

## The Heath family of Erith and Crayford

**Jeremiah Heath, a shopkeeper of Erith, was born in 1759.**

He married Martha, daughter of Thomas Payne, a carpenter. On his father-in-law's death he and his wife inherited some property but details of this are not known. He must have prospered, for he purchased several properties in Erith. He died in 1830, leaving two sons, George and Thomas. Thomas died soon after, as did his wife Sarah, and her heir sold Thomas' share of the inheritance to George.

George's date of birth is not known. It must have been in or before 1801, the year of his mother's death. According to Carr he had some trouble with one of his legs and on medical advice used a treaule lathe as a means of exercising and strengthening it. He progressed from small steam engines to sextants and other navigational instruments and was able to find a commercial outlet for his work. In 1845 he established his business as a nautical instrument maker. One presumes that he had been carrying on the family business since his father's death, since he is shown in directories as a grocer and cheesemonger from 1834 to 1847. (Perhaps he was too unsure of his prospects in 1847 to describe himself as a nautical instrument maker, or possibly the date of the establishment of the new venture was a few years later than 1845).

By his wife Elizabeth he had several children. Two of them are buried (with Jeremiah, their grandfather) in Erith Churchyard. They are Martha, who died in 1844, aged 21, and Jeremiah, who died in 1829, a baby 19 months old. Two of his sons are said to have helped him build three houses at Crayford and later to have taken over the business there. One of his sons was called Frederick. Another source speaks of sons called George, Charles, John and Thomas and names wives of sons of these. It is apparent that some members of the family emigrated to Australia.

About 1850 George Heath went to live at Crayford. For some years he appears in the Poll books as living at Crayford Hill, Crayford, although his business, first as a grocer then as an instrument maker, remained at Erith until at least 1858. The first reference to business activities at Crayford is in 1870, when he is shown as both private resident (as previously) and as an instrument maker. This must have

been shortly before his death, which was reported at a Court Baron in Erith in 1872. In 1874 his name is not found in the directory, but the firm of Heath and Co takes the place of his personal entry. Mrs Heath, no doubt his widow, is shown as living at Glenview Villas, Station Road, Crayford, where the factory was, and Frederick Thomas Heath and George William Heath, presumably two sons, as private residents in Crayford, the former being no doubt the one named by Carr and the latter possibly the George mentioned above.

There are a few people of this name whose relationships are not known. George Wilson Heath, of Crayford, acted for other members of the family at Erith in 1872 and was said by Carr to have retired from the business in about 1926. George Andrew Heath joined the board after the amalgamation of Heath's with Stanley's in 1926; he was a grandson of George Heath Senior. Erith churchyard contains the graves of Frederick James Heath, who died in 1899, aged 19; another Frederick James Heath, who died in 1914, ages 62; and Charlotte Heath, who died in 1930, aged 74. There are two graves in Crayford churchyard which have not been examined; they are nos. 177 and 197 (in rows 10 and 11 respectively) of Plot E. (See the survey of this churchyard).

### **Extracts from poll books and directories**

#### **Entries for George Heath**

<b>1834 Pigot's Directory</b>	Grocer	Erith
<b>1835 Poll book</b>		Erith
<b>1837 Poll book</b>		Erith
<b>1841 Pigot's directory</b>	Grocer	Erith
<b>1845 P.O. directory</b>	Grocer	Erith
<b>1847 Bagshaw's directory</b>	Grocer	Erith
<b>1847 Poll book</b>		Erith
<b>1852 Poll book</b>	"gent."	Erith and at Crayford Hill, Crayford
<b>1855 P.O. directory</b>	Nautical instrument maker	Erith
<b>1857 Poll book</b>		Erith Crayford Hill

<b>1858 Kelville's directory</b>	Nautical & surveying instrument maker	Erith
<b>1859 Poll book</b>		Erith Crayford Hill
<b>1865 Poll book</b>		Erith Crayford Hill
<b>1870 Kelley's directory</b>	Mathematical instrument maker, gent	Swan Lane Crayford

### **Entries for Heath & Co.**

<b>1874 Kelley's directory</b>	Nautical instrument makers	Station Road, Crayford
<b>1907 Kelley's directory</b>	Opticians	Station Road, Crayford
<b>1915 Kelley's directory</b>	Nautical instrument makers	Station Road, Crayford

### **Further Notes**

Heath & Co.'s Crayford factory in Station Road was actually just within the boundary of Bexley parish. It is first shown in the Bexley rate books in 1890 but entries in the Crayford rate book for 1882 suggest that it may then have been treated as in Crayford.

An article on the firm appeared in the Sidcup Times on 29/5/1953 p.7. It states that George Wilson Heath and Frederick Thomas Heath were sons of the founder. George W. had two sons, George Andrew and Harold E. (a director in 1953).