

## November 1916...

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1914, in St. Peter's Church, Emma Dixon married her sweetheart Charles Kent. At the time Charles was retained as an Army Reservist, so the couple knew he would be one of the first to be called up should war be declared. As it was Emma had barely a month of married life with Charles before he left for France. In February of the following year, Brandon residents felt much sympathy for Emma as news filtered through that her husband had been killed in the fields of Flanders. Today, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 1916, she stands before magistrates at the Brandon Police Court to explain why a Brandon family assaulted her.

It all began when Emma went out collecting sticks for firewood, or 'sticking' as it is more commonly known. Seeing a group of women doing likewise she asked if she could put her coat on their wheelbarrow, to which they agreed. These were the Rayner girls, out with their formidable fifty-four year old mother Laura. After Emma had returned home to Town Street, she realised she had left her coat behind. It was a fabulous garment, with three large buttons down the front, and bought from Housman and Relhan's shop on the High Street. She walked over to the Rayner's home on Mile End, but was dismayed to hear them say they did not have her coat. A few days later she paid them another visit, but still no joy. Then one Monday morning as she was walking to work she spotted her coat draped over the arm of 19-year-old Mildred Rayner. Emma and the Rayner girls work at Rought's huge fur factory on George Street, so when Emma saw the coat hanging up in the unattended factory cloakroom she seized the moment and reclaimed it back. Days passed and no one questioned her, so she assumed a wrong had been righted. Then at the end of the week it all kicked off.

That Friday at 5.15pm, Emma finished her shift, put on her coat and, accompanied by Edith Newell, proceeded to walk home. As they passed the Five Bells Inn, two of the Rayner girls came at them demanding to have the coat back. Emma and Edith hurried on until they saw Laura, the mother, standing outside Collen's grocer shop on the High Street. Laura proclaimed she was taking the coat back, then grabbed at the collar, dragging Emma over the pavement. Pieces of coat were torn off, along with Emma's work pinafore and hairnet. Then Emma felt a punch in the back. A very distraught Emma ran from the scene and headed to the Police Station on London Road, where she met Inspector Frederick Mobbs. Mobbs went into town looking for the girls, subsequently finding Laura in the Avenue. Laura claimed the coat was her property, so when Emma refused to give it back she tried to forcibly remove it from her. Mobbs had no choice but to summon her to appear in court to give her version of this sorry tale.

Today in court there is no shortage of eyewitnesses supporting Emma - Maud Rolph and Alice Lingwood all testify against the Rayner girls, as does Edith Newell who also swore on oath that the coat belongs to Emma. The Rayners are found guilty, with Laura fined 5s, while the two Rayner girls are each fined 2s 6d. Emma gets justice.