

## **Samuel Strickland and his windmills**

**Samuel Strickland was a well-known figure in Erith, Crayford and Dartford in the 19th Century.**

He was born in 1812, near Hailsham in Sussex, and he was apprenticed to a miller. Soon after completing his first apprenticeship he went with a civil engineer friend to France and it is said that he managed windmills there for Louis Philippe. On the latter's abdication in 1848 he returned to England and took over the Crayford windmill in Mayplace Road. This mill stood as a prominent landmark where the Bexleyheath bus garage is now. In 1851 he bought the old-established business of John Willding, a corn merchant in Dartford, and long after the end of the windmill era this business was carried on by his family under the name of R.&H Strickland.

When his lease of the mill in the Mayplace Road expired in 1858 he bought the windmill in Mill Lane, Northumberland Heath. One of the tales told about him is that he built a wooden house by that mill but mounted it on wheels as a device for avoiding having to pay rates on it. Bexley rate books and tithe map strongly suggest that 62 Woolwich Road, said to be this house, was built in c.1838/9, and it was owned by a Mrs Hawkins or John Dann (or his executors by 1842). John Dann had the Bexleyheath mill in 1832 and 1835 and George Strickland had it in 1839 (by rate books.) So if there is anything in the story John Dann could have been the man behind it.

Whatever the truth of this story, it is certain that Strickland built the house at 106 Bexley Road, Erith and called it Hastings Villa. This must have been fairly soon after his arrival in the district, for the builders provided underground cisterns for rainwater storage in the garden, with a pump to raise water in the house. This was presumably because no piped water was available; in 1857 the Vestry agreed to a proposal that water mains should be laid in the parish and it is unlikely that any house built after that decision would have such elaborate and expensive provision for water supply.

Strickland was a careful man of business. He had known of occasional bank failures and considered that the Bank of England was the only safe place for his money. So every Sunday evening he drove by trap to London, stayed the night there, and banked his money in the

morning. Then he proceeded to Mark Lane corn market and drove back in the afternoon. On one occasion when he was on his way to London a footpad held him up and demanded his money. Fortunately his horse was so high-spirited, it took flight and bolted with Strickland and his cash. So all was well.

One stormy night he told his man at Northumberland Heath not to work the mill but was disobeyed and the wind blew down the sails and damaged the body of the mill. His son, Harold Strickland, then got a steam engine to work the machinery, which did a better job, though the old man would never admit it.

Strickland was remembered in Dartford for his habit on corn market days of sitting at his stand in the "Bull" yard smoking a churchwarden pipe; when he considered that he had done sufficient business, he just went away back to the office, regardless of whether the market was over or not.

He continued active in the business until 1891, when he retired at the age of 79. He died in 1894. He had married Caroline Jenner and they had four sons and three daughters.