

Chairman's Report - YCBC AGM November 2025

The last 12 months have seen a very successful year for the club. We have had a period of stability with regard to staffing of the Centre and a profitable year due to increased room hirings and use of the building generally.

Regular use of the building for mind sports activities continues to grow. Hammersmith Chess Club goes from strength to strength, both of their two evenings a week having been extended during the year to cater for different sections of the chess community. Under their new President Adam Cranston, now also a member of the YC and a rapidly improving bridge player, the club has recently been voted the 2025 Chess Club of the Year. The London Chess League continues to use the Centre one evening a week, and the London Go Centre continues to meet every Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon. We have had a Shogi tournament, a major Scrabble event, a Strategy Games festival and plans are in hand for a big Backgammon competition next year. In addition to HCC, we now host many other chess events and have attracted many top chess players to the building. And of course there is a significant amount of bridge usage for one-off matches and by external bridge bodies including the EBU, BGB and LMBA.

We also have a wide variety of other regular daytime and weekend users, too disparate to itemise. Much of our business has come from Hammersmith & Fulham council, who have continued to be significant users of the Centre during the daytimes. Their Wellbeing programme for older residents of the borough continues to use the Main Hall regularly on Mondays and Wednesdays and is booked to do so until the end of this year. Many other contacts within LBHF hold frequent meetings and other activities within the Centre. We are aware, however, that the new Hammersmith Civic Centre is nearing completion, and the opening of this building may have a negative impact on the business we get from LBHF in future. Another negative factor this year has been the loss of Chessable, who have ceased their long-term use of the small meeting room on the first floor. On the plus side, however, this gives us an additional room to use for bridge matches and other small-scale hirings – we have now named this room the Chelsea Room.

Turning to the club's own bridge activities, our membership over the last year has grown slightly, up from 489 last year to a total membership of 518 at present, including 145 juniors and full-time students, 6 more than last year. Our efforts to introduce a new monthly match-pointed pairs ladder in the Spring were not a success - the sessions were poorly attended and it was decided not to run this event again. Our core Friday evening sessions continue to attract a healthy regular attendance, however, the YC Super League maintains its popularity, and our one-off and annual competitions have been better attended this year than in recent years. The Goldhawks activity is well-established with three sessions a week, all with regular loyal supporters. We introduced a new event in the summer to help to integrate the Goldhawks with the regular club members – a "Right through the Pack" Teams competition with each team comprising players from both groups. Two such events have been held and were enjoyed by all who took part – another is planned for early January 2026.

Our teaching activities continue to grow. In addition to myself, who co-ordinates the teaching and runs seminars, and Elisabeth Mathison who has been our main tutor for the last couple of years, the teaching team has been boosted by Shelley Shieff and Sara Chiappara who are both now teaching and proving popular with their students. We have organised MiniBridge teaching at a local Youth Club and hope to extend this. And our after-school bridge sessions for local school-children, run by Tom Townsend, have attracted a significantly increased attendance this term.

Having said at the start that our staffing during the year has been static, we are about to see some changes. Sadly, Maciej Szczerczak now feels that the time is right to retire, due to his age and some health problems, and he leaves his post as Club Manager's Assistant role at the end of October. Newer members may not know that Maciej has worked with the club, off and on, over a period of over 40 years in a variety of capacities and his loyalty to the club and his willingness to turn his hand to absolutely any task that needed doing have been outstanding. He will be very much missed and we wish him a long and happy retirement. We will in any case continue to see him at the club as he will continue to play bridge and will help out from time to time, if needed. We are pleased to have found a

replacement in the form of Gabor Lekai who joined us in early October and will take on much of the practical work previously undertaken by Maciej.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking everyone else who has helped to keep the wheels turning and to make the club a success this year:

- Eva Balazs-Elek and her loyal and hard-working Ukrainian team, especially our main bar helpers – Nataliya, Olena and Tanya – without whom we simply couldn't function
- Brian Callaghan, unpaid member of the Management Team who looks after our equipment, runs most of the club competitions and maintains the website – all never-ending tasks
- the other Management Committee members – Mark Lehto (Treasurer), David Muller (technical bridge movements whizz), Sara Chiappara, Athena Chow, Heather Hanbury and Ryan Stephenson – all of whom provide valuable support
- Gitte Hecht-Johansen who organises the Super League, the team of club TDs and the Friday host system, as well as keeping us all in order at Friday duplicates
- all our teaching staff – Elisabeth, Shelley and Sara; Rosie White who drives the Youth Club project; Tom Townsend and Ewa Kater for the schools programme.
- many others who have helped in small ways with aspects of the smooth running of the club, such as hosting, offering professional expertise when needed, helping with competitions and events.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members who support the club by coming along to play – do keep coming as often as you can! The Young Chelsea Bridge club belongs to you, its members, and without you there would be no club.

Chris Duckworth
November 2025