

Annual conference of the Association of Business Historians

Conference Summary

The annual conference of the Association of Business Historians (ABH) met in Preston on the 28th and 29th June in Lancashire Business School. Responding to a theme of “Business History in the 21st Century”, more than 75 presentations took place on a variety of business and economic history topics reaching as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries and as current as 2013. Following recent successful conferences in Liverpool, York, Reading, and Birmingham (Aston University), UCLan hosted more than 90 delegates for the meeting arriving from thirteen countries including Finland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, Portugal, the United States, and Chile.

The events took place in Greenbank Building and the conference dinner took place off-site in central Preston. The Association was very pleased to have as its keynote speaker this year Dr. Thomas Haigh of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (USA), whose title was “Taking Care of Business History: Challenges and Opportunities for the 21st Century”. A published authority on the history of computers and computing and an active blogger, Tom provided entertaining and insightful suggestions about how business historians could infuse their subject with new approaches, structures, and content that would speak to other social sciences. He discussed what it might mean for the field to enter a new era without the overarching structure of one meta-narrative as had previously been the case; he believed this will empower the formerly peripheral to become more mainstream and enable more diversity in the field. British by birth, Dr. Haigh has worked in the United States for several years, and therefore spoke from an American perspective on the changes and opportunities he saw in the States, UK, and Europe in the field of business history.



Dr Thomas Haigh of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The local organiser for the conference at UCLan was Dr. Mitch Larson (LBS), assisted by Dr. Billy Frank (History), and Emma Woodward and Liz Roberts, UCLan conference officers. The ABH extends its gratitude to the Lancashire Institute for Economic and Business Research for supporting the conference through funding the keynote speaker's travel to Preston, and to Lancashire Business School for hosting this year's conference. Delegate responses to the conference have been very positive since the event took place. Next year's ABH meeting will be hosted by the University of Newcastle.