



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 16th April 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Nottinghamshire	Pravin Tailor (PT)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Previous Meetings' Minutes

1. All the technology worked today, and Mike Willoughby could create the meeting without the usual 40 minute limit.
2. The minutes of the last two meetings were approved and we agreed to record the meeting, and the link is available on request from the chair.

ITEM 2: Round Robin on News/Plans/Problems

3. First **KS** reported from **Herefordshire** that all club activity had ceased there, and with it being a small county population-wise and with only two qualified teachers (and only one active), there was only a small number of people identified so far with an interest in online bridge.
4. Then **MT** reported from **Warwickshire** that Darren Evetts was running daily Pairs Competitions for WMBC (and a wider audience) and that Roger Bryant was active also, but focused on teams. RB was also addressing (for Warwickshire) KH's proposal issues after the last meeting for friendly inter-county matches at multiple skill levels.
5. Next **PT** reported from **Nottinghamshire** that Nottingham BC had been very active early (running Tuesday and Friday games - but nothing on the website), but others clubs were active now too. One club is organising inter-club matches.

6. From **Oxfordshire RP** reported that the County Management Committee had met and agreed to have two Directors trained under the new EBU/BBO offering; OBA are also aiming to support KH's inter-county venture. He also raised some wider issues
- Noting that the average grade in the EBU online games is about 55% (does this correspond to Congress players?) means a lot of weaker players are not getting involved. [LATER NOTE : Cheltenham BC's coming online games will include some labelled Gentle Bridge] He suggested the EBU should be more active in advertising the online opportunities, but PS suggested that County Associations (and their clubs) might be better placed to do that chasing.
 - The current charges for the EBU online games is low at BBO\$1.50; if the EBU needs revenue this could be increased. PS noted that the new EBU/BBO offering had a minimum charge of BBO\$3 per head.
 - The experience of working from home might encourage re-consideration of the amount of office space the EBU needed in Aylesbury.
7. MW reported from **Worcestershire** that not much had changed in the past week, although a non-EBU-affiliated club had approached the WCBA recently for advice. MW identified that integration of online and F2F bridge was a topic that deserves out attention.
8. **FD** reported that it had been an interesting week in **Northamptonshire** (with thanks to KH) with many matches taking place. Stanford BC has a Pairs Ladder with 32 pairs and is on round four of their Swiss Teams event (14 teams) – both running on Bridge Club Live. Bourne BC is also very proactive, again on BCL. For newcomers to online, the material prepared by Paul Gipson at www.berwickbridgeclub.co.uk/bbo is excellent, and the experience of using Zoom with a shared screen to help people get started has proved very effective. The issue now is creating a cascade where the few can promulgate the technique to the masses. At least one small club FD knows of looks unlikely to open post crisis (a danger across the country identified by the EBU).
9. **FD** also mentioned the EBED event which had taken place on Tuesday, explaining techniques for playing and teaching online. It is available from this link and the speakers (Jacks and Lorna from EBED led) were very knowledgeable :
<https://twitter.com/EBEDCharity/status/1250000887315156993>
10. **TR** reported from **Somerset** little change, with four sessions a week continuing to run. They are also about to start an online league and have 13 teams in that. Nothing is happening at the club level, only at the county level.
11. **KT** reported that a survey showed that her class of ~16 students contained some keen to work online, but others who were not.
12. **KH** reported from **Lincolnshire** the County CBA had decided to shut up shop, but that a group from the grass roots had taken up the challenge and was active in setting up friendly matches and the like. For pairs the BBO options are easy to drop into, but teams matches can be a pain to arrange; he has a group attending BBO every Thursday at 1930 and willing to take a challenge from any other team that turns up, or else play amongst themselves. He had also organised a BBO match with a Budapest team and managed to arrange a video feed to Twitch.

13. **KH** also reported on his recent activity with EBED, for whom Covid-19 was causing an acceleration of the move to online bridge and online teaching. EBED have concerns about the future of their revenue stream (has been book publication in the past) and about staying relevant, but are very open minded about the future and more experimentation is coming over the next few weeks. KH noted that, while it is a common practice online, most of our teachers don't yet offer free taster sessions as a form of marketing. Within Lincolnshire they have set up a Facebook Group for all players, allowing them to share availability (although WhatsApp is also popular for arranging games).
14. **PS** reported from **Gloucestershire** that their online Swiss Teams is now active with 20 teams, and that he has run a handful of events for Cheltenham Bridge Club but it is a tedious task and CBC are planning to take up the EBU/BBO offer, paying a TD to do the work. He has written to all clubs in the county, offering to run a game for the non-Cheltenham people who want to play, but the offer has not yet been taken up.

ITEM 3 : ISSUES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

15. KH identified that there is an incredible opportunity here to introduce more people to the game of bridge. Online learning and play remains available in lockdown and many social barriers and prejudices disappear. Attacking this opportunity is ideal for a joined up effort as geography is irrelevant. In his home town of Louth, there is a Facebook Group of 3000+ people (from a population of 17k) – many searching for something to do. Our chance to catch the attention of these people will drop over time.
16. KH has been involved with the EBED training team – helping them set up live streaming of their (over-populated) Zoom conference, and can supply help to others wanting to do this also. As well as Zoom, Google Hangouts and Skype are candidate technology, and OBS (Open Broadcast Software) offers opportunities to stream to Twitch, Youtube and more.
17. As well as the non-players and the committed tournament players, there is a large community of social bridge players who also need and deserve our support. FD pointed out that for these, and for many club players, the community is much happier playing with and against people they already know – they find strangers uncomfortable, and more hand holding is needed. We as MCWG and CBAs need to support not just the top of the skill pyramid; but catching the attention of the lower parts needs direct email contact rather than broadcasts on website they never visit – and might be something best done by clubs.
18. MW identified that if marketing the game succeeded, we are currently short of suitable deliverables – although EBED is working as fast as it can on this. In some ways there are too many options available, but no one option which stands out.

ITEM 4 : FUTURE PLANS

19. We confirmed we will meet again next week, same time, same place.

END OF MINUTES