

Case History Tracing a Traveller ancestor

Seven Steps to Glory: Walter the Gypsy

By John Pateman

The title of my book, *Seven Steps to Glory: Private Pateman Goes to War* is in two parts, as is the story of Walter Pateman's life — part one is *Walter the Gypsy* (*Seven Steps to Glory*) and part two is *Walter the Soldier* (*Private Pateman Goes to War*), as related in *FHM*'s December issue.

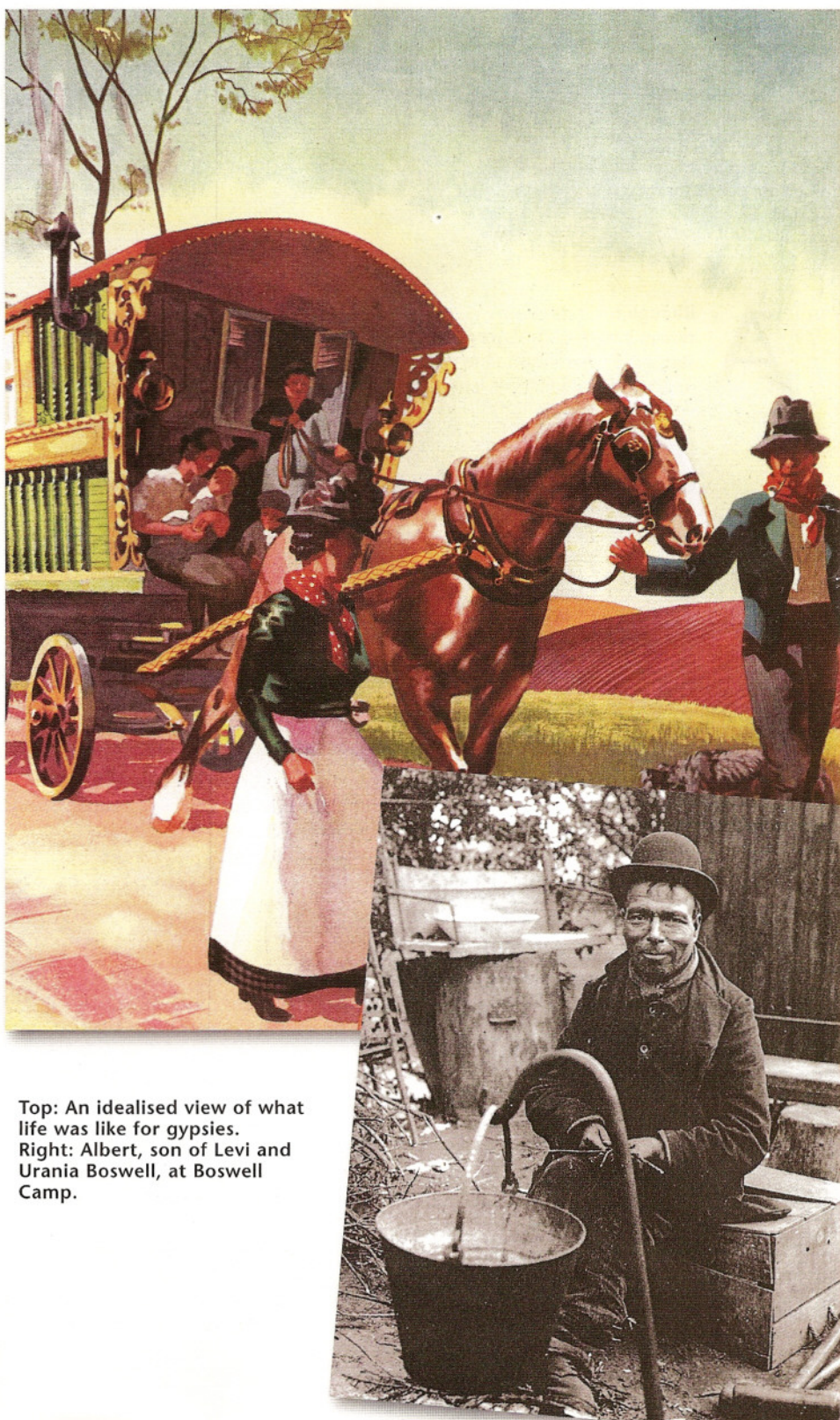
It is, as they used to say on *Match of the Day*, a game of two halves. But these halves were far from equal — Walter was a typical agricultural labourer for most of his 31 years; he spent just five months as a soldier in France (October 1916–February 1917). Within these two stories there is a third story — the story of how I discovered and recreated the life of Walter Pateman, Gypsy and soldier.

Tugmutton Common

Walter Pateman was born into the Gypsy community that lived on Tugmutton Common near Farnborough Village in Kent. This community is less well known than its counterpart in Orpington at Corke's Meadow. Both emerged for the same reasons. After generations of travelling around the Home Counties, these communities settled on the outskirts of London. They used places like Farnborough and Orpington as winter stopovers, before setting off once more on their travels the following spring.

Tugmutton Common was named after the English village-green game of tying a leg of mutton on a high branch or pole and getting contestants to jump to try and tug it down. An Ordnance Survey map of 1909 shows Tugmutton, which is also shaped like a leg of lamb. Nearby is Broadstreet Green, also known as Brasted Green, Bastard Green and Broad Green. The road from Tugmutton to Orpington is Crofton Road, sometimes called Croydon Road or Orpington Lane, though its true old name is Piggerton Lane, or Piggenden Lane, after a farm of that name near the Black Horse.

Walter's grandfather, Robert Pateman, was living in a barn in Beckenham during the 1871 census. He was described as a Gypsy and a licensed hawkker. Walter's father, William Pateman, was variously described as a pedlar, a hawkker and a



Top: An idealised view of what life was like for gypsies.
Right: Albert, son of Levi and Urania Boswell, at Boswell Camp.

Farnborough Village, Kent.
Walter's family would often
settle nearby during the
winter months.



beehive maker, all traditional Gypsy crafts. Walter's mother was Mercy Reynolds, from another travelling family. Walter's family had moved around Middlesex, Surrey and Kent looking for work picking fruit, vegetables and hops. They moved into the Farnborough area around the time of the 1881 census. William Pateman was living in a 'van on the side of Orpington Lane' and his brother James was living on 'Bastard Green'. Mercy's family was living in a 'van in Piggenden's Lane'. These families would spend the summer months travelling and would then return to Farnborough to settle for the winter period.

The committee made life difficult, if not impossible, for the Gypsies of Tugmutton

Walter's birth certificate states that he was born on 9th May 1886 on The Common, Farnborough. Walter had an older sister, Mary (born 1876) and two older brothers, Henry (1878–1961) and Noah (1883–1949), who was my grandfather. It states on Noah's birth certificate that he was born 'in a house cart' at Locksbottom, Farnborough. I realised that a house cart was a Gypsy vardo, caravan or wagon and that I had a Romany ancestry. My father died when I was nine

and did not tell me my family history — perhaps he was waiting until I was older or perhaps he thought it best not to tell me at all, given the high levels of prejudice and discrimination that the Gypsy population suffers. Either way, I am proud of my Gypsy background.

A year after Walter was born, the Farnborough Commons Protection Committee was formed. At its very first meeting on 17th June 1887 an issue was raised about "the debris left by a succession of Gypsy encampments". One of the Committee members, Mr Penfold (ironically this is a common Gypsy surname) "spoke in favour of forming a ditch and bank around the frontage of the common with gates so that no vans could be drawn upon it".

The Secretary of the Committee said that "he intended writing to Mr Birket, the Chief Commissioner of Police, with regard to the indecency occurring in the Gypsy camp". It was also agreed that notices be placed on the common on the 18th June to the effect that "any persons found camping on the same after 12 noon on the following Monday would be forcibly removed by the overseers and police". The Secretary was obviously not clear about the powers of his committee because in his letter to Mr Birket he asked a number of questions including:

"If Gypsies or other non-parishioners pitch upon the Common or waste land at the road side and turn their cattle out to graze (attended), have the freeholders or

ratepayers right of action against them?" and

"What is the shortest and best mode of procedure to eject these trespassers?"

Farnborough Village

The committee made life difficult, if not impossible, for the Gypsies of Tugmutton, and many of them were forced to move into houses. According to the 1890 edition of *Strong's Directory of Farnborough*, Walter's family were living in Stow Cottages, Farnborough. These were named after JW Stow, a local fruit grower and member of the Common's Protection Committee. Stow Cottages were in Church Road, and Walter's family are recorded as living here in the 1891 census. The family then comprised Walter's parents, his three older siblings and his younger sister, Alice, who was born in 1889. This family of two adults and five children was living in a tiny labourer's cottage that only had three rooms.

Walter is described as a five-year-old scholar, but there is no evidence that he went to the local school. Farnborough Board School opened in 1873, but I have been unable to locate its records. I have tried Bromley Local Studies, Bromley Local Education Authority and Kent Archives. It is possible that they went missing after the school closed or during their transfer from Bromley to Kent (Farnborough was part of Kent until local government reorganisation in 1965).

The only information I can find the school is in *A Short History*



The 'The New Inn' local community pub, Farnborough Village 1863

Farnborough Board Schools 1873–1973, which has a section on 'van children':

"On May 28th 1907 there is a report in the boys-school log book that two 'van' children were admitted. Presumably these are the children from the caravans along Tugmutton and would appear to be the first children to attend school from that encampment."

By 1910, several of the gypsy families had moved into small cottages on Willow Walk

By this time Walter's family had moved again. The 1901 census finds them living at 4 Cobden Road, on the outskirts of Farnborough Village. These were substantial properties (with kitchens and bathrooms), which marked the border between Farnborough Village and the outlying estates. I am curious to know how William Pateman made the transition from a small labourer's cottage in 1891 to a semi-detached Victorian villa in 1901. By now Walter was a 17-year-old farm labourer and had three more siblings, Phoebe (born 1892), William (born 1894) and Amy (born 1896).

Farnborough Village was a bustling community on the stagecoach route from London to the coast. A plaque in the village records that:

"There was much activity on a Sunday lunchtime. Horses were run up and down the High Street and much buying and selling took place, mainly with Gypsies. Many villagers turned out each week to see the interesting and colourful spectacle."

Every year a Gypsy horse fair was held in the village, the horses being trotted along the high street for prospective buyers to see. Perhaps William Pateman made his newfound wealth from horse dealing?

Walter was working as a farm labourer at Crofton Old Farm when he married Priscilla Arnold, a field hand, on 24th February 1909. The bride and groom were both 23 years old and the witnesses were Walter's sisters, Alice and Phoebe. The Arnolds were a travelling family and Priscilla had been born in 1887 at Ford Farm in Penshurst, Kent. The Arnold family was living in 'house carts' in Orpington at the time of the 1901 census. Priscilla's father, Edmund or Edward Arnold, was an agricultural labourer from Hyde Hill, Kent. Priscilla's mother, Ann Selina (or Lena) Arnold, "formerly Brazil" (a well-known traveller family name), was from Lindfield, Sussex. They had six

children: Emma, Betsy, Pryss (Priscilla), Sarah Ann, Albert and William.

The Coates family was living in an adjacent house cart — William Coates, his wife Jane and their five children, Daniel, Mark, Benjamin, Elizabeth and John. By a strange twist of fate, after the death of Walter Pateman in 1917 and her marriage to John Carpenter in 1919, Priscilla lived with Benjamin Coates from 1923 until her death in 1971. They are buried in adjacent graves in All Saints Churchyard.

Willow Walk

After getting married, Walter moved from 4 Cobden Road to Crofton Road, where his namesake child, Walter Pateman, was born on 14th April 1909 (just two months after he got married). By the time that their next child, Albert, was born on 1st June 1910, Walter was living back at Tugmutton Common, at 2 Willow Walk.

Several of the Gypsy families who had lived on Tugmutton Common had moved into small cottages on Willow Walk. *Bush's 1910 Directory of Farnborough* records that Levi Boswell junior lived at 1 Willow Walk, Walter Pateman lived at number 2, George Reynolds lived at number 3 and James Reynolds lived at number 4. James Pateman lived at number 5, John Reynolds lived at number 6 and Levi Boswell senior lived at number 7. Walter's father was married to Mercy Reynolds and his uncle, James, was married to Jane Reynolds. So the Pateman and Reynolds families were living close together in the cottages on Willow Walk.

Another well-known Gypsy family, the Boswells, were also living on Willow Walk. For over 200 years the family carried on the business of providing 'fair tackle' to county families in connection with private sports gatherings. Levi Boswell was known at every horse fair and fete in the county and was reported to be without equal as a horse dealer. He had a herd of donkeys and for over 70 years the family had a stand for donkeys on Blackheath, just

Further Reading

Sharon Floate, *My Ancestors Were Gypsies*, (Society of Genealogists, 1999)
Janet Keet-Black, *Some Travellers In The 1891 Census*
(Romany & Traveller Family History Society, 1999)
Alan McGowan, *On The Gypsy Trail*,
(Romany & Traveller Family History Society, 1998)
John Pateman, *Seven Steps to Glory: Private Pateman Goes to War*
(Romany & Traveller Family History Society, 2002)

Archival Sources

The Gypsy Collections, Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, L69 3DA
The Romany Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT
The Robert Dawson Collection, Rural History Centre, University of Reading,
RG6 6AG

Website

Gypsy Collections
www.sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/gypsy/intro.htm
This is one of the three principal Gypsy archives in Britain, housed in the Library of the University of Liverpool.

opposite the main gates of Greenwich Park. Kanza Boswell was eight years old when he first helped his father with the donkeys, and every morning the donkeys were driven to Blackheath and in the evening back to Farnborough.

Levi Boswell died in 1924 at the age of 77 and the local newspaper reported that there was an attendance of over 1,000 at his funeral, which took place at St Giles Church, Farnborough. His funeral was surpassed by that of his widow, who died nine years later when she was 81 years of age. She was Mrs Urania Boswell, but was generally known as Gypsy Lee. Although she resided at Farnborough, she normally spent about six months of each year travelling with fairs and circuses as a palmist and fortune teller. It was said that she forecast her own death and it was estimated that there were 15,000 present at her funeral, which was reported in *The Times* newspaper and on a Pathé newsreel.

There are some photographs of the Tugmutton Gypsy community taken around the time Walter was living on Willow Walk. There is a picture of Albert, son of Levi and Urania Boswell. There is also a photo of Omi Johnson making flower stands in the Boswell Camp. These photos were taken by Fred Shaw on 17th October 1912 and form part of the Scott Macfie collection at Liverpool University.

St Andrews Cottages

In 1912, Walter moved to Mount Pleasant Cottages in Orpington, where his daughter Lena was born on 11th March. Walter then moved again, this time to St Andrews Cottages in Lower Road, Orpington. This was part of New Town, which had been built for the railway workers who brought the line to St Mary Cray in 1860. Also known as the Building Fields, this area of South Cray formed the most populated part of the parish of Orpington. An 1869 directory lists five public houses here plus a boarding school, a laundry, several shops and even a photographic artist.

Living in such a confined space, they were terrified that the children also caught the measles

It was at 2 St Andrews Cottages that Walter's three-year-old namesake child, Walter, died of measles on 1st March 1913. He was buried in the same grave as his uncle (Albert Arnold) at All Saints. Living in such a confined space, Walter and Priscilla must have been terrified in case their two younger children, Albert and Lena, also caught the measles, which was then a killer disease that caused the death of many small children. But they survived and on 28th June 1913 they were joined by another brother, William Pateman.



Omi Johnson, making flower stands in Boswell Camp in 1912

Local maps and photographs show St Andrews Cottages, which got their name from the church on the other side of Lower Road. They also show the Royal Albert public house on the corner of Lower Road and Albert Road. There were seven steps connecting St Andrews Cottages to the Royal Albert and these were known locally as 'Seven Steps to Glory', which gave me the title for my book about Walter. On a Friday and Saturday night there were frequent fights and disturbances inside and outside the local pubs, as reported in the *St Mary Cray and Orpington District Times* on 15th May 1914:

"Walter Pateman, a labourer, of St Andrews Cottages, Orpington, pleaded guilty to disorderly behaviour whilst drunk, and not guilty to using obscene language. Police constable 300R stated that at 9.30 on Saturday night whilst at Wellington Road he was called to eject prisoner from a public house. He did so, but subsequently prisoner returned, and was again put out. Prisoner then put

himself in a fighting attitude, and used the language complained of. Corroborative evidence was given by police constable 566 and prisoner was fined 5s., with costs 4s. 6d. for each offence."

Walter was working as a farm labourer when war was declared with Germany in August 1914. Unlike many other local young men, Walter did not rush to volunteer. He was an older man with three young children and on 15th March 1915 his last child, Edmund, was born. When conscription was introduced in 1916 Walter must have realised that the call to duty was imminent, and this may have prompted him to get his children baptised at St Andrews Church on 12th April 1916.

The Military Service Act was introduced on 3rd May 1916, in which it was proposed that compulsion be applied to all men, regardless of marital status, between the ages of 18 and 41. It was a watershed; universal conscription had become a fact in Britain. It was now only a matter of time before Walter would be enlisted.

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11 July 2007

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Seven Steps to Glory - Private Pateman goes to War by John Pateman



Walter Pateman

This is the story of a Gypsy, Walter Pateman, born on Leg of Mutton Common, Farnborough, Kent, in 1886.

He married another Gypsy, Priscilla Arnold. When the Great War broke out, he did not rush to volunteer because he was an older man with a young family but, following the introduction of conscription in 1916, he enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment.

Within days of his arrival on the Western Front he took part in an attack which proved to be one of the final actions of the Battle of the Somme.

He also went back into action in the Bouchavannes sector, and trained for a major attack which was due to take place on 4 March 1917. In preparation for this attack, night patrols and raids were sent out into No Man's Land to gauge the strength of the enemy.

During one of these raids on 27 February 1917, Walter was killed near Leg of Mutton Wood. Seven Steps to Glory is the story of Walter Pateman's journey, from his birth on Leg of Mutton Common, to his death near Leg of Mutton Wood.

The book is the result of meticulous research by John Pateman who has traced the footsteps of his great uncle from his birth in Kent to his death on the battlefields of France.

During the nineteenth century the Patemans travelled the area between Surrey and east Kent undertaking seasonal casual employment. The family finally came to rest in north west Kent living in houses as well as on well known stopping places such as Farnborough Common and Ruxley Pit near Sidcup.



Many Gypsies worked with horses in the 1st WW.

Large numbers of Gypsies fought in the two world wars and helped to defeat Hitler who sent so many Romany people to the gas chambers. On returning home in 1945 many became angry and disillusioned with the treatment that they continued to receive in the country which they had gallantly helped to defend.

Seven Steps to Glory is published by *The Romany and Traveller Family History Society*

Have you read the book? What did you think of it? Email kent@bbc.co.uk

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Coincidences in his seven steps to glory

Born on Leg of Mutton Common near Farnborough and killed in action near Leg of Mutton Wood during the Battle of the Somme, Walter Pateman's gipsy life and brief military career is traced by great nephew John Pateman. ANDRE ERASMUS takes a look at his book about Private Pateman going to war ...

DECIDING to research his family history led author John Pateman to discover the story of his great uncle, Walter Pateman, and his own rich gipsy heritage.

This was further aided by his seeing the name of Walter Pateman listed among those who gave their lives for "God, King and Country" on several war memorials in the Orpington area.

Pateman is not the most common of surnames and John's research centres around the life of Walter and his early days among the gipsy community ruled in Kent by King and Queen Levi and Urania Boswell.

He covers his conscription in 1916 through diaries of fellow soldiers and his own research. The book *Seven Steps To Glory, Private Pateman Goes to War*, gives a graphic account of Walter's all too short five months in France and the brief report of his death.

John found four reports of the action in which his great uncle died. One, by Walter's regiment, the Middlesex regiment, tells of an attempted raid by an officer and 23 other ranks at midnight, on February 27, which was thwarted by enemy machine gun fire.

The report says "one other rank killed". That was Walter Pateman and his body was never found.

And, although he fell on February 27, his family was only informed of his death in April that year.

John found Walter and his battalion left for France in October 1916 and, within days, took part in one of the battles of the Somme.

Alternating between the front, support and reserve lines, Walter went back into action at the Bouchavnes sector of the front, preparing for an attack planned for March 4.

Several excursions into No Man's Land to gauge enemy strength took place and it was on one of these he died near Leg of Mutton Wood, the Somme.

John's research into the family history found Walter had been born at Leg of Mutton Common, Farnborough, in 1886 and spent most of his childhood in Franborough village with the gipsy community, many living in "house carts".

He worked as a farm labourer, married fellow gipsy Priscilla Arnold in 1909 and they had four children, the first-born dying at the age of three of measles in 1913.

In 1916 he enlisted, as required by law, after not volunteering when war started due to his age.

On June 17, 1916, his short military career started when he was conscripted to Middlesex Regiment.

That day he said goodbye to his young wife and children.

He never saw them again.

Seven Steps To Glory is published by The Romany and Traveller Family History Society and is available, at £5.50, from the Orpington and Bromley libraries or from Janet Keet-Black, 6 St James Walk, South Chailey, East Sussex, BN8 4BU.

9:23am Thursday 5th December 2002

By Andre Erasmus

[Back](#)