

# Gunner Eric Powell Davies

Eric's grandfather, 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'.<sup>i</sup>

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.

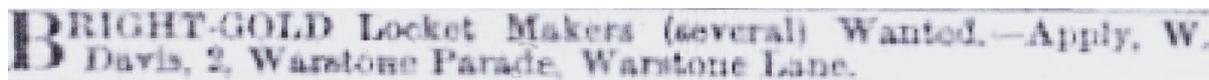


Figure 1: An 1873 advertisement for locket makers at the workshop of William Davies



Number 2, Warstone Parade was Grade II listed on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2004 (see picture left<sup>ii</sup>). It was described as a small late 19<sup>th</sup> 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 story 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.<sup>iii</sup>

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 14<sup>th</sup> April 1891, William Oakley Davies married Emily, the daughter of Alfred Powell, a wholesale grocer at St James' Church, Handsworth.<sup>iv</sup>



**Figure 2: Postcard of St James' Church, Handsworth, pre-1878**

William and Emily's first child, Gladys Powell was born in 1893. The baptism register for 4<sup>th</sup> October 1893 records the family address at 61 Lindwood Road, Handsworth.<sup>v</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> September 1902, but, sadly, he died in the summer of 1909, aged six.<sup>vi</sup>



**Figure 3**  
**(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 locketts, 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 locketts, 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 20<sup>th</sup> December 1904. A violin case, a leather bag, 290 ounces of mixed gold and silver dust, 100 ounces of gold and silver stampings, 6 locketts, 6 napkin rings, 20 ounces of silver sheet and other articles were taken.

In February 1905, the robbers were apprehended and sent for trial.<sup>vii</sup>

**Figure 4**  
A newspaper cutting describing the robbery at 2 Warstone Parade on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1904

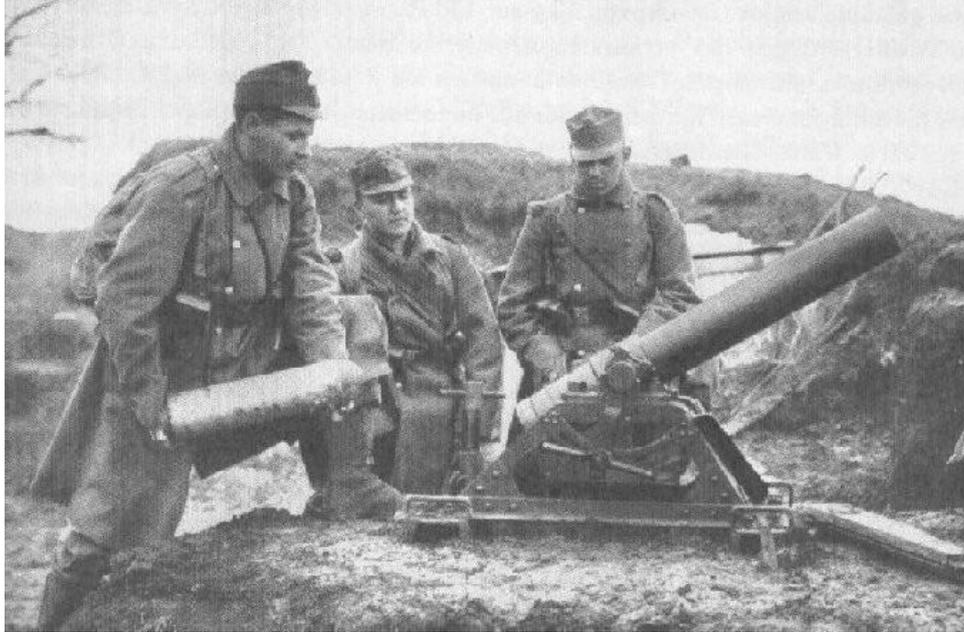
By 1911, William, Emily and the family had moved to 73 Alcester Road, Moseley, Birmingham.

Their eldest son, Eric, attended King Edward's School, then in New Street, Birmingham, from 1907 to 1910. At school it was noted that he showed talent at drawing and science, but was less successful at French and Latin.<sup>viii</sup> On leaving school at fourteen years of age, Eric gained an apprenticeship. Whether this was in his father's jewellery business or another profession is not known.<sup>ix</sup>

Eric was too young to serve with the colours, when war was declared on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, but a year later he enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) Territorial Force, 3<sup>rd</sup> South Midland Brigade as Gunner E P Davies, No 1460. In 1916 Eric was posted to France and attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army School of Mortars at their base at Saint-Venant. Eric was given a new Service Number 835456.<sup>x</sup>

At the start of the war, trench mortars did not exist in the British Army, whereas the Germans had Minenwerfers (mine launcher) that could lob bombs into the Allied trenches, although their ammunition was considered inherently unsafe. After a period of experimentation with mortar design, the British settled on a 3" Stokes mortar named after its inventor. By the end of 1916

three types of mortar. light, medium and heavy varieties, became standard in most Divisions and by 1918 each of them were equipped with 24 Stokes Mortars, 12 Medium mortars and a few 9.45" Heavy weapons together with trained crews to operate them.<sup>xi</sup>



**Figure 5: An early German Minenwerfer**

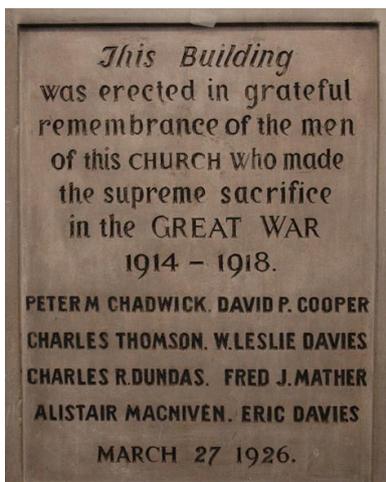


**Figure 6: The Stokes Mortar, the standard light mortar used by the British from 1916**

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917, Eric's brother, William, also in the RFA, died from malaria at Summerhill Camp, the RFA base camp in Salonika. Just over a month later Eric died. Eric's death was not directly due to injuries sustained on the front line, but as a result of 'accidental electrocution'. The exact circumstances surrounding the accident on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1917 are unknown. He was just twenty-two years old when he died.

Eric is buried in Aire Communal Cemetery, about 6 miles from St Venant and 11 miles south east of St Omer. He is also commemorated at St Mary's Church and St Columba's United Reform Church, Moseley as is his brother William. Eric is also on the Roll of Honour at KES, Edgbaston and the Hall of Memory in Birmingham.

By the end of 1917, William and Emily had lost all three sons, the eldest two while serving abroad in the Great War and the youngest at a young age to causes unknown leaving just one child, their daughter Gladys.



**Figure 7: (Top left) Headstone of Eric Goodheart Davies at Aire Communal Cemetery**

**(Top middle) St Mary's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial**

**(Top Right) KES, Edgbaston WW1 memorial**

**(Left) WW1 memorial at St Columba's United Reform Church, Moseley**

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## Endnotes

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- 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 England & Wales Births 1837-2006, Kings Norton 1902, 4/4, 6c, 402  
England & Wales Deaths 1837 2007, Kings Norton, 1909, 3/4, 6c. 183
  - vii *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1905
  - viii From the Archives of King Edward's School, Edgbaston, with thanks to Alison Wheatley, archivist
  - ix 1911 census
  - x WW1 Service Medal and Awards Rolls 1914-1920  
Medal Index Cards
  - xi The British Trench Mortar Batteries in the First World War  
<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/the-british-trench-mortar-batteries-in-the-first-world-war/>

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## Illustrations

- Figure 1 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1873
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- Figure 3 Items for sale online made by William Oakley Davies on ebay and Daniel Bexfield Antiques  
<http://www.bexfield.co.uk/sdx300.htm>
- Figure 4 *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1905
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[http://landships.info/landships/artillery\\_articles/images/9cm\\_MW\\_M14\\_3.jpg](http://landships.info/landships/artillery_articles/images/9cm_MW_M14_3.jpg)
- Figure 6 The Stokes Mortar  
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- Figure 7 Headstone of Eric Goodheart Davies  
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56489931/eric-powell-davies#view-photo=132290494>  
King Edward's School WW1 plaques  
<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/236798/>