



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 11th August 2022 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Apologies: Richard Evans (Suffolk), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Rob Procter (Oxfordshire), Julia Staniforth (Nottinghamshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 7th July 2022 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website. **DB** was able to listen but technical issues prevented any audio contribution from him.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. It was noted that a new release had just emerged from RealBridge; it offers the ability to pre-load a set of results (eg from a past International Competition) so that players, as they complete each board, can see what others outside this game have done. In support of teaching, there is now the ability for the teacher to share with players (it replaces the table in the player view) either their screen or just the score window, and the teacher can use the latter to step everyone through the play of a hand by stepping through it on their own screen. The pre-loading capability supports the uploading of specific play sequences for demonstration by the teacher. Players can chat publicly or just to the teacher.
3. **PS** asked about how the BBO/RealBridge split was playing out in different counties, explaining that in Gloucestershire clubs there was more BBO than RealBridge, and in the County games it was usually BBO for Pairs events and RealBridge for Teams events. **RM** reported that in Lincolnshire it was RealBridge for Pairs events, but – it being free – BBO was used for all Teams games. **PC** reported one session a week in Staffs on RealBridge, others being BBO. Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire confirmed they always use screens on RealBridge, but most others did not.
4. **PS** asked how much of County programmes were now being arranged for online play. Many reported that Teams games, in particular league matches, were heavily online, mostly to avoid travelling. Most counties are allowing matches also to be face-to-face by agreement, but if any dispute the match becomes online. **MT** reported that the Warwickshire CBA plan for their Championship Pairs was for heats and final to be face-to-face. **JF** and **PS** explained that their counties were testing the players' appetite with a trial of some face-to-face events in the autumn, and would commit later.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

5. **MV** (and **PS** similarly) was able to report a new peak in face-to-face numbers over the past week – but no explanation for why this would happen in August was forthcoming. Generally, some clubs are running only live, and some only online, and some both – in a way that seems to fit a fairly evenly-balanced appetite in the playing population.
6. The current expectations for the autumn live congresses (Weston, then Newport and then Malvern, all in October) was positive. The July Herefordshire/Gloucestershire Congress at Ross-on-Wye had 20 tables in the Swiss Pairs and 15 tables in the Swiss teams, which was not great but was satisfactory. Although there has long been a sense of the stronger players waiting for a critical mass before they return to face-to-face games, there is some evidence this is now happening.
7. There was a short discussion about players' preferences when presented with small numbers; many now switch to cross-imps rather than match points when this happens.

ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING

8. Douglas Wright had presented on BridgeWhiz at the last meeting, and in the weeks since has done multiple presentations about Shark Bridge. A number present had seen the presentations and were impressed, but had not yet found time to download Shark Bridge and try it themselves.
9. The need for online training was subjectively confirmed, although it is difficult to quantify the latent demand. The fact that both RealBridge and BBO (in addition to Teaching Tools such as Shark Bridge) are active in adding new features to support online teaching is important evidence. There are now multiple sources of online teaching (reinventing the wheel?), but the ease of integration of these with Assisted Play sessions, which a club needs to run if learners are ever to become club members, is not always clear. The sources and the integration are the subject of a study by the EBU's Education WG at this time. The most efficient use of all the possibilities might take some time to emerge.
10. **FD** commented on how useful NoFear Bridge has proven, in supporting lessons with exercises and other activities. As with Shark Bridge, all players get to play every hand when required on this platform.
11. Some online learning resources not previously noticed include:
 - a. Material from the ACBL at <https://www.acbl.org/teachers-lounge/#materials> which does include a number of lessons on card play
 - b. Material from the Swedish BF (in English) hidden away on the WBF website at <http://www.worldbridge.org/resources/youth/wbf-teaching-material/>
 - c. Eddie Kantar and others contribute to <https://www.bridgetoday.com/store/lessons/index.php> where online courses can be purchased.

ITEMS 6/7: The Midlands Counties Online League & No Fear Swiss Events

12. There are no known issues with the plans for the MCOL; it was agreed that the existing Dawes, Porter and Markham trophies should from 2021-22 onwards be awarded to the winners of the corresponding online league.

13. For the No Fear Swiss events, we need someone else to step up to work with Mike Willoughby on the organizing of these (primarily liaison with Sarah Amos and managing entry lists); nobody volunteered. Arm twisting is needed. Mike Willoughby is in the process of setting up a central bank account to manage the funds associated with these games.

ITEM 8: ROUND ROBIN OF NEWS

14. From those present, in aspects not already covered, we had

- a. **PC** reported that Staffs & Shrops had lost its County HQ but had so few plans for face-to-face events that the SSCBA can cope.
- b. **MT** asked about the audit issue being raised at the coming EBU EGM; **PS** explained that the proposal was that the comprehensive audit undertaken annually for some time has become an unnecessary expense, and the proposal is that the same checks are done, but these are spread over a five-year period, considerably reducing the cost. **MT** noted that it appears that the new EBU Audit proposal would transfer liability for the financial accuracy from the Auditors to the EBU Board, not EBU shareholders.
- c. **RM** from Lincolnshire reported a new and improved programme for the County including 9-High events and hybrid events. There is lots of new teaching (four new teachers) and there are Master Classes planned for more experienced players.

15. By email we received reports that:

- a. Mike Willoughby from Worcestershire: RealBridge is used universally at County level, and BCL used by one (significant) club. County level games are almost entirely online though the intent is to move championship events to F2F and to offer options in leagues and knockouts.
- b. Jim Parker from Derbyshire: all County bridge is F2F and although some nights have low attendance, the intent is to recover to pre-pandemic numbers. DCBA is planning to run their inter-club team-of-eight F2F October-March although expectations are for only about 60% of the pre-covid numbers. For Derbyshire, with the DCBA and Affiliated Bridge Clubs owning the county premises (3 clubs play there too) the F2F table fees are essential. An extra teacher is starting to run bridge courses on a Friday evening (new night and this is aimed at younger players that won't normally do courses on a school night. For MCOL, Derbyshire can only field teams to play F2F or on BBO.
- c. Keith Stait from Herefordshire: regrettably another club, Hereford BC, was forced to close due to lack of numbers attending sessions, but more happily, Ledbury BC is due to recommence F2F bridge. HCBA's weekly game continues to run online, and a limited schedule of intra-county competitions for next year is in preparation with an emphasis on F2F events. The tuition class is in recess for the summer but it is hoped that 12 (or more?) pupils will sign up for the resumption in September. It is intended that the HBA AGM will again be held online during September.

ITEM 8: NEXT MEETING

16. We agreed that the next meeting will be back to the first Thursday of the month, on 1st September, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES