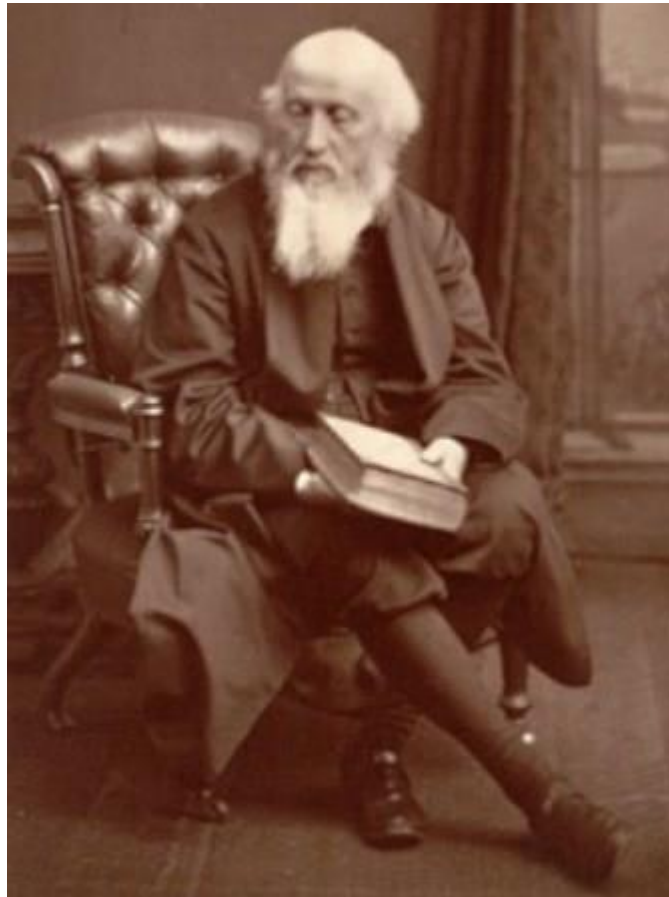


*William Barnes*  
*Educationalist, Clergyman and Poet*  
*Resident of Mere 1823-1835*



William Barnes was born in the year 1801. At the age of 15, excelling in penmanship, he left school to start work in a solicitor's office. At 18 he fell in love with a girl, Julia Miles, whom he saw descending from the coach as he walked along the High Street in Dorchester. Four years later they were secretly engaged, but her father was obdurate. The prospects of a solicitor's clerk were not good enough.

Then he heard that a school at Mere was losing its headmaster. Julia urged him to take it and proposed to take pupils herself in Dorchester with the idea of helping him in the school later on. He moved to Mere in 1823 and for four years lived in lodgings, keeping his school in a public room in the Market House.

From a letter to Julia dated 9th April 1823 he tells of having ten pupils although he was hopeful that ten to twelve more would join later. He found life in the country agreeable although he thought the buildings mean and the society much inferior to that of Dorchester since they were not many well educated young men around the area.

By August of 1823 the number of pupils had increased to 24 although in the November of that year he wrote again to Julia that he had put off writing to her in the hope that he would have better news about his school.

He said that although the pupil count had increased the state of agriculture and the peculiar poverty of Mere and other factors he had difficulty in collecting his fees. He wrote that being a schoolmaster was laborious and that he felt tired both in body and mind in the evenings. Julia's father thought it useless and a waste of time attempting to establish a school at Mere.

In October 1826 he one more writes about his school saying that it had improved somewhat but he had reservations as to whether he would still be a schoolmaster or whether he would become an artist. He wrote "In the arts and scholastic acquirements I have made considerable progress since I have been at Mere and I do not think it reasonable that I should continue here at a poor school while I have a talent for another profession lying dormant." He had around this time applied for a teaching post at Plymouth but had not been successful since he was unmarried and therefore unable to accommodate boarders at the school.

In March of 1827 he rented the Chantry at 20 Guineas a year with the intention of taking in Boarders and in the May he wrote to Julia telling her he had ordered bedsteads. He also told Julia of the village gossip that he had taken over Miss Grove's house and was going to keep a Boarding School and marry a young Lady from Bristol.

In his diary of the period he wrote "I took the Chantry House at Mere and on a happy day - happy as the first of a most happy wedded life - I brought into it my most lovable and ever beloved wife, Julia Miles, and then took the boarders."

Teaching methods that William Barnes used would today be called modern. The mind should be trained and not crammed and particularly trained in discrimination. He wrote that the curriculum should contain "the germs of all the knowledge which the man would require in after life." His object was to teach science, geography and natural history in a way to be understandable but interesting so as to encourage the boys want for more knowledge. His attitude to punishment and morals was unique in that there was no forced menial tasks, no use of the cane (except on the rare occasions a boy was caught out to be lying), there were no hard rules and regulations apart from the natural requirement of respect and each boy knew the natural consequences of wrong-doing.

The age range of the school was from six to fourteen and there was a maximum of around 40 pupils in the school at any one time. The fees started at 25 guineas per year.

While at Mere William read widely learning Latin, Greek, French, Italian and German. He also attempted Persian and Russian. He engraved some blocks for Mr. John Rutter of Shaftesbury, cultivated his garden, took up wood turning in the empty coach house, invented a pair of swimming shoes, painted the doors of the Chantry House, played the flute, violin, piano and the organ in the church, wrote a play for a company of strolling players, many articles for the Gentleman's Magazine, and his first poems in the Dorset dialect which were published in the Dorset County Chronicle.

In June 1835 he left the Chantry House and with his wife moved to Dorchester. Before leaving he wrote the poem 'To A Garden - On Leaving It.