

## January 1915

A Happy New Year from Brandon ...1915.

This past Christmas we heard how the Germans came out of their trenches and shook hands with our lads. You would be forgiven for thinking that there is at last some humanity in this world. Is it conceivable that the Germans might finally see sense and call a halt to this war? Well forget such fantastic notions because within the first minutes of this year the enemy has taken the life of a Brandon teenager ...

More precisely, it was 140 minutes into New Year's Day, when a German U-Boat slammed a torpedo into the Royal Navy battleship, H.M.S. Formidable. During the frantic minutes of the crew evacuating the heavily listing ship the enemy slammed another torpedo into her. The ship, and more than five hundred men, went to the bottom of the English Channel. One of them, a lad named William Kent, had left Brandon in the summer to join the navy. Just three weeks ago, after passing his training, he embarked on his first ship. No one foretold at the time that his new home, H.M.S. Formidable, would also be his final resting place. His life had already been tragic. He never had the love of a mother or father. You see his grandmother brought him up until she became too frail, so he was then passed into the care of another family. The Germans have crushed his hopes of a future in the navy.

Subsequently it appears our Royal Navy is not as indomitable as we had believed, and yet we pin our hopes on them repelling any invasion threat the Germans might have up their sleeves. A local newspaper has listed things we should do if an invasion might occur. Apparently us civilians should not attack the enemy, but instead remain in our homes out of the way. If we want to help then we should offer the army our pick axes, spades and shovels, just in case they need to dig trenches. One wretched point has been raised. We may be ordered to burn our precious crops and give up our horses and farm animals, for we cannot concede them to the enemy.

Even without this sombre war news the town is feeling somewhat depressed anyway. Our maligned Suffolk County Council has still not sorted the flooding along Thetford Road which has gone on for eighteen months! The council's latest suggestion is that the water is pumped into a butcher's blood cart and taken away. The cart is currently used to take unwanted blood from the slaughterhouse so it is watertight. One resident is so desperate that he has taken to cutting a channel across his front garden to drain the water from his home.

So do I have a tonic for these New Year blues? Perhaps! The men in the town are excited to hear the talk of a new volunteer army forming in Brandon. The idea is for those men not serving in the army to join and act as proper soldiers, with marching and drills. Details are sketchy at the moment but it seems all will be revealed at a meeting at the Paget Hall next month. If rumours are to be believed then the volunteers may be armed!