“Almost 50 years as dummy”

After the passing of our friend , Austin Barnes, we thought we would pay tribute to him by passing on some bridge memories of him.

After reading Chemistry at Cambridge he went on to Swansea to study for a PhD.. He was well known in the area for running bridge events and playing regularly with Patrick Jourdain in Camrose matches and European events. He once gave us a piece of advice from that time which was, “don’t psyche in the open room” when in front of an audience. He once opened 2NT on very few points the audience giving him away by their sharp intake of breath. Memorably he recalled playing against Omar Sharif and his many onlookers. In 1972 he became a lecturer in Physical Chemistry at the University of Salford and came to live in Bolton joining the Bridge Club shortly afterwards. His talent at this game soon became apparent and he clearly remembered sitting down to play in a duplicate with Frank Farrington. What was remarkable was that they never discussed the system they were playing at any time during the evening. It soon followed that we three and Ian Powell formed a team which had a considerable reputation in the old NWCBA.. He had a fine mind ideally suited to academia and scientific research. At the table this meant he had awesome speed of thought and analysis almost as though he had counted the whole hand within the first few tricks, and in some cases he had. This was only dimmed slightly in the last few years having to cope with ill health. Towards the end of his career he was awarded a DSc. for his contribution to research and rose to be Chairman of Chemistry having to juggle egos and issues of the day. This made him ideally suited to be President of Bolton Bridge Club for an unusually long stint of ten years and also Chairman of Lancashire- modest as always of his achievements. He played in the Tollemache over many years sometimes as captain.

At the table he was a delight to play with being kind to weaker players and “admonishing” good players when appropriate yet complimentary when warranted. He had a keen dry sense of humour with more than a tinge of sarcasm and cynicism. Having executed an easy straightforward double squeeze he asked, “why didn’t you lay the hand down”. His favourite opening bid was 1NT and we opted to change from 12 -14 to 12 – 16 so he could open it more often. His definition of balanced was flexible sometimes outside of partnership understanding and he claimed once to have miss sorted his hand when he opened it with a void- may have been the opposition. Similarly 3NT was one of his favourite contracts often wriggling home on difficult hands. It was always a challenge in the auction to become declarer before him and bidding NTs before him always presented him with a problem. As his partner we were dummy often, once in a Hubert Philips match playing all ten boards in a set. He did sometimes miscount and he revoked very rarely. He was fond of operating yet in more serious events he resisted the temptation, his technical prowess coming to the fore. He liked a pint and we usually went for at least one, or a meal, after a match or congress to swap stories of the day- he was good company.

It was a joy to be his friend and, like lots of others, we will miss him.

Rod Greenhalgh, Stuart Norris