

Dr. ALFRED BARBER

Queen's South Africa: bar Defense of Ladysmith. Naming impressed
A. BARBER.



Ex Frank Mitchell Collection. The prior provenance is unknown.

Dr Alfred Barber M.B.,C.M (Aberdeen) certainly was present in Natal in the early years following the Second Anglo-Boer War. Indeed he may have been a civilian doctor active during the Siege of Ladysmith. However, to-date, there is nothing to prove that the medal above and that which follows are linked.

NAB AGO I/8/89. 114A/1903 Criminal Investigation.

This is a disjointed collection of papers, a summary of which follows.

Mid-August 1902, Dr Alfred Barber is served a subpoena by an officer of the C.I.D to appear at Port Shepstone Magistrate's Court to give evidence relating to a post mortem examination which he had conducted as some unspecified date following a faction fight.

At the time, Barber was aboard the "S S Ripplingham Grange ¹ "having received an indulgence passage to the United Kingdom; he was without work and totally without money".

¹ S.S.RIPPINGHAM GRANGE

Built by Workman, Clark & Co, Belfast, she was completed in Oct.1898 for the Ripplingham Grange Steamship Co. Fitted with refrigerated cargo space for the carriage of frozen meat and with passenger accommodation. Left South Africa 14 September 1902, arrived Southampton 10 October 1902. 28th May 1917 was torpedoed and sunk by U.86 while 140 miles south of Bishops Rock with the loss of eight lives.

A letter dated 25 August 1902 from Romer Robinson, Solicitor & Conveyancer of Durban to the Attorney General, Pietermaritzburg (PMB), draws attention to Barber's physical estate and seeks financial compensation at the rate of £1.10 per diem. After "nine wires and 3 letters", no financial assistance was forthcoming and the doctor, having been offered a post as ship surgeon, was about to leave Durban on board the "S S Alwick Castle ²". Following advances of food and cash by Romer Robinson, Barber is prevailed upon to remain in Durban. Later, when acknowledging receipt of a cheque for £21, the lawyer notes on 20 October 1902 that Barber is "impecunious and literally starving".

The last document in the file is dated 15 April 1903 from Lynn & Collins, Solicitors & Notaries Public, Durban responding to the Attorney General, denying any knowledge of Barber's whereabouts.

NAB CSO 1728. 1903/3011

From the Chief Magistrate, Durban dated 24 March 1903. He is reclaiming from exchequer a fee of 5/3 for Barber having examined an Indian thought to have plague on the court verandah. The Indian declared fee of fever; and Barber was paid by magistrate.

NAB CSO 2594. C43/1903

This is a collection of papers, a synopsis of which follows.

Included is an undated newspaper report (probably 14th June 1902) from "The Mercury", headline "A Doctor's Escapade", describing Barber's drunk and disorderly behaviour.

Letter 21st February 1903 from D Campbell-Watt M.D., Secretary, Natal Medical Council ³ to Governor of Durban Gaol requesting information on Barber.

Letter to Secretary, Natal Medical Council from John R Thomson, Governor of the gaol, PMB dated 23 February 1903 stating that Barber was admitted to the gaol on 11th June 1902. He was arraigned before the City Magistrate on 13th (June 1902)(one Mr. Stuart presiding) but that the outcome was unknown to him. In fact, he was fined £2. There had been a prior court appearance for a self-same reason.

Copy of the "Return of Convictions Recorded Against" Dr Barber notes a history of fines with hard labour dated 15th January 1903, 26th January 1903 and 21st February 1903.

Letter dated 21st March 1903 addressed to Campbell-Watt from Dr J Hamilton Safe of Addington Hospital confirming that Barber had been

² ALNWICK CASTLE built by Wm Beardmore & Company Govan, 1901 for Union Castle Mail Steamship Company. Passenger Cargo Vessel. Left Port Elizabeth 18th July 1902, arrived Southampton 11 August 1902. 1917 torpedoed and sunk 300 miles from Bishops Rock; loss of 40 lives.

³ The Natal Medical Council was established in terms of section 18 of the 'Medical and Pharmacy Act' of 1896 and the first meeting was held on 9 October, 1896 in Pietermaritzburg.

admitted with Cirrhosis of the Liver and was thought to be living at the Seaman's Institute, Durban.

Receipt for Registered Articles canceller Chapel Street, Pietermaritzburg dated 24th March 1903 from Campbell-Watt to Alfred Barber M.B., C.M.(Aberdeen) at Durban.

Two letters dated respectively 24th March 1903 and 30th April 1903, requiring Barber to appear before the Natal Medical Council "to show why his name should not be erased from the register, [he] having been charged with infamous and disgraceful conduct as is shown by the convictions against him in the Criminal Court of the Colony". The last was sent to the Durban Gaol.

Letter from C.I.D, Natal to Campbell-Watt dated 5th May 1903 explaining that Barber was in Durban goal sentenced to 14 days hard labour for drunkenness; and informing Campbell-Watt that Barber was usually to be found of a night in the "casual ward or in Albert Park".

Receipt for Registered Article, canceller "Chapel Street, Pietermaritzburg" dated 6th May 1903 from Campbell-Watt to Dr Alfred Barber M.B., C.M.(Aberdeen) at Ingwavama, Zululand marked "GONE NO ADDRESS"

A typed letter from Barber to Campbell-Watt dated 7th May 1903 wherein he confirms that he shall attend the meeting scheduled for 8th May 1903. It goes on to say: "I may state that I am not, at present, in practice in Natal, and my name being still on the register through an oversight, I ask the Council to kindly overlook this slight indiscretion on my part, and to allow me to formally to resign my position as Medical Practitioner in the Colony of Natal".

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alfred Barber" followed by the initials "M. B." in a smaller, printed font.

Letter from Campbell-Watt to the Colonial Secretary dated 12th May 1903. Dr Barber had appeared before The Council as requested. It reads inter alia that "After full consideration the Council judged Dr Alfred Barber to have been guilty of disgraceful conduct and resolved to advise the Governor in Council to erase his name from the Register & to withdraw & cancel his license". The Executive Council minute of 12th June 1903 confirms this decision and notice is published to that effect in the Gazette dated 23rd June 1903.

REFERENCES:

1. Natal Archives Repository, Pietermaritzburg.
2. The Medical Register, General Medical Council, London after 1947
3. The Medical Directory, London: J & A Churchill Ltd., after 1947

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