

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2022

The past year has again been adversely affected by the pandemic. After an 18-month closure we finally re-opened for face-to-face play on 23<sup>rd</sup> September in new premises. I would like to thank Tony Harris for steering us through that long fallow period. Tony resigned as chairman at the end of this time but has remained a member of the club. It was lovely that he and Judy were able to attend the opening night and later come to Bournemouth.

The process of moving here was greatly facilitated by Brian Cutler's long and close association with The Old School. Apart from occasional parking issues, the building is ideal for our current needs. Given the way that things have panned out, we should be grateful that we are not struggling to pay the bills at a new-build in the grounds of Warden Park. Thank you, Brian, too, for ensuring that the prepared boards are here on time for every session.

Initially, the club met twice a week on Thursday afternoons and evenings. Jane Lawrence then set up and managed an online survey to pick all of our thoughts. Jane, by the way, is also the brains behind the new interactive features on the website. The survey was impressively user-friendly and got a remarkable number of responses. It revealed that there was still an appetite for f2f play once all restrictions were lifted and that there would be support for a Tuesday evening game. We therefore resolved to start a third session on Tuesdays after Christmas. Unfortunately, the omicron variant forced another closure in mid-December and the first Tuesday session was delayed until 15th February.

Since then, attendances have been poor, with Tuesdays especially disappointing. The club has financial reserves and has been able to weather the storm, but without that security blanket market forces would surely have forced our closure. As it stands, the club faces an uncertain future and it may be necessary to abandon at least one of the sessions. However, my hope remains that numbers will gradually increase as members' confidence to socialise returns.

Some members are now playing exclusively online, understandably preferring the comfort and convenience of being at home. Others are mixing online play with f2f. The alliance games in conjunction with the Avenue and Lewes are continuing to attract good numbers, though well down on last year when they peaked at over 70 tables a week over the three sessions.

In the autumn, Chris Jago made an enormous effort to launch an online game on RealBridge that would be exclusively for our own members. This was not a success. For some reason, this platform just doesn't cut it with club players. Other clubs, notably Horsham, have had a similar experience. Much more encouraging was another season of our pairs' league, with two divisions playing online monthly from September to January. Many thanks are due to Robert Hirst for taking over the considerable task of running this event. The competition provides an excellent way to practice teams' bridge without the hassle of finding team-mates.

Returning to f2f play, we held a charity bridge afternoon in aid of Ukraine in March and raised £412, doubled by the committee to £824. Though there were only seven tables in play, it showcased just how well that sort of attendance works in the Tudor Room..... particularly when Suzy has been baking!

The highlight of the year was the bridge holiday in Bournemouth in early February. This was brilliantly organised by Chris Jago. Under the circumstances, he did extraordinarily well to sell every room, in fact there was even a waiting list. Sadly, Chris was unable to take up his own booking as he went down with the virus at the eleventh hour. The success of the bridge was down to the genial directing of Graham and Berry Hedley and some hard work behind the scenes by Brian Kirkdale. On the last evening we played a friendly teams match against our guests from Horsham and Patcham. As perfect hosts we did, of course, let them win! The hotel is booked again for next year.

On a sad note, we have lost three long standing members since our last meeting. They are May Langmaid, Elisa Dobson and Peter Brown. May and Elisa had not been seen at the table for a number of years but Peter played regularly right up to the first lockdown.

I will finish by thanking all of directors and committee members for their continued support. Thank you, too, to all who have played in our games either here or from home.

Neil Watts