



# Minutes of the 2011 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers

The meeting was held at the Copthorne Tara Hotel London Kensington, Scarsdale Place, Kensington, London W8 5SR, at 6.30pm on Tuesday 15 March 2011. There were 64 members present, 31 fewer than in 2010. There were 49 apologies.

Minutes of the last AGM were approved.

The Guild's Chair, Clarissa Hyman, offered the Guild's condolences to members affected by the Japanese earthquake.

## Report of the Secretary

Jane Hughes delivered a report detailing the activities of the Guild in the past year. The Guild recently welcomed its 400th member, and membership stood at 405, with 29 new members this year. The website is continually developing and last year attracted nearly 24,000 visitors. The new membership directory had been published. The Guild's book, *How The British Fell In Love With Food*, received an award for Best Culinary History Book in the World at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in March. The Guild's Vice-Chair, Lewis Esson, who edited the book, and its President, Jane Sutherland, who did the food styling, were congratulated and thanked for their work. The Guild also thanked its publishers Simon & Schuster, and Billingtons for sponsorship. The Guild had worked with Cow PR and Europcar to produce *The Roadside Gastroguide*, which was well received and nominated for a marketing award. The Guild's two competitions for young people, Cook It and Write It, had attracted more entrants than last year and prestigious judging panels had been appointed. The Guild had also run a successful Haiku competition in conjunction with the Japanese Embassy. Over the year, eight workshops had taken place and two were the subject of features in *The Independent* newspaper. Members were encouraged to approach the Committee with ideas for workshops. Two new members' lunches were held during the year and there were plans to continue this. The Annual Lecture Dinner was a success. Held at Café Spice Namaste, it featured a talk by Professor Richard Wrangham and food by Guild member Cyrus Todiwala. The 2010 Awards generated good media coverage and plans were in place for the 2011 Awards and Party. Thanks were expressed to Committee members who had helped to organize all the events and also to those who had worked to try to raise sponsorship. Members were reminded that there was a survey of rates of pay in process and asked to contribute their feedback.

## Report of the Treasurer

Anne Benson delivered a report outlining the financial position of the Guild. Income from Membership was good, reflecting the 400+ membership. However, self-financing activities did not make a profit during the year. The Guild is seeking ways to address this, including considering saving money by moving the Directory of Members onto CD and the website, looking for ways to use the website to generate funds, and ensuring that the Guild's funds are properly managed and where possible held in an account with a longer notice period for withdrawals which offers a good rate of interest. A number of members had benefitted from the Guild's Benevolent Fund during the year.

## Report of the Chair

Clarissa Hyman delivered an entertaining presentation explaining her thoughts and experiences of having been on Committee for four years. With over 400 members, the Guild is becoming a 'brand' and PR companies are increasingly interested in linking with the Guild. It is important to clarify the Guild's concerns and ambitions.

*Professional standards* – it was a matter of concern that many of the people contacting the Guild for advice on becoming food writers displayed poor standards of written English. Basic qualifications were required to ensure better standards of writing and to enable the Guild to develop into a large group of diverse voices.

*Ethical standards* – in the digital age, plagiarism and copyright issues were cause for concern.

*Pay and conditions* – what is the position of the Guild concerning food writers who are prepared to work for low or no wages as a work placement – is this exploitation?

*Tools for communication and mutual help* – the Guild should seek to encourage and inform members about effective use of the food forum, the website, e-newsletters, Twitter and other social networking innovations.

## CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE:

- ♣ Is print dead? How are web-based publishing, e-books and –zines, blogs and twitters impacting upon traditional publishing? How do on-line open access restaurant review sites affect the livelihood of professional reviewers? What is the future for multi-media publishing?

- ♣ The cult of celebrity – how does the public interest in celebrity chefs, whose books are often ghost written and produced with back-office support, impact upon the writing and publishing opportunities available to food writers who are not media celebrities?
- ♣ Ethics – should the Guild develop a position regarding topics such as animal welfare, fair trade, sustainability, the business of food, public health and nutrition, food and science, and food safety? How far are untrustworthy marketing messages affecting the public's food choices and impacting upon information about food that is delivered in schools?

In conclusion, the Chair stated that the Guild should strive to remain a group of professional writers whose work was factually accurate and trustworthy. She also recommended that as a profession, we have to expect the unexpected.

## **Election**

Committee members Colin Presdee, Sarah Beattie and Clarissa Hyman were standing down. Four candidates were standing for election. The winning candidates were Tracey Barker, Heather Grant and Jane Hughes (who was co-opted onto Council last year). The new Chair and Vice-Chair would be agreed at the next meeting of the Committee. The Chair thanked Colin Presdee and Sarah Beattie for their contribution to the work of the Guild. It was announced that Clarissa Hyman had agreed to become the new Vice-President of the Guild.

## **A Special Award**

Lewis Esson was presented with a special Guild Award in recognition of his work on the Guild's book, *How The British Fell In Love With Food*.

## **Resolutions**

Clarissa Hyman proposed a resolution to change the wording of the Guild's Articles of Association to relieve the Guild of the necessity of publishing a printed copy of the Directory of Members every year.

Current wording: '...to print and issue an annual list of members'.

Proposed new wording: 'to issue a list of members'.

Concerns were expressed by members about the possibility of publishing the Directory online leading to unwanted approaches and junk mail. Members were reassured that their personal contact details would not be made freely available online without their consent. The resolution was passed.

## **Other Business**

A member asked whether Workshops could be held on a variety of days of the week to give all members a good opportunity to attend. It was agreed that this was good practice.

A member suggested that the AGM should be held at lunchtime. It was stated that this arrangement had been considered but it is hard to find a time suits everybody.

A member asked why the Benevolent Fund was increasing in value every year and whether members were fully aware of its availability. It was agreed to use the next e-newsletter to explain procedures for applying for funding and loans, including the fact that applications are treated confidentially.

## **Closing words**

The Guild's President, Jane Sutherland, thanked the Committee and welcomed Clarissa Hyman to her new role as Vice-President. She also thanked British Tourism Week and Select Lincolnshire for their support.