

throughout the world, to put flesh on the bones. The chapter on the eighteenth century has information on care of the poor and the burgeoning road system and the building of the Oxford Canal. This had a great influence on the town as it enabled coal to be brought from the Midlands coal fields rather than by sea from the north of England, halving the price of coal overnight. This must have had a great impact on local industry.

This chapter also covers the Blue Coat School and the printers Cheney and Rusher, and horse-racing in the town. We find a brief reference to the Banbury Cross rhyme. The explanation given for cock-horse is that 'it applied to hobby horses which were mounted by two persons, the man in front and the lady on a pillion behind'. According to my dictionary a hobby horse is one on a wooden stick used as a child's toy, rather than a real horse, which is not the meaning suggested in the book, although I would agree with the explanation that cock-horse meant riding pillion. At least on this occasion Brian debunks the myth that it was a 'Fiennes lady' referring to Celia Fiennes, a determined lady, daughter of a Saye and Sele, though never living near Banbury, whose now famous accounts of tours of England between 1690 and 1710 were not in fact published until the 1880s, a century after the rhyme was first recorded in print.

The chapter on the nineteenth century has a worthwhile section on Banbury Gaol, although one caption, for illustration 55, a page from the 'Articles and Rules of the Felons' Association', is amusingly misleading. The text lists various crimes such as varieties of vandalism, theft *etc.*, with sums of money beside them, and the caption reads: 'Extract from the list of rewards offered by the Association', suggesting, I hope incorrectly, that rewards were being offered for committing the crimes! There are references to the coming of the railways, and the increasing importance of industries, particularly Samuelson's agricultural engineering works.

Banbury underwent many changes in the twentieth century, with much development and an influx of population. Shops from national chains replaced some of the local names, and the town expanded greatly. Its character has changed even over the past couple of decades, as the chief shopping area has shifted from the High Street and Market Place to the new Castle Quay Shopping Centre. No doubt the town will continue changing as, if it fossilises, it will die.

Banbury's history is unique, as is its distinct identity – so are many of our historic towns. This book gives a concise overview, with some new information, and an interesting selection of photographs and graphics, but the lack of space for text means that many of the fascinating details which add charm to its history have had to be omitted. For this reason it needs to be read in conjunction with other books about the town. Because of the diverse material included in each chapter it would have been easier to read if sub-headings had and been included within these. But at least there are a bibliography and useful (if selective) index.