

## Memories

We have reserved this section for those retired members who witnessed the early days of HTAI.

### The Early Days

In 1962 a group of history teachers met in Dublin with the object of forming an association which would have as its aims those of providing a forum for the exchange of views and information, of publishing suitable history textbooks in English and Irish and of organising refresher courses, tours and lectures.

In November 1965, a similar meeting of history teachers took place in Cork. The minutes of this meeting are to hand, courtesy of Pat Holohan, first and long-time Hon. Sec. of the Cork group. The aims were stated as being similar to those of the Dublin group “which had promised every help”.

The guided spirits and first Chairpersons, in Dublin and Cork respectively, were W. G. Kirkpatrick, who taught in Wesley College Dublin and Leonora Hanrahan who taught in South Presentation Secondary School, Cork. It is interesting to note that each of these two teachers was then deeply involved in A.S.T.I. affairs and, indeed, the minutes of the Cork meeting clearly indicate that the genesis of that meeting had been a plea from the Education Sub-Committee of the Cork branch of the A.S.T.I. for help in the drawing up of a paper on “The importance, Status and Organisation of History teaching in Second-Level Schools”.

The Cork meeting discussed “exploring the possibility of a form of association with the Dublin association” and while some misgivings were expressed regarding the nature of the association, it was decided to contact the Dublin association before its general meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

So much for the documentary evidence for, to date, that is all that is available. There is, however, anecdotal evidence that the path towards amalgamation did not always run smoothly. However, due to the good offices – and good senses, - of the respective Chairpersons, together with the active encouragement of the then History Inspector in the Department of Education, Seán Mac Carthaig, by 1967 the History Teachers’ Association of Ireland, (H.T.A.I.), was formulated and a constitution drawn up.

This constitution, which has been amended only minimally over the years, is substantially that which still governs the activities of H.T.A.I. down to the present day.

Dr. Robert Kirkpatrick, son of W. G. Kirkpatrick tells me that, among his father’s possession on the latter’s death in 1992, he is fairly sure there is material pertaining to this period in the formation of H.T.A.I. It is to be hoped that it will merit the attention of a historian or archivist at some future date. (The same Dr. Kirkpatrick represents an interesting thread of continuity in the development of H.T.A.I.

Having taught history in Alexandra College for many years and been a long time member, both at ordinary and committee level at the Dublin branch, he was, in March 2002, appointed History Inspector with the Department of Education and Science and in that capacity, is

currently meeting H.T.A.I. representatives for discussions on, among other things, the status of history in Second-Level schools. Wheels turning full circles come inevitably to mind.

Among some papers left by Rev. J. J. McGuiggan, CM, an early Hon. Treasurer of H.T.A.I., there is documentary evidence of a fairly rapid expansion of H.T.A.I. between 1970 and 1972. As well as the existing branches in Dublin, Cork, (South Munster), and Limerick, (North Munster), branches were formed in Galway (1971), Navan (1971), Kilkenny, (1971) and Sligo, (1971), Tralee, (1972) and Mayo, (1972). All of these had quite a sizeable membership and, where lists of officers and members are available, it is interesting to note the large numbers of members of religious teaching communities who were involved in both the founding and the organisation of these branches.

In the years since 1967 – 8, the offices of C.E.C. have been filled by many whose names, for various reasons, will be familiar to history teachers throughout the country. They have been writers of history textbooks, - (Mark Tierney, Elma (M.E. Collins, Frank Holohan, Jim Byrne, Des Cowman, Peter Gallagher, Mary Ó Dubháin); they have become School Principals and Vice Principals, (Henry Collins, Delma Mills, Máire Ní Riain); a Director of an Education Centre, (Niamh Crowley); Advising and Chief Advising Examiner at junior and leaving certificate history examinations, (Mark Tierney, Deirdre Clancy, Máire Ní Riain and John Dredge); history teachers' representatives in the persons of Henry Collins, (A.S.T.I.) and Donough O'Brien, (T.U.I.), have also held office on C.E.C. through the years.

Busy and committed people, they have frequently combined the holding of office both to the subject, (history) and to the association, (H.T.A.I.). Many indeed have held more than one office on C.E.C., moving from the offices of Hon. Secretary or Hon. Treasurer, which have no time limit on their holding, to that of Chairperson, the holding of which is limited to two consecutive years.

In the earlier years of H.T.A.I. the office of Chairperson of C.E.C. was held, - as well as the two already mentioned, - by Sr. Maurice of the Holy Faith Sisters, (now Dr. Una Collins, Dublin), Elma Collins, (Dublin), Fr. Mark Tierney O.S.B. (Limerick), Henry Collins, (Waterford), Jim Byrne, (Dublin), Frank Holohan, (Dublin) Delma Mills, (Dublin), Deirdre Clancy, (Dublin), Máire Ní Riain, (Limerick), Niamh Crowley, (Waterford), Donough O'Brien, (Midlands), Des Cowman, (Waterford), Mary Ó Dubháin (Dublin). In recent years, the office has rotated successfully through the various branches. The current Chairperson, (2001 – 2003) is Gráinne Henry of the Kerry branch.

The first national Hon. Treasurer was Rev. J. J. McGuiggan C.M., who taught in Chanel College in Dublin and who successfully nursed H.T.A.I. through its financial traumas for over a decade. On his sudden retirement due to ill-health, the position passed to Deirdre Clancy, (Dublin), not because of her great financial acumen, but because the relative proximity of her house to Chanel College, inspired a colleague of Fr. J. J. McGuiggan's to deliver all the treasury material to her doorstep in her absence!

Having held the office for a number of years, on becoming Chairperson of C.E.C., Deirdre relinquished it to John Drege (Dublin Branch). John presided over a period of many changes in the financial relationship between H.T.A.I. and the Department of Education and Science. In this respect he did Trojan work until 1999, during which period he was also the Education Officer on the new syllabus committee for Leaving Certificate History.

In 1999 he was succeeded by Niamh Crowley, (Waterford), who is the current National Treasurer. Niamh will be well known to all history teachers in the south-east of the country, as she has had, just at this point, just completed a lengthy start as Directory of the Waterford Education Centre. Incidentally, as a previous National Chairperson and National Hon. Sec., Niamh is the only person to have held **all three office** on the C.E.C. since the inception of H.T.A.I.

The current National Hon. Secretary is Maureen Cooney, (Dublin). Her predecessors include Anne O'Donnell. (Dublin), E. E. Harrison, (Dublin), Sr. Caoimhín, (Galway), Henry Collins, (Waterford), Jim Byrne, (Dublin), Terry Sheils, (Dublin), Frank Crowley, (Waterford), Mary Ó Dubháin (Dublin), who relinquished the post on becoming Chairperson in 1999 and was succeeded as Hon. Sec. by Maire Lucey, (Cork).

While in both these offices, Mary Ó Dubháin also served as a H.T.A.I. representative on the Leaving Cert. History Syllabus Committee. This is a position which she still holds and to her must go the credit for sensitising history teachers to the need for participation in the consultative process and for carrying branch representations back to the syllabus committee, neither of these being always easy tasks.

As well as the normal branch activities of H.T.A.I., - the holding of meetings for teacher members, the organisation of seminars for history students, etc., there are other activities which pertain to the organisation as a whole. One is the holding of an annual conference, sponsored by the Department of Education and Science and organised in liaison with C.E.C. by the branch in the locality in which the conference is being held.

This is usually held in October and all history teachers are entitled to apply for participation. Over the years conferences have been held in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Killarney and have comprised of lectures, workshops, updating on the work of syllabus committees and other matters of interest to history teachers.

Other activities which embrace H.T.A.I. as a whole, are a web site and the publication of a biannual newsletter and an annual journal. The former has been, for the past few years in the capable hands of Des Cowman, (Waterford), while the annual journal, - STAIR, - has been produced each year since 1978. When in 1977, H.T.A.I. decided to publish an annual journal for history teachers, the dubious honour of being its first Editor fell to Elma Collins who was cajoled by her colleagues on C.E.C. into accepting the (purely voluntary!) position. They felt that her experience in the world of publishing would be invaluable; it was. They also felt that Elma would do an excellent job; - and so she did, - for all of twenty-one years. Throughout those years she sourced articles, begged book reviews, shored up missed deadlines and arrived unfailingly at the October conference bearing bundles of STAIR fresh, - (very fresh!) off the printing press, a feat which was taken totally for granted by those of us so eager to receive our copies.

When after twenty-one years Elma shouted 'halt!', H.T.A.I. was again fortunate when Dermot Lucey (Cork), agreed to take over the position. Since 1998, Dermot has maintained and, we have no doubt, will continue to maintain, the high standard set by his predecessor.

H.T.A.I. has also sponsored, since 1989, the presentation of a medal each year to the student who has gained the highest mark in the Leaving Certificate Higher-Level History Examination.

Despite the amount of work tackled by all the above-mentioned and by branch committees, membership of H.T.A.I. is not without its lighter side. Over the years, friendships have been formed and common ground found by people unlikely to have met outside the Association. The burden of work has often been eased by good humour and wit, frequently fuelled by reminiscences of past crises after more entertaining the recollection than at the time of occurrence. Whenever history teachers meet under the auspices of H.T.A.I., the gathering is both stimulating and enjoyable. Long may this situation continue.

Deirdre Clancy

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