

Cheltenham Bridge Club AGM 26th April 2025

Chair's report

This has been a very busy but positive year for the bridge club. We have been managing a lot of change and making some improvements. A new strategy was agreed last summer which included advertising for and recruitment of a new operations and development manager. There is a huge amount of work involved in running CBC and we have always relied on and continue to rely on many wonderful hardworking volunteers. However, like many similar sized bridge clubs we increasingly realised we needed to make this new appointment. We welcomed Steve Bunker last October and he has already made a significantly positive impact.

Management Committee

I am sincerely grateful to all the members of the MC who contribute their time and expertise in so many ways. It is a reflection of this great team that enables such a supportive and friendly atmosphere around the committee table.

There have been several changes to the MC. I was most grateful to Toby Roberts as before stepping down he supported me as deputy chair during the first six months of my tenure. He has contributed a huge amount of work over the years to the club for which we are most grateful, and he continues to provide some input over complaints and disciplinary policy. John Skjonnemand is stepping down from his role running the bridge programme. There can't be a single member who doesn't know John and appreciate just how much he contributes to the club. Thankfully he will continue to direct and I am sure he will be a support to Steve who will be overseeing the bridge programme and development going forwards.

We are also very sorry to see Nicola Renshaw leaving the MC and from running our highly successful teaching programme. The Bournemouth trip continues to be very popular as well. Nicola has done a really fantastic job establishing our teaching programme over many years and we are most grateful to her.

Last summer we welcomed Louise Wilkinson to the MC. She had no specific portfolio but contributed enthusiastically in many different ways and kept an eye on the noticeboards. She has recently stepped down, but I would like to thank her for her contributions in the short time she was on the MC.

I am delighted to announce that Robert Huguenin and Jan Bailey are up for election to the MC. Robert's portfolio will be café and catering and Jan's portfolio will be teaching.

To the remaining existing MC members not mentioned by name, I would like to extend a personal huge thank you to you all for your continued support and hard work.

Volunteers

There are a huge number of volunteers who are all essential to the running of our club. From the duplimators, rota planners, directors, scorers, IT and kitchen provision purchasers plus so many others, on behalf of all the club members I would like to thank you for your support and efforts. I would also like to thank the volunteers in particular for making Steve welcome and assisting him as he settles in. He has taken on a new role which is not always easy and we have all had to adapt and adjust. I would also like to mention and extend my thanks to Pauline Sanderson for doing such a professional job on refreshing and updating the club website.

Bridge programme

There has been a small percentage drop in membership compared to last year although it is less than the national trend.

Overall participation rates for face to face bridge are up by 4%, but the online participation rates have fallen. This is partly due to Danish pairs on BBO stopping last summer. This has been reinstituted and we are watching the figures carefully. Due to popular demand another "friendly" bridge session has started on Monday morning to add to the highly popular Thursday morning session. That plus the excellent mentoring sessions run by Alison Nicolson provide good opportunities for the members who are new to bridge to gain experience and enjoy their games.

The new Friday afternoon session is also gaining popularity. There is also a handicapped pairs session on Thursday evenings which is being trialled.

The GCBA Monday evening events held on site remain very popular.

In addition to our own club events and competitions, CBC hosts and takes part in several regional and national events.

Congratulations go to Patrick Shields and Richard Chamberlain who have qualified to represent England in this year's Senior Camrose (Teltscher Trophy) in May of this year.

Thank you to Ro Kaye and her team for putting on Cheltenham Congress last August. There was lots of positive feedback and the event will run again this August at Dean Close.

There is an excellent programme of development and support for youth bridge run by Gloucestershire Youth Bridge and supported by GCBA. We are delighted to assist in their efforts by providing our facilities for some of their sessions and some of our members actively take part in the teaching.

Finances

Angela our treasurer does a most important and demanding job for us. We are very fortunate to have her and are most grateful for all her hard work. Table money has not changed since 2017. Since that time, we have had years of inflation sometimes at 10%, huge increases in the price of gas and electricity bills and significant increases in the costs of building maintenance, and in addition to this, the recent requirement for an employed operations and development manager. For these reasons, we will be asking members to vote on a small rise in table money.

Teaching

The teaching programme continues to be a very active and successful aspect of the club. We have seen the results of its success in the applications for membership and the increased attendance at gentle bridge sessions. This is an essential arm of the bridge club and we are most grateful to all the teachers and admin staff and of course Nicola who have made this work so well.

Premises

We enjoy this lovely old club building with its high ceilings and grand staircase and large numbers of people passing through every day. All this requires regular care and maintenance. For many years this has been overseen by Peter Swales and indeed he was delighted to host The Cheltenham Heritage day last autumn whereby members of the public could look around and admire. The maintenance programme over the last year has included repainting the external paintwork at the back, cleaning of the front of the building and tree surgery. In addition there is the regular maintenance of the lift, fire alarm system, plumbing etc. Although Steve is

now taking on much of the day to day building management, Peter continues to be a huge support and a font of knowledge when it comes to our lovely building.

Catering

It has taken some time to find the best solution for our tea and coffee breaks. Coffee machines were trialled but proved not ideal and expensive. Steve has recently recruited Phoenix to serve hot drinks for every session during the day and many evenings as well. You are now served a hot drink and biscuit with a friendly smile, from a kitchen meeting proper standards of hygiene and health and safety. These are standards rightly expected for a Charity Incorporated Organisation. Over time, what is on offer may be developed further depending on demand and practicality.

RIP

Several of our members passed away this year; Alan Thomas, Peter Jackson, Ralph Brooks, Richard Harris and Marion Howitt. Our sincere condolences go to their family and friends.

Finally other than a most supportive MC and many friendly faces over the bridge table, I would like to thank Alan Wearmouth and all the trustees for their support and friendship. There are always occasionally stormy seas but on the whole the ship is moving forwards and the waters are currently calm!

Sophie Jaques April 2025