

## HISTORICAL NOTE

# Snow, Empson and the Barkers of Bath

### D. Zuck

*Honorary Consultant Anaesthetist, Enfield District Hospitals, UK*

### Summary

The identity of the artist who painted the well-known portrait of John Snow has been established. It has been discovered that the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 1847.

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*Correspondence to: Dr D. Zuck.*

*E-mail: fy96@dial.pipex.co.uk*

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In addition to the well-known photograph of John Snow at the age of 44, taken in 1857, the year before his death, there exists an earlier portrait in oils (Fig. 1), the property of Dr R. G. Snow. A modern copy of this portrait hangs in the Royal College of Anaesthetists. Dr Snow, a retired anaesthetist, is descended from John Snow's brother Robert (1819–1886). The College's copy was commissioned by Dr Jackson Rees and was painted by Charles Oliver. Who painted the original was not known; enquiries made by Mr Oliver failed to reveal the identity of the artist.

Also in the family is a portrait in oils of Charles Empson (Fig. 2). This portrait, also without attribution, is the property of Mr T. A. Snow, a descendant of John Snow's brother Thomas (1821–1893). Charles Empson was the brother of John Snow's mother Frances (Fanny), and was therefore John Snow's uncle. In 1824, he accompanied Robert Stephenson, son of George, the railway engineer, to South America. They returned in 1827, and Empson opened a bookshop in Newcastle upon Tyne, very close to the surgery of William Hardcastle, to whom John Snow was apprenticed [1]. Empson published an entertaining account of his adventures in Colombia, including a long description of the goitre, which was so prevalent that anyone without one was thought to be deformed [2]. He moved to Bath in 1834 and set up as a dealer in books, paintings, and objets d'art. John Snow visited him in 1836, en route to the Windmill School of Medicine in London. Richardson, in his biography of Snow, says that he was devotedly attached to Empson.

Charles Empson died in 1861, and is buried next to John Snow in the Brompton Cemetery. His possessions were sold by auction, the auctioneer's catalogue listing, among a large number of other works of art, several pictures by Thomas Barker, a local painter. An enquiry at the Royal Academy yielded a photocopy of a brief biographical note and a page with a list of those of Barker's paintings that had been exhibited there. Also listed on that page was Thomas Jones Barker, eldest son of Thomas Barker, and under his name item 601 of the 1847 exhibition leaped out (Fig. 3). The effect of this discovery on the writer can be imagined.

### The family doctor

Recently, while plotting the extent of John Snow's general practice by marking the non-anaesthetic visits noted in his Case Books on a map of North London [3], it was noticed that there were quite frequent attendances at three or four outlying addresses about a mile from the compact nucleus of his practice in Soho. This seemed strange. Among these addresses were 101 Stanhope Street, off Hampstead Road, 40 Ampthill Square, which was north of Euston Station and is now a housing estate, and 37 Gloucester Road, Regent's Park. Comparing these addresses with those on the Royal Academy's list, it is seen that they are places where Thomas Jones Barker and his family lived, and it is clear that John Snow was the Barker family's general practitioner, and, as the entries bear out, also their obstetrician [4]. In all, nearly 100 visits to the Barker family are indexed, and it appears that on a few

occasions Richard Ellis, when meticulously transcribing the entries, misread Snow's handwriting, and entered I. J. and I. James Barker for T. J. and T. Jones Barker. The relationship must have originated from Charles Empson's friendship with Thomas Barker in Bath. The Royal Academy did not start to publish an illustrated catalogue until 1888, and still does not keep pictorial records of all exhibits, so the very remote possibility that item 601 was a different portrait of John Snow of which we have no knowledge today cannot be disproved. However, the existence of another such portrait seems most unlikely, and the date (1847) fits well with this representation of Snow's probable appearance at the age of 34.

### The Barkers

Both Barkers have an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Thomas (1769–1847) was a landscape painter and the founder of an artistic dynasty known as the Barkers of Bath [5]. All four of his sons and one of his four daughters were artists. He is said to have been so influenced by Gainsborough that their works were often confused. A number of his pictures depict scenes, usually overcast, of the countryside around Bath. In addition, he painted a number of sporting pictures. Some of his

paintings are in the Tate, the Bath Victoria and the Bristol Art Galleries, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and the Fine Arts Museums, San Francisco. Some of his scenes were used to decorate Worcester china.

Thomas Jones Barker (1815–1882) was trained first by his father, then went to Paris in 1834 and spent four years studying with Émile-Jean-Horace Vernet (1789–1863). Subsequently, he attracted several prestigious commissions and exhibited in the French salons during the late 1830s and early 1840s. Vernet was the son and grandson of French painters of landscapes and military subjects. He specialised in battle scenes and was among the foremost of French military painters. The National Gallery owns his portrait of Napoleon and five battle paintings.

Thomas Jones Barker returned to England and settled in London in 1845. Although he painted portraits and sporting scenes, he is best known for his historical paintings, especially the splendid battle scenes of the Napoleonic, Crimean and Franco-Prussian Wars. He was sufficiently successful to have employed a manservant, who also was a patient of John Snow's. His works, including his 1848 self-portrait, are owned by the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, and the Southampton Art Gallery. Prints of his battle



Figure 1 Dr John Snow (1813–1858).

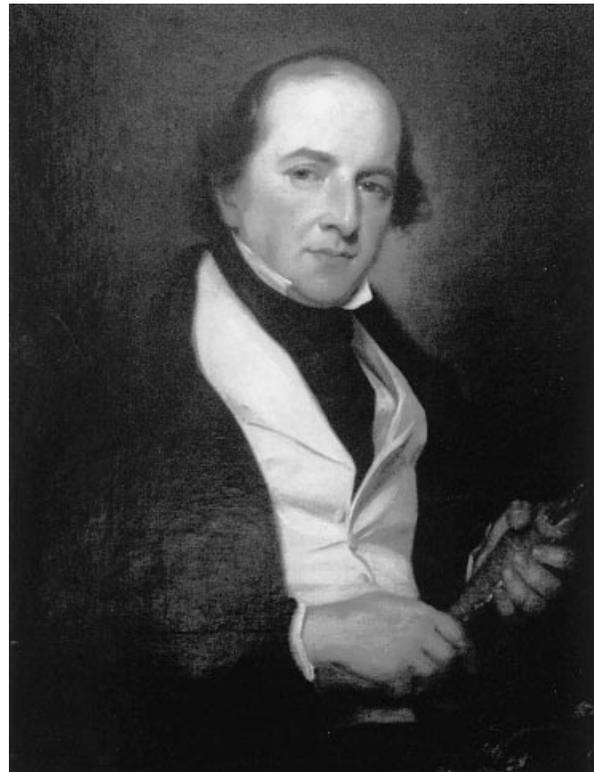


Figure 2 Charles Empson (1796–1861).

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<p><b>BARKER, Miss May H. ... Medalist.</b> 46, <i>Fitzroy Street.</i></p> <p>1891. 1992 Medal, St. Martin, etc. <i>Devonshire Mansions,</i> 107, <i>Marylebone Road.</i></p> <p>1892. 1565 A Study. 1893. 1693 Portrait Medal, etc. 1894. 1412 Study of a Head. 1895. 1332 Study in silver-point. 1658 Study in tinted plaster; relief. 1897. 1699 Head of a Man. 1708 An old Salt.</p> <p><b>BARKER, Thomas ... Painter.</b> <i>Bath.</i></p> <p>1791. 173 Landscape with Waterfall— View at Wick. 382 Moonlight with Banditti in a Cave. 437 Landscape, View near Bath. 20, <i>Lower Brook Street.</i></p> <p>1796. 206 Portrait of a young Lady. 273 Catalan Peasants at an Osteria at the foot of Monsuratti. 337 A Cavern Scene near Subiaco, Italy, with figures, etc. 342 A View of the great Waterfall at Tivoli, seen through the Ponte Lupo. 1797. 224 A Banditti of Galleots with their wounded Companion. 336 Portrait of a Girl. 532 Banditti.</p>	<p><b>BARKER, Thomas Edward.</b> <b>Painter.</b> 142, <i>High Street, Marylebone.</i></p> <p>1800. 698 A Fresh Breeze. 1801. 644 Weymouth Harbour.</p> <p><b>BARKER, Thomas Jones ... Painter.</b> 7, <i>Ely Place, Holborn.</i></p> <p>1845. 36 Ascension. 603 Mrs. Campbell of Islay. 74, <i>Newman Street.</i></p> <p>1846. 113 Charles I and Henrietta, his Queen, reposing after the Chase in Windsor Forest. 1156 The Chevy Chase. "Scarce had the Percy seized his sword, etc."</p> <p>1847. 224 Portrait of a Lady. 601 Dr. Snow. 634 The Beauties of the Court of Charles II, portraits. 40, <i>Amphill Square.</i></p> <p>1849. 539 The Troubadour. "Alas! upon the battlefield, etc."</p> <p>1850. 490 News of Battle—Edinburgh after Flodden. "Round him crush the people, etc." 37, <i>Gloucester Road,</i> <i>Regent's Park.</i></p> <p>1851. 640 An Incident in the Life of William Rufus. "While hunting in the New Forest, etc."</p>
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**Figure 3** Exhibitors at the Royal Academy in 1847.

scenes, such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, are still in production. Both Barkers are listed as exhibiting at the British Institution (1806–1867) in Pall Mall. Examples of their paintings can be seen on the World Wide Web [6, 7].

### The Royal Academy of Arts

Founded in 1768, with George III as patron and Joshua Reynolds its first President, the Royal Academy was housed in rooms on the Strand side of Somerset House. In 1837, it moved into the East Wing of the newly built National Gallery, which looked down on the newly laid out Trafalgar Square. Nelson's statue was raised to the top of its column in 1843. The first Director of the Gallery, Sir Charles Eastlake, was, conveniently, also President of the Royal Academy. The annual exhibition opened each year on the first Monday in May, and no artist was allowed to exhibit more than eight works, none of which must previously have been exhibited elsewhere. The number of visitors increased substantially after the move to Trafalgar Square. Admission cost one shilling, as did the catalogue. During the first three days of the 1847 exhibition, the total receipts were £350, which equates to about 1500 visitors a day [8].

That John Snow's portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1847 puts him in a new light. It is a distinction that he shared with a select number of medical men, including Sir Astley Cooper, and it would have

brought him to the attention of people who mattered rather earlier in his career than has previously seemed likely.

### The Empson Portrait

Also listed in the Empson sale catalogue are two portraits of Charles, one in South American costume, by Houghton, and another, 'Portrait of the late Charles Empson, Esq., by Willes Maddox.' As this portrait is not mentioned in Charles's will, it is probable that it was bought back by the family and is the one now owned by Mr T. A. Snow.

Willes (or Willis) Maddox was born in Bath in 1813, and was a protégé of the local wealthy eccentric, William Beckford of Fonthill Abbey, author of the Arabian fantasy *Vathek*. Maddox moved to London and exhibited at the Royal Academy. He painted a highly acclaimed portrait of the Turkish Ambassador and as a result was invited to Constantinople by the Sultan. There, he painted a number of portraits and Turkish scenes, dying of a fever in Pera, on the northern side of the Golden Horn in 1853. He too has an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

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Courtauld Institute, London. Gratitude must also be expressed to the late Richard Ellis, whose painstaking transcription and indexing of John Snow's Case Books has made this invaluable source so readily accessible.

## References

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- 6 [http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/barker\\_of\\_bath\\_thomas.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/barker_of_bath_thomas.html)
- 7 [http://www.military-prints.com/thomas\\_barker.htm](http://www.military-prints.com/thomas_barker.htm)
- 8 Cunningham P. *The Hand-Book of London*. London: John Murray, 1850; 428–9.