

FORGET ME NOT

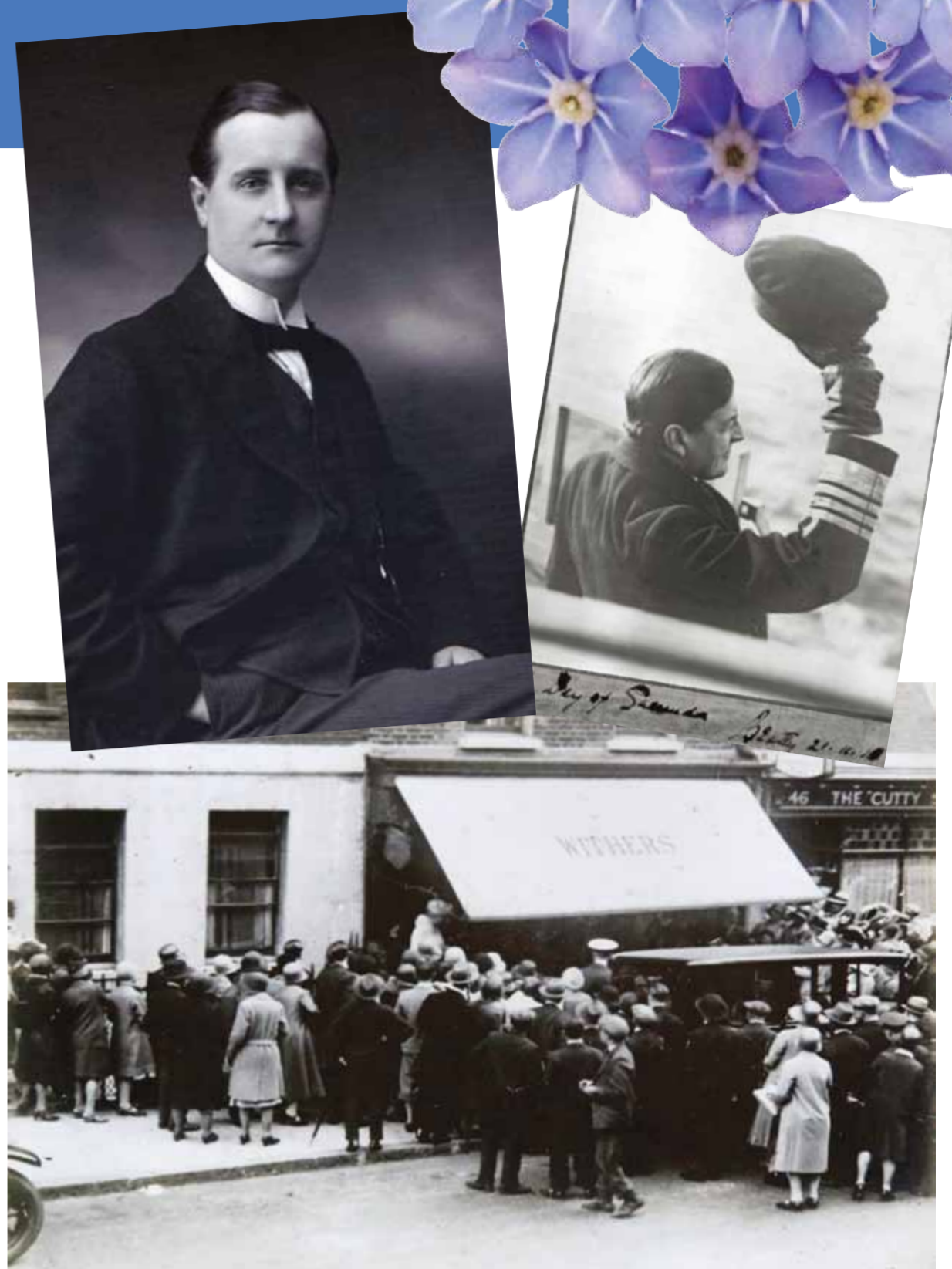
EDWARD FRINGS SIMON FRINGS'S GRANDFATHER

My grandfather was born in Yorkshire and at some point moved to Leicester and married my grandmother. My grandmother's family owned an antiques shop, Withers of Leicester and eventually Edward took over the running of the business.

There was also a Withers shop in London, on Orchard Street. Queen Mary was a regular visitor to the London shop and the photograph below shows the scene in the street outside during one of these visits. Apparently she expected to be given anything that caught her fancy in the shop and my grandfather started spiriting away the choicest items to prevent her bankrupting the business.

Immediately before and during the First World War antiques were hard to come by and my grandfather diversified into interior design. This was a very high end business and he did work in many of the large houses in the County. At some point Edward started doing work for David Beatty at Brooksby Hall. I'm not sure when this was, but the family has a signed photograph of Beatty dated 1918, so it may well have been immediately after the First World War when Brooksby Hall stopped being a convalescent home for sailors and needed a bit of refurbishment. At some point Earl Beatty had shares in Withers antiques but my grandfather eventually bought him out of the business.

My mother was Edward's secretary and also helped with the interior design work. She told us that on one occasion she was up a ladder in the library at Brooksby when David Beatty came in and whilst engaging her in chit-chat he put his hand up her skirt. Despite being a very young woman at the time, my mother took exception to this, came down the ladder and slapped the Earl's face. When my grandfather found out about this he played hell with her and accused her of jeopardising future business with the Beatty's! Earl Beatty's reaction is not recorded. Apparently my mother got on very well with Lady Beatty, who gave her pieces of jewellery and the odd knick-knack, so it seems that the incident did not sour relationships too much.



THOMAS HANNEY MADELINE FRINGS'S GRANDFATHER

My grandfather, Thomas had a wooden leg. The family story is that Thomas contracted gas gangrene and eventually had his leg amputated at the thigh. I say eventually, because the story is that the war pension for men invalided out of the army was related to the amount of their leg or arm they had lost.

My father used to say that in an attempt to reduce costs doctors were under strict instructions not to amputate too much limb initially. As a result of this policy, it was said that poor old Thomas was subjected to four or five amputations until eventually, when he was transferred to Roehampton hospital, what remained of his leg was amputated at the thigh.

The family story is also that grandfather was gassed and developed gas gangrene as a result. I have since found out that gas gangrene is an infection which is mostly the result of contamination of the muscles following injury or an operation. The soil in France and Flanders was highly cultivated and contained a large amount of horse manure, which contains bacillus bacteria. Because the trenches were filled with mud, soldiers' clothing became saturated with the bacteria. When these men were wounded, it would be likely that pieces of their bacteria saturated uniforms would lodge into the wound, causing an infection. So it is more likely that grandfather developed gangrene following an injury, of course now I will never know the true story.

I didn't know Thomas but by all accounts he was a colourful character and after the war acquired a barrel-organ and a monkey. He must have been a street performer as my father used to complain that he would be left in charge of the organ and the monkey, as Thomas went from hostelry to hostelry spending his takings!

My maternal grandfather, Albert Mee, was in the Grenadier Guards. I know very little about him only that he was an émigré and I am trying to find out where he came from and when.

We have a piece of trench art, a German shell case engraved Ypres 1914 - 1918 and although it is not a family piece, I think it came from a house clearance, I have included a picture of it here because someone's ancestor went to the trouble making it.



Albert second left

