

Barry, Dr James

The Unexplained

Dr. Barry's Secret

By Allen Spraggett

THERE have been people who seemed hardly unusual at all while they lived, but after death it became a different story.

One such person was Dr. James Barry.

He was English and made an enviable record in his undergraduate studies at Oxford University. He entered the University of Edinburgh and graduated in 1815.

Barry entered the British army as a surgeon and was posted to a garrison in Cape Town. He was generally well liked by his comrades in spite of a nasty temper that sometimes got him into hot water.

Once, he was obliged to fight a pistol duel with a certain Sir Josiah Colete of Cape Town. Both men emerged from the contest unscathed. Barry acquired a reputation as a headstrong, aggressive individual who wouldn't back down from anyone or anything.

On another occasion, when he was stationed in Quebec, a fellow

officer made the mistake of remarking sarcastically on Barry's rather high-pitched voice. The surgeon turned on the man and knocked him cold with one punch.

Eventually Barry's medical skill and devotion to duty won him many official commendations. But he had a few eccentricities.

He was abnormally shy about sharing his quarters with anyone

else, even in an emergency. On the other hand, he was known by his fellow officers as quite a lady-killer.

For more than 50 years Barry discharged his duties as an army medic in many parts of the world. Stationed for varying periods in tropical climes he became something of an authority on leprosy.

When on July 15, 1865, Barry died, he was widely mourned.

Then came the bombshell. James Barry, reported the mortician, wasn't a man at all but a woman. Moreover, a postmortem revealed that Barry had borne at least one child.

What was James Barry's real name? When had she borne her child? And what drove her to disguise herself as a man and live like one for more than 50 years? •



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