# Leamington Bridge Club

Chairman’s Report 2021

Since my last report in November last year, much has happened. At that time we were effectively in lockdown and no bridge had been played since March, at least none organised by this club. Almost immediately, the situation changed with the development of the RealBridge platform, which made it possible to play online while simultaneously being able to see and speak to your partner and opponents. We started hosting sessions in December 2020 and have continued to do so on a weekly basis. The Monday evening sessions have been well supported, with as many as 7 tables on occasion, and among our regular players have been former members Julian Ash and Alan Robinson, now resident in France and Florida respectively. We also experimented with running online sessions on a Thursday afternoon, but these were less well supported and the experiment has been discontinued.

In ordinary circumstances the most significant development this year would have been the merger with the former Leamington Bridge Club, which was formalised in April. This occurred as the result of an approach from that club’s committee, and was welcomed by the Lillington club’s committee. There was already a substantial overlap in membership between the two clubs. The former Leamington club used to meet in Trinity Street on a Wednesday evening, but there was no enthusiasm for those sessions to continue (although I understand that the premises and equipment there are still being used by the U3A bridge club). For reasons of space, we were unable to take over the tables belonging to the former club, but we did accept a generous contribution to our club’s funds amounting to £3,000.

Following the merger, we took the opportunity to revise our constitution and to adopt the name of Leamington Bridge Club, in recognition of the fact that we are now the main bridge club in the town and no longer have any particular connection with the village of Lillington. I want to thank Don Earley for his work in drafting the new constitution and also for his work in preparing a survey of members earlier in lockdown. Don has now decided, for reasons connected with his health, to stand down from the committee and I thank him for his service.

I also want to thank Geoff Wiskin, our former Treasurer, who has stood down following his move away from the area earlier this month. As well as dealing with the cash collection and banking, not to mention preparation of the accounts, Geoff also arranged for us to have online banking facilities, something essential for a world in which bank branches are closing down and cheques are becoming a thing of the past. We have been fortunate in persuading Mark Oaten to take over as Treasurer.

Mavis Watts and Ken Boutell are also standing down from the committee; in Mavis’s case I think it is because she is not comfortable with resuming face to face sessions, so is unable to make the practical contributions that she used to be able to do. She is still playing regularly online. Ken has agreed to stand down as membership secretary, after more years’ service than just about anyone, in order to enable us to move to a computerised membership system which will use the club’s website as a membership database.

The website is an innovation for which I take full responsibility, although it uses the same underlying software as is used by other local clubs, such as Kenilworth and Coventry. It is already used by those who play RealBridge online, making it unnecessary to send out an email with a link to the session. In future I hope to follow those clubs and move to a subscription model whereby both annual subscriptions and table money will be paid online, making it unnecessary to handle cash at all. Members will also be able to use the website to find a partner as well as to see a record of their results (something which is already happening).

I also want to thank all the other committee members, namely Jerome, Ron, Andrew and Judy for their input this year and for agreeing to continue to serve.

I will say nothing at this stage about the immediate future, as that will be covered in the discussion we shall be having in a few minutes’ time.

Finally, I want us to remember two long-serving members who have died in the past year: my old partner John Rowley (a former chairman of the club) and, more recently, June Walters. In the context of the pandemic, we should perhaps be grateful not to have lost more than these two.