

Bookham Afternoon Bridge Club

Chairman's Report 17th October 2022

I ended my report at the last AGM thanking those of you had returned to playing face-to-face bridge and I expressed a hope that this would slowly encourage others to make their own return. I will now start this report by repeating those thanks to all of you who have come back to playing face-to-face bridge and to those who have encouraged others to return and, in several cases, to bring new visitors along.

In March we decided to stop our Monday online bridge sessions and to restart face to face for both our weekly sessions albeit with protocols in place to protect us all. Table numbers understandably were initially low but have gradually improved as we all learnt to live with Covid. I am delighted that we are now regularly on Thursdays needing to run two sections. Monday table numbers are still running just below the 15.5 required for two sections but, fingers crossed, we may get there soon.

You will soon be hearing from Kate, our membership secretary, who will provide more details, but as we had anticipated, there were more than 40 members from 2019 who did not renew their membership last year. We have continued to attract new members so that we currently have just under 190 although we do anticipate maybe around another 30 or so, who have not yet returned to playing face-to-face or have only played once, not renewing this November. This would still mean that we still have a flourishing club with around 160 members which compares extremely well with most other bridge clubs, some of whom have had to close completely through lack of numbers.

So, I thank you all once again by coming back and ensuring the long-term future of Bookham Afternoon Bridge Club.

Also, in March we had another memorable and enjoyable Masterclass session with Andrew Robson. I am sure that all of you who attended took away at least one worthwhile tip and I am delighted that he will be coming to us again in March 2024. The profit from this event together with an additional fund-raising event in June meant that we raised over £1,600 for the Barn Hall and their village week fundraising. We are so lucky to have this hall and to have Roger and Rob who put out and clear away the tables for us. But, more importantly this coming winter, it is a comfortable and warm environment to play bridge in. Yes, we do need

to keep some ventilation to keep us safe, but we will also endeavour to keep the temperatures up – and, as I frequently mention, – “Bring layers”

Further fundraising Charity SIMs events once again supported both Children-in-Need and Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation for Disabled People plus raised funds for Ukraine which meant that throughout the year we raised over £2,900 for all charitable causes. Once again, a fantastic achievement and one that our Club should be very proud of.

One big change during the year has been the move to collecting payments using the contactless card reader. I think that most members would agree that this has been a much simpler way to pay for table money and certainly has helped Sue tremendously with her accounting. We did have the hiatus following the assertion that we were running a den of iniquity involving gambling. I was delighted that, with help from the Gambling Commission and the Financial Conduct Authority that we succeeded, where the EBU had previously failed, to get the ban lifted. However, and more on this later during the Treasurers report, Square has now thrown yet another challenge our way, for which we will be proposing a solution to our membership.

The fact that we have such a smoothly run club is thanks to so many of our members. Many of you take the time at the start of a session to help set up or to help at the end putting away boards and everything else required during the afternoon. Thank you to you all who help.

We owe a big vote of thanks to Alice Harper and her teams of duplimators who ensure that we have pre dealt boards ready for every session. Alice took over this daunting role a year ago from Sandra and I know that this has given her a few sleepless nights worrying about the challenges she faced particularly with the Charity SIMs events. Thank you, Alice.

Thank you also to Marilyn Clarke who has been leading and co-ordinating our team of essential directors and scorers. We are so fortunate to have so many members who are willing to help in this way but of course we should welcome more volunteers to join our team to lighten the workload of others. We can provide training for anyone who wishes to direct or score a session so, if you are interested, then please let Marilyn know.

A few months ago, we started using a new scoring system – this still interacted with our existing bridgemates so there were no costs associated with this. In fact, there has been a

cost saving since this new system, which is offered by the EBU, is free. There have been a few hiccups along the way, and we are acting as one of the test clubs for the EBU trialling use of a new "Two Section" model.

We are so fortunate to have our own informative website which keeps us all updated with club news. This would not be possible without the time and contributions of both Ron Rutstein, who has led this for so many years, and now with the help of Miranda Moore. Thank you both and I would urge everyone to regularly look at the site.

I mentioned earlier that we anticipate our membership falling further. One side effect of this is that there are fewer members to draw upon to act as hosts. Last week we unusually were not able to provide a host, and this sadly meant that one member, who came along looking for a game, had to return home as there was no one left to pair her up with. So a plea from me, and I appreciate that some of you will only come along if your regular partner is coming so do not make use of the host system and also that many of you drive some distance or do not drive yourself, but do all consider putting your name forward to act as spare partner – if we all did this once then it would only come around again every 18 months! – The spare partner list is on the side table and there are plenty of slots for the rest of this year.

This now only leaves me to pass on my biggest vote of thanks and that is to your committee. We have been so lucky to have had such a stable committee for some time now and they all work so hard setting up the sessions, collecting your table monies and clearing up afterwards. More importantly they have acted as a team supporting me, and at times controlling and challenging some of my wackier, I would say innovative, ideas and I am extremely grateful to them all. We shall be coming onto the election of officers later, but I should like to take this opportunity to personally thank four members who, having all served on the committee for five years or more, will not be standing again. So, Alice Harper, Carol Newton, Julie Kamieniecka and Steve Leach, on behalf of not only me but also from all Club members, thank you for your help and support whilst I have been Chairman.

Now a spoiler, just to keep you interested and awake throughout the rest of this meeting, under AOB we will be announcing the format of our Christmas Event being held, as you might anticipate, in December. We have not been able to hold this since 2019 but feel that now it is safe to reintroduce this so you will be the first to hear what we have planned.

I am sure that I will have failed to mention someone who I should have highlighted and thanked so if I have, I apologise – no slight was intended.

I shall finish by once again thanking you all for coming back to play in the Barn Hall and ensuring that Bookham Afternoon Bridge Club continues to flourish and finally to thank you all for maintaining the ethos of the club as “a club which continues to be somewhere people want to come because they can have a good game of bridge, played according to EBU rules in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere.”

Neil Higgins

17 October 2022