



THE GUILD OF CORNISH HEDGERS is a non-profit-making organisation run on the democratic principle of the old craftsmen's guilds. It was founded in 2002 by Robin Menneer FRICS Msc, a Cornish farmer's son who learned to love hedging as a boy. The idea of establishing a new craftsmen's guild was his response to the concern among traditional hedgers about deteriorating standards of workmanship in Cornish hedging at that time.

Robin's objective in forming the Guild was to create a nursery for Cornish hedgers to be trained to the old standards, also to raise public awareness of Cornwall's unique heritage of hedges, and establish wider recognition of Cornish hedging as a skilled craft vital to historical significance, landscape and wildlife.



To this end, in 1994 Robin had established and co-authored the Cornish Hedges Library as a separate and personal enterprise, embodied in this Cornish Hedges website, with the aim of giving free access to the first existing source of full and reliable written knowledge on Cornish hedges.



Funding to develop new ideas and skills

Initial funding for the Guild by the generosity of its founder was assisted by Rural Progress. The Guild was designed to be run by the craftsmen, with two elected stewards and a small band of voluntary helpers to administer the funding and deal with the everyday work.



The Guild was the first organisation authorised by Lantra to give a Craftsman's certificate for proficiency in Cornish hedging. Robin's criterion was that skilled Guild Craftsmen should be able to offer a 100-year written guarantee for their hedges built to the Code of Good Practice. By his efforts the Code was drawn up according to the advice of the old traditional hedgers then still living, many in their nineties and including champion hedgers with many trophies from the old hedging competitions, providing a standard which was approved by them.



In 2005 the Guild bid successfully for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, providing bursaries to assist craft training for apprentices in Cornish hedging, match-funded by the voluntary labour input of the Guild.



The Guild supplied information to help other organisations and individuals in their work involving hedges, including the Cornwall County Council's Cornish Hedge Group on which Robin served from its outset. Its logo was designed by a Guild volunteer.



In response to official requests, the Guild provided technical information on Cornish hedges relating to the design of environmental schemes. Robin's previous career with the Ministry of Agriculture, culminating in setting up the West Penwith Environmentally Sensitive Area, uniquely qualified him to provide a link between Cornish hedgers, farmers and government.



Supported by a grant from Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a Cornish hedges education pack was produced for schools and adult educational or community projects.



Realising the shortcomings of current hedgerow surveys, Robin designed and established the innovative Hedge (& Wall) Importance Test, a simple, safe and non-invasive survey method to assess the importance of any hedge, hedgerow or wall in Britain, on equal terms, for its history, landscape and wildlife values. For some years the HIT was hosted by the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, before returning to the Cornish Hedges website.



In 2007 the Guild of Cornish Hedgers' work was recognised when it received the Prince of Wales' Award of Honour, under the aegis of the Royal Cornwall Agricultural Association, for “providing knowledge of the traditional skill of hedge-building in Cornwall”.

In 2009 Robin suffered a stroke and had to give up the work to which he had devoted his retirement, so, while the Heritage Lottery Apprentice Training Scheme continued, many other of the initial Guild activities he had promoted and carried out ceased.

In 2013 Robin was made a Bard of the Cornish Gorsedd in recognition of his efforts to help revitalise the ancient and endangered craft of Cornish hedging. He died in 2018 aged 85.



Robin Menneer June 2014

After his death Robin's co-author maintained and developed the Cornish Hedges Library, the enterprise so dear to his heart.

With the inexorable loss of the old generation of hedgers, Cornish hedging continued to decline and in 2023 was Red-Listed as a critically endangered craft. Anticipating the crisis a group of Guild Craftsmen formed the Cornwall Rural Education and Skills Trust (CREST) to continue and broaden Robin's legacy and build on his vision for the future of Cornish hedging.

The Guild of Cornish Hedgers continues to provide support and facilities for the craftsman hedgers who are members of its co-operative.

THE GUILD IN ACTION



Guild apprentices working under the Heritage Lottery Training Scheme in 2007.



Guild apprentice manning the stand at a local show. Robin's handmade folding display stand, designed for ease of transport and handling in the early days of the Guild, showed displays that embraced the building, history, landscape and wildlife aspects of Cornish hedges.



The much-loved Cornish comedian Jethro (left) with Guild founder Robin Menneer watching an apprentice test in progress in 2009. Jethro, son of master hedger Hugh Rowe, said “With programmes like this the skill will not disappear. This is the best thing I’ve seen for years.”

There is always a demand for new Cornish hedges. Building new, and repairing existing hedges is a skilled craft. There are still a few traditionally-trained professional hedgers in Cornwall who can be relied on to do a proper job, but there are others who lack correct training, and contract workmen who are not trained in hedging at all and are pressured to do seriously sub-standard work. Good training needs to be readily available for future professional hedgers. Also, many people enjoy the therapeutic value of looking after hedges as a volunteer and want to do a proper job, but need expert advice and supervision.

By supporting the next generation of Cornish hedgers with suitable, quality training schemes, this ancient Cornish craft will continue into the future, with new trainees coming forward to look after Cornwall's unique and amazing heritage of hedges.



Building a Cornish hedge.