

# The coronavirus and membership renewals



10 June 2020

As soon as it was clear that coronavirus was causing a mass cancellation of model railway shows and exhibitions, (including the London Festival at Alexandra Palace which I was greatly looking forward to attending for the Guild), we recognised that a large number of members who normally renew via their Conrep at such shows might be lost. Also it looked quite likely that due to the crisis our members would have other immediate concerns than renewal.

Given that 2020 unfortunately promised to be an exceptional year through which to manage the Guild, the Management Committee asked me to survey non-renewals. I designed a Renewal Query letter, asking after members health as sensitively as possible, and asking them to give feedback to the Guild on the reasons for not renewing. In mid-May 2020 Artytype posted out the questionnaire to all members who had not renewed their membership at that time. An addressed envelope was enclosed, and an email address was also available for returns.

As of today (6/6/20), 145 replies had been received. This is slightly more than 25% of posted.

The categories of responses invited for the reasons for non-renewal were:

1. Normally renew at shows which are now cancelled.
2. Change of hobby or scale of modelling.
3. Disenchantment with the *Gazette*, Guild shows, Forum, etc (and suggestions for how to improve).
4. Guild membership no longer value for money.
5. Any other reason (briefly stated).

The responses were:

1. 28 respondents had forgotten, or faced more important issues, but did intend to renew, and some had done so. The lack of shows was not mentioned.
2. 58 respondents had changed hobby or scale, some due to health or housing changes.
- 3 and 4. These were often jointly selected. There were 31 respondents. The *Gazette* is a major part of our membership offer.

5. 8 respondents mentioned the changed management structure of the Guild, or perceived attitudes of elected officers.

Sadly 18 replies informed that the member was deceased..

Of those who gave the *Gazette* as a reason, a few wanted more modern image (ranging from 'more diesels' to 21th century rolling stock), but others regretted lack of live steam and scratch building, so no clear picture has emerged.

A Guild PayPal facility is now offered, so online membership renewal using credit card or PayPal is possible, this will be particularly helpful to our overseas members renewing.

Richard Clark, Secretary said: "The survey results are very valuable. We understand that the coronavirus pandemic has focused people's attentions elsewhere and Guild membership will drop as a result. These results suggest that the decline is not as serious as it might be."

"We will be looking at the feedback on disenchantment with the Guild and value for money more closely to see what can be learned and how the Guild can develop in the future, particularly as we get back to the "new normal" - whatever that is."

**Geoff Goddin**

**IT and Membership**