

Royal Air Force

As soon as man took to the skies, another means of engaging in warfare became available. First in balloons and then later in aeroplanes, Britain took to the skies.

A Bit of History

The first Army Balloon School was established at Woolwich Arsenal in 1878 after the Government War Office finally agreed that there was scope within the British Army for the use of balloons in warfare. However, by 1911, the War Office had decided that, with the invention of the aeroplane, the Balloon Section should be expanded to become an Air Battalion. But the trained pilots were few and far between. It was thought that there were just a total of 11 in the Army and only 8 in the Navy – not really enough for a fighting force.

March 13th 1912 saw the instigation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Bristol Scout and Sopwith bi-planes amongst others, played their parts in the battle of the skies in World War One. Following lessons learned during the Great War, the Royal Air Force finally came into being on 1st April 1918.

Air Force Ranks

Whatever role your ancestor played in the Royal Air Force, understanding the rank in which they served will help.

Officers

Marshal of the Royal Air Force
Air Chief Marshal
Air Marshal
Air Vice-Marshal
Air Commodore
Group Captain
Wing Commander
Squadron Leader
Flight-Lieutenant
Flying Officer
Pilot Officer

Other Ranks

Warrant Officer
Flight-Sergeant
Chief Technician
Sergeant
Corporal
Junior Technician
Senior Aircraftman
Leading Aircraftman
Aircraftman

Where are the Air Force records?

Whilst some records are held on various pay per view websites, the National Archives at Kew hold Service Records for Airmen (not officers) from 1918 to 1922, Commission and Promotion of Officers are also there from 1919. Other records may also be found in local Archives. First World War medal cards may also be seen for a small fee. For the service records of those who served in the Second World War, you will need to visit the Veterans Agency website and download the appropriate forms.

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If you are having problems in finding a particular Air Force or royal Flying Corps record or are too far away to pop in to Kew and have a look, someone else might be able to help you. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and post details of your ancestor. The members will be delighted to try to help. Also, if you have an Air Force record of your ancestor and have problems either reading the writing or understanding initials and abbreviations, post the details so that others can see if they can assist.

If you would like to discover additional information about the Royal Air Force, what life was like for those who served and the conflicts in which they fought, listed below are some products that will certainly help you to learn more, and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details.

- Essex and its Race for the Skies Ref: CSB-1088
- Heroes of Bomber Command, Cambridgeshire Ref: CSB-1053
- Love is in the Air Ref: JFP-03
- The Making Of The SAS And The World's Elite Forces Ref: MJB-CB273
- Tracing Your Second World War Ancestors Ref: CSB-60
- Voices From The Battle Of Britain (DVD) Ref: FTL-DVD10229
- WW1 Royal Flying Corps Ref: YBM-SKU930480110000
- 1879-1994 Military Courts Ref: FHI-CDMC

Parish Chest has a complete section that is dedicated to **Armed Forces** where you will find everything from Air Force Lists to WW1 Volunteers. Don't forget to use the website search box as well and pop in words such as **Air Force** or **Flying**.