**MCBA AGM 2023 Paper 1: Report of Officers to AGM**

**4.1 Chair (Irene Davies)**

 **State of Play**

Bridge in the County is still in a recovery period following COVID. Clubs are slowly

increasing their numbers of players at Face-to-face sessons, while online numbers

seem to be falling. A similar process is taking place at County events. But On-line

bridge is clearly an option that is here to stay. Most clubs have a mixture of both

F2F and online sessions and the County’s leagues and cups have mostly been

played online. The EBU’s events are also a mixture of both. This is the reality we

face. It does make life difficult for the County and clubs as the bridge population

seems to be divided into those who only want to play online, those who only want to

play F2F and those who only want to play.

We will have to see how this develops over the coming year but at present it seems

best to be flexible in our organisation of events.

**Tollemache**

Manchester won the Tollemache Cup. Its the most prestigious national teams event

run by the EBU, involving all the Counties. Its the first time that Manchester as a

separate county has won the event. Well done and long overdue.

**Teaching Beginners**

I am glad to report that more teaching of beginners is taking place this year. We

now have beginners being taught at Manchester BC, Ashton BC, Bramhall &amp;

Cheadle Hulme Bridge Centre as well as by individual teachers in the County.

Trafford BC are also planning to restart their Beginners teaching programme.

Improvers lessons are also taking place in a number of clubs. The hard work of

turning learners into club members and attenders at duplicate sessions is the next

target. Manchester BC is a model for this transition.

**Worries**

• The falling numbers in the League and Higson Cup is a real concern. The drop in

numbers seems to be equally from all divisions. Most matches are being played

on line. We need to put in a big effort this year to see if we can increase the

number of teams in the league and cup and if this is not successful we will have

to rethink our whole plan around the League and Higson Cup.

• There is also a concern among the stronger players in Manchester that the EBU

has put so many competitions on line. This has been done largely for finnacial

reasons but has led to a reduction in the numbers of good players playing in

National Competitions. (As seen in the recent Corwen Trophy). This is also the

case for the Northern Bridge League and the Presidents Cup, where we are

finding difficulty in organising a real A team.

• We do not have a Youth and Schools organiser at the moment. This has been a

difficult area of work for the last few years but one that is surely essential to the

survival of bridge.

**Tournament Directors**

The County is organising a Tournament Directors Course in the Autumn at Trafford

BC. This is in response from requests from a number of clubs.

**Members sub-committee**

A new members sub-committee has been set up to improve the executive’s

communication with clubs and the members and to reach out to the unaffiliated

clubs. See a separate report from the Sub committee.

**EBU Chairs meetings**

I have attended a number of these online meetings over the past year. (Thanks to

Alan Mould for standing in for me when I couldn’t attend).

They are now chaired and the agenda organised by the Counties so are not as top

down as they were previously. Good practice and initiatives from clubs are aired

such as Norfolk engaging with the libraries sector to have bridge lessons in

libraries, or how chess is organised in primary schools. But there doesn’t seem to

be an overall EBU strategy to develop the game. So I find these meetings

somewhat frustrating.

**Succession (Not the TV series)**

My thanks have to go to the people who run the County. They are all volunteers

who give up their time to ensure that bridge can be enjoyed by the players in the

County. Unfortunately, none of us are getting any younger (though MGB thinks he

is) and there is a need to recruit new people to help organise bridge in the County.

So, we are happy to involve anyone who feels they can give up a little bit of their

time to help.

On this note I would particularly like to thank Eve Lighthill for her many years as

President of the Association. Eve was already a stalwart of Manchester bridge

when I started playing in 2002. We thank you for all your service to the County and

trust you will keep playing for many more years yet.

**4.2 Secretary (Alan Mould)**

Another extremely quiet period in terms of my secretary duties. The Executive has met only once in this year, and Council has met twice as usual. There has been the usual trickle of correspondence from the EBU.

My main business for the County has been chairing the Constitution Revision Group, and I am grateful to Howard Rosemarine and Alec Smalley for their work on that. The redrafted constitution is a major agenda item.

**4.3 Treasurer (Joy Blakey)**

 No report to date

**4.4 Membership Secretary (Alan Mould)**

I have in previous reports given caveats concerning the value of the membership data given the very slow return to F2F bridge. Given that the pandemic is now 2 years past its peak, I feel more confident in the figures, though that is based on a gut instinct rather than any actual analysis.

I give below the data from the EBU as of 15th November 2020, as of 23rd February 2021, as of 19th October 2021, as of 8th May 2022 and as of 7th May 2023.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Member** | **Total****15/11/2020** | **Total 23/02/2021** | **Total****19/10/2021** | **Total****8/05/2022** | **Total****07/05/2023** |
| P2P | **1405** | **1396** | **1435** | **1485** | **1307** |
| Direct members | **44** | **45** | **42** | **39** |  **31** |
| Students (People on the EBED register as learning bridge) | **21** | **20** | **0** | **5** |  **39** |
| Total from spreadsheet | **1470** | **1461** | **1477** | **1529** |  **1377** |

The obvious notable feature of this data is that total numbers are down by 152 from last year and exactly 100 from the year before. Frankly, this does not surprise me as numbers “normalise” post pandemic and members have left clubs or not renewed membership. I see this as a clear reflection of the reduced numbers in club games and at county events. I strongly suspect this pattern of reduced numbers is repeated across the country. The number of MCBA affiliated clubs has remained constant at

Dealing only with the data of 7th May 2023, of the 1377 members, 1307 are Pay to Play, 31 chose to be Direct members and 39 are student members on the first year of a student course. I strongly suspect one of these has been mis-coded as she lives in Newcastle and her only registered club is Whitley Bay and Tynemouth! Of the 1377 members, 1327 have primary allegiance to MCBA and 50 secondary allegiance. Of the 50 secondary allegiance, all bar one are P2P, with the 1 direct member living way outside the county boundaries.

Under the EBED category the following are listed:

* 16 people listed as “EBTA” (ie teachers) which is a pleasing increasing of 3 from last year (though still well down from the height of 28 pre-pandemic), all of which are Pay to Play. However, one has a club of primary allegiance outside of the area (Deva).
* 39 people are listed as “BFA Year 1”, the same 39 as listed as a category of “Student”.
* All others are listed as “None” under the EBED category

The data download from the EBU includes details of NGS grade and MP rank. The AGM may be interested to know that the county has 4 members who are ace of spades, 41 members who are aces (down from 51 last year), though 11 are secondary members, and 18 premier grand masters (up from 17 last year), though 6 of these are secondary members.

**Club Numbers**

I have given the MCBA primary clubs and numbers below. Clubs will obviously have their own records, but I thought people might be interested to see what the EBU records show. There are actually 58 bridge clubs listed as primary in the spreadsheet scattered all over the country. This is the result of Adam enrolling people as members of MCBA when they play in our online events. I have thus ignored everything except the MCBA affiliated clubs and simply listed the numbers in them. This does mean of course that the total is NOT 1377 since all of the “other” clubs are missing. I give the number as of 23rd June 2021, as of 8th May 2022 and as of 7th May 2023 for comparison.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Primary Club** | **Number****23/06/2021** | **Number****08/05/2022** | **Number 07/05/2023** |
| Adam Wiseberg Bridge Club  | **27** | **52** | **65** |
| Altrincham Bridge Club |  **217** | **217** | **115** |
| Ashton and District Bridge Club |  **105** | **106** | **83** |
| Besses O’Th’barn Bridge Club |  **45** | **47** | **41** |
| Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme Bridge Centre | **125** | **110** | **146** |
| Chorley Monday Bridge Club | **-** | **80** | **85** |
| Larkhill Bridge Club | **-** | **53** | **63** |
| Manchester Bridge Club | **206** | **219** | **227** |
| Marple Duplicate Bridge Club |  **74** | **74** | **48** |
| Prestbury Duplicate Bridge Club | **69** | **69** | **61** |
| Stretford Bridge Club | **74** | **73** | **78** |
| Trafford Bridge Club | **273** | **273** | **168** |
| **Total** |  **1215** | **1373** | **1180** |

The most striking feature of these numbers is the huge drop in primary numbers at all of Altrincham, Marple and Trafford clubs, with numbers not far off dropping by 50% in each case. I have no idea whether this is a real drop, or poor data. The clubs presumably do know.

In addition, we have 60 primary members listed as no club, but of these 39 are the student members given above and 21 are Direct members. The other 10 direct members are scattered amongst MCBA affiliated and other clubs.

Of the members who list a primary club, 326 also list a secondary club, sometimes several. Usually these are MCBA affiliated clubs, but not always, with clubs such as Bury Athenaeum or Preston featuring.

I have no wish to stand again as membership secretary (or indeed for any other post) so anyone who is interested in taking up a role please contact me.

**4.5 League Secretary (Adam Wiseberg)**

No report to date

**4.6 Higson Cup Secretary (Paul Beckwith)**

 No report to date

**4.7 Goldstone Trophy Secretary (Roger Hopton)**

 No report to date.

**4.8 Green Point Secretary (Rhona Goldenfield)**

 GP Teams July 2022 we had 15 teams face to face. The winners were Rodney Lighton Michael Byrne Sally Brock and Barry Myers.

Pairs in March 2023 30 pairs winners Stephen Lloyd and David Smith from Merseyside.

We made a profit of £107.

We decided to give out prizes despite the lower number of participants and keep the entry fee the same at £20.

Stuart Davies directed.

July this year there are only 8 teams entered so far. I keep sending out emails but the response is very slow. I hope by the time of the AGM we have had many more entries.

Stuart Davies is directing.

I don’t think we should increase the entry fee as it is difficult to compete with online events.

I have booked St Peters for both events next year.

**4.9 Tournament Secretary (Michael Byrne)**

 No report to date.

**4.10 Congress Secretary (Barbara Lewis)**

 **January 2023**

The Congress was held on-line (RealBridge) for the third year: January 7th and 8th. The Pairs attracted 38 pairs (46 in 2022), and the Teams 12 teams (21 in 2022). Half the players were from MCBA proposed single session non-expert competitions were combined into one session of 8 pairs on Sunday. A quiz was organised by Michael.

The organising of the weekend and directing was excellent. Thanks to Joy for taking all the entries and to Adam for all the tasks involved in directing. Entry fees per person were kept to a minimum - £10/£11 and £4. Even so, the weekend was profitable for MCBA – adding approx. £700 to reserves.

However, it was subsequently agreed at a meeting of the MCBA Executive that an on-line Congress has now run its course and that the Congress should return to face-to-face.

**January 2024**

The Congress has been booked with the EBU with a licence for January 6th (Pairs) and January 7th (Teams) 2024. It is on the EBU calendar as Face to Face – black pointed.

*Venue and organisation.* The executive discussed various venues including Altrincham bridge club and hotels in Manchester and Cheshire. Also, it was agreed that MCBA no longer has ‘what it takes’ to put the package together: eg organising boards, booking van hire and collection of furniture and equipment from several places, set up/break down, hiring TDs, appropriate advertising, etc. Consequently, it was agreed to enlist the assistance of a professional tournament organiser who would do all of the above work. As a result, Oliver Cowan agreed to organise all aspects of the Congress, has carried out research and costings and the Cresta Court hotel in Altrincham has been booked as the venue. Further details will be available at the AGM.

**4.11 Chair of Selectors (Adam Wiseberg, chair, and John Roberts, secretary)**

The current committee is Adam Wiseberg (Chairman), John Roberts (Secretary), Catherine Draper, Roger Hopton and Rodney Lighton. All members except Rodney Lighton are prepared to stand for next year. Alec Smalley has indicated that he would be prepared to stand in place of Rodney.

Since the last report to the AGM in May 2022, the Selection Committee has been involved with the following:

***Tollemache Qualifier***

The Committee selected a team for the Tollemache Qualifier. The event was played on-line on the Realbridge platform on the weekend of Nov 12th/13th 2022. The selected pairs were :

Holland/Hassett

Byrne/Smalley

Draper/Woodcock

Lighton/Mould

The Manchester team finished second in their group and thus qualified for the final, which was held face to face on February 18th / 19th 2023 in Stratford. The team selected for the final was :

Holland/Mould

Slater/Smalley

Draper/Woodcock

Byrne/Hassett

The selectors are pleased to report that Manchester, for the first time in 36 years, finally won the event. They won all of their matches and finished well ahead of Middlesex with an average VP score of 16 per match. All players were above average on the cross imps. The Committee extends its congratulations to all the players.

***Corwen Trophy***

The Ben Franks Trophy is the qualifying event for this. The top four pairs with Manchester allegiance qualify and in the event of non-availability the next highest placed pair qualify, with the proviso that they must have scored at least 50% in the Ben Franks qualifier. Because of the relatively small field in the Ben Franks and the unavailability of some qualifying pairs for the Corwen it was only possible to enter 3 pairs to play in the event which was played over the weekend of 3rd/4th June. The qualifying pairs were :

Kath Nelson and Rhona Goldenfield

Eddie Thornton-Chan and Tony Hodgson

Martin Taylor and Justin Hackett

Justin and Martin were the highest placed Manchester pair finishing 22nd out of 87 pairs

***Presidents Cup***

The Committee has determined the availabilities of players and has selected for the Presidents Cup which will be held on-line over two days on June 24/25 2023 on the RealBridge platform. Because of the low availability of players, Manchester is fielding only one team this year. The teams selected for the two days were :

**24th June**

Paul Murray & Andrew Woodcock

Tony Hodgson & Eddie Thornton-Chan

John Stell & Steve Allen

John Roberts & Royce Alexander

**25th June**

Paul Murray & Andrew Woodcock

Tony Hodgson & Eddie Thornton-Chan

Pearl Fielding & Mike Hart

Roger Hopton & Dave Fussell

***Inter-County National Bridge League Finals***

Manchester won both the A and B Divisions and finished 4th in the C Division of the Northern Bridge league last year. As a result teams from the A and B pool will play in the Inter-County National Finals on June 18th 2023. The event will be played on the RealBridge platform.

The teams selected to play are :

A Team

Ray Semp & Gary Hyett

Joy & Irving Blakey

Phil Taylor & Josh Clarke

Kath Nelson & Rhona Goldenfield

B Team

Mike Hart & Pearl Fielding

Tony Hodgson & Eddie Thornton Chan

Irene Davies & Karen Reissmann

Pauline Lang & Steve Mattinson

***Northern Bridge League***

The Northern Bridge League is set to continue on-line during the months of July to October 2023. Selection for the first two of these matches is in progress.

**4.12 Match Secretary (Adam Wiseberg)**

 Subsumed into Selection Committee report above.

**4.13 EBU Shareholders (Alec Smalley, Jeff Morris, Alan Mould)**

No report to date.

**4.14 Publicity Officer (Susan Triggs)**

There is a limited amount to report in terms of publicity activity in the last 12 months. The MCBA online team continue to do a great job of publicising the MCBA duplicates and events. They can send out the information to all members along with updates which is very helpful.

Members are now returning to play F2F at our local clubs. Most local clubs are currently offering more F2F sessions and generally less online games than 12 months ago. Few clubs have returned to their pre-pandemic timetables and bridge offers but many are close to previous levels. A key priority for publicity must still be about attracting new players to our clubs, as well as encouraging previous players to return.

We are now at the time when we should be preparing to publicise Bridge lessons over the summer, and I will contact the Secretaries of all the Bridge Clubs in MCBA to get details of any plans they have to run beginner’s lessons in September. Currently, Ashton, Bramhall/Cheadle and Manchester Bridge Clubs will be running lessons in September and Trafford/Sale BC also hope to. Jenny Morris is running a range of courses including a beginner’s course.

As part of my role with Manchester Bridge Club I am organising publicity with a local newspaper. If we join their network and agree to advertise in their paper, they will publish good news articles about our club in each of their editions for the next 12 months. This, or something similar, may be available to other clubs via their local community newspapers.

My priorities for publicity this year are:

1. Re-contacting as many bridge teachers and clubs as possible to find out what opportunities they will be offering for beginners to learn to play bridge from September 2023 onwards. There are still limited opportunities to learn bridge F2F currently in our area but hopefully this will increase by September. People want to learn to play bridge and we are missing an opportunity by not having more courses available for beginners. Just for info I have currently finished 2 courses for beginners at Manchester Bridge Club (25 new members) and have interest from 25+ people already for the courses in September.
2. Publicising clubs’ current offers via updating the teacher’s information on the MCBA website (with Rodney’s assistance).
3. Supporting the work of the Member’s Sub Committee
4. Finding a way to get trained/more skilled in the use of social media – is there any-one who could help me improve my skills?

Last year I had a small budget (£250) for advertising for beginner’s lessons. If the Executive wish to spend any money on advertising this year, I’d suggest the budget is given directly to clubs who commit to running beginner’s lessons in September 2023.

**4.15 Schools, Youth & Teachers Liaison (Vacant)**

No report.

**4.16 Webmaster (Rodney Lighton)**

The MCBA website receives about 45 visits per day currently.

This is down to about 80-85% of the level that it was before lockdown.

Thanks to all those who have contributed to the Deal of the Week feature.

The Player of the Year competition has been won by Rodney Lighton in the expert category and jointly by Barbara Eastabrook and Karen Jones in the non-expert category.

**4.17 Members Sub-committee**

The Members sub-committee was set up to improve the communications

between the executive, the clubs and the members and to reach out to the

unaffiliated clubs.

We have met online on 3 occasions so far. People so far involved are Irene

Davies, Susan Triggs, Howard Rosemarine, Gordon Bickley, Paul Murray and

Barbara Eastabrook.

Actions so far:

* Organised a successful joint Charity pairs MCBA and Larkhill.
* Sent out the first Chair’s newsletter.
* Visited 2 clubs. Other visits arranged
* Asked clubs for volunteers to liaise with Sub committee. 6 responses so far.
* Plan to organise a teachers register in Manchester to co-ordinate beginners lessons.