

Book Review

Banbury – A History, by Brian Little (132pp., 151 illustrations including 24 maps + endpapers, bibliography and index). Phillimore, Chichester. Available at Banbury Museum / Tourist Centre, Ottakar's, W.H. Smith and other local bookshops, £15.99.

For a relatively small town, a great deal has already been written on Banbury's history. This began with Alfred Beesley's outstanding *The History of Banbury*, published in 1841 (still the first port of call for serious Banbury historians), but was followed by William Potts' *A History of Banbury* (1958, with a much enhanced second edition edited by Ted Clark in 1978) and the even more important Volume Ten of the *Oxfordshire Victoria County History, Banbury Hundred*, ed. Alan Crossley, 1972.

Quite apart from these detailed and authoritatively researched histories, we have had a plethora of publications whose chief merit has been their illustrations, often accompanied by informative captions. The first was W.P. Johnson's *The History of Banbury* (c.1863), whose frontispiece has the same rôle (unacknowledged) in this book, and whose engravings (together with those from Beesley) have enhanced the covers of *C&CH* over the years. In the past few decades we have had Marjorie Lester's *Memories of Banbury* (1986) and *These Golden Days* (1992), illustrated by her wonderful 'Grandma Moses' pictures, Ted Clark's *Banbury: History and Guide* (1992), various editions of 'postcards', Brian Little's own three 'Changing Faces' books on *Banbury* (1998), *Grimsbury* (1999) and *Easington* (2000); and last, but not least, our reviewer Christine Bloxham's *The Book of Banbury* (1975). Into this latter category Brian's new book, with its lavish illustrations, must fall.

Jeremy Gibson

Writing a new book on Banbury must be a daunting proposition, as earlier works, as described above, are numerous. Views on history have changed over the years, but it is not easy to find a new slant, particularly within the constraints of size of this book, which has approximately fifty percent of its space devoted to photographs and maps.

One new aspect which Brian Little has included is information gleaned about the history of the town from the excavations over recent decades, beginning with those on the site of the castle in the 1970s. However, even now information about the Saxon origins of the town is elusive. Most of the section on early Banbury is illustrated with the wonderful nineteenth century engravings used by Alfred Beesley (and others are found throughout the book); it would have been good to see their origin acknowledged to help those wanting to delve further into Banbury's history.