



The Sobell Bridge Club



The MINUTES of the 12th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on Sunday 9th May 2004 in the Olwen Bettsworth Hall, Mount Vernon Hospital at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Ken Short - Acting Chairman/Hon Treasurer

Geoff Gray - Hon Secretary
Jennifer Hay - Playing Secretary
Michael Tucker - Assistant Treasurer
Liz Crook - Liaison Officer

Kevin Colling, Phil Ryan, Daphne Santon, Len Turner, Brian Simmonds

And 102 ordinary members.

1. Welcome by the Chairman. The Acting Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming the large number of members who were attending.

He stated that the last year had been a difficult one, not least because of the death of our Chairman and Founder, Stan Nicholls. On behalf of all members he asked that a message indicating our great sorrow be included in the Minutes, together with commiserations to his son Anthony.

Many members had expressed the opinion that without Stan the Club would collapse. That it had not was a credit to his organisation. The real strength of the Club lay in the 40 or so members who gave unstintingly of their time to run the day-to-day affairs. They are too many to mention by name, but as an example the name of Geoff Gray, our Secretary, was mentioned, who had literally "climbed out of his sick bed" to be present at this Meeting today.

Ken Short went on to say that it was Geoff who had talked him into the job of Acting Chairman and it was in this capacity that he was conducting this meeting.

2. Apologies for absence were received from Committee members Jacquie North and Gerald Williams and from 30 ordinary members.
3. The minutes of the 11th AGM, held on the 11th May 2003, were approved without alteration, proposed Liz Poyser, seconded Ruby Stiles.
4. The Treasurer's Report. Ken Short asked that his report as Treasurer be heard before his report as Chairman. He started by displaying the Income and Expenditure Account on the screen and by using two 'pie slice' diagrams comparing the last two financial years.

Total proceeds for 2003 - 2004 had dropped by about £8,700 from the preceding year, and this required some explanation.

Proceeds from Bridge Sessions now took up over 75% of the total but had stood up remarkably well in spite of accommodation problems. Proceeds from Monday

Evening, Thursday Evening and Friday Afternoon sessions were very similar to last year. The other three evenings had suffered from the change in Michael Sobell working practices, which, with their increased accommodation needs, had led them to restrict our use of the Annexe to one room only and at first, to Tuesday evenings only. Temporary accommodation had been found for Friday Evenings in the Enterprise Room for two months until Michael Sobell allowed us back in the Annexe. For Sunday Evenings, which needed more space so that a Beginners' Course could be run at the same time as normal play, we managed to hire the Olwen Bettsworth Hall. These restrictions both increased rental costs (by about £800) and reduced Tuesday numbers able to play to about 10 tables. Proceeds from Tuesdays were reduced by about £1, 000. However, the increased numbers playing on Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays meant that total proceeds from Sessions dropped only by about £400.

Turning to the other items on the charts, proceeds from Fees & Dues were unchanged.

Bridge Suppers were reduced as a new management team had to be found. However, after a slow start, the 'Learning curve' had built up and the December event produced the second highest proceeds for any Supper. A further successful Supper had taken place on April 3rd - but counts toward 2004-2005. Proceeds were down by £1,500 on 2002-3.

Weekends had been very successful in the hands of a newly appointed sub-committee but proceeds were reduced because costs to members were reduced following the removal of pressure to raise funds following the demise of the Cricket Club project. This resulted in proceeds dropping by £1,800.

Tuition was also much reduced. This activity had been very much Stan's baby. If Kevin Colling had not taken on the job of running a Beginners' Course late last year, there would be no proceeds from this source at all. However, proceeds were down by £2,500.

Income from other sources in 2003-2004 was limited to Bank Interest and even that had dried up when the bank ceased to pay interest on Treasurers Accounts from September 2003. Overall the resultant drop was £2,400.

Turning to the Balance Sheet, the Treasurer pointed out that in spite of our problems and reduced proceeds, we had managed to transfer £40,000 to the Sobell Club Development Fund, which is held by The Friends of Michael Sobell House. This was possible because of the high Cash in Bank at the beginning of the year had enabled an early transfer of £10,000 in May, while a build up of Funds in the Bank in March had enabled us to get in a fourth payment of £10, 000 right on the end of the year.

Ruby Stiles asked if it would be possible to publish the accounts in advance of the AGM. Brian Simmonds explained that the amount of work required of the treasurer and then the Auditor meant it was not possible unless we either changed the financial year of the club or delayed the AGM till June/July.

5. Motion to Approve the Accounts. The accounts were approved, proposed Adrienne Finch, seconded Martin Isham.
6. The Acting Chairman's report. Ken Short explained that his report would better be called 'The Accommodation Story' because that was what he was going to talk about.

At the last AGM we had a proposal for joint accommodation with the Northwood Cricket Club. We had a plan and we had planning permission. The cost estimate was put at £295,000 for our half share but our estimated financial 'reach' was only £250,000. The Chairman gained support from the meeting albeit with several dissenting members. A request for volunteers to help in raising the additional funds required received no support.

At the next Committee Meeting in August the cost had risen to £315,000 with a possible addition of £55,000 VAT. The price gap had already risen to over £100,000. The VAT might be reclaimable on completion but would have to be included in the initial costs. Your Committee was undecided whether to proceed or not and called for a meeting with N.C.C.

This took place in September where delegates considered the joint project to be no longer viable and recommended abandonment to their respective Clubs.

In late September we had a meeting with the Friends of MSH where the Friends explained their shortage of accommodation. They stated that they greatly valued us as a long term source of ready funds and after hearing our problems said that if we were in agreement they would seek a site in Mt. Vernon that would cope with our needs as well as their own, if we would contribute our savings in the SBC Development Fund to the cost.

At the next Club Committee Meeting it was agreed to abandon the Cricket Club scheme and support the proposal from the Friends as part of our continued search for a home.

We were invited to a further meeting with the Friends in February where they said they had found a suitable site and asked for our space requirements. These were provided from a plan developed for the Cricket Club project.

In April we received a letter from the Friends saying that they had received the necessary clearances at their end and asking us for our formal agreement.

A description together with a preliminary plan of the proposed building, which would be an extension of the Michael Sobell complex, that they would give us access to, was then presented to the Meeting. The Acting Chairman proposed that we give our full support to this project and on a show of hands received unanimous approval.

In the ensuing discussion, Terry Butfield asked about the status of the building fund. Ken Short explained that the fund was an accumulation on money donated by us to the Friends, which the Friends were holding on our behalf to support our attempts to develop our own accommodation.

Brian Simmonds proposed that draft agreements between the Friends and ourselves should be drawn up and put to a Special General Meeting of the Club. This was seconded by Cyril Gibor and passed, with one against.

7. The Hon Secretary's Report. Geoff Gray stated that we have 484 current members; this is 6 fewer than at the AGM last year. This is the first time the secretary has had to

report a drop in membership, however, given the problems the club has had this year, particularly with accommodation, he felt the numbers have held up remarkably well.

This is due to the hard work of a lot of committee and ordinary members, in keeping the day-to-day organisation of the club running smoothly. The Secretary thanked them for their work, and also the members for the tolerance they have shown in some difficult circumstances.

Finally Geoff Gray thanked Joan Prior for providing the buffet after the AGM.

8. Report by the Chairman of the Playing Subcommittee. Jennifer Hay reported that this is the first year that we have had a trophy to play for at each session, for a full year. It is nice to see some new names appearing on the cups and plates, but more of that later...

Once again we have had 2 teams competing in the West Herts League this year. The team, which includes Doug and Anne Edmonds, and Robin Pyburn, has played their 3rd season in the first division. Although the results have not yet been confirmed, they feel that they have maintained their position. Our other team consists of Pat and Cyril Gibor, Michael Melville, Ron Stevens, Allan Chalmers and Phil Ryan, and plays in the 3rd division. Again, without having the final results they think that they may end the year in 2nd or 3rd place, which could mean promotion. They also reached the semi-final of the Plate knockout competition for the 2nd year running.

If anyone else is interested in entering a team, of between 4 and 6 players, please let the Playing Secretary know.

Once again, Michael Melville did a superb job of organising the Simultaneous Pairs competitions throughout the year.

The first competition, run by the EBU, was on September 15th and 1963 pairs took part.

Bea Segall and Olive Stretch came 163rd with 59.97%
Pat and Cyril Gibor came 186th with 59.47%
Phil Ryan and Looi Tan came 204th with 59.15%

The second competition was The David Boston pairs on the 3rd November, in which 1684 pairs took part.

Catherine Stafford and John Francis came 52nd with 63.94%
Stan Figiela and David Kilby came 303rd with 56.77%
Pat and Cyril Gibor came 410th with 55.13%

The third competition was run by the Hertfordshire Bridge Association on the 2nd February, with 161 pairs competing.

Marion Sweet & Geoff Gray came 11th with 61.71%
Herman Hirshberger & Bob Batchelor came 17th with 59.93%
Shirley Tucker & Rachel Tunstall came 24th with 57.04%

Jennifer Hay thanked all the session managers, tournament directors, scorers, people who collect the money, set up and put away the tables etc and provide refreshments.

Special thanks to Michael Melville for organising and running the simultaneous pairs competitions throughout the year.

Also thanks this year to Kevin Colling who took over the ordering, storage, distribution and payment of all the stationery items from the Playing Secretary this year.

9. Report by the Chairman of the Social Subcommittee. Brian Simmonds reported on the Bridge Drives.

We were only able to hold two bridge suppers in the last financial year, instead of the usual three. They were held on 8th August and 6th December 2003, and raised £384 and £1062 respectively, the latter total being the second best ever for a bridge supper.

These suppers would not, however, be possible without the help of a truly dedicated and hard-working team. Brian stated he was not happy about naming individuals as invariably someone is left out, and he apologised in advance if this was the case. At the risk of this, he thanked, in no specific order, Elisabeth Ray, Jane Culley, Sheena Edgar, Michael and Shirley Tucker, Cyril and Pat Gibor, Alison Dewar, Gillian Sale and Len Turner and all those others who provided food and assistance. Without their help there just would not be an evening.

Going forward, we held a further successful supper on 3rd April this year, raising about £700.

Brian Simmonds concluded by saying he looked forward to seeing many of those who were there this evening at the next scheduled supper on 14th August.

10. Proposed Changes to the Constitution. Geoff Gray explained the changes to the constitution.

The purpose behind the changes was to put the structure of the committee and club on a more formal basis. Following Stan's death last summer, it became clear that there was nothing in place to cover such an eventuality, and in effect, the committee had no guidance on what to do. The changes were meant to cover this, by defining the organisation of the committee and its election.

At the same time, we have attempted to simplify the constitution. The current constitution defines an executive council and various specific sub-committees. The executive council had fallen into disuse, so it has been removed from the constitution. The committee has also proposed the removal of each specific sub-committee defined in the constitution, and instead just given the committee the power to appoint standing sub-committees for specific purposes (paragraph 12). This is to avoid having to change the constitution each time a new subcommittee is formed or one is disbanded. This year there is a new sub-committee, consisting of Joan Prior, George Howlett and Gerald Williams, to look after our weekends away. At the same time, the building sub-committee has been disbanded.

Finally, there has been added a new post of Vice-Chairman.

John Francis commented that, while as far as he could tell, the changes to the constitution appeared legally satisfactory, he was unhappy that the changes should be presented to the meeting without advance notice. He felt that there should be at least 21 days notice for members to assess the changes. Geoff Gray responded that the proposed changes had been posted on club notice boards and on the web site for more than the last 21 days, and that the last newsletter had also referred to the changes. This was, however, with the exception of the introduction of the post of Vice-Chairman, which was a late introduction. Ahmad Mallick said that, as a charity, the club would be bound by the rules of the Charity Commission as regards changes to the constitution; Geoff Gray explained that the club is not a charity.

Ken Short proposed that the club would work to the new constitution from now on, but that the formal adoption of the changes be agreed at the next General Meeting of the Club.

11. Election of Committee Members. Ken Short said that before we go ahead with the election for chairman, we would first like the meeting to ratify a decision the committee made during the year. The committee agreed that Len Turner should become the Club's President. This is an honorary post, with no formal duties, and is purely in recognition of Len's outstanding service to club over many years.

The meeting confirmed the appointment by acclaim.

Ken Short stated that he was standing down as Treasurer, and Ron Hooker had volunteered to take over the post. As he was standing down, Ken wished to thank Michael Tucker, and all those who had acted as collectors at the sessions, Shirley Tucker, Joan Knaggs, Ruby Stiles and Kevin Colling.

At this point, Ken Short stood down as Chairman of the meeting and Len Turner took over the chair.

Len Turner thanked Moira Wishart for taking the trouble to make a written recommendation on his behalf to the committee. He accepted the position humbly, he knew there were a lot of other people who do very valuable work. He thanked all those who had supported the proposal.

The following were elected to the committee en-bloc: -

Geoff Gray Hon Secretary
Ron Hooker Hon Treasurer
Liz Crook Liaison Officer
Michael Tucker Assistant Treasurer

and the current session managers.

The posts of Playing Secretary and Social Secretary are vacant.

The election for the Chairmanship of the club was held by secret ballot. This was adjudicated by Brian Simmonds, with the assistance of Ruby Stiles and Pat Gibor.

57 votes were cast for Kevin Colling and 51 votes for Ken Short; Kevin Colling was duly elected as Chairman of the club.

Kevin Colling proposed that Ken Short be elected Vice-Chairman; this was agreed, by acclaim.

12. Election of Honorary Auditor. Ron Hooker proposed that Brian Simmonds be re-appointed, Howard Atkins seconded.
13. Any Other Formal Business. John Francis expressed thanks to Ruby Stiles for her work as club matchmaker. He had required her assistance on many occasions, and she had never failed him.

Ken Short proposed a vote of thanks to all the members of the outgoing building committee, headed by Bill Graham. They had put in a huge amount of work over many years.

The formal meeting closed at 7.30 p.m., and was followed by the presentation of Championship Prizes.

Jennifer Hay announced the prizewinners:

Broughton Trophy (Monday evening):

1st Stan Figiela & David Kilby

2nd Michael Melville & Ron Stevens

Stan Figiela and David Kilby were absent. Ethel Broughton presented the 2nd place plaques to Ron Stephens.

President's Trophy (Tuesday evening):

1st Andrew Pullin & Michael Melville

2nd Kevin Colling & Catherine Stafford

Andrew Pullin and Michael Melville were absent. Ethel Broughton presented the 2nd place plaques to Kevin Colling and Catherine Stafford.

L and R Trophy (Thursday evening):

1st Kevin Colling & Catherine Stafford

2nd Stan Figiela & David Kilby

Sue Sheldon presented the L and R Trophy to Kevin Colling and Catherine Stafford.

The trophies for the Friday afternoon sessions:

Individual Trophy

1st Lucy Rees

2nd Martin Isham

Daphne Santon presented the trophy to Lucy Rees.

Pairs Trophy

1st Lucy Rees & Martin Isham

2nd Alan Milne & Rita Jacob

Daphne Santon presented the trophy to Lucy Rees and Martin Isham.

Graham Trophy (Friday Evenings):

1st Kevin Colling and Michael Melville

2nd Bea Segall and Olive Stretch

Len Turner presented the 2nd place plaques to Bea Segall, and the trophy to Kevin Colling.

Apologies for absence were received from: -

Arna Davis, Pam Parkhurst, Alan Marks, Allan Chalmers, Ruth Allenby, Tony Letts, Brian Godfrey, Ann Godfrey, Ann Walker, Barbara Robjant, Christine Ross, Phil Williams, Eileen Williams, Terry Naylor-Vane, Angela Naylor-Vane, Stan Orlans, Rebecca Orlans, Jenny Sandercock, Maura Finan, Judith Barnett, Gordon Shelton, Belle Anthony, Helen Graham, Douglas Graham, Margaret Rainbow, Pam Montgomery, Bill Hassey, Brenda Weston. Isobel Williams, Michael Melville.