

Another viewpoint, reproduced by kind permission of "Four Shires", Dec. 2007.

Fifty years ago Banbury Historical Society came into being. It was an event which has placed Banbury well and truly on the map as far as academic historians are concerned. Look in any serious scholarly work on social, economic, or religious history and the chances are that Banbury will feature in the index. Over the years Jeremy Gibson, Ted Brinkworth, Barrie Trinder and others ensured a steady flow of material which has been joyfully plundered by hundreds of amateur and professional historians on both sides of the Atlantic. It is fitting that in this, their 50th year, they should mark the event with another little treasure chest. Their latest offering is, without doubt, the most beautiful to date. Packed with pictures of all styles and colours, virtually every page brings something fresh, attractive and interesting. Bearing in mind the title of the book it is not surprising to see only one photograph. The authors' decision to exclude photographs is both logical and sensible. Rather than reproducing the same photographs which have appeared in so many books about Banbury they have produced something new and fascinating.

This work has been compiled by Jeremy Gibson and Simon Townsend and bears all the hallmarks of good historians writing for a wider audience. It is intelligently researched and well written. By following a specific route through the town they have produced a logical structure which makes the book easy to read in its entirety or to check specific locations. Earlier work is acknowledged by a number of other members of the Society, including Dr Barrie Trinder who is now one of the country's leading historians. Others may not be so familiar to the general public but their contribution has proved equally invaluable.

One of the authors' aims was to provide entertaining text to accompany the illustrations and to my mind they have succeeded admirably. A large proportion of this text comes from writers who were contemporary with the artist and this provides a fascinating glimpse into attitudes and values of the time.

Special praise must be reserved for local artist Maurice Draper who has made a very important contribution to the study of Banbury's history. Mr Draper has for many years made a record of many of the buildings which were demolished so that future generations can see what has been lost. Many of these pictures have never appeared in print before but, thanks to his generosity in waiving his copyright fees, have been included in the book. His generosity has been mirrored by many others, without whose assistance the book would never appeared.

The appearance of this book just before Christmas is welcome. For those hunting for the perfect Christmas present for somebody interested in the history of Banbury this book is the answer. However it is more than something for Christmas. In my opinion it is the best book about Banbury and its history for years and is an indispensable addition to anyone's bookshelf. If this is what Banbury Historical Society can do for its fiftieth anniversary I'd better start investigating the possibilities of cryogenics so I can be around for their centenary!

Bob Mason