

KENT HISTORY FEDERATION

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Vice-President: Dr Maurice Raraty
Chairman: Mrs Jackie Grebby
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**From the President
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Dear Personal Members and Affiliated Societies of the Kent History Federation

The Future of the Kent History Federation (KHF)

It has become apparent in the last few years that voluntary associations are attracting fewer and fewer members and finding it increasingly difficult to recruit sufficient of them into leadership roles within the association. There are various sociological theories as to why this is so in western societies today, but considering those is not my purpose here. Instead I want to stress the increasing incidence of this phenomenon which affects a broad spectrum of organisations, including political parties, amenity societies, churches, the pursuit of interest in arts and crafts, amateur dramatics, photography, music-making, book reading clubs and all sorts of other societies at the local level, including local history societies.

For over a year, three officers of the KHF, including Jackie Grebby our Chairman, Robin Thomas our Treasurer and me as KHF Secretary, and all of us now in our seventies and with over five decades of service to the KHF between us, have all expressed a desire to stand down on grounds of worsening health linked to increasing age. In the year and a half since such notice of a need to stand down was given, not one credible offer has been received by any of us to replace us, and the matter of what options the KHF has in the circumstances was discussed at length at the 7 December 2018 quarterly meeting of the KHF held in County Hall, Maidstone. I refer you to the minutes of that meeting which will be found on the KHF website. The link is: <http://kenthistoryfederation.org/Reports.html>, 'December minutes'.

As those who read those minutes will see, it was eventually agreed that the KHF committee should discuss possible options for the future of KHF, and report back to the March 2019 quarterly meeting. As was pointed out in December, the next committee meeting is not due to be held until 11 February 2019, and obviously I cannot say now what the committee will propose to the March meeting, but I can say that at the time of writing this letter, there is a notice on the home page of the KHF's website advertising the following vacancies: 'Hon. Secretary, a Minutes' Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, Conference co-ordinator, Journal Editor, Website Manager, Lecturers List Co-ordinator, Database Manager, and Chairman.' As the

lawyers say, *res ipsa loquitur*: the thing speaks for itself. In the circumstances, in discussions prior to the committee meeting, consideration is primarily being given as to how best to wind up the affairs of the KHF: with the continuing unwillingness of anybody to step into our shoes, we cannot see what else we can realistically do.

You may be sure that none of the officers or any member of the KHF committee has come to this position without a lot of sadness. Jackie, Robin and I are doing the lion's share of the work of keeping the KHF on the road, together with others on the committee. We three need to stand down. Others on the committee are not in a position to do more than they currently are doing. None of us wants to see the end of the KHF, but without help, which has not been forthcoming so far, all that seems to be left to us is to wind it up as best we can, ensuring as we do so that as much of its work as can be carried on by others is indeed taken forward.

We are not alone in being sad at the likely passing of the KHF. I have recently received a letter from Dr John Whyman who retired to Spain when he stopped teaching in the University of Kent, and who was my immediate predecessor as KHF President. He said that he was sending the letter to both Jackie and Robin as well as me. He wrote:

I am alarmed at the prospect of the KHF being on the way to being wound up. Certainly Pat Winzar would not be happy, but neither would Miss Ann Roper going back to the 1960s or more recently Joan Thirsk. It was in 1968 that I replaced Professor G.E. Mingay as the University of Kent's representative and my involvement has been continuous since then.

The Federation can be proud of its mission in promoting Kentish history, throughout the ancient County of Kent, including serving the interest of the three universities of Kent, Canterbury Christchurch and Greenwich. The *Journal of Kent History* is a wonderful publication in being devoted wholly to the history of Kent, including excellent book reviews; more so than *Archaeologia Cantiana*. Although [I am] a proud patron of the Kent Archaeological Society, the latter's function has always been to promote first and foremost the archaeology of the county.

To lose the Kent History Federation, therefore, would be a tragedy for Kentish history, so what can be done? I offer two suggestions. Firstly, conferences every other year and/or organised by two or more societies acting together. Secondly, and of much more profound importance, engaging a paid secretary/administrator funded by a higher affiliation fee, as the inevitable price of getting nobody to do anything.

John's letter will be discussed at the February committee meeting, as will any others that we receive between now and then. Please do write to me with your comments or offers to serve as a KHF officer or committee member, between receiving this letter and 11 February. I will circulate whatever comments and offers I receive to the committee.

Looking at John's two suggestions, I can say firstly that we have for years been asking for two or more affiliated societies to combine to produce an annual Conference, but it has only happened once in the last quarter century. As for Conferences every other year, it happened during my chairmanship that we did not have a Conference one year, because nobody offered to host it, but did the next. The same position is being experienced again now. Nobody has

offered to host a 2019 Conference, but there is an offer for 2020. In effect, therefore, the KHF has already in effect done what John has suggested.

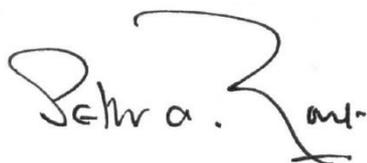
As to his second suggestion, this was discussed at the December meeting (I have referred to its minutes above), and the relevant minute says this:

Mention was made that some societies had only been able to secure the services of people to carry on their work if they were paid. Everybody agreed that it was not the payment of officers that was the problem for the Federation. Its problem was that it was unable to recruit any officers. In that it was not alone.

The KHF committee will continue to give thought to what it will propose at the March quarterly meeting. As things are at present, this will most likely involve the very reluctant winding up of the KHF. If you can come up with something that makes that less likely, then do please get in touch quickly. To the extent that you are able, please circulate this letter widely to all your society members, and please tell them that when we write again, giving notice of the agenda of the March meeting to consider the committee's proposals for the future, an invitation will be issued to everybody who wishes to attend that meeting to do so. It begins at 1.00 pm in the Archives Centre, Maidstone, on Monday 4 March 2019. You will note that it is not on a Friday, is not at 2.00 pm, and is not in County Hall. We look forward to seeing a large turnout at that meeting.

In the hope that 2019 brings all that you would wish for yourself and those dear to you, I send you my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Rowe'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R'.

The Revd Dr Peter Rowe