

# 2015 HISTORICAL FICTION READER SURVEY

... conducted by M.K. Tod  
author and blogger at [www.awriterofhistory.com](http://www.awriterofhistory.com)

## From the World of Historical Fiction Reader Opinions Revealed

June 2015

This report contains results from the third comprehensive historical fiction reader survey. The survey occurred during April and May of 2015 and reached 2033 participants (84% female, 16% male).

### WHAT'S NEW?

This year's survey explored new territories:

- unique questions for authors, bloggers and publishing industry professionals
- the use and value of social media in support of reading
- ingredients that make historical characters come alive for readers
- and for the first time, favourite historical fiction

Each chart that follows is presented with a few highlights.

Information and analysis from the [2012](#) and [2013](#) surveys are also available on [A Writer of History](#).

### A NOTE OF THANKS

I am very grateful to all who took the time to participate in this year's survey and to Jenny Quinlan of Historical Editorial and Beatriz Williams author of *The Secret Life of Violet Grant* who made suggestions and road tested the survey.

### LOOK FOR FURTHER RESULTS AND ANALYSIS ON A WRITER OF HISTORY

*M.K. Tod writes historical fiction and blogs about all aspects of the genre at [A Writer of History](#). Her latest novel, *LIES TOLD IN SILENCE* is set in WWI France and is available from [Amazon](#), [Nook](#), [Kobo](#), [Google Play](#) and [iTunes](#).*

*Mary can be contacted on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Goodreads](#).*

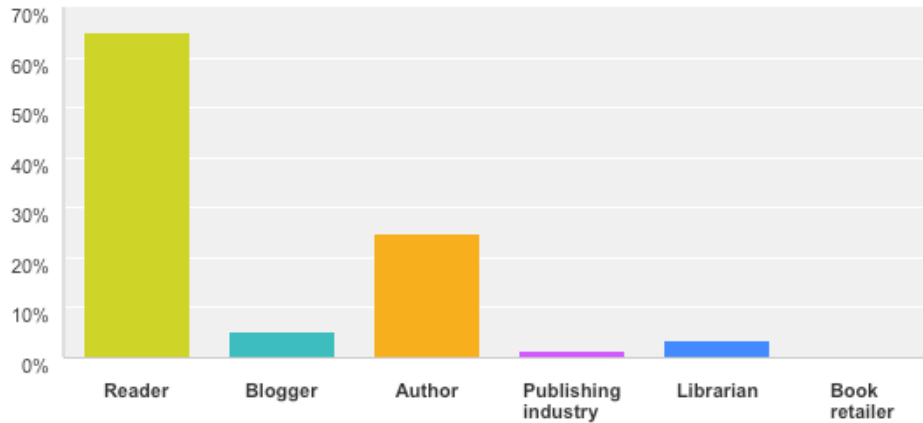
*I am pleased to have others reference information from the survey and only ask that you include my name, M.K. Tod, and blog [www.awriterofhistory.com](http://www.awriterofhistory.com).*

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015

- **2015 SURVEY ATTRACTED SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION** – of 2033 responses 1264 are readers, 537 are authors, 92 are bloggers; 839 participants read more than 50% historical fiction
- **SURVEY ATTRACTED HIGH VOLUME READERS** – 69% of participants read more than 20 books a year and 50% read more than 30
- **MORE RECENT TIME PERIODS FASCINATE AUTHORS** – 423 of the authors who participated (79%) enjoy writing stories set from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today
- **AUTHORS PREFER WRITING ABOUT FICTIONAL CHARACTERS** – 60% of authors prefer to write about fictional characters against a backdrop of great historical events; fortunately, readers have similar attitudes
- **LACK OF TIME & POOR QUALITY BOOKS** are the biggest frustrations for those blogging about books
- **TO BRING THE PAST TO LIFE** is the dominant reason for reading historical fiction
- **TOP THREE PREFERRED HISTORICAL FICTION STORY TYPES** are STRONG FEMALE CHARACTER, ADVENTURE and A SERIES WITH ONGOING CHARACTERS
- **IMMERSED IN TIME & PLACE** and **SUPERB WRITING** top the charts for favourite historical fiction
- **60% OF PARTICIPANTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA REGULARLY TO SUPPORT THEIR READING**
- **GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE** – among the differences—women read more than men and use social media more regularly in support of reading; men and women prefer different types of stories
- **SOCIAL MEDIA ENHANCES THE READING EXPERIENCE** and correlates with high volume readers
- 50% of participants agree with the statement: **SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED THE WAY I READ**

## 1. GENERAL QUESTIONS

### WHO ARE YOU?



#### Highlights:

- READERS DOMINATE – this question asked participants to select a dominant role which will allow for deeper analysis; a whopping 1264 or 64% are readers
- AS FOR BLOGGERS & AUTHORS – 92 bloggers and 537 authors responded
- PUBLISHING INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS – sadly, only 26 responded
- 61 LIBRARIANS and 6 BOOK RETAILERS participated

#### Digging further:

- GENDER DIFFERENCES – of participants, readers are 85% women, 15% men; authors are 76% women, 24% men; bloggers are 95% women, 5% men
- AGE PERSPECTIVE – 55% of those classified as readers are 50-69; 59% of authors are between 50 and 69; 50% of bloggers are between 20 and 39

### ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY BOOKS DO YOU READ EACH YEAR?

#### Highlights:

- SURVEY ATTRACTED HIGH VOLUME READERS – 69% of participants read more than 20 books a year and 50% read more than 30
- ROLE DIFFERENCES – not surprisingly BLOGGERS and LIBRARIANS read more on average than others

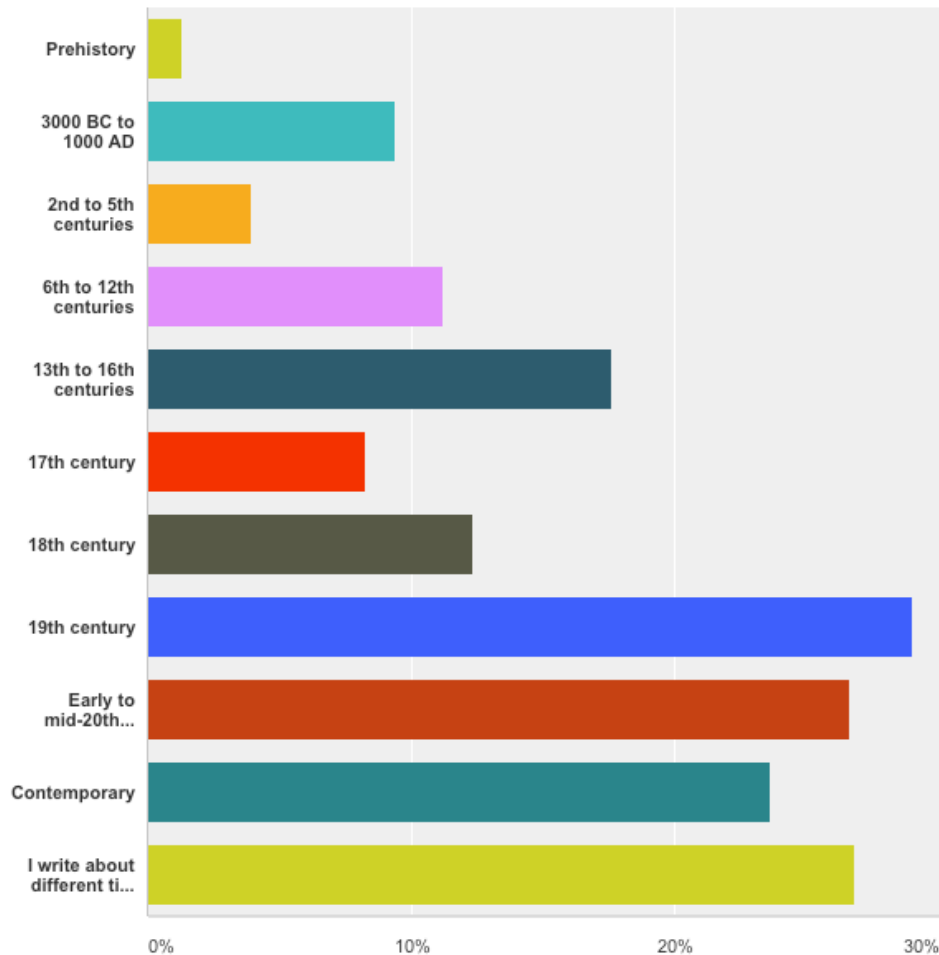


**Digging further:**

- WOMEN READ MORE THAN MEN – 55% of women and 28% of men read more than 30 books a year

## 2. QUESTIONS FOR AUTHORS

### AS AN AUTHOR, WHAT TIME PERIODS DO YOU WRITE ABOUT?



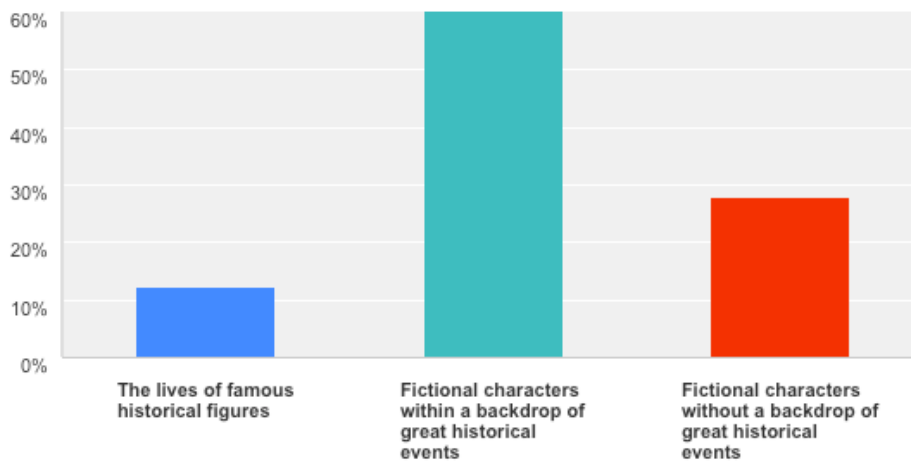
#### Highlights:

- MORE RECENT TIME PERIODS FASCINATE AUTHORS – 423 authors write in the periods from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today (note: authors could choose more than one option)
- PREHISTORY and the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries are least popular with authors

#### Digging further:

- GENDER DIFFERENCES – more women are writing about the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries than men; more men write about earlier time periods than women

## AS AN AUTHOR, WHAT TYPE OF CHARACTERS DO YOU MOST PREFER TO WRITE ABOUT?



### Highlights:

- 60% of authors prefer to write about FICTIONAL CHARACTERS against a backdrop of GREAT HISTORICAL EVENTS
- LIVES OF FAMOUS HISTORICAL FIGURES IS LEAST POPULAR among writers; further on you will see that readers have slightly different preferences

### Digging further:

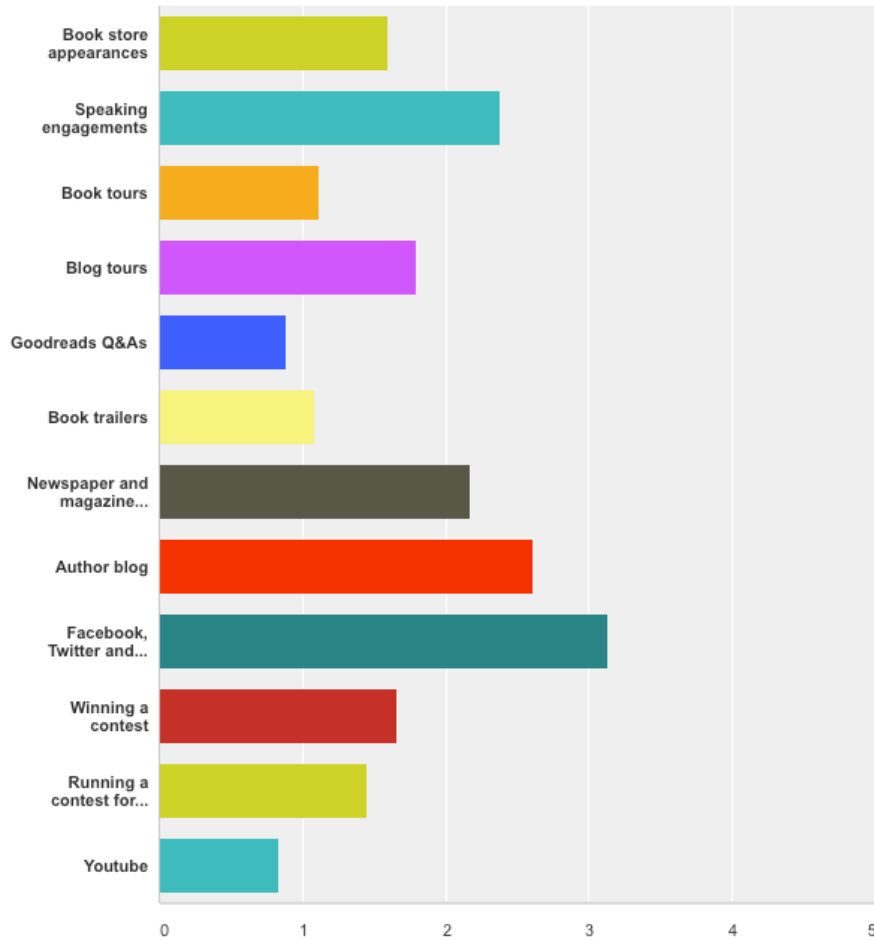
- SLIGHTLY MORE FEMALE AUTHORS PREFER WRITING ABOUT THE FAMOUS – 13% of women versus 9% of men
- SLIGHTLY MORE MALE AUTHORS PREFER WRITING ABOUT THE FICTIONAL – 65% male authors prefer fictional characters in great events compared with 58% female authors

## AS AN AUTHOR, WHICH MARKETING ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN MOST SUCCESSFUL?

**Caveat:** there was no button for Not Applicable and some authors wrote in that they scored a marketing tool 0 to reflect this; results likely skew low as a consequence

### Highlights:

- NO MARKETING TOOL DOMINATES – authors use a wide range of marketing activities
- BEING ONLINE HAS BECOME MAINSTREAM – author blogs as well as Facebook, Twitter and other social media are more helpful than other tools; 72% of authors rated this category 3 or more
- SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS and NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES are considered the most effective traditional activities
- A later question (see section 4) asks those in the publishing industry to rate these same marketing tools.



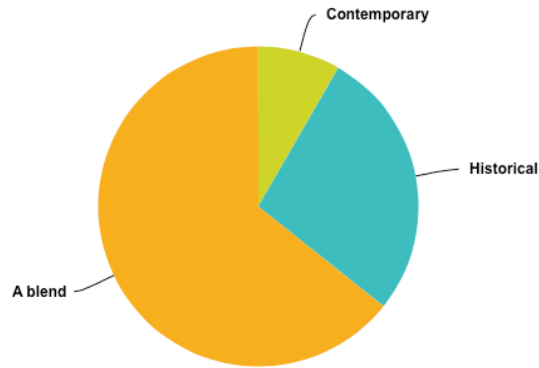
### 3. QUESTIONS FOR BLOGGERS

#### AS A BLOGGER, WHAT KIND OF BOOKS DO YOU CONCENTRATE ON?

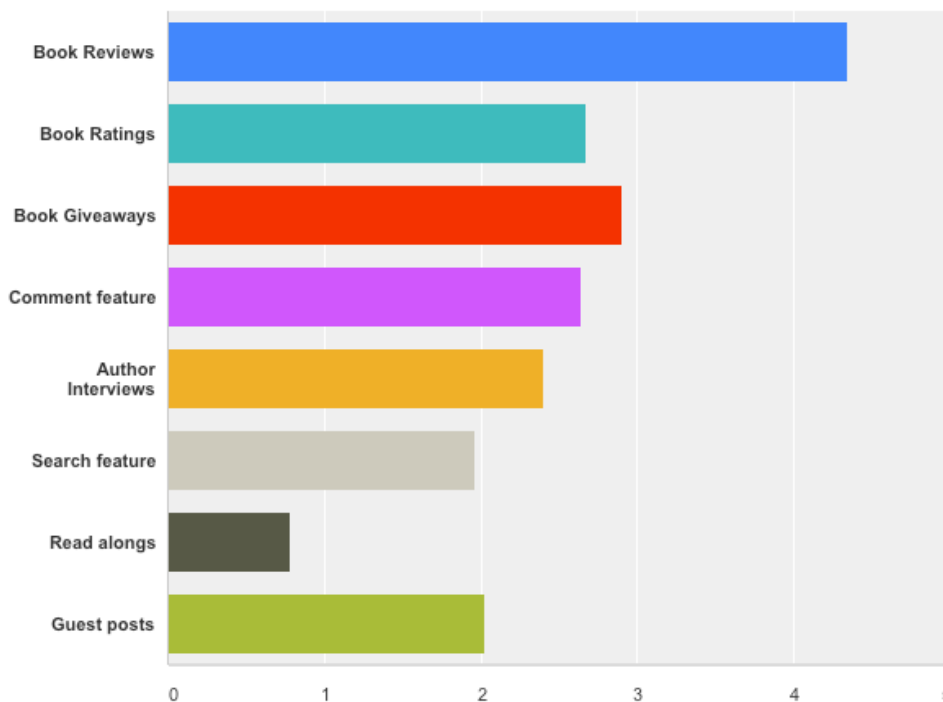
##### Highlights:

- BLOGGERS ENJOY VARIETY – 64% work with a blend of historical and contemporary fiction; since the survey was publicized by a number of historical fiction authors and sites, I suspect the numbers do not reflect the broader book blogger community



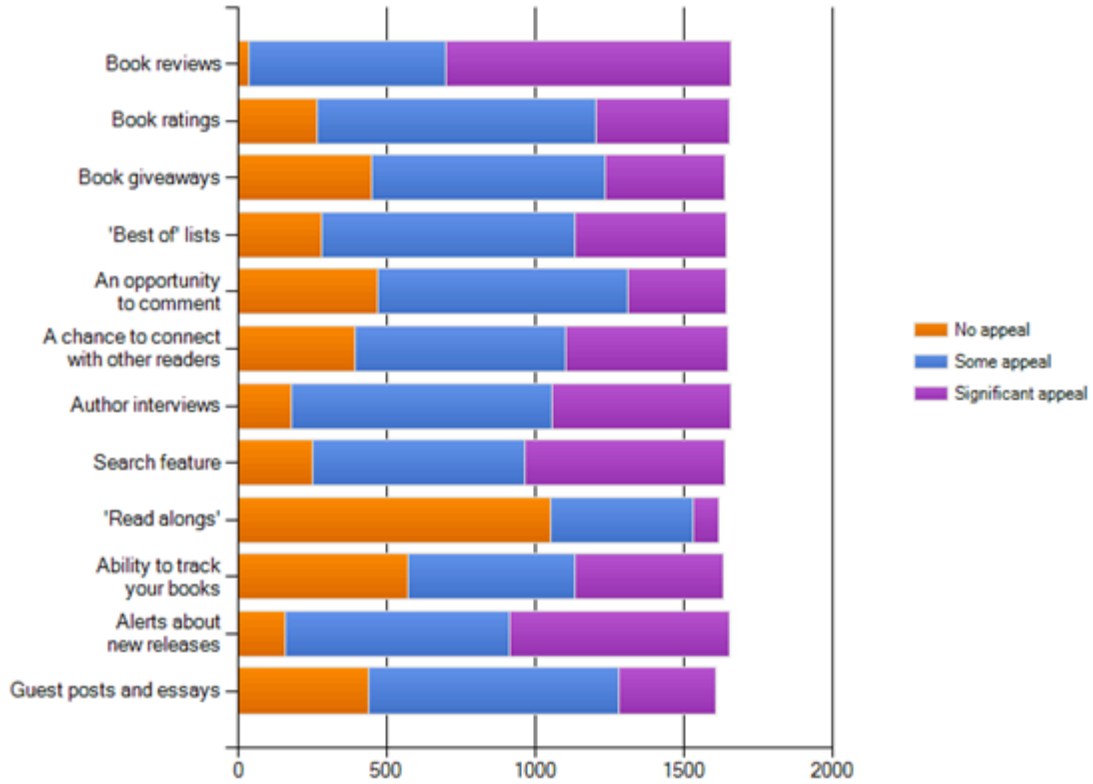


### AS A BLOGGER, WHICH ASPECTS OF YOUR BLOG ARE POPULAR WITH READERS?

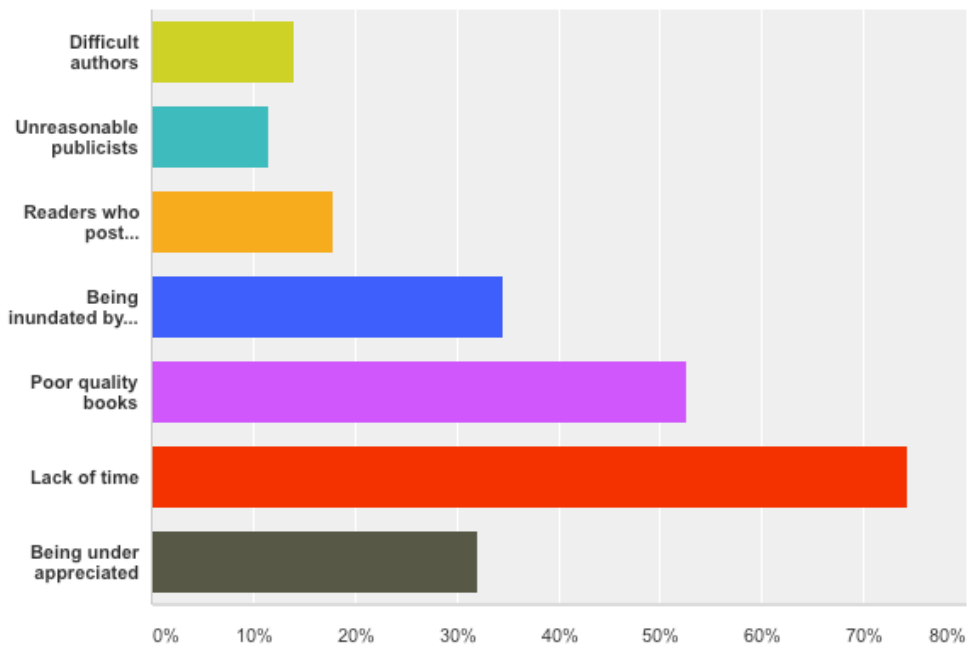


#### Highlights:

- BLOGGERS OFFER A RANGE OF SERVICES – bloggers consider readalongs least popular
- BLOGGERS ARE CREATIVE: comments mentioned additional services such as 'books combined with matching shopping', 'character interviews', 'ebook deals', 'upcoming releases', 'book cast if made into film', 'romance reading trends', 'weekly memes'.
- The 2013 survey asked a similar question of READERS with different results.



**AS A BLOGGER, WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU MOST?**



*Note: Readers who post ... reads in full 'Readers who post inappropriate comments'. Being inundated by ... reads in full 'Being inundated by self-published authors'.*

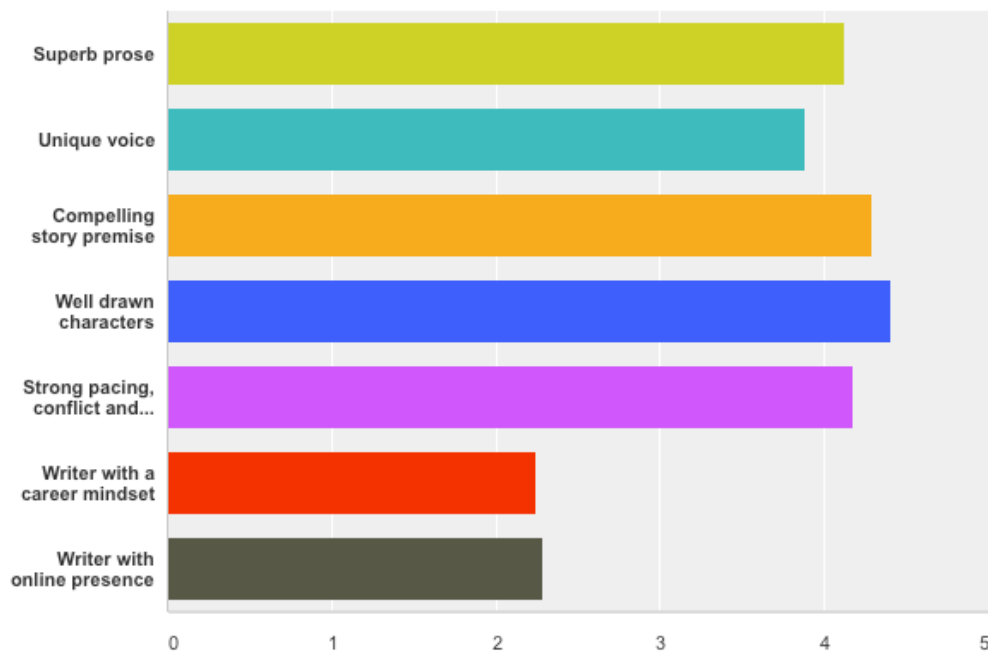
**Highlights:**

- LACK OF TIME and POOR QUALITY BOOKS – are the biggest frustrations for bloggers

## 4. QUESTIONS FOR PUBLISHING INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

**NOTE: only 26 publishing industry professionals responded to the survey. Therefore, results are not statistically significant and are presented here for anecdotal purposes and completeness.**

### AS A PUBLISHING INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL, WHAT CRITERIA ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR SELECTING A NOVEL TO REPRESENT?

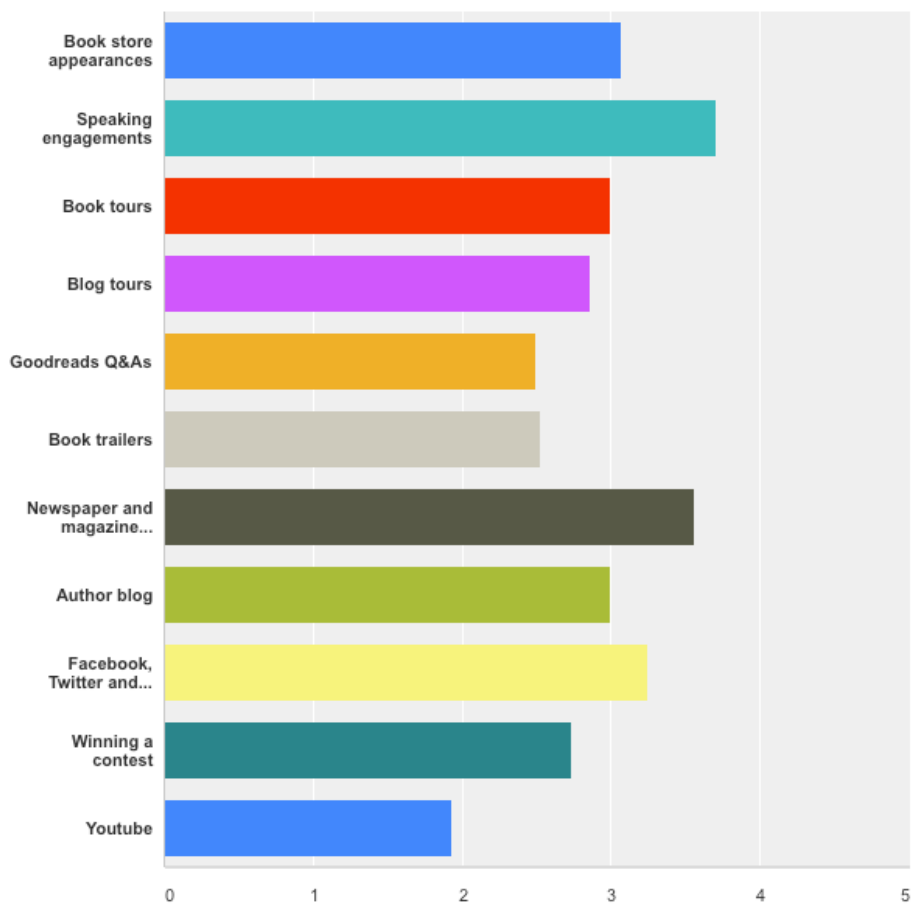


*Note: Strong pacing, conflict and ... reads in full 'Strong pacing, conflict, and tension'.*

**Highlights:**

- Given the small number of responses, THE FIRST FIVE CRITERIA are likely equally important, not surprising given that these are the essence of excellent writing.
- WRITERS WITH A CAREER MINDSET and WRITERS WITH ONLINE PRESENCE are less significant for publishing industry professionals.

## AS A PUBLISHING INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL, WHICH MARKETING ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE MOST SUCCESSFUL?



### Highlights:

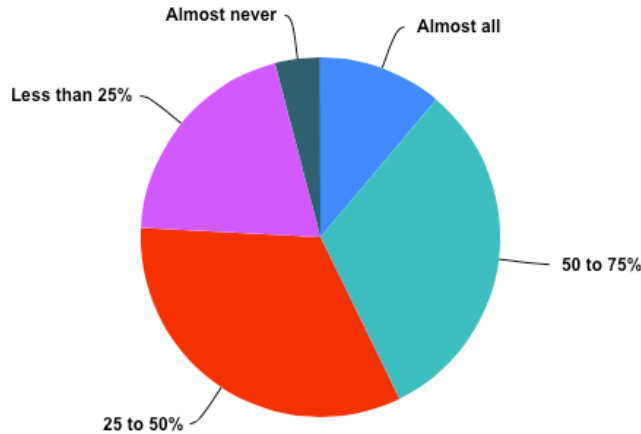
- **Remember this is a small sample:** In contrast with authors' responses, the traditional activities of SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS and NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES are considered slightly more successful marketing activities.

## 5. HISTORICAL FICTION PREFERENCES

### WHAT PORTION OF YOUR BOOK READING IS HISTORICAL FICTION?

#### Highlights:

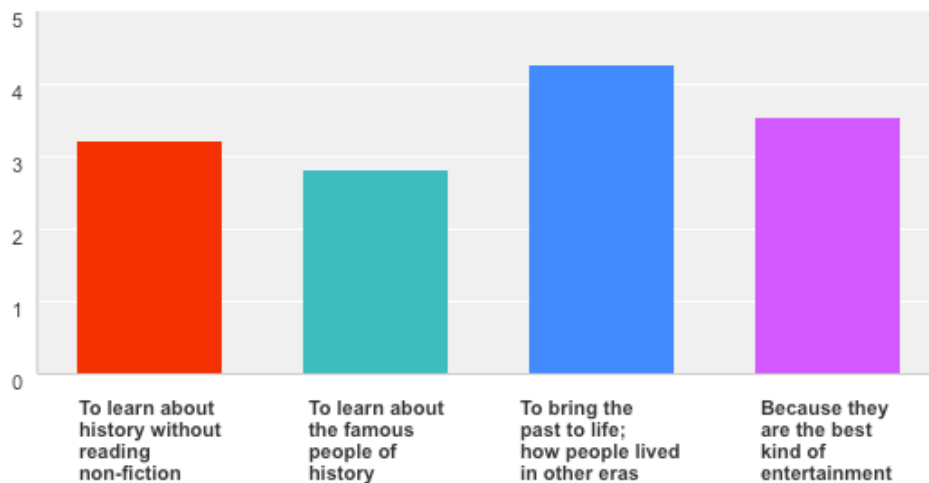
- PARTICIPANTS ARE ENTHUSIASTIC READERS OF HISTORICAL FICTION – 43% read more than 50% historical fiction
- *Note: some survey distribution was through historical fiction blogs, hence a profile for the general reading public would be different.* Nevertheless, 474 individuals reading less than 25% historical fiction is sufficient for further analysis.



#### Digging further:

- GENDER: 45% of women read HF more than 50% while for men it's 32%; and 8% of men compared with 3% of women never read HF.
- AGE does not make an appreciable difference to portion of HF

### WHY DO YOU READ HISTORICAL FICTION?



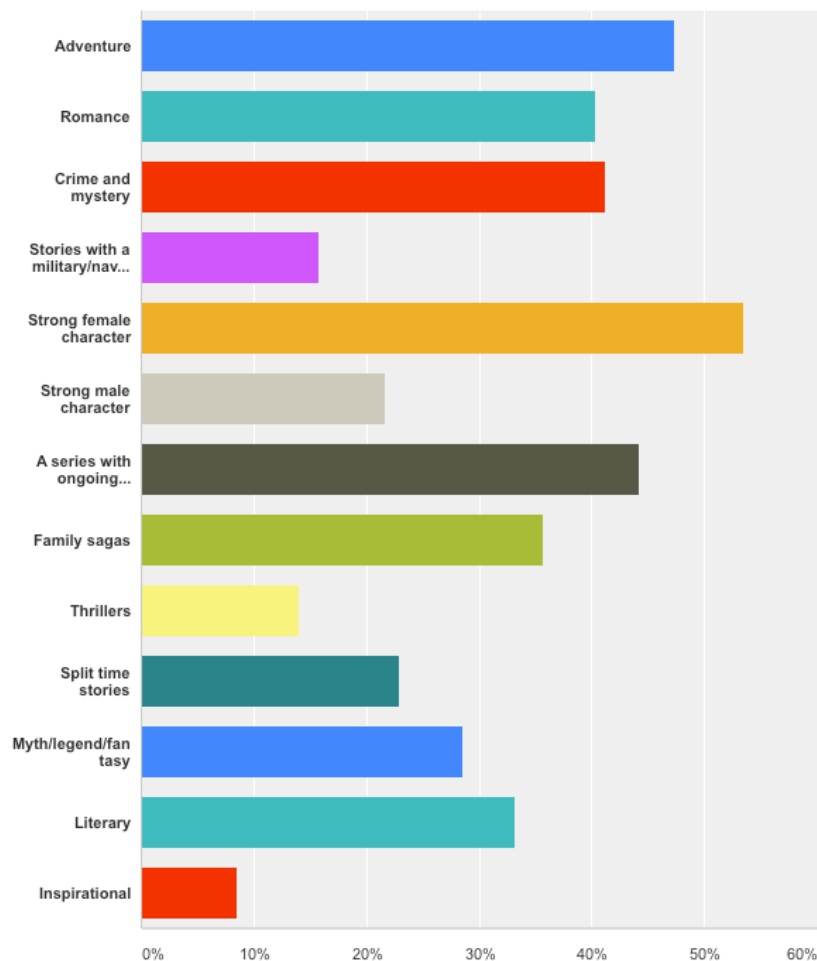
### Highlights:

- TO BRING THE PAST TO LIFE is the dominant reason for reading historical fiction.
- BECAUSE THEY ARE THE BEST KIND OF ENTERTAINMENT is not a surprising second given the participant bias to reading historical fiction.

### Digging further:

- THOSE WHO READ A LOT OF HISTORICAL FICTION rate the importance of these factors higher than those who read less HF.
- WOMEN rate the importance of these factors higher than MEN. For example, 85% of women rate bringing the past to life either 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, compared with 76% of men.
- A review of WRITE-IN COMMENTS shows that a number of readers prefer to get their historical fix from non-fiction, while others say they select books because they are good stories whether historical or contemporary. Another category includes those who read historical fiction to help with their writing of the genre.

### WITHIN HISTORICAL FICTION, WHAT TYPE OF STORY APPEALS TO YOU?



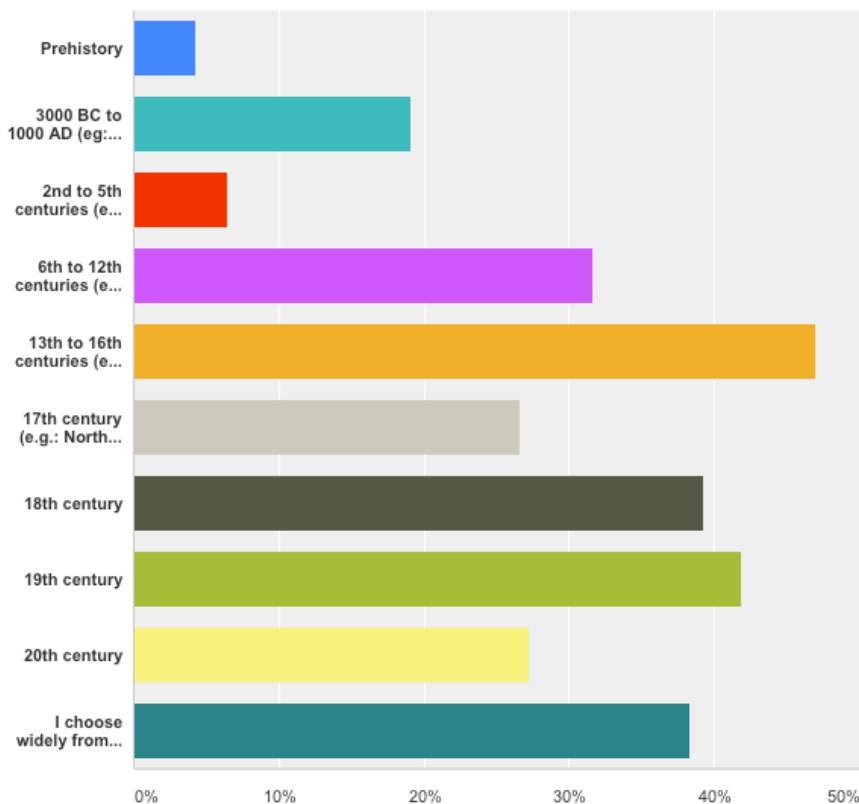
### Highlights:

- TOP THREE STORY TYPES are STRONG FEMALE CHARACTER, ADVENTURE and A SERIES WITH ONGOING CHARACTERS.
- 2013 RESULTS – the 2013 survey included 'Life of a significant historical figure' and 'Fictional characters within a backdrop of great historical events' as possible answers for this question. Eliminating these shows that the top 5 story types of 2013 remain the top 5 in 2015, although in different order.

### Digging further:

- GENDER DIFFERENCES – for MEN, ADVENTURE is the most popular (64%); for WOMEN a story with a STRONG FEMALE CHARACTER (59%) is most popular
- Interest in a SERIES WITH ONGOING CHARACTERS increased with age while an interest in ROMANCE generally DECREASED with age.

## WHAT HISTORICAL TIME PERIODS DO YOU READ?



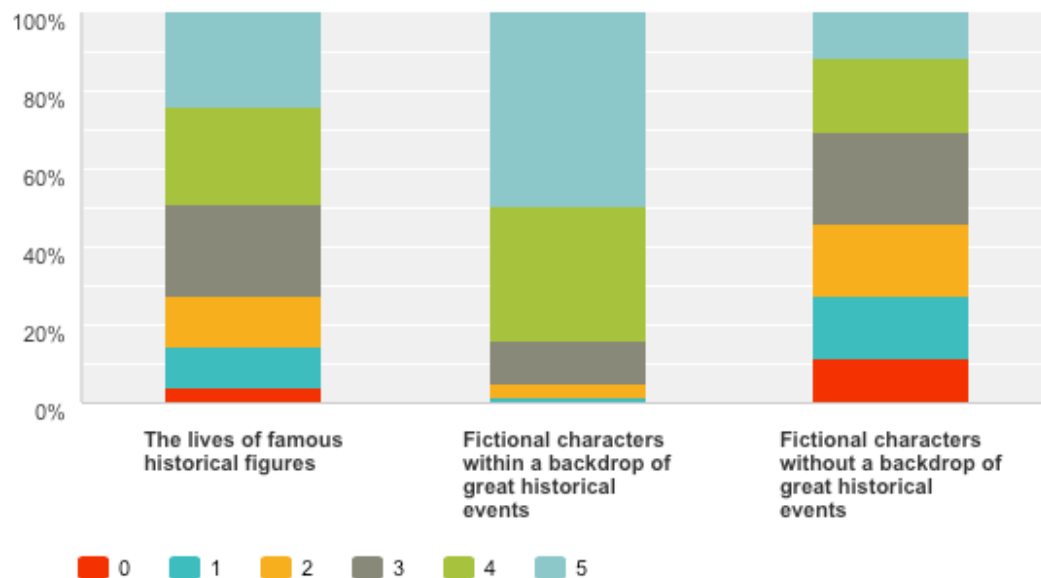
### Highlights:

- 13TH TO 16TH CENTURIES MOST POPULAR – as with the 2012 and 2013 surveys, the 13th to 16th centuries are the most popular time period. Beyond that, in close proximity are 18th and 19th centuries as well as choosing widely from different periods.

**Digging further:**

- MEN READ ABOUT ANCIENT TIMES MORE THAN WOMEN while WOMEN CHOOSE TUDOR AND 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY in much higher proportions than men
- TOP 3 FOR MEN are 19<sup>th</sup> century, 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and 3000BC to 1000AD
- TOP 3 FOR WOMEN are 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries
- US chooses 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES more than other geographies
- UK and EUROPE have the strongest interest in 13<sup>TH</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup> and 6<sup>TH</sup> TO 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES
- UK has the strongest interest in 3000BC to 1000AD

**WITHIN HISTORICAL FICTION WHAT TYPE OF CHARACTERS AND SETTINGS APPEAL TO YOU?**



**Highlights:**

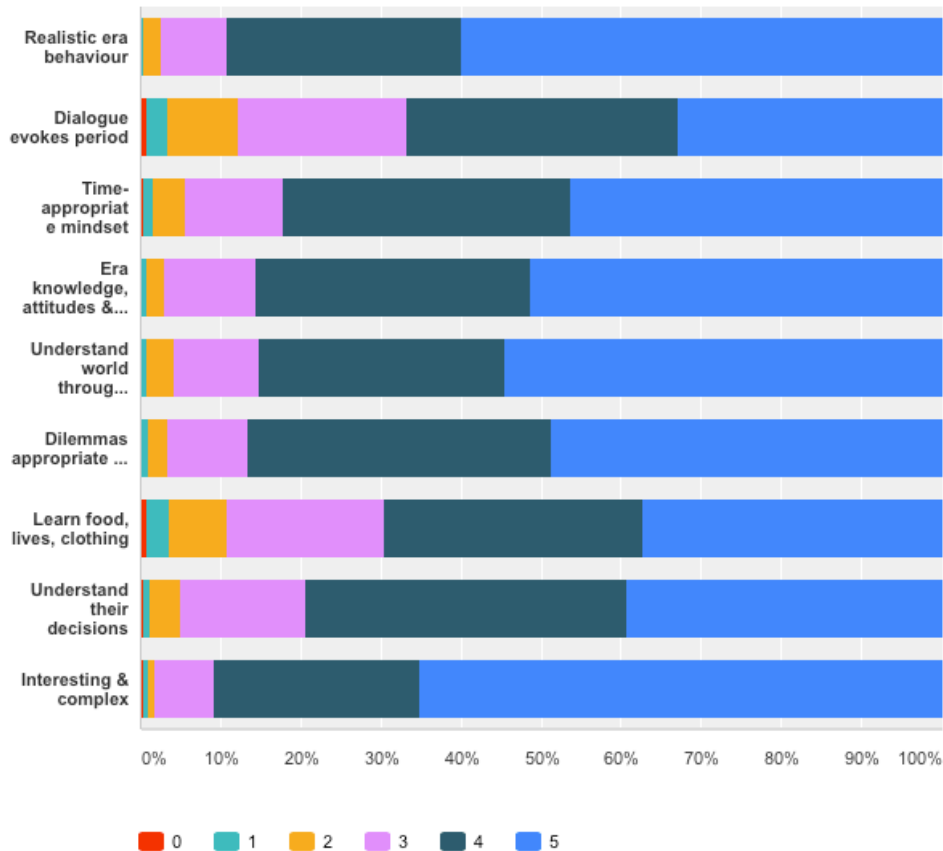
- Considering those rating any given option 4 or 5, FICTIONAL CHARACTERS WITHIN A BACKDROP OF GREAT HISTORICAL EVENTS is preferred.
- Fortunately, this is the most popular choice for AUTHORS.
- The second choice of AUTHORS is FICTIONAL CHARACTERS WITHOUT A BACKDROP OF GREAT HISTORICAL EVENTS, while READERS' second choice is LIVES OF FAMOUS HISTORICAL FIGURES.

**Digging further:**

- GENDER DIFFERENCES – MEN are less interested in the LIVES OF FAMOUS HISTORICAL FIGURES than WOMEN



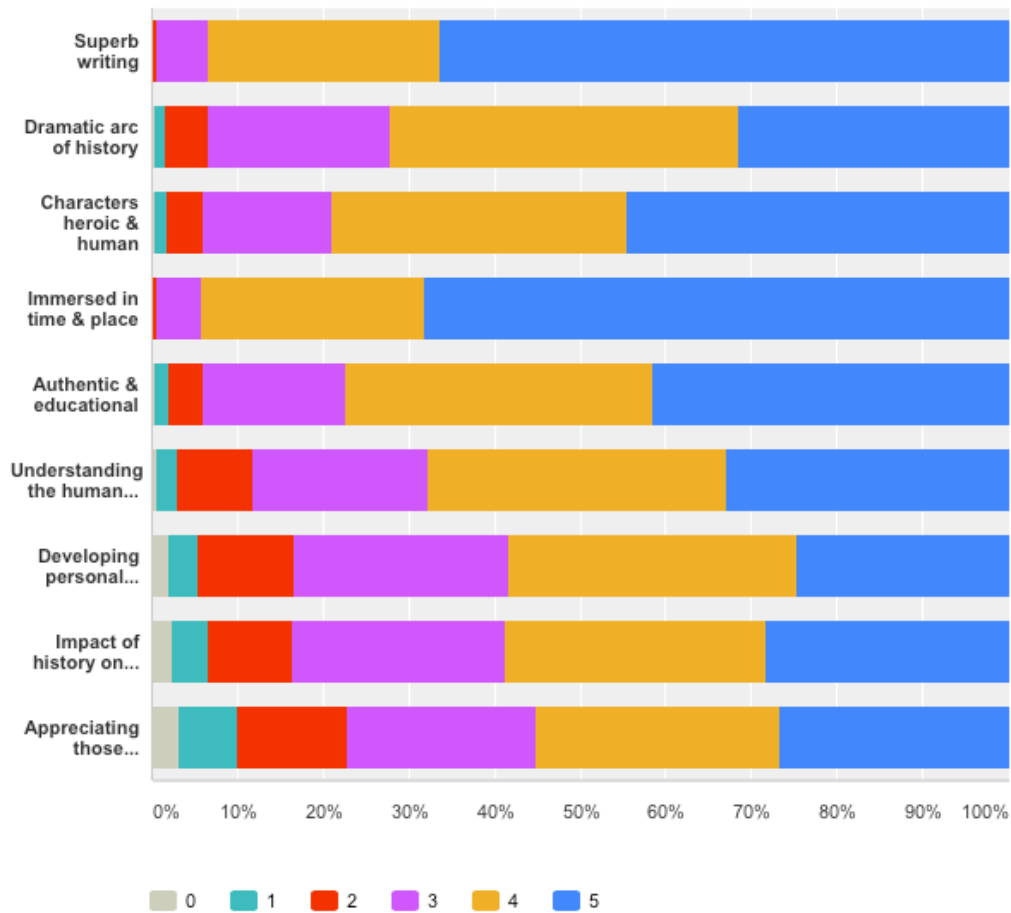
## WHAT ASPECTS ARE MOST CRITICAL TO MAKING CHARACTERS COME ALIVE IN HISTORICAL FICTION?



### Highlights:

- Most important factors are: CHARACTERS WHO ARE INTERESTING AND COMPLEX and BEHAVIOUR THAT IS REALISTIC TO THE TIME PERIOD
- Least significant are LEARNING ABOUT FOOD, CLOTHING AND THE WAY THEY LIVE and DIALOGUE THAT EVOKES THE TIME PERIOD; MEN rate these aspects as even less significant than women.

**REFLECTING ON YOUR FAVOURITE HISTORICAL FICTION, HOW RELATIVELY IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS?**



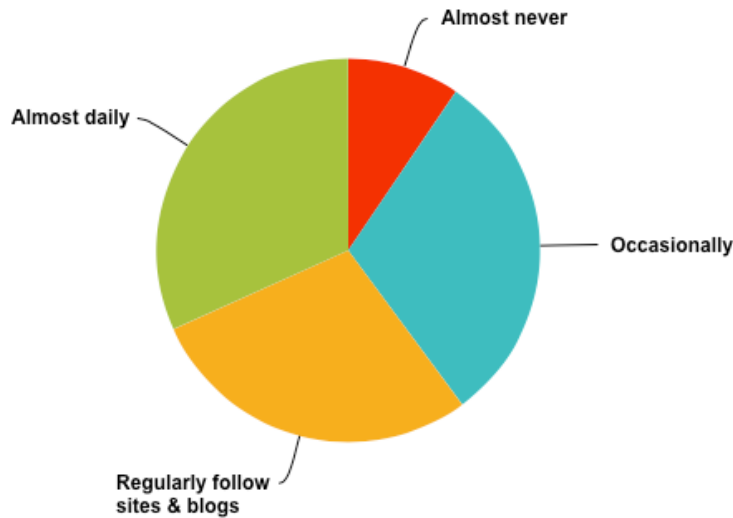
**Highlights:**

- As in 2013, the most important factors are feeling IMMERSED IN TIME AND PLACE and SUPERB WRITING
- Least important are DEVELOPING PERSONAL INSIGHTS and APPRECIATING THOSE MARGINALIZED BY HISTORY.

## 6. INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON READING

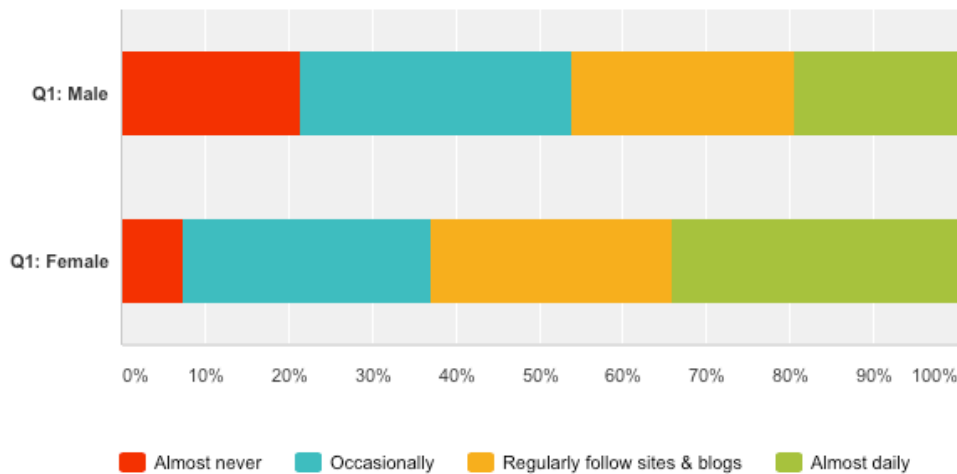
Note: results are skewed given that survey distribution was primarily through social media. Still, 652 participants or 42% chose 'almost never' or 'occasionally'.

### HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR READING PURPOSES SUCH AS BOOK DISCOVERY, BOOK REVIEWS, AUTHOR INTERACTION, and BOOK DISCUSSIONS?



#### Highlights:

- 60% of participants USE SOCIAL MEDIA REGULARLY OR DAILY; 31% SAID DAILY
- GENDER DIFFERENCES – men and women differ in using social media

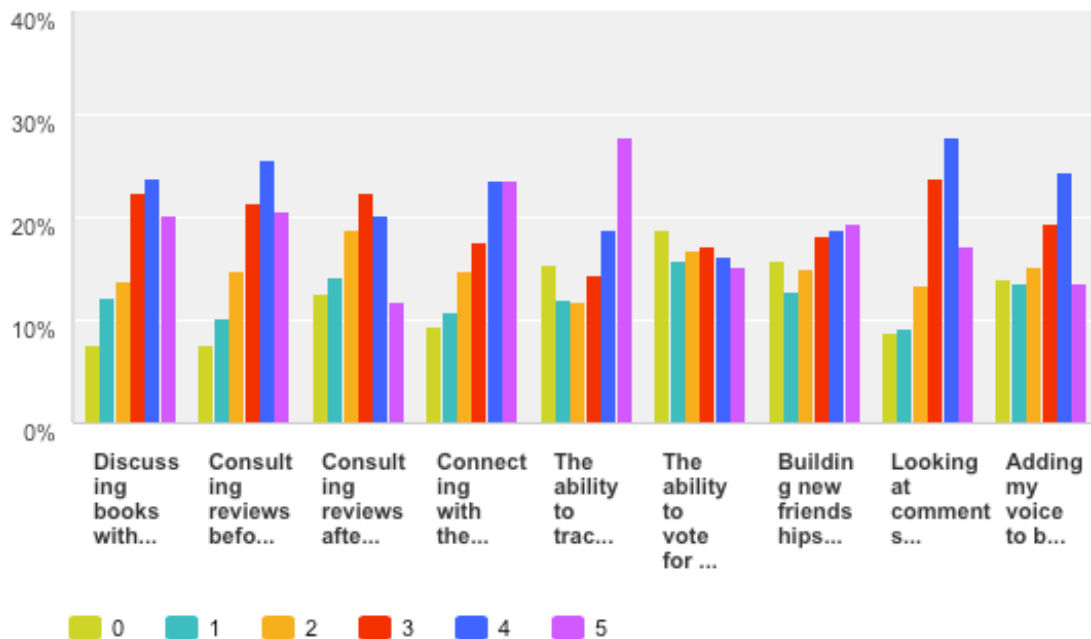


- More participants between 30 and 59 say they are daily users of social media.

- CANADA and UK are less likely to be daily users of social media in their reading.
- HIGH VOLUME READERS are more likely to use social media in their reading

### HOW MUCH DO YOU VALUE THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONALITY AVAILABLE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA?

(0=no value, 5=highest value)



#### Choices are:

- Discussing books with other readers
- Consulting reviews before purchasing a book
- Consulting reviews after reading a book
- Connecting with the author of a book I've read
- The ability to track my books
- The ability to vote for my favourites
- Building new friendships with readers
- Looking at comments and/or highlights others have made
- Adding my voice to book ratings

#### Highlights:

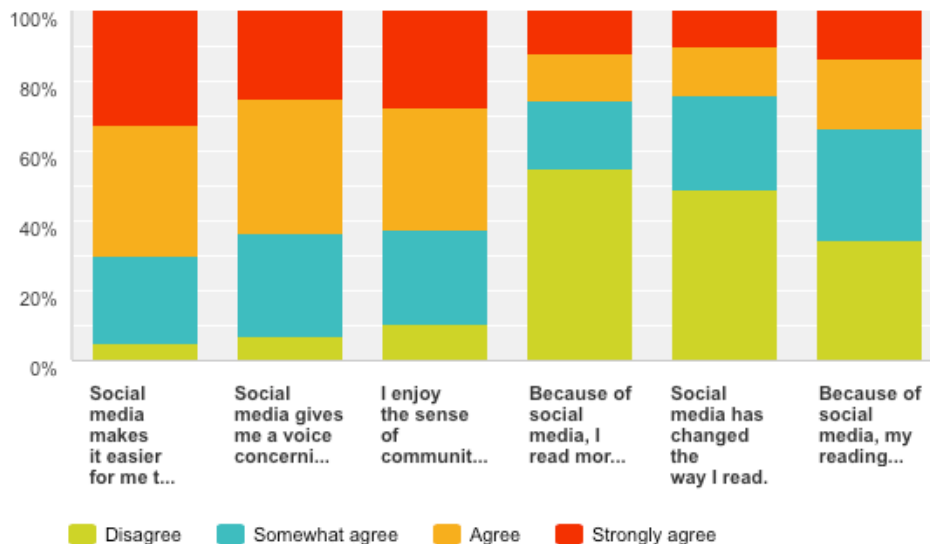
- After adding ratings 4 and 5, little separates the following functionality in the mind of readers: Connecting with the author of a book I've read, The ability to track my books, Consulting reviews before purchasing a book, Looking at comments and/or highlights others have made, and Discussing books with other readers.
- THE ABILITY TO VOTE FOR MY FAVOURITES ranks lowest

#### Digging further:

- Not surprisingly given their different usage patterns, MEN CONSIDER SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTIONALITY LESS USEFUL THAN WOMEN

- However, MEN AND WOMEN VALUE LOOKING AT COMMENTS EQUALLY HIGHLY
- THE MORE YOU READ, THE MORE YOU VALUE BEING ABLE TO TRACK YOUR BOOKS
- CONSULTING REVIEWS BEFORE PURCHASING is of highest value to those who read less than 5 or greater than 30 books a year
- BLOGGERS RATE EVERY ELEMENT OF FUNCTIONALITY HIGHER THAN READERS OR AUTHORS DO
- PERCEIVED VALUE OF FUNCTIONALITY INCREASES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
- Top functionality for LIBRARIANS is CONSULTING REVIEWS BEFORE PURCHASING and CONSULTING REVIEWS AFTER PURCHASING; in general librarians place higher value than general readers on social media functionality

**PLEASE GIVE YOUR OPINION ON THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND READING.**



**Highlights:**

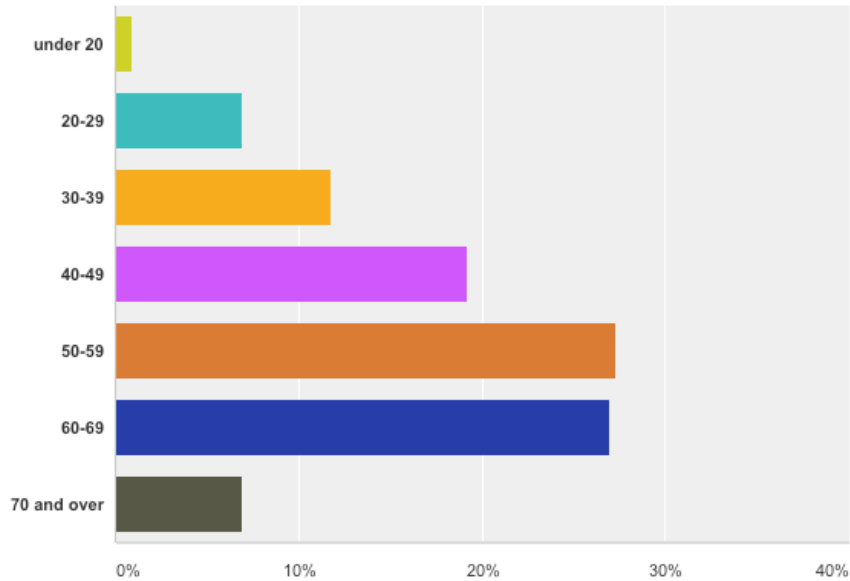
- Readers gave strongest endorsement to the following statements: SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME TO FIND BOOKS I LIKE; SOCIAL MEDIA GIVE ME A VOICE CONCERNING THE BOOKS I'VE READ; and, I ENJOY THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL MEDIA ENABLES AROUND READING
- 45% of participants agree that BECAUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA I READ MORE THAN I USED TO
- 50% of participants agree that SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED THE WAY I READ
- US and AUSTRALIAN READERS value the contribution of social media ahead of other geographies

## 7. HIGHLIGHTS SUMMARY

- **2015 SURVEY ATTRACTED SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION** – of 2033 responses 1264 are readers, 537 are authors, 92 are bloggers; 839 participants read more than 50% historical fiction
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## DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

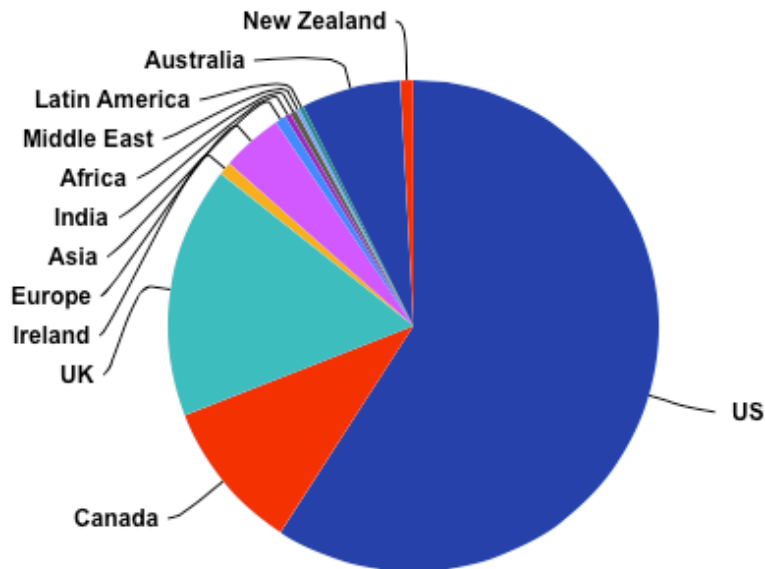
### HOW OLD ARE YOU?



#### Highlights:

- PEOPLE OF ALL AGES RESPONDED – solid distribution of age ranges; sufficient at all levels except under 20 to consider differences by age

### WHERE DO YOU LIVE?



**Highlights:**

- NUMBERS BY GEOGRAPHY: US – 1187, Canada – 201, UK – 334, Ireland – 17, Europe – 81, Asia – 14, India – 8, Africa – 8, Middle East – 5, Latin America – 6, Australia – 132, New Zealand – 17, Other – 18
- US PARTICIPATION DOMINATES – however UK, Canada, Australia and Europe also had good participation
- BROADENING SURVEY APPEAL beyond predominantly English speaking countries is proving difficult despite extensive appeal through social media

**Digging beyond the averages:**

- GENDER DIFFERENCES – amongst women, 61% are from the US and 14% from UK; amongst men, 47% US and 29% UK

**END NOTES:**

I am neither a statistician nor a survey specialist, however, I realize conclusions cannot be drawn from small numbers. As a result, I have avoided drawing inferences from small partitions of data and for the most part, comments in 'digging further' reflect gaps of 8-10 percentage points or more.

Survey publicity was almost totally through online means and used a number of historical fiction blogs and websites. These factors likely create biases towards (1) historical fiction readers, (2) readers who are accustomed to social media, and (3) participants who read more than the average individual. Consequently, results do not reflect the general public. Nevertheless, I believe the results are highly interesting and of significant value to authors, bloggers, members of the publishing industry and, of course, to readers.

Since the survey software reports to one decimal point, percentages are rounded up or down as follows: .5 to .9 rounded up, .1 to .4 rounded down.

*I am pleased to have others reference information from the survey and only ask that you include my name, M.K. Tod, and blog [www.awriterofhistory.com](http://www.awriterofhistory.com).*