

Fig. 1 John Barlow 1815-1856 (Photograph from the RDSVS archive)

JOHN BARLOW: 'A mind of no common mould'

Colin M. Warwick and Alastair A. Macdonald,

John Barlow (Fig. 1) was born on the 20th of September 1815, the first of three sons and four daughters, children to John Barlow (1789-1846) and Deborah Nield (1790-1850)¹. They lived in The Oak at Chorley, Wilmslow, Cheshire where his father was a farmer and their family had lived for 200 years. His early education was for four years at the Friends' School, Ackworth and he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps but developing a love of animals, particularly his father's dairy cows, he decided on a career in the veterinary profession^{2,3,4,5,6}. In 1842 he contributed a scientific paper to the *Veterinarian* ('On the Present Epidemic among Cattle') and that same year, travelled to Edinburgh to enroll for the two-session course at William Dick's Veterinary College. Gaining a diploma of the Highland and Agricultural Society on the 24th April 1844, Barlow, 'after a most rigid examination' was also awarded a prize for general proficiency in his year⁷ and a silver medal 'awarded to Mr. John Barlow as the student who most distinguished himself at the examination for diplomas' (Norman Comben, personal communication). Dick, realizing the young man's potential, employed him as demonstrator for a further year before appointing him as Assistant Professor of Zootomy (Anatomy and Physiology).

All his life he followed the doctrine of the Society of Friends (Quakers) whose Christian beliefs probably shaped his gentle, modest, unassuming character. For the 'Edinburgh Meeting' of the Society of Friends, the mid-19th century was a period of growth. They would congregate in the Quaker's Meeting House in the Pleasance (Fig. 2). The group of worshippers and friends, 'strong Liberals in politics'⁸ often inter-married, as was the case with John Barlow and his wife to be, Eliza Nicholson. Eliza had an older sister Sarah (1803-1872) who became the second wife of another Friend, John Wigham Junior (1781-1862). Wigham was a wealthy businessman who with his cousin John Wigham Tertius (1784-1864) owned a shawl manufacturing company in Edinburgh⁸. Joseph Lister (1827-1912) later Lord Lister, who reformed surgery with the use of antiseptics, was also an Edinburgh Friend in his early days, later marrying a daughter of Prof. James Syme.

John Barlow's short, successful career in Edinburgh was summed up by his illustrious peers; his friend Prof. William T. Gairdner (1824-1907), a Pathologist who became Glasgow's first Medical Officer of Health and was knighted for his services⁹, called him 'an original thinker ... so truthful, so

unselfish³. Sir James Y. Simpson (1811-1870), the pioneer in the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic, wrote 'I seldom or never conversed with him on such questions without deriving much information from his conversation. It often appeared to me that he was a man destined to advance and elevate veterinary medicine'³. Prof. John Goodsir (Professor of Anatomy, Edinburgh University) said that Barlow's achievements were:

'the result of very remarkable ability, regulated and fostered during the period he had spent as a pupil and teacher in the Edinburgh Veterinary College. ... When the increase of the school rendered necessary a division of labour in teaching, Mr. Barlow was selected to lecture on Anatomy and Physiology, and to superintend the dissecting room. ... he was enabled to conduct a course of instruction which in character and extent was in all respects on a level with the corresponding courses in our Schools of Medicine'³.

Mr. Finlay Dun, who taught *Materia Medica & Diatetics* at Clyde Street (1849-55), wrote:

'I never knew anyone whose influence on those with whom he came in contact was so wholly and powerfully good ... While the teaching of anatomy and physiology was his appointed sphere, he early found that veterinarians must be instructed in morbid anatomy, and shortly instituted systematic lectures on pathology, and practical classes for the use of the microscope'⁵.

Barlow's scientific investigations, in conjunction with fellow Physiologists at the Medical School, were actively discussed in the University Physiological Society. Prof. James McCall (who founded Glasgow Veterinary College in 1862) enrolled at the Edinburgh Veterinary College in Nov 1856 and was taught by Barlow for two months, he, however:

'took copious notes of his lectures ... and I was fortunate enough to obtain access to the notes of a senior student who had been under his tuition for two years. That [Barlow] was well to the front of his profession no one who had the pleasure of his acquaintance would attempt to question'⁵.

Another student, Dr. George Fleming, remembered his 'almost paternal kindness and interest in the students, made him greatly beloved – nay, revered by them. I think he was one of the hardest working men I have ever known'⁵. Thirty-seven years after Barlow's death, William Williams in a New Veterinary

College prize day speech declared that Barlow was, '... the pioneer of Veterinary Science ... a man living one hundred years before his time. The others were rule of thumb practitioners, while he brought the light of science to bear upon the profession'^{10,11}.

Barlow married Eliza Nicholson (1813-1894) of Whitehaven, Cumberland on New Year's Day 1851. She bore him three children; Alfred (1851-1857), Mary Eliza (1853-1899), John Henry (1855 -1924) and they lived at No 1 Pilrig Street, Leith¹².

In his short life he published several papers, mostly in *The Veterinarian*, (see bibliography) and was veterinary correspondent for *The North British Agriculturist*, contributing answers to veterinary questions from readers. By 1854 he had started writing an anatomy of the horse¹³ (meanwhile becoming accomplished in the use of the microscope). The paper which he read to the monthly meeting of the Highland & Agricultural Society in 1855 is thought to have been a chapter from this unpublished work.¹⁴ Sadly for Veterinary Education, this textbook was not completed before his death on the 22nd January 1856. He died as a result of inflammation of the spinal cord (probably meningitis), which caused severe pain during the last month of his life¹⁵.

John Barlow was buried at the Society of Friends graveyard opposite the Meeting House in the Pleasance, Edinburgh (Fig. 3). *The Veterinary Record* observed, 'It was said that Professor Dick, who had never been seen to shed a tear, wept at Mr. Barlow's funeral like a child'⁵.

Barlow dictated his will the day before he died, his friend John Wigham Junior being an executor. He left his wife and family well provided for by an insurance policy (taken out one month before his death) and shares in the Western Bank of Scotland. He also left, intriguingly, 'One-sixteenth share of the Old Ship Emmerdale'¹⁶.

John and Eliza Barlow's elder son Alfred (aged 5 years) tragically died a year after his father's death from mesenteric consumption and was buried with his father¹⁷. In 1864 Eliza Barlow and her two remaining children moved to Carlisle and were living in Rickergate, Cumberland in 1881¹². Eliza died in November 1894, her daughter Mary Eliza, who contributed a biography of her father to *The Veterinary Record*, died five years later. The surviving son, John Henry became a respected Quaker and was secretary to the Bournville Village Trust, Birmingham (established by George Cadbury who was another Friend). John Henry Barlow died with no surviving family in 1924¹⁸.

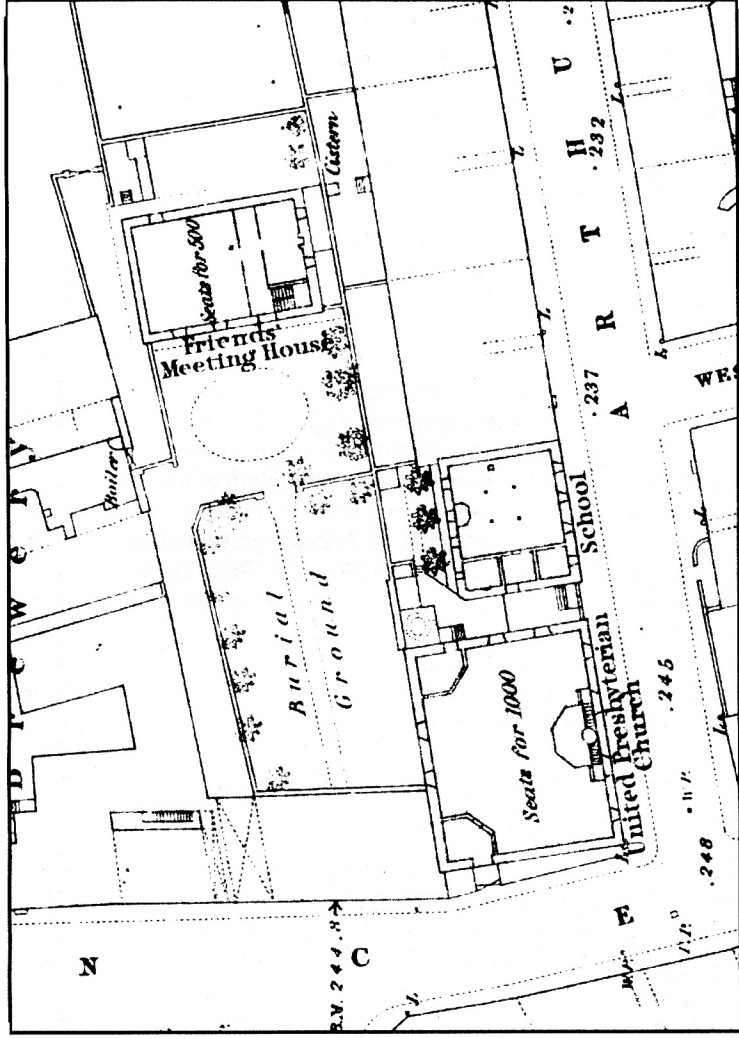


Fig. 2 The 1849-53 O.S. map of part of Pleasance, Edinburgh showing the Friend's Meeting House, which was built in 1791 and seated 500. The House (now a University of Edinburgh store) and the burial ground still exist.



JOHN BARLOW
 DIED
 TWENTY-NINTH OF FIRST MONTH
 1856
 AGED FORTY YEARS
 AND HIS SON ALFRED
 DIED
 THIRTIETH OF SIXTH MONTH
 1857
 AGED FIVE YEARS

(Fig. 3) John and Alfred Barlow's gravestone, Quaker's Burial Ground, Edinburgh. The gravestones have been rearranged against the south wall.

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were presented in a style as popular as was consistent with description of the diseases ... in a plain, concise yet lucid manner ... For several years Mr. Barlow has been engaged in a work upon the Anatomy of the Horse ...']

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his spiritual feelings at the time of his death. He made peace with his God and 'his spirit passed away.']

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RETURN OF THE BEAVER

Beavers which have been extinct from Britain for more than five centuries have now been reintroduced to a wildlife reserve on the edge of the Cotswolds. The six European beavers (*Castor fiber*) had been in quarantine for 6 months prior to their release following their importation from Bulgaria. The project has been paid for by millionaire property developer Jeremy Paxton after Britain failed to respond to European Union demands to restore extinct wildlife species.

The great bustard, the world's heaviest flying bird, was imported from Russia to Salisbury Plain in 2004 and the white-tailed eagle was reintroduced to the Inner Hebrides in 1975. Red kites, once a familiar sight scavenging in Elizabethan London, were returned to Scotland and the Chilterns in 1989. In 1983 the 'large blue' butterfly which disappeared from Britain in 1979 was returned from Sweden.

Paul Lister, the owner of the 24,000-acre Alladale Estate in the Highlands, hopes to reintroduce wolves, lynx and bears in the near future.