

August 1915

It has been a difficult time for the farmers of Brandon. There is an urgency to get harvesting, but the young men who would normally do the hard graft are away fighting in this war. In their absence it has fallen upon others, such as the older folk, teenagers, women and soldiers billeted in the town to help out. However horses still do the lion's share of the work. In fact there is barely a business in the town that does not rely upon the beasts. On any given day you will see horses pulling carts laden with wood, provisions and of course passengers. This month we saw the horses go off to war when the artillery from the Essex Regiment, who had been billeted in the town, left for pastures new ... quite literally. Their horses are trained to pull artillery and wagons full of munitions and just before they left Brandon, the soldiers gave the town a fine display of horsemanship on Mr Towler's meadow. There were flat races, with distances ranging between one hundred yards and a mile, and the soldiers even showed off their dexterity by wrestling on horseback!

It seems that horses may have had their time though. I must concede that modern day machines do seem to be taking their place. Brandon is getting used to seeing the new motor cars filling up on fuel at Hanbury's garage. Mr Teed, who owns a shop on the High Street, knows a good thing when he sees one and has applied for, and got, a licence from the Brandon Rural District Council to sell petroleum too. It seems the businesses serving the motor cars are booming and this month Hanbury's garage did almost do that ... go BOOM! Let us revisit the evening of Saturday 28th August, at about 7.30pm ...

A motor car pulls into Hanbury's garage on the London Road. It is a twelve horsepower Peugeot, costing £400, and is driven by Lieutenant Gunther. He asks the garage manager, Mr Scott, for four gallons of petrol to be put in the car's fuel tank. Mr Scott retrieves some cans of fuel, lifts the bonnet, attaches a funnel to the petrol tank in the engine bay and begins pouring the flammable liquid into it. The first can empties its contents into the engine, so Mr Scott pours the contents of a second can, all the time captivated by his charming visitor. It seems the lieutenant is serving with the highly skilled commandos, called the Lovat Scouts. They are moving off from their base in Hunstanton and rumour has it they are destined for Gallipoli. The two men are so preoccupied in their chit-chat that neither notices the fuel is overflowing. The lieutenant is mistaken and requires much less fuel than he thought. Worse than this though, he has left the engine running.

Fuel spills out over the hot engine and ignites. The men's attention immediately turns to putting out the fire. Mr Scott tries his best, but only succeeds in burning himself. The flames are soon out of control and spread to the rest of the car. A crowd, drawn to the blaze, gather around watching the car's awesome demise. Mr Scott's burns are not too bad and he will be fine. However the same cannot be said for the car, its glowing skeletal remains are all that is left of the beast. It would have cost the local farm-hand more than seven years wages to buy such a thing. On that bombshell some might quip they never once saw a horse go up in flames when it was being fed!