

**Minutes of the Somerset Contract Bridge Association  
(SCBA) AGM held at Woolavington Village Hall on  
Sunday May 14<sup>th</sup> commencing at 1.00 pm.**

1. Apologies

John Gould  
Frank and Gina Coltman  
Paul Burgess  
Simon Brook  
Eric Cummings  
Jean Howard  
Ceri Pierce  
Ken and Ann Bawdon  
Caroline McPherson  
Michael Martin  
Mike and Liz Tracy  
Liz Hale  
Tim Mather  
Steve Pedrick  
Colin Simcox

2. Chairman's Report to the SCBA AGM May 2023

It is with mixed emotions today that I step down as County Chairman. I have been involved in the affairs of the SCBA for some 15 years as committee member, education officer, chairman of selectors, Congress Organiser and finally Chairman, and after much consideration and reflection, I feel that it is time for me to hand over the dealing machine and allow someone else to take on this important role. I also recognise that it is important for new leadership to emerge and bring fresh ideas and perspectives to the county. I believe that this is the right time for me to step down and allow someone else to take on the responsibility of leading our county into the future.

It has been a great honour and privilege to serve as your Chairman for the past six years, which have sometimes been challenging, have always been busy and usually been fun. When I took on the role I wanted to shake things up a bit and in particular to involve more people in the affairs of the SCBA, to encourage more teaching and to persuade non-affiliated clubs to join. I have been unsuccessful in the first two of these objectives but can claim success in the third as we now have six new affiliated clubs in addition to the rejuvenated Yeovil Phoenix Club.

Where I wish my successor the most luck is in generating new club members through teaching. It seems clear to me that clubs that thrive are those that teach or are at least accommodating and encouraging to learners.

I was delighted recently to read "Well done to Somerset which has more players now than in February 2020. I think the only county to buck the

trend.” We were amongst the first counties to get organised for online bridge, which enabled our players and clubs to keep going during the pandemic, and some three years later Somerset Online is still ‘a thing’ and we have achieved a balance of face to face and online bridge in the county which caters for everybody. Once again I would like to thank and congratulate those people in those clubs that kept things going during the lockdown days. We’ve had a merger and one club has lost a weekly session but otherwise all our clubs are intact, which has really pleased me.

The county situation is not so healthy with county events attracting far fewer players than before the pandemic, a county committee unable to fill three vacancies and nobody coming forward to lead the county as Chair. This is deeply disappointing and I fear for the future. It is important to remember that leadership is not limited to a certain group of people or a specific age range. Leadership can come from anyone who is willing to step up and make a positive impact and I urge all SCBA members with a little time and a lot of enthusiasm to consider if there is a contribution that they could make.

Richard will talk about the financial position, which is very healthy in spite of making a loss this year. I don’t regard this as a loss but more of an investment in our efforts to help bridge in Somerset recover from the ravages of the pandemic. This is surely what our accumulated funds are for. We have deliberately run events at a loss in an effort to encourage players back to f2f bridge and continued to make funds available to clubs to support their efforts.

As I step down, I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for your support and trust in me as your Chairman, which has given me the confidence that we were doing the right things, and of course I am grateful to those members of the committee that have worked hard to support the game of bridge in Somerset whether it be Tournaments, the Congress, County matches, Newsletters, the website or events such as Andrew Robson or the Michael Coda Cup.

I look forward to staying involved and supporting the county in any way that I can and once again I thank you for my period as Chairman of the SCBA which I have thoroughly enjoyed.

Tony Russ

3. Approval of minutes of previous AGM, no matters arising.

4. Treasurer’s Report to the AGM May 2023 (attached)

In the book of Genesis, seven years of plenty shall be followed by seven years of famine and thus ladies and gentlemen the biblical prophecy has come upon the bridge world. Though without the famine of biblical proportions as so vividly reported by Michael Buerk in his BBC despatches from Ethiopia, thankfully.

SCBA has indeed had the luxury of seven and more years of plenty. When I took the treasurer position in 2017 the county had a fund of £26,500. Today that stands at £41,000 and in that time the growth of funds available to the county has been from bridge events, initially all face to face, latterly both face to face and online, which yielded surpluses. It

also enjoyed positive contributions from bridge related seminars and the prestigious WOE Congress.

It is no coincidence that the county has progressed so well as it has been led throughout this period by our outgoing chairman Tony Russ. His energy and commitment has been phenomenal. He took the position at the same time I was elected and I will recall the conclusion of his acceptance "I don't think I'll be a disappointment to you". Ladies and gentlemen, Tony has been an inspiration to us all, not least for securing a £10,000 grant to fund the development of bridge in the county. Little did we know at the time that Covid19 would have such a dramatic effect on the bridge world. Before I continue please join me in applauding Tony's efforts and contribution to the SCBA.

Covid has had a significant impact the county, where we are seeing dwindling attendances at events and 2022/23 results bear this out. Our Congress is at break even, our county events too suffer from low attendance where held face to face and run at a loss. The surplus shown in the accounts is largely due to a refund secured for cancelled events in the Covid years from Woolavington and from BBO events.

You might recall me telling this audience that 20/21 BBO yielded a surplus of £6,000 when it provided a playing platform that replaced face to face. This was primarily Tony's determination to keep the county and clubs active. Income was £26k then; it is now a quarter of that. So we must accept that the years ahead are likely to be similar to the last 12 months and your committee will need your support and your club's support to ensure the continuity and hopefully re-grow events laid on by the county. I envisage that we will see deficits in our overall numbers in the short term. Our cost base, excluding charity events is £2,000. If we break even over the year for all events and secure £1,000 contribution from seminars we will be investing £1,000 from our reserves. Our reserves stand at £35,000 (assuming we commit £6k held for club developments) so we can and will accommodate the seven years of famine that may lie ahead.

##### 5. Tournament secretary's (John Cockram) report

John began by stressing that numbers were falling at tournaments and it was imperative to reverse the trend as much as possible. Face to face bridge had been picking up, the same could not be said for county events and overall turnout had been quite poor.

John C predicted at least 40 tables at the face to face Congress which is currently being organised

In addition a new tournament was being planned catering to the under 9 NGS levels in July. This would include a hand analysis and an hour's teaching seminar.

The county league continues to be successful but is now held exclusively online.

Next year another Andrew Robson day is planned and the Michael Coda cup.

##### 6. Election of Officers and other Executive Committee members for 2023/24

Tony spoke about the need for a website manager and hoped somebody would come forward.

Mike Letts was nominated for Chair by Tony R and seconded by Sheena Lanham.

This year three committee members have resigned: Eric Cummings, Paul Burgess and Tony Russ.

Michael Wigmore was also nominated to join the committee. The remainder of the committee were all reelected:-

Richard Feetenby

Ceri Pierce

Sheree Pavey

John Cockram

Simon Brooks

Frank Coltman

Andy Ridgers

Colin Simcox

Michael Letts addressed the meeting. Thanking Tony for his very hard work, e gave an outline of his recent history in Avon and his switch to Somerset. He expressed a desire to visit all Somerset clubs but wasn't sure how long and when this would take place given the number and spread of clubs.

He finished by issuing a plea for more to join the committee.

7. Any Other Business  
None