

BABC 2024-25 Chairman's Report

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

This year's review of the year just gone was dominated by two main events, both of which stalled the plans the committee had at the beginning of the year to continue making this a welcoming, high quality bridge club, where a good standard of bridge could be enjoyed throughout the year.

The first was the death of my wife Elisabeth only a month into my second year as Chairman, and the second was Kate's decision to step down as Club Secretary after 10 years of loyal service to the club.

As every previous Chairman of the club will tell you, you need an excellent sounding board at home to listen to your thoughts and ideas about the club, and to steer you in the right direction. Elisabeth was that for me and she was brilliant at it. She gave me so much good, sound advice, gleaned from 10 years of expertise as a Head Teacher herself. I often adopted her suggestions of how best to go about things because, as you may appreciate, getting a group of intelligent but opinionated individuals to agree on something new and different can be a bit tricky! Very tricky! Let's just say that, amongst other things, I miss her wonderful calmness and diplomacy in knowing how best to get things done!

It was inevitable that Kate would step down as Club Secretary one day, having put her heart and soul into it and making the role her very own. She was an excellent club secretary and all of us have benefitted from her expertise and thoroughness. She went above and beyond what she needed to do, and many of you will have been very appreciative of the time and attention she gave you whenever you wanted to speak to her directly. She was also very good in giving us plenty of notice of her intention to step down. The committee took the opportunity to modernise and streamline the role because there was simply no way that Marilyn, as our new Club Secretary, was going to be able to devote as much time to it as Kate has done. Enter Pianola. As we have been explaining to you, Pianola is a programme designed specifically for bridge clubs which enables us to stay on top of our onerous GDPR requirements. It also improves the way the club communicates with you whilst at the same time keeping your data very secure. It also has another major benefit in that Marilyn will not have to spend hours on GDPR compliance herself. She can rely on Pianola to process that for her, whilst she herself acts as the Data Controller. Win, win.

Of course, the club had to transfer the data we had from our current systems to Pianola's systems. Neil Higgins agreed to head up the small team responsible for that transition, comprising Kate, Marilyn, Yvonne and Neil himself. The transition was hard work for the team involved but finally appears to have been implemented successfully. I think the club owes them an enormous vote of thanks and gratitude for their superb efforts behind the scenes. Please can we show our appreciation in the usual way.

The club can now look forward to a new era of GDPR compliance while key individuals on the committee also hone their skills in learning how to get the best out of Pianola. Neil has also very kindly agreed to stay on as our friendly Pianola expert for a few more months to help key committee members through the learning process.

Will Pianola cost us money? Not initially because the first year is free! But it will in future, particularly if our table numbers continue to increase. A very small price to pay in my opinion because Marilyn would not have agreed to become our new Club Secretary without the assistance Pianola gives her. The role is time consuming enough as it is, let me tell you. Kate herself can vouch for that!

We have also taken the opportunity to syphon off some of the peripheral roles Kate also managed to do, like the Harrison Room list and the Spare Partner List. Jill Pattison has volunteered to do both. Thank you Jill! It means more of the workload of managing the club is shared among members. I'm all for that.

But despite these two major distractions, your experienced committee continued to ensure the smooth operational running of the club with the minimum of fuss. New members were welcomed; rotas were prepared; table vouchers were collected and the tea and biscuits magically appeared at half time. What I have always liked so much about your committee is that, whenever something went wrong over the last year, the number of individuals who stepped up and wanted to help never ceased to amaze and humble me. Truly phenomenal, and thank you all on the committee for that. There are others who also continue to give extra hours of their time to the club: - Miranda, as our superb Webmaster, Neil as the head of scoring and now our Pianola expert too (you already know from his previous senior roles in the club how talented he is) and finally to the duplicating teams who ensure the boards are prepared well in advance every week. The teams are now ably led by Steve Leach. Once again, thank you all, and thank you for the extra hours you give.

Going forward, the Committee is going to be bolstered by two new members, David Allbuery, and Alan Long. Their own expertise of being on other committees and their calm influences are likely to be very welcome. I have a feeling that we will be able to get back to fulfilling the ambitious plans and priorities the committee had for the Club quite quickly. But first, I would just like to go through those priorities, to indicate how many of them we can already tick off. Here goes:

The first was to continue the previous Committee's plan to improve efficiency and increase the membership back to pre-Covid levels. With the help and support of you, the members, continuing to introduce your bridge friends to the club, we are nearing our maximum membership of 210 members. We currently stand at 203 members with an excellent pipeline of potential new members doing their visits, waiting patiently to join the club. The maximum is drawing close and I don't think it will be too long before we have a waiting list once again!

The second was to increase the Club's 'technical human resources' i.e. Directors, Scorers, Dealing Coordinators, etc. We have certainly achieved that on the directors'

front with 6 new directors joining the existing team and several are now very happy to direct as often as they can, headed by Adrian and Richard. Roger Sugden has joined the scoring team and Sue McDonald has expressed an interest in joining the scoring team in due course. Steve Leach now heads up the Duplimating teams, but we also have Richard Arnatt and Marilyn who have thorough duplimating knowledge themselves, sufficient to show new duplimators exactly what to do. So we can tick that one off too.

The third was to spread the knowledge more widely among key people. As you know, the aim is to make sure we have cover at all times when key members are off sick or are on holiday. This is always a work-in-progress priority, because you can't really have too many knowledgeable people in a club of this size. Still, as you have just heard, we are doing very well on that front too.

So far I have only talked about the plans which had previous priority, but there are others now. The biggest new priority is to implement Pianola into our daily bridge lives and to get key committee members fully integrated and conversant with what it can do to help us. That is going to take time but it will be worth it because Pianola has much to offer. So far, we are only scratching the surface of its capabilities.

If we have time, we would also like to take a closer look at the needs of our members, explore the “power of the welcome” and to continue to improve your own awareness of the EBU’s standards and regulations. In my opinion, you as members will always benefit from knowing those standards and regulations well, and I make no apologies in believing that we should always be improving our own knowledge of this magnificent game of cards.

I also have some new ideas but I need to discuss these with the committee first!

Finally, a club is only as good as its members, which is where every one of you plays a key role each week, by coming and playing. I am particularly pleased with the regularity with which our newer members come to play. That enthusiasm for the game is great to see and is a key reason why the club has posted such positive numbers in our financial results for the year. Our visitor numbers continue to increase too, so things are looking rosy. Thank you all for promoting the club to your bridge playing friends and acquaintances as you have done this year. Please continue to do so. Visitors I have spoken to this year tell me that they really appreciate the friendliness which you the members show them. That in turn makes them feel very welcome indeed. This is also a large part of “the power of the welcome” idea I referred to earlier, which the committee would like to explore further in due course.

Smiles on faces is also something I like to see. The sense that we take our bridge seriously but we don’t get too grumpy about it when things don’t quite go our way. And they don’t! It is only a game after all! Incidents of bad behaviour are also down this year which is good, but can always be improved upon. So remember, if there is bad behaviour at your table, do call the director. He/she will clamp down on bad behaviour because it has no place in our club.

This year, I have also valued how critical the supportive side of the Club is, particularly as we get older and need some help from our bridge friends ourselves at one point or another. There are some very good examples of that support out there - Adrian for instance giving Clive a lift whenever he can. And he is by no means the only one doing good things for fellow members. I have benefitted from that generous support myself so I know how important it is to one's wellbeing. It's certainly lovely to see it being offered to others who need it which is entirely down to the kindness of spirit within all of you. Long may that continue.

The buzz at tea time, the sounds of laughter and the general noise of people chatting in good cheer is another example of a happy place. I love to hear it. The over-subscribed Christmas event; the generous raffle prizes at charity fundraising events also tell me that this is not just a Bridge Club - it is a place of genuine friendship, warmth and kindness.

This bridge club will not stand still, there's too much we still have to do! So thank you for all your continued support. Much appreciated! Keep coming to play and we, the committee, will just crack on, and continue to make your day's bridge an enjoyable one!

Thank you for listening.

Jerry Broers