

Book Reviews

Banbury 1853: the first detailed map of mid-nineteenth century Banbury and Neithrop, Bob Mason (A4, 44 pp.), Banbury Historical Research, 2004. Obtainable @ £12.99 including postage and packing from Banbury Historical Research, 9 Centre Street, Banbury, Oxon.; www.banburyhistory.co.uk.

First, this is a considerable technical achievement, which in that respect deserves commendation. The map concerned is large, decrepit and has suffered from past attempts at restoration. The book makes it accessible at modest cost to anyone who wishes to use it, and is the result of patient copying work, involving the taking of more than 300 photographs, and some digital enhancement. Everyone interested in nineteenth century Banbury will find the publication of value. Banbury Historical Research, an agency that provides services for family historians, is to be congratulated on bringing this document into the public domain.

The map is one of many produced in the early 1850s for towns where local boards of health were established under the Public Health Act of 1848. The superb map of Derby in 1853 which names streets and shows many details of such suburban features as nurseries, allotment gardens and brickworks, has been published and is used by many urban historians. The contemporary map of Ludlow, kept in Shropshire Archives, details the primitive sewers then working in the town, but is also a valuable source on the topography of that medieval planned town from its origins to the date of publication. By contrast this is a less informative piece of work. No streets are named, no indications are given of what was happening in fields on the fringe of the built-up area, nor does it mark such primitive sewers as then existed. It is nevertheless an accurate representation of the buildings of Banbury in the early 1850s.

The survey was carried out in 1852 for the newly-constituted local Board of Health by Charles Henry Davids, then in his late 20s. He was born at Crayford, Kent, about 1824. He apparently worked for the London partnership Davis & Saunders, for whom he did the Banbury survey, but was subsequently appointed surveyor and inspector of nuisances for the Board of Health. His wife came from Wardington, and the couple were living in Neithrop when their daughter Alice was born in 1857. By 1861 the family had moved to Highland Villa, Tadmarton.

The map is useful to the historian of nineteenth century Banbury in many respects. It provides accurate outlines of several large buildings, particularly places of worship and industrial premises, that had been demolished before the production of the first large-scale Ordnance Survey plans in the 1880s. It shows that some of the houses in Monument Street were of back-to-back construction. It reveals buildings on plots in South Bar that were replaced by large new houses in the second half of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately Davids did not provide very much detail of what was happening on the fringes of the built-up area of the town.