

October 1917...

On Saturday 6th October, police arrested a Brandon soldier, Percy Wicks, and held him at the Police Station on London Road. Although Percy had been given leave to return to Brandon for a few days, he had not departed for his unit when he was supposed to. There is at best a weariness of war and at worse a full rejection of it. The local newspapers, printing a steady stream of casualties, add to the malaise. William Adams' name appeared a few days ago, killed by a sniper's bullet, with two others - Bertie Docking and Bertie Challis; listed as missing, indications point to them being dead too.

Every action has a reaction. A reluctance to go to war has led to conscription, with men compelled to attend court if they want to dispute their call up papers. Each court hearing is known as a 'Tribunal', although 'Inquisition' would be more apt. Most cases are dismissed, with men being ordered to report for duty or else face harsh punishment in prison. Today, Thursday 23rd October, the Brandon Tribunal, convenes at the Guildhall in Thetford. Heated scenes erupt when a conscientious objector from Theltenham refuses to be medically examined let alone consider putting on an Army uniform. He claims he would rather be shot. Frederick Mount, who runs the lime extraction pit on Thetford Road, is next to appear before the Tribunal. There are many cases to be heard today so he is only allowed a few minutes to present his case.

Captain Spencer Willoughby, sitting on the Tribunal, is none too impressed that Mount has brought an exemption certificate from a previous Tribunal hearing. Willoughby says the certificate was given to Mount due to him being employed as an assistant overseer for Brandon Council, deemed an important job, but now Mount is no longer doing that job he should put on an Army uniform and go off to war, especially as Mount is in the top fitness category – Class 'A'. Mount suggests he had to give up the council job because so many of his employees had gone to war, leaving him to work all hours to keep his business going.

Willoughby takes Mount to task. He implies Mount is making himself indispensable to the business by refusing to replace anyone who has gone to war. An incensed Mount strikes back, "I DON'T STAND BEFORE YOU AS A SHIRKER!" He then tells the Tribunal he would go to war, as he feels it is his duty to do, but he is a hard working man with lots of duties that require him to remain in Brandon. Willoughby is yet to be convinced, so highlights his point again, "... but your work could be done by a man not fit for general service." Mount replies, "Mine is a one man business." Willoughby won't let this go and knows otherwise, "YOU ARE A PARTNER!" Mount's answer is to the point, "YES, BUT MY MOTHER IS SEVENTY-TWO YEARS OF AGE!"