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SERVICE RECORDS OF TWO MILLION FIRST WORLD WAR BRITISH SOLDIERS NOW ONLINE

Definitive collection details the full military careers of English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh World War One soldiers

- **Records typically stretch to 16 pages for an individual soldier**
- **Famous names include Noel Coward and Basil Rathbone**
- **Collection will be of huge importance to everyone wanting to discover more about a war hero this Remembrance Day**

****Embargoed until 00:01 on 5th November 2009****

Ancestry.co.uk, the UK's leading family history website*, today completed the world first online launch of the **British Army World War One Service Records, 1914-1920**, which detail the full military careers of more than **two million** soldiers who served during World War One.

Service records contain a variety of information concerning all aspects of the army careers of those who completed their duty or were either killed in action or executed, including the soldier's name, date and place of birth, address, next-of-kin, former occupation, marital status, medical records, service history, regiment number, locations of service and discharge papers.

Each service record contains an average of **16 pages of personal information**; however they can contain as many as **60 pages**.

The **British Army World War One Service Records, 1914-1920** complement the **British Army World War One Pension Records, 1914-1920**, which are already online and contain **9.7 million pages** of personal information relating to almost **one million** discharged soldiers who, having sacrificed their own wellbeing for the war effort, suffered disabling sickness or injuries for which a pension was subsequently granted.

As approximately **60 per cent** of the paper originals of the service records were destroyed by fire when the War Office in London was struck by a bomb in 1940 during an air raid, the surviving **32.5 million** paper records now online have become known as the **'Burnt Documents'**.

Microfilm of the total **43 million pages** of paper originals which comprise the service and pension records are the second most viewed collection at **The National Archives**, which maintains the collection and is **Ancestry.co.uk's** official partner in hosting it online.

Together, the service and pension records form **the definitive source** of information in existence on more than **three million ordinary soldiers** who fought in the British Army during World War One. The sheer volume of material has meant that the collection has been digitised in stages in a process that has taken **three years**.

Among the surviving service records are those of a number of both famous and ordinary, brave soldiers, including:

- **Basil Rathbone** – *the British actor best known for the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes in 14 movies between 1939 and 1946 enlisted in the London Scottish Regiment in 1916. The*



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discharge papers within his service record describe his eyes and hair as 'dark' and his complexion as 'fresh'

- **Noel Pierce Coward** – *the flamboyant English playwright, director and actor was drafted for military duty in 1918. His service record details a head injury that saw him obtain an honourable discharge with a '30 per cent degree of disablement' – enough to receive a pension*
- **George Peachment** – *George's service record reveals he was awarded the Victoria Cross – an accolade he received for his bravery in saving the life of an officer near Hulluch, France, where he was later killed in action. His record also features a letter from his mother requesting his personal effects after his death and a journalist requesting a photograph of him*
- **Henry Mays** – *Henry's service record contains a letter from his sister revealing that he enrolled under a false name to avoid being traced by his mother. This solved a family mystery that had spanned 90 years (further details and interview available)*

The service records are the latest addition to **Ancestry.co.uk's** extensive British military collection, which includes the **World War One Medal Index Cards, 1914-1922**, detailing medal entitlements for more than 5.5 million soldiers, and the **British Army Prisoners of War, 1939-1945**, detailing more than 100,000 World War Two British POWs.

Ancestry.co.uk International Content Director Dan Jones comments: *"The service records will provide millions of people with information to help them better understand what their heroic ancestors were like as soldiers, including their performance in battle, their health and details of their general appearance.*

"These are a welcome addition to the millions of military records available online at Ancestry.co.uk, including our ever growing collection of World War Two records."

William Spencer, Military Records Specialist at **The National Archives**, comments: *"It is fitting that the digitisation of surviving First World War soldiers' records of service should be completed at this time. With Harry Patch's death last July, any direct living connection to these records has finally been severed and marks the passing of this significant period in British military activity into history.*

Digitising these records makes them accessible to people around the world, many of whom had ancestors who served in the "war to end all wars", and who will now be able to discover so much more about them."

ENDS

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION / INTERVIEWS:

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NOTE TO EDITORS

*Based on market share of visits among all UK websites in the Hitwise Lifestyle - Family industry category, January-June 2009

ABOUT ANCESTRY.CO.UK

Ancestry.co.uk is officially the UK's leading family history website. It has more than 820 million searchable family history records in major collections including the England, Wales and Scotland Censuses from 1841 to 1901, the England and Wales Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1837-2005, World War One British Army Service and Pension Records, UK and Ireland Parish and Probate Records and the British Phone Books, 1880-1984.



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Ancestry.co.uk was launched in May 2002 and belongs to the global network of Ancestry websites (wholly owned by Ancestry.com Operations *Inc.*), which contains **four billion family history records**. To date more than **11 million family trees** have been created and over **one billion names** and **22 million photographs** uploaded. **8.2 million unique visitors** log on to an Ancestry website every month (comScore, June 2009).

The Ancestry global network of family history websites: www.ancestry.com in the US, www.ancestry.co.uk in the UK, www.ancestry.ca in Canada, www.ancestry.com.au in Australia, www.ancestry.de in Germany, www.ancestry.it in Italy, www.ancestry.fr in France, www.ancestry.se in Sweden and www.jiapu.com in China.