

Chairman's Report, July 2023

This has been the year that we finally, on the whole, seem to have escaped the curse of Covid and yet its legacy has shifted the world on its axis to some extent and it may well be that OBC online bridge is here to stay. Or maybe it is too early to tell. This has been one of the major considerations of the trustees in the past year. We might all like the conviviality of face to face bridge (F2F) at the clubhouse that was the norm up until 2020 but the convenience and geographical liberation of online bridge is undoubtedly popular. Under the guidance of the Bridge Committee, ably led by Liza Furnival and assisted by Martin Illingworth, Steve Fisher and several others, there has been a gradual return to F2F bridge on the premises while retaining the option of playing online at the club. Our hybrid sessions try to cater for individual preferences and these would not be possible at all without the generosity of those willing to direct, score and host in all these combined sessions. I would like to tell you all a bit about the hive of activity that goes on in order to run OBC and particularly want to mention the worker bees. (and, lest anyone runs with this metaphor, I am most definitely not the queen bee!). The Bridge Committee organises all the bridge playing opportunities at OBC (including all the wizardry that allows scores to be combined in the hybrid events) and a lot of work goes into planning, setting up the sessions both online and on the premises, organising the competitions or special events during the year and ensuring directors and scorers are in place. Of course, this requires the pre-dealt hands and here I would like give particular thanks to Cliff Pavelin who was Chief Dealer for more years than anyone, including Cliff himself, can remember. This is very much a "behind the scenes" but essential job whereby he and/or members of his team come to OBC, set up the programmes, print out the hands and work the duplimator before placing the sets of cards into the boards. Thank you, Cliff and many thanks too to Ron Gould who has taken over as Chief Dealer.

Any club is very reliant on its treasurer to stay afloat but in the case of OBC, as a charitable organisation and with its own premises, complete with a mortgage, this requires additional financial intelligence and skills to navigate the vagaries of the post-Covid and Putin-instigated turmoil. Not to mention some own goals by our government. So we are very fortunate that following the last AGM, Peter Schroeder volunteered to take on the role of treasurer. His calm and measured approach has seen the club finances well managed and in the black. There are undoubtedly challenges ahead but the trustees are confident that, with Peter's help, we will be able to deal with these. Peter is assisted by members of the finance committee who share some of the routine tasks. Thank you, all.

The premises are now under the excellent stewardship of Chris Bone who also stepped up after the last AGM and we are delighted to have his conscientious and sensible approach to managing the myriad predictable and unpredictable problems that arise in any building, old or new. These have included temperamental electrics, several leaks (gutters, roof, kitchen sink), mysterious exploding double glazing and replacing the side gate as well as organising insurance, heating and ventilation, routine servicing and fire safety. The Premises Committee all play a part in these tasks and thanks go also to Richard Sills who liaises with the flat owners and tenants on the floors above OBC, Sue Smith who manages fire safety, Juliette Riehl who oversees cleaning and supplies within OBC and Phil Chaundy.

One of the key strategies in encouraging the return to face to face bridge on our premises has been arranging social bridge events and Sandra Devaney, as Social Secretary, has been instrumental in instigating many events in the past year including the Christmas and summer parties, an Andrew Robson day and the charitable event in aid of Motor Neurone Disease which very sadly affects our former Education Secretary, Susan Fletcher, who is still able to play bridge using eye-gaze technology despite not being able to use her hands. These have all been popular, well attended with attendees appreciating the catering included as part of the events. Many thanks to Sandra for her enthusiasm and organisational skills as well as her colleagues on the social committee including Juliette Riehl- their cheerful and welcoming presence have very much contributed to the success of these events. Sandra is now stepping down from her role so we hope her successor will soon be in post to carry on the good work. In addition, I would like to record OBC's gratitude and appreciation of the generosity of John Deech who has helped to encourage the return to F2F bridge by financing the monthly Wednesday evening competition (the challenge pairs) including the cash prizes, drinks and nibbles and who has kindly extended his generosity to fund 4th Wednesdays over the summer months. On the second Wednesday each month, there is "Bridge and Après-Bridge session" where some of the tricky or interesting hands of the evening are discussed with guidance from Diane Nettleton and Charlie Bucknell, both expert players. We are grateful to both of them for their time and commitment in also facilitating the return to F2F bridge while adding a bit of spice to the evening session. Charlie had also helped us try out a regular Speedball session where 2 hands were played in 10 minutes instead of 15 minutes. These sessions were eventually discontinued due to poor attendance- it seems that some brains don't like being rushed and maybe that is particularly brains of a certain vintage.

OBC has maintained its membership numbers despite the disruption of recent years and you will all be aware, assuming you read your emails, of the monthly newsletter that comes from OBC courtesy of the commitment and attention to detail of Richard Sills who has held just about every office within OBC and, if anyone can step down having contributed all they can, it is Richard. On behalf of you all, I thank Richard for his unwavering support in running the club over so many years. He is now stepping down as Communications Officer but his hand may well remain behind the regular newsletter. Good communication is vital to the success of the club and I would like to urge anyone who feel they might be able to contribute in this area, to step forward. You would be assisted by other members of the Communications committee including Matthew Wilkinson, membership secretary and cheerleader for signing up new members (grateful thanks are still due for his long and assiduous application to this role, even if he is my husband) and Brian Mills who so ably runs the OBC website and the G drive- the repository of all the trustee documents.

Probably the only committee that has not had too much to do has been the Conduct Committee, chaired by Paul Watson, because there have been no reported instances of bad behaviour at bridge. Nonetheless, when such instances do occur, they are stressful and difficult for all concerned with potential reputational and individual damage that cannot be undone so

we continue to remind all members of their responsibility to be courteous, respectful and pleasant to visitors and other members, new and old.

Last year, Ursula Bower stepped down as Club Secretary and stepped up as Education Secretary which includes overseeing the bridge education programme for new players (the 2 year Bridge for All courses), sessions for new players (Learn and Play) and continuing bridge education in the form of seminars and one-off events for various levels of players. This all happens under the banner of Oxford Bridge School and involves considerable organisational and communication skills. Ursula has applied herself very effectively in this role and risen to the challenges including having to absorb some of the work formerly carried out by the education administrator when Jennie-Lee Economou stepped down from the role at the end of 2022. Many thanks to Jennie-Lee for her work in this arena but unfortunately, attempts to find a replacement proved unsuccessful. Others on the education committee support Ursula in the provision of bridge education and of course, OBC remains extremely grateful to the Bridge for All teachers, Christine Bishop and Ann Lee. The Saturday seminars are now run by Pat Lewis who has taken over from Annabel Barnet. The Education Committee also lost Anne Laming who so effectively marketed and advertised the OBC bridge education programme to recruit new students many of whom have or will become regular playing members when they have mastered the basics. Ursula also started the Saturday Next Steps bridge sessions for those who have just learnt bridge and these have been well received and appreciated. We would love to hear from anyone who could help with the mechanics of advertising and promoting the next Bridge for All programme over the summer ready for the September intake. Just over a year ago, OBC agreed with Bucknell Bridge that Charlie Bucknell, a young and highly skilled international player, could run some of his bridge education sessions on our premises. His courses offer an alternative range of learning opportunities and do not directly compete with the course organised by Oxford Bridge School. There are links on OBC website that give further details of his courses. Charlie also provides a link to tips on bidding and play.

9 of the 12 trustees at OBC are trustees by virtue of the office they hold and there are 3 directly elected trustees. 2 of these positions are held by Joe Brash and Juliette Riehl and the 3rd is vacant so we hope one of you will join the board of trustees and contribute to our meetings/discussions. Last, but by no means least, Ursula's replacement as Secretary of OBC has been ably filled by Ruth Kim who organises the trustee meetings and ensures everything is properly documented.

I took over as Chairman a year ago with a certain amount of trepidation but I can honestly say my role has been made much easier by the competence and diligence of my fellow trustees and their committees. If this report is a little longer than I might have liked and you might have wished, it is because it is only by recounting all that these key people do that you can join me in expressing our mutual gratitude and appreciation for the success of the club's operation. And I appeal to your goodwill and our mutual enthusiasm for the game to consider volunteering for one of the vacant roles or by supporting the various committees to ensure we can continue to make the most of our lovely premises and our bridge playing opportunities.

Julie Anderson