

HASA 2012 Conference report “Doing History”

The Historical Association of South Africa (HASA) held its fourteenth conference from 6–7 July 2012. It was hosted by the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria (UP) for the third time. As the oldest national academic historical society in the country (established 1956) it was decided to look to the future of the discipline, very much in line with what was done a half dozen years ago when the conference was held at UP in 2006 – but taking this even further. Thus in framing the conference focus it was hoped to encourage the combined participation of both established academics as well as the postgraduate cohort of the historical fraternity. The call for papers was very well responded to, with over 80 papers with a fifty-fifty ratio of established academics and postgraduate participants – a ratio which bodes very well for both HASA as well as the future of the discipline itself.

Participants came from almost every university in South Africa, along with participants from the SADEC region, Europe, America, Japan and the United Kingdom. Our thanks are due to the generosity of our sponsors that enabled us to keep the conference registration fee low – exactly what it was six years ago! Without these sponsors this would not have been possible: the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Fund; the UP Faculty of Humanities; the UP Registrar's Office; the UP Archives; the UP departments of Historical and Heritage Studies and Information Science; Protea Books; Juta; and Createk. Thanks to the generous support from the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Fund the participation of five postgraduate students from universities outside of Gauteng was sponsored. The students selected to represent their respective universities were Glen Ncube (UCT); Danè van Wyk (US); Louwna Erasmus (UFS); Kylie van Zyl (Rhodes); and Karthigasen Gopalan (UKZN). In addition the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Fund also made it possible to make awards to the three best papers submitted by postgraduate students. The winners were: first place: Danelle van Zyl- Hermann (Cambridge University); second place: Cornelis Muller (University of Pretoria); and third place: Godfrey Hove (University of Stellenbosch).

The conference theme was also intentionally cast as broadly as possible to include the many facets of “Doing History”. Again we are glad to report that we succeeded in attracting a very wide spectrum of papers ranging chronologically from primates to denuclearisation and with subjects varying from water to waste; bread to beer; sanity to insanity; Zulu to Hindu; leisure to resistance; labour to capital; health to disease; war to peace; community to national identities, along with the oral and written archives of old and new, as well as the teaching and writing of history.

It was both an honour and experience for all to have two renowned academics to present keynote addresses. Prof Ian Phimister (University of Sheffield and now the University of the Free State) gave a paper entitled “Rooms with views: researching and writing history”; and Prof Bill Nasson (University of Cape Town and now University of Stellenbosch) presented a paper “Dabbling in history: more apprenticeship than sorcery”.

During the proceedings, two books were launched. One was by Rory Pilosoff, a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of

Pretoria entitled *The unbearable whiteness of being. Farmers' voices from Zimbabwe*, which was introduced by Prof Alois Mlambo, head of the same department. The other book is by Archie Dick, entitled *The hidden history of South Africa's book and reading cultures* and was discussed by Prof Charles van Onselen, research professor at UP. The conference also included an international round table discussion between South African postgraduate students and students from the United States of America.

That it was a worthwhile academic endeavour was evident in the exceedingly positive response we received from the participants after the conference, one international academic referring to it as "thoroughly enjoyable and extremely stimulating conference ... and a watershed moment for the South African historical profession".

Professor Karen Harris
Chairperson HASA