

Blaydes House - a brief history



A contemporary depiction of Blaydes House and the building as it is today

From medieval times until the nineteenth century, High Street was the home of some of the most important merchant families in Hull. The business of the port was largely conducted from their houses which lined the narrow winding street that follows the west bank of the River Hull. Like all the leading merchant dynasties of the time such as the Wilberforces, Maisters, Sykes, Thompsons, and the Standidges), the business of the Blaydes family was undertaken on the premises. The building was a counting house, living quarters and warehouse all rolled into one, with the adjoining staithe (or street) running alongside the house to the river Hull where vessels were loaded and discharged. In spite of much decay and damage in the two world wars, the High Street retains at least four notable merchants' houses - Blaydes House (No. 6.), Wilberforce House (no. 25), Maister's House (No. 160) and Haworth House (No. 202).

The Blaydes family was significant in the port of Hull for upwards of two hundred years. In classic mercantile fashion, members of numerous generations of the family engaged in a range of maritime activities: merchanting (i.e. organisation of purchase, despatch and sale of overseas cargoes), shipowning, ropemaking and shipbuilding - a risk sharing approach to business typical of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Blaydes specialised in shipbuilding. In the eighteenth century, they owned North End Yard (100m north along the High Street), one of Hull's oldest shipyards which is now a semi-derelict dry dock or basin, and also a yard at Hessle Cliff. They were Hull's principal shipbuilders in the Georgian era, when

they constructed a range of vessels for local shipowners - from coastal sloops to Baltic traders to whalers. The firm also built a large number of ships for the Royal Navy, including a number of 5th and 6th rates (up to c.1300 tons) in the 1740s and 1750s.

The most famous vessel built in Blayde's yard was the *Bethia*. Of c.400 tons burthen, she was launched in 1782 and deployed in the Baltic timber trade. In 1787, she was purchased by the Admiralty and renamed H.M. Armed Vessel *Bounty*. She was modified at Deptford Dockyard to accommodate more men: 15 would have sailed on her as a merchantman, but 46 set off for Tahiti in charge of a cargo of breadfruit to plant in the Pacific Islands to be cultivated and transported to the West Indies to feed the slaves. The extraordinary consignment entailed reducing the officers' cabin space and adding a sort of arboretum to the quarter deck, which arguably undermined Bligh's power to command by restricting the space he controlled as captain. More importantly, perhaps, the modification of the ship meant that there were too many men in too little space for too long a period of time. Tension increased en route and finally boiled over when the prospect of life in a Tahitian paradise appeared to offer itself. It was then, on 28 April 1789, that the famous mutiny occurred.



Detail from J.W. Carmichael, *Hessle Haven and the Humber Ferry*, 1829
(Ferens Art Gallery, Hull)



Detail from *Bounty in Home Waters*.
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In social and political terms, the Blaydes were prominent among the High Street families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, providing Hull five Chamberlains, five Sheriffs and three Mayors. The first family members to be recorded in Hull were the brothers William and James Blaydes (variously Blades or Blaides). William from whom the family at Blaydes House was descended, was

born about 1550 and became a freeman of Hull in 1576. His grandson James Blaydes (died 1657) married Ann Marvell, sister of the renowned and incorruptible 'poet-patriot', Andrew Marvell, who was one of Hull's Members of Parliament in the troubled years of the seventeenth century.

We cannot precisely pin-point the date of the building of the house, but the architectural evidence would suggest the 1730/1740s with later modifications, of which the ornamentation of the entrance and staircase halls, probably by Joseph Page, could be one. The monogram BB on the ceiling is a clear reference to another Benjamin Blaydes: this is possibly the Benjamin who was Chamberlain in 1736 (died in the 1770s), to whose memory is dedicated a tablet in Saint Mary's, Lowgate. The earlier Benjamin had bought the advowson of Saint Mary's in 1737 for his son-in-law, the Reverend Isaac Thompson.

Whilst we do not know exactly when Blaydes House passed out of the ownership of the family, it seems likely that they continued into the nineteenth century, trading under the name of Blaydes, Loft, Gee and Company. At this point the Blaydes seem to have left Hull, with one son (Benjamin) moving to Cheltenham, while another (Hugh) purchased Ranby Hall, Notts, where he resided as a 'gentleman'.



Benjamin Blaydes' descendants at Blaydes House on 16 August 2001.
Left to right: Mark and Sally Blaydes, Hugh and Joan Blaydes, Andrew and Sue Blaydes