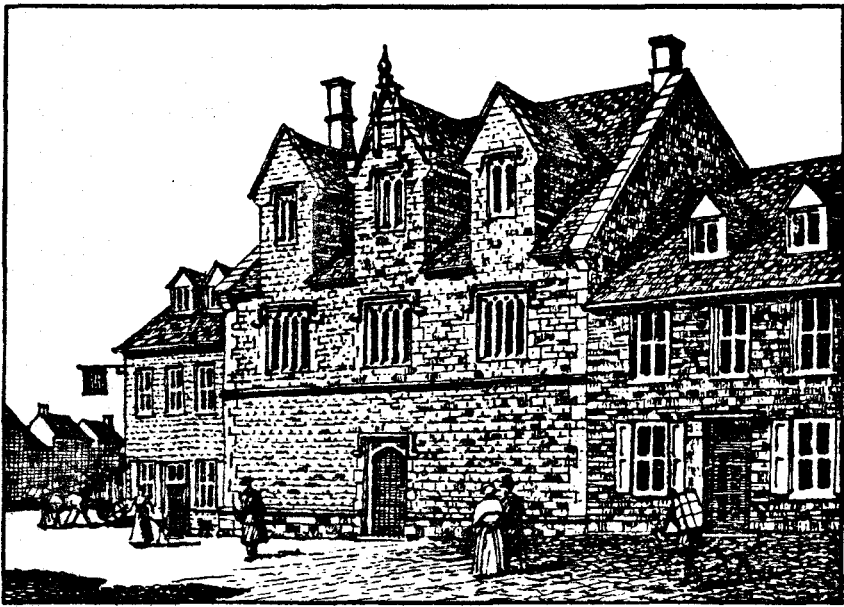


CAKE & COCKHORSE

The Magazine of the Banbury Historical Society



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C A K E A N D C O C K H O R S E

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Local History is the study of a particular local community, a distinct social entity, whether it be a county, a village or a great industrial city. Local Historians should therefore be concerned with the Arts as an essential aspect of the life of any vital society. It is widely acknowledged that the Arts of a nation or a continent are a very definite part of its history. The paintings of Rembrandt are as much part of the life of the Netherlands in the 17th century as the deeds of the House of Orange, and the painting of the Sistine Chapel is an event in European history as significant as Charles V's sacking of Rome. Understanding of the English Middle Ages is impossible without contemplating the aspirations of those who built the Angel Choir at Lincoln as well as the ambitions of Simon de Montfort. In the same way, the literature, the graphic arts and the architecture of a local community are worthy of study in their own right, as an aspect of that society as well as part of the wider history of the Arts, just as much as the community's politics, economy or religious beliefs.

In considering the turbulent Banbury of the 1830's it is essential to realise that one of its leading citizens could write poetry of the sort reviewed by Mr. Burden as well as take the lead in local struggles for Parliamentary and ecclesiastical reform. It might be objected that the Town Hall Portraits are not truly part of local history, since few, if any, were painted by local artists, but a community's accumulated art treasures are an essential part of its culture, and the portraits are as significant in the history of Banbury as the Elgin Marbles in the history of England. Nevertheless of all the Arts, that of town planning is perhaps more worthy of consideration than any at the present time. The historic pattern of the streets of Banbury is not just "a work of art", it is the most valuable of all sources of local history. As Mr. Kaye's article suggests, its disfigurement should not be undertaken lightly.

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Forthcoming Meetings

Thursday, 29th November. "Recent Advances in Neolithic and Bronze Age Studies."
Squadron-Leader G. Wood.

The speaker has been excavating over the last two years a Bronze Age round barrow at Tusmore, near Bicester. His talk will be concerned in particular with the excavation of this barrow and its significance in relation to various other monuments and features of archaeological interest in North Oxfordshire. It will be illustrated with coloured slides.

Thursday, 31st January. "Heraldry, a Living Art."
J. P. Brooke-Little, Esq., Bluemantle Pursuivant of Arms.

Thursday, 28th March. "Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region."
Dr. R. B. Wood-Jones.

All of these meetings will be held at 7.30 p.m. in the main hall of the Technical College, Broughton Road.

Christmas Card

As announced in the September issue, this year's Christmas Card is of the Town Hall and Cow Fair, Banbury in 1863. It is reproduced in full-colour from a contemporary water-colour painting. This is the first time the Society has been able to produce a coloured card, and it is even more important than ever that members should support it fully both by buying it in quantity themselves and by recommending it to their friends. The cost to members is 9/- per dozen (12/- per dozen to the public) including envelopes, and cards are available from the Hon. Secretary.

Previous years' cards are still available: the Old Gaol, Broughton Castle and Cornhill, all 4/6d per dozen. The Banbury Cross card is out of print. Cards will be on sale at the meeting on November 29th.

Our Next Issue

Volume One of "Cake and Cockhorse" included a number of original sources such as Hearth Tax Returns and Muster Rolls which aroused considerable interest. It is proposed to devote a large part of our January issue to reprinting another such source - the 16th and 17th century registers of Williamscote School. These will be most interesting and useful to genealogists and to anyone concerned with the history of Education, and their value will be enhanced by an introduction written by their owner, Dr. Thomas Loveday.

The Society's Library

A most welcome recent addition has been a copy of Alfred Beesley's "History of Banbury" acquired by Mr. Gibson. Transcripts of Parish Registers continue to be placed in the Library as they are completed and a full list of those available will be published in a future issue. A large collection of coloured slides, mostly of condemned buildings in Banbury, taken by Mr. I. W. Stratford has also been added.

ALFRED BEESLEY: POET

Alfred Beesley was a man of many interests and occupations: insurance agent, organ-builder, member of the Camden and Shakespeare Societies, historian; and his poems show a similar width of interest and painstaking application.

As a poet, he shows skill, but relies too much upon traditional words and phrases and too little upon personal observation. His stylistic range is reasonably wide but he tends to imitate others or to write in the flat impersonal style of the Augustans rather than evolve a style of his own.

His poetic output is contained in a small volume entitled: Japheth, Contemplation, and Other Pieces published in 1834 - six years before his famous "History of Banbury". He addresses his book thus:

"Go forth! If in some quiet hour
Thou yet perchance shalt please a few
Who will not scorn the little flower
That in my humble garden grew."

and in four cunningly evasive stanzas, pretends to define his theory of poetry, leaving the reader at the end no wiser than when he began.

The opening poem, Japheth, a pint-sized epic in which Beesley adopts the style and attitudes of John Milton and unwisely covers the ground which Milton himself covers in Paradise Lost XI (Noah's flood) gives a fair indication of his technical ability and the relationship between his poems and his own experience. One could very well introduce this poem with a stanza from the pleasantly whimsical To My Greenhouse:

"Welcome within my little door
.....Thou little Nursery!"

Stepping through the little door,

I stood upon the green and pristine earth
Ere the first taint of sin had nipped its blossoms
Like to a wintry frost; and the whole land
Was rich and fruitful nor required hard toil
To wake its genial spirit into birth.
.....Then I toiled
Rather for pleasure and the interest felt
In Earth's productions whence I drew my food
Than from my present doom to toil for food...
Then you glad sun, still bright, though greatly dimmed
From the young splendour, mov'd in equal round,
Pouring on the rich earth perpetual spring
Or summer always coming, never flown.

The vocabulary and syntax are distinctly Miltonic - note the Latinate "pristine" in L. 1. and the "nor required" instead of "and did not require" in L. 4. Technically, these lines are very good: the vocabulary is well chosen, and syntax blends with blank verse in varied and melodious rhythms. Beesley has a much better ear for blank verse than many better-known poets, than Cowper, for example, whom Beesley admired. No doubt his interest in Wordsworth and Shakespeare reinforced a natural bent.

Beneath the surface of the poem, one can detect Beesley's hatred of big towns - a hatred vociferously expressed in a splendid passage in The Two Hamlets. The approach in Japheth is an indirect one:

"And now the hour was come when desolation
 Appeared more near to us, - just as we parted
 From all we knew and could of that old world
 Each cottage and each farm, where our young days
 Had oft been gaily spent, was torn from us,
 Or we from them."

The hamlets are submerged, but the "cities of Cain" (a Miltonic phrase) are demolished:

"The flood tore them down
 And then the screams were dreadful"

Perhaps here, and in a later reference to

"The fragments of a huge and mighty city"

there is a hint of the historian's fascination with the disintegration of the present into the past, and interest evident in a passage dealing with fossils - an ugly mixture of clumsily expressed scientific theory and highly non-scientific vocabulary. Something of this lingers about the poem Banbury Castle:

"Of which no relic now the eye could trace
 Save one dark vestige of the ruined wall
 Where climbing leaves now cling in fond embrace
 And where upon that base, a cottage small
 Stands on the slumb'ring wreck to deck the ruin all."

But any awe which may be in the poet's mind has no power to break through the heavy masonry of stereotyped concepts, only a certain scholarly irritation:

"Cannot those townsmen that I here behold
 Sons of the veterans who then wrought the soil
 And shook, or else defended in the broil
 Of Civil contest those dark, massy walls,
 Name aught that perished of those stately halls,
 Those high-built towers and mounds and spacious courts,
 and stalls."

Beesley handles the difficult Spenserian stanza very ably although, "...wreck to deck..." and the redundant "all" in the first extract are pretty nasty. There is a historical footnote which is slightly more interesting than the poem itself.

The Miltonic diction of Japheth is understandable. By Beesley's day it had become the O. K. diction of English epic; moreover, Paradise Lost probably loomed large in young Alfred's Quaker upbringing. But comparison between Japheth and Paradise Lost XI serves only to show, at Beesley's expense, what a superb artist Milton is. Here is Milton, with his complexity of phrasing, his ellipses, latinisms, inversions, yet easy and unlaboured, powerful yet subtle:

"Meanwhile the South wind rose, and with black wings
 Wide hovering, all the clouds together drove
 From under Heav'n; the hills to their supple
 Vapour and exhalation dusk and moist,
 Sent up amain; and now the thicken'd sky
 Like a dark ceeling stood; down rush'd the rain
 Impetuous and continu'd till the Earth
 No more was seen; the floating vessel swum
 Uplifted; and secure with beaked prow

Rode tilting o'er the waves; all dwellings else
 Flood overwhelmed and with them all their pomp
 Deep under water rould; sea cover'd sea,
 Sea without shoar; and in their palaces
 Where luxurie late reigned, sea monsters whelped
 And stabled;"

Beesley's grander effects give way to ludicrous anticlimax:

"It was a rush of floods; for on they pour'd,
 Not like a stream, but one huge torrent wide
 Moveing along the plain like to a vast
 Perpetual motion - it was terrible!"

* * * * *

"And the sound near'd us, till, with one horrible crash
 The earth's whole frame fell in! So we believed!"

Contemplation is written in the style of Alexander Pope's epistles and essays, though without Pope's wit and subtlety. A lot of heroic couplets were written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and very few are read today. Contemplation begins:

"To man, while here, two principles are given
 One binds him to the earth, one soars to heaven"

and the rest of the poem is of equal profundity. No doubt it would go down well with those people who insist that a poem should "mean something" - i. e. that a poet should use his words in the least evocative and most crassly obvious way - and who throw up their hands in horror at such daringly obscure moderns as T. S. Eliot, William Blake and John Donne.

So much for the title poems. The Two Hamlets is a more mature performance. Language is used with greater subtlety:

"Where were those lords who had from time of old
 Walk'd o'er the soil in pride of feudal sway?
 Have they all sunk unto their stately vault?"

The play with ideas of status and rank: "pride... feudal sway... sunk... stately", and the simpler interaction of "walk'd o'er... sunk" show an awareness of the power of words and their associations which is proper to imaginative writing.

The two hamlets in question are Sulgrave and Chipping Warden:

"Each with its pleasant groves, its little church
 Its bright flower'd gardens, and its white-wall'd cots,"

- an example of the impressionistic scene-setting which is one of Beesley's strong points; as witness these lines from the inferior Village Daughter describing a country church:

"Standing amid embowering trees. . . .
 O'er their bright foiliage, turrets gray
 With lichens hoar, rose into day
 And uncouth effigies look'd out
 From each gray niche and leaden spout."

The two hamlets are the respective family seats of Washington and North, protagonists on opposite sides in the American War of Independence. North is scathingly and brilliantly attacked:

"He who sustain'd that one disastrous war
Of England against English blood, Lord North
What British heart beats not with patriot joy
Wherever freedom burns! Then why wert thou,
America, deserted at thy need?
More than deserted, harrass'd, scorn'd and spurn'd,
Till taught to spill thy blood in thy defence,
Then glorious was thy rising.....
.....and what thou sufferdst
In patient hope taught ages to be free."

Best of all however, is the rhetorical attack on the huge industrial towns - a trifle grandiose, but full of vitality:

"This too is Britain's boast - her hamlets' pride!
Here her best joy, her health, her strength are found
For where the ample wheel of Fortune turns
The dizzy manufacturing sound, among
The unwashed artisans of those large towns
Where midnight pastimes rob the day of health
Where close confinement robs the hours of joy,
And smoke and din exclude the sweets of life.
Or where the swift stream meets the factory's maze
There never was a population found
Could give to England half the joy and strength
The moral, social, intellectual force
That mask the lives of Britain's rural sons.
Perchance ev'n Burns, amid the ady's glare,
Might have grown up unto no higher fame
Than the vile scribbler of some low lampoons;
Nor Cowper rais'd a name of better worth
Than ballad-monger of some narrow lane.
Proud was the fate that elevated these,
And gave their names to glory! Shakespeare, thou
Hadst never learnt to rob the human heart
Of all its secret stores, and paint the beings
Of thy creative fancy with the hues
And circumstance of life, hadst thou not breath'd
Beneath the beautiful canopy of heaven..."

The Two Hamlets is not the only poem of the late eighteenth- early nineteenth century to attack life in the large towns. The best is Blake's London (Songs of Experience: 1794). Here are two of its four stanzas:

"I wander through each charter'd street
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

* * * * *

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls;

And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls."

Beesley's lines cannot compare with these for potency: all the same, his association of the wheel of fortune, a grandly classical concept, with the factory machinery of squalid commerce is quite ingenious: in the large town fortune's wheel becomes a vicious circle - an aspect of the confinement mentioned a few lines later. The line:

"Where the swift stream meets the factory's maze"

sums up the stultifying effect of machine civilisation on natural forces and symbolises natural drive and endeavour frustrated and degraded.

When Beesley sees in Burns a potential writer of "Low Lampons" he has in mind, perhaps, Burns' comic epitaphs, such as:

"Here lies with Death auld Grizel Grim,
Lincluden's ugly witch;
O Death! how horrid is thy taste
To lie with such a bitch!"

but it is difficult to imagine Cowper quitting his teapots and his countryside where:

"Scarlet fruits the russet hedge adorn
And floating films envelope every thorn"

to write such scurrilous ballads, especially as his own words testify to his impeccable refinement and good taste:

"But what old Chaucer's merry page befits
The chaster Muse of modern days omits:
Suffice it then, in decent terms to say
She saw - and turned her rosy cheek away."

The country setting of The Two Hamlets gives an opportunity for good nature poetry, and the eulogy of rural demands it, but both opportunity and demand are largely ignored. Easier perhaps to fall back on

"Verdant, daisy sprinkled meads-"

and phrases of this sort which any coffee house bore in eighteenth century London could spout forth by the bucket-full. Living in a country town, Beesley had no excuse, especially considering the vigour with which he condemns city life. When he discards his petrified eighteenth century word-hoard and looks around him, sensitive observation pays off:

"Where the cov'd violet lurks and, courting view,
The uncover'd cowslip dares the winds of heaven."

The clever little word plays and the idea of the pagan cowslip boldly facing the elemental principle which governs its existence, bringing to mind certain biblical associations, make these lines stand out from their context. Similarly, in The Fairest Flower, one reads of the Hawthorn

"Its snowy bloom hung on the hard gnarled thorn"

- the young, delicate, ephemeral (like snow), contrasted with the old, tough, permanent. In the same poem, one water-lily becomes an organ of the living environment:

"Search ye the waters that tremblingly run
Where the lily throws up its bright disk to the sun"

and this flower/sky idea is developed to its fullest extent in A Churchyard in Montgomeryshire, a poem well-conceived, but ill executed. One Sunday, the poet says

"I passed o'er the ground that encircles the dead."

From a wilting wreath, a single flower takes root:

"In the dews of the morning it hid its fair face
But its root spread around and its foliage was green....
And when the sun shone, it bloom'd o'er the dead....
While till evening it turned its full face to the sun."

The fragile disc of the flower confronts the life-giving, life-destroying disc of the sun. But all this is buried amid a good deal of sentimentality and stereotype, and when Beesley goes on to talk about

"The fresh gush of grief"

one thinks of Hardy's lines:

"As well cry over a new-made drain
As anything else, to ease your pain."

Beesley shows in his poetry no evidence of a sense of humour, although some of his poems have an air of whimsy about them - The Child Blowing Bubbles is the best, and there is also the poem To My Greenhouse (quoted above with reference to Japheth) and The Penny Magazine:

"But now, in all my fancy's flight,
Where'er my wayward thoughts have been
There's nothing yields more pure delight
Than thee, sweet Penny Magazine.....

Still shall the thrifty, home-bound swain
His earnings count to hear thy tale
And longing eyes, through cottage pane
Shall greet his steps to yonder vale.

Past is the day when it can be
That idle lore shall e'er nave sway
Thy lot was cast on Time's wide sea
And ignorance is chased away."

But the most laughable effects come when they are least intended. The anticlimaxes in Japheth are a prime example, and A Recollection of E. E. A. particularly in verses like

"Come not back! Come not back! It were madness
That would, where thou'rt happy to leave;
Thy sorrows are chang'd into gladness.
While tis ours here to sorrow and grieve"

is altogether too much like some of the well known comic epitaphs of the eighteenth

century: Burns's Grizel Grim, Pope's John Gay, Goldsmith's Ned Purdon:

"Here lies poor Ned Purdon from misery freed;
He long was a bookseller's hack;
He led such a damnable life in this world
I don't think he'll every come back."

The high spot of Edgehill is a verse praising Hampden. The praise is, without doubt, perfectly sincere, but its expression is so complicated and ambiguous that it reads like a piece of deadpan irony in the best traditions of Dryden:

"Hampden, as free as brave, and true as free,
And just as true, and wise and good as just."

Edgehill ought to be the best poem in the collection; an ideal subject for a local epic, full of historical interest; but it is an inexcusably mediocre performance in view of Beesley's detailed knowledge, and the excellence of the accompanying historical note (which occupies twelve pages). The excessive eulogy of Charles I

"O that the days should be when saint-like virtues.....
Should mark thy land's victim!"

indicates Beesley's high church conversion, although in some of the eulogy, one suspects ironical undertones -

"unhappy Charles, whose spirit
Was never form'd for conflict;"

one who died

"Because thy country's greatness and thyself
Might not exist together."

What is Beesley up to?

It is interesting to compare part of the historical note to Edgehill with some lines from the poem:

"Considered in connexion with history, the hill has the advantage of giving almost a bird's eye view of the places of the leading events of that part of the campaign which preceded the battle. To the north-west, until lost in the distance, is the country surrounding Worcester, the towers of which may be seen on a clear day; whence sweeping to the northward are the coal and iron industries of Staffordshire; the smoke of whose furnaces, happily not the smoke of havock and rapine, points the route of the King's advance.... In the foreground runs the Avon... its course being marked almost from beginning to end by the rising mists of a summer evening."

"Here, wearying world, we may look down on thee
And think awhile that all thy toils are vain! ...
Thence to the time when thy own Shakespeare walk'd
Beside the classic Avon - there he lies!
Through regions vast where yonder spire shall stand,
Far in the distance then see Worcester's towers
Where the pale porcelain clay is mark'd with beauty."

One good line (the only one in the poem). But the dry precision of the note, with its eye-witness veracity and controlled allusiveness is a far more vivid digest of geographical, scenic and historical fact than the ornate, rather pompous fustian.

Beesley's poetry illustrates certain aspects of his character clearly, others not at all. His political position - an enlightened patriot - is easily deducible. He champions America (in The Two Hamlets) but insists upon the natural virtue of his native soil:

"I never wandered from my native land:
 No distant clime hath shed its sould o'er me
I love the land
 That gave me birth, too well to wish for scenes
 Of far and other climes; and it is well
 To have an English heart all sound within
 That we can feel such scenes as this, at home....
 To have a charm no other land can give."
 (Barmouth)

He rejoices in England's past victories, yet condemns war as barbarous:

"And where is now that dark ancestral hate?
 Gone and forever to the abyss of time!
 Civilization, can thy progress fail
 To curb the licence of barbarian will?"
 (England and France)

But there is little indication of his religious opinion, besides a few Christian generalities, in any of the poems.

Although not so lively as The Two Hamlets, the most "mature" and most consistently well-written of the poems is Barmouth. Here is a sample of its dusty splendour:

"What burst of glory fills yon golden tide!
 Yon placid land - lock'd bay, stretch'd out so far,
 With its few vessels scatter'd here and there
 Their white sails floating in the evening gale!
 Above the scene, stern Cader Idris stands
 In mighty majesty, the giant king
 Of this high realm, upon his throne of hills;
 And canopied on high in towering clouds
 That almost ever shroud his highest peaks.
 Now turn to seaward, where the setting sun
 Beams o'er the wave, along the distant hills
 Of blue Caernarvon, and tips their giant peaks,
 Covering them with a flood of crimson light.
 Now the vales darken fast, and scarce I see
 The beautiful fringes of the ocean waves
 Breaking below me on the shallow sands."

The end-of-the-world quality of this sunset is powerfully conveyed.

The style resembles that of some of Wordsworth's poetry, whom Beesley ranks next to Shakespeare. But there is no plagiarism. Beesley, for all his imitations; is remarkably free from this fault, while the work of many greater poets is full of unconscious borrowings. (Shelley's The Cenci is the grossest example.)

Best of all Beesley's poems is To a Child Blowing Bubbles.

Although the delicate synthesis of philosophical outlook and sympathetic observation gives way too soon to clumsy moralising, there is enough good material in the earlier part of the poem for one to quote at length with unqualified praise:

"Fairest and loveliest form of earth:
 Thou, Nature's youngest, sweetest birth,
 With soul so pure and yet so wild
 That every scene where thou hast smil'd
 Deserted seems, which thy young breath
 Of Joy no longer cherisheth!
 Fair rose-bud thou, with every streak
 Of Beauty bursting from thy cheek;
 I love to view thee, rapt in this
 Fresh scene of thy young light and bliss,
 Watching with young enthusiast's eye
 Those fairy tints ascend on high;
 Till, frailer than the rainbow's hue,
 Thy breath exhaled, they fall in dew;
 And like young joys, thy labours vain
 Yield but a fear to earth again.
 Still wilt thou view the colouring drip,
 So pleas'd! and pout thy ruby lip
 And swell thy cheek, and roll thine eye
 On those fair forms - till off they fly!
 High mounting on the blissful gale,
 Light as the heart and formed as fair
 As all thy painted visions are,
 Without a stain;
 Without a tinge of aught that care,
 Evil, or woe, might picture there
 Seeming, as they toward heaven have flown
 Like little worlds for Thee alone.

And can the joy of heart be vain?
 Young, fond enthusiast! - art thou blind
 To disappointment, grief, and pain,
 That follow all our joys behind!
 And even thou, fair as thou art,
 Art thou a thing of clay?
 So like a rose, press'd to the heart,
 That soon must fade away!
 So nurs'd, so priz'd, so sweet to view;
 But like the rose, so fragile too!
 Must all these charms, in their young prime,
 That so become a soul like thine;
 That cheek's fresh red, that eye's clear blue,
 As those thy heart now danced to view,
 That mock'd the tints ev'n Fancy drew,
 But linger to decay?
 Then let no smile on them be mine;
 Man's bubbles are as fleet as Thine!

* * * * *

This is poetry of quite a high order. It is possibly the result of a reading of the poems of Andrew Marvell, the seventeenth century "metaphysical" poet who was so popular among nineteenth century radicals. Marvell's A Drop of Dew (where the dew-drop symbolises the soul) resembles Beesley's poem in treatment and language. It begins:

"See how the Orient Dew
 Shed from the Bosom of the Morn
 Into the blowing Roses,
 Yet careless of its Mansion new,
 For the clear Region where 'twas born,
 Round in itself encloses,
 And in its little Globes Extent,
 Frames as it can its native Element.
 How it the purple flow'r does slight,
 Scarce touching where it lyes,
 But gazing back upon the skies,
 Shines with a mournful light;
 Like its own Tear,
 Because so long divided from the Sphere.
 Restless it rouses and insecure,
 Trembling lest it grow impure:
 Till the warm sun pitts its Pain
 And to the Skies exhalt it back again".

In conclusion, Beesley was, taking into consideration his History of Banbury and the historical notes which accompany some of his poems, a very good prose-writer, but an indifferent poet; far better at collecting and collating facts than at imaginative composition. He was a poet of his age, a little old-fashioned, technically efficient, writing, on the whole, dull and lifeless poetry with occasional flashes of eloquence and insight. Only three, possibly four, can be called 'fair'; only two 'good', although quite a large number are up to the standard of Palgrave's Golden Treasury. He did however take pains in the writing of his poems and he has a feeling for words which protects him from the elementary naivetes which are particularly evident in the verse of the modern amateurs who try to write in a style and diction of fifty years ago or earlier. As has already been said, Beesley's reading of English poets was fairly wide and from them he at least learned stylistic technique and discipline.

Beesley was certainly a very good historian, but as a poet, his main virtue is conscientious application.

Department of Education,
 University of Birmingham.

B. J. Burden, B. A., (Oxon.)

A KIND OF PAINTING: - REPRESENTATION OR INTERPRETATION?

Thoughts on the Town Hall Portraits.

When I was first asked to write about the paintings hanging in the Town Hall for Cake and Cock Horse, I thought it might be best to tackle the problem on historical grounds, but on reflection I decided that it would be an ideal occasion to make clear a few points on painting that are very dear to my heart; points which I do not have the opportunity of putting to a detached audience such as the readers of this magazine.

In teaching Art in a College of Further Education I have found that much of my work involves undoing certain set ideas that have been acquired by my pupils in relation to painting. To this end I have taken the opportunity to put forward my thoughts (even my own set ideas) in this article. I must leave the reader to draw his own conclusions at the end.

"Banbury does not possess a municipal art gallery in the usual sense of the term, but the interior of its picturesque Town Hall practically serves the same purpose in a modified way, for it is hung with many pictures which are interesting on historical or artistic grounds, or both". These lines come from the Official Guide to Banbury and they have prompted me to tackle this article in the way I have.

Having seen the paintings, I am certainly not averse to them on "on historical grounds", but artistically, for me, they leave much to be desired. For those who have not seen the paintings, I feel it is sufficient for me to say that they are in the main representative of past mayors and civic dignitaries, all very much lost in antiquity.

On first entering the hall where these paintings are hanging, one is immediately struck by the similarity that these paintings show (although they are representative of different periods and painters.) This immediately suggests that they might be a type of painting, as opposed to a collection of paintings on the same subject. They all have a certain air about them, which might be described as extreme objective interpretation. It is here that I must ask forbearance while we decide whether or not a painting is something more than the realistic interpretation of the subject. When we look at a painting, are we in fact admiring purely the realistic quality? Is the painting merely a means of recording objective impressions, a means of recording visual impressions for their own sake, or is the painting something more than this?

To answer this, we need to consider a photograph. Here we have the perfect means of capturing the actual visual interpretation of the subject.

Now, in what way can the painting be something more than this? I grant that until the invention of the camera the painting might be argued away as a means of recording visual facts, but surely in this age the painting must be something more than this.

I try to explain this to my pupils by asking them, "What is the artist's job?". Invariably the reply is, "to interpret what he sees", but this in itself is not enough. A painting should be a means whereby the artist can put over ideas that he has had in such a way that they are also experienced by the people who look at his works. (This may or may not be in a realistic way.) A painting should suggest to the beholder something more than the photograph can ever do, even if this something appertains to the artist and not to the subject.

If one is to determine the worth of a painting by the artist's ability "to see" and by his interpretation of the subject, one must have an extraordinarily difficult job when it comes to the paintings hanging in the Town Hall, for they are all involved, it seems, with the importance of the sitter and the attempts to "get a likeness" by realistic objective means.

To understand this, one must realise that when a person says he likes a painting, he is not merely saying that the painting is "nice" or "good", as a photograph is "nice" or "good"; he is saying that the interpretation by the artist is understood or means something to the beholder personally. In psychological terms, the motivation of the artist has been observed and is understood and reactivated in the beholder.

By observing a painting we are using a mental process to understand and identify ourselves with the work. It is extremely difficult, therefore, to decide what it is that makes a "good" or a "bad" painting. Are we to leave it to the art critics to decide what is of worth, or is it a purely personal matter? I am inclined to think that it is the latter, remembering, of course, that there are degrees of appreciation in art, as there are in music or poetry. It is this association - the association between the artist, his work and the public - that makes a painting of worth or not.

Let us consider the paintings in the Town Hall once more. Can one honestly say that these paintings do anything more than arouse a faint curiosity that goes with the association of important figures? Are these more than the facade of the robes that they are dressed in? (Better still - could a photograph have done this job?)

I would like to go on to discuss each individual painting - to talk about a Mytens as opposed to a Birley, but this is done in Banbury's "Official Guide", and I feel I might detract from something that is for me of much greater importance. I feel that I will have done much more if I have, if only briefly, touched on a more important subject - the artist's job - representation or interpretation?

City of Worcester Technical College.

Ian Henderson, A. T. D.

If present plans for the growth of Banbury are put into effect, the town will grow in population from about 20,000 to 40,000, within ten years. It is hard to look upon this development with enthusiasm; the addition of 20,000 people to a town the size of Oxford or Northampton would make little difference, but to a place which has already reached the optimum size for a market and country town, the effect can only be to change its character completely. Moreover, although such growth will be enough to drown the pleasant, small country town atmosphere, it will not be nearly enough to provide the inhabitants, by recompense, with the advantages of a really big city. There has been much talk, in connexion with the Council and Civic Trust's plans, of the rebuilding of Coventry: it would be more appropriate to think in terms of, say, Dewsbury, Lowestoft, Woking or Gillingham. Towns of 40,000 inhabitants are not, on the whole, objects of admiration. Theatres, concert halls, first class department stores, and good hotels are not found in them: they form a vague and dreary hinterland, between the big cities and the places which are small enough to be still largely rural.

No amount of careful town planning can prevent such a change from taking place, for the character of Banbury is not a matter of buildings and streets alone. I hope to show, however, in this article how this change can be minimized, if care is taken to preserve in Banbury those things on which the character of the town and much of its charm depend. It will, of course, be at once objected by some people, that there is nothing in the town worthy of preservation: certainly it lacks the architectural glories of Oxford, or the elegance of Leamington or Cheltenham, but it possesses many buildings worthy of greater respect than they often receive. Without giving an exhaustive list, the following should on all account be spared:

The Town Hall. Much maligned, and already tendered for by eager speculators. This building is not only a very good and original piece of "Flemish gothic" architecture, with what Pevsner would call "wilful" details: it also, by its careful alignment, dominates and gives a civic character to the eastern end of the town. It is a monument to the pride of the townspeople in achieving a democratic form of government, and its presence should remind one that a town should consist of more than shops and commercial buildings. If it is replaced by modern shops, this end of the town will be undistinguished indeed.

The Parish Church. My plea here is not for retention of the church itself, which no-one has yet suggested (surprisingly) should be pulled down, but for its preservation from being encroached upon in any way: a few high buildings on the south or east, or the construction of a "lay-by" in front of the main entrance (the most irresponsible suggestion, this, that I have yet seen made in print), would deprive the church of most of its beauty. As it stands, it is a tribute to the late eighteenth century parishioners who built it: they are often maligned for having destroyed their mediaeval church on flimsy pretexts; it is high time they were praised for their good taste which has bequeathed to Banbury the finest ecclesiastical building of its type in the county.

The whole of the High Street, as it stands. This street is a microcosm of the development of a country town, and if it is seriously altered or demolished, and its buildings replaced by flat featureless modern shops, the town will never recover from it. There are buildings here from every period, and some of high quality: nos. 85-87 (Neale & Perkins, etc.) - the best late mediaeval building in the town; Lloyd's Bank; an excellent Georgian facade, and a link with the old local bankers who built it; the White Lion - the most handsome nineteenth century building in Banbury, and one which still fulfils admirably its original function, of providing hospitality and a social gathering point for the surrounding country. No modern hotel however resplendent with the latest fashionable decor, could replace an inn which has acquired so strongly marked a character by centuries of growth. Of Banbury's former coaching inns, this is the only one left in its original state, fulfilling, now that the roads have come back into their own, its original function. To demolish it, as is proposed by its owners, would not only remove a fine building, but would help to destroy the country town atmosphere and the attraction of Banbury to the people of the surrounding districts. It is true that the remaining buildings in the High Street are a very mixed lot. Some are downright bad: Messrs. Burton's, who have done their best to ruin almost every town in England; some

are dull imitations of past styles: Messrs. Woolworth's (neo-Georgian), and Martin's Bank (neo-Cotswold); some are frankly comical: Messrs. Mawle's shop front, and the County Fire Office with its pompous clock. The point is though, that they all harmonize well together, and form a street which is never without interest and liveliness: the sum is greater than the individual parts. It would be useless to preserve the two or three really good buildings whilst allowing the rest to go: in places where this has been done, e. g. in the Cornmarket, Oxford, the result has been far from pleasing, as buildings of the present century simply do not mix with those from a century or more ago. An awful warning of what such a policy of piecemeal preservation might lead to can be seen in Bridge Street: the Baptist church, one of the best nonconformist buildings in the county, has been ruined by the supermarket placed next to it.

Town planners have long realized the need to preserve vistas, rather than single buildings, and it is surprising that in the town's negotiations with the Civic Trust, no mention has been made of the admirable schemes which the Trust has evolved for smartening up, without any drastic demolition, streets like Banbury's High Street. The town council's planning committee ought to be taken to Norwich and shown what the Trust has achieved in Magdalen Street - a street which, to start with had less possibilities, and certainly less good buildings than the High Street has.

The market place. Of all the proposals of the town council, none is likely to be more damaging than the whittling down of the market place, and the erection of modern shops on much of its area. This again is a matter of atmosphere and tradition, rather than a pure question of architecture. Apart from the old Post Office, the "Unicorn", and one or two plain Georgian buildings, there is not much of architectural value in the market place, though undoubtedly it could be made much more attractive by a face-lifting scheme of the Magdalen Street type. My objection is really, to the disappearance of the open market itself. What is a market town without a market? Such history as Banbury has is the history, since 1149 at least, of its market. The insignificant Civil War skirmishes, so much beloved of the town's local historians, are bits of national events which happened to take place near Banbury. The town never had any political significance: its castle was unimportant, its corporation no more corrupt and inefficient than any other, it never gave birth to any great man, civil or military, ecclesiastic or lay. But for eight hundred years, it has been the focal point for a district extending for twelve miles and more on every side, and even today people flock into Banbury on Thursdays and Saturdays in vast numbers. People who see on these days only the crowds and the litter, the blustering market tradesmen and the idle lookers on, may not be aware that they are witnessing the town's oldest tradition, but they are, and a tradition which Oxford and other large towns have long since lost. Planners should remember that for country people who can only come to town once or twice a week, shopping is a social occasion which cannot be adequately catered for by supermarkets staffed by bored teenage girls. If the market is killed, and street-trading decreed to be obsolete, the town centre may perhaps be less congested, but will certainly be more humdrum.

The South Bar and Horse Fair. No proposal has been made yet, so far as I know, to alter the character of this part of the town, which is all to the good, as this is the most spacious and elegant part of Banbury, and any degree of commercialization would be utterly ruinous. One or two glaringly ugly advertisements and signs have crept in, but on the whole no damage has been done. The Essoldo cinema is a model of well-mannered architecture, fitting well with its surroundings, and showing that good taste need not be sacrificed to commercial utility. (Would that the shop-keepers who are having grossly inelegant shop-fronts fitted to old properties in Parsons Street had learned this lesson.) It is important that this area should be preserved for professional and residential use, as it is at present, to prevent the monotony which would ensue if every street in the town were crammed with shops.

Considering the Civic Trust's scheme as a whole, one rather unfortunate thing is that whereas much that is of value in Banbury - or which could be made valuable if a little care were expended on tidying it up - will be destroyed, the real horrors of the town will escape. The dreariest and ugliest streets in Banbury are undoubtedly George Street and the south side of Bridge Street, yet these are to be preserved. No amount of

face-lifting could redeem the Electricity showrooms, or the premises of the Co-operative Society, or the whole north side of George Street. Apart from the Baptist church, only two buildings in this area deserve to be spared: Barclay's Bank, and Messrs. Hunt Edmunds' off-licence: the latter, almost as fine a nineteenth century facade as that of the White Lion. This was surely the area for redevelopment as a shopping centre, and it is difficult to see why it was overlooked. The Council's plan to cram most of the new shops into the very centre of the town will, despite provision of pedestrian precincts, cause much congestion when the town's population has risen, whereas were the new shops to be spread more thinly in the George Street and Bridge Street areas, this danger would be much less.

It is difficult to contemplate town planning in this country, without feeling the apathy which exists towards it. Even in cities like Oxford and Norwich, a great deal of rubbishy building is going on to the detriment of the beauty of their existing buildings: in Oxford, most of the damage is being done by the University and Colleges who are vying with each other in the erection of concrete boxes to house more and more undergraduates. If this can happen in a much vaunted, much visited, "historical" city, what hope is there that in a market town the citizens will care enough about their past, as represented in its surviving architecture, to want to preserve it? People do care, of course, about preserving the Tower of London - even though they surround it with block upon hideous block of offices; they care about preserving Shakespeare's birthplace, even though scarcely so much as a nail or a floorboard in it is original; most of the people who troop through Blenheim Palace every summer are more concerned to see the room in which Churchill was born, than Vanbrugh's achievements - even though, as a matter of fact, Churchill was not born in that particular room at all. On the continent, this attitude is not so common. The citizens of Bruges take care to preserve their town, although its greatest glories, historically, were commercial. It was a trading town, and as such it is preserved. The same is true of many a small German town, of lesser importance than Banbury: its old inns, its old burgher houses, are carefully restored and converted for changing modern needs. Why, in England, one should find a complete lack of interest in anything except the dramatic or the picturesque, is a mystery. Those who wish to demolish everything and start again from scratch frequently say, that this was done in past ages, so why should the process not continue? The answer to this is that standards of design, of taste, of decoration were higher previously than they are today. Every modern building which is erected to replace an earlier one is, with remarkably few exceptions, worse than its predecessor. The exceptions occur when care is taken to engage one of the few architects of genius to design it. This is of course expensive, and not so much resorted to: in Oxford, for instance, only one major building project of the past five years, the erection of the new St. Catherine's College, is the work of an architect of international reputation. What is too expensive or too ambitious for Oxford will also be too expensive for Banbury, and, mediocre as some of the threatened buildings undoubtedly are, their replacements, designed by architects of technical competence but no particular aesthetic sensibilities, will be positively bad.

In conclusion, I would repeat, that the outlook for Banbury seems to me bleak. The town's best buildings will go, unless some energetic action is taken to prevent it - and it is not certain that any such action will be forthcoming - , and the town's traditions and character will go with them. Twenty thousand immigrants, with no tradition of living in a small town, will bring with them suburban standards wholly alien to Banbury's past, and yet will not be enough to make the place into a large city with a large city's amenities. It will be a curiously nondescript, Banbury, in ten years' time, and perhaps, by then, a few people will be wondering whether the price of acquiring a few more shops and a higher rateable value may not have been a little too high.

Survey of pre-1700 houses in Banbury

This survey is intended primarily to make an accurate and detailed record of the older houses in the town before they are further altered or destroyed. Measured plans, sections and detail drawings, supported by photographs and written description, are being made of every such house to which entry can be obtained. However it is also hoped that the survey will produce enough information to reconstruct the original appearance and lay-out of the houses and so gain an overall picture of the types of housing available in seventeenth-century Banbury (there seem to be virtually no houses of an earlier date left in the town). It is proposed to use whatever documentary sources are available - mainly title deeds and probate inventories - to help build up the picture. Banbury is not as interesting from an architectural point of view as many mediaeval towns, but it does have an unusually fine group of mid-seventeenth-century timber-framed houses in and around the Market Place. A further point of interest is that the houses exhibit a mixture of regional styles. Those built of stone are all characteristically Cotswold, while those built of timber are either pargetted in the fashion common in south-east England or have the patterned framing (e. g. the Reindeer Inn) found mostly in the west of England.

A start was made on the survey in March, when six buildings were measured - No. 1 Parson's Street (Powell's), the Unicorn Inn, Kettering and Leicester's shoe shop, Lincoln Chambers, Nos. 86-87 High Street (Brown's and Neale and Perkins), and No. 62 Calthorpe Street, a small stone house due to be demolished. No dramatic discoveries were made, but it may be of interest to record that the Unicorn seems to have been galleried originally and that No. 86 High Street has an impressive Jacobean chimney-piece. Warmest thanks are due to those people who allowed their houses to be surveyed, also to Messrs. Ellacott and Gibson of this Society who gave valuable assistance, particularly Mr. Gibson who devoted an entire week to holding one end of a tape-measure. It is hoped to resume the survey this autumn. Any members who can provide help are most welcome. Particular requirements are (a) information about architectural features not visible from the street, (b) old photographs showing houses, whether still existing or not, (c) title deeds of the mid-nineteenth-century and before relating to the older streets; it does not matter if the old building itself has been demolished.

J. M. W. Laithwaite.

Our Cover.

The gaol in the Market Place was one of the first buildings in Banbury to be rebuilt after the ravages of the Civil War. Between 1654 and 1656 it achieved notoriety as the place where Quakers were imprisoned. One of them described it as "A close nasty place, several steps below ground, on the side whereof was a sort of common shore that received much of the mud of the town that at times did stink sorely". Towards the end of the 17th century the rooms above the gaol were used as the town's staple hall for the sale of wool, but in 1705 they were taken over by the Blue Coat Charity School which continued to meet there until it was merged with the newly founded National Schools in 1817. By 1833 the gaol was considered inadequate, although a treadmill had recently been installed, and in 1852 the Borough Council arranged for prisoners to be accommodated in Oxford Gaol. The building was subsequently the office of a coal merchant and later came to be used as shops. Its overall appearance was little altered until it was rebuilt in 1961 when one of the two remaining gable ends was removed.

Church Architecture Study Group.

The first season of visits to study church architecture has now been completed and if success is to be measured by the degree of support received, your committee may take some encouragement for on no occasion did less than twenty attend. The steady increase in numbers was largely a tribute to the way in which Mr. Forsyth Lawson communicated his learning and love of his subject. His clear introductions were appreciated alike by those with a newly-awakened interest and the seasoned enthusiast, and the committee are most grateful for the help he has so willingly given.

The first visit was to Swalcliffe church which offered a wide variety of architectural features and, for those who braved the tortuous tower steps, a fine view of the surrounding countryside. The evening at Horley brought heavy rain, but this did not prevent enjoyment of the wall paintings and an account of the medieval stained glass by Mr. Kirby. At Adderbury the rood loft was probably more heavily populated than at any time since minstrel days, and an interesting contribution was made by Mr. Clark in his dual capacity as architect and parishioner. As the evenings shortened, Broughton was visited and it was our good fortune to have Lord and Lady Saye and Sele to conduct us round the many richly decorated family monuments.

Consideration is now being given to the programme for next year when, in addition to visits to local churches, it is possible that in response to requests we shall look further afield. A half-day visit to Fairford and Cirencester churches is contemplated and perhaps a day trip to some of the fine "wool" churches of Suffolk. Details will be available at a later date.

It has been suggested that some members would appreciate advice on suitable books about church architecture. A good and comprehensive work is The Medieval Styles of the English Parish Church by F. E. Howard, (Batsford 25/-) and a useful but rather cheaper book is The Parish Churches of England by J. C. Cox, (Batsford 12/6d).

R. K. Bigwood.

Visit to Farnborough Hall.

On the evening of the 30th August about thirty-five members of the Society visited Farnborough Hall, home of the Holbech family since the late 17th century, which was transferred to the National Trust in 1960.

Inside the house we were able to inspect some of the many improvements carried out since the National Trust acquired the property. The fine rococo dining room with its great white marble chimney piece has been re-decorated in Beauvais pink and the splendour of the room completed by an attractive modern Bohemian chandelier. Unfortunately the four views of Venice by Canaletto and the Pannini painting of the interior of St. Peter's, Rome were sold and replaced by copies in the 1920's. The great staircase has also been re-decorated, most of it in white, the original colour. In the Library we were able to admire a most interesting collection of books, including a particularly fine selection of topographical works, and also the unusual green and gold flock wall paper given by Mrs. R. Holbech. In the Hall we were able to peruse the fascinating accounts of William Holbech, squire of Farnborough in the late 18th century.

Perhaps the most rewarding and memorable aspect of the visit was the view from the Terrace walk westward towards Edgehill. This was seen at its best on a lovely summer evening and provided a fitting climax to a most enjoyable visit.

Index to Volume One.

Indexes to personal names, subjects and places have been prepared to the first twelve issues of Cake and Cockhorse, which comprise Volume One. It is hoped to distribute these with this issue to all members who have been receiving the magazine for more than a year.

Canons Ashby House.

In an edition devoted to the Arts and Architecture, it is good news indeed that one of the most interesting of local "stately homes" is to be saved from the demolition which until recently threatened it. Canons Ashby House, ancestral home of the Dryden family, has been purchased by Messrs. Peter and Christopher Woodard who have commenced the enormous task of restoring many years of neglect. The rich collection of tapestries has been saved, and although some rooms have been damaged by water coming through the roof, the magnificent state bedroom with its vaulted ceiling built for Anne of Denmark, wife of James I, is in excellent preservation. A hidden room resembling a "priest's hole" has been found and valuable discoveries have been made among the thousands of books in the library. It is hoped that it may also be possible to restore the stately monastic church of Canons Ashby.

A Forthcoming Book on the Banbury Area.

Many local historians from the time of Baker and Beesley onwards have described the church architecture and the great houses of the Banbury region, but until recently very little study has been made of farmhouses, cottages and other domestic buildings. Mr Laithwaite's survey, reported in this issue, is an encouraging beginning to this work in Banbury itself, and it is pleasing to announce the coming publication of a work dealing with the vernacular architecture of the whole area. This is "Traditional Domestic Architecture of the Banbury Region" by Dr. R. B. Wood-Jones of Manchester University and it will be published by the Manchester University Press in the Spring of 1963. The volume is the first of a series which, it is hoped, will cover all of England. As announced elsewhere in this issue, Dr. Wood-Jones will be addressing the Society on this subject on March 28th next.

Archaeological News.

During August and September, members of the Society under the direction of Mr. Roger Fearon made a number of excavations on the site of the White Horse Inn in High Street. Some most interesting discoveries have come to light and a full report will be published in due course.

The Oxford University Archaeological Society have again been excavating at Rainesborough Camp this summer and a summary of their findings will be included in a future issue.

Administrative misunderstandings caused the postponement of the dig planned at Sulgrave Castle by the group from the Queen's University, Belfast, but a large scale operation is planned there for next summer.

The latest issue of "Oxoniensa" contains a full and very detailed report by Mr. Peter Fowler of the excavations carried out by the Oxford University Archaeological Society at Madmarston Hill in recent years.

Oxford University Extension Lectures

We would remind members once more of the series of lectures on "Eminent Banburians" to be delivered by Dr. Brinkworth on Wednesdays in the New Year at the Technical College.

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The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Banbury Historical Society.

Banbury Geographical Society

The recent formation of this new Society is welcomed. The Chairman is Mr. Brian Little, c/o North Oxfordshire Technical College, Broughton Road, Banbury, who will be pleased to answer enquiries.

**OXFORD ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

The Society is concerned with the archaeology, history and architecture of the Oxford region. Its activities include lectures, excursions and the publication of an annual journal, Oxoniensia. The Society also endeavours to preserve and safeguard local buildings and monuments. Full membership (To include Oxoniensia) one guinea. Ordinary membership ten shillings. Apply Hon. Treasurer, O.A. & H.S., Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

BANBURY MUSEUM