

Thursday 13th December 2007

Going to Town in the 2000s: Banbury's Typicality as a Market Town -

Professor Brian Goodey

Here was a lecture that intriguingly offered more questions than answers. The reasons for this approach are not difficult to seek as the only confident statement of Banbury's market town status can be found on roadside signs at the extremities of the built-up area.

Professor Goodey's first challenges were to claim that the mediaeval market image did not survive the 1990s; linked to this has been a need to redefine townscape. In their day those local studies experts Professors Everitt and Hoskins could pronounce on this with confidence but since then greater significance has attached to awareness of and concern about heritage.

Brian noted in passing that there have been many attempts to gain acceptance of plans for the commercial future of Banbury. However, themes such as a 70,000 population target or re-development of Hunt Edmunds Brewery site have filled the rejection bin.

Throughout all of these schemes key issues of public transport have remained unfulfilled and the full potential of the Oxford Canal only partly realised.

Pedestrianization has also lost its way. We need places to enjoy contemplation of our surroundings but not when these are marginal to the best of the central area or sacrificed to the gods of security and tidiness. A town famous for its alleyways both long and short has not ensured that they retain their unique characteristics.

One of our lecturer's many challenges was to suggest that present day townscape reflects the battle between communities of people and developers. This has been especially true of so-called gateways to Banbury such as the North Bar/Warwick Road junction where we have lost touch with the basic form of the town. The decline of key eye-stopping buildings from the past has not helped.

If there was one issue that Professor Goodey wanted to leave as a longer term discussion point it was how the market town image could be revitalised. He staked a claim for people and activities to gain clearer recognition: not perhaps in the way of Grimsbury's livestock market site redevelopment where the new housing has not been drawn into the town as a whole. By contrast and more centrally in Banbury, well-established views of St Mary's church may offer a lead we would do well to follow in any future planning.

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Behind the scenes of 'Who do you think you are' - Nick Barratt

This excellently-attended talk, well justifying our use of a larger auditorium than usual, well lived-up to expectations. The full report is being held over to our next issue.