



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 8th October 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

Apologies: Geoff Clements (Devon)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There was one new face today – we welcomed Mark Goddard. We approved the minutes from the 24th September meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 2: Active Topics #1 : Face-to-face Bridge

2. **PS** noted that the advice on the EBU website had been updated since we last spoke. **FD** reported that Stamford BC is now doing four sessions per week (max 7 tables, usually full) and that it is run as a single round event (ie no movement of pairs). **JP** reported that he had concerns about having cardboard screens and pointed out that recent guidelines meant that unless food or drink was being consumed at a table masks had to be worn; this effectively reduces the interest.

ITEM 3: Active Topics #2 : Experiences with Online Platforms

3. **PS** reported that he had tried the EBU offer of a trial on RealBridge; others had too and found it impressive. While some like the video, others find it a distraction and studios faces are not always an inspiring view, so some prefer the BBO atmosphere. The ability of a TD to turn up at the table in person (ie by video) was appreciated. It was noted in discussion that
 - a. RealBridge already supports multiple teams games, and is the planned platform for the Tollemache (and the EBU Autumn Congress before that). **JF** reported being part of a trial of Swiss Teams on this platform, but noted that scoring the event had proved a struggle.
 - b. The attempt by RealBridge to replicate face-to-face actions was appreciated by some, but felt to be a missed opportunity by others. Some commented favourably on the appearance and enforcement of the “stop card” usage.

- c. Some experiences of RealBridge on an iPad were less than ideal (but it is early days). RealBridge is not yet available to the public although some clubs (Andrew Robson, Richmond) are running regular sessions there. [Shireen Mohandes](#) is a good POC if you want to get involved. Offline, KS reported that a small number of Herefordshire players also joined one of the EBU hosted taster session on the “Realbridge” platform; while there were some issues, (notably one lady whose tablet did not communicate with the site during one round at least), the video and audio feeds were thought to be very worthwhile additions to the functionality available.
4. **KT** reported that in preparation for the Oxfordshire team-of-8 Wessex League, they had prepared detailed instructions for managing of replicated boards across multiple matches, and these are [available from the OBA website](#).
5. **KH** reminded us of the online platform feature list which he had initiated, and reported that he has recently instigated a new venture – a [Bridge Standards Working Group](#) – which was getting positive attention from both NBOs and online platforms. He pointed out that there were three new platforms soon to emerge – one undisclosed at this time, plus [Neo-bridge](#) and Pianola Play (rumoured, no web reference). Different platforms have different offerings (although these will converge over time) and different strengths.

[KH had to depart at this point].

ITEM 4: Active Topics #3 : Relationship of CBAs/NBOs with clubs

6. We raised this question at the last meeting and deferred discussion to the Facebook Group. **PS** opened by noting that in Gloucestershire the recent survey highlighted the need to involve clubs more and to that end the GCBA was active now in rebuilding a bridge between the County Committee and the clubs. **MV** reported that in Worcestershire they have run meetings for a few years for Club Chairs and that has led to successful involvement. **MP** reported that in Suffolk clubs are encouraged to input agenda items to the County Committee, and the club-county relationship has grown over lockdown. **PC** reported that in Staffs & Shrops clubs are invited to send a representative to any County Committee meeting but in practice only an occasional appearance happens. **MT** reported that there was an open invite to clubs in Warwickshire, but that none had attended during his tenure as Warwickshire Vice Chair.
7. **PS** summarised by saying that we had good examples here where successful engagement was possible, so we should not be discouraged from trying.

ITEM 5: Active Topics #4 : EBED Priorities and CBA relationship with teachers

8. **PS** raised this because EBED are just starting to plan their future now with a new CEO in place; it was agreed that a sense of direction from EBED would be valuable, as a refresher from when Giles Ip visited this group a few years back. The first aspect which was raised was marketing and the profile of the game; nothing is happening and some current publicity (bridge articles in newspapers) is waning. The split between EBED and EBU (both as a legal nicety, and in their activities) was unhelpful here.
9. On the question of Youth Bridge (a key plank of EBED responsibilities), **FD** reported that at Stamford BC, which had been strongly engaged with schools, they are now expecting a two-year gap before restarting. The big difficulty is seeing how to get schools en masse engaged in learning bridge online. Schools bridge has to be a locally driven event.

10. On engagement with teachers, it was noted that while English Bridge School (EBS) is up and running there are many teachers not engaging with it – for which the main reason voiced was a preference for using their own teaching material rather than the EBED books (**JF** reporting this for Hampshire and **MP** for Suffolk). **MV** reported that BCL holds a regular teachers' meeting. **RP** raised the question of whether it was existing teachers on which we should focus, or is it about acquiring new teachers? Some counties have fewer teachers and some have more (online) teachers than in face-to-face days.
11. As short-term focus for EBED, **FD** suggested that getting EBS up and running and making it into an effective forum for teachers was very important. **PS** reported that his county had many teachers outside EBTA who were not in touch with EBED, and asked whether CBAs ought to be doing more in communicating with teachers.

ITEM 6: Active Topics #5 : Managing Online Hesitations

12. **JP** has come across some recent incidents where the way forward was unclear. The question was how to handle issues in head-to-head matches where there was little opportunity for a TD to visit the table and much less information available than is true in Virtual Clubs (which have a Table History including timing of all events). **JF** highlighted the difficulty of resolving when slow play could be associated with cheating. It was noted that there are many more reasons online for slow play, so that reading anything into a slow bid/play is much less certain. It was noted that commenting ("sorry, got distracted") when something happens would help defuse some situations. **PS** advised that tolerance was the best approach.
13. **JP** also asked about time limits on games, and it was suggested that on BBO there is a time limit even on head to head matches (based on 10 minutes a board) but in practice it is rare for it to matter. **KH** pointed out that there is a "+slow+" option in match set-up which can be used to avoid the timeout ([see this blog](#)).

ITEM 7: Active Topics #5 : The Midlands Counties Online League

14. **PS** reported that arrangements were in place for the first round this coming weekend. He reported that the Derbyshire & Gloucestershire teams had agreed to play a team-of-4 in Division One (but team-of-8 in other divisions). The suggestion that this disallows them from winning the league was not voted on.
15. One outstanding question was the management of the UMS payment; a fee comparable with the standard one was expected. **MW** volunteered to chase down the details of the amount and how that worked from Paul Hammond. Some counties (eg Suffolk) were running leagues and charging the players an entry fee; such events are liable for a charge if played on BBO and Suffolk is planning on paying \$10/team to BBO. We agreed that we were not charging players to pay in the MCOL and were therefore not liable to pay anything to BBO. **PS** agreed to check with Gordon that the position we were taking was valid. **PS** explained that in Gloucestershire some events earned money, and others (particularly teams games) were free.
16. **PS** confirmed that the deals for the day would be distributed on the day to the Match Arrangers, and that it would be one LIN file for each stanza.

ITEM 8: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

17. Four reports were received offline

- a. Derbyshire: Year 1 & 2 lessons are now ongoing. The weekly County Pairs is still getting 15 tables, and the Pivot Teams of 4 and Premier teams of 4 competition are ongoing. Instead of the Team-of-8 inter-club event DCBA is now running an interclub team-of-4 competition with 40 teams entered.
- b. Herefordshire : the club pairs hosted by HBA has its third session this evening, Ross BC online Pairs continues to average about 24 pairs and a number of Herefordshire members play in the Newent club pairs on Wednesday evenings with about 20 pairs. Another club, Marches, successfully held its first online session on the "YourBridgeClubOnline" site which attempts to replicate the feel of a club duplicate session. The site was reported to be rather less user-friendly, but is in the early stages of its development, hoping to add audio and video facilities later. The HBA committee will soon be discussing, inter alia, further online competition formats and how the Western League might proceed this year.
- c. Gloucestershire: continues its mix of events and the last Swiss Teams evening had an odd number of teams, so that a team of robots were introduced (and they came first).
- d. Staffs & Shrops: at the AGM a motion was passed which eliminated the word "duplicate" from the constitution. SCBA is resuming the weekly "no fears" pairs sessions starting Thursday 15th October and currently taking entries for the Staffs online league.

18. At the meeting we learned that

- a. From Hampshire **JF** reported some disappointment with online Virtual Club figures, as people are finding too many other opportunities to play, and in such cases a club could lose out. The Surrey Green Point weekend had worked well.
- b. From Leicestershire **DB** reported on a successful AGM online and the welcomed receipt of two Dimmie Fleming awards. LCBA is at work trying to encourage some non-affiliated clubs to become satellites of a Virtual Club (the same is happening with U3A Cheltenham and Cheltenham BC).
- c. For Nottinghamshire **MG** reported that their online AGM was successful, and that the NCBA is now trying to follow the example of various county clubs in becoming seriously active online.
- d. For Warwickshire **MT** reported that the WCBA had its AGM online and had one Dimmie Fleming award to announce. A couple of clubs had been considering face-to-face bridge but their plans are now believed to have been put on hold.
- e. For Oxfordshire **KT** said that little had changed and online numbers were holding up. She reported that OBA's reaching out to non-affiliated clubs has started well with a half dozen stepping forward for an improved relationship.
- f. For Northamptonshire **FD** said there was little change; the uptake on learning was not as high as previous year, but mentoring and improvers sessions were continuing.

- g. For Worcestershire **MW** commented on concern about “over-bridging” and **MV** commented that he had changed the profile of one competition to encourage people to move over to Virtual Club duplicates. **PS** commented that variety was key and noted that in Gloucestershire the CBA runs five different events none of which mirrors a club duplicate.
- h. For Suffolk **MP** reported on an insatiable appetite for online play and that a good handful of clubs are running supervised play sessions. All the SCBA competitions are now running online with attendances up by between 10% and 40%. There is an intent to keep some of these online forever.

ITEM 9: AOB and NEXT MEETING

19. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 22th October. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES