

Pamphlet
GV 915.C655 WIN

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
THE UNIVERSITY, BRISTOL

Price £1.50 1991

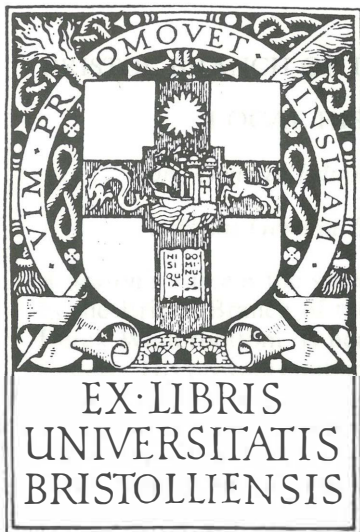
ISBN 0 901388 60 2

A SEASON'S FAME

How A.E.J. Collins of Clifton College in
1899 made cricket's highest individual score



DEREK WINTERBOTTOM



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seventh pamphlet to be published
Historical Association. The author,
of History and Archivist at Clifton
ons include *Henry Newbolt and the*
er Percival: A Public School in the
pamphlet he examines the astounding
s and looks also at the world of the
ading up to World War I. Collins'
s not always received the credit it

the authorities of Clifton College for
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ISBN 0 901388 60 2

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Patrick McGrath.

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Sadly, this pamphlet was the last to be edited by Professor
Patrick McGrath who died as it was going to press. He had
been the Honorary General Editor since the series began in
1960 and its success is largely due to his work. A new Editor
will be appointed shortly and publication will continue.

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A SEASON'S FAME

How A.E.J. Collins of Clifton College in 1899 made cricket's highest individual score

Arthur Edward James Collins was born in India on 18 August
1885, the son of a judge in the Indian Civil Service. ¹ By the time
he became world famous at the age of thirteen years and ten
months he was an orphan who had arrived in September 1897 as a
twelve-year-old boarder in one of Clifton College's two junior
boarding houses. ² Now called Poole's House in honour of its first
housemaster, the place was then known as Clark's House after
George H. Clark who was in charge from 1897 to 1905. A
handsome Victorian villa, it stands at the corner of Guthrie Road
and Northcote Road and it looks across at the Rackets Court of
Clifton College and the forbidding walls of Clifton Zoo. A glimpse
can also be caught of the green grass of Clifton College Close, only
a few steps away across Guthrie Road, the site where fame
awaited Arthur Collins.

It was not an ancient school that had been chosen by the
guardians of this orphan boy, who themselves lived in the West
Country, at Tavistock. Clifton College had opened as recently as
1862 but so great was the genius and the reputation of its first
Headmaster, John Percival, that in 1879, the year he laid down his
office, there were 680 boys at Clifton. Percival's successor James

1. *The Record Score* by 'Cliftonian'; a contemporary account of the Collins
match in the Clifton College Archives, hereafter referred to as *The Record
Score*; *Clifton College Register 1862–1947*, p. 214; copy of Collins' marriage
certificate in the Register of Marriages, Douglas, Isle of Man.
2. *The Record Score*.



Wilson maintained the popularity of the school but Clifton's third Headmaster, Michael Glazebrook, was a regrettably forbidding man, nicknamed 'The Bogey' by his pupils.³ He was successful in maintaining excellent academic standards and a high moral tone as well as promoting music in the school but he was not popular and this was reflected in a steady decline in numbers at Clifton during his time. In addition to winning first classes at Oxford in both Classics and Maths, Glazebrook was an athletics blue and reputedly the first Englishman to jump six feet. Clearly, he was proud of his sporting achievements for his medals were framed and hung for all to see outside his Clifton study.⁴ Yet when he went out to watch a cricket match on the Close this tall, sombre figure 'in a black frock-coat and clerical wide-awake' would cast 'a transient gloom on each game as it passed,'⁵ according to Richard Keigwin, a notable games player in Watson's House and two years Collins' senior.

Not that young Arthur Collins of Clark's House in the Junior School would have had much to do with Glazebrook except perhaps to see him sitting in the Headmaster's stall in Chapel. Although the Junior School was a separate department of Clifton College, with its own Head, William Laxton, it was not a separate school and it was quite common for members of staff to teach Junior forms as well as Senior forms. Laxton, for instance, before he took up the Headship of the Junior School in the year that Collins arrived (1897) had been at one time House Tutor of Dakyns', a senior house. In addition to Clark's House there was one other Junior School boarding house, Hartnell's, in Percival Road, and there were two day-boy houses, North Town and South Town. When founding Clifton, John Percival had attached great importance to the day-boy element in the school and at Clifton the 'Town' boys were not regarded as social inferiors – which was the case at other public schools.

Although not a separate school, the Junior School did have its own set of classrooms standing next to the Chapel and looking out across the Clifton Close. Completed in 1876 by Charles Hansom, the architect of Clifton's main buildings, the Junior School was less than inspired in design and its classrooms were generally thought

dingy and inadequate. The building was eventually demolished in 1925 to make way for Clifton's exciting new Science School. Yet in one sense the Junior School was well placed, for as Arthur Collins and his contemporaries emerged from their Latin or Arithmetic lessons, they stepped immediately onto the green turf of the Close where they were free to practise the game dear to every Cliftonian's heart, cricket.

'It is, I believe, a mere truth to say,' wrote Sir Henry Newbolt, who left Clifton in 1881, 'that there were very few members of the school who would not have bartered away all chance of intellectual distinction for a place in the Cricket Eleven or Football Fifteen. The days of our youth are the days of our glory, and it would be a tame existence that had never known an hour of glory – the hour, for example, of the glorious return of the Eleven from a Cheltenham match, when the road was dense with an expectant crowd, who hurled themselves like a storming party upon the brake when it reached the top of College Road, took out the horses and brought the Eleven down the hill, hauling, swaying and cheering as if they were dragging a successful lifeboat ashore after a whole day's battling in danger of death.'⁶ Even by the time of Collins' arrival the Clifton Close had won a special place in the story of English cricket. Bristol was the home of that eccentric cricketing doctor, W.G. Grace who, too old to be a Cliftonian himself sent his sons to Clifton and played many games on the Close. Indeed, according to E.W. Swanton 'Clifton in fact could well be called W.G.'s favourite ground. Though the County only played there in the school holidays he made 13 of his 126 hundreds on the Close; as many as he got in the rest of Gloucestershire put together, and more than he had anywhere else except Lord's and The Oval.'⁷ It was on the Close, too, that Edward Tylecote, a School House boy, in a match between the 'Classical' and the 'Modern' sides of the school in 1868 scored a memorable 404 not out that stood as a cricket record for many years. Tylecote later played for England as did Charles Townsend, a North Town boy who left Clifton in 1894.

Although rugby football and cross-country runs were an important part of Clifton life from the school's foundation, there can be little doubt that cricket was the pre-eminent sport up to the Great War. The 1st XI initially played local clubs and gradually

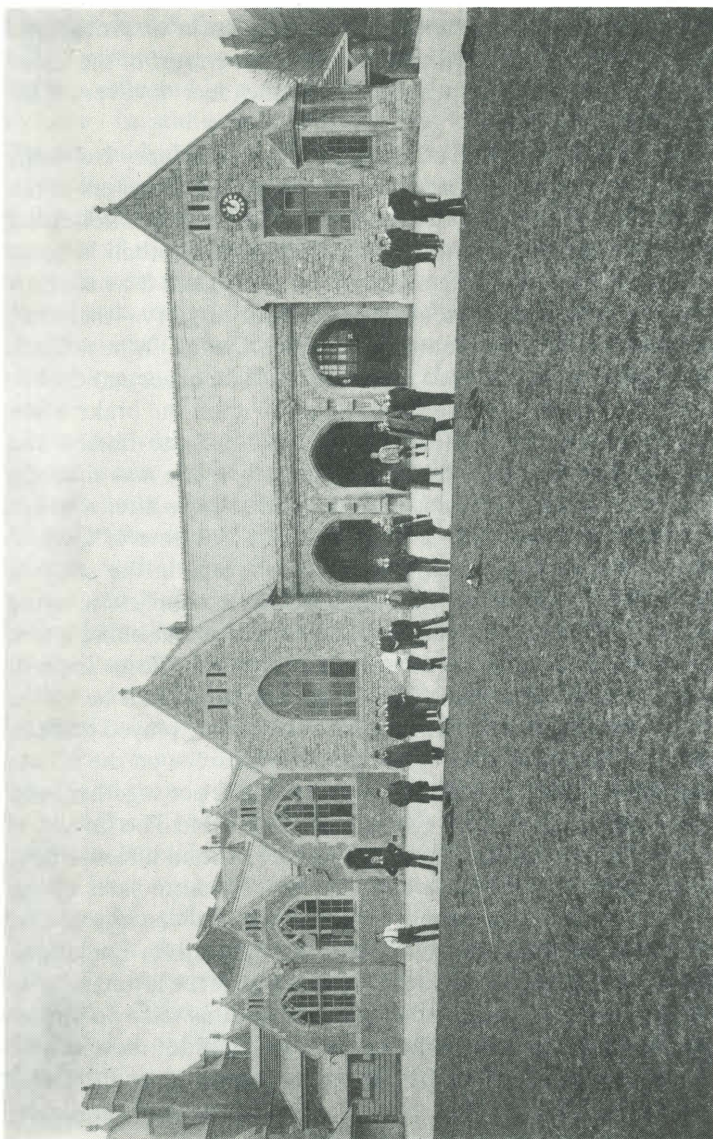
3. *Centenary Essays on Clifton College*, edit. N.G.L. Hammond, 1962, p. 148, hereafter referred to as *Centenary Essays*.

4. *Centenary Essays*, p. 137.

5. *Centenary Essays*, p. 148.

6. Sir Henry Newbolt, *My World as in my Time*, 1932, pp. 62–63, hereafter referred to as Newbolt, *My World*.

7. E.W. Swanton, newspaper cutting, 1963 in Clifton College Archives.



The original Junior School buildings (now demolished). The Collins match was played just to the right of the buildings, on what is now known as 'Collins' Piece'.

developed a regular fixture list with other schools, starting with Sherborne (1865) and adding Cheltenham in 1872, Rugby in 1887 and Tonbridge in 1899. There were also many internal matches, especially those between forms and between houses. House matches called upon the powerful emotion of 'House patriotism' which in turn extended to 'School patriotism' and ultimately to Patriotism itself. By the end of the nineteenth century this had come to mean pride in the achievements of the British Empire and a desire to serve the State either in the Civil or the Armed Services. Percival had greatly emphasized the all-important virtue of Service both to the local community and the nation at large. Statistics published in *The Cliftonian* for June 1898 showed that there were 580 Old Cliftonians serving in the Army, and in 1901 another survey revealed that there were more Old Boys from Clifton in the Indian Service than from any other school.⁸

A cricket match, therefore, even if only an internal one within the school was seen as more than just a game at this time. It was truly a training for life's future challenges and hardships, an occasion on which character was moulded and the skills of leadership developed. And just as Arthur Collins entered Clark's House as a new boy in 1897 a slim volume of twelve poems, written by an Old Cliftonian and published in October of that year captured the imagination of the British reading public – so much so that twenty-one thousand copies of the poems were sold in the first year. Entitled *Admirals All*, these verses of Henry Newbolt dealt mainly with heroic episodes in England's naval and military past, as seemed fitting in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee when her 372 million subjects scattered across the globe turned to salute the little old lady who reigned over the largest Empire the world had ever known. One of these poems would come to be learnt by heart by many thousands of schoolchildren. It began –

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night –
 Ten to make and the match to win –
 A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
 An hour to play and the last man in.
 And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
 Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
 But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote –
 'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

8. *The Cliftonian* magazine, vol. 15, pp. 261–280 and vol. 16, p. 422.

The obscenities of twentieth century battles discredited Newbolt's relatively innocent attempt to emphasize that warfare, like cricket, should be conducted with chivalry, according to accepted rules; and *Vitaï Lampada*, once among his most admired poems, sank after 1918 into notoriety. Yet at Clifton, between 1897 and 1899 the success of Newbolt and his poem about the Clifton Close brought general satisfaction and delight. 'I am confident,' declared Rowland Whitehead, the Secretary of the Old Cliftonian Society in 1898 'that there is not a Cliftonian who does not rejoice at the sudden leap into fame which has attended the publication of that small and unassuming volume.'⁹ Just before the end of the Christmas term in 1898 Newbolt was invited to speak at the annual Supper of North Town, his old House, and found 'the place was alive with silent warm congratulation. . . . It's a pure marvel, a School,' he thought, 'and the intangible invisible thing we call "House-feeling" is about the most wonderful thing in it.'¹⁰

One of the most powerful ways of creating 'House-feeling' was to hold regular games competitions between the houses, and it was in just such a competition that in June 1899 Arthur Collins became a Newbolt hero and a cricket legend. On Thursday 22 June, as Captain of the Clark's House XI he led his team across Guthrie Road to assemble on the Junior School pitch nearest the road and do battle with the Junior XI of North Town. Collins was two months short of his fourteenth birthday, and there were five other thirteen-year-olds in his team. Of the other five Clark's House players four were fourteen and one was twelve. The North Town team was definitely younger on average with one player aged fourteen, four aged thirteen, four aged twelve, one whose age is not known and one who celebrated his twelfth birthday on the last day of the match.

Collins won the toss and put his side in to bat. As this was not a particularly prestigious school game it was played on a pitch of limited and irregular size, as the diagram shows. Boundary hits on all but the Sanatorium side counted for only two runs, but as there does not seem to have been a boundary at all on the Sanatorium

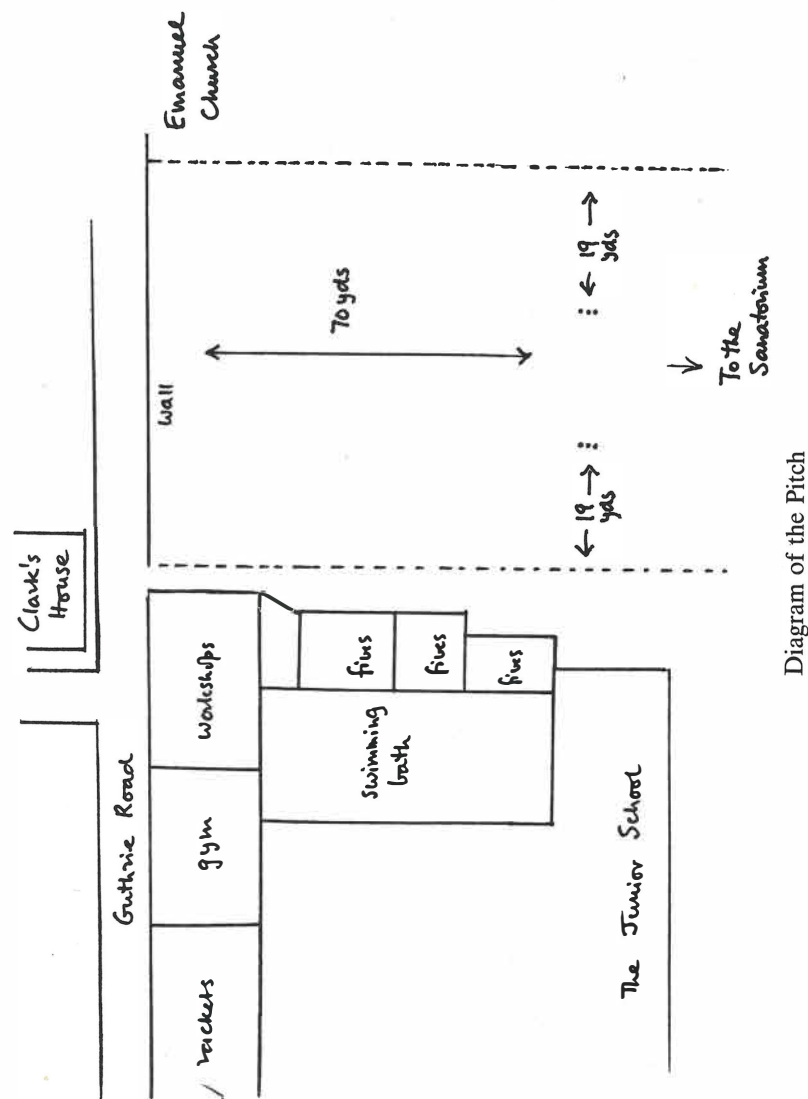


Diagram of the Pitch

9. *The Cliftonian* magazine, vol. 15, p. 298.

10. Newbolt, *My World*, p. 204.



A.E.J. Collins

side, all hits in that direction had to be fully run out. Collins opened the batting with A.M. Champion at 3.30 p.m. and in the 2½ hours of play that Thursday he reached 200 runs. Another 2½ hours' play on Friday afternoon saw him on his best form according to an observer who wrote 'So brilliant was his play on the second afternoon that even the Old Cliftonian match, which was in progress at the same time, lost all its interest, and quite a large crowd watched the boy's phenomenal performance. . . . His hitting was beautifully timed, and for the most part crisp and judiciously placed. The strokes for which he showed the greatest partiality were cuts and leg hits.'¹¹ With 400 runs on the board Collins' innings nearly came to an end because he hit a catch in the direction of Victor Fuller Eberle who was fielding at point. Eberle was eleven years old and therefore the youngest member of either team – an excuse much needed, because he dropped the catch, to the irritation of his North Town team-mates.¹² Collins, meanwhile, went on to equal A.E. Stoddart's existing record of 485 and finished the day's play with 509 runs to his credit. According to the *Bristol Times and Mirror* Collins 'gave only about three chances and his strokes all round the wicket were brilliant, his cutting and driving causing the greatest astonishment to the many cricketing veterans who, hearing of the performance, flocked to the ground.'¹³ Strangely, perhaps, the game was not continued over the weekend but this gave time for the news to flash round the cricketing world that a new record had been set, and that there was plenty of life in young Collins yet.

The third day of what had now become a celebrated match was Monday 26 June, and there was only time for 55 minutes play after the end of lessons. Collins survived for the whole period, taking his score up to 598. But the determined bowling of Archibald Crew and David Monteath was taking its toll. The time would come when Monteath, as a colonial Under-Secretary of State, would be decorated with three orders of knighthood, but on this summer afternoon at Clifton he and Crew were thinking only of how to bowl out Clark's House. By the time the last man, Tom Redfern, came in to bat, they had three wickets each. As far as the *Bristol Times and Mirror* was concerned, Redfern 'is playing the correct game, and is content with allowing his partner to make the

11. *The Record Score*.

12. *Bristol Evening Post*, 1 June 1963, p. 4.

13. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 24 June 1899.

runs. Collins gave a chance in the long field when his score was 566, but otherwise his display was perfect.¹⁴ This Collins-Redfern partnership put on a tough last stand, eventually scoring 138 between them (though only 13 for Redfern).¹⁵

Tuesday 27 June, being a half-holiday, put more time at the disposal of the great contest. Collins and Redfern went out to bat but it seems that concentration was lacking all round for Collins was dropped in the slips at 605 and a much harder chance was dropped by Tom Rendall at square leg when his score was 619.¹⁶ In the end it was Eberle who made up for his former error by catching Redfern at point off a ball from Crew 25 minutes after the start of play. So ended Clark's House's innings for a total of 836, and according to the messy handiwork of a harrassed schoolboy scorer, A.E.J. Collins had achieved 628 not out. In a total of just under seven hours at the wicket he had hit 146 boundaries (scoring two each), and had run one six, four fives, thirty fours and thirty-six threes.

This was a two innings match and observers were possibly wondering what other surprises might be in store. Would the mantle of Collins perhaps fall on some batsman of the North Town team? It was not to be. In the remaining play on Tuesday and Wednesday North Town could only make 148 in their two innings and the bowler who took eleven wickets for 63 runs was none other than A.E.J. Collins. So victory went to Clark's House by an innings and 688 runs.

With the match at last over on its sixth day (Eberle's birthday) praise and congratulations fell upon the young shoulders of cricket's new hero. A.E. Stoddart, whose record of 485 Collins had broken, hastened to present him with a new bat. 'Presents have poured in on him from all parts,' we are told, 'but the College officials are exercising a wise discretion in his acceptance. . . . They have not forgotten that Collins is still a boy, and they are not disposed to allow one big score to ruin his career.'¹⁷ It was indeed a discreet, though fulsome tribute that *The Cliftonian* magazine offered in its next issue (July 1899). Entitled 'To A.E.J.C.', three poems were penned in salutation, but the first was in Greek, the others in Latin. Whether Collins could have fully understood them

there must be some doubt, even though he was a scholarly pupil. Translated they read:¹⁸

To A.E.J.C.

1. Greetings to you, my son; you are a source of great wonder to all citizens, and a splendid star for all in the school. You completed 628 runs, you who are now the most successful of all the boys. You yourself were undefeated – the rest departed – and you have easily passed all records. I have written this in great admiration – though not with a skill to match yours, I believe, – brilliant star amongst the young.
2. Greetings great boy! Now you are far the most famous – with your hands you have easily excelled earlier achievements. People always point you out: 'Now, now look,' they all cry out, 'the boy himself is coming;' 'for undefeated he made 628 runs.' The story passes from lips to lips.
3. Boy, glorious in your recent brilliance; this is the way to the stars; the fields, the constellations and the very Age itself will sing of you.

Adulation on this scale, one might think, would not be good for one so young. The fact appears to be that Collins was not only blessed with a superior intellect and wide-ranging sporting prowess but he was also unassuming and modest. According to Victor Fuller Eberle he was 'short and stockily built, with fair hair and almost an unhealthy pallor. By nature reserved and sparing of words, he was modest almost to shyness, with a complete absence of what as boys we called *side*. The outstanding impression you received from him was one who was invariably cool and imper-turbable, with a readiness to face up to any task without flinching. He was a leader by sheer dogged example, rather than by inspiration. You instinctively knew that in no circumstances would he ever let you down.'¹⁹ 'He is a bright, well set-up youngster,' another contemporary noted, 'And very popular with his colleagues.'²⁰

If there is little doubt that Collins was a modest and decent boy,

14. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, Tuesday 27 June 1899.

15. *Bristol Times and Mirror*, Wednesday 28 June 1899.

16. *ibid.*

17. *The Record Score*.

18. The originals appeared in *The Cliftonian*, vol. 16, p. 40. Copies of the translations are in the Clifton College Archives.

19. 'Notes on A.E.J.C.'s score' in the Victor Fuller Eberle papers in the Clifton College Archives.

20. *The Record Score*.

MATCH BETWEEN

BATSMEN.		
1	Collins	132 42 232 132 222 232 22 121
2	Champion	22 122 22 112 233
3	Gilbert	112 23
4	Studdy	112 13
5	Shoreff	112 2
6	Galwey	1112 24
7	Whitty	22 23 22 22 22 22 22 33 22 1
8	Shorne	x
9	Sease	23 12 22 132 313 12 22
10	Raine	42 111 311
11	Redfern	112 22 121
Byes		2 12 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2
Leg Byes		1
Wide Balls		1111111111
No Balls		x

212125221231122234112211
RUNS AT THE FALL

1 for 127 2 for 169 3 for 226 4 for 268 5 for 311 6 for 436 7 for 451

BOWLERS.		RUNS FOR							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Sindrea	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2	Bainsbury	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	Crew	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
4	Rendall	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
5	Davis	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
6	Monteath	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
7	Bainsbury	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
8	Sindrea	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

HOW OUT.	BOWLER'S NAME.	TOTAL.
not out		628
caught Monteath	Rendall	27
bowed	Crew	9
caught Davis	Bainsbury	8
bowed	Crew	6
bowed	Crew	11
c & b	Monteath	42
bowed	Monteath	0
bowed	Monteath	32
bowed	Bainsbury	14
caught Bainsbury	Crew	13
		34
		10
		1

OF EACH WICKET.

8 for 9 for 6 98 10 for 11 for TOTAL 836

BOWLING.														
EACH OVER.														
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	WIDE BALLS	NO BALLS	RUNS	WICKETS	OVER	MAIDEN OVERS	BALLS BOWLED	AVERAGE RUNS PER WICKET
2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	218	0	50	5	50	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	185	4	100	5	103	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	18	1	10	3		
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	79	0	14	0	70	
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	113	3	17	2		
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	166	2	32	7	160	

was he really such a good cricketer or was his record achieved through luck or – worse still – some form of stage-management at Clifton? According to the author of an article about the Collins match written a few days after the event, ‘during the present season he has made several good scores, but he was not regarded as a batsman very much above the average. Even today, Jack Painter, the old Gloucestershire batsman, who is now the chief coach at the College, says he has as much to learn as most boys. A fault which has cost him his wicket many times is the difficulty he finds in keeping his right foot firm. He likes to jump in and have a bang, and though very quick and possessed of a good eye, he is still far too reckless to achieve permanent distinction, unless he improves.’²¹ As we shall see, this was a shrewd judgement because Collins, though a capable adult cricketer, never again approached his sensational Clifton score.

Can it perhaps be argued that the North Town team was rather feeble and that, in the end, they collaborated in prolonging Collins’ innings? Victor Fuller Eberle fiercely contested this charge, claiming that the match was played ‘in the traditional spirit of House rivalry and keenness,’ and that the ‘North Town XI was not an unduly weak one by normal standards.’²² This seems fair comment because E.A. Sainsbury and A.H.R. Fedden (later Sir Roy) both eventually played for the School 1st XI, and Crew and Eberle both captained it (in the same year, 1905). It was Eberle, of course, who brought Collins’ innings to a close by catching a ball from Redfern. As he pointed out later in life, he was not popular for dropping Collins at 400 and not particularly popular for catching Redfern when Collins had reached 628, by which time most onlookers were hoping for 1,000. Still, the Eberles were not a family to shirk their duty. The fact that the ground was small and uneven is used as an argument in Collins’ favour ‘as his timing was good and he hit the ball hard, so that many of his twos would have been fours.’²³ And if the point is going to be made that the match was only played for a few hours each day with a full week-end break in between, it has to be said that Collins had scored 509 by the end of the second day, *before* the week-end.

There is, perhaps, a legitimate doubt concerning the accuracy of

the scoresheet. One of the scorers was a young North Town boy called Edward Pegler and in June 1962 E.W. Swanton wrote in *The Sunday Telegraph*, ‘I am bound to record that Cdr E.W. Pegler (R.N. retired) casts an element of doubt on the last two digits of Collins’ total.’ According to Pegler’s own account, quoted by Swanton, he was ‘much badgered by masters and reporters. An inky small boy is rather defenceless against grown-ups. However, the score is substantially correct – 628 plus or minus 20, shall we say.’²⁴ This remark does not inspire absolute confidence in the official score, it has to be admitted. Even so, with 608 Collins would still hold the record, and it *might* have been 648. When all the reservations about Collins’ feat have been considered, it still remains very remarkable.

In addition to his sporting triumph in the summer of 1899 Collins also pulled off a major academic success by winning a scholarship to the Senior School awarded on the basis of a competitive examination. Moreover his guardians, who had lived hitherto at Tavistock, moved to Bristol in time for the September term of 1899. This meant that instead of moving to a Senior School boarding house Collins could join one of the two day-boy houses, North Town or South Town. In fact he joined North Town and thereby became a messmate of all the boys who had played on the opposing side in *the* match. As it happened, 1899 was an historic year in the annals of North Town because it saw the retirement as housemaster of G.H. Wollaston, a legendary figure in the Clifton community. Appointed in 1873 by Percival he was qualified in Biology, Botany and Zoology, all of which he taught with special zest throughout his Clifton career. When the ‘Town’ house was divided into North Town and South Town in 1877 Wollaston became the first housemaster of North Town. One of his greatest admirers was Henry Newbolt, who entered North Town in 1876 and rose to be Wollaston’s Head of House: indeed to the fatherless Newbolt his housemaster became and remained a surrogate parent. ‘He will long remain in the memory of all who knew him as a unique figure in the Clifton saga,’ Newbolt wrote. ‘His huge frame, his blue eyes and fair beard, his bluff sincerity and the sudden thunders of his utterance gave him a strange Norse air, and made him almost as much feared as he was loved.’²⁵ Some of this

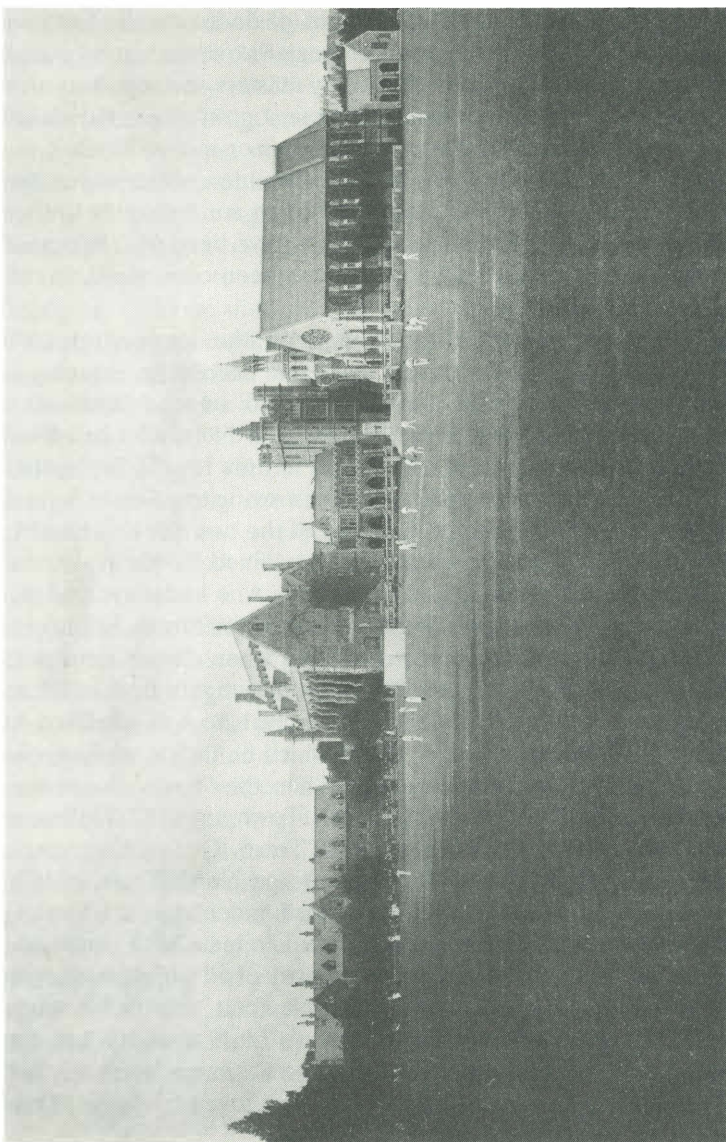
21. *ibid.*

22. V.F. Eberle, ‘A.E.J. Collins, a Retrospect’, in Clifton College Archives.

23. V.F. Eberle, ‘A.E.J. Collins, 628 Not Out’, p. 1 in the Clifton College Archives.

24. *The Sunday Telegraph*, 3 June 1962.

25. Newbolt, *My World*, p. 78.



The Clifton Close c. 1904

'strange Norse air' can be seen in the fine portrait by William Carter R.A. which was presented to him in the summer of 1899 by Old Cliftonians, and now hangs in the Newbolt Room at Clifton College. Newbolt's personal memorial to Wollaston was a poem which he dedicated 'To G.H.W.' and which was published in *The Cliftonian* in June 1899, the very month of Collins' triumph. It was entitled *The Best School of All* and is well known to Cliftonians because the poem was eventually set to splendid music by Newbolt's friend Sir Hubert Parry and adopted as the official School Song. Part of it reads:

The stars and sounding vanities
That half the crowd bewitch
What are they but inanities
To him that treads the pitch?

To Arthur Collins 'The stars and sounding vanities' (i.e. academic honours) were not entirely inane, nor were they to Newbolt himself, a most scholarly man without particular distinction as an athlete. However, for many Englishmen at the time, doubtless, sporting honours seemed more glamorous than academic ones.

Because of Wollaston's retirement in the summer of 1899 the fatherless Collins did not quite follow in the footsteps of the fatherless Newbolt by sharing the same housemaster. To succeed Wollaston Glazebrook appointed William Vaughan, an Old Rugbeian and former England rugby international who had been on the staff since 1890. He was a much respected young man who left Clifton in 1904 to become one of the superstars of the schoolmasters' profession as Headmaster successively of Giggleswick, Wellington College and finally his old school, Rugby. This was the man who guided Arthur Collins through the rest of his career at Clifton. The question is, what became of the young prodigy?

Given that Collins stopped playing school cricket in 1902, when he was still sixteen, his achievements as a cricketer at Clifton after the famous score were impressive, if not outstanding. A fortnight after the match he scored 121 and took four wickets in the annual game between the Junior Schools of Cheltenham and Clifton.²⁶ In his first season in the Senior School during the summer of 1900 he

scored 95 for the North Town XI and he was awarded his School Second XI colours ('twenty-two's'). In 1901 he played for the Clifton 1st XI at the age of fifteen and headed the school batting averages with 38, including scores of 112 and 63, while his average in House matches was 42. The 1902 season was Collins' last and his highest score for the 1st XI was 56 against Cheltenham, though his House match average rose to 68.8. Had he stayed at school for another two seasons, as some of his contemporaries did, his record might have been even more impressive.

In other games Collins proved himself to be a versatile all-rounder. He played rugby for the School XV, and gained his cap in 1901 for his work as a half-back. Also in 1901 he won a bronze medal in the Public Schools Boxing Competition at Aldershot, having been 'narrowly beaten' in the final of the featherweights.²⁷ As a Rackets player he represented Clifton at Queen's Club, and he won the school bat-fives and House fives competition. He finished fifth in the Short Penpole cross-country run and he won the school six lengths swimming competition for under sixteens. Clearly his departure from the school was a serious loss on the sporting side where by 1903 all was not going well. In that year the rugby XV lost all its matches and *The Cliftonian* lamented that 'the degeneration of our football cannot be ascribed to want of physique, for we suspect that the fault lies deeper still – in lack of energy.'²⁸ That was a euphemism for a decline of morale in the school generally, and for that only the Headmaster could be to blame. In fact Glazebrook had offered his resignation to the Council when numbers first began to fall in 1897, and he offered it again in 1898. For the time being the Council supported Glazebrook because they were impressed with his insistence on discipline and good academic results but by 1905 the numbers were down to 528, nearly 100 less than they had been in 1897, and Glazebrook's resignation was accepted. The Council replaced him with A.A. David whose friendly and enthusiastic methods raised morale and numbers in a very short time.²⁹

Collins was, of course, a Scholar of the school and his academic record proved to be excellent. He became a member of the Sixth

Form, still a prestigious élite, in September 1902 and after working 'exceptionally hard' he gained fourth place in the competitive entrance examination for the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich.³⁰ It should not be forgotten that Collins' career at Clifton coincided with the South African (or Boer) War which began in October 1899, his first term in North Town, and ended in May 1902, his last cricket season. By 1900 there were 200 Old Cliftonians serving in South Africa and there were 347 before the end of the war. The second verse of Henry Newbolt's *Vitaë Lampada* suddenly seemed to read not as poetic fancy but as contemporary reality:

The sand of the desert is sodden red, –
Red with the wreck of a square that broke; –
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks;
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

In the summer of 1900 the entire school assembled in the quadrangle to celebrate the relief of Mafeking with a hearty rendering of the National Anthem, and Clifton boys began to hear praise for one Douglas Haig who had left School House in 1879 and was now achieving distinction in South Africa as Colonel of the 17th Lancers. Forty-three Old Cliftonians died in the South African War, and when a memorial was erected to them at Clifton in the shape of a statue of a mediaeval knight in full armour it symbolized perfectly the 'Newboltian' concept of warfare that dominated the thinking of this era.³¹ War was still a chivalrous game, all the more noble for exposing its players to the risk of the 'final sacrifice'.

Clearly the risk was one that Arthur Collins was prepared to take because the Boer War did not deter him from his ambition to be a soldier: perhaps it made him all the more impatient. He started at Woolwich in 1903 and resumed his cricketering career in the Academy's 1st XI, which he captained.³² But when he was commissioned he was posted to India with the 2nd Sappers and

26. V.F. Eberle, Letter to the *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 May 1962, in Clifton College Archives.

27. V.F. Eberle, 'Notes on A.E.J. Collins' 1962, Clifton College Archives.

28. *The Cliftonian* magazine, vol. 18, p. 97.

29. Derek Winterbottom, *Clifton after Percival*, pp. 39–40.

30. V.F. Eberle, 'Notes on A.E.J. Collins', 1962.

31. Derek Winterbottom, *Henry Newbolt and the Spirit of Clifton*, 1986, p. 53.

32. V.F. Eberle, 'A.E.J. Collins, 628 Not Out', p. 2, in the Clifton College Archives.

Miners where he naturally made little impression on English cricket except during home leave when he played for Old Cliftonian touring teams. According to the researches of his ex-North Town team-mate Victor Fuller Eberle 'on the last such occasion in June 1913 . . . he had an average of 103 for the four innings which he was able to play on the tour. In what proved to be the last of these matches in which he was destined to play, against the Trojans C.C. at Southampton, he scored 121 in his first innings. In the second innings, going in first with Foster G. Robinson (Gloucestershire County captain 1919–21) he scored 68 not out.'³³ He never played first class cricket, though he scored 58 and 36 for the Royal Engineers against the Royal Artillery at Lord's in 1912.³⁴

In the spring of 1914, at the age of 28, Collins married. His bride was Ethel Slater, four years his senior, the daughter of a retired Army officer living in Castletown, on the Isle of Man. The wedding took place in St Mary's chapel in the parish of Malew, not far from Castletown, and the Rev. William Waldegrave Warren, curate, conducted the ceremony.³⁵ The area round Castletown is dominated by the imposing tower of King William's College where T.E. Brown, the distinguished Manx poet, had received his schooling. Later, after a brilliant career at Oxford and some experience of schoolmastering Brown was recruited to the Clifton staff in 1863 by Percival, and he opened 'Brown's House' in 1864, remaining housemaster until he left the school in 1892. He retired to the Isle of Man but returned in 1897 to give a talk to the boys in Tait's (Oakeley's) House, and it was while giving this talk that a blood vessel burst in his brain and he died the same night. This explains why his grave, relatively neglected, lies in the grounds of Redland chapel rather than on the Isle of Man where he is still revered as a great Manx poet. Collins had entered Clark's House in the same year as Brown's traumatic death but he could not have known this great Clifton figure, except by reputation. Another Clifton link with Castletown was the fact that Percival's successor, James Wilson, had also been a pupil at King William's, where his father was the Principal. A great friend of Brown and a loyal advocate of his poetry, Wilson made frequent trips to the Island on the steamer from Liverpool, taking the young Henry Newbolt on holiday with him one one occasion.³⁶ After leaving Clifton Wilson

became Archdeacon of Manchester and, according to his obituary in *The Times* refused an offer of the Bishopric of Sodor and Man. He died in 1931 in his 93rd year looking and sounding, in his long white beard, like an Old Testament Prophet.

We must assume that Arthur Collins' attention was centered, that April day in 1914, not so much on Clifton's connections with the Isle of Man as on his new bride. Yet they were not to spend long together. In the month of August 1914 the international conflict that had threatened for so long broke out into a major European War and Collins was one of the first to leave with the British Expeditionary Force to France. 'It is not without many misgivings that we take up our pen to write these few paragraphs,' ran *The Cliftonian's* Editorial for October 1914. 'So much has happened in the last two months, that the gulf between last term and this cannot be bridged by any words of ours. Events of such momentous importance are taking place even as we are writing, that it seems almost impossible to give our attention to more trivial matters.'³⁷ That issue of the magazine gave the names of twelve Old Cliftonians killed in action. The next issue, in December, contained another twenty-five, including that of Lieutenant A.E.J. Collins, Royal Engineers. 'World-famous – to his own unceasing annoyance – for a phenomenal innings in a Junior School House Match,' the entry ran, 'he distinguished himself in all games, fives, racquets, football, boxing; at the same time he possessed mental abilities of a high order, and won a School Scholarship. A regular visitor to Clifton when he was home on leave, he loyally supported the O.C. Cricket Tour. His death will come as a shock to many.'³⁸

Arthur Collins was not the only member of his family to fall victim to this war. His younger brother Herbert, who left Clifton in 1907 at the age of eighteen was commissioned in the East Surrey Regiment and was killed in action in 1917. A third brother, not a Cliftonian, also died in the War.³⁹ Just over 3,000 Cliftonians fought in the war, and 578 of them died. The School provided one Commander-in-Chief (Haig), one Army Commander (Birdwood), 23 Major-Generals and 52 Brigadier-Generals. All members of the 1914 Clifton XI 'played the game': five were killed, one died of disease, and four were wounded.⁴⁰

33. *ibid.*, p. 3.

34. Derek Salberg, *Much Ado about Cricket*, p. 96.

35. From the Register of Marriages, General Registry, Douglas, Isle of Man.

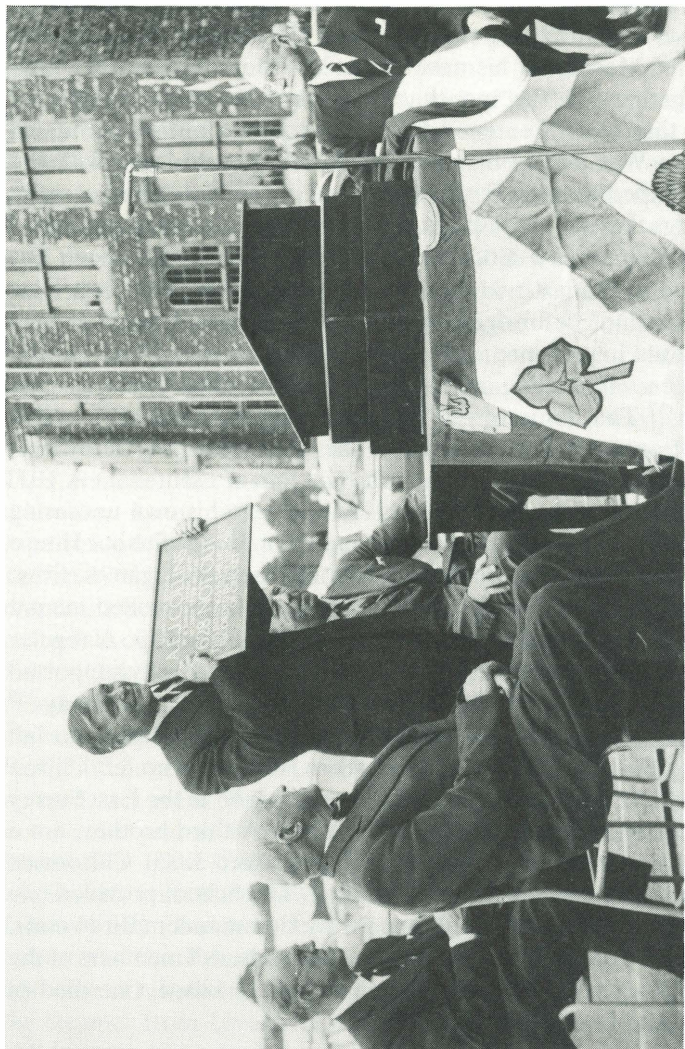
36. Derek Winterbottom, *Henry Newbolt and the Spirit of Clifton*, 1986, p. 30.

37. *The Cliftonian*, vol. 23, p. 303.

38. *The Cliftonian*, vol. 23, p. 358.

39. V.F. Eberle, 'A.E.J. Collins, A Retrospect', the Victor Fuller Eberle papers, Clifton College Archives.

40. Derek Winterbottom, *Henry Newbolt and the Spirit of Clifton*, 1986, p. 70.



The Headmaster of Clifton, Nicholas Hammond, holding the commemorative plaque in 1962 at approximately the spot where the wicket stood in 1899. Victor Fuller Eberle is sitting on the far right of the picture.

In 1962 Clifton College celebrated its centenary and it was decided that visible recognition should be given to the achievement of Collins, whose cricket record of 1899 had not been broken and whose short life, fifty years later and in a very changed world, still seemed gallant, if not, indeed, heroic. One of Collins' North Town contemporaries, Ellard Hughes, offered to donate a memorial tablet and it was agreed that this should be fixed to a wall overlooking 'Collins' Piece', the site of the famous match. The memorial was unveiled on Saturday 30 June, the Centenary Commemoration at Clifton. The ceremony was performed at 6 o'clock in the evening by the Duke of Beaufort, President of Gloucestershire County Cricket Club, and a short address was given by Victor Fuller Eberle, a long-serving and devoted member of the Clifton Council, and one of the few survivors of the Collins match. The occasion caused a flurry of interest in the national and local Press and Eberle found himself much called upon for his recollections of the match, and its hero.

In 1991 Collins' record still stands, and the question now must be, will it reach its centenary? One would like to know more details about his career at Woolwich and in India, but information is scarce. In 1962 Clifton College attempted to trace his relatives and discovered that his widow – who had not re-married – was still alive, aged eighty and living in Shepperton-on-Thames.⁴¹ She was unable to attend the memorial ceremony, but Mrs E.A. Evans, the daughter of one of Collins' brothers, together with her own daughter, accepted the invitation.⁴² It seems a shame, even in these co-educational days, that there appear to be no direct relatives to carry on the Collins tradition. What he would have made of his life had he survived the War we can only guess, but if the *losing* team could produce three future knights (Sir David Monteath the colonial administrator; Sir Roy Fedden, a brilliant aeronautical engineer; Sir Edward Robinson the scholar and numismatist) what might the captain of the winning side have done? Perhaps he did enough: nearly a hundred years later no-one has yet surpassed his feat and the passage of time has, if anything, served only to magnify the achievement of this modest schoolboy and his season's fame.

41. Letter from I.D. Merry to Mrs E.A. Collins, 18 September 1962 in the Victor Fuller Eberle papers in Clifton College Archives.

42. Letter from A.D. Imlay to V.F. Eberle, 20 June 1962 in the V.F. Eberle papers in Clifton College Archives.

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A.E.J. Collins A Retrospect

A.E.J. Collins 628 not out

Letter to the *Sunday Telegraph* 30 May 1962

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Transcripts of articles in the *Bristol Times and Mirror*, June 1899

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b) *Clifton College Archives*

Translation of three poems in honour of Collins

Transcript of an article 'The Record Score' by 'Cliftonian' – a contemporary account of the Collins match

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