

FIREMAN FREDERICK DAVIES GC

17 FEBRUARY 1913–23 AUGUST 1945

On 23 August 2008, the restored grave of Frederick Davies GC of the National Fire Service (NFS) will be rededicated, on the 63rd anniversary of his death, with a plaque to commemorate the heroic act for which he was posthumously awarded the George Cross, the highest civilian award for bravery in the Commonwealth.

Davies lost his life attempting to rescue two girls from a fire in Craven Park Road, Harlesden, on 22 August 1945. The citation for his award was published in a supplement to the *London Gazette* of 5 February 1946:

“The King has been graciously pleased to award the GEORGE CROSS to: Frederick Davies (deceased), Fireman, No. 34 (London) Area, National Fire Service.

“Premises which consisted of a shop and house of five rooms caught fire. The NFS were informed that two children were in the front room on the second floor. The escape was immediately slipped and pitched to the middle window of this floor. Before it was in position Davies ran up the escape.

“At this stage flames were pouring from the windows on the second floor and licking up the front of the building. Upon Davies’ reaching the window he at once tried to enter but bursts of flame momentarily halted him. Undaunted, however, he climbed

into the window with his back to the flames and entered the room. He was seen to endeavour to remove his tunic presumably to wrap it around and protect the children but his hands were now too badly burned for him to do so. During this time Davies was moving around the blazing room in an endeavour to locate the children, and after a short period he returned with a child in his arms whom he handed out of the window. He then turned back into the room to find the other child.

“He was next seen to fling himself out of the window on to the escape, the whole of his clothing being alight. He was helped to the ground, the flames on his clothes were extinguished and he was conveyed to hospital suffering from severe burns. Later he died from his injuries.

“The gallantry and outstanding devotion to duty displayed by Fireman Davies was of the highest order. He knew the danger he was facing, but with complete disregard of his own safety he made a most heroic attempt to rescue the two children. In so doing, he lost his life.”

The citation does not record that the two girls, Avril and Jean Pike, also lost their lives. Recalling the story in the *Willesden and Brent Times* of 19 June 2008, Lindsey Alexander wrote: “Mr. Davies, who was one of the first on the scene from Willesden Fire Station,

The restored monument of Frederick Davies after the service of rededication on Saturday, 23 August 2008

climbed the wheel-ladder and crept through the window in a desperate attempt to save the girls. Tragically, both were already dead. Davies, who was born in Shepherd Bush, died from his injuries in hospital the next day.”

The George Cross was established by George VI in September 1940, at the start of the Blitz, to recognize heroism amongst the civilian population at a time when most awards for bravery had a distinctly military bias. The decoration is given “for acts of the greatest heroism or of the most

conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger”. The George Cross Database (www.gc-database.co.uk) reports that it has been awarded directly to 154 people, 84 posthumously, and was bestowed on over 100 recipients during the Second World War.

Fireman Davies’ grave has been restored with the permission of his daughter, Doreen, who was contacted after a search that attracted some media coverage (including the story above). The service of rededication



will be co-hosted by the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery and the Civil Defence Association, with the support of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association, the Worshipful Company of Firefighters and the London Fire Brigade Museum. The museum, on Southwark Bridge Road, now holds Davies’ George Cross within a collection that spans the history of the Brigade since the Great Fire of 1666; visits are by appointment only (0208 555 1200 ext. 39894, e-mail museum@london-fire.gov.uk).