

Minutes of the seventeenth Annual General Meeting of the New England Chess Club, held in the upstairs function room of the Yard of Ale pub, on Wednesday, 10th May, 2023.

1. The chairman, Paul Hanks opened the meeting at 7.38pm and thanked everyone for attending.
2. There were ten members present: Paul Hanks, Paul Spencer, Phil Turp, Ray Ilett, Jim Jennings (and his wife), Isaac Goodwin, Andy Neville, Dak Dhokia and Chris Russell. Ed Knox attended via a zoom link. Apologies for absence were received from Neil Chedd.
3. The minutes of the sixteenth meeting had previously been circulated, were published on our website and were approved as a true record. (Chris pointed out that he had recorded the meeting and offered to send a copy to anyone who wanted to challenge his record!)

4. *Matters arising from minutes*

- 4.1 There were no other matters arising. Paul said that everything we had talked about last year would likely come up again this year. Last year at this time we were reviewing our first season at the Yard of Ale.

5. *Treasurers Report*

- 5.1 Chris said that pleasingly, we have attracted several new members during the season and currently stand at 17 (realistically now 15 as Gary was in Peterborough on a contract, and Rob Lepley has resigned.) So, we now have an effective annual income of £900 (15x£60) from our membership. Four members only joined after Christmas and were charged £20 (for 4 months pro rata), so actual income was £860 (13x£60+4x£20), most of which (£700) went on room hire. We also spent £24 on CCA league fees, £10 on scoresheets and £6 on batteries, making a small profit of around £130 for the season. This roughly balances the loss from last season and with a club balance of around £250, is sufficient balance to allow us to spend some money if we need to, without having to raise fees. So, we have largely recovered from the difficulties created by Covid.
- 5.2 Paul has been running his popular masterclass sessions right through the last year. These classes are good social chess evenings and are funded by charging attendees £1 per session. The required Zoom licence went up by £1.20 to £15.59/month during the season, so to make a profit from this arrangement we need between 4-5 attendees, which is roughly what we get. Individual fees have to be collected in arrears (in September) so it is difficult to be precise about the current financial position, but we generally make a small club profit from Paul's efforts. Starting from 1st June, 2022, this season there have been 183 individual attendances. However, we agreed to let new members have their first season free, so Andy (5) and Dak (4) have had their contributions waived. Zoom fees for the year were £161.89 (=8x£14.39+3x£15.59), so we made an approximate profit of £12. We will add all summer masterclasses to next season's membership fees, which are payable in September.
- 5.3 We also need to ensure that we remove batteries from clocks at the end of the season to help prevent leakage, which leads to rusting up of the electronics. While we can afford to start considering replacements it makes sense to look after our existing equipment.
- 5.4 Some good news is that the Yard of Ale has told us that they will not be raising their room hire price. James has been very accommodating to us and as things stand, we can reasonably afford to stay at the Yard of Ale for the coming season. Consequently, no increase in fees is necessary, and membership will remain at £60 for the next season. If we can attract some more new members then we may be able to review fees in the future.

6. Match Captains' Reports

- 6.1 Ray said that running the first team had been a pleasure this season, and rather better than in previous years, as we had always struggled to have enough players, but with a few new members joining us we now had enough reserves for a proper squad, which made his job much easier. Team spirit had been excellent, and he thanked everyone for their support, especially Peter, Ed and Chris for helping out with driving. We won the league, but narrowly lost to a very strong Cambridge team in the FKO semi-final.
- 6.2 Chris said that much to his surprise the B team had won division 2, despite a policy of trying to give everybody a game where possible. We started badly, with two 1.5-2.5 losses, the first to a good Ely team, and then more unusually to Godmanchester, after the captain had taken an ill-judged draw, leaving mate in 3 on the board! We were then unbeaten for the rest of the season and overtook Ely in the last match to win. Everybody had supported him well and he was not going to try and pick out any favourites, but he could not miss the opportunity to point out he was unbeaten throughout the season with (5.5 /7)! He said that he had no plans to seek promotion to division 1, which would be silly as we cannot compete with two teams in division 1. Like Ray he thought we should have more squad options next season and looked forward to an interesting challenge next year.
- 6.3 The 7000 Team captain, Ed said that he had a similar season to the B team, using 11 players, and trying to give everybody a game where possible. We had a good season and won the North division, a highlight being three pleasing 4-0 whitewashes along the way. We were knocked out of the FKO cup by Royston and also eventually faced them in the North v South final. We drew that match 2-2 but lost the trophy due to having the higher graded team.

7. Tournament Secretary's Report.

- 7.1 Paul said that as agreed, we organised our club championship on an all-play-all basis, which meant 11 rounds when Neil turned up at the start of the season. This was a challenge to fit in but we managed it, and it was completed with no defaulted games, which he thought was fantastic. Phil and Ray both scored 8/11 and could not be separated, so they share the title as joint champions.
- 7.2 The ladder competition mopped up the other two newcomers that arrived before Christmas, and Ben was the winner, managing to fit in ten games in the second half of the season.
- 7.3 The club Grand Prix competition was closely contested and Paul S was the winner, ending up on 22 points. Peter was second on 17 followed by a bunch of players at circa 13-16 points, showing a healthy competition for the title.
- 7.4 The rapid-play and lightning competitions were both won by Peter. An end of season rapidplay was held as well and Ben won that. There was no room in the schedule for the handicap competition, but no demand was expressed.
- 7.5 Paul arranged a 'chairman's challenge' tournament for several late-comers that arrived in the second half of the season and Isaac managed to win that.
- 7.6 The Problem Night will be held online, next Tuesday, after the AGM. The result will be reported in the club newsletter.
- 7.7 Paul held a Christmas Special which was enjoyed by all that attended. Peter was the winner.

7.8 Paul concluded that we have had an event of some sort each week and therefore a successful season. He is to be congratulated on what he managed to fit in.

7.9 Chris asked if we wanted to consider awarding trophies as it has been raised in the past. No-one spoke up in favour. Paul said that there was an honours board on the website that would provide recognition for winners.

8. Website Manager report

8.1 Phil reported that our website traffic was down by 30% this year, attracting just less than 5000 hits, but since we now have a Facebook page, some may use that as their point of contact.

8.2 Apart from the home page, Paul's monthly newsletter gets the most hits, which is clearly a valuable asset, having reached the landmark of 200 issues this year. Chris said that this was an incredible achievement by Paul and encouraged others to analyse their games to find out just how much work it took. We should all try to contribute and spread the workload.

8.3 The website is now tied into the LMS database for results access. The honours board needs updating. Paul agreed to send Phil a new copy. Phil asked if there were any proposals for new additions to the website. He was happy to continue unless anyone else wanted to replace him.

8.4 Andy said that he found the club through Facebook. There was some discussion on the merits of developing more Facebook links.

9. Chairman's Report

Paul said that last year we were in contention for most Cambridgeshire competitions but sadly mostly fell just short. This year was remarkably similar, except that we managed to go on to win all 3 leagues. He apologised for losing the deciding game in the Team 7000 league final to Royston, but felt that we should consider that we have had a very good year, with most players improving their grades. He hoped that we would be back for more of the same next year.

10. Club Policy

Venue: There was some discussion on whether we should stay at the Yard of Ale next year. Most were happy to stay put. Chris said that he had asked the landlord, James whether he planned to put up our room rental in September, and he said that he intended to charge us at the same rate. We should be grateful to James for that. It allows us to keep our membership fees at the same rate, and not need to search for a new home. There is some room for expansion here, and if we can get ourselves up to around 20 members, we should be very comfortable where we are.

Teams for 2023/24: Chris said that John Beck was thinking of proposing a new 3-board third division for next year, possibly grade limited to 4000/4500, but it was dependent on there being enough support for the proposal. Also, if we entered a team, it would need a team captain. There was also a proposal to cut the number of boards in Division 1 from 5 to 4, in the hope of attracting an extra team. Ely had been suggested, but Chris thought it unlikely. He had also been told that Royston and Cambridge will not be re-joining Division 1 any time soon. March club, Rookwood will likely enter division 2. Paul thought that we were best continuing with the teams we currently have, and also supporting the 4000 league - assuming it take place. This was agreed.

Club competitions: With 15 members the club championship cannot be all play all. Paul was not keen on a Swiss system draw, due to the likelihood of postponements, so Paul planned to organise the championship into more than one division. This was agreed, with the format left to Paul's discretion.

Paul said that with all the league competitions and club championship, there was only room for a few internal events. The ladder will continue as it did last year. We will attempt to fit in the Lightning, Rapidplay, Christmas Special, Problem Night (and Handicap?) competitions dependent on available nights. There was some discussion on online options for the summer. Individuals can organise their own internet games through the summer. Chris pointed out that organised online events would need a critical mass, perhaps of at least 4-5 players. When we ran summer events at Yaxley, sometimes only 2 or 3 would turn up, making room hire here an unattractively expensive option.

Paul Spencer plans to hold a summer rapidplay one weekend at the Yard of Ale. He will send out an email to both Peterborough and New England to gauge interest.

11. Election of Officers

Paul asked whether all officers were prepared to stand and if anyone wanted to volunteer for a new job. All other committee members were happy to stand again and were elected en-bloc as follows. Hence, the following posts were elected, all unopposed: -

Chairman:	P. Hanks
Secretary:	C. Russell
Treasurer:	C. Russell
Website manager:	P. Turp
First team Captain:	R. Ilett
Second team captain:	C. Russell
Team 7000 Captain:	E. Knox
Team 4000 Captain:	J. Jennings
Internet Captain:	P. Spencer
FKO Captains:	R. Ilett, E. Knox
Tournament Secretary:	P. Hanks

Chris asked whether we needed a new post of Facebook page designer. There were no takers, but Jim said that he would continue to post club events on the page, for which he was thanked. If division 3 happens we will need a Third team captain. Paul proposed Jim, who said he would consider it dependent on work commitments. Chris thought that the event would be organised on a north-south split like the '7000' league, with no more than 4 clubs in the north (us, Peterborough, March and Spalding) meaning likely just 6 games in the season, of which only 3 will be away, and only Spalding and March would be any significant distance. Chris promised to support Jim if he took on the job. On that basis it was agreed as a shared commitment.

(.... Pause while the secretary buys a round!)

12. Recruitment, Social Media and Advertising

Paul said that he had received an email contact from an old member, Steve Walker, congratulating us on our success this year and saying that he thought that with all the new members there would not be any place for him anymore. However, with a possible new division 3 perhaps we should contact our ex-members to let them know that more chess was available, and see if that encouraged some to return. Chris said that he would contact Steve, Ron Jones

Peter Weinburger and Piers Cooper. Also, anyone else that might be interested. Hopefully some may return.

Chris said that we should also make more efforts with Facebook as it is the modern communication tool. Ed commented that he had joined local Orton and Woodston groups without success, but Chris had some email contact through Facebook. He accepted that contact will be a bit hit and miss.

We did have issues with Google not showing our website prominently. Thanks to Jim's Facebook efforts, we are now second on the search list for Peterborough chess clubs and shown in Google maps alongside Peterborough club, which should help our cause. We can only hope that new chess players find us through such publicity. Phil pointed out that the only way we could do better was to pay Google some money!

Paul said that we do appear to be doing as much as we can at present and we are now getting people to come through the door, so perhaps for now, we have done as much as we can.

13. Any Other Business

The Cambridgeshire Chess Association AGM will be held on Tuesday, 27th June at St Ives. We will report back the outcome.

There being no other business, the chairman closed the meeting at 9.00pm.

Minutes prepared by

Signed by

C.J. Russell
Secretary

P. Hanks
Chairman

Appendix: New England Chess Club Covid-19 Prevention Protocol

New England Chess Club shall: -

- designate two members as principal and reserve points of contact for matters concerning the Covid-19 pandemic. These nominees shall
 - liaise with the venue operators about any local procedures
 - stay abreast of developments in recognisable symptoms
 - circulate venue compliance measures, the symptoms and any subsequent changes to the membership
 - mandate members displaying symptoms, awaiting a test result or required to quarantine/self-isolate not to attend club events
 - be able to pass on information about testing and vaccination
 - notify the County Association of their contact details and responsibilities for onward forwarding to similar appointees at other clubs.
See <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>
- provide hand sanitiser for use on entry to the playing area
- maintain a register of everyone entering the playing area including contact details for visitors
- require members to inform the Covid designates immediately should they test positive for Covid-19 or strongly suspect infection due to their symptoms
- broadcast the potential for infection to all possible contacts on the register for the appropriate session and the Covid designate for any visiting team.

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Measures not included: -

Risk assessment and publication

Knowledge of cleaning and sanitisation schedule at the venue especially for common touch points e.g. handrails, door handles and table tops

Mitigation procedures in the playing area e.g. limiting numbers, one-way systems, barriers/screens, social distancing, side-by-side play, face covering, fresh air/ventilation, no raised voices, staggered starting, fixed subdivision bubbles

Restrictions for high-risk groups e.g. clinically extremely vulnerable, ...

Sharing common facilities e.g. scoresheets, pens

Reduced surface contact e.g. tidying your own litter and glasses

Separate travel