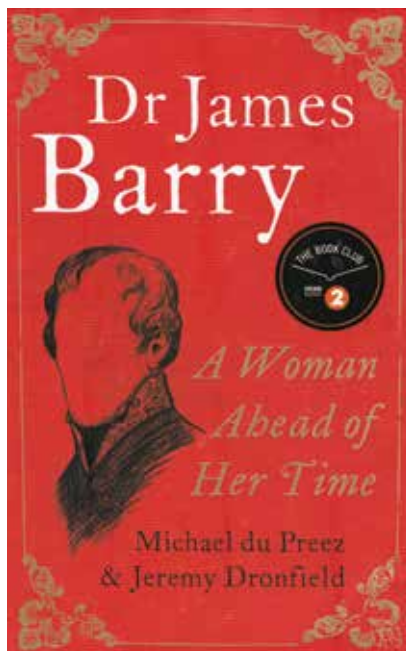


## BOOK REVIEW

### **Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her Time**

By Michael du Preez and Jeremy Dronfield.  
London: Oneworld Publications, 2016.  
ISBN: 9781780743141



Dr James Barry, on dying, was discovered to be a woman. The transformation of the young woman, Margaret Bulkely, into a man – a disguise that she was able to maintain throughout her long and eventful medical career – was uncovered by Michael du Preez and first published in the *SAMJ*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Through extensive research, this story has now unfolded into a fascinating tale of the full life and times of this remarkable woman. But this is not a dry scientific document; it reads like a novel, enabling one to appreciate the times, many places, and the people that had an impact on Barry's life and career.

The reasons for her to take on the guise of a man represent a whodunit of political and social intrigue. Although her earliest years were in Cork, Ireland, she was aided by her intellectual connections in London at a time when women were expected either to marry well or to take on limiting careers. Women could not study medicine in Great Britain at the time. However, Dr Barry implemented and successfully carried off her disguise at Edinburgh University, and for the rest of her life thereafter.

Dr Barry's professional career as a well-qualified military surgeon took him all over the world and continually up the ranks through promotions. He had a long and

eventful stay at the Cape of Good Hope – most of his life was eventful! His personality, drive and vision resulted in improvements to medical services wherever he was posted. At the Cape he developed a close relationship with the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, performed the first successful caesarean section in Africa (both the mother and child survived, the child being named James Barry Munnik), and took part in a duel against Captain Josias Cloete at Alphen.

His other appointments included Mauritius, Jamaica, St Helena, Antigua, Barbados, Trinidad, Malta, Corfu and Canada. We have a sideshow of Barry at the Crimean war and with Florence Nightingale. Barry's fiery temper and intolerance of fools resulted in many scenes which often required the intervention of his friends in high places to rescue him from his folly.

Apart from the full story of the extraordinary life of Dr James Barry, the book provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of the people during those times.

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1. Du Preez HM. Dr James Barry: The early years revealed. *S Afr Med J* 2008;98(1):52-58.