

A SHORT HISTORY OF BRANDON AND...

THE SUMMER PARADE OF 1914

Fred Rissbrook stands on the meadow behind the Ram Inn. Dressed in a shirt, tie and jacket, with a bushy grey beard, he has an air of authority about him and quite rightly so. A couple of months ago, he celebrated his fiftieth year as a Baptist Sunday school teacher. Today, Wednesday 8th July, 1914, he keeps an eye on his young congregation, watching for anyone about to step out of line. Above him, what were once blue summer skies have now given way to dark storm clouds. Every summer, the Sunday schools of Brandon have a day of activities for their students, known locally as a "Frolic", when they take it in turns to parade through town. The first to do it this year were the Methodists, two weeks ago, last week it was St. Peter's church, now today it is the turn of Fred's Baptist church. The weather for the other churches was ideal, but this afternoon it is looking a bit cloudy. Nonetheless, come what may, Fred is determined to go ahead with the festivities.

Proceedings start when the children congregate at the Baptist church on High Street. There's a short service before Fred marshals them into a decent line behind the Town Band, where they then head toward Market Hill, with the children's parents following behind. Fluttering in the breeze, held aloft by some of the older children, are huge bright blue banners depicting colourful religious scenes. Once on Market Hill, the band plays on, with the Sunday School children joining in, singing their hymns. Once concluded, Fred marshals the children in a line because they now need to parade back down High Street, over the old bridge and onto the Ram Meadow. They don't mind, because on the meadow an array of treats awaits them. Stalls have been set up, offering sweets and ice cream. Mr Ashley has set up his swing boats, where children sit inside and pull on a rope to gain momentum in their swing. Truth be told, excited children, ice cream and motion sickness is not a mix that fills Fred with joy.

However, this year's Frolic does not go to plan. Fred barely shepherds his flock onto the meadow, when the dark clouds unleash a heavy torrent of rain. He calls to his congregation, telling them to head back to the bridge, where they are then ushered into the old maltings building nearby. The building is owned by Arthur Lee-Barber, and every year he clears it out to host an evening tea for the children. Volunteers hurriedly bring the tea forward to take place in the afternoon, during the storm. The Malting's neighbour, Colonel Hamilton, of Brandon House, keeps the children occupied by addressing them with a short speech. It buys enough time for the tables to be set. The children tuck in to bread and butter, followed by sponge and fruit cake. When the weather clears up, the children can return to the meadow for their treats. Once the tea had gone down, there are games to compete in, with the winners receiving a small prize. The festivities are brought to a close with a torchlit procession back to Market Hill, and a final hymn sung in the darkness.

It is late when Fred finally returns home, having 'survived' another manic summer Frolic. He does not know what is ahead, but that summer there will be an

outbreak of diphtheria among the Brandon children, leading to local schools, including his Sunday school, closing for a while. Also, the town will be plunged into war.