

Newsletter

August 2024

Tony Russ

We start this newsletter with the very sad news of the loss of Tony Russ, our ex-Chairman.



Tony was elected to Chair of Somerset Contract Bridge Association at the 2017 AGM, taking over the role from Gina Howard. Tony will be remembered, above anything else, for his unstoppable drive: there were no half measures, his focus and commitment to whatever he was working on was boundless.

Once elected Chair, it's safe to say Tony hit the ground running. By the next AGM in 2018 he had successfully secured a grant from the National Lottery of £10,000 to fund the Fast To Play Bridge programme. This included a weekend of learning and several follow-up lessons. He recognised at the time this condensed programme would most likely appeal to a younger demographic. He often claimed how absolutely critical teaching was to the success of the game. It is only those clubs with a robust and ongoing teaching programme that are successful in the long term.

Tony recognised and cherished the concept that his role fundamentally existed to represent and support each and every player at whatever level in the County, without exception. He visited every single club in the County in his first year. He devised and created ideas to bring clubs together, believing that working together was more fruitful for players and clubs whether for social reasons (claiming philosophically that "Happy Bridge is Good Bridge") or to promote inter- and intra-club competitions. He invited every Chair in the County to attend a meeting to exchange ideas, which attracted a sizable number. Sadly he concluded that the response ongoing was fairly lukewarm.



Tony was a successful rugby coach in an earlier phase of his life

There is no doubt the finances of the County flourished under his stewardship. By 2018 revenue had increased by £1,000, mostly due to the success of the WOE Congress.

The Covid years certainly presented challenges. Tony himself caught Covid very early in the pandemic and went on to catch it another three times! He along with others from the Committee, however, mobilised themselves and saw to it that Somerset was the first in the County to offer plentiful online bridge in which thousands participated. During the lockdown, Somerset held three games per week and helped many affiliated and non-affiliated clubs play. Tony supported County clubs to keep themselves going by organising online bridge; most clubs set up games themselves under his guidance. Undeterred by the Covid lockdown, he planned and executed an enormously successful nine-day online WOE Congress.

2021 was recorded as one of the most lucrative in the County's history. The revenue from online games including the WOE Congress enabled the County to create a generous development fund to assist clubs coming out of lockdown.

By Easter 2023 Somerset boasted that they had more players than they did in 2020. This was extraordinary as nationally numbers had fallen.



Tony receives the EBU Silver Award

Sadly Tony felt it was time to move on, and he resigned from Somerset, taking up a role with the EBU. True to form he was very quickly promoted to Vice-Chairman, a position he absolutely revelled in. Within a matter of weeks he had launched BIABD—Bridge It's A Big Deal, a national bridge festival taking place over the course of a week—an event that you could not be unaware of, having been promoted relentlessly with details splashed across the EBU website and Facebook. Within months, unfortunately, he became very ill and could not continue in his role, but not before he was awarded the EBU Silver Award, recognising his extraordinary achievements in the game of bridge.

And finally, Andrew Ridgers remembers:

When Tony moved to Evercreech, his cottage had a lovely garden that he took an interest in. He decided to start growing some vegetables, decided there wasn't enough room, and so looked to get a space on the local allotments. He couldn't get one (I can't remember if there was a long waiting list or just that there were no allotments in Evercreech). As you might expect, he got involved, and in April 2009 Evercreech got a spiffy set of 31 new allotments. He grew far too many vegetables for a year or two, and then got bored with it

West of England Congress 2024

Some may be wondering why the West of England Congress was cancelled this year. The circumstances were considered very carefully by the Committee and the decision to cancel was very difficult. At the time of the booking the organisers were unaware that it fell on the same weekend as the evidently very popular “Beach Race” at Weston. This event takes over Weston with regard to all available accommodation and car parking. Various options were considered in detail but the cost/benefits were thought to be unfavourable and the Committee concluded their only sensible option was to cancel. You will notice from the Calendar that the WOE Swiss Teams event has been salvaged and will now be held at Woolavington Village Hall; there is still space for more to sign up, please do so here:-

https://www.bridgewebs.com/cgi-bin/bwx/bw.cgi?club=somerset&pid=display_page10

County Events

Participation in Somerset events is picking up slowly. If you've never participated or not done so for a long time, please consider returning—you really won't be disappointed. As well as the “grown up” events, the Committee are committed to running regular 9 High (NGS grade 9 and under) events alongside. The idea is that players can play in a less intense game and without the experts.

BIABD Bridge It's A Big Deal—Festival of Bridge

As you are aware, the English Bridge Union, in conjunction with Cancer Research UK, is running the “Festival of Bridge” from 9th to 15th September. The Festival of Bridge has two main aims.

- Firstly to persuade casual bridge players and non-bridge players to take part in what we know to be a great social leisure activity.
- Secondly to raise money for Cancer Research UK, and to demonstrate our commitment as bridge players to supporting the wider community.

It would be helpful to know if your Club has any plans to participate in the Festival of Bridge.

Here's what Bridge Clubs in Somerset have told us they are doing.

Organised by Clevedon & Portishead Bridge Club

A public match played ideally in the open air between Nailsea and Clevedon & Portishead Bridge Clubs on Tuesday 10th September, with one table in Portishead and one in Nailsea.



The table money from the regular Wednesday evening and the Friday evening duplicate will be donated to Cancer Research UK.

Organised by Winscombe and District Bridge Club

A Social Bridge Event with a cream tea on Tuesday 10th September.

A Handicap Pairs Event with an American Tea on Sunday 22nd September.

Somerset Mixed Team

Somerset Mixed Teams takes place on Sunday 15th September at Woolavington..

This is an opportunity to promote bridge. Let's take advantage of it.

Langport Bridge Club

A teams event on Monday 9th September. Participants are encouraged to wear weird and wonderful uniforms.

Special Axe event for Bridge

Cheddar & Wedmore Bridge Club, together with Winscombe Bridge Club, are opening up their BBO Axe online bridge session at 7:00pm on Wednesday 11th September to all Somerset players as part of the EBU's 'It's a Big Deal!' week-long festival of bridge.

Please contact Mike Dobson at jeanneandmikedobson@sky.com to register your BBO username, your name and EBU number with the SCBA by Monday 9th September

National Handicap Pairs Championship

This EBU event takes place in various clubs, online and face-to-face, on 8th September 2024. Results are based on scores handicapped by NGS grade.

The nearest venue to play face-to-face is Bristol Bridge Club, but Somerset members are invited to play in the Realbridge event hosted by Cambs and Hunts Contract Bridge Association.

Crewkerne Bridge Club are holding a challenge match against Bridport BC where table money and any donations will go directly to CRUK. The halftime interval will include homemade cakes and biscuits etc.

Don't Forget...

Calendar

The regularly updated Calendar of Somerset events is on our website at

www.bridgewebs.com/cgi-bin/bwor/bw.cgi?club=somerset&pid=display_future

EBU Master Point Promotions

These are published monthly in the second week after month-end, so about 9th February for January promotions, and those for Somerset members will appear on our homepage.

www.bridgewebs.com/somerset/