



COMMONS REGISTRATION ACT 1965

Reference No.29/U/8

In the Matter of Old Reading Room Site,  
Launton, Oxfordshire.

DECISION

This reference relates to the question of the ownership of land known as Old Reading Room Site, Launton, being the land comprised in the Land Section of Register Unit No.C.L.16 in the Register of Common Land maintained by the Oxfordshire County Council of which no person is registered under section 4 of the Commons Registration Act 1965 as the owner.

Following upon the public notice of this reference Mr. O.K. Slaymaker claimed to be the freehold owner of the land in question and no other person claimed to have information as to its ownership.

I held a hearing for the purpose of inquiring into the question of the ownership of the land at Oxford on 22nd November 1973.

At the hearing Mr. Slaymaker was represented by Mr. M.S. Foreman, solicitor.

The land the subject of this reference has long since ceased to have a reading room standing on it. It was derelict and covered with weeds by 1961, when Mr. Slaymaker bought the adjoining piece of land on which his house stands. After working on his house for a time, Mr. Slaymaker decided that he would like to clear the derelict land next to his garden. He had been told that the land belonged to either a Mr. Hawkins or to Mr. R.A. Deeley, so he asked permission from both of them and each said that as far as he was concerned Mr. Slaymaker could fence the land. This Mr. Slaymaker did, after which he cleared it and now maintains it as a lawn. It does not appear what interest, if any, Mr. Hawkins had in the land, but Mr. R.A. Deeley was a son of Mr. W.B. Deeley, a former owner of the land, which was assented by the trustees of his will to one of his two sons. It so happened that Mr. E.K. Truman happened to be present waiting for another case to come on and he kindly volunteered to give evidence in this case. Mr. Truman's firm has dealt with the Deeley family estates for many years and he remembered the devolution of the title, save that he was not certain whether the assent by the trustees of Mr. W.B. Deeley's will was to Mr. R.A. Deeley or his brother, but he thought that it was probably to Mr. R.A. Deeley. Had the land been assented to his brother, it is unlikely that Mr. R.A. Deeley would have given Mr. Slaymaker permission to take possession of it. On the balance of probabilities I find that Mr. R.A. Deeley was the owner of the land and that having allowed Mr. Slaymaker to expend time and money on it, he is now estopped from asserting his title. In these circumstances Mr. Slaymaker, having been in undisturbed possession for a substantial time, is the only person in a position to convey the land to a purchaser.

For these reasons I am satisfied that Mr. Slaymaker is the owner of the land, and I shall accordingly direct the Oxfordshire County Council, as



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registration authority, to register him as the owner of the land under section 8(2) of the Act of 1965.

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 ~~18th~~ day of January 1974

Chief Commons Commissioner