



# Minutes of the 2014 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers

The meeting was held at wallacespace, 18 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DP, at 6.30pm on Thursday 10 April 2014. There were 63 members present, 15 more than in 2013. There were 31 apologies.

## ***Minutes of the last meeting***

The minutes of the last AGM were approved.

## ***Welcome by the President***

Xanthe Clay welcomed members, thanked the committee for their work and introduced the issues to be discussed.

## ***Report by the Secretary***

Jane Hughes reported a successful year for the Guild, with increases in the number of members, the number of members attending events, the number of people 'following' the Guild on Twitter and the number of visitors to the website. On behalf of the committee, she acknowledged the work done by Jane Sutherland, Jane Milton, Signe Johansen and Andrew Webb, who had stood down during the year. She also thanked Carol Wilson, Silvija Davidson and Richard Ehrlich for their committee service. Six places were available on the committee and six people had been proposed and seconded, so no election was necessary. The six new committee members were Angela Clutton, Beverley Glock, Orlando Murrin, Christine Smallwood, Christopher Trotter and Laura Washburn.

## ***Report by the Treasurer***

Jane Gifford reported a busy year of events and thanked the sponsorship team for their work in attracting more than £32k of funding for Guild activities. She noted that the Guild was currently showing a small profit from events but said that every effort was being made to keep ticket prices low, with the intention of breaking even on workshops and events. She appealed for members with suggestions for potential sponsors to bring these to the attention of the committee.

## ***Chair's Address***

Richard Ehrlich acknowledged that he was stepping down as chair and thanked those who had served alongside him for their creativity and enthusiasm. He gave an overview of current issues affecting the Guild including

- ☛ whether the Guild's focus should be outward or inward – if outward, we will need to find serious money from sponsorship
- ☛ what the Guild's position on public food policies (if any) should be, and
- ☛ how the term 'professionalism' might best be interpreted in terms of membership applications.

## ***Discussion: Should membership be available to people who are not paid for writing about food? Introduced and chaired by Silvija Davidson***

Silvija Davidson: When the Guild was set up, the term 'Professionalism' was considered to mean both having a professional attitude to your work and getting paid for your work. Is that how members here understand it?

Susan Volk: The question of whether admitting unpaid writers would adversely affect the employment prospects of Guild members is key. I have felt that my living is being taken away by people who fancy themselves as food writers, without any training. However, it would be great to broaden our scope whilst including some kind of quality control – the ideas for 'bridging' arrangements seem sensible. The Guild should be forging links with unpaid bloggers. Perhaps an associated membership scheme should be considered – it would make money for the Guild. Perhaps it could be piloted for a year?

Sudi Piggot: Would people outside the Guild appreciate the difference between 'real' members and associate members? The best bloggers do get paid for their work.

Kaori O'Connor: Endorsing the 'cons' position – we should stay as we are. Bridging measures are no use, it's just 'letting the barbarians in'.

Silvija Davidson: As a judge on this year's Guild awards for blogs, some of the work published online is outstanding. Bloggers call the Guild old fashioned and outdated.

Josephine Bacon: The Society of Editors and Proofreaders and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting both have associate membership schemes and it is easy to tell members of different types apart. However what distinguishes bloggers from paid professional food writers is that bloggers write what they want to write and are not subject to the discipline and direction imposed by editors and publishers. People who take part in Am Dram can't be members of Equity!

Silvija Davidson: Surely the Guild should be encouraging 'by any means' unpaid food writers...

James McIntosh: I have 28,000 followers on my blog. These days the people getting book contracts are the people who have online presence. Blogging is an important aspect of earning an income. Don't let just any bloggers join the Guild – ask them to prove that they have a following.

Thane Prince: We are professional food writers who are paid for our work. Blogging is not the same thing. They are in essence amateurs.

Carol Wilson: I am against admitting unpaid writers to the Guild. We are the guild of professional food writers.

People who write for national magazines for free are doing others out of work.

Philip Dundas: I've sold my book via Amazon and in my restaurant but I hadn't sold any copies when I joined the Guild, although I was a published author. The nature of professionalism has changed. Just because bloggers don't choose to be full-time journalists doesn't mean they should be excluded from membership.

Judy Jackson: I am a barbarian! I don't think people are unprofessional because they don't get paid. Bloggers will get their work seen. Online publishing is affecting us all, whether we like it or not.

Sally Cox: Do bloggers and unpaid food writers want to join the Guild anyway? What's in it for them?

Philip Dundas: We might be missing some amazing talent.

Silvija Davidson: Admitting good bloggers would strengthen our skillbase but somebody has to make a judgment about the quality of writing is difficult.

John Whiting: Consider the context in which we operate: 'Welcome to a dying profession!' We have to invent the way we get heard, things are not the way they used to be. Nobody has mentioned literary excellence – we should not be judging quality by number of 'hits'. The book I submitted when I became a member was self-published – nobody asked me how many copies I had sold, but it was judged on quality of the writing.

Jenny Linford: How is the committee planning to take this matter forward? I would like to see a referendum.

Silvija: There will be certainly be voting amongst all members in the coming months.

A show of hands showed a 2:1 vote against admitting unpaid writers to the Guild.

Rosemary Moon: I think we should acknowledge that if we were starting out today, we would not be able to make a living as food writers. How many of us are making a living wage purely from food writing? If we all know the answer to that, please bear it in mind as the discussion goes forward.

## **AOB**

Richard Ehrlich asked new committee members to stand up and briefly introduce themselves.

Susan Wolk said that payments from the Guild's benevolent fund are loans. With £40k in the bank account, payments should be gifts, and should be generous enough to make a real difference. Richard Ehrlich responded that there is no rule that payments from the benevolent fund have to be repaid – people pay the money back voluntarily if they can. He also said that £40K could disappear quickly if the benevolent fund was not carefully managed. Glynn Christian said that perhaps some rules should be drawn up so that people could understand what sort of application for a payment from the fund would be likely to be considered favourably. Richard Ehrlich suggested that Glynn Christian take this matter up with a committee member after the meeting.

## **Close**

Outgoing Chair Richard Ehrlich welcomed Xanthe Clay as the Guild's new president and presented Jane Sutherland with an engraved vase to mark her terms as President and Vice President. He presented gifts to Carol Wilson and Silvija Davidson in recognition of their service, and was himself the recipient of a gift presented by Clarissa Hyman. The evening continued with a sherry tasting tutored by Sarah Jane Evans, followed by canapés, and doors were opened to paying guests.