



Stratford upon Avon Bridge Club

Newsletter – December 2025



Alan Patel looks back on his first 5 years as Chairman



My Chairmanship started in September 2020 at a Zoom AGM (!) and my first major task was to get the club re-opened for face-to-face bridge. After 15 months closure, this happened on 29 June 2021. As many will recall, there were restrictions in place - masks had to be worn and members had to have two vaccinations to be allowed to play. Biscuits were individually wrapped and sanitiser and advisory signage abounded.

I'd first joined the board in 2019 as Deputy Chair to Roger Harris, having recently retired at the tender age of 55. Of course, in March 2020, lockdown happened, and the world changed. I took charge of organising monthly meetings via Zoom, Peter Styles started our online bridge sessions which were a lifeline to many of our addicted bridge members, and we decided to expand and refurbish the reception area. Gradually restrictions were lifted and we returned to 'normality'.

However, like all bridge clubs, our membership had dropped by around a quarter (from 400 to 300). Strategically, increasing membership became our number one aim to guarantee the club's ongoing financial and operational viability. Lockdown had also served as a catalyst for several longstanding committee members to step down after their long and significant service.

As I settled into the position, I quickly realised that my business and organisational abilities could significantly contribute to strengthening the club's solid foundations. My priority was to build a great, new, management team. I threw away the old handbook of seeking volunteers (always difficult) and, instead, asked people who I knew had the skills and the passion to make the bridge club a fantastic environment and atmosphere. They also needed to be trusted to "get on with it", without significant input from me and other committee members. By the 2024 AGM I had filled all 9 committee roles as well as recruiting more like-minded people to help in other areas behind the scenes.

We were all determined to make the club an enjoyable environment for everyone, including new members who have come through our excellent teaching programme.

So, what have we achieved?

- Pleasingly, many former members have returned to the bridge club, noting the improved atmosphere
- Membership exceeds 400, much boosted by two years of record student intakes
- We've organised a programme of workshops with top trainers like Andrew Robson and Abbey Smith
- We now have a great teaching team of 10, essential for future recruitment of new, younger members
- We've streamlined our offering, providing more, clearer opportunities for development and progression
- 62 members went on the bridge holiday to Hayling Island, and we've enjoyed many great social events
- We've got a refreshed, more focused, website and have worked at improving all our communications
- We've offered an Open Day and Coffee Morning, generally raising our profile in Stratford
- The clubhouse has been refurbished and external signage improved
- Our financial position remains healthy
- We were the first club in the country to take delivery of production line of the new Bridgmate 3s
- We're about to launch a BBO online session on Wednesday evenings

I've been asked to Chair the WCBA and to join the board of the EBU (and even become PM!) but have declined both offers as I want to give all my spare time to our club and the team that runs it.

Bridge Holiday to Harrogate 23 – 26 March 2026

There is still time to book. Costs include dinner, bed and breakfast for three nights, parking and all bridge sessions. The timetable is

- Monday afternoon - arrive and check in. Welcome drinks reception before dinner in the hotel restaurant and a welcome pairs session.
- Tuesday – breakfast followed a short discussion from the hands the previous evening and a 16-board duplicate. Free afternoon. Dinner and bridge. Championship pairs for the more established players and improvers pairs for those less experienced players.
- Wednesday – as Tuesday with a hand discussion and 16 board pairs in the morning. There will be a normal duplicate afternoon game on offer. Gala dinner with prize giving and a live singer.
- Thursday – breakfast, check out and farewell pairs before heading home.

• single occupancy £499, • double/twin £399 per person, • £60 discount for non bridge playing spouses/partners



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Contact social@stratfordbridgeclub.org.uk for more information.

Calling those with long memories

The history of the club was well documented up until 2008 in the excellent booklet "The Story so Far". We are now keen to record what happened next and member Penny Gray has kindly offered to put this together. She will be interviewing some of our long term members but, if you have any memories or ideas that you'd like to see included, please email her at penny@pennygray.com.

Up Coming Events

Club Competitions 2025/26

Every year we run six competitions with prize winners being announced at the September AGM.

1st Monday afternoon - October 2025 to June 2026 - Monthly Pairs

1st Thursday afternoon - October 2025 to June 2026 - Monthly Handicapped Pairs

Thursday 11 December 2025 – One off Swiss Pairs

Monday 16 February 2026 – Championship Pairs

Wednesday 11 March 2026 – Championship Improvers Pairs

Anyone can enter, but only members with a NGS below 7 on 31 December 2025 can win

Thursday 16 April 2026 - Championship Teams

Thursday 14 May 2026 - Championship Handicapped Pairs

Learning and Development

Sunday 1 February 2026 – Masterclass with Ollie Burgess

Social

Christmas Party – Saturday 13 December 1.30pm for 2pm start

Join us for an afternoon (and early evening) of bridge and food with plenty of fun and prizes. The event includes bridge, a pre-dinner drink from a selection of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic options, and a delicious Christmas meal. You are welcome to bring your own accompanying drinks. The cost will be **£35** per head. Please sign up on the notice board and make payment via the card machine.

A Handy Summary of Club Sessions Winter 2025/26

	Events	Characteristics	Systems	# Boards	Master Points	Handicapped	Average NGS
	Monday afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate Pairs 7.5 minutes a board 	No restrictions	24 - 26	Yes	No	52%
	Thursday afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate Pairs 7.5 minutes a board 	No restrictions	24 - 26	Yes	No	50%
	Friday evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate Pairs 7.5 minutes a board 	No restrictions	24	Yes	Yes	51%
	Friday morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate Pairs 7.5 minutes a board 	No restrictions	24	Yes	Yes	45%
	Tuesday afternoon (volunteer hosted - see website)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gentle Pairs 8 minutes a board 	Simple systems	21 – 24	Yes	Yes	45%
	Saturday afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gentle Pairs 7.5 minutes a board 	Simple systems	24	Yes	Yes	45%
	Wednesday morning (hosted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving Pairs 8.5 minutes a board 	To suit	16 – 18	Yes	No	41%
	Tuesday evening (hosted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving Pairs Timing to suit players ability 	To suit	16 - 18	Yes	No	39%
	Monday morning (assisted play)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on learners Assistance when needed 	N/A	No time pressure	No	No	N/A
	Wednesday afternoon (assisted play)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on learners Assistance when needed 	N/A	No time pressure	No	No	N/A
	Thursday evening (assisted play)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on learners Assistance when needed 	N/A	No time pressure	No	No	N/A

