

HENRY ALABASTER OF SIAM

1836-1884

SERVING TWO MASTERS



Henry Alabaster (1836-1884)

Henry Alabaster of Siam 1836-1884

Serving two masters

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CONTENTS

	page
List of illustrations	vii
Foreword by Angela Alabaster	ix
Preface	xi
Partial Alabaster Family Tree	xiii
1. The early years and family ties	1
Education	3
2. Service in the British Foreign Office	5
Journey to China	5
Hong Kong	9
3. Transfer to Thailand	11
First impressions of Bangkok	11
Engaging with his new environment	16
Bad news from home	20
First home leave and reflections on Thailand	21
Return to Thailand	24
Of boats and sailing	26
Work at the consulate	28
Animosity and alliances	29
Home leave and a second tour of duty	32
A bid for promotion	34
4. Triumph and disaster	37
‘An act of outrageous violence’	40
The Kralahome	41
Compensation	43
Official judgement of the incident	43
Sick leave	44
Journey to Phrabat	44
By river from Bangkok to Samklok	45
Overnight in a travellers rest-house at Samklok	46
Practices of the monks	47
Local native prosperity	48
By Canal to Yuthia	49
Sight-seeing in Yuthia	51

Onward to Nophburi (i.e. Nothaburi)	52
Hospitality from the Governor at Nophburi	53
Old trade and industry at Nophburi	55
By elephant to Phrabat	56
Phrabat	57
Return from holiday to face the music	57
Sojourn in England	60
Initial impact of King Chulalongkorn	62
5. The Post-1872 period	63
Catching up on Percy	65
Palacia's return to Bangkok	68
Some notable visitors	68
Palacia's family concerns	71
Percy's business interests and dealings with Henry	73
Prince Sai's Ointment	76
Increasing both business and risk	77
Henry's main preoccupations in Thailand	81
Knox and the gunboat <i>HMS Foxhound</i>	89
An unexpected turn of events	90
Henry's last days	91
Postscript	94
6. Summary and conclusions	95
Appendix 1. Letters from Henry Alabaster to Percy Criddle	99
Appendix 2. Henry Alabaster's account of the eclipse of the sun in 1868 (PRO FO 69/46)	125
Appendix 3. Recipe for Prince Sai's Ointment	131
Appendix 4. Inscriptions on four plaques inside the tomb of Henry Alabaster	133
Appendix 5. Abridged extracts from <i>The Wheel of the Law</i> by Henry Alabaster	135
Index	143

List of illustrations

Cover:	Bust of Henry Alabaster	
Frontispiece:	Photograph of Henry Alabaster (1836-1884)	
Fig.		Page
1.	<i>A Thaw in the Streets of London</i> (by M. Jackson; from the London Transport Museum)	1
2.	View of Gibraltar from the sea	5
3.	Map showing the route of Henry’s first visit to the Far East	6
4.	Cinnamon Tree	7
5.	View of Hong Kong Victoria harbour from above Causeway Bay, 1845	9
6.	Sir John Bowring, 1871 (by Richard Taylor after Maul & Polyblank)	10
7.	Wat Paknam c. 1900	11
8.	Map of Thailand showing main places mentioned in the text	12
9.	Simplified map of Bangkok (based on that by Margaret Ayer in <i>Anna and the King of Siam</i> by Margaret Landon)	14
10.	Old postcard of bullock cart, c. 1900 (by J. Antonio)	15
11.	King Monghut (from <i>Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations</i>)	15
12.	Royal Barge of 2 nd King (<i>The London Illustrated News</i> , 21 November 1857)	18
13.	Siamese envoys sent to England in 1858 (by J. Antonio)	20
14.	Percy Criddle as a boy	21
15.	Hmong girls, Plain of Jars, Loas (by Oliver Spalt)	22
16.	The Grand Palace, Bangkok	23
17.	The British Consulate, Bangkok (from <i>Fanny and the Regent of Siam</i> by R. J. Minney)	25
18.	Henry’s sketch of his boat in 1859 (provided by Nan Kenyon)	27
19.	Henry’s sketches of his boat in 1860 (provided by Nan Kenyon)	28
20.	The Kralahome (from <i>Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations</i>)	29
21.	Robert Schomburgk (1804-1865)	31
22.	Chelsea Parish Church by Walter Greaves (Leeds Art Gallery)	32
23.	Siamese band	33
24.	Victorian croquet	33
25.	Gravestone for Herbert James Alabaster (provided by Laraine Hake)	34
26.	Chaloner Alabaster (provided by Nan Kenyon)	35
27.	Path of the Eclipse over Thailand, 18 August 1868 (from Wikipedia)	37
28.	Sir Harry Orde (1819-1885)	37
29.	Party that observed the solar eclipse at Bann Wa Kor, Tambon Hua Wan, Prachap Khiri Khan, Thailand (from <i>Ode to Friendship: Celebrating Thailand-Singapore Relations</i>)	38
30.	Painting by Palacia of the Royal Camp at Bann Wa Kor (F.O.; provided by Angela Alabaster)	39

31.	Solar total eclipse, August 1868	39
32.	Thomas George Knox (1824-1879)	43
33.	Riverside housing in Bangkok (<i>bangkok.sawadee.com</i>)	45
34.	Typical traditional Thai house	46
35.	Painting of Ayutthaya, ordered by the Dutch East India Company, Amsterdam (<i>Wikipedia</i>)	49
36.	Buddhas in Ayutthaya, the second overgrown by fig-tree roots	50
37.	Typical river view in Thailand (<i>Bangkoksameidi.com</i>)	50
38.	Golden Mount, Ayutthaya (<i>by Alan Ingram</i>)	51
39.	Floating houses (<i>by S. Hatano</i>)	53
40.	Black Ear Catfish <i>Pla Tepo</i> (<i>by EddieMounce, www.fishtailand.co.uk</i>)	55
41.	Custard-apple	56
42.	Consular flag (<i>Crown Tudor version by Clay Moss</i>)	57
43.	Earl of Clarendon, Foreign Secretary (9 December 1868-6 July 1870)	59
44.	Henry & Palacia's sons (<i>by G. Hawkins, Brighton</i>) (<i>provided by Nan Kenyon</i>)	60
45.	Earl Granville, Foreign Secretary (6 July 1870-21 February 1874)	61
46.	The young King Chulalongkorn	62
47.	Arms of the King of Siam embossed in gold leaf on purple leather (<i>provided by Nan Kenyon</i>)	64
48.	Percy Criddle as an adolescent	65
49.	Elise Harrer, 1863 (<i>by J Schulze; Criddle-de-diddle-ensis by Alma Criddle</i>)	66
50.	Dr. Arthur Schuster, FRS (1851-1934)	69
51.	Captain John Bush (<i>by Derick Garnier</i>)	69
52.	Percy Criddle as an adult	73
53.	Type of stoneware supplied by Henry for Thailand	78
54.	Page of Austin & Seeley catalogue	79
55.	Bangkok Bar Lighthouse (<i>by Dmitry Rostopshin</i>)	81
56.	An early postman (<i>Philatelic Museum, Bangkok</i>)	82
57.	First Thai postage stamp (<i>Philatelic Museum, Bangkok</i>)	82
58.	Siamese musicians in Bangkok (<i>by J. Antonio</i>)	85
59.	Phetchaburi today	86
60.	HMS <i>Foxhound</i>	87
61.	Ulysses S. Grant	88
62.	Probably Henry's two Thai sons (<i>provided by Nan Kenyon</i>)	90
63.	Monument to Henry in Bangkok (<i>by John S. Alabaster</i>)	93
64.	Charles Alabaster (1869-1954) (<i>provided by Nan Kenyon</i>)	94
65.	The Albany, Hong Kong (<i>from www. Delcamp.net</i>)	99
66.	Pompey's Pillar at Alexandria	102
67.	Henry's sketch of an Egyptian Donkey-saddle (<i>provided by Nan Kenyon</i>)	102
68.	Drawing of S.S. <i>Malta</i> (<i>from georgmacdonaldld.info/matter</i>)	106
69.	Schomburgk's deer	117
70.	HMS <i>Impregnable</i>	125

Foreword

In the early 1990s my husband Adrian and I were researching the family of James Chaloner Alabaster^a. We found the career and character of his youngest son, Chaloner fascinating as he made his way up the consular ladder in Hong Kong and China – from junior interpreter to Consul General and a knighthood. But we knew little about his older son Henry, except that he served in Siam, now Thailand.

Adrian contacted the Thai Embassy in London from which we were able to get in touch with Henry's grandson, ACM Siddhi Savetsila. Some time later we were excited to hear that Khun Siddhi and some of his family were coming to London briefly and we had a merry meeting, courtesy of the Thai ambassador. Khun Siddhi promised to send us some papers from which we could learn about Henry's career, particularly a biography of Henry written by his son, Thongkam. From this and other sources I was able to write the chapter on Henry in Adrian's "Quintet" - rather a thin effort in the light of the information now available.

It is sad that Adrian did not live long enough to enjoy the hospitality of Khun Siddhi and the family in Thailand, for which I am so grateful as well as for all his help with family history. Nor was Adrian able to use this opportunity to discover the full story of why Henry "crossed the river" into the service of the King of Siam. It is written in the huge tomes of Foreign Office records at the Public Record Office at Kew. I much enjoyed being a reader in that amazing place; a voyage of discovery, bit by bit as information was revealed.

Now we have John's fifth *Occasional Monograph* in which he has most skilfully put together the different strands of Henry's story including the new material he has discovered. I congratulate John and thank him. Again the Alabaster Society owes John a great debt of gratitude for his work enabling us to learn about the lives of this remarkable family.

^a See the family tree on p. xiii.

Angela Alabaster
March 2012

Preface

In what has been published to date about Henry Alabaster, virtually nothing has explained why, after working for the British Foreign Office in Siam (Thailand) up to the year 1869, he then (in 1873) entered into the direct service of the King of Siam in whose employment he remained until his death in 1884. The only, seemingly incongruous information we had was that, when working for the British, he had fallen foul of the Siamese authorities in an obscure wrangle about procedures concerning national flags^b.

However, Angela Alabaster, who wrote the chapter on Henry in Adrian book^c, subsequently abstracted a considerable amount of relevant material from Foreign Office papers, shedding much more light on the mystery which we felt should be made more widely known. And although the initial idea was simply to describe this seminal event in Henry's career, other new information became available about Henry's life and offered the opportunity to fill in other gaps in his biography.

Much of it is in the archive material that has been made available by Nan Kenyon, a descendant of Henry's aunt, Mary Ann Rebecca Alabaster who married Henry Criddle (as shown on the partial family tree on p. xiii). This includes Henry's correspondence with his cousin, Percy Criddle which, although already transcribed and published^{d&e} had not yet been fully utilised biographically.

Furthermore, a number of hitherto unpublished letters have also recently come to light which relate particularly to Henry's early years

^b Archivist of King's College School via Adrian Alabaster.

^c Adrian Alabaster (1999) *A Quintet of Alabasters*. Able Publishing, 259 pp.

^d Laraine Hake (1999) *Letters between cousins in the 19th century*. Alabaster Chronicle No. 13, The Alabaster Society, pp. 12-19.

^e John S. Alabaster (2009) *Henry Alabaster of Siam: Correspondence 1856-1884 and Career*. Occasional Monograph No. 3, The Alabaster Society, 63 pp.

abroad; they are transcribed in Appendix 1, together with others already published of the same period since they clarify his movements to and from Thailand at this time and highlight the beginning of a long relationship with his young cousin, Percy who helped with importing goods into Thailand. And then there were extracts from Percy Criddle's diary kindly made available by Myrna Paquette (also shown on the partial family tree on p. xiii), another descendant of Henry's aunt Ann Rebecca which augmented the story of their relationship.

With all this new information, the main objective of the present work is simply to fill in some of the gaps in Henry's life, rather than to attempt a full-scale, comprehensive biography.

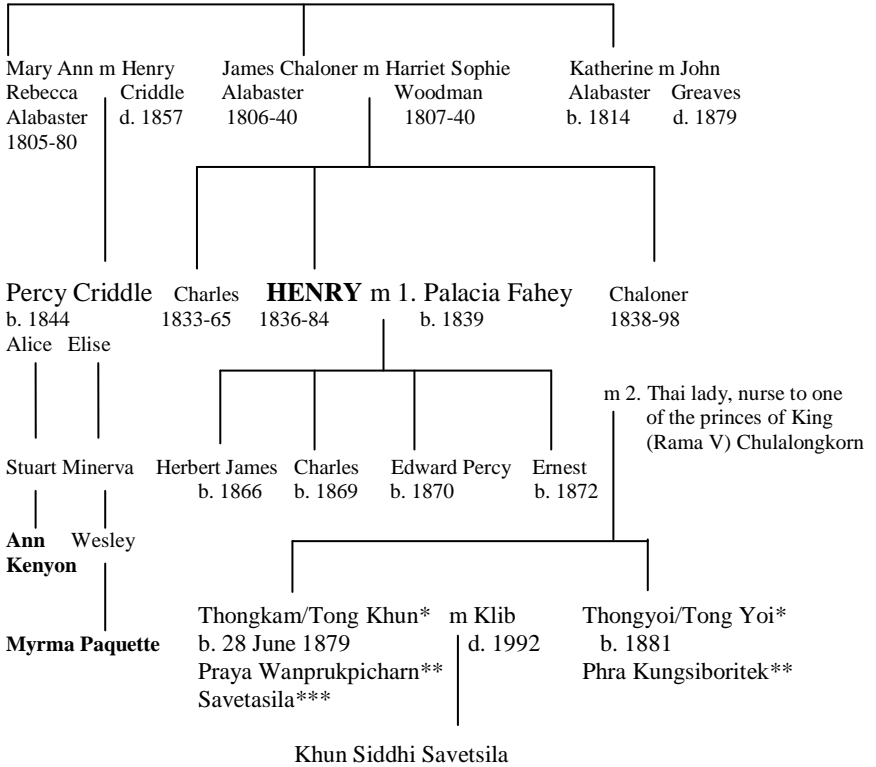
The sources of illustrations are specifically acknowledged, except for Figs. 2, 4, 5, 7, 14, 16, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, 31, 32, 34, 36, 41, 43, 45, 46, 48, 50, 52-54, 59-61, 66, 69 and 70 which were obtained only through Google.

As always, my thanks are due to my wife, Beryl for her ever constructive criticism and encouragement.

John S. Alabaster
March 2012

PARTIAL ALABASTER FAMILY TREE

Including members mentioned in the text



* The English spelling is variable, as with many Thai names.

** Knighted by King Rama V

*** Given the family name *Savetsila* by King Rama VI, meaning 'white stone' or alabaster

