

OXFORDSHIRE BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Reports to the Management Committee Meeting on 16th November 2015

CHAIRMAN

I am writing this somewhat earlier than usual as I will be away next week – so my apologies if it doesn't include everything of significance.

Personnel

David Bygott has told me that he would like to step down from his role as Publicity Officer, whilst for the moment he is happy to continue editing the county newsletter. I would like to thank him for his efforts on our behalf. Despite these, entries into our county closed events have declined this year and it is therefore a matter of some urgency that we find someone to replace him in the publicity role.

Mike Robinson has agreed to take over the role of leader of the Congress Committee. I am pleased to welcome him aboard and to thank Diana Nettleton for her service in this role last year.

Diana Nettleton has also had to stand down from the subcommittee set up at our last meeting to consider the content of the "Best Practice for County Associations" document prepared by the National Counties Working Group. That currently leaves Kathy Talbot on her own in this subcommittee and I am sure she would appreciate someone else to bounce ideas off.

Website

Some of you may have noticed that the website went down for a few days. After jumping through the considerable hoops of 1and1's security measures, Alan Grunwald and I managed to get them to transfer the site into my name. It then became apparent that the reason the website had gone down was that Alan's visa card, registered on the site, had passed its expiry date! I have told him that the county will happily reimburse him his expenditure over the past four years and have paid this year's myself and recharged it to the county. Subsequently I rang 1and1's helpline to see if it was possible to change the site's address so that when you googled Oxfordshire bridge association the new site came up rather than the old one. I was stunned when they did this for nothing in about ten seconds as we had previously been advised by a website specialist that it was a difficult exercise and would cost us £500. Eureka! However if you had saved the Joomla address in your favourites you need to change it to www.oxfordshirebridge.co.uk.

Club Chairmen's Conference

Early in October we held the first Oxfordshire Club Chairmen's Conference which was attended by representatives from approximately half of our clubs. I would like to thank Neil Higginbottom of Bicester for preparing the attached report on the meeting.

The meeting's principal focus was on what can be done to reverse the current decline in numbers attending our duplicate sessions. We received a presentation by Abbey Smith describing the many procedures she adopts both in teaching beginners and in helping them over the line into the club duplicate atmosphere. Over five years her club (in Buckinghamshire but affiliated to Oxfordshire) has grown from nothing to over a hundred members and she has another sixty beginners in the pipeline. Note that it is only as a result of this growth in her club that Oxfordshire's membership numbers have managed to remain relatively static during the last five years. We have plenty of beginners being taught in the county so the issue is how do Oxfordshire replicate her rate of conversion of beginners into duplicate players? Feedback on her presentation was very positive and I will try to arrange for her to give it again for those who could not be there and particularly for those involved with teaching and transition groups. I believe there are lessons that can be learnt – in attention to organisational detail, about controlling behaviour and about understanding a beginner's nervousness and helping him or her to overcome those nerves – so long as we recognise the need to do so.

The meeting also talked briefly about county governance and as you will see from the notes there was a feeling that this was something we should look at.

Midlands Counties Working Group

In October I took the chair of this meeting for the last time as I have decided to pass that responsibility on to someone else. Nicky Bainbridge of Northamptonshire will be taking it on together with my role on the National Counties Working Group as Midlands Representative. I hope to spend the time that this frees up working with others on the issue referred to above of improving our beginners' conversion rates.

We discussed the possibility of counties synchronising calendars for closed events. At first sight this looks unlikely to

be practical but we have exchanged calendars and delegated a review to Mike Willoughby of Worcestershire. We talked in more detail about the proposed Midlands Region Improvers Event. We have agreed to hold a simultaneous Midlands Region final at three centres for an event for people relatively new to duplicate bridge. Subject to checking venue availabilities, the date, venues and eligibility criteria will be notified shortly. The intention is to invite all clubs to run a qualifying heat to provide pairs for the finals, but some may wish to do so as part of a normal club duplicate or by some other selection process. Numbers in each final will be determined after there is feedback about the level of interest. [We will need to appoint one person to coordinate Oxfordshire's clubs entries and to liaise with Clare Batten, the overall organiser, and we will need to publicise the event well if it is to be a success].

Robert Procter 19 October 2015

CLUB CHAIRMAN'S CONFERENCE

4th September, Shipton-on-Cherwell Village Hall

Attendees

OBA – Robert Procter
Abbey Smith Bridge Club – Abbey Smith
Abingdon – Gordon Carroll, Keith Sadler
Aylesbury – Peter Watson
Bicester – Neil Higginbottom
Farringdon – Faye Slade, Françoise Stacey
Menagerie – Mike Robinson
Oxford – Richard Sills
Summertown – Holly Kilpatrick, Bridget Watson
Thame – Peter Bowen
Wallingford – Colin Jones, Jayne Watney
Wantage – Gaye Kyle, Marilyn Newbould

Purpose of the Meeting

Recognise that the number of Pay to Play (P2P) plays per annum is declining across the county and exchange ideas on how this trend might be reversed.

- (i) A focal point of the meeting was a presentation from Abbey Smith, covering teaching and how new players transition from lessons to clubs. Subjects covered included:
 - Teaching priorities
 - Important that lessons are enjoyable
 - Teach in small groups
 - Don't overload students with too much information
 - Be patient
 - Transition from lessons to club
 - Teacher accompany student to a 'friendly' club to help with the transition
 - Recognise students will be nervous at first – club officials, members and Directors need to understand and modify their behaviour accordingly.
- (ii) The meeting split into three to discuss different aspects of the issue

What can clubs do to encourage others to play?

Thought was given to how new players could be encouraged to move from teaching to playing at clubs. Topics discussed included: allowing teachers to attend with their students, if new players are attending make other attendees aware, think about who new players are seated with at the start of the session, the availability of refreshments, accessibility and comfort of venues (including parking and steps/ramps).

What Can EBU/OBA/the wider bridge community do to encourage participation?

Issues raised under this heading included making the most of World Bridge Day, expanding Café Bridge, encouraging the OBA Schools Cup, more frequent events where experts are paired with less experienced players.

Management of the OBA

Some concerns that the current system does not work well, with many clubs not being represented or given little time or opportunity to influence the decision making process. There were suggested options for change which included:

1. an executive committee of officers only,
2. an annual meeting of club chairs,
3. an AGM to allow democratic input,
4. use of on-line survey vehicles (such as Survey Monkey) to gauge views and opinions across clubs.

(iii) Overall those attending found the meeting worthwhile and such an event merits repeating in the future.

Neil Higginbottom

Chair - Bicester Bridge Club
12th October 2015

DUPLICATE BRIDGE PROMOTION & YOUTH TEAM

Junior Bridge Clubs

Both the Junior Bridge Clubs (Oxford & Roke) are continuing to operate on Sundays in term time. Please refer to our bridge4schools web site for up to date information.

In the recent Wallingford Swiss Pairs 4 Junior players participated and with their adult partners all won at least one match.

Loughborough Junior Teach-In

Fourteen OBA juniors attended this week-end event at Loughborough.

Junior Congresses

An open junior Winter Congress is planned for November 22nd at The Oxford Bridge Club, and our thanks are due to the OBC for providing their premises. Refer to our website for full details.

The 4th OBA Junior Annual Congress is planned for February 21st 2016.

Financial Support

Financial support has been provided to Thame Bridge Club to purchase Bridgemates.

Unaffiliated Clubs

No further work with unaffiliated clubs is planned until volunteer(s) are recruited.

Mike Fletcher

EDUCATION

1. County's Northern Towns development project is going very well:
 - 'Accelerated Beginners' Class (7 weeks) piloted at N.O.B.C. (Started September 2015: e.g. 5 tables at 7th October 2015 class).
 - There are firm plans to run 'Accelerated Beginners' in other Oxfordshire Clubs.
2. Delighted that some of Oxfordshire teaching talent getting local recognition (richly deserved). E.g. Alison Nicholson is a Bridge Teacher with a National Reputation (for wonderful teaching!)
3. County is still studying 'Mentoring'. In the meantime a member of the Education Team has been invited to act as a mentor for another County's scheme.
4. Abbey Smith gave a dazzling presentation on small group teaching techniques to the Club Chairs. Things have moved on a lot in bridge education.

Abbey knows a great deal: ASK HER!

5. Peter Finbow has made a hard working start to his membership of the Education Team.
6. Education Team interested in ideas
 - ?Promoting teams playing raises bridge playing standards?
 - ?Promoting teams playing raises Bridge Club numbers?(Hence, for example, County's Northern Towns Development Project is working on a North Oxfordshire Village Bridge Club Teams competition).

Contributions to this conversation invited?

Jonathan Price

COUNTY TEAM MANAGEMENT & COUNTY NIGHTS

Honours Boards

Sandra Nicholson has done an excellent job of sorting things out and we now have the website as good and consistent as it is likely to be. We have decided on a layout for the physical boards which involves a slightly darker background than the OBC one but in the same style/font etc.

Sandra is now awaiting a quote and also some sizing stuff – we are unlikely to be able to put all of the “boards” that are on the website up and probably do not want so to do (e.g. it is not clear that paying to use good clean blank wall space for the defunct restricted pairs A and B is a good idea). The decisions will be made on the basis of cost and space but there is a pecking order and the President's cup, Wessex League (all divs), County Pairs, and Premiership are top of it.

Thanks to Sandra for a lot of hard work and also to those who answered questions from memory/looking at a trophy including Kathy Talbot, Nick Smith, Christopher Whitehouse John Williams and Sandra Claridge. Anyone wanting a keepsake of an old physical board should contact jbs before Nov 5th.

County “Nights” not on Tuesdays at OBC

The first Great Northern Seniors pairs at Central Yarnton attracted 0.5 tables. Some of this is due to illness of the principal, but the future may be in doubt. Possibly a change of week may help. The Seniors event at Wallingford still attracts enough pairs to break even.

The Wallingford third Friday teams event ran in August and Sept and attracted 5 and 7 teams respectively. Thanks to Alan Wilson for coming to help kick it off but otherwise county players not from the south of the county were thin (except jbs?). Wallingford are now proposing that, starting in 2016, they will invite all county members to an open teams event (no visitor fee) on 5th Fridays. The exact format is not clear (may be multiple teams or could involve longer matches). It would be nice if this could be a fixture and the attraction of 5th Fridays is that nothing much gets in the way.

Menagerie has agreed that the Claridge Cup and other events could be county badged although they will be returned by Menagerie. This is good as they attract the strongest fields in the county.

OBC have been asked and we are waiting a response but space is likely to be an issue. Everyone else approached has said that they are not interested and in some cases that it may reduce attendance as their own players will be put off.

So the future is Wallingford and Menagerie with Central Yarnton and OBC still possibilities. County Tuesday numbers at OBC however are such that a further review may be triggered.

County Team

We are now using data from a variety of sources more as suggested by the questionnaire responses. The Wessex league Div 1 Butlers are now being collected and will be used soon once the set has built up. Data from National Competitions, county matches and county events feed in routinely.

In some cases, however, this is academic as the county captain has barely enough folk from whom to choose. Some of this relates to people not keeping their availability up to date on the relevant poll and that is reported as partially relating to the website.

At the time of writing, results to date have been not as good as the high of last year but all three teams are above average after 2 matches against Derbyshire and Leicestershire, with a third against Nottinghamshire due on Nov 1st.

John Slater

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Membership at the start of October was a total of 1542, made up from:

- Pay to play - 1340 of whom 15 are juniors
- Direct 106 - of whom 84 are juniors
- Teachers 23
- Bridge for all 66
- Anonymous 7

There was a drop of 15 members in August, mostly Bridge for all members.

Peter Briggs

COUNTY JUNIORS REPORT 2014-15

We have made great strides in the year, but have inevitably encountered some problems.

Oxfordshire had over 380 youngsters playing minibridge or bridge in their school clubs last year. These were all run by volunteers, of whom the largest number came from Wallingford BC. So far this year with many schools not yet started playing, the number is over 250. Of these over 80 are returnees playing bridge, which is an amazing %age. As a county, we have more junior bridge players than any other.

The junior club which has been running at Roke for over a year, has quality rather than quantity of members. Last year, George Anstis braved the BP swiss pairs, and this year we had 4 youngsters entered, who all enjoyed themselves. George is now training with Michael Byrne's Under 20 squad. Arthur Anstis and Cameron Butcher won the EBU student sims in March in the heat held at WBC, and the minibridgers from Oxford came 3rd in their section. The Oxford junior club is doing much better with its membership than Roke, but there are fewer schools offering bridge clubs in the area. We do not know the reasons.

We are hoping to boost our Roke membership by running a 'Learn Bridge in a Weekend' course on 9th and 10th January aimed primarily at teenagers, but also at teachers who may give our cause in the schools a boost. This is being run by Ned Paul and Alison Nicolson. A grant has been applied for to EBED- cost sheet attached. Help from OBA would also be appreciated. The costs are pretty much fixed, but the income is a guestimate. Bring/send your grandchildren along.

We, as a county, sent 14 children to the JTI in Loughborough- previously only Freddie and Laura had gone- and several parents. The subsidy from the OBA has been dispensed and welcomed by the recipient families. Many thanks.

LEARN BRIDGE IN A WEEKEND - LEAD TUTOR Ned Paul
WALLINGFORD BRIDGE CLUB OX10 6JJ
JANUARY 9TH & 10TH 2016

Estimated Income

Fees 396
OBA Meeting on Nov 16th 400
Sponsorship 350 £100 pledged so far.
Wallingford BC 60 Refreshments
Total estimated income £1206

Expenditure

Room hire 300 Fixed. Payable to VHC
Tutor costs 800 Fixed for 16 p
Drinks costs 60 Fixed-20 people for 2 days.
Course materials 200 Dependent on student numbers
Publicity materials 750 Dependent on funds-variable
Total estimated expenditure £2110

Estimated deficit £904

ASSUMPTIONS

Student numbers=16. Full time students=8. Willing teachers=4. Others=4 Total income=£396

It is proposed to offer the course free to schoolchildren

or young teachers who intend to help or run bridge in their schools.

It is hoped to advertise the course in December 2015 English Bridge and local bridge clubs.

This is to attract grandchildren of bridge players.

It is also hoped that our existing network of primary school heads will assist by identifying their young teachers.

We have asked our existing junior club members to bring their friends to give them a flying start to the game.

We intend to ask OBA, who have been very supportive in the past, for a subsidy.

Joan Bennett

SANDRA NICHOLSON

The honours board listings on the County website are now fully updated and as correct as we can make them.

A decision has been taken that not all the lists will be transferred to physical boards, only the "major" ones. Exactly which will depend partly on cost and partly on physical space available at Banbury Rd.

I am now in touch with the engraver used by OBC and we know what style and colour of board we want.

Copies of the electronic files have been sent to the engraver and I'm waiting for his estimate on the number of boards required and the price. As and when I hear more I'll report to the Management Committee.

Sandra Nicholson

CHIEF TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

Nothing to report, and no interest currently in scorer training.

Rob Dixon