

## Barker, Edward (1816-1885)

Edward Barker (1816-1885), surgeon and pastoralist, and William Barker (1818-1899), pastoralist and medical practitioner, were born at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England, sons of John Barker (1789-1833), gentleman, and his wife Mary Anne, née Elridge (1790-1872).

Edward (b.12 July 1816), the second son, was educated at Dr Hamilton's school, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, and articled to Henry Oldknow, honorary surgeon to Nottingham Infirmary. He then went to University College Hospital, London (M.R.C.S., 1839; F.R.C.S., 1859), where he was dresser and later house surgeon to Robert Liston. He sailed for Port Phillip in the *Marmion* with his brother John; they arrived on 8 August 1840. Soon afterwards Edward deserted medicine for the land; with John he took up the pastoral runs of Barrabang, Cape Schanck and Boneo in 1840-44 and Barker's heifer station (Westernport) in 1841-42, and by himself held Englefield in 1841-42 and Kenilworth South in 1849-55; the latter was taken over by James Riley who sold it to Thomas and Andrew Chirnside in 1856. With Riley, Edward also held Kenilworth in 1841-47 and 1848-49; Peter Parton was their partner in 1847-48.

John Barker went to England in 1842 and returned to Melbourne with his wife, mother, Miss Elridge and younger brother, William, in November 1844. While Edward was looking after Barrabang in John's absence he fought a duel with Maurice Meyrick who owned the neighboring property, Coolart, Balnarring. The quarrel was over the stripping of wattle bark. Edward fired in the air but Meyrick's ball whistled past Barker's ear. He apparently became tired of pastoral pursuits in 1849, for he returned to Melbourne from his Kenilworth run to practise medicine. In 1851 he was appointed the first honorary surgeon of the Benevolent Asylum and in 1862-75 was on the surgical staff of the Melbourne Hospital. He had a large practice, for he and William Gillbee virtually shared the surgical operating of Melbourne. When the gold rush began Edward went to the Mount Alexander goldfields, where with Dr David John Thomas he combined gold digging with medicine. The partnership did not last long and both returned to their Melbourne practices. In 1859 Edward visited London and on his return was elected president of the Medical Society of Victoria, with which he had been closely associated from its foundation in 1855; he also helped to start the *Australian Medical Journal*.

After admission to the University of Melbourne (M.D., 1863) Edward was appointed the first lecturer in surgery in the new Medical School of the university, a part-time position which he held until 1880. For many years he was the local agent and secretary for the New Sydenham Society. He was a founder of the Royal Society of Victoria and an official visitor to lunatic asylums. A keen collector of books, he allowed extensive use of his large library to colleagues and friends. He served on the Medical Board of Victoria for many years. Although highly successful in practice and a large property owner he lost most of his money and in his last years, particularly after 1882 when involved in two medico-legal inquiries, he was in considerable poverty. He died at Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda, on 30 June 1885 and was buried in the Melbourne general cemetery. Both Edward and William were members of the Church of England. In 1843 at Dandenong he married Madeline Charlotte Skene, daughter of Alexander Scot of Trinity, Midlothian; she died in 1885. They had four sons and two daughters.

Edward Barker was a skilful if rather slow surgeon with a very sound reputation among his fellow practitioners. In his prime he was the best surgeon in Melbourne. As lecturer at the university he gave students a sound, practical, working knowledge of surgery.

William (b. 25 November 1818) went to Dr Hamilton's school and then studied medicine at University College Hospital (M.R.C.S., 1840). Like Edward and John, he took to the land and in July 1845 acquired the Mount Alexander run of 20,000 acres (8093 ha). It became the centre of the Castlemaine goldfields, and meetings of the miners to protest against the 30s. monthly gold licence were held in William's woolshed. In 1852 he was appointed a territorial magistrate for Castlemaine. He kept his pastoral run at Mount Alexander until it was resumed under the Duffy Land Act. He returned to medical practice in 1862 and next year was appointed surgeon to the Beechworth Hospital. In 1865-71 he practised in Echuca, then moved to Melbourne and started practice at Albert Park. There he died on 8 June 1899, unmarried.

The Barker brothers have left their name in Melbourne and Castlemaine. Barker's Road, Kew, is named after Edward. William is remembered in Castlemaine by Barker's Hill and Barker Street, and by Barker's Creek near Castlemaine.

Last updated: 17 January 2025

Source: K F Russell, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.3, 1969.



EDWARD BARKER.

