

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR OBA AGM JUNE 2016

In June 2015 I gave special thanks for the work of a few named individuals who were retiring from their long-held roles in the county's administration and reported on the difficult task of finding people to replace them. This year's departures may be less long-standing but nevertheless we will miss their contribution. Rather than mention individuals by name I would like to thank everyone who has worked hard for the county over the past year, whether or not they are continuing in post. There would be no county events without the work these people have put in.

Finding new people to take their places is not always easy. What might help would be to share the work that needs to be done amongst a greater number of volunteers. If you would be prepared to give a bit of your time to help in any way at all please say so. It doesn't need to be in a post with long-term ongoing responsibilities. There are always jobs to be done - ranging from helping me in the chairman's role to directing, from publicity to event organisation, from website maintenance to education, and from secretarial to financial - I am sure we can negotiate a role that suits you.

Some features of the year:

- The County C Team won the Markham Trophy in the Midlands League.
- The County achieved third place in a strong qualifying heat in the Tollemache.
- We held another successful annual Congress and many county competitions.
- The Youth Team built on the good work of the previous year, continuing teaching sessions for juniors at both Roke and Summertown, and our juniors put in some great performances at Loughborough. We look forward to seeing a number of them performing at this year's Congress.
- In addition to the county's cafe bridge day at Henley a number of clubs have run similar events, establishing a valuable bridge between social and competitive bridge.
- Some significant improvements have been made to our website.
- The county has made grants to help clubs acquiring equipment.
- Numbers participating in county competitions and county nights fell and clubs report a decline in evening bridge numbers, but daytime bridge is growing and overall play numbers remain steady.
- The Treasurer reports a downturn in the county's financial results, due to the declining county night numbers, to a lower than usual profit on the Congress and to the aforementioned club grants. The Management Committee is acting to try to reverse the first two of these in 2016/17.
- We held our first Oxfordshire Club Chairmen's Conference at which we talked about how to convert a greater proportion of those learning the game into duplicate players. The message is that clubs need to concentrate on two areas - making duplicates more friendly by eliminating poor behaviour and "hand-holding" the beginner through those early intimidating moments. Of course this applies equally to county events.

Some thoughts for the future:

- The Management Committee has set up a small working party to consider the EBU's "Best Practice for County Associations" document based on practices used in other counties. This has some good ideas which we may be able to adopt, particularly with regard to governance.
- Following from the discussions at the Oxfordshire Club Chairmen's Conference I believe the county's more experienced players have the potential to do a lot to help the bridge development of the less experienced players - this can be through partnering them in higher level events than they are used to, mentoring them or just by being more welcoming when they play against them. We have to dispel the notion that bridge at a higher level is over-competitive and unfriendly. I know from personal experience of playing against many friendly top-level international players that it doesn't have to be so. Yet some people come to our clubs and say "never again"!
- A subject that will be addressed again by the Management Committee is the size and use of the county's accumulated funds. Personally I hope that this debate will lead us to better achievement of the county's agreed objectives.

If you decide to have me as your chairman for another year I look forward to working with a new group of people to continue to try to ensure Oxfordshire is a good place to play duplicate bridge.

Robert Procter May 15 2016

