

Minutes of the Guild Week Meeting held in Reaseheath College, University of Chester on Wednesday 26th August 2009

There were present:

President: C Y Barlow

Master: J A Agg

Assistant Master: C C Shearer

R T Backhouse

C M P Johnson

J R N Lebon

D Lynch

H F Pettifer

J D Shanklin

Jim Taylor

M S Threlfall

* Non-members

Anthea Edwards*

D A Jones

B I Le Gallez

B G Meads

C H Rogers

N J H Small

Jennie Taylor*

R L Underwood

A J Griffin

K Lebon*

A J Griffin

L Pelc

P A B Saddleton

L T W Smith

J Thorpe

I G Vincent

The President was in the chair and opened the meeting at 20.20.

1. Apologies for absence.

Apologies had been received from:

D Beadman

P L H Brooke

P W Hill

H Muirhead (just out of hospital)

James Trevelyan

Stephen Ward

J Wrenbury (Short of breath these days and can't climb stairs)

N Bright

A R Guy

M A S Jones

D Rothera

V Nutton

A S Watt (surgeons working on his leg)

M Bright

C R Hill

L A Jones

B D Threlfall

A R D Walton

Richard Youdale

2. Minutes of the 2008 Guild Week Meeting.

The President noted that the minutes of the previous meeting had been available on the Guild website. As has now been agreed as accepted practice, she read out a précis of the central points:

There was discussion of numbers attending Guild Week and the need to make Weeks good value for money. Cost was a large factor for many, particularly for undergraduates. It was agreed that places of current students would be subsidised.

Future Guild Week venues were agreed for 2010 (Oxford: Richard Youdale), 2011 (Cambridge; Nicholas Small) and 2012 (Nottingham, Ian Vincent).

Updates on planned and completed work at Cambridge towers were presented.

Diary dates were announced.

The meeting agreed that the minutes should be signed by the President.

3. Matters arising

It was agreed that all matters arising were adequately covered in the agenda.

4. Matters relevant to the Guild Week Meeting raised during the academic year 2008 – 2009

The President commented upon a number of events and points of interest from the previous academic year:

- Cataloguing the Guild library is virtually complete. Discussion concerning the possibility of distributing or selling some of the books needs to be re-activated; we have a list prepared a few years ago.
- Four new life members were elected at the Michaelmas meeting; two in Lent and two more at the AGM.
- The resident Guild is in good heart, but numbers are still on the low side. The undergraduate officers are to be complimented on their good work in recruiting and retaining members, which has been achieved by providing a supportive and stimulating atmosphere at Guild events.
- Elections have featured in various ways during the year. J A Agg was catapulted into taking on the office of Assistant Master at the Michaelmas meeting, only days after arriving in Cambridge. At the Lent meeting, it was rather precipitately agreed to offer Honorary Membership to Martin (Dill) Faulkes, in recognition of his donation of the new ring of bells for Great St Mary's (Dill did not formally reply, but expressed his pleasure when the President met him at Taylor's for the casting on one of the bells.) Following the Lent meeting, the President contacted a number of senior members of the Guild to explain what had happened, and to ask for their blessing. There was discussion at the AGM of the proper procedure for the election of Honorary Members. A motion was proposed by Clarke Walters and agreed by the meeting: "That one month's notice should be given of intention to propose an Honorary Member, without naming them". The logic behind this is that interested members can enquire about the proposal, but that no public announcement of a name will be made to save embarrassment in case the election is not agreed. This motion will be discussed at the Michaelmas meeting, and voted on at the Lent meeting. Elections of Senior Officers did not happen at the AGM, since no written nominations had been received before the Guild Dinner. The Committee met after the AGM and agreed to appoint CY Barlow as President and F H King as Auditor. PLH Brooke has also agreed to take on the role of Senior Treasurer; M S Edwards had indicated his wish to stand down from that office. All will be confirmed in their positions at the Michaelmas Term meeting.

5. Election of new members.

No new members were proposed.

6. 2009 (current) Guild Week.

J D Shanklin made a number of administrative announcements. He then apologised for communication failures in the run-up to the Week, due to IT problems at work (voicemail had not been getting through, and the website went down just before the Week).

Although there had initially been about 100 expressions of interest in the Week, actual attendance was a little low. Student subsidies were in place in accordance with last year's suggestion.

There was discussion about the best way to disseminate information, in particular the programme for the week. Most communication now takes place electronically; some had asked for paper copies, which had been supplied. Downloading from the web had been unexpectedly problematic because

of the website failure. Some had asked not to be sent attachments, although for others this was the preferred way of receiving the programme. It is clear that a variety of methods will be needed, and organisers will need to respond flexibly to the wishes of participants. Posting material on the Guild website would be helpful.

The communication problems had highlighted the need for more information about phone numbers to be provided. The organiser should provide a working mobile phone number for participants to call, in the run-up to the week and on the week itself. Participants (particularly those arriving during the week) should be asked to provide a mobile phone number: J D Shanklin has modified the booking form to reflect this, and will pass it on to future organisers.

C H Rogers asked that the list of participants be made available; this request will be passed on to future organisers. He also added that it is good practice for the principal towers (10s and 12s, plus other particularly desirable bells) to be booked early, and the rest of the Week organised around them.

B G Meads proposed a vote of thanks for J D Shanklin's organisation of Guild Week. Having organised a Guild Week himself he was well aware of the huge amount of work entailed. He himself was thoroughly enjoying the week, and spoke for all of us in extending warmest thanks to Jonathan for all his efforts.

7. Structure and format of future Guild Weeks

The President introduced a discussion of whether the current format of Guild Weeks is still appropriate.

To start the debate, the President summarised the results of a survey which had been conducted in 2006. Not all the discussion is currently relevant: at that time, there were concerns centred on overcrowding. There were also some internal tensions between ringers of different aspirations, ages and experience, which are reflected in some of the questions asked. The President was pleased to note that many of the responses to question 3 were no longer applicable.

Question 1 – What do you hope to get out of this Guild Week?

People looked forward to meeting old friends and forming new friendships, building on these by spending time walking, going to the pub and eating together. Visiting new areas and places was popular, as was sampling the various local beverages. Members welcomed the opportunity to ring handbells and to ring methods of a greater complexity than those that they normally had the chance to ring during the year.

Question 2 – What have you enjoyed most about Guild Weeks you have attended in the past?

The mixture of different generations was considered as a highlight by undergraduates and older members alike - this is helped by the transport arrangements. People also enjoyed socialising with intelligent people with a sense of humour.

Touring pleasant countryside and visiting rural churches was an important feature and was preferred to visiting urban towers, although organisers were asked to ensure that there are opportunities for tea, coffee and other refreshments. The occasional 'days out' were remembered fondly, such as the trip on the Settle-Carlisle railway and the visit to Lundy Island. The availability of a choice of evening activity was appreciated.

Question 3 – What has irked you?

Poor striking was a common irritation. It was appreciated that standards needed to be at a reasonable level to ensure the ringing is enjoyable and not embarrassing.

Pushy ringers were also indicated as an annoyance, particularly those who persistently ring things outside their capabilities, leading to poor striking. Tenor grabbers were frowned upon, especially those who are not as good as they think they are. Less experienced ringers have often felt disheartened because they have not been given the chance to ring things that would enable them to progress.

Long drives to just one tower were not appreciated, even if it were a 12 bell tower or a particularly rare or good tower. Overcrowding was recognised as a frequent problem.

Question 4 - What are your thoughts about placed bands?

(This was a passing phase which has now passed.)

Although there were mixed feelings about this issue, there was almost universal disquiet about this becoming normal practice. It was realised that most members are sensible when catching hold, but ringing masters needed to be prepared to intervene should a band prove to be inappropriate. There was agreement that some placing can be useful at times, such as to give help to weaker ringers, when the bells are particularly difficult or heavy, or on higher numbers. The difference between delegating a band of ringers and telling them exactly which bell to ring is significant.

Question 5 – Comments

People who come on Guild Week are often getting their best ringing of their year and are keen to ring well-struck touches of methods within their capabilities in a relaxed atmosphere. Too much fierceness in running the touring ringing is not appropriate. Those who seek a higher standard can opt to ring in a greater number of peals. Ringing masters need to be sensitive to the needs of less experienced and out-of-practice ringers – letting them attempt things to extend their capabilities, but not allowing them to push their luck.

Several generations are missing on Guild Week, particularly in the 25 – 50 age range. This led on to a discussion of the attitude of the Guild to the presence of partners and families on Guild Week. Varying views were expressed, but it was agreed that making it easier for families to put in an appearance could encourage attendance of the 25-50 group. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation might prove to be more reasonably priced for families. Camping (even at a small distance from the main accommodation) may be attractive.

At the time of the discussion, overcrowding of Guild Weeks was an issue, so concern was expressed that Guild members might be crowded out by families. It was agreed that Guild Week organisers should discuss arrangements with families, and each should be treated on a case-by-case basis.

The President summarised the main points of current relevance as follows:

We have now had three Guild Weeks with rather low numbers, so keeping up numbers would seem to be a real concern.

We need to continue to try to make the Week attractive to students, subsidising places (as has happened this year), looking creatively at ways of reducing costs (e.g. providing a low-cost ‘camping’ option whenever possible, and perhaps exploring the use of church halls etc).

Keeping costs down and ensuring ‘value for money’ is a concern for many of the Guild.

The generation gap is a concern: the 25-50 age range needs nurturing. Guild with young families should be encouraged to come, even for odd days. Non-residents are always welcome. We need to make non-members feel part of the Week and to join activities.

Some of the issues raised in 2006 are no longer ‘live’. However, we should continue to try to make sure that Guild Week is pleasant and fulfilling for all who come.

The meeting was invited to comment.

Numbers; duration of Guild Week

J D Shanklin mentioned that about 100 members had asked to be sent further information, although only about 35 are actually participating in the Week. It was agreed that he should enquire why others decided against joining us.

The numbers have been sufficiently high (peaking at about 28) to make the Week enjoyable.

There was discussion about whether a full week is still the preferred model, and it was agreed that there was no reason to change. There is still a substantial group coming for all or most of the Week. People coming for shorter periods within the week is fine; what is difficult is when the numbers are too uneven (e.g. overloading in the middle of the week; everyone disappearing before the end).

It was agreed that undergraduates should be encouraged to come, even if just for a few days.

Some keen peal-ringers are not coming at present, in contrast to even a few years ago.

M S Threlfall stated that it is not just the CUG which lacks the 25-50 group: they just don't have the time nowadays.

For some London-based Guild members, recent Weeks have been regarded as too far to go if joining only for a short period. Oxford and Cambridge are within easy range of London, so we may see more visitors.

Accommodation.

The need for a range of different accommodation was highlighted.

This year we had the choice of 'standard' or 'en-suite' rooms, with differential costs. This was much appreciated.

It was noted that some educational establishments may be able to offer reduced rates to current students: this should be explored.

Some, including students and recent graduates, have enjoyed the low-cost 'camping' option. However, others have indicated that other 'basic' accommodation might be preferable – e.g. a village hall (village and church halls are commonly used in this way, so fire regulations and insurance are clearly not problematic). The resident Guild was asked to discuss this matter and communicate their views to the President. C M P Johnson suggested conversing with younger members of the OUS, who frequently use such accommodation.

Cost is, however, a major concern for others who would still prefer a proper bed. For these, bed-and-breakfast or cheap hotel (e.g. Travelodge) may be a more economical option than staying in the main accommodation.

The possibility of 'farming out' people on a bed-and-bath basis around households in a village was raised. H F Pettifer noted that this option had been considered on a previous week, but no one could remember it actually being done.

Some concern was raised about the character of Guild Week changing if people were too spread out. It was agreed that whatever the accommodation arrangements, central catering during the Week is essential, and a common-room/communications centre.

Other matters

B G Meads suggested that some very keen peal ringers did not come on Guild Week because they could not ring the peals they wanted, to which J D Shanklin replied that as the average age of attendees has increased, the tendency to want to ring peals appears to decrease. However, it was agreed that one of the advantages of Guild Week is the unique combination of a touring party, quarters, peals and social activities, and it is essential to retain all these elements.

L T W Smith would appreciate having an afternoon off to do something else: this might be an organised activity as in the past, or unstructured. J D Shanklin said that when he had raised the possibility of a trip to a salt mine this year he had had very little response, although many present could not remember hearing about this option.

8. Future Guild Week venues

2010

Richard Youdale has written as follows:

Accommodation has been provisionally booked at Ripon College Cuddesdon, near Oxford, for the week of 21st - 28th August 2010. The college is assuming about 25 full residents and about 25 campers, but there is enough residential accommodation to cope with up to about 40 at any one time. The price quoted is £48 for dinner, bed & breakfast or about £16 for dinner & breakfast for campers. These figures do not include organisational costs or donations. Although the cost will therefore be a little higher than previously the facilities and the location are good.

I have already made some provisional bookings for peal towers actually in the centre (since they need early booking); I will begin work on other towers shortly.

The College asks for a deposit of just over £1000 (an estimated 5% of the total accommodation bill). Would it be possible for the Guild funds to advance this sum either to me or to the College?

It was agreed that the Guild should pay the booking fee; organisers should not be out-of-pocket.

In the current climate, numbers would seem to be over-optimistic, especially those for camping. There was discussion about the relatively high cost of accommodation. To this needs to be added a daily rate for organisation and tower donations (we are paying £7 this year), plus transport (£5 this year), plus a levy to enable undergraduate places to be subsidised. A number of members felt that the projected costs would be beyond them. The camping option was appreciated, but there is likely to be significant interest in other lower-cost accommodation. It was also agreed that family-friendly accommodation in the vicinity should be explored.

The President agreed to discuss options with Richard Youdale, but it was noted that the booking with the College has now been made.

2011

N J H Small had offered to arrange a week in Cambridge for 2011; he will now be assisting B I Le Gallez in the task. She has made some exploratory investigations on accommodation, and sought guidance from the meeting about whether we wished to be in Cambridge or nearby (e.g. Ely). After some discussion it was agreed that a base in Cambridge would be preferable (easier for residents to join for the odd day; possibility of staying with friends in Cambridge).

The only College within our price range is Fitzwilliam (£43.60 bed, breakfast and evening meal for a utilitarian room). However, there is parking at the College, and driving out of Cambridge should be less affected by traffic than for many other Colleges. It was agreed that Barbara should make a provisional booking.

There was discussion about whether VAT should be payable. If Guild Week is classed as an educational activity, then it is exempt from VAT. However, the interpretation of the ruling is in the hands of individual VAT officers. We have paid VAT on all Weeks in recent years, although often not on the Guild Dinner; C M P Johnson suggested that the formula used in this case might be applied to the Week.

C Rogers requested that special attention be paid to including new or altered rings, e.g. towers which had been augmented in recent years. B I le Gallez requested that any other members with requests for towers or other aspects of the Week contact her.

2012

I G Vincent has looked into arranging a week in Nottinghamshire. The best bet for accommodation is on the University of Nottingham campus, about two miles west of the city centre; the price quoted is £35 + VAT. Rooms are not en-suite. Following the discussion at the meeting, he would

also be seeking a range of lower-cost accommodation options for students and families: camping is not possible, but there may be a village-hall or equivalent. Some low-cost hotels (e.g. Travelodges) charge a room rate and can accommodate several people per room.

It was remarked more generally that any 2012 Guild Week should be careful to avoid clashing with the Olympics.

9. Cambridge city centre towers

9.1. GSM

L T W Smith has been deeply involved in the work at GSM, and the President asked him to summarise what has been happening.

The bells are now ringing; they handle very well and the project has been successful. Iterative work on the acoustics continues: the back 8 are regarded as ‘fantastic’; the 12 aren’t quite there yet.

The frame was designed by Barry Johnson and Luke Smith. The front 11 bells swing E-W and the tenor N-S. The old clock bells (3, 4, 5, 8, 12) have been retained for use with the clock. 6, 9 and 10 are hanging in the void. The ceiling of the ringing chamber has been raised, some of the timbers exposed, and a viewing port in the door has been added; the panelling needs attention.. A viewing gallery has also been included in the bell chamber.

9.2. St John's

The President invited C M P Johnson to speak about St John's.

The project has been taken to the College Council, which was neutral on the matter and set a number of conditions to be addressed. The next stage is that the Governing Body will vote whether or not to go ahead. This decision is expected during next academic year; it is difficult to gauge which way the vote will go. Discussions with members of the College and with experts continue. A report “Appendix A” had been displayed; people were encouraged to read it and to discuss it with Dr Johnson.

It was suggested that it could calm some fears to provide evidence from Oxford Colleges with bells, demonstrating that bells need not interfere with the academic life of the College. This was agreed, and it was also noted that the current Master has an Oxford background and is known to be in favour of bells.

9.3. Other Cambridge towers

Rope guides have been installed at the Catholic. This improves their handling, and J A Agg expressed the expectation that it should make them less intimidating to less experienced ringers.

New tail ends have been purchased at St Andrew the Great.

There was comment about the ‘go’ of the fourth at St Bene’t’s, although J D Shanklin maintains that there has been no change.

10. Diary Dates.

Michaelmas meeting: 16th October

SUA Striking Competition: 14th November

London outing: 21st November (Tessa Beadman is organising this)

Annual Dinner: 13th March 2010 (venue to be decided).

Guild Week: 21st – 28th August 2010: Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford

11. Any Other Business.

With no other business, the President closed the meeting at 22.10.