

Book Reviews

From Banbury Cakes to a Bushel of Sweetmeats: A Look at trades and trademarks, by Barry Davis and Brian Little. Card covers, 96 pp. Witney: Robert Boyd Publications, 2011. (ISBN: 978 1 908738 00 4). £9.95.

This book will delight all who knew Banbury in the first half of the twentieth century. It is a collection of nearly 150 images depicting retailing in the town ranging in date from a bill from Bernhard Samuelson for five patent turnip cutters issued in November 1854 to views of the Fine Fare supermarket opened in March 1961. Most date from the years between 1890 and the outbreak of the Second World War. A few are straightforward photographs but the majority would be regarded by archivists and librarians as ephemera, sheets of notepaper, bill and receipt headings, advertising postcards, handbills, cabinet cards, pages from catalogues and directories and even tickets. Not all include formally-registered trademarks. Ephemera have increasingly been regarded in recent times as a valuable historical source, and collecting them has a distinguished pedigree in Oxfordshire. Banbury's principal nineteenth century printers, the Potts, Rusher, Cheney and Walford families all left collections of their works, and that in the Bodleian Library accumulated by John de Morris Johnson (1882-1956), printer to the University of Oxford between 1925 and 1946, is recognised as the best of its kind in England.

The book is a valuable record of a period of formality in retailing. A bill heading of 1875-76 from the grocers Austen & Payne of 9 High Street is delightfully elegant, and proclaims that no business would be transacted on Bank Holidays, which had been introduced four years earlier. On a trade card of about 1907 the proprietors declare themselves Italian warehousemen as well as provision dealers, and undertook to pay the cost of delivering orders of ten shillings and upwards. A photograph of the shop of the same date shows three male assistants bedecked with white aprons standing by the Doric columns that framed the entrance. A flyer issued by the watchmaker, jeweller, engraver and optician Edward Durham lists in rather small type the many goods and services that could be supplied at No 36 Market Place, silver prize cups, gold and silver watches, items of jewellery 'unsurpassed for style and cheapness' and electro-silver plate by the best manufacturers.

The book provides records of some of Banbury's long-disappeared historic buildings, including the gabled premises at 69 High Street, between Church Lane and Butchers' Row, when it was occupied by Harry Boxold, seed merchant and English and foreign fruiterer, before it was replaced in 1934 by the Art Deco store of Montague Burton, the 'tailor of taste'.