

Notes on visit by C.E.O. Terry Murphy to MEG on 24th March 2018

This series of talks started in 2011. The Guild is not a simple organization and is subject to enormous requirements and regulations which are imposed by legislation. Branch officers are never personally liable, trustees are. We struggle because of this, members engage locally, but that isn't enough to satisfy "public benefits". Rules arrive and impose themselves upon the branch. If we had become an independent group individuals could be personally liable. Unless you look deeply you would think "why would you join an organization to learn how to stitch". Membership of the Guild has halved in the last 12 years. As a national organization we are able to do things smaller groups cannot. There are savings and costs to being part of a larger group. We use Unity Bank so there is no liability to members of the branch, or trustees or T.M. himself. There has only been 1 claim against a branch officer in the history of the Guild.

T.M. has been working on GDPR –General Data protection Regulation. It means all members follow the same procedure, with no variation. It is coming because the internet has overtaken what the data Protection Act has to offer. Top 10 charities are selling email addresses. None of us will be able to avoid it. It is about protecting your identity. Too many firms have been overtaken by the development of data information and this scheme protects individual identity.

Since the move to Bucks museum 3.5 full time members of staff answer 10000 queries annually; most of these are from members. In Contact T.M. summarized the issues HQ deal with and he noted 17 benefits for members. The workload is heavy but there is little hope of employing more people. Volunteers have disappeared since the move. Members of 18 branches have left in last 60 months and 182 branches have lost 50% of their membership. 5 new branches have opened, some with only a handful of members.

The Embroiderers' Guild needs to be a main leader in a national movement for stitch. By working under direction from HQ he indicated that branches could help more people to be attracted ie by National Stitch Day, various themes eg Cap Brown/Page 17/100 Hearts. He didn't state how many new members had joined as a result of seeing these initiatives. Exhibiting in areas of high foot fall would attract more people, especially under 30s. Demands on the Embroiderers Guild as a charity are increasing. Page 17 was voted the exhibition of the show at NEC and Harrogate. We need to attract more people or branches will close.

N. Wales has 117 members and has difficulty finding a Chair.

Organisation of a branch.

A .A branch can run with only a Treasurer as a committee. B Some branches run with a working party, which changes periodically C Members vote each year to set aside the Constitution. D Hull branch only has 8 members and functions with a working party, whose roles are interchangeable.

N. Wales Chair remarked that she would have valued a Facebook group of Chairs (closed group) but T.M. didn't want that. TM was concerned over Forums on the internet as standards of politeness, decency, and communication drop. HQ had tried to address these issues through the Regional chair, helplines and Branch Officers. A closed group must be managed. TM wants to start virtual branches which would be available 24/7 – 365 days of the year. Attackers feel safe and anonymous on the internet. A Facebook closed group would be completely outside the Guild, and not under control; CEO wants control but having difficulty gaining it. This issue of control seems to be a main concern.

A new database for the Guild is being created by someone in Crete using Word Press. There will be private social media within the Guild for forums and courses. With the new website will come much lower costs.

Q. If you lowered the membership fees would it attract new members?

A. No. Membership fees go down, and benefits to members go down. We suggested that 3 years ago there would be 3 layers of membership and this was rejected.

Members commented- it was the elitism and not the money charged. CEO very surprised at the reaction.

It was a consultation document saying this is what it might be.

Members' comment- the proposed fees were astronomical to be imposed on an aging population, some on small fixed incomes.

TM wanted a tiered structure to attract textile artists who left in the early 1990's. They would be willing to pay more to join. He did not explain how he knew this. He claimed there are 400 textile artists nationally and would like them all associated with EG.

The Regional Chairs in April will be asked to commit to open 2 new branches per year for 5 years in their regions. If we don't change what we do and how we do it we may only have 2 more years to survive.

Q. The branch has a responsibility to inform members about what is happening in the Guild. Members are complaining about the short notice for lots of projects run by HQ and short deadlines. We need to know about projects in plenty of time. (TM said he would come back to this but did not)

Q. Recruiting new members. What proportion is under 25 or coming along from YE?

A. Less than you could count on one hand. It is up to branch members to invite a friend. We are not helping ourselves by not actively recruiting members. He has little idea how branches operate to attract new members; Merseyside uses its web site to bring in new people. Members do bring along friends but the fee is a stumbling block. HQ can help but members must take the lead in recruiting. Early Bird Discount was badly timed because TM did not think of it in time and he apologised. There will be an Early Bird Discount this year as well. We got more money in earlier through this scheme.

600 members pay by direct debit. Members comment- we can't claim Gift Aid if we pay by direct debit. TM- When we were designing the website we could have opted to pay in half yearly instalments but this was rejected. We have a very inefficient system for payment.

Q. HMRC gift aid small donations collection scheme. Does this qualify? We were told "there is no benefit from these donations". TM will check with HMRC, but suspects that there is no third party benefit.

Q. If we labelled the tin "exhibition fund" could we claim?

Sponsorship comes in kind these days, not in money linked to third party benefit. It has never been TM's aim to deprive branches of Gift Aid. Answer not satisfactory.

The likelihood is that we will not have to have branch AGM's in the future.

Members stressed that we find our AGM's necessary for electing new branch officers and sharing annual reports.

Q. Why do we keep the Collection? How unique are the pieces?

A. We would not now save a lot of money. The Collection costs £17000 p.a. to keep. It is funded by a legacy for the next 5 years. TM has asked Regional Chairs to find suitable places to display the Collection. No real answer to uniqueness or whether it attracts non-members who view it at Aylesbury or when touring.

Not many people have visited the Collection in Aylesbury. Visitor numbers were modest. Every 3 years the Guild will take the Collection out on tour. Not every venue is suitable. It is more important to display members work at trade shows etc.

Q. Campaign for Creativity. EG do not seem to be fully involved in this campaign.

A. We got it on the website very quickly and on Facebook the next day. It has been on the front of the Guild's website since it started. Been promoted the whole time.

We set out aims for the Guild in 2015 and one of those aims was that in 2020 we would be engaging with 1500 young people per year. The World's Longest Embroidery for Schools goes towards this. On average at least 10 people are connected with each 1 metre piece.

Mayflower 2020 exhibition will be part of this scheme. It will be aimed at 15-20 age group to engage with 500 young people by 2020. All branches to ask local schools to take an interest in embroidery but offered no suggestion as to how to proceed. There are plans to extend displays to USA and ports from which Pilgrims sailed.

Q. School visits- do schools pay?

A. No

Q. Why do YE have to pay £10 p.a.? How do they benefit?

No answer; one member said "Pack of needles" which drew chuckles from the audience. TM gave the impression he had no answer to YE tutor/looked uneasy.

Meeting drew to close due to lack of time.