

Chairman's Statement Thursday March 19th 2020

Dear Conference 2020 delegate (and the wider Guild membership),

Thank you for your patience whilst we have monitored Government advice and Public Health England guidance on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and discussed our planned gathering next month with the Events Team at Jurys Inn Oxford.

Even the latest information from the Government on Monday was only to advise (but not mandate) not gathering in groups and self-isolation for the over 70's and those with underlying medical conditions; even travel from overseas countries home to some delegates was not restricted just difficult, sometimes involving compulsory self-isolation on returning home.

Whilst the health and wellbeing of all Guild members, especially those of more advanced years or with specific health issues, has been at the forefront of the minds of the Committee, as Trustees we also have specific obligations and responsibilities for managing the Guild and its finances.

In the absence of formal bans, rather than just advice, from the Government Jurys Inn were not able to allow the Guild to cancel our booking without invoking the cancellation fees stipulated in the contract between the hotel and the Guild. Deducting the VAT, if we were to cancel the event before next Monday the cancellation fee would have been £17,881.25 (75% of the contract value) and this would have increased to £23,841.67 (100%) from Monday.

Whilst sympathetic to the voluntary and charitable status of the Guild, the hotel were placed in a very difficult situation whilst all the Government "instructions" were (and still are) only "advisory" so they themselves would not be able to claim on their own insurance (even supposing they would be able to claim for Coronavirus if it was not, as a new disease, listed as an insurable notifiable disease) or seek Government financial support for losses.

The Guild trustees have faced an unenviable situation of having to decide whether or not to cancel immediately and face the lower, but still significant, financial penalty or to risk the higher penalty whilst hoping that the Government would change their advice to a mandatory instruction between next Monday and the date of the conference.

At the same time the Conference Planning Team have been in regular contact with the hotel stressing to them the impact on the Guild of enforcing the cancellation penalty and seeking to explore alternative options for still holding the event. We are now relieved and delighted to advise, and very grateful to the hotel for agreeing, that the 2020 conference has now been postponed with no penalty and will now be held at Jurys Inn Oxford from April 23rd to 25th 2021; this will also mean that we will now negotiate to move the conference planned for Northampton in 2021 (for which we have so far only paid a nominal fee as a deposit) back a year to April 2022.

We will now be writing by the end of April direct to all delegates booked for the 2020 conference to discuss their options for transferring their booking to the new weekend in 2021 or for cancelling. As we have now postponed, not cancelled, the booking we are still required to fully pay the contracted amount of £28,160.00 before April 10th 2020.

The Guild Committee has decided that the Annual General Meeting, due to be held during the conference on April 25th, will now be held as an online meeting to take place on the same date but at 20.00 UK time. We will circulate further details to all members in due course.

W Paul Featherstone
Chairman, Guild of One-Name Studies