

To All Guilds and all Guild members.

Here is a transcription from The Association AGM to the 52 delegates plus observers present and I felt it important that for those unable to attend to also be aware of what was said.

New Chairman's introduction

I quite honestly never ever imagined myself in this position and everyone on the GPC will tell you I have worked very hard at not taking on an Officers role, as I was always very happy to be a 'backroom boy'

It was only at the end of last year, I realised that I was the 'only one left standing', with as much experience, as these amazing people who are retiring, some of whom started in 2009 like myself. So I took a big gulp and offered to stand.

I know I am taking on a huge role, as there have been some pretty amazing people who have held this role before and therefore I have a lot to live up to but hopefully with all of your support, together we can continue what they all were so passionately committed to.

There is a lot of work to do, not least within Guilds themselves, as I am always so very surprised when I hear of members who don't know they even belong to The Association. I proposed the idea of having regional reps some time ago but unfortunately we didn't have sufficient members on the GPC to give each region their own rep, so this had stalled however it does now look likely that after the AGM, we will be able to appoint a GPC member to each of the ten regions. The GPC secretary sends out information to all Guild secretaries, as does the GPC member, who compiles the Association News. This information is meant to filter down to all Guild members but as with all voluntary organisations, this isn't happening uniformly across all Guilds. So many Guild members really don't have a true understanding of what The Association is, as I just said, some don't even know they belong to the Association, some think their Guild is affiliated just to get 'the insurance cover'. Some think there is a Head Office, or the Chair gets a salary and a company car, (lucky me) so there are many, many reasons why the GPC felt having regional reps could help with some of this communication. It also means Guilds can pass on their own views, thoughts and ideas to the rep and this can go in to 'the melting pot' when the GPC meets. If this is something that could benefit the wider membership it can be taken forward but there will always be limits to what the volunteer members of the GPC can physically do and there is always the issue of cost implications, so not all ideas will necessarily be practical or viable at the end of the day.

In a perfect world reps would be local to their region but sadly not all regions have people on the GPC and anyway every five years GPC members retire and there would be no guarantee that someone from that region would stand. If a guild would like their rep to come and give them a talk, then it will be for the Guild to pay for their travelling expenses, as it would not be possible for The Association to fund the travelling to every Guild. Members of the GPC do not charge for their time when on Association 'duty'. I wouldn't like to even begin to calculate how many hours members of the GPC and the JEC give to the Association and therefore to you as members.

Obviously this is all very much in its infancy but after the AGM, at the first GPC meeting, this will be a priority. Reps will be able to meet up with Guild members at events such as summer school, conference, AGM etc. They will hopefully be able to communicate with the Guild members, through Guild newsletters, so information about the Association reaches each and every member and we can hopefully bury some of the urban myths. In the fullness of time some regions may well have regional events, like exhibitions, workshops (some already do, so not reinventing the wheel). It will be for each region to decide what works best for them and if they want a regional on-line forum, blogs, FB, twitter, Pintrest, Instagram etc. There are thriving Guilds and Guilds who are in danger of closing and maybe there are lesson to be learnt on how to help them to increase membership. There are Guilds who don't want 'incomers' or have waiting lists to deter new people, some are too small to have a committee, some resist even being part of a region, so there will need to be flexibility, respect and understanding, as all Guilds are autonomous. Some Guilds are so small they cannot afford speakers or workshops and maybe they could be invited to join a larger Guild event? There are so many opportunities and ideas, which will hopefully help every Guild member, where ever they are, to have the knowledge and information to make more use of their membership, if they wish to do so.

So many Guilds never ever come to an AGM, so perhaps reps could do some persuading and more Guilds are represented?

The other problem, which is quite common, is that so often new members to Guilds are not told about the Association and so the ignorance perpetuates. This is not necessarily done deliberately by existing members, it is just we all know what we know and it doesn't occur to us that newer members will have no reason to know!!!

We will also be producing one of these for every member. It was, many years ago, my business card but The Association one will have images of Summer School, National Exhibition, National Conference, The Journal, Foundation Certificates, The Stuart Groom library etc on the front. On the reverse it will have website info and contact details for Journal & Association and to cap it off down one side will be a ruler, so it will even be useful and now you can even use it as a proper bookmark for all those books, you are going to borrow from the Stuart Groom Library! Hopefully members will then all know what the Association is and does. Guilds could request supplies to hand out, at outside events, if they felt them to be useful. *(obviously I cannot show you here what I held up at the AGM but is basically a bookmark, with photos on it).*

We also have what; I feel is one of the best Journals in the World for spinning, weaving & dyeing, which is put together by a dedicated team of Guild members, also volunteers, from all over the UK. This is REAL dedication because it is ongoing. You don't finish one and then start another; you are working on two/three at a time, with an eye on even further ahead. Much is done on email, I know because I get them all. Every article that is written is sent round for scrutiny and for comments and members take their role very seriously. Many organisations have professionals who produce their magazine. We should all be very proud of our Association Journal and support their hard work. It is now so easy to subscribe, as you can do it all on the website. I am sure for those who don't like on-line there will be members in their own Guild who would be more than happy to do it for them. I was one of those who

trilled the electronic version and was absolutely convinced before it started that I was definitely not up for this NEW malarkey and would stick with my paper copy. But when you see the electronic version and can zoom in on textiles and see the structures or blow up the font to a size you can read. WOW it is really something but I do still like to sit down and flick through the paper copy and they do look lovely on the bookshelf, so I have both. The Journal now has a new website, which you will not have seen but when it is up and running you must take a look. Even something like a new website and all the terminology that it entailed didn't daunt them. They just got stuck in and went with it and didn't hold back when they felt something wasn't quite right.

There is however something you can all do and take back to your Guild members and that is encouraging them to send articles in about your own Guild or even an article for showcase. The Journal really does appreciate the Guilds who are regular subscribers but there are also other Guilds who are never represented in the Journal and that seems to be a great shame but the JEC are totally reliant on the information coming from the Guilds. Sally, who looks after this section, couldn't possibly contact all 114 Guilds to ask for articles four times a year, as well as editing those that arrive and going back for more information, photos etc.

Now back to the membership. If you think that Summer School attracts say 250 people, National Exhibition up to 300 or so, conference less than 80, and some will participate in all three, there are still many, many members who do not experience the joy being part of something so much bigger. There are also many groups across the UK who are not affiliated to the Association for whatever reason and it would be wonderful if we can all persuade some of them to join. I know we won't win them all and I know some who are vehemently against The Association but I firmly believe that the Association could and should be the voice of Spinning, Weaving & Dyeing in the UK but we can hardly be that voice, unless we are more representative of the whole community of weavers, spinners & dyers.

There is now so much more awareness of what we do, through The Campaign for Wool, through Heritage Crafts Association, National Trust etc. Following the huge success of the National Exhibition last year in Killerton, when it is estimated our event generated them something in the region of £20,000, we can honestly say we are a very valuable partner and should not feel we have to go cap in hand to anyone. It was for them, a free, high quality event, as we organised it, set it up, stewarded it and demonstrated and then packed it all away and posted it back to Guilds. We also increased their footfall by something like 135%. I know many Guilds already have excellent relationships with their local NT property but if you have a local NT property where you feel it would be worthwhile demonstrating to raise the profile of your Guild but haven't yet managed to get your foot in the door, please do tell them about Killerton. We have Wool Week coming up in October, let's see if we can get NT on board and get them to help us with publicity for a National TwinSpin event??

Many, many more people, particularly younger people have discovered the joys of knitting, so we need to now get them to take the next steps and spin and or dye their own yarn. We started TwinSpin, just through social media, so cost us nothing and we continue to get enquiries almost two years on. I am not sure how many people I have directed to Guilds but well over 300. My map reading skills and knowledge of the UK have vastly improved, as a result!

We the members, however cannot sit back complacent, otherwise The Association and the Guilds will wither and die, if we don't encourage the next generations, as to be very truthful we are MOSTLY, all of a certain age!! I know younger people are leading manic lives but everyone needs time out, to recoup and we all know how therapeutic our crafts are.

Also I recently read this quote sent by The American Tapestry Alliance

"Weaving...this constant repetition of one movement followed by its opposite, generates a balancing of left and right brain activities. It has a harmonizing effect on the weaver that is then transmitted to the viewer. This peaceful, harmonizing effect is most visible when working with children. A class of hyper-active children is transformed into intent and dedicated weavers. When I tell them that weaving puts more peace and beauty back into the world, they don't want to stop. They weave with purpose and integrity and a mission. Peace and harmony are real necessities, very real, and children understand this." ATA member Thoma Ewen, Artists-In-Schools.

So we all know how important our skills are, not only for heritage and preservation but for health and for education.

We were all new once and were welcomed in to our Guilds, so we need to offer that hand of friendship to others. I can remember, many years ago, thinking about joining Durham Guild and for three months I put off going to a meeting, because I had to open that door, to a sea of strange faces and wondering if they would be friendly. Of course I needn't have worried, it was the best thing I ever did and I have learnt so much from them and made so many dear friends.

I know how hard it is to get volunteers at Guild level. My own Guild was founded in 1979 and two of the founder members are still on the committee!! So perfectly understand the reluctance for members to come forward to join the GPC or the JEC but we do need to bring in new faces, new ideas. We even have members not sitting on either committee but willing to lend a remote hand. Heather has been a victim of her own success and made Cof A so amazingly 'a must do', for many members, so it now needs its own team to help out. Janet Crowther has offered to lead on CofA but if anyone can offer to help with mentoring or some of the back room stuff, we would love to hear from you. Likewise Steve has done something very similar with the Foundation Spinning cert and that could do with some help too. We are looking for Guild members to act as mentors for other members in their area who wish to do the Foundation Spinning cert. We are not looking for members to join the GPC but to volunteer and report back to the GPC. We have a job's description which is not onerous if you think you can help. Steve is in the process of writing/editing the modules for both chemical and natural dyeing and very keen to produce a dyeing foundation certificate but we need people acting as guinea pigs to test the wording out, like members did for the spinning cert and then we will need a team for each to take this forward to the membership.

I so love the fact that we are a broad church of members, with some always wanting to stretch and challenge themselves with things like CofA and there are many others who are more than happy to potter, dipping in and out of fibre related crafts. All have something to

give and we need to celebrate all levels of skills and aspirations and try and make sure they all feel part of the Association.

The Association is up for doing lots of inspiring things for members but at the end of the day we are a self-help group. I can tell you that being part of The Association GPC and or JEC you get far more from it than you ever put in. I have met so many lovely people from all over the UK. I have now been involved quite heavily in the last four National Exhibitions and being able to handle such amazing work is an honour and a joy. Going to Summer School and realising this is a whole week of 'me time', no cooking, no washing, no ironing, just ME, is something I had never experienced before, being among over 250 likeminded souls is just great and spending a week with a fantastic tutor is brilliant and when you look at the cost of workshops around the UK it is amazing value for money.

Finally I would like to say that members of the GPC and the JEC are just ordinary members of Guilds, with no special skills, only that desire to ensure that the skills we all love and take for granted are there for the next generations to enjoy. As I said earlier we aren't elitist, nor are we professionals, nor doing this to promote our own work, nor do we get our work automatically selected for the National Exhibition or get priority over others for places on Summer School. (all things over the years, that have become urban myths).

However

We are just like everyone here in this room, whether that is a spinner a weaver a dyer or a combination of all three. So if you think you can offer some of your time to help, please do get in touch. We won't expect you to hit the ground running but if we can slowly build a pool of members who can take over when others retire, the Association will continue way in to the future.

I look forward to working with everyone but I cannot promise to visit every Guild, as I do have my family of four children and currently five grandchildren and counting, who also keep me very busy but will always be at the end of the phone or email for any enquiries, issues or ideas.

Thank you

Angela Colbridge

Footnote

Since the AGM I have been doing some research, for my own interest, for one of the Points for Discussion at the AGM.

Ashfield Guild had asked if a pre AGM discussion on-line would be helpful/useful in order for Guilds to have better knowledge and information, before voting on propositions and there was a suggestion that we could possibly use Ravelry. I thought I should do some researching of what blogs/groups etc were active, what they were used for and what was discussed, as my knowledge of these on-line forums is extremely limited.

I came across this, which is very relevant to the urban myths that abound and thought I would share it with you.

I came across a blog, in which someone stated and I quote '*cliquey, pompous academics comes to mind when I think of the GPC*'