

High Wych History – 29

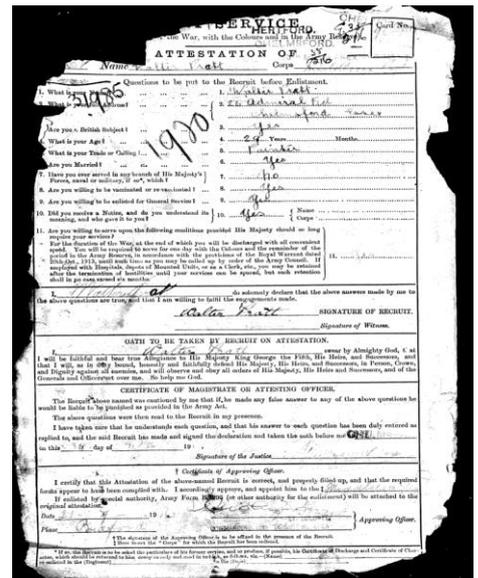
Three men called Walter and a woman called Louvain

Walter Glyn Pratt was born in Bishops Stortford in 1862. By 1891 he and his wife Sarah had moved to Little Hadham and had a son, another Walter. By 1901 they had moved to Sawbridgeworth and by 1911 to Little Beazleys, High Wych. In 1914, one day before the outbreak of war, Walter James Glynn Pratt, let's call him Walter II, got married to Annie Edith Broad.

By that time the UK had joined the war. The Germans had invaded Belgium, breaking that country's neutrality. On the 20th August, the city of Louvain (between Liege and Brussels) had been captured. Five days later Louvain was the subject of mass destruction by the German army. Snipers, so it was claimed, had attacked their soldiers. This "fact" was then used as a reason to forcefully evacuate the city, kill 248 civilians, burn down many houses and also the university library with a priceless collection of 230,000 books.



25-8-1914 – The destruction of the city of Louvain



Walter Pratt II joins up in 1915

Newspapers in the UK and allied countries reported the massacre in great detail and the public reacted with great sympathy. "Louvain shall be our battle cry" was the title of a popular march. A ship was named for the martyred town. And most importantly for our story: some girl babies born in England in the autumn of 1914 were named Louvain, which brings us back to "local history"

One such girl, Louvain Bell was born in Houghton le Spring, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear. She was the daughter of Joseph Newstead Bell and Elizabeth Carter. They too were married on 3rd August 1914.

Meanwhile, in 1915, Walter II had joined the Middlesex Regiment. He fought at the Somme, got wounded in his arm and was discharged. Walter and Annie Edith then had 4 sons and a daughter, the oldest of which was another Walter. It was this third Walter who, after a short spell as a baker with Dorringtons, (where he excelled at icing cakes) joined the grenadier guards on 26th June 1933 His army number was 2613674. Just prior to the second world war, whilst stationed in London Walter III met the love of his life: one Louvain Bell. Louvain had come down from the North and was in service in the capital. Walter and Louvain got married on 25-3-1940.



Louvain and Walter Pratt Walter III

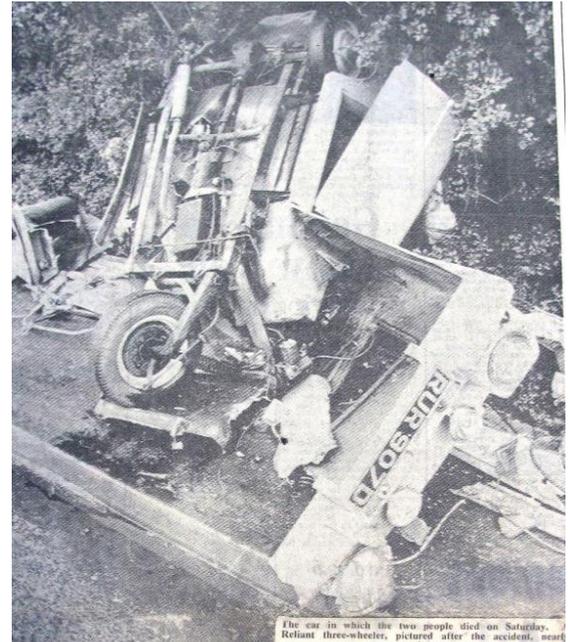


Walter (2) and Annie Pratt at the wedding of Fred and Ethel Webb

Walter III stayed in the army for 12 years, quite a long time, but thankfully perhaps, he did not see much active war time service. In 1940, shortly after the Germans had invaded the Netherlands and Belgium his unit was sent to France as part of the British expeditionary force. There he was wounded in his hand, captured and subsequently spent the rest of the second world war as a prisoner of war in France. Upon his return to civilian life he became a postman. His damaged hand, however, made it impossible to write or to take up his former profession of baker. Walter's wife Louvain meanwhile was well liked and regarded as a very generous person "who would do anything for anybody". Walter and Louvain had two children, a daughter, Shirley, who was born in 1947 and a son, Kenneth or Kenny, born in 1949.



Happy days: Walter and Louvain at the wedding of their daughter



The car in which the two people died on Saturday. Reliant three-wheeler, pictured after the accident, nearly cut in two.

**TWO PEOPLE DIED
IN THIS CAR**

1971: a tragic accident

This story has a tragic end. On Saturday 19th June 1971 Louvain and husband Walter set off on holiday to Cromer in their Reliant Robin three wheel car. On the Birchanger corner near Stansted Mountfitchet their car collided with another car and overturned. The two of them were taken to Herts and Essex hospital but were dead on arrival. The occupants of the other car were luckily unhurt. To son Ken befell the horrible task of officially identifying his parents. Louvain and Walter III were both buried in St. James's Churchyard. Six years later Walter II died.

Sources for this article were: Glynis Bradley, Ethel Webb, Ancestry co.uk, Wikipedia, The Herts and Essex Observer and "The burning of Leuven Library and the international response", a paper by Mark Darez. The High Wych History Project still needs your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs. Get in touch!! Contact me at: theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone me at 01279 725468 You can also visit my blog at <http://vandebilt.co.uk/history/>