

JOHN LAW DAVIS AND HIS FAMILY

John Law Davis, the son of a tanner named Benjamin Davis, was born in Wales in about 1827. He served as a private in a West India Company regiment and was eventually inducted into the Enrolled Pensioner Force. He arrived in WA on the 'Dudbrook', February 7, 1853 (1). Davis served briefly as a WA Police Force constable in Perth later in the year (2). As will be seen, his grandson revived this common EPF and police connection.

John Davis married Amelia, daughter of Peter Wood, in Perth on July 3, 1856. They had quite a large family – four sons and three daughters. One daughter, also named Amelia, married William Young, the son of another pensioner soldier (3).

John Davis was made caretaker of the EPF cottages at Guildford on November 27, 1857. Several cottages were built in the vicinity of Surrey Street and North Road, but only one was still standing by the 1940s. Among them was one called 'The Retreat', which was used by caretaker Davis. Recently Special Interest group member Ian Barnes took a fine photograph of the last cottage during a 'dig' in October 2007 (4).

EPF man Davis acquired a land allotment at West Guildford (Bassendean) in 1864, but died in his early 40s in 1870 (5). One of his sons was Benjamin Davis (1863-1930), who was in turn the father of Ernest William Davis (born Perth 1886), a public servant who began work as a messenger in the WA Police Force and eventually ended up as a member of the Police Commissioner's office staff (6). He was a clerk in the records section early in World War 1 and resigned to enlist. No doubt to his

extreme annoyance, he was rejected because of varicose veins. Davis then worked as a labourer until having another try. In early 1916 the army medical people were not so fussy – he was recruited into the 1st AIF and served in the 44th Battalion of Infantry.

Davis proved to be a first rate soldier and was promoted to sergeant in 1917 after surviving a bad bullet wound. One of the men serving with him was former police constable William Casterton, who later wrote a graphic letter to their mutual friend Constable Innes in Perth describing the sad but gallant death of Ernest Davis.

He was in the forefront of a night attack near Corbie on the Somme on the night of March 28, 1918 when his company was caught by enemy machine gun fire. Casterton wrote that Davis turned to his men and said 'I am hit, but carry on'. Davis then collapsed and died; his remains were never found (7). The story of this grandson of an EPF member is quite typical – so many young men of his ilk carried on a strong family service tradition from one generation to another.

- (1) Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans* (Hesperian Press, 1989), B73; *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol.2, D-G, p781.
- (2) Bentley, M. *Grandfather was a Policeman* (Hesperian Press, 1993), p36.
- (3) Broomhall, B303.
- (4) Broomhall, B73; Thomas, A.L. *A History of Bassendean* (Bassendean Road board, 1947), p13; Carter, J. *Bassendean: a Social History 1829-1979* (Town of Bassendean, 1986), pp54, 57.
- (5) Guildford Land Application Deed 2017; Broomhall, B74.
- (6) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.2, D-G, pp776 and Western Australia Police: service record of Ernest William Davis.
- (7) National Archives of Australia: Series B2455 – Ernest William Davis; Browning, N. *The Westralian Battalion. The History of the 44 Battalion AIF 1916-1919 and the Western Australian Rifles* (The Author, WA, 2004), p246, with p218 for a group photograph including Davis.