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INTRODUCTION

This volume of *Transactions* is notable not only – of course – for what it contains, but also for what it does not contain. Readers will find the usual varied fare of papers read at the Society's meetings – the cream of recent scholarship – as well as three of the papers read at the colloquium on 'Croatia and Europe' held at the University of Leicester on 27 March 2013 to mark Croatia's entry into the European Union – an unusual and timely reminder of an important geopolitical story not often included in standard accounts of European history. As for the missing contents – with this volume, *Transactions* will no longer include the Society's annual report and accounts. This change will decouple the publication of report and accounts necessary for the AGM from the publication of *Transactions* and will enable us to include more academic content in the latter. The annual report and accounts will be made more widely available by publication before the AGM in November on the Society's new website (*www.royalhistsoc.org*). I encourage all Fellows and Members to take a look, not only for the full annual report, but also for the wide range of new resources now available on the website: an archive of policy documents (the Society's but also other scholarly and public bodies), on subjects ranging from the school curriculum to freedom of information; podcasts of all of the Society's recent public lectures; information on upcoming events of interest to historians; application forms for proposing new Fellows and Members and applying for the Society's early career research grants and fellowships; a guide for early career historians; and much more relevant not only to the Society's activities but to the rich world of historical research beyond.

We intend in the coming year to extend the usefulness of the website to Fellows and Members: to allow you to pay your dues and buy additional publications online; to encourage you to list your research interests and thus build up an enhanced directory of historical research for public benefit; and to permit online voting for Fellows electing members of Council. This enhancement of the website is part of a renewed effort on our part to improve the services we provide both to our members and to the wider community. For our members, we want to make easier and more regular communication between them and their Society, to encourage more participation in our governance and events, and to migrate our high-quality publications – a tradition we have been maintaining since before our foundation in 1868 (the Camden Series dates from 1838,

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though we inherited it only in 1897) – to new formats that will keep them vital in the twenty-first century. For the wider community, we want to provide direct access to serious scholarship through our lectures (now all available for free online) and publications (on Open Access to the greatest extent feasible, at moderate subscription rates where not), and to serve as a gateway for news about history and historical events more generally.

In making these changes, we are seeking both to perform the traditional functions of a learned society – support for research and publication, lectures and conferences, recognition of achievement through grants and prizes – and to continue to take on new functions called for in a rapidly changing academic and political landscape. One of the positive features of recent decades has been the growing recognition of historical research in libraries, archives and museums, and we are keen to recruit more Fellows and Members from among researchers in these places, as well as to provide distinctive forms of support for them (such as the Aylmer Seminar for archivists, historians and archivist/historians, that we co-sponsor with the Institute of Historical Research and the National Archives). Less happily, as the network of higher education breaks up into competing institutions with their own interests and bottom-lines firmly in view, we find that we have more and more to perform the functions formerly taken up by government bodies and the network of vice-chancellors, which establish and defend healthy norms for the discipline: access and choice in undergraduate and postgraduate provision for History; the centrality of academic freedom and quality in funding decisions; the importance of ethical peer-review in publication, hiring and promotion decisions; maintaining the conditions for a fulfilling academic career in history and ensuring such a career is open to all comers.

Increasingly, too, we have sought to represent the interests of high-quality historical scholarship in public-policy debates. The two issues that have dominated our agenda this year have been the school curriculum – where, working closely with the Historical Association, representing schoolteachers, we have been intimately involved in the reworking of the curriculum at all levels from Key Stage 1 to A-Level – and Open Access publishing – where we have sought to widen access without sacrificing academic freedom and quality through the wrong kind of regulation. More detailed information on both issues is available in recent newsletters, which are posted on the website. But we have also been engaged in more quiet work on many other issues: defending the freedom of historical research in Brazil and India; playing a role in upcoming commemorations of the centenary of the First World War and the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta; taking a leaf from the scientists' book in raising questions about gender equality in the humanities; drawing attention to the effects of the quasi-privatisation of English Heritage; arguing for the preservation of the decennial census.

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None of this would be possible without the hard work and dedication of our small staff – Sue Carr, our Executive Secretary; Mel Ransom, our Administrative Secretary; Jane Gerson, our new Research and Communications Officer – and our voluntary leadership, the officers and members of Council. It is the best part of my job, working with these people, on such a varied diet of enterprises, all of which fly the flag for the best historical scholarship, our goal for nearly 150 years now.

Finally, this is the place to mark the loss on 9 April 2014 of Sir James Holt, President of the Society 1981–5, a great medieval historian and an adornment to the profession.

Peter Mandler
President

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