

Fishergate, Fulford & Heslington
Local History Society

FISHERGATE SCHOOL



Photograph taken on 9th August 1895, eight days after the school opened, with the Headmaster, George Barker on the right and possibly Edward Hope Hawthorne on the left. *Photo courtesy York Explore*

GREAT WAR MEMORIAL

REMEMBERING THE 86
FORMER PUPILS

THE HEADMASTER, 1895-1923

George Thomas Barker

George Thomas Barker was Headmaster of Fishergate School from its foundation in 1895 to his retirement in 1923. Born in York in 1860, he was the oldest son of Robert Barker, from the Bolton Percy area, and his wife Amelia, born in York. Robert and Amelia had eleven children.

Between the censuses of 1871 and 1881 the family lived in Elmwood Street, now the site of St George's Roman Catholic Primary School, living first at number 56 and later at 61. Despite the large size of the family confined within a small terrace house, there was also a three-month 'nurse' child, Edwin Osgodby, and a boarder, William Wardage. The census described George Barker's father as a coachman.

From 1865, George went to St George's Wesleyan Day School. This was a large Methodist school in Walmgate, where local children received a basic education. He was obviously a very bright pupil, as he went on to matriculate at London University. He was only 22 when he became Headteacher at his childhood school in 1882, the start of a life spent in education.

In 1893 the St George's Wesleyan Day School was transferred to the management of York City Education Board and renamed George Street Temporary Board School. They appointed George Barker the head and from there, he was clearly the obvious choice to become headmaster of Fishergate School when it opened in 1895.

There is a centenary booklet about St George's Wesleyan Day School (1826-1926) which can be read at the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York. This says that George,

'remained at the school in various capacities until 1895, when transferred to Fishergate under his sole direction. Many who have played a conspicuous part in York's commerce and civic life passed through the School and gladly acknowledge their indebtedness to the School and to Mr G T Barker.'



George Barker was 35 in 1905 when pictured here in one of a number of photographs of this date (*courtesy of York Explore*). These boys would become the generation who faced the trauma of the Great War and maybe some of them are the former pupils we have written about in this booklet.

Mr Barker appears in all the photographs taken at this time and looks like a man with kindness and moral authority, and it is not surprising that he recorded notes and newspaper cuttings on the lives of his pupils in the school log book.



George Barker married Annie Louise Chapman in York in 1884. They lived at 13 Melbourne Street for some years during the 1880s, before moving to Westbourne Villa, Barbican Road (pictured left, now the Barbican Hotel) around 1893.

The 1901 census records three children; Elsie 16, Sydney 14 and John 8. His wife's sister, Emily Chapman, also lived with the family.

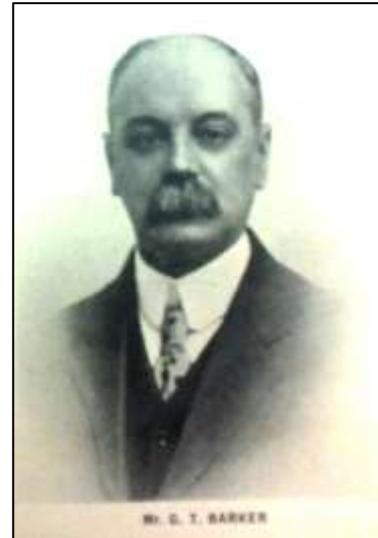
George's brother in law, F.C. Chapman, his successor as Headmaster, lived next door in the first house in Wellington Street, both houses are pictured above. George and Annie later moved to Holme Green, 47 Hull Road, which they continued to share with Annie's sister.



Annie Louise died in June 1920, which he recorded in a typically succinct log book entry on 2nd July

"owing to the death of my wife I have been away from school since 24th."

George Barker retired in 1923 and died aged 69 only 5 years later. He was in poor health and had recently returned from a visit to his



younger son at Seaham.

Their children all attended Fishergate School. Sidney was a very high achiever and we have included an extra section on him on a following page. Their younger son, John, worked in a bank at Seaham Harbour, county Durham. Their daughter, Elsie, had been a pupil-teacher at Fishergate and married the headmaster of Knavesmire Higher Grade School.

Underpinning his role in education was George's Methodism. A lifelong Wesleyan, he was Superintendent at the St George's Wesleyan Sunday School from 1883-89 and 1891-1893.

The above photographs of George and Annie are taken from the School's Centenary (1826-1926) booklet (*courtesy of the Borthwick Institute*).

George was also an active member of the Melbourne Street Methodist Church which was just around the corner from Fishergate School and opposite the entrance to York Cemetery.

(pictured right; private collection).



His commitment to improving the lives of ordinary working people like him is also shown by his involvement in the National Union of Teachers, where he was president of the York and District branch three times. He was also a Governor of York County Hospital.

George Barker recorded the academic achievements of his pupils on a large plaque in the hall, headed by the motto *Finis Coronat Opus*, which translates as: *The End Crowns the Work*.

The names include his daughter Elsie, who won a scholarship and then a 1st class teaching certificate, and his son Sidney, who has five entries. Fred Chapman's teaching certificate (he was George's successor) is also listed in 1895. The plaque is still there and inspiring pupils today.



The York Herald reported that school closed for the afternoon when George Barker retired on 27th March 1923. Pupils, teaching staff, councillors and local education officials gathered in the hall to pay tribute to his 51 years' service to education and present him with gifts, including an easy chair. Later in the afternoon, the head of the Infants' Department, Miss McIntosh presented him with a gate-legged table on behalf of the staff and said that

“after such a long association they naturally felt pangs of regret at the severance but hoped that the pleasure he might derive from his well-earned rest might more than compensate him for having to give up a work which he had been eminently suited to carry out.”

The York Herald recorded that

‘many of his old scholars held degrees and five headmasters of local schools had at one time or another been under his guidance and several old pupils held important positions in the civic and official life of the city. He had been a member of the National Union of Teachers for 41 years and four times held the office of President. He was a member of the city’s Advisory Panel [which devised the strategy for implementation of the 1885 Education Act which led to the building of the new schools across the city] and was the first teacher to sit on the City Education Committee.’

‘Two senior school pupils made “admirable speeches” referring to the “high esteem in which Mr Barker was held by the school children.” Master Palethorpe of the Junior Department introduced by Miss Norah Ross, presented a beautiful bouquet to Mr Barker saying “I have great pleasure in asking you to accept this bunch of flowers as a token of our esteem. We hope your future will be as bright as these pretty flowers.” (Applause).’

The Herald report also quoted Mr Barker returning the thanks, saying that

“41 years had been a long time and many changes had been brought about, but he was no believer in the good old days; the good old days were now, and children of York had never had the privileges as they had today.” He “looked forward with great hope to the future, as he believed it was golden and all that was brightest, best and noblest still remained in the days to come.”

Mr Barker continued with his hopes for the future and that he wanted:

He wanted scholars to “go forward and always do their best, always seeking the highest and the best. Nelson’s famous words; ‘England expects every man to do his duty’ had been his watchword. A poem of Wordsworth ‘Ode to Duty’ spoke of love as an unerring light, actuating and guiding the actions of everybody. Duty and love had been his watchwords and he felt he had done his duty.” (applause!) “The memory of Fishergate would remain with him a sacred one as long as memory lasted.”



Headmaster, George Barker with the school football team in 1919.

The teacher on the right is probably F C Chapman, who took over from Mr Barker in 1923.

(Picture from Fishergate School Log Book)

Fishergate School, George Barker and the campaign for women’s suffrage

A further insight to the life of the school during George Barker’s headship, is that a number of staff and pupils were actively involved in the campaign for women to be able to vote in parliamentary elections. Most prominent was Mrs Annie Coultate, who initiated the formation of the York branch of the Women’s Social and Political Union in 1910, becoming its secretary and very actively campaigning until the outbreak of the Great War.

Annie Coultate was a colleague of George Barker at St George’s Wesleyan Day School, where she was Headmistress of the Girls’ Department, and moved with him to Fishergate in 1895. The log book records her playing an important role in teaching across the curriculum, with particular responsibility for the girls.

At her retirement in December 1920, the York Herald reports that she was Head Assistant Mistress. Pupils and staff assembled in the hall to wish her a long and peaceful retirement and presented her with an easy chair and a timepiece.

Mr Barker paid warm tribute to her for the

“long and valuable service which had been rendered in the service of education in the city by Mrs Coultate, and also to the prominent part she had taken in years gone by in the cause of women’s suffrage and the general improvement of the conditions under which women work and live.”

THE HEADMASTER'S ELDEST SON: Sidney Barker

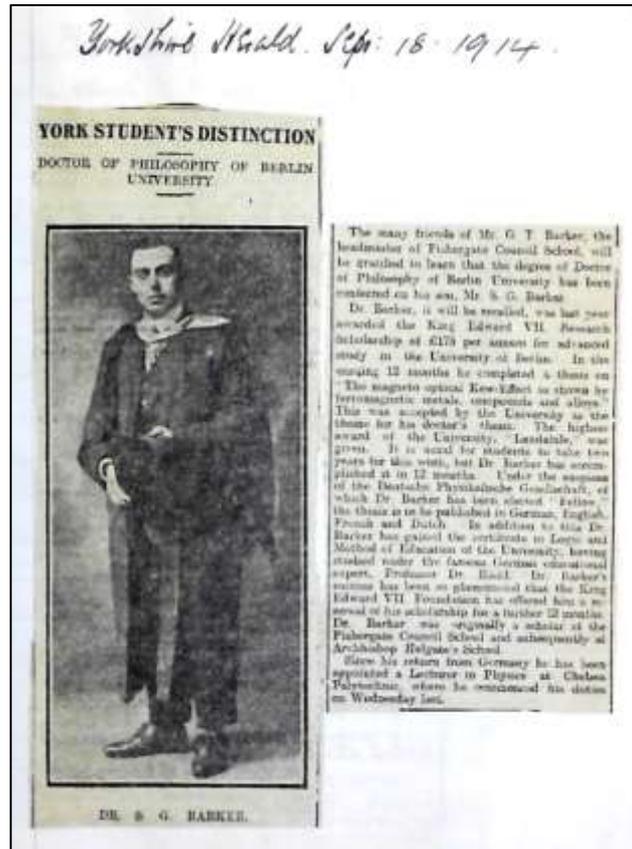
George was very proud of the achievements of his oldest son, who had begun his education at Fishergate School.

A cutting pasted into the school's log book from The Yorkshire Herald on 18th September 1914 tells of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Laudable – highest award level) conferred on his son, Sidney G Barker by Berlin University.

Sidney had been a pupil at Fishergate, before moving to Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School. Later, he taught science there for a short while before studying at the Royal College of Science in London.

Sidney was awarded a King Edward VII Research Scholarship to study at Berlin University. His thesis, which he completed in one year rather than the usual two, was on

'the magneto-optical Kerr-Effect as shown by ferromagnetic metals, compounds and alloys'



a subject with very practical applications and underpinning much of our modern technology, including smart phones. It was due to be published in English, German, French and Dutch, although it is not known how the outbreak of war affected this plan.

Although offered a renewal of the scholarship for a further year, Sidney began a lectureship in September 1914, teaching physics at Chelsea Polytechnic (now part of King's College).

He was not there long, because in December 1914 he was appointed Vice-Principal of the University College of Trivandrum in southern India. On 5th February, Mr Barker recorded in the log book that he went to London *'to see my son off to India'*. He did not mention he was also going to be a witness to his son's wedding to Irene Leonora Knight, in London

Sidney and Irene Barker returned from India in 1921. They settled in Leeds with their family, where Sidney became Director of Research at the British Research Association for the Woollen and Worsted Industries. Sidney may have helped write an article about this association which was published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, volume 69, no. 3575 for 27th May 1921.

Maybe after his pre-war studies in Berlin, he decided to keep away from Europe and avoid the slaughter, and afterwards return to the academic study of a very Yorkshire Industry, sheep, wool and textiles.