



Little Hinton Tribunal Exemption Appeals 1916

On 27th January 1916, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith's government passed the 1916 Military Service Act and introduced conscription to the British Isles. It came into force on 2nd March, 1916. Previously the British Government had relied on voluntary enlistment, and latterly a kind of moral conscription called the Derby Scheme.

Percy Daniel Cooke

Swindon Rural Tribunal, a working farmer of Church Farm, Little Hinton, who applied to be "starred" and exempted, as a working farmer. He was accompanied by his father, who, it was understood, lives in Devizes, where he occupies a farm, but he has an interest with his son in the farm at Little Hinton. The applicant stated that he had occupied the farm 3½ years. It comprised 120 acres of pasture land, and 140 acres of arable. He milked 50 cows with a milking machine.

Applicant's father, giving evidence, said his son managed the farm at Hinton, and worked daily upon it, having the assistance of one man and two boys. A carter and a youth, who used to drive the milk cart to the Railway Station, both left four months ago, in order to join the Army. The applicant could not be spared off the farm, because he understood the working of the milk machine, and that was a very important point. In the first year they had the milking machine, they lost quite £100 by it. Through not properly understanding its working. In reply to questions by Mr. Kimber, applicant's father said the farm was really his, but his son had an interest in it. He could not dispense with the services of the applicant.

Mr. Kimber: You have made no attempt to get anyone else?

Applicant's father: I have not done so yet.

Mr. Kimber: Are you willing to try?

The father: I don't think I should ever get a man to take his place. These milking machines are so complicated, and my son understands them now.

Mr. Kimber: How often do you go over to this farm from Devizes?

Mr. Cooke, sen., Once a fortnight. I used to go once a week, but cannot leave so often now, as I am a short of men on my farm there. Five men have left me, and joined the Army. I have a milk contract to supply 80 gallons a day.

Mr. Kimber pointed out that the applicant was a fine, able-bodied young fellow. He suggested exemption for a period only.

After hearing further particulars, the Tribunal decided to grant the exemption asked for by the applicant.

Source: Devizes and Wilts. Advertiser 2 March 1916.

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19, single, farmer, of Hinton Parva, was allowed until the end of September. - The Chairman drew attention to the applicant's age, but Mr. Maggs pointed out that the man was in every sense of the word a farmer, with 250 acres, and he was given time to carry him over the harvest.

Source: Wiltshire Telegraph 20 May 1916.

OPC Note: Not everyone in Britain supported the war, however, and not everyone welcomed conscription. The Military Service Acts put in place a national system of local tribunals to which conscripts could appeal for exemption from service. Among the grounds for exemption, along with hardship, illness, education and the essential nature of their work, men could also claim on grounds of a conscientious objection to military service.