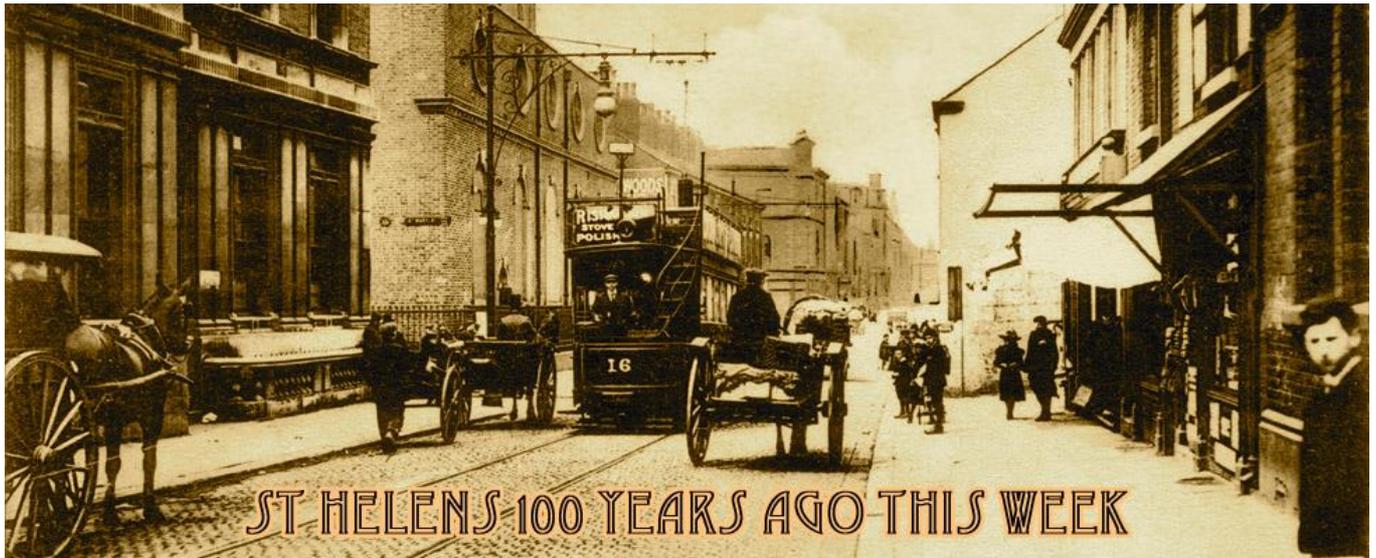


St Helens 100 Years Ago – January to June 1917



St Helens 100 Years Ago This Week is a 1500-word article published every Sunday at 2pm on the Sutton Beauty & Heritage [Facebook Page](#). This document is a compilation of articles – written by Stephen Wainwright – which describes events that took place between January to June 1917.

January 1917

There was a good attendance at Knowsley Road on New Year's Day for the annual derby game between Saints and St Helens Recs, which the home side won 15 – 0.

Margaret Kivlehan was in court on January 2nd, facing the music after a brutal Christmas Day assault on her lodger Patrick Connolly. Dr. Eric Reid from Cotham Street told the court that the 59-year-old labourer was lucky to be alive, after being repeatedly struck by a poker and a heavy yard brush. Connolly claimed he had been attacked after simply returning to his lodgings in Water Street and asking for his dinner.

However when arrested by Constable Smith, Kivlehan told a quite different story. The 43-year-old claimed that Connolly had struck her first, adding that she would have liked to have “given him more with the brush”. Witnesses corroborated the Irish lodging-house keeper's account of acting in self-defence and despite her response to the original assault being quite disproportionate, the magistrates chose to only fine her £2. The bench dismissed a charge against Kivlehan's 18-year-old son, Timothy, of being involved in the assault.

Another Timothy Kivlehan – who was probably Margaret's brother – had been sent to prison on July 27th 1914 for a vicious assault on a police officer. PC Toft appeared in court with his head completely enveloped in bandages as he revealed details of his brutal beating from the hands of Kivlehan and his accomplice. It was a tough life being a bobby in St Helens in those days. The attack on Toft was the 12th assault on the police during that month and the 40th so far during 1914.

Just before Christmas a public meeting had been held to discuss how a scheme of allotments in St Helens could help alleviate food shortages caused by the war. It was decided to form an allotments committee and on January 2nd it was announced that one had now been formed. Its purpose was to decide what public land in the town's parks and in other places could be given over to food production. The committee members were some of the top people in the town, with the Mayor acting as chairman. This reflected the importance of producing food on the home front, with

German submarines sinking many merchant ships. Children were also joining in, with some schools in St Helens creating small allotments.

It was also revealed on the 2nd that the severe winter was causing the death rate in the northwest to greatly increase. With no central heating, the elderly were particularly vulnerable to the cold and the fog. In Liverpool 438 persons had died during the previous week, with the mortality rate for those over 70 almost double the winter norm.

An interesting act appearing at the Hippodrome Theatre in Corporation Street during this week was Frederica's Comedy Terriers, who were billed as 'Britain's best comedy animal actors'. Later the act used the strapline 'a performance that baffles description'.

On the 4th a tragic accident occurred in Rainhill when 8-year-old Marion Mutch was fatally injured by a motor car near to her home in Sutton Road, not far from the Coach and Horses (now Rainhill Road). Such accidents were becoming increasingly common, with children routinely playing out on the streets. On that same day a number of St Helens officers were mentioned in despatches for bravery in the war, including Captain Guy Pilkington of Rainford Hall in Crank, who'd been awarded the DSO. He'd served with the 5th South Lancashires since they were mobilised and had twice been dangerously wounded.

On the 5th the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society presented a bravery award to Police Constable Frederick Moseley. On Boxing Day the officer had rescued a boy from a frozen pit in St Helens after some of the ice had broken. The constable was handed a bronze medal and certificate of thanks and 13-year-old James Johnson was awarded 12s 6d and a certificate, for giving assistance.

Also on the 5th a soldier in the Irish Guards, who gave the name of Joseph Mudford, appeared in court in Prescot, charged with having received £20 by false pretences from Mary Robinson. The confectioner from Huyton had been conned by Mudford after giving him lodgings. Despite only being 23-years-old, the smooth talker had managed to convince his landlady that he'd just started work at Lea Green Colliery as manager on a salary of £500 a year. In reality he'd taken a job in the colliery's electrical department at £2 per week but had never shown up for work. After being loaned £20 by Mrs. Robinson, Mudford disappeared but was arrested in London and subsequently sentenced to 9 months hard labour.

The fighting collier Mick Gordon from Harrison Street in Sutton fought Johnny Melia from Oldham at Newcastle's St James Hall on January 6th. Boxing magazine described some 'hot exchanges' before Gordon knocked out Melia in the 7th round of a 15-round contest using his renowned left hook. In the Newcastle Journal's report they said Gordon was 'Lancashire's best pitman lightweight.'

On January 8th Josephine Wilson – described as a 'respectable married woman' – appeared in St Helens Police Court charged with shoplifting and was fined £2 7s 6d. The 49-year-old from Rutland Street, near Victoria Park, had been seen dropping items into a carpet bag, while walking around the Co-op in Baldwin Street.

A New Year's Day row in Rainford between two neighbours led to Hugh Ball appearing in court on the 9th. The 35-year-old lived in Hardings Lane, which no longer exists but was a row of cottages near Bushey Lane that was occupied mainly by miners from Rainford Colliery. The trouble began after Ball had told his next-door neighbour William Jones to come to his house and then in the presence of his wife, accused him of being 'improperly friendly' with her. After Jones denied the accusation, Ball took Jones by the throat and 'commenced to mop the floor with him', as the

Liverpool Echo put it. The magistrates were in generous mood and simply bound Hugh Ball over for six months on condition of good behaviour.

On the 11th it was announced that Sergeant Major James Edwards from Peter Street in St Helens had been awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action. On the following day John Duffy appeared at the Liverpool Appeal Tribunal to try and keep out of the war. The 28-year-old headmaster of St. Anne's RC Boys School claimed exemption from military service, arguing that as a teacher he was indispensable in Sutton.

There was a real shortage of schoolteachers in St Helens with almost half of those who were eligible to serve in the army having already left the town. Many wouldn't return with 1,300 British teachers killed by the end of 1917. The authorities had arranged for a discharged soldier and assistant master at St Teresa's School called Pennington to act as a substitute for Duffy at St. Anne's, while he was in the army. However Pennington told the Liverpool hearing that he'd been told that Duffy was already serving and after discovering that he'd been misinformed, was no longer prepared to stand in for him.

The tribunal granted Duffy a further one month's exemption from service, after which time he'd have to re-apply. This was quite normal with exemptions only awarded for a limited period. John Duffy served as headmaster of the boys' school at St. Anne's for 37 years, after being first appointed in 1913 at the age of just 24. In 1931 he told a teachers' conference that he was "looked up to in my district as a little tin god". At another conference he compared his pupils to animals, saying that a class of 30 to 40 schoolboys could be as "lively as a cage of monkeys".

Also on the 12th January Mary Griffiths from Union Street (off College Street) was sent to prison for 6 months with hard labour for neglecting her six young children. Dr. John Donnellan (from Westfield Street) told the court that the soldier's wife had given way to drink and he'd been forced to send her children to the workhouse in order to "rescue them from their terrible condition".

At the same hearing Dr. Donnellan gave evidence at the prosecution of John Harrison from New Cross Street. He was charged with neglecting his son James, who had been suffering from diphtheria. It took five days from when the 12-year-old first developed symptoms before Harrison called in the doctor. James was immediately removed to hospital where Dr. Donnellan performed an emergency tracheotomy in order to save the lad's life. The bedding at Harrison's house was said to have been filthy, with the backyard dirty and insanitary and the midden overflowing. Dr. Donnellan told the court that many children had died of diphtheria in St Helens because parents were waiting until the last moment before calling in the doctor. John Harrison was admonished by the bench and fined £1 11 shillings.

At 11:30pm on the 12th Inspector Anders and several constables raided some gipsy caravans on a site near to St Helens Hospital. They were looking for draft dodgers and found three brothers of military age, two of whom were hiding inside boxes. The men had been earning their living as hawkers but didn't have a licence. On the following day the brothers appeared in court and were each fined between 40 and 50 shillings and handed over to the military authorities.

Gladys Richards was also in St Helens Police Court on the 13th charged with stealing items from kind-hearted people who had given her shelter. This was after Gladys's exasperated parents had thrown her out of their Gartons Lane home in Clock Face. Superintendent Dunn told the bench that the youngster was a "cunning thief" who had been leading an "immoral life". The magistrates placed Gladys on probation upon condition that she went into a home. However she replied that she would rather go to prison.

At the same hearing six young boys living in Victoria Street and Cowley Street, near Victoria Park, were each ordered to receive six strokes of the birch for stealing from shops. Also on the 13th the Crown Inn at 99 Peasley Cross Lane, in between Manor Street and Greenough Street, finally closed under the compensation scheme. This allowed payments to pub owners when the licensing magistrates decided that their houses should be closed through insufficient need.

War is incredibly expensive and traditionally people have been encouraged to help with the financial cost by investing in war savings schemes. On January 15th the Mayor of St Helens, Alderman Henry Bates, presided over a meeting at the Town Hall to kick start War Savings Week. The boys' choir of Higher Grade School provided some musical entertainment and a number of speakers gave addresses. Councillor Heaton said that £68,450 worth of War Saving Certificates had been purchased at St Helens Post Office so far. That was a commendable amount – worth around £3 million in today's money – but small beer in terms of the £3 billion cost of the war that the British government had to find.

On the 17th 76-year-old Joseph Leigh died at his home in Liverpool Road, where he had run a bakery and provisions store for about 50 years. Leigh was very well known in St Helens having also been jury foreman at large numbers of coroner's inquests. This was in an era when the deceased was legally required to be present at inquests (which were often held in pubs), so that jurors could inspect the body for injuries and confirm the identity of the dead. Inquests were usually held between 24 to 48 hours after death to minimise the stench from the corpse as it decomposed and putrefied.

On the 18th it was revealed that Sir Joseph Beecham had left an estate worth £1 million, the equivalent of more than £40 million in today's money. The 68-year-old son of the founder of the pill empire had died on October 23rd 1916. It was a tradition for wealthy folk to make a bequest to their domestic staff and Beecham left a year's salary to each servant at his homes in St Helens, Huyton and Hampstead, as long as they'd worked for him for 10 years. Also his coachman Thomas Oldham was left £100 and several workers at Beecham's received generous legacies.

On the following day Hilda Williams from Arthur Street – who was described as a coloured girl – was sent to a reformatory for 5 years for stealing beef from a shop in Liverpool Road. Hilda was in a family of seven, with one brother already in a reformatory. The 12-year-old's father, Thomas Williams, had been born in Africa and had married Clementina Forrester in St Helens in 1898. One can only imagine the difficulties of being in an inter-racial family at that time. Shortly after Hilda was born, her father Thomas died and his widow then married labourer James McDonald. Whether Hilda's mixed-race contributed to her behaviour can only be speculated upon, with the police describing the girl in court as being a pest.

Two more gipsy hawkers, as they were described, were brought before St Helens magistrates on the 19th, after a police raid on waste land off Fleet Lane. Inspector Anders told the court that he had found Alfred Smith hiding in a cupboard in one caravan, with a huge kettle positioned in front. In another van his brother Walter was discovered after a search. Both were charged with being absentees from the Army reserve and failing to register under the Military Service Act. Alfred Smith told the court that he shouldn't have to serve in the army, as he was a man of business with a wife, three children and several horses to look after. The magistrates were unimpressed and fined both brothers £4 and handed them over to the military authorities.

Confectioner Thomas Middlehurst was back in court on the 19th, this time for selling chocolate sweets after 9pm on a Saturday. The early closing of shops had been introduced in October 1916 in order to save on coal, although on Saturdays the limit was extended to 9pm. Middlehurst claimed that his assistant's wristwatch had stopped and she was fined 10 shillings and her boss £1. The customer Thomas Glover was even prosecuted for buying the sweets and he received a fine of 5

shillings. Middlehurst owned shops in Higher Parr Street, Church Street and Ormskirk Street and was a regular in court, having been charged with a variety of offences. These included selling chocolates with flies embedded in the cream and keeping his son off school in order to sell sweets at a cinema.

On the following day a remarkable undercover operation was undertaken by St Helens police officers at the Royal Court Hotel in Warrington. As previously mentioned in this weekly feature, the Defence of the Realm Act had made the buying of an alcoholic drink for another person a criminal offence. The No Treating Order was introduced in October 1915 with a maximum penalty of 6 months in jail and was one of a number of measures intended to reduce alcohol consumption and boost war productivity.

The Warrington police had concerns that people were being bought drinks at the Royal Court but they needed evidence and their own men were too well known. So they asked their St Helens colleagues to investigate and Chief Constable Ellerington sent constables Perkins and Maddocks. PC Perkins had form for making treating arrests, having detained two actors in 1916 for buying each other drinks at the Swan Hotel in Corporation Street in St Helens.

So the two policemen purchased several glasses of beer at the Royal Court Hotel while in plain clothes. At one point Elizabeth Finch, the licensee's wife, told the pair that they had to pay for their own drinks as treating was not allowed, adding that she had to be careful when serving strangers. However at another time she allowed one of the undercover bobbies to pay for two drinks. During the evening the policemen made a return visit to the hotel and saw treating being allowed by barmaids Lily Bonnon and Sarah Butler. In court on the 30th PCs Perkins and Maddocks said that treating at the Royal Court had been widespread and they could have reported almost 100 people if they had been able to take down their names.

The punishment for these offences by the Warrington magistrates was quite harsh, with four individuals who worked at the hotel fined a total of £90. This included the two barmaids, Lily and Sarah, who received fines of £20 and £10 respectively. That was a lot of money when they would have earned less than a £1 a week. Let's hope that the landlord George Finch did the decent thing and paid their fines.

To conclude this week's news report, here is some non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. It was revealed that 'Signor Marconi' was testing a wireless telephone that would allow troops in France to talk to each other. During WW1 much of the communication was done by carrier pigeon! It was reported that a well-to-do reclusive clerk called Thomas Williams from Carmarthenshire had died 30 years after having 'imposed dumbness on himself'. There had also been a big police raid in Liverpool's Chinatown to capture opium smokers in which 33 arrests had been made.

The Liverpool Echo published a letter from someone who vociferously complained of the numbers of persons who continually spat on tramcars, despite notices telling them not to spit. They also reported that a young woman had given birth to a son in a large Glasgow music hall during the interval. The article didn't say whether she had to buy another ticket for the second half! It was also stated that 75% of troops at the front were of the belief that the death at sea in 1916 of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, had been faked. And I bet you thought conspiracy theories were a modern invention!

It seems odd that someone should be prosecuted for not answering their telephone but strange things happen in wartime. On January 26th Samuel Adcock of the St Helens Smelting Company appeared in court charged with failing to comply with a works lighting order by allowing his firm's phone to go unanswered. St Helens Corporation had introduced a night-time black out in February

1916, so as not to act as a guide for German Zeppelin airships on bombing runs. As well as street lighting being turned off, houses and works were required to be screened to prevent their lights from being seen from outside.

However by the end of the year some of the lighting restrictions were eased, as it was realised that slow-moving airships would be spotted well before they reached St Helens. This would allow plenty of time for lights that were powered by electricity to be turned off. The St Helens Smelting Co. was one of a number of firms undertaking war work in the town who were allowed to emit some light under the works lighting order. However they had to comply with certain conditions, which included being contactable by telephone in the event of airships being in the vicinity. On January 15th at 6:10pm a telephone operator made the daily 'readiness' call to the smelting works to test the line and ensure that someone was by the phone. There was no reply and so three further calls were made over a 9-minute period and all went unanswered.

Inspector Morrison of St Helens Police was contacted and he visited the works for an explanation and was told that the person left by the phone hadn't known how to use it – or as was said in court "was strange to the telephone". Chief Constable Ellerington told the magistrates that an offence of this description should entail a withdrawal of the lighting exemption granted to the works. However the bench decided to be lenient as this was the first such breach and the company was only fined £2. The St Helens Smelting Co. worked 24 hours a day during the war turning out metallic antimony for shrapnel shells. A previous version of the company had been involved in a landmark House of Lords judgement in 1865 when William Tipping, the eccentric owner of Bold Hall, brought an action against the St Helens Smelting Co. for damage to his estate.

On the 27th January Thomas and Hannah Smith from Barber Street in Pocket Nook appeared in court charged with cruelly neglecting their children. Their house was said to have been in a shocking state with Hannah looking 'ill and worn'. She said her husband spent his wages on beer and gave her very little money. Thomas was sent to prison for 3 months with hard labour and Hannah was fined 20 shillings and sent to the Prescot Workhouse, where her children had been taken. Just how she was expected to find the money to pay the fine wasn't explained.

St Helens was going through a really cold snap with the winter being the first severe one of the 20th century. Frozen snow-covered pitches caused the abandonment of Saints away game at Leigh and the Recs home match against Oldham. These were all unofficial, friendly games with competitive matches having been suspended for the duration of the war. Newspapers though published a 'merit table', which was a bit lopsided with teams ending the season having played a different number of games.

On January 29th Joseph Taylor from South John Street was fined 20 shillings for gambling on waste ground off Park Road. The young collier was among a group of 30 men, who were probably playing pitch-and-toss and he was the only one that Constable Maddocks was able to apprehend. Such games were then widespread in St Helens and lookouts were placed at strategic places to provide advance warning of the police – keeping 'nix' as it was known.

At the same hearing Richard Wilson was fined for strewing glass onto Grosvenor Road, off Prescot Road, over an area measuring nine yards by three yards. Wilson denied that he had deliberately placed the glass on the highway to damage the tyres of motor vehicles in order to boost trade.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A six-week-old abandoned baby was discovered alive and seemingly well in an old disused office off Chaloner Street in Liverpool. It was reported that a wealthy man from Alderley Edge who had recently died had put this in his will: 'I bequeath to my once dear wife nothing. She left me for nothing, and wants for nothing, and I have nothing more to say respecting her.' A letter

was published in the Liverpool Echo in which a man claimed to have requested nine doctors to attend to his seriously ill wife but all nine refused. The 10th only agreed to attend upon receiving an advance fee of 1½ guineas and then insisted upon having his breakfast before turning out!

Addressing a Women's Labour League conference in Salford, the union activist Mary McArthur said that despite the good pay currently being earned in munitions works, many women still earned slave wages in other jobs. Although a gender pay gap still exists today, a century ago it was a chasm. Before the war women's average pay was 11 shillings a week, well under half the average for men, although many earned much less for a working week of over 50 hours. During a court case in 1901 it was revealed that most women at the Lancashire Moss Litter Company's premises at Sutton Moss worked from 6.30am until 9pm for just 1s. 2d. per day – that's less than 7 shillings a week.

St Helens was enduring its worst winter for many years, which caused considerable suffering for many. The extremely cold houses with frozen pipes can't have been much fun, although the children enjoyed themselves in the snow. At noon on January 30th a boy called William Waine was amongst a group of lads who were sliding on the canal at Haydock, when the ice suddenly broke plunging the 10-year-old into the water.

However tragedy was averted by the bravery of Private J. Holden who was home from the war on sick leave suffering from rheumatism. Hearing the alarm he ran from his house and dived into the water to rescue the boy, assisted by Dennis Lafferty, the headmaster of St Augustine's RC School at Blackbrook. Young William was very fortunate as many children have lost their lives playing on iced up ponds and canals in St Helens in the past, with six children having drowned in Wigan on Christmas Eve.

February 1917

A scheme of voluntary food rationing was announced on February 1st with people encouraged to reduce their consumption of bread, meat and sugar. Also on that day Elizabeth Barton from Glasshouse Farm in Lowfield Lane in Lea Green lost her life while giving birth to a son, who also died. Bearing a child used to be one of the most dangerous things a woman could do. It is only fairly recently that the Church of England removed from its prayer book a special service that gave thanks for a woman's 'safe deliverance and preservation from the great dangers of childbirth'.

More covert activity by undercover bobbies Maddocks and Perkins was revealed in St Helens Police Court on February 2nd. In January the pair of St Helens policemen had visited the Royal Court Hotel in Warrington to gather evidence that customers were buying each other drinks. This was in breach of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) and led to four people (including two barmaids) being given heavy fines totalling £90.

Now the pair pretended to be drinkers at the Queen's Head in Worsley Brow in Sutton to prove that landlord Thomas Dean was allowing treating and selling whisky during prohibited hours. In court the clerk said that Dean appeared to have tried to see how many provisions of the Liquor Control Order that he could break. As well as making other restrictions, the order had reduced pub opening hours to a maximum of 6 hours a day – before the war they could open from 5am until midnight. Male publicans were pressured to either join the forces or work in munitions plants and put their pubs in the hands of their wives. For those that continued to run their houses and whose profits were being affected by reduced hours, there was a temptation to make illegal sales.

Constable Maddocks told the court that he had bought two bottles of stout in the Queen's Head for himself and PC Perkins, making a single payment of 6d. An innocuous transaction in normal times but it was against the no treating order, which had a maximum penalty of 6 months in prison. Constable Perkins also asked for two noggins of whisky to take away and Dean had the drink put in

an unlabelled bottle. The landlord told the court that he had been in the business for nearly 40 years and had always tried to do the right thing but was given a fairly heavy fine of £12.

Three days later PCs Maddocks and Perkins were back in court after undertaking undercover work at the Clarence Hotel in Wigan. However the landlord William Thompson had hired up-and-coming barrister Walter Greaves Lord, who gave the two St Helens' bobbies a hard time. He accused them of going round Lancashire looking for treating offences and claimed their recollections of events was unreliable. As a result the magistrates dismissed the charges against Thompson but his barmaid and barman and four customers were each fined £2 10s.

On the 5th it was announced that Pilkington's new Special Hospital for Wounded Soldiers and Sailors had been completed and was ready for the arrival of patients. The state-of-the-art hospital with 100 beds was situated in Borough Road and was said to have been specially designed for the 'treatment of cases where the patient is in a broken-down state from shock, &c'. It was reported that no expense had been spared, with the hospital specialising in restorative and orthopaedic treatments. Pioneering work with muscle re-education through hydrotherapy in swimming baths, was one of their methods.

The medical superintendent was Dr. James Kerr, who between 1915 and 1916 had served as chief surgeon in a hospital in northern France. In October 1918 Kerr was presented with a medal by the French military authorities in recognition of his service. At one point in France he'd caught diphtheria while treating an outbreak. In April 1917 the exiled King Manuel of Portugal visited Pilkington's hospital on behalf of the British Red Cross and in October a British government minister went to see for himself the important rehabilitation work being done in St Helens.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A 30-inch-long live snake was discovered in Derby amongst a consignment of bananas from Jamaica. A Liverpool woman called Mary Leach was sent to prison for 3 months for simply telling fortunes for fourpence in her own home. A report revealed that a 15-year-old boy working at a Portsmouth brewery was already an army pensioner, having served for a year in the Dorset Regiment. The lad had been a band boy and was discharged after suffering a ruptured lung and now received an army pension of 5 shillings a week.

For some people women taking over male jobs during the war years took a bit of getting used to. 'Girl Drives Fire Engine' was the shock headline in the Liverpool Echo in which it was revealed that an 18-year-old woman called Isobel Silver had driven horses attached to a steam engine to a fire in Hampshire. Meanwhile in Chester the clerk to the court told a 'lady motor driver' attired in a chauffeur's uniform to take off her hat. Women could keep their hats on in court but the clerk had assumed that she was male. "My name is Mary", replied the chauffeur to the clerk, telling him that she didn't think it necessary to remove her hat. The clerk look confused until somebody whispered "she is a girl"!

The week began with an update on the work of the St Helens Allotments Committee, which had recently been formed to boost food cultivation within the borough. Only five days earlier a scheme of voluntary food rationing had been announced by the Government, which in tandem with more food production on the home front, was intended to deal with shortages caused by a big drop in imports.

The actions of German U-boat submarines were responsible for most of the problems with 470 merchant vessels having been sunk in the last 3 months. It was estimated that there were 100 subs at sea at any one time and since February 1st they'd begun waging unrestricted war on all merchant ships taking supplies to Britain and its allies. So things were likely to get worse and self-sufficiency in food production was the Government's ambition.

The St Helens schools were doing their bit and the council's Education Committee had given permission for children to spend half an hour a day tending gardens during school time. Seeds and manure were being supplied with £50 loans available for schools to cover their costs. It was also announced that the council's Gas Committee had given directions to grow oats and clover on vacant land in Knowsley Road and leaflets had been issued offering land at nine places in St Helens where plots were available. These measured 300 square yards with a nominal rent of 1s. a year and seed and manure provided at cost price. It was reported that large numbers of St Helens people had already signed up for an allotment.

Just like Little Bo Peep, William Welsby from Market Street in Rainhill announced on the 8th that he'd gone and lost his sheep. However if the sheep knew what was good for them they wouldn't have gone home wagging their tails behind them as Welsby was a master butcher! It took the 47-year-old three weeks after the five animals had apparently performed a great escape from his slaughter yard before placing a newspaper ad. "Finder will be well rewarded", he wrote. Although business insurance wasn't as widespread as it is today, it's likely that Welsby was insured and his insurance company refused to cough up without an advert, hence the delay.

People weren't given the rest breaks that workers enjoy today and where smoking was banned for safety reasons, some would find it hard to go through the day without tobacco. On February 9th John Martin from Bank Street (off Prescott Road) and 19-year-old Frank Devine were fined 30 shillings and 20 shillings, respectively, for smoking in the boilerhouse of a St Helens munitions works. The two boiler hands had smuggled cigarettes into the plant, breaking its safety rules. The exact location of munitions plants was never revealed in newspaper reports for reasons of security. Such works were dangerous places and just three weeks earlier 73 people had died in a massive explosion at the Silvertown munitions plant in London which also damaged 60,000 properties.

When Sir Joseph Beecham died on October 23rd 1916 he left an estate worth £1 million, the equivalent of over £40 million in today's money. Wills for large estates rarely satisfy everyone and on February 9th litigation by three parties was outlined in the Chancery Division of the High Court for hearing later in the year. The renowned conductor Sir Thomas Beecham was responsible for one action.

It was a very severe winter and although comprehensive weather records weren't kept until 1914, an amateur meteorologist in Aigburth claimed that this week had been the coldest for over 20 years with as much as 30 degrees of frost. This translates to about -17 degrees Celsius with ferryboats on the Mersey bearing icicles a foot long. The bad weather continued to affect the Northern Union's rugby league programme, with Saints and St Helens Recs unable to play their games scheduled for the 10th. In fact all matches in Lancashire and Yorkshire were cancelled for the second successive Saturday due to frozen pitches.

Famous actress Lillie Langtree was in St Helens during the week performing in a pantomime as Robin Hood. She had been renowned for her beauty and affairs with famous men – including royalty – but was now in her 60s, although still attracting many admirers.

On the 12th there was more bad news for the mother of 5-year-old Johanna O'Neale from Wilson Street in St Helens (near Boundary Road), who discovered her daughter dead in bed. Her husband was a soldier in the King's Liverpool Irish Regiment and six months earlier he had been reported missing in action. A verdict of death from natural causes was recorded at Johanna's inquest.

To conclude here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were in the local newspapers this week. A soldier at the front mailed a letter to his family in which he said he had sent five Germans to hell. All letters had to pass through a censor, who after reading the soldier's comment, drew a

line through the sentence and wrote: "It is not permitted to refer to the whereabouts of the enemy." Commenting on the coldness of unheated theatres and cinemas during the severe weather, the Liverpool Echo said: "Some places of amusement are nightly store-houses of chilled meat". It was also reported that in south Wales 50 ponies had frozen to death and in north Yorkshire sheep had been found frozen on the moorland.

Also in the Echo was a long article on how the greater independence granted to young women during the war was having 'tragic results' by making them 'fast and sporting'. According to the author women had become immodest and vulgar with a mode of dress that was a 'regrettable blend of suggestion and provocation'. The article said that the greater freedom that females now enjoyed as a consequence of being in well-paid employment, often doing jobs traditionally performed by men, was making them reckless: 'Unless the modern girl mends her ways the prospects of the future generation cannot be contemplated without dismay'.

The annual licensing meeting for St Helens's pubs was held on the 13th, in which the Chief Constable presented his yearly report. Arthur Ellerington told the justices that the recently introduced regulations that curtailed drinking hours and reduced the strength of beer had greatly decreased drunkenness in the town.

In his previous report the Chief Constable had complained about drinking amongst women, declaring that: "stringent measures should be taken to cope with the evil". However Ellerington now said there was no longer any evidence of excessive drinking by females. This, he believed, was probably because many licensees had taken it upon themselves to limit women to two halves of beer.

Only 217 people were prosecuted for drunkenness during 1916, the lowest number on record and less than half the number in 1915. However the Chief Constable failed to say that large numbers of men were serving in the forces, depleting the population, although this was partly compensated by war workers coming into St Helens. Ellerington complained that some people had been getting round the licensing laws by persuading doctors to give them certificates that stated that they needed alcohol for medical reasons!

A special charity concert was held on the 15th at the Hippodrome Theatre in Corporation Street in aid of the Lord Kitchener Memorial Fund. Nineteen acts – including the Three Dancing Madcaps and the Famous Juggling Jays – performed with over £300 raised. Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, had died at sea 8 months earlier and his Memorial Fund still exists, providing scholarships for the sons and daughters of those who've served in the armed forces.

The winter sales in the shops continued with Stewart's 'The King Tailors' with 130 branches nationwide – including one in St Helens in Church Street – advertising made to measure tweed suits on February 15th for just 23 shillings 3d (£1 16p). However wartime inflation appears to have affected their prices, as a year ago their cheapest sale suits cost 15/3.

On the following day an inquest was held on Margaret Hutchinson who had lived at the British Lion pub in Church Street, where her mother was licensee. The 14-year-old had been asked to look after the baby while her Mum went out. A piece of coal fell out of the fire and as the girl lifted it back in using tongs, her clothing was set alight. Young Margaret was holding the child at the time but had the presence of mind to carefully put the baby down before dashing into the bathroom to get some water. Unfortunately the pub's pipes were frozen because of the severe winter and some time later Margaret was found in the British Lion's backyard trying to put out the flames. She was very badly burned and died later in Providence Hospital.

There were countless similar deaths of clothing being set alight by house fires in St Helens, although it was mainly small children who were affected. It wasn't until legislation was passed in 1967 and again in 1985 that regulations were imposed on the flammability of fabrics. The British Lion in Church Street closed in 1931 and is not to be confused with the pub of the same name in Lugsmore Lane.

On the 17th the 'mammoth boxing entertainment' held at the Prince's Theatre in Preston featured as its main event Mick Gordon 'the fighting collier' from Sutton taking on Bombadier Walter Rossi from South Wales. The latter had the best of the exchanges and in the fourth round he had the St Helens man hanging helpless on the ropes but then Rossi struck Gordon below the belt, for which he was disqualified.

Food shortages caused by the war and profiteering by some retailers led to the government capping prices. Not all foods were in short supply, although sugar and butter were particular scarce. Potatoes when out of season were in short supply and a price limit of £8 per ton had been imposed on potato dealers. On February 19th farmers Henry and William Birchall of Barrow Farm in Rainford were charged with selling spuds for £9 17s 6d a ton to Peter Barton from Dentons Green Lane. In court it was stated that the farmers were so confused by the many rules and regulations that they didn't do anything about them until the police brought a court action! As a consequence of it being the first prosecution under the Potato Prices Order, the magistrates dismissed the charges upon payment of court costs.

Also on the 19th an unusual prosecution took place when William White appeared in St Helens Police Court. The labourer from Nelson Street in Sutton was fined £2 for advancing money to a woman for the purpose of obtaining drink. He'd given a Mrs. Woods some cash and then taken her into the Alexandra Hotel in Fisher Street. In court it was stated that the woman had later been found on some waste ground in a "helplessly drunken condition" with her clothing "almost torn off her".

The waste ground would likely have been what Suttoners called the 'Show Field' which at various times of the year was inhabited by travelling show folk of all kinds, who put on circuses, animal shows, fairgrounds and boxing bouts. However the animal or 'wild beast' shows led to complaints from residents who didn't like the noisy lions and tigers disturbing their sleep! So from around 1920 these were stopped.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. In an article entitled 'Jack the Clipper', it was revealed that Eastbourne police had received complaints that girls wearing their hair in plaits had been the victims of 'hair-snipping outrages'. In one case a 17-year-old had her locks surreptitiously shorn while standing in a small crowd outside a railway station. In London at a conference on food in wartime, a man called William Lawton claimed that the domestic staff shortage was leading to ladies going out onto the streets to 'kidnap' other people's servants in order to induce the women and girls to work for them.

The death of rich recluse Herbert Childs from cold and hunger was announced. Although a member of a wealthy family, Childs had lived for many years in Essex in a small hut composed of railway sleepers. Within his 'wretched hovel' – as it was described – Childs dressed in cut-up sacks and would only speak to people through a small hole in a wall.

Towards the end of the 19th century there were 300 pubs and beerhouses in St Helens serving a population of 70,000. Around 1,300 arrests were made each year for drunkenness and many drink-related crimes and assaults on the police took place. There was much pressure for the numbers of drinking houses to be reduced and one important tool was the compensation scheme.

This was introduced in 1904 and was paid to the owners and licensees when the licensing magistrates decided that their houses were no longer needed. The prospect of compensation also induced some owners to voluntarily give up their licence and close down their pub. The compensation pot came from a levy on all licenses, which in St Helens amounted to £3,000 per year.

On the 20th February the Prescot licensing magistrates considered an application to close down five houses in Prescot, Whiston and Rainhill under the compensation scheme. These were the Derby Hotel and Hearts of Oak beerhouse, both in Eccleston Street in Prescot; the Horseshoe and George and Dragon in Whiston and the Bridge Inn beerhouse in Rainhill.

The application came from the police, who felt that all these houses were 'redundant', as they put it. Fewer pubs meant less police supervision and hopefully less trouble. However the magistrates didn't want to take away people's livelihoods unnecessarily and after some discussion agreed to close the Prescot and Rainhill houses but renewed the two Whiston licences for another year. Not that there was a huge amount of beer for them to sell. During this week the Government announced that beer output in 1917 would be reduced to 10 million barrels, from 26 million barrels in 1916. This was so that their ingredients could be diverted into food production at a time of great shortage.

It wasn't until 1983 that St Helens had two members of parliament and a century ago it was Conservative Rigby Swift who was our sole representative in the Commons. He was also a barrister, who despite his parliamentary duties during wartime, continued to act as counsel in court. For several days this week Swift defended 87-year-old socialite Lady Jane Taylor in a libel action after she and three others had published a letter in a newspaper.

Taylor was the president of a Christian faith group and in the letter comments were made about the organisation's former secretary. They were rather innocuous comments but on February 22nd the ex-secretary was awarded £1,000 for her hurt feelings. This was a huge amount, which would have taken the average working man over 10 years to earn, with compensation for death at work being a fraction of that amount.

In fact widows could expect an award of just £150 - £200 after the death of their husband, with the compensation usually doled out bit by bit upon application to the court, with refusal commonplace. In 1915 Judge Shand told a widow at St Helens County Court that she had "far too exalted notions" when hearing that the woman had £27 funeral expenses to pay for her dead miner husband. She asked for permission to spend a total of £50 out of her compensation award but left the Market Street court with just £16.

Rigby Swift had been born in St Helens in 1874 and was brought up at Hardshaw Hall in Windle. He became MP for St Helens in 1910 and a judge ten years later. In their 1937 obituary the Lancashire Evening Post described Sir Rigby Swift as 'undoubtedly the most outspoken judge of his day', who had called the divorce laws 'wicked and cruel' and as counsel or judge had taken part in 'some of the most sensational criminal cases of this generation'.

As the war progressed the government added to the young single men already called up (and in many cases killed) by increasing the age limit and conscripting married men. As a result many small businesses were either sold off or closed down, due to the owner being in the army or not being able to find workers. It was the latter that led carters R. & G. Whitmore to shut down their carting business and on February 22nd their horses and carts were put up for sale in an auction at Four Acre Farm in Sutton Manor. Four Acre Lane, incidentally, is named after the farm.

In many ways carters were the backbone of commerce distributing supplies mainly by horse and cart within their local area. So many of them went into the army that it created shortages, especially of coal during the harsh winter of 1916 / 17 when people needed it most. Plenty of coal was being mined but a lack of means of transporting it meant that some homes had their supplies interrupted while temperatures plunged as low as -17 degrees Celsius.

Talking of carting there was an odd advert published in the Preston Herald on February 24th. It read: 'Wanted. Stable Manure in large or small quantities for Allotments. The Corporation will cart. Offers to Borough Engineer, Town Hall, St. Helens.'

You would have thought that there was enough muck in St Helens without having to import it from Preston! But large quantities of manure were needed for the council's public allotment scheme, which was part of a national drive to deal with food shortages caused by German U-boats sinking merchant ships. Prime Minister David Lloyd George had only declared in a speech in the House of Commons on the previous day that "the plough is our hope", adding that food stocks in the country were "alarmingly low".

Also on the 24th in front of a good crowd of 2,000 spectators Saints lost at Warrington 9 – 8, after failing to convert a try at the end of the game. And 13-year-old Samuel Kew from Newton Road in Parr committed a courageous act when he saved a child from a pit near Derbyshire Hill Road. The boy would later receive a cash reward for his bravery from the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society.

The 'burning season for children' – as County Coroner Samuel Brighthouse dubbed winter – continued with two more fatalities. Three-year-olds Nellie Parr from Liverpool Street and Eric Wilding from Burtonwood both died in St Helens Hospital on the 26th from their burns. Poorly guarded house fires that set highly flammable clothes alight, caused most of the children's deaths.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A mother in Seaham in County Durham was brought to court for not ensuring that her son attended school. The woman told the magistrates that she had two boys but they only had a single suit of clothes between them, which one son wore in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Liverpool Police made another raid on an opium den in Greetham Street, off Park Lane. They arrested seven young Chinese men, who were found lying on beds puffing away on pipes.

The latest fashion news from Paris revealed that skirts in 1917 would be longer than in 1916, being of ankle length with 'sleeves very long and necks very open' and with no collar. The Daily Mirror took out huge adverts in local papers to justify its increase in price from a halfpenny to a penny. They claimed that a single photo in their 'picture paper' could cost them as much as £1000. The Daily Sketch and Daily Mail were also doubling their prices to cover increased costs.

The 'disappearance' of the German sausage through the war was lamented. In 1909 at a Swiss exhibition 1,785 varieties of the German banger were on display. 'It has been said that a good German would sooner invent a new sausage than anything else', the Liverpool Echo wrote!

March 1917

When pub landlords and landladies were convicted of an offence, they had a nervous wait until the annual licensing sessions to find out whether they could keep their licence. In 1898 the St Helens Newspaper stated that magistrates on the licensing committee had in recent times 'never hesitated to take any legitimate opportunity which has offered itself to reduce the facilities for drinking in the borough.' They claimed that the annual licensing renewal days were seen as opportunities to quash

the licenses of those who'd broken the rules, although the magistrates would also take into account the gravity of the offence and any prior convictions.

On March 1st 1917 there were five St Helens pubs whose licences were up for review. Thomas Dean, landlord of the Queen's Head of Worsley Brow in Sutton, had been fined £12 for allowing treating and selling whisky during prohibited hours and the landlord of the Druid's Arms in Ashcroft Street had been fined for using 'unjust' pint mugs. The licensees of the Victoria Vaults in Pocket Nook Street, the Golden Lion in Lyon Street and the Royal Arms in Traverse Street were also on the naughty step in the St Helens Court. In the event all had decent records, so after each landlord was brought before the bench and 'strongly cautioned', their licenses were all renewed.

These days licensing is undertaken by St Helens Council but a century ago it was down to a group of magistrates, who controlled all aspects of licensed pubs and places of entertainment. So Peter Highcock of the Primrose Inn in Park Road had to apply for permission to put a billiard table into the pavilion of his bowling green. However the licensing justices refused the application after Chief Constable Ellerington said the pavilion was unsuitable as it was low and dark. Eight cinemas also had their licenses renewed, including the Electric Theatre (which became the Scala), the Thatto Heath Empire, the Oxford Picturedrome in Duke Street (which became the Plaza & Cindy's), the Sutton Empire (Bug) and the Co-op Hall in Baldwin Street.

In the St Helens Newspaper of March 2nd an advert read: 'PIG KEEPING – Persons desiring to rent a Corporation pig-sty are requested to communicate at once with the Medical Officer of Health, Town Hall, St. Helens.' There'll be an explanation of this and much more on pig keeping in St Helens in next Sunday's article.

On the 3rd the Royal Humane Society honoured Dennis Lafferty, the headmaster of St Augustine's RC School at Blackbrook. Four weeks earlier the 45-year-old from Argyle Street, off North Road, had helped to rescue a boy called William Waine from drowning. The bad winter had frozen the canal at Haydock and the 10-year-old was amongst a group of lads who were sliding on the ice. As so often happened the ice broke and Waine was plunged into the water and Lafferty went to his aid.

Private J. Holden was also honoured by the Society for his part in the rescue. The soldier was home from the front on sick leave but hearing the alarm ran from his house and plunged into the icy water. At St Helens Police Court the Mayor, Alderman Bates, presented the headmaster with the Humane Society's vellum certificate, which is awarded when someone has placed themselves in danger when carrying out a rescue. A second certificate was forwarded onto the soldier. The 'vellum award' is still given by the Society but these days they use card instead of vellum parchment, which was made out of calf skins.

On March 5th Sgt. James Heaton discovered two deserters hiding in a room over the stables at Sherdley Hall. It was believed that Emma White, who worked in the Sherdley gardens, had hidden her son Edward for up to five months and his brother John since December 1916. The latter's story was that he'd been on leave but had scalded his foot the day before he was due to go back to France and so was unable to return.

His brother offered no such silly excuse and on the following day the pair appeared in court and were remanded in custody pending a military escort. The St Helens Chief Constable told the magistrates that no one at the Hall knew of the men and if they went out it must have been at night. Emma White would later be jailed for harbouring her sons.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. It was considered 'remarkable' by the Daily Dispatch that an army office in London was

permitting female clerks to smoke during office hours. They thought it likely that this was the only such office in the country that allowed women such a concession.

A few days later the Liverpool Echo countered with a lengthy article entitled 'My Lady's Fag' in which they reported that London was not alone in allowing smoking by women. They said that a big Government office in Liverpool permitted smoking by the 'feminine fag brigade', adding that: 'some nicotine maids find a cigarette-case as indispensable as the powder-puff and hand mirror.'

Women doing male jobs were popping up everywhere, causing more than a few eyebrows to rise. The Echo reported that the first fully uniformed policewomen had appeared in Birkenhead. 'The ladies in blue look most businesslike in their garb', they wrote. It was also announced that during the summer season women would be driving the trams at Blackpool.

Newspaper placards and posters that provided pedestrians with news headlines stopped this week for the duration of the war. This was by Government order in order to save paper. In the Cheviot Hills a black-faced ewe was rescued after having been buried in snow for 48 days, seemingly no worse for its experience.

It was also reported that aircraft maker Anthony Fokker had predicted that a regular air passenger service between Berlin and New York would begin after the war. This he believed would prove more popular than even the most luxurious of steamers because of the speed – although the new transatlantic airplane service would take 36 hours!

And the death was reported of the curiously named Captain Leone Sextus Denys Oswolf Fraudati-Filius Tollemache-Tollemache de Orellana Plantagenet Tollemache-Tollemache of the Leicestershire Regiment. His father had been a clergyman in Grantham, who chose to inflict on his ten children a total of 88 bizarre Christian names. One of them said letter signing became "such a terror" that he changed his name by deed poll!

On the 6th it was announced that St Helens Corporation's Health Committee had received a grant from the Local Government Board of £570 to go towards maternity and child welfare. The Board was a branch of the Government responsible for overseeing local administration. They congratulated the Council on their welfare work and said they were pleased to hear that a maternity home for complicated pregnancy cases was being considered.

Through walking the same beat night after night the boys in blue developed an instinct when things weren't right. So when PC McHale heard a dog bark behind the Running Horses pub at 3:30am on the 7th March he decided to investigate. He discovered a man dressed in khaki crouching behind a box, with whisky, rum and cigars on his person that he'd stolen from the pub. The burglar turned out to be Stephen McDermott, a soldier serving in the East Lancashire Regiment and within hours he was facing the music in court, where he was remanded in custody. There'll be more on this case next week.

Also on that day 57-year-old John Meehan from College Street died from the injuries he'd received while working at John Varley's iron foundry in Atlas Street in Parr, when a large door fell on top of him breaking several ribs. The family firm began in 1837, the same year that Queen Victoria ascended the throne. When they closed in 1990, the sixth generation of Varleys was running the business. The resurgence of decorative cast iron by conservationists and on heritage projects had boosted Varley's sales in the years prior to its closure, with examples of its work at Manchester Town Hall and Air and Space Museum, Liverpool's Albert Dock and Stockport's Market Hall.

These days we think of jumble sales as involving the selling of second-hand articles of one sort or another and not a place where you buy a horse! However a century ago the term could also be

applied to livestock and agricultural products. On March 7th the Liverpool Echo published a notice advertising a 'Jumble Sale of livestock, including 2 thoroughbred Colts (three-year-olds), presented by Colonel M. Hughes'. The sale was held in the yard of the Fleece Hotel on the following day, with the proceeds to the Red Cross Fund run by Hughes's wife Edith. This was not the same Fleece that closed in 1986, as the original Church Street hotel was demolished in 1931 and a new Fleece built in the same year.

At the St Helens Town Council's monthly meeting on March 8th there was a discussion on pigs and poultry. The council had been considering erecting pigsties in various parts of St Helens for townfolk to keep pigs and adverts had been placed in the local papers. This was part of their plans to boost food production, which included creating public allotments. However the Mayor said an insufficient number of applications for pigsties had been received and the expense of building sties could not be warranted. Instead people were going to be encouraged to keep pigs and poultry in their backyards, where it wasn't detrimental to health.

It used to be very common for people to have pigs in their yards but by 1917 it was far less so, through concerns over public health. Councillor Peter Phythian (who would become Mayor in 1922) had been calling for a relaxation of pig keeping rules since 1915. He'd complained at council meetings how St Helens folk who'd kept pigs for 30 years were now being served with notices ordering them to give up their pigs despite the food shortages caused by the war.

As well as providing a supply of meat, pigsties could also be used for nefarious purposes. In just over a year's time James Sexton would become the MP for St Helens, despite his family having been members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They were the IRA of their day and from their little umbrella repair shop in Tontine Street, the Sextons were heavily involved in gun running for the IRB. One day after receiving a tip off about an imminent police raid, 11-year-old James helped his mother remove a collection of guns from underneath the floorboards of their house and hide them in the buckets of swill that they kept for their pigs.

'Gaming Evil at St Helens' was the headline of a newspaper article on the 12th, which described how collier Thomas Unsworth from Harris Street in Dentons Green had been caught playing pitch and toss. This is a game in which the player who throws a coin closest to a mark gets to toss all of the players' coins, winning all those that land heads up. Pretty innocuous by today's standards but a century ago it was considered 'evil' and a lot of police time went into catching offenders. Unsworth was amongst a number of men who were playing the game but he was the only one arrested, as he was seen to be in charge.

Usually a group of gamblers would have someone looking out for the bobbies – or keeping 'nix' as it was known. However to prevent being spotted, two plain-clothes policemen were used to observe the men before making the arrest. In court Unsworth was fined 10 shillings for playing the 'evil' game. In a separate case two miners called Peter Feeney from Wilfred Street and William Myatt from Haswell Street (both off Mill Street and no longer exist) were also both fined 10 shillings for gambling with cards on waste ground.

There was bad news on March 12th for young men who had been exempted from going to war. Alderman John Forster, Chairman of the St Helens Military Tribunal, said that under the new regulations they were going to have to deal much more drastically with exemptions than they did a year ago. Forster explained: "It means that all men under thirty-one years of age, and especially single men, will have to go. I cannot see anything else for it."

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A woman from Southport was so convinced that she'd swallowed her false teeth that she had to be admitted to hospital where she quickly became seriously ill. Within days the woman

had died, however her teeth were discovered in her bedroom where she'd left them. The Liverpool Echo reported that motor tractors were now being used on many farms. They said a motor tractor could plough a 42-acre field in 12 days, compared to the 56 days that a horse plough took.

In London a deputation of officials representing taxi drivers met the Home Secretary to ask him to withdraw an order that permitted women to be licensed to drive taxis but received short shrift. In the House of Commons John Burns MP, a former President of the Board of Trade, said he knew of cases of men who'd caught VD by simply kissing women on the street while celebrating the relief of Mafeking in 1900. Burns also claimed that a bookie had transmitted the disease by handing a collier a coin that had been in his mouth. The miner was then supposed to have passed the coin and the disease onto his mate. Not that the term VD or venereal disease was actually used by the newspapers at that time, who instead referred to it as the 'hidden plague', mystifying many readers.

And although the soldiers in France were enduring a hard time in the trenches, the people of Willesden were having a tough time too. A magistrate in the London borough complained that the heavy tread of policemen's boots while walking their beat often kept him awake at night and he felt that the bobbies should wear lighter boots!

On the 13th Private Stephen McDermott pleaded guilty in St Helens Police Court to a charge of stealing from the old Running Horses pub. A week earlier just before closing time, the soldier of the East Lancashire Regiment had secreted himself within the Liverpool Road pub and at 3:30am was discovered by PC McHale wearing his khaki uniform and hiding behind a box at the rear of the hotel.

McDermott attempted an escape but was collared by the bobby and found to be carrying whisky, rum, cigars and cash to the value of £1 10 shillings. The original charge had been burglary but as the soldier had walked into the pub as a customer, the police knew that charge would never stick, so it was reduced to theft. McDermott's story was that he'd been drunk during the evening and didn't know what he was doing and when he woke at 3:30am had decided on impulse to take some items. However this didn't wash with the police, who were able to establish that the soldier had been quite sober when seen inside the house and so the magistrates gave him three months hard labour.

On the following day in court, the licences of the Duke of Cambridge in Duke Street and that of the Eagle Vaults in Liverpool Road were transferred to Joseph Shaw and John Henthorn, respectively. Shaw had been discharged from the army with a good character reference and Henthorn had been rejected from service on medical grounds. Since the onset of war pub opening hours had been limited to just 6 hours a day and so both men were told that they should spend their spare time undertaking munitions work or doing some other work of 'national importance'.

On March 16th Emma White appeared in court charged with concealing her two sons Edward and John, who had both deserted from the army. Sgt. James Heaton had found them hiding in a room over the stables at Sherdley Hall, where Emma worked in the gardens. The 48-year-old widow had hidden her son Edward for up to five months and his brother John for about three. Nobody at the Hall knew of the men with the brothers only going out at night. Emma told the court that she had asked her boys to go back several times and then said: "It is a mother's feeling; I could not help it."

For obeying her maternal instinct Emma White was sentenced to a month in prison in the second division. This was a class of prisoner who were granted certain privileges. These included being allowed to wear clothes of a different colour to the standard prison issue and being able to receive more frequent visits and letters than other prisoners.

Also on that day John Gallagher and James Nevan from Watery Lane in Sutton appeared in court charged with failing to comply with the National Registration Act, for which they were fined. On August 15th 1915, all men and women aged between 15 and 65 were obliged to complete a census-type form and then were issued with a registration card – or id card as we would call it today. It was an offence not to register or be able to produce your card when asked to do so by the authorities.

In actual fact the National Registration scheme was rather chaotic and the police were somewhat selective in their prosecutions. In court Sgt. Adams said James Nevan acted as legal adviser to an “Irish gang” and knew the law better than the police, something that might well have initiated the prosecution. The Irish were in an odd position. Although subject to the National Registration Act in England, they were exempt from conscription as long as their main home was in Ireland. Proving this to the police wasn’t easy and to have someone advising them on the legal loopholes would have been invaluable to the men and have irritated the heck out of the police!

On the front page of the Liverpool Echo of March 19th this notice was placed: ‘I CHARLES LONGSHAW, of 48, Hills Moss-rd., Sutton Oak, near St. Helens, Lancashire, will NOT BE RESPONSIBLE for any DEBTS other than personally contracted.’

Reading between the lines the 39-year-old miner was saying that he’d separated from his wife Mary and wasn’t prepared to pay any of her bills. Such notices in newspapers were quite common at this time, with husbands being legally responsible for the debts of their wives. Although courts did grant orders compelling husbands to make a weekly maintenance payment to their separated wife, these sums tended to be small. So women might be tempted to instruct shopkeepers to bill their estranged husbands for purchased items. An alternative explanation for the notice was that Charles’s 18-year-old son George had been running up bills but this is less likely.

To end this week’s news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. The War Office revealed that 3,500 conscientious objectors had so far been sent to prison. A letter in the Liverpool Echo said that the present “cinema craze” in the city was largely because the variety theatres had been like ice-boxes during the severe winter, whereas the cinemas were always nice and warm. However the correspondent did add that having not been to the pictures for a while he had been “agreeably surprised by the wonders of modern cinema acting”.

An 18-year-old military absentee – who suffered from dwarfism and whose height was only 2 feet 3 inches – suffered the indignity of being marched through the streets of Eastbourne in a knickerbocker suit by a tall Canadian soldier, much to the amusement of locals. The young man had failed to answer his call-up papers and once his height was realised by the recruitment officer, was told he could go home. It was reported that the general increase in wages over the past couple of years – mainly as a consequence of war inflation – had led to a big increase in gambling by the working class. One bookie claimed that three times as much business was now being transacted on race days.

You have to feel some sympathy for German immigrants, who’d been living in this country for years and weren’t well treated during the war. This week a German woman applied to a West London court to change her surname to a more English-sounding name and asked the advice of a magistrate. “I do not sit here to give advice to Germans”, was the sharp retort.

The Lord’s Day Observance Society were annoyed with the Archbishop of Canterbury, after he had recently given his blessing for people to work in the fields on Sundays during the food crisis. The Society sent his Grace a letter declaring that his words were against God’s commandment and could have disastrous consequences for the nation. Some would have countered that the country running out of food would have had worse consequences.

There was bad news for 70-year-old widow Jemima Ward from Croppers Hill on the 22nd March, when it was announced that she'd lost yet another son through the war. 31-year-old Corporal Fred Ward had been recommended for a commission just before his death at the front. Before the war he had worked at the London City and Midland Bank, as the Midland / HSBC was then known.

Fred's older brother Lieutenant John Ward had died in action during the previous September. John had an interesting background. After being educated at Cowley, his first job aged 13 was as a clerk in a St Helens glasswork but he clearly had ambition and later left for South Africa where he became a solicitor. He then sailed to Canada where he qualified as a barrister before joining the Canadian Infantry.

Traders found it hard to keep up with all the rules and regulations, which increased during the war. For reasons I've yet to figure out, the Board of Trade only allowed bakers to bake loaves that weighed a pound or an even number of pounds. So 1, 2 or 4 pound loaves were perfectly legal but 3 or 5 pounders were not. Some bread laws did make sense, such as the legal requirement from March 1917 for millers to extract a minimum of 81% of flour from wheat. This was to boost the efficiency of food production during wartime but the illegal 3 pound loaf is a bit of a headscratcher!

On March 23rd William Gabbott – who had kept a bakery in Liverpool Road for 19 years – appeared in court charged with selling illegal 3lb loaves. The Chief Constable of St Helens, Arthur Ellerington, asked the magistrates to deal with Gabbott as a “particularly bad case”. The baker's explanation was that until a few days earlier he'd thought that even pounds meant a complete pound, i.e. comprising a whole 16 ounces. The baker made a statement that he wasn't trying to “do the public down” but was fined £1 and told he'd been very careless and obstinate.

Also on that day Robert Rennie from 323 Mill Lane was fined 20 shillings for working a horse in an unfit state and Emma Bath was fined 10 shillings for permitting the offence. Sgt. Heaton told the court that the horse was “worn out” and the Bench ordered it to be destroyed. For many decades the Bath family ran a grocer's shop at 337 Mill Lane near the Bull & Dog and opposite the present-day ‘Sherdley News & Booze’. Robert Rennie was a coal miner who appears to have been helping out his neighbour with deliveries, with staff being hard to find during the war. Although he probably stopped doing it after discovering it was an expensive business!

On the 26th yet another music hall artist appeared in St Helens Police Court as a military absentee. Like many others before him George Bennett from Birmingham had an excuse, which was that he had been declared medically unfit on two occasions. He claimed he'd been granted war service exemption certificates but had seemingly decided to travel the country without them while performing his act. The Birmingham Recruiting Officer sent a telegram to St Helens Police saying they had no record of any rejection through unfitness concerning Bennett and so he was remanded in custody for military escort.

Also on the 26th plumber Henry Turner appeared in court charged with theft. He'd been working at a munitions works in St Helens (probably Sutton Bond in Lancots Lane), where he'd been a shop foreman. He decided to take some souvenirs from his workplace back home to the Midlands but was spotted by Inspector Anders at St Helens Junction Station. The policeman became suspicious of Turner after noticing that he had a box and luggage labelled ‘O.H.M.S. War Service, Ministry of Munitions’.

Inspector Anders searched the box and discovered an 18 lb. shell, which had been inscribed ‘A souvenir of the great European War, 1914 – H. Turner’. There was also part of another shell, an oilskin coat, globes and some stationery. The magistrates fined him £2 for these thefts, plus 10

shillings for not having a correct registration or id card. The Bench added that there must be a slackness in the munitions works that had allowed these thefts to happen.

Frank Bamber, who was born in 1910, recalled in his memoir how two shell cases and two hand grenades were kept on the family mantelpiece in his home. These were rejects and came from his cousin Nellie who worked at the Sutton Bond munitions factory and regularly came to his house for dinner.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. In London an 18-year-old lad who possessed what was described as a "remarkable ability for drawing" was sent to prison for six months for forging £1 Treasury notes. It was reported that there was a shortage of clogs in Wigan, with many clog makers having been called up. Stocks were down to a tenth of what they'd been before the war. A German language professor was forced to resign his position from Birmingham University after the city council had refused to pay them a £13,000 grant as long as German professors were employed there.

Five young children in the Welsh mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog were badly burnt after setting fire to a flask of blasting powder that they'd found while out playing. From this week it became illegal for shopkeepers to insist that purchasers of scarce goods, such as sugar, should also have to buy other items. This had been a common practice during the early years of the war. Hoarding was also going to be being dealt with.

And finally a lengthy article in the Liverpool Echo criticised the 'wobbly penwomanship of the lady clerks', who had stepped into the shoes of men who had gone to France. Not only did the author think these women made far too many errors in ledgers, he also criticised their 'weakness during office hours for the romantic patches in the latest popular novel' and their love of afternoon tea. However women office workers' main sin was in poor handwriting, for which the writer blamed the 'modern educational system'. Not that we'd ever do that today!

The St Helens Police Force was considerably depleted during the war, with many of its officers in the army and so a police reserve force was created to fill the gaps. It was reported on March 30th that 140 special constables comprised the reserve and they had all now been issued with badges, warrants, batons and whistles. They also received a book of instructions, which St Helens Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington had written and the Mayor of the town, Alderman Henry Bates, had thanked them at a special parade for their willingness to serve.

Any British man could be a special, with few age restrictions and ill health the only barrier. One problem was that the St Helens men had no uniforms until later in the war and apart from the Chief Constable's instruction book, received little if any training. Their main role was guard duty in protecting reservoirs, industrial sites, railways and bridges from saboteurs, as well as being available to assist the regular police when needed.

However in a report issued in April it was said that that the specials were mainly interested in volunteering for the more exciting emergency work and many didn't show up for the monotonous beat and guarding duties. They weren't helped by not having a uniform, which led to some ridicule at times. It was quite different in WW2 with the War Reserve Constables not only having uniforms and the full powers of a police officer but they also had guns!

Also on the 30th it was reported that 19-year-old James Twiss from Haydock was being given a trial at Everton. The club was struggling for players with many having been called up and so they were recruiting men who'd been exempted from war service, such as miners. Twiss played for Haydock Colliery and went on to make a few guest appearances with Everton and then after the

war played for Burnley and the old Wigan Borough club. Another footballing miner called Sergeant Murray, who worked at Clock Face Colliery, was also having a trial at Goodison Park.

A surprising number of St Helens folk used to advertise in the Preston Herald. On March 31st J. Collier from Mill Lane in Sutton was flogging his hens, which he said were 'splendid layers'. Harry Preston from Portico Lane was also selling his fowl, promising 'reliable sittings'. However John Borrill of Laurel Road (off Prescott Road) in St Helens and A. Watson of Maypole Farm in Bold, jointly win the award for the oddest advert with their 'Sexometer', claiming that: 'This remarkable instrument will correctly tell the sex of anything alive, the fertility and sex of eggs, plants, bulbs, etc.' All for 3 shillings and 6d!

During the afternoon of the 31st, a special concert was held at the Town Hall for wounded soldiers. Large numbers were brought in from the local hospitals, with the event hosted by the Mayor of St Helens. The highlight was the presentation of the Distinguished Conduct Medal to Sgt. Thomas Phelan of the St Helens Engineers. He was also the holder of the Croix de Guerre, awarded by the French Military authorities for bravery.

April 1917

There was bad news for the members of Grange Park Golf Club on the 2nd April, when it was announced that the new part of their golf course was to close. The club's professional Chris McGowran had extended the course from 10 to 18 holes in 1912 but last year he'd been killed in action in France. Their groundsman had now been called up, with his assistants already serving in the army, and so the committee decided to revert back to 10 holes. A smaller course was more manageable and could be maintained by the club secretary and fellow members.

Also on the 2nd Peter Morley of Eccleston Street in Prescott was fined 20 shillings in St Helens Police Court for being drunk and disorderly in the town. The price of beer was going to go up quite sharply on the 3rd and the collier told the police that as it was the last Saturday for cheap ale, he'd decided to have a "proper fill up"!

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. The shortages of some foods through the war led to a prize in a singing competition in a London music hall being a sack of potatoes. Fortune telling was illegal and a New Brighton woman was fined 40 shillings for 'using palmistry to deceive his Majesty's subjects'. Rumour-mongering was reaching ridiculous levels with rumours of a German invasion having recently been given credence by announcements in public places. The Liverpool Echo warned its readers that it would in future report such 'malicious lies' to the authorities.

There was a dawning recognition by the Echo that women could do many jobs just as well as men. In one article they described how the new 'lady constables' in Birkenhead had given evidence in court for the first time: 'Their deportment in the witness-box was strictly professional, and they told their stories in the direct and succinct style of their male colleagues.' I wonder how they were expecting them to behave?

In another article they wrote how 50 'girl steel chemists' had been trained in Sheffield to work in laboratories to replace men who'd been called up. 'At first a few of the girls were overcome by the fumes, but actual experience had shown women to be as fitted for positions as men', they wrote. However farmers in North Riding weren't so keen as having women working for them. The Mayor of Middlesbrough said this week that large numbers of women had volunteered to take the place of men in the fields but the farmers refused to have them.

The new prices for beer, whisky and stout set by the St Helens and Widnes Licensed Victuallers Association took effect on the 3rd, leading to a near doubling of prices. A glass of beer rose from twopence to 3½d and a pint increased by threepence to 7d. Beer production had been cut by Government order, due to shortages of the many ingredients that went into a pint. Pubs were rationed and their opening hours had already been drastically cut, which caused their profits to fall and as a consequence prices had to rise.

The Victuallers Association's price hike was based on the Liverpool scale and their thirsty dockers were infuriated by the increase. They picketed pubs in their hundreds and used the snow that was still on the ground to throw snowballs at drinkers who wouldn't join their boycott. It wasn't much fun being a drinker during the war years and even the strength of beer was reduced.

Barely a week seemed to go by in 1917 without an actor who was performing in St Helens making a court appearance as a military absentee. Ironically Jeremiah Curran was playing the part of a heroic soldier who had won the Victoria Cross in a play at the Theatre Royal when he was accused of being a conscription dodger!

The Irishman appeared in court on the 3rd and offered the usual excuse of being domiciled in the Emerald Island, which if true would provide him with exemption from conscription. However St Helens Police were able to show that the actor had little connection with the address in Dublin that he claimed to be his permanent home. Curran told the police that he was a supporter of Sinn Fein and if another rebellion broke out like the 1916 Easter Rising, he would fight for the rebels. He was fined the usual 40 shillings and handed over to the military.

Also on the 3rd in Prescott, Corporal David Davies was sent for trial at Liverpool Assizes after being charged with burglary. Police Constable Cunliffe caught him breaking him into the Griffin Inn in Eccleston but was only able to arrest him after a considerable struggle. Two weeks later the 43-year-old was sent to prison for 12 months for that crime and a burglary in Whiston.

When we think of George Formby an image of a chap with a daft, toothy grin, strumming a ukulele and saying "turned out nice again" springs to mind. However a century ago it was his dad of the same name who was the comedy star, capable of earning huge fees in music halls. George Formby Snr. made his first stage appearance in the 1890s at the People's Palace music hall in St Helens for just 25 shillings a week. He was so poor that he persuaded the Corporation Street theatre, which was rebuilt as the Hippodrome, to pay his train fare from Wigan.

By 1917 he was a wealthy man and on the 3rd an action was brought against him for breaking a contract to appear at the Southport Palladium and instead performing in London for more money. He lost and was told to pay £175 damages, which would have been his fee for the week-long engagement in Southport. That's 140 times more than he got at the People's Palace!

It was revealed on the 4th that the child mortality rate in St Helens was 242 per 1000. To put that another way, for every 20 children born in the town, 5 wouldn't see their fifth birthday. Wigan was slightly worse with a death rate of 254, although Ince was the worst of the Lancashire towns with a child mortality rate of 288 per 1000. Dr. Newsholme was the medical officer of the Local Government Board, the branch of the Government that oversaw local administration. In releasing the figures, he blamed excessive drinking by the mothers and fathers as a significant cause of the high death rate.

In February a scheme of voluntary food rationing had been introduced to deal with food shortages caused by German attacks on merchant ships. However some people decided that more was better than less and started to hoard food. As a result the Government on the 5th issued a Food Order

under the Defence of the Realm Act making hoarding illegal, with the police given powers to search people's homes for more than a fortnight's worth of food.

At an St Helens Town Council meeting on the same day, Councillor Francis said he had been told of a case where a woman had gone into a shop and bought £50 worth of groceries. This, he said, had been on the instructions of her husband, who had told her to provide for the future. The woman must have bought a heck of a lot of food, as in today's money £50 amounts roughly to £2500!

Also on the 5th the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society decided to award a silver medal and certificate of thanks to Private J. Holden of the 3rd Battalion South Lancs. Regiment. He'd rescued a 10-year-old boy called William Waine from drowning in the canal at Haydock, along with Dennis Lafferty, the headmaster of St Augustine's at Blackbrook, who was awarded a certificate of thanks. Fifteen shillings and a certificate were also awarded to 13-year-old Samuel Kew for courageously rescuing a child from a pit near Derbyshire Hill Road.

In the Liverpool Daily Post on the 7th a mother from St Helens, who used the pseudonym 'Justice', complained about the calling up of men who had been discharged from the army through injury or illness. She said calling them up again was unfair when there was thousands of young men who had deliberately joined exempted trades in order to evade their duty.

It had been the coldest March for over 20 years and the severe winter continued over Easter. Newspapers described Arctic conditions on Easter Monday, which in 1917 fell on April 9th. Pleasure-seekers normally flooded out of St Helens on Bank Holidays, with many organisations chartering special trains or charabancs to Blackpool, Rhyl, New Brighton, Southport, Conway etc. However the Government wanted people to travel less during the war and so there was a reduced train service. That coupled with the poor weather meant many seaside resorts had few visitors and most people in St Helens were left at home to contend with snow, hailstorms, gales, lightning and thunder.

A measles epidemic began this week in St Helens that lasted more than two months. Before the introduction of the measles vaccine in 1968, the disease often proved fatal. In fact during the ten-year period before 1917, there had been more than 1,000 deaths from measles in St Helens. However from the start of April's outbreak, the health authorities had decided to be much more proactive. Two hospital nurses were seconded into the community to provide home nursing for the more serious cases. I'll be reporting on the success of this scheme over the coming weeks.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. The Registrar-General said that the "phenomenal rise" in marriages during 1915, the highest on record, was down to the war, with the birth rate being the lowest on record. There was much joy after America finally declared war on Germany, with considerable newspaper coverage. King George sent a telegram to President Wilson in the US congratulating him on the decision.

The spud shortage led to the Government announcing that potatoes could only be served in hotels, restaurants and boarding houses on two days a week. A jeweller in Covent Garden tried to capitalise on the scarcity by placing two large diamonds within a potato in his shop window. He explained that diamonds were ordinary commodities but the potato was now in such short supply that it was certain to attract attention and might lead to the sale of a diamond!

The week began with something highly unusual. A conscientious objector policeman appeared in St Helens Police Court charged with being a military absentee. At least Leonard Smith from Rigby Street (off Duke Street) had until recently been a bobby until his boss Chief Constable Ellerington found out about his feelings and sacked him from the force.

You can understand Ellerington's anger. Many of his officers had left for France, where some had won awards for bravery and a few had died. His force were heavily involved in rounding up those trying to avoid military service and to have one of own men as a conscientious objector would have been considered a personal disgrace. There was no respect for principled people during a terrible war.

The ex-PC Smith told the magistrates that he had attested in 1915, i.e. agreed to serve in the army when required. However in early 1916 he had realised that he could not obey military orders and remain a Christian. George Smith, an 18-year-old chemical labourer's assistant from Knowsley Road, also appeared in court as an absentee. The two seemingly unrelated Smiths were both fined the customary 40 shillings and handed over to the military.

What happened to the pair isn't known. If they had stuck to their guns (so to speak!) as so-called 'conshies' and continued to refuse to serve in the army, they could have been granted non-combative status and served at the front in the dangerous role of stretcher-bearer. Or they could have joined the 3,500 conscientious objectors that by 1917 were languishing in prison. Or they could even have been shot.

Also on the 10th seventeen-year-old John Ashton from Friar Street, near Victoria Park, had a hand cut off at Pilkington's glassworks after getting it caught in machinery. Such accidents were quite common in all types of industries and some girls even lost an arm or hand when working as pit brow lasses at St Helens coal mines.

On the 13th Elizabeth Burns from Pitt Street (off Pocket Nook Street) appeared in court charged with stealing a lady's coat costing 15 shillings. She helped herself to the jacket while buying a skirt from T. W. Gill's shop in Naylor Street (near Parr Street) and was silly enough to have worn the stolen coat when out and about in St Helens in front of the bobbies on their beats. Elizabeth was fined ten shillings.

Also in court on that day was the controversial Thomas Middlehurst. He was the confectioner and café owner with shops in Church Street, Ormskirk Street and Higher Parr Street, who had been convicted several times during 1916. Middlehurst had been fined for breaking gaming laws, for keeping his son off school in order to sell sweets at a cinema and twice for selling food unfit for human consumption. Sweets had been sold with the legs of flies stuck to them! This time he'd been charged with selling chocolates after hours at two of his shops.

Many shops used to stay open until very late but last October the Government ordered them to close early in order to save on coal and lighting. Two junior clerks in the St Helens medical officer's department gave evidence that they had bought chocolates in Middlehurst's Church Street shop at 9.27pm and then at the Ormskirk Street shop at 9.47pm. Assistant Ada Brimble had made the latter sale and she was also in court charged with abetting the offence.

This wasn't the first time that Middlehurst had been convicted of selling goods after hours. He was fined £4 and his assistant 10 shillings, with the Bench telling the confectioner that he should not be trying to take advantage of the other shopkeepers. During the same hearing Matthew Frederick was fined 5 shillings for selling ice cream from his barrow on the streets after hours.

The derby Northern Union rugby league game between St Helens Recs and Saints on the 10th at the City Road ground resulted in an 11 – 0 victory for the home side. This was the fourth time the sides had met during the season. Competitive games had been suspended for the duration of the war with friendly games taking place instead.

Quite a few of the plays that took place at the Theatre Royal and Hippodrome theatres were about the war. One might have thought that people would have preferred escapist entertainment but there was, of course, no radio or TV or cinema 'talkies', so newspapers and the theatre were the only outlets for war news and depictions.

On April 16th *Enemy In Our Midst* played at the St Helens Opera House, as the posher thespians preferred to call the Theatre Royal! The play was based on the Zeppelin raids and was put on by George Carlton Wallace's touring party. In one of Wallace's plays in 1913, an actor had died of a wound that was accidentally sustained when another actor fired a blank cartridge.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. It was claimed that the Germans were deliberately spreading TB in France by pretending to vaccinate people against smallpox. Was this an early example of fake news? The annual conference of the National Union of Teachers passed a resolution calling on local authorities to make by-laws banning school age children (i.e. under 12s) from working. They were particularly concerned about the numbers of young kids who sold goods on the street.

A man in Manchester bled to death after having a tooth pulled by a dentist. The editor of the *Spectator* predicted that Britain would now likely become a nation of gum-chewers since America had entered the war. It was the fifth anniversary of the Titanic disaster and four notices were placed in the *Liverpool Echo's* 'In Memoriam' section of their obituary column.

It was reported that a Liverpool greengrocer was so overcome by receiving a consignment of hard-to-obtain potatoes that he fondled them like a miner might fondle a nugget of gold. The scarce spuds were then placed in a 'fancy box' in the centre of his shop window. The *Daily Post* wrote: 'The public came and gazed at the sight, but, although they could buy their carrots and apples, no money would tempt the dealer to part with one solitary spud. It had the place of honour of a pearl beyond price.'

And finally a 30-year-old Shotton shop manager was forced to pay his former fiancé £100 in a breach of promise action, after deciding to marry someone else. The 376 love letters that he'd sent to his intended did not help his case!

Sons tended to follow fathers down the pit despite it being a horrible, dangerous job, which wasn't well paid. So when Harold Littler from Elephant Lane left school he joined his dad Thomas and older brothers Robert, James and Thomas Jnr at Lea Green Colliery. All four worked underground but 17-year-old Harold was a carpenter's apprentice, and so would have spent much of his time on the surface.

However on the 17th Harold and a colleague had to go down the mine to measure up for a job and a chain at the end of a rope struck him on top of his head, instantly killing him. It was a freak accident but one of many mining deaths where the precise cause could not be stated at Harold's inquest.

On the 19th April Sebastian Henderson Kenrick from Hardshaw Street appeared in court charged with embezzling over £1000, (this would later be reduced to £121). The 35-year-old was a traveller for a local firm called G. W. Collins, who were wholesale provision merchants. The St Helens magistrates set Kendrick a very high bail of £600, the rough equivalent of £30,000 in today's money. The term traveller has a different meaning today, of course, but through much of the 20th century it was the term used for a company salesman who went from place to place. In the USA travellers were often known as 'drummers' – company reps who drummed up business.

Also on the 19th St Helens Corporation was advertising in newspapers for 'navvies' to work on the Hardshaw Brook Works in Jackson Street. Not a term we tend to use today, but navvy is short for

navigator and was coined in the late 18th century when canals were being dug in places like St Helens.

On the following day Henry Hewitt, the driver of the Sutton Manor bus, was fined 20s. for overcrowding his vehicle. The police had counted 63 passengers coming off his bus when it was only licensed to hold 30 people. The motor bus service between Market Street in St Helens and Sutton Manor had only begun in 1914 and was the first such service in the town.

When we talk of National Service we think of the compulsory military service during peacetime, which ended in Britain in 1960. However during WW1 National Service meant something quite different. It was a huge voluntary scheme launched in February 1917 by Neville Chamberlain to encourage men and women who were not in the armed forces to be employed on work of 'national importance', such as in munitions factories, mines, agriculture, shipbuilding etc.

The idea was for such volunteers to become part of an 'industrial army', taking the places of young men in exempted jobs, who would now be free to serve in the forces. There was a colossal amount of newspaper advertising for the scheme, which played on people's consciences. It suggested that failure to sign up would prolong the war and as a consequence 'many a brave man's life may lie at your door', as one ad warned.

On April 20th the St Helens MP Rigby Swift and the town's future representative in Parliament, James Sexton, both addressed a meeting to promote National Service. Swift said in the war St Helens had made "tremendous sacrifices and had lost some of its brightest sons" but now it was the turn of those who had been "compelled to stay at home" to do their bit in industry and on the land. He said the young men of St Helens had responded magnificently to the call to fight and he could not believe that the townspeople would turn a deaf ear to this new appeal.

There were two sudden deaths in St Helens on the 20th. 53-year-old Greenall Whitley drayman Richard Sephton collapsed on his lorry in Bickerstaffe Street and 60-year-old Thomas Bellis from Carnarvon Street in Thatto Heath collapsed while leaving Lea Green Colliery.

On the 21st newspaper advertisements stated that the 'Recently-erected and fully-appointed up-to-date kinema hall buildings and premises, known as the Oxford Picturedrome' in Duke Street was going to be sold by auction at the Fleece Hotel. The cinema was actually opened in 1912 and would later be known as the Plaza and Cindy's nightclub.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A 26-year-old man was hung at Pentonville Prison for murdering a Canadian soldier. An insomniac doctor from Bewsey Street in Warrington died after taking morphine to help him sleep. The body of a victim of the 1908 Maypole Colliery disaster at Abram, near Wigan, was discovered down the pit but could not be identified as it was too badly decomposed. A total of 75 miners had lost their lives in the terrible explosion almost nine years earlier, although amazingly 41 bodies had yet to be recovered.

The death was announced of Georgina Hogarth, the sister-in-law of Charles Dickens, who'd been a member of his household from 1843 until his death in 1870. When Dickens's wife separated from Charles in 1858, Georgina stayed with him to bring up his younger children.

The Liverpool Daily post wrote: 'Never before in the history of Liverpool have so many "Stars and Stripes" flown over the city as yesterday in celebration of America's entry into the war'. Being a city of commerce, the Post couldn't help pointing out that the US declaration of war against Germany and its allies must have been a great boon for flag makers!

I begin this week's article with a salacious story of sex for sale in Crank. Well that's grabbed your attention, hasn't it! Although you might be disappointed to learn that it concerns horses not people! Major Norman Pilkington of Rainford Hall advertised on the 24th April that in order to 'encourage the breeding of high-class draught horses' he would allow his 12-year-old bay Rainford Sirdar to 'stand at the Home Farm, and serve Mares at the nominal Fee of 35s.'

The boss of Pilks glass firm added the caveat that 'All Mares at Owner's risk'. Whether the disclaimer referred to the success rate of the 'serving' or whether his 17-hands horse could get a bit rough, wasn't explained. A postscript stated that Rainford Sirdar had sired more high-price geldings than all other stallions travelling the district. Lucky horse!

They didn't mess about a century ago. At 7.35am on April 25th Police Constable Marsh dragged the body of a badly decomposed middle-aged man out of St Helens Canal near Ravenhead. Within a matter of hours the mystery man's inquest had been held in which it was revealed that a pocket book in his possession suggested a connection with Swansea. It was a common occurrence for unidentified people to be found in the canal. Some would eventually be identified and some not. Some had drowned themselves on purpose while others had accidentally lost their lives through falling into the water, mainly through drink. The coroner's jury returned an open verdict.

On the following day 15-year-old Ellen Barratt from Sandon Street in Thatto Heath appeared in court charged with stealing 28 skirts and other clothing from Mrs. Stansfield's shop in Bridge Street. Her stepmother, who had the same name, was charged with being the 'fence' – having received the articles valued at £22 knowing them to have been stolen. The stepmother then asked friends to pledge the stolen items in pawnshops, telling them the clothes had been the property of her late sister. The girl was fined £2 and her stepmother was sent to prison for 3 months and probably lost quite a few friends too!

On the 27th Jane Jones from Elephant Lane appeared in court in St Helens charged with giving false information to a pawnbroker. Jane had been one of the women who had disposed of the stolen skirts and she was given a fine of 20 shillings.

Also on that day the exiled King Manuel of Portugal visited Pilkington's special hospital for soldiers and sailors on behalf of the British Red Cross to see for himself the important rehab work being done in St Helens. The king had gone into exile after a revolution had led to the dissolution of the Portuguese monarchy. The state-of-the-art hospital in Borough Road specialised in restorative and orthopaedic treatments for patients in a 'broken-down state from shock, &c'.

Also on April 27th the annual St Helens Hospital subscribers' meeting was held. Although the hospital received some income from donations and legacies, much of its revenue came from the 'penny-a-week' subscriptions in which employers deducted pennies from staff wages. This insurance scheme provided free hospital treatment for many workers in the years prior to the NHS. This was vitally important in industries such as coal mining and chemicals, where accidents and health issues were commonplace.

With many workers having gone to war, the penny-a-week subscriptions in 1915 had decreased by £931 – a huge drop. However during 1916, with many war workers now in St Helens, the situation had stabilised and income from the scheme had risen by £105. During the last year the total number of patients had been 1,585, including 477 wounded soldiers. It was also revealed at the meeting that the hospital had launched an appeal to raise £500 to pay for its first motor ambulance and an X-ray machine, with £389 already collected.

On the following day the United Irish League held a flag day in Earlestown, Sutton, Haydock, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Golborne and Burtonwood in aid of Irish soldiers and prisoners of war.

On April 29th Rev. Albert Baines, the vicar of St Helens, announced plans to build a new parish church on the site of the old one in Church Street. This had burnt down last December through an electrical fault and until a new church could be built, services were being held in the Town Hall. Some additional land would be needed for the new building and six shops between the old site and the market place were being acquired.

On the 30th it was announced that the British Red Cross were going to build a pavilion at the Eccleston Hall Sanatorium for the treatment of discharged soldiers suffering from TB. Before antibiotics were developed, it was felt that fresh air offered the best hope for curing sufferers who were 'treated' in open windowed huts.

On the same day it was reported that St Helens Council's Parliamentary Committee had given permission to the tramways company to reduce its services. This was felt necessary through staffing problems, with a large number of tram drivers and conductors being in the forces. The company had recruited many women to take over the role of conductor but they were still short-staffed.

The Education Committee announced proposals to increase the salaries of schoolteachers in St Helens. Ten free secondary scholarships were also going to be offered to 11-year-old boys who wanted to be teachers. There was a great shortage of male teachers in St Helens, with many having gone to war. Although it would be some years before the boys would be in a position to teach, the committee appears to have been planning ahead. By the end of the year a total of 1,300 British teachers will have been killed in the conflict, so the shortage of male teachers was going to last for some years after peace had been restored.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. A soldier in Hull stabbed his wife to death with a bayonet and a woman from Manchester killed her maiden aunt by striking her with a flat iron. What was described as a 'gigantic shell' with a slit in its top obstructed the progress of pedestrians in several streets within Liverpool city centre. It was part of the Lady Mayoress's Red Cross appeal, with the public invited to insert contributions to help the sick and wounded.

A famous actress known as Violet Vanbrugh was awarded the curiously named 'decree of restitution of conjugal rights' against her husband, who a year earlier had told her to leave their house. This was the first stage of a divorce proceeding when a couple were living apart without good reason. Sugar was very scarce and a 25-year-old London man called Harry Marshall was charged with stealing 7 pounds and then stashing it down his underpants. He told a court that his young wife was dying and he had stolen the sugar to make her some gruel. Marshall had been discharged from the army after receiving five wounds and once his sad story had been confirmed, he was bound over and freed by the court.

May 1917

The week began with a separation allowance fraud being described in St Helens Police Court. This was the money paid to the wives of soldiers and sailors while their breadwinner husbands were away from home. This worked out at 12 shillings 6d per week, with additional payments for each child.

Mary Davies from Brunswick Street in Parr was charged with obtaining the considerable sum of £92 by false pretences. That was the equivalent of around a year's salary for many folk at that time. Her husband had been in the Territorials before transferring to the regular Army, and he had applied for two lots of separation allowances for his wife. The fraud was only uncovered in

September 1916 when the woman claimed for an illegitimate child. This is another case of a fraud clearly set up by the husband for which the wife paid the penalty. In the case of Mary Davies it was three months in prison.

At the monthly meeting of St Helens Education Committee it was revealed that the town's head teachers had recommended 250 eleven-year-old boys who they thought would make suitable teachers. If their parents gave permission, the lads would be considered for one of ten secondary school scholarships that were on offer from the committee. When they reached 14, the boys would be eligible for the maintenance grants that prospective teachers received. This was part of the council's proposals to ease the shortage of male teachers in St Helens, which would continue long after the war had ended, with many having been killed in action.

It was announced on May 3rd that during the past week, St Helens had the worst mortality rate in Lancashire. The national average was 16.7 deaths per thousand people per annum but the rate in St Helens was 23.2. There were a number of causes, with many related to the town's deadly industries. Although the coal, chemical and glassmaking firms provided badly needed employment, accidents killed many of their workers and others had their lives shortened by the work that they did. Serious health issues were also caused by the hundreds of works chimneys and the thousands of domestic chimneys that belched out fumes and soot that polluted the air and the people that breathed it.

When Sir Joseph Beecham died in October 1916 he left an estate worth £1 million, the equivalent of over £40 million in today's money. The 68-year-old son of the founder of the pill empire was an art collector, with a particular liking for the work of John Constable and J. M. W Turner. On the 3rd and 4th of May, Beecham's extensive collection – comprising 80 oil paintings and 161 prints and watercolour drawings – was auctioned at Christie's. As one newspaper put it: 'Rarely have so many great pictures appeared at Christie's in any single sale'.

Constable's masterpiece 'Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds' attained the highest price of £6,510, roughly £300,000 in today's money. Painted in 1823 this is one of the artist's most celebrated works and is now held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It's clearly worth a lot more today, with Constable's other painting of Salisbury Cathedral recently purchased by the Tate for £23 million.

On the second day of the sale twelve Turners were sold for a total of 26,300 guineas, with the whole collection going under the hammer for 90,000 guineas. This didn't impress some newspapers, who were uncomfortable with so much cash being spent on art at a time when the Government was demanding war economy. In October I'll be describing the sale of Beecham's extensive property empire, which included many shops in the centre of St Helens.

On the 4th Sebastian Henderson Kenrick from Hardshaw Street appeared in court charged with embezzlement. For many years the 35-year-old had been a trusted traveller for provision merchants G. W. Collins and on April 12th had sent his boss a surprising letter. This listed £1,300 worth of what he termed 'deficiencies', meaning company money that he'd spent.

However the firm decided to prosecute him for just £121 and asked the bench to treat Kenrick leniently. This was because much of the money had been spent on presents for the company rep's own customers, although some of it went on gambling. Kenrick's solicitor said his client was of a "most generous disposition, big-hearted but foolish". However the magistrates showed little sympathy and sent Kenrick to prison for three months with hard labour.

Later that day Mick Gordon, 'the fighting collier' from Sutton - who worked down Sherdley Colliery - fought Charlie Yeomans from Pontypridd at Oswestry, winning in the 10th round.

On May 7th it was reported that Queen Alexandra, the widow of Edward VII, had appointed Barbara Lacey from St Helens to be a Queen's Nurse. This meant she was a district nurse and member of what is now the Queen's Nursing Institute. Barbara was born and bred in Sutton at 8 Ditch Hillock, later living in Irwin Road. She was a familiar figure for many years pedalling round the district in her nurse's uniform. All that cycling was clearly good for her, as Barbara was ninety-six when she died in 1985.

Without the media that we have today, posters were an important means of communicating information. St Helens Local History & Archives Library holds hundreds of WW1 posters that were stuck up in the town, including one that reads:

'Should races be abandoned? Not the recruiting race at any rate! St Helens leads but other towns are close up. The jockey calls, so stick to it St. Helens, as you must not tail off into the 'also ran'. Recruiting office:- Town Hall, St. Helens.'

This tapped into a longstanding debate as to whether horse racing should be allowed to continue during the war. From May 5th the Jockey Club decided to give up the struggle and discontinue flat racing for the duration of the conflict. This was partly through public pressure and partly through newly-imposed restrictions on the supply of oats for horses.

The drama production at the Theatre Royal this week was called A Message from Mars. This had been made into a moving picture four years earlier, becoming Britain's first full-length sci-fi film. However the play was still popular as it offered something different to the film – speech!

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. It was reported that the Germans had body factories, in which dead people were converted into oil and fat. A captured German doctor admitted that 'corpse-conversion factories' existed and dismissed his own Government's statements that only dead animals were used.

The Echo commented on the 'beautiful sight' of a wrecked fruit boat – that for some time had been lying in the Mersey – being deliberately blown up, describing: 'a great column of water shooting up about fifty feet into the air'. For some moments afterwards they said the surrounding water boiled with foam. And finally a report describing the poorly state of Sarah Bernhardt stated that the veteran French actress had in her long theatrical career endured 7,000 plunges into the Seine, 10,000 deaths by self-administered poison and 5,000 suicides with a revolver!

On May 9th a boy called Ernest Gilbert appeared in court charged with defrauding shopkeepers in St Helens. The young lad would purchase a cheap item from a shop and then soon afterwards would return and tell the assistant they'd not given him enough change. Most shops would give the boy the extra pennies but after cashing up at the end of the day, would realise they'd been duped. As the amounts were small, the court only fined the boy ten shillings.

Ernest had been in trouble before but the Police Court Missionary had supported him and got the lad a job working at Pilkingtons. The missionaries were the forerunners of probation officers but were tied to the church and temperance movements. William Munding, the father of Hollywood actor Herbert Munding, had been one of the first court missionaries in St Helens.

Children could be quite ingenious with their simple ruses to extract coppers from people. My favourite story is of the little girl from St Helens who during August 1916 had a habit of bursting into tears on the street. When passers-by asked her what the matter was, the child would say she'd lost a tanner. Soon the girl would have sixpence collected from the passing Good Samaritans, which she then spent at the pictures!

Also on the 9th May three 12-year-old boys from Thatto Heath were each fined 7s 6d for stealing a bottle of stout off a brewery wagon outside the Smithfield Hotel.

On the 10th at Newton Petty Sessions, the manageress of Rushton's grocers in Haydock was fined £5 for imposing conditions on the sale of sugar, which had been in short supply for some time. The unnamed woman had told a local optician that he could only buy a pound of sugar if he spent 6s. 8d. on other goods. This practice had been quite common amongst shopkeepers but earlier in the year had been made illegal.

On May 11th the St Helens Tramways Company were prosecuted for overcrowding a tramcar. They'd recently had to reduce their scheduled services due to staffing problems, as many tram drivers and conductors were in the forces. This inevitably had led to extra demand for those trams that were running, particularly at peak times.

The company's solicitor told the magistrates that the Act under which his client had been summoned had been passed before electric trams had been invented. The purpose of the law, he said, was in preventing cruelty to the horses that hauled the first tram cars. The solicitor added that the offence had been committed on a Saturday night and the girl conductor, as he put it, had found it impossible to stop people from crowding on the car. The case was dismissed upon payment of costs.

The St Helens court was extremely busy on the 11th with 84 charges considered by the magistrates, of which 63 were for gambling. These related to two police raids on betting houses, as well as a raid on a group of 49 men and youths caught playing pitch-and-toss at Glade Hill in Parr.

Chip shop owner Albin Bond from Higher Parr Street was considered the worst culprit of the lot and he received a substantial fine of £25. The St Helens Town Clerk, who brought the charges, said the chip shop was a front for a gambling house, with 45-year-old Bond having paid £329 into his bank account so far this year. £26 of the deposits were in the name of Bond's wife Jane, which the clerk argued were the real proceeds from the chippy, with the rest of the cash coming from gambling.

It was reported on the 11th that Prescott had become a milkless town, as the local milkmen were refusing to go out on their rounds. The milk dealers were protesting against two of their number being conscripted into the forces and their actions were much resented by the thirsty people of Prescott.

Lancashire bantamweight champion Ernie Proudlove from Sutton fought a boxer called Pte. G. Jones on May 12th at Preston's Prince's Theatre. Boxing Magazine reported that it was a 'real fine slam' of a contest over 10 rounds, which ended in a draw.

A very sad accident occurred on the 14th to Lizzie Gardener at her home in Grosvenor Road (off Prescott Road). The 49-year-old had been an invalid for many years and lived with her younger brothers and 79-year-old widowed mother Margaret. Lizzie hadn't been seen or heard since she went into the bathroom some time after 11am. About noon her family checked to see if she was all right and found her body inside the bathtub. It was thought that Lizzie had bent over the tub to turn off a tap but had overbalanced and fallen face down into the water. Being partly paralysed she hadn't been able to extract herself and had subsequently drowned.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. The plans were announced for the forthcoming visit to Liverpool by King George and Queen Mary. During the following week the pair would spend a morning visiting munitions works

and then proceed to Fazakerley Hospital. At Liverpool Town Hall the Royal couple would present medals to soldiers and then at 1:10pm would depart for Lime Street Station, where the Royal train would take them to Manchester. The level of detail of the head of state's planned movements during wartime was extraordinary and it would never have happened in WW2 when there was much more secrecy.

The final word goes to the Liverpool Echo who mused on the recent statement by Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the war was costing the country £6.25 million per day. They said: 'If this expenditure were devoted to purposes of construction instead of destruction for only one year, slums would be abolished, and the country transformed. Moreover, the lives of the majority of the 90,000 infants who die every year in England and Wales under the age of twelve months would be saved.'

An advert in the Lancashire Evening Post on May 15th said: 'A ST. HELENS MOTHER sends WELCO cocoa regularly to her son in FRANCE. Don't forget the BOYS are always delighted to receive WELCO.'

Such adverts by companies that linked their products to the war were very common. It could be seen as capitalising on the conflict but many businesses were financially in dire straits and needed all the help they could get. John Rothwell's Welco factory was situated in Golborne and they also made chocolates using the strapline 'famous for quality and purity'. When the factory closed in 1936, two hundred people lost their jobs.

At the meeting of the St Helens Health Committee on the 16th it was reported that there was much sickness in the borough, with the measles outbreak that had begun in April threatening to become an epidemic. There had been more than 1,000 deaths from measles in St Helens over the past ten years, so during the new outbreak two hospital nurses had been seconded to provide home nursing for the most serious cases. It was also announced that there was going to be an increase in gas prices for St Helens consumers – the first rise for some years.

On the following day St Helens Hospital took delivery of its first motor ambulance – a Ford Model T Field Ambulance, which cost £215 and had a top speed of 45mph. On May 18th the Liverpool Echo's 'Echoes of The Day' column – subtitled 'Gossip From Here, There, and Everywhere' – featured a contribution from an unidentified woman from St Helens. Their contributor argued that the recent fashion for low-necked dresses and open blouses had a considerable health benefit in providing a fresh air cure for many ill. She wrote:

"It would not surprise me to learn that women were never more free from colds in the head and sore throats than they are since the low-necked dresses came into vogue. One scarcely ever sees a woman in a low-necked dress giving any evidence of nasal catarrh. Are our naval men, with their throat and upper part of the chest constantly exposed in all weathers, more subject to throat and chest troubles than any other section of the community? In fact is not just the contrary the case? What is the experience of our school teachers? Do they find that the children who wear short socks are more prone to colds than are the other children? Are the London Bluecoat School boys, who never wear hat or cap, adversely affected by this practice? I never heard it suggested."

Also on the 18th St Helens police were highly embarrassed when a prisoner that they'd arrested for fraud managed to escape from his cell. The unnamed man had previously escaped from a jail in Manchester and had boasted that he could pick any lock in the world with a wire. He had little difficulty getting through two doors inside St Helens Police Station and the whole force was turned out with orders to find him. What was described as a hue and cry took place until the escaped fraudster was recaptured at Carr Mill.

On the following day Harry Beecham announced that he was going to buy a suite of recreation rooms and bathrooms for the Providence Free Hospital. The total cost would be £3,000 and the gift would be in memory of his father Sir Joseph Beecham, who had died last year and had long been the hospital's treasurer.

Also on the 19th the friends of Private J. Millington received a shock when his name was wrongly included in an official list of war dead. The soldier from Borough Road was in the Leicester Regiment with the regimental number of 37852. However the soldier who had been killed in action was a Private J. Millington who had the number of 37853. It's likely that the wife of the St Helens 'Tommy' had advance notice of the other man's death as she very quickly had correction notices placed in local papers.

Bowls was one of the few sports that wasn't affected by the war. On the 19th St Helens's star bowler Jack Charnock appeared at a charity contest at Winnington in Northwich in aid of a 'Tommies Tobacco and Comforts Fund'. A Cheshire newspaper said: 'There are few more entertaining players than Charnock who is quick to size up a green'.

It wasn't easy being a policeman in St Helens. In July 1914 Chief Constable Ellerington told the magistrates that there'd already been 40 assaults on the police during that year with people "playing pitch and toss" with his officers and in some districts they would "set upon them like bulldogs".

A particularly bad case of violence against the police occurred on May 20th 1917 when Police Constable Johnson was attacked. He had attempted to arrest a soldier called William Williams near Fingerpost, but after a 30-minute struggle the bobby was knocked down and kicked unconscious.

Despite being handcuffed Williams managed to escape, assisted by Richard Platt and Isaac Ramsdale. The Rev. John Manifold Courtenay, the vicar of Holy Trinity Church at Parr Mount, tried to aid the injured PC but was roughly handled by the pair. A man called Dolan who fought for the policeman was beaten up and pushed through a shop window. In court on the 21st Platt and Ramsdale, a 29-year-old miner, were both fined £5 for obstructing the police.

To end this week's news stories here are a few snippets of non-St Helens stories that were also in the papers. There was much excitement in Liverpool when King George and Queen Mary paid a brief visit. Upon the Royal party leaving a munitions works, the 'shell girls' were described as having shouted themselves hoarse in waving them off. It was reported that 25-year-old Frederick Kempster was being treated in a London hospital. Measuring 8 feet 2 inches tall, Kempster held the British height record and was being cared for in a bed improvised from two bedsteads.

It was revealed that the army had a Munitions Inventions Department, which considered ideas for inventions that could have a military use. Since it came into being in August 1915, the MID had received 33,000 suggestions from inventors.

The war was a fruitful time for conmen and fantasy heroes such as Harry Davies. On May 22nd the chairman of St Helens magistrates described Davies as a "wandering rogue", as he sent him to prison for six months. Miss Johnson of Speakman Road had given Davies food and lodgings after he'd falsely claimed to have fought in the Battle of Jutland and now held an important position at Pilkington's. Davies had also conned the secretary of the YMCA into lending him money and he had a string of convictions "in all parts of the country".

At the same hearing seven boys were fined 5 shillings each for setting fire to a large elm tree in a wood at Eccleston. Constable Hugh Lynch from Windle had found the boys trespassing on the estate of Lord Derby after starting the fire. There was a huge problem during the war with what

these days we call anti-social behaviour. Last September the St Helens Chief Constable had said: "Parental control has absolutely gone for nought, and children are running wild".

Some workers used trams or motor buses to get to work and some would walk, although most used a bike. A number of employers had large sheds where their employees could leave their bikes, although security was often poor and they could easily be nicked. Punishment for taking a machine could be quite harsh as James Brown discovered. The youth was sent to prison for three months on the 22nd for stealing a bike from Cannington Shaw's bottle plant where he'd worked. However at the court hearing it was revealed that Brown had joined the army since committing the offence, so might not serve the sentence.

In the early hours of the 23rd a smash and grab raid took place at the Co-op in Baldwin Street. Robbers broke a large plate glass window in their jewellery department and stole £40 worth of items.

It's a bit of a myth that the cinema was silent before the talkies came along. There was invariably music provided, with the bigger picturedromes employing a small orchestra and a pianist would tickle the ivories in the smaller ones. The Bridge Street Picturedrome had a small organ instead of a piano to provide accompaniment to the pictures and on the 23rd they advertised for a first-class player who was a good sight reader. The Picturedrome was little more than a long wooden hut with basic amenities but could seat 520 people. In 1920 it changed its name to the Savoy and fourteen years later it was demolished to make way for the 'new super Savoy'.

The parlous finances of St Helens Northern Union Rugby Football Club – as Saints was then called – were revealed on the 24th. Their accounts showed a net loss for the season of £124, with collections and grants trimming the loss down to £46. Pre-war the club's gate receipts had been almost £4,000 but in the recently ended season they amounted to just £210.

Many star players and supporters were in the services and competitive matches had been suspended for the duration of the war. Newspapers published a 'merit table', which recorded the results of the regional friendly games. These didn't have the same attraction for spectators and the club had considered shutting down for the duration but had decided to struggle on. If they closed they would still have rent, rates and other expenses to pay. Other rugby league clubs (as the Northern Union became known in 1922) were also suffering financially, with Wigan losing £278.

On the following day a tragic accident occurred in Westfield Street when a 3-year-old boy was crushed to death by a heavy motor waggon that belonged to a Bolton firm. Ernest Barker from Tullis Street (off Prescott Road) had run out into the path of the vehicle while his mother was in a shop near the end of Hamer Street.

On May 26th a soldier called William Williams of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers was sent to prison for 6 months with hard labour for a brutal assault on P.C. Johnson near Fingerpost. After the officer had arrested him for fighting, Williams fought with the bobby for half-an-hour, knocking him down and kicking him unconscious. A crowd egged Williams on and attacked those who went to the policeman's aid.

It was Whit Bank Holiday on the 28th and a Liverpool police dog with the wonderful name of 'Bow-Wow P.C. 9' decided to get into the holiday spirit by making his own excursion to St Helens. The Airedale terrier's adventure began after the dog had recognised a former member of the Liverpool constabulary who was stationed with his regiment in Knowsley Park. Bow-Wow P.C. 9 followed the staff-sergeant to his camp but was ejected and so hopped onto a passing tram that was making its way to St Helens. The canine traveller took a seat next to the driver, who after reading the lettering

on the dog's collar, passed his four-legged passenger onto St Helens Police who rang up their colleagues in Liverpool.

Also on the 28th the body of Robert Antwis from Eccleston Park was discovered in the canal at Haydock. The 45-year-old clerk to accountants Hammill and Marsh of Hardshaw Street suffered from what was described as an occasional loss of memory. Five weeks earlier Antwis had found himself at Rainford with no recollection of how he'd got there and then two weeks later had wandered to Glazebrook, not knowing why he was there. So it was surmised that Robert had suffered a similar episode at the weekend and had accidentally walked into the canal. A specialist from Liverpool told Antwis's inquest on the 30th that the deceased's condition was down to overwork and brain fag with nothing to suggest that he would commit suicide.

To end this week's news stories here are some non-St Helens items that were also in the papers. The Prime Minister was asked in the Commons whether he would consider a scheme of limited self-rule in Scotland, Wales, England and Ireland. Apart from England, this is essentially what we have these days with devolution. Dog shows were banned this week and the police were given powers to destroy any stray dog after three days. It was reported that a further 50% increase in train fares was about to be announced with the intention of deterring holiday travel in wartime.

A woman from Tooting was awarded the King's bounty of £3 for the second time after again giving birth to triplets. The payment to mothers for multiple births had been introduced by Queen Victoria and continued up until 1957. And finally a dinner held by the British Empire Producers' Organisation at the Savoy in London was interrupted when Lord Beresford looked under his plate and discovered that it had been made in Germany. He hurled it to the floor in disgust and complained to the manager, who ordered a stocktake to ensure there was no more German crockery in the hotel!

On May 30th an inquest was held on 3-year-old Mary Baines, who had been found dead in bed three days earlier. The child from Market Street had died from TB and her mother told the coroner that her daughter had been ill for three weeks but she hadn't been able to afford a doctor. However the St Helens police claimed that the soldier's wife was of 'drunken habits' and her behaviour had led to two of her children being taken away. There'll be more on this sad case in a couple of weeks.

Also on the 30th there was bad news for ratepayers in St Helens with the announcement that the rates were rising by threepence, making the total rates for the borough 8s 6d in the pound. Such rises regularly occurred during the war years as inflation took hold and as a consequence Corporation workers demanded higher wages. However the increases didn't go down well with some property owners, such as Colonel Michael Hughes. The Sherdley estate owner had this to say about St Helens councillors in February 1918 after another rate rise: "It is perfectly ridiculous that a few men in a position of brief authority, should be allowed to squander other peoples' money, for the sake of popularity."

June 1917

On the first day of June bottlemaker's Cannington Shaw were handed a hefty fine of £25 by St Helens magistrates for keeping 150 gallons of petrol without a licence. Fuel rationing had been introduced in July 1916 and the amount of petrol that industry could purchase and store was carefully controlled.

As I've stated in a previous '100 Years Ago' feature, it's surprising how many St Helens folk used to advertise in the classified sections of Preston newspapers. On the 2nd June within the Preston Herald, all but four of the eighteen ads in the Situations Vacant section came from the St Helens district. They included a restaurant in Church Street who wanted a 'good, plain cook'; County

Carriers in Boundary Road needed a motor driver for their Daimler taxi and Bowdell Brothers in Church Street had a position for a tailoress with a 'good coat hand'.

There were also two more adverts from solicitor William Webster, who since last December had been seeking 'two respectable girls' to work at Abbotsfield, his home near St Helens Junction. He was limiting his options by discriminating against Catholics (and Irish) by insisting that applicants had to be Protestant.

Most of the adverts in the paper were for domestic staff, which was difficult to find during the war, as much better money was on offer from munitions factories and other firms engaged in war work. In fact women aged 18 – 40 earned between 27 – 30 shillings a week filling shells, although they had to work 54 to 60 hours a week. Men, of course, got paid more for doing exactly the same job!

Also on the 2nd a newspaper article on aspects of horse racing claimed that William Legh (1828-1898) – who had been the Squire of Newton (and later 1st Baron Newton) – used to claim manorial rights and insist that all of his horses run on the inside of the racecourse. This was at the local meeting that was the forerunner of Haydock Park and it gave his horses an advantage over the others. His actions led to the racing authorities banning the practice and introducing a draw to determine the starting places at races. Legh Street in Newton, Golborne and Warrington is named after the Baron.

On the 4th it was announced that Joseph Bethell Leach was being knighted, one of 46 in the King's birthday honours. The name of J. B. Leach still resonates around St Helens, having being auctioneers and estate agents since 1862. The 76-year-old was honoured for his work as chairman of Providence Hospital, which he had helped to found in 1882, and as governor of the Lancashire Masonic Orphanages.

Since 1877 Leach had organised free New Years Day breakfasts for poor children in St Helens. In some years as many as 7,000 kids – some in bare feet – were treated to food and entertainment at nine centres in the borough. In 1905 along with Sir David Gamble, Leach had arranged a Free Trade meeting in the Volunteer Hall in St Helens in which Winston Churchill gave a speech.

It had been said that during WW1 you never saw any tramps as they'd either been conscripted into the army or given a job. However some tramps went from job to job, as was the case with Thomas Madden who appeared in St Helens Police Court on the 4th. The labourer was fined 25 shillings for not producing his registration card and for wearing a military badge that he wasn't entitled to.

Identity cards had been issued to the population in 1915 and it was an offence not to possess one. Madden said his card had been left behind in a lodging house and he'd bought a jacket with a military badge in the button-hole and hadn't realised its significance. The bench said that further cases would be much more severely dealt with.

To end this week's news stories here are some non-St Helens items that were also in the papers. On the Whit Bank Holiday two 8-year-old Warrington boys drowned in a pit near the aluminium works at Bank Quay. A chief officer of a steamer docked at Bootle died after accidentally shooting himself in the head. He was showing his young son how his gun worked and not realising it was loaded, pulled the trigger and the revolver went off.

A campaigner against high infant mortality rates made the claim that it was more dangerous to be a baby in England than a soldier in France. Although nine soldiers had died every hour during 1915, twelve babies had died every hour at home. She claimed that more than half of the child deaths were preventable and said that Baby Week would be held during the first week of July to try and improve matters.

The newspapers were fascinated by the 'sensational' story of 'boy-girl' Dora Lewis, who had been born a boy but brought up by his family as a girl and even given a female name. The 20-year-old was arrested in Carnarvon under suspicion of being a military absentee and a medical examination proved his male sex. This appears to have traumatised poor Dora, along with the attendant publicity in many papers nationwide. "I could not help it. This is how I have been brought up", was what he told the police.

Before any work can be undertaken to a Church of England building or churchyard, a licence called a faculty has to be obtained. So on June 5th a special sitting of Liverpool Consistory Court met to consider an application to demolish most of what remained of St Helens Parish Church. This had largely burned down last December because of an electrical fault.

The vicar, Rev. Albert Baines, also sought permission from the Court to construct a temporary chapel for 150 people on the north side of the existing site off Church Street. This would make use of the old church's south wall and vestry, which had survived the blaze. Since the devastating fire had occurred, Sunday services were being held in the Town Hall as a short-term measure. In time a new church would be built, although six nearby shops would have to be demolished to make room for it.

Two more pit deaths occurred on the 5th, with one of the dead being just 15. He was Thomas Pendlebury from Joseph Street in Sutton who died on the way to St Helens Hospital after being injured at Collins Green Colliery. The other fatality was 31-year-old William Lyon from Park Road, who was crushed to death by a stone falling from the roof of the workings at Havannah Colliery in Parr. This was one of the most common means by which miners died down mines.

Before the nationalisation of electricity and gas in the late 1940s, those on the mains obtained their supplies from St Helens Corporation. This meant that prices could be kept low, with profits from the undertakings subsidising the rates. At the monthly meeting of St Helens Council on the 6th June, it was revealed that their gas profits for the year were £1087. This was a lot less than in previous years and was blamed on a combination of higher costs, reduced gas lighting and less consumption through summertime having been introduced for the first time in 1916. As a result prices were going to have to rise by threepence per 1000 feet.

A shocking story of cruelty and theft was outlined at St Helens Police Court on the 7th when Edward Jones from Dorothy Street in Thatto Heath was sentenced to 6 months in prison. A total of 47 pawn tickets were found at his home, mainly for goods that he'd stolen from shops. Jones had even pawned his baby's clothes, leaving his child wrapped in brown paper. The court was told that the man came from a respectable North Wales family, who had disowned both him and his wife. Three years ago Jones had persuaded a Prescott woman to move in with him and he had pawned her clothes as well!

Also on the 7th John Ashton was added to the list of small business owners who were forced to sell up after being conscripted into the army. An auction of his nine horses, traps and waggons took place that day at the Bridge Inn in Peasley Cross. On the following day Sutton boxer Ernie Proudlove successfully fought in a 10 round bout against Gomer Perkins. The referee stopped the fight in the second round, which took place at the original Liverpool Stadium. Three days later Ernie fought again in a 20-round contest in London. Can you imagine Martin Murray doing that these days, as well as having to work down the pit?

On June 11th the death of Sir Joseph Bethell Leach was announced. The 76-year-old St Helens auctioneer and estate agent had only been knighted during the previous week as part of the King's birthday honours. I wonder if he ever imagined that the name of J. B. Leach would still be well

known in St Helens, a century after his death? A champion of temperance – having signed the pledge in 1854 – Leach had also been a councillor in the town for 13 years.

Voluntary food rationing had been introduced in February to deal with wartime food shortages and there was much discussion about what should be done about dogs. The Home Office believed that there were 3 to 4 million in the country eating food that could feed half a million men. Some favoured a programme of canine culling, although the government was reluctant to take such a drastic course with man's best friend.

Instead Andrew Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, decided to reduce their number by increasing the dog licence fee. The theory was that people would choose to put their own dogs down rather than pay the extra cash. Or simply not buy a dog in the first place. Other measures that were planned included the banning of dog shows, allowing police to destroy stray animals after just three days and making illegal the feeding of bread, rice and tapioca to a dog.

However it was estimated that up to a million animals were unlicensed, so the Home Office wanted action to be taken against defaulters. St Helens Police launched a campaign, which according to the Chief Constable of St Helens, had led to "quite a rush of people" taking out licences. Those caught without a dog licence began appearing in court, with Charles Gilham from Milton Street in Sutton Manor fined ten shillings on June 11th.

At the same hearing Ellen Owen from Sutton Road claimed that as a soldier's wife she didn't need a licence for her pooch. This wasn't quite as daft as it sounds as the National Canine Defence League had paid for the licences of some soldiers in 1915 before running out of money. In the coming days many more dog owners would appear in court with quite a number offering the same excuse as Ellen and receiving a similar fine.

To end this week's news stories here are some non-St Helens items that were also in the papers. A female actress in Dudley had her hair cut short while playing a male role in a local theatre. While taking a walk a rumour quickly spread that she was a man dressed as a woman in order to avoid conscription. Crowds in those days could appear as if out of thin air and within minutes several hundred were following and roughly handling the woman until a special constable came to her rescue.

A man in Birkdale was given a hefty fine of £25 for hoarding food. In Stockton a woman was said to have died from heart failure, caused by the joy of her husband unexpectedly returning home from the front. During the conscription of millions of men mistakes were inevitable and the newspapers enjoyed describing them. This week they reported how calling up papers had been served on a 5-month-old baby boy in Hull and in Sheffield a man investigated for evading military service would have been 103 if he'd still been alive!

On June 13th fortune teller Prudence Gaskin appeared in court charged with tricking two young women from Parr Stocks Road out of five shillings. Arthur Ellerington, the Chief Constable of St Helens, told the magistrates that Gaskin had gone about the town supposedly selling lace, although in reality she was telling fortunes. Ellerington claimed that the two Parr women had been so "mystified" by Gaskin that they had ended up buying lace that was practically worthless.

The police seemed very keen to bring Prudence Gaskin to book, having had her arrested in Old Swan and then they brought her back to St Helens. She was fined £4 and ordered to repay the 5 shillings to the women from Parr. There were two Acts of Parliament that banned people from pretending to tell fortunes. There was the Witchcraft Act of 1735 (which wasn't repealed until 1951) and the Vagrancy Act of 1824 under which fortune-telling, astrology and spiritualism were outlawed on the streets. So Prudence would likely have been charged under the latter law.

Since the first week of April St Helens had been in the midst of a serious measles outbreak. At a meeting of the council's health committee on the 13th, the town medical officer updated councillors on the effects of the disease. Dr Joseph Cates reported a total of 780 instances of measles over the past 2½ months, although the outbreak had only caused seven deaths. As over 1,000 people (mainly children) had died from measles in the town over the last ten years, seven was considered a very low number. The proactive actions taken by the health committee were credited with this drop in mortality. These measures included two hospital nurses being seconded into the community to provide home nursing for the worst of the cases.

There was general agreement within the health committee that this intervention had saved lives. However Alderman Peet was not happy that the service was being provided free, saying people should not expect to have everything done for them for nothing. Henry Bates, the chairman of the committee and Mayor of St Helens, countered that the free nursing was being provided to protect public health. However the town's medical officer criticised some parents who he said had shown an "appalling disregard of the elementary measures of precaution to prevent the spread of infection". Dr. Cates said that the behaviour of a few of the parents had been so bad, that they were going to be prosecuted.

The St Helens Newspaper reported on June 15th that the funeral on the previous day of estate agent Sir Joseph Bethell Leach had been conducted in a 'most impressive manner'. J.B. had died just a week after being knighted and his funeral took place in Huyton where he'd lived. The Rev. A. J. Pearse told the mourners that they were gathered to show their affection for one who had been a "succourer of many and the encourager of many good causes". It wasn't just talk, as Leach had co-founded Providence Hospital in 1882 and as the Liverpool Echo put it 'had been a friend to thousands of the little children in St Helens and district'.

They were referring to the New Year's Day breakfasts for poor children in St Helens that Leach had organised since 1877. In his will he left £75 to pay for breakfasts and entertainment for 3,000 kids on the first New Year's morning after his death. J.B. had also served as governor of the Lancashire Masonic Orphanages.

St Helens police's drive against unlicensed dog owners led to 24 more people appearing in court on the 15th, for which they were fined between 10 to 15 shillings. The police's campaign was linked to war-time food shortages and the Government's belief that a steep increase in the dog licence fee would lead to some owners putting their animals down. This, they said, would generate more food for the general population. However up to a million dogs in the country were unlicensed and the Home Office demanded action.

In fact the Chief Constable of St Helens had received a letter from the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, on June 2nd asking him to proceed against those who were dodging the doggy tax. Cave claimed that dogs were eating food sufficient for half a million men, although this appears to have been an inflated figure, as many dogs lived on household scraps, biscuits and horse flesh.

The police's action since receiving the letter had led to many summonses being issued and as the news of the prosecutions spread, many folk in St Helens rushed to post offices to take out licences. The Chief Constable warned the magistrates to expect a further large batch of licence defaulters within the coming days.

The Daily Post described on the 15th how an unnamed man from Windle had been motoring to his wedding when his car ran into a ditch. The bridegroom was forced to tramp four miles to the church, arriving 90 minutes late which caused 'great perturbation' to the bride. Fortunately the groom was forgiven for his tardiness and the wedding went ahead.

Also on the 15th Mary Baines from Market Street was sent to prison for two months with hard labour for failing to provide adequate medical assistance to a dying child. It was claimed in court that the soldier's wife was addicted to drink and two of her children had been taken from her. Mary's 3-year-old child – who was also called Mary – had developed TB but all her mother had done was buy a bottle of cough medicine from the chemist. Mary claimed that she couldn't afford a doctor but this was dismissed in court, especially as treatment in the Fever Hospital in Peasley Cross was available free of charge.

To conclude here are a few non-St Helens stories in the newspapers this week. Last month it had been reported that Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had said that the war was costing the country £6.25 million per day. This week Law revised that figure to almost £8 million per day, which is around £400 million in today's money or £140 billion per year. Not much more, in fact, than what the NHS costs to run.

Justice Bray at the Liverpool Assizes commended Lancashire for being well behaved. This was after he only had to try six people in four cases, which he managed to do within a single day. The Assizes were periodic court sessions dealing with serious crimes and in one year at Liverpool, Bray had tried ninety prisoners over more than 3 weeks. The fact that much of the young male population was in the armed forces probably accounted for the large drop in prisoner numbers, along with the great shortage of beer and spirits.

The danger of munitions plants was underlined by an explosion at Ashton-under-Lyne that killed 23 workers, along with 11 adults and 9 children from the surrounding area. And finally a female piano teacher from Cheltenham won £500 damages from a farmer for breach of promise of marriage. That's equivalent to more than 5 years average wages – all because the man chose to change his mind!

The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) introduced at the start of the war was incredibly wide-ranging, covering many aspects of life on the home front and removing many civil liberties. DORA was even used to prosecute two men from St Helens on the 19th June for simply walking on allotments at the rear of Scotch Barn Lane in Prescott.

Frank Burrows and Michael Power were munitions workers and they told the court in Prescott that they'd taken a short cut to the plant not realising they were tramping on allotments. These had come under the DORA regulations because the government wanted to boost food production to deal with war-time shortages. There were not many allotments before the war but now there were half a million spread across the country. The court fined the pair six shillings each.

After Theodore Case had helped himself to someone's bicycle, he chalked on a board: 'We have laid down our life's blood for you, and we are taking all we can.' However Case from Cardiff had never been out of the country or been injured, despite illegally wearing a gold stripe that indicated he was a wounded soldier. However in court in St Helens on the 20th June, the Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington did say that Case suffered from a "loathsome disease". That was his tendency to send lots of letters to girls and women all over the country!

Case had been in and out of the army and as well as the bicycle theft and wearing of the gold stripe, also pleaded guilty to being a military absentee. For these offences he was sentenced to 6 months hard labour. Later in the day he was brought back to court to receive a further 3 months for stealing billiard balls from Millbrook House in Eccleston.

Working class or lower middle class students who wanted to go to university had to pass an entrance exam and apply for a scholarship, of which a small number were made available by St

Helens Corporation. Liverpool University was the main choice for most students as they couldn't afford to live away from home and could easily commute to the city by train.

On the 22nd June Allan Cathcart and Joseph Gilman received the good news that the council had offered them £40 scholarships over their 3 years of study at Liverpool Uni. Allan's achievement was quite remarkable, as he was in a family of ten with his father a glass sheet flattener at Pilks and two of his siblings working there as labourers. Joseph like Allan was a Cowley lad but his background appears to have been a bit more middle class as his dad ran a baker and confectioner's shop in Greenfield Road.

On the following day Sarah Abbott from Bickerstaffe Street appeared in court charged with neglecting her six children, one of whom was described by the NSPCC as a "living skeleton". Inspector Roe told the court that although Sarah's husband was away in the army, she now received more money than before he left.

The inspector was referring to the separation allowance for soldiers' wives, which worked out at 12 shillings 6d per week, with an additional 5 shillings for the first child and 2/6 for any additional child. So in Sarah's case she would have received £1 10 shillings a week, which was not far off the average weekly wage.

Despite this income Sarah's children were in a dirty, neglected state and her youngest child of 22 months weighed just 11 pounds. The norm for a child of that age was 28 pounds. The NSPCC prosecuted the case and their inspector said the youngster was apparently being starved to death. After hearing this evidence the magistrates told Sarah that she ought to be ashamed of herself, as they sent to prison for three months with hard labour.

On the same day the unnamed wife of a Russian Pole, who was living in Haydock, was fined 30 shillings for entering a prohibited area without permission. The woman was arrested while shopping in St Helens market, after previously being warned not to enter the town. The war work that was taking place at some factories meant that foreigners could not enter the borough without express consent from the authorities.

Benefit fraud a century ago was mainly confined to the separation allowance awarded to soldiers' wives, with some recipients continuing to claim after their husband had been discharged from the army. The prosecution of 73-year-old John Ewins on the 25th for pension fraud was less common. The means tested old age pension had been introduced in 1909 and at 5 shillings a week for single people aged over 70, was not particularly generous.

However an additional weekly allowance of 2s 6d was available for some and this had been granted to John Ewins in October 1916. At that time he stated that his income was just 4 shillings a week. However four months later it was discovered that he actually earned a wage of between 15 - 20 shillings working at a leadworks, near where he lodged. In total Ewins had fraudulently claimed £1 17s 6d pension money and he received a fine of £5 or 28 days in prison. The magistrates said he had done a great wrong, whatever his circumstances were.

To conclude here are a couple of non-St Helens stories in the newspapers this week. There was criticism in the letters column of the Liverpool Echo that the 'tram women' in the city – who had replaced the men who had gone to war – were slovenly in their appearance with untidy uniforms and unpolished shoes. The 'girl conductors' responded angrily with one saying that she was thoroughly disgusted by the comments, especially as they often had to report for duty at 4:15am and work in all weathers.

Another correspondent criticised the recent decision to place a bounty on agricultural pests in Southport. The authorities there were paying a shilling for each dozen rats' tails that were handed in and for each dozen heads of fledged sparrows 3d was paid. Many a schoolboy was apparently out and about in Southport with their catapults and penknives earning a few bob!

This week's stories include a swimming tragedy in Bold, a railway prosecution for 'plundering packages in transit', travelling showmen in trouble, expansion plans for Cowley and an army deserter who made a dramatic leap from a bedroom window in Borough Road to try and dodge the police. But let's begin in Parr with another mining death.

It's a rare week when a miner working down a St Helens pit wasn't crushed to death as a result of a roof collapse. This week's victim was Thomas Mullaney, who was killed down Ashton's Green Colliery on the 26th by what was described as a 'huge stone'. The 28-year-old had been undertaking maintenance work in an underground roadway that had been driven almost 30 years earlier. He was removing broken wooden bars that were supporting the roof when the collapse occurred.

Inquests were always speedily held and two days later the coroner's jury brought in the usual 'accidental death' verdict. Although mining inspectors made regular unannounced visits to pits to check up on safety procedures, there was a view that in a dangerous environment such accidents were inevitable.

On the following day St Helens Co-op was fined £5 for storing petrol in an unsuitable and dangerous store. The amount of petrol that industry could purchase and how it was kept was carefully controlled during the war. The police kept a check on businesses that stored petrol and bottlemakers Cannington Shaw had received a hefty fine earlier in the month for a petrol offence.

On the 28th both Cowley boys and girls' schools advertised for a total of four mistresses and assistant mistresses to teach various subjects, including English, French and Geography. The yearly salaries on offer of £110 to £140 were a little higher than before the war, reflecting the shortage of teachers with many males serving in the army. The pool of available staff had been slightly widened by Cowley ending their unofficial practice of banning single females from St Helens from teaching at the school.

William Harty had been a deserter from the army for 14 months before Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for War, granted him a free pardon. The 26-year-old from Borough Road reported to the army depot at Warrington on the 26th June as instructed. However the lure of khaki could not have been very strong, as within hours Harty had again taken to his heels.

The deserter foolishly went straight back to his home in Borough Road, which was the first place the police would look. When Sergeant Bowden came calling on the following day, Harty attempted an escape by jumping out of a bedroom window into the back yard. He then climbed over the walls into neighbours' yards but was captured by the police and taken into custody. Two days later on the 29th Harty was brought into court and returned to the army. There'll be more on this story next week, when members of his family are charged with harbouring him.

At the same hearing George Ryan – who was described as a showman – was fined £2 for being a military absentee and handed over to the army. The police gave the travelling showpeople who regularly appeared in St Helens special attention as they often included absentees or deserters. Some showmen would not be in possession of registration documents – compulsory id cards as we would call them today – which had been introduced in 1915. Indeed George Ryan and his brother John, as well as another showman called Joseph Shaw, were each fined ten shillings for not possessing id cards.

Show folk would from time to time occupy various parts of the borough where there was waste land, such as the so-called 'Show Field' in Sutton, that was sandwiched between the rears of Edgeworth Street, Peckershill Road and Robins Lane. The level of entertainment varied from simple amusements and barrel organs to fully-fledged circuses, animal shows, fairgrounds and boxing bouts.

Also on the 29th Peter Greeley from Tennyson Street drowned while bathing in a large pond off Union Lane in Bold. The 16-year-old worked as a haulage hand at Sutton Manor Colliery and had swum the length of the pond. His 15-year-old friend Peter Standish told him not to swim back as he looked exhausted. However Greeley ignored the advice and when about half-way back, suddenly sank into the water and drowned.

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