

# NCA — President's Report

*Dr A. N. Walker*

*Q: What is the difference between the President and an Honorary Life Vice-President?*

*A: If you ask someone to become an HLV-P, they say 'Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!'; if you ask someone to become President, they say 'No thank you, no thank you, no thank you!'. [You didn't think it had anything to do with honour, life or vice, surely?]*

I would like that to change. I think people should want to become President, should regard it as an honour, and should not see it as a chore. It *isn't* a chore! The only duty assigned to the President is to chair meetings; and that only if he or she can be bothered to attend. Everything else is voluntary. So it's a relatively painless way for colleagues to give up their responsibilities; 'I'd *love* to continue as [whatever], but I've just become President so you'll have to find someone else.'

In these reports, Presidents have traditionally pushed their pet projects. This year, that's very easy. I don't have any. Except, perhaps, to retrieve the C4 situation which was, when I took over, spiralling somewhat out of control. But I asked people to step back, and this very largely happened. Despite two resignations, the usual activities within NCA ran, as far as I can judge, very smoothly.

In relation to C4, I held a very constructive meeting with Brian Hayward, and Robert Richmond met representatives of Gambit CC. The results were seen at the RRM, when a well-attended meeting held lively discussions, and came to responsible decisions on a whole raft of proposals. Gambit asked for a statement by EC, and this will appear in the EC report. I hope this whole affair can now be laid to rest.

There is a matter arising. We are an entirely volunteer organisation. No-one is being paid to take on any of our responsibilities, and many of us don't even bother to claim minor expenses. In return, it is important for everyone to be careful what they say. Some very unfortunate comments were made in the C4 debate before I took over. There were, as noted, two resignations. Had an SGM been called, there *would* have been more.

I am not asking for NCA officers and others to be beyond criticism. But the critics have a responsibility to ensure that they are not making things worse. If many posts within the NCA were decided by a contested election, then it's reasonable for the candidates to say why the incumbent is or is not doing a good job, and what they intend to do to improve it. We are not in that situation. Some posts are unfilled, elections have a lower frequency than blue moons, willing volunteers are thin on the ground, and many of them take on two or more responsibilities — often thereby failing to do any of them to their full satisfaction. So we make do with what, and who, we have.

If criticism, whether or not it is well-founded, causes colleagues to walk away — and who could blame them? — it is a double whammy. We lose the services of a current volunteer; and in addition others who might think of helping out are deterred. Why expose yourself to all that flak? We need all the help we can get, especially from newer and younger blood, and especially with some new responsibilities coming our way and with several current officers, including your President, at the veteran stage.

I did have a hand in one new activity. NCA was approached to provide a team of a dozen or so chess players to provide the 'brains' for a secret BBC programme. Lured by the prospect of fame, or at least a liaison with Alice Roberts, I put out a call, and we did our bit. Sadly, the numbers and our slot were gradually whittled down, but a day of filming, with everything shot three times, did result in a couple of minutes on episode 5 of *Food Detectives*.

My other Presidential activities were pretty-much confined to chairing meetings and dealing with e-mails. My attempts to present prizes after the County Championship and the Congress were quietly rebuffed. A couple of other initiatives may gain mentions at the AGM, but do not hold your breath.

Finally, thank you, on behalf of the NCA, to all the officers, both of the NCA and of clubs, who have kept things running smoothly this year.

Andy