**MCBA AGM 2024 Paper 1: Report of Officers to AGM**

**4.1 Chair (Irene Davies)**

**Where are we?**

It seems we survived COVID with most of our clubs intact. Face to Face bridge is slowly coming back to be the norm in most of our clubs. Though there is still a role for online bridge, particularly in the Winter months.

Our County competitions are slowly growing in size. We had good numbers at our Congress, Ben Franks Pairs Trophy, the Gazette Cup and our Green Point events.

However, we haven’t been able to get our stand alone J high events off the ground. This is an area that needs working on.

The Cantor Cup for beginners had 14 pairs playing. We hoped for greater numbers, but this was truly a beginners competition with some of the players very new to bridge.

We have had problems in finding sufficient players to play in the online Northern Bridge League and in the F2F friendly match with Lancashire. We need to find new players who want to represent the County in these events. In my experience there are just lots of people who haven’t been asked yet.

Our League and Cup numbers are also falling each year. Hopefully the Summer F2F league will get off the ground.

**Tollemache**

Manchester County has always been blessed with more than its fair share of expert players. As a testimony to this the County won the prestigious Tollemache Cup for the second year running. Even more impressive was the fact that we fielded 2 rookies in the team who coped with the event well.

**Teaching Beginners**

We have excellent beginners’ classes taking place at Manchester BC, B&CHBC, Ashton BC, Trafford BC. This has created a real long-term potential for these clubs. Excellent work has also been done in terms of the transition from learning to attending duplicates. All our clubs should learn from this. Teaching is the key for a healthy future for bridge.

Thanks should go out to all the individuals who put so much hard work into running their clubs. They do this with no recompense and often devote hours of work each week to the basics of keeping a club going. You are the bedrock of the County’s success.

**Succession**

I am standing down as Chair at this AGM. Michael Byrne is standing down as Tournament secretary, John Roberts is standing down from the selection committee and Alan Mould is relinquishing some of his responsibilities. Thanks go to those people for all the work they have put in in their roles. We need new blood on the executive that runs the County. At present we are far too dominated by expert players. The vast majority of our members are ordinary club social players and they need to be better represented on the exec. I know it’s difficult because many of those people are already very busy organising their clubs and teaching the new generation of players, but that balance is needed.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who has helped me in the role of Chair over these years. Teamwork is essential to get anything done. So, thank you team.

**4.2 Secretary (Alan Mould)**

My role as Secretary has been a bit busier this year. There has been the usual succession of emails from the EBU to pass on to relevant officers and/or clubs concerning events and other matters, including ga recent flurry about the Festival of Bridge. The Executive has met considerably more frequently this year, a total of 4 occasions, and I have set up the meetings and taken notes at that.

Sadly, we had a formal complaint by one of our members against another member this year. This required me to set up a Conduct Committee which was not easy with the available people and required co-opting other members. The matter was extremely time consuming for all concerned, but the Conduct Committee resolved the matter without recourse to the Disciplinary Committee (which has not had to meet since 2012). The matter highlighted that we are desperately in need of more people to be available for the Conduct Committee. Please put your name forward if you are interested – you need neither to be a top rank bridge player, nor a lawyer, just the ability to think straight and hear the various sides dispassionately.

I wish to make a couple of observations in this report:

Firstly, the 2023 EGM voted down the proposed changes to the Constitution, one of which was the scrapping of Council. Several people at the EGM were outraged that this was a reduction in the democracy of the organisation, whereas as the Executive saw it as removing a clearly broken part. This year the chair decided that she would hold two personal meetings that were Council and invited any member or club to turn up and discuss any issues they wanted, which she would then refer to the executive. Despite extensive publicity to all members **NOBODY CAME**. I cannot see what more proof is needed that Council simply does not work and is not fit for purpose. I am all for the democracy of the organisation, but the members have said very clearly that Council is not the way forward.

Secondly, Irene has sadly decided to step down as chair of MCBA after a long period. She has worked tirelessly for the Association and has always taken on far more than just the chairing of the meetings. The Association owes her a huge debt of gratitude. I don’t know how we are going to replace he and at the time of writing there are no candidates for chair. If you have any interest in this, please put your name forward or approach Irene (or even me) to see what it involves. I cannot emphasise enough again that being a top ranked bridge player is entirely unnecessary for the role (indeed it might be seen as a hindrance – we need the executive to represent the views of the majority of the members).

Finally, I am looking to reduce my own involvement in the Association as I simply do not have the spare capacity anymore. I am relinquishing the role of membership Secretary (more on that below) and would like to relinquish this role as well. All the above comments about what is required stand for this role as well – organisational skills and the ability to herd cats are the main requirements. If anyone is interested, then please contact me for more information. If no one is available I will reluctantly take on the role for 1 more year, but I give notice that I will stand down in 2025.

**4.3 Treasurer (Joy Blakey)**

Report to be circulated later or at the AGM.

**4.4 Membership Secretary (Alan Mould)**

This will be my last report as membership secretary as I am standing down at the AGM. I am grateful to Gordon Bickley who has agreed to take on the role.

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, as of 7th May 2023 and as of 11th May 2024.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Member** | **Total**  **15/11/2020** | **Total 23/02/2021** | **Total**  **19/10/2021** | **Total**  **8/05/2022** | **Total**  **07/05/2023** | **Total**  **11/05/2024** |
| P2P | **1405** | **1396** | **1435** | **1485** | **1307** | **1249** |
| Direct members | **44** | **45** | **42** | **39** | **31** | **27** |
| Students  (People on the EBED register as learning bridge) | **21** | **20** | **0** | **5** | **39** | **41** |
| Total from spreadsheet | **1470** | **1461** | **1477** | **1529** | **1377** | **1317** |

As can be seen from the figures, we are continuing to lose members. The figures are down by 60 over last year, and by 212 at the peak in 2022. Frankly, this does not surprise me as numbers continue to “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 dropped by 1, the Adam Wiseberg Bridge Club having disaffiliated from the EBU, which would explain a lot of this year’s drop as that club had a significant number of members who were not members of any other club.

Dealing only with the data of 11th May 2024, of the 1317 members, 1249 are Pay to Play, 27 chose to be Direct members and 41 are student members on the first or second year of a student course, 32 of which have a primary club of B&CHBC. As I have reported before, this does not really reflect the number of students, since many clubs do not register their students as student members in the EBU. The chair has reported above that in addition to B&CHBC there are also strong teaching programmes at Manchester, Ashton and Trafford, but these are not seen in the members download.

Of the 1317 members, 1274 have primary allegiance to MCBA and 43 secondary allegiance. Of the 43 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:

* 14 people listed as “EBTA” (i.e. teachers) which is 2 down from last year (and well down from the height of 28 pre-pandemic), all of which are Pay to Play. However, one has left the area for London this year and so we will have lost another teacher.
* 36 people are listed as “BFA Year 1”, and 5 as “BFA Year 2”, agreeing with the total of 41 student members.
* 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 3 members who are ace of spades, 46 members who are aces (up from 4 last year), though 11 are secondary members, and 18 premier grand masters (the same as last year), though 6 of these are secondary members.

**Club Numbers**

I have in the past given club numbers, but I don’t think anyone found them useful. It is difficult to disentangle the primary and secondary club status to get accurate numbers, and clubs keep their own records. Suffice it to say that all MCBA affiliated clubs are represented on the EBU download.

**4.5 League Secretary (Royce Alexander)**

Report will either be circulated later or tabled at the AGM.

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

The hoped for increase in team numbers by including cost of entry in with the League, and simply requiring teams to tick a box for League only, or for League and Cup did not significantly materialise.

24 teams this year as against 20 last year, of which 2 were non-league teams, and from the remainder one team claimed to have inadvertently ticked the wrong box, and so conceded their 1st round match.

Of the teams contesting the Cup final, all got there by playing a 2nd round match.

It was a different picture for the Plate final, where only 2 of the 6 matches to get to the final were actually contested, the other 4 being conceded, although one of these then withdrew to leave a 5 team Plate final.

The finals day itself ran as smoothly as last year, due largely to the use of a well experienced Director with all the ability needed to run a 2 section event with different numbers in each, and not a little advance preparation on my part, plus a full day on hand to see things ran smoothly, and then to transfer the raw data to come up with the Handicap results for each.

I think that all who took part enjoyed the day.

**As for the bigger picture - is it worth the effort?**

I think that may be for others to judge, but one observation I had was that despite the use of the Discrete VP table, the Plate event was ultimately decided by one large defeat for a team having a particularly bad day. The Cup was much closer.

**Alternatives available if the format was to be changed?**

Assuming continuation of the Handicap ideal.

There could be a case for a straight knockout, in which case awarding the Cup to overall winners, with the Plate going to runners up?

With these numbers that would require 4 rounds plus a final.

Input from an organiser would be reduced, though calculation of handicap difference for each round could be a little more work.

A smaller venue required and could even be scored manually.

I'm afraid I haven't crystallized these thoughts into a conclusion, but it's stick with what we have or  something like the above.

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

Report will be circulated later or tabled at the AGM.

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

The teams July 2023 had 19 entries.

Winners were John Holland, Gillian Whyte, John Hassett and Adrian Thomas.

The Pairs March 2024 had 38 entries (19 tables).

Winners were Tom Dessain and Rodney Lighton

Events were held at St Peters. Stuart Davies ran both events and I have booked him and the hall for 2025.

It was decided at the last exec meeting to increase the entry to £22.50 up from £20.

So far on May 1st for July there are 5 entries (hopefully more by the time of the AGM).

I do try to give out a fair proportion in prizes including to Non experts.

As usual my thanks go to Joan Lewis who does a tremendous amount to help me with the organisation.

I also give grateful thanks to our President Kevin and Celia who always help by being the standby pair, so we don’t have a half table.

**4.9 Tournament Secretary (Michael Byrne)**

Report will be circulated later or tabled at the AGM.

**4.10 Congress Secretary (Barbara Lewis)**

The Manchester Congress returned to face-to-face on January 6th and 7th 2024, after 3 years on-line.

It was held at the Cresta Court hotel in Altrincham and was organised and run by Oliver Cowan in conjunction with MCBA representatives.

The Pairs attracted 23 ½ tables and the Teams 24 tables. A non-expert pairs held on Sunday afternoon was supported by 10 ½ tables. No students/juniors played – disappointing.

The TD for the main events was Stuart Davies. Stuart and Oliver brought all the tables, cloths, bidding boxes, bridgemates and all the boards/cards - that Stuart had dealt. The non-expert event was directed by Victor Ridding with tables, boards and bridgemates from Bramhall.

The weekend was generally excellent, and the bridge deemed to be successful. There were a few issues to be dealt with before 2025 relating to ’housekeeping’ at the hotel and the poor behaviour of some of the players.

Oliver Cowan has agreed to organise the congress for 2025. This is now on the EBU calendar for 4th and 5th January. Once again, it will be a black pointed congress with multiple pairs on Saturday and for the first time Swiss teams on Sunday. The Cresta Court hotel has been booked for the event.

**4.11 Chair of Selectors (John Roberts, secretary)**

Report will be circulated later or at the AGM.

**4.12 Match Secretary (Position vacant)**

No report.

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

Report will be circulated later or tabled at the AGM.

**4.14 Publicity Officer (Position vacant)**

No report

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

No report.

**4.16 Webmasters (Rodney Lighton & Espen Gisvold)**

**News website**

The MCBA web site is visited on average this year by 49 people per day, this is slightly up on last year.

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

The Player of the Year competition is not yet complete at the time of this report, but John Holland will win the expert category and Barbara Eastabrook and Karen Jones will be joint winners of the non-expert category.

I intend to change the scoring for the expert category next year to reflect the general reduction in entrants that we have had for events.

**Results & Registration website**

The site has been redesigned to get the same look and feel as the main MCBA web site. It is now use solely for the purpose of Registration to events, presentation of Results and as a database for emailing members about registration to events. Since last year’s AGM over 45 bulk emails have been sent. The frequency has fallen and is now at a more sustainable level of 2 or so bulk email shots sent a month.

**4.17 Festival of Bridge (September 2024)**

The county is at the moment planning two events - Twin Town Tournament and a promotional event at the Trafford Centre. The suggested SIMS has been canceled as EBED has a Festival Of Bridge SIMS 2nd - 5th September and the clubs will be encouraged to join these events.

**Twin Town Tournament**

15 French clubs have been contacted, and two have replied that they will participate. I’m working on calling every French Club. The French Bridge Federation has been very helpful in creating our French promotional material. Shireen Mohandes of RealBridge has been instrumental in creating the English promotional material. I have every reason to believe that we will get a good turnout for the event.

**Promotional event at the Trafford Centre**

At present we have managed to recruit 5 volunteers to play and one to be an “usher”. Before we can progress with this event, we need 3 more to play and one more as an “usher”. As soon as this is in place, the work with the event will proceed. Until then the event is hanging in the balance.

The main events of the festival are to be run by the clubs, and most clubs are planning some sort of activity. The EBU map (<https://www.ebu.co.uk/festival/map>