

# Making It Real

**Co-founder Shireen Mohandes tells us how RealBridge went from lockdown project to platform used all around the world by national event organisers, clubs, and teachers.**

## **Lockdown project**

Almost a year ago today, Graham Hazel, an English bridge-player and I.T. professional, found himself, like most of us, at home with some time on his hands. Also like others, he was playing more online bridge, and finding that it was OK, but not quite like the real thing. What do you do when the software doesn't do what you want? If you're Graham, you write your own.

Two months later, he had the core of what you see at the table today – an interface for playing bridge, with built-in audio and video. He showed it to me, and I went "Wow!"

## **A long hot summer**

There was still a huge amount to do. We spent the summer designing and building the rest of the system, testing exhaustively on different types of hardware, and spreading the word about the new platform.

We wanted a platform that was good for everybody, so we consulted everybody: players, tournament directors, teachers, club owners, and major-event organisers. Everybody had ideas: mostly good; some quite challenging; some rather impractical.

Many hands make light work, especially when you're testing a multi-person game. A group of about 30 people from around the world rallied round and joined in the testing sessions. We are eternally grateful to them for all their help.

Clubs in England, Wales, Norway, Germany, Australia and India started running their games on the beta version. National bridge organisations got interested, starting with the English Bridge Union and the USBF. Both of these organisations were very supportive, and started running events on RealBridge in the early autumn. In Wales, Cardiff and Lisvane were amongst the early adopters. Sarah Amos took interest in the project and has been very helpful to us.

## **Launch**

In November 2020 we launched the platform commercially. By now we had a solid core of clubs and teachers using the platform. It had already been used successfully for two national events and one international one (that was a nervous moment!).

A few months on, and RealBridge has been adopted by more than 1000 clubs and teachers, and nearly 20 NBOs. We have a growing team of staff – currently four of us, with more joining soon.

### **What's next?**

Online bridge will never replace face-to-face bridge, but it doesn't have to be a poor relation. We're determined that RealBridge will be a big part of the future of bridge.

We are continuously working on new features. This week's release added broadcast video features for directors and teachers. In the next few weeks we expect to provide significant improvements to the vugraph experience. We have more things planned for later in the year.

### **It's never too late**

Finally, a story from the TV news in the UK: Bessie Hyder, from Lancashire, had her 106th birthday recently. She celebrated by eating some cake, then joining a game on RealBridge.