

President's Report AGM 2014

This is my last report to the Australian Historical Association Annual General Meeting as President. Elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2012, I have completed two terms of two years each. It's been an honour and a pleasure to serve my professional community in this capacity and to work with so many good people. The skills and commitment of the members of two national executive committees have made my job so much easier and more enjoyable.

The collective effort

I first want to thank the two Executive Officers with whom I've worked as President, Jayne Persian and Kate Matthew, both based in New South Wales and thus working at a distance from me in Melbourne, communicating with me mostly by email. Their New South Wales base suited them and never detracted from their professionalism and conscientious work on behalf of and in the interests of the AHA. Kate took over the work of Executive Officer, when Jayne Persian went on maternity leave and again when Jayne retired to take up a new position. Thank you both so much for keeping our organisation running smoothly and professionally, for keeping us all in touch and producing regular informative Newsletters that seem to carry an ever-increasing number of announcements about conferences, fellowships, jobs, prizes, publications, deadlines.

I offer heartfelt thanks, too, to the members of the two national executive committees with whom I've worked over the last four years: Angela Woollacott, who served as Vice President and also took responsibility for the research portfolio for her vital contribution and support, Andy May and Erik Eklund for their careful and conscientious work as Treasurers, Susan Mary Withycombe and Leigh Boucher in their role as Secretaries, Martyn Lyons as Immediate Past President and ordinary members of the committees, Dave Roberts, Dave Earl, Hilary Carey, Jill Matthews, Penny Edmonds, Glenda Sluga, Michael Ondaatje, Martin Crotty, Kate Matthew and Anne Rees. Kate, Anne and Dave Earl, as postgraduate representatives have substantially increased the presence and participation of postgraduates in the AHA,

at the annual conferences, where they have initiated regular professional and social events and their active presence on social media. Dave Earl's service went beyond the call of duty when he also volunteered to organise the design of a smart new AHA logo for our organisation.

The successive editors of *History Australia*, Penny Russell and Richard White, based at the University of Sydney followed by Frank Bongiorno, Tomoko Akami and Alex Cook at ANU have also made a substantial contribution to the work of the national executive committee in addition to their role as editors of our excellent journal. We've also been fortunate to be served well by co-opted members of the committee: Sean Brawley, who has kept us informed about developments in the teaching and learning field especially at the federal policy level and Rosalie Triolo, who has informed us of the work and views of History Teachers' Associations around Australia, especially in relation to ACARA and the various iterations and implementations of the national curriculum in history. I thank too the Council of Professional Historians of Australia and their representatives, who served on the AHA national executive committee.

The current situation of the AHA

The AHA continues to flourish, extending its networks and international links, through associated programs run, for example, by the Australian Women's History Network, the History of Religion conferences, the Dragontails conferences, the Centre for the History of European Discourses, the Centre for the History of Emotions and the World History Association, whose conference in Fremantle in October 2013, organised by AHA member Deborah Gare we supported with an AHA-sponsored panel focussed on historical research on the Pacific. The AHA annual conference this year in Brisbane has attracted record numbers of people and papers and a range of affiliated events. AHA membership is, however, slightly down from last year, a decrease possibly reflecting the decline in employment of historians at Australian universities. On the other hand we have an increased membership and participation of postgraduate students and Early Career Researchers and a higher

number of institutional subscribers. Our finances are healthy, with our income and surplus both steady, thanks in part to the profit generated by the annual conferences during the last several years and the careful management of our Treasurers during the last four years, Erik Eklund and Andy May. The conferences in Launceston (2011), Adelaide (2012) and Wollongong (2013) all returned a considerable profit to the AHA, especially that in Wollongong that earned the AHA over \$30,000. I thank the conveners, Dr Tom Dunning, Dr Rob Foster, Dr Georgine Clarsen and this year Dr Martin Crotty for their dedicated work, and the work of their local committees in assisting with conference organisation.

Presidential Initiatives 2010-14

As this is my last report to the AGM, I thought I would highlight some of the initiatives undertaken during my Presidency that will I hope continue into the future.

1. The decision to work more proactively in developing closer links with history teachers in schools. It seems to me that this two-way relationship is mutually enriching and crucial to the future of history as a discipline in Australia. As mentioned before we invited a representative of the HTAA to sit on our executive committee, a position filled with flair during the last couple of years by Rosalie Triolo from Victoria, who has played a fantastic role in reporting on current developments in the fraught area of the national curriculum in history, who has advised us of teachers' concerns and frustrations as they seek to translate an ever-changing curriculum into classroom practice with inadequate resources, and who has worked with the conference committees to ensure that sessions relevant to teachers and teaching are included in the program. At the same time a number of AHA members have addressed history teachers' conferences and classes in individual schools around Australia. I was able to present keynotes to the HTAA annual conferences in Perth (2012), Canberra (2013) and this year will speak at the annual conference of the HTAA in Brisbane in early October.

2. We co-opted Sean Brawley as an expert on teaching and learning policy developments to sit on the national executive committee and keep us informed and up to date with the constant change affecting the teaching of the discipline of history in universities within the frameworks created by Higher Education Standards, AQF and TEQSA. I thank him especially for urging the AHA to become more proactive in asserting our right and capacity as a discipline to self-regulate and set our own professional standards.
3. In 2011 in response to the growing amount of work accruing to AHA officers and lengthening meeting agendas we introduced a policy of allocating portfolio responsibilities among the members of the national executive committee. I want to thank Hilary Carey who was followed by Michael Ondaatje and Glenda Sluga for their innovative and imaginative work in the areas of liaison, affiliation and membership categories; I thank Dave Roberts, who has served two terms in the demanding portfolio with responsibilities for awards and prizes whose work became especially pressing every second year. He has been conscientious in sorting out the various anomalies and ambiguities in guidelines that regularly seem to require clarification and has done sterling work particularly in clarifying the terms and conditions that govern the Daniels, Martin, Serle and Roe awards.
4. One of the initiatives whose success is most pleasing has been the introduction by the AHA of the new Jill Roe Award for the best article-length unpublished article by a postgraduate student enrolled in a history degree in Australia. The funding that has made this new award possible was raised for the most part from members' individual donations and as a result of a special initiative at Macquarie University coordinated by Michelle Arrow. Its introduction means that the AHA now administers a total of 6 awards – three named in honour of women historians, the Daniels, Magarey and Roe awards and three named in honour of male historians, the Hancock, Martin, and Serle prizes. The winner of the inaugural Jill Roe Award will be announced at the dinner this evening along with the Daniels, Hancock, Martin, and Serle awards. The Magarey Medal is awarded alternately at the ASAL conference

dinner. The Ernest Scott prize is administered and funded by the University of Melbourne, but traditionally announced at the AHA dinner. A new history prize established by *Australian Historical Studies* in honour of Pat Grimshaw will also be announced at the AHA annual dinner this evening.

5. The AHA has sought to engage with other national cultural institutions in several ways. We worked with the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to establish a new scheme to benefit postgraduate students: bursaries awarded twice annually that provide postgraduate researchers, often working at a distance, with digitised copies of NAA records necessary for their research. The AHA has also urged that the NAA bring more resources to the challenge of reducing the backlog in the supply of documents for researchers more generally and is pleased to report the NAA's progress with this daunting task. More recently we responded to an NAA request for advice on the appointment of an historian to comment on the significance of the next release of Cabinet records.

The AHA made a submission in relation to the future of the Mitchell Library and its research services which seemed severely threatened last year. It offered advice on invitation regarding the Department of Veterans' Affairs guidelines for their research funding scheme in relation to the commemoration of World War 1. It made a submission regarding proposed new war memorials at the edge of Lake Burley Griffin.

The AHA has continued to work with the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) to maintain the AHA/CAL bursaries that assist postgraduates to present papers at the AHA conference and receive mentoring from senior historians: my special thanks in particular to our two Treasurers Erik Eklund and Andy May and our EO Kate Matthew for their vital work in securing continued funding for this scheme and to the editors of *History Australia* for organising conference mentoring arrangements.

Finally, in relation to liaison with national (and international) cultural institutions, I wish to report that I was invited last year to act as Patron of the

Australian 'Memory of the World' Committee, a program organized by UNESCO to establish a world register of valuable archival holdings and library collections administered in Australia in conjunction with the National Library of Australia. Hopefully the AHA membership can make a major contribution in nominating potential collections.

5. One of my commitments has been to internationalise the AHA so that all historians working in Australia – not just Australianists - identify with the AHA as their local professional organisation; and to encourage the national executive committee and the annual conferences to present historical scholarship on the Americas, Asia and Europe in addition to our traditional focus on Australian history at the national and regional levels. I have met with the Presidents and Executive Officers of the American Historical Association and the Organisation of American Historians to exchange information and reports on recent developments in both countries.

A new feature of AHA conference programs, beginning in Launceston in 2011, that has furthered the endeavour to internationalise our orientation to history has been to balance individual keynotes with plenary panels, comprising a number of historians representing a range of national or international historiographies. To this end we have featured panels on the histories of human rights, writing histories from the margins, on new Australian/Asian/Pacific histories and the theme of mobilities.

Another innovation was to organise an opening plenary panel to pay tribute to the influence of a particular historian's work. In 2012 in Adelaide the opening panel comprising Julia Martinez, Agnieszka Sobocinska and Sophie Loy-Wilson paid tribute to the path-breaking work in the field of Australian/Asian history of David Walker, now on a Visiting Professorship in Beijing, who responded to their papers in his usual thoughtful and witty way. This year in Brisbane the tradition of thematic international panels has continued with one theorising violence in history and another on intimacy and violence on the frontier that ranged across the Pacific and Australia.

Future conferences

A note on future conferences: the national executive committee decided a couple of years ago to forgo the traditional distinction made between major (metropolitan) and regional conferences in order to accord regional conferences equal significance. We are still committed, however, to alternating conferences, when possible between major capital cities and regional centres. We are pleased therefore to announce that the 2015 conference on the theme of 'Foundational Histories' will be based at the University of Sydney and the 2016 conference on the themes of heritage and region will be held at Federation University at Ballarat.

In Conclusion

I look forward to joining you at dinner this evening and celebrating an enjoyable conference, the success of all those short-listed for prizes and congratulating the winners.

Thank you all for your support.