

Chairman's Report - YCBC AGM October 2023

The last year has seen the club well-established in its new home, and gradually improving its operations in a number of respects.

In August 2022, the club expanded to include the Warwick Room and associated Match Room as part of its premises. These areas have been well used during the last year, and in August this year, the licence for their use was renewed. The additional space has provided not only additional capacity, but also has greatly increased the flexibility of the building to accommodate different events at different times.

In addition to the bridge activities, the Centre now has many different regular users. The Hammersmith Chess Cub continues to hold club nights every Monday evening and matches on many Thursdays. The London Chess League holds regular matches on Tuesday evenings and many one-off chess tournaments have been held during the last year. The London Go Centre holds two sessions a week and a couple of big congresses each year. We have had a regular weekly meditation session for most of the year, and a number of photographic sessions have been held in the Centre. The London Riverside Church holds fortnightly meetings on Sundays and a number of other one-off events have taken place. The majority of users still want to come in the evenings and weekends, so there is still capacity to increase our daytime room hires.

Turning to bridge activities, there is good and bad news. The good news is that Friday evenings, our core sessions, are vibrant and are now regularly attracting a healthy 12 or more tables. In addition, "Super Wednesday" sessions, which started during the summer when the Super League had ceased, have proved to be popular and are now continuing on alternate Wednesdays to the League. The Tuesday daytime Goldhawks sessions continue to attract a loyal core of players who attend regularly and numbers are gradually increasing. The Spring and Autumn YC Super Leagues continue to attract a good number of teams, and we have held a number of special events during the year, greatly enjoyed by those who attend, though still in need of better promotion to increase the entries. On the negative side, despite many efforts to promote them, Monday evening sessions had to be ceased earlier this year through lack of support. And the Thursday daytime sessions also suffered from diminishing support and were suspended over the summer. It is still hoped to re-start these soon, but what is needed is someone to take ownership of these session and work to promote them, so as to build up viable attendances.

We have run teaching courses throughout the year for Beginners, "Next Steppers" and Improvers, and we have regular practice play sessions to enable those who have come through the courses to develop their skills. We do suffer as a club because of the lack of an evening duplicate session that is suitable for learners to make the progression into regular club players – the jump to playing on Wednesdays or Fridays is very large for newcomers to make. In order to introduce such a duplicate, again we need someone to help to build up enough core players to make a regular game viable.

A major administrative task during the year was the conversion of all membership subscriptions to a fixed subscription year, from 1st April to 31st March each year. This will make ongoing subscription collection much more streamlined and efficient. We have also established a "Premises Committee" to look at promotion of use of the Centre for more activities. The London MindSports Centre website now advertises our events and is generating regular enquiries for room hire.

The bulk of the management has been handled throughout the year by the Management Team of Chris, Brian and Rosie. Valuable support has been provided by:

- Maciej Szczerczak, who works part-time for the club and is indispensable in dealing with all sorts of problems
- the Management Committee, who include Andy Clery (Treasurer), Sara Chiappara, Athena Chow, Carrie Eden and David Muller

- our loyal and hard-working Ukrainian bar and cleaning staff – Nataliya, Tamara, Iryna, Olena and, most recently, Alina
- Gitte Hecht-Johansen who organises the Super League and the team of club TDs - Jonathan Jacobs, Mike Eden, Jonathan Lillycrop, Richard Creamer, Chris Dee - as well as keeping us all in order at Friday duplicates
- our team of teachers and occasional tutors, this year including Brian McGuire, Niall Igoe, Simon Prager, Elisabeth Mathison, Shelley Shieff and Chantal Girardin
- Mike Eden who took over the book-keeping for a month when Rosie was on leave
- many others who have helped in small ways with aspects of the smooth running of the club.

Turning to the future, we cannot continue to rely so heavily on the voluntary services of a small core of people. Rosie White has announced her intention to retire at the end of the current financial year from the work she has been doing – most notably all the club's book-keeping as well as many other aspects of the Centre management. Brian and I are continuing to press on, but we are both very aware of our age and limitations. However, as you will have seen from the Treasurer's Report, the club is now making a surplus and it should be possible to employ someone new to replace Rosie and, in due course, hopefully much of what Brian and I also do.

We have come to recognise that running the Young Chelsea is much more than simply running a bridge club, and is also more than can be handled by one person. A very big part of the work is Centre management – building maintenance, room hires, staff management, bar and catering management, etc – none of which necessitates bridge knowledge. It is therefore likely that any new manager will be primarily a Centre Manager rather than a Bridge Club Manager. Finding the right person to take on this role should free up the voluntary Management Committee to run the bridge side of things.

So I am now taking this opportunity to appeal to all club members to help in the search for the right person to employ to make a success of the Centre and the club. Once we have introduced new management, the Young Chelsea should be able to go from strength to strength and the MC can focus on our core bridge activities. Do you know someone who might fit the bill? If so, please contact any of the current management team – all suggestions will be welcomed.

Meanwhile, I will conclude this report with my regular reminder about the status of the Young Chelsea. We are a members club, owned by the members - there is no proprietor making money out of the club. We are all in this together, and without club members coming forward there would be no club. Each of you can do your bit to keep the club going – please think about how you can help. You might:

- help to organise club events – such as a one-off competitions, parties, other events
- offer assistance based on your professional expertise eg in technology, accountancy, marketing etc, etc
- act as a host for duplicates
- encourage and play with new learners so as to help integrate them within the club
- bring the building to the attention of anyone you know who might be interested in hiring space at the club
- and above all, support our events by playing as often as you can!

Chris Duckworth
October 2023