



Wimborne in World War One

By Elizabeth Hann

(Adult Category)

It is the war to end all wars. Down in Wimborne we aren't affected as much as other places have been. On our farm we breed chickens for their eggs. We have a pony and trap to be able to get the eggs to the railway station so they can go to the hotels in London. We also have an extensive orchard and we supply the village with our surplus fruit. Sometimes when the forces march past, on their way to goodness knows where, we hand out apples and plums to them. It is a very small way to say thank you to them. Some seem so young, hardly older than my older brother.

I am nearly 12 years old and help feed the chickens, and, with my younger brother Trevor, collect the eggs. We would collect them in an old bucket then later put them into cardboard trays. We would then put them into a large box, load them into the pony and trap to head off for the station with our Daddy. They get put on the train to go up to London for the hotels and, I suppose, to sell in the shops up there. I wonder what life is like up there. All parties and dancing I expect. Too much for a country girl like me, though sometimes I dream about going to a party, dancing and having fun.

Once the eggs are safely on the train Trevor, Daddy and I return to the farm. My older brother, Daniel is waiting for us when we return. We all go in for breakfast. Mother is such a good cook and it is such a pleasure to have enough food on the table. When we have finished eating we go off to do our chores, as Daddy says the chickens don't clean themselves out. Daniel and Trevor get the wheelbarrow to clean the chickens while I go and get the grain to feed them and then let them out into the field. After that it is my job to look for any eggs that have been laid since this morning and take them to the house.

By the time this is all done it is just about lunchtime. Mother calls us all into the house to eat. When we are finished Daddy says that we are going up to the top field so we can plant a new crop of wheat so

we will be able to make more of our own bread eventually as the local shop won't be able to keep up with demand. Daniel has been up there most days ploughing and removing the stones and making a nice field for planting. It will be up to all of us to make sure that the field is sown. I have a bag full of wheat and I will be walking up and down throwing handfuls out and carefully making sure that I cover them with a layer of dirt. By the time I am finished I am hot, dirty and sweaty. I am now looking forward to having a bath when we finish. I am not sure whether I am more hungry, or the need for a bath will outstrip my hunger at the moment.

Daniel and Trevor are going down to the river to cool down once we are finished here and they are trying to get me to go with them. I am very tempted to go with them but I am developing and I am embarrassed by the way my body is betraying me. I asked Mother once and all she told me that it was all natural and not to be frightened about it. I am still scared and not at all sure what is happening to my body. Maybe I will go with them anyway. It is so hot and I am grimy.

It would be a pleasure to feel cool and clean again. Now I have decided to go I am eager to finish and go for a lovely swim as the river is quite deep where we go. Finally we have finished and now we can go. The water is calling. We are on our way and we are all excited to be going to get cleaned up. Once we get to the river we just run in, the water is so cold but feels so good. We played for a while splashing around and getting clean. We got out and returned home.

When we returned home Mother had made one of her wonderful vegetable stews. We all had a bowl full along with a hunk of her home-made bread. Mother had also made an apple tart as a surprise. That was the most wonderful dinner after a day in the fields. Having had a wash at the river we didn't need a bath in front of the fire. After finishing a few chores I went to bed, exhausted but happy.

I found going to sleep difficult as I am worried that Daddy will be called up to the war even though he says it won't happen as he hurt his leg years ago and it stops him doing things now, plus they need him for the farm. I wish I could believe him more but I am scared. There is just something telling me that he won't be here for much longer. I cry because I don't want him to go anywhere but the war is important for us to win but I am only 12 and still need my Daddy. I will never let anyone know that I cry at night. It would upset Mother and Daddy if they knew I did.

Everyone else has gone to bed and I am the only one still awake so I quietly go downstairs and get myself a drink of water. While I was drinking I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye, what was that that I saw? I turned around and saw something white flit across the window in the front room. I stood still, scared stiff, looking with my eyes wide open. I didn't understand what it was I was seeing. Mother came down and asked what was wrong so I told her what I had seen. She looked out of the window and then laughed as she said she could see an owl flying near the window. Feeling a little foolish I went off to bed. I slept well after my fright earlier.