

# Summer One Hundred Years Ago ...

By Mike Trippitt

Mike Trippitt is a freelance writer living in St Ives. His blog is at [www.miketrippitt.com](http://www.miketrippitt.com) and you can follow him on Facebook.

"We are watching history being made," said one St Ives resident recently, whilst ruminating on the country's future relationship with our European neighbours.

That the road ahead is complex is beyond argument. That we live in monumental political and social times is undisputed, and what St Ives will become in the next 100 years is unknown.

But a century ago, our town, the country and Europe also faced a new dawn. Though the guns of the Great War fell silent on 11th November 1918, it was only on 28th June 1919 that the Treaty of Versailles brought war with Germany to an end. Britain began the process of getting back to normal.

Food price ceilings were still in force and though food scarcity remained, supply was improving. Johnson and Randall in St Ives sold the "finest English Cheese" for 6d. per pound (2.5p), announcing proudly: "*This is a special purchase and we can supply any reasonable quantity.*"

Industrial production increased as demobilised men returned to the labour market. F A Standen of Stanpoint Works, St Ives supplied the farming community with new agricultural equipment. The Fordson Farm Tractor was offered for sale at £280.

By July 1919, St Ives livestock market was again flourishing. On 21st July, 418 cattle were entered for sale, 919 sheep, 124 pigs and 3 horses. The auctioneer described the trading as "good".

On Saturday 19th July throughout the land 'Peace Day' celebrations were held. One reporter noted: "*Great Britain was beflagged from end to end, and in the evening there were everywhere illuminations and fireworks.*"

Here in St Ives a day's festivities began with the firing of early morning guns, followed by a scouts' parade at 10.00am. In a service of thanksgiving later in the day the congregation listened to a message from King George: "*I desire you to express my admiration of the courage and endurance displayed by the sailors, soldiers and airmen of your county during the past five years of war,*" said the sovereign.

Later, after a mayoral address, a tea and an 'Old English Sports' competition, celebrations concluded with a fancy dress dance. It proved all too much for Thomas William Smith, a discharged soldier from Plymouth. Thomas was arrested in Market Hill for being drunk and disorderly and held in custody until the Monday, when he appeared before the St Ives Divisional Bench. Given that he had not been in trouble before, and had been incarcerated over the weekend, the court gave him one-day imprisonment, allowing for his immediate release.

In his earlier message King George rejoiced "at the restoration of peace" which he trusted "*will bring to us all unity, contentment and prosperity.*" A journalist reporting in The Huntingdonshire Post that week shared his optimism: "*It is now generally believed in motoring circles that the government will abolish the petrol tax at the earliest possible moment.*"

The unity, contentment and prosperity the King spoke of have been absent at times in the last 100 years, and remain under threat. Perhaps we need them now more than ever. As for the predicted abolition of the petrol tax, no doubt for that we will be waiting rather longer ...