

TO KILL REFUSING

BRISTOL'S WORLD WAR 1 CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

**This image is to be reproduced and used
for educational purposes only**

Title: Notes on Frank Merrick's time In prison

Description: Testimony

Details: Notes on Frank Merrick's time In prison. As described to his daughter Phoebe and recalled by her in 2007

Source: Private Collection

Credit: With thanks to Phoebe Merrick

File name: RTK_Primary_DOC_fm-prison.pdf

From: <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/refusing-to-kill/>

Notes on Frank Merrick's time in prison

As described to Phoebe Merrick and recalled in July 2007.

My father went to prison as a conscientious objector in the First World War. He was an absolutist and refused any compromise such as non-combatant duties or farm work. He was imprisoned between 1916 and 1919.

He was sent to Wandsworth prison, although he lived in Manchester. His wife, Hope, was allowed to take over his students at the Royal Manchester College of Music, but was not allocated any students in her own right. Whilst in prison, he used to keep up his manual dexterity by practising playing on a plain surface as he did not have access to a piano. He gave a public recital within a week of his discharge from prison, which he said was not one of his better performances.

In prison, he refused to do work that might damage his hands and ended up sewing mail bags. For a while he refused to undertake any work because he was offended by the prison authorities confiscating his wedding ring. However, they retaliated by not allowing him any letters which upset Hope, so he compromised.

He had become vegetarian in 1911 and a letter from the prison chaplain to Hope details the diet.

Letters were severely restricted and could only be on one piece of paper which gave him an incentive to write small and Hope an incentive to use large sheets of paper. The letters that they exchanged are part of the collection as are many of the documents associated with his arrest and imprisonment. Letters were not allowed to comment on prison conditions or on political matters. When Lord Bertrand Russell was imprisoned as a conscientious objector, Frank commented that 'Bertie had joined the chaffinches' which was code for saying that Lord Bertrand Russell was now in Wormwood Scrubs. However he was kept somewhat separated from the other prisoners so could not mix with the other conscientious objectors.

When in Wandsworth prison the conscientious objectors made a deliberate attempt to break down prison discipline. For example they would walk round the exercise yard in a group and talk to each other, rather than obeying the single file and silence rules. It was for this reason that my father and some of the others were moved to Wormwood Scrubs where they never managed to break down the discipline.

Amongst other things, they would tap messages to each other along the pipes, using a code based on a simple five by five grid position for letters. They also used to give each other lectures in the evenings when they were supposed to be in silence. For example my father gave lectures on Beethoven.