

Chairman's Report to the AGM 2022

Looking back at my report for last year's AGM, many of the issues remain the same. The optimism that we could return to some sort of normality during 2021 was dashed in the autumn, although with hindsight the omicron strain seems to have helped to reduce the Covid virus to the status of a relatively mild seasonal infection. Most of us can look forward to yet another vaccine injection later in the year!

Society as a whole has largely returned to pre-Covid normality, albeit with some areas that are struggling, notably the NHS. The picture for bridge is somewhat patchy still. Many clubs have returned to F2F, some offering a mixture of online and F2F. Sadly some of our smaller clubs have not resumed and may well not do so. Numbers are still down compared with pre-Covid but in my club (Farnborough) attendance is gradually increasing, heading back towards the numbers that we had pre-Covid. As a County we continue to offer some online games, with the 9 High Saturday afternoon game still thriving. We are aiming to return to largely F2F for County Competitions, with our first one being the Phillimore, which is held at the same time as this AGM. We are combining with Sussex to run a joint Congress (F2F) at the end of October. This will enable us to offer GP events on both days. Please look out for the advertising in due course. We will still be running some online games, and are considering establishing a Kent teams league to run online.

In the medium to long term the overwhelming priority for all of us is to attract new players to our game. In my opinion we need to offer F2F bridge as a social experience, as well as a competitive challenge. While online bridge will continue to have a place, the length of time that it takes to learn bridge may not be that attractive to people if it is essentially another computer game, competing with all the others that are out there. We have to encourage more people to attend our clubs, otherwise they will gradually wither and die.

To try and make learning to play bridge quicker and easier, and thus more attractive, Kent are collaborating with the EBU in September to run a trial of a new initiative called 'SmartBridge'. This is a 10 week online course designed to teach people the basics of the game, without going into too much detail on bidding systems and conventions. The hope is that this will inspire the participants to take further lessons and proceed in due course to playing in our clubs. However this programme will need a number of volunteers to assist, who have to attend the online sessions with the pupils to facilitate the break out sessions, and then to host the follow up supervised play sessions, preferably F2F.

While I realise that this is a big commitment for people to offer, if we get enough volunteers the load will be spread. This cannot be left to just a few members to do, we need a concerted effort from everybody to make this work. So my plea to all of you is to please get involved and offer whatever time you can to make this a success and start the process of securing the future of our great game. You do not need to be a trained teacher to do this, but we would of course welcome more teachers into our ranks as we definitely need more. My thanks to Pat Welsh, who is working really hard on this initiative.

The County remains in a healthy financial position and we continue to look for ways that we can assist any projects that will further the game in Kent. So far we have agreed to sponsor Tom Furness and Thomas Gardner to help them attend the Junior European Championships next month. We contributed to the costs of the annual Junior Bridge Camp last year, and intend to do so again this year. On the teaching front we are trying to increase the number of teachers and have offered to pay half of the fee for the teacher training course for the second person attending from any of our clubs, the EBU fully subsidise the first person. We are happy to consider any requests for financial assistance that will help clubs recover from the impact of Covid, and we are particularly keen on anything that will help grow our membership base and attract new players to the game.

On the representative front it has been a bit of a lean year for Kent representative teams. We won the 'A' Division of the Metropolitan Cup in November and went on to win the 'A' Division in the National Inter-County League Finals. Congratulations to the team, Kay Preddy, Norman Selway, Colin Wilson, Gerald Soper, John Amor, John Hemington, Peter Law and Steve Auchterlonie. Kent also currently lead the Home Counties League Division 'A' with one match to go.

We have had a number of individual successes throughout out the year, which have been documented in my reports to the Committee, and on the web site.

I am particularly proud of the leading role that Kent played in the Kent/Surrey/Sussex GP Swiss Teams held online in April, with all proceeds going to the Ukraine Refugee Appeal. Everyone involved gave their time free of charge and we raised (after calculating Gift Aid) over £12000. A magnificent effort for a most worthy cause.

Finally can I pay tribute to the members of the Kent Committee. In my humble opinion Kent is lucky to have such an outstanding Committee. As members you may not be aware of the amount of work that is going on behind the scenes, not only on the competitions and other visible stuff, but also the more mundane stuff such as keeping the membership records up to date, handling the finances and locating and engraving the trophies, to mention just a few. The members of the Committee are very enthusiastic and dedicated, and have worked extremely hard this year. My thanks go to them all.

If anyone has any suggestions for how we can further improve what we do in Kent, or, even better, if you can offer your time and expertise to help run bridge in Kent, then please let us know. We would still like to recruit a Publicity and Social Media officer, to reach out to potential new members and to continue to raise the profile of KCBA in the bridge world.

I hope to see you all in person in the near future.

Norman Inniss

Chair KCBA June 2022