

OBA Officers' Reports for Management Committee meeting on 8th December 2011

Chairman

I have spent much of the past four months on the tasks of getting to know the officers, visiting all 18 of our affiliated clubs, and using a survey to find out from our members what they want from their county association. The result of all of this activity is that I believe we now do have a much clearer picture of what needs to be done. But of course no-one will think anything of us if we don't get on and do it.

A few key objectives that I would pick out of the many that have been identified:

- Promotion aimed at all constituencies
- Educational opportunities at all levels
- Regional activities – whether training, competitive or social bridge
- Competitions for all levels
- Help for beginners to cross the gap to being club players
- Improved communication – website and other
- Clubs and county working together for Oxfordshire bridge players

And a few pressing issues to deal with:

- Declining numbers in our northern clubs
- Waiting lists at our central clubs
- The need to reduce the criticism that the OBA is too “Oxford-centric”
- The need to reduce the criticism that the OBA is only interested in competitive play.

These won't all be achieved at once – but if we want to take everyone with us on this journey forward we need to set the wheels in motion.

On October 31 some of us were joined by a number of interested members at Exeter Hall in Kidlington. Alan Wilson presented a summary of the survey results. I presented my vision of how I hoped the OBA might look in about four and a half years' time.

Then we split into groups to put more flesh on the bones of where we wanted to get to and how we might get there in each of the following areas:

- Duplicate Bridge Marketing
- Youth and Education
- Improvers' Development
- Social
- Communication
- County Nights and Competitions
- Selection and County Team Management
- Premises and Finance

If you haven't already done so, you should acquaint yourselves with the full content of the October 31 meeting, available on the website.

Those present agreed with my proposal that we should set up autonomous teams under the MC, each charged with responsibility for a distinct area of activity. Subsequent discussions have suggested that Youth be merged with Marketing and Improvers' Development with Education, thereby reducing the number of teams from 8 to 7. This proposal for autonomous teams together with appropriate terms of reference will need to be discussed under the Governance item on the agenda. What follows assumes the verbal support I have received for these proposals will be backed up by formal approval on December 8.

The meeting agreed that I should start to set up provisional teams as quickly as I could. Each team's first task should be to produce a refined “vision statement” for its area of responsibility, some initial suggestions as to strategy and a request for a budget. Where it was possible to do this and for a team to meet before

December 9 their vision and budget could be approved then. Other teams' vision statements and budget requests would need to be dealt with in some other way – e.g. by E-mail.

At the time of writing I am still working on building these teams and will give a full up-date at the meeting. My intention is to find a team leader for each team who is not currently an executive officer of the association, to ensure that each team contains at least one officer, to ensure that all officers (other than myself and Sandra, as we will be keeping the overview) are included in a team and to ensure that each team contains representatives from all five regions of the county (N, S, E, W and Central).

The leaders I have recruited so far are:

- Duplicate Bridge Marketing and Youth – Mike Fletcher
- Education and Improvers' Development – Gillian Weatherley
- Communication – Peter Litchfield
- County Nights and Competitions – John Slater
- Selection and County Team Management – Alan Wilson

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has helped me to get this far, particularly Gillian and Alan for their fantastic work on the survey, and Sandra for keeping me on the straight and narrow. - *Robert Procter*

Treasurer

Balance in Current Account	£ 5321.13
Standard Life Account	£25104.89
Total funds	£30426.02

It is intended that in future budgets for various groups within the Management Committee will be agreed, and reported to Committee Meetings. - *Dinah Lintott*

Secretary: including correspondence

Nothing to report on this occasion.

- *Sandra Nicholson*

Chief Tournament Director

The Men's and Ladies' pairs went very well under the direction and scoring of Marryat Stevens and Rob Dixon (many thanks to them both). Entries were small, around 6-7 tables for each. Entries for the Swiss Pairs are going much better (already around 15 tables) and Kathy Talbot & I are directing / scoring this.

I am looking for some directors from clubs around the county to direct some other County Events, including the County Pairs Semifinal and Final and Beck Cup Heat in January. If any club director would like to get involved in directing county events, please get in touch with me. TD Fees are paid and there is no reason why we cannot look for a change of venue for at least one event, e.g. one of the County Pairs Semifinals.

Stephen Brown

Membership Secretary

There are currently 1271 Full Members of OBA including 22 Direct Members. The number of Direct Members has increased from 5, in March 2011, to 22 primarily as a result of the EBU's decision to collect county membership fees for Direct Members on behalf of the counties. In addition to our Full Members,

there are currently 32 Dual Members. It should be noted that members of the EBU through 'Bridge for All' and living in Oxfordshire are no longer included in OBA membership figures unless they also belong to an Affiliated Club.

The Management Committee's decision to offer free membership to Juniors playing Bridge in Oxfordshire has not yet resulted in a significant increase in Junior Members. This decision needs to be communicated to those working in the Youth Bridge programme with guidance on the joining process.

In September the OBA Competitions Brochure was distributed electronically to all members whose email addresses were on the EBU database. Hard copies were posted to those without email addresses and ten spare copies were posted to the secretary of each of our Affiliated Clubs. Approximately 80 of the email addresses supplied to the EBU by members were incorrect. Each returned email was traced to the member to whom it had been sent and letters were sent out to these members explaining the process for changing their recorded email via the Members Login on the EBU website. In total, OBA has email addresses for approximately 60% of its members.

A working group was set up to discuss membership. This group's report will be presented to the meeting as a separate agenda item.
- Vicky Fleming

Tournament Secretary

Entries for the Ladies' & Men's Pairs were reasonable but both events should be attracting higher attendance figures. We also offered a Newcomers Prize in both events, but failed to attract any Newcomers to the Ladies' event. By contrast, the Swiss Pairs event was fully subscribed and attracted a waiting list.

I feel that we have been a little vague in our definition of Newcomers and would like the Committee to define this for future events.
- Claire MacDonagh

Webmaster/Internet Officer

Nothing to report on this occasion.
- Alan Grunwald

EBU Shareholders

The EBU AGM on 5th October was attended by all three of our OBA shareholders. Draft minutes are now available on the EBU website, but to summarise the main items of note:

- From April 2012 Bridge Great Britain (BGB) will continue to run home internationals, but will no longer organise Sim Pairs in the UK. Instead these will be run by the EBU using new in-house software. The Gold Cup will continue but the final will be moved from Peebles, most probably to the Midlands.
- Despite making a loss in the latest financial year, the Treasurer felt that the underlying position of the organisation was sound. He hoped to return to surplus in 2012/13, partly by raising the P2P charge and partly from additional income generated by taking on the Sim Pairs. Efforts to reduce costs were also ongoing. The meeting voted virtually unanimously to accept the proposed 2p increase in the P2P charge, from 31p to 33p, from April 2012.
- The board is continuing to explore the possibility of becoming a registered charity which could bring significant financial benefits, although it might also require substantial change in operating methods. It was agreed that this was worth pursuing in principle and an expenditure of up to £30k for professional advice in this respect was authorised. A detailed proposal will be put to next year's AGM.
- The National Grading Scheme (NGS) is making progress and is expected to go live early in 2012, based on all the data accumulated since the introduction of P2P.
- Three new board members were elected: Ian Payn, Val Gibson and Jerry Cope. Congratulations to Nick Smith who was elected, in a competitive ballot, to the national Selection Committee.

The next meeting will be held on 18 April 2012. A Chairmen's Conference will be held on July 11 2012.

Sandra Nicholson/Brenda Harris/Alan Wilson

Publicity Officer

The most exciting development in recent months is the participation of all-Oxfordshire Newcomers in our "County Nights." By far the most popular event was the "Pivot Teams with an Expert." We are grateful to OBC for allowing the front room to be used solely for this purpose.

The Men's & Ladies' Pairs were very well attended due to the late entries of the "Non-Expert" pairs. For future events, the term "Newcomers" should be used as "non-expert" includes many players of long-standing who have failed to improve their standard.

- Brenda Harris

Match Secretary

Since the last meeting in July we have played two further matches in the Midlands league. The A team managed comfortable wins in both and currently stand top of the league with a margin on 7VPs over Gloucestershire in second, who we still have to play. The B and C teams have had less success and are both currently in 5th (out of 9) in their respective leagues.

Unfortunately the Tollemache qualifier was not a success. Oxfordshire got a reasonable draw playing in a group with many teams of a similar standard, however the team underperformed. Only one pair managed a positive butler, another was level and a couple were heavily minus. The team finished 7th out of 9 in the group.

I received our first invitation in over 12 months to send a team to the Nottinghamshire Anniversary teams. We managed to field a reasonably strong team who finished 4th out of 9, though one of the players indicated to me that the standard was not particularly high.

- Ian Angus

President's/Chester/Wessex League Secretary

President's Cup and Chester Cups are proceeding okay and with very few problems. The Chester Cup is in two mini-leagues this season, with just three matches to be played by each team before a split (cut) of two different divisions depending on results.

Re. the Wessex League, I have received a further specific complaint about home venues when these are members' private houses. Although I do not think we wish to ban these completely, as sometimes they can be very good places to play, there are nonetheless serious issues with lighting and heating, animals and choice of venue. Let me deal with each of these in turn:

1) Lighting and heating. These really do have to be adequate....complaints have been received in the past, from several different clubs, that some players have trouble seeing their cards when playing matches in houses. It is not usually a problem in teams-of-four events as only two tables are then needed and most houses can cope here. However there can be lighting issues when four tables are needed.

2) Animals. It is totally wrong that cats and dogs are allowed to roam around in the middle of an inter-club match. Not all people like animals and in any case, cats jumping on tables and dogs wandering around (particularly larger ones) can definitely affect concentration. When people compete in the Wessex League they do not expect this to happen....this is generally not the same issue for the President's Cup and Chester Cup as most of these matches do take place in private houses. People enter these two competitions in the expectation that animals will be met (albeit comments about concentration do remain relevant).

3) Choice of venue. Let us start by saying here that commonsense has to prevail. No one objects to playing matches at a club-base which is generally within a couple of miles of where the home club holds its weekly duplicate. What people do tell me they resent is being asked to travel to a private house when this necessitates about an hour's travelling for the away team's players.

I suggest that these matters go back to the sub-committee for a further discussion. I am afraid that if firm action is not taken here then we could see a reduction in numbers taking part in the Wessex and this would be a great shame.

- *Geoff Nicholas*

Youth Officer

Since the last meeting we have run a very successful mini bridge congress which was attended by 20 children. This was a great success where we ran a teams event as well as entering the results into the school mini-bridge sim pairs. This helps to promote junior bridge in Oxfordshire in one easy congress. We will aim to do this again next term, and hopefully advertise it slightly more widely as well.

Schools bridge seems to be going very well. Both Vicki Fleming and Joan Rogers are doing a fantastic job of finding more helpers, and matching them up with schools who are keen to start bridge clubs. I am both very grateful for all of their efforts, and will continue to support them both in any way that I can.

Overall I am very happy with the way that Junior bridge is developing in Oxfordshire, although I still believe there is a lot more that we can do to achieve this.

- *Marryat Stevenson*

Education Officer

To encourage newer players to attend duplicate events we ran 3 sessions on the 1st Tuesday of September, October and November. These were well received and supported by newer members. The Play with an Expert Pivot Pairs night was a particular success. However, as Oxford Bridge Club have introduced a new Intermediate night on Thursdays I feel that the Tuesday night sessions as a straightforward duplicate are now redundant. I will be exploring alternatives, such as play with an expert for the future.

As part of the Oxford Open Doors weekend we ran a bridge demonstration/taster event at Oxford Castle. This was very well attended and helped raise the profile of bridge within the city and county. Particular thanks should go to Sandra Nicholson who organised the event and to all those who helped out on the day.

Bicester Bridge Club have approached me as they are planning on starting a streamed duplicate session for newer players on their club nights and would like the County to support and assist them in this endeavour. They will also introduce an annual Pro-Am competition and again would appreciate any assistance the County can offer in setting up and promoting these new ventures.

- *Claire MacDonagh*

Club Committee representative

To follow

-*Krishan Jalie*

SJN, 01.12.11