

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR OBA AGM JUNE 2015

As with many end of term reports, this one tells of both good and bad performances and looks forward with lots of hope and a few concerns to the future. Getting the concerns out of the way first, whether or not we are able to provide a good platform for competitive duplicate bridge in Oxfordshire depends so much on the energy and enthusiasm of those who give up their free time to organise things for us. This year we are losing three such people who will be difficult to replace.

Sandra Nicholson has given a great deal of time and professional skill to the role of County Secretary throughout my four years as Chairman and for several years before that. Without her knowledge of the rules, regulations and constitution I for one would often not have known the right way to proceed and her constant support and consistent advice have been extremely valuable to me. On top of all that her exemplary minutes, action point lists and follow-up e-mails have kept members of the Management Committee on their toes. I think we all owe her a big thank you.

Another person who has given a great deal of time to the county over an even longer period is our Chief Tournament Director, Stephen Brown. He retires from his headmastership this summer and will be moving down to Kent, where we wish him well. Apart from his regular appearance as director on Tuesdays he has organised and/or directed most of our county competitions for over 25 years and has been responsible for keeping us updated on county competitions through the website. Over the past year he has been phasing out his own directing in order to give more experience to those who will succeed him. They will have a tough job to do so. Again a big thank you is in order.

Last but by no means least Esme Alden has been making and serving marvellous teas at county competitions and matches for as long as I can remember. Finally at an age most of us cannot expect to reach she has decided that the time has come to call it a day. We wish her a long and happy retirement.

What has been happening in the county this year? Well, quite a lot in some areas and not so much in others. So much depends upon where the energy is applied.

Our county team, under the captaincy of Alan Wilson, has won the top two divisions of the Midlands Counties League and come second in the third division - Oxfordshire's best ever performance in this. However it was still only able to achieve fourth place in its Tollemache qualifying group, not good enough to reach the final, so there is still work to be done here.

Our Tuesday County Nights enjoyed a resurgence in popularity early last summer under the guidance of Diana Nettleton, only to be set back by disagreement as to the structure her team had proposed. Their purpose in providing a stronger game than clubs provide can only be achieved if the better players from all over the county are attracted to attend. The increase in National competitions over the years combined with more traffic on the roads have contributed to a further decline in numbers and we have had to look at alternatives. I believe the continuance of county nights is important to the sense of unity and cohesiveness of the county. Linking performance in such events to county selection is one move towards encouraging the attendance of those with aspirations to improve. I am grateful to John Slater for his continuing work, liaising with the Competitions and County Nights Team, the County Squad and clubs to try to set up a new pattern of fewer county nights in Oxford (first and third Tuesdays) together with some events elsewhere in the county. This is still a work in progress.

The year has also seen the emergence of two new affiliated clubs at Yarnton and Kings Sutton under the leadership of David Bygott and Marian Day respectively. I am sure we all wish them success. Both in different ways will provide new opportunities for players in the north of the county. Jonathan Price, our Education Officer, has been campaigning energetically for these clubs as they will improve the spread of learning opportunities in that area of the county. He is also working on

setting up a mentoring scheme to help all players, but particularly those who have advanced beyond the standard beginners' courses. Finally on the Education front he ran a successful Teachers Conference last year and will be running one again this summer at which he hopes to give teachers the opportunity to borrow from Abbey Smith's ideas about how to successfully convert all pupils into long-lasting duplicate club members, something she seems to achieve apparently effortlessly at her bridge club in Little Horwood.

Barbara Jordan continues to help us all with her husband Peter by running or advising on cafe bridge events. Last year she resigned from the role of "Social Team Leader" and I have been unable so far to find a replacement. Whilst this may seem unimportant if she is continuing on the cafe bridge front I personally believe we should be doing more for our "social" players and would welcome a volunteer to fight their corner. I understand that Abingdon BC has recently set up a social league and doing this elsewhere in the county could be one of their targets.

I will finish this brief round-up with a mention of the continuing excellent work being done by our Junior teachers, Joan Bennett, Alison Nicholson, Holly Kilpatrick and others. With bridge for juniors now available on Sundays in both Wallingford and Oxford together with the ever-increasing support for bridge in primary schools, Oxfordshire continues to lead the way. Well done, all.

And finally may I make a plea to everyone to go out and enjoy their bridge and make sure it is enjoyable for those you play against too. It is always disappointing to hear of aggravation either at the table or between those organising our game and I hear only too often of such situations. We must not allow them to occur. Be happy! We have a great game.

Robert Procter, 28 May 2015