

The President's Column

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In early November I was delighted to attend the HA Branch Officers' Meeting in London. Many branches were present and I enjoyed talking to people from across the country. It also gave me the chance to hear more about the activities of our local members and I left with a lot of excellent ideas for promoting history! Since becoming President in May I have also been involved in a variety of events where I have represented the HA. These have included meetings with the Royal Historical Society, History UK (HE), the Higher Education Academy and the A-level examination boards.

The HA survey of history in secondary schools has been an important basis for these discussions. The survey has been widely quoted in the press and has been used by MPs and government advisers. Another topic has been the government's research monitoring exercise, the Research Excellence Framework (REF). For the first time the REF will measure the public impact of research in the universities. The HA will have a significant role in providing evidence of impact when the current exercise ends in 2014. The HA will also benefit from increasing contact with university history departments, who already provide lecturers, day schools and conferences for our branches.

I am very keen to ensure that HA Members can learn more about the world class historical research being done in our universities. One project of interest to readers of *The Historian* concerns English nuns in exile between 1600-1800, which has been led by Dr Caroline Bowden at Queen Mary, University of London. Caroline was interviewed about her work on BBC Radio 4 earlier this year and more information about this fascinating group biography can be found at the web site. This also contains material for the study of English nunneries on the continent. Anyone interested in religious, recusant and women's history in the early modern period will find this invaluable. The web address is www.history.qmul.ac.uk/wwwtn/index.html

As a part of my activities as President, I also took part in a panel discussion at the Novel Approaches conference about historical fiction at the Institute of Historical Research at

London University in November. The conference opened with Hilary Mantel talking about *Wolf Hall*, her novel about Thomas Cromwell, and also featured Alison Weir and Ian Mortimer. My panel discussed whether historical fiction was a threat to academic history. I do not believe this is the case, as the popularity of historical fiction helps to engage people with the study of history more widely. The HA recognises this with its annual Young Quills Competition for the best historical fiction for children. I am not sure, though, whether the panel came to a conclusion on this interesting topic. Anyone wanting to hear more from the conference can listen to podcasts of all of the talks and panels at <http://ihrconference.wordpress.com/conference-programme/>

As we are approaching the end of term, I am looking forward to the coming holidays, but at this time of year I am always reminded of the riots that took place in Canterbury in 1647, when Christmas celebrations were banned by the Long Parliament. There is no comparison, though, between these earlier riots and last summer's rioting. In the volatile political atmosphere of civil war, the abolition of the Easter, Whitsun and Christmas holidays was a serious provocation. The uneasy peace that followed the end of the First Civil War in 1646 was shattered when the mayor ordered the weekly market to be held as usual and tried to stop church services from going ahead. An angry crowd forced the traders to close, seized the city munitions and closed the city gates against the troops sent to restore order. The soldiers destroyed a large section of the wall on the west side of the city, which was never rebuilt, and they burnt the gates in order to get inside.

Forty nine rioters were later prosecuted for disturbing the peace by breaking the glass windows in the mayor's house and creating great terror, fear and 'perturbation'. Amongst the accused were bakers, bricklayers, butchers, cordwainers, hempdressers, labourers, tapsters, tobacco pipe makers, a currier, a woolcomber, and a hackney man. An anonymous pamphlet, *The Declaration of many thousands of the City of Canterbury*, appeared a few days after the riots. The author claimed to have been amongst the rioters and attacked the Long Parliament as an arbitrary power for imprisoning the King, maintaining a standing army and raising excessive taxation. He correctly predicted that Charles I would be deposed or killed, and pledged to release the King from 'thraldome and miserie'. The riots, which also affected London and Ipswich, were the signal for further resistance to Parliament in Kent and heralded the outbreak of the Second Civil War at the battle of Maidstone in June 1648.

Historians are now divided over whether the execution of Charles I was a foregone conclusion. Even during his trial, the king could perhaps have negotiated to save his life. I will be speaking to the HA Dining Group about this debate in January just before the anniversary of the regicide at the end of the month.

As the New Year begins, I will also be looking forward to visiting a number of branches. Meanwhile, I wish everyone a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and New Year.

Jackie Eales