

EWBA CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021/22

I took on the Chairmanship of East Wales in the autumn of 2020, following on from the late Geoff Evans. Shortly thereafter Sue Ingham took over the website from Mia Deschepper. I knew that Simon Gottschalk intended to step down as Treasurer, and he resigned formally in March 2021. I had hoped that we might find a replacement, but ill health put paid to that so I took on the Treasurer role in addition to being Chairman. Helen Houston remained as ATO, with Bill Parkinson as Secretary. Richard Welsford continued as Western League organiser, and Adrian Trickey continued as EW League organiser until stepping down for family reasons, to be replaced by Mia. I would like to thank all these officers for their efforts on your behalf.

Competitive bridge (that is to say, beyond the club game) has been in decline in our area, and in Wales generally, for at least thirty years. We have failed to recruit a new tranche of tournament players, and time's winged chariot has taken care of the rest. We are desperately short of players, and also short of people willing to give their time to keep an amateur sport on the road. There was bound to come a point when tournament bridge in Wales would cease to be viable, and we are approaching that point. The pandemic has also had an impact – positive in some ways, with the fillip given to online competition and the creation of new platforms, but negative in its having accelerated the decline in entries for local tournaments.

This has been reflected in entries to East Wales events this year. Despite Helen's considerable efforts, augmented by Charlotte Ingham's skill in designing brochures, entries to our autumn events – Stan Berger, Patrick Jourdain and Mixed Pairs – were very disappointing (5 tables or fewer). These events ran at a loss, which is not a problem in itself but is further confirmation of the direction of travel.

We had hoped to hold our February Congress at Lysaght's, as before the pandemic, but we gave up on that in the face of the continuing health risk. The event was reasonably successful online, but entries were about 35% down on last year. The Congress threw me an unexpected curve ball when I discovered that there was a parallel East Wales account in an American bank, operated through the BESS entry system and linked to our Barclays account by means of a Direct Debit.

Online bridge will obviously have a part to play in future, but Congresses need to be face to face or they are virtually indistinguishable from one another. Given our small pool of local players, the February event, if run online, is likely to see a further decline in numbers. Our ability to run a successful Congress at Lysaghts once the pandemic recedes must also be open to doubt. We don't have enough support in the locality.

The successes this year have been the East Wales League, run by Mia, and the Western League, run by Richard and Mike Best. Both events are well adapted to online play, and provided the organisers remain in post they should continue to flourish. My personal view is that the League should be confined to local players in order to retain its distinctiveness, but I lost that battle.

One of the privileges of being EWBA Chairman is that it gives one a seat on the management committee of the Welsh Bridge Union. If I sound depressed about the future of East Wales, I am even more pessimistic with regard to the prospects for the WBU. I doubt it can survive as an independent NBO, and I doubt it deserves to survive. The organisation is not fulfilling its basic functions. It desperately needs an injection of new blood, but I can't see where that is going to come from. I did not allow my name to go forward as the next President of the WBU because I did not think I could turn the organisation around.

I see more hope for EWBA, but it needs new post-holders to support Helen and the other remaining officers. The members of that team need to be comfortable working together.

I will step down as Chairman at the AGM. I will fulfil Treasurer responsibilities as they relate to the 21/22 season, but not beyond that.

Gwynn Davis

April 2022