

BENJAMIN BARROW

Plarr's Lives of The Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (2 Volumes 1930)
by Victor Gustave Plarr

BARROW, BENJAMIN (1814 – 1901). MRCS, June 27 1836; FRCS, Nov 13 1862.

Third son of S Barrow of Bath, thus belonging to a family which included two distinguished generals who each became a KCB. He entered St Bartholomew's as an articled pupil of Edward Stanley (q.v.), then as assistant surgeon, Luther Holden being a contemporary pupil. For twelve months he acted as dresser, and for a further twelve months as House Surgeon under J Painter Vincent (q.v.).

Socially he became distinguished as an excellent talker in the Abernethian Society and was active in starting the 1830 – 1840 Contemporary Club, which included among its members Richard Owen, Charles Locock and James Paget. Barrow acted as secretary. He also joined a club where boxing, fencing and single-stick exercises were taught, fencing by Angelo, boxing by Tom Spring (1795 – 1851), once champion boxer of England. Barrow was able to stand up against him and get in a blow now and again. He does not appear to have taken part in the cricket, football and rowing of the time.

He is said to have served for a short time in the Army and then to have practised at Liverpool from 1841 – 1848. In 1841 the Society of Arts presented him with a Silver Medal as the inventor of a splint for compound fractures and diseased joints. The apparatus is described and figured in the Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal (1847, ii, 29), and a specimen is preserved in the College Museum. A pair of 'lined splints', also called 'Gooch's' or 'kettleholder' splints, were applied, one above and one below the fracture or joint, and the two splints strained apart by means of a semicircular bracket, one quadrant of the bracket sliding on the other, so as to vary the distance of the two ends of the bracket, each of which was turned horizontally to slide in a groove on one of the splints.

Barrow's real career, however, began when he settled in practice at Ryde, Isle of Wight, and became the advocate of improved sanitation. Typhoid fever was then of almost constant occurrence in Ryde, owing to the pollution of the wells, yet there was great opposition to the expenditure upon a water supply from the chalk downs, as well as against the drainage of the adjacent marshes.

Barrow acted for a number of years as Hon Medical Officer of Health and Chairman of the Water, Highways and Sanitary Committee. This led on to an advocacy, in conjunction with J Webster, QC, Father of Lord Alverstone, CJ, of a scheme for making docks to facilitate traffic with the mainland. Ryde was incorporated in 1859; Barrow was elected on the Council and Mayor for nine years in succession. The Esplanade, Museum, the Literary and Philosophic Society, the School of Art and of Science, the Recreation Ground, the Gymnasium for the children of the poor, were all largely owing to Barrow as the moving spirit. He was besides the founder and first treasurer and secretary of the Isle of Wight Artisans' and Mechanics' Institution. He acted as Surgeon at the Infirmary, Coastguard and Honorary Surgeon to the Royal Victoria Yacht Club.

Barrow had been an active member of the British Medical Association when, in 1881, he became President and gave the Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting. The success of the meeting was largely due to his boundless energy, seeing that it was held just after the great International Medical Congress in London. (Brit. Med. Jour., 1881, ii, Presidential Address, p249; Editorial, p200).

Barrow continued a vigorous fighter and talker, showing little diminution in either physical or mental strength up to the age of 86. He attended the St Bartholomew's October dinner in 1900;

unfortunately, a few days later he fell on the street and sustained a comminuted fracture of the left wrist. At first he made light of the accident, but sinuses developed after his return to Ryde, and he had to put himself under his friend Alfred Willett (q.v.). Eventually, in January 1901, the arm was amputated above the elbow joint. Age prevented recovery, and he died at his house in Ryde on March 7 1901.

Barrow was twice married: first in 1848 to the daughter of Edward Stanley (q.v.); his second marriage was to Miss Arnold, who survived him. He had no children.

(A portrait accompanied the Obituary Notice in *Brit. Med. Jour.*, 1901, 1, 659, 745, which includes reminiscences by his contemporary, Luther Holden (q.v.)).