

---

**Banbury Civic Society**  
**Newsletter**

**August 2005**

---



*Spencer House – our disappearing heritage*

## Banbury's challenges for the future

---

The past year has brought bad news and good news for Banbury. Sadly we have seen the loss of Spencer House, a significant building, both in the context of the town's industrial history and also as a local example of the Art Deco period of design dating from the early part of the last century.

On the positive side, we have seen the arrival of the statue of a Fine Lady on a White Horse, a beautiful and tangible image based on the words that have made the town known across the English speaking world.

What challenges have we to look to during the coming year? Writing this on a hot summer afternoon, it seems to me that high on our priorities should be to secure the re-opening of the open air swimming pool at Woodgreen. The Spiceball pool is fine for exercise or an hours relaxation with the family during the colder months of the year but an open pool is a unique place of enjoyment during the long summer days particularly for young families and teenagers. The Civic Society had pledged its support to the Banbury Town Council in its efforts to see this pool re-opened.

Another challenge is to seek to persuade the District and County Councils not to abandon the initial steps taken by both towards the regeneration of the canal and riverside areas to the south of Bridge Street. To the north there has been a vast improvement in recent years and this is celebrated at the annual canal festival each October. In contrast, the area to the south remains largely neglected apart from the splendid refurbishment at the old Town Hall as residential accommodation and the construction of some stylish new houses on adjacent land. The remainder is a mix of oil depots, tyre retailers and small industrial units amongst others, with a considerable accumulation of street litter. This newsletter refers in more detail elsewhere to the efforts the Society is making to

keep alive the County Council's concept of a Multi-Modal Interchange scheme between bus and rail traffic at the railway station. This would go hand in hand with and form an essential part of the District Council's scheme to regenerate the wider area encompassing further sections of both the canal and the River Cherwell. Cash, or resources as it is now known, seems as always to be the problem but a little by little, yet planned approach, with constant pressure by the Society and others should make these objectives achievable.

Finally, there is now a threat to Stanbridge Hall, a distinctive and characterful part of Banbury School built in the early part of the last century. Whilst it served well the pupils of fifty or more years ago and may now be inconvenient and inadequate, surely the essentials of the building can be preserved and re-adapted to modern needs by architects with a sense of value for the buildings of the past. There must be many educational buildings which are inadequate by modern standards in Oxford but demolition is not an option there, so why should it be in Banbury?

The Society will do what it can to keep this building for the town and to seek to avoid the same fate as Spencer House.

*John Bell – Chairman*

## Membership Report 2004-5

---

Emphasising the positive, the Society has been pleased to welcome this year our third Life Member, and to receive donations on top of some of our membership fees. We are particularly grateful for an increasing number of fees by Standing Order - a great help to the Treasurer, and which we would like to encourage from all our members. We believe that our new membership cards (renewable annually) will be popular.

Total membership numbers remain far too small at 62, considering the constant need to protect and enhance 'Banbury's character'.

Our small working groups work hard and are having an impact but we are well aware that we should do better as regards Publicity and Events. VOLUNTEERS are urgently needed to help with these.

*Rachel Kinchin Smith*



## Banbury's Fine Lady on the White Horse Sculpture.

---

### **Great Expectations – *Does it Pass the Critical Test?***

Members of the Civic Society may recall that about a year ago I gave a talk on Art and Sculpture in the Landscape. I concluded the slide presentation with a short appraisal of the Fine Lady on the White Horse Sculpture and we explored whether or not the sculpture would pass a set of critical objectives. At that time we only had a model of the proposed sculpture to work from and the approximate guide that the sculpture would be scaled up to one and a quarter times real life size. The set of critical objectives were not so much an appraisal of the art of sculpture but looked instead at the contribution this particular work would make to its setting and its appreciation by local people. Everyone has a right to express an opinion and, as the people of Banbury have given the money to fund the project, their opinion will be the most important. The sculpture belongs to the people of Banbury but of course there will be many visitors and tourists who will hopefully come to admire it and express their opinion.

The critical objectives I set were as follows:

1. Is it relevant to Banbury? 'Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross'
2. Does it respect its location next to the Victorian Banbury Cross? The Victorians were very fond of the Gothic style.
3. Can it be understood as a figurative work of art?
4. Is it distinctive as an entirely original work of art for Banbury?
5. Is it people friendly, or is it too high on an artistic pedestal for mere mortals to make contact? (DO NOT TOUCH, KEEP OFF THE GRASS)
6. Is it durable, strong, weatherproof and capable of standing up to the vagaries of public attention and the elements?

7. Does it respect its setting within the heart of the Banbury Conservation Area? Is the scale and proportion right and does it add to or detract from the Cross as the main local feature?

8. Does it have real integrity as a creative work of art? Does it stimulate creative thought and comment?

9. Does it enhance the special sense of place?

I am usually happier when my list adds up to a nice round number but on that occasion I stopped at point nine, which leaves you the opportunity to add your own number ten and perhaps more.

On the 12th April I had the great pleasure of being able to visit the foundry where the bronze sculpture has been cast. It was a long drive up to Castle Fine Arts Foundry at Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant near Oswestry and two things concerned and exercised my mind on the journey. The first was, if I get lost how on earth would I pronounce the name of the village and secondly, will the sculpture pass the critical test? The committee responsible for the project and all the fund raising activities had given themselves the awesome responsibility of placing a permanent feature next to Banbury's most famous tourist attraction, in the historic heart of the town's conservation area. Reputations could rise or sink to the depths over such matters. Talk about sticking one's neck out!

I needn't have worried on the first score as others from the committee were with me and they were excellent readers of maps, but the anticipation of seeing the sculpture for the first time did make me feel rather anxious. We arrived at the foundry, set in the beautiful, rolling hills of the Welsh border countryside. The Spring sunshine and blossoms were glorious. The omens were good.

All about us in the foundry were pieces of sculpture in various stages of completion from mould to finished article. The foundry was obviously very busy and many of

the clients were incredibly talented. Our Fine Lady was in prestigious company. We were taken through to a barn-like workshop and then WOW,WOW WEE, was my first unsolicited, non-professional, non-artistic, unqualified and unreserved first reaction. It was love at first sight.

She (I say she but of course the largest mass was the horse, a very powerful beast and very obviously not a she). She was magnificent, beautiful and so much Banbury's Fine Lady. The sculpture was so imposing and alive from the Fine Lady's fingertips to the dramatic swirl of the horse's tail. I suppose the next step should have been to control my emotions and stand back to give a more objective and critical examination – but I couldn't. Rather like a child I just wanted to enjoy the excitement

and to search further and as I did I discovered more delight in the charming details of rings, bells and embroidery.

So, having set myself up with a pre-determined set of critical tests and failed to apply them, I then realised just what the all important final test point should have been. Can you fall in love with it? Will it immediately, or will it become a figure that you become fond of? Will you be proud to show family and friends? I had got my all important nice round number, list of ten.

There are those who prefer the shock simulation. Let the first



reaction be shock. The first emotion be horror. Let the cheers go up from the younger people who see the statement made as one of anarchy, rebelling against the mundane, an awakening to new ideas and the future. Perhaps I'm just getting old but deep down, I felt greatly relieved, happy and warmed at the realisation that the people of Banbury were not going to get a shock, that like me they may even fall in love and that word would quickly go round the town that the sculpture was beautiful. Invitations would go out to friends and family to come and see our Fine Lady and post cards of the Fine Lady would soon fill the shelves of the Tourist Information Centre. Yes, the local papers would pick on the first scrawl of graffiti but that would soon be washed off. Yes, the starlings and pigeons would add to the white patina, but that will wash off as well. And roll on New Year's Eve when the first traffic cone will no doubt be carefully placed. The first year in the life of the Fine Lady sculpture has begun and hopefully there will be many, possibly hundreds more to come.

By the time you read this article the sculpture will be in place, graciously unveiled by our Royal visitor and commented on by the media and discussed at length over the bars of The Swan and The Woolpack Inns. Everyone of us will become an art critic and every comment will be valid. There will be those who vote for and those against. The most important thing to me is that people will want to express an opinion and that the Fine Lady on a White Horse sculpture will continue to stimulate emotional reaction – and most important of all – creative thought and expression. And for what it's worth, I think she passes my test with flying and thankfully subtle colours.

*Jeremy Sacha*

## The Arts Centre Project

Acting on advice from both Cherwell District Council and Arts Council England, the Banbury Visual Arts Centre Trust has very recently applied for funding for organisational development. We are delighted to report we have been successful, including a 10% grant to supplement it from Cherwell District Council

Cutting through the jargon, this simply means that we have asked for funding for a business consultant with specialist knowledge of the arts, to work over a period of about three months from appointment to research and publish a report on the feasibility of our proposed art gallery for Banbury.

This will involve interviewing and assessing the needs of a representative number of the estimated three hundred professional artists who live and work within a fifteen mile radius of Banbury together with other interested parties.

If, as we expect, the net result is positive, then we will be in a much stronger position to construct a more robust business plan that will in turn give the project a firmer base from which to go forward.

We advertised on the Arts Council web-site and nine consultants responded. Short listing is taking place as we go to press and interviews will be on Monday 5th September, to start work immediately and publish a report by Christmas. The consultant will make a public presentation of the findings early in the New Year, 2006

*Hugh Jones*

## Transport

Your representatives on the Banbury Traffic Advisory committee have maintained pressure on the Highways Department on those matters that members have indicated are important to them.

These include in particular addressing the state of the footpaths in Banbury and looking again at some of the anomalies concerning signage within the town. We have been given assurances that both these matters will be attended to over the next twelve months as money becomes available.



*Typical example of street clutter in Upper Windsor Street*

Earlier this year, Oxfordshire County Council undertook an exercise to improve access to all those basic activities that govern so much of our lives, such as access to work, education, shops, health etc., and at the same time to look how traffic congestion can be balanced with the need to both reduce accidents as well as improve the quality of the air we breathe. The suggestions were contained in a booklet titled 'Transaction'.

It is a very sobering thought that every year, on the roads of Oxfordshire, sixty people are killed and over five

hundred seriously injured. Even more sobering is the fact that nationally, road accidents are the single biggest killer of school age children.

Halcrow, the consultants undertaking the study on behalf of OCC, also included some very interesting pages of comments from the public seminars they organised in conjunction with the study.

Unfortunately, nearly all the comments seem to relate to Oxford city and its immediate environs. Presumably this is partly because no-one from Banbury was able to attend. There is a passing mention of Chipping Norton and Charlbury but nothing about Banbury and its problems. No mention of a southerly ring road. No great surprises for Banbury people there then!

The other obvious weakness is that no where at all is the word 'Rail' mentioned, despite the furious row, involving our member of parliament, Tony Baldry, that went on for months between our Cherwell Rail Users group and First Great Western Link (formerly Thames Trains), over plans to reduce the number of trains stopping at stations along the Cherwell Valley. The time table proposals would have inhibited regular commuters from Kings Sutton, Tackley, and Heyford to use the train to get to work in either Banbury or Oxford. Given the well known problems of trying to get in or out of either Banbury or Oxford by road during the morning and evening peak times, one can only despair at the obvious lack of any joined-up thinking on this matter. There is some small comfort in that somewhat belatedly, OCC have now woken up and joined the fray. By all good parties working together, Great Western have now agreed to some improvements.

Further disturbing news for those awaiting the proposed re-generation of Banbury's canal side site, is the suggestion that the key Multi-Modal Interchange scheme (MMI) (to bring buses and trains together at the station), is in distinct danger of being quietly shelved by OCC. Following yet another consultants appraisal of the

scheme, it concluded that since so few rail travellers use buses to access the station, there was little point in proceeding with the expense of the scheme. This was despite the report acknowledging that two-thirds of those interviewed said they would consider using buses to reach the station if the services were more convenient. The report did not mention the year on year double digit growth in rail passenger numbers in each of the last ten years, nor was there any consideration given to the need to anticipate travel requirements resulting from Banbury's expected future growth.

Furthermore, neither was there any acknowledgement of the whole regeneration scheme planned for the currently rather depressed area around the canal and railway station. Once again, short-term financial reasons are dictating schemes urgently needed to improve things for future generations of Banburians.

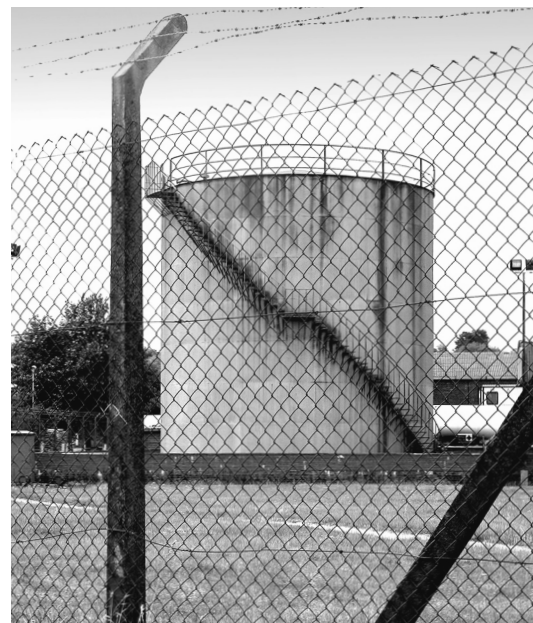
Members who attended the inspiring presentation on the whole regeneration scheme given two or three years ago by Linda Rand from CDC, who is fronting the whole scheme, will be dismayed by this further blow to Banbury's revival. The scheme to open up the station frontage to the town centre, integrate public transport by sensibly (at last) having buses connecting with trains and improving both access as well as the appearance of the whole area including the station itself, was first put forward to OCC and CDC by consultants in 1991

This proposed scheme, as envisaged, is designed to give a massive up-lift to Banbury as a place to live and work, to bring back family homes, employment, restore green spaces and give new cultural and leisure facilities to the town itself. It will play a major role in determining what the world at large will think and feel about our town for much of the twenty-first century. The MMI scheme, as originally planned, is a key element in all this.

For all these reasons and in all these ways, the proposed scheme is as vital for Banbury's future success as

retaining our hospital, planning for a future ring road and improving the achievement in Banbury's schools (which in the context of the national league tables also do not do much for Banbury's image). The whole tone of much of Banbury's new town centre, its overall appearance and quality of life, will suffer if we don't do all this properly now.

Accordingly, John Bell, Hugh Jones and Dr Sheila Gover the secretary of Cherwell Rail Users group, jointly prepared a paper which went to all the elected heads of the committees on Cherwell District Council as well as David Robinson, the chairman of Oxfordshire's Transport Committee. In this paper we drew attention to the basic flaws in the consultants' study of the MMI scheme, of too narrow a focus, a failure to anticipate future trends, completely overlooking the re-generation plans for Banbury which are arguably the largest



*Future site of the MMI Scheme*

justification for the idea and the combination of arithmetical and geographical errors (eg 'Brackley lies to the north west of Banbury') which altogether led us to feel this report is a rather sloppy piece of work, and therefore of questionable value. As ratepayers, we could well be curious as to know who at County Hall was responsible for defining the terms of reference for the consultants.

Happily, the senior elected members of CDC have expressed doubts to the County about the value of the report. Even more encouraging was a meeting on 14th

July of planning officers from both County, CDC, Network Rail and Chiltern Railways at which both John Bell and Hugh Jones were present. Largely thanks to positive assistance of the railway representatives, ways may now have been found to safeguard the land needed for the MMI along with a progressively staged programme that could yet bring this bold vision to eventual fulfilment in the long term.

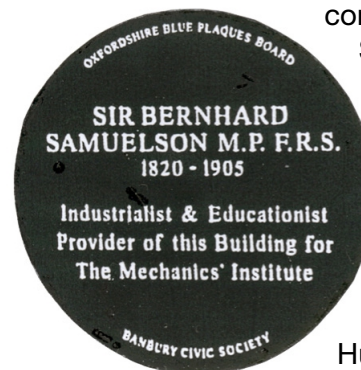
There is a certain irony in that since 1991 when the consultants first published the plans for Banbury's canal side regenerations, firstly British Rail Network South East and its successors the privatised railway companies, in particular Chiltern Railways and Railtrack (as was), have done us proud by refurbishing our station in close consultation with regular rail users and giving Banbury without doubt the best train service it has ever had. Let us hope that in this regard, our own OCC can now match this same sense of vision, commitment and energy. Banbury's future requires it.

*Hugh Jones*



## The Blue Plaque Scheme

As most of our members will probably know, this scheme of awards applies nationwide, but until about two years ago it had not been put into effect in Oxfordshire. When we were approached by the Oxfordshire Blue Plaque Board, we took early action and arranged for two of Banbury's notable past personalities to be commemorated. They were, Sir Bernard Samuelson and William Potts. The plaques erected in Banbury were two of the first three erected in Oxfordshire – the other put up in Oxford City.



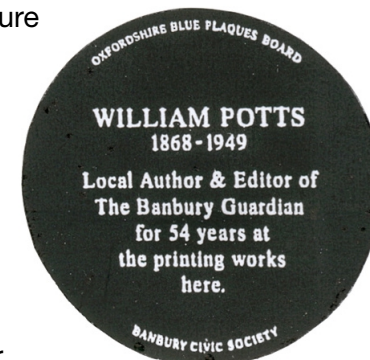
Currently our society is considering two further plaques to be displayed, one for John Cheney, who founded the printing firm of that name in 1765 and Thomas Hunt, who first brewed beer here in 1832.

It was thought that producing newspapers and providing beer were both notable events in the history of the town.

We have further plans for the future – to mark the foundation of the Bluecoat School and of the Co-operative Society, the first of which was set up in Broad Street.

There are other events which are in our minds to honour but more of these at a later date. So please keep a keen eye open for them to appear in these pages.

*Derick Ingram*





## Planning and Historic Environment Round-Up

The last 12 months have been eventful with regard to planning issues related to Banbury's historic built environment. The saddest event was the demolition of Spencer's, whilst the most positive has been the extension of Banbury's conservation area to include the Newlands area, the western Victorian suburb (the People's Park / Bath Road / Park Road / Broughton Road area) and the Victorian and Edwardian buildings on Oxford Road, Hightown Road and Bloxham Road.

With regard to new planning applications affecting the historic environment, the last 12 months have been



*19 North Bar before demolition*

relatively quiet. Proposals within the town centre have generally been small-scale. The only application to have drawn Civic Society comment has been one to insert a large shop window into the High Street facade of the part of the former White Lion Hotel that lies on the western (Cross) side of White Lion Walk.

Interestingly, the last year has seen CDC attempting to bring enforcement action against the owner of 8-10 West Bar for replacing traditional wooden sash windows with inappropriate modern UPVC double glazing. Believing that this represented a positive action in maintaining the historic character of the conservation area, the Civic Society has supported the Council in this matter. By way of contrast, the Society unsuccessfully lobbied CDC to take similar action against Persimmon Homes who blatantly flouted the Council's authority by rebuilding the facade no.19 North Bar with enormous new shop windows, despite their retrospective consent for the building's demolition specifically requiring that the building's new facade be reconstructed as an 'exact



*Spencer House before demolition*

replica' of the original. Press coverage drew a comment from one councillor that 'enforcement was a very difficult area', a comment that appears to send out all the wrong signals to large development companies.

The Society has welcomed the extension of the Banbury conservation area, marking the culmination of many years of lobbying and much hard work by the town's Built Heritage Working Party and the Society's Planning and Built Environment sub-committee. Building on the work carried out for the Local List, the extension more than doubles the area of the town to be statutorily protected, belatedly encompassing much of the town's Victorian residential areas. Unfortunately, and in spite of clear statements to the contrary, CDC decided not to include the canal side in

the enlarged conservation area. With the regeneration of this area firmly off the agenda, it now seems highly probable that the next few years will see the virtual eradication of the town's last remnants of its industrial heritage. On a more positive note, the extension of the conservation area may mean that the empty 18 and 20 Broad Street, long marketed as a 'Development Opportunity' site, will remain. CDC is currently considering an application from Crofts pet-food store to use them as an extension to their shop, although the proposal will require the buildings being comprehensively gutted internally and the demolition of buildings at the rear in order to gain additional car-parking.

On the longer-term strategic front, the Society was astonished to learn that, after years of hard work by CDC's officers and many comments from this Society, CDC unilaterally decided to withdraw its new Cherwell Local Plan 2011, virtually on the eve of the Public Inquiry



18-20 Broad Street

that was to be the final step before its adoption. Whilst technically withdrawing it, Cherwell has nevertheless adopted the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2011 as 'supplementary planning guidance', pending the drafting and adoption of a new-style 'Local Development Framework' at some unspecified future date. Thus the existing Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2011 will frame local planning policy for the foreseeable future, notwithstanding that the latter has not undergone the rigor of a Public Inquiry. Whilst the recent Conservation Area extensions are protected by existing policies contained in the Cherwell Local Plan 1996, all of the more recent policies contained only in the draft Cherwell Local Plan 2011, including that regarding the Local List, will be open to challenge at planning appeals. Such uncertainty cannot be helpful at a time when CDC needs to be employing more robustly its existing planning arsenal in order to encourage more appropriate and sensitive development, or to enforce its own planning decisions. CDC has invited the Civic Society to participate in the preparation of the new 'Local Development Framework' and hopefully the Civic Society will be able to use this forum to further these objectives. In the meantime, with more development proposed than at any period since the 1960s, we can only hope that in future Cherwell will manage to make more effective use of the existing planning armoury that it already has at its disposal.

*Robert Kinchin Smith*

## Membership of the Management Committee, 2005-6

Chairman: John Bell (01295 710005)

Vice Chairman: Rachel Kinchin-Smith (722925)

Hon. Secretary: The Revd. George Fryer (262909)

Hon. Treasurer: Adrienne Rees-Brown

Laurence Carey (720433)

Penny Carey (720433)

Derick Ingram (251449)

Hugh Jones (256769)

Robert Kinchin-Smith (251217)

Lynda Pamment (251792)

Robert Richwood

Coun. Stuart Robbins (Banbury Town Council)

Kathleen Smith (262658)

John Stokes (256648)