



Q Guild Midlands Region
Minutes from meeting - 18th Sept 2017
White Lion Hotel, Brinsley

Present:

Robert Jones - Walter Smith (Chairman), Claire Holland (Guild Manager), Scott Barlow - Barlows Butchers, Lee Gold - Owen Taylors, Arthur Wright - C N Wright, Sheila Lane & Glen - Grasmere Farm Trad Butchers, Dave Mason & Sally Ann Thorley - Weddel Swift

1. Apologies:

- a. Alan Bennett Ltd, Gaynor Richards - Walter Smith Albrighton, Richard Field - Weddel Swift, Steve Jones - Dalesman, Richard Hawes - Chase Farm Shop, Frank Parker, Stephen Hewitt - Walter Smith Albrighton, Steve Derrick - Lucas

2. Minutes from 27 March 2017 passed.

RJ welcomed CH and Claire outlined her roles. RJ commented that they had missed GN and requested that CH continue a similar supporting role for the Midlands Group, including encouraging members to support events and meetings by ringing round and making regular contact.

3. Smithfield Awards - RJ wanted to highlight that he normally puts on a Van to take up any entries to Glasgow, but he is not sure he can offer this at the moment, so people should start to look at making their own provisions for getting their entries to Glasgow - products are required to be there by 17th October. Address/Details on the entry form and acknowledgement email.

RJ stressed the importance of using/finding a good courier which would look after their packaged products and ensure timely delivery.

4. Midlands Meeting Venue options - RJ commented that it was convenient to hold meetings at the White Lion, as it was owned by Scott Barlow and closed on a Monday.

5. Open forum/discussion

Grasmere, Lincs

- Grasmere own 3 independent retail shops, 1 in a town centre and 2 in market towns. Trade is steady, one improved by 20%, one flat lined, one decreased due to staff. Employment seems to be the problem. Now aim to employ more chefs which has seen an increase in sales as a result. Main baker left, and replaced by a chef who has also helped sales. They also have 3 young butchers coming through the business. Grasmere also attend farmers markets and shows - sales have flat lined a bit this year. They are also pig farmers and the margins on pigs is still low. Added value is a big part of their sales. Prices and margins are under pressure. Often offer multi buy offers i.e. 2 for £20 on joints. They see pre-packed as breaking down the barrier to buying, and have seen their multi deck take 45% of sales, seeing an increase from 650 -700 customers per week to 1000. They also sell 3 sealed pouches for £10. Volume sales are reducing.

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Owen Taylors

- EHO Audit 5* maintained. They recently had a student intern for a few months who they used to get their marketing material ready for marketing purposes which resulted in all their photography and social media posts being produced up to Christmas. As well as their Xmas hampers promo material.

Barlows Butchers

- Diversified into ready meals, employing girls to make them. Shop sales stable, sandwich vans offer a good profit and sales. They now also do a lot more outdoor catering - hog roasts/BBQ - sales and profit are split 50% with another butcher. Their customer shopping habits are changing and so they sell a range of 3 packs for £10. They also price and pack joints which sell better than ones from the window display. They can now pack the multi deck on a Friday ready for the w/e which they just refill during the day. Feels the offering is similar to a supermarket's but better quality. Forequarters already deboned before they reach the shop, to save time. They are going to look at prepacking and getting ready for Xmas early in Dec for home freezing.

Wrights

- Been having staffing and sickness issues. They still buy traditionally, live beef and lamb, then they butcher which makes cutting quite labour intensive, also one butcher is on an apprenticeship which does slow down the process. Trade pretty stable, BBQ products done well this year, rationale oven has been a good buy

Walter Smith - RJ

- They have been questioning how many butchers are required in each shop, as most of their meat is already cut or could be cut by one butcher. Also now taken on chefs and his star find are dinner ladies, as they are used to making volume dishes. RJ feels sometimes a closer look at margins is needed when using sauces/marinades. He sells up to 6 pallets of gas flushed Dutch chicken fillets, p/wk plus offers English and organic, skin on/off. The gas flushed have a longer shelf life and look brighter, and have outsold the other packs and been selling really well. SCS - are the suppliers of his gas flush machine (appx £8.5k) - initially used on mince and now trialled on other products in Huntingdon where they sold really well. Does half trays as well. 8 days shelf life. 40% retail GP on each pack.
- General discussion ensued around vac packing vs gas flushing packs to extend shelf life, which also means products can be produced and displayed in quantity.
- **Weddel:** Commented that 90% of their beef was Vacpac vs bone in (of that 90% - 5% was matured - a few pistols and short fours) they fore saw that H&S issues would become a problem in the future whereby some drivers would and some won't carry/move fores and hinds from the van to the shop, and that their employers can't force them. This would mean extra cutting and trimming at an extra cost. The future could be that sides will be prepared to a high quality and boxed ready for delivery.

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General Comments and further discussion topics:

- **SB:** commented that requests for help from Guild members re new ideas was disappointing in that no one replied to his email re Loyalty schemes
- **DM - Weddel** commented on a premium halal butcher in London - Tariq Halal (6-7 shops) -who sells large volumes of sides of lamb = £50K sales per/week - he felt the shop was well worth a visit.

Xmas Hampers/Orders incentives

- **Walter Smiths** - Put in £10 Christmas order and get a free Pork Pie
- **Grasmere** - customers get stamp for each shop, then when card is full they get £7 off their shop which often gets spent at Xmas. Also they offer a free item if an order is placed before Nov

Trends:

- **HG Walters, Barons Court** - produce Gourmet Burgers, i.e. a pure beef patty with no additives - no water, no rusk, they just mince any premium meat, i.e. beef, wagu, etc. and they sell really well.
 - **Scott** commented that he used Scobies supreme burger mix - which gave a good flavour

Staff recruitment and retention issues discussed:

- **RJ:** his staff have every third weekend off, the view was to reward the managers well, and treat them with respect - especially re weekend working
- **Barlows:** Open a bit later, at 8am now
- The view was that with better working conditions and hours you would get the right calibre of staff.
- **Grasmere:** Their shop managers share in the profitability, which means they get to understand and own the GP - in essence educating them to run a business which makes them feel more part of the business - they have a bonus which is paid a month in arrears, this seems to work well for them and as it gives them some business ownership.
- **Barlows:** sandwich van seller gets a sales incentive, which has helped to drive up their sales

BOS

- Members were not aware of the updated areas on the BOS, so new passwords may be required, as a few felt they may not have their original P/W's. CH said the agency could reset them and to let her know if people needed a new P/W.

POTM

- Once a month too much - takes time to get the butchers and customers used to the product, then only a few weeks until a new one is introduced.

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- Could the product be a member's product rather than a Corp Member? CH said that it had been discussed to use the Smithfield and BBQ comp winner's products next year.
- Ingredients often expensive and if bought in a large quantity which sometimes means there are ingredients left over.

Next meeting:

- 9th Oct Porter House Bistro by Barlows, Forest Road, NG17 5JB - J27 off M1
- 5pm prompt start - focus to be on Xmas offerings, products, promotional material, hampers, birds (whole or crowns), opening hours, nibbles and freezer products.
- Corporate members - there is only one slot at this meeting - (please respond to Robert Jones asap if you are interested)- presentation must be Christmas products focussed

Meeting closed 2.30pm

Thanks went to Scott Barlow for usage of venue and tasty refreshments.

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