

Chairman's Report

It seems amazing that yet another 15 months has passed by since our last AGM.

The year started with highs, the election of 7 new Trustees and lows, the unexpected resignation of our secretary.

The Club was also without a Treasurer, but the newly formed finance committee were actively seeking ways forward. During the previous year, a generous member on 'gardening leave' put all the OBC accounts onto Xero an electronic package which was a great start to modernising our accounting system and we appointed SPX a firm who provide bookkeeping services for the 'not for profit' sector to run our day to day finances.

We were very pleased when Steven Bliss agreed to step into the post of Treasurer in November. It has been a very busy year for him especially, setting up new systems and financial controls but I think you can be assured that the Club finances are in very secure hands. Thank you Steven.

In November we also welcomed Ursula Bowler as our new Secretary. She has embraced the role and after a steep learning curve now has us all under control with a 'light' touch. She is another enormous asset for the Club. Steven and Ursula have put together the Annual Report for the Club and it has now been sent to the Charity Commission as required.

At the end of October we were honoured to have a visit from Andrew Robson who formally opened the Club after the refurbishment, by unveiling a plaque acknowledging the major donors to the project. He met the thriving Junior Club, organised by Holly Kilpatrick, who were playing and gave them some jewels of advice, before joining the members present for wine and nibbles which were so attractively set up for us by Sue Smith and the social committee. We were very delighted that Andrew a local boy felt he could give us and bridge his support.

At the end of the year Vicky Fleming stepped down as manager of the Education programme. She with others was the instigator of Oxford Bridge School which was started four years previously and which, all credit to her, has grown to be a very successful teaching arm of the Club. Shirley Rawlings took over her role and during this year of huge changes has managed to continue teaching and setup new classes despite the loss of face to face bridge. This has been a very onerous task for the teachers and Education committee. Lessons are now taught with a video link and not only have they made it possible to finish all the courses started at the beginning of the academic year, but they have also started two new classes for first year students and a new second year class will start in the new year. We must congratulate them all for achieving so much.

Julie Anderson became the Trustee in charge of the Premises committee in January and with a couple of new members on her committee has been able to ensure that the building and fabric are in good order and that all the snagging has been completed after the builders departure. The committee plan to have the front wall removed to help parking on the forecourt for the larger cars of today. Some of us who have had discussions with this wall will be delighted!!

This has been a year of two halves the closure of the Club in March was a big blow to us all but it has given us time to reflect and get our house in order.

During this whole 15 month period the Trustees have spent many hours considering the Governance of the Club. We were pleased to have the services of an independent facilitator, recommended by Lis Long, who gave his services 'pro bono'. He guided our discussions and decisions which were concluded at a meeting in January. To implement our decisions a review of the Constitution and Articles of Association was also required. This was completed very ably by

Martin Illingworth and two others in July, in preparation for the EGM which was held in September. We have reduced the number of Trustees from 19 to 11 and I hope that this will make meetings shorter, more constructive and decisive and improve our management of the club. There now follows a continuing review, by a small group, concerning the implications of this structure within the workings of the club. This is an ongoing action.

The Bridge Committee have borne the full brunt of the change from face to face bridge to online bridge. Lisa Furnival led a small group to investigate and setup online bridge and the technicalities required for us to play as a Club. They have been fully stretched to keep abreast of the many changes required since March. All actions for online bridge are different from face to face bridge. Directors and scorers need to retrain and the sessions we run have been constantly reviewed. Susan Fletcher set up video bridge very early on and this has been very successful for both the Gentle duplicate sessions.

Later tonight we will be playing on RealBridge which has great potential as the nearest thing to face to face bridge and hopefully will be the future for us all. Before Covid we were getting very well attended sessions - so how have we fared since. Numbers have improved during the last few months and I encourage members to play under the OBC umbrella. It helps to keep our Club finances healthy and you are meeting and playing with friends whom you know! The bridge committee have now set up all the sessions which we previously had in the Club pre Covid and I ask members to support these sessions. I wish to thank all the bridge committee for their very hard work.

Our membership Secretary Matthew Wilkinson keeps our database and tells me we have 523 members at this moment. We have one member who will celebrate her 100th birthday in 3 days time and who was coming to the Club by bus to play on Monday and Friday mornings until we closed in March. Bridge is for every age!

A number of our members have achieved great results playing at National and International levels. This is a very good stimulus and advert for the Club encouraging young, potentially high flying players to join OBC. Charlie Bucknell one of our younger members who is now teaching some of our seminars has recently become a professional bridge player. We wish all these players continuing success.

The Club excels at all levels – and we are united by our love of bridge.

We should congratulate ourselves on being a thriving club in these difficult times, but we must not be complacent and we do need members to take an interest in the Club and the running of it. It is YOUR Club but it needs YOUR support.

I would like to thank all those who have served as Trustees over the past year or more and are now retiring - Vicky Fleming, John Fleming, Lis Long, Christopher Shepherd, Martin Illingworth, Matthew Wilkinson, John Cooper, Shirley Rawlings, Graham Walcroft and Sue Smith. It has been a year of change and the number stepping down as Trustees is partly due to the restructuring of the Board of Trustees! Many of these members continue to support the Club in many different ways

My personal thanks go to all the Trustees past and present for their wonderful support during my term of office but particularly to the members, without whom there would not be a Club.

I wish the Club every success in the future – and we look forward to returning to a more natural way of life and face to face bridge sometime during next year.