

MCBA AGM 2022 Paper 1: Report of Officers to AGM

4.1 Chair (Irene Davies)

COVID

It's been a difficult year for bridge in Manchester. Despite COVID restrictions being lifted we have not had a return to bridge as it was before COVID.

Most of our clubs have returned to some Face to Face sessions as well as maintaining some online sessions. But numbers playing bridge in the County both F2F and Online seem to be down.

The reluctance to return to F2F bridge has a number of intersecting reasons: Continued prevalence of the COVID infection, the discovery of online bridge by many who had not played online before, a preference by some to want to play online because of its convenience and the fact that our bridge players are generally of the older generation. Also, some players in Lockdown may have the time to reconsider their priorities in life and found bridge not one of them, others may have developed new hobbies.

Whatever the reasons it is clear that bridge will not be reverting back to the old normal even when COVID is not a threat. Some would say that the old normal wasn't that good any way.

Competitions

As a County we have adopted a pragmatic approach, organising competitions F2F where its possible and online otherwise. We have been hampered by not having a Tournament secretary which has meant that we haven't been able to organise any Intermediate competitions or the Cantor Cup. On a positive note, Espen Gisvold organised a hugely successful on line competition for Ukraine relief.

Teaching

The key to moving forward in this situation is to find new members and the way to do this is through beginners lessons. Its essential that clubs plan for this and use the new material that has been provided by the EBU to find their audience and organise teaching and play sessions for the Autumn. With care many of these beginners go on to become the club members of the future.

New Clubs

On the bright side we have had 3 new clubs join the MCBA and EBU this year: Adam Wiseberg Bridge Club, Larkhill Bridge Club and Chorley Monday Bridge Club. This process was aided by the the EBU's scheme to interest unaffiliated clubs and the hard work of Adam Wiseberg.

Successes

Our members have as always been successful in a number of bridge competitions, across the Country, in EBU tournaments and Internationally.

In the World Championships held at Salsomaggiore we had a number of Manchester player playing for England. Catherine Draper won a bronze medal in the Venice Cup. Michael Byrne reached the quarter finals in the Bermuda Bowl. John Holland and John Hassett played in the d'orsi Senior Trophy.

All other successes by Manchester players over the year can be found on the Websites archive.

Thanks

A big thank you to all the people who have given up their time to help organise the County's events and day-to -day running. Its done with no financial gain and often

with some degree of hassle. Manchester has a big reputation in the bridge world and without you we could not maintain the bridge life we have in the County.

4.2 Secretary (Alan Mould)

As might be expected another extremely quiet period. The Executive has met steadily less often over the last few months as there has been less urgent business. There has been the usual trickle of correspondence from the EBU and I have been asked by Council or the Executive to ask for clarification from the EBU on various technical matters relating to our events, all of which are now resolved. I also attended the county chairs' meeting on behalf of Irene who was on holiday. I reported that to the Council meeting on 24th March and give my report again below:

On February 23rd, Alan Mould attended the EBU County Chairs' Meeting on behalf of Irene who felt being on holiday was an excuse for not attending the meeting. The format was different from any previously in that the EBU, under the promptings of the Board member with responsibility for county liaison had arranged for three counties to set the agenda and give introductions to the agenda items, etc, rather than the EBU doing everything. This had the effect that it was a much more interactive meeting rather than the information dump from the EBU to counties that have previously characterised these meetings. At the end of the meeting there was call for counties to design the next meeting – I did not volunteer Manchester.

The main agenda items were

- Return to F2F bridge
- Green pointed county weekends
- Development of the game and finding new players
- Development of novice players
- EBU Strategy and County involvement

The first item took up the most time with all counties reporting a very slow return to F2F with numbers well below 50% of pre-pandemic levels. The message from most counties was the same – that the reluctance of the membership to return to F2F bridge was now not so much Covid, but that a good proportion of the membership, having been forced by necessity into online bridge, have discovered that they actually prefer it and are very happy continuing with it. This has hit the rural counties particularly hard. Norfolk reported that two of its clubs have closed and two more were merging; Cumbria and Devon that clubs were really struggling; etc. The more urban counties had a similar story. Merseyside and Cheshire reported that very few of its members have returned to F2F bridge, and there was a similar story from some of the Southern counties. It was interesting to note that no county reported they had been able to run a F2F league and most felt there would never be a return to any F2F league. Counties were finding it very hard to run F2F events and some have no intention of trying. Middlesex for example reported that its main congress will remain online forever – far less work, greater entries, and more profit being the reasons cited.

Given that picture, it is not surprising that the counties pointed their guns at the EBU for its position on online green pointed events. Following the AGM where the EBU announced the doubling of UMS for online GP events, this had been reduced to increasing by a half (I think). There was not much dissent to this, but the counties were furious that the EBU would only allow 1 online GP event a year. It seems, for

example, that many counties run their main congress as essentially two GP events – pairs one day, teams the next – and so this dictate from the EBU means they cannot run such a Congress online. Given the difficulties above with getting people to F2F bridge, the counties were understandably not happy. Gordon Rainsford, representing the EBU, was completely unmoved by all of this, pointing out repeatedly that the calendar is too full, that county events compete with the EBU’s own events, that online events are not geo-restricted as F2F events are, and that he thought the EBU position totally reasonable.

The next two items rather merged into one. There was much discussion of the “Yorkshire model” of teaching beginners and related matters. It was interesting to note that all counties agreed that the main problem was finding teachers. It would appear that many counties have seen the same drop off of teachers during the pandemic that Manchester has.

No one had much to say concerning the EBU strategy and county involvement.

The minutes are not yet available on the EBU website.

4.3 Treasurer (Joy Blakey)

The accounts have not yet completed audit. They will be available at the AGM.

4.4 Membership Secretary (Alan Mould)

I have in previous reports given caveats concerning the value of the membership data given the very slow return to F2F bridge and I stand by those comments, but I present the data nevertheless.

A matter of celebration is that we have had three new clubs affiliate to the county and the EBU. They are the Adam Wiseberg club, the Chorley Monday club and Larkhill. We welcome you all, and if there is anything I can do to assist the new clubs please let me know.

I give below the data from the EBU as of 4th August 2020, as of 15th November 2020, as of 23rd February 2021, as of 19th October 2021, and as of 8th May 2022.

Type of Member	Total 04/08/2020	Total 15/11/2020	Total 23/02/2021	Total 19/10/2021	Total 8/05/2022
P2P	1400	1405	1396	1435	1485
Direct members	42	44	45	42	39
Students (People on the EBED register as learning bridge)	21	21	20	0	5
Total from spreadsheet	1463	1470	1461	1477	1529

So, as can be seen, numbers have come up by 52 since October 2021 and 68 since February 2021 which is clearly an encouraging sign. This of course has been driven by the increased number of affiliated clubs who together have 185 members listed. This is of course significantly more than the increase of 68 over the last year, but

some were already members of MCBA through membership of other clubs, or playing in the Manchester League or whatever. It does suggest however that we would have seen a downtick of members without the newly affiliated clubs..

Dealing only with the data of 8th May, of the 1529 members, 1475 have primary allegiance to Manchester, and 54 have secondary allegiance. Of the 54 secondary all but 2 are Pay to Play members, the remaining 2 being direct members, both of whom live way outside the county boundaries.

Under the EBED category the following are listed:

- 13 people listed as EBTA (ie teachers), all of which are Pay to Play. However, one has a club of primary allegiance outside of the area (3 Counties BCs) This is down from 28 in November 2020 but consistent with the whole of last year so I suppose the best that can be said is that we are not losing any more teachers.
- 5 people are listed as “BFA Year 1”, the same 5 as listed as a category of student. Student”. They all have addresses in the Altrincham area so I surmise this is a class at or around Altrincham BC.
- All others are listed as “None” under the EBED category

For the first time this year, the data download from the EBU includes details of NGS grade and MP rank. The AGM may be interested to know that the county has 3 members who are ace of spades (though one is a secondary member), 51 members who are aces (though 16 are secondary members), and 17 premier grand masters (though 7 of these are secondary members).

Club Numbers

I have given the MCBA primary clubs and numbers below. Clubs will obviously have their own records, but I thought people might be interested to see what the EBU records show. There are actually 53 bridge clubs listed as primary in the spreadsheet scattered all over the country. This is the result of Adam enrolling people as members of MCBA when they play in our online events. I have thus ignored everything except the MCBA affiliated clubs and simply listed the numbers in them. This does mean of course that the total is NOT 1529 since all of the “other” clubs are missing. I give the number as of 23rd June 2021 and as of 8th May 2022 for comparison.

Primary Club	Number 23/06/2021	Number 08/05/2022
Adam Wiseberg Bridge Club	27	52
Altrincham Bridge Club	217	217
Ashton and District Bridge Club	105	106
Besses O’Th’barn Bridge Club	45	47
Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme Bridge Centre	125	110
Chorley Monday Bridge Club	-	80

Larkhill Bridge Club	-	53
Manchester Bridge Club	206	219
Marple Duplicate Bridge Club	74	74
Prestbury Duplicate Bridge Club	69	69
Stretford Bridge Club	74	73
Trafford Bridge Club	273	273
Total	1215	1373

Note that these numbers much more closely reflect the increase in numbers with the newly affiliated clubs, since they count only members at clubs of primary allegiance.

It is interesting to note how well clubs have maintained their numbers during lockdown.

In addition, we have 30 primary members listed as no club and 2 secondary members listed as no club. 27 are direct members and the other 5 are the student members. The other 12 direct members are scattered amongst MCBA affiliated and other clubs.

Of the members who list a primary club, 391 also list a secondary club, sometimes several. Usually these are MCBA affiliated clubs, but not always, with clubs such as Bury Athenaeum or Preston featuring.

4.5 League Secretary (Adam Wiseberg)

The league recommenced in September 2021 after eight seasons of an online only league during 2020, 2021 and early 2022.

The new season was to run from September to May 2022 with the default being online but an option for teams to play their matches face to face if both teams were willing to do so.

During the season a few matches were played face to face but the vast majority were played online, usually on the BBO platform.

There were five divisions of which all but one started with 10 teams. Division 4 started with 11 teams due to a late entry being received. Unfortunately one team had to withdraw from Div 4 owing to their captain suffering a stroke so all divisions ended up with 10 teams.

Division winners were:

- Div 1 Inverted Minors

- Div 2 Proteus
- Div 3 AZ Stars
- Div 4 Manchester Misfits
- Div 5 Revolver

Feedback from the team captains indicates that there are not sufficient teams willing to play face to face in the 2022-3 season to enable the county to revert to that format. There are currently insufficient teams to even play a single face to face division.

It seems certain therefore that we will resume the league in September with online being the default option.

Whether this will change in future years remains to be seen but it is interesting to note that at the County Chairs meeting earlier in the year there were no other Counties which planned to run their leagues face to face. Some County Chairs indicated that they had no plans to return to Face to face leagues at all in the future.

4.6 Higson Cup Secretary (Adam Wiseberg)

32 teams played in round 1 with all the losers going to the Plate.

The first round was seeded to ensure that no Div 1 or Div 2 played each other in the first round.

As the matches were handicapped (and seeded) I decided that the longstanding rule that neither Div 1 or 2 teams could play in the Plate would be abandoned. The hope was that all teams from these Divisions would all reach round 2 of the Cup and so not be eligible to play in the Plate. Only one higher Division team was actually beaten in Round 1 and went through to the Plate.

Round 2 of the Cup and Round 1 of the Plate had 16 teams in each.

All teams have played at least two matches (unless their opponents conceded) and there will be two 8 team finals.

The finals will take place concurrently at St Peter's Assembly Hall on June 19th.

The finals will again be handicapped using the method specified by the EBU in the NGS full guide. This is based on average NGS of the team members. After considerable investigation regarding this method, MCBA will modify the numbers used as it was considered to be slightly too harsh on the stronger teams.

The full method will be published to all the team Captains before the event.

Thanks go to Alan Mould, Michael Byrne and Mike Bell, all of whom are mathematicians and International bridge players, for their input into how to modify the handicap fairly.

4.7 Goldstone Trophy Secretary (Roger Hopton)

Gone well with not problems, other than that two matches have been conceded, one at the semi-final stage. The final (Morris v St. Titus) has yet to be played.

4.8 Green Point Secretary (Rhona Goldenfield)

Teams held Aug 1st was our first f to f since pandemic began and was socially a great success. We gave out free lunch and wine which resulted in the event making a loss. We had limited it to 16 tables and got 11. It was held at Bramhall village Hall which was light and airy. Stuart Davies directed.

Originally it was decided to hold the pairs March 2022 on line but was changed to f to f. St Peters was not available so Bramhall Village Centre was booked and it was decided to limit it to 12 tables. At one time it was fully booked and 2 on the reserve list. However 3 cancellations left us with 1 pair short. I had cancelled Stuart Davies as Director when we thought it was going to be on line so I asked Adam Wiseberg who was to direct on line. He decided to use robots instead of a threesome. I personally think players would have preferred a threesome. However, he worked extremely hard to set it up and run the event which he did well. Thanks to Barbara, Alec and Adam and Joan Lewis for all the work March 5th. We made a loss, but most players enjoyed being back f to f.

I have St Peters booked and Stuart Davies for the teams in July 2022.

I have also booked next year 2023 Pairs March 4, and teams July 30 with the EBU both f to f. I have emailed St Peters to book both dates for 2023 now confirmed.

The info for July teams is on both the MCBA website and the online webs page which has the entry form. I have emailed my usual participants. We decided to limit it to 18 teams. In the past we have had 26 and it will be interesting to see what response we get.

4.9 Tournament Secretary (Vacant)

The previous Tournament Secretary, Celia Comrie, sadly had to resign mid-year. We are desperately in need of a Tournament Secretary.

4.10 Congress Secretary (Barbara Lewis)

At the October 2021 Council meeting, reasons to move the Congress on-line were put forward and agreed, and the booking at the V&A was cancelled – no deposit having been paid.

The Congress was held on-line (RealBridge) for the second year running on January 8th and 9th 2022.

The Pairs for the Michelle Brunner Trophy attracted 46 pairs and the Teams for the Bernard Goldenfield Trophy 21 teams. Half the players were from MCBA clubs, and the 'out-of-town/country' players included a good number of those with national and international standing. So, the fields for both competitions were strong and challenging for all, although this may deter a few local players. Adam Wiseberg was chief Tournament Director.

The 2 single session non-expert competitions, the Players' Progress Cup and the Kevin Comrie Cup. attracted only 11 and 15 pairs respectively, but they were viable and sociable as all were local players. Some may have been deterred by RealBridge and others by the availability of club duplicates and social games. TDs were Alec Smalley and Victor Ridding.

Quizzes were organised by Michael and Raymond. These could have been publicised earlier.

The organising of the weekend and directing throughout was excellent and a credit to MCBA. Thanks to Joy for taking all the entries and payments and to Adam for all the tasks involved in directing.

Entry fees per person were kept to a minimum - £10 for each of the main events and £5 for the non-expert competitions. Even so, a substantial contribution was made to MCBA reserves.

The Executive will need to discuss the pros and cons of F2F and on-line for future Congresses. At present, there is a booking at the V&A for January 7th and 8th 2023, although no deposit has been paid.

4.11 Chair of Selectors (Adam Wiseberg, chair, and John Roberts, secretary)

I, Adam Wiseberg, have served on the Selection Committee (SC) since 2017. For the last two years I have been elected Chair of the SC.

From 2017 to 2021 the SC have made their various team selections. These would then be reported in the minutes of the SC. The selections were then passed to the Match Secretary for him to advise the players about their selection and provide details of the venues, timings and general instructions.

Over this period of time the SC has found this to be inefficient. Once the players have been selected the SC considers it important for them to be advised about their selection quickly. This is also essential for those pairs who are required as reserves.

Unfortunately, this has not always happened quickly enough and sometimes SC members have then had to communicate directly with players to ensure that withdrawals are replaced in order for the County to field a team.

The views of SC members have been that it would be much more efficient for the Match Secretary to be a member of the SC or for the SC to take responsibility for these duties.

For 2021-2 the Match Secretary was asked if he would offer himself as a selector and he was duly elected. This went a long way to resolving the perceived problem. However, for 2022-3 the Match Secretary is not offering himself for re-election to the SC.

Consequently, I am going to stand for the position of Match Secretary. I have the support of the existing members of the SC who are quite prepared to share the task if it is delegated to them on occasion during the season.

The Selection committee (Adam Wiseberg, Roger Hopton, John Roberts, Michael Byrne and Rhona Goldenfield) was re-elected unopposed at the last AGM in July 2021. At its first meeting Adam Wiseberg was elected as chairman and John Roberts as secretary. The committee has continued to work throughout the year mainly by Zoom conference meetings but also by email exchanges.

The inter-county matches which have taken place during the past year, and are reported below have been :

The Inter-Counties Super Finals (for A and C Division winners of the Northern League)

The Tollemache (Qualifier and Final)
The Presidents Cup
Northern League (and Superfinal)

A number of informal matches (against London, Devon, Gloucestershire, Sussex, Suffolk and Norfolk) were played on the RealBridge platform during 2020/2021 and the last of these was played on February 2021. The matches were competitive and well received by players and the results were given in the last report to the AGM. It has not proved possible to arrange further informal matches since then.

The annual Derbyshire match did not take place in either 2020 and 2021. There seemed to be little feedback or enthusiasm for it by Derbyshire. The selection committee will explore whether Derbyshire wish to resume the fixture in 2022.

Inter-County Super final (deferred from 2020)

Manchester's A and C teams both won their respective divisions of the 2019 Northern League, which qualified them for the inter-county Superfinal. However, this did not take place in 2020 because of the pandemic but was played instead in 2021 on the Realbridge platform on Sunday July 11th.

The committee selected the two teams and attempted, where possible, to select from players who had played in the qualifying matches in 2019. The A team was John Holland/Alan Mould, Rodney Lighton/Michael Byrne, Alec Smalley/Tom Slater, John Roberts/Pete Foster. The C team was Gordon Bickley/Ann Farquhar, Irene Davies/Karen Reissmann, Victor Ridding/Mary Green, Gil Fletcher/Richard Acaster.

Both teams (A and C) performed very poorly, both finishing in last place in their respective divisions. As a result, at its meeting of 16th July, the selection committee reviewed the possible reasons for this and also reviewed its selection strategy for this event. A number of explanations were considered to be possible, amongst which were a dislike by some players of the on-line format. Also senior players seemed to be less available for the event. However, the committee also felt that its selection policy for the event had been wrong and needed to be changed. Manchester had selected its teams for the Inter-County Super final on the basis of considering only those players that had played in the qualifying stages. This had been inconsistently applied and, more importantly, was not being done by other counties, which left Manchester at a disadvantage. There was nothing in the rules of the event which stated this caveat. The committee therefore agreed that in future it would select its best team for this event irrespective of whether players had or had not participated in the qualifying stage.

Presidents Cup

The 2021 renewal of this team of eight took place on 17th 18th July 2021 on the Realbridge platform. Two teams were selected, one from each of the A and B pool of players.

Playing for Manchester Blue team (A pool) were Catherine Draper/Andrew Woodcock (both days), Michael Byrne/Rhona Goldenfield, Alan Mould/John Holland, Raymond Semp/Gary Hyett (Sat), Michael Byrne/Rodney Lighton, John Holland/John Hassett, John Currie/Royce Alexander (Sun). The Manchester Blue team won by a large margin, after lying second overnight on Saturday.

The Manchester Red team (B pool) was Adam Wiseberg/Phil Taylor, John Stell/Andy Green, Eddie Thornton-Chan/Graham Currie, Irene Davies/Barbara Lewis (Sat), Roger Hopton/David Fussell, Pauline Lang/Steve Mattinson, Peter Foster/John Roberts, Josh

Clarke/Phil Taylor (Sun). They performed respectably but were less successful and finished 6th

Manchester has been approached again this year to enter one or two teams for the 2022 renewal which will be held on-line on 16/17 July on the RealBridge Platform. The committee has circulated requests to Manchester players for their availability. The response will determine how many, if any, teams we will enter. Selection will then be made by the committee in the usual way.

Northern League

The Northern league was not played in 2020, but the event did take place in 2021 on Realbridge and was played on four Saturdays (July 10th, August 21st, September 18th and October 9th)

In past years Manchester has fielded two A, one B and two C teams, but Shortage of available players this year meant that only one team was selected for each division. The final matches of the NBL season were played on Saturday 9th October. In the A division Manchester were fourth on the day and finished third overall. In the B division Manchester won on the day and overtook Merseyside & Cheshire to win the division. In the C division Manchester were fourth on the day and finished fifth overall.

The B team will therefore play in the Inter-County National Super-Final on 21st May 2022. The selection committee is in the process of making selections for this event. The Northern league is set to continue in the summer and autumn of this year. It will be held on-line on the RealBridge platform again and the committee will meet later in the spring to select the teams.

Tollemache Qualifier

The team selected by the committee for the Tollemache Qualifier played on-line on the Realbridge platform on the weekend of Nov 13th and 14th. The selected pairs were :

Holland/Hyett
Byrne/Smalley
Draper/Woodcock
Lighton/Mould

Manchester won their group of 16 counties. The team started modestly on the first day and lay in equal sixth place. A change of seating arrangements for the second day had a dramatic effect and the team won most of their matches by large margins to move steadily up the field and finally finish in first place just 4 VP above Devon. All four pairs had good positive cross imp scores.

The first 4 teams in the section qualified to play in the final which was scheduled to be face to face in Warwick on February 19/20th 2022.

The Tollemache Final

The team originally selected for the final was substantially as above, but with John Hassett replacing Alan Mould. Because the final was initially intended to be face to face Alan Mould, who was only able to play on-line during the pandemic, was unavailable. John Hassett was therefore brought in to replace Alan. John Hassett was to play with John Holland and Gary Hyett with Rodney Lighton.

However, at quite short notice, the event was changed to on-line, and the selectors then felt it right to include Alan in the line up as he had contributed strongly to the qualification. After some discussion with the players the final Manchester team was

Michael Byrne/Alec Smalley, John Holland/John Hassett, Catherine Draper/Andrew Woodcock, and various combinations of Gary Hyett/Alan Mould/Rodney Lighton.

The eight team final took place on the weekend of 19-20th February 2022 on the RealBridge Platform. Manchester started well with a 14-6 win against a strong London team, but this was followed by a large loss to the ultimate winners Gloucestershire. Then a mixture of indifferent results left Manchester finally in fifth place out of eight.

Holland/Hassett and Byrne/Smalley were both positive on the cross imps. But the general performance of the team in the final had been a little disappointing.

4.12 Match Secretary (Michael Byrne)

I have now been Match secretary for over 15 years, having taken the role since I was a junior. Despite the changes that have occurred to the various competitions it is one I intend to continue with, as I think it is right and fair that players put back into the game that have given them so much.

As the longest standing member of the executive by some margin I hope to bring my views and experience as a player both at county and international level, as well as my ongoing experience as a bridge teacher in the Manchester area.

It is important to me that the roles of Match Secretary and selector remain separate to allow as many players as possible to contribute to the selection of the teams as well as the debate and discussion about the format and entry of competitions.

Report 2021-2022

Despite the return to normal life in the previous year, county bridge has been slow to return to what it once was. Financial concerns and the reluctance of people to travel has meant many once great events are now reduced to a shadow of their former selves, with little support or competitive value.

1) The Northern League

This was held online on Realbridge. Manchester had 3 teams (from 5) in each of the A, B and C divisions.

In the A division, the regular players were reluctant to play and thus under strength teams were fielded. This resulted in Manchester coming 3rd in the division to Lancashire, their worst performance in the history of the event.

By contrast in the B division the absence of an A2 team gave Manchester much greater strength in depth and the team won comfortably, despite only winning match 4.

In the C division Manchester finished 5th out of 6 teams.

2) The Presidents Cup

This was held on Realbridge over the weekend of 17th-18th July. After a reasonable start where they were 2nd overnight Manchester turned on the afterburners and won by a record 27 victory points, scoring 92/120, with the next team just over average with 65.

3) The All Counties Super Final was held on 11th July 2021 (last year)

Manchester had teams in the A and C categories, both of them finished in last place. By this stage, the general feelings of misery associated with online bridge were felt by a number of players, contributing to the lack of support for future online matches such as the Northern league.

The All Counties Super final 2022 was held on Saturday May 21st (2022)

Manchester had a team in the B division that finished a respectable 3rd out of 6 teams.

4) Pachabo

This was held online over the weekend of 12th-13th June 2021. Manchester won the event for the 4th time in 6 years, and the 3rd time in a row. Congratulations go to Alan Mould / John Holland, Catherine Draper/Andrew Woodcock, John Hassett / Jeff Morris.

5) Corwen

This was held over the weekend of 5th-6th June 2021. Manchester were represented by 3 pairs, Alec and Barbara were the best, finishing 32nd out of 106.

6) Tollemache

The qualifier was held online on November 13th-14th, as a two section event. After a slow start, Manchester won their group of 16 counties.

The final was supposed to be held in Warwick over the weekend of 19th/20th February. However the EBU caved to pressure and moved it to Realbridge which

generated debate about whether or not teams should withdraw. In any event Manchester competed and finished 5th out of 8, an event generally not enjoyed by the players. Future discussion will be held about whether or not to support this event.

4.13 EBU Shareholders (Alec Smalley, Jeff Morris, Alan Mould)

The only duty of the shareholders now is to attend the AGM – there is no other function for them. As in 2020, the AGM was held online on zoom in November. Despite the advantages of networking and exchanging information at a F2F AGM, I (Alan Mould) do not think we will ever see it return to F2F – it just saves so much time and expense to have it online.

This year, the AGM was attended by Alec Smalley, Alan Mould, and Adam Wiseberg, who kindly agreed to be Jeff Morris's proxy as Jeff was unable to attend. It was the usual dull technical affair, enlivened for the second year running by issues relating to the disciplinary regulations and online cheating. Last year it was the Board putting forward motions; this year it was 4 related motions put forward by Middlesex. These related to:

- The removal from the disciplinary regulations of the interim playing suspensions introduced last year.
- The removal of the publication of names after a guilty verdict but before any appeal is heard introduced last year.
- A verdict of no confidence in the online ethics group and the prosecution panel and both to be disbanded immediately.
- That henceforth all disciplinary matters be dealt with in their entirety directly by the Laws & Ethics Committee.

The chair conceded the first two of these without debate or vote. Both of the last two were debated at the meeting with no speaker other than the chair of Middlesex in favour. Alan Mould spoke and could barely control his anger. Both the motions were overwhelmingly defeated.

All elections to the Board, Selection Committee and L&E Committee were uncontested as there were the same number or fewer of candidates as vacancies. It is interesting to note that in the last 18 months there has been a vice chair of the Board, 2 chairs and a vice chair of the Selection Committee, the chair and vice chair and two other members of the L&E resign.

After long service Jerry Cope has stepped down as treasurer. His last report was cautiously optimistic that things were not as bad as he had feared, with receipts from online bridge being the main mitigating factor.

The draft minutes are available on the EBU website at:

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/minutes-and-reports/agm/2021/30-november.pdf>

4.14 Publicity Officer (Susan Triggs)

There is little to report in terms of publicity activity in the last 12 months. The MCBA online team have done a great job of publicising the MCBA duplicates and events. The recent duplicate supporting Ukraine was very successful and Espen sent information about the event to the Manchester Evening News. I am hoping Espen will help me with publicity for MCBA.

Our local clubs are still struggling in terms of returning to F2F bridge and no clubs have returned to their pre-pandemic timetables and bridge offers. We need to help our clubs gain new members.

We are now at the time when we should be preparing to publicise Bridge lessons over the summer, and I will contact the Secretaries of all the Bridge Clubs in MCBA to get their ideas about existing groups and events in their area which will be useful to publicise bridge. Manchester Bridge Club for instance will have a stall again at the Didsbury Festival in June which was very successful a few years ago in attracting new members for the club. Similar opportunities will exist in other areas for other clubs.

I attended the April meeting of the Cheadle & Gatley WI who were keen to know more about bridge – the meeting was attended by over 50 people, and I was helped by colleagues from The Manchester Bridge Club. Every-one played a couple of hands of mini-bridge and, whilst it was a little chaotic, everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. There was a lot of interest in learning to play bridge and I will keep in touch with the Secretary to see if I can encourage the WI members to take up bridge lessons in September.

The EBU have recently produced some publicity material which is very helpful and was positively received at the WI event. We will also be using it at the Didsbury Festival.

Priorities for publicity in the next 6 months are:

1. Publicising clubs current offers via updating the Handbook and using the MCBA website (with Rodney's assistance).
2. Re-contacting as many bridge teachers and clubs as possible to find out what opportunities they will be offering for beginners to learn to play bridge from September 2022 onwards. Few opportunities to learn bridge F2F currently exist in our area and hopefully that will change in September. People want to learn to play bridge and we are missing an opportunity by not having more courses available for beginners. I am currently running an additional F2F beginners' course due to demand and have 18 people signed up for it.
3. Using the EBU material and an updated flyer along with the MCBA website as a central point for contact details for bridge teachers in the county.
4. Using the flyer for beginner's lessons along with general information about bridge in the county, to publicise the active and successful nature of bridge in the greater Manchester area. Sending this out to a range of local organisations e.g., WI, U3A, etc encouraging people to learn to play and telling them about our local clubs and online opportunities to learn and play bridge.

It would be helpful to have a small budget (£250) so I can put adverts in local publications such as Open Up and SK8 to publicise our Bridge Clubs and beginner's lessons over the summer ready for Beginners Classes starting in the Autumn. I also need to look again at Facebook and Nextdoor and I would appreciate help from anyone who has experience of using these or other forms of Social Media for advertising.

4.15 Schools, Youth & Teachers Liaison (Frank Eade)

I made contact with a range of state secondary schools regarding setting up some bridge type sessions outside of school hours. All indicated that because of catching up with the impact of covid they could not get involved for the next two years. Many also indicated their extra curricular were already very full and they therefore believed that bridge could at best only attract a tiny number of students.

I am not willing to engage with private schools as I feel these do not fit with my beliefs about equality in education. I therefore think I am not the most appropriate person to have in this position.

4.16 Webmaster (Rodney Lighton)

The number of visitors to the MCBA web site was down by about 25% in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic years, but there are still just over 40 visits per day.

The PotY competition is proceeding *most* satisfactorily this year. The final results cannot be announced at the AGM however as the Higson Trophy and Plate are not being played until after the AGM.