

April 1918...

If it were not for horses, ploughs would not turn over the farmer's soil, heavy timber drugs would not take wood to the saw mills, residents would not have their milk delivered and the town's hotels would suffer from a lack of travellers. In a nutshell Brandon owes much to these beasts of burden. Beyond this, the horse is also a barometer of life in Brandon. Years of war has led to food shortages, disease and many being overworked. Man and beast alike suffer, but there is protection for both in the form of the Brandon Police.

On Friday 5th April, Police Constable Burgess is walking along London Road when he spots a horse collapsed on the road. Upon investigation, he sees the poor animal is in a bad state – malnourished, with swollen sores over its back and shoulders. It is obvious the animal is in no fit state to be pulling a milk cart, despite two dairy girls trying to get the horse up. Burgess tells them to return it to its paddock immediately. He then pops into the police station to inform Inspector Frederick Mobbs.

Edward Sheriff, from the Ipswich branch of the R.S.P.C.A., arrives in town, having been alerted by Inspector Mobbs. The two men head over the railway crossing and arrive at Lime Kiln Farm. They ask for the farm manager, William Wortley, but is told he is not there. Instead the dairy manageress, Mrs Wood, takes their questions. She says the responsibility for the horse is down to two young women, employed to replace men who have gone off to war. She had told Wortley just two days before that the girls must not use this horse, and instead take one of his other horses. One of the girls, Elizabeth Rolfe, replies that it is not her duty to fetch the horses, she is merely employed to drive the cart and deliver milk around town. The other girl, Alice Ballard, clearly upset, tells Mobbs that she has only been on the farm two weeks and is still learning. Yes, she had harnessed the horse that day but had not noticed the sores. Mobbs informs the women that they, and Wortley, will have to answer more questions before Brandon magistrates.

This is not the first time this year Mobbs has summoned Wortley to appear before magistrates. Last harvest, Wortley's farm had threshed wheat and rye, only to store it in a such a bad way that it is now covered in green mould. In these days of food shortages, the authorities have taken a very dim view of this and want to make someone accountable. It doesn't end there. Wortley recently told Brandon Council's Food Committee their setting of a maximum price for milk was far too low, so he was planning to cease milk deliveries in the town. The council's answer has been to look at ways to requisition his milk. Nor is this Mobbs' first prosecution for cruelty to a horse this year. In January, Annie Kent's horse was pulling a heavy timber drug along the High Street, when he noticed raw sores, each one the size of his hand, on its back and shoulders.

However, there is one irony to all this. From April 7th, meat will be added to the list of food being rationed. Each meat coupon entitles the bearer to not only the usual beef and pork, but also up to 6oz of raw horse flesh. Horses, it seems, still have something to offer those struggling in the war!