



Minutes of the 2020 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers

At 6pm on 4 November 2020 via Zoom

President's welcome – Orlando Murrin

Orlando welcomed the other 60 members who had joined the first virtual AGM for the Guild of Food Writers in what has been a troubling year due to the COVID pandemic.

Minutes of the 2019 AGM

The minutes of the 2019 were approved.

Secretary's report – Sam Bilton

Sam Bilton reported that the Guild's membership has increased to 597 up from 547 in 2019.

The workshops continue to be one of the key draws to becoming a member with 260 people attending at least one of the physical or virtual events held in the last 18 months (which is substantially higher than in previous years). It is gratifying that workshops attendances continue to be strong and we are seeing different members engaging.

One of the casualties of the COVID pandemic was the Guild's annual awards party. The committee successfully produced an online presentation to recognise the winners of each category. Due to the uncertainty ahead the 2021 awards will follow a similar format and will be announced on 23rd June 2021. Following feedback from the judging panel the Drinks category will be divided in two with awards for Drinks Writer (i.e. feature based work in the press) and Drinks Book. There will also be a new category for Self Published Work. Details for these new categories will be available on the Guild's website prior to the Call for Entries being released next month.

The Guild continues to have a positive presence across the major social media platforms. There are now 262 members of our Facebook group where there are so many interesting and convivial conversations everyday. The Guild has over 28k followers on Twitter and over 4750 followers on Instagram.

Treasurer's report and presentation of the accounts – Samuel Goldsmith

This year, we have ended with a financial surplus of just over £4,000. This was mainly thanks to a combination of increased sponsorship income of £4,500 for the awards, savings of just under £3,000 on the awards and the completion of the website.

The sponsorship team did a fantastic job of raising funds for the 2019 awards and have formed excellent relationships with sponsors that we hope will continue to support the awards as we enter a challenging time for events.

Ticket sales for events and workshops were significantly up on 2018. Regional events saw an increase in ticket sales of over £1000 and workshops over £2000. That said, workshops and events still ran at a loss due to our investment of Guild Membership Fees in order to run events at an affordable price for members.

Income from membership was slightly down on 2018, though we have seen membership numbers increase this year, which should leave us in a better position in 2021. The Guild made the right decision to refund 50% of membership fees to those members who accepted. However, overhead expenditure and the majority of operating costs will remain. We will manage to save on workshops and events due to there being little or no need for event space hire. We had aimed to implement Direct Debit collection last year, this is still a work in progress but is a priority for the coming year.

Chair's report – Charlotte Pike

Charlotte Pike thanked the previous Chair, Genevieve Taylor, for her work on the committee and also the committee members and special officers who are standing down from the committee. She also thanked the existing committee as well as Jonathan Woods, Orlando Murrin and Felicity Cloake for their support.

The Guild of Food Writer's Young Food Writer year of the competition was a tremendous success in 2020. We partnered with The Week Junior magazine again this year, and it was our first without a commercial sponsor in a few years. We were delighted with number of entries and quality of material submitted and we are currently working on our plans for next year.

The Guild launched our 2020 pay survey, which will be our first review of this important document in four years. It also launched a new mentorship scheme last Friday, which we hope will offer the opportunity to learn and share knowledge with our fellow professionals. That is now open for registration from those who may wish to mentor or become a mentee. In the new year, members will receive a Chair's survey, which will hopefully provide an opportunity to have your say about what you would like to see from the Guild in the future. In addition to our usual committee roles, the committee has decided to appoint a full committee member to look at the issue of diversity, with immediate effect, to ensure that everything we do represents all of our members.

Charlotte Pike concluded her report by inviting members to come forward if they would like to help with the work or projects the Guild is working on.

Resolutions

Both resolutions were passed with 98% of attendees voting in favour.

Clarissa Hyman (CH) asked that if voting were to be conducted by an e-poll in the future that an option to abstain from the vote be included.

Results of committee election

As a result of the approval of the resolutions the Guild of Food Writers committee will be increased from 12 to 15 participants. CH asked whether there would still be a role for special officers and CP confirmed that special officers will still be welcomed. Former special officers Paul Bellchambers, Sally Brown and Gavin Wren have become full committee members. Ruth Watson, who will be taking on the role of Secretary from Sam Bilton, and Laura Hadland, who will be managing the Guild's social media strategy, will also be joining the committee as full members.

Any other business

Several members (e.g. Christine McFadden, Rosemary Moon and Geoff Tansey) praised the programme of online events and expressed thanks to the committee for organising them.

Clare Gordon-Smith asked if the 50% membership discount would continue into 2021. CP explained that no decision had been made regarding this as it will depend on the situation with the pandemic and the Guild's finances.

Kristen Frederickson thanked all the members who use the forum for their contributions.

Gavin Wren encouraged members to come forward if they are interested in either being a mentor or a mentee. The scheme will also be open to one person outside of the Guild.

Laura Hadland will speak to Jenny Linford about the Guild's Twitter strategy and how the Guild can help give members a voice. In particular, it was noted by several members that the Guild should be expressing a view on certain food policy issues as it had done in the past. Gavin Wren has been tasked with looking at the Guild's response to food policy issues and will be in touch with specific members shortly to see what our organisation can do in the future to provide support in certain areas.