



Walter Ayles
Blue Plaque Unveiling

**12 Station Road,
Ashley Down, Bristol, BS7 9LA
3:30pm Sunday 17th April**

Walter Ayles 1879 - 1953

One hundred years ago today Walter Ayles was arrested for distributing 'Repeal The Act' - a pamphlet calling for the repeal of the Military Service Act under which conscription was introduced. He was sentenced by Bristol magistrates court to 61 days in prison.

Walter Ayles was born in 1879 in Lambeth, South London, He moved to Birmingham where he worked as an engineer and was district secretary for the Associated Society of Engineers.

In 1910 he moved to Bristol to become local organiser for the Independent Labour Party. Bertha and he lived at 12 Station Road from 1911. In 1912 he was elected city councillor for Easton. Shortly after his election he published "Bristol's Next Step", arguing that transport, gas and water "must not be entrusted to private individuals any longer, but must be placed in the hands of the people themselves."

In 1914 when war was declared he was the only councillor to vote against a motion offering 'wholehearted support' for the war. He was a founder member and national executive member of the No-Conscription Fellowship.

After his imprisonment for distributing 'Repeal The Act', Ayles was conscripted. Like hundreds of other men from Bristol and the surrounding area who opposed the war on moral, religious or political grounds he applied for conscientious objector status at a Military Service Tribunal. This was refused and he was handed over to the military. Refusing to wear uniform, he was court-martialed and served 112 days in prison with hard labour. On release he was conscripted again and imprisoned again. Overall he was imprisoned from April 1916 to February 1919. While Ayles was in prison, his wife Bertha, like many other relatives of conscientious objectors played a leading part in supporting him and continuing to oppose conscription and the war.

After his release from prison, Ayles returned to Bristol, became a Quaker and in 1923 was elected MP for Bristol North. He published "The Hell of Unemployment" and, after losing his seat in the election of 1924, won it back in 1929 holding it until 1931. In 1945 he was elected as MP for Southall, finally moving to the constituency of Hayes and Harlington in 1950. He resigned his seat in 1953 and died in the same year aged 74.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

Walter Ayles
1879 – 1953

Labour councillor and Bristol MP

*Imprisoned for opposition
to the First World War*

*Lived here
1911 – 1928*



Programme

Introduction

Poem - "The Thames and the Rhine"

**Song - "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier...
...To shoot some other mother's darling boy."**

Brief biography - Who Was Walter Ayles?

Song - "The Green Fields of France"

**Excerpt From Walter Ayles's statement to Bristol
Magistrates, April 1916**

Unveiling Of Plaque



This Bristol Civic Society plaque is an initiative of the Remembering The Real World War 1 group and Bristol Radical History Group. The cost of the plaque was met through many generous donations, among which we would like to acknowledge Independent Labour Publications, the Peace Pledge Union, Unite The Union (South West Region) and Bristol Trades Union Council.



On Sunday June 26th at 2pm there will be a re-enactment of Walter Ayles's appearance before a Military Tribunal where he applied for Conscientious Objector status. This takes place on the centenary of Ayles's hearing and in the same venue – The Old Council House (now the Register Office), Corn Street, BS1 1JG. The re-enactment is based on a transcript of the hearing published in 1916. For more information email rememberingrealww1@gmail.com.



Bristol Radical History Group has recently published a biography of Walter Ayles – 'Slaughter No Remedy' by Colin Thomas, price £2.50. This is on sale today, or online at www.tangentbooks.co.uk or from Hydra Bookshop, 34 Old Market Street, Bristol, BS2 0EZ.



If you would like to be kept informed about future Remembering The Real World War 1 events please email rememberingrealww1@gmail.com.