

EXTRACTS FROM 'THE COLFEIAN'

Selected by Stephen Clarke

STEPHEN CLARKE has in his collection some editions of *The Colfeian*, the magazine of Williamson's Blackheath school, and has very kindly sifted through them for the following extracts which relate to his school days there. We are sure members will find these of great interest.

No. 22. Vol. 6, June 1911

22nd March. For the Annual Cross Country Run there was a new course. Starting from the School ground at Eltham Green, across the fields by the Palace, to Mottingham and Grove Park, and returning by Mottingham Lane and Middle Park, the total distance being exactly $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Williamson (Buff) came 56th. (First man in for the 'Bufs'.)

No. 23. Vol. 6, June 1912

H.W. Williamson received a 'Pass' in the Senior Local Cambridge Examination held in December, 1911. H.W. Williamson and V.M. Yeates included in the team for the Bufs, and in the Harrier's Cross Country Williamson came first for the house, and third in the school.

No. 25. Vol. 7, November 1912

Henry Williamson played in the Second XI Football Team and also in the Cricket Team.

No. 26. Vol. 7, June 1913

H.W. Williamson and V.M. Yeates passed with 3rd class Honours in the Senior Cambridge Local Examination held in December, 1912.

H.W. Williamson was included in the Football Second XI, and V.M. Yeates in the First XI for the Bufs. Yeates and Williamson were in the Cricket team.

In the School Sports, Williamson was third in the hurdles, and Yeates third in the $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile.

No. 27. Vol. 7, November 1913

H.W. Williamson (1907-1913) took up an appointment with the Sun Insurance Office. Buff House regrets the loss of H. Williamson as Captain of Harriers. On Visitation Day, 1913, H. Williamson was awarded a Bramley Prize.

No. 28. Vol. 7, June 1914

A report on the Old Boys' IVth XI. Our thanks are due to H. Williamson for the keenness shown (at least during the first half of the season; he probably got 'fed up' during the second half). Also to V.M. Yeates.

An extract from *Colfensia*, No. 22, 1915. (This was to be the last issue until 1923.)

Under the heading "War News".

All Buffs will be deeply interested in reading the following letter from an old Buff, H. Williamson, of the London Rifle Brigade, now invalided home after many weeks of warfare with his regiment in the trenches of Flanders. The House is proud to number such among its Old Boys.

"I was invalided home about two months ago, but am now cured, although, of course, I am now not very strong; my 'nerves are a bit 'joggy' too.

"Trench work is rather monotonous. We relieve men holding them, and are relieved in turn, regularly.

"The first time we went in the trenches we were mixed up with regulars, being, of course, rather nerve-shaken. But the feeling of nervousness soon left us, and we set to work to pump the trenches. I must tell you that the actual trenches were two feet deep in mud and water, and the harder we pumped, the deeper grew the water, (or so it seemed to us). In the trenches we do one hour 'on' sentry, and one 'off'. This is throughout the hours of darkness. During our hour 'off' we pump, dig, fix up wire in front (we were about 90 yards from the Germans), fetch rations and numerous other jobs. You can imagine, then, that after three or four days of this the strain is rather acute. The fact of no sleep, and legs, and, in fact, all the body, wet through, does not help to improve the situation.

"Now and then we get a shell or two over, and, when very lucky, an attack. We are literally overjoyed when they attack us, for it means a great shooting practice. They attack shoulder to shoulder, and march on our trenches. When (and if) they get within twenty yards they open fanwise, and some sections lie down to allow a clear path for the Maxim fire.

"But, generally, they get to the barbed wire entanglements, and there they stop. It is a fine sound to hear thousands of rifles and machine-guns all cracking at once, and now and then a 'rafale' of several batteries of French 75mm guns."

Also from *Colfensia* No. 22, 1915, under the heading of "Old Colfeians at the Front":

H. Williamson, London Rifle Brigade, (a well remembered Buff) writes as follows of some of his experiences:-

"We have had a stiff time at the front. The chief trouble is the mud. We sleep on mud, we freeze on mud, we get mud on our rifles, on our clothe, in our hair, in our food. We were holding trenches in front of a wood in Flanders. Pumping had to be done day and night, and also baling, but it availed little. The parapets of the trenches slipped down, the sides fell in, the trench got dangerously shallow. It was impossible to dig, and we were compelled to crouch down in the daytime and wait for the night. When night came we worked in the trenches, put up barbed wire in front (the Germans were about 120 yards off), went and

fetched water and rations, and exercised ourselves a bit. All this, remember, under intermittent rifle and maxim-gun fire, and a continuous shower of white rockets that lit up the country for two or three miles around.

"Then, when work was done, sentries were posted. Each man did one hour on and one hour off all night. When wet and freezing up to one's thighs in mud and water the game is apt to get a little trying at times; but, when the relief comes, oh, blessed hour! We troop back indescribably muddy but cheerful. Woollen caps on most of our heads, some with equipment over goat-skin coat, some with cooking pots on behind, some with fire pails, others with helmets and other souvenirs, we reach our billets (peasants' cottages) about 1½ miles away, take our soup and then lie down on the straw on the floor.

*"The stove is burning brightly, we are warm and well filled. A good post of letters and parcels awaits us, 'grub' is not scarce. We are men who live in the moment only; we cannot tell when a bullet will find us or a shell hasten our end, but for the moment the room is warm, the roof over our heads keeps out the rain, we are happy and contented. Three days later, another week of wet and mud. Thus our little life goes on. The past appears to have belonged to another world. **

"We hope and pray that it will come again, and know inwardly that, if we are spared, the day is not so very far away when, having done our duty to our country, we shall look back on the days of fighting as but a memory, and not a very pleasant one."

Extract from Supplement to the *Colfean*, October 1915.

ROLL OF HONOUR

*Bedfordshire Regiment,
10th Battn. Williamson, H.W., 2nd Lieut.*

The letter under the heading of "Old Colfeans at the Front" is also included in the book *Colfe's Grammar School and the Great War 1914-1919*, when the paragraph above marked * is omitted, and the following substituted:

The "The Xmas of 1914 was a curious one. The Saxons opposite to us wanted a truce and we exchanged souvenirs and gifts. They promised not to fire until we did. This was kept up for a day or so when we sent over a note to the Germans saying our artillery was going to begin and would they please get under cover! So ended the truce."