



Portrait of the Month: December Robert Barbour, 1885 (1797-1885)

attributed to T. J. Hughes

A textile merchant who lived in a castle, Barbour was also a generous philanthropist, funding schools and churches across Manchester, and a Professor's Chair at Westminster College.



Robert Barbour, by TJ Hughes (attrib.)
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Born in Kilbarchan, Scotland, in 1797, Robert Barbour joined the Glasgow firm of John Macfarlane, a textile export merchant, and worked his way up to become a partner in the firm, running the Manchester branch. When Macfarlane retired in 1828, Robert took over the company to form (with his brother George) the **Robert Barbour and Brother partnership - a very successful textile business.**

He married twice and in 1857 he bought [Bolesworth Castle](#), with its 2,000-acre estate - and retired there with his wife and children in 1866. He lived there until his death in 1885.

Barbour was also a lifelong supporter of the new Presbyterian Church on England. In the very first Synod in 1836, he sat as an Elder of the Church and as the first Treasurer of the Home Mission Committee.

But his 1885 Memorial Minute describes him as **“A man of simple faith, of life-long integrity, and of large-hearted liberality, he has left behind him a bright example to the Church and to the community which his life adorned”**, because he believed in helping disadvantaged people through education and spiritual support, and so he funded schools and churches throughout the Manchester area. In 1876, to mark the formation of the Presbyterian Church of England, he gave a staggeringly generous gift of £10,000 to establish a third Chair or Professorship at the English Presbyterian College in London (later Westminster College). He also left a bequest of £5,000 to the College, and another £5,000 to the Church Building Fund.

As well as his portrait, Robert Barbour's coat of arms are also found at Westminster College, in the stained glass in the dining hall windows.

Portrait attributed to T. J. Hughes, 1885.

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Helen Weller, Archivist
2021

Bibliography and Further Reading:

"Memorial Minute" in *the Synod Records of the Presbyterian Church of England 1885* p697

Synod Records of the Presbyterian Church of England 1877

Westminster College Cambridge 1899, ed. A Halliday Douglas (PCE: London, 1900)

Westminster College Cambridge: its background and history, by R Buick Knox (Westminster College: Cambridge, 2007)

'Robert Barbour: A Brief History', online at the [Bolesworth Estate website](#)

With thanks to Diana Paulding for additional research.