

## The History of a Barber family of Bradwell

There is a large family tree associated with the Barbers of Bradwell. This includes a best-selling author, a past chief secretary of the Midland bank, a Baron and an RAF Flight Lieutenant. The subject of this piece is John (Jack) Barber and it is his three sons and their half-sister who reached the positions of eminence.

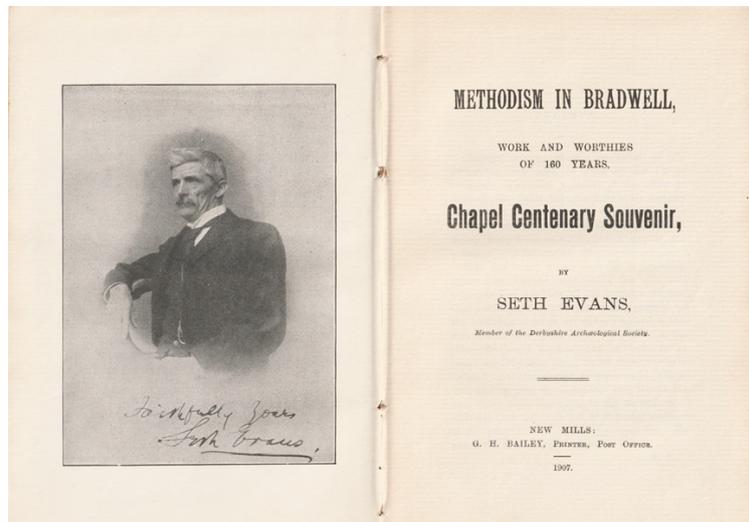


*Jack (left) and Jimmy Barber and John Henry Hall (darker jacket)*

To begin at the beginning John Barber was born in Bradwell on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1885. We can be reasonably sure that he is the Jack Barber who is the subject of this essay for several reasons. There is an old photograph of Jack, his brother Jimmy Barber and John Henry Hall all three of them in their 20s. Our Jack did have a younger brother named James Page Barber (who wrote a poem called 'The Village Blacksmith' about John Hall – not directly related to John Henry). Secondly John Barber had a sister Jessie Leech (for their mother's maiden name) Barber. A newspaper cutting from 1917 recorded that Annie Elizabeth Barber (née Leech) had been taken ill while visiting her son Jack at Hessle in Hull. A later report recorded Annie's death. Jessie Barber was at that time a school teacher and also the secretary of the Bradwell Belgian Refugee Committee. Before Annie's trip to Hull Jessie (who was unmarried) had been caring for her mother. (On a sketch map of the Town Bottom area dated 1915 a house that seems to be in the location of the present Town Bottom Cottage is marked as Mrs Barber's, but the Barber house has also been described as being 'above The White Hart'). Following her mother's death Jessie resigned both her teaching post at Bradwell Board School and her position on the Bradwell Belgian Refugee Committee. The latter resignation deprived the village of the beautiful hand writing to be found in the minutes book of the Committee. A subsequent newspaper report recorded that Jesse's brother Jack Barber of Hessle had helped his sister to enrol as a trainee mid-wife in Edinburgh, where she qualified and was certificated by examination with the Midwives of Scotland in 1926. By that time she was living in the house called Bornholm, Hessle, Hull. Bornholm is a Danish island off the coast of Sweden and as we shall see there is a strong connection between Jack Barber and Denmark. Subsequently Jessie's career took her to Doncaster. Jack is also known to have moved to that city. Jessie Leech Barber died in Doncaster in December 1935.

When we trace the Barber family tree we find that it has been associated with Bradwell all the way back to Benjamin Barber. Benjamin was born in Castleton in 1745, married Sara Cheetham in Hope in 1766 and the couple had moved to Bradwell by 1775. Searches going back to Benjamin Barber reveal that Jack Barber's father John married Annie Elizabeth

Leech in 1868. They had five daughters and two sons Jack and Jimmy. Jack's grandparents were Isaac Barber and Margaret Evans. In turn the great grandparents were Josiah Barber and Ann Middleton with Josiah being born in Bradwell in 1775. The next step back takes us to Benjamin Barber and his wife Sara Cheetham. In his *Methodism in Bradwell*

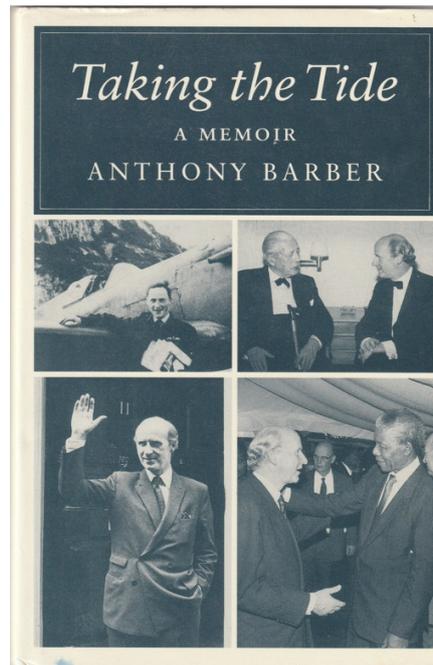


published in 1907 Seth Evans gave the opinion that Benjamin Barber was a 'Methodist Pioneer'. On p 15 of Seth's book he describes Benjamin as 'a principal stay of Methodism in those days of trial but also as the great grandfather of John Barber one of our trustees (in 1907)'. This John must have been the father of Jack Barber. The days of trial included abuse and indeed physical injury at the hands of the villagers of Castleton. Benjamin had gone to Castleton with the preacher William Green of Rotherham to preach 'the word of life' in a 'commodious house'. What happened next is described by Seth in these words:

In little while there came up a number of men shouting, and beating drums, old kettles and pans. They thought to disturb the worshippers with their noise, but could not get into the house, which was filled with anxious hearers. Finding they could not stop the preacher, they began to blow a nasty compound through the keyhole, but the preacher still went on with his discourse. After the service the Methodists were permitted to disperse quietly, and the preacher and his friends retired to the house of Mrs Slack to take some refreshments. There the mob re-assembled, and forced their way violently into the house making tremendous tumult and beating a large drum. Mrs Slack requested them to withdraw, and told them if they did not she would burst the drum open. These roughs however treated her threat very lightly, when the good woman proved her word by boldly making a rush and plunging a large knife in the drum-end, which put an end to their music, and for a moment caused them to withdraw. They were, however, still bent on mischief, and carried out their intentions by getting upon the roof of the house and throwing cow's entrails down the chimney of the parlour where the party were sitting. After waiting a considerable time to allow of their tormentors departing, the preacher and his friends went out, but found the rabble awaiting them not far distant, on the road to Bradwell. They were mercilessly attacked with dirt, stones, sods or anything that could be picked up, and finding their lives in imminent danger, they turned around on their attackers, and the preacher, having faced them, pointed out what would be the consequences of assaulting them on the highway. The cowards then cried out "We've done the preacher pretty well, let's have a go at Benjamin." The poor fellow, although a neighbour (*as mentioned Benjamin was Castleton born*) and a most harmless man, was instantly attacked with stones and other missiles, one of which gave him a severe wound on the back of the head and caused the blood to flow copiously. Seeing this some of the cowardly assailants began to be alarmed, lest he might die and they themselves found guilty of murder, so they desisted, and suffered the

persecuted little band to depart without further molestation than jeers and scorn. Benjamin Barber carried the marks of this ill usage to his grave.

We also learn from Seth Evans that from 1792 until his death in 1805 Benjamin Barber received an income from several bequests, principally from James Whittingham of Manchester. Benjamin and Sara's first born son was also named Benjamin. He became a Captain in the militia and the owner of several lead mines. Thus in the Barber family tree we find just two Benjamins: the Methodist pioneer and the Captain of militia. Both of them dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we shall later see one of Jack Barber's sons was to become Lord Anthony Barber of Wentbridge. In 1996 Anthony Barber published his memoir entitled *Taking the Tide*. In the first chapter 'Family matters' he describes the early life of his father Jack in Bradwell. He tells us that there were six children

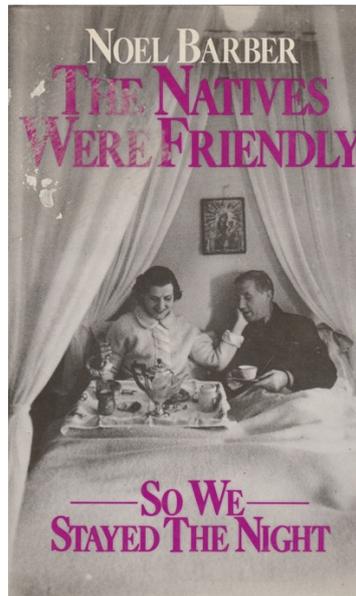


consisting of four girls and two boys whereas there were five girls and there appears to have been no infant death amongst them. Anthony Barber then goes on to say that Jack was brought up very strictly by his father Benjamin who was a Wesleyan lay preacher. But as we have seen and is confirmed by Seth Evans Jack's father was John Barber. This seems to have been a case of mis-remembering what he had been told when he was younger.

We can now trace Jack Barber's career forward from 1908. By then Jack was working for Lever Brothers who had sent him to Denmark where he met the 16 years old Ellen Katty J Lysberg from Copenhagen. By the end of the following year the couple were in Wales where Jack married his Danish lady; the marriage was solemnised in Hawarden in Flintshire. The move to Deeside is not unexpected because the village of Port Sunlight built for Lever Brother's workers is close to the River Dee. The couple clearly lived on Deeside for at least a year because their first son John Lysberg Barber was born in late 1910 the same year Jack's father John died. (John Lysberg later became the best-selling author Noel Barber, but it is not clear when the 'Noel' was added to his name.) By early in 1911 the new family had moved to Hull and the census for that year shows John (Jack) Barber working as the managing clerk of a blacklead factory. His wife is named as Ellen Katty Jorgenson Barber and their son as John Lysberg Barber. The use of either Lysberg or Jorgenson for Ellen Katty's surname is

probably due to fact that Danish names were still patro/matronymic in those days. Kenneth Lysberg Barber the second of the Barber sons arrived in the second quarter of 1912 also in Hull.

It seems to have become the practice of the family to spend their summer holidays with Ellen's relatives on Bornholm Island and so they were in Denmark when war was declared in 1914. In early September of that year the Barber family boarded the *SS Ficaria* in Copenhagen and departed for Leith in Scotland. Noel Barber wrote an account of the event in



his autobiography '*The Natives were friendly ... so we stayed the night*'

... the day I was taken a prisoner-of-war by the Germans just before my fifth birthday in August 1914 (*in fact his birthday appears to have been on the ninth of September*). We were in Denmark when the war broke out, and fired with patriotism, Jack got us on a boat for home, luckily a Danish vessel the *Ficaria*. A German destroyer chased us and boarded us, and we were taken to Heliogoland but war those days was more 'legal', and after three months of internment the Germans allowed the *Ficaria* to continue its journey because it was Danish and neutral.

A newspaper report of the events as described by Jack Barber adds some details of the internment

Mr Barber (*Jack*) gives a graphic description of the German battleships anchored there (*off Heligoland*). He says there were numerous waterplanes, two of which we saw rise into the air. In addition there were numerous German battleships steaming in every direction and we were literally in the thick of it. After hours of waiting our captain was told to proceed to Cuxhaven (*on Germany's North Sea coast*). Here again a German naval officer came on board to take command, escorted by about a dozen marines. We were escorted below but were allowed to stay in the saloon and smoking room, with curtains drawn. Marines ... had instructions to shoot anybody who attempted to look out and when any motion of the vessel moved one of the curtains aside it was instantly adjusted. (*Their journey then took them to Hamburg and Mr Barber related*) ... while in Hamburg we had opportunities of conversation with the marines (*in what language?*) who treated us in a perfectly courteous manner. They were all, however, cocksure of the victory of the German and Austrian armies.



*Jack (dark suit, wing collar) and Musse (centre of 3 ladies)  
as German Internees.*

After his return from Germany Jack seems to have joined the Royal Flying Corps to become the first of what Noel Barber describes as the 'flying Barbers'. After the war, in 1920, Ellen Katty (Musse as the boys called her) gave birth to their third son and gave him the splendid name of Anthony (Tony) Perrinott Lysberg Barber. The second name came from his French grandmother and the third from Musse herself. In the 1920s the family moved to 25 Avenue Road, Doncaster with Jack taking up the post of managing director for a sweet manufacturing company. This may have been the Doncaster firm that made Radiance toffee; certainly Noel had a short term job with this company. In time all three brothers joined the forces Tony initially the army and Noel and Ken the RAF.

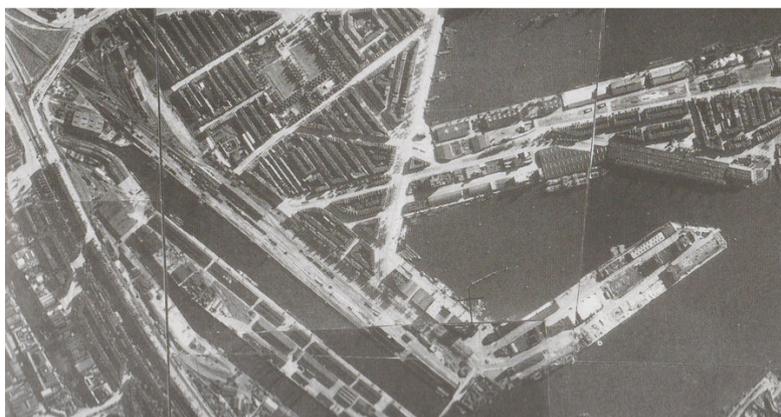
Of the three brothers Tony's exploits in WWII were the most remarkable. In 1939, as an eighteen year old, he found himself commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in his local Territorial Regiment of the Royal Artillery in command of a troop of 50 men. He had by then received no training but soon found himself in France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. He was billeted with the butcher in the town of Seclin where he supervised the establishment of four gun sites for Bofors anti-aircraft guns. In May when the Germans invaded Belgium Tony's regiment moved to meet them but it wasn't long before his battery was in full retreat to the coast. They came to La Panne in Belgium just along the coast from Dunkirk and their task was to provide what anti-aircraft protection they could to the troops being lifted from the beaches. A report published in a Doncaster newspaper several years later described Tony's role in the final stages of the evacuation

I was with him (*Mr Barber*) on the night of May 31<sup>st</sup> and the morning of June 1 1940. During those last hours on the beaches he was ordering guns and lorries to be immobilised in accordance with GHQ orders

When this had been done two trucks which had been left intact were used to pick up the wounded on the beaches, and Mr Barber was seeing to this himself. Eventually we found a rowing boat which was loaded up with wounded and a few fit men who were to row out to HMS *Salamander*, where the wounded were taken on board and made as comfortable as possible.

I remember making inquiries about Mr Barber while on the *Salamander* and was told that a soldier had taken the rowing boat back to fetch some men left on the beaches, among them Major Matthews, our battery major.

Back in England when his troop was deployed to protect Gatwick Airport in the Battle of Britain Tony saw that flying an aeroplane was the best contribution he could make to the war. There was no question of relinquishing his Army commission and joining the RAF however. At the same time some Army officers had been seconded to the Air Force for certain specific duties. The flying of photo-reconnaissance missions was one of these. After accelerated training Tony joined the Photo-reconnaissance Unit (PRU) at RAF Benson, Oxfordshire. The



*Reconnaissance photograph of the type taken by Tony Barber*



*Tony Barber beside his Spitfire in Gibraltar, the next day he was forced to bail out*

Spitfire he was to fly was unarmed and had no radio – the weight saved was for extra fuel. His orders were that under no circumstances could his aircraft and especially the films it carried be captured by the enemy. During what turned out to be his last mission he was returning home from Gibraltar, but without radio navigation and in the face of a strong headwind he was not going to make land-fall in England nor could he use a radio to say he'd ditched. With fuel running out he abandoned his aircraft to its fate in the Channel and parachuted to land in France close to Mont-St-Michel (at one point he feared being impaled on one of the spires). On landing he was taken prisoner by an SS unit. The unit had not seen the Spitfire and could not understand the arrival by parachute of a man in a khaki army uniform but wearing RAF wings. These questions formed an important focus during his subsequent interrogation near Frankfurt. He was then to move gradually east through prisoner-of-war camps.



*Mont-Ste Michel*

In Oflag IX-A Spangenberg Castle, Hesse in Germany he met Ollie Philpott who later escaped using the 'Wooden Horse'. Following his escape via Sweden Ollie made his way to Yorkshire to re-assure the Barber family that Tony was safe and well. After being moved to Oflag XXI-B near Szubin, Poland Tony achieved his own escape. His plan was to reach Denmark and then Sweden. In fact he reached the Danish border disguised as a Danish worker for the Germans. (He spoke Danish although it seems to have been of the playground variety with an emphasis on rude words.) The forgers in Szubin had achieved wonders in preparing the documents he needed, all except the letter he should have had from his supposed employers. This lack was his undoing and so he found himself in the north compound of the notorious Stalag Luft III at Żagań, Poland featured in the film '*The Great Escape*'. It was from the south compound that 76 prisoners had escaped and 50 of them had been shot 'resisting arrest'. This convinced Tony that the escaping game was 'not worth the candle'. Instead he asked for and received law books and eventually under auspices of the International Red Cross he sat his final degree law exams under the watchful eye of a Wing Commander who acted as his invigilator. On getting back home he learned that his papers had been assessed and he had been awarded a first class degree in law. This launched him on a career in the law.

Tony's wartime career was much livelier than that of his two elder brothers Noel and Ken. Noel's account of his time in the RAF is the more flamboyant of the two. Having lived as a civilian through the blitz, he spent nine months in the ranks of the RAF before he was commissioned as a navigator. But this was despite coming close to not being accepted in the service. Noel later wrote:

Despite the shortage of air crew, the medical was tough, and the doctors looked askance at my age. Finally I was asked to produce a specimen of my urine. I couldn't. Lined up with a dozen other naked men, I pushed and coughed to no avail. I heard a rasping voice behind me, not meant for my ears, "He's not only ancient, he can't even pee". Then a corporal slithered up and whispered, 'Slip me a tenner mate, and I'll put half of the last bloke's piss in your bottle'.



*A/C 2 Noel, another of the flying Barbers*

Having completed his training as a navigator he was immediately despatched on board the troop ship *Queen Mary* on a 'Secret Mission' to America about which in 1977 he was still unable to speak. He didn't return to the UK until early 1945 when he managed to get himself assigned to the Ministry of Information and a post as the editor of the *Continental Daily Mail* in Paris. Thus ended his war. The role played by Ken Barber in the RAF has not been possible to piece together although in Noel's autobiography he provides a photograph of his brother with the comment that he was in RAF intelligence. After the war Ken was able to combine his banking with writing and contributed several short stories to the London *Evening News*.



*Ken Barber*

After the war the Barber family holidays at Dam's Hotel in Ronne on Bornholm Island resumed and this led to a truly traumatic event for the four men of the family, but especially for Tony. He left for England by sea but persuaded Musse to abandon her plans to leave Copenhagen and use the same sea route as him to return home but instead to fly to Paris and visit Noel. Musse had a great fear of flying but was persuaded to follow Tony's suggestion. Jack and Tony both learned about the crash of the Dakota aircraft on which Musse was flying from a newspaper report. Air France had released the names of the dead before the next-of-kin had been informed. The Dakota had crashed as it made a second attempt to leave Kastrup airport in Copenhagen.

At the time of the crash Jack was just 62 but something almost as bad was to follow about six years later. It happened in 1951 the year that Tony entered the Houses of Parliament as

Conservative MP for Doncaster. But it was as a lawyer not an MP that Jack consulted his son that year. Tony later explained the consequences of the legal advice he gave his father:

*(my father)* was managing director of a medium-sized private limited company. He had no stake in the company which was owned by the chairman. The Investigation Branch of the Inland Revenue suspected the chairman of having charged the company a substantial item of purely personal expenditure. I told my father there was only one sensible course and that was to tell the revenue all he knew. He did just that, with consequences which are hard to believe these days (1996). He had no contract of employment, having naively assumed that as he was largely responsible for making the chairman a wealthy man, he would be properly looked after on retirement. It was not to be.

The chairman who had to pay substantial penalties to the Inland Revenue was furious with my father for disclosing the truth and sacked him without a penny – no *ex gratia* payment and no pension. Furthermore, he was living in a company house and, with indecent haste, he was served with a notice to quit. He had no redress but, typically he accepted the position philosophically.

Soon afterward Jack married his ex-secretary Kathleen who later qualified as a school teacher. Kathleen and Jack had a daughter Jane, who followed her half brothers in entering the RAF. By 1977 she had risen to the rank of Flight Lieutenant. Lowly former A/C 2 Noel Barber claims never to have been afraid of her as he had been of other RAF officers he'd met (but he was 40 years older than Jane).



*Flight Lieutenant Jane Barber*

Tony Barber visited Bradwell in 1957 to join in the celebrations for the 150 anniversary of the opening of the Wesleyan Chapel. Tony's father Jack passed away two years later at the age of 74.