



The Sobell Bridge Club



**The MINUTES of the 9th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held on Sunday 13th May 2001**

Present:

Stan Nicholls - Chairman
Ken Short - Hon Treasurer
Geoff Gray - Hon Secretary
Jennifer Hay - Chairman, Playing Committee
Michael Tucker - Assistant Treasurer

Michael Melville, Phil Ryan, Daphne Santon, Len Turner, Gerald Williams

Wendy Aarons, Barry Aarons, Maureen Bannatyne, Ethel Broughton, Thelma Charlton, Isabelle Classey, Margaret Cook, Liz Crook, John Francis, Jane Graham, Douglas Graham, Bill Hassey, Marjorie Haynes, Doreen Howlett, George Howlett, Roland Lewis, Jane Natrass, Robin Pyburn, Rita Reddie, Christine Ross, Sue Sheldon, Brian Simmonds, Ron Stevens, Jim Teesdale, Maureen Thackeray, Gabriel Thaddeus, Stella Thaddeus, Diana Walker, Brenda Weston, Isobel Williams, Thelma Williamson, Irene Willis.

Welcome by the Chairman. The Chairman opened the meeting by thanking all those present for attending.

Apologies for absence were received from Committee members Bill Graham, Kevin Colling, Jacque North, Ken South and from 48 ordinary members (list attached).

The minutes of the 8th AGM, held on the 14th May 2000, were approved without alteration, proposed Bill Hassey, seconded Michael Melville.

The Chairman's Report.

The Chairman reported that we have had another good year. Attendances have kept up well and our membership is fairly static at around 450 members.

Four Bridge Weekends away were organised last year together with three Bridge Drives and a number of training courses. One of our members, Rita Mason, arranged to run duplicate sessions at the Vagabonds Club in Pinner on Monday afternoons, but unfortunately the revenue from the numbers attending did not cover the running costs, so, with some reluctance we had to abandon this scheme.

Another interesting development was the setting up of the Club's own web site, thanks to the Club's Webmaster, Asaf Ersoy. He has done an extremely professional job. There is a home page giving details of the Club's meetings, together with a notice board and a map. He also publishes the results of all our duplicate sessions.

The Chairman commented that we still have problems with our accommodation. Operating from two separate sites sometimes causes its own problems, as no doubt everyone is aware, the space available to us in the Annexe gets steadily smaller. The O.B. Hall, though spacious, was very cold last winter, when on a number of occasions there was no heating, and there were other times when it has been left in a very untidy condition. For these reasons, we are still looking for more suitable premises. The report by the Building Sub-Committee Chairman will go into more detail.

The Chairman concluded by thanking very sincerely those 50 or so members who regularly help to run the Club so efficiently, not forgetting Daphne Santon and her helpers who run the Friday afternoon sessions in Rickmansworth. The Chairman appealed to the other 400 odd members to consider lending an occasional hand and so spread the load more evenly.

The Hon Secretary's Report.

The Secretary reported that we now had 483 members, 11 more than at the AGM last year, so the Club is still gradually growing.

The Secretary said that Joan Prior was standing down as Partnership Coordinator, after doing the job for four years. Ruby Stiles is taking over, and the Secretary thanked both Joan and Ruby for doing this job.

In his newsletter last winter, the Secretary had bemoaned the lack of volunteers for various tasks in the Club. There was some positive response, we now have extra scorers, and offers of help with the newsletter, but on a personal note, the Secretary would really like to see more offers for Tournament Directors. At the moment the Secretary is TD for Friday evenings, back-up TD for Mondays, and second back-up for Thursdays. The job is not difficult, and the Club would organise training for anyone interested.

Finally, the Secretary commented on the web site. He congratulated Asaf Ersoy on doing a splendid job in setting the site up and on being so prompt in posting the duplicate scores as they become available. The Secretary said that everyone who had spoken to him had been most complimentary about the site.

The Hon Treasurer's Report.

The Treasurer presented a review of the annual accounts using pie charts to show income and expenses compared to the previous year, and the overhead projector to display the accounts.

The total income was down £2000 against last year. Our 'core business', the

playing sessions, were up, providing 70% of our income as opposed to 60% last year. The weekends away were up against last year, but tuition fees were down, as a result of poorer attendance at the courses. Fees and dues were down on the previous year, but the biggest drop came in the Bridge Drives. We only ran 3 drives rather than 4, and attendance was generally down. As a result, the income from the Drives was down £1500.

Expenses were up at £7,400 this year compared to £6,700 last year. The expenses are over 20% of gross income. The rental of the Olwen Bettsworth hall takes a large proportion of this, and the Monday afternoon sessions made a loss. Cash in bank at start of year was £4,700 and is now £15,000, so we need to pay money to the Friends. We paid £20,000 to the Friends this year. On the accounts, we have now depreciated the wooden tables to no value, and it was agreed at the last committee meeting that we depreciate the metal tables at 20% pa.

As Auditor, Brian Simmonds has signed the accounts as correct.

John Francis commented that there was a danger in holding funds in the bank, that we may become liable to tax. The Treasurer said that was why we wanted to transfer the money in the bank to the Friends as quickly as possible.

The Treasurer thanked all the collectors at the various sessions, Shirley Tucker, Michael Tucker, Ruby Stiles and Joan Knaggs, and also thanked Michael Tucker as his deputy on the Committee.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Ken Short for his work as Treasurer and Brian Simmonds as Auditor.

Motion to Approve the Accounts.

The accounts were approved, proposed Daphne Santon, Michael Melville seconded.

Report by the Chairman of the Playing Subcommittee.

The Playing Secretary reported on the bridge activities of the Club: -

Due to the hard work and efforts of our Competitions Secretary, Michael Melville, we ran 4 simultaneous competitions this year.

Last September we had an EBU competition on a Monday and a Tuesday evening. Our best result of the year was in the first of these on the Monday, Philip Vernon and Carolyn Woolf came 2nd out of 1,599 pairs with 72%. On the Tuesday, Lynne Mathys and Alison Montague came 18th out of 3,147 pairs with 67.28%.

In February this year we entered the Hertfordshire Simultaneous Pairs, on a Monday, when Kevin Colling and John Wood came 6th out of 209 pairs with 64.13%.

We also had another EBU competition earlier this month, but have not yet

received the national results.

Apart from the organising and running of these events there is the job of dealing all the cards beforehand to pre-set curtain cards so that all competitors are playing the same hands. Michael has had a lot of trouble finding volunteers to do this and has even resorted to getting his neighbours to do it, who are not members of the club. As we have over 400 club members, at 4 competitions a year, then we each only have to do it once every 100 years. The Playing secretary asked for volunteers to make themselves known to Michael or herself, otherwise we will have to stop running the competitions.

We also had a Teams of Four competition at the Uxbridge Bridge Club. We had 4 teams each, and it was played as a friendly. In fact it was so friendly that no one seems to have scored it, so we don't know the result. We are hoping to return the invitation and invite Uxbridge to play us here.

Sobell had 3 teams competing this year in the Hertfordshire West Region League. Two of those teams had been promoted at the end of last season from Division 3 to Division 2. Although at this time of year we don't have the official results, it seems very likely that one of these teams with Sobell members Doug Edmonds and Robin Pyburn will be promoted again to Division 1, so we wish them well for next season.

The club now has its own web site, kindly set up and managed for us by Asaf Ersoy. Information about the club and the results of each session are posted on it. The Playing Secretary said she would pass on the site address to anyone who required it. Her thanks went to Asaf for his efforts.

The Playing Secretary thanked all the helpers at the bridge sessions who work very hard to make the evenings enjoyable for all, and finally thanked the players on Tuesday evenings for putting up with some very cramped conditions at times.

Report by the Chairman of the Social Subcommittee.

In the absence of the Social Secretary, the Chairman reviewed the year on her behalf.

We held only three drives last year as opposed to the usual four, due to lack of support from the Club. This year we may only be able to hold two drives.

Ruby Stiles has decided to stand down as Social Secretary, so we are looking for a volunteer to take her place. The job is mainly one of co-ordination and organisation. Brian Simmonds does an excellent job as Director of the evening, and we have people who look after the bar and raffle stands.

Report by the Chairman of the Building Subcommittee.

The Building Secretary had prepared a report in advance and this was read to the meeting by Michael Tucker: -

"Family commitments in Houston prevent me attending this meeting, which is a pity because this report should inform members of our need to find a new venue for the bridge club. It is vital that we pursue this goal if we wish to continue to flourish and support the hospice.

The building committee met twice during the course of the past twelve months or so. Those meetings took place against a background of increasing but tolerable difficulties at the Annexe and the OB Hall. With this in mind discussion centered around the following options: -

- a) continuing with the existing arrangements,
- b) a new building alongside the hospice,
- c) accommodation within existing buildings on the Mount Vernon site, and
- d) new accommodation outside the Mount Vernon site in association with others.

I think that members of the bridge club are well aware of the difficulties with a) above and our view is that alternative arrangements with better facilities and security of tenure should be found. Option b) is no longer available to us, despite planning approval, given my informal discussions with hospice personnel who would strenuously oppose the construction of a new building alongside the hospice.

Option c) seemed to be viable earlier this reporting year but the various sites examined, including the nursery building by the main car park and the neuro-engineering block, could not be progressed despite support from John Schorrtle, the Estates Director. The nursery building will be required for the storage of medical records and the very large neuro-engineering block does not meet the needs of the hospice with whom we might have shared accommodation. It would seem that the hospice is interested in the site - not the building - and I would imagine that the unsettled future of the Mount Vernon estate as a whole will have to be taken into consideration.

Towards the end of the year the building committee concentrated on option d); particularly in association with the Northwood Cricket Club (NCC) without ignoring other opportunities in the area. I have maintained informal links with the NCC over the past three years whilst the future tenure of the cricket ground was established. I am now informed that the freehold will pass to a trust set up by NCC to protect the site from commercial development. NCC in turn will have tenancy rights, which could also presumably include the bridge club. Trust arrangements are by their nature complicated and very careful consideration will be necessary. However no formal discussion has taken place to date between the clubs to discuss these and other important matters. Officers of both clubs, including respective chairmen and treasurers had an exploratory meeting in February which concluded that shared accommodation such as a combined bridge club/ cricket pavilion on the existing site was worthy of further consideration.

The building subcommittee looked at this proposal in greater depth at its last meeting making the following recommendations for consideration by the committee and the bridge club as a whole: -

We should: -

- a) urgently pursue the concept of shared accommodation with the NCC,
- b) establish a small working group to achieve the best possible financial and legal terms for the bridge club, and
- c) authorise the building committee to:-
 - i) continue to evolve, without prejudice, plans and a building programme for a combined NCC/Sobell Bridge Club building in conjunction with the NCC consulting the bridge club at significant stages, and
 - ii) enter early discussion with the cricket club on ongoing maintenance and service costs and make recommendations.

I think that it will be self evident on reading the recommendations that the building committee recognised the substantial commitment that a project of this type requires and the need to safeguard the rights of members. Nevertheless there is a clear opportunity, if our best interests can be established, to safeguard the future of our club and our contribution to the hospice. With that in mind the outline discussion sketch attached to this report has been developed after informal discussion with the NCC chairman. If the project goes forward we will have access to all the upper floor with facilities for those who have difficulty with stairs. The main playing area will be sufficient for 36 tables with another 8 or so tables in the bar area for classes.

NCC is seeking an estimate of the cost, a rough idea at the moment suggest a cost around £400,000.

If the project is to go ahead you are invited to agree to the recommendations made in this report. With the support of the bridge club as a whole we can pursue our primary objectives - financial support for the hospice and secure accommodation for the future whatever is decided years hence for Mount Vernon as a whole - with sufficient playing area and other facilities available for our use at comparable times as at present.

This report would not be complete without my thanks to the sub-committee as a whole and to Maureen Bannatyne and Mervyn Mascarenhas in particular for joining the group and making significant contributions already. "

Following the report, the Chairman added that Northwood Cricket Club is on the site next to the Hospital, and have just purchased the freehold of the site.

Bill Hassey asked if we can afford the building, the Chairman responded that we do not yet know the cost, or what our share may be.

Isobel Williams asked if we went ahead, would we have our own rights to the building. The Chairman said yes, and cricket and bridge are reasonably compatible activities.

Rob Pyburn asked if the NCC intended to replace the current pavilion, the Chairman responded yes, the NCC want a new building.

Ethel Broughton asked about parking spaces, the Chairman responded that the current space would need to be improved.

Bill Hassey asked how we would finance the building. The Chairman said we do not yet know the costs yet. The Committee did not want to organise finances too much until we knew the feelings of the members.

Rob Pyburn asked if the fund money was potentially available. The Chairman said that the money is held by the Friends of Michael Sobell House.

Diana Walker, as Chairman of the Friends, explained the funds are held in a CAF account and can only be withdrawn by signatures of specified Committee members of the Friends of Michael Sobell House, and specified Committee members of the Sobell Bridge Club. Signatures of both organisations must be present. The account is 'in limbo', it is not shown in either the Friends or the Club accounts.

Diana Walker said that the current situation with the Hospice is that staffing costs are roughly £500,000 pa, covered by the Friends. The future of the Hospice is uncertain, it could be off-site, at the moment we are waiting for information.

The Chairman said it was the duty of the Committee to provide accommodation for the members. A permanent building will mean that we will be able to provide more support for the Friends in the longer-term.

Michael Melville commented that the Hospital site could change use, Diana Walker explained that the Mount Vernon site is mostly made up of gifts, most of them covenanted. It would take intervention by the Department of the Environment before any change of use could take place.

The Chairman summed up by stating that the information before the meeting was just currently about possibilities, the Committee has no definite proposal to make to the members at this time.

Proposed Changes to the Constitution.

The Chairman explained the background to the proposed changes. Initially, it was intended that the Club would have its own account where money could be

put aside, but this was found to be impracticable, because we would end up paying tax.

The Secretary read out aloud each proposed amendment in turn. For the first amendment, John Francis suggested that the words 'at the end of the financial year' be inserted, to ensure that funds were not carried over the financial year end in the Club accounts. John Francis also advised that the words 'pay such monies into the Club bank account' be added to the second amendment, as a safety measure. The revised paragraphs became: -

Paragraph 3: Payments shall be made for the use of various premises. Funds, at the end of the financial year, surplus to these and the running and maintenance and development expenses of the Club shall be donated to the Friends of Michael Sobell House, Registered Charity No. 1079638.

Paragraph 10: The duties of the Honorary Treasurer are to collect all monies due to the Club, pay such monies into the Club bank account settle all accounts and keep a record of such transactions. A bank account will be maintained in the name of the Club, withdrawals from which will require the signatures of two of the officers of the Club or their authorised deputies whose signatures will be registered at the bank. Duly audited accounts will be prepared annually for approval at the AGM. The financial year shall run from 1 April to 31 March the following year.

The changes were proposed by Ethel Broughton, seconded by Brian Simmonds, and agreed nem con.

Election of Committee Members.

The Chairman said that Ruby Stiles was standing down as Social Secretary, and we still had no replacement for Len Turner who retired as Liaison Officer last year. In addition, we need a Newsletter editor. The remaining existing Committee members will stand again if elected.

There being no competition for any committee places, the existing members were re-elected en-bloc, proposed by Brian Simmonds, seconded by Bill Hassey.

The Chairman commented on the need to fill the remaining places and asked again for volunteers from those present. He described the work of the Social Secretary as a co-coordinating job, recruiting volunteers to do various jobs. If we get no one to come forward, we will not be able to run the Bridge Drives any more. These Drives give a lot of pleasure to people outside the Club.

Brian Simmonds commented that the Drives were a lot easier to set up these days, with the Salmon meals being bought in.

Ethel Broughton suggested we ask for volunteers at the playing sessions.

John Francis volunteered to act as Newsletter Editor.

The Secretary commented that although Len Turner had retired as Liaison Officer, he still acted as our intermediary with the Hospital Authorities, and deserved our thanks for doing so.

Election of Honorary Auditor.

Brian Simmonds said he was willing to continue as Auditor, Gerald Williams proposed that he be re-appointed, Michael Melville seconded.

Any Other Formal Business.

Michael Melville commented, regarding the Secretary's request for volunteer Tournament Directors, that two people were due to go on the first training course. The Secretary responded that he was aware of this; the people concerned were Michael Melville himself and Jacquie North. Both did other work for the Club; the Secretary had been hoping that some new people would come forward.

Christine Ross asked that copies of the minutes of the AGM and the Agenda be sent to all members three weeks prior to the AGM. The Treasurer responded that the cost to the Club would be significant, and the Chairman stated that as we are not a Charity or a formal business, there is no legal requirement to do so.

The formal meeting closed at 7.00 p.m., and was followed by the presentation of Championship Prizes:

President's Trophy:

1st Andrew Pullin and Michael Melville

2nd Colin Thomas and Eddie O'Sullivan

Ethel Broughton presented the President's Trophy to Michael Melville

L and R Trophy:

1st Brian Simmonds and Michael Melville

2nd Joan Prior and Stan Nicholls

Jennifer Hay presented the L and R Trophy to Brian Simmonds and Michael Melville, and the second place shields to Stan Nicholls.

The trophy for the Friday afternoon competition:

1st John Walsh

2nd Rita Jacob

This trophy was presented at the Friday afternoon session by Daphne Santon.

Subsequent to the meeting, the following people came forward as volunteers to assist in the running of the Bridge Drives: -

Wendy Aarons, Liz Crook, Bill Hassey, Rita Reddie and Brenda Weston.

Apologies for absence were received from: -

Dorothy Bradley-Perdue, Pat Graham, Gaye Townsend, Peter Townsend, Zena Stewart, Ian McKeller, Suzanne McKeller, Geoffrey Burge, Barbara Burge, Graham Sanders, Norman Foat, Melita Foat, Barry Cooksley, Shirley Cooksley, Derrick Gordon, Gordon Sadler, Ann Hooker, Ron Hooker, Dorothy Edwards, Helen Samuels, Mark Samuels, Shirley Woods, Roy Sterry, Phil Williams, Eileen Williams, Ita Hunt, Mabel Spurr, Pat Gayton, Alastair King, Martin Holden, Moira Wishart, Rexine Malalgoda, Shirley Douglas, Len Douglas, Averil Backhouse, Peter Moir, Sharon Christie, Pat Fallan, Ian Judges, Shirley Tucker, Lynne Mathys, Alison Montague, Maureen Diggins, David Wilson, Delyse Fyfe, Valerie Wilson, Jack McEnery, Ruth Allenby.