

HISTORY OF PERFIN USERS

FRASER AND CHALMERS ENGINEERING WORKS, ERITH, KENT

By Arthur Smith.

In the early 1800's two Scottish engineers, Tom Chalmers and David Ross Fraser, emigrated independently to the USA to further their studies. It was a coincidence that they met, and after working in various manufacturing places, realised that their knowledge and experience warranted them starting their own business. A mining engineering works was then established by them in Chicago in 1847.

In 1891, with a well won international reputation, they set up a similar works at Erith in Kent, under the supervision of D.R. Fraser, which became one of the largest employers in the Borough. The land sold to Fraser and Chalmers for the works consisted of an 18 acre site which had been excavated for valuable foundry loan and subsequently part was used as a recreation ground. The machine shop of the factory is said to have been built on the site of several historic cricket matches played from 1884 to 1890 between Erith and Australian teams. (This information is well documented.)

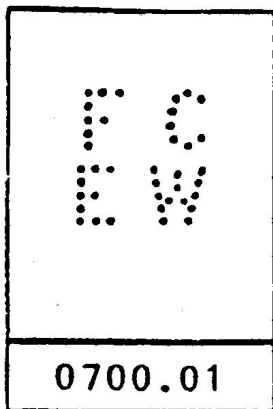
The principal products produced were machinery for mines, including prospecting plants, crushers for rock and ore, and engines for running machinery. Over 90% of the Erith products were exported.

During the Boer War the works had a slack period and the nearby Maxim gun factory made an offer of £300,000 for the Fraser and Chalmers factory which was rejected. The firm began to recover in 1902 and were receiving success in the home market with the growth of conveyor belt and turbine production. Access to the works was improved in 1906 by the construction of Fraser Road alongside the factory where only a rough track existed before. This is a very well known road in the area now.

Conditions in the factory were explained in a small book entitled "The Rules and Regulations of Messrs Fraser and Chalmers Ltd, Erith Works, Erith" dated 1900. Every employee was provided with one of the books. It stated that the working week was to consist of 54 hours, Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 5.45 p.m. and Saturdays 7 a.m. to 12.15 p.m. No-one was allowed to enter the works after

8 a.m. without special instructions. Workmen were not allowed to bring intoxicating liquids onto the premises or to harass their fellow employees. A medical officer had been appointed after several accidents at the works.

In the pre World War I period there was a marked expansion of trade and intake of workers. Then, on the outbreak of war, men leaving to join the forces were told that their families would be supported up to 10/- a week (i.e. 50p in today's currency). The heavy mechanical work carried out at Erith during the 1914-18 War was attracted to the attention of the General Electric Company Ltd. After a period of negotiation the company was acquired by them on 1 April 1918 to complement the G.E.C. works at Witton. The Fraser and Chalmers name was retained as it is still referred to as such by local residents.



The perfin used by the factory was:-

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FC/EW

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5mm

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