

# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
<b>PLUS: Shireen Mohandes (SM, RealBridge)</b>			
Apologies: Dean Benton (Leicestershire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Ian Sidgwick (Gloucestershire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)			

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

## ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. **PS** reported two items from the news:
  - a. The INTOBRIDGE platform has gone live, with a Pro-Am invitation event and commentary by Zia, and associated YouTube videos. It was suggested that post BBO and RealBridge, our communities lacked the appetite to learn a new interface.
  - b. The STEPBRIDGE platform has reported issues (being resolved) with cheating in the same vein as we have seen with BBO in the past.
3. **SM** reported on a several RealBridge events of potential interest:
  - a. On the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> December there is an open invitation to engage in a “Up Over / Down Under” match between British Isles players and those in Australia / New Zealand. Participants will be split into three camps so that they play people of appropriate experience. Contact any club which hosts RealBridge if you are interested.
  - b. The sessions provided by RealBridge for training on Bridge Composer have proved popular, and are very informative. More are to come.
  - c. Middlesex is trialing a “pop up” Sunday afternoon in the style of Assisted Play with two mentors present to help. It aims to be different from the AP provided by teachers.
  - d. There is a very strong game in New South Wales on a Monday evening (Monday morning here) to which visitors are welcome, although ABF membership (which is free) is required.
4. She also talked about new features becoming available in RealBridge:
  - a. The ability to include a commentary in the traveller seen by players once a hand has been completed, something which fits in nicely with Simultaneous Pairs or with Unsupervised Practice sessions.

- b. There can be imposed actions (bidding or play) ingrained in a deal; this supports some teaching scenarios and supports par contests (of which several old sets of deals are available – courtesy of Barry Rigal, Bob Rowlands, and others).

#### **ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE**

5. In the past month the attendance at the face-to-face Weston Congress in Somerset was good (38T, 35T for the main event against 36T, 33T the year before) and at the Malvern Congress in Worcester was reasonable (21T, 23T) when competing against an online Green Point Swiss Pairs in Lancashire on the Saturday. It is likely both live events made a small but acceptable loss.
6. It remains the case that about 70% of bridge is face-to-face, with daytime clubs having a much easier time than evening clubs. **PS** reported that with the offer of the bridge club for County League matches on two evenings so far, only 2 of 6 matches one evening and 1 of 6 the other evening wanted to play live. There is a worry about club viability if the rent for premises increases over the winter.
7. The value face-to-face brings in recruiting new players to the Tournament scene was noted. Alternatives such as café bridge were seen as a welcome respite from wall-to-wall matchpoint pairs. **SM** reported that teams' games organised for a bundle of U3A clubs had provided very popular. **PS** reported on a Pairs League run in Cheltenham which involved cross-imping manually with 3 other tables; the extra social interaction that entailed had made the event very popular.
8. **FD** reported on several charity events being oversubscribed, as was also true for club bridge holidays. Several others reported successful bridge holidays and it was suggested that sharing the experience of, and the knowledge of how to run such holidays would be a Good Thing. These are excellent steps towards building a strong bridge community. **PS** will suggest this to the EBU including this in forthcoming club seminars.
9. **SM** commented on the large number of parallel games running at any time in an American championship; this increased the number of players with an opportunity to win. **KT & PS** reported on the running of restricted events alongside their main congresses.

#### **ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING**

10. There were reports of continued success on the teaching front from **JS, PC** and **JF**; **JF** also reported on a coming Fast Track weekend. **PS** asked about clubs without their own premises starting up teaching; **FD** reported that this had happened in Bourne and that the beginners' session was run in parallel with an open session – there was rather more noise from the beginners' group but the shared tea break was useful in building a sense of a single community.
11. **SM** suggested that she was seeing a shortage of teachers, and **PS** commented on the unfortunately long and broad commitment that was often needed of teachers; we need more cases where club members share the load rather than rely on heroic efforts of one individual.

## ITEM 6: The Midlands Counties League

12. The MCL is running successfully but some team managers had commented on the difficulty of persuading players to turn out to play on a particular platform – with different people refusing whether it was live or BBO or RealBridge. Similar issues had arisen with the recent running of the Edgar Foster Cup (which ran on BBO so as not to exclude Derbyshire). We agreed that **PS** would request and collate feedback from the team managers, and we would consider holding a meeting with them on the topic if that was deemed useful.
13. Even though for the MCL, live games are declared as preferred, all games so far this season have been online. To be fair, most happened to be with remote counties, so prospects for some live games later in the season remains (and the coming Leicestershire – Derbyshire is a strong candidate). **SM** reported being quoted out of date regulations for the MCL (in terms of default platform) and **PS** undertook to advertise more strongly the current position.

## ITEM 7: The Midlands Counties No Fear Swiss Events

14. The event scheduled for Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November had been agreed as an inter-county Swiss Pairs game in which counties can field as many pairs as they like (the total score of the three highest scoring being the county score). **MW** will arrange the TD function with Sarah Amos (or step in) and the arrangements for entry fees are as before – each county will collect their players' entry fees and remit £6 per pair to the account **MW** has set up. We must all advertise this event strongly.; **PS** reported that the representative nature of the event has already raised interest levels in Gloucestershire.

## ITEM 8: ROUND ROBIN OF NEWS

15. From those present, in aspects not already covered, we had:
- JF** reported that **SM** had been very helpful in setting up a Basingstoke match with players in Portugal, and that their “bridge & chips” games run in local pubs continued to be a great success.
16. And by email we had:
- Jim Parker from Derbyshire reported that every effort is being made there to get back to playing County Matches F2F, and that the Chair of the Selection Committee is getting Realbridge set up, so that might become an option too. The DCBA F2F calendar is full, so getting time on Realbridge to effectively adopt that platform for MCL matches maybe a lengthy process. Derbyshire has again failed to field a Tollemache team due to lack of volunteers to play on-line and particularly Realbridge. DCBA has scheduled the Midlands Mixed Pairs and Fritch for F2F on Sunday April 30<sup>th</sup>; with both starting at 1pm – all local counties to note!
  - Myra Scott & **MT** from Warwickshire: WCBA recently held their first County face-to-face event - the Mentored Pivot Teams, with numbers slightly down (~80%) from the last time this was held in 2019. Everyone was glad to be back, offering lots of positive feedback and looking forward to next time. (This success was very much down to the enthusiasm and hard work of the Education Teams and mentors from the various Clubs represented – but some clubs still struggled to raise teams for this). Face to face numbers remain a concern at several smaller clubs.

- c. Keith Stait from Herefordshire: sadly, the re-commencement of F2F bridge at Ledbury BC was unsuccessful and their committee has since decided to close the club. HCBA continue to run a Herefordshire Clubs online event, Thursday evenings on BBO. A limited schedule of intra county competitions for the season is in preparation with an emphasis on F2F events. First up is a No Fears Teams event on Saturday 19th November. The tuition class has restarted after the summer break and it is hoped that a number of the pupils will transition to club play during the coming months. A new course is intended to start in January 2023.

#### **ITEM 9: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

17. **PS** asked about the levels of involvement in the [National \(online\) Teams League](#), which is currently well through its first season with 35 teams in three divisions. A number present had not realised that this event was active. A new season starts in January.
18. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, on 1<sup>st</sup> December, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES