

Guild of Agricultural Journalists



**50th
Anniversary**



50 YEARS OF THE GUILD

Welcome to this collection of reports, reviews and reminiscences covering 50 years of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland.

It is a fitting testament to the strength and durability of our Guild during a period that has witnessed huge changes and challenges, not just in agriculture but also in technology which has revolutionised communications in general and journalism in particular.

The Guild has developed in parallel to the developments in agriculture and most of the key figures that have been part of the history of Irish agricultural reporting have also been very much part of our Guild. From the founding fathers, like Paddy O'Keeffe and Larry Sheedy, to the current crop of young and eager journalists, the Guild has attracted many well known journalists and broadcasters as members and officers over the past five decades.

The role of the Guild during that time has been two fold. Firstly, it has acted as an educational forum for members to network and attend events, ranging from farm visits to meetings and from factory tours to topical debates. Secondly, the Guild serves as a quasi social organisation that provides members with the opportunity to meet regularly, and indeed

many lifelong friendships have been forged through these activities.

While tales of some of the more legendary gatherings from yesteryear are chronicled here, this booklet takes a forensic look back at the evolution of agricultural reporting since the inception of the Guild in 1961. And it also covers our two major events which are held on consecutive years - the Agricultural Journalism Awards, in association with AIB, and the Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture, in association with the Kerry Group.

My sincere thanks to Michael Miley, Colm Cronin and David Markey for their dedication and work in putting this booklet together. Not only is it an important memento that marks our 50th anniversary, but it is also an historical archive on agricultural reporting over the last 50 years. To all those who have contributed, thank you.

I trust you will enjoy the read!

Damien O'Reilly

Chairman, Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland.



How it started

Larry Sheedy



Paddy O'Keeffe, Michael Dillon, Larry Sheedy and John Hayhurst at the 21st anniversary celebrations in the Incorporated Law Society, October 1982

It may be helpful, and it is at least interesting, to recall that for most of the first half of the 20th century Ireland was a barren land as far as agricultural communication of any kind was concerned.

By way of print media there was the Farmers Gazette, which reported on fairs and precious little else. There was a rather dreary Talk for Farmers on Radio Eireann and there was Old Moore's Almanac for anyone who needed to study the future. To supplement this, I recall that my father contributed to the English Farmers Weekly but I suspect that circulation was very limited. That was about it for several decades of little inspiration and less progress in Irish farming.

Then all of a rush Macra na Feirme was born about 1948 and a new enthusiasm for information and encouragement

was aroused. One of our founders, Michael Dillon, began his bountiful career in the Farmers Journal and moved into radio to assuage some of the hunger for relevant information. Radio Eireann increased its commitment by introducing much livelier farming programmes in the form of Field and Farmhouse and the Farmers Forum, the latter chaired by another notable founder of the Guild, Farmers Journal editor Paddy O'Keeffe.

In 1955, IFA was launched and the Agricultural Institute followed in 1958. This meant that farmers were now organised and a valuable store of the required relevant information for farmers was being built up by the Institute's excellent research centres. By now, Maurice Liston was recognised as the man who covered agricultural events for the Irish Press and Jim Norton had a regular column in the Saturday Independent.

That was the scene in the second half of the 1950s. Farmers had their ears pinned back for knowledge and the genesis of agricultural journalism had taken shape. It was time for the Guild to be born.

First Moves

In 1961 we had a visit from John Hayhurst, President of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists, London. He was editor of a weekly called *The Smallholder*. He was exploring Ireland's potential for membership. He was met by Henry Kennedy, director of IAOS (now ICOS) and General John Costello, chief executive of the Irish Sugar Company.

New scope had arisen with the imminent launch of RTE television and the growing significance of public relations for the larger agricultural bodies like the Department of Agriculture, the Irish Sugar Company and the newly formed Bord Baine.

At the time, Costello's Sugar Company had a publication, *Beet Grower*, with a circulation of about 25,000 while Henry Kennedy's *Agriculture Ireland* was achieving circulation of between 12,000 and 14,000.

It was suggested that we should look to Northern Ireland with a view to forming an all-Ireland Guild. The response was immediate and positive.

Four of our people met four of theirs in Dundalk. We had a long and healthy discussion about whether or not we should proceed. The unanimous reaction was "why not."

Among those involved at the time were a representative from the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board who



Steve Treacy, Guild president with Larry Sheedy

published a monthly paper; Jim Lambe, who ran the paper for the Ulster Farmers Union and Con Murphy of the Sugar Company.

Then Billy Morrow, a great character and prolific journalist with the *Belfast Telegraph*, spotted a piano in the corner of our small meeting room, lifted the lid and led us into a couple of hours of music and craic. He immediately set a style and tone for the Guild that would prevail for many years.

I was the only one who produced a pen and notebook so I became the first secretary. It was a distinction that lasted longer than I expected. For many years, enjoyable monthly meetings were held in the Ballymascanlan hotel on Saturday nights. The Troubles eventually brought a halt to the enjoyable and productive meetings.

I remember our former chairman, Mairead McGuinness, remarking that the Guild functions were great craic, as well as solid business for years - and then we all grew up. Maybe the growing up bit wasn't the best part of our development.

Memories

One of my happy memories concerns the Bord Baine Spring Show dinner. It's probably no harm to recall it now since Bord Baine, now the Irish Dairy Board, is also celebrating its 50th anniversary. Sir Anthony O'Reilly (then just Tony) had just joined the Board as managing director. He hosted one of the earliest dinners in the Shelbourne Hotel and approaching midnight he looked around and asked "Where's the piano?" There



Joe Kelly, Irish Dairy Board and Guild member Noel Lawlor with President Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh.



At the Guild Journalism Awards in 1984 were Matt Kavanagh, Irish Times, Tony Conway, RTÉ, Tom Cleary, Chairman, Irish Dairy Board, Des Maguire, Irish Farmers Journal, Frank Mulrennan, RTÉ.

wasn't one. Joe McGough, then secretary of Bord Bainne, took off with a team of sturdy men to find a piano. Some of the stories of where they found it are a bit apochryphal but the important part is that they arrived back with one about half an hour later. Tony himself took a seat at it with a cigarette in his mouth and gave us a session of very acceptable swing and ragtime.

It was probably the worst possible Monday night preparation for the busiest week of an agricultural journalist's year but it was the beginning of a great relationship with the Board which was carried on by Joe McGough and includes a tribute to the Board's public relations man in the form of the Vincent Colgan trophy, the bronze bull which is still treasured as the award for excellence in agricultural journalism.

International Scene

The Guild went on to carry out a full programme of home events and to box far above its weight in international affairs. It hosted three full international congresses, numerous international study groups and helped dozens of members to look at farming outside the Irish box. The Irish contingent at the International Congress is still invariably one of the

brightest and liveliest, wherever in the world that event is held. It also supplied two international Presidents of which David Markey is one and I share the distinction of being the other.

I'll leave it to younger colleagues to describe other aspects of 50 years of growth, such as the huge influence of RTÉ, the advance of farming news from its designated spot in daily press to the news and even the front pages, the introduction of farming supplements and the flush of farming magazines and other periodicals in the 1970s.

It is encouraging that no less than the then President, Mary McAleese, hosted members this year to kick off the 50th anniversary and met a very strong contingent of members from North and South. It is indicative that the Guild has a healthy and significant future.

Larry Sheedy is a founding member of the Guild, its first secretary and a former President of the IFAJ. He worked as deputy editor of the Irish Farmers Journal before setting up his own specialist public relations business in 1973.

Looking back with gratitude

Brian Donaldson



Olive Daly, Honorary Member, Paddy O'Keeffe, Honorary Member, Brian Donaldson, President GAJ and Aidan Cotter Bord Bia.

When you look back over 50 years of the agricultural industry in Ireland, its importance to the economy is just as relevant today as it was in the 1960s. And so the same can be said about the role of agricultural journalism which continues to play its part in bringing an important message to all those actively engaged in the industry and to the wider public.

The fact that we have a strong and ambitious Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland is in no small measure due to the founding fathers of the organisation who had the foresight and the skills to bring like-minded people together to share their passion for an organisation, structured on an All-Ireland basis, to represent the interests of agricultural journalists.

The organisation was not parochial in its views. As travelling developed over the decades, so did the ability to get the story from around the world.

Agricultural journalists from Ireland have played their part in the development of the organisation on a global scale. As an affiliated member of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists, Ireland has actively contributed to the development of IFAJ and continues to play an influential role in the IFAJ praesidium.

It was at the World Congress hosted by Ireland in 1996 that I made my debut as a fledgling member of the Guild. It attracted several hundred agricultural writers from across the globe.

Having never met any of the international delegates previously, I soon did at the reception and welcoming dinner in the Burlington Hotel. I recall sitting beside agricultural editors of extremely large publications in the United States and Denmark and found that courtesy and respect were the hallmarks of the IFAJ.

That is why the organisation has progressed to where it is today, and why our Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland still sends out that powerful message of informed thinking.

It is the members of the organisation who have made it what it is to-day. In reaching this milestone in our organisation's history, we should look back with gratitude to those who shaped the organisation and look forward to the future as we continue to keep abreast of the rapid developments in the electronic age of communication, with the ultimate goal of bringing the story to the people.

Brian Donaldson is a journalist with the Impartial Reporter and President of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland.



The Guild was my apprenticeship

Mairead McGuinness



Guild of Agricultural Journalists trip to Strasburg and Brussels in November 1981.

Long before “building bridges” became a central and important political theme on the island of Ireland, the Guild of Agricultural Journalists was already in construction mode.

Building bridges between agricultural communicators on the island and building bridges between an agriculture industry of the past and a new emerging one of the future.

As I write this reflective piece, I am struck by the words written by one of our founder Guild members, the great Michael Dillon, about life on the land at the time the Guild was set up. He was writing for the 21st anniversary in the publication ‘21 years of Communicating with Farmers’.

He recalls a low output, low income farm sector, of farm homes without creature comforts, of a country which relied heavily on the British market and a country which could not afford the necessary budget to support farmers in volatile times.

He also recalls a sense of excitement and anticipation, about the impact of the first programme for economic expansion, the establishment of Bord Baine and the expectation of membership of the EEC.

Mingling

I wish I could clearly recall when I joined the Guild. From the early days of my career in agricultural journalism, I was a member – a shy and retiring one at first until those more established allowed me to gradually assume more and more responsibility.

The Guild gave access to the wider world of agricultural communications. It allowed those of us with ‘L’ plates mingle with the many established and respected people in the industry and in so doing we were educated and informed about communicating and about the issues impacting on Irish agriculture.

I recall a visit to the Royal Show in Scotland in the early 1980s and navigating a roundabout in Edinburgh in Jerry O’Callaghan’s car, with Michael Dillon one of the back seat passengers. I think they were all terrified – but I was the dedicated driver and they were in no position to take over! The many Guild meetings throughout the years were both social and informative. By the 1990s, I was chairing the Guild and, in 1991, we marked the 30th anniversary with a conference and black tie ball.



The fifth Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture was delivered by broadcaster and historian Dr John Bowman on 4 November 2011. Dr Bowman (centre) is pictured with Guild chairman Damien O'Reilly and Stan McCarthy, chief executive of the Kerry Group. The bi-annual lecture was initiated by the Guild in 2003 to honour the late Michael Dillon, a founder member of the Guild and one of the pioneers in Irish agricultural journalism. It is generously supported by the Kerry Group. Previous lectures have been delivered by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, John Bruton, former Taoiseach and former EU Commissioners, Peter Sutherland and Ray MacSharry.

Apprenticeship

The Guild was my apprenticeship. It taught me so much, about organisation, about issues, about people and places that I cannot imagine my career taking shape without the guidance of the Guild and the kindness of the membership. Above all, it gave me confidence to engage and debate with those who were much more knowledgeable and those at the forefront of developments in the sector.

And long before the X factor, the Guild's membership regularly held impromptu sing-songs. The 1808 hit written by Thomas Moore 'Believe me if all those endearing young charms' was Michael Dillon's favourite and he indulged my murdering of it on several occasions!

It is only true friends that indulge such behaviour and in the Guild I met many who were and remain real friends -friends who I don't meet as often as I would like to. And friends who are sadly departed but fondly remembered.

On a serious note, the Guild played a vital role in communicating technological developments to farmers. It is a role which over time has been somewhat diminished as opinion journalism became flavour of the month, but it is a role which perhaps needs to be revised and revived.

Mairead McGuinness is a member of the European Parliament. She is a former journalist with the Farming Independent, the Irish Farmers Journal and RTE and was twice Guild chairman.



Anne Marie Stynes, Bank of Ireland, David Markey, IFP Media and Mairead McGuinness at the Mansion House during Dublin's Millennium in 1988.

The Examiner and Farming

Ray Ryan



The winning horse shoe throwing team at the RDS Spring Show 1985. Included are: Liam Cloonan, David Gray, Olive Daly, Dick Cullinane, Declan Farrell and PJ Cunningham.

It came as no surprise when the Cork Examiner began publishing the Farm Exam as a weekly supplement in 1977. Cork City's economy was after all founded on a butter market which exported the home-made product of small farmers from many parts of Munster to the far corners of the globe. And the paper's traditional catchment was in the heart of the country's most intensive farming regions and the home to a range of key food processing industries.

Ireland's entry into the EEC brought buoyancy to the farming sector and agriculture and food was now big news. The Cork Examiner had been devoting two inside pages each week to the sector and farming stories were regularly carried on the front page.

The paper installed a full colour press with the capacity

to produce a 24 page tabloid size supplement with a 20 page morning paper. With this new technology, the idea of publishing Farm Exam was raised by Tim Cramer, the former editor of the Cork Examiner, who was then in charge of the company's special publications division.

Ted Crosbie, chief executive, and technical director at the time, as well as the board, gave the project full support. The venture was a huge success, was well supported and continues to flourish.

Dick Cullinane, who spent 31 years on the staff, most of it as agricultural correspondent, will always be associated with Farm Exam, which he helped set up and later edited. Known to his colleagues as "Richie Dan, the Farming Man" he was a larger than life character, with twinkling eyes and a quirky sense of fun. He died in 1994, aged 49.

Ralph Riegel, now with the Irish Independent, succeeded



Roz O'Shaughnessy, Maura and Ray Ryan at the Michael Dillon lecture 2011.

Dick as the daily paper's agricultural correspondent while Brian O'Mahony, business correspondent, regularly monitored developments in the food processing industry. This writer succeeded Ralph Riegel as agricultural correspondent and spent 13 pleasurable years covering the agri-food industry.

On the Farm Exam advertising side, Noel Kelly became a household name to many in the sector while the now retired Donal Murphy and William Wills were among others who made significant contributions. Stephen Cadogan, an agricultural science graduate and a journalist, was appointed editor of Farm Exam in 1987 and brought a new expertise to the publication, which he continues to edit.

Farm Exam also underwent change. It was re-named Examiner Farming when the daily paper became The Examiner and later Irish Examiner. Brian Looney, who succeeded Fergus O'Callaghan as editor of the morning paper, introduced a dedicated daily agri business slot in the Irish Examiner – the only national newspaper to provide such a service.

This commitment to the industry continues under current

editor Tim Vaughan with reporter Joe Dermody filling the slot with reports and analysis five days a week in the business pages, edited by Conor Keane.

Farming and the agri sector has changed dramatically since Farm Exam was first published, and so has the technology behind newspaper production. However, half of the available national farm advertising was in colour and tabloid format back in 1977, a fact recalled by Ted Crosbie, when Farm Exam celebrated its 21st birthday in 1998.

“The advantages of Gouldings’ 10-10-20 and NET ammonia based fertilisers were sold energetically, with enough green ink to fill two milk quotas,” he wrote.

A fitting analogy for a paper in the south west, which has about 60% of the country's dairy cows – as well as 45% of the calves, 42% of the pigs, 41% of the silage, 40% of the forests, 35% of the poultry and horses, 30% of specialist tillage farms, and 20% of the sheep.

Ray Ryan is former agriculture correspondent with the Irish Examiner and a Guild member. He retired in 2010 after 48 years in journalism.

Friendships I will cherish

Mike Wilson



Former IFAJ presidents David Markey and Larry Sheedy with current president Mike Wilson at the Michael Dillon Memorial Lecture, November 2011

On behalf of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ), I want to congratulate the Irish Guild of Agricultural Journalists on 50 years of service. It is a remarkable accomplishment and something that every guild member, past and present, should be proud of.

Since those first days in 1961, Ireland has played crucial leadership and support roles in the growth of IFAJ. In fact, Ireland helped make IFAJ what it is today: a growing, dynamic international federation with eyes firmly focused on the future.

It is past contributions that brought us to this point. The organisation benefited greatly from the leadership talents of former presidents Larry Sheedy and David Markey. Today, the IFAJ praesidium is lucky to have the services of long-term guild member James Campbell as treasurer.

Voluntarism

Many colleagues worldwide have enjoyed Irish agriculture and hospitality first-hand at the three congresses you have hosted, most recently in 1996. That is just one example of the volunteer attitude that IFAJ has enjoyed from the Irish guild. You have built a solid reputation as a group of colleagues who can be called on for smart advice and voluntary service whenever the need arises.

It was at the 1996 congress where I first had the opportunity to get to know my Irish colleagues and taste the wonderful culture of the emerald isle. These have been wonderful experiences and friendships that I will always cherish.

In 1996, my journey with IFAJ had just begun. It was my first year representing my country on the IFAJ executive committee. I went in to the congress with little expectation and came out with unbridled enthusiasm for service to the organisation.

Pivotal

And like so many Americans, I was, until then, less informed about the world outside my borders. That gathering of international colleagues gave me a much broader perspective on the world. It really was the start of a journey. As I look back, I consider 1996 a pivotal moment for my following years of service to the organisation.

As vice-president I got to work with David Markey, first in his role as treasurer and later when he served as president. David helped re-energise the federation. In 2004, he organized a first-ever professional development meeting for IFAJ in Dublin. He helped set the stage for a new approach to IFAJ, with grassroots committees and a strong financial foundation. These are benefits that I have enjoyed these years as we worked to bolster IFAJ's internet outreach,

networking opportunities and professional development activities.

IFAJ has made a lot of progress in recent years, but it's the kind of progress that could never happen without strong cross-country ties among colleagues who share common goals. This is the strength of IFAJ: networking that grows into friendships and relationships that go beyond language and border barriers. Learning to work together, we have accomplished much. I'm confident that will continue well into the future.

Again, congratulations to the Irish Guild. Your contribution to world agricultural communications is a great success story, and one that is only just beginning.

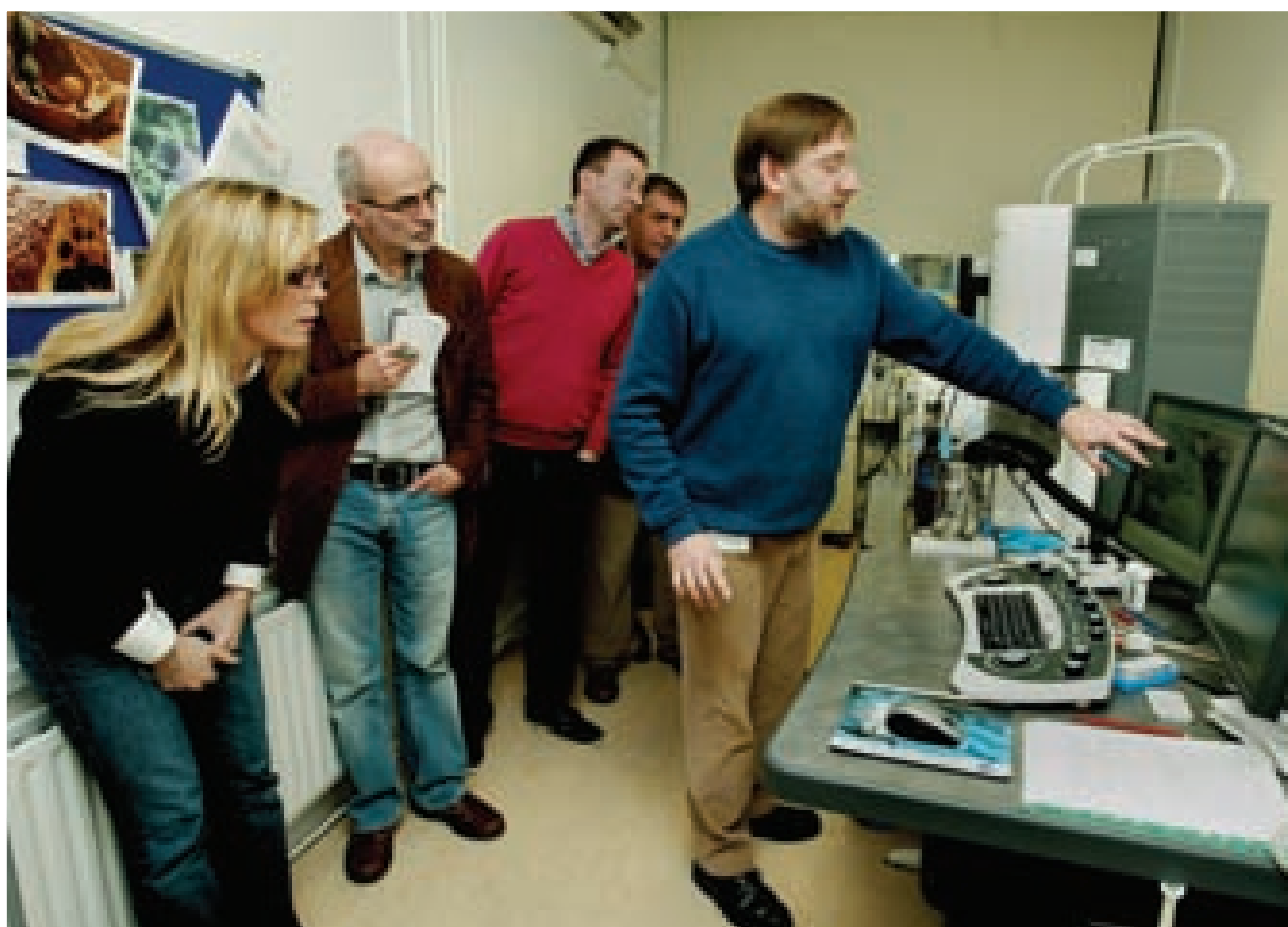
Mike Wilson is President of the IFAJ.



IFAJ Executive members and presidium visit RTÉ in 2004.

Core Principles Remain the Same

Pat O'Keeffe



Guild members Margaret Donnelly, Stephen Cadogan, Pat O'Keeffe and Kieran O'Connor on a visit to the Teagasc food research facility at Moorepark.

In the 13 years that I have been with the Irish Farmers Journal, there have been massive improvements in communications technology. The tools of our trade are changing rapidly. Smartphones can now do almost everything, including capturing broadcast and publication quality pictures, sound and video.

Furthermore, social networks such as Twitter and Facebook allow interaction with readers and colleagues in new and exciting ways. No one is quite sure where the technology

will take journalism. Once prosperous titles are struggling to find a viable business model as much of the news becomes a commodity that people no longer expect to have to pay for. Attention spans have become shorter. BBC research indicates that the optimum duration of an online video is just 90 seconds.

There is a flight to quality. TV viewers are no longer forced to sit through poor programmes without a range of alternatives. Digital channels and online players allow consumers to watch the programmes they want, when they want them.

Despite the rapid change, I believe that the core principles of good agricultural journalism remain the same. News still remains something that is “known by a few but with implications for many”. Technical broadcasts and articles still have the ability, using Horace Plunkett’s motto, to deliver “better farming, better business, better living”.

To be a good journalist, there is still a requirement for a natural curiosity and an ability to communicate complex concepts in a clear way. As the late Joe Rea often quoted to me, you should “use words as if they were rationed”.

There is still a premium for “a good story, well told”. Honesty, integrity and a willingness to stand up to various commercial and political pressures remain essential. You have only one brand, one reputation. Consumers of your output must trust you.

Science is at the core of agricultural journalism. We have a duty to examine each new product and new policy through this prism of knowledge. More and more consumers are growing up further from the land; there is often a job of work to educate them on where food comes from and what farming is about.

Authorative Filter

As more and more information becomes available online, I am convinced that authoritative filters will remain of value; journalists who can sift through the issues, the noise and the propaganda to tell their readers the important information. Likewise, consumers still enjoy being entertained by good journalism.

In the same way that I grew up captivated by the voice of Jerry O’ Callaghan on “Landmark”, the agricultural journalists of the future are hopefully today being educated, informed and entertained by good agricultural journalism on smartphones, tablet computers, TV screens, radio or print. The challenge for agricultural journalists is to produce quality content that attracts readers, listeners and viewers to consume the content, regardless of the medium. When you look at it like that, it is no different than it was 50 years ago. Will it be any different in 50 years time?

Pat O’Keeffe is Deputy Editor of the Irish Farmers Journal and a former chairman of the Guild.



Committee of Guild of Agricultural Journalists with President Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh at Áras an Uachtaráin in 1975.

Comings and Goings

David Markey traces the magazines that have come and gone over the last 40 years.



Michael Dillon, David Markey, Nora Dillon, Betty Treacy and Brian Gilsenan at the world meat congress in Kerry.

Entry into the EEC in 1973 led to the birth of a new family of farming magazines. The Irish Farmers Monthly was first out of the blocks, arriving on the scene in October 1974.

The publication covered agricultural issues but failed to make an impact in circulation. In 1977, it was revamped and distributed through newsagents. Its average ABC circulation from 1979 to 2004 was 19,200 copies. In 2005, it went direct mail and now has a circulation of 22,645 per month. In 1979, Irish Farmers Monthly was 144 pages with an index to advertisers. What a contrast to 1992 when the publication dropped to 60 pages.

In the early years, Guild stalwarts like Gerry O' Grady was its dairy correspondent, Liam De Paor covered pigs, Michael Drake from the Belfast Telegraph was its northern editor and Liam Cloonan its machinery editor. The magazine's first editor was Breasal O' Caollai and the late Willie Ryan joined

us in 1987. Willie had worked in the Irish Farmers Journal as their pig correspondent and had also worked with Michael Miley in the Sunday Journal on the editorial desk.

Over the past 25 years, Willie Ryan, Brian Gilsenan, Paul O' Grady and Margaret Donnelly who joined IFP Media in 2005 have edited Irish Farmers Monthly.

New titles

In 1979, two new titles were published - the Progressive Farmer from Tara Publishing and the Farmer magazine from Business & Finance. The first editor of the Progressive Farmer was Maurice Henry and Paddy Smith moved from RTE to edit the Farmer magazine.

The Farmer magazine changed direction in 1981 and went direct mail. It also changed its name to the Practical Farmer. This was a brave move by the publisher as direct mail was an

unknown quantity back then.

Under Paddy Smith, editorially the title was successful, but the recession in the 1980's was hard on the magazine sector with the Progressive Farmer closing in 1984.

The Practical Farmer continued to struggle and closed in 1989. The eighties also saw the birth of Co-Op Ireland which was also edited by former ICOS

employee, Maurice Henry. The publication had the support of ICOS and initially did well commercially. It continued for a number of years and closed in 1994. IFP Media took on the title in 1995 and started publishing the successful "Who's Who of the Irish Co-operative Industry" on behalf of ICOS. The title continues to be published bi-annually. The FTMTA also launched a machinery magazine in 1979 which was edited by Liam Lavelle. While the concept was interesting, the problem was advertising. It's hard to believe that in 1979 sales of new tractors in Ireland hit 8,790. Two years later the market had collapsed, with sales of just 2,300. Shortly afterwards the machinery magazine closed. Liam headed on to Canada. A couple of years later, he came back to join John Cummins and set up Agtel, where he has had a bountiful career in video and broadcasting. Teagasc launched a direct mail magazine, Today's Farm, in 1990. Edited by Michael Miley, the bi-monthly magazine focused on the latest science and advice for farmers and was distributed to all Teagasc clients. In subsequent years, the magazine was edited by John Keating and the current editor is Guild member, Mark Moore.

Sunday Journal

The period under review also saw the emergence of a national weekly agri-rural newspaper, the Sunday Journal. Set up by former Sunday World news editor, Tony Fitzpatrick, with London-Irish money, the newspaper hit the streets in early 1980. Michael Miley was recruited as editor and he brought in Willie Kealy, agricultural correspondent with the Irish Press, as deputy editor. As already mentioned, Willie Ryan joined from the Farmers Journal. Liam Nolan, formerly of RTE, was sports editor.

The editorial package was strong but the commercial



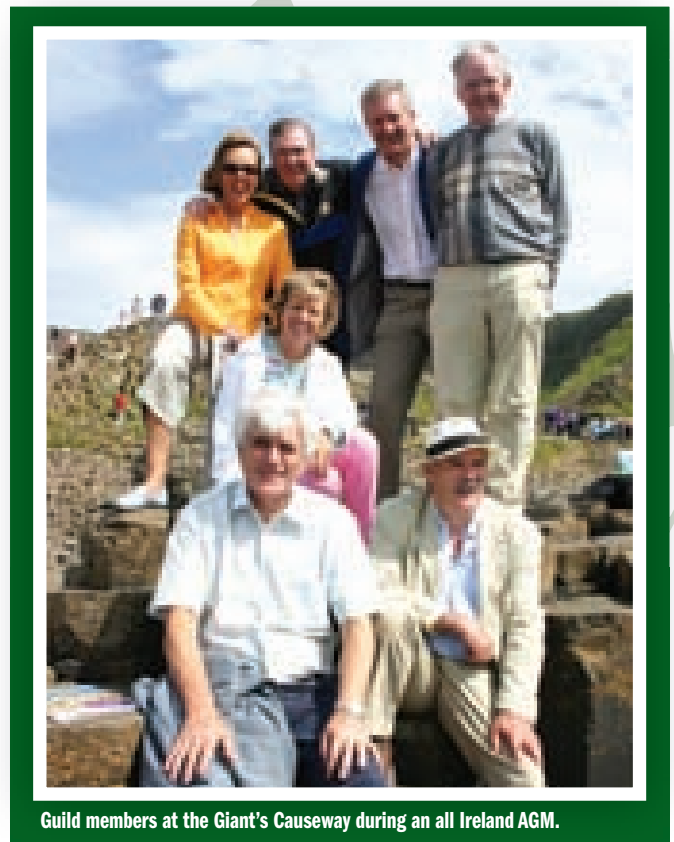
Outgoing president Joe Murray and former president Steve Treacy being awarded life membership of the Guild at an event in Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel. They are pictured receiving their award from then chairman David Markey and Journal editor Matt Dempsey.

and distribution structures were poor. Within the first year, a boardroom row emerged over shareholding. The paper was taken over by Joe Moore of the PMPA insurance group, a self-professed admirer of Charles J Haughey. The Sunday Journal changed editorial direction and Miley left to head up the public relations

function in ACOT, the newly established advisory and training service.

The Sunday Journal limped on for a number of years. Tony Fitzpatrick left the paper and joined the Fianna Fail press office. The paper eventually closed down and was followed soon afterwards by the collapse of the PMPA group.

David Markey is Chief Executive of IFP Media; he is a former world president of IFAJ and a former Guild president and chairman



Guild members at the Giant's Causeway during an all Ireland AGM.



Confessions of a Junketeer

Damien O'Reilly

The word junket is a dirty little word. And it is even dirtier if it is assigned to describing an event attended by journalists. We would never admit that we were on a junket. It was always work. Politicians go on junkets but not journalist. Yeah, right!

I have to admit that I found myself on a visit to Austria in 2003 which can be described as nothing short of the most lavish junkets of all time. To this day, I still cannot work out what we were doing there. The "we" being Paul O'Grady, former Farmers Monthly editor, and Jim O'Brien, then editor of 'Country Living' in the Journal, invited thanks to our involvement with the Irish Guild of Agricultural Journalists.

We were "invited" by the then Commissioner for Agriculture Franz Fischler to his home in Salzberg in the run up to Christmas of that year. We flew there via Frankfurt arriving in the picturesque Austrian city, home of the Sound of Music.

We spent three days there at the EU taxpayers pleasure and all I can remember of it was food, drink, jokes, more food and more drink and more jokes. Did we get a story on our visit? To quote the late James Gogarty, did we f..k!

The first evening we were brought to a big castle for dinner. It was the most astonishing night of eating and drinking I have ever had the pleasure of attending. We met many other Irish agriculture industry people there. On leaving, we were told that we could not under any circumstances take with us the beautiful signature jug glasses in which we had enjoyed many helpings of the local brew.

So I decided to hide six of them under my coat. Pdraig Gibbons of Connacht Gold tried the same but he was caught! I will never forget the look or innocence on his face as he was forced to hand the glasses back.

The following day we were taken to a farm high up in the mountains on a coach with police outriders for company. The farmer and his wife were dressed like Hansel and Gretal and, for the life of me, I do not know what on earth we were



Damien O'Reilly, Chairman with Brian Donaldson, President, presenting life membership to David Markey.

doing on their farm. Franz Fischler was there and of course there was by now the obligatory generous helpings of food and drink laid out on long tables in the hay barn. And then, in want of something useful to do, I decided to do an interview a "local" farmer called Fisch Franzler aka Jim O'Brien. In front of a delighted audience of fellow European journalists, Mr Franzler welcomed us all in his best high pitched broken English accent. It was a scream, worthy of any comedy.

When we got back home to Dublin, we went in search of the Department of Agriculture office in the arrivals hall as we had visited this infamous farm in Austria and it was our civic duty to report this to the authorities in Dublin, so soon after the foot and mouth crises. But there were no officials to be had.

At last I had a story to report which I dutifully did on Five Seven Live the following evening. The only lie I told was that I was returning from a press conference in Austria with Commissioner Fischler.

In truth, I had just returned from one of the most astonishingly stunning junkets ever. Sssh, don't tell anyone!

Damien O'Reilly is an RTE radio broadcaster and is Chairman of the Guild.

Agricultural Journalism Awards 1976 - 2010

The Guild's Journalism awards honour professionals who have achieved excellence in journalism and communications. The awards were initiated in 1976 in honour of the late Vincent Colgan, public relations manager with Bord Baine (now the Irish Dairy Board).

The Journalist of the Year was selected by nomination and ballot of Guild members and was presented with the bronze bull. There was just one annual award which was presented at the Bord Baine sponsored function for the Guild, held on the eve of the RDS Spring Show.

In more recent years, the awards have become a bi-annual event, run in association with AIB. There are now a number of category awards - for national broadcasting, national print, local media, technical journalism, targeted communications and photography - with the overall award and bronze bull presented for work of exceptional merit. Judging is by an independent panel drawn from media and industry.



Returning to Ballymac. At the function in the Ballymacscanlon Hotel in June 2011 to mark the 50th anniversary of the first meeting of the Guild were Larry Sheedy, John Johnston, Mairead McGuinness, guest speaker and Paddy O'Keefe



John Dardis, IFJ, Journalist of the Year 1982



Willie Ryan, Editor, Irish Farmers Monthly, receives an Agricultural Journalism Award from Nuala Colgan, widow of Vincent Colgan, watched by Tom Cleary, Chairman of Bord Baine.

AWARD WINNERS

- 1976 Des Maguire
- 1977 Michael Miley
- 1978 Michael Dillon
- 1979 Aengus Fanning
- 1980 John Johnston/Steve Treacy
- 1981 Joe Murray
- 1982 John Dardis
- 1983 Jerry O' Callaghan
- 1984 Des Maguire
- 1985 Gerry Daly
- 1986 Michael Dillon
-
- 1989 Willie Ryan
-
- 1992 Jim Miley
- 1994 Frances Shanhan
- 1996 Ear to the Ground
- 1998 Joe O' Brien
- 2000 Mary Brophy/John Kelly
- 2002 Joe Murray
- 2004 Ray Ryan/Brian O' Mahony
- 2006 Mairead Lavery/Con Hurley
- 2008 Justin McCarthy
- 2010 Agri Aware



Guild members celebrating at th Áras in January 2011.





Guild members with Dr Ian Paisley in Bushmills distillery in summer 2006 - Michael Miley, president, Pat O'Keeffe, chairman, Dr Paisley, Maura McArdle and James Campbell, treasurer IFAJ

The Guild and Ian Paisley

James Campbell

The Guild was well ahead of the political press pack when we arranged for the Reverend Dr Ian Paisley MP to address members on Saturday 17 June 2006, as part of our all-Ireland annual general meeting. This was many months before Dr Paisley made the historic power-sharing deal with Sinn Fein, which was a notable milestone in the 'peace process'.

Ian Paisley took time away from a Free Presbyterian Church convention to keep the appointment. The meeting was noteworthy as it took place in the unlikely surroundings of the World's Oldest Licensed Distillery Bushmills. Its North Antrim location happens to be in the heart of the rural constituency that the redoubtable politician represented in the House of Commons at Westminster.

Guild member, Michael Patten, suggested the venue following the completion of the acquisition of the famous brand and the Bushmills facility by Diageo plc. Acknowledging the venue, Paisley advised the Guild members about the dangers of strong liquor, which he had

often referred to as "the Devil's buttermilk".

Ian Paisley was in grand form, having recently celebrated his 80th birthday. He related experiences from his days growing up on a farm in County Antrim to his time as a Member of the European Parliament and his dealings with the various British politicians who had been assigned to the 'peace process' over the years.

The first all-Ireland Guild event I attended was a visit to Stormont in the mid-1980s during one of the early attempts to have a locally elected Assembly governing Northern Ireland. Ian Paisley was the chairman of the Agriculture Committee at Stormont and proved to be a charismatic host to the Guild, which defied the public perception of the man. He told us that the pen was mightier than the sword. The Guild saw a different side to the firebrand preacher and politician.

James Campbell is northern editor of the Irish Farmers Journal. He is a former Guild president and is current treasurer of the IFAJ.

By the Banks of the Blackwater

Jimmy Brett

It promised to be a night to remember! An invitation to a mid summer evening barbeque at Paddy O Keeffe's farm by the Blackwater meant I had arrived to join the elite of Irish agricultural journalism. Yes the boys from the Guild were in Fermoy for another vintage night of 1970's revelry.

I got a lift from the Grand Hotel with the inimitable man from the cattle markets, the late and great Michael Dillon. Michael was so generous to all young journalists, sharing his rich history of thirty years in the business.

Paddy O'Keeffe was as ever the generous host at his wonderful place on the banks of the beautiful Blackwater. We feasted on succulent steaks and the booze flowed as the darkness of night approached. Never one to disappoint his guests, on the stroke of midnight, our host threw down a challenge. What braveheart among the now very drunk journalists would take on mine host in a swim across the river? Hardly one to take on my local pool even when sober, I quietly declined the challenge. Mind you when push came to shove, there wasn't any other taker either.

But that didn't deter Paddy and in a flash he was stripped down to his underpants heading for the water. History would surely have unfolded so differently were it not for the timely and brave intervention of one Olive Daly. Yes, as we men stayed loyal to our beverages Olive, information officer with

AFT and the only lady present, headed off after Paddy in an heroic effort to dissuade him.

Well she seemed to achieve very quick success because all of three minutes later we heard shouts of 'Help' from her. Now we were worried until we saw two silhouettes running in our direction. The panic ended when we realised that Olive was running frantically but Paddy, far from having any difficulties in the Blackwater was in hot pursuit.

Panic over and we all departed for a nightcap in the Grand in Fermoy at about two o'clock in the morning.

While driving out the avenue Michael Dillon's VW beetle,

so beloved of collectors now with its split windscreen, somehow came to an abrupt stop when we crashed into a heap of lime. It took me 40 minutes to find poor Michael's trademark rimless glasses. Not an easy task in the dark crawling around a heap of lime! We also refitted the windscreen and I will forever recall

Michael's immortal analysis as he rebooted the VW – "What a stupid place to tip a heap of lime".

Modesty prevents me from recording the dénouement of that never to be forgotten Guild evening in Co Cork except to say that we didn't achieve consensus on whatever we were arguing about in the Grand Hotel and luckily there was no CCTV in those days.

Jimmy Brett is managing director of the Brett Group. He started his career in RTE Radio



At the First International Congress held in Ireland in 1972 were (left to right): Strev Treacy, Joe McGough, Bord Baine, Betty Treacy and Dutch visiting Journalists Nick Sickenge and Alfred Van Kyke.



Destroying the Country with Bagstuff

John McCullen

My father entered the room and listened for a few seconds to the sound of the radio.

“Turn off that O’Keeffe fellow, or he will have the country destroyed with bagstuff....!”

“But did you not want to hear Michael Dillon with the cattle price?”

“O’Keeffe is wasting electricity; we will turn on again in a few minutes.”

This is pure 1950’s rural Ireland and the tussle between youth and age, invaded by electricity and two of the original agricultural journalists, Dillon with facts was acceptable, but Paddy O’Keeffe, with opinions and science, was a totally different matter.

Half a century ago, the hangover of the Economic War was heavy and farmers were suspicious of change and of gurus who came with a magic wand in either newspapers or on radio. The Instructor in Agriculture (pre Advisor days) needed several years to build a reputation for commonsense before his word could be taken.

There was an eternal tussle between the economics for the individual farmer and the National Economics of what limited the State. What was the point of removing all the noxious weeds and being so busy that you lost the hay crop? Looking at Ireland from space it was in need of change and had great potential and through the decades to 1975 it came in a torrent, caused by a large family of instigators. This was not a conversion like that of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, rather a slow dawning of the day, lit up by shafts of sunlight; like the cousin in the next Parish, the article in the Journal, the radio programme, the column in the local paper, the Agricultural man, or even the lad from the Co-op, or the milk price.

Once lit up the change flourished. With a flexing of muscles in Macra and NFA and the widespread advent of telly when we saw the real face of Joe Murray, Joe Rea, Donal Cashman, Paddy Lane, Alan Gillis, Jimmy O’Keeffe and



John McCullen

Michael Owen Fogarty.

TV pushed the limits, and even went interactive with Justin Keating on Telefis Feirme meeting in the Old School in Ballinlough! Immersed as I was in the Farm Centre, the “twenty past six” was like a call to prayer daily for ten minutes, when we all fell silent and turned to face Bluebell or Montrose, whichever you are having!

With that tiny programme was unleashed a more glamorous group of journalists, Mairead McGuinness, Jimmy Brett, Michael Miley, the Shanahans, Frank Mulrennan, Paddy Smith, Joe O’Brien, John Dardis and several others including Matthew Dempsey of the beautiful accent....

Floating along all at their own pace were the Ag corrs of the national daily papers, the Wicklow twosome of Jim Norton and Monica Carr, the man with the beard from the Irish Times, Sean McConnell, and the other fellow with the beard in the Irish Press, Willie Kealy. If you thought that all these arrows of instigation jabbing the poor Irish farmers were all he had to endure, get ready for more.

The advent of the local radio and even columnists in local newspapers; suddenly there were new moments of “twentypastixism”, in Judge from Bonnicolin, Nicky Furlong from Wexford, Pat Lynch in Kerry and even lads in Cork and Limerick, with opinions of their own.

Alas, in a half century, it is invidious to name a few when there really was a cast of thousands, orchestrated by a small group of dedicated and often inspired people in the Guild. What inspired them you ask? Look no further than the words of an erstwhile regular correspondent of the Farmers Journal, an awkward lad named Patrick Kavanagh, who once wrote “I find a star lovely Art, in a dark sod”. May we keep searching for the Art.

John McCullen is a farmer in Co Meath. He has published a number of books.



A young Liam Lavelle attempting to throw a horseshoe at the Spring Show in 1981.

Fifty Years of TV Farming

Liam Lavelle

Since the foundation of the Guild in 1961, agricultural journalists and Guild members have been prominent in presenting and producing television programmes on farming, food and rural affairs. As skilled communicators with a deep knowledge of Ireland's biggest industry, these journalists played a key role in the development of agriculture and television.

On the establishment of the national television service in 1962, one of the key objectives was education and high on the list of national economic priorities was agricultural education. The 'powers that be' saw a pressing need among the country's farmers for information and knowledge. Justin Keating, a lecturer in the veterinary school in Ballsbridge and later a government minister, was pressed into service to deliver a weekly illustrated lesson in animal husbandry. This was called Teilifis Feirme and ran over two winters from 1962 to 1964, drawing groups together in halls

throughout the country and providing ample stimulation for advisers and farmers alike.

The need for up to date information was also recognised and so began Mart and Market, one of the longest running programmes on Irish television. Presented by founder member of the Guild, Michael Dillon, the weekly bulletin on cattle prices ran from 1962 until 1988.

On the Land

Teilifis Feirme was followed by On the Land, a weekly programme that ran from 1963 to 1971. The programme brought the latest developments in farming to a wider audience. Filmed mostly on location on farms and research centres around the country, it was hosted by Joe Murray and by a number of guest presenters, including another founder member of the Guild, Larry Sheedy and research scientists Dan Browne, Roger McCarrick and Vivion Timon.



The Ear to the Ground team in 1993, including three former Guild chairmen, Liam Lavelle, Mairead McGuinness and John Cummins

Into Europe

The excitement and opportunity surrounding Ireland's entry into the EEC in January 1973 was captured in a special series of 'Into Europe' programmes presented by Joe Murray and Martin Downes in 1972. These award winning programmes profiled farmers and farming on the continent. The series was revisited in the 1990s when much had changed. According to Joe, he was heartened to find Europe's farmers no better than Ireland's, and sometimes worse!

Farming in Colour

The advent of colour television saw a new approach to farming on television. The Landmark series, which was less educational and more informative, ran from 1973 to 1987. Critical and analytical, the studio and filmed reports saw many distinguished presenters feature in their wellingtons. Peter Martyn, Ken Curran, Kieran Kissane, Nick Coffey, Jerry O Callaghan, Mairead McGuinness and Jim Miley all cut their broadcasting teeth on Landmark, under the vigilant tutelage of Joe Murray. It is a testament to the programme that they all went on to distinguish themselves in journalism and other careers.

As the 1990s appeared, the style of agricultural programmes on television changed. In 1992, Jim Miley and Jerry O'Callaghan presented a 26 part series of programmes,

Taking Stock, which tackled the major issues facing Irish agriculture and rural Ireland. It proved an audience winner on RTE 1 in prime time and paved the way for a style of farming television that appealed to a wider audience.

Ear to the Ground

Ear to the Ground hit the screen in 1993. Produced by Agtel, the independent production company, established by this writer and fellow Guild member John Cummins, the programme is now into its 19th consecutive season. The long list of presenters includes Mairead McGuinness, Kieran Mullooly, Maeve Dineen, Ronan Clarke and the current trio of Darragh McCullough, Helen Carroll and Ella McSweeney.

A rural enterprise series hosted by Peter Young of the Irish Farmers Journal and Paul McCarthy of Teagasc was broadcast on RTE 1 in 2009-10. The programme followed start up rural businesses as they grew and developed. During the past decade, other broadcasters have moved into the farming and rural affairs space, including TG4 with An Tuath Nua from 2001 to 2007 and Feirm Factor from 2007 to 2011. The series, A Year on the Land, was broadcast recently on TV3.

Liam Lavelle is Executive Producer of Ear to the Ground and a former Guild chairman.



Matt Dempsey surveying Washington from the heights of Congress!

Curiosity the Greatest Virtue

Extracts from a speech delivered by Irish Farmers Journal editor **Matt Dempsey** at the Guild's first 50th anniversary event in Bord Bia in January 2011

Our mission statement in the Irish Farmers Journal is “enhancing the competitiveness of Irish agriculture and the well being of those engaged in the sector”.

If our information is of little use then we won't be bought – we stand or fall on being picked up in the newsagents each week. As a result, we probably take ourselves too seriously in being fiercely protective of our patch. We are constantly looking for new ways for farmers to do better, so we do not

hesitate to portray practices and procedures which may not have yet impacted in research stations or demonstration farms.

I like to think we have been at the forefront of encouraging progressive technical change. Whether it was Paddy O’Keeffe chartering the Boeing 747 in 1973 to expose farmers to New Zealand dairying; or 2010, when we took a share in a lease with others to demonstrate the costs, returns and pitfalls in developing a 300 cow farm in Kilkenny; or to



joining with factories and FBD in the BETTER Beef Farm project.

Our circulation is somewhat higher now than when I took over as Editor in 1988, though not dramatically so, but we have now become the largest selling agri publication in Britain or Ireland. The great help has been the European moves to prevent the overt corporatisation of production agriculture.

It strikes me that the Journal in its core is becoming more specialised. The recruitment policy has become geared towards a high degree of technical competence, an ability to write and also a capacity to function as part of a team where the competition is about being invited to participate in the most prestigious gatherings in your particular area. So, if Andy Doyle is contacted by BASF on the likely relevance in Ireland of a new fungicide, I say well done. At the same time, BASF does not expect - and would I think be disappointed - if they received non-stop laudatory coverage if the product did not deserve it.

Similarly with our joint programmes with the meat factories - granted they are not particularly sensitive souls - but nevertheless there is a healthy mutual respect and trust. Progress within the agri media sector obviously depends on one's capacity and inclination. We expect and, I hope, pay for, hard work, real commitment and a capacity to belong to and enjoy being part of a team.

Relationships

In general, I find we have inevitably a changing relationship



Joe McGough, former president of the Guild and Vincent Colgan, former chairman of the Guild, on their way to the Horse Show in August 1975.



Larry Sheedy and Matt Dempsey in conversation outside the Irish Embassy in Paris in 1971.

with sectors of the industry depending on the policies and personalities involved at any particular time. The Department of Agriculture is a most interesting case.

In my early days, future Secretaries General such as Donal Creedon and John Malone served their time as the press officers for the Department and Michael Dowling was Mark Clinton's private secretary - in 1973-77 for those who can remember that far back. So as they climbed the ranks, there was already a basic relationship established.

At that stage, the Department press office functioned as the provider of relevant technical, EU market information. Now its role is much more in providing the Ministerial view of the day as well as providing the relevant contact points within the Department. I have no great problem with this as I find the Department extremely helpful to us.

It has been an ongoing aspiration to have a general rural magazine within the paper with the aim of promoting a family loyalty to the Journal. While it's always difficult to attribute circulation to any specific area, it is clear that Irish Country Living does have a significant positive effect, especially with Mairead Lavery in charge - someone that has such empathy with the target market.

There are few occupations that embrace hard science, animal and crop husbandry, genetics, pathology, economics, history, travel, current affairs and human interaction in such a heady mix.

Sometimes it may be slightly frustrating in looking out on real life as from a goldfish bowl but again I think that depends on the individual's make-up and aspirations.

Advice for young journalists? Aspire to be accurate, up-to-date, ideally innovative and most of all, curious. I would deem curiosity to be the greatest of all the non-religious virtues.

Matt Dempsey is editor of the Irish Farmers Journal. He started his career in RTE radio.

The Independent – From Norton to O’Brien

Frank Mulrennan

Any chronicling of agricultural coverage within the Irish Independent over the past five decades is dominated by the name, Jim Norton. As far back as November 1953, Maxwell Sweeney’s Radió Eireann review proposed that: “Any turkey-rearer who heard the contribution from Jim Norton on turkey prices got value for his licence fee.”

Appointed as the first specialist agricultural reporter in a national newspaper in 1957, Jim never pulled back from voicing an opinion, particularly when it related to pedigree livestock breeding!

The inaugural Farming Independent of January 24 1969 was a notable move by the Indo as Ireland geared up for EEC entry and the paper catered for its strong farming (and grassroots Fine Gael) readership.

Farming Independent

Jim was joined on the Saturday paper by his sister, Mary Norton who, using the pseudonym, Monica Carr, wrote a Country Diary which was reflective of an Ireland in which women on the farm were only beginning to assert their role. Right up to her death in 1997, she engaged readers with stories about her (fictitious) husband Tom and family, and was truly a lovely woman.

A young reporter called Chris Glennon, later to become the country’s leading political journalist, had also joined the Indo in 1963 and began to contribute to the Farming Independent, bringing a sharp political edge which Norton admired.

The 1970s and entry into the EEC heralded a heyday for farming news stories with Aengus Fanning as the Indo’s ag. corr, Willie Kealy at the Irish Press and the Brett and Miley double-act at RTE. Fanning became editor of The Sunday Independent in 1984 and, remarkably, still holds that position today.

By the mid-80s, as Jim Norton neared retirement age, the Farming Indo was reduced to less than a couple of pages on a Tuesday. This writer’s arrival in 1987 brought new vigour. The Farming Indo continued to be pro-farmer but frequently took different stances to that of the Farm Centre lobby.



In tandem with the new harder-edge editorial came expansion into a 32 page tabloid supplement that made Tuesday the second highest circulation day of the week, after Saturday’s TV mag. Paddy Smith and later Paul Mooney joined the team.

This development delighted then managing director, Joe Hayes, who saw advertising revenues multiplying by a factor of 20 within four years to over £1m by 1992.

Management at Middle Abbey Street then scored a spectacular own goal in 1994 when – acting on the advice of an Australian media consultant – they decided to drop the Farming Indo from the city edition. An embarrassing volte-face happened within a couple of months, following a meeting in Middle Abbey Street, at which a dozen of the key movers in agri-industry berated the Indo top brass. This writer’s move from farming to the business editor role within the Indo in 1996 led to Mairead McGuinness arriving with a high profile from TV’s Ear to The Ground - the next three Farming editors all had Ear to the Ground



Guild Members David Grey, Jerry O'Callaghan and the late Gerry O'Grady.

experience - and brought a real freshness of personality to the publication.

Her successful election to the European Parliament in 2004 paved the way for Maeve Dineen and a greater emphasis on technical and husbandry matters was evident. Dineen became the second Farm Indo editor to transition to business editor in 2008. The incumbent is Declan O'Brien whose team of Darragh McCullough and Caitriona Murphy are bringing a hard news approach to the paper and is fully embracing the digital and social media opportunity. Meanwhile, a dichotomous attitude to farming coverage was becoming more evident throughout the 90's in the newsroom. Fine journalists – starting with PJ Cunningham, Gerry Mulligan, Willie Dillon and the incumbent Aiden

Sheehan – found their role gravitating to that of food corrs, often struggling to get space unless it involved consumer price wars, health scares or farm subsidy rip-offs!

As it happens, the man responsible for leading the Irish Independent through almost half of the past 50 years – the irascible Dub, Vincent Doyle who passed away last year – revelled in this apparent schizophrenic coverage. After all, it was “Vinnie” who ordered a young sub to cut an expensively-purchased piece from the NY Times to mark Samuel Beckett's 80th birthday – because Doyle had to make space for results from the Spring Show!

Frank Mulrennan is a former editor of the Farming Independent and a former chairman of the Guild.

Hosted in Stormont

Richard Wright

When I joined the Guild, it was a very different world of agricultural journalism. We hammered copy out on typewriters, read it over to copy-takers by phone, and in broadcasting still used old fashioned tape, edited by splicing it together.

Over 50 years – and thankfully I do not remember all of them – there have been many highs for the Northern section of the Guild, mostly associated with activities we have done in conjunction with our southern colleagues.

I remember two IFAJ congresses in Ireland, after which more than one delegate concluded the best thing would be to let the Irish organise all the congresses and just move them around the world.

I remember going to the Green Week in Berlin when Larry Sheedy was IFAJ president and thinking he won an incredible level of recognition. Only later did I note his remarkable resemblance to the popular then German farm minister, Ignaz Kiechle.

The Markey reign began in South Africa on a high note, and just got better as the years went on – a role which helped cement relations between north and south as we travelled the world in support of his time as president.

There were many highlights. There was the annual dinner during Balmoral Show, at which the then chief executive of the old Milk Marketing Board, the late George Chambers, always called for a brush to give his very personal rendition of ‘Slattery’s Mounted Foot’ – usually followed by my ex-BBC colleague, John Johnston’s rendition of WW Marshall’s ‘Livin’ in Drumlister’.

As president of the All-Ireland Guild, I remember presiding over an event in the Long Gallery at Stormont, where I



Guild members in 1991 on a farm visit in Northern Ireland.

remarked that I was probably the first all-Ireland president to speak there at an event sponsored for us by the DUP.

Today, in the new politics of Northern Ireland, such events are everyday occurrences – and perhaps we as a Guild helped to lead the way. But if politics have changed dramatically, the Guild is essentially the same.

Many of us have become those with the big, now electronic, contact books. But best of all there is a new generation of journalists, as enthusiastic now as we were then about reporting on an industry central to the Irish economy.

Richard Wright is a BBC journalist and a former president of the Guild.

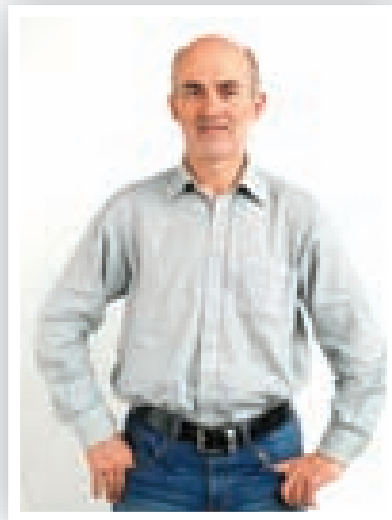


Pictured at the Guild of Agricultural Journalists visit to the Kepak meat plant in Watergrasshill, Co. Cork are: Michael Nason, Managing Director, Musgraves, Damien O'Reilly, Guild Chairman, John Grogan, Irish Farmers Journal & Kevin Cahill, Commercial Director Kepak.



The Guild's International Dimension

Stephen Cadogan



Within 10 years of its formation in 1961, the Irish Guild was one of 14 active members of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ).

Representing an agriculture and food sector ever looking to export in order to realise its dreams of expansion, Irish journalists benefited by rubbing shoulders in IFAJ with colleagues from nations such as France, Germany, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands and the US, which have since become major markets for Irish foods. As early as 1970, IFAJ gave its Irish members a great opportunity to promote their industry, by bringing the IFAJ annual congress to Dublin.

It must have been an enjoyable event because IFAJ was back in Dublin in 1979 for another annual congress. Ireland thus became only the sixth country to have hosted two or more congresses.

Irish members have in turn played key roles on the Executive Committee which guides IFAJ in its efforts to give agricultural communicators a platform for professional development and international networking.

First President

Larry Sheedy, then deputy editor of the Farmers Journal, represented Ireland on the Committee through the 1970s, and became Ireland's first president of IFAJ in 1981. His achievements as president are recorded as follows in Paul Queck's history of IFAJ:

"In accepting the president's gavel, Sheedy noted that there was a large knowledge gap between agricultural experts and farmers and stressed that the world needs journalists with adequate training to bridge that gap."

By 1984, IFAJ had active member associations in 18 countries. When Larry Sheedy stepped down from the presidency in 1985, he took over the task of compiling the

IFAJ Newsletter. And in 1993, he developed and managed IFAJ's Star Report Prize contest. This annual search for the best published report from an IFAJ annual congress was won two years later by Ireland's James Campbell.

IFAJ historian Paul Queck has happy memories of Ireland. The Indiana, US agri-editor was elected president in 1996, when Dublin hosted the eighth IFAJ World Congress, becoming the sixth country to stage a third annual congress. Queck's history of IFAJ records;

"The Eighth World Congress in Dublin was attended by more than 200 agricultural journalists from 24 countries. The theme of the Congress was 'Free Trade and the Family Farm,' but a good deal of attention was given to the issue of BSE in Irish cattle, and how Ireland and its farmers were working to assure consumers of the safety of their beef."

In the late 1990s, Ireland also featured in a four-year professional exchange programme, primarily with the US. Journalists had travel costs paid by their national guild and were hosted overseas by local IFAJ members for up to two weeks, while working alongside host country agricultural journalists.

New Leaders

Through the 1990s, Brian Gilsenan and Michael Patten represented Ireland on IFAJ. David Markey took on the job in 1999 and in 2001, when it was decided to split the roles of IFAJ treasurer and secretary-general, IFAJ appointed Markey as treasurer. He was asked to develop a three-year plan of grants, sponsorships and cost-cutting options. Paul Queck's history of IFAJ records his contribution as follows: "Markey was a gifted leader and fundraiser and was very successful in securing financial support for IFAJ's programmes and activities."

IFAJ membership

At the 2004 World Congress, delegates elected David Markey as IFAJ president. He made his four-year stint as president one of the busiest periods in IFAJ history, by setting several goals, including: to make IFAJ more dynamic; to use the latest communications technology to better serve the membership; to focus a new education programme on developing countries and on professional development; and to further develop IFAJ contacts internationally and within member associations.

Major progress was made in all these areas, helping to boost IFAJ membership to 31 guilds in Europe, North and South America, Oceania, Asia and Africa. Markey's initiative to publish IFAJ's informational brochure in Spanish, Russian, English and German has helped spread the message.

Three years on, and Ireland retains one of the strongest IFAJ presences, with James Campbell elevated to the praesidium, as IFAJ treasurer; this writer representing Ireland on the Executive Committee and chairing IFAJ's Communications Committee; and past president David Markey a highly valued consultant in key areas such as sponsorship.

Stephen Cadogan is editor of the Farming Examiner and represents the Irish Guild on the Executive Committee of the IFAJ.



Joe Murray handing over the presidential chain to Richard Wright at Stormont in 1999. Joe passed away in 2011.



Peter Murphy, a Guild member for almost 50 years, who passed away in 2011.



Ear to the Ground presenters in 2001 - Darragh McCullough, Mairead McGuinness and Ronan Clarke

RTÉ Slow off the Blocks

While agriculture was a dominant part of the economy during the 1960s and especially after EEC entry, it took a remarkably long time for RTÉ news to appoint its first agriculture correspondent. Following heavy lobbying from the IFA and other industry groups, the station's head of news, Wesley Boyd, eventually relented and Paddy Smith, who had joined RTÉ as a news reporter from the Irish Press in 1971, was appointed agriculture correspondent in 1976.

Paddy left RTÉ in 1980 to edit the Farmer magazine and was succeeded by John McAleese, who had returned from the European correspondent role in Brussels. After just a year in the role, McAleese left RTÉ and was replaced by Michael Lally who served as the agriculture correspondent until 1989. For the past 22 years, Carlow native Joe O'Brien has been the station's agriculture correspondent.



The Early Years of the Journal

Paddy O’Keeffe

It all started with John Mooney, a visionary Co Meath farmer who had access to capital. John developed the concept of establishing a weekly farm paper, strong in technical capacity and supportive of farm development.

He approached me for help and I readily agreed. At the time I had a contract to resuscitate and bring to profit to a 1,800 acre belt of land producing meat, milk and vegetables for a Dublin hospital group. The project was going well.

On the publishing venture, we surveyed the market and eventually the Irish Farmers Journal was purchased by John Mooney in mid 1951. The paper had been established by Macra some years earlier. Success evaded the young farmers due to capital shortage. To meet accumulated debt, the Journal was taken over by its printers, a small low cost printing group headed by Hugh McLoughlin.

Publication reverted from weekly to fortnightly and there was little capital injected. Circulation dwindled and it barely reached 2,000 copies per issue at the time. Terms of purchase included a printing contract that was to remain with the McLoughlins – subject to quality of product being at an acceptable level.

John Mooney brought John Litton, an active dairy farmer and Prof. E.J. Sheehy as co-directors, with minimum capital. Michael Dillon joined the production team with responsibility for advertising, for farm machinery and for livestock prices. The takeover was completed in November 1951.

A programme of growth was established. Weekly publication resumed; paper size was increased in parallel with extended editorial. Increased costs were inevitable – financed by bank capital and by increased advertising. Sales went up but advertising remained sluggish. By early August 1952, the bank overdraft approached £12,000 and was growing fast – beyond borrowing limits and beyond the capacity of John



Mooney to finance in the long run. Emergency action was needed.

The bank agreed to remain with us provided an agreed action plan was followed. Michael Dillon left advertising but remained on machinery and livestock prices. Jack Carmody was hired from the Sugar Company. He was an agricultural graduate, outstanding on sales and on commercial organisation. Carmody was the man with real resources for the job.

From week one, his commercial acumen prevailed.

Advertisers were given confidence in the Journal and in its commercial value. From early 1953, the loss making pattern ceased. The Journal grew in size and in circulation. Despite the national depression of the 1950’s, income and sales increased. By 1960, circulation exceeded 25,000 weekly and was steadily increasing.

Shortly afterwards, John Mooney received a letter from Lord Thompson offering to purchase the Journal. At the time, Thompson was establishing a strong foothold in the British press including a range of prestigious papers. In his letter, £100,000 was his initial offer for the Journal.

John Mooney’s immediate response was a declaration that his long-term intention was to place the Journal in the hands of a Trust without any cash demand on Trust resources. The Thompson offer was turned down and The Agricultural Trust was created. IFA (NFA) had been in discussion with the Journal and were brought in as participants in the Trust. Profits were to be used to develop the Journal and to support Irish farming.

In the hands of the Trust, the Irish Farmers Journal has maintained growth.

Paddy O’Keeffe was editor of the Irish Farmers Journal from 1951 to 1988. He is a founding member and former president of the Guild.



Farm News Presenters pictured at RTÉ celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the programme in 2005.

RTÉ Radio a Dominant Force

Michael Miley

RTÉ farming programmes have been a fertile source for the Guild for much of the past 50 years. Larry Sheedy has covered the period before and after establishment of the Guild and the role of founder members, Paddy O’Keeffe and Michael Dillon in programmes such as Farmers Forum and Field and Farmhouse.

A whole new approach got underway in 1969 when Joe Murray took charge of agricultural programmes on television and radio and Matt Dempsey, who had just graduated with a degree in agricultural science, was recruited as the first specialist producer/presenter of radio agricultural programmes.

Farmers Forum, now called Farming Progress, a lively half-hour discussion on the big issues in farming was chaired by Paddy O’Keeffe and broadcast every Wednesday evening. Field and Farmhouse had a new name - On the Land. This was a magazine programme involving interviews with key scientists and farmers and reports on new developments in the world of agri-food. It was presented by Michael Dillon

and broadcast every Saturday.

A third programme, Country Call, was broadcast on Sunday evenings after the news and angelus. The 25-minute programme was presented by Peter Murphy and covered the current affairs and political issues that dominated the farming and rural landscape. Peter Murphy was by then a household name through his presentation of the popular prime time TV programme, Cross Country Quiz – the University Challenge for Macra members. Peter was also presenter of a number of sponsored programmes on morning and mid-day radio in the 1960s and 1970s.

Matt had responsibility for all three programmes and was also responsible for a farming slot during an early morning radio programme, Morning Call, which was presented by personalities such as Mike Murphy and Valerie McGovern. (This was well before the days of Morning Ireland) The three-minute farming slot was presented by a range of people including Michael Hennerty of UCD and John Dardis of the Farmers Journal. Others to present the slot in later years included Tom Arnold, now chief executive of



Concern, and Brendan Kearney, the top economist with the Agricultural Institute. It lasted well into the 1990s when P J Nolan and Paddy Smith delivered beautifully crafted and sometimes humorous pieces on aspects of rural life.

In 1972, Paddy O’Keeffe came calling and offered Matt a job in the Farmers Journal. This writer who had just graduated from UCD and was about to take up a job as some form of pig specialist with Hanley’s bacon factory in Rooskey was offered the job. To the relief of the porcine population, Joe Murray had found his second radio recruit.

Farm Diary

The mix of farming programmes remained the same until 1975 when the daily programme, Farm Diary – or the ‘twentypastsix’ as it soon became known - was launched. Broadcast at 6.20pm Monday to Friday, the brief was to deliver a fast-paced roundup of the day’s big stories, capped by Michael Dillon’s livestock prices. The first Farm Diary was broadcast on 3 April 1975. In the early months this writer broadcast three days a week with Michael Dillon and John Dardis, still moonlighting from the Journal, covering the other days. Dardis later went on to become a founding member of the Progressive Democrats and to become a long-serving member of Seanad Éireann.

The broadcast output of radio farming was now almost three hours a week. Later in 1975, another shy young graduate, Jimmy Brett, joined the RTE radio staff and the twentypastsix started to get noticed. There was a vigorous and healthy rivalry between the various media outlets, particularly between us and the Farmers Journal. If we had a good story on a Tuesday, we would wait until Wednesday to broadcast it, just ‘to rub Maguire’s nose in it’. It probably mattered little to the majority of readers or listeners but it kept the adrenaline flowing.

On the weekly programming front, Paddy O’Keeffe joined the RTE Authority in 1973 and was ‘disqualified’ from broadcasting. Matt Dempsey made a return as a freelance chairman of Farming Progress. In the late 1970s, Farming Progress and On the Land were merged into a new 45-minute programme, Agriview, broadcast initially on Friday evenings. It was subsequently reduced to 30 minutes and had numerous presenters, from Matt Dempsey right through to Damien O’Reilly who broadcast the last show in 2004.

There were a range of freelance contributors to the programmes during those years. They included the prolific Martin Ryan, a longstanding Guild member and Paddy Donegan, a north Dublin farmer and contractor who was addicted to broadcasting. Also, RTE’s long serving western correspondent Jim Fahy had his first ever radio interview broadcast on Michael Dillon’s On the Land.

New Voices

Brett and Miley left RTE in 1979/80 and were followed by a succession of presenters and producers over the next 20 years, all recruited and managed under the fatherly guidance of Joe Murray. They were led by Gerry Daly, later to become a national gardening institution. Brian Donaghy came from New Zealand. He was followed by Dermot Eviston, a young graduate from Tipperary who later went to the Farmers Journal and then to Bord Bia. Dermot now runs a meat distribution business in Italy.

Frank Mulrennan, another UCD graduate, held the radio reins for a number of years before moving on as public relations manager of the IFA and later editor of the Farming Independent. Jim Miley cut his broadcasting teeth on Farm Diary before moving to television. He went on to become general secretary of Fine Gael and chief executive of Dublin Chamber of Commerce before founding the online property sales company, Myhome.ie.

Padraig Mannion was there during the 1980s. Padraig is now involved in the food publishing business in Holland. The tenure of the inimitable P J Nolan stretched into the 1990s. After a stint with the Journal, P J is now concentrating on dairy farming and a host of other ventures. Tommy Conway was another prominent radio farming voice. He was poached by the Journal to be its business editor. He is now head of equities with NCB Stockbrokers. Eric Donald also gained his early media experience on RTE farming programmes. He was also poached by the Journal and is now head of public relations with Teagasc. Other radio farming voices in more recent years were Padraig O’Neachtáin and Darragh McCullough, now deputy editor of the Farming Independent and presenter of Ear to the Ground.

Frances Shanahan has been part of the radio broadcasting team for more than 20 years. She has presented Farm News - the renamed Farm Diary – and also Farm Week, the Saturday morning show initiated and broadcast by Joe Murray in the 1990s. The programme was broadcast until recent years when it was replaced by the high profile Country Wide, now broadcast on Saturday mornings by the resident farming and rural guru, Damien O’Reilly.

Damien and Frances have held the RTE farming fort since before the turn of the new century. The daily Farm News started to become ‘less daily’ about five years ago and was broadcast at varying times during the RTE Drivetime programme. It has now become a rarity in the evening broadcast schedule though apparently not yet formally retired. Or have I missed something!

Michael Miley is a former chairman and president of the Guild. He has worked in broadcasting, print journalism and public relations.

Farming on the Front Pages

Michael Miley

The journalist who first put farming on the front pages of national newspapers was Des Maguire. The Newbridge, Co Kildare native was the dominant figure in national agricultural news for more than 30 years.

As the agriculture correspondent of the Irish Press, Des had become a national figure in agricultural journalism even before entry to the EEC in 1973. Farmers Journal editor Paddy O'Keeffe recognised his talents and recruited him as the Journal's news editor in 1973. He later became the paper's deputy editor and continued to churn out the big stories until his untimely death in 2003, aged 57. Des also had the distinction of serving as a member of the RTE Authority.

The decade after EEC entry was the golden period in national agricultural journalism. The big names in the Irish Independent and Irish Examiner are chronicled elsewhere in this publication. Farming was also front page news in the Irish Press and the Irish Times. Willie Kealy succeeded Des Maguire as agriculture correspondent in the Irish Press and Michael Browner was the agriculture correspondent for the Times. Their stories on developments in Brussels and on a rapidly developing and energetic industry at home regularly led their papers.

Kealy, who still works in journalism - as deputy editor of the Sunday Independent - moved to the Sunday Journal in 1980 and was succeeded as agriculture correspondent by Limerick man, Stephen O'Byrnes. After two years in the job, Stephen moved to the news features section of the Independent and later into the political world with the newly-formed Progressive Democrats. Stephen is now a prominent figure in the public relations industry.

O'Byrnes was succeeded by Darragh McDonald, the son of a former ICA President, Mamo McDonald. Next up was Tim Ryan from Tipperary who held the agriculture



Tim Ryan, former agricultural correspondent, Irish Press.

portfolio in the late 1980s before joining the paper's political staff. Tim, a prominent Guild member, now works in public relations in Dublin.

The last agricultural correspondent with the Irish Press was Offaly man Chris Dooley who was the incumbent when the paper bit the dust in July 1995. Chris is currently a member of the senior editorial staff in the Irish Times.

In the Irish Times, Michael Browner, who died following a long period of ill-health, was succeeded as agriculture correspondent by Fergus Pyle who was the paper's Brussels correspondent in the years following EEC entry. Pyle later went on to edit the Times and was succeeded by Ella Shanahan. For the past 22 years, Fermanagh man Sean MacConnell has been the paper's agriculture correspondent. Sean retires at the end of 2011 after more than 40 years distinguished journalistic service. Ella, who later served for a period as the paper's agri-business correspondent, died in August 2011.

A notable feature of Irish Times agriculture coverage in the 1970s and 1980s was the earthy daily column from Michael Dillon. Douglas Gageby, editor of the Times, had a big interest in agriculture and rural issues and recruited the highly-respected Dillon to provide comment and analysis on the big topics affecting the sector. His column had a wide readership, especially among industry figures and policy makers, for more than 15 years, until his death in 1992.



John McGrath, an Bord Tráchtála, Ella Shanahan, The Irish Times, Colin McCrea, an Bord Tráchtála and Maeve Bracken, CBF, at a meeting hosted by an Bord Tráchtála in 1994.



Guild members Roz O'Shaughnessy, Liam Lavelle, Damien O'Reilly and Margaret Donnelly.

Building Contacts and Friendships

Margaret Donnelly

Joining the Guild as a young journalist gives you the immediate benefit of getting to know your peers in a social setting. Starting out in agricultural journalism it soon becomes apparent that it's quite a small club, but there are a lot more people in the Guild than the handful of full-time agricultural journalists.

Behind every press release, every statement, every product launch, every conference is a host of people involved in agricultural communications, the majority of whom are Guild members.

The Journalism Awards, the Michael Dillon Lecture, the opportunities to travel to IFAJ congresses around the world, to avail of travel bursaries and to participate in visits and tours here at home and the chance to mix and mingle with people you would not otherwise meet are among the many benefits of Guild membership.

Getting a personalised tour of Coolmore Stud, seeing the bowels of cheese factories and stepping into a shed of 20,000 chickens are not opportunities everyone gets. Nor is the

chance to attend a private audience with the President of Ireland or visit the House of Lords. It's during these events that you get to build up contacts and friendships and see a different side to the agri-food industry.

The mix of people in the Guild is varied, from those who have been there since the beginning or near it to people new into the profession. Abroad, the circle the Guild offers extends further with the number of Guild members worldwide increasing annually, extending the circle of friends and colleagues for all members of the Guild. Every member organisation is just what its members make it, and it takes a variety of people who each bring something different to the table. The Guild allows members to do that – be as active as you want, join the committee, take responsibilities on board, help organise events and partake in as many activities as you want. Without new, young people coming on board the Guild would not have a future.

Margaret Donnelly is editor of Irish Farmers Monthly and a former chairman of the Guild

