

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF VERBATIM REPORTERS

Company Registration No. 23811

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on:

Saturday, 7th June 2008

Held at:

The Salisbury Room
St Bride Foundation
Bride Lane, Fleet Street
London EC4Y 8EQ

Commencing at 2:00 p.m.

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DIRECTORS

Frances Dobson (President)
Valerie Doyle, Shelley Dutton,
Ann Lloyd, Jean Lukins, Robyn Nott
Virginia Wason, Miriam Weisinger, Betty Willett

Secretary)
Treasurer) Mary Sorene
Registrar)

IN ATTENDANCE

Roger Bell, Lindsay Bickers, Iris Butcher
Frances Dobson, Valerie Doyle, Shelley Dutton,
Pat Frith, Jean Gough, Ann Hill, Sheryll Holley
Ann Lloyd, Jean Lukins, Robyn Nott, Pauline Miller,
Jackie Roper, Mary Sorene, Virginia Wason,
Norma White, Leah Willersdorf, Betty Willett

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome, everyone. I am just going to check that Jean can hear me fine. She is taking the note for us today. If I drop my voice and you cannot hear me, tell me to speak up. The first thing is for Mary to read the notice.

MRS SORENE: Just before I do that, Raymond is flitting around the room. He is just packing everything up, so I hope everybody approves that Raymond just stays in the room while we have our AGM. He is not taking any part in it, obviously. I will read the Notice convening the meeting.

“Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of this Institute will be held on Saturday, 7th June 2008 at 2:00 p.m. (with Heritage Exhibition from 10:30 a.m. followed by lunch) in the Salisbury Room, at St Bride Foundation, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EQ for the purposes of considering and if thought fit passing resolutions as to the ordinary business of the Company relating to the Council Members, accountant and accounts; to receive and adopt the Report and Accounts; to elect members to serve on the Council for the year 2008-2009; to pass a Special Resolution to elect a President for the present year 2008-2009; to elect a President-Elect for the ensuing year 2009-2010; to elect an Accountant for the ensuing year 2009-2010; to appoint the date of the next Annual General Meeting; any other business.”

That was signed by me as Institute Secretary from the registered address, and dated 15th May 2008.

THE PRESIDENT: Are there any apologies for absence?

MRS SORENE: Yes. Has anybody else heard of any? I have the whole list here, which I will pass over to Jean, but I will read them out.

THE PRESIDENT: I do know that Kath Sykes could not be here today and sent her apologies.

MRS SORENE: I have Paul Brincau, Karen Young, Carol Evans, Karen Wedge, Melanie Ball, Jenny Chandler, Victoria Rose, Diana Tapper, Miriam Weisinger, Frances Barrett, Natalie Bracken, Dawn Scott, Hilary Maclean, Susan McIntyre, Carol Redwood-Pain, Helen Edwards, Michelle Sowerby, Joan Webb. You have just said Kath Sykes.

MRS BICKERS: And Diana Burden. She said yesterday.

MRS SORENE: And Diana Burden as well. Julie Smith

MRS LLOYD: Lynn Briault.

THE PRESIDENT: The minutes of the last meeting have already been circulated. There are a few spare copies here which can be handed out, perhaps just to check they are all agreed.

MRS SORENE: If anyone would like a copy, you have had them already. (*Same handed*)

THE PRESIDENT: Are we all agreed on the minutes? Yes, so I will sign those.

(The Minutes of the 2007 Annual General Meeting were agreed and signed)

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome to the AGM for 2008. BIVR's Memorandum and Articles of Association has served to remind me of the aims and objectives of the Institute. My term as your President has focused on those things. I am going to give the Shorthand Writer a break as I have a handout. Shelley, if you could take those and hand them out? This is just a reminder of what those things are. (*Same handed*)

As you can see, sections 3(A), (B) and (C) indicate targets and commitments. Each part is like a crossroads. It shows the way forward and empowers the decision-maker with options

for change. There is scope to think and plan ahead and develop a strategy for SMART outcomes.

SMART outcomes, for those who do not know, are things that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. There has always been an expectation of a journey. I would like to share with you my experience of that journey. I have been very proactive this year in promoting the features, advantages and benefits of using verbatim shorthand writers, and that has been in every field of work.

During my term of office I have attended 18 Government conferences, 40 Business Link workshops in East Anglia and I have discovered some ability to challenge ideas, values and beliefs of the decision-makers, the budget holders, and the gatekeepers who have not appreciated our value.

A BIVR qualification is the start of a journey, not the end of the road. A BIVR qualification is a step in the right direction for a career that changes over time and makes different demands on the reporter. We can see today how flexible we have been. Status is about self-worth and understanding your value. You are special.

I am going to read you something. This was an e-mail sent to me and it was about a neuro-psychologist's deposition. She says:

“Our brains are a miracle – okay a miracle that needs to be protected. And if you look at the court reporter right now, as an example, this is a miracle in progress happening right before your eyes.

Let me just explain what she needs to do. I am speaking, so the information has to come in through her ear into her temporal lobe, and it has to go log itself into the language centre. She has to be able to comprehend what I am saying. Then it has to get re-routed in the prefrontal cortex where it has to hold. She has to be able to hold that information because I continuously talk so she has to hold it.

Then she has to analyse it, integrate it and synthesise it. Then it has to come back to the cerebellum and she has to be able to execute this, and she has to be able to then convert my words into those little squiggly marks. Have you ever seen court reporters have little squiggly language things? So she has to convert it into a different language, and the white matter track allows her to re-route all this information simultaneously without effort.

We take our brains for granted. She is sitting there and I am probably talking too fast for her, but she is able to do this simultaneously. Seamlessly. Okay?

No animal on the planet can do this. All right? That is why I believe court reporters will never be replaced, because no technology could replace the beauty of that brain and the miracle of that brain. And that is why your brain should always be protected and you should take care of it.”

That is quite nice. I also this year was invited to Milan to look at court reporting over there. It is non-existent. They have only 20 stenographers in the whole of Italy and the record is something that is not very trustworthy. That showed me the value of what we do for people.

On going to workshops, which incidentally are free and provided by the Government, I went to 40 workshops in East Anglia. They are about two hours long and they are on a range of subjects about maintaining your business and growing your business. They are all free. In East Anglia the Government have funded that to £5 million worth of investment. You can take advantage of that.

Another special event I went to was a conference about Modernising Justice. There was a speaker there from Lockheed Martin. I could have kissed this man. I really could have because he was talking about the transportation of digital technology. That is the service we

are in, a lot of us. He was talking to managers who run the courts. He came out with this little dinosaur, and he said, "If you want to preserve this data, you need to put it in a storage box." He broke off the tail and he broke off the head, and he put it into the box, and he said, "But you have got to label it so that you know how those bits fit together. There have to be instructions." I thought, "I do that all the time."

He gave a very long explanation. I have left his handouts here for you to look at. When he handed over to the floor and said to the managers of the courts, "What do you think of that?" they said, "We could not do that. That needs a dedicated person." I thought, "That is a court reporter", and I was really pleased.

Another workshop I have attended was about knowing your value. It is interesting how other people see your products and services because, when I explained what I did, she said, "You are a rare breed. You are a specialist. You are in a niche market. You do not have to do things on the cheap, because you are rare." I think that is something to remember because other people seem to know what our value is.

Venture capitalists are investing heavily in information technology. They are interested in unified communication. We have big business investing, like Microsoft and IBM. You have to bear that in mind.

In fields like speech-to-text we are seeing lots of foreign language interpreting agencies who recognise that we have a value to them, but they are trying to undervalue and do things on the cheap. They will say, "There is no money for cancellation fees. These are our terms and conditions." Hold on a minute. "We have not talked about **my** terms and conditions." You do not have to just accept their terms and conditions. Be prepared to stand your ground.

Another very interesting workshop I attended was "Are you the barrier to business?" There are a lot of women in this profession and it is very easy to just do anything because you feel like you have to give a hundred percent to other people and that that is your purpose. But you are special. You have to know what you want out of life, so give yourself time. Make time to think what you want.

BIVR now has a Code of Professional Ethics and that states:

"Every member shall maintain and develop professional skills and knowledge."

Prepare yourself for that journey and ask yourself questions. "Where am I now? Where do I want to be?" Look at the gaps in your skills, your knowledge and your experience. It is not just about speed and accuracy. I have gaps. I am the world's worst at getting the money in. I hate doing accounts. Because I am a woman, it is hard to say, "I can delegate that to a bookkeeper."

Look at the jobs you want to do and what you do not want to do, and be picky. Have the courage to do it. Consider options and changes that are right for you so that you can have better outcomes. Turn that vision into a reality. BIVR are here to help you to develop a plan that is right for you and benchmark your progress and tell us about your success. That is my speech. (*Applause*)

Do we have any questions or comments? Jean Gough.

MS GOUGH: Just a very general point, actually. I work exclusively in the speech-to-text field and I think that we certainly have a lot more say as far as negotiating fees. We are able to lay down our terms. I am not quite sure if other people working in different fields are able to dictate such terms. This is just a question really. How do other people feel about that? Is that something that is possible in other fields?

THE PRESIDENT: I will open it to the floor. Do you think you can negotiate your fees on transcripts?

MRS BICKERS: I think those of us who work for firms that have contracts have absolutely no room to negotiate because the contracts have been let after a tender process usually, so it is really a "Take it or leave it" situation. Sometimes even in the middle of a contract the situation changes. You will start off with four on a write-out. It is a difficult job sitting from 9:30 until 5:00. It is a hard day. Now suddenly you are told, "You have to do it with three." and it is a very hard day. But it is a case of "Take it or leave it". You either do it and put up with the long hours and the fact that you cannot read your work a second time. You either take it, or you just say, "This is too much for me. I do not accept it", and do other work, or do not do any work.

There is not very much room to manoeuvre. Not many note takers have all their private clients where they can negotiate, but if you have a few private clients for little jobs, they are usually more reasonable. You can usually say to them, "It was a long day. There will be overtime", or whatever. That is my experience.

MS WASON: Can I say from the point of view of someone who has had contracts with the Lord Chancellor's Department that you get the contracts and there is no negotiation. It is "Take it or leave it." Usually you cannot speak to other firms about it because it is all confidential at the moment you get it. You are not allowed to say you have got it. They know perfectly well. As Lindsay was saying, it is "Take it or leave it. Sign on the dotted line." That is very wrong, I think.

THE PRESIDENT: Tendering is going on in the law field as well, agencies are tendering for contracts. They are now trying to reduce the charges. I have seen £20 an hour with no cancellation fees. You do not have to accept it. They may say they can deliver it, but you do not have to accept it.

MRS BICKERS: But someone else will.

THE PRESIDENT: Maybe not. If nobody did, maybe not.

MRS BICKERS: But people do not stick together. There will always be somebody who will do it for less, perhaps not as well, but they will do it.

MS GOUGH: I certainly feel quite strongly that when agencies ask for a quote for an hourly rate, I am quite confident in saying, "I do not charge by the hour. I charge an attendance fee."

MRS HOLLEY: I do not know any speech-to-text reporters who charge by the hour. It is always attendance fees.

MRS NOTT: We must all make sure that we stick to that and make sure that other people do know that.

MRS BICKERS: But how can you tell somebody what to do?

MRS NOTT: You can certainly let them know.

MRS BICKERS: But they do not have to do what we say.

THE PRESIDENT: I think the important thing is to know your worth. If you went to a Business Link workshop they would help you to break down your costs, because we have a lot of hidden costs, and know what your time is worth and what your profit margin is after you have paid for all your equipment. If you are travelling, that time has a value. Once you understand what your value is then you become confident, and say, "These are my terms. That is what I charge."

MRS BICKERS: It is quite right that if someone comes along and says they will do it for less, they will get the job.

THE PRESIDENT: Maybe.

MRS BICKERS: I totally agree with what you are saying, but unfortunately there will always be someone who will come and undercut.

THE PRESIDENT: They will, but there is plenty of work out there. The market is growing, and we have seen that because there are new areas coming to the forefront now. We have had advertising agencies and we have had funeral directors who are all interested, because information has a value.

If I could just read you this one thing, this is from Lockheed Martin, and this is on their website.

"Information is the most valuable asset today's Government agencies, the intelligence community, the military forces and businesses possess. The ability to share information with partners in a timely and secure fashion is the key to success."

That is us.

"In direct correlation, information security or information assurance must be tightly woven into the fabric of all information sharing solutions."

That is just so much like a reporter. These people understand the value of information. Communication is going through the roof at the moment. It is not just mobile phones. It is all kinds of information delivery on all platforms. I would say that it needs to be in all formats and delivered. Nowadays we are going to have to start thinking about our carbon footprint and how we can deliver remotely as tele-workers. It is changing.

MS GOUGH: Sorry to hog the floor. I think traditionally reporters generally tend to work very much on their own in many instances. I think on the speech-to-text front in the organisation AVSTR, the Association of Verbatim Speech to Text Reporters, which is a sister organisation of BIVR but specifically for speech-to-text reporters, we do tend to get people who telephone us and actually ask what terms and conditions would be fair. We do tend to communicate quite regularly with each other, so it is not so isolated. We think we are more aware, but that does involve sticking together. It would be good if we were able to continue that in BIVR as well.

THE PRESIDENT: There is one danger. There is a copy of it up there which is from the Office of Fair Trading where it is actually illegal to talk about charges.

MRS WHITE: AVSTR do not tell anyone what to charge. They make it very clear it is up to the individual what they want to charge.

THE PRESIDENT: It is illegal to carve up markets and to price-fix. It is all up there. If you want a copy, you are welcome.

MRS NOTT: We do not have a schedule of fees any more, but everyone more or less knows what everyone charges. Some people do not realise. They think that they are charging a fair rate, but if they only knew that everybody else charged a lot more, they may not even do those jobs. They do not actually know that they are being undersold. They are under-valuing themselves, but they do not realise they are under-valuing themselves. They also do not realise that somebody is making a lot of money, but it is not them, and if they had a little bit more contact with what other people are charging, they would realise that. As you said, they would stick together.

Sometimes you have to tough it out a bit and you cannot just have a negative attitude and think, "Some of them do it, so I may as well do it cheaply." You have to be tough and say, "I will not go down below what levels you have." Maybe you might lose one or two jobs, but in the end, collectively, it will be much better.

MRS WHITE: I think it is the same with the terms and conditions that agencies send out. If everybody does not sign up to them, they soon forget about it. That is what has happened.

MRS NOTT: That is certainly right.

MRS WHITE: You have to be a bit tough.

THE PRESIDENT: They need you a lot more.

MRS NOTT: They need us a lot more. That is the President's message in her speech: know your worth.

MRS WHITE: Know your worth, and that has to be communicated, and I do not know if it is as much.

MRS WILLETT: We are verbatim reporters. We should recognise what the reporter has to do. We should not all speak at once.

MRS NOTT: Jean is perfectly able to manage!

THE PRESIDENT: She is fantastic! If there are no more questions, we will move on to the Treasurer's report.

MRS SORENE: The Report and Accounts were loaded up on to the website and were sent out. I have some copies here, if anybody wants to have a copy to just check over. What we ask you to do now is to approve them. Are there any questions? If I can answer them, I will, as Treasurer. I just note that this is the position as at the 31st December 2007. We have not got worse, but this was the position then. (*After a pause*) Jean Gough has a question.

MS GOUGH: It is probably a very naïve question actually, but I am just seeing our net current assets and I just wonder is it possible in the current financial year to actually have some training of some sort. Is that money to be used for training?

MRS SORENE: That is the money that effectively we have at the bank. These are the only assets we have.

MS GOUGH: Right.

MRS SORENE: The capital reserve in the educational training fund at £309 is what is left over from the money we got when we amalgamated with the National Society of Stenotypists. It is the money that they had brought in and was earmarked for training. Gradually it has been eroded and that is what is there. We have never, as it were, put aside a sum. We did offer some years ago for people to have training workshops, but nobody came up with any proposals.

MRS NOTT: Perhaps you can come up with a training workshop for us, Jean, on how to do STT reporting. You will run it for and we will fund it.

MRS SORENE: A few of us wanted to do some software training, but it is a question of the cost of somebody coming over from America to give us training on it. That was very expensive and nobody could get together at the same time on the same day.

THE PRESIDENT: I can tell you that I have recently e-mailed members of the Council with an option to look at various types of software, which would allow us to do on-line webinars with audio conferencing. Obviously, hiring a venue like this is quite expensive and our members are all over the country. One of the benefits of doing it on-line is that you can archive it for 90 days. It is just so much cheaper and greener. We have not had our meeting yet to discuss that. It would give an opportunity for different presenters to share their knowledge and their expertise in different aspects of the profession. I have to say that has not been approved yet, but it is one of the ideas that has been mooted.

MRS SORENE: If there are no more questions on the accounts, we just need a proposer and seconder to approve the accounts. Roger Bell is proposing and Iris Butcher seconds it.

(The Accounts were approved)

THE PRESIDENT: We now deal with the election to Council. There are no nominations, so there is no election. But we will be having a special resolution. That is going to be put to you and Mary will read that out.

MRS SORENE: In the Notice for nominations for Council, nobody, in fact, sent any in. I noted in here in the Annual Report that:

“At the conclusion of the AGM the term of office of the President will expire. The President-Elect, Miriam Weisinger, has stated that for personal reasons she is unable to take up the office of President this year. It therefore falls to the membership to vote for a President for the coming year.

Frances Dobson, who has been the President this past year, has offered to stand as your President for another year. Our rules only permit a President to stand again within three years by Special Resolution under clause 22 of our Memorandum and Articles of Association. In order for the membership to have a choice of President, the Special Resolution has been worded to enable all those on the Council to be elected, or nominated, if that is the membership's wish.”

The Special Resolution is on page 2 of the Notice. I have pointed out that it is

“Is to consider and, if thought fit, to pass the following Special Resolution:

A: To permit the names of Valerie Doyle, who was President in 2005-2006, Robyn Nott, who was President in 2006-2007 and Frances Dobson, who was President in 2007-2008 to go forward for election as President for this year. This is just for the moment to go forward for the election for this year, by virtue of clause 22. I have actually printed that up on page 2, and it is here:

"The President shall hold office for one year and shall not be eligible for re-election for a period of three years after the termination of his year of office. Provided nevertheless that the Institute may from time to time in General Meeting",

which this is,

"by a resolution (of which due notice shall be given in the notice convening the meeting)",

and I gave the notice,

"passed by a majority of two-thirds of the Fellows and full Members present and voting thereat declare that any Fellows or full Members who but for the period of disqualification mentioned above would be eligible for election as President shall be so eligible for the then ensuing year, and upon such resolution being passed any Fellow or full Member affected thereby shall be qualified to hold the office of President."

The first vote that we have, please, is to vote for or against the resolution to permit those three names to go forward. After that, if they go forward, then those names are added to the others. If it is voted against, then just the others go forward, and that will be a second Special Resolution, Part B.

MRS HOLLEY: When you say the others, you mean Shelley and Jean and Betty?

MRS SORENE: Yes. They go forward in any event. If you read that it says "but in any event for these to go forward". But first of all we have to say whether you are agreeable.

MRS HOLLEY: For the other three to go forward?

MRS SORENE: For the other three to go forward, to be added, yes. I have forms for people. (*Same handed*)

MRS ROPER: Can I just ask a question? I may be a bit dense. I am not quite sure what is the need for this election when there are four names already there. Why do we need to enlarge it for this year?

MRS SORENE: Because Frances Dobson volunteered, and therefore we cannot just say, "Go away. No, you cannot continue." It is for the membership to decide, and that is why we are having a vote.

MRS ROPER: I see.

THE PRESIDENT: Miriam should be this year's President, but she cannot be for personal reasons.

MRS ROPER: Yes, I understand that.

THE PRESIDENT: I have volunteered.

MRS SORENE: To stay on for another year.

THE PRESIDENT: As caretaker in her place.

MRS ROPER: Thank you.

MS WASON: Then we will vote after that, presumably, for the President for the following year. Then, of course, the usual names will be applied.

MRS SORENE: If I can just say that Part A is just for or against these three going forward for the election for this year.

MRS NOTT: We would not normally have Frances's name on here.

MRS SORENE: That is why.

MRS WILLETT: It could be any of the three of them normally.

THE PRESIDENT: Those three have gone forward for it. That is the reason.

MRS NOTT: France offered to do it, so we have this situation.

MRS WILLETT: Have we got any Tellers?

MRS SORENE: I am just going to appoint some. I was going to appoint Leah. Who else would like to do it?

MR BELL: Me.

MRS SORENE: Roger, would you like to do it? Just on that point, I have got some proxy votes. Can I use those on this?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

MRS SORENE: I will just count the proxy votes. Five.

(Leah Willersdorf and Roger Bell were appointed as Tellers)

MRS BICKERS: Might I say something, whilst the votes are being counted? As the exhibition is being taken down and it was so very interesting, for those who did not have time to digest all the text on the wall, I have suggested that perhaps a disk could be attached to something and sent to everyone and be put on the website.

MRS SORENE: It is going to be.

MRS BICKERS: Right.

MRS WILLETT: Can everyone get on the website?

MRS ROPER: Not all the time, no. I think there are problems with it.

MRS WILLETT: I have problems. I am on AOL, so does anybody else who is not AOL have problems?

MS GOUGH: It is a problem with Internet Explorer.

MRS BICKERS: I did not mean to start a discussion on everything else, but I was waiting for the vote. The exhibition was so brilliant that I think we should study it afterwards.

MRS NOTT: I think it is a good idea to put it on the website.

(After a pause)

THE PRESIDENT: We have the result. The Motion was not carried.

MRS SORENE: We had 12 for and 11 against, so a two-thirds majority would be 14 for. On that basis then we go to the Special Resolution, Part B, because Resolution A is not passed. The election for President for this year continues with the names of Shelley Dutton, who sits on my left, Ann Lloyd, who is over there, and Jean Lukins and Betty Willett. These are the people who are eligible. It does not say they want to. That is our next task. We can hand those out.

(Leah Willersdorf and Roger Bell were again appointed as Tellers)

MRS SORENE: *(After a pause)* Betty Willett is our next President. This is for this year.

THE PRESIDENT: The next President will be Betty Willett. *(Applause)*

MRS WILLETT: I am a great delegator!

MR BELL: This is in case you do not have anything else to do, Betty!

MRS SORENE: Our last vote for the day is for President-Elect, and this is for the ensuing year, 2009-2010. Depending on the result of the election for this year, and, of course, Betty's name is on the bottom of it so that you now have to ignore Betty's name on the bottom, those eligible are Valerie Doyle, who will come out of the three-year rule because, by next year, the year after, she would no longer have been a President within the last three years. I hope that is not too complicated.

Also eligible are Shelley Dutton and Ann Lloyd and Miriam Weisinger, who could not stand this year, but who did say to us that she felt she would be able to take it up, if you were to vote for her as President-Elect again. It is entirely a matter for you. Please do not put a cross against Betty's name because it would be a wasted vote.

MRS WILLETT: I might not be alive! I am getting old now.

(Leah Willersdorf and Roger Bell were again appointed as Tellers)

THE PRESIDENT: We have a result. Miriam Weisinger will be President-Elect for 2009-2010.

MRS WILLETT: That was exhausting!

THE PRESIDENT: The next item is to appoint the Accountant, and that is Mr Kypri, trading as Alliance Accountancy. He is willing to continue, and he is a Certified Accountant. We need a proposer and a seconder.

MRS SORENE: Roger proposes.

MRS HILL: I will second.

MRS SORENE: Ann Hill is seconding.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

(Mr Kypri was appointed as BIVR Accountant for 2009-2010)

THE PRESIDENT: We now come to the date of the next AGM. This year the AGM was quite late, which was to suit Miriam really. We are wondering whether the middle of May or June would suit the members, if we can go back to that kind of time slot again. We want to avoid Deaf Awareness Week, if we can.

MRS WILLETT: And the Cup Final and Derby Day.

MRS SORENE: That is two weeks now, Deaf Awareness is two weeks.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it is now two weeks -- and avoid the Bank Holiday weekend.

MRS MILLER: You have two Bank Holidays in May.

THE PRESIDENT: It is very difficult, but if we can get it in May or June because, if we go into July people are on holiday.

MS DOYLE: What is the earliest it can be?

MRS SORENE: It was usually after the Whitsun break near Easter.

MRS WILLETT: What is wrong with early June? May is so difficult.

MRS NOTT: It is half-term in early June. For those with children that is not always convenient.

MS DOYLE: In June there are more summer things going on, and something cropping up.

MS WASON: We did not always have it on a Saturday. That is why it is difficult now.

MRS BUTCHER: The third week in May?

MRS SORENE: We used to have it in April. Sometimes a lot of events were held in April.

MRS BICKERS: Are we sticking with Saturdays?

MRS SORENE: When is Deaf Awareness Week? The fourth Saturday would be the 23rd.

THE PRESIDENT: Is that a Bank Holiday?

MRS SORENE: The Bank Holiday would be the following weekend, the 30th.

MRS WILLETT: Can someone check whether the 23rd will be in the school holidays because we have got mums here?

MRS SORENE: It is not cast in stone, but we like to put it down so that, hopefully, members might put it in their diaries.

MRS NOTT: Half-term is Bank Holiday weekend and into that week.

MRS WILLETT: Whilst we are talking about it, can I just raise the question of the lunch? It is very nice to have lunch, but how do people find the lunch this year in comparison with previous years? This lunch is very expensive. I suggested we all brought some French bread and cheese and wine and fruit. There are some people who are vegetarians, who were not served very well this year.

MRS BICKERS: I think we need to know the cost, and then that might focus our minds.

MRS SORENE: That was £10 a head.

MS WASON: That is a lot.

MRS WILLETT: Are we happy to have it over a lunch or meet later and have tea?

MRS NOTT: It might be better just to have tea and cakes at 4:00 o'clock; have it a bit later and then you can have an afternoon tea.

MRS MILLER: People travel a long way.

MRS NOTT: That is why I am asking you how it would suit you, with a later train.

MRS WILLETT: That could be considered, and we will send out a round-robin and see how it goes.

THE PRESIDENT: We have agreed on 23rd May 2009. I should like to point out there are some free things to take away, right at the back of the room. Also I would like to convey my thanks to all the Council, and especial thanks to Virginia, who is retiring from the Council this year, and for all Betty's work on the heritage stuff, and Mary is a like a workhorse really. *(Applause)* That just leaves the washing-up!

MRS WILLETT: Is there any other business? Just before I get on to what I wanted to say about what is in this bag, I do not know whether anybody saw the news last night. The Spelling Society is having an AGM this week somewhere up in Lowestoft. They are appalled by the standard of spelling. I felt like shouting at the television. "I do not have any trouble with the spelling from our members; it is their bloody punctuation." That is true. We all know how to spell, but I think some of the membership needs to look at punctuation. Commas are the only things that exist.

MRS BICKERS: Apostrophes.

MRS WILLETT: Apostrophes; we do not even mention those. I see that the French are trying to do away with semi-colons.

MRS DUTTON: They would.

MRS WILLETT: I will fight them to the death. What I really wanted to raise is that many of you will remember Bill Frencham. He was a member of the Institute as a Pitman writer for many years. He ended his career as the Deputy Editor of the House of Lords Hansard.

He was a deeply religious man. He wrote a book which was on show here, in which he talked about his experiences as a shorthand writer as well as his life experiences. Unfortunately, he died, much too early, last year.

He said to me, "I am going to give you something. I hope to give it to you before I die, but, if I do not, Hettie will give it to you. You can keep it for as long as you want but I want it eventually to go to the Institute. You can keep it until you die, if you want, and then leave it in your will, or you can donate it at an appropriate time, as you wish."

I think an appropriate time is on a day like this when we have got our Heritage Exhibition here, because this is part of the world's heritage, not just our heritage. What he has given me is a New Testament written in Pitman shorthand. It is the most beautiful shorthand. I actually was a shorthand writer. I had a certificate for 150 words a minute before I turned to Palantype. I could read some of it because it is beautiful. It was written in 1886. He has dedicated it to us, and I think it would be a very apt part of our heritage collection.

Bill being Bill, bless him, has written in his handwriting on a yellow sticker post-it note on the back, "Early Revised Bibles" and "Adrian Beckham Books", where, if we wanted to sell it, we could but I hope we will keep it for a time. I would like, Mary, if possible to have a little stick-on label inside, saying, "Dedicated by Bill Frencham to BIVR and kept in his memory", or some such words.

MS WASON: Do we know its value?

MRS WILLETT: I am sure it must be a very valuable book. I think next year, perhaps we will have it valued. I did not want it to be on display today because I wanted to present it to you. I do not want to keep it in my house because it will get lost. My kids will say, "That is a load of rubbish", and out it will go. I will give it to Mary, I know it will be stored and kept, lovingly.

I will write to Mrs Frencham, Hettie, and say thank you and how much it has been appreciated by you all, I am sure.

MS WASON: Perhaps it could be placed in a lovely box with a label on it?

MRS WILLETT: I would like to say that one person I know who would have loved to have read this is Lindsay's dad, George, of whom you saw from the photographs taking notes in the Bush. He would have loved it because George, too, was a very religious man and would have loved the shorthand.

MRS SORENE: Once you donate things to museums; you give them up. The IPS did, unfortunately, with its books. It sent them to the Guildhall Library, but if people would like to have another look at something, they say "You cannot." You have to make an appointment. The other idea is to lodge it at Bath. There is a lot of Pitmans stuff at Bath. But it would be good to keep it for a while until everyone decides what to do with it.

MRS WILLETT: If we ever get hard-up -- I would hate it, if we did sell it -- Bill always had that in mind.

MS WASON: Or if the Institute dissolves.

MRS HILL: I have a point. It probably will not go down very well. I suggest that we give some thought to maybe having an AGM, the occasional year, out of London a little further north because I am sure there must be an awful lot of people who are members to the Institute who live north of the border, and getting down here is not the easiest of things.

MRS WILLETT: Do you mean north of the border?

MRS HILL: Sort of Manchester direction.

MS GOUGH: North of Watford.

MRS WILLETT: I thought you meant Scotland.

MS WASON: We are the British Institute, by the way.

THE PRESIDENT: We will certainly discuss it. One of the reasons for the audio conferencing is so that we can perhaps engage more with the members up north and in different parts of the country.

MRS HILL: Yes, because there may be an awful lot.

THE PRESIDENT: That is something we are still looking at. We will certainly consider it.

MRS NOTT: We could have two meetings. We could have one down here and one up there at the same time.

THE PRESIDENT: With a video link.

MRS NOTT: I have done AGMs like that with two locations. We could do that.

MRS BICKERS: We did once at the Birmingham Conference Centre have a joint stall with the northern Association.

MRS HILL: Does that still exist?

MRS WILLETT: No.

MRS BICKERS: It was very well attended and had a great deal of interest.

MR BELL: Just as a matter of interest, that raises the question to me of what percentage of our membership, in fact, does live out of London, or very far out of London.

MRS SORENE: Quite a few.

MRS BICKERS: But they do not all live where we have the AGM.

MRS HILL: I think there must be quite a few.

MRS BICKERS: But they do not all live there.

MR BELL: I was just interested to know.

MRS DUTTON: But they do not all live where we would be holding the AGM.

MRS NOTT: It would be sensible with this video conference type thing.

THE PRESIDENT: Or even audio conferencing.

MRS WILLETT: I have already suggested that we can have a meeting, as we are having today but for the people who live north of the Watford Gap. They would have to agree amongst themselves where their central point would be. Then we could have an audio conference or a live link so that it runs concurrently and they will be able to participate.

MRS BICKERS: That is like video-link evidence.

MRS LLOYD: Exactly.

MRS WILLETT: You will not get a lunch though!

MRS NOTT: We could both have a lunch.

MRS LLOYD: We could interact with them.

MR BELL: I suggest a nice country pub somewhere! (*Hear-hear*)

THE PRESIDENT: And you are going to say Wales? (*Indicated Mrs Holley*)

MRS HOLLEY: Why not! I have two questions. How many people here have actually travelled from out of London to come to London today?

THE PRESIDENT: A good question.

MRS HOLLEY: There is me.

MRS SORENE: Pat, behind you. Have you come from Somerset today?

MRS WILLETT: Who has come the furthest? I have come from out of London.

MRS HILL: I am from Worcestershire.

MRS WILLETT: Who has travelled more than a hundred miles?

MRS HOLLEY: I was three hours on the train today. We were diverted.

MRS NOTT: You could participate from your home.

MRS HOLLEY: The other question I had was if that does not come off with the audio thing, as a way to get members here, would the Council consider giving some kind of donation towards travel expenses because coming into London is very expensive?

THE PRESIDENT: It is very expensive. I know because I actually went to Manchester a couple of weeks ago and I think my fare was £82. It was five hours from where I live, because I live in East Anglia.

MRS MILLER: Where do you live, Frances?

THE PRESIDENT: I live near Colchester.

MRS MILLER: I live in Suffolk.

MRS HILL: Can I just say on that score, if there is an AGM we have advance notice of that, and you can buy tickets in advance, and it is a lot cheaper.

THE PRESIDENT: It is a five-hour journey for me.

MRS HILL: It is four for me by the time I left from home by car.

MRS NOTT: We have video links, and I have actually done meetings where you have a big screen and you can see the people in another country. It would be good to have something like that.

MRS HILL: It is just from the expense point of view.

MRS NOTT: Exactly; so therefore people would not have to travel so far.

MRS WILLETT: If we were going to go to the expense of doing it, we would have to make sure that there were the numbers. There would have to be about six of you up there, if you say, "Yes, we will guarantee to be there." Otherwise it is really going to be dipping into our reserves. There will not be lunch and that. That is a dead cert. It would be taking over from the lunch. We would be dipping into our reserves quite heavily.

MRS NOTT: We are going to look into it. I am sure we can come up with something, in this modern age.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

MR BELL: I would think that if we did agree to have a meeting outside of London, *a-propos* of what Betty has just said, none of us is so poor that we would not put forward a tenner to buy a few bottles of wine and a few nibbles.

MRS HILL: That is right. Yes.

MR BELL: I say that.

MRS MILLER: That is if the fees go up.

MRS HILL: Would that not be a better suggestion overall? Perhaps that would be a minority, to ask for a donation from members towards lunch for the AGM?

MRS NOTT: We have done in the past.

MRS SORENE: It does not always go down very well.

MS WASON: We used to do it.

MRS WILLETT: Jean was talking about AVSTR earlier, our sister organisation. They have their AGM in the afternoon, and then they all go to their bedrooms and titivate. Then they come down and have drinks. Then they have a party and then they go home the next morning very hung-over. We could think of something like that! They do that in various places round the country.

MRS LLOYD: That is a good idea.

MRS WILLETT: But BIVR members have never wanted to socialise in the last 15 years.

MRS BICKERS: We have tried. We had a dinner and dance.

MRS WILLETT: It does not work. They do not want to associate socially with other BIVR people.

MRS NOTT: I think it is not quite like that. Saturdays are very precious.

MRS BICKERS: We had a nice trip down the river once. We also used to have a very big formal dinner and dance, but then the firms used to pay for that. The principals of the firms were all members of the Institute.

MS WASON: We had parties for the Judges. We had an ulterior motive.

THE PRESIDENT: There are various types of software like SoftWeb, WebEx, GotoMeeting, and Microsoft have one as well, Live Meeting, where members could vote on-line and they could hear what was being said. It is not that expensive, so it is one of the things we can look at.

MRS WILLETT: Can they participate as well?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, they can.

MRS WILLETT: I think it is something.

MRS NOTT: It is worth looking into.

MRS WILLETT: We have to start looking into it now.

MRS FRITH: I think things have improved in that at one time it used to be in the evening during the week, which really meant that most people who lived outside London, unless they were going to take the day off work, were not going to be able to come.

MRS WILLETT: But Pat, even before that, when I first became a member of the Institute, which was back in the early sixties, they used to have the meeting at 12:00 o'clock on a Monday. Of course, the only people who turned up were the principals of the firms. That is why the principals were always the Council and always the President. That is why the division of the fees was always absolutely crazy. Then I became a freelance, and I said, "Right. I am going to that meeting." Of course, I started asking questions, and that really set the cat among the pigeons. But it was always on a Monday at 12:00 o'clock and it used to last about half an hour. Everything was approved, and, "It is old Charlie's turn this year."

MRS FRITH: I did not know that was how it was.

THE PRESIDENT: I think the web conferencing, though, is good because people can vote on-line.

MRS NOTT: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: And they can chat. If you grab your seat early, you can actually talk as well to presenters, so I think that is probably the way forward.

MRS NOTT: We want to still meet because that is part of the social aspect. With two locations then you could socialise with people from the North, so that would be a solution as well. We do not want to be all sitting in our own homes.

THE PRESIDENT: It is not instead of face-to-face meetings. It is augmenting what we have got. That is the idea there.

MRS HILL: Could I ask one other very brief thing as well to do with the Institute website and the forum? I do not know if it is me just being thick, but I do not seem to have an awful lot of luck with that. I cannot seem to access the messages properly on there. It is very hit-and-miss.

THE PRESIDENT: If you talk to me after the meeting then maybe I can help you.

MRS HILL: Is there any way that you could do an easy-to-follow guide on how to use the forum?

THE PRESIDENT: We actually did a guide last year.

MRS NOTT: Mary did a very good one with little add-ins, and everything.

MRS HILL: On the forum?

MRS NOTT: I think so. It was a hand-out.

MRS HILL: I was not here last year. I did not make it last year.

MS GOUGH: I find that when I go in via Internet Explorer, as I am on AOL, it is not self-explanatory, actually how to get to the forum. Usually I manage to open it up by opening one particular thing; I cannot remember what it is called now. But it is not immediately obvious that that would open the forum, and it comes up as "Test forum".

MRS HILL: Yes, that is right. That is like what I get.

MRS SORENE: I am afraid that is still up there. We never managed to get that wording taken off.

MS GOUGH: But the messages I was able to get went back to, I think, the beginning of last May or the end of last May in the forum. Is that right?

MRS SORENE: It was only in about February-March time that it went on-line with our new website. Some things have disappeared from it. We do not know why.

MRS DUTTON: To add something to the forum I have discovered, because I have added something, you have to click the "Forum" box. Am I right on that, to add something to the notice board? That is not obvious. I did not find it.

MR BELL: That is right, Shelley. I have had that experience.

MS GOUGH: It might be because I am thinking of how the old website worked.

THE PRESIDENT: It is actually the same.

MRS SORENE: It is virtually the same way of getting in to it as before. Sheryll?

MRS HOLLEY: Is it possible to get stuff in date order because I go on there every now and again and I am for ever looking down the right and the blur of dates, thinking, "Has anything new gone on there?"

MRS SORENE: The date comes up at the beginning when you log in. Having got into the forum, the last post is actually dated on the right.

MRS HOLLEY: That is right, but I am just wondering whether there is a way of putting everything in date order.

THE PRESIDENT: I can tell you if there is something new that you have not seen, it comes up orange. There is an orange bell, or something.

MRS WHITE: It should be emboldened if you have not seen it.

MRS SORENE: It is not as well used as I would have hoped.

MS GOUGH: I think what confuses me is that sometimes I look at what I am thinking is the date of the post, but it is actually the date that the person joined the register or first registered. That confused me.

MRS SORENE: Some people, unfortunately, had to be put back in because the "do not know your password" click for some reason had gone awry. I have had to delete somebody to put them back in to give them their password again, otherwise they cannot get in. It looks as if they have only just joined, and they have had to be reinstated.

MRS NOTT: We are looking at it to see if we can tweak it and get it a bit more user-friendly.

THE PRESIDENT: The website has been a success. Lots of people are using the website to find reporters.

MS DOYLE: Those that can get into it.

THE PRESIDENT: Last year we had people who appreciate the value of our database of people with niche skills. We had one firm that wanted us to give them all of our database so they could market shorthand writers to legal bodies, and we said no. But it is interesting.

MRS NOTT: People are getting work through the website and enquiries for work.

MRS HILL: I think another thing, though that could be a lot clearer on that website, is especially where members are based. I am in the Midlands. What do I call that? Do I call that the South West or the North? I have to call myself as being in the South West.

MRS NOTT: We are all listed. If you say you want to go on, we are all listed under that "All" regardless of the area.

MRS HILL: Yes.

MRS NOTT: Then the people have worked out that they paste all of the names in or all the e-mail addresses. I do not know if you have had that. You get something through, say, a job in Manchester. They are not just looking at Manchester people. They just send it to everyone.

MRS HILL: Yes. I am so annoyed. I registered my name on it. I thought I do not know what the hell area to put myself into because the Midlands is not there as well.

MRS SORENE: It is only north, south, east or west or London. It is not versatile.

MRS NOTT: We thought it would be useful for clients to say you are in Manchester, that you get someone up North. In fact, they do not. They just send to it everyone anyway, so the Manchester jobs come down to people in London because they just paste in all of the e-mail addresses because it is easier for them, rather than searching through where people live, they just send it to everyone as a sort of round-robin, which is fine really. It does not matter where you put it. You are still there.

MRS HILL: I will stick myself anywhere!

MRS NOTT: If it's Manchester and, you know, if you are down south, you can just ignore it.

THE PRESIDENT: There are no more questions. That is the end of the meeting. Thank you all very much for coming. I appreciate it.

(There being no further business, the meeting was closed)