

# Dorcas Barleycorn (1851-1889)

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In the western part of Highgate cemetery, by a wall which runs along Swain's Lane, is the grave of one of the earliest African converts to Primitive Methodism. The inscription on the gravestone reads:

Absent from the body, present with the Lord

In Loving memory of Dorcas Fanny Barleycorn, beloved wife of the rev  
W N Barleycorn, Born at Fernando Po W Africa October 10<sup>th</sup> 1851,  
died in London April 15<sup>th</sup> 1889.<sup>1</sup>

Dorcas Barleycorn was the wife of the Primitive Methodist minister [William Napoleon Barleycorn](#). The Barleycorns were residents of the Spanish colony of Fernando Po where the Primitive Methodists had established a mission in 1871. William Barleycorn was ordained as a minister in 1881, the first African to become a Primitive Methodist Minister.

The most prosperous families in Fernando Po at this time were related to people who had come from elsewhere on the West African coast, particularly Sierra Leone, where they and their families had been converted to Christianity. Migration to Fernando Po was a consequence of the establishment there of a British naval base earlier in the century. These migrants from the coast, known as Fernadinos or Fernadians, stayed on as traders and farmers after the British abandoned the base in 1861. A Baptist mission had been established in 1841, in the hope of becoming the nucleus of a settlement for Jamaicans after the abolition of slavery there in 1839. Nothing was to come of this scheme, and the Baptists were expelled by the Spanish governor in 1858. The Baptist mission had nevertheless succeeded in forming a Protestant community and the members of this community formed the core of the congregation for the Primitive Methodist mission which was established in 1870.

The Primitive Methodist records, including the magazines, missionaries' memoirs and the GMC minutes, seem to be largely silent about Dorcas Barleycorn's life and work. We know from the account of the funeral in PMM that she left two children. It is likely that, in common with other wives of missionaries, she had a role in the mission, especially in working with female converts. In 1883, during a period when the English PM missionaries had been expelled by the Spanish authorities, William Barleycorn was left to manage the mission and Dorcas's role in the community may well have been of greater significance.

Dorcas Barleycorn came to London in October 1888 for medical treatment and spent five months there. At this time, Barleycorn was studying in Barcelona in the hope of getting a Spanish teaching qualification. It is not clear whether Dorcas travelled from Spain or from Fernando Po. According to the report of her death in the Primitive Methodist Magazine<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grave no 28365/15 (map 57). Visited 22 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> PMM 1889 p 381

no particular danger was apprehended, but after some five months spent somewhat hopefully, she suddenly passed away, while undergoing a second surgical operation.

The report says that most of the PM ministers in London attended the funeral (there were about 30 of them) as well as many other friends. William Barleycorn left London in May 1889. William Barleycorn returned to England in 1892 and 1893 but, despite petitioning the General Missionary Committee for permission to visit England again, he was never to return.

William Barleycorn continued to work as a minister on Fernando Po until his retirement in 1918. After the death of Dorcas, William remarried, this time into the wealthy Vivour family, who were strong supporters of the mission. One of his brothers-in-law was a Mr Vivour of San Carlos Bay, who had the role of magistrate and was a prosperous trader.<sup>3</sup> William was also employed as an adviser and accountant by his mother-in-law, a source of some concern to the superintendent of the mission.<sup>4</sup> William died in 1925.

In March 1928, the London Cemetery Company wrote to the Primitive Methodist minister in Holloway, N London, drawing attention to the decayed state of Dorcas Barleycorn's grave. This was the subject of discussion in the committee of the PM Missionary Society and an effort was made to get funds to restore the grave. An appeal to Barleycorn's widow was not successful though. She told the superintendent minister at Fernando Po, George Bell, that she had not given authority to spend £10 on restoring the grave and that there had evidently been some misunderstanding.<sup>5</sup>

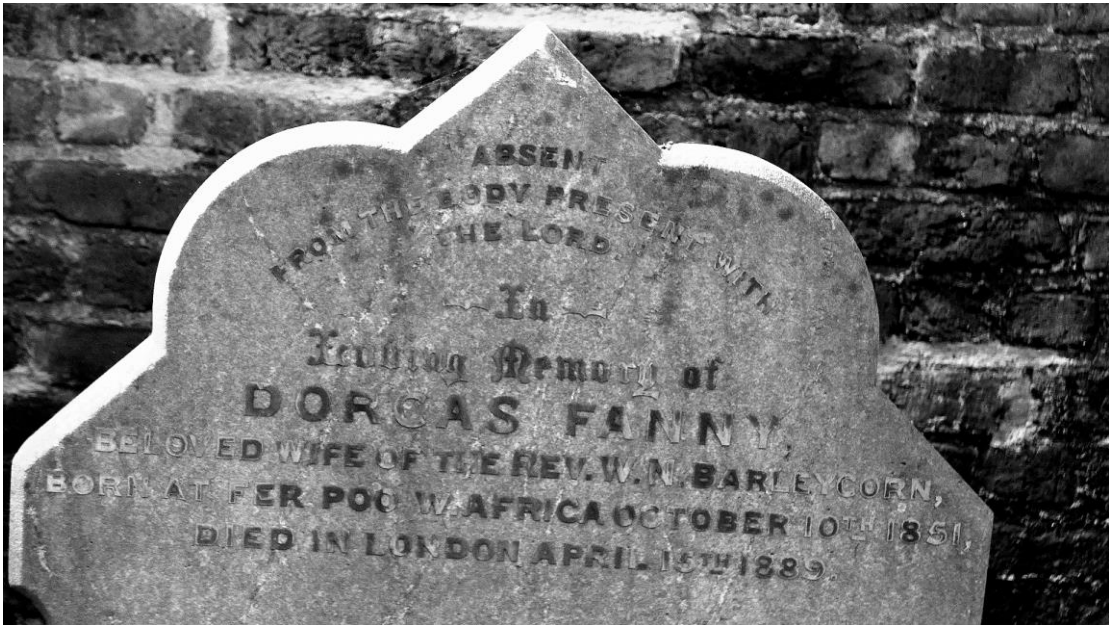
Dorcas Barleycorn's grave is a simple one, and the location in the cemetery unpretentious. Nevertheless, the Connexion was evidently willing to meet the expenses of a funeral and the attendance of so many ministers reflects the importance they attached to the mission and the Barleycorns' role in it.

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<sup>3</sup> Primitive Methodist Magazine (PMM) 1890 p 123

<sup>4</sup> Primitive Methodist Missionary Society archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Letter from Banham to Pickett 16 October 1907

<sup>5</sup> Dorcas Barleycorn's grave is discussed in the General Committee Minutes of 7 March and 12 November 1928. These records are also at SOAS.







Map of Highgate cemetery. Dorcas barleycorn's grave is marked in red.

1889	DECEASED	TESTAMENT NAME	Age	Sex	Rank	Spouse	1889	DECEASED	TESTAMENT NAME	Age	Sex	Rank	Spouse	1889	
Dec 20	Balle	Jeph	80	Con	4246	5	189	Dec 20	Barney	Allen B. Barney	65	Con	665	15	189
27	Balle	Samy	47	-	28211	19	189	27	Barney	Barney	69	-	28237	15	189
28	Barnes	Anthony	53	-	19041	5	189	28	Barney	Barney	77	-	28246	19	189
1893	Barnett	Samy	56	-	14671	118	189	29	Barney	Barney	81	-	27015	16	189
1	Barnes	Samy	66	-	28216	23	189	30	Barney	Barney	82	-	28211	15	189
2	Barnes	Samy	47	-	19526	119	189	31	Barney	Barney	79	-	28244	15	189
7	Barnes	Samy	53	-	20260	119	189	32	Barney	Barney	102	-	28247	15	189
11	Barnes	Samy	62	Con	28236	15	189	33	Barney	Barney	62	Con	28247	15	189
11	Barnes	Samy	91	Con	15236	18	189	34	Barney	Barney	60	Con	28210	15	189
11	Barnes	Samy	61	-	24036	118	189	35	Barney	Barney	67	-	28246	15	189
12	Barnes	Samy	62	-	28241	120	189	36	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	27343	135	189	37	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	38	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	39	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	40	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	41	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	42	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	43	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	44	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	45	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	46	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	47	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	48	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	49	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	50	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	51	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	52	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	53	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	54	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	55	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	56	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	57	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	58	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	59	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	60	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	61	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	62	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	63	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	64	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	65	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	66	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	67	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	68	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	69	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	70	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	71	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	72	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	73	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	74	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	75	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	76	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	77	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	78	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	79	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	80	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	81	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	82	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	83	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	84	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	85	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	86	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	87	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	88	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	89	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	90	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	91	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	92	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	93	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	94	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	95	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	96	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	97	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	98	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	99	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189
15	Barnes	Samy	37	-	28243	135	189	100	Barney	Barney	60	-	28243	15	189

Highgate cemetery burial register for 1889. Dorcas barleycorn's entry is in the upper part of the right hand page.