

= Thomas Ferens =

Thomas Robinson Ferens (4 May 1847 ? 9 May 1930) was a British politician , a philanthropist , and an industrialist . He was the Member of Parliament for Hull East for 13 years , and served the city as a Justice of the Peace and as High Steward . He helped establish Reckitt & Sons , a manufacturer of household goods , as one of Kingston upon Hull ' s foremost businesses . His career with the company spanned 61 years ? from his initial employment as a confidential and shorthand clerk until his death , as chairman , in 1930 .

In the House of Commons , Ferens spoke to further the cause of Women 's Rights . He supported women 's suffrage at home , and repeatedly drew attention to the trafficking of women and girls in the colonies . But never a great orator , and by nature a retiring man , much of his work at Westminster was completed in the committee rooms , away from the limelight . He did not seek re-election after being unseated in acrimonious campaign in 1918 .

A devout Wesleyan Methodist , Ferens made numerous charitable donations throughout his life . His gifts to Hull include the Ferens Art Gallery and a donation of £ 250 @, @ 000 for the establishment of University College (now the University of Hull) . He is memorialized in the University 's motto : Lampada Ferens . In other parts of the country he made substantial donations to schools , hospitals and charitable organisations .

= = Early life = =

= = = Childhood and early career = = =

Ferens was born on 4 May 1847 in East Thicky , a village close to the market town of Bishop Auckland , County Durham . He was the third of the seven children of George Waller Ferens (1817 ? 1893) , a flour miller , and his wife , Anne , née Jackson . After attending Bishop Auckland private school until the age of thirteen , he found employment as a clerk in the Shildon office of the mineral department of the Stockton and Darlington Railway . Six years later , he left home for Stockton where he worked as a clerk to Head , Wrightson & Co .

A committed autodidact , he taught himself grammar , arithmetic , mechanics , and shorthand . At weekends he taught at Sunday School and enjoyed playing cricket . In 1868 , after working in Stockton for two years , he left to take up a post as a confidential shorthand clerk to James Reckitt of Reckitt & Sons in Kingston upon Hull .

= = = Family life = = =

In Hull , Ferens continued to teach in Sunday School , a practice he began during his time in Stockton . While teaching at the Brunswick Sunday School he met Ester Ellen (Ettie) Field , a fellow teacher and a wealthy merchant ' s daughter of " rather masculine appearance . " They married in 1873 at Sculcoates Registry Office ; and they continued to teach at the Sunday School for the rest of their lives . Though Ettie remained childless , the couple adopted her nephew , John Johnson Till (known as Till) , in 1880 . Till Ferens separated from his wife and became estranged from his adoptive parents during the 1914 ? 18 war . Till Ferens , like Thomas , was a Liberal and stood for the Liberal Party at Gainsborough in the 1935 general election .

= = A career in industry = =

Reckitt & Sons was already a successful firm when Ferens joined it in 1868 . It produced household wares such as starch , washing blue and black lead . It had been acquired by Isaac Reckitt , a Quaker , in 1840 and was now run by his sons , also Quakers , George (1825 ? 1900) , Francis (1827 ? 1917) and James (1833 ? 1924) .

Ferens was industrious and forward @-@ thinking ; he moved swiftly through the company 's

managerial ranks . In 1874 he became Works Manager with a share in profits ; in 1879 , Secretary ; in 1880 , General Manager . He joined the board of directors in 1888 when Reckitt & Sons became a private joint @-@ stock company . When James Reckitt died , 36 years later , Ferens was named joint chairman .

Under the guidance of Ferens and James Reckitt , the company flourished , becoming one of the most successful in the city . It opened offices in London and New York and expanded into pharmaceuticals ? a natural progression from its disinfectants business . Dettol was launched in 1932 .

= = Politics and public life = =

In 1894 Ferens was appointed a Justice of the Peace . In 1911 he was made a Freeman of the City of Hull . He entered parliament as Liberal member for Hull East in 1906 after an unsuccessful bid for the same seat six years earlier . In 1912 King George V appointed him to the Privy Council , and in the same year he became High Steward of Hull .

He was not a frequent speaker in parliament but he chaired several committees and was a member of the Inter @-@ Parliamentary Union before the First World War . Hansard , the printed record of parliamentary debates , records that his first parliamentary contribution related to schools in orphan homes , and his last to the health of troops in Palestine .

A recurrent theme in Ferens ' parliamentary contributions is Women 's Rights . In 1910 he presented a petition in favour of the enfranchisement of women . In 1912 , when the House discussed an allegedly inflammatory speech by Emmeline Pankhurst , Ferens wondered whether her speech might have been influenced by the " example of some Privy counsellors . " The following year , he asked several questions regarding slave @-@ trading in women ; including the trade in West African women , and the trade of European and Japanese women to India . In 1917 he questioned the Home Secretary on the role of women in the police force .

Ferens ' personal and religious convictions are evident in other of his parliamentary contributions . He tabled a number of questions concerning temperance , both at home and in the colonies . His first question in the Commons was about orphan schools . He later asked about railway accidents to children , and about trafficking of young girls in India .

In 1915 Ferens opened a parliamentary debate on the increase in the cost of living caused by the war , which was " causing much hardship , especially to the poor . " He noted that " Many labourers ' families have now to be content , owing to the high price of the necessities of life , with one meal of meat in the week . " In replying , the Prime Minister , Herbert Asquith , agreed that prices were high but he felt they were not as high as might have been expected considering the scale of the global conflict . He remarked that the current high prices were not without precedent , even in peacetime ; the price of coal was no higher than it had been in 1875 .

Ferens also intervened on behalf of his constituency and its inhabitants . In April 1913 he drew the attention of the Postmaster @-@ General to the case of a post office sorting @-@ clerk who was having difficulties claiming his pension . On 10 August 1916 , after a fatal raid by a Zeppelin in the early of the previous morning , against which the city had been able to muster only a single searchlight and one gun , he asked that adequate defences be provided and brought to action where necessary .

The 1918 election campaign was acrimonious and Ferens was subjected to personal attacks accusing him of being a Little Englander . In reporting on the four contested Hull seats , The Times spoke of ? Slashing attacks , covert insults , challenges , defiances and the incessant chatter of other weapons ... ? It noted that Ferens ' opponent , Charles Murchinson , was ? busy digging out ' Little Navy ? speeches of Mr Ferens in 1909 [cf. Little Englander] ... ? Murchinson was elected and Ferens resolved never to stand again . After the war he became an active supporter of the League of Nations . Away from politics , Ferens was an important figure in the Nonconformist community although , typically , he stayed out of the limelight . In a survey of the personalities of Free Church leaders , the Times noted that ? among the most respected counsellors of Nonconformity are men who seldom figure on platforms ? , and went on to list Ferens among their number . ? The

leadership of Nonconformity is largely in the hands of laymen ? , it commented .

In 1924 Ferens attempted to intervene on behalf William George Smith , a Ship ? s Painter who had been sentenced to death for murder at York Assizes . A telegram addressed to the King was sent in the early hours of 9 December appealing for the exercise of the Royal Prerogative . But the appeal was unsuccessful and Smith was executed at Hull Gaol later that morning .

= = Temperance = =

Ferens was a lifelong teetotaler and a strong advocate of temperance . In his youth he attended Band of Hope meetings . In 1913 he was elected treasurer of the United Kingdom Alliance .

In 1923 he shared a platform with the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Mansion House . The occasion was the inaugural meeting of the National United Campaign of the Churches , which was organised by The Temperance Council of the Christian Churches of England and Wales .

The campaign 's objectives were to present ? the modern scientific indictment of alcoholic beverages and its moral implications ? , and to ? rally local support for the Council ? s immediate legislative program ? , which included the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18 , and the banning of the sale of alcohol on Sundays . But the Campaign was firmly opposed to Prohibition , as is plain in the Times ' report of the Archbishop 's address :

" To his mind prohibition was the very antithesis of temperance (Cheers .) It was an open confession of failure . "

Ferens donated £ 1 @, @ 000 to a fund established to accomplish the aims of the campaign .

= = A benevolent man = =

From the time he started earning a salary , Ferens allocated 10 % of his income to charity . His personal wealth increased quickly , inline with the growth of Reckitt & Sons , affording him the opportunity to make ever more generous donations . This he deemed " one of the greatest blessings of my life . " By 1920 he was distributing £ 47 @, @ 000 out of his annual income of £ 50 @, @ 000 .

In 1917 Ferens purchased a plot of land in Queen Victoria Square in Hull city centre . The land was the site of a former Church , Saint John 's . Later in the year he wrote to the council , informing them that he intended to donate the land to the city , and that he would also donate shares in Reckitt & Sons worth £ 35 @, @ 000 . In his letter , which was read out at a council meeting , Ferens explained that the shares and the land were to be used to build an art gallery .

Nine years later the Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone for The Ferens Art Gallery . Afterwards , the prince visited the premises of Reckitt & Sons where he was greeted by the company ? s workforce which now numbered 6000 . The Ferens Art Gallery finally opened in 1927 .

Educational establishments and hospitals were often the beneficiaries of Ferens ? munificence . In 1924 he donated £ 30 @, @ 000 to extend Kingswood School for Boys , Bath . A year later , the Queen opened an extension to Farrington Girls School , Chiselhurst , which Ferens had made possible with a donation of a similar amount . In the same year a new post @-@ graduate Theological College , to which he had donated £ 17 @, @ 000 , was opened in Cambridge for the training of Wesleyan ministers .

In February 1927 Ferens formally handed over the Ferens Institute of Otolaryngology to Prince Arthur , which he had made possible by a donation of £ 20 @, @ 000 . In handing over the institute , Ferens said that he hoped that it would attract workers from all parts of the Empire , and from countries outside it .

In 1925 Ferens made his largest single donation . He wrote to the Lord Mayor of Kingston upon Hull to inform him that he intended to donate £ 250 @, @ 000 towards the foundation of a university college in the city . The college would be built in the west of city on an eighteen and a half acre site , which Ferens had previously donated . The Duke of York laid the foundation stone in 1928 , and Prince George opened the new college in 1929 . Ferens became the college 's first president , and is memorialized its motto : " Lampada Ferens " ? " carrying the light (of learning) . " The dove in the university 's logo , which signifies peace , is taken from Ferens ' coat of arms .

Ferens remained a modest man ; he saw giving as a moral duty and repeatedly declined offers of ennoblement . In replying to the headmaster ' s speech when he visited Kingswood school in 1926 , the King said :

' The headmaster is right in assuming that I am already well acquainted with Mr Ferens ' s benefactions in other parts of the country ; this is not the first time I have been associated with him in this manner , and though I know the last thing that he would want would be a public expression of thanks on my part , I would like to be allowed to share in the debt of gratitude which the Kingswood School owes him today . '

= = Legacy = =

In March 1930 , ill health prevented Ferens from attending the company ' s Annual Meeting . It was the first he had missed in 50 years . He had not fulfilled any public engagements for some weeks ; nevertheless , he wrote out his speech and it was presented by Sir Harold Reckitt . In the speech Ferens was again able to present the board with pleasing figures . The net profit was £ 1 @, @ 277 @, @ 683 , an increase of £ 33 @, @ 108 over 1928 , which was itself a record year . It was a source of great gratification for him ' to be able to say that the most cordial relations exist between the workers , the management and the board ' . Ferens died in his home , Holderness House , in East Hull on 9 May 1930 . Hettie had predeceased him eight years earlier . In his will he bequeathed the house and its grounds , together with an endowment of £ 50 @, @ 000 , to be used as a rest home for poor gentlewomen and to be preserved as an open space for East Hull . As of 2011 , the house continues to be run as a residential home for ladies .

The year after his death , a pageant was held to mark the opening of Ferensway , a major new thoroughfare in the centre of the city . The Times reported that it would ' rank as one of the finest in the North of England ' , and continued , ' The street is 100 ft wide , 10 ft wider than Regent Street in London . ' To make way for the new street , a large slum area was cleared of houses . Low @-@ rent housing was provided to those displaced by the new road .

Reckitt & Son merged with J & J Colman in 1938 becoming Reckitt & Colman Ltd . In 1999 that company merged with Benckiser N.V. to become Reckitt Benckiser . In 2006 Reckitt Benckiser acquired Boots Healthcare International for £ 1 @. @ 9 billion . Though the company is now headquartered in Slough , the Hull site remains one of the city ' s most significant employers .

In the 21st century , Thomas Ferens ' legacy remains woven into fabric of the city of Hull . University college continued to expand , gaining its Royal Charter in 1954 . In 1979 it became the first university to be awarded the Queen ' s award for Technological Achievement .

Alumni include John Prescott , Frank Field , Roy Hattersley and Roger McGough . Ferens Art Gallery now houses an internationally renowned permanent collection which includes works by Antonio Canaletto , David Hockney , Stanley Spencer and Henry Moore . Generations of Hull 's children have enjoyed summers on the boating lake and drenching , perilous trips aboard its Wicksteed Splashboat . Almshouses which Ferens donated to the city in 1910 still provide shelter to the City 's needy almost a century after his death . In 2012 a new secondary school named Thomas Ferens Academy opened in Hull which was named in his honour (the school was renamed Sirius Academy North in 2015) .