

**SAXON BARTON 1892-1957: A MEDICAL POLYMATH****Peter Stride\***

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Article Received on 02/07/2024

Article Revised on 23/07/2024

Article Accepted on 12/08/2024

**ABSTRACT**

Most doctors at the end of their careers are highly contented to have been considered 'a good doctor'. A few are blessed with other skills such as the authors Anton Chekhov and Arthur Conan Doyle. Saxon Barton achieved acclaim as an obstetrician, infectious diseases expert, painter, poet and medical researcher, a veritable polymath.

**KEYWORDS:** OBSTETRICS, ROYAL NAVY, RICHARD III, WHITE BOAR, POETRY, PAINTING.

Barton's historical research specialised in King Richard III, the last Yorkist King of England, himself of medical interest. Psychiatrists may wonder if his personality was as evil as the historical revisions of Shakespeare and Thomas Moore. Orthopaedic surgeons would have liked to offer corrective scoliosis surgery when Richard was a youth. Respiratory physicians may have considered his prognosis with an eighty-five percent scoliosis to be limited to another ten years had he not been betrayed at the Battle of Bosworth and cut down from behind when aged only thirty-two.<sup>[1]</sup>

A brief synopsis in the Ricardian Bulletin by Pat Oxley about Saxon Barton and places in Liverpool associated with him piqued the interest of the author, a fellow UK medical graduate and son of a Surgeon Captain RN. There must be more to discover.<sup>[2, 3]</sup>

**Youth and Education**

Saxon Barton was born at 19, Southwood Rd, Liverpool, an only child, on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1892, the son of Jessie Latimer and Samuel Saxon Barton senior, a superintendent on the railways. At the age of eight he is recorded in the census as living with his parents in Toxteth Park, Liverpool.<sup>[3]</sup> His primary education was at Greenbank Primary School in Liverpool.

**Loretto School**

Barton's secondary education was at the distinguished independent Scottish school, Loretto, set on eighty five acres in Musselburgh, East Lothian. The School was listed as the fourth-highest Scottish independent school in the 2018 A level league tables.

Amongst many distinguished alumni are Jamie Parker who was named best actor at the Olivier Awards in April 2017 for his performance as Harry Potter and Jacob Slater who appeared in the Outlaw King.<sup>[4]</sup> At the age of eighteen in 1911 Barton is recorded in the census as being at school and resident at 'The Beach, St Michaels, Liverpool'.<sup>[5]</sup>

He proceeded to the Medical Schools of the University of Liverpool and Edinburgh graduating in 1917 with the non-academic triple degree of the Scottish Royal Colleges, LRCP (Edinburgh), LRCS (Edinburgh), LRCPSG and in 1920 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

### Qualifications, Fellowships and other accolades

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow is an institute of physicians and surgeons in Glasgow, Scotland. The College was founded in 1599 with a Royal Charter from James VI.<sup>[6]</sup> The College, in combination with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh provided a primary medical qualification as held by Dr Saxon Barton, which entitled the bearer to practice medicine, and was registerable with the General Medical Council as a primary medical qualification, the Triple Qualification diploma, LRCP (Edinburgh), LRCS (Edinburgh), LRCPSG.



**The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow 232–242 St. Vincent St.**

Non-university qualifying examinations were abolished in 1999, leaving only the traditional university based bachelor's degrees in medicine and surgery, MB, BS, the equivalent of the American MD.

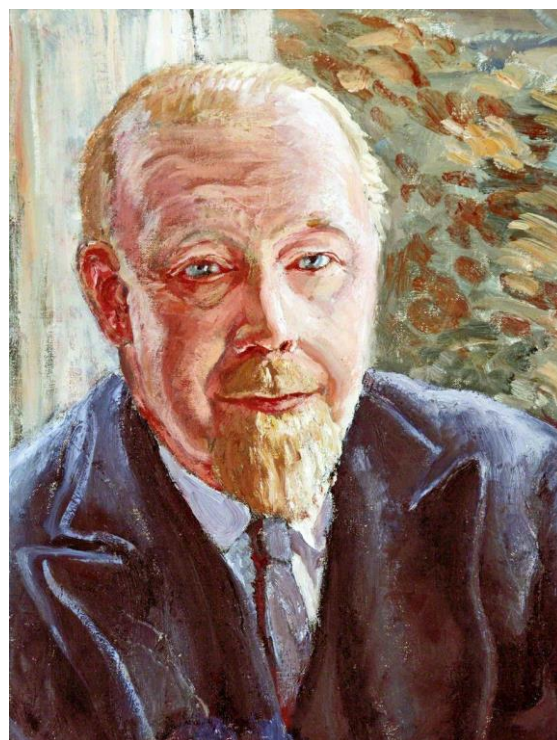
Barton was elected a Member of the British Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (O and G) on 5 April 1933, the College having only been founded in 1929. Fellowship of this and the other medical colleges of UK is the higher qualification, a mark of senior status. They are elected from those who have been distinguished members for at least 12 years. Prior to 1929, obstetricians had been Fellows of the Surgical College.

Barton complained that his FRFSPG was not recognised as having the same status as all the other Medical Royal College Fellowships in UK. Liverpool teaching hospitals accepted applicants with any fellowship except that of Glasgow. Anecdotally it was said to be the last resort for medical students who had failed in London or Edinburgh. It appeared not even to be esteemed in Glasgow and was usually omitted from published works.<sup>[6]</sup>

However, any postgraduate qualification obtained two or three years after graduation, such as the MRCP (UK) is only an essential tick a short way along the path to completed training as a specialist, a process taking some eight or ten years.

Barton appears with his portrait by Mavis Blackburn in the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, Birkenhead, with FRSA after his name, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. This appears to be an error, Barton is not a fellow of that society, his name does not appear in the Society list of Fellows, a fact confirmed by their archivist.

However, Barton is documented to have been a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland (FSA). He was also elected an honorary member of the Royal Cambrian Academy, an accolade reserved for distinguished artists.



**Saxon Barton** Mavis Blackburn, Williamson Art Gallery Museum, Birkenhead.

### Medical Career

The time line of Barton's pre-registration year has conflicting dates. According to his file with the Royal College of Obstetricians he commenced his House Surgeon's position in 1916, perhaps before the official notification of his graduation in 1917. Following graduation, Barton worked as House Surgeon in the Liverpool Hospital for women and as House Physician in the David Lewis Northern Hospital.

The standard British requirements for full registration are six months in each position, presumably Barton therefore joined the RN on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917 before completion of these positions which may have been then abbreviated

because of the war as he joined HMS Dwarf before the end of November 1917.

Following the war Barton returned to Liverpool becoming Honorary Clinical Assistant at the Hospital for Women. He served as specialist in tropical diseases following his experiences in Africa during WW1 on the Medical Board for the Ministry of Pensions and had a private practice in Liverpool, at Roscoe House, 27, Rodney St. He also had private rooms in Warrington. Barton was known as a skilled compassionate obstetrician.



**Roscoe House Liverpool**

Subsequently he was elevated to the position of honorary assistant surgeon in the Hospital for Women and at the nearby newly constructed Samaritan Hospital from 1923 to 1924. He never had a position at the Royal Liverpool Infirmary, subsequently the Royal Liverpool Hospital due to the lack of an appropriate fellowship.

He joined a private O and G practice in Llandudno building a large practice in North Wales. In 1941 he was appointed consultant O and G surgeon to the Liverpool and Welsh Regional Hospital Boards.

Next he relinquished those positions to become Honorary Obstetrics and Gynaecology surgeon at the Liverpool Hahnemann Hospital and Dispensaries, a position he held until his death. The Hospital, originally specialising in homeopathic remedies, joined the National Health Service in 1948. It was renamed as the Hahnemann Hospital in 1969 and eventually closed in 1976.



**Hahnemann Hospital**

Barton married Dorothy A Williams in 1925. They lived together at 61, Parkfield Rd, then 23, Alexandra Drive. She was also a doctor, becoming a consultant ophthalmic surgeon and surviving him by many years.<sup>3</sup>

Saxon Barton died in 1957 of injuries received in a car accident thirteen days previously and is buried in Halewood near Liverpool.<sup>[7]</sup>



Saxon Barton operating on a patient, with a nurse and an assistant, probably in The War Memorial Hospital, Blaenau, Ffestiniog c 1930-1940 By George Herbert Buckingham Holland.

#### **Publication**

Barton published an article in the Lancet describing the injection of colloidal copper into the thigh in four patients with advanced inoperable cancer of the cervix. All experienced a reduction in vaginal discharge and pain with micturition. Two experienced a reduction in abdominal pain and an improvement in appetite. All were deceased within nine months. At best it was a palliative measure.<sup>[8]</sup>

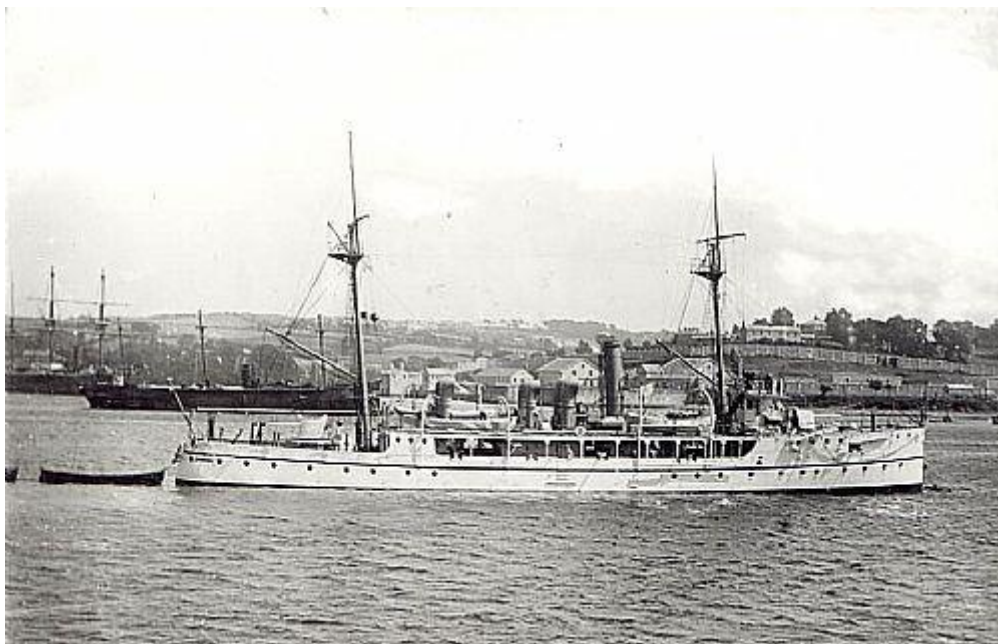
#### **Military and War Service**

In 1908 at the age of eighteen he enrolled at Toxteth Park, Lancashire, England in the territorial force, possibly in a Scottish Battalion.<sup>[4]</sup>

Barton joined the Royal Navy on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1917, shortly after graduation, for the remaining duration of WW1.<sup>[4]</sup> He served in HMS *Dwarf* of the coast of the Cameroons and West Africa. The ship's log notes that he joined the ship at 9.25 pm 12<sup>th</sup> November 1917 when docked in Gibraltar. His name does not appear again in the log.

H.M.S. *Dwarf*, then under the command of Lieut Commander Cosmo Alec Onslow Douglas was one of

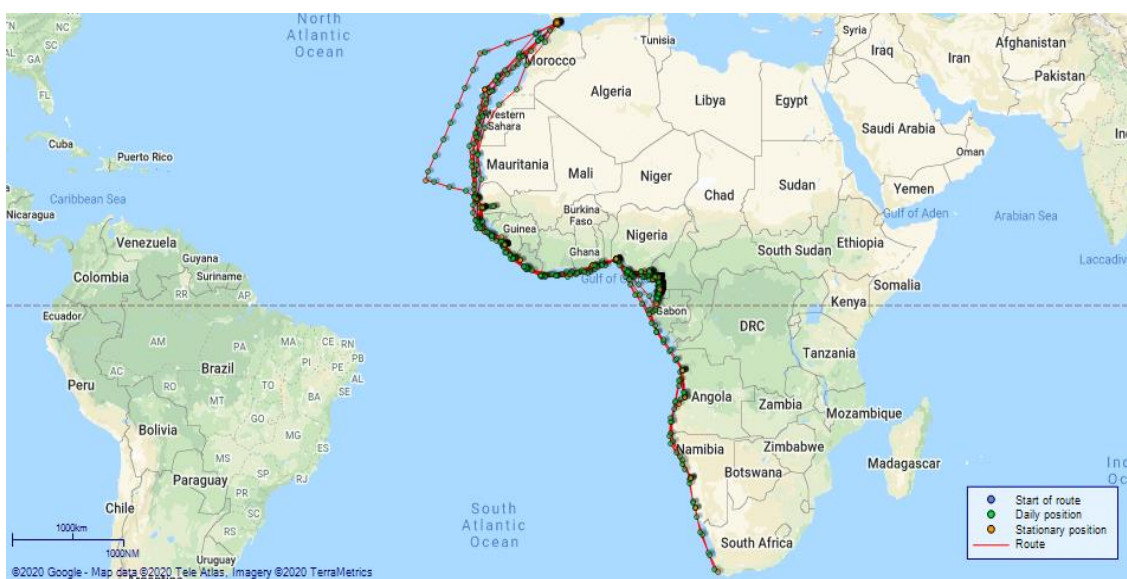
four gunboats of the Bramble class completed for the Royal Navy about the turn of the century. Dimensions were displacement 710 tons, length 180ft, beam 33ft, draught 8ft. Her engines generated 1300ihp giving a maximum speed of 13.5kts. Armament was two four inch guns and four twelve pound guns.



### HMS Dwarf

She served during the Boer War. In 1913, she was stationed on the West Coast of Africa *Dwarf*, recommissioned at Gibraltar on 1 July, 1914, and again on

10 October, 1924. The *Dwarf*'s only recorded naval action was sinking notably the German armed steamer *Nachtigal* in a gunnery duel in 1914. She was paid off into Dockyard Control on 3 December, 1925.



### The voyages of HMS Dwarf 1914-1923

Barton was awarded an OBE for his war services on 22/8/1919. His citation reads.

'This officer entered the RN on the 1st May, 1917 and served at the R.N. Hospital, Haslar and H.M.S. 'Dwarf'. He is a very zealous and efficient medical officer, untiring in his efforts towards the sick. During an

influenza epidemic at Sanza Taranga (spelling?) he worked day and night to keep down the number of cases and in the face of many obstacles and lack of medical comforts, there were no deaths. The S.N.O. (Senior Naval Officer) reported that the services of this officer were most meritorious.<sup>14</sup>

Knowledge of parasitic and bacterial diseases was extensive thanks to Patrick Manson, the well-travelled brilliant Scottish clinician and pathologist, author of the then popular 'Tropical Diseases'. Haslar Hospital is well known to the author.



**Haslar Hospital**

### **Richard III society**

The story of the origins of the Richard III Society will be well known to most Ricardians. The House of York may have lost George of Clarence in a butt of Malmsey, but it gained the Richard III Society with convivial after dinner drinks one balmy English summer evening on the veranda of 'The Gate House,' home of the Bacon family, in the village of Northwood in Hertfordshire.

A conversation between the seventeen year old Patrick Bacon and two guests, Samuel Saxon Barton and Dr Philip Nelson, who were both enthusiastic amateur antiquarians revealed a shared particular interest in late medieval history.

The guests believed that the last Plantagenet had been harshly and unfairly dealt with by history. In the heat of the discussion, Saxon Barton uttered the genesis words 'Let's form a society' to promote a re-revisionist cause and encourage research into the life and times of King Richard. Surely the Tudors were the original revisionists? They called themselves 'The Fellowship of the White Boar.' It was decided that Barton would be secretary, Nelson the treasurer, and the young Patrick Bacon the first member., and so it began.

As founder and president in 1934 he erected a stained glass window in Middleham Church, Yorkshire to commemorate Richard III. He had hoped to erect a monument to the king at Bosworth Field of the White Boar Society. Barton was also a former president and secretary of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

Patrick Bacon in later years recalled that Barton was Rabelaisian in the extreme! Perhaps he fooled some people into thinking that he was an arrogant

exhibitionist, however, his scholarship was deep and true and he embellished it with a Shavian gusto and passion. Barton wrote 'In my view historical belief must be based on facts where possible and on honest conviction.' He was a fighter who loved to be involved.

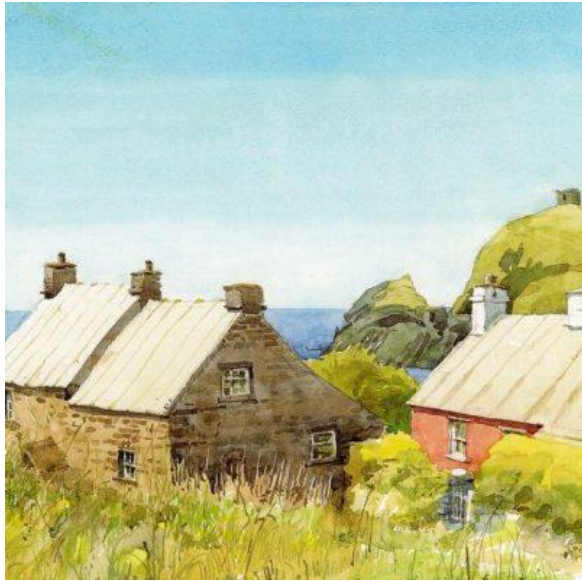
His widow, Dorothy Barton, survived him by many decades, dying shortly before her 100th birthday in 1996. In 1989 she attended the Society's Bosworth commemorations and wrote shortly afterwards, '*How delighted Saxon would be to know that the torch he lit so long ago is not only still burning brightly but is so much strengthened. Long may it continue.*'<sup>10</sup>

### **Art and History**

Barton was a man of many and varied interests. He was a gifted artist, having been trained by the celebrated Liverpool artist, James A Watts. His paintings were exhibited annually at the Cambrian Academy and the Liver Sketching Club.

He founded an annual prize at the Royal Cambrian Academy of Arts to encourage young artists to exhibit their work. In 1951 when the prize was won by Mr Ausitn Davies, there were about a hundred entries.<sup>11</sup>

He was a member and secretary of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.<sup>11</sup>



**Welsh country cottages – Saxon Barton**

He was a member and secretary of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.<sup>[12]</sup>

Barton published three books of poetry, 'Songs by the wayside,' 'Songs before sunset' and 'Songs by the fireside.' Copies of all three are held in The Poetry Collection of the University at Buffalo, New York.<sup>[13]</sup>

From 'Songs before Sunset,' verses of wartime, written on the eve of WWII

### THE LOST CHILDREN

September 1939

*From now onward, dark and silent,  
Shall the haunted house remain  
Children's voices, shrill, and strident,  
Will not echo there again.*

*At this hour has time relentless  
Stolen all the sunshine there;  
Stolen all the playful quenchless  
Antics on the empty stair.*

*Time ticks on and youth is passing,  
Never can those days return  
When the sound of children laughing  
Is but more the chance sojourn.*

*Dark the nursery windows  
Stare across autumnal trees  
As a portent, and the wind blows  
Softly as a sighing breeze*

*Bearing hopes of future gladness  
Glistening through the gleaming dawn,  
Though the present crowned with sadness  
Holds the empty house forlorn.*

From 'Songs by the Wayside'.

### A Legend of Bosworth Field

*When gusts of wind and clouds of rain  
Blow up to shroud the midnight moon,  
And twelve has struck, but not for noon,  
And lovers leave the haunted lane*

*White Surrey buried by the brook  
At Sandy Ford near Shenton Lea  
Stirs in his grave as if to see  
His Royal Rider's last sad look.*

*A loud neigh splits the startled night,  
and echoes over Redmore Plain,  
Carried along by wind and rain;  
The frightened owls are stirred to flight*

*And many sleepy men arise  
And bolt and bar their cottage doors,  
And cross themselves, and pace the floors  
Until the haunting echo dies.*

*While up above on Ambien Hill  
The wild white roses bow their heads;  
The fretful wind dies, sighs and spreads  
Their petals on the meadows still,*

*And round about King Dickon's well  
There is a stir among the grass,  
And ghostly figures halt, and pass  
And whisper words that none may tell;*

*Till at the hour before the dawn  
They fade int the morning mist.  
There, where the rising sun has kissed  
The spires of Leicester, and the morn*

*Floods with glad light the Bow Bridge grey,  
An old bent woman stands alone  
Beside the spur-marked coping stone  
And shakes a finger at the day.*

### CONCLUSION

Saxon Barton was the Richard III society's founder and first polymath, skilled surgeon, painter, writer, researcher, historian, a driven man with a sense of justice committed to the poignancy of a once lost cause.

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