



Lest We Forget

By Anne Eatough

(Adult Category)

It is Wednesday the 3rd January 1917, a bitter winters day; I have just come home from visiting a friend in Wimborne.

The breaking news on the billboards is the death of Rasputin the evil Russian monk.

I usually write my diary each evening around 7pm whilst enjoying a rum and water. It is only 5pm, a little early for my tipples, but when the weather is cold my arm aches and a dram eases the pain.

I am a creature of habit, rum and diaries go together.

I am the oldest of three brothers, Arthur, Stanley, and my name is Guthrie, we also have a sister called Alma.

Looking out of the parlour window in Ethelbert Road few people are out and about, just a few workers going home from the Cycle Works in East Street, they are mostly older men and also women who, because of the war, worked in factories, many worked with dangerous chemicals which gave them toxic jaundice and turned their skin yellow; thankfully not in the cycle works.

The younger fit men volunteered for the Queens Own Dorset Yeomanry Regiment; Arthur and Stanley trained in Wimborne St Giles, they called it pre-war camp; enlistment day was almost like a picnic outing, bunting and flags strung out in the streets, they even put on a "smoking concert"; all this was done to put the men at their ease, if only they knew what lay ahead.

I would have volunteered along side them, but I was born with a withered arm, I would have been more of a liability; I could not hold a bayonet.

I am an academic; I teach at the Wimborne Grammar School; they are pleased to have a young male teacher, some of the older boys need firm discipline.

I also run the local Scout Group; we make basic medical equipment for the soldiers, such as swabs and slings.

In the autumn the school children collect conkers which can be turned into explosives.

Stanley my brother is a good horseman, he used to help our uncle Tom on his farm near Cranborne, Tom drops us off eggs and chickens on his way to Wimborne market.

He had four horses, three were commissioned for the war effort, he was left with Molly the oldest mare.

Stanley was put in charge of the horses on the troop ships; many of these gentle creatures would die horrific deaths along with the soldiers in the trenches.

Conditions were terrible; they lived along side rats who ate their rations and also their feet if they were not covered; many of the troops had foot rot and had to have their feet amputated. Before they went to war our mother Winifred bought both brothers a pair of stout 38 shilling boots from Pitmans, the shoe and bootmakers in Bournemouth; I am not sure these would have given them much comfort for long.

The trenches were often waist deep in water, mud and blood; fever and cholera were rife in these conditions, and many men died from disease.

Our mother works as a nurse in the Wimborne cottage hospital; she treats soldiers arriving home from Southampton on the hospital trains, many are broken men in body and soul. Those being treated wear a blue uniform with a red tie known as the "hospital blues".

Her favourite sister Muriel is also a nurse and lives in Dover, a place known as "Hell Fire Corner".

She wrote a letter to us saying they train Airdale Terriers further along the coast to spot Zeppelins; the only German airships to raid Britain up to now.

Our sister Alma followed in mum's footsteps, she tends the wounded soldiers on the hospital trains, many have terrible gaping wounds, missing limbs and mental problems, not visible but their lives will be affected forever. She lives on the train for weeks on end because the workload is never ending. She says if she came home more often it would be tempting not to go back; Alma is a headstrong young woman and wants to go to London and join the Suffragettes. I wonder if woman will get the vote soon; they

started fighting for this back in 1897. Some forward thinking men have supported them; one of the most high profile was George Lansbury, the M P for Bow and Bromley.

On a lighter note I am looking forward to the weekend. I am meeting my friend George in the Coach and Horses Pub, near to our house; in some towns closing times is 9.30pm to reduce alcohol consumption; they say the beer is also watered down!

George's father is deaf and needs help to run his hardware shop in Wimborne so George has been spared call up!

They are not as busy these days as they make cart ropes; most of the horses are away on The Western Front, Egypt or Gallipoli so there are less carts around; although the milk horse have been spared, and horses carrying essential provisions.

I write my diary every day - not much to help the war effort is it?

I often wonder if in a hundred years time nations will still be at war; or on happier note will the local pubs still be around Wimborne; my favourites being the Coach and Horses and the Kings Head in the Square.

May be the motorcar will be available to more people.

At the moment none of this matters; I just pray that both my dear brothers will return home safely; we dread the knock on the door from the messenger boy with a telegram; our family would be broken.

Maybe my diary will be read in years ahead.

A REMINDER OF THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE.