

NORTHERN IRELAND BRIDGE UNION.

REPORT OF THE HONORARY SECRETARY 2022-23

Administration

Council met 5 times during the year under the chairmanship of Brian Mullan. One of the meetings was held via Zoom. The Management Committee continue to meet sporadically when needs arise and remains incumbent on the Union to review its current structures in the light of declining membership and other changes taking place.

The Laws & Ethics Committee considered a serious case of online cheating early in 2023. As a result two members were banned from playing for a period. It was agreed that players under suspicion would be monitored closely.

Affiliation

The Union now has 31 affiliated clubs. We have lost 16 clubs since the pandemic. Membership stands at 1485. Although the decline is to be regretted, things could be worse – our membership is almost exactly the same as in Wales , a country with double our population! The Belfast-based clubs of Derryvolgie and Kelvin & Malone remain our biggest clubs by far with over 500 members between them. The good news is that our 3rd biggest club is newly affiliated St. Colmcille based in Holywood with 91 members. The biggest ‘country’ club is Newcastle with 80 members. Many clubs continue to play both live and online .

Some Thoughts on the Future of Bridge

With the pandemic hopefully behind us it is incumbent on Bridge administrators to take a cold hard look at how the game has changed in recent times.

Arguably Covid simply speeded up a process of change that was already taking place notably:

- the inexorable rise of online bridge from its origins in mid-1990s
- the dearth of young people taking up the game.
- conversely an increase in retired folk taking up the game as part of their retirement programme e.g. via U3a.

The hoped-for return to face-to-face Bridge has been sporadic to say the least. The social aspects of playing live have in many ways been trumped by the convenience offered by the online game. Suddenly many aspects of playing live seem hopelessly out of date – having to handle cards, delays caused by revokes and rulings, the lack of instantaneous scoring. It is true that cheating online is a problem but the live game is equally spoiled by players discussing hands they have just played within earshot of other tables (exhortations by TD’s not to discuss hands have always been routinely ignored by many).

There is much speculation that a TV series or film centred on the game could work wonders for Bridge in a way that ‘The Queen’s Gambit’ brought Chess to many young people. However the Chess authorities have found that young people want to play on their own terms, in this case the ‘speed game’ is their preferred mode of play. It’s highly likely that playing online will be the norm for young players who may nevertheless be attracted to ‘live’ Bridge when it features as a special occasion.

Michael McFaul
Honorary Secretary