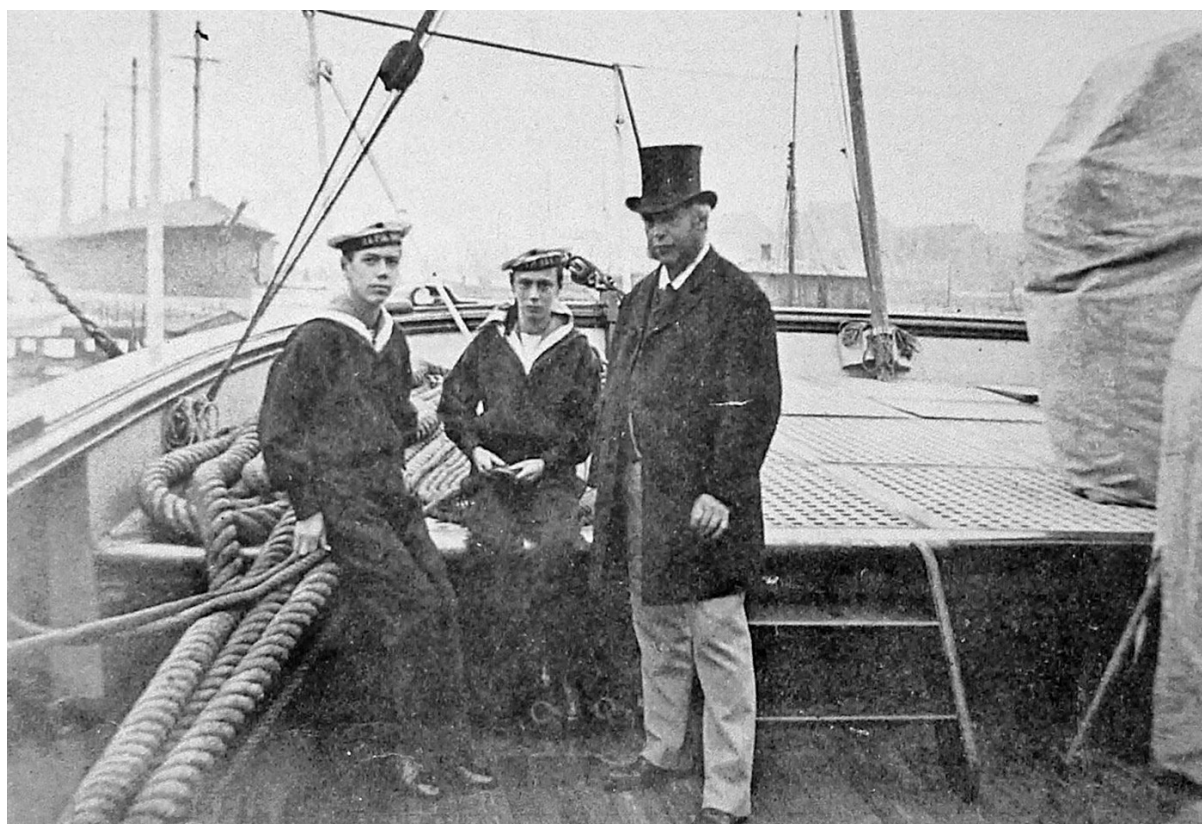


## Charles Heath – Tutor to the last Tsar of Russia

Ewelme News, Feb-Mar 2006

Further unexpected information regarding a member of the old Ewelme ‘yeoman farmer’ Heath family has come from avid researcher Chris Heath regarding Charles Heath, who was born in 1826. Charles was the grandson of Joseph and Ann Heath (formerly Ann Read, co-heiress of the Cottesmore Estates). Unfortunately, we cannot claim Charles as a true villager as his branch of the Heath family had moved to the Stokenchurch area, leaving Cottesmore to Ann’s sister Mary and her husband Richard Greenwood. The Heath’s rented three farms from the Dashwood Estates, with Charles being born at Mill End Farm, near Stokenchurch.

However, the Buckinghamshire Heaths continued to identify with Ewelme and at death their bodies were returned to be buried in chest tomb monuments, (located to the left of the path by the North door of the church). Charles went to Cambridge University and, on the recommendation of his Great Uncle William Heath, (apparently a turkey merchant in business with the Dashwoods in Russia), he joined the Court of the Russian Imperial Family and became the English tutor to the children of Tsar Alexander III. This appointment must have commenced in 1873 or 1874, as *The Times* states that the future and last Tsar, Nicholas II (1868-1918), was then 5 or 6 years old. His talents were noteworthy, as there is an extract in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* regarding Nicholas’ early years – ‘An English tutor, Mr Charles Heath, taught him excellent English, and inspired a love of sports and healthy exercise...’



Charles Heath in 1884 with Tsarovich Nicholas and Grand Duke George of Russia.

The Times of December 4th 1900 reports that Charles Heath died in St Petersburg in the Annitchkoff Palace, the town residence of the Tsar Alexander III's widow, the Empress Dowager. The issue for December 8th 1900 gave the following front page account of the service, illustrated with a pen and ink drawing of the principle mourners.

‘A funeral service, held on Thursday in the Anglican church in St Petersburg, over the body of Mr. Charles Heath, English preceptor and assistant governor to the present Tsar during his Majesty's minority and to his brothers and sisters for the last 20 years, was attended by the Empress Alexandra, the Grand Duke Michael, the Emperor's brother and Heir Presumptive, the Grand Duchess Olga, the Emperor's younger sister, the Grand Duke Constantine, other Imperial personages, and a large number of dignitaries and officials of the Russian Court administration and establishments of higher education. Her Imperial Majesty with her children occupied the pew of the British Ambassador. The full choral service for the dead was conducted by the Rev. M. Mcloud, assisted by the Rev. M. Young. The bier was carried out of the church by the Imperial Grand Dukes - General Prince Bariatinsky, and others followed by the Empress and her daughter, while the "Dead March" in Saul was played on the organ. A great number of costly wreaths in silver and flowers from the Tsar, the Empress, the Grand Dukes, the British Ambassador, and others, with many touching inscriptions, testified to the affectionate esteem in which Mr. Heath was held by the Russian Imperial family and a large circle of friends. Her Imperial Majesty in her mourning carriage followed behind the funeral car [drawn by 6 horses] for some distance towards the cemetery.’

The high rank of the mourners and pall bearers signifies the regard felt for Charles Heath by the Imperial Family, who could have adopted the standard Royal protocol of sending representatives. Reading this account 105 years later, it is astonishing to consider the exceptional honour they conferred on a servant, commoner and foreigner.

Chris Heath continues to be actively involved in the Archive. He has kindly organised the Church Burial Record 1599-1999 (already prepared chronologically by century in four Excel documents) into alphabetical order in one large Excel document. This makes fascinating reading. From the (approx) 3,000 entries for those 400 years the earliest recorded mention of ‘modern’ family name is Ann Walklin in 1669, then Esther Frankelin [sic] in 1729 and infant Esther Munday in 1780. The first Heath burial is Martha, who died in 1753.

**Ewelme Village Archive**