

ISLE OF WIGHT MERCURY

Friday, May 19, 1916

Page 5

Ventnor Tribunal

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Mr. Smith, of Gosport, Chairman of the Ventnor Sanitary Steam Laundry Co., made an appeal on behalf of Mr. Philip Facey, Secretary and Manager of the Company on the grounds of indispensability. The Company were contractors to the Admiralty, doing work for Osborne Naval College. Without Mr. Facey's services it would be difficult to carry on the work. The military representative assented to one month's exemption. The company also appealed for Mr. C.A. Benham, wash-house machine attendant. His work could not be done by any woman, and he was therefore indispensable. The military representative dissented, and sent the case to the tribunal for evidence.

Mr. C.F. Hiscock, solicitor, appeared in support of both applications. He said Mr. Facey had been with the company for 15½ years – four years as secretary with an establishment salary. The company claimed that his services were indispensable. There were two laundries. At one the work was substantially devoted to the cleansing of work. At Shanklin one man had joined up, and if the military representative could tell him where to get a man he would be obliged.

Colonel Guild rose presumably to reply but the Chairman said it was not the military representative's business to find employees.

Mr. Hiscock said he agreed, but the military representative recommended another man should be obtained; he (Mr. Hiscock) wanted to point out how difficult it was to get people to fill vacant positions nowadays. Another point was that it was never the intention of the Legislative that businesses should be closed down. Three employees in all had enlisted and the other labour was all girls. The secretary was indispensable for the working of these two laundries. As to the other employee, Benham, he was a married man with one child. He had charge of six machines and the repair and superintendence of them was difficult and technical work. There was no desire on the part of Facey to escape military service. He had nine years' service in the Territorials.

Mr. Smith said it would be a very serious thing for the company if they lost men. Numbers of letters had been written, but they had not been successful in getting men.

Dr. Robertson: The point is, have you been endeavouring to get anyone, or men to take the positions of these two? Have you written with the specific idea of getting anyone to replace the Manager?

Mr. Smith: Not specifically. They had been trying for months past to replace Benham. These industries were the means of a considerable amount of money being spent in the town. Very little went out. At Ventnor 48 girls were employed and 28 at Shanklin.

The Chairman: was the Ventnor business managed by a lady before Mr. Facey was appointed? – Yes, but I personally had to come over a lot, and I could not do so now. We could not get a woman to look after the machines.

Mr. Hiscock said he knew a lady could work a lathe, but she could not be responsible for the adjustment of these large machines.

The Chairman said he knew of laundries where a stoker only was employed and all the other labour was girls.

Mr. Hiscock: Surely someone is wanted to superintend and adjust the machines!

The Chairman: You should bring in an engineer to do that.

Mr. Hiscock: That is certainly the position of Benham. He overlooks the machines.

Colonel Guild asked Mr. Smith whether so far as Mr. Facey's clerical work was concerned, they could not replace him by employing a man over military age. As to the managership, could not one of the Directors undertake it?

Mr. Smith replied he thought not. Mr. Facey had an intimate knowledge of the work, which enabled him to control those over him. If there was a breakdown, for instance.

Colonel Guild said women were taking the places very largely of men in the country.

Mr. Smith: Yes, and doing wonderfully well, but they require special training for this work.

Mr. Sheppard: Both Facey and Benham understood machinery? – Yes.

Colonel Guild: You do not, surely, require both these men in time of war?

Mr. Wetherick: If you had female labour could you not relieve one of them? – We might by training a woman, laundry work is complicated.

If Facey was relieved of clerical work could he not do both? – He might be able to do so.

The Chairman said the firm formerly had a manageress and advertised it. He asked Mr. Facey if he had any domestic or other reasons to lay before the committee.

Mr. Facey said he was a married man and the allowance of 12/6 was not sufficient. It would mean breaking his home up.

Dr. Robertson moved and Mr. Wetherick seconded that conditional exemption be granted. – Carried.

In the case of Benham, Mr. Wetherick moved that a temporary certificate of three months be granted.

Dr. Robertson seconded.

Mr. Wetherick said he did not know whether it was within their rights to suggest that the Company should use every effort to fill Benham's place.

Dr. Robertson: They must show they have used every possibly every endeavour before they apply again.

The proposal was carried.

(not all the report has been transcribed)

Friday, September 8, 1916

Page 5

Ventnor Tribunal. VENTNOR STEAM LAUNDRY EMPLOYEES CONFLICTING EVIDENCE

The Ventnor Sanitary Steam Laundry Company asked for conditional exemption for Mr. C.A. Benham, a wash-house machine attendant, who was granted a temporary certificate for three months on May 17th. His services were indispensable as the work could not be done by old men or women. The Company stated they had

strenuously used ever (*sic*) endeavour to get another man. Applicant's removal would seriously hinder them in carrying on the business.

The Military Representative dissented and suggested that a discharged soldier might do the work.

The Chairman said he thought the Clerk and Manager could be done without better than this man, who was more essential to the firm.

Mr. Fardell, who represented the Company, said exemption was granted to this man on the last occasion on the understanding that the Company made efforts to get another man. This was an old establish company with over 4,000 customers. Of the 47 hands employed, 43 were women. Owing to the fact of there being such a large number of women workers, it was necessary that there should be at least one man to run the machinery. Mr. Smith, Chairman of the Directors of the Company, was present, and he would tell them he had tried every possible means to get a man who could take applicant's place, but had not, owing to the shortage of labour, succeeded. Men with a knowledge of machinery were either being retrained by their own firms or had gone into munition factories where their services were valuable.

The Chairman said that was just where this man would be useful.

Mr. Fardell who said he represented the firm and not the man, replied that he could not be spared from his present business. In the cleaning and over-hauling of machinery women would not take on the work.

Dr. Robertson said the Company made application for the exemption of two employees at a recent Tribunal. They said Facey, the manager, had been with them a great number of years, and had knowledge of the machinery. It was not the question of getting another man, but whether with Facey's knowledge of machinery it might be possible for this man to go. Facey having a knowledge of the machinery, the difficulty of carrying on the business was not quite so acute.

The Chairman said at the last hearing this man was appealed for because of his knowledge of machinery. He (the Chairman) suggested then that a woman should manage the business, and that Facey should go, but the Company's representative then said Facey had knowledge of the machinery. Now they said Benham was in charge of six machines.

Mr. Smith: Yes

Mr. Fardell said he was at a disadvantage in taking on the case, as he did not know what happened at the last hearing.

Mr. Smith said a small laundry might be controlled by someone sitting in a chair, but in a business like theirs a man must be active. Sometimes the employees caught their fingers in the machinery and had to run release the belts. He knew of a score of accidents which would have been more serious if active help was not at hand.

Mr. Sheppard: But surely all your machinery is protected according to the factory laws?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Would you be surprised to know I am connected with a laundry which is managed by a woman and the only assistants are women. If your machinery is not properly protected we must have an inspector down to examine it, for the safety of those who work there. The laundry I speak of is that at the Island County Asylum, and the only time a man goes into the place is when something breaks down. Is the applicant in this case an engineer?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Has he served his time as an engineer?

Mr. Smith: No, but he can do the repairs.

Mr. Wetherick: What is the nature of the work Facey does?

Mr. Smith: Bookkeeping and looking after the accounts. We must have men to attend to the flues of the boiler. Women could not do work like this. In reply to a further question, Mr. Smith said they were working seven days a week now owing to the shortage of staff. They lost their engineer at the outbreak of war and had news recently that he lost his life in H.M.S. Kent.

The Chairman: You told us on the last occasion that Facey was the man necessary for all the work and machinery. Now you say it is this man.

Mr. Fardell said Facey was in the position of a supervisor over Benham, who was the practical man. There must be two men because of relief. Benham worked at Ventnor, but Facey attended to both places.

Dr. Robertson: It is not practicable with Facey's knowledge to get the work done by some less experienced man?

Mr. Smith: We have advertised. – But you have advertised for a man similar to Benham? – Yes. – That is not the question. Facey knew the work and could act in any emergency. – He knew what the work was and how it should be done, but he was not a practical engineer. – Could you not get a man to act under Facey's guidance? – That is just the man we are trying to get.

Mr. Wetherick said the Company appealed direct for Facey on the last occasion, and said they would rather he remained than the other man. The office work particularly was always done by a woman formerly.

The Chairman: Always.

Mr. Sheppard: Then they state that Facey is more indispensable than the other man.

Dr. Robertson: Are we going to stop this business which employs 47 people?

The Chairman: They won't stop. I am not afraid to say that if this business closed, the laundry work of Ventnor would employ 80 women among the inhabitants of the town. I should have been brought up in a workhouse if my mother had been unable to keep things going by washing.

Dr. Robertson: Are we going to divert the income to some other locality?

The Chairman: If this Company want a man and are prepared to pay the money for him, they could get one. The man they are appealing for is not an engineer: I know that.

Mr. Burroughs said he quite understood that Facey would look after the machinery if this man went.

Dr. said they would give the Company a certain time, and tell them they must get a man.

Mr. Wetherick said there were a large number of people here now and the Company were no doubt doing additional work. He moved that exemption be granted to November 1st, this to be final. – Mr. Burroughs seconded and it was carried.

Colonel Guild: Of course they can appeal to Newport.

Mr. Wetherick: They can do that if they like.

(not all the report has been transcribed)