

EQUITY

Incorporating the Variety Artistes' Federation
Guild House Upper St. Martin's Lane London WC2H 9EG

EQUITY BRANCH VARIETY OFFICERS MEETING
WEDNESDAY 9TH OCTOBER 2024 AT 2.00 PM
VIA ZOOM (OR AT GUILD HOUSE)

Notes of Meeting

In attendance:	Christie Clifford	East Yorkshire and Humber
	Mary Lane	Bristol and West of England
	Peter King	Birmingham and West Midlands
	Chris Clarkson	Greater Manchester
	Sid Scouse	Greater Manchester
	Elise Harris	South Wales
	Rhubarb the Clown	London North
	Belle Fin	London South
	Nicholas Brand	Kent
	Nikki Simon	Essex and Herts

Staff: Michael Day and Nick Keegan

1. Apologies for Absence

Were received from: Hannah Kidman (Merseyside and Cheshire), Nick Putz (London North), Chris Rhodes (Glasgow and West of Scotland)

2. Introductions

There was a round of introductions where everyone introduced themselves and the branch that they were representing.

3. Variety Officers' Reports

In this part of the meeting each branch gave a report on both what was happening in the branch as a whole and with the variety network for the branch.

Greater Manchester: Chris Clarkson said that there were 1511 members in the branch but didn't know who the variety members were. The branch met about every 6 weeks and an average of 33 people attended. They've had different speakers including comedians and drag performers. They'd also visited venues in Canal Street as a branch outreach activity with staff. He'd also done some comedy visits with Kirsten, the NW Organiser.

Kent: Nicholas Brand said that variety was alive and well in Kent but not many members attended the branch meetings. Lots of the variety performers currently worked on cruise ships.

London South: Belle Fin had recently become the Variety Officer for London South. The branch seemed to cater more for actors currently and there was less awareness of variety within the branch. The branch met on the third Monday of the month at 7pm at Brixton House.

Bristol and West of England: Mary Lane stated that the network had not been getting together over the recent months due to her having a fall and the venue being refurbished. They found the Variety Report from Michael Day useful and there was always variety on the agenda of branch meetings. The panto in Bristol had Brian Conley and his daughter in it which was 'very variety'. Mary wanted to attend network meetings again and would attend if there was another local drag network meeting. Storytellers had been mentioned at the previous day's Council meeting and their intention to publish a rate card.

South Wales: Elise Harris said that it was hard to get impetus within the Branch. They'd had a drag guest speaker recently and some members had been wanting to put together directories of different performers. It was noted that a drag performer had been attacked in the street in Cardiff. Elise would like to know which members in the branch area did what types of work. There could also be an issue with Welsh language speaking at meetings as a translator could be needed and the branch didn't have a bank account yet so had no funds to pay for this.

Essex and Herts: Nikki Simon was also new to the Variety Officer role and had volunteered for this just to keep the branch going as they needed this position filled. There were only 6 officers who regularly attended. There were no variety members attending. The branch was looking at putting on a showcase in February 2025. This may be held in a London venue rather than in the branch area. The branch usually meets on a Saturday with the next meeting being on 9th November 2024. It was noted that Saturday meetings are not usually ideal for variety performers as that's when they tend to be working. It was commented on that the branch's socials were not advertising the showcase and if they wanted members to come forward that would be an idea.

East Yorkshire and Humber: Christie Clifford said that her branch had not changed that much from the previous one as it was a mixture of actors and variety performers beforehand anyway. One new member of the committee was a lighting designer. There was some activity in the area with the Beverley Puppet Festival and another of the new committee members was a puppeteer. There had been funding for puppet shows. Christie also found the updates from Michael Day useful to report to the branch.

London North: Rhubarb the Clown reported that the branch had some variety members attending and had had speakers from the drag sector and also had been involved with the campaign to save Bethnal Green Working Men's Club.

Birmingham and West Midlands: Peter King said the branch continued to meet monthly at the Hippodrome. The agendas tended to lean towards actors. They did a trial of not having an agenda but some felt this didn't work and that more structure to the meetings was needed. They would be meeting next Tuesday 15th October. They'd had a variety of guest speakers. Many in outlying areas preferred to attend remotely. The figures they had from Action Network suggested there were 764 variety members in the branch area. The branch would be putting together an action plan along with Ian Manborde and Vijay Shah when the new Birmingham office is open.

In general discussion it was stated:

The last three Equity magazines did not feature variety content. Mary would try to get a discussion about this at Council.

A significant amount of the legal work carried out by Equity was on behalf of variety members.

4. Venues at Risk

There was a general discussion about looking out for venues that may be at risk of closing before it actually happens. If potential closure is known about in time then it may be possible to assist in keeping the venue open. Once developers have got involved it's usually too late.

Nick Keegan gave an update on the progress with Bethnal Green Working Men's Club and how this was listed as an 'asset of community value' which does provide some protection. There is a lot of work still to be done to raise funds for the community to buy the venue and run it as a performance space. Some good union work has already been carried out in this regard including a petition which received 12,500 signatures and contact with the local authority and other organisations that may be of assistance.

The Old Nun's Head, Peckham was mentioned as another venue that had been bought by the community.

The Black Cap had not yet been redeveloped since closure and while that situation prevailed there was still a chance it could be reopened.

There was an ongoing campaign to save the Bottle Yard in Bristol which is primarily a film and TV studio.

5. Equity Insurances

The enhancements to the insurances were outlined including:-

Increase of the weekly payment in accident injury cases to £300 / week

Inclusion of some of the top-ups such as fire, medical scans etc.

The previous 24-hour cover for accident had been included but was not all-encompassing in that it provided cover when the member was involved in a work activity including travel to work, rehearsal, audition, training etc. It couldn't be topped up to cover non-work situations.

Stage hypnotism would not be covered by the new insurers. Very few members had taken up the previous policy. It was thought that Federation of Ethical Stage Hypnotists (FESH) did provide insurance to their members.

6. Forthcoming Campaigns and Events

Elise mentioned that there was a venue named the New Inn at Abersychan which held a Pride event this year (Torfine Pride) and will do so in the future. This would be worth engaging with. Pride events generally engaged performers these days but some did have sponsorship from questionable sources.

Birmingham Pride had had a funding cut due to the city council being bankrupt.

Equity would be campaigning on late night safety which affected very many variety performers.

7. Communications between Variety Officers

The WhatsApp group was continuing to be a resource for Variety Officers. Belle Fin wanted to join this group which all the others present were already in.

8. Variety Officer Training

A date for another training session would be arranged for the middle to end of January 2025 as there had been some new Variety Officers.

9. Any other business

It was noted that performers who produce video content as an entertainer could be eligible for Equity membership. Influencers were not eligible however.

10. Date of next meeting would be arranged for March 2025

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm