

## **BABC Chairman's Report 2023**

Traditionally, your Chairman's report would give a review of the last twelve months. I hope that you will forgive me with breaking that tradition and include reference to some of the events of the last five years.

I first came along to play bridge here in 2012, and as was typical in those days, it took almost a whole year before I became a full member due to the length of the waiting list. At that time Coral was Chairman and she was always so welcoming and friendly. Her aspiration, which she passed onto both Lawrence when he was Chairman and to me was that we should maintain 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." I believe that we have fulfilled her wish and I am confident that, under your new Chairman's leadership that this will be continued in the years ahead.

But a Club is not just one person and the success which we continue to enjoy is thanks to the contributions of so many of you, committee members and the many other members who help to ensure the smooth running of each session.

Our numbers at each session have remained strong and, on many occasions, we have played with twenty or more tables – not quite the heights of 26.5 which we achieved in February 2020 but still a number which many Clubs could never dream of achieving.

Even more impressive has been our ability to attract new members. We have had a constant flow of applicants, and Kate will be giving us all the statistics in her report,

but with another 6 individuals either finishing today or in the process of completing their two week notice period plus returning ex members will bring our membership level to around 200

once again. We know that, as always, there will be a few members not renewing their membership, but I am confident that by the time of our next AGM that a waiting list for new members will be in place.

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

Once again, 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. If any of you are able to give up an hour or so, every 4 to 6 weeks, on a Thursday before our session to help deal the boards then do please let Alice or any of the committee know. Alice, please pass on our thanks to all of the team.

Thank you again also to Marilyn Clarke, who is not here today, she 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 welcome Robert Newhouse to our scoring team but there is always space for more. We can provide training for anyone who wishes to direct or score a session so, if you are interested, then please let Marilyn know.

We are indebted to Richard Arnatt who has introduced some new movements into our sessions. These have been partly in response to requests from some members to reduce the frequency of the three board sit out when there is a half table. The new movement should mean that we only have a 2 board sit out with the added advantage of producing a fairer result due to having only 24 boards in play, so that you play all the boards, plus playing against more players each session. The movement for odd table numbers still requires some smoothing out and we are grateful for your patience whilst this beds in.

On your behalf I wish to thank Ron and Miranda who maintain our website informing us about all the Club news and forthcoming events. I do periodically see statistics about page viewing numbers and it is clear that this is a much-valued asset for the club and I also wish to thank our

Independent Examiner, Chris Pullen who each year provides insight as to how we can make our accounts clearer. The need to reserve for unused pre-paid vouchers being a typical example where his input has been invaluable.

During the last five years we have embraced a number of changes and I again thank you all for supporting them. Who would have ever thought that we would move away from collecting cash for table money, so no longer an opportunity for some of you, following your summer holiday abroad, to use up your spare overseas coins. Firstly, the move to collecting payment through the contactless payment machine and then during this last year the move to using books of pre-paid vouchers has significantly improved the efficiency of our accounting and banking. The take up of the books of vouchers has far exceeded our initial aspirations and so the queues which used to form for payment at the central table each time are a long-forgotten memory. The battle we had last year proving that we were not a gambling den, getting our contactless machine reinstated, has more than paid off.

I never cease to be amazed by the generous fund raising of our members. During the five years for which I have been Chairman we have raised over £14,800 for a variety of causes and over the next few months there will be further opportunities to continue this good work. Next month we will again be entering the CIN SIMs and then in December the Dorin Salver SIMs organised by Surrey in aid of QEF. Our Christmas event will be raising funds for Cherry trees which provides short term respite for children and young adults. In March we will again be holding an Andrew Robson Masterclass with funds raised being split between the Barn Hall and other local charitable organisations. Shortly after I became Chairman in 2018 we celebrated our fifty year anniversary. As well as a number of one-off events, including our golden anniversary tea, we raised considerable funds which went to a number of causes nominated by our members as well as providing £800 towards the furtherance of bridge amongst the younger generations in Surrey.

Mentioning the Barn Hall, reminds me that we should pass on the thanks of the Club to Roger and Rob who prepare the Hall and then clear away afterwards for us. On your behalf we do give them something a little more tangible, by way of thanks, at Christmas.

The fact that we have such a smoothly run club is of course 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 but there is one area where the Club needs more of your help and that is we need more of you to volunteer to act as host. We have been so successful in attracting new members and I know that some of our newer members do drive some distance to play. But if everyone takes a turn then you should only need to act as host once every two years or so – not much of an ask – rather than relying on a limited number of individuals who kindly fill in at short notice whenever we look to have a gap. Just occasionally, and that is sad, we have not been able to provide a host and an individual looking for a game has had to return home. I urge you all to find a slot when approached, or just add your name to the schedule on the side table.

Finally, this now only leaves me to pass on my biggest vote of thanks and that is to your committee. Not just the most recent committee but to each of those who stood over the last five years. We have been so lucky to have had so many willing committee members and they have all worked so hard setting up the sessions, collecting your table monies and now the vouchers plus clearing up afterwards. More importantly they have acted as a team supporting me and I am extremely grateful to them all. However, I should like to single out two individuals who, without whom, I should not have been able to complete the last five years and they are Kate, who administers our membership so efficiently and who does so much more besides plus Sue, who I know sometimes gets driven to despair by my interfering with her cash analysis. Thank you both for all your support and I know that the next Chairman will be equally grateful for your support over the next 12 months.

I am convinced 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 your support over the last five years and ensuring that Bookham Afternoon Bridge Club continues to flourish. I know that the Club will be in safe hands with Jerry, and I urge you all to support my proposal by electing him as your new Chairman shortly. I will support him in every way possible and I am sure that you will all help him as much as you have helped me.

Thank you.

Neil Higgins

16 October 2023