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Man who lost employment case tried to attack judge with a cleaver

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A man disgruntled because he lost his employment tribunal case walked calmly into the court and tried to attack a judge with a meat cleaver.

Russell Hardwick, the employment judge, was dealing with an NHS employment claim at Reading Employment Tribunal when the man walked to where the judge was sitting behind a desk on a level with the lawyers and pulled out the cleaver.

Andrew Burns, one of the barristers in the case, told *The Times*: “He was very calm. It was all very silent. He just walked up to the judge and said something like ‘you threw out my case’, then he raised this meat cleaver above the judge’s head.

“The judge cried out and tried to protect himself with his arms. I quickly went up to the man and asked him to hand it over. Amazingly he complied. It was all just a matter of seconds. I then kept him talking for about ten minutes until the police arrived.”

He added: “It was unreal at the time but afterwards we were all as white as sheets and it could have so easily turned out very differently. The judge was understandably in a bad state.”

The incident has prompted concerns about security. There are no scanners or bag checks at the tribunal nor any security staff, despite judges having raised their concerns with the court authorities.

Mr Burns, an employment specialist, said that the incident highlighted the “scandal” of lack of protection in tribunals compared with other courts. “We are dealing with people who often have very emotional reactions and the need for security is just as great as in other courts.”

He said that it appeared that the man had been dismissed from his job in the library at Slough Council two years before.

Attacks on judges are extremely rare. Judge Ann Goddard had to go to hospital and have five stitches in her head when a prisoner leapt from the dock at the Old Bailey in 2001 and attacked her.

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