

OBITUARY
Hon. Joseph Barry, Esq, M.L.C

During the past month, Death has been making a sweeping harvest of it, and several of our best and most distinguished men have been carried away. Foremost among these we have to name the Hon'ble JOSEPH BARRY Esq. M.L.C one of the most enterprising merchants and staunchest friends the colony has ever had. Mr. Barry attained to the ripe and honoured age of three score and ten; and for more than half of that period of his life has been intimately associated with all that has marked the progress and prosperity of the Cape.

Mr Barry was born on the 1st, April, 1796, at Hitchin in the county of Hertford, in England, being the youngest son of his father Richard Barry, who died in 1808, and of Elizabeth Stretton, the daughter of a Leicestershire clergyman, and who died in 1812, when their son Joseph was about 15. Although the wills of both parents indicate their possession of landed and funded property of some value, the Barrys in England seem to have been blessed with numerous children and grandchildren, and the division of the estate in the interest of so many obliged Mr. Barry in his early youth to rely very much upon his own resources. An elder brother, Charles, had previously established himself at Marseilles, and was a partner in an eminent firm connected with the wine trade in that city. He was a generous man, with some literary ability, and was honoured with the friendly acquaintance of Lord Byron, of some of whose manuscripts he at one time had charge. Mr. Barry's early youth and early manhood were spent under his brother's care. He lived on the Continent during some of those exciting years when the first French empire was fighting its famous battles.

He arrived in the colony in 1818. He was then a quite young man, but possessed with great natural shrewdness, and ever having an eye to business.

Mr. Barry resolved to settle down at Swellendam and establish a business at that place. The village did not number more than twelve or twenty houses, and only one shop was able to sustain itself there. He, however, obtained the appointment of Deputy-Sheriff, which enabled him to form an acquaintance with the whole of that extensive district, which then embraced portions of Caledon, George, Robertson, Montagu, Riversdale, etc. His activity and persevering industry had an influence upon all around him, and from the time of his appearance there the products of the country began to grow and increase. In those days the farmers would have nothing to do with merino sheep; but he removed their prejudices, and by kind and generous conduct, and the offer of highly remunerative prices, he soon had the satisfaction of purchasing their wool for export. The first year the quantity was small – only 600 lbs. weight; while for the last half-dozen years of his life, the firm of Barry & nephews alone have purchased 1,000,000 lbs. weight of the wool crop of the district. He was also the first to turn the capabilities of Port Beaufort and the Breede River to account. He freighted vessels to that port, and induced others to do the same. The town of Swellendam at the same time was, by his enterprise, raised from a poor and inconsiderable place to its present wealthy and important position. With the increase and extension of business, he invited his nephews John Barry, Esq., (of London), and Thomas Barry, Esq., (of Port Beaufort), to join him, and established the firm of Barry & Nephews which has now, as well as for years past, the largest business connection in the Western Province, if not in the colony.

At the assembling of the first parliament in 1853, Mr Barry was returned as one of the members of the Legislative Council for the Western Province – the late Mr. Rutherford being at the head of the poll. At the election in 1858, the contest was particularly severe, the

different candidates being all men of ability and worth. Such, however, was the popularity enjoyed by Mr. Barry, that he was again returned and this time he took the first place on the poll. His conduct in Parliament was such as to entitle him to the greatest confidence on the part of the electors. Although he was by no means an orator, he nevertheless expressed himself on political matters with a good deal of judgment and plain common-sense. His words were few, but they were well chosen and to the point. Probably no man knew the wants and capacities of the colony better than Mr. Barry, and this knowledge gave considerable weight to his opinion on public matters.

A few years ago he visited England for the benefit of his health, and was accompanied by Mrs. Barry, who, unhappily, died a few months before the time appointed for their return to the Cape. In 1860 Mr. Barry once more returned to the Cape and visited most of the towns and villages in the Western Province, in all of which he met with hearty expression of esteem. After his return, however, he had several indications of failing health; and during his attendance at the last session of Parliament in Graham's Town he was seriously indisposed. From that time, the disorder from which he suffered appears to have gained upon him, and for the last two or three months he was obliged to lay aside from any active duties. He removed to Kalk Bay, in the hope that the bracing sea-air of that place would check his illness, but without any benefit; and last month he came back to his residence, Hopemill, in the Gardens, where, surrounded by sorrowing relatives and friends, he died on the evening of Sunday, the 26th of March. The remains of the deceased gentleman were interred in the English burial ground, Somerset-road. The funeral was a very large one, no less than seventy carriages and cabs forming the procession. The mourners comprised the members of the deceased gentleman's family, His Excellency the Governor, most of the heads of departments, the lending merchants of the place, members of both Houses of Parliament, the Commissioners and Ward-masters of the Municipality, etc.
