

Chairman's Report - YCBC AGM October 2022

This has been a year of considerable change for the club. This time last year we were occupying our current premises on a short term licence which covered the ground floor and half of the first floor. After lengthy negotiations, a 30-year lease was signed for these premises, securing a long-term future for the club. After several peripatetic years, the club has finally found somewhere to be its long term home for the foreseeable future. In August this year, a further agreement was reached to take over the remaining area of the first floor of the building, comprising the lovely open-plan Warwick Room and the Match Room, on a 1-year licence at a very favourable rental rate. This gives considerably more flexibility for accommodating different events, both for bridge and other mind sports, and it is very much hoped that the extra space will prove its worth and become a permanent part of the club at the end of this licence period.

The management of the club has also gone through some upheavals during the year. As you no doubt know, overall club management is in the hands of the members in the form of 6 elected Directors of the company YCBC Ltd, augmented by other volunteers who together form a Management Committee (MC). For much of its history, the MC has employed a manager to undertake all the day-to-day tasks of management. Ian Payn was our caretaker manager for a few months until the end of 2021, but was never in a position to take on the job for longer. He was replaced by Gad Chadha on a trial basis for the first 6 months of 2022. Gad worked very hard for the club but in the post-Covid era it has proved very difficult to generate sufficient income to cover the cost of a full-time manager. It was therefore, sadly, decided that he could not be confirmed in the post and that the club should continue to be run on a volunteer basis by the MC members.

The composition of the MC has also changed significantly during the year. On completion of the lease negotiations, David Ewart and John Dean, who had mainly represented the club on these matters, both resigned from the MC, after both serving as directors for a considerable number of years. The club is extremely grateful to them for all their contributions over these years. Andy Clery briefly took on the role of acting-Chairman from David Ewart, then he was replaced by myself. In February and March three new volunteers joined the MC - Carrie Eden, Athena Chow and Sara Chiappara - and in July India Natt resigned, prior to the birth of her baby. The resultant MC membership is now as follows:

Brian Callaghan, Andy Clery (Treasurer), David Muller, Rosie White – Directors
Sara Chiappara, Athena Chow, Chris Duckworth (Chairman), Carrie Eden – MC members

The bulk of the management is now handled by the Management Team of Chris, Brian and Rosie. Although the team works closely together at all times, it is worth noting the primary areas of responsibility of each of the team members, so that club members know who to approach about any issues:

Rosie – day-to-day book-keeping, room hire and match bookings, membership subscriptions
Brian – webmaster, bar provisioning/stock control, on-going bridge events (YCSL, YCKO, etc)
Chris – teaching, membership communications

So how is the club doing now, under the new regime?

A lot of work is being done on getting the finances of the club into good order. The Treasurer is producing regular management reports so that we can see how we are doing overall – and you will see from his report that we are more-or-less breaking even at the present time. Membership subscriptions are being chased and we are in the process of changing to a fixed subscription year so that renewals will be much more straight-forward in future.

Room bookings are very buoyant and earning us roughly the same as club bridge events. The London Go Centre continues to have their home in the T Mark Hall room on the first floor, meeting twice a week. And the chess community in particular has enthusiastically taken to the building, with the vibrant Hammersmith Chess Club and the London Chess League now both using it as their permanent home, and with many other

competitions and events also being regularly booked in. The club is in full use most weekday evenings and about 2 in 3 weekends, but we still need more daytime activities to maximise revenue from the space. A new working group comprising representatives of three main mind sports has established a dedicated new website and a social media campaign aimed at marketing the MindSports Centre and the hire of rooms within it.

We currently have five teaching courses in progress – three Beginners, one Next Step and one Improvers. In addition, the Tuesday daytime Goldhawks sessions – which are essentially supervised duplicates - are well-established. A Thursday evening Supervised Play session is currently held every week but is suffering from intermittent attendances. Two series of Improver seminars have been run during the last year and more are planned. We have not as yet achieved major progress on the planned Youth project that was hit by the pandemic, but we are supporting student bridge at Imperial College and we are funding some young students on our teaching courses from the Youth Fund. We continue to offer free play as well as free learning to all full-time students.

Bridge events during the year have been many and varied. The Women's Teams was re-introduced as a f2f event at the end of last year and has already attracted a healthy entry for this year, when it will be held in November – thanks to Paula Leslie's sterling efforts in promoting this event. A New Year Pairs and the August Bank Holiday Blue-pointed Swiss Teams were successfully run thanks to the efforts of Carrie Eden. The Spring SuperLeague was completed and the Autumn SuperLeague is ongoing – the competition is well-supported and thanks are due to Gitte Hecht-Johansen for her efforts in running this. The YCKO for the current year is in its final stages. Brian Callaghan organises this event and must be doing so efficiently as he has managed to ensure team Binkie is the last undefeated team! A Christmas Party and a Summer Jubilee party were held, the latter incorporating the Keith Loveys Individual which attracted a bigger entry than its last pre-Covid run. Most recently, the YC Marathon was revived, with a small but enthusiastic entry.

One thing that has not changed during the year is the hard work and dedication of our Ukrainian bar and cleaning staff. Natalya, Tamara and Iryna (our cleaner) have been with us throughout and have recently been augmented by another Iryna. They all have family back in Ukraine and we are extremely grateful to them for their loyalty to the club throughout such a difficult time for them all. We ran a very well-supported event earlier in the year in aid of a humanitarian aid for Ukraine and you will have seen that we are currently housing a wonderful collection of Ukrainian art displayed throughout the building. Much of this was painted in the war zone and brought to this country for sale with the aim of funding an armoured ambulance to help with the war effort. I do hope we will be able to provide further support for the people of Ukraine through the sale of some of these art works.

Looking to the future, our regular Friday games are gradually growing and we are optimistic this trend will continue. Monday evening games are struggling and we need to find a way of making them more attractive to the membership. Daytime bridge is recognised as a growth area, and it is intended to re-introduce a daytime session soon that will be of interest to those members who have been reluctant to come and play in the evenings post-Covid. Crucial to our future is increasing the hire of space within the building during the daytimes – it is flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of uses and we need to be creative in finding potential users.

To summarise, the club is on an even keel and doing well. But this is due to the efforts of a limited number of the members and I would really like to see more members getting involved. There are lots of small ways in which every member might contribute:

- acting as a host for Monday and Friday duplicates
- helping out at a promotional event
- acting as a mentor to a new learner
- bringing the building to the attention of anyone you know who might be interested in hiring space at the club

- considering what professional expertise you may have that could be of use to the club
- helping to organise a one-off club event – could be bridge or social
- etc, etc.

Do remember – the Young Chelsea Bridge Club is owned by its members. There is no proprietor making money out of the club, we are all in this together. It's your club, and we rely on you – without club members coming forward there would be no club.

Chris Duckworth
October 2022