

Why should the Guild be concerned about the Data Protection Act?

Many of you share your address and telephone number with a spouse or partner.

How many of them know that their address and telephone number are on a circulated list?

How many have expressed concern at this?

One partner of a Guild member was concerned and has highlighted this point. If your spouse or partner is not made aware that these contact details are on a data base that is circulated then your Guild is in contravention of the Data Protection Act.

Three points:

1. When asked, at the start of the Guild financial year, to check your details against those currently held on the membership list, you may have been offered the chance to **opt out** of the circulated address list. You should have been offered the chance to **opt in**.
2. Most Guilds currently have no clearly stated limits as to the use, care and control of the membership data list. There are Guilds where only the three Committee Officers have a membership data list, used purely for the contact of members on Guild matters. However, many Guilds have traditionally made this list available, as a paper copy, to all members, unfortunately without guidelines as to the proper use or the legal limits on its availability and use for past members.
3. We, as individuals, make regular email contact with little regard for the visibility of members' email addresses. These addresses are as private, personal and significant as telephone numbers, but are seldom seen as such.

Having been made aware of these shortcomings, Guilds can no longer plead ignorance, although even that is apparently no defence in law. After preliminary discussion with a member of staff at a District Council Voluntary Service regarding this matter a number of issues regarding the legal aspects of running a Guild have come to light and all Guilds must be aware of the following:

1. The **address list** is for members use only. Any person not a fully paid up member cannot use the list, or be contacted by a member, without explicit permission (i.e. a friend, or colleague in another context). For example: an ex-member cannot use an old list to 'phone / e-mail / or write to Guild members individually to advertise their forthcoming book / exhibition / garden-party etc. Likewise, current members should not contact ex-members to, for example, advertise spaces in workshops or forward advertising material for commercial visitors (suppliers, speakers, etc.), without the explicit permission of that ex-member upon their departure (and also unless they are a friend, or colleague in another context).
2. The way you use the **membership list**, and circulate it, will have to be considered for security reasons. In the meantime members must be made aware of the possible misuse that this list could be put to, e.g. data theft, and ensure that any copies held, electronically or on paper, are secure, password protected or safe in a drawer etc.
3. **General e-mails:** when sending mail to more than one person please note that if the e-mail addresses are visible to all, you may be contravening the Data Protection Act. For example: It would be wrong, if you e-mail details of a forthcoming event of interest to both Guild members and your embroidery group and allow all the addresses to be visible. You should put the address of one person (or yourself) in the "To..." line. Then select the "Bcc" (blank carbon copy) line – NOT the Cc (carbon copy) line – and fill in the remainder of the addresses. Each recipient will see only their own address in the "To..." line.