

Some Festival Reports:

From Chris Close, Notts visitor

## I went to Oxford.....

I went to Oxford – did you, which college?

Quite a few: St Hugh's, Christ Church, Keble, Wadham, Trinity,

Oh; how long were you there?

Just under a week; we went to the Oxford Festival of Bridge in September–  
Ah.

We and some others booked accommodation, Monday to Thursday, at St Hugh's College the main bridge base. St Hugh's was a short bus ride or a 15 minute walk to the city centre where some chose B & B at Christ Church. Many were locals who travelled daily. Some attended all 4 days but you could choose individual days.

St Hugh's B & B was excellent; breakfast in the dining hall was excellent in content and atmosphere and the excellent bridge room was not far away, a short walk through the pleasant gardens. Wi-fi and on site car parking completed the domestic facilities and we did not move our car from Monday to Friday afternoon. We strolled to Jericho for our evening meal in Morse territory.

Between Monday and Thursday, after the introductory Quiz and yummy cream tea, participants played in up to 4 drives, 14 tables or so, [including 2 rubber] plus Café Bridge, 24 tables, enjoyed 4 Seminars and 2 Master Classes and visited Christ Church College (private tour) and the Ashmolean. Those latter visits also provided seminar locations as a change from St Hugh's. The Café Bridge was centred on the High Street and gave an interesting, if slightly frenetic, tour of the High itself.

A thoughtful range of seminars began on Tuesday with the humorous lighter touches of Robert Procter [*improving partnership play*] and of Alison Nicolson [*taking the guesswork out of leading*] followed on Thursday by the more advanced and analytical approach of Ed Scerri [*read your opponents cards*] and Patrick Shields [*Defence is not all guesswork*]. All our speakers entertained but Ed and Patrick demanded a little more concentration with the corresponding reward of the insights which they showed were readily available to us all.

Thursday's gala prize dinner rounded off the Festival which had combined entertainment, education, insight and indulgence. We were free the following day to do our own thing, first an excellent walking tour from the TIC visiting other colleges and Oxford sights and then our own visits to Keble College and the Oxford Museum of Natural History.

I can only guess at the work, perspiration and inspiration, that Robert Procter and his team put into the festival but in my view it is reflected in the quality of the outcome and, I trust, in the success of this inaugural event. As such, teething troubles were inevitable but entirely capable of resolution. It is to be hoped that the Festival will flourish as a hardy perennial. It could be enjoyed by a wide range of bridge players, abilities and interests from rubber players, Really Easy Bridge players and Bridge tourists of all standards.

And from Ian van Maanen, local bridge player

## **Oxford Festival of Bridge**

As soon as we saw the announcement we knew that we would go to the Festival, albeit only for the first three days.

We arrived early for the first session, a bridge quiz, and were told to look for clues in the beautiful garden of St Hugh's College. The weather cooperated and while one of us rushed round the garden to take photos of all clues, the other met up with our team members and made a start on solving the bridge problems. It was a nice way to meet the other participants and, while we enjoyed our tea and some yummy cakes, answers to the questions were discussed and the quiz was marked.

Then it was on to more serious stuff and the cards were taken out of the boards. In spite of teething problems with the computer, which meant the planned Swiss Pairs movement had to be abandoned, the director and his team managed to recover and a full movement could be played; the Festival was off to a good start.

Day two began with a tour of Christ Church; a must for visitors to Oxford, but equally interesting to locals because we were taken to parts that the official guides don't normally reach; there was a rare view of the library, and a glimpse into the office once occupied by Charles Dodgson aka Lewis Carroll. A real treat! After a master class by Kathy Talbot who discussed some of the hands played the previous day, there was time for lunch or a

stroll through St Giles' Fair before going to St Hugh's. There, Robert Procter and Alison Nicholson each presented a lecture on a different aspect of bridge before tea was served and our second bridge session commenced. The computer behaved flawlessly and the bridge was good.

Day three and it was 'Cafe Bridge'. We all convened in All Bar One, were allocated a team, and set off to one of three other venues along the High; Chiang Mai, The Chequers, and the Mercure Eastgate. The first location served coffee, the second lunch. In spite of some problems, of pairs not always going to the right venue first time and kitchens having difficulty serving 24 meals simultaneously, the organisers again managed admirably and we greatly enjoyed the experience of 'bridge with a difference'.

There was a long break before the evening's bridge session at St Hugh's, but this offered opportunities to explore famous bookshops or other tourist attractions of Oxford, or simply gave one time to have a rest before taking up the next hand of cards. As before, the bridge was enjoyable and the evening was well led.

All in all, we had a great time and hope this is the start of a great tradition!

And finally from Robert Procter, festival organiser:

## **THE OXFORD FESTIVAL OF BRIDGE**

We wanted to put on an event with a difference combining social and cultural activities with opportunities for bridge learning and play. On the cultural side we had morning visits to Christ Church and The Ashmolean, some time set aside for sightseeing in the rest of the city and the chance to go to St Giles Fair at the end of each of the first two days. Socially we got together on different days for a superb tea, a city centre cafe lunch and a wonderful college dinner, whilst the bridge encompassed an instructional quiz, two master classes, four seminars and five bridge sessions.

Is it any wonder that the organisers were tired by the end? But the general consensus amongst them was that "it had been a blast".

What of the participants? Feedback from those visitors who took the opportunity to have a bridge holiday in Oxford was universally positive despite the many little things that could have been improved and they urged us to do it again. Clearly seeing Oxford and staying in an Oxford college rated highly for them. For locals of course this was less of a draw, but they still had a lot of fun, were forgiving of our mistakes and thought a second year would go even better. One said we would have got far more takers if we had put greater stress on the fun element in our marketing.

For me the biggest challenge would be to do more to assist inexperienced players to come to terms with the rules and etiquette of competitive bridge and to accept the fact that, just as I would lose heavily to Andy Murray at tennis, they will come a cropper when up against players with much more bridge experience. Equally there appears to be much for the experienced player to learn about introducing social players to their competitive game - for example discussing detailed system thoughts with your partner when your opponents sit down against you can be very off-putting for beginners. Had we had more participants we could perhaps have split the field into two but was

this really the solution? We had no master points, no NGS and only small prizes, so could participants not enjoy bridge for its own sake? Perhaps we should have had no scoring! A subject for a seminar I think.

Enough theorising. What about a story from the bridge?

On Tuesday in a seminar on partnership I gave an example of two players getting into extreme difficulty in the bidding because they hadn't agreed which two suits they were showing when they overcalled two of the opponents' major suit opening. There are two different common conventions, Michaels and Ghestem, one showing the other major and an unspecified minor and the other showing spades and clubs over a heart bid and hearts and clubs over a spade bid. I advised avoiding making a bid which you thought your partner might not understand.

On Wednesday evening someone had to move his car so I took the South seat to bid a hand. Virtually no system discussion could take place before I picked up QJ864, KQ10982, 5, 5 and RHO opened 1C. I couldn't just assume that partner would play 2C as showing the majors, so I knew what I had to do, overcall with a simple 1H. LHO bid 1S, partner said 2C which looked likely to be conventional, I bid 3H and partner raised to 4. At this point the player I was replacing returned and I left him to play the hand. I understand that a defensive slip enabled him to make an overtrick.

Two hours later someone else was absent and I went to play as North. My hand was A103, 543, K2, A10842. LHO opened 1C, partner bid 2C. I alerted but didn't know whether it was Michaels or Ghestem. When RHO now bid 2D I was pretty sure it must be both majors and not spades and diamonds, but as I had three spades it did not much matter and I bid 3S which partner raised to 4. After a defensive slip I made 11 tricks.

I forgot to tell you the dummy - it was QJ864, KQ10982, 5, 5. So I had played the same board twice from different sides of the table without realising it. Both my partners had called 2C intending it as conventional despite no agreement to that effect and I had scored two joint tops on the same board. I claim an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. Isn't bridge fun?