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International Dateline — The Butcher the Baker the Candlestick Maker..

by **Rita Ricketts** (Blackwell's Historian and Bodleian Visiting Scholar, Author *Adventurers All, Tales of Blackwellians, of Books, Bookmen and Reading and Writing Folk*) <Rita.Ricketts@bodleian.ox.ac.uk>

While **Will King** and his fellow autodidacts toiled in **Blackwell's** vineyard, the diggers moved in to change the face of **Broad Street's** North side. Thirteen old houses to the left of **Blackwell's** until the corner of Parks Road, which in some parts dated back to medieval times, were being bulldozed to make way for **Sir Gilbert Scott's New Bodleian**.¹ It seemed there was no stopping the tide. More libraries were needed to house an unending supply of new books to feed an army of old and new world scholars and an increasingly literate and educated public. **Blackwell's** used the opportunity to shore up its own future, rebuilding the dangerously unstable East wall of its Queen Anne Buildings. **Basil Blackwell** explained that this expense was a "symbol of our hope for the future." It was also a mark of respect for the sundry folks, from all walks of life, who had plied their trades and written their lucubrations in Broad Street's old houses since time immemorial. Things are on the move again as the **New Bodleian**, to be renamed the **Western Library**, undergoes a complete restoration, and the ground floor **Blackwell Hall** will honour this illustrious bookseller. This instalment tries to re-connect to the ghosts of Broad Street who may, in the imagination, walk the shelves at night. Readers of *Against the Grain*, should they visit Oxford, may also like to imagine all the souls who lived and worked here.

Scholars and tradesmen have existed cheek by jowl in Oxford's Broad Street at least as long as the medieval scribes of Cattle Street, who crafted manuscripts alongside the **Great Bodleian Library**. In the early fourteenth century Broad Street, known then as Horse-monger Street, was a favourite place for students to take lodgings; in medieval times they were not compelled to enter colleges, still less reside within their walls.² Such inmates found themselves in the company of

diverse tradesmen, tutors, medical doctors, dentists, and publicans. At the back of the narrow terrace, they could mingle with, and smell, the livestock, stable their horses, amuse themselves at billiards, or take boxing lessons to keep fit. Their neighbours' children would scrimp for apples in the long thin town gardens, as **Basil Blackwell** and his sister did in the 1890s. Broad Street's eclectic mixture of inhabitants, and its jumble of old dwellings, persisted in a recognizable form until the site was cleared. By 1939 the North side of Broad Street from the east end of Trinity, excepting the White Horse pub at No. 52, was transformed into a world of books. Numbering from 50 to 35, were the four old buildings **Sir Basil** had saved and united and thirteen former old houses that now formed the **New Bodleian**.³ With the **New Bodleian** and **Blackwell's** joined at the hip between Nos. 48 and 47, all and sundry could share the magic space **John Masefield** described:

(where) "Half England's scholars nibble books or browse.

Where'er they wander blessed fortune theirs" — **John Masefield**

But if the ghosts of yesteryear were to appear today among the shelves of the bookshop or linger in the adjacent building site, where **Gilbert Scott's** icon is being transformed and made available to people

from all walks of life, would they not rejoice at this further conjoining of town and gown? **Jan Morris** had decried the demolition of the old houses, and **Sir Harold Macmillan** treasured a childhood memory of the "charming little row of houses which ran from Trinity gates past **Mr. B's** shop."⁴ Despite their historic value as timber-framed structures, it is doubtful if the inhabitants would have thanked either **Sir Harold** or **Jan Morris** for condemning them to life in these insanitary hovels.⁵ Successful in their fields, we can only guess that they

would have welcomed change. But just who were they, and what were their stations?⁶

Before the advent of **Blackwell's**, the majority of the occupants of 48, 49, 50, and 51 Broad Street were also skilled tradesmen. Living proof of **Napoleon's** famously disparaging nation of shopkeepers, they were not to be disparaged. These small businesses were the source of the next generation of more ambitious, socially mobile, and often scholarly progeny, who later went on to the universities. This gentility was arrived at via china and glassware (48) stationery, stays and then heraldry and frame-making (49), plumbing and glaziers (50), and tailoring (51).⁷ At the time of the 1851 Census, **Susanna Seckham**, a dealer in glass and china, and her spinster daughter and their servant occupied No. 48. **Elizabeth Rose**, continued in this trade from 1881, living with her son **Edward**, a building surveyor. Next door at No. 49 lived **Charles Lobb** and his wife **Mary**, aged 57 and 62 respectively. Incongruously described as haymakers, they must have been doing well, as they kept a servant (1851 census). By 1881 we find resident **John Chaundy**, a print seller and lay clerk, with his wife, five sons, and a general servant. According to the 1851 census **John Bradfield**, a glazier and plumber, lived at No. 50, with his wife and five grown-up children, and at No. 51 **John Lockwood**, with a wife and five young children, was a master tailor employing six men who also kept a general servant. By 1981 **John Lockwood's** daughter, who took in undergraduate boarders, was continuing her father's business, while **Benjamin Henry** lived over his newly-opened book shop at No. 50 with his mother **Nancy**.

Behind **Blackwell's**, numbering now 48-51, was a jumble known as Bliss Court, which **Basil Blackwell** remembered as anything but "blissful."⁸ There, he observed, only ferns would grow in the fetid atmosphere fanned by the breezes from the three communal "offices" and a standpipe. Amidst the dwellings of the poor were stables and a hayloft where "undergraduates were still prone to equestrian exercise." Notwithstanding the environment, the elderly residents seemed to thrive and could be removed only when nature took its course.⁹ Intermittently, assistants in the bookshop would hear the "rapid footfalls and alarming spuds" where students could safely put the gloves on with "Dolly" the boxing coach.¹⁰ By 1939 most of the occupants had departed for Elysium's Fields, and those remaining were accommodated elsewhere at **Blackwell's** expense.¹¹ More to **Benjamin Henry Blackwell's** taste was the headquarters of the Churchman's Union, deriving from the Oxford Movement. **Basil Blackwell** recalled

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The Coach & Horses on Broad Street during the 1930s. Photo courtesy of The Bodleian Oxford.

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the visit of the poet **Verlaine** to these quarters. Before he could meet his audience, **Verlaine** had had to snake his way through “un dedale de chambers regorgeant de livres.”

Next to **Blackwells** No. 47 was typical of this row of long, thin, timber-framed houses, with a cottage at the rear; its frontage measured 6 yards 2 feet 4 inches, and its chimney stacks dated from the 16th century. The house had had 16 windows in 1696, wooden panelling, and marble fireplace; there had been alterations in the 18th century. **Anthony Wood** mentions musical evenings at this house from 1656 onwards, when it was occupied by **William Ellis**, and in the 1920s there was a detached room at the north end of the garden known as the Music Room. Other former lease-holders were: 1634 - **Stephen Hawes**, cook; 1652 - **Edward Sellwood**, cook; 1667 - **Edward Sellwood** (occupied by **William Ellis**); 1683 to 1696 - **John Taylor**, limner (occupied by **Dr. John Luffe** in 1683 and **Thomas Swift** in 1696); 1709 - **John Taylor**, painter (occupied by **John Gibbons**, victualler); 1723, 1737 - **Henry Wise**, mercer, and **John Taylor**, gent (occupied by **Daniel Shilfox**, tailor, in 1723 and **Charles Stephens**, cook, in 1737); 1751 - **Charles Stevens**, cook; 1765 - **Rev. Samuel Forster**, D.LL; 1779 - **Anne Cleeve**, spinster; 1793, 1807, 1821 - **William Fletcher**, mercer who lived at No. 46 and lent this house out; 1835 **Joseph Parker**, of the bookselling fraternity, leased his property to wine merchant **John Parkins**, who had a house servant and a porter. By 1861 it was the home of a College Servant, who doubled up as a wine merchant. Gentrification came in 1881 when the occupant was **William T. H. Allchin**, a Professor of Music, with a wife, four chil-



*This photo shows the end wall of Blackwells.
Photo courtesy of The Bodleian Oxford.*

dren, governess, nursemaid, and general servant, and by 1930, the architect, **Thomas Rayson**.

No. 46, in common with 47-53, had originally belonged to Chantry of **St. Mary Magdalene**, which after reformation passed to the City of Oxford.

From the 14th to 17th century there was reputedly a succession of cooks and an eating-house. From 1656 – 81 the main occupant was one **William Ellis**, the organist (who also lived at No. 47). Following him in a flurry came more cooks, painters, a victualler, a bookbinder, and **Alderman Fletcher** in draper and antiquary. Next came **Well Hall** at No. 45; a tenement of **Magdalen College**, with the following leases granted from 1591 to an eclectic bunch of labourers, apothecaries, and “gents.”¹² To the east of the house was a narrow passage leading to a long outbuilding used as Billiard Rooms. By the 1840s the shop at the front was divided into two premises, and the back cottages numbered 45a and 45b. The 1851 census shows No. 45 occupied by a wine merchant, a widow, **Charlotte Sheard**, and her two young children. Also at No. 45 (presumably living in the building behind) was **Thomas Betteris**, described as a “Billiard Table Keeper” with his wife, two children and a servant. The billiard room must have thrived, since by 1861 **Betteris** had five children and two servants. Between 1876 and 1881 No. 45 had only a single occupant: an unmarried waiter of forty-nine, and it opened as a boarding house in 1882. More famously, from 1882 to 1889, **John Chaundy & Son’s** “ye olde picture shop” was at 45b. In 1904 the *Oxford Chronicle* reports that the offices of the **Electric Company**, which had been at the back, “have been removed to the front premises in Broad Street, thereby offering to the public greater facilities of approach and convenience.” From 1893 to 1904 **Biddle Adams & Co.** (tailors) are also listed at No. 45, followed by **Fred Cutcliffe**, English teacher and the Oxford Secretarial Bureau.

Next in line at No. 44 came the **Thorpe** family, hosiers and drapers from 1783. An advertisement by **A. H. Thorp & Co.** in the Oxford Directory for 1861, shows that they were also undertakers. The 1851 census cites **John Charles Thorp** (great grandson of the original **Thorp**) as a 28-year-old draper, employing eight men, living over the shop with his wife and two young children; three of his employees lodged in the house, with a cook and two nursemaids. **Thorp’s** partner **James Waldie**, a Scotsman aged 36, also lived over the shop with his wife



*This photo shows the ground clearing for the New Bodleian.
Photo courtesy of The Bodleian Oxford.*

and two young children, along with three other shop assistants and four servants. By 1881 the house is occupied by **Webber Patterson**, an unmarried mason of 46 and the employer of three men, two women, and a boy; he may also have run the downstairs draper’s shop which bore his name. Three of the shop assistants lodged in the house, and there were also two servants, one of them a draper’s porter. Subsequently antique furniture ruled the roost with **Henry Adams** 1890-1906, **Frances Cambay** 1907-25, and **Cecil Halliday** from 1925-36.

To the side of the master drapers, whose stay-making attracted customers from many walks of life, were rather conveniently the medics. Well-known in the annals of Oxford was **Dr. (later Sir) Henry Wentworth Acland**, friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, who came to Oxford in 1845 when appointed Lee’s Lecturer in Anatomy at Christ Church, who eventually owned Nos. 43-39. Other medics had preceded him: in 1840 a **Dr. Wootten** had taken over the lease of No. 41, merging it with No. 40 to form one dwelling. This may have been fortuitous, since the building had previously been the Duke of York pub, owned by Christ Church and then leased by **Morrell’s Brewery**. **Acland**, married to **Sarah Cotton** on 14 July 1846, moved to 40 Broad Street in October 1847. By 1858 the **Aclands** had eight children and nine servants, including a governess and a page. As Regius Professor of Medicine, from 1857 to 1894, **Acland** was largely responsible for the establishment of the University Museum and endowed a nursing home in Oxford in memory of his wife **Sarah** that later became the **Acland Hospital**. He died at home on 16 October 1900, and, like the first **B. H. Blackwell** and other Oxford worthies, is buried in Holywell Cemetery. From 1902-1911 **William Bailie Skene**, Treasurer of Christ Church, occupied the house. From 1911 the buildings were taken over by the University and named **Acland House**, housing the School of Geography and then various small departments until the demolition in 1936.

Something of the interior of **Acland’s** old house in Broad Street can be gleaned from an Edwardian account:

It was Dr. Acland’s amusement and delight to improve this curious old place until he turned it (his house) into

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These photos show Broad Street and the Broad Street Blackwells in the 1930s. All photos are courtesy of The Bodleian Oxford.

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a veritable museum... Entering from Broad Street you came into a narrow hall with a Devonshire settle made of walnut and with paneling as a dado on the walls. This paneling continued down the long passage which led to the dining-room and libraries, and the doors of the dining-room were also of walnut and made in the same shops. Out of this narrow hall opened a small room, used as a waiting room for patients, or for those many people who came on all sorts of errands to the house. The walls of this room were completely covered, chiefly with engravings from portraits... Passing down the long passage you came to the first library... Books accumulated everywhere on every sort of subject, down the passage and up the walls, till at least it was all so full that it was a matter of some difficulty to get in or out at all... The stairs to the drawing-room were narrow and steep, but could not be improved, owing to the presence of a massive chimney-stack.... The drawing-room was a low room with a huge beam running down it.... This room was the centre of the family life... Last the dining-room and the garden, into which the former looked ... in the oldest part of the house, with very thick walls and quaint appearance. On either side of a stone ogival arch cut through the wall was painted in the pre-Raffaelite days, in red letters, the old college "grace" for before and after meat – Benedictus Benedictat: Benedicto Benedicatur... The garden ran back as far as Trinity Garden Wall, and Dr. Acland's originality and ingenuity were constantly exercised in making it as unlike a square bit of town garden as possible. At the four corners of the little fountain stood four pillars, removed from the Tower of the Five Orders at the Bodleian at the time of its restoration...¹³

Acland's neighbours at Nos. 38-39 were also part of this medical enclave: **John James Sims Freeborn** (1795–1873) matriculated as a

"medicus" (doctor) on 15 September 1834, and Robson's Directory of 1839 lists him as an apothecary at 38 Broad Street. By 1851 **John Freeborn** had moved next door to No. 39, and his 27-year-old physician son **Richard Fernandez Freeborn** (1823–1883), surgeon, was occupying No. 38 with his wife **Clara**, their baby daughter and two servants; ten years later they had six children and five servants, including a footman. By around 1860, the **Freeborns** had combined the two houses into one. In the 1881 census **Richard Freeborn** is still shown as a physician with four grown-up children living at home: **John** (a graduate of **Exeter College** was studying medicine at London), **Albert** (an undergraduate at Christ Church), **Clara**, and **Mary**. They were all well looked after by a cook, housemaid, indoor manservant, and under-housemaid. **Richard Freeborn** died as a result of a carriage accident in 1883, and his son succeeded him, continuing in the Practice until 1928.¹⁴ Next door at No. 37 was **Dr. H. E. Counsell**, who campaigned vigorously against the demolition of the houses.¹⁵ In days past, this larger house had been a thriving shoemaking business, more a factory than a cottage industry. Its owner, **Mrs. Clara Simms**, was a widow of 41 employing 18 men, including her two sons **George** (21) and **James** (19). She had three younger children, kept a servant, and took in student lodgers. By the time of the 1881 census, her son **George (Simms)** had taken over the business. A widower of 51, he lived over the shop with his son of the same trade, his daughter, and a general servant.

At No. 36 there had been a succession of small shopkeepers: watchmakers, jewellers, and cabinet makers. Notably, in 1912, it was the site of **Chaundy's Bookshop**, mentioned in the lines of **John Betjeman's** verse autobiography, *Summoned by Bells*:

*One lucky afternoon in Chaundy's shop
I bought a book with tipped-in colour plates –
"City of Dreaming Spires" or some such name –
Soft late-Victorian water-colours framed
Against brown paper pages....*

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It may be that **Betjeman** had written his soft-toned prose under the influence of **Bacchus** at the **Coach and Horses**, next door at No. 35. This was the last in the row of houses at the east end, with **Rippon Hall** behind. The pub had a long-serving record with at least three different names. In 1587 **John Carter**, described as a “joyner in Canditch” took out a licence to hang up a sign here with the name of the **Prince’s Arms** (twenty years before the **King’s Arms** opened on the opposite corner). On 14 February 1723/4 **Thomas Cale**, a victualler of **St. Mary Magdalen**, took out a licence for the new name of the **Dog & Partridge**.¹⁶ The **Dog & Partridge** was then in the occupation of a **Mr. Davis**, and its frontage measured 5 yards 2 feet 9 inches. In 1841 the publican was **John Ryman**, while the 1851 census shows **Richard Cozens** living at the pub with his wife, three small children, a lodger, and one servant. The pub was reconstructed in October 1881, and **Elizabeth Gilbert** moved in. She had been landlady of the **Coach & Horses** at 44 Holywell Street, and when that pub was about to be demolished to make way for the **Indian Institute** she brought the sign with her and gave the name to this pub instead. How delighted the **King’s Arms** proprietors must have been to see the **New Bodleian**: more customers and less competition! Yet again they will be giving three cheers in expectation of even larger crowds, when the **New Bodleian** reopens as the **Western Library** in 2015.

Just as making works of art freely available to the general public saved **Gilbert Scott’s** iconic Backside Power Station for posterity, so booklovers have ensured the future of his **New Bodleian**. The **Western Library**, with its street-level doors opening into the **Blackwell Hall**, celebrates the lives of former inhabitants and welcomes those from all walks of life who share a love of books. **Basil Blackwell** in his restored shop had similar thoughts in 1939:

*“I have said that this new building (finished 1939) was a symbol of our hope for the future. I am reminded that in 1935, in my valedictory address as Pres of Booksellers Association I said that if our civilisation must go down in the havoc of war, it will be to the bookshops, or the ruins of bookshops, that the men of the future must turn to find knowledge and inspiration to build a better world. There is our hope; and long may this building and this firm stand to bring that hope to fulfilment.”*¹⁷

These sentiments apply equally to the aims of those at the **Bodleian** and in the wider community, whose vision and generosity has enabled the transformation of the Library. But the old houses of Broad Street are not forgotten. And former inhabitants can rest in peace. As **Milton** lovers **Will King** and **Basil Blackwell** would have assured them: the **Muses’ Bowre** where medieval scholars polished their writing is safe in **Gilbert Scott’s** carapace. Bodley’s Librarian, playing **Electra**, together with her mandarins, has seen off any **Alexandrian** tendencies!

*Lift not thy spear against the Muses’ Bowre,
The great Emathian Conqueror bid spare
The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre
Went to the ground: and the repeated air
Of sad Electra’s Poet had the power
To save th’ Athenian Walls from ruine bare.*

Rita Ricketts, Oxford, January 2012. 🐼

Endnotes

1. The designer of Liverpool Cathedral, Battersea Power Station (1948) and the Red telephone box.
2. *Oxoniensia* vol 2, 1937.
3. The report of a University Commission published in 1931 led to the building of the **New Bodleian Library**, designed by **Sir Giles Gilbert Scott** at a cost of £1 million, opened in 1940 by **George VI**. See also note on the new buildings, **Basil Blackwell**, September 30, 1938 – 1938: 48 and 49 Broad Street rebuilt and merged with 50 and 51 to more than double book-shelf space.
4. BLK/3/21 **Macmillan** on childhood – his memories on first arriving in Oxford from 1903 in *Times Sat Review* Oct 18 1975 p 7
5. **James (Jan) Morris**, Oxford (1965): “If you are in your fifties, nothing will reconcile you to the Bodleian extension at the end of Broad Street, which looks like a well-equipped municipal swimming bath, and replaced a nice corner of jostling old houses in the late 1930s.”
6. See the bound typescript in the **Bodleian Library** entitled “The Demolished Houses of Broad Street and the Freeborn Family” (1943), attributed to **Emily Sarah Freeborn**. Before the advent of **Blackwell’s** the occupants of 48, 49, 50, and 51 Broad Street listed in directories paraded diverse wares: China (48) stationery, the making and fitting of stays, and then heraldry and frame-making (49), Plumbers and Glaziers (50), and Lockwood the tailor (51).
7. Nos. 48 and 49 had been given to the parishioners of **St. Mary Magdalen** by **George Owen** in the sixteenth century and then sold to **Trinity College** in about 1920.
8. **MBC Basil Blackwell’s** notes. See also **Rita Ricketts** *Adventurers All* and *A Norrington History of Blackwell’s*, p 18.
9. **Benjamin Henry**, who had wanted the space to expand his shop, bore their unexplainable longevity with his usual kindly patience. His diary notes the gifts of money he regularly made to them at Christmas and fruit for the few children living in the buildings. See **R Ricketts** *Adventurers All*, 2002 and **MBC**.
10. *Oxford Magazine* 1939.
11. Nos. 48 and 49 became dangerous when their immediate neighbours to the east were demolished to make way for the **New Bodleian Library** in 1936. **Blackwell’s** managed to get a building lease of the site of 48, 49, and Bliss Court (which ran between 49 and 50) at an annual rent of £155, for eighty years from **Trinity College**. The dangerous shops were demolished, and the right-hand half of the present shop was rebuilt to include the large area of Bliss Court.
12. 1591: **William Clarke**, labourer; 1637, 1647: **John Ellis**, gent; 1662: **Christopher Brooks**; 1677: **Widow Brooks**; 1691: **Richard Wood**; 1717: **Dame Norreys**; 1745, 1759, 1773, 1787, 1801: **Thomas Curtis**, apothecary; 1815-43: **Richard Curtis**, apothecary etc.
13. **B. Atlay**, in **Henry Acland: A Memoir** (1903) gives a good description of 40–41 Broad Street.
14. See the bound typescript in the **Bodleian Library** entitled “The Demolished Houses of Broad Street and the Freeborn Family” (1943), attributed to **Emily Sarah Freeborn**, and the Webpage by **Alan Simpson** which reproduces some of the material in it.
15. See **H. E. Counsell**, 37 The Broad (London, Robert Hale Ltd, 1943), where the author, a doctor who had his surgery at No. 37, gives his reaction on hearing in 1934 that his house was to be pulled down:
I received notice from the University who owned the property that at any moment the house might be pulled down with all those from the corner of Parks Road to Blackwell’s bookshop to make room for the new Bodleian Library. This was no surprise to me, as for several years various schemes for the site of the new Bodleian had been the subject of hot discussion in the University and the public press. Once the Broad Street site was definitely turned down by Convocation, and to celebrate the good news we hung a flag from the windows of “Thirty-seven”; but when a commission reported that Broad Street was their choice we knew that our days there were numbered.
16. In 1772 a survey of every house in the city was taken in consequence of the **Mileways Act of 1771**.
17. **MBC BB Minute Bk B** ltd p 402.