

Gunner William Leslie Davies

The three 'Ms' of the campaign in Macedonia were 'mules', 'mountains' and 'mosquitoes', which carried malaria.

William's grandfather, also called William, was born around 1841, to William Davies, a canal worker born in Basford, Shropshire, and his wife Elizabeth. The 1851 census records William and Elizabeth living at 'Two Houses Building' in Heath Mill Lane, Digbeth with their three sons and two daughters. The eldest son, John (born 1838) was a 'goldsmith worker'.

It is likely that William followed his brother into the goldsmith's trade as he subsequently became a jewellery manufacturer. In the spring of 1863, William married Emma, whose father John Oakley was a 'jeweller and provisions dealer'.ⁱ

By 1871, William had set himself up in business at 2, Warstone Parade, Hockley in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham as a jewellery manufacturer. He employed 3 men and 8 boys in the company. Living above the shop was Emma with their three children, Emma Maud Mary, William Oakley and Flora born in 1864, 1866 and 1871 respectively.

BRIGHT-GOLD Locket Makers (several) Wanted. —Apply, W. Davis, 2, Warstone Parade, Warstone Lane.

Figure 1: An 1873 advertisement for locket makers at the workshop of William Davies



Number 2, Warstone Parade was Grade II listed on 29th April 2004 (see picture leftⁱⁱ). It was described as a small late 19th century manufactory, displaying architectural and plan form characteristic of industrial buildings in a specialist quarter of Birmingham. It had an L-shaped plan with a street frontage made of red brick and comprised a symmetrical 3 storey building with 3 bays and semi-circular arch-headed openings on the ground floor. The rear elevation consisted of a three storey workshop range with a narrow rear yard.ⁱⁱⁱ

By 1881, William's workshops in Warstone Parade employed 8 men and 2 boys. Emma and the six children (three more children, Kate Perry, Nellie Langford and Edith Ann were born in 1872, 1874 and 1877 respectively) had moved out to separate accommodation at 'The Hollies', Grove Lane, Handsworth. The final child, Winifred, was born in 1886.

William's only son, William Oakley Davies, followed his father into the jewellery business.

On 14th April 1891, William Oakley Davies married Emily, the daughter of Alfred Powell, a wholesale grocer at St James' Church, Handsworth.^{iv}



Figure 1: Postcard of St James' Church, Handsworth, pre-1878

William and Emily's first child, Gladys Powell was born in 1893. The baptism register for 4th October 1893 records the family address at 61 Lindwood Road, Handsworth.^v Their second child, Eric Powell, was born in 1896, and baptised in Hampton-in-Arden, Warwickshire. By 1897 when a second son, William Lesley, was born, the family had moved to Kings Norton. The 1901 census records, William and Emily's address as 21, Strensham Hill, Balsall Heath. A further child, John Oakley was born on 28th September 1902, but, sadly, he died in the summer of 1909, aged six.



Figure 2
(Far left) A sterling silver pocket compass c1900 by William Oakley Davies
(Left) A silver compass fob, c1911, by William Oakley Davies

A case reminiscent of the warehouse-breaking epidemic in the jewellers' quarter came on when Cornelius Jukes (22), was indicted for breaking into the warehouse of William Oakley Davies, at 2, Warstone-parade East, on December 20 last, and stealing a violin-case, a leather bag, 290 ounces of mixed gold and silver dust, 100 ounces of gold and silver stampings, 6 locket, 6 napkin rings, 20 ounces of sheet silver, and other articles.

From private information, Detective-sergeant Moss went to 3 back of 2, Bridge-street West, and arrested Jukes. In his possession were six silver locket, a pair of gold links, gold and silver scrap, and other articles, identified by Davies.

A verdict of guilty was returned. Detective-sergeant Moss said the police looked upon the prisoner as one of the ringleaders of the gang that had been making depre-dations upon the jewellers' quarter. The house where he lived was a house of ill-fame and crime.

The Recorder sentenced the prisoner to five years' penal servitude.

"It only hardens us," shouted the prisoner, struggling with the warders, "next time I'll have a revolver on some of them."

William's jewellery business was broken into on 20th December 1904. A violin case, a leather bag, 290 ounces of mixed gold and silver dust, 100 ounces of gold and silver stampings, 6 locket, 6 napkin rongs, 20 ounces of silver sheet and other articles were taken.

In February 1905, the robbers were apprehended and sent for trial.^{vi}

Figure 3
A newspaper cutting describing the robbery at 2 Warstone Parade on 20th December 1904

By 1911, William, Emily and the family had moved to 73 Alcester Road, Moseley, Birmingham.

On leaving school, William Leslie Davies worked as a side car body maker for the firm Compeer Motor Carriage Co Ltd.

A month after war was declared on 4th August 1914, William enlisted for four years service in the Territorial Force of the 3rd South Midlands Battalion, Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and became Gunner W L Davies, No 1573. He was immediately embodied for service (called up for potential active service) and was based at the barracks in Stoney Lane, Birmingham. On 23rd May 1916, William was promoted to Corporal, but six months later, at his own request, he reverted to being a Gunner. Shortly afterwards, William was posted to 33rd Division. He left for France on 6th June 1916 and was given a new Regimental Number 835555.^{vii}

William's time in France was relatively short as he succumbed to an undiagnosed illness and was subsequently admitted to No.14 General Hospital at Wimereux on 22nd October, before returning to England on 1st November 1916 on the Hospital Ship *St Denis*.

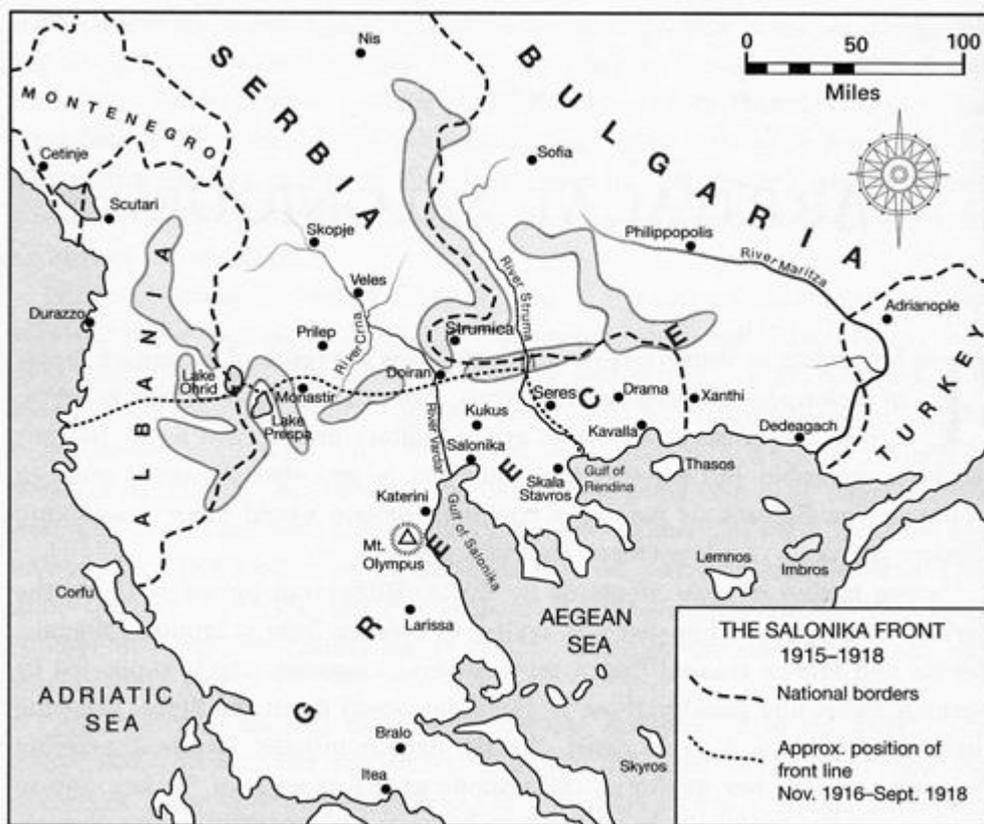


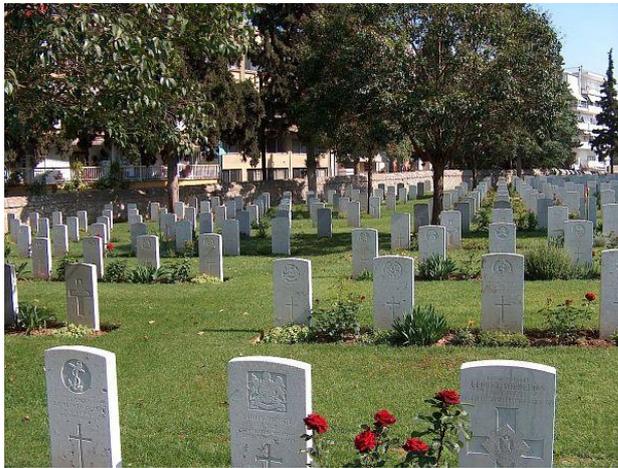
Figure 4: Map showing the Salonika front from 1915-1918

William's next posting was on 3rd March 1917 to Salonika in order to join the 54th Brigade. Two day's later, William set sail for Salonika. He arrived twelve days later on 17th March.

In March 1917 the British Salonika Force (BSF) under General George Milne held 90 miles (144 km) of front, including the key strategic position at Doiran. Living conditions for soldiers on both sides were harsh. Winter and summer brought extremes of climate and disease, especially malaria, which caused many more casualties than the fighting. This was the fate of poor William, who reported ill on 13th October 1917 and was diagnosed with 'cardiac debility'. He was sent to Sumerhill Camp at the RFA base camp but died nine days later on 22nd October. William's body was taken to 64th British General Hospital where a post mortem was carried out. It confirmed that his death was consistent with malaria - the fatty degeneration of heart muscle, the accumulation of watery fluid in the pericardial cavity, and congestion and oedema of the lungs and brain.

William's personal belongings were returned to his mother on 20th March 1918. These included a gold ring, Rule Book, letter, photos, wallet, spectacles (in case) and a pair of pince-nez.^{viii}

William is buried at Salonika (Lembet Road) Military Cemetery. He is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley, Birmingham.



**Figure 2: (Above left) Salonika (Lembet Road) Military Cemetery
(Right) WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, Moseley**

William's parent's must have been heart-broken at the death of their son, but worse was to come when just over a month later their eldest son, Gunner Eric Powell Davies, lost his life in France on 28th November 1917.

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Endnotes

- i England & Wales Marriages 1837-2005, 1863, Birmingham, 2/4, 6d, 265
- ii British Listed Buildings
<https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101392838-2-warstone-parade-east-ladywood-ward/photos#.Wfhm9Vu0Pct>
- iii British Listed Buildings
<https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101392838-2-warstone-parade-east-ladywood-ward>
- iv Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1754-1937
- v Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813-1912
- vi *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11th February 1905
- vii British Army Service Records
- viii See vii

Illustrations

- Figure 1 Postcard of St James Church, Handsworth
<https://ahistoryofbirminghamchurches.jimdo.com/handsworth-st-mary/st-james-handsworth/>
- Figure 2 Items for sale online made by William Oakley Davies
ebay and <http://www.bexfield.co.uk/sdx300.htm>
- Figure 3 Poppycock
<http://poppycockww1.com/category/salonika/>
- Figure 4 Commonwealth War Graves Commission