

The President's Column

As 2014 starts I am conscious that I am entering the last few months of my time as President. The past two and a half years have flown by for me, partly because I have really enjoyed meeting so many of our members at my talks and finding out what makes each branch 'tick'. In December I was delighted to speak to the Nottingham and the Cheltenham and Gloucester branches followed by a Christmas buffet.

I have noticed that these social events always seem to be particularly well attended. Having tea and biscuits (or cake!) after talks or organising a special buffet once a year seems to be a very successful strategy for making the HA feel like a friendly club, especially for new members. My 2014 diary is also very well stocked with HA talks during the next few months and I am looking forward to speaking at the Central London, Warwick and Richmond branches in February and March.

This term I will also be giving some special talks to schools for the Canterbury and York branches. It is always such a pleasure to meet enthusiastic school students, who might well become our future historians and HA members. In October the HA's Education Officer, Mel Jones, organised a fascinating schools event at the Banqueting House in Whitehall, where I was able to talk to a lot of the teachers and their students.

The afternoon started with a brilliant demonstration from Andrew Wrenn about the nature of historical significance. Edward Vallance, Joel Halcomb and I then talked about whether the execution of Charles I, the offer of the Crown to Oliver Cromwell or the 'Glorious Revolution' should be presented to visitors as the most significant event associated with the site.

After a vote, the result was a tie for the regicide and the accession of



William and Mary, with Cromwell in third place, but with a respectable number of votes. Talking to the participants during this event, I was not surprised to hear that learning about the past in a historical setting had made the whole experience highly memorable. This is a format that branches might like to adopt and I hope that the Mel will organise similar events in future.

2014 sees the start of the commemorations of the outbreak of the First World War and the HA will be taking a lead in showing how the Great War can be remembered in a sensitive and reflective way. Many branch talks will be held on topics ranging from the causes of the war, to war memorials and the viewpoints of conscientious objectors.

An HA Great War Centenary Tour of sites in England associated with war poets and artists, and with

seven young officers who died in battle, will also be held from 24 to 27 June 2014. The tour will be led by Anthony Fletcher and Niall Campbell and will include visits to the Stanley Spencer Museum in Cookham and T. E. Lawrence's retreat at Clouds Hill.

So many people today still have family memories of the personal impact of the war that there is bound to be a huge interest in extending our knowledge of the events of 1914-18. We are, therefore, currently conducting a survey about memories and knowledge of the war and you can take part on the HA website.

The HA's 2014 annual conference will be held in Stratford-upon-Avon on 16 and 17 May and it will provide the opportunity to hear about many other subjects of historical interest from the medieval to the modern. With the Shakespeare connection in mind, I am looking forward to talking about puritan objections to plays and other leisure pastimes in the Tudor and Stuart period.

We are also delighted to welcome Dr Anna Keay, Director of the Landmark Trust, as a keynote speaker this year. Dr Keay is a wonderfully engaging lecturer and the author of *The Magnificent Monarch: Charles II and the Ceremonies of Power*. She has also published a history of the Crown Jewels and is currently working on a study of Charles II's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth.

I hope to meet many of you at the conference, and if you have not attended before, do consider coming, as it is a truly enjoyable event with plenty of history on offer for everyone.

With best wishes to all our members for the New Year ahead.

Jackie Eales