

Report of the Honorary Secretary: June 2014

This has been my first year as Secretary. Having been astounded at the cost of postage, not to mention the time it takes to create 'snail-mail', an early priority was to work towards creating a 'paperless office' in common with most organisations these days. By early 2014 the task was complete with every affiliated club bar one now contactable by email.

Affiliation

A key objective of the NIBU Strategic Plan was to increase the number of affiliated clubs and I am delighted to report a significant achievement in that we now have 44 clubs on our database- up from 33 in the previous year. Much of this increase is down to the tireless efforts of Chairperson Burns who spent much of her time travelling round the province, playing in clubs and encouraging them to 'Come and Join Us'. The NIBU umbrella insurance offer also became a useful selling point and by April 2014 some 18 clubs had signed up with the scheme.

Members' Database

The Members' database has proven to be a very useful means of keeping everyone informed of NIBU news, events and competitions. We now have almost 600 members listed but with around 1700 members registered in total, many have still to sign up. Club Secretaries should encourage those with email addresses to sign up while taking care to record the address exactly and also ensure that NIBU officers are noted as 'safe contacts' (so that NIBU emails do not get treated as 'spam')

Publications

The NIBU Newsletter continues to be produced at regular intervals by Derek Cannell and he is always on the hunt for news and articles. It needs to be fully supported by the membership. Also we now have our own column in the 'Irish Bridge Journal'. Although the journal has been running for almost 40 years, it still has relatively few subscribers in the North and is excellent value for money.

Volunteers

It became apparent to me early on that the NIBU depends on the hard work and goodwill of a very small number of people. Without volunteers the organisation would flounder and so in my calling of the AGM I am strongly encouraging members to get involved any way they can – by standing for Council or to sit on sub-Committees or just to be available as a helper should the need arise. Club Secretaries can help by nominating those from amongst their membership who they know would have a contribution to make.

Constitution

The 2012 Constitution was designed to make the NIBU more democratic. It removed the former General Purposes Committee and replaced it with a Council presiding over a number of Standing Committees. Unfortunately the change, while well-intentioned, did not produce the expected result and both Council members and Office-Bearers found the high level of prescription and procedural detail impossible to comply with. As a consequence, in September 2013, Council asked me to chair a group charged with revising the Constitution. In the main this involved creating a précis of the

current document, making certain structural changes and introducing a more flexible approach suitable to the management of a voluntary organisation.

Team Performance

The International team turned in an excellent performance to finish 2nd in the Camrose and hopes remain high that our first win in the competition must surely come soon. The first triumph in 17 years over the South in the Sonya Britton trophy was a pleasure to record especially as the achievement was largely down to our Intermediate players. Although our Lady Milne, Junior Camrose and Peggy Bayer teams did not fare so well, it is to the NIBU's credit that we can always turn out players at all levels who are keen to represent their country. At the time of writing we have no less than 10 young players signed up for the EBL Junior pairs and Training Camp at Burghausen in Germany this summer – supported by NIBU funding.

Council

The NIBU Council met six times during the year including one Emergency Meeting in October to resolve a matter involving the Selection Committee.

New Season

I have high hopes for the incoming year. Having increased the number of affiliated clubs, the task now must be to entice more 'ordinary' members into entering and participating in NIBU major events and competitions. The Gala Pairs planned for August will hopefully provide a springboard for this.

Thanks

I'm grateful to my colleagues Robin Burns, John Murchan and Neill Cauwood for their help and co-operation throughout the year; Also Ciara Burns for her daily wake-up phone calls and for the sheer amount of energy she input to her role as Chairperson. Lastly my thanks to former Secretary Liz Scott for being so helpful and generous in the early days and to Anne Hassan for her advice on which Microsoft Office package I should go for. I only regret I could not offer more assistance in helping her choose a sunny site for her wallflowers and lupins.

Michael McFaul

Hon. Secretary

June 4th 2014.