

Sidney H. Beard (1862 – 1938)

Until recently I had never heard of Mr Beard, but by pure accident, I found an article online and discovered this gentleman's connection to Paignton.



Sidney with his first wife Pattie, in Salvation Army uniform

Sidney Hartnoll Beard was born in Putney, London, in 1862. At the age of 32, Sidney became a vegetarian, and the following year he set up the 'Order of the Golden Age', with headquarters in Ilfracombe, where he lived with his wife, Annie Patterson (pictured left), and their children. In early life, Sidney and Annie were members of the Salvation Army, later moving to the Spiritualist Church.

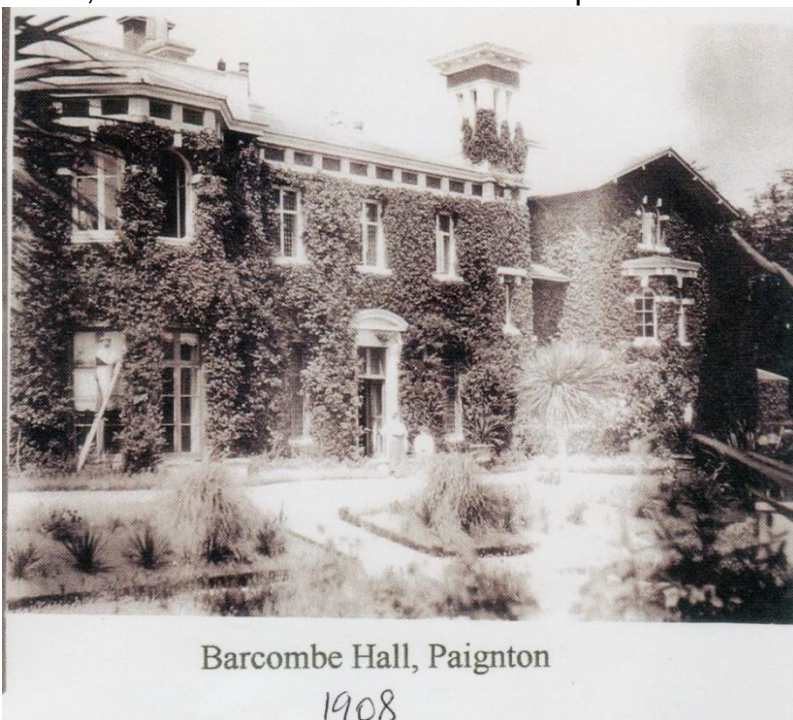
In 1904, the Beard family moved to Barcombe Hall in Paignton, together with the Headquarters of the Order of the Golden Age. The Order published a journal, edited by Beard, called the Herald of the Golden Age, and its purpose was to promote "a fruitarian system of living, and to teach its advantages". Beard was a staunch Christian, and he believed it was the moral duty of a man to follow the humane treatment of animals as part of a Christian belief system. The Prospectus of the Order on the next page outlines this belief system:

Barcombe Hall, pictured here in 1908, was later in 1927 to become Montpelier School.

A Newsletter dated 3rd April 1987, of the Devon Buildings Group, records:

"We have renewed our request for the listing of Barcombe Hall in Paignton, a stylistically eclectic villa built in 1837-38 and of considerable architectural and historical interest".

The Newsletter goes on to say that the House was designed by Edward Davis, but despite protests, unfortunately English Heritage refused to list the building, and it was demolished in 1985 to make way for a housing estate.



Barcombe Hall, Paignton

1908

THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN AGE.

HEADQUARTERS :
PAIGNTON, ENGLAND.

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Founded 1895.

To proclaim a message of Peace and Happiness, Health and Purity, Life, Spirituality, and Power.

To hasten the coming of the Golden Age when Love and Righteousness shall reign upon Earth—by endeavouring to promote universal benevolence, by protesting against all social customs and ideas which hinder its advance, and by proclaiming obedience to the laws of God—*physical and moral*—as a practical remedy for the misery and disease which afflicts mankind.

To advocate the adoption throughout Christendom of a bloodless and natural diet, because the practise of eating the flesh of animals is :—

1st.—A violation of one of the most important Physical Laws which govern man's being, and the cause of a large proportion of the disease and depravity with which our Race is cursed.

2nd.—A transgression against Moral Law, because it involves the massacre of millions of sentient creatures, and the infliction of an appalling amount of cruelty which is *totally unnecessary*.

To plead the cause of the weak, defenceless, and oppressed, and to deprecate cruelty, and injustice, and all that is opposed to the true spirit of Christianity.

All Members of The Order are pledged to seek the attainment of these objects by daily example and personal influence. They are divided into two classes—*Companions and Associates*—the former being abstainers from flesh, fish and fowl, as food ; the latter from flesh and fowl only. Members do not receive any remuneration from the Funds of The Order for any service or literary work that may be rendered. The Society is composed of disinterested men and women who are actuated by altruistic motives. They contribute towards the work and they invite the co-operation of other kindred souls.

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A copy of the Prospectus will be forwarded, together with any information that may be desired, upon application to The Council.

Beard and his friend and fellow fruitarian, Physician Josiah Oldfield, lectured on the benefits of fruitarianism at the Cambridge Guildhall Council Chamber in 1908. Similar to Oldfield, Beard's type of fruitarianism was not strict and included dairy and eggs. Beard defined fruitarianism as "systematic living upon the various fruits of the earth, instead of upon the products of the shambles". He stated that fruits of the earth included all kinds of cereals, seeds and every variety of nuts, all fruits and every kind of vegetable and this could be supplemented by dairy and egg products. Beard argued that fruitarianism helped one to live a humane and hygienic life with freedom from the butchery of animal flesh.

The Vegetarian News published an epitaph of Sidney following his death in 1938:

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One more link with the early days of vegetarianism, as an organised movement, in this country has gone with the death, which we regret to record, of Mr. Sidney H. Beard, at the age of seventy-six, after a week's illness, at his home in Putney on October 20th. Besides horticulture, Mr. Beard was keenly interested in metaphysical and scientific research, and he became an honorary member of the Psychical Research Society in 1882. Like Mrs. Beard, he was an ardent spiritualist. However, his chief interest, to which he devoted his life, was the Order of the Golden Age, and of this he was founder and president. A ready writer, and also a lecturer, on health and religious topics, Mr. Beard was editor of the *Herald of the Golden Age* (the official organ of the organisation just mentioned) from 1896 to 1918. He was also the author of numerous articles, pamphlets and booklets. Among the last mentioned may be cited "Is Flesh-eating Morally Defensible?" and "A Comprehensive Guide-Book to Natural, Hygienic and Humane Diet." In November, 1894, a series of lectures held in Devonshire under the auspices of the Exeter Vegetarian Society was the means of Mr. Beard adopting the vegetarian diet. Subsequently, he and the society's hon. secretary, Mr. J. I. Pengelly, decided to resuscitate the practically defunct Order of the Golden Age, and headquarters were established at the residence of Mr. Beard, "The Beacon," Ilfracombe. Soon afterwards, in January, 1896, the first number of the *Herald of the Golden Age* made its appearance. In 1904 headquarters were transferred to Paignton, Mr. Beard occupying the offices of president and hon. treasurer. Among its objects, as set out in its literature at that time, were "to proclaim and hasten the coming of the Golden Age, when humaneness and peace, righteousness and spirituality shall prevail, and when kindness towards every fellow-creature shall reign in the human heart." In the year 1909 headquarters were removed to London. Since then, countless thousands of leaflets and brochures have been distributed in many parts of the world, branches of the organisation being established in Pietermaritzburg and Bombay, as well as in Burma.

D.B.A.

The Vegetarian News, December 1938.

Karen Chapman, September 2023

Sources: Wikipedia
Devon Buildings Group Newsletter
Vegetarian News
Paignton Heritage Society archives