

Book Reviews

Banbury Past through Artists' Eyes compiled by Simon Townsend and Jeremy Gibson; 128 pp, endpaper maps, over 200 illustrations, mostly in colour, biographies of artists represented, indexes of historians of Banbury, of persons mentioned in the text and of architects, artists, commentators and contributors, hard-bound and jacketed. Banbury Historical Society vol. 30 (ISBN 978 0 900129 28 5) in association with Robert Boyd publications (ISBN 978 1 899536 85 6), 2007. £15.00 + £2.00 p&p from BHS, c/o Banbury Museum. Free to subscribers.

The thirtieth publication of the Banbury Historical Society is a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Society, co-authored most appropriately by one of the founders of the BHS. Previous discussion over the best way to commemorate the event ranged over several possibilities but this was both the most ambitious and exciting. It combines the resources of local museums and libraries, the Royal Institute of British Architects, The British Library, Corpus Christi College Oxford, the Ashmolean Museum and private collections. The compilers acknowledge the pleasure of tracking down many of the illustrations and it is to be hoped that the publication will stimulate the investigation of other sources to add to the existing corpus. Many have not been printed before, and none in this format which invites comparisons, asks questions and poses conundrums, teasing the reader into thinking about the current landscape of the town and how it has changed. The addition of contemporary watercolours by Maurice Draper is important for the current record of old buildings – not all of particular architectural interest – in the process of change or even demolition.

As a market town Banbury might be expected to have attracted illustrators since it was important to encourage potential traders to the area as well as recording development in the days before photography. Banbury Museum has a collection of some fifty pictures of the town and it is these which constitute the nub of the book. However, they have been enhanced by additions from other institutions, making a most attractive picture book, while keeping the reader on his or her toes by asking questions and drawing attention to obscure facts. The questions are important since they highlight the licence often taken by artists in terms of what they saw or what they thought might make a good picture –