

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

**BY TIMOTHY RAYLOR**

As I sit down to write my final president's column, I look back on a period of transition, consolidation, and growth. We have gained a new webmaster in Matthew Augustine, whose home institution, the University of St Andrews, generously houses our updated and reorganized website, and our increasingly ambitious *Newsletter*. Our new Executive Secretary, Emma Wilson, has given us a social media presence, through Facebook and Twitter. Our published Constitution now accurately reflects our recent amendments and squares with our practice. And annual email renewal reminders allow us to monitor membership without instituting dues.

Taking a wider view, we have established a presence at annual meetings of the Renaissance Society of America while strengthening our involvement in the South-Central Renaissance Conference. For our 2014 meeting in Tucson, AZ (April 3-5) we received our largest ever number of submissions. Only by stuffing several sessions with four papers, as opposed to our usual three, were we able to avoid scheduling parallel sessions; even after such cramming, we will sponsor no fewer than seven panels. These will feature scholars from all over the USA, as well as Canada, the UK, and Continental Europe.

But it's not just in growing numbers that we can measure success: our commitment to fostering the next generation of Marvell scholarship has been enhanced by the anonymous benefactor who generously sponsored the John M. Wallace Award, for the best paper on Marvell by an early-career scholar delivered at the South-Central Renaissance Conference. The society today is in robust shape.

There are, of course, some challenges ahead, the most obvious of which is the strain, both physical and financial, of sustaining two homes. Over the last few years we have managed to appear at both RSA and SCRC; but with the two events habitually scheduled within a few weeks of each other, putting on sessions at both conferences has not been easy. In the spring of 2014, the two conferences—one on the eastern seaboard, the other in the southwest—will be just five days apart. And while a few hardy souls will be attending both (thank you Martin, Nigel, and Nick), such temporal proximity and geographical distance stretches our resources beyond sustainable levels. If neither conference has plans to move its meeting, we will need to decide, before very long, where our future lies.

Such decisions are even more pertinent given the increasingly international character of the society. Two of our leading officers are now based in the UK: our webmaster at the University of St Andrews and our incoming president, Professor Martin Dzelzainis, at the University of Leicester. And imminent occasions will, in the coming years, increasingly draw our attention back to Britain. Late last year came the announcement that Hull had beaten out Dundee, Swansea Bay, and—sorry Martin—Leicester to be the UK's City of Culture in 2017. A flurry of excitement swept over the media. Marvellians reached for their copies of the 1921 Tercentenary volume, with its photographs of stout alderman in procession, its inadvertently comic account of the civic celebrations.

Although no contemporary has (to my knowledge) echoed the view of Alderman Beecroft Atkinson—who, after presiding as Lord Mayor over a fine luncheon at the

City Hotel, stood up and declared the poet to be “the greatest advance advertisement agent Hull ever had”—Marvell has nevertheless featured prominently in accounts of the triumph, the Hanneman portrait popping up all over national press websites. The *Hull Daily Mail* flagged him at no. 8 in its list of “50 reasons why...”—below William Wilberforce and Amy Johnson; slightly ahead of Philip Larkin and The Housemartins.

We do not yet know what shape the 2017 festivities will take, but it seems appropriate that the Andrew Marvell Society should attempt to contribute to them. And if 2017 will celebrate Hull, 2018 will see the 340th anniversary of the poet's death and, looking further out—though not all that much further—2021, of course, the 400th of his birth. There are, in short, good reasons for trying in the next few years to strengthen our links with UK-based Marvellians. Our incoming president is well placed and, as one of the leading early modern scholars in Britain, ideally qualified to help us do so.

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