

# MILITARY HISTORY SOCIETY OF IRELAND

## Survey of Members' Attitudes 2017

### Executive Summary

#### **1. GENERAL**

This is the Executive Summary of the Final Report of a survey carried out of members of the Society to obtain their opinions as to how well the Society meets its aims and, in particular, how it meets the needs and desires of its members. A copy of the Full Report is available on the Society's website [www.mhsi.ie](http://www.mhsi.ie). You may also request a copy from *Comdt Paul Mullally, 11 Ashton Grove, Knocklyon, Dublin D16 KT10, Ireland*, or [mullpaul@indigo.ie](mailto:mullpaul@indigo.ie). Please state whether you wish to receive your copy by email or by ordinary post.

#### **2. RESPONSES ANALYSED BY AREA**

About 570 survey forms were issued: about 470 to addresses in Ireland and about 100 to addresses overseas.

Responses were received from 95 members who represent about 17% of our ordinary, life and honorary members: Of the responses, 82 (86%) came from Ireland and 13 (14%) came from overseas.

40% came from Dublin; 11% from the rest of the Greater Dublin Area<sup>1</sup>; 35% from the rest of Ireland; and 14% from Overseas.

Of the 82 responses received from Ireland, 46% came from Dublin; 13% from rest of the Greater Dublin Area; and 41% from r/Ireland.

#### **3. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL REASONS YOU ARE MEMBER OFF THE MHSI?**

A total of 236 reasons were given in response to this question: the most popular was the Irish Sword at 80; Lectures 53; Irish Tours/Field-Days 43; Overseas Tours 28; Annual Dinner 16; Other 16.

#### **Response by Council**

Council is satisfied that most of its resources are concentrated on those areas which are of greatest interest/importance to its members and this will continue to be a guiding principle in planning its programmes into the future. It is also satisfied that all its current activities should continue so long as members support them. No new activities were suggested in the survey.

#### **4. IRISH SWORD**

91% stated they were satisfied with the Layout and Style; 82% with the Content; and 86% with the Quality of the Articles. A total of 45 made submissions under the heading of "*Improvements or Changes they would like to see*" in the Sword. Most members also made comments relating to the main questions under this heading. Most of these were very positive and favourable.

#### **Response by Council**

The suggestions and comments will be considered by the Editorial Team. Otherwise, no significant changes are proposed.

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<sup>1</sup> The rest of the GDA included counties Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth within commuting distance of Dublin. It was considered that members in these areas would be more likely to access events organised in, near or commencing in Dublin and that this factor would be worth considering in the analysis of responses.

## **5. WINTER LECTURE PROGRAMME**

Attend Lectures? 16% attended on a regular basis; 44% attended occasionally; and 40% never attended. A combined figure of 60% attended regularly or occasionally.

The most common suggestion made by you under this heading 41%, was that some lecturers should be held outside Dublin. There were 11 comments made under other headings to similar effect.

Other suggestions under this heading: change lecture day (4); change time (3); provide better amplification (2); topics (1); record lectures (1); change of location within Dublin (1). 13 of you also stated that you were unable to attend because of other commitments, health and age issues or you were living abroad.

Quality of Lectures: 54% were satisfied; none were dissatisfied; 46% did not respond.

Subject Matter: 56% were satisfied; 3% were not; 41% did not respond. Of those that responded, 95% were satisfied.

24 comments received under this heading: 10 wanted some lectures to take place outside of Dublin. (A further 21 of you expressed similar views under the questions “Do you attend” and “What might entice you to attend”).

Other comments: Topics (6), e.g. 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century, middle ages, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century, Peninsular War, West Indies; Lecturers (4); Use of online/YouTube technology (2); Better location/venue within Dublin (2); Use of email to advise members of lectures (1); Inadequate amplification (1).

### **Response by Council**

The survey confirms Council’s view that the lectures are popular, very well attended and form a vital part of the business of the Society. The Editorial Team will give consideration to the various comments made.

A 3-year pilot scheme will be introduced where at least one lecture each year will be held at a rural venue. The first such lecture will be held in Wexford Town in October 2018.

Council will consider the feasibility of holding an occasional lecture at a different time in Dublin and/or in conjunction with the AGM.

Council will evaluate the possibility of recording the proceedings and making them available on its website or on YouTube.

Where lecturers submit articles for publication, these will generally be published (as is the current practice).

Council will review sound/amplification issues in conjunction with Griffith College authorities.

Council will continue to ensure that a wide range of topics and periods are covered in its Programme, having regards to your comments and suggestions.

## **6. CONFERENCES**

Attend Conferences: 39% attended; 58% did not; 3% did not respond. Of those that responded, 40% attended.

Quality and Subject Matter: All of you stated that you were satisfied with both the quality and the subject matter of the lectures.

33% suggested that some conferences be held outside Dublin. Some topics, e.g. Spanish Civil War, 20<sup>th</sup> century battles/campaigns, were suggested. Other comments generally related to why members could not attend, e.g. other commitments.

### **Proposed Action by Council**

Council notes suggestions that some Conferences be held outside of Dublin. Depending on the subject matter, it will give consideration to holding the next conference in Cork or Belfast.

Where practicable, papers from conferences are published in the Irish Sword, e.g. the 2016 Conference was published in editions 123 & 124 in 2017.

## **7. LIBRARY**

52% agreed that the Society's library should be accessible, 1% disagreed, 5% made other comments, 42% did not respond. Of those that responded, 89% agreed.

### **Proposed Action by Council.**

Council will approach Military Archives with a proposal. An index or catalogue would need to be prepared.

## **8. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Attend AGMs: 5% attended regularly; 23% attended occasionally; 66% never attended; 5% did not respond. Of those that responded, 30% attend regularly or occasionally.

Change time of Year: 8% said Yes; 10% said No; 30% said they had No Opinion; 52% did not respond. Of those that responded, 83% said No.

Willing to Serve on Council: 9% said Yes; 53% said No; 38% did not respond.

In relation to what might entice you to attend AGMs or attend them on a more regular basis, very few gave suggestions were made that would enable Council to further facilitate members in that regard. Most of you gave reasons why you could not attend: these related mostly to distance, time constraints, other commitments etc. However, 3 suggested that the AGM be held in conjunction with a lecture and 1 suggested that the agenda and minutes be published online.

### **Proposed Action by Council**

The AGM has been moved to February to dovetail with a change in the financial year which now ends on 31<sup>st</sup> December. . Council will consider suggestions received to hold a lecture in conjunction with the AGM, and of publishing the agenda and minutes on its website. It will also look at co-opting new members to council where vacancies occur.

## **9. ANNUAL DINNER**

Attend dinner regularly/occasionally: 36% attended regularly or occasionally; 62% never attended; 2% did not respond. Of those that responded, 37% attended.

Format: 32% were satisfied with format; 2% were not satisfied; 66% did not respond. Of those that responded, 94% were satisfied.

Value for Money: 33% agreed that they got value for money, 7% disagreed; 60% did not respond. Of those that responded, 82% got value for money.

Quality of the meal: 28% were satisfied; 8% were not satisfied or not entirely satisfied; 63% did not respond. Of those that responded, 76% were satisfied.

Change time of year: 8% agreed; 29% disagreed; 63% did not respond. Of those that responded, 23% wanted a change.

Change location/venue: 21% suggested a change; 19% said stay the same; 60% did not respond. Of those that responded, 53% suggested a change.

8 members suggested that the dinner take place in an army mess, Dublin Castle, Royal Hospital Kilmainham or other 'prestigious' venue. 7 suggested locations outside Dublin: Cork, Limerick, Galway, Belfast, Newry and the Curragh were suggested. 2 suggested hotels while 2 others opposed hotels. 2 suggested not changing.

### **Proposed Action by Council.**

In 2017, the Annual Dinner was held in the Officers' Mess, McKee Barracks, Dublin. It appears the change was most welcomed and that the meal was very satisfactory. Council has decided to hold the dinner in McKee Barracks for the foreseeable future.

## **10. SUMMER TOUR (Ireland)**

Attend Tour: 44% attended the Summer tour regularly or occasionally; 51% did not attend; 5% did not respond. Of those that responded, 47% attended regularly or occasionally.

Duration of Tour: 28% preferred a 2-day tour; 17% preferred a 3-day tour; 2% were open to either; 53% did not respond. Of those who opted, 63% opted for 2-days.

Commence Tour on Sunday: 53% favoured or were open to commencing the tour on a Sunday; 5% were against; 42% did not respond. Of those who responded, 91% were in favour or were open to the suggestion.

Quality of Tours: 42% were satisfied with the quality; none were dissatisfied, 58% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied.

Value for Money: 41% said they got value for money; 1% that they did not; 58% did not respond. Of those who responded, 98% got value.

Topics/Locations Suggested: Limerick, Shannon, Waterford, the Boyne, Ulster, *The Demise of Irish Large House and the Military after the Act of Union*, events that encompass non-Irish topics.

### **Proposed Action by Council.**

A 2-day Summer Tour, commencing on a Sunday, will be held in 2018. Future tours will generally be two days long but some, depending on distance and the number of sites involved, will be three days. Tours will commence on Sundays. Council may also consider holding some Summer Tours in the United Kingdom.

## **11. FIELD-DAY**

Attend Field-Days: 48% attended regularly or occasionally; 47% do not attend; 4% did not respond. Of those who responded, 51% attended regularly or occasionally.

Quality of Tours: 44% were satisfied with the quality; none were dissatisfied; 56% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied with the quality.

Value for money: 45% said that they got value for money; 2% said they did not; 53% did not respond. Of those who responded, 96% got value for money.

Suggestions made by you included Dublin Castle, Grattan's Parliament (Bank of Ireland), Siege of Derry (Ed note: probably too far for a field-day but could be considered as part of a Summer Tour), 1798 Rebellion (Ed note: done in 1998, but could be incorporated into a summer tour of the South-East); and the Battle of Ballinahinch.

**Proposed Action by Council.**

Council will consider whether it is feasible to commence some field-days earlier in the morning which would allow the tour to travel further and thus increase the catchment area of potential participants.

**12. SWITCH SUMMER (WEEKEND) TOUR/AUTUMN FIELD-DAY**

Switch Tour to the Autumn & Field-Day to the Summer: 40% said No; 6% said Yes, 54% did not respond. Of those who responded, 86% said No.

**Proposed Action by Council.**

Council will retain existing arrangements, unless circumstance warrant otherwise.

**13. OVERSEAS TOUR**

Attend Tours: 30% attended regularly or occasionally; 66% never attended; 4% did not respond. Of those who responded, 31% attended regularly or occasionally.

Quality of Tours: 32% were satisfied; none were dissatisfied; 68% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied.

Subject Matter of Tours: 31% were satisfied; 1% were dissatisfied; 70% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied.

Satisfied with Battles/Locations: 28% were satisfied; none were dissatisfied; 72% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied.

Satisfied with Hotels: 27% were satisfied; none were dissatisfied; 73% did not respond. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied.

Satisfied with hotel B&B & lunch options: 33% were satisfied; 1% were dissatisfied; 66% did not respond. Of those who responded, 97% were satisfied.

Duration of Tours: 23% preferred 7 days; 8% preferred 12 days; 8% preferred 14 days; 61% did not respond. Of those who responded, 58% preferred 7 days; 21% preferred 12 days; and 21% preferred 14 days.

Optional 2/3 Day R&R Extension: 41% Agreed; 3% did Not Agree; 60% did not respond. Of those who responded, 93% Agreed with the Extension.

Locations suggested: USA (Civil War) [Ed note: Eastern Theatre of Civil War done by Society in 2011]; Spain – Civil War, Cadiz, Tenerife; WW1 [Ed note: Western Front done in 2017]; WW2; Italy (Papal War) [Ed note: done in 2015]; Scandinavia; The Marcher Normans & Castles in Wales; Scotland (Culloden); Waterloo; mix of 20<sup>th</sup> & pre-20<sup>th</sup> century battles; non-Irish themed battles.

### **Proposed Action by Council.**

Council proposes to restrict the majority of overseas tours in the future to one week except where the destination and/or campaign warrant a longer period. It will also consider your suggestions in relation to topics, locations etc.

Council will continue with the optional 2/3 days R&R extension to tours.

### **14. COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

How MHSI Communicates with You: 81% are satisfied; 8% are not; 11% did not respond. Of those who responded, 91% were satisfied.

Use of Social Media: 73% use social media; 12% do not; 15% did not respond. Of those who responded, 85% used social media.

Social Media Used: 80 use email; 49 use websites; 25 use Facebook; 8 use Twitter and 5 use *WhatsApp, Viber; Messenger, Instagram, & texting.* 15 did not respond.

Welcome further use of Social Media: 43% said Yes; 24% said No; 33% did not respond. Of those who responded, 64% said that they would welcome further use of social media. However, this was qualified in some cases.

### **Proposed Action by Council.**

Having regard to the overwhelming number who stated that they were satisfied with how the Society communicates with you, Council has no immediate plans to change its current practice.

Council is, however, mindful of the benefits of modern technology and how it may be used to reduce costs, provide efficiencies and provide alternative options to those who prefer to use information technology exclusively or as their primary means of communications. Council will have regard to all the above.

### **Conclusion:**

Council was very satisfied at the relatively high number of its members who returned the Survey forms and of the time and effort spent by you in completing them. We believe that an overall 17% response rate is very good and gives a good representation of the view of all its members. Your time and effort has ensured that Council is now better informed of the requirements of its members and is better able to meet their needs into the future. This is probably the first major survey ever undertaken by the Society (a more limited survey was undertaken in recent years in relation to the annual dinner).

Overall, Council is satisfied that its current policies, programmes and activities are meeting the overwhelming needs and desires of its members and the quality of its output is ranked high among you. It also gives its members good value for money in the range of events it organises. What was not covered in the Survey was the annual subscription fee which, at €32, represents very good value for money. The fee has not been increased in 25 years. New membership was not addressed either; this is an ongoing issue for the Society and one in which all its members can contribute by trying to recruit new members.

In this Summary Report (and in the [full] Final Report), Council has set out a series of proposed actions. Council will report on these actions at its AGMs over the next few years.

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Adopted by Council on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018