

Oxfordshire Bridge Association
Officers' and other reports presented to the
69th Annual General Meeting – 9 June 2015

Communications and Infrastructure

Secretary

During the year two new clubs have been formed in our county, North Oxfordshire Bridge Club and Central Yarnton Bridge Club, both of which have affiliated to the EBU and to OBA. This means that Oxfordshire now has a total of 21 affiliated clubs.

In January 2015 a set of guidance notes for new Management Committee members was prepared and circulated to new and existing members of the committee.

In 2014 we introduced a new OBA “distinguished service” award, intended to recognise individuals who have made a significant contribution to the development of duplicate bridge in the county over a sustained period of time. Last year two awards were made. All clubs were canvassed again this year but no nominations were received.

Finally, after somewhat more than 5 years in post, I will not be standing again as Secretary this year. However, I will still be a member of the Management Committee (as a representative of my club) and will continue to support its activities in other ways.

Sandra Nicholson

EBU Shareholders

Led by its new Chairman, Jeremy Dhondy, the EBU has had another successful year. Numbers of affiliated clubs and registered members continue to rise, albeit slowly, and our international teams have turned in some excellent results. Competitions and overseas events are generally doing well although, as announced in the latest issue of English Bridge, the flagship summer meeting is to be moved next year from Brighton to Eastbourne. The new, smaller format for English Bridge magazine has resulted in a considerable saving on postage costs and overall, the financial results for the year are forecast to be about £100K better than budget, generating a surplus of over £80K. Clubs will be aware that some of the surplus has already been redistributed in the form of free playing cards, and the EBU board is actively considering how best to invest the remainder in the future of the game, now that the new charity EBED has taken over responsibility for education.

Later this year the EBU will be taking over Jeff Smith’s scoring program (rebranded as “EBU Scorer”) and will be offering it to all affiliated clubs free of charge, with a small ongoing charge if support is required. They will also be replacing the IT system currently used for membership management and have said this should eventually mean they will be able to provide better management information to the counties – which would be welcome.

Sandra Claridge, Sandra Nicholson and Alan Wilson

Membership

	<u>Membership as at 28th June 2014</u>	<u>As at 1st June 2015</u>
Bridge for all	39	84
Teachers	28	24
Pay to play	1330	1333
Dual/Direct	97	101
Anonymous	7	7
Total	1501	1549

As can be seen, the core membership (P2P) has remained more or less constant and almost all the increase is accounted for by a rise in the number of BfA members, i.e. new learners.

Peter Briggs

County Night and Competitions

The competitions team is facing a difficult year with many changes in structure and personnel anticipated. We will be losing two of our County TDs who will be moving away, in particular Stephen Brown who has been the backbone of County events over many years. We are also faced with declining numbers both for Tuesday nights and the competitions held throughout the year. John Slater has provided a report on Tuesday nights (see below for summary) which has prompted us to reduce these to two nights per month from 1st July 2015. We would welcome volunteers to join the committee and any suggestions for improving our events, in particular how to make them more inclusive and enjoyable.

The County also needs more TDs and has offered to fund TD training both at club and county level so would again welcome anyone who would like to take up this challenge. Another challenge we will be facing is with regards to catering for our Sunday events. Esme has spent many years at the counter, tea-pot in hand providing sustenance for ravenous competitors but will sadly be stepping down from this position. In summary, help needed at all levels and volunteers sought!

Claire MacDonagh
Chair, Competitions Sub-Committee

Chief TD

I am pleased to report that there has been a good entry to most Sunday events this year, but numbers attending on Tuesday night have declined. As a result there will now just be OBA Duplicates at OBC on the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of each month. Many thanks to Rob Dixon, Aleksander Lishkov, Chris Dawe, Diane Coe & Kathy Talbot for assistance with directing or scoring.

Detailed minutes of the competitions sub-committee's latest meeting in April 2015 will be considered by the next Management Committee meeting but I can confirm that action points have been followed up. Claire MacDonagh has agreed to take over from me as Chair of this group.

I have enjoyed being Chief TD for Oxfordshire for almost 35 years since 1981 and will miss this role once I move to Kent in July. I hope that bridge will continue to flourish in Oxfordshire and wish my successors well.

Stephen Brown

Working Party on Decline of County Nights

Following a continuing but non monotonic drop in county night attendance, a chair's working group comprised of R Dixon, C Jones, P Litchfield, M-A Sheehy and J Slater was asked to use evidence to make proposals on how to take County Night (CN) forward. The group collected evidence from the current county squad, those who had led on the various recent changes, and the county captain and chair of selectors. It looked at the practices of other counties. As a result a purpose and 14 detailed recommendations were drawn up covering such things as better organisation, and hosting and matchmaking facilities in order to help improve numbers. The report was essentially accepted for implementation by the competitions committee.

County Night Purpose (CNP): *To ensure that there is a regular set of events open to Oxon players wherein the level of competition is serious, and when actual or aspiring county standard players will compete together in ways that facilitate development of individuals and partnerships, and help inform the county selection process.*

The main reasons given for falling attendances were:

- Pressure/working away/distance 8
- Removal of Claridge cup etc. 8
- Organisation/website 7
- Club commitments 7
- Team difficulties/Lack of regular team/pard 6
- Environment at OBC/CN 4
- Resulting overall standard too variable 6

Many constructive suggestions were made but the likely baseline attendance was in the area of 3-4 tables and this, together with support problems, leads to the conclusion that **CN in its current form is not financially sustainable.**

Accordingly, OBA should move to having **only 2 county nights pm at OBC on Tuesdays** (one Swiss pairs and one multiple teams). These should then be kept under review and the number of OBC CN pm further reduced to a bit pm (1 or 0) if numbers did not keep up to about 7-8 tables.

In addition, **all OBA affiliated clubs should be invited to propose to the competitions committee their own club based county events during the 2015/6 year.** To be accepted the following conditions have to be met:

- The event has to be open to all OBA members (but not necessarily restricted to them).
- There has to be evidence that the event attracts or will attract county level players.
- Some mechanisms have to be found to ensure that good players play against one another.

Discussions are already under way with 3 clubs. It would be nicer if it were 3 clubs doubled.

John Slater

Wessex League

In general this was another successful season for the Wessex League with a total of 38 teams competing from 17 different clubs. Congratulations are due to the winners of the 5 Divisions as follows:-

Division 1 Menagerie A

Division 2 Menagerie B

Division 3 Thame A

Division 4 Wantage B

Division 5 Abingdon C

As League Division 1 winners Menagerie duly qualified to represent the County in the Garden Cities Trophy.

Continuous scoring was employed for the first time during the 2014/15 season. Captains of all 38 teams were asked whether they would prefer to retain this method or revert to the previous Discrete method. Replies have to date been received on behalf of 24 teams as follows:-

Prefer discrete 5

No preference 2

Prefer continuous 17

One rather disappointing feature was the repeated failure of a number of team captains to enter match details on a timely basis as required by the Rules.

I wish my successor as League Secretary every success next season.

Hugh Thomson

President's/Chester Cups

There were 10 entries this year for the President's Cup and the winners were Christopher Whitehouse, Cathy Rowland, Mary-Ann Sheehy and Aleks Lishkov, who will represent the County in June in the Pachabo Cup.

5 teams entered for the Chester Cup and at the time of writing one match remained to be played.

The Competitions Sub-Committee has agreed that next year the Chester Cup will be run over the summer (April – September) which we hope will make it easier to arrange dates for matches.

Sandra Claridge

County Pairs

Nine clubs (Abingdon, Aylesbury, Bicester Oxford, Summertown, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Witney) held heats for the County Pairs, and altogether (with the County Night heat) there were 98 entries. Four of these were ineligible (due to having Primary Allegiance to another County Association, despite this being mentioned in my emails). Clubs need to pay attention to players' allegiance for events like the County Pairs for which it is a requirement!

Most of the clubs who did not hold a heat never replied to my emails. It would have made the organiser's life simpler had they sent a quick, polite "We will not be holding a heat this year" email.

As I am no longer working in Oxford (I expect to start in Coventry in mid-June), I am standing down from the role of County Pairs Organiser.

Chris Dawe

County Team Management

OBA Selection Committee

This has been a successful year for the county and the selection committee has worked cohesively to achieve its various objectives. Indeed, it has (arguably) been the most successful season in the county's history (on the field of play) with a dramatic triumph in the Dawes League for the first team and a rather more comfortable success in the Porter Trophy for the B-team. The C-team narrowly failed to make it a clean sweep for the county in the final fixture against Warks. The A and B-teams will accordingly represent the Midlands in the National Championships Finals at the end of June.

This unprecedented success was in part due to the selectors' decision last summer to appoint Alan Wilson as captain, in succession to Chris Cooper who had himself been at the helm for the county's only other Dawes League triumph in 45 years. Alan has done an outstanding job so far in terms of galvanising the troops, conducting post-match analysis sessions and assisting with recruitment and selection.

This success stands in obvious juxtaposition to the disappointing attendances on Tuesday 'County' nights and shows again that the county is blessed with a talented and deep pool of players willing and able to play at county level.

Meanwhile, in the Tollemache, the task was as ever to finish in the top two of a tough nine-team qualifying group. But once again we finished fourth, some way behind the powerful squads sent by London, Kent and Manchester.

All fixtures have been fulfilled and there have, in general, been enough pairs making themselves available for selection, especially for distant away matches. A problem arose with the fixture against Worcs on 16 Nov 2014 in that OBC premises were required by the club on the same day and the county was forced to make emergency arrangements elsewhere. We were very grateful to Wallingford BC for making their premises available and for the support of club officials in making the day a success. It is good to know that we have a more-than-satisfactory reserve venue available if it should become difficult to play at OBC.

Two or three new and talented pairs have again been recruited to the squad from which the teams are selected and there has been slightly more opportunity for the selectors to actually select, rather than pick the 12 available pairs and cross fingers.

This was the second year since the introduction of an online enrolments sheet so that all players can indicate their availability for forthcoming fixtures. Thanks again to Rob Dixon for setting up and managing this in Doodle.

I have again tried to ensure that the "county" corner of the new OBA website is up-to-date and interesting. Team-lists, fixtures, match reports and quizzes have been added every few weeks during the year and I hope it is all well-organised and attractive. Some of the associated pages and content mysteriously disappeared last summer and our best IT brains were unable to tell me where they have

gone so we have now been reduced to a single page which, although cluttered, contains all necessary information about selections, etc.

Thanks are again due to John Williams (in particular) who wrote long, witty and erudite accounts of all the matches in which he was playing, and to Esme Alden who continued to provide teas of the highest quality. Our enjoyment of these matches was hugely improved by the efforts of those two and it is to be hoped that they will continue in these roles.

I have been nominated as a selector for 2014-15 and I am prepared to continue in my current role if invited to do so. Once again, we warmly welcome fresh members of this committee.

As I have said before, the situation is complicated by the fact that our constitution continues to stipulate that selectors are nominated by clubs (one per club). A number of clubs do not address this issue in time for the AGM or find suitable volunteers while individuals who are keen to become selectors and who would make a valuable contribution find themselves hamstrung by a situation in which their club already nominates someone else. My own preference would be to abandon this requirement and to remove the notion that selectors somehow “represent” the interests of a particular club. They should be (and currently are) unbiased in that respect.

Apart from that, most of my objectives on becoming Chairman have been fulfilled and I’m very happy to be replaced by someone with a fresh vision! I offered my resignation as Chairman a year ago when my playing partner was appointed captain as I felt there might be a perceived conflict of interest but I was persuaded eventually to continue in this role pro tem.

Nick Smith, Chairman of Selectors

Education and Improvers

The current members of this team are: Jonathan Price (Education Officer), Robert Procter, Cathy Rowland.

Education Officer

1. During the year E.O. has attended over 40 County Organized Bridge Learning/Teaching events.
2. E.O. has played in 14 of the 20 Oxfordshire Clubs.
3. E.O. has played in three Clubs outside the County where there are notable teaching programs.
4. There is to be a second Oxfordshire Bridge Teaching Conference 4th July 2015 at Wallingford.
5. Northern Towns Bridge Education Project
 - (i) Marian Day’s ‘North Oxfordshire Bridge Club’ (EBU and OBA registered) is up and running.
 - (ii) There is now an established Improvers Day game on Wednesdays at N.O.B.C. (30 minutes teaching, 1½ hour play).
 - (iii) A Beginners Class starts at N.O.B.C. in the autumn.
 - (iv) The taught part of County’s Mentoring Scheme Pilot is up and running in the upstairs lecture room at Marian Day’s North Oxfordshire Bridge Club (two sessions so far completed).
6. Book reviews: currently there are five reviews on the website; further reviews are being written in respect of books by Clyde, Kantar, MacLeod, Mollo and Segal.
7. Computer Based Mentoring Scheme: Cathy Rowland (new member of Education Team) has made an impressive start with a paper on how a County Computer Based Mentoring Scheme might work. Much more on this subject to come.

Jonathan Price

Youth and Duplicate Bridge Promotion

Duplicate Bridge Promotion

The Promotion Team has been created to encourage and support individuals and groups of all ages to play bridge and minibridge and to help those wishing to progress to duplicate bridge, including assisting any groups who wish to form new affiliated duplicate bridge clubs.

The Team comprises separate sub groups to deal with Youth, and Adult Player and Duplicate Bridge Club Development.

Youth

During the year, Joan Bennett and Alison Nicolson have agreed to jointly fill the vacant post of County Youth Officer.

Since September, there has been a new Junior Bridge Club in Oxford as an addition to the well-established club in Roke.

The number of schools teaching bridge in the OBA area has remained flat at 26 schools and the Team is keen for parents/grandparents to encourage their local schools to consider adding minibridge/bridge to their extra-curricular activities.

For all information check out our website: www.bridgwebs.com/bridge4schools.

Our third Junior Congress, held in Roke on March 22nd, was a success, with 32 children attending. Whilst this was down on last year, more schools were represented.

Two of our pupils have participated in the Abingdon Swiss Pairs Competition.

The Youth Team were pleased that the Management Committee agreed to allow some of the proceeds from the Henley Café Bridge Event to be used to subsidise schoolchildren from the OBA area wishing to attend the Junior Teach In at Loughborough University in August. A further report on this will be made to the Management Committee later in the year.

The EBU is forming a new Under 15 squad and some of our juniors are hopeful candidates; watch this space next year when we might be able to report on their progress up the ranks.

The EBU has also developed an Award scheme for youngsters that is currently being trialled by us and other counties. It will go live in September for the start of the school year.

Player and Club Development

The objective is for all bridge players in the OBA area to be aware of duplicate bridge, and to be given the opportunity to learn how they could incorporate duplicate bridge into their own bridge groups.

- To provide documentation to support the move to duplicate bridge
- To be given a contact point for advice and help
- The OBA to provide members for on-site support
- The OBA/EBU to provide start-up interest free loans for wallets and cards
- In conjunction with the Social Team the OBA to run events for Novices & Students, and next Steppers
- Affiliated clubs to be given the responsibility to “foster” groups new to duplicate.

The Management Committee has been requested to identify unaffiliated clubs with contacts. Information gathered thus far is being maintained by the Promotion Team but any further action such as adding details to the OBA website, and opening lines of communication to establish any areas for development is delayed pending volunteers joining the team.

The Management Committee resolved to provide funding to help start new clubs, and it further resolved that existing affiliated clubs could also use funding for any projects that sought to achieve the aims of the OBA. The Promotion Team has been charged with monitoring and advising any claimants for the funds. So far approximately £500 has been allocated to the new North Oxfordshire Bridge Club.

Promotion Team Contacts:

Mike Fletcher and Holly Kilpatrick.

Email: promotion@oxfordshirebridge.co.uk

Oxford Junior Bridge Club email: juniorbridgeoxford@gmail.com