would only have been followed by more paperwork, a check to ensure that he had arrived with the exact number on the roll that he had signed for originally, and that there were valid reasons if any were missing. Having officially handed over the draft, he would have seen them sent off to whatever billet was available, while the authorities there worked out where to send them and to which units, in view of the dramatically changing circumstances, thanks to *MARS*. Henry would then have had his permit and travel passes validated for the return journey, been notified of the train departure for Boulogne in the morning, been allocated a billet for the night, and then would have had the rest of the day off to rest up, wander into town or onto the beach, or even take a trip on the tram to Paris Plage.

The references to Etaples in later years, primarily in the scenes in *The Golden Virgin*, in which Phillip arrives there in early June 1916, is put through the rigours of the Bull Ring training ground and sees the chaotic selection arrangements of drafts for battalions, can be partly ascribed to the autobiography by Max Plowman, *A Subaltern on the Somme*. Henry is known to have read this book, and even recommended it in his 1929 article, 'Reality in War Literature'. Yet original images of Etaples in *The Golden Virgin* and *Love and the Loveless* cannot be ruled out. There is a sense of authenticity about the phrase

I know that base camp Mr. Ford does not mar my memory of it,72

in Henry's original draft, in 1926, of 'Reality of War Literature', in reference to scenes set in the Etaples Base camp in Ford Madox Ford's novel *No More Parades*. It was possibly in the Depot, in Etaples or in Paris Plage that Henry heard gossip about the riots of the previous September, during which the writer of the 2nd Canadian Division IBD War Diary noted that despite an uneasiness in the camp, the soldiers had not joined the several hundred riotous other men being disorderly in Etaples, ⁷³ and that by 13 September, what would in later years be inflated by hearsay and rumour into a mutiny, was only a riot

caused and carried on by a few irresponsible boys,74

for all that it had been acknowledged that

large numbers of troops [have been] brought from front to quell riot.⁷⁵

By the evening of 28 March, with the weather starting to break at last, but the fighting dying down, thus enabling strays and stragglers to rejoin their units and adjutants to start totting up the casualty numbers and then wiring the statistics to GHQ, it was most likely then, in some hut or tent back in the IBD, that Henry scribbled a note as an aide-memoire: 'return [to] Felixstowe 5 am'. It meant that he'd have to be up early if he was to catch the train to Boulogne at that hour, thus beginning the long journey back to Landguard from a place that Wilfred Owen had once described as neither England nor France.⁷⁶ Then, seeing as he was writing on the 27 March page, Henry wrote an abbreviated summary of the journey from Brockley to Etaples. Finally, he concluded with the remark

Up the line tomorrow to 8th Battn.77

Having checked many references to reinforcement drafts joining battalions at this time, it is certain that while Henry's draft was going somewhere up the real line, Henry himself was not. Henry was possibly making a prosaic reference to the draft that was no longer his responsibility, as regards their destination. The 8th Canadian (90th Rifles) Battalion War Diary does not record the arrival of reinforcements at this time, 78 while the 8th Canadian Railway Troops Battalion War Diary only lists the returning personnel from leave. 79 It is possible that like so many other drafts, Henry's one was kept back until the outcome of *MARS* was known. Other Canadian Corps units were to be shortly allocated reinforcements, but the fate of Henry's draft is of no concern to his story. It could be that an element of wishful thinking may have taken over Henry, now imagining himself on that same journey, presumably unaware that the draft was not being allocated to their originally designated

unit, or that they would even be leaving camp on 29 April. Or he may have been being sarcastic, in reflecting on the fact that apart from an afternoon at the seaside, his active service in France was now about as real as that of the 8th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment, which had been disbanded back in February. Either way, he would have had to board that train for its 5 am departure on Good Friday, 29 March, presumably in the rain. This was on a day when over 7000 reinforcements arrived from Boulogne, but only 429 actually set out towards their final destinations; when a shell from a long-range German gun landed on a packed church in Paris, igniting a new blaze of political and popular hysteria; and when exhausted soldiers on both sides of a new line had to start converting their improvised bivouacs and shelters into real trenches all over again, and in a cold rain. Orders were orders, as much for Henry as for his draft, in what his friend and future author of *Winged Victory*, 2nd Lieut. Victor Yeates of No. 46 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, relaxing at his aerodrome thanks to the weather, after crashing three times in a week, would later describe the Base Depot zone, from which Henry was now departing, as

the plutonic regions behind the battle front, where fighting men were cattle and organizers prevailed.⁸⁰

Back then, to the routine at Landguard, of haircut checks and of drafting notices on permitted fishing hours, of watching groups of A-status subalterns settle their mess bills and prepare for departure, with only the prospect of Tilton's imminent court martial as a dubious highlight of the near future. Henry arrived back at Landguard by evening of 30 March, possibly at about the same time as a 2nd Lieutenant Stuart Dare Harrower, just returned from a medical board at the Bedford Depot. Harrower was debarred from A or B service on account of a bad chest ever since Passchendaele (he said), but was capable of captaining a football team a few days later, in circumstances which, as was reported in *The Bedford Daily Circular* edition of Thursday, 11 April, 81 also provides circumstantial evidence supporting the reconstruction here of Henry's lost days. The article in the paper concerned a surprise 1-0 win by a team of recuperating Bedfordshire Regiment officers against their Norfolk regiment counterparts at Felixstowe on Saturday, 6 April. What matters here is that the unnamed journalist listed the officers in that team, including a Lieutenant Williamson. After having carefully scanned the Army Lists of this time for any other Williamsons gazetted to the Bedfordshire Regiment, and discovered that there was only one such person, also a Lieutenant, also named Henry, also first commissioned in the 10th Battalion in Spring 1915, but now attached to the 7th Gloucesters in Mesopotamia, thus the Henry Williamson who was on Felixstowe football pitch on 6 April cannot have been the Henry Williamson who was in a Training Reserve battalion in India on 29 April. 82 Rather, it had to be the Henry Williamson who had been in the Colfe's 2nd XI football team, and who, as a recuperating officer based in Felixstowe, was determined to make use of any opportunity to demonstrate his fitness under the eyes of his superiors. This is also what he did, after all, in going for a swim in the North Sea each sunrise, at the same time as Lord Ampthill, and who was to be an active, if mostly losing, participant in all of the regimental tennis tournament fixtures in August. This football match could also be the factual basis for the one that is described in A Test to Destruction, being a goalless draw between the Gaultshires and a Lancastrian team, much to the disgust of the latter's supporters.⁸³

However important the fixture, it could not have justified the recall of Henry from France, if he had been given a posting there, just to turn out for a match! His participation is perfectly logical however if, errand accomplished, he had returned to Landguard at once, to continue his ordinary duties, as was stated in the report of the next medical board. The ability by Henry to recuperate in the same Hall-Walker hospital that he had liked when there in June 1917, rather than have to take pot luck in a returning casualty convoy, also makes more sense. Falling ill in England rather than France after 6 April (which explains the absence of a casualty form in his Officer's file or his name appearing in the 'sick' list in the daily *Times* Roll of Honour lists for April and May 1918), would at least have given Henry more scope in which to pick an establishment that he actually liked. As for the diagnosis of why he was ill, it is significant that the words 'anaemia' and 'dyspepsia' are noted in the April medical board report. A study of these medical conditions indicates that, though not serious enough for Henry to be suffering from stomach ulceration, he was still afflicted by acute nauseous indigestion with internal bleeding. This had most likely arisen out of all the stresses and

strains of a recently intensified army life on a somewhat fragile metabolism, added to which were all the farewell dinners and parties-turned-binges for those Bedfordshire Regiment subalterns departing for the front at last. There is a memorable description of one such shindig in *A Test to Destruction*, in which, after a pack of bloodshot eyed subalterns, howling like Red Indians, hurl a captain out of a carpet into the North Sea, Phillip blows up his billet chimney and is then sick. Finally, although a Medical Board had been arranged at Caxton Hall in London, Henry's return to Landguard instead, where he was to have a pre-scheduled Board, suggests that he had had the sort of ailment as has been described above, which responded fairly quickly to proper healthcare. Henry may also have preferred to be boarded by sympathetic medical staff at Landguard, rather than by strangers in London who might actually lower his medical status.

Coincidentally, J.R.R. Tolkien, gazetted to the Lancashire Fusiliers and based in Brockton Camp in Staffordshire, and starting to imagine and write about a mythological world which would be inhabited by hobbits and orcs, also fell ill at this time, from a bout of gastritis, also under pressure.85 Brockton Camp was to be Henry's last posting before his discharge from the Bedfordshire Regiment in September 1919, but it would, admittedly, be a little fanciful to think that, in isolating himself in his cubicle to write, he was living in the same one previously occupied by the future author of The Lord of the Rings. Not so much a case then of there being no more parades for Henry after March 1918, or a farewell to arms, but rather a sort of desperate glory that summer, as a warrior against his own rickety health. This was despite being seen to do well in the Regiment, gaining a B status, and briefly, even the much coveted A grade, and also being trusted with the acting captaincy of a company (thus justifying to a factual as opposed to official extent his self-designation as 'Captain Williamson' in later years). Yet he was constantly thwarted from being able to get back to France, or into the RAF, or even the Indian Army, where, if he hadn't been inspired to anticipate Paul Scott (author of the epic Raj Quartet) of a later generation, he might at least have met his namesake. Not for Henry the Victoria Cross won by Captain Dougall, 88th RFA, on 10 April, striding fearlessly about atop the Messines Ridge in full view of the enemy to steady a wavering line of mixed infantry and artillerymen, an incident echoed in the winning of a Military Cross there in A Test to Destruction. 86 Not for Henry either, the unknown grave of Captain Donald Neilson, DSO, MC, 1st Lincolns, who died in a self-sacrificing last stand in the Stanyzer Kabaret on 16 April, in circumstances which were the opposite of the whisky heroics of Bill Kidd therein, in the same novel,⁸⁷ and gave the Headquarters staff time to escape as the stormtroopers closed in.⁸⁸

What Henry had met out there was not a chimera. Rather, what Henry met was his own fate as a soldier, his character, not as a participant but as a spectator, always missing the most famous battles, always being at the sidelines. This must have been a terrible burden to bear until Henry discovered his true vocation as a writer, and as a writer, learn to come to terms with and articulate the reality of life as expressed by Jack Hobart in *Love and the Loveless*, that:

Fate is character. A man makes the same pattern again and again. It's the pattern he's born with. He can try and alter it, but he won't succeed.⁸⁹

Yet despite there being no escape from being a spectator at the battle of Ploegsteert on 19 December 1914, at Arras on 9 April 1917, and of the numerous attempts to break through the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt in May and June 1917 – of being as it were, under the spell of the Life-in-Death – Henry, unlike so many actual participants who had also survived, had the sort of imagination that enabled him to be with them at the Somme and at Passchendaele, in some 8th Battalion of the imagination, and thereby attempting to write on behalf of those in any battalion who, to recall his valedictory words, never returned. This imagination was heightened as well as distorted by the experience of war, albeit as a spectator rather than warrior, not healthy in day-to-day living, but essential for the experience of writing. Goethe, in choosing to give the title of his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, appreciated this dichotomy, for if the word *Wahrheit* unequivocally means Truth (or the Iron God of Truth as Victor Yeates would have said to Henry), *Dichtung* can variously be translated as meaning Poetry, or Invention. As for the pattern of fate, it is somehow inevitable that twenty years after his experiences with the 208 MGC in 1917, Henry's experiences as a Norfolk farmer, struggling against run-down conditions and insubordinate or

lackadaisical farm workers, against a backdrop of increasingly antipathetic authority figures in the district, should be capped by a meeting with Wright again. 90 If they had not previously met in Felixstowe in 1918, a discussion now of the circumstances which led to their expulsion from the Machine Gun Corps could have given Henry the basis for the scenarios in *Love and the Loveless*, in which Phillip is sent to an infantry course at Etaples to get rid of him, and ultimately sent back to England to join the Gaultshires after the Cambrai debacle in late 1917, one of many scapegoats to cover for the person with real responsibility for that battle, General Sir Julian Byng.

Henry's fate could have been worse: like that of Harrower, eventually sentenced to a prison term in Wormwood Scrubs with hard labour, for several convictions of fraud, albeit having gained a sort of backhanded commendation by his former C/O as being a gallant scoundrel. Harrower may be reasonably identified as being Pat Colyer in *The Dream of Fair Women* and Devereux-Wilkins and his imaginary twin in the *Chronicle* novels. The fate of Sinclair is as yet unknown; but Frank E. Tilton, found guilty of absence of leave on 2 April 1918, and sentenced to be instantly dismissed the King's Service, sentence communicated to the prisoner on 25 April and subsequently published in the *London Gazette* as a warning to all subalterns, 2 recovered from the shame of being cashiered by soon becoming a member of the D'Oyly Carte Theatre Company.

Lieutenant Hedges was to win a Victoria Cross in the last battles of 1918, as described in *The Power of the Dead.*⁹³ Unable to cope with the death of his only child in the next war however, he committed suicide. Eaton, name left out of the published Register of Service for Solicitors and Articled Clerks, was, even in 1939, unable to get on the list of the Reserve of Officers. Mitchell, his wish granted in terms of obtaining a commission in the Leicestershire Regiment in 1918, was possibly to become involved in a very different kind of war in Ireland. King, on the other hand, was to become managerially involved in the post-war armaments industry. He would also feature in ongoing *Times* articles in the 1920s and 1930s, in which he maintained a reputation as a high scoring sharpshooter in the annual National Rifle Association competition at Bisley.

As for the man who was to be the basis of not only the character Piston but also that of Bill Kidd in the *Chronicle* novels (although the latter character had Harrower's chest trouble), it will suffice to say for now, that despite having a nondescript war on the Gold Coast of all places, albeit with a somehow acquired Military Cross (or so he said), an even more fantastical imagination than Henry's was to develop This led him to be commended as a sort of bequest to the nation in the late Hon. Mrs Bovill's will and writings in 1934, for fighting a one-man war against Soviet spies in Appledore, North Devon, and elsewhere. His self styled chronicle of true facts about his exploits (a sort of bizarre anticipation of Henry's *Chronicle*?) was to be slated by *John Bull*'s Special Investigator as a ridiculous, monstrous piece of fiction. Histead of trying to anticipate Ian Fleming by writing filmable 007-style spy novels however, Captain Bill Child, 'MC', was to write children's books about Devon and the Caribbean in the era of the Monmouth Rebellion in the 1680s (*The Wake of Rebellion* and *The Tide of Fortune*), followed by the publication of his fishing guide in 1966, reprinted in 1970, *Fishing with Float and Fly.* This guide, written in a jaunty, eccentrically likeable style, may be found with the two other books cited in the British Library.

As if in conclusion, an answer to another mystery concerning Henry may have been found. It was after Henry's sojourn in hospital, and leave in London, during which, as he records in his diary, he went to see the operetta *The Lilac Domino* at the Empire Theatre, and met Terence Tetley, returned from Le Havre, 95 that he himself returned to Landguard on 24 April. It was thus only on 30 April that he (informally?) heard that an acquaintance had been killed. This acquaintance, arriving at Landguard at the same time as Henry in October 1917, invalided out of the RFC, had recovered sufficiently to gain an A status and be posted to the 2nd Bedfords, in the 18th 'Iron' Division. 96 On 22 March, in going back to an evacuated line to check that none of his men had been wounded and abandoned, he was killed by machine gun fire. Later praised in a Bedford newspaper in May by his Adjutant as having been nothing short of magnificent, 97 the isolation of the 2nd Bedfords in the far south of the Somme battlefield in March and April, among the French, meant that information regarding their casualties, and more specifically his death, did not reach Landguard until at least mid-April (when Henry was isolated in a London hospital), and then published in *The Times* in its edition on 26 April. 98 This officer had a distinctive but difficult to pronounce name. It might have been out of convenience as much as affection that 'Sticks' Williamson and the other

subalterns at Landguard gave their brother officer a nickname, and that it was of Lieutenant Westropp Orbell Peyton Winmill that Henry wrote in his diary:

Heard Westy Killed.⁹⁹ [then adding] Tremendous Fighting in France. Wish I were there.¹⁰⁰

Notes

- 1. Anne Williamson, A Patriot's Progress: Henry Williamson and the First World War, Sutton Publishing, 1998, p 143, see also p 190, notes 34 and 35. (Reprinted as p/b as Henry Williamson and the First World War, 1998.) (Please note: this text differs slightly from that in Anne Williamson, Henry Williamson: Tarka and the Last Romantic, Sutton, 1995.)
- 2. Ibid, p 145. See also p 191 note 48.
- 3. Henry Williamson, The Gale of the World, Macdonald Publishing, 1969, p 364.
- 4. Nigel H. Jones, The War Walk: A Journey Along the Western Front, Robert Hale, 1998 ed., p 227.
- 5. Daniel Farson, Henry: An Appreciation of Henry Williamson, Michael Joseph, 1982, p 187.
- 6. Henry Williamson, The Power of the Dead, Macdonald Publishing, 1985, p 268.
- 7. The Gale of the World, pp 247-8.
- 8. Ibid, p 177.
- 9. A Patriot's Progress, p 118 and p 134.
- 10. War Diary, ADVS, 62 Division, WO/95/3074 (National Archives).
- 11. Ibid.
- 12. Ibid.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. Ibid.
- 15. Ibid.
- 16. Ibid.
- 17. Ibid.
- 18. Ibid.19. Ibid.
- 20. War Diary, 208 Machine Gun Company, WO/95/3091 (National Archives).
- 21. A Patriot's Progress, p 81.
- 22. War Diary, 187 Brigade, WO/95/3088 (National Archives).
- 23. A Patriot's Progress, p 77 and p 98.
- 24. Ibid, p 105.
- 25. War Diary, V Corps Signal Company, WO/95/761 (National Archives).
- 26. A Patriot's Progress, p 125.
- 27. 'Tar-And-Feather Court Martial', The Times, 11 September 1919, p 10.
- 28. C. F. Wright File, WO/339/985 (National Archives).
- 29. Ibid.
- 30. Ibid.
- 31. Ibid.
- 32. Ibid, and A Patriot's Progress, p 134.
- 33. WO/339/985.
- 34. A Patriot's Progress, p 134.
- 35. Ibid, p 118.
- 36. WO/339/985.
- 37. Ibid.
- 38. WO/95/3091 and A Patriot's Progress, p 130.
- 39. A Patriot's Progress, p 88.
- 40. WO/339/985.
- 41. W. F. Eaton File, WO/339/40422 (National Archives).
- 42. A Patriot's Progress, p 139.
- 43. File of routine official correspondence and memoranda between the colonel and adjutant and the brigade headquarters, Felixstowe section, October 1917–March 1918, etc., X550/4/5 in X550 Series of Records of the Royal Anglian Regiment (former Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment), Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service. The website address is www.bedscc.gov.uk/archive.
- 44. Ibid.
- 45. Ibid.
- 46. Ibid.

- 47. A Patriot's Progress, p 141.
- 48. J. Wheatley Blench, 'The Apprenticeship of a Novelist part 1', HWSJ 17, March 1988, pp 5–19, particularly p 5. A book cover therein on which Henry refers to himself as being in the 1st Bedfords, 5 Division, is correct only insofar as he was gazetted to that battalion. Otherwise, this is wishful thinking, for that division was in Italy until early April 1918.
- 49. Samuel Impey War Pension File, WO/364/1865 (GS No: 1736020), ILES, Horace IMRIE, Alexander.
- 50. Henry Williamson, A Test to Destruction, Macdonald Publishing, 1985, p 37.
- 51. Henry Williamson, 'When I Was Demobilised', Indian Summer Notebook, HWS, 2001, pp 22-4, particularly p 24.
- 52. A Patriot's Progress, p 142.
- 53. 'Concert at Landguard', The East Anglian Times, 22 March 1918, p. 3.
- 54. A Test to Destruction, p 96, and 'The News in the House', The Times, 22 March 1918, p 7.
- 55. 'Strange Incident on Western Front', Ipswich Evening Star and Daily Herald, 20 March 1918, p 3.
- 56. F. E. Tranter File, WO/339/26194 (National Archives).
- 57. C. C. R. Murphy, The History of the Suffolk Regiment, 1914-27, Hutchinson, 1928, p 828.
- 58. War Diary, 1/5 South Staffordshire Battalion, WO/95/2686 (National Archives).
- 59. War Diary, 1/5 Leicestershire Battalion, WO/95/2690 (National Archives).
- 60. J. H. Boraston and Cyril E. O. Bax, The Eighth Division in War, 1914-1919, Medici Society, 1926, p 173.
- 61. The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914–1919, ed. Robert Blake, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952, p 304 for 19 April 1918 diary entry.
- 62. Anne Williamson, Henry Williamson: Tarka and the Last Romantic, Sutton Publishing, 1995, p 52.
- A Test to Destruction, pp 126–40. War Diary, 7th Suffolks, WO/95/1582 and War Diary, 4th Bedfords, WO/95/3118 (National Archives).
- 64. The Times, 26 March 1918, p 7.
- 65. Ibid.
- 66. A Patriot's Progress, p 143.
- 67. 'Prayers Throughout Canada' (subheading under 'German Report of the Advance: Bapaume Captured', *The Times*, 26 March 1918, p 6.
- 68. A Patriot's Progress, p.76.
- 69. Henry Williamson, 'The Battle of Vimy Ridge', Days of Wonder, HWS, 1987, pp 17-23, particularly pp 20-21 and p 22.
- 70. A Patriot's Progress, p 190, note 35.
- 71. War Diary, Canadian Infantry Base Depots and Reinforcement Camp, Etaples, WO/95/4191 (National Archives).
- 72. Henry Williamson, 'Reality in War Literature', HWSJ 34, September 1988, pp 6-16, particularly p 12.
- 73. WO/95/4191.
- 74. Ibid.
- 75. Ibid.
- 76. Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell, OUP, 1967, p 521.
- 77. A Patriot's Progress, p 43.
- 78. War Diary, 8th Canadian (90th Rifles) Battalion, WO/95/3769 (National Archives).
- 79. War Diary, 8th Canadian (Railway Troops) Battalion, WO/95/4070 (National Archives).
- 80. Victor Yeates, Winged Victory, Mayflower, 1974, p 382.
- 81. 'Officers at Football', Bedford Daily Circular, 11 April 1918, p 3.
- 82. The Quarterly Indian Army List, October 1918, Army Headquarters India, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1918, No. 3 Reserve Battalion (India), p 785. Lt. H.E. Williamson was officially gazetted to this training battalion in Bangalore on 29 April 1918 after probation, with certificates in Instruction in Bombing, and in Physical and Bayonet Training, for drafts who would be posted to Mesopotamia after acclimatization.
- 83. A Test to Destruction, pp 59-60.
- 84. Ibid, pp 41-3.
- 85. John Garth, Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle Earth, HarperCollins, London, 2004, pp 246-7.
- 86. A Test to Destruction, p 168.
- 87. Ibid, pp 179-81, and pp 184-6.
- 88. War Diary, 1st Lincolns, WO/95/2154 (National Archives), and C. R. Simpson, *History of the Lincolnshire Regiment* 1914-1918, Medici Society, 1931, p 323.
- 89. Henry Williamson, Love and the Loveless, Macdonald Publishing, 1984, p 42.
- 90. A Patriot's Progress, p 134.
- 91. S. D. Harrower File, WO/339/31517.
- 92. London Gazette, 17 May 1918, Issue 30692, p 5967.
- 93. The Power of the Dead, p 341.
- 94. 'Amazing Spy Scare Plots Deluded Society Woman Disclosures', John Bull, 28 April 1934, p 15.
- 95. A Patriot's Progress, p 145.

- 96. W.O.P. Winmill File, WO/339/497211 (National Archives).
- 97. 'The Late Lieut. Winmill', Bedford Daily Circular, 11 May 1918, p 3.
- 98. 'Killed in Action', The Times, 26 April 1918, p 1.
- 99. A Patriot's Progress, p 145.
- 100. Ibid, p 145.

Acknowledgements

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Biographical Note

A member of the Society since 2000, I am a researcher by profession, and live close to the recently replanted lavender fields of Carshalton that Henry wrote about.



HW has written on the back of this photograph from his archive: 'Lt. C.F. Wright "Bright" of No. 7'.



