



Conscientious Objectors

When Britain got involved with the war in Europe, lots of Brits were killed, so by 1915/16 conscription would be the norm, but there was a band of people who didn't want anything to do with the war, some believed they didn't think we should be at war with Germany, others said it was against their religion, ie, Quakers and Jehovah's Witnesses, these people were called Conscientious Objectors.

They were viewed as cowards by some people, and they were subjected to being arrested and put in prison, there was a song written about them." We all know of certain people far too slack to fight the huns, who will one day face the music, tho they might not face the guns, men who hid in secret places when the bugles called to fight, or conscientious Objected killing Germans was not right, There was another well-known person,--- don't speak his name out loud, who when he comes to fighting is really much to proud! there's the man who claimers exemption, stays at home and steals our jobs, there's the fraudulent contractor who the British soldier robs, Dump, Dump we'll put them on the Dump for cowards and swindlers it's just the place is Dump,!"

Although some did want to help in some way, some worked in the munitions factories; some even went to the front line and worked as stretcher bearers,

On the 5th November 1914, a letter from WJ Young appeared in the "Labour Leader" a newspaper of the independent Labour Party which had taken an anti-war stance, asking what socialists intend to do about conscription, as he had no intention of taking up arms. the following week the paper declared that, "it would be as well for those who resist conscription,[should it come] ,to enrol] themselves for united action" this was accompanied by a letter from the editor, Fenner Brockway, suggesting men of fighting age who were not prepared to fight, should send their names and addresses to him "to bond" together, so that we will know our strength,.....he received 150 names and decided to form an organisation to reprieve these men. Thus the NO-CONSCRIPTION FELLOWSHIP, was born.

One of the first pieces of correspondence from this new organisation in Jan/Feb 1915 was a list of all members. At this stage the only name from Hyde was Councillor **Walter Fowden**, and from nearby Mellor came Fenner Brockway and Percy Redfern. When the fledgling organisation requested nominations for a national committee all three put their names forward, Brockway was elected as secretary, Redfern as Treasurer, but Fowden failed to get a place

It wasn't only socialists and Christians who opposed the war, Hyde's Liberal MP, Francis Neilson, had been forced to resign in Jan 1916 because of his outspoken criticism of the war during a speech he gave in America.

During the following by-election campaign the ILP held a large meeting of over a thousand people chaired by **Walter Fowden** who spoke about profiteering being carried out by capitalists enriching themselves with war production. The supporting speaker was Fenner Brockway, who moved a resolution opposing conscription which was carried with only two dissenting votes. This would have given the COs who would have been in the audience, a tremendous boost. Other speakers were JH Hudson chair of the Manchester NCF and Margaret Ashton, Manchester's first woman councillor and a maverick member, of prominent Hyde Mill owner.

There were about 32 COs from the Hyde area covered by the Hyde NCF. This was a small number in comparison to those volunteering for military service. On one day in September 1914, 96 men volunteered at the Hyde Recruiting Office

There were over 16,000 COs in WW1, there were 306 COs shot at dawn for cowardice or desertion, 5 were shot for disobedience. All 306 were given pardons in 2006 by the Labour Government

Lord Kitchener drowned at sea on the 5th June 1916 on his way to Russia

A lot of this information was taken from "Pacifism and Socialism In Hyde during the Great War", by Christine Clayton. **WALTER FOWDEN**

Walter Fowden was born in 1879, the fifth son of Thomas and Sarah, living at 3 Hamnet St, Hyde. The census of 1881 shows there was a servant Annie Adamson and an adopted son, Henry Davis, living at the same address.

In 1889 the swimming baths opened in Hyde, in 1895 four youths belonging to the Amateur swimming club had been up to mischief what and why not known, but the club wanted an apology; this brought a refusal, so the boys were fined. After refusing to pay the fine, the boys got together and decided to found a new swimming club, The officials of the Amateur swimming club were amused and mocked their intentions, These youths were Walter Fowden, Ernest Fowden, Robert Howard and Tom Wildgoose, they called the club Hyde Seals, so Hyde had two swimming clubs.

By 1904 the Hyde Seals went to compete in Paris, Walter Fowden was the Honorary Secretary of the club, they went on win the 500 meters championship of the world. The Seals won all their matches, they beat the champions of France 9-1 the French football club de Paris 10-1 the final match was between Brussels and Hyde, Hyde won 14-2, Hyde became the champions of the world. The trophies can be seen in Hyde Library.

In the 1911 census Walter Fowden was married to Martha Alice Higham they had two children, Alice and Walter, living at the Homestead, Gee Cross.

Walter Fowden was a well known pacifist and a Councillor of Hyde, so when married men were called up, he went to the Hyde Tribunal on the 22nd July 1916, Mr C Brogden Auctioneer, valuer and Estate Agent supported an appeal on behalf of his managing clerk, Councillor Fowden, the Constable said conditional exemption was recommended.

In 1922 Councillor Walter Fowden was made Mayor of Hyde,

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Mary Owen, Tameside History Forum, July 2014