

## Dr Harry Leslie Heath of Wickhamford

Dr H. L. Heath lived in a house on the top of north side of Longdon Hill in the 1930s and 1940s. He was a General Practitioner and Surgeon working from premises in Bengeworth and practiced in Evesham from 1926 to 1948.

### Family background

Harry Leslie Heath's paternal grandfather was Thomas Heath who was recorded in the 1871 census as living in Oldbury Road, Harborne. He worked as a commercial traveller in wines and spirits. With his wife, Henrietta Letitia, he had three children by this date – Harry Edwin, aged 4, Amy Florence, aged 3 and one-year-old Beatrice.

Harry Edwin Heath married Fanny Church in Kent in 1894 and by 1901 he was living in Grantham Road, Birmingham and running his own business. He was a manufacturer of paints, oils, glass and wallpaper. At this time they had two children, Kathleen, aged 5 and one-month-old Harry Leslie. When Harry senior filled in the 1911 census return the family were still living in the same road, but Harry junior was recorded under his second name of Leslie, so that is presumably what he was known by. He had been born on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1901.

### Medical training

Harry Leslie Heath was just too young for service in the Great War and went to medical school at the University of Birmingham in about 1919. He qualified on 15 May 1925 as a physician and surgeon – M.R.C.S. (Member of the Royal College of Surgeons), L.R.C.P. (Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians), M.B. (Bachelor of Medicine) and Ch.B. (Bachelor of Surgery).

### Life in Wickhamford

Dr Heath moved to Evesham in 1926 and was later joined in practice by Dr S. R. Goodwin. He had married Sadie Samuel in Birmingham in 1925. The couple were reported in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 12<sup>th</sup> December 1925 as staying at the Montpellier Spa Hotel, Cheltenham. Sadie had been born in India, in 1890, and arrived in Britain on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1921, travelling 1<sup>st</sup> Class aboard the P&O ship SS *Plassy*. The ship's manifest listed her as a Nursing Sister. The 1928 edition of *Kelly's Directory* describes him as a physician and surgeon and a medical officer in Evesham. By this date he was living at "Corig, Bengel Hill, Evesham". In 1928 the couple had their only child, a daughter named Edwina J. Heath. She was educated in Evesham, probably at a Private School.

The property on Longdon Hill had been called *Longdon House* in the 1901 census when fruit grower Frank Broadie lived there. Its name was changed to *Carrig* by the 1911 census when the Moss-Blundell family were in occupation and in 1924 Alfred Woodall J.P. was resident. Dr Heath changed the name again, to *Woodlands*, which is given in the 1940 edition of *Kelly's Directory*.



*Dr Heath's home on Longdon Hill, photographed here in 1961.*

In the local press, Dr H. L. Heath's name regularly appeared from 1930 until 1944 in connection with sudden and accidental deaths. In the *British Newspaper Archive* there are almost thirty cases reported. (This archive does not yet include items from the *Evesham Journal*, so many more cases would probably have been reported there.)

The range of cases was wide, concerning deaths from road accidents, swimming tragedies, assault, falls, gales, railway accidents and even beriberi. In the later case, in 1940, Grace Hawkins aged 59, a vegetarian for 40 years, antivivisectionist and founder and honorary secretary of the Humanitarian League, was visiting her sister in the Evesham area when she became ill. Dr Heath warned her to take 'proper food' or she would die of vitamin B deficiency, but she became hysterical and even refused vitamin supplements. She died in Blackminster and was buried in the cemetery at Waterside, Evesham.



*Grace Hawkins*

One case, involving a Wickhamford resident, was the death of Mrs Doris Colley of 14 Council Houses, Pitchers Hill in 1931. She was the wife of Jesse Colley a market gardener and daughter-in-law of Jesse R. Colley who was at one time the village sub-postmaster.

Dr Heath had advised 24-year-old Mrs Colley to have all of her septic teeth removed, to prolong her life as she had been suffering from tuberculosis for four years and he thought she would die within a few months without the procedure. He gave her a general anaesthetic at home and then dental surgeon, Leslie Shovelton, began to remove Doris's teeth. After eight teeth were removed she suffered heart failure. A stimulant was applied, which had some effect, but she died soon afterwards. The Jury at the Coroner's Inquest commented that both Dr Heath and Mr Shovelton had acted with commendable skill and were in no way to blame for the death of Mrs Colley (*Cheltenham Chronicle* of 27th June 1931).

Another case, in Wickhamford, was the sad death of 4-month-old Peter John Loehnis, son of Lt-Commander and Mrs Loehnis of Hody's Place. The baby was found dead in his perambulator and Dr Heath reported on the case to the Coroner's Inquest in 1940. The baby's grave is in the Churchyard.

In the days of before the N.H.S., doctors were paid by their patients and occasionally had to pursue them through the courts to obtain their fees. In 1939, Drs Heath and Goodwin took John Huxley of Evesham to court for the non-payment of £12 14s. but in this instance the medical men lost the case.

### Later life

Dr Harry Leslie Heath left Wickhamford and his practice in Evesham in 1948. He returned to Evesham in 1956 to marry the woman who had been his servant at *Woodlands*, Rachel A. Benyon. She was recorded at the home of Dr Heath in the National Register of the population in September 1939 as housekeeper to the family. At that time, the doctor had his daughter and mother living with him, but not his wife and Rachel was 34 years of age.

Whether he had divorced his first wife, Sadie, or whether she had died is unknown, as no record of either has been found. Similarly, no records have been found of the marriage or death of Edwina Heath. One possibility is that both emigrated.

Dr Heath died at his house in Lickey Square, Rednal, Birmingham on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1963, having been ill since the previous Christmas, according to an obituary in the *Evesham Journal*. He was 62 years of age and was survived by his wife and daughter. Probate was granted to his widow, Rachel Ann Heath, and his effects amounted to £2990 4s. His address in the Probate records was given as 45 Twatling Road, Rednal. Rachel Ann Heath died in Worcester in 1982, aged 77 years.