



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

Chair's Report to the Meeting

Introduction

It goes without saying that this has been an extraordinary and difficult year for everyone, and the British Guild of Beer Writers is no exception. Coronavirus and lockdown have disrupted all our activities and also put an extra strain on all our Board members as we try to navigate new priorities and stresses created by the crisis. We have nevertheless continued to meet regularly (albeit virtually) as a Board and make what progress we can.

Before the virus hit, we were having an incredibly positive year, with one of our most successful dinner and awards events to date, ever-improving events and training courses, increasing our individual membership, at the same time as getting much closer to an annual break-even point in our accounts thanks to increased sponsorship of the dinner and a dramatic rise in revenues thanks to a huge effort on gaining new corporate members. We have improved our social media following and used that to give greater exposure to award-winners and help increase the profile of our members. The Guild directors responsible for each area of this will expand on this in their own reports.

Over the last five months, we've done what we can to hold a sense of progress together, and adapted. As the beer and pub industry re-emerges from lockdown it faces uncertain times, economic hardship and changes in beer consumption that may or may not be long-term. The one thing we do know for sure is that almost everyone in the industry is seeing a significant drop in income. Our members – and the Guild itself – are no exceptions to this.

The mission of the Guild is to extend public knowledge and appreciation of beer and pubs. I firmly believe that over the coming years this mission will be more urgent than it has been in the history of the Guild. The Guild would like to help the industry thrive once more, but that means we need to be in good shape too. I urge all our individual and corporate members to renew their subscriptions when they fall due this year, because that is the key source of income that allowed us to do what we did before Covid, and will allow us to do so again afterwards.

I'd like to thank all the members of the Board for their commitment and drive at this time, with particular thanks to Jo Dring, who has chosen to step down as of this AGM. Jo has spent four years on the Board and really brought some new energy and ideas to how we present ourselves and engage with our various stakeholders.

Overleaf is a bit more detail on key areas and achievements before and during Covid. Let's look forward to an AGM in 2021 that toasts the results of the hard work we do now.

Cheers

Pete Brown

Covid-19 Response

When lockdown was implemented in March, all our scheduled activities were cancelled. We gathered together and communicated information and links that might be helpful to beer communicators facing a loss of income, and devised a series of informal midweek meetings online with presenters discussing topics we felt might be of interest to members looking to improve their skills. These were done on an entirely voluntary basis and were very well attended.

Dinner and Awards

The feedback we received for our 2019 dinner and awards event was very positive: the venue, the meal, the beers and the presentation of the awards were all well received. 2018 winner Emma Inch presented Jonny Garrett with his first Beer Writer of the Year Award and we were pleased to see various other first-time category winners too. Sponsorship income was significantly up on the previous year and we divided our biggest ever cash prize fund between our winning members. In January, we showcased category-winning work on social media.

So far, our plans for 2020 are to follow other award schemes such as Fortnum & Mason and the Guild of Food Writers and host an online awards event, returning to One George Street – our 2019 venue – in 2021 (we have already booked the venue.) We have halved the fee for category sponsorship this year but with spending freezes among many brewers, we are still well short of the income that allows us to give out the most generous prizes in the food and drink-writing world. The awards will go ahead, but prize money may be down on its normal amount. We invite any commercial body who may be interested in a bargain award sponsorship this year to contact Pete Brown or Robert Humphreys.

European Chapter

Following the announcement of the Guild establishing an informal network for its members living in Europe outside the UK, an initial meeting was held in Brussels in September. The meeting was a success and our European members are planning activity to forge closer bonds among themselves and with members in the UK.

Secretarial Role

Natalya Watson was appointed new Guild Secretary in September 2019. Since then Nat has done a fantastic job of looking after the day-to-day running of the Guild and coming up with new ways of interacting with and helping our members. Thanks, Nat!

Strategic Plan

Following feedback from the 2019 AGM we pretty much completed a strategic plan that encapsulated how the Guild will deliver against its mission and core aims while achieving a position of long-term financial security. Sadly, much of this work has been rendered temporarily obsolete by the current situation. We propose to revisit the plan when we have a better idea of what the next 12 months looks like.