

**WILLIAM DAVIES 1841 - 1905**  
**STEELMAKER, WOLLONGONG**

William Davies, ironmaking visionary in Illawarra from 1882 until his death in 1905, has been sadly neglected by the historians of Illawarra. Only Bill Bayley seems to have been aware of the historical significance of what went on in the foundry at Charlotte Street, Wollongong. Over it's life the foundry had a number of names, the Illawarra Mercury refers to it variously as the Illawarra Foundry, the Wollongong Foundry and, in 1901, the South Coast Times calls it the Lilleshall Iron and Steel Foundry and Engineering Works. Apart from a small reference in the Illawarra Historical Society's Journals it was only in Bill Bayley's meticulous notes in which he indexed newspaper references to matters of local historical importance that any material on William Davies and his foundry was found.

William, 37 (under engagement to the Lithgow Ironworks (1)) and Catherine, 36 (born 10/1 1842(2)) together with their family arrived in Australia as assisted immigrants per the La Hogue on 21 October 1878 having left Plymouth on 25 July.

William born to Samuel and Mary Davies[?] in Lilleshall, Salop, Shropshire on 5 May 1841(3), worked in the Lilleshall Ironworks before coming to Australia. In or about 1863 he married Catherine Bloor in the Lilleshall Church. Their five children, shown on the shipping records as born Stafford, were Mary Ann 14, Sarah J (4) 12, (both shown as "School") Selina 10, Anne 8 and Samuel 7. Apart from Mary (known as Polly) and Sarah J who were shown as Wesleyan, the balance of the family were shown as Primitive Methodist. One other item of interest on the shipping record(5) was that William had a brother-in-law, William Cheadle living at McDonald Town, a suburb of Sydney. A subsequent study of the electoral roll and BDM indexes showed this to be Farmer William Cheadle (i.e. his first name was Farmer) and that he lived at Septimus Street, McDonald Town in the electoral district of Newtown. It is likely that the family stayed there for a period after arrival as the shipping record for Catherine's nephew, William Ashley, shows Catherine as at McDonald Town.

W. Ashley, 26, his wife Eliza Ann nee Proctor, 28, their one year old son William and infant Samuel followed the Davies, arriving on the Hereford on 6 December 1878(6).

Not long after W. Ashley's arrival uncle and nephew took up positions at the Lithgow Ironworks. The terms of William's contract provided that he be paid for iron produced. From the sum he received he paid the workmen, shared the rest with Ashley and appeared to prosper. The manager of the works was so impressed he thought that by watching them he could learn how to convert ore into iron himself but William was too clever to let his secrets be discovered. Eventually Ashley and Davies services were dispensed with and William went to the Lal Lal Iron Mining Company at Ballarat(7), remaining there until Lithgow asked him to return. After a further short period there, William became dissatisfied and having heard a lot about Illawarra set out for Wollongong(8). At about this time (1882) James Rutherford, owner of the Lithgow Ironworks, destroyed the same with two wagon loads of blasting powder in order, so it is said, that he should never again be tempted to re-open the works. He had attempted to run it profitably without success a number of times(9).

On arriving in Wollongong William, together with one Coulson, set up a foundry on a small scale in Charlotte Street at the rear of the hospital(10) and adjoining the Gas Company's works. After twelve months Coulson resigned from the business leaving William to carry on on his own and by 1885 William was doing well. By the turn of the century, the general engineering works, which the foundry had become, consisted of a machine shop, smithy and foundry and was producing castings up to six tonnes in weight (considered very large even to-day). It was supplying customers all over Australia and in New Zealand. Among the major customers were the collieries who bought his chilled cast iron skip wheels in preference to the imported steel ones. In the early days he made, among other things, palisades and railings for graves and fencing as well as cast iron cooking stoves. There is a family belief that the foundry produced the cast iron fencing for Circular Quay and Milson's Point in Sydney but no proof of this has yet been found.

A series of articles headed '**WOLLONGONG, ITS POSSIBILITIES' ITS REPRESENTATIVE MEN, ITS NATURAL RESOURCES, ITS PICTURESQUE SPOTS AND ITS INDUSTRIES AND TRADES** commenced in the **South Coast Times** of 13 July 1901. Article no. 1 is headed '**WILLIAM DAVIES' LILLSHALL IRON AND STEEL FOUNDRY AND ENGINEERING WORKS**' and is written by Edwin Howell who, inter alia, has this to say of William Davies: "In 1886 . . . Mr. Davies . . . commenced to devote particular attention to the manufacture of **steel**". This is followed by a description of the foundry and its machines in detail. It goes on

All along the floor in serried lines lie some hundreds of moulds, and **mirabili dictu**, among these there are a few which have been filled and otherwise dealt with by a young grandson of Mr. Davies, aged 9½ years. [William Bloor Eastaway b. c1891 ?] . . . the loop of railway which runs behind the annealing shed enables the trucks laden with coal or any other material to discharge their freight in the most convenient manner conceivable, and here again, as all through the works, is manifested that foresight and determination of minimising all labour . . . The active management of the mill has for sometime been deputed to a son and two sons-in-law of Mr. Davies . . .

By 1892 other members of the family were taking some part in the running of the business: the son, Samuel Henry, was now 21 and Sarah Jane's husband, Ted Eastaway who, at some time became a foreman in the mill, was working there as was Hezekiah Turner of Unanderra who had married Selina Davies.

William was a man of many parts: in November 1892 he made representations to the Minister for Works (William Lyne) arguing that a capital sum of £20,000 should be found to build an ironworks capable of turning out 300 tons a week, in 1893 he invited the butchers of the district to a demonstration of a new improved version of a sausage making machine designated the "Silent"(11). At another time he demonstrated that the fireclays of the South Coast were suitable for furnaces and that Illawarra ore was of sufficient quality for making pig iron. In 1897 he produced a bar of pig iron which he estimated could be made in Wollongong for fifty five shillings (\$5.50) compared with the going rate of 6 pounds (\$12) and made a public offer that he would manage a new ironworks without salary until such time as output and quality were up to standard(12).

The necessary capital was not forthcoming but William continued to be an advocate for this proposal pointing out the suitability of Port Kembla for receiving ironstone from South Australia and elsewhere while at the same time not losing faith in the suitability of the local ore(13).

William died from pneumonia on 3 November 1905 leaving a wife, a son and four daughters, Miss Davies, Mrs. E. Eastaway, Mrs. E. Turner and Mrs. O. E. Weeden of Tumut(14). Catherine died on 12 April 1910. Both are buried in the Wesleyan/Presbyterian Section of Wollongong Cemetery.

The Electoral Rolls around this time are interesting:

All Davies

1901 William & Samuel Henry at Charlotte Street

1903 William, Sam, Catherine & Mary at Charlotte Street

1906 Catherine, Mary & Samuel Henry at Charlotte Street

1917 Samuel Henry, Jane & Mary at Charlotte Street

1922 and 1924 Samuel Henry & Jane at Charlotte Street

1930 Samuel Henry, Ironfounder, Charlotte Street

Edward S.L. and Sarah Jane Eastaway/Easterway are also shown in Charlotte Street up to at least 1922. The family had two houses in Charlotte Street "Lilleshall" and "Ethel Cottage", the Davies living in "Lilleshall" and the Eastaways in "Ethel Cottage".

Samuel Henry who carried on the firm after his father's death is said to have been rather a flamboyant character - it is said of him that after a trip to England he returned with a car and an actress. Mr. Doug Harrigan, whose father worked at the mill, tells me that between 1906 and 1909 there were two cars, both 20 H.P. Metallurgics with pneumatic tyres, in Wollongong. They were owned by Sam Davies and J. Parsons. As the Eastaway family have a photo of the car taken with William Davies we can be sure this car was in Australia before November 1905.

Mr. Jack Shepherd, whose father Walter Frederick Shepherd (Fred), was a boiler maker for the Davies and whose uncle Bill Carr also worked for them, passes on these memories through his daughter Mrs. Joyce McDonell. Jack points out that it is all hearsay consisting as it does of his memory of what his father told him a long while ago:

Jack, who was born 1915, remembers that at about the age of six he had to take his Uncle Bill's lunch down to the works. That would have been in 1921 so the works were still operating then. Jack's impression is that the works closed just before the depression.

Jack said that his father, Fred, who recognised no shades of gray, considered that Sam was a good bloke and a good business man and that it was only love of the good life (whiskey, women and song) that caused his failure.

Fred left the firm in 1915 and went to Carlton in Sydney for a couple of years and then returned to Wollongong (but not to the firm) After his return, Sam would often ask Fred for advice and sometimes come and pick him up in the 20 H.P. Metallurgic and take him out to the coke jetties or wherever the job happened to be. I understand that Fred was an exceptionally good boiler maker.

The foreman, Ted Eastaway, never swore. The strongest expression he used, and only when he was really stirred up, was "blessed ass". He was a Methodist lay

preacher.

Mr. Jack Shepherd feels very much that the Davies have not been given the credit due to them as the first steel producers in Wollongong. They used Bessemer convertors. Mr. Sid Shepherd, Jack's elder brother, points out that Sam introduced a machine to the works for punching holes in the tapered flanges of the RSJs for rivetting. This would have been most useful in building the overhead cranes which the firm supplied to some Sydney warehouses. The firm also supplied the Public Works Department with many of their requirements.

- (1) *South Coast Times* 13/7/1901
- (2) From headstone
- (3) Ibid
- (4) Married Edward Samuel Lewis Eastaway, 4th son of N. B. Eastaway of Cawnpore, India. *Illawarra Mercury* 23/8/1890
- (5) Archives Office Reel 2389
- (6) AO Reel 2389
- (7) Obit. *Illawarra Mercury* 3/11/1905
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) J L N Southern and J E A Platt: *Iron Making in Australia 1848 - 1914* Pt. Kembla. 1986
- (10) Albert Memorial Hospital
- (11) *Illawarra Mercury* 26/1/1893
- (12) *Illawarra Mercury* 26/6/1897
- (13) *South Coast Times* 13/7/1897
- (14) Obit. *Illawarra Mercury* Friday November 3rd 1905. Mary (Polly) did not marry while Annie had married Charles Weeden, draper, of Tumut.