



60 years: 1959-2019

Annual report 2018-19

www.writersguild.org.uk

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain is a trade union
registered at 134 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU

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General Secretary's report

In our 60th year we are celebrating the activism and achievements of the WGGB, the writers' union.

WGGB's Equality Writes campaign has provided undeniable proof to employers that there is a serious issue with inequality in our industry, and they are now working with us to effect positive change for underrepresented groups of writers. Over the past few months, we have met with television commissioners, ITV consulted with us during the development of Comedy 50/50 for women writers, the BBC set up an equality and diversity group for writers, and our own Equality and Diversity Committee continues to grow in strength.

The campaign against free work continues. Recently, a short film contract came across my desk, which offered a scriptwriter the opportunity (for use of a better term) to have their work produced for free on a complete buyout of rights. This gives another meaning to "exploiting a script". Just to clarify, a professional writer is not being unreasonable if they ask to be paid properly and it is standard practice to be paid in exchange for work, not the opposite. Unpaid work discriminates against writers without independent means.

To further the fight against socioeconomic discrimination, we are collaborating with sister unions in the Performers Alliance, in the parliamentary inquiry Breaking the Class Ceiling in the Arts. A cross-party inquiry into the decline of social mobility in the creative sector will gather oral and written evidence to identify how policy makers and others can effect change. It will investigate the barriers for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, review social diversity initiatives and scrutinise best practice from across the industry.

In January, to further the long-term FEU campaign Creating Without Conflict against bullying and harassment, the FEU hosted a conference entitled From Disbelief to Dignity. Concentrating on sexual harassment, we brought together members, union activists, organisations and employers to discuss the effects of harassment on freelancers



and the challenges of reporting, and we celebrated progress made across the industry to tackle this. The morning session was chaired by WGGB President Olivia Hetreed, and I facilitated the closed afternoon session with union activists who deal with harassment cases.

In Europe, we continue to take an active part in negotiating the implementation of the European Copyright Directive. Acting with the Musicians' Union and others, the WGGB fought off a last-minute attempt to scupper the directive, which was finally adopted in April. The directive must now be published in the Official Journal of the EU, after which member states will have 24 months to implement the measures at national level. If we are out of the EU before implementation, we will campaign for the UK government to adopt the directive.

Further afield, the WGGB continues to support writers' unions globally. WGGB stood alongside members of BECTU and WGA East protesting outside the ITV AGM, supporting the WGAE in its dispute with ITV USA against discrimination and unequal pay suffered by US writer-producers, and in its long-standing calls for union recognition. We are now supporting the WGA in its dispute with the Association of Talent Agents to stop the practice of packaging fees, whereby an agent can act as a producer/investor in a programme/series written by a writer-client – clearly a conflict of interest and detrimental to the agent-writer relationship.

Back on home turf, we continue to lobby all political parties on Brexit. In November 2018, we co-organised a briefing session at the House of Commons titled “Brexit and the Audio-Visual sector”. Over 30 MPs and peers attended, along with representatives from co-organisers Directors UK, ALCS and the Society of Authors. Over the past two years, Chair Gail Renard has been leading on this and has met regularly with MPs and peers. We have also held several briefing sessions alongside unions from the Performers Alliance, Federation of Entertainment Unions and other industry bodies. We will continue to lobby politicians during the current extension period (until October), lest they forget the importance of our industry, both culturally and economically to the UK.

WGGB submitted a response to the Over-75s Licence Fee consultation. We stated that the BBC should not be expected to bear the cost of a free licence for the over-75s. Instead, this cost should continue to be borne by government, like all other welfare benefits. Should the BBC be forced to bear this cost, the impact would be a 20% cut to the BBC budget (£745m from the BBC’s budget in 2021/2022) – a sum equivalent to the amount the BBC spends on all its radio stations or on sports production, drama, film, children’s and entertainment and comedy content.

We have responded positively to the consultation of the extension of the iPlayer, stating that as long as writers continue to be paid for iPlayer use via Writers Digital Payments then we support the extension.

We have met programme executives from the major television soaps to address concerns members have raised about working practices, including the number of rewrites, rewrites vs re-brief, deadlines within deadlines and bullying behaviours. This work has resulted in positive changes. The BBC/PMA/WGGB have signed off Guidelines for Best Practice in Working with Writers on BBC Continuing Drama Series which have been distributed across the soaps.

In the nations, prior to BBC Scotland channel getting the green light by Ofcom last year, we negotiated contractual terms for scriptwriters applicable to BBC4 and put protections in place on script fees for River City writers. At the Welsh language

broadcaster S4C we negotiated a new improved fee structure for their on-demand platform Clic, effective from December 2018.

A new fee structure has been negotiated for podcasts, as part of the BBC Radio Drama Agreement, and signed off in August last year. The negotiations resulted in an increase in the public service fee from 12.5% to 15%, which is the fee paid to writers for the five-year public service use.

Other wins for writers at a glance:

- a 5% increase for Emmerdale writers in August 2018 and a further 5% in August 2019
- ITV – 2% from 1st November 2018 and an 20% increase in attendance fees to £120 from 3rd May 2019
- UKT (theatre) – 4.5% from 1st May 2019
- ITC (theatre) – 2.5% from 1st April 2019
- BBC radio – 2% in August 2018 followed by a further 2% in November 2018
- BBC TV – 2% from 27 November 2018

Our awards are an important part of our work in advocating for writers – to raise the profile of the profession, support new writing and showcase how important writing is to our culture. Our annual Writers’ Guild Awards go from strength to strength and this year we introduced a new category – Best Musical Theatre Bookwriting. Our Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards and Tinniswood audio drama script award are two other important dates in our annual calendar.

With writers coming together through our union we can bring about change. None of our achievements over the past year would be possible without writers getting active, as a great deal of this work is driven by our committees – volunteer members themselves who give a great deal of their time to take part in negotiations and campaigns or organise our events and awards. I would like to thank them, and all our Executive Council Officers, for their continued hard work this year. I would like to offer a special thank you to the out-going Chair Gail Renard and President Olivia Hetreed for the support they have given me over the past year and for the exceptional work they have done on behalf of WGGB members, including leading on bullying and harassment, equality, international

representation and transforming the WGGB Awards. I would also like to thank all our dedicated staff and welcome Nadine Edwards who joins the staff team as an Organising Assistant.

I would like to thank all WGGB members – without you, there would be no WGGB – and by working collectively we have the strength to move mountains.

More and more new and experienced writers are joining our ranks every year. If you are a are one of this growing number, welcome aboard. If you are a longstanding member, thank you for your support over the years. If you are reading this and are not a member, please join – we welcome writers at all stages of their careers, and just by signing up you will make a difference and support our vital work.

Ellie Peers
General Secretary



Writers taking part in an evidence session at the Performers Alliance Parliamentary Group enquiry *Breaking the Class Ceiling*

Photo: Dr Dave O'Brien



WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers, (pictured front row, far left) joins the WGGB, BECTU and WGA-East demonstration outside ITV's shareholders AGM in London.

Photo: Prospect

Chair's report

I'm happy to report that the WGGB is stronger than ever. Our membership is rising and we've welcomed another new member of staff, our Organising Assistant, Nadine Edwards. We're continuing to fight and lobby on many fronts.

I can't say anything new about Brexit because at the time of writing we might be in, out or still shaking it all about. No matter what the outcome, the WGGB is keeping many steps ahead to protect members' copyright, income and futures. I've been in Westminster so much they could charge me rent. We've also been busy internationally going to meetings of the FSE (Federation of European Screenwriters) and IAWG (International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds.) In today's global market what affects one, affects us all.

Our [#EqualityWrites](#) campaign continues to gain momentum. There's hardly a panel discussion or media piece where our campaign isn't brought up, often to the aggravation of some who would just like the issue to go away. It won't. Women writers are starting to be more visible in the industry, but we won't be happy until we see 50/50 equality up on stage and screen; not just as a blip, but as the new normal.

The same goes for diversity. The WGGB has started a new Equality and Diversity committee, chaired by Sukie Fisher and Sumerah Srivastav. Together we're all going to make the changes we want to see. For those worried about losing work, thanks to new platforms there's more scripted content than ever before. We're just levelling the playing field.

We've also taken a step forward in comedy, where only 11% of scripts are written by women. The lie we keep hearing from commissioners is that they can't find women comedy writers. With the help of ITV's Comedy Controller, Saskia Schuster, we're happy to announce Comedy 50/50, an independent database of women comedy writers. Hundreds of previously invisible women have registered. We exist. Let us into the room.

I take my hat off to Continuing Drama Series writers. They provide close to a public service, making millions of people happy daily, writing award-winning shows under often difficult conditions. The Guild has new Guidelines for Best Practice in Working with Writers on Continuing Drama Series which the BBC and ITV have signed up to. We know they are sometimes ignored. If they are, please contact the WGGB where your information will be treated anonymously and



something will be done. You have the right to be treated with respect and not to have to work in a climate of fear and exhaustion. With so many new opportunities, writers can take back control of their work, filming shorts, uploading sketches, writing blogs and e-books. I encourage writers to look towards Netflix, Amazon and other new platforms where you can do original work and it doesn't take three years to get a response. Next year consider going to Series Mania in Lille, France, where you'll get a chance to meet with producers from all over the world, and your ideas will be listened to. British writers are getting work on drama series in Europe, on co-productions that aren't even British. Scripts are being written in English. Even with Eurostar, it can cost less than many UK screenwriters festivals. You'll get a WGGB discount too. Widen your horizons.

I'm stepping down as WGGB Chair, having completed my four-year term. I've loved every minute. It's been great to work alongside our EC, committees, President Olivia Hetreed and our wonderful Deputy Chairs, Lisa Holdsworth and William Gallagher. Many thanks to our incredible staff, Lesley Gannon, John Sailing, Sarah Woodley, Kate Glasspool, Rose Clooney and Nadine Edwards, and a special bow to Ellie Peers, our General Secretary, who's been a joy to work with.

It's been a privilege to be Chair in the WGGB's 60th anniversary year and to honour the writers who came before us and risked their careers to give us the strong WGGB we have today. We stand on giants' shoulders.

I've been re-reading Nick Yapp's history of the WGGB, *The Write Stuff*. I want to share a recurring fact from the past 60 years which has kept me going in harder times: the Guild never loses. Remember that when you're going forth to do battle.

Gail Renard
Chair



Chair Gail Renard, President Olivia Hetreed and Deputy Chair Lisa Holdsworth (pictured left to right) backing the call for more climate change plotlines on film and TV.

Photo: BBC News screenshot



WGGGB Chair Gail Renard (middle) and General Secretary Ellie Peers (right) with Shadow Minister for Arts and Heritage Kevin Brennan (left) at a cross party lobby of MP's and Peers on the potential impact of Brexit on the audio-visual industry.

Photo: Lesley Gannon

President's report

This is my final report as President of the Writers' Guild, a role I did not expect to take on but which I have found immensely rewarding and to be a great honour. I have represented the Guild around the world – I am writing this in a Berlin hotel room, having spoken to the European Publisher's Forum about adaptation and the role of the Guild in protecting and promoting IP. Still not entirely sure if I'm a wolf in the sheepfold in that gathering or a goat in a tiger forest!

I am so proud to leave the Guild in such good shape, a situation to which my contribution has been minor. Exhaustive and exhausting work by the Officers and Staff of the Guild has produced a union which is a real force to be reckoned with as a campaigning organisation – witness the ongoing visibility of our Equality Writes campaign, which has also spawned new activism among our members – and, under Ellie Peers' fearsome leadership, an unstoppable negotiator of better terms and conditions. We are working with our fellow unions in the FEU – yes, I've become acronym-happy these past six years (the Federation of Entertainment Unions) – to change permanently the culture and the regulation around bullying and harassment issues. The Awards are established as a highlight of the year and an accolade treasured and coveted by writers.

But there is always more to be done and new challenges to face up to. Negotiating a new Film Agreement has proved frustratingly slow but the Film Committee persists and is making small but measurable progress. The rise of the mighty SVODS – we all know that one I'm sure (OK, streaming video on demand) – means a whole new area of negotiation opens up to get decent terms for our members in this thrillingly expanded field of TV writing. Offshore, unaccountable, notoriously secret about their own data, while ruthlessly harvesting all of ours, Netflix and Amazon are formidable enough, with a rush of other players coming in behind them. They have made terms with the American Guilds so we know it can be done, but it's not easy even to get in the room.



Talking of American Guilds, one of the most dramatic rows of recent months is that between the WGA, E&W (Writers' Guild of America, East and West) and the agencies, over something called packaging. You can read David Simon on this (<https://davidsimon.com/but-im-not-a-lawyer-im-an-agent/>)

or plenty of other great accounts of this practice, but the fundamental problem is that the agents have not been working for their clients' benefit – the writers, actors and directors – but for their own enrichment. At once shocking and not shocking at all. Did we really expect flawless integrity from Hollywood agents? The upshot is that WGA writers have been sacking their agents in protest – this is the power of the closed shop at work – and taking the fight to the top. UK writers who are also WGA can get full information and advice on what they do and don't need to do (see <https://writersguild.org.uk/we-stand-with-wga/>). At the time of writing it is not yet resolved but it's a powerful message of solidarity.

We too must stand together, with each other and with our fellow unions, to make sure that the current opportunities are to the benefit of our divided country – compassionate, insightful, humane writing has never seemed so vital – and to the benefit of our members.

Olivia Hetreed
President



#FEUDignity: President Olivia Hetreed (far left) chairing a panel on challenging sexual harassment in the creative industry as part of the FEU's Creating without Conflict: From Disbelief to Dignity conference held in 2019.

Photo: Mark Thomas



The inaugural award for Best First Novel went to *White Chrysanthemum* written by Mary Lynn Bracht (left) was presented by Sheena Kalayil (right).

Photo: Matt Writtle

Finance report

WGGB continues to be in good financial shape. The General Fund, the amount that the WGGB has in its bank account for paying wages, rent and other expenses, saw a balance carried forward at the end of the 2018 WGGB financial year of £579,472.

There has been increased expenditure on WGGB meetings and activities, indicating more members are participating in union activities. We've also spent more on contract vetting and legal advice for members, due in part to an increase in the number and complexity of cases requiring external advice. The final area of increased expenditure has been on our infrastructure replacing all the outdated IT and communication equipment, giving staff the tools to provide effective support to members and volunteer activists.

The Royalties Account (which holds funds for distribution to writers) received £10,855 and distributed £19,882 in payments to writers through 2018. A total of £47,648 was carried forward.

The Welfare Fund, which provides grants/loans and assistance to members in times of trouble, continued to provide help through 2018, making a series of soft loans and grants in excess of £10,700. Following a Welfare review it was decided to write off £2,000 of unpaid loans. With donations from members of £2,532 across the year, this left the fund's balance as £48,372. The Welfare Fund

is administered by a committee comprising of volunteer members, and it has a committee chair appointed by the Finance Committee (FC).

There is one area where we are operating in a deficit, the position of Treasurer remains unfilled. The General Secretary is working closely with our Accountant, keeping the day-to-day finances in check and reporting directly to the FC. So if you are eligible and can spare a little time, then put yourself forward as WGGB Treasurer.

I will take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer members of the Finance Committee for their wisdom and diligence in managing the WGGB finances; Richard Pinner, John Wilsher, Rupert Creed, Gail Renard, Lisa Holdsworth, Antony Pickthall and William Gallagher.

I end with a quote from our previous Treasurer, Andy Walsh, "Thanks must also go to you. As a member, you are a writer who decided to stand up and be counted. Without you there would be no Guild. From finances, budgets, spreadsheets should come agreements, protection and a loud voice for writers. We hope that you continue to be there for the Guild as the Guild is there for you. The more members we have, the stronger we shall be."

**Ellie Peers, General Secretary
on behalf of the Finance Committee**



Members of the WGGB Finance Committee hard at work.

Photo: Em Fitzgerald

Craft committee reports



BOOKS

Books are still surviving, despite the onslaught from the digital age and the blurring of boundaries in the written word media. People still read books – albeit in many different forms and in many different ways.

There is an interesting parallel between the age of videos and DVDs (which were believed to be threatening to eliminate the cinema), with e-books creating a threat for real paper books. The latter may be less frequented now, but are still a fond option, with a significant number of people being attached to the visceral experience of going to a favourite cinema and reading a paper book. Many people still love feeling a volume in their hands and turning dog-eared pages in delight on a journey, in bed, in a café or simply in the open air.

In fact, we are in an era where people “mix and match” the reading media they dip into, including real paper books and digital devices. This is similar to their still buying newspapers for in-depth news and features, while skimming the internet on devices for quick news bytes. Whatever our particular reading proclivities, however, people are still wanting access to books – old and new form – and are keen to protect the art of writing from being taken over by our inevitable AI future. What’s more, people still want to write books – fiction, non-fiction, all sorts.

So, this means the Writer’s Guild will continue to have its hands full in the decade to come, as it has done in the past 60 years, to protect the

writer’s craft from censorship, commodification and disintegration. As with other craft areas, book writers are also still fighting to get paid (and paid well) for their work – especially as publishers are under pressure from the internet and world digital market, from self-publishing and social media. Thus, the ability of writers to get published by a pukka establishment has simply got harder. As has getting agent representation. Publishers and editors now look at Instagram and Twitter posts first and foremost. The more ‘followed’ a writer is, the more likely they are to get a publishing deal. Plus, if a book is a slow seller, it can mean there will be no other deals forthcoming.

This situation makes many burgeoning writers feel utter despair about earning a decent living from writing books. Indeed, it has got tougher to live on book earnings (unless you wrote *Fifty Shades* or *Harry Potter*), especially with the closure of libraries and the limiting of opening hours, thus affecting earnings through the Public Lending Right (PLR) and the Authors’ Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS).

There are also many blurring boundaries today between books and films, box set series and books, podcasts and blogs. All written media seem to be evolving and shape-shifting into different forms and cross-genres, not only in books, but in film and TV, theatre and radio. In the future it may well be difficult to identify craft areas as they merge into some kind of multimedia whole.

All this said, all is not lost. Definitely not. The Books Committee of the Guild has spent the past year hoping to keep books alive as an area of craft. People are still passionate about books and writing and the Guild is still a hugely important part of published authors’ lives for all sorts of reasons, not least advising on contracts, publishing and payment.

The second year of the Best First Novel Award ended in January 2019 when *The White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn-Bracht was the jury’s unanimous first choice. This was an extraordinary and maturely written story of Korean *Heaynu*, or female deep-sea divers, and their pressing into prostitution as “comfort women” by Japanese soldiers during the Second World War. Also shortlisted was the brilliantly written and creative *In Our Fast and Furious City* by Guy Gunaratne and

Craft committee reports

the quirky yet exhilarating *The Gods of Love* by Nicola Mostyn. The prize was awarded by last year's winner Sheena Kalayil (*The Bureau of Second Chances*).

The Books Committee has also raised the issue of increasing the annual author fees at the PLR and lobbied on the devastating effects Brexit will have on the book trade. The Committee has researched serious issues surrounding digitalisation of academic books and records. A publication is being prepared on self-publishing and e-books and authors' rights. The Books Committee has grown this year and we are always open to new members. During the next year we aim to set up sub-groups so we can become more effective in terms of public speaking, attracting new members and fighting for authors' rights and better pay.

The Books Committee is always glad to hear from you, especially if you have some time to spare to promote the invaluable work of the WGGB. We believe that there is an art in writing both fiction and non-fiction, and we pledge to keep the quill, rollerball and keyboard alive. We welcome members from any field or genre or cross-genre – the wider the better.

Corinne Sweet
Chair



COMEDY

I'm delighted to report that three years on from our euphoric energised inception, enthusiasm remains undimmed. The formation of our committee and our efforts to champion the writer-led show have coincided with a rare burst of writer-led productivity on the BBC and Channel 4, and while I don't think we can take too much credit, we know commissioners have been listening to our pleas for more scripted shows and more diversity across comedy.

In the coming year, inspired by Guild chair Gail Renard, we have writer credits in our sights. Too

many writers on panel shows are not being credited properly, and as a result are not receiving the royalties due to them. We'll be chasing companies who've been running off with our hard-earned residuals, and as Gail often reminds us, the Guild never loses!

It's been a difficult year for ITV but despite the suggestion, later denied, that the days of narrative comedy on ITV1 were numbered, we've seen a number of new shows on ITV2. Head of Comedy Saskia Schuster has been a great friend to the Guild and an avid supporter of our Equality Writes campaign. She has instigated a target of 50/50 for male/female writers by 2023 and is inspiring members throughout the Guild. Kay Stonham, who has been very active in pushing for more female writers in comedy, has moved to the Diversity committee and we're sure she'll do great work there.

Also, sad to say a temporary goodbye to James Cary, who is currently touring his new theatre show but plans to come back to us soon. In the meantime we've recruited Daniel Page, Nathaniel Tapley, Brenda Gilhooly and Eddie Robson. I'd like to thank the rest of the committee - Sian Harries, Carrie Quinlan, Abi Burdess, Neil Forsyth, Joel Morris and Shai Hussain for all their work and help. Here's to an exciting year ahead.

Dave Cohen
Chair



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

FILM

Following last year's publication of the WGGB report into gender inequality in the film and television industries, many of our committee discussions have focused on how we can push the conversation on and support the change that is needed.

The report has had a huge impact in the industry already and there's a definite groundswell for meaningful action. Along with members of the TV committee, we're taking part in MP Tracy Brabin's enquiry, 'Breaking the Class Ceiling', which looks at the issues of class in the industry. Improving diversity and equality in the film industry is a number one priority.

Consequently, the Equality Campaign group has been working on a "Think. Stop. Commission" document. This is intended as a follow-up to the report which asks financiers, commissioners and producers to examine their own criteria for commissioning decisions, to think about how these decisions might better reflect a diverse society and to change their practice to bring about meaningful change. This will be distributed to all commissioners, producers, agents and other decision-makers in the industry. We need a culture shift alongside everything else and our campaign aims to address this.

Our other big focus has been the new Minimum Terms Film Agreement that we have been negotiating with PACT and the PMA. The negotiations stalled last year but are now picking up pace again and we expect to have moved them on by the time this has been published. We are very clear about the shortcomings of the existing agreement and now have a strong idea of what any Agreement needs to

do to protect screenwriters and their rights. Whilst we will be stepping down as chairs this year, we intend to continue with the negotiations until we have a new Agreement in place. We are hoping this will happen by the end of the year.

Once again, our committee took part in viewing and voting for the Best First Screenplay and Best Screenplay for the WGGB awards in January. We watched more than 60 films then narrowed them down to a final shortlist. This was difficult, particularly in the first screenplay category, as the standard was high. We gave the award to *Apostasy* by Daniel Kokotajlo. Best Screenplay was won by *American Animals*, written by Bart Layton. This screenplay employs both fiction and non-fictional story-telling techniques which led to some interesting discussions around what constitutes fiction. In the end we agreed that *American Animals* was indeed a work of fiction.

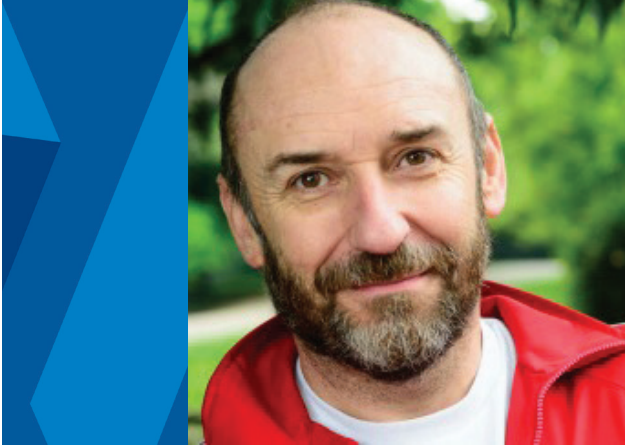
Once again we'd like to thank our film jury for volunteering their time and their expertise to these awards and to Phil O'Shea, film committee member, for his excellent chairing.

The film committee is made up of working writers and we are grateful to them for their energy and commitment. This year's committee was Olivia Hetreed, Phil O'Shea, Richard Deakin, Guy Hibbert, Tom Williams, Tosin Otudeko and Samantha Horley. Andrea Gibb and Line Langebek are Co-Chairs. James Hughes decided to step down to concentrate on other work.

Finally, we'd like to thank the Guild staff for all their support in helping the film committee do their work.

Line Langebek and Andrea Gibb Co-Chairs

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Nicholas McNerny (left) and Amanda Whittington (right), Radio Co-Chairs

RADIO

The Radio Committee is actively developing ways to raise the profile of radio drama across the country – seeking to recruit new members to the Guild as well as safeguarding radio dramatists’ rights in a rapidly changing landscape. With the launch of SOUNDS, BBC Radio drama is increasingly reaching out beyond traditional formats to commission new plays for new audiences. Naturally this presents both new opportunities and challenges.

BBC SOUNDS describes itself as aiming “to give people, especially younger listeners, the best in entertaining, experimental and highly creative audio. Our podcast commissions for BBC Sounds will be distinct and will serve that younger audience who are already more likely to listen online and on-demand”. Not only ambitious in terms of form and content, it has also required detailed negotiations via the regular BBC Radio Forum meetings, of which the Guild is an active part.

The Guild also invited Alison Hindell, newly appointed as Radio Drama Commissioner, to its offices in March, to discuss both the Tinniswood Award (chaired by myself) and to introduce her to staff. The Radio Committee notes with some concern the cuts in Radio Drama output, especially the Saturday Play and will continue to lobby for Radio Drama output in all its forms. We also continue to monitor the growing number of digital radio archives now available online.

In 2018 we had one Radio Drama Roadshow at Nottingham Trent University (29 October). I believe these events are a valuable way of introducing the work of the Guild to prospective recruits and hope to programme more over the next year. For example, I hope to speak at the Forthcoming Audio Drama Festival being held at Goldsmith’s College in May 2019.

Once again, I was a project manager for the 5th UK International Radio Drama Festival which took place at Canterbury 18-22 March 2019. With 60 entries and 48 selected for the competition, the festival once again shone a light on the different traditions of radio drama from around the world, an especially exciting experience in these divisive times. Recordings can be heard online at <http://www.radiodramafestival.org.uk>. The festival also hosted a Q&A from Gillian Reynolds, and was sponsored by the WGGB and ALCS.

In 2018, my Co-Chair Amanda Whittington stood down. I would like to thank my committee members for their active support, commitment and good humour – Nicholas Baldwin, Steve Chambers, Lucy Flannery, Martin Jameson, Katharine Way, Phil Nodding, Gillian Richmond and Keri Davies.

**Nicholas McNerny and
Amanda Whittington
Co-Chairs**



TELEVISION

2018-2019 was another busy year for the Guild's TV activists and the staff members who work with us on negotiations, campaigns and events.

TV is one of the Guild's largest craft areas. Our members write on every type of show and at every level. The Guild works hard on behalf of all writers, from beginning and emerging writers to the most well-known and established names. We advocate for the creators of shows, for jobbing writers who contribute occasional episodes, for the established core writers of long-running series and for writers of individual dramas. Some of this work is highly visible – examples include the Guild Awards, the release of our report into gender equality in film and TV writing, and the many appearances of Guild activists and staff on TV, radio and other media to comment on important industry issues or high-profile disputes. But most of our work happens in less public spaces. In TV, in addition to our ongoing negotiations with the BBC, ITV and PACT over remuneration and conditions, we work hard to establish dialogue with producers, commissioners and other gatekeepers about such important issues as equality, bullying and harassment policies and agreeing guidelines for best practice. We aim to resolve issues as amicably as possible, seeking the best outcomes for our members, and this is usually best achieved by avoiding the additional bad feeling which inevitably arises when arguments are carried out publicly, online or through the media. However, when a public response is called for, the Guild is always ready to react.

NEGOTIATIONS

Following on from the long negotiations that took place last year, the new BBC Script Agreement for Television and Online (SATO) was finalised and came into effect. BBC writers received a 2% pay rise.

Emmerdale writers, long underpaid, banded together and worked with Guild activists to secure a substantial pay rise – 5% increase in the basic fee from August 2018, and a further 5% uplift from August 2019.

FREE IS NOT AN OPTION

“Free Is NOT an Option” is the name of the Guild's ongoing campaign against low-paid and unpaid work. We continue to campaign for fair pay for TV writers. Whether creating new work or seeking employment on an existing show, writers should not be asked or expected to do an unreasonable amount of work without payment. Guidelines about what is and is not reasonable can be found on our website under Free is NOT an Option, and helpful flowcharts are currently being finalised for all craft areas. We have had meetings with producers and commissioners, who have all agreed that producers should pay for work before taking it to broadcasters, and that unpaid work is not acceptable. We appreciate that it is hard for writers to resist requests for “just a few pages” and continue to urge writers to look at the Free is Not an Option guidelines, and contact the Guild if in doubt.

We cautiously welcome the return of the BBC Writers' Academy, which offers paid work to a carefully selected group of emerging writers, providing training and experience on both Continuing Dramas and original work. It is certainly a good alternative to unpaid trial scripts and unpaid or low-paid shadow schemes.

CONTINUING DRAMA SERIES

All of the BBC Continuing Dramas (*Casualty*, *Doctors*, *EastEnders*, *Holby City* and *River City*) have signed up to a new set of guidelines drawn up by the PMA, the WGGB and the BBC itself. These guidelines address many day-to-day issues about good and bad practice.

In the past year, the TV Chair and General Secretary of the WGGB had a series of meetings with the heads of some continuing dramas (soaps).

We discussed the conditions that all writers should reasonably expect to work under.

- Delivery dates should be respected.
- Writers have a right to family life and working reasonable hours.
- Delay in the giving of notes should result in a corresponding extension of the writer's deadline.
- That last-minute changes of storyline should result in a rebrief fee.
- Bullying of any kind is unacceptable.

Discussions were constructive and we hope that this signifies the good intentions of the production team, even if the shows don't always live up to their own standards. So we encourage our members to keep reporting good and bad practice so that we can hold the producers to their word.

We have written to all our members who write for BBC CDSs, and have had a lot of feedback. We encourage all our members to share their experiences with us – the more we know and understand the culture on long running shows, the better we can help our members.

EQUALITY

The independent report commissioned by the Guild into gender equality in TV and film writing made waves in the industry when it was finally released last year. The statistics spoke for themselves; in TV, women writers are under-represented in all genres and the more well-paid and prestigious the job, the more likely it will go to a man. Many women writers have been bold enough to stick their own necks out and explain why it is not necessarily women's "choice" to write children's and soap instead of prime-time thrillers. An open letter by a group of female screenwriters was widely publicised. After

the inevitable initial hostility and denial, there have been some very positive developments. A group of senior commissioners met with representatives from the Guild and the conversation soon moved to a more general discussion of equality. The Guild has now formed an Equalities Committee to champion the rights of under-represented groups. It is our intention to work with commissioners to help them to question subconscious bias about who possesses "a safe pair of hands".

Leaving aside the work of writer-performers, comedy writing is one of the least diverse areas of all. ITV has set up a database of female comedy writers which can be used by all bona fide production companies looking for funny writers, to challenge the familiar "we couldn't find any" excuse.

Several members contacted the Guild with concerns about a sitcom set in the British East Asian community. The Guild chaired a meeting between representatives of the broadcaster (BBC) and British East Asians Working in Theatre and Screen (BEATS) and progress was made towards settling the dispute and finding an acceptable way forward for the show.

PROJECT DIAMOND

The Guild continues to boycott Project Diamond, the TV broadcasters' diversity monitoring scheme. Several members have asked why this is, and what this means in practice. To put it briefly, when Project Diamond was first announced, the WGGB actively supported and promoted the project. We withdrew this support because programme-level data collected by Project Diamond will not be shared, even in confidence, with recognised trade unions. However, we do not discourage our members from completing and submitting equality monitoring forms.



WGGB, PMA agents and the BBC have signed off a new set of best practice guidelines for working with writers on continuing drama series.

WORKING AS, OR WITH, A WRITER-SHOWRUNNER

More British shows are now adapting a writer-showrunner model, but how that works in practice varies wildly from show to show. In order to help our members negotiate this tricky area, a TV subcommittee is currently working on a set of best practice guidelines for working with writer-showrunners.

The subcommittee is made up of writers who have worked as lead writers, contributing writers or both. The aim is to create a set of guidelines for working with TV writers in a writers' room setting, which provide support and suggested best practice for Show Runners (SR) and contributing writers employed by the SR.

THANKS

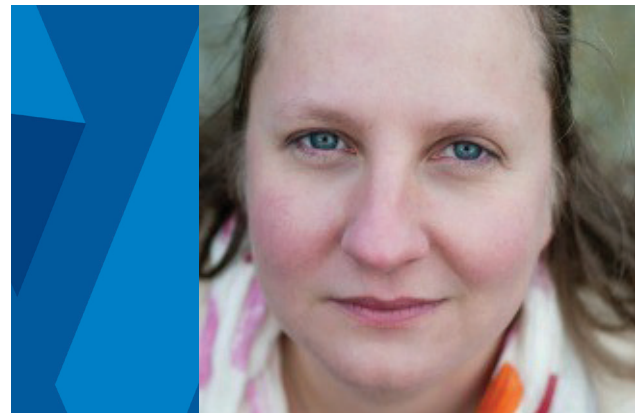
Thanks as ever to the TV committee for their commitment and hard work. The current committee members are Jenny Davis, Neil Forsyth, Lisa Holdsworth, Henrietta Hardy, Darren Jones, Maggie Innes, Matt Leys, Sophie Petzal, Amy Roberts, Katharine Way and Miranda Walker. Thanks also to former members Kate Delin, Shai Hussain and Chris Jury, who have stepped down this year. If you would like to influence the Guild's policy in television, please contact the TV Chair at the Guild – we always welcome new activists.

Emma Reeves
Chair



WGGB won significant increase in fees for Emmerdale writers.

Photo: Shutterstock/James W Copeland



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

THEATRE

Many of our activities and achievements this year follow on from last year and the year before, with one major exception.

We have continued to mine our research into the way in which British theatre companies relate to playwrights, to negotiate with UK Theatre (UKT) about non-compliance with our agreements, to seek to incorporate live streaming into our agreements, to meet with the Arts Council and to pursue a new iteration of the Playwrights' Progress development project. We are delighted that – at last – musical theatre bookwriting was among the prizes at the Writers' Guild awards.

The new development is the forging of links with the Dramatists' Guild of America, which has already born practical fruit.

Following a visit by co-chair Jenifer Toksvig to New York to attend a Dramatists' Guild of America conference on devising, WGGB hosted three events during the visit of a senior DGA delegation to London from 22-24 October. During a dinner (attended by Theatre Committee members, alongside playwrights David Eldridge, Tanika Gupta, Nina Raine and April de Angelis) it was agreed that the two organisations should explore collaborating. As a result, a guest membership scheme (the Good Neighbour Initiative) has been launched, designed to welcome and assist American playwrights visiting Britain and British playwrights visiting America. In addition to a website providing contractual and other information (<https://www.dramatistsguild.com/goodguest/>), members of both guilds are granted temporary guest membership when working in the other country,

including help, support, advice and some other membership benefits. Several playwrights have already taken up the offer.

At the end of the Dramatists' Guild stay, WGGB organised an event at the Royal Court to present the DGA's exemplary guidelines on playwrights and devising to British playwrights.

In addition to the Good Neighbour Initiative, Samuel French is matching a scheme to provide free tickets for playwrights in New York with a similar scheme here.

In 2017-18, we held two meetings (in London and Manchester) to explore and discuss how playwrights relate to theatres beyond our collective Agreements. The project was organised and led by Theatre Committee co-chair Jen Toksvig, who produced a report on the discussions and the survey, in collaboration with Theatre Committee members, General Secretary Ellie Peers, and Assistant General Secretary Lesley Gannon. The report contains a number of proposals, including a directory of venues producing new work and clear statements from companies about their resources and procedures. The report was presented to a Literary Managers' Forums, held at the Almeida on 5 October.

At our March Committee meeting, Jen and Lesley presented a plan for an online publication, titled *The Working Playwright: Theatre Writing Handbook*, half of which would be directed at playwrights and the other half at producers. A draft of this will be presented to two Literary Managers' Forums, one in London and one in Scarborough, later this year.

During the year efforts were made to relaunch the playwrights' development programme Playwrights' Progress, initiated by Committee member Richard

Pinner some years ago. Last summer Richard, Debbie McAndrew and Nick Wood met with a delegation from the New Vic and Northern Broadsides; a further meeting with Northern Broadsides discussed new forms for the project, and the drawing-up of a new funding application.

The Committee has continued to meet regularly with Arts Council England. On 31 May last year, a delegation led by Richard Pinner met with Director of Theatre Tarek Iskander and Alex James (relationship manager, London). Topics discussed included: new grants schemes (including the new funding stream Developing Your Creative Practice, which supports independent artists, including writers), ageism, funded theatres' compliance with the UKT/WGGB Agreement, and Playwrights' Progress. The next meeting is scheduled for 30 April.

Our negotiating team continues to seek to conclude a deal with UK Theatre on noncompliance by its members with the UKT/WGGB Agreement. Our offer is that, in exchange for a new and lower studio theatre payment rate (and other benefits for theatres), UKT would set up a robust system of enforcing the Agreement. On 21 May 2018, we met to finalise (as we'd hoped) this agreement but talks broke down over the issue of rehearsal payments (in which we'd asked for minor improvements). Although noncompliance appears to have receded as a major problem, we were unhappy with walking away from the talks, and so suggested that a working-party attempt to resolve the rehearsal payments issue. A new proposal was delivered, and discussed at a well-attended meeting between our team and the PMA (agents) on 22 October. At this meeting, it was agreed that – despite many frustrations – we should reopen talks with UKT (not least as our offer on studios is to the benefit of the theatre industry as a whole). We met on 2 May and hope to have a resolution soon.

We have also sought to include terms for live and encore streaming of plays in the TNC Agreement (which covers the RSC, the Royal Court and the National Theatre, which conducts most UK theatre streaming, of its own and other theatres' work). We met with the National Theatre on 15 February, for a general fact-finding discussion, during which we learnt that the National had come to an agreement on its On Demand in Schools programme for writers, creatives and actors to waive fees during a three-year pilot programme of free streaming. Now the scheme

is being set up on a more permanent footing, we are insisting that the NT negotiates with us on terms (as they have done with Equity).

During the year we have negotiated increased rates for playwrights with the TNC and the Independent Theatre Council. An agreement on increased rates UKT has not been implemented.

Over the past few years, we have been in discussion with Stage Directors UK about their campaign to increase payments to directors, which we support wholeheartedly. Both bodies have been concerned that any increase in directors' royalties should not be at the expense of playwrights, and that playwrights' copyright should not be infringed. In collaboration with Equity, SDUK has won a substantial increase in fees for directors, but without any agreement on royalties, which will be addressed in future negotiations.

In January, for the first time, the Writers' Guild awards included an award for musical bookwriting, for which the Committee has campaigned for three years. The selection panel was chaired by Samuel Adamson and the winner was Tom MacCrae for *Everybody's Talking about Jamie*. The best play award was presented by Roy Williams and won by Frances Poet for *Gut*. The best play for young audiences award was again presented by Roy, and won by Tim Crouch for *Beginners*. A musical theatre kit – jointly drawn up by WGGB and the Musicians' Union – was published by both unions.

On 8 February, our annual Olwen Wymark Awards were held at the Royal Court, honouring individuals and organisations that have made a particularly strong contribution to playwrights and playwriting. As usual, this was organised by David James, and proved – as ever – one of the highlights of our year. The winners were artist and producer Ali Al Zougbi (nominated by Hannah Khalil), director Kate Budgen and dramaturg Sarah Dickenson (nominated by Samantha Potter), Greyscale artistic director Selma Dimitrijevic (nominated by Sean Burn), Player and Playwright group activist Peter Thompson (nominated by Karen Bartholomew), teacher Martin Cort (nominated by Mary Rensten) and, indeed, David James himself (Evi Stamatiou).

We have retained the collegiate structure of the Committee and its work. David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig are Co-Chairs, with Jenifer representing theatre on the EC. Our TNC/UKT negotiating team

has expanded: David and Nick Wood have been joined by Sarah Woods, Vanessa Brooks and Dan Rebellato. Richard Pinner leads on the Awards (last year's readers were Debbie McAndrew, Roy Kendall, Amelia Bullmore, Lisa Evans, Brian McAvera, David James, Vicky Ireland and Nick Wood).

We are grateful to all Committee members for their work and their enthusiasm, as well as to WGGB staff. Both General Secretary Ellie Peers and Assistant General Secretary Lesley Gannon have played a crucial role in negotiations with both UKT and TNC during the year and have provided vital advice and help to the Committee on the development of the new Theatre Writing Handbook in particular.

We gained four new Committee members during the year: Jan Woolf, Poppy Corbett, Rosamund Gravelle and Alan Spence. During the year Adrian Beckingham left the Committee. The full Committee is Alan Spence, Amelia Bullmore, Brian McAvera, David Edgar, Deborah McAndrew, Jan Woolf, Jenifer Toksvig, Lisa Evans, Nick Wood, Poppy Corbett, Richard Pinner, Rosamund Gravelle, Roy Kendall, Sarah Woods, and Vanessa Brooks. Having served for three years as co-chairs, David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig are stepping down as co-chairs, Vanessa Brooks and Richard Pinner have been nominated to take over these roles, and if elected will do so after the AGM.

David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig Co-Chairs



The recipients of this year's Olwen Wymark Awards, celebrating at the Royal Court Theatre.

Photo: Kate Glasspool

Craft committee reports

VIDEOGAMES

Aside from supporting the work necessary for the WGGB's videogames award, the committee has been progressing key initiatives aimed at increasing recruitment and to opening the videogames industry to a wider range of writers. We have attended talks and events to promote the work of the WGGB.

The committee's annual panel took place in December 2018 and covered the 'Do's and Don'ts' videogames writing. Well attended, the event received great feedback. This panel has been followed by a number of networking events that have been used to promote the WGGB videogames guidelines and to make contact with games writers on behalf of the WGGB. Changes made to the way we promote our events has seen a positive increase in the diversity of attendees.

Moving forward from 2019 into 2020 the committee has begun a review of the survey used as the basis for the WGGB videogames guidelines. As the



industry continues to evolve quickly, the committee wishes to review and revise these guidelines to keep them up to date. It is hoped that the release of these revised guidelines will form the central pillar of a new recruitment drive to bring more videogames writers into the WGGB.

Andrew S. Walsh
On behalf of the Videogames Committee



The Videogames Committee is currently revising its guidelines for games writers

Branch reports

EAST MIDLANDS

LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

In the past year, the London & SE committee have organised two major membership events.

The first, a new member welcome evening at The George, was well attended. About 40 people registered, and about 25 of those came along. They were greeted by members of the Executive Council, and all agreed it was an excellent evening of peer-to-peer support and the sharing of industry info.

The second event, in 2019, was an open space event facilitated by Improbable theatre company as part of their Devoted and Disgruntled series of industry events supported by Arts Council England.

It was a very successful event. Writers themselves raised topics for conversation, which ranged from questions about adapting novels for the stage, to craft advice about musical theatre, to conversations about fundraising.

The Dramatists Guild of America was also in attendance. Together, we launched the new Good Neighbour Initiative: a guest membership for those visiting and making work in the other country.

We made provision for two BSL interpreters to ensure the event was fully accessible.

There was excellent feedback on this event from attendees, and the committee feels it may be worth doing this once a year.

In changes to our working process, the Committee has agreed that meeting once a month seems too frequent, and we have agreed to meet four times a year.

Following some upcoming research by the



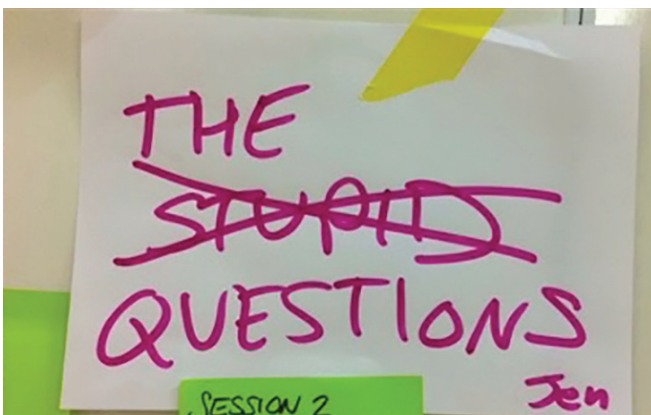
WGGB into how members like to be contacted by, and connected to, the Guild, the London & SE Committee will connect with other regional committees to consider the role we play and work we do on behalf of members, and how best to optimise that work.

This includes consideration of:

- splitting the region into London, and the SouthEast, as two separate regions
- considering how the EC allocates seats to the regions, and perhaps proposing proportional representation
- the work of regional committees in organising member events
- the work of regional committees in being connected to the region's engagement with the arts, through specific companies, and/or local councils

We intend to organise future events including panels of experts, tours of interesting industry locations, and social gatherings.

Gary Thomas
Chair



The WGGB collaborated with Improbable theatre company to host a 'Devoted & Disgruntled' open space event for writers in all craft areas.

Photo: Jenifer Toksvig

SOUTH WEST (DEVON AND CORNWALL)

The best-laid plans of mice and men! Regretfully, personal ill health issues inhibited the progression of my plans for WGGB South West (Devon and Cornwall) during the first half of the year 2018/2019. A major medical operation put pay to any progression of my plans for the second half of the year.

I look forward to getting back on track during the coming months and supporting all WGGB SWDC members to fulfil their desired writing potential.

Apologises to any member inconvenienced by my circumstances. I now look forward to meeting up with you all during the coming year.



Do feel free to contact me about any writing issues specific to you or your area. I can't promise a resolution but I can promise my attention.

Malcolm Kat
Chair

SOUTH WEST (WESSEX)

I'm sure the Wessex region isn't the most sprawling of Guild areas, though it does run from the Dorset coast to the edge of the Cotswolds. But it does still mean that members are somewhat scattered, and organising events that most can attend is difficult. However, I have travelled to or organised informal events in Bournemouth and Bath, and hope to do more of this in the future. It's vital that we, as writers, keep talking to each other and sharing our stories and insight. I would love to hear from any local Guild members regarding events that they would like to see (and if you have the time to help organise something, no matter how low key, then that would be great as well).

Of course, most of my contact with Guild members is via email, and I like to think that even if I don't have the answers, I can usually find someone who does. And we are lucky, in as much we do have a hub in the region, namely Bristol, which Channel 4 is in the process of making its English 'Creative hub' (alongside Leeds as the new National HQ and Glasgow as the Scottish hub). It will be interesting to see what impact this might have on local writers.



The South West TUC have been putting together a regional Creative and Leisure Industries Committee and a manifesto for the creative and cultural industries. The Guild has been involved with this, and I've attended a meeting at the TUC offices in Bristol. I'm keen to make as much as I can of – for example – the filming of *Poldark* and the final season of *Fortitude* at the Bottle Yard Studios, and there will be future meetings, possibly with local MPs, to ensure that the region remains committed to and involved in arts and culture in the future.

Martin Day
Chair

WALES

It has been another busy year for the Wales Committee, a year that has seen resolutions to some withstanding issues and a year in which new challenges have come to the fore.

In the world of broadcasting there are two developments to report. Firstly, after a period of consulting and negotiation we reached a deal with S4C regarding their online service Clic. The new deal allows them not only to show archive material on Clic but also allows them the possibility of extending the catch-up period on their drama series for up to 90 days (instead of the previous limit of 30 days). During negotiations, S4C accepted WGGB's arguments that the archive material should be curated and carefully selected. The new-look service launched in December 2017.

Secondly, a new deal was also reached with BBC Studios Cymru/Wales regarding story-lining on *Pobol y Cwm*. After lengthy and hard negotiations, which included consultation with all 12 writers affected, we failed in our attempt to safeguard the number of episodes allocated to each story-liner but did, however, succeed in increasing story-lining fees. WGGB and the BBC have agreed to review this new deal at our next *Pobol y Cwm* annual catch-up, which should be happening around September.

In the world of theatre, WGGB supported some of the points raised in an open letter signed by prominent Welsh playwrights concerning the output of National Theatre Wales. As a direct result of this support, Ellie Peers and I met with Lisa Maguire, Executive Producer NTW, and Kully Thiarai, Artistic Director NTW, to discuss our position and to hopefully embark on a constructive dialogue with NTW.

Turning to books, a delegation of WGGB Wales Committee members held an informal meeting with Cyngor Llyfrau Cymraeg to seek clarification on how



the new relationship between them and Llenyddiaeth Cymru will affect grants and bursaries to writers. We were encouraged to learn that little has in fact changed.

Events-wise we have continued to hold the occasional After Committee Meeting. The meetings offer our members an opportunity to meet and discuss issues that affect us as writers in Wales with various people who either work in the industry or who have a direct link to the industry. This year's guests have included Catherine Paskell, Artistic Director Dirty Protest Theatre, and Bethan Sayed AM, Chair of the Welsh Assembly's Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee. Helen Perry, BBC Writersroom Wales, will be attending one of our events in the near future.

We also continue to try and recruit new members and offer advice to future writers by attending events such as Creative Pathways Careers Fair and The Other Room Theatre's New Artists Festival.

Finally, I would like to thank the Wales Committee members for their continuing support and their shared aspiration to safeguard and improve the working life of writers in Wales.

William Gwyn
Chair



Writers in Wales are facing pressure across the board and the Welsh Committee has been working hard on their behalf this year

WEST MIDLANDS

The branch was extremely happy to welcome WGGB to the Library of Birmingham for last year's AGM. It was gratifying to see so many members making the trip to our region and hope that we and other branches have the opportunity to host the AGM again in the future.

The AGM also saw Chris Jury step down as Branch Chair. Since then he has also stepped down as WBBG rep on the Midlands TUC Culture and Leisure Industries Committee (CLIC). Chris was instrumental in setting up the CLIC and we would like to thank him for his valuable contribution. The branch has also welcomed several new members to our committee although the door is always open to other West Midlands members who would like to get involved!

We hosted a very successful radio drama event with Alison Hindell, Radio 4's new Commissioning Editor for Drama and Fiction. The event was held in *The Archers* studio at BBC Birmingham, where a mixture of members and non-members listened to Alison talk about her vision for the network, BBC Sounds, and how to get work on air. We have also continued holding our semi-regular "not-working" social evenings. They are open to anyone working in the creative industries, the one condition being that there should be strictly no networking! We used one evening to say goodbye to the *Home Front* team, which has now finished production (leaving *The Archers* as the only radio drama made in Birmingham once again), and another to celebrate the launch of Jo Toye's new novel *A Store at War*.

Meanwhile, we have continued to promote WGGB at various events and careers fairs, including Midlands RTS, Warwick University and West Midlands Screenwriters' Forum. We are also working to



strengthen and forge fresh alliances with Writing West Midlands, Culture Central, Screen Central (previously West Midlands Producers' Forum) and the Birmingham Rep. Production in the region is still chronically low, our arts sector is facing further swingeing cuts from local government and the scandalous imbalance in investment between London and the rest of the country remains unaddressed. However, the region is also looking forward to Coventry being City of Culture in 2021 and Birmingham hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2022, with the attendant cultural festival that will go with it. As a branch we are determined to lobby the organisers of both events to make sure that they create genuine work opportunities for writers and artists in our region and that they leave the creative economy stronger and more confident.

Finally, a big thank you must go to the branch committee for all the work that they do, especially William Gallagher who, in addition to being WGGB Deputy Chair, finds time to write our monthly branch newsletter. You can also keep up with what we're doing by following us on Twitter [@WMWritersGuild](https://twitter.com/WMWritersGuild)

Tim Stimpson
Chair

YORKSHIRE AND NORTH EAST

It is my pleasure to represent the WGGB in Yorkshire and the North East. It is invaluable talking to other writers, and to help our members with whatever problems they may have. If you have anything I can help with, or any constructive feedback, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

The standout headline for Yorkshire & NE in the past 12 months is the news that Channel 4 has chosen Leeds for its new main regional headquarters. It is hugely significant and important decision, and one that places a major UK terrestrial broadcaster in the heart of our region.

It's important to note that one of the reasons that Leeds won the bid was its emphasis on nurturing new creative talent and providing opportunities for existing talent for the whole region. It is essential that the broadcaster delivers on that promise and uses this as a springboard for a new era in regional creativity.

So much lip service has been paid to the debate about regional representation and access, but for



many writers, regardless of whatever field they work in, the London-centricity of their industries can feel they are shut out from decisions and opportunity. Are we now beginning to see a genuine sea-change? And will other industries follow suit and recognise that there is so much untapped talent outside the M25? We can but hope.

Here's to a productive and creative year ahead to all our members.

You can contact me by email on:
yorksne@writersguild.org.uk

BRANCH VACANCIES

The position of chair for the following committees are vacant. 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 6 June 2019 deadline, visit <https://writersguild.org.uk/wggb-agm-2019-at-the-iconic-unicorn-theatre/> and download the Executive Council vacancies form.
- After 24 June 2019, email admin@writersguild.org.uk for an update/ further details, unfilled seats will go out to the membership after the AGM.

Branch seats up for election in 2019 – East Midlands, North West Manchester and Lancs, North West Merseyside, Scotland and South West Wessex.

Other reports

EDITORIAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Editorial and Communications Committee helps set the communications strategy for the WGGB.

Over the past year, we achieved the following:

- created a welcome pack for new members of the WGGB's Executive Council
- worked together with the Dramatists Guild of America to share knowledge and best practice
- piloted new ways for the WGGB to engage with its members over social media
- created a communications grid to ensure our messages get to the right people at the right time
- commissioned an update to *The Write Stuff*, the history of the WGGB, for our 60th anniversary
- improved the navigation of the website
- analysed where our new members are coming from.

The committee is currently working on the following projects:

- asking our members how they prefer to engage with and receive information



- updating our communications strategy
- simplifying our membership criteria
- improving the ease of paying WGGB dues by direct debit

If you think you could help the Editorial Committee on these – or any other projects – we are always looking for new members. You don't have to have any experience, and it only takes a few hours each month. Just email editorial@writersguild.org.uk to volunteer.

Thanks to the following people who served on the committee this year: Poppy Corbett, Thom Fell, Lesley Gannon, Kate Glasspool, Susannah Saary, John Sailing, Jenifer Toksvig, and Sarah Woodley.

Piers Beckley
Chair



This year the Editorial and Communications Committee has broadened our presence on social media, enabling writers to connect more easily with the WGGB and with each other.

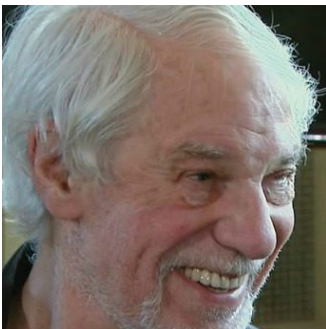
Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2018-19, 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/).



Denis Norden (1922-2018)



Ray Galton (1930-2018)



Stephen Jeffreys (1950-2018)



Polly Churchill: (1963-2018)

Remembering WGGB members:

DENIS NORDEN (1922-2018)

Denis Norden was a comedy giant, WGGB stalwart and former Chair, whose writing shaped British comedy for over 70 years. He is remembered here by WGGB Chair Gail Renard

Denis Norden was a former WGGB Chair, award-winning comedy writer and performer, gentleman and scholar. His writing shaped British comedy for over 70 years.

Born in Hackney in 1922, Denis had a great love of Hollywood films. At the age of 17 he became the manager of a cinema in Watford and organised variety shows. Like so many of his generation, the war changed his life. Denis served in the RAF with Eric Sykes. They began to write and put on shows to entertain the troops to get off night duty. Looking for some lights for their show, they were sent to Bergen-Belsen just after it had been liberated. They went back to their own camp to gather all the food they could.

Denis was introduced to Frank Muir in 1947 and their great writing partnership began. Between them they wrote 300 episodes of *Take It From Here* starring Jimmy Edwards and June Whitfield. The series lasted 11 years and had its own spin-off series, *The Glums*. Frank and Denis also wrote for *That Was The Week That Was*, *The Frost Report* and countless other radio and comedy shows. Their spoof documentary *Balham, Gateway To The South* was recorded by Peter Sellers and is still as funny today as it was 50 years ago. Frank and Denis were also responsible for the immortal Carry On line, "Infamy, infamy, they've all got it in for me."

Muir and Norden were given a three-year contract at the BBC as comedy writers and consultants. Denis left when his contract ended to go freelance, finding the BBC stifling. Though Frank and Denis didn't write together anymore, they continued appearing on the TV and radio panel shows, *My Word and My Music*. They remained best friends all their lives and rang each other every evening.

In 1977, Denis and Paul Smith, the future producer of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, were laughing over the famous *Blue Peter* clip where an elephant disgraced himself on set. They wondered if they



Photo: Gail Renard

could do a whole show based on funny outtakes. They called LWT director of programmes Michael Grade. In 30 minutes they had a commission. *It'll Be All Right On The Night* ran for 29 years, Denis choosing all of the clips, writing the scripts and presenting every show.

Denis was a Writers' Guild stalwart who was a member of the Television Committee along with Ray Galton, Alan Simpson and Jimmy Perry; a reminder of the comedy giants who gave up their valuable writing time to improve all writers' pay, rights and working conditions – and what meetings those must have been.

Denis was also a Guild negotiator, Co-Chair from 1965-6 and instrumental in establishing the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds. As Denis said at the fifth annual Writers' Guild Awards in 1966: "We effected last October a series of international affiliations with writers' organisations in other countries. So we now have what is called a 'global standpoint'. We can watch writers being screwed in 16 different parts of the world..."

Denis won many awards and was honoured with a CBE in 1980. The one he said he cherished the most was the Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the WGGB in 1999 for his services to comedy and entertainment.

Former WGGB Chair, Mike Sharland, paid tribute: Denis was “a talented, nice, wise and very funny man – if you had lunch with Denis, you were guaranteed plenty of laughter, lots of advice and you would leave feeling the comedy world of our time was a decent place to make a living.”

WGGB Comedy Chair Dave Cohen added: “In the early 2000s I worked with Denis, writing jokes with him for his *It’ll Be Alright On Election Night* shows. I’d turn up early at his office in Rathbone Place, a small, top floor flat in an old house barely converted to a place for writing. As I wheezed my way up the stairs I found Denis making a cup of tea. He’d already arrived earlier, gone for a quick constitutional round his old haunts, a walk that would take in Broadcasting House and the old Paris Theatre in Regent Street, where all the great post-war comedy shows were recorded, and come

back in time to put the kettle on. Denis was in his late 70s then but had enough energy for both of us.”

This year we will be celebrating our 60th anniversary at WGGB. We’re still here largely because of the hard work of Denis and many others.

A man of great warmth, wit with a constant love of comedy, Denis always kept up to date with all the latest comedy shows. Once when I didn’t appreciate a series Denis told me, “Don’t be a fuddy-duddy about comedy, Gail.” He urged me to watch it again and embrace the new. Of course he was right.

Denis Norden was a unique writer and WGGB giant.

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The Writers' Guild of Great Britain has made best efforts to ensure all information in this annual report is correct at the time of going to press.

Up-to-date news can be found on the WGGB website:
www.writersguild.org.uk

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