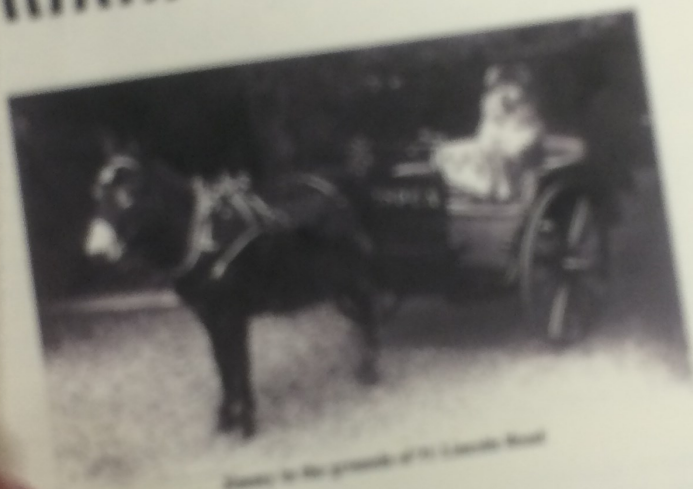


# The Controversial Story Of Jimmy the Donkey



Jimmy in the grounds of St. Lawrence Road

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## Jimmy the Donkey

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On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 1920, a Mr G. Walding brought up to Peterborough Cattle Market, a little black donkey, which went by the name of "Jimmy"; he had been purchased earlier at the Remount Depot at Swaythling near Southampton. This donkey had supposedly been born in the trenches of France during the First World War and had spent the first three years of his life in trenches, he had been wounded on seven occasions and his back still contained shrapnel from his wounds, Mr Wadling continued to inform the public that whilst in France, Jimmy had become the mascot of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Scottish Rifles.

Mr Wadling was hoping to sell the donkey to perhaps a showman, but when Mr W. Burch (an inspector for the R.S.P.C.A.) heard the story, he suggested that the animal should become the property of the Society and a satisfactory bargain was conducted.

Mrs W Heath (Hon. Sec. of the Society) and Mr Burch said that the donkey should not be put to work, but be suitably stabled and become the local mascot of the R.S.P.C.A. be exhibited at Fetes, Gala's and at Agricultural Shows, with permission of course.

Although a contract had been struck between Mr Walding and the R.S.P.C.A.; funds had to be raised to pay for him, Jimmy's first public appearance was the following Saturday at the Peterborough Hippodrome where he appeared on stage with Mr Burch in charge, the audience fell in love with him immediately.

It was reported that Jimmy looked charming, indeed one lady declared that he looked positively sweet, the backdrop cloth could not have been better, it was a woodland scene bathed in golden light, with patches of bluebells under the trees.

Mr Burch explained to the audience about Jimmy's war experiences and stated they had been given his war records by the War Office when sold; Jimmy now stood before the crowd to beg their donations on behalf of other donkeys and all other animals, that might be saved from cruelty and brutality; the audience were delighted, they cheered and forthwith a collection was made not for Jimmy but for the society's funds.

The collectors were Mrs Hawking's members of the Hippodrome staff and artistes, Mr and Mrs Heath, Miss Ruddell and Miss Burch.

Although this was the first of many collections that would be made on behalf of poor and distressed animals, the future of Jimmy had first to be secured by raising monies to cover his purchase; so was announced a "Shilling Subscription List" which if successful would cover his purchase price in just a few weeks.

The Editor of the Citizen newspaper stated that he would be pleased to acknowledge any single or associated shillings that may be sent for this purpose, alternatively they may be sent direct to the Society's local secretary Mrs Heath residing at St. Marks Villas, Lincoln Road, Peterborough.

Donations of shillings, over the following weeks continued to pour in and within four to five weeks, sufficient funds were collected to cover his purchase price, as promised the numerous subscribers had their names and donations published in copies of the Citizen newspapers, Jimmy had not been idle during these weeks as he too had secured more funds for the Society.



In with the donations sent direct to Mrs Heath came the following poem: -

### **"Black Jimmy"**

(Dedicated to Peterborough Branch of the R.S.P.C.A.)

Black but comely and innocent of any crimes !  
Led in War, was I, and wounded seven times !  
A beast of burden, content with green food, or hay.  
Called out, born and bred off the Western front,  
Kicking at times, I bore the fierce battle's brunt !

Just a poor ass, "demobbed" who asks no pay.  
Intent on working and collecting for the R.S.P.C.A.  
Money to have animals abuse and pain, every day !  
Mild now my life, with the run of my teeth !  
Yet happy and free, thanks to a Peterborough Heath.

E.J.

The following month of May (1920) Mrs Heath and Jimmy were collecting on the "Roll of Honour" flag day, when she came across a soldier dressed in khaki sitting on the side of the drinking trough, he said " he was just passing this way and added that he had known Jimmy ever since he was born.

The soldier was Private Dudley residing in Castor, he had joined up in 1914 and came through the fighting alright, until February after the Armistice was signed, when trying to stop two horses running away with a transport laden with meat, his intervention resulted in an injury, causing the loss of one foot and part of his leg.

He continued by saying that he already had several operations and was due to return to Sidcup the next day for another, he further revealed that he had a wife and six children, the eldest of whom was with the army in Palestine.

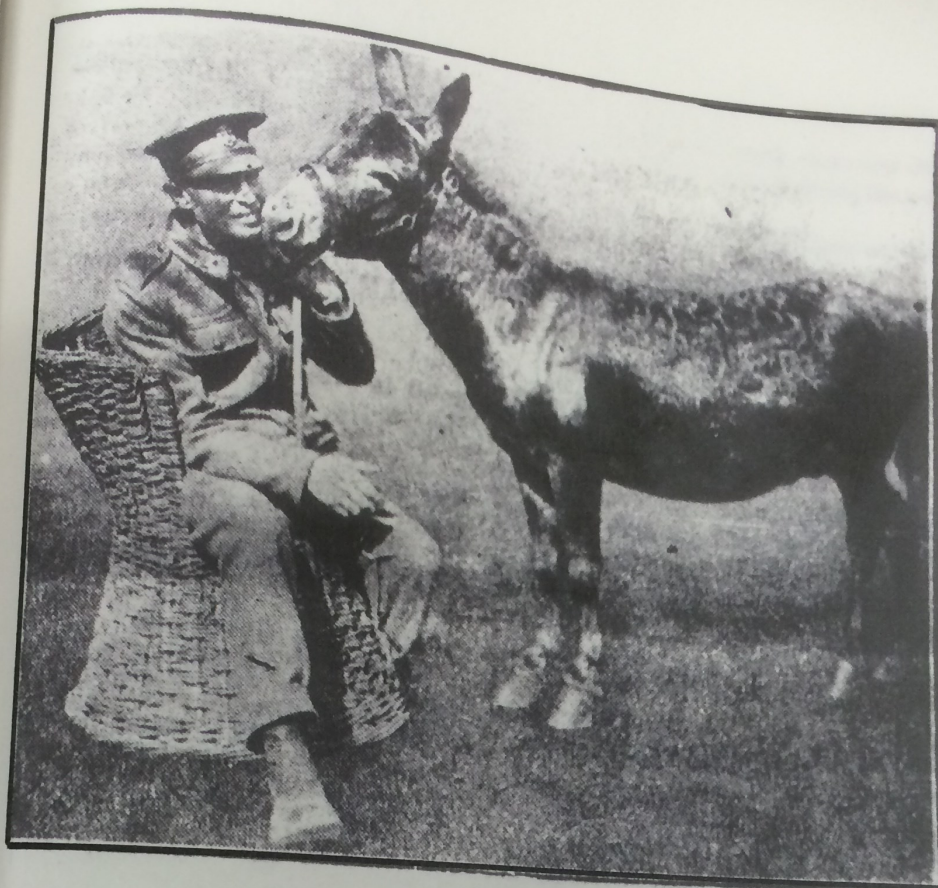
Pte Dudley thought the donkey seemed familiar and on a closer examination was convinced it to be the mascot of the Royal Scots, he accosted the donkey, which immediately showed signs of pleasure and recognition and then began to lick his hands and face. He confirmed that the Regimental Mascot had the name of "Neddy" and not Jimmy.

Dudley continued his story by saying that he joined the army in 1914 and went out to France on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1916, Neddy (Jimmy) was born in the "Horse Line" near Arras and was, when old enough, employed in transport, carrying the officers revolver ammunition and sometimes revolver ammunition, as one day a flying pilot came down accidentally and someone ran to the donkey for the whiskey flask, which proved very useful.

He would be generally a few miles behind the line but still managed to receive several wounds from shrapnel, which he believed were caused by the bursting of a shells known as a "Spring Bombs" the donkey must now be nearly five years old, he worked from 1917 to 1919.

Pte Dudley repeated that the donkey was the mascot of the Royal Scots Regiment, of which Dudley was attached to their supply-column; Neddy was a general favourite of the whole division, (the 32<sup>nd</sup>). He lived almost the same as we did, having plenty of biscuits and jam and as his resting place was where there was an abundance of oats, he fared sumptuously.





**Private Dudley re-united with the Mascot of his Regiment. May 1920.**

Of course he was rationed like the rest of us, but on average he didn't go short of food.

The soldiers taught him many tricks, they would hold a stick out and the donkey would jump over it, just like dogs perform, he also acquired a form of recognition amongst his warrior companions, which rather alarmed strangers.

On meeting one of his soldier companions, at hearing their greeting "Hello Neddy" he would rise on his hind legs and place the hooves of his fore-legs on the soldiers shoulders "and no doubt he would do it now" but with only one leg now, I would not dare to put it to the test.

Pte Dudley concluded his story by remarking that the donkey is entitled to wear four blue chevrons, a wound stripe and his regimental decoration which is four noughts placed like pips on a five of spades, only united so as to make four eights which would be equal to 32, the number of his Division and to complete, a diamond with red in the centre.

July 1920 saw Jimmy attending the first of many Agricultural Shows at the Eastfield Showground, the R.S.P.C.A. had a canvas stall erected and a photograph of the event appeared in the Peterborough & Huntingdon Standard dated 17<sup>th</sup> July. Showing Jimmy with his groom Mr John Cole in the forefront, surrounded by local dignitaries such as Mr G.C.W. Fitzwilliam plus high-ranking members of the R.S.P.C.A.





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The end of July saw another important turn in the story of Jimmy, there was concern over the condition of his health due to the injuries he had sustained during the war and in particular the shrapnel that was still in his back. Mr Taylor from the Infirmary in Priestgate agreed to X-Ray the donkey and give his opinion on the seriousness of the wounds. It was reported that Jimmy took a bit of persuading to enter the X-Ray room, but once in position, behaved himself. The results showed that Jimmy had no shrapnel whatsoever in his back and was not disabled in any way, Mr Taylor did notice that Jimmy had sustained some surface wounds, but had not effected his general health.

A small trap complete with harness was acquired, capable of carrying two adults or three children as shown in the following photograph dated March 1923: -



It was reported in the Citizen dated 11<sup>th</sup> April 1933 that a new book had just been launched, titled "Animal War Hero's" and published by A & C Black Ltd. of 4-6 Soho Square, London W.1.; in which was a story of our Jimmy the Donkey.

Later that year in September, both Mrs Heath and Mr Burch attended a meeting at the Salvation Army Citadel in King Street to enlighten the congregation on the works and achievements of the R.S.P.C.A. including the exploits of Jimmy; unfortunately Jimmy was not allowed to attend on this occasion, but was content to be in his stable at 91 Lincoln Road (the home of Mr and Mrs heath). *Mr Heath was a local Antique Dealer.*

It was about this time that Jimmy's daily routine was changed, he was to be looked after by Mr & Mrs D.E. Wright of 86 Dogsthorpe Road, an elderly couple who both originated from Sutton Bridge, who had moved to Thorney and eventually retired in Peterborough; both were from farming families and had a love for animals. Not only did Jimmy have new keepers, he had also took up a new residence in a small field between Broadway and Park Road (the site where Clifton House now stands), through the kindness of Mr Frank Rippon of "Woodlands" in Longthorpe.





**Mr David Wright of Dogsthorpe Road with Jimmy**

During April 1943, Jimmy was obviously unwell and diagnosed with Senile Decay and unlikely to last many more weeks, Mrs Heath immediately wrote to the City Council requesting that Jimmy be allowed a final resting place in the Central Park close to Children's Corner, this request was granted by the Council and confirmed in the Citizen on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May.

Jimmy duly passed away on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May and was interred on the 21<sup>st</sup>, in the Park between Children's Corner and the perimeter cycle track. Mrs Heath also had permission to install a Headstone and surround to Jimmy's grave; the headstone had the following inscription:-

OUR JIMMY  
BORN ON THE SOMME. JUNE 1916  
MASCOT OF THE 1<sup>st</sup> SCOTTISH  
RIFLES. DIED MAY 10<sup>th</sup> 1943  
BOUGHT BY Mrs HEATH IN 1920  
TO GIVE HIM A GOOD HOME  
AND TO PROMOTE INTEREST IN  
THE R.S.P.C.A.



One might think that was the end of the story, but about fifty years after Jimmy was originally purchased; 75 year old Mr Derek Walding, then residing at 16 Lilac Road, Dogsthorpe, son of George Walding the Horse Dealer; revealed his version to the press on how Jimmy was purchased and sold to Mrs Heath.



**Mr Derek Wadling beside Jimmy's Grave in Central Park**

He stated that his father was originally a butcher, but had gone into Horse Dealing after the 1914–18 War, when the British Army brought home its war-horses to be sold fortnightly at a depot at Swaythling, near Southampton.

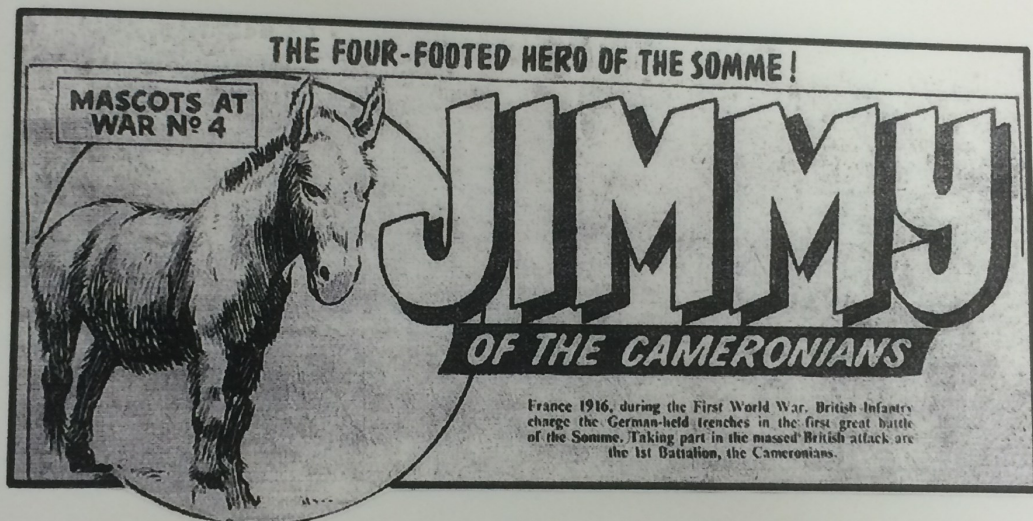
His father bought hundreds of horses this way, but on one occasion there were a lot of buyers down from London and the prices went sky-high, as not to completely waste his trip down to Swaythling he purchased a black donkey from a group of gypsies who were camped close by for £4/- and a further 2/6 (12.5p) to have it sent by rail in a horse box back to Peterborough, as the donkey was too heavy to go in a crate.

His father lived at 30 Crawthorne Road (according to the 1922 Directory) and had intended selling the donkey to Sanger's Circus, although the donkey had never been out of the country, he was selling it with a fictitious story that he had been born from a German donkey, captured by the British "Tommies" in the Somme trenches; hearing this story the Cruelty Inspector of the R.S.P.C.A. agreed to buy Jimmy for £20/-.



Mr Derek Walding concluded his story by saying that every time he took his father to the Railway Station and passed Jimmy grazing in the Broadway paddock, his father would laugh his head off.

During September 2002, the saga of Jimmy was once again featured in the local Evening Telegraph, about his history and being wounded by German shellfire. City councillor Yvonne Lownds (who's ward includes Central Park) is planning to restore Jimmy's headstone and Colonel Hugh Mackay of the Regimental Association, revealed its 400 members are hoping to create a memorial to Jimmy at the Cameronians museum in Hamilton, Lanarkshire. Anne Beales, a pensioner from New England, also revealed she had saved this old comic dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 1975 then costing 5p; the comic strip told how Jimmy saved the life of Jack Dudley by amazingly summoning help as the soldier lay wounded after rescuing the pilot of a burning plane.



**Comic strip, which appeared in "Warlord", dated January 4<sup>th</sup> 1975**

The comic tells how Jack and Jimmy were later reunited in Peterborough, with Jack saying "its Jimmy! Am I glad to see you again! You're the best friend I ever had."

To say the least, the story of Jimmy is controversial; was he English or French? was his name Jimmy or Neddy? was he ever injured by shell fragments? has the truth been stretched over the years?

Whatever your opinion maybe, the black donkey purchased by subscription, as a mascot for the R.S.P.C.A. was liked by all the local children, was instrumental in collecting hundreds of pounds for neglected animals and has earned a memorial in the City's Central Park, for that reason, "May He Rest in Peace"