

The President's Column

On 10 December an advance copy of a report (*History for all*) by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on History and Archives was publicised, which relied heavily on research and expert witness from the Historical Association. The report noted that 'there is a great deal to be positive about in the way History is currently taught in schools', but expressed concerns that in some schools the time devoted to the study of history was being trimmed to only one hour a week. In turn this has an adverse effect on students' understanding of chronology and their maturity of historical analysis and thought. The Group has proposed that a new British History qualification should be introduced for 11-16 year olds and that students should not be deterred from studying History by the 'perverse' incentives of league tables. The report also contains oral evidence given to the Group by Simon Harrison, Chair of the HA's Secondary Committee and the HA's CEO, Rebecca Sullivan, and Education Manager, Mel Jones. It is most encouraging to see the expertise of the HA having an influence in the deliberations of our policy makers in this way.

In November I reached the halfway point in my time as President of the HA and I have now visited 14 branches including, most recently, Bolton, Shrewsbury and Ealing. I have greatly enjoyed talking to local members and I have been struck by how many have told me that they first joined the HA when they were at school or university. This has been underlined this year by the number of jubilee fellowships, which the HA has awarded to members of 50 years standing or longer. In order to thrive in the future, though, the HA must continue to recruit more young members and with this in mind, I was delighted to announce a new initiative at the Branch Officers Meeting in November. From the New Year, each branch will be able



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to make annual awards of a free, one-year, online subscription to up to 5 people aged under-21. The awards could be made, for example, to young committee members or to the winner of a competition. My own branch in Canterbury organises a schools debate every year and has also run essay competitions and local history quizzes. All of these could include a prize of a free year's subscription for the winners, in the hope that they will want to become life-long members. I am sure branches will find their own interesting ways of making these awards and I will look forward to hearing about them at the next BOM.

I also have a number of branch visits organised for this term and I shall be talking at Hertfordshire, Exeter, and North London in January and February. I am also particularly pleased to have been invited to give the Christopher Durston Memorial Lecture at Plymouth in March. Chris taught at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, for nearly 30 years before taking up a post at the University of Plymouth. His research focussed on the social and religious cultures of the early modern period and he published two highly influential books on *The Family in the English Revolution* (1989) and

Cromwell's Major-Generals (2001) before his sadly premature death in 2005 at the age of 54. I collaborated with him in editing a collection of essays on *The Culture of English Puritanism: 1560-1700* (1996) and found him to be an energetic, scholarly and generous colleague and friend. I first met Chris when he gave a seminar paper on public days of fasting and thanksgiving at the Institute of Historical Research in 1991. A few years earlier in 1985, he had published a fascinating article in *History Today* about the 'Puritan War on Christmas'. Taking these two publications as my starting point, I shall be talking about 'Fasts and feasts: Christopher Durston and the religious cultural divide in Civil War England'.

At the start of the New Year, I would also like to congratulate Lawrence Lyle on the award of an MBE for services to Archaeology and Local History. Lawrence is a founding member of the Canterbury HA set up in 1972 and is now the branch President. He helped to form the Canterbury Archaeological Trust in 1975 and is a former Vice-President of Kent Archaeological Society. He is also Vice-President of the Canterbury Archaeological and History Society. I am delighted that his tireless work has been recognised in this way; it is thoroughly well deserved.

Finally, if you want to receive up to the minute information about the activities of the HA, the Association now has a presence on twitter. You can follow us there at: @histassoc and @jeales1 and I will look forward to communicating with HA members via twitter as well as in person in 2013.

With all the very best for the New Year.

Jackie Eales