

33. Weeks 28 and 29 of the Great War, and the young people of Neston are being kept busy.

Last week saw the start of one of the major allied disasters of the War, when an Anglo-French naval task force headed for the Dardanelles in Turkey, eventually leading to the Gallipoli fiasco where thousands died, including several Neston men. Nearer home, in British coastal waters, German U-boats were attacking British shipping and on the Western Front the French were struggling and calling for more British assistance. Things were not going well.

Fear of after-dark attacks had caused the authorities to issue an order this week about night-time lighting under DORA (Defence of the Realm Act). Lights had to be dimmed or shaded from above, illuminations on building fronts, clock faces and advertisements were to be discontinued. It is doubtful if any of these were a problem in Neston as they were still managing with gas for street lighting.

It must have been an impressive sight in Birkenhead on Saturday 20th when 2,700 "Bigland's Birkenhead Bantams", the small stature soldiers of the Cheshire Regiment, marched around the town. Labelled as 'hordes of eager little men' by the Birkenhead Advertiser, they were still having to suffer a rather patronising attitude by the media and authorities. The idea of such Battalions had rapidly spread nationwide from its Birkenhead origins.

In the Infants' section of the C of E School on Liverpool Road, a lot of children and one of the teachers were off sick, or were staying at home because it was raining, and to make things worse the caretaker had no coke for the stove; Clatterbridge Workhouse also reported that it was running out of coal. Relief payments to those not resident in the Workhouse were being increased as the cost of living was rising.

Forty members of the Boys' Brigade with Neston Girls' Drill Class showed what they were capable of in an impressive display in the Town Hall on Monday 15th. Ambulance drill, military and physical drill with arms were demonstrated, along with more light-weight entertainment such as Scottish Reels, Irish Jigs, Sailors' Hornpipes, Welsh dancing and skipping rope work. Captain Coventry of Townfield in Mill Street was the leader, and sixty-seven old-boys and officers of the Brigade had already volunteered to fight. The wounded soldiers from Parkgate Hospital were in the audience.

Mrs Barrett, from the house that is now the carpet shop opposite to the church, widow of the late curate, features this week for playing the piano for the Church Missionary Society's talk in the Town Hall on missionary work in China, on Saturday, emphasising the 'militant' work of the church. The Parish Church continued its monthly organ recital after the Sunday evening service, featuring Bach and Widor.

A really impressive concert in aid of Belgian Relief was performed in the Presbyterian Lecture Room on Tuesday evening, entitled "John Bull, his Friends and Allies", the members of the Presbyterian Sunday school in fact. Lloyd Hughes, the 6 year-old son of J.R.Hughes the Grocer from High Street, was a self-confident John Bull who started the evening by conducting 'Tipperary'. Bobby Hughes, Eddie Wright and Willie Howe performed 'The Lads in Navy Blue'. The young performers managed 'Marseillaise' in French, featuring Lloyd's 10 year-old sister. Florrie and Edie Howe, Lily Foote and Emma Kameen appeared as Japanese ladies singing the Japanese national anthem, the whole troupe managed 'Gallant Little Belgium', then there was a song in Welsh by Dot Hughes, Dorothy Johnson, Jessie Scott and Kathleen Skelly. And that only takes us up to the interval, so we will list some more of these gallant young performers next week.

Neston had one of the many groups of home defence Volunteers that had rapidly sprung up in a somewhat disorganised fashion across the county, so it was agreed by the County Council to form a Cheshire Volunteer Regiment based on Parliamentary divisions, with strong support from the Duke of Westminster who sent his apologies as his command of armoured cars was being fitted out for going abroad.

A George Formby film was on at the Picturedrome in Chester, plus of course news films, and the film of the Bantams' march could be seen at Saronie's Electric Theatre by Birkenhead Park Entrance.

On Saturday the Portites had beaten the Nomads 1- 0, BUT, the previous Saturday the Nomads had been victorious by 8-1 over the London and North Western Permanent Way men. On Monday this week the Institute Billiards team went to Port Sunlight for a match, and were beaten despite a good game; they were low in the league table.

(This article covers roughly 10th - 24th February 1915)

