

## Alfred Ernest James



*Alfred was almost 40 at the time he was conscripted. He was arrested at his home in Easton in September 1916. Married with two children, he was a stone mason, a member of his trades union, a socialist, a supporter of the Independent Labour Party and an atheist. He did not believe that war solved anything.*

Alfred was refused exemption as a conscientious objector and was charged at Bristol Police Court with being an absentee from the army. He was fined and handed over to the Gloucestershire Regiment. At Windmill Hill Camp he refused to sign the enlistment form, wear a uniform or hold a gun. He was court martialled and sentenced to 112 days imprisonment with hard labour at Wormwood Scrubs.

Alfred was an 'absolutist'. When his first prison sentence was completed he was handed back to the army, court-martialled and imprisoned again. This happened four times. His later sentences were served in Gloucester, Northallerton and Newcastle prisons. In 1918 he seriously scalded his leg in the prison kitchen at Northallerton but was refused early release.

Alfred's family visited him at Gloucester Prison but could not travel to Northallerton. During the war they went without his income and were helped by Quakers including Mabel Tothill. Like other 'absolutists' Alfred was not released from prison until 1919 – so some time after the Armistice.

After the war Alfred resumed his trade and was secretary of his union branch for many years. He always wore his union badge and union fob watch. Through his life he suffered from the effects of the scald injuries on his legs. His son and daughter were taught socialism at Sunday School. They were always aware of being the children of a conscientious objector and endured hardships at home and school. He died in 1959 at the age of 81. He was a stubborn man, never giving up his principles under hardship.

Alfred's granddaughter, Cathy Dyer, helped put together this information, supplied us with the photo and in 2019, 100 years after her grandfather was released from prison, was [interviewed about him by the BBC](#).

The photo above is available [here](#).

See also the pdfs on this website relating to *COs in Prison* and *Mabel Tothill*.