

## **RAF Research Guidance Leaflet**

This guide has been published by Professional Genealogists Clare Wilson & Sarah Minney, both of whom have a personal interest in Air Force Research.

If you have any questions in relation to Air Force Research do not hesitate in getting in touch, their details are at the end of this document.



### **War Dead**

If a Family member lost their life whilst serving then there will be a listing on the Commonwealth War Graves Website. Not all personnel are listed under their Christian names, if you cannot find a listing when searching with Christian name then try with first initial only.

See <https://www.cwgc.org/>

Remember to check if they are commemorated on a War Memorial. These may be town memorials, school or even business memorials. Some men could be mentioned on several so check all avenues.

### **WW1 – Service Records/Medal Cards**

Service Records & Medal Cards are held by the National Archives in Kew with some Subscription Websites having copies.

See <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

### **WW2 - Applying for Service Records**

It is possible to apply for a copy of a WW2 Service Record if any of the following apply: -

- you're their immediate next of kin e.g., their spouse or parent
- you've got consent from their immediate next of kin
- you have a general research interest - you'll only have access to limited information, unless they died more than 25 years ago

You need to know the person's full name, date of birth and service number.

Depending on the links to this person a fee may apply & it is always advisable to obtain a copy of the persons death certificate to send along with this application.

See <https://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records/apply-for-someone-elses-records>

### **Canadian/Australian/New Zealand Service Records**

Canadian & Australian service records for those who lost their lives during WW2 are available via subscriptions websites & often provide information in relation to the circumstances of crashes. If a crew member came from overseas, it is worth checking to see what information is contained in their record.

Service Records of New Zealanders who lost their lives are not available although the Clare does have access to a database that provides information in relation to those who trained in Canada, their Service numbers, postings etc

Remember to check National Archives, Commemoration websites & newspaper Archives in these countries too

### **Air Historic Branch**

If your family member was involved in an Aircraft Accident the RAF Air Historical Branch may hold information on the crash investigation

See <https://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/units/air-historical-branch/>

Also check The National Archives (see Further details below)

In the case of Bomber Command, Dom Howard's database of Crash/Accident cards have been scanned & are freely available to view online

See <https://www.lancasterbombers.net/>

### **Operational & Combat Reports**

The National Archives hold RAF Operation Record Books, Appendices & Combat Reports indexed by Squadron & Date. These can easily be downloaded from their website (see Further details below)

See <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

If you are unsure what Squadron the person you are researching served with then The Genealogist website also has these. They are searchable by name/first initials, but again this is a subscription website

See <https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>

### **Training Units & Heavy Conversion Units**

Information in relation to these units have not yet been digitised by the National Archives.

Although downloadable records relating to some of the men who lost their lives whilst training are available via the National Archives website.

## **Casualties/Losses**

There are a range of RAF Losses books by various authors which detail information in relation to the operation, crash & crew as well as providing information on any airmen who lost their lives, evaded or were taken POW.

Some of these books are collated by year, others cover training units, losses in the middle east & Mediterranean & Rolls of Honour. Many of these books are now out of print, therefore some issues can be pretty expensive.

Most Aviation Researchers will already have a wide range of these & it would often be more cost effective to pay a researcher a couple of hours than buy 1 or 2 books.

## **Luftwaffe Claims**

There are various publications available which detail claims made by the Luftwaffe, these normally provide at the very least date/time, location, aircraft & if the aircraft was shot down by a night fighter or flak.

There are also books relating to Luftwaffe Aces which provide biographies of the men along with claims & often a photograph.

Again, most Aviation Researchers will have access to these books.

## **Prisoner of War Records**

Many of the records in relation to Prisoners of War are held at the National Archives (see Further details below)

A few of the Subscription websites also have information in relation to Prisoners of War which include indexes, questionnaires, camp histories etc

Information is also held with the International Red Cross

See <https://www.icrc.org/en/archives>

There are publications which also detail information in relation to those captured.

Some POW Camps are now Museums, if this is the case then it is worth checking if they have their own archive.

Many documents relating to Camp life are available, many are documented on Subscription websites & others are in the form of books, these give the reader an idea of the conditions that prisoners lived under.

## **Evaders**

On return to the UK Evaders provided statements in relation to their crash, evasion & the journey they took returning to the UK. Information can range from 1 page to several & these are held at the National Archives in Kew, some are now available to download & some still await digitisation.

There are various publications which also detail information in relation to those captured

## **War Crimes**

If an incident resulted in a War Crime being reported then information may be available via The National Archives although little at this stage has been digitised. A number of other Archives may also be consulted.

Read the National Archives Guide on researching these at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/war-crimes-1939-1945/>

Nuremberg Interrogation Reports & Safehaven Reports of War Crimes (Nazi Looting) are also available via Subscription sites.

## **Medals**

Information in relation to some Medal awards can be found on The National Archives Website along with many of the Subscription Websites (these mainly relate to Gallantry/Distinguished Conduct Medals)

Many of these can also be found in The Gazette (Previously the London, Edinburgh & Dublin Gazettes) a free online Newspaper website that details Awards, transfers, promotions etc

See <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

If your relative did not apply for their service medals then as next of kin you will be able to do so. This is only available for service from World War 2 onwards & the application would need to be posted along with a copy of the Service Record & Death Certificate

See <https://www.gov.uk/apply-medal-or-veterans-badge/apply-for-a-medal>

## **The Royal Air Force List**

Official lists for the RAF have been published since 1919. The lists of officers are arranged according to their role & rank. There are lists of officers in order of seniority, retired officer lists & alphabetical indexes

Books for both World Wars are available to view on the National Library of Scotland's Website

See <https://digital.nls.uk/british-military-lists/archive/93506069>

Some of these are also available to search via Subscription Websites.



## **Wills**

On signing up men were encouraged to write a will, so it is always worth checking for their will if they lost their lives during their service. The location of this may vary depending on where they lived.

## **Newspapers**

Newspapers can often detail information relating to Promotions, POWs, Obituaries, Crashes, Deaths etc. Keep your search as wide as possible as articles may feature in the local newspapers where the person lived, went to school, worked etc.

Depending on where the Aircraft crashed was you may manage to find information in relation to the crash.

Most Newspaper Archives websites online are on a Subscription basis.

## **Museums**

Can any museums assist you with your research? Check Museums in the UK as well as overseas, particularly if the person was involved in a crash overseas.

The Imperial War Museum contains a wealth of information in relation to the World Wars as well as holding their own Archive

See <https://www.iwm.org.uk/>

The International Bomber Command Museum in Lincoln has an amazing Museum & Archive

See <https://internationalbcc.co.uk/>

If your Family members served with Fighter Command then the Battle of Britain Museum in Kent may be of interest

See <http://www.kbobm.org/>

## **RAF Museum & Archive**

The RAF Museum has a wealth of information in relation to the force. They also have an archive that is searchable online

See <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/>

## **Records in private hands/Overseas Archives**

There are a number of independent researchers who hold databases, these could be in the UK or overseas.

It is always worth dropping an email to the Overseas Archive closest to where the crew crashed.

## **Squadron Associations**

Check to see if the Squadron your family member served with has an Association as these may hold more information in relation to their service. Often these Associations have their own Archives, Webpages & Social Media Pages.

## **Internet Search**

Don't forget an internet search! Try searching for squadron, names, aircraft number, places etc who knows what this might uncover.

**Suggested original documents to search at the National Archives TNA):**

<b><u>TNA Reference</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
AIR 1	Papers, mostly dated 1914 to 1918, received by the Air Historical Branch from Air Ministry Departments, from formations of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force and various other sources for use in the official history of the Air Ministry, squadron histories and operation narratives. Also includes registered files which originated in the Admiralty, Air Ministry, Ministry of Munitions and War Office. Included in this series are a large number of important papers collected for use in the official history of the department and which otherwise would have been in AIR 2, but which were kept separate by the Historical Branch of the Air Ministry and were placed in this series. This series is useful for World War 1 Record Operations Books.
AIR 2	Files of registered correspondence of the Air Ministry, including records which originated in the War Office, the Admiralty and the two Air Boards which preceded the Air Ministry. The series comprises policy, case, committee and miscellaneous papers and reports over the whole range of British air administration and related topics. With the unification of the Ministry of Defence in 1964, the Air Ministry became the Air Department of the Ministry of Defence, its registered files are generally to be found thereafter in DEFE 71, but there is some overlap with this series. 1887-1995 This series is useful for Recommendations for Awards to RAF personnel in World War 2.
AIR 27	Record books in this series provide a daily record of events in each squadron entered on Form 540, with appendices including some photographs (many of which may have different covering dates from those of the books themselves). Also included are some Operations Record Books (ORBs) for Dominion and allied air force squadrons under British command. Though the system of Operations Record Books started after the First World War few books in this series date from before the mid-1930s. Please note: Electronic images of AIR 27/1-2893 can be downloaded from the National Archives web site. <b>These can be used to trace a man's actual operational flights.</b>
AIR 28	This series consists of Operation Record Books (form 540) and appendices (form 541) for RAF Stations. Also included are some Operation Record Books for RAF Stations which, although under British command, were used by Dominion and allied air force units. Though the system of Operation Record Books started after the First World War, few books in this series date from before the mid-1930s. <b>Good series for getting a feel about the operations and work being done on each RAF station.</b>
AIR 29	This series consists of Operation Record Books (form 540) and appendices (form 541) for units of the RAF other than Commands, Wings, Squadrons or Stations. Also included are some ORBs for Dominion Air Force units operating as part of the RAF during the Second World War. Although the system of Operation Record Books started after the First World War, few Books in this series date from before the mid-1930s. <b>As AIR 28</b>
AIR 40	1926-1987 Air Ministry, Directorate of Intelligence and related bodies: Intelligence Reports and Papers This series consists of various intelligence reports, narratives, photographs and surveys of enemy capabilities and reports of operations carried out against the enemy and of interrogation of prisoners of war. A substantial number of files relate to the Air forces and Commands of the United States Army Air Force. Also included are some records of the Joint Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of Defence.



AIR 50	<p>Air Ministry: Combat Reports, Second World War</p> <p>Combat reports of squadrons, wings and groups in Fighter, Bomber and Coastal Commands and of Fleet Air Arm squadrons, of various Commonwealth and Allied units based in the United Kingdom including the United States Army Air Force; of miscellaneous units and flights; and of individual officers either of senior rank or otherwise distinguished.</p> <p>Digital copies of the Air Ministry Combat Reports (1939-1945) can be searched and downloaded.</p>
AIR 81	<p>Air Ministry: P4 (Cas) Files relating to casualties suffered during air operations and aircraft accidents 1939-1945. <b>Very useful when a man was involved in a downed aircraft. Often contain family information, sometimes going up to the 1970s'. These files were closed for a long time due to the sensitive nature of the material they contain. They are currently being reviewed and released to the public. Currently up to 1941 have been opened.</b></p>
WO 416	<p>This series comprises some pre-printed cards, containing personal details of some 200,000 individuals held by German Authorities during the Second World War, most relate to prisoners of war though there are several hundred relating to civilians. The collection also includes details of several thousand airmen whose bodies were found in German occupied territory. Cards are printed in old style German and have been completed in English, and are in a number of differing formats. Some cards have very few details completed whereas some include photographs and fingerprints of the prisoners. A few cards include chest x-rays, and there are separate, usually pink, cards which record basic medical conditions (if applicable). The number of cards for each individual varies from one to fifteen, but in most cases, there are just one or two.</p>
WO 344	<p>This series consists of approximately 140,000 Liberation Questionnaires completed by mainly British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War (PoWs) of all ranks and services, plus a few other Allied nationals and Merchant seamen. While the plans to question all liberated PoWs never materialised, these records nevertheless represent a large percentage of those still in captivity in 1945.</p> <p>Although the questionnaires for those held by Germany or Japan differ in appearance and format, the information they might provide is very similar. As well as giving personal details, name, rank, number, unit and home address, these records can include: date and place of capture; main camps and hospitals in which imprisoned and work camps; serious illnesses suffered while a prisoner and medical treatment received; interrogation after capture; escape attempts; sabotage; suspicion of collaboration by other Allied prisoners; details of bad treatment by the enemy to themselves or others.</p> <p>In addition, individuals were given the opportunity to bring to official notice any other matters, such as courageous acts by fellow prisoners or details of civilians who assisted them during escape and evasion activities. Consequently, additional documentation is sometimes attached.</p> <p>Both questionnaires also enquire if the prisoner had witnessed or had any information about war crimes. If so, they were required to complete a form 'Q'. These forms contained information about behaviour of enemy captors which could constitute illegal acts</p>

### **Bibliography:**

<p>“Tracing Your Air Force Ancestors, a guide for family historians” by Phil Tomaselli Published by Pen &amp; Sword Ltd. ISBN 978 1 78303 057 6</p>
<p>“Air Force Records for Family Historians” – Public Record Office Reader’s Guide No. 21 by William Spencer. ISBN: 1 873162 93 6</p>
<p>“Operational and Flying Accident Casualty Files at the National Archives” by Mary Hudson. ISBN: 978 1 526783 52 3</p>

### **Hiring a Professional Researcher:**

If you are unable to visit the National Archives in person, the mutual partnership of Clare Wilson & Sarah Minney, are available to undertake research on your behalf.

**Sarah Minney** is an experienced researcher based in London, not far from the National Archives at Kew. Sarah started using RAF records when researching her late father's Royal Air Force service using the above records. He served in 103 Squadron flying on bomber operations during 1943. Sarah also has good general knowledge of many other records at the National Archives as well as other London repositories.

Email – [sarahminney@gmail.com](mailto:sarahminney@gmail.com)

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**Clare Wilson** is a Scottish based researcher ideally situated between Glasgow & Edinburgh. Clare's Air Force Research began with the discovery that her Great Uncle was one of the Aces of WW1. It wasn't until she researched his younger Brothers service with Bomber Command during WW2 that she became obsessed with the subject. Having served with 102 Squadron & 35 Pathfinders Squadron his aircraft was shot down in 1943 & saw him spend the rest of the war in a POW Camp. Clare has gone on to become Archivist for 102 Squadron & works as part of the Research team at the Aircrew Remembrance Society. She has worked on various Air Force Research Projects, some of which can be viewed on her website & can provide talks on the subject.

Website – [www.treehousegenealogy.co.uk](http://www.treehousegenealogy.co.uk) Email – [enquiries@treehousegenealogy.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@treehousegenealogy.co.uk)

Or check out her dedicated website to Allied Air Force Research at [www.alliedairforceresearch.com](http://www.alliedairforceresearch.com) & sign up to the FREE Blog to receive articles & newsletters direct to your inbox.

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Why not join their Facebook Group 'Allied Air Force Research' at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/alliedairforceresearch>

Clare & Sarah also collaborate with Kerstin Devine, a native German speaker & qualified English/German AITI translator. Kerstin can provide German document transcripts/ translations & interpreting services should this be required as part of your research.

### **Useful addresses:**

The National Archives

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Kew

Richmond

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Phone: 020 8876 3444

Website: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>