



# Frederick John Redfern

## 83 Kedleston Road

Frederick was born in 1897, son of Henry John Redfern and Elizabeth Hammond who lived at 83 Kedleston Road. He had an older sister Alice. On leaving school Frederick began training as a Chartered Accountant.

Frederick was one of some 80 Conscientious Objectors in Derby. In March 1916 he was called up for military service, but his enlistment was deferred until a Military Service Tribunal in July 1916. The local Military Service Tribunals accepted few exemption claims but his appeal succeeded as a member of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church. His Church took a stand against bearing arms, preferring to be recognised as non-combatants rather than conscientious objectors.



NCC Cap badge (Wikimedia image from [www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forum](http://www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forum))

In October 1916 he was posted with the Non-Combatant Corps, which was established in March 1916 when the Military Service Act introduced conscription. It was commanded by army officers, its members wore army uniform and were subject to army discipline and provided physical labour for building, cleaning, etc.



Members of the NCC were subject to ridicule – the press called it the “No Courage Corps”.

[www.worldwar1postcards.com](http://www.worldwar1postcards.com)

At first he was posted with 5<sup>th</sup> Northern Company Non-Combatant Corps. There were problems of defining what constituted a non-combatant role and on 22 December 1916 questions were asked in the House of Commons on about Frederick’s Corps:

*Mr. SNOWDEN: asked the Under-Secretary of State for War if members of the 5th Northern Company, Non-Combatant Corps, have been ordered to do work in connection with the handling of munitions; if on the 30th November seventeen men refused to do this work and were placed under arrest; and, in view of the promise made that men attached to the Non-Combatant Corps would not be called upon to do this kind of work, if instructions will be given immediately to that effect in this particular case? (Hansard Records).*



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On demobilisation in January 1920 Frederick was transferred to "Z" Army Reserve, back to civilian life but under obligation to be recalled to service if peace negotiations failed. He returned to his job as an Accountant. After his mother died in 1932 Frederick moved to 56 Statham Street. Peter Clarke who lived at 54 Statham Street from 1944-1959 recalls: *"Mr Redfern was one of the nicest people you could meet - a good neighbour to have and well liked by*

*everyone. He lived with Miss Nash and Miss Parker. The three of them were very religious".*

After Miss Nash and Miss Parker died Frederick appears to have lived alone. On 7 February 1973 he made his will and it was witnessed by neighbours at 52 Statham Street. The same day he disappeared and his body was found a month later in the River Derwent at Spondon.

### Conscription and Non-Combatants

In 1914, Britain was the only country in Europe without a conscripted army. Following massive casualties in 1914-15, there was an urgent need for essential workers to keep country and war effort going. With opposition to the war from many - socialists and trade unionists as well as those with moral or religious objections, the government faced diminishing numbers of new, fit volunteers.

In January 1916 the Military Service Act was passed to legally require men to serve. From March 1916 single men aged 18-41 were called up, extended in May to married men of the same ages. The age was extended to 50 following a German military offensive in the spring of 1918.

Call-up papers were sent out to eligible men, who had to fill them in or apply for exemption. Applications for exemption were judged by Military Service Tribunals. The Act also included a "conscience clause", but failed to offer a detailed definition. The problem that Conscientious Objectors faced was convincing Military Service Tribunals that their claim for exemption was a genuinely held belief.

2,000 local tribunals were set up, including one in Derby. The *Derby Daily Telegraph* reported interesting stories of what people claimed as grounds for exemption, and how they were treated by the panels. Very few claims for conscientious objection were accepted. An account of an appeals panel refusing 3 men's claims in 1 minute appeared in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* on 14 April 1916.

The Derby branch of the No-Conscription Fellowship, which campaigned for repeal of the Act and fair treatment at Tribunals, offered personal support to Conscientious Objectors. There were at least 80 in Derby. Whilst initially "conchies" were often viewed as cowards, gradually many people became more sympathetic and recognized that some were repeatedly imprisoned and persecuted for the same offence. Tribunal materials were so sensitive that in 1921 most records nationally were destroyed.

