

May 1917...

Supply and demand, two conditions determining the value of an item. Food is now as valuable as it has ever been and will only get more expensive. Pressures on the supply chain, such as a focus on producing munitions and a lack of men to work the fields, is leaving shops low on stock. With the threat of hunger looming, savvy businesses will gladly take food as payment, such as the landlord of the Plough Inn taking vegetables for a sneaky pint. It is understandable therefore that Colonel Basil Spragge, of North Court, Brandon, upon hearing of raiders taking our crops, wants action. Before coming to the town he commanded men in the Boer War and now sits as one of Brandon's most influential men, serving as magistrate and district councillor. Today, at a meeting of the Brandon Rural District Council, Basil is hearing that everything is costing more, be it the proposed building of a smallpox hospital, or the roadmen wanting an extra 2s a week. However when it comes to fighting the crop raiders the council agree with Basil and approve costly measures. They proclaim a bounty on the heads of all those raiders, only payable upon proof of their death!

At previous meetings Basil mentioned that rats and sparrows are in the ascendancy, eating all before them, and they desperately need controlling. He recalls a conversation with a man from Bury St. Edmunds who told him three hundred rats were killed in just one haystack. Another councillor tells of Euston Hall estate where the land was cleared of the pests, only to find those on neighbouring farms merely moved in and took their place. Many farmers simply do not have the manpower to kill the animals. So how does the council propose to deal with the situation? Plans are proposed, then one by one turned down, until an innovative suggestion hits the table. Perhaps the council could pay residents a penny to kill the pests? But how would the council pay for this 'bounty' when purse strings are only getting tighter? Perhaps a new rate levied on landowners could be the answer? A notice from the Board of Agriculture implies this would be acceptable. Would residents question why pest control is not already being done when it is supposed to come from the existing rates? They would have a point. Basil suggests people keeping pigs are often the biggest attraction for rats, so those people should pay more. The council disagrees and prefers that all landowners should pay a little more. With the funding sorted it is just a matter of how to implement it in the district.

Basil is against people putting out poisoned grain, as this will kill all manner of birds, not just pests. The council members all agree. Perhaps residents could create sparrow groups, going out to collect eggs and kill the pests. With the scheme gathering momentum, the council sign off their plan and instruct the Clerk to issue a proclamation to be posted around town. Residents will be paid tuppence for a dozen sparrow corpses, six farthings for a dozen of their eggs and a shilling for twelve rat's tails, with payments to be made every Friday evening. Just in case anyone was in any doubt, there can be no prisoners in this battle, the clerk will only provide payment upon evidence of the enemy's death!