

OXFORDSHIRE V DERBYSHIRE
18th September 2005: Oxford Bridge Club

Derbyshire are similar to ourselves, in terms of strength in depth. John Armstrong was a welcome addition to their A team last Sunday, but otherwise there was little to choose between their A and B teams, who prevailed over ours by 22 IMPs (13-7) and 7 IMPs (11-9) respectively. However, it was their C team which proved to be the main difference, seeing off our own much-vaunted outfit by 128 IMPs, much more than the margin needed for 20-0.

This had an unfortunate effect on the overall cross-IMPing, of course, bringing our A and B pairs down badly in the following schedule:

	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>	<i>Butler</i>
David and Jeremy Bygott (EW B)	+22.33	+47
Robert Procter and Michael Robinson (EW A)	+05.67	+29
John Slater and Nelson Stephens (NS A)	-08.50	-2
Keith Bennett and Steve Noble (NS A)	-12.67	-3
Mike Webley and Nigel Wilkes (NS B)	-19.83	-12
Nick Doe and Nick Smith (EW B)	-21.83	-7
Ron Quainton and Peter Russell (EW C)	-32.00	-23
John Williams and Chris Wilson (NS B)	-32.50	-29
Norman Gascoyne and Jean Squires (EW C)	-48.00	-46
John Clifford and Gillian Lonsdale (NS C)	-49.83	-38
Steve Elliott and Peter Jordan (NS C)	-51.00	-47
Geoff Nicholas and Debbie Roberts (EW A)	-58.83	-52

All the more credit, therefore, to the top 4 pairs, three of whom were in the A team, with possibly the hardest task, plus the Bygotts for a fine card against the (almost) equally tough Derby B team.

About half the boards were (or should have been!) flat but the other half held a lot of swing potential.

Board 4: Game All, dealer W

	♠None	
	♥K1032	
	♦J10652	
	♣AQ108	
♠107542		♠AJ863
♥964		♥QJ8
♦73		♦None
♣J96		♣K7532
	♠KQ9	
	♥A75	
	♦AKQ984	
	♣4	

It's not often that partner opens the bidding and you find yourself looking at AKQXXX in his suit, but it happened for me here. East overcalled 1S and we

continued 4NT-5D-6D, scoring 1390 on Ace of Spades lead. Opening the North hand is the key to an easy 1370 or so, or 1100 if the opponents save in 6S. Oxfordshire managed to bid the slam twice (Slater/Stephens were the other pair), languished in game 3 times and took an 800 once. This compared with Derby's record of 2 bid and made slams, 2 X 1100 penalties, 1 X 800 penalty and one game.

Board 5: NS Game, dealer N

North ♠J92 ♥A632 ♦K7 ♣AK43 South ♠Q7 ♥KQJ98 ♦QJ2 ♣862

Everyone was in 4♥ and only 1 pair went down (the unlucky pair were Webley/Wilkes). I say unlucky because it takes a club lead from West's J75 or East's Q109 to beat the contract. At my table, Chris got the fatal lead and played a spade to the Q and K after drawing trumps in 2 rounds. West knew he couldn't cash ♠ A immediately, because a club would go from dummy on the established Jack, so he continued clubs. Now, when East won her ♦A and cashed a club winner, she should have switched back to spades for the setting trick, but she didn't so the second spade loser went away on the thirteenth club. Oh, I also forget to mention that one Derby C pair bucked the trend by saving in 4♠* over 4♥, which gave Quinton/Russell 800, so God was still in his heaven at this stage.

Board 7: Game All, dealer S

	♠K873	
	♥KQ83	
	♦976	
	♣106	
♠65		♠9
♥742		♥J95
♦AK543		♦102
♣754		♣AKQJ932
	♠AQJ1042	
	♥A106	
	♥QJ8	
	♣8	

It was hereabouts that God deserted us. Chris and I bid 1♠-2♠-4♠, with never a squeak from East, and I congratulated us on sight of dummy. This was short-lived, however, when West cashed ♦AK and gave his partner a ruff! The sad aspect was that the defence had done nothing to justify their plus score. We had to score this board up with Doe/Smith, who naturally enough had found rather more to do in the bidding and ended in 5♣*. As you can see, this makes against careless defence but goes for 500 otherwise (particularly galling when you discover it was all a phantom). Our overall record on this board was pretty dismal: we made 4♠ once and 5♣ once, which should have been more than enough to show a profit, but we let 4♠ through twice (!), 5♣ through once, and we went down in 4♠ 4 times to Derbyshire's once. Apart from a partscore conceded, the only time 5♣ went for 500 was as mentioned above.

Board 8: Love All, dealer W

West ♠K4 ♥K5 ♦K862 ♣Q10983 East ♠865 ♥Q102 ♦QJ103 ♣AK4

This was bid to 3NT six times, after a shaded 1NT by West. North led ♠Q and declarer had nothing better to do than win, knock out ♦A and pray (this is becoming a religious treatise). When this happened at my table I was looking at a 4-4-3-2 13-count and it was child's play to win ♦A and cash ♥A before playing A and another spade, thus protecting partner from any possibility of going wrong – (perish the thought!). I knew I was doing the wrong thing if the opening lead had been from QJX, but the likely gain seemed to outweigh the small risk involved. Three declarers actually made 3NT (mercifully, only one of these was from Derby, whilst two Oxon defenders did the obvious thing, to one from Derby. Perhaps there was hope yet, after all.

Board 12: NS Game, dealer W

	♠A93	
	♥Q	
	♦AJ7	
	♣KQ10764	
♠KQ842		♠J76
♥865		♥KJ104
♦109642		♦K3
♣None		♣A852
	♠105	
	♥A9732	
	♦Q85	
	♣J93	

Chris, now radiant as West in a matching all-grey outfit (trousers, top, hair and face – I can claim responsibility only for the last two), found a good moment to open an off-centre weak 2♠, North competed with 3♣ and I bid the (fairly) obvious 3♠, which made in comfort. NS are cold for 4♣ and have some small chance in 3NT. The only pair to try the latter was Clifford/Lonsdale, but enterprise went unrewarded on this occasion. Two pairs were lucky enough to play 4♣*: one was the Bygotts, the other, unfortunately, was seated against Slater/Stephens at the time.

Board 16: EW Game, dealer W

You are East, on lead against 4♥ after North, answering an enquiry, has shown a maximum weak 2♥. You hold ♠QJ76 ♥KJ6 ♦4 ♣K10973. Your choice? Well, I reasoned that as I might well have 2 natural trump tricks, the singleton lead might stand to lose more than to gain, which left the choice between a spade and a club, so I opted for the safer ♠Q. Disaster! North, whose spade suit was AK9 in dummy and 105 in hand, had time and space to ditch his one losing club on the third spade, losing two trumps and a diamond. A club lead is best, but even a diamond lead and return (with McKenny for a club switch) will just do. One Oxon pair (Doe/Smith) were allowed to make 4♥ after a spade lead, compared with two Derbyshire pairs. Everyone else went down. It's hands like this that help determine the outcome of matches, just as much as enforced errors.

Board 17: Love all, dealer N

North ♠AQ85 ♥Q52 ♦A52 ♣Q75 South ♠62 ♥AJ8643 ♦KQ64 ♣A

We bid 1NT-2D-2H-3D-4H-P, which was possibly fairly common, and were relieved

to find both major-suit finesses wrong. No Oxfordshire pairs aspired to slam on this deal. Three Derbyshire pairs did, but only one got a friendly lead into ♠AQ, so the other two went down. Again, this kind of board influences the result without any blame attaching either to bidding or missing the slam.

Board 18: NS Game, dealer E

West ♠None ♥KJ64 ♦Q732 ♣K10954 East ♠AK964 ♥98 ♦KJ5 ♣AJ8

More of the same. Those who missed 3NT regretted doing so, but many of those who bid it experienced greater regret. It comes down to the two-way finesse in clubs: get it right and you're in clover, wrong, and you're likely to be struggling. Against me, declarer was West, who got it right. This was a terrible board for the county – of the 5 declarers who bid and made 3NT, 4 were from Derby, and of the 4 who bid it and went down, 3 were from Oxon!

Board 20: Game All, dealer W

	♠KQ6432	
	♥5	
	♦AK2	
	♣K83	
♠107		♠A85
♥AQJ632		♥10874
♦None		♦J53
♣A9654		♣1072
	♠J9	
	♥K9	
	♦Q1098764	
	♣QJ	

I think all the NS pairs found this easily the most difficult board of the day. Against me the oppo had a gadget, an opening 2♥ bid showing a heart/club two-suiter with at least minimum opening values. Chris had no real alternative to a 2♠ overcall, and seeing 6 of my 9 points in opener's suits, I passed without great thought. West re-opened with a double to show his extra strength and Chris re-doubled (likewise). East bid a quiet 3♥ and I passed again, first immediately and then again when West pushed on to 4♥. Each pass was successively agonising. I felt wholly inadequate when 4♥ made, especially on seeing that 4♠ our way might easily be let through. EW have no real problem, in the sense that they're pretty much bound to bid 4♥, and are very likely to push on to 5♥ if necessary. In practice, only two pairs bid and made 4♠ and the good news is that they were both from Oxon (well done Slater/Stephens and Gascoyne/Squires). 4♥ was bid and made 3 times (2-1 in Derby's favour, though ours was doubled). 5H went down 3 times (twice by Oxon) and made twice (with an overtrick, incredibly!) – the big winners here were the Bygotts, and the losers were Quainton/Russell, who had doubled it (ouch!).

Board 23: Game All, dealer S

South ♠862 ♥QJ2 ♦A105 ♣AK95 North ♠AQ10743 ♥AK74 ♦Q72 ♣None

The trouble with Stayman on this hand, if partner opens 1NT, is that the knowledge of a 4-4 heart fit, on its own, isn't that useful. OK, you may be just short of a slam-try 3♠ at your first turn, but aren't you wanting to play in either 4♠ or 6♠, depending on

partner's overall strength and fit? Chris and I bid 1NT-2♣-2♦-4♠-P, which Chris was the first to say didn't do justice to the North hand. Forcing after a transfer would have helped much more. Everyone would want to be in slam on this deal, but only 4 pairs managed it – 2 on either side: well done to Bennett/Noble and Webley/ Wilkes, and commiserations to Doe/Smith and Elliott/Jordan.

Board 26: Game All, dealer E

South ♠986 ♥J10863 ♦AK2 ♣A7 North ♠J ♥KQ74 ♦QJ76 ♣10832

Another hand which NS pairs found difficult. As you can see, 4♥ is stone cold, and might be difficult to bid in isolation. However, when partner is able to compete to 3♥ and EW bid and support to 3♠, 4♥ should surely represent at worst an excellent each-way bet? (South can picture short spades opposite and needs only ♣K or the actual ♦QJ, in addition to decent heart support). Only 2 pairs bid and made 4♥ (well done to Procter/Robinson). Chris and I were obliged to save in 4♠, 1 down, as were Clifford/Lonsdale's and Nicholas/Roberts's opponents, so all those are exonerated, but it's amazing how often 3♠ was bid and made (5 times!)

Board 27: Love All, dealer S

	♠Q	
	♥J4	
	♦AKQ1074	
	♣10843	
♠J10986		♠74
♥KQ1063		♥A975
♦2		♦J53
♣A6		♣K752
	♠AK532	
	♥82	
	♦986	
	♣QJ9	

I opened 1♠ as West, North overcalled 2♦, Chris made a Sputnik double and South contested with 3♦. I jumped to 4♥. Quite where South then found his 5♦ bid I don't know, but neither partner nor I felt able to double – a shame as we could have taken 500 double-dummy (worth more than the game we had bid!) However, the downside of opening on hands like West's is that partner frequently leads the first-bid suit and that's what happened here. Now, swap East's ♦J with dummy's 9 and the contract is making! As it was, we were lucky to get a puny +100. This was another terrible board for the county. There were part-scores and minor undoubled penalties aplenty (Doe/Smith were down 4 in 4♠ as NS - thank you for asking - after an offbeat opening bid) but we were also outnumbered on the significant scores: Slater/Stephens bid and made 4♥ but two Derby pairs managed the same feat and Procter/Robinson's opponents took 300 out of 5♦*.

Board 32: EW Game, dealer W

West ♠K10543 ♥J ♦Q10984 ♣AQ East ♠QJ92 ♥A3 ♦762 ♣KJ95

I opened 1♠ as West, Chris bid 2NT as East (asking in hearts) and I showed a minimum with 3♠. There we played, to lose 10 IMPs in the match – which was the

difference between winning and losing it - and a bucketful of cross-IMPs, because this game was bid almost everywhere. I remain completely unrepentant. Game is absolutely horrible (it makes because South holds both ♥A and ♦AK doubleton). About 90% of the time the defenders will take two diamonds and a diamond ruff to go with Ace of trumps, and even if they don't find that, declarer needs ♦J onside. So please don't mention this hand again. The toys are already out of the pram, and are liable to get trampled on. The Bygotts actually scored well as the cards lay when David found a T.O double of the game try and Jeremy saved in 5♥* for a mere -300.

JOHN WILLIAMS

26/09/05