

The Friars and Paradise: An Essay in the Building History of Oxford, 1801-1861

By R. J. MORRIS

'Let it then only be repeated: this is not a bad house; not a bad locality, as houses and localities are counted bad; but it is a kind of house and a kind of locality, and this is a kind of life for those who live in it, which begat eleven cases of cholera upon two floors, built upon a piece of ground about 28' by 18'.'

HENRY WENTWORTH ACLAND, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Physician to the Radcliffe Infirmary Oxford, Lee's Reader in Anatomy at the University of Oxford, and Physician to the Oxford Local Board of Health in the cholera epidemic of 1854, was writing about the house in Gas Street (PL. XVII B) which had been the explosive focus of the epidemic which attacked Oxford in the summer of 1854.¹ Gas Street was part of the recently built Friars district of St. Ebbe's Parish. The high incidence of cholera in this area showed that areas of recent housing were as vulnerable as the older and crowded parts of English cities.² This prompts the question: who built the houses in which people suffered and died from cholera? This question leads to wider issues, for the building activity which radically changed the nature of the Friars district between 1820 and 1850 was part of a greater change in the housing pattern of Oxford City itself.

The nature of this larger change is best indicated by the census data for the thirteen parishes within the Liberties of Oxford.³ Table 1 shows that 1821-31 was the key decade in which the shape of 19th century Oxford was decided. FIG. 2 shows two sides to this change; first a huge building programme in St. Ebbe, St. Giles, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Thomas. The maps in Slatter's *Guides* and the remaining visual evidence show that the Friars district, the Little Clarendon Street-Observatory Street-Plantation Road area, the area between Gloucester Green and St. John's Street, and Jericho were the districts most affected. The prevalent house type was the small urban cottage—the smaller windows and the contrast between the rougher slimmer hand cut bricks used before the middle of the century and the smoother wire cut bricks of the later

¹ H. W. Acland, *Memoir on the cholera at Oxford in the year 1854*, London, 1856, p. 81; J. B. Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, a memoir*, London, 1903; see also R. J. Morris, *Cholera, the Social Response in Britain* (forthcoming).

² M. W. Beresford, 'Prosperity Street and others,' in M. W. Beresford and G. R. J. Jones, *Leeds and its region*, Leeds, 1967, pp. 186-197, makes similar comments on parts of Leeds. Like many urban historians, my ability to interpret 19th century building has benefited enormously from the lectures and conversation of Professor Beresford. This is an appropriate place to acknowledge that debt.

³ Map one (Fig. 1), table 1 and Fig. 2. Data from *Census of England and Wales, 1801-1861*. Two areas outside the Liberties, St. Clement and North Hinksey were part of this change and later came within the area of Oxford City boundaries.

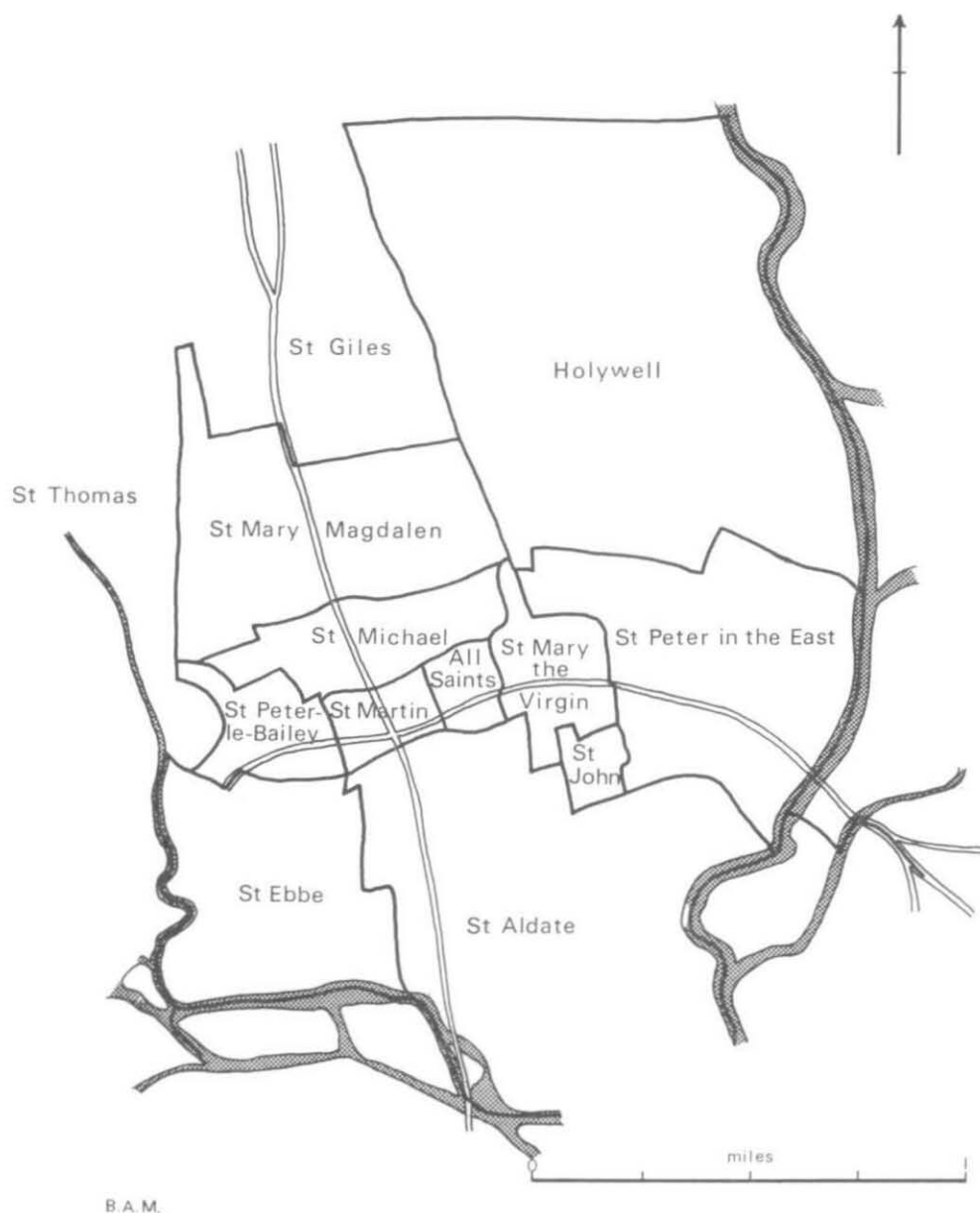


FIG. 1

Map 1: Boundaries of the thirteen parishes of the City of Oxford, 1835.

TABLE I

POPULATION, HOUSING AND MIGRATION WITHIN THE LIBERTIES OF OXFORD, 1801-1861

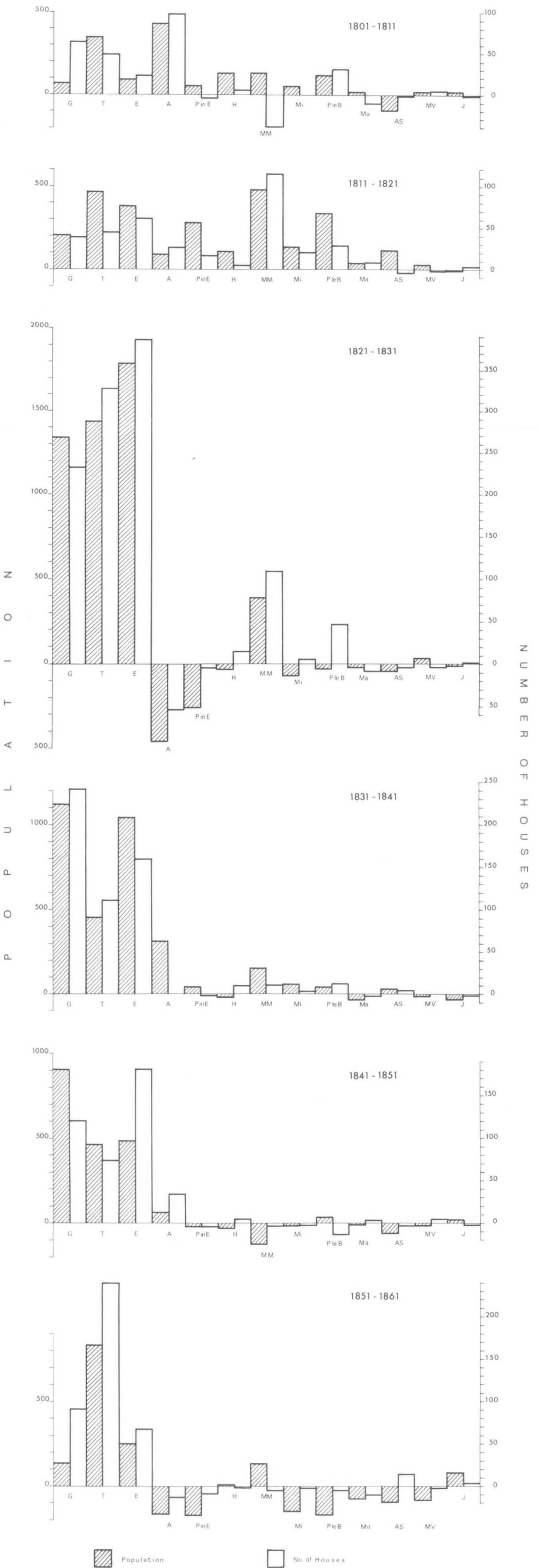
i) Population			
	total at start of the decade	net addition	percentage net addition
1801-1811	10,523	1,393	13.24
1811-1821	11,916	2,675	22.45
1821-1831	14,591	4,074	27.92
1831-1841	18,665	3,187	17.07
1841-1851	21,852	1,706	7.81
1851-1861	23,588	590	2.50
1861	24,178	—	—
ii) Housing			
1801-1811	1,885	219	11.62
1811-1821	2,104	362	17.21
1821-1831	2,466	1,047	29.80
1831-1841	3,513	553	13.60
1841-1851	4,066	396	9.74
1851-1861	4,462	368	8.25
1861	4,830	—	—
iii) Net Internal Migration			
	decade total*	as a percentage at the start of each decade	
1801-1811	99	0.94	
1811-1821	5	0.04	
1821-1831	914	6.26	
1831-1841	88	0.47	
1841-1851	280	1.28	
1851-1861	280	1.19	

* These totals are the sum of the losses of those parishes which suffered an inter-census loss. Whilst in no way an exact measure of internal migration, it is assumed these totals will vary in the same manner as actual internal migration.

decades, indicate these areas of cottage building.⁴ Many builders used harder blue bricks to form a checker board pattern on the front of the cramped cottages (PL. XVII). This decorative device which enlivened the appearance of the narrow streets, was common in much south midlands housing of this quality and period. It seems a vernacular foreshadowing of the later polychromatic fantasies of the elite architects of the Gothic Revival.⁵ The second aspect of change was found in the central parishes, St. Martin, All Saints, St. Mary the Virgin, St. Peter in the East, St. Michael and St. Aldate. This group suffered a substantial loss of population,—the net loss was 218 between 1801 and 1861, but the 1821-31 decade showed a net loss of 352 people. The housing stock of this area only gained 35 between 1801-1861. The footnotes to the 1831 Census Abstract suggest what was happening in the 1820s.

⁴ *The Oxford University and City Guide*, printed and sold by Munday and Slatter, High Street, Oxford, 1820, 1831, 1834, and 1851; see also Ruth Fasnacht, *A History of the City of Oxford*, Oxford, 1954, pp. 189-191; for the technological background to the rough dating procedures which visual evidence makes possible, see M. W. Bowley, *Innovation in Building Materials*, London, 1960, pp. 56-65, 92-98.

⁵ K. Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, London, 1962; Henry Russell Hitchcock, 'High Victorian Gothic,' *Victorian Studies*, vol. 1 (1957), pp. 47-71; this hint of a vernacular tradition among urban cottage builders, lively enough to develop with the new material, brick, conforms with 'the picture of a declining regional tradition, perpetuated in the building of smaller dwellings of lower social class,' found further north, R. B. Wood-Jones, *Traditional Domestic Architecture of the Banbury Region*, Manchester, 1963, p. 183.



B A M

FIG. 2

Parishes			
G	St. Giles	Mi	St. Michael
T	St. Thomas	P le B	St. Peter le Bailey
E	St. Ebbe	Ma	S. Martin
A	St. Aldate	AS	All Saints
P in E	St. Peter in the East	MV	St. Mary the Virgin
H	Holywell	J	St. John
MM	St. Mary Magdalen		

⁶ Penson's Gardens, the Friars, St. John's Close, and other grounds situate in the parishes of St. Ebbe, St. Giles, St. Mary Magdalen, and St. Thomas, have been appropriated to building, which has tended to increase the population of these parishes; on the other hand, the demolition of houses for improvements has proportionally decreased the population of all other parishes within the jurisdiction of the City, particularly in the parish of St. Peter in the East, for the improvement of Magdalen College by the removal of Magdalen Hall.⁶

The demand for housing in the 1820's came from three sources. There was a demand from the natural increase of population within the City, and the migration of people from outside Oxford; both had built up since the beginning of the century and both were familiar features of English demographic change in this period.⁷ To this demand was added that caused by internal migration within Oxford itself as the colleges and other owners in the crowded central parishes cleared housing to extend and improve. Those of low economic and social status were thus forced out into St. Ebbe, St. Thomas, Jericho, Plantation Road, Summertown and St. Clement, a ring of suburbs around an upper class centre. This was the reverse of the usual pattern of 19th century urban development in which the upper and middle classes retreated from the deteriorating environment of the town centre to build spacious suburbs on the outskirts.⁸ Such situations were stylized in the zonal hypothesis of the American urban ecologists which suggested that towns developed a series of concentric rings, central district (commercial and slum), working class housing, then middle class housing, so that social and economic status rose as the distance from the centre increased.⁹ If the concentric rings are applied to Oxford in 1850, they appear inside out. Perhaps the Oxford pattern was an early example of town centre 'improvements'—a railway station, or a shopping street—which in many towns later in the century cleared areas of slum housing forcing their population into nearby areas.¹⁰ Lack of industrial development in the centre, and the small size¹¹ of Oxford undoubtedly helped the process, but there were two decisive factors which made the inside out pattern inevitable, the topography of Oxford, and the special nature of the social

⁶ *Census of England and Wales, 1831*, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1833, xxxvi, p. 502; advertisements in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 19 Feb. 1820, indicate that the work at Magdalen College took place that year.

⁷ A. F. Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the 19th century*, New York, 1899 (reprint Cornell, 1965), pp. 230–284; A. Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800–1850*, London, 1926, pp. 14–17; John Saville, *Rural Depopulation in England and Wales, 1851–1951*, London, 1957, p. 4; see M. W. Flinn, *British Population Growth, 1700–1850*, London, 1970, for a guide to the discussion and literature on the demographic changes involved here.

⁸ S. G. Checkland, 'The British Industrial City as History: the Glasgow case,' *Urban Studies*, vol. 1 (1964), pp. 35–53; A. J. Youngson, *The Making of Classical Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1966; C. W. Chalklin, 'Urban Housing Estates in the 18th century,' *Urban Studies*, vol. 5 (1968), pp. 65–85; F. Engels, *The condition of the working class in England, 1845* (Oxford, 1958, translated by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner), p. 55, on Manchester.

⁹ E. W. Burgess, 'The Growth of the City: an introduction to a research project,' in R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess and R. D. McKenzie, *The City*, Chicago, 1925, pp. 47–62; the theory is discussed by P. H. Mann, *An approach to urban sociology*, London, 1965, pp. 69–114, and by Leo F. Schnore, *The Urban Scene, human ecology and demography*, New York, 1965, pp. 203–214.

¹⁰ A. Briggs and C. Gill, *History of Birmingham*, Oxford, 1952, vol. II, pp. 18–22, 77–82, and J. R. Kellett, *The impact of Railways on Victorian Cities*, London, 1969, pp. 292–3, 324–32, 337–46.

¹¹ Leo F. Schnore, *op. cit.*, pp. 206–209, shows that for the United States the movement of high socio-economic status groups to the edge of the town is more pronounced in larger towns.

institutions within which the upper and middle classes lived. With the exception of the northern quarter, the centre of Oxford was surrounded by low lying ground liable to flood, ground unsuitable for high quality housing. The nearest suitable ground for the housing of the attendant professional aides of the colleges and the more prosperous entrepreneurs in the service occupations that surrounded university life, was the ring of low hills around Oxford. Eventually the middle class were to push through the lower class suburban development into the outer areas, but in the transport conditions of the 1820's this would involve an unacceptable loss of contact with the centre. The lives of the upper class of 19th century Oxford were bound by the institution of college life and this was tied to the accumulation of capital and tradition represented by their ancient sites. In practical terms leaving the city centre was not a choice open to the upper classes of Oxford for their lives were not guided by the needs and constraints of living in family units as were the actions of the elites of most other towns. The pattern of housing development set by the 1820's continued until 1861, slackening only when the land in each parish was used up. By 1861, St. Thomas was the only parish in which building approached the old quantities, and the Census noted that this activity had spread west in the parish, around the new railway stations.¹² In 1861, most major housing projects were outside the 13 parishes and the old municipal boundaries.¹³

Although it is not possible to measure the difference in social and economic status of the inhabitants of the 13 parishes, it is possible to show the substantial differences in the quality of the housing provided in each of the parishes by three measures, the proportion of houses for which the landlord paid the rates (an indication of low status), the average rateable value of each house, and the number of cholera cases per 1,000 people in each parish. This measure which must be in parish units because of the nature of the data is not an exact test of the thesis that the development of socio-economic status zones was the reverse of the usual pattern as parish boundaries include areas of very different quality—this happened in St. Giles and St. Mary Magdalen, but the high status ratings of the central parishes along the spine of the High Street conform to the thesis suggested.

II

It is clear from the evidence given that St. Ebbe's parish saw a large amount of new building from the 1820's onwards, and that the result ranked unfavourably with other areas of the City in terms of landlord involvement, rateable value and the risk of cholera infection. The history of this building development in St. Ebbe will thus show how new, but unhealthy and poor quality housing was created. In 1820 there were three areas available for building in St. Ebbe; Paradise Gardens, which was occupied as a market garden by Thomas Tagg, nurseryman, who sold fruit, florists' trees, shrubs and laurels;¹⁴ the land between the 18th

¹² *Census of England and Wales, 1861*, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1862, L, p. 99.

¹³ See sale plans in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxon. b.59.

¹⁴ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 5 Feb. 1820.

TABLE 2

THE THIRTEEN PARISHES PLACED IN RANK ORDER OF DESCENDING DESIRABILITY, 1835.

% of total housing with rates paid by landlords		rent value per house in £s per annum	
St. Martin	0	All Saints	86.59
St. Mary the Virgin	0	St. Mary the Virgin	71.64
St. John	0	St. Martin	71.05
All Saints	0	St. Peter in the East	46.59
St. Michael	3.4	St. Michael	44.68
Holywell	6.2	Holywell	40.12
St. Peter in the East	12.5	St. John	26.82*
St. Mary Magdalen	25.6	St. Mary Magdalen	26.40
St. Giles	26.2	St. Aldate	24.57
St. Peter le Bailey	30.3	St. Giles	23.28
St. Aldate	35.3	St. Thomas	17.17
St. Ebbe	38.5	St. Peter le Bailey	15.82
St. Thomas	45.7	St. Ebbe	12.13

* St. John was not one of the United parishes of Oxford under the act of 1771 (An Act for Better Regulating the Poor within the City of Oxford, 11 Geo. III, c. 14), so a different basis for rating may account for its odd position in this table.

Data source : *Municipal Corporation Boundary Commission*, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1837, XXVIII, p. 31.

TABLE 3

RANK ORDER OF DESIRABILITY OF THE THIRTEEN PARISHES OF OXFORD ACCORDING TO THEIR CHOLERA RECORDS, GOOD TO BAD, 1832-54.

parish		cases per thousand of population		
		1832	1849	1854
good				
St. John	.. ..	0	0	0
Holywell	.. ..	1.06	0	0
St. Michael	.. ..	0	0	1.96
St. Mary the Virgin	.. ..	0	0	2.56
medium good				
St. Peter in the East	.. ..	3.55	0	1.75
St. Martin	.. ..	4.08	0	2.23
St. Mary Magdalen	.. ..	2.08	0.82	0.81
St. Giles	.. ..	2.88	2.05	0.79
medium poor				
All Saints	.. ..	3.57	1.79	10.73
St. Peter le Bailey	.. ..	1.62	11.41	3.80
St. Paul*	.. ..	14.86	1.90	1.90
poor				
St. Aldate	.. ..	8.95	6.57	12.16
St. Ebbe	.. ..	9.93	11.60	11.60
St. Thomas	.. ..	8.24	11.48	21.81

* St. Paul's was a new parish cut from St. Thomas and St. Giles in 1836.

Data source : H. W. Acland, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

century buildings of the parish and the Trill Mill Stream which was occupied by market gardeners and the grounds of Littlegate House ; and the open area of the Friars which was empty except for the tan-yard and Alderman Bricknell's house near Littlegate Bridge (PL. XV), and the Gas Works opened in 1819. To the east of the road leading to the Gas Works was Treadwell's market garden, to the west meadow land. A general picture of the early development was given by the

maps in Slatter's directories. The 1820 edition showed open fields, but by 1831 the lines of houses in Penson's Gardens, Bull Street, Bridge Street, Friars Street, Blackfriars Road and Gas Street had appeared. The later editions did little more than add Holy Trinity Church, a few houses in Commercial Road and sketch the layout of Paradise Square. Lower St. Ebbe was not an area to interest the tourist purchasers of *The University and City Guide*, so Henry Slatter had little motive for updating his plan of the area after the initial interest had passed.¹⁵ The first reliable map of the area was surveyed by the civil engineer, R. S. Hoggar, in 1850 for the public health survey of Oxford done in that year.¹⁶ The ratebooks provide an outline to the development of the area. Between 1817 and 1826 the ratebooks do not distinguish individual streets, but aggregates can be calculated for the whole parish. It seems reasonable to suggest that the increase in the numbers of ratepayers that began in 1820-21 indicated the subdivision of the area into building plots, and the increase in the revenue from a sixpenny rate indicated the increasing number of houses completed and occupied, thus raising the value of property in the parish. Certainly in May 1826 the parish vestry of St. Ebbe noted:

'The population of this parish having increased within a few years to an extraordinary extent it appears to this vestry that the sittings in the church are inadequate . . .'¹⁷

Although after May 1825, the ratebooks record the number of ratepayers in each street, there seems to be no significant increase in the rest of the decade. Of course these figures could mask the building of further houses by ratepayers already in the streets concerned, but it seems likely that only Union Place—where houses were of larger rateable value—continued building after 1826. The ratebooks of the 1840's which show the number of houses in each street indicate that minor pieces of infilling were still taking place in the central area of the Friars but that the building of the 'forties was filling in the corners, Paradise Square, the Bridport Street area and the Speedwell Street-Friars Wharf area. The information prepared for Cubitt's report in 1850 again showed that these were the only areas making substantial additions.¹⁸

III

Who then did build the houses in which people suffered and died of cholera? Who built St. Ebbe's? So far only the outline of their work has been made clear—a massive building boom in the 1820's and the spreading of houses and streets from the centre of the Friars to the corners of open ground in the parish.

¹⁵ *The Oxford University and City Guide*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Oxford Paving Commissioners Miscellaneous Papers, 1849-53, Oxford City Records R.3.7.; the survey was published as Sir William Cubitt, *Report upon the sewerage and water supply of Oxford, with an appendix by T. MacDougal-Smith*, Amersham 1851; Hoggar published his map separately after a dispute over payment—there is a copy in the Bodleian, Map Oxon. d.1.

¹⁷ St Ebbe's Vestry Minute Book, 1825-45, Bodleian MSS. D. D. Par. Oxford St. Ebbe's d.1.

¹⁸ Sir William Cubitt, *op. cit.*, appendix A.

TABLE 4

i) St. Ebbe's Parish	no. of ratepayers	revenue from a 6d rate
12 Jan. 1817	170	£19. 6. 0
11 Jan. 1818	158	£19. 4. 0
8 Jan. 1819	168	£19. 6. 6
16 Jan. 1820	168	£21. 13. 6
12 Jan. 1821	181	£21. 8. 6
6 Jan. 1822	181	£22. 5. 6
5 Jan. 1823	251	£23. 12. 0
2 Jan. 1824	253	£23. 6. 0
6 Jan. 1825	276	£23. 9. 6
12 Jan. 1826	356	£30. 13. 9

ii) The new streets of St. Ebbe	no. of ratepayers	no. of houses			
	May 1825	Jan. 1830	1832	1840	1847-8
Paradise Gardens	.. —	—	—	21	54
Penson's Gardens	.. 55	53	54	62	64
Turnagain Lane ..	.. (30)	19	(35)	27	33
Littlegate .. ..	.. ( )	13	()	15	15
New Street .. ..	.. 20	26	29	76	77
Friars Street .. ..	.. 43	46	44	87	92
Blackfriars Road ..	.. 59	23	22	133	117
Bridport Street ..	.. —	—	—	19	17
Gas Street .. ..	.. —	28	24	30	35
Union Place .. ..	.. 9	17	21	6	6
Commercial Road ..	.. —	—	—	12	19
Water Lane .. ..	.. —	—	—	10	13
Friars Wharf .. ..	.. —	—	—	4	14
Speedwell Street ..	.. —	—	—	24	44

Data source : Rate books for St. Ebbe's Parish, 1817-21, Bodleian MSS. D.D. Oxford St. Ebbe's b.19 ; Rate Book 1821-25 b.20 ; Rate Book May 1825, c.4 ; Rate Book January 1830, b.21 ; Rate Book 1840, c.9 ; Rate Book July 1832, Oxford City Records, P.5.15 ; Rate Book 1847-48, City Records, P.5.21.

Note : minor variations may be caused by houses being empty or ratepayers being paupers in which case they were not rated ; sudden falls in the number of houses or ratepayers in a street occur when the rate collectors separated out streets previously included under one title.

The map provided in Acland's *Memoir* showed that all areas of this new building suffered from cholera although the lower parts, especially Gas Street, are more densely covered with the dots which mark individual cases.¹⁹ The whole area of new building Acland marks as badly drained with the exception of Paradise Square. The relationship between building conditions and cholera depended on the means by which cholera infection spread. Modern medical knowledge indicates that cholera is communicated by the excreta of cholera patients infecting the drink and food of others, so the aspects of house building which need special attention are water supply and drainage.²⁰ Contemporaries also believed that cholera was related to a lack of cleanliness and ventilation which produced poisonous miasmas that generated cholera,—so these factors need attention if the housing conditions of St. Ebbe are to be criticized in the terms of those who built

¹⁹ H. W. Acland, *op. cit.*, frontispiece ; E. W. Gilbert, 'Pioneer maps of health and disease in England', *The Geographic Journal*, vol. 124 (1958), p. 172.

²⁰ R. Pollitzer, *Cholera*, W.H.O. Geneva, 1959, pp. 98-99 ; N. Longmate, *King Cholera*, London, 1966, pp. 223-232 ; early suggestions of this mode of communication were made by John Snow, 1849 and 1854, but met with little general acceptance until Koch's work in 1880's, see John Snow, *On the mode of communication of cholera*, London, 1849 ; second edition enlarged, London, 1855 ; reprint New York, 1936, with an introduction by Wade Hampton Frost.

them.²¹ Material to answer the question 'who?' is provided by the deeds of St. Ebbe property which have been collected in the legal department of Oxford Corporation as the 20th century process of demolition and renewal has taken its course in the area.²² The development of an area in small freehold plots naturally scattered the relevant deeds, so for practical reasons building historians have tended to be limited to the study of housing developed by the large estates which have been dominated by leases, thus keeping the records of their origin in one place.²³ One by-product of demolition was the gathering together of the documents of freehold development for the first time for over a hundred years. It is rare that one of the surviving deeds matches a cholera dot, but there are enough to show the pattern of development in the Blackfriars Road-Gas Street area, in the area around Littlegate House and the Tan-yard, and in Paradise Square.

The deeds show that the development of the first two areas began with a series of great auctions in the early 1820's, and that William Fisher, builder and auctioneer of Littlegate, was active in promoting many of the sales. The first important sale came in September :

'Capital freehold estate in the City of Oxford, to be sold by auction by Mr. Henry Wilson (105, Hatton Garden, London), at the Mitre Inn, Oxford, Tuesday, 5 September, 1820, by the direction of the mortgagee—A most desirable freehold estate situate in the parish of St. Ebbe, in the City of Oxford ; consisting of a capital residence, faced with stone, coach houses, stabling, and numerous attached and detached offices, all recently erected at very considerable expense, in the most substantial manner ; extensive gardens, sloping lawns, and a MEADOW of about SIX ACRES, surrounded by a raised walk, and encircled by a stream which flows from the river Isis. Also a capital TAN YARD, with pits, drying sheds, bark houses, mill houses and various other buildings, well arranged for carrying on the business of a tanner on an extensive scale.

'The whole of this property is freehold, and now in the occupation of Alderman Bricknell.'²⁴

The whole estate, nine acres, was bought by Charles Day of Euston Square, Middlesex, for £3510, which enabled Bricknell to meet his mortgage obligation.²⁵ Day called in Fisher, the meadow behind Bricknell's houses was staked out into 49 building plots, and a new road (Friars Street) laid across the estate. The new plots of land were auctioned on 22 December : '... the situation is pleasant and

²¹ See N. Longmate, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-82 ; and M. W. Flinn (editor), *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, by Edwin Chadwick, 1842, Edinburgh, 1965, pp. 62-4, for a discussion of the general importance of miasma theory to contemporary public health.

²² I am grateful to Mr. Earnshaw and his staff in the Town Hall Legal Department for showing me these deeds, and would like to record my thanks here. I refer to the deeds as Town Hall Deeds.

²³ C. W. Chalklin, *op. cit.* ; Jean M. Imray, 'The Mercers Company and East London, 1750-1850 : an exercise in urban development', *East London Papers*, vol. 9 (1966), pp. 3-25 provide examples of this approach ; H. J. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb*, Leicester, 1966, and 'The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, vol. XI (1968), pp. 641-90, has used builders' and building society records to show the process of development later in the century in London.

²⁴ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 12 August 1820.

²⁵ Schedule of Deeds and Documents relating to the late Mr. John Eykyn's Estate at Littlegate in Oxford, February 1835, Oxfordshire County Record Office, R : I/v/1b ; Town Hall Deeds, Pl/49(a), 11-14 Friars Street.

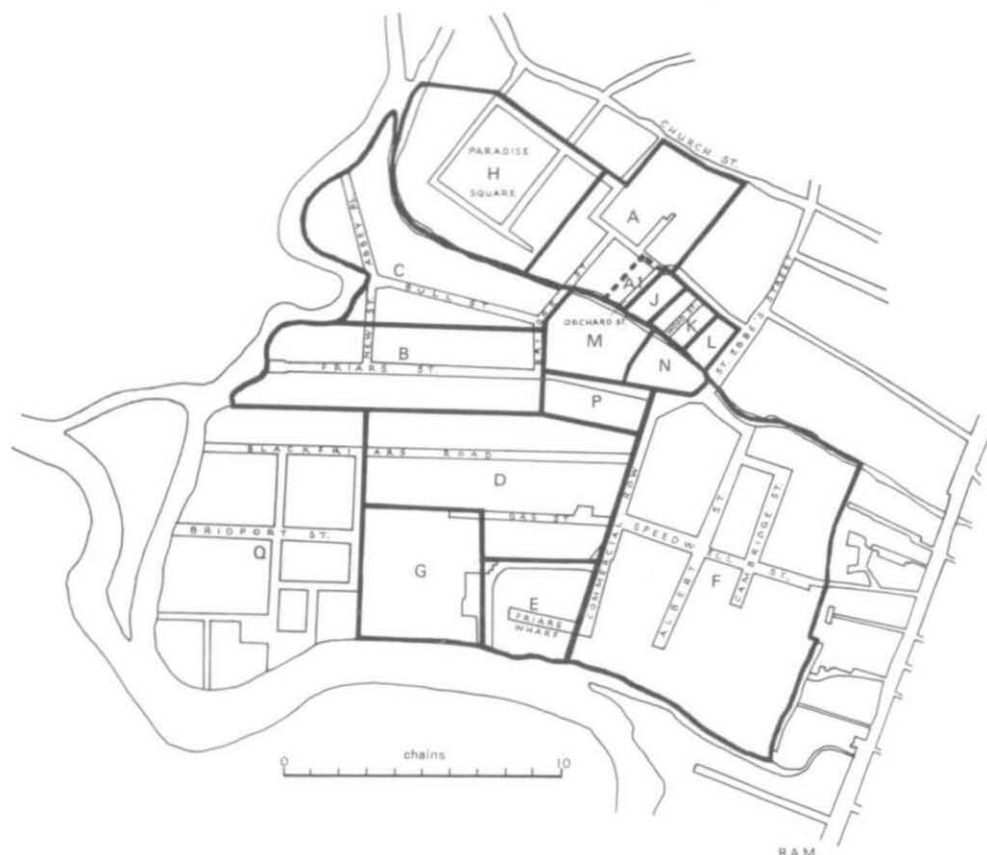


FIG. 3

Map 2: The building estates of St. Ebbe, 1819-1838. The Trill Mill stream runs from the S.W. corner of Paradise Square, under the bottom of St. Ebbe's Street, and disappears under St. Aldate's.

Total decennial increases in the amount of housing and population in the thirteen parishes of Oxford, 1801-1861.

- A Wilson *née* Stevens estate (Penson's Garden and other market gardens) auctioned March 1822.
- A1 Lot one of the Wilson *née* Stevens property bought by William Fisher.
- B Part of Alderman Bricknell's estate, auctioned December 1820, to become Friar's Street.
- C Part of Alderman Bricknell's estate, auctioned November 1822, to become Bull Street-New Street-Abbey Place.
- D Auctioned August 1822 to become Blackfriars Road.
- E Friars Wharf area, auctioned December 1820.
- F Treadwell's Garden, abortive auction April 1821, not built on until after 1832.
- G Gas Works, opened 1819.
- H Paradise Gardens, auctioned October 1838.
- J The ground on which the Bark rick once stood, and the land on which the 17th-18th century tan yard stood.
- K Garden and Orchard of Littlegate House.
- L Littlegate House.
- M House and Garden formerly owned by Alderman Bricknell.
- N The tan yard sold to John Eykyn, December 1822.
- P William Fisher's building yard, 1832.
- Q Bridport Street and west Blackfriars Road area, built on after 1832.

the soil exceedingly rich.²⁶ Lot 25 of this sale was bought for £40 by William Farmer, wharfinger of Oxford.²⁷ Lots 1 and 2 stood next to Bricknell's limepits and farmyard—they were bought by John Jackson, cordwainer, for £30 and £32.²⁸ As two houses per lot was the usual outcome of this sale, it must have laid out both sides of Friars Street, for at this rate the 49 lots would have accounted for the 92 houses rated in Friars Street in 1847–8. The layout of the Bricknell property for building was not completed until November 1822. Fisher advertised for sale :

‘—41 lots (as staked out) of rich freehold pasture land lying on the north side of Friar Street in the parish of St. Ebbe, partly bounded by a branch of the river Isis . . . Some of the lots have choice fruit trees growing upon them, and the intended roads or streets will be so arranged, as that communication may be had with the new street and buildings late Penson's Gardens, by which means great facility of access will be afforded to the principal parts of the City.’²⁹

This seems to refer to the New Street–Bull Street–Abbey Place area which in 1847–8 was rated for 77 houses, again about right for the 41 lot sale allowing for one or two vacant lots, and lots with single dwellings on them. Bricknell had maintained his involvement in the estate until 1822, for late in November Fisher offered for sale by private contract, a tan-yard with pits containing over 2,000 hides, and ‘if desired’ a convenient dwelling house lately occupied by Alderman Bricknell. Two weeks later Fisher sold Bricknell's household effects.³⁰ Bricknell's house and the tan-yard were sold to John Eykyn. Eykyn let out the tan-yard; Charles Robinson, tanner, appears in the St. Ebbe division in the 1832 Poll Book, and Edward John Wright in the 1838, 1841 and 1847–8 Rate Books. John Eykyn divided the property on which Bricknell's house stood into two tenements. In 1838 one was occupied by Elizabeth Hester Eykyn, his widow, and the other by Josiah Nutt, a schoolmaster.³¹ Thus the financial pressure upon Alderman Bricknell in 1820 precipitated the laying out of the northern part of the Friars meadow in building lots.

By the end of 1820 there was a general increase in the sale of property throughout Oxford. Fisher auctioned 13 lots of building land near the Speedwell Wharf in the south east of the Friars.³² Early in 1821 he was selling some of the end products of the building boom; four new stone built houses in Red Lion Square, annual rental £34 6s. with a 5% mortgage available, and six new houses in St. Clement, which would let at £95 a year.³³ Not all the schemes of these early years were successful. In March 1821 William Treadwell, the market gardener who worked the land between the road to the Gas Works (later Com-

²⁶ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 16 Dec. 1820; Town Hall Deeds, Pl/49(c), 49 & 50 Friars Street.

²⁷ Town Hall Deeds, Pl/49(c), 49 & 50 Friars Street.

²⁸ Town Hall Deeds, Pl/49(a), 11–14 Friars Street.

²⁹ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 8 Nov. 1822.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1822, and 7 Dec. 1822.

³¹ Deeds relating to the late Mr. John Eykyn's Estate at Littlegate, Oxfordshire County Record Office R: I/v/1b; *Poll of the freemen and electors of the City of Oxford*, 1832; Rate Books, as Table 4.

³² *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 16 Dec. 1820.

³³ *Ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1821 and 30 March 1821.

mercial Road) and St. Aldate's, doubtless with his eye on events to the north, offered 35 lots of land for sale :

'The plan of the said lots is so arranged as to open a new communication from St. Aldate's to St. Ebbe's, by a commodious street commencing nearly opposite Mr. Sadler's livery stables, and terminating near the premises of Mr. Alderman Bricknell.'³⁴

But he had to abandon the sale because of unexpected objections to the opening of the new road.³⁵ The Speedwell Street area was not developed until the 1830's and 40's because Treadwell failed to resolve the communication problem. 1820 also saw the beginning of development north of the Trill Mill Stream, and the records of this show in more detail some of the methods and problems of William Fisher, and those who employed his professional services as auctioneer and builder.

IV

William Fisher was builder and auctioneer involved in the building speculation in all parts of Oxford. The notice of a sale at Besselsleigh in 1799 suggests that he began his career auctioning timber from the large country estates around Oxford. In November 1819, he was selling 45 lots of freehold land in St. Clement. The notices in the Oxford newspapers after 1820 show that his work was increasingly dominated by property auctions and timber played a smaller part. In 1824 he was auctioning land in Summertown and in 1827 16 lots in Jericho.³⁶ His prosperity was evident from the rateable value of his house, workshops, office, stables, sheds and yard in Littlegate—£76 a year. Although he owned three houses further up St. Ebbe's Street he does not seem to have retained any extensive interest in the property ownership of the newer parts of the parish.³⁷ It is difficult to believe that he did not employ his building resources in the actual erection of houses in the 1820's but there is no record of contracts for this ; staking out plots and making roads was the major activity connected with his auctions. In 1836 just after the reform of municipal government he became councillor for west ward which included St. Ebbe.³⁸ William Fisher died in 1848, after which the business was continued as I. & W. Fisher.³⁹ Occasionally the capital involved in the developments was his own, more often he was clearly operating with capital laid at his disposal by others. He was in fact offering the professional services of a property developer to those who wanted to risk money in such ways in the search for profits.

The wide variety of techniques used by William Fisher and those like him

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 March 1821.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 April 1821.

³⁶ Sales of property in or around Oxford 1799, Bodleian, Oxon. b.59 F4-9.

³⁷ Rate Books 1841 and 1847-8, as Table 4.

³⁸ Council Minute Book, 1832-39, Oxford City Records, B.4.3.

³⁹ Council Book J Proceedings, 1843-49, report from the Committee of Estates records an entry fine to his executor, Oxford City Records, B.5.7 ; Sales of property around Oxford, *op. cit.*, F.12.

appeared in the history of Littlegate House and the gardens and orchards to the west. The history of the site can be traced back to the 14th October in the 13th year of Elizabeth's reign when Thomas Norwood the younger leased to Roger Taylor and Richard Williams, Gentlemen,

'all the site of the then late dissolved house of Greyfriars situated between the street called Littlegate on the east, one part of the River Thames on the south, grounds called Paradise on the west part, and another street leading from St. Ebbe's church to the West Gate of the City on the north part, together with all the houses, tofts and cottages being upon the same and all garden grounds'.

This large piece of property between Littlegate, the back of Paradise Square, the Trill Mill Stream and Church Street soon lost a small section in the south east corner when William Stibbs rented a tan-yard on the property of Taylor and Williams for 1,500 years. In 1738 John Calne, brewer of Oxford, bought the tan-yard for £84. He already owned land to the east on which he had a malt-house and coalyard; to the west was a house and garden occupied by Robert Wilkins. The actual tan-yard must have been a comparatively small piece of ground for there was to the north, 'the ground at the end of the common lane where William Stibbs used to keep a bark rick'. To finance his business Calne had to mortgage the property for £800, and in 1768 the executors of the mortgagee's widow, Mary Ives, wife of William, Alderman of the City, sold the property, brewhouse, tan-yard and all, 'coppers, coolers, brewing vessels, barrels and other utensils', to Thomas Stevens of Oxford. When his widow sold in 1770 the property included the orchard where the bark rick had formerly stood. The next year the executors of the purchaser, Sir James Cotton, sold the property to Swithin Adee, doctor of physick, for £515. In his short ownership of the property Cotton brought to an end its function as a minor industrial site for tanning, brewing and malting. The conveyance recorded:

'... the said brewhouse and malthouse have been lately pulled down, and the ground whereon the same stood and the said tanyard have been reconverted into a garden and close and some extensions or outoffices have been built'.⁴⁰

The tan-yard of the Littlegate deeds was not that on Hoggar's 1850 map south of the Trill Mill. This yard, active in the late 18th-early 19th century on the Bricknell-Eykyn property, may have replaced the smaller one to the north in the 18th century.

Swithin Adee owned and lived in Littlegate House, though it is not clear from the deeds if the house itself was built at the time of his purchase of the land. He left the property and the house to his four daughters, Martha, Mary, Olivia and Catherine. When the last of them, Catherine, died in 1823, the executors sold the property to William Fisher of Oxford, builder, for £1810. The notice of the sale describes the property which Swithin Adee had developed:

⁴⁰ Town Hall deeds, bundle marked, Site of Holy Trinity Church, which in fact principally concerns Littlegate House.

' This estate . . . consists of a stone built sashed and slated dwelling house, containing a good entrance hall and staircase, three good sitting rooms, with capital kitchen on the ground floor ; six servant rooms on the attic storey, with convenient closets and good cellaring ; detached are a laundry, brew and washhouse, large roomy coachhouse and stabling with lofts and all requisite conveniences, together with two large gardens and orchard abundantly planted with fine fruit trees and the whole comprising about an acre of land inclosed by a lofty stone wall and bounded by the river . . . this property is calculated for the residence of a genteel family, or any trade requiring room with the advantage of a running stream.'⁴¹

So, the area was still balanced between residential and light industrial use. It was surprising that the Adees had maintained their genteel residence for so long close to the offensive smells of the tan-yard across the Trill Mill.

Fisher wanted this property as part of a larger building plan. The sale had been in October 1822 although the conveyance was dated 4 February 1823. This conveyance noted that the land to the west was already owned by William Fisher. He had bought this for £400 in September 1822 from Elizabeth Wilson, the wife of a Stadhampton yeoman. Elizabeth had inherited a freehold estate in Oxford from her father, John Stevens, a yeoman of Clifton, in 1805. It was lot 1 of a larger sale which Fisher had conducted in March 1822.⁴² When the Wilson *née* Stevens estate was sold it was divided into 30 lots, stretching back from the house and garden occupied by Mrs. Grimmett, and the house, garden, out-buildings and yard occupied by Mr. Claridge and formerly occupied by Thomas Penson, which both fronted St. Ebbe Street.⁴³ A new carriage road was laid out on the former market garden and the lots sold for the building of what became Penson's Gardens and Bridge Street.⁴⁴ The whole estate, the two houses and the open garden ground between them, Church Street, Paradise Gardens and the Trill Mill Stream had been bought by Stevens from a London lawyer in 1770, since then let to tenants of whom Thomas Penson and Sarah Grimmett had been the most important. Penson was a working gardener, but Widow Grimmett let the garden ground attached to her house to undertenants. Thomas Keate and Robert Gibb, both gardeners, occupied the place which Fisher bought in the 1822 sale. This Wilson *née* Stevens estate was offered for sale in 1820 by Fisher but little seems to have come of that notice.⁴⁵ Possibly 1820 saw a false start to the building boom in this part of St. Ebbe as it had in Treadwell's gardens in the east. The successful sale of 1822 enabled Fisher to lay out Bridge Street and complete the development of the Bricknell property with Abbey Place, Bull Street and New Street.

By early 1823 Fisher was able to turn attention to the development of the Littlegate House property which he now owned. As the site of Littlegate House itself made it impossible to run a road down the centre of the estate as he had done

⁴¹ Town Hall Deeds, *ibid.* ; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 5 Oct. 1822.

⁴² Town Hall Deeds, P.1/49 (a), 6-10, Orchard Street.

⁴³ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 2 March 1822.

⁴⁴ Town Hall Deeds, P. 1/441 (a), la. Penson's Gardens, and P.1/412, 14, 14 & 17, Penson's Gardens. (My thanks to Dr. Hilary Turner for these references.)

⁴⁵ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 23 Dec. 1820.

with Friars Street, Fisher used Turnagain Lane, the old cul de sac which had run to the field where William Stibbs had long ago kept a bark rick, linked this to the new Penson's Gardens, and set out two streets running down to the Trill Mill. At this point he brought in a second tier of developers. Lot 1 of the Wilson *née* Stevens estate and the bark rick/tan-yard portion of the Adee estate was sold in June 1823 to John Broadwater of Oxford, baker, for £720.⁴⁶ Broadwater is typical of the many tradesmen and shopkeepers who took part in developing the small freehold plots of St. Ebbe, except that he operated on a larger scale than most. He appeared again in Paradise Square in 1838, where he bought lot 18, and there built and lived in number 34 (PL. XVIII A), until his death in 1845.⁴⁷ His investments in property in the 1840's included tenements in Orchard Street rated at £20 a year, and two tenements in Penny Farthing Street, which he leased from Christ Church.⁴⁸ In 1825, by a neat piece of financial and legal gymnastics, Broadwater sold his property to Charles Lane, builder, for £1,000, of which a deposit of £100 was paid. Lane then laid down a road running from Turnagain Lane to the Trill Mill, i.e. Orchard Street. Lane sold lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 (see map 3, PL. XVI A), and Broadwater, then, as part of the original agreement bought back the rest of the ground for £572. In the meanwhile Lane had built a tenement, bakehouse and other buildings on these two pieces of land. These were paid for separately, possibly with the credit left on the 1825 price. Thus Fisher drew in the capital of a substantial local tradesman, and handed over to him the task of developing a small portion of the estate. Broadwater in turn brought in Lane, who provided the skills, materials and some of the managing ability needed to develop Orchard Street. Broadwater finished with an extensive bakery for his main line of business, and five tenements for his growing subsidiary income from property.

A similar process was carried out in Wood Street. William Fisher and Crews Dudley sold the property to George Wood for £1,980 ; £650 for Wood Street and the rest for Littlegate House. Crews Dudley was a local lawyer and member of Oxford City Corporation. His name appeared on the deeds of several of the 1822 sales, mostly as trustee for the lease and release process of conveyancing, but occasionally as here, he was involved with the financing of the purchase.⁴⁹ Now,

'... the said George Wood, soon after the said contract (2 January 1825) caused a considerable portion of the said premises, comprising some of the outbuildings of the said dwelling house and part of the said gardens, and the said part of the said orchard, to be divided and set out into lots for sale, and a road or street then called Wood Street to be laid out across the same from Turnagain Lane to the river.'

⁴⁶ Town Hall Deeds, P.1/49(a), 6-10, Orchard Street.

⁴⁷ No. 34, Paradise Square, Oxfordshire County Record Office, Misc.Martin.

⁴⁸ St. Ebbe's Parish Rate Book, 1840, Bodleian, MSS. D.D.Par. St. Ebbe's b.19 ; Index to the Register of Leases, Vol.II, p. 206, Records of Christ Church, Oxford. My thanks to the archivist of Christ Church, Mr. E. G. W. Bill, for arranging for me to see this register.

⁴⁹ Council Minute Books, 1820-32, and 1832-39, Oxford City Records, B.4.2. and B.4.3 ; on lease and release, see A. A. Dibden, *Title Deeds*, The Historical Association, 1968.

Charles Lane, builder, was also part of this contract. Of the 15 lots, Wood ended up with two of them and Lane with one. Broadwater also appeared soon after the sale, buying two of the lots. In June 1826, Wood raised a mortgage of £800 from John Hutt, yeoman of Northleigh, to finance the property which remained to him.⁵⁰ George Wood or possibly his son—for Littlegate House was rated under the name of Henry Wood in 1847-8—lived for a considerable time in the large house beside the property which they had developed as a letter some 90 years later suggests,

‘Wood Street and Orchard Street right side were built about 1825, and Wood Street was named after dear old Captain Wood, who with his daughters were very good friends of the whole neighbourhood when they lived at Littlegate House.’⁵¹

V

William Fisher was not the only developer at work in St. Ebbe. The lines of Blackfriars Road and Gas Street were laid out by others in a 44 lot sale on 31 August 1822. This area stretched from Commercial Road to a line that passed from Gas Street to the edge of the Friars Street property touching the west wall of Holy Trinity Church. In 1813, Richard Wootton of Oxford, mercer, had bought this estate, along with others, from Thomas Robinson and his wife Margaret. In 1822, he sold it by auction with the aid of Morrell and Cox, partners in the Oxford Bank. It is not clear if in managing the sale, they gave financial backing in any way or merely acted as trustees for the conveyancing of the freehold lots. A sample of the deeds of properties from this sale showed three types of people were involved; the pure speculator, in the person of Crews Dudley, bought and sold land, taking his profit from the rising market, but doing no more than hold land for a few weeks or months; the small tradesman of the building industry, a mason and a carpenter here, bought land, built on it and sold again, seeking a profit and the cost of the labour and materials invested in the land; finally the men who invested in land, employed their own builders, then retained the property to provide themselves with a dwelling place or an income from tenants. In the sale of August 1822, the Blackfriars estate was broken up for piecemeal development. The breaks in bonding of the houses, the minor variations of detail in style and accommodation reflect the process in which houses were built in ones, twos and occasionally larger multiples (PL. XVII). Some of the pressures on the purchasers, and the choices open to them, may be illustrated by three examples, two from the south side of Blackfriars Road, backing onto Gas Street, and one from the corner of Gas Street and Commercial Road (see Table 5).

Lot 37 began life in a flurry of speculative buying. Crews Dudley bought for £28 at the August sale, sold to John Magicks, hairdresser, for £36. 3s. 8d, who sold to John Eveness, coachsmith, of St. Mary Magdalen, for £48. The 87%

⁵⁰ Town Hall Deeds, bundle marked, Site of Holy Trinity Church.

⁵¹ Letter from H. W. Taunt to Rev. H. E. Salter, 11 March 1912, Bodleian, MSS. Top. Oxon. c. 455.

TABLE 5

purchaser	occupation	residence	lot no.	dimensions	price
<i>Crews Dudley</i>	gent.	Oxford	11	100' x 23' 6"	£70
In May 1823 this was sold to James Palmer, carpenter, for £105					
<i>Robert Godfrey</i>	labourer	St. Peter-le-Bailey	15 & part 14	127' 6" x 27' 6" plus 1' 6" strip	£41
<i>Thomas Wyatt</i>	mason	Oxford	23	?	£25
He built 'several houses' and sold to John Eveness for £250					
<i>Joseph Sturman</i>	college servant	St. Aldate	35	95' x 24' 8"	£31
<i>Robert Dingle</i>	whitesmith	St. Ebbe	36 part	12' 2" + 13' 5" x 58' 6"	?
<i>John Eveness</i>	coachsmith	St. Mary Magdalen	37	102' x 33'	*
* This lot was bought at the sale by Crews Dudley for £28, sold to James Magicks, hairdresser, for £36.3.8, then to Eveness for £48, all before the conveyancing was complete. Those who came late to a speculative boom had to pay for their tardiness.					
<i>Thomas Spiers</i>	tailor	Beef Lane	43	93' x 40'	?
<i>John Burton</i>	bookbinder	Oxford	site of Holy Trinity Church	84' x 40'	?

He made a garden ground of this site, then in 1844 sold it to Rev. S. Waldergrave of All Souls College as a site for Holy Trinity Church which was opened in 1845.

Data source : Lot 11, Town Hall Deeds, P 1/79, Queen's Arms, Commercial Road, and 31, 32, 33 Gas Street ; Lots 15 and part 14, 36 and 43, Town Hall Deeds, P 1/209(a), 94, 91, 73, 9a and 9b, Blackfriars Road ; Lot 23, Town Hall Deeds, P 1/90, 21, 22, 104, 105 and 106, Blackfriars Road ; Lot 35, Town Hall Deeds, P 1/52, 22 and 23, Gas Street ; Lot 37, Town Hall Deeds, P 1/53, 89 and 90, Blackfriars Road and 26 and 27, Gas Street ; site of Holy Trinity Church, bundle also in Town Hall Deeds.

rise in price was a measure of the speculative enthusiasm generated by the 1822 sale. By 1824, Eveness had built four tenements on his land, occupied one himself and rented the others. This property he used as a base for extending his credit, and his property operations. He borrowed £500 at interest from John Kirkby of Bicester, draper, and Burrows Mathias Kirkby of Banbury, ironmonger and seedsman. This money financed the building of five tenements on land in Gloucester Green leased from St. John's College. The success of such investment depended on a regular income coming from tenants. The risk taken was the risk of houses standing empty or rents falling. In 1835, Eveness spread this risk a little by leasing two of the cottages in Blackfriars to William Dyer for a 14 year period at £22/2/- per year. Eveness was to be responsible for exterior repairs, and Dyer for the inside, and 'to keep the water courses clear and pay half the cost of emptying the privies'. Although Eveness had had other property interests during his life, notably his purchase of lot 23 with its houses in 1822, his estate at his death consisted of nine tenements in lot 37 and in Gloucester Green.⁵²

A similar pattern was followed by lot 35 bought by Joseph Sturman of St. Aldate, college servant. He was a man who worked on a smaller scale than Eveness and with less capital or credit. By December 1823, Sturman had built two tenements on his land. In order to pay the costs of this, he mortgaged the property to David William Dean, coal merchant of St. Ebbe, for £100 at 5% interest. Sturman was to pay in six months. The debt however was to last much longer than this. When Sturman died, his will dated April 1838, showed he lived in Brewer's Lane and worked for Christ Church College and rented out the two cottages in Blackfriars to John Slatter, and to Thomas Toovey, labourer. He left £100 from an insurance, and asked that this be put out at interest for his wife and children. In 1840, Mrs. Sturman renegotiated the mortgage, this time

⁵² Town Hall Deeds, P 1/53.

with Mrs. Eve Dean, widow, for £50 at 5%. The Sturmans did not take the opportunity their plot offered to build two cottages on the Gas Street frontage. This may have been due to capital shortage. The slow reduction in the mortgage was another symptom of this. It may have been due to an unwillingness to increase the amount of his property at risk in the uneasy balance between rent income and mortgage obligations. This shortage was not resolved until after Mrs. Sturman's death. The three Sturman children then sold the property in two lots in 1856, and the purchaser of lot 1, John Marsh, a bath chair hirer of Oxford, built two cottages on the Gas Street frontage, again with mortgage help.⁵³

The history of lot 11 showed the full range of techniques used for the development of the Friars area. Lot 11 stood at the corner of what were to become Commercial Road and Gas Street. It was bought in the August sale by Crews Dudley for £70. He waited until May 1823 before taking his speculator's profit, selling the land to James Palmer, carpenter, for £105, a 66% gain. The conveyance was witnessed on both occasions by William Fisher, another piece of evidence to show the close co-operation between the speculative financier and the builder. The 1823 conveyance stated that Palmer, 'hath erected or is now erecting three messuages or tenements on part of the said parcel of land'. Palmer, drawn to lot 11 as a tradesman, had evidently been persuaded to take the full burden of risk and finance. To do this he immediately raised a mortgage of £150 from Miss M. A. Saunders of Oxford, spinster. In March 1824, he raised another mortgage, £300 from William Dry, tailor of Oxford; part was needed to repay Miss Saunders, and part to pay for more building on the site: 'the said John Palmer hath erected and built on the eastern extremity of the said piece of land therein comprized a messuage or tenement and bakehouse or brewhouse adjoining'. In January 1830, Palmer went back to Dry again and raised another £100. Palmer continued to call himself a carpenter and lived in the corner house, until he sold the property in 1854 for £460, enough to pay the outstanding mortgage of £400 to William Dry. It was possible that Palmer used the corner house with its brewhouse or bakehouse adjoining as a public house (it became the Northampton Brewery's 'Queen's Arms'), and also continued as a carpenter, carrying the mortgage debt until the end of his working life, when he had to sell to liquidate the debt.⁵⁴

The general picture which emerges from these examples was similar to that further north by the Trill Mill. The man of substantial capital or credit, it does not matter which, laid out the ground and provided roads, in this case Richard Wootton. In this process of the general division of the estate he was helped by others, the bankers, and even the speculative buyers who provided temporary finance for the sale operation. It was men of smaller means, often tradesmen, who provided capital or obtained credit for piecemeal building. The smaller investor had two ways of participating in the building boom. They might give mortgage finance, like Miss Saunders and the Kirkbies. Such people accepted less of the risk of the venture, but their gains were limited to the 5% return allowed

⁵³ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/52.

⁵⁴ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/79.

by law as mortgage interest. Those who became owners of property were often people whose lives were closely involved with the Friars area, men who lived and worked there.

VI

The years 1820-22 were good years for any property developer to start building operations. What happened in the meadows of the Friars reflected economic conditions that influenced consumer and investment behaviour throughout British society. The best single index of national building activity is the brick index. Its movements reflect all aspects of brick use, dock, warehouse and railway building as well as houses, but it gives a general guide to changes in the national economy.

TABLE 6

BRICK PRODUCTION (millions)⁵⁵

1817	701.7	1822	1019.5
1818	952.1	1823	1244.7
1819	1101.6	1824	1463.2
1820	949.2	1825	1948.8
1821	899.2	1826	1350.2

The 1819 peak made little impact on St. Ebbe, except for the building of the Gas Works, but the parish took full part in the boom which peaked in 1825. Although 1819 saw a peak in building activity, this mainly reflected investment plans with a long gestation period, for 1819 was a year of commercial difficulty. The prices of 1816-17 were high, especially in the grain market, which was denied imported supplies by the Corn Laws of 1815. These high prices brought an increase in imports in 1818, when wheat rose above 80/- per quarter. These imports lowered all commodity prices in 1819, bringing a flood of bankruptcy notices to the *London Gazette*, as those with debts to pay found the value of their stocks fell. The financial pressure on Alderman Bricknell may reflect some of this price fall. Some time early in 1820 the price of wheat began to fall. In 1819, the price varied around 70-72/-, but by August 1821 was down to 42/-, and at the end of the 1821-2 season touched 38/- a quarter. Such falls were naturally reflected in the price of bread. This meant that the real value of the wages of artisans and labourers rose, as the falling price of bread released purchasing power for other things, namely housing. Now in an underemployed economy like the south midlands at this time, it was likely that employers would force money wages down, thus reducing some of the real gains, but this never happened as rapidly as the fall in grain prices, because of the reluctance to face the resentment of the labour force when the tangible symbol of cash wages was decreased. A need for housing had been created by the population increase and the immigration before 1821; when real wages increased, this need turned into an effective economic demand for houses which the developers of Oxford endeavoured to serve. For these suppliers of housing, the task became easier as capital finance grew cheaper

⁵⁵ A. D. Gayer, W. W. Rostow, and A. J. Schwartz, *The growth and fluctuations of the British Economy, 1790-1850*, Oxford, 1953, p.147 and 185.

and more readily available. The period of easy money began in 1819 as the slump in industrial activity reduced the demand for cash. By 1822, bank rate had been reduced from 5% to 4%, and the yields on government stock fell from 4% to 3½%, so that investors began looking for other opportunities. Hence money looking for mortgage opportunities increased at just the right time for Penson's Gardens and Blackfriars Road.⁵⁶

VII

The building of Paradise Square was a strange postscript to the building of the Friars district, strange because it was a middle class square built to fill the space left by the lower quality housing of the Friars estate. It was usual for the development of an area to begin with the middle class housing, then move down the social scale as infilling and the building on poorer land took place. After the 1820's building in St. Ebbe moved from bad to better. In 1832, Paradise Square did not exist. No poor rate was collected there, and no one from there voted except Thomas Tagg of Paradise Gardens, gardener. Development began in 1838, and can be traced in the papers of John Broadwater who built and lived in No. 34, a distinctive white-walled house of mildly Georgian character which stood in the south-west corner of the Square (PL. XVIII A). By a deed of conveyance dated 9 October 1838, John Broadwater of Oxford, baker, bought, 'a piece of ground, parcel of the nursery and garden called Paradise Garden'. This land had been bought as lot 18 in a recent sale by John Chaundry for £30. He sold it to Broadwater at £5 profit. Broadwater was to have free access for himself, his tenants, coaches and horses to Paradise Street and Penson's Gardens along the Square, 'which said roads or ways have been set out by the said John Chaundry'. The day after this deed was signed Chaundry was released from a mortgage for the sum of £30 by, among others, John James Tagg of Reading, innkeeper. So it seems that after Thomas Tagg had died his son had sold the property and moved to Reading (possible he had been there some time). At the sale Chaundry bought substantial amounts of land, and financed this purchase with a mortgage provided by Tagg, a Maidenhead surgeon and a Wallingford lawyer. If Broadwater was typical of the first residents of the Square, its character was prosperous middle class. When the baker died his will was valued between £3000 and £4000 in the probate courts. He owned a tenement in Wood Street and was able to reserve £400 for his daughter's marriage portion. When the trustees under the will conveyed the Paradise Square property to his son William, the conveyance recorded that John Broadwater had erected a tenement on the whole of the eastern part, and a wall on the north-west corner to the river.⁵⁷ The picture of the Square provided by the City Rate Book of 1847-8 showed that Chaundry had not been so fortunate with all the plots of land he bought. There were 54 houses on the

⁵⁶ A. D. Gayer, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-167, 171-185; J. Parry-Lewis, *Building Cycles and Britain's Economic Growth*, London, 1965; A. K. Cairncross and B. Weber, 'Fluctuations in Building in Great Britain, 1785-1849', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 9 (1956), pp. 283-297; Thomas Tooke, *A History of Prices*, London, 1838, Vol. II, pp. 61-82.

⁵⁷ Papers of John Broadwater, Oxfordshire County Record Office, Misc. Martin.

Square and four gaps, but Chaundry still owned 17 of the houses, five of them without a tenant. Chaundry must have started in the manner of William Fisher, buying the ground, laying it out (in this case with mortgage finance from the vendor and his friends), then selling plots of land, and possibly building on them, but with finance provided by the purchasers of the land. But at some point Chaundry must have started to finance the building of the houses himself to push ahead the slow development of the Square, and had been left with these on his hands during the difficult years of the 1840's when the British economy suffered two major trade slumps. Whatever these difficulties were Chaundry survived them well, for in 1832 he voted from a small house in Bull Street, but by 1847-8 he had moved from this obscure area to Littlegate to a house with a rateable value of £48; his old house was valued at £18. Paradise Square had not weathered the financial troubles of the 1840's so well, for Mr. Vincent writing in the *Oxford Herald* in 1851 complained,

'The condition of Paradise Square is certainly not what it ought to be . . . Surely something might be done to render the large, blank and unsightly space in the centre of the Square ornamental, at a comparatively trifling cost. It is truly a desert waste at present.'⁵⁸

VIII

The men who built St. Ebbe, and thus the houses in which the cholera victims suffered and died were of two kinds, first the major developers who laid out the estate and divided it into lots, in the two examples examined here, a builder with his financial backer, and a landowner; then came a host of small capitalists investing savings and mortgage loans in the building of small groups of houses on individual lots. They were mainly tradesmen, occasionally college servants and labourers. The results they produced may be summarized from the 1840 Rate Book (see FIG. 4). The bulk of the houses were in the £10-£5 range, few rated at under £5, though a considerable portion at over £10. Now as the parliamentary reformers of 1832 felt that the ownership of a £10 house was an indication of middle class status, the 1840 table indicates a population with a scattering of people who might claim this status.⁵⁹ The Friars was by no means a working class ghetto, but contained houses suited to many on the borderline of middle and working class. Individual streets did vary in quality, and cholera often struck the worst streets with most force, such as Bull Street in 1832 and Gas Street in 1854, but streets with bigger houses also suffered explosive outbreaks as did Speedwell Street in 1849.

Neither the major developers nor the small capitalists involved in the building of the Friars could possibly have been aware that cholera was to affect their houses because the excreta from cholera patients polluted the drinking water of the area, but all were generally aware of the need for drainage and water supply. The

⁵⁸ *The Streets of Oxford*, reprint from a series of letters in the *Oxford Herald*: this was reprinted as an appendix to *Report of the evidence taken before T. MacDougal Smith into the State of the Sewerage, drainage and water supply of . . . Oxford*, Oxford, 1851. The letters are attributed to Mr. Vincent by H. W. Acland, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ J. R. M. Butler, *The passing of the Great Reform Act*, London, 1914.

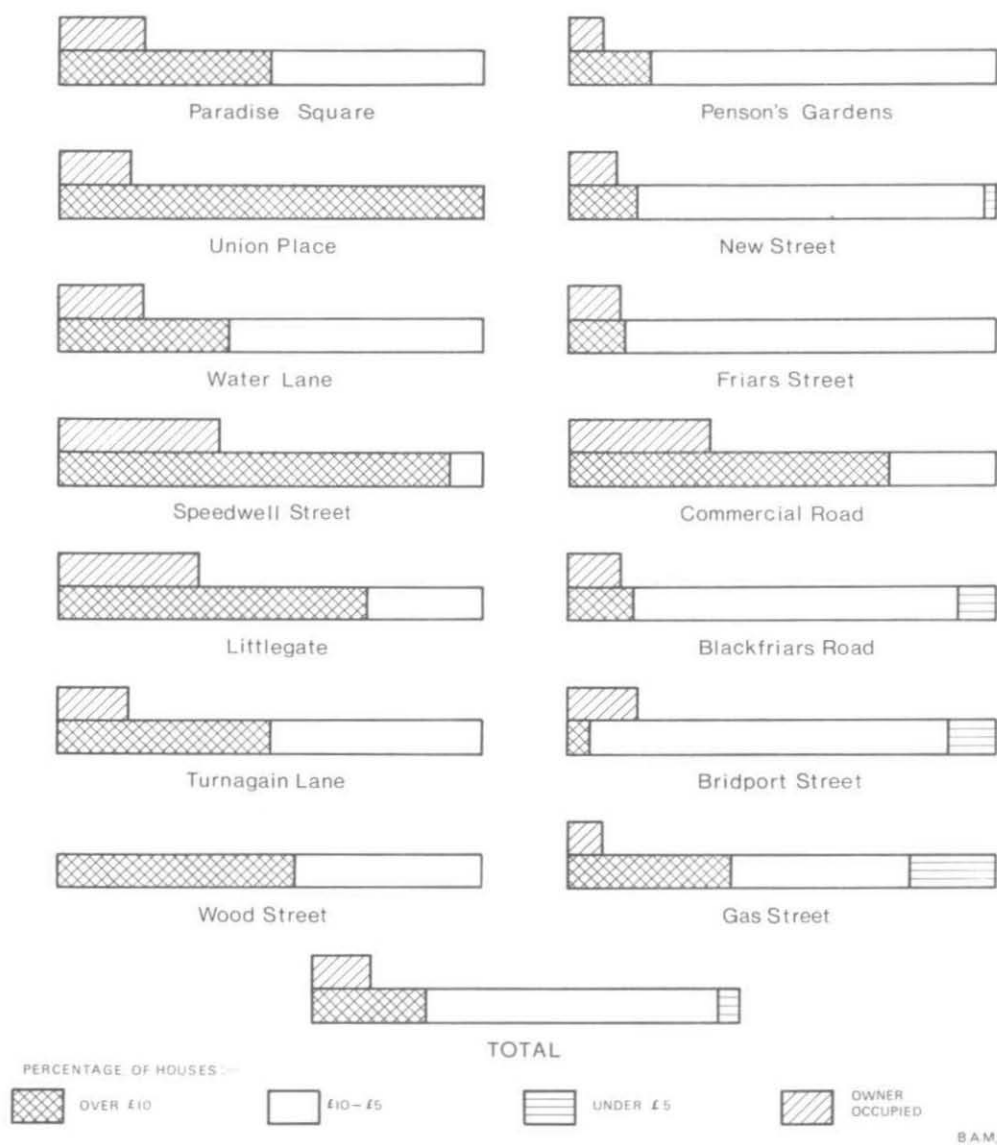


FIG. 4

Rateable value and ownership structure of houses in the recently built streets of St. Ebbe, 1840. Data source; St. Ebbe's Parish Rate Book, 1840.

public health reports at the end of the 1840's were all critical of the area. The Cubitt report found the whole of the drainage of lower St. Ebbe imperfect. It was a system of cesspools, privies and open ditches, so that the water in many wells was contaminated, 'in some of which the water was found to be in a green and putrid state'.⁶⁰ Acland felt that houses should never have been built in such a low-lying situation which made good drainage impossible.⁶¹ One of Fisher's 1822 advertisements hinted that he knew the risks being run by building in the lower parts of St. Ebbe; 'The lots now for sale are more desirable than the land adjoining which has been lately sold, the ground being much higher, the situation altogether better and the lots of larger dimensions'.⁶² The general evidence showed that the developers of St. Ebbe made limited efforts to provide both water and drainage. All the plots to the south of Blackfriars Road in the 1822 sale had a ditch on their south side. Attention was given to this and other forms of drainage for Eveness's lease to Dyer in 1835 includes an obligation to keep watercourses clean.⁶³ There was a similar ditch between the Friars Street properties and those on the north side of Blackfriars Road. The outfall of both ditches was into the Isis, and appear on Acland's 1854 map as 'points of contamination'. Both were above the inlet to the Oxford Water Works at Folly Bridge. The Orchard Street plan (PL. XVI A) and the building agreements for Wood Street both show that the developers provided a culvert leading down to the Trill Mill Stream for the use of the individual plots.⁶⁴ The information on water supply indicated that this came from a limited number of wells. The two houses built by Sturman on lot 35 had, 'a well and joint use of a pump'.⁶⁵ When Thomas Buckland bought 45 and 46 Friars Street he was told,

'there is but one well and one pump for the use of the several tenants and occupiers of the four several tenements adjoining the two hereditaments'.⁶⁶

When Vincent surveyed St. Ebbe for the *Oxford Herald*, he found the quality of the actual buildings,

'satisfactory . . . its (the lower part of the parish) external appearance being compact two storey brick edifices, of comparatively recent erection with, for the most part, patches of garden ground attached. They are not so crowded together as to prevent their being swept by currents of fresh air in sufficient abundance . . . (The gardens), some of them are exemplary in point of cleanliness and order, but most of them are the reverse'.⁶⁷

Thus the Friars district was inadequately supplied with drainage and water, despite the moderately high quality of the housing and the occasional efforts of builders and developers to pay attention to drainage and water. This failure came from ignorance rather than wilful neglect. This is evident from an

⁶⁰ Sir William Cubitt, *op. cit.*, appendix p. 10.

⁶¹ H. W. Acland, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁶² *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 8 Nov. 1822.

⁶³ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/53.

⁶⁴ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/49, and bundle marked, Site of Holy Trinity Church.

⁶⁵ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/52.

⁶⁶ Town Hall Deeds, P 1/49 (a).

⁶⁷ *The Streets of Oxford*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 72-74.

examination of the structure of ownership of the houses in the Paradise Square, Penson's Gardens, Turnagain Lane, Friars Street, New Street, Union Place, Water Lane, Blackfriars Road, Speedwell Street, Gas Street areas. This shows that nearly half the houses were owned by people who lived in the area covered by those streets. Men like James Palmer and Joseph Sturman accepted the same risks as their tenants. They were men whose lives and businesses were closely involved with the area in which they built houses. The houses they invested in provided a small rent income, possibly an insurance against old age. The houses they let often stood next door to their own. This helped the management and care of the property. This group of men, who might be called owner-occupier-rentiers were not just small men but could own over a dozen houses. This

TABLE 7

No. of Houses Owned per Person	Total No. of Owners in Each Category			Total No. of Houses in Each Category		
	Owner-occupier-Rentiers	Absentee-Landlords	Total	Owner-occupier-Rentiers	Absentee-Landlords	Total
1	28	30	58	28	30	58
2	15	20	35	30	40	70
3	7	10	17	21	30	51
4	4	12	16	16	48	64
5	3	4	7	15	20	35
6	4	6	10	24	36	60
7	1	—	1	7	—	7
8	1	1	2	8	8	16
9	2	—	2	18	—	18
10	—	2	2	—	20	20
11	—	—	—	—	—	—
over 12	4	3	7	60	43	103
total	69	88	157	227	275	502

structure of ownership did put difficulties in the way of the Oxford Street Commissioners when they made sporadic efforts to improve the conditions of the Friars. As Vincent commented :

'The owners of house property are very frequently not over wealthy—sometimes their position is only one degree above that of the poorest of their tenants in the social scale ; therefore it is thought it would be hard to press them for an expenditure which they could ill afford. On the other hand, when proprietors are wealthy, their influence and consideration amongst their fellow townsmen almost inevitably outweigh all desire to enforce upon them the improvement of their property even where it is most needed.'⁶⁸

The history of the Friars district was the history of a group of developers who lost control over the property they had created. When this area is compared with

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

other similar urban developments, a feature conspicuous by its absence was the covenants which controlled the type, the standard and subsequent use of buildings in many estates.⁶⁹ The developers of the Friars had neither the will nor the resources to impose controls on owners and builders, but they attempted to influence the area by taking a part in the institutions of local government which existed at the time. The activities of the parish vestry showed them as much concerned with the type of community that grew in the Friars as with the environment of the area. Among the active members of St. Ebbe's parish vestry were many of the leading property owners. The new trustees of the church appointed in 1829 included William Fisher, builder and auctioneer, Thomas Tagg, the gardener of Paradise whose son had six houses in New Street in 1840, William Hopkins the carrier, who had a house, wharf, warehouses, weighing machine and outbuildings at Friars Wharf in 1840, John Chaundry, the builder of Bull Street who came to develop Paradise Square and own ten houses in the district, and smaller men like Thomas Spiers, the tailor of Beef Lane who owned one house in Blackfriars.⁷⁰ The vestry showed more concern for the type of amenities provided for the community of the Friars than for public health measures. In 1826 they proposed that the seating of the church should be extended to cater for the rising population. The year before, the vestry tried to stop the opening of a public house in Friars Street,

'we are of the opinion a great deal of loose and immoral company will thereby be introduced into the parish and the peace and good order which have hitherto prevailed will consequently be disturbed . . . the privacy of its situation would make it a most convenient resort for dishonest and debauched persons . . . (its) vicinity to water . . . (would lead to) the speedy removal of stolen goods'.⁷¹

Such petitions to the magistrate had little effect and such fears seemed groundless, for at the first meeting of the Watch and Ward committee of the reformed corporation it was recorded that St. Ebbe had 13 licensed public houses and 15 beer houses, but only 'The Parrot' kept by Bailey Wakelin could be classed as disorderly.⁷² The dangers of the uncontrolled use and development of freehold property in St. Ebbe was made clear in the cholera epidemic of 1832, not only by the death toll, but by the nature of the complaints which came to the Oxford Board of Health:

'a pig at the back of a cholera patient's house in Bull Street (Mr. Marshes) has been affected by some morbid action of viscina after the manner of cholera; . . . nuisance report of Jethro Ludlow against William Hathaway of Blackfriars Road for keeping the entrails of horses in a tub and hanging up horse flesh to the great offence and alarm of his neighbours'.⁷³

⁶⁹ C. W. Chalklin, *op. cit.*; J. R. Kellett, 'Property Speculators and the Building of Glasgow, 1780-1830', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 8 (1961), pp. 211-232; Jean M. Imray, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ St. Ebbe's Vestry Minute Book, 1825-1845, Bodleian MSS. D.D.Par. Oxford. St. Ebbe's d.1.; the other information comes from the Parish Rate Book, 1840, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1825.

⁷² Watch and Ward Committee Minute Book, 1836-1871, Oxford City Records, H.H.1.1.

⁷³ Minute Book of the Oxford Board of Health, 27 and 28 July 1832, Bodleian MSS. Top.Oxon. c. 272.

The first death of the epidemic illustrated the problem Vincent was to mention. The Board inspected the filthy house in which the woman called Leadbeater had died and found that the proprietor was too poor to pay for proper cleansing.⁷⁴ In the long term action on such conditions could only come from the Oxford Street or Paving Commissioners, on which several of the major St. Ebbe developers were represented; William Fisher, Crews Dudley, Thomas Mallam and John Chaundry. Of course such a position on the Commission would defend their property operations from undue legal interference, but it was also a position from which they made sporadic efforts to improve the drainage of the Friars. After 1832 when many complaints had centred on the Trill Mill Stream, filthy and often blocked, the Commissioners inspected the stream and ordered several property owners along its banks to remove obstructions, especially privy stands. In 1843 they filled in the ditch between Friars Street and Blackfriars Road, but the drainage provided was only replaced by cesspools which did little to solve the drainage problem of the area. Again the building of a well in Friars Street in 1846 was a contribution to water supply which dodged the big problems of the area.⁷⁵ Even where the original developers of the estate showed some concern for the progress of the Friars by their actions in local government, their concern was ineffectual.

The creation of this area of unhealthy housing with its inadequate system of drainage by open watercourses flowing into the Thames was not the result of deliberate negligence by the developers. Each developer acted rationally within his own plot of land, but collectively their decision to drain in this way was a disaster, as the sewage from the overloaded, overflowing ditches and streams seeped into the wells. Householders who had no access to the ditches dug cesspools in their gardens. These added to the contamination of the wells. This situation was made worse by the choice of a site where the water table was always near the surface thus spreading contamination further. The developers could not deal with the drainage problem of the Friars as a whole because the area was developed in several large estates, and these estates broken up into small plots of land, so that each financier, builder and owner made his decisions without reference to others, and pushed drainage into the Trill Mill, or dug cesspools without thought for the collective disaster he was bringing about. The system of piecemeal development meant that there was no need to think of the cumulative results of such actions. The only point in the development at which some overall control might have been exercised was at the moment before the big auctions, when most of the land was controlled by a few people. But it was impossible even for the first rank of developers to control the overall building operations on the estate. The building industry had no unit of production big enough for such a job, and no developer or builder had the capital or credit needed to take the risk and hence gain control of the building over such a large area. Capital shortage and the struggle for capital was part of the building history of St. Ebbe from

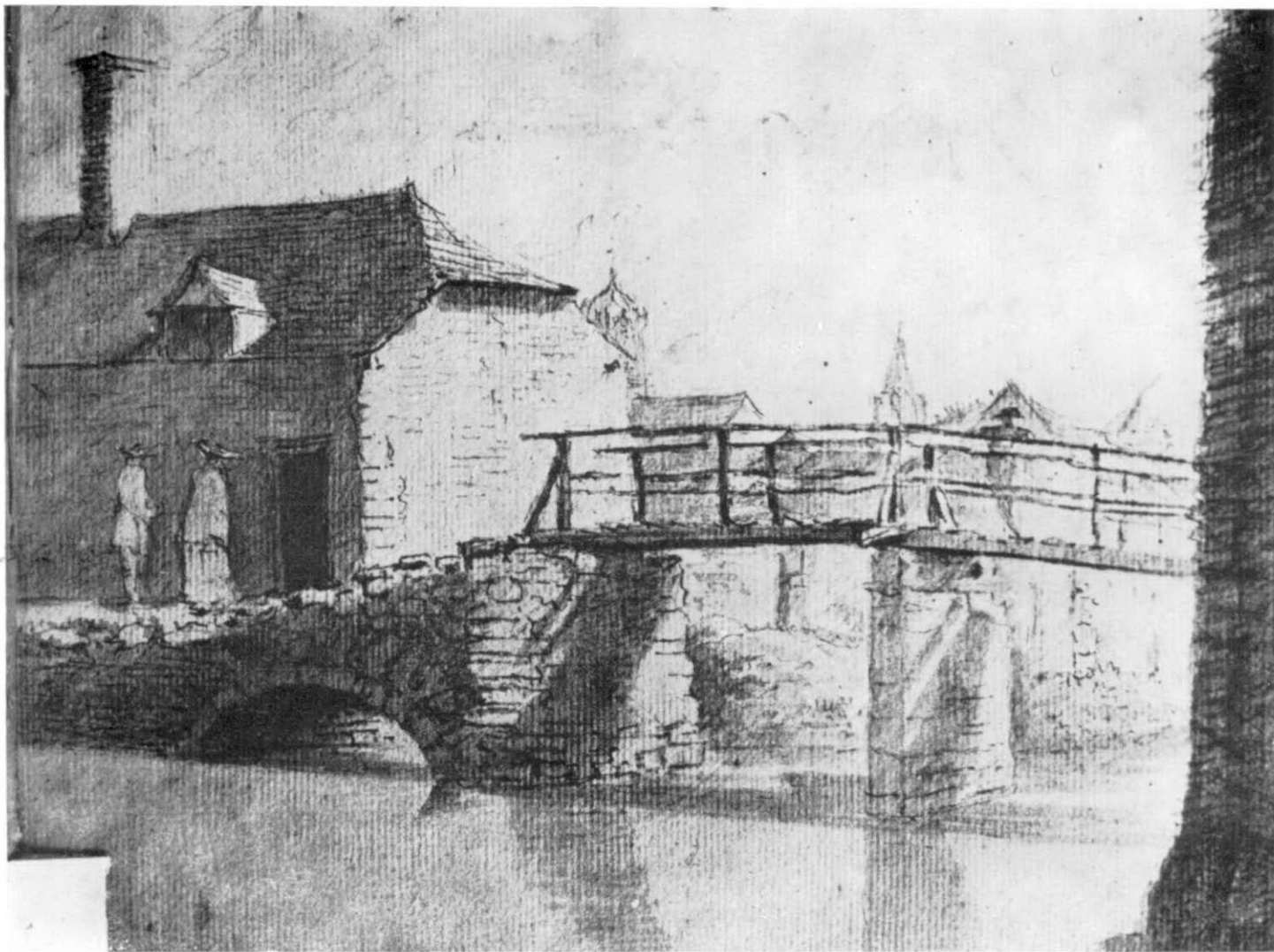
⁷⁴ Old Minute Book of the Oxford Board of Health, 24 April 1832, Bodleian MSS. Top. Oxon. c 271.

⁷⁵ Paving Commissioners, MSS. and printed papers, 1774-1845, and Misc. papers 1832-, Oxford City Records, R.3.10 and R.3.16.

William Fisher to James Palmer. The land had to be sold in plots as the only way to draw in the small savings of the tradesmen and shopkeepers of Oxford and the surrounding market towns. These sales created the anarchic situation in which men could quite honestly and rationally take the decisions which collectively created the conditions in which men suffered and died from cholera.⁷⁶

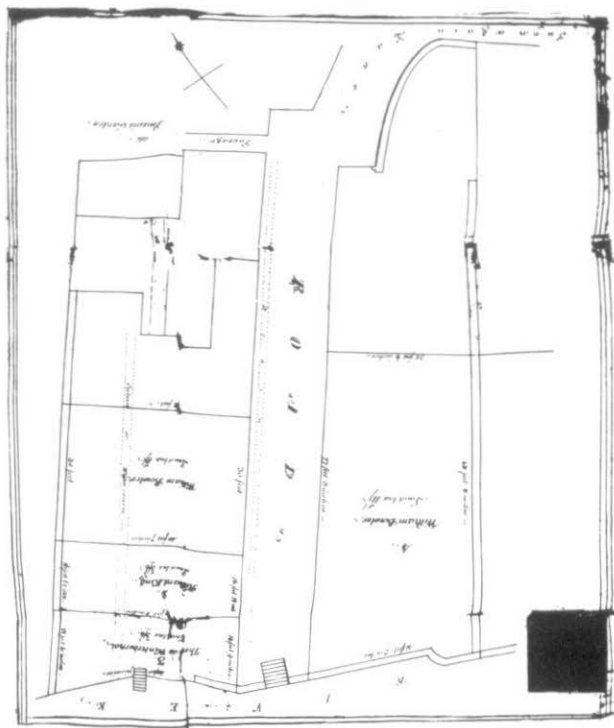
University of Edinburgh

⁷⁶ I am fortunate in finding that this article complements the work of Mr. T. G. Hassall and Dr. Hilary Turner for the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee on the site of the new Westgate Centre. Whilst I have concentrated on the development of the part of St. Ebbe which was open meadow and garden ground before 1820, their historical and archaeological work has concentrated on the area built on since the Middle Ages. Their final report will be published in a forthcoming edition of this journal. I am grateful to Mr. David Hinton for his help in preparing this article for publication.

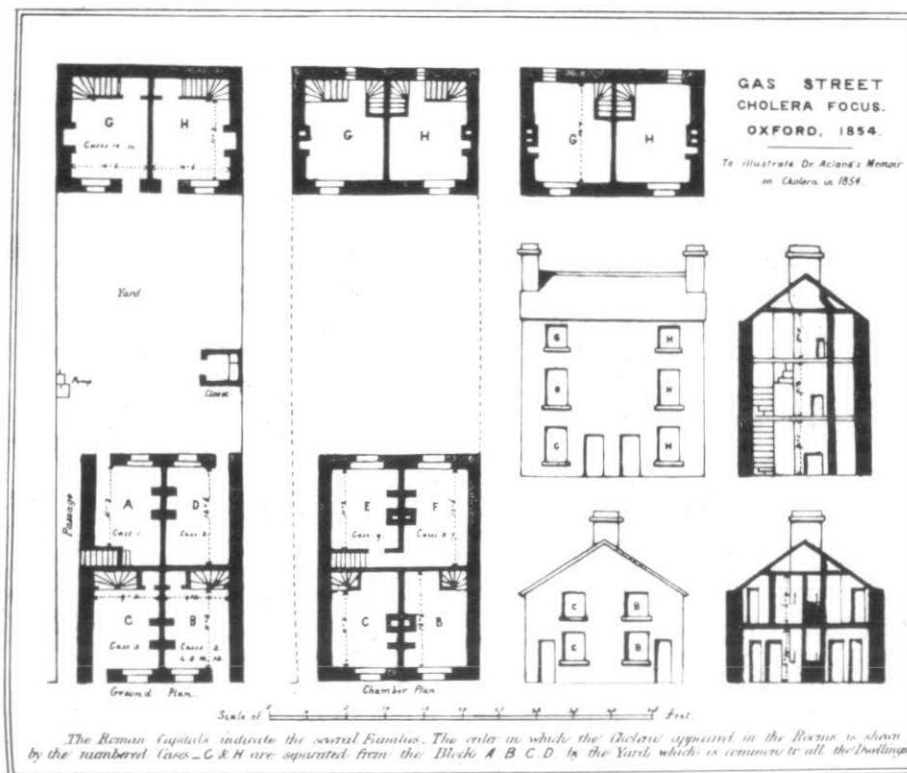


View of the Tan Yard in Littlegate, and Bridge over the Trill Mill Stream, 1787. (Oxford, Bodleian G.A. Oxon. a.64, p. 105.)

Copyright : Bodleian Library, Oxford.



A : Map 3—Littlegate House Development, Orchard Street. Oxford Town Hall Deeds, P. 1/49 (a.)



B : Plan of House in Gas Street.

Reproduced from H. W. Acland's Memoir . . .
Photos : D. Carpenter

PLATE XVII



Houses in Blackfriars Street.

Photos : R.J.M.



A : John Broadwater's House, 34 Paradise Square.
B : Two and Three Storey Houses in Paradise Square.



PLATE XVIII