

WBC Wimbledon Bridge Club WBC

1986 - 2026

Welcome to the 40th Anniversary of WBC as a members' club. This newsletter brings you a whistlestop tour of the highs, and one or two of the lows, of our club through the decades.

A Brief History of the Wimbledon Bridge Club prepared by G Rangarajan (Rangy) in 2006

There is no documented history in the club archive - this is unfortunate...

With the passage of time it has become difficult to capture the history accurately. Some of the people actively involved with the formation and running of the club are no longer with us. Those who are tend to have recollections that are hazy and general. Having spoken to a few members, including Ruby Reynolds and Jean Bartlett, I have attempted to trace the origin of the club.

The club founder was John Gullick, pictured below, supported by his wife Elizabeth. He was a good friend of Jeremy Flint - a well known name in the bridge world - they jointly produced a book on bridge, the latter playing at the club occasionally.

Editor's note: In his article Rangy quoted from a piece appearing in The Times, which I traced from their archives.

• FEBRUARY 5, 1983
The Times



Anyone who doubts the healthy interest in bridge would have been considerably heartened if he had attended the annual

Bridge



John Gillick

“Anyone who doubts the healthy interest in bridge would have been considerably heartened if he had attended the annual meeting at The Kenneth Black Memorial Hall of Wimbledon Bridge Group, a creation of John Gullick, who has taught a number of them how to play, and now by his good natured example shows them all how to enjoy the game. Sixteen tables of all ages played for four hours in an atmosphere unmarred by the constant recriminations which are the regrettable hallmark of some duplicate circles. But Gullick plays many parts with equal facility; fairy godfather distributing prizes, not necessarily for skilful play; sergeant-major when he requires people to move; and benevolent but firm landlord as the stragglers finally depart.”

This fascinating account gives clues to the founder and his philosophy - evidently he was a great bridge enthusiast. His vision was that teaching is part of the game and should be given high importance, and that one should enjoy the game and have fun playing. John started playing Rubber Bridge in the late seventies or early eighties, later teaching himself duplicate from books. Ruby and husband Jim, Jean

Bartlett and some others became interested and helped him run the club. Initially John held bridge classes for Merton at The Downs, which became sessions at St John's Church Hall when more room was needed. Later they moved into our present premises, starting with Tuesday evening and Thursday afternoon sessions. As sessions increased John arranged a long lease on the hall. Numbers grew and Felix Karlsen joined John in teaching.

The first members paid £100 for a ten-year subscription - a good investment as the charge subsequently increased. John also solicited interest-free loans from some members to finance the setting up of the club. These were intended as long-term loans, but as the club grew more prosperous the committee was able to repay them ahead of time. Initially the club was a Proprietor's Club run with the help of a members' committee. In 1986 the Committee took over the club, paying John Gullick £20,000 for the goodwill, making us a Members' Club.

Originally the office quarters consisted of one room where the computer had to fight for space with all the other activities of running a club. These tasks were simply carried on from two old tables. There was a junk room beyond, where stationery supplies, cleaning equipment etc. were stored. The stage was still in its original state, complete with piano and curtains, ready for performances, with stairs going down to the room below. These were gradually improved to provide more space for playing and storage.

Before the appointment of a manager in the mid-nineties, the Honorary Secretary dealt with the routine correspondence. Part-time staff, including Oscar Radevski, Barbara Scoble and Peter How, handled the finance and banking and were paid token amounts. Don and Kaye King helped in the organisation of bridge activities with a panel of volunteers doing the scoring - the system was reportedly primitive. Jim Ratcliffe introduced an old BBC schools' model computer and wrote our initial scoring programme. Jean Bartlett did much of the scoring, but when Jim went off abroad on long school holidays and the system broke down, no one else could put it right. Jean often ended up scoring by hand. Jim was very resistant to getting a PC because he did not know how to use one and would not be able to help with any problems. At this stage Julie Benson became the club's computer expert and wrote a new scoring programme. Later the club bought or developed other programmes.

As membership touched the 1,000 mark, every inch of space was required to accommodate the large number of tables in play, especially during special events. The stage and the little room (that is now used for housing the Duplimate machine) would all be converted into playing areas on those occasions.

From one of the papers relating to Programme of Play that has survived, some interesting facts:

- They played bridge for 6 days a week with three sessions on three days.
- Membership: Full £10; Day £7; Country or Overseas £5, and other variations.
- Table Money: Rubber, 2p stake 70p; 10p stake £1.60
- Duplicate and Supervised play £1; Ploughmans £2.50 inclusive of lunch.
- Swiss teams £9 per head inclusive of supper, coffee, tea & biscuits.
- One-fourth of the Table Money given as prizes.
- There was a licensed bar: coffee at 25p; Afternoon Tea & Biscuits at 25p.
- Dress Code: No jeans or T-shirts allowed.

I am not sure of the year or years when the above programme was current, but we all know this has changed.

G Rangarajan
London
28th July 2006



Kindly provided by Terry Hewett. Edited by Julia Ellis, Newsletter Editor.

Memories of the Early Days of Wimbledon Bridge Club

Compiled from contributions by founder members Ruby Reynolds, Kitty Schreiber, Joan Peel and Miranda Fellows.

The club originated in the early 1980s at The Downs, Wimbledon where Ruby and husband Jim took lessons given by John and Elizabeth Gullick. At the time they played rubber bridge only. After a year John took Ruby aside and asked her if she would help him form a committee and run a club.

Finding a home

At that time the new club was in a “pretty grotty” church hall, and it was soon appreciated that better premises would be needed. John managed to rent The Kenneth Black Memorial Hall on Thursday evenings. Ruby and Jim searched salesrooms and advertisements for extra bridge tables. Tea was made in a “miserable collection” of cups and saucers belonging to the Scouts; tables and chairs had to be removed from the hall at the end of the session, with the caretaker looking on, rattling his keys. The hall was also used by many other groups, however John increased the number of bridge sessions and eventually negotiated with the Scouts to take over the hall completely. Miranda recalls that there were at least one or two sessions every day of the week except Sunday. On a Monday evening there would be an individual event on the tables to the right as you enter the club. The pairs event would take the rest of the tables in the main room, usually on the stage and quite often in the small teaching room. On rare occasions there could also be a single table in the bar. Full House! Now that bridge had total control of the premises John was able to obtain a bar licence and purchase items such as a coffee maker. To fund these improvements John suggested forming a members’ club, with 10-year memberships available for £100. Ruby and Jim became members no. 1 and 2. The members bought John out in March 1986.

Social Life

The first of a number of bridge holidays was to Portugal, with subsequent trips to Malta, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia. These were very popular, attracting 40 - 50 people each trip. Those fortunate enough to take part always had a very relaxing, fun time while getting to know each other better. John was full of grandiose ideas and once even considered holding a WBC evening in the Albert Hall! John and Elizabeth also began the tradition of an annual charity pairs event, which continues to this day. All of the contributors to this piece stress John Gullick’s old-fashioned courtesy; he insisted on good manners and good conduct around the bridge table. The standard was high and an offender could be on the receiving end of John’s tongue. Good manners and comfortable surroundings were essential. Kitty describes how, since her husband George died, the bridge club has been a home from home, keeping her brain active and enabling her to see friends socially. There was no eating at the table, although drinking was certainly allowed, as was smoking, John and his wife being heavy smokers. Miranda recalls that the atmosphere was often heavy with smoke, and Joan tells me that members joked that John’s fragile frame was held together with nicotine! Apparently, the clubhouse nearly caught fire on several occasions.

Dress the Part

Dress code is another recurring theme in the recollections of our long-standing members – John was a stickler for good personal presentation. Men had to wear jackets and ties – although the latter could be removed during July and August. Jeans, shorts, T-shirts and trainers were not allowed. Despite rules that may seem a little draconian today, John’s philosophy was that the club should have a friendly atmosphere, with all members treated the same.

No Smoking!

Much has, of course, changed since the club’s beginnings; smoking was banned in 2007 in both public buildings and private members’ clubs. I am told that the AGM at which this issue was discussed had the largest turn-out ever, with members queuing outside to have their say. After that, smoking was only allowed in the grounds with a dedicated smoking bin attached to the outside wall. Unfortunately smoke from this caused a nuisance, drifting into the clubhouse - now members are asked to smoke well away from the building.

Moving with the Times

Our attitude to dress code is totally different now, with jeans, T-shirts and trainers accepted in many work settings. WBC has moved with the times - some brave souls sporting shorts well into the autumn! The introduction of computerised scoring and Bridgemates in 2006 revolutionised the game, with results available seconds after the final board is played. The scrolling results on screens were found to attract a good deal of attention and added an air of excitement to the room, encouraging friendly chat between members. John decided from the outset that WBC should be affiliated to the EBU, and that Master Points would be awarded to those who wanted them, but you could opt out. Individuals had to pay separately to join the EBU. With affiliation in 2010 came Pay to Play – the club pays the EBU a fee per player per game, so members automatically join. The National Grading System (NGS) was introduced in 2012.

John Gullick died in February 1994. Despite the many changes that have taken place in the 40 years since his club's nascence, John's ethos of providing a friendly and inclusive atmosphere for learning and playing bridge lives on.

Julia Ellis, Newsletter Editor, March 2026

Many thanks to Ruby, Kitty, Joan and Miranda for their excellent contributions.

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Night of the Stars – A Truly World-Famous Charity Bridge Pro-Am

The *Night of the Stars* was a high-profile, good-natured charity bridge Pro-Am with its roots firmly in Wimbledon Bridge Club. It was conceived and driven by Terry Hewett, past WBC committee member and Chairman, for whom it became almost a full-time job. Her vision, energy and commitment were the driving force behind the event throughout its entire nine-year run.



The Playing Room in 2009



Andrew Robson and Zia Mahmood in discussion

The success of *Night of the Stars* was the result of strong teamwork and would not have been possible without Wimbledon Bridge Club's popular manager Marietta Andree, Janet Cahm, both co-founders of the event, and Meeka Burke, NoS Treasurer. Simon Cochemé produced and edited the *Night of the Stars* booklet, which featured hand commentary written by leading players and coaches from around the world. Martin Lee was the original MC and Director and set up and managed each *Night of the Stars* event. In later years, Vivien Harris, a member of Richmond Bridge Club, sourced wonderful raffle and silent auction prizes, which added greatly to both the enjoyment of the evening and the funds raised.

Night of the Stars consisted of two linked events. The first was Paul Mendelson's highly entertaining auction of Stars, held each November. The second was the main *Night of the Stars* event in February, when successful bidders had the opportunity to play with their Stars. The event consistently attracted the very biggest names in British and international bridge, many of whom returned year after year. Equally important was the generous support of so many club players, whose enthusiastic and often spirited

bidding to play with the Stars was fundamental to the success of the event and to the sums raised for charity.

The reputation of *Night of the Stars* quickly spread worldwide. Andrew Robson regularly referred to it in his *Times* column as “the flagship event in the world of charity bridge”, while The New York Times described it as “the Who’s Who of British bridge”. Coverage followed not only in *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Spectator* and *English Bridge*, but also on numerous bridge websites across the world — and, it is said, even on the evening news on French television.



Zia explaining a point in 2012

The *Night of the Stars* website remains a comprehensive archive of this exceptional event. It lists all the Stars who so generously took part, together with donors and the many clubs that played the hands simultaneously. It also includes photographs, results, charity information and the full set of commentary booklets:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/nightofthestars/>

Terry Hewett WBC Chairman 2009 – 2012

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In Memoriam: Marietta Andree 3rd November 1952 - 7th March 2022



The club has lost many members over the years, all of whom were greatly valued and are very much missed. It is beyond the scope of this newsletter to mention all of them, so we will confine ourselves to remembering our manager, Marietta Andree.

Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Marietta came to England at the age of 6, attended boarding school and eventually pursued a career at United Biscuits. She retired early in order to devote herself to her new hobby – bridge.

With the huge enthusiasm which was typical of Marietta, she set out to become “the best bridge player in the world”. Her mission was however put on hold when she realised that she wanted to bring the game she loved to as many people as possible, by running a bridge club. Never one to do things by halves, Marietta took on Richmond, Wimbledon and Hershams Bridge Clubs all at once! Her effects were immediate and positive – increasing memberships, table numbers and social events. In total Marietta was the manager at WBC for 7 years and Richmond for nineteen, organising delicious suppers and sell-out Christmas parties. She played a significant role in the largest Café Bridge event ever held in the UK, raising life-changing sums of money for charity; her favourites being Cancer Research and the RSPCA.

While Marietta excelled in her own role as manager, she could also put together great teams, whether paid or voluntary, expecting - and getting - the highest standards for her clubs.

On a personal level Marietta was loving, caring, sincere and loyal, with a mischievous sense of humour. On top of her hard work running three clubs, she found time to mentor several people who showed promise. She continued to play bridge, achieving many highs - her proudest moment probably being representing England in the Lady Milne with her partner Janet. The bridge world misses Marietta. Thousands of bridge friends miss her; the world is a poorer place without her.

The Covid Pandemic

In late March 2020 Covid arrived on our shores and cut short or devastated thousands of lives and livelihoods. Hospitality and leisure were catastrophically affected by the series of lockdowns, which confined vast numbers of us to our homes. For us at WBC this meant not only no income from table money and catering but, coming just before subs were due on 1st April, left members in a dilemma as to whether to pay for a facility they knew would not be available for a while. Despite this, the rent had to be paid. Fortunately, 95% of our members continued to pay their subscription. This, along with donations and grants from the government totalling over £14,000, allowed us to scrape through those difficult years.

A 'War Room' was set up in the teaching room where socially distanced meetings were held. The white boards were covered with action plans; help was given to numerous members, unfamiliar with IT, to log into BBO. Six online bridge sessions provided a lifeline for participants, and a small income stream. Our thanks to Gad Chadha (our then-manager) for initiating games on BBO, and Calum Stewart for developing the billing system.

During the later part of 2021 the country slowly and falteringly crawled out of the series of lockdowns and WBC was finally able to open its doors for face-to-face play during August 2021.

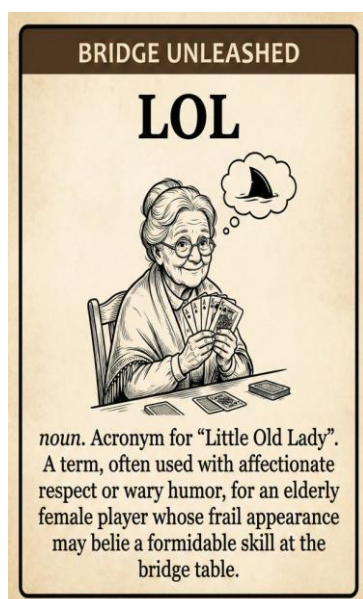
Sadly, we lost some members to the COVID itself, others had given up playing bridge, and some were nervous at first about risking infection. As a result, table numbers were way down. When I joined the club in January 2022, there were only seven tables that particular Tuesday morning: every spare surface displayed boxes of tissues and bottles of hand sanitiser, with players trying to be friendly and cheerful behind surgical masks! I remember being told how, in the past, there would be 20-plus tables, with some up on the stage. At the time this was difficult to envisage, but now, happily, it is a regular occurrence.

Since the pandemic we have recruited over 200 new members, so that the current membership is nearly 900. We look forward to a very bright future!

Julia Ellis, Newsletter Editor, March 2026.

Thanks to Denny Endicott, Honorary Treasurer, for his input.

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Little Old Ladies...

I saw this and it made me think of Gaby Mollart. Gaby was a sweet, kind, dignified lady. I had the pleasure of playing her many times at the club and I think we might have celebrated her 95th birthday here. Gaby would peer myopically over her glasses and innocently ask you to remind her what contract she was declaring. I would politely respond. She would then proceed to surgically make her contract, painlessly extracting overtricks from you with a sweet and innocent smile on her face. I asked her one afternoon how long she had been playing. Gaby replied, "I learnt as a child at home" and here is the punchline "but I was European Ladies Champion once".

Beware Little Old Ladies **Laughing Out Loud!**

Denny Endicott

The Movers and Shakers

A special mention for **Ruby Reynolds**. Member **Number 1** and still going strong.
Congratulations Ruby!

Our club relies on the hard work and dedication of a whole team of volunteers. Some of them have shared photos of their younger selves. Can you guess who they are?

Submit your answers to wbcnewsletter40@gmail.com or by letter to Julia Ellis, left in the office, by 10th April. Correct answers will be placed in a draw at the Anniversary Supper – a bottle of champagne for the winner!



1986 - 2026  Wimbledon Bridge Club Celebrates its . . .

40th Anniversary

with Special Events 12th to 18th April 2026

★ Sun 13:00	Blue Pointed Swiss Pairs ♠	Duplicate Bridge • 6x6 board matches • £200 1st Prize
★ Mon 13:30	Chicago Bridge	Supervised Play • Prosecco • Medals for the Winners
★ Tue 19:00	Speedball ♦	Fast But Fun Competitive Duplicate • Cheese and Wine
★ Wed 11:00	Anniversary Ploughman's ♠	Duplicate Bridge • Lunch can be Ordered • Prosecco
★ Thu 13:30	Pick and Mix Teams ♦	Try Teams! • Come as a Pair • Pick Random Teammates
★ Thu 18:30	Introduction to Duplicate ♠	Cheese and Wine • Mini Lesson • Supervised Duplicate
★ Fri 11:00	Mini Swiss Pairs ♠	Try it out! • 5x5 board matches • Lunch can be Ordered
★ Sat 18:30	Anniversary Supper ♠♦	Buffet with Wine • Gentle Duplicate or Supervised Play

♠Booking Required ♦Master Points awarded but no NGS
40th Anniversary Souvenir Medals for the Winners!

PLAY BRIDGE

Try Something New This Week!

Something for ALL levels of bridge player, from Beginner to Advanced. Visitors most welcome. More details on the website.

Kenneth Black Memorial Hall, 56a Worple Road, London SW19 4EY 020 8947 0147 manager@wimbledonbridgeclub.co.uk www.wimbledonbridgeclub.co.uk

