



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Hangouts conference call
on Thursday 30th April 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Previous Meeting's Minutes

1. The Google Hangouts technology worked reasonably but Rob Procter (Oxf) could not connect, Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk) nearly got in, and DT was not able to speak to us! Some reported that the Zoom technology had worked better, but KH pointed out that some of that would be a consequence of more practice in using that.
2. The minutes of the previous meetings were approved for publication.

ITEM 2: FACEBOOK

3. PS kicked off by pointing out that KH had produced an MCWG Facebook Page (search for MCWG), which now had three members. MW agreed that he would send out an invite to all MCWG representatives to allow them to join. KH pointed out that this has to be part of a wider digital strategy, and the role of a forum like this was allow efficient contributions to, and tracking and recording of, conversations relevant to the MCWG. KH's help was much appreciated by OBA and others whose FB groups he had helped to create. The advantage of a FB Group for each County was explained, noting this gives easy cross-posting options to and from other counties and the MCWG. MW pointed out that getting members to sign up was difficult (a long-standing Worcestershire group had only 50 joiners); PS suggest that the focus of the group mattered, and he could imagine different groups within Gloucestershire for Club Organisers, for Teachers, for Players. We all agreed to progress this within our counties, and KH offered his help to any who needed it.

ITEM 3: Round Robin on News/Plans/Problems

4. We started with TR from **Somerset**, who said that little had changed recently, but pointed out that Somerset CBA had a Facebook page (search for "Somerset bridge").

5. We continued with **KS** from **Herefordshire** who reported that he had received only 6 replies to his letter to club chairs and from that 4 had very little interest, and the others could identify 22 online players. He intended canvassing Hereford's county players directly and possibly later others in the Western League (equivalent of the MCL) about how they should proceed with that event. He (and MW later) commented favourably on the "Bridge in Ten Minutes" handouts which PS had advertised on www.qcba.org.uk.
6. Next came **KT** from **Oxfordshire** who declared that the county was now forging ahead, having had its first game last Sunday with 15 tables and positive feedback, and from next week will be running a regular Thursday evening game (all as an EBU Virtual Club). Oxford BC continues to run games, and wants to expand this to reflect its previous F2F programme, and to earn some money for the club (this can be done if you make appropriate arrangements with BBO – consult Gordon Rainsford if relevant). PS pointed out that currently Richmond BC is seeing more online players than it had F2F players – and it was the busiest club in the country! OBC are also organising some social games, and have been able to use previous Vugraph hands in an online play & learn context.
7. Then we heard from **FD** from **Northamptonshire**; he said that the latest EBED tutorial on BCL usage was great (as did MW later), but that the take-up on BCL was not that great – this might be due to limited facilities, but these are expected to see new developments soon. While Stamford and Bourne BCs were doing OK, it seemed that small clubs were struggling to do anything. Stamford, having had to cancel its planned courses for new players, was now doing these online and had a respectable take-up; FD has found No Fear Bridge excellent, and recommended starting such activities with only a very small group, as much of the first session is spent sorting out everyone's technology.
8. **FD** pointed out that a lot of current online bridge is shorter sessions than we are used to in clubs, and the feedback from users is that 16 boards is plenty if sitting in front of a computer. This tendency, which might well filter into clubs, needs to get reconciled with current Master Points restrictions on board numbers etc. He also noted that while clubs have been able to cater for a mix of competitive and social players, when play goes online these groups tend to separate into distinct communities.
9. **MT** reported next from **Warwickshire**. Darren Evetts continues his (free) two games daily for WMBC (and visitors) and reported that they have seen spectators – which is a good way for people to learn (and also to keep themselves occupied). The details on the Sam Punch initiative mentioned last week have been distributed to all clubs.
10. We heard next from **KH** from **Lincolnshire**. He told of many inter-county and inter-town matches, and of the setting up of regular pairs games with just 4 people (which facilitated such a foursome becoming a team for other games), and of his running a Bridge Surgery (via Google Hangouts) which lets people ask any bridge questions of him. He also explained a new initiative to help beginners get started, viz
 - To produce a video of people getting started, learning to play bridge online. The plan is to generate many samples and from these to create a collage from snippets of these samples which will be attractive to view and encourage newcomers into the game. The project needs volunteers to find some newcomers, to work through the game with them, and to video the process. The idea is the next generation of the Pete Holland video on YouTube – for which [you can click here](#). KT, PS and KS volunteered to chase down some samples.

11. **MW** reported from **Worcestershire** that the inter-county matches were looking attractive but before embarking on that WCBA has another (undisclosed) initiative in the pipeline. [LATER: MW confirmed that this was intended as a replacement in some form TBA for County Night). MW noted that Andrew Robson BC is now active on BBO (21 sessions weekly, 12 or 16 boards, 60 tables each day – and a Gentle Bridge session has just been added). With no geographical restrictions on bridge club membership now, anyone can join a Virtual Club which means all clubs might have new revenue models to consider. He also raised the question of the future direction of the EBU and asked about visibility of the EBU Board's activity to manage (and even to take advantage of) the current crisis. PS reported that a number of virtual meetings had taken place and action was underway to publish notes from those.
12. From **Derbyshire** we heard from **JP** who told us of the (County?) committee conferring through WhatsApp, and that players in the county were using a combination of WhatsApp and BBO. The County has now run two online County sessions successfully. DCBA had looked at its incomplete leagues and decided that the missing matches had little chance of changing the results, so they declared them complete.
13. Finally, PS reported from Gloucestershire that the County Swiss teams was running along with 20 teams, that Cheltenham BC was running three sessions a week as an EBU Virtual Club, and the CBC beginners had got themselves well organised on BBO & conferencing tools and were now looking to initiate a Beginners' Duplicate. CBC were planning to offer a challenge to all members playing online to find a member who wasn't playing online, and to show them how; currently it is estimated that 50% of the club membership are playing online.
14. Offline we had a report from **Pravin Taylor** from **Nottinghamshire** to tell us that playing arrangements have not changed in the past week but that the County Committee is meeting (online) shortly to discuss what could be a tricky future. Offline **Malcolm Pryor** from **Suffolk** suggested it was worth advertising the approach developed at Ipswich BC for presenting BBO event scores on a Bridgewebs site – [click here](#).

ITEM 4: MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

15. We had completed all but one of the current season's matches when lockdown arrived, and it is very unlikely that we will start the next season face to face at the expected time. The "room" was asked for thoughts as to how we might proceed. No decision emerged but the following points were made
- a. We could declare the 2019/20 league complete at this point, or we could produce an artificial result for the last match based on the performance of the relevant teams up to this point.
 - b. We could consider a merging of the two years 2019-20 and 2020-21 and expect to complete that single "season" just about one year late with that final match.
 - c. If we decided to play online there are issues around how the independent tables play the same boards. There are mechanisms which could be used, by KT reported that these have been known to corrupt the hands, so there are dangers therein.

ITEM 5: FUTURE PLANS

16. We confirmed we will meet again next week, same time, same place – feedback welcome but it would seem natural to give Google Hangouts a second chance. To login to the session you just need your browser and a Google login.

END OF MINUTES