

The Cromwell Association comes to Banbury

The Cromwell Association, the academic and historical society which works to promote the study and understanding of the life and times of Oliver Cromwell and of the civil war period in general, is coming to Banbury on Saturday 24th April. Each year, the Association holds its AGM and related events on the Saturday nearest to Cromwell's birthday – he was born on 25th April 1599 – in a venue with some Cromwellian or civil war significance.

Banbury has been selected as the venue this year, for the town and castle served as a key civil war stronghold in north Oxfordshire. To the south lay strongly royalist territory, focused on the king's HQ at Oxford. However, Banbury lay on the fringes of much more divided counties, for the parliamentarians held much of neighbouring Warwickshire and Northamptonshire. Banbury itself was notoriously puritan, and of course parliamentary, but early in the war the royalists siezed and garrisoned the castle, thus holding the town for most of the civil war. The surrounding area saw frequent parliamentary raids and parliamentary forces occasionally attacked the town itself. Thus parliamentarians overran the town in summer 1644 and established their HQ in St Mary's church, but the royalists held out in the castle, resisting a brief and unsuccessful siege, and in October royalist reinforcements drove off the parliamentarians. In January 1646, with the king now clearly losing the war and facing defeat throughout the country, the parliamentarians returned and overwhelmed the town. Again, however, the royalist garrison in the castle held out for several months, only surrendering after the king had fled Oxford in May. With that, Banbury's civil war effectively came to an end. Although Cromwell passed through north Oxfordshire on several occasions, we have no clear record of him ever staying at Banbury or playing a rôle in any of the military actions in and around the town.

The Association will be in Banbury on Saturday morning, meeting at the Museum. As well as the AGM, there will be a short lecture on the civil war in the area, entitled 'Beyond Edgehill: Further Thoughts'. It will be given by Dr Philip Tennant, author of *Edgehill and Beyond: The People's War in the South Midlands* (B.H.S. 23, 1992), an outstanding study of the civil war in the south midlands region, which focuses on the involvement of the ordinary people in the war.

In the afternoon the Association will be paying a group visit to Broughton Castle, the grand fortified mansion owned by generations of the Fiennes family, Lords Saye and Sele. In the 1630s the first viscount was one of the key political opponents of Charles I and his Personal Rule, and the Castle was their regular meeting place. In effect Broughton Castle was the birthplace of what led to the civil war and the overthrow of the king.