

Reviews

LEICESTER, A PICTORIAL HISTORY by *Malcolm Elliott*. (Phillimore, 1983). £7.95

This work is somewhat rare in publications upon Leicester, a lavishly illustrated 'coffee table' book to be scanned through rather than poured over; in the author's own words, 'this is a book to be enjoyed'. It consists of a short historical essay upon the town and city from Roman times to the present day, followed by some one hundred and sixty illustrations, photographs of archaeological finds, prints, plans, aerial photographs, photos of stained glass and reproductions of paintings of the town mostly of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In total and in effect, they constitute a somewhat unique visual record of the history of the town. In the nature of things such a work is eclectic and perhaps tells us something of the interests of the author himself. Even so, as an accessible, visual record of the town through the ages, the book is a useful and successful venture. Its appeal to members of the Society lies in the fact that despite the author's modest disclaimer in his preface, it is a useful source of *first* reference, in that it reveals what the city and its pictorial archives have to offer. Many of the illustrations will be familiar, a surprising number will not. This is a result of Mr Elliott's painstaking and systematic hunt amongst the storerooms of the Leicester Museums and Art Galleries and private collections, to reveal the lesser known or forgotten material that still exists. The work also owes a great deal to Jack Jeffs' photography and Olwen Hughes' accurate and artistic (a rare combination) pen and ink sketches.

There are one or two points of criticism to be made. A work of this size ought to be paginated, a numbered list of illustrations is really not enough, the difficulties of locating the coloured plates alone is proof of this. The black and white reproductions do not, of course, do justice to George Henton's delightful nineteenth-century paintings. Compare, for example, the coloured reproduction of his West Bridge, 1881, with numbers 94, 143, 144 and others. It is to be regretted that George Elgood's view of St Mary de Castro (26) could not have been added to the modest number of colour reproductions. Even so, black and white does what the reader's appetite for a view of the real thing. Perhaps the city art galleries might be persuaded to hold an exhibition of these evocative and captivating local artists? Finally, the aerial photographs do not fit into the nature and purpose of this book, perhaps they might have been left for a similar visual survey of the county?

Malcolm Elliott's *Pictorial History*, particularly in view of its modest price, ought to find its place on many bookshelves; it would make a useful and delightful Christmas present!

Daniel Williams