

# THOMAS GEORGE DAVEY

## 1873-1961

Thomas Davey was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1873 and christened at St. Mary church Ellacombe Torquay, he was one of ten children, five males and five females. His Father's Christian name is unknown, but it is understood he was a compositor on the local paper, later known, as the Torquay Times. His mother's maiden name was Gover / Govier. Some Scottish connection somewhere hence his grandson's third Christian name is Munro.

When as a youth he was hit in the eye by a cricket ball and had treatment in Exeter Hospital but had very little sight in that eye thereafter

It is believed he volunteered for the medical corps in the 1914-1918 war but was turned down due to this disability. He was probably a member of St. John's Ambulance Association at the time and later became Superintendent of the local Bridgwater branch and was presented with a Serving Brother Medal at their Headquarters in Clerkenwell London in May 1931 or 32.

Nothing is known of his schooling but presumably this was at local school / schools in Torquay.

He was trained by Great Western Railway as a Carriage Builder (firstly horse drawn vehicles and later railway carriages) which were built on similar lines. Because of his training he was an excellent carpenter, one of the things he was asked to do by the Great Western Railway was to build a table for the Railway Waiting Room at Exeter Station, this was used for many years.

He was made redundant due to the Economic depression After this he travelled by bicycle looking for work. At some stage of his travels, he was at Croydon but on his way back towards the West Country eventually gained employment at G.W.R. (Great Western Railway's) Carriage Works at Bridgwater. He became a Foreman and remained at the carriage works until it closed down in the early 1930's. He was considered to be too old at the age of 57 for a transfer to another location and was compulsorily retired on a pension of £115 a year.

He married firstly Rose Sealey and lived possibly in Cranleigh Gardens Bridgwater at that time, (nothing much is known about this).

He married his second wife Flora Burnett at her parish Church St. John's, in

September 1918 although he had for a number of years been a member of St. Mary's choir and continued to be so until over the age of 70. They moved into her parent's house at 5, Cecil Terrace the address of the house was later to change to 20, Westonzoyland Road.

There were three children of this marriage Marion Hemborough born 30<sup>th</sup> June 1919, Denis James born 11<sup>th</sup> September 1921 and James Thomas born 9<sup>th</sup> August 1923 known as Jim or Jimmy.

The family moved to a much larger house "Brunswick" 110 Wembdon Road on their son Jim's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday 9<sup>th</sup> August 1928. An elderly lady had lived there on her own prior to this and it had been badly neglected. It needed an awful lot of work to bring it up to a reasonable standard but this only got done a very little at a time.

The garden was quite large with mature trees mainly Silver Birch all along the side of 108 Wembdon Road and a large Cedar, a Mountain Ash and several Fir trees along the road frontage, there was also a large Monkey Puzzle tree in the middle of the very rough lawn. This and the trees alongside 108 were cut down and the roots dug out by Billy Wyatt and helpers with horses and pulleys etc. He and Daisy (Di Di) (Flora's sister) lived at Cannington the next village on the Minehead Road at that time. The timber was all eventually cut into logs which were used as fuel. Charles Macey (Flora's uncle) helped with this after he finished work as a Stone Mason at Yeovil.

The veranda on the front (road side) of the house had had the ends closed in, these were cleared and opened up again which greatly improved its appearance.

A vegetable garden was made with a bank along the drive, the land being higher on that side with a wide flower border usually filled with snap dragons during the summer and standard rose trees, some of which Tom had budded himself.

A small orchard was left at the back end of the property. Twice this side was dug through and large drainage pipes put in together with large manholes just inside the road wall to help prevent flooding in the road and Whitegate (the field on the other side of the road from 110).

In front of the house a lawn and flower beds were made. During the 1939-1945 war, Thomas wanted to use this in the Dig for Victory campaign to grow vegetables but all the family rebelled against this and it was never done.

For many years Thomas had been a pipe smoker and during this time tobacco was rationed and almost impossible to obtain so he grew tobacco plants and dried the leaves by hanging them in a greenhouse he had built on the Wembdon side of the house and in the garage but this wasn't entirely successful, if the smell was anything

to go by, in spite of the fact that he gave them a coating of rum and molasses, due no doubt to the lack of heat and sunshine. He used the best of the leaves to make cigars the rest was put in a small wooden box and pressed with an old letter press for several days, when the resulting block was removed it was shredded and used as his pipe tobacco.

He also grew sunflowers for the seed having won a songbird probably a cross between a canary and a linnet in a raffle. It was called Joey and lived to be a grand old age for a small cage bird.

He was a good card player but never for money, he was very much against gambling. He had at one time "Signed the Pledge", but did actually enjoy a drink on occasions, a little was kept in the house for medical purposes, and lack of money would probably have restricted anything else.

The greenhouse was later moved to the other side of the house next to the orchard, when the house was divided into two in the mid 50's to accommodate Jim and his family. He had married Eileen Mary Smith in Bangor, South Wales in October 1946 (they had three children). The work was carried out by a local builder Albert Davey (no relation) and his workmen to plans drawn up by Robert Davey, one of his sons. This part of the house was later occupied by Daisy Wyatt, until her death in 1974.

At some stage possibly in the 1910's - 20's Thomas belonged to a syndicate of local estate agents and business men and acquired houses at Rosebury Avenue and possibly the one at Cranliegh Gardens and 14 and 16 Chilton Street all of which were let too long-standing tenants, the first two were sold at some time possibly to pay the £750 for 110 Wembdon Road. The next property venture was the purchase of a cottage and the Christian Spiritualist Church / Chapel in Queen Street so called for an Ambulance Station, but this idea fell through possibly due to lack of funding and so continued to be let until sold to become the Arts Centre. It later transpired that 110 was mortgaged to finance Denis in 1940 and Jim in 1941 when they continued their education at Bristol University.

Thomas had shares in the G.W.R., and when this was taken over as a public utility by the Labour government after the end of the war these shares were bought in at face value. Presumably the proceeds of this and the sale to the Arts Centre were used to pay for the alterations to, and redeem the mortgage on 110, Wembdon Road.

In his younger days he was a keen angler and painter in water colours, there was quite a large painting with pink roses on a dark green background hanging in the sitting room a smallish one still remains in the family and there are two examples of his work in Flora's autograph book.

He was also interested in photography using an old box brownie camera and did his own developing and printing, there are still a few of his prints around. With the aid of a jeweller's eye glass, he would also endeavour to repair clocks and watches with varying degrees of success.

At some stage he must have learned Book Keeping and for years ran the G.W.R. Workers Coal Club whereby trucks of coal were bought direct from the collieries, delivered and sold to workers at a competitive price.

After finishing work, he took to going to nearby Auctions, mainly clearing auctions, he refused to join any 'rings' then in operation as now. He would buy odd job LOTS if anything in any lot appealed to him and so accumulated an enormous number of books pictures etc. One room of the house was completely stacked with books and every available wall in the house was covered with pictures. He always said they would appreciate in value but he never sold any, actually some did so but not nearly to the price they would have reached when inflation became rampant in the 1980's. In the end a great many of the things deteriorated, a lot of this no doubt due to the conditions under which they had been kept, much of it was of no value anyway and was destroyed.

At one time he was asked why he cycled everywhere, it must have been almost two miles through the centre of town to the railway works and so about 8 miles a day there and back twice, his reply was that he'd worked out it would cost about £1.00 per week to run a car and so it was out of the question.

He was naturally very affected by the death of his sons Denis in 1941, he had been in the Army for just one month when he contracted Meningitis and died in a hospital in Richmond Yorkshire at the age of 20 and Jim who died in a plane crash near Bordeaux in France on his way from Paris to Africa in 1959, at the age of 37 leaving a widow and 3 small children.

Marion was married in 1940 and continued to live at 110 Wembdon Road with her husband George and later two children Richard and Helen until her husband was transferred to Salisbury in 1949.

He seldom went away to stay, but took day trips with the family using his GWR free ticket privilege pass select concessions. They visited Torquay to see his surviving family there, actually he out lived them all. Bristol was another destination where one of his sisters lived in the St Ann's districts and enabled visits to be made to the museum; on trips to London the Natural History Museum and picture galleries were visited.

Thomas was diagnosed with cancer sometime after he retired and ate mainly a

diet of fish particularly plaice this he covered with vinegar.

Thomas and his wife went on living at 110 quietly until about 1960 when his health and strength declined, he died on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1961 at the age of 87 and was buried at Quantock Road Cemetery. He left the house and the remainder of his estate solely to his widow. She remained in the house with her sister Di Di occupying the adjoining part of the house until her death on the 8th February 1974.

The house was then put on the market for £14,750 and Flora moved to Salisbury on the 1st December of that year and died on the 29th January 1978. When the house was advertised in 1993 the asking price was £165,000.