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# Barry, John Milner

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Barry, John Milner (1768–1822), physician, was born in Kilgobbin Castle, Ballinadee, Co. Cork, eldest among two sons and nine daughters of James Barry (d. 1804) and Elizabeth Barry (née Milner), co-heiress of William Milner of Dunmanway, Co. Cork. Educated at a school near Bandon, Co. Cork, he graduated MD (1792) at Edinburgh University and subsequently returned to Cork, where he established a medical practice.

Forename: John, Milner  
Surname: Barry  
Gender: [Male](#)  
Career: [Medicine](#)  
Religion: [Anglican](#)  
Born 1768 in [Co. Cork](#)  
Died 16 May 1822 in [Co. Cork](#)

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One of the first in Ireland to appreciate the importance of smallpox vaccination – though not the first, as the procedure was adopted in Dublin in March 1800 – he obtained a vaccine by post from London and used it for the first time in Cork, 6 June 1800, subsequently vaccinating 270 more subjects with marked success. He then wrote *An account of the nature and effects of the cow-pock* (Cork, 1800), principally to inform parents of the efficacy of cowpox inoculation and provide reassurance that it carried no danger of infection, thereby hoping to eradicate a disease ‘so highly destructive to human happiness’ (*Account*, 3). He also promoted the idea that the city should establish a vaccination centre for the poor – the Cork Vaccine Institution was established in 1819.

In 1802 Barry founded the Cork Fever Hospital and House of Recovery. Requested by the Rev. [T. D. Hincks](#) (qv) to investigate ways of combating fever epidemics, Barry published a *Report of the state of fevers . . . in the city of Cork* (Cork, 1801), suggesting that a fever hospital would isolate and care for the ill and check the spread of the disease. Supervised by the Benevolent Society and financed by private subscription and donations, the hospital opened (1802) in the Old Youghal Road, with seven wards and accommodation for forty-eight beds by 1803. To lessen contagion, patients were washed on admission, their clothes destroyed, and their houses fumigated, disinfected, ventilated, and whitewashed. Barry was appointed its physician – though unpaid, due to lack of financial resources – and wrote many of its annual reports, graphically and repeatedly describing the wretched, insanitary, and overcrowded conditions of the poor in the city, which, he argued, contributed to the spread of disease. In November 1817 he was one of a group of Cork physicians who, faced by a severe typhus epidemic, campaigned successfully for the introduction of a number of measures including the supply of food and cheap fuel to the poor, the installation of sewers and public lavatories, regular cleansing of the streets, and inspectors to oversee the policy.

Barry’s medical publications include contributions to [William Harty](#) (qv), *An historic sketch of the causes . . . and mortality of the contagious fever epidemic in Ireland . . . 1817 . . . 1819* (Dublin, 1820), to [Francis Barker](#) (qv) and [John Cheyne](#) (qv), *An account of the rise . . . and decline . . . of fever in Ireland* (Dublin, 1820), to the *London Medical and Physical Journal* (vols. iii–iv, vi, 1800–01), and a paper (‘The origin of intestinal worms’, *Transactions of the Association of the Fellows and Licentiates of the King and Queen’s College of Physicians*, ii (1818), 382–96) in which he proposed the novel idea that intestinal parasites might be of external origin rather than spontaneous internal generation. Outspoken on social issues, he denounced drunkenness, which was ‘well known to prepare the body for fever’, as ‘one of the most destructive evils’ to afflict mankind (Geary, 137–8), and advocated imprisonment for habitual drunkards; he supported equal education between the sexes and for all classes, imploring his children – especially his daughters – to assist personally in the education of poor women.

A principal founder (1803) and original proprietor of the Cork (later Royal Cork) Institution, and its lecturer on agriculture until 1815, he published a *Syllabus . . . of lectures on agriculture and rural affairs* (Cork, 1809) and contributed articles to the *Munster Farmer’s Magazine* – founded 1811 and organised by a committee of the society, it was the first agricultural magazine to be published in Ireland. Interested in all literary activities, Barry was president (1820) of the Cork Philosophical and Literary Society, which during his presidency was dissolved and revived as the Cork Literary and Scientific Society, Barry becoming a member.

Kind, affectionate, and sincere, he died from apoplexy at his house in Patrick’s Hill, Cork, 16 May 1822, and was buried at Ballinaltig, near Rathcormack, Co. Cork. His obituarist claimed that ‘the city has seldom seen a physician of more skill and humanity’ (*Cork Morning Intelligencer*), and [James Roche](#) (qv) described his ‘premature death’ as a ‘public misfortune’ (Coleman, 307). In 1824 a cenotaph was erected in the grounds of the fever hospital by public subscription.

He married (1808) Mary Phair of Brooklodge, Co. Cork; they had eight children, including at least three sons and three daughters. The eldest son emigrated (1854) to New Zealand; the second son, John O’Brien Milner Barry (1815–81), graduated BL (1834) from the University of Paris and MD (1837) and LRCS (1838) from Edinburgh, and became a member (1859) and fellow (1876) of the Royal College of Physicians, London. He published papers in professional journals and practised at Tunbridge Wells, Kent, from 1852 until his death. The third son, the Rev. Edward Roche Milner Barry (1819–1902), was vicar of Scothorne, Lincs. Barry’s brother Francis (c.1787–1832) served as a lieutenant in the 83rd Regiment in the Peninsular war, and died in Cork.

**Sources**  
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