

CECIL HENRY SYMONS



3rd October 1917

1894-1917 Aged 23

Private 13711, 6th (Service) Battalion The Buffs, East Kent Regiment.

Cecil Symons was born in Bradford on 2nd August 1894, the second child of Henry Octavius Paul Symons (known as Harry) and Eliza Cooke. Cecil's grandfather was a civil engineer who constructed railways all over England, including the Settle-Carlisle line. He settled his family in Bradford during the 1870s. Harry had been born in Hampshire. He started work as a clerk, as did two of his brothers, and he rose to become Cashier to a wool-combing company. In 1890 he married Eliza, the daughter of a Bradford tailor. They had five children, four of whom survived infancy.

Cecil showed promise from an early age and he went to Bradford Grammar School shortly after his eighth birthday in 1902. He would be a pupil there for seven years, leaving shortly before he was fifteen. Throughout his school years he did well at French, and also Maths, History, Geography and, in his final year, Physics. From school he went like his father to work in the wool trade, as a clerk with wool merchants Messrs. Francis Willey and Co. in central Bradford. When the war began Cecil was twenty and a single man living with his parents, near Toller Lane. He did not volunteer during the first year of hostilities, but when the government moved towards compulsion in November 1915 Cecil attested his willingness to serve when called upon. Although the place of his attestation was Bradford, he was assigned to the 2/5th Battalion of The Buffs, the East Kent Regiment. He was duly mobilized in April 1916 and travelled to Tonbridge in Kent. His medical inspection reveals that he was 5 feet 5 inches tall, weighed a little over nine stones and his chest measured 36 inches. He received eight months training before he was sent to 38th Infantry Base Depot in France at the end of December, where he was posted to 'D' company 6th Battalion East Kent Regiment (6/Buffs).



In 1917 Symons survived going 'over the top' twice during the British Spring Offensive around Arras. On 9th April, 6/Buffs successfully took their objectives for relatively light losses; on the disastrous 3rd May, however, the battalion lost 360 men for no gain at Monchy-le-Preux. The 6/Buffs were then withdrawn to refit and train in the new attack methods the B.E.F. was adopting. At the end of June Symons went down with 'trench fever', caused by infected lice bites, and was eventually taken to a hospital at Boulogne. He was not discharged until 4th September, and he was then at 38th Infantry Base Depot before returning to his unit on 24th September. A few days later, on 3rd October, the 6/Buffs were in the front line at Monchy when a neighbouring battalion launched a raid on the German trenches. In retaliation the Germans heavily shelled The Buffs' trenches, causing 33 casualties. Cecil Symons was one of six dead who were buried in the same row at Monchy British Cemetery.

Cecil's sibling Horace had volunteered before his elder brother, in January 1915. He served with the Royal Field Artillery and the Royal Engineers, and survived the war. Their parents dedicated a window in St. Chad's, their parish church just off Toller Lane, to Cecil's memory.

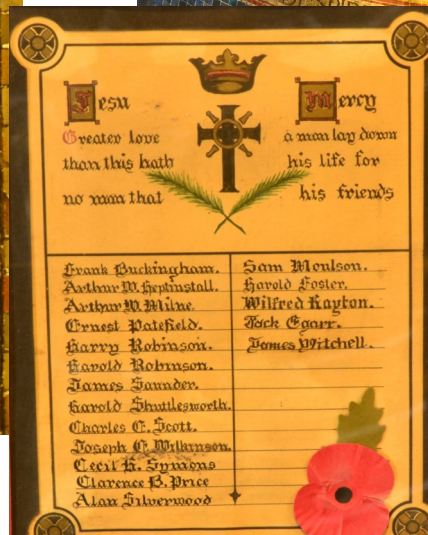
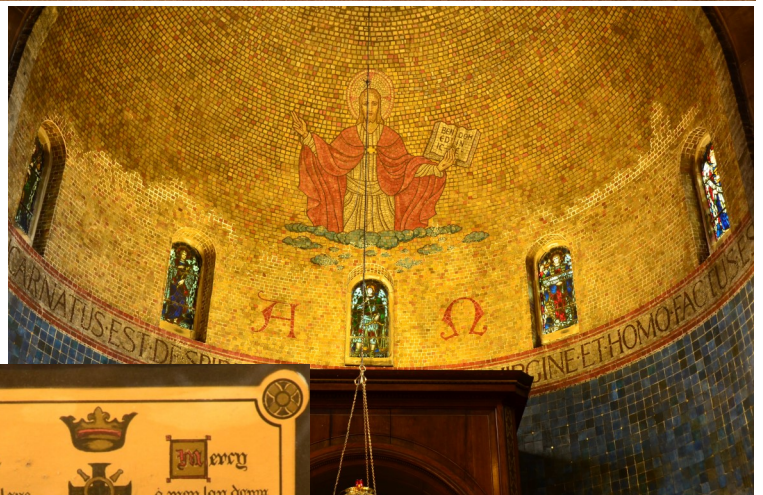
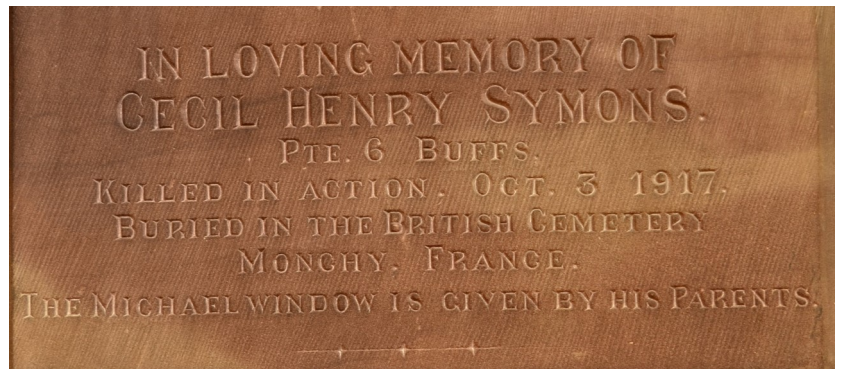


Acknowledgements:

Cecil Symons's photo is from the School memorial roll, with thanks to B.G.S. and the O.B.A. Family research was done through Ancestry.com. The outline of Cecil's life from De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour is available there. His school years are recorded in the B.G.S. Annual Reports for 1903 to 1909. Cecil's Service Record is also available on Ancestry.com, which is the source for his physical statistics, dates of service and illness. For the 6/Buffs I consulted the Battalion War Diary, again through Ancestry (https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/60779/43112_1860_0-00163?pid=537826&backurl=http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DKih1606%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26indiv%3D1%26db%3DUKWarDiariesWW1%26gss%3Dangs-d%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26msT%3D1%26_F0007CF4%3DRoyal%2520East%2520Kent%2520Regiment%26_F00088EF%3D6th%2520battalion%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3D6n6%26pcat%3D39%26fh%3D73%26h%3D537826%26recoff%3D%26fsk%3DBEK5W-47-UlgADtawAAnsM-61-%26bsk%3D%26pgoff%3D%26ml_rpos%3D74&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=Kih1606&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imgeld=43112_1860_0-00343).

For the 6/Buffs other dead of 3rd October, I used cwgc.org. The Graves Registration Report Form wrongly gives Symons' death date as 8th October. The war service of both Symons brothers was recorded in the City of Bradford Great War 1914-1918 Roll of Honour (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bradfordww1/albums/72157638727571004/page2>). The P.D. Lodge Register of Bradford War Memorials records the dedication of the St. Chad's Michael window (see <http://www.ww1bradford.org/people-search/>). The photos were taken by the author. My thanks to Mrs A. Longcake for allowing me to take them.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper (Nhooper1956@googlemail.com) in September 2017.



St. Chad's was constructed 1912-13. The five archangel windows form a war memorial—three were dedicated by families in memory of lost relatives, the other two were dedicated to the parish dead. The archangels brought messages, healing and comfort.