

ALFRED BARNARD

A short biography

Michael E Billinghamurst (a great grandson of Alfred Barnard); November 2011

Early Life

Alfred Barnard was born in Thaxted, Essex on 8th May 1837. His father Abraham Barnard ran a draper and grocer business in Town Street, Thaxted. His mother was Mary, formerly Hayden, who had eight children altogether, Alfred being the sixth of seven boys, and one girl. The family appear to have been brought up initially as members of the Baptist church. (The family bible indicates that all the children were baptised by the local Baptist ministers Mr. Sewell or Revd. Clark). The Barnards can trace their family back to Richard Barnard, a farmer, in the mid 17thC in the Thaxted area; they were generally farmers and/or millers.

Alfred's education was initially at a school run by Sarah and Mary Ann Barnard which from the 1841 census appears to have benefited primarily children named Barnard. This is the only information that has been found on his upbringing. (Note that the records for the 1851 Census for much of Essex have been lost). Nonetheless Alfred must have enjoyed at worst a sound education in view of his later literary success.

In 1859 Alfred married Fanny Ruffle, both then age 22, at Great Sampford Parish Church. Great Sampford is a neighbouring village of Thaxted. Fanny's father was also a draper and grocer (we believe this is a generic term of the period for a small general store). Alfred's occupation at the time is given as draper, and residence as Kensington. I can only presume that Alfred had migrated to London as the family business would not have had room for him and his brother Arthur who was still at Town Street, Thaxted.

Alfred and Fanny had three children over the next few years: Theodora Mary in March 1861, Edith Maud in July 1865, and Harold Alfred in March 1869. During this period the family moved house several times from Islington, to Pancras to Cavendish Square suggesting a certain amount of upward mobility? Alfred's occupations also seem to be equally varied from "toilette soap warehouseman" employing 3 travellers, 2 men and 2 clerks (shown as soap exporter in Theodora's birth certificate) whilst in 1865 he is a "merchant" and in 1869 "gentleman".

In the 1871 census the family is in Kingston upon Thames at 15 Derby Villas, and Alfred is described as "Wine Merchant". This indicates the genesis of the involvement with the wine and spirit trade which is discussed below.

In 1881 the family is found in Acacia Grove, Camberwell very close to Dulwich College where son Harold was a pupil from April 1880 to April 1882. Edith the younger daughter is also away in Essex at a boarding school. The household also has one young servant. Whilst, at the date of the census, there is no indication of Alfred's whereabouts (perhaps he is already on one of his Scottish whisky excursions) it would seem that the family was now reasonably prosperous.

Wine and Spirit writer

By the early 1880s Alfred appears to be working as a journalist for Harper's Weekly Gazette, a trade journal for the wine and spirits industry. Harper's was controlled by Herbert Harper and a John Bishop was Chairman. These and other members of the group, other than Alfred, appear to have had commercial interests in the wine and spirit trade. The offices were located at 39 Crutched Friars in the City of London. I have been through many back numbers of Harpers for that period but evidently the editorial policy was that no reporter's names were disclosed. The first reference to Alfred Barnard is in the 5th March 1887 edition of Harper's where it is stated that:

"In the early part of 1885 our correspondent, Mr Alfred Barnard, during a visit to many of the Highland distilleries, was struck with the fact that the Whisky world in general was entirely ignorant of many, if not the whole of, the establishments from which the various makes of Whisky emanate. At public sales, and on the market generally, the make of Glen this and Ben that are freely referred to and dealt in, but how few know anything of the locality or detail of the manufacture connected therewith. Thus the idea was formed of a personal visit to every distillery in the United Kingdom for the purpose of describing its history, locality and method of working, embodying such descriptions in a volume specially devoted to the subject." This gave rise to Alfred setting off later in 1885 to visit the 129 known whisky distilleries in Scotland as well as those in Ireland and England (161 distilleries in all). The article also describes in detail the setting of the itinerary. It is also noted that the book was richly illustrated with etchings mostly rendered from photographs.

Suffice to say Alfred Barnard and his travelling companions spent considerable time travelling around Scotland and Ireland, during 1885 to 1887, probably spread over several trips as his book suggests. Travel was by the various means then available such as rail, steamer, horse-drawn vehicles and on foot. Equally they experienced a great variety of weather, scenery and accommodation and hospitality. The book gives a colourful description of Victorian travel as well as a detailed historic record of the whisky industry of the time. Clearly he revelled in the experiences and was greatly enamoured of the places he visited and the countryside through which he passed.

The resulting book the Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom was published in March 1887 at a price of one guinea (less to subscribers pre-publication) and appears to have sold well. Original copies of the book are very rare today (and expensive) but there have been five facsimile reprints between 1969 and 2008, the last two being published by Birlinn with introductions by Richard Joynson of Loch Fyne Whiskies, of Inveraray, a leading specialist whisky retailer.

Several other smaller works on whisky by Alfred were published later as "spin off" from the original; some of these have been included in the most recent Birlinn edition. The book is an excellent historical record of the industry in the 19C as well as technically very informative. It appears to have become an essential handbook for the industry today. It is also an excellent travelogue of Victorian Britain and more particularly of Scotland.

Following the extensive time and research that went into the whisky book Alfred then set out to visit the larger breweries in Great Britain and Ireland. He planned to publish the research in three volumes which eventually became four entitled "The Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland". In the introduction to Volume 1 dated February 1889 he says:

"The kind and flattering reception, which was accorded to my work on the "Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom", prompted me to make a similar tour among the noted Breweries. The work which I now commit to the press, with becoming solicitude as to its reception, has occupied me for nearly two years, during which time I have visited the principal establishments in England, Ireland, and Scotland. My pilgrimage was undertaken, firstly, with a view to acquaint the reader with a knowledge of the colossal trade and manufacture of beer, and the vast resources of the great breweries; and, secondly, to make known the history and antecedents of some of the eminent brewers, whose names are well known to fame, and whose deeds are recorded in the annals of their country."

The emphasis is on the major breweries and Alfred approaches these by size in more or less descending order. In all 113 breweries were reviewed in the books although it appears that Barnard and his companions may have visited many more.

Volume 1 covered eleven Breweries starting with the Guinness St James' Gate Brewery in Dublin: "we decided to commence our tour at the above well known and famous Brewery, without doubt the largest establishment of its kind in the world." The format of the books is similar to the whisky book with marvellous descriptions of the journeys to the brewery locations followed by Barnard's usual detailed eye witness account of the buildings and operations accompanied by excellent illustrations.

The remaining three volumes were published as follows: Volume 2 in August 1889 covering 28 breweries; volume 3 in June 1890 with 31 breweries; volume 4 covering 43 breweries in May 1891.

The fourth volume was a late addition and the "justification" for it is contained in Alfred's preface to volume 4 which I quote below:

On completion of my work, "Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland", I feel it incumbent on me to say a few parting words, and explain, to my numerous subscribers, the reason of the appearance of this, the Fourth Volume.

On writing up my voluminous notes, and putting them into print, it was impossible to include, in the Third Volume, an account of all the Breweries visited, hence a supplemental one was absolutely necessary.

The reader must bear in mind that the work is not a treatise on the art of brewing, but simply a *tourist's* description of some of the noted Breweries where the "National Drink" is well brewed, and the malt is manufactured from whence the beverage is produced.

I have endeavoured, as much as possible, to condense the substance of what I saw, and daily noted down during my travels, adding thereto some topographical information concerning the localities wherein the Breweries are situated.

Regarding the illustrations I feel justifiably proud of the way in which the work has been accomplished, as the publishers have spared neither time nor trouble in having the pictures executed with the utmost accuracy. Some of the fac-simile impressions from the photographs exhibit pictures full of crispness and beauty---and how admirably the various artists have succeeded, the work itself shows.

To make the work as complete as possible, I have given minute descriptions of the newest appliances, machinery and inventions, which came under my notice; and have, also, collected some valuable information on

yeast cultivation and storing; analyses of various brewing waters, and the utilisation of waste steam; so that those Brewers, wishing to remodel their Breweries, may find the book of considerable use.

And now that my tale is told, and my laborious but pleasing task is ended, like many a self-complacent scribbler, I am unwilling to resign the pen while one final note can be portrayed.

Again I have to acknowledge, with gratitude, the many facilities afforded me, and assistance rendered, by some of our most eminent and scientific Brewers, whose names are too numerous to mention. Such assistance has stamped a superior and intrinsic value on the work it would not otherwise have possessed, and imparted to it the nature and importance of a handbook.

Finally, to those who have so liberally supported this publication I tender my gratitude and acknowledge my obligations, and from my critics I again ask their wonted indulgence.

May 30th, 1891

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It is asserted in the introduction to the centenary reprint of the Whisky book that the proprietors of the breweries had to pay an entry fee of 25 guineas to Alfred Barnard for inclusion in the Brewery books.

As a result of these works Alfred was commissioned to write an illustrated book on the business of William Whiteley who founded the first department store in London, in Westbourne Grove, becoming a household name. The book is entitled "Orchards and Gardens ancient and modern" with the subtitle "With a description of the Orchards, Gardens, Model Farms and Factories owned by Mr William Whiteley, of Westbourne Grove, London".

Alfred Barnard is also noted in the title page as author of "Classic Canongate", and "A Tour of Argyllshire". The book was printed by Sir Joseph Causton & Sons of 9 Eastcheap, EC; 1895. I have not been able to trace copies of the other referenced books.

William Whiteley had expected high sales of the book at five shillings each and 50,000 copies were printed. However few copies were sold and indeed my own copy bears a "with Compliments" stamp from Mr Whiteley on the fly leaf!

Personal life after 1881

Returning to Alfred Barnard's personal life after 1881 there are again only small windows available such as census and marriage records.

The first item post 1881 is the marriage of the Barnards' younger daughter Edith Maud to Joseph Rayner on 23 August 1886 which took place in Southwark; Alfred was a witness with occupation given as accountant (curious). The next "window" is the 1891 census. We find the family in South Norwood at 14 Whitworth Road; Alfred is now described as a Journalist and author. He is there with wife Fanny, and Theodora and Harold (shown as a "Clerk, Merchants"). Then there is the marriage of daughter Theodora Mary to Herbert Smithers in April 1895 at Holy Trinity Church, Beckenham. Theodora is shown as living at Glenalmond, Whitworth Road, South Norwood (the same address as in 1891) and Alfred is a witness and is described as a Journalist.

In the 1901 census Fanny and Harold (now called a “journalistic clerk”) remain at 14 Whitworth Road, South Norwood whilst Alfred is found as a visitor at the home of a dentist(sic), Henry Chapman and his wife at 33 Howe Street, Edinburgh. Alfred is described as an Author and Pressman. One can only imagine that he was there on whisky or related business particularly given that he wrote several small books in the late 1890s for individual distillers. For example in 1889 the Highland Distilleries Company commissioned him to write about their four distilleries. It was titled “Willie Brewd a Peck o’ Maut” and is included in the 2008 reprint of Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom. Another book, also included in the 2008 reprint, was possibly published in the first two or three years of the 20th century titled “How to blend Scotch Whisky”; it includes brief descriptions of three distilleries.

It would seem that Alfred Barnard had continued to work for or contribute to the Harper’s Weekly Gazette after the publication of the Whisky Distilleries book in 1887. His son joined the firm at sometime around 1901.

In 1902 the Harpers decided to expand the ownership of Harper’s Weekly Gazette. They established a Limited company with an initial capital of about £19,000 and sold shares to employees and others that were interested. Alfred Barnard was one of the buyers and became a director with Herbert Harper and John Bishop and Alfred’s son Harold became the Company Secretary.

The timing was not propitious, at least for the buyers. The wine and liquor trade was beginning to experience difficulties due to an economic recession in the first few years of the 1900s, which was exacerbated by Lloyd George, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, imposing a huge increase in duty on the trade in 1909. With falling circulation the company had been losing money and the new impost decimated the trade and the Gazette’s circulation.

Alfred’s woes were far from over. On 17th June 1909 Harold died, at the age of 40, from a severe attack of pneumonia, which the Gazette recorded “as of scarcely 48 hours’ duration”. The journal continued: “From all those who knew his gentle disposition, sterling sense of duty, and will and capacity to fulfil it, we shall we know have the warmest and sincerest sympathy, and we bespeak the same for the family from whom he is so suddenly removed in the prime of youth and vigour.” The secretarial duties were taken on temporarily by his father Alfred. [As a footnote, I recall that one of Harold’s brothers in law, my great uncle James Perrier, told me that Harold was earning close to £500pa at Harpers soon after he married James’s sister, my grandmother].

Then in early 1910 the Gazette went into liquidation and the business was sold to its printer which was its largest creditor. Alfred lost his investment and evidently his livelihood.

A further blow was to descend early the following year, 1911, when his elder daughter, Theodora Mary (Smithers) died suddenly on 19th February at the age of 49. By this time Alfred Barnard and his wife Fanny had moved to Wallington near Croydon, near to their younger daughter Edith (Rayner). By the time of the 1911 census Alfred and Fanny are living at 11 Grenaby Road, South Croydon, a less attractive and less expensive area than Whitworth Road South Norwood; Alfred is described as a retired journalist. They remained there until their deaths.

There is no further record of Alfred's activities. In November 1914 Fanny died at the age of 78 of heart disease and Alfred followed at the end of May 1918. It is believed that they are buried at Croydon cemetery.

Postscript

One of the sad aspects of this short review of the life of Alfred Barnard, my great grandfather, is how little my brother and I knew of him until comparatively recently. My mother was not three when her father Harold Barnard died and she and her mother went back to her maternal grandmother's home in South Norwood soon after Harold's death. Sadly it seems that there was little, if any, contact with Alfred and Fanny thereafter, although for most of her life my mother had a warm relationship with her first cousin Beatrice Rayner, the daughter of Alfred's younger daughter.

Thus whilst I have been able to assemble some basic facts on Alfred Barnard, the only family record is a copy of the fly leaf from the family bible which records all the births of Alfred and his siblings and a cryptic family tree roughed out by my mother which describes her grandfather, Alfred, as a publisher and her father as a newspaper editor.

Therefore to gain a truer insight into the persona of Alfred Barnard it is necessary to read his books. From these one gains a sense of a man with a wonderful joie de vivre, with an enormous appreciation of his surroundings, in particular the Scottish countryside, as well as a continually questioning mind coupled with a tremendous, almost obsessive, eye for detail. His enthusiasm would have been catching. The quality of his writing also suggests a well educated person and one who is well read. He also displays considerable warmth and appreciation of those with whom he interacts.

I have tried to find some of his own words to conclude this; there are many to choose from. I have opted for a short extract from what is possibly his last book (How to Blend Scotch Whisky) where he is setting out with his companions from Glasgow to go to Craigellachie :

What a relief to bid farewell to the hustle of noisy thoroughfares and the sterner pursuits of industry, to again wander northwards into sunshine and a breezy mountain atmosphere. How we enjoyed the rush of the train, panting and roaring along through such a pleasant country; who would exchange this luxurious travelling for the coaching days of olden times!

And it is fitting to end with the short verse at the end of that book:

For we could do no less than drink
A glass of this immortal drink

Sources: Other than the usual public records such as Free BDM and UK censuses I was able to review archives at Harpers offices before their removal from the City of London. I have also relied on material in the introductions of the 1969 reprint (I Glen) and 1987 reprint (Michael Moss) where it does not conflict with my own findings. I must also thank Richard Joynson of Loch Fyne Whiskies, in Inveraray, for his input and the additional material he has added to the 2003 and 2008 reprints of the whisky book.

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