

HENRY ALABASTER OF SIAM
CORRESPONDENCE AND CAREER

Henry Alabaster of Siam
Correspondence 1857-1884 and Career

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Foreword

In my mind, all Alabasters are of interest; through the lives of just one particular family I can see the movement of the history of the common people over the past five hundred years. However, as is probable in every family viewed over half a millennium, there emerges the occasional character who does not appear to be one of 'the common people' but whose life has had a greater impact on history in at least one corner of the world. Such a person was Henry Alabaster (1857-1884).

In this, the third Occasional Monograph that John Stammers Alabaster has produced for the Alabaster Society, we get as close to hearing Henry speak his own words as we can to somebody who was deceased before the advent of voice recording equipment. John has transcribed the actual letters that Henry wrote to his family. He has not detracted from their content by adding extensive commentary but John's occasional comment of explanation, whether about the vocabulary, the political situation or the more intimate family details, does facilitate clarity and helps to bring them alive.

Once again, the Alabaster Society owes John a debt of gratitude and I give him my own grateful thanks.

Laraine Hake
August 2009

Preface

Henry Alabaster served in Bangkok both the British crown and later the king of Siam (Thailand). He and his wife, Palacia (née Fahey) corresponded over many years with Henry's aunt, Mary Ann Rebecca Criddle and her son Percy Criddle, and their letters have been passed down to Percy's granddaughter, Ann Kenyon in Canada, who kindly made them available for transcription, together with a number of other relevant documents, mainly business letters addressed to Percy.

These documents (in Part 1) compliment others already provided by Nan: those of Henry's father, James Chaloner Alabaster of 58 Piccadilly, London, dealing especially with his visit to America in 1837 (now transcribed and deposited in the Westminster Archives as Acc. 2369), and those of his brother Chaloner Alabaster, dealing with his career in China (now transcribed and deposited at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, MS 380823).

Altogether, these 'Henry' letters provide further insight into the Alabaster family and supplement the biographical information already available, not only on Henry himself¹, but also particularly on Percy Criddle – both by his daughter, Alma² and by his granddaughter Oriole Vane Veldhuis³. The originals or photocopies are now deposited at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, MS 380824.

The 'Henry' letters also shed light on Thailand's acquisition of European technology and expertise, and its import of European culture and artefacts, including Botanical Garden flora, and above all, perhaps, on its successful resistance to colonisation, unlike its neighbours Cambodia to east (colonised by France) and Burma to the west (colonised by Britain).

Henry's role in this aspect of Thailand's history is discussed in its historical context in Part 2 based on an essay completed in 2002 for a course on World History by The University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education, revision being made in the light of further information kindly supplied by Henry's grandson, Khun Siddhi Savetsila and Angela Alabaster.

¹ Alabaster, Adrian (1999) *A Quintet of Alabasters*. Able Publishing, 2nd Impression, 259 pp.

² Criddle, Alma (1973) *Criddle-de-diddle-ensis – A Biographical History of the Criddles of Awne, Manitoba Pioneers of the 1880's*. 288 pp,

³ Veldhuis, Oriole Vane (2003) *Chips of Alabasters...: My Great German Search. Alabaster Chronicle* No. 21, pp. 10-23.

List of the Letters (with tentative chronology)

Only photocopies used, unless original copies otherwise noted.

- H = Henry Alabaster
 P = Palacia Alabaster, née Fahey, Henry's English wife
 I = Insurance by P & O
 F = James Fahey, brother of Palacia Alabaster
 E = Elosserez, Paris
 K = D. Kellason, Consulate general of Siam
 B = Borneo Co. Ltd., Singapore
 N = Nimching at Singapore
 Ed = Edward Percy Alabaster, second son of Henry Alabaster
 O = O. Frankfurter at Bangkok
 C = King (Rama V) Chulalongkorn

No. (Notes)	Date		From			To		Page
	Year		Henry	Palacia	other	Percy	Aunt	
1	1857	10 Apr	*			*		2
2	1857	17 Oct	*			*		5
3	1857	21 Nov	*			*		7
4	1859	12 Nov	*			*		8
5	1859	5 Dec	*			*		9
6	1859	13 Dec	*			*		10
7	1860	27 Mar	*			*		11
8	1860	30 May	*			*		13
9	1860	28 Dec	*			*		15
10(1)	1864+	?	*				*	17
11 (1)	1865	4 Sep			I			17
12(2)	1866	1 Feb		*			*	17
13 (1)	1872	31 May	*				*	20
14(1,2)	1872	Thursday		*			*	21
15(2)	1873	7 Dec		*			*	22
16(2)	1872/3	?		*		*		23
17(2)	1874	13 Apr		*		*		23
18(2)	1874	18 Jul		*		*		24
19(2)	?	Tuesday		*		*		24
20(1,2)	1875	23 Apr		*			*	25
21(1,2)	1875	18 Dec		*			*	27
22(1)	1876	Jan	*				*	28
23(2)	1876	11 Oct			F	*		29

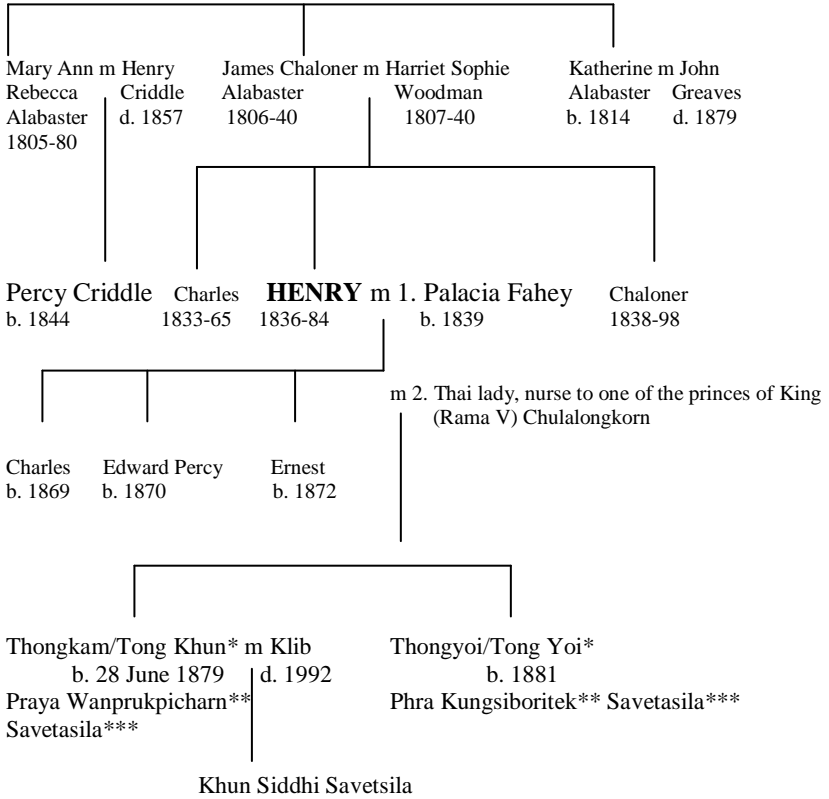
No. (Notes)	Date		From			To		Page
	Year		Henry	Palacia	other	Percy	Aunt	
24	1877	12 Jan	*			*		30
25(2)	1877	19 June		*			*	34
26(1)	1877	25 Aug			E	*		35
27	1877	Arrived 14 Jan, 1878	*			*		35
28	1878	16 May	*			*		36
29	1878	17 May	*			*		38
30(1,2)	1878	20 May		*			*	39
31	1878	11 Aug	*			*		39
32	1878	12 Sep	*			*		41
33(2)	1879	4 Jan			K	*		42
34(2)	1879	17 Jan			B	*		42
35(2)	1879	18 Jun			B	*		43
36(2)	1879	23 Jan			K	*		43
37(2)	1879	22 Mar			K	*		44
38(2)	1879	21 Apr			F		*	44
39(2)	1879	26 Apr			N.	*		45
40(2)	1879	7 May			Ed		*	46
41(1,2)	1879	26 May		*			*	46
42(2)	1879	10 June			N	*		47
43(2)	1879	1 Jul			B	*		48
44(2)	1879	23 Nov	*			*		48
45(2)	1880	20 Feb			F		*	49
46(2)	1880+	13 Jul	*			*		49
47	1884	8 Aug			C	P		49
48(3)	1884	17 Aug			O	*		51

Notes

- 1 Notes taken from original document in Canada, 17 October 1993
- 2 Original document available in 2005 prior to deposition at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
- 3 Supplied by Khun Siddhi Savetsila

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