**MCBA AGM 2025 Paper 1: Report of Officers to AGM**

**4.1 Chair (report submitted by vice chair Alec Smalley)**

The AGM of 2024 saw the retirement of our Chair, Irene Davies, after many years of service to the County: her contributions to the world of bridge led to her receiving a Dimmie Fleming Award. The year since then has progressed without a chair, but with an otherwise complete executive committee who have run all our events and competitions with enthusiasm and dedication. Our clubs, both affiliated to the EBU and those that are not, have been busy and successful, and MCBA members have been visible and successful in county, and numerous national and international competitions.

MCBA Leagues. The county ran a summer (F2F) league for the first time in 2024 with 2 divisions. The winter league season attracted 4 main divisions with 30 teams: in addition, and with help from teachers in several clubs, 2 newcomers’ leagues took place with 12 teams participating. Thanks to Royce Alexander for his organisation and running of the leagues.

Several clubs have active teaching programmes with students progressing to supervised play and introductory duplicate sessions – with duplimated boards and bridgemate scoring – all face-to-face. This bodes well for the future of bridge in the county as these newcomers develop their bridge.

All our other activities were well managed and successful, namely: the Higson Cup and Plate (Paul Beckwith), Goldstone Cup (Roger Hopton), Cantor Cup (Susan Triggs/Ann Thornton), Green Pointed Pairs and Teams (Rhona Goldenfield), Gazette Cup (Irene Davies), on-line weekend and Ben Franks (Barbara Lewis). Details of all the results and winners, with photos, are on the MCBA website.

An inter-county match between Manchester and Lancashire took place together with a Jack high match. The Manchester teams were not successful, but we hope to reverse the results in a return event this coming summer.

The county entered only one team in the Northern Bridge League but plan to increase this to 2 or 3 teams in the coming season. We did not participate in the President’s Cup. Both these events are played on-line.

EBU competitions.

Members were well represented in numerous EBU national events which includeed: the Year End Congress, the Premier League, the Easter Festival, the Summer Meeting, Jersey Congress, Guernsey Congress, Northern Midweek Congress, Harrogate Spring Congress, and the Spring Fours. Players/teams also qualified for the finals of the National Pairs, Garden Cities, Tollemache Trophy, Crockfords and the Pachabo. Notable successes were winning the On-Line Knock-Out teams (Royce Alexander, Jeff Smith, Joy and Irving Blakey, David Barton and Alec Smalley), the Corwen (John Holland and Alan Mould), the Hubert Phillips (Michael Byrne in the winning team) and the Gerald Faulker (John Holland and Alan Mould in the winning team).

Members also played in various national and international trials, the European Championships and the USA nationals.

The EBU had a Festival of Bridge in September with several of our clubs organising special events and activities and raising money for Cancer Research.

EBU Awards. We were delighted to see our members receiving EBU awards: the Dimmie Fleming award for Irene Davies, and Michael Byne received a Silver Award for contributions to junior bridge. Jeff Smith (of Lancs) also received a Dimmie Fleming Award. We congratulate all of them.

On behalf of the MCBA Executive, I would like to express thanks to all our members for their participation in our clubs and events, and to our event organisers and selectors for all their endeavours during the year. Also, to Rodney Lighton for the website and Espen Gisvold for Manchester Events. Special mention should be made of our secretary Alan Mould who keeps us extremely well informed of all matters relating to the EBU, our treasurer Joy Blakey for her continuing sterling work managing our finances, and Rhona Goldenfield who is retiring after many successful years as Green Points secretary. We look forward to welcoming a new Chair of MCBA at the AGM.

**4.2 Secretary (Alan Mould)**

A very quiet year this year. The executive has met twice, and the forwarding of correspondence from the EBU and other matters relating to that has continued. I am pleased to report that there have been no disciplinary cases to deal with.

I will make the same point this year I made last year. Council has not met, and there has been precisely 0 complaints about that. One of the reasons the proposed redesign of the Constitution was voted down is that people saw the removal of Council as an attack of MCBA democracy. It wasn’t and isn’t. Council simply doesn’t work and no one on the Executive is intending to organise something that is such a waste of its time.

If anyone is interested in taking on the role of secretary, I would be delighted to relinquish it.

**4.3 Treasurer (Joy Blakey)**

The County remains in a stable and healthy state financially. We have paid entries for our teams to represent the County in National events and area events. All of our own County Competitions have either broken even or shown a small surplus – it remains a constant concern that face-to-face numbers have never fully recovered since Covid; however, we strive to make our events attractive to enter in good locations and always with generous money prizes and additional wine or chocolate prizes so that lots of people go home with something! We are always hopeful that numbers will recover to pre-covid levels. Some events, the Goldstone, Ben Franks and Gazette have prizes which are the entry fee to the qualifying Competitions – The Pachabo, The Corwen and The Garden Cities. Winners of each of the divisions in the League will get free entry for next year.

All debtors and creditors are paid up to date and the year seems to have passed on quite peacefully in part due to the running of the Manchester Congress being outsourced.

My thanks and gratitude to Howard Stubbings for so carefully scrutinising my book-keeping, record keeping and my tournament reports and for miraculously producing the accounts which are attached.

**4.4 Membership Secretary (Gordon Bickley)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | TOTAL | TOTAL | TOTAL | TOTAL | TOTAL | TOTAL | TOTAL |
| Type of Member | 15/11/20 | 23/2/21 | 19/10/21 | 8/5/22 | 7/5/23 | 11/5/24 | 21/5/25 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| P2P | 1405 | 1396 | 1435 | 1485 | 1307 | 1249 | 1283 |
| DIRECT | 44 | 45 | 42 | 39 | 31 | 27 | 19 |
| STUDENTS | 21 | 20 | 0 | 5 | 39 | 41 | 20 |

At last, a very slight upward trend, albeit only 24. The figures for Manchester, as provided by the EBU, do however disguise some things. The primary one is that, as with any county, there are clubs within the MCBA area whose catchment extend to Derbyshire, Lancashire and Cheshire. Where members state that their primary club is outside the MCBA area, they are excluded from the table. From a personal perspective I am aware of many members whose names do not appear but are regular attendees at clubs in our area. However, the MCBA list also includes many players whose residence is well outside our area but are included. Again, I am aware of at least 4 people who have moved out of the area and are still shown as MCBA primary members. Thus, it is swings and roundabouts and one doubts the veracity of the statistics the EBU provide.

The data provides information about primary and secondary allegiance. It may be of interest to some but suffice it to say many are members of two or three clubs with the odd one or two finding those inadequate, showing membership of four clubs.

To add further context to this, the sessions statistics which the EBU provided for 21st May show only 1,208 primary club members. The Ashton figures, with which I am most familiar, show 94 primary members out of a membership of 135.

One plus gleaned from the session statistics is that virtually every one of our affiliated clubs has an increase in the average number of tables year-on-year since 2022. This may be a sign that F2F bridge has staged a reasonable recovery of late.

All the student members are from Bramhall and Cheadle, whilst 4 of the Direct members have postcodes well outside our geographical area. This year we have only 12 people shown as EBTA members, a further drop of 2, albeit that two of the Ashton teachers would appear to have primary membership in Lancashire.

Is it any wonder that one can be sceptical about the figures?

To continue the theme from last year’s report, the latest figures show four members with an NGS ranking of ace of spades. With regard to Masterpoint rankings we have no further additions to the 18 recorded last year. What is beneficial is that club members seem to derive greater satisfaction from MP promotions than they do from their NGS, a situation perhaps which is quite the opposite for experienced players.

**4.5 League Secretary (Royce Alexander)**

I took on responsibility for the League at the 2023 AGM which debated whether to continue with a Default of Online or change to a Default of Face-to-Face, or whether separate Online & F2F Leagues would be best. After a survey and Executive discussion, the Online Default was narrowly continued.

The 2024 AGM debated the issue again and produced an indicative vote of 8 – 6 in favour of changing the Default to F2F which was ratified 5 – 1 by an Executive meeting by 5 – 1. So the main League was to change to Default F2F.

Meanwhile, a Summer F2F League was approved, received 11 entries by the closing date and was set up with 2 Divisions playing 24-board F2F matches between May & September.

The main League entry dropped from 36 teams in 2023 to 30 teams in 2024 and would have been lower but for F2F-preferring teams in Divisions 3 & 4 agreeing not to enforce F2F matches on Online-preferring teams. During the season, 4 teams have withdrawn and most of the emails to me have related to F2F/Online issues.

We decided to try a Newcomers League and it attracted (with much help from 4 clubs) an astonishing 13 teams who had mainly started learning bridge in the last 2 years and so this league provided them with an introduction to Teams bridge. Matches were of 16 boards and the teachers at the clubs provided a lot of help with setting up, IMP scoring etc. We had 1 division of 8 teams and another division of 5 teams.

The winners of all these competitions were:

Summer League Division 1: St Titus

Summer League Division 2: Yet Another Level

League Division 1: Mutton Madras

League Division 2: Hindsight Convention

League Division 3: Lastminute.bid

League Division 4: AZ Trumpers

Newcomers Division A: The Irregulars

Newcomers Division B: Bridge of Sighs

Looking forward, I believe that the main League will continue to lose numbers in its current format as it includes a group of experienced players who moved to Online bridge during the pandemic and cannot or will not for various reasons move back to F2F bridge.

Changing back to Default Online would lose those who favour F2F.

I believe (and the Executive will be proposing this solution at the AGM) that the only long-term solution is to make the main League predominantly F2F and to create a new separate Online League. We hope to retain almost all of the current teams, recover some lost teams, and in time build up both leagues. Teams or indeed pairs or individuals who are happy to play in either manner will be able to play in either League or indeed both Leagues if they so wish.

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

Briefly the event this year was run on the basis of round robin matches for the initial qualifiers, rather than straight knockout. The reason being that with an initial entry of fewer than 24 teams ( 22 entered) – it was felt that a method of qualifying that produced the maximum number of teams, was a desirable objective, in order to have a decent event. Therefore we had 7 groups (6 with 3 teams, and one with 4 teams initially) the principle being that the 1st placed team in each group would play in the Cup final, and the 2nd placed in the Plate Final. (In the case of the group with 4 teams which contained 2 division 1 teams, I made the judgement that 2nd and 3rd should go into the Plate, however this was found unnecessary as one of the teams withdrew from that group reducing it to 3. There was also a withdrawal from one of the groups of 3 which meant that they only got to play one match before the Final, and of the other Qualifiers one of the Plate teams was a last minute withdrawal, but the overall outcome was to produce a 7 team Cup Final and a 6 team Plate Final on the day.

The feedback I had was generally positive with respect to the round robin arrangement for Qualifiers.

As to the Finals – both were closely contested and with Stuart Davies running the movements and directing, the day ran very smoothly, I was able to get the raw result data from him in a way that enabled it to be entered into the handicap spreadsheet in a relatively short space of time and produce an accurate result without much delay.

The results would suggest that the handicaps applied are about right, despite the complaints from some parties that they were too much.

Most people seemed to enjoy the event.

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

There were 18 teams who entered the Goldstone for 2024/5 competition.

There was only one conceded game this year.

There were no major problems, all went well.

St Titus won a close final against Inverted Minors.

I am not proposing any changes for the 25/26 competition.

I do not propose any changes for the competition next year

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

The teams July 2024 had 19 entries same as 2023

Winners Sally Brock Barry Myers Rodney Lighton Tom Dessain.

Pairs March 2025 had 34 entries (17 tables) 2 tables less than 2024

Winners Sue Woodcock and Michael Fay

Events were held at St Peters. Stuart Davies ran both events. He is retiring from directing after our teams in July.

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. Also Joy our treasurer par excellence who deals with all the entries and pays out the costs.

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

Flyers for teams in July have been emailed and distributed.

Next years dates confirmed with EBU are pairs Sat Feb 28th and teams Sunday July 26th St Peters has been booked for both events.

I am retiring as Green Point Sec but will run the teams in July. I have enjoyed running the events although since covid it has been difficult to recruit players. Some of the regulars did not come back but we still have quite good support.

**4.9 Tournament Secretary (Ann Thornton)**

*"The MCBA Executive discuss where to hold each event and try to spread the venues between the clubs.*

*It was decided for the coming year to hold the Cantor Cup at TMBC - Susan Triggs or others to organise; the Ben Franks at Bramhall - Barbara Lewis to organise; and the Gazette Cup at Altrincham - Irene Davies to organise".*

**Ben Franks:** Sunday 1st December 2024

The MCBA Ben Franks Trophy was held at BCHBC. The TD was Jeff Smith who was extremely efficient. This is a 2 session pairs event. The Ben Franks Trophy is MCBA’s qualifying competition for the EBU’s prestigious Corwen Trophy. The top 4 pairs qualify.

**Gazette Cup:** Sunday 16 February, 2025

Originally to be held at Altrincham Bridge Club (ABC), the MCBA Gazette Cup inter-club teams of 8 competition was held at BCHBC. The venue was changed because the Altrincham 10K run scheduled for the same date involved the closure of roads leading to ABC. The Gazette Cup serves as the qualifying round for the prestigious EBU Garden Cities Trophy. There were 10 teams entered. The TD was Jonathon Lillicrop who was totally professional. The winners were The Manchester Bridge Club Team Hassett: Paul Hackett & Mike Goldsmith, Martin Taylor & Justin Hackett, Rhona Goldenfield & John Hassett, David Sarabowski & Jeff Morris.

**Cantor Cup:** Sunday 23rd February 2025

The MCBA Cantor Cup was held at The Manchester Bridge Club. The TD was Nicholas Greer who was both efficient and professional. There were 17 pairs entered with players from BCHBC, Trafford BC and MBC and enjoyed by all who attended. Also present were Susan Triggs and Ann Thornton, who presented prizes. The winners were Steve Dauncey and Jackie O’Donnell. Susan Triggs has resigned from her role as organiser. In discussion it was agreed that newcomers be recruited for next year. Rachel Hardcastle and Nita Shankra have agreed to take on this role.

*I propose that the executive discuss venues for next year: Ben Franks at MBC, Irene Davies: The Gazette Cup at ABC, Barbara Lewis: The Cantor Cup at BCHBC, Rachel Hardcastle and Nita Shankra.*

**4.10 Congress Secretary (Barbara Lewis)**

Due to the sudden closure of the booked Manchester Congess venue, MCBA was left with no viable option other than to hold an on-line event for 2025. This Manchester New Year On-Line Weekend was run on RealBridge, directed by Ken Johnston, on 4th and 5th January. 36 pairs played in the Saturday Pairs – the majority being from out-of-town/contacts of Oliver Cowan. 12 teams played in an all play all Sunday teams. There were insufficient entries for the proposed 9 high Kevin Comrie Cup. A prize fund was included. Thanks to Oliver Cowan for his organisation of the weekend. MCBA received £388 from the accounts for the weekend.

The Manchester Congress will be returning Face-to-Face on January 3rd and 4th 2026 at the Manchester Airport Hotel, Wilmslow

**4.11 Chair of Selectors (Royce Alexander, secretary)**

The selectors for 2024-25 were:

Alec Smalley (Chair), Royce Alexander (Secretary), Robert Ferrari, Catherine Draper, Phil Taylor, Roger Hopton

Several ZOOM meetings were held to discuss and select teams for various events.

National Inter County League Finals C Division

The previous committee had selected the team that had qualified for this by winning the Northern Bridge League C division in 2023.

F2F Friendly vs Lancashire

The previous committee made selections for this friendly match at Bolton Bridge Club on June 30th 2024. The Jack High match introduced numerous players to County level bridge.

Presidents Cup

The previous committee felt it would be too difficult to raise a team, so Manchester withdrew its entry for this inter county teams of 8 event (played on Realbridge over a weekend).

Northern Bridge League

In 2024, Manchester fielded 1 B team (no A teams or C teams) in this inter county teams of 8 event played on Realbridge on 4 Saturdays from July to October.

A total of 20 people played for the Manchester B team which finished in a respectable 3rd place. It was vital to have reserves selected with dates reserved in their diaries as players frequently needed to withdraw.

Tollemache

The inter counties teams of eight Qualifier was played online on November 9-10th 2024.  12 players were selected to cover the weekend and Manchester won their qualifying group.

The final was F2F in Telford on 1st-2nd February 2025, and it was agreed unanimously that 8 people should travel and play (with reserves selected and on standby). 2 players had to withdraw in advance, so the selected team had to be changed. The team finished in 3rd place overall (1 VP behind the 2nd placed team).

**4.12 Match Secretary (Royce Alexander)**

National Inter County League Finals

The Manchester team finished third in the C division of the National Inter County League Finals played online on Sunday 2nd June, 2024.

The team had qualified by winning the C division of the Northern Bridge League in 2023.  The team was Gordon Bickley/Ann Farquhar, Gil Fletcher/Richard Acaster, Ann Thornton/Karen Jones, Sally Leigh/Judith Dunkerley.  Gordon and Ann were our best pair on cross imps finishing second overall.

Pachabo

The Manchester team of Catherine Draper, Andrew Woodcock, Jeff Morris and John Hassett finished a creditable fourth in the inter counties teams of four held online on 8th-9th June, 2024.  They had qualified for this by reaching the unplayed final of the Goldstone Trophy (and being the only players who wished to play from the two finalists).

Corwen

Congratulations to John Holland and Alan Mould who won the inter county pairs Corwen Trophy at Yarnfield on 15th-16th June, 2024.  They previously won this event in 2018.  Three other Manchester pairs Rodney Lighton/Tom Dessain, Kath Nelson/Rhona Goldenfield and Eddie Thornton-Chan/Tony Hodgson also played in the event.

Friendly vs Lancashire

The match against Lancashire on June 30th, 2024 took place at Bolton Bridge Club.  In the open event Lancashire won by 109 VPs to 71.  The team was Rhona Goldenfield/Kath Nelson, Jeff Morris/John Hassett, Alec Smalley/Barbara Lewis, Phil Taylor(Capt)/Peter Grauer, Mike Hart/Pearl Fielding, Alan Tranter/Andy Burnett.

In the Jack High match on the same day, Lancashire won by 119 to 61 VPs.  The team was Ray & Angela Ashleigh, Rachel Hardcastle/Phil Kemp, Margaret Harris/Judith Eva, Mike Kisil/Melody Slinn, Peter & Paul Berens, Mike Whiteoak/Sue Howard, Ann Taylor/Ivor Rosenberg, Suzanne & Roy Beckett, Mike Greaney/David Leigh.

Presidents Cup

Manchester was unable to field a team in 2024 for this inter county teams of 8 event played on Realbridge over a weekend.

Northern Bridge League

In 2024, Manchester fielded 1 B team, but no A teams or C teams in this inter county teams of 8 event played on Realbridge on 4 Saturdays from July to October.

The team for Saturday 13th July 2024 was Irene Davies (Capt)/Karen Reissmann, David Sarabowski/Eve Lighthill, Ann Thornton/Chris Hine, Richard Acaster/Gil Fletcher.  They finished seventh, with Karen and Irene our best pair on the cross imps.

The team for Saturday 18th August 2024 was Alan Tranter/Andy Burnett, Karen Jones/Barbara Eastabrook, Stuart Shalom/Daniel Kelsall, Gordon Bickley/Ann Farquhar.  The team finished fifth on the day and Alan and Andy did well on the cross imps.

Round 3 of the NBL took place on 14th September 2024.  Manchester finished fifth on the day and are fifth overall.  The team was Eve Lighthill/David Sarabowski, Karen Reissmann/Ann Thornton, Gordon Bickley/Ann Farquhar, Richard Acaster/Gil Fletcher.  Karen and Ann and Gordon and Ann were positive on the cross imps.

The final round of the NBL took place on Saturday 19th October.  Manchester produced their best result of the year winning on the day with a big score which moved them up into third place overall.  The Manchester team was Roger Hopton/David Fussell, Karen Reissmann/Irene Davies, Gil Fletcher/Richard Acaster, Chris Hine/Ann Thornton.  The first three pairs all did well on the cross imps, with Roger and David best pair in the division with a fine score.

Overall, the Manchester B team finished in a respectable 3rd place after a strong final match.

Tollemache

The  inter counties teams of eight qualifier took place online on November 9-10th 2024.  Manchester won their qualifying group, winning most of their matches.

The team was Alec Smalley/David Barton, Michael Byrne/Gary Hyett, Rodney Lighton/Tom Dessain/Royce Alexander/Alan Mould, John Hassett/Andrew Woodcock, Rhona Goldenfield/Kath Nelson.

Congratulations to Michael & Gary who headed the cross imps with Alec & David close behind in third place.

Manchester finished third in the Tollemache final at Telford on 1st-2nd February 2025.  They were just 1 VP behind Surrey but a long way behind London.  Manchester won five of their seven matches and the two they lost were only 8-12 losses.  Congratulations to Alec Smalley/Tom Slater, Alan Mould/John Hassett, Rodney Lighton/Tom Dessain and Nicholas Greer/Phil Taylor.  Alec and Tom were our best pair on the cross imps, Alan and John also did well.

Future Bridge:

Friendly vs Lancashire

Sunday 29 June, 2025: A return F2F friendly vs Lancashire at Manchester Bridge Club

1 Open Team of 12 + 1 Jack High Team of 12+.

Presidents Cup

Manchester intend to field 1 team in this inter county teams of 8 event played on Realbridge over Saturday 12th – Sunday 13th July 2025.

Northern Bridge League

Manchester have entered 1 A team and 1 B team in this inter county teams of 8 event played on Realbridge on Saturday July 5, August 16, September 13, October 11.

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

No report to date.

**4.14 Publicity Officer (Espen Gisvold)**

This report covers the activities done by the press officer as well as the activity done as web master for MCBA’s Results and Registration Services Web site.

External Activities

In the period there has been no external press activity. In conjunction with The Bridge Festival an attempt to get some external promotion activity off the ground was undertaken, but without success. The Bridge Festival in itself was a great success both within the county as well as across England & Scotland.

Internal Activities

In June 2024 a Newsletter was launched as a tool for the different officers within the executive to communicate their activates to the affiliated members. Three such Newsletters was produced, but was discontinued in 2025 when the executive questioned the value of the Newsletter. Since then no communication has been undertaken to communicate the activity of the executive.

MCBA’s Results and Registration Services activity

29 email shots have been sent between 22nd May 2024 and 29th April 2025. This includes the distribution of the Newsletter and the call to the AGM. The rest has been emails promoting MCBA’s events. This amounts to a little over 2 shots a month, an amount I regard as about right as it is not so much that it will be felt by the recipient as “spam”.

Some results have not been uploaded to the website as they have not been given to the webmaster for uploading or not been uploaded by the persons organising the event via the “scorer password”. One organiser requested the admin password to be able to upload the results, but was told to use the scorer password as we have to restrict admin access in accordions with our obligations under GDPR rules.

The amount of time needed and used by the Press Officer and webmaster for the R&RS web site has dramatically fallen in 2025 as a result of the discontinuation of the Newsletter and lack of communication from the executive to the members.

**4.15 Schools, Youth & Teachers Liaison (Raymond Semp)**

On taking up the job of S & Y officer my intention was full of enthusiasm, but in early May my life took a sudden, drastic turn. My wife had to go into a Care Home which consequently took up all of my free time for the following nine months.

However, things have now improved and I might consider continuing after the school holidays in September if no one else is willing to take over from me, which, I would welcome.

In addition, I have offered to help Tom Dessain (A math’s teacher at MGS) teach 6th form plus students bridge, my Grandson included.

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

The MCBA web site continues to get around 40 visitors per day.

Thanks to those who contributed deals for deal of the week and to John Holland for checking the articles.

In the Player of the Year the league points are still to be determined, but they will not affect the top positions.  Rodney Lighton will win the expert category and Karen Jones and Barbara Eastabrook the non-expert category.