

WEST OF ENGLAND BRIDGE CLUB
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 17 May 2017

Committee present:

Bernice Horseman (Vice Chairman and Membership Secretary), Bill Ashford (Treasurer), Chris Frew (Secretary), David Jones (Tournament Secretary), Alan Evans (GHS Liaison)

Members: Bridget Johnson, Dorothy Hoyle, Gordon Allen, Paul Brown, Laurie Barth, Keith Rayford, Anne Oppenheim, Alex Harding, George Whyte, Simon Rye, Pauline Hart, Alan Millichamp

Apologies: Alan Williams (Club Chairman), Jen Challoner (Committee member), Jan Duncan, Tom Nolan, Carol Nolan

Alan Williams was unavoidably absent for the AGM, so the meeting was chaired by Chris Frew

1. Minutes of the last Meeting – 18 May 2016

A proposal to accept them as correct was made by Bernice Horseman and seconded by Alan Evans. This was accepted by all those present.

2. Matters Arising

The action to update the Constitution to recognise 'Daytime' membership was completed in June 2016. The updated Constitution is viewable on the website.

3. Chairman's Report (Alan Williams)(read in his absence by Chris Frew)

It has not been a good year for me personally because of sustained poor health, culminating in the need in January and February to remove myself from all bridge and other social activity to break a chain of repeated infections. As a result I have put far less effort into the Club than I was hoping to do. Luckily the rest of the Committee have been brilliant, and I can't thank them enough for keeping the Club running and in good shape during my absences. Alan, Bernice, Bill, Chris, David and Jen have all been stars.

A worrying concern for the Club is the drop in table numbers in all of the evening sessions. This could be for a number of reasons; perhaps the most likely are the state of our premises and our failure to attract new members. On premises, the balcony works are now complete and look good. I thank all those members who supported this project, so helping Golden Hill Sports to obtain the funding. Historically the Golden Hill story has been one of survival, but now I am encouraging the Trustees to proceed more confidently and quickly with further refurbishments to the clubroom, stairs and toilets. On attracting new members, the Thursday afternoon supervised play sessions have gone from strength to strength, and are the success of the year, offsetting reduced revenue elsewhere. I congratulate all who have contributed so much to this (more on this in Jen's report). The challenge remains to bring some of these new Day members into the competitive sessions. In the winter we did try to introduce a format that might enable these players to swell the very small turnout on Friday evenings. This was not as well thought out by me as was needed, and we had to drop this after a few weeks. Nevertheless, it has prompted the regular Friday members to think of a new approach, and their good-looking ideas were compiled and sent to me by Gareth, to whom thanks for his continued support for me and the Club despite having his hands full with his new bridge responsibilities.

Perhaps more hopeful is the new gentle duplicate session that we have started on Monday afternoons, the first of which was held just this Monday. As intended, it was populated mainly with Thursday afternoon regulars, but it was a fully competitive non-supervised session, albeit at just 18 boards a slightly slower pace than the evening sessions. This was well received, and although it was just four tables this week, it has good potential to grow.

I'd like to thank David Jones for his Committee work. He is stepping down this year, but he will continue to support the Club through his work with the Thursday afternoon sessions and as director of the new Monday afternoon sessions. David also ran a successful set of improvers' lessons in the autumn.

Socially, it has been a good year, culminating in 'the best ever Burns Night' (again, more on that in Jen's report). Although I have not been so involved this year, I do think the social side of the Club is its great strength. Thank you for your support.

4. Treasurer's Report (Bill Ashford)

Bill submitted a summary of the accounts, together with Notes to the Accounts; both are attached.

Bill said in summary that Profit is slightly increased this year, though Table Money is down, because of the contribution of Interest received, and the lessons that David Jones ran.

Discussion ensued on why attendance had dropped. It is across the board in the evening sessions, equivalent to 7 tables a month. Gordon Allen was worried that the loss was of the better players, though Chris Frew said that that would be evidenced by the NGS Strength of Field dropping; which is not apparent. We may notice the absence of better players, but the lost numbers are across the ability board. Is it because more games are available elsewhere? There's no evidence that other 'established' Clubs are also losing numbers. Keith Rayford blamed the quality of the premises, including the stairs; and Gordon Allen thought the chairs uncomfortable. Gordon asked, are we keeping an eye out for better premises? Chris said that we are not closed to the thought, but believe the best option is to remain in an improved GHS Clubhouse.

In summary, Chris said, we accept the points, and they underline the necessity and urgency of the upcoming GHS refurbishment, and the wisdom of committing some of our own money to improve the playing environment.

Adoption of the accounts was proposed by Gordon Allen, seconded by David Jones and accepted by all members present.

5. Membership Secretary's Report (Bernice Horseman)

The current membership of the Club stands at 153, composed as follows:

- 15 Life members
- 1 Junior Associate member
- 94 Full members fully paid up
- 27 Full members paid to 31 March 2017
- 16 Full members paid to 31 March 2016

I am hopeful that about half of the unpaid members will rejoin. We remove unpaid members from our records two years after their last appearance at the Club.

The decrease in full membership seems to be due to:

- 1) people moving away
- 2) people growing older and not wishing to come out at night
- 3) the growing availability of other bridge games in and around Bristol

We have introduced a new type of membership, 'Daytime Membership' which comprises those people playing in the Thursday afternoon improvers' sessions. We currently have 45 'Daytime' members. The 'Daytime' membership will also apply to the players who come to the Monday afternoon 'Gentle Duplicate' which commenced 15th May.

We look forward to the renovation of the premises promised by Golden Hill for this summer. The balcony has already been replaced and is open for our enjoyment (when the rain stops!).

6. Tournament Secretary's Report (David Jones)

It has been a year of consolidation and progress in some areas of the regular club programme but a loss of support in others. Table numbers are down a little on the previous year and greater support for the club competitions held on Wednesdays would be welcome.

The new session on a Thursday afternoon which began in March 2015 and is run by Jen Challoner and Laurie Barth (with Alan Evans directing) has proved to be a real success with typically 7 or 8 tables in play of late. It is aimed at newcomers to duplicate and the players are offered "at the table" assistance with their problems from a range of experienced players including Laurie, Jen, Bill Ashford, Alan Evans and your reporter. We are starting a new duplicate on Monday afternoons to be run by your reporter where the target audience is players who are newish to bridge.

The club tournament programme remains essentially the same although the committee is always prepared to consider ideas and new types of competition.

I shall conclude by mentioning some recent successes by members in the county and nationally.

In Avon county events the following West of England members achieved successes :-

County League 3 was won by the team of Mary McKenzie, Gerry Gowling, Gill Davies, Sue O'Hara & Muriel Bailey.

County League 2 is led by the team of Eric Page, Colin Oakley, Mike & Cathy Davies.

The County Pairs saw Mike Huggins & Irene Robinson finish in second place and Keith Rayford & Jack Armorgie in third.

The County Men's Pairs saw a win for Steve Tomlinson and the County Ladies Pairs for Gill Davies.

The County Handicap Pairs was won by Margaret Young playing with Robert Gregory.

Irene Robinson & Mike Huggins won the Avon Mixed Pairs.

David Jones was a member of the winning teams in the Avon Knock Out and Championship Teams.

National Events

West of England club members feature in the National Final of the Garden Cities (EBU inter-county teams of eight) having won the Avon and south west regional events - Andrew Urbanski, Mike Letts, Steve Turner, Robert Covill and David Jones.

In the National Inter Club Knock Out the West of England team of Mike Elliott, Steve Turner, Robert Covill, Steve Tomlinson & John Atthey is through to the 5th round (last 16) where they play the leading Bristol team led by Tim Brierley.

Sue O'Hara & Nelson Stephens finished in 10th place in the English Mixed Pairs in a national field of over 300 pairs.

David Jones came in 5th place in the English National Pairs Final.

Your reporter had a nice fortnight in Poland at the World Championship last September assisting the England Open team in a coaching capacity (they reached the quarter finals in a field of 53 countries).

When David Jones finished his report, Chris Frew, on behalf of the Committee, noted that David is now standing down from the Committee. We thank him for his contribution to the Committee's work over the past years. We are pleased to note that David will continue with us in his work on Monday and Thursday afternoons.

7. Golden Hill Liaison Officer's Report (Alan Evans)

The main development on the premises in the past year has been the rebuilding of the balcony following the successful bid for an Aviva grant, won with popular local support. Thanks to all who helped by voting for it online. We can now use the balcony again. Communication on progress, however, was mainly through the Chairman rather than me, and he is urging GHS to proceed with the planned redevelopment of the clubhouse.

A new club manager, Ash, was appointed by GHS last September, and he is now our main contact. He is at the club more often than Sue, the previous contact. A new dishwasher was installed in February, which is useful for our afternoon sessions.

A problem with the heating in February took longer to resolve than it should have. The first fix by the engineer did not work and further visits were needed to diagnose the root of the problem and replace a key part.

Part of my role is scheduling our sessions: the timing of Thursdays has been changed twice this year and Monday afternoons have been added. Note that at least two other groups use this room apart from us and GHS. On this topic please note that GHS are allowed to pre-empt a few Fridays each year for their own events and the next is this week, so no bridge this Friday, but please come along on other Fridays.

This role also seems to include maintaining stationery and printer supplies. The club computer is showing its age, being slow and running on the no longer supported Windows XP. Discussions are underway to replace it, probably with a new laptop.

Finally, the annual GHS fundraising event, the Party in the Park, will take place on Saturday 16 September. WOEBEC traditionally run the tea/coffee stall, so I'll be pleased to hear from volunteers for this nearer the time.

8. Fun Events Officer's Report (Jen Challoner)

The Fun Events Burns Night and Bastille Night are now both firmly embedded into our annual bridge calendar, along with Christmas.

On our first Bastille Night in 2013 we had 8 tables. In 2016 we had 11 tables.

On our first Burn Night in 2015 we had 9 tables. In 2017 we had 13 tables – a full house.

Thank you to all who attend and join in the SPIRIT of the night by dressing up and attempting to speak a foreign language – on both nights! Thank you also to all who help with these events, especially Damian Nicholls, our cheese and haggis purveyor, Lesley Reed, our sausage purveyor, Julie Lee and Karen Nicholls, who all cook and serve.

Christmas, now run by Marc and Julie Lee, was a great success. Marc’s no-nonsense approach to the Quiz entertains us all. And thanks again to Julie, who now cooks for all our events.

Thank you to the Committee who help on all the nights.

Turning to the Thursday afternoon ‘supervised play’ bridge sessions: these have proved enormously successful. Starting two years ago with only four people, we now average 24 to 28 people, with new players joining regularly. Our format is a short ten minute lesson starting at 1:30 pm, followed by supervised play until 4:00 pm. It is a friendly session, and chocolates are awarded for accurate, occasionally inspired, bidding and play. Enormous thanks go to all my evangelical, expert players who turn up week after week offering their help and enthusiasm to our fledgling players; they are Laurie Barth, Alan Evans, David Jones, Bill Ashford, Jane Drew and Bernard Mitchell. Alan Franks and Alan Peak-Payne also stepped in to help during February and March. Many of these Thursday players who have improved greatly will also be joining our new Monday afternoon ‘gentle bridge’ sessions, which started this week.

9. Motions submitted for Discussion

No motions were submitted.

10. Election of Officers

Other than David Jones, all members of the current Committee were proposed and seconded for their existing positions, with no alternatives presenting themselves. Chris Frew therefore suggested that the existing Committee members standing again should be elected *en bloc*. This was formally proposed by Keith Rayford, seconded by Dorothy Hoyle, and passed by all members present.

The Committee vacancy created by David Jones, who covered the Tournament Secretary’s role, was discussed. No volunteers were forthcoming. Chris Frew said a period of arm-twisting will now begin.

11. Any Other Business

The meeting concluded at 19.15, with Prosecco and nibbles.

Signed

Date.....