



Minutes for the Guild of Food Writers' AGM
6.00 pm on Wednesday, 8 November 2023 (Zoom)

Notice of the AGM was circulated by email as well as flagged up in the Newsletter and on the Facebook Forum. 48 members attended.

Brief notes of the President's, Chair's and Treasurer's reports follow. Full transcripts can be found at the foot of this document.

President's welcome

Orlando Murrin welcomed all the attending members and thanked the Committee, Special Officers and Administrator for their work this year. In particular, he lauded Vice-President, Felicity Cloake, for her unhesitating wisdom and total honesty; Sam Goldsmith, our Chair, for energising the Committee and the membership as a whole; Julie Friend, Vice-Chair, for her seemingly invisible but massive contribution; and Ruth Watson, Secretary, for not being invisible but providing enormous professionalism and integrity.

2022 AGM Minutes

Sam Goldsmith, Chair, asked if we could agree on last year's AGM minutes, or were there any questions? There being none, the minutes were agreed.

Treasurer's report and presentation of accounts

Vice-Chair, Julie Friend, reported that the GFW had finished the year with a deficit of some £3,600 because of exceptional but necessary expenditure on such matters as recruiting a new Administrator, Kim Furnell; a new computer; unbudgeted website improvements; and a VAT status inquiry that had required legal advice. She went on to say that the 25th Anniversary Awards in September 2023 had been a glittering success, and had just broken even. Going forward the intention was to make a small profit.

Membership has grown and subscriptions are back up to full rate (currently £92 per annum). It was good to see an influx of new post-Award applications, including a number of persons who were re-joining.

There is a healthy cash and asset balance of some £46,00 but the Committee is continually looking at how income can be increased and where expenditure can be reduced.

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The Chair's report

Sam Goldsmith thanked the Committee, Special Officers and Administrator for their support. He explained that, following the resignation of Nicki Taylor, the accounts were now being managed by Association Management & Services.

He went on to report that there had been 21 GFW events in the last year and that he particularly wanted to see more face-to-face and regional events in the coming year, as well as an in-person AGM in 2024 (albeit with optional online attendance). He specifically congratulated Julie Friend and the events team; Angela Zaher and Felicity Cloake for managing the mentorship and Futures Fund schemes so impeccably; Joy Skipper for her tireless work on discounts; Jacob Smith for the informative and enjoyable newsletters; Anisha Mistry for bringing life to the Instagram platform; Laura Hadland for sending out regular press releases; and Heather Brown for keeping a watchful eye on the website.

The Guild is seeing an increasing number of members with 564 paid-up members and 12 new members pending. He gave a big thank you to Kathy Slack for overseeing this area and Kim Furnell for her support. Thanks to Mallika Basu and the team we are also seeing a burgeoning diversity in the membership. Sam Goldsmith also paid tribute to Lorna Wing, no longer a committee member, for overseeing the amazing Awards ceremony, and to Jan Fullwood and the judging team for ensuring a smooth and rigorous process.

The membership having given its approval, the Guild is now reaching the end stage of transformation into a 'company limited by guarantee'. Further information concerning the Articles of Association, and an accompanying rule book, will be circulated in early 2024.

Finally, with Artificial Intelligence gaining traction, there is a need to ensure members are safeguarded and an event will soon be held to ensure the GFW's needs, and the challenges, are being addressed.

Resolutions

There was one resolution, proposed by Sam Goldsmith and seconded by Julie Friend, to reduce the Special Officers' subscription by 50%. In addition, it was proposed that members over 75 years old with unbroken 10-year membership should have a 50% reduction on their subscription and those over 80 years old with unbroken 10-year membership should enjoy free subscriptions. A vote was required.

Geoff Tansey enquired about the implications of subscription discounts on the overall income. Sam Goldsmith explained that as there were relatively few members to whom it applied the impact was only about £500 per annum. Geoff Tansey also enquired about the reserves policy for the GFW, mentioning charities needing to comply, but Sam Goldsmith said it was not an issue and Ruth Watson mentioned that the GFW was not a charity anyway.

Jane Suthering asked if the meeting was quorate and was told it was not. [To explain, 7.5% of the membership are required to be quorate and with 48 attendees, we were. However, as it stands, 15% are required for resolutions, as above, that amend the constitution.] Sam Goldsmith then said that it will all be wrapped up in the constitutional vote targeted for January 2024.

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Resolutions continued/

Eve Tudor made the point that as a Special Officer (Awards) she worked hard for the GFW and, in effect, the Guild was asking her to pay for doing this work. Sam Goldsmith replied that, historically, there had been no reduction in subscriptions for Special Officers and what was being proposed was an improvement. Eve Tudor reasserted her position while apologising for raising the matter. Sam Goldsmith acknowledged her views but said the point should really have been raised earlier at a general Committee meeting. Ruth Watson said it was difficult to estimate how many hours Special Officers worked, with some doing very little. Felicity Cloake thought Eve Tudor should not be doing as much as a full Committee member and this needed to be looked out. She also pointed out that workloads varied according to different roles and fluctuated across the year. A member [I apologise but missed who the speaker was] asked why Eve Tudor did not join the committee? Sam Goldsmith explained that she had herself stepped down. He went on to acknowledge that the awards judging process did take up a lot of time but this normally devolved on to the lead person, in this instance Jan Fullwood. Discussion ensued about past protocol and the fact that until recently all Committee members and Special Officers had paid the full subscription rate.

Geoff Tansey asked about the term limits for Committee members and the difficulty of recruitment Sam Goldsmith replied that it could be tricky and there were never a huge number of people running for the Committee. The limit was four years for full Committee members and one-year (renewable) for Special Officers.

Christopher Trotter commented that the discussion was treading on dangerous ground. As someone who organises events in Scotland he did not expect payment and if it were not for people doing things for the good of the Guild ... it was a great honour.

Results of committee election

The committee should comprise a maximum of 15 members. This year there were five candidates, Jacob Smith, Angela Zaher, Jan Fullwood (all stepping up from SOs), Helen Graves and Ren Behan. An election was not required as the committee still stood at 13.

Any other business (AOB)

The Chair invited anyone to speak.

Susan Wolk asked what was happening about AI and the implications for the GFW's work. Sam Goldsmith replied that he was asking a work colleague to run an informative workshop/event on the subject. She then asked if a WhatsApp group could be set up? Felicity Cloake thought this a great idea and said that if it became too active people could mute it. Jacob Smith will investigate.

Sam Kilgour wanted to thank everyone on the Committee and the Special Officers for making the Guild the wonderful place it is as she knows how much work goes into it.

The AGM concluded after c.40 minutes with Sam Goldsmith thanking everyone for their attendance and saying the minutes would soon be circulated.

Chair, Secretary and Treasurer's reports follow:

Orlando Murrin – President

It's an honour to open this year's AGM.

Good to see you all on Zoom. We know some people would prefer an in-person get-together and we'll continue to keep that in mind in future years.

I'm sure you're anxious to get on with the meeting, therefore I'll hand over shortly to Sam.

I know Sam is going to thank lots of people, but for my part I'd like to thank my Vice President Felicity Cloake. I'm not sure Felicity has any idea what a valued and respected voice she is within the Guild, and how much I and the committee rely on her wisdom and intelligence, always given without hesitation and with total honesty.

Sam Goldsmith has stepped into the Chair role with swashbuckling confidence, and it's been wonderful to witness him energise the committee and the membership.

He's assisted in this by Vice Chair Julie Friend. She's another one whose contribution may seem invisible but is massive.

Which brings me to our Secretary, Ruth Watson. I don't think anyone would describe Ruth as invisible, but she has enormous professionalism and integrity, and in many ways sets the standard for the committee and its activities.

Thank you everyone for making 2023 another great year for the Guild.

Julie Friend – Vice-chair and Treasurer

Good evening everybody. This is the treasurers' report for the financial year ending December 2022.

Up until November last year we were operating at a small profit but by the end of 2022 we finished with a financial deficit of £3,631 due to some exceptional but necessary, expenditure.

We had an unexpected change of administration at the end of the year following the resignation of Jonathon Woods. We spent some funds on recruitment and some interim consultancy costs with a replacement which sadly did not work for us, but we were then lucky enough to find Kim Furnell who stepped in with the ultimate professionalism for a smooth transition. Any change of personnel, results in expenditure but it was of course, a necessity for the organisation. With the new administration in place, we subsequently needed to upgrade the existing computer.

Additionally, we incurred vital but unbudgeted expenditure on our website which we all agreed, required a long-awaited revamp as several members had mentioned how difficult it was to navigate and we wanted to start the year afresh. All the work and changes were ably overseen by members of the committee, and we hope that you will agree, that we now have a much improved, user-friendly site, which can be updated regularly without further, significant expenditure to the Guild. Thanks to those involved with this, particularly, Heather Brown.

There had also been an ongoing VAT status enquiry, and this was concluded at the end of 2022 with a cost attached.

The awards in June last year were only our second in-person event in a couple of years. It was also our 25th anniversary and we wanted to ensure this was a party to remember. With a sparkling guest list and glamorous central London venue, we felt we succeeded. The committee worked tirelessly, using all their contacts, to obtain significant sponsorship from companies who were coming out of difficult times post-COVID and overall, we pretty much broke even. Going forward we would like to use the awards as an opportunity to make a small profit each year to replenish our reserves.

Membership fees were back up to the full cost after offering a discount during lockdown and new members grew steadily, particularly after the awards when we often see an influx of new applicants.

Looking forward for 2023 we have this year, seen membership show a healthy growth with an excellent mix of both new names and re-joiners which is always heartening. If this pattern continues, these additional fees will also add to our reserves.

We continue to have a healthy cash and asset balance of just over £46,000 but as a committee we are fully aware of the implications of these small losses which can eat away at these funds. As a group we are continually looking very carefully at areas where we can increase income and those where we can cut back on expenditure.

Sam Goldsmith – Chair

Hello and Welcome to the 2023 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers. It's been a busy year for the Guild with some big decisions made but productive ones that will ensure the Guild continues to run professionally and efficiently.

It's been my first year as Chair and I'm very grateful for the support of our fantastic committee, special officers and our administrator, Kim, as well as our recently departed financial administrator Nicki. We are incredibly lucky to have such a hard-working and dedicated committee, particularly special because every member is a volunteer balancing their lives as well as their commitments to the Guild. With the departure of Nicki, we are now enlisting the support of Association Management & Services – the previous contact email is still in use.

Before my overview of some key activities, I would just like to reiterate my thanks to the committee and special officers as well as our President & Vice President who are also entering their final year in office. There's not enough time to outline how each one of them contribute to the Guild but I can assure you that they ALL work incredibly hard and I couldn't do my job without each and every one of them.

This year we've run 21 events which have been attended by 266 members. I'm sure you will agree that the Guild hosts a fantastic mix of professional workshops as well as trips, socials and opportunities for members to expand their knowledge. Since becoming Chair I've expressed several times how important I think it is that members have the opportunity to network and I've been heartened by the number of regional events that have taken place, though I would love to see more next year. A reminder that we are happy to contribute towards events where possible. We hope to host the 2024 AGM in person with an optional online attendance so watch this space – we are hearing that several members would like to have more events in person and I hope that those members have managed to attend those growing number of events that we are hosting in person. A huge thank you to Julie Friend and the events team for their dedication to the events programme.

Our other programmes such as the Mentorship Scheme, impeccably overseen by Angela Zaher and Futures Fund, managed passionately by Felicity Cloake have also continued to flourish and support members. A reminder that our discounts scheme continues to grow – no mean feat. Joy Skipper has been working very hard to ensure membership have such great benefits. Also a big thank you to Jacob Smith who ensures that our newsletters are both informative and enjoyable to read. Our social media continues to grow, especially on Instagram, under the watchful eye of Anisha Mistry who has continued to bring life to the platform. We have also started sending out regular press releases, with the help and guidance of Laura Hadland, to outline member news and activity. We know this has led to several projects being featured in the press. We've also continued to improve the user experience on the website as well as future proof it all under the watchful and talented eye of Heather Brown.

We are steadily increasing the number of members. Currently the Guild consists of 564 paid members with a further 12 members pending due to receive committee approval or just having had it and awaiting payment. This is up from 559 this time last year. We had 45 members who did not renew their membership from 2022 and while I would love for this number to be 0, times have been challenging. 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 also important to note that we are seeing a strong number of diverse members joining the Guild and this is in large part due to the great work that Mallika and the Diversity team have been doing.

We've only just recovered from our amazing Awards ceremony which was a huge success thanks to the many committee members involved but a particular thanks to Lorna Wing who oversaw the reception which was incredible. Also to Jan Fullwood and the judging team to ensuring a smooth and rigorous procedure.

Now, I could speak all evening about the great number of things that have happened this year but I know we have others to hear from and questions to answer! So, looking to the future, as we have had confirmation from the membership that we can proceed to register as a company limited by guarantee, we are now reaching the end stages of making that happen. You will be receiving, most likely very early next year, further information around our articles of association and rule book which will effectively be our new constitution. We don't intend to make many new changes to the current constitution, it will more be a tidying up and reinvigoration of the existing one.

As we enter a new era of journalism with the introduction of AI and continued importance put on social media, we want to ensure that the Guild is future proof. We will be running an event on AI for members and will continue to ensure that the needs and challenges of our evolving profession is at the forefront of our minds.

My final words are to you, our vibrant community. Firstly to say thank you for your support and friendship over this past year and lastly a thank you for your contribution and commitment not only to the Guild but to our profession.