

# The British Commission for Military History

## Founding Principles

*This is an edited version of a note written on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1977, by Dr CJ Duffy, Secretary of the BCMH, with the War Studies Dept at RMA Sandhurst to an enquiry from a prospective member.*

“The BCMH is the British branch of the International Commission for Military History, and acts as an academic and social liaison between those in the United Kingdom who have a professional interest in military history.

Our parent body, the ICMH, was founded in 1938 as a sub-commission of the worldwide International Committee of Historical Sciences. Both organisations were revived after World War II.

Britain has been represented in the ICMH since 1965, and the BCMH held a very successful five day international colloquy on home ground at the Royal Military Academy in 1974 which was attended by representatives of 16 nations. More recently a determined effort has been made to expand the membership of the BCMH and break down the notorious insularity of military historians in our country.

The first general meeting of the BCMH was held at the National Army Museum, Chelsea on 23 October 1976. Three basic principles were endorsed :

1. The primary functions of the BCMH shall be to represent British military historians in the activities of the ICMH.
2. “Military History” is defined as the study of warfare and relevant institutions at all times and in all places, in the operational, technical, social, economic and political aspects.
3. The BCMH shall remain independent of the control of all state and private institutions.

Lastly a couple of general points:

Our definition of ‘military history’ has been cast in wide terms and is intended to embrace foreign military history and naval and aerospace affairs.

Foreign governments are now engaging national prestige and the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of pounds in support of their respective military history commissions. However the ICMH continues to value scholarship and enterprise more highly than bluster and cash, and it would be disgraceful if Britons failed to bestir themselves from their hoggish apathy and take their place in the international community of military historians.”

The original 43 members of the BCMH included professionals in War Studies at Sandhurst and King's College London, publishers, independent writers, wargamers and those who described themselves as 'amateurs'.

The Commission maintains its founding principles in terms of:

1. Treating the subject of military history in the widest terms
2. Playing an academic and a social role with a broad membership to break down insularity
3. Independence both of state and private institutions.

These days, the ICMH describes itself as an affiliated organization of the International Committee of Historical Sciences that belongs to the UNESCO / UN family. As per the end of 2012 there were just over 40 member countries within the commission.

With thanks to Richard Tennant for providing the original note.