

Kendal Contract Bridge Club –a brief history

What happened that year half a century ago?

- Famously, the first James Bond film, Dr No, was released as was the Beatles first hit single 'Love Me Do'.
- Marilyn Monroe died but Sir Steven Redgrave and Jimmy White were born.
- Ipswich Town won the 1st Division Championship while Watson and Crick won the Nobel Prize for their discovery of the structure of DNA.
- More importantly, Algeria gained its independence from France and the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved without war.
- Harold Macmillan, John F Kennedy and Khrushchev were in power.

Meanwhile a small group of card players met at the Fleece Inn, Kendal to form a Bridge Club. The first Chairman was Charles Cumpsty and Mary Hadwin (later Mary Cameron) was Treasurer. Peter Brown, then a young solicitor, became the club's first Secretary. Now 50 years on Peter is the club's President. Before September 1962 there was no duplicate bridge in Kendal. Rubber bridge, scored Chicago style, was played at the golf club and at the Ladies Circle. Numbers were initially small. The first duplicate evening had only four tables but membership grew rapidly in the first year. The playing area at the Fleece became too restrictive, so in 1964 the club moved across the road to the County Hotel.

In 1965 Paddy Carson came to Kendal. He joined the Bridge Club and was instrumental in our joining the EBU and the formation of the Westmorland County Bridge Association. A county could not be affiliated to the EBU until it had a membership of over 50 players. By 1967 we had 62.

The club continued to flourish but the County Hotel was redeveloped in about 1970. New accommodation was needed and found at the Boot and Shoe Operatives' Union Office at the bottom of Gillingate. This proved a better venue and the club stayed there for about 19 years, playing twice a week and having about 10 or 11 tables. Young players from Lancaster University joined the club. Inter club matches were played against the usual gang of suspects –Barrow and Lancaster- and also regularly against Carlisle.

The minutes of that time are models of brevity. Here is one;

MINUTES of a MEETING, held on Monday 18th NOVEMBER, 1971.

MINUTES:

The Minutes of a Meeting, held on 16th August, 1971 were read and signed by the Chairman.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer reported that at the beginning of the year there was an opening balance of £36.73. After all payments had been made the balance to date stood at £18.85. Members agreed that this was a very satisfactory position.

Chairman

27 3 72.

Occasionally the issues of the day are glimpsed.

At the 1981 AGM the chairman *'referred to the subject of psyche bids which was felt tended to disrupt the harmony of the club and appealed for members to refrain'*.

In 1992 *'Mr * let it be known that the 'Barrow Cup' played for annually by the two respective clubs, was currently rather tarnished and required a home. Our Chairman, following a prompt from Mr *, offered to polish it and look after it whilst in our possession'*.

The atmosphere on a club night was more rumbustious than now. Bidding boards were used on which all the bids were marked and you tapped as appropriate. Nowadays we worry about not taking advantage of partner's hesitation – in those days one had to be careful that the speed, aggression, or loudness of your pencil hitting the bidding board didn't help partner to know whether a "no-bid" was a suggestion or an order, a 'double' was for 'business' or for 'take out'!

We had a lady who came in and made the interval tea and coffee and cleared away afterwards.

A lot of players smoked and by the second half the fug was noticeable. Surprisingly nobody objected –in fact some of the older women said how much they liked the smell of tobacco – *"it reminded them of their late husband."*

Scoring was done by hand and usually took about 15 minutes at the end of the evening. Often 2/3 members would add the columns up and cross check each other's arithmetic so most of us waited for the results which were normally out by the time tablecloths and bidding boards had been put away.

In 1990 Babs Matthews and Peter Ford recognized that the number of bridge players in Westmorland had increased to a level that a second bridge club was possible. They were, therefore, instrumental in the formation of Windermere Bridge Club. This has flourished and has benefited bridge in the area. Westmorland stopped being a one-club county and Kendal v Windermere is a regular match, the most recent occurring this month.

When the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union required the room that the club was using, new accommodation was needed and found at Kendal Rugby Club where we stayed until 1999. We had had to move out of their main hall into a smaller room and the Line Dancing, which started in the main hall was, even for Country Music lovers, intrusive so when Bill Thomson, then Chairman, found we could move to Abbot Hall the club did so.

The club's membership was declining at this time and, although a few loyal members came on a regular basis, this continued until Philip Wraight arrived in Kendal when his highly successful bridge classes and the resulting injection of players reinvigorated the club.

We now have 176 members and bridge is played regularly on Monday and Thursday evenings with 11 to 12 tables the norm. On Tuesday evenings there is still bridge being taught as well as supervised play for less experienced players.

The club plays matches against the 5 local clubs and also has a match against Keswick. All of these are as enjoyable for their sociability as well as for the competition.

The history of a club is, of course, a recollection of its members as much as a record of its competitions or accounts. Over half a century there are many who have contributed to the club's well being. Three of these have cups, played for in the intra-club competitions, named after them.

They are:

Paddy Carson. Paddy was an Irish Bridge international who came to Kendal in 1965. He was the engineer in charge of the construction of the bus station and multi-storey car park on New Road. He was old enough to have lived in Ireland before the south became independent and he remained a committed republican all his life.

He was brought up in a small town in what is now Northern Ireland and every Thursday evening his parents, the local priest and the curate would have supper and play bridge. This was fine until the curate got his own parish and moved away. It was the 1910s - a time when who you were friends with was determined by religion and class. Suddenly his parents, being middle class Catholics in a predominantly Protestant town, found they now had no one to make up a 'Four' on bridge evenings. Paddy was 'volunteered.'

So, at the age of 7, he was sat on a chair with 3 cushions to make him high enough to see the table and he was expected to hold his cards properly and learn to play. This continued for 2 years until his father got a promotion to a job in the south of Ireland and his parents found new bridge partners. Paddy was, of course, by that time hooked on the game.

Brian Ellis. Brian is a retired local farmer whose land lay between Kendal and Burneside. He was an active committee member who played in the teams for both club and Westmorland County. Outside bridge, Brian was very active in local affairs. He was Chairman of Governors at Kirkbie Kendal School, a director of Preston Farmers and was a member of the group who enabled the purchase of land and the transfer of the Westmorland County Show from the Show Field in Kendal to its present site near Crooklands.

Philip Wraight. Philip moved to Stavely in 2002 following retirement from his work in Cambridge as a Consultant in Nuclear Medicine. He is a keen bridge player who recognised that the Kendal Club was beginning to fail, as there were not enough bridge players in the area. He therefore started classes, initially in his own house, to teach the game. He has brought an enormous commitment and enthusiasm to this and has renewed Kendal Bridge Club to the extent that we are now in danger of outgrowing our present premises.

Philip's contribution to bridge generally was recognised by the EBU in 2008 when he was given their Dimmie Fleming Award for services to the game. He is our present club Chairman.

I am sorry I have not learned to play cards. It is very useful in life: it generates kindness and consolidates society.

- Dr Samuel Johnson.

21st November 1773.

Mike Howse October 2012