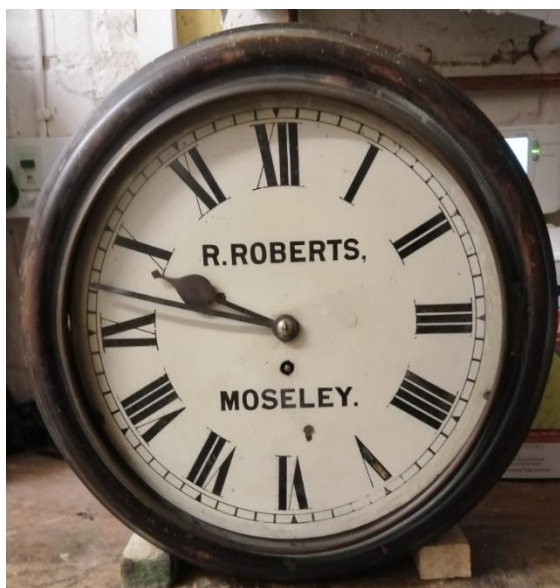
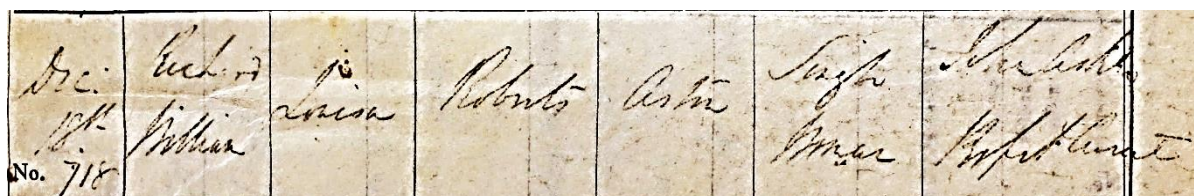


The Richard Roberts Clock



At the start of 2024, the Moseley Society History Group received an email from Gascoigne's Funeral Directors, who, during a clear-out, found an old wall clock made by 'R Roberts of Moseley'. They offered to donate the clock which was accepted. When the clock was collected on 23rd January 2024, it was found to still be in working condition but, unfortunately, the front glass was missing. This has now been repaired and the clock is now in the reception area of the Moseley Exchange

The 'R. Roberts' named on the clock was identified as Richard William Roberts who established a business as a clock and watch maker in 1868. He was born on 17th November 1848 in Aston upon Carrant,ⁱ referred to as just 'Aston', in the Parish of Ashchurch, Gloucestershire. His baptismal record for 18th December (see below) named his mother as Louisa Roberts but his father is not named (see below).



Louisa was the eldest daughter of Richard Roberts, an agricultural labourer and Mary Ann (née Goddard). Richard and Mary were married on 5th January 1829 at St John the Baptist church, Oxenton, Gloucestershire. After their marriage, the couple lived at Bishop Cleeve, where Louisa was born and baptised at St Michael & All Angels' Church on 7th February 1830 (see below).



Other siblings were baptised there too: John Goddard Roberts on 10th June 1832 and Mary Ann Roberts on 2nd November 1834 but Richard and Mary's fourth and fifth children, Allen Roberts, and Susannah Roberts were born and baptised at Oxenton, Gloucestershire on 24th December 1837 and 22nd March 1840 respectively. Their 'abode' in the baptism register was 'Turn Pike, Oxenton'. The Oxenton Gate toll house was situated on the Cheltenham to Bredon road, running east of the village, turnpiked in 1755.

The 1841 census recorded Richard, an agricultural labourer and Mary, a toll collector, with their children, with the exception of Louisa who, at barely twelve years old, was working away from home at Oxenton as a house servant, the youngest of three, in the employ of John Pullin, a farmer, and his wife Ann. Louise would have been expected to assist in the running of the household and helping out with John and Ann's seven children. Later that year, Louisa's father, Richard, was mortally injured on 6th September, when he fell from the top of a wheat rick dislocating his spine. He died at Worcester Infirmary on 15th September. Richard was buried four days later in Bishops Cleeve. His abode was noted as Aston upon Carrant.ⁱⁱ

Another inquest was held on Friday, before the same coroner, at the Gloucester Infirmary, on the body of Richard Roberts, farmer's labourer, who at a late hour on Monday evening, the 6th of Sept. while employed in topping a wheat rick, at Alstone, near Tewkesbury, fell to the ground, and di-located his spine. He was conveyed to the house of his master, Mr. Tombs, of the above place, and in about a week was brought to the infirmary, where he died on Wednesday last. Verdict, *accidental death.*

**Inquest of Louisa's father Richard Roberts from the *Cheltenham Chronicle*,
23rd September 1841**

Richard Roberts No. 911.	Aston upon Carrant	September 19 th	41 Years	James Cadwallader Curate
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**Burial record of Richard Roberts on 19th September at Bishops Cleeve,
Gloucestershire**



Map showing Aston-on-Carrant, Ashchurch, Alstone and Oxenton

The 1851 census recorded that Mary, now widowed, was working as a gloveress (a woman who makes gloves), residing with her children Louisa, Allen and Susannah in Aston upon Carrant.ⁱⁱⁱ Louisa's son Richard, now two years old, was recorded as the 'son' of Mary, but by 1861 as 'grandson.' This could be due to the fact that Louisa, a dress maker, by 1861, was married and living at 83 Gooch Street, Birmingham. Her husband is named on the census as Frederick Tovey, a plasterer, aged 28 from Cheltenham, Gloucester.

The last known census record for Louisa is 1871 where she is noted as living at Manor Road, Edgbaston. Her brother Allen is at the same address. Louisa died in Aston, Birmingham at the end of the year.^{iv}

The presence of Louisa in Birmingham could be the reason for Richard's move to Birmingham as, aged twenty, in 1868, he married Ann Caffell at St Paul's church, Balsall Heath on 16th February.

At the time of his marriage Richard was working as a carpenter. His father is named as Richard William Roberts, a farmer, but this might have been to hide his illegitimacy.

1868. Marriage solemnized at <i>St Paul's Church in the parish of Balsall Heath</i> in the County of <i>Worcester</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
244	16 Feb 1868	<i>Richard William Roberts</i>	20	Bachelor	Carpenter	<i>Balsall Heath</i>	<i>Richard William Roberts</i>	<i>Farmer</i>
		<i>Ann Caffell</i>	22	Spinster		<i>Balsall Heath</i>	<i>William Caffell</i>	<i>Carpenter</i>

Married in the *parish of St Paul* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by *T. Barnes* or after *J. Barnes* by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, *Richard William Roberts* and *Ann Caffell* in the Presence of us, *William Woodstock Holmes* and *Mary Ann Robbins*

Richard William Roberts married Ann Caffell on 16th February 1868 at St Paul's Church, Balsall Heath, Birmingham



Richard Roberts and Ann Caffell

On 13th March 1866, Ann's father, a carpenter from Woolhope, Herefordshire, died. As a result, her brother, Frederick Caffell, a clock maker and her sister Emma came to live with them. Frederick's and Richard's combined skills would have made possible the establishment of the clock making business in 1868.^v

Richard and Ann's first child, William Bertram Roberts, was born in Balsall Heath in 1869. By the time of the birth of their second son, Ernest Henry Roberts, in 1870, the extended family had moved to 166 Cattell Road, Bordesley Green, Birmingham. The 1873, White's Trade Directory was the first to list Cattell Road as the address of their business under the heading 'Clock Manufacturers and Dealers'. By 1881, six further children: had been born Richard Percy Roberts (1872); Frederick George Roberts (1873); Frank Edgar

Roberts (1876); Sydney Silvester Roberts (1878) and Clarence Roberts on 17th July 1879.

By 1881, the family had moved nearby to 136 High Street in Bordesley. Also living with them was a nurse to assist Ann with her three-month old baby daughter, Annie Louise Roberts, together with a general domestic servant. Clarence and Louise were baptised together at Holy Trinity Church, Bordesley on 22nd May 1881.

Three of Richard's sons by 1891 had joined him in the business; Ernest, aged twenty, as a watchmaker; Richard, aged eighteen, as a clock repairer and Frank, aged fifteen, as a shop assistant. By then, the family business had relocated from 136 to 149 in the High Street. Around February that year, the family home at 6 Cowper Villas, Green Lane, Small Heath was up for rent as the family had moved to Arthur House, Moseley Village.^{vi}

COWPER Villas, Green Lane, Small Heath, containing entrance hall, vestibule, parlour, sitting-room: kitchen, with range, hot and cold water on sink, four bedrooms, bath and lavatory, hot and cold water; £18.—Corner House, £20.—Thomas Richards, Estate Agent, 88, Colmore Row. 4367

***The Birmingham Daily Mail* on 21st February 1891 advertised this Cowper Villas House for rent at £18**

Meanwhile, from 13th December 1889 Clarence, having passed the examination to King Edward Camp Hill School for boys, was attending the school as a fee-paying scholar. He left in April 1894 before travelling to France and/or Switzerland to learn about clocks and watches.^{vii}



King Edward Camp Hill School for Boys, Stratford Road, Birmingham. A view from the playground from the archives of the King Edward School Foundation

Arthur House, Moseley Village was one of five houses situated opposite St Mary's church.

The *Birmingham Daily Post* for the 26th October 1889 describes Arthur House along with four others up for auction (see below).

Very Important and Substantially-erected **FREEHOLD SHOP PROPERTY**, situated in the village of Moseley, opposite St. Mary's Church.

MESSRS. THOMAS & BETTRIDGE will Sell by Auction (by order of the Mortgagee), at the Estate Sale Room, No. 1, Newhall Street, Birmingham, on **THURSDAY, November 14, 1889**, at half-past Six o'clock in the evening, subject to conditions of sale incorporating those of the Birmingham Law Society—the above Capitally-situated and Improving **FREEHOLD INVESTMENT**.

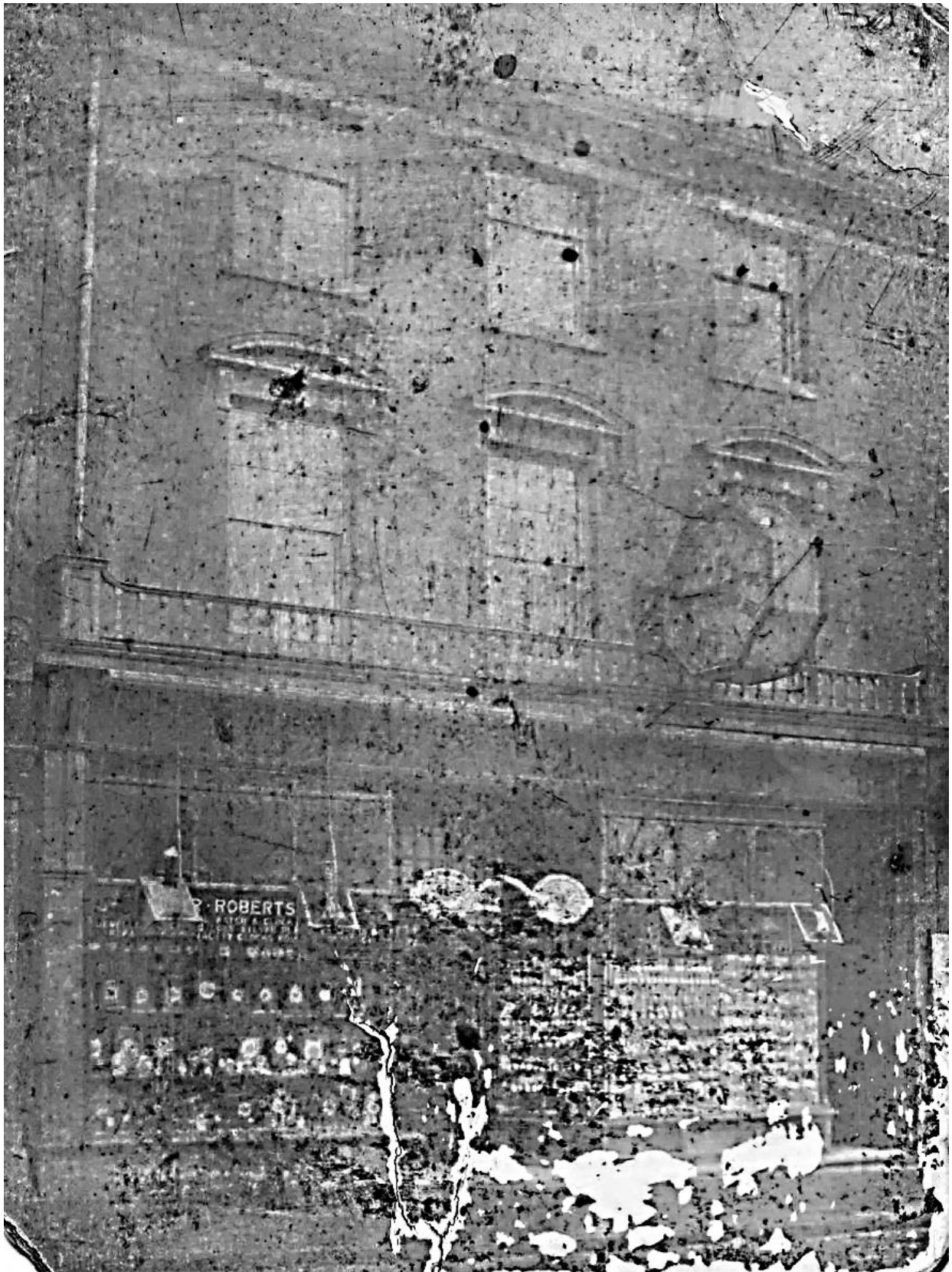
It comprises Five Front Three-storey **SHOPS** and **DWELLING HOUSES**, known as "VENTNOR HOUSE," "WEST HOUSE," "ARTHUR HOUSE," "BRUNSWICK HOUSE," and "HUBERT HOUSE." Ventnor House is in the occupation of Mr. Coombes, Painter and Decorator, and has extra Stabling and Workshop accommodation. A large outlay has been judiciously expended in adapting the premises to their present use, and they are estimated to be worth at the very lowest an annual rent of £80. Three of the other Shops are let at £35. a year each, and one at £40., making a total rental value of £225. per annum. The tenants pay all rates, and the site extends to 670 square yards of land, or thereabouts.

This is a valuable Freehold Property, and comprising as it does five of the principal Shops in the important village of Moseley should command the attention of investors.

For further particulars, apply to Mr. William Thomas, Solicitor; or to the Auctioneers, all of Waterloo Street, Birmingham. 1149

Three years later, Kelly's Birmingham Trades Directory for 1895, listed Richard's 'Watch and Clock shop' around the corner at 150 Alcester Road, Moseley. Below is a trading receipt for Richard's shop.





Richard Roberts shop at 150 Alcester Road, Moseley

The old photograph of the Roberts shop at 150 Alcester Road shows a double fronted building. The shop was divided into two at some stage. The family remembers that:

There were two entries to the premises, one through the shop and the other round the back which was approached through huge wooden doors, arched at the top. It had a small door in it so that people could get to the back of their premises. Going through the door you came to a wide area where there were quite a few buildings ending in stables. One of the buildings was occupied by Mr Nightingale, a furniture maker.

In the back yard of the Roberts house was a toilet and two sheds. Up three steps were three gardens. The first contained two cooking apple trees and the others raspberry, black current and loganberry bushes plus strawberries and other home-grown foods.

From the back of the house, the first room you entered into was the kitchen and to the right a sitting room. There was always a lovely fire burning in the grate and often a kettle on the hob. Above the mantle shelf was a beautiful turquoise and gold clock. The furniture consisted of a large table, high-backed dining chairs, a small mahogany chest and a radiogram plus two comfortable arm chairs each side of the fire. Another door led to a storeroom and then to a cellar that was filled with coal during the winter. Upstairs there was a bedroom that overlooked the garden with a brass bedstead, dressing table with a silver hairbrush, mirror and powder bowl, plus a wash-stand with a jug and bowl. To the side of this room were stairs that led to an attic bedroom with a skylight. The wardrobe in it was topped with gentlemen's hats gathering dust. The washstand was full of books. Down the stairs to the first floor again was another room with a bath and a workshop which had a mahogany cupboard and a mirror over the fireplace and a treadle lathe for making watch parts. On the wall was a place to hang watches that were ready for collecting. A long bench sat in front of the window, one part for watches the other for clocks waiting to be repaired. The main sitting room was on the front over the shop itself. Here you could hear the clock hanging outside swinging in the wind. The room featured a big marble fireplace with a brass fender and a beautiful gilded mirror the width of the mantle shelf. It was furnished with a mahogany table and six parlour chairs with lime green velvet seats, a sideboard and piano. Either side of the mirror were wall lights. The carpet was red with a blue pattern.

On the ground floor inside the shop were two counters joining at a corner where there was a small office. Glass cabinets lined three walls of the shop and counter cases were filled items such as silver knitted purses, chains, and bead necklaces. The door had a bell. For security, the entrance door had wrought iron gates and the two windows wrought iron casings.

The 1901 census confirms 150, Alcester Road as Richard's business premise and recorded that two of his sons, Ernest and Clarence, were still assisting in the business.

Two years later on 17th May 1903, Richard died during his visit to see his son, Frederick, a clock maker, at Newnham-on-Severn, Gloucestershire. Richard was just fifty-four years old. He was buried at St Mary's Church, Moseley. His probate record records that he left the equivalent of £183,000 in today's money.

**BIRMINGHAM JEWELLER'S DEATH
AT NEWNHAM.**

THE INQUEST.

On Monday evening Mr. M. F. Carter, Dean Forest Coroner, conducted an enquiry into the cause of the death of Richard William Roberts (56), married, jeweller, who resided at Alcester-road, Moseley, Birmingham. The evidence was to the effect that on Saturday last the deceased arrived at the home of Frederick George Roberts (his son), watch and clock maker, who carries on business at High-street, Newnham-on-Severn, with the intention of paying a short visit. The following morning, when he had breakfast, he appeared to be in his usual health. At 10 o'clock the son left the house, and about an hour later deceased asked a servant named Fanny Parry to brush his clothes, and remarked that he had not felt the same since he suffered with his heart. Immediately he fell backwards on the floor, and did not speak again. Assistance was quickly at hand, but life was extinct. Dr. Carleton having stated that in his opinion death was due to failure of the action of the heart, which probably had been in a weak state for some time, the jury returned a verdict accordingly.



**Inquest into the death of Richard William
Roberts held on 18th May 1903^{viii}**

**Richard William Roberts
1848-1903**

ROBERTS Richard William of 150 Alcester-road Moseley Worcestershire watchmaker and jeweller died 17 May 1903 at Newnham-on-Severn Gloucestershire Administration **Worcester** 13 June to Ann Roberts widow Effects £1132 10s. 7d.

Probate Register for Richard Roberts

Richard's widow, Ann and the youngest son, Clarence, variously a jeweller, watchmaker and clock repairer and dealer, carried on the business.

On 6th September 1911, Clarence married Lillian Boswell of 24 Russell Road, Moseley at St Agnes Church, Moseley.



Clarence Roberts and his wife Lillian (née Boswell)

Clarence was described by his family as well-read and studious all through his life and could quote pieces from John Bunyon and also a variety of Psalms. He was also fluent in the French language.

In 1912, a son, and only child, Richard William Neville Roberts was born.

During the course of WW1, Clarence trained as a specialist instrument repairer for the Royal Flying Corps.

After the war, Clarence took on the responsibility of looking after the clocks of Mrs Cadbury' house in Moor Green Lane. He also looked after all the clocks in the offices and public houses owned by the old Holt Breweries in Birmingham. When Ansells brewery took over, he remained the subcontractor, but big clocks in towers were gradually going out of fashion.

Clarence's wife, Lilian, died on 17th November 1955. Despite this setback he decided to carry on his trade.

At ninety years old, and taking into account the economics of travelling to Moseley from his retirement home in Linden Road, Bournville, Clarence decided to call it a day in December 1969. He agreed, however, to keep an eye on the turret clock above his 'local,' the Fighting Cocks. He began winding it in 1905. He made weekly visits, climbing to the third floor, then ascending two sets of step ladders into the clock itself that was more than sixty feet above the ground. He did have one recommendation in his letter of retirement – that it would be inexpensive to convert to electricity.

**Time to retire,
says Clarence**
Evening Mail Reporter
CLARENCE the Clock-winder has decided, at the age of 90, that it is time to end his clock-watching days in Birmingham.



Above and right and overleaf
A newspaper cutting taken from the
Birmingham Evening Mail on 16th
December 1969 announcing
Clarence's retirement

OUT OF FASHION
When Ansell's took over he remained the sub contractor but big clocks in towers above public houses gradually went out of fashion.
When he retired from business he agreed to keep an eye on the turret clock above his "local," the Fighting Cocks. The clock and public house were built in 1899—and Mr. Roberts began winding the clock in 1905. He made his weekly visit to—
sets of step-ladders into the clock itself.
With him went the licensee, Mr. Henry Stanley, whom Mr. Roberts has been instructing on how to carry on the clock-winding after his retirement.
'VERY SORRY'
An Ansell's Brewery spokesman said: "Mr. Roberts is almost an institution in Moseley. He is certainly part of the history of public houses in this city.
"We are very sorry that he has finally had to give up his last connection with our public house clocks."
Mr. Roberts made a final suggestion for the future of the Fighting Cocks clock in his letter of retirement—that it would be inexpensive to convert it to electricity.

FARES

"I suppose I could still wind the clock," he said today.

"But the brewery pays me only a few shillings a week and the bus fares would come to 2s. 6d.

"In these circumstances, it now looks as good a time as any to pack it up. I of all people should know that time marches on."

Mr. Roberts's former family clocksmiths' business, founded in 1868, used to look after all the clocks in the offices and public houses owned by the old Holt Brewery in Birmingham.

A widower and great-grandfather, he has told the brewery for whom he has been winding clocks for more than 70 years that he will retire in the New Year.

It is not that Mr. Clarence Roberts, of 150, Alcester Road, Moseley, feels that he is now too old to make his weekly trip 60 feet above Moseley Village to wind the turret clock at the Fighting Cocks public house.

He will be moving out of the district to Lyndon Road, Selly Oak and this has presented him with a travelling and economics problem.

Clarence died in hospital on 8th January 1974, aged ninety-four. His funeral was held at St Mary's Church, Moseley.

ROBERTS. — Clarence, in hospital on January 8, 1974, husband of the late Lillian, of 90 Linden Road, Bournville, (late clock repairer of Moseley), aged 94 years. Funeral service at St. Mary's Church, Moseley, Tuesday, 12 noon.



The picture above shows Clarence's shop in Moseley, identified by the large clock outside the shop. The 1911 census recorded that there was a: boot maker, fruit shop, draper, watchmaker, draper, fruitier/fishmonger, chemist and a lady's outfitter in that row of shops.

Although Clarence's son was a clockmaker he did not want to carry on the business and became a tool maker in a factory. As a result, when Clarence died, the shop was demolished with four others to make way for Tesco's supermarket, now the Cooperative supermarket. The picture below shows how it looks today.



The Moseley Society was established in 1979. One of its aims is to preserve the character of the village and its environs. Unfortunately, it was established too late to stop the incongruous building replacing 150 to 158 Alcester Road but public revulsion at this building and an M40 link road were powerful motivating forces that drove the creation of the Society.

The Moseley Society is still fulfilling the same purpose today. Would you be interested in joining to lend your support? If so, you can join via our website <https://moseley-society.org.uk>

Researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group with thanks to Rachel Brown, archivist for King Edward VI Foundation, Birmingham and Tracey Green, Clarence's great-granddaughter and her aunt in Australia for the photographs and their personal memories of the family

Endnotes

- i Tracey Green, Clarence's great-granddaughter
- ii Bishops Cleeve Burial Records
This explains why Mary, aged 30, had no further children after 1841. There is another Richard Roberts who died on 9th May 1850, aged 40 but he could not be Mary's husband as he was an affluent farmer, not a labourer, and single.
- iii The 1851 census referred to in this article is the correct one for the Roberts family living in Aston on Carrant . Findings this census was made difficult to find as the head of the family, a widow, had her Christian name erroneously transcribed as Margaret instead of Mary Ann Roberts. Other family members match
- iv The 1861 and 1871 census confirms that the married name of Louisa is Tovey. She was born in Bishop Cleeve, Gloucestershire. Her relationship to 'Allen Roberts 'as her 'brother' born in Aston also confirms that this Louisa is Richard William Roberts mother. What is erroneous is her age and Allen's place of birth as Aston, Birmingham and not Aston, Gloucestershire. It could be that the Birmingham enumerator has made the assumption on hearing 'Aston' as his birthplace would presume Birmingham. At a time when there were no birth certificates, only Baptismal dates, dates of birth are often incorrectly stated in the census. At a time when most of the population was illiterate, the spelling of names was often phonetical.
- v The trading advertisement for Richard's Clock and watchmaking business at 150 Alcester Road, Moseley states that the business was established in 1868
- vi The 1891 census recorded the family home as 6 Cowpers Villas, Small Heath. The King Edward Camp Hill School for Boys record for Clarence for January 20th 1891 amended the family address from 149 High Street, Bordesley to Cowper Villas, In 1892 Clarence's home address was again amended from 149 High Street to 'Arthur House, Moseley Village'. The *Birmingham Mail* on 3rd February 1891 advertised a Cowper Villas house for rent.
- vii See i
- viii Death of Richard Roberts from, *Gloucester Journal* 23rd May 1903