

## WICKHAMFORD MEN AT THE MILITARY SERVICE TRIBUNALS

The Volunteer Training Corps was a home defence militia which was first formed in late 1914, but which became more firmly established in 1916 after the introduction of conscription into the Armed Services in March. With conscription came the Military Service Tribunals to hear the cases of men wishing to avoid service for a range of reasons. No personal service records exist for the V.T.C. and no campaign medals were given for home service, so the only information on men who went into these units comes from newspaper reports of the Tribunals. The official records of the Tribunals were destroyed during and after the Great War because of the sensitive nature of the issues involved.

Men could appeal against conscription on the four grounds under the Military Service Acts –

1. Ill health.
2. Reserved occupation (employed in an industry of national importance).
3. Family responsibility (dependents who would suffer if they were conscripted).
4. Conscientious objection.

In the area around Evesham many men claimed that their market gardening work fell into the second category.

Anyone who claimed exemption had to go before a Military Tribunal and these could reach one of four conclusions –

1. Absolute exemption (unconditionally exempt from service).
2. Conditional exemption (an individual was exempted provided he undertook work of national importance).
3. Exemption from combatant duties (an individual had to join the armed forces but would not be required to be part of a fighting unit).
4. Rejection (the individual had to join a fighting unit and be subject to normal military discipline).

Those instructed to join the V.T.C. would be expected to wear a red brassard or armband bearing the letter 'GR' for *Georgius Rex*. Nationally, by February 1918 there were 285,000 volunteers of whom 101,00 had been directed to the Corps by Tribunals. The Corps was disbanded at the end of the War. The *Evesham Journal* editions in 1916-1918 reported on many cases of men in the area who were appealing against conscription and those involving men in Wickhamford are detailed below.

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| <i>A Proficiency Badge of the Volunteer Training Corps</i>                          | <i>Volunteer Training Corps brassard</i>   |

## Records from 1916

| Name of applicant and age, if given | Reason for claim  | Tribunal decision<br>( and authors' notes)  |
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| Robert William Walters (26)         | Market gardened 15 acres in partnership with father, aged 68, and brother, who was on active service.   | Conditional exemption<br><br><i>(His brother was John Henry Walters, of the Worcestershire Regt)</i>                              |
| Stephen Styles (34)                 | Market gardened 6 acres and had 2 sons. Affected by deafness for 15 years. He did basket-making when he could not get on the land   | Conditional exemption   |
| David William Hampton (31)          | He was a foreman for Mr Guy Snell, who was on active service at Salonika. Mrs Snell was partly dependent on the income from the 8½ acres of land he managed.  | Conditional exemption on applicant joining the V.T.C.   |
| George Henry Pitts (38)             | Market gardener of 3 acres, who also worked as a labourer for Messrs. Shindler, Thorne & Co on their 40 acres for the past 5 years.   | Had been passed for general service previously and had to join the V.T.C.<br><br><i>(He later joined the Worcestershire Regt)</i> |
| Wilfred Charles Pitman (24)         | Market gardener with 3¾ acres. He had served with the Territorials and was discharged in Nov. 1915; during this time the land had got into a very bad state. When in the Territorials he had refused to volunteer for foreign service.  | Refused exemption<br><br><i>(He later joined the Royal Field Artillery and served in Egypt)</i>                                   |
| Jesse Colley jun. (18)              | He had 2 acres of land for nearly 2 years and acted as a carter for his father, J.V. Colley, who had 24 acres, 10 of which are open ground and the rest turf.   | Refused exemption<br><br><i>(He later joined the Machine Gun Corps)</i>   |
| Raymond Percy Marston Hartwell      | Had a previous postponement and applied for another as a market gardener working for his mother. No one could take his place as his mother had had five sons and they were all dead. She thought it was poor work if she could not keep this one. Applicant said he worked for Mr Swift most of the time and for his mother at other times on 1½ acres. | Exempted for 3 months<br><br><i>(He later joined the Worcestershire Regt and Machine Gun Corps)</i>                               |
| Vernon J.B. Pethard                 | Claimed postponement as being indispensable on the land. His mother had 8½ acres and he had 1¼ acres himself. There was only his brother, besides himself, and he would apply for exemption later.  | Refused exemption<br><br><i>(He later joined the Royal Fusiliers and Labour Corps)</i>  |
| Arthur Heritage (35)                | Market gardener of 4½ acres and living with his mother, who he supported. Also worked ¾ acre for her. His married brother, who lived next door could not look after his mother, who was 76 years old. He had 2 married sisters with   | Exemption granted to end of September   |

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|   | children who did munitions work in Birmingham. His brother did hauling for market gardeners.  | <i>(His brother was Robert Heritage)</i>  |
| William Percy Wormington (27)<br><br><i>(in some records surname is spelled 'Warmington')</i> | A married man occupying 9 acres of market garden land.  | Exempted on condition the applicant to joined V.T.C.  |
| Hamilton John Siderfine (29)<br><br><i>(his surname should be spelled 'Siderfin')</i>         | Had 7½ acres and was a conscientious objector on the grounds that all wars were contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. He was a Plymouth Brethren. After questioning he insisted he objected to all sorts of military service.   | Total exemption granted   |
| Arthur Edwin Thorne   | He was an unmarried market gardener and conscientious objector, who objected to all wars. Under questioning by the Military Representative he stated that he was a Quaker and objected to the military oath and to non-combatant service. He had resigned from the South Worcestershire Liberal Association in protest against Lord Derby's recruiting campaign.  | Total exemption granted   |
| Jesse Arthur Percival Davis   | Arthur E. Thorne appealed on his behalf as he was the only man of military age in his employ as a market gardener with 40 acres. Otherwise he only had a man of over 70, two boys and occasionally two married men. He also looked after 11 acres for a man in the Territorials.  | Granted one day's exemption   |
| Frederick James Masters (35)  | The military applied for a review of a conditional exemption previously granted. Masters was a confidential clerk and manager in the employ of his father Mr Henry Masters of Evesham. It was said by the military that he could now be spared as the season was over, but Henry Masters denied this. If his son was taken his business would be largely disorganised and he had lost 24 men by enlistment. | Certificate of conditional exemption withdrawn; temporary exemption given until 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1917. The man to join the V.T.C.<br><br><i>(Henry Masters was a wholesaler at Evesham Market who bought produce from most Wickhamford market gardeners)</i> |
| Ernest Sadler (38)  | A market gardener from Badsey, who was cultivating 7 acres of land in Badsey and Wickhamford. He had been passed for general service.   | Conditional service; applicant to join the V.T.C.   |
| Charles Robert Mason (36)   | A married market gardener of Pitcher's Hill, Wickhamford, occupying 3½ acres of land.   | Temporary exemption till 15 <sup>th</sup> March; applicant to join V.T.C.   |
| Arthur Heritage (36)<br><br><i>(second appearance)</i>  | He had not been medically examined, was single and had 4¾ acres of land. The local Tribunal alleged that his land was not properly cultivated.  | Exempted until 15 <sup>th</sup> January 1917.   |

### Records for 1917

| Name of applicant and age, if given   | Reason for claim  | Tribunal decision  |
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| Arthur Heritage (36)<br><br><i>(third appearance)</i>                       | Appealed as occupying 5 acres of ground.  | Exempted to 31 <sup>st</sup> March, subject to substitution.<br><br><i>(At a fourth appearance, he asked for his exemption certificate to be renewed. He had been passed for general service. A substitution order was made)</i> |
| George Henry Pitts (39)<br><br><i>(second appearance)</i>                   | A married man, from Pitcher's Hill, who has 2 acres of his own ground and works for Messrs. Shindler, Thorne & Co. four days a week. Mr Thorne had no application but gave an account of his holdings and employees.  | Exemption refused, the military undertaking not to call him up before 1 <sup>st</sup> April.<br><br><i>(At a third appearance his exemption was extended to June.)</i>   |
| Walter Frederick Malin (18)   | Mr B.R. Swift, of Longdon Hill applied for the temporary exemption of Walter Malin, a market gardener's labourer.   | Application refused. The military not to call him up before 1 <sup>st</sup> June.  |
| Wilfred Iva Moulder<br><br><i>(his middle name should be spelled 'Ira')</i> | Mr B. R. Swift of the Homestead, Longdon Hill, Wickhamford appealed on the man's behalf. Moulder was a gardener's labourer, of Evesham, whose father, Mr George Moulder, also appealed for him. Swift had 45 acres of land and asked for Moulder's exemption until 30 <sup>th</sup> June to get the asparagus cutting completed and vegetables planted. The father had 5 acres, three at Hampton and two at Wickhamford and he asked for exemption until 1 <sup>st</sup> September, saying he had two other sons in the army. | Application refused. The military not to call him up until 1 <sup>st</sup> August.<br><br><i>(A 'Wilfred I. Moulder' served in the Hampshire Regt)</i>   |
| Edmund Joseph Jelfs (18)  | He was a carter of Badsey who worked in the winter at the grist mill in Wickhamford belonging to Messrs. Shindler, Thorne, & Co.  | Exemption to 1 <sup>st</sup> October.<br><br><i>(He later asked for a further exemption and was to be medically examined and await the decision of the War Agricultural Committee.)</i>  |

### Records for 1918

Although the Tribunals continued to be held until the end of the War, in November 1918, only one reference involving Wickhamford appeared in the *Evesham Journal*.

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| Allen Marsh (48) | He was a tailor, Grade 2, of Old Schools, Offenham, who had land at Wickhamford. He had been in business as a tailor for 23 | Six months exemption as a tailor and also to cultivate the land. Also exempted from |
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|  | <p>years in Bridge Street, Evesham, and did not enjoy good health. He had two sons in the Army and another who had been killed. He also appealed as a conscientious objector. Asked by the Chairman why he limped, he said that he had got the gout. The Chairman said that if he were in the Army, perhaps he would not have the gout.</p> | <p>the Volunteers.</p> <p>(The War had ended by the time this man's exemption expired)</p> |
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*Tom Locke – March 2014 (Revised February 2015)*