

Ernest Victor Davey (1888-1957) and dentistry in North Bristol at the time of the First World War

Chris Stephens*

This all came about because a box of instruments from Mr Davey was given by his son to the Dental School

Ernest Davey was born in October 1888 to Albert Edward Davey a house painter of Bristol and Mary Ann (née Williams) who had come there from Birmingham. The family were then living in 4 Lower Brandon St, Bristol and Ernest was baptised at St George's Brandon Hill on 25th October 1888. (This is now a well known chamber concert hall). In the census of 1911 Ernest, aged 23 years, is described as a mechanical dentist, perhaps somewhere between a prosthetist and a dental technician (Fig.1). His work was almost entirely confined to full and partial dentures although he does seem to have undertaken extractions.

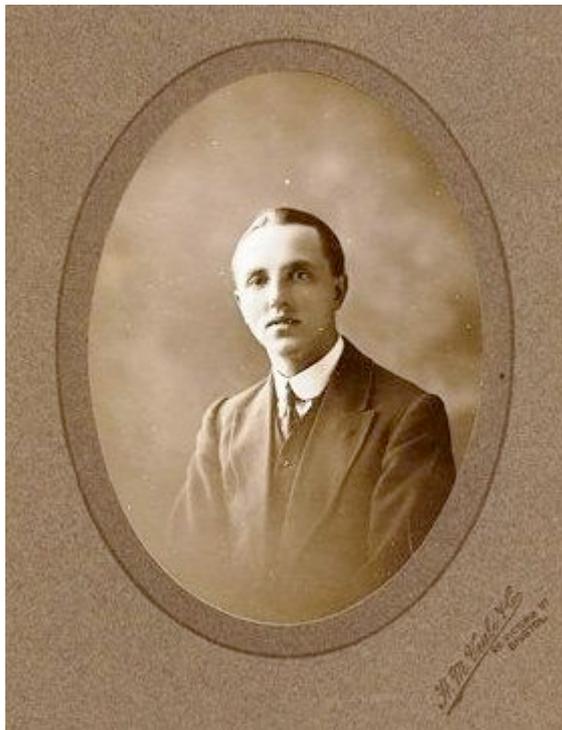


Figure 1. Ernest Victor Davey



Figure 2. 41 Monmouth Road

At this time Ernest was still living with his father at 41 Monmouth Road, Bishopston in the north of the city (Fig. 2), his mother having died in 1906. He had clearly been practising there for some while since the first entry in his account book, £2 for making upper and lower vulcanite dentures with gold bands for a resident of Clifton Bristol, is dated August 1907. Much of his work thereafter was for people living closer to his home in Horfield, Bishopston, Redland, Montpelier, St Andrews, and Stokes Croft. Ernest continued to work as a technician until December 1915 at which point there is a break in the entries in his account book. Maybe after this he worked in some other capacity or for a dental practice. More likely he had volunteered for military service. Although his enlistment paper is dated

5th October 1916 there is an entry which implies he had undergone earlier training as a reservist (Fig. 3). The Military Service Bill had been introduced in January 1916, providing for the conscription of single men aged 18–41 years. It is possible, though unlikely, that Ernest appealed against his recruitment. An appeal could be successful on the grounds of work of national importance, business or domestic hardship, medical unfitness, or conscientious objection. Over half those called up in Bristol did so at the local Military Service Tribunal ¹.

On 22nd July 1916, Ernest had married Maud Keturah Williams from Redfield, Bristol but must have known that he was still eligible to serve as in May 1916 conscription had been extended to married men. So finally on 5th October that year, with his address remaining that of 41 Monmouth Road he was signed up to join the 5th Norfolk Regiment (Fig. 3). However his military service is not recorded in the National Archives nor in the records of Norfolk Regiment². One explanation might be that he was that he was immediately co-opted to serve in one of the dental units set up behind the lines. Perhaps that is what is meant by his enrolment classification “Service abroad, not general service”.

¹ By the end of June 1916 748,587 British men had made appeals to local military tribunals.

² Personal enquiry to Norfolk Regimental Museum, Norwich, June 2014

Army Form 8

OF SERVICE PAPER

is permitted to be enlisted in H.M. Regular Forces for General Service with the Colour or in the Reserve for the period of the War, under the provisions of the Military Service Act, 1916.

No. 7473 Name Ernest Victor Davey Corps 5th Bn 8th Bde

Questions to be put to the Recruit on Enrolment

1. What is your Name? ... 1. Ernest Victor Davey
2. What is your full Address? ... 2. 11, ...
3. Are you a British Subject? ... 3. Yes
4. What is your Age? ... 4. 24 Years 17 Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... 5. Dental Mechanic
6. Are you Married? ... 6. No
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military? If so, which? ... 7. As a 4 day ...
8. Have you any preference for any particular branch of the service, if so, which? ... 8. No
9. Are you desirous of serving in the Royal Navy, if so, state your qualifications. ... 9. No

I, Ernest Victor Davey solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true.

Ernest Victor Davey SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.
W Lloyd Signature of Witness.

EXEMPTION FROM COMBATANT SERVICE ON CONSCIENTIOUS GROUNDS.

If the Recruit has been exempted by a Tribunal on conscientious grounds from serving as a combatant it should be so stated here

MEDICAL CLASSIFICATION AS TO FITNESS FOR SERVICE ON ENROLMENT.

Classification* B, SERVICE ABRO NOT GENERAL SERVICE

* To be filled in by the Recruiting Officer after Classification by the Medical Board.

† Certificate of Approving Officer.

I approve the enrolment of the above-named man, and appoint him to the 5th Bn 8th Bde

Date 5 Oct 1916 19

Place ... Approving Officer.

† The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.
‡ How best the "Corps" to which the Recruit has been appointed.

* If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former service, such as positions (if possible), his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Character, which should be retained as long as conveniently practicable in and with, or in the vicinity of, the Recruit.

Figure 3. Ernest Davey's enlistment record of 5th October 1916

In August 1914 facilities for dental treatment in the army were negligible. No provision had been made for treatment in the field as the British Expeditionary Force ranked vets and blacksmiths higher than dentists in their list of priorities. In October 1914, during the Battle of the Aisne, the Commander of the First Army General Haig suffered severe toothache. Finding that there was not one British dentist in the BEF he had to be treated by Charles Valadier (later Sir August Charles Valadier) a dental surgeon from Paris. Haig immediately called for dentists to attend the BEF and by the end of the year, there were 11 dentists attached to the RAMC; an average of one for four divisions. Initially a dental officer was allocated to each Casualty Clearing Station on the Western Front. There were no technical facilities there, nor when casualties were evacuated back to base. This was of

some significance as a high proportion of the soldiers wore dentures and loss of these rendered a man unfit for duty. In May 1916 a mobile dental laboratory was presented to the army and was such a success that eventually each of the 5 armies in France had one enabling basic dental services to be provided over a wider area. Despite these and later commissioning of dental surgeons, almost all treatment for soldiers was carried out by civilian practitioners, many of whom were not properly qualified. It seems highly likely that Ernest Davey was one of these. This began to change in 1916 when an Inspecting Dental Officer was appointed to the staff of Deputy Directors of Medical Services (DDMS). Progress was slow but by 1918 there were 850 dental officers in the Royal Army Medical Corps. In 1921, dentists of the RAMC were split off into a separate Army Dental Corps (ADC). The corps was awarded the "Royal" prefix to become the Royal Army Dental Corps in November 1946 in recognition of its service in World War II.



Figure 4. One of the three nesting trays of instruments which made up the dental kit used by Davey and which was presented to the Dental School by his son. This is now held by the BDA Museum.

In May 1919 Ernest Davey was back in Bristol working for himself as a mechanical dentist, although this was now mainly denture repair work. His father died on 9th October 1920. Given the size of his estate (£798 5s 10d) it would seem he already owned the 3 bed terrace house which he left to his son. It was perhaps at this point that the inscription "Ernest Ville" was placed over the front door (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. The inscription above the front door of 41 Monmouth Road

Ernest's last account book entry is April 15th 1924 (Fig. 6). By this time non-registered dental practice was illegal. The period for registration under the 1921 Dentists Act had been extended by the 1923 Dentist Act which gained the Royal Assent on 2nd August that year.³ As Davey had no formal dental qualification and had no basis because of his previous restricted dental work to be "grandfathered in" to the Dentist Register he could no longer practice independently.⁴ He was then only 36 years old. Quite what he did thereafter is not known. By this time there were several local dental practices in the Gloucester Road Bishopston (Fig. 7), and maybe he worked in one of these. There were two manufacturers of artificial teeth within half a mile of his house indicating the high level of denture wearing in this part of the city.⁵ In fact he may have undertaken technical work for more than one of these dental practices before the War since his personal earnings as recorded in his cash book, were hardly sufficient to give him a living.

³ The London Gazette. 3rd August 1923, p.5322

⁴ It is of interest in that in anticipation of this change Kings College Hospital had resolved to introduce a dental teaching course. Minutes of the Management Committee, Kings College Hospital, 12th April 1923

⁵ Wright, D., Hyde, J. *Bishopston –The early Years*. Research Group Paper 5, Bishopston Horfield and Ashley Down Local History Society, Bristol, 2010. pp 84-100.

1923.

Mar. 7	Mr. J. Bailey 33 Downend Park, Horfield. Remake Upper & add 3 teeth.	2-2-0	2-2-2
April 14 1924	Mr. Brown Upper & Lower Repair 6 teeth	18-0	18-0
April 15	Mr. Kilton Remake Upper	1-10-0	1-10-0

Figure 6. The last entry in Ernest Davey's practice accounts

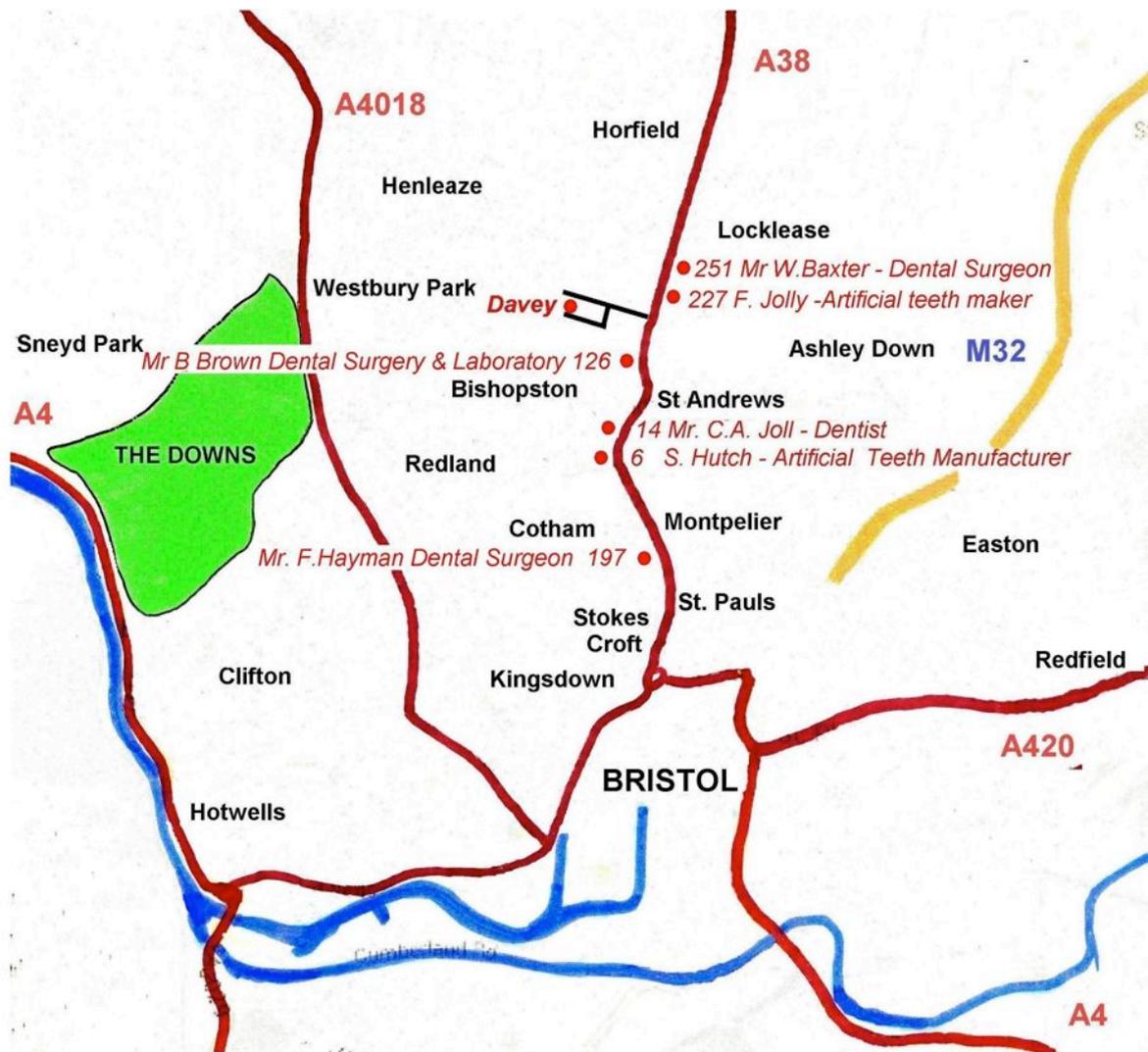


Figure 7. Dental Practices in North Bristol in 1914

Perhaps the most likely of these was the nearby practice of Mr. B.G. Brown at 126 Gloucester Road, barely two minutes walk from Monmouth Road, and which claimed to have a dental laboratory on the premises (Fig. 8).

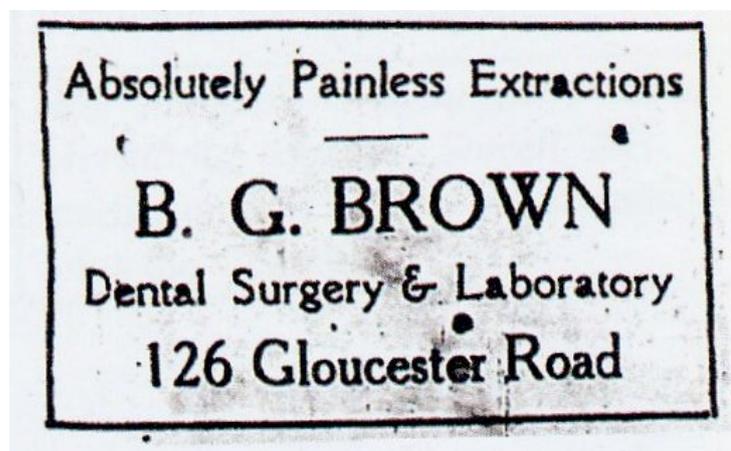


Figure 8. An advertisement in the Horfield and Bishopston Record of 13th June 1914

Notably another local practice was that of Frank Hayman, located half a mile away at 197 Cheltenham Road. No fewer than 9 members of the Hayman family were dentists. Four had attended the 21st Annual Conference of the Western Counties Branch of the British Dental Association held in Bristol in 1903 under the presidency of Frank's cousin Charles A Hayman (Fig. 9). Charles was by then the Lecturer in Dental Mechanics and Metallurgy at the Bristol University College.⁶ Frank Hayman's nephew, George Fawn, had initially worked in Frank's practice before qualifying in medicine and dentistry at the newly established Bristol University in 1912. George then served in the Royal Army Medical Corps as a dentist from 1914-1918, returning after the war to the Bristol Royal Infirmary as its Dental Surgeon and eventually becoming the first NHS Consultant Dental Surgeon in the City (Fig. 10). He is still remembered in the Bristol Dental School by the award of an annual George Fawn Prize in Paediatric Dentistry.

Ernest Victor Davey died in December 1957.

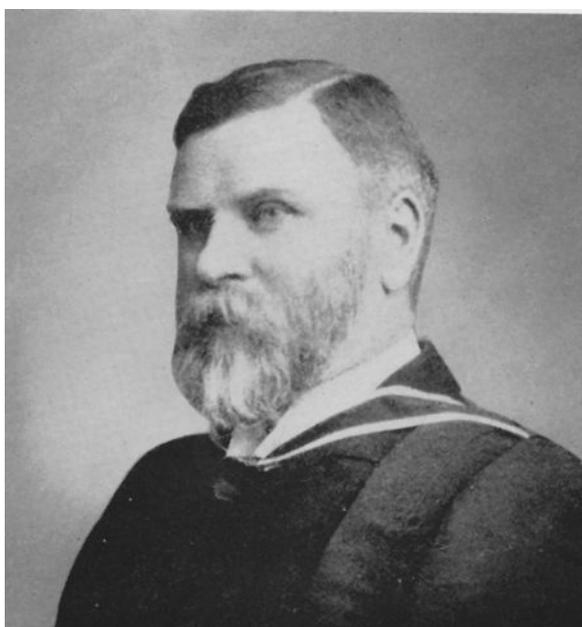


Figure 9. Charles A. Hayman MD, FRCSI, LRCP, LDSRCS

⁶ This would become Bristol University in 1909 see Stephens C.D., *A history of the University of Bristol Dental School and its site*, Bristol Dental Alumni Association, Bristol, 2012.



Figure 10. George Fawn MDS,FDS,MRCS LRCP