



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 23rd April 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Previous Meetings' Minutes

1. All the technology worked adequately, but there were occasional near glitches; we agreed later that we would test out Google Hangouts next session (for which we need everyone's Google id, eg a .gmail address).
2. We welcomed Malcolm Pryor from Suffolk who is leading the effort in the Eastern Counties to get a CWG up and running.
3. The minutes of the previous meetings was approved and we agreed to record the meeting, and the link is available on request from the chair.

ITEM 2: Some Initiatives worth Advertising

4. PS kicked off the meeting by listing some initiatives which had come to his attention and would merit promulgating by CBAs, viz.
 - a. There has been a second EBED tutorial this week by Jacks Morcombe and it contains a lot of useful information. It can be found at https://youtu.be/1rpy_lhGSno, but go to www.facebook.com/pg/EBEDCIO/videos for the full collection. KH reported that it has been live streamed to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter but that future episodes would go live to one of these and become available from the others later (to save effort). This is especially geared to teachers, but there are useful ideas for others too.
 - b. First for Bridge (the holiday company) is offering online BBO sessions geared to their typical audience (4 sessions a week labelled "club standard" and 3 sessions a week labelled as "Improvers, up to NGS-6"). There are various details on their website at <https://www.bridgewebs.com/first/>. Some relevant players will have received an email from FfB, but many will not.

- c. Surrey CBA are organising a “Sim Pairs” event on five days next week (Mon-Fri) and for those not members of Caterham BC (the host of the event) players can register through the SCBA website at <https://www.bridgewebs.com/surrey/> and there is the option of running a session just for your club/county – contact tonycherrettbridge@gmail.com.
- d. There are **new** and **interesting** books being offered for free downloads – by a Swedish author (Mats Nilslund) and covering very up to date approaches to bidding. You can find the details on <http://www.itbolaget.nu/bridge/nilslundbooks.asp>; they should be appealing to any county level players.
- e. A number of clubs have organised friendly matches, with Berwick BC offering a chance for a 12-board match followed by discussion at 1400 hrs next Tuesday to the first comer. KH reported a number of ventures – and at different skills levels – in which Lincolnshire had got engaged (reaching as far as Budapest for opposition).
- f. The Sam Punch (Sociology of Bridge) initiative on the effects of Covid-19 on the bridge playing community, has reached some but not all participants. The email went to County Chairs and more and can be found at the link below.
<https://keepbridgealive.bridgecloud.com/about/bridge-in-the-time-of-covid-19>
Nobody had yet decided on engagement.

ITEM 3: Round Robin on News/Plans/Problems

- 5. We started with **TS** from **Nottinghamshire**; she reported on some clubs now trying to play team-of-8 matches but finding a busy BBO causing them difficulties (others reported similarly, PS having seen two matches abandoned earlier this week). TS told us that the club players were getting involved in BBO but the top county players were nowhere to be seen. The NCBA intent is to run a Summer Teams League (as preparation for an expectation this would carry on into the Winter Season) but there was very limited technical ability in a committee who were not particularly interested in online bridge. It was noted that team-of-8 scoring had to be done manually, external to BBO, as it had to be run as individual team-of-4 matches on BBO.
- 6. Next **MP** reported from **Suffolk** that the county had pulled out all the stops to provide an online service for its (about 1000) members, and you can see their transformed website at <https://www.bridgewebs.com/suffolkbridge/>. They have been running online games (including a specifically “relaxed” session) and will now switch to being an EBU Virtual Club. SCBA has an online team-of-4 league with 21 teams in four divisions running until mid-May. There are two experienced BBO directors in the county and now a quarter of the county’s clubs are running online. The SCBA are also running a 28-board (Wednesday) and 5-board daily Funbridge competitions. A great set of video helps for online bridge are available from [Little Clacton Bridge club – click here](#). There is also an active Bridge Club Live community in the county. Teachers (led by Jacks Morcombe) are engaged in teaching using Zoom. He identified as a concern how EBU, counties and clubs come to a consensus on if and when to restart face-to-face bridge.
- 7. **KT** reported from **Oxfordshire** that the county was “late to the party” but was now moving forward. She (and another) are being trained as EBU-approved BBO-TDs and the first event was due next Sunday, to be followed by a regular Thursday evening with OBA running as an EBU Virtual Club. Oxford BC is running a number of events (casual bridge with video alongside, a teams event) and some other clubs are active on Funbridge. OBA has created a Facebook Group (with much help from, so thanks to, KH) which allows more easily for feedback from all members.

8. **MT** reported from **Warwickshire** that they had a Lincolnshire match coming, while Darren Evetts was trying to continue the daily game for West Midlands BC but running into issues with the restrictions BBO are imposing on the timing of Free Tournaments. He raised the concern that some bridge players were showing evidence of being “stir crazy”. The advice was that getting these people online is key, and the use of video when online (whether for bridge or other things) does a lot to make people more comfortable. Contacting people directly, where emails and websites get ignored, was sometimes needed.
9. **KS** reported from **Herefordshire** that he had circulated the advert for the Surrey NHS charity event, and had emailed all club chairs asking them to consult their members about current online activities and what they don't do but would want to. The county committee has had a virtual meeting, and there is a lot of interest in teaching complete newcomers (an idea that had arisen in other contexts – just getting players to teach family & friends), but the right teaching resources is a pre-requisite. **PS** reported that he had placed some (still developing) material on the www.gcba.org.uk site and would welcome feedback.
10. **FD** pointed out that only a small proportion of members ever visit any website, and more direct communications will be needed. **KH** supported that need for personal contact, with telephone and Facebook being better than websites and emails. He described how a combination of introducing the game to people on a Zoom session, at the same time as them logging onto BBO for the first time, and then letting them play (if very badly) was a great way to get a younger generation started. Some had experienced less than ideal performance from Zoom or BBO in doing this, and **KH** suggested running without video or less resolution on the video, or using Google Hangouts as a more robust (if less fully featured) platform (and others suggested WhatsApp). He also reported from **Lincolnshire** that they had run an intercounty event at three levels and next week had a match for 5 teams (each a different skill level) playing two sets of 8 boards against Warwickshire.
11. **MW** reported from **Worcestershire** that while Worcester BC had got off to a fast and structured start, most clubs were now doing something less formal online (and happy with that) – leaving little for the CBA to tackle. He had produced a Covid-19 release of the County Newsletter highlighting the options for online play, and noted that WCBA had run a Facebook Group for some years (with about 50 members). He suggested we might have too many communications channels at play, and that it would be nice if we could standardise on fewer. There is a WCBA committee meeting later this week. He identified the availability of a starter pack (with video, and if it was good enough it might go viral) and the use of Zoom's breakout rooms as key tools.
12. **FD** reported from **Northamptonshire** that he had found only a small number of the Stamford BC committee were conversant with the relevant technology, but they were running a Pairs Ladder and an Online Swiss Teams. Of the smaller clubs in the county only Bourne was active (on BCL at first but this didn't stick). He reported that getting people conversant with Zoom and onto BBO, and setting up a teaching table, had proved difficult (some of which might come from it being evening events, when BBO performance struggles). Use of NoFear Bridge had proved much easier – particularly as pupils can replay the lessons at their leisure.
13. **PS** reported that in **Gloucestershire**, the Cheltenham BC games he had been running were moving this week to be under the EBU Virtual Club structure, and would happen three times a week with one session tagged as Gentle Bridge. The County-level Swiss teams is on round two.
14. **Jim Parker** reported in by email from **Derbyshire** that the county has just played an online event (9 tables, run by EBU as a Virtual Club, and getting a positive reaction) and intend to run it weekly. There is an interruption to teaching at Spondon (the couple running it retired).

ITEM 4: ISSUES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

15. **FD** raise the fact that the extensive Stamford BC youth bridge venture with local schools had been crippled by the current crisis; the major problem is that Safeguarding means that bridge teachers cannot make direct contact with pupils. No way forward has yet been identified (ideas welcome), but the more we can do a non-interactive taster, and/or get parents to learn and bring along their children, the better chance we have. The ideal position would be to have something attractive enough that parents would take the initiative and come pull on it.
16. **KH** asked whether we should be thinking of more regular times for online bridge – for instance arranging for a foursome to appear on BBO at a specific time and take on whoever comes to challenge, but otherwise play amongst themselves. The idea was supported, but **PS** reported that his attempt to suggest this for the GCBA Swiss Teams had fallen on deaf ears.
17. We discussed using means other than these meetings to keep in touch, and for each of us to keep in touch with our players. It was agreed that Facebook groups really had to be local to each county to ensure the intended members were comfortable there, but a Facebook group for the MCWG attendees from which they could selectively cross-post to a county specific group, would be a Good Thing. **KH** agreed to set up such a group.

ITEM 5: FUTURE PLANS

18. We confirmed we will meet again next week, same time, same place – but using Google Hangouts. All attendees need to send a google identifier (email address) to **PS** in advance.

END OF MINUTES