

## January 1918...

Today sees us taking a walk toward the railway, starting in George Street, stood outside the flint walled Methodist chapel. It's that time of year when the Sunday School children are rewarded for their previous year efforts and usually all the children, even those not getting an award, receive an orange. This year, due to food shortages, there will be no much-needed vitamin boost because the oranges have been substituted by a book. In Town Street, the children at the Methodist chapel will have to settle for a subdued feast of whatever their parents can spare from home. We should set off now for the railway as it is quite cold standing here.

As we walk, we may ponder on how the scarcity of food might affect us. Local newspapers are telling jam makers to start saving their sugar rations now as they cannot guarantee any sugar later in the year. We are also told the country cannot produce enough meat to feed everyone, so it must be imported across the deadly seas, with ships running the risk of being torpedoed at any time. As we pass Josiah Collen's grocer shop on the High Street, sandwiched between Hyam's bakery and the Post Office, I can tell you he had to apply at the Post Office for a licence to sell the imported meat. So did the grocer Frank Neep, on the other side of the High Street, along with International Stores – which we are now passing. The shops are heavily regulated as to what they can sell ... and the price they put on it.

Last month local butchers petitioned the Ministry of Food when they felt they were forced to sell beef too cheaply, while livestock was so expensive. The ministry responded by restricting the price of livestock. However, the ministry then advised Brandon its butchers were selling pork at too high a price and it must come down to no more than 2d per pound. I can also tell you the ministry told Brandon it should supplement its diet with rabbits. Now on the surface this sounds like a good idea as the beasts are plentiful. However, you must consider firstly whose land they populate and secondly that due to the war there are not enough able-bodied men to go out and trap them. So, with some irony, there are a steady stream of illegal poachers standing before the town's magistrates, while residents are threatened with hunger. If you have land, then you are likely to weather this better than those without. To their credit the town's residents have not shown signs of panic just yet, although on a couple of occasions there were long queues for paraffin, the much-needed fuel to illuminate homes in these dark winter months. The town's council is trying to help by breaking up land in the cemetery for allotments.