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MR AND MRS BARKER AND FAMILY : FRANKS IN THE LEVANT

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John Barker, Levant Company Consul in Aleppo, British Consul and Consul General in Egypt, and creator of a garden, is only a footnote in history. But he represents an important group in the kaleidoscope population and culture of the Eastern Mediterranean: the 'Turkey merchants', the Consuls and their families who lived and worked for generations in Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon.

Barker may have hoped to shine in the reflected glory of Lady Hester Stanhope, whom with her lover, Michael Bruce, and physician, Charles Meryon, he met in winter 1812. In his relationship with Lady Hester and others one feels that, by class-based British thinking, Barker was regarded as 'not quite a gentleman'. He, with good reason, regarded himself as a 'friend' of Lady Hester - and he certainly had good reason to regard himself as a friend of Michael Bruce with whom he travelled and looked after when he was ill. Lady Hester probably saw Barker as 'useful', rather as she did her long suffering doctor. She was, for all her eccentric life style, a born aristocrat rather than a democrat.

She did however at times speak of and to Barker almost with admiration. In June 1814 she wrote to him: "... part of my respect for you proceeds from you being a true John Bull, who is

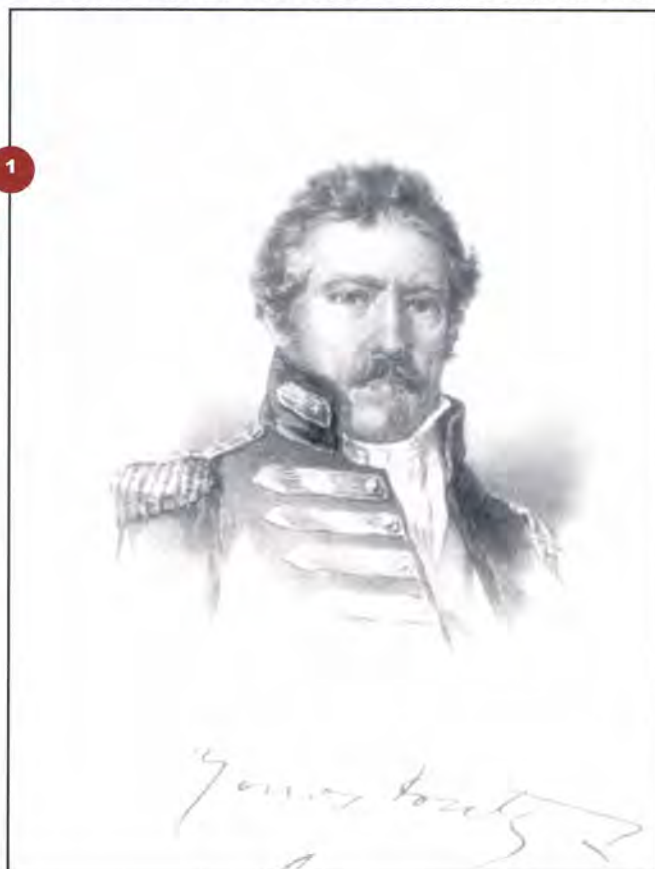
always marching to Paris, & never getting there." In a letter in 1815 she wrote of him as "a thorough John Bull", and in a footnote added: "The virtues I grant to John Bull are liberality and sincerity without parade". She wrote of him to the British Ambassador to the Porte: "he is a very good sort of John Bull (he) possesses a high degree of the necessary qualifications of a John Bull, that is, considering the person of a king like that of the Great Lama..."¹.

Dr Meryon commented ruefully (after Lady Hester's death) that she was "noble by birth and haughty by nature"².

Here, I look at John Barker and his family as members of an expatriate community who, although always claiming citizenship of their 'mother country', were most comfortable in their countries of birth and adoption, particularly when in the company of their 'own' people. In 1815 Barker wrote of British travellers to an acquaintance: "a countryman can never be to me a stranger"³. Although Barker lived predominantly in Turkey, Syria and Egypt, he could equally have lived and worked in Beirut or Sidon. His father before him, his sons

- 1 Bruce, *Nun of Lebanon*, letters, 266 (16.6.1814) and 331 (18.3.1815).
- 2 Meryon, *Travels*, I iv.
- 3 Dorset Record Office, Bankes Papers, DKL:HJ1, 35 (referred to as DKL:HJ 1).
- 4 *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1917; New *Dictionary of National Biography*, due 2004.
- 5 E.B. Barker, *Syria and Egypt under the last five Sultans*, 2 volumes, 1876 (referred to as EBB I and EBB II) and *Private Papers*.
- 6 EBB I, 28 and *Private Papers*.
- 7 *Private Papers*.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 C.F. Barker, *Memoir of Syria*, 40 (later referred to as CFB).
- 10 EBB I, 29.
- 11 EBB II, 324-6 and Griffiths, *Travels*, 349 ff.

- 1 Consul John Barker, frontispiece of his son's biography. Illustration for Mrs Barker box.



and daughters after him were in that continuity of European families who were part of Eastern Mediterranean life for a century and sometimes much longer.

A good starting point for the study of any British life is the Dictionary of National

Biography, even though we must still rely on entries more than a century old until the New Dictionary of National Biography reaches the world in 2004 ⁴. Fortunately, there is also a biography of Barker by his son, Edward, and his friend John Lee drafted a brief sketch of his life in the 1820s. Through his consular work, official papers tell us more. He and his family also had walk on parts in many travellers' accounts and incidental meetings recorded in their 'Travels' help us piece the story together. Finally, I have been able to see later family accounts of recent generations ⁵.

After a quick run through his antecedents and early life - and those of his wife - I consider Barker's life in the context of the 'Frank' or expatriate in the Ottoman empire, and look at his links with John Lewis Burckhardt and Lady Hester Stanhope; and his life after retirement. I then briefly consider his immediate descendants and their own contributions to the region. When the narrative of these lives runs out, the questions may begin.

EARLY YEARS

John Barker was born in Smyrna on 9 March, 1771, the son of William Barker (1738-1825), the youngest son of Thomas Barker (1709-1754), a gentleman with an estate near Bakewell in Derbyshire in the English Midlands ⁶. The reason William Barker came to Smyrna appears somewhat unusual. He had (according to Edward Barker) earlier emigrated to Florida where he purchased an estate - a purchase which, as a younger son, he was unlikely to have been able to make in England. He had to abandon this life and return to England, and plan to seek a new future in India. The family papers show slightly different events. He had the opportunity in 1759 to purchase membership in the Levant Company and decided to trade with India ⁷. He got no further than Smyrna where ill health made him pause, settle and start a new life.

In 1763 he married Flora Robin, daughter of a French Consul. With her he had five sons and two daughters, until her death (pregnant again) of asthma. He later re-married and had further issue, providing several surviving half-brothers and sisters to John ⁸.

Like other Levant-British sons, John Barker was sent to England for his education. In 1789, he entered a London banking house and rose to become confidential clerk.

The pull of the East was strong, and in 1797 he returned. John Spencer Smith, British Ambassador to the Porte and brother of the celebrated Admiral Sir Sydney Smith, offered him a post in Constantinople. It was not long before, on 9 April 1799, Barker was appointed pro-consul to Aleppo to act as agent for the Levant and East India Companies. (This connection continued for some 33 years). In 1803 Barker was raised to full Consul for the Levant Company in Aleppo.

MARRIAGE AND MARIANNE

On 15 June 1800 Barker married Marianne Hays, the step-daughter of his predecessor as Consul, Robert Abbott. Her mother had first married David Hays, also the Aleppo Consul, and, after his death, married Abbott, his successor. When Abbott died in 1797 Barker had been sent to Aleppo, although for some two years Mrs Abbott had run consular business herself, negotiating directly with the Pasha of Aleppo "whenever matters demanded" ⁹.

Mrs Hays (Abbott) was the daughter of Thomas Vernon, a Levant merchant of Aleppo "when that city was the grand emporium of the commerce of India". The Vernons came from Hilton in Cheshire, and claimed near relations with Admiral Sir Edward Vernon "of Portobello celebrity" ¹⁰. She was a beauty. Dr Griffiths, who knew the family in 1786, described her as "one of the most beautiful and most amiable women, 'such as youthful poets fancy when they love'" ¹¹. Her daughter, Marianne Hays was something of an heiress, having a jointure of £10,000, inherited from a maiden aunt, "and as much in jewels and landed property". Being born in the Ottoman empire, though of European parentage, she was considered a subject of the Porte - and, although a girl, allowed the privileges of all Europeans. She was also allowed to purchase and hold land in her own name - a privilege she would not have enjoyed in Britain for almost a century.

Marianne had come to the attention of Dr John Griffiths during a strange, tragic journey.

MARIANNE'S JOURNEY

When Marianne was only about seven, Dr Griffiths described her as "a peculiarly engaging child ... of uncommon quickness and comprehension, and of most retentive memory". She could speak Arabic, Greek, French, Italian and English fluently. For some reason not clearly explained her father urgently needed to go to India. Loathe to leave his wife and children (there was another daughter, then about two years old) he longed to take "some portion of his treasure with him" and, reluctantly, her mother let Marianne accompany him and Griffiths, with a caravan through the desert to the great trading port of Bassorah¹² (Basra).

At first Griffiths travelled with Marianne in a *mahaffeh* - an arrangement of two boxes slung on either side of the camel, with a canopy thrown over for shade. Griffiths found the camel's stride made it like "being in the prow of a vessel when labouring against a head sea." Marianne stayed in the *mahaffeh*; Griffiths walked; their Armenian servant, Johannes, rode a camel; Hays rode a good horse.

Hays had provided "provident care" for the party: an excellent tent, wines, and water purifying materials. But they ran into trouble with insufficient and bad water supplies; the food too was

unsatisfactory, the diet very limited. The temperature in the desert rose to 108°F in the day, only dropping to 90°F at night.

The men covered Marianne with thick cotton handkerchiefs to preserve her from the parching atmosphere. She seemed to suffer less from heat and fatigue than any of them, and rallied them with great cheerfulness - even when her mouth was much blistered.

They had not far to go on the long weary journey when Hays collapsed and died of dehydration and exhaustion. Griffiths' book depicts the scene. They buried Hays and Marianne and Johannes knelt as Griffiths offered prayers by her father's grave. Within two days they were at the Euphrates and there was enough water to bathe in, let alone drink. Deeply grateful for the help given them by the Arabs, Griffiths reached Basra and handed Marianne over to the East India Company Resident and went on to India. After some months Marianne was sent back to Aleppo with Captain Currie of the Company army.

The Barker's marriage seems to have been a good one, and Mrs Barker makes her mark in his biography and in travellers' accounts.

Her inheritance, including land near Sueda, on the Orontes River, made it a "gainful alliance". Barker wrote effusively to a friend about his bride that people would "lose sight of pecuniary advantages, and extol his good fortune to have found ... such a person in Aleppo: her purity of manners, propriety of deportment, humility, knowledge of domestic economy, candour, and good sense has

12 EBB II, 336 and Griffiths, 349ff.

13 EBB I, 30.

14 British Library, J. F. Lee Papers.

15 R. Walsh, *Levant Company* and PROFO 78/89, f.414 (possibly the manuscript of this book).

2 From Griffith's 'Travels'

An illustration in Griffiths' book shows Marianne at the death of David Hays in the desert, with Griffiths and Johannes in attendance. "His lovely child moistened her mouth of roses, blistered by the noxious blast.... All human efforts were in vain! Gust after gust of pestilential air dried up the springs of life, and (Hays) breathed his last upon my bosom".



not her equal in any country" ¹³. Certainly these qualities occur in glimpses of her over the years. The beautiful and redoubtable Mrs Abbott was also at times part of the Barker household, but appears in the biography only briefly in the autumn of 1813.

BARKER'S CAREER

By 1800, before he was thirty, Barker was a married man with a responsible job. A Consul's work was mainly concerned with encouraging British trade interests and keeping an eye on her citizens abroad. It was a post that gave a man some standing in the population, both local and foreign, and access to political knowledge.

John Lee, in Aleppo in 1809 as a "traveling bachelor" of the University of Cambridge, noted that "*although the Consul was at liberty to carry on a little commerce for himself,*" he did not do so. Yet he lived in "*a Great Building, called the British Khan, which was like a palace in size, and he was obliged to keep up a certain degree of state and dignity as the only representative of the British Nation for those parts*", but, Lee added, "*His wife possesses a considerable private fortune*". Barker, Lee wrote, "*lived like a prince, esteemed by British, Greek, Europeans and the natives and kept up the honor and character of courtesy in a proper manner*" ¹⁴.

To understand more fully Barker's position it is useful to have some understanding of the Levant Company and to consider Barker's thoughts on the Ottoman empire.

The Levant Company

In 1581, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a group of British merchants had been granted a limited charter "to trade in the Grand Seigneur's lands" (the Ottoman empire). In 1605 King James I granted a perpetual and more powerful charter to "the Governor and Company of Merchants of England trading to the Levant Seas". The Company appointed and paid an ambassador at the Porte, "and all the expensive appendages of such establishments", and also appointed chaplains, physicians and consuls to British 'factories' (premises of

a group of traders) from Constantinople to Algiers. In 1803 the British Government "assumed to themselves the appointment and payment of the Ambassador and his Secretaries" at the Porte (the first such ambassador being Lord Elgin of the 'Marbles'), but not until 1825 was the appointment and maintenance of Consuls taken over by the Government, and the Levant Company surrendered its charter ¹⁵.

THOUGHTS ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

As a young man Barker listened to others and considered and dissected their opinions carefully... later it is likely that he discussed his ideas with his sons and others.

As early as 1801 he wrote to a friend in England:

The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire would be attended with great difficulties from the locality of the countries of the supposed invaders.

France, he suggested, once Russia was "fairly possessed of Constantinople", would have no route to attack "our Indian possessions by land". The English because of their navy, would have advantage over the French "especially in a country so full of natural barriers".

Edward Barker, 75 years later, drawing together his father's papers for the biography, brought the problem up to date.

If a hostile power becomes mistress of the Bosphorus, England's Navy could no doubt defend the Suez Canal but would not be of the least use in Asia Minor and Persia, Mesopotamia and the shores of the Persian Gulf.

John Barker looked, in 1803, at how such a ramshackle structure as the Ottoman Empire could continue to exist. He described the state of the Empire thus:

...it appears all discord and confusion, but on a better acquaintance,... it will be found to contain concordia discorde... a harmony arising out of discordant materials, that has impelled the crazy machine so many centuries, and will, in my humble opinion, if left to itself, jog it on some time longer.

Later that year he wrote to an unidentified friend that "*Ottoman power is verging on rapid decay... the vices inherent in government are sapping the foundations of that frail fabric*". He recognised the 'balance of power': "the jealousy of the European Powers (acts as) a barrier to each

other's cupidity." In his humble opinion, it would last his time with very little alteration:

...except in the constant gradual impoverishment of its subjects, which must produce a proportionate decline in the commerce and in the resources of its Government ¹⁶.

In 1845 when Charles Fiott Barker, the youngest son, published his *Memoir of Syria*, he wrote:.... *in spite of every attempt of the European Powers 'to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire', its authority as a nation is fast crumbling into dust. Every act of the Government tends to diminish the population, and inflicts irreparable injuries upon the country as well as on individuals. He summed up his opinion with the sentence: ... A Power which once threatened all Europe with invasion, has fallen to its direst state of weakness, and is only kept alive by the indecision of Europeans, who, could they agree among themselves, might curb the rapacity of the despotism, and render Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor, the most prolific, flourishing and happy territory on the face of the globe* ¹⁷.

In these comments the Barkers gave a glimpse of contemporary thinking in the Levant at the turn of the 19th century and through the century - and indicated how and why the Ottoman Empire continued to exist beyond its natural span.

THE BARKERS AT HARISSA

In March 1807 the Barkers' life was temporarily shattered by reports of "a rupture between Britain and the Porte at the instigation of Russia." Barker sent his pregnant wife and two children (Sydney, aged five, and a girl 18 months younger) into the care of 'the Prince of the Druses' at Harissa in Lebanon, and with some difficulty followed himself soon after. Mrs Abbott, his mother-in-law, stayed firmly in Aleppo, blockaded in the Consulate and much admired by all for her courage ¹⁸.

Barker was isolated and restless at Harissa. The monastery where they lodged was "*a delightful residence in summer: the light fresh air and clear cold water most agreeable*" with cool nights that "*predisposed one to sleep*". He found it, however, both difficult and expensive to obtain provisions: "*meat is very rare, and when obtained is only goat-flesh*".

Mrs Barker was surprised to discover that the Druse women slept with their heavy and cumbersome silver horns (*tantour*) on their heads, making a hole in the wall "*to rest the top of the horn, and placing a small cushion under the head*" ¹⁹. Edward Barker wrote, "*perched on top of Lebanon, in a dwelling to be reached only by almost impassable roads...*". One would have thought Barker's work for the transmission of news to have been completely paralysed. Not so. He was more active than ever. Copies of the letters which he "addressed in all directions" remained in the family when Edward wrote his father's biography ²⁰.

- 16 EBB I, 53, 68-70.
- 17 CFB, 43-44.
- 18 J. F. Lee Papers.
- 19 EBB I, 99ff.
- 20 *Ibid*, 121, and *Ibid*, 112.
- 21 *Ibid*, 125.
- 22 Burckhardt, *Travels*, v-vi.
- 23 Meryon, *Travels* II, 220.
- 24 Burckhardt *Travels*, xlvii.

- 3 Dr Charles Meryon, frontispiece to his '*Travels*'.



Barker began to despair that they would ever return to Aleppo, and arranged that a small schooner be brought to the coast near the Bay of 'Joonee' (Djoun). But his daughter was ill, near death, and they did not go. Their son Sydney had died earlier.

It was March 1809 before peace was declared between Britain and Turkey and they could return to Aleppo. His wife and children (another daughter, named Harissa, having been born in Lebanon) travelled in a camel-litter. Barker entered the city in some splendour on 2 June, 1809: "with seven led horses, a military guard of honour and music, a salute of guns from the castle, etc ²¹.

JOHN BARKER AND OTHERS

Over the next decade Barker's life and name became linked with two important travellers in the Levant: Lady Hester Stanhope and John Lewis Burckhardt.

John Lewis Burckhardt

The African Association (a British organisation devoted to funding and arranging exploration in Africa) had contracted a young Swiss, John Lewis Burckhardt, to follow up researches across Africa by travelling with the Fezzan caravan from east to west. For this it was necessary for Burckhardt to have an intimate knowledge of Arabic and "*acquire a habitude of Oriental manners*" so that in his travels there would be little risk of him being recognised" ²².

In 1809 he set out through Malta to Syria. In Malta he met one of Barker's brothers, a merchant, and continued east in the guise of a Mohammedan merchant with letters and goods (including beer and potatoes) for "the East India Company's well known agent in Aleppo". He remained in Aleppo under Barker's protection for more than two years, learning both literary and vulgar Arabic and making exploratory sorties in the region. (The Barker's son William was his godson, and given the second name Burckhardt).

Burckhardt made himself known to Lady Hester's lover Michael Bruce at Tabariah near Nazareth and was introduced to Lady Hester and Dr Meryon, though urging them to obscure his origins. Lady Hester took against him - an opinion she never altered. Meryon enjoyed his company and provided very well observed descriptions of him, but noted that "although he spoke Arabic better than any European traveller upon record, still he was incapable of opening his mouth for ten sentences without being detected as a foreigner." However, as "all Turkey" was full of Italians and French renagadoes and Syria, Egypt and Arabia "abounded with Albanians and other natives of European Turkey", this caused no stir ²³.

At times Barker advanced Burckhardt sums "necessary for his livelihood" until the Association reimbursed him. This kindness put Burckhardt "under everlasting obligation to him" ²⁴.

Lady Hester Stanhope

Lady Hester became a part of the history of Lebanon. From 1814 until 1817, she lived at the Convent of Mar Elias near the village of Abra, inland from Sidon. She then moved to the village of Djoun about fifteen miles north-east of Sidon, where she lived until her death in February 1838.



4 From John Carne's *Syria*. View of Djoun, the Lebanese village where Lady Hester lived, and was visited in 1835 by the artist W. H. Bartlett. His companion, John Carne, commented "The view of the residence of this celebrated woman is taken on the approach from Sidon - Lebanon has a hundred sites of exquisite attraction and scenery; but this woman, ever loving the wild and the fearful more than the soft things of this world, had fixed her eagle's nest on top of a craggy height that is swept by every wind".

For a few months (1813 to January 1814) Lady Hester's base was in the vicinity of Latakia, where her links with Barker were strengthened.

Barker wrote of her fulsomely: "... the lustre of all ancient as well as modern travellers in Syria will be eclipsed by the transcendent exploits of her ladyship", who was, when he wrote, waiting in the mountains to descend to Baalbec, Damascus and Palmyra. "The mouth of every traveller... from Palestine is filled with tales of her influence at the court of Acre," where her public entry had been performed "with all the honours due to a Pasha of three tails." Barker even suggested that people in the area would date events and their children's birth as being before or after the transit of the 'English lady' ²⁵.

John Barker's acquaintance with Lady Hester has kept him in the historian's eye. As everyone knows she was not an easy person to get on with. However she chose Barker as a confidante, although appearing to keep him somewhat at arm's length, addressing him as "Dear Sir" for years, though by 1817 she was writing to him as "My dear friend".

In late August 1813, the Barker family decided to spend part of the autumn in the vicinity of Latakia, near Lady Hester who, after her queenly visit to Palmyra, had settled there with Michael Bruce in a spacious mansion, with Dr Meryon in a smaller house nearby. On the rise of the mountains

at the village of Besnada Barker fitted up a cottage "and with the addition of a tent or two, found room enough for his large establishment" ²⁵.

Through these autumn weeks Barker had many sporting opportunities, with falcons for hawking, partridges to shoot, and wild boar to hunt. He was a much admired and skilful sportsman supplementing his family's and neighbours' diet. In Latakia, as at Harissa, as winter approached, provisions became scanty: little meat except goats' flesh which, wrote Meryon "we could not fancy", poor fowls and butter melted like hog's fat. The wild meat was especially welcome and Meryon commented that he "never saw a place where a sportsman might have more diversion" ²⁶.

In October Bruce decided to return to England for good; Lady Hester decided to stay on, and was offered accommodation at the monastery at Mar Elias near Sidon.

Just as her party was about to set off "a series of melancholy events" made them stay. The Barkers' two little girls, Harissa and Zabetta, fell ill with a fever so virulent that their parents were advised to leave them at Besnada in the care of Mrs Abbott, Marianne's mother. On 31 October the two little girls died within five hours of each other. "Latakia came, of course," Edward Barker reported his father saying, "a most disagreeable residence to us." He was especially attached to "sweet Harissa". "She had taken such a hold in my affections that I cannot yet forget her animated intelligent looks and endearing manners" ²⁷.

In November both Meryon and Lady Hester fell ill - possibly of the plague - and at one

- 25 EBB I, 152.
- 26 Meryon, *Travels* II, 284.
- 27 EBB I, 153.
- 28 Meryon, *Travels* II, 160 and EBB I, 162.
- 29 EBB I, 163.
- 30 Cleveland, *Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope*.
- 31 EBB I, 246.
- 32 Meryon, *Travels* II, 312.
- 33 J. F. Lee Papers.
- 34 Finati, *Narrative* II, 171.
- 35 Irby and Mangles, *Travels*, 232-5.
- 36 EBB I, 285 ff.



point the doctor told Barker, in her presence, that he despaired of her life and, as Consul, she asked Barker to be responsible for her effects should she die. He remembered that she had given him these instructions "with more composure of mind than is often displayed for an ordinary journey". It was 4 January 1814 before Lady Hester was able to travel. A vast crowd gathered to see her off ²⁸.

There was nothing Lady Hester enjoyed so much as political gossip and this Barker provided. In return she wrote him long letters from Mar Elias expressing her opinions on people and politics. In September, 1815, for example, she criticised him for planning to give a great public fete in Aleppo in honour of the great victory at Waterloo. *"There is much to settle in France, she warned. 'I wish to God it was all over... Dance upon a tight-rope, if you like it, when all this is quite settled'"* ²⁹.

It was about this time, probably in the spring of 1815 that, after a series of misfortunes, Lady Hester had to ask Barker for a loan. Dr Meryon noted it was the first occasion on which she ever found herself in debt. She had to economise: dismissing superfluous staff and living in greater seclusion in Lebanon.

In the autumn of 1816 Lady Hester went to Antioch, partly to avoid an impending visit from the Princess of Wales who was touring the Levant in somewhat disreputable company, and partly to settle accounts with Barker. As her niece, the Duchess of Cleveland, wrote in 1914, "for all the remaining years of her life, she was never again free from this haunting incubus of debt" ³⁰. This was not an easy time financially for Barker either. The Levant Company halved his salary; the East India Company reduced his pay to a £100 pension.

Lady Hester partly repaid Barker's aid: she was fulsome in her praise of him to Sir Thomas Maitland, Governor of Malta, in March 1816: *"Mr Barker of Aleppo performs his public duty as British Consul... in zealous manner... and sedulously keeps up the character of the British nation"*. This was praise indeed for she found *"every possible fault"* with other Consuls and with most English travellers in that part of the world, whom she later described as *"troublesome people... so wrong-headed, so obstinate and self-*

sufficient" ³¹.

Sadly, after page 277 of Barker's biography, his son wearily found her letters "too voluminous" to use. Lady Hester was descending into the half-mad senility of her later years. In those years she turned against Consuls generally and said crossly to Dr Meryon: *"Consuls have no rights over nobility; they may have over merchants, and such people: they never shall come near me, and I would shoot the first who dared to do it"* ³².

BARKER'S NEXT YEARS

The Barkers' kindness to travellers was celebrated. John Lee reported of him: "Many travellers are under great obligation to him for his protection, kindness and assistance as a friend, a countryman and as a Consul" ³³.

In March 1816 Giovanni Finati, Janissary to the English traveller and archaeologist, William John Bankes, reported that at Aleppo they were received "with distinction" in his handsome houses, both in town and country ³⁴. In December 1817 two touring naval captains, Charles Irby and James Mangles, arrived while Bankes was paying a second visit, and were delighted to meet "this celebrated and indefatigable traveller", and to share with him their pleasure in staying in "this hospitable mansion" where they had had "every comfort and luxury we could imagine".

Barker took his guests shooting ("the gardens near Aleppo abounding with woodcocks"), coursing hare and gazelle ("the greyhounds in this country being very swift and strong") and hawking. Additionally they found Barker's help and assistance of the greatest use - particularly supplying them with letters of credit and whatever money they needed ³⁵.

In May 1818 Barker went again to Britain, this time taking his wife for her first visit and his own young sons to be educated. He left them with his sister, Mrs Grace Richards of Laurennny in Wales. He took too some Arab horses to sell. Lady Hester's long suffering companion, Mrs Anne Fry, returned to England in their company.

Through ill luck they were delayed and then caught in quarantine twice on their way: once at Malta for forty days and again in Marseilles because Malta had been declared 'plague stricken'.

After their time in Britain, they eventually reached Sidon on 17 September, 1820 ³⁶.

THE BARKERS' FAMILY

Quite how many children Barker fathered I found it difficult to be absolutely sure. Sydney died, aged five, in 1807. The two little girls died in 1813 in Latakia. Twin daughters were born when they

were on their way to England in 1818, and deposited with a wet nurse in Marseilles. Both died: one in Marseilles and the other, Fanny, on their return in Sidon.

However a further three sons (William Burckhardt, Edward Bruce and Charles Fiott) and two daughters survived to adulthood. One of these was the god-daughter of Lady Hester, who suggested she be called Hester Isabella (but they chose Hester Elizabeth); another was born in France on their way home in 1820, and named Caroline³⁷.

6 There are pictures in Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* of a dress which seems very similar – perhaps this is what she wore? The pictures are titled 'A lady in the dress worn in private' – and 'Lady adorned with the Kurs and Safa etc'.



MRS BARKER'S APPEARANCE

I have no record of how Mrs Barker appeared to her British relatives, but travellers in the East describe her dressing according to local Greek custom.

In the 1830s Dr William Holt Yates found her "a truly amiable, kind and motherly person", and wrote that, "a Levantine by birth", she still dressed in the costume of her country, which is similar to that of the Greek: the robes being loose in front

like a pelisse, and a kind of broad band or shawl around the waist, which has a rather singular appearance; the hair is allowed to hang freely down the back and is more or less ornamented, plaited with cords, to which small gold coins are attached ... (she wore) a huge pair of lofty high-heeled wooden clogs or rather pattens; they are worn in the house; a practice which is difficult to comprehend³⁸.

THE NEXT YEARS AND BARKER'S PROMOTION AND DEMOTION

The greatest experience of the next years, and one which the Barkers would never forget, was the earthquake of 1822. At half past nine in the evening of 13th August disaster struck Aleppo: an earthquake felt as far as Baghdad and from the coast of Lebanon almost to Cyprus. After shocks continued until early October.

The Barkers were lucky to escape alive. He wrote dramatically of their experience to the Levant Company and through his efforts raised some £1000 for the relief effort. It was not appreciated. The Pasha of Aleppo ordered the money be returned: the Porte would not permit its subjects to be relieved by a foreign nation³⁹.

In 1826 there was a great change in their lives. The Levant Company negotiated to give up its charter to the British Government. In September 1824 the Levant Consul in Alexandria, Peter Lee, died suddenly. The post was vacant and Barker sought it. The Barkers moved to Alexandria for a few years. Barker had been looking for promotion, as his letters to William Bankes at this time show⁴⁰.

Only when the charter was fully surrendered did Barker take up his post on 25 October 1826. It was a mistaken move, and he admitted to his patron in February 1827 that he was "infinitely better off in Aleppo". They had hardly arrived before he was writing to all sundry of his complaints. The work of the Consulship was "laborious, uncomfortable and poorly provided for"; Alexandria was "the dearest and most disagreeable place in Turkey (the Ottoman lands)."

Almost exactly a year after his arrival, the long standing Consul General Henry Salt died, and Barker who had been openly expecting him to retire, after acting in his place for some time, became Consul General in 1829 - a prized posi-

tion. In May 1828 he had been grumbling to his sister that he would be "happy to leave this detestable place." Once he had succeeded to the post of Consul General matters improved.

His son Charles Fiott Barker worked as his secretary for several years from 1828.

Edward worked as Clerk to the Consulate in Alexandria for two years.

That period of the Barkers' lives is not part of this study, but in 1833, after only four years service as Consul General, Barker was somewhat unceremoniously retired. His son slips this event into the father's biography as if such a happening was normal:

"Mr Barker on 5th February, 1833, received a dispatch from Lord Palmerston, the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, informing him that Lieut-Colonel Patrick Campbell had been appointed to succeed him as Agent and Consul General." He would be given "a retired allowance as the nature and duration of his services may justify" ⁴¹.

One might think from Edward's account that the ending of Barker's diplomatic career was caused by a dispute he had over a merchant ship and that he and the Pasha of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, were "the best friends in the world", even when Barker persistently told the Viceroy that "his idea of dethroning the Sultan was a delusion" ⁴².

The real cause appears to be his lack of diplomacy. It was not only to Mehemet Ali that he expressed this not very respectful view, as Foreign Office papers at the time show.

Edward Barker suggested that the Foreign Office wanted a Consul General "of a more yielding disposition to (Pasha) Mehemet Ali" ⁴³. More diplomacy might have been what they sought.

But the period in Egypt had benefited the Barkers, for, following the example of his predecessor, Henry Salt, he had taken the opportunity to collect antiquities, which he knew were much sought after in Europe. In March, 1833 his collection was sold at Sotheby's in London ⁴⁴. This is a matter which Edward Barker did not touch on.

RETIREMENT AND LAST YEARS

The Barker family sailed back to the Levant in May 1833 and settled at Sueda, near the mouth of the Orontes River, on Mrs Barker's land. Barker set about building, planting trees and developing the local silk trade. He planned to split his time between Sueda and Aleppo, but in the event lived almost entirely at Sueda. He had already introduced into the region silkworm eggs of "the best yellow Piedmont silk" - judged as good or even superior "to the generality of silk produced in France" ⁴⁵.

37 *Ibid*, 287, 295.

38 Yates, *Modern History and Condition of Egypt*.

39 EBB I, 321.

40 DKL:HJ 1, ff. 244, 251, 285 Dorset Record Office.

41 EBB I, 197.

42 *Ibid*, II 192.

43 *Ibid*, 241.

44 *Catalogue of Hartwell House*, *passim*.

45 W. B. Barker, *Lares and Penates*.



8 The topographical artist William Bartlett drew "Mr Barker's Villa at Suadeah" in 1835. "The house – built by himself – is commodious and picturesque: a gallery in front is covered with the choicest vines of Europe; a handsome music room with an organ is attached from the house; and from a tower above, the view is truly charming".



At Sueda and in the neighbourhood, Barker created gardens and introduced many species and varieties unknown in the Levant. He also supplied new Levantine varieties to England. His son Charles listed his imports as including: mulberry from the Philippines, choice fruit from Europe (greengages, 'golden pippins', strawberries, goose-

berries and raspberries); tropical fruits like the guava; varieties of apricots from Damascus ("all much superior to any apricot in Europe"), two sorts of peaches and a white nectarine. From Egypt Barker introduced "a sweet orange of excellent flavour" and a large thick-skinned orange. He also grew tomatoes, potatoes and numerous other European vegetables ⁴⁶.

The most famed of the fruit he introduced to England was the award-winning Stanwick Nectarine, promoted through the good offices of the Duke of Northumberland with whom (as Lord Prudhoe) he had become acquainted in Egypt.

THE BARKERS AT HARTWELL HOUSE

In 1844, in his 73rd year, Barker sailed from Beirut and again visited Britain to introduce some of his trees. He was accompanied by his son Charles Fiott and together, in April, they visited Charles' namesake, John Fiott Lee.

Lee (then John Fiott), while travelling in the East 1807-10, for the University of Cambridge had met Barker. In England John Fiott had changed his name to Lee and inherited an estate and beautiful Hartwell House in Buckinghamshire.

The Barkers spent three days with him and presented items to his Egyptian antiquities collection. Lee took them down two trap-doors to see the foundations of the observatory he had built in the grounds. "He caused them to write their names upon the bricks, on which were cut the names of his friends" ⁴⁷.

William Burckhardt Barker had for some years been in correspondence with Lee, seeking his support in applications for various consulships ⁴⁸.

On 5 October, 1849, John Barker died of 'apoplexy' at the age of 78 years at his summer house at Betias on a commanding eminence of Mount Thosus, and is buried close by. He had expressed a wish to be buried by the wall of the Armenian church at Betias and there he was laid. Two years afterwards "a handsome marble monument, procured from Genoa, was placed over the vault, and a suitable inscription put on the slab" ⁴⁹. But the monument is no longer so fine. The Barker papers include a report of it made at the request of the British Consul in Iskunderun in 1952. The

- 46 CFB, 36.
- 47 EBB II, 285.
- 48 J. F. Lee *Papers*.
- 49 EBB II.
- 50 Private Papers.
- 51 F. A. Neale, *Eight Years in Syria*, 51.
- 52 Private Papers.
- 53 CBB, 36.
- 54 A. A. Paton, *The Modern Syrians*.
- 55 Carne, II, 19.
- 56 Searight, *British in the Middle East*, 115.
- 57 Paton, 27.
- 58 Neale, 59.
- 59 Yates II, 219.
- 60 EBB II, 219.

grave was still visible at the upper part of the village; it stood in a grass-covered plot with a low wall around it. The monument was "no more than a pile of stones with no inscriptions" and would be "very costly to restore". "Nobody," commented the 'inspector',

"seems to have visited the grave for many years" ⁵⁰.

REPORTS OF BARKER'S RETIREMENT

Barker's last years were enthusiastically described by F. A. Neale who lived in Syria, Palestine and Asia Minor 1842-50 and spent eight months in Antioch, less than three hours ride from Sueda "through country that is a perfect paradise upon earth", though along "an execrable road" ⁵¹. (In 1952, the visitor to Barker's grave commented that the road was not very good, and "the Humber took three quarters of an hour to go the eight kilometers" ⁵²).

At Sueda, on the banks of the Orontes, was the delightful home of the Barkers. They had built a house "suited to his means and station" on "his wife's landed inheritance" and lived there with his family and many visitors - both friends and strangers.

The house was surrounded all year long by rare and beautiful flowers, and seeds and cuttings supplied all the gardens around". Charles Barker reported that his father introduced many flowers and shrubs, formerly unknown in Syria: gardenias, several mimosas, phlox, rhododendrons, the lavender plant and several varieties of rose ⁵³.

The traveller, A. A. Paton, who spent some years in the Near East including serving in various posts, was taken by Barker to "a high kiosk" on top of the house from which he could enjoy the panorama. Outside the house was "a carpet of turf as one might see in the lawn of an English park" ⁵⁴. John Carne, accompanied by the artist W. H. Bartlett, visited in 1836. They rode with Barker in the neighbourhood: "the hedges are odiferous with clematis, bay, myrtle, and arbutus, the pomegranate in profusion. . . this plain of Suedeah might be a paradise. . . there is a happiness in the site - open to the sea, and sheltered by mountains, with a delicious climate." Bartlett drew the house and peopled the garden with the Barkers and their family ⁵⁵.

Another traveller, Frederick Walpole, wrote of his delight "to find oneself amidst English, more pleasant still amidst English ladies; and to complete the charm, fresh rosy dear English children running about talking English as a household tongue" ⁵⁶. How pleased the 'John Bull' would have been by this praise!

A few miles away at Huderbeg was Barker's fruit garden with guavas and bamboo from India and Chinese quince ("double the size of an ostrich egg"), loquat, nectarine, plums and a myrtle tree. At Bitias, Barker's garden was "overrun with flowers" and had "handsome fountains and basins".

Paton described this garden in more detail. Up in the hills, Bitias had "a totally different climate" and Paton thought it "as lovely a hill retreat as I ever saw". The house was built on a terraced hillside; a spring rushed from the rocks above to a stone basin near the door". Above "firs from the Braes of Scotland flourished", and there was a Belvedere: a circular terrace, trellised with vines and creeping plants, with a fountain in the centre and a glorious panorama ⁵⁷.

F. A. Neale, one of Barker's greatest fans, described him as "a perfect gentleman, an accomplished scholar, a sagacious thinker, a philosopher, and a philanthropist" ⁵⁸.

Dr Holt Yates, who became a neighbour, wrote of how Barker distributed "to the poor natives those blessings which a good heart and a cultivated mind alone can render useful". Their "hospitable dwelling" he lauded as an Oasis in the Desert of "the intellectual wilderness" which everywhere surrounds it" - thinking of course in limited European terms ⁵⁹.

The Barkers continued to be ever-welcoming hosts to travellers of all nations - especially welcoming British travellers. Their house was "something like a hotel," Edward recalled. "Any letter of welcome was sufficient to ensure a healthy welcome". The guests had the additional pleasure of hearing "a large self-playing organ" giving out pieces from the best Italian operas "as if imitating an orchestra" ⁶⁰.

THE BARKERS AND THE EUPHRATES EXPEDITION

In spring 1835 the expedition to survey the Euphrates led by Colonel Chesney had arrived. The expedition had two boats in kit form - to steam along the Euphrates. Delayed at Sueda by

political matters, they put one together and, on 22 May, launched it on the Orontes. Mrs Barker broke a bottle over her bow and named her *Tigris*. Her engines set up, her cargo loaded, the *Tigris* was ready to ascend the Orontes to Antioch.

But the current was too much for her and she had to be dismantled and, with the heavy cargo, carried across country ⁶¹.

THE BARKERS' DESCENDANTS

We know about the Barkers' sons from various sources.

Edward Bruce Boughton Barker, his father's biographer, served for a short time with the Euphrates Expedition and was included in the 'Biographical Record of Officers' in Chesney's Narrative in 1862. While his father was Consul General in Egypt he had served as Clerk to the Consulate in Alexandria and for some months served the new Consul General, Colonel Campbell, as Private Secretary. He acted, unpaid, as Vice Consul at Sueda (1836-8) and was confirmed in that post. In 1842 and again in 1855-7 he was appointed Acting Consul in Aleppo; at more or less the same time he was agent for the Land Transport Corps in the Crimea (1855-6). In 1860, at last he gained a permanent position as Consul for the Ports of Samsoon and Sinope, and later as Vice-Consul at Theodosia in the Crimea ⁶².

This series of somewhat unimportant posts given to a European living in the Levant or, more usually, to a local man, indicate the rather hand-to-mouth existence of some of the resident 'Franks', few of whom – unlike John Barker – seem to have risen to high positions in government. Edward married Sophia, an orphan Creole girl, (1818-1898) who lived with their family ⁶³.

William Burckhardt Barker, born in 1810, survived his father by only seven years, dying in the Crimea in 1856. From both parents, the *Dictionary of National Biography* reports, William "inherited a singular linguistic aptitude". His second name came from the Swiss explorer who lodged with his family in Aleppo. Educated in England, William was familiar with European languages but also knew Arabic, Turkish and Persian ⁶⁴.

WILLIAM'S PROJECTS

In January 1834 William Burckhardt Barker wrote from Alexandria to his father's friend John Lee of Hartwell House in England. It had always been his "project to follow the footsteps of my godfather Burckhardt". For this reason he had kept up his Arabic studies and was now seeking support for his ambition. He was proposing to the newly formed Oriental Society to travel for five or more years in Arabia, Persia and Turkey (the Ottoman lands) during which he would solicit ancient manuscripts from private families⁶⁵. There is no evidence that he received support, but in 1835 he did some exploration on the cheap.

In August 1835, William left Beirut with the purpose of travelling over Mount Lebanon to the source of the Orontes River.

On his first day he met some of the people who make up the population of the Levant: an Armenian coffee house owner, two Druse ladies who, appearing encumbered by their rich robes, mounted and descended their donkeys without any assistance; an encampment of Turkomans; peasants at their work in the fields...

He was delighted by the scenery. ("You may easily fancy yourself in fairyland"), but disappointed by the Cedars, and hardly commented on Baalbec ("... too often measured and described for me to add anything further").

The source of the Orontes (El'A'si or 'the rebel') springs with some violence from a natural basin of rock. Nearby is an excavation said to be a hermitage for Maron the first Maronite. Barker sketched the spot and continued on his way.

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- 61 *Ibid*, 216, 223.
62 Chesney, *Narrative*.
63 *Private Papers*.
64 *Dictionary of National Biography*.
65 J. F. Lee Papers.
66 *Royal Geographical Society Journal*,
volume vii, 1837
67 J. F. Lee Papers.
68 *Private Papers*.
69 W. Barker, *Lares and Penates*, 4.
70 EBB II, 285.
71 *Private Papers*.

He reached his home at Sueda on 22 August ⁶⁶.

He then shipped to Lee a box containing thirty cedar trees from Lebanon which he had himself procured and packed. "I hope," he wrote, "that I shall have been the means of your having little

Mount Lebanon near your Palace at Hartwell House" ⁶⁷. Those Cedars of Lebanon still surround Hartwell House to this day.

For many years William lived at Tarsus. He published a number of books.

The youngest son, Charles Fiott, returned to England in the 1840s, after 17 years in the East working mainly as his father's secretary. He married twice: first the sister of the French Consul at Urfa. He parted from her following religious differences but remarried. He seems to have had one son, John, born in 1841 who worked in Tunis and died in France in 1925 ⁶⁸.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps John Barker's best epitaphs - and certainly ones he would have enjoyed - as would many Britons who choose a new homeland as he did - were those of his sons.

William wrote: "This true-hearted Englishman, indeed, spent all his income in keeping up to the last the honour and respectability of the British nation" ⁶⁹.

Edward wrote: "the true-hearted, honest, straight-forward old English gentleman, whose nature long resident in a foreign barbarous country could not change from its sterling worth, and only added the polish and ease of a citizen of the world!" ⁷⁰.

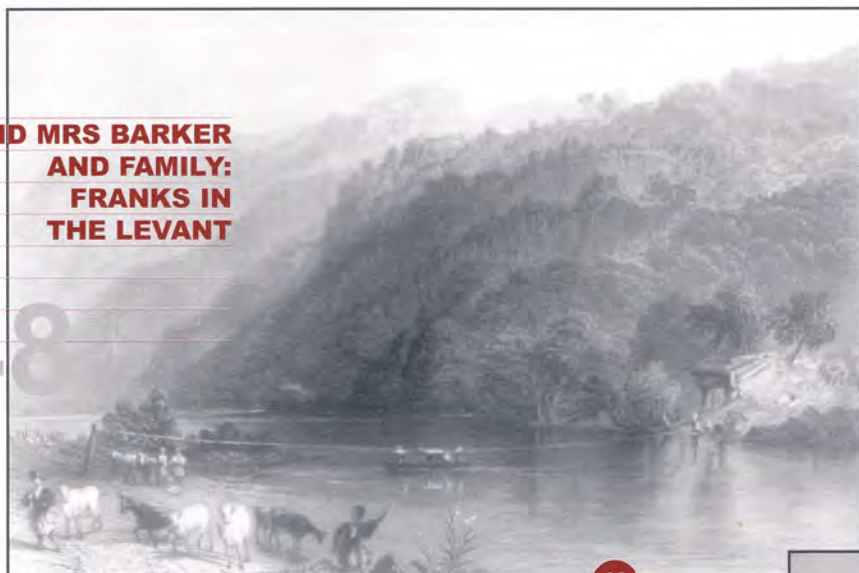
The story of these "world citizens" is still to be told in full. In 1850, one of the first William Barker's grandsons moved to Alexandria, and there the family flourished running a shipping business until 1956 when so many 'foreigners' left Egypt, their property taken by the state. In 1944 Edward's eldest granddaughter, Fereeda, died unmarried in England. She had inherited the family property in Syria, but it did not pass on. In 1957 Mary Barker, wife of Oswald (1824-1952) died - "the last Barker left in Smyrna" ⁷¹. The family's life in the Eastern Mediterranean had not quite reached its second centennial. A friend who knew the family at this time remembers them as "very English".

7 The church at Hartwell House flanked by the Cedars of Lebanon sent by William Burckhardt Barker. September 2002.



**MR AND MRS BARKER
AND FAMILY:
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10 The Orontes River by W.H. Bartlett, from Carne's Syria.

11 The Barker family tomb in the Protestant cemetery in Alexandria in 2000, with inscriptions to various members of the family. Private source.

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