

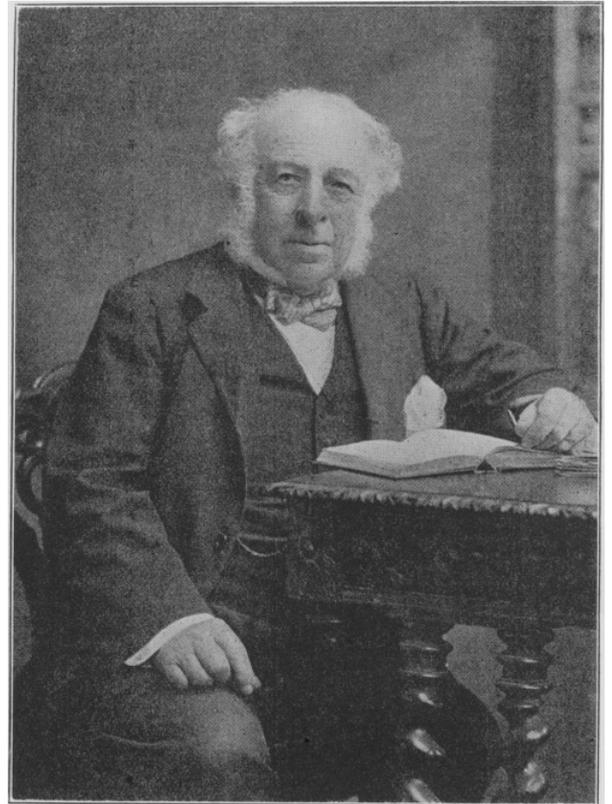


Text of a talk about Benjamin Barrow given by Janette Gregson, Chair of the Ryde Social History Group

This is the grave of Benjamin Barrow. It is very understated and gives little clue to the fact that he was one of the most prominent and influential people in the public life and health of Ryde and we have much to be grateful to him for. He was

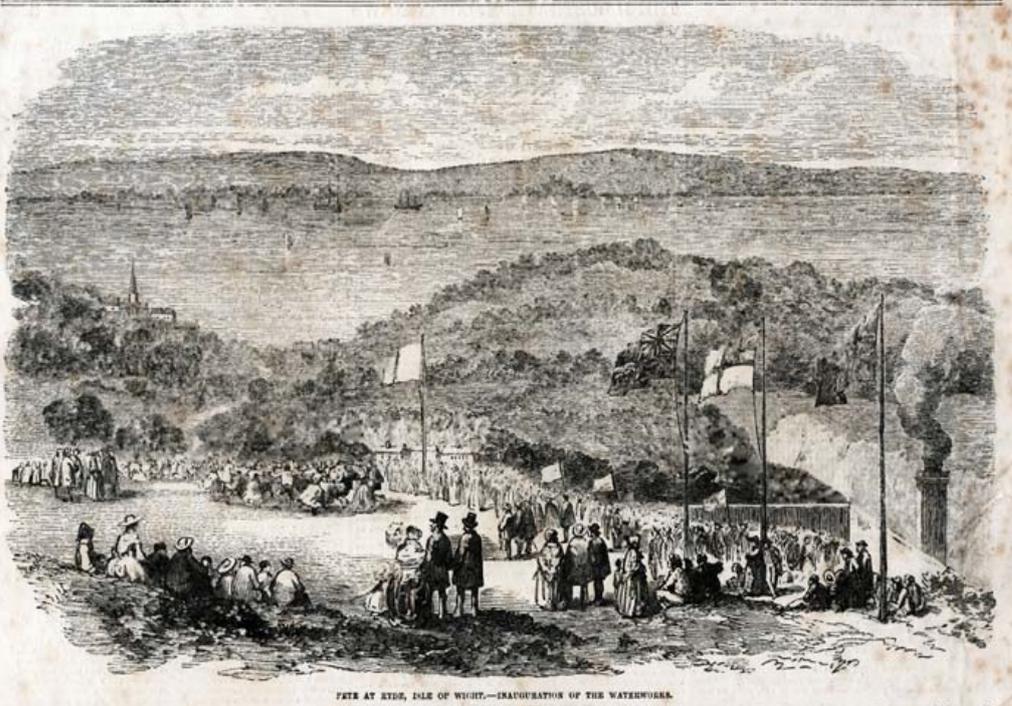
born at Bath in 1814 and trained as a doctor and in 1836 of became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1862. Initially he was an army surgeon and then moved to Ryde to set up his practice in 1848.

He was a rather abrupt man, a plain and forthright speaker, an excellent talker, but a very poor listener. Yet despite this unfortunate manner he was kind and had a great love for the town he chose to make his home. Ryde was his home for over 50 years and he did lots to benefit the town. When he first moved to the town the water supply was from wells and the toilets mainly pit latrines. Because of poor drainage there was often cross contamination between the latrines and the wells and the health of the people of the town suffered. Typhoid and dysentery were rife and a frequent cause of death. Dr Barrow suggested it would be beneficial to have a clean water supply brought to Ryde from the chalk downs of Ashe and Knighton. This would be a huge and expensive feat of engineering and met much opposition from the people of Ryde who clung on to their polluted old wells rather than have to pay for clean water. It was a bitter battle and won him no friends, but Dr Barrow was resolute in his belief and continued to argue the case.



Finally it was agreed to go to Ashe for the supply and eventually magnificent Water Works were built at Ashe in 1856. There was a big celebration for the opening. Unfortunately Dr Barrow received little thanks at the time but as the years passed and the health of the

town improved the benefits became apparent. A fierce battle was fought at the November elections in 1874, Mr Henry Knight and the Ratepayers Association lost and Dr Barrow was elected Mayor. At the time the Council meetings were disruptive and disorganised and it was felt that a strong man was required to take the lead. The choice of Dr Barrow was justified and proved by the fact that he served the office of Mayor nine times.



FETE AT RYDE, ISLE OF WIGHT.—INAUGURATION OF THE WATERWORKS.

The opening of the Water Works

During this period a great many important works were accomplished – improvements at the waterworks; drainage of the town and marshes; the construction of the Boating Lake and Esplanade Gardens to name a few. Dr Barrow fought tenaciously for these improvements nothing could daunt him. He held sway over the Council in an almost dictatorial manner for many years, but then as the disputes were settled and the improvements brought about Council Members began to long for a more gentle and tactful leader and in the end Dr Barrow retired into private life.

As well as his work in the Council he did much more for the town. For many years he was the president of the School of Art and assisted in arranging a number of art exhibitions in the Town Hall. He rented ground to be used as a recreation ground and threw it open for sport. Eventually Miss Brigstocke purchased the land and gave it to the town. This is Simeon Street recreation ground. He also paid for a gymnasium to be built for the use of Ryde schools. He was unpaid Borough Medical Officer for many years and took a leading part in the establishment of the County Hospital. In August 1881 he was President of the BMA and hosted their Annual Meeting at Ryde – a four-day conference attended by many distinguished doctors and surgeons from around the country.

Even in retirement he remained active but in the autumn of 1900 he fell in the street and injured his left wrist. He made light of his injuries at first however complications set in and in January 1901 his arm was amputated above the elbow. Initially he made a good recovery but a little later he became restless and his health deteriorated. He died on 7 March 1901 aged 86 at his residence, St. John's Lodge, St John's Road, Ryde. The funeral service was held at Holy Trinity Church on 11 March followed by burial at Ryde Cemetery.



OPENING THE FINE ART EXHIBITION AT RYDE BY THE PRINCESS BEATRICE: THE MAYOR DELIVERING THE ADDRESS