

A Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers in Great Britain and Ireland ...

HEATHCOAT, John (1783–1861), machinist, inventor and lace manufacturer, was born in Duffield, near Derby, in August 1783, the son of Francis Heathcoat, a grazier, and Elizabeth Burton. Apprenticed as a frame smith or textile machine engineer in the East Midlands, he set up in business in Nottingham and in September 1802 married Ann, the widow of John Chamberlin of **Hathern**, and daughter of William Caldwell, also involved in the lace trade.

About 1803 he became interested in developing lace-making machinery, and attempted unsuccessfully to take out his first patent the following year. In partnership with his brother-in-law, Samuel Caldwell, he removed his business to **Hathern** in 1805. His first patent was taken out in 1808, and a more successful one in 1809, capable of making lace curtains. In partnership with Charles Lacy and a hosier named Boden, they established a lace mill, with fifty-five frames to his designs, at Loughborough which, on the night of 28 June 1816 was wrecked by a gang of Luddites. The year previously Heathcoat had begun operating in a six-storey textile mill at Tiverton, Devon, and he thereupon moved his plant and staff there. In this venture he was joined by John Farey (q.v.). They had three-hundred frames in operation

Heathcoat launched a lace enterprise in France at about the same time. A Brevet d'Importation for one of his machines was granted in 1817 and between 1820 and 1828 he took out six French patents for them. He was elected an Associate of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1826, resigning in 1855.

In 1832 he patented a steam plough and in the same year he was elected MP for Tiverton, holding the seat until 1859. Heathcoat died at Tiverton on 18 January 1861. His wife had died in 1831, and they were survived by three daughters. His portrait is reproduced by Gore Allen (1958), but its current whereabouts is unknown.

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