

BARNWOOD HOUSE AND GROUNDS

by Hugh and Rosemary Conway-Jones

The original Barnwood House, on the south side of the road to Cirencester, was built as a gentleman's residence sometime during the first five years of the nineteenth century.¹ It was a square block of three storeys with two full-height bays on the garden front, a service wing to the west and a semi-circular drive at the front.² It was built by Robert Morris of nearby Barnwood Court, a partner in the Gloucester bank of Turner & Morris and MP for Gloucester from 1805 to 1816.³ It is unlikely that Morris built the house for his own use as he had recently undertaken considerable improvements to the Court,⁴ and so it is possible that it was intended for his son Robert. However, Robert jnr set up home in Cheltenham where he ran a branch of the bank,⁵ and by 1808 Barnwood House had been purchased by Sir Charles Hotham Bart. Sir Charles had inherited the family baronetcy of South Dalton near Beverley, Yorkshire, but his estate there was entailed.⁶ As he had recently married a young bride and he was not in good health, it seems he wanted a property where she could continue to live after his death.⁷

As well as buying the land immediately associated with the house, Sir Charles also purchased neighbouring properties fronting on to the turnpike road together with the field between those properties and the Wotton Brook and some fields to the south of the brook.⁸ One difficulty was that a public footpath ran across the field close behind his house, which may have been the reason why the house was built so close to the main road. In 1810, however, Sir Charles managed to get the right of way diverted on to neighbouring roads, although other parts of the route still survive between Barnwood Avenue and Eastern Avenue.⁹ Unfortunately, Sir Charles did not enjoy his new property for long, as he died at Barnwood House on 18 July 1811 at the age of 45. He was buried at the cathedral, where his memorial is a white marble plaque on the north wall of the nave.¹⁰ In the following year, his widow married the Rev. George Morgan of Wadham College, Oxford, and the house was put up for sale with 48 acres of land.¹¹

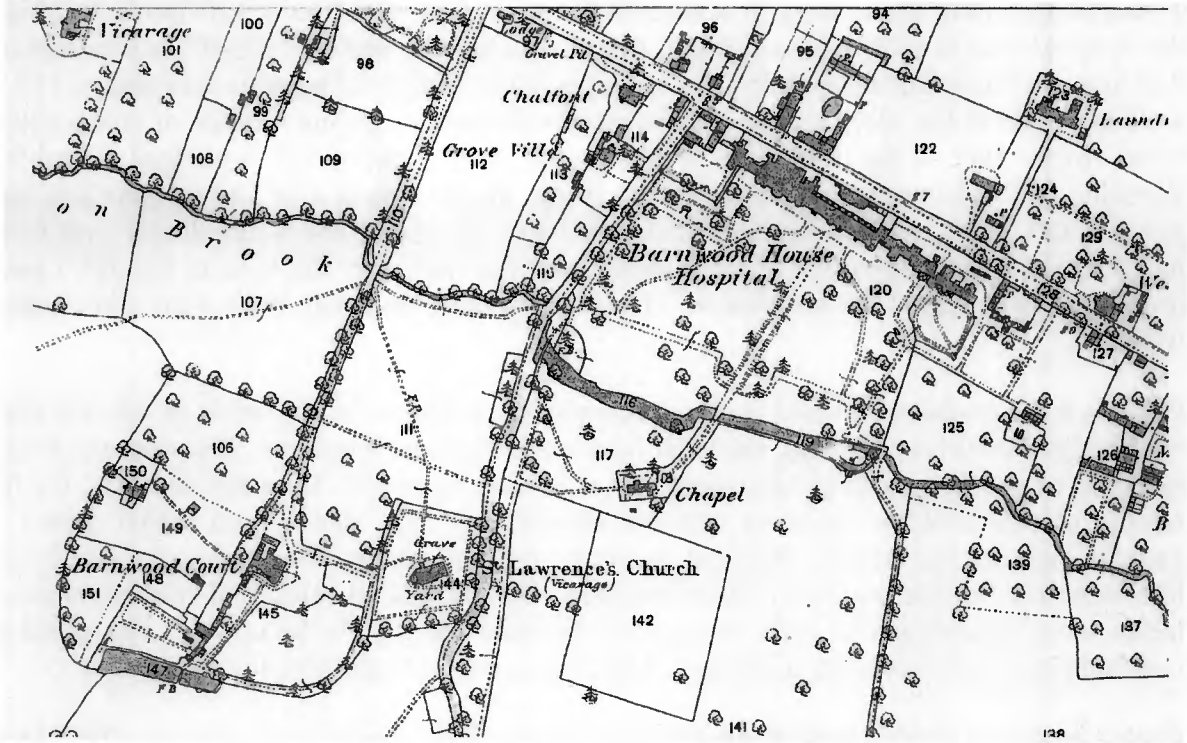
Barnwood House and grounds were purchased in 1813 by David Walters¹² who came from Richmond, Surrey, where he had banking connections. He may well have had business with the Turner & Morris bank, as his daughter Louisa soon married Thomas Turner who joined his father as a partner in the bank.¹³ The house was described as being 'beautifully situated on a lawn, fronting to the south, commanding extensive and highly diversified views of the adjacent country'. The property included a greenhouse and a kitchen garden which was 'surrounded with lofty walls well clothed with the choicest fruit trees'.¹⁴ David Walters lived in the house until his death on 6 May 1833, and then it became the home of his son James Woodbridge Walters, who was a founder director of the new County of Gloucester Bank in 1836.¹⁵

Either father or son had added wings to the original house by the time of the Tithe Survey in 1838. The lawn and garden extended about 50 yards behind the house, and then there was a pasture sloping down to the Wotton Brook, which was dammed to form a small lake. The Tithe Map shows trees to the east and west of the pasture, framing the view from the house which included two distant spinnies. There was also a plantation of trees on the north side of the main road. To the east of the house were two cottages, a walled kitchen garden and an orchard sloping down to the brook. Both father and son had added much further land to the estate on both sides of the main road, and by 1838 the total area was 719 acres.¹⁶

As well as being a director of the County of Gloucester Bank, James Woodbridge Walters also became prominent in public life. He was a captain in the volunteer militia, a Justice of the Peace and in 1841 Sheriff of Gloucestershire.¹⁷ It seems, however, that his pretensions were rather greater than his resources, and when he died in 1852, he was heavily in debt. He had arranged for the bank to settle all his debts in exchange for taking over his property, but the bank soon found that the debts considerably exceeded the value of the estate. For several years, the other directors did not formally recognise this as a bad debt, and instead they tried to sell the property at unrealistic prices - but without success.¹⁸

Eventually, in 1858, the bank agreed to sell Barnwood House and 48 acres of land to a Committee of subscribers who were wanting to establish a private mental hospital. The subscribers had formerly supported

patients in the Horton Road Hospital, but this arrangement had ended due to a great increase in the number of pauper patients needing the accommodation.¹⁹ The chairman of the subscriber's committee was W.H. Hyett of Painswick House, who would have been familiar with Barnwood House as his sister had married previous owner James Woodbridge Walters.²⁰ The existing house was converted to a residence for the Medical Superintendent with some offices and communal rooms, and large new wings were added on either side to provide accommodation for about 70 patients. Water was obtained from the brook which ran through the grounds and was pumped up to the house by two hydraulic rams installed at the weir. The existing gardens were extended down to the brook with gravel walks and additional trees and shrubs.²¹ The walled kitchen garden was reserved as an airing ground for the ladies, and a separate area was enclosed with a paling as 'a court for the more excited gentlemen patients'.²² A bridge was built near to the weir so that patients could follow a gravel walk around the field beyond the brook, returning via an existing bridge further east. The route of this walk, known as the Ladies Mile, was marked by a line of trees.²³



Detail from 1884 OS map (Gloucestershire Collection)

The hospital patients were expected to pay for their care according to their means, the richer ones helping to subsidise those less well off, with additional contributions coming from generous subscribers. In the first year, 1860, twenty-five patients were admitted and eleven were discharged cured. The number of patients increased steadily over the following years, and the finances were so healthy that additional accommodation and other amenities were provided as required, including a private chapel to the south of the brook in 1869 reached via a third bridge. In the mid 1870s, the farm on the north side of the main road was purchased with the help of a bequest, and this was managed for the hospital by a farm bailiff. By the mid 1880s, the hospital buildings extended for 215 yards along the main road and the annual average number of patients had risen to well over 100, some being accommodated across the road in North



Barnwood House c.1890 (Gloucestershire Record Office Ref D3725 box 1)

Cottage.²⁴ A cricket ground was formed to the south of the chapel, fancy dress balls and garden parties were attended by some of the local gentry and groups of patients occasionally visited local houses for tea.²⁵

Towards the end of the century, it was realised that the original Barnwood House forming the central block of the hospital was in such poor condition that it was unsafe, and in 1896-97, it was replaced by a four-storey building. By the end of the century, the annual average number of patients was near to 150. Additional facilities were provided in the early years of the twentieth century, including a block of coach sheds and stables with a small clock tower on the north side of the main road, later converted to garages. Suitable patients were taken shopping or for drives in the country. In 1919 the Manor House near Upton Lane was opened for a few lady patients and North Cottage became the nurses home. In May 1924, a cloudburst over Coopers Hill caused so much water to rush down the Wotton Brook that the wall over the weir in Church Lane was destroyed and property downstream was inundated.²⁶ The replacement wall was built with additional apertures for flood water.

Patients were graded according to the severity of their illness. A few were so serious that there was little the medical staff could do for them, but most were suffering from temporary illnesses, and they were encouraged to take part in a wide variety of activities as part of their treatment. Between the wars, the hospital's hall was in regular use for concerts, lectures, amateur theatricals, films, dances and indoor games. Other activities for patients included handicrafts, physical exercises, croquet, tennis, Morris dancing and ballroom dancing with a live orchestra. For the gentlemen, there was also billiards, a skittle alley and cricket matches in the summer, and ladies were encouraged to walk around the grounds and watch the cricket. The grounds were kept in fine condition by a dozen or more gardeners, who also provided vegetables for the kitchen.

During 1938, the district was affected by the development of an aircraft factory at Hucclecote, and this led to a search for a new site for the hospital. After some disappointments, the Woodchester Park estate was purchased in 1939. Although the outbreak of war then prevented any early action, planning for the move continued, and the County Council agreed to purchase the Barnwood House estate after the war with a view to making it their administrative headquarters.²⁷ In the event, the agreement lapsed and the hospital continued at Barnwood.

Following the appointment of Dr G.W.T.H. Fleming as Medical Superintendent, Barnwood House became the first hospital in the country to carry out electric shock treatment in 1939, and pre-frontal leucotomy was tried in 1941. Both treatments followed a study by Dr Fleming and the Director of the Burden Neurological Institute at Bristol, Prof G L Golla, of pioneering work abroad. After the war, they set up a research department to study the biochemistry of the brain before and after these treatments were undertaken. Meanwhile, several new houses were built on the hospital's land to provide homes for key workers. In November 1953, to commemorate the coronation year of Queen Elizabeth II, two metasequoia glyptostroboides trees were planted in the grounds by the Chairman, Mr W J Croome, in the presence of a representative gathering of the Committee, patients, officers and staff.²⁸

From the mid 1950s, following the introduction of the National Health Service, the number of patients fell and the hospital began to have financial problems. After several years of using up reserves, the main hospital was closed in 1968 and most of the land was subsequently sold for development. The work of the hospital initially continued on a much smaller scale at the Manor House, until in 1977 this became a day home for the elderly.

Most of the hospital buildings were demolished, although the central block survived as a private house until 2001. Most of the former gardens were developed for housing with the rest becoming Barnwood Park and Arboretum. The site of the cricket pitch was dug out to form a balancing pond to avoid overloading the Wotton Brook with the run-off from more housing to the south. Much of the route of the patients' walk is still marked by walk-ways through the new housing lined by mature trees. One of the spinnies visible from the house in the 1830s survives at the south-east corner of the patients walk and the other is at the junction of Spinney Road and Broad Leys Road off Abbeymead Avenue. Much of the hospital's land on the north side of the road has been used for office and retail developments, but the plantation and some of the farm buildings survive, some of the houses for key workers are in Welveland Lane and North Cottage is now occupied by the Emmaus charity.

Acknowledgement

The second half of this account draws heavily on a history of the hospital: *Barnwood House Condensed* by A.G.T. Gale, who was Secretary to Barnwood House Trust from 1946 to 1974.

References

- ¹ In 1799 the property was described as Barn & Yard 1r 26p and Part of Garden 19r belonging to Robert Morris (Gloucestershire Record Office GRO Q/RI 70) and in 1804 the property was described as Messuage & Garden 2r 5p belonging to Robert Morris (GRO D936 E144).
- ² GRO Q/SRh 1810 A/1; D3725 Box 1 Photograph.
- ³ See 1 above; Williams, W.R., *Parliamentary History of Gloucestershire*.
- ⁴ *VCH Glos IV* p.413.
- ⁵ *Griffith's New Historical Description of Cheltenham* 1826 picture after p.14; T. Hannam Clark in D3398 2/4/1.
- ⁶ House mentioned in codicil of Sir Charles Hotham's will 22 Oct 1808 but not in original will 5 Jun 1807 (National Archives NA PROB 11/1528 Q536).
- ⁷ GRO D3725 Box 144 Manuscript notebook: *Records of Barnwood House*.
- ⁸ GRO D936 M1/2.
- ⁹ GRO Q/SRh 1810 A/1.
- ¹⁰ *Gloucester Journal GJ* 22 Jul 1811.
- ¹¹ *GJ* 13 Jul 1812; *GJ* 19 Oct 1812.
- ¹² GRO D936 M1/2.
- ¹³ *Records of Barnwood House* qv.
- ¹⁴ *GJ* 13 Jul 1812.
- ¹⁵ *GJ* 11 May 1833; D2025 Box 128 Deed of Settlement.
- ¹⁶ GDR T 1/16.
- ¹⁷ *Records of Barnwood House* qv; *Trans BGAS* 1967.
- ¹⁸ *GJ* 3 Jul 1852; Glos Coll JR 13.7(6).
- ¹⁹ *VCH Glos IV* p.274.
- ²⁰ *Records of Barnwood House* qv. p.48.
- ²¹ *Barnwood House Condensed* by A.G.T. Gale (copy in GRO PA 35/3)
- ²² Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy 1860 (thanks to Ian Hollingsbee).
- ²³ The remainder of this article is largely based on *Barnwood House Condensed* by A.G.T. Gale and on Mr Gale's memories, with some additional sources noted below.
- ²⁴ *VCH Glos IV* p.274; 1883 OS map.
- ²⁵ Verey, David, *The Diary of a Victorian Squire*.
- ²⁶ *GJ* 24 May 1924.
- ²⁷ Darell, Sir Lionel, *Ratcatcher Baronet* p.245.
- ²⁸ GRO D3725 Barnwood House Minute Book Vol. 10.



Barnwood House c.1890 (Gloucestershire Record Office Ref D3725 box 1)

[Image from front cover]