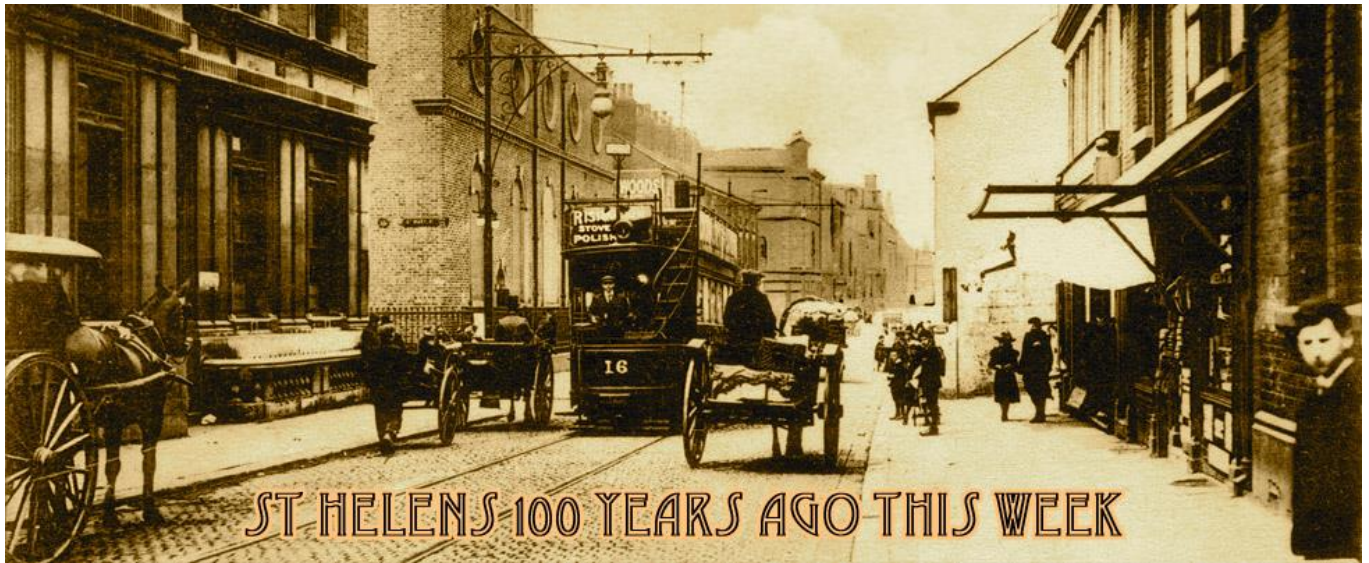


St Helens 100 Years Ago – January to December 1916



St Helens 100 Years Ago This Week is a 1500-word article posted 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 during 1916.

January 1916

The year began with the annual New Year's Day breakfasts for 3000 poor children at 12 centres in St Helens. This event was organised by Joseph Bithell Leach of the estate agency / auctioneers and first began in 1885. As well as tucking in to a substantial meal, entertainment was provided for the kids, many of whom would not normally receive a breakfast when out of school. After attending the centres, the Mayor Henry Bates of Sutton Hall visited Providence Hospital to present gifts to wounded soldiers. Also on New Year's Day, the league match between Saints and St Helens Recs was played in a gale for 17 minutes but then abandoned.

On the 5th suspicions were raised at a meeting of St Helens Council that the company commissioned to build cooling towers for the borough's electricity plant could have a German connection. Before the war it had had a German name but now bore a "very high-sounding British title", as Councillor Turner put it. This was 18 months before King George V did exactly the same when he changed the name of the Royal Family from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor.

Despite a world war being fought, the police still brought fairly trivial prosecutions. On January 10th 1916, Sutton Moss firelight merchant Walter Barrow appeared before St. Helens magistrates for using a cart that didn't have his name on. P.C. Robinson told the bench that the words 'Sutton Moss' were on the cart but Barrow's name had gone. Barrow interjected that there was "More than that gone. We have been nearly washed away down at Sutton Moss. We have been just the same as Robinson Crusoe on an island". The constable who served the summons explained to the court that bad weather had led to three feet of water being in Barrow's house. The firelight man was fined half-a-crown to add to his troubles.

Also on the 10th French artiste Marcel Leblanc was sent to prison for a month for entering St Helens without a passport and proper permission. This was yet another act that was due to appear at the Hippodrome, who didn't understand St Helens's strict war-time regulations, as they didn't apply to many other towns on the music hall circuit. The furious Frenchman - who had an English wife who performed with him - said he would write to the French Consul to complain about his treatment. A week later soldier James Reade was given a 3 months prison sentence for begging in

St Helens. It was revealed in court that he had 35 convictions, mainly for burglary, and had spent 20 years of his life locked up.

On January 22nd Maud Beirne of 1 Edgeworth Street, Sutton was also sent to prison for 3 months with hard labour for receiving stolen goods from her 10-years-old son Gilbert and a boy called Unsworth, who had been on a nicking spree from local shops. The chairman of the magistrates said it was the worst case of receiving that he'd known and the sentence was nothing like Beirne deserved. Four months earlier, Gilbert's 15-year-old sister Mary had been sent to a reformatory for 3 years for receiving stolen money from her friend Eliza Davies. The girls had used the money to visit Manchester where they were arrested after behaving in a 'depraved manner'.

On the 25th at Liverpool assizes, Margaret Roberts was sent to prison for 7 days for bigamy, having first been married to a man called Owens of Sutton Heath Road. Bigamy happened fairly regularly then with divorce being frowned upon. On the 28th police Inspector William Jackson – who had been in charge of the Sutton district for 23 years – retired and received a stirring tribute from the County Coroner Sam Brighthouse. Two years earlier Jackson had had his nose broken by P.C. William Weaver of Mill Lane, after the inspector had found his constable on his beat apparently drunk.

A seaman called Robert Hall was sent to prison for 6 months by St Helens magistrates on the 29th for fraudulently obtaining food and lodgings and stealing a watch. The sailor had turned up at Mrs. Hewitt's house in Woodville Street in St Helens on November 2nd dressed in naval uniform and wearing a war medal. Hall claimed he'd served on HMS Lion, the Royal Navy's flagship battlecruiser and had been wounded. However he decamped with a watch without paying, after telling his landlady that he was going to draw £49 that was due to him. Hall was arrested after leaving prison at Manchester after being convicted of a similar offence. Although actually a seaman, the rest of his story was a fabrication.

On the last day of January, Sgt. Shaw told the St Helens Magistrates that a strange event had occurred on the previous Saturday night. In arresting George Sloane, who had been 'assaulting people right and left' in Liverpool Road, bystanders had given the police a round of applause. "It is a most unusual thing", said the sergeant, with the police more accustomed to being abused and even assaulted after making an arrest on the streets of St Helens.

February 1916

A long list of casualties from the Western front was published in the local papers on the 3rd February, which included two St Helens Pals who'd been wounded. On the 5th there were rumours that German Zeppelin airships were airborne in the vicinity, but these proved false. Two days later the Liverpool Echo reported that the body of an unknown man had been recovered from the St Helens Canal, near a lead works. He'd been in the water for a fortnight and was found wearing a blue serge suit. On the 8th February it was reported that the Mayor Henry Bates of Sutton Hall had held a meeting with the owners and managers of all the St Helens works. The purpose of the get-together was to formulate a plan to reduce light emissions that might assist the feared Zeppelins or 'Zeps', as they were generally known.

Also on the 8th the Mayor – who was also chief magistrate – presided over the annual licensing meeting for St Helens, where the Chief Constable reported that drunkenness was on the wane. Arthur Ellerington stated that 474 persons had been prosecuted in 1915, down from 525 in the previous year. He said there was still too much drinking among women and he said: "stringent measures should be taken to cope with the evil". The mayor also declared that 10.30pm was going to be closing time for cinemas and billiard halls and pubs were also to have shorter hours. That same day Cowley Girls School advertised in the Liverpool Daily Post for a very experienced French teacher, offering an annual salary of £125, rising to £160.

On the 9th the inquests on three St Helens children, who'd each died after being burned or scalded, were held. One of the youngsters was Mary Lane, aged 18 months of 1 Clock Face Road, who'd pulled a can of boiling water off a table onto herself. Also on the 9th soldier John Martin pleaded guilty to stealing a prize-bred fox-terrier from the Clock Face Hotel. He'd simply walked into the hotel yard and helped himself to the puppy. Having a bad military record, Martin was sent to prison for 2 months.

Also on that day, the body of the man found in the canal, was identified by his sister as Arthur Unsworth. He'd worked for Pilkington's all his life but had been out of work for some weeks. An inquest was also held on 17-year-old Ernest Taylor of Rookery Lane in Rainford, who'd thrown himself into the canal at Earlestown, seemingly because his solicitor employer in Cotham Street had ticked him off. Finally on the 9th it was revealed that a collection in St Helens in aid of the Mayoress's fund for comforts for the troops on the front line had raised £250, the equivalent of about £12,000 in today's money. On the following day the Mayor announced that as a precaution against Zeppelin attacks, street lighting was to be switched off in St Helens and householders were to be instructed to 'obscure' all their windows. For their part manufacturers had agreed to screen their furnaces and prevent any light being reflected skyward.

There was a tragic end to Spencer Cliff's visit to his soldier son at the Oakdene Military Hospital in Rainhill on February 12th. Upon returning to St Helens Junction station, the 54-year-old from Keighley dropped dead on the platform. Three days later Joseph Ellwood Anderson, an American seaman, was fined 20 shillings for entering St Helens without permission, a prohibited area for 'aliens' during the war. He'd previously met a Sutton girl in Manchester while on shore leave and decided to visit her in St Helens. Anderson was told to go the Town Hall to register but not having a passport, was locked up by the police. Also that day colliery day wageman Robert Corkill of 150 Sherdley Road and Carl Bligh – described as a French-Irishman – were remanded in custody accused of attempting to set on fire a St Helens munitions factory. It was claimed that Corkhill had turned on the taps of oil vats placed over the furnaces at a Ravenhead smelting works. Although Bligh's only crime appears to have been that he had been born in Germany. Both would later be sent to prison for 6 months.

Despite the war, Cruft's dog show went ahead as normal with J. Woosey and J. Stronach of Claughton Street winning first prize in the collies junior dogs and bitches section with their pooch snappily named 'St. Helens Simplicity'. On the 17th Nathaniel Houghton, an engineer from 56 Bickerstaffe Street, was sent to prison for 6 months with hard labour for 'making statements likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, and discipline of his Majesty's forces.' At one point he'd stood at the bar in the Fleece Hotel while recruiting was taking place and said: "Only the scum of the Earth join the English Army. If the Germans landed here and came to St. Helens, I would be the first to meet them at the station, shake hands with them, and show them up the main street". Strange how he thought that German invaders would come by train! This led to a fight and a window being broken. His employer pleaded for leniency saying there were signs Houghton was deteriorating mentally and he'd been drinking too much. Despite this testimony the bench decided to send him to prison as a warning to others.

On the 18th February Lewis Ogle – who was an engineer at a works at St Helens Junction – was fined £2 16s 6d for driving a motor car, supposedly at over 30mph, as he journeyed through Peasley Cross to the Raven Hotel. He told the magistrates that it was quite impossible to travel at that speed on that stretch of road. After they had delivered their verdict, the unimpressed Ogle said: "Well, I will say good-bye to St. Helens." On the 23rd, fourteen-year-old William Cunningham was tragically killed by coal tubs while working at Ashton Green Colliery. On the 25th at midnight the swing bridge at Blackbrook over the St Helens canal underwent repairs, meaning that boats could not pass through for at least a week. The month ended with three young Japanese pedlars

being sentenced to Walton Gaol for a period of three months after selling paper ornaments in St Helens without registering. However the Home Office would be requested to discuss the case with the Japanese Embassy and if they could provide assurances about the prisoners, they might have their sentences commuted.

March 1916

On the first day of March it was reported that 15-year-old Edward Horsley of Parr Stocks Road had been killed at Ashtons Green Colliery. On the same day in the Liverpool Echo, the Coop Cinema in Baldwin Street was advertising for an operator (projectionist) who was ineligible for war service. The pioneering Weisker Brothers had begun screening films at the Coop in 1907. One brother lived at Sutton Grange by Sherdley Park for a while.

On March 2nd Robert Corkhill of Sherdley Road was imprisoned for 6 months and fined £60 for attempting to set fire to a St Helens smelting works. Corkhill denied the offence, saying he'd been living in the USA, Canada and New Zealand for some years and had no idea how he'd got into the works. A furnaceman said he saw smoke coming from the direction of the furnace and Corkhill (who wasn't employed there) was running away. Also on that day the inquest took place on master clogger Robert Crest of Haresfinch Road, whose body had been found in the canal after he'd been missing for three weeks. It was reported that Crest had been depressed as he had one son in France and another in Liverpool Infirmary, although the coroner thought it was probably an accident.

Also on that day it was revealed that there was an unwritten rule at Cowley Girls School banning any females from St Helens from teaching there. In fact it was claimed that nearly all secondary schools in the country practiced discrimination against local teachers. A resolution was passed unanimously at a meeting of St Helens Education Committee not to enforce such a hard and fast rule. Well-known fruit merchant William Norbury was fined 12s. 6d. on March 3rd for using a flash light in George Street. A man's hat had been blown away by the wind and he was helping him find it in the black out but was spotted by the police. Three days later Dr. Harry Guthrie of Lancots Lane was fined £4 for driving his motor car with the headlights on. Both these cases concerned breaches of the newly-introduced black out regulations, designed to prevent German Zeppelin airships from easily picking out targets.

I wonder if the case at St Helens County Court on March 8th 1916 was the first time in the town that a dodgy car was the subject of a summons? William Grimble of Market Street in St Helens claimed £40 for breach of warranty from J. Saggerson, a cyclemaker whose business was in Prescott High Street. At the hearing Grimble told the judge that the car steering was in a bad way and its second gear didn't function. He also said that the car would do nothing like 25 miles an hour, as had been guaranteed by the defendant. Joseph Corrigan of the Automobile Company of St Helens gave evidence that the car was not roadworthy. However in a curious judgement, the judge ruled in favour of Saggerson, essentially saying that it was Grimble's fault for buying the car without driving it first and seeking expert advice.

Speed was also the issue on March 10th when Henry Sumner was fined 20 shillings for driving a motor waggon at nearly ten miles an hour along Prescott Road, which was almost twice the speed limit! His motor vehicle was only licensed to travel at 5 mph. Also that day Suttoners were shocked to learn that Dr. Bird had died from pneumonia at the young age of 33. He'd cared for Sutton folk as assistant to Dr. Tom O'Keefe of New Street for less than three years but in that short time he and his wife had become very popular. It's also not a great advert for the medical profession when doctors die young and it reminds people of their own mortality.

Also on the 10th there was more evidence of people struggling to get used to the new lighting regulations. Thirteen St.Helens shopkeepers and residents were fined between 5 and 10 shillings

each for showing too much light. In a number of cases, shopkeepers had simply left their front door open. Also on that day sympathy was extended to the mother of 6-year-old Thomas Worthington, who had died at home after his clothing was accidentally set alight. She'd left him alone with three other children in order to go out washing. No criticism was made of Mrs. Worthington at her son's inquest. Instead the Coroner said he would give money to the police to buy her a better fireguard and also grant her £1 from his poor box.

Although domestic service in the past is often portrayed on TV and in films as having taken place in large houses (eg. Downton Abbey & Upstairs Downstairs), far more females found work in better off small homes or in busy places like pubs or farms. Often they would live away from home, like Elizabeth Ratcliffe from Bold, who became a maid in a farmhouse at Glan Conwy, near Colwyn Bay. On March 11th the inquest on her dead child took place, the infant having been discovered by the police stuffed inside a bed in a spare room. The 20-year-old claimed the child had been born 'stone dead' and the father was a soldier, who'd been killed in the Dardanelles. Two doctors who conducted a post-mortem said they believed the child had died through 'inattention at birth'. Elizabeth didn't attend the inquest, having been committed to Conway Institution. This would have been under the cruel Mental Deficiency Act of 1913, which put so-called 'feeble-minded' and 'moral defective' females into institutions, sometimes for the rest of their lives. Many vulnerable girls had simply had an illegitimate child and a number ended up in Rainhill Asylum.

In an article published on March 14th the Liverpool Daily Post wrote: 'The neighbouring town of St. Helens has an excellent name in the matter of recruiting. Large numbers of the men have joined voluntarily for any branch of the services where they are wanted'. Another piece on the page commented how: 'A smartly-dressed young conscientious objector said he would not mind serving in the Navy, only he objected to their awful trousers.' Also on the 14th, Mary Winstanley, who kept a farm in Warrington Road in Bold, appeared in court charged with keeping cattle and pigs in insanitary conditions. Her defence solicitor claimed that she was in her 80s, although my checking of records suggests she was actually in her early 70s. She might have exaggerated her age to get sympathy, although it was not uncommon for people to not know exactly how old they were. Police Inspector Fraser had for 15 years patiently tried to get her to improve the state of her farm, which he described as a public nuisance. The farmhouse kitchen and bedrooms were dirty and the smell from the pigsties and cattle shippens caused many complaints from passers by.

Five separate accidents at five different St Helens collieries took place on the 15th, causing five men to be taken to St Helens Hospital, with a range of injuries including a dislocated hip, broken arm, head and internal injuries etc. On the 16th it was announced that Verdun Street was to be the name of a new road in St Helens, although it no longer appears to exist. A St Helens War Tribunal on the 17th heard an appeal from Albert Helsby. He asked for exemption from being called up on the ground that he was the last of seven sons able to support his invalid father. Five brothers were serving in France and another was in training in England. Albert's mother produced a letter from the War Office congratulating the family on having sent so many soldiers. The Chairman of the Tribunal, Alderman John Forster (who served as town mayor in 1900) added his congratulations and gave the seventh son exemption.

On the 18th Karl Johansen, aged forty-five, of 28 Fleet Lane, was killed at the Sutton Heath Colliery through a roof fall and 14-year-old Norman Jones from Gartons Lane broke his leg at Sutton Manor Colliery. At a meeting on the 19th, St Helens MP Rigby Swift called for men in reserved occupations to be brought into the army. James Seddon, the former MP for Newton (and failed council candidate for West Sutton ward), added that it "was amusing to see how eagerly unskilled workers had posed as skilled engineers, &c., in order to do their bit, if it would save their skins".

A curious event occurred at the Clock Face Hotel on March 20th at the inquest on Thomas Kelly, who'd died at Bold Colliery. The jury were signing their names to their verdict of accidental death,

when a man called William Jelley hurried into the room. He told the coroner that the dead man was not Kelly but his brother Albert Jelley (23) who'd been living at 18 Powell Street. So the coroner simply altered the name on the death certificate.

On the 22nd March an unnamed railway shunter from St Helens unsuccessfully appealed against the local tribunal's refusal to grant him exemption from service saying: "I cannot inflict death on my fellows, because I hold that war is inconsistent with the teachings of Christ". However he'd never thought of conscientious objection until he'd read about it. On the following day three cloggers appeared at the St Helens Tribunal to argue that their trade was a reserved occupation – meaning they wouldn't have to go to war. Many people tried to get out of conscription by saying they were conscientious objectors or in reserved occupations but few were successful.

A peculiar prosecution took place on the 24th when two actors, who were performing at the Theatre Royal, appeared in court charged with treating each other to alcoholic drinks! In order to reduce alcohol consumption, the government had in October 1915 introduced a No Treating Order, as part of the Defence of the Realm Act. On the 16th Constable Perkins had been sitting in the Swan Hotel in Corporation Street when he saw Charles Longden and John Aitken buying a drink for one another. As a result of the prosecution the actors were both fined £2.

On the 26th Baxters Chemical Works in Sutton caught fire but the blaze was brought under control after two hours. The firemen had to wear respirators because of the sulphur fumes, which was a little unusual in those days. On the following day a soldier called Owen Mooney from Stanley Street was sent to prison for 6 months. Not only was he an absentee from the 3rd South Lancashire Regiment but after being arrested for breaking windows in his father's house, he'd attacked three police officers. Mooney had been arrested on three previous occasions for being an absentee from the army.

On the last day of the month teacher Ernest Everitt of Dentons Green Lane appeared in court as an absentee under the Military Service Act. The 31-year-old had become notorious for the controversial statements that he'd made while appearing before military tribunals in St Helens and Liverpool. Everitt had angered many by saying that he wouldn't raise a finger to stop a German from 'ravishing' his sister and would only teach or encourage people to honour the King as a man and not as the King. He was fined £2 and handed over to the military authorities.

Also on the 31st, John May and Fred Chabot, who were members of a company performing at the Hippodrome, were fined 20 shillings each for treating each to drinks at the Black Bull. Husband and wife Edmund and Margaret Laird faced the same charges but were let off with a warning after the clerk of the court raised a legal point. He said husband and wife were in law a single person but apparently the new regulation made them two. With a bit of uncertainty as to whether a man buying a drink for his wife was legally buying one for himself and so not breaking the law, the couple were simply told to be more careful in future!

April 1916

On April 1st newspapers commented on popular April fool's tricks of the time, which included sending a boy to the chemist's for a pennyworth of pigeon's milk! One Scottish paper said that the most common joke was to send a lad a mile or so to hand a letter to someone. But when opening the letter the recipient read the line: 'Never laugh and never smile, but send the gowk (fool) another mile'.

On the 3rd seventeen more St Helens people were fined for not completely observing the blackout, which had been introduced to foil German Zeppelin airship raids. Most were shopkeepers, including the manager of a butcher's and a Church Street confectioner. Apart from at Bold in 1918,

St Helens never suffered any Zeppelin raids, but there was a tremendous fear of them. On the same day Vincent Rimmer, a glasscutter of Windleshaw Road, appeared in court charged with being a military absentee, having ignored the notice sent to him in March ordering him to join up. Rimmer was handed over to the military authorities. Single men who had wanted to claim exemption from conscription through being in a reserved occupation were supposed to have applied by March 2nd. The police were now rounding up those men aged between 18 and 41 who had failed to report to the army.

On April 4th the inquest on miner Samuel Brown took place. The 59-year-old had been killed down Sutton Heath Colliery by a collapse of the pit roof. Such accidents, often through insufficient roof supports, caused many of the deaths underground. A St Helens Council meeting was held on the 5th in which the Mayor Henry Bates of Sutton Hall said there was a smallpox outbreak in the district and warned residents to take precautions. Smallpox caused up to half a billion deaths worldwide during the 20th century before it was eradicated in 1979.

On the 6th April 35-year-old Peter Anders of Albion Street was fined £20 and handed over to the army, for not reporting for military service. The average weekly wage then was less than £2, so £20 was a hefty sum. Some tried drastic measures to get out of being sent to France. Edward Flood reported to the army at the Volunteer Hall in St Helens on the 6th and promptly cut his throat. Two weeks later he appeared in court charged with attempted suicide, which until 1961 was against the law. Superintendent Dunn told the Bench that the conscripted man had not fully recovered, but Flood was still discharged from the court into the custody of the military.

The St Helens Tribunal met again on the 7th to consider more applications for exemption from conscription, which could come from individuals or their employers. The St Helens Co-op asked for 27 exemptions, mainly for shop managers. All apart from two were granted, with 125 Co-op staff already serving in the forces. An unnamed St Helens farmer was granted exemption for a farm hand until the hay harvest ended in May. Although he now employed 7 women to replace his many male hands who were fighting in France, he said women were not strong enough to stack the hay!

Michael King got into a fight with a man named Kennedy on the 9th at the Prince of Wales Hotel in Junction Lane. Patrick Goodison went between the pair to separate them but later discovered that his watch, chain and medal were missing. Police Sergeant Harvey went to King's lodgings at 8 Alice Street in Sutton and found the items inside King's pockets. On the following day the colliery daywageman appeared in court saying he'd no idea how King's possessions had managed to find their way into his jacket. The magistrates were unimpressed by his defence and fined him £1.

On the 10th William Crosby, described as a well-known St Helens butcher, returned home on a week's leave from the front. Within hours the soldier had got himself drunk and after being refused beer in the Griffin Inn in College Street, smashed a glass panel in the door on his way out. He was fined 11 shillings in court two days later. That same day the controversial conscientious objector Ernest Everitt was sent to prison for two years with hard labour at a military court martial. The Cowley teacher had created a storm in St Helens by declaring that he wouldn't stop a German from 'ravishing' his sister and would only teach children to honour the King as a man and not as a monarch. Everitt had previously said that he wouldn't serve in the army in any capacity – not even as a non-combatant, such as a stretcher bearer – and he clearly meant it.

The week began with Henry Bates, the Sherdley Estate manager, receiving a letter at his Sutton Hall office from the wife of Colonel Michael Hughes, who owned Sherdley Hall. Writing from Thornham Hall near Eye in Suffolk, Edith Hughes said the dreaded German Zeppelin airships – which she dubbed "devils from hell" – had flown over their rented estate: "We've had a most unpleasant 10 days of Zepps and guns and God knows what....one went right over the back of the house. I'm really

not frightened of them but am so tired that I promptly had a heart-attack, which was useful just at that moment, and I am much ashamed of myself.”

There might be a war on but the St Helens Canine Association still had a record number of entries for their dog show on the 13th April, which was held at the Fleece Hotel. This was not the same Fleece that many can still remember, as the old Church Street hotel was demolished in 1931. The best in show was awarded to P. Cook’s bulldog called Haydock Dragoon.

Two days later 13-year-old Tom Roberts from Pocket Nook was sentenced to 6 strokes of the birch rod for breaking into Middlehurst’s shop in Higher Parr Street and stealing cigarettes and chocolates. He passed some of his ill-gotten gains onto his 14-year-old pals John Helsby and Patrick Cain, who were each fined £1 for receiving. Roberts was said to have broken into shops on numerous occasions and his mother was criticised for keeping him at home scrubbing floors and doing housework. This horrified the magistrates who ordered Mrs Roberts to immediately find her wayward son work. It was revealed in court that John Helsby’s mother had had 19 children, 12 of whom were alive.

On the 16th the Ormskirk Street Congregational Church commemorated the tercentenary of Shakespeare’s death with a special service. On the following day coalman Ernie Crouch of Leach Lane in Sutton advertised his ‘good sound business’ for sale in the Liverpool Daily Post, as he was joining the army. In the next column was an advert for a screening at the Olympia in Liverpool of D. W. Griffith’s highly racist film Birth of a Nation, which they described as the ‘8th wonder of the world’.

On April 17th three St Helens café owners, with premises in Church Street, Baldwin Street, Corporation Street and Higher Parr Street, were prosecuted for breaking gaming laws. They each had ‘clown machines’ installed in which customers inserted a halfpenny (or penny in some cases) into a slot at the top, which released a miniature football. The ball dropped down the other side of the machine, where stood the figure of a clown with a cap in his hand, controlled by a handle. The aim of the game was for the player to catch the ball in the clown’s cap by moving the handle, for which he or she would win twopence. The makers of the simple amusement argued that it was a game of skill but the magistrates at a further hearing fined them £20 - £25 each. These were big fines when £2 a week was a decent wage.

On April 19th St Helens Council’s Parks Committee discussed whether female gardening students, who were working for free in Victoria Park, should be paid. These days their two month stints would be called a work placement but the Chairman of the committee, Alderman Peet, didn’t think they should be employed at all, saying: “We don’t want them, and would rather do without them... a man had to be with the students all the time, and that meant that he was wasting his time.”

On April 20th Henry France died from injuries received at Lea Green Colliery. The 61-year-old had suffered a brain seizure and was then run over by coal boxes. Henry had been a survivor of an explosion at the colliery in 1893, which badly burned him and six other mineworkers and killed Evan Jones of Junction Lane. On the same day John Noble, an American from Boston, appeared in court after making threats to blow up St Helens. He was charged with entering a prohibited area and making ‘false statements likely to cause disaffection’. On the previous day Noble – who said that he had come over as a stowaway – was in the Finger Post Hotel asking about the local munitions works. He then went into Heaton’s chip shop and alarmed people by saying he was a Hun who was going up in an aeroplane that night to blow up St Helens! At another hearing on the 28th, Noble said he was drunk at the time, but that didn’t impress the magistrates who sentenced him to six months hard labour.

Also on the 20th Thomas Middlehurst of Higher Parr Street was fined 20 shillings for keeping his son off school, so he could sell sweets at a picture palace. Two days later Sutton's own Ernie Proudlove fought against a boxer called Young Tomkins in the Prince's Theatre in Preston, with Tomkins from Horwich retiring in the 7th round. Ernie lived in Herbert Street and later in the year would become Lancashire bantamweight champion.

On the 24th April two boys were given six strokes of the birch rod for a series of 'creeping' thefts from shops, while the owners were in their back rooms. Twelve-year-old John Creese had crept into a shop in Duke Street and stolen 15 shillings from the till, before creeping out on his hands and knees. He shared his ill-gotten gains with his 13-year-old mate Richard Hale of Albion Street, who was keeping 'nix', the colloquial term for look out. They also stole six gross of picture postcards from Jane Adamson's shop in Church Street, chocolates from Walter Fairclough's premises in Westfield Street and 22 shillings from butcher Anthony Ground of Cambridge Road.

Sergeant Anders, who had put the pair under surveillance, finally collared the lads one Sunday afternoon in Baldwin Street, after spotting them trying a number of shop doors and attempting to remove post from letter boxes. Creese then began to creep into an open toffee shop before Anders pounced and the creeping crime wave was brought to a close. The birch was seen as a short, sharp, shock and the police administered the punishments at their police station or at the court itself. Girls used to be birched or whipped but that stopped in the 1820s.

On the 25th April Thomas Glynn, an 8-year-old boy from Campbell Street, was given the birch after stealing a purse from the paybox of the Oxford Picturedrome. The Duke Street cinema had been opened four years earlier and would later be known as the Plaza and Cindy's nightclub. The boy told the magistrates that he and another lad had been keeping watch on the paybox and had crept in when the attendant was absent.

Chief Constable Ellerington told the court that there was a problem in St Helens with boys roaming the streets and creeping quietly into shops in order to steal, sometimes on their hands and knees. The lads waited until the shopkeeper was in a back room and if they were seen, would make up some excuse. Often they would claim that they were seeking an empty box in order to send parcels to soldiers. The rise in juvenile delinquency was blamed on many boys being in large families, with their fathers fighting in France and mothers unable to control them.

The 43rd annual meeting of St Helens Hospital took place on the 27th, in which it was announced that the number of patients admitted during the year had been 1,314, with many of them wounded soldiers. It was also stated that large extensions were being planned for the hospital, including its first maternity ward. Although infant mortality was declining, maternal mortality of new mothers was on the rise and health campaigners argued that hospital births would be safer. However it took until 1926 before the new maternity ward was opened and even then some were sceptical. The Mayor Sir David Gamble said at the time that he believed the "experiment" of a maternity ward would be a success. But if not, the hospital would have a room available for general use.

On the 28th April four bookmakers from Manchester and Liverpool were each fined between £10 and £20 for taking bets at an event on the Sutton Commercial football ground at St Helens Junction. Thomas Hanson had stood on a raised platform of bricks and wood while announcing the odds, with his mate Albert Cunningham standing by his side taking bets. In court Hanson denied the offence, saying he suffered from rheumatism and had stood on the platform on the wet ground to keep his feet dry! Illegal bookies regularly stood on a platform at sports events in order to make them conspicuous to pundits, although that also made them more visible to the police.

On the 29th it was announced that Sutton doctor Fred Tough, who'd gone to France with the Royal Army Medical Corps, had been promoted in recognition of his 'devoted services at the front'. He

received the Order of St John of Jerusalem and would later be promoted to Major. Dr. Fred attended to Sutton folk from about 1907 to 1921.

The 29th was also the last day of the Northern Rugby Football Union season, which in 1922 became the Rugby Football League. Saints beat Swinton 5-3 and St Helens Recs lost to Leigh 0-8, with Dewsbury becoming league champions.

May 1916

On the 1st of May Frederick Milsop of Park Road in St Helens appeared in court after threatening his wife with a razor while drunk. "It was all a cod", he told the magistrates, "I did it to frighten the missus"! Two days later John Corbett from Hard Lane was sued in St Helens County Court for not paying a builder £8 2 shillings for work done to the roof of his house. Corbett told Judge Thomas that he'd assumed the contractor was doing it for free as "an advertisement" for his business, adding that he thought the workman was being a "jolly good sport" about it. That was before he got the bill! In fact he was very lucky to have got the work done in the first place as builders and other workmen were hard to find during the war and they certainly didn't need to advertise. A building firm that might normally employ 20 workmen, would only have had two or three who hadn't gone to France.

That evening Trooper Thomas Eliot of the South Notts Hussars was found wandering around Peasley Cross. He'd been invalided out of Egypt but couldn't remember how he'd got to St Helens and which hospital he'd been in. Not only did St Helens Hospital and Providence Hospital take many injured soldiers from all over the country but there were also three convalescent homes in Rainhill (Oakdene, Oaklands & The Tower) and in other nearby places. On the following day Wigan railway clerk Herbert Cowley was discovered at Blackbrook lying on a colliery branch line with his head cut off. The theory was that the 23-year-old had hitched a ride on top of a coal train while travelling to friends at Clock Face but had fallen off and then been run over by the wheels of the coal wagons.

On the 5th of the month William and Mary-Ann Bishop of Frazer Street, near Jackson Street in St Helens, appeared in court charged with cruelly neglecting their children. Their house was reported as being in a very bad state of filth and neglect, and although they had a decent income, spent it all on drink. As was often the case the woman was treated more harshly, with Mary-Ann being sent to prison for 3 months but her husband was only fined £5. The glass tube gatherer was even given 5 months to pay his fine, which was unusual. On the following day Sutton's boxer Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street defeated Billy Winkley at Preston in the sixth round of a ten round bout.

On May 7th the death of 63-year-old Robert Hall Durie of 5 Cotham Street occurred. He'd been a dentist in St Helens for almost 40 years, one of few such professionals that the town had at that time. Lowly paid folk couldn't afford dentist's prices and many would instead employ the services of a 'lightning tooth extractor', such as William Mitchison, who worked in St Helens Market. In 1906 eight-year-old Joseph Johnson lost his life after Mitchison pulled out two of his teeth but left in their stumps and blood poisoning set in.

For many people dental care didn't exist and the only treatment was extraction. Some could get their local doctor to pull their aching teeth, such as Dr. Edward Casey of 1 Junction Lane, who practised in Sutton from c.1882 to 1909. Writing in the St Helens Star in 1983, 94-year-old Catherine Williams said the Irishman would charge sixpence for each painful extraction, although if a child didn't cry or shout, the tanner would be returned. Catherine added that Dr. Casey had been a character of "unusual rarity" and a "Godsend to the many starved children of those days". Incidentally dentist Robert Durie was related through his wife Eliza to the Griffin family, who for decades kept a furnishers and a photographer's studio on the corner of Westfield Street and

Ormskirk Street. Griffins Victorian portraits of St Helens citizens are regularly auctioned on eBay. Eliza's brother Alfred Griffin had in 1911 opened the first purpose-built cinema in the town, which initially was known as the Electric Theatre before changing its name to the Scala.

The name of controversial conscientious objector Ernest Everitt from Dentons Green Lane cropped up once again on the 10th. Just to recap, the Cowley teacher had infuriated many in St Helens by declaring that he wouldn't stop a German from 'ravishing' his sister and would only teach children to honour King George V as a man and not as a monarch. After refusing to serve in the army in any capacity, Everitt had on April 10th been sent to prison for two years with hard labour.

A London-based group called the No Conscription Fellowship now took up the schoolteacher's cause and published a leaflet attacking his sentence. They made Everitt out to be a martyr, who was 'fighting the old fight for liberty'. Andrew White and Allan Macdonald Laing were members of the group's Liverpool branch and on May 10th they were both sent to prison for a month for distributing the pamphlets. Freedom of speech was severely curtailed during the war under the wide-ranging Defence of the Realm Act, which permitted prosecutions against anyone whose actions might in any way 'jeopardise the success of the operations of His Majesty's forces'.

On the 11th St Helens's Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington was elected vice-president of the Chief Constables Association of England and Wales. In 1928 Ellerington made the national news for several weeks after a dispute with the Council's Watch Committee, which led to a 17-day board of inquiry. On May 12th Stephen Wood of 170 Elephant Lane was prosecuted for not closing his shop on a Thursday afternoon. Religious leaders in St Helens had fought for many years during the second half of the 19th century for the introduction of early closing on Thursdays, concerned about shop staff working very long hours. Saturday then being payday was the worst day of the week, with many assistants employed from 8 – 9am until midnight. By 1916 not that much had changed, apart from children being protected from working late hours, and the introduction of a Thursday half-day holiday. Retailers who chose not to observe it could be fined, as happened to Mr. Wood.

Also on that day at Liverpool Assizes, a private company called the National Film Agency (NFA) brought an action against St Helens Corporation, after their Cinematograph Committee had banned the film 'Five Nights' from being shown at the Hippodrome. This was because the romantic melodrama had a little bit of nudity, although it had been granted a British Board of Film Censors certificate. The Hippodrome had entered into a contract with the NFA in which the music hall agreed to pay £40 to screen Five Nights over five days. Upon being banned by the council from showing the film, the theatre in Corporation Street refused to pay the company the rent money, hence the court case, although the NFA chose to sue the council. After hearing the evidence, the judge decided to reserve judgement in the case. Although a music hall theatre, the Hippodrome had in 1903 become the first place in St Helens to have regular film screenings, which were shown in between performances by the on-stage acts.

Also on the 11th two plumbers were granted exemption from conscription at the St Helens Military Tribunal after the hearing was told that there were hardly any plumbers left in the town and sanitary work was being neglected. Two days later almost £300 was raised in St Helens in a collection towards the town's YMCA hut appeal. This was a national YMCA scheme to provide soldiers with places to rest and enjoy recreation, either at the front or in military camps and railway stations in Britain. The St Helens branch of the YMCA claimed to be the first in the country to pay for a hut in France, although the Germans later destroyed it. A further appeal in St Helens in 1918 to replace the large structure, which included a dormitory and recreation facilities, raised the huge sum of £10,000.

On the 15th May portrait painter Frank C. King, who had been commissioned to paint two portraits of the Beecham family, sued Sir Joseph Beecham for £72 10s. He claimed this was the outstanding

amount, which was disputed by Beecham. At the suggestion of the judge the two parties consulted and agreed on a settlement.

On the 18th of the month George Thompson was sent to an industrial school for 5 years by St Helens magistrates. The 11-year-old had run away from his Liverpool home on ten occasions and kept being found wandering the streets of St Helens, sometimes in the middle of the night. Industrial schools were created to deal with juvenile delinquency and to teach youngsters a trade and were for those yet to commit a serious crime. For those children that had, they were despatched to reformatories, which later became known as approved schools. Also on that day three lads from Lyon Street, near Prescot Road, were given six strokes of the birch for stealing coal from the waggons of a firm called Midland Pottery to start a fire on waste ground.

“For the sake of yourself and the children, you must go to gaol for four months”, said the chairman of the magistrates to Nellie Davies on the 19th. It’s unlikely that Nellie from 65 Water Street agreed with that statement but she had been warned nine times over the past year about keeping her children in a ‘wretched state’. Nellie was separated from her husband and was sharing a single bedroom with her four kids, which Dr. John Donnellan (of Westfield Street) told the court was in an “indescribably bad” condition. Her husband had gone to live in Warrington but he did send her 20 shillings a week, so Nellie did have something (although not a lot) to live on.

With the Easter Rising in Dublin having ended just three weeks earlier, the scale of Irish involvement in the Great War was revealed at an event in Burnley on the 21st. It was stated that 6000 Irishmen from St Helens had gone to fight in France, with over 30,000 from Liverpool. The Irish contribution to WW1 on behalf of the British became an embarrassment to the Irish Free State when it was formed in 1922 and veterans were not well treated.

Earlier that day at 2am British Summertime had been introduced for the first time, following a campaign led by builder William Willett, the great-great-grandfather of Chris Martin of Coldplay. Early one summer morning about 1905 after riding his horse near his Kent home, Willett noticed that many house blinds were still drawn. He considered that daylight was being wasted and so had the idea of daylight saving time. Nothing was done for some years but the outbreak of war made the issue more important because of the need to save coal and boost production.

The Summer Time Act had only been passed on May 17th, so there had to be a rapid education of the public with simple instructions of what to do. The Liverpool Echo ran a lengthy article on the 20th under the headline ‘The Great Advance’, which said: ‘Pa and Ma, and the grown up sons and daughters, should come to an agreement to have an official “putter on” or the clock - and time - may be scandalously ill-treated.’ The Daily Express commented on the challenge of getting young children into bed when the sun was shining, as the kids would suspect an ‘elaborate plot’ to get them to bed early. Of course if Willett had been riding his horse early in the morning in Sutton, he’d have found that the coal miners, railway and industry workers were all up and at work and not lazing in their pits as in Kent!

The week began with a remarkable rescue after Alfred Glover from Charles Street slipped down a steep bank into deep stagnant water. The 4-year-old had been playing with his pal John Ashcroft on Hardshaw Street when the accident happened. John was horrified at what he’d seen and ran home screaming. This attracted the attention of Harry Houghton, who was eating his tea at his parent’s house. Harry was a corporal in the 1st Field Company of the West Lancashire Engineers, who was home on leave from France and he immediately dashed off to the pit.

The soldier dived in and found the little lad lying unconscious in six feet of water among thick mud and he brought him to the bank. Alfred was revived with the help of Margaret Dale of Bramwell Street and despite the minutes spent underwater, was seemingly none the worse for his experience.

On June 19th the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society presented the father of Harry Houghton with a silver medal to pass onto his hero son, who was now back with his unit. Margaret Dale was also handed a certificate of thanks for her part in saving the little boy's life.

Empire Day was celebrated in St Helens on May 24th, with the Mayor Henry Bates of Sutton Hall visiting a number of schools in Sutton. He also went to the Queen's Recreation Ground, where schoolchildren from Rivington Road School performed patriotic songs. Empire Day was celebrated in Britain and her colonies annually between 1904 and 1958, with bonfires often lit and fireworks set off.

On the following day 10-year-old William Wilcock appeared in court charged with stealing a postal packet from the letterbox outside Nutgrove Post Office. The crafty lad from Leicester Street in Thatto Heath had discovered that at certain times of the day the letterbox would become full, allowing him to easily extract a letter. It was decided to prosecute William because the boy had previously been in trouble for stealing coal and he'd also committed thefts at school. His father John was serving in France and his mother Mary had seven children to look after. The magistrates decided that 6 strokes of the birch rod would put him to rights and they also put the boy on probation.

An extraordinary case went before St Helens magistrates on the 26th when Robert Critchley of Victoria Road in Rainhill was charged with persistent cruelty to his wife. In fact as was pointed out in court, he was very lucky not to have been charged with murder. The bricklayer had left for work at 5am one morning after turning on the gas in the couple's bedroom and deliberately closing the window and door. Two hours later his wife woke up with a suffocating feeling and smelling gas. Critchley said he'd only done it to frighten her because on occasions he'd come home from work to find his wife absent and his tea not ready. Mrs. Critchley said they'd only been married 18 months and her husband had treated her badly. After the gas incident she'd left home and was now seeking a separation order. The magistrates granted it and ordered Critchley, who was joining the army in three days time, to pay his wife £1 a week maintenance.

On the 27th it was reported that the St Helens Medical Officer of Health had said that 10,000 children in England and Wales were dying every year from measles. Dr Cates stated that the death rate from measles amongst infants of unskilled labourers was almost four times as great than children from middle and upper classes. This, he claimed, was often because poor people's houses were not kept clean. In 1968 the measles vaccine was introduced and only two (unvaccinated) children have died in the UK during the last 10 years.

On the 29th June 37,000 people visited the Royal Show in Manchester, the annual agricultural show/fair organised by the Royal Agricultural Society. In the dog exhibition King George V won the gun dog championship and St Helens Sensation – owned by barman John Woosey from Claughton Street and dentist George Stronach of Duke Street – easily won the collie championship. Most of the toy dogs on show lay on cushions lined with costly textures and wearing what was described as 'dainty shawls'. Some of the pampered pooches even had their coats perfumed with scents! This luxury was a world away from the slaughter that was taking place in France, with the horrendous Battle of the Somme only two days away.

June 1916

On June 1st St Helens magistrates ordered Mary Murphy from Johnson Street in Parr to be kept in custody for 8 days after attempting suicide. Mary worked as a shop assistant in an Ormskirk Street confectionery shop and had rowed with her boyfriend. The magistrates were told that the 17-year-old had a history of flying into a passion when not getting her own way. After having a 'slight

difference' with her young man, Mary bought some salts of lemon from a chemist's and was caught taking them.

On the following day the Sutton Empire cinema (a.k.a. Sutton Bug) was prosecuted for screening a film after 10:30pm. They were fined 20 shillings, despite explaining that their projector had broken down and the film was being run through by hand, which caused a delay. The wide-ranging Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 imposed limits on the opening hours of places of entertainment and the police were keen to enforce even minor infringements.

Labourer Joseph Rigby was found on the evening of the 3rd lying unconscious on a small piece of waste ground on the corner of Foundry Street and Salisbury Street. The 59-year-old had suffered what was described as 'shocking injuries' to his head and died in Providence Hospital on the following day. Investigations revealed that Rigby had quarrelled with a labourer called John Towey, who lived in the same lodgings and they had decided to fight it out. A charge of manslaughter was laid against 42-year-old Towey but he was later found not guilty at Liverpool Assizes. A doctor told the court that Rigby had been so drunk that he might have simply fallen and fractured his skull on a brick.

Monday 5th was supposed to be Whit Bank Holiday but St Helens' shops and works decided to open as usual due to the war, although the local school kids still enjoyed a day off. Also on the 5th, the author of a pamphlet that championed the cause of conscientious objector Ernest Everitt was revealed. If you recall, he was the teacher from Dentons Green Lane who had refused to serve in the army in any capacity. A pamphlet entitled 'Two Years' Hard Labour for Refusing to Disobey the Dictates of Conscience' had flooded the country and a number of men who had distributed it had been put in prison. The author was Bertrand Russell, who would later become a world-renowned philosopher, historian and Nobel laureate. In 1916 the pacifist was a lecturer at Trinity College Cambridge and the St Helens case was his first rung on the ladder to becoming a household name.

Shocked that people were being sent to prison for distributing his pamphlet, Russell had turned himself into the police and on the 5th appeared at the Mansion House Police Court in London. The Lord Mayor of London presided and spared Russell a prison sentence. Instead he was fined the large sum of £100 and then dismissed from his position at Trinity College. The magistrates might have been influenced by the fact that Russell came from an aristocratic family, with his grandfather having twice served as prime minister.

An inquest on the sad death of William Harper of Rodney Street, near Boundary Road, was held on the 7th June. The 48-year-old widower had cut the gas pipe that went up his bedroom wall and then he lay with his mouth over the open end until death came. On the following day St Helens Council announced that their Lighting Restriction Order had so far saved them the substantial sum of £2000. Street lighting had been curtailed in the town since February, so as not to act as a guide for the feared Zeppelin airships. However the order was also proving to have a financial benefit for the council.

Of the few personal possessions that people owned in those days, watches were one of the most prized. Watch thieves often ended up in court and on June 8th it was Vincent Skepper's turn. The 14-year-old from Spray Street in Dentons Green was another lad who was too clever for his own good. Vincent's father Jesse ran a laundry and the boy worked for his Dad returning washed articles. While in one customer's home, Vincent pinched a silver watch, leaving in its place a cheap, metal one that he'd previously stolen. As soon as questions were being asked about the missing silver watch, the boy abandoned it in a public toilet in Lowe Street. The lad wrapped the timepiece inside a note that he'd written, in which he blamed another boy for the theft. Surprisingly Vincent wasn't badly punished, with he and his father ordered to pay £2 sureties for good behaviour.

On the 9th of June 15-year-old John Hennesey and 17-year-old Harry Bennett from Elephant Lane were admitted to St Helens Hospital after being buried by a fall of the pit roof down Sherdley Colliery. It took two hours to extricate Bennett from the rubble.

During the war strangers who visited St Helens were treated with some suspicion and they needed to be very careful what they said. On the 10th an unnamed man gave two convalescing soldiers a treat by taking them in his motor car to their parents' homes in St Helens. To give the men some time alone with their families, he went for a walk in the town and while strolling down Park Road asked someone a couple of innocent questions about the local chemical works. The cry quickly went up that he was a German spy and what was described as a huge crowd soon assembled and roughly handled the man. Fortunately the police were quickly on the scene and the Good Samaritan was able to explain himself. In those days whenever there was some sort of incident, crowds assembled rapidly, as if out of thin air. In part that was because people then lived in much quieter homes than today, with no TV or radio, and many lived somewhat drab lives. Front doors were regularly left open, so a rumpus out in the street would easily be heard indoors and quickly bring out residents hungry for excitement.

You rarely hear of people being prosecuted for bigamy these days with marriage having gone out of fashion for many and the ease of divorce. However 100 years ago bigamy was a not uncommon charge and punishment could be severe. On June 12th Lewis Pennington, a 27-year-old soldier in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, appeared before St Helens magistrates, having married Annie Owen two months earlier at Holy Trinity church at Parr Mount. Pennington had only met his bride, who lived at 2 Arnold Street in Peasley Cross, the day before the wedding, the pair having conducted their short courtship by letter. Annie was a widow and her brother-in-law had acted as matchmaker, not knowing that his friend was already married. In his defence Pennington told the court that his first wife had not given him a minute's peace during their four years together and they were constantly quarrelling. He also blamed his mother-in-law, as was often the case! At Liverpool Assizes eight days later Pennington was jailed for six months.

A licence transfer sessions for St Helens' pubs was held on the 13th, presided over by Ald. Charles Bishop. The former mayor told the hearing that male publicans should leave their pubs in the hands of their wives while they get work in munitions factories. Two days later an odd excuse for the theft of an £8 tent from the YMCA was offered in court by the solicitor representing 12-year-old John Phillips from Brynn Street: "He is a boy scout, one of the Buffalo patrol, and has wanted to bring the Wild West nearer home." Mr. Garner added that it was "simply love of open-air life" which led to the theft. This romantic explanation didn't impress the magistrates, who ordered the boy to be brought back to earth with six strokes of the birch rod!

Sutton's champion boxer Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street won again on the 14th, after beating Kid Harris in Wigan on points. But he lost three days later in Newcastle to Curley Hughes of Glasgow after a 15 round bout. These days it's unthinkable for Martin Murray to fight twice a week and Ernie also did a full shift down the pit!

The St Helens police were always on the look out for strangers in the town, who might be deserters from the army or avoiding conscription. On the 16th Thomas Hall from Manchester appeared in court charged with being absent from the Army Reserve. The 26-year-old had been working for a circus in St Helens and had told DS Anders when questioned in Park Road that the army had twice rejected him. Hall's claim that his discharge papers had been destroyed didn't impress the police and he later admitted that he'd been telling lies. The circus man was fined 40 shillings by the magistrates and handed over to the Army.

Also on the 16th Walter Richards appeared in court in St Helens summoned for knocking down a street lamp in Chancery Lane, Parr. The motor lorry driver worked for a Bolton tanner's and had

tried to manoeuvre his waggon between a tram and a gas lamp. He didn't make it and his large load caught the lamp breaking it into three pieces. Richards' firm was ordered to pay £6 damages.

The death on June 5th of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, when the ship on which he was a passenger struck a German mine, had been a big blow to the country. The war hero is remembered today for the 'Your Country Needs You' posters more than anything else. On the 18th a special memorial service for Kitchener was held at St Helens Parish Church, which was attended by a large congregation. The vicar, Rev. Baines, said Kitchener had received the "eulogy of the great and the gratitude of an empire". It's hard to imagine such a service for a politician or military leader taking place in St Helens today.

On the 19th John Murran and Michael Toher, described as Irish labourers, appeared in court after collecting 14s 11d from drinkers at the Park Road Inn. The pair told Constable Moore that the money was to pay for a solicitor for a friend, who was facing a charge of manslaughter. However the prosecution claimed that the collection was really for beer money and the Bench decided to make an example of the pair, jailing them for three months. Sentences for Irish people were often more severe than for non-Irish.

On the 21st June there was more evidence of the merit of having bobbies on the beat, after Constable Rigby nabbed William Hartley. The labourer from Accrington wanted a new pair of boots and he thought that at 1:40am he could safely break into a boot shop in Bridge Street and help himself to a pair. However in those days the street bobbies were never far away and after PC Rigby heard the sound of breaking glass, Hartley was soon having his collar felt. Within hours the bungling burglar was in court, where he complained to the bench that the constable hadn't allowed him time to get hold of a pair of boots!

Two days later the inquest was held on Alfred Hardy of Fisher Street in Sutton, who had died from apoplexy down Bold Colliery. The 63-year-old had worked down the pit for 20 years and for much of that time had also run the Boilermaker's in Hoghton Road. His son Billy later described his father as a "victim of his own liquor, being a drunkard ever since I could remember him, and a great bookie and gambler". Writing in his autobiography, Billy Hardy said he himself had been drinking from the age of five and wouldn't go to bed in the Boilermaker's without a glass of beer. After his youthful experiences, it's not surprising that Billy preached against the evils of drink, first at the Methodist Chapel in Herbert Street, before founding the Emmanuel Mission in Helena Road.

On the 21st June a lengthy Liverpool Echo special report on women and secrets was published, which repudiated the reputation of females as being gossips. It stated that the war had shown that ladies were just as capable of keeping secrets as men, although women secretaries were still excluded from Cabinet meetings. Most of the censors in Liverpool were women - who would also have censored St Helens mail - who the report said: "have given every satisfaction".

On the 22nd June the owners of Berrey's mattress and bedding factory at the corner of Tontine Street and Naylor Street were counting the cost of an overnight fire. The blaze gutted their works and badly damaged offices and an adjacent house. The damage was estimated at costing around £2500 - a lot of money in those days. On the following day four-year-old Richard Sharrock from Hoole Bank Street drowned in the St Helens Canal. Such accidents in the town's many waterways were very common a century ago.

Also on the 23rd, thirty men appeared in court charged with gambling after a big police raid in Blackbrook on the previous Sunday. They were caught playing pitch-and-toss under a railway bridge. This is a game in which the player who throws a coin closest to a mark gets to toss all the players' coins, winning those that land heads up. These days it would be considered harmless fun but 100 years ago catching those engaged in pitch-and-toss was a police priority. Although the

Blackbrook event was on a large scale with 70 men involved and they were also gambling large sums. Twenty of the men were from Haydock and most were fined £1, the best part of a week's wage. The magistrates described pitch-and-toss as a "very mischievous practice" that had to be stopped.

On the 29th June 17-year-old Ralph Ashcroft of 8 Graces Square in Sutton was sent to prison for three months for repeatedly stealing bikes. One of his thefts was a bicycle belonging to Robert Baxter of Burtonwood, which had been left in a shed at Bold Colliery. Ashcroft flogged the bike for 10 shillings, while adopting the name of another youth employed at the pit. The police visited the latter but the buyer of the stolen bike exonerated him. Ashcroft had two previous convictions for cycle theft and had been discharged from the 3rd South Lancashire Regiment for being under age. Graces Square, where Ashcroft lived, had been built adjacent to what had been Sutton Workhouse, with Sherdley Primary School and its playing fields now occupying the site.

Also on that day Bertrand Russell appeared at London's Guild Hall to appeal against his £100 fine for writing a leaflet attacking the prison sentence given to conscientious objector Ernest Everitt. He was the Cowley schoolteacher from Dentons Green Lane who had been given two years hard labour for refusing to serve in the army. Russell's appeal was dismissed with the Bench not giving a reason. The man who would later become a world-renowned philosopher, historian and Nobel laureate, was from a wealthy, noble family but refused to pay the fine, as he preferred to go prison. However Cambridge Police foiled his plan to become a martyr for the conscientious objector cause. They raised the cash by confiscating Russell's valuable book collection and then auctioned them off. However Russell's pals also foiled the police by buying the books back for their friend at the auction!

July 1916

On July 3rd 47-year old Richard Kenyon of Pasture Lane in Rainford died in St Helens Hospital from injuries received in a cart accident in Scholes Lane. Although the motor car would soon be causing far more deaths, horse-drawn vehicles could also be killers. This was often as a consequence of 'furious' riding, as it was often described. However in Kenyon's case he was run over by his own cart, after a train startled his horse while passing over Thatto Heath railway bridge. Kenyon was thrown to the ground and a party of Boy Scouts took him on an improvised stretcher to Dr. Andrew Graham's surgery, who referred him to the hospital. Also on the 3rd July 1916, 34-year-old Edward Davies from Tickle Street in Parr died in St Helens Hospital from injuries received while working down Bold Colliery.

Despite the dangers of working down coal mines, some workers still took great risks. John Ford of Derbyshire Hill Road was fined 40 shillings in court on the 3rd for sleeping down Ashton's Green Colliery. It wasn't just the fact that he had been snoozing when he should have been working, but the 18-year-old had decided to lie down on a box by the side of a motion brow, where coal boxes travelled. If Ford had rolled off in his sleep onto the waggon way, he would almost certainly have been killed.

On July 4th a shocking tragedy took place in Crank, when 19-year-old James Appleton of Moss Lane Farm accidentally killed two-year-old Mary Lyon. The farmer's son was using a repeater rifle to scare off birds in his Dad's garden and fired at a sparrow on a thick 7-foot high hedge. Unfortunately Joseph Houlton and his two grandchildren were walking down old Moss Lane on the other side of the hedge and the bullet meant for the sparrow struck the toddler in the neck. The shocked Appleton immediately got on his bike and furiously pedalled to Rainford for a doctor. However little Mary - who was the daughter of Crank wheelwright Samuel Lyon - was dead before medical help could arrive. Guns were easy to obtain a century ago if you had the cash, with the only

regulation being the need to get a licence from the post office, as you would for a dog. Amazingly during the 1880s, a revolver was a prize in a fundraising raffle in aid of St. Anne's church in Sutton!

On the following day at the monthly meeting of St Helens Education Committee, Councillor Glynn moved a resolution to exempt male teachers from military service, when so recommended by their managers. He warned of "dangerous consequences", in terms of discipline and efficiency, if there were no men in the classroom, citing a "great wave of juvenile crime" throughout the country. Another councillor said 45% of eligible male teachers had already left the town to serve in the army. However, only four members supported the resolution, with councillors stating that the needs of the country had to be put first. The rise in juvenile delinquency was probably more to do with the absence of many fathers, rather than teachers.

Also on the 5th at a St Helens Town Council meeting, councillors voted to increase the cost of electric lighting by 10%, the second such increase in 3 months, caused by an increase in the cost of coal. St Helens Corporation generated and distributed the electricity themselves, which helped to keep the price down. However they were not immune from inflation, which more than doubled between 1914 and 1920. Also on that day council members were among a large crowd that assembled in front of the Town Hall to watch Corporal Peter Wood be presented with the Military Medal by the Mayor of St Helens. The Royal Engineer from Campbell Street had earned the honour by repairing a telegraph cable while under heavy fire at St. Eloi near Ypres. The crowd was entertained by the band of the East Lancashire Royal Engineers, which played a number of selections. Understandably the council liked to show off its heroes to boost patriotism and demonstrate that the war wasn't all bad news.

On the 6th Thomas McDermott of Back Blackbrook Road was sent to prison for 6 months with hard labour for obtaining money from the War Office by false pretences - although the offence was actually committed by his wife. She had continued to draw a separation allowance that was awarded to the wives of soldiers, long after her husband had been discharged from the army as medically unfit. Not only were husbands responsible for the debts of their spouses but they also could in certain circumstances be held accountable for their crimes.

On the 7th of the month it was reported that news had reached St Helens that the Pals regiment had in the recent fighting suffered just under 100 casualties. Fighting of a different kind took place on the following day, when Sutton's champion boxer Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street won the Pitmen's Bantamweight Championship of Great Britain, stopping Billy Welch in the 17th round of a 20 round bout.

'Boys will be boys' is the theme of the first of this week's stories, which concerns 13-year-old William Cowley of Peckers Hill Road and 11-year-old James Robinson of Fenney's Lane. One Sunday afternoon the two lads were playing with a mate near Allen Barton's Providence Foundry at St Helens Junction when they spotted a hole in one of the walls. They couldn't resist climbing into the building, where they played around with lathes and an electric motor and took some dies in order to mark their names. The Sutton boys clearly had a fun time but July 12th was their day of retribution when the pair appeared in court, charged with damaging the machinery and stealing dies. William and James - both sons of mineworkers - were treated somewhat leniently and weren't birched, as many mischievous lads were at that time. Instead the boys were both fined five shillings and put on probation and told that they were lucky not to have electrocuted themselves.

On the following day Ralph Ashcroft appeared in court charged with being an absentee from the army. The labourer from Manor Street in Peasley Cross told DS Anders upon being arrested that he'd "never received any justice in this country" and so wasn't prepared to fight for any king. In court he was advised to change his attitude when he got into the army or he would likely be shot or

put in prison. Ashcroft replied: "I will be shot in cold blood before I will go and be a soldier". He was fined 5 guineas and handed over to a military escort.

During the war years many of the people of St Helens busied themselves raising funds for the Red Cross, as well as 'comforts' for the troops, such as tobacco, pipes, etc. The cash came through collections and donations, as well as the holding of events. On July 13th 1916 a huge fête was held in Victoria Park to raise comfort funds, attended by 25,000 people. The children of the town's infants and junior schools took part in many races and competitions and the band of the East Lancashire Royal Engineers entertained the crowd.

On the 17th there was another example of foreigners being treated with suspicion during the war years, when George Leitanch appeared in St Helens Police Court. PC Ballantyne had arrested the Polish collier on the previous day, after he'd travelled from his home in Manchester to visit his brother in St Helens. Leitanch was remanded in custody for enquiries to be made, after initially stating that he couldn't speak English and not possessing registration documents.

At the Liverpool County Tribunal on the 17th an unnamed St Helens farmer appealed against his son being sent to war, claiming he was indispensable in the gathering in of the crops. The tribunal had heard many similar claims and dismissed the appeal, with a military representative at the hearing promising to provide someone to help the farmer bring in his harvest. As in WW2, many so-called land girls helped out in the fields.

Also on that day Peter Twist, the caretaker of Thatto Heath Labour Club, was charged in court with permitting treating. He was accused with breaching the extraordinary 'No Treating' order within the Defence of the Realm Act, which from October 1915 had banned people from buying someone else a drink. This along with greatly reduced pub opening hours was designed chiefly to reduce alcohol consumption. Constable Garrett had gone undercover in the Elephant Lane club and taken out a membership. Over several days he witnessed a number of rule irregularities and incidents of treating, including the winner of a raffle buying drinks for his friends. For permitting these offences, Twist was fined £2, which was around ten days pay.

This was not an isolated case of the depleted St Helens police force going undercover during the war years for fairly frivolous reasons. My favourite example occurred in May 1915 when two policemen joined Ann Dugdale's dancing school in Westfield Street, as they had suspicions that it was really a place of entertainment. If it was, the venue required a music and dancing licence, unlike bona fide dancing schools, which were exempt. A number of undercover visits were made by these bobbies to determine whether or not dancing tuition was being offered. PC O'Donnell enjoyed himself dancing the afternoon away in the line of duty on three separate occasions in order to gather evidence!

A century ago large numbers of people could assemble in St Helens with remarkable rapidity, as word quickly spread that something exciting was on the go. After all there was no TV and life on Sundays and weekday evenings must at times have been rather dull! It might be a fight, a suspected spy caught on the street or some nefarious activity that attracted a crowd. In April 1899 it was reported that as many as 1000 people had quickly assembled in Peasley Cross to challenge someone who had insulted a priest.

Only 50 people were involved in the incident that took place on the evening of July 18th 1916 but it was still quite a remarkable event. Word had got round that free timber was available from a builder's shed near Glasgow Street in St Helens. So the neighbouring men, women and children made a beeline for the shed completely stripping it of timber. They tore up floorboards and removed other wood to the value of £10, seemingly oblivious to the illegality of what they were

doing. A lone police sergeant went for easy targets, arresting three women and three children, who four days later were facing the music in court.

Also on the 18th ten-year-old Alice Richards of Walkers Lane appeared in court charged with stealing an umbrella from the cloakroom of the new C. of E. Mission Room in Sutton Manor. Chief Constable Ellerington told the magistrates that Alice and her siblings were not under 'proper control', as their father was fighting in France and her mother was occupied at the local blue works. The girl was put on probation for three years and her mother ordered to pay 5 shillings costs. Brook Works at Micklehead, near Lea Green, made the so-called 'dolly blue' for over 100 years. It was used when washing white fabrics to compensate for a slight colour cast and give clothes a whiter look. On that same day it was reported that the St Helens Pals had suffered as many as 180 casualties since the Somme offensive had begun on the 1st. However this figure only included dead and injured up to the 11th July and a complete list had yet to be issued.

On the 20th the identity of the phantom coal thief of Pythian Street was revealed in court. Coalman William Ball was fed up with coal being nicked from his yard with 1½ tons having gone walk-about over the past five weeks. So he decided to keep watch on his yard and late one night saw 11-year-old Hannah Glynn climb over his wall and fill her pinafore with coal. Upon being challenged by the coal man, the girl claimed that she was simply looking for a ball, which had gone into his yard. In court it was suggested that Hannah's mother, the 33-year-old wife of a chemical worker, had trumped up that excuse for her young daughter. In fact Isabel Glynn was blamed for the whole thing, with the magistrates saying that they would have fined her but didn't have enough evidence. It's unlikely that little Hannah was solely responsible for all the coal thefts but she was the one who received a criminal conviction and whose name got in the papers. It wasn't until 1933 that the press were banned from reporting the identity of children involved in court cases.

Two days later Sutton's champion boxer Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street was back in action, this time in Newcastle in front of a large crowd, stopping Munroe Grainger in the 7th round.

A nice ceremony took place on the 24th July when 14-year-old Edith Parr from Higher Parr Street was honoured for rescuing her little niece. A fire had occurred at the house of Edith's older sister in Corporation Street. While the fire brigade were extinguishing the flames, Edith went upstairs through dense smoke to bring the little girl down from a bedroom. The Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society presented a certificate and postal order for 15 shillings to brave Edith, with Chief Constable Ellerington stating that she had undoubtedly saved her niece's life. Surprisingly postal orders are said to be still popular today, despite the rise of credit cards and electronic transfers. During WWI postal orders were declared legal tender to save on paper and so could be used to buy goods in shops.

It's rare these days for a defendant to appear in court charged with 'working a horse in an unfit state'. In an era when farm work and much local transport was horse driven, it used to be common for individuals to be prosecuted for not looking after their working animals properly. On July 25th 1916 Gregory Verity was fined 10 shillings in St Helens Police Court after Sgt. Butler had told the magistrates that he'd seen Verity's horse staggering as if in great pain. The policeman had also found wounds on the animal's back and shoulder underneath its harness.

The 68-year-old farmer from Rainhill Stoops should have known better, having in 1896 won a best-managed farm award at the Royal Lancashire Show. Typically Verity denied the offence as the very suggestion of mistreating a working animal was as anathema to most farmers and tradesmen as suggesting they'd abused their children. In addition there was the cost of the horse, which was a valuable asset. In Charles Forman's book *Industrial Town*, the head of Daglish's Foundry in St Helens was quoted as telling a young employee: "I say, lad, you'd better look after that horse, it costs money. I can get men for nothing."

Also in court on the 25th was William Gorse, who was accused of failing to report for military service. Chief Constable Ellerington told the bench that Gorse had “run about from lodging house to lodging house and changed his work so frequently that the military authorities were unable to trace him”. The 39-year-old Gorse, who was now living in Raglan Street, was fined £3.

On the 27th July Arthur Harcombe of Grafton Street, off Knowsley Road, fractured his skull while cycling down Crank Hill. The 19-year-old would have passed the Crank Hotel near Crank Station and on the following day it was announced that Greenall Whitley had sold it to Arthur Pilkington. The owner of Windle Hall and chairman of the glass firm announced that he planned to convert the hotel into a private residence for one of his estate staff. An annual ploughing competition used to be held on land in between Crank Station and Rainford Hall, followed by a dinner at the Crank Hotel, where the winners' prizes were dished out. Such competitions were regularly held over the rural parts of St Helens during the 19th century – especially in Bold and Sutton – and still take place in other parts of the country. Not only did they encourage good practice (being a measure of quality rather than speed) but the ploughmen could also win a £5 prize, which was more than three weeks wages.

Soldiers given a few days home leave were, of course, fully entitled to enjoy themselves after their experiences in the war, although some would inevitably drink too much and end up in court. Most received a fine, such as Edward Ryan, who on the 29th was ordered to pay 15 shillings for being drunk and damaging a sergeant's uniform. However his pal Richard Jackson, from the same battalion was sent to prison for three months for disorderly conduct and assaulting a constable. Jackson was described in the St Helens Police Court as being very violent and having committed twenty offences against military discipline in just three weeks.

On the 31st July the names of 28 St Helens soldiers who had recently been killed overseas were published. Also on that day Peter Logan of Langtree Street was ordered to be given 6 strokes of the birch for shop-breaking. The 13-year-old had broken a window at the rear of Tom Middlehurst's shop in Higher Parr Street and then stolen cigarettes and chocolates. The lad had previously been convicted and put on probation, which clearly hadn't worked, so a good beating was now seen as the solution. Tom Middlehurst was somewhat of a controversial character, who regularly appeared in court, either as prosecutor or defendant. The confectioner – who also owned shops in Church Street and Ormskirk Street – had been fined in April 1916 for repeatedly keeping his young son off school in order to sell sweets at a cinema. Middlehurst had also been in court during May for breaking gaming laws, with up to 60 boys being in his shop on one day, putting money into a 'clown' machine. Then again in October he was convicted for selling food unfit for human consumption. Sweets were being sold with the legs of flies stuck to them!

August 1916

The new month began tragically for two St Helens families who both had to bear the heartbreak of losing a son. Joseph Rimmer of St Paul Street, near Boundary Road, died in St Helens Hospital from the severe internal injuries that he'd received while working at Pilkingtons. A large iron planer had crushed the 14-year-old lad after he'd broken the company's rules by going behind the machine to wash his hands. On the same day 9-year-old Eli Richards from Pocket Nook Street was playing with a dog by the side of the St Helens Canal and accidentally rolled off the path into the water and drowned. A boy called Daniel Holland from Corporation Street was commended at Eli's inquest for valiantly attempting a rescue.

Also on the 1st, the St Helens Newspaper described how a 'rather serious railway mishap' had occurred at Clock Face Colliery sidings, which had blocked the St Helens to Widnes line for two hours. An engine had run off the line and turned over on its side, although the engine driver and

fireman were uninjured, having leapt to safety before the loco came to grief. A large breakdown crane had to be brought in to clear the line.

On August 4th Thomas Partridge of Spray Street in Dentons Green appeared in court charged with embezzling £57 from the Hearts of Oak Life and General Assurance Company. The average pay then was £90 per year, so the stolen cash was a fair sum. Partridge was the insurance company's superintendent in St Helens, who collected and banked all their customers' payments. After getting into debt, Partridge helped himself to some of the friendly society's funds, seemingly intending to make up the amount at a future date. The insurance man told the magistrates that he was now able to repay the company's cash, so was only given a £5 fine. Having only recently got married, it was Partridge's new wife who had raised the missing money – not an ideal way to begin married life!

Also on the 4th egg merchant John Byrne from Earlestown was run over and killed by his own motor van. The 43-year-old's engine had stalled while in Junction Lane in Sutton, so he got out of his van to turn the starter handle. However the egg man had left his vehicle in gear and when the engine was re-started, the van shot forward with the wheels going over his head and neck. One hundred years ago few people in St Helens owned motor vehicles, which then cost more than a house. However an increasing number of business owners were being attracted to them.

On the following day what the St Helens Newspaper described as a 'shocking accident' occurred on the old Sutton Glassworks site in Lancots Lane. Repairs were being carried out to a steam crane – which was being hoisted by a second crane – when it suddenly toppled over onto Harold Naylor, causing him fatal injuries of a 'shocking character'. The 16-year-old had lived with his parents James and Elizabeth at their grocer's / off-licence at 51 Waterdale Crescent. The collapsing crane also injured 42-year-old William Chadwick, who had been working for over 15 hours when the accident occurred. At Naylor's inquest Chadwick, from Appleton Street, told the coroner that he hadn't felt fatigued in any way, having previously worked even longer shifts.

Also on the 5th Vincent Fildes of Newmarket Place in St Helens appeared in court charged with stealing two pairs of boots from his grandmother. This wasn't his first conviction as three months earlier the 12-year-old had been given 6 strokes of the birch for stealing £8. As physical punishment hadn't stopped the lad from thieving, the magistrates decided to send him to a reformatory for five years. Reformatories didn't always reform young offenders – indeed placing them with other junior criminals meant such places could act as 'schools for crime', as the Daily Mail had dubbed them in 1911.

After he left the reformatory Fildes served quite a number of prison sentences and in court in 1925 – after being caught stealing in a Southport hotel – it was stated that the 21-year-old had 11 previous convictions. Remarkably these included four separate, successive convictions within a three-year period for stealing a bicycle. On three of the occasions he was sentenced to 6 months in prison for bike stealing and twice came out of jail and nicked another!

Then in July 1926 in Rochdale Fildes was sent to prison for 12 months after dressing up as a clergyman and collecting cash. A year later Fildes was imprisoned for 3 years after again posing as a clergyman, this time in Preston. By now he'd acquired a scar down one cheek, probably from his time in jail. This wouldn't have helped his impersonations, as you don't come across all that many 22-year-old scar-faced vicars! Vincent Fildes certainly didn't graduate from the school for crime with any honours or brains!

In the St Helens Newspaper on August 8th it was reported that the St Helens War Association had in the 7 days up to the 5th, despatched 510 parcels of 'comforts' to soldiers in various Lancashire regiments involved in the war. These comforts usually involved cigarettes, tobacco, pipes and clothes such as thick socks – important when having to spend time in cold, wet trenches. The paper

also printed an interview with Sutton boxer Ernie Proudlove, in which he claimed to have fought 80 bouts, won 60 and never been knocked out.

A remarkable summer camp run by Pilkingtons was outlined in the Liverpool press on the 10th. One hundred and fifty boys employed at the glass firm, most of them orphans, were spending a few days in the fresh air in Grange Park learning new skills. It was part of a scheme to give employment and training to vulnerable lads, who had come to St Helens from all over the country. They lived in a hostel in Ravenhead, which contained a gym, baths and recreational rooms. The boys had to adhere to certain rules, one of which required them to join the Boy Scouts.

The article described how a brass band had recently been formed, with Pilks employing a team of specialists to look after and guide the lads. A century ago the minimum working age was 12 and although there were laws about the education, meal times and night hours of working children, Pilkington's benevolence went much further than other firms and was well ahead of its time.

On the 10th August the tragic tale of Rachel Makin of Milton Street in Sutton Manor was outlined at her inquest. On July 7th the 36-year-old had given birth to a son called Eric and had subsequently become weak and depressed. The Sunday school teacher also complained of severe pains in her head but her symptoms weren't thought important enough to call a doctor. Neighbours were instead asked by her husband Benjamin to keep an eye on Rachel while he was working down the pit.

On August 8th after returning home from work, Benjamin was told that his wife had been behaving strangely all day. While he was in the tub washing the pit grime off his body, Rachel slipped out of the house cradling her month-old baby. She was seen walking down Bell Lane in the direction of Rainhill and so searches were organised. Eventually about eight o'clock, little Eric was found safe and well crying on the banks of a large pond in a field known locally as Gregsons. When Benjamin arrived on the scene he immediately jumped into the water but was unable to find any trace of his missing wife. However on the following day Sergeant Butler and his constables dragged the pond and recovered Rachel Makin's lifeless body.

There was then little support for new mothers and little understanding of post-natal depression, as we now know it, apart from the recognition that childbirth could cause 'temporary insanity'. We will never know for certain whether Rachel intended to drown her baby, along with herself, but wasn't able to go through with it. I was first alerted to this tragic tale some years ago by the grandson of little Eric, who must have reflected on how Rachel's likely change of mind had also given life to him as well as his grandfather.

Also on the 10th, 34-year-old Peter Twist of Cairne Street in Thatto Heath successfully appealed against a decision by the St Helens Tribunal not to grant him exemption from military service. The hearing in Liverpool was told that Twist had a widowed mother and all of his six brothers were serving in the army. That same day there was a large attendance for a military wedding at St Nicholas Church in Sutton, when Ada Royle married Lieutenant West of Brook House. Ada was the daughter of Samuel Royle, the well-known Sutton grocer and councillor, who then lived at Mill Lodge in Mill Lane.

On the 11th Mary Greenall of Bronte Street, off Rivington Road, was sent to prison for a month with hard labour for stealing from shops and market stalls. The 45-year-old wife of a glass blower was said to have brought up a 'large and respectable' family but had recently 'given way to drink'. The stolen items were pawned, with the proceeds spent on booze and the police found 60 pawn tickets inside her home. Like post-natal depression, alcoholism was barely understood a century ago and no help was available for Mary, just hard labour and shame.

Sisterly love was in short supply on August 15th when Sarah Ashton appeared in court in St Helens charged with theft. The 16-year-old miner's daughter from Parr was accused of stealing 13 shillings from the bedroom of her married sister and then spending the money on a day trip to New Brighton for herself and a friend. The bench were lenient and bound Sarah over for three years.

Also on the 15th four youths from Dentons Green were in court charged with breaking into the pavilion of a rifle club at Littler's field and causing damage worth £5. Fred Howard, John Pennington, Arthur Perry and W. H. Twist had smashed the place up, broken doors and windows and used guns stored in the club to shoot 100 yards across the road. The boys claimed that the pavilion had been ransacked before they got there but their story was dismissed and they were each fined 35 shillings.

County Coroner Sam Brighthouse presided over inquests in St Helens for 55 years and used to refer to winter as the "burning season" for children. This was because of the countless deaths of youngsters from poorly guarded house fires, which set them alight. He might well have referred to summer as the drowning season, with an increased number of kids losing their lives in St Helens's many waterways, with far more ponds, pits and reservoirs in the past than today. On the 16th August 9-year-old Joseph Gorman of Raglan Street drowned in a pool of water on the sandbank at Ravenhead, while sailing a piece of wood. The pool was over 100 yards from the road and Joseph and his two pals were trespassing.

Juvenile delinquency and what these days we call anti-social behaviour by St Helens' youngsters seems to have worsened as the war progressed. On August 17th the town's magistrates heard a total of 31 charges against children, of which three were levelled against Agnes Burns. She was another kid who was far too clever for her own good! One of Agnes's regular stunts was to burst into tears on the street. When passers-by asked her what the matter was, the 11-year-old would tell them that she'd lost a tanner. Soon the girl would have sixpence collected from the passing Good Samaritans who felt sorry for her, which Agnes then spent at the pictures!

The girl from Fern Street (near North Road) had also conned shopkeepers out of copper change and had burgled a shop in Duke Street, stealing a few articles. On July 18th Agnes had gone into a shop in Peter Street, near Kirkland Street, and told the assistant that a woman on a market stall had sent her to pick up a basket of strawberries. Agnes claimed that this lady would pay for the strawberries later but after leaving the shop she ate them all!

After being told by the magistrates that she was being sent to an industrial school, Agnes left the courtroom in tears. These had been created to deal with juvenile delinquency and to teach youngsters a trade and were for those yet to commit a serious crime. They were strict places with the children usually rising at 6am and going to bed at 7pm. Agnes appeared in court exactly two years to the day after her father Peter had been sent to prison for 6 months for neglecting his family. His wife – also called Agnes – and his seven children had been forced to collect and sell firewood to get by. So little Agnes, who appeared to be quite bright, really didn't stand much of a chance in life.

What was described as the saddest bathing tragedy to have occurred in Blackpool for some years occurred on the 17th, when 23-year-old Ellen 'Nellie' Lyon of Lugsmore Lane and 25-year-old Ethel Broughton from Corporation Street perished in the sea. The St Helens pair were in a party who were bathing on the North Shore near Uncle Tom's cabin when they got into difficulties, cut off by the incoming tide. Heroic rescues were made by a number of people, with thousands of holidaymakers witnessing the drama from the cliffs above, cheering whenever someone in the group was brought to safety. Despite over an hour trying to resuscitate schoolteacher Nellie and wool shop manageress Ethel (who wasn't able to swim), both women were declared dead.

The death of 79-year-old Colonel James McTear occurred on the 19th August. Not only did he run Sutton's Copper Rolling Mill for many years but he also was a longstanding officer in the reserves and served as a magistrate on the St Helens bench for 19 years. McTear died at his Prescot home but was buried at St Nicholas Church in Sutton.

As previously noted in this feature, St Helens was a prohibited area during the war and there were strict rules about foreigners entering the town. Quite a few 'aliens' got locked up after innocently calling at the police station or town hall to enquire about registering. It was a bit of a Catch 22 situation. They couldn't register without entering the prohibited area but by doing so they broke the law! If the foreigners didn't possess all the necessary paperwork, the police would quickly have them in a cell.

The rules applied to all, even 'friendly' nationalities as Matthew Hannon from Liverpool Road discovered. He was an Irishman who in 1894 had emigrated to the United States, where he married and became a naturalised American. The labourer had subsequently 'quarrelled' with his wife (his term) and left for England in 1910 but had now decided to return to the States. Hannon had paid his passage back to America but when his paperwork for the trip was checked, it was discovered that he'd failed to register as an alien while living in St Helens. On August 22nd Hannon appeared in court but was treated leniently and only fined £2 – just over a week's wages for most.

The war had only been running for two years but the slaughter had already been so high that memorials to the dead were being planned. On the 22nd it was announced that on September 9th Lord Derby would unveil a war memorial in Prescot. The monument would be situated in the centre of Church Street and West Street and paid for by Cllr. Lucas, the chairman of Prescot Urban District Council.

On the 23rd the London newspaper The Era – which featured provincial drama listings – stated that Sandy Powell was one of a number of acts appearing at the Hippodrome theatre in St Helens (the Dandy Mascots were another). The 16-year-old would later become a massive radio star with the catchphrase 'Can You Hear Me Mother'? He was born Albert Arthur Powell in Rotherham and during the comic's early music hall days would usually wear a kilt in the style of a Scottish comedian. Once when doing radio work Powell dropped his script onto the studio floor. While he rearranged the pages, he said 'Can You Hear Me Mother' into the microphone, as his mother was profoundly deaf. This rapidly became Sandy's catchphrase.

Today we are fortunate to have a health service that's free at the point of use and which provides effective treatments for many conditions, as well as offering pain management. It wasn't like that 100 years ago and despite suicide being illegal, far more sick people chose to end their suffering by taking their lives. John Muxlow's sad story was told at his inquest held on the 23rd. The bricksetter's labourer had endured trouble with his ears for 18 months and hadn't worked for over 6 months. In July Muxlow had had an operation at the Liverpool Eye and Ear Infirmary near Mount Pleasant and had been in considerable pain ever since. The 30-year-old was staying at his sister's house in Milk Street in St Helens and on August 21st was found dead sitting in a rocking chair in front of a fireplace with a gas pipe in his mouth. A letter was discovered on a table, which read:

"Dear Sister, I want you to try and forget what I have done, and also Annie. I have asked God to forgive me, which I know He will, so good night and God bless you, from your broken-hearted brother. I can't stand this pain any longer. My head is on fire. This is sixteen nights and never one hour of sleep. My head is gone altogether. I have tried to bear it, but I can't."

On the 24th August Bertram Brewis from Windle resigned as clerk to the St Helens Police Court, having been appointed 25 years earlier at the age of just 23. The Brewis family had been officials in local affairs for many years with Bertram's Dad Thomas having been made Town Clerk in 1873 and

later the magistrates' clerk, with Bertram's younger brother Arthur the clerk at Prescott. These were well-paid part-time positions, earning up to 10 times the average wage and the Brewis's also ran their own legal practice, so were worth a bob or two!

On the 29th a second St Helens teacher appeared in court as a conscientious objector. Ernest Everett from Dentons Green Lane had become nationally celebrated amongst pacifists after being given two years hard labour for 'refusing to disobey the dictates of conscience', as Everett's champion Bertrand Russell had put it. Now Edgar Marshall was in front of the magistrates, presenting a hopeless case for not being sent to France.

In July the 30-year-old from Rivington Road had been granted non-combative status – which usually meant serving as a stretcher-bearer or labourer. However this was unacceptable to Marshall, who told the bench that the Military Service Act had not been passed by a freely elected parliament, so he didn't feel obliged to join the army in any capacity. Presenting an intellectual argument to the powers-that-be never worked and the magistrates fined Marshall £5 (about 3 weeks average wage) and handed him over to a military escort. Later Marshall sent letters to the St Helens recruiting officer in which he called the war pre-meditated murder and accused the Government of "exercising tyranny over the people and attempting to enslave them."

Many police officers went to fight in France leaving the force back in St Helens depleted in numbers. So it seems odd that they should have decided that catching apple thieves was a priority. However Sergeant Heaton clearly felt that apples didn't grow on trees, so he went on surveillance within the garden of a house in Mill Lane in Sutton. In the early hours the fruits of his labours were rewarded when William Cunliffe was caught red handed, having damaged a fence to get into the garden. On the 30th August the 18-year-old haulage hand appeared in court and was fined 13 shillings and William Carter and Albert Flanders – who'd been pinched for nicking apples in Elton Head Road – were both fined 15 shillings.

A century ago you were largely free to demonstrate discrimination in job advertisements. On August 31st, the Gambles – one of the most celebrated families in St Helens – advertised for a parlour maid. The young woman needed to be Protestant, which usually meant 'No Irish need apply'. This was very common, despite the fact that domestic help was hard to find during the war, with much better money being earned by girls and women in the munitions factories.

September 1916

On the 1st day of September James O'Brien – who was described as an old man with 80 convictions to his name – was sent to prison for 3 months having been found loitering in St Helens Market with the intention of stealing. On the following day another seemingly unrelated James O'Brien was facing the music in a Barrow courthouse, having been caught out in a lodging house in the town. The 37-year-old married man had left his home in St Helens to spend a few days with his 21-year-old girlfriend Annie Little. The pair had gone with their friends Lance Holroyd (36) and Edith Mees (20), with both couples claiming to be man and wife. Holroyd was a tram conductor from Blackbrook and was also married with a child.

It might be thought that the foursome's activities were more in breach of the law of the landlady, rather than the law of the land. However anyone staying in a lodging house during the war had to complete a detailed registration form and it was unlawful to give inaccurate information. O'Brien was fined £2 and his young lady Annie Little was ordered to return to her parents in St Helens and be bound over to be of good behaviour for 6 months. The same applied to her friend Edith, although her boyfriend Lance Holroyd was remanded in custody for a few days, while enquiries were made into his status under the Military Service Act. However the real punishment for the

quartet would have awaited them back in St Helens. Just what the men's wives and the girls' fathers said to them when they finally returned home from their Furness love-in hasn't been recorded!

On September 4th the Liverpool Echo sang the praises of 21-year-old Jack Bamber from Peasley Cross, who on the previous Saturday had scored a goal in Liverpool FC's season-opening victory over Bolton. That same day John Seddon, the licensee of the Royal Arms in Traverse Street in Parr, was fined £5 for allowing treating on his premises, with four of his customers fined between 5 and 20 shillings. Buying someone a drink had been made illegal in October 1915 as part of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in order to cut down on drinking. Mrs Johnson of Langtree Street would not have made herself very popular with her neighbours as she gave evidence against them in court. DORA also required employers to post a list of all employees of military age at their works. On that same day three St Helens employers were fined between £2 and £5 for failing to comply with that rule.

On the 6th September fog caused what the Liverpool Echo described as a "somewhat destructive collision" between the Sutton Manor bus packed with colliers going to work and a tramcar. The accident occurred in Peasley Cross Lane, although there were no serious injuries. The motor bus service between Market Street in St Helens and Sutton Manor had only begun two years earlier and was the first such service in the town.

Also that day it was announced that well-known Saints player Robert Walker had died from wounds received from fighting in what was then known as Mesopotamia. The Liverpool Daily Post, incidentally, carried a very brief report on the 6th, which said that a study in Woolwich had revealed that people who were heavy smokers and drinkers were more than twice as likely to die from cancer than those who didn't smoke or drink. It's amazing that it took 50 more years before such research was taken seriously.

With no television or radio to fill people's leisure hours in St Helens, book reading was increasingly a popular pastime. It was revealed at the St Helens Libraries Committee meeting on the 6th that despite many men being away in the forces, the number of book issues at the various town libraries had been almost a quarter of a million during the previous year. Literacy levels were continuing to improve amongst the working classes and even miners were becoming bookworms taking out a total of 3,490 books.

The tragic death of little Ellen Rigby was described at her inquest on the 8th. The collier's daughter from Park Road was found drowned in the family dolly tub in just six inches of water. Her mother told the coroner that Ellen liked to fill a ball with water and then squirt the water out. So the toddler may well have accidentally fallen into the dolly tub while filling her ball, knocked herself out and drowned.

On September 9th a war memorial was unveiled in Prescott, which took the form of a soldier in the South Lancashire Regiment. The 7 feet high statue was made out of Aberdeen granite and was unveiled by the Commandant of the Prescott barracks, Col. Sir Henry Webb MP. At the unveiling ceremony it was stated that this was the first statue in the history of Prescott and it was certainly a very long history. Cllr. Hemingway of Prescott Parish Council told the crowd that 1000 years ago Prescott was a country town when Liverpool was only a village and St Helens just a few farmhouses. Anyone sending a letter to Liverpool would address it as 'Liverpool, near Prescott'. So far 42 soldiers from Prescott had died in France and there would be many more names to go on the monument before the war was over.

Also on the 9th the funeral of John Cross Lowe of Eltonhead Hall was held at Rainhill Parish Church, with the well-known farmer having died three days earlier at the age of 40. An extraordinary fact is that the 17th century occupiers of Eltonhead Hall – the Eltonhead family themselves – had a direct

family connection not only with both the English and American civil wars but with President James Madison, Confederate General Robert E. Lee and the present US president Barack Obama! The latter is a fifth cousin to the Sutton family, eight times removed. Give that a thought next time you pass down Elton Head Road! Elton Head Hall's Farm still exists and has just launched a Small Animal Hotel for rabbits, guinea pigs and the like.

At the licensing session for St Helens' pubs on June 13th, the magistrates had made a request for able-bodied male publicans to leave their pubs in the hands of their wives, while they themselves worked in the munitions factories. At another hearing on September 11th the town's Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington was quizzed as to whether this instruction had been carried out. St Helens's top policeman confirmed that it had and in addition a number of licensees had joined the armed forces, with their licenses transferred to their wives.

Finally on the 11th the Liverpool Echo published an article titled 'Findings Not Keepings', in which they described how George Roberts's notion of 'finders keepers' had got him into trouble. He and his wife had been visiting friends in Sutton Manor when Roberts spotted two vices at the bottom of a telegraph pole that had been mislaid by a linesman. He decided to take them back to his home in Malden Street in Liverpool but was spotted by the linesman who chased after him on his bike. It summons up a comical image of the guy pedalling furiously, shaking his fist and shouting: "I want my vices back"! Roberts was eventually traced to Liverpool and fined 20 shillings in St Helens Police Court.

A comedy chase Buster Keaton-style took place on the 12th, as Police Sergeant Charles Carter and two army corporals pursued Private William Kennedy through St Helens. The pursuit went through the open doors of people's homes "backwards and forwards", knocking an elderly man over in one house and putting the whole neighbourhood into uproar.

Pte. Kennedy was in a company of soldiers in the King's Liverpool Regiment who had been detailed to work in a munitions plant in St Helens. Kennedy had been a non-commissioned officer but he'd been reduced to the ranks after not turning up for work and had since been insubordinate to his superiors. Captain Watts Morgan described to a court hearing on the 13th how Kennedy's "insolent and unruly behaviour" had made the lives of the company's NCOs "a perfect hell". Sgt. Carter then told the magistrates that he'd spoken to Kennedy outside the works and the soldier then assaulted him and ran off. The chase then ensued which only ended when Kennedy was collared on the railway line after a fight, which cut the policeman's face. The magistrates gave Private Kennedy two months in prison to cool off.

On the 14th it was announced that Sgt. Anders and Sgt. Ricketts of the St Helens force were being made up to the rank of inspector. That same day another chase ensued when the newly promoted Inspector Anders pursued John Dingsdale from Thatto Heath, where he'd been hiding for 3 weeks, into Sherdley Park. The army deserter must have looked a sight as he was wearing a slouch hat – as worn by Australian soldiers – with a patch over one eye. Not a great disguise for a deserter! Eventually an arrest was made when Dingsdale was discovered hiding in some bushes in the park. On the following day he appeared in court and was remanded in custody awaiting a military escort. The magistrates were so pleased with their new inspector that they awarded him a £1 bonus.

Sherdley Park had an attraction for deserters during WW1, which enraged Col. Michael Hughes of Sherdley Hall, who had spent many years in the army. A month before Dingsdale's arrest, another deserter had been arrested by the police in a pigsty in the Sherdley Home Farm stable yard. Then on March 5th 1917, Sgt. Heaton found brothers Edward and John White in a room over the stables. Their widowed mother Emma, who worked in the Sherdley gardens, had been concealing her two sons from the law. For simply following her motherly instinct, she was sent to prison for a month.

The eyes of many St Helens children must have been like saucers on the 15th September 1916 when a mile-long convoy of motor vehicles passed through the town. A small number of residents and tradespeople did own motor cars and vans, but the parade of 25 motorbikes, 12 officer cars and about 50 heavy waggons was probably unprecedented. It was part of a drive to recruit Volunteers in St Helens and Widnes using the resources of what was known as the Heavy Car Battalion. Although motor cars were well out of the price bracket of working class folk, the Liverpool Daily Post felt there was sufficient interest to have a weekly column for enthusiasts called 'Motor Notes'.

One of the few agricultural shows held in Lancashire during 1916 took place on the 16th at Billinge, where many shire horses and cattle were in competition. Two days later Dr Joseph Cates, the St Helens medical officer of health, brought a prosecution against confectioner Thomas Middlehurst for 'exposing for sale chocolate cream which was unfit for human consumption'. Dr Cates had noticed 20 to 30 flies in the window of Middlehurst's Church Street shop which were crawling over 14 melting chocolate bars, with four flies embedded in the cream. He told the magistrates that almost all of the many cases of diarrhoea in the town over the summer had been caused by food contamination, chiefly by flies. Thomas Middlehurst – who in April had appeared in court for keeping his son off school in order to sell sweets at a cinema – strongly objected to Dr. Cates's claims, but received a fine of £2.

Also on that day two men accused of dodging conscription appeared in court in St Helens. 36-year-old Patrick Biggy from Wigan had been arrested in St Helens marketplace while hawking fruit and was fined £2 and handed over to the military. When Richard Eden from Pocket Nook Street was arrested, he told the police that he was in a reserved occupation at a local smelting works. However that wasn't quite true as he only worked there irregularly and hadn't been exempted. In court Eden told the magistrates that he did want to be in the army. They replied that they were very happy to oblige him and immediately handed Eden over to a military escort! The magistrates also fined the manager of Quirk, Barton & Co.'s leadworks 20 shillings for not posting in their works a list of workmen of military age. This was required by law to assist the police in checking for those trying to avoid conscription.

With St Helens designated a prohibited area, due to the war work taking place in factories, the police carefully vetted any newcomers. The actors and music hall entertainers who performed at the Theatre Royal were put under special scrutiny, as there were fears that the performers or members of their entourage might be spies or conscription dodgers. Most entertainers who ended up in court in St Helens were completely innocent but as they often travelled throughout Britain and the Continent, their status could become complicated.

On September 19th Hilda Martelliere appeared in court charged with being an alien and entering a prohibited area without permission. She was an actress who was appearing in St Helens in a revue called 'Good Evening'. Although born in Hornsea in Yorkshire, Hilda had in May married a Frenchman. He was now serving with the French Army and consequently Hilda had lost her British status. The police and magistrates in St Helens were usually quite strict in enforcing the rules, with punishments of heavy fines or prison sentences regularly given to those who breached them. However the bench was unusually lenient with Hilda and only handed the actress a small fine of 5 shillings, as well as requiring her to register as an alien.

That same day clogger Thomas Mills from Junction Lane in Sutton was advertising in the Liverpool Echo for clogmakers, stating that he had 'constant work'. There might be a war on but there was still a big demand for footwear and miners especially liked to wear clogs.

On the following day Jane Jones of Watery Lane in Sutton was sent to a reformatory for 5 years for shopbreaking. This was despite the Chief Constable telling St Helens' magistrates that her father's

neglect was the cause of her trouble. He was a widower with five children, who made 12-year-old Jane look after his house. Some time ago while undertaking the housework, the girl had been severely scalded and had to spend three months in hospital. Earlier in September Jane had broken into three shops in Sutton and as a punishment would now be removed from her home and placed in an institution. However, the only price that her father had to pay was 5 shillings a week towards his daughter's keep in the reformatory.

It was not uncommon for a father to make a young daughter cook and keep house after the death of his wife. In 1890 15-year-old Annie Makin from Sutton Street in Peasley Cross drowned herself in Sherdley Delph after being forced to perform domestic duties for her four siblings and father. At his daughter's inquest James Makin defended his behaviour by saying he hadn't beaten Annie for three or four months.

Also on the 20th it was announced that iron foundry workers in St Helens, Prescott and Widnes were to receive a war bonus of 2 shillings per week. Food prices had risen by two-thirds since the outbreak of war, which was causing some hardship. On the 21st Thomas Pennington, aged 55 from Dorothy Street in Thatto Heath, was killed down Sutton Heath Colliery at half-past midnight. The experienced miner, who had spent all his working life at Sutton Heath, died when a stone weighing a ton fell on top of him as he went for his supper. Roof collapses down the pit were one of the most common causes of mining accidents.

On the following day James Fenney, from Marshalls Cross Road, was fined 25 shillings for driving a horse and trap along Baldwin Street 'at a fast pace to the danger of the public'. The offence took place on a Saturday night when St Helens was always crowded with shoppers, with many retailers staying open until very late. That was because Saturday was pay day and shopkeepers wanted to extract as much cash as they could from people before having to close for the Sabbath.

On the same day the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society presented bravery awards to a number of St Helens heroes for saving children from drowning. William Critchley from Garnet Street in Sutton was awarded a certificate and 15 shillings for rescuing a child from a pond off Peasley Cross Lane. After the rescue he had simply walked off without revealing his identity. Four other people, including 13-year-old Bertram Heyes, were given awards for saving the life of 11-year-old Joseph Woodward in Island's Brow. The Society was formed in 1839 and still exists, having made over 9,200 awards.

The bravery awards in St Helens were presented by Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington, who on the same day told the town's magistrates that: "Parental control has absolutely gone for nought, and children are running wild". The town's top policeman made this claim as he introduced 53 summonses against lads for throwing stones at trains. Ellerington added that the fathers of most of the boys – who were each fined 5 shillings – were fighting in France and some had been killed.

On the 23rd September 39-year-old Charles Dyer, who lodged at 41 New Street, died in St. Helens Hospital after being crushed between a railway wagon and the side of a shed at the Sutton Bond munitions works in Lancots Lane.

On the 26th the shops in St Helens were digesting the news that the government had issued a draft order for the compulsory early closing of shops. Essentially it was a consultation document but that word was not used then. Instead the Home Secretary Herbert Samuel was inviting 'expressions of interest' from trade associations before finalising his grand plan.

St Helens shops used to open to all hours, with many in the town centre not closing until midnight on Saturday. However the draft order would ban opening after 7pm (or possibly 6pm) during the first four days of the week. On Fridays shops would have to close by 9pm and by 10pm on

Saturdays. The newspapers urged shop owners to educate their customers on the advantages of shopping by daylight. The order, which was finally introduced on October 30th, was designed to save on coal and lighting.

A compulsory car insurance scheme wasn't introduced in the UK until 1930. So if you were the victim of a road traffic accident and the offender wouldn't cough up, court was the only option. On September 27th engineer William Birchall from Elm Road in Thatto Heath went to St Helens County Court demanding compensation from John Cox of Spray Street. The latter was ironically an insurance man who in Thatto Heath Road had driven his car into Birchall's motorbike. The 47-year-old had rather foolishly not bothered to insure his own vehicle and was now facing a claim for £40. That was six months wages for most people, which Judge Thomas thought was excessive and so only awarded Birchall £21.

On the 28th September it was reported that the parents of Sgt. John Critchley of Ellison Place in Rainhill had received some excellent news. Their boy in the King's Liverpool Regiment, who had recently been awarded the Military Medal for bravery, had been missing since August 8th. However John had written home to say he was alive and well and being held in Germany as a prisoner of war. Astonishingly 2.4 million POWs were held by Germany during WW1 in almost 300 prison camps, in which they weren't always treated very well. Parcels of 'comforts' were regularly despatched from St Helens to the imprisoned men, facilitated by the Red Cross.

On the last day of the month St Helens Recs lost their Northern Union game to Barrow 14 - 11. Both St Helens's rugby league sides had begun the new season badly with Saints at the bottom of the 'merit table' having lost both of their opening matches and the Recs only winning one in three. Competitive games had been suspended for the duration of the war and the table was an unofficial one recording the results of friendly games.

By 1916 sport was only being played in a very limited fashion. There was no first-class cricket and the Football League had ceased all of its games, with only the occasional friendly soccer match being played. Horse racing continued until May 1917 when the War Cabinet put its foot down. The government wasn't too keen on sport being played during the war as they felt it was hindering recruitment, although women's football partly filled the vacuum.

One sport that didn't cease for the duration was bowls and a special charity contest took place on the 30th September at the Gerard Arms in aid of Providence Hospital. The war put the town's hospitals under considerable pressure having to cope with many wounded soldiers, as well as local patients. The considerable sum of £200 was raised at the event, with the star attraction being the Mayor of St Helens, Henry Bates, taking on and beating James Seddon, the former Newton MP.

October 1916

On October 1st St Helens folk put back their clocks by an hour as summertime reverted back to Greenwich Mean Time. This was a new experience for them as summertime had only been introduced in May to boost war production. William Willett, the great-great-grandfather of Chris Martin of Coldplay, had tirelessly campaigned for daylight saving time. The builder was ridiculed at the time but died from flu before it was brought in. As in May newspaper readers were given guidance in how to change their clocks. Liverpool newspapers told readers not to force the hands of striking clocks backwards but to advance them by 11 hours instead.

On October 2nd Matthew Murphy pleaded guilty to three charges in court at St Helens of being an absentee from the army and was fined a total of £2 12 shillings and given an escort to the army offices in the town. Murphy was a hawker who travelled from street to street selling his goods from

a handcart and shouting to alert housewives. This less than inconspicuous method of trading also attracted the attentions of the police!

Domestic servants were hard to find during the war. Women and girls could make much better money working elsewhere, especially in St Helens's munitions works – such as at Sutton Bond in Lancots Lane. Nationally between 1914 and 1918 400,000 females left domestic service for other jobs, where they enjoyed a newfound sense of independence. On October 3rd a total of 124 classified adverts for domestic help appeared in the Liverpool Echo, including one from Mrs. Jones of Junction Lane in Sutton and Mrs. Trotter from Dentons Green Lane. The latter tried to induce a girl to come and work for her by saying that she wouldn't have to do any heavy washing – a real chore in those days.

The St Helens Chief Constable Arthur Ellerington had been complaining throughout 1916 that juvenile delinquency was getting out of control and during the previous week had said the town's children were "running wild". Now there were some stats to back this up, which were revealed on the 3rd by G. A. Aitken, head of the Children's Department at the Home Office. He told a conference that offences by under 16s had risen nationally by a third over the same period in 1915. This he blamed on the war, which had led to many absent fathers and male teachers.

However Aitken also slammed silent movies for "depicting crimes of all sorts" and gaming machines in small shops for turning children into little criminals. The latter included simple amusements like 'clown machines' in which customers tried to convert a halfpenny into twopence by catching a ball in a clown's cap. In April shop owners with premises in Church Street, Baldwin Street, Corporation Street and Higher Parr Street had been given huge fines for hosting these machines. Aitken also called for more use of corporal punishment for troublesome kids, which he recommended as "character forming". Bruise forming is probably more accurate!

Yet another list of St Helens' war dead was released on the 4th. Among the many names was Chris McGowran of the Prince of Wales's Volunteers, who for eight years had been the golf pro at Grange Park Golf Club. Four years earlier he had been in charge of extending the course to 18 holes.

Also on that day a resolution was moved at a St Helens Council meeting calling for Alderman Henry Bates of Sutton Hall to serve as town mayor for a second year. Councillor Francis supported the resolution but said mayors should be given a grant to carry out their mayoral duties. He argued that many able candidates were forced to rule themselves out because they simply couldn't afford to take the job. The average pay then was £85 - £90 per year but Bates earned a salary of over £700 as Colonel Hughes's Sherdley Estate manager, so he certainly had the cash to be mayor.

Since conscription had been introduced in January, some had done everything they could to get out of going to war. Painter George Jones from Birchley Street was one who had given a "lot of trouble", according to Chief Constable Ellerington. He told the town magistrates on the 4th that instead of reporting to the military, Jones had gone away to Birmingham and had written letters to the recruiting officer which were "full of lies". Jones was fined £2 for not reporting for duty as a soldier and handed over to the military.

On the following day yet another actor performing at the Theatre Royal appeared in court. During the war years many performers were charged with not registering as a foreign alien or being an absentee from the army and it was the latter that got Ernest Vaughan into trouble. He was the lead actor and manager of the 'Little Grey Home in the West' theatre company, named after a popular wartime song. Vaughan had been touring England and Scotland for over 10 years and as an Irishman claimed exemption from conscription. Although the Irish were excluded from the draft, this didn't apply if they lived mainly in England. Vaughan had not spent enough time back home in the Emerald Isle and so was fined £4 and handed over to the military.

On the 6th October twenty-two more St Helens people – mainly shopkeepers – were fined for not completely observing the blackout. This had been introduced in February to foil German Zeppelin airship raids. Apart from at Bold in 1918, St Helens never suffered any raids, but they created much fear and so the streets were blacked out at night. Shopkeepers were used to opening late and keeping their front doors open and so found the new regulations challenging.

Newspapers a century ago contained many adverts for ‘medicines’ of dubious benefit, which made wild cure-all claims. Getting testimonials was easy, as people would regularly confuse the effect of taking some mixture with the body’s own natural powers of recovery. The makers of Angier’s Emulsion reckoned their concoction was good for ‘consumption, all lung affections, stomach and bowel disorders, ulcers, chronic indigestion, diarrhoea, dysentery, nervous dyspepsia and constipation’.

Baptist minister William Holroyd from Windle Street was a fan of Angier’s powers of prevention and on October 7th the 53-year-old had a glowing testimonial published in a Sheffield newspaper: “As a preventive against taking cold and as a sure pick-me-up when run down, I have found nothing to equal Angier’s Emulsion. Many an illness would be avoided or shortened by its prompt use.” Writing more recently Chris Langton said he hated being given Angier’s Emulsion as a child: “Emulsion was probably a good description because it had the consistency of paint and stuck to the roof of your mouth!”

‘Depraved’ fraudster Eliza Dobson was given a double dose of justice on the 10th and 11th of the month. At Prescott she was sentenced to 3 months hard labour for obtaining charitable contributions by fraud. Then on the following day she was given the same sentence in St Helens for offences committed within the Boundary Road district. The 27-year-old had gone round Gladstone Street, Chamberlain Street and Warwick Street telling people she was collecting for wounded soldiers but then pocketed the cash. During the war years there were large numbers of collections for the Red Cross and other war-related causes, which was ideal cover for rogues like Eliza. The St Helens Chief Constable told the magistrates that Dobson was in a “depraved condition” and she had been a source of trouble for nearly 10 years and many times convicted of fraud.

An extraordinary claim was made at a meeting of St Helens Council’s Health Committee on the 12th. Ernest Swift, the councillor for North Windle, said that in most towns the ordinary workman was earning more money than ever – even more than in the “good old days when it was said that colliers fed their coursing dogs on beef steaks and themselves drank champagne.” Fellow councillor William Forshaw immediately countered that that was a complete fairy tale. Swift had been registrar of St Helens and Widnes County Courts for many years and came from a well-off family, with his brother being the St Helens MP Rigby Swift. Many such people had little notion of the life of a miner who worked in dangerous conditions for poor pay.

On 13th October charges were brought against Esther Harrison, the owner of a domestic servants agency, for breaching St Helens byelaws concerning record keeping. Although based in Southport, Esther also ran a branch office in St Helens. Inspector Blackhurst told St Helens Police Court that Mrs. Harrison had obeyed the local laws “very reluctantly” and did not see why there should be any at all. She had told the inspector that Southport was a “superior place” to St Helens and there were no such laws there. After receiving promises from Esther that her books would be kept properly in future, the charges were dismissed upon payment of costs.

Also on the 13th, the defence solicitor representing a lorry driver accused of driving his vehicle without a red rear light offered a curious defence in court. William Webster told the St Helens bench that the fact that his client’s lamp had been out when he arrived at the Lingholme was an “act of God”. The solicitor – who lived at Abbotsfield House in Gorsey Lane in Bold – then said perhaps it

wasn't right to blame the Almighty and it would be better to attribute the event to the powers of darkness! The chairman of the magistrates Henry Oppenheim, himself a solicitor, was unimpressed and in fining the lorry driver 5 shillings replied that the cause was more likely to have been a dirty lamp than the Almighty. A century ago electric lamps on the front and rear of vehicles were still in their experimental phase and the vast majority of owners used acetylene gas lamps, which sometimes went out during a journey.

One thing that hasn't changed over the last 100 years is people's love of gossip and desire to feel important. The Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 made the spreading of war rumours a criminal offence but an Act of Parliament cannot change human behaviour quite so easily! On October 14th John Smith from Stanhope Street near Victoria Park appeared in court accused of raising a false alarm of an air raid. The 33-year-old colliery labourer had travelled two miles on foot to the Thatto Heath Empire to tell the cinema manager that a Zeppelin air raid was imminent. Smith gave the manager the impression that he was a policeman and arranged for an official warning slide to be displayed on the screen.

In court Chief Constable Ellerington said John Smith had caused much alarm and commotion in Thatto Heath and called for "salutary punishment to be inflicted". St Helens's top policeman said there was a considerable problem in the town with people spreading rumours. In his defence Smith said that someone had told him that there was going to be an air raid and he thought he was doing a good turn by letting people know. The magistrates said there was no excuse for such behaviour and sent Smith to prison for three months with hard labour.

On October 16th Thomas Middlehurst was again in court for selling sweets unfit for human consumption at his Ormskirk Street shop. St Helens Medical Officer Joseph Cates told the court that he'd seen a considerable number of flies in the window of the defendant's shop, along with chocolates bearing the marks of fly excreta. Upon entering the premises Dr. Cates had selected three trays of sweets, some of which had the legs of flies stuck to them. Middlehurst's solicitor, William Hutchen, told the bench that his client was being unfairly persecuted, with this being the second time in a month that he'd been brought to court. Hutchen said the council's campaign was causing alarm amongst shopkeepers, which if pursued to the end would create "a sort of revolution". Dr. Cates stated that the prosecution was part of a crusade by the Health Committee to protect food. Other shopkeepers were warned and they took action but Middlehurst didn't. The confectioner was fined 40 shillings, as he had been on September 18th when convicted of the same offence.

At the same hearing Annie Fairclough of College Street and John Marr of Higher Parr Street were fined for having 'unsound' fruit and fish in the windows of their respective shops. Mrs. Fairclough was offering mildewed and rotten grapes and pears for sale and Marr had 11 plaice in an advanced state of decomposition.

It was reported on the 17th that Saints had decided to cancel their fixtures for the rest of the season after playing their next match against Warrington. This was through lack of support, with only £7 raised on the gate at their last home game. However nine days later the club changed its mind, as the Liverpool Echo reported: "St. Helens have decided to make an effort to revive the club, which on financial grounds is in a very great difficulty...old subscribers are to be appealed to for help in the crisis".

On the 18th October Folkestone Town Council considered a letter from St Helens Council that called for the separation allowance awarded to the wives of soldiers and sailors to be increased. It was part of a campaign led by the councillors in St Helens who felt that the dependants of those fighting at the front were suffering a 'grave injustice' and being condemned into poverty. The wives received a separation allowance of 12 shillings 6d. per week, with 5 shillings extra for their first

child and 2/6 for each additional child. This hadn't changed since the start of the war, despite big rises in the prices of many foodstuffs. In fact 5 days later the Board of Trade revealed that staple foods had risen 65% between July 1914 and September 1916. St Helens Council wrote the same letter to many town councils nationwide, asking them to pass a resolution calling on the Government to increase the allowance. This was easy for them to do, as they didn't have to foot the bill!

It was the separation allowance that led to Eve Pye appearing in Liverpool Police Court on the 20th charged with having obtained £20 from the War Office through false pretences. The 34-year-old was married to miner John Pye and in 1911 the couple had rented out a room at their Queen Street home (off North Road) to a man called Michael Salmon. Taking in lodgers used to be much more common than today, as it provided an easy source of extra income for hard-pressed families. However it also led to overcrowding and romantic entanglements. In August 1882 a mini-riot occurred in Higher Parr Street after a woman who'd run off to Scotland with her lodger had returned home to her husband. A wave of moral outrage swept over the district, which was depicted in the Illustrated Police News and reproduced here. Their drawing shows part of a large crowd outside the couple's home, beating tin kettles, pots and pans and hooting and yelling. The traditional burning of an effigy was attempted but stopped by the arrival of the police.

Exactly when Eve Pye left her husband to live with lodger Michael Salmon does not appear to have been revealed in court. However after spending some time in Canada, Salmon enlisted in the British army in December 1914 and lived for a while out of barracks with Eve Pye. In February 1915 her boyfriend put in a claim for a separation allowance to be paid to Eve. Salmon claimed that Eve was his 'unmarried wife', whom he had kept prior to his enlistment. Soon afterwards Eve claimed extra cash for a 13-year-old illegitimate child, the father of which was not revealed. She claimed that Salmon had kept the child for 3 years before his enlistment, which wasn't true. The prosecution was essentially for an exaggerated claim and the judge's sentence of 3 months imprisonment for Eve was probably influenced by his feelings on the morality of the case. As for Michael Salmon, he appears to have escaped any punishment.

On the 23rd October the death of Sir Joseph Beecham took place at his London home in Hampstead. The 68-year old son of the founder of the pill empire was a 3-time mayor of St Helens and had only been in the town two days earlier, seemingly in good health. The businessman, philanthropist and owner of London's Aldwych Theatre had been a busy man, having once said: "I lead a rushing life and am constantly travelling to and from America, and between London and St. Helens." Although his father Thomas had founded the firm, it was Joseph Beecham who developed the business into a huge concern. By 1890 the firm was making 9 million pills per day and spending £100,000 per year on advertising (over £6 million in today's money), with 'worth a guinea a box' as its strapline.

Beecham was a great lover of opera and had spent about £3 million in 1914, acquiring 5 theatres in Covent Garden, including the Royal Opera House, as well as 26 streets. "Some men spend their money on horses, some on yachts, some on other things," he once remarked, "but I prefer to spend mine on music." In the north-west Sir Joseph owned the Court Theatre at Warrington and was chairman of the Theatre Royal in St Helens.

On the 24th October 14-year-old Charlotte Boyse from Watery Lane in Sutton died in St Helens Hospital after her clothes had caught fire while doing housework. It was a little unusual for someone of that age to die that way but very common for young children. County Coroner Sam Brighouse, who presided over inquests in St Helens for 55 years, used to refer to winter as the "burning season" for kids, who would wear highly flammable clothing in front of poorly guarded fires.

A special meeting of St Helens Town Council was held on the 25th in which it was decided to award a war bonus to all employees. An extra 2 shillings a week would be paid to St Helens Corporation staff, who were single or married without children. Those with children would receive 3 shillings a week, plus an additional tanner for each child. Staple food prices had gone up by two-thirds since the outbreak of war, which was causing hardship for some.

On October 26th a 'Grand Monster Matinee Programme' was held at the Theatre Royal in St Helens in aid of the Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee. Newspaper magnate Sir Arthur Pearson had founded the charity in order to provide vocational training to visually impaired servicemen. The owner of the Daily Express was himself blind, having lost his sight through glaucoma. Also on that day Hugh Jones, a metalman aged 40, died down Sherdley Colliery after a roof fall.

The funeral of Sir Joseph Beecham took place at St Helens Parish Church on the following day. Lancashire County Mounted Police escorted the cortege and as well as councillors and St Helens Corporation officials, there were also representatives present from St Helens Cycling Club, which Beecham had helped to found in 1876. Large crowds turned out to witness the procession to the cemetery, where the former mayor and pill maker was interred.

Before WW1 benefit fraud was largely unheard of – mainly because there were hardly any benefits for people to claim! Ungenerous old age pensions and tax allowances for children had both been introduced in 1909, but there wasn't much else. However the separation allowances awarded to the wives and dependants of servicemen had much more potential for fraud. The wife of a soldier or sailor with two children would receive £1 per week, with 2/6 extra for each additional child. This was good money for those with very large families, when £1 10 shillings (50p) was the average weekly pay for a labourer. So after being discharged from the forces – as many were for one reason or another – there was a temptation to keep claiming the cash.

Those caught trying to cheat the system were treated harshly. Last week I wrote how Eve Pye from the North Road district had been sent to prison for 3 months for making an exaggerated claim. On October 27th 1916 the same sentence – but with the additional punishment of hard labour – was imposed on 30-year-old David Gravener and his wife Florence from Manor Street in Peasley Cross. Gravener had joined the Royal Field Artillery in January 1915 but within four months had been discharged (seemingly through having flat feet) and he returned to his old job at a St Helens chemical works. However for a further 15 months his 29-year-old wife continued to claim the separation allowance, falsely claiming £74 15s in total. After serving his sentence in prison, Gravener was able to re-join the army after the rules were loosened and he became a Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery but lost his life in October 1918.

A music hall artist called Bertram Hall Robotham – who'd been appearing in the Hippodrome in Corporation Street – appeared in court in St Helens on the 30th October charged with being an absentee from the Army Reserve. He was given the usual fine of £2 and handed over to the military. Private Robotham lasted twelve months in the Royal Defence Corp before being granted a silver war badge – an honourable discharge awarded through illness or injury. The large, circular, silver badge was worn by the holder to signify that they'd done their bit in the war. It was introduced in part to prevent them from being given a white feather by women who often challenged men in civilian clothing and called them cowards. Being 'badged' – as it was known – was a right given to most male civilians of military age, whether discharged servicemen or war workers.

Also on the 30th it was announced that three mineworkers had died in St Helens Hospital from injuries received at Ashton's Green and Sherdley Collieries. 40-year-old William Jones from Gaskell Street in Parr was working down Sherdley when he heard a man shout that a stone was about to come down from the pit roof. Jones dashed out from a tunnel where he'd been quite safe and was immediately struck down by the stone. On the same day Mary and Joseph Heyes, of Ravenhead

Cottages in St Helens, were sent to prison for 6 months and 1 month respectively for 'cruelly neglecting their children'. It was claimed that the family had a good income but Mary spent it all on drink and kept her children dirty and not properly clothed.

Shops in St Helens used to stay open to all hours, with some not closing until midnight on Saturday, as that was pay day for most workers. However with lighting restrictions having been introduced and in order to save coal, an order requiring the early closing of shops was introduced on October 30th. There were a number of exceptions, including the sale of newly-cooked food for eating off the premises.

November 1916

The parents of Gunner Albert Whalley from Ormskirk Road in Rainford must have been very proud of their son, when told he'd been awarded the Military Medal for bravery under fire. The news came through on November 1st and on the same day the monthly meeting of St Helens Town Council took place with street lighting on the agenda.

Since February the town had been blacked out, so as not to provide easy targets for Zeppelin airships if they chose to drop bombs on St Helens. However some relaxation had recently taken place, with electrical lighting having been installed in some parts of the town. Unlike gas lamps, which had to be extinguished manually, these could quickly be turned off electrically in the event of a Zeppelin attack. As the airships moved slowly, the authorities would receive plenty of notice of them heading in St Helens's direction, allowing sufficient time for the lights to be switched off.

However Alderman Alfred Foote complained at the council meeting of a "blaze of light" at the top of Dentons Green, which lit up the whole district and dazzled travellers coming out of the dark. He said the electric lights were so bright that people could not see for quite some time afterwards. Cllr. Arthur Rudd added that the "bunches of brilliant lights in different quarters" of the town were an attraction for ten miles. The Mayor of St Helens, Alderman Bates of Sutton Hall, said he would arrange for the electric lighting to be subdued.

The war created heroes, such as the aforementioned Albert Whalley, but it also provided a platform for fantasists and opportunists to pretend that they'd been heroic in battle. One such individual was John Galty from Scholes Lane, who appeared in court on the 2nd November. Some months ago he'd suffered an injury in a coal mine and then went around St Helens limping and claiming he'd been shot in four places while serving in France.

People were captivated by his fantastic stories – including one of being bayoneted by a German after giving the man water, which led to him emptying his rifle into the assailant. Galty also claimed that he'd been discharged from hospital without any money and so well-wishers gave him cash. In court it was revealed that the collier had never been to France and his wife had left him on account of his 'brutality and immorality'. Galty, who'd been before the court several times before, was sent to prison for two months for his Walter Mitty-like fantasies.

Also on the 2nd at 8am, railway platelayer John Mercer from Raglan Street was found on the line near Fleet Lane, having been 'mangled and killed on the spot'. The 49-year-old foreman had been struck down by the brakes-van of a coal train while inspecting the line.

On the following day a police raid took place on the house of Elizabeth and Henry Bridge of 64 Hamer Street. 60-year-old Elizabeth was accused of using her home to receive bets and 63-year-old Henry of knowingly permitting it. The police had been keeping watch and on the 1st November had seen 54 people enter the back door of the house (and curiously 87 leave!), with 43 and 33 going in on the 2nd and 3rd respectively.

Upon being arrested Mrs. Bridge was found to have £7 13s 11d in her possession, along with seven betting slips and four football coupons. She told Inspector Roe that her husband had wanted her to stop taking betting slips and he denied knowing it was still going on. In court on the 13th the charges against Henry Bridge were withdrawn but his wife received a substantial fine of £20.

Blackouts led to many accidents with people not being able to see where they were going on moonless nights. During the evening of April 21st, William Todd from Newtown was taken short and so went to use the toilets in Taylor Park. With the convenience in total darkness, Todd fell down 15 steps and fractured his arm, which led to him spending 16 weeks off work. He decided to take legal action against St Helens Corporation and on the 3rd November a special jury at Liverpool Assizes heard his claim for damages. The Council denied responsibility through the Defence of the Realm Act and also said it was partly Todd's own fault for walking down steps on a dark night. However the jury disagreed and awarded the glassworks labourer the considerable sum of £48.

The War Pensions Committee of Cambridge Council discussed a letter sent by St Helens Council on the 4th concerning the separation allowance awarded to servicemen's wives. It was part of a campaign led by the councillors in St Helens who felt that the dependants of those fighting at the front were being condemned into poverty by an inadequate allowance. The Council wrote the same letter to many town councils nationwide but Cambridge appears to have been the only one who refused to endorse it. This was after an intervention by Cllr. Hill who said that women in Cambridgeshire were far better off than they were before the war and they were squandering the money that they got.

There was no Guy Fawkes night in St Helens – or anywhere else in Britain. The Defence of the Realm Act, which took away many pleasures, banned it. On November 6th Constable Reynolds arrested Gavin Hall Padgett for causing a disturbance on a tram at St Helens Junction. When locked up PC Reynolds said Padgett fought like a madman and tried to strangle himself, initially with his braces and then by using his trousers and then socks. In court on the following day, Padgett was remanded for 7 days for enquiries to be made.

At the same hearing John Lea from Bolton was sent to prison for a month for stealing from his lodgings and unlawfully wearing a stripe to indicate that he was a wounded soldier. It was revealed in court that the youth had previously escaped from an asylum and had been working at a St Helens cinema, or picturedrome, as they were then called.

On the 7th two inquests were held on miners who had both been killed by large stones that had fallen on top of them. Collapsing pit roofs was one of the biggest perils of mining in those days, which took the lives of countless men underground. Thomas Dullard had been killed down Ravenhead Colliery and Martin Devine from Derbyshire Hill Road lost his life down Ashton's Green.

A more pleasant event took place on the evening of the 7th, when a presentation was made to Rev. William Daly, who for eight years had been an assistant priest at Sacred Heart RC Church. The 36-year-old, who lived with fellow priests in Borough Road, was leaving St Helens to become an army chaplain and the church's Men's Association presented him with a cheque for the substantial amount of £25.

Dr Joseph Cates, the St Helens Medical Officer of Health, told a meeting of the council's Health Committee on the 8th that a fever epidemic had caused a spike in the town's death rate. Six young patients had died from diphtheria over the past four weeks and there were 55 new cases of scarlet fever. Dr Cates put the blame on the parents, saying they didn't call in the doctor until their children were "practically dead". Although some might have been concerned about the cost of

medical help, treatment in the Borough Sanatorium (a.k.a. Fever Hospital) in Peasley Cross had long been made free.

On November 9th 1916 Sutton Picturedrome manager Edward Westhead was prosecuted for non-payment of entertainment duty. After an undercover visit by an Excise officer, a scam had been uncovered in which purchased tickets were not being torn by cinema attendants as required by law. Instead the Sutton cinema (which later became the Empire or 'Bug') was recycling them to other customers. The duty was being paid via postage stamps that were attached to each ticket and the scam meant that the cinema was able to save money by buying a lesser number of stamps. Westhead denied the offence but was fined £5.

Also on the 9th at a St Helens Town Council meeting, Alderman Henry Bates of Sutton Hall was re-elected as Mayor of St Helens. In his acceptance speech Bates said he felt proud that the so-called peace agitators had never troubled St Helens, unlike in many other towns. That, he argued, was down to the: "spirit which imbued them all with the determination to do their best in the interests of the Empire and Christianity at large to help in winning the war."

On the following day 18-year-old Benjamin Fenney from Grace's Square in Sutton (off New Street) died after his bike skidded under the back wheels of the Sutton Manor bus. On the same day a curious court case took place in St Helens when Patrick Higgins was prosecuted by the Prescott Union for failing to maintain two illegitimate children that weren't his. The Union was the organisation that ran the workhouse at Prescott and also employed a relieving officer who supported families in distress.

The court was told that in 1911 a woman called Mary Riley took two illegitimate children into the workhouse. Two years later she married Patrick Higgins, who was immediately informed by the authorities that he was now legally liable for supporting Mary's kids. The glassworks labourer was understandably not too happy about that, particularly as the father of the youngsters was still living in St Helens. Higgins told the court that he knew nothing of the illegitimate children when he married Mary and he had five children of his own to support. The magistrates recognised the unusual circumstances and decided to dismiss the summons but reminded Higgins of his legal liability to look after Mary's children in the future, even though he was not their father.

The ringing of church bells was yet another aspect of St Helens life that ceased during the war – in fact it was an offence to ring them under the Defence of the Realm Act. This was because some people might interpret their ringing as signifying a Zeppelin attack or even an invasion. So when William Bibby pressed the wrong button on November 12th, Constable Griffin came calling. Bibby was the caretaker at what was described as St Mark's Children's Church in Windle Street. He thought that he was switching on the lights for the church hall but accidentally pushed a button that triggered an electric bell. There were up to 200 noisy kids in the hall, so he wasn't able to hear the bell ringing. The Chairman of the bench said if Bibby agreed to put the church bell switch out of action, then the charge would be dismissed.

Throughout the war years the government was constantly adding more rules and regulations covering many aspects of life. The underlying purpose was to boost production of everything from food to munitions. Before the war Britain imported 2/3rds of its food and throughout the conflict German U-boats destroyed many merchant ships that were bringing in supplies. The government wanted to make the country as self-sufficient as possible and all sorts of rules were imposed on farmers to boost their crop production and reduce waste. Controls were even placed on the movement of hay, to ensure that it was being used solely for animal fodder.

On November 13th two farmers and two hay / straw dealers appeared in court in St Helens charged with removing and dealing in hay without permits. One farmer was William Nixon of

Havannah Farm in Newton Road and the other was William Glassey of New Zealand Villa in Dentons Green. Both had had their hay delivered to an address in Cotham Street without permits. In court their defence solicitor said the farmers did not properly understand the many orders and regulations, which were so numerous that even lawyers could not keep up with them.

The agricultural community – who were not the most literate of people – were getting pretty fed up with all the paperwork. Constable Barker told the court that when he challenged hay dealer John Harley Berrey from Croppers Hill for removing hay from Haydock, he used bad language against him! All were given small fines or told to pay the court costs.

On the 15th it was announced that Sgt. W. Potter of Phythian Street had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for leading three attacks against the German lines in which he displayed great courage and initiative.

The St Helens War Service Association had a depot in Bridge Street from where they despatched parcels to British POWs. The soldiers' families and friends provided some of these parcels but the Association also made up their own. For these they needed cash and so fundraising events would be held. One of these took place on November 16th at St Helens Town Hall when Lady Gerrard opened an auction and 'café chantant', in which patrons had a bite to eat and were entertained by musicians.

The War Service Association was about to embark on a new scheme in which 300 parcels of 'comforts', costing 6 shillings each, would be despatched weekly to troops in France. These comforts usually involved cigarettes, tobacco, pipes and clothes such as thick socks – important when having to spend time in cold, wet trenches. However so many organisations sent so many socks to so many soldiers that eventually they started saying "no more socks please". These days many men will know that feeling at Christmas!

In court in St Helens on the 18th a moulder called J. Henry Hoffick was sentenced to 28 days hard labour for assaulting a young woman called Lilian Davies. Both worked at John Varley's Foundry in Atlas Street and Lilian told the court that Hoffick had attempted to "take liberties" with her in the moulding shop. She resisted his advances by striking him with the time-board that she happened to be carrying. In retaliation Hoffick hit her in the neck and chest and then kicked her several times. The Liverpool Daily Post in their report of the attack said Hoffick was a 'cad', which seems rather tame. A brute would be more accurate, I think.

Also on the 18th boxer Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street fought Ted Thomas in a 15 round bout in Middlesbrough. The latter was disqualified for using his head in the 9th round and Proudlove, the Lancashire flyweight champion, was declared the winner. Ernie was a regular in the Junction Inn in Sutton and his photo used to be hung over the bar.

On the 19th November 11-year-old Edward Westhead of Lawrenson Street in Croppers Hill was killed after running in front of a motor taxi in Bank Street, off Prescott Road. The vehicle was being driven by Wilfred Ellison from Dentons Green Lane, who'd only turned 17 two days earlier. However the youth admitted that he had been driving cars for eight months, despite the minimum age being 17 like it is today.

The car was proceeding up Croppers Hill, continuously sounding its horn, while taking VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurses to The Tower convalescent hospital in Rainhill. There were three such places in Rainhill during the war years, with Oakdene and Oaklands being the others. Since 1948 the historic Tower building in Mill Lane has been a private school run by the Oxley family.

The young taxi driver Wilfred Ellison claimed that he'd been dazzled by the electric lighting that had recently been installed in Croppers Hill and at the boy's inquest was exonerated from blame. However his case triggered a campaign by St Helens police against underage drivers, who had falsely claimed to be 17 when getting their licence. These were easily obtained from St Helens Town Hall by simply filling in a form with no proof of age required. Young drivers did need their father's permission but many dads were happy to sign the form in order to get an extra wage coming in. The war left many employers short-staffed and so they asked few questions of lads under military age. There'll be more reports of boy drivers brought to book by the police in future editions of this feature.

Joseph Cates, the St Helens medical officer of health, issued his annual report on the 20th in which he said the health of the town was unsatisfactory, with the rate of infant mortality continuing to be excessive. Dr. Cates wrote that there were a number of causes but the main one was poor sanitation. In some parts of the town property was beyond repair and sanitary defects had been accumulating at an "alarming rate". It took a war for action to be taken, as many young recruits were so unhealthy that they failed medicals or had to be discharged. A report published in 1917 revealed that nationally 12% of school children were so unfit and underweight with stunted growth that they weren't able to benefit from education.

Churches used to get tremendous attendances on Sundays and consequently the collection plates could do very nicely. However on Sunday the 19th November, St Helens Congregational church in Ormskirk Street did more than nicely with collections on the day totalling an amazing £1184 2s 4½d – that's almost £60,000 in today's money! The coffers were swelled by the fact that it was their anniversary service, with the church having been founded 206 years earlier. But it was still a remarkable amount.

On the 21st longstanding domestic servant Elizabeth Swift from Earlestown was sent to prison for three months with hard labour on four charges of theft. The exact details of her case were not stated within the newspaper reports but some St Helens magistrates did appear to punish female offenders far more severely than men.

On the following day it was revealed that the 'Grand Monster Matinee Programme' held at the Theatre Royal on October 26th had made almost £420. This was the highest amount ever raised for charity at the St Helens theatre. The proceeds went to Sir Arthur Pearson for his Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee. Pearson was the founder of the Daily Express who had himself developed blindness and his organisation provided vocational training to visually impaired servicemen.

There was an embarrassing court appearance on the 24th for Councillor James Heaton, who was chairman of the St Helens education authority. The 56-year-old from Prescott Road was summoned to appear before the magistrates for failing to obscure a Town Hall light. The blackout regulations – designed to foil bombing by German airships – required all residents to make sure that lights inside buildings could not be seen from outside.

The case was particularly embarrassing for Heaton because on that very same day he himself had been appointed a magistrate! The Chief Constable explained to the bench that in attending a meeting at the Town Hall, Heaton had mistakenly turned on the wrong light switch and so the new J.P. – who was also the managing director of the Ravenhead Sanitary Pipe & Brick Co. – was only fined 2s 6d.

The advent of the Co-op did much to help working class folk's cash go further with its famous 'divi'. Unfortunately it also drove many small shops out of business. In interview with historian Charles Forman, the anonymous daughter of a Robins Lane shop owner, who had been born in 1895, said:

"Our business went flop because the Co-op opened on Robins Lane. They used to slope us and take their money to the stores. They got three shillings back in the pound there. Sloping is the word we had for people who had stuff on credit and wouldn't pay. There was my mother getting up at all hours and getting nothing for it."

The lure of the dividend led to Mary Young appearing at Manchester Assizes on November 25th. The 26-year-old was wrongly under the impression that she wouldn't be entitled to the divi unless she had £5 worth of goods listed in her purchase book. So Mary altered a receipt and subsequently found herself in St Helens Police Court charged with obtaining goods by false pretences.

For that offence she was given a £1 fine but was subsequently charged with the far more serious offence of perjury, after admitting making false statements in court. As a result Mary was sent to the Assizes where she was given a three months prison sentence. Plenty of time for her to reflect on why she hadn't admitted to the relatively minor offence of altering the receipt straight away – probably through the shame of being in court.

Both St Helens boxers were successfully in action on the 25th. The Lancashire lightweight pitman champion Mick Gordon fought in Newcastle against Mick Harney in a 15 round contest. Boxing Magazine described Gordon's "hurricane tactics" which led to Harney's seconds throwing in the towel in the 3rd round. Meanwhile the Lancashire flyweight champion Ernie Proudlove from Herbert Street also won his bout against Billy Reece at Darlington's Theatre Royal. The referee stopped the fight in the 6th after Proudlove had downed his opponent for the fifth time. They bred them tough in those days with both Sutton boxers having day jobs as miners and then travelling to fights during the evening or at weekends.

On November 27th the first prosecution of an underage car driver took place in St Helens. Like today motorists needed to be 17 to get a licence but at the recent inquest into the death of a young boy, it was revealed that the vehicle's driver had driven cars for 8 months while underage. Wilfred Ellison from Dentons Green Lane had applied for a licence at the Town Hall claiming to be 17, when in reality he was only 16. St Helens Police began an investigation and discovered that this practice was widespread, which led to three youths and their employers appearing in court.

Ellison was dealt with first and was only fined 5 shillings. However his employer, County Carriers of Boundary Road, received a £3 fine for employing an unlicensed motor driver. The company said their prosecution was absurd as St Helens Corporation had issued the driving licence to Ellison and they had simply accepted it on face value. Wilfred Ellison's father was also fined £3 for aiding and abetting his son by signing his licence application and the United Yeast Company received a £5 fine for their employment of an underage driver. More lads and their employers would appear in court in the coming weeks as St Helens Police began a blitz against boy drivers. The court case didn't do Wilfred Ellison any harm, as during the 1920s, he founded Ellison's coaches, which still continues in Boundary Road to this day.

So many kids were set alight by poorly guarded house fires that Coroner Sam Brighouse dubbed winter the "burning season". It was actually illegal to not have a fireguard, but many owned cheap and inadequate ones. However at the inquest on 5-year-old Ellen Hall on November 28th it was revealed that her illiterate collier parents James and Gertrude had never had a fireguard, despite having four children. The Coroner expressed astonishment and called for the police to be given powers to enter homes to check whether a fireguard was in place. A week later 25-year-old Gertrude Hall was summoned to appear in court for not having a fireguard at her home in Derbyshire Hill Road and was fined 10 shillings.

Also on the 28th the inquest took place on 55-year-old John Gutteridge of Clock Face Road who had died as a result of an underground roof fall down Clock Face Colliery. Two days later there was an

odd accident when 65-year-old Thomas Rimmer fell in front of a tram in Prescott Road and was picked up by the lifeguard. This was not a person but the wooden slatted gate under the front of the tram, which acted as a safety device collecting obstacles in the vehicle's way.

The Board of Trade had insisted upon lifeguards when initially steam and then electric trams replaced the horse driven ones. They felt that people were so used to the 'clip clop' sounds of horses, that unwary pedestrians would not appreciate the dangers of the more modern tram and walk under its wheels. Usually the lifeguards left people with bumps and bruises and perhaps a broken bone but nothing worse. However Thomas Rimmer suffered some serious injuries and died in St Helens Hospital two days later.



December 1916

On December 1st an unnamed proprietor (or proprietress as she was described) of a confectioner's shop in Corporation Street appeared in court charged with keeping her shop open after hours. In fact her offence was selling pies after 10pm, which were cold and not hot! The many rules and regulations introduced during the war were often baffling and the woman had been to the Town Hall for advice. She was told that she could keep her shop open after 10pm as long as she only sold newly baked items. In court the woman was told that these needed to be newly cooked and hot and it was against the law if the pies had been baked the same day but sold cold. The bench imposed a fine of 5 shillings, warning they would be more severe in future.

Shops used to stay open to all hours, with many not closing until midnight on Saturday. However with lighting restrictions having been introduced and in order to save coal, an order requiring the early closing of shops had been introduced on October 30th. There were a number of exceptions, including the sale of newly cooked food for eating off the premises. But it had to be hot!

The rigid enforcement of the regulations by St Helens police drove people mad. In a separate court hearing on that day, Peter Dickson from Rainford Road received a 5 shillings fine for using

headlights without sidelights on his motor car. The 40-year-old master tripe dresser complained that he'd previously been fined for having too much light on his car – now he was in court for not having enough! In a further case on the 1st, Detective Sergeant Bowden told the bench how Edward Hallahan had cursed the authorities after being told that he would be reported for breaking the law. Hallahan was a variety artist in charge of a Fred Karno revue who had failed to post a list inside the Theatre Royal of all his employees of military age. For committing this offence he was fined £2.

The Defence of the Realm Act required all employers to post such a list to aid the police in checking for draft dodgers. Theatre impresario Fred Karno is credited with popularising slapstick comedy – especially custard pies in the face – and Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel began their careers working for him.

The 2nd December was a busy day for news in St Helens. Another body was pulled out of the St Helens Canal, near to Todd's works. The man had been in the water for a long time and no one knew who he was and probably never would. There was also another pit tragedy when 37-year-old collier Samuel Parr from Nutgrove Avenue in Thatto Heath was crushed to death by a 6 cwt stone that fell on him down Alexandra Colliery. In addition the fur was flying at the Fleece as the Church Street hotel hosted the St Helens, Prescott & District Poultry, Pigeon and Fur Association Show.

However a disastrous fire, which engulfed St Helens Parish Church, overshadowed these events. The fusing of the main electric switch caused £10,000 worth of damage and it must have been a dreadful shock to the new church verger, who'd only taken up his duties hours before. You can imagine his predecessor George Wratten saying: "I took care of the church for 20 years and nothing happened. You were caretaker for 24 hours and the church burned down!"

Seriously though the destruction was a great shock to the people of St Helens, who with the worry of the war must have wondered if things could possibly get any worse. The town's Post Office was then located next to the church and a member of staff had raised the alarm around 3:30am. With much of the church having been built from wood, the fire spread rapidly and the roof came crashing down after little more than half an hour. The vicar Rev. Albert Baines described on the following day how the beautiful stained glass east window had "curled up like a piece of paper" and within three hours his historic church had been reduced to ruins.

On the 5th there was a bad fire at Bibby's copper works, which caused £800 worth of damage. The St Helens Fire Brigade with their motorised vehicles were now more adept at extinguishing fires than in the past, when they used horse-driven waggons and steam appliances. It used to take so long to get to a blaze on the outskirts of the borough that the fire could have burnt itself out!

On the 6th December Britain had a new Prime Minister when David Lloyd George replaced Herbert Asquith. This would have delighted Colonel Michael Hughes of Sherdley Hall, who bizarrely believed that Asquith and his government had been in the pay of the Kaiser and did not want to win the war. In one letter he wrote that Asquith was a: "...traitor to his country, who cares not a jot for England, Scotland or Ireland so long as he gets votes for his party."

Also on that day the monthly meeting of St Helens Town Council heard that a new generator had been purchased for the tramway system. It had the capacity to power 400 tram cars, although only 46 were run in St Helens each day. Alderman Foote asked whether the generator would make the trams keep better time, but doesn't appear to have received an answer!

For many years, the Gamble Institute by the Town Hall housed a technical school, as well as the main library. On the 6th it was revealed that despite the war, their examination pass rate had improved over the previous year with 986 passes out of 1,133 entrants. Students were also able to attend evening classes at Robins Lane School, Sacred Heart School and Higher Grade School.

On the 7th December 14-year-old May Delmage from Elephant Lane appeared in court charged with stealing almost £10 from the St Helens Motor Service Company and the coal proprietor Richard Evans. The girl worked in an office in Hardshaw Street and was regularly asked by staff in the Motor Service Company's office to help them count copper. May's defence solicitor said she had simply succumbed to temptation and helped herself to some of the cash, although almost £4 had already been repaid.

The magistrates criticised the 'very free and easy' way in which moneys had been dealt with by the two firms and on condition that May's parents paid the £6 balance, placed the girl on probation. May's dad Thomas worked as a labourer at a brickworks and paying off the outstanding amount was the equivalent of about four weeks wages. What he said and did to his daughter isn't recorded but she probably wasn't able to sit down for a week!

St Helens police's campaign against underage car drivers continued on the 8th when William Twist was fined 10 shillings for obtaining a licence when he was only 16. Cabinetmaker H. Williams from Duke Street was also fined for employing the lad. On the same day there was another pedantic prosecution with the owners of the Oxford Picturedrome fined £5 for having three openings from their projection room into their cinema, when the law said only two could be open at the same time. The Duke Street picture house had begun four years earlier and would later be known as the Plaza and then Cindy's nightclub.

Also that day a curious bigamy case was heard in Southport. It concerned Irene Wilkes from York Street in St Helens, who as Jane Wilson had married William Wilkes in April 1909 at St Thomas's Church in Eccleston, seemingly when only 15. The couple remained in St Helens for 3 – 4 years until William left his young wife to go and live in Glasgow and subsequently went into the army. Irene then left St Helens to enter domestic service in Southport, where she met Alfred Harvey, a soldier who'd been billeted in the town. They entered a form of marriage at Birkdale on March 21st 1915 and Harvey was then posted to Salonika in Greece.

Irene Wilkes told the court that before her second marriage she'd received a telegram telling her that her first husband had died in Glasgow of pneumonia. William's aunt from St Helens also told the Southport magistrates that she'd heard that her nephew had died and had bought black clothes for Irene to wear in mourning. Former workmates at Cannington Shaw even collected for a wreath after a telegram had supposedly been sent to the works!

There were several unanswered questions. Why did Irene use completely different names in the two marriage ceremonies? Why did she state she was a spinster and not a widow when marrying for the second time and why did she not have her first husband's death certificate? If she'd only been 15 when making her first marriage, it wouldn't have been legal; so she couldn't have committed bigamy anyway! Bigamy was a serious crime with offenders routinely sentenced to prison, sometimes for years. The bench felt that this case was so muddled that a conviction at the assizes was unlikely so discharged Irene – or was it Jane?

Speaking at a meeting of the St Helens Trades and Labour Council on the 9th, union leader James Sexton called for price controls on foodstuffs, which had increased by two-thirds since the start of the war. In 1918 Sexton would become the most remarkable MP that St Helens ever had with his early life resembling something out of a Boy's Own adventure. His Irish family were involved in gun smuggling from their umbrella repair shop in Tontine Street and at the age of 9 he left Lowe House school to work at Pilkington's before running away to sea. During several years of adventures, Sexton was shanghaied in San Francisco and involved with sea rescues, a mutiny, pirates and shark attacks!

That same day grocer and baker Sam Royle of Sutton was advertising for a driver for his motor van, who could be male or female. That would have been considered odd before the war but women were now replacing men in many industries.

There was another prosecution of an underage driver on the 11th when 16-year-old Herbert Towers from Dentons Green Lane was fined in St Helens Police Court. He'd got a licence from the Town Hall when only 15 by simply filling in a form and stating that he was 17. The magistrates said that the authorities should get proof of age when issuing driving licences and not hand them out to any boy who wanted one and then prosecute them later.

Also on the 11th the licence of the Crown Inn in Peasley Cross Lane – situated in between Manor Street and Greenough Street – was temporarily transferred to Ann Foster until the closure of the beerhouse under the compensation scheme. Pressure from temperance movements had led to the creation of this scheme in which all licensed houses paid a levy into a compensation pot. When the licensing magistrates decided that beerhouses or pubs were no longer needed, compensation was paid to the owners. It also served as an inducement for the surrendering of licences.

A public meeting was held on the evening of the 11th to discuss the rebuilding of St Helens Parish Church, which had been destroyed by fire nine days earlier. There was a large attendance – including the Mayor of St Helens and the Bishop of Liverpool – and a committee was formed to plan for the new church. In the meantime Sunday church services were being held in the assembly room of St Helens Town Hall.

A century ago outbreaks of fevers, such as measles, diphtheria and scarlet fever, were quite common. These led to many deaths in St Helens, although lives could be saved if doctors were called in early. Dr Joseph Cates, the St Helens Medical Officer of Health, had recently complained that some parents didn't call in the doctor until their children were "practically dead". Now Dr Cates was telling the council's Health Committee that "stringent action" needed to be taken against parents who delayed reporting that their child had diphtheria.

The town's Medical Officer declared on the 14th December that far too many lives had unnecessarily been lost in the recent epidemic. The committee agreed to call in the mothers and fathers of the deceased to give them a "good reprimand", where they felt it was needed. This was seemingly an insensitive and unnecessary decision, as the parents would already be aware that their tardiness had contributed to their child's death. However the committee wanted to ensure that the parents didn't make the same mistake with their other children, if they became ill.

On the 15th December Olive Dowd from Haydock Lane in Haydock was sent to a home for girls for 5 years for theft. The 14-year-old had a history of running away from home and on one occasion had turned up at the house of a Mrs Worthington in Bickerstaffe Street, saying that she had nowhere to live. The kindly lady took the girl in but was rewarded by having £3 stolen.

Also appearing in court in St Helens on that day were James Kelly and John Traynor, who were both hawkers. This was a popular trade a century ago in which individuals travelled from street to street selling goods from a handcart. However Kelly and Traynor didn't own what they sold, as they'd persuaded some marine shop owners to let them sell their ship-related odds and ends on the streets of St Helens for a commission. The problem was that the hawkers didn't return to the shops but kept all the money for themselves, for which they were fined 20 shillings each.

On the 16th the annual Christmas 'fat cattle sale and show' took place in St Helens. It was reported that there had been a fine display of beasts, with record prices having been obtained. Also on that day Sherdley Hall Farm was advertising the sale of 30 geese, which were 'good for Christmas'.

The inquest on William Montgomery of Elephant Lane was also held on the 16th December. On April 1st the 55-year-old colliery worker had been a passenger on the top deck of a tram travelling from Whiston to St Helens with his mate John Foster, both of them being considerably the worst for drink. Once the tram arrived at Thatto Heath railway bridge the pair descended down the steps but Montgomery fell off the tram car and landed on his head, followed by Foster. It conjures up a comical April fool's day picture but with tragic results for Montgomery, who eight months later died from septic pneumonia.

Sutton's Ernie Proudlove fought a tough 15-round fight in Newcastle on the 16th against Sgt. Joe Percival from West Yorkshire. Ernie was in a reserved occupation as a miner but Percival was one of many soldiers, who not only fought at the front but battled away in a boxing ring while home on leave. As he'd been awarded the Military Medal and the Distinguished Conduct Medal for conspicuous service, the large Geordie audience tended to be on Percival's side. Boxing Magazine wrote that Proudlove 'boxed gamely' but at times took 'severe punishment' and the heroic soldier won on points.

It wasn't a great surprise that Ernie Proudlove lost the fight, as it was the coal miner's second in 48 hours. Can you imagine St Helens's top boxer Martin Murray being asked to do that these days, as well as having a full-time job? Talking of mining 16-years-old Fred Hilton was crushed between boxes of coal at Bold Colliery on December 16th. However the lad from Burtonwood failed to report the accident to his bosses and just told his parents that his legs hurt. Hilton didn't seek medical attention until two days later and soon afterwards died in hospital from blood poisoning.

Before the introduction of antibiotics, deaths from blood poisoning or sepsis – as it is more commonly known today – were much more common. Even the most minor of accidents could lead to death. In 1894 Richard Pemberton from Lancots Lane died through opening a tin of mustard, after scratching his thumb against the rough edge of the tin. Catherine Roberts from Waterdale Crescent also died from blood poisoning in 1914, after she'd pricked her thumb with a pin.

On the 18th December 1916, Maria Travis from Heath Street in Thatto Heath was given the option of paying a £2 fine or going to prison for a month for receiving goods stolen by her daughter Ellen. The 9-year-old had been caught stealing parcels from the Nutgrove branch of the Co-op by the shop manager. The court bound over the child with her father ordered to act as surety for £5.

There have been a number of other occasions in the past when parents have sent their children out to steal. A notable case was that of Maud Beirne from Edgeworth Street in Sutton, who in January 1916 was sent to prison for 3 months for receiving goods stolen by her son Gilbert. The 10-year-old had been on a nicking spree from local shops and the magistrates said it was the worst case of receiving that they'd known. Another family fence was Ellen Barratt from Sandon Street who was also given 3 months in April 1917 for receiving 28 skirts stolen by her step-daughter.

The St Helens Charity Sports Committee met on the evening of the 19th and revealed that their fundraising during the year had raised the considerable sum of £230. It was decided to donate £50 each to St Helens Hospital, Providence Hospital and the nurses' home. In addition £10 would be given to the Chief Constable's Clog and Stocking Fund, the Fresh Air Fund and to the Crippled Children's Aid Society. An additional £2 10s would go to the Crippled Children's Outing.

St Helens police's Clog and Stocking Fund provided footwear and clothing to the poorest children in the borough. It's unthinkable these days for kids to attend school in bare feet but it used to often happen in the town. James Sexton became the Labour MP for St Helens in 1918 and came from a poor family that mended umbrellas for a living in Tontine Street. For at least part of his schooling Sexton attended the school at Lowe House in bare feet. The Fresh Air Fund was designed to take sickly children to places like St Anne's, away from the smoky, unclean atmosphere of St Helens.

Two sets of families in the Rainford area were due to have contrasting Christmases as a result of announcements made on the 19th. The parents of Corporal James Lomax from Crank Hill Road would proudly have been celebrating the award of the Military Medal to their 23-year-old son for an act of bravery in France. However the parents of Private George Lydiate from Ormskirk Road would have been devastated to learn that their collier son had been killed in action in France.

It snowed heavily in St Helens on the 19th, which led to an unusual death at Wood Pit Colliery in Haydock. John Burns from Newton Common in Earlestown was part of a work party instructed to clear the snow from the pithead and siding. He somehow became trapped between loaded coal waggons and suffered such serious injuries that he died soon afterwards. That day's snow was also blamed for a disastrous 50 mph collision between two trains at Wigan, which led to the deaths of two people.

As the war progressed food became more of an issue. In 1914 Britain had imported 2/3rds of its foodstuffs but during the conflict German submarines destroyed a large number of merchant ships that were bringing in supplies. A scheme of voluntary food rationing was only a few weeks away and as well as persuading people to eat less of certain foods, the Government was keen to boost domestic crop production.

St Helens wanted to do its bit, so a public meeting was held on the 20th presided over by the Mayor Alderman Bates. It was decided that St Helens Council should be asked to form an allotments committee to consider what public land in the town could be given over to food production. Private landowners would also be invited to give up some land rent-free for crop cultivation and the Mayor would invite donations to administer the scheme. By May of 1917 it was estimated that there were half a million allotments and vegetable plots being cultivated nationwide, with even tennis courts having been dug up.

Christmas shopping was now in full swing with only four shopping days left until the 25th, although it would be just another day for many poor families in St Helens. For those who had the cash, quite a few would make their way to Liverpool, where the stores offered 'tempting lines for Christmas'. This was the strap line of Creamers advert in the Daily Post on the 20th, although the Bold Street furriers were selling fur coats costing up to £150 guineas. Not many miners in St Helens would be tempted by that price!

Meanwhile Owen Owen was offering 'thousands of toys, dolls, games, books, cards etc.' from their London Road premises with youngsters invited to enter their children's store and marvel at free attractions – including Red Riding Hood, Jack and Jill and Babes in the Wood. Parents could purchase a ticket costing either 6d or a shilling, which entitled their children to a present from Father Christmas or a fairy.

Also in the Post Rushworth and Dreaper of Islington was calling on people to 'entertain quietly at home this Christmas', with plenty of auditory delights available in their H.M.V. Gramophone Lounge. These included children's records, with narrated fairy-tale and bible stories, as well as dance 78s and accompaniment records. The latter enabled sopranos or tenors to sing to well-known musical numbers, with instrumental versions also available in keys suitable for contraltos and baritones. These were available decades before the Japanese claimed to have invented karaoke! The records at Rushworth and Dreaper weren't cheap, costing either 2/6 or 4 shillings and only lasting a few minutes per side. To put that into context, a pint of beer was then fourpence.

On December 23rd William Webster placed a hopeful advert for staff in a Preston newspaper. The solicitor wanted '2 respectable girls' to work as cook and housemaid at Abbotsfield, his home near

St Helens Junction. Despite the fact that domestic help was hard to find during the war, he was discriminating against Catholics (and Irish) by insisting that applicants had to be Protestant.

In the same newspaper Mrs Anderton of Warrington Road in Rainhill, was advertising for a 'strong, willing girl to make herself generally useful' in her grocer's shop. Being strong and respectable were adjectives often used in classified ads for young female help. Quite a number of girls (and boys) from poor families who didn't get enough food became unfit with stunted growth and these weaklings were the ones that employers wanted to avoid.

There was the usual packed programme of rugby league planned for the festive period with Saints set to play three games in four days. They were due to entertain Leigh at Knowsley Road on Saturday 23rd, visit the City Ground for the Christmas Day derby with St Helens Recs and then host Wigan for the annual Boxing Day game. Can you imagine today's players coping with that?

The Recs were also due to play on Saturday against Runcorn and on Boxing Day against Warrington. However the weather on the Saturday was appalling and both St Helens teams' matches had to be called off. The winter of 1916 – 17 was the first severe one of the 20th century, which lasted well into April. The Christmas period was very cold and frosty (apart from the Day itself) and although it snowed in St Helens on Saturday 23rd, it soon turned to slush.

Christmas in St Helens came at the end of a dreadful year, in which there had been much suffering. As a result many celebrations on the 25th were muted, as the Liverpool Echo explained on Boxing Day: 'Christmas this year found a subdued and sobered nation. Many were missing from the family gatherings, and it was this sense of personal loss, and apprehension for the future, that prohibited the customary feeling of festivity.'

However folk in St Helens tried to enjoy themselves as best they could, especially within households where a serviceman was home on leave. The Government had done their bit by waiving a recent restriction, which allowed people to have a larger meal for Christmas dinner. There was a great shortage of turkeys and geese; so many people had chicken or duck instead. Although it was a bad winter, with snow having fallen in St Helens in the run up to Christmas, it didn't snow in the town on Christmas Day. Indeed the weather in Lancashire was described as having been 'pleasant'.

So what could people do on December 25th in St Helens with no TV to entertain and annoy them? Well apart from going to church, they could watch the town's two rugby league teams do battle at the City Ground. Attendances throughout the season in the friendly Northern Union matches had been poor but the Christmas Day derby game of 1916 was well attended and the many spectators watched the Recs beat the Saints 7 – 0.

People in St Helens could also go to the picture house. Last month the Odeon cinema chain controversially announced that 20 of its cinemas would be screening films on Christmas Day. Church leaders complained that it was an erosion of traditional values. In actual fact a century ago it was a tradition for some cinemas to put on special screenings on December 25th. In 1916 the Picturedrome in Bridge Street had Mary Pickford – then the biggest movie star in the States – performing in 'Hulda from Holland', a story about a 'plucky Dutch girl' who takes her three little brothers from the Netherlands to live with their rich Uncle Peter in America. The cinema, which changed its name to the Savoy in 1920 and seated 520 people, had two showings of the silent film at 3pm and 7pm.

Meanwhile the Parrvilion in Jackson Street (which was later nicknamed Parrdog) had a Christmas Day screening of the grammatically dubious 'Me and Me Moke'. This is a film about a wealthy man who gets a job as a porter at Covent Garden and presumably uses a donkey (a.k.a. moke) to carry stuff. The title sounds like it could have been the best part of the film!

An effort was made to cheer up the patients in the town's hospitals, with many being wounded soldiers. The day at St Helens Hospital was reported as having been 'devoted to pleasure'. It began at 6:30am when staff went round all the wards singing carols, with the highlight being, of course, Christmas dinner, which was served in one of the large wards and presided over by Sir David Gamble.

At Providence Hospital the wards were reported to have been 'gaily decorated', with a large Christmas tree in the children's ward. The Mayor and Mayoress, Alderman and Mrs Bates, assisted with the plum pudding at dinnertime and distributed gifts. The St Helens Reporter said that: 'In the evening a most enjoyable entertainment was given by Miss Brown and several other ladies. The children found great enjoyment in the Christmas tree provided for them, and everything passed off in an exceedingly pleasant manner.'

About 200 yards further north of St Helens Hospital, on the other side of Marshalls Cross Road, was the Borough Sanatorium, which had opened in 1881. It was also known as the Fever Hospital, which was a good description of its patients, who may have been suffering from measles, diphtheria, typhoid or scarlet fever. It could also have been described as a children's hospital, as youngsters were far more prone to catching such fevers. On Christmas Day 1916 there were 115 children and 2 adult patients in the sanatorium, with recent epidemics having inflated patient numbers.

Another name for the sanatorium was the Isolation Hospital; so the parents of the children would not have been allowed to visit them at Christmas. Despite this the St Helens Reporter said it had been an 'exceedingly pleasant day', adding that: 'All the wards were beautifully decorated by the willing staff and everything was done to make their little lives as happy as possible during Christmas. The patients in the various wards were amply provided with suitable toys and those whose condition admitted of Christmas fare received it'.

That's quite a sad final line as some of the children wouldn't have been capable of eating anything, and for some it would be their last Christmas. A lot depended on how early their condition had been diagnosed, with some parents delaying calling in the doctor until it was too late. Unlike St Helens Hospital, treatment at the Sanatorium was free, but the parents would still likely have had to pay their local doctor, which deterred poor families from getting help.

The St Helens Reporter said a 'right jolly good time of it' was held on Christmas Day at the Tower Hospital, the military convalescent hospital in Mill Lane in Rainhill, that's now a private school. They should really have said a 'reet jolly good time', but it's unlikely that any of the soldiers would have been local. Messages from King George V to soldiers and sailors and to the sick and wounded were read out to the men, as the Reporter described:

'The reading of the letters caused intense feeling, which found a vent in the outburst of great cheering. The dinner, comprising all the usual Christmas fayre, was admirably served and greatly enjoyed, after which each man was given a useful present. The day wound up with an excellent concert and play, which created great enthusiasm. The staff, under the Commandant Mrs Jackson, joined heartily in the efforts made to give the wounded men a happy time, and they succeeded admirably in their efforts.'

However not everyone enjoyed a peaceful and merry Christmas, with a violent poker attack in a Water Street lodging house. With coal fires in virtually all homes, pokers designed to stoke fires also served as a handy weapon in passionate, spur-of-the-moment crimes. When Margaret Kivlehan had a row with her lodger Patrick Connolly on December 25th, she hit him twice in the face and then continued her attack with a poker, before striking him with a yard brush. When arrested by

Constable Smith, the Irish 43-year-old lodging-house keeper told him that Connolly had struck her first and she would have liked to have "given him more with the brush".

There have been countless instances of pokers being used in violent assaults in St Helens, although they could also be used to defend property. When Thomas Smith heard somebody trying to break into his farmhouse in January 1908, he quietly climbed out of a back window and crept round to the front. The farmer from Union Bank Farm in Bold then bashed the burglar over the head with a poker before handing him over to the police. No discussions about reasonable force, as we have today. Just a whack over the head with a poker and off to jail!

The last word on Christmas Day 1916 goes to the St Helens Reporter, who described the celebrations at Oakdene, another military convalescent hospital, situated in Lawton Road in Rainhill:

'Christmas Day at the Oakdene was wound up by three cheers for the very able staff, who in turn gave three cheers for the patients. From this it will be seen that the day passed off quite merrily, as every Christmas Day should.'

The term Boxing Day is, of course, derived from the old custom of people receiving gifts or 'Christmas boxes' as appreciation for good service. On Boxing Day 1916 it was the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society who were giving gifts. The Society, which was formed in 1839 and still exists, presented bravery awards to a number of St Helens heroes for saving children from drowning. 16-year-old John Heyes from Epsom Street, off Broad Oak Road, had rescued two small boys from a stagnant pool in Parr and Reginald Penketh had saved a 5-year-old girl, who'd been carried down a culvert into Windle Brook.

With many St Helens' works having their own reservoirs for cooling, as well as large numbers of water-filled pits, there was a far greater danger of drowning a century ago than today. In the summer kids drowned in bathing accidents and in winter through skating on iced up waters that gave way. The drowning of six children in Wigan on Christmas Eve in two separate incidents had reinforced the dangers of the latter.

The bravery awards were presented in St Helens Police Court, which was open for business even though it was Boxing Day. The worst case was that of Thomas Middlehurst from Brook Street, who had attacked his wife with a chair. His vicious assault created a circular wound that needed eight stitches. Mrs Middlehurst was the mother of 20 children and she was nursing her youngest child of 10 months when brutally felled by the chair.

Middlehurst only received a £5 fine but his wife was awarded a separation order by the court, which hopefully would have kept her safe. These were first introduced in 1878 and were made available to married women who had suffered cruelty. An importance aspect was maintenance, with Mrs Middlehurst granted 12 shillings 6d per week – although this wouldn't have gone very far with 20 children.

The traditional Boxing Day Saints vs. Wigan fixture was played at Knowsley Road in front of 3,000 spectators and in fine weather for a change – in previous years it had poured down. Alice Bates, the Mayoress of St Helens, kicked off for Wigan but it didn't do the pie-eaters any good as they lost the game 11 – 3.

The 27th was back to work day, with many people in St Helens having enjoyed an extended break over Christmas. The 25th had been on a Monday, so most would have finished work at lunchtime on the Saturday as usual but not gone back to their labours until the Wednesday. As most bank holidays in 1916 had been cancelled through the war, the break would have been appreciated.

There were quite a number of mining inquests held on the 27th, including ones on Peter Smith (53) and Thomas Gordon (37), who had both died from injuries received underground in a shot explosion at the Old Boston colliery in Haydock. The inquest on Joseph Halsall of Sunbury Street in Thatto Heath revealed that the 44-year-old had died from injuries received down Lea Green Colliery, which included his thigh having been broken.

James Devine (21) of Glover Street died from injuries received at St Helens Collieries after being crushed by stones. The coroner Samuel Brighthouse criticised his workmate Patrick Brady for leaving the inexperienced Devine alone down the pit for an hour. That same day James Roughley (52) of Horace Street off Boundary Road in St Helens – whose job at Pilkington's was described as a 'cullet crushing pan attendant' – was killed after slipping into the crusher while going to change his lamp, severely crushing his own legs.

A deputation of eight women strolled into the St Helens Police Court on the 27th. They were all from the Vernon Street district of Fingerpost, whose houses had been condemned as unfit for habitation and given 6 months to move. However there was a housing crisis in St Helens and finding somewhere else to live was difficult, to say the least. So the women requested an extension but received short shrift from Thomas Edmondson, the 63-year-old chairman of the magistrates, who appeared to think that he was Scrooge. The well off mineral water manufacturer from Grosvenor Road (off Prescott Road), told the women: "You have had plenty of notice and you must get out or you will have to be put out," adding that their families were now living rent-free.

When it came to aspects of health and education, St Helens was often considered a model of good practice and from time to time other councils despatched fact-finding delegations to the town. On 28th December Chorley Council's Education Committee discussed the results of their sub-committee's visit to St Helens to find out how the medical inspections of schoolchildren were organised. The government had mandated these inspections in 1907 and the Chorley delegation were so pleased with what they saw, that their Education Committee decided to replace their existing scheme with the one run in St Helens.

The people of St Helens must have been really glad to see the back of 1916 – a really rubbish year. Conscription had begun in January and the number of families bereaved by the war had been on a huge scale. The price of staple foods had risen by two-thirds since 1914, 'war bread' was being introduced, houses were overcrowded, pub opening hours had been greatly reduced and the beer diluted. Shops closed early, the streets were dark and even Bank Holidays and Guy Fawkes' night had been cancelled.

Life had been bleak, with more rules than you could shake a stick at. You could find yourself in court for buying someone a drink, selling a cold pie after 10pm, flying a kite, talking about the war and if you were in business there were regulations and permits galore. Even the parish church had burned down and many people permanently wore mourning clothes. The bad news continued over Christmas, with the government announcing that from January 1st there would be drastic cuts to train services, along with hikes in ticket prices.

On the plus side the huge drive to boost war production in St Helens meant work for all and higher wages for many – with a greater sense of independence for women, who now made up much of the workforce. It was even said that you rarely saw tramps anymore. They'd either been stuck in the army or given a job. Traditionalists like Colonel Hughes of Sherdley Hall were mystified by all the change, refusing to increase the wages of his employees and then wondering why he was short-staffed! Life was grim in St Helens but it would get even worse in 1917 before it would get better.