

## Foreword

Though I'd not met Jon Harris before I returned to Cambridge in 2013, I'd certainly heard of him. He'd worked with some of my favourite National Trust properties creating maps, interpretation boards, evocative sketches and striking watercolours of often lesser known corners of these beautiful places. Some of those pieces are here: Houghton Mill, Sheringham, Felbrigg and Orford Ness; and to each he brings his characteristic capacity for delight and perceptive insight.

When I did meet him, as part of the team led by Oliver Caroe and Jeremy Musson in conducting a conservation analysis for Emmanuel College, it was as though I'd known him forever. Twinkling, warm and reflective all at once, his piercing eye notices the details and idiosyncrasies others fail to see. He is so empathetic that what leaves his pen or brush captures the spirit of place in a way no camera or more literal artist ever could: from him flows architectural nuances, light and shade, atmosphere and mood. His illustrations thus proudly adorn and enrich our Conservation Statement, and some are also reproduced here.

So this wonderful volume, focussed on, but not exclusively about Cambridge, is – at last – a proper appreciation of the extent of Jon's talent and the depth and perceptiveness of his engagement with places he loves. The drawings and paintings from his home – a flat perched high above Green Street, in the heart of Cambridge – are the most poignant, showing angles and views that are at once essentially Cambridge but also new to most of us. Indeed everywhere Jon looks he sees,

and therefore shows us, unpredictable angles and perspectives that bring delight.

For me, though, a student in Cambridge in the late 1970s, it is Jon's observations of a changing city that are most evocative. The demolition of the Kite, the wrecking ball smashing some of Cambridge's large Victorian buildings, and the recent transformation of the University Arms Hotel show how change can be both bad and good; but whatever it is, we must record the story of loss of places and buildings of beauty and charm.

In today's sophisticated, busy and often crowded city, it's more important than ever that Jon's insightful eye, passion for architectural stories, and ability to capture and narrate the spirit of our place, are given voice and are heard. We must and will change, but *how* we do so is a responsibility we cannot duck.

Jon's special talent is that while he loves the past he also shows us how to love the future, providing it is shaped thoughtfully and with courtesy. Readers of this book will have their eyes opened by Jon's insight, empathetic sketches, bold watercolours and warm appreciation of diverse, characterful places. We are all taught how better to look, listen and respect the world around us and the story of its evolution.

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