

The Mysterious Barclay Grave; Elizabeth Anne Barclay (1834-1895) Kensal Green Cemetery

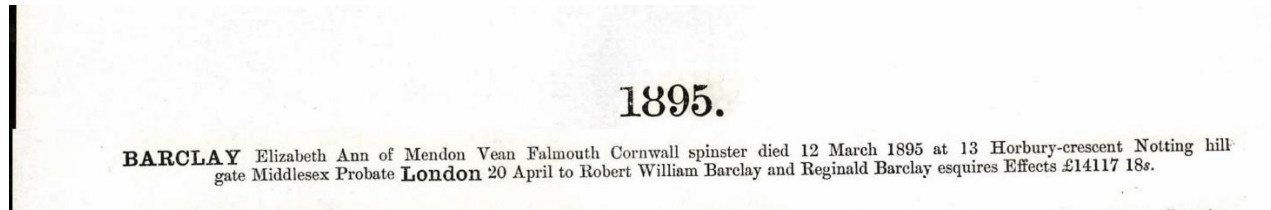


This memorial in Kensal Green cemetery first caught my attention back in 2013. The unusual design is unlike anything else in the cemetery; a trefoil cross carrying a crude depiction of Christ carved out of one large piece of stone, it looks semi pagan, vaguely Celtic, a product of the dark ages when Norsemen swept through the British Isles putting Christians to the sword and ransacking monasteries. It is pretty hefty; almost four feet tall with a span of two and a half feet across the patibulum, made from hard-wearing, unpolished granite, it must weigh at least 650Kg. The bottom of the cross is slotted into a base of the same stone just over three feet long, a foot wide and 9 inches deep. The weight of the base is just a fraction of the weight of the cross, 200Kg perhaps. Unsurprisingly then the cross is starting to incline at quite an alarming angle. The weight of the base can't be enough to support the cross and as soon as earth movement took the upright out of perfect vertical alignment, the whole memorial was going to gradually, but inexorably, topple over in real time slow motion. Standing it back up will be quite a job, base and cross together weigh over 130 stone, well over three quarters of a tonne. There is no epitaph or any other inscription or mark on the memorial to give any clue as to its age or who might be buried here. Whether some element of the memorial is missing or whether the person buried here wanted anonymity is impossible to tell. Having admired the rude beauty of this monument for over a decade, I decided it was time I did some research to find out who was buried here.

THE GENERAL CEMETERY COMPANY.					
Register No.	NAME.	ABODE.	Part of Cemetery.	Year.	Register No.
11	Barclay Elizabeth A. Bodbury Crescent		35332		

I started by locating the grave on the cemetery maps. These give the number of the grave and a surname. In most cases, but by no means all, the name on the map is the name of the person buried in the grave; the name is actually that of the grave owner, the person who purchased the plot, and as this is generally a close relative, spouse or child, they tend to share the same name. The map gave me the name Barclay and the plot number 35332. The grave number is useful because these were allocated sequentially by the General Cemetery Company so it gives us

a rough date for the purchase of the grave. Graves close by numbered in the 35000's all dated from the 1890's. This was a surprise; I thought the grave might be more modern. With a surname and a timescale, I could search Deceased online, who have Kensal Green's burial records, for any Barclays buried in the cemetery in the 1890's. There were only four. I paid to view the burial record of the person who was buried in the middle of the decade, an Elizabeth A. Barclay, and bingo, the grave number matched 35332. The records also have the address of the deceased, in this case Horbury Crescent, Notting Hill. With a name, an address and a date of death it was then a relatively simple matter to search on Ancestry for further records relating to Elizabeth Barclay.



Probate records show that Elizabeth Anne Barclay died on the 12 March 1895 at number 13 Horbury Crescent, W11 but her permanent address is given as Mendon Vean in Falmouth. Her estate is valued at £14,117 and 18 shillings which was a substantial sum in the 1890's. On-line estimates of the cash value of £14,000 at current prices say that it would be worth over £2 million but this must be an underestimate. Some assets, particularly land and property have risen significantly more than cash values in the last 130 years. Elizabeth was the only voter registered at Horbury Crescent which means that she almost certainly owned it. The property still stands and online estimates of its current value are all over £5 million. Elizabeth also owned her property in Cornwall and also owned land. She was an extremely wealthy woman. She was baptised on 28 December 1834 at Great Bookham in Surrey which means that she was 61 when she died. Her parents were David and Maria Dorothea Barclay who had recently bought the grand mansion at Eastwick Park and its 'uncommonly fine' estate, once the home of the Dukes of Effingham. David Barclay, had been the Whig MP for Penryn in Cornwall and the year after her birth would be elected as MP for Sunderland. He had substantial business interests, he formed Barclay Brothers and Company, at 34 Old Broad Street, the merchant house of which he eventually became head and was also an auditor of the Rock Life Assurance Office, a director of the Anglo-Mexican Mining Association, 1825-8, and had two spells as a director of the Bank of England. The Barclays were an extremely wealthy Quaker family; Elizabeth's grandfather Robert had bought Thrale's brewery in Southwark. Dr Johnson, who had acted for the Thrale family during the sale, famously said that the purchaser had 'the potentiality of becoming rich beyond the dreams of avarice' and so it proved, the brewery became the biggest and most profitable in Europe. When Robert died in 1830, David inherited a one-eighth share in the brewery, a legacy of £15,000 and a share in the residue of the personal estate, which was sworn under £160,000. Elizabeth's grandmother was a Gurney and two of her aunts married into the Fox family of Cornwall, Quaker aristocracy.

But all was not well with her parents' marriage. Outwardly respectable David Barclay was not in reality quite the upright, moral figure he presented to the world. The couple had six children and Elizabeth was the youngest. Her mother died at the age of 48 in 18 in 1846 when Elizabeth was just 12. Elizabeth and her older sister Maria were sent to live with her mother's sister, Sophia, who was Countess of Zetland after marrying Thomas Dundas, the Earl of Zetland, in 1823. The boys in the family stayed with their father. The scandalous reasons for this unusual arrangement only became public knowledge three years later when David Barclay issued a writ of habeas corpus against his sister-in-law and her husband, demanding that his youngest daughter be returned to his custody. The court proceedings were widely reported in the newspapers at the end of April when an error by David Barclay's lawyer, Sir Frederic Thesiger (later Lord High Chancellor of England and 1st Baron Chelmsford) led to the reading out in open court of the Zetland's return to the writ. On the day scheduled for the hearing the Court told Sir Frederic that the Attorney General had requested that the date of the hearing be postponed. Sir Frederic was furious at the

postponement and demanded that the case go ahead. It was rescheduled for 3pm that day, to allow time for Elizabeth to be brought back to court. When the court reconvened Sir Frederic insisted that the Zetland's return to the writ be read out in open court, in front of Elizabeth and her father, despite the Attorney-General, who was acting for the Zetland's saying "I am anxious to prevent unnecessary discussion and painful inquiry, but if my learned friend, who appears for Mr. Barclay, insists on a return, I am ready to give one." Perhaps David Barclay had not fully appraised Sir Frederic of the full circumstances surrounding the decision by his late wife, to place her daughters under their aunt's protection. This is what the Attorney General read out to the Court as reported in the West Kent Guardian of Saturday 28 April 1849;

Miss Elizabeth Anne Barclay was the youngest daughter of David Barclay and Maria Dorothea his wife, and was sixteen years of age; that her mother died on the 24th of June, 1846, leaving two daughters, the elder being now twenty-two years of age; that the late Mrs. Barclay was the sister of the Countess of Zetland, and that, previously to her death, the two young ladies resided with their father, and in the year 1844 there was a female resident in his house who acted as governess to the children, with which female Mr. Barclay in the lifetime of his wife carried on adulterous intercourse, which caused Mrs. Barclay the most poignant anguish and distress, and that immediately prior to her death she requested the countess to take charge of her two children, and always to let them remain with her, which the countess promised to do; that on the day of Mrs. Barclay's funeral the two children, with the concurrence of their father, went to reside with the countess, and have ever since remained under her care and protection, with the exception of a short visit made by Elizabeth Anne to her father; that during the years 1847 and part of the year 1848 Mr. Barclay carried on an adulterous intercourse with a female who resided in the neighbourhood of his house in Surrey, and that in the spring of 1847 the earl and countess, being ignorant of the fact, permitted Elizabeth Anne to visit her father for a short time, and that during the visit the father allowed her to meet and associate with the female in question; that in the year 1848 differences arose between the earl and countess and Mr. Barclay as to the custody of the children, and a negotiation took place between Sir Hedworth Williamson, Baronet, the brother of the countess, on the part of the earl and countess, and Charles Barclay, Esq., on the part of David Barclay, when a written agreement was entered into that the two children should remain under the care of the countess, and that Mr. Barclay should allow £500 per annum for their expenses, to be paid to the elder Miss Barclay. There were also provisions for the occasional access the father and his son to the young ladies.

John Henry and Diana Clements, the two friendly geologists, who tentatively identified the Barclay memorial as being made of Cornish granite

I imagine that no one in the court knew where to look as the Attorney-General read out his statement. Elizabeth was probably hearing these salacious details of her father's life for the first time and was possibly not aware of the "poignant anguish and distress" he had caused her mother. David Barclay no doubt sat listening in barely concealed turmoil as details of his private life were made public and probably could not bring himself to look at his youngest daughter. Sir Frederic, doing his best to retrieve the situation, blustered that he could disprove all the allegations against his client but suggested that to avoid further painful discussions in open court, that an interview be granted between his client and Elizabeth, in the Judges Chambers, to ascertain what her wishes were – did she want to stay with the Zetland's or return to her father. "After some further discussion," reported the West Kent Guardian, "it was arranged that Mr. Barclay and his son should see Miss Barclay in the judges' private room, in the presence of the judges, the Earl and Countess of Zetland, and of the Attorney-General and Sir Frederick Thesiger. A short interval having elapsed, the judges returned, and it was understood that Miss Barclay elected to remain under the care of the countess, but nothing transpired in court upon the subject."

Two years later the 18-year-old Elizabeth appears to have left the Zetland's home and was living in Falmouth with another of her aunts, Lucy Fox. Had there been some sort of rift? Lucy Fox died in 1859 and by the time of the 1861 census, 28-year-old Elizabeth was living with her father at Roscow in the parish of St Gluvias in Falmouth. Whilst not quite Eastwick Park, the property was still very substantial and there were six live in servants including a butler, a groom, a cook, and house, kitchen and laundry maids. David Barclay barely had time to complete his census return that year as he died on the first of July. Elizabeth never married and spent the rest of her life moving between

homes in London and Cornwall. After her father's death she seems to have a house at 26 Bolton Street, WC1 no doubt to be near her eldest brother who lived at number 25. She also acquired her own property at Mendon Vean and was staying there at the time of the 1881 census. I can't trace her in the 1891 census, perhaps she was abroad? By 1895 she was dead. We don't know who commissioned her memorial or why there is no epitaph or inscription. Two geologists who looked the memorial with me told me that it was probably made of Cornish granite which may indicate that Elizabeth had already chosen the mason who made it while she was alive.