

17. Week twelve of the war and a big fund-raising night at the Institute

In Belgium, fierce combat was waging around the town of Ypres with heavy British losses, and the first merchant ship had been sunk by the Germans after a U-boat attack. A dip in the rate of recruitment prompted the government to lower the physical standards required of applicants, and so more men came forward. Around 130 men were said to have signed up from Neston by this time in the war.

The vicar, Rev Brooke-Gwynne, 'back in the saddle' after some time off following a cycling accident, presided at a special event of cinematographic entertainment in the packed Institute on Tuesday night, in aid of the Neston Red Cross fund. He quoted an officer who had written to him saying he thought the Germans were beaten in France, but the vicar was not so sure, and he thought that Kitchener had a point when he alluded to three years. The young men of Neston should follow the example of those who had already volunteered, and the sooner we poured great masses of men into France, the sooner this war would be over, he urged. In these years before Neston had a proper cinema, Mr W.H. Maxwell's Neston Electric Picturedrome had regular sessions in the Institute. At this special fund-raising event he showed several contemporary war films with views of our national leaders, greeted with huge applause. An enthusiastic "God Bless the Prince of Wales" greeted pictures of the King's son (the one who later briefly became Edward VIII), followed by films of drama and comedy, with local singer Albert Littler's rendering of "Yes, Let me like a Soldier Fall" in the interval (on-line versions of the song available!).

The evening was organised by some of the ladies whose names were becoming familiar and were beginning to show what women could do, given the opportunity: Mrs Pemberton, Mrs Gladstone, Lady Hill from Leighton House at the bottom of the Runnell, Lady Bates from Hinderton Hall, Mrs Brooke-Gwynne, and GP's wife Mrs Lewis Grant.

On that same night Neston and District Bowling Club held a presentation evening for one of their long-term members, John Smith, manager of the Neston, Parkgate and District Steam Laundry, a big employer in the town. John R. Hughes, who had a grocery business where HSBC is now situated, made a speech at the event which was held at the Letters Hotel, opposite to the Town Hall.

Neston was by no means a cultural desert, and the previous February had seen its Concord Society performing five nights of the comic opera "Merrie England", having exhausted Gilbert and Sullivan. The decision was made to not put on a show this winter, but to get local children to do a 'Kinderspiel',

performance of “The Forty Thieves” in February 1915, where they take on the acting roles which are usually performed by adults.

Another popular sport had a meeting in town this week; Wirral Billiard League held its AGM at the Institute, Rev Otty from the Congregational Church presiding. Despite all the Wirral teams having lost men who had gone off to war, they decided to carry on with the league competitions.

On Saturday the Nomads drew with Wirral Railway (the ‘Rails’) at home, but perhaps a more interesting match was a Rovers v Chester cup-tie at Prenton Park, with the home team victorious 5-1. A return fixture for the Lancashire Combination is due next Saturday at Sealand Road. A ‘friendly’ was played between the rival railway men of those two towns at Bebington for the ‘Cigarettes for the Tommies’ fund on the same day as the Prenton Park match.

This is our second report of farm animals apparently strolling around the town centre (it was sheep last time): on Wednesday a cow walked in through the back door of the police station on Park Street, ambled around the kitchen and out of the front door. Perhaps on its way to one of the several butchers in the town who did their own slaughtering?