

Report in the Hexham Courant on 27th May 1915:

Local Tribunals, Hexham Urban

A War Office Clerk as Conscientious Objector

A sitting for the Tribunal for the Hexham Urban was held in the Council Chamber, Priestpople, Hexham on Thursday afternoon. The members present were Mr. E. S. Lee (in the chair), Mr Herbert Lees, Mr. John Civil, Mr. W. C. Rollingson and Mr. John Forster with Mr. J. M. Thompson (clerk).

Mr. J. J. Kirsopp, the military representative and Major Dixon, the recruiting officer for the area, were also present.

George F. Lamb, 19, of Hexham, lately employed in the War Office, London, appealed for exemption on conscientious grounds. In his application he stated that his conviction as a Christian and a Socialist forbade his taking any part in war, involving as it did, suffering to the innocent and also the taking of human life, which seemed to him to be in direct opposition to the principles of Christianity and civilisation. To attempt to kill militarism by militarism was to attempt to cast out Satan by Satan. A hundred years ago the same attempt was made, with the result that militarism stood more firmly entrenched in the nations of Europe than ever before. History would again repeat itself unless people refused to support such a theory.

The clerk said that enclosed with the application were letters from the officials of the War Office.

The Chairman: You apply for exemption as a Christian Socialist:

Applicant: Yes.

The Chairman: Is objection to militarism one of the tenets of the Society?

Applicant: Yes; I think it is one of the chief ones.

The Chairman: You also apply as a Christian?

Applicant: Yes.

The Chairman: And yet there are thousands of the best Christians in the land and their conscience does not prick them.

Applicant: They are denying their principles.

The Chairman: I don't think so or they would not be there. Can you give us any instances of your past experience to show you were a conscientious objector then?

Applicant: I did not think about it before the war. When I read Norman Angell's book was the beginning of my thoughts on the matter.

Mr. Lees: Bur Norman Angell's objection is not on conscientious but on economical grounds.

Applicant: Yes, that it does not pay; that was the ground on which I studied it first of all.

The Chairman: You have been in the War Office three years. Did you go there as a conscientious objector?

Applicant: It was after I entered the War office that I began to read on the subject.

The Chairman: But you were in the War Office 16 or 18 months before war began. How long was it before you came to the opinion that war was wrong?

Applicant: I had thought of the matter before the war once or twice and then I nearly went myself. Then I found that my convictions were such that I disapproved of war, and I thought this the best opportunity of saying so, and that it would have most effect if I came before this tribunal.

The Chairman: It has been a long time in coming to you.

Mrs. Lamb said she would like to say that his parents were responsible for his appearance there, as they felt that the conscience clause of the Military Service Act did retain to them some fragment of the British tradition of liberty of conscience. The second point was that they thought it better that their son, rather than submit himself to military authority and lie in prison, should do service to the State in some civil employment. When he went to the War Office it was really part of the Civil Service, but now that voluntary service had ceased and compulsion had become the law matters were different.

Mr. Lees: You have no objection to non-combatant service?

Applicant: I have.

The Chairman: In the War Office were you not called up under the Military Service Act?

Applicant: No. I am not particular whether I go to prison or not only that my parents and friends would be sorry to see me there.

Major Dixon: What would you like to do in the present state of the country, a big, strong fellow like you?

Applicant: I think I am helping the country by what I am doing; I am on a farm.

Mr. Lees said it seemed to him that the appeal was vitiated in the first place by the applicant going to the War Office at all. The War Office was established for war purposes. There could be no doubt about that. It might be that this young man did not fully appreciate that when he went there, but his parents had some choice and it was not necessary for him to go into the Civil Service at all, and especially the War Office, if they had conscientious objection.

Applicant said he studied for two years for the Civil Service and was only put into the War Office temporarily.

Mr. Lees said that if the applicant had been willing to take up non-combatant service the matter would have been simplified.

The Tribunal dismissed the appeal.

Report in the Hexham Courant on 10th June 1915:

The County Tribunal

A sitting for the County Tribunal for the Hexham area was held at the Court House, Hexham, on Wednesday afternoon last.

Col. J. M. Clark, of Bellister Castle occupied the chair and the other members of the Tribunal present were; Mr. Cuthbert Riddell, Swinburne Castle; Mr. John Robson, Newton; Mr. J. T. Robb, Hexham; and Mr. R. Spencer, Netherwhitton Hall, together with the Clerk (Mr. Jasper Gibson).

THE CASE OF A WAR OFFICE CLERK

George F. Lamb, a former War Office clerk whose appeal on conscientious grounds was not entertained by the Hexham Urban Tribunal, now appealed to the higher tribunal.

In reply to a lengthy series of questions he said he considered all forms of militarism were in direct opposition to the teachings of Christ. He objected to non-combatant service as being a form of militarism and he did not wish to have anything to do with militarism in any shape or form. He had held conscientious objections to war ever since he was 17. He had resigned his position at the War Office on that ground, a position that was actually permanent and pensionable. He was prepared to take up any work that was not connected with military service and was now engaged in farm work.

A letter was read from one of the heads of the War Office stating that the action Mr. Lamb had taken was sincere and unselfish. He had left the War Office of his own accord and while in the office his work had been entirely satisfactory. He was in the War Office from December 4th 1914 to 20th April 1916.

The Chairman said they would adjourn the case for a month and at the end of that time the appellant would have to submit a certificate showing that he had been constantly employed in work of national importance.