

## Private Joseph Leslie Collis

Joseph can trace his family origins to Cauldon Grange, Pitchings, near Waterfall, Staffordshire, where his great-great-grandfather John Collis farmed 55 acres with his first wife Ann (née Salt) and family.<sup>i</sup>



**Figure 1: Castern Hall, Ham, Staffordshire**

John's eldest son, Joseph who was born around 1817, was an agricultural labourer. He married Hannah Collis, the daughter of Thomas Collis, a farmer, on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1838 at the church of St. James and St. Bartholomew, Waterfall. Hannah at the time of her marriage was a servant at Castern Hall, near Ham, Staffordshire.<sup>ii</sup> The house was substantially featured in *Agatha Christie's Poirot* in the episode 'The Mystery of Hunter's Lodge'. Other movies and series that have been shot there were *Jane Eyre* (1983), *Sherlock Holmes: The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1988), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1997) and *Jonathan Creek: Frog Hollow*. (1999).<sup>iii</sup>

By 1851, Joseph was managing his own farm of 17 acres at 'Stoney Rock', Calton, Derbyshire not far from Ham. The census records that Joseph and Hannah had three children, Ann (born 1841), James (born 1845) and Frank (born 1851).

On 8<sup>th</sup> February 1870, Joseph's eldest son, James, married Ruth Worthington at Ipstones, Staffordshire<sup>iv</sup> Following their marriage, the couple settled at 'Three Stones', Waterfall, where James farmed and grazed 16 acres. He was also a

wheelwright. Their first child, Joseph, was born in on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1870 and christened at St James and Bartholomew Church on 29<sup>th</sup> January.<sup>v</sup>

By 1881 James had given up farming and had moved to 37 South Street, Stoke-on - Trent, where he continued his work as a joiner and a wheelwright. On 30<sup>th</sup> August 1882, a second son, James (junior), was born.

Joseph took a very different occupational path to his father, James. At the age of twenty, in 1891, he was working as a clothier's assistant at Trevethin near Pontypool, Wales. In early 1898 Joseph married Emma Louisa Iliffe in Birmingham.<sup>vi</sup> Their only child, Joseph Leslie Collis, was born on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1898 in Moseley.<sup>vii</sup>



**Figure 2: 6 Aldwyn Terrace, Moseley**



**Figure 3: King's Norton Boys School**



**Figure 4: A young Joseph taken c1900**

The census for 1901 recorded the family living at 6 Aldwyn Terrace, Tudor Road, Moseley, a two bedroom terrace house. Joseph senior was a warehouse man. Both Joseph and Emma worked in the wholesale clothing business.

Just after his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, Joseph entered Preparatory Form 'B' at King's Norton School on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1911. He was one of the first of 60 pupils in this new school, opened by Sir George Kenrick, chairman of the Birmingham Education Committee. The boys were received by the Headmaster, Mr A James, and four assistant masters, Messrs Weaver, Morris, Valiance and Randle. The accommodation was for 200, but by 1914 it was found necessary to use the library and

the clerk's room as form rooms in order that the 250 boys on the register could be accommodated. The west side of the school was occupied by the boys and the east

side by the girls and they were kept very much apart. In the early days the west field was shared by the combined school. When Mr. George Cadbury visited the school in about 1914, he saw the difficulty of this situation and very generously made a gift to the school of the adjoining field of area about 5 acres. It then became possible to proceed with an adequate organisation of the school games.<sup>viii</sup> Joseph left the school from Form IV on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1913, just before his fifteenth birthday.<sup>ix</sup> He was employed as a clerk in the City of Birmingham Veterinary Department based at Holliday Street Wharf.



**Figure 5**  
**(Left) Joseph as a civilian**  
**(Above) Holliday Street Wharf**

Joseph enlisted in 'A' Coy of 6th Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1916, ten days after his eighteenth birthday. He became Private J. L. Collis, No 27183. When his training was completed at Wyke Regis, Dorset, Joseph joined his regiment in France a month before his nineteenth birthday,



His first letter home from France indicated the abrupt nature of his posting. He wrote:

I arrived back in camp at about 7.30 last Sunday night and warned immediately for draft and had issued water bottles and identification disc etc. We had a stormy passage across, most of the chaps were very seasick but it did not affect me. I caused several chaps to heave by smoking my putrid old pipe.

The food is very good, better than we had in England. This is not a bad place here, not as comfortable as Wyke, but of course much rougher. We are under canvas here, 15 of us to an army bell tent.

In another letter home Joseph told his father;

'not to complain about digging the garden as he had been digging trenches in his training and he reckoned that was much harder!'

Soon after further training in France in the art of trench warfare, Joseph found himself billeted in 'Y' hutments on the St Pol Road, six miles from Arras and in training for an attack on the village of Roeux, as part of the Spring Offensive and the Battle of Arras.<sup>x</sup> The Dorsetshire Regiment was part of the 17<sup>th</sup>

Division in the Second of Kitchener's New Army.

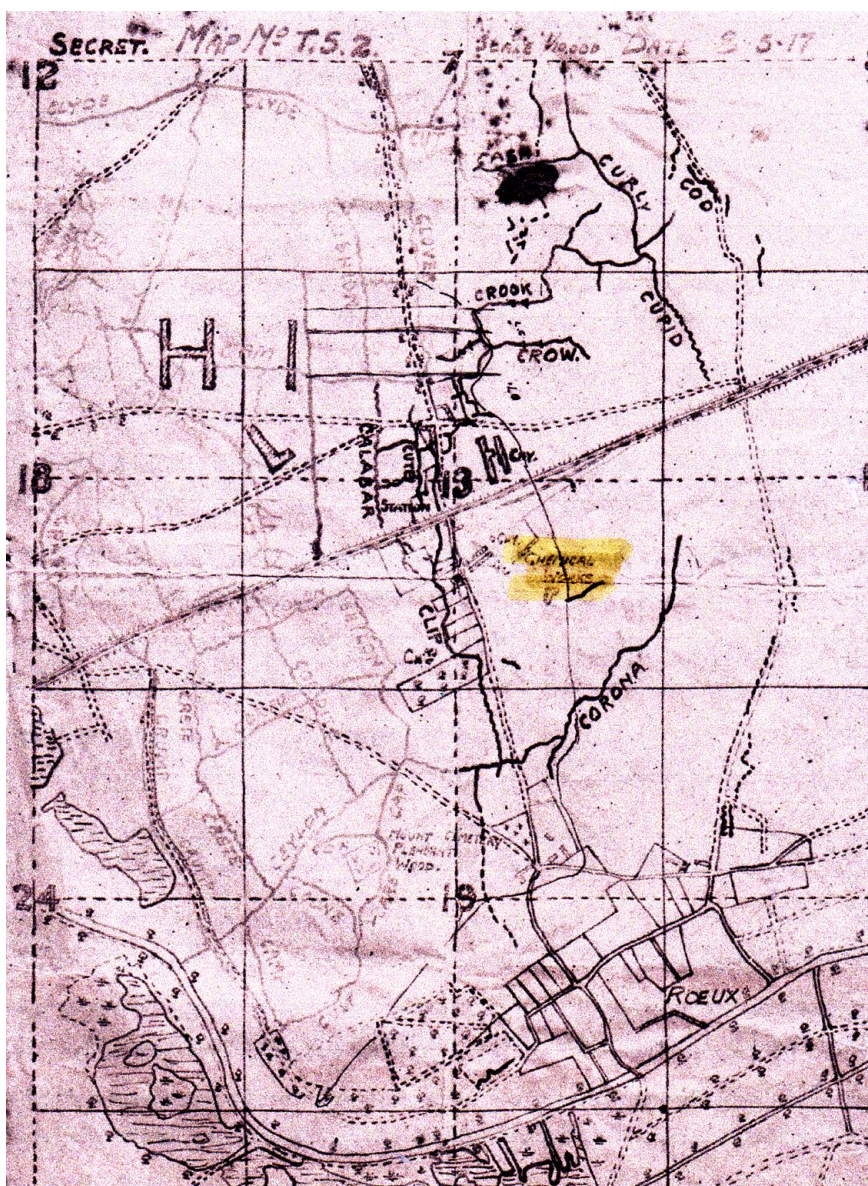
Roeux is situated 4.5 miles east of Arras in the Scarpe Valley and was one of the fortified villages that formed part of the German defences behind the German front line. The ground before Roeux posed many difficulties for the British, two of which were: the Arras to Douai railway line, which ran north-east to south-west in a cutting and on an embankment; and secondly, the River Scarpe with its surrounding marshland.<sup>xi</sup>



**Figure 6: Map showing Arras, St Nicholas, Roeux, the River Scarpe, the railway line and the location of the Brown Line and the Chemical Works**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May, the battalion, attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, moved to a field in St Nicholas and made ready to move to the Brown Line in the evening ready to attack the following day. Their objective was to capture the Chemical Works and the group of station buildings up to the junction with Crook and Crow trenches with Cam trench, just beyond the green line on the map above.

The attack on the 11<sup>th</sup> May commenced with the left half of the battalion advancing and taking Crow and Crook trenches. The next day, the battalion were in reserve, but in the evening 'A' and 'C' Coys moved forward from the Brown line taking over Crow and Crook trenches from 'C' and 'D' Coys.



On 13<sup>th</sup> May the battalion was spread between Clover, Crook, Crow, Cushion and Cardigan trenches and the Bombing Posts manned at the junction of Cupid and Curly trench and Crook and Crow trenches (see Figure 7). The following day, 14<sup>th</sup> May, the companies were in the same position. There was some bombing activity at the junction of Cupid and Curly trenches. On the 15<sup>th</sup> May the enemy shelled the battalion sector all day and well into the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. The relief of the battalion commenced at 11.30 pm during which the Germans counter attacked. These attacks initially met with some success but the flanks held and the enemy were eventually repulsed from all but the most easterly positions, most of which were regained by the evening.<sup>xii</sup>

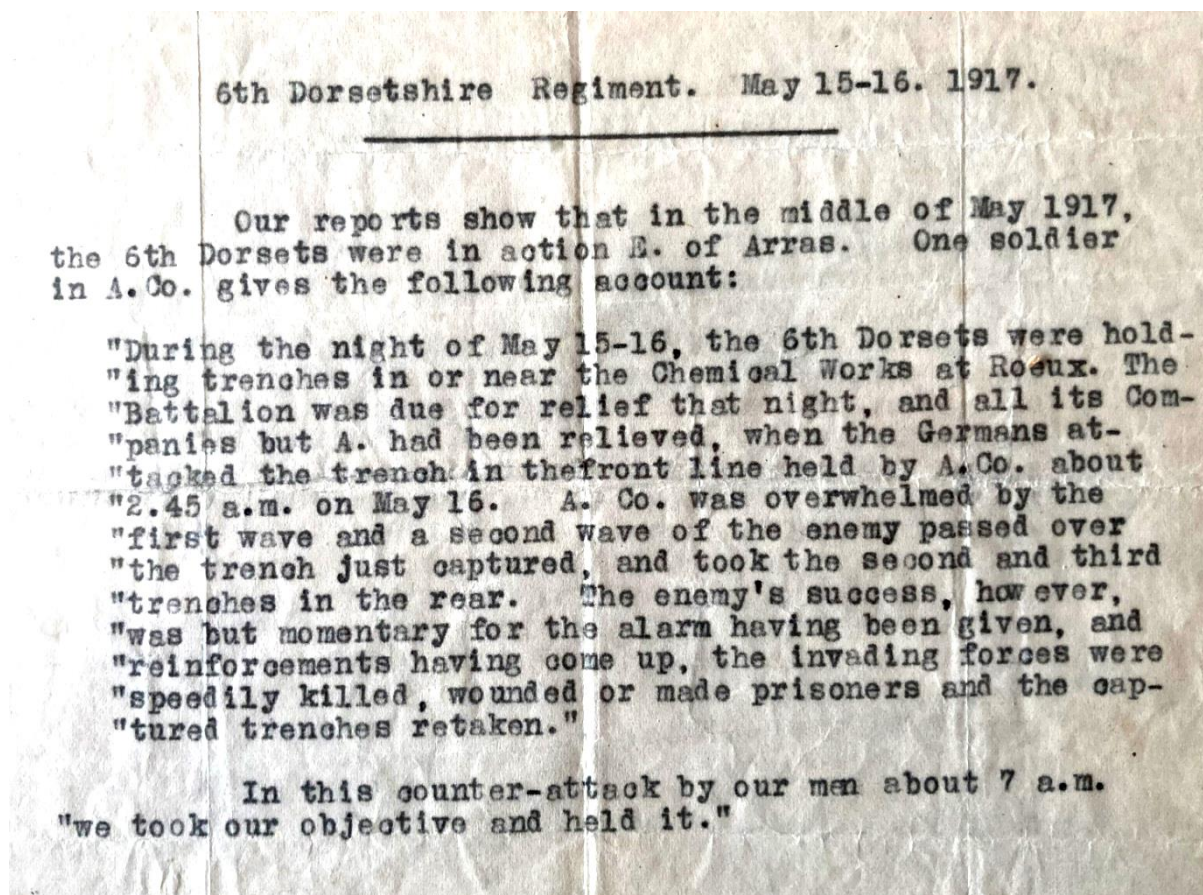


Figure 8: Report from a soldier in A' Corps of the events of the 15/16 May 1917

The Battle of Arras officially ended on 17 May, although a limited attack at Roeux on 5 June regained the remaining ground lost on 15/16 May, the line stabilised for the remainder of 1917.<sup>xiii</sup>

The casualty figures for the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorset Regiment in May were 14 killed, 107 wounded and 20 missing.<sup>xiv</sup>

Joseph was reported as 'missing' on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1917 and was one of twenty whose bodies were never found. He is commemorated on Panel 6 of the Arras memorial.

Joseph is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley, King's Norton Boys School and his name is on the Roll of Honour at the Birmingham Hall of Memory and the City of Birmingham Veterinary Department memorial. Joseph was just nineteen years old when he was killed.



ARRAS - Le Memorial Anglais

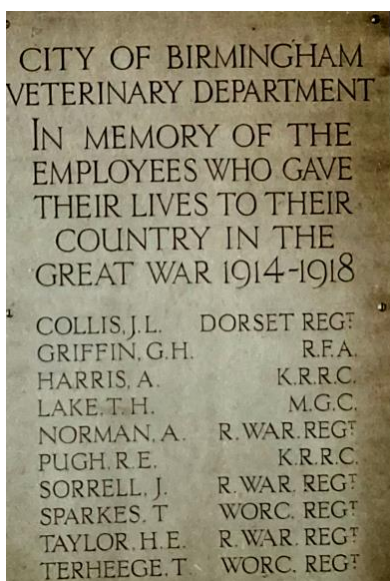
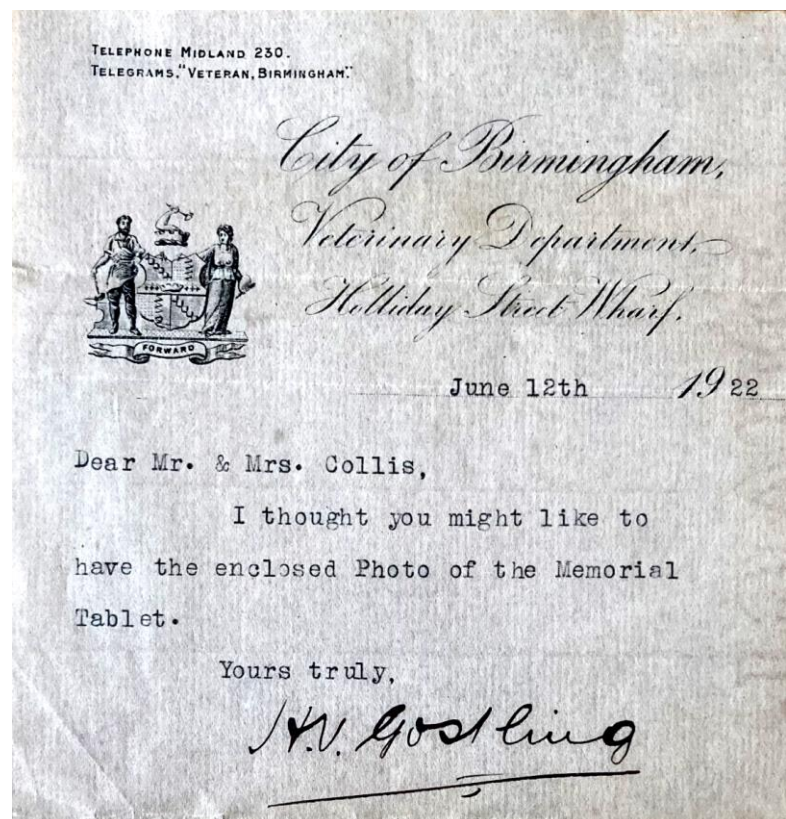


Figure 9

(Top left) Arras memorial in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery  
(Top right) Kings Norton Boys School memorial  
(Middle left) St Mary's Church, Moseley, WW1 memorial  
(Bottom left) City of Birmingham Veterinary Department memorial  
(Above) A letter to Joseph's parents from the Veterinary Department

Joseph's medals, cap badge, letters home and other military papers together with the death certificate of Joseph's mother were discovered in a box in the attic of Leonard Lowenthal. It is believed that the box was bequeathed to Leonard by Joseph's father on the death of his wife. It is clear from the letters that Joseph, an only child, and Leonard, were great friends. They lived near to each other and were most likely at school together. The box and its contents are being donated to the Dorset Regiment's Archive held at The Keep Museum, Dorset, once the gatehouse of the Regiment's barracks.

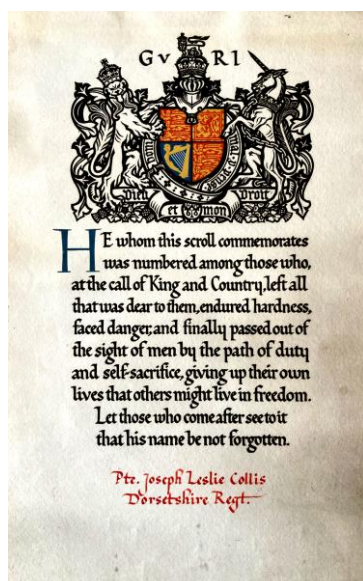


Figure 10: Joseph's war medals, scroll and plaque



SOUTH AFRICAN MEMORIAL

1914



1918



ULSTER MEMORIAL

FOR KING AND COUNTRY  
TO THE  
**GLORY OF GOD**  
AND  
IN EVERLASTING MEMORY  
OF



COLLIS, Pte. Joseph Leslie, 27183. 6th Bn.  
Dorsetshire Regt. 16th May, 1917. Age 19.  
Son of Joseph and Emma Louisa Collis, of  
6, Aldwyn Avenue, Tudor Rd., Moseley,  
Birmingham.



AUSTRALIAN MEMORIAL

WHO GAVE HIS LIFE IN THE GREAT WAR  
THAT WE MIGHT LIVE  
AND WHOSE NAME IS CARVED IN STONE  
AT



HIGHLAND MEMORIAL

YPRES  
LOOS  
ARRAS  
BETHUNE  
SAINT-QUENTIN  
NEUVE EGLISE  
BOURLON WOOD  
PERONNE  
MONCHY  
HEBUTERNE  
WANCOURT  
PASSCHENDAELE  
BEAUMONT-HAMEL  
CARVOY  
THIEPVAL  
BULLY-GREYAY  
POZIERES  
COURCELETTE  
CROISILLES



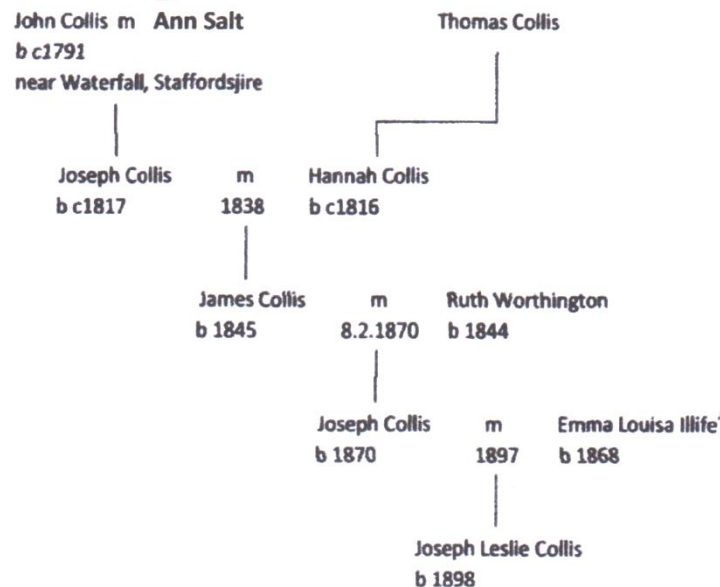
THE BRITISH MEMORIAL AND CEMETERY, ARRAS - France

CAMBRAI  
LILLE  
ALBERT  
ARMENTIERES  
LA BASSÉE  
NEUVE CHAPELLE  
THONES WOOD  
MONS  
FRICOURT  
GOMMECOURT  
MAMETZ  
HILL 60  
DELVILLE WOOD  
FLERS  
ACHET  
HAVRINCOURT  
VIMY RIDGE  
BAILLEUL  
BULLECOURT

Researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group  
with thanks to Julie Lowenthal for the contribution of material from the  
family archive

## Family Tree of Joseph Leslie Collis

Created using the census from 1841 to 1911 together with birth, baptismal and marriage records



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### Endnotes

- i Selective Marriages, England recorded John Collis' marriage to Ann Salt on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1815. They had four children: Joseph in 1817, James in 1819 (died 1829), Francis in 1824 and Mary Ann in 1826. John's wife Ann died aged 45 in 1837. He remarried in 1840. His second wife was Jane Harrison  
1841, 1851 census
- ii Marriage Certificate  
England, Select Marriages, 1838-1973  
Picture <http://www.casterne.co.uk/>

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- iii Castern Hall [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castern\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castern_Hall)
- iv England & Wales Marriages, 1538-1988
- v Staffordshire Baptisms  
1939 Register records DOB
- vi The 1911 census records that Joseph and Emma had been married for 14 years  
England and Wales Marriages: Joseph Collis to Louisa Iliffe\* in the first quarter of 1898 in  
Birmingham, volume 6d, page 197  
\* Louisa Iliffe is recorded on the marriage entry although the census for 1901 and 1910  
records her name as Emma Louisa  
The birth registration for Joseph Leslie Collis records his mother's maiden name as Iliffe
- vii Remember the Fallen  
<http://www.rememberthefallen.co.uk/casualty/collis-joseph-leslie-2/>
- viii Kings Norton Boys by L.K. Ecclestone.  
[http://www.kingsnortonboys.bham.sch.uk/archive/history/history\\_of\\_our\\_School.pdf](http://www.kingsnortonboys.bham.sch.uk/archive/history/history_of_our_School.pdf)
- ix See viii
- x The Regimental War Diary of the Dorset Regiment, National Archives  
95/2000/5, p 569 Ref WO
- xi The Western Front Association, contributed by Peter J Palmer.  
<http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/the-great-war/great-war-on-land/battlefields/1011-roeux-apr-may-1917.html#sthash.mJiEsDgJ.dpbs>
- xii See x, pp 570 – 572 and pp 589 - 590
- xiii See x1
- xiv See xi, p 618

## Illustrations

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Holliday Wharf from an article 'The horses of Holliday Wharf'  
<https://birminghamhistoryblog.wordpress.com/2020/06/22/the-horses-at-holliday-wharf/>
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Ref WO 95/2000/5, p 620
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[http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/portfolio/the-lives-of-local-soldiers/King's Norton School for Boys](http://www.voicesofwarandpeace.org/portfolio/the-lives-of-local-soldiers/King's-Norton-School-for-Boys)  
<http://www.rememberthefallen.co.uk/memorial/kings-norton-boys-school-ww1-war-memorial/>  
Julie Lowenthal family archive
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