

Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

Autograph First World War Diary of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, 1914-1919.

2014-64

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The First World War shaped the world throughout the 20th century, and profoundly affected the combatant nations in an unprecedented way. The war continues to resonate with researchers and the general public alike, and the role of the armies and the generals who led millions of men into battle, is a key component in its history. Field Marshal Douglas Haig commanded the largest British Army ever assembled, and for his role as Commander-in-Chief has become arguably the most controversial general in the Army's history.

Haig kept a diary throughout the war, and this iconic document forms part of his personal papers at the National Library of Scotland. The diary is of both national and international importance because it lies at the heart of the documentary evidence that has informed modern opinion on the First World War. Used by a succession of international scholars, it provides insight into how and why decisions were made, and of the interplay between Haig and other Allied generals. As undoubtedly the most detailed and extensive account kept by any senior commander during the war, the diary is unique. Written in these circumstances, it offers an immediacy that few documentary sources can in the day-to-day record of this cataclysm.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

The National Library of Scotland.

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The National Library of Scotland owns Earl Haig's First World War diary, which is part of the Haig Collection.

2.3 Contact person(s)

Alison Metcalfe, Curator, Manuscript and Archive Collections, National Library of Scotland

2.4 Contact details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>
Alison Metcalfe	Manuscript and Archive Collections, National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW

Telephone

Facsimile

Email

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Autograph First World War Diary of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, 1914-1919. The diary forms part of the Haig Collection, owned by and in the custody of the National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW.

3.4 History/provenance

The Haig Collection was deposited at the National Library of Scotland (NLS) by Field Marshal Haig's son, the Second Earl Haig, in 1961, and acquired for the nation by purchase in 1983.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address	Telephone	Facsimile	Email
National Library of Scotland (owner and custodian of the Haig papers)	Contact: Alison Metcalfe, Curator, Manuscript and Archive Collections, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW	0131 623 3874	0131 623 3874	a.metcalf@nls.uk

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	Telephone	Facsimile	Email

4.3 Legal status

The National Library of Scotland (NLS), a publicly funded body, is the owner and custodian of the Haig Collection, of which Haig's First World War autograph diary forms part.

The Board of Trustees are legally responsible for the general management and control of the NLS, and for ensuring that its collections are maintained and made accessible. In practice, they delegate much of the responsibility for this to the senior management of the NLS, who determine the practical detail of policies on storage, preservation and access to the collections.

Immediate responsibility for the Haig Collection lies with Alison Metcalfe, Curator, Manuscript and Archive Collections, who is the contact for the nomination.

4.4 Accessibility

Access to the original diary is in line with the normal access procedures for all heritage collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS). This ensures access within a secure, invigilated reading room to anyone who wishes to consult the diary and who has registered as a user with the NLS.

Anyone wishing to consult the diary must register as a reader with the National Library of Scotland, but thereafter there are no restrictions on access to the original document.

4.5 Copyright status

The diary is still in copyright, which remains with the descendants of Field Marshal Haig.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

After Field Marshal Haig's death in 1928 his First World War diary, along with the rest of his papers, remained at the family home with his widow and son, the Second Earl Haig, where it was consulted by numerous researchers. The Second Earl deposited Haig's papers including the autograph diary at the NLS in 1961, and the collection was purchased in 1983. Along with the entire collection, the diary has been freely accessible to researchers for over 50 years and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity.

5.2 World significance

As nations across the world mark the centenary of the First World War, and public interest is greatly heightened, Haig's diary takes on a new level of significance. The document itself is unique since no other commander is known to have undertaken to keep such a detailed, extensive or continuous diary, and the creation of this document at such a pivotal moment in world history makes it all the more remarkable. The sheer scale of the diary – that it covers almost every day of the war – makes it a truly comprehensive account, albeit from the perspective of a single individual, and is perhaps why it has proved to be a key part of the documentary evidence. As a record of the strategy and activity of those engaged in waging the 'war to end all wars', the diary remains central to our understanding of the war, how it was fought, and the role of the British Army, her commanders and her allies. That the diary continues to be well used by historians of the First World War is testament to this centrality.

The diary stands as a record of how a man, an army and, indeed, the allied nations, adapted to an increasingly modern conflict. Arguably the most controversial general in the history of the British Army, at the end of the war Haig was considered something of a national hero, not least for the part he played in delivering victory in the battles which finally brought the war to an end. Haig's reputation was further cemented on the international stage in the years after the war, as he devoted much of the remainder of his life to work connected with the welfare of

ex-servicemen. In the years after his death in 1928, however, Haig's reputation was eroded to the extent that in the popular conscience at least he came to be vilified as the man more than any other responsible for the high casualty rate of the British Army. Regardless of one's opinion of Haig's own character or level of success in adapting to modern warfare, there is no doubt that the British Army underwent terrific change during the First World War, emerging as a very different force by 1918. All combatant nations, too, changed irrevocably during the war; for example, British factories, often staffed by women, adapted to deliver weapons and munitions on the scale required to keep her army supplied and fulfil the strategies set out by the senior commanders.

The diary is irreplaceable because, without it, the understanding we have today of the First World War would be greatly diminished. Successive research using the diary has had an enormous impact on our fundamental appreciation of the First World War, and the years of controversy surrounding Haig's contribution to the war have greatly coloured popular perceptions of the way the war was fought.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

The First World War was undeniably a pivotal period in British and global history. That the diary was written during this period, covers the entire duration of the war, and has that immediacy of having been written at the Western Front by such a prominent figure, make it a particularly evocative document.

2 Place

The First World War was, of course, fought across many arenas, but the Western Front was the most significant in terms of the size of the armies and the numbers of casualties sustained. In many ways the Western Front captures the essence of what the war was: one of attrition, where the wearing down of one's enemy in every aspect was the only way to deliver victory and bring an end to the conflict. Since the end of the war, the Western Front has in popular terms, rightly or wrongly been seen as the epitome of everything that the First World War was about. Mud, gas, tanks, the Somme, Ypres and other key elements that figure highly in popular associations with the war all stem from the Western Front, and Haig's diary offers a direct window into it.

3 People

Although in recent years many historians have shifted their focus away from the personalities of individual generals and their competence in command, their role in the First World War is still debated. Haig has continued to be probably the most lambasted general ever to have commanded the British Army and as his diary is his own account written as events unfolded in France, Belgium and beyond, it is fundamental evidence of what he was thinking and how his strategies took shape. It also gives an insight into his sometimes difficult relationships with key figures, such as David Lloyd George, Marshals Foch and Petain and other leading commanders and politicians, which contributes to the diary's international significance.

4 Subject and theme

The First World War, the British Army at the Western Front, and the role of commanders

including Haig, continue to capture the imagination of a broad spectrum of researchers as well as the general public, and the subject features on school and university curricula in the UK. Furthermore, a great deal of activity is planned during the centenary period to enhance school students' understanding of the war, including visits to the battlefields and cemeteries of France and Belgium. Haig's diary is central to our fundamental understanding of the war, and the content can be used in many ways to help explain the subject to anyone undertaking to study it.

5 Form and style

Although Haig was not the only senior commander to keep a diary during the First World War, he was certainly the most prolific and most significant figure to do so. It is an intriguing reflection of Haig's character that he created this record, and even more so to consider why he chose to diarise his command. Diaries of all ranks during the war have survived, and were perhaps written in an attempt to make sense of the war and the individual's place in it. Perhaps in common with these diarists, Haig was attempting to impose sense and order through his diary, or perhaps it was written with an eye to his post-war reputation. Whatever one's view on why Haig chose to write the diary, it remains an iconic document from a seminal moment in world history.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

Although the last of those who fought in and survived the war are no longer with us, people are alive today whose childhood was punctuated, punctured and fractured by living in households where the day-to-day implementation of the military strategy of commanders like Haig marked a generation and its offspring. The diary can be seen as a representation of the detachment of the senior command of the British Army from the ordinary soldier and his suffering. Haig, and the part he played in the war, has continued to starkly divide opinion, a popular opinion influenced by negative depictions of Haig in British popular culture, such as 'Oh! What a Lovely War!' and 'Blackadder Goes Forth'; in this context, the diary is a very emotive document.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The diary is unique as a contemporary record of the First World War made as events unfolded by an individual with a pivotal role. More widely, no equivalent personal diary kept by any other British Commander-in-Chief is known; for example, the diary of First Viscount Montgomery of Alamein was written up from notes compiled by his staff officers.

6.2 Integrity

The diary is completely intact and in excellent condition.
