

HENRY WILLIAMSON SOCIETY STUDY DAY

18 MARCH 2017

at

THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ

I had hoped that we would be given a presentation by one of the Museum staff that would have some relevance to Henry Williamson's activities as a soldier during 1917, perhaps concentrating on his duties as a Transport Officer. Unfortunately, because of recent staff redundancies leaving only two learning staff, there will be no one available to do this for us, nor will any artefacts be made available for us to examine. This was always a bit of a long shot, and I am a little disappointed that the day isn't quite what I had in mind. However, I am sure it will all be worthwhile and I look forward to our meeting and discussing what we see. There will be a room made available for our exclusive use, as promised, and the lady with whom I have been corresponding will give us an introductory talk. There will be no charge for the day. The arrangements are as follows:

- 10.00** **Museum opens**
- 10.00** **Purchase refreshments** as required in the café in main atrium. The café entrance is situated between the Reuters' white Land Rover and the crumpled Baghdad car – "both very large and impossible to overlook".
- 10.30** **Meet staff member** Ngaire (pronounced Nyree) Bushell outside café entrance in main atrium. Proceed with her to the learning room, where she will give a talk and then lead us to the First World War galleries. The learning room will remain available for us (Ngaire will be in attendance as she has the pass code).
- 12.30** **Lunch** in our reserved room. Please bring a packed lunch, or you may prefer to purchase a meal in the café.
- 13.30** **Resume our own exploration** of the museum. For those interested, Ngaire will make audio guides available for the excellent Holocaust Exhibition.
- 16.00** **Finish.** Some may wish to depart earlier, or stay on later. Ngaire will not be available after this time.
- 18.00** **Museum closes**

On the next page is the summary of HW's 1917 experience taken directly from the Society's website, with links to follow at home if you wish. This may help to give some focus to the day.

WH

- 6 Jan 1917 HW diary entry: 'Go to 208 as T.O.'
- 24 February 208 MGC leave Grantham for Southampton. They embark with all animals on the next evening, and arrive at Le Havre at 2 a.m., 26 February.
- 28 February 208 MGC, attached to 187th Infantry Brigade, 62nd Division, moves up to the front line at Astreux. HW's role as Transport Officer is to oversee the welfare of horses and mules, and to organise the logistics of movements of guns and armaments, together with general support, such as arranging billets and provisions for both horses and men.
So begins a period of continuous movement from village to village, backwards and forwards, with attacks and counterattacks (see Anne Williamson's *Henry Williamson and the First World War* for full details) in preparation for the attack on the Hindenburg Line, commencing on 3 May.
Web page: [Henry Williamson and 208 Machine Gun Company](#)
Web page: [208 Machine Gun Company: HW's photographs](#)
Journal article: [Peter Cole: 'The 286th Machine Gun Company'](#) (HWSJ, September 1988)
- 9–12 April The Canadian Corps takes Vimy Ridge. Web page: [Henry Williamson: 'The Battle of Vimy Ridge'](#) (Daily Express, 6/7 April 1967)
- 8 June HW is gassed on a night journey taking limbers with supplies of ammunition up to the front line. One of the mule drivers, Private Frith, is killed by a shell within yards of him. He is admitted to a Field Ambulance Hospital. Web page: [Driver Frith](#)
- 8 June HW is gassed on a night journey taking limbers with supplies of ammunition up to the front line. One of the mule drivers, Private Frith, is killed by a shell within yards of him. He is admitted to a Field Ambulance Hospital. Web page: [Driver Frith](#)
- 15 June Moved to No. 8 General Hospital at Rouen. Diary entry, 15 June: 'For England by first boat !'
- 18 June Arrives back in Southampton, and leaves for London and Sussex Lodge Hospital.
- 22 June Medical Board – HW is considered unfit for General Service for three months, unfit for Home Service for two months, and unfit for Light Duties for one month.
- 29 June HW travels down to the Auxiliary Hospital for Officers at Trefusis House, near Falmouth, Cornwall. Among the friends he makes here is Major Colin Traill, MC. Web page: [Henry Williamson at Trefusis House](#)
Journal article: [Anne Williamson \(compiler\): "My Friend": Major Colin B. Traill, MC'](#) (HWSJ, September 2007)
- 3 July HW diary entry: 'Began story.' There are no other details, but it seems probable (with hindsight), that this has been recommended to him as a form of therapy for his extreme state of nervous exhaustion – then known as shell shock, in the Second World War as battle fatigue, and later as post-traumatic stress syndrome.
- 29 August Moves from Trefusis to Devonport Military Hospital.
- 24 Sept A Medical Board notes that he has improved and fit for light duty, but still 50 per cent unfit; he is given three weeks' leave.
- 15 October HW is posted to C Company, 3rd Battalion, the Bedfordshire Regiment, stationed at Landguard Camp just outside Felixstowe, Suffolk, as (assistant?) adjutant. The CO is Lieutenant Colonel Lord Ampthill. Regular medical boards still mark him for general home duties only and unfit for front-line service.
Web page: [Henry Williamson at Felixstowe](#)
- 30 November HW notes in his diary, 'Bosche counter attack. Transport lost.' This refers to the Battle of Cambrai. On this day Brigadier General Roland Boys Bradford, VC, MC, commanding 186th Infantry Brigade during the battle, is killed when a shell hits his headquarters. Aged just 25, and known as 'the Boy General', he is the youngest Brigadier General in the Army. He is one of the four remarkable [Bradford brothers](#) (external link) who between them win two VCs and two MCs during the First World War. He appears as a character in [Love and the Loveless](#).