

## **JOHN POOLE DAVIS**

John Poole Davis was baptised on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1822 at St James Parish Church (Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0EA). His parents were William Davis (gentleman) and Martha Davis (nee Eaton). They had married on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1812 and at the time of John's baptism were living in Windsor Terrace, Clerkenwell (off City Road, N1 7TE). John had three older siblings: William Perry Davis, born 1813, Maria Frances Davis, (1815-1864) and Eliza Ann Davis, born 1817. He also had a younger brother Anthony Aransolo Davis, born in 1826.

John started work with the Great Western Railway in about 1840. He married Georgiana Laura Slater on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1841 at St George's Parish Church in Bloomsbury (6-7 Little Russell Street, WC1A 2HR.) He was 19 at the time, working as a clerk and living in Peckham. Georgiana was 22, the daughter of schoolmaster William Salter. She was living at 32 Russell Square, (WC1B 5D, now part of the University of London).

There is no trace of the couple in the Census taken on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1841 but their history over the next ten years can be deduced from the census taken on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1851. This records that by 1842 they were living in Twyford, Berkshire. The main line of the GWR was built in 1838 through Twyford. Their first child, Laura Georgiana, was born there in 1842. Their second child, another John Poole Davis, was born there in 1844.

The family then moved to the village of Box in Wiltshire and John Poole Davis worked as a railway clerk. The railway had opened in Box on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1841 with the completion of Box Tunnel. The census hints that Davis preferred his wife's second name as she is recorded as Laura G. Davis. Four more children were born in Box; Anthony A. Davis in 1845, Louisa in 1846, Matilda in 1849 and Charles in 1852. John Poole Davis left the employ of the GWR in 1852 and joined the Eastern Counties Railway. The family moved back to London and their last child, Frances M. was born in St Pancras, Middlesex.

By 19<sup>th</sup> October 1855, Davis was in post as a District Superintendent with the ECR at a salary of £200 per annum. (£14,600 in 2010). By 1<sup>st</sup> April 1856, he was appointed Assistant to the Out Door and Passenger Superintendent at £300 per annum (£21,900 in 2010). On 27<sup>th</sup> November he resigned. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1856, he requested a privilege pass for his "family and furniture" to go to Bishop Stortford on the occasion of his leaving Service. This was granted.

It seems that he had taken a position with Gurney & Company, the Norwich Bankers who were the owners of the River, having foreclosed on a mortgage to Sir George Duckett, the son of the original proprietor of the Navigation. There is a letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 1857 to Jno Marchant Esq, Clerk to the River Lee Trust, at Hertford. It is signed "J. P. Davis, Manager, Stort Navigation." He was to spend the next thirty two years as a servant of the river, followed by nine more years as its owner.

The census taken on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1861 reveals that the marriage had broken down. Georgiana L. Davis, now 44 years old and reverting to her original sequence of Christian names, is living at 2, Lansdowne Cottages, Lambeth (possibly now Lansdowne Grove SW8 2EG). Unusually there is a note on the domestic situation "Living on a separate maintenance, husband having left her". Six of their seven children are living with her. The seventh, John Poole Davis, junior, aged 17, has left home and is an apprentice chemist and druggist, living in the High Street in Wells, Somerset, in the home of his master, William Flook.

On that same date in 1861, John Poole Davis, senior, aged 38, is living at 24, Dover Place, Southwark (long since demolished but close to the Bricklayers Arms, SE1). He is living with Minnie Davis, 21, who is incorrectly recorded as his wife. She was born in Doncaster, Yorkshire. Curiously, he is recorded as a clerk not a river manager.

His name appears on a stone block on a new stable building on Roydon Lock on the Stort Navigation. The inscription reads:

ERECTED  
1864  
J.P. DAVIS RSN SURVEYOR

On 14<sup>th</sup> December 1866, John Poole Davis (as River Manager) gave evidence to the Pollution of Rivers Commission, concerning the state of the Stort Navigation.

A record of a court case was reported in the Chelmsford Chronicle on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1868. A boatman, William Barber, was summoned by Davis for drawing a clough or slacker ... whereby the water was mis-spent and wasted. Barber was found guilty and fined 20shillings.

Another letter has survived dated 10<sup>th</sup> November 1869, addressed to John Poole Davis, River Manager.

John Poole Davis, junior, died in Kensington, London, in 1870, aged 26.

The census taken on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1871, shows that John senior has moved to 23 Doddington Grove, St Mary Newington (now demolished and replaced by flats, Southwark, SE 17). He is now a surveyor. He is living with Minnie, although she is listed now as Mary and still shown as his wife. A visitor in the house on that census night is Minnie's mother, Mary Theakston.

Georgiana has moved to Upper Holloway. She and her family are living at 18 Stanley Road. (Road disappeared but near Alexander Road, Holloway, N19). Five of the six surviving children are still at home. Laura, 29; Anthony, 26, a solicitor's clerk; Matilda, 22, a governess; Charles, 19, a junior clerk and Frances, 16. Louisa, 25, has left home and there is no record of her.

Again, a letter survives from 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1873 where Mr Davis is referred to as the "River Manager". His full name appears as an executor in the Probate of Will of Athelstan Iveson. His address at that time shows that he has moved a few doors along to 17, Doddington Grove.

In April 1877, Georgiana L Davis died aged 60.

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1877, at St Marys Parish Church, Lambeth (the church building now houses the Museum of Gardening. It is situated by the entrance to Lambeth Palace, SE1 7JU), John Poole Davis aged 55, a widower; a surveyor, of Lambeth, son of William Davis (deceased), married Mary Jane Theakston aged 37, a spinster of Raynham St, Camden Town, daughter of the sculptor, Charles deLatre Theakston.

By the next census of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1881, they had at long last moved north of the Thames, to Rupert House, High Road, Tottenham (High Cross, near Colsterworth Road N15 4BJ). John P Davis, aged 58, a surveyor and Mary J Davis, his wife, aged 39 (having somehow lost a couple of years ) were sharing their home with Mary's father, Charles Theakston and Mary Farr, a servant.

This is an extract from the Minutes of the Lee Conservancy Board of 23rd November, 1888. "The Clerk reported that Mr J P Davis, Manager of the River Stort, had informed him that the owners, Messrs Truman, Hanbury and Co; were in negotiation with a firm for the sale of the whole concern for £500...the Board did not think it advisable to entertain the question"

A further extract continues the story: 19th July 1889 " .....Messrs Truman, Hanbury & Co had just sold to him the undertaking of the Stort Navigation; and that he hoped that the amicable relations which had hitherto existed between the Lee and the Stort would continue..."

On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1889, the sale was completed and John Poole Davis bought the River Stort from his employers, Truman, Hanbury and Buxton for the sum of £100.(They had paid £15,000 for the waterway, just sixteen years earlier.) At the time he was living at 11, Bedford Road, Tottenham. (N15 4HA)

The census on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1891 shows that, whilst he was prepared to live in London and administer the Navigation as a manager and surveyor, when he owned the Stort he moved to a house (now demolished) on Latton Island, Harlow beside the waterway. On census day he was in residence. He was then 68 years old and records himself as a civil engineer. Mary, his wife, now 49 and reverting to her former name of Minnie, was away visiting friends in 131, Mercers Road, Islington (N19 4PY).

On 1st April 1892 Davis published his intention to increase the Tolls for the Stort Navigation with the following announcement in the London Gazette:

“THE RAILWAY AND CANAL TRAFFIC ACT, 1888. Stort Navigation.

Proposed Revision of Tolls for Traffic on the Stort Navigation.

"NOTICE is hereby given that, pursuant to the Railway and Canal Traffic Act, 1888, the Stort Navigation has submitted to the Board of Trade a revised schedule of maximum tolls proposed to be charged by the said Navigation.

Printed copies of the proposed schedule can be obtained, at the price of one shilling, at the principal office of the Navigation, Latton Island, Harlow, Essex, or on application to the Toll Collector at Roydon, on the Navigation.

Anyone wishing to raise any objection to the proposed schedule may forward, by post a notice of objection to the Board of Trade, marked on the outside of the cover enclosing it, “Railway and Canal Traffic Act, 1888.”

Notices of objection must be transmitted to the Board of Trade so as to reach there on or before the expiration of eight weeks from the 2nd day of April, 1892.

The date on which the said term of eight weeks will expire is the 27th day of May, 1892.

Every objector must at the same time transmit to the Proprietor of the said Navigation, a copy of the notice of objection, otherwise the objection will be liable to be dismissed without being heard. Due notice will be given of the time appointed for hearing and disposing of notices of objection.

JOHN POOLE DAVIS, Proprietor of the Stort Navigation.

Latton Island, Harlow, Essex”

Also on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1892 he sold a small piece of land near the South Mill Lock House in Bishops Stortford to Mr J Taylor. No price is recorded for this transaction but two months later on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1892, he sold “a slip, piece or parcel of freehold meadow or pasture land ...near South Mill” to Sir Walter Gilbey for £80. The third and last sale is recorded in an

indenture of the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1893 which shows that Davis sold part of Latton Island to a Mrs Ann Sadgrove but again there is no record of the price.

These appear to be the only sales of property that he made during his ownership of the Stort Navigation so that his reputation as an asset-stripper seems to be ill-founded and is possibly based on a report written in 1902 by George Corble, the Lee Conservancy Board's Clerk, concerning the possible purchase of the Stort. "Land. - There is none to offer. In 1870 the Engineer reported "There are many strips and wide banks alongside the River suitable for depositing dredgings, etc, but not of intrinsic value for sale, nor should they be sold." To that Mr Tween (the Conservancy's Engineer) adds:- "Unfortunately the late Mr Davis thought otherwise, and sold every piece he possibly could" ". This would appear not to be true. The largest sale of Stort land took place on the day he bought the Navigation. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 1889, Truman Hanbury & Buxton sold the major part of the wharf and buildings in Bishops Stortford and two other pieces of land, one at South Mill Thorley and the other at Sawbridgeworth, to Edward Cornell and other people for an undisclosed price.

He owned the waterway for just nine years and made a number of improvements or at least repairs and replacements, possibly paid for by the tolls. Unfortunately no record survives of the income or expenditure but from figures taken just after he relinquished ownership the income may have averaged around £850 per annum. He sold the waterway to Sir Walter Gilbey, of gin fame, for £500 on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1898. John Poole Davis was the only owner who actually sold the Stort for more than he paid! By this date he had left Latton Island and was living at No 7, The Circus, Greenwich (Now 7 Circus St, Greenwich SE10 8SG)

He died on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1899, at the age of 78, of senile dementia and exhaustion in the Lewisham Union Infirmary. Minnie was living at 23, St Stevens Road, Lewisham (now St Stephens Grove, Lewisham, SE13), at the time of his death.

His will was administered on 5<sup>th</sup> July to Minnie Davis, widow. Effects £190. As a footnote, the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1901 census showed that Minnie Davis was still living at 23 St Stephens Road, Lewisham, aged 55, a widow living on her own means.

I'll leave the last word about John Poole Davis to Charles Tween. The lack of many of the original and old records for the Stort may be explained by this extract from his Report of 23rd January 1920. "A large number of documents and plans relating to the Stort were taken away by the late Mr J Poole Davis, and as these may be in the possession of his assigns, I would suggest that a few advertisements be issued with a view to their recovery" There was a handwritten note added "to next meeting". There were no further entries....

### **These are the records from which his story is taken**

Parents William Davis (Gent) and Martha Davis (nee Eaton). Parents married 24<sup>th</sup> June 1812. Living at Windsor Terrace, Clerkenwell.

Baptism 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1822 **John Poole Davis** at St James Parish Church, Clerkenwell.

Siblings William Perry Davis (1813 - )  
Maria Frances Davis (1815-1864)  
Eliza Ann Davis (1817 - )  
Anthony Aransolo Davis (1826 - )

Great Western Railway

*May have started work with GWR as early as 1840. (see ECR 1855 entry below) Living first at Twyford (first two children born there) and then moving to Box. (see 1851 Census below)*

Marriage 1 25<sup>th</sup> April 1841.

**John Poole Davis**; Minor; Bachelor; Clerk; Peckham; William Davis (Gent) Georgiana Laura Salter; Of full age; Spinster; 32 Russell Square; William Salter (Schoolmaster)  
At St George's Parish Church, Bloomsbury

Census 1841 7<sup>th</sup> June 1841:- No trace

Census 1851 30<sup>th</sup> March 1851:- Living in Box Village

<b>John P Davis</b>	Head	m	28	Railway Clerk	Middlesex
Laura G do	Wife	m	31		Middlesex
Laura G do	d	unm	9		Berks, Twyford
John P do	s	unm	7		Berks, Twyford
Anthony A do	s	unm	6		Box, Wilts
Louisa do	d	unm	5		Box, Wilts
Matilda do	d	unm	2		Box, Wilts

Great Western Railway

*Left their employ 1852 and joined ECR (see below). Last child with Georgiana born 1853, in London*

Eastern Counties Railway

19<sup>th</sup> October 1855 **Mr. J. P. Davis**, (In post as) District Superintendent at £200 per annum,

31<sup>st</sup> October 1855 Letter from **Mr. J. P. Davis** ... he has had 12 years experience with Great Western and three with this Co.

2<sup>nd</sup> April 1856 **Mr. J. P. Davis**, to be appointed Assistant to Out Door and Passenger Supt. at salary £300 per annum to commence 1st. Apr. inst.

27<sup>th</sup> November 1856 **Mr J.P. Davis resigns.**

10<sup>th</sup> December 1856 Letter from **Mr. J. P. Davis** requesting privilege pass for his family and furniture to Bishops Stortford on occasion of his leaving service – granted.

River Stort 24 November 1857. Letter to Jno Marchant Esq, Clerk to River Lee Trust, Hertford. Signed **J P Davis**, Manager Stort Navigation.

Census 1861 8<sup>th</sup> April 1861:- 24 Dover Place, Southwark, London

<b>John P Davis</b>	Head	m	38	Clerk	Middlesex
Minnie do	Wife	m	21		Yorks, Doncaster

Census 1861 8<sup>th</sup> April 1861:- 2 Lansdowne Cot, Lambeth

Georgiana L Davis	Head	M	44	Living on a separate maintenance, husband having left her.	Mddx, St Pancras
Laura G do	d	unm	19		Berks, Twyford
Anthony A do	s	unm	16		Box, Wilts

Louisa	do	d	unm	15	Box, Wilts
Matilda	do	d	unm	12	Box, Wilts
Charles	do	s	unm	9	Box, Wilts
Frances M	do	d	unm	8	Mddx, St Pancras

Census 1861 8<sup>th</sup> April 1861:- High Street, Wells, Somerset  
 John P Davis Apprentice unm 17 Chemist's Apprentice Twyford, Berks

River Stort 1864 **John Poole Davis** Built stable on Roydon Lock

River Stort 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1869 **John Poole Davis** Letter addressed to River Manager

Death Record Jan - Mar 1870 John Poole Davis b. c1844 Age 26  
 d. Kensington (ref 1a 122)

Census 1871 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1871:- 23 Duddington Grove, St Mary Newington  
**John Davis** Head m 48 Surveyor Middlesex  
 Mary do Wife m 31 Yorks, Doncaster  
 Mary Theakston m 65 Stepney, Mddx

Census 1871 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1871:- 18 Stanley Road, Upper Holloway  
 Georgiana L Davis Wife m 54 Mddx, St Pancras  
 Laura G do d unm 29 Berks, Twyford  
 Anthony do s unm 26 Sol'rs Clerk Box, Wilts  
 Matilda do d unm 22 Governess Box, Wilts  
 Charles do s unm 19 Jun, Clerk Box, Wilts  
 Frances M do d unm 16 Mddx, St Pancras

River Stort 29<sup>th</sup> April 1873 **Mr Davis** (River Manager) (Letter to Gurney & Co from  
 Tanqueray, Williams and Hanbury)

Address 26<sup>th</sup> June 1875 **John Poole Davis** 17 Doddington Grove, Kennington Park  
 Road, Surrey, Executor. (Probate of will of Athelstan Iveson)

Death Record Apr 1877 Georgiana L Davis b1817 Age 60

Marriage 2 20<sup>th</sup> June 1877  
**John Poole Davis**; 55; Widower; Surveyor; Lambeth; William Davis  
 (Mercantile Clerk)  
 Mary Jane Theakston; 37; Spinster; Raynham St, Camden Town; Charles  
 deLatre Theakston (Sculptor)  
 At St Mary Parish Church, Lambeth.....

Census 1881 4<sup>th</sup> April 1881:- Rupert House, High Road, Tottenham  
**John P Davis** Head m 58 Surveyor Clerkenwell, Mddx  
 Mary J do Wife m 39 Yorks, Balby  
 Charles D Theakston m 77 Ret'd Sculptor Marylebone

River Stort Deed 188 27<sup>th</sup> June 1889 **John Poole Davis** of 11 Bedford Road, Tottenham.  
 Bought River Stort for £100 from Truman, Hanbury & Buxton

Census 1891 5<sup>th</sup> April 1891:- Latton Island, Harlow, Epping  
**John Poole Davis** Head m 68 Civil Engr Clerkenwell, London

Census 1891 5<sup>th</sup> April 1891:- 131 Mercers Road, Islington  
Minnie Davis visitor m 49 Yorks

Indenture Indenture 30<sup>th</sup> January 1893. **John Poole Davis** sold Latton Island to Ann Sadgrove of 56 Highbury New Park, Islington

River Stort Deed 190 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1898 **John Poole Davis** Sold River Stort for £500  
to Sir Walter Gilbey

Death Certificate 19<sup>th</sup> May 1899 **John Poole Davis** aged 78 died at the Lewisham Union Infirmary

Will **DAVIS, John Poole** of 23, St Stevens Road, Lewisham, Kent, died on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1899 at the Lewisham Infirmary. Administration, London 5<sup>th</sup> July to Minnie Davis, widow. Effects £190.

1901 Census 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901 at 23 St Stephens Road, Lewisham.  
Minnie Davis Head Widow 55 Living on own means Yorks Doncaster