



COMMONS REGISTRATION ACT 1965

Reference No. 10/D/9

In the Matter of The Drives,  
Punchknowle, Dorset (No.2)

DECISION

This dispute relates to the registration at Entry No.2 in the Rights section of Register Unit No. C.L.10 in the Register of Common Land maintained by the Dorset County Council and is occasioned by Objection No. 890 made by John Roddick Bridgman and noted in the Register on 29th January 1971.

With the assistance of Mr. J. Svensson, F.R.I.C.S., as Assessor, I held a hearing for the purpose of inquiring into the dispute at Dorchester on 7th March 1972. The hearing was attended by Mr. Alec Laver, Mr. R.W. Cox, Chairman of the Punchknowle Parish Council, and Mr. P.J. Zneip, solicitor for Mr. Bridgman.

Mr. Laver claims to be entitled in gross to a right to graze 12 head of cattle over the whole of the land comprised in the Register Unit.

I heard this dispute at the same time as a dispute relating to similar rights of grazing over the land claimed by Mr. Laver's sister, Mrs. Ellen Male.

Mr. Laver's grandfather and father lived at Home Farm, Punchknowle. Mr. Laver could remember them grazing up to 12 milking cattle on the land as far back as 50 or 60 years ago. Other people living in the village used to put donkeys and horses on it. After his father died in September 1934 Mr. Laver grazed his own cattle on the land until 1962. It then became physically impossible for him to put cattle on the land, because in that year Mr. Lionel Joseph King, the then owner of the Punchknowle Manor Estate, took down the fence between The Drives and his field to the south and ploughed up most of the land.

Mrs. Male said that the origin of the right was unknown to her. Mr. Laver said that there was no grant of any rights by the lord of the manor to their father or grandfather, but he claims to have succeeded to the rights enjoyed by his father and grandfather. Mr. Laver's father by his will divided his property equally between his four sons and four daughters, but there was no formal transfer of grazing rights. Mr. Laver's claim is, however, based on an allegation that each of the sons and daughters acquired by inheritance a right to graze the same number of cattle as his father and grandfather had grazed. Mr. Laver said that it was his "birthright". Such a form of right could over the generations lead to an indefinite multiplication of the number of cattle to be grazed on the land. This would be utterly unreasonable and is not, in my view, capable of having any foundation good in law.

On this evidence I am not satisfied that Mr. Laver acquired through his father the right which he claims. Mr. Laver's own enjoyment of the grazing would not support a claim to a right by prescription. Since the Prescription Act 1832 does not apply to rights of common in gross (see Shuttleworth v.



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Le Fleming (1865), 19 C.B.N.S. 687), any such claim would have to be based on prescription at common law, and the period of enjoyment which Mr. Laver can show falls far short of what would be required for that purpose.

For these reasons I refuse to confirm the registration.

I am required by regulation 30(1) of the Commons Commissioners Regulations 1971 to explain that a person aggrieved by this decision as being erroneous in point of law may, within 6 weeks from the date on which notice of the decision is sent to him, require me to state a case for the decision of the High Court.

Dated this 27<sup>th</sup> day of March 1972

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. L. J. J. J. J.', written in a cursive style.

Chief Commons Commissioner