

2022-09-26

My look back as chairman



Jean Olivier Leconte
Bob van de Velde

At the General Assembly in Marostica, previous chairman Bob van de Velde looked back on his tenure. Here is his speech:

Dear members of our Society,

Today is a special day in many respects. The last member meeting of this kind took place 7 years ago in 2015. The place of performance was the library of the German city of Kiel, which properly accommodated a beautiful chess collection. Its catalog is a well-known work of reference. That meeting was the result of the courageous initiative of our creative and energetic member Andreas Saremba. But sadly, he was the last one who had that courage. From then on, seven lean years began, the years during which I was your chairman.

Looking back

Since we are here mainly in order to look into the future of our activities on the fields of history and literature and especially into the future of our Society, I could end on this very moment the look back at my precedency that our new chairman requested me to present to you. Because we are

all historians in one way or another, and perhaps many of you will have a certain interest also in the history of our Society I will still say a few words about our recent past.

In 2016 my predecessor rather suddenly announced his retirement. The then board couldn't find a successor at once and disclosed this impasse during the informal half-yearly member meeting in Braunschweig, as always close connected to the likewise half-yearly auction of chess books at the house of antiquarian bookseller and auctioneer Klittich. In this meeting I was confronted with an appeal from the side of our two founders and honorary members of our Society, Jurgen Stigter and Michael Negele who urgently requested me to accept the chair only for a half year, perhaps at most a year, with the aim to give the board an opportunity to find a proper chairman. This was a complete surprise for me because as an ambitious collector of bridge literature and writer about bridge history, amidst the members of the Society I considered myself as the odd man out. Before, I only had served the Society as a kind of counsel for the structure of the association and the foundation. However, as it was difficult for me to disappoint the honorary members, both by me highly regarded, as well as the other board members I agreed. In the big world it is no exception that it usually costs a little bit more time to find the ideal candidate, in our case it lasted the mentioned seven years, and, I say this somewhat proudly, it was myself who did find him.

Initiatives

What happened in between? I started with two initiatives, the first one aimed at the development of a new website, because the old one became obsolete, the second one to get a more precise idea about what the more or less active members wanted from the Society. I sent them a Memorandum containing a comprehensive survey with about 50 proposals and alternatives. This resulted in a most ambitious program of intentions that only ended in rather modest results. Why? The answer can only be complex. But in my opinion because most members are focused mainly on their own fields of interest, and less on the common goals of the Society, and secondly the number of members that is willing to spend time and energy in these common goals is limited, and worse, is diminishing. However, there are many more answers possible. For instance the influence of internet on finding information about books or sources.

Anyway, one result we all know is the new name for the former Ken Whyld Association: Chess History & Literature Society, a name everybody can find on the internet who is interested in us. Another one is the lasting support for the ToBiblion project, the bibliography on a 'professional' or scientific basis for which once the Society was founded. But many more issues of the outcome of the Memorandum had to be discussed in the board first and as the next step needed decisions. Discussions in itself are not the problem, but the execution of decisions is. And there I felt it as a handicap that I came from another world, being the bridge world and the world of management, thus without a network of relationships within the membership. I could not find enough members willing to support the ambitious plans or to contribute to the new website. Furthermore, honorary member Michael Negele as mainstay of the Society and at that time also involved as editor of the website fell away, first because of his work as editor of the three-volume Lasker monograph, later because of illness.

The future of the CH&LS

Because of the lack of activities and lack of response from the membership, and the need to update the statutes, the then board started to a discussion on the future of the Society, but could not reach unanimity. Broadly speaking there were three voices. One of them wanted to return to the original format: a limited group of interested collectors and bibliographers such as the group that once founded the association, without statutes, formal meetings and bureaucratic correspondence. My

own voice said: let's stop with the Society as a formal association, get rid of the unavoidable bureaucracy of an association, focus on the easy going Ken Whyld Foundation for the bibliography for which the association once was founded, and transform the membership into an informal circle of friends to the Foundation who can profit from the Foundation. And against this proposal a third voice pleaded strongly for the continuation of the fully-rigged association, as it is, including a full swing membership and full possibilities for members to participate in the activities of the Society.

A deadlock was threatening, but we were more or less saved by the bell: just at this moment the period of Corona lockdowns was beginning. No biennial board meeting in Braunschweig anymore, no possibility to break the deadlock in a constructive way. In those days we lost first our treasurer-elect, then also his successor who became ill, and in the end both members of the Committee of Cash Auditors. The lockdowns also torpedoed my own efforts organizing a general assembly as part of the "Week of the Mind Sports" in the Netherlands in the library Tresoar, which on my initiative had founded the national Collection Centre of the Mindsports. Partners in this Week should have been the Chess Collectors International, the Board Game Studies, the International Playing Card Society and other organizations.

The end of the lean years

During this difficult period I got full support from our member Karl Klittich, at that time also member of the board, and always willing to put rooms in the house of Klittich at our disposal for the meetings of the board and for the informal member meetings. It was he, who found practical solutions for a number of delicate issues and spend a lot of his impressive energy to help the Society through these difficult years. The Society owes him a debt of gratitude!

And so after the last lockdown these seven lean years came to an end with the formation of a new and fresh board and in the chair a chairman, himself an experienced chess historian, with a many ideas, and what is more, a broad network in the chess world and a lot of energy to realize new plans. Now it is not difficult anymore for me to look into the future of our Society and to predict that from this day on the seven fat years will begin!

Bob van de Velde
Chairman from 2015-2022
Marostica September 10th, 2022