

WEST OF ENGLAND BRIDGE CLUB
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 24 May 2023

Committee present:

Alan Evans (Club Chairman), Bill Ashford (Treasurer), Chris Frew (Secretary), Jan Duncan (Tournament Secretary), Jen Challoner (Minister for Fun), Bridget Johnson (Membership Secretary), Alan Peak-Payne, David Jones

Members present:

Paul Brown, Jane Drew, Sandra Cooper

Apologies: Jane Chapman, Bernice Horseman, Margaret Randall, Philip Lidstone, John McLaren, Jane Butterworth

1. Minutes of the last AGM Meeting – 18 May 2022

These were accepted as correct and approved by all present.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 The tea/coffee charging anomaly was resolved. Tea/coffee and biscuits are now free at every session.

2.2 Some success has been achieved in attracting back the pre-pandemic members who had hitherto not returned to face-to-face bridge.

2.3 There was a complaint of excessive noise at sessions. To some extent we are hamstrung by the low ceilings and hard wall surfaces, but the Chairman has reminded all Directors of their responsibility to shush the excessively noisy when it may distract others still in play.

3. Chairman's Report (Alan Evans)

Alan reported:

"This is a shorter report than last year's, which covered the move to the RAFA Club and our relaunch following the pandemic closure. Our concern in the eight months from our relaunch to last year's AGM was to create a stable environment and programme of playing sessions that would suit members and prove financially viable, and this past year has been one of consolidation on those foundations. We hold five sessions a week, as we did 12 months ago. Player numbers at the more competitive sessions on Wednesday and Friday evenings are fairly stable, though not as high as we would like, but attendance at the gentler Monday afternoons continues to be good – even stretching our capacity with nine tables in one recent week – and this has been joined by the rise of the similar session on Friday afternoons. Many thanks to David Jones for directing the majority of these afternoons. Our Thursday Improvers session of supervised play continues to attract both longstanding regulars and new faces, many of whom have proceeded to join the Club. As a reminder, a partner will be provided if you turn up on your own for any session except Friday evenings. Relations with the RAFA Club continue to be good and are now mainly through Jan Duncan, who will provide more detail shortly. We thank Alan Peak-Payne for the addition – and maintenance I hope – of the plants at the entrance. Our Treasurer will provide a financial update in a moment, but the Committee did make one big commitment this year. At four sessions a week, we use a new set of

random computer-dealt hands, and we have our own machine to deal the boards, though it has mainly been operated by Gareth Evans. Until recently we used a Duplimate machine dating from about 2012. It was serviced in 2021 but developed further problems. Gareth used his own machine for a period (for an extra fee), but the Club took the decision to invest in a new state-of-the-art machine, a PlayBridgeDealer 4+. At over £4000 such machines are not cheap, but with some servicing it should last many years. Though Gareth was very reliable, we also decided to deal the boards ourselves, and Gareth has trained Jan Duncan and Jane Chapman, who have kindly agreed to deal the boards in future. Bundled with the PlayBridgeDealer 4+ were four new sets of boards, which have replaced some damaged sets. One feature we reintroduced this year is quarterly leagues for first Monday afternoons and then also Wednesday evenings. Small cash prizes are awarded each quarter to the two players with best seven ranked results in the period. You can track your progress and past winners on the website. Another possible reintroduction later this year is a Christmas lunch event, perhaps with another pantomime, but there are no more details yet. As I have indicated, I am leaving the Committee from today, but I still intend to help here on Thursday afternoons and I will also continue some work on the website. I am sure the Club will continue on a sound footing in the capable hands of those standing for the Committee today.”

4 Treasurer’s Report (Bill Ashford)

The Accounts, and Notes to the Accounts, were distributed. The summary reads: “A loss of £392 was recorded for the first "normal" year following the "Covid" 17 month period. This was partly massaged by carry forward of subscriptions received prior to April 2020. Table numbers were considerably reduced from the pre-pandemic figures, with the exception of Monday afternoons. Monday evening sessions were suspended, due to low numbers, making the player experience poor and also being economically untenable. However, at times there were signs of recovery and indeed overall membership remains good. With lower overheads, 4-5 tables per session would enable the club to break even. We also maintain a healthy bank balance so the club remains in a secure position financially. In addition, rising interest rates may benefit the club - but perhaps not individual members!”

Bill then talked the meeting through the accounts. If we ignore the capital cost of the new dealing machine, the bottom line is that we are now trading at a slight profit. In terms of fees and charges, There may be a case for increasing the annual membership from £9-50 to £10, which will be considered at the next Committee meeting.

The accounts were accepted and approved by all those present.

5. Membership Secretary’s Report (Bridget Johnson)

Bridget reported:

“This report gives an overall picture of where our membership numbers stand and how many active members we have. According to Pianola, the club has a total of 176 members: this includes 17 ‘Life Members’ (only 3 of whom are regular players) and 158 ‘Ordinary Members’. From that overall total of 176, 66 have played in our main sessions just once or not at all, while 82 have played the main sessions more than 12 times since the last AGM, i.e. an average of once a month. The percentage of ‘active members’ thus defined (82 or about 47%) is a little larger than the 31% of members who were active last year, suggesting that although we have fewer members in total more of them

attend regularly. There are 13 people who were members in 2021/22 who have not yet renewed. We are still including all these as 'Ordinary Members' until the end of August 2023, after which they will be removed from the membership list and categorised as 'Lapsed'. Seventeen new members have joined since the last AGM (compared with 15 last year), but our total membership has declined by 58 (a 25% reduction) since August 2022 on account of a substantial number of members not renewing last year (the majority being those who did not return after the pandemic for one reason or another)."

6. RAFA Club Liaison Officer's Report (Jan Duncan)

Jan reported that she attends the RAFA Club's Committee meetings, which are held every month. Bristol RAFA Club continues to be very welcoming, with both sides resolving any issues promptly, and with goodwill. Jan and David Jones were invited to the RAFA Club's Coronation 'street' party.

We offered free bridge lessons from David Jones to members of Bristol RAFA Club, but there were no takers.

Following an attempted break-in, RAFA Club is installing security cameras, both in the car park and at the front of the building.

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

Jen spoke of the Thursday afternoon 'Supervised Play' sessions, which she initiated and still manages. These are going very well, with her core team of Alan Evans, Alan Peak-Payne and Laurie Barth offering expert and friendly help. Lorna Watson is still recommending this session to those who complete her 'Bridge for Beginners' course at Stoke Lodge.

Jen also complimented the Monday and (now) Friday afternoon sessions. She said that David Jones' conduct of these sessions is excellent, creating a very happy atmosphere. She also thanked Paul Brown (on behalf of us all) for being the afternoon session 'spare player' for the last eighteen months.

Alan Evans added that we are happy that these sessions are enjoyed by the participants, but to improve members' skills, and our revenue, Directors should encourage transition from Thursday's Supervised Play, through Monday and Friday afternoons' Gentle Bridge sessions, to the Wednesday and Friday evening sessions for more experienced players.

Jen also outlined her ideas for a Christmas Lunch prior to an afternoon session in December, to also feature a pantomime and raffle. She will discuss this proposal with RAFA Club, and in particular the catering arrangements.

9. Motions submitted for Discussion

None

10. Election of Officers and Committee

Chris Frew reported that he had received only one nomination for four of the Officer roles, and no nomination for the fifth (Vice Chairman). As the Committee is limited to eight people in total this would allow for four 'Ordinary Committee members', and four nominations have been received. Chris proposed that all nominees to the new Committee should be elected *en bloc*.

This formulation was put to the meeting, and agreed by all members present. The Committee until the next AGM will therefore be:

Chairman: Chris Frew

Treasurer: Bill Ashford

Secretary: Alan Peak-Payne

Membership Secretary: Jane Chapman

Other Committee Members: Jen Challoner, Jan Duncan, David Jones and Bernice Horseman

Philip Lidstone has reportedly indicated that he would be prepared to serve on Committee. **Action:** Secretary to contact him.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 Paul Brown asked whether the processes for joining the Club, Bristol RAFA Club and the national RAF Association could be simplified. Jan said that Bristol RAFA Club would also like to simplify them, and had developed a proposal, but the national RAFA would not play ball.

11.2 Thanks were recorded to RAFA Club for installing a dishwasher downstairs, resulting in clean cups.

11.3 Paul Brown knows of a student learning bridge at school as part of his D of E award; might we do something to encourage bridge in schools? **Action:** to be discussed at the next Committee meeting.

11.4 Jane Drew asked for more photos on the website, to make it not just authoritative, but more engaging. **Action:** Alan Evans, as webmaster, to solicit entries. Jen added that WOE Begotten, the 30-year anniversary magazine, should grace our noticeboard.

11.5 Sandra Cooper longs for Monday evenings to be restarted. Alan Evans explained that, in common with both bridge and other kinds of clubs, evening session numbers have been down since the pandemic and show little evidence of reviving. We will only restart Monday evenings when there is a realistic prospect of sufficient numbers for an enjoyable playing experience.

11.6 Sandra would also like the grubby and worn bidding cards replaced. **Action:** Committee need to organise a public stock box, where players can swap out unacceptable bidding cards as they find them.

11.7 Chris Frew reminded the meeting the Alan Evans and Bridget Johnson were both retiring from their roles on Committee, after years of service, having also played a vital part in steering the Club through both the move from Golden Hill and the pandemic shut-down. On behalf of the Committee and Club, he thanked them for their valuable service; in recognition of which the Club is pleased to award Life Membership to them both. Alan responded that their move from Henleaze to Nailsea had been the principal driver of their stepping back, but Alan intends to continue as Webmaster and a core 'expert' at the Thursday Supervised Play sessions.

Signed

Date