

ON CHARLOTTE STREET AND THE DAVIES

Mrs. Dorothea Stuart nee Byron writes (12 July 1991)

I was born in Charlotte St, Wollongong in 1900. In those days there were no numbered houses until much later when my grandmother's house opposite Davies was No. 2. It was a small street mostly taken up by Davies' foundry and the Gas Works. The foundry was located behind the homes of Ethel Cottage (Eastaways) and Lilleshall (Davies). The Gas Works took up a large share of the bottom and end of the street but at the very end was the Ashley home, a very grand house on several acres of ground. The Ashley grounds contained several derelict brick ovens etc. but they did work in my time. We as children often played around them.

You are correct in your research as the Davies' Foundry was there many years before the Steelworks came and I remember very well when the Steelworks first opened at Port Kembla as I was at school at St. Francis Xavier's. The E.R. & S. opened before the A.I.S. I can't recall the name Bill Bailey but have a very good recollection of quite a lot of the old residents of Wollongong. I could go down Smith St. and point out who used to live there - not all of course but most.

I don't remember William Davies senior but most of his family were almost next door neighbours. Sam was the big boss and I remember the day he brought his car home from England - a very big day indeed. I knew his wife but didn't know she was English. Old Polly was the matriarch of the family and ran the house leaving Sam's wife a very quiet and sad lady. Sam loved life and lived it up resulting in the failure of the foundry.

The Eastaways from Ethel Cottage lived next door to us. There was one daughter Ethel who was a school teacher at Wollongong School. Bill and Norman worked with their father who mostly ran the works. Mrs. Turner, was another daughter of William [Davies] and her husband also worked at the factory. Mrs. Weeden visited with her family.. The Eastaways were very strict Methodists and attended church twice each Sunday as Mr. Eastaway was a lay preacher. After the foundry closed down (?) the Eastaways family moved to St. Peters in Sydney and started up in business on their own. My brother Matt Byron (deceased) worked as a moulder pattern maker for a short time at Davies' but later went to work for many years at David Bros. in Denison St.

There was a railway line from Mt. Keira mine running directly behind the gas works and Davies' foundry and Wollongong Harbour. The line crossed Flinders Street and Mrs. Castle, who was the gatekeeper at the time, when warned of the approach of the Engine would come out with her red flag and stop the traffic in Flinders Street until the train was well clear of the traffic. After the death [23/1/1907] of Granny Quilty who owned the land directly behind the hospital, it was bought by the Davies family and a large *smelting furnace* was built. We as children would watch with fascination as the sparks of many colours would fly as the metal was poured into the moulds. All I can remember was rows and rows of wheels. I imagine also that at one time iron lace was also made there as Lilleshall was completely

surrounded all around three sides of the verandah, from gate and fence, etc.

Sam Smithers was a family friend. He owned and rented many houses in Wollongong. He did not die in Charlotte Street, Wollongong, as they had moved further up the line [the Mercury describes him as of Charlotte St., perhaps they meant "late of Charlotte St"]. After they moved, our family shifted in to their house until my grandmother [Honorah Byron] who lived in No. 2 Charlotte Street, died in 1915 [5 June] and we moved into No. 2. It [the Smithers home] was then sold to a Meat Company as a warehouse.

I hope I have been of some assistance to your History of Wollongong and when I next come down I may get in touch with you and make things a little clearer. My brother, Leo Byron . . . as an 11 year old boy, while playing with mates in the old foundry, lost three of his fingers in an old machine in the derelict foundry which had been left idle for many years. He has a great recall of Wollongong in the old days and can tell some very interesting tales.

I suggest that the large smelting furnace as described by Mrs. Stuart is the Bessemer Converter mentioned by Mr. J.M. Bayley and that it was installed shortly after 1907. If this is so I believe that it would have been ordered by William Davies before his death in November 1905.

Peter Doyle