

## June 1915

Who knows what fate awaits us. Within a split second our lives can change forever ... our boys in the fighting know all about that. Sometimes we are victims of consequence. Or hindsight may show us we made a bad decision. This month hundreds of miles from the fighting, back home in Brandon, one lad made a decision he would not live to regret.

With the onset of these long summer days we are all preoccupied with trying to keep cool and for the young lads in the town they naturally gravitate toward the river. At noon on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, three 12-year-old lads, James Parry, Alfred Palmer and Edward Turner, went for a swim by the staunch. By all accounts they could all swim well and usually stuck to the shallows. So why on this occasion did James try to swim across the deep fast flowing middle? This decision ultimately led to his drowning and became the focus of discussion at his inquest, held in the Paget Hall four days later.

The two surviving boys appeared before the inquest's jury. Alfred spoke first. It appears the strong current dragged James under. James then reappeared frantically struggling and screaming for help. When he disappeared for good, the terrified Alfred ran off toward the town for assistance. Alfred got as far as London Road where he found two soldiers who followed him back to the river. One dived in and began searching.

Edward was next to give evidence. Inspector Mobbs quizzed the boy about some gossip he had heard. Had Edward dared James to swim across the river? Was the reward for doing so a cigarette? Edward of course denied this. In some ways it did not matter. The boys never considered the dire consequence of larking about in the river and any finger pointing at them now would serve no useful purpose.

Edward Puckeridge, from Bromley in Kent, was next to stand. He had been fishing from the bank when he witnessed the lad dragged past him. He looked for a long pole to reach out to James but could not find one. It was already too late because the boy had disappeared, such was the speed of events. Puckeridge ran down the riverbank searching for the boy and then noticed Palmer Lingwood, the owner of the fur factory, in a motorboat on the river. Puckeridge alerted Lingwood to what had happened. Lingwood, in his boat, scanned along the river looking for the boy and found him lying on the riverbed at a depth of about five feet. He pulled the boy onto the river bank and began artificial respiration. The boy's eyes were still open and it was this that inspired Lingwood to persevere. Dr Trotter then told the inquest that he had been summoned to the river and upon arriving he saw the lad laid out on the bank. By this time a soldier had taken over giving artificial respiration but Trotter could see the boy was already dead. Nonetheless he told the soldier to continue. It was all they could do.

It was no surprise that a verdict of accidental death was recorded by the inquiry. The jury expressed their sympathy to the boy's parents, who live on the High Street, and the jury foreman speculated if there would ever be a means devised to prevent boys from jumping in this dangerous part of the river.