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Back Talk -- Ideas Worth Selling

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times... and a rise of £60 was not to be winked at! Then too, when the fellows return from the army, they may regard me as having climbed into power and position over their backs. These and a hundred and one other considerations kept my mind in a perpetual ferment. At last, through the good offices of **Mr. Hanks**, I obtained a talk with **Mr. Blackwell**, who with characteristic tact and kindness brushed away the baseless fabric of my fears."

Rex did remain at **Blackwell's** for the rest of his life, and his love and respect for both **Benjamin Henry** and then his son, **Sir Basil** as he became, did not diminish. At his death, in October 1950, **Basil** wrote the following note for his staff: "Early in the year it was manifest that **Will King's** health (always frail) was failing fast. We did all we could to lighten his duties at Broad Street, leaving him free to come and go as he pleased, and later giving him the status of consultant; but we were not able to aid him in the inexorable routine of his home. As his strength waned, his wife's illness made increasing claims upon it; nevertheless, he spared himself no part of his duty, as he understood it (for loyalty was of the essence of his nature), and, sustained by some power which he could only ascribe to 'a miracle of the Grace of God,' ran his straight race to its merciless end. From time to time he honoured me with his confidence, and during his last weeks at home I had several talks with him on terms of simple friendship, though most, I think, was said, as formerly, in the clasping of hands. Anyone who knew of or worked with him must be aware that we have lost something irreplaceable in his mastery of his calling, and the knowledge and judgment which he drew from the store of his vast reading. But this is not all. As I reflect upon the witness of his life and conversation, and upon the meditations recorded in his journals, a question insistently presents itself to me (I write with no sense of exaggeration): have we at **Blackwell's** these thirty-four years entertained at unawares one who may deserve the tremendous title of Saint?"⁵ And **Rex's** famous writings, that "showed the whole working world was a great university," were, by his own admission, used by **Basil** to write his many notes and speeches.

The next installment compliments **Rex's** stories with those of other **Blackwell** apprentices, notably **Fred Hanks** whose long service at **Blackwell's** was rewarded with an Honorary Degree of MA from **Oxford University**. 🐾

Endnotes

1. This work will form part of a contribution to *An Oxford Education: Blackwell's* "alternative seat of learning," which celebrates the life and work of the **Blackwell** family and their associates from many walks of life, their contributions to publishing, bookselling, to the 'commonwealth' of writers and readers both near and far, and to many and varied aspects of life in the City of Oxford. It will be published by the **Bodleian** in 2013-14 to commemorate the opening of the **Blackwell Hall** in the **Weston Library**, and in recognition of the gift by **Julian Blackwell** of the **Basil Blackwell** working library and the **Blackwell** publishing and bookselling archives to the **Bodleian** (Modern Papers and Printed Books and Ephemera) and **Merton College** (The Merton Blackwell Collection College). The editor and principal author is **Rita Ricketts**. It was also the subject of a paper to be given by **Rita Ricketts** at **Merton College**, 25 November 2010 as part of the Study of the History of the Book series: A Moral Witness.
2. **Basil Blackwell's** papers, Merton Blackwell Collection (MBC).
3. **H. V. D. Dyson** to **Basil Blackwell** 27.12.65, **Merton Blackwell Collection** (MBC).
4. **Thomas Carlyle's** major work, *Sartor Resartus* (meaning "The tailor re-tailored"), first published as a serial in 1833-34).
5. Broad Sheet, **Blackwell's** house journal, **MBC**.

Rumors from page 76

Libraries have traditionally shunned textbooks but wonder what the future holds? www.onle.wsj.com/ (need UN and PW)

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play in preserving the scholarly record by giving away single terabytes of memory to departments across campus. This isn't heavy-handed control, just helpful. Such a policy is helped by the University being against the creation of new departmental server rooms.

10. Mobile devices are becoming very big but small treatments of serious topics are being sought. Having just got off a plane and having read the airline magazine in which there were advertisements for summarized books for the busy executive (it is amazing what one is willing to read when they have to turn their **Kindles** and **iPads** off), I thought maybe libraries should consider buying summarized books like the **Elements** and **Shorts** provided by **FT (Financial Times) Press** <http://www.ftpress.com/promotions/promotion.aspx?promo=137607>, books like the old tried and true, *Cliffs Notes* or even electronic versions of *Readers Digest Select Books*. Amazing how some old ideas in new clothes can be popular again.

I have to admit that I probably wouldn't take such good notes on these ideas except **Katina** makes me give the summary talk at the end of the conference. Having said that, I still maintain that the **Charleston Conference** is the best value for dollar when it comes to getting educated while having fun. 🐾

And in this issue, **Mark Herring** (p.65) talks about **Borders** and contrasts this with changes that **Barnes & Noble** has made to their operation. He suggests that libraries should do likewise. And, on the **ATG News Channel**, **Dennis Brunning** mourns **Borders'** demise. <http://www.against-the-grain.com/2011/03/atg-hot-topic-of-the-week-borders-bankrupt-some-borders-closing/>

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Back Talk — Ideas Worth Stealing

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As I have said before, I love the **Charleston Conference** because it is such a good place to steal ideas and then, once I get home, pretend I thought them up myself. Of course I can't simply implement them wholesale, but learning from others as they overcome identical or nearly identical challenges and then copying and adapting the good ideas and rejecting the ones which failed is a wonderful way to improve things back home. Frequently, just listening to others causes me to think up new ways of doing things to resurrect ideas I previously thought of but rejected for forgotten dumb reasons. Here are some of the ideas which I came away with from the last conference:

1. Stretching library materials dollars. Some of America's cash-stretched libraries are combining user initiated document delivery (like the Hong Kong Academic Link system we use here to allow users to order their own books from the other seven academic libraries in our city) AND only buying books and journal articles on demand — e.g., put records for books which might be of potential interest into the library's catalogue but only buy the book when someone clicks on this item in the online catalogue. Similarly, don't subscribe to whole journals; instead buy articles from vendors who specialize in this sort of work. We here in Hong Kong have not been pushed to take this latter course of action, but it may become necessary if our budget doesn't improve.

2. Expresso Book Machine <http://www.ondemandbooks.com/hardware.htm>. I thought this purchase-on-demand on steroids variation of the model just described had more or less evaporated, but I was pleasantly surprised to see it has new life. In this case, a library purchases this super fast custom designed machine which prints entire books and sticks a cover on them when a reader identifies what they want from an on-line source like **Amazon.com**. This book could then be sold to the reader, or the Library could absorb the cost and then process and add it to the collection after the original requestor is finished with it.

3. Collaborative remote storage. Individual and consortia of libraries who are storing books off campus are beginning to collaborate with each other to avoid the unneeded redundant storage of seldom used but still important research materials. I immediately identified this as relevant to Hong Kong. We are currently designing a seven million plus volumes Joint University Research Archive (JURA) to allow all eight Government supported academic libraries to store one copy of these sorts of books in behalf of all eight libraries. But if our shared archive will be filled by 2029, then what? Faced with a similar situation, the U.S. libraries are banding together across state and funding boundaries so that one copy could be shared by multiple consortia. I wonder if in this digital world, perhaps our Hong Kong based shared repository could collaborate with consortia in the U.S.? Australia? China?

4. Promote open access publishing. The **University of California** is developing an eScholarship program designed to "provide a suit of open access, scholarly publishing services, and research tools that enable departments, research units, publishing programs, and individual scholars..." to publish their own research instead of totally relying upon commercial publishers as in the past. This sounds like a great idea which could be copied by other groups of universities. It looks to me, however, that one would need a certain critical mass so as to share the startup costs across many institutions — but, once again, in our digital world, I don't think political and geographic boundaries need to be of enormous importance.

5. Put discipline specific critical library information on flash drives and give them to students. All libraries spend a lot of time teaching students how to use the library. Some libraries are simply loading up cheap "finger" drives and giving them away to new students in hopes that they will teach themselves critically needed information-finding skills. These drives could be filled with brief how-to papers with links to additional information and learning exercises loaded on library servers to help readers figure out how to find the information they need.

6. "Get it at Cal State Libraries." These libraries are simply promising their students that whatever their research needs, they just need go to the library, and the library staff pledge that they will get them the information they need. This seems to be a simple but clear marketing campaign worthy of emulation.

7. Every library can have Harvard-like collections. Because of the **Google Book** program which has now scanned 15 million plus volumes and libraries can access a major portion of these books (the ones whose copyright has expired) available through the graces of the **HathiTrust**, libraries can provide their readers with access to super collections never dreamed of before. For example, since we try to collect books published in or about Hong Kong comprehensively, I searched for "Hong Kong" in the **HathiTrust** and got 6 million hits. In **Google Books** I got 3.2 million hits. Now, no doubt much of it is garbage and/or we already have it, but the thoughts of further strengthening our Hong Kong Special Collections through a sort of bibliographic "sweat equity" is mind blowing.

8. Bookless branch libraries? Bookless libraries? Johns Hopkins library recently reduced its holdings from 1.6 million volumes to 80,000 volumes and instead is relying upon its rich collection of electronic resources. This is an intriguing idea. Since **HKU's** libraries still circulate 1.4 million volumes per year, I don't think we should run right out and throw away the nearly 3 million volumes we have acquired over the past 100 years, but learning about the **Hopkins's** experience made me think we could create bookless branch learning commons-like libraries for all the faculties not now served by a branch library. This sounds like a marriage made in heaven.

9. Library role in preserving the scholarly record. **UC San Diego's** library is demonstrating the role the library can

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