

February 1916

Three years ago a new Infants' school, down the lane off Market Hill, was unveiled to the town. This month the Managers of that school partook in a simple ceremony, along with Headmaster Appleby and Headmistress Lingwood, in planting seven lime trees in the school grounds. The hope is that in years to come the trees will form a wonderful screen between the school playground and the field adjoining it. However the planting of those trees has coincided with a monumental decision by our national government, which, if those trees live for a hundred years, could serve to remind Brandon of a most troubled time ...

Appearing all over town are posters declaring that the new Military Service Act will come into operation later this month. For those who are not aware of what this means, I shall elaborate. Our army has till now been filled with the ranks of volunteers, either career soldiers who enlisted many years ago or those who enlisted at the outbreak of war. Upon enlisting into the army, recruits enter their details onto an enlistment form, which the army then use to send the recruit their call up papers. These papers arrive very quickly, the next day in some cases, leaving just enough time for a quick farewell before the recruit leaves town to report to barracks. Well, that was how recruits joined the army. I say "was", because the Government are about to change all that.

You see, despite the army receiving hundreds of thousands of volunteers, it is still not enough to match the might of the enemy, especially when so many of our lads have been killed or wounded. Put simply, this country needs more men fighting at the front. Therefore after this month, an enlistment form will automatically be filled out containing the details for every able-bodied man in this country, aged between 18 and 41. All these men will then be presumed as having "enlisted" into the army, whether they intended to or not, and will be liable to receive their call up papers at anytime. This is nothing less than conscription.

You should note that there are some who can get exemption from this new law, but expect these exemptions to change anytime. The Government say they will exempt married men or those widowed with young children. If you feel you deserve exemption because the work you do is vital, either to the nation or to your family, then you may get exemption too, but to do so you will need to appeal at a Tribunal. Brandon's Tribunal will oversee cases not just from the town but also in those outlying villages served by the Brandon Rural District Council and will therefore consist of mostly district councillors. Also sat on the Tribunal will be a Military Officer, who you should be most wary of because he is solely there to ensure you are sent to the army.

Take heed. The new Military Service Act has been created to get more men into the trenches. If you are mindful of this fact then you will only appeal if you have a watertight case, otherwise it is off to the trenches for you! Dozens of Brandon men are now applying to appear before the first Tribunals planned for next month. I shall let you know how they get on ...