

COUNTY NOTES FOR E.B.U. GOLDEN JUBILEE

KENT: by L.E. Handley, County Secretary

The Kent Contract Bridge Association seems to have been formed in 1937, although, having lost our pre-war minute book, we can't be too sure. Certainly our first County Secretary (and I'm only the third!) was Maud Corbett and she held the post for over thirty years. I'm indebted to Maud for digging into her memory for recollections of the early days. Incidentally, Maud is still an active bridge teacher and regularly attends Committee meetings in her role as President of the West Kent Club at Tunbridge Wells.

The first bridge league in Kent was started in the Tunbridge Wells and Tenterden areas in 1932 and was a great success. Maud's father, J.W. Pearson, was our first Chairman and held the post until shortly before his death in 1959. Our current President, Dimmie Fleming, was an early member of Mr. Pearson's team. Other survivors from the early league matches, and still playing a good game of bridge, are Scott Page and Baroness (Olga) Knoop.

There were only three affiliated clubs in the original K.C.B.A., viz Folkestone, Birchington and Tunbridge Wells. Folkestone was by far the most active area then, whereas these days it's probably the least.

Whereas our membership has grown steadily over the years, and is now approaching 1,000, it is curious how support for some County events has declined. I noticed, in browsing through the old minute book, that in the early sixties the Individual Competition was so popular that we had to have two regional semi-finals as well as local heats in order to get the numbers down to a manageable final. Today, by contrast, the event has been abandoned altogether because of lack of support.

Many of the names of the early enthusiasts and benefactors are perpetuated in the County Trophies - Arnold, Pearson, Corbett, Jameson and Buck for example. George Buck was a fighter pilot and was one of those killed in the 'suicide' attack by the ancient bi-planes on the battleship Scharnhorst as she slipped through the Channel.

Our first open Congress was held at Margate in 1938 but the next wasn't until 1959 at Folkestone, now, of course, the regular venue for our annual congress.

The immediate post-war years saw Tunbridge Wells firmly established as the centre of Kent bridge with Maud Corbett and Dimmie Fleming the guiding lights, but the '50s and '60s saw the wider spread of bridge activities in the north of the County with Beckenham and Sidcup rapidly developing into strong playing centres. Eric Crowhurst, an early editor of our Newsletter, was as eagerly read then as now; Ingram, Dormer, Rimmington, Crowhurst, Fox and Spurway regularly competed in Kent events, while the Sidcup congegesses attracted out-county competition from Harrison Gray, the Sharples brothers, Flint, Priday, Omar Shariff and Lederer among others. We then entered a too-long period of gradual decline as the more ambitious players concentrated on national events in order to improve their national bridge rating.