Second Lieutenant Frederic* Clifford Alabaster

Frederick known as Clifford, and his four brothers all served in WW1. Clifford was wounded just days before the start of the Battle of the Somme by a fragment of shrapnel that perforated his steel helmet splintering a small piece of bone in his scalp. He was expected to make a full recovery, but he died in hospital a month later, aged 29 years.

The Alabaster family can be traced back to Finsbury Market, Shoreditch, Middlesex where Frederick's great grandfather, James (b 24th June 1794), was the licensee of a pub.[i] He married Mary Ann Weston on 28th February 1824 in Shoreditch.[ii] Edward was born 4th July 1828, the second of three sons by Mary.[iii] At the age of twelve, Edward is recorded as a boarder at Hill House Academy School, Theydon Garnon, Essex.[iv]

At the age of twenty-five Edward married Margaret Jackman a confectioner's daughter from Kings Lynn, Norfolk on 28th July 1853.[v] The electoral rolls place Edward at 8, Shrubland Grove, Dalston in the parish of Hackney from 1859 to 1862,[vi] The couple had five surviving children, Edward (b 1854), Arthur (b 1856), Frederick (b 1857), Herbert (b 1859) and a daughter, Annie in 1861.[vii] Tragedy struck the family five years later, on 11th August 1866, when Margaret died aged only 35 years.[viii] At the time of her death the family were living at 13 Abery Terrace, Darnley Road, Hackney.[ix] With five children to care for, it is unsurprising that Edward married again. His marriage to Fanny Dickinson took place on 26th March 1868 at St Michael's Church, Hackney.[x] Soon after, Edward, a 'commercial traveller, drapery', left Hackney and moved his family to Birmingham where Fanny gave birth in early 1869, to a daughter Ellen Margaret.[xi] The couple had two more daughters, Fanny Louisa born in 1871, who died shortly before her first birthday on 4th February 1872 and Nora Katherine, born two years later in 1873. The 1871 census records the family residing at Bourton House, Trafalgar Road, Moseley but by 1872 at 228 Moseley Road.[xii]

Figure 1: Arthur Alabaster, born 1856, co-founder of Alabaster & Wilson, jewellers

In 1877, eleven years after the death of his first wife, Margaret, Edward received probate for her effects. How much he received is unknown as sums of less than £300 pounds were not published. Edward's address for probate was given as 228 Moseley Road, Birmingham.[xiii]

Figure 2: St Paul's Church, Balsall Heath, Birmingham

By 1881 the family had moved to Park Road, Moseley and Edward's second eldest son, Arthur, now 25 years old had left King Edward's School, New Street and become a commercial traveller, like his father.[xiv] The following year, on 5th October, Arthur married Catherine Birch at St Paul's Church, Balsall Heath.[xv] His marriage certificate records that at the time of his marriage he had taken up a new occupation as a jeweller. The newly married couple set up home in Ombersley Terrace, Moseley Road, Balsall Heath.[xvi] Initially he worked for the firm W & G Myers, silversmiths for about ten years before starting his own business and going into partnership with Joshua Edward Cartwright whose offices were in Vyse Street and business premises in Warstone Parade.

Figure 3: Alabaster & Wilson, 11 Legge Lane, Birmingham

When Joshua Cartright left the business five years later, in 1887, Arthur teamed up with his friend, Thomas Wilson, to form a new partnership known as Alabaster & Wilson. The firm prospered and expanded. As a result a new factory was built in 9 - 11 Legge Lane, Birmingham in 1890.[xvii]

The success of the jewellery business enabled Arthur and Catherine by 1891 to move to 20 Park Hill, Moseley, with their four sons Arthur Stanley (Stanley), Frederic Clifford (Clifford), George Herbert and James Wilfred (Jim).[xviii] (Arthur's father, Edward, still living at the family home around the corner from them at 7 Park Road in 1891, moved across the road to No 14 by 1901. In 1904, Edward's wife, Fanny, died, leaving him her effects of £275 17s 1d.[xix] The 1911 census records that Edward's daughter, Nora, now married to Lawrence Hadley, an assistant editor to a daily newspaper,[xx] had moved to 14 Park Road with her husband and two children to look after Edward in his old age. He continued to live there until his death in 1912, aged 84 years.[xxi])

In the meantime the business at Legge Lane continued to expand and, with it, a reputation for high quality jewellery, particularly with an animal, equestrian, hunting or fishing theme.[xxii]

Figure 4: 2 Amesbury Road, Moseley, now converted in to flats

The 1901 census records, Arthur and the family living at 'Longfield' in Salisbury Road with the addition of two further children, another son Edward Beric (Beric) born in 1893 and a daughter Enid Catherine Margaret (Margy) in 1897.[xxiii] The family were assisted in their domestic chores by a lady's help, a cook and housemaid. By 1911, the family had moved into an even larger residence at 2 Amesbury Road,

Frederic*(the birth certificate and army records show Frederic with a 'k', but his signature[xxiv] and gravestone are spelt without), known as Clifford, was Arthur's second son, born on 29th September 1886.[xxv] All five sons were all educated at King Edward's School (KES), New Street, Birmingham. Clifford attended KES from 1889 to 1905 having been awarded two Foundation Scholarships. At school he represented the school at chess, cricket and rugby football. He was also a prefect, an actor, debater and the Natural History Librarian.[xxvi] On leaving school Frederick continued to play at three-quarter back for the Old Edwardians.[xxvii] He was also a keen tennis player and regularly played with his brother Jim lawn tennis at the Botanical Gardens.[xxviii]

Figure 5: 1903-04 KES XV rugby team photograph. Clifford is seated on the ground right of picture

On leaving school Clifford joined his elder brother and his father in the firm of Alabaster & Wilson. In 1903 Wilson died and in 1905, Cartright dissolved his partnership with Arthur, leaving the three Alabaster's running the business, which continues to this day. In 2012 the firm celebrated 125 years of manufacturing.[xxix]

Figure 6: Alabaster & Wilson run by Stephen and Paul Alabaster, with Paul Fenner, partner at Chantrey Vellacott DFK

Figure 7: (Above) Clifford as Best Man at his brother's wedding on Wednesday 17th April 1912 (Below) *Newspaper report of the wedding in the Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*

MR. A. S. ALABASTER—MISS M. M. GLOVER.

Another Warwick wedding in which considerable interest was shown took place at St. Nicholas' Church on Wednesday afternoon.

The bridegroom was Mr. Arthur Stanley Alabaster, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. A. Alabaster, of Moseley; and the bride was Miss Mary Marguerite (Rita) Glover, second daughter of Mr. J. W. Glover, J.P. and Mrs. Glover, of Beechwood, Warwick.

The ceremony was performed by the Vicar, the Rev. F. H. Lawson, assisted by the Rev. Lionel Duddington. The organist played appropriate music before and after the service.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a dress of white Liberty satin, with white ninon tunic, pearl trimming, and Brussels lace.

There were three bridesmaids—Miss Birch, Miss Margaret Alabaster (sister of the bridegroom), and Miss Beth Glover (niece of the bride). The page was Master Guy Glover (nephew of the bride). The bridesmaids were attired in dresses of pale blue crepe Anglaise, with tunics of pink mauve and blue ninon. They wore large black hats, and carried bouquets of pink roses and marguerites.

Mr. Clifford Alabaster (brother of the bridegroom) was best man.

During the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Alabaster left for the honeymoon, which is being spent in Devonshire. The bride's going-away dress was a pale grey costume, and she wore a grey hat, trimmed with roses. Their future residence will be Hazelwell.

In 1912, Clifford was the best man at his brother Stanley's wedding to Mary Glover at St Nicholas' Church Warwick on Wednesday afternoon of the 17th April.[xxx]

In 1914 the First World War disrupted the normal running of the business when Clifford and his eldest brother Stanley, were called up. Both brothers enlisted in the 1/5th Royal Warwickshire Regiment (RWR), Territorial Division, Stanley in 'B' Coy and Clifford in 'C' Coy.[xxxi] On 3rd July 1915, Clifford was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant, Stanley having received his commission in 1908.

Figure 8: 2nd Lt Frederick Clifford Alabaster

After a period of officer training, Clifford embarked for France on 20th February 1916[xxxii] and in the 1/5 RWR war diary for 28th he is recorded as joining his regiment at Bayencourt.[xxxiii]

During the first half of the year, the regiment was being prepared for the 'Big Push'. Many attempts were made during this time to practice storming the German front lines, but the barbed wire defences were invariably too thick to penetrate.[xxxiv]

Figure 9: A Mark 1 or Brodie steel helmet

A new protective steel helmet was issued to the frontline troops earlier in the year. Soldiers criticised the helmet, finding it too shallow, too reflective, and the edge of the rim too sharp. None-the-less, it was recognised that steel helmets were invaluable. In May 1916 the Mark 1 helmet (referred to as a Brodie helmet after its inventor) was developed, with a 2-part liner, thin mild steel 'folded' rim, and painted khaki, the texture roughened with a covering of sawdust or sand whilst the paint was wet, which gave it an excellent matt surface. With a few minor modifications, the Mark 1 saw the war out.[xxxv]

Between the 5th and 8th June, the 1/5th RWR commenced the digging of a new front line trench, near Hebuterne, completing the saps which were still to be joined up. During this three day period in the trenches, the regiment sustained fifteen casualties from sniper fire and sporadic shell fire. The battalion returned to the trenches on 22nd June. Clifford was located in Alsace trench on 24th June, 'U' day' (Z day being the designated start of the battle but delayed by two days due to bad weather) when he and four other ranks were wounded by shrapnel.[xxxvi] Clifford was injured in the head. His friends believe he owes his life to the wearing of his steel helmet, for although it was penetrated, his injuries were less serious than must otherwise have been the case.[xxxvii]

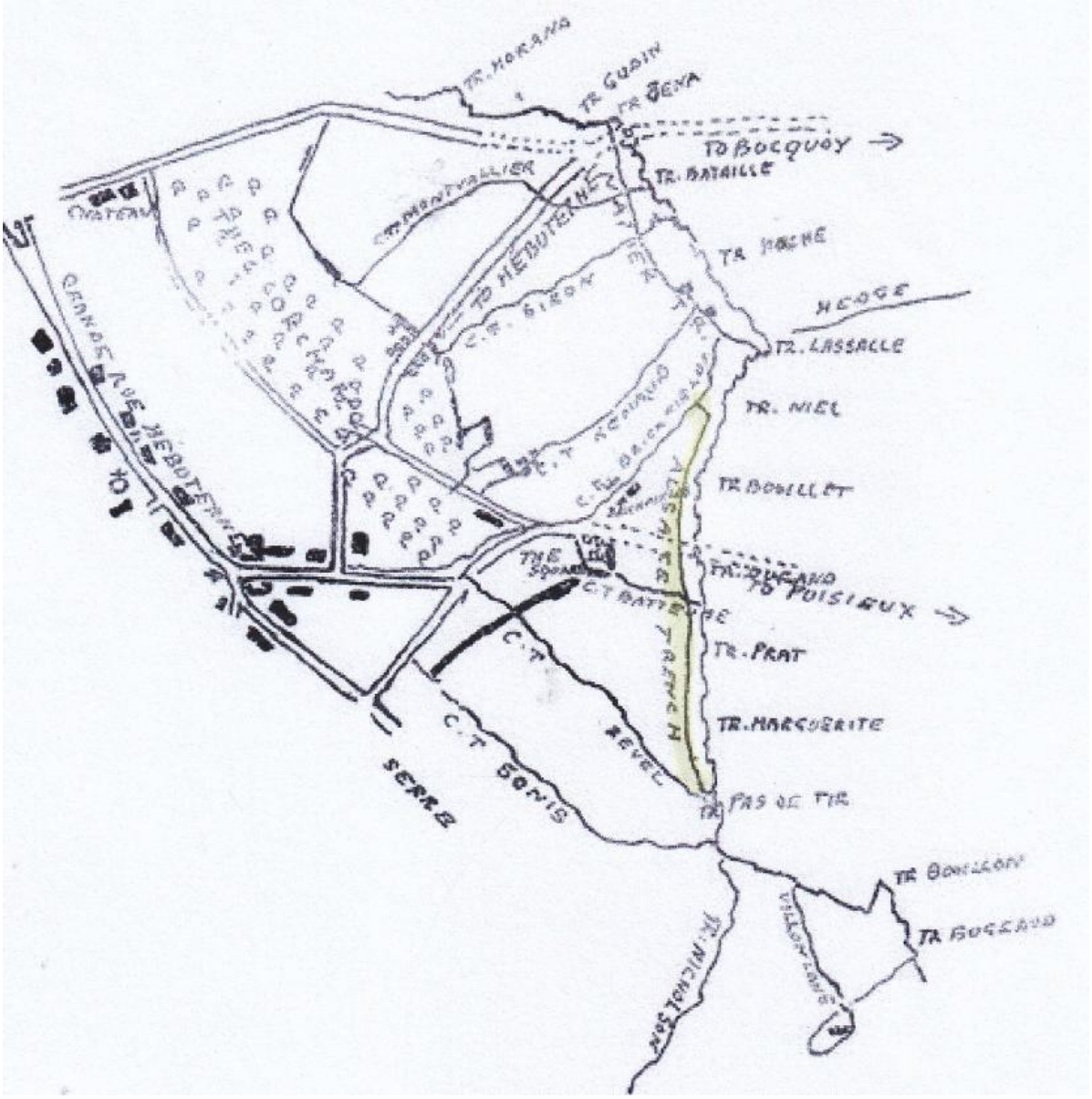

Figure 10: Map showing the village of Hebuterne and Alsace trench highlighted in yellow

He was taken to the Empire Hospital for Officers in Vincent Square, London.[xxxviii] The hospital had been taken over by the War Office at the beginning of 1916 for the treatment of officers suffering from traumatic paraplegia and brain injuries caused by bullet and shrapnel wounds under the care of the aptly named neurologist, Henry Head.[xxxix] After an operation to remove a small piece of bone Clifford was expected to make a full recovery.[xl] However, sadly, this was not the case and Frederick died of his wounds on 25th August 1916, just over a month later. The cause of death was given as encephalitis, the inflammation of the meninges of the brain. His mother was at his side.[xli]

Clifford's funeral took place on Wednesday afternoon, 30th August 1916 at Brandwood End Cemetery, The service was read by the Rev Everett Bishop, an uncle of the deceased, and Canon Moore, the vicar of St Anne's Church, Moseley, followed by 'the last Post'.

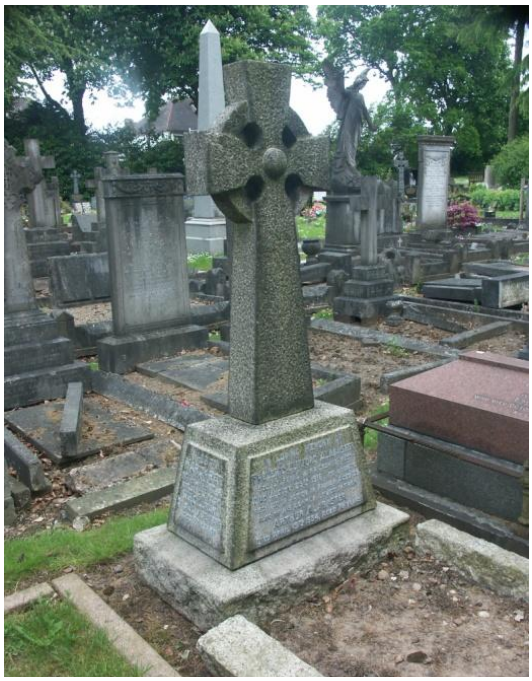

Figure 11:
(Above) Clifford's grave at Brandwood End Cemetery, Birmingham
(Right) An account of the funeral service

FUNERAL AT BRANDWOOD END.

The funeral of the brave officer took place on Wednesday afternoon, at Brandwood End Cemetery. The service was read by the Rev. Everett Bishop, an uncle of the deceased gentleman, and Canon Moore, Vicar of St. Anne's, Moseley. The chief mourners were Mr. and Mrs. A. Alabaster (father and mother), Miss Alabaster (sister), Mrs. A. S. Alabaster (sister-in-law), Mr. Herbert Alabaster, and Mr. Fred Alabaster (uncles), Mr. and Mrs. L. Hadley (aunt), Mrs. Everett Bishop (aunt) and Mr. G. Birch (uncle).

A number of officers in uniform attended the funeral, including Second Lieutenant J. W. Alabaster, Royal Warwicks (brother), Lieutenant D. Birch, Royal Warwicks (cousin), Captain E. L. B. Ravenhill, and Captain E. W. Assinder. There also followed Lieut. N. McWilliam, R.E., and about twenty N.C.O's and men from the Barracks. There were also present a number of employees of the firm of Alabaster and Wilson.

Beautiful floral tributes were sent by the following:—Mr. and Mrs. A. Alabaster, Miss Alabaster, Mrs. A. S. Alabaster and Mrs. G. H. Alabaster, Captains Stanley and George Alabaster, Lieutenant Eric and James Alabaster (brothers), Mr. and Mrs. Birch, Messrs. H. and F. Alabaster, Mr. and Mrs. Bishop, Mr. and Mrs. L. Hadley, Dr. and Mrs. Eric Assinder, Mr. and Mrs. Glover, Mr. Harry Wood, Mr. and Mrs. Percy Hudson and family, Captain E. L. B. Ravenhill, Mrs. Fred Jeavons, Mrs. and Mr. Percy Wood, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Padmore, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Langham, Mrs. Holmes Ravenhill, Miss E. M. Padmore, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Bowen, Mr. John Avery Hadley, Mr. and Mrs. F. Machin and family, Miss Wilkinson, Mr. and Mrs. Percy Adams, Mr. and Mrs. J. Buchanan Adams, the Officers commanding and staff of the 5th Warwicks, and members of the Old Edwardians' Club.

At the close of the service at the graveside a bugler sounded "The Last Post."

Clifford is also commemorated in St Anne's and St Mary's Church, Moseley and also at King Edward's School, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Figure 12:
Stanley Alabaster

Clifford's elder brother, Stanley, served throughout the entirety of WW1. In October 1916 he received the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action. He led his company in an attack with great dash, capturing many prisoners and two machine guns. He held on to the position won for thirty-six hours until relieved and beat off several counter-attacks.[xlii] After serving in France, Stanley was posted to Italy. In September 1918 he was awarded the Croce al Merito di Guerra. He finished the war as a Major.

Figure 13: Left to right. George, Jim and Beric Alabaster

Clifford's younger brothers also survived the war.
George served as a doctor in the RAMC in France and Salonica. He finished the war as a Captain.
Jim, an articled clerk served in the Second Battalion Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. He was wounded twice and in 1917 left active service, but became sectional director in the Ministry of Munitions. He finished the war as a Lieutenant.
Beric, a doctor, served with Lady Paget's combined Serbian Relief Fund and the St John's Ambulance Unit in Bulgaria and later Mesopotamia. Beric finished the war as a Captain.

The Alabaster boys have a Tolkien connection, in as much as they not only went to the same school but Beric, the youngest son was in the same 1st XV rugby team as JRR himself.[xliii]

Probate for Clifford's estate was granted in October 1916. Clifford's effects amounted to £783 1s 6d. Probate was granted to Arthur Alabaster.[xliv]

By direction of the Executors of the late Mrs. CATHERINE ALABASTER.
SALE ON THE PREMISES OF THE ATTRACTIVE WELL-BUILT RESIDENCE, No. 2, AMESBURY ROAD, MOSELEY.
With Vacant Possession.
The DETACHED DOUBLE-FRONTED RESIDENCE briefly contains: Lounge Hall with Cloakroom, THREE RECEPTION-ROOMS, FIVE Principal BEDROOMS, Bathroom, four secondary Bedrooms and ample Offices; Electric Light; Garage. Delightful WELL-SHRUBBED GARDEN. Lease about fifty-one years. Ground rent £20.
To be followed immediately by the Sale of HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE,
Bedsteads and Bedding, mahogany Chests, mahogany Bedroom Suite, Persian Rugs,
MAHOGANY DINING APPOINTMENTS,
Fine-toned Steinway PIANOFORTE, antique Sofatable, China Cabinets, Pictures, Electro-plate, Glass and China, Hoover Cleaners, Kitchen Requisites and Outside Effects.

Clifford's father, Arthur, died on 19th April 1934 leaving an estate worth £10,489 2s 2d. Probate was granted to his wife Catherine and son, Beric, an ophthalmic surgeon.[xlv]

Catherine passed away in 1944 and the family home at 2 Amesbury Road was sold.[xlvi]

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society Local History Group

Endnotes

i a) 1841 census
b) England Marriages 1538-1973, 1853 James Alabaster, licensed victualler father of Edward Alabaster
c) Julia's List
http://www.juliesfamilytree.co.uk/html/dat2.asp#3

ii England & Wales marriages 1538-1973, 1924

iii a) England, Births & Baptisms 1538-1975
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c) Roots Web at Ancestry
http://worldconnect.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=SHOW&db=williams146&recno=5624

iv 1841 census, Hill House Aladony (erratum s/b Academy) School, Theydon Garnon, Epping, Essex

v England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, 1853, Kings Lynn, 3/4, volume 4B, page 596

vi Electoral Registers 1832-1932, County of Norfolk, Western Division

vii England & Wales births 1837-2006
a) Edward Alabaster, 1854, Hackney 2/4, IB, 312
b) Arthur Alabaster, 1856, Hackney, 2/4, 1B, 311
c) Frederick Alabaster, 1857, Hackney, 4/4, 1B, 336
d) Herbert Alabaster, 1859, Hackney, 3/4, 1B, 342
e) Annie, 1861, Hackney, 3/4, 1B, 372
See 1c

viii a) England & Wales Deaths 1837-2007, 1866, Hackney, 3/4, 1B, 295
b) 1877 Probate Calendars for England & Wales 1858-1959

ix See viii (b), p 39

x England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, 1868, Hackney, 2/4, 1B, 683
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xi 1871 census
England & Wales births 1837-2006, 1869, Kings Norton, 1/4, 6C, 434

xii England & Wales births 1837-2007
a) Fanny Louisa, 1871, Kings Norton, 1/4, 6C, 464
b) Nora Katherine, 1873, Kings Norton, 1/4, 6C, 429
England & Wales Deaths 1837-2007
a) Fanny Louisa, 1872, Kings Norton, 6C, 271
b) Birmingham Daily Post 6th February 1872

Kelly's Directory 1872

xiii Probate Calendars for England & Wales 1858-1959, 1877, p 39

xiv a) 1881 census
b) Two Lives meet in the school Fist XI by Stephen Alabaster from the Alabaster Chronicle No 25, Spring 2006
http://www.alabaster.org.uk/chron25.htm#firstxv

xv *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7th October 1882

xvi Alabaster Chronicles, No 29. Part 2. Jackie Settle 30.11.2007

xvii This is Helen Lloyd recording the memories of Stephen Alabaster at the Assay Office on the 26th of February 2015. Tell me first about your family firm.
https://theassayoffice.co.uk/uploads/files/26.%20Stephen%20ALABASTER.pdf

xviii See xiv b

xix 1904 Probate Calendars of England & Wales 1858-1959

xx England& Wales marriages 1837-2008, 1907, Kings Norton, 6C, 690

xxi England & Wales deaths 1837-2007, 1912, Kings Norton, 3/4, 6C, 348

xxii a) See xvii
b) Illustration, Alabaster & Wilson equestrian
jewelleryhttp://www.alabasterandwilson.com/index_8.htm

xxiii England & Wales births 1837-2006
a) Edward Beric, 1893, Kings Norton, 2/4, 6C, 419
b) Enid Catherine Margaret, 1897, Kings Norton, 4/4, 6C, 412
c) See xiv (b))

xxiv Reference Stephen Alabaster

xxv National Archives, Kew. British Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/670

xxvi a) Service Records of King Edwards School 1914-1919
b) *Moseley B13 Magazine*. Issue 465, September 2016, p 19. Source material from Alison Wheatley, curator at KES

xxvii *Evening Despatch 28.8.1916*

xxviii *Birmingham Daily Post 23.6.1905*
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Birmingham Daily Post 22.6.1914
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xxix See xvii

xxx *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*. 20.4.1912

xxxi a) See xxv, p 86
b) Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1919, Naval and Military Press Ltd 2010

xxxii WW1 Medal Index

xxxiii See xxv, p 42

xxxiv See xxv, pp 64-88

xxxv The Advent of the Steel Helmet
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xxxvi See xxiv, p 85

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xxxviii See xxv

xxxix Lost Hospitals of London
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xl See xxxvii

xli See xxvi (b), p 20

xlii *Birmingham Daily Post,* 21.10.1916

xliii King Edward's School Chronicle, Volume XXVI, February 1911, No 185, p16
Courtesy of Alison Wheatley, archivist for KES

xliv Probate Calendars for England & Wales for 1858-1959

xlv Probate Calendar for England & Wales 1858-1959, p 1934

xlvi England & Wales deaths 1837-2007, Birmingham, 1944, 3/4, 6D, 543
The Birmingham Post, 11.7.1944

Illustrations

Figure 1 Portrait of Arthur Alabaster
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Figure 2 St Paul's Church, Balsall Heath
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Figure 3 Alabaster & Wilson Ltd
http://wikimapia.org/20664367/Alabaster-Wilson-Ltd

Figure 4 2 Amesbury Road, Moseley
http://www.zoopla.co.uk/house-prices/moseley/amesbury-road/

Figure 5 1903-4 KES rugby team. Courtesy of Alison Wheatley archivist KES

Figure 6 *Express and Star*, 10th August 2012

Figure 7 *Moseley B13 Magazine*, Issue 465, September 2016, p 19. Source material from Alison Wheatley, archivist at KES

Figure 8 KES newsletter, The Spokesman, Summer 2016, p 5

Figure 9 Brodie Helmet
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Figure 10 Hebuterne map. Crutwell, C R M F. *War Service of the 1/4th Berkshire Regiment* (Tf). Chapter 15. Fox, Jones & Co. Oxford.
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Figure 11 Find a grave.
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Birmingham News, 2nd September 1916

Figure 12 Arthur Stanley Alabaster
http://www.alabaster.org.uk/chron29b.htm

Figure 13 *Moseley B13 Magazine*, Issue 465, September 2016, p 20