

GLOUCESTERSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE
Cheltenham BC: 15th January 2012

Oxon A – (Cooper/Murphy, McIntosh/Paul, McPhee/Wilson, Williams/Wilson won 14-6 (+26 IMPs)
 Oxon B – Kazmierczak/Nicholson, Lintotts, Slater/Lawton-Smith, Webley/Wilkes won 12-8 (+12 IMPs)
 Oxon C – Clacey/Middleton, Finbow/Gascoyne, Flower/Stead, Quainton/Russell lost 9-11 (-5 IMPs)

	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>	<i>Butler</i>
Clacey/Middleton (EW C)	+36.33	+42
McIntosh/Paul (EW A)	+25.00	+30
Lintotts (NS B)	+22.83	+19
McPhee/Wilson (NS A)	+19.67	+19
Kazmierczak/Nicholson (NS B)	+7.83	+3
Flower/Stead (NS C)	+0.33	+4
Alater/Lawton-Smith (EW B)	-1.00	-3
Finbow/Gascoyne (NS C)	-7.17	-14
Williams/Wilson (EW A)	-7.67	-12
Webley/Wilkes (EW B)	-11.33	-7
Quainton/Russell (EW C)	-14.83	-16
Cooper/Murphy (NS A)	-16.33	-26

So much for bare statistics. The story of the day was a useful win for the A team against their nearest challengers for the Dawes Trophy, which raises hopes of a possible triumph at long last, a small win for the B, who let much of a big lead slip in the last 8 boards, and a narrow loss for the C. League placings: A stand 1st in the Dawes with 98 VPs, 12 ahead of 2nd placed Gloucestershire

B stand 5th in the Porter with 66 VPs, 19 behind leaders Derbys

C stand 5th in the Markham with 55 VPs, 34 behind leaders Warwickshire

This still only tells half the story: the A team shipped 67 IMPs in the first 8 boards (!) and were 68 down at half-way; a fight-back in the third quarter saw the deficit reduced to 29 IMPs and an avalanche of +55 IMPs in the final quarter completed an amazing turnaround. (208 IMPs were exchanged at the 4 tables, the eventual margin being 117-91.) It follows that swingy hands abounded...

Board 1: love all, dealer N

West KJ5 J108 Q652 J83 East Q64 AQ6532 None A1096

4H was reached at 5 of the 12 tables, despite North being able to open his balanced 17-count first in hand with either a strong NT, 1D or 1S. Just look how West's miserable flat collection of a King, a Queen and three Jacks dovetails with East's shapely 10-count. Chris Cooper's oppo fell on their feet despite a dubious auction: (1NT) – 2C showing hearts and another, anchor to the shorter suit – (2D) – 2H – (P) – 4H. It's normal to treat 6-4 hands as single-suited, particularly where the 6-carder is a major, so West's free bid of 2H in the actual auction was asking for trouble (as Chris says, he deserved to find partner with 5-4 in the majors) but made the cold heart game easy for East to bid. At my table I overcalled the strong NT with 2H, South essayed Lebensohl with 2NT (holding 1092 94 J10983 Q75), which made it hard for Chris to compete in hearts or for me to sail the boat on my own, so we ended up defending 3D (starting with 3 rounds of hearts didn't help the cause: anyway, our small plus was scant consolation for a game missed.) Alan Wilson, playing a weak/mini NT and 4-card majors, opened the North hand 1S, East overcalled 2H, Stuart passed and West raised defensively to 3H. Though not a game try, it was odd and very fortunate that East now didn't bid on.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

	A832	
	KQ	
	AKQ	
	K952	
J765		KQ104
4		8653
109765		J32
1043		A7
	9	
	AJ10972	
	84	
	QJ86	

Well done to McPhee/Wilson, Lintotts and Flower/Stead for bidding the cast-iron 6H and commiserations to three other Oxon pairs who had to defend the same contract. At the other 6 tables things weren't quite so straightforward. There was a disaster for the A team when after a 2H opening and a slight concern over agreed subsequent methods, Cooper/Murphy got to 6NT – against which KS lead wasn't hard to find! Some IMPs came back when McIntosh/Paul's oppo got to 4H only and there was a chance to more than recover the rest at my table when our oppo judged to play 6C: my partner suspected an Ace might be missing but the auction did nothing to suggest this would be in trumps (diamonds were unbid) and the lead of a singleton heart might well kill a key honour in my hand. So Captain Birdseye took the considered but unlucky view to lead a diamond, where Blind Pugh would have led a heart and gone plus.

Board 4: game all, dealer W

	73	
	AQ	
	432	
	AJ9873	
AQJ86		K10952
K102		54
A875		J109
10		Q42
	4	
	J98763	
	KQ6	
	K65	

Our bidding went 1S – (2C) – 2S – (3C) – 4S (end). The play started with CA, followed by CJ to Q, K and a ruff. Chris played a spade to the 9, ruffed dummy's last club, played a spade to the K and ran D10, hoping for an endplay on North. When the diamond was covered he had to win and play a diamond back and there was no guess on the heart switch, so we were down 1. I had thought myself a bit good for a pre-emptive 3S raise in our methods but I can see now that North's eventual opening lead was made easier by his partner's 3C raise. Still, 4S should fail on any lead but HA, so I'm not beating myself up. After 1S, 2C and 3S, Stuart McPhee found a raise to 4C, which became the final contract(!) Alan would have made this after a diamond lead and return, had trumps been 2-2, but as it was East could over-ruff the third heart and cash out. Still, this meant it was a small board. At Chris Cooper's table, Andrew bid 4H over 3S, rather than 4C, which persuaded Chris (a) to double 4S and (b) to lead HA (ouch!) Not such a small board now, especially when at the fourth

table, McIntosh/Paul sold out to 4H which made. 4H can't be described as a bad bid with the South hand: after all, it's a making game if allowed to be played, but it's unfortunate that it might also be construed as lead-directing. South has a genuine dilemma – 4H is the best bid if you think West might not push on to 4S; 4C is the best bid otherwise. All decisions by either side are close but Oxon A lost no less than 25 IMPs on the board.

Board 6: EW game, dealer East

South AK62 K7 QJ962 98

North 5 J2 K10854 AK1076

Six pairs in all found the easy 5D after a 1H opening by East. Well done to Cooper/Murphy for Oxon A and Kaz/Nicholson for the B. Unfortunately the other 4 pairs were all from Glos. My oppo sailed into it via X-2H-3D-5D (indeed, every making game bar one in the entire afternoon was bid against us, which did nothing for our cross-IMP score). 5D is hard to reach, however: at McPhee/Wilson's table the bidding was (1H)-X-(P)-3D-(P)-3NT(end), a quick 2 down after a heart lead. Alan comments that he found it hard to know what to bid as North on either round: yes – and it's no doddle for South either...

Board 7: game all, dealer South

	97	
	952	
	AJ9854	
	42	
10		K8643
K3		QJ107
Q107		63
AKQJ1086		75
	AQJ52	
	A864	
	K2	
	93	

At my table South opened 1S, partner doubled, North passed and I bid 2H (not liking my SK) and then passed 3C reluctantly: I suppose I should have chanced 3NT opposite a known big hand but it's difficult to see how this would succeed in practice against a sure-footed defence - who have two chances to cash in, after all. So how did the 3NT-ers fare? In the A team McIntosh/Paul went 5 down undoubled, in the B Webley/Wilkes were 3 down whilst Kaz/Nicholson took it 1 off and in the C Clacey/ Middleton were 2 down whilst Finbow/Gascoyne took it 1 off. Apart from some oddities (Cooper/Murphy were allowed to play 2S-1 as NS! and the Lintotts made 3D), the contract was normally clubs, where even 3C fails on pin-point defence (spade to Q, DK switch and an over-ruff on the third D to go with HA – this was what happened to my partner) but partscores generally made. Oxon A's misery was compounded, however, when 5C* made against McPhee/Wilson, thus giving us a loss of 20 IMPs on the board. (It's much easier to defend against 3C than 5C because clearly a miracle is needed, hence the diamond switch).

After we lost a further 6 IMPs on board 8 (partner failed to bash a thin game) scoring-up was not exactly fun. However bad we all felt, it was good to see that team spirit remained fully intact. Our captain, who has been honest to the point of embarrassment about his own performance on the day, is to be congratulated for ensuring continued good humour and determination. Not that the second set did anything to improve our chances...

Board 9: EW game, dealer North

North K75 A5 K104 AJ852 South QJ642 7 AQ9875 3

You open 1C, LHO (old fart with beard and glasses) intervenes with 1H, partner bids 1S and RHO 4H. Your go? At my table North went 4S without much thought, for 12 tricks when trumps behaved. Something similar must have happened regularly because only the Lintotts bid and made a slam. The action otherwise took place in the C match where Finbow/Gascoyne got 1100 from 5H* and Clacey/Middleton lost 800 a level lower. The intervention certainly makes things awkward because there's no time to discover the double fit. McPhee/Wilson had some sort of chance when they **were** able to find out about the diamonds but lost the spades instead: 1C-(1H)-2D-(3H)-4D-(P)-5D (end). From South's point of view, North could still have held a weak NT hand. Cooper/Murphy had the best chance I've heard about: 1NT (strong)-(P)-2H (spades)-(P)-2S-(P)-3D (GF)-(P)-4S (end). Chris had the chance to bid 3S rather than the sign-off 4S, which would have led to cue-bids and a slam. People often talk about the pre-emptive value of a weak NT but clearly, a strong one works just as well (though less frequently).

Board 10: game all, dealer E

North 863 973 A1083 1074 South A107 AK105 KJ9 A32

1H was the popular contract here but in a great board for Oxon B, the only two pairs in the entire field to bid and make 3NT were the Lintotts and Kaz/Nicholson. A good Fitch hand for the ladies to impress their male partners – or vice versa...

Board 11: love all, dealer S

North A10984 KJ K74 KQ10 South KJ6 10743 AJ109 64

Curiously, my opponents were the only pair in the field to bid and make a partscore in spades (2S+1). No less than 8 pairs pushed on to 4S and only one guessed well and made it (v Webley/Wilkes). That leaves 3 pairs and all these bid and made 3NT (in the A match Cooper/Murphy made 430 after a strong NT and raise to 3NT, followed by a spade lead from QXXX – phew, whilst McIntosh/Paul conceded the same score, and in the B match 3NT was just made against Slater/Lawton-Smith to complete a 20-IMP loss on the board for that team). All of this proves nothing except that life is randomly fair or unfair, most of the time – just depends on where you're standing when the lightning strikes....

Board 12: NS game, dealer West

West AQ1062 43 KQ10976 None East J9852 102 A53 AK2

You may have judged from foregoing comments that Williams/Wilson had an unlucky afternoon – and you'd mostly be right – but it's time to admit that this was one dishonourable exception. Our auction, which it pains me to reveal, was 1S-2NT-4D-4NT-5D-6S. 2NT was the usual raise to S3+, 4D was a control, 4NT was RKCB and my final bid was in the knowledge that we had one Ace too many, or one too few. I leave the reader to judge which of us was the greater idiot (but please don't tell me – we're a solid partnership, happy to share idiot status). For my part, bearing in mind that partner could have bid 4C with a first or second-round control (except I had them) or 5C Exclusion with a void, he was making a slam try with club losers plus a second-round control in another suit and must therefore have strong holdings in the majors. With 5 controls of my own and a fifth trump I could scarcely sign off in 4S so I took us over the top in a headstrong charge, bayonet fixed. Partner's 5D response to RKCB suggested a severely bent bayonet but, as I say, it was fixed – hence the daft final bid (this made no real difference because with SK wrong, we had three top losers anyway so it was a 4 or 6 hand). Graham Sadie, on lead against a slam bid after several minutes of

heavy breathing – mainly from my partner - held K73 K975 42 Q1086 and led – a club. We thus chalked up the most undeserved 980 of recent memory (notice I don't say ever). Clearly this hand is not a cakewalk and there were others left to lament their fate and perhaps a part in its unwinding: in the A team McIntosh/Paul were down 1 in 5S and McPhee/Wilson profited by the same result; in the B all was sanity but the C match produced the same exchange of 50s in 5S at two tables. We tried to apologise to team-mates at scoring-up time but they'd have none of it: it just shows how desperate we were at that stage for anything good to happen.

Board 14: love all, dealer East

West KJ8 AQJ4 QJ AQJ6 East 754 107 A95 108543

At my table Chris opened 2C third in hand as a prelude to 2NT without a 5-card suit. I relayed with 2D and South, who held AQ1032 83 K108743 None, came to life with 3D. Chris doubled to show the afore-mentioned and I decided to leave it in – I down for +100 to us. However, it was then patiently explained to me, as to an aged and confused relative, that the contract had been undoubled for +50. Just as well that 3NT is odds-against (though McIntosh/Paul for Oxon A got it through, as did Clacey/Middleton for the C). I'm reminded of the words of the hymn – "Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind"....

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

North AQ6 AK54 Q4 A964 South 752 QJ3 AK106 K52

Only two pairs ventured a slam on this collection. It's pretty horrible but with the spade finesse working and DJ coming down onside in 3 rounds it's difficult to go down (though an Oxon pair, names with-held, managed it). So the only 990 was notched up against – you've guessed it – yours truly. This completed a thoroughly wretched first half.

Board 17: love all, dealer N

	A3	
	J10632	
	KJ83	
	64	
10854		KJ76
AQ8		None
A109764		Q52
None		KJ8532
	Q92	
	K9754	
	None	
	AQ1097	

This offering produced the widest variety of results on any deal. I opened 1C second in hand and came to rest eventually in 4S. A winning heart finesse at trick 1 offered fleeting hope of success but with 2 trump losers and only one outside entry to dummy, I had to rely finally on playing diamonds for one loser by leading the Q up and hoping for a favourable position. No such luck! North had an answer to anything I did and the result was -3 for -150. With suits breaking badly and offside, this was definitely a defender's hand. The A team lost narrowly on the board when Cooper/Murphy lost 100 in 4H* and McPhee/Wilson took 300 from 5D* to cancel McIntosh/Paul's demise in the same contract. The B team lost out badly when the only notable results were -300 in 5H* by the Lintotts

and -800 by Webley/Wilkes in 6D*. The C team gained when Clacey/Middleton got 300 from 5H* and everyone else avoided a double.

Board 19: EW game, dealer South

West A9872 KQ J10876 2

East 54 A108542 5 AJ74

With spades 3-3 and hearts 3-2, I suppose 4H might be worth a bash at teams but a trump lead wrecks it, of course, when followed by a second trump ASAP. Declarer can take a discard but has three losers in the minors to go with a spade. The defence can prevail even after a top diamond lead, provided they switch to a trump. McPhee/Wilson managed this and Cooper/Murphy got lucky when, despite a top diamond lead and club switch, declarer lost his way and succumbed eventually to a club ruff. Joe Clacey showed how to play the hand after a similar start when he won CA, ruffed a club, cashed HK, got to hand with a diamond ruff, drew trumps and ducked a club to the bare Q: note that switching to CQ rather than a small one would prevent this. Still – well played! Slater/Lawton-Smith also made 4H, so Oxon boasted the only declarers to bring in a vul game. I should add that South has an opening bid which might derail proceedings somewhat. Against me N/S got to 2NT by North in double-quick time and this silly contract went three down on a heart lead.

Board 20: game all, dealer West

North 984 Q92 A874 Q75

South AQ AKJ54 KQJ6 K6

6D is cold because, although the spade finesse is wrong, trumps are 3-2 and declarer can ride roughshod over the 4-1 heart break to ditch two losing spades in the North hand and thus make 1 spade, 5 hearts, 5 trumps and a club. Not a single pair in the field found the diamond slam, however. Cooper/Murphy got close when Chris knew partner had a GF with hearts and diamonds and had the chance to offer 6D at the end of a complex sequence but was worried that it might be construed as showing DAK and looking for a grand in hearts – so he settled for the unlucky 6H. 6H needs careful/lucky defence, however: at my table North introduced clubs for some reason I can't now remember and I was able to double for an eventual lead, holding A109842 of the suit. When partner obliged with CJ against 6H I had to decide whether to play him for a singleton, win and give him a ruff, or duck and wait for something good to happen. Mercifully I did and it did, in the shape of a losing spade finesse and club cash. Winning CA immediately would only have been right if (a) partner held a singleton and (b) declarer had held a suitable 2-6-3-2 shape. Kaz/Nicholson managed to make 6H – presumably on a spade lead or a premature club cash – and Quainton/Russell succumbed to the same 1430. Slater/Lawton-Smith conceded 1440 against 6NT by S (essentially the same as 6H), whilst five pairs stayed quietly in game and McIntosh/Paul scored a humiliating goal by going 5 down undoubled in 3H by East (can this really be right? – if so, South evidently had had all his red cards confiscated)...

Board 21: NS game, dealer N

North J1063 52 Q73 J1065

South AK952 AK108 A4 73

When partner (South) opens 1S third in hand, do you raise or pass? Well, the red-blooded ones scored here when partner raised 2s to game and found trumps 2-2. Well done to Cooper/Murphy, the Lintotts and Flower/Stead. Hard luck to Chris and me, Clacey/Middleton and Quainton/Russell, who had to write the same 620 in the out column. Board 22 was a similar story, with a thin 4S making, courtesy of trump K 2-2 onside. This was bid more frequently, the 420s and the 170s evening out everywhere, except in the A team where the only -170 (against McIntosh/Paul) meant 6 IMPs in. I had to put 420 in the out column, yet again.

Board 23: game all. Dealer S

	10642	
	98	
	QJ87	
	AK4	
Q5		K9
AQ732		K104
A103		K965
Q53		J862
	AJ873	
	J65	
	42	
	1097	

Starting with West we bid 1H-2C-2D-2H-2S-4H. 2C showed 10+ HCPs, 2D didn't absolutely promise 4 cards, so 2H was a convenient way of showing a min hand for the bidding to date. When Chris made a try with 2S, however, I thought I was worth game. So did 5 other pairs and everyone made it but, as you can see, it's a poor game. It was lucky I didn't raise partner's diamond bid, which would have put North off the DQ lead he eventually found (all partner then needed was the kindly club position). Still 4H wasn't half as dodgy as the 3NT McIntosh/Paul got to, but that rolled in with an overtrick!

The A team fightback was well and truly on: +39 IMPs on the set to reduce our losing margin to 29 IMPs.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

North AJ6 8432 KQ107 104

South Q1093 None 63 AKJ8753

At my table South opened 4C third in hand and played there, making 11 tricks for +150. They played 3C against McIntosh/Paul but at least had the presence of mind to take 12. Both our NS pairs brought home game but before you fire off the congratulatory postcards, it must be reported that the contract in each case was 3NT. McPhee/Wilson bid 1NT (mini) by North-2C(Stayman) by South, 2H-3NT (!) and when East couldn't find a heart lead and tabled a spade instead that was 9 tricks. Events at the captain's table were even odder: the auction starting with South was 1C-1H-1S-2NT-3NT. Chris's 2NT was an acknowledged overbid and 3NT relied strongly on clubs as a source of tricks. East led H7 (from K10975) and West, when in with HA, was sufficiently confused to switch to DJ (from J852). This went to K and A and East, equally confused by now, returned the suit. Chris could win and take a winning club finesse, unaware that the suit was 2-2 onside anyway. Further indignity followed when a show-up squeeze developed on West, who couldn't keep SK and his 3 remaining diamonds, so 11 tricks resulted. Only one pair in the field managed to bid 5C (they were from Glos v Clacey/Middleton) but Quainton/Russell got caught in 3H* with the EW cards to lose 500 and help make this a terrible board for the C team.

Board 27: love all, dealer S

South AQ10 1064 AQ9432 7

North 843 A93 65 AKQ104

The bidding at my table was 1D-2C-2D-3NT and I tried a speculative spade from 952. This proved a spectacular success when partner could win and switch to a heart (from Q72). As partner also held DK107 and I had CJ965 there was just nowhere for declarer to go and he finished 2 down. McIntosh/Paul also got 3NT 2 down (I've no details) but both our Norths got home on a heart lead. Chris Cooper won the 3rd round, took a losing diamond finesse, won the club switch, cashed a second club and played Ace and another diamond, endplaying West to give him either 2 spades and three

more diamonds or a club, a spade and three more diamonds. Well played! Alan Wilson had an easier ride, winning the second heart and playing a diamond to the Q which West ducked! Alan now had only to play A and another diamond for 9 tricks. This was another big board for the A. It was flat in the B and good for C when they made 3NT at one table whilst the other three were down one. McIntosh/Paul carried on the good work by bringing in an unlikely 4H on the next board.

Board 31: NS game, dealer South

West 96 AKJ8642 10 842

East KQ753 105 J983 A10

Nothing much to say about this, except that when both our West players (Chris Wilson at my table) chose to open 4H rather than 3H and found trumps 2-2, the A team picked up 12 more priceless IMPs.

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

North AKQ1053 75 62 Q103

South 2 AQ3 KQJ1098 872

Against me the oppo bid 1S-2D-2S-3NT and declarer's heart must have been in his mouth when a club was led. But the 10 forced my Ace and though the club return was ducked, he could play on diamonds and find my hand with DA and an original club holding of A9 only, thus making an extremely lucky 11 tricks. McPhee/Wilson flattened this result, however, and Cooper/Murphy played a sensible 2S+2 whilst McIntosh/Paul took 4S a comfortable one off (two clubs, a diamond and a trump, one way or another).

I'm sorry this has been so long (and not terribly inspired). However, the circumstances were compelling and the hands testing if not terribly instructive. Thanks to Chris Cooper, Alan Wilson and David Flower for written comments.

JOHN WILLIAMS
23/01/2012