

Oxfordshire Bridge Association
Officers' and other reports presented to the
68th Annual General Meeting – 10 June 2014

Secretary

Following a particularly poor level of attendance at the December Management Committee meeting in 2013, members were canvassed about possible changes and as a result a new schedule of meetings has been introduced, with three meetings a year to be held in March, July and November, on days and dates which so far as possible do not clash with major events within member clubs (i.e. 2nd Wednesday in March, 3rd Thursday in July and 3rd Monday in November). Refreshments were also served at the most recent meeting and this proved a popular innovation which will be continued whenever practical. It is hoped that these changes will improve the overall attendance and that wider representation will help us to reach balanced decisions in a way that is broadly representative of all areas and types of player within the county.

Towards the end of 2013 a complaint was received about some material appearing on the County website. After investigation this proved to be unfounded; however, it has led to the introduction of some helpful guidelines for the publication of website content, designed to ensure that we do not publish anything that might be seen as derogatory to either individuals or clubs.

Earlier this year, all secretaries/owners of affiliated clubs were contacted to ask for nominations for the new OBA “distinguished service” award, intended to recognise individuals who have made a significant contribution to the development of duplicate bridge in the county over a sustained period of time. Two nominations were received, for Esme Alden and Roy East, and both were accepted by the judging panel. Their citations will be circulated separately and certificates will be presented to them as part of the AGM prize-giving.

Lastly, if re-elected, this will be my 5th year as OBA Secretary. I am intending to bow out in 2015 and hope that a suitable successor can be found.

Sandra Nicholson

EBU Shareholders

At the EBU AGM in October 2013, Sally Bugden retired as EBU Chairman and was replaced by Jeremy Dhondy. It had been intended that she would go on to lead the new English Bridge Education and Development Charity [EBED], but this was prevented by family problems and so that role is now being undertaken by Jerry Cope.

Financially, the outturn for the year ending March 2013 was £61k better than budget, representing approximately 3% of total turnover. The shareholders agreed to increase the P2P amount for 2014/15 by 1p to 35p, an increase of approximately 3%, which was in line with inflation. At the April shareholders' meeting it was reported that the budget for the year ending March 2014 had again been beaten, this time by £67k, of which £45k had been donated to EBED. The budget for 2015 indicated a deficit for the year of around £15k, including a contingency for pursuing a further VAT appeal following the well-publicised rejection of the initial appeal.

During the year the Regional Club Committees were disbanded and were replaced by regional County Working Groups (focussing on communications and relationships with Counties, Clubs, Members, and potential Members), which were felt to be more productive. The EBU shop is now fully operational online, with a 12% discount available to all affiliated clubs. English Bridge will continue to be distributed as paper copies (although in a different format, to save postage costs) and the diary will be printed in the UK this year so that it can definitely be sent out with the August issue. A new structure of awards is to be introduced including individual awards for play, support for play, and teaching of mature students, and club awards based on percentage success and growth year by year.

As at 31 March 2013 the total number of members was 54,303, an increase of just over 4% on the previous year. The number of affiliated clubs had gone down slightly, from 607 to 604. The corresponding figures for Oxfordshire showed an increase of approximately 10% in the membership, to a total of 1543, but a reduction from 19 to 18 affiliated clubs (although this has since been restored

to 19 with the reaffiliation of Menagerie). An update on these figures will be available at the next EBU AGM in November.

Sandra Claridge, Sandra Nicholson and Alan Wilson

Communications and Infrastructure

Publicity Officer

This is my final report as I have now resigned from the post.

- For the past 14 years I have sent flyers for OBA comps to all clubs.
- Up until this year, I was responsible for designing the Congress advert for the EBU magazine.
- From 2000 up until 2013, I penned the Oxfordshire column in English Bridge.
- In recent years, I have contacted & encouraged all prize-winners to attend the AGM in person to receive their awards.
- I am willing to continue obtaining the refreshments served at the AGM.

Brenda Harris

County Night and Competitions

In March 2014 I agreed to take on the joint responsibility of leading the Competitions Team and acting as County Night Co-ordinator. In this capacity I was asked to address two matters on behalf of the Competitions Team:

1. A handover from Stephen Brown as County Chief TD and organiser of Tuesday night events.
2. Declining attendances, as a result of which the OBA had been subsidising Tuesday nights.

These changes needed to be made within 4 weeks so that the Tuesday night players could be forewarned of the changes and make arrangements accordingly for the start of the new County year on 1 May. This was a particular challenge to achieve because in this short timescale I needed to consult with many others, find Directors and scorers, write the protocols and rules, and of course come to understand the mechanisms of County Nights at OBC which was in itself no small matter.

1. There were many complaints about Tuesday nights – some of which were as follows
2. Playing too slowly and finishing too late
3. Standard of Bridge not good enough to attract the stronger county players
4. Monthly clash with a Menagerie teams event on a Monday night for those players unable to play consecutive nights
5. Issues with Directors and scorers and their availability
6. Results being posted onto the OBA website too late
7. Bridgemates running out of batteries

In consultation with a small enough group to support the idea of change, we put together a new programme of Tuesday night events. We consulted with the County Selection team to encourage the possibility of results on Tuesday night “flighted” events having an input into the County Selection criteria. We consulted with the Menagerie to find a way to persuade them to give up their Monday night Bridge events so as not to compete with the OBA Tuesday night events in the same week. We reaffirmed the commitment to OBC to continue to use their premises as the Tuesday night venue and to abide by the terms of our agreement with them

I also consulted as often as I could with Stephen Brown so I could come to learn about how to let him handover the helm to us following his tenure as our chief TD and county competitions organiser.

The events we have organised so far have been

1. First Tuesday – Butler Pairs organised by Rob Dixon and Aleks Lishkov
2. Second Tuesday – Multiple Teams organised by Rob Dixon and Ian Constable
3. Third Tuesday – Swiss Pairs organised by Chris Dawe and Stephen Brown
4. Fourth Tuesday – Teams League organised by Christopher Whitehouse and Alan Wilson
5. Fifth Tuesday – “Amsterdam” style individual organised by Aleks Lishkov and friends

Because of the timescale, we are aware that some issues have not been fully resolved and will be happy to discuss these further at the next Management Committee meeting. However so far the signs are encouraging: we have had 12 tables for the Swiss Pairs, 10 teams for the League, 12 teams for the multiple teams, and 17 pairs for the first flighted Butler pairs. It is early days, but there has been an atmosphere of optimism and friendship. The Swiss Pairs was also attended by two outstanding Gloucestershire players – a formula we hope to repeat with other counties. Bridge mostly finishes by 10.30 pm and we are tidied up and away by 11.00 pm.

Our plan for the future is to work at developing new opportunities for County Bridge - these may be events at other clubs, social events or new events. We will also champion a greater team spirit within the county so that those that represent the County not only cherish their place on the Oxfordshire county team, but commit to supporting County Bridge nights with charm, respect, and encouragement for all Tuesday night players!

Diana Nettleton

Chief TD

I am pleased that most Sunday competitions have been successful with good entries for the Swiss Pairs and County Pairs. Entries for the Congress and Mixed Pairs are still coming in as I write this report. I am pleased to be part of the competitions team working with Diana Nettleton to lead forward new events on a Tuesday night and initial response has been good, particularly with entries for the 3rd Tuesday Swiss Pairs and I encourage members of the County to support these new initiatives. I would like to thank the following for regularly directing / scoring this year: Rob Dixon, Aleks Lishkov, Chris Dawe & Ian Constable. I also add my thanks to Clive Keep who is retiring from his role as County Pairs co-ordinator after many years of service to the County.

Stephen Brown

Wessex League

In general this was another successful season for the Wessex League with a total of 38 teams competing from 17 different clubs.

Congratulations are due to the winners of the 5 Divisions as follows:-

Division 1: Wallingford A

Division 2: Banbury

Division 3: Aylesbury C

Division 4: Blewbury

Division 5: Wantage B

As League Division 1 winners Wallingford A duly represented the County in the Garden Cities Trophy.

Right up to the final match of the season the Division 2 contest was a particularly close and hard fought affair from the top to the bottom of the League, with second position being decided on a 3-way split tie, and the second relegation position also being decided after application of the split tie procedure. Well done to all the teams for a splendid competition.

One rather disappointing feature was that 3 matches were conceded or claimed without a board being played. It is hoped that all teams will try to ensure that all matches are played next season.

The Wessex League Rules were subject to a comprehensive review at the start of last season. However, in the opinion of the writer, there are a number of rules which should be revisited, namely:-

- Appeals against the decision of a Tournament Director's Ruling.
- Penalties for non-fulfilment of matches.
- Facility to play matches in May.
- VP scales..... consider continuous scoring methodology.

Hugh Thomson

President's/Chester Cups

Last summer I was asked to run both the Chester and President's Cup as Geoff Nicholas had been doing this for a while and wanted to step down. I was a little hesitant as my only involvement with Bridge organisation is directing at a local club (Aylesbury Vale) fortnightly, and I have to say that prior to taking this on I had never heard of either competition, but I agreed to give it a go and Geoff has given me lots of help and guidance. Invites were sent out and participants asked to email me their entries which most did by deadline day with corresponding fees. At this point and for the future I wonder if it is worth advertising these competitions more widely. Although I doubt we would have made any impact, I am sure I could have entered a team in the Chester.

There were only 8 entries for the President's Cup so that from an organisational point it was straight into quarter finals and I was able to coerce a couple of players to make the draw for me.

The Chester Cup only had 6 entries so again it was fairly easy to complete the fixture table.

When issuing both draws I suggested a provisional time table for the early rounds and for the main this was adhered to. At one stage I did agree an extension as my own personal feelings were that the whole idea was to allow people to compete and enjoy and this did not seem to cause any problems.

All the Captains have been excellent in keeping me posted on results and I have tried to email them regularly with updates. Unfortunately I have to admit to being lax in getting the tables posted on any Bridge Club web sites and again have to thank Geoff for posting this on Aylesbury's.

In the end all matches were completed on time and results have now been submitted to the EBU for Master Point awards. Unfortunately I will not be able to continue for another year since my wife and I are hoping to move to the West Country. I hope all goes well in the future.

Mike Dobson

County Pairs

Eighty four pairs entered the county pairs heats from ten different venues (nine clubs + the OBA heat at OBC) this year. This resulted in just one semi-final with 17 tables and the usual ten table final, both held at OBC. This was the second year that revised methods (based upon the EBU's national pairs format) had been used to determine the semi-finalists from the heats, making selection both easier and less time-consuming. The final was won by Aleksander Lishkov & Cathy Rowland with a score of 60.42%. They, along with the next top three pairs, also went on to represent Oxfordshire in the Corwen Trophy. Aleks and Cathy did best there too, finishing a very creditable 20th out of 112 pairs in that event.

Clive Keep

County Team Management

OBA Selection Committee

This has been a slightly easier year for OBA selectors, after the turmoil of 2012-13. There has been greater clarity over selectorial roles and responsibilities, all fixtures have been fulfilled and there have, in general, been enough pairs making themselves available for selection, especially for distant away matches.

One fixture went unplayed – the one against Notts in Sept 2013 – but this was entirely due to Notts' last minute withdrawal. It was not possible to find an apt alternative date.

Two or three new and talented pairs have been recruited to the squad from which the teams are selected and there has been slightly more opportunity for the selectors to actually select, rather than pick the 12 available pairs and cross fingers.

The biggest change this year has been the introduction of an online enrolments sheet so that all players can indicate their availability for forthcoming fixtures. Thanks to Rob Dixon for setting up and managing this in Doodle. Most players have cooperated but not yet got into the habit of changing their entries as their availability changes. We hope to instil better discipline in this respect in future.

I have tried to ensure that the “county” corner of the new OBA website is up-to-date and interesting. Team-lists, fixtures, match reports and quizzes have been added every few weeks during the year and I hope it is all well-organised and attractive.

The selectors were invited to make proposals on how the revised schedule of Tuesday events could be linked to county selection and I/we made a series of fairly detailed proposals. As far as I know, these proposals have not yet been formally agreed, so they have not been announced.

In the 2013-14 season which finished in April, Oxfordshire ‘A’ finished 7th in the Dawes League with 66 VPs; our ‘B’ team finished 3rd in the Porter Trophy with 107 VPs (just 2 VPS behind the winners, Warks) and the ‘C’ team finished 3rd in the Markham Trophy with 90 VPs. A team of just four pairs was again selected for the Tollemache Qualifier in November and played surprisingly badly, with all chance of finishing in the top 2 gone before the end of Saturday.

Thanks are due to Chris Cooper, the appointed captain of the team who took on a much reduced managerial burden in what was for him a busy year, to John Williams (in particular) who wrote long, witty and erudite accounts of all the matches in which he was playing, and to Esme Alden who continued to provide teas of the highest quality. Our enjoyment of these matches was hugely improved by the efforts of those two and it is to be hoped that they will continue in these roles.

I have been nominated as a selector for 2014-15 and I am prepared to continue in my current role if invited to do so. Kathy Talbot has been Vice-Chairman and I hope she will be able to continue in that role. I believe that Peter Finbow may be standing down as a selector (TBC) and we warmly welcome fresh members of this committee.

As I said last year, the situation is complicated by the fact that our constitution continues to stipulate that selectors are nominated by clubs (one per club). A number of clubs do not address this issue in time for the AGM or find suitable volunteers while individuals who are keen to become selectors and who would make a valuable contribution find themselves hamstrung by a situation in which their club already nominates someone else. My own preference would be to abandon this requirement and to remove the notion that selectors somehow “represent” the interests of a particular club. Selectors (in my opinion) should have only the interests of the county at heart with no bias towards their own club and, in reality, I believe this has always been the case anyway – I have seen no sign of club bias from any selector.

Apart from that, most of my objectives on becoming Chairman have now been fulfilled and I’m very happy to be replaced by someone with a fresh vision!

Nick Smith, Chairman of Selectors

Education and Improvers

Education Officer

I apologise for being unable to attend the AGM due to a prearranged family holiday.

I have been acting as Education Officer only since March this year (hoping to be confirmed in post for a further year at the AGM) and April and May have mostly been concerned with talking to lots of people and familiarising myself with clubs around the County.

My initial project is to update the Education area of the county website. This will include lots of new information, for example:

- Notes on the NGS Scheme.
- Who taught what in Oxfordshire in 2013 – 2014.
- ‘Book of Month’ feature.

Subject to interest/demand, I am hoping that OBA will be able to offer level 2/3 classes designed for ‘top half’ Club players. In addition, a mentoring scheme is being piloted, and there is to be a bridge teachers’ conference in Oxford, to be held at OBC on the morning of Saturday 12 July – anyone interested in attending, please contact me for more details.

I am also helping with the launch of a Junior Bridge Club based in Oxford, along the lines of the one already running at Roke.

Jonathan Price

Youth and Duplicate Bridge Promotion

The Promotion Team has been created to encourage and support individuals and groups of all ages to play bridge and minibridge and to help those wishing to progress to duplicate bridge, including assisting any groups who wish to form new affiliated duplicate bridge clubs.

The Team comprises separate sub groups to deal with Youth, Adult Player and Duplicate Bridge Club Development, and Membership.

Youth

The last twelve months have seen the start of the Junior Bridge Club on Sunday afternoons in Roke. Parents are also welcome to attend, and learn to play minibridge. Plans are in hand to start a Junior Bridge Club in Oxford from September.

The number of schools teaching bridge in the OBA area has remained flat and the Team is keen for parents/grandparents to encourage their local schools to consider adding minibridge/bridge to their extra-curricular activities.

For all information check out our website bridgewebs.com/bridge4schools.

Our second Junior Congress held in Roke on March 9th was a success, with 39 children attending up from 21 in 2013.

Player and Club Development

The objective is for all bridge players in the OBA area to be aware of duplicate bridge, and to be given the opportunity to learn how they could incorporate duplicate bridge into their own bridge groups.

- To provide documentation to support the move to duplicate bridge
- To be given a contact point for advice and help
- The OBA to provide members for on-site support
- The OBA/EBU to provide start-up interest free loans for wallets and cards
- In conjunction with the Social Team the OBA to run events for Novices & Students, and
- Affiliated clubs to be given the responsibility to “foster” groups new to duplicate.

The Management Committee has been requested to identify unaffiliated clubs with contacts and the Promotion Team will use this information to add details to the OBA website, and open lines of communication to establish any areas for development.

Promotion Team Contacts: Mike Fletcher, Holly Kilpatrick, and Mike Webley

Email: promotion@oxfordshirebridge.co.uk

Social

To follow