

# ***John Bastin Tribunal Reports***

## **Military Service Tribunals- Transcriptions of Newspaper Reports**

**From Bexhill Chronicle 22nd July 1916 (DSCF2141) – Local Tribunal**

### **THE LETTER KILLETH**

#### **BEXHILL WATCHMAKERS CONSCIENCE**

##### **£. s. d. of Faith**

At the Tribunal on Wednesday, the Mayor (Alderman Bond, M. A., J. P.) presiding, John Bastin (34), married, working watchmaker and jeweller, of Station Road, asked for absolute exemption on conscientious and also on business grounds.

The Clerk read the answers received to the questions put to conscientious objectors by direction of the Central Tribunal. He objected to combatant service as he was a believer and follower of Him Who came to save life, and not to destroy it, and he objected to non-combatant service, as it was only helping those who did fight. Asked if he would join any branch of military service engaged not in the destruction but in the saving of life, he said that no part of the Army could be said to be life-saving. He had been a member of the Brethren for 18 years, but he could not state any particular sacrifice his conscientious objections had entailed, though “the pathway of the Christian is one of continuous self-denial.” Mr Bastin added at the end of the statement that it would mean complete ruin to him if he had to leave his business and engage in philanthropic work for the good of the community.

The Mayor: “The conscience that makes cowards of us all.”

The Town Clerk: Have you thought what your business would be worth if the whole of the people of the country were conscientious objectors? – I can trust God to look after the country.

The Mayor: Do you trust God to look after your business?

The Town Clerk: No, he does not say that; he says if he goes he will be ruined.

The Mayor: What if the Germans came, would you trust God to defend the country? Would you trust God to keep thieves away from your shop? They would be no need for police, then? – That is aside the question.

The Mayor: Will you do any kind of work, say ambulance? – That would be only to patch up men so they could go and fight again.

The Town Clerk: Do you realise that at the present time you enjoy the privileges of British Citizenship, and that is because of the Army and Navy? – I do not enjoy any privileges other than those paid for in rates and taxes, the same as other people.

The Town Clerk: You enjoy the protection of the Army and Navy, and so carry on your business? – Of course I do, but I have to pay for it.

The Mayor: Other people who pay the same taxes have to go and fight? – That is their responsibility.

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Alderman Paton: How do you explain these words – they are those of our Lord in St Luke xxxvi., 22. “He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one”? – That does not apply to it.

Alderman Paton: We have had a new dispensation? – Yes, at the Cross.

Mr Moysey: Our Lord said that before He was crucified? – That was not said to us; that was to the Jews.

Alderman Paton: Do you say that what our Lord said applies to the Jews only?

Mr Moysey: Including the Sermon on the Mount?

Mr Bastin: Primarily.

The Town Clerk: Do you recognise it is the “un-conscientious” objector who is protecting your business? – No, I do not recognise that; I do not wish other people to fight for me. I am ready to suffer for my conscience, and seek the grace of God to help me.

The Town Clerk: You are the first conscientious objector to urge the question of business. – If the business had to go I should still rely on the Cross.

The Mayor: Business seems to be to you more important than the country. You still object to non-combatant service “– I would not object to non-combatant work.

After consultation, the Tribunal decided to exempt Mr Bastin from combatant service, the Mayor added “You will have to go into non-combatant service in another branch; you won't have to fight but you will have to do minesweeping or something of the kind.”