

Chairman's report AGM October 2022

The OBA has been through quite a difficult few years, facing large challenges and operating on a minimal staff. The AGM was cancelled in 2020 and since then I would describe what we have been doing as "firefighting".

A few short words on the negatives before we focus on the positives. COVID hit the bridge-playing population and still threatens the existence of some clubs. When I took on the Chairmanship, I did so on the understanding that we would get a secretary. We do not have a secretary and no nominations have been forthcoming. It had been the intention of the Treasurer to resign at the 2020 AGM. Face-to-face meetings stopped and it's likely that the new norm will be Zoom for all committee meetings. This works well with existing members but is not a good forum for recruiting new helpers.

Counties throughout the country are facing difficulties: the situation is very different from that of years ago when there was a natural progression from club to County to national competitions. We seem to be facing the question of "What is our primary role?". Entries to County competitions are generally falling.

But I think we can look back on several positives over the last couple of years.

Oxfordshire was one of the first counties to get going with regular sessions on BBO. Starting initially with County nights, we and the EBU gradually rolled out training to several clubs. This resulted in many of our clubs starting online sessions and these contributed greatly to the wellbeing of their members and helped maintain communities. Many clubs then moved to RealBridge when it became available and this, I think, enhanced the online playing experience.

At the start of Lockdowns, OBA was there to offer regular Junior games, nationally.

The County is financially stable. We have offered financial help to clubs who may be struggling but none have yet taken advantage of this offer.

The Wessex League is successful. We've lost some teams and gained others – in particular, the daytime session is thriving.

The new X-IMP pairs league is functioning successfully and numbers are growing.

The Congress has been held online twice, this year in conjunction with Berks and Bucks. Increased EBU fees and sharing of profits led to a lower profit this year (about £800 including B&B's Teams event). It may be time to return to a face-to-face congress.

Teaching has continued with many teachers successfully transitioning to online. Although classes in general are down in numbers, it is hoped that these will start to grow. Successful clubs will be those that embrace beginners and have a structure in place for them to develop their game in "Learn and Play" and "Gentle" sessions

Peter Litchfield, having resigned as Treasurer agreed to continue with running the bank account: making payments and checking balances. We eventually managed to update signatories to include me, so the financial side continues to function. What has not been done is detailed accounting. I am very grateful to Peter – thank you.

I owe huge thanks to Robert Procter. Throughout this time he has always been there as a support and has helped in many ways. And to Stephen Brown who is always willing to take on those website and scoring tasks. Sandra Nicholson has been extremely efficient and helpful as Wessex secretary, thank you. Thanks also to Dave Tarsky for his help in organizing Wessex matches. And thanks to Alan Grunwald and Dermot Padden, together with Dave T, who in the early days of online Wessex helped with writing instructions for players and captains. Thank you to John Rowe for help with the organization and directing of competitions. To Sandra Claridge for running the President's Cup. And to Peter Finbow for help with competitions for relative newcomers.

I think the time is now here when we need to get back to normal and start thinking and planning for the future. For this we need help from our membership. It is not too late for any volunteers to come forward.

Before I finish, it is my pleasure to announce two awards that have been made since our last AGM.

Congratulations to **Holly Kilpatrick**, member of Oxford and Summertown bridge clubs. Holly received the Tom Bradley award which for her significant contribution to junior bridge. Holly established the Oxford Junior Bridge Club in 2014 and has been the driving force behind establishing junior bridge in the Oxford area, with some of her pupils even progressing to international representation in their age groups. Holly was nominated by Oxford Bridge Club, supported by the OBA.

And congratulations to **Robert Procter** who receives the EBU's Silver Award. Robert has contributed a huge amount to the development of bridge in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. His infectious enthusiasm has resulted in an increased uptake of bridge in the county at all levels. He has been a hard-working member of the Association's management team for at least ten years and was active behind the scenes for many years before that. Robert became OBA Chairman in 2011 and continued until illness necessitated his resignation in 2018. Robert continues on the committee to this day, heading the Promotions team. He also is an active and effective participant in the Midland Counties Working group.

Robert has given a huge proportion of his time to encouraging newcomers. He introduced new events for newcomers and improvers and strongly encouraged participation. These events included festivals, "High Fives", Nine and Under and similar grade-limited events. He continues to raise the profile of bridge throughout the county and was instrumental in setting up the OBA Facebook page. His passion for the game has not been daunted by successive Lockdowns; when he has been a vital force for good in the continuance of the online game.

Robert is forward-thinking and creative. Currently, much of his energy is given to imagining how the game can continue to grow and flourish.

Robert has yet to receive his trophy as we wanted to present it face-to-face. **PRESENTATION**