**Chairman’s report to the Ealing Branch AGM 12 December 2023**

During the course of the last season I have been combining the roles of chair of the Ealing Branch, with chair of the Branches and Membership Committee of the Association, so I am involved with the work of the Association more generally and sit of the Executive Committee and Council. So, I can report that the rapid rise in membership which the Association had experienced over the last few years has ended and the level of membership is plateauing. The Association now has to focus on retaining members in a time of rising costs and prices when members faced with pressures on their budgets may consider making savings by not renewing subscriptions. The other challenge is to build bridges between the 4 constituent parts of the membership – teachers in primary schools, teachers in secondary schools, academic historians in universities, and those with a general interest in history, like many of the people who attend branch meetings across the country.

The Association is also spending a considerable sum of money on refurbishing its offices in Kennington which occupy the basement of a Victorian Rectory now let in flats, and the staff are decamping from the office during December to prepare for the builders who will be starting in January.

The branch network survived the Covid lockdowns pretty well and there are hopeful signs of new branches opening or defunct ones reviving, such as the one at Liverpool. Many branches are now offering hybrid meetings, to take advantage of the bigger audiences they can bring in as we all learnt during the Covid years, but, as many of you will have witnessed, these can be subject to technical hitches, and don’t always provide a perfect experience for everyone. Clearly some of you prefer to join our lectures online, and we will continue to try and accommodate that.

I spoke about the HA Strategy 2022-25 in my report last year. Two elements of that strategy which your committee here in the Ealing Branch would like to work on. The first is to try and attract new members from across the whole range of diverse communities that make a borough like Ealing, particularly younger people. Secondly, we would like to build links between branches and local teachers. This is something that has many challenges, and other members of our committee could tell you about the difficulties we have experienced over the years, but it is something that we need to persevere with.

Having been booted out of Liverpool by the Eurovision Song Contest and relocated to Harrogate the HA Conference held in May this year was a great success. Philip and Judith Woods, and Frances and I took the Ealing Branch bookstall to the conference and had good sales, helped in part by the investment in an electronic card reader, which the branch now owns.

The conference next year takes place in Birmingham in a purpose-built conference centre which will allow for a greater number of attendees. A full programme of talks and visits is being arranged, and I encourage any of you who haven’t been to an HA conference to consider it when booking opens after Christmas. It is worth taking out full membership of the Association to get the discount that members enjoy.

The HA also held a successful Awards evening at Foyles in July when fellowships were awarded, the winners of the children’s historical Quills awards were celebrated and the Medlicott Medal was presented to Diarmaid MacCulloch, who then gave the traditional Medlicott lecture.

Professor Peter Mandler’s term as HA President came to an end at the AGM this year and he is succeeded by a Cambridge colleague Professor Alexandra Walsham, who will be coming to speak to us in 2024.

Our lecture series for last season hit a very high standard, and we finally got to hear Professor Toby Green who had been unable to fulfill his engagement in the previous season. Sadly, something similar happened last season as Dr Alexander Morrison was unable to give the sixth form lecture in October 2022 because of a family tragedy, and unfortunately at short notice we were unable to find another speaker to fill that slot. I was pleased that he was able to deliver his talk on Russian colonialism a couple of months ago in October 2023.

I mentioned in my report last year the sudden death of Elizabeth Sunley, a long-serving and much-loved member of the branch. We were pleased therefore to recognize her contribution to the branch by arranging a memorial lecture for her in the current season.

I am grateful for the support that I have received over the last year from my fellow officers and from the branch committee, and from you the loyal members. Branches of the HA which go under do so most often not for a lack of members at meetings, but for want of people to take on the officer roles. My particular thanks this season go to Robert Jones-Owen who has taken up the Treasurer role, and has had to overcome a number of challenges in dealing with our seemingly incompetent bank and to Paul Sawbridge who is helping me particularly by taking control of the AV equipment at meetings. Simon Cockshutt has informed the committee that he is standing down as Secretary at this AGM and we will need to elect someone to replace him. I am pleased that Phillip Woods has indicated his willingness to take on the Secretary’s role in addition to his role as publicity officer for the next year or so, whilst we seek a longer-term replacement.

The committee always needs new members, with fresh ideas and different perspectives, and so we would welcome any of you who feel that you would like to get more involved with the branch, and might contemplate becoming a branch officer in the future.

Peter Hounsell

Chairman