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Eyam House
Eyam
Via Sheffield
Derbyshire

Mr W B Rowland
Chairman
Bradwell Parish Council
Bradwell, via Sheffield
7th May 1974

The invention of the tin hat 1st World War

Dear Sir,

I read the article in the Telegraph of 12th April 1974 giving an account of the placing of a memorial plaque to Samuel Fox the inventor of the umbrella frame at his birthplace at Roseleigh cottage, Bradwell.

There is another engineer/silversmith who resided in Bradwell whose invention has been adopted by every Army in the world as the following facts will show.

I was an engineering student at Sheffield University from September 1914 to July 1916 when I joined up in the Royal Engineers.

When Lloyd George was minister of Munitions he set up a Local Committee in Sheffield of Business Men and Engineers to advise the Ministry and arrange for procurement and manufacture of Munitions and other good requirements by the Army and Navy.

The Headquarters of the Sheffield Munitions Committee' was the University Committee room at St George's Square. The chairman was Professor Reffer (Head of Engineering Dept) and Secretary a Mr Davidson, a prominent Engineer in Sheffield, assisted by the University clerical staff.

The Committee met every morning at 10.30 5 days a week. Persons who had business with the Committee lined up in a passageway at the University to wait there to go for interviews. As a student every morning at 11.15 I changed lectures and passed these military guests, many of them I knew as they were friends of my family.

During 1915 with trench warfare going on it was found that too many soldiers were being shot thro' the head as the khaki cap gave no protection.

During late 1915 and early 1916 the Committee had a request from the Ministry to provide a suitable steel helmet to protect soldiers being shot thro' the head.

Moving down the corridors one day I came across Mr Walter Sissons (WG Sissons & Co) Silversmiths of St Mary's Road, Sheffield, carrying several samples of steel helmets he had made to submit to the Committee for approval.

Mr Sissons explained to me that his eldest son Walter who lived up the hill beyond the church at Bradwell had obtained a 'Bradder' (Bradda) felt hat made in Bradwell many years before for the use of Lead Miners.

Walter covered the hat with wet newspaper and made plaster casts of inside and out. Then green dies were made from the plaster casts and used to wrap stands for the helmets.

Walter Sissons' drop stamps were not heavy enough for the job. The Military provided a suitable new building in John St. for their production which was worked by Viner's for the Ministry. Later Viner's advertised on their notepaper 'We made 1½ million Steel Helmets for the 1914/1919 war'.

As you are aware the Sissons hat in various shapes is used all over the world.

Walter Sissons both father and son have been dead many years but these facts can be vouched for by the younger son Gordon Sissons who was in the army at that time. He is a friend of mine and now lives in Eyam.

I suggest if Samuel Fox is worthy of a plaque of Remembrance so is Walter Sissons as he lived in Bradwell, produced and adopted a Bradwell product as an idea for his life-saving invention. I should therefore appreciate your views on this subject and bring the matter to the notice of your Council.

With kind regards'

Yours Sincerely,

Edwin Walker

Added by Brian Gillham (April 2021):

It is easy to verify that there was a Sheffield Silver Smith called Walter Sissons who had a son called Walter Maxfield Sissons. There is no direct evidence that the son ever lived on the Hills. However Walter Snr had a brother Charles who he married Edith Helen Davy. Charles died in 1914 but records show that Edith Helen Sissons was living on the Hills in 1939. In the same house were living two sisters Deborah M Davy and Amy C Davy. Edith H Sissons died in 1948 and in the probate of her will it is stated that she lived in Oswald House, The Hills, Bradwell. So perhaps Walter Maxwell was given a Bradda Beaver by his aunt.



WWI Helmet (upper) and Bradda Beaver (lower)