

CHELTENHAM BRIDGE CLUB

Chair's report to the AGM, April 27th 2024

2023 was a very successful year for the Bridge Club. We made further significant strides forward and by the end of the year we were close to being back to pre-Covid "normal".

Numbers

Numbers have continued to rise as you will see from the participation figures. We no longer have the 25+ tables on Tuesday evenings that we saw in the past but we now have several additional sessions across the week and one of them, Gentle Bridge on Thursday morning, is our most popular session of all, just edging past Tuesday evening. This shows the impact that the player development programme is having.

The work of the Committee

This year we have welcomed two recruits to the committee who have become officers of the club: Jackie Saitch, Treasurer, and Caroline Bristol, Club Secretary. Both have settled quickly and made important contributions to the smooth running of the club.

Finances

The finances of the club are in robust health, as you will have seen from the Accounts.

Bridge activities

There are eleven sessions of bridge each week, nine face to face and two online. The move back towards F2F continued right across the year so that even those who said they liked online better and would stay with it have gradually come back. The club intends to continue to offer online opportunities, though, because for some members it is their only chance to play with partners and opponents whom they know.

Competitions have returned in force and we have seen the Championship Pairs resurrected, as well as the Verrion, Ceri Rees and others. There is a trophy for the highest scorers in the Swiss Pairs across the year and new trophies for Gentle and Improver tournaments.

Congress

The much-admired Cheltenham Congress took place in August 2023 (for the first time since May 2019) and thanks go out to Ro Kaye and her team for making it happen, in a new, prestigious venue – Dean Close School. This was another important step towards Normal and was warmly welcomed. We hope to see the event prosper with even higher attendances in the future and Cheltenham BC members competing with the very best in the country.

Teaching

The Teaching programme continues to do us great credit. It is hard to imagine that there is a club that has one to match it (except possibly Andrew Robson's!). The teaching and organising team deserve great credit for attracting so many new recruits into the game and then capturing their commitment and enthusiasm. Congratulations to all of them.

Probably the most important reason our membership is so strong is that we have a substantial number of new recruits each year from the teaching groups and they bring energy and commitment with them. Our numbers have risen again this year from 538 to 556. This is good news at a time when many clubs are finding it hard to maintain their totals.

Catering

We began 2023 with a catering service that was running well and was well-supported by the members. Mid-year, however, James who manages 'Wild Slice' announced that he would be returning to full-time study in September and we faced considerable uncertainty. We tried very hard to appoint a new provider but none of the business people who looked at it was prepared to take it on. However, a new, volunteer-run system was introduced in September and despite some teething problems it is now established and is providing a good basic service, with the café being as well-used as it has ever been. We are grateful to Stephanie Molyneux for launching it along the right lines, to Angela Newell and Robert Huguenin for picking up the baton, and to the many members who now contribute to the service at each session.

Premises

The Club building is now over 180 years old and therefore the maintenance effort (compared with a modern building) is quite significant. A programme of major works (including new roof slates, installation of IT infrastructure, a new kitchen, refurbishment of the toilets, redecoration throughout, new carpets and installation of a lift) took place from 2011 onwards, and was substantially complete by 2021 when the club re-opened post-Covid. Since then, required work has largely been confined to minor repairs and continuing routine (statutory) maintenance/inspection of electrical systems, the heating system and the fire protection arrangements. Some further redecoration has also been done, and the 12 year old carpet in the downstairs hallway has been replaced.

Art Display

One of the features of Wild Slice's tenure was that it demonstrated the potential of the cafeteria as a space for displaying pictures. Under our new arrangements it has been a pleasure to see the walls adorned with the excellent artwork of our highly talented members. It has added greatly to the atmosphere of the break-times.

Bournemouth

The Bournemouth holiday was once again heavily over-subscribed and will be again next year because it was a great success again. Thanks go to Martin and Nicola Renshaw for making this big undertaking so popular every year. Thanks too to Mark Giard and Neil Smith who make up the organising team.

Events

As one of the country's leading clubs, it is important that we contribute to the overall health of the game and we are pleased to act as the regional venue for events such as the Masters Pairs, Handicap Pairs and other national competitions. We are happy too to host an annual Charity Day Tournament and a number of events run by the county association. The Christmas Party ran again this year and was again much enjoyed by all.

Volunteers

All of the activities reported above are dependent on the efforts of the very many members who contribute so generously to the work. In no particular

order I would like to thank all the directors, scorers, duplimators, standbys, accountants, trustees, teachers, committee members, refreshment providers, maintenance workers, for all the work they do to make everything operate so well. I hope I've not left anybody off!

RIP

Three of our members died this year, Kathleen Barry Brown, Valerie Braunholtz and Tony Rowland. We send our condolences again to their families.

CH 12.2.24