

Elizabeth Barrett ID 5522 per *Garland Grove* 1843.

Elizabeth Barrett

Chester Summer Assizes July 1842

Murder

Death

Commute this sentence to transportation for life (Graham)

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Petition most respectfully signed from the inhabitants of Stockport stating that there were doubts of the actual murder although the Jury placed no reliance in the Prisoner's statement that it was evidently unforeseen [dicitated] that thro the body was not deprived of any clothing and prays that the extreme penalty of the Law may not be carried into effect.

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Day of Execution 20 August 1842

Pardoned 19 August 1842

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To her Gracious Majesty The Queen

The undersigned most humbly address your Majesty on behalf of Elizabeth Barrett now lying under the awful sentence of Death in the Castle of Chester for the murder of her illegitimate child.

Previous to her unfortunate fall from virtue and the birth of her child this female bore an excellent character as a humane kind hearted and industrious girl. Her seducer refusing to marry her and the poor girl having no means of supporting herself and child they were removed together to the Stockport Workhouse and as proved on her trial she treated her child with the utmost love and affection up to the moment she left the Workhouse. On her way to Northwich she was overtaken by a storm of hail and rain which induced her to seek for shelter in the yard of a house in Cheadle and there the child was afterwards found dead in a cesspool.

Whether the child died of convulsions as the unfortunate woman stated or whether in a moment of phrenzy and despair she threw it into the water alive seems a mystery but her kindness to the child before its death and her grief afterwards speak strongly in her favour.

We humbly implore your Majesty to spare the life of this poor woman and extend your Royal mercy towards her in such a way as the circumstances of the case may require.

And as in duty bound we shall ever pray.

John Birkett – Curate of Witton

Samuel Siddon

John Griffiths

Thomas Barlow

And a further 102 signatures.

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Memorial from Northwich

Stockport

13<sup>th</sup> August 1842

Gentlemen

The conduct and character of Elizabeth Barrett who left the Stockport Union Workhouse on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1842 with her illegitimate child was good and she appeared to have great affection for the child. There was nothing remarkable in her conduct towards it during the week previous to her leaving the Workhouse nor on the morning of her departure.

The Board of Guardians have memorialized Sir James Graham for commutation of her sentence of death thinking the murder was committed in one of those uncountable moments of insanity which allow mothers in some cases to destroy their own offspring.

I have the honour to be Gentlemen

Your most obedient servant

Henry Coppock

Clerk to the Union

(To the Poor Law Commissioners, Somerset House, London)

To her Most Gracious Majesty The Queen

We the undersigned most humbly address your Majesty on behalf of Elizabeth Barrett now lying under the awful sentence of Death in the Castle of Chester for the murder of her illegitimate child. On her trial before baron Rolfe at the late Chester Assizes. It appeared that the prisoner's child was about 8 months old and that on the day when the fatal transaction took place the prisoner left the Stockport Workhouse where she had been an inmate for several months and proceeded to Cheadle on her way to Northwich where her father resided.

The poor woman was without a penny in her pocket and the weather being exceprively cold attended with a very severe storm of hail and rain she went into a yard of a house in Cheadle

to seek for shelter. While there it would appear that she threw the child into a cess pool and it was discovered there the following day. She declared her innocence of the crime of taking away the life of a child alleging that it died of a convulsion fit and in her distressed state and destitute condition having no means of procuring any funds for its interment she disposed of the body by placing it where it was found. The Jury however found her Guilty.

Serious doubts were indeed suggested by the Learned Counsel for the prisoner and these doubts were laid before the Jury by the humane Judge who presided, but they failed to convince the Jury. It may be that the prisoner tho' she denies it, did in a moment of phrenzy and in the despair, of her mind arising from her then destitute state drop the child into the water but her previous kindness towards it coupled with the grief and distress which she subsequently displayed showed that the crime arose from a momentary impulse and was not the act of a hardened and deliberate offender.

As a proof of all the events that the prisoner did not make away with her child for the sake of lucre or gain it was noticed particularly on her trial as a strong circumstances in her favour that when she deserted the body of her child she did not strip it of the slightest article of clothing although such clothing was of good quality and of some value but on the contrary the whole was found upon the child perfect and complete.

Under these circumstances and considering the excellent character which the prisoner had previously borne for humanity and extraordinary affection for the child during the whole time of her residing in the Stockport Workhouse and which is fully certified by the annexed testimonial from persons of the highest respectability and character we venture to implore of your Majesty as the foundation of mercy to spare the life of the unfortunate female in the hope that she may endeavour to redeem her character by a life of penitence and future good conduct.

Charles Kenricks Prescott MA – Rector of Stockport

Charles Baker – JP

Henry Mansland MP

John Stanley Burrett – Prosecutor and Special High Constable

As 86 other signatures

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The Chaplain of Chester castle begs to state that the conduct of Elizabeth Barrett convicted of child murder at the last Chester Midsummer Assizes was, before her trial, most mild and becoming and since her trial had survived the deepest contrition and he believes, that if the life is spared which has been forfeited by the Laws of her country it will be devoted to penitence and prayer.

William George Eaton

Chester castle

11<sup>th</sup> August 1842.

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8 New [V]

9<sup>th</sup> August 1842

Sir

At the Chester Assizes last week a woman named Elizabeth Barrett was convicted before me of the murder of her child an infant of about 8 months old. The child was born (illegitimate) in the summer of last year and about September or October the prisoner and her child became inmates of the Stockport Union Workhouse. All the evidence shewed that she treated the child with great kindness and exhibited to all appearance and mother's fondness towards it. On the 1<sup>st</sup> April she quitted the Union Workhouse with the child and proceeded to her friends who lived at a considerable distance. In her way there she was observed by one other person as being in a state of great destitution and they gave her some assistance in the way of food. The day was very stormy and cold, and in passing through Cheadle she took refuge from a hailstorm in a privy in the back yard of the houses in the village, and while there, it would seem she strangled the child and threw the body into a sort of cesspool behind the privy. She afterwards proceeded on her journey to her friends and arriving there said that her child had died a few days before and was buried in the cemetery at Stockport. The body of the child was discovered on the following day (the 2<sup>nd</sup> April) and being clearly identified. It was a fine healthy child and well clean, all the clothes were left with the child. Such were the facts of the case, and I do not think there is any sort of doubt but that she did murder her child, and I believe her motive was that of despair arising from the state of destitution in which she was.

I of course passed sentence of Death on her, I have copied the necessary documents required by [5[WGC]] for her execution on Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> instant.

I am unable to suggest anything in extenuation of the prisoner's guilt but as the murder of the child of 8 months of age is certainly a crime affecting the security of society in a degree very different from that of the murder of an adult. I have thought it right to bring the case under your notice, and should I learn from you that it is a case in which you may think it proper to make any commutation of the sentence I will not leave town till I have an opportunity of personally communicating with you on the matter.

I should add that I did not hold out to the unfortunate woman the slightest hope of any [ ] of the [ ] penalty.

I have the honour to be your obedient servant

R Rolfe

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Elizabeth Barrett

Chester Summer Assizes July 1842

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