EACF Annual General meeting
26th February 2024
Webmaster's report

The EACF website has continued to operate without any significant problems for users, except for a short outage in March 2023 caused by memory capacity being exceeded. An interim fix was introduced to avoid that, but the proper solution is an increase in memory capacity.

The website as a whole has now passed 4 million hits. As last year, around 50% of all visits by real users are to the "Day" view of the Court Booking System, again 10 times as popular as the most visited page on the rest of the EACF website, which is the home page. Most visitors go straight to the CBS pages from direct links in their own club website.

As mentioned earlier in the year there was an impending requirement to upgrade the operating system of the server underlying the EACF and Court Booking System websites, and that it was starting to outgrow the limited 1GB of RAM available on the server. An operating system upgrade would have aggravated that problem further. An increase in the capacity of the virtual private server ('VPS') would have doubled the hosting cost at Digital ocean from $7.20 per month (including VAT) to $14.40 per month.

Although that cost increase was agreed, following a further investigation of alternative hosting possibilities, a better VPS offer was identified at Ionos, which is Europe's largest hosting company. It is based in Germany but has a data centre in the UK and therefore avoids any GDPR issues. For comparison, our Digital Ocean VPS provided 1 CPU core, 1 GB of RAM and 25 GB of SSD storage for $7.20 per month, while Ionos offers a VPS with 2 CPU cores, 2 GB of RAM and 80 GB of SSD storage (technically, NVMe storage, which is the latest and fastest kind of SSD) for £2.40 per month for the first 6 months and £4.80 per month thereafter. So the Ionos offer provides more than double the capacity at a lower cost than the service with Digital Ocean, and is quite sufficient to meet the needs of our websites system with the latest, upgraded Linux operating system.

Therefore at the end of the summer playing season and after checking a few key details a 12-month rolling contract for an Ionos VPS was taken as described above, and a migration project begun. The Digital Ocean server remained in operation in parallel while the new Ionos server with an upgraded operating system was developed and tested. Testing was completed and the switch to the new server was finally made in early December simply by changing the DNS for angliacroquet.uk. (The DNS is the network of public servers which link domain names to the actual address, which all browsers consult when you type in a website name.). The change was therefore invisible to users – they did not need to do anything and did notice that anything has changed at all (unless they are very technically inclined and start looking "under the hood" of their website browser).

As of today the migrated systems are all working correctly with good performance, and the few minor glitches which emerged have been corrected (for example, a temporary problem with all bookings being shown an hour later when an external time service used by the system started to assume – wrongly – that the server was located in a German time-zone; it is physically in London).
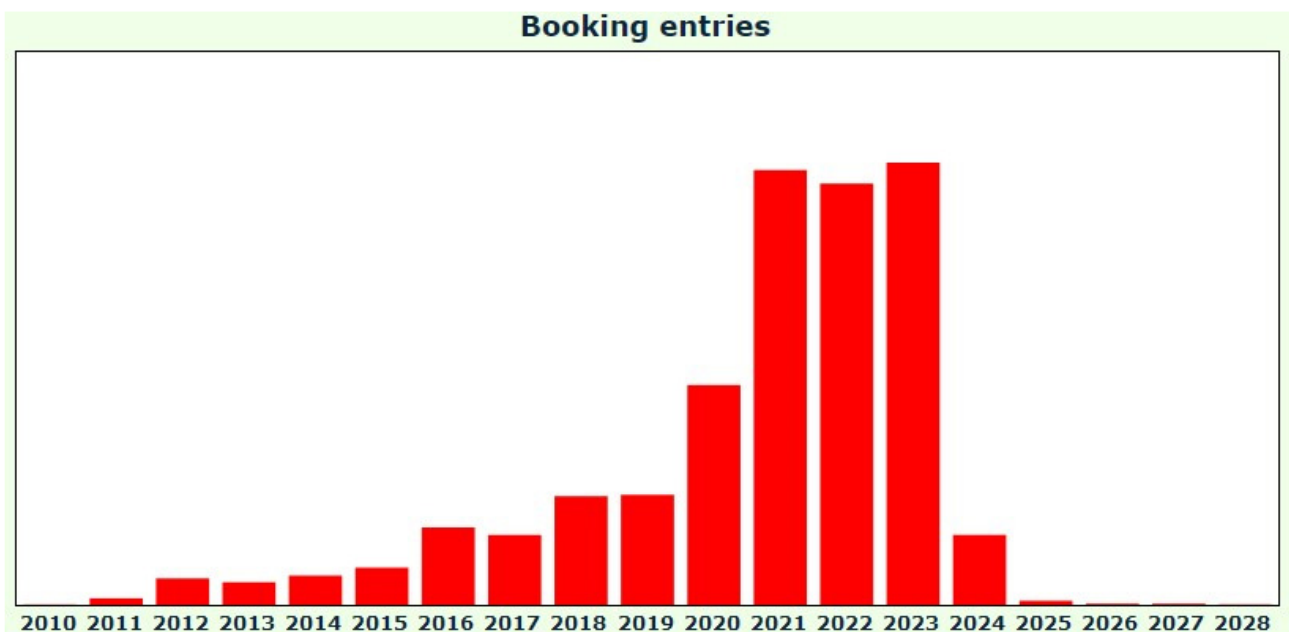
The trickiest part of the migration was not the websites or the operating system upgrade, but the email sub-system. This is a crucial feature which allows registered users to get emails from the system which enable them to ask for a temporary password when they forget their current password. With about 1800 registered users of the CBS this happens quite often. Unfortunately there has been a particular problem of late with all users with a btinternet or btopenworld email address, as BT have been blocking delivery of all emails from angliacroquet.uk without any warning to the end user. This was a problem on the old server which remains with the new server as well. Delivery problems to other email addresses have been resolved by relaying these emails via a specialist emailing company called Brevo (formerly known as Sendinblue), a French service which allows up to 300 emails per

day for free, but unfortunately this still does not work for users with BT addresses. Until another solution is found the information that is blocked to BT customers has to be monitored in system logs and sent to them by other means.

This migration and upgrade opportunity was also used to enhance further some of the security features, since the level of hacking attempts of various kinds remains relentless. These attacks now average at least 1 every 10 seconds around the clock, from all over the world - automated attacks which attempt to gain access by various means. Independent security checks on our websites from both SSL Labs and ImmuniWeb now score a rating of "A+", which is better than most UK banks. (For comparison, the CA website today scores "B-".)

Court Booking System

Two more clubs started using the booking system in 2023, bringing the total to 44. Between them they have made over 190,000 bookings. The heaviest users are, in decreasing order, Letchworth, Colchester, Watford, Sidmouth and Nailsea. It is interesting to note that the booking levels remained at the same level in 2023 as they reached during the Covid pandemic.

Booking entries

SJH
16/1/2024