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Questions Arising from Bertrand's Toyshop in Bath

Vanessa Brett

Early in 2003 I was given a slim file containing the research of a friend. I did not realise at the time (and nor did he) that I had been handed a project that even now, twelve years later, would take me into the foreseeable future. In 2014 I published the first part of the research under the title *Bertrand's Toyshop in Bath*. That book was a huge, and hugely rewarding, diversion from the original plan, to which I am now returning, which will deal with luxury retailers in London: highlighting the family of Paul Bertrand's second wife, Mary Deards.

Every writer builds on the work of others – and it is important to leave something for the next person. The tough decision is when to publish. When do you release years of work so that it does not die with you? When do you accept that one person cannot do it all, cannot chase every lead; when do you recognise that in order to make a book readable, much information must be distilled or omitted? At what point should an author hand over the work to others? Is it that 'the journey is more important than the destination'? This article is very largely written for the person or persons who may find ideas for further journeys in *Bertrand's Toyshop*.

The diversion to writing about Bath came about because I discovered a bank account. Before launching into that discovery, however, there must be explanation for those who have not yet seen the book: what was a toyshop, and who was Paul Bertrand?

The eighteenth-century use of the word 'toy' is now largely redundant. A toy was a small and desirable luxury item such as a gold snuff box, watch, cane, notebook or seal. However, a toyshop sold many other items and was, in effect, the original luxury department store. Some shops had particular specialties, others had a wide-ranging stock, and it is often hard to distinguish between a toyshop and a goldsmith, jeweller, cutler or haberdasher. These shops also sold porcelain, theatre and opera tickets, children's playthings, scientific instruments, writing materials, hardware, medicines, and much, much, more. Not all toys were made of precious materials and they were not bought exclusively by the wealthy. Although the shops of Paul Bertrand in Bath and his wife's family in London were high-end shops with an aristocratic clientele, many toyshops catered for the all-important 'middling sort' – fellow



fig 2: Snuff box, gold circa 1720, with engraving in the manner of Simon Elizabeth (Sotheby's).

fig 1: Terrace Walk in 2013. Bog Island was formerly part of Leake's bookshop and lending library, the shop to its left was the Bertrand's toyshop. (Photograph by Vanessa Brett)

tradesmen, merchants, doctors, yeomen and manufacturers. There would have been stalls of toymen or toywomen at most country fairs and market days in towns and, because toys were essentially small items, hawkers and pedlars were able to carry them throughout the country. The range of objects, materials, quality and the resultant prices, was wide: even the most expensive shop in London sold pencils for pennies to pears.

Susan Sloman referred to Paul Bertrand in her book, *Gainsborough in Bath*, published in 2002. Bertrand was born in America in about 1689. His parents were Huguenots whose attempt at a new life in Maryland was cut short when Bertrand's father died. Back in London, Bertrand became a goldsmith. Following the death of his first wife, he was married again in 1729/30, to Mary Deards. Her father had a toyshop in Fleet Street, a business that was to continue through three generations based in several venues in London. John Deards, the patriarch of the family, sold also in Tunbridge Wells and Newmarket, and was in Bath during the season in the first years of the eighteenth century. Following their marriage, Paul and Mary Bertrand moved to Bath permanently and ran a toyshop in Terrace Walk until 1747, when they retired. Their closest friends in Bath were the painter William Hoare and his family – they had adjacent houses. Bertrand contributed to the life and development of the city as a trustee of the Mineral Water Hospital, as a freeman of the city, and as a freemason. He died in 1755. Although he did not live to see the re-building of his parish church, St Swithin's Walcot, there is a monument to him on the north side of the altar there.

The business of selling luxuries is to a certain extent a performance – Robert Dodsley's comic play *The Toyshop* depicts an outrageous example. Did Paul Bertrand's temperament lend itself to 'shew', or was it his wife? It was her upbringing and inheritance that enabled her and her husband to set up shop. Her brother William, in London, had a wide acquaintance within the arts. One of the things that distinguishes the Deards family and Bertrand from other retailers, is that their customers mentioned them in letters, retained their invoices, and featured them in poems and novels. Few other shopkeepers in the eighteenth century received this kind of attention. This written legacy has been strengthened by Bertrand's bank account, which is a rare addition to the handful of shop records that have so far been found for the jewellery, goldsmith and toy trades in the eighteenth century. The bank account was opened in May 1736 and continued until Bertrand's death.

Historically the business of a goldsmith embraced banking (before banks) and making and/or selling objects in gold and silver. A goldsmith might also make or deal in jewellery, though trading in precious stones was the job of a diamond merchant. Whether Bertrand was ever a hands-on gold worker has not been discovered – so far little record of his life in London has been found – but he described himself as a goldsmith. Whether he was in banking during his time in London is also unknown. Although no establishments in Bath were described as a 'bank' until later in the eighteenth century, the question has to be asked: how did visitors obtain cash and how did they pay bills in the first half of the century? The answer is through bills or notes of exchange, and through shops and merchants, many of whom operated as a banker at some level.

The challenge for any author is to provide detail, but not so much that the book becomes unreadable and physically unwieldy. Speculation can lead to tentative ideas and suggestions being wrongly interpreted as fact. A point that was not put forward in the book for that reason, is whether anything can be read into the timing of events set out in the timeline below – or are they coincidence?

Soon after he came to Bath, Bertrand formed a connection with members of the Wiltshire family, who had a carrier's business. John Wiltshire was apprenticed to Bertrand in 1732 and went on to be his partner. He would not have been apprenticed to learn a craft: his apprenticeship must have been to learn business, retailing and banking. Monetary dealings of the Wiltshire family, Bertrand and Thomas Harrison (who financed the river-side Assembly Rooms opened in 1708/9), reveal new information about the development of Bath in the early years of the century. There is also the tantalising story of the relationship between two women who ran the Assembly Rooms, namely Mary Lindsey and Elizabeth Hayes. The two were described as 'sisters' (which could mean full siblings, half-sisters, or sisters-in-law); Lindsey was beneficiary in the will of a third 'sister', Catherine Hayes. It is complicated! Birth and marriage records have not yet been found and the precise relationship of the three women has not yet been proved. However unravelling their story, finding previously unpublished information, and linking the running of assembly rooms to luxury retailers, has provided a fascinating sub-plot. Is there any significance in the fact that Paul Bertrand started his bank account three months before the death of Mary Lindsey? Was he, after all, somehow involved with the Lower Assembly Rooms together with the Wiltshire family from as early as 1736? Did the Bertrands come to Bath because Terrace Walk was rebuilt, or did they get wind of Thomas Harrison's impending retirement and saw an opportunity? We shall probably have to accept that these will always be unanswered questions.

The development of Bath during the eighteenth century affected its society as much as its landscape. During the first thirty years those who came to Bath were primarily the nobility; following in their wake came the less wealthy including those who the Earl of Orrery described in a letter written from Bath on November 20th 1731: 'Here is one Dockry a Money Lender; and one Laydeman of the same traid here are also many Lords, Pickpockets, broken Merchants and desolate widows'. Presumably this refers to 'Mr Ladyman, famous for making Dice, by which he acquired a Fortune of £30,000', whose death was reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1738.

Rebuilding and improvements to the city's amenities accelerated through the 1730s, '40s and '50s. The 1760s were a turning point, as 'society' peaked, gambling lost its foothold, and the *grandeecs* retreated. Thereafter the 'new town' was developed and Bath became the genteel city that Jane Austen knew: a place for the lesser aristocracy and gentry, and the newly-rich.

1705-1710	Richard Nash arrives in Bath Charles Delamain and Thomas Harrison both build 'rooms' in Terrace Walk.
1728-1730	Terrace Walk rebuilt by John Wood incorporating the newly-designed Lower Assembly Rooms run by Mary Lindsey. Deards family in London divide their business, probably due to the ill-health of John Snr, but also because of the marriages of his daughters, Mary Bertrand and Elizabeth Chenevix. Paul and Mary Bertrand open shop.
1731	Thomas Harrison retires from the river-side Assembly Rooms. His account at Hoare's bank ceases. Elizabeth Hayes/Hawley takes over the rooms.

1732	John Wiltshire apprenticed to PB. Walter Wiltshire Snr opens account at Hoare's. Hayes' Theatre moves (for hospital to be built) to her assembly rooms.
1734 [5th Feb]	Thomas Harrison dies.
1736	Mary Lindsay dies; Lower Rooms taken over by Catherine Lovelace. PB opens account at Hoare's.
1737–1739	Paul and Mary Bertrand in newly-built house in Barton Street (now 36 Gay Street).
1739	PB's bank a/c begins to show payments to Ann, John and Walter Wiltshire. John Wiltshire completes apprenticeship.
1740	Ann Wiltshire takes on management of Lower Rooms.
1741	Earliest known reference to 'P. Bertrand & Company'.
1743	Walter Wiltshire Snr writes will, possibly signifying change in the structure of the business (dies 1765). PB's bank account entries shift emphasis.
1744–1745	Elizabeth Hayes/Hawley dies.
1745	Following the Gaming Acts of 1738–45 Richard Nash introduces the game E.O; in gaming partnership with the Wiltshire family at Lower Rooms.
1747	Ann Wiltshire dies. PB closes shop and retires. John Wiltshire moves to manage the Lower Rooms. Wiltshire family probably continue the banking side of the business.
1755	PB dies.
1757	Nash sues Wiltshires.
1758	Thomas Gainsborough moves to Bath (until 1774).
1762	John Wiltshire and Richard Nash die.
1766–1775	Development of the Circus (1754–67), Royal Crescent (1767–72), Assembly Rooms (1769–71), Pulteney Bridge (1769–74).

Bertrand's bank account, held at C. Hoare & Co. in London, covers eleven of the years he had the toyshop in Bath. He must have kept accounts in Bath, including day books to record every detail of the day-to-day business of the shop, but these do not appear to have survived. The account definitely had a wider purpose than to manage the finances of buying and selling toys. It records the names of many banks and merchants: these firms had nothing to do with luxury trinkets. The only explanation for their presence

1738 *M^r Paul Bertrand - D^r*

March 28	To Edu ^d Farymond	100	
April 8	To Edu ^d Feline	49	11 6
18	To Mary Worin	35	
21	To Jas ^s Leake	20	10
25	To Jas ^s Spender	38	7
29	To Mr. Frame	27	2
May 1	To Edu ^d Farymond 23 4 35	38	
10	To Edw ^d Mainwaring	12	
11	To Tho ^s Carter	10	10
12	To Jos ^s Walker	30	
17	To Jas ^s Leake	16	9 10
19	To Edw ^d	25	4
24	To W ^m Alcock	14	13
26	To Change of B. & C. Bill of P. of 13 May	0	6 9
June 1	To W ^m Alcock	21	
5	To Beaver	5	5
	To Jas ^s Spender	15	
6	To W ^m Puffenbent	10	13
7	To Edw ^d Feline	63	
9	To M ^r Foreman	21	
10	To W ^m Ruffall	27	16
10	To Mary Worin	20	
20	To W ^m Burnier	25	
23	To Jas ^s Mulford	40	
26	To Chas ^s Halfpenny	13	10
28	To W ^m Fox	28	
July 22	To W ^m Ruffall	50	
26	To Louis Luce	70	7
	To Jas ^s Desvieux	31	10
	To W ^m Self	260	14 5
28	To Edw ^d	100	
Aug ^t 2	To W ^m Puffenbent	50	
15	To W ^m Self	100	
31	To W ^m Puffenbent	21	12
8	To W ^m Self	100	
11	To Jas ^s Spender	14	
11	To Green Hill Lane	53	10
11	To W ^m Self	191	3 6
		1701	3

1000

Recd Aug^t 11. 1730. of M^r Ben. Hoare & Co One Hundred
 1000

Paul Bertrand

fig 3: Page from the bank ledgers recording Paul Bertand's account (C Hoare & Co London)

did, must have dealt with in cash. And there are few listings of Bristol businessmen. With its strong trading links abroad, and local manufacturing of metalwork, glass and ceramics, and mining of hardstones, it would be surprising if the shop's suppliers did not include Bristol merchants. Bristol's proximity to Bath, and much improved communication via the River Avon, raises the question of whether Bertrand's expensive

in the ledgers is that a firm's name was on a note or bill of exchange, presented in the toyshop either as payment for purchases or, as the forerunner of an uncrossed cheque, to obtain cash. Numerous aristocrats who are known to have been in Bath, and must have gone into the shop, unfortunately do not feature in the ledgers. They would have travelled to Bath with bills to be drawn on their bankers rather than purses of gold: the threat from highwaymen on the road was very real, and presumably their transactions are listed within a bank's entries.

The ledgers that contain Bertrand's financial dealings reveal the names of nearly 900 people, comprising customers, banks and over 100 different trades and occupations, but the account cannot contain all the shop's transactions. There were many shopkeepers in Bath with whom Bertrand appears not to have done business, or if he

(and sometimes fragile) stock travelled only by road, or whether some came by sea. The manufacture of metal trinkets in Birmingham was only just getting under way during the years the shop traded, but Bertrand, and other Bath toymen, must have dealt with Birmingham makers.

Analysis of the entries in the bank account revealed another surprise: totalling the debit entries for each person reveals that three men to whom Bertrand paid out the highest sums had nothing to do with luxury toys: they are John Jesser, Robert Neale and Philip Baker. Over a ten-year period the money recorded to each, on the debit side of the bank account (i.e. Bertrand paying out money), totalled £3,996, £3,155 and £1,496 respectively. Individual transactions could be as much as £500. To put this in context, recorded payments to the gold box maker Peter Russel, a close friend of Bertrand and his main supplier of high-end goldsmith's work, totalled £1,341; the two highest-paid silversmiths were paid a total of £1,003 and £729 respectively. Methods of translating present-day values to those of the eighteenth century vary between £1 equating to £100 or £150, sometimes more. What were Bertrand and his partner John Wiltshire up to? In addition to the toyshop and the Wiltshire family's involvement with the Lower Assembly Rooms, was there a further operation to do with cloth, linking the business to Jesser, Neal and Baker, or does the money merely represent banking transactions?

Portraits of John Jesser and his wife, by William Hoare, are in the collection of Bristol Art Gallery. Jesser was a clothier in Frome. In March 1753, the Earl of Orrery reported the death of Elizabeth Jesser with a curious sentence: 'The wife of Pontius Pilate Jesser and mother of Dick Jesser died today suddenly, but Pontius Pilate will hold out until the Day of Judgement'. As it happened Jesser died only three years after his wife, in 1756. Philip Baker is a more common name, but the man in Bertrand's bank account was probably the Philip Baker from Bridgwater, who featured in the notice of bankruptcy of Richard Baker, a clothier of Chard, also in Somerset. The name Richard Neale produces several candidates, but he was most probably from Corsham, the son of a wealthy clothier; he married Elizabeth Shaw of Melksham. The questions of how and why Paul Bertrand was possibly connected to the business of clothiers were not pursued for the book, because it seems too far removed from luxury retailing; but it was with some reluctance that they were left for others to pick up on.

There is a vault beneath the garden at the rear of the shop in Terrace Walk. The bank account contains the names of several wine merchants, vintners and victuallers. It seems probable that these transactions relate to the Assembly Rooms rather than the toyshop, but this is, at present, a guess. The vault would have provided extensive storage for drink and non-perishable goods, and the life of the shop may in this respect have come full circle. The shop now specialises in spirits, ales and beers (but the vault is empty!)

Many of the names in Bertrand's bank account have been identified with certainty, others have been given suggested identities, and some (particularly those with commonly-found names) will probably never be identified. There is scope for further investigation. This is probably the first time that so many names have come to light, from a single source relating to Bath, of those whom G.K. Chesterton later described as 'the people of England, that never have spoken yet': not aristocrats, not gentry, but tradesmen, shopkeepers and others in the lower ranks of those now styled as 'the middling sort'.

Whether or not Paul and Mary Bertrand were involved in business outside that of a toyshop, they still had to work hard to maintain its standards and justify

employing high-calibre craftsmen and shop staff. The ability to manage money – liquidity and cash flow – was essential. Bankruptcy was a frequent hazard for tradesmen whose customers arrogantly delayed payment or failed to pay bills. Many of those customers were themselves struggling financially while maintaining a veneer of wealth – sometimes self-inflicted, sometimes through factors outside their control; long-established families died out, land was sold and major houses demolished. Some bankrupts were ruined, other craftsmen and shopkeepers managed to continue trading, albeit at a different level while they recovered. There was fluidity in the class structure: some tradesmen flourished, enabling their children and grand-children to rise out of workplace drudgery and the social stigma of ‘trade’ and move into the professions. Elizabeth Chenevix’s husband (the son of an army officer and brother of a future bishop) lost status when financial problems led him to marry into trade. The children of her second husband, the gold box maker Peter Russel (a close friend and executor of Paul Bertrand, whose first wife was the sister of William Hoare), moved away from luxury trades. Russel’s son Bertrand became a clergyman; his daughter Mary married Col. George Lewis, who gained distinction at the Siege of Gibraltar and at Louisbourg. Unfortunately portraits of the whole family that descended through the Lewis family have not yet been traced.

The importance of ‘things’

The starting point for this research was ‘things’ – the objects that have come down to us that intrigue and give pleasure because of their beauty, inventiveness or utility. The act of touching a gold box, an earthenware dish, or a paper invoice, triggers a thrilling journey of discovery; however the route taken often depends on the interests of the investigator. Neil MacGregor used the collections of the British Museum to ‘tell history through things’ [*A History of the World in 100 Objects*, 2010]. The great range of objects sold by toyshops, and the diversity of subjects and materials they encompassed, would make for a similarly fascinating project. A relatively simple item such as a small ladle for punch contains a wealth of possibilities: its silver bowl might be inset with a coin, its handle made of whalebone – it thus takes us to world trade and banking; to a metal and a mammal; further, to the techniques used to decorate the bowl and the workshop in which it was made; to the manners and customs of drinking; and to the source of the spices and wines that are the ingredients of punch.

From high-end shops such as the Bertrands’ to those in London’s Ratcliff Highway, there would have been a wide range in the quality, cost and utility of stock at a toyshop – and in the decor of the shop itself. In the eighteenth century a set of drawing instruments could be made in precious or base metals, incorporate exotic or domestic woods and ivory or bone, be decorated in the latest fashion or left plain, be pocket-sized or larger, be cased in shagreen or beech, be made to suit a countess or a working man. The Chenevixes and Deards needed minimal promotion because their fame was widespread (today, the finest actors have the shortest CVs in theatre programmes) – should a shop’s promotional material be interpreted in much the same way? In contrast, others stocked a barely believable quantity of different items (for example Richard Clarke, a hardwareman, jeweller and toyman).

Academics use the phrase ‘material culture’ to describe a currently-fashionable subject that has an increasingly complex palette. Essentially the study of ‘things’, it covers the culture or society that created the need for a castle or a terraced house, a

coach-and-four, a pair of silk or knitted stockings, or a silver dinner service – and also luxury retailing. A disadvantage of this understandably popular broad social-history approach is that fewer people are developing the discerning eye needed properly to look at an object and fully understand it, which can only be done through handling. As objects disappear into museums, or into landfill and recycling as fewer people want ‘old stuff’ and ‘things’, there is less opportunity daily to feel the past through your fingers. Only by doing this, however, can we understand the quality of goods that might have been stocked by the Bertrands and the Chenevixes in comparison to toys sold by travelling chapmen.

The objects that have come down to us cause us to question the reasons for their manufacture, the people who made and sold them, and the society whose behaviour created the demand for them. This last is crucial if we are to understand the much ridiculed extravagance of high-end toys in particular. In the eighteenth century luxuries such as canes, snuffboxes, buckles, gold lace, the latest design of coach (lace and coaches were not toys, of course), were considered essential to the maintenance of court and diplomatic relations, and thus the balance of society, throughout Europe. An ambassador – who had to uphold the honour and economic status of his country – had to put on a show in Paris, Berlin or Dresden and in London – which included having the correct accoutrements. It was therefore essential for the toyman to be alert to fashion and operate in a kind of partnership with his customers, in order to maintain the social and financial position of both. He also needed to keep abreast of the latest equipment, imported materials and manufacturing techniques. James Leake’s lodgers included the Earl of Chesterfield (ambassador to The Hague) and the Earl of Egmont (President of Georgia). Among Paul Bertrand’s known customers were Frederick, Prince of Wales, several members of the Royal Households, Members of Parliament, the heir to the immensely rich Duchess of Marlborough, and the wife of the architect the 3rd Earl of Burlington. They wanted quality and fresh designs.

To maintain his position, Bertrand would have liaised with numerous craftsmen, manufacturers and merchants at all levels. Despite the restrictions placed on imports because of war and to encourage home production, the Bertrands’ shop would have been filled with fashionable wares from France, Germany, Italy and the Low Countries and from the East. The influence of Huguenot craftsmen who came to England affected the range and quality of luxury goods made mainly (but not exclusively) in and around London: as a Huguenot himself, Bertrand was part of their world.

The proximity of craftsmen to one another and to their customers, is increasingly recognised as part of the study of luxury markets. So too are the friendships and location of customers, through whom the talents of craftsmen and shopkeepers were recommended. In London craftsmen were clustered in adjacent streets; customers and the shops they patronised moved location as London spread. Bath was so small in the early eighteenth century, that geography mattered less than family connections and apprenticeships. The author’s collaboration with Mike Chapman (who made a new map of Bath during the Bertrands’ time for the book), together with a fresh look at the drawings of Bernard Lens and Thomas Robins in particular, resulted in an interesting re-assessment of the area of Terrace Walk and Orange Grove, where the shops were located.

Unfortunately *The Bath Journal* was founded only towards the end of the Bertrands’ time as shopkeepers. Gossipy titbits that spice up their story therefore largely come from contemporary letters and diaries that, because of the accident of

survival and literacy levels at the time, mainly relate to the upper echelons of society. London newspapers reported thefts, losses of property and trials that broaden the social spread. And so those who people the pages of this book include bankrupts, suicides, gamblers, wastrels, tradesmen who suffered from conmen and thieves, craftsmen with supreme skills, merchants to America, Africa and the East, and upstanding citizens who suffered ill-health.

This diverse society, and this wealth of objects, were contained in, or can be culled from, a shop with a street frontage of about 14ft 9in (4.5m). The Bertrands' toyshop in Terrace Walk must have been a wonderful, glittering, dazzlingly colourful scene – not only because of the stock, but also because it was a meeting place, described so clearly in the words of Richard Percival in 1747:

To this fam'd shop all loitring people run,
Where with incessant noise themselves they stun –

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