



# Rural Life and Food Production

**Eggs.** The summer price for eggs in Derby in 1914 was 6 shillings for a dozen. The winter price was 9 shillings for a dozen. By 1918 these prices had risen by 300% to 500%

Farmers and farm labourers were reluctant to keep large numbers of chickens because of the love of the Earl for fox hunting. The Derby advertiser noted that the Earl required his tenants not to use wire in fencing and to have proper laid bush hedges of controlled height.

Thus it is seen that quantity farming of chicken was at risk of foxes which were only killed by the Earl and his hunting friends. No record of chicken or egg production has been ascertained although it is likely that most people kept a few for their own use.

**Meat.** In 1917 the Ministry of Food fixed the wholesale price of meat: beef, veal, mutton and lamb. The price of imported meat was set lower. By 1918 the average price of meat had risen considerably from the 1914 prices but foreign imported meat remained cheaper than English meat.

The Elvaston Estate was predominately pasture land and locally produced meat would have been sold to local butchers. People living on the estate often kept a pig for their own table.

For prices etc see additional material



Since 1918 Britain had increasingly relied on other countries for food supplies. In particular wheat, sugar and meat.

By 1916 only six weeks worth of wheat was left. The price of food rose by 130% and the Ministry of Food introduced voluntary rationing.

In 1917 Germany introduced unrestricted warfare and one in four Merchant ships were sunk. British food supply was in Jeopardy.

In order to deal with this need the Government was given powers to take over land. War Agricultural Executive Committees were formed in each county and these enforced orders to "Plough up Pasture for Crop Planting"

This saw over 2.5 million acres of grazing land ploughed. This was not altogether successful as many farmers only had experience of raising animals.



Because maintaining food supplies was so important the control of pests and vermin was essential.

The minutes of Elvaston Parish Council on 21st May 1917 and chaired by Lord Harrington reported a Proposal and Action for "organising for the destruction of rats, sparrows and other vermin that are injurious to crops."

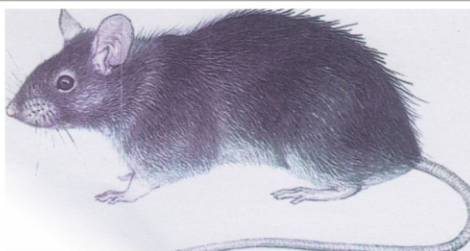
It was resolved that the destruction of linnetts, larks, starlings and sparrows be paid for at the rate of one penny (d) for every three heads and one penny (d) for every three eggs and that rats be paid for at the rate of two pennies (d) for each tail. (The Local Government Board to be written to ask "if this could be paid for by parish rates").

Proposed by Cllr Weetman and seconded by Cllr Hutchinson. C. Williamson (Ambaston), W.Riley (Thulston) and Mr Jordon (Elvaston) be appointed to receive and make payments.

Also in response to the increasing food shortage rationing became compulsory.



Nationally half a million horses were claimed by the War Office to help on the front line. With the absence of horsepower the Government invested in machinery. 400 British Saunderson Tractors were purchased followed by tractors brought over from America. By 1918 6,000 tractors were in operation.



In 1914 Britain was only 40% self sufficient. However 98,000 women of the Womens' Land Army were recruited to work on the farms boosted by 66,000 men returning from the front line to work in agriculture.



By 1918 Britain had produced an extra 915,000 tons of oats, 1.7 million tons of potatoes and 830,000 tones of wheat in addition to what was already being produced. The hard work of the British farmers, together with the men who had returned from the front line and the Womens' Land Army had secured the food supply so the United Kingdom wasn't starved into submission.

