915* (Spellmount, 1999)

Janet Gooch, *A History of the Brighton General Hospital* (Phillimore, 1980). Pages 106-112 are dedicated to the time it was known as the Kitchener Indian Hospital (later the Kitchener Hospital). The Accommodation and operating conditions are described, along with the number of Indian patients.

David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* (Macmillan Press, 1999). This book transcribes the 650 Indian soldiers' letters held in the British Library collections.

There is a short chapter on the Indian army in William Spencer's, *Army Service Records of the First World War* (TNA Readers' Guide, IXX, 2008) while his book *Medals: The Researcher's Guide* (TNA, 2006) contains a wealth of information.

Second World War



Before the Second World War there was an acknowledged ban of the entry of non-Europeans into all three services. This was lifted in the first month of the war, and non-Europeans were admitted not only as other ranks but also as temporary commissioned officers.

The addresses listed in the **General Sources** section at the beginning of this guide can also be used for researching Indian soldiers in the Second World War.

There is an interesting article on the history of the Indian army up to the

present at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/rqt.htm>.

For Second World War records relating to the Indian Army it is best to consult the **Moving Here** website

<http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/roots/asian/servicerecords/servicerecords.htm> for guidance.

Sources held at Surrey History Centre

Although Surrey History Centre does not hold a large amount of records for the Indian Army, it does hold the vast archive of The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment and its predecessors, which spans four centuries and contains some surprising material.

The regiments served all over the world, including China, India, Africa, and the Far East. Through battalion war diaries and private journals, official photograph albums and snaps taken by wide-eyed soldiers, thousands of stories are revealed documenting heroism and disaster, imperial heyday and decline, the trenches on the Western Front, the deserts of the Middle East and the jungles of Burma. The collection contains regimental photographs albums, many containing images of the diverse cultures encountered, for example an album taken by the 31st Regiment of Foot (later East Surrey Regiment), based in Calcutta and Allahabad in the 1880s (SHC ref ESR/2/13/4 p.79).

In 1825, the Queens and the 31st Foot landed in India for the first time. Both stayed for 20 years beginning a long association with the sub-continent. Between 1825 and Indian independence in 1947, the regular battalions of both the Queen's and the East Surrey Regiments, along with some of their territorial units during World War I, spent a total of 177 years in India.



Both regiments took part in the 1st Afghan War of 1839-42 and the 31st Foot in the two campaigns against the Sikhs in 1843 and 1846, gaining the battle honour Sobraon. The 70th Foot saw action on the North West Frontier during the Mutiny of 1857-9 and later in the 2nd Afghan War of 1879-81. Both regiments took part in many punitive actions against the tribes along the North West Frontier.

For information about the Surrey Regiments in India see

http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/the_regiments_in_india_photographs/

In the collection of Mohammad Ilyas Raja (SHC ref Z/454/-), there are papers relating to Major Raja Alaf Khan of the 1st Punjab Regiment, who served in both the First and Second World Wars, and Rang Khan, of Mirpur, Kashmir, who served with the 7th Rajput Regiment and whose name appears on the Rangoon Memorial.

A search using the term 'Indian' or 'India' using the History Centre's **SURCAT Collections Catalogue** <http://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/Calmview/> will highlight references in the Surrey History Centre archive and illustration collections. For example, accounts of operations by 33 Indian Corps, including 1st Battalion QRWS, compiled from reports, war diaries, captured enemy documents and personal accounts, 1944-45, can be found in SHC ref QRWS/2/8/12-23.

A similar search using **The Exploring Surrey's Past** website <http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/>, which includes Surrey museums and local history collections as well as the Surrey History Centre collections, will give a wider search results list.

For information about Surrey's connections with The Anglo- Afghan wars (1839 -1919), see <http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/war-memorials/afghanistan/>

For records of Gurkhas in the Surrey Regiments see http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/gurkhas_in_the_archive_of_the_surrey_regiments/

To read more about the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment see: http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/the_queens_royal_surrey_regiment/.

To read a summary of the arrangement of the records of the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment held at the Surrey History Centre see:

http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/summary_of_the_arrangement_of_the_records_of_the_queens_royal_surrey_regiment/.

Click here to see the research guide  (pdf) "**Tracing military records at Surrey History Centre**": http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/170761/Military-Records-at-Surrey-History-Centre,-Apr-09.pdf

To find out more about Surrey's diverse cultures see:
<http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/diversity/>.

Published works relating to the history of the Surrey regiments, Black soldiers and the Muslim Burial Ground, held at Surrey History Centre and other Surrey libraries can be searched for using the online Surrey Libraries catalogue

<https://arena.surreylibraries.org/web/arena/welcome>

We hope you have found this guide useful. If you have any suggestions for further additions please let us know.



**Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking, Surrey,
GU21 6ND,**

Tel: 01483 518737; shs@surreycc.gov.uk

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/surreyhistorycentre>

follow us on
twitter



@surreyheritage



<http://www.facebook.com/surreyheritage>