

For Frederick C. Pratt and the horses
Mark Grainger

A portrait hangs in my mother's hall.
No bigger than a postcard.
It shows a young man in uniform
sitting straight-backed on a horse.

That's your great granddad, mum says,
he died before you were born.
He never talked about the war, mum says,
except to praise the horses.

How he let the reins drop,
how he let the horse take charge
to pick a path across the mud
to the front on narrow boards.

A feat no man could muster,
the boards too small, too wet.
How one misstep into the mud
would leave you stuck, and dead.

How the only way to stay alive
was to give your horse his head.
To trust him under shellfire.
To bet on his sure feet.

Great granddad lived, got married,
had children after the war,
and it's strange to think of now,
how we all owe our lives to the horse.