

# Annual report 2015-16

[www.writersguild.org.uk](http://www.writersguild.org.uk)

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Or by phone: 020 7833 0777

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## CONTACT US

If you want to contact any of the WGGB officers, craft chairs or regional representatives featured in this annual report, you can find their details on our website:

[www.writersguild.org.uk/contact/](http://www.writersguild.org.uk/contact/)

You can also follow us on Twitter:

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# Acting General Secretary's report

Firstly, I want to take this opportunity to thank Bernie Corbett for all the sterling work he has done as General Secretary, he has been instrumental in making WGGB a forward thinking, strong trade union. Although Bernie has now stepped down as General Secretary, he hasn't left WGGB and continues to work with us as Finance & Business Manager. In this role he oversees the Writers Digital Payments scheme, which he pioneered, and also our members' pension scheme and the WGGB Welfare Fund.

We have been busy since the last AGM and it has been another round of successes for WGGB, as the following reports from our officers, craft and regional committee chairs will show. I won't repeat the detail, but just to give a taster: we have paid out (via Writers Digital Payments) over £1 million in royalties to TV writers whose work has been shown on BBC iPlayer and ITV Player; and we have negotiated above-inflation minimum fee rises for writers working in television, theatre and radio.

In other areas, our strong affiliations mean we are able to push for the very best deals for writers. This is evidenced by our work as a member of the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU), alongside Equity, the



Musicians' Union, BECTU and the National Union of Journalists. This year we have joined forces with our sister unions in the BBC Love It Or Lose It campaign (see page 18), to fight for a strong, independent and publicly funded corporation as it faces charter renewal.

The partnership also benefits our members on a day-to-day level too, whether it be as a result of free workshops offered by FEU Training, or opportunities to attend Parliament with other entertainment union members to raise issues that affect all creative workers.

The creative industries in the UK are worth over £80 billion per year yet there is a creeping expectation that writers (and other creatives) should work for free. We are challenging that narrative, as our Free is NOT an Option campaign is showing (see page 18). We are also tackling the inequality and lack of diversity that is a real problem in the creative sector.

It's not just the UK we set our sights on, though. We have considerable influence over politicians in Westminster, Brussels, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay and beyond, and we meet regularly to ensure that we maintain that. We are also fully engaged with other writers' guilds and unions throughout the world.



**The Writers' Guild Awards are a highlight of the WGGB calendar. This year Russell T Davies won the Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award**

Photo of Ellie Peers (above) by Sarah Woodley,  
Photo of Russell T Davies by Joanne Gennard

There have been some great WGGB events over the past year, including Meet the Radio Drama Producers, Meet the Agents, Getting Paid for Your Work, Television Writing: Women's Work?, our annual videogames panel event, our regular Celebrating the Writer film screening, plus a new series of screenings tied in with the BAFTA and Academy Awards season (see page 13). We have also enjoyed the regular highlights on our annual calendar, including our Literary Managers Forum, Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards, the Tinniswood audio drama award and of course our high-profile Writers' Guild Awards ceremony each January, which this year saw acclaimed writer and long-term WGGB member Russell T Davies receive the coveted Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award.

One of the benefits of attending WGGB events is the opportunity to meet our members. In fact none of our events would even be possible if it wasn't for WGGB members participating in their union. There are too many individuals to name, so in true union style I want to thank you collectively for the work you have done on WGGB committees, events, negotiations, campaigns and the face-to-face recruitment of fellow writers.

Much of the work WGGB does would also not be possible without the support of our dedicated group of staff, who do amazing work, including successfully resolving contractual disputes; growing the WGGB membership; expanding our communications; and producing the weekly ebulletin.

In the coming year I plan to build on our achievements, to expand our agreements across all sectors, and – in tandem with our elected officers – oversee the election of a permanent General Secretary, in accordance with the required legal process.

It is a real privilege to represent the WGGB and I hope that each one of you is proud to be a member.

**Ellie Peers**  
**Acting General Secretary**



**Julian Simpson (pictured right) was presented the Tinniswood audio drama award by comedian Lenny Henry (pictured left)**

Photo: BBC





**WGGB wields influence in (clockwise from top left)  
Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay, Brussels and beyond**

Photos (clockwise from top left): 123rf.com/David Novi; Shutterstock.com/Heartland;  
Shutterstock.com/Horia Bogdan; Shutterstock.com/Darryl Sleath

# Chair's report

It's been a year to remember, as all years at the WGGB are. The biggest news is that Bernie Corbett has stepped down after more than 15 years as our General Secretary. Bernie will be remaining as our Finance & Business Manager during the transitional period.

If I list all of Bernie's achievements, it would run longer than my last series. Bernie had the vision years ago to spot online viewing as a possible new income stream for our members. He's worked hard to ensure that writers are paid for their work shown on BBC iPlayer and ITV Player, and was instrumental in establishing Writers Digital Payments (WDP), a not-for-profit company run by the WGGB and Personal Managers' Association. So far WDP has paid out over £1 million to TV writers and, as far as we're concerned, that's just the beginning.

We will be starting the legal and formal process of appointing a new permanent General Secretary later this year. Until then I assure you that WGGB remains in the best of hands. Ellie Peers, our Assistant General Secretary, has become our Acting General Secretary. Everyone's worked together to make sure business has gone on without missing a beat.

As usual the WGGB has been policing all genres including television, film, theatre, radio, books and videogames. There have been a steady stream of negotiations, as the craft chairs will report (see pages 12–22). A happy resolution of members' problems also remains at the heart of our work.

We've been busy lobbying in both Westminster and Brussels too. We're active in the BBC Love It Or Lose It campaign, along with our fellow entertainment unions, Equity, the Musicians' Union, BECTU and the National Union of Journalists. It's paramount that we protect public service television in Britain and the independence of the BBC.



We continue to fight against low pay or no pay for writers, especially when everyone else is being paid. We constantly push for diversity, both in the hiring of writers and work being commissioned. The Federation of Entertainment Unions' Creating Without Conflict campaign (against bullying and harassment in the creative industries) remains at the forefront; as does protesting against arts cuts.

All this heavy lifting is done by our hard-working staff and our committees, made up of our members who give up valuable writing time to help us all. The WGGB is a trade union for professional writers; we also welcome emerging writers (our Candidate Members) because all of us started somewhere. No matter where we are in our careers, we all need all the help we can get.

We have more members than ever before but there's strength in numbers and recruitment is vital to our future. The best recruitment policy is to tell writers you know that they should be members and bring them along to some of our events to see what we do. One day they will thank you for it too.

I can't finish without a deep bow to Bernie Corbett, who taught me the art of negotiation so I'm now the terror of energy companies. My appreciation also to Ellie Peers, Anne Hogben, Kate Glasspool and Sarah Woodley for keeping the WGGB home fires burning.

A special thank you to the Executive Council, masterminds every one, and also to my fellow officers, Andy Walsh, Richard Pinner and Tim Stimpson, for their unflagging support and good humour.

As a union, we teach the world how to treat writers. There isn't anything we can't achieve when we all work together.

**Gail Renard**  
Chair





**Clockwise from top left: Bernie Corbett has stepped down as General Secretary, while WGGB has joined campaigning forces with other entertainment unions. Members voting at last year's AGM show that writers can effect important change**

Photo of Bernie Corbett by Ellie Peers; bottom photo by Em Fitzgerald

# President's report

As I write, a report by the Institute For Fiscal Studies tells us that 43% of the population falls below the current Income Tax Personal Allowance threshold (£10,600), though of course they are heavily taxed in other ways. In *The Telegraph* this is reported as “burden of tax falls on the rich” – the fabled 1% pay 27.5% of all Income Tax raised. How much more one wonders if it weren't for Panamanian practices.

As with the country, so with the Writers' Guild. Many of our members pay the minimum subscription, not an inconsiderable amount for a freelance creative worker, while a small number pay the maximum. These high-earning members, it would be reasonable to surmise, do not need WGGB on a day-to-day basis. They and their agents can command fees and conditions well above any minimum terms agreement. They are less likely to be treated with the lack of respect meted out to their less distinguished colleagues (although not immune: I had to write to a major studio during the most recent BAFTA awards season to point out that they had left out all mention of their British Oscar-winning screenwriters from their awards publicity). They are easier to raise development money for, or to be commissioned to write, and therefore more likely to be paid for their efforts.

So why are they members, if not primarily out of self-interest? I would surmise it is because they care: about writers; about the conditions necessary for good writing; about supporting their colleagues and maintaining a critical, bold and inquisitive

culture across all the fields in which our members work. This is what, by dealing with the unglamorous detail of contracts and conditions, WGGB does for all writers in this country. I salute our top members for their altruism and I wish that even more of our country's most successful writers could see that we really are all in this together. When you meet them, tell them so. I do.

The Socialist Dream has followed a trajectory not dissimilar to dungarees: once a rugged necessity of the worker's life, it became for a while an essential fashion item (a glorious oxymoron) for any reasonable modern person before coming to languish as the preserve of the resolutely cranky or unpardonably old-fashioned. Modern attempts to revive it in some shape or form are short-lived and often treated with suspicion. Look at the terms in which the current junior doctors' dispute is framed. On one side the Government characterises the BMA as a ruthless and intransigent union, prepared to kill patients to get a better deal for its members. On the other side the doctors say they are the ones fighting for the safety of patients and against privatisation of the NHS and studiously avoid any language that might suggest this is a pay or terms and conditions dispute.



**WGGB's agreements protect writers in the digital age**

Photo of Olivia Hetreed (top) by Joanne Gennard, photo of iPlayer by Shutterstock.com/antb



The Writers' Guild is studiously and rightly apolitical. But there are issues which we all face that are larger than politics: the global movement of money and people; the destabilising effects of climate change; the potential benefits and dangers of bio-science and, much closer to home, lack of diversity, equality and opportunity in the creative industries. One of the new offerings we would like to make to our membership is the opportunity to hear from and discuss with experts in these and other fields, so as to better inform the stories we all tell. These events will take place alongside our popular screenings, networking sessions, 'Meet the... (Agent/Commissioner/Producer etc)' and many regional meetings.

I can't end without thanking Bernie Corbett for the tremendous work he has done over his 15 years as General Secretary. Wise, witty, principled but irreverent, Bernie has led WGGB through interesting times and pioneered digital agreements to the enormous benefit of writers. Personally I hugely appreciated his support and guidance in relaunching the Writers' Guild Awards and negotiating the BFI 'locked box' agreement. I am glad we will be able to continue to draw on his expertise for some time to come. And I am delighted that Ellie Peers has agreed to take on the role of Acting General Secretary, with an appetite and energy for change and improvement but a realistic understanding of the problems we may encounter along the way.

**Olivia Hetreed**  
**President**



**Guests at the Writers' Guild Awards, which were relaunched in 2015 and are just one of many events organised by WGGB**

Photo: Joanne Gennard

# Treasurer's report

A union's central focus is the well-being of its members. Negotiations, campaigns, training, opportunities, advice and support. For the Writers' Guild staff and officers this means a focus on the finances that provide those services and will ensure that the union can continue to support its members in the long term. 2015-2016 has been the second most exciting thing in accounting – stable. A drop in subscription income through 2015 was offset by a decrease in expenditure.

Subscriptions for 2015 saw a drop from £362,419 to £328,467. Supplemented by other income, this means that WGGB received around £30,000 less in 2015 than in 2014. Despite this reduction, a tightening of spending meant that the union was able to post a small profit after tax of £118 for 2015, as opposed to the deficit of £2,196 for 2014. An examination of the figures has explained the lower income and we have seen a positive increase in subscriptions at the start of 2016, which is bringing WGGB back to a balanced budget. As we look to the future, the staff, officers, craft and regional committees will be working with all of our members to help increase the size of our membership and to find other sources of income that will secure the future of the only TUC-affiliated trade union that supports writers. Every member, every pound, really counts.

Where are we now? The General Fund, the amount that WGGB has in its bank account for paying wages, rent and other expenses, saw a balance carried forward at the end of the 2015 financial year of £112,796. This sounds healthy, but represents only three months of operating costs for the union. The Finance Committee is pleased that this figure has stabilised and has made it a priority to try and increase these reserves to give WGGB more security as we move forward.



The Royalties Account (which holds funds from the BBC, ITV and other organisations for distribution to writers) received £36,762 and distributed £267,990 in payments to writers through 2015. A total of £38,340 was carried forward for distribution in 2016 and beyond. This large distribution was as a result of the successful processing of the first three rounds of payments under the Writers Digital Payments scheme – which launched in 2015 and provides another source of royalties on top of those we already distribute.

The Welfare Fund (see page 11), which provides grants and assistance to members in times of trouble, continued to provide help through 2015. The precise figures weren't available at the time of writing, but a series of grants adding up to more than £5,000 were made over the year. The Finance Committee has been working with the Welfare Committee to decide on the best plan for topping up the Welfare Fund and will be carrying out an appeal later in the year.

Looking forward. As we enter the year 2016-2017, the union continues to react well to changing times. We are putting plans and budgets in place that will expand the size of the WGGB staff and enable us to achieve more. Thanks as ever are due to the officers, members of the Finance Committee, the Executive Council and the staff for their ongoing support, hard work and insight, which ensures the union has a sound financial basis on which to carry out its work. Thanks must also go to you. As a member, you are a writer that has decided to stand up and be counted. Without you there would be no union. From finances, budgets and spreadsheets should come agreements, protection and a loud voice for writers. We hope that you continue to be there for the Writers' Guild as the Writers' Guild is there for you. The more members we have, the stronger we shall be.

**Andrew S. Walsh**  
**Treasurer**

# Finance & Business Manager's report

## WGGB PENSION SCHEME

Our unique scheme entitles members to pension contributions from broadcasters and producers, over and above writing fees, provided the writer also makes a contribution and maintains membership of WGGB. This was one of the great achievements of the early pioneers of the WGGB, and over the decades it has generated millions of pounds to set up pensions for writers when they grow old.

Annual payments into members' pension schemes exceed £600,000. Many writers are comfortable in old age because of this scheme, and new writers join every year. It has always been an important recruiting incentive for WGGB.

Since the Maxwell-Mirror pension scandal, there have been frequent amendments to pension regulations and recent changes have seen an increase in problems such as payments not made into individual members' accounts, and members having difficulty in finding out what payments have been made into their plans.



WGGB has launched a major review of the working of the pension scheme. Members can be confident we will do all in our power to safeguard their pensions. More information about the WGGB pension scheme can be found at [writersguild.org.uk/member-benefits/pension-fund/](http://writersguild.org.uk/member-benefits/pension-fund/). If you have any questions about the WGGB pension scheme please email [corbett@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:corbett@writersguild.org.uk)

## WGGB WELFARE FUND

WGGB has a fund that is ring-fenced to help members who suddenly run into urgent financial problems. In the past this has included fires, floods, computer disasters, and many other unpredictable catastrophes. 2015 was a quiet year for the fund, and there were no major grants or loans. But we continue to pay WGGB subscriptions for members who want to remain in the union but simply can't afford it. If you are in desperate financial circumstances, please contact [corbett@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:corbett@writersguild.org.uk)

**Bernie Corbett**  
**Finance & Business Manager**



**Left to right: The Welfare Fund helps WGGB members who run into urgent financial problems, while the pension scheme means members who are eligible receive contributions from broadcasters and producers**

Above photo of Bernie Corbett by Ellie Peers. Photo (top right) by Shutterstock.com/vinnstock. Photo (top left) by Shutterstock.com/Kamira



# Craft committee reports



## BOOKS

The new Books Committee is determined to establish a solid foundation of support for all authors.

Across the year, we will discuss and take action on the most pressing issues facing authors and the writers wishing to break into the publishing industry. This help will also extend to those wishing to join the Writers' Guild to gain the benefits we can offer.

We will also actively seek to form a presence at the major book festivals over the next year, so writers can speak to us directly, along with staging events with leading authors so that they can share their own insight and advice.

Another passion of the Committee is to give a voice and presence to new authors, and we will be announcing plans of how we will endeavour to do this later in the year.

If you have any pressing matters you would like the Committee to discuss or take action on, please email us: [books@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:books@writersguild.org.uk)

**James Hughes**  
**Chair**



**Low pay is a pressing issue  
facing authors**

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Yeko Photo Studio



**Andrea Gibb (left) and  
Line Langebek (right), Film Co-Chairs**



## FILM

The WGGB Film Committee has had another eventful year.

### WRITERS' GUILD AWARDS

Once again we awarded two scripts in the annual Writers' Guild Awards. James Graham won Best First Screenplay for *X+Y* and Paul King won Best Screenplay for *Paddington* – two outstanding scripts. Members of the Film Committee participated in watching and judging all the eligible films – a herculean task because of the number. We are grateful to them for putting the time and effort in. We would like to make special mention to Phil O'Shea who coordinates the film releases on a weekly basis, which makes the Committee's life easier. The workload is still a considerable one for our small committee so we are continuing to develop and refine our jury system. We may follow the TV Committee's lead and bring in other industry writers to sit on the jury with us. This is all for discussion.

The Committee would also like to thank WGGB President Olivia Hetreed and events organiser Ali Welsh for their work in organising the Awards ceremony itself. It was a fantastic evening and the Film Committee is proud to be associated with it.

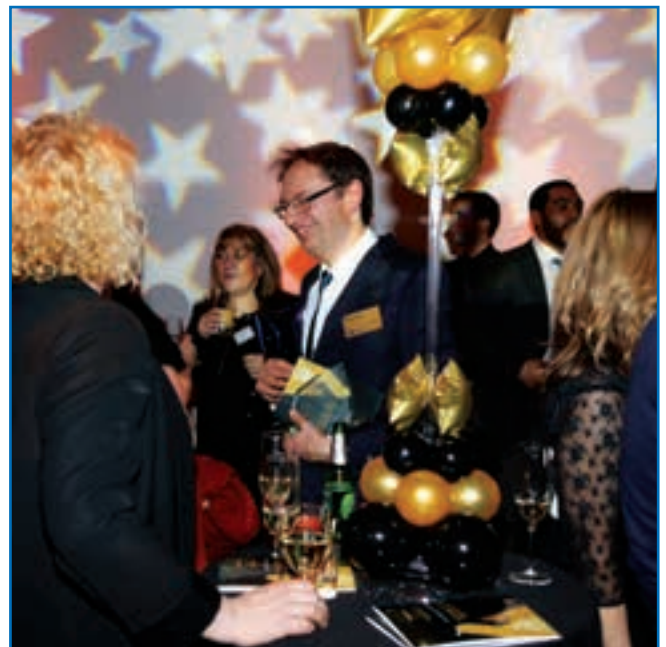
## EVENTS

Following on from the Awards, we are now planning our annual Celebrating the Writer events and are in talks with the Wellcome Trust to arrange a screening of *X+Y*, with James Graham in attendance. We are also looking at holding other screenings throughout the year. (Last year's screening of *Starred Up* with Jonathan Asser was a great success.) As always the main sticking point for organising events is the availability of suitable venues at the right price.

We also partnered with Premier PR and other PR companies on some of their film screenings during the BAFTA and Academy Awards season. We offered these to our members and, where possible, hosted Q&As with the screenwriters afterwards – among the writers interviewed were Nick Hornby (*Brooklyn*) and Matt Charman (*Bridge of Spies*). The feedback from Writers' Guild members was extremely positive and the added bonus was that the screenwriter was featured in the pre-awards publicity, something that doesn't always happen. We are very keen to continue this in the autumn of 2016.

## PACT

Negotiations with Pact are finally picking up again after a long hiatus. We are hoping the first meeting will happen in the next few weeks. We are in the process of revisiting our 'bucket list' and setting up preliminary meetings with the Personal Managers' Association.



**Clockwise from top left: Paul King and James Graham (pictured top right; centre) receive the Best Screenplay and Best First Screenplay Awards at the Writers' Guild Awards this year. Guests at the ceremony at RIBA in London in January 2016**

All photos: Joanne Gennard



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## WOMEN IN FILM AND TELEVISION

In September 2015, Film Committee Co-Chair Andrea Gibb met with Kate Kinninmont from Women in Film and Television (WFTV) and Dr Natalie Wreyford (Research Fellow at the University of Southampton) to discuss gender inequality in the industry; an issue which has been at the forefront of a lot of discussion lately. And not before time! Dr Wreyford has been researching female writers' presence in the film industry and is a fount of knowledge. We are due to meet with her and WFTV again soon, with the intention of establishing a collaboration that would support further research into this area and help promote female writers in film and TV. This would also involve discussions on diversity. We are then hoping to partner on an event in the autumn of 2016 that will highlight the issues.

We are also forging links with Raising Films, a group that aims to address some of the obstacles that prevent film-makers (both above and below the line) with children or caring responsibilities from pursuing their careers.

## LONDON SCREENWRITERS' FESTIVAL

We are regular sponsors of London Screenwriters' Festival (LSF) – the only one of its kind in the country – and are currently in discussions about involvement in the forthcoming festival, due to happen in September 2016. Our physical presence at LSF has proved very useful in recruiting new members and last year was no exception.

## NEW FILM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We were delighted to welcome four new members into our committee this year. They are James Hughes, Tom Williams, Anji Loman Field and Bob Farquhar. They are all extremely busy screenwriters and we're grateful to them for voluntarily giving up their time.

We'd also like to thank Michael Walker, Dare Aiyegbayo and Phil Nodding who stepped down this year, for their commitment and hard work throughout their time on the Committee. They have been invaluable and valued members and will be missed.

Once again we'd like to thank the Writers' Guild staff for all their support in helping the Committee do their work.

The current Film Committee is as follows: Olivia Hetreed, Phil O'Shea, Tracy Brabin, Richard Deakin, Guy Hibbert, James Hughes, Anji Loman Field, Tom Williams, Bob Farquhar, Andrea Gibb and Line Langebek.

**Line Langebek and Andrea Gibb**  
**Co-Chairs**

## RADIO

**This is not so much a report as a recruitment drive and a call to arms!**

After six years as Chair of the Radio Committee and Radio Rep to the Executive Council (ie, two consecutive three-year terms), I am obliged to stand down – though I remain on the Committee. The other Committee members, after many years of service, have decided that their many other commitments prevent them from continuing. It's time to remake the Radio Committee almost from the ground up – to get some new blood and to continue its vital work in a challenging, and changeable, radio environment. If Full Members of WGGB who work in radio and have experience as commissioned radio writers want to get involved, do contact me (by email: [radio@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:radio@writersguild.org.uk)). We need new energy to set priorities for the future and to do what the Radio Committee has always done – protect, assert and, if possible, improve the rights, pay and condition of all radio writers.

And it has never been more important. The BBC, the only broadcaster of radio drama, is under threat as it negotiates to have its charter renewed. We want it to continue in the same form, as this seems the best prospect for radio and for radio writing. The only thing that is certain (at the time of writing) is that more cuts are looming, in radio as everywhere else. The survival of radio drama and comedy, the nurturing of new writing talent and the

possibilities open to radio writers, depend on the survival of the BBC.

It's appropriate that, in public, WGGB campaigns to save the BBC and it is doing so. In private, and in negotiations with them, we need to be critical friends – to safeguard the pay and conditions of radio writers.

In 2015 we negotiated a 2% pay increase on minimum fees. Constant vigilance is necessary to make sure that payments are maintained, and not eroded. And, as ever, the BBC is engaged on another structural reorganisation which may or may not be good for writers. The BBC Studios, if created, will be a sort of 'super-indie', making programmes for the BBC but also for other broadcasters. Radio and TV comedy are being combined in one department, which allows for some potentially fruitful cross-fertilisation but also perhaps risks radio being sidelined, or seen as the poor relation. Finally, with the snappily titled *Compete and Compare*, the BBC is opening up more and more radio drama and comedy slots to independent



**A domestic abuse storyline in *The Archers* recently sparked a frenzy of debate (the photo shows the view from Hanbury Church, Worcestershire, the fictional setting for the radio drama)**

Photo: Shutterstock.com/David Hughes

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production companies – up to 60% of production could be done by indies in six years. That does beg the question of what will happen to in-house drama and comedy, and how much that sector may shrink.

But it is not all doom and gloom. The recent domestic violence storyline in *The Archers* has had the nation gripped, created a frenzy of interest on social media and sparked debate everywhere from *Newsnight* to *Woman's Hour*. It has raised the profile of radio drama enormously; millions of people have seen what we've always known – that radio drama is an enthralling medium, to dramatise the most important and troubling issues of the day. Radio 4 Extra, the digital channel for drama and comedy, has grown its audience exponentially – at a recent meeting, according to the BBC's own figures, its audience is now 2.2 million – a rating comparable to many TV channels, and better than some. The BBC iPlayer Radio app and the 30-day catch-up period mean that radio writing can be enjoyed anywhere and at any time, on a phone or tablet or computer. The BBC is making digital downloads of TV programmes available through the BBC Store; we are continuing to press for radio drama and comedy to be included in this.

And WGGB, like the BBC (though not so extravagantly) has undergone a small reorganisation of its own. We are in the process of setting up a separate Comedy Committee which will work for the rights of all comedy writers in all media. The Radio Committee will continue, working alongside and in cooperation with it.

Thanks are due, as always, to the WGGB staff for their unfailing support and to the Radio Committee members who are standing down, and who deserve a medal for long and distinguished service: Sue Teddern, Tim Stimpson, Nick Warburton, Dave Cohen and Jonathan Myerson.

**Katharine Way**  
**Chair**



## TELEVISION

### FREE IS NOT AN OPTION

The TV Committee continues to campaign for better pay, fairer treatment and appropriate recognition for TV writers across all genres.

Alongside other entertainment unions, we have made it a priority to tackle the problem of low-paid and unpaid work. Our Free is NOT an Option campaign, spearheaded by former WGGB TV Chair Bill Armstrong, continues to challenge the expectation that writers should work for free.

In Bill's words: "The dominant narrative of the last few decades asserts that there is nothing wrong with expecting young people – increasingly even older, more experienced people – to work for nothing for extended periods of time before they are paid for their work. The situation is as grim for writers as it is for anyone else. The WGGB may be a very small union but rewriting narratives is what writers do best... We are only too happy to do our part in challenging the pernicious and destructive narrative that says it's OK to expect people to work for free."

On 4 June 2015, Kerry McCarthy MP for Bristol East asked a question about Free is NOT an Option in the House of Commons. Culture Minister Ed Vaizey responded that he'd been briefed about Free is NOT an Option and said that it was "scandalous" that companies weren't paying writers. At a subsequent event in Parliament, nine MPs and a member of the House of Lords signed our campaign statement. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady also pledged her support, as have other high-profile figures in the creative industries.

In conjunction with the Personal Managers' Association and after consultation with a wide cross section of UK television writers, producers and business affairs managers of independent production companies, the WGGB produced a 'Right to Pitch' document. This template document is based on option contracts that have successfully been used by major production companies. The WGGB suggests a minimum option fee of £500.



### BBC LOVE IT OR LOSE IT

TV Committee member Chris Jury has worked with the Federation of Entertainment Unions on the BBC Love It Or Lose It campaign as the broadcaster faces charter renewal. On Chris' recommendation, WGGB signed up to the statement agreed by other entertainment unions in support of the BBC:

*Recognising the core principle above and the importance of the BBC as a keystone of the culture, economy and citizenship of the UK:*

- 1. We believe that the BBC's founding mission – to inform, to educate, to entertain should remain the bedrock of what the BBC does and should apply to all new media/technology the BBC publishes in or broadcasts on.*
- 2. We believe that the licence fee is currently the best way to fund the BBC and that it should be set at a level that ensures the corporation remains the cornerstone of the successful British creative industries; at a minimum it should increase by RPI.*
- 3. We believe in an independent and efficient BBC that is accountable to audiences, staff and those who work in the creative community, and believe that their voice must be central to the charter renewal process and in the broadcaster's future.*

### SHADOW SCHEMES

An uplift in shadow scheme fees has been agreed for the shows *Holby* and *Casualty*, and the BBC has pledged to work with WGGB to address future problems with the schemes, which have not always functioned well in the past.

Various broadcasters are still asking writers to write unpaid trial scripts for 30-minute shows. This is a difficult issue for WGGB, as we expect that our members will be divided on the issue – it's well-established that asking people to work for free favours the better off and more privileged, and leads to a lack of diversity. However, an individual writer who has been offered a place on an unpaid shadow

scheme may feel that this opportunity is preferable to a straight 'no'. I welcome members' opinions on the matter!

As certain people have expressed the view that a trial script is not an onerous task and can be done in a writer's 'spare time', we would like to develop a type of time and motion study to establish the amount of time spent by writers when delivering and developing scripts.

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We are committed to making the ethical, creative and business case for greater diversity in TV writing. BAME writers are still under-represented and, as WGGB's statistics show, so are women.

In the coming year, we plan to launch campaigns to tackle the lack of gender equality and BAME diversity in TV writing. If you would like to get involved in this, or any other element of the TV Committee's work, please get in touch by email: [tv@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:tv@writersguild.org.uk)

## CHANGES IN THE TV INDUSTRY

Things are changing fast in the UK TV industry. BBC3 now broadcasts only online, BBC in-house production is to be replaced by BBC Studios, catch-up services are making overnight viewing figures less significant, and the distinction between 'terrestrial' and 'digital' TV channels is increasingly irrelevant in terms of how audiences watch TV.

The current, hard-won WGGB agreements were negotiated in a very different world, and we are ensuring that writers are protected in the digital age. This is evidenced by Writers Digital Payments (set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association), which ensures TV writers are paid royalties when their work is shown on BBC iPlayer and ITV Player. And also our recent deal to protect writers in the move from BBC3 to online only. It's important that we writers stand together to ensure that if and when change comes to the ways we are contracted and paid, we do not lose out.

The TV Committee are all busy working writers, and these issues affect us directly. Between us, we have a wide range of experience, but every writer has a different perspective on the industry, and a valuable contribution to make. If you want your voice to be heard, please consider joining the Committee and / or one of our campaigns. We are always eager to hear from WGGB members.

Unfortunately, TV Chair Bill Armstrong had to step down this year. He was an inspirational leader and will be sadly missed. I have stepped into the breach as Acting Chair and would like to thank all of the brilliant TV Committee, and in particular, Jenny Davis, Kate Delin, Lisa Holdsworth, Henrietta Hardy, Shai Hussain, Maggie Innes and Chris Jury for their hard work.

**Emma Reeves**  
**Acting TV Chair**



**The Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, MPs and General Secretary of the TUC Frances O'Grady are just some of the people to add their support to our Free is NOT an Option campaign this year**

Photo: Shutterstock.com/stokkete



**David Edgar (left) and Jenifer Toksvig (right)**  
**Theatre Co-Chairs**

## **THEATRE**

These are contradictory times for playwrights. Early last year, research was published showing that – for the first time since records began – new writing has overtaken revivals in the British theatre repertoire. However, we are increasingly aware of London and regional theatres who are not complying in full with our negotiated minimum terms agreements.

Accordingly, our negotiating team is pursuing the matter with vigour with theatre managers and we hope to have further news on this by the AGM. In addition, we hope to make significant progress in our long-standing negotiations to revise our agreement with the Independent Theatre Council. We continue to revise the financial provisions of all of our agreements; the full rate for a play at the National Theatre, the RSC and the Royal Court is now well over £12,000.

During the year, we learnt of the campaign by Stage Directors UK (SDUK) to improve the pay and conditions of stage directors. Stage directors are underpaid and we support this campaign. However, we are concerned about suggestions that directors should share royalties with writers under certain circumstances. We had a positive meeting with SDUK on 8 December 2015, expressing our support for their campaign but also our concerns. In particular, we emphasised that (under the terms of our agreements) any collaborative agreement with directors or anyone else should only be made at the contractual stage, and not imposed on writers during the process. We will continue to have informal conversations, on matters of mutual interest and concern.

The Committee has worked hard on recruitment of playwrights to the Writers' Guild. We are pleased that a significant cohort of leading playwrights in their 30s and 40s are members, including Mike Bartlett, April De Angelis, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Alecky Blythe, James Graham, Dennis Kelly, Lucy Kirkwood, Rebecca Lenkiewicz, Nick Payne, Jack Thorne, Laura Wade and Anthony Weigh.

We will be holding a reception for current, recent and prospective Writers' Guild members as part of a day of events for London Writers' Week at Central Saint Martins on 6 July 2016. The other events are two panels, open to the public, curated by our Co-Chairs. The first is on bookwriting for musical theatre, with Catherine Johnson (*Mamma Mia!*), Gurinder Chadha (*Bend It Like Beckham*), Joe Penhall (*Sunny Afternoon*) and Rob Hartmann (*Vanishing Point*). The second is on fact-based theatre, with panellists Alecky Blythe (*London Road*), Gillian Slovo (*Another World: Losing Our Children to Islamic State*), Theatre Committee member Robin Soans (*Talking to Terrorists and Crouch, Touch, Pause, Engage*) and Richard Norton-Taylor (writer of the Tricycle Tribunal plays).

Events during this past year included our regular Literary Managers Forum (held on 3 July 2015 at the Almeida Theatre), which was attended by 16 literary managers and 12 playwrights. The meeting discussed the implications of the British Theatre Consortium's British Theatre Repertoire report, particularly for women playwrights. British Theatre Consortium's Dan Rebellato presented research which demonstrated that plays by women represented only 31% of the repertoire of productions, but also had shorter runs in smaller theatres. Theatre Committee member Sarah Woods led a detailed and productive discussion as to how this imbalance might be redressed.



On 4 December 2015, we held our annual Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards, honouring individuals and organisations which have made a particularly positive contribution to playwrights and playwriting. As usual, this was organised by David James, and proved – as ever – one of the highlights of the year. The recipients were Polly Thomas (nominated by Dan Rebellato), Joe Sumsion (nominated by Debbie Oates), Jarek Adams (nominated by Andrew Thorn) and Mared Swain and Kate Wasserberg (nominated by Alun Saunders).

Our detailed guidelines *Writing Musical Theatre* have been updated and are now online. Co-Chair Jenifer Toksvig has been leading on this, as well as on the ongoing preparation of a Musical Theatre Kit in collaboration with the Musicians' Union and other unions. Our *Working Playwright: Agreements and Contracts* guidelines have also been updated.

Plans for 2016-7 include reactivating our regular meetings with the Arts Council and mounting an investigation into play competitions. We are hoping that Playwrights' Progress, Richard Pinner's innovative programme of playwright development, will find funding and come back on stream.

A year ago, our Chair Nick Wood reached the end of his three-year term. He has proved a very hard act to follow, and we are grateful that he has continued as an active member of the Committee. One of his many legacies was new recruitment to the Committee itself, increasing the proportion of women members significantly.

As a result of the expansion of Committee membership, we have been able to establish a more collegiate structure. David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig are Co-Chairs, with Jenifer representing theatre on the Executive Council. David, Robin Soans and Nick Wood are our negotiators, and Richard Pinner leads on the Writers' Guild Awards (last year's readers were Nick Wood, Brian McAvera, Lisa Evans, Amelia Bullmore, Debbie McAndrew, Robin Soans, Roy Kendall and David James; this year Vanessa Brooks will also be reading). We are grateful to all Committee members for their work and their enthusiasm, as well as to Writers' Guild staff, particularly Ellie Peers (who handles negotiations) and Anne Hogben.

The full Committee is Amelia Bullmore, Brian McAvera, David Edgar, Deborah McAndrew, Jenifer Toksvig, Joseph Coelho, Lisa Evans, Nick Wood, Richard Pinner, Robin Soans, Roy Kendall, Sarah Woods and Vanessa Brooks.

### **David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig Co-Chairs**



**The Literary  
Managers Forum  
(top) and the Olwen  
Wymark Theatre  
Encouragement  
Awards (bottom) are  
two regular highlights  
of the Theatre  
Committee's year**

Photo of Jenifer Toksvig on page 20 by Kate Griffin Photography. Photo of the Literary Managers Forum by John Morrison. Photo of the Olwen Wymark Awards winners and guests by Sarah Woodley

## VIDEOGAMES

The past year has seen the UK games industry's worth pass the four billion pound mark, which is a staggering amount of money. Yet we still see studio closures and the cancellation of projects of varying sizes, often leaving creative individuals with uncertain futures. It's a time of mixed fortunes.

Thankfully, the UK still has a lot to offer, creatively, as shown by the substantial number of writers and games suggested for this year's Writers' Guild Best Writing in a Video Game Award. In many respects, it's a shame we cannot recognise the talents of everyone, but the award jury, after a lot of hard work (judging games can be very time-consuming), managed to reach agreement on the three well-deserved nominations, which were:

- Sam Barlow for *Her Story*
- Dan Pinchbeck for *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*
- Alexis Kennedy, Chris Gardiner, Meg Jayanth, Emily Short, Richard Cobbett and Amal El-Mohtar for *Sunless Sea*



After further deliberation, which proved to be very close, the final winner was Dan Pinchbeck. The award was presented by games writer Julia Hardy.

The Writers' Guild's guide to videogame writing was reviewed and edited. Although not substantially different from the previous version, last updated in 2011, there have been a few tweaks and changes. Thanks to Andy Walsh for his help and support on this matter. The guide, for those who don't know, is available in print and as a download from the Writers' Guild website, in the resources section.

Andy Walsh also worked with London South Bank University to put on another game writing panel in December 2015, which has become something of an annual event. The panel was entitled, *Playing the Story* – how to marry gameplay with narrative without divorcing the player.

Thank you.

**Steve Ince**  
Chair



**Dan Pinchbeck (centre) receives the Writers' Guild Award 2016 for Best Writing in a Video Game from comedian Susan Calman (left) and games writer Julia Hardy (right)**

Photo: Joanne Gennard

# Regional and branch reports

## EAST MIDLANDS

The urgent priority for the region is the reinvigoration of the Committee and election of a new East Midlands Chair. Anyone who is interested in leading WGGB's work in the area (or indeed would like to make a contribution to the Committee) should do one of the following:

- Before the AGM on 17 June 2016, visit [writersguild.org.uk/join-us-writers-guild-agm-2016/](http://writersguild.org.uk/join-us-writers-guild-agm-2016/) and download the Vacancies information/form.
- After 17 June 2016, email [admin@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:admin@writersguild.org.uk) for an update/further details (please put East Midlands Chair vacancy in the subject field).

## LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

Over the last year the London and South East Branch Committee has continued to organise events for members based in the region. The most recent of these – Meet the Radio Drama Producers, with Nicholas Briggs, Marc Beeby and Sally Avens – was sold out.

These events are free for WGGB members and incur a small charge for non-members. In addition to being a small revenue source, they help writers to make new contacts and find out what producers and agents are looking for, as well as encouraging new and developing writers to join WGGB.

If you are a WGGB member who lives or works in London or the South East, please consider joining the Committee – the work only takes up a few hours a month and helps to determine how we focus our efforts helping all writers going forward.

Thanks to the following people who served on the London and South East Committee this year: Gary Thomas, Jamie Rhodes, Katharine Way and Poppy Corbett.

**Piers Beckley (top right)  
Chair**



**The London and South East  
Committee's Meet the Radio  
Drama Producers event in April**

Photo: Em Fitzgerald





## NORTH WEST (MERSEYSIDE AND MANCHESTER)

The last year has been a very important one for Manchester, with the completion of HOME providing a new focal point for the dramatic arts and the venue for the 2016 Manchester Theatre Awards, which I was not only honoured to attend but also to present an award for Best New Play at.

In addition to HOME, various other grassroots theatre organisations such as Manchester Acting and Directing Partnership (ADP) have also been flourishing.

The Manchester Branch of WGGB was privileged to attend the Manchester Theatre Awards, as well as Manchester ADP performances, and hopes to build stronger ties with the rich theatrical heritage of this great city.

Aside from theatre, MediaCityUK's role has been growing in stature as a central hub for television.

In the future I hope to put on a special WGGB event which celebrates Manchester, with guest speakers and special screenings.

To find out more or get involved in WGGB in the area, please email:  
[manchester@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:manchester@writersguild.org.uk)

**Grant Foxon**  
**Chair**



**MediaCityUK, in Salford, continues to grow in stature as a central hub for television**

Photo: TasfotoNL/Shutterstock.com



## SCOTLAND

The past year I have been working on developing the Writers' Guild presence in festivals so our members can participate – benefiting them and raising the profile of the Writers' Guild. This remains a work in progress. The Scottish Branch Facebook page is proving to be an effective medium due to the geographical spread of the members.

### EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2015

The Writers' Guild was present with a stand at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Participants Fair, which was well-attended. We plan to participate again this year.

### LITERATURE ALLIANCE SCOTLAND (FORMERLY LITERATURE FORUM FOR SCOTLAND)

The Literature Forum for Scotland changed its name last July to reflect its evolving role. Literature Alliance Scotland has been proactive in defending the sector, forming task groups and has now been granted formal charitable status by the Scottish Charity Regulator. A successful bid was made to Creative Scotland and the Alliance has been awarded a £50,000 grant to continue and develop its work.



**WGGB had a stand at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015**

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Ivica Drusany





## SCOTTISH FEDERATION OF ENTERTAINMENT UNIONS

There have been no meetings of the Scottish Federation of Entertainment Unions since the last AGM.

## CROSS-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON CULTURE, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, HOLYROOD

The Cross-Party Parliamentary Group on Culture was initiated in May 2013, formally convened in September 2013 and I have attended most sessions or others have attended for the Writers' Guild. The last session was held on 3 March 2016. Though a debating forum, it is important the Writers' Guild voice is heard at these levels.

## SCOTTISH FILM STUDIO

The debate regarding building a post-production film studio continues, but it is being held back by no clear direction on behalf of decision-makers. The Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Creative Scotland combined seem incapable of making it happen. Private investment plans have been 'called in' by the Scottish Government for a studio proposed at Straiton, but (at the time of writing) this is currently stalled by upcoming elections.

**Julie Ann Thomason**  
Chair

## SOUTH WEST (CORNWALL AND DEVON)

Cornwall and Devon are geographically huge yet have small populations compared with other creative clusters. But we pack a punch and constantly celebrate great writers, independent bookshops, festivals, competitions and literary events.

Plans are ongoing to bring together members of Equity and WGGB for socials to encourage networking, collaboration and creative projects.

If you would like to get involved please email:  
[swdc@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:swdc@writersguild.org.uk)

**Marie Macneill**  
Chair



incorporating the Variety Artists' Federation

**WGGB hopes to join forces with the actors' union Equity in the South West this year**

## SOUTH WEST (WESSEX)

The South West (Wessex) region became vacant last year as a result of its Chair moving out of the area.

Anyone who is interested in leading WGGB's work in the area (or indeed would like to make a contribution to the Committee) should do one of the following:

- Before the AGM on 17 June 2016, visit [writersguild.org.uk/join-us-writers-guild-agm-2016/](http://writersguild.org.uk/join-us-writers-guild-agm-2016/) and download the Vacancies information/form.
- After 17 June 2016, email [admin@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:admin@writersguild.org.uk) for an update/further details (please put South West Wessex Chair vacancy in the subject field).

## WALES

The Welsh Committee has had another busy and proactive year of negotiations, issue raising, supporting training initiatives, and organising recruitment events with a variety of guest speakers.

### TELEVISION/RADIO

**BBC: POBOL Y CWM:** S4C cut the omnibus of the series back in March 2014, causing the BBC to cut the weekly number of episodes to four, leading to protracted but successful negotiations on behalf of the writers by our WGGB team at the time. However, in September 2015, S4C unexpectedly decided to commission five episodes a week again, which meant our team had to hit the ground running yet again, as the expected change – though welcome – had obvious implications, especially as the proposal affected weeks, and writers, already ‘in the system’.

Former WGGB General Secretary Bernie Corbett and the team met with the BBC in late August 2015, new episode fees were agreed, and negotiations on storylining fees were successfully brought to a close. The Committee would like once again to thank Bernie, and members Sion Eirian, William Gwyn and Wil Roberts, and note again that our united ‘voice’ back in 2014 seems to continue to have a positive effect on our dealings with the series producers, although there has been a delay in meeting with them again in 2016 due to illness.



As a result certain questions over a further increase in storylining fees, plus a few ‘good practice’ points, remain outstanding.

The Committee notes member Angela Graham’s work in respect of the Institute of Welsh Affairs’ audit of the media in Wales; it has made 37 policy recommendations. She has suggested that it would be useful if a WGGB representative was on its Media Policy Group and this matter is in hand. Angela has also kept us informed on matters such as the White Paper on the future of the BBC.

**S4C:** S4C are still contacting the Committee, wishing to discuss afternoon drama repeats from the archive. Initially they offered a pathetic amount to both Equity and the WGGB for these repeats – which both unions refused. The Welsh Committee at the time was resolute that existing agreements should stand, and currently continues to hold this position in spite of further requests to discuss a compromise.

There is also still concern over some S4C productions/commissions employing writers from outside Wales to write scripts subsequently translated into Welsh, which raises concerns about the marginalisation of non-Welsh-speaking writers in Wales, the impact on the number of Welsh-language commissions generated within Wales, as well as the creative role of translators.



There were more successful negotiations for writers on the Welsh-language soap *Pobol y Cwm* this year

## THEATRE

The new board of Sherman Cymru is currently in the process of being appointed: we have been told there will once again be a place for a playwright. The appointment of Kully Thiarai as the new Artistic Director of the National Theatre Wales has been welcomed and the Committee have invited her to speak to us, once she has settled in to her post. Meetings between Writers' Guild representatives and the Arts Council Wales continue on a regular basis.

## BOOKS

The issue of grants for translations has arisen – given that there are huge variations in rates. A meeting to discuss this and other issues with the Welsh Books Council took place in December 2015, but they were being told at the time by the Welsh Government to make 10.6% cuts across the board. The Committee – and many other parties – sent letters of protest, and as a result the cut was withdrawn. The Welsh Books Council has thanked the Writers' Guild for contributing to this very important and successful campaign. Discussions are ongoing.

## CULT CYMRU

The Writers' Guild in Wales continues with its role within Cult Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together – the training initiative for freelancers, involving WGGB, BECTU, Equity and the Musicians' Union). Their funding from the Welsh Government has been renewed for another two years. Recent workshops have taken place in subjects such as mentoring, effective use of social media, and pitching ideas.

## RECRUITMENT EVENTS

Member Anna-Lisa Jenaer continues to organise successful events on our behalf, which are helping to raise awareness of WGGB, particularly in the Cardiff area. Events have included Emma Reeves (WGGB's Acting TV Chair) on 'Getting Your Show on TV' (which sold out); Owen Atkinson of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society came to talk to us about the organisation; and WGGB former TV Chair Bill Armstrong gave a well-attended talk on 'Getting Paid for Your Work'. We are still hoping to organise an event with Rhodri Talfan Davies (Director of BBC Cymru Wales), and also director Phil John. James Robinson, Senior Producer at BBC Radio Wales, has agreed to come in the future.

**Manon Eames**  
**Chair**

## WEST MIDLANDS

Last year's fight to save the Library of Birmingham derailed the Writers' Guild's plans for a time yet it also helped. We haven't got the library back the way it was but the cultural hole we were facing has been reduced to a cultural dent and along the way new partnerships and relationships have been formed. Here in the region we were deeply grateful for the help from the national Writers' Guild but we've also found that it's as if the fight reminded local organisations of our existence.

So we're now working closely with Arts Connect, which means we're plugged into local arts venues across the entire region; we're working with the Royal Television Society such that we're represented on their committee; and we've been supporting the Campaign for Regional Broadcasting, which is based here.

We're now being approached by the BBC and other organisations who want us to get our members involved in events such as a forthcoming storytelling one at BBC Coventry. That's off the back of our fast-turnaround event promoting a Birmingham writer in residence post which was initiated by the BBC last December.

That's an example of a writing opportunity that had nothing to do with the Writers' Guild yet we worked so closely with the organisers that people assumed it was ours. It's also an example of how this is not about organisations getting together to follow some agenda, it is about people helping people. We knew that the writer in residence project came from within BBC Birmingham and the Birmingham Rep, that it wasn't some BBC edict, and so we knew it needed help and promotion.

The whole WGGB West Midlands Committee worked with the Rep's Artistic Director and Assistant Artistic Director plus senior BBC staff to



create an event the moment the project could be formally announced. Within days, we had a prime venue within the Rep, we had the only access to the people running the project, and we had a crowd of Birmingham writers who came, saw, and asked questions about the Writers' Guild.

We've been getting a similar cross-pollination of members from what we've been calling our Notworking events. These are intended to be quite low key drinks and so far they gather around 20 people with no more than a third being existing Writers' Guild members. The rest are actors, directors, producers and writers who are banned from discussing work or sharing ideas or conjuring up projects, yet they do it anyway. You can't control these people.

Those are rather happy events, I am delighted to tell you, and they have continued through this year, with new Notworking evenings every few months.

What else is continuing is a collaboration with Writing West Midlands that is very important to us and will this year see us represented at the brand new National Writers' Conference in July. We're also planning to be at the Birmingham Literature Festival in October.

Last year had some bad times for Birmingham and the West Midlands but by working through it we've grown and overall this year has been a thoroughly positive and affirming one. We're planning more of the same now.

**William Gallagher**  
**Chair**



**The West Midlands Writers' Guild has formed close relationships with organisations such as the BBC**

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Mikecphoto



## YORKSHIRE AND NORTH EAST

It's been great to spend another rewarding and interesting year as the WGGB representative for Yorkshire and North East. I've had a lot of one-to-one contact with members in my region again. Being a writer can sometimes be an isolating and stressful experience. Poor management and callous treatment can exacerbate that feeling of being unsupported and undervalued.

I would like to think that those members who have contacted me have been left feeling a little less adrift. As ever, it is a real pleasure to speak to them and I would encourage any WGGB member in need of help to make contact with their regional representative. I can guarantee that you will be listened to and whatever you say will be treated in the strictest confidence.

The overwhelming feedback I have had from those writers who have made contact with WGGB representatives is that they have no longer felt isolated and unsupported. I have also had great feedback on how empowering WGGB members have found the Federation of Entertainment Unions' Creating Without Conflict campaign (against bullying and harassment in the media and entertainment industries).

The big event in our region this year was a special WGGB panel event, Television Writing: Women's Work? A healthy crowd of writers listened to Kay Mellor OBE, Gwyneth Hughes, Alison Hume and Alice Nutter discuss the realities of being a female writer working on British television.



All four had clear memories of being marginalised and silenced early on in their careers, although things have improved as they have become more experienced and confident. All four speakers are long-standing WGGB members and they urged other writers to find their voices, speak up for themselves and join WGGB.

All of the speakers also backed our Free is NOT an Option campaign (tackling unpaid development work in the TV and film industries), underlining how important it is for writers to speak to production companies and producers about remuneration.

I hope to organise more events along these lines in the future and would welcome any suggestions, thoughts and offers of assistance from members in my region (you can email me at: [yorksne@writersguild.org.uk](mailto:yorksne@writersguild.org.uk)).

As ever, it is a pleasure to work on behalf of the Writers' Guild and hopefully I'm doing a good job. Still, I'm happy to receive any feedback or suggestions about how I can do an even better job.

**Lisa Holdsworth**  
**Chair**



**The Yorkshire and North East region held the Television Writing: Women's Work? panel event in Leeds in November 2015**

Photo: Paul Harness Photography

# Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2015-16, who have contributed to the strength of the union over many years.

We would like to remember all of the following members, listed below (obituaries can be found on our website: [www.writersguild.org.uk/category/obituaries/](http://www.writersguild.org.uk/category/obituaries/)). We have also printed a speech given at the Writers' Guild Awards 2016 ceremony by writer Jonathan Coe, in commemoration of David Nobbs.

## REMEMBERING WGGB MEMBERS:

**Victoria Wood CBE**

**Sir Arnold Wesker**

**Tony Read**

**Hazel Adair**

**Julia Jones**

**Dick Sharples**

**David Nobbs**

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## David Nobbs remembered at the Writers' Guild Awards 2016 by writer Jonathan Coe

Last August saw the death of David Nobbs who, over a period of more than two decades, held many positions in the Writers' Guild, including President. His death came quickly, after a short illness, at the age of 80. I was in France when it happened, and found out in the 21st-century way, via Twitter. An unusual number of people in my timeline were Tweeting quotations from his work and at first all I thought was, "That's nice – people are discussing David". It was only after a few seconds that the awful truth sank in, the realisation that there was a reason – the usual reason – for all this sudden attention.

It's appropriate that I should be speaking about him here tonight, because I first met David at a Writers' Guild Awards dinner, in 1994. I had just published an effusive review of his novel *The Cucumber Man*, which culminated in the sentence: "I think he is probably our finest post-war comic novelist." It was a bold claim to make, and David never seemed particularly pleased that I'd made it. Over the years, I came to the conclusion that it was the word 'probably' he objected to. Not at all. He finally admitted to me, about five years ago, that the word he didn't like was 'comic'. He didn't want to be described as a comic novelist, because he felt it diminished him. He thought of himself as a novelist, pure and simple.

But in fact, there was nothing simple about David's writing career. He was a unique and remarkable writer because he excelled in two fields which are sometimes considered incompatible.

He wrote for television, and he wrote for the printed page, and he wrote for both with equal brilliance. Even if the whole country didn't know his name, the whole country certainly knew his greatest creation: Reginald Iolanthe Perrin, the 1970s frustrated, suburban Everyman, so memorably incarnated on television by Leonard Rossiter, but already a vividly realised character within the pages of David's novel, *The Death of Reginald Perrin*, which had introduced him a couple of years earlier.

The making of that iconic TV show was the moment, at the age of 40 or so, when David's two writing worlds began to converge. Up until that point, he had kept them separate. Having started as a journalist for the *Sheffield Star* and other papers, in the 1960s he became one of the country's leading comedy writers, with sketches for *TW3* and *The Frost Report*, for Frankie Howerd, Ken Dodd and Les Dawson, and, most famously, for *The Two Ronnies*. And he published three fine, well-reviewed novels. Although the two kinds of writing ran on parallel lines at first, what united them, made them recognisably the work of the same person, was not just their sense of comedy but their sense of the absurd. David was a huge admirer of N F Simpson and the early Beckett. He believed that life only made sense if you realised that it was fundamentally nonsensical. This awareness runs through all the Reginald Perrin stories, but it was also a recurring motif in his life. I don't believe that more absurd things happened to David than anybody else, but he had a keener eye for them than anyone I've met. Here, for instance, from his autobiography, is one of my favourite David stories, one he never tired of repeating. It concerns a film producer called Dennis Lewiston, who was taking him out to lunch to discuss the film rights to his first novel:

“Dennis told me that he was a great friend of Lynn Redgrave, and might well be able to persuade her to take the lead role. I pointed out, somewhat diffidently, through my coq au vin, that the lead role was a man. Dennis said that we could change his sex. I struggled with a recalcitrant shallot and pointed out that he had a sexual relationship with his landlady. Dennis said that we could make it a landlord. I mumbled through a wodge of mashed potato that the landlady had sexual feelings for the two airmen upstairs. Dennis said we could make them Wrens. He was prepared to change the sex of everyone in the book because he knew Lynn Redgrave.”

After the success of *Reginald Perrin*, David came into his prime. He wrote *A Bit Of A Do*, which explored family relationships through a series of social gatherings in a Yorkshire town, and *Second From Last in the Sack Race*, the first of his glorious novels about Henry Pratt, his awkward, insecure alter ego. Then there was *Going Gently*, his surprising but totally successful change of direction, a sweeping panorama of the 20th century, told from the perspective of an elderly Welsh matriarch, looking back on her life on the eve of her 100th birthday. A more overtly serious and emotional book from David, but still, as always, full of laughter. Like the sculptor who specialises in male nudes, but isn't actually very good at them because he can't do testicles. The reason: “I just can't get the hang of them.”

As he entered his 70s, David did not slow down. He did find it harder to get television work commissioned. There was the remake of *Reginald Perrin*, with Martin Clunes, which gave him great pleasure, but otherwise commissioning editors tended to tell him that his ideas, in the age of *Happy Valley* and *The Fall*, were “too gentle”. He wrote for radio, instead, with his long running series *The Maltby Collection*, and his masterly eight-part adaptation of my own novel, *What a Carve Up!*, which he improved with dozens of new jokes. And, remarkably, he published no fewer than six novels in his 70s – an amazing burst of late creativity,

which included *Obstacles to Young Love* and *It Had To Be You*, in which he explores the philosophy of Humanism which had become so important to him.

Another facet of his busy, energetic life at this time, besides his tireless mentoring of younger writers, was becoming a Patron of the British Humanist Association.

At the same time, his reputation as a novelist was starting to spread abroad. In the last few years, Italian and Spanish editions of *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* have appeared, and in those countries, unburdened by memories of the TV show, the book has come to be seen for what it really is: one of the great English novels of the 1970s. And the last time I saw David, in fact, was in Spain, where we took part in a festival in Barcelona, and were placed on stage together in a set designed to look like a commuter train, at 11 o'clock at night, and instructed to have a conversation about the British comic tradition, in front of an audience of bemused young Spaniards who were really there to see the pop star who was going to be on even later than us. An experience he found bizarre but also strangely satisfying.

In his last few days, with his beloved wife Susan by his side, David may have been unable to speak, but I like to think that silently, he was still cracking jokes, smiling wryly at the idea of death as life's ultimate absurdity. He would certainly not have been afraid of it. We're talking about a man, after all, who'd suffered a seizure in a crowded restaurant a couple of years earlier. Paramedics were summoned, and he told me afterwards that he'd really thought he was about to die. And yet, to David, it was a source of pride – professional pride, almost – that still, while being carried out on a stretcher past a table full of concerned diners, he found the energy to look up and say: “One word of advice – don't have the fish.”

**Jonathan Coe is an award-winning novelist, biographer, critic and scriptwriter. He is also the author of short stories, many essays and a wide range of journalism.**



**David Nobbs, who died last year, was a “unique and remarkable writer” and former WGBB President**

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