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*Connections*

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*Michelle Stephens*

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# Digging up my past – Thomas George DAVIES

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My great-grandfather Thomas George DAVIES was born in 'about' 1860 in Blaenavon, Monmouthshire, Wales. The 1871 Wales census (online database RG10; Piece:5354; Folio:45; Page:16; GSU roll: 848449) shows a Thomas DAVIES aged 11, son of James DAVIES, carpenter, and Catherine DAVIES. James' birthplace was given as Hereford, Leominster. As well as young Thomas, James and Catherine also had Annie (16 yrs), Catherine (14), Mathar (3), Sarah (1) and one David DAVIES, aged 81, father-in-law (of Catherine ?) and widower. All the children except one year old baby Sarah (born Glamorgan, Rudry) appear to have been born in Blaenavon.

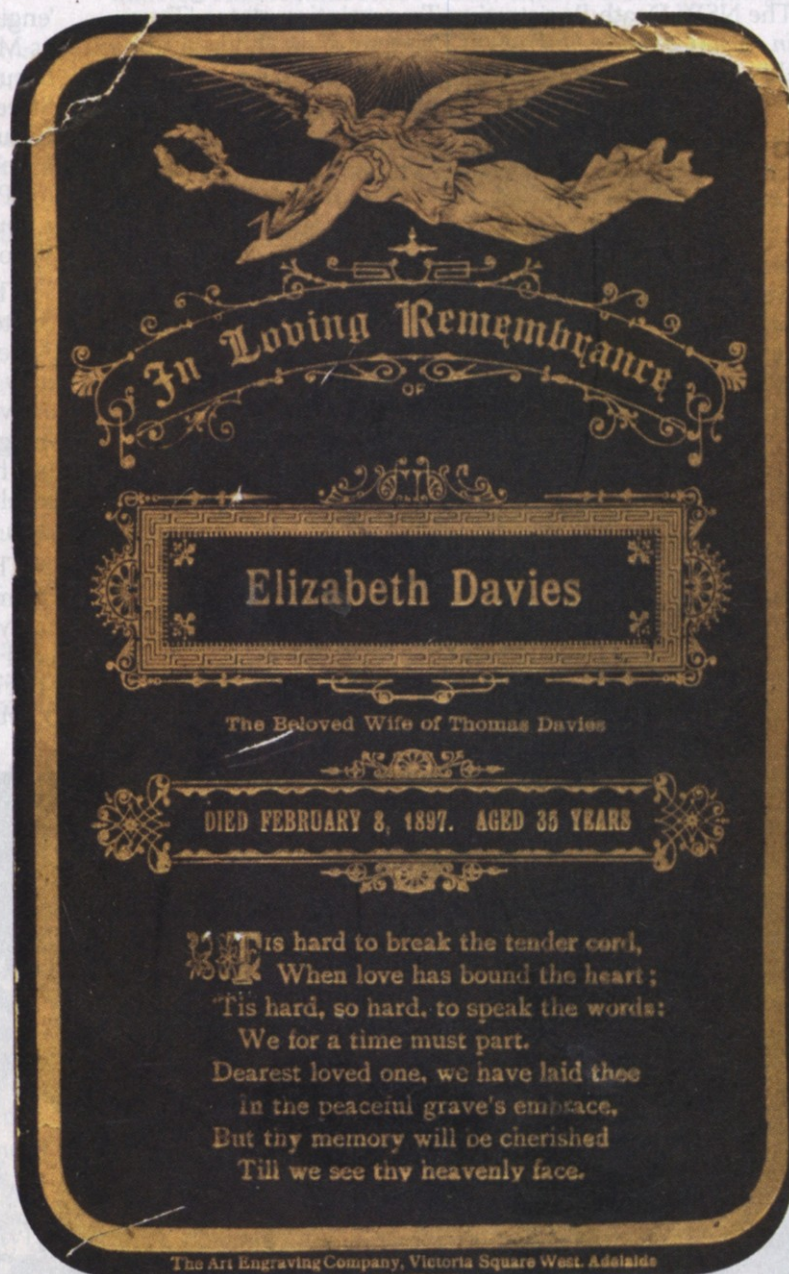
Ten years later, the 1881 census (RG11; Piece:5275; Folio:33; Page:6; GSU roll:1342268) shows Thomas at age 21. His father James, born Worcester/Leominster, was still a carpenter, but Thomas's occupation was 'Tin Millman (Plateworker)'. Now appears another son (not mentioned in 1871) of James and Catherine: David DAVIES, aged 19 in 1881, whose occupation was 'Sawyer'. He also was born at Blaenavon. The young Sarah DAVIES was now 11 years old and a Scholar, and she had acquired a new sister since the 1871 census, Emily DAVIES, born like Sarah in Glamorgan, Rudry, and at age 7, also a scholar. This later census gives a street address of 'Nr Tyncoedcae'.

When did my great-grandfather come to Australia? It must have been between 1881 and 1888, when he first married. What ship did he come on, and from what port did he leave the UK? What was his entry port? These are some of the bricks in my research wall.

His reason for coming to Australia, given that Blaenavon was a mining area with massive ironworks, may have been a hope perhaps of better prospects coupled with a young man's adventurous wanderlust. His father being a joiner and his younger brother being a sawyer could hint at timber work connected with the Welsh mines.

Jenny CAMILLERI, Hon Secretary of the Broken Hill Family History Group Inc, advised that Thomas George DAVIES married a Catherine HAYWARD in 1888 in Broken Hill, and also unearthed a Court House record stating that 'Catherine Davies died 22/11/1888 from injuries, daughter of James Hayward a butcher and mother Catherine Rogers – married in Broken Hill, aged 21, Thomas Davies. Catherine was born in Cheltenham, England c1866 and they had no children.' Fortunately Jenny had also discovered a death notice in the *Silver Age* newspaper dated 23 November 1888 stating that (Catherine) 'died of injuries from a fire at the Eaglehawk Mine early hours of the morning last Monday 22. She was only married for three months. Buried in Mt Gipps Cemetery.'

At last I had confirmation of a vague family story that one of Thomas's wives had died in a fire. I followed this up in 2010 with the help of a transcription service, Turtle Consolidated Services, and struck gold, so to speak. The marriage registration transcription shows the groom,



*Elizabeth (JOHNSTON / JOHNSON) DAVIES' memorial card*

Thomas DAVIES, as an engine driver, usual residence being Mount Gipps. His father was James DAVIES, a joiner, and Thomas's bride was Catherine HAYWARD, a dressmaker living at Mt Gipps near Broken Hill. She was born in Cheltenham, England, her father being James HAYWARD a butcher and her mother Ann ROGERS. Thomas and Catherine married in August 1888 at the District Registrar's Office, Broken Hill. The witnesses were Minnie BOURKE and David DAVIES, who I think could have been Thomas's younger brother, two years younger than him in the 1881 census.

Almost three months to the day, Thomas's new bride died on 22 November 1888 at the Eaglehawk Mine, 10 miles from Broken Hill, from burns accidentally inflicted, and shock. Dr BELGRAVE's last visit to the suffering 22 year old woman was on the 20th. She had lingered for 3 days and her anguish at this time, with her



family the other side of the world, can only be imagined. The NSW Death Registration Transcription states '*Time in Aust. Colonies: Unknown.*' There were no children from this, Thomas's first marriage.

Although plenty has been written about the Argent Street fire, I cannot find any other reference to the Eaglehawk fire, nor any reason why or how Catherine could have been involved.

What did Thomas do then? With his young bride of only 3 months dead in a horrible accident, perhaps he went to Sydney to begin a new life. If the witness to his marriage, David D, was indeed his brother, did David return to Wales before Catherine's death, or did he stay in Australia? Did he go to Sydney with Thomas? Another few bricks in the wall!

The main fact is that about a year later in September 1889 Thomas married Elizabeth JOHNSTON (or JOHNSON) who became the mother of my maternal grandmother Gladys Gwendoline DAVIES and my great-aunts Edrie Catherine DAVIES and Olive Aileen DAVIES. There is a discrepancy in the marriage date; the birth registration gives the date of Thomas and Elizabeth's marriage as 2 September 1889 whereas the NSW Marriage Registration Transcription (Ref #1889/3034) gives the date as 2 November 1889 which is more likely to be correct.

This transcription gives Thomas's occupation as 'engine driver', his status as widower, and his residence as Moncur Street, Woollahra, Sydney. His father, James, occupation was "Builder". Elizabeth's residence was Nelson Street, Woollahra, Sydney; she was born in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, England, and her father was Henry JOHNSON, a confectioner, and her mother Annie PAGET (or PAGETT). Once again, the couple married not in a church but in the Office of the District Registrar at Woollahra.

Thomas and Elizabeth moved to Broken Hill where, in September 1890, Gladys Gwendoline DAVIES was born at Argent Street. Thomas was still an engine driver and was now 30 years old. In June 1892 Edrie Catherine DAVIES arrived, and then Olive Aileen in 1895. I have a happy image of my great-grandparents at this time; Thomas had put his sorrow behind him, had a beloved wife and three lovely little girls. Then, two years later, his life was again torn apart.

The often-quoted family story was that pneumonia had claimed Elizabeth after she had taken off a coat to shelter the younger children when caught in a downpour. The cold facts from the NSW Death Registration Transcription (Ref #1897/809) show that Elizabeth DAVIES died on 9 February 1897 at Argent Street, North Broken Hill



*Marriage of Gladys DAVIES and Albert John HASTWELL*

*L-R Edrie Catherine DAVIES, Victor BUXTON, Stella DAVIES (with shepherd's crook), Albert John HASTWELL (seated), Gladys Gwendoline DAVIES, Neta DAVIES, Arthur BUXTON, Lillian HASTWELL*



from influenza and inflammation of lungs, length of illness 10 days, Medical attendant Dr Mackay; date last seen 8 February 1897. Her father was Henry JOHNSON, a baker, and her mother, Ann PAGETT. She was buried on 10 February 1897 in the Church of England Cemetery. Time in Australian Colonies: 9 years in New South Wales. The children of the marriage were 'Gladys 6 years, Edrie 4 years, Olive 1 year, all living.'

How on earth did this young father handle this trauma? There were no grief counsellors in those days and he had no church community to call upon. How could he continue his employment as an engine driver and care for his three small daughters?

Once again, Turtle Consolidated Services transcription service came to my rescue with a transcription of the NSW Marriage Registration (Ref. #1898/3073). Thomas DAVIES, engine driver of Broken Hill, widower, born Monmouthshire, Wales, age 38 years, (father James DAVIES, carpenter and mother, Catherine DAVIES) married on 13 June 1898 one Mary DROUGHT, a housekeeper, resident in Broken Hill. She was a 22 year old spinster born in Willochra, South Australia; her father was Stewart Andrew DROUGHT (deceased hotel-keeper) and her mother Julie Emma CURWEN. This third marriage, although held in the residence of the bridegroom, Argent Street, North Broken Hill was celebrated by the Revd Alfred J Wheeler, according to the rites of the Church of England.

I may wonder that a 22 year old girl had left her widowed mother and moved to a place like Broken Hill; perhaps she could have been guaranteed employment there as a housekeeper given the high mortality rate among miners. Did Thomas perhaps employ her to look after his daughters and his home? Did the relationship deepen over the few months between Elizabeth's death and Thomas's marriage to Mary DROUGHT, from one of necessity to one of companionship and love? The 16 year difference between their ages may have been of less importance than the needs of Thomas and his children.

My great-grandfather went on happily to father 7 more children with Mary Ann. They were Gilbert D DAVIES in 1899, Stella Irene DAVIES 1900, Florence M DAVIES 1901 (died September 1902 aged one year), Neta Muriel DAVIES in 1903, Mildred E DAVIES in 1906, Stanley Thomas DAVIES in 1907 and Walter Francis DAVIES in 1908. I believe they were all born in Broken Hill.

Death still stalked Thomas, first losing little Florence and later on his first son, Gilbert D DAVIES at only 19 years 10 months. The National Archives online database, *AIF Project*, records that Gilbert, of the 27th Battalion, died on 15 October 1918 at 2 General Hospital Le Havre, France. Lumbar pneumonia was his killer.

Jenny Camilleri, from the Broken Hill Family History Group also found that Thomas DAVIES was a member of the IOOF, American Order Lodge, P G Brother, and a member of the Barrier Ranges Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association. Further research is in hand to find out more details of these memberships, as it is thought possible that Thomas worked for the Silverton Tramway (tramway in this case meaning private railway). 'Engine-driver' of course could mean a driver of either locomotives or stationary engines. Silverton had been established in about 1884 as a township in its own right.

When did Thomas George DAVIES move from Broken Hill to Adelaide? In 1914 when his first daughter Gladys

married Albert John HASTWELL, Gladys' trade or calling was home duties and her residence was Semaphore. Her sister (a witness) Edrie's residence was Birkenhead. Thomas witnessed his daughter Edrie Catherine DAVIES' marriage to Justus WILLIAMS in September 1915 when his residence was given as 'of Hindmarsh' and occupation was 'engine driver'. I found it interesting that at his son Gilbert's enlistment on 27 April 1916, the address of his mother Mary DAVIES was 17 Beans Road, Southwark, South Australia. They appear to have moved again prior to Gilbert's death, for the address of Thomas and Mary in October 1918 was 22 Murray Street, West Thebarton, South Australia.

Little more is known of Mary after 1918, except that she also pre-deceased Thomas in November 1931 aged only 55 at Richmond, South Australia.

Not long afterwards the old widower was taken in by his daughter, Edrie Catherine WILLIAMS, and her husband Justus. My late mother Pearl, (who had been fostered by the childless Edrie in a parallel story of family tragedy) remembered Grandpa DAVIES living with them. She must have been 12 or 13 at the time. Meal-times were something of a trial, she said, as Grandpa would sit at the head of the table, pointing a wavering finger at nothing in particular, and saying 'Grandpa wants ...' leaving Edrie to play a guessing game as to whether he wanted salt, pepper or anything else. Mum said that Grandpa DAVIES had asthma and the doctor called often at the house.

Like most family historians, I regret not having asked Mum more about her Grandpa DAVIES. I should like to think he had a good Welsh singing voice and wondered whether he had that beautiful lilt when he spoke? Mum would have known, but it's too late now.

My great-grandfather's life story finished with his passing in April 1933, as recorded in the family notices of *The Advertiser* newspaper on Saturday 27 May 1933:

**DAVIES.**— On the 28th April, Thomas George Davies, late engine driver, Walkerville Brewery. Father of Gladys (Mrs J. Carlton), Melbourne; Edrie (Mrs J. Williams) Plympton; Olive Davies, Adelaide; Stella (Mrs A. Goldfinch), Melbourne; Neta (Mrs A. Sommer), Woodville; Stanley, and Walter Davies, Hindmarsh. His worries and trials are over.

Peace at last, as indeed the 74 year old Welshman deserved.

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