



Guild AGM 2025 Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 10th June 2025 7pm
Zoom

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Attendance

Present

Amelie Tassin
Annabel Smith
Jonny Garrett
Charlotte Turner
Christian Gott
Daisy Turnell
Emmie Harrison-West
Jane Peyton
John Porter
Kate Hempsall
Kathryn Tye
Mike Hampshire
Lotte Peplow
Malin Norman
Kimberly Spivey
Matthew Curtis
Myles Pinfold
Natalya Watson

Paul Newton
Paul Nunny
Pete Brown
Rachel Auty
Rodney Challis
Simon Lewis
Steven Gibbs
Will Simmons
Adrian Tierney-Jones
Michael Clarke
Charlotte Turner
Emma Inch
Gary Gillman
Richard Dakin
Jeff Evans
Mitch Adams
Robyn Black
Steve Hobman

Apologies

Christine Cryne
Fran Nowak
John Cryne
Kate Oppenheim
Laura-Ashley Huckerby (Accountant)
Lloyd Lugsden
Phil Mellows
Roger Protz
Rose Davis
Sue Nowak

Declarations of Interest

Charlotte Turner
Robyn Black

Introduction

Jonny Garrett brought the meeting to order, welcomed attendees to the AGM and went through housekeeping.

Appointment of Tellers

Tellers were not appointed as Zoom was configured for online poll with instant results, with Mike adding any received proxy votes.

Minutes of the 2024 Guild AGM

There were no matters arising and the minutes were approved.

Chair Report

Jonny put on record the sad news of the passings of Ron Atkins, Jos Brouwer and Martyn Cornell, particularly Martyn as a founding member of the Guild.

Jonny provided a summary of the written chair's report. Positives included the success of the awards season, with the most entries ever, a brand-new Beer Writer of the Year and great event attendance. Six mentorship schemes were completed, three socials, three trainings and three new membership perks. Jonny noted the huge growth in social media thanks to the work done by Kimberley Spivey.

There are challenges with finances, with VAT a new cost and a drop in sponsorships for the 2024 awards. Although thanks to work from Robyn Black, this loss was less than forecast and work is already well underway to gain the sponsors needed for the 2025 awards. Motions have been submitted to help with the financial challenges.

Jonny closed his summary with comments on the volume of official and unofficial complaints he has had to deal with and *encouraged members to act in a professional way when in disagreement* otherwise this can bring the Guild into disrepute. As a result, a motion to tighten the code of conduct has been submitted.

Questions and Comments from the Floor

John Porter asked if the complaints were being raised within the auspices of a Guild event, or if Jonny is being asked to deal with disputes taking place outside the Guild.

Jonny said both. He said the ones happening outside of the Guild (although still on occasion about Guild matters) are the reason for the proposed code of conduct changes. The changes introduce a framework for dealing with this that didn't exist previously.

Michael Clarke asked if there was any categorisation of the complaints, for example are people being rude to each other, or are there inappropriate behaviour complaints.

Jonny said that most complaints came through about professional disputes, not inappropriate behaviour such as harassment. It has mainly been related to work projects or Guild matters.

Emma Inch said Jonny had phrased things well and had argued a good case for the amendment of the code of conduct, but the important point is realising the amount of time it takes, whilst still not wanting to discourage complainants. The system needs to be robust, with everyone being nicer to each other.

Jonny said there's not huge changes to the code, nothing that has happened is outside the scope of expected behaviour, rather the code itself is missing a framework for dealing with complaints outside of the Guild.

Gary Gillman said he wasn't clear on the types of disputes, asking what professional dispute meant.

Jonny said that he could not go much further into the issues as it may inadvertently identify someone. Jonny said that these are issues that are already mentioned in the code of conduct, but that the code does not currently have a full framework for dealing with matters outside the Guild.

Member Vote

Members voted to approve the Chair's report.

Finance Report and Year-end Accounts

Jonny presented as per the AGM papers, commenting on the remarkable report that deals with the last two years of change.

Summarising, Jonny said that there are new financial issues with VAT as a new cost, which has not been applied to individual member fees, plus increased inflation and costs, and a loss of £7k at the awards. The board have been trying to mitigate this, not just through the acquisition of new sponsors, but through cost cutting too. Overall, there was a £6k loss in terms of cash in the bank, which is unsustainable. A lot of things in the report are in relation to the detail of what has occurred since Cask Marque stopped working on the Guild's accounts.

Questions and Comments from the Floor

Matthew Curtis said it was a great idea to raise membership fees, but with people struggling to find work and writers on low incomes, he asked if a low-income membership tier could be considered in the future.

Jonny said he would love to introduce this, not just for existing, but new members too. The issue would be around calculating and proving eligibility. Jonny said he is open to ideas as to how that could be enacted.

Paul Nunny said he found the report difficult to understand, including a lack of headings on the analysis. Paul said there was an implication that balances transferred from Cask Marque were wrong. Cask Marque spent £500 ensuring the transfers were correct and if the Guild didn't collect outstanding balances, it was the Guild's responsibility. Trying to reconcile the figures, with the profit and loss report, Paul said there was a major error of £20k corporate member subs. The line says £35k, when it should be £15k. If this is changed, it puts the Guild's losses at £27k. He also mentioned that dinner loss was £11k, saying that more investigation is required. There is still plenty of time for this as the filing does not need to happen for several months yet.

Jonny said he saw the final figures only after it had been worked through but is surprised at a loss of £27k when in cash real terms the Guild is down £6k. Jonny said the matter would be taken seriously and investigated further. He added that whilst a vote would not proceed on this topic, he asked for any further comments and questions.

Annabel Smith said she would like to see a breakdown of the Award Costs line showing £40k.

Jonny said this was venue costs including food and Tipple costs including judging. Annabel said that judging was a separate line and Jonny said he would seek clarity on this for future discussion.

Jonny said that the cost of running a dinner for 180 people in central London is high and that work is ongoing for a new tender that will have to step away from the current format, with 2026 likely not to be a dinner and possibly not in central London to try and reduce costs by 50%. The work on this is based on feedback gained from members earlier in the year.

Member Vote

Due to the queries raised, it was agreed to defer voting on the accounts until a future EGM.

Motions

1. To Increase Individual Membership Fees by 20%

The motion was presented by Jonny.

John Porter asked if members who were registered for VAT could get an invoice, Jonny confirmed yes.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

2. To Increase Industry Partner Membership Fees by 20%

The motion was presented by Jonny.

Paul Nunny said that income was down in the Corporate Member category in the previous year and asked if the Board was confident that they would be able to retain membership at the higher rate.

Jonny said that the Board felt there was a base of loyal and supportive industry partners who have backed the Guild for a long time. Jonny said he was fairly confident there would be no major drop off but accepted there may be issues in the recruitment of new ones, although he felt £300 per year for brewers was still a small fee.

Paul Nunny said that he's happy if the Board is.

Jonny added that training and mentorship are open to industry partners, with little uptake. Jonny said he would be keen to approach industry partners to encourage participation should the following motion pass.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

3. To Make Training Provided by the Guild Free to All Members

The motion was presented by Jonny. Jonny added context to say that attendance at training events had been low, despite training subjects having been requested by multiple members. Based on this he believes cost and timings are a challenge and making it free will add value.

John Porter asked if there was any member feedback to suggest cost was a problem, adding that given the Guild's finances it may not be wise to remove a revenue source.

Jonny said that it's not a source of revenue, it's an extensive cost as typically trainer fees have been somewhere between £125-£400 since the Guild doesn't currently set the fees. With the low attendance numbers, the Guild has not come close to cost neutrality or profit. So even if the motion failed, the Board would still look for a cap. In terms of member feedback, Jonny said he didn't think feedback had been received but said that member tickets are a quarter of the cost of annual membership and this looks imbalanced. Jonny also said non-members would still be charged.

Mike Hampshire added that he had received comments from members who could not afford training fees.

Jonny said one of the best attended training sessions was provided by David Jesudason, which was free-to-attend at his request.

Matthew Curtis said that he was part of a panel on how to help Guild members make more money, where only three people attended.

Jonny said that training will focus on new models of making money, and producing and releasing content and it appears contradictory to charge for this when it is known that writers are struggling.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

4. To Amend the Code of Conduct

The motion was presented by Jonny.

Paul Nunny said he wondered if the code should be simplified. He said he felt the code ought to cover conduct between beer writers, and things that affect the reputation of the Guild. Part one is personal conduct, i.e. writer to writer, the rest is guidelines, which should not be in a code of conduct as they are guidelines on how members ought to behave, rather than how they must. Paul said his view was to simplify things by having a code of conduct between members and how they behave towards the Guild, then the rest are just best practice guidelines on how to behave, and this might be clearer and reduce the number of grievances.

Jonny said he takes the point that simplicity would be ideal, however this does lead to more questions. What he has found in the last year is that simple language has led to questions such as “can I complain about this?”. This takes time, alongside the solicitors, to work out. The adjustments in the code are an attempt at clarification. Jonny said that the complaints received have not been around the element of guidelines that Paul was referring to. He said he would be interested in hearing other viewpoints if people felt that member conduct guidelines were not strict enough and work production guidelines were too strict.

Emma Inch asked if the changes had been run by the HR advisor and Napthens (a legal company).

Jonny confirmed so, adding that he had approached Napthens with some changes, but Napthens decided to edit the code from scratch instead.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

5. To Amend the Code of Conduct Regarding Generative AI

The motion was presented by Jonny.

Matthew Curtis said he would support the motion as a writer and publisher as he is seeing instances of this. He said that there is no ethical use of AI, be it environmental or creative, which is the key. He confirmed he was speaking specifically about large language models (LLM), generative AI. He said it's in the Guild's values and mission statement to improve communications of writing, he believes LLM generated content diminishes the content out there. He feels it's important for the Guild to take a stand on this, and that the right side of history is to make sure it doesn't influence work that is put out there. He said we want to be taken seriously, to be seen in mainstream media coverage and see writers and publications thrive. He feels strongly about this and hopes people support this and the following motion.

Jonny said it was an interesting angle that it was linked to one of the core tenets of the Guild, which AI is opposite to.

Michael Clarke asked if the Guild adopts the motion, would they lobby the Government and have input into consultation. He added that as an aside if you ask Gen AI to identify writing created by Gen AI it does seem to be capable of identifying its own work.

Jonny said that tools like this will be needed to identify the use of AI, particularly in relation to the next motion. He said that the Guild is apolitical, so it's fine to take a position internally, but any lobbying of Government would be outside the scope of the Guild. He added that being a member of the Guild does not stop people themselves lobbying. .

Mitch Adam spoke on the point of using AI to identify AI, highlighting that it's a problematic route as work fed to AI for identification then becomes accessible by AI as a source.

Jonny said he was making a flippant remark, but this challenge will need to be debated with the next motion.

Michael Clarke added that he had not put any beer related work into Gen AI for identification.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

6. To Ban the Use of Generative AI in our Annual Awards

The motion was presented by Jonny.

Jonny said that he was being deliberately vague as to the correct method of investigation, as this requires discussion. He said he would like to hear from members who can help with this.

No-one spoke against the motion.

Members voted to carry the motion.

Director Elections

The meeting was briefly adjourned to allow members to vote in the election.

Jonny noted that there were two withdrawals, Martyn Cornell due to his passing, and Des De Moor for health reasons.

The directors elected to the board were:

Christian Gott (New Appointment)

Jonny Garrett (re-election)

Michael Clarke (New appointment)

Myles Pinfold (New Appointment)

Rachel Auty (Re-election)

For those unsuccessful, Jonny said he would be in touch with them about how they could still help.

Any Other Business

Gary Gillman asked if the appointment of awards judges was not subject to member election.

Jonny said that judges are selected by Tipple (the organising agency) and typically comes from a brief from the board and the previous year's panel chair with regard to the balance of experience and expertise, but appointments are not voted upon.

Emma Inch asked if the Diversity Grant could be brought back

Jonny said yes, there were various reasons it disappeared, including the closure of grant partners Good Beer Hunting, but it is on his to-do list. It could be combined with other moves such as Matthew Curtis' suggestion on lower rates for low incomes and one day he would love to see the Guild funding important work such as investigative pieces that aren't picked up by publishers. This is an element of mentorship or training he'd like to enlarge. Jonny will pick the diversity grant up with the new board. The challenge will be funding.

John Porter asked whether the Guild would formally commemorate Martyn Cornell's contribution to beer writing in some way, such as an award rename.

Jonny said he thought there was potential for an award rename, or perhaps a Guild library, a source for members to draw upon. This idea is not fully formed.

Adrian Tierney-Jones said the Guild used to have a lifetime achievement award and could this be considered? In this instance it would be posthumous.

Jonny said he would explore the archives on the lifetime achievement award and how it works.

Pete Brown said the lifetime achievement award was discretionary and not an annual requirement. Pete said there is a library at Oxford Brooks University that was started with Michael Jackson's archive. It might be worth the Board trying to build a relationship with them.

Adrian said he has contacts and would pass them on, adding they would also like copies of new books for the library.

Annabel Smith said that when polls were done for the motions, they were not anonymous, and this could lead to unconscious bias. Annabel said this should be anonymous.

Mike said he had located where people could be identified and added that if the meeting was in-person, then the votes would not be anonymous either as it's a showing of hands.

Annabel said she agrees, but online this could lead to unconscious bias.

Jonny said we would work on the best way to move forward at future meetings.

Matthew Curtis said he would like to thank outgoing directors, especially Emmie Harrison-West, for work on the mentorship scheme, but the others too, acknowledging it is hard work.

Jonny added his thanks to those leaving the board and those staying on. He said there is a lot to do, but the Guild will be stronger for it. Jonny encouraged members to contact him via chair@beerGuild.co.uk for any further comments and questions. Jonny reminded members that an EGM will follow to vote on the accounts.

The AGM ended.

Minutes Sign-off

This section is for completion once the minutes have been formally approved.

Signature
Date
Name
Position

Appendix

I. Copy of Text Based Conversation from the Meeting

19:19:39 From John Porter : Is it possible to indicate which aspects of the code have been updated?
19:20:26 From Annabel Smith : Reacted to "Is it possible to in..." with 🙌
20:09:36 From Mike : Director voting form -> <https://forms.gle/MkgmGncTseTtwyHG6>
20:09:47 From Matthew Curtis : Reacted to "Director voting form..." with 🙌
20:12:31 From Jonathan Garrett : Sorry folks! Mike will mute asap!
20:12:44 From Daisy Turnell : My poor cats aren't happy
20:14:29 From Charlotte Turner : Reacted to "My poor cats aren..." with 😄
20:14:43 From Charlotte Turner : Replying to "My poor cats aren..."
same, I got a real stink eyeballing!
20:14:55 From Daisy Turnell : Reacted to "same, I got a real s..." with 😄
20:29:15 From Daisy Turnell : Thanks, J & M!
20:29:21 From Mike : Reacted to "Thanks, J & M!" with ❤️
20:29:25 From Daisy Turnell : Reacted to "Thanks, J & M!" with ❤️
20:29:26 From Daisy Turnell : Removed a ❤️ reaction from "Thanks, J & M!"
20:29:33 From Matthew Curtis : Thanks you!