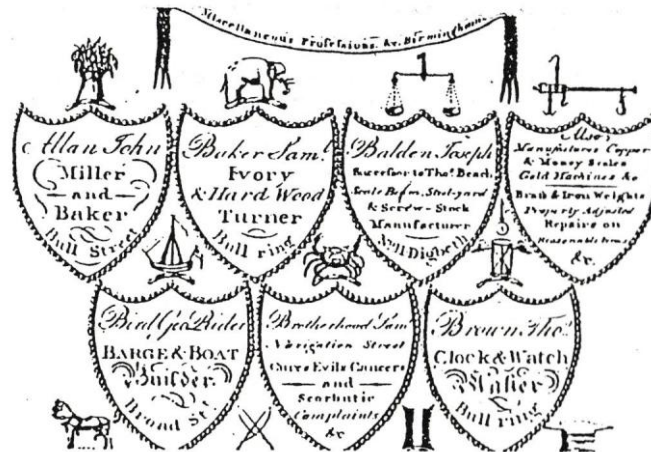


THE BALDENS OF BALSALL HEATH HOUSE

Balsall Heath House was in a 45-acre estate on Alcester Road where Trafalgar Road now runs; it was owned by the Balden family. Joseph Balden had married Mary Avery, a niece of Thomas Beach who owned a scale and weighing-machine factory, and this business passed into Joseph Balden's hands in 1799. One of his daughters, Elizabeth, married her first cousin William Avery, and on Joseph's death in 1813, both of his sons being under age, William and his brother Thomas Avery took over the business, which is still known by their names.



A Trade Advertisement for Joseph Balden, 1800

Joseph Balden's elder son, also named Joseph, was eighteen years old at the time of his father's death; the younger son, Samuel, was only nine. Joseph senior had not made a Will, and his estate was inherited by the younger Joseph, who seems to have been a rather wild young man, addicted to drinking, horse—racing, and other sporting amusements. He came of age in 1816, and in October of that year things came to a head when he ran a race at Walsall one afternoon for a bet of £50, which he won but only by a great effort. Afterwards he was very excited, and "drank freely of ardent spirits". The same evening he went to the theatre in Birmingham, and followed this up with a quick dash to Leamington Spa, where he indulged in another excess of drink. This proved to be too much for him, and he became delirious; he was removed to Dr Burnham's Private Asylum in Henley, where he remained for several months. His sisters were worried about him, "fearing that from intellectual weakness he might become the victim of an improvident marriage, or otherwise squander his property."

As a result, a Trust Deed was drawn up, by which all of Joseph's property was put into the hands of trustees, who were to allow him only "sufficient for his meat, drink, clothing, medicine, attendance, house-rent, house repairs, furniture, servants' wages and other expenses to be incurred by him suitable to his station in life. Joseph apparently signed the deed of his own free will, and stayed at the asylum. Meanwhile, Balsall Heath House became a private preparatory school.

But by now Samuel, the younger son, had become a rather hard-headed solicitor. He was appalled to find that he had no rights to anything from his father's estate unless and until his brother died, and that mean while the trustees seemed to be making a good living out of the arrangement.

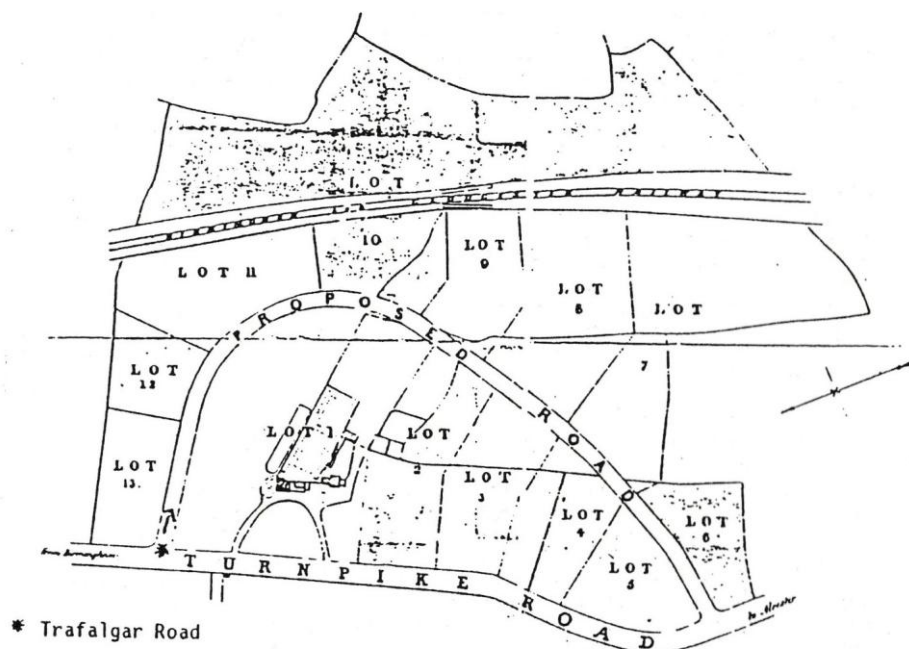
In 1834, Samuel began to publish pamphlets attacking the Trust Deed and its trustees. He tried to have the deed set aside by obtaining a Commission of Lunacy against Joseph. A

long and unpleasant public enquiry concluded in 1836, when it was decided that Joseph was not mad, and that the Trust Deed was valid.

Joseph died in 1843, but this did not bring family disagreements to an end; the estate was divided into three between Samuel and his two sisters, Elizabeth Avery and Mary Whitfield. A Mr and Mrs Harrison were put into the house as caretakers, but Samuel complained that he had not been consulted, and twice broke into the house with a group of his friends. On the second occasion, Mr Harrison fired a shotgun out of a window as the attackers approached, but they broke some windows, with the result that Mrs Harrison and her young child narrowly escaped injury from flying glass as they were having tea. Samuel Balden and his friends broke into the house, and chased Mr Harrison into an upstairs room in which they cornered him, and tore his clothing and broke some furniture. This resulted in appearance before a magistrate, but wrangling continued until 1848 when the estate was finally sold and the proceeds were divided between Samuel and his sisters. But Samuel lived for more than another thirty years, and is said never to have forgiven his sisters for what had happened.

The illustrations accompanying this note show an advertisement for Joseph Balden senior, printed in Bisset's Survey of Birmingham in 1800, and the sale plan of the estate in 1846, from which it is clear that the Balden property extended well across to the far side of the railway. The proposed road, curving back into Alcester Road Just north of Fivelands, differs greatly from Trafalgar Road as it was actually laid out. Balsall Heath House was not pulled down until considerably later; both it and the subsequently built Brighton Place, standing in front of it, are shown in the 1860 Post Office map of Birmingham.

(Information extracted from a note researched by Val Hart for the Moseley and District Churches Housing Association.)



Plan of the Balden Estate, 1846