**Chairman’s report to the Ealing Branch AGM 10 December 2024**

During the course of the last year I have been continuing to combine 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. As a result, I can report that the rapid rise in membership which the Association had experienced over the last few years has ended and the number of national members has fallen back to below 10,000. It is important for the Association to recruit new members and to try and retain members at a time of rising costs and prices when members faced with pressures on their budgets may consider making savings by not renewing subscriptions and school budgets are tight.

I reported last year that spending on refurbishing the HA offices in Kennington was putting a major strain on the Association’s finances; the work started last winter and was completed in the summer, and all those who have visited the building since are impressed by the much-improved conditions for the staff who work there and for visitors. Having better premises will also reduce the amount previously spent on hiring venues for committee meetings and training sessions.

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. One of our objectives is to try and build stronger links with local schools and teachers, something that Ann has been working on over the last year. Although it doesn’t fall within the year under review, yesterday Rob and I judged a local heat of the Great Debate, the first time that the Ealing Branch has been involved. There were 6 contestants, and heat was held at Barnhill Community High School in Hayes organized by Marcus Liddell who is a teacher at the school.

We are continuing to try and grow the branch network across the country, and fill gaps in the geographical coverage, so it is pleasing that this autumn the Norfolk and Norwich branch and the East Sussex branch (meeting in Eastbourne) are now up and running. However other branches face challenges, some from rising costs, others from difficulties in recruiting officers to keep the branch going.

Diversity in its membership and in its programming it still a key issue for the Association and for individual branches. Programming is something with our control, but a bigger challenge is to try and attract new members from across the whole range of diverse communities that make a borough like Ealing, particularly younger people.

This year the Annual Conference took place in Birmingham at a purpose-built conference centre, The Eastside Rooms, which has a hotel attached. The conference was in many ways a great success, but sales at the Ealing secondhand bookstall did not live up to expectations. I would like to thank Frances for minding the stall for much of the conference, whilst I was otherwise involved. As the conference is in Liverpool in 2025, it is doubtful whether anyone would wish to drive a carload of books that distance. If not, we will probably not sell books at the conference.

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 Catherine Hall, who then gave the traditional Medlicott lecture, and subsequently spoke to our branch

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 Philip Woods who has been combining the roles of Publicity Officer with that of secretary, to Robert Jones-Owen our Treasurer, to Sallie Mercer our new Membership Secretary, to Pierre Thomas who has been arranging outings for us, to Paul Sawbridge who looks after the AV equipment at meetings, to Jane Cocking who provides us with refreshments and finally to Tony Sullivan who has become involved with the committee during the year and has offered to take on the publicity role.

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