

Autumn 1913 ...

The season began well enough. We enjoyed several good Harvest Festivals before news gripped the town about the tragic death of Mr William Stegges. You see everyone knew him. He worked for the Great Eastern Railway, then ran the Five Bells after his dad had it for many years and then he went on to set up his own business doing what he did best, carting stuff for the G.E.R. He was well enough and there seemed no apparent reason for him to drown himself, but his body was found submerged by the bridge and the town's inquest heard that he liked a drink, so perhaps one too many had contributed to his demise? Anyway, the town came out in force for his funeral, local shops closed, and houses along London Road where the cortege travelled closed their blinds as a mark of respect. We looked after our own back then.

The hint of war was already in the air. Twenty-three of our magnificent Red Cross nurses held an inspection at the home of Colonel Hamilton. An officer from the RAMC inspected them in the gardens of what is now the Brandon House Hotel and they received high praise for their work and smart appearance. The Major even suggested that Brandon would be strategically vital in the event of an invasion and casualties would be brought to the town!

6pm, Saturday 18th October. The King passed through the town this evening on his way home to Sandringham from a shoot near Newmarket – a guest of the German born banker, Sir Ernest Cassel. In this last autumn before war there was no shame attached to having German links, and so when Mr Goldsmith, the Stowmarket M.P., visited Brandon late in October to talk about Home Rule in Ireland and the new National Insurance Act, the townspeople applauded him and shouted “hear, hear” with approval when he spoke. They didn't know that Mr Goldsmith was actually born in Germany, and although Colonel Hamilton introduced him to the town as Mr Francis Goldsmith, his actual name was Franck Adolphe Goldsmith and poor Franck's political career was dead in the water when his German roots were revealed in the war; a victim of anti-German hysteria. He was not a bad M.P and he did go and fight in Gallipoli with the Suffolks, but even Brandon was not immune to this hysteria and when war came the town's gossip mongers got one resident hauled off by the police in the High Street for having a German sounding name! Funny how those we thought of “as our own”, were suddenly viewed with suspicion ...