

# **CHARLES BARKER**

**(Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's  
Grammar School 1817-1842)**

**by  
Keith Jordan**

Charles Barker succeeded William Webb as Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School. Webb, who had been Headmaster for the 53 years previously, a remarkable achievement in itself, died in office in 1817. He had been in charge for such a long period that, in later years, the school was known as Webb's School rather than Bishop Vesey's.

Barker was born on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1793 and was subsequently baptised at St. Philip's Church, Birmingham on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1794. He was the son of Thomas Barker (c.1754-1815) a prosperous Linen Draper in Birmingham.

His father's first marriage was to Mary Thomas and they had two children, namely:-

<b>John Fisher Barker</b>	born on the 12 <sup>th</sup> November 1776
<b>William Barker</b>	born in 1778, who died at a young age.

Following the death of his first wife, Thomas Barker married again. His second wife was Mary Lander and they had nine children, as follows:-

<b>Katherine Anne Barker</b>	born on the 12 <sup>th</sup> January 1788.
<b>Mary Barker</b>	born on the 22 <sup>nd</sup> January 1789.
<b>Jane Sophia Barker</b>	born on the 1 <sup>st</sup> September 1790.
<b>Charles Barker</b>	born on the 31 <sup>st</sup> January 1793.
<b>Thomas Henry Barker</b>	born on the 16 <sup>th</sup> June 1794
<b>George Barker</b>	born in 1795.
<b>Francis Barker</b>	born on the 21 <sup>st</sup> November 1797.
<b>Helen Barker</b>	born on the 20 <sup>th</sup> October 1798.
<b>Edgar Barker</b>	born on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 1801.

Barker's younger brother, George Barker, deserves special mention. He qualified as a Solicitor and, by 1825, was practicing at Gray's Inn, London. He became a Justice of the Peace for Berkshire and was also High Sheriff.

He seemed to have made a great deal of money during his career, but the nature of his legal practice and thus his wealth is far from clear.

By 1845, however, he was in a position to retire at the age of 50 and, two years later, he purchased the property known as 'Stanlake Park'.

Upon his death in 1868, he was able to leave a substantial fortune of £250,000, equivalent to approximately £30M today.



Fig.1 Front elevation of 'Stanlake Park', Hurst, Berkshire in the 1920's.  
(Photograph courtesy of the University of London/Victoria County History)

Charles Barker was sent to Rugby School, where he was admitted in 1805. He matriculated in 1811 and went on to Trinity College, Oxford. He subsequently obtained a B.A. degree in 1815, followed by a M.A. in 1817. He also became a Bachelor of Civil Laws in 1830.

Following his application for the vacant post at the school, his testimonial from the President, Bursar and Tutors of Trinity College declared that:-

***"He hath lived piously, soberly and honestly and hath diligently applied himself to his studies. Nor has he, as far as we know, or have heard, maintained or written anything contrary to the doctrine or discipline of the Church of England. Moreover, we think him a person qualified and worthy to fill the situation of Master of the School."***

A postscript, signed by the President alone, further stated:-

***"From motives of personal regard for Mr Barker, arising from the general correct conduct during his residence in my College, I beg further to add, most respectfully, my particular and earnest recommendation of him, as a Gentleman every way qualified to do credit to the situation to which he aspires."***

His appointment was confirmed at a meeting of the Trustees, held on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1817. In actual fact, this was their first meeting for 12 years, so they had not been unduly overburdened with matters for their attention!

The minute of the meeting was short and succinct and read, as follows:-

***“Mr Charles Barker of Rugby is this day appointed Master of the School in the room of William Webb Esq., deceased.”***

Barker was just 24 years of age at the time, being newly qualified and this was his first appointment.

Zachariah Twamley in his ‘History of Sutton’ remarked upon Charles Barker’s appointment, as follows:-

***“Mr Charles Barker obtained the Headmastership by the small majority of only one vote more of the Trustees in his favour than his opponent, Mr Joseph Shutt, who was at the time a schoolmaster in the town of his own account.***

***He ought to have had the appointment, if right had taken place. He was rightly and well qualified for the situation. He likewise had some reasons to expect to have had it, it being partly promised him by some of the Trustees, who did all in their power to serve him.***

***I have no doubt, if he had gained the appointment, the English Department in the school would have been taught the same as it had been by the previous master.***

***I do not hesitate in saying so, for I well knew the man. After Mr Charles Barker took the Headmastership, Mr Edward Parnel, the incumbent Undermaster, stopped for a short time with him, whose integrity could not agree with Mr Barker’s assumption.”***

**FILE NOTE:** It would be interesting to know what transpired here, although it was probably the case of a new broom sweeping out the old and leaving the field completely clear.

Zachariah Twamley, in his book, further commented:-

***“Mr Parnel’s irreproachable uprightness as a Master had been put to the test in the school for 37 years previously and he was a man who strove to do his duty. He was not an assuming man himself, neither could he like to be with a person who might be possessed with such a spirit about them. His regular good conduct, amongst the pupils committed to his care, was soon missed after he left the school.”***

It would appear that Charles Barker did not move to Sutton until seven months after his appointment was confirmed. In a letter written by Wriothesley Digby (Chairman of the Trustees) to Edward Sadler and dated the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1818, it was stated that:-

***“By a letter received from Mr Barker, I understand he is going to Sutton to reside next week and wishes to know whether he is to have a Power of Attorney to enable him to receive the rents due at Lady Day on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, or what directions were given by the Trustees on the subject.”***

At a meeting of the Trustees on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1818, held at the ‘Three Tuns’ Inn in the High Street, the Trustees duly executed a Power of Attorney authorising Charles Barker to receive the school rents. Edward Sadler, also at that juncture, produced a valuation of the school estates, which had been prepared by Henry Jacob, together with an estimate for necessary repairs amounting to approximately £300.

Henry Jacob’s valuation contained the following detailed information, showing that the total amount of rents due at the time came to £321.4s.2d.

<b>Valuation</b>			
Henry Jacob's valuation contains the following details:			
<i>Property</i>	<i>Tenant</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Rent</i>
		a. r. p.	£ s. d.
Lower Piece, Middle Piece, Home Piece, Homestead Buildings and Garden, Croft, Long Piece, Tamworth Lane Piece	Thomas Wilkins	17. 1. 3	36. 4. 2
Tamworth Lane Meadow, Frog Meadow, The Sling, Oak Tree Piece	late in Mr Webb's occupation	12. 0. 0	30. 15. 0
Mushroom Piece, Big Piece	S.F.S. Perkins	13. 0. 0	31. 10. 0
Piece of land near the Parsonage	Charles Cooper	1. 31	1. 2. 1
Tenement and Garden Croft over the Way	John Clarke	1. 1. 6	6. 9. 0
The Backside and Orchard, Homestead Buildings and Garden, Middle Close, Lower Close, Taffs Close, Hovel Close, Rape Close, Oak Tree Piece, Broomy Field, Leys Meadow, Little Meadow, Rough Pit Cocks, Long Pit Cocks, Upper Pit Cocks, Andertons Croft, the Birch Hills, Marygold Meadow, Tenement Barn Fold Yard and Garden, Marygold Close	Ann Haywood	82. 2. 12	157. 11. 11
2 Pieces of land at Reddy Cap Lane (Cumberlands)	Benjamin Woodward	3. 3. 4	7. 11. 0
Piece at Four Oaks, 2 Pieces near Mare Pool	Thomas Ashford	6. 0. 20	13. 5. 0
House, small barn, stable and yard in Sutton	Thomas Wright	— — —	16. 16. 0
House and Garden by the Church Building on Church Hill	James Wright	— — —	14. 0. 0
	Chas. Neville	— — —	5. 0. 0
		<u>136. 1. 36</u>	<u>321. 4. 2</u>

Fig. 2 Valuation, prepared by Henry Jacob, of Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School’s estates in 1818.

The equivalent figure today would amount approximately to £30,000, a not inconsiderable sum of money.

The Trustees, at the same time, ordered the timber on the estates to be valued and Charles Barker was instructed to negotiate new leases with the school's tenants and to report the terms agreed, at the next meeting.

New Trustees were also appointed and the list included some of the most influential people in the area surrounding Sutton. The full list being:-

1. The Reverend George William Bowyer **Adderley**, Clerk in Holy Orders, of Hams Hall, Warwickshire.
2. The Reverend Egerton Arden **Bagot**, Clerk in Holy Orders, of Pype Hayes Hall, Warwickshire.
3. William **Bedford** Esq., of Birches Green, Warwickshire.
4. Nathaniel **Gooding** Esq., of Handsworth, Staffordshire.
5. William **Dilke** Esq., of Maxwell Castle, Warwickshire.
6. Dugdale Stratford **Dugdale** Esq., of Merevale, Warwickshire.
7. William **Fletcher** Esq., of Aston, Warwickshire.
8. William Humberstone Corley **Floyer** Esq., of Hints, Warwickshire.
9. Sir Robert **Lawley**, Baronet, of Canwell, Warwickshire.
10. The Reverend Charles Gregory **Okeover**, Clerk in Holy Orders, of Tamworth, Staffordshire.
11. Charles Edward **Repington** Esq., of Amington, Staffordshire.
12. The Reverend Robert **Sadler**, Clerk in Holy Orders, of Over Whitacre, Warwickshire.
13. Sir John Eardley **Wilmot**, of Berkswell, Warwickshire.

For the first time since the original appointment of Trustees in 1527, clergymen were included. Robert Sadler, who died in 1830, was Edward Sadler's younger brother.

William Bedford, a magistrate, was also a retired Birmingham attorney, who had married Lydia Ryland, the daughter of Richard Bisse Riland, Rector of Sutton, in 1784.

Sir John Wilmot was one of the Members of Parliament for North Warwickshire. In March 1843 he was appointed Governor of Tasmania.

Sir Robert Lawley was also a Member of Parliament for Warwickshire and was later created Baron Wenlock in 1831.

It is noticeable that none of the above Trustees was a Suttonian. One possible explanation may be that all the suitably qualified local people were already members of the Sutton Corporation and the School Trustees preferred to be an independent body.

In 1819, a couple of years after taking up his position as Headmaster, Charles Barker made proposals for the use of the considerable funds belonging to the Corporation, which were presently frozen in the Court of Chancery.

His first suggestion was the establishment of an elementary school in Sutton. However, in putting forward this idea, Barker did have an ulterior motive in mind, in that his ultimate aim was the removal of reading, writing and arithmetic classes from the Grammar School itself. He would then have a free reign to concentrate entirely upon the teaching of Greek and Latin and so the die was cast.

In 1821, another event occurred which, if one had a crystal ball, would have set yet more alarm bells ringing. Barker was a Latin and Greek scholar and, as such, he was reluctant to become involved in the day to day teaching of other more mundane subjects.

Unfortunately, he even delegated responsibility for the teaching of Latin and Greek to an assistant who, quite clearly, was not up to the task in hand.

In September of that year, Edward Sadler received a letter of complaint from a Mr William Davis, whose son was being taught at the school. In an extremely bitter diatribe, he stated that:-

***"I have a boy about ten years of age, who goes on the foundation to the above school and I must say I feel great dissatisfaction that he is not instructed by a person that knows something of the language he is learning. It is a mystery to me to know how a person can teach that which he is himself totally ignorant of.***

***My Son was instructed for a few weeks at home by an elder brother, previous to his going to school, hoping it would ease the Master of a little of the extra trouble which is usually found in giving boys the first ideas of declining, conjugating, etc.***

***I was of the hope that he would have been able to go on readily with his Grammar and, no doubt, he might have done, had proper attention been paid and by a proper person.***

***The elder brother often spoke of the time when he went to the same establishment at about the same age as his brother and, in the course of about four years under the tutelage of Mr Webb, his Master pronounced him fit for the university, notwithstanding he had employed half the day generally in writing, arithmetic, book-keeping etc.***

***I think that if my younger Son goes on as he has begun, he will not be fit for College in less than 24 years! I am also informed that there are boys who have been at Latin Grammar for two years and know nothing of it yet.***

***If something cannot be done for the progress of my Son's education in a better manner, I shall be under the necessity of taking him away, as it can be of no service to him to go on to learn from one that cannot instruct."***

Sadler's reply, unfortunately, has not survived but it is known that the complaint was not formerly referred to the Trustees. It was likely, however, judging from later episodes, that there was some justification in the allegation. A double indictment of Barker, not only for appointing an incompetent assistant, but also for failing to take the classes himself, as his predecessor had.

After a flurry of activity on the Trustees' part during the period 1817-19, which entailed three meetings, a new headmaster in the shape of Charles Barker and a new set of Trustees, four years elapsed before another meeting was held.

At noon on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July 1823 the Trustees of the School gathered once more at the 'Three Tuns' Inn, on the High Street.

The meeting, chaired by Sir J E E Wilmot, was mainly occupied with a complaint laid by none other than Thomas Holbeche, the Corporation's Deputy Steward, against the headmaster for inattention to his son's education.

The Trustees read Holbeche's reasons for his complaint and later Barker's subsequent reply. After due deliberation, the Trustees unanimously resolved,

***"That such charges were not substantiated."***

Barker had therefore successfully sidestepped censure on both occasions. Later, however, he would discover further storm clouds gathering above the horizon.



**Fig. 3 Charles Barker as a young man.**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1825, shortly before his 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Charles Barker married Caroline Richards at St. Martin' Church, Birmingham. She was the daughter of Theophilus Richards of Edgbaston.

Barker's plan to completely do away with the teaching of elementary subjects took a step forward a little later the same year, when the Court of Chancery finally approved a scheme for the use of the fund for educational and charitable purposes. It was agreed that three Charity Schools should be set up in Sutton Town, Hill and Walmley and that writing and arithmetic should be taught in these schools. A sum of £2,392 was allocated for the building and fitting out of these schools and the Corporation was authorised to fell timber in the park for this purpose.

In 1828, another event occurred, which strengthened Barker's aims still further. The Corporation decided that they wished to increase the size of the parish churchyard, but they found that they were unable to proceed with this plan without the consent of the Trustees of the Grammar School, who still owned the old school buildings to the west of the churchyard, where the extension was required.

The Corporation duly passed a resolution which stated:-

***"That an application be made to the Trustees of the Free Grammar School, to give the Corporation the Old School House and Garden and also the Buildings and Yard called the Lodging House in exchange under the Enclosure, with the view of enlarging the churchyard and that the Trustees will be pleased to point out any particular properties belonging to this Corporation, which they think would be proper to receive in exchange."***

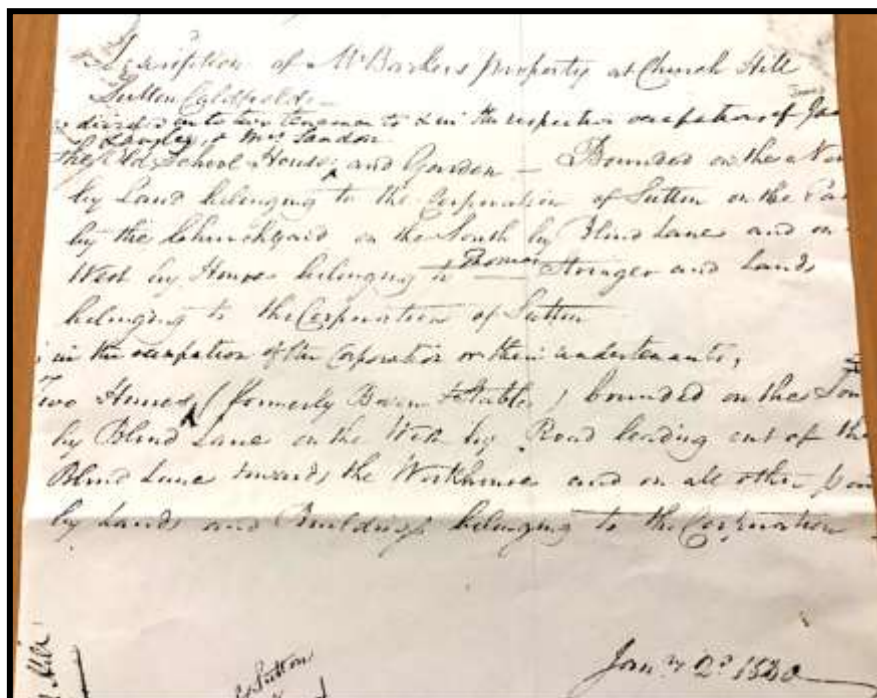


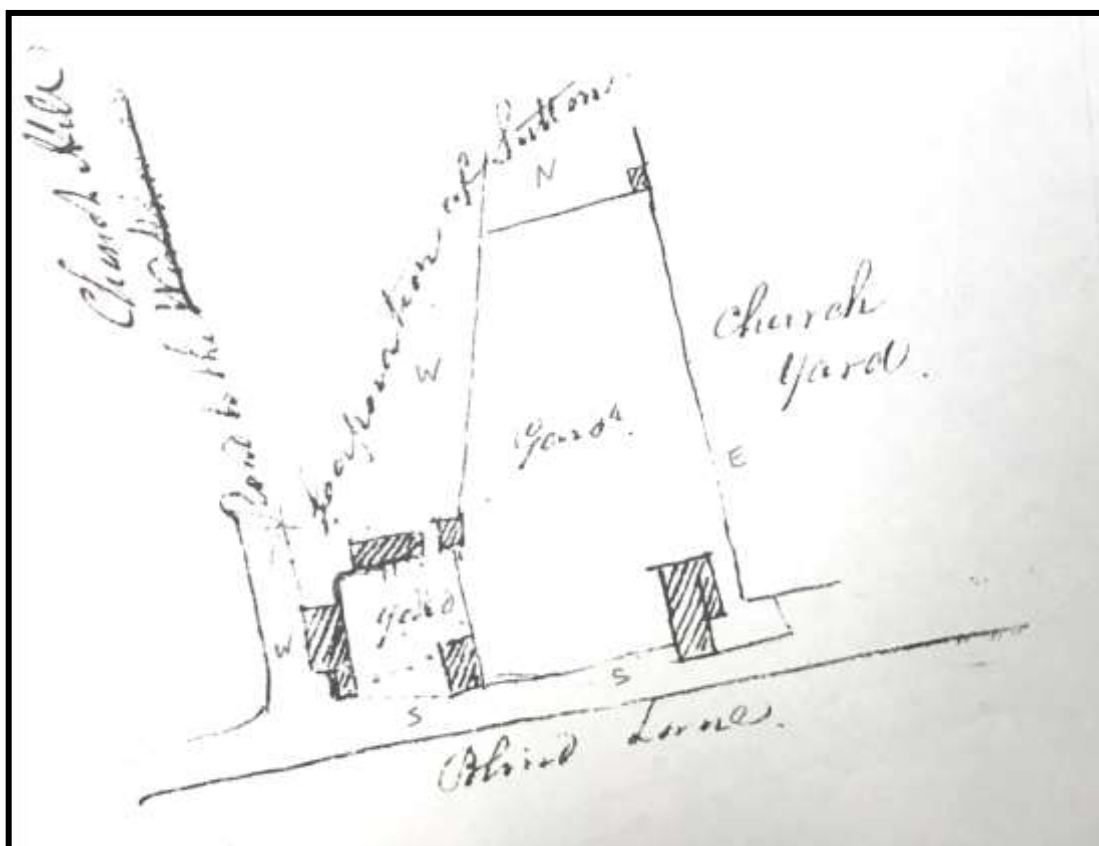
Fig. 4 A copy of the original document forming the agreement made between the Trustees of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and the Corporation dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1830.



The wording of the application read, as follows:-

***'Description of Mr Barker's property at Church Hill, Sutton Coldfield.***

***The Old School House and Garden is divided into two tenements and in the respective occupation of James Lawley and Mrs Lander. – Bounded on the north side by land belonging to the Corporation of Sutton, on the east by the churchyard and on the south by Blind Lane and on the west by house belonging to Thomas Stringer and lands belonging to the Corporation of Sutton.'***



**Fig. 5 Plan of the site, (shaded in RED), showing the various buildings and land owned by Bishop Vesey's Grammar School in 1830.**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, the Trustees declared their willingness to proceed on the basis proposed by the Corporation.

Charles Barker, however, had a different proposition in mind namely, the Corporation should give the freehold of the **present schoolhouse** to the school trustees, who would then agree with the Headmaster for the surrender of the old lease and once the lease had gone, the requirement to take elementary classes would also be at an end.

Barker's proposal was put to the Corporation, who decided to take the advice of John Harris Esq., the Commissioner involved with the Sutton Enclosure Act.

Almost a year later, on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1829, the Corporation received his report, which was generally in favour of the proposal, subject to certain amendments. These, after discussion between the parties, were found to be acceptable and, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July, the Trustees met once more at the 'Three Tuns' to formally seal the agreement.

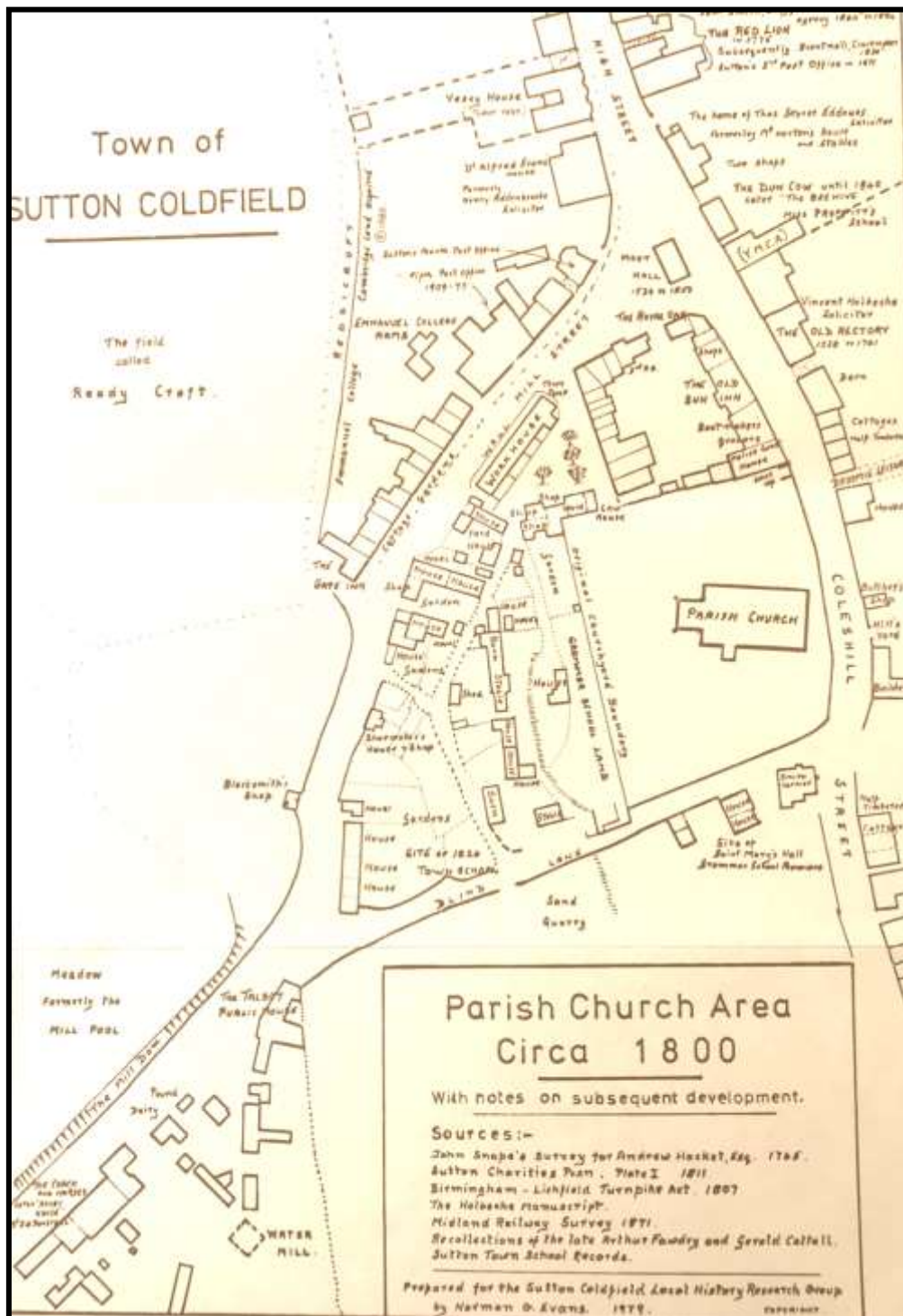


Fig. 6 Plan of Sutton Coldfield around Holy Trinity Parish Church circa 1800, drawn up by Norman G Evans, in 1979.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1830, the Barker household suffered a tragedy, when their young son died at the very tender age of just 16 months. 'Aris's Birmingham Gazette' included a short resume under the column marked **DEATHS** on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March.

**"On Friday, at Sutton Coldfield, aged 16 months, Francis George, youngest child of Charles Barker Esq., died."**

The Trustees did not meet again for over three years. On the 25<sup>th</sup> August 1832, along with other outstanding matters, they discussed several complaints about the school, in particular the state of the schoolroom and the regular attendance of pupils. No Minute, however, was made regarding the result of their deliberations, but it would seem that Barker was allowed to sublimely carry on, free of censure.

He had, by now, achieved his primary objective of getting rid of the elementary classes and was free to devote most of his time to running the school estates, coupled with his leisure activities of hunting, shooting (he had for many years regularly renewed his Game Certificate from the Corporation) and attending meetings, dinners etc. with the great and good of Sutton and the surrounding area. For the remainder of his time at the helm, however, he was never free of complaints about the manner in which he ran the school.

In November 1833, Edward Sadler received a letter from Charles Turner, the Clerk to the Charity Commissioners, who were set up to investigate endowed charities.

***"I am directed by the Commissioners of Charities to lay the following remarks before you, as a resident Trustee of the Sutton Coldfield Grammar School and to request that you, at an early opportunity, submit them to the general body of the Trustees.***

***The Commissioners during their enquiry heard with regret many complaints of the inefficiency of the school, which they understand were brought before the Trustees at their meeting in August 1832.***

***No entry, however, respecting them appears in the Minute Book, possibly because the Trustees, either considered the complaints as not made in a manner sufficiently formal to call for such notice, or hoped that the grounds would be removed without it. Unfortunately, the latter has not been the case***

***In particular, the Commissioners are informed that the attention of the Trustees was called to the state of the room in which the boys are now taught and to the circumstance that the Master, without consulting the Trustees, has converted the Schoolroom into a Dining Room for his private use and has placed the boys in what was formerly the Laundry, a place totally unfit for the purpose and incapable of containing more than 10 boys at the utmost.***

***The Commissioners are also informed that Mr Barker was required by the Trustees to build another schoolroom as soon as the number of scholars should render it necessary, but that for the existing number, the present room was deemed sufficient.***

***It appears, however, to the Commissioners that the duty of the Trustees requires them to insist upon Mr Barker appropriating, without delay, a good and commodious room for the use of the boys.***

***The site of the present room is quite sufficient to prevent any increase of the School and to deter parents from sending their children to a place where it might be expected that the attention paid to them would be only in proportion to the accommodation they received.***

***The arrangement is indeed discouraging to the neighbourhood, as indicating too clearly the expectation, and perhaps the wish that the School should not increase, on the part of the Master who, had he intended to take boarders, would unquestionably have provided a better room for his pupils.***

***It appears strange that, in a building so extensive and so amply endowed for a Grammar School, the scholars are the only parties whose accommodation is utterly neglected.***

***Unless a proper provision be forthwith made for such a number of boys as the endowment may fairly be expected to command, either by restoring the old room or building a new one, when some attention would be well bestowed on providing a playground for the exercise of the scholars, the Commissioners will feel compelled to lay the facts of this case before His Majesty's Attorney General.***

***The Commissioners have further to add their request that this letter may be entered in the Minute Book of the Trustees, together with any order the Trustees may make in consequence of it, a copy of which order they beg may be forwarded to their office at 13 Great George Street, Westminster."***

This was indeed a damning indictment of Barker's running of the school.

Zachariah Twamley, in his 'History of Sutton', also commented upon the situation at the time, as follows:-

***"The day pupils of the English Department in the said school were turned away. None were continued, except some few who learnt the Classics at the time.***

***The school room was afterwards altered into two rooms, one for a Dining Room for company who visited the house and the other room for a Study."***

One would have thought that Barker's obvious indifference to the pupils under his care and the conditions they were forced to study under, which might be described as 'Dickensian,' had finally caught up with him.

This, however, proved not to be the case. The Chairman of the Trustees at the time, Sir John Eardley Wilmot, did not take kindly to the letter. In his reply he stated:-

***"In my judgment, the letter requires little attention."***

He also took umbrage to the tone of the letter from the Charity Commissioners and commented:-

***"On the whole, I think Mr Tucker's letter is not a correct statement of the facts regarding the school, which I attribute to his not having a correct statement of what the Trustees did last year. I also think that, considering the respectability of the Trustees and their stations in life, a threat of letting loose His Majesty's Attorney General, without any previous explanation to us, very disrespectful."***

It was well known by this time that Barker's main priority was his own comfort and well-being and his pupils' welfare was not considered to be of any great importance. He was not a dedicated teacher and his main interests were in managing the school estates and his extramural activities.

He was an excellent horseman and it followed that he was also passionately fond of hunting. This love of hunting brought him into regular contact with the aristocracy in the surrounding shires and thus ensured that, amongst other things, he enjoyed many a stirrup cup with them. It also provided him with opportunities to meet and converse with all the influential figures in the area.

In addition to this, it should be remembered, that he was a member of the Warden and Society and moved freely within this circle also.

His position in Sutton was therefore very secure and it was no surprise that he had the full support of all the Trustees, including Sir John Wilmot.

Despite Wilmot making light of Tucker's letter, Edward Sadler decided to call an early meeting of the Trustees on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1834, in an attempt to clarify any misunderstandings and to resolve outstanding matters in dispute.

The Minute Book showed that Barker produced the rules and regulations in respect of the school hours and the attendance of the boys. The school hours were stipulated, as follows:-

8.00am – 11.00am Mondays to Saturday.

2.00pm – 5.00pm Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with half holidays on the other days.

When this is tallied up, it amounts to a mere 27 hours per week!

In addition, there were two vacations of 4 weeks each at Christmas and Midsummer.

With regards to the question of the schoolroom, the minutes continued:-

***“Mr Barker, having produced a recommendation from the Trustees, made at their last meeting, either to restore the old schoolroom, or provide another suitable for the purpose and also having stated that in consideration of the large sums he had expended on his house, the understanding between him and the Trustees was that he should have two years to make this alteration in, unless the number of boys should increase so much as to make this alteration necessary before the expiration of the two years.”***

The Trustees resolved that this was ‘highly satisfactory’.

In relation to the playground for the boys, the minutes stated:-

***“Mr Barker reported that he had endeavoured to find a playground without success, but was willing to dedicate so much of his orchard as the Trustees may direct.”***

The Trustees accepted this offer, leaving Barker to decide the size of the playground.

The next thing to come flying in Barker’s direction was a petition, addressed to the Trustees, and signed by numerous and respected people in Sutton.

It was written in the somewhat flowery prose prevailing at the time and requested the following:-

***“We the undersigned inhabitants and freeholders of the Parish of Sutton Coldfield beg leave to represent that in consequence of the instruction given to the scholars attending the school of which you are the Guardians being confined to Latin and Greek the limited benefits which now arise from the school are within the reach of but very few of the inhabitants and the inhabitants at large derive little or no advantage therefrom; indeed we consider the school has hitherto operated rather as a check than otherwise to the general interest of the Parish.***

***We beg leave further to represent and we feel confident that if some alteration were made in the constitution of the school or present system of instruction and it was made an efficient school for an English education in addition to Latin and Greek, the very handsome endowment being quite ample for the purpose, the benefits and advantages derived would be greatly increased and extended and that the Parish would altogether much improve and increase in wealth and respectability; such being the opinion***

***we entertain, we respectfully solicit you to communicate with the Master of the School and endeavour to obtain his consent to the alterations we have suggested.***

***We seek the required alteration through you and apply to you as being, as we consider in this case our Guardians, and therefore the persons from whom we ought in the first place to seek redress.***

***We hope the Master of the School will not oppose the improvement we desire, but feel he will best do his duty and consult his own interest by at once acceding to this application.***

***We consider we should be quite out of place if we were to attempt to explain to you what appears to us to have been the intentions of our pious founder of the school with which you must be conversant than ourselves. We beg, however, to call your special attention to the fact of there being now 5 and for some years past 2 or 3 scholars only attending the school and that the income received by the Master is near £500 per annum, a sum we consider evidently far too great for the little duty he performs.***

**FILE NOTE:** This is roughly the equivalent of £70,000 today.

***With respect to a scheme for the future regulation and management of the school should the Master not oppose this application, and we hope he will not, it should as we consider emanate with you as Guardians of the school and we feel convinced you will use your best exertions to make the school an efficient one for a general English education, in addition to Latin and Greek, and put it on such a footing as will give general satisfaction and make it as profitable to the Parish at large as the very handsome endowment imperatively calls for and we trust we shall be favoured with some communication from you on the subject.***

***We cannot allow the present opportunity to pass without thanking you for the kind attention you bestowed on the welfare of the school at your last meeting and for what you then did.”***

Despite the good intentions of the people who signed the petition, it was never going to succeed, as Charles Barker’s influence with the Trustees was far too great for it to have any effect.

In fact Sarah Holbeche made an entry in her diary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1835, as follows:-

***“Mr Barker one of the big ‘B’s – Warden.”***

The big B’s was a very important triumvirate in Sutton during the 1830’s. They were the Rector, the Reverend William Riland Bedford, George Browne (Warden in 1833

and 1834) who lived at Park House for many years, also referred to as the Blade Mill, and Charles Barker himself.

Riland Bedford was, in fact, asked to sign the petition but refused. He did, however, introduce a rider to the petition, which elicited a further 16 signatures in support. This read, as follows:-

***“Though, after the most mature consideration of the above address, I feel that I cannot sign it in its present shape. Yet, as I have been strongly urged to do so, I hope the Trustees will excuse my stating what my opinion on the subject is.***

***The Parish of Sutton Coldfield, the population of which is about 3,680, is very peculiarly situated with respect to the education of its inhabitants. By direction of the Court of Chancery, the Corporation have established schools in three different parts of the Parish, which schools, about 330 children, receive an excellent common English education, free of expense. There is also belonging to the Corporation another school of a rather superior description for the education of 24 boys who are selected from a class of persons above those from families the larger schools are usually filled. These are also educated free of expense.***

***It thus appears that the inhabitants of Sutton Coldfield are exceedingly well provided for as respects a common English education, but I would beg to state that if the Trustees can make any equitable arrangement with the Schoolmaster by which the higher branches of an English education, together with a knowledge of those modern languages which are most necessary in commercial pursuits, shall be secured to the boys who may attend the Free Grammar School, I believe they will confer a very great benefit upon the inhabitants of this Parish.”***

The Trustees resolved that the petition, together with a copy of the Charter under which the school was regulated and a statement of everything relating to the school, be laid before the Commissioners of the Charities. Their opinion was also asked, as to the powers of the Trustees to comply with the said petition, should they, upon consideration, be inclined to do so.

This decision would not have pleased Charles Barker, as he would have much preferred the Trustees to have responded to the petition themselves by saying that there was no power for the school to have English classes.

At about the same time as the petition was being presented, an entry in Sarah Holbeche’s diary on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1835, referred scathingly of Barker’s poor teaching. Her comments, upon the death of her younger brother Tom were, as follows:-



***"On Mr Barker's head must rest or rather rested much blame, for Tom's want of education and capability for better things.***

***He was in the Merchant Service. Want of education and proneness to associate with those below him, induced Mr Croxall (a solicitor in Sutton) to persuade my father and hurry his decision in sending him to sea. He was twice wrecked and worked his way home from India. Hardships, privations and exposure brought disease in the lungs."***

At the next meeting of the Trustees, in July 1834, they discussed Charles Tucker's reply on behalf of the Charity Commissioners.

In essence, the Charity Commissioners replied that:-

***"They could not be held to make it compulsory upon the Headmaster to give any education of a description inferior to that which was usually comprehended under the term 'Grammar', which has been restricted by the decisions of Courts of Equity to a classical education."***

On the matter of Riland Bedford's suggestion, they were of the opinion that this had merit.

Unfortunately, his additional idea that some clergyman, probably his own curate, should take the English classes at the school and that Barker should receive a quarterly payment for allowing part of his house to be used for this purpose, did not receive approval.

Their letter, in response, stated:-

***"In reference to the compromise alluded to, the Commissioners think it their duty to state, although it may tend to retard the arrangement which they consider desirable, that it appears to them that a gentleman in Holy Orders cannot properly hold the office of schoolmaster. As the Commissioners have no authority to bind any party to their opinion, the foregoing must be considered as thrown out merely for the guidance of the Trustees, without any official sanction."***

This is a reference, of course, to the fact Bishop Vesey had stipulated initially that the schoolteacher should be a layman.

Charles Barker therefore, no doubt, gave a sigh of relief and continued along his merry way!

The next few years were ones of inactivity, both on the part of the Headmaster and also the Trustees. At their meeting at the School House, on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1835, only three of the surviving Trustees attended. Similarly, only three Trustees attended the next meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1836 and it was minuted that:-

***“No business having been this day laid before the Trustees, which required their attention, the meeting adjourned to the fixed annual day unless in the mean time specially convened.”***

The year 1836 was a notable year for Charles Barker as, during this period, he was elected as Warden. He was re-elected the following year also.

In addition to this, in the *Coventry Standard* on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1837 Charles Barker's name appeared on the '**List of New County Magistrates**'.

When the Trustees met again on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1837 only two attended, these being Sir J E E Wilmot and the Reverend E A Bagot.

Edward Sadler, who had been a Trustee for 55 years and had attended every meeting held during this period, except for the last when ill health prevented him, died on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1837, aged 79. He was succeeded by his youngest son Richard.

At the next meeting, on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1838, The Reverend Bagot was the only attendee. He discussed the appointment of new Trustees with Barker and they decided upon nine replacements, five of which were nominated by Barker. This ensured the balance of power was still very much with Barker.

As before, none were Suttonians and all but two were relations of the previous Trustees.

Despite being newly appointed, only five of them attended the next annual meeting in July 1839, but nothing of consequence needed to be discussed, except Barker reported that the day of the annual meeting was inconvenient to him on account of his holidays. The Trustees resolved that, in future, the annual meeting would be put back to September.

In actual fact, the next meeting took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1840. As the only attendee was John Floyer of Hints, Staffordshire, the meeting was therefore formerly adjourned.

A similar occurrence took place the following year on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1841 when only Charles Adderley of Hams Hall, Warwickshire attended and the meeting was again adjourned.

It is apparent from this that the Trustees were quite content to take no part in the school's affairs and to leave Barker to carry on with the day to day running in his own way.

Barker, on his part, was content to have a small number of classical scholars under his wing and it was reported this had reduced to just one pupil by 1840.

His remaining time was devoted to the management of the estates, matters relating to the Warden and Society and to his own pleasure.

Upon examination of the Census Return for 1841, it is interesting to note who were listed as being at the School House, High Street:-

Charles Barker	Aged 48	Head of Household	Schoolmaster
Caroline Barker	Aged 45	Wife	
Charles Barker	Aged 14	Son	
Catherine Barker	Aged 8	Daughter	
Helen Barker	Aged 43	Sister	
George Mylne	Aged 45	Brother-in-Law	Independent Means
Jane Sophia Mylne	Aged 50	Wife also Sister of Charles Barker	Independent Means
Elizabeth Smith	Aged 30	Servant	
Elizabeth Sidwell	Aged 30	Servant	
Mary Bridges	Aged 25	Servant	
Thomas Damper	Aged 19	Servant	

It is more than possible that Jane, her husband George and her sister Helen were not actually residing at the School House at the time the census was taken, but were merely on a visit to see their brother.

On the next Census Return in 1851, it can be seen that all three were living together at 4, Paragon Terrace, Bath Road, Cheltenham, in one of the most fashionable parts of the town. They were described as Annuitants, which meant they all had private income of their own.



Fig. 7 Paragon Terrace, Bath Road, Cheltenham where Jane Mylne (nee Barker) lived with her husband and sister.

Following research, it is known that Charles' Sister, Jane, married her husband George in Italy. Could it be that they met whilst both on the 'Grand Tour' which was *de rigeur* at the time?

Charles Barker was an accomplished classical scholar of the old school and, during the period attending Rugby School, he was a contemporary of and friend of W C Macready, a Shakespearian actor who later went into theatre management (1793-1873). Barker, however, did not publish any works during his career.

He did, unknowingly, finally make print, in '*The Warden*' magazine over 50 years after his death, when one of his poems was included in an article.

In 1841, it would appear that Charles Barker was approached to support a Sutton Park Bazaar in aid of the erection of St. John's Church, Walmley and accordingly wrote a long narrative poem. This was divided into three cantos and so only the Introduction is included here.

#### INTRODUCTION

*The way was short, the wind was fair,  
The Minstrel ordered chaise and pair,  
Resolved to visit the Bazaar.  
For well that Park remembered he,  
And all its wild-wood scenery;  
And longed to view the glad array  
Of lords, and 'squires, and ladies gay,  
Would gather to its bowers that day.  
And fain to others would he tell  
The charms himself had loved so well.  
Fain would he guide their steps across  
The hill, the vale, the moor, the moss,  
And point each beauty there:  
Perhaps, too, he was not unwilling  
To try to turn an honest shilling  
In aid of the Bazaar.  
Then, lords and ladies, listen pray  
To what such wondrous bard can say.*

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October 1842 the situation at the school completely changed when Charles Barker died, following a fall from his horse. Kerry Osbourne, in his book '*The History of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School*' summed up the situation quite succinctly by stating:-

***"Barker's removal from the scene was of considerable benefit to the progress of the school and may even have prevented its extinction."***

An article on Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1842, which appeared in the *Warwick & Warwickshire Advertiser* and which was attributed to *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* gave a full account of the incident, as follows:-

***'We announce the sudden death of Charles Barker Esq. of Sutton Coldfield, one of the magistrates for Warwickshire, acting for the northern division of that County.***

***On Monday afternoon, Mr Barker mounted his horse to call on Joseph Webster Esq. of Penns. After conversing with that gentleman for some time, he left his horse in the care of a servant and walked across the fields with Mr Baron Webster, who was shooting, after which, about 5.00 o'clock, he parted with Mr Webster, walked quickly across the ploughed field and rode away, to return home for dinner.***

***At this time, he appeared in perfect health and spirits, but very shortly afterwards he was found by Mr Baron Webster lying by the side of the lane leading from Penns to Sutton and, in a few minutes, notwithstanding the kind and judicious care of Mr Baron Webster, he expired in his arms.***

***An inquest was held at the Swan Inn at Sutton, on Tuesday afternoon, before Mr Horton the Warden.***

**FILE NOTE:** The Swan Inn was situated right next to Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and was therefore the most appropriate to use. At the time, public houses were very often used for inquests and also for auctions. The Swan was frequently referred to as the 'Upper Swan' to differentiate between it and the public house of the same name, positioned closer to the town on the High Street. This was called the 'Lower Swan'. Eventually, for purposes of clarity, the name was changed to the Royal.

***Mr Baron Webster was examined as to the foregoing facts. Mr Hodgson (by whom, together with Dr. Evans, Mr Dickinson Crompton and Mr Horton, a careful post mortem examination had been made), deposed that there were no marks of disease or injury to produce death, which he could only account for was the supposition that it occurred from a fainting fit.***

***The jury immediately returned a verdict of 'Died by the visitation of God!'***

An article, written by Stephen Roberts for the Old Veseyian's website, described the event in similar fashion, but he also additionally commented, as follows:-

***"Charles Barker had fallen from his horse, which had then bolted. The horse, in fact, returned alone. At the time of his death, Barker was 49 years old.***

***Described as 'an elegant scholar' he was, undoubtedly, a man of culture and refinement, with a taste for writing poetry. He was also noted for his***

***humour and lively conversation and pursued a profitable sideline in the selling of hay, corn and straw.***

**FILE NOTE:** This can be substantiated by an article which appeared in the '*Birmingham Journal*' on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June 1839, which detailed the prosecution of one Henry Wadley for non-payment of hay, corn and straw, the property of Charles Barker.

***On the day of his death, Barker had set out from the grammar school at about 1.00pm for Penns Lane. It was a journey he had often made. The Wire Manufacturers, Joseph Webster and his son Baron, were his friends.***

***From this distance, it seems likely that he suffered a heart attack."***

A meeting of the Trustees took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1842 at the '*Three Tuns*' Hotel and one of the items agreed upon was that Sir Eardley Wilmot should write a letter of condolence to Mrs Barker assuring her that she would not be removed from the School House until absolutely necessary and after due notice had been given to her.

Holy Trinity Parish Church contains a marble memorial tablet to Charles Barker. This is situated beneath the tower on the right hand wall.

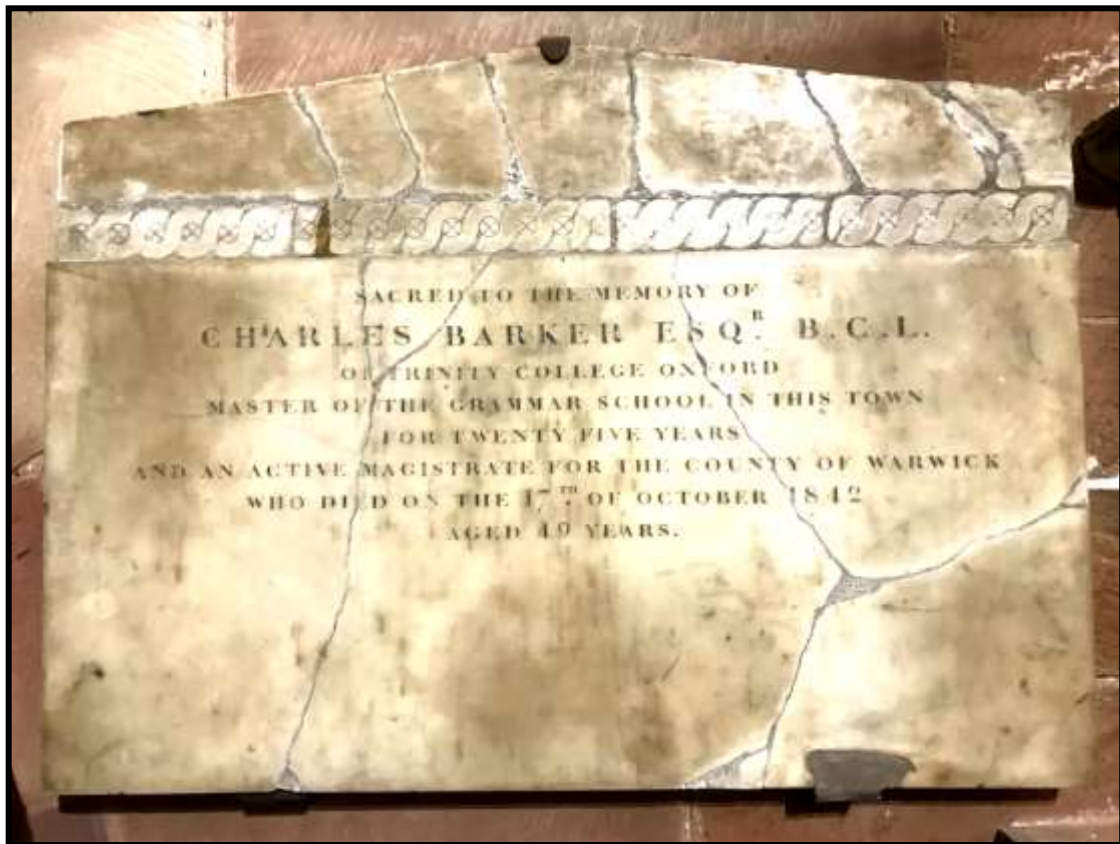


Fig. 9 Charles Barker's Memorial Tablet in Holy Trinity Parish Church. Janet & Keith Jordan's Photographic Collection.



It was not until August 1843 that James Eccleston, the replacement Headmaster, visited Sutton and received a black-edged note from Mrs Barker, dated 14<sup>th</sup> August, saying that she would be glad to see him on that day, probably to show him around the school premises.

On Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1843 an advertisement appeared in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* advising that a sale would take place at the School House on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September of Charles Barker's Household Furniture and Effects.

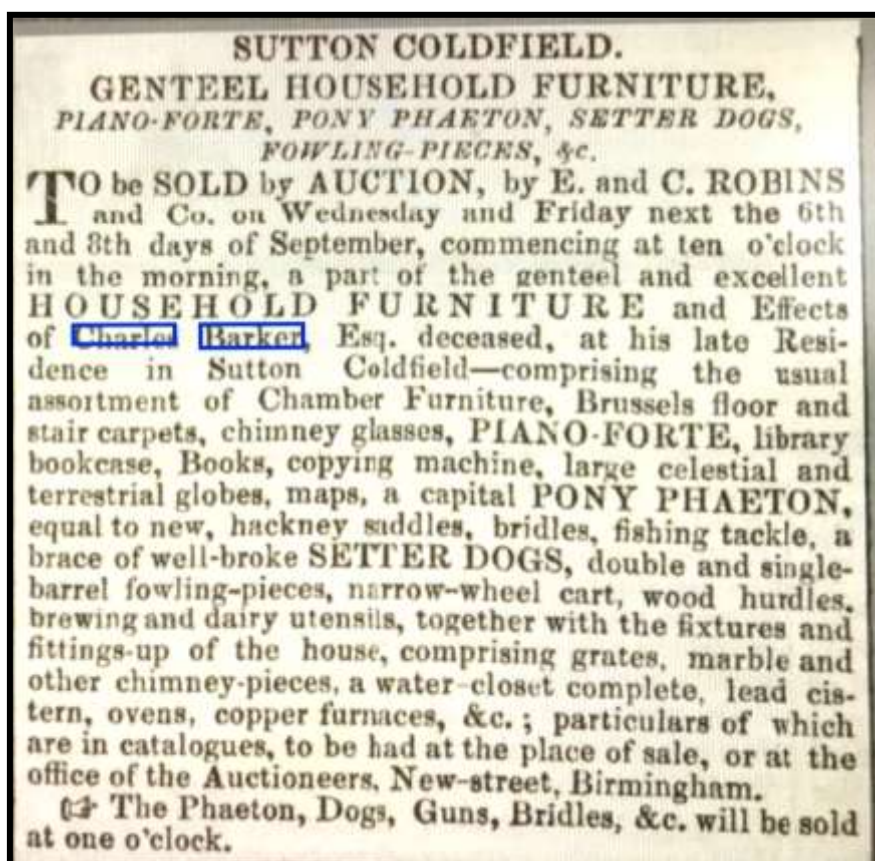


Fig.8 An advertisement which appeared in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September 1843, giving notice of the sale of Charles Barker's Household Furniture and Personal Effects.

After the sale had been finalised, Mrs Barker sent a message down to the High Street to Richard Sadler on the 11<sup>th</sup> September saying:-

**"Mrs Barker's compliments to Mr Eccleston and she has sent the key of the School House and begs to apologise for not having sent it on Saturday, as agreed before, but owing to the sale being so much longer than she expected, she could not make her final arrangements earlier."**

Mrs Barker afterwards moved into 'The Rookery' with Miss Webb. (Daughter of William Webb the Headmaster of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, who died in office in 1817).

Miss Webb herself died on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1861. Sarah Holbeche, in her diary, commented, as follows:-

**“Miss Webb died, surpassed by none in her generation for good works and kind actions, succeeded by her nephew T V Webb Esq. and not forgetting her old friends.”**

At some point in time, Mrs Barker left Sutton and moved down to Kent, where she had family and friends. She died there on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1869, aged 75, at Etherton Hill, near Tunbridge Wells.



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### **Photographs**

Fig. 1 Front elevation of 'Stanlake Park', Hurst, Berkshire in the 1920's.  
<https://landedfamilies.blogspot.com/2019/08/388-barker-of-stanlake-park.html>  
(Photograph courtesy of the University of London/Victoria County History)

Fig. 2 Valuation, prepared by Henry Jacob, of Bishop Vesey's Grammar Schools' estates in 1818.  
'A History of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School – The first 375 years' by Kerry Osbourne 1996. Produced by Rosemary Wilkinson, Sutton Coldfield. Printed by Renault Printing Co. Limited, Birmingham. Ref No. SH.48.34. BLS

Fig. 3 Charles Barker as a young man.  
'A History of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School – The first 375 years' by Kerry Osbourne 1996. Produced by Rosemary Wilkinson, Sutton Coldfield. Printed by Renault Printing Co. Limited, Birmingham. Ref No. SH.48.34. BLS

- Fig. 4 A copy of an original document, which formed the agreement made between the Trustees of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and the Corporation of Sutton Coldfield, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1830. Originally in the possession of Mr Kerry Osbourne, but now forming part of the official records of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School.
- Fig.5 Plan of the site, showing the various buildings and land owned by Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, which formed the agreement made between the Trustees of the school and the corporation of Sutton Coldfield, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1830. Originally in the possession of Mr Kerry Osbourne, but now forming part of the official records of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School.
- Fig. 6 The area around the Parish Church circa 1800, drawn up by Norman G Evans of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group in 1979. 'The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield - A Commemorative History' by Douglas V Jones. Published by The Westwood Press. Third Edition 1984.
- Fig. 7 Paragon Terrace, Bath Road, Cheltenham. <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1683586>. (Photograph courtesy of Tom Jolliffe).
- Fig.8 An advertisement which appeared in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September 1843, giving notice of the sale of Charles Barker's Household Furniture and Personal Effects.
- Fig.9 Charles Barker's Memorial Tablet in Holy Trinity Parish Church. Janet & Keith Jordan's Photographic Collection.

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