

# MYSTERY OF THOSE DISAPPEARING PORTRAITS

PERHAPS the most striking aspect of the Alton Art Society's Fiftieth Annual Exhibition, held last week in the Assembly Rooms, was the paucity of portraits. Not so long ago, paintings of people commanded almost as much wall-space as landscapes, but now there is just no contest.

This could merely mean that the exhibition selection panel has a landscape bias and tends to pass over portraits in favour of panoramas. But far more likely is the fact that portraits are simply out of favour, with their demise just part of a regular, if unpredictable, cycle.

Preamble over, it must now be said that the exhibition was replete with good pictures, revealing once again that talent frequently lurks in the most unexpected places. True, some were unremarkable and scarcely merited a second glance, but others demanded full attention.

In the latter category were two small watercolours by Dorothy Dean, surely one of the Society's most able members. "Beotworth, Winter" exactly encompassed the rigours of that harsh season, while "Edge of Cornfield" was similarly evocative.

Both paintings were priced at £5, which was a rare bargain. Sadly, however, they were not easy to appreciate, hung as they were behind the programme desk by the entrance.

Barbara Van der Noot had several paintings on display, with her "Hampshire Farmland" a gem. Also pleasing on the eye was "Padstow Harbour," a symphony in grey.

Joan Bickerdike is another artist with a deep feeling for the countryside, as demonstrated in the excellent "Clays," a restful canvas, redolent of a drowsy English summer's day. "West Worldham," by the same artist, was another eye-catching exhibit.

G. W. James is certainly prodigal with his paint, but he gets the desired effect. "L'Abcurach" was one of the most striking pictures in the show, while his other entry, the aptly-named "Riddle of the Sands," was every bit as good. His sensitive use of light perhaps reveals an admiration for Turner.

"January Morn" and "Hampshire Woodland" were two offerings from P. J. Walters and very good they were, too. Both revealed that "feel" for the countryside that is so manifest among many of the Alton society members.

Gordon Trimming's "Bursledon from Warsash," Norah Coggin's "Snow in Surrey" and Mary Towsey's life-like "Sunflower" all merited their laurels, as did Judith Shady's highly original "Taken from a Camera Study," painted, like a black and white photograph, entirely in monochrome tones.

More usually the subject of photographers, the brooding "Eilean Donan Castle" was finely portrayed by Priscilla

rather than aesthetic, was that quite a few of the exhibits appeared cluttered and carried too much detail. The most successful paintings were invariably simply composed and resisted that fatal temptation to fill that vacant space.

C. P. N.

Forsyth, whose fiery sunset was first-class. Scotland was also the scene for Betty M. Davie's "Isle of Rhum and Eigg from Arisaig," another well-executed exhibit.

Two pictures by Zweena Ta'bois—"Evening Light" and "The Red Bean Patch"—also spoke of a sizeable talent, while Jackie Osgood's "Burning Stubble at Ropley" was a delight. One could almost smell the smoke and hear the crackle of the flames.

Cartoonist and illustrator Toni Goffe had four paintings on display, with his "Welsh Barn" a beauty. Predictably, that was not for sale, but two others, "Hill Tree" and "Towards Selborne," would have graced any wall.

Eric Street is another accomplished exponent of oils and his two exhibits amply demonstrated this. His picture of "Selborne, Gracious Street" exactly captured the timeless tranquility of an English village, while "Selborne Woods" was pleasantly rural.

Other eye-catching oils were Jean Heathcote's "Near Harwich," Tana Riviere's "He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not" and three Australian bush scenes, the work of Patrick Edwards.

With a name like "Peacock," it is perhaps not surprising that Viola Peacock loves butterflies, as evinced by her exquisite "Red Admiral's Delight." Her study of a Meadow Brown butterfly was also first-rate.

Fiona Mearns is another regular exhibitor and her versatility shows in the excellent "Arnfield, Yorks." Equally talented is Faith Harris, whose "Cornfield" and "Welsh Farm" were simple and satisfying.

Joan Wingate's "The Watcher" and "Harvest Mouse" were nicely executed, as was Harwood Eye's "From Bailey Pound towards Bentley."

Also deserving more than a passing glance were D. G. Cokayne's "The Rusty Gate," Mary Towsey's "Daisies" and H. Taylor's "Boat Yard, Ibiza." Mention should also be made of Kathleen Beadle's dance studies, which were both very good.

The exhibition was complemented by a small display of pottery and sculpture, in which the work of Patricia Dodson and Margaret Colson was outstanding, while the stage was occupied by the artistic efforts of the various Alton schools.

On the debit side, it should be said that the "herring-bone" pattern of the exhibit stands did not make for easy viewing, although it did perhaps enable more paintings to be hung.

Distance, 'tis said, lends enchantment to the view. Conversely, it is difficult to appraise a picture, except a miniature, from a "warts and all" viewpoint one yard away from the subject.

Another criticism, practical

## BATTERY STOLEN

A car battery worth £50 was stolen from a vehicle at Holybourne Garage over the week-end.