



Winnie the Pooh and the Bear that Inspired its Creation

As a small child I remember being tucked up in bed in my Worton home cuddling my well-loved teddy bear and listening to my dad reading the stories about Pooh Bear to me before dropping off to sleep.

Little did I know that my love of Winnie the Pooh would last a life time. Even Christmas 2018 I had a Pooh Bear cuddly toy bought for me wearing a Santa Hat and I still possess the singing Pooh I bought at Disneyworld Florida in 1990 amongst other Pooh items.

Little did I know the story behind the inspiration that helped with A. A. Milne creating the loveable little bear and how close to my birth place did the real Winnie reside for a very short while during WWI.

At the outbreak of war many soldiers from the Commonwealth volunteered to serve their King and Country alongside those regular soldiers already heading for the front line. One of these was a Canadian Veterinary Surgeon from Winnipeg, Canada who answered the call and volunteered to serve to take care of the horses used for both Cavalry Regiments and those horses used for pulling gun carriages, field ambulances and supply carts to the trenches.

The vet, Captain Harry Colebourn was ready to leave for Europe when at Ontario Railway Station he spotted an orphaned black bear cub for sale. Being a vet he immediately paid \$20 for it and embarked on his journey to England.

Captain Colebourn named the bear Winnipeg after his native home but shortened it to Winnie. On arrival in England both soldier and bear were sent to West Down South Camp, Tilshead and bear became the mascot of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps. The bear was stationed at West Down from September to December 1914

When Captain Colebourn's regiment was due to be shipped out to France he asked London Zoo to take care of Winnie and he would take the bear back to Canada with him after the War. On his return the bear had become so popular with children that he donated the bear to the zoo.

One frequent visitor to London Zoo and Winnie was a young boy, who was so taken by the bear cub that he named his own teddy bear Winnie. The boy was Christopher Robin Milne the son of A. A. Milne the creator of Winnie the Pooh. The rest is history.

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In January 2019 a plaque commemorating Winnie's brief stay at Tilshead was erected in the village hall



Captain and Colebourn & Winnie c1914

Images courtesy of BBC Wilshire and Lindsay Mattick