

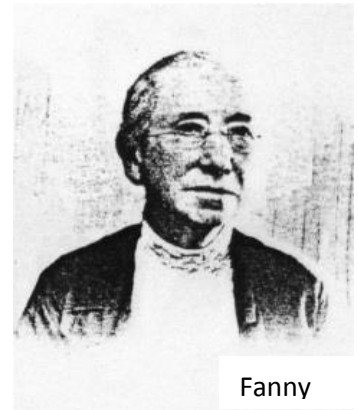
Private Charles Henry Davies

Died 2nd June, 1918, aged 26.



William

Charles Henry Davies was born in November, 1892 to William and Fanny Davies, in the Queen's Head, High Street, Church Stretton (what is now the corner house next to the Ying Wah Chinese Restaurant, opposite the Silvester Horne Institute). He had two older brothers: William, 3 and Robert, 2 and one older sister: Mary Ann, aged 1. William senior was



Fanny

a farmer's son: his father had 160 acres in Little Stretton and employed three men and a boy. He became a carpenter working on the farm. However, Fanny had been living in the Queen's Head since her birth. She had two older sisters and an older brother. Her father died when Fanny was just 5 years old, after which her mother took over running the pub and by the 1881 census there was just Fanny and her mother left there, with one lodger: a 64 year old agricultural labourer. Fanny's mother died in 1888 so perhaps it wasn't surprising that William and Fanny themselves took over the pub.

The Queen's Head was one of the smaller inns in the area, probably more accurately a beer-house. Increasingly, the smaller alehouses were becoming uneconomic in comparison



Charles Henry Davies

with the larger establishments and William and Fanny had bought Upper Farm, Chelmick, (nearly 130 acres) in 1905. In 1911 they were employing two labourers as well as his elder brother, Robert and sister so one assumes that there would have been a living there for Charles too. As Robert would probably be the one to inherit the farm, though, perhaps Charles thought it better to look elsewhere for his future. His eldest brother, William, had already moved on.

Certainly, Charles seems to have stayed in the town. In 1911, he was lodging a few doors away from the old Queen's Head. He describes his occupation as "grocer's apprentice": an interesting choice of words, as opposed to "grocer's assistant", denoting some expectation of a future livelihood, perhaps with the intention of going into business himself.

The next we know of Charles is that he died of his wounds while fighting on the Western Front in France, on 2nd June 1918. He was in 1st 4th Battalion, KSLI: service no. 201126. Although his military records haven't survived, we can estimate when he joined the Regiment from the amount of his war gratuity, which indicates that it would have been circa March 1915: ie he had volunteered (conscripted wasn't to be introduced for another year). He would have been sent to the Far East for the first two years of his service. 1st 4th KSLI was there on routine garrison duty, in order to free up the Regular battalions for more active war service. By the end of July 1917, however, the reality of war came to the battalion and they landed at Le Havre, to be sent immediately to the Ypres Salient and pitched straight into the 3rd Battle of Ypres. On their first day of "real" warfare, they lost 130 men – compared with half a dozen lost to illness in the Far East over the past three years

In the Spring of 1918, the Germans launched what was to be their last great offensive on the Western Front. On March 21st, their all-out attack began along the Somme and as this petered out in April, they renewed the offensive towards Kemmel until this too was fought to a standstill. 1st 4th K.S.L.I. was involved in both of these campaigns.

By May, there was a lull in the fighting on the British front, but the Germans then switched their attention to the much weaker French sector in the Champagne region – an area where British troops had not previously been involved. Nevertheless, to support the French, it was decided to send two British Corps and Charles's battalion formed part of this contingent. They moved by train via Paris to Rheims and on May 28th, the Germans attacked in strength between the Marne and the Aisne. The British Corps were hurried into action to meet them.

Over the next few days, Charles's battalion was pushed back in a fighting retreat from Chambrecy and by 5th June, it was reduced to only 350 men. Charles Henry Davies was not among those survivors. He had died of his wounds on 2nd June. He is buried in Chalons-En-Champagne East Communal Cemetery: one of just four WW1 British soldiers buried among 4,144 French troops.

His effects were paid to his mother, Fanny: including the war gratuity, it amounted to £31 16s 4d. Quite a sum – perhaps he had been saving up to start his own grocer's shop.

Charles is also commemorated in St Andrew's Church, Hope Bowdler and, along with his mother and father, is remembered on the family's burial plot in the graveyard there.



Sources

Photographs of William, Fanny and Charles Henry Davies with the kind permission of John Dodworth

Information on 1st 4th KSLI courtesy of the Shropshire Regimental Museum,

<https://www.shropshireregimentalmuseum.co.uk/>