

returned to Banbury streets. Among those indulging in the violence it was noted were a number of women.⁸

The disturbances connected with the Pretoria celebration provoked a stern rebuke from the editor of the *Banbury Guardian*. It was high time, that influential townsman insisted, that the authorities put an end to what he termed ruffianism. He regretted that no arrests had been made, though he hoped the ring-leaders would be brought to book. It was 'discreditable' that such a spate of lawlessness should be tolerated, he continued, and pointed out that the cost of the damage would have to be borne by the ratepayers.

'This was the second occasion in which there had been wanton destruction of property. It behoves any man who has the honour of the town at heart to see that any recurrence is put down with a firm hand. The good name of the town for loyalty at such a time should be far above any paltry local feeling in connection with some recent events in the place.'⁹

Banbury was by no means exceptional in experiencing such disturbances. It was a symptom of the mood of the country, people were keenly divided on the question of the war. From many parts of the country came reports of rowdyism. So high were feelings that the Liberal opposition introduced a Commons motion claiming that the right of free speech seemed to be in danger, and deploring the violence directed against the opponents of the South African war. MPs learned of the towns and cities where there had been disturbances: Paddington, Gloucester, Northampton, Peterhead, Leicester, Derby, Norwich and Edinburgh among others, and apart from meetings being disrupted, property destroyed, patrons of the respectably-run Rowntree's refreshment rooms at Scarborough were deprived of that useful amenity when it was completely destroyed by a gang of rioters. The Liberal opposition suggested that the range and the nature of the riots suggested some sort of preconcerted plan to stifle public opinion with regard to the war. This claim was dismissed by a government speaker, who sought to minimise accounts of the unrest and assured the House that each report of a disturbance was carefully examined by the authorities.¹⁰

⁸ *Banbury Advertiser*, 7 June 1900. Councillor Humphrey Bartlett was the proprietor of a chemist's shop in Market Place, though he lived in The Green.

⁹ *Banbury Guardian* 7 June 1900.

¹⁰ *Hansard*. Parl.Debs., Vol. LXXX, (15 March 1900), cols. 940-986.