

## STAFFS & SHROPS V OXFORDSHIRE

Wolverhampton Bridge Club

13<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Oxfordshire had a good day for a change in all three matches, the A winning by 25 IMPs (12-8 VPs), the B by 146 (18-2) and the C by 208 (19-1).

The stats are as follow:

	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>	<i>Butlers</i>
Sheehy/Whitehouse (NS B)	+45	+39
Lawton-Smith/Slater (NS C)	+37	+35
Furnival/Birks (EW C)	+46	+32
Litchfield/Cottaar (EW C)	+44	+32
Geary/Patterson (EW B)	+44	+27
Flower/Stead (NS C)	+37	+26
Swadling/Dickinson (NS B)	+33	+17
Procter/Robinson (EW A)	+31	+17
Smith/Wilson (NS A)	+17	+04
Nettleton/Covill (NS A)	+13	-01
Williams/Wilson (EW B)	+10	-08
Talbots (EW A)	+07	-09

***Before continuing, the tardiness of this report gives me an opportunity to hail the achievement of our A team in qualifying for the Tollemache Final over the weekend – and doing so in style. Well done indeed – and long overdue. I was a member of the team the last time we achieved the feat, and it's so long ago that I can't remember all who played: I seem to remember that Nick Smith was NPC and the Lintotts featured as well as myself and Brian Claridge. Rob Procter was also playing. Sandra? Step forward anyone else still playing for the county today...***

### Board 3: EW game, dealer S

	65	
	A852	
	K853	
	KQ10	
KQ10432		AJ987
Q		J4
J976		AQ
J8		9654
	None	
	K109763	
	1042	
	A732	

One of the oddest auctions I've ever been involved in occurred at my table. South opened a multi 2D, which I deemed it prudent to pass, so North responded 2S (pass or correct). South duly corrected to 3H which rode round to my partner, who could diagnose a spade fit our way and thus backed in with 3S, which I raised to 4S, keeping a straight face. We had all pretty much put our bidding cards away when South disobeyed the laws of gravity by bidding 5H. As my trumps were a little better than they might have been(!), and defence was confined to the odd good card in partner's hand, I pushed to 5S, which went 1 down. It was gratifying to discover that South would

have made 5H by the easy option of playing Chris for AQ bare of diamonds, so our -100 beat even the -200 we would have conceded by defending 3H.

**Board 4: game all, dealer W**

	KJ	
	A973	
	AK97	
	Q104	
96		A108432
J10542		K
J5		106
AJ87		K632
	Q75	
	Q86	
	Q8432	
	95	

Some odd bidding once more. North opened 1H, Chris bid 2S weak and when this was passed round to North he doubled for T.O. South bid 3H and that was that. So oppo settled for playing in a 4-3 fit against a 5-1 break when they could have played a 5-4 fit with a 2-2 break. 3H didn't play especially well, losing 300 points. NS mostly made +110 or better.

**Board 5: NS game, dealer N**

	Q1052	
	8	
	K987652	
	9	
98		A4
A109753		K42
AJ43		Q
2		KQJ10853
	KJ763	
	QJ6	
	10	
	A764	

North evidently didn't fancy a vul pre-empt first in hand with such a weak suit and a 4-card major on the side, so passed, allowing Chris to open 1C. South overcalled 1S, I bid 2H and North lost no time in raising to 4S. Chris opted not to defend but 5C failed by one trick on a diamond lead to the King and a spade switch. A spade lead would have been equally terminal. 4S probably fails if the defence gets off to 2 rounds of trumps, but has chances otherwise, so Chris's decision was sound in one sense. However, a heart contract is more difficult to defend against and 450 was actually made 3 times, all by Oxon declarers, whilst one Oxon pair seem to have defended 4H. Birks/Furnival completed a good board for the county when they made 550, presumably in 5C\*.

I'll take a deep breath before proceeding to the next board...

**Board 6: EW game, dealer E**

	KQJ8	
	A1052	
	None	
	KQ1093	
A73		None
Q		K98643
AKQJ862		75
62		AJ854
	1096542	
	J7	
	10943	
	7	

The one certainty about a three-level major-suit pre-empt, first in hand and vul, is that it's based on a very long and (at worst) semi-solid suit. So when I heard an opening 3H from partner I knew that we had at most one trump and a couple of clubs to lose, with a good chance that any spade losers would go on my diamonds. So it didn't take long to find a practical raise to 4H. When North made a T.O double and South jumped to 4S, I realised that the downside of the heart raise was that I couldn't now bid 5D because it was certain to be construed as lead-directing on the way to 5H. Besides, 5D might play very badly opposite a single-suited hand with no outside entry to take discards on hearts. I might have doubled I suppose, but I opted to pass. Hearing 5C from partner was not a moment of joy! I corrected to 5H which was doubled for -1100. Now partner is a devotee of Lucas-style two openings, which he hasn't yet persuaded me to play, so his choices of opening bid were limited here to either 2H anyway (ie just a weak 2) or pass with the option to look for a way in later. 3H just doesn't begin to describe the hand (and 5C later is perhaps a further indication of mental turmoil: if you didn't have a 3H bid in the first place, do you have a 5C or 5H bid now?) 4S is sure to go 1 down. There just isn't enough there to do all that's needed. It's good to report that we have sufficient rapport and mutual respect (Chris is a fine player, anyway) to recover normal composure after such an incident. Not surprisingly there were a few other big results here and there. Sheehy/Whitehouse spared at least some of our blushes in the B match by taking the same 1100 after a similarly catastrophic auction, whilst Dickinson/Swadling conceded 950 defending 5D\* (note that 5D is a lucky make because North doesn't have a trump to lead either at trick one or when in with Ace of hearts: indeed it takes CK lead to hold the contract to 11 tricks). Procter/Robinson got 800 after a Lucas 2H opening, when their Standard Staffs oppo judged to play in 4C\* rather than spades (!). And Geary/Patterson scooped the pool when West was allowed to open 1D and subsequently bid and made 6D\* after their oppo tried to save in 5S. Huge amounts of cross-IMPs and Butlers swung on this board and those NSs who defended 5D for -600 or -620 must have felt mightily relieved after failing to make a save in 5S\*!

**Board 8: love all, dealer W**

West 986432 Q K1052 Q4      East KJ10 1054 AQ AKJ73

We bid P – (1NT) – Dbl – (2H) – 3S – (P) – 4S. I lost 2 trumps and heart (but could have made an overtrick by playing the first spade to the King). Amazing that four pairs missed this (though three of them were playing Standard Staffs). Cottaar/Litchfield got a fine 800 on these cards (wonder what the Staffs auction was there!)

**Board 9: EW game, dealer N**

North AJ KQJ76 J10 QJ102      South Q7632 3 KQ982 A4

Everyone's 3NT, one would think but Smith/Wilson have bravely recorded their auction for posterity: 1H-1S-2C-2D-3D-5D-5H-6C. 2D was fourth suit forcing and 3D fifth suit forcing (you're welcome to ask what that means) but was taken as natural, hence the misconstrued raise to 5D. This might have

had some play (though both black Kings are wrong) but any higher – no chance... Flower/Stead also went minus with these cards, though Geary/Patterson rescued something when their oppo did the same.

**Board 10: game all, dealer E**

	AKJ1052	
	A632	
	2	
	93	
987		Q3
854		Q9
KQ1073		A9854
42		KJ85
	64	
	KJ107	
	J6	
	AQ1076	

Chris opened the East hand 1D, South passed and I responded 2NT (we play the old-fashioned 3D raise as value-showing and 2NT as either a weak or strong distributional raise). Whether this has any merit or not, I'll leave you to judge but it just might have scored a goal here: however, North managed to bid 3S and was raised to game, and when the first two tricks were DA followed by a diamond to the Q, declarer had a good inkling that Chris held SQ as well as HQ and CK. So he should have made 12 tricks but didn't. (Memo: avoid this method at pairs.) This was another odd board, in that half the field missed game. Smith/Wilson own up to another mishap, their auction being (1D)-2C-(3D)-3S (end)

**Board 11: love all, dealer S**

West KJ1042 AK5 AQ5 A5      East Q98 J862 32 10943

This was odd for the opposite reason: no less than half the field bid game! I opened 2NT promising 20-22 including a five-card suit and Chris made a normal pass. Could he have justified 3C to discover that my suit was spades? I don't think so. Anyway, I made 9 tricks on a kindly diamond lead away from the King. Just how did people get to 4S, having decided it was a realistic target?

**Board 12: NS game, dealer W**

North QJ8 Q42 AQ82 854      South K7653 AJ87 105 AJ

Against me they bid P-1S-2D-2H-3S-4S. This is perhaps a more normal opportunity to punt game, because it's vulnerable. And lo and behold, the diamond finesse works, so despite the wasted CJ, the marginal game rolls in. This one finished 3-3.

**Board 16: EW game, dealer W**

	A103	
	AJ95	
	964	
	QJ2	
KJ42		865
K103		8742
Q1075		J
106		K8543
	Q97	
	Q6	
	AK832	
	A97	

3NT by North was the popular spot and Chris led C4. Declarer put in the 9 from dummy and this small and innocent error jeopardised the contract at trick 1. The 7 would have forced my 10 anyway, giving her 3 tricks in the suit. As it was, she won CJ and led a low diamond towards dummy. When partner's J appeared I had the presence of mind to realise that I could afford to overtake and return a club, which both opened up the suit and threatened dummy's only quick entry to the long diamonds. CQ was covered by the K and ducked, and Chris cleared the suit despite the fact that he had no entry: after all, declarer didn't know this. I discarded S4. Declarer won CA and ran HQ to King and Ace, following with a spade to Q and K. I exited a heart and she won the 9 but the rest was plain sailing now for the defence. We eventually won two spades, two diamonds and a club. Litchfield/Cottaar also got +50 but I don't know how. Everyone else made 430.

**Board 18: NS game, dealer E**

South AJ764 KJ853 None AQJ    North KQ85 Q2 K973 1053

The main danger to NS is bidding a slam, which fails on the losing club finesse, but no one did that. The secondary danger is failing to bid 5S if EW try to save in cheaply in 5D. No one did that either, though John Slater confesses to a brainstorm when he played hearts from the wrong hand after failing to spot a significant discard and left himself unable to draw trumps. Flower/Stead also went down, by undisclosed means.

**Board 19: EW game, dealer S**

West A106 J32 AJ52 KQJ    East KQ873 K8 109764 5

It's normal to speed into 4S and making it depends on how one views the diamond situation. I'm no great statistician but my (instinct?) in these cases is to play the Ace, which gains whenever the suit is 2-2 or a singleton honour drops. The alternative line of taking two finesses may fail here, because the suit is 2-2, but turns out to be unnecessary when South turns up with the King at his second turn. Chris found an unusual solution to the problem. He finessed first and then followed (when stuck in dummy) by playing the Ace, because he noticed that his RHO, in winning the first trick, had played the card second from the right hand end of his hand! Bravo for table presence!

**Board 20: game all, dealer W**

West AKQJ 4 AKQJ3 K62    East 86432 K72 1052 J5

We bid 2D (big) – 2S (very weak) – 3D – 3S – 4S. No doubt a common sort of auction.

Dickinson/Swadling got a gift when their oppo played a partscore in diamonds, and I know of a near miss by another Staffs pair – but I'm not saying to save someone's embarrassment on our side.

**Board 23: game all, dealer S**

West Q8 Q2 Q1053 K10962    East J95 AKJ873 K9 A7

South opened 1S, raised to 2S by North, and Chris bid 3H with every hope of spade shortage opposite. I dredged up a raise to 4H from somewhere deep inside and this rolled in, losing a diamond and two spades. Just over half the field got to game but that included only two Staffs pairs.

**Board 24: love all, dealer W**

West AJ92 84 K9876 93    East K65 AQ103 J KQJ74

Our auction was P-(P)-1C-(1D)-P-(P)-1H-(P)-1NT-(P)-2NT-(P)-3NT. The opening lead was Queen of diamonds, overtaken by the Ace and followed by a spade switch, my 9 drawing the Queen from North. These happy developments culminated in +430. Three pairs missed game and Lawton-Smith-Slater got a bonus when EW went minus somehow.

**Board 26: game all, dealer E**

	A62	
	Q74	
	863	
	AKJ8	
K		Q4
KJ9652		A1083
J94		AK1052
Q53		92
	J1098753	
	None	
	Q7	
	10764	

Chris opened 1D and South overcalled 1S (wow!) I was there with 2H, as was North with 4S. It's very difficult for East to judge that 5H is the bid now (though that can go off more than one, depending on guessing and the defensive line). Anyway, the club finesse sees 4S home easily. There are times when normal bridge has to give way to inspiration. 4S was bid and made by less than half the field and there were a number of +100s to NS.

**Board 28: NS game, dealer W**

West QJ9763 KQ972 104 None A84 1085 KJ862 A7

Another argument in favour of Chris's beloved Lucas Twos. I didn't open the West hand in their absence, knowing I had a sure way into the auction later and duly did so, but this wasn't enough to get us to game. 3S was all we managed: red faces all round when the trump finesse worked and HJ came down, for 11 tricks. Only 6 IMPs lost but nonetheless, I feel a system change coming on....

**Board 31: NS game, dealer S**

South A1082 Q103 AQJ7 75 North J96 AK9754 8 QJ6

The Staffs auction fell short here at my table with the auction 1H-1S-2S-4S (!) Trumps were 3-3 but mercifully, declarer still couldn't get home. Everyone else was +620 or 650 in 4H. Well, we deserved some luck, I suppose.

**Board 32: EW game, dealer W**

West 105 KJ975 K AK932 East KJ86 A106 J1085 65

We bid unopposed 1H-1S-2C-2H (end), Chris taking the view that his hand was worth only a simple preference, with the option to raise any try to game. I can't fault this reasoning. It's one of those games you either bid or you don't, with no blame attached either way. 10 tricks aren't certain anyway. I played on spades early, as the most likely way of guaranteeing the 2H contract, so made only 9 tricks after losing 2 tricks in the suit. In game, you're pretty certain to make it unless you lose to the bare HQ.

So there it is. I should spend more time perhaps, checking people's contributions to these notes – for which many thanks. But it's old news now compared with the big recent news!

**JOHN WILLIAMS**

**22/11 16**