**Chairman’s report on the season 2012-13**

I am pleased to report on another successful year for the branch. We maintained a wide ranging programme of lectures which stretched, chronologically, from the architecture of ancient Egypt to Clement Atlee, with the Tower of London, Elizabeth I, French actor Talma, and Italian poet and adventurer Gabriele d’Annunzio along the way. We were happy to have a visit from the Association’s current President Professor Jackie Eales, who is attempting to emulate her predecessor Anne Curry in the number of branches she visits during her term of office. We did experience a difficult moment in April when Sam Willis, who was to talk about the Royal Navy in Nelson’s time, had to withdraw at short notice because of illness. I am grateful to Philip Woods, who filled the gap very ably and shared with us his current research on war correspondents in Burma in World War II.

In the course of the year we undertook two visits, to the City of London in November and to the Bank of England in May, but the attempt to organise a foreign trip, following on the success of our one to Lille, foundered on the difficulty of finding a weekend that suited enough people. The Branch committee have not given up hope and something along these lines may be possible in 2014.

Perhaps the most significant event of the season was Colin Emmins’ decision to stand down as secretary of the branch, and he sadly suffered a bout of ill health in the autumn which put him in hospital. We are all very pleased to see that he is much better. Colin and I have been friends for a long time, and as many of you will know swapped the roles of Secretary and Chairman some years ago. Colin continues to be actively involved in the work of the branch, but I wish to record my thanks to him for the years he spent as a Branch Officer, the many diverse and interesting speakers he invited to speak to us, the many outings he arranged, and his hospitality to the branch committee.

I was particularly pleased that we were able to fill the role of Secretary when Pierre Thomas volunteered to take it on and we look forward to the first full season that he has arranged. However, he has already made his mark by extending this year’s programme into June with a talk on family history by John Deighton.

This year the Historical Association’s annual conference was in York, a city I enjoy visiting, so it was no hardship to offer to staff the branch secondhand bookstall during the proceedings. Pierre kindly offered to transport the books to the venue, and collect the unsold ones at the end. However, sales this year were disappointing, compared with those the previous year at the conference in Reading, despite the fact that the conference was well attended. Was it the selection of books, the difficult economic times, or the rise in adoption of e-books? Who knows. The branch committee will need to decide whether a bookstall at future conferences is worthwhile.

The conference itself was very enjoyable. Much of the content was aimed at school teachers, but there were also good sessions aimed at historians without that particular professional interest, many of the speakers coming from the History department at University of York. A number of speakers at the plenary sessions made reference to the debates about the proposed new national curriculum, and you can imagine that Michael Gove was not a popular figure, especially as he had made disparaging remarks about the Association a few days previously.

In the course of my sales duties during the coffee and lunch breaks to speak to many HA members, some of them old friends, and specially to talk to three local teachers. At the moment Pierre and Philip are trying to improve links with local schools, in order to foster their involvement with the Association, and a school’s questionnaire has been sent out; we await responses with interest.

I would like to thank the committee that runs the branch: Pierre, the secretary, Philip Woods who manages our communications, and maintains our website, Peter Crane, our treasurer, and Richard Morse who has been looking after refreshments for us this year.

I look forward to our new season and look forward to seeing you on 10th September.