



BRITISH GUILD OF  
AGRICULTURAL  
JOURNALISTS

**Minutes of the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the British Guild of Agricultural Journalists,  
held at Jesus College, Oxford, 27 March 2013 at 4.00pm**

**In the chair:** Lord (Ewen) Cameron

**Welcome:** Ewen Cameron introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the 71st Annual General Meeting of the British Guild of Agricultural Journalists. He thanked Massey Ferguson for sponsoring the AGM and for all the other sponsorship they give to the BGAJ.

**Apologies:** Clive Rainbird, Peter Hill, Wendy Ryder, Peter Ryder, Sam Luckin, Claire Powerll, Spence Gunn, Roy Bird, Nick Rainsley, Geoff Dodgson, Eddie Gillanders, Jeremy Hawkey, David Steers, Sally Whittall, Roger (Ahead PR), John Allan, Colin Jackson, Max Reader, Michel Priestly, Michael Bunney, Andrew Arbuckle

**Minutes:** The Minutes of the 2013 AGM, having previously been circulated, were adopted EC will sign in due course.

**Chairman's Statement:** Ewen Cameron invited Chairman Jane Craigie to read her statement:

Twelve months ago we were at the Tower of London when I took over as Chairman from Adrian Bell. At the 2013 AGM we agreed the constitution for The British Guild of Agricultural Journalists, which now exists as a newly formed company limited by guarantee. The Guild's Council are now Directors of this company, with Nikki Robertson standing as our Company Secretary. We were exceptionally grateful to Burges Salmon who undertook all the incorporation work free of charge; their level of service and care for our future was exemplary. We have also set up a new bank account with Lloyds Bank for the BGAJ and the 2014 IFAJ Congress; Lloyds has very kindly waived any charges for both accounts for 18 months. We will also be running the Congress as a Limited company, called Small Island Innovations Ltd. Again, Burges Salmon has very kindly agreed to undertake our Memorandum and Articles for this company.

These big changes to our governance were just a small part of what the Council has been doing over the past 378 days. To describe the intervening months as busy doesn't do justice to the time that a group of voluntary people have been putting into the Guild and to the 2014 IFAJ Congress in September.

As Congress Chairman, Adrian has kindly written the 2014 IFAJ Congress report included in the paperwork handed out at the AGM. But some staggering headline stats for you about our event this September. The Congress has a working budget of over half a million pounds; we have raised over £160 thousand in monetary sponsorship from 15 companies including the main sponsors Massey

Ferguson, Waitrose and Perkins, and have in-kind support from a further 24 organisations totaling over £80 thousand. This abundant backing of our Guild has warmed my heart; but more importantly, it shows how valuable the pre-, main and post-Congress is seen as a story-telling opportunity to discerning companies, organisations and people. This sponsorship will mean that delegates coming to Scotland in September will have to pay just 40% of the actual costs associated with their place.

The workload being undertaken, by volunteers, to develop and run the Congress is phenomenal. In addition to those organising all that a congress entails, Adrian and I have approached six PR providers in our sector to ask if they would undertake the Congress PR. I had a very emotional evening after they all offered their wholehearted support - free of charge. The six involved are Judith O'Leary, Pinstone, ABC, Ware Anthony Rust, RDP and Niamh Tye.

Amidst all of our frenetic activity we were all - quite literally - stopped in our tracks when we heard of the death of our friend and colleague, Joe Watson. Joe was only 43 and he had dedicated over a decade to the running of the Guild - and he was instrumental in Scotland winning the right to host the 2014 Congress. We are all devastated that he will not be there to share the event, the friendship and the story -telling in September. He was a principled, prolific and highly respected journalist. He was sometimes abrasive; and many of us had felt the lash of his tongue. But he was a warm, witty and loyal friend to many of us. Heartfelt tributes for him have come from the highest echelons of Government and the furthest corners of the globe. Many Guild members attended his funeral last Monday where Eddie Gillanders gave a very poignant eulogy. We will run the Congress in Joe's memory.

Just before his funeral, Louise Impey, our Guild awards Secretary, called me to say that Joe had won the Stuart Seaton Award for the third time and for the second consecutive year. I know that his editor, Damian Bates, was very hopeful that this would be the case. We are going to decide at the April Guild Council meeting where and how we present his award. The Highland Show Guild Party - one of his favourite events, which often coincided with his birthday - might be a fitting time.

I thought one of the most touching tributes to Joe was by Cedric Porter, his words reflected many others and said: "It is a testament to Joe that his influence was felt so keenly far beyond the North East of Scotland. At events throughout the UK, you would always see Joe asking the most relevant and probing questions of ministers, company representatives and farmers. His legacy is to be a blueprint for anyone wishing to convey farming in a clear and engaging way to both farmers and the wider community. There will be a bit of a hole at Guild and other events but it is at times like this when the non-business value of the Guild is the most apparent, demonstrating that we are a community bound by friendship."

The most poetic was from George Chancellor who said: "We've been deprived of one of the most consistent campaigners against mediocrity within our profession and most ardent advocates of accuracy beyond it. Where on earth are we going to find someone big enough in spirit and determination, as well as shoe size and appetite, to fill your space and continue preventing ill-informed and often ill-intentioned commentators on our industry sleeping that much easier in their beds? We'll miss you Joe. But we'll remember you by the length of your shadow. And, hopefully, find a way to continue championing the causes you held so dear."

After more than a decade, Joe had already decided to stand down from Council from today's AGM. His decision was driven by bouts of poor health and an increased workload. I had planned to present him today with an engraved Mont Blanc pen to thank him for all that he has done for the Guild over the years. I will present it to his Mum, Mirren, when I go to see her over the coming weeks.

Joe's decision to stand down mid-way through his term created a vacancy for the British Guild's IFAJ Executive Representative, which Adrian Bell has put himself forward to undertake, at the same time standing again to serve council. Joe's decision also created a vacancy on Council. Simon Haley has put his name forward to take this vacant position.

Simon Haley has also taken over the role as IFAJ Congress Treasurer - a demanding fiscal and governance role that fits well with his farm business consultancy expertise. Simon is working closely with our Guild Treasurer, Tim Price, on the interface between the Congress and the Guild finances and accounting.

Not only has the Guild had a busy 12 months - the Council has also has some challenges to address. One that is nearing resolution is that we have discovered some significant issues in the Guild membership subscriptions database which resulted in a failure to collect subscriptions from a number of members during 2012 and 2013. These issues have come to light as we have been preparing to transfer Guild subs collection from a manual system to the web-based, automated SmartDebit system, which will be fully integrated to the Guild's website and the Guild FMC contacts facility.

We took the decision to halt the 2014 subscription payment run in February until the required work to the membership database is completed. It is anticipated that the subscription direct debit run will be implemented in late April. Members whose direct debits failed for 2012 and/or 2013 will be contacted by our secretary, Nikki Robertson, to explain the situation and will be asked to settle their subscription dues retrospectively. Going forward, the SmartDebit system will be managed by Nikki who will receive alerts if direct debits fail; ensuring that this issue does not arise again. I would like to thank Nikki, Peter Hill and Tim Price for their roles in the lengthy and time-consuming process of implementing the changes to our membership system.

Linked to membership, the Guild's Yearbook will be changing. After 31 years of dedicated service, Peter and Wendy Ryder have decided to stand down as orchestrators and publishers of this well-received publication. Our thanks to Peter and Wendy for their dedicated service to the British Guild which extends much wider than the Yearbook. Wendy continues her work with the Guild's Charitable Trust, and Peter as a Guild Senior Fellow. A presentation of an engraved claret decanter and glasses was made by Clive Rainbird to Wendy at the last Charitable Trust meeting.

The plans for a new contract publisher for the 2014/15 Yearbook are being worked on by Peter Hill, the Guild's Communications Officer. Peter undertakes a huge amount of activity for the Guild and continues to keep our membership updated on the Guild's operations, activities and the Congress. His commitment of time and care to this role, is very gratefully received.

Earlier this year the Guild undertook a survey of members to understand what the requirements are for training and continuing professional development (CPD). Julie Mate undertook the very comprehensive survey and is managing the membership training options going forward - which is likely to include Webinars as well as conventional face-to-face delivery. Julie's survey findings have given us some very solid guidance on what members want from any training we organise. A copy of Julie's report accompanies the other AGM materials provided.

Our links to the Guild's Charitable Trust have been strengthened by the formal recognition of the Trust in our Constitution and by Clive Rainbird's role as the Guild Council's Charitable Trust liaison representative. Our Trust continues to play a crucial role in supporting those members affected by ill-health and an inability to work; please remember our Trust in any fundraising that you are

planning - none of us know if and when we might need their help. Stephen Howe has agreed to stand for one more year as the Trust's Chairman. I wish him well in that role.

Activities run by the Guild, such as the Harvest Lunch and the various receptions held at events during the year, are cited by members as one of the main reasons for joining the Guild. There's still room to make more of that: our generous sponsors already contribute to make these events happen. Later in the agenda, I'll ask our events secretary and my deputy, Howard Venters, to update those present on our event plans for 2014.

The Guild's range of Awards conscientiously managed by Louise Impey grows year on year. The awards offer our members valuable recognition for their work. It is important that we all support our awards programme and those companies that generously sponsor them by encouraging as many entries as possible.

Today's AGM follows the AGM for the vibrant and very active Midlands Branch of the Guild; I'd like to thank Julie Mate and Liz Snaith for the work they have put into making today happen.

I'd also like to thank Massey Ferguson again for their ongoing invaluable support of the Guild and as sponsors of this our AGM. Paul Lay is an outstanding supporter of the British Guild extending to Massey Ferguson's support of the 2014 Congress as a Principal Sponsor. A huge thank-you for this sponsorship to Campbell Scott who played a big part in securing the funds to support us. We will hear from Campbell later. Thank-you to Sally-Ann Dennis for the important role that you continue to play in the liaison between Massey Ferguson and the Guild.

Finally, I'd like to thank the members of Council for their hard work and commitment over the past 12 months. To remind you who they are: our President, Ewen Cameron, our Secretary, Nikki Robertson, my Deputy, Howard Venters, our Treasurer Tim Price, IFAJ Congress Chairman, Adrian Bell, Ben Briggs, Peter Hill, Louise Impey, Julie Mate, Clive Rainbird, Peter Ryder and Liz Snaith. And also to Simon Haley our Congress Treasurer.

The demands on your time are wholly disproportionate to what should be expected of volunteers. My gratitude to you all for your commitment to me and to the Guild is immense. The Guild would not be as strong as it is; and we would not be able to put on the showcase that we are in September, without your personal drive, enthusiasm and sense of loyalty to the great organisation that is the British Guild of Agricultural Journalists.

**Annual Report for 2013:** The Annual Report for 2013 was also circulated in advance and was duly proposed by Adrian Bell and seconded by Mike Gooding.

**Accounts for 2013:**

The accounts were circulated as part of the handouts for the meeting. TP said the BGAJ had had a very good year with the many events and continuing support from our sponsors.

He said we ended the year with a deficit of £4900 which we expect to return to zero when the outstanding subscriptions are collected. Subs have increased to £70 for full members and £36 for retired members.

TP said the banking system has been very cumbersome over the past few years and the change in the company status has enabled us to move to an electronic system, which should streamline processes.

We will collect 2014 subs in April and an E-alert will be sent out ahead of this and members whose direct debits failed last year will be contacted and asked to send a cheque.

With regards to the Congress, the committee has taken advice and, on the strength of this advice, have set up a new and separate company.

During 2013 the BGAJ bank account has been used to fund the IFAJ Congress and this is set out clearly in the accounts. We now have a new IFAJ Congress bank account and the two accounts can now be reconciled. Campbell Dallas has agreed to handle the accounts FOC.

TP stated that the Congress finances have now gone beyond his skills and Simon Haley has agreed to take this on board and also help TP with the BGAJ finances. TP and SH are currently speaking with three accountancy firms to handle the accounts and have asked that members allow the Council to make the final decision at a later date – this was proposed by Nick Bond and seconded by Clive Marlow.

Finally, TP thanked the sponsors for all their support.

The accounts were proposed by Louise Impey and seconded by Ben Briggs, all were in favour.

#### **Election of Officers:**

The following reappointments for the year ahead were agreed:

##### **Presidency:**

Ewen Cameron has agreed to stand as president until after the IFAJ Congress 2014.

##### **Members of Council:**

There are three members to stand down, AB, JAC and HV, plus a resignation from JW. However, because JAC is chair and HV deputy they can defer until next year. There is a nomination from Simon Haley to join Council. AB would like to remain on Council and put himself forward as IFAJ Representative

The three proposals were proposed by Howard Venters and seconded by Nick Bond and were duly adopted.

##### **Chairman:**

Jane Craigie will commence her 2<sup>nd</sup> year in office.

##### **Treasurer:**

TP will stand until next year and Simon Haley has expressed an interest in standing when TP ends his term, however, any member is welcome to put himself or herself forward too. The Treasurers election will take place at the 2015 AGM.

##### **Chaplain:**

The Reverend George Pitcher (Biography can be found in the Council Report) was proposed by Howard Venters and seconded by Paul Lay and he was duly elected.

The BGAJ would like to acknowledge David Meara's long standing association with the Guild as Chaplain and Rector of St Brides and to wish him well in his retirement

#### **Election of Auditors:**

TP and SH are currently speaking with three accountancy firms to handle the accounts and have asked that members allow the Council to make the final decision at a later date – this was proposed by Nick Bond and seconded by Clive Marlow.

#### **Notices of Motion:**

There was no notice of motions.

**IFAJ & ENAJ:**

Reports were handed out before the AGM (are contained in the Council Report) and are available on request.

**Event Plans for 2013:**

Ewen Cameron invited Howard Venters to talk about events. HV gave a short synopsis of events and full details of last year's events can be found in the Council Report.

**Charitable Trust and 200 Club Draw:**

JAC urged members to become a member of the 200 Club and any member can join by contacting either Clive Rainbird or Montague (details in the BGAJ year book). Shares are £10 each.

Winners are as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> - Natalie Yeatman-Read - £250

2<sup>nd</sup> – Peter Adams - £100

3<sup>rd</sup> – Teresa Wickham and Guy Attenborough £50 each.

**Any Other Business:** None

**Close of Meeting:** There being no further business, Ewen Cameron closed the meeting at 4.45pm and handed the floor to Harry Smit of Rabobank.

NR

March 27, 2014