

Second Lieutenant Leslie Norton Rolason*, Grandson of the founder of Rolason Jewellers

*The earlier spelling of the name was Rollason until 1839 onwards when it was mainly spelled Rolason.

Leslie's grandfather was William Rollason* born in Birmingham on 28th April 1816 to Thomas, a brass founder, and his wife Elizabeth. William was baptised three months later on 17th July at St Martin's Church (now known as St Martin in the Bull Ring), then in the Borough of Birmingham. At the time of William's birth the family home was in Hurst Street, Birmingham.

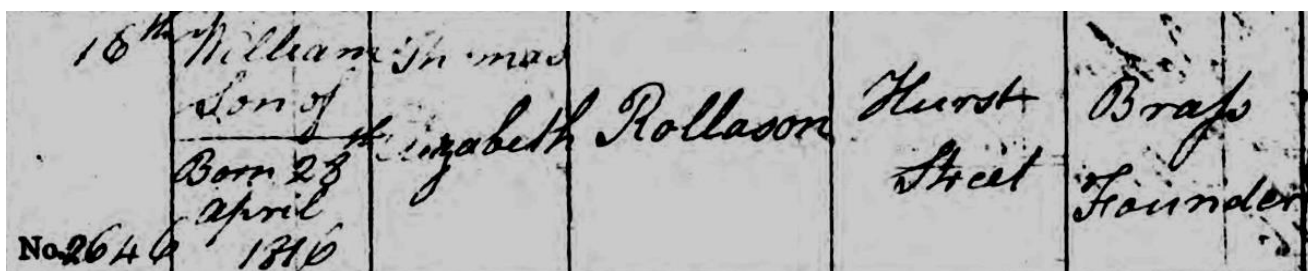


Figure 1: Baptismal record of William Rollason

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
67	20th January 1839	William Rolason	Full age	Bachelor	Jeweller	Bromsgrove Street Birmingham	Thomas Rolason	Brassfounder
		Elizabeth Hope	Full age	Spinster		Bromsgrove Street Birmingham	John Hope	Butcher

Married in the Register Office according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the By Certificate before by me, John Rolason

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Rolason and Elizabeth Hope in the Presence of us, Joseph Rolason, Joseph Rolason, Thomas Rolason, John Rolason, James Rolason, William Rolason

William Rolason Elizabeth Hope John Rolason James Rolason William Rolason

Figure 2: Marriage certificate of William Rolason to Elizabeth Hope

William became a jeweller and at the age of twenty-two he married Elizabeth Hope on 20th January 1839 at Birmingham Register Office. Soon after the marriage Elizabeth gave birth to their first child George Thomas, followed by John William on 29th August 1840 and Elizabeth Hope on 4th July 1842. George unfortunately died in the summer of 1844, aged five and William's wife early the following year. At the time of their marriage William and Elizabeth lived in Bromsgrove Street round the corner from Hurst Street but by the time of the 1841 census the family had moved to Brearley Street, Hockley Birmingham.

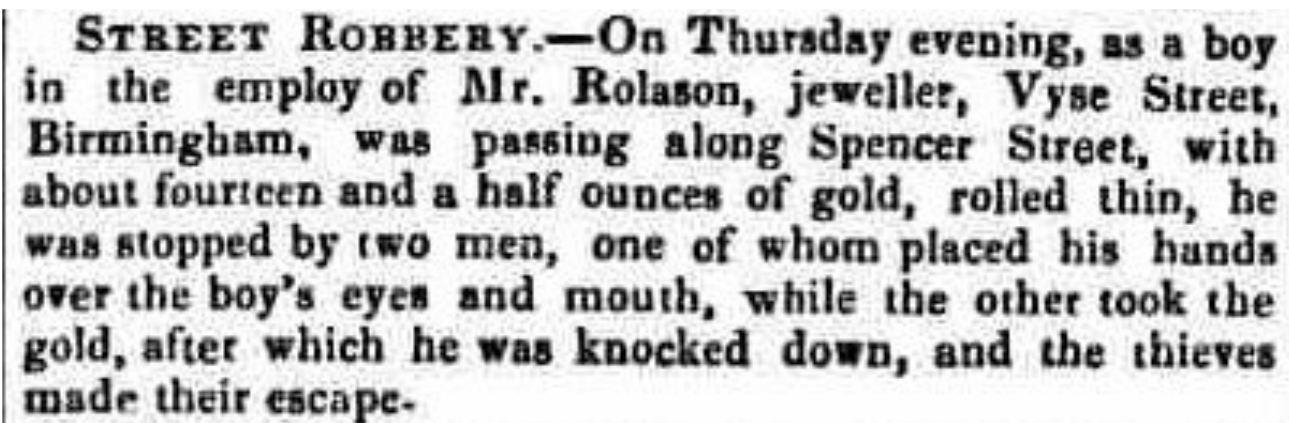
A year after his wife's death in 1845, William remarried. His second wife was Caroline Adkiss Vine, the daughter of John Vine, a Japanner, and his wife Frances (Fanny) of

Summer Lane, Aston. A Japanner was someone who applied a lacquer finish to objects to make them appear glossy. Summer Lane was in an area known for its back-to-back houses, workshops and small manufacturing outlets. At the beginning of the 19th century it was considered a reputable area, but as the years passed, the houses and accompanying courts became significantly overcrowded leading to many health problems. William is listed as a 'manufacturing jeweller' in *Slater's National Directory* for 1846 working from Great Hampton Row but by 1849. *The Francis White Directory*, recorded William's working address as 81 Vyse Street, Hockley Birmingham.ⁱ

The 1851 census records that 81 Vyse Street was also William's residential address where he and Caroline together with her mother Fanny, two surviving children from his first marriage, and two children by his second marriage, Caroline Adkiss (born 1848) and Annie Jane (born 1850), lived. Not long after the census was taken, on 30th March, Caroline gave birth to her third child Emily Adkiss. That summer Annie died and tragically Emily and her mother the following year. Caroline was just thirty two and her daughter just barely one years old.ⁱⁱ

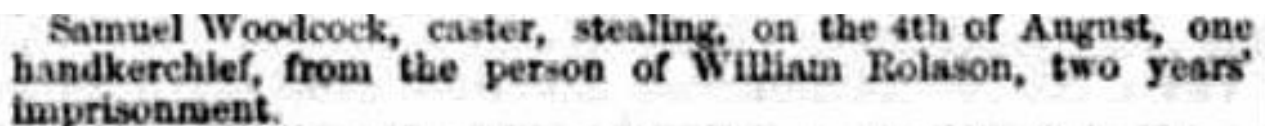
With three surviving children aged from four to twelve years old to care for, William married again in late 1852. His third and last wife was Sarah Gilbert. Sarah gave birth to a further six children: Sarah Gilbert (1854), Emma Jane (1856), Ada Hannah (1867), Charles Frederick (1858), Fanny (1860) and Joseph Gilbert (1861).

The jewellery trade was often a target for theft and William's business was no exception. The three following newspaper reports are evidence for this.



STREET ROBBERY.—On Thursday evening, as a boy in the employ of Mr. Rolason, jeweller, Vyse Street, Birmingham, was passing along Spencer Street, with about fourteen and a half ounces of gold, rolled thin, he was stopped by two men, one of whom placed his hands over the boy's eyes and mouth, while the other took the gold, after which he was knocked down, and the thieves made their escape.

Figure 3: *Worcester Journal*, Thursday 4th November 1852



Samuel Woodcock, caster, stealing, on the 4th of August, one handkerchief, from the person of William Rolason, two years' imprisonment.

Figure 4: *Birmingham Journal*, Saturday 5th October 1856

Joseph Watkins, aged 19, a jeweller, residing in Great Russell-street, was charged with stealing a quantity of scrap gold, the property of his master, Mr. W. Rolason, Vyse-street, Hockley.—Detective Yates stated that he was sent for to the manufactory of Mr. Rolason on the previous night at eight o'clock, and on searching the prisoner found in his pocket a paper containing a quantity of scrap gold. Mr. Rolason was present, and on seeing it said "that's a portion of the gold I have lost." He pointed out marks on the gold by which he could identify it. The prisoner was asked if he wished to give any account of the matter, when he replied "not then." He was then taken into custody.—The prosecutor said that Watkins was his apprentice, and had been in his employ six years. On Thursday morning he marked the gold given out to the prisoner, and which was found in his possession the same evening. Mr. Rolason further stated that during the last three months he had been losing gold to the extent of 3*l*. or 4*l*. per week.—By the advice of his solicitor, Mr. Palmer, the prisoner pleaded guilty, and he was sent to the House of Correction for six calendar months.

Figure 5: *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, Monday 8th December 1856

There was a further report of the theft of eleven rings and fifteen broaches from the warehouse of William Rolason in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* on 11th January 1866.

William became active in politics in his local ward, initially as a burgess, a merchant or craftsman who owned property in the borough and was allowed to trade free of charge. It meant he could also attend local council meetings to raise issues that affected his livelihood. In 1865 he was elected as a councillor for St Paul's Ward. He was described as 'A good man of business and hard worker, and an active and resolute business man'.ⁱⁱⁱ At the time William was employing '5 men, 5 youths and 4 women' in his business.^{iv} His job as a councillor was to ensure the welfare and interests of his ward. He relinquished his position after nine years in November 1874.^v

ST. PAUL'S WARD ELECTION.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—
 Accept my best Thanks for the 1,219 good Votes polled on my behalf on Monday last; nineteen other Votes were recorded in my favour, giving me a majority, but being informal were not counted.
 In taking a Farewell of my Friends and the Burgesses of St. Paul's Ward, a large majority of whom I have represented for nine years in the Town Council, and worked with generally for the last thirty Years, allow me to Thank you for the kindness received at your hands, and to hope that your new Representative will give that time and attention which this important Ward demands.
 To my Committee and Canvassers my Thanks are especially due, and are hereby tendered, for the labour performed by them against the organisation to which they were opposed.
 Yours faithfully,
W. ROLASON.
 81, Vyse Street, Birmingham, November 4, 1874.

William's son's, John, Charles and Joseph, set up their own business Rolason Brothers working from 80 Vyse Street and also their father's premises next door at 81 from around 1887.^{vi} The year 1887 represents the first appearance of their hall mark.



Figure 6
Hall Mark for the Rolason
Brothers from 1887 to 1894



Figure 7
(Above) Stirling silver
enamelled Vesta case,
Rolason Brothers, 1909

(Near right)
Solid silver Rolason Brothers
napkin ring, 1898

(Far right)
9 carot Rolason Brothers Arts
and Crafts Suffragette heart
necklace, 1912

ROLASON BROS.
81, VYSE STREET, BIRMINGHAM.
**MANUFACTURING GOLD & SILVERSMITHS,
DIAMOND MOUNTERS AND MEDALLISTS.**

9 ct. & 15 ct. GOLD.	Hall Marked SILVER.
Brooches. Pins. Bracelets.	Medals and Badges.
Topaz & Amethyst Brooches.	Locketts. Match Boxes.
Scarf Slides. Earrings.	Cigarette Cases.
Box and Glass Brooches.	Serviette Rings. Card Cases.
Enamelled Brooches.	Coin Mounts. Buckles.
Hall Marked Duty Paid	Paper Knives and Book
Medals for Athletic Sports,	Markers.
&c.	
Nickel Cigarette Cases and Match Boxes.	
THESE GOODS MAY BE HAD THROUGH ALL MERCHANTS.	

Figure 8: An advertisement for Rolason Brothers dated 1889



In August 1889, The British Trade Journal advertised a new button hook made by the Rolason Brothers. The citation reads:

Messrs. Rolason Brothers, manufacturing jewellers, 81, Vyse Street, Birmingham, have brought out a useful article in the form of a new pattern button-hook, combined also as a button-hook and pencil-case, which is selling remarkably well. It forms a useful addition to a lady's chatelaine, being so made that it can readily be applied either for writing or for buttoning gloves. When it is not being used it closes up over the handle, thus forming a pretty ornament, not in the least catchy like the old-fashioned hooks. Simply as a button-hook without pencil, it presents a novel design, and a decided improvement on the patterns heretofore made. It is manufactured in silver and in various alloys.^{vii}

Businesses in Birmingham were subject to regular safety inspections. As a result of one such inspection, the Rolason Brothers were prosecuted on the 22nd December 1893 for neglecting to fence off the fly-wheel on their gas-engine by which one of their employees was injured. They were fined £1 and 14s.

Charles, the first of two sons by Sarah, was educated at the Birmingham Middle-Class School in Frederick Street, Newhall Hill where he matriculated in 'Magnetism and Electricity' in 1875.^{viii} On leaving school he joined the family business as a jeweller.^{ix}

BIRMINGHAM
MIDDLE - CLASS SCHOOL,
FREDERICK ST., NEWHALL HILL,
MR. EDWARD BALL.

TERMS :

English, French, Drawing, Chemistry, and Mathematics.

One guinea per quarter, in advance, for pupils under 15.

Two ditto ditto ditto over 15.

Quarter commences from any date.

A prospectus may be had at 22, Congreve Street,
71, High Street, or at the School. [145]

Figure 9: *Illustrated Midland News*, Saturday 2nd October 1869

Charles married Katherine Ellen Norton in early 1886. They had three children: Dorothy, born 7th January 1887, Helen, born 31st May 1888 and Leslie Norton born 12th February 1890.

In August 1888, three months after his second daughter was born, Charles dissolved his partnership with Rolason Brothers and Richardson & Co. to become a 'grocer and provision merchant'.^x Kelly's Directory of 1888 is the last time he appears in it as a 'jeweller see the Rolason Brothers'.

Charles then secured 253 Wheeler Street, Aston as a grocers shop rented from Mr W Janney of 41 Hall Road, Handsworth. On 19th August 1890 Charles applied to 'the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Aston and the Superintendant of Police' for a licence to sell wine and spirits at his shop to be 'drunk or consumed off the premises'. His application was successful.^{xi} The 1891 census indicated that 253 Wheeler Street was also home to himself and Katherine and their three children together with a domestic servant.

TO the Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Aston, in the Division of Aston, in the County of Warwick; and to the Superintendent of Police of the division within which the House and Premises hereinafter mentioned are situate, and to all whom it may concern. I, **CHARLES FREDERICK ROLASON**, now residing at No. 253, Wheeler Street, in the parish of Aston, aforesaid, Grocer, do hereby give you Notice that it is my intention to **APPLY** at the General Annual Licensing Meeting for the Division of Aston, in the county of Warwick, to be holden at the Court of Summary Jurisdiction, sitting at Victoria Road, Aston, on the 12th day of September, 1890, for a **LICENSE** authorising me to apply for and hold an Excise License to Sell **WINE** in pursuance of the Act 23 Vict., Cap. 27, Section 3, and Acts amending the same; an additional Excise License to Sell **SPIRITS**, in pursuance of the Act 24 and 25 Vict., Cap. 21, Section 2, to be drunk or consumed off the premises, at the house or shop situate and being No. 253, Wheeler Street, Aston aforesaid, of which W. Janney, of No. 41, Hall Road, Handsworth, is the owner, and which is now occupied by me as a grocer's shop.—Given under my hand this nineteenth day of August, One thousand eight hundred and ninety.

237 **CHARLES FREDERICK ROLASON.**

Figure 10: Charles' application for a licence to sell alcohol in August 1890

Two years later, the business was in trouble. In January 1891 Charles advertised the sale of his horse, 'a 15.2 splendid hunter together with its equestrian harness'.^{xii} Four months later his business was also up for sale.^{xiii} In a 'Deed of Assignment' dated 13th May 1891 and filed on 20th May under Mr F. M. Sharp, of 120 Colmore Road, Birmingham, accountant and trustee. With assets of £358 19s and unsecured liabilities of £1,315 17s 11p (owing about £93,000 in today's money) Charles was financial situation was not looking good.^{xiv}

RE CHARLES FREDERICK ROLASON, of 253, Wheeler Street, Birmingham, Grocer, Tea Dealer, Provision Merchant, and Dealer in Wines and Spirits.
The Trustee is authorised to DISPOSE of the BUSINESS lately carried on by the above.
The Shop is situated at the corner of Wheeler Street and Gerard Street.
There is a ready-money and family Trade. Shop fitted with mahogany and marble Fittings.
Rent £55. per annum.
The whole to be Sold at a Valuation, including the Book Debts.
For further particulars, apply to the Trustee, F. M. Sharp, 120, Colmore Row, Chartered Accountant; or Messrs. Bradley and Cuthbertson, Solicitors, 53, Colmore Row, both of Birmingham. 718

Figure 11: The disposal of Charles' business in May 1891

[illegible]

What happened after he arrived in Australia is unclear but on 28th December 1895 he died 'at sea'. Probate was eventually granted nearly four years later on 27th September 1899. Charles left an estate of £32, about £3,248 in today's money.

Figure 13: National Probate Record for Charles Frederick Rolason, 1899

After the death of her husband, Katherine, and her three young children moved in with her parents Sydney and Ellen Norton at 124, Pershore Road, Northfield. Sydney was a cordwainer from Somerset. A cordwainer is someone who makes new shoes from leather rather than a cobbler who repairs them. In the 1901 census he was described as a 'leather dealer and boot and shoe factor'.

Charles son, Leslie, was admitted to King Edward's School in September 1901. At school, Leslie was a promising gymnast, winning proxime (that is coming second), in the Lower Removes for the high jump when he was fifteen, although he showed far less aptitude for academic work. After leaving school in 1905 he went on to become a jeweller with the Rolason Brothers.^{xvi}

Leslie's grandfather, William Rolason, died on 11th January 1902. His estate of £69,313 3s 5p is worth about £6,729,422 in today's money.

ROLASON William of "Oak-hill" Upland-road Selly Hill Northfield Worcestershire gentleman died 11 January 1902 Probate **Worcester** 25 February to John William Rolason and Joseph Gilbert Rolason jewellers Effects £69313 3s. 5d. + 10500d. probt

Leslie's other grandfather, Sydney Norton, died in 1907 and left a considerable amount of money too, £15,707 19s 11d (about £1,492,601 in today's money). Katherine must have inherited enough money to move to a substantial house at 118, Gough Road. The 1911 census records her living on 'private means'. She later moved to 'Hillcrest', Wellington Road, Edgbaston, another well-to-do area of Birmingham.

NORTON Sydney of Northfield-house Selly-park (near Birmingham) Worcestershire leather-dealer and boot and shoe-factor died 31 March 1907 Probate **Worcester** 31 May to John Howard Heaton chartered-accountant and John Rolason jeweller Effects £15607 16s. 3d. Resworn £15707 19s. 11d.

In May 1906, John William and Joseph Gilbert dissolved the Rolason Brothers partnership, as John had reached the age sixty-five. Joseph continued the business until he too reached retirement age in 1926^{xvii}

After the outbreak of war, Leslie enlisted for the duration of war, on 28th August 1914, as a Trooper with the 3rd County of London Yeomanry, a volunteer cavalry regiment originally raised in 1901. It was based in Allitsen Road, St John's Wood, London.

In accordance with the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907 which brought the Territorial Force (TF) into being, the TF was intended to be a home defence force for service during wartime and members could not be compelled to serve outside the country. However, on the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914, many members volunteered for Imperial Service. Therefore, TF units were split in August and September 1914 into 1st Line units (liable for overseas service) and 2nd Line units (home service for those unable or unwilling to serve overseas). Leslie chose to serve in the 1st line.

The 1st Line London Regiment gathered at its war station at Cavalry Barracks, Hounslow. It joined 2nd Mounted Division on 2nd September at Streatley, Berkshire, where the brigades dispersed for training due to the lack of water supplies. The division moved to East Anglia in November 1914, with the London Mounted Brigade stationed round North Walsham.

Early in March 1915 the division was warned to prepare for overseas service,

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
ROLASON Leslie L. N.	3/6 of Lond. Yps	P6	1204
	C 87 th Lr	-	26528
	9/ Lond. R.	2/Lt	—
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY			* in R.F.R. C-1/120 B 196 Com. 28. 2. 17
BRITISH			
15 STAR	C. 1. 2 B 1	624	
Theatre of War first served in	(3) Egypt		
Date of entry therein	28. 2. 15		

NW/3/2212 K. 1380

Figure 14: Medal Record Index for Leslie Norton Rolason

On 14 April 1915, the regiment departed from Avonmouth docks for Egypt, arriving at Alexandria. Leslie's WW1 Medal Card recorded his arrival in Egypt on 28th April 1915. The regiment was posted to the Suez Canal Defences near Ismailia by the middle of May and its parent brigade was designated 4th (London) Mounted Brigade. The regiment was dismounted in August 1915 for service in the Gallipoli Campaign. It left a squadron headquarters and two troops (about 100 officers and men) in Egypt to look after the horses.

The regiment landed at Suvla Bay on the morning of 18th August and moved into reserve positions at Karakol Dag. It moved to "C" Beach, Lala Baba on 20th August. The following day, it advanced to Chocolate Hill under heavy fire and took part in the attack on Hill 112 (the Battle of Scimitar Hill). The Yeomanry brigades advancing in

squadron columns 'presented such a target as artillerymen dream of' and suffered heavy casualties as they 'stumbled blindly forward into battle'. When the first column reached Green Hill and occupied the trenches there, they were 'chock full of dead and dying' from the earlier attack by 86th Brigade. It was ordered to retire during the night and the survivors were back at Lala Baba by 04.30. Leslie was wounded during the attack.^{xviii}

Leslie served in Gallipoli until 3rd December 1915 when he was invalided home with typhoid (known then as enteric fever). His service with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force came to an end on 24th January 1916.^{xix}

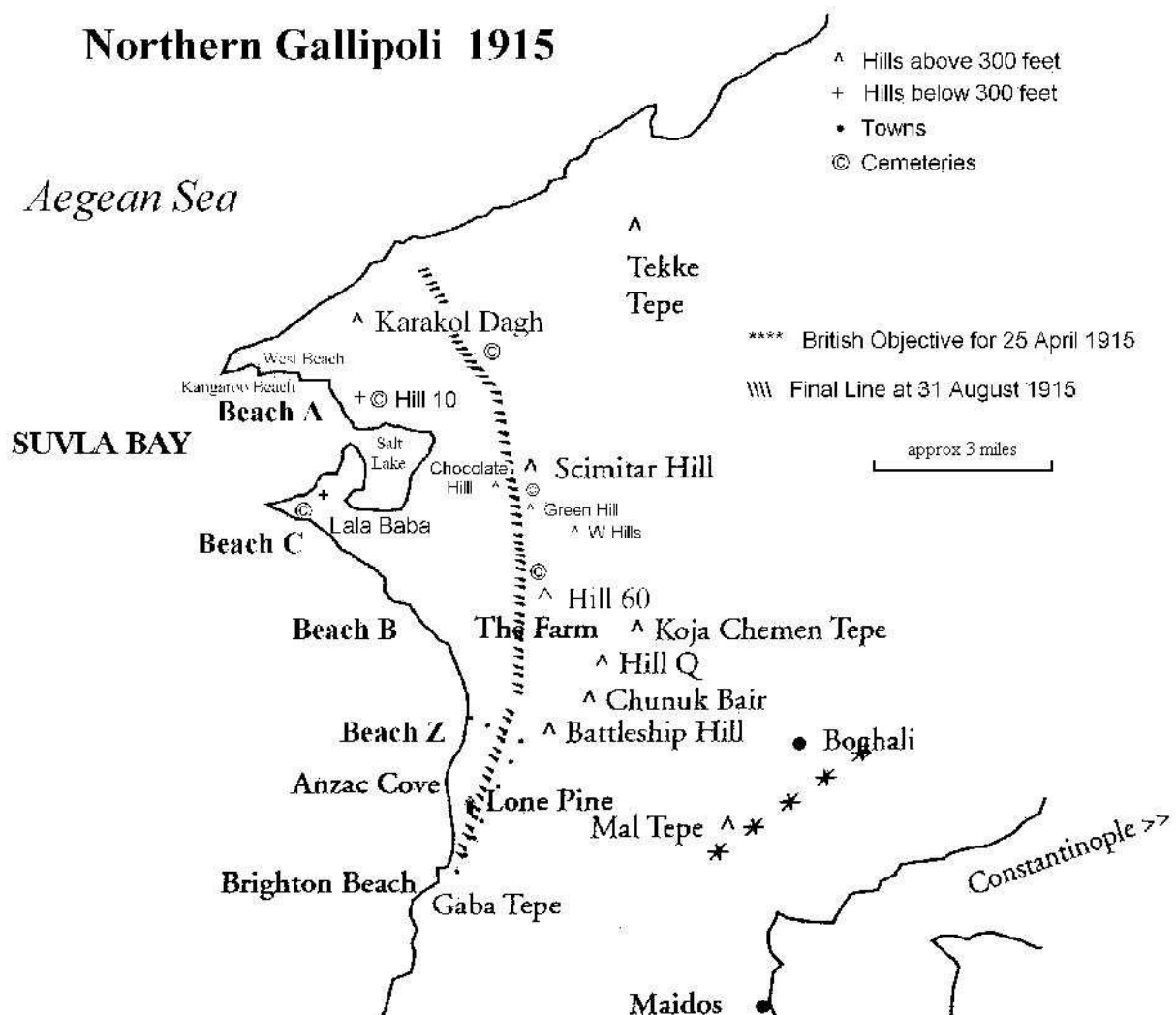


Figure 15: Map of the Suvla Bay landings in 1915

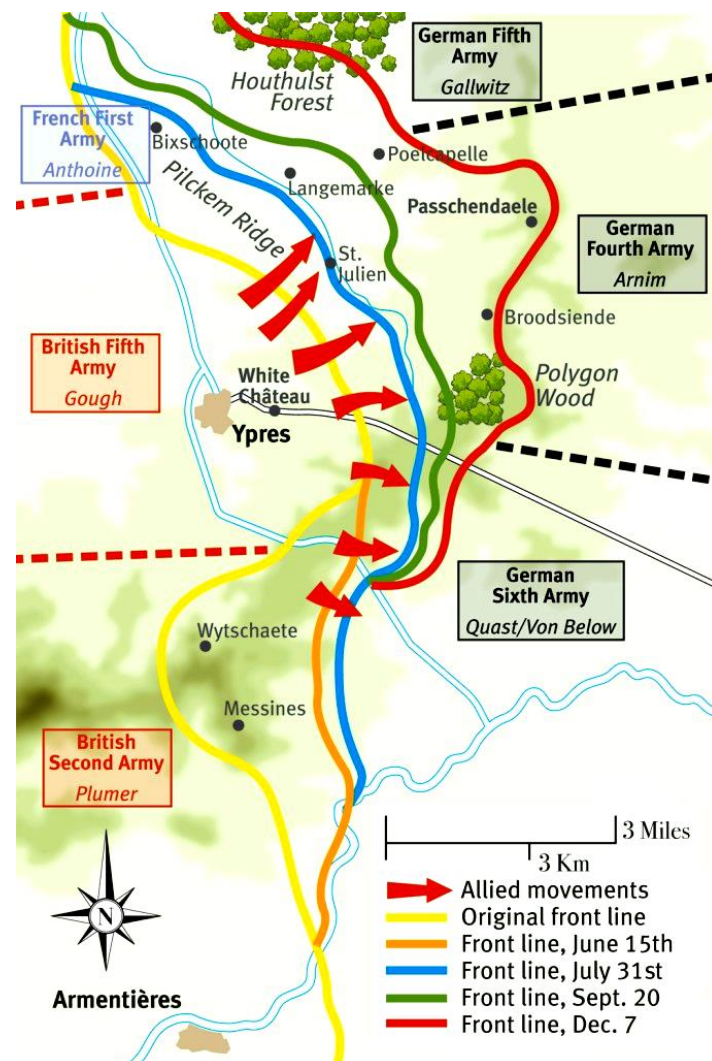
Back in England, Leslie was recommended for Officer Training at Bristol. He received his commission on 28th February 1917 and was subsequently discharged from the Yeomanry joining the 2/9th (2nd Queen Victoria's Rifles) London Regiment as a Second Lieutenant and arrived in France on 1st March 1917 to join his regiment, part of the 58th Division.



Figure 16
Second Lieutenant
Leslie Norton Rolason

Leslie was wounded for a second time on 25th May 1917 in a charge on Bullecourt.

He was sufficiently recovered from his injuries to be back in action near Ypres, Belgium where the 2/9 London Regiment had been based since 6th September. He was to take part in what became known as the Battle of Polygon Wood commencing 26th September 1917. It was the second phase of the Third Battle of Ypres. The battle was fought in the area from the Menin road to Polygon Wood and thence north, to the area beyond St Julien (see map below).^{xx} Much of the woodland had been destroyed by the huge quantity of shellfire from both sides since 16th July and the area had changed hands several times. Leslie was killed in action on the first day of the attack aged twenty-seven. His body was never recovered,



The 2/9th London Regiment war diary entry for 25th September 1917 reads:

"Moved up to the line. HQ at CLUSTERS HOUSES preparing for the attack in am"

The entry for 26 September reads:

"5.50 am, ZERO hour. The Bn attacked. 58 prisoners passed through HQ. We had very little news through from Coys (Companies). All Coys consolidating. Counter attack in night but enemy repulsed."

Evidence given later by those involved and quoted in the war diary shows that many of the troops became lost as they advanced in thick mist, which reduced visibility to 30 yards. Heavy shell fire prevented them from reaching their objectives, and the battalion suffered heavy casualties. Many men were forced to take cover in shell holes and wait until darkness so that they could return to their own lines. The attack gained only about 100 yards.

However, by 3rd October the 58th Brigade had inflicted a severe blow on the German 4th Army, causing many losses, capturing a significant portion of *Flanders I Stellung*, the fourth German defensive position, which threatened the German hold on Broodseinde ridge.

Leslie is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial and the Baptist Church, Oxford Road, Moseley (now the Calvary Church of God in Christ). He left his estate of £1326 to his mother around £72,662 in today's money.



Figure 17: Rolason L. N. is named on the Queen Victoria Rifles memorial at Tyne Cot on the bottom left

In 1939, Leslie's mother Katherine was living at 31 Fox Hill, Bournville with her unmarried daughter, Helen, a kindergarten teacher. Katherine died on 7th December 1942 and was buried in Lodge Hill cemetery. Dorothy, Leslie's other sister married John Hobson Roberts, in 1919. In the 1939 Dorothy and John were living at 43 Reddings Road, Moseley with their two children David born on 18th February 1921, a Cambridge student, and daughter Lesley Patricia, a dispenser, born on 7th December 1922.

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Illustrations

Map of Galipoli

<https://www.winkleighonline.com/wmc/level3/suvla.htm>

Figure 9 – Birmingham Daily Gazette, 5th August 1875

Figure 16 and 17 - From the archives of King Edward VI Foundation with thanks to Charlotte Gallant

Endnotes

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- i *Slater's National Directory*, 1846, p22
Francis White, Birmingham History and General Directory, 1849, p 242
 - ii Civil Death Register for:
Annie Jane Rolason, Birmingham, 2/4, Vol 16, page 185
Emily Adkiss Rolason - Civil Death Registration, Birmingham, 1/4, Vol. 6d, page 132
Caroline Adkiss Rolason - Civil Death Registration, Birmingham 1/4, Vol. 6d, page 136
 - iii *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, Wednesday 15th November 1865
 - iv 1871 census
 - v *Birmingham Daily Post*, Thursday 5th November 1874
 - vi Birmingham Rates Book
 - vii *British Trade Journal*, 8th August 1889
 - viii *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 5th August 1875
 - ix *Kelly's Directory for Birmingham* 1884 and 1888

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- x *Lloyds List*, 18th August 1888
- xi *Birmingham Daily Post* - Saturday 13 September 1890, p 6
Birmingham Daily Post, Monday 25th August 1890
- xii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9th January 1891
- xiii *Birmingham Daily Post*, Saturday 16th May 1891
- xiv *Birmingham Daily Post*, Saturday 23rd May 1891
- xv Outward UK Passenger List for 1891, Ancestry
- xvi From the archives of King Edward VI Foundation with thanks to Charlotte Gallant
1911 census
- xvii *The Times*, 6th May 1907
- xviii City of London Yeomanry
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_London_Yeomanry_\(Rough_Riders\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_London_Yeomanry_(Rough_Riders))
- xix 1st line County of London
Yeomanry[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_County_of_London_Yeomanry_\(Sharpshooters\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_County_of_London_Yeomanry_(Sharpshooters))
- xx Third Battle of Ypres map – Military History Matters, Passchendaele 1917
<https://www.military-history.org/feature/passchendaele-1917.htm>