



Minutes for the Guild of Food Writers' AGM

6:30 pm on Monday, 7 October 2024 at The Guild of Fine Food, London and online via Zoom.

Notice of the AGM was circulated by email, on the Guild's newsletter and via the Facebook forum. 86 members attended: 41 in-person and 45 online.

Brief notes of the President's, Chair's and Treasurer's reports as well as the incoming and outgoing Presidents' speeches follow. Full transcripts can be found at the bottom of this document.

2023 AGM minutes

It was announced that the President Orlando Murrin was running slightly late. In order to remain on schedule, the Chair, Sam Goldsmith, decided to skip to approving last year's AGM minutes. Sam asked if any members had any queries, questions or concerns. There were none, and the minutes were agreed.

Treasurer's report and presentation of accounts

Vice-Chair, Julie Friend, reported that the Guild finished the year with a healthy profit of £8,182, an improvement on the small loss it made the year before. Julie added that the Guild continued to save money by hosting events on Zoom as opposed to in-person. Further money was saved thanks to ceasing the automatic issuing of plastic press cards in favour of digital ones.

The Guild's financial Administrator, Nicki Taylor, had to suddenly leave her post due to family reasons. However, the Guild soon employed chartered accountants, Association Management Services. Jo Maguire and Gill Hinton now oversee the Guild's finances.

Thanks to the diligent work of special officer Heather Brown – and several committee members – the website has been moved onto a modern service which should be cheaper to run. This move should also avoid expensive updates being sprung on the Guild in the future.

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Julie reported that there is a healthy cash and asset balance of just over £52,000. Keeping such a buoyant reserve is important for future plans or emergencies. She also shared that membership continues to grow.

President's welcome

President Orlando Murrin offered his sincerest apologies for being late and promptly welcomed everyone to what is a very important event for the Guild. He thanked Harry Hook for providing the refreshments and highlighted that it was after much demand that the Guild decided to have the AGM in-person once again. He finished by saying it was wonderful to see so many members in attendance both in-person and online.

The Chair's report

Sam Goldsmith, the Chair, started by welcoming everyone to the AGM. He thanked the committee, special officers, the Guild's administrator Kim Furnell and the finance administrators Jo Maguire and Gill Hinton for their support.

Sam shared that the Guild has run 19 events during the year with three more in the pipeline and several others to be announced. Past events were attended by 213 members. 68 are signed up for upcoming events. He pointed out that hot topics, including ultra-high processed foods and AI, have been covered by Guild events. He thanked Julie Friend, Angela Zaher, Adele Conn, Judy Bastyra and Marie Cheong-Thong for their work in organising these wonderful events.

Further congratulations were offered to Felicity Cloake for her work on the Futures Fund; Angela Zaher for overseeing the Mentorship Scheme; Joy Skipper for organising the Discounts Scheme; Jacob Smith for the newsletter; Anisha Mistry, Claire Ruston and Sam Wilson for their work on social media; Fliss Freeborn, the new Early Careers Members committee member; and the diversity team of Mallika Basu, Aaron Vallance, Chetna Makan, Dina Maki and Priya Mani.

Sam noted how successful this year's Awards were. He thanked Julie Friend for taking the lead; Kim Furnell for her support; Jan Fullwood, Gilli Cliff and Eve Tudor for their work as judging co-ordinators. He also mentioned that changes have been made to how the judging process will work for the 2025 Awards. Sam went on to thank Helen Graves and Silvana Franco for their work in acquiring sponsorship for the Awards.

Sam thanked Ren Behan for joining the Guild's committee to oversee professional issues and Heather Brown for the work she has put into updating the website.

He shared that the Guild consists of 577 paid members with 4 new members pending. He gave heartfelt thanks to Kathy Slack for overseeing this area as well as Kim Furnell for her support.

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There were no new committee members to vote in. Sam thanked outgoing committee member Laura Hadland for her four years of service. He then announced that Ruth Watson was stepping up from secretary to President and that Chetna Makan will be the new Vice-President before adding that the new constitution and rule book, created as the Guild proceeds to register as a 'company limited by guarantee', are ready and would be voted on later in the AGM.

Ruth Watson – Incoming President's speech

Ruth Watson started by saying that becoming the Guild's new President was a real honour. She went on to say that with an excellent Chair and Vice-Chair in the form of Sam Goldsmith and Julie Friend, her job would be rather simple. However, she vowed to advise on issues and suggest initiatives where appropriate.

Ruth then celebrated the excellent Felicity Cloake for her time as the Guild's Vice-President. She then turned her attention to Orlando Murrin, listing the many things he instigated while President. These include but are not limited to starting the Mentorship Scheme; establishing the regional networks; suggesting the recipe testing network; helping to establish the Diversity Team; running the newsletter; and bringing Delia Smith, the Guild's patron, on board.

With Orlando blushing, Ruth finished by stating her hope that Orlando would continue to support the Guild 'from the bleachers' as an active member.

Orlando Murrin - Outgoing President's speech

Orlando said he was touched by Ruth's words and ceremonially handed his President's badge over to her. He also pointed out that his list of achievements was only made possible by the diligent work of those he delegated the tasks to. He went on to say it was the prospect of working with Felicity Cloake that sold him on the idea of becoming President (something he wasn't initially keen on) and that he learned so much from working alongside her.

Sam Goldsmith – Award

Sam Goldsmith then took centre stage, announcing that The Guild had a new award for "Outstanding Contribution to the Industry". He went on to add that, while it will usually be handed out at the annual Awards ceremony, this inaugural edition of the award would be handed out imminently.

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Sam listed the achievements of the recipient. These include but are not limited to reaching the semi-finals of MasterChef; commissioning and furthering the careers of numerous food writers; being editor of both BBC Good Food and Women & Home; founding Olive Magazine; working as recipe columnist for the Daily Express; and writing seven cookbooks and a novel. The award was duly presented to Orlando Murrin amid much applause.

Ruth Watson then invited Felicity Cloake, outgoing Vice-President, and Chetna Makan, incoming Vice-President, up to the 'stage'. Ruth spoke about Felicity's exemplary stint as VP and said that she had no doubt Chetna would be a just as impactful VP as Felicity had been. There was another round of applause.

Resolutions

There was one resolution proposed by Sam Goldsmith and seconded by Julie Friend: to "adopt Articles of Association and a new rule book to allow finalisation of The Guild of Food Writers to become a company limited by guarantee."

Susan Wolk enquired as to what the advantages there were in becoming a company limited by guarantee. Sam Goldsmith explained that, in its current form, the Guild cannot operate efficiently. For example, its current state means the Guild cannot open a bank account. Ruth Watson added that if the Guild were to become a company limited by guarantee, the committee members would no longer be liable for any debts the Guild may have (in excess of £1). Sam Goldsmith reassured those in attendance that there would be no changes in the way the Guild operates.

The resolution was then voted on in-person via a raising of hands. While the online poll was loading, Kim Furnell reminded members that details of the resolution, including the documents, had been emailed to them on Monday, 30 September.

While the poll continued to load, Jayne Cross asked if the Guild, in its new form, would have to be VAT-registered. Sam Goldsmith said it would not (as Guild membership does not contribute to reaching the VAT Threshold), but that the Guild would have to pay corporation tax on profit. However, as the Guild is not-for-profit, this is not an issue.

Irina Janakievskia then asked who wrote the constitution. Both Sam Goldsmith and Ruth Watson reassured her that it was put together by lawyers.

There was general chatter, featuring reminiscences of AGMs past, while all waited for the online vote to start operating properly. Votes were cast as soon as it was live. The resolution was passed.

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Any other business (AOB)

Geoff Tansey wanted to know how the stipulation that members must be 'paid to write' in order to qualify for Guild membership affected those members who are retired. He also pointed out that the Society of Authors have a reduced membership fee for over-65s who are retired. He urged the Guild to rethink its stance on these matters. Sam Goldsmith responded by saying the Guild does have reduced membership for over 75's (who pay 50% while members over 80 get their membership for free). He also said Geoff could raise a resolution on the matter to be discussed at the next AGM.

Ruth Watson added that the last time this was discussed there were concerns regarding how many members were over the age of 65 and how reducing their membership fees would impact the Guild's finances. Felicity Cloake pointed out that the potential loss of expertise the Guild could face by not lowering fees for these members was also a concern. Sam Goldsmith added that they would discuss the issue of reducing fees at a committee level in the near future.

Geoff Tansey suggested that older members could prove highly beneficial to the Guild's Mentorship Scheme. Orlando Murrin was quick to say that Angela Zaher, the committee member for Mentorship, is always on the lookout for potential mentors and reiterated the key role that experienced members play in the scheme. Ruth Watson highlighted that a call out for mentors is often included in the newsletter.

Geoff Tansey said he would consider putting himself forward as a mentor but for the fact that the Guild (and its members) have generally moved away from his area of expertise – food policy – in recent years. He conceded that the Guild held recently held an event on ultra-high processed foods but urged the Guild to focus more of its efforts on reflecting the issues around food policy, pertinent as they are given the impact both poverty and climate change are having on diets.

Susan Wolk wanted to make sure that she had understood Geoff Tansey's initial concerns about membership fees for those over 65 and whether he was eligible to remain in the Guild given that he was retired and thus not being paid for work. Julie Friend reassured all in attendance that if they have been paid in the past, and then subsequently retired, they are still eligible to be a Guild member.

Susan Wolk also added that she was a member of another Guild and that they offer a separate section of membership for those over a certain age, the involvement in which does not impact their general membership. Felicity Cloake suggested that having such a section might be a nice flipside to Fliss Freeborn's work as Early Careers Members committee member.

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Clare Gordon-Smith shared that she has been a mentor for the Guild's Mentorship Scheme twice and that she heartily enjoyed it both times. She recommended that older members, who have so much experience to offer, sign up with Angela Zaher. Clare Gordon-Smith also mentioned that her sister has been involved in something known as reverse mentoring wherein mentors learn things from mentees. Orlando Murrin suggested such exchanges of knowledge were possible and encouraged older members to sign up for the Mentorship Scheme.

Sam Goldsmith announced that an unnamed member asked [via the chat] how to access the Mentorship Scheme as a new member. He said emailing Angela Zaher was the way to go [her email can be found in the newsletter].

The AGM concluded after c.47 minutes with Sam Goldsmith thanking everyone for their attendance.

President, Treasurer and Chair's reports and incoming and outgoing Presidents' speeches follow:

Orlando Murrin – President

Good afternoon and welcome everybody to this important festival in the Guild's calendar. It used to be a real highlight in the Guild's calendar and thanks to Harry [Hook] it is again now. Look at this gorgeous spread! Thank you all so much for coming.

We stopped having an in-person AGM and then people said they missed it a lot, so it's very nice to see a big crowd here, but that doesn't mean you little people in the distance [on the computer screen] are not welcome because it is also wonderful to see you too and we'd like to give you a round of applause for joining us and missing out on the food!

Julie Friend – Vice-chair and Treasurer

Good evening everybody. This is the financial report for the year ending December 2023.

At the end of 2023, our accounts showed that we had made a healthy profit of £8.182 as opposed to a small loss in 2022.

Our awards, although bringing in less sponsorship money than in 2022, did very well on ticket sales and this helped boost the balance sheet.

By having more events on Zoom, which proved so popular during the COVID months, we saved some money in this area although we do appreciate the appeal of ensuring there is a good mix of in-person activities too.

We changed from automatically issuing a plastic press card to all members, to a digital version and then charging a small fee for anybody desiring a physical card, thus saving us money overall.

Our Financial Administrator, Nicki Taylor, had to leave quite suddenly for family and personal reasons, but we were recommended chartered accountants, Association Management Services, who were and still are, also employed by the Garden Media Guild. Luckily, they had some space for new clients and took us on board with Jo and Gill now overseeing the finances. Despite their costs being very slightly higher than we were paying before, we feel their level of expertise is invaluable and was counteracted by us savings in other areas.

Expenditure we thought that we would spend on the website and on legal fees, has now been carried over to this year.

We were aware the website needed a complete overhaul, and we needed to save money from last year to this as the quote for the website was more than expected. Primarily this was required to ensure the security of the website but also to give us a smarter and slicker profile. Heather Brown, along with a number of the committee, has been working on moving it to a more modern service which should make it cheaper to run year-to-year and not leave us with unexpected expensive updates

We continue to have a healthy cash and asset balance of just over £52,000 but appreciate how important it is to keep such a buoyant reserve for any future plans or emergencies.

Looking forward for 2024, membership continues to grow well. We tend to see a large number of applications after the awards, particularly if there has been a buzz about our guestlist, as in the last few years. We are constantly recruiting and spreading the word, aided by the committee running events for non-members with an “Ask us anything or Let’s tell you all about the Guild” theme. By explaining clearly that we welcome a diverse mix of all demographics in the food writing world, as long as they are paid, along with the change in becoming a limited company, we are creating a stronger, perhaps more inviting, professional organisation, still mostly carried by volunteers and only spending out on one paid employee.

Not attached to this report but certainly affecting finances, I would like to say a huge thank you to a recently joined member, Harry Hook (here with us tonight), who through her clients, has provided pretty much all of the refreshments for this event. Harry we are most grateful.

Sam Goldsmith – Chair

Hello and Welcome to the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers. We’ve had a productive year this year with a whole host of events, and we’ve been working on some big projects, too.

As I finish my second year as chair, I’ve been grateful for the support of our fantastic committee, special officers and our administrator, Kim, as well as our finance Administrators Jo & Gill. All of the committee members and special officers give up their time on a voluntary basis and although we are nearly 600 strong as a Guild it can be

challenging to find people with time and effort to give so we are incredibly lucky to have such a hard-working and dedicated committee. I would love to give you a long speech outlining why they are each so fantastic, but I know you'll all appreciate a quick speech so just take my word for it...

This year we've run 19 events so far with a further 3 in the pipeline and no doubt more to be announced. The past events have been attended by 213 of our members and we have a further 68 signed up for the future events. I'm sure you will agree that the Guild hosts a great mix of professional workshops as well as trips, socials and opportunities for members to expand their knowledge. We've also ensured that topics that are currently affecting the industry have been covered such as Ultra High Processed Foods and AI. As promised last year, we have brought the AGM back to an in person event and it's great to see so many of you here today. A huge thank you to Julie Friend who oversees the fantastic events team which consists of Angela Zaher, Adele Conn, who has hosted some fabulous Scottish events, Judy Bastyra, and Marie Cheong-Thong.

Our other initiatives such as the Futures Fund, faultlessly overseen by our outgoing VP Felicity Cloake and the Mentorship Scheme, flawlessly overseen by Angela Zaher have continued to flourish and support members. Our discounts scheme has continued to flourish under the watchful eye of Joy Skipper. You'll no doubt enjoy the newsletter pinging you're your inbox every first of the month – a big thank you to Jacob Smith who ensures they are both informative and a pleasurable read. Our social media continues to grow, a huge thanks to the team of Anisha Mistry, Claire Ruston and Sam Wilson. We introduced a Early Careers Members Committee position last year which has seen Fliss Freeborn host events for those who are new to the Guild – more will be coming so keep an eye out for those.

Thanks to the Diversity team Aaron Vallance, Chetna Makan, Dina Maki and Priya Mani diligently led by Mallika Basu. There have been some fantastic events that have shone a spotlight on a variety of cultures as well as some insightful pieces in the newsletter and much much more. It's also important to note that we are seeing a strong number of diverse members joining the Guild and this is also down to their hard work.

This year the Awards returned to June and what an Awards it was! A huge thank you to Julie for taking on the reigns this year and to Kim for her support here. This is also the time to say a big big thank you to Jan Fullwood, Gilli Cliff and Eve Tudor for their work coordinating this years' judging. Looking to the 2025 Awards, we've made some significant tweaks to the way the judging works and also the communication that judges receive so that we can ensure that they are refreshed and working in the best way possible. Don't worry, all judges will still be from the membership! We also bagged a great number of sponsors this year with some big brand names joining us – it also looks like many of them will continue to sponsor. I need to thank Helen Graves and Silvana Franco for their help in bagging the cash for us.

Ren Behan joined the committee this year to oversee professional issues and I know she has some BIG plans ahead including some new surveys to keep our information up to

date. She's also been a big help personally when overseeing some confidential matters. Thanks to her legal prowess.

This brings me to Heather Brown who has put in days and days of work in the last few months updating the website. You can't really see the fruits of her labour at the moment because it's going to launch this week. You won't see any drastic changes to the look but it will feel much better and, more importantly, makes the website more secure. More information will follow by email.

The Guild consists of 577 paid members with a further 4 members pending due to receive committee approval or just having had it and awaiting payment. This is up from 564 this time last year. Fifty members did not renew their membership from 2023. It's heartening to see how many re-joining members we have had in recent months. A big thank you to Kathy Slack for overseeing joining members and Kim for her support.

It's a quieter year for the committee this year with no new recruits to vote in and one person to say goodbye to. Laura Hadland has done a fantastic job on the committee over the past few years having worked on social media, the website and more recently PR. A huge thank you to you Laura. We also see Ruth Watson, who has been our spectacular secretary, stepping up to the position of President. And I can announce today that Chetna Makan will step up to Vice President.

Now, last year we had confirmation from the membership that we could proceed to register as a company limited by guarantee. I'd hoped to have sent the new constitution and Rule Book to you earlier this year, but it took much longer than expected. However, it is now ready, and we will look to ratify that later this evening. As I'm sure those of you that have read it have noticed, it is more of a tidying up than a significant rewriting. This will, however, allow us to operate more professionally.

Finally, to all of our incredible community, thank you for getting involved in all the Guild does and thank you to for your support and friendship over this past year.

Ruth Watson – Incoming President's speech

I try not to use clichés, especially 'delicious' — such a lazy adjective — but there's no avoiding the fact that being the Guild's new president really is an honour. I am truly grateful for being considered to be up to the role and would like to thank you all for having faith in my abilities. I am also aware that a good president is more than just a decorous figurehead: with the position comes responsibilities.

We have an excellent chair and vice chair in Sam Goldsmith and Julie Friend, as well as an effective and hardworking committee and administrator so, frankly, the wisest thing to do is let them get on with it. But I don't intend to sit back and do nothing other than smile on key occasions. I want to continue helping the committee, to advise if asked and perhaps suggest the occasional initiative. What I don't want to do is interfere.

I have the best of role models in this regard. Not only has Felicity Cloake been the most lively, intelligent and philanthropic of vice presidents, but Orlando Murrin has exemplified what a good President should be. Always involved, always egalitarian, always kind and encouraging, always conscious that the Guild needs to stay in the vanguard, not only in terms of technology but culturally, too.

During the last four years, while I have been Secretary and Orlando President, he has been responsible for instigating and/or doing so many things that have enriched the Guild and enhanced its purpose and smooth-running. There has been so much progress but some of the important achievements Orlando has been a vital part of are:

1. starting up the Mentorship scheme that Angela Zaher now manages so competently
2. establishing the regional networks, each with its own coordinator, and supporting the marvellous Joy Skipper who oversees it
3. suggesting the recipe testing scheme
4. encouraging the establishment of a better system to ensure subscriptions are paid on time
5. on the same subject, insisting we put the subs up a little — I can hear him adding, yes, after 12 years of stagnation — not just to bring them in line with inflation and other guilds and associations, but so we could stay solvent
6. being an active initiator of, first, the Diversity survey and, subsequently, the establishment of our lively Diversity team
7. establishing and writing the guidelines for the Facebook forum
8. running the newsletter, professionalising it and insisting it stayed pertinent and potent
9. more recently, leading a small team to push ahead with the necessary changes to the construction of our website so that in future it will run much more efficiently and cost-effectively. (And we must all thank Heather Brown for her vital and professional work on bringing everything to fruition).
10. and, finally, bringing Delia Smith, our illustrious patron, on board

In a nutshell, Orlando has enthusiastically and consistently supported, cheered, guided, urged, chided and, yes — occasionally — employed the occasional threat to ensure the Guild runs as effectively as possible for all its members. His boundless energy has fired and driven the Guild's engine for four years.

To use an American baseball expression he might appreciate, as he leaves the Diamond we can but hope he will continue to inspire us from the bleachers.

Orlando Murrin – Outgoing President's speech

I'm not the sort of person to ever get touched, but I'm really touched. So, thank you, Ruth. I give you my badge. Although that is a formidable list of things, I think I should declare, for the sake of truth and accuracy, that practically everything on that list was

actually delegated to someone else. I did push for it but someone else ended up doing the work in, I think, every single case.

When I was asked to become President five years ago, Angela was there, I think – you don't mind me saying – that I didn't want to be President. In fact, we gave over lists of people who we thought should have been Presidents instead of us. This wasn't because I didn't want the job but because I thought someone more lustrous should have it. Then the idea was put in front of me that I would be partnered with Felicity. I was so excited because she provided, as far as I was concerned, the lustre and the figurehead-value, and I would be allowed to toddle along and do the things I like doing which is organising and delegating.

Apart from being so amazed at what fun it turned out to be – 10 times, 100 times better than I'd anticipated – I made wonderful friends and have loved getting to know the Guild members, The committee has gone from strength-to-strength – Angela it was wonderful in your day, but it is even more 'wonderfuller' now. There are more of them, as well which might have something to do with it. We leave The Guild in a fantastic state.

One of the real pleasures of it has been getting to know my Vice-President who, unbeknownst to anyone, had to put up with me often throwing toys out of prams, shrieking and generally being hysterical. She had to talk me down, into the sane, rational person that Ruth has presented me as having been. Felicity, every conversation, every email exchange I've had with you has been a pleasure, a delight, illuminating, and I've learnt so much from you. So, thank you and thank you everyone.