



Minutes of the 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers

Meeting held on Monday 30 March 2009 at Blueprint Café, The Design Museum, Shad Thames, London SE1 2YD.

64 members attended the meeting (12 less than the previous year). 38 members sent apologies.

The Chair, Gilli Cliff, opened the meeting at 11am and read out the 2008 minutes. Rosemary Stark proposed and Elaine Hallgarten seconded them, and they were approved as an accurate record.

Clarissa Hyman delivered the Secretary's Report. The key points were:

- Membership stood at 379 (six more than the previous year).
- Lifetime honorary membership had been given to Katie Stewart.
- Debora Robertson and co-opted member Carol Wilson had stepped down from the committee. Both were thanked for their hard work.
- There were three vacancies on the committee. These were uncontested and the three candidates – Richard Ehrlich, Anne Benson and Joan Ransley – were duly elected.
- Lewis Esson was particularly thanked for his work on re-drafting the Guild's policy document.
- There had been 11 workshops over the year, a most successful Awards and Awards Party, an equally successful Lecture Dinner, regional events and trips, and a Scottish members' lunch.
- A new category in the Guild's Awards for excellence in food and travel writing had been introduced in memory of Kate Whiteman.
- CookIt! was now in its sixth year, and Writelt! in its second. It had received good coverage and there had been a total of 79 entries.
- Lewis Esson was thanked for his work on the Directory, available this year in both printed and CD format.
- Sarah Beattie had set up a Legal Aid scheme and also a tax helpline for members, and was thanked in her absence for all her hard work including a 'rate of pay' survey.
- The committee had established links with various groups and organisations including DEFRA, Gorkana, The Circle of Wine Writers and the Guild of Travel Writers.
- Carol Godsmark was thanked for all her work on Savour.
- A monthly E-newsletter and E-foodletter had been published, along with the international newsletter produced in co-operation with the Guild's Italian twin, the ASA. The Food Forum also continued to be a lively source of debate and information.

In Lewis's absence, Emma Sturgess announced that the Guild's new website would launch on 20 April and would include Savour (as a PDF), Directory details and the facility to handle financial transactions.

Rosa Pawsey delivered the Treasurer's Report and presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2008. She also thanked Jonathan Woods for his role as book-keeper and also thanked the auditors.

Overall, the Guild's finances are in a healthy, if wary, state, with income continuing to be generated by Directory sales, subscriptions and sponsorship. However, in the current financial climate, she noted that finances needed to be managed with due caution.

Total Guild income was £72,229, from General Income (membership fees and bank interest) and Operating Activities Income (sponsorship, directory sales, ticket sales and others).

Total Expenditure was £81,439 (operating activities and overheads).

The deficit of £9210 as compared to £386 in 2007 was due to an increase in activity, the costs of printing Savour and investment in the new website.

Net assets remain strong at £56,420 (with £18,085 in the current account, £7,500 in the 14-day account and £37,882 in the Benevolent Fund).

Sue Barnard, from the floor, asked about the benevolent fund. Rosa explained that two and a half per cent of the membership subscription went into the Benevolent Fund but this money was not totally ring-fenced. It was also possible travel and research bursaries up to the value of £1000 could be available from the Fund.

Sue Wolk asked whether the Benevolent Fund could assist members with subscription fees? It was generally agreed this was something the committee could consider.

In answer to a question from Josephine Bacon about postage, it was explained Savour would in future be only available online.

Hugo Dunn-Meynell asked about members receiving copies of the accounts (these were available by email on request). After discussion, it was agreed the previous year's minutes plus the accounts should be emailed to members who could print out copies to bring to the meeting.

The accounts were proposed as a true record by Sarah Jane Evans and seconded by Charles Campion, and voted as such.

Gilli Cliff delivered the Chair's Report. The key points were:

- A tribute to Kate Whiteman, tragically killed at the start of the year, and a huge loss to the Guild. She also thanked Jane Suthering for putting together the obit that appeared in The Times.
- The difficulties of sponsorship in the year ahead.
- Plans for the Anniversary Book in the Guild's 25th year, to be sponsored by Billingtons and published by Simon and Schuster. This would be published in the first part of 2010.
- She also gave individual thanks to each member of the committee, and also thanked Food and Wine from Spain, the Rhug Estate and Jeremy Lee for their help in organising the AGM lunch. She also thanked Jonathan Woods for all his consistent hard work, good humour and commitment.

Jane Suthering then presented the two departing committee members – Gilli Cliff and Rosa Pawsey – with a gift in appreciation of all the work they had done for the Guild.

AOB:

Sue Barnard asked about the online directory and whether printed copies would still be available to sell.

Sue Wolk said the issue was balancing the prospect of future employers contacting writers directly through the website vs the need to gain income from selling the directories. It was pointed out there was also a data protection issue.

John Whiting pointed out the membership list was currently available without a password on the Guild's website.

Jonathan Woods explained the website currently did not contain contact details apart from agreed email addresses.

The committee would discuss the issue further.

John Whiting suggested a free index programme might be downloaded for Savour.

Josephine Bacon asked about updating membership details online.

Katherine Blakemore asked about marketing and sales plans for the anniversary book. It was agreed Lewis would announce more details as soon as appropriate.

Rosemary Stark informed the meeting the City University course on food writing had been closed after 5 years because of cuts.

Hugo Dunn-Meynell asked about archive arrangements. Jane Suthering explained the Guild rented storage space but was looking for better facilities nearer to Jonathan.

Carol Bowen asked about criteria for potential sponsors. Gilli replied the Guild was looking for money, produce and venues, but that sponsors had to be acceptable to the Guild as a whole.

Rosemary Moon announced that Kate Whiteman, before her death, had arranged for the Awards Party to be held in Lincoln's Inn.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm.