

Yorkshire History Prize 2015 - Report on Awards

The number and quality of entries for the Yorkshire Society's competition for essays on the County's history vary inevitably from year to year. After a strong entry in 2014 the judges were unable this year to make an award in the category for longer essays, the Beresford Prize (£300). The following decisions were taken in the competition for shorter essays (5,000 word limit):

The Bramley award (£150) to **Dr Dennis O'Keefe** (Halifax) for his essay: *'Not Playing the Game? The Continuation of Cricket in Halifax and the Calder Valley during the Great War'*

An additional special prize of £100 was awarded to **Dr Christine Verguson** (Huddersfield) for an essay of exceptional merit: *William Holt of Todmorden: broadcasting Yorkshire and Britain to the World*

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Dr O'Keefe's essay points to contrasting attitudes to the social role of cricket held by two different sections of English society during the First World War – the cricketing establishment on the one hand, largely public school educated and based in the south of the country, and the cricketing communities of the north competing in local leagues and representing a cross section of society in small towns and villages. For the former, cricket, for all its peacetime value in recreation and 'the building of character', could not be allowed to interfere with the vital business of winning the war. It should therefore be dropped while its exponents fought for their country. For the latter, their teams were fundamental to the identity of the local communities, an essential aspect of a way of life which war service sought to preserve. News of cricket back home contributed to the morale of local men serving in the forces

Dr Verguson describes the remarkable fortunes of a Yorkshireman who, from unlikely beginnings, won national and even international fame through his radio broadcasts during World War two, a man whose varied parts and achievements are reflected on the plaque commemorating his life: 'weaver, author, artist, publisher, political activist, broadcaster, inventor, world traveller and humanist'.

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After a brief career in teaching **Dr O'Keefe** spent many years in IT before resuming an early interest in history in middle life. A cricketer himself for over four decades he has been researching the social history of the game for several years and was a contributor to the pioneering Calderdale and Kirklees Cricket Heritage project at the University of Huddersfield's Cricket Research Centre, now defunct. His PhD thesis (2013) dealt with sporting and religious developments in the context of economic, political and social transformation. He is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at Huddersfield University.

Having started her career in the Local Studies and Archives department of Huddersfield Central Library, **Dr Verguson** spent 30 years at the BBC in Leeds as librarian, researcher and finally journalist before leaving to become a research student at the University of Huddersfield. Having completed her doctorate on the history of the BBC in Yorkshire between 1945 and 1990, she is now free to expand on her previous research relating to Yorkshire broadcasters and to the part that Yorkshire played in the early development of radio as well as pursuing her interests in local and urban history. She is press and publicity officer for Huddersfield Local History Society as well as for two other local history/heritage groups.