

Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England



Lest We Forget

World War 1



4029 STOKER

L. W. ROBERTS

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY"

9TH JULY, 1917

Leslie William ROBERTS

Leslie William Roberts was born in 1886 at Wallington, Surrey, England. His birth was registered in June quarter, 1886 in registration district of Croydon, Surrey, England. (Note: Wallington was a parish within the Croydon Registration District).

[Note: The date of birth listed on the UK Royal Naval Register of Seamen's Services was listed as 6 March, 1887, however on the Royal Australian Naval Record of Service card the date was listed as 28 May, 1886. It is not possible to correctly identify his parents as there is insufficient information.]

Leslie William Roberts joined the Royal Navy on 16th November, 1906. His occupation was listed as Clerk. He was 5 feet 9 in with light brown hair, blue eyes & a fresh complexion.

Stoker 2nd Class Leslie William Roberts was issued an Official number of 104184 (Chatham). He was posted to *Acheron* from 16th November, 1906 then transferred to *Achilles* on 27th April, 1907. Stoker 2nd Class Roberts was in Cells for 7 days & returned to duty in *Achilles* on 18th May, 1907. He was promoted to Stoker 1st Class from _ May, 1908. He was in Cells for 12 days from 3rd July, 1908 & returned to duty on 16th July, 1908.

Stoker 1st Class Leslie William Roberts was transferred to *Pembroke II* on 9th February, 1909. He was transferred to *Scylla* on 26th May, 1909 & was in Cells for 7 days from 6th July, 1909. Stoker 1st Class Roberts returned to duty in *Scylla* on 14th July, 1909.

Stoker 1st Class Leslie William Roberts was transferred to *Pembroke II* on 2nd August, 1909 then on to *Diamond* from 3rd November, 1909. He served 10 days in Cells from 16th February, 1911 & resumed his duties on 27th February, 1911.

The 1911 England Census recorded Leslie William Roberts, aged 24, as a Stoker 1st Class, as a member of the crew of H.M.S. *Diamond*, which was a 3rd Class Protected Cruiser & captained by Godfrey Paine, MVO, RN. The ship was located in Falmouth Harbour, Cornwall, England at midnight on Sunday 2nd April, 1911 – the night of the Census.

Stoker 1st Class Leslie William Roberts was transferred to *Pembroke II* on 16th November, 1911 & was recorded as "Shore CS expd." (Shore – Continuous Service expired) on 17th November, 1911.

Stoker 1st Class Leslie William Roberts was transferred to R.F.R. (Royal Fleet Reserve) Chatham B 8225 from 18th November, 1911. He was discharged from R.F.R on 28th August, 1914 "the day prior to engaging for the period of hostilities in the Royal Australian Navy."

Royal Fleet Reserve

The Royal Fleet Reserve was established under the authority of "The Naval Reserve Act, 1900," and of "The Naval Forces Act, 1903," to provide a reserve of trained men for service in His Majesty's Fleet in time of emergency.

It consisted of:-

Class A - Life Pensioners, who draw no retainer, but receive a Reserve Pension of 5d. a day at 50 years of age in addition to their life Pension.

Class B and Immediate Class - Men who have served for 5 years or more in the Fleet, but who are not in receipt of a Life Pension.

Class B, receive a retainer of 6d. a day, and a gratuity of £50 when they are 40 years of age and have completed 20 years' service in the Fleet and Royal Fleet Reserve combined.

The Immediate Class receive a retainer of 1s. a day and a gratuity of £50 under the same condition as Class B.

Men belonging to Classes A. and B. are required to perform one week's drill at the Home Ports each year. Men belonging to the Immediate Class are required to do 28 days' service in the Fleet each year during the manoeuvres.

The various conditions of pay and service are shown below.

Petty Officers and men of the Seamen and Stoker classes, and Non-Commissioned Officers and men of the Royal Marines, are eligible for Classes A. and B. and the Immediate Class as detailed below and in pages 4 and 5. The Seamen Class includes Signal, Telegraphist and Sailmaker ratings. Naval Police ratings serving in the Fleet as such before the 8th July 1810 are eligible for enrolment in Classes A. and B., but not in the Immediate Class. Men transferred to the Naval Police after that date are not eligible for enrolment in any class of the Royal Fleet Reserve.

(Information from pamphlet "The Royal Fleet Reserve and How To Join It 1914.")

Leslie William Roberts joined Royal Australian Navy on 29th August, 1914. He was 5 feet 9 in with light brown hair, blue eyes & a fresh complexion. He had scars on both knees. His date of birth was listed on his Record of Service card as 28th May, 1886. His next of kin was written in pencil & is illegible in part – "Drummoyne, Sydney". Another address is listed for next of kin- Mr W. T. (?) Roberts, 27 King St, Balinan (?) (possibly Balmain), NSW.

He joined *Cerberus* as Stoker on 29th August, 1914 with an Official number of 4029. On 31st December, 1914 Stoker Roberts was transferred to H.M.A.S. *Sydney*. He was involved in the taking of German New Guinea on 11th September, 1914.

[H.M.A.S. *Cerberus* – previously H.M.V.S. *Cerberus* was renamed H.M.A.S. *Cerberus* when the navy became the Royal Australian Navy in 1911. By World War I, the weapons and boilers on H.M.A.S. *Cerberus* were inoperable & was confined to Port Phillip Bay in Victoria, Australia. The ship was retasked as a guardship and munitions store, while carrying the personnel of the Royal Australian Naval College on her paybooks.]

H.M.A.S. Sydney

H.M.A.S. *Sydney* was a Chatham class light cruiser of the Royal Australian Navy (R.A.N.). Laid down in 1911 and launched in 1912, the cruiser was commissioned into the R.A.N. in 1913.

During the early stages of World War I, *Sydney* was involved in supporting the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, and escorting the first ANZAC convoy. On 9th November 1914, the cruiser defeated the German cruiser SMS *Emden* at the Battle of Cocos. During 1915 and 1916, *Sydney* operated on the North America and West Indies Station, before joining the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron at Greenock, Scotland in November 1916. On 4th May 1917, the cruiser was involved in an inconclusive action against the German zeppelin L43; neither was damaged. (*Wikipedia*)

Later in 1917, *Sydney* was fitted with an aircraft launching platform and equipped with a Sopwith Ships Pup fighter. On 1 June 1918, while patrolling in the Heligoland Bight, *Sydney* and *Melbourne* launched their aircraft to engage two German reconnaissance aircraft. *Sydney's* fighter destroyed one of the enemy aircraft.

Sydney was present at the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet on 21 November 1918. She returned to Australia on 19 July 1919. After the war, *Sydney* carried out routine fleet duties until paid off in 1928. She was broken up the next year. (*The Australian War Memorial*)



H.M.A.S. Sydney 1914

Stoker Leslie William Roberts, H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, died on 9th July, 1917 at Rosyth, Fife, Scotland from Accidental death (Ship Explosion). (details as per Australian War Memorial). His Service Record recorded "*Killed in Vanguard*".

H.M.S. *Vanguard*

HMS *Vanguard* was one of three St Vincent-class dreadnought battleships built for the Royal Navy in the first decade of the 20th century. She spent her whole career assigned to the Home and Grand Fleets. Aside from participating in the Battle of Jutland in May 1916 several months later, and the inconclusive Action of 19 August, her service during the war generally consisted of routine patrols and training in the North Sea.

Vanguard was refitted in Rosyth in December, 1916. On the afternoon of 9 July 1917, the ship's crew had been exercising, practising the routine for abandoning ship. She anchored in the northern part of Scapa Flow at about 18:30. There is no record of anyone detecting anything amiss until the first explosion at 23:20. She sank almost instantly, with only three of the crew surviving, one of whom died soon afterwards. A total of 843 men were lost, including two Australian stokers from the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* serving time in the battleship's brig. Another casualty was Captain Kyōsuke Eto, a military observer from the Imperial Japanese Navy, which was allied with the Royal Navy at the time through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The bodies of 17 of the 22 men recovered after the explosion, plus that of Lieutenant-Commander Alan Duke, who died after being rescued, were buried at the Royal Naval Cemetery at Lyness, not far from the site of the explosion. The others are commemorated on the Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth Naval Memorials.

A Board of Inquiry heard accounts from many witnesses on nearby ships. They accepted the consensus that there had been a small explosion with a white glare between the foremast and 'A' turret, followed after a brief interval by two much larger explosions. The board decided, on the balance of the available evidence, that the main detonations were in either 'P' magazine, 'Q' magazine, or both. A great deal of debris thrown out by the explosions landed on nearby ships; a section of plating measuring approximately six by four feet (1.8 by 1.2 m) landed on board the battleship *Bellerophon*. It was found to be from the No. 2 Hydraulic Room abaft 'A' barbette. It showed no signs of a blast from 'A' magazine, which reinforced the visual evidence suggesting that the explosion took place in the central part of the ship.

Although the explosion was obviously an explosion of the cordite charges in a main magazine, the reason for it was much less obvious. There were several theories. The inquiry found that some of the cordite on board, which had been temporarily offloaded in December 1916 and catalogued at that time, was past its stated safe life. The possibility of spontaneous detonation was raised, but could not be proved. It was also noted that a number of ship's boilers were still in use, and some watertight doors, which should have been closed in wartime, were open as the ship was in port. It was suggested that this might have contributed to a dangerously high temperature in the magazines. The final conclusion of the board was that a fire started in a four-inch magazine, perhaps when a raised temperature caused spontaneous ignition of cordite, spreading to one or the other main magazines, which then exploded.

The wreck was heavily salvaged in search of non-ferrous metals before it was declared a war grave in 1984, although some of the main armament and armour plate were also removed. As might be expected, the wreck, which lies at a depth of 14.2 metres (46 ft 7 in), and its associated debris cover a large area at 58.8566°N 3.1062°WCoordinates: 58.8566°N 3.1062°W. The amidships portion of the ship is almost completely gone and 'P' and 'Q' turrets were blown some 40 metres (130 ft) away. The bow and stern areas are almost intact as has been revealed by a survey authorised by the Ministry of Defence in 2016 in preparation for the centenary commemoration planned for 2017. The wreck was designated as a controlled site in 2002 and cannot be dived upon except with permission from the Ministry of Defence.

(Extract of information on H.M.S. Vanguard & photo from Wikipedia)



H.M.S. Vanguard

The Australian connection

Other men on board Vanguard that night included two Australian stokers – Robert Houston and Leslie Roberts. The two men had been serving on board HMAS Sydney, which was anchored nearby.

However, on 9 July, 1917 the two men were part way through a seven-day sentence in the Vanguard's brig. After almost a week in confinement the two men died when in the explosion. Boats from HMAS Sydney were first on the scene, but Houston and Roberts were not found.

(Information from Scapaflowwrecks)

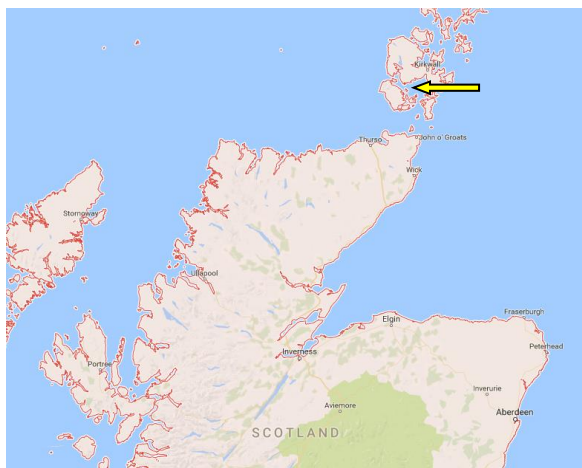
Australians were closely involved with the loss of the Vanguard which suffered a massive internal explosion on the night of 9 July 1917 caused, it is believed, by faulty cordite charges, incorrectly stowed. HMAS Sydney was the nearest ship, anchored about half a mile away; her boats were the first on the scene and rescued the only two men to survive the disaster. Unfortunately, two of her own sailors were on board the battleship and were lost.

The Vanguard Memorial in Lyness cemetery is dedicated to all those who died in the disaster, including the two men from HMAS Sydney.

Both men, Stoker Robert Thomas Houston and Stoker Leslie William Roberts, were unlucky enough to have been sentenced to seven days cells on 3 July, and appear to have been serving their sentence in Vanguard as no other cells were available. They would have spent their last week with little or no bedding and daily picking two pounds of oakum, which was weighed when given to them and then again when received back. Like most of the 804 men who were lost in Vanguard, they have 'no known grave but the sea'.

(Information from Semaphore Issue 4, 2009 – Royal Australian Navy Publication)

Stoker Leslie William Roberts was lost at sea at Scapa Flow, North Sea after a series of internal explosions caused the sinking of H.M.S. *Vanguard*.



Scapa Flow marked by yellow arrow

Stoker L. W. Roberts is named on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England – Panel 23. He has no grave, however his death is still acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

England & Wales National Probate Index:

ROBERTS, Leslie William of H.M. Ship Vanguard died 9 July 1917 at Scapa Flo. Administration (limited) London 5 January to Montague James Raymond solicitor attorney of William Roberts, Effects attorney of William Roberts, Effects £49 9s. 1d.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Stoker Leslie William Roberts – service number 4029, of Royal Australian Navy – H.M.A.S. “Sydney.” No family details are listed.

Stoker L. W. Roberts is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 1.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

L. W. Roberts is remembered on Royal Australian Navy WW1 Memorial, located at HMAS *Cerberus* Protestant Chapel of St Mark, Nelson Road, Crib Point, Victoria.



HMAS *Cerberus* Protestant Chapel of St Mark, Crib Point, Victoria (Photos courtesy of Karen Standen)



A Memorial to *Vanguard* is located in Lyness Royal Naval Cemetery, Hoy, Orkney Islands, Scotland.

The memorial is on the left hand side near the boundary. The 845 men lost on the Vanguard included two Australian stokers from H.M.A.S. Sydney in her cells and an observer from the Japanese Navy, a Commander Kyosuke Eto. The memorial commemorates those lost from HMS Vanguard in 1916, some of whom are buried in the cemetery. The memorial was erected by their shipmates and is separate from the graves.



The Vanguard Memorial (Photo by Iain Anderson – CWGC)



Memorial Stained-Glass windows to H.M.S. *Vanguard* can be found in Rochester Cathedral, High Street, Rochester, Kent, England.



(Photo from Vanguard Crew Photos – Wendy Sadler)



(2 pages of Stoker Leslie William Roberts' Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour) & National Archives



Newspaper Notices

THE VANGUARD LOSSES

800 PETTY OFFICERS AND MEN

The Secretary of the Admiralty announces the following losses by death in connection with the destruction of H.M.S. Vanguard:-

.....

Houston, R. T. Stoker, R.A.N. 4388;.....

.....

Roberts, W., Stoker, R.A.M., 4029;.....

(Aberdeen Press and Journal – 16 July, 1917)

IN MEMORIAM

ROBERTS – In memory of our dear mate, Leslie W. Roberts, late H.M.A.S. Sydney, and also of the Fremantle Lumpers' Union, who was killed on board H.M.S. Vanguard on July 9, 1917.

In the midst of life we are in death.

-Inserted by his shipmates, D. Sweetman, N. McGowan and P. Staten (H.M.A.S. Sydney)

(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 12 October, 1917)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials in 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. In all 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth forces from WWI and WWII have been honoured and commemorated in perpetuity.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of its mandate, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead individually and equally. To this end, the war dead are commemorated by name on a headstone, at an identified site of a burial, or on a memorial. War dead are commemorated uniformly and equally, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or creed.

Not all service personnel have a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. In some instances the relative chose to have their own memorial/headstone placed on the deceased's grave. These private headstones are not maintained by the CWGC as they have no jurisdiction to maintain them.

Stoker Leslie William Roberts has no headstone but is instead named on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.

Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England

The Memorial is situated centrally on The Hoe which looks directly towards Plymouth Sound.

After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided.

An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, who had already carried out a considerable amount of work for the Commission, with sculpture by Henry Poole. The Plymouth Naval Memorial was unveiled by HRH Prince George on 29 July 1924.

After the Second World War it was decided that the naval memorials should be extended to provide space for commemorating the naval dead without graves of that war, but since the three sites were dissimilar, a different architectural treatment was required for each. The architect for the Second World War extension at Plymouth was Sir Edward Maufe (who also designed the Air Forces memorial at Runnymede) and the additional sculpture was by Charles Wheeler and William McMillan. The Extension was unveiled by HRH Princess Margaret on 20 May 1954. A further unveiling took place on 11 November 1956, when panels 101 to 103 honouring those who died on shore, but who had no known grave, were unveiled by Admiral Sir Mark Pizey.

In addition to commemorating seamen of the Royal Navy who sailed from Plymouth, the First World War panels also bears the names of sailors from Australia and South Africa. The governments of the other Commonwealth nations chose to commemorate their dead elsewhere, for the most part on memorials in their home ports. After the Second World War, Canada and New Zealand again chose commemoration at home, but the memorial at Plymouth commemorates sailors from all other parts of the Commonwealth.

Plymouth Naval Memorial commemorates 7,251 sailors of the First World War and 15,933 of the Second World War.
(Information from CWGC)



Plymouth Naval Memorial *(Photo from VWMA – Julianne T. Ryan 2017)*



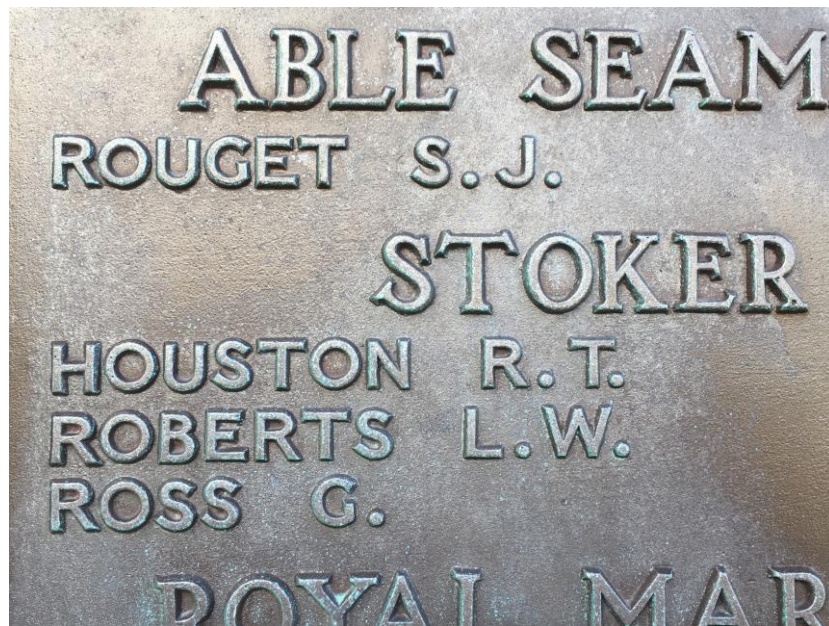
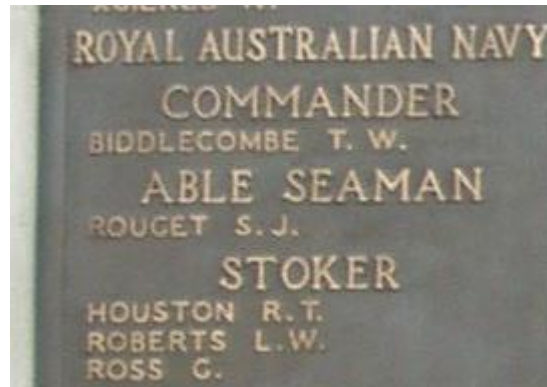
(Photo from CWGC)



1914 – 1918 1939 – 1945
All These Were Honoured In Their Generations
And Were The Glory Of Their Times

Photo of Stoker L. W. Roberts' name on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Devon, England.





(Photo from Find a Grave – Cliff Barry)



(Photo from CWGC)



Poppies Wave at CWGC Plymouth Naval Memorial *(Photo by Robert Pittman)*