

Bexhill Observer Week 9 1st. March 1919.

A Soldier and His Wife

Nathaniel J. Skippings, a soldier, was summoned by his wife, Emma Skippings, who asked for a maintenance order. Mr. H. J. Hardwick, solicitor (of Messrs. Gaby and Hardwicke), represented complainant; and Mr. E. R. Willett, solicitor, defended.

Mr. Hardwicke said the parties had four children – three working and one younger boy.

Emma Skippings, a cook, living at Dorset-road, said she and her husband were married at Hollington Church-in-the Wood. They lived at Caves-road, St. Leonards, and afterwards at Windsor-road, Bexhill. Her husband joined the Army in 1916, and came home every ten weeks, but he was chiefly in Hastings with his mother. On the 15th October, 1917, he came home and used filthy language. He had a large stick in each hand, and said he had heard from the neighbours that she had been “carrying on”. She was frightened and ran out, “and that was all the conversation”.

Colonel Langham – You did not have any, apparently. (Laughter.)

Complainant said that next day her husband turned the lodgers out and started selling up the home. He said he would allow her half the proceeds. She had to take a room in North-street. The separation allowance was stopped, and she had had no opportunity of explaining. She had not gone to the police or any Association about it, but she wrote to the regiment and to the Ministry of Pensions. When she met her husband he ran away, and she ran after him.

Complainant absolutely denied misconduct. She said she had been letting all the time. There were too many Canadian soldiers and wives to be empty. Her lodgers were married people.

The further hearing and cross-examination was adjourned for a week.

Bexhill Observer Week 10 8th March 1919.

Wife's Soldier Friends

At Bexhill County Bench yesterday (Friday), before Mr. W. H. Dewing (in the chair), Mr. A. D. Snow, and Colonel C. H. W. Café, D. L., the hearing of a summons to Emma Skippings, who asked for a maintenance order against her husband, Nathaniel J. Skippings, a soldier, was resumed. Mr. H. J. A. Hardwicke, solicitor (of Messrs. Gaby and Hardwicke), represented complainant, and Mr. E. R. Willett, solicitor, defended.

At the previous hearing it was suggested that complainant had been “carrying on” (in her husband's absence). Defendant had denied misconduct.

Mrs. Skippings, in cross-examination by Mr. Willett, said that a letter of the 7th October 1917, by her to her husband was written in a temper. Mr. Willett said the letter had “Please don't trouble to come and see me”.

Mrs. Skippings – I don't remember that. I must have been in a fearful temper to write that. I think it is very unfair for these letters to be read in Court when mine were stolen from me.

Complainant said she had no soldier friends except those she took in as lodgers or cooked for; she cooked some things for them to take to the Hall. They were nothing more than friends.

Mr. Willett produced four letters which he said were written to Mrs. Skippings by a gunner in the R.G.A.

Complainant – He is a boy about 20. Complainant said the writer was engaged to a housemaid she knew.

Mr. Willett said all the letters finished up with “Fond love” and crosses.

The Magistrates’ Clerk (Colonel F. G. Langham, C.M.G.) - were they written from the front? I see they are on Y.M.C.A. paper.

It appeared that some were.

Mr. Willett – These letters all finish with crosses? Complainant: Well, I suppose boys do not know better.

Your husband found these letters? - Yes, he stole them out of my workbox.

Complainant denied that the writer had ever kissed her. She admitted knowing another man, who was called “Paddy,” because he was an Irishman.

Mr. Willett said that when her husband came home on one occasion he found the Irishman having supper in the kitchen.

Complainant said her husband had two sticks to thrash her. She was sure he did not thrash the man. Her husband was too timid to tackle a Colonial. Afterwards her husband sold all the furniture. Her separation allowance had been stopped over a year ago.

Re-examined – she had done cooking for soldiers, and had been paid for it. Many people did so.

The Magistrates’ Clerk – A sort of “Sister Susie” in the cooking line.

The husband said he was now demobilised. On one occasion he found his wife in the York Hotel sitting between “Paddy” and another soldier. When he saw “Paddy” at supper with his wife he had been standing in the rain from seven o’clock to ten watching the back of the house before he went in. They came to blows.

The Magistrates’ Clerk – Which won, the Canadian Army or the Ordnance Department? - I hardly know, sir.

A Canadian and his wife were lodging in the house at the time.

The husband, in cross-examination, admitted having made accusations against his wife before on two occasions.

Mrs. Rigelsford said she lived next to the house in Windsor-road, which had been occupied by the Skippings. She had seen “Paddy” the Irishman coming from the house at 6 a.m.

Mr. Hardwicke said soldiers often went to houses to have their breakfast cooked.

Ms. Lawrence, Annie Pennells, and Thomas Warren also gave evidence.

An old man said there had been a regular hue and cry.

A lad of 15, the son of the parties, gave evidence as to Mrs. Skippings’ alleged conduct.

No order, by consent. The application was withdrawn.