



The National Archives

How the records are arranged

The National Archives contains 11 million publicly available documents created or collected by central government and the courts of law.

So, where do you start? Well, the documents in The National Archives are arranged by the government department or court that created them, and each department's documents have their own reference code.

For example, the personnel record of a First World War serviceman may be found among records created by the War Office or the Admiralty, but you may find other information about his life elsewhere. You may find out more about:

The man and his family in 1911 or earlier censuses...

His home and surroundings in the Valuation Office Survey...

His previous employment if he worked for a railway company...

Skeletons in the cupboard through our legal records...

So, information about the same event or person may have been recorded by several government departments for different purposes. If you want to find this information, you will need to search through the documents of each relevant department. Doing this may give you unexpected pieces of information or a different view on the same subject.