

Minutes of the sixteenth Annual General Meeting of the New England Chess Club, held in the upstairs function room of the Yard of Ale pub, on Wednesday, 25th May, 2022.

1. The chairman, Paul Hanks opened the meeting at 7.37pm and thanked everyone for attending.
2. There were seven members present: Paul Hanks, Paul Spencer, Peter Walker, Ray Ilett, Ed Knox, Jim Jennings and Chris Russell. Apologies for absence were received from Ed Smith, Mahmoud Tarabad, Phil Turp, Ron Jones, Piers Cooper and Norman Wedley.
3. The minutes of the fifteenth meeting had been circulated before the meeting and were approved as a true record. (Chris pointed out that Paul 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. Chris said that everything we had talked about last year would likely come up again this year. Last year at this time we were only able to play online and were deciding whether to play at the Yard of Ale next season.
5. ***Treasurers Report***
 - 5.1 Chris said that after the pandemic we have got back to spending money in a big way! To hire our meeting room at £20/night from September to May (38 weeks) we paid the Yard of Ale a total of £760 over the course of the season. This is a lot more than we were paying for membership of the Lancaster club, but we have not found another viable option.
 - 5.2 Unfortunately, we now have only 12 members. Based on our new membership fee of £50 this gives us revenue of just £600, so we are currently running at a loss. We had a balance in the Nationwide of £290.98 at the start of the season. Now that balance has reduced to £154.47, a loss of £134.29 over the season. We therefore need to find another 2-3 members, or to raise our membership by £10-15 or a combination of both to break even.
 - 5.3 Paul has been running his popular masterclass sessions over the winter as well. These classes are good social chess evenings and have been funded by charging attendees £1 per session. Consequently, the required Zoom licence (£12+VAT/month) has been self-supporting. Starting from 1st June, 2021, this season there have been 184 individual attendances. No sessions occurred in September, so the fees of 11 months x £14.39 (=£158.29) was fully covered. However, it was agreed to let new members have their first season free, so Piers (5) and Jim (33) contributions were waived. We will add all summer masterclasses to next season's membership fees, which are payable in September.
 - 5.4 We will need some more batteries next year and scoresheets. Also, the Cambridgeshire Chess Association is likely to restart levying fees again, but these costs are only incidental, at around only £50 in total.
 - 5.5 There is some potential to get old members to return. Various contacts were discussed. Based upon this, it was proposed that we raise the membership fee to £60 for next season. That is a compromise based on the assumption that we might recruit 2-3 members. Chris said that he was loathe to increase costs when times were difficult, but with a reduced kitty we can no longer afford to run at a significant loss. It was pointed out that Peterborough is still charging £100 for membership, though that may change as their new venue does not charge a room fee. But anecdotal evidence is that their new venue may have a significant background noise. This may be a problem, but will have to be dealt with as it arises.

- 5.6 Some concern was expressed that the Yard of Ale would raise their room hire price. Chris thought that this was unlikely, as there had been no indication from the landlord, James, but said that he would talk to him and explain that if they did, we would be unable to meet it. We would then have to find new premises. So far James has been very accommodating and has offered to help with parking when Peterborough Utd plays at home. On that subject, we can get the Posh fixture list at the start of the season, and where possible arrange to play away games when Peterborough are playing at home. Ultimately, it was concluded that at present, if things stay as they are, we can reasonably afford to stay at the Yard of Ale for the coming season.
- 5.7 An increase in fees to £60 was agreed by the membership, based on the assumption that we continue to use the Yard of Ale for the next season. If we can attract sufficient new members then we may be able to review fees in the future.

6. Match Captains' Reports

- 6.1 For the first team, Ray said that we had done very well, with mostly a squad of six players, and had won the league. We had managed not to default though it would have been good to have a few more reserves. Everybody performed, especially Peter and Paul, and we earned the important 3-2 wins that can so easily turn into 3-2 losses. Ray said it was the easiest team to captain that he had ever experienced, and he thanked everybody for their support. Peter thanked Ray for doing most of the driving. Peter said that he could not see the table on the C4 website and asked what the winning margin was. Chris explained that the database could not support a league playing each other three times, so it was split into two parts. We ended up on 13 points with St Neots in second place on 11 points. The Open FKO team had played well but went out in the semi-final to the eventual winners, Cambridge.
- 6.2 Chris said that the B team had generally had a good season and finished second to St Neots equal on points (10) but with fewer game points (16.5 to their 19.5). Paul Spencer 3.5/8 played in every game. Ron (4/7) and Chris (3/6) provided solid support. Norman (1.5/5), Jim (1/3) and Ed S (1/1) also contributed especially in the second half of the season, when we were unable to use our best division 1 players [Peter (1/1), Ray (0.5/1)] Our season turned on the performance of the captain, who played well in the first half of the season, but abominably thereafter. Had we managed just a draw in our last game (against St Neots) we would have won the league, but we got whitewashed 4-0.
- 6.3 The 7000 Team captain, Ed said that he had a similar season to the B team, starting well but eventually finishing second to Spalding, equal on 14 game points, but with a higher average team grade total. Ed said that he had no problem getting up a team, but occasionally we hit the 7000 GP limits, which could cause us issues next season, as some peoples grades will increase. We almost won the 7000 FKO as well, losing in the final to St Neots. Paul commented that like Liverpool, we could have cleaned up, and won 4 trophies but in the end it was a case of so near and so far.
- 6.4 As the online team captain, Paul Spencer said that we had entered several rapid play leagues over last summer, with a new competition starting, as soon as the previous one ended. We were generally out graded but gave a good account of ourselves. Results appeared in Paul's newsletter. After September, once we returned to OTB chess, online club play was suspended. Paul was thanked for helping us to keep playing during the pandemic. And our online activities attracted two new members, Piers and Jim. It was hoped that we could join some more summer leagues and find new local recruits.

7. Website Manager report

7.1 Phil was not present but had submitted a short report (attached). He said that our website attracted around 7000 hits, similar to last year, with some 600 readers of Paul's monthly newsletter, which is a valuable asset. Since the reorganisation of the website last year there were no new problems to report.

7.2 He did not know how much longer we will be able to use Dave Wild's database. Chris said that the website will close in July and so next season we will have to use the LMS database.

7.3 Phil was happy to continue unless anyone else wanted to replace him.

8. Tournament Secretary's Report.

Paul said that our season had been well supported, with the club championship being popular and accounting for most of our games when not playing league matches.

8.1 Peter won the championship with a score of 8.5/9 ahead of Paul S and Ray tied for second place.

8.2 The winner of the Ladder competition was Jim, rather to his surprise. Paul H explained that the format rewarded those who played the most games. Runner up was Peter.

8.3 Early in the season we held a rapid-play competition, which was won by Paul S, ahead of Ray, Peter and Jonathon Sadler. We had 8 participants for that event. Later in the season Paul organised another lightning competition, but sadly there were only 4 participants. Peter won ahead of Paul.

8.4 Paul concluded that individual events during the season would not be so well attended, and consequently was not bothered when the Handicap Tournament was squeezed out of the fixtures due to postponements.

8.5 The Problem Night was eventually held online, the evening before the AGM. Ed and Ray won.

8.6 The club Grand Prix competition was closely contested between Peter and Paul S, with Peter winning by just a half point. It was suggested that we consider awarding a trophy to the winner. We have elected not to spend money on trophies in the past. Paul said that he still had the 'Alan Jucha Memorial' trophy from Perkins and we could repurpose that. It was suggested that we could use that and engrave our past history onto it. In that case, the trophy will need to be for the club championship as the grand prix is a recent invention.

8.7 Paul held a Christmas Special which was enjoyed by all that attended.

9. Chairman's Report

Paul said that last year we were just moving into the Yard of Ale and he confessed that he had been worried about the survival of the club at that point. However, we have now played a full season here, are well set, and have managed to start rebuilding our club after the pandemic. He thanked everybody for their contribution to keeping us running online chess under difficult circumstances. (Pause while the chairman buys a round)

10. *Club Policy / Coronavirus issues*

Coronavirus: Paul said that he stopped doing a coronavirus register in February, once the government relaxed restrictions. The meeting was asked whether it thought that we still needed a coronavirus policy as we are living with the virus now, and could dispense with formal safeguards. This was agreed.

Venue: Chris said that he put this on the agenda as a number of concerns had been raised this year: namely parking, Posh home games, and suitability for juniors. He pointed out that it had been very difficult to find a venue that satisfied all of our needs. The Yard of Ale represented the best compromise that he had found: it was affordable, with a central location and on a bus route, had a comfortable good sized and well-lit room, with generally adequate noise levels. While cheaper, junior friendly options could be found out of town, he had rejected those as having impractical transport difficulties. However, if a better alternative can be found we would consider it.

Teams for 2022/23: Paul said that John Beck was thinking of proposing an amalgamated first and second division for next year, but it was thought that there would not be enough support for the proposal. Peter asked whether Royston and Cambridge would be re-joining Division 1. Chris thought it unlikely, as Royston was no longer a strong club, and although Cambridge have been invited, the latest surge in transport costs might be a factor against it. Paul thought that we were best continuing with the teams we have, and there was general agreement. Paul asked whether there was support for a season ending at 1st May. This could save us £80 in room fees, but it might not be possible to fit everything in with all-play-all 3 times in Division 1, as that meant 9 weeks in total. Paul would like to have fixed home/away for the third round in Div. 1 as this made organising the fixture list easier, but this will be decided at the CCCA AGM.

Club competitions: There was support for making the club championship all play all. This would currently require one extra round, but may not be possible if we recruit new members. All-play-all allows us to set a fixed schedule at the start of the season, but cannot cater for late joiners. Paul said that he would organise the competition based on numbers signing up at the start of the season. Paul said that the Lightning was not well attended and Handicap competition had not taken place. He proposed leaving them out of the season at the start, unless there was space. The ladder will continue as it did last year. The rules were briefly explained by Paul. Peter pointed out some inconsistencies, and Paul agreed to try and clarify them for next season. Chris explained that the ladder had previously run up to 30th June because we could, but we now might want to reserve the summer for online events. There was some discussion on online options for the summer. Paul S said he would investigate league possibilities and send out an email 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
550 league Captains:	E. Knox
Internet Captain:	P. Spencer

FKO Captains:
Tournament Secretary:

R. Ilett, E. Knox
P. Hanks

12. Recruitment

Paul pointed out that a new member of Peterborough chess club had turned up to our club one evening a night early. He was not aware of New England club, as he had only looked on Facebook! Our website also only appears 6th or 7th in a Google search and not as a chess club in Google maps. So, we need to do better. Peterborough club are on as an advert, their website, on the Peterborough local government site, Google maps, and Facebook, all ahead of us. Paul suggested that we consult Phil to find how we could raise our profile. Jim altered our entry on Google maps to identify us as New England (Peterborough). Ray asked whether it was possible to change the club's name, but this requires alterations to bank accounts, ECF/LMS/C4 names and codes, website (and Facebook if we sign up). It is possibly confusing as we are no longer based in New England, but it would involve a lot of work to change.

Paul said that there is a new university opening in Peterborough with local campuses at the old British Sugar site and by the Key Theatre. These are both close to us and it was hoped that we could attract some interest. Possibly we could offer them the opportunity to play at our club under a separate team name. Ed asked if there was a possibility to play matches on their campus as a new venue, but that was thought unlikely without us signing up for university membership. Paul said he would explore links this summer, and if we get interest, we could pursue it further.

It was asked if the Yard of Ale would allow us to advertise on a pinboard. Apparently, there is one in the gents' toilets. It was agreed that we should ask James. Ed suggested that we advertise in the local Woodston and Stanground communities, possibly libraries, community centres, local business Facebook groups and the ET, which may still be going online.

Junior chess would have to be run at a separate time and/or venue. We would need to start earlier, say at 6pm. Ed thought that our current venue was inappropriate, but the challenge remains, we would need to find a suitable alternative that we can afford.

13. Any Other Business

The Cambridgeshire Chess Association AGM will be held on Wednesday, 29th June at Warboys. We will report back the outcome.

There being no other business, the chairman closed the meeting at 9.36pm.

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