



WW1 – CONSCRIPTION AND EXEMPTION FROM IT

With the continuing, and rising, demand for men to join the Army, conscription was introduced in 1916, initially for single men and later for married men.

Men who were due to be called up for military service were able to appeal against their conscription: they or their employers could appeal to a local Military Service Tribunal in their town or district. These appeals could be made on the grounds of work of national importance, business or domestic hardship, medical unfitness or conscientious objection. A very large number of men appealed: by the end of June 1916, 748,587 men had appealed to tribunals.

A SOCIALIST CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR: an early Lingfield case was reported on 20 May 1916 under this heading.

"Application was made by Lionel Bertram Temple (26), an insurance agent who lives at Old Town Lingfield. He based his objection on religious and moral grounds, and also stated he suffered in health."

Replying to questions he said he could not assist either in combatant or non-combatant services. He belonged to the World Order of Socialists. He took the pledge of the "World Fraternity" when he joined three years ago. A member of the Tribunal: "The German Socialists don't adhere to the pledge."

The Tribunal refused exemption, ordering the applicant for non-combatant service.

An interesting case, to modern eyes, was reported on 18 November. Mr W A Fisher, the postmaster, appealed for his clerk, A J Terry. The local Tribunal asked whether a woman could take on the work. The postmaster said that Christmas time being near the pressures of work made it essential he should have a trained man. The exemption was granted until 31 December. We do not know whether the key word was 'trained' or 'man' - anyway the Tribunal accepted the case.

The impact of the loss of men of working age began to be reflected in the nature of the applications made to the Tribunal:

William Miram, butcher, High Street, Lingfield, applied for Albert Boorer (37) slaughterman. He stated there was no other slaughterman in the neighbourhood. Exemption was granted until 11 August. In many cases the Tribunal simply put off the date at which the individual would have to join the forces. Albert Boorer eventually joined the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment and went to France in 1917. Albert

returned to Lingfield after the War and managed his own butcher's shop in the High Street.

Another Boorer, William Edward aged 32, applied in May 1916 for exemption on the grounds that he was the only one who could look after his business. He was granted exemption until the end of June but eventually joined the Royal Flying Corps. The business evidently survived as after the War as William and his brother Fred were partners in an ironmongers business on the site of the present Lingfield Garage.

Albert Stanford, building contractor, applied as he had two contracts to finish. His son aged 18 had joined the Forces. He usually employed 15, 16 or 20 men but now had only 6.

On 20 May 1916 there was a report of an application for exemption from Mrs Avice Skinner, High Street, Dormansland on behalf of Frank Skinner (37) and Gordon Mayo (30) shoeing and general smiths. It was stated that they were now turning out 100 [horse]shoes a week under an Army contract as well as doing repair work for farmers. They had 4 men but now only one other besides Mayo and Frank Skinner. Exemption was granted.

Against this background of mass conscription and exemptions, there was public concern about those who, rightly or wrongly, were perceived as evading war service. The following report of a military round up at the Racecourse on 3 March 1917 reflects this.

On Saturday last the Military made a raid on the Lingfield racecourse at the conclusion of the day's racing. Likely looking men were held up and requested to produce papers proving their exemption from military service. A cinematograph operator who attempted to get a picture of the event had to be protected by the police and narrowly escaped a rough handling by some members of the crowd. Five men were eventually taken to Oxted police station.

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East Grinstead Observer archives