

February 1917...

Brandon, gripped by freezing weather, is finding it tricky underfoot, as two of the Ashley family will testify. Maria slipped on ice in the High Street, putting her in hospital with a fractured ankle, then Fred cracked his head open on heavy machinery while it was being unloaded at Mr Rought's fur factory. The conditions have also frozen the lighting equipment in St. Peter's church, so for now the congregation are assembling for evening service in the Church Institute, which seems to be the only public building withstanding the cold. The inevitable thaw cannot come soon enough, but when it does then it may present another problem. Flooding presents a greater risk this year because the river weeds have not been cut for some time.

You see, just like fighting a war there are two fundamentals required to cut river weeds, which Brandon is distinctly lacking. Men and money. When the men departed to fight in the war, it left farms and businesses lacking labour. Many families, lacking the wage of a father or son, are now sending out mothers and children to work, although the military does offer a 'separation allowance' to those women whose husband is still alive and fighting. It all helps.

Despite this lack of cash everyone has a patriotic duty to assist with the war effort in any way they can. Those with any cash would do well to put it into the government's War Savings, which offers a decent return. As always a committee is overseeing Brandon's scheme and by all accounts the town is responding well. The outlying villages, which have been less forthcoming with their cash, have irked Colonel Spragge of North Court. *"If you ask them whether they would rather have the Germans over here or pay 6d a week, you would have many who would save"*, he told a recent committee meeting in the Church Institute. Another member suggested, *"There must be a lot of families where boys and girls are earning, and money could be saved."* Yes, even those children working hard for a few pennies have a patriotic duty to put cash into the war effort.

So far, in just two weeks, five groups have been set up to promote the War Savings scheme, and three of those are operating in the Council School where twenty-six saving certificates have been issued. Of the other two groups, the one in St Peter's church has been most generous with thirty-one certificates, followed by the women at Rought's fur factory who have twenty-four. The scheme is merely a couple of weeks old and other groups are planned for the employees at Lingwood, George Wood, Spartan Works and even the members of the Oddfellows. It is no coincidence that a group is to be created to target the shoppers of the Co-operative, considering the welcome news their members have just received. The aptly named Mr Benjamin Money, announced at the Church Institute that the Brandon shop has realised six-month profits of over £430, meaning a dividend of three shillings for each of its members. Those shoppers will of course be reminded of their duty to put that surprise wind fall into War Savings. It seems that Brandon in 1917, just like those shoppers on the icy High Street pavement, will need to tread carefully if they are to balance the needs of the family versus the war.