



# The Sobell Bridge Club



## The MINUTES of the 10<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Held on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2002

Present:

Stan Nicholls - Chairman  
Ken Short - Hon Treasurer  
Geoff Gray - Hon Secretary  
Jennifer Hay - Chairman, Playing Committee  
Bill Hassey - Joint Chairman Social Committee  
Brenda Weston - Joint Chairman Social Committee  
Michael Tucker - Assistant Treasurer

Kevin Colling, Michael Melville, Daphne Santon, Len Turner, Brenda Weston, Gerald Williams.

Lynne Adler, Jo Aldridge, Bernie Allwright, Janet Archdeacon, Fay Benjamin, Betty Blundell, Hugh Broomhead, Shirley Broomhead, Ethel Broughton, Esther Casey, Thelma Charlton, Liz Crook, Asaf Ersoy, Benjamin Fickling, Shirley Fickling, Adrienne Finch, Cyril Gibor, Pat Gibor, Hetty Hartman, Marjorie Haynes, Doreen Howlett, George Howlett, Joan Huggins, William Hughes, Shirley Lawrence, Roland Lewis, Rexine Malalgoda, Joanna May, Derek Miles, Jane Natrass, Peggy Neale, Eddie O'Sullivan, Elizabeth Poyser, Joan Prior, Margaret Rainbow, Lucy Rees, Joan Scoles, Sue Sheldon, Brian Simmonds, Lesley Snuggs, Ron Stevens, Ruby Stiles, Jim Teesdale, Gabriel Thaddeus, Stella Thaddeus, Margaret Toscani, Calver Townsend, Mary Townsend, Diana Walker, Rosemary White, 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 and Jacquie North and from 68 ordinary members (list attached).

The minutes of the 9th AGM, held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2001, were approved without alteration, proposed Ron Stevens, seconded Gerald Williams.

### **The Chairman's Report.**

As this year is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club the Chairman thought it would be appropriate to have a quick look back over the last ten years. He thought we could all be quite pleased with what has been achieved. We now have a thriving Club with nearly 500 members, one of the largest in the country. We have organised about thirty Bridge Drives, and a roughly similar number of Bridge Weekends in various parts of the country, and we have run about 20

courses for beginners as well as others for improvers during the last 10 years.

The Chairman supposed that "achievement" was not really quite the right word because when the Club was set up, they didn't actually set out to achieve anything very much. They started with about 12 members, and simply wanted to run a small social club where bridge was played in a friendly and informal atmosphere. They also wanted to support Michael Sobell House. They expected to do this mainly by providing a venue where relatives of the Hospice patients could meet, and by raising the general awareness of the work of the Hospice. They also had the thought that we might eventually be able to make a small but worthwhile financial contribution to the Hospice.

As things have turned out we have made quite a significant contribution. Almost £250,000 has been donated to the Friends of Michael Sobell House since the Club started. And the Chairman believed we have also managed to maintain a friendly atmosphere, and we are very proud of this. So, on behalf of the committee, the Chairman thanked all of our members for their support over the last 10 years.

None of this could have been done without a good deal of hard work by a lot of people. The Chairman singled out just three. First of all the late Charles Buszard. He was our first Secretary. We would not have had a Club at all without his enthusiasm, vision and drive. Secondly Ken Short who has been our hard working Treasurer ever since the Club started, and thirdly Geoff Gray who eventually took over the quite onerous and somewhat thankless job of Club Secretary. There are another 50 or so names the Chairman could and perhaps should have mentioned, but he didn't want to prolong the proceedings unnecessarily. They know who they are, so the Chairman said "thank you all."

There was just one other name the Chairman had to mention - Len Turner. His title is Liaison Officer (retired) and he also looks after the interests of the Rubber Bridge players. But in practice he has done much more than that. The Chairman has relied very heavily on his wisdom, enthusiasm and hard work behind the scenes for many years and will be very sorry when he eventually takes a well-earned rest.

Looking to the future, we have reached our maximum capacity in the existing premises. We are now getting around 20 tables fairly regularly in the Olwen Bettsworth Hall, and over a dozen in the Michael Sobell House premises. The Friday afternoon sessions in Rickmansworth are still well attended. We are still negotiating with the Northwood Cricket Club in the hope that we can build with them a suitable Clubhouse and our Buildings Secretary will be reporting on this. The Chairman said that our aim to acquire our own premises has always been supported by the Friends of Michael Sobell House and they are prepared to help us financially if the scheme with the Cricket Club goes ahead. They have now opened a new reserve fund, called the Sobell Bridge Club Development Fund, into which the funds they were holding as our building reserve have been transferred. The fund now stands at £160,000, which can be made available to the Bridge Club if the scheme with the Cricket Club goes ahead. The Chairman thanked the Friends for their very generous

support of our aims over the years.

Finally, to celebrate our anniversary, we have decided to hold a Teams-of-Four Duplicate bridge event here in Michael Sobell House on Saturday 6th July. The Chairman hoped it will be well supported.

### **The Hon Secretary's Report.**

The Secretary said that the Club now has 486 members; this is 3 more than this time last year, so things are stable. This was probably just as well considering how busy some of our playing sessions have become.

Given that it is the Club's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Secretary had done some checking on the Club's history. The Club started with a group of 12, and had grown to 52 members at the end of the first year, when membership was temporarily closed. The Secretary noted that 30 of the original 52 are still with the Club. By the AGM 5 years ago, the Club had grown to 370 members, and again over 200 of our current members have been with the Club at least 5 years.

The Secretary pointed out that during the ten years the Club has only had one Chairman, Stan Nicholls. Given what the Club started from, and where the Club is today, the Secretary commented that he thought the Chairman had done a good job of it.

Two highlights stood out for this last year. At the last AGM the committee asked for volunteers to take over the bridge drives. Afterwards a number of people had come forward, and the Club now has a team headed very effectively by Bill Hassey and Brenda Weston. All who have attended the drives they organised have been impressed by the dedication and professional attitude they have put in to the job, and the Secretary thanked them on behalf of the committee.

The other highlight was the Marathon. This turned out to be a marvellous idea, must successfully implemented by Liz Crook and Fenny Lough. The Secretary said he ended up playing for 10 hours, it wasn't meant to be that long, but the food was so good. The Secretary also discovered afterwards that it demonstrated how the press could get things so wrong sometimes. The article in the Watford Observer had an inaccuracy and the Secretary took this opportunity to put the record straight. The last two paragraphs read: -

‘Although there were prizes for highest score and a slam prize, the prize that arose the most excitement was a fluffy toy dog passed around to any player who took a trick with a two. One lady became so attached to it, Liz gave it as a going home present, and donated a fluffy cow for the rest of the contest.’

The Secretary explained that he was that lady.

The Secretary concluded by thanking all those who had helped to run the Club during the past year and the past ten years.

At this point, a cheque for £1100, from the proceeds of the Marathon, was presented by Liz Crook to Diana Walker, Chairman of the Friends of Michael Sobell House.

### **Report by the Chairman of the Building Committee.**

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

'Family commitments in Houston mean that once again I cannot attend the next committee meeting and the AGM. My report last year started with the assumption that we need to find new accommodation for the club if we wish to continue to flourish and maintain our support for the hospice. I believe that this remains our primary objective and with that in mind the committee and the AGM agreed to the Building Sub-Committee's recommendations for the way forward after consideration of a number of alternative arrangements and taking into account the increasing but tolerable difficulties at the Sobell unit and the OB Hall.

Since then and in summary, the recommendation that the club should open formal discussions with the Northwood Cricket Club (NCC) has been followed up and progress has been made. But before I report on those discussions it may be useful to remind ourselves what was agreed last year. The detailed recommendations adopted were that we should: -

a) urgently pursue the concept of shared accommodation with the NCC

b) establish a small working group that includes Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary of the club and the Chairman of the Building Sub-Committee to

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c) ensure that all the above are subject to satisfactory financial and legal terms being agreed with an agreed sum from the bridge club funds being designated to the combined NCC/Bridge Club project,

d) amend the constitution to allow c) above and appoint a legal adviser

e) authorise the committee to:

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In response to the adopted recommendations meetings with the NCC have taken place. Whilst formal agreement between the clubs would be inappropriate at this stage – not least because at the time of writing this report the freehold has not been transferred to the NCC - a number of basic principles have been established. They are: -

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What has not been agreed between the clubs despite extended discussion is a formula that establishes ownership. A number of formulations have been considered including the formation of a trust with representatives drawn from both clubs, a 'split freehold' concept whereby both clubs have title to separate parts of the grounds and, with increasing support, the creation of a management company. This would in all probability be a limited liability company with directors from both clubs, which would hold the freehold and be the lessee to both clubs.

It is too early to give a precise formula for any eventual agreement between the clubs. For the moment we have concentrated on producing the plans for the new building which have now been with the local authority for over three months, The NCC has also been in discussions with Sport England (the agency for lottery grants) which some four months ago resulted in wholesale changes to the building plans which had been developed by architects with an estimated building cost of £400,000 in mind. In essence the building will

consist of a cricket facility with changing rooms, showers, lounge at one end and at the other end, at ground level, a 12.5m x 12.5m (25+ tables) bridge playing room with an office and stores. Between these areas there will be shared facilities i.e. kitchen, bar and toilets. Whilst the two areas, bridge and cricket, will be largely independent there will be occasions when both clubs will wish to use the lounge and bridge playing areas e.g. bridge drives, social functions, cricket festival week. Clearly some form of management committee will be needed to ensure that these arrangements work smoothly and to manage the building and its associated running costs.

The £400,000 estimated building costs referred to earlier do not include some ground and security improvements that the NCC wish to make or for resurfacing and lighting the car park. Where will the money come from? As stated earlier the bridge club has agreed in principle to fund half of the cost which, given the nature of building projects could arguably approach £250,000. It is only just conceivable that the existing pavilion could be demolished this autumn and be replaced by the new building by spring 2003. If that were indeed to be the case then the club would need all our skills and effort, not least Bill Hassey and his team to meet our target from club funds. If however the new building work were to start in September 2003 then perhaps a modest and temporary increase in the £2.00 nightly subscription would suffice. I am confident that Ken Short and Michael Tucker will have some ideas on that topic.

Clearly this project requires a very careful and thorough approach by all concerned. I can assure you that the officers of the club - Stan Nicholls, Ken Short and Len Turner (deputising for Geoff Gray) - are looking after your interests and, given the goodwill and enthusiasm of the officers of the NCC, we have made some progress towards good value accommodation. I must also mention the contributions made by Alison Dewar and Mervyn Mascarenhas who have already freely given the benefit of their legal and architectural experience to the club.

There are many hurdles to clear - establishing freehold, local authority approval and lottery funding being the most immediate - but I would ask that you join me in looking forward to the club improving its contribution to the hospice whilst sharing a building that should be an asset to the community.'

Ruby Stiles asked how much money was in the Building Fund; the Chairman answered £160,000.

Ruby Stiles also asked about the likely running costs; the Chairman responded that they are likely to be less than the rental for the Olwen Bettsworth Hall.

### **The Hon Treasurer's Report.**

The Treasurer thanked Brian Simmonds for auditing the accounts. He stated that the net income was down slightly from last year.

The bulk of our income comes from the regular playing sessions, this year the

net income from the sessions is £18,000 as compared with £19,700 last year. Fees and dues are up slightly and the Bridge Drives are up on last year, thanks to the new team who had revived them. The income from the training courses is down as we held one fewer course. Likewise income from the weekends away is reduced. The marathon provided a new source of income.

Overall there is an increase in total takings, but this is offset by a greater increase in expenses, and this is a trend that is growing. In 1997, our expenses were £3,000, last year they had grown to £7,000 and this year they are over £9,000. The bulk of this cost is the rental for the Olwen Bettsworth Hall, and the accounts show this expense divided against the relevant playing session. The income for Monday also includes extra takings from the simultaneous pairs events, these takings go out again to the organising body. The next biggest expense is for Masterpoints; but this is a small sum. There is also rental for the Friday afternoon sessions, but again this is a much smaller figure than that for the Olwen Bettsworth Hall.

The rental for the Olwen Bettsworth Hall will go up again next year, and will be around £4,500 for the year. This is all the more reason for getting our own accommodation.

The balance sheet shows a donation of £40,000 made to the Friends of Michael Sobell House; this has been added to the building development fund, giving a total in the fund of £160,000. We still need a lot more to raise enough to support the building.

The Treasurer proposed that, with the committee's agreement, playing fees should be raised from £2.00 to £2.50, and visitors' fees should be raised from £3.00 to £4.00. This was seconded by Ethel Broughton, and passed nem con.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for producing the accounts.

Cyril Gibor asked if there was no income from Wednesday sessions, the Secretary responded that there had been no sessions on a Wednesday this year.

Brian Simmonds said that it was unfair on the previous organisers of the bridge drives to credit the income on the new team. Although takings had been down last year, in previous years they had been even higher, due to the efforts of Rita Reddie and her helpers. The Chairman agreed, stating that good work had been done in the past as well.

Brian Simmonds also asked that his appreciation of the tremendous work that the Treasurer and Michael and Shirley Tucker put in be minuted.

Michael Melville noted that on the evenings when the Club took part in simultaneous pairs events the takings were reduced as the Club subsidised the players to an extent.

### **Motion to Approve the Accounts.**

The accounts were approved, proposed Adrienne Finch, 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, the Club ran 4 simultaneous competitions this year. One was national, run by the EBU, and 3 were run by Hertfordshire County.

In May 2001, in a Herts competition, out of 375 pairs we had 3 very highly placed duos. In 3<sup>rd</sup> place were Philip Vernon and Sue Sheldon, in 5<sup>th</sup> place were Jenny Schaueremann and Jenny Ramprakash, and in 9<sup>th</sup> place were Carl and Margaret Goldsmith.

In September 2001 we entered an EBU national event which had 4732 pairs taking part. Our top pair of Michael Melville and Andrew Pullin came a very commendable 15<sup>th</sup>, Judy Walshe and Looi Tan came 156<sup>th</sup> and Barry Davey and John Mortimore came 175<sup>th</sup>.

February 2002 brought another Herts competition consisting of 215 pairs. In 13<sup>th</sup> place were Pat and Cyril Gibor, 15<sup>th</sup> were Jenny Schaueremann and Jenny Ramprakash and in 17<sup>th</sup> place were Brian Simmonds and Sue Sheldon. Altogether 10 of our pairs were placed in the top 50.

In the Three Counties (Herts, Beds and Bucks) Simultaneous Pairs Olive Stretch and Bertha Segall came 3<sup>rd</sup> and won £20 each, so we could call them our first professional players!

All of these events have proved very popular with many extra pairs turning up on these nights. The Playing Secretary thanked everyone involved in helping. Michael Melville not only arranges to hold them but also does all of the scoring for the Club. Despite the Playing Secretary's plea last year for club members to volunteer to deal the cards for these events, Michael was still having to call on his neighbours to do it for us. As this was an entirely unsatisfactory situation it has been decided that in future the boards will be prepared by all players at their first table and moved on before play.

Sobell had only 2 teams competing this year in the Hertfordshire West Region League. At the end of last season, for the second year running, Doug Edmonds' team was promoted, this time into Division 1. The other Sobell member in his team is Robin Pyburn. As the season has only just finished, we don't have any results for this year. The games are very friendly and the Playing Secretary encouraged anyone who would like to play to contact her.

The Playing Secretary thanked all the helpers at the bridge sessions who work very hard to make the evenings enjoyable for all.

### **Report by the Chairman of the Social Subcommittee.**

Bill Hassey reported on behalf of the Social Committee. He said that when the new team took over, they did not know what to expect. They have been learning as they go along.

The team would be happy if members would provide input on how to improve the suppers, and they also want ideas for raffle prizes. In the last year the main prizes have included a Christmas hamper and a restaurant dinner for two.

Bill Hassey commented that they had received a lot of help from members who did not necessarily attend the drives but helped in other ways, and he thanked all those who had helped over the past year.

### **Proposed Changes to the Constitution.**

No proposed changes had been put forward.

### **Election of Committee Members.**

The Secretary said that the position of Liaison Officer had been vacant for two years. Maureen Thackerey had volunteered to act as Press and Publicity Officer for the Club, and it was proposed that she should join the committee as Liaison Officer, covering publicity initially, and may subsequently take on more of the role or enlist any help she requires. The Secretary proposed she be elected to the committee, seconded by Joanna May.

The Secretary said that all the remaining existing members were standing for election again, and there was no competition for any places. He therefore asked that the committee be re-elected en-bloc. This was agreed, proposed Irene Willis, seconded Cyril Gibor.

Election of Honorary Auditor. Brian Simmonds said he was willing to continue as Auditor, Ron Stevens proposed that he be re-appointed, Eddie O'Sullivan seconded.

Any Other Formal Business. Isobel Williams asked how much would be saved if the Club did not issue Master points, the Treasurer said it would have been £1530 last year. The Chairman commented that the current feeling is that enough people like them to justify continuing with them.

The formal meeting closed at 6.50 p.m., and was followed by the presentation of Championship Prizes:

President's Trophy:

1<sup>st</sup> Andrew Pullin and Michael Melville

2<sup>nd</sup> Joan Prior and Barry Davey

Ethel Broughton presented the President's Trophy to Michael Melville, and the runners-up shields to Joan Prior.



L and R Trophy:

1<sup>st</sup> Brian Simmonds and Michael Melville

2<sup>nd</sup> Joan Prior and Stan Nicholls

Sue Sheldon presented the L and R Trophy to Brian Simmonds and Michael Melville, and the runners-up shields to Stan Nicholls.

The trophies for the Friday afternoon sessions:

Individual Trophy,

1<sup>st</sup> Esther Casey

2<sup>nd</sup> Arthur Worth

Daphne Santon presented the trophy to Esther Casey.

Pairs Trophy

1<sup>st</sup> Esther Casey and Arthur Worth

2<sup>nd</sup> Alan Milne and Rita Jacob

Daphne Santon presented the trophy to Esther Casey.

**Apologies for absence were received from: -**

Ros Miller, John Francis, John Gwilt, Joan Collins, Sue Hillier, Jackie Holland, Jenny England, Malcolm England, Bertha Segall, Olive Stretch, Colin Thomas, Rene Fer, Reg Littlejohns, Barry Davey, Marion Davey, Sheena Edgar, Joyce Hickey, Valerie Weeks, Tony Letts, Pat Graham, Peter Moir, Alan Thomas, June Solomon, Carol Sensky, Carl Goldsmith, John Lyon-Maris, Judy Lyon-Maris, Zena Stewart, Graham Sanders, David Kilby, Eleanor Turner, Laurie Turner, Liz Foster, Bernard MacDougal, Audrey Fairweather, Phil Williams, Eileen Williams, John Taylor, Irene Newton, Vera Crowe, Joan Nolan, Joyce Jackett, Marion Sweet, Helen Shapira, Gerry Shapira, Phyllis France, Beryl Wallis, Peter Philips, Maureen Wood, Mary Quinn, Maura Finan, Ruth Nielson, Ellen Cook, Allan Chalmers, John Wood, Fenella Lough, Ann Hooker, Ron Hooker, Shirley Woods, Gerry Woodhouse, Mabel Spurr, Pat Gayton, Moira Wishart, Ian Judges, Shirley Tucker, Jack McEnery, Ruth Allenby, Christine Ross.