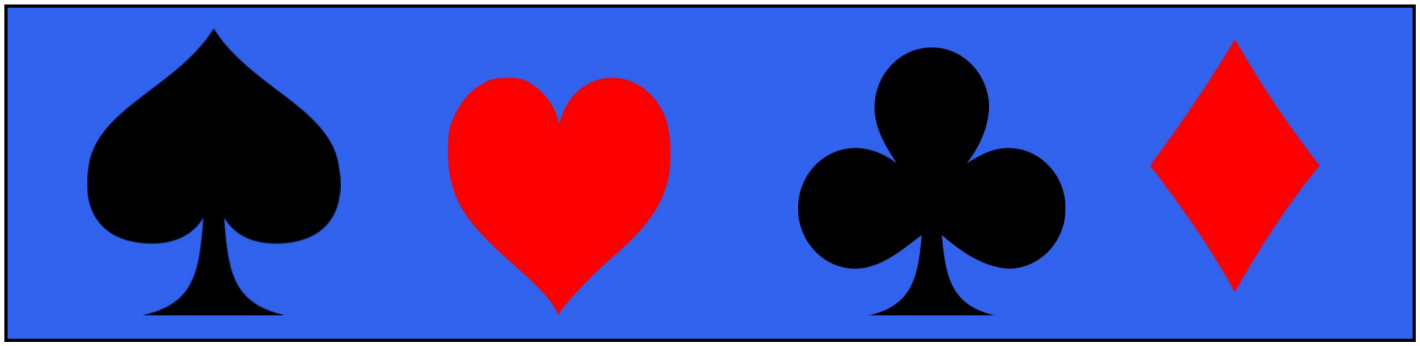

TOURNAMENT BRIDGE IN ENGLAND

1925-1945

Richard Fleet

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Finally, I owe a great debt to my wife, Debbie. Not only did she have to put up with my concentrating on this project to the virtual exclusion of everything else, she also had the thankless task of proofreading the draft manuscript, a task which she performed with characteristic dedication.

Richard Fleet
Sidmouth
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Introduction

One often hears sportsmen say that they knew when the time was right to retire. During 2012, I became convinced that it was right for me to cease full-time work when I reached the age of 60. I gave my employer a year's notice of my intentions and left at the end of 2013, a couple of weeks after my 60th birthday.

I had long been interested in the history of bridge and envisaged my retirement project as encompassing research in this field. The game's history is hardly virgin territory but it is fair to say that the published works are of uneven quality.

When an author lists five members of a bridge team, whilst omitting reference to the sixth, it does not fill the reader with confidence; when the same author, in discussing a significant deal from the match in question, states that no slam was makeable, ignoring the fact that the slam was both cold and bid at the other table, his failing is glaring.

Similarly, an author who, perpetuating the error of a previous writer, misstates the first name of a player shows that he could not be bothered to carry out proper research. Finally, when an author states that a player took part in six European Championships, but elsewhere names him as being a member of nine teams, his carelessness is apparent to all. As someone who spent his working life having to pay attention to detail, I found avoidable errors of this sort deeply frustrating.

Accordingly, I thought that it was time to put the record straight, and to produce an authoritative work detailing the history of bridge. It did not take me long to realise that this was an impossibly ambitious undertaking and that the resources available to me, not to mention the limits of my own enthusiasm, meant that it would need to be scaled back.

I therefore decided to concentrate on the history of tournament bridge in England. It was when I started my research that I realised that I was far too late - the people who could have helped me fill gaps in the documentary trail were dead. The era which was of particular interest to me (1925-1945) was the one where the position was most acute: virtually all the contemporary records had disappeared, very possibly pulped during World War II, and all that was left was the first minute book of the English Bridge Union (only a bit-part player in the tournament world prior to the War), and even this was incomplete.

I concluded that, at least so far as the period up to 1945 was concerned, I would need to compile a work which included an unwonted degree of speculation and imaginative reconstruction. This was quite some distance removed from what I had first envisaged and would be significantly more taxing. I therefore decided to limit my endeavours to this period with the possibility of the post-War period being covered subsequently.

To a large extent, the history that I have written is focused on personalities, Buller, Culbertson, Ingram, Kempson, Lederer, Manning-Foster, Phillips and Vanderbilt prominent among them. I make no apology for this: I never had the opportunity of meeting any of them but feel that I now know them better.

In *Design for Bidding*, the late S J "Skid" Simon commented, à propos Nico Gardener's suggestion that it was best to play Acol two bids in first, second and fourth positions, but weak two bids in third seat:

> "Owing to my habit of not really about settling down to think about any chapter until I have settled down to writing it, I can't tell you yet."

Similarly, whilst in no whit claiming to be of Simon's calibre as a writer, I am unable to promise that a further work will follow. What follows may turn out to be simply the first part of a far more comprehensive project, or it may stand alone. And if further instalments do follow, I will at least be able to comment on some of the *dramatis personae* by reference to my personal knowledge of them.

There are several hands included in this book. I have assumed that the reader is sufficiently familiar with bridge diagrams not to need telling that North is the top hand in the diagram with East the one on the right.

For convenience, I have used some abbreviations, though the full form is used when the term first appears:

ABM	*Auction Bridge Magazine* (later *Bridge Magazine*)
BBL	British Bridge League
BBW	*British Bridge World*
BGB	Bridge Great Britain
BM	*Bridge Magazine*
CBJ	*Contract Bridge Journal*
DBCB	Duplicate Bridge Control Board
EBU	English Bridge Union
EMP	European Match Point
IBL	International Bridge League
IFS	Irish Free State
L&HC	London and Home Counties Contract Bridge Association
NBA	National Bridge Association
NIBU	Northern Ireland Bridge Union
SBU	Scottish Bridge Union
TBA	Tournament Bridge Association
VP	Victory Point
WBA	Welsh Bridge Association

Chapter 1

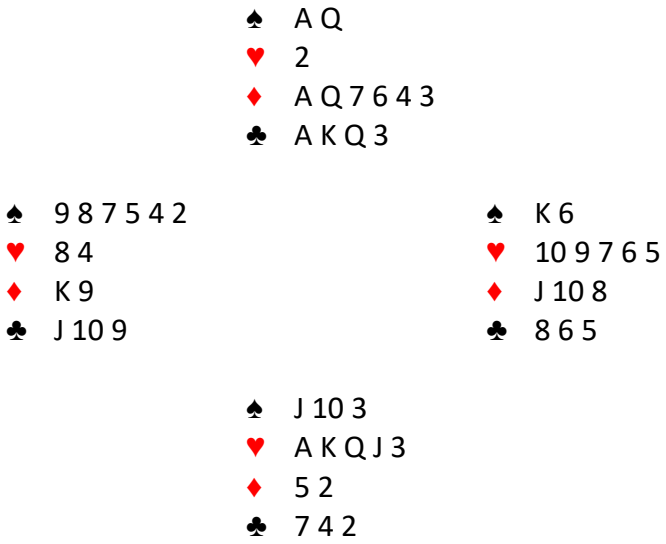
Prehistory

It may seem eccentric to begin a book on the history of tournament bridge with a chapter which, to a large extent, concerns neither bridge - that is the current game of contract bridge - nor tournaments. But I think it important to put our game into context: although not preserved in aspic, contract bridge has been in substance unchanged since it came into being in 1925, and the changes since the mid-1930s have all been quite minor.

Our story begins during the late 1870s. At this time, Whist was the fashionable game both here and abroad. It was the successor to a number of earlier games based upon the principles of trick taking and trumping, for example Triumph, and Ruff and Honours. Whist had been predominant for some 150 years and a considerable literature had grown up around it, starting with Edmund Hoyle's seminal work *A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist* (1742).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Whist developed along scientific lines. For example, Dr William Pole wrote *The Theory of the Modern Scientific Game of Whist* in 1864, a work so successful that it was updated and reissued many times.

The hand set out below caused a sensation at the time. It was included by James Clay in *A Treatise on the Game*, coincidentally also published in 1864, and was apparently solved (at double dummy - that is with sight of all four hands) by a famous Viennese player. The object is to make thirteen tricks with clubs as trumps and North on lead: at first sight, there are only eleven available and, even after the passage of 150 years, it takes a good player to work out how to do it.



West is the dealer and so (playing Whist) North has the opening lead. He decides to draw trumps and the key play arises at trick four: he needs to play a fourth round of the suit (obviously, this play is only tenable with sight of all four hands). East is now squeezed (though the term did not then exist) in three suits: if he discards a spade or a diamond, he concedes two tricks so he has to discard a heart, though this only delays the inevitable, the squeeze

becoming progressive. North now cashes the ace of spades (the *Vienna Coup* unblocking play) and plays a heart: on the fifth round of hearts, East is squeezed in spades and diamonds.

It should be noted that, should an aggressive bridge-playing North arrive at a club (or no-trump) grand slam, a heart lead from East ruins the communications for the squeeze and limits declarer to twelve tricks. Twelve tricks can always be made in clubs, diamonds, hearts and no-trumps, though the slam in hearts must be played by North (unlikely!) since a spade lead is fatal if South is the declarer.

The scientific approach was a mixed blessing. In the Preface to the fifth edition of his book, Pole was clear that flexibility was needed:

> "It is indeed essential that the foundation of all good play should be systematic knowledge; but it is not pretended that the rules are to be considered as inflexible … many cases are mentioned in which strict play should be departed from."

However laudable the intention, the effect was precisely as might have been envisaged. Having digested a mass of conventional leads and plays, players tended to assume that there was nothing more to learn, with the consequence that the game became stereotyped, dull and boring. Consequently, the time was ripe for Whist to be supplanted by a new game, and that game was bridge, though not bridge as we now know it.

Before leaving Whist, however, we must acknowledge the debt due to it. The mechanics of duplicate bridge, including the use of boards and the commonplace Howell and Mitchell movements, were devised for use in Whist tournaments in the USA in the late 19th century. Also, the "American Whist League" movement for team events is still in use today, the name bearing witness to its parentage.

Bridge Whist

Bridge (otherwise referred to as bridge Whist, ordinary bridge or straight bridge to differentiate it from the games that came later) was introduced to London's Portland Club (then the recognised authority on Whist and later on bridge) in the autumn of 1894 by Lord Brougham. He was dealing the cards for a rubber of Whist and failed to turn over the last card to indicate the trump suit, as was the rule. Apologising for this oversight, he explained that he had just returned from Cairo where he had been playing bridge, "the best card game ever invented".

The other players asked him to explain the game to them and they proceeded to play. Confirmation of these facts was provided by William Dalton, a well-known bridge writer, in the September 1927 edition of what was then called *Auction Bridge Magazine*.

> "I remember that afternoon perfectly. I walked into the card-room at the Portland for the usual rubber of Whist and found four men playing a strange game … I played in the second rubber and we all agreed with Lord Brougham's description of the game, so much so that, from that day onwards, Bridge superseded Whist at the Portland Club. Very soon the Turf Club took it up, and after that it spread like wild fire, not only to other Clubs but also to the general public."

Although bridge only reached the Portland in 1894, there is evidence that it had been played for several years before this. A pamphlet entitled "Biritch or Russian Whist" was copyrighted and published privately by John Collinson in 1886, and the rules of this game are virtually the same as those of bridge. It can hardly be a coincidence that biritch is a very similar word to bridge.

Recent research by a number of French authors, published in the July-September 2011 edition of *The Playing Card* (the journal of the International Playing-Card Society), has revealed an article published in *The Graphic* in December 1886 concerning Constantinople (now Istanbul). The anonymous author states that:

> "Whist is little played, but poker, many French games, and a modification of Whist called "bridge" or "britch" … flourish."

This is the first recorded mention of the name "bridge" for a card game. In the same article, the authors refer to an article in *Le Matin* in February 1888. This comments that there is a new card game in Paris which:

> "It is called bridge; but, in spite of its English name, it is of Russian or Greek origin. It is Whist with quite a new way of scoring".

It is not known how the name bridge came to be applied to the new game. Indeed, whether the name "bridge" derives from "biritch" (or britch) or vice versa has been the subject of much learned speculation but no unanimity.

In May 1906, Dalton wrote an article for *The Saturday Review* in which he set out the history of bridge and made reference to Collinson's pamphlet, though not mentioning the author by name. Dalton concluded that bridge had been invented in Greece, basing this opinion on a letter "from an English gentleman of Greek extraction" who remembered seeing the game played by "a colony of Greeks, settled in Manchester". Three weeks later, a letter from Collinson was published giving the following additional information:

> "Between 1880-1884 I spent a considerable time in Constantinople and Asia Minor, where I played what was then called 'Biritch or Russian Whist'. I was then living, while in England, at Cromwell Road and introduced the game to many of my English friends, who liked it so much that they asked me to have the rules printed. 'Biritch' was attributed to the Russian colony at Constantinople, in my time the dominating social and political element."

Further information was supplied by Frank J Nathan in an article which appeared in *Bridge Magazine* in May 1932. Nathan stated that he was the sole survivor of what he claimed to be "the original four to play Bridge in England". He added that the game had a Levantine origin and had been brought back to this country by a Colonel Studdy who had served with the Turkish army and learned the game "in the trenches" at the siege of Plevna (now part of Bulgaria) in 1877-78.

On retirement, Studdy lived in London and joined the St George's Club. Having found it impossible to persuade the members there to play bridge, he invited people to play privately. Nathan's father agreed to host a bridge dinner, the first four being the two Nathans, Studdy and Jack Sefton Mayors "a well-known West-End figure". Such dinners developed into a regular occurrence and, other players became involved. Ultimately, there was sufficient

support for the game by the end of 1892 for the St George's Club "to set aside a table for Bridge."

It is reasonable to assume that bridge or biritch would have been played for some years before Studdy learned it, and there has been speculation that it might have been played by officers during the Crimean War (i.e. the mid-1850s). Convincing evidence in support of this contention is lacking, however.

Bridge reached the USA at about the same time as it started to be played in London. Henry Barbey, having returned from a visit to Paris in 1892, promptly introduced bridge to the New York Whist Club and organised the printing of a set of laws. This move proved controversial and the bridge players ultimately left and founded a new club, the Whist Club of New York, a few doors away.

So there we have it. A form of bridge, initially regarded as no more than a variant of Whist, was played at least as early as the late 1870s, and very probably earlier, reaching this country no later than 1886 and France maybe a little later. Bridge started to be played in the West End in late 1892, in New York at about the same time, and reached the Portland Club less than two years later.

As stated above, the new game was not bridge as now played. In particular, bidding was rudimentary: the dealer was always the declarer and either had to choose the trump suit (or no-trumps) or pass the decision to his partner. Either opponent could double and either member of the declaring side could redouble, with doubles and redoubles continuing indefinitely. Otherwise, there was no bidding and so the concept of a contested auction did not exist.

This ability to double was controversial since it added a significant gambling element to the game, appealing to some whilst attracting condemnation from others. In time, a change was made to restrict the number of doubles and redoubles so that the maximum value of each trick could not exceed 100 points.

After the bidding had finished, the opening lead was made and the dummy was displayed. The objective was, as in Whist, to take at least seven tricks: the side which took the majority of the tricks scored below the line (i.e. counting towards game) for each trick in excess of six irrespective of whether this was the declaring or defending side.

The scores for each trick after the first six were as follows: in no-trumps 12 points, hearts 8, diamonds 6, clubs 4 and spades 2. To win a game, 30 points were required below the line and it is interesting to note that, even in this original form of the game, nine tricks in no-trumps, ten in hearts or eleven in diamonds sufficed to win the game from a love score - though making all 13 tricks in either black suit was not sufficient for game. Doubles and redoubles affected the trick score, so if the denomination were no-trumps or hearts redoubled, making just seven tricks (48 or 32 points respectively) would suffice for game.

The reason for the very low value of the spade suit is that, however bad their hands might be, the declaring side had to choose a denomination. If they decided to play in spades, and the opponents doubled, they could not lose the game on this one hand – the maximum score below the line for the opponents was 28, and this would require them to take all thirteen tricks.

All other points were scored above the line and so did not count towards game. There were bonuses for honours, chicane (a void in trumps), and making 12 or 13 tricks; even at this early stage in the game's development, these latter two bonuses were named Little Slam and Grand Slam. The side winning two games won the rubber and received a bonus.

The bonuses for honours were related to the trick value and could be enormous. Imagine deciding to play in hearts with a good hand and a trump suit of 987654: you struggle home with seven tricks and triumphantly score 8 points below the line. One of your opponents has AKQJ10 of hearts and claims 80 points for his honours; to make matters worse, his partner has a trump void and claims 16 points for chicane! It may seem odd that the same side can claim both honours and chicane but there is nothing in the published laws to prevent it.

The recommended strategy for the dealer was to choose to play in no-trumps, hearts or diamonds if possible. If he passed the declaration to his partner, he was implying some strength since, with a truly awful hand, he would declare spades. Early books on the game stress the importance of keeping track of the score: when his side's score was approaching 30, dealer would be far more likely to choose clubs or even spades if he thought that this gave a chance of making game.

Although bridge was regarded as a variant of Whist, there were several features which differentiated it from the older game. However, none of these were novel.

1. The most significant difference was the obligation for the declaring side to choose a trump suit, rather than the dealer's last card determining it, with a very limited facility to consult (i.e. if the dealer passed the decision to his partner). The ability to choose trumps was a feature of various predecessor games, of which the most well-known nowadays is Solo Whist. It was also part of the French game Boston, which dated back to the 1770s.

2. Both the ability to play in no-trumps, and the varied scoring depending upon the denomination chosen, were also features of Boston.

3. The play of the dummy hand by declarer was well known since it meant that Whist players could have a game when there were only three of them present. This game, which dates back to at least the 1840s, was first called Dumby Whist, with the change from dumby to dummy happening within forty years.

4. The ability to increase the stakes (i.e. by doubling and redoubling) was a common feature of games, poker being perhaps the best known example.

Before leaving bridge, it might surprise readers to know that the first example of a conventional double dates back to the late 19th century: if the opponents were playing in no-trumps, double requested a heart lead. The reasoning behind this was that, if the opponents had decided not to play in hearts, the reason could be that they were weak in the suit.

The first English duplicate

In 1994, and presumably in ignorance of the evidence that bridge had been played here for several years before it reached the Portland, the English Bridge Union celebrated the centenary of the game's introduction to this country. As part of this, the EBU produced a special edition of their magazine, *English Bridge*, and this included an article concerning what was said to be the first English game of duplicate. This included a quotation from *Foster's Complete Bridge*, a 1906 work by the prolific American bridge writer R F Foster:

> "The first duplicate game of bridge ever played in England was a private tournament held at The Priory [a large private house], Warwick, on April 15, 1904, in which 30 couples took part, the highest score being made by two Americans, Mr and Mrs C T Garland."

Whilst there is no reason to doubt that a game of duplicate bridge took place on that date, how Foster can possibly have known for a fact that this was the first one ever played in England must remain a subject for conjecture.

Auction bridge

Bridge in its original form did not last for long since, by 1905, auction bridge was being played. The evidence seems fairly conclusive that auction originated as a game for three players, however, not four.

The story is that four bridge players were based at a hill station in East Bengal. Since one or other of the four was often away from their base, they needed a game for three players and, after much experimentation, devised what they called "Auction Bridge".

Dalton, in his 1927 article referred to above, said that he had spoken to two of the players involved and that they both confirmed the facts, though the exact date was uncertain. Certainly, auction was known about as a game for three by the beginning of 1903: on the 16th of January, a letter from Oswald Crawford of Lausanne was published in *The Times* detailing the rules of the three player game of auction bridge.

As further confirmation, "John Doe", writing in *BM* in May 1930, said that he was one of the four players who devised the game and provided the names of the others. He wrote that he described the game in *Pioneer* in 1902 and published a pamphlet entitled *Auction Bridge* during the following year.

By 1905, however, auction had become a game for four and was being played at the Bath Club in London. In his 1909 book *Auction Bridge And How To Play It*, Captain (later Major) H S Browning said that it was certain that:

> "Auction Bridge was first played at the Bath Club, where the original rules were framed and issued for private circulation amongst its members. These rules still hold good, but the Portland Club having taken the game up, the Card Committees of the two clubs joined forces and conjointly passed the present rules early this year."

This view was supported by George F Hervey in the November 1952 edition of *BM*. Without specifying the source of his information, he said that auction was played at the Bath Club in 1905 and was first played at the Portland in the spring of 1908.

Auction was originally quite similar to bridge as then played: the suit values were the same and the dealer was obliged to make a bid. However, a major innovation was that all the other players were also now allowed to bid and each bid had to be valued higher than the previous one.

For example, a bid of one diamond was valued at six points and was thus a higher bid than two spades (four points), and two hearts and two no-trumps (sixteen and twenty four points respectively) outbid any number of spades. It was held that, when two calls were equal in value, the one which contracted for the greater number of tricks was the higher. For example, four diamonds outbid two no-trumps, though both were valued at twenty-four points.

The negligible value of the spade suit quickly led to conventions being developed, including the first example of a transfer bid: an opening bid of three spades (six points) was a request to partner to bid one heart (eight points and thus higher).

Once the auction was finished, the opening lead was made by the opponent on the left of the declarer: the dealer had lost his automatic privilege of playing the hand. If the contract failed, the opponents scored a penalty (above the line, so not counting towards game) but, if the contract made, all the tricks made by declarer were scored below the line. Thus, assuming a love score, if declarer was playing in one heart, the efforts of the defenders would be primarily aimed at stopping him making ten tricks (i.e. since ten tricks would equate to a score of 32 below the line, giving him game).

It did not take long for modifications to be made. In particular, the value of the spade suit was problematic and various solutions were devised, including one period when there were two values for spades, the higher one being referred to as Royal Spades or Royals. By the time that the First World War broke out, auction had reached its final incarnation. The dealer no longer had to make an initial bid and the values of the various denominations had been fixed as follows: no-trumps 10 points, spades 9, hearts 8, diamonds 7 and clubs 6.

Well, almost its final incarnation. The very principle of auction, that you valued the call that you were about to make and calculated whether or not it was greater than the previous one, was awkward for players, leading to frequent insufficient bids. In the USA, they solved this problem by adopting “majority calling”, that is the principle with which we are now familiar: each bid at the three-level, for instance, was automatically higher than any bid at the two-level and lower than any bid at the four-level. This change was adopted by the Whist Club of New York in its 1915 laws but it took a while longer for England to change: it was not until 1932 that there was one world-wide set of agreed laws, and auction had by then been largely superseded by contract.

The contract principle

There is a common - but erroneous - belief that contract bridge was invented by the American Harold S Vanderbilt on a cruise in 1925. The next chapter discusses his role: although Vanderbilt played an important part, he did not invent the game.

If anyone can be truly said to have invented contract bridge, Sir Hugh Clayton has first claim to the honour. Clayton was an English colonial administrator in India and the first person to

publicise the contract principle (i.e. that the declaring side could only count towards game the tricks that it had contracted to win).

Whilst in Poona in 1912, Clayton and three others devised a form of contract bridge and called it SACC. The name was derived from the initials of the four players - though Clayton, when asked many years later, was unable to recall the names of the others. Clayton went on to write an article setting out the rules of the new game and this was published in *The Times of India* on 15th July 1914.

In 1940, Clayton saw an article in *The Field* by Hervey discussing the history of bridge and this stated that the first form of contract bridge was played in France in 1918. He wrote to the editor drawing attention to the 1914 letter and so was able to establish his role in the development of the game.

There was indeed a form of contract bridge played in France during the second decade of the twentieth century. This was Plafond and remained very popular in France throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Essentially, Plafond was contract bridge but with auction bridge scoring. In particular, two key contract bridge features, vulnerability and the large bonuses for bidding and making slams, were absent.

This form of contract bridge did not catch on in this country. Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Buller CBE, about whom there will be much more in later chapters, claimed in *Reflections of a Bridge Player* (1929) that:

> "It was I who endeavoured to introduce [Plafond] into London, under the name of 'Contract Bridge'. It was not liked at the Portland. The consistent winners were content with the game in vogue and the consistent losers thought they might lose more. However, I got it going in several other clubs. It was played in these for some time and then it died out. It was popular among those who played it, but it received no 'official' support, and the general public did not get to hear of it. Later it was tried in America. It faded out there also."

The Hervey *BM* article referred to above confirms that Plafond was introduced into England (in 1919) but that the Portland did not take it up. He adds that it persisted for a few years at the Cleveland Club and that Albert Edye Manning-Foster (1874-1939) , who founded *Auction Bridge Magazine* in 1926, was almost a lone advocate of the game in the press. Certainly, Manning-Foster was always keen to recommend Plafond, going so far as to write a book about it in 1933: sadly, Plafond was obsolescent by this stage, and his efforts were in vain.

Chapter 2

Mr Vanderbilt takes a cruise

As discussed in the previous chapter, the contract principle was invented at least as early as 1912. It was due to the efforts of two Americans in the second half of the next decade that contract bridge became first of all firmly established and then wildly popular. The two men could not have been more different.

Harold S Vanderbilt was the first of these, an extremely wealthy man and one at the very pinnacle of American society. He was travelling from California to Cuba on SS Finland in the autumn of 1925 and played Plafond with a group of friends. They discussed amongst themselves possible changes to the game and the upshot was that, on 1st November, Vanderbilt produced a new scoring table.

It is a testament to Vanderbilt that there have been so few changes to his work: the necessary balance between risk and reward was nicely calculated and so has stood the test of time. The suit values and bonuses for honours, slams and rubbers are all exactly as played today, though each trick in no-trumps initially counted 35 points. The only differences of note are that undoubled overtricks were each worth 50 and the undertrick penalties were different - being vulnerable was more hazardous in those days. Vanderbilt wrote later that the term "vulnerable" was suggested by a young lady also travelling on the Finland, he and his friends having failed to come up with anything more appropriate than "game in".

Harold S Vanderbilt (1884-1970)

Vanderbilt's endorsement as a society figure was all the new game needed: within a year, contract bridge had spread widely; and, as we shall see, this opened up opportunities to others. It has often been suggested that one reason for contract's success may have been the larger numbers available, and one can appreciate the satisfaction gained when an old adversary suffers a penalty in excess of 1,000 points. However, I am sure that the main reason was simply that contract was a better game. Buller summed it up in *Reflections of a Bridge Player*:

> "I have come to the conclusion that the fascination of Contract is due mainly to the fact that thrills in bidding are frequent, while at Auction they are few and far between … Thus at Auction, dull bidding is the rule; at Contract it is the exception."

Although Vanderbilt devised the scoring table, and presented trophies in his name for American and World events, including the endowment of funds to ensure that replica trophies would continue to be presented to the winners, his most important contribution to the game may well have been the devising of a bidding system. The Vanderbilt Club, details of which were first published in 1929, is now obsolete, but it was the forerunner to all other strong club systems and thus of great significance in the history of the game.

Culbertson

The second American was Ely Culbertson, an immigrant from Romania who survived by making money from playing auction bridge and poker. It is hardly possible to do justice to the life and career of Culbertson in a work of this nature and I am not even going to try. A showman, an entrepreneur, a publicist, suffice it to say that Culbertson saw a gap in the market and exploited it to the full, promoting contract bridge (and also himself) in a way that has never since been emulated. The success in other spheres of such well-known players as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates and Omar Sharif has attracted some publicity to the game but these are as nothing compared to what Culbertson achieved. Nowadays, it seems to need a cheating scandal before bridge gets any significant publicity.

Culbertson was a pretty mean player, too, though not everyone was convinced. Writing in *BM* in May 1976, Hervey opined that:

> "Culbertson was no great bridge player. His best friends rated him no better than of average club standard, and some of us thought he was not as good as that … His wife, Josephine was an excellent player and teacher."

It is arguable that Hervey, who never played tournament bridge at all, was not in the best position to judge. A more nuanced view came from the great French player, Pierre Albarran, who had the advantage over Hervey of having actually played against Culbertson (in a 1933 Plafond match). In translation, he is quoted in Terence Reese's autobiographical *Bridge at the Top* as saying:

> "I take this opportunity to destroy a legend that has spread among bridge players all over the world. With an air of being in the know, people have implied that Culbertson, whilst an excellent business-man, was only a moderate bridge player, much inferior to his wife. Josephine was an excellent player, to be sure, who made very few mistakes, but let us go no further. Ely, on the other hand, was a player of genius, liable to an

> occasional black-out, it is true, but of an originality in attack such as has not been surpassed by any player in the world, even by the greatest champions of today."

Within a period of five years from the date of Vanderbilt's cruise, Culbertson had positioned himself as the leading authority on bridge in the USA. By then he had: founded *The Bridge World* magazine, still published today, though its declining circulation must cast doubt on its future; devised the Culbertson bidding system, which ultimately formed the foundation of Standard American methods; written the *Contract Bridge Blue Book*, which achieved best-seller status; inaugurated an organisation for Culbertson bridge teachers; and had beaten a British team in a widely-publicised match.

He was well on the way to making contract bridge the fashionable game for middle-class America, a welcome side effect of this being that he made himself extremely wealthy in the process. Perhaps Culbertson was lucky with his timing. The Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Great Depression which followed it meant that there was less money available for leisure activities.

Bridge, which merely required four people plus a pack of cards, was an ideal recreation, combining mental stimulation with social interaction, all at minimal cost - people could play bridge for minimal stakes or for none if they wished. An added attraction was the vicarious pleasure to be gained from the notion that they were doing exactly the same with their leisure time as society greats such as Vanderbilt were doing with theirs.

Auction Bridge Magazine

Meanwhile, Manning-Foster founded *ABM*, the first issue of which was published in May 1926. Manning-Foster was fortunate to have had the backing of John Waddington Ltd, manufacturers of playing cards, and they continued to publish the magazine until the middle of the 1980s.

In the early years of its existence, virtually all the magazine's content related to rubber bridge. This was hardly surprising since tournaments in the sense that we now understand them did not yet exist in the UK and the idea of duplicate bridge was unfamiliar.

Although there was an article with the title "Duplicate Auction Bridge" by J W F Gillies in the very first issue of the magazine, this discussed replay bridge: two pairs play a set of hands twice, once as North-South and once as East-West, at an interval of at least a week. This game works quite well so long as the hands are not discussed when first played.

When I first acquired copies of the early editions of *ABM*, I was surprised to see that, as early as the second half of 1926, Manning-Foster had written a series of articles entitled "Contract bridge". In fact, these were nothing to do with Vanderbilt's game but referred to Plafond.

By April 1927, however, Manning-Foster had noticed what was going on across the Atlantic and had given his readers details. His crystal ball must have been a shade cloudy, however, because he commented:

> "Personally I like the game immensely and prefer it to Auction. That it will ever supersede Auction in this country I don't believe, although we may have a temporary revival of it just as is now happening in America …"

One of the obstacles to the development of bridge was the lack of an agreed code of laws. Indeed, in late 1926, Manning-Foster had called for an international code to be agreed for auction and the situation was worse for contract: in his April 1927 article, Manning-Foster pointed out that two American writers, Foster and E V Shepard, had each published a different set of the laws and scoring tables. As it happened, neither of the scoring tables was that advocated by Vanderbilt.

Fortunately, this chaos was not to last for long: in the November edition of *ABM*, an article by R J Leibenderfer reported that the Whist Club of New York had completed a new code of laws and had received the backing both of other major clubs and the American Whist League. He added that the adoption of the new laws by these clubs "makes it a certainty that it will receive national recognition".

By the middle of the next year, Manning-Foster was having to take more notice of contract. Major Freddie Barton, who later devised a very popular strong one club system (its chief merit - arguably its only merit - was simplicity), wrote three articles explaining contract.

It is fair to say that his ideas no longer possess wide appeal. For example, he suggested the bidding sequence 2NT-4NT-6NT-7NT, meaning that the hand could be played in 4NT or 7NT, but not in 6NT if that happened to be the right contract; he said that, when holding ♠K42 ♥KQ10 ♦108 ♣QJ943, there was no point in responding to a 1♦ opening ("It is a good defensive hand and nothing more"); and, unless playing to the score, he condemned a single raise of a major suit opening ("You must either pass or call three or more")

Bridge matches

There was a novelty in the December 1928 *ABM*, a report of a bridge match. This was the final of an auction event ("A large number of clubs entered") between two American teams, representing respectively The Detroit Athletic Club and The Cleveland Club. This was scored on a point a board basis and Detroit won the 52 board match comfortably, by 25 points to 14 with thirteen hands flat. So far as I can see, this is the first occasion upon which a bridge tournament in the modern sense was referred to in the British media.

The possibility of a match involving British players was raised two months later. Ralph Reed Richards, ex-President of the American Auction Bridge League, wrote to Manning-Foster and suggested that a match be held between teams from England and the USA. Manning-Foster's reaction in the February *ABM* was less than enthusiastic:

> "While the proposal is interesting, I do not think there is any chance of it being carried out. First of all we have no such body as the American Auction Bridge League to select a representative team of players over here.
>
> Nor do English players care for this sort of thing at all. It fails to appeal to them. Somehow it savours of professionalism, and the mere fact of that is enough to put the average Englishman off. He likes to play his game quietly in his club and does not care to advertise his prowess."

Events were to prove Manning-Foster wrong and this was not the only inaccurate prediction that he made at this time. In the same Editorial, he opined that contract was a passing craze and that it would never supersede auction as a club game. Buller, however, was all in favour

of such a match being held, though he admitted that team selection would be a difficulty. In the March issue of *ABM*, he was quoted as saying that:

> "With one or two exceptions, the best players in this country shrink from the public eye, and it would be very difficult to induce them to depart from that attitude.
>
> For some reason or other they regard Bridge as different in this respect from all other games. Any one of them would be proud to win the amateur golf championship or the tennis championship at Wimbledon, but they prefer to hide their skill at Bridge from the public gaze."

As will be shown, Buller was right to have these reservations.

In the same issue, there appeared the first full deal from a bridge tournament to be published in the magazine. It took place at an auction "duplicate match" held at the ICI Club in Newcastle-upon-Tyne but it is unclear whether this event was for pairs or teams.

Because of its historical significance (as the first tournament hand to be reported in a bridge magazine in the UK), I reproduce it here.

	♠ Q 8 5 ♥ 8 5 4 ♦ A 6 5 ♣ Q J 7 2	
♠ A K 3 ♥ A ♦ K J 10 7 2 ♣ A K 6 3		♠ 10 9 2 ♥ J 10 6 ♦ Q 8 4 3 ♣ 10 9 4
	♠ J 7 6 4 ♥ K Q 9 7 3 2 ♦ 9 ♣ 8 5	

West dealt and, at every table, opened 1NT - playing auction, there was no need to bid more. After two passes, South bid 2♥ and now the West players diverged. Some bid 2NT, played there on a heart lead and went one down; others doubled (take-out, or "informatory" in the terminology of the day), and were charmed to hear East respond 3♦.

Whilst one South led the king of hearts against 3♦, thus enabling declarer to set up a heart for a spade discard and make eleven tricks (and game), others managed to avoid this temptation and so held declarer to ten. Manning-Foster commented that, had West opened 2NT, he would have ended the auction and made game on North's low club lead.

A recurrent theme in the magazine's columns was that opening 1NT with a very strong hand could turn out to be a false economy: it allowed the fourth hand to make a relatively cheap bid for the lead whereas a 2NT opening would have had a pre-emptive effect.

Progress of contract

There was no stopping the onward progress of contract bridge. One significant development was noted in the March 1929 *ABM*: the Portland Club was giving a trial to the game. In a letter to *British Bridge World* in 1937, Buller claimed that he had been responsible for the introduction of contract to the Portland in 1928; it may be significant that no-one came forward to challenge this.

At the end of that year, Manning-Foster bowed to the inevitable and announced that, from the beginning of 1930, the title would be changed to *Bridge Magazine*. He rationalised this as a device to make it plain that it was not exclusively a publication on Auction Bridge. In fact, the magazine had never been exclusively devoted to auction: the very first issue contained an article on poker and many more followed.

International bridge was in prospect. Manning-Foster reported in the April 1930 *BM* that it was envisaged that:

> "The first International Bridge Congress is likely to be held in Vienna from June 14th to 17th.
>
> It is contemplated that the Congress will deal with outstanding questions about the game and discuss how to lay down uniform rules concerning Bridge Tournaments and how to find out not only which team or pair, but also which single player is the best on the spot.
>
> It is also intended to arrange a Bridge Tournament. Further particulars of this Congress will be given next month."

Manning-Foster must have been premature in his expectation since the promised details failed to materialise. Three months later, he reported that the Congress had been postponed until the next year and in fact there was no progress on this front until 1932.

In an article in the July *BM*, Frank England commented that, in contrast with the position in the USA, duplicate bridge had made no headway in this country:

> "Personally I have heard of very few Duplicate Tournaments being held in London and none at all at the larger Clubs, whereas in America most of the important Inter-Club Contests and Inter-State Championships are tested by duplicate play."

This was about to change, however. Soon, duplicate bridge was to be given an enormous boost, and Buller would be right at the centre of events.

Chapter 3

For the fun of the thing

Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Buller CBE (1887-1938)

Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Buller CBE (according to Captain Ewart Kempson, who was a friend, partner and frequent team-mate, a child suggested that these initials stood for "Contract Bridge Expert"), late Assistant Director of Quartering at the War Office, was no stranger to controversy. Indeed, he often appeared to court it, frequently including provocative comments in his column in *The Star*.

The importance of bridge in his life can be gleaned from a passage in his first book, *Reflections of a Bridge Player*:

> "My wife and I arrived in Torquay at half-past four on the afternoon of our marriage. … Within an hour I had introduced myself at the Royal Yacht Club and was seated at the bridge table. We have lived happily ever since!"

This hand, from an article by Simon in *Contract Bridge Journal*, quoting Kempson's newspaper column (Buller had died some eight years earlier and so the provenance cannot be guaranteed), indicates that he was a resourceful player of the cards:

♠ 10 8 6 5 4 2
♥ K 7 5
♦ 9 3 2
♣ 5

♠ A K J 7 3
♥ A J 10 9
♦ A Q
♣ A 10

The auction is not stated, but the contract was 6♠ on the lead of the King of clubs. Reasonable bidding in Buller's style would have been 2♠-3♠-6♠: the 2♠ opening was non-forcing and could have been made on a far weaker hand. The raise to 3♠ was logically forcing since it was inconceivable that any sensible player, and common-sense was the bedrock of Buller's approach, would open at the two-level and pass when raised; he would surely "bid one more for game", as the Colonel was wont to put it.

Captain Ewart Kempson (1895-1966)

Few players would find Buller's line. Technically, it is slightly inferior, but as a practical matter it could not have been bettered. What Buller did was to win the opening lead, draw the outstanding trumps and lead the 10 of clubs. When West covered it with the Jack, he let him hold the trick, discarding a heart from dummy!

Obviously, a minor would be fatal, so West had to lead a heart, and if either opponent had originally had the Queen with no more than two small cards, the contract would make. And, as Simon pointed out, there were extra chances:

> "The scientists were sceptical and were busily discussing percentage angles, distributional frequencies and what nots in an effort to prove a simple finesse through East offered the better chance. … But in practice there is no argument but that Buller's line of play was correct. Because while the scientists' line of play gives opponents no chance to go wrong, Buller offered both East and West a first class opportunity to chuck.
>
> First, West on play does not know whether to lead hearts or diamonds and, if he leads diamonds, that's that! And if he leads hearts and East holds Queen to four, then East must play low or he will present declarer with the contract. And how many Easts do you know who could be guaranteed to play low in this situation?
>
> But this aspect of the Colonel's play had inevitably never even occurred to the scientists. It never does occur to them to think about opponents."

Culbertson challenge

In his *Reflections* book, Buller was not backward in assessing the relative merits of players in this country and the USA:

> "I am firmly convinced that in spite of silly prejudice against it I could get together a four which would beat any four from America.
>
> We in this country have nothing to be ashamed of as regards skill at the game, but we are very backward in all other respects."

And in much the same vein:

> "I feel sure that a good four could be got together to take on the Americans, and that, while not necessarily the best available, they would beat them 'sky high'."

This was just the opportunity that Culbertson had been waiting for. Treating these comments as akin to a national insult, *The Bridge World* responded, laying down a challenge to British players, and this was reported in the May 1930 *BM*. Buller was not the man to duck a fight and he accepted the challenge. With the help of Hubert Phillips, who would himself play a pivotal role in the development of tournament bridge in this country, the necessary arrangements were made. Buller explained what he had in mind in the August 1930 *BM*.

> "I have been asked by my old friend, the Editor of "The Bridge Magazine", to state precisely what I have in view in organising a Bridge "Test Match" between Britain and America.
>
> My first object is the fun of the thing. I shall enjoy it and I think everybody else will too.
>
> Secondly, we have international matches at other games; why not Bridge? We all go publicly mad over cricket, golf, and tennis. Bridge - the most popular pastime in the

world - is played behind closed doors. There is no Public interest. There should be, and there will be.

Thirdly, a study of American literature would lead the reader to suppose that our cousins across the sea are the only people who know anything about the game. I have always disputed this privately. Recently, my blood began to boil and I challenged it publicly. And there you are! I regard this match merely as a beginning. It is certain that the side which loses will want to fight again, and so it will go on!

Suppose we win! We shall go about saying we are the champions of the World! Will other countries stand it? Will Australia and Canada, Austria and Germany, take it "lying down"?

I look forward to the time when international tournaments on a grand scale will be organised. I claim no more than to have been instrumental in starting the ball rolling.

In order to ensure a start and to avoid bickerings and endless controversy, I have assumed the role of "Dictator" (pro tem). I shall choose the team and more or less run the show. But Mr Manning-Foster has very kindly consented to act on the Committee of Management. With him will be Mr Frank England and Mr Hubert Phillips ... Once the match is over, we must form an organisation for the proper conduct of such contests.

We need such a body anyhow. The Public should not be left without authoritative guidance. Beyond individual press opinions, all we have at present are our law makers. These have not the ear of the Public, nor any means of knowing what the Public thinks.

I can well imagine that the selectors of future Bridge "test" teams will be quite as unpopular as our dear old MCC is today. In this connection, too, it is just as well for me to assume the responsibility of choosing the first team. Unpopularity does not affect me in the least. In fact, I like it! The American team has been chosen arbitrarily by Mr Ely Culbertson.

The Press will be represented. They will be asked to publish results daily, and also any feature of particular interest. In addition, I hope to make arrangements for the publication at cost price in pamphlet form of every detail of bidding and play.

We shall be playing "Duplicate", but even so it is quite impossible to eliminate luck. Apart, therefore, from actual results, the Public will be able to judge which team were the better players.

My aim is to stimulate interest in this fascinating game. If these matches do not achieve that object, nothing will."

This would be the first ever contract bridge international event, and was quite probably the first duplicate contract match held in Britain; as such, its significance cannot be overstated. Previously, bridge was synonymous with the rubber game, almost inevitably played for money, possibly with very high stakes; afterwards, duplicate developed with rapidity. As Buller put it apropos the first North v South match, ***watched by almost 700 spectators*** in January 1932:

> "Recently I got together a 'South' team to take on the 'North'. This National match, the first of its kind, was a great success. Some of us would normally have spent these leisure hours gambling 'at the club'. For once we gave it a rest to play without financial interest, just for the fun of the thing."

At the time, the North v South match was regarded as an event of significance: having been well beaten in the first two matches, the North went on to dominate. They led the series by five wins to three when the War broke out, credit possibly being due to the generous North-Eastern hospitality lavished on the South.

Buller v Culbertson

The 200 board match took place in September 1930 at the New Almack's Club in London. Although both sides consisted of good, experienced players, neither team could be regarded as representative of its country. The evidence is that duplicate bridge was still very much a novelty in this country: boards were not used and the hands were transferred from one room to the other in envelopes.

The American team contained, besides the Culbertsons, two players who would go on to win World Championships after the war, Theodore Lightner and Baron Waldemar von Zedtwitz: Lightner was part of the American team that won the 1952 Bermuda Bowl whilst von Zedtwitz won the Mixed Pairs event at the 1970 Olympiad in partnership with Barbara Brier when legally blind. The Americans lined up in all three possible partnerships, though for the first 144 boards Culbertson played with Lightner and Mrs Culbertson with von Zedtwitz.

According to his own account, Buller had invited a strong team. However, events were to conspire against him: Hugh Elliott, bridge correspondent of the Evening Standard died in an air accident a few months before the match; one invitee decided that he preferred to go shooting whilst another decided that the publicity attached to the match might be bad for his business. In Buller's own words "Two or three days before the match I did not know one of the players, even by name".

In the circumstances, Buller did well to get a team to the table at all. He played with Alice Gordon Evers, who was later to partner Phillips in early Camrose matches, whilst the other pair were Cedric Kehoe and Dr Nelson Wood-Hill. The team had a reserve, J W Blake, who was not called upon to play.

Systems …

The Americans were playing the Culbertson Approach-Forcing system. Ely had just finished writing the *Blue Book* on the system and this was published on the opening day of the match: the first edition sold out within 24 hours, leaving Culbertson conscious of the financial imperative of beating Buller's team.

It is interesting to note that Culbertson in those days advocated methods which seem more characteristic of Acol than the American style: no-trump openings were weak; and both a double raise and an immediate 2NT response were limit bids, not forcing.

The American team

… Or natural bidding

So far as Buller was concerned, conventions were anathema and natural British Bridge was the way forward, bidding the full value of your hand as soon as possible. Even a natural, but forcing, opening two-bid was regarded by Buller as an artificial convention. He had no time for American methods, later describing them as "unethical in principle and worthless in practice".

Buller's view of what constituted a convention was idiosyncratic: obviously, a bid in the opponent's suit could not sensibly be natural, nor an immediate double when they opened the bidding. However, the same applied if your partner opened the bidding and the next hand overcalled at the one-level - yes, negative doubles were part of Buller's methods in the 1930s. Some years ago, I asked Dimmie Fleming (who had played against Buller before the War) what it was like playing against his natural bidding. Her reply surprised me: "You've never seen so many conventions". Apparently, anything which Buller regarded as common-sense was natural, not a convention.

Although Buller's outspoken views were derided by some at the time, his ideas influenced many players, including ultimately the design of Acol. At a time when Culbertson's word was regarded by some in much the same light as holy writ, Buller's trenchant writings were refreshingly iconoclastic.

Previewing the match in the August 1930 *BM*, Phillips detailed three advantages which the American team would have:

> "Firstly, they have ample experience of duplicate matches. Secondly, they are a well-organized, well-balanced team, and they understand thoroughly one another's play. Thirdly, they will be bidding according to a system which, personally, I believe to be the best so far devised."

It is fair to observe that Kehoe and Wood-Hill showed that at least a modicum of common understanding is necessary in order to enable a partnership to function effectively. Leaving aside faulty judgement, of which there were many examples, this was perhaps the most telling instance:

Kehoe held ♠652 ♥AK ♦654 ♣AK876 and responded 3♣ to Wood-Hill's 1♦ opening (a simple change of suit was not forcing and was often passed by opener). When considering how the auction might proceed, it is difficult to imagine that Kehoe would have taken into account what actually happened ***since Wood-Hill passed***. The opposite hand was ♠KJ10 ♥Q106 ♦KQ873 ♣95 and there was no making game - the normal 3NT contract failed at the other table on a heart lead!

Culbertson wins

Buller took an early lead but a catastrophic decision on his part late on the first day, combined with a missed opportunity in the other room, ceded the initiative. The US led by 905 points after the first day and disaster followed: on "Black Tuesday", Culbertson gained over 4,000. With inevitable fluctuations, the score remained much the same to the very end, the final margin being 4,845. Typically, Buller maintained that this was not a decisive result and was to all intents and purposes a draw.

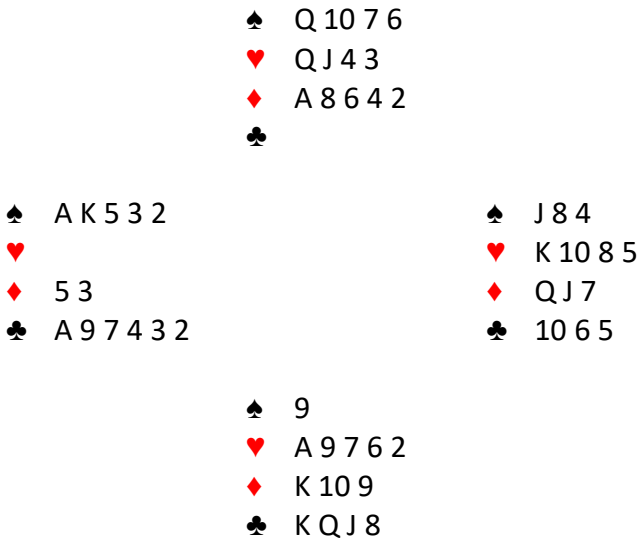
When all is said and done, and for all Buller's bluster, the fact is that the British team was outplayed. He had expected to win easily and had failed. Perhaps he hit the nail on the head when commenting about it in his 1932 book *From Auction to Contract* (both this book and his earlier one remain an excellent read):

> "One of my reasons for believing that practically any British Team would beat the Americans was that I had seen some published records of their bidding and play in championship matches. I said to myself, 'I am not aware that I make these sort of mistakes, and I am quite sure that many of those with whom I have played for years past in the chief card-playing clubs of London do not'. The Americans duly made the same sort of mistakes, but, alas, we made them too! …Every bridge-player, even the 'top-notchers' makes innumerable mistakes which, in the hurly-burly of the normal game, pass unnoticed."

In fact, if it hadn't been for two massive pieces of good luck, the margin would have been almost double: firstly, Culbertson and Lightner bid a vulnerable grand slam which only needed a 2-1 trump break, but they were 3-0 (the final bid was a bit of a shot but the contract was fine); secondly, Kehoe and Wood-Hill bid a grand slam (1♣-6NT-7NT) with fourteen tricks but a missing ace - Josephine Culbertson led the wrong suit and all was well.

Buller's decision

This was Buller's critical decision from late on the first day:



At Game All, Von Zedtwitz opened 1♥ second in hand as South and Buller came in with 1♠, doubtless reasoning that this suit represented the best chance of game. However, when hearts were raised to game, he had a critical decision to make. With hindsight, it is easy to say that, if he were intent on bidding at a high level, he should have bid clubs first – but what if 2♣ had ended the auction with 4♠ icy?

Had Buller passed, there would have been no story, but he risked 5♣ and the price was 1,400 (the penalty for four down doubled in those days). In fact, he did quite well in the play: the queen of hearts was led (king, ace, ruff) and he found the imaginative play of a small spade to trick two – had he played the two top spades, he would have lost an extra trick which would have cost a further 400 points.

At the other table, Culbertson also bid 1♠ but Wood-Hill only raised to 3♥, which was something of an underbid. Now, when Kehoe bid 4♥, it was less attractive to venture 5♣ (i.e. because East had an opportunity to bid over 3♥ and, by bidding on, South had indicated some form of extra values). And worse was to happen in the play: after leading a top spade, Culbertson found the imaginative switch to a low club.

It looks pretty clear to discard a diamond from dummy, expecting to be able to ruff one in dummy ultimately and hold the losers to three tricks. Admittedly, it would be excellent defence on the part of East to withhold his ace, but this is the sort of play which is generally found in the post mortem rather than at the table.

For whatever reason, Kehoe didn't see matters in this light and ruffed trick two. Next, he played dummy's queen of hearts which held.

Had he now ruffed a spade to hand, he would still have been well placed since he could have reached an end position where East is forced to open up diamonds, but he instead crossed to hand with a diamond, ***East splitting his honours***.

Kehoe now played the king of clubs (which held - another fine, imaginative shot by Culbertson) and then the queen, covered and ruffed in dummy. He now ruffed a spade to

hand and played his master club - but East was able to ruff and return the king of hearts. With East still holding a spade to exit with, Kehoe had to go one down. Did Kehoe realise at the time that he could have made the contract even as the play had gone? The line needed was quite unintuitive: he had to ruff the king of clubs, ruff a spade, ruff a club and ruff another spade. Now, ace and another trump: East is welcome to his two trump tricks but will have to lead a diamond into the split tenace.

Bidding styles

This hand illustrates one of the themes that comes out of the match, the emphasis on bidding major suits, very possibly a relic of Auction days when the minor suits were regarded as hardly worthy of mention. Another reason was that, if you didn't bid a major early, it might be difficult to find a fit - in particular, there were numerous examples of 4-4 major suit fits being missed after no-trump openings.

Another recurrent theme is the reluctance of players to open the bidding. Four hands were thrown in at both tables and on three of these at least one player had what I regard as a normal opening bid (and I am considerably more conservative in this area than many nowadays).

A further seven hands were thrown in at one table - and three of these were bid to 3NT at the other, all failing (on one such occasion, Culbertson and Lightner bid unopposed to 3NT with two balanced hands and 19 points between them).

One of the 3NT contracts was unfortunate for Buller in that he and Mrs Evers had full values for their game but it had to fail on tight defence. However, 4♥ was making with a 4-4 fit, though this contract was impossible to reach in those days after a 1NT opening. At the other table, Kehoe must have wondered what was going on: his only high card was a king and the hand was passed out!

On two occasions, the fourth player passed with 14 points. There was a theory at the time that the fourth hand needed extra values to open since there was always the option of throwing in the hand, and the players seemed to take it to extremes. Unsurprisingly, this was not a uniformly successful strategy: when Wood-Hill tried it, he discovered that he had missed a making 4♠ (bid at the other table).

An extreme example of bidding majors was found by Culbertson on the deal which appears on the next page (dealer South, Love All).

At the other table, South opened 1♠, Buller doubled, North raised to 2♠ and there was no more bidding (obviously, both East and West might, or possibly should, have acted). After the normal lead of a top heart, play proceeded in predictable fashion and Von Zedtwitz made eight tricks. Although 5♣ is cold for East-West, it would have been all too easy to finish in 4♥ (e.g. East bids 3♥ over 2♠, raised to game; or West doubles again and East jumps to 4♥).

When Kehoe opened 1♠, however (it is interesting that this action was chosen at both tables), Culbertson eschewed the double - he bid 2♥! Wood-Hill passed (?), Lightner raised to 3♥ and Culbertson bid game; I am reminded of a Victor Mollo comment about the Hideous Hog - he needed fewer trumps than most people.

	♠ Q J 7 5 4 ♥ 7 ♦ J 6 5 ♣ 10 8 6 4	
♠ 9 ♥ A K 6 ♦ K Q 10 2 ♣ A J 9 7 3		♠ 8 6 2 ♥ 10 5 4 3 ♦ A 8 4 ♣ K Q 5
	♠ A K 10 3 ♥ Q J 9 8 2 ♦ 9 7 3 ♣ 2	

When 4♥ came round to him, Kehoe doubled: Wood-Hill, obviously expecting a different type of hand, removed to 4♠ and Kehoe went two down doubled. One could argue that Kehoe should have been content to defend 4♥ undoubled, but it really cannot have been right for Wood-Hill to pass over 2♥ and then arbitrarily remove a penalty double: had Kehoe wanted Wood-Hill to bid, he could have doubled 3♥, and the double of 4♥ was purely for penalties.

British performance

Buller himself played well throughout the match, handicapped as he was by his British Bridge bidding methods, and Kehoe didn't perform too badly, But the team was let down by Mrs Evers and Wood-Hill, both of whom were inclined to underbid and, in addition, made some very poor plays.

For example, it is difficult to fathom Mrs Evers' thought processes on the following hand. Dealer South, love all:

	♠ K J 9 8 7 4 ♥ 9 ♦ A 7 ♣ A 9 7 5	
♠ ♥ K 2 ♦ K Q 9 8 6 5 4 3 ♣ Q 8 4		♠ A 6 2 ♥ A Q J 10 7 3 ♦ 2 ♣ J 3 2
	♠ Q 10 5 3 ♥ 8 6 5 4 ♦ J 10 ♣ K 10 6	

When Buller's team was North-South, a relatively normal result was achieved, Wood-Hill going one down doubled in 4♠ (Wood-Hill sitting North got to open 1♠ ***third in hand***, followed by 2♥-2♠-4♦; inevitably, he now bid 4♠). However, he had perhaps missed an opportunity - we will never know. A diamond was led and declarer played spades at trick two: Von Zedtwitz ducked, won the second spade and exited safely with a third round.

Alice Gordon Evers (1874-1950)

Had Wood-Hill won on table and ducked a club to East, the winning defence (to lead a low heart to partner's king) was not obvious: however, if you assume that declarer has ace to four clubs and at least two diamonds, it never loses. But East was never tested, Wood-Hill following the weak line of playing a diamond at trick five.

It was hardly likely that Buller would pass the West hand and so it proved. He opened 1♦, Lightner doubled (standard with a good hand at the time) and Mrs Evers bid 3♥, stronger than 2♥ in British Bridge. Buller, showing exemplary confidence, raised to 4♥ and Lightner bid 4♠. Mrs Evers, who had shown her hand, passed and Buller reopened with 5♦: this was removed by his partner to 5♥ over which Culbertson dubiously bid 5♠, doubled by Mrs Evers.

Although Buller's style of bidding had obvious weaknesses, it has to be conceded that East and West gave a pretty accurate picture of their holdings on this occasion. But what they had gained in the bidding was lost in the play.

The first three tricks were the same as at Wood-Hill's table. However, Mrs Evers (who, it should be noted, had reason to assume her partner had the king of hearts), made the inexplicable play of a club to the fourth trick.

This was catastrophic: Lightner finessed the 10 of clubs on the next round, cashed the king and returned to hand with the delayed third round of trumps. Now he could cash the thirteenth club and discard dummy's diamond loser. It is difficult to conceive of a reason for the club play: it could never be necessary and would at best be passive – but, if passivity was needed, a trump was obvious. One can only conclude that Mrs Evers lost concentration.

Media response

It seems incredible now, but the match was front page news on both sides of the Atlantic. Many correspondents were sent to cover the match, including the World Champion chess player Emanuel Lasker, who filed reports for the Austrian and German press. The results were published daily and even broadcast by the BBC. And, in line with Buller's undertaking, *The Star* published a detailed record of the match for the princely sum of two shillings (i.e. 10p for younger readers).

Ely Culbertson (1891-1955)

Even the newspaper cartoonists got into the act. After Black Tuesday, Tom Webster produced a caricature in the *Daily* Mail of an unhappy lion bearing a distinct resemblance to Buller. Playing cards are falling from its paws and the caption was "Cricket, tennis, golf and now this!" At the time, England's sporting fortunes were at a low ebb: Australia's cricketers held the Ashes; Fred Perry's tennis successes lay some way in the future; and the American Bobby Jones was three quarters of the way towards his golfing grand slam.

The result of the match helped immeasurably with the establishment of Culbertson's reputation, and the sales of the *Blue Book* were enormous, with the first three imprints being sold out even as the match progressed. This was the first sensible, detailed treatise on bidding at contract bridge, and even today much of the advice remains valid.

This was by no means Buller's only significant contribution to bridge. We have already seen that he introduced contract in both its original and American forms to the Portland Club and, after the Culbertson match, he played a great part in popularising duplicate bridge in Britain, playing matches all around the country. He also had a role to play in the development of the game's administration; the emergence of national governing bodies will be the theme of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Colonel Buller's suggestion

The proposal that there should be a national governing body for bridge was not the idea of one person alone. In the June 1930 *BM*, an article from a Colonel Cecil Allanson suggested that an association be set up either by or in conjunction with the Portland Club, and that all clubs where bridge was played could affiliate to this new body; however, he did not mention the possibility that individuals might affiliate, only clubs.

Buller took up the idea of a national association, writing to *The Daily Telegraph* and pointing out that the Portland, being a private club, had its limitations: the Americans had recently set up such a body and Britain ought to have one too. Manning-Foster quoted this letter in *BM*, though it is clear that he was less than whole-heartedly enthusiastic about the proposal:

> "The idea is excellent. But where, oh where are we to find the material to set it going.
>
> From what I know of players in this country, they are an apathetic lot. They do not want to be bothered about organisation. They play Bridge most of them for fun and a few of them for money.
>
> Neither those who play for fun nor those who play for shekels are going to take the enormous trouble that would be involved in initiating and keeping going such a scheme.
>
> The average London player does not care a jot about the provincial players. He has never met them and does not want to do so. He is quite content to follow the Portland and there he leaves it.
>
> At the same time it might - I say advisedly - **might** be possible to enlist a few ardent souls who would be prepared to give the time and labour for such an enterprise.
>
> But will they be regarded by the public as authoritative? I do not want to appear to throw cold water on the idea, but I have my doubts."

The next development was a meeting arranged by Buller. Writing about this in a letter to *BBW* in March 1937, he commented:

> "The facts are that in 1930 I arranged a meeting of a number of well-known players … with a view to the formation of a League. I asked Culbertson to attend in an advisory capacity which he did. After a lot of cross talk [I rather suspect that this should read cross-talk], the meeting broke up in disorder, as is customary when bridge players meet."

According to Manning-Foster, who was one of those attending the meeting, Captain Wood Smith, who had hosted it (and, per Buller, provided an excellent tea), tried to make some progress and formed a provisional committee. However, the attitude of the Portland was negative and nothing came of it.

British Bridge League

It was left to Manning-Foster himself to take the initiative. An editorial in the March 1931 *BM* commented that there would soon be an international code of laws and that various European countries had either already formed leagues or were in the process of so doing. In June, he was able to write that:

> "After considerable pressure, mainly from the young people [Harry Ingram, who will be prominent later, was one of these], I have at last consented to form a Bridge League and it is now actually in existence. … Accordingly, at a packed meeting consisting of myself, my Sub-Editor and a black cat for luck, the League was formally inaugurated on May 1st and I was unanimously elected Hon. President and my Sub-Editor [Alex Hasler] Hon. Secretary, with power to add to our number! …
>
> I am convinced that such an organisation is needed. Unity is strength and in bringing together the vast number of players in this country, the rank and file … I am doing something that is really worthwhile for Bridge.
>
> Hitherto we have had scattered forces. The ordinary average player in the suburbs or provinces has had no opportunity of expressing himself. He has no voice in the game. The League is going to give him the recognition he desires and deserves.
>
> The promotion of Duplicate Contests, while an important function, is by no means all that the League is out to do. There are numerous ways in which it can help players, especially those in the provinces who are out of touch with London."

In a commendably brief statement in the magazine, Manning-Foster set out the aims and purposes of the British Bridge League. It is noteworthy that both contract and auction bridge fell within the BBL's ambit, one of the ambitions being the arrangement of auction tournaments. Manning-Foster's attitude to how the BBL should be governed is summed up by the paragraph headed Constitution:

> "Realising that Committees lead to endless talk, difference of opinion and to nothing being done, the League at present has no Committee. The Editor of the Magazine is the temporary Hon. President and the Assistant Editor the Hon. Secretary. Later, if it seems desirable, a Committee may be appointed by election by the members."

I must have attended several hundred bridge committee meetings over the years and the first sentence of the above contains more than a kernel of truth.

So far as players were concerned, the most significant announcement was that *BM* had presented a £100 trophy, to give members the opportunity of competing in match play, and that the first tournament would commence in September. This was the Gold Cup, the first open duplicate competition ever organised in the UK.

The aims and purposes statement stressed that the BBL's basis would be strictly amateur. This was quite ironic since, per Reese, Manning-Foster was "the most successful professional in the game"; he had, as well as his magazine, columns in *The Times*, *The Observer* and *The Field*.

The BBL developed rapidly. In August, the first list of local secretaries appeared in *BM*: twenty seven had now been appointed, not bad for a new venture, and there were some forty by the

autumn and over sixty one year later. Given the negligible coverage of bridge news in the press nowadays, it is sobering to observe that, within a year of its foundation, the BBL was of such importance that *The Times* was publishing its news every Saturday; it can't have harmed that Manning-Foster was *The Times* bridge correspondent.

Manning-Foster appears to have had a weakness for titles, and three of the local secretaries were so designated. These included the secretary for Cheshire, Lord Tollemache, still commemorated by the trophy which he was later to donate, who had devised a recherché bidding method, the "Chronological Order System". This might well be the least meritorious system ever seriously suggested, and Manning-Foster found himself obliged to say that he was not responsible for the noble lord's views and theories. The others were Doris, Lady Rhodes (Mayfair) and Lady Jacqueta Williams (Shropshire).

Given his comments on committees, it is ironic that within a year of the BBL being formed, an "Advisory Council" was formed. This was to have no more than eight members (plus the President) and six had already consented to serve: three of these were titled whilst the other three were bridge journalists past or present. It is fair to say that not all of the members would have been noted for their bridge expertise.

Ambivalent attitude

In some respects, it is surprising that Manning-Foster should have founded the BBL since he was no great lover of duplicate. He virtually never appeared in tournaments himself, far preferring rubber bridge. Indeed, some ill-chosen comments in the Editorial of the August 1933 *BM* generated such a mass of correspondence that he found himself obliged to restate his position in the following month.

What he wrote in the September edition hardly constituted a ringing endorsement of tournament bridge:

> "I am not opposed to Duplicate matches and Tournaments in principle. … But I make a distinction. … I believe that tournaments on the lines of Culbertson are inimical to the interests of the vast body of Bridge players and a real menace to the game as a game."

His views were much the same a year later. In the August 1934 *BM*, he said that he did "not welcome unreservedly the passion for Duplicate" and opined that "the majority of players do not welcome too frequent Duplicate tournaments".

The most likely reason for his founding the BBL is a simple one, a preventative measure designed to avoid the possibility of anyone else doing so. Indeed, given his professional interests, it is unlikely that his action was entirely disinterested. He doubtless hoped that he would thereby promote the magazine, which from then onwards featured BBL news every month.

Another possibility is that John Waddington encouraged the venture, realising that more duplicate bridge meant the sales of many more packs of cards. After all, four people could play bridge together with one pack only if they wished, but a set of duplicate boards required thirty two packs. It is surely significant that the BBL's official address was John Waddington in London, the same as that of *BM*.

European championship

The September 1931 edition of *BM* included a note that the Dutch Bridge League had announced that they would be holding an international bridge congress at The Hague during 1932, and that an international competition would be held on the same days so that those attending the congress could take part.

BBL members were invited both to attend the congress and take part in the competition. Several months later it was clarified that the event would be held at Scheveningen, close to The Hague, and that invitations had been issued to official organisations from sixteen countries. The BBL hoped that the Gold Cup winners would be the authorised Great Britain representatives, though in the event this did not come to pass.

This was an event of great significance in the history of international bridge since the International Bridge League was founded then (with Manning-Foster as its first President) and the tournament was retrospectively recognised as the first ever European Bridge Championship. Although perhaps not strictly relevant to a history of English tournament bridge, I think it useful to include a record of the pre-War European Championships and details of these, including how the Great Britain teams performed, can be found in the Appendix.

Gold Cup

The September edition of the magazine also contained full details of the first (1931/32) Gold Cup competition: it was open to all BBL members and there was no entry fee. Non-members could participate so long as their subscription was sent in along with the entry form. Hasler had produced a "Duplicate System" which enabled a thirty two board match (all the Gold Cup matches were of this length) to be played without the need for boards, and a set of this was provided free of charge for each match.

The tournament seems to have progressed smoothly and was ultimately won by a team captained by Edward Mayer, accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Henry "Pops" Beasley, Horace Renshaw and Percy Tabbush. In the final, they defeated T E Morel's team by 2,565 points. The *BM* report notes that seventy two teams entered the event and that three quarters of the participants were female, though only two women reached the semi-finals and none the final.

The semi-finals and final were staged in style at Selfridge's. Manning-Foster opened proceedings at the final and pointed out that, as he had always felt to be the case, the best players were not all concentrated at well-known London clubs. This was fair comment but the fact remains that it was not until 1959 that the Gold Cup was won by a team containing no players from the London area.

One hand was reported from the final, one on which both teams missed a chance. South was the dealer but the vulnerability was not stated:

	♠ A J 9 8 4 3 ♥ 10 6 ♦ A 10 6 ♣ Q 6	
♠ ♥ A Q 4 2 ♦ Q J 5 2 ♣ A J 10 4 3		♠ K 10 5 ♥ K J 7 5 3 ♦ K 8 ♣ K 8 2
	♠ Q 7 6 2 ♥ 9 8 ♦ 9 7 4 3 ♣ 9 7 5	

At both tables, South passed, West opened 1♣, North bid 1♠, East 2♥ and West raised to game. The anonymous author (most likely to have been Alex Hasler, the tournament manager) remarked that there was no need to jump to 4♥ and that it would have been better to first bid 2♠, and to follow this with a heart jump.

Unquestionably, this would have been a better sequence. In 1932, the 2♠ bid would unequivocally have guaranteed first round spade control and knowledge of this might have inspired East, with his club fit and crucial diamond control, to bid the slam. Nowadays, I would expect West to bid 3♠ over 2♥: East would now bid 4♣ and West could jump to 5♥, implying first round control in both black suits and asking for diamond control.

One chance encounter was to have enormous repercussions for the future of the duplicate game. In *Aces All*, Guy Ramsey reported that Richard Lederer, a noted rubber bridge player, by chance saw a placard announcing the Gold Cup Finals. He went in to watch for an hour and was not at all impressed: reasoning that a team of seasoned rubber bridge players would be more than a match for the duplicate "experts", he resolved to enter a team himself. A physically imposing man with a personality to match, he duly entered, won the 1933 event, went on to dominate tournament bridge for much of the 1930s, opened a famous club and played a major part in the administration of the game.

Richard Lederer (1895-1941)

National Pairs

The January 1932 *BM* contained two announcements relating to major events. One, not a BBL event, was a North v South match: as noted above, this attracted a lot of spectators and the South, captained by Buller, beat Kempson's North team by the impressive margin of 9,720 points. The other event was a proposed National Pairs tournament.

This was discussed at a meeting of local secretaries and Hasler pointed out that the BBL's finances would not permit free entry: it was agreed to charge an entry fee and to allow non-members to participate at twice the cost. In April it was announced that it was expected that the event "had exceeded our most sanguine expectations" and that some 2,000 players would take part.

The challenge of organising the National Pairs must have been a considerable one. Knowledge of how to run such events was not widespread and Hasler wrote an article setting out such essentials as scoring and movements. The final was held on a Friday evening in a Chancery Lane hotel and by modern standards was a decidedly primitive affair. There were nineteen tables in play, the event was scored by aggregate with separate North-South and East-West winners and only one board was played against each opposing pair.

The winning pairs, however, contained strong players: Buller and Kempson won as North-South by 1,800 points whilst Lady Rhodes and Wood-Hill won the East-West line by 950. Since Buller and Kempson were both substitutes, the North-South winners were officially a Bedford pair, Mrs Stephenson and Mrs Watson, and their names are engraved on the trophy as the first ever winners.

One hand from the final has been preserved for posterity, featuring a successful sequence by Buller and Kempson (shown as East-West for convenience):

♠ K 8	♠ A 10 7 2
♥ Q	♥ A K 4
♦ A Q J 10 8 6 2	♦ K 7
♣ Q J 7	♣ A 9 8 4

This was the last hand of the evening and Buller was the dealer with his side being vulnerable. He opened 2♦ which, on his methods, showed a hand which "is so definitely above average in high cards and/or distribution as to justify optimism" (this is taken from his third book "*How to Play Contract Bridge*"). Kempson, who had the values to bid at least 6NT, responded 4NT: this was not, of course, any form of ace asking convention but a natural, non-forcing slam try. However, since it was virtually certain that Buller would possess either the distribution or the high cards to justify another bid, it was highly unlikely that he would pass.

Recognising that his hand was of appreciable value in terms of playing strength, Buller now jumped to 6♦. Kempson, realising that the king of diamonds was the key card, bid the grand slam, and they were the only pair in the room to do so. Given the scoring method, they were correct to play in diamonds: with Buller's one hundred honours, the score came to 2,240 whereas 7NT would only have been 2,220. Buller used this hand as an example of the luck element inherent in duplicate. His opponents had done nothing wrong but suffered the ill luck to play against the one pair who had bid the grand slam. Lady Rhodes and Wood-Hill, however, had been blessed with good fortune: their opponents stopped in game!

New laws

Towards the end of 1931, the BBL formulated regulations for the conduct of duplicate bridge tournaments. These were fairly perfunctory in scope, taking up slightly more than a page of *BM*, but set out everything needed to enable the game to proceed. Less is sometimes more, and setting out basic principles rather than mind-numbing detail might usefully commend itself to current bridge legislators.

The first agreed international laws were published in November 1932, the work of representatives from Britain, France and the USA. Of most significance to players, were the five scoring changes:

- In order to encourage grand slam bidding, though it is unclear why this was felt to be at all a desirable objective, the bonuses were increased to 1,500 non-vulnerable and 2,250 vulnerable.
- The undertrick penalties (apart from non-vulnerable undoubled, which remained at fifty points per trick) were put on to uniform scales based upon the principle of arithmetic progression; for example, three down vulnerable and three down doubled non-vulnerable were both 450 (100 + 150 + 200).
- For no good reason, the bonus for making a doubled contract was abolished and was not reinstated until 1948.
- The score for undoubled overtricks was reduced to trick value.
- In a no-trump contract, the first, third, fifth and seventh tricks scored thirty points each and the second, fourth and sixth tricks forty points.

This last change had not been thought through properly. A corollary was that a side which made 1NT three times would not score game and this was contrary to the principles which had governed the game since the earliest days of bridge. This anomaly was duly drawn to the attention of the lawmakers who were, however, unconcerned by it.

In addition, there were many changes to the laws governing irregularities of one sort or another. The new laws did not command widespread approval and were replaced within a surprisingly short period: the next version was published in the first quarter of March 1935. Unusually, the preface mentioned why another set of laws was needed:

> "The revised code … conforms, in particular, to the very general desire for a reduction in the bonus for Grand Slam and a corresponding reduction in certain penalties."

The new laws were better set out and easier to use than the 1932 code. So far as scoring was concerned: the grand slam bonuses reverted to the pre-1932 position; the undertrick scales were changed to the ones with which players were familiar for some fifty years; and the trick values in no-trump contracts were changed to 40 for the first trick and 30 for each subsequent one.

The Portland Club Cup

The first major English tournament organised by a body other than the BBL was the Portland Club Cup. This was an invitation event for London clubs and only men were allowed to take part. The format of the event was knock-out and the game played was rubber duplicate, a

hybrid form intended to encompass the best features of both rubber bridge and duplicate. Many of the leading players of the day took part in this event and Manning-Foster devoted a lot of space to it in *BM*. The War meant the discontinuance of the event and it was not revived when peace returned. However, a similar tournament (the Devonshire Cup) was started in 1946 and this still exists, all matches being played at the Royal Automobile Club.

Friendly matches

One feature of bridge in the first half (in particular) of the 1930s was the number of friendly matches that were played. People such as Buller, Ingram and Phillips travelled all round the country, introducing duplicate to many people who had never seen it before. As was only to be expected, the standard of the opposing teams was variable and so the bridge was often less than first class. However, as a means of popularising the game, it could not have been bettered.

A cloud on Manning-Foster's horizon

Up until the end of 1932, Manning-Foster's grip on bridge had been complete. In November of that year, however, he was to get an inkling of what the future held for him. Phillips, backed by the De La Rue playing card company, started a new bridge magazine, the *British Bridge World*. The *BBW* cover price was the same as *BM*'s (though the subscription price was more expensive), it had more pages and was generally aimed at duplicate players.

Faced with a competitor, Manning-Foster proceeded to ignore it completely. As Rex Mackey put it in *The Walk of the Oysters*:

> "So far from observing the usual journalistic courtesies, … never once in the seven years of its lifetime did Manning-Foster allow, by even the most oblique reference, the chaste columns of his magazine to be profaned by an acknowledgement of the existence of its upstart rival."

However, this was just the start of Phillips' challenge to Manning-Foster and we will return to this in Chapter 6. Meanwhile, the next chapter focuses on some of the major matches that took place during the 1930s, including an event which was of great importance at the time yet is now almost forgotten.

Chapter 5

Major matches

Following Buller's match against Culbertson, there were a number of other major matches in the 1930s and some of these are mentioned here. It would be very easy to include a lengthy list of such contests, some of which were of little significance in the history of the game, but I can see little point in this. I have attempted to be discriminating and this will explain, if not excuse, any omissions.

Crockford's invitation

One event which was of undeniable significance was an invitation extended by Crockford's Club to teams from Germany and The Netherlands. This took place in the last week of January 1932 at the Grosvenor House Hotel on Park Lane and was the first time that European teams played duplicate matches against the cream of Britain's players.

Crockford's fielded three teams, all of which played a long match against each of the European teams. The Crockford's No. 1 team (Beasley-Renshaw; Sir Guy Domville-Mayer) won both its matches comfortably whilst the other home teams beat Germany but lost to The Netherlands; The Netherlands in turn beat Germany.

There was a surprisingly large amount of press coverage of what was a purely private match, although the newspapers often referred to it as "international", thus implying a degree of official recognition which it did not possess. Manning-Foster, though full of praise for the fact that the match was a purely amateur affair, was critical of this aspect, blaming the press for the exaggeration and commenting portentously that:

> "Serious exception was taken to the description by the Dutch and German Bridge Leagues."

According to Mackey, the degree of press coverage approached that of the Buller match. Certainly, quotations by "A Stunt" in *BM* indicate that the Daily Express, Daily Mail, Evening Standard, Morning Post and Sunday Times all had reporters present at the event.

One of the hands received a lot of press coverage. It was reported in *BM* by A F Stapleton-Harris who, perhaps mercifully, omitted to include the names of the players.

Game all, dealer West:

	♠ K 7 6 2 ♥ 10 9 8 7 4 ♦ 9 8 4 ♣ A	
♠ A 8 ♥ 2 ♦ A K 6 5 2 ♣ 10 9 8 7 4		♠ 9 ♥ A K Q J 6 5 3 ♦ Q J 10 7 3 ♣
	♠ Q J 10 5 4 3 ♥ ♦ ♣ K Q J 6 5 3 2	

With this layout, large swings are clearly a possibility and the Crockford's North-South pair must have felt that they had got the better of their German opponents.

S	W	N	E
	P	P	4♥
5♣	5♦	P	6♦
6♠	X	P	P
P			

It is fair to say that all of West's contributions to the auction were debatable. In particular, the initial pass and subsequent 5♦ bid (as opposed to what looks like an obvious double) seem peculiar choices. Having made these choices, however, there was something to be said for passing over 6♠ and allowing his partner to express an opinion: after all, East presumably bid 6♦ to make and West's hand could hardly have been better; although tempting, it was too risky for West to bid 7♦ since East's black suits could have been reversed. Displaying the same level of inspiration in his choice of lead as he did in the bidding, West led his singleton heart, the outcome being that Crockford's scored 1,660 (this is the score per the article but it should have been 1,710; the bonus for making a doubled contract when vulnerable was at that time 100).

However, the result turned out not to be as good as it first seemed:

S	W	N	E
	1♦	P	2♥
4♠	X	XX	6♦
P	P	6♠	P
P	X	XX	P
P	P		

Once again, West failed to find the killing club lead (it would have been quite an achievement on this bidding) and Germany scored 2,170, the bonus for fulfilling a vulnerable redoubled contract being then 200.

Whilst North's redouble of 4♠ may perhaps be understandable, though by no means to everyone's taste, his subsequent redouble of 6♠ smacks of lunacy - he should have been delighted to be allowed to play in 6♠ doubled. And, particularly at aggregate scoring, surely East or West (if not both) ought to have removed to 7♦: it is very likely that North would have doubled this (on the strength of his ace of clubs - it's pretty unlucky when a singleton ace ***in an unbid suit*** gets ruffed) - and the score to East-West would have been 2,380.

Stapleton-Harris recorded one humorous incident from the match. One onlooker commented to him that Mr Crockford himself was not playing:

> "Almost tearfully I managed to convey the sad news that this had been found impossible owing to Mr Crockford's untimely demise in 1844!"

In more serious vein, he commented on the German bidding methods, opining that one of their ideas:

> "Functioned quite well so long as it was not completely appreciated by their opponents. After agreeing by their early bids to play a hand in No- Trumps, one or other of the partners would then bid his weakest suit, presumably to prevent the opponents leading it. … As soon as this ruse was detected by their opponents, it was defeated by the immediate lead of the "warned" suit, often with dire results to the Germans."

One can imagine their opponents suggesting to the German players that this sort of undisclosed agreement was not quite cricket, let alone bridge.

An Empire Tournament?

The Times reported in September 1932 that bridge centres had been established in several of the dominions, mentioning Australia, Canada, Kenya, New Zealand, South Africa and Zanzibar. The article speculated that one of the BBL's tasks in the near future might be to organise an Empire Tournament.

Given that Manning-Foster was the bridge correspondent for *The Times*, this report was presumably based upon a realistic expectation that such an event would take place. However, nothing more was heard of it and it was not until a further 70 years had passed that a bridge tournament was held for the countries of the Commonwealth.

The first European

The first European Championship organised by the IBL was held at the Grosvenor House at the end of May 1933. This should properly be recognised as the first ever European Championship: the 1932 Scheveningen tournament was no more than a private event organised by the Dutch Bridge League (it was only whilst this was taking place that the IBL was founded), with other leagues being invited to participate. The abridged report of the IBL for the years 1932-1937, printed in the July 1937 *BM*, supports this view:

> "The first Congress and the first International Championship Tournament was held in Grosvenor House, London."

That Great Britain acted as the host country was a corollary to Manning-Foster having been elected IBL President in 1932. The presidency changed each year and the principle was that the Championship should be held in the President's home country.

Six teams took part, the others being Austria (the winners), Belgium, Denmark, The Netherlands and Norway; Germany and Hungary were both expected to take part but neither produced a team. Further details can be found in the Appendix.

One of the features of the event was the entertainment provided for the teams. The bridge took place only during the afternoon and evenings (except for a visit to The Derby one afternoon) and a reception with lunch was laid on every day. So far as Manning-Foster was concerned, the overseas teams were our guests and should be treated appropriately.

In contrast to the splendid hospitality, the arrangements for the bridge were low key. When press reports mentioned the low attendance by members of the public, Manning-Foster merely commented:

> "Well, we did not seek the public, nor was the tournament advertised in the Press as a spectacle.
>
> We had quite as many onlookers as I expected or desired. A small charge was made for admission and, while the demand for free tickets was abnormal, Bridge players … did not roll up in their thousands when they found they had to pay."

Culbertson was in London whilst the event was taking place and Manning-Foster invited him to attend. This turned out to be a mistake. As Mackey put it:

> "In an interview which was prominently featured in the newspapers of two continents Mr Culbertson gave his considered opinion of the bidding and play, which was not calculated to affect the contestants with any delusions of grandeur.
>
> He amplified these observations with a reference to the arrangements for the tournament itself, which he suspected had been delegated to a clergyman's wife with a wide experience of running Whist drives in the parish hall."

Writing in the June 1948 *Contract Bridge Journal*, George Nelson, who was covering the event for the *Yorkshire Post* and *Yorkshire Evening News*, gave his recollections of what happened on this occasion:

> "Someone asked [Culbertson] what he thought about the English bidding and play - and his short reply was 'lousy'. This mightily offended the late Manning-Foster who had nominated the team and arranged the Event. When Culbertson came to the Contest a second time there was what a London newspaper described as a 'Dramatic Scene at Bridge Tournament'. Manning-Foster sent him a message telling him not to come again, whereupon Ely Culbertson walked out.
>
> Manning-Foster then called a meeting of Press representatives and suggested that we should taboo Culbertson in all our papers. I edged* by saying that such a decision ought surely to be left to our respective Editors. Consulting mine, I told them that leaving Culbertson out of Contract Bridge was like playing Hamlet without the prince."

*Nelson, who often dropped his aitches, might have meant to say hedged.

Manning-Foster was outraged, describing Culbertson's comments as "offensive and unpardonable", and it seems that Culbertson's instinct for self-publicity superseded any sense of duty or obligation that he might have felt towards his host. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Culbertson's voicing his opinions in this public way, the fact remains that the arrangements for the event were poor. A set of six hands circulated from table to table and spectators were able to follow those boards which looked interesting, with consequences which were predictable.

Ingram, who was playing on the British team, shared his recollections in a series of articles in *BBW* in the 1960s; he commented as follows:

> "At one point during our match against Austria a crowd arrived at our table, which rather suggested that there was a slam in the air. Sure enough, playing with W E T Cole, I opened One Club (a strong conventional bid) and received the response of Two Diamonds, showing two quick tricks and a five-card suit. With little preliminary bidding, and being nervous that Cole, who was inclined to underbid, might refuse to bid the slam, I jumped to Six Diamonds.
>
> Cole, however, had seen the crowd and appreciated the slam prospects, so that when he found I could jump to six he bid seven. These were approximately the two hands:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | ♠ A 4 2 | ♠ K 5 3 |
> | ♥ A Q 5 | ♥ J 7 |
> | ♦ A J 3 2 | ♦ K Q 7 6 4 |
> | ♣ K Q 2 | ♣ A 9 3 |
>
> [Edmund] Pollak, South, led the 9 of hearts and Cole reviewed the hand. It looked a hopeless seven with the king of hearts marked with North. Finally he could see no recourse but to play a small heart from dummy, and to his amazement it ran round to his jack and the slam was made. When the victorious Austrian team arrived back at the Vienna Bridge Club, the first thing Pollak saw on the card room wall was a six-foot 9 of hearts. He had led the 9 from K92."

One has some sympathy with Pollak since the lead could have been best chance to deflect Cole from the winning line; one can imagine certain prominent players nowadays who would be likely to find it. However, the auction was, to say the least, hit and miss, thus increasing the level of risk attached to the lead.

Schwab Cup

It is difficult now to appreciate the excitement generated by the two Schwab Cup matches in 1933 and 1934. As Ingram put it, some thirty years after the event:

> "Today very few players will have heard of the Schwab Trophy, yet in the 1930s to play in it was possibly a greater honour than any other in the bridge world. … Perhaps its importance could be likened to the Ryder Cup or Walker Cup of the golfing world."

The trophy was presented by American steel magnate Charles M Schwab for international bridge competition and it was hoped that the event would become the bridge equivalent of tennis's Davis Cup. Although Schwab had been wealthy, years of extravagant living and the

1929 stock market crash had impoverished him, and it is difficult to see how he could have afforded what was by all accounts a magnificent platinum trophy: he died in 1939, having spent the last few years of his life living in a small apartment, and his estate was found to be insolvent to the not insubstantial tune of $300,000.

This is not the only mystery concerning the trophy. Reese commented laconically that "what became of his trophy is obscure", and I can find no certain reference as to its fate. Although *The Official Encyclopaedia of Bridge* claimed that it had been passed to the World Bridge Federation by Culbertson's heirs and that it was now the trophy for the World Pairs Championship, the WBF have informed me that there is no trophy for this event; as negative confirmation of this, there are no photographs of the winners with the trophy such as one would expect to see.

The most likely answer is that the trophy was reclaimed by Schwab's heirs. A letter written to Culbertson by Schwab in May 1933 makes it clear that the trophy was donated for international bridge competition between countries. That is, the trophy was not Culbertson's personal property and should not have formed part of his estate: if it was not being used as Schwab intended, it should have reverted to his heirs.

Arrangements for the 1933 match

An article in the March 1933 *BBW* stated that arrangements had been made for a match between the Crockford's Clubs in London and New York, and that this would be staged in London about three months later. It was expected that the New York team would include the Culbertsons with any of Michael Gottlieb, Oswald Jacoby and Lightner comprising the other pair.

No details were given of the likely London representatives save for a comment that they would undoubtedly be selected from amongst those players who had recently participated in a number of international matches.

This was beyond doubt a private match between two clubs since the only national bridge organisation in the UK was the BBL, and this was not involved at all. However, it was not long before the references to Crockford's were dropped and *BBW* referred to it as "the Anglo-American match".

An ad hoc Selection Committee was cobbled together, chaired by Bernard Westall (the Chairman of *BBW* and shortly to be appointed the Managing Director of De La Rue), and containing only bridge journalists. The best that could be said about the members of this committee is that most were entirely disinterested since there could be no question of their being good enough to take part.

The Selection Committee quickly found itself enmeshed in controversy. In line with his characteristic ability for grabbing the headlines whilst treading on the toes of others, Culbertson had mentioned the names of players whom he expected to find in the opposing ranks, and this was inevitably interpreted as an attempt to dictate the composition of the English team.

A lengthy article in *The Times*, anonymous but presumably written by Manning-Foster, criticised both this and any reference to the match as "international". In its daily reports on the match, however, although *The Times* began by referring to "Ely Culbertson's team" and "a team of British players", it later modified its wording and referred to the American and British teams, thus implying that the match possessed international status.

One consequence of Culbertson's comments was the resignation of two members of the Selection Committee. A very limited trial was held (four tables playing 24 boards) and the team selected. Beasley, who had been a member of the Selection Committee, was appointed captain and the other members were announced as Domville, Mayer, Renshaw, Tabbush, Graham Mathieson and George Morris. This team was certainly representative of Crockford's since all were members of that club but in no sense could it be said to represent England (or Great Britain).

However, this was not the team that took the field. When details of the players "finally selected" were announced a month later, Mayer and Renshaw (arguably the two strongest players in the original team) were not included and had been replaced by Lady Rhodes, another Crockford's member. No reasons were given in *BBW* for the change in personnel (indeed, it was not alluded to at all) but it is reasonable to speculate that the absentees might have felt uncomfortable at any suggestion that their selection had been influenced by Culbertson. Perhaps it is significant that Phillips felt called upon to deny that this had happened:

> "For this allegation, we assert flatly there is no foundation at all."

There were no surprises in the Culbertson team: Gottlieb and Lightner were duly selected. All three possible line-ups were chosen at some time or other but, for most of the match, Ely partnered Lightner whilst his wife played with Gottlieb.

High public profile

The match attracted great publicity: per Mackey, both the Daily Mail and the News Chronicle, having engaged Beasley and Culbertson respectively to provide daily copy, "treated the match as front page news with banner headlines". Phillips was later to opine that no bridge match in this country had ever attracted as much publicity as this one, and it is a reasonable assumption that none will in the future. According to Nelson, there were press representatives present from twenty seven countries, and he produced four deals each day for his two Yorkshire papers.

Not that one should necessarily take on trust everything written by Mackey. As Kempson put it in reviewing *The Walk of the Oysters* in *BM*, "The book contains inaccuracies of which no historian should be guilty." Although, as might be expected, *The Times* covered the match in more restrained fashion than its less inhibited rivals, it did publish a daily column giving details of the play and the standing of the teams. It is simply wrong to allege, as Mackey did, that it virtually ignored the match:

> "With that majestic philosophy that what should not exist does not exist it allotted an inch and a half to an announcement of the match."

The match was staged in style at Selfridge's, with an electronic display board similar to the Bridgerama that became popular some 25 years later, commentary by expert players and even periscopes (to enable the players to be seen). The crowds of spectators seem more reminiscent of football than bridge – per Mackey, some 27,000 attended the event, Nelson's view being that there were a thousand spectators present at every session. There was even a score board set up in Oxford Street for passers-by, and a big crowd cheered every success for the home team.

The significance of the match can be gauged from the fact that a hardback book some 400 pages in length, including analysis by Culbertson as well as the match records, was published by the News Chronicle and was on sale *within 36 hours of the conclusion of the match*. At the time, this was held to be a publishing record. Its cost was three shillings and sixpence, or 17½p in modern terms.

Strong British start

The British team started well and was still leading after 150 of the scheduled 300 boards. However, a decline set in at this point and the Americans gained 5,960 points during the fourth day. There was no way back from here and the lead never fell below 5,000 for the rest of the match, the final margin being 10,900.

There were two reasons for the disastrous results on the fourth day. Firstly, the Americans got more of the close decisions right, bidding game when it could be made and staying out when it could not. It certainly didn't help that there were two occasions when the British allowed 3NT contracts to make which were down in top tricks (neither defence was completely trivial but one inclines to the view that both contracts should have been beaten).

Secondly, Beasley decided to change the line-up. Up to and including board 164, he partnered Domville with Morris and Tabbush in the other room. Perhaps he was concerned that the overnight lead of 320 had turned into a deficit of 970, or maybe he just thought that a change would do good. Whatever the reason, he partnered Mathieson for the rest of the day, continuing with Morris and Tabbush for another sixteen boards.

After board 180, with the deficit now up to 1,450, he decided to try Domville and Morris. There may have been good reasons for this (maybe Tabbush was tired), but the outcome was catastrophic: the new pair missed a pretty easy grand slam and then bid one with an ace missing, Domville being the guilty party on both occasions. Finally, Domville had to find a lead against a slam and, with a choice of two plausible suits, chose the wrong one (most would have done the same). Between them, these three boards cost almost 4,200 points (diligent readers will recall that the bonus for a vulnerable grand slam was at this time 2,250).

The 4-5 No-trump convention

Culbertson's 4-5 No-trump was the first slam convention invented. It was a far more sophisticated convention than Blackwood in that it both gave and requested information. In order to bid 4NT, a player had to possess either three aces or two aces and a king in a suit bid by the partnership. If he had three aces and a king in a bid suit, and was definitely interested in a grand slam, it was open to him to bid 5NT instead.

In response to 4NT, 5NT showed two aces (or one ace and the king in every suit bid by the partnership), five of the lowest partnership bid suit was a sign-off and any other bid was natural and descriptive. In the light of the information given by the 4NT bid, the responder could of course jump direct to a slam. If the 4NT bidder bid 5NT on the next round, it guaranteed possession of all four aces.

In the hands of expert practitioners, this was a very effective convention, one of its strongest features being that significant negative inferences were frequently available from the fact that it had not been used. It was adopted as part of the original Acol system and remained so for many years, although (as Jack Marx put it in a *BM* article on his "Byzantine Blackwood" convention in April 1972) "Diminishing numbers were using it with diminishing efficiency."

Culbertson was very proud of the 4-5 No-trump and, in large part, attributed to it his victory. Others fell in with this line, including Phillips who opined that:

> "The match was very largely won by the 4-5 No-trump convention."

Beasley also admitted that the Americans had done better on slam hands:

> "The Americans … were our superiors in bidding big hands. Almost entirely we lost by missing slams that were bid and made by the opposition."

Whilst it is true that the British team did badly on slam hands, this had very little to do with the opposing team's use of the 4-5 No-trump convention. To be sure, there were three hands where the use of the convention made it easy to reach the right contract, which in each case was missed by the British pair in the other room, but there were three hands where the convention proved ineffective: whilst all of these instances could be explained by individual error, the fact remains that, in the hands of its users, the 4-5 No-trump did no better than break even.

It is fair to say that, had the British been employing any form of slam convention, their bidding would have been significantly improved. Morris and Tabbush in particular seemed to have no other way of inviting a slam than to jump to the five level, leaving their hapless partner with the last guess.

Every silver lining has a cloud …

No reference to the 1933 Schwab Cup match would be complete without mention of the most discussed hand. Dealer East with North-South vulnerable:

	♠ K J 5 ♥ 6 4 ♦ 7 4 ♣ A Q 10 8 7 4	
♠ A Q 10 9 7 3 ♥ Q J 9 2 ♦ K 6 5 ♣		♠ 2 ♥ K 10 8 7 5 3 ♦ A Q J 2 ♣ 5 2
	♠ 8 6 4 ♥ A ♦ 10 9 8 3 ♣ K J 9 6 3	

Unusually, Morris and Tabbush did well on a slam hand. After an initial pass by East, their unopposed auction was 1♠-3♥-5♥-6♥. I suppose that one can say that Morris did well to raise to 5♥, but the sequence was no more than a blind guess. Had Morris's minors been reversed, he would have bid in exactly the same way and ten tricks could easily have been the limit of the hand.

This looked like a good board for the home team and they certainly needed it: at this point in the match, the American lead was almost 8,000. Well, there was a swing but it went the other way!

Lightner opened 1♥ as East (on the system, he lacked the values for this bid) and Culbertson responded 1♠. Beasley now entered the fray with 2♣ and, after a pass by Lightner, Domville cue-bid 2♥. At least, that is what he thought that he did. Beasley read this as natural, bid in an attempt to expose a psychic opening, and passed. Note how well Culbertson did to pass over 2♥: perhaps Beasley's manner had indicated some uncertainty over the meaning of his partner's bid.

Two hearts made the predictable one trick, leaving Domville seven adrift. This would have been no tragedy nowadays, a penalty of 700 to East West and a gain of 280 on the board. However, in 1933, the penalty was 1,750 (100 for the first undertrick, a further 150 for the second, then 200 for the third etc.), meaning that the Americans gained 770 on the board.

Beasley's immediate reaction to this debacle was to call Domville a lunatic (in the columns of the *Daily Mail*, which can't have done much for team harmony). Apparently, he later accepted that he should have bid again and, in a situation where there was even a possibility of ambiguity, this would surely have been the safer action: with a well-placed spade holding, Beasley's hand was far from being hopeless in support of hearts if that is what Domville had; and if he didn't have hearts, it would be catastrophic to pass.

Adverse reactions

It is fair to say that not everyone was impressed by the standard of bridge that the participants displayed. Phillips was enthusiastic:

> "The recent match was a first-class exhibition of Contract Bridge as played by the world's best players … Naturally if every hand were bid, and every card played, in accordance with the directions of a committee of wiseacres who had all four hands in front of them, a much higher class of Bridge would be exhibited. Unfortunately the best players make mistakes. The fact remains that the winning team in the Schwab Cup Match played Bridge of a different class from that which any English side is capable."

Perhaps predictably, *BM* took a different view, referring to "in-and-out form" and opining that both teams fell short of international standard. Mayer had made his views clear in the *Evening Standard* and his comments were quoted:

> "It is difficult for me to criticise either of the team captains as it is now their practice to devote their exclusive attention to publicity and to have their matches as a side-line. … The truth is that there should never have been a match of this kind at all."

The 1934 match

The second and last Schwab Cup match took place the next year and was arranged in somewhat of a hurry. In line with the aspiration that the Schwab Cup would become a quasi-Davis Cup for bridge, there had been announcements in *BBW* that "several European countries have indicated their desire to enter teams" and that England would probably play Holland in the first round of the European Zone.

Whatever interest there may have been in other countries, none became officially involved and no matches took place in the European Zone. This can be no more than speculation, but it seems likely that the Dutch would have had reservations about playing against a team which was not authorised by the BBL (and another factor may have been the fact that neither 1933 team was officially accredited).

There was uncertainty up to virtually the last minute as to whether the match would take place. In the October BBW, Phillips wrote:

> "In the meantime, there has been much speculation concerning the Schwab Cup. Is it to be played for this year or must our next assault on the Cup be postponed? At the moment of going to press, it is impossible to say."

The same issue quoted a late press release of 17th September, to the effect that the match would be played in London starting in the middle of October. A committee was being formed (with Beasley as chairman) and team trials would be held on a knock-out basis. As it happened, several of those invited to join the committee declined, including both Manning-Foster and Phillips: in Manning-Foster's case, the reason was the fact that the BBL was the representative body, not Beasley's committee: the latter could not "rightly claim to represent England".

The knock-out team trials had doubtless been decided upon in order to address the criticisms of the way in which the 1933 team had been selected. However, there was hardly sufficient

time to organise this form of trial and, as might well have been anticipated at the outset, the format was changed to pairs and the trial took place over one weekend only a week before the match.

Although a pairs' trial scored by match points was hardly an ideal method of team selection, there was no realistic alternative to match-point scoring available at the time. Sixteen pairs took part, and it is fair to observe that some of these did not possess the quality required to take on Culbertson.

Fortunately, two of the best pairs in the country at the time finished first and second: Lederer and Willie Rose were the easy winners with Stanley Hughes-Ingram second and Alan Frost-Colonel George Walshe third. The first two pairs were automatically selected with the third pair as reserves (in the event, they were called upon to play one session of 30 boards, to allow Hughes and Ingram to rest); Walshe was appointed captain.

This was a powerful team. Lederer and Rose had dominated the tournament scene in 1934, winning both the Gold Cup and the Tollemache Cup (the newly-formed National Bridge Association's equivalent of the Gold Cup), whilst Hughes and Ingram had been prominent in events ever since duplicate bridge had started. However, the rivalry between the two pairs was keen and they had never before been team-mates.

The American team showed one change from that which had played in 1933: Albert Morehead, a Culbertson acolyte aged only 25, replaced Gottlieb and played throughout with Jo. Although this was a strong team, better ones could have been selected and once again the players were not official representatives.

Given the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there was hardly any advance publicity. However, according to Phillips, "the whole of the London press carried full reports each day", and there was clearly a lot of interest in the match. In contrast to the arrangements made in 1933, spectators were not encouraged: the match was held at the Dorchester Hotel over five consecutive days and only the press and match officials were supposed to be allowed in the playing rooms. This was easier in theory than in practice: per Phillips, there seemed to be "a devil of a lot" of either officials or journalists, and Lederer threatened to stop playing if his wife was not allowed to watch.

Another good start

As had been the case in 1933, the British team again got off to a good start and led by over 3,000 points after 180 of the 300 boards had been played. This lead was increased by another 2,000 in the course of the first twelve boards on the Thursday afternoon but disaster struck in the second half of this session.

It may be significant that, during the tea break, Ingram had suggested to Lederer that he and Rose should take the evening off so as to be fresh for the final day but this proposal was not accepted. Perhaps Lederer had less than entire confidence in Frost and Walshe, though they had held their own when playing the Wednesday evening session in place of Hughes and Ingram.

After the break, a succession of swings went the way of the Americans and the lead was cut to 2,040 by the end of the session. It might well have been better if Lederer and Rose had taken the evening off: the decline continued throughout the evening, at the end of which the USA led by 990.

This was hardly an insuperable obstacle, but it must have felt like one to the home team. According to Ingram, they were all exhausted: certainly, they were making more mistakes than earlier in the match and it could hardly have helped that both Hughes and Ingram were going to their offices each morning.

The last day started with a change in the playing arrangements: up until this point, Lederer and Rose had played throughout against Ely Culbertson and Lightner with Hughes and Ingram taking on Jo and Morehead.

According to a report in *The Times* which referred to the penultimate day's play, Hughes and Ingram had "established complete supremacy" in their room, so it is not obvious that a change of opponents was called for. Writing about it in 1963, Ingram conceded that this decision may have been misjudged:

> "Looking back, I do not think this was a good move, although it seemed all right at the time. We rather imagined that the change of systems against the Americans would upset them a bit."

Lederer and Rose played a Two Club system whilst Hughes and Ingram used a Strong Club. Both methods were sensible and eminently playable, particularly in comparison with some of the ridiculous systems advocated at the time.

What went wrong?

A selection of over 50 hands was published in *BBW* but this is still less than 20% of the total; it appears that the full records were not made publicly available. It follows that any attempt to analyse what went wrong in the last three and a half sessions is inevitably circumscribed by the limitations of the material available.

What is certainly true is that the Americans bid and made some half a dozen game contracts that the British did not. In addition, there were several poor decisions in the slam zone: on consecutive boards, Lederer and Rose bid a slam missing a cashing ace-king (Lightner did well to find the lead) and then voluntarily bid to 5♠ one down; unforgivably, Ingram claimed in print that they had the chance to double 5♥ which would have gone five down: in fact the 5♥ bid was a slam try made by Lederer. Not long after, as a result of wanton over-bidding by Rose, the same pair bid a slam missing two aces.

Perhaps the most crucial hand was one early on in the last day: having just had an excellent board (making a vulnerable 3NT doubled which could easily be missed, and was in fact played in a part-score at the other table), Hughes and Ingram gave back all the gain and more by bidding a grand slam which needed a side suit of A10854 opposite Q2 to play for no losers. Ingram himself described it as "the hand which, to my mind, decided the match".

With one session to go, the Americans led by 970. In fact, according to Ingram, the margin should have been only 330 – a swing of 320 to England had been wrongly credited to the USA. Apparently, the players did not check the score sheets at the time and Walshe did not notice it. As an experienced non-playing captain, I can only describe this as a pathetic dereliction of duty.

Early on in this last session, the most publicised hand in the match occurred, quite probably the final nail in the coffin. As the hand went, the USA gained 550 points, but it is not inconceivable that a swing of equal or even greater size might have gone Britain's way.

North was the dealer at love all.

	♠ J 10 9 8 7 ♥ J ♦ A 10 3 ♣ K J 10 4	
♠ 2 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ K 9 6 5 4 2 ♣ A 9 6		♠ A Q 6 5 4 3 ♥ K ♦ Q 8 ♣ Q 8 5 3
	♠ K ♥ Q 10 7 6 5 4 3 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ 7 2	

This is how Ingram described what happened at his table:

> "Hughes opened One Spade [not the most solid of opening bids], Lightner passed and, sitting South, I realised that, as Hughes had not opened One Club (our strong opening bid), or a Two Bid which showed good distributional values, the chances of a game were small and to bid the hearts might get us out of our depth.
>
> So I passed and now the fun commenced. Culbertson doubled my partner's One Spade and after two passes, rather imagining the opposition had more than they really held [really?], I psyched with Two Diamonds. This was duly doubled and when it came round to me again I debated whether to bid 2NT or even Two Spades, with the object of getting doubled and then escaping to Three Hearts.
>
> Naturally these thoughts took a few seconds and then I looked at the board, saw it was love all and thought, why flog it? So I bid Two Hearts, which to my surprise was doubled by Culbertson [who had no reason to do anything other than pass] and passed out.
>
> The two of spades was led to Lightner's Ace and a small one was returned. It was quite simple for me to discard and make the contract, but foolishly I trumped and got over-trumped for one down."

Culbertson was not at all happy about Ingram's hesitation before bidding 2♥ and I can't say that I blame him. The comment "Naturally these thoughts took a few seconds" seems disingenuous, just the sort of self-serving statement that people make in front of Tournament Directors and Appeal Committees.

Culbertson was on less firm ground when he turned his attack to Hughes, asking him how he could pass the 2♥ bid.

Hughes pointed out that it was hardly likely that someone who had just been doubled in 2♦ - and had run from it - would want to be put back to that suit a level higher, and that ended the matter. The fact was that Ingram should have been plus 420 on the board and was instead minus 100, the psychological loss probably being greater than the actual one.

The result at the other table was not much to shout about. Somewhat surprisingly, there were two passes to Jo Culbertson who opened 3♥. The failure of Rose to open with the East hand failed to attract any comment at all in *BBW*: at the time, the approved method of hand valuation was by way of honour tricks, and Rose's hand was sub-standard. However, given that he held the spade suit, he might have stretched a point and opened.

Lederer, who was a difficult man to keep out of the auction, overcalled 4♦, at best a dubious action facing a passed hand. Rose, protected by his passed hand status and partial fit for diamonds, tried 4♠. Whilst Lederer might (should?) have passed this, he decided to repeat his diamonds and Morehead doubled. The jack of hearts was led and Lederer finished three down, a penalty of 450: on the surface, Lederer had nine tricks easily available so there seems no reason for him to have finished with eight. One possibility is that he played a club to the ace at trick two in order to try the spade finesse.

Had Lederer passed over 3♥, it is reasonable to suppose that Rose would have bid 3♠ and then it would have been characteristic for Lederer to try 3NT. Whilst this contract could, and indeed should, be beaten, it is not impossible to envisage it making. Assuming a heart lead, declarer wins and plays the queen of diamonds from dummy. If the defence duck, they can always prevail, but if North wins, and far worse mistakes than this were made during the match, there is no defence.

It is fair to say that, had the luck been running Britain's way at that moment, both Ingram and Lederer would have displayed more inspiration, resulting in them gaining a swing of 820 as opposed to losing one of 550.

Ingram's poor performance on the hand continued when he came to discuss it some 30 years later. He alleged that Morehead bid 4♠ over 4♦ and that Rose, instead of doubling, raised to 5♦! This would have been the most extraordinary simultaneous exhibition of appalling judgement by two expert players, and I was happy to set the record straight in a recent *BM* article: bridge in the 1930s might have been unscientific but it wasn't suicidal. Ingram stated in his article that he had the match records in front of him and one can only assume that he must have misread them. Certainly, had the auction proceeded as he alleged, it would have attracted trenchant comment in *BBW* from Phillips. To make matters worse, the incorrect version of the auction was subsequently published in two books.

Strong performance by Lederer

The match had slipped away and a couple of late attempts to turn the tide merely exaggerated the final margin. The Americans won officially by 3,650 but no-one was under any illusions that this fairly reflected the respective merits of the two teams. It was a very close affair, one that could easily have gone the other way. Indeed, the anonymous reporter in *BM* opined that:

> "Next year England **will** win the Schwab Cup. Taken all round, I consider they played on the whole the better Bridge."

The *BM* writer could hardly have been more wrong. After the smoke had cleared following the 1934 match, the Schwab Cup was never contested again and rarely as much as mentioned. The IBL decided in 1937 that the team winning the next European Championship would play for the Schwab Cup but, apart from this, the event disappeared into history. In one sense, however, the 1934 prediction was correct: the next match between teams from England and the USA was for the Crowninshield Trophy in 1949 - and this time there **was** an English victory, albeit by the narrow margin of 330 points!

As a postscript to the 1934 event, and notwithstanding the hand quoted above, it should be noted that general opinion was that Lederer himself played a pretty good game. Both Phillips and Ramsay (in *Aces All*) stressed how well he had performed, mentioning also that not all the rest of the team stood the strain to the same extent as he did. As Ramsay put it:

> "I covered this match, and I wrote at the time that Lederer played Ely off his own ground. He dominated the thronged rooms as a star dominates the stage. He seemed tireless; he appeared invulnerable. …
>
> But alas! The British team was not composed of four Lederers. Ingram found the strain so great that he could not sleep and no-one else could play with Stanley Hughes, whose psychic bidding had to be seen to be believed. Moreover, Rose suddenly blew up and lost all his wonted [and certainly wanted] judgement."

Almack's v Buller's team

One match widely reported at the time was Almack's Club versus Buller's team. The Almack's team had won the Portland Club Cup (the winning margin in the final was an amazing 7,730 over 32 boards) and Buller challenged them to a match. His team had played a number of matches in various parts of the country, though never against a top London team, had never been beaten, and Buller was convinced that his British Bridge natural bidding methods were unbeatable.

The match was held at the Dorchester towards the end of March 1934. Buller had some good players with him (Mrs Evers, Kempson, Lederer and Mathieson) but, handicapped by having to play British Bridge, they proved to be no match for the experienced system players from Almack's (Maurice Ellinger and Niel Furse; Alan and Cedric Kehoe). When the smoke had cleared, Almack's had won the 100 board match by 8,660 points.

Cedric Kehoe, who was, it will be recalled, a team-mate of Buller's in the 1930 match against Culbertson, wrote an article for *BM* in which his criticism of British Bridge was coruscating:

> "The match was a farce and produced the worst exhibition of bidding ever seen in public. It was pathetic to watch six [sic] fine players trying to reach the correct contract by "hell for leather" methods. … It has been said that the cause of natural bidding was murdered in this match. I myself consider that it was a case of suicide."

This example was typical (dealer West, N-S vulnerable):

	♠ J 3 ♥ J 10 9 3 ♦ 10 7 4 ♣ A J 9 4	
♠ A K 10 9 7 ♥ A ♦ K Q 8 6 5 ♣ 7 3		♠ Q 8 6 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ A 2 ♣ K Q 10 2
	♠ 4 ♥ Q 8 7 5 4 2 ♦ J 9 3 ♣ 8 6 5	

The Kehoes reached the obvious 6♠ contract but their method of achieving this was hardly beyond criticism: 1♦-1♠-4♠-5♠-6♥-6♠. It is difficult to see why Cedric chose to open 1♦, which in other circumstances could have worked out poorly, but luck favoured him this time.

At the other table, the irregular partnership of Kempson and Lederer found the hand unsuited to the British Bridge style. Kempson opened 2♠, a bid for which he had something in reserve, and Lederer raised to 6♠, possibly an incautious choice with only one ace.

Kempson now bid one for the road. In considering the merits of this choice, it should be borne in mind that the non-vulnerable grand slam bonus was 1,500 at the time so it was reasonable to bid a 50-50 proposition. Weaker hands than the one that Lederer held would have made the grand slam cold and it was good odds that the East hand contained two aces.

Writing about the hand afterwards, both Buller and Kempson felt that Lederer should have bid 5♠ on the first round: Kempson would then have bid 6♥ and, with the club position apparent, there would have been no danger of getting too high. I think it fair to say that the best British Bridge bidding on any hand was often only apparent in hindsight.

Although purely natural bidding methods faded away and were seldom seen after the War, Buller's legacy remained: much of the free-wheeling "attitude of mind", of the early Acol pioneers, in contrast to the strictures imposed by Culbertson's methods, was influenced by his approach to the game, and the striking success of British teams immediately after the War was very much the product of Acol.

Aces

The Four Aces were arguably the top US team at the time, certainly stronger than the Culbertson teams, and two of them, Gottlieb and Howard Schenken, visited London in 1935. This turned out to be a very profitable trip for them since they won two high-profile rubber bridge matches whilst here. These matches attracted a lot of attention, including daily reports in *The Times*, and Reese commented that it was difficult to get a seat in the small spectator stand at the Dorchester.

The first match, of 150 rubbers, was against Hughes and Ingram. This was for the substantial stake of £500, though with a proviso that a winning margin of at least 5,000 points was required; in a letter to *BBW*, Ingram clarified that the stake was funded "by about thirty personal friends". In the event, the draw margin was academic. After what Reese described as a "discouraging start", the home pair played below form and lost by the colossal margin of 41,120 points (Buller wrote in *The Star* that he was not unduly impressed by this number!). In terms of rubbers won and lost, the American margin was 83 versus 67. Ingram wrote in 1964 that he had always preferred duplicate bridge to rubber and one can see why.

For those who put their trust in high card points as a method of hand valuation, it is salutary to observe that the English pair had slightly more than their share, 15,109 as against 14,971, including the preponderance of both aces and kings, which makes their heavy defeat a tad difficult to understand.

If the hand which follows had been typical of the Hughes-Ingram form, the result would have been a lot closer:

	♠ K 9 6 2 ♥ Q 2 ♦ Q J 8 4 ♣ Q 8 5	
♠ A 8 7 5 4 3 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ A 9 5 ♣ 4		♠ Q J 10 ♥ ♦ K 10 6 3 2 ♣ K J 10 6 2
	♠ ♥ K J 10 8 6 5 4 3 ♦ 7 ♣ A 9 7 3	

East was the dealer with North-South vulnerable. It is fair to say that the bidding followed a course which would not necessarily appeal to everybody.

Ingram, sitting East, and Gottlieb both passed. Whether Gottlieb's decision was dictated by system or was a tactical move is not known; if allowed by system, I would far prefer to make an immediate statement about the hand and open 4♥.

At this point in the match, Ingram was playing with Herbert Newmark, who also partnered Hughes from time to time. Newmark opened 1♠ and Ingram decided to raise to 3♠. This was a hedge of sorts: if, as was likely to be the case, Newmark had five spades, the hand was surely worth game; if he didn't, it could easily play better in one of the minors.

Having passed on the first round, Gottlieb was committed to bidding 4♥ now and duly did so. Newmark had an obvious 4♠ bid and Schenken doubled. With all due respect to one of the all-time greats of the game, this seems a pretty awful double: Schenken had no reason to assume that he could beat 6♠, let alone four. There is absolutely no defence to 4♠: even if declarer misreads the club position, North will be squeezed in the minors at the end.

Gottlieb, with little respect for the principle of captaincy in these situations, or possibly with equally little respect for Schenken's judgement, elected to remove to 5♥. This is just the sort of unilateral action which costs money, loses matches and ends partnerships. Newmark had an obvious double and led his club.

The English pair defended well. After the first club went to the ten and ace, Gottlieb played a heart to the queen and a second heart to the jack and ace. The early play had marked Ingram with the king of diamonds so Newmark underled his ace. Showing that he had read the position, Ingram now played a low club for his partner to ruff. Declarer still had two clubs to lose so the cost was 800.

In *Bridge at the Top*, Reese pointed out that declarer could have saved a trick by the "Scissors Coup" (then known as "The Coup Without a Name"). Had Gottlieb played the king of spades from dummy to trick three, and discarded his diamond, the defence could not have taken their club ruff and declarer could have built a second trick in the suit.

In a later book, Reese noted that, if one were being particularly critical, there was a counter to this play: West simply needed to take his ace of hearts on the first round. Although true, I suspect that few would even think of this, and even fewer would do so for the right reason.

The second match, this time of 100 rubbers, was against Morris and Tabbush. This was also played for stakes, reported in *The Times* as being £5 per 100 per pair, and was a very different affair, being relatively close throughout. Holding good cards in the last three rubbers enabled the Americans to pull away at the end and win by 6,860 points, 56 rubbers to 44. As in the previous match, the home players had the balance of the high card points, this time 12,328 as against 12,112, and again including more aces and kings than their opponents.

The only hands recorded from this match are those which appeared in the press. Unsurprisingly, spectacular results were more likely to feature than technically good bridge. One of these hands gives a further insight into Schenken's view of what constituted a sound double when playing for money.

♠ J 10 6 4
♥ Q 7
♦ K Q 6 4
♣ A 9 7

At Game All, Schenken passed as dealer and Morris opened 1♠ fourth in hand. Tabbush raised to 3♠ and Morris tried 3NT. Possibly hoping that his opponents would retreat to 4♠, Schenken doubled and Morris in his turn redoubled.

Suffice it to say that Morris's action was a good deal sounder than Schenken's: had the defence been card-perfect (a club lead!), and had Morris misjudged the play, declarer would have been held to ten tricks. As it was, the choice of the worst possible opening lead (a low diamond) meant that declarer had an easy squeeze to make twelve tricks.

This gave him a score of 2,100 on the hand (400 for 3NT redoubled; 1,200 for the three overtricks; 500 for rubber), resulting in a winning rubber of 3,240 points. This rubber would have cost the American pair £160: to put this into context, it was not much less than the average man's yearly income at the time (£187.60 in decimal terms).

Perhaps Gottlieb should have removed the double: apart from a six-card heart suit headed by the ten, he had a Yarborough. With best play all round, four hearts would have cost a mere 1,100.

The Austrian match

Austria won the first official World Championship in 1937 (in reality, a European Championship with two American teams taking part), beating a Culbertson team by 4,740 points in the 96 board final. This was held to be a very significant result, not least because the Austrians were playing Vienna, the first artificial system to achieve success. In Vienna, 1NT was a strong, artificial opening, 1♣ showed a hand of less strength without a five card-suit (except possibly clubs) and any other one-level opening showed a five-card suit, or possibly a 4441 distribution with a very strong suit.

The Austrian captain, Paul Stern, agreed to bring a team over to London to play a match and this was held under the auspices of the BBL. The Austrian team was Walter Herbert-Karl von Bludhorn and Hans Jellinek-Karl Schneider.

For reasons which are no longer apparent, the English team was a hotchpotch: it included Kenneth Konstam and Mathieson, who had as a pair been part of the British World Championship team; Maurice Harrison-Gray, unquestionably the most successful tournament player of 1937, but in an unfamiliar partnership with Stanley Merkin; Kempson as fifth man; and England as captain.

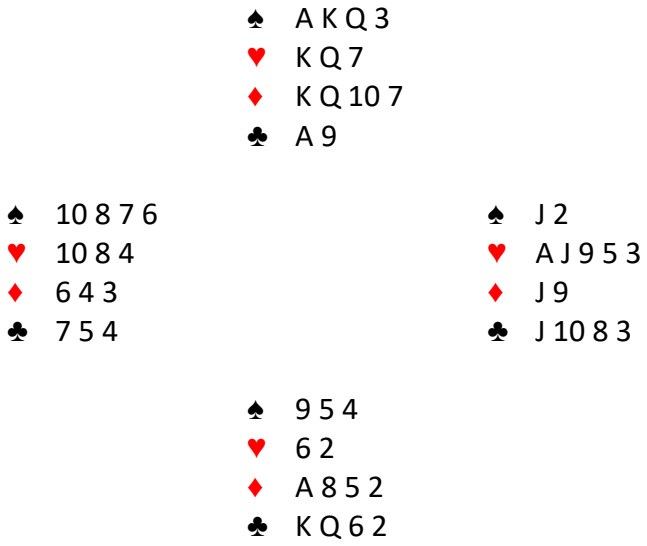
There may have been valid rationale underlying this team selection. However, it was undeniably unsuccessful. The Austrians won the 300 board match by 196 match points, or 10,910 aggregate points. The official result was that calculated by reference to European Match Points (an early form of the IMP scale), a 2,000 point swing being needed for the maximum 12 EMP; *The Times* commented that the English players did not like this method and that it was unlikely that it would be accepted for use in future matches. I estimate that the margin of 196 EMP is equivalent to somewhere between 275 and 300 IMP on the current scale.

Team harmony seems to have been an issue, at least so far as Harrison-Gray was concerned. In a *BBW* article, he criticised at various points his three team-mates, being particularly sarcastic where Kempson was concerned:

> "Kempson … managed to prove conclusively with his usual clear-cut logic that he was easily the best player on the English side."

Konstam was unimpressed and pointed out that it is results that count - and it was a fact that the team was winning when Kempson played. Interestingly, Reese commented that Von Bludhorn had told him that all the Austrian team agreed that Harrison-Gray was in a class of his own.

Reese reported a number of interesting hands from this match but the one below was perhaps the best. North was the dealer with neither side vulnerable.



Harrison-Gray and Merkin had an excellent Acol auction to the par contract of 6♦: 2♣-3♣-3♠-3NT-4♦-5♦-6♦. The 3♣ positive response showed one of a number of combinations of high card holdings as well as a biddable suit and there were clearly no inhibitions about bidding four card suits whenever it seemed sensible: from his own hand, Harrison-Gray was able to infer that Merkin had the ace of diamonds and king of clubs, so he was on pretty firm ground when he bid the slam. Obviously, there were no problems in the play.

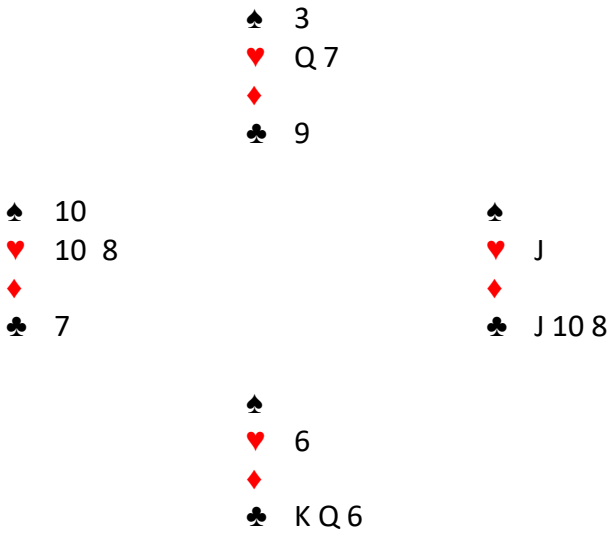
The Austrian auction was nowhere near as impressive: 1NT-2NT-4NT-5♣-6NT. The 2NT response to 1NT showed at least twelve points on the Robertson scale (75321 rather than 4321) and no five card suit other than possibly clubs. The rest of the auction can charitably be described as natural but didn't come close to getting to grips with the hand. Not that 6NT was hopeless. Indeed, were both the majors lying favourably but diamonds breaking badly, it would be possible to make 6NT when 6♦ failed. Were 6NT to make, Jellinek stood to gain 3 match points but to lose 10 if he failed (nowadays, these figures would have been 2 and 14 respectively).

Mathieson, with an awkward hand, chose to lead the jack of diamonds. This did no harm but might have led to declarer wondering why he had chosen a doubtful holding from which to lead - and coming up with the right answer.

A good line for declarer would be to take the two top diamonds in hand, overtake the ten with dummy's ace (so that the eight would be a further entry) and then play a heart. Reese pointed out that the best defence was for East to duck this trick: indeed, given East's high card holding, this seems clearly marked, so long as it can be done in tempo.

At double dummy, declarer could now succeed: after eight tricks (four rounds of diamonds, three of spades plus one heart), East's last five cards have to consist of the singleton ace of hearts and four clubs; declarer can now duck a heart. This is not, of course, a practical way to play the hand, and declarer would very likely go down if East were to duck the first heart smoothly.

At the table, however, Mathieson won the heart, leaving the way clear to a double squeeze. Jellinek in fact reached the following ending and perhaps should have succeeded in making the contract:



If declarer plays the two top clubs, Konstam would have been squeezed in the majors. However, he instead played off his queen of hearts, which could only be right if he could instead squeeze him in the black suits. As Reese noted:

> "Attention to the discards should have made it clear, however, that this was not the right line of play, for Mathieson had already discarded three hearts and could hardly have started with seven of them."

Whilst it is true that it is unlikely that Mathieson had started with seven hearts, there was nothing in the bidding or play to rule it out as a possibility.

Chapter 6

Hubert makes a move

Hubert Phillips (1891-1964)

Hubert Phillips played a very prominent part in the development of tournament bridge prior to the War, though Mackey's description of him as the "father of duplicate bridge" is somewhat of an overstatement. Apart from the trophy which still commemorates him, I suspect that his name means nothing at all to the modern generation of players.

As Reese put it, Phillips was a man of many parts. A distinguished economist, later a prominent journalist and adviser to the Liberal party, bridge was just one of his many interests. As well as devising challenging intellectual puzzles and cryptic crosswords, he displayed his breadth of knowledge on the *Round Britain Quiz* wireless programme. Whilst he was well-known as both a player and a writer on the game, he was not in the top rank. Writing in the March 1964 edition of *BM*, Kempson said that Phillips "was not in the top twenty, but not far short of that standard." Reese put it more candidly: "cards were something of a blind spot for him".

BBL inertia

Having started its operations and launched its two tournaments, the BBL seemed content to sit back and do little else. Perhaps it never occurred to Manning-Foster that others might want to get involved or maybe he lacked the resources to do anything about it. The BBL's

ideas of tournament organisation remained at a very basic level: over 3,000 players had entered the 1933 National Pairs and 78 pairs took part in the final: as in the previous year, a measly nineteen boards were played and there were separate winners for the North-South and East-West lines.

There was clearly a gap in the market and Phillips was the man to exploit it. The first ever bridge congress in this country was announced in the June 1933 *BBW* and held in October of that year in Bexhill-on-Sea. That the participants got value for their money can hardly be doubted: it cost £4 to enter, and this included full board for four nights at the congress hotel as well as the entry fee for all events. The programme of events looks strange to modern eyes: there were two hours of lectures and discussions in the morning with most of the afternoon left free; the bridge started at tea-time and continued after dinner.

As a first venture, it was undoubtedly a success. About 170 players took part, the majority of them from in and around Bexhill, and the winners of the main event were a strong team – Ingram, Cole, Hughes and Newmark.

National Bridge Association

Innovative as it was, the Bexhill congress was arguably not the most important development in the world of tournament bridge in late 1933. Pressing home his advantage, Phillips inaugurated the National Bridge Association. Interestingly, it would not have been obvious to the man in the street that Phillips was behind the NBA: he was merely one of thirty-five members of its Advisory Council.

Had Manning-Foster been minded to read the first edition of the *BBW*, he might have realised that the setting up of the NBA was a very real possibility. Beasley had contributed an article in which, whilst omitting any reference to either the BBL or the IBL, he called for the Portland Club to take the lead in setting up a National Association.

> "The Portland Club must lead … Let us be united in this one aim of getting a real organisation for the promotion of the game and for keeping England to the fore in the international matches of the future."

The objects of the NBA were much as one might have expected. Most worrying for Manning-Foster would probably have been the clause which referred to the NBA as:

> "An authoritative national organisation for the final determination of all questions and matters which may arise in the play of the games, to interpret the rules and laws and to serve as the arbitrator of controversies on all matters directly or indirectly pertaining to the games of Auction and Contract Bridge and any future developments of these games."

Belatedly reacting to the challenge, the BBL announced in *The Times* that it had appointed three new members to its Advisory Council. These men might have been distinguished in their own fields but were not conspicuous for their bridge ability. The same announcement was at pains to point out that the BBL was "in no way connected with a newly formed association in London". A little later, and perhaps realising that it might be helpful to have

some bridge knowledge at the heart of things, three bridge players, of whom the most prominent and certainly the most expert was Mayer, were appointed to the BBL Advisory Council.

Officially at least, the NBA did not regard the BBL as a rival. Westall was quoted in *The Sunday Times* as confirming this and adding:

> "The [NBA was] grateful to the League and Mr Manning-Foster for the work they had done to develop match play in England. Mr Manning-Foster would be the last to claim for his league that it is the MCC of Bridge. We cannot allow this state of affairs to continue. I was sick and tired of hearing the word 'ballyhoo' over the match between Colonel Beasley's team and Mr Culbertson's team.
>
> Therefore we hope support will be given to the Association so that it will become the MCC of Bridge, not merely to run tournaments, but to act as the governing body on matters relating to the rules and regulations of international matches.
>
> Asked whether the two organisations … would not lead to a split in the Bridge world, Mr Hubert Phillips, Hon. Secretary of the congress, said that he thought that inevitably the two organisations must get together."

Predictably, Manning-Foster saw things differently. In the October 1933 *BM*, he said:

> "I cannot welcome its existence because I consider that it is a mistake to have two rival bodies in this country and I do not see how anyone can join it without disloyalty to the BBL.
>
> It is in the main the work of a coterie of a certain London Club which has opposed the BBL for some time past for reasons of its own. It is out to supplant and supersede the BBL - a great mistake and a great pity. Because there is nothing that the new Association is formed to do which has not been done or could not be done by the BBL.
>
> Granted that the BBL is not perfect and may not have fulfilled yet all the aspirations of players and members, yet here to hand is an established organisation ready to adapt itself to all requirements.
>
> The BBL does not propose to enter into any acrimonious controversy. It will continue in its own quiet unostentatious fashion and leave Bridge players to judge for themselves the rights and wrongs of the case."

In fact, the key issue was the BBL's lack of democratic accountability. Although there was an Advisory Council, all the power lay in Manning-Foster's hands: he was the President with his Assistant Editor (Hasler) acting as Secretary-General.

Walshe wrote a lengthy article in the December *BBW* about the NBA and touched on this defect in the BBL. Referring to the 1930 meeting organised by Buller (see Chapter 4), he commented that:

> "The authorities who then met did not to my knowledge function again in any mutual endeavour to form an Association to assist Bridge players. Then came the British Bridge League, which, as far as I can gather, was a laudable and brave effort of private enterprise, which was meant to do the work which should be done by Bridge authorities and players as a whole. I am far from clear as to what efforts were made

by this body to collect a representative controlling group of players and authorities. I am a great believer in the control of any game being largely vested in the experienced players of the game.

It was with a view eventually to include our best Bridge talent in a democratically-governed body, and to give them a large share of control that [the NBA] was founded. It was not intended in any sense to be antagonistic to the British Bridge League. Should the functions of the two bodies overlap, the question of the survival of the fittest should not arise, as there should be room for both."

Walshe went on to outline the role of the NBA in the selection of international teams, commenting that an Association was needed so as to avoid a repetition of the "improvised procedure" used in the selection of the team for the first Schwab Cup match. As it happened (see Chapter 5), the 1934 match was arranged in so much of a hurry that there was no time to do anything but improvise again.

At the end of his article, Walshe mentioned that the NBA would be running two important competitions, one for open teams and a parallel event for women's teams. This women's competition is merely one instance of the NBA being a more dynamic and proactive organisation than the BBL, a theme which recurs during the mid-1930s. There was a lot of interest in duplicate on the part of women, the majority of participants in the Gold Cup being female.

Although Manning-Foster had announced in the March 1933 *BM* that the BBL planned to hold a women's event, nothing seems to have been done about it at the time and there was no further mention of it for some eighteen months.

So far as the players were concerned, the existence of two administrative bodies does not seem to have had any great significance. As one would have expected, players entered the competitions that appealed to them, without worrying whether playing in the "other" organisation's events might be seen as disloyal. In any case, the NBA was not much more democratic than the BBL: although bridge players were involved in taking the NBA's decisions, there was no mechanism at all for the rank and file members to have any say in their appointment.

The Tollemache Cup

The NBA's premier competition was the Tollemache Cup for open teams, the trophy for this having been presented by Lord Tollemache (the original one was stolen in 1938 and replaced shortly afterwards). From the outset, it attracted a particularly strong entry though the organisation was not beyond criticism. The final stage was advertised as a "triangular test" but, for reasons that remain obscure, one of the three teams was given a bye to the final.

That left Lederer (partnering Rose with Cuthbert "Bertie" Collingwood and Samuel Kosky as team-mates), who had already won that year's Gold Cup, playing T E Morel in the semi-final. On paper, this should have been close to a walk-over but Lederer made heavy weather of it, with one hand proving decisive. The crucial hand is set out below, the swing gained being more than the final margin of 1,810. South dealt, with East-West vulnerable, and the bidding at the two tables represents an interesting contrast in styles.

♠ 10 9 8 7 6 3
♥ 9 7 4
♦ 3 2
♣ 7 2

♠
♥ K Q 8 6 2
♦ A J 10 9
♣ K 9 6 4

♠ Q 5 2
♥ A J 5
♦ K 8 7 5 4
♣ A Q

♠ A K J 4
♥ 10 3
♦ Q 6
♣ J 10 8 5 3

The Morel pair's sequence is grist to the mill of those who believe that bidding in the 1930s was crude, inaccurate and slapdash. I have found two versions of their auction and, in either case, it can be fairly said that they made a hopeless mess of the hand. In both cases, West opened 1♥ and East responded 2NT: either West now bid 4♥ or, alternatively, West raised 3NT and East removed to 4♥. All that can be said about these sequence is that, irrespective of the system that East-West were theoretically employing, all of the bids apart from the 1♥ opening were at best dubious and at worst shockingly wrong.

It was not difficult to do better than that and the sequence at the other table is evidence for those who believe that bidding in the 1930s could be incisive, subtle and thoughtful. Collingwood opened 1♥ and raised the 3♦ response (a simple change of suit was not forcing in the Lederer methods) to 4♦. Kosky bid 4♥, giving a fair picture of his hand, though at the risk of some confusion as to what was the agreed suit. Collingwood seems to have been in no doubt that diamonds were agreed: he bid 4♠ and followed with 5♥ over 5♣.

Kosky now found a very good bid: wanting to encourage a grand slam, but with doubts about the solidity of both red suits, he improvised with a bid of 5NT. This worked extremely well, enabling Collingwood to bid 6♣ which Kosky converted to 6♥. This was enough to convince Collingwood that Kosky wanted to play in hearts: realising that his queen of hearts combined with the impressive diamond holding were the key to the hand, he bid the grand slam in hearts.

In his book "Modern Contract and Duplicate", the team captain was less than effusive in his praise of the sequence: "The Grand Slam should be bid … but it seems to me that it might have been reached a little more quickly". Whether or not this actually reflected Lederer's view is a moot point: Marx informed me that this book, together with the earlier "Lederer Bids Two Clubs", was actually written by Simon.

Assuming the best lead for the defence (a spade) the chances of 7♥ making are about 53%. If trumps are 3-2, declarer succeeds whenever the queen of diamonds is singleton, doubleton or when South has four (i.e. by starting with a diamond to the king). If trumps are 4-1, the communications are awkward because of the club blockage: declarer needs to play South for the queen of diamonds and take a first round finesse.

Since the bonus for bidding a vulnerable grand slam was 2,250 at the time, it was well worth bidding. And there was an extra chance: North, showing an utter lack of appreciation for what was going on - or perhaps wishing to speed up the play - chose to lead not the obvious spade but a diamond!

Having had a scare in the semi-final, Lederer left nothing to chance in the final against a decent Cardiff team captained by Simon Rivlin. A succession of early disasters left the Welsh almost 2,000 points in arrears with only a quarter of the match gone. There was no way back and the final margin was 3,580.

New competitions

The NBA quickly set to work to make its competitions a success. Within less than three months of starting up, both the Tollemache Cup and the Lady Milne Cup (donated by Clare, the wife of Field Marshal Lord Milne) for women's teams had been launched. One suspects that Manning-Foster might have been green with envy at the thought of titled persons donating trophies for two major NBA events. Full details of both were set out in the February 1934 *BBW*, and a month later the organisers were able to report that entries of 65 and 53 teams respectively had already been received.

As if to emphasise that the NBA was not solely concerned with duplicate, the March 1934 *BBW* announced a rubber bridge competition, subsequently known as the Pairs Goblets. Entries came in quickly and the first draw listed 126 pairs, the winners being Mathieson and Eric Summers.

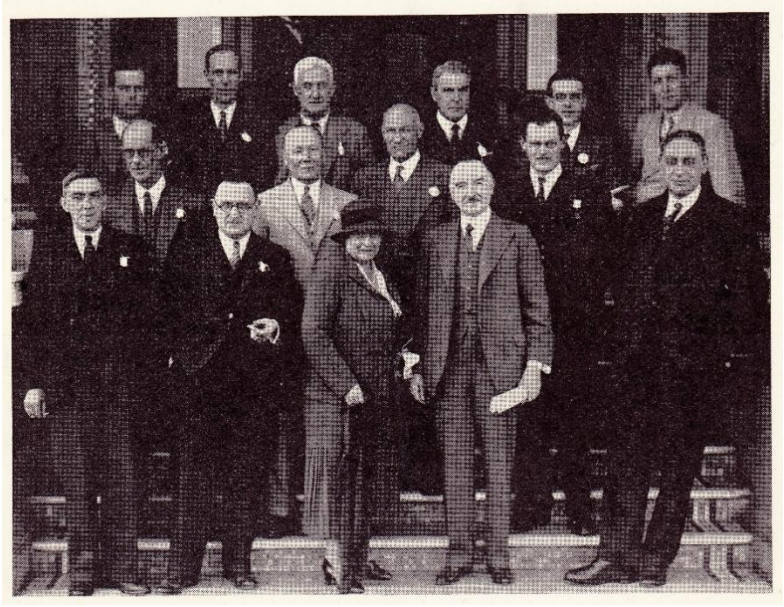
Later in 1934, two new events were announced. The first of these, the Drake Bowl, was restricted to players who hadn't reached the semi-final of other major events. Described as "a beautiful golden bowl", the trophy was presented by Eugenie, Marquise de Dumas, who was a descendant of an American branch of the Drake family.

The Drake Bowl was held once only, and won by Kempson's team of North-Easterners (A Lill, F Herman Smith and T Selby Wraith): this was by far the strongest team outside London and they scored a significant victory in the 1934 North v South match, beating a powerful team (Beasley, Domville, Mrs Evers and Mathieson) by just over 2,000 points. The result depended on a vulnerable grand slam on a two-way finesse: Kempson took it the right way (a count of the hand indicated that he had odds of three to two in his favour, though he later said that he was too agitated to do more than guess!) whilst Domville didn't.

The other new event was the Pachabo Cup, billed as the County Championship Teams of Four. The trophy for this event was presented by A E Whitelaw who wrote articles under the pseudonym *Pachabo*. Teams qualified via county heats for a London final and, when the event was first held, all the players plus many luminaries of the bridge world were entertained to dinner at the Savoy Hotel by Whitelaw and his wife.

Finally, the NBA announced that a league would commence in the London area in the autumn of 1935. From the beginning, this attracted a strong entry with virtually all the acknowledged London experts taking part. The trophy for the league was the Duveen Shield, subsequently used for the Home Counties League, a teams of eight event.

Belatedly, the BBL added to its repertoire, organising its first ever congress at Eastbourne in the spring of 1934, and incorporating within it the finals of both the Gold Cup and the National Pairs. In addition, a women's team event was held for a trophy presented by Whitelaw, who thus displayed fine impartiality as between competing organisations.



Eastbourne Congress 1934 with Manning-Foster slightly right of centre, next to Lady Jacqueta Williams with Lederer on his other side

Somewhat surprisingly, it was the BBL who took the lead in sponsoring an individual competition. The National Individual Championship was launched in the autumn of 1935 and fifty players qualified in local heats for the final stage which was held in London. This was a two stage affair: a further qualifying round consisting of two heats of twenty five players each and a final for the top eight players from each of the heats. The final featured a very strong field (ten of the participants were current or future internationals) and was won by a well-known player of the time, H Freeman.

A final addition to the BBL's programme was the institution of the Silver Cup, for those teams eliminated in the first two rounds of the Gold Cup. This event was not included in the tournament calendar when bridge resumed after the War and it was not until 1979 that it was restored, though with the name Silver Plate.

One final change of significance to tournament players was a relaxation of the rule regarding team composition. Prior to 1935, Gold Cup teams had to consist of four players, though a reserve could be nominated in case of emergency. From this year onwards, teams were allowed to consist of four, five or six players.

The Varsity Match

The Oxford-Cambridge bridge match has a continuous history (apart from the War years) dating back to 1935. In that year, Iain Macleod (who served as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Heath government but died before presenting a Budget) issued a public challenge on behalf of the Cambridge club and this was duly accepted by Oxford.

The match was duly held (under the auspices of the BBL) and resulted in a victory for the dark blues by 3,800 points. Although the university did not yet have a bridge club, Oxford had a stronger team, Reese being the star. A distinguished gallery was present at the start, including Beasley, Buller and Manning-Foster: the presence of Buller gave Reese the opportunity for a characteristic comment, focusing on the Colonel's oft-stated belief that, the better your hand, the higher you should bid.

Reese had opened 5♣ and been raised to the small slam by his partner, Charles McLaren. The dummy came down with three aces: "Pity you weren't playing with Colonel Buller, Charles; you could have bid eight clubs".

Regional organisations

Although the BBL had many local Secretaries, there was not much in the way of organised bridge taking place at regional level – it was not until after the war that a comprehensive network of county associations came into existence. Although, depending upon the enthusiasm of the individual organiser, occasional matches and other events might take place, there was no regular programme of events.

With the encouragement of the NBA, regional organisations began to appear. A Scottish Bridge Union and Welsh Bridge Association (so called though the WBA was in fact a South Wales organisation; it was not until 1949 that it merged with its North Wales counterpart to form the Welsh Bridge Union) both came into being at the end of 1933 and a Northern Ireland Bridge Union followed a few months later. The SBU was an overnight success: within three months, 60 clubs had joined and over 100 teams entered the Scottish Cup.

Other developments quickly followed: in the June 1935 *BBW*, Kempson reported that the North East Bridge Association had been formed and he understood that a Yorkshire Association might soon follow at Nelson's instigation. He emphasised that the new Associations were not intended to compete with the NBA but for the benefit of those who were unable to travel further afield. Not long afterwards, the North West Contract Bridge Association came into being on the initiative of Edward ("Teddy") Bruce Parker.

Choppy waters

Not everything was plain sailing, however. The NBA spring congress in 1934, due to be held at Harrogate, had to be cancelled when the local police, on the basis of a particularly rigorous interpretation of the relevant legislation, opined that playing bridge on licensed premises constituted "gaming" and hence would contravene the Licensing Acts.

The NBA managed to find an alternative venue in the less legalistic climate of St Leonard's and, at very short notice and with improvised arrangements, did well to attract some 28 tables, though not without considerable soul-searching about what could have been.

In mid-1934, and as a portent of things to come, R E Kemp (a well-known London player who was a frequent participant in early tournaments and who wrote about both bridge and chess) took the bold step of opening the country's first ever duplicate bridge club in central London. Sadly, the time was not right for such a venture and the club closed its doors some six months later.

But who will do the work?

Both the BBL and the NBA suffered from the difficulties experienced by many, if not all, voluntary organisations. Although the recruitment of enthusiasts is not all that hard, getting people to commit to doing work is a different matter. And ensuring that people actually carry out their allotted tasks can be a challenge.

Much of the BBL's work was carried out by Hasler. He seems to have been quite an efficient administrator but, by the middle of 1934, he had had enough. Citing ill health, he resigned his office and a testimonial was organised for him. The BBL was lucky in that an able successor came forward, Mrs Lynette Lowry, and she took on much of the workload of running tournaments.

In an article published in the July 1935 *BM*, Hasler wrote of the work involved behind the scenes at a congress: in the days when everything had to be done manually, the amount of effort required ***from volunteers*** was prodigious. One example: the National Pairs qualifying round (i.e. for people who had qualified from local heats) required 961 entries to be checked ; 1,944 entries to be made on the match-pointing charts; sixty-two arithmetical calculations to be performed; and everything to be cross-checked and balanced.

The situation at the NBA was worse. An Honorary Secretary (D A Mehan) had been recruited at the outset but resigned "for reasons of private business" within three months. He was succeeded by Westall, with the assistance of the Marquise de Dumas and Lady Milne. How much Westall managed to do personally must be open to doubt since his role as Managing Director of De La Rue can hardly have left a great deal of spare time.

The burden seems to have fallen primarily on the Marquise and, in fairness, it does at least appear that she got on with the job. In *Kempson on Contract*, the author reported that:

> "Madame la Marquise de Dumas is a real bridge fan; she goes to all the important matches in this country, complete with writing pad and pencil, and records every bid and every card played at the particular table she honours with her presence; she never makes a mistake.
>
> I have never seen the Marquise play bridge, and I am completely indifferent as to how good or how bad she is. It is her presence at matches which is all-important; she is one of the really good influences in the game.

I pay an occasional visit to the Savoy, where she lives, and there she sits - as large as life - behind masses of books, pamphlets and papers. She is the power behind the National Bridge Association, and undoubtedly their greatest asset."

NBA Headquarters at The Savoy, left to right the Marquise de Dumas, The Honourable Joan Milne, Lady Milne

But something went abruptly wrong with the relationship. The April 1935 issue of *BBW* had included a fulsome tribute to the Marquise and she was the Secretary of the Southport congress in May of that year (a photograph shows her beaming out, seated between the Mayor and Mayoress of Southport).

However, in the June 1935 *BBW*, a brief statement reported that it had been decided to "reorganise the machinery for governing the tournaments" and that a Tournament Committee had been appointed with its own Secretary (H Ashley Mason). From this point, the Marquise disappeared entirely from the picture.

I mentioned previously that the Drake Bowl was only contested once. Taking this fact in conjunction with the sudden change to the tournament arrangements, it is reasonable to speculate that the Marquise may have fallen out with Phillips and taken back her trophy. Certainly it is difficult to reconcile what happened in any other way. Perhaps the mere suggestion that changes might be needed to tournament organisation had caused offence.

The NBA's struggles were not yet over. A further reorganisation in the spring of 1936 saw Phillips appointed Honorary Secretary and the correspondence address changed to that of the *BBW*. However, as the next Chapter shows, Phillips now had bigger concerns on his mind.

Chapter 7

Three new bodies

Even some 80 years later, the audacity exhibited by Phillips in the early part of 1936 is breath-taking. His aim was ambitious: to take over British tournament bridge in its entirety via the formation of a Board of Control. But first, a new regional body came into being.

A bridge association for London

A rudimentary bridge organisation had been established in the middle of 1935 in order to run the new London bridge league. In April of the next year, a further step was taken with the establishment of the London and Home Counties Contract Bridge Association.

This was an umbrella grouping for London and the Home Counties, defined for this purpose as Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex. This brought the total of regional bridge organisations up to four, though there was still nothing to serve the whole of East Anglia, the Midlands and the South-West.

The L&HC, as it is convenient to refer to it, ran three major events prior to the War, the Daily Telegraph Cup (a team event with qualifying heats in each county), a Masters' Individual and a Masters' Pairs. Both of these new events attracted a very strong entry and the Masters' Pairs, whilst organised on an invitation basis, remained an event of great prestige. When the dead hand of official bureaucracy intervened, and decided that it should be opened to all Life Masters (then the highest master point ranking), the strength of its entry was diluted and its prestige diminished. As the success of the Lederer Memorial Trophy indicates, there is still a place in the calendar for invitation tournaments.

The constitution of the L&HC made clear that it was to be a democratic body. There was to be a Council (made up of ten London representatives and five from each of the nine Home Counties) elected by the members and an Executive Committee elected by the Council. Unsurprisingly, given that he had taken the initiative in its formation, Phillips was elected to serve as the first President.

The L&HC was not revived after the War, its place being taken by the London County Contract Bridge Association (since renamed the London Metropolitan Bridge Association). For many years, however, until the realisation belatedly dawned that a great deal of work was being done for the benefit of non-members, all its competitions remained open to members of the Home Counties.

Proposed Control Board

The idea of a Control Board was not original. In his column in *The Star*, Buller had written about the allegedly poor performance of the British team in the 1935 European Championship (see the Appendix) and said that the institution of a Board of Control would be a desirable step. He further suggested that the Portland Club be asked to nominate the first members of

the Board. In his final book, *The Buller System of Contract Bridge*, he repeated this suggestion and explained that there was no reason why this should affect either the BBL or the NBA:

> "There is no reason why the two existing organisations … should not continue their activities, but "England" will no longer be represented abroad by teams chosen for their allegiance to this organisation or that. In the national and international sphere, the Board will have sole authority, and if its first members will agree to get together, we shall in future be worthily represented."

Discussing this in the October 1935 *BM*, Manning-Foster had doubted that the Portland would have anything to do with it and, quite pertinently, pointed out that the European Championship team included the two pairs who had done so well in the 1934 Schwab Cup match and queried whether any Board could have done better. One of his comments echoes down the ages:

> "To select a team which would represent the best Duplicate players in this country is not difficult. **It is impossible.** That is to say few people would ever agree that it was the best even if it happened to win. The same of course applies to other countries and if you heard as I have heard, the opinions of foreigners about their teams and the methods of selection, you would realise that they have the same difficulties as ourselves."

The formation of the DBCB

Following discussions held between interested parties at the Southport congress in March 1936, a meeting of representatives was convened at the request of the SBU and held at the Belfast congress (the first ever organised by the NIBU) on April 13th. Ten people were present, and these represented: the NBA; the three home country bodies; the Contract Bridge Association of Ireland; and three of the regional associations, the L&HC, the North-East and Yorkshire.

Phillips had prepared a draft scheme for the constitution of a Duplicate Bridge Board of Control. It was proposed that this would initially contain representatives from all the parties present at the meeting, and also from both the BBL and the Portland Club. The proposed functions of the Board were widely drawn but, most significantly, included "the creation of machinery for the selection of teams for representative matches".

It was agreed that Phillips' draft scheme would be circulated to all of the bodies whose representation was envisaged and that each of them would be invited to send two delegates to a meeting at Liverpool on May 23rd, these delegates to have full powers to constitute the Board. Writing in the May *BBW*, Phillips noted that:

> "There are inevitable minor differences in the viewpoints of the various Associations represented, but all such differences are susceptible to compromise, and, where necessary, compromise will be effected."

Perhaps, with this end in view, it was suggested that proposed amendments to the scheme be submitted in advance of the Liverpool meeting. In the event, Phillips may well have been surprised at the degree of compromise required.

The minutes of the Liverpool meeting have not been preserved, but we know something about it from an article in the October 1948 *Contract Bridge Journal* by Bruce Parker, one of the participants. The purpose of the meeting was apparently "to try to work out some form of democratic set-up which should cover the British Isles". The emphasis here is on democracy, unlikely to have been a prime consideration so far as Phillips was concerned.

Per Bruce Parker, those present at Liverpool included representatives of the four other countries and of the three Northern associations; several leading London players including Beasley; and, on behalf of the NBA, Lord Tollemache (its President) and Phillips. Significantly, but probably to no-one's great surprise, there were no representatives from the BBL.

Parker wrote that there were wide discussions, that the three regional associations were prepared to join together but that the Scottish and Irish representatives would only deal with a national democratic organisation. This account of what happened is supported by an *Edinburgh Evening News* item of 2nd September 1936, quoted in the official SBU history published in 2009:

> "The Scottish Bridge Union has been indirectly responsible for the formation of an English counterpart. In England, bridge has been largely under the control of private organisations without any national standing.
>
> These organisations have served, and will continue to serve, a very useful purpose, but no one of them was able to speak for England as a whole on questions of general importance.
>
> Our representatives [the SBU President, Dr W G MacDonald and Clement Ellis] quite rightly refused to treat with them in discussions as to duplicate control, international representation and the like."

The SBU history comments that, as a result of Scottish insistence backed by the Irish, the EBU came into existence; this occurred at the Liverpool meeting.

As finally formed, the DBCB had twenty-four members: twelve representatives from England; four from Scotland, three each from (South) Wales and Eire; and two from Northern Ireland. This meant that, in practice, the DBCB was very likely to do what England wanted, although - should the need arise and the will be there - the other countries could theoretically gang up against her.

Frustration for the DBCB

The main aim of the DBCB was to organise the machinery for the selection of international teams. In an attempt to bully the BBL out of the way, Phillips was instrumental in persuading twelve of the leading players to put their names to a letter to the BBL in response to an invitation to take part in trials. The letter, published in *The Times* on 5th January 1937, stated that the writers were:

> "Not prepared to be considered for inclusion in a team which purports to represent this country unless it has been selected in cooperation with the organisation which represents the players' own associations throughout the country, i.e. the Duplicate Bridge Control Board."

The letter was handed to Manning-Foster by a deputation consisting of Ingram, Konstam and Lederer. The response, as stated by Lederer in the article, was that:

> "Mr Manning-Foster refused to entertain any suggestions for cooperating with any other body in the selection of an international team."

Since the BBL had formally announced (in the July 1936 *BM*) that it had no connection with either the DBCB or the EBU, this could hardly have come as a surprise, and the next move was an approach to the IBL, asking it to recognise the DBCB. The reply was that neither the DBCB nor its component bodies were known to the IBL and that only the BBL was known to it. This reply was made public by the BBL and reference to it appeared in *The Daily Telegraph*. Phillips wrote a letter in response, pointing out that:

> "The British Bridge League … is a non-representative and non-responsible body, whose members have no voice in its administration. Its President, who is also, I believe, an official of the 'International Bridge League', appears to be the sole dictator of its policy. It is thus self-evident, now that the Board has come constitutionally into existence, that the pretensions of the British Bridge League to function in a representative capacity have no foundation in fact. And if, in due course, the 'International Bridge League' fails to recognise that this is so, then, so far as this country is concerned, international contacts must be sought elsewhere."

None of this made the slightest difference and the BBL proceeded with holding trials and selecting its team for that year's international Championship.

As I remarked in Chapter 5, the 1937 event was technically the first ever official World Championship, though with the appearance of a European Championship which included a couple of American teams. The IBL had recently merged with a Culbertson organisation, the International Contract Bridge Union, and it was announced that the IBL would henceforth have two divisions, Europe and USA.

The selected team included Konstam and Mathieson, both of whom had signed the letter but had publicly disassociated themselves from it; if one were cynical, this could look like a reward. The team was completed by a pair described by Reese as "two BBL loyalists from Birmingham", A Duncan Lock and Edward Reeve (who had written an article defending the BBL in a Birmingham paper; if one were cynical, this could also look like a reward). These two went on to win the 1938 National Pairs ahead of two very strong London pairs and so presumably were not complete mugs, though Reese refers to them as "no great shakes".

A troubled existence

As noted in the Introduction, most of the original records relating to bridge prior to the War have disappeared. If the opportunity to examine the archives of the DBCB (in particular) had been available, I feel sure that much would have been clear which at present appears obscure. As it is, I have been able to do no more than draw inferences from what has been recorded elsewhere.

Even with this caveat, it looks reasonably clear from the references to it in the EBU minute book that the DBCB had a troubled, albeit short, existence. In June 1937, it is recorded that the SBU had made a proposal (details unspecified) and the English delegates were instructed

to vote against it on the grounds that it infringed the autonomy of the national associations. At the same meeting, the EBU refused to accept a reduction in the number of DBCB delegates, proposing instead that there be two full meetings every year with a standing committee (to consist of four English members and one each from the other countries) to meet on two other occasions.

Taken together, these two items suggest to me that the other countries may have been concerned at the cost and inconvenience involved in holding full quarterly meetings and that methods of short-circuiting this were being proposed. Clearly, the EBU was opposed to anything which might weaken its position.

At this time, the EBU's representatives on the DBCB were nominated by the regional representatives (see below). In November 1937, Phillips reported that the other countries were opposed to this and he therefore proposed that the practice be discontinued: this turned out to be a contentious issue (one suspects that the regional associations feared a reduction in their influence) and agreement to the proposal was only passed by the Chairman's casting vote.

A year later, the DBCB was no more. The SBU and WBA had withdrawn and, after what appear to have been lengthy discussions, it was "finally deemed" that this action had had the effect of automatically dissolving it. In early 1939, it was succeeded by a new body, the Duplicate Bridge Board, which had four EBU representatives and two from each of the other countries. Reading between the lines, it is not difficult to deduce that the Scots and Welsh baulked at the ability of the EBU (with half the votes) to effectively control what the DBCB did. The Duplicate Bridge Board itself had a short life, not being revived after the War.

International bridge at home

It might appear from the foregoing that the DBCB was an ephemeral body of little influence or significance, but this is to understate the importance of one of its actions. For the DBCB was instrumental in bringing into existence the Camrose, the "most-played international bridge series in the world" (as per the Bridge Great Britain website).

Viewed in hindsight, Phillips seems to have been high-handed and autocratic in some of his actions (in this respect, he was similar to Manning-Foster). However, it is salutary to bear in mind that, without his intervention, the establishment of an official series of bridge matches between the home countries would have been, at the very least, significantly delayed.

Whether gracefully or grudgingly, the DBCB had no option but to accept that it was not going to be able to select teams to take part in the European (or World) Championship. In early 1937, making the best of a bad job, the DBCB launched a competition for the five member countries.

A few months later, Phillips announced in *BBW* that Lord Camrose, the Chairman of *The Daily Telegraph*, had agreed to donate a trophy for competition from 1938 onwards: it was hoped that this trophy, which was subsequently lost and replaced, would be available at the beginning of the year and exhibited at the matches. Although it is convenient to refer to them as such, it follows that the 1937 series of matches were not technically part of the Camrose series; the pre-War history of the Camrose is discussed in Chapter 9.

An accident of history

As will have become apparent, the foundation of the EBU on 23rd May 1936 was no more than an accident of history, its coming into existence being a crucial compromise to bring to fruition Phillips' dream of a Control Board for duplicate bridge. Reese, who was much associated with Phillips at this time, wrote in *Bridge at the Top* that the L&HC, and EBU, were established as "makeweights".

Phillips put a positive gloss on what had happened, writing in the June *BBW* that:

> "Bridge players everywhere have become conscious of their rights and responsibilities … There has been a strong reaction against organisation from the top and a demand for organisation from the bottom. …
>
> The proposals before the Liverpool delegate were fully set out last month. They were unanimously accepted … but with two vital alterations. In the first place, the non-representative organisations - the BBL and the NBA – disappear from the scheme. …
>
> In the second place, there is no representation of the English regional Associations as such. Instead, there appears, as a constituent organisation of the Board, a new body called the English Bridge Union. …
>
> For the first time, there is now in being a scheme of self-government for English bridge players wherein all who are interested can participate. This embraces (1) the democratically constituted Associations, formed or about-to-be-formed throughout the country; (2) the English Bridge Union, which links them together for the purposes of Control Board representation, and for such other purposes as the delegates to the Board may determine."

Early EBU activities

Wasting little time, the fledgling EBU Council met on 12 June 1936. There were eight people present, including Lederer, Phillips and Walshe on behalf of London, with Kempson and Bruce Parker representing the North-East and North-West. The others represented Yorkshire and two new regions, the North Midlands and West Midlands. It was envisaged that there would in due course be a further two regional associations, one for Eastern Counties and the other for the South-West.

As was perhaps only to be expected, a lot of time was taken up with constitutional matters. It was decided that the Council would consist of twenty-five members, of whom seven would come from London, four from the North-West, three each from the West Midlands and Yorkshire, and two from each of the other four regions. Phillips, Kempson and Lederer were respectively appointed to act as Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Honorary Secretary.

Another significant issue was the allocation of the twelve DBCB representatives. It was agreed that there should be four from London, two each from the North-West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and one each from the North-East and North Midlands. Lest this might be seen as excluding the other regions, it was provided that, from 1937 onwards, London and the West Midlands would respectively consult the Eastern Counties and South-West associations before nominating their delegates.

There were a number of other decisions taken in respect of lesser matters and it was agreed that Phillips would draft the Constitution on the basis of what had been agreed. Discussions on the Constitution occupied a lot of the Council's time up until the end of 1938 but the document was never finalised.

Selection shenanigans

Aside from issues relating to its own Constitution, the other main issue which occupied the Council related to the selection of teams for Camrose matches. At a meeting in January 1937, the Council appointed a Selection Committee under the chairmanship of Norman de Villiers Hart, now probably best remembered for his co-authorship with Robert Darvas of *Right Through the Pack*.

This committee's brief extended only to England's first Camrose match (against Wales) and they were instructed to select a team "likely to win – not necessarily the best available". Nonetheless, it was a powerful team of London players: Lederer (captain) and Rose; Harrison-Gray and Simon; Jack Flores and Dr Joe Whitby. Whitby had a reputation for inscrutability: once, declaring a grand slam contract and seeing his position hopeless, he ducked the opening lead, the only way to hold his losses to one trick; this play was subsequently immortalised in the Hart-Darvas book as *The Tale of the Three of Diamonds*.

A couple of days before the match, the Council changed the composition of the Selection Committee and also changed its brief: "Select as far as possible: (a) different personnel for each match; (b) include two players from the provinces for each match." The reference to provincial players is a reminder that those from London were then regarded as a cut above the rest, not least in their own opinion. Interestingly, the team that took the field against Wales contained Kempson and Wraith in place of Flores and Whitby. This was described by Phillips in *BBW* as an "eleventh-hour substitution", the reason not being specified. It is tempting to see this as a consequence of the Council decision regarding provincial players.

Later that year, the Council overturned the Selection Committee decisions for two forthcoming matches, leading to Hart's resignation. Lederer also resigned, though the reason is not stated: he had written a letter of resignation which was discussed at great length, with a vote of thanks for his services only being passed by seven votes to five. It is reasonable to conclude that this letter was possibly expressed in less than diplomatic terms. Shortly after, however, he returned to the Council as one of the L&HC representatives.

In the autumn of 1937, the Council appointed four (playing) captains to select the teams for the 1938 Camrose matches. Three of these (Harrison-Gray, Lederer and Mayer) were acknowledged top players but the fourth was Phillips. It is not difficult to envisage that this decision might, to say the least, prove controversial.

The upshot was that, in protest at what had gone on, the North-East association withdrew from the EBU and affiliated instead to the BBL. In an attempt to change the decision, the EBU wrote to the North-East suggesting that they reinstate their membership "with past differences forgotten". Replying on behalf of the North-East, Kempson opined that it was impossible to reconcile the Council's recent selection decisions with the desire to forget past differences, and emphasised that teams should be selected upon merit.

A little later, the Council ventured to select teams for two matches without the assistance of a committee: this mechanism turned out not to be beyond criticism, the Council proving adept at selecting its own members (of the thirteen people present, four were selected).

Aside from selecting international teams, one is struck by how little the EBU actually did in those early days. In particular, there were no EBU competitions of any sort: although there were proposals to hold inter-regional matches and an "English Cup", nothing came of them. Of course, Phillips would have expected the EBU not to compete with his established programme of NBA events.

An additional reason may have been the deteriorating financial outlook: the EBU had a balance of almost £19 in April 1938, and this occasioned no comment. By the end of the year, the finances "required very serious consideration" and it was only possible to pay £24 due to the DBCB upon receipt of £14 from the L&HC.

Peace at last

The existence of competing bridge organisations could not last. Indeed, in the April 1938 *BBW* Phillips wrote that:

> "No-one is more anxious than I am to see a complete cessation of that attitude of hostility between Bridge organisations which a few misguided individuals have been concerned to promote. I see no reason why they should not, in the near future, get together; pool their resources; eliminate redundant activities; and emerge much strengthened from the process.

It is noteworthy that, from this point onwards, the *BBW* increased its coverage of the BBL's tournaments. This may have been no more than a gesture but it surely indicated at least a willingness to cooperate.

By the beginning of 1939, there seems to have been a general consensus that it would be best to restructure the administration of the game and bring to an end the rivalry and duplication that then existed. In February of that year, Stapleton-Harris reported to the Council that negotiations were in hand for the "fusion" of the EBU and the BBL "to the obvious advantage of bridge in England."

Part of the reason for this is that the principal players were no longer involved to the same extent. Manning-Foster had stood down as BBL President at the end of 1938 and had been succeeded by Noel Mobbs: the new President's attitude was generally more conciliatory than that of his predecessor and *BM* quoted him as undertaking to work towards amalgamation.

Manning-Foster remained involved with bridge as editor of his magazine until his death just before the outbreak of war. He may not have been the disinterested amateur enthusiast of his public persona, but all bridge players in this country owe Manning-Foster a debt.

Phillips, on the other hand, seems to have been losing interest in bridge. As time went by, his magazine diminished in size, with Reese taking on more and more of the work of editing it. Phillips had resigned as EBU Chairman in September 1937 and ceased to attend Council meetings after April 1938.

Another contributing factor may have been a shortage of personnel. There was a distinct shortage of volunteers prepared to undertake the various tasks and, at one point, the EBU Chairman (A F Bearn) found himself having to act as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer as well.

Although it is not specifically recorded, it is a reasonable inference that it was intended that the Duplicate Bridge Board and NBA would both be included in the amalgamation process. Indeed, since all were creations of Phillips, it would very likely have proved impractical not to involve all the relevant bodies.

Work on this proceeded apace and, in July 1939, the new EBU memorandum and articles of association were approved and also a draft constitution for a democratic BBL. The Council decided that the amount of work on hand justified the temporary appointment of a paid secretary and appointed one of their number to this post for three months: this envisaged an honorarium not exceeding fifty guineas, though the amount ultimately agreed was thirty guineas. In early September, just a few days after war had been declared on Germany, the old Council held its last meeting.

Chapter 8

Business as usual

Meanwhile, duplicate bridge remained popular and the BBL and NBA continued with their programmes of tournaments. Indeed, both organisations showed their initiative in staging new events.

There was a rash of new attractions in the autumn of 1936: the BBL launched its Affiliated Clubs Cup, whose purpose was self-explanatory, whilst the NBA announced the Hubert Phillips Bowl. Aside from the fact that the matches then consisted of 36 boards, the rules of the Hubert Phillips are the same as when it was inaugurated. A year later, *The Field* offered the BBL a challenge cup for competition by teams of four: perhaps recognising the popularity of this type of event, it became the trophy at the Buxton Congress for mixed teams.

An original venture was the formation of the Horatian Club. As described by Phillips in the *BBW*, the purpose of this organisation was ambitious:

> "To promote and maintain contact between leading players in different parts of the country. The Club will serve as a clearing-house for ideas and as a centre for experiment and innovation, and, while not overlapping with 'official' activities - such as those of the Regional Associations - will help to give them 'stuffing'."

In practice, however, the Horatian Club appears to have done no more than hold its own competitions and play a few friendly matches.

Perhaps perceiving that the Affiliated Clubs Cup was proving popular, the L&HC reorganised its League for the 1938/39 season. In future, instead of playing under a captain's name, teams would represent clubs. In addition, there was a change to the scoring method: giving the lie to the suggestion that match point scoring of team events would not prove popular, this method was introduced, using the EMP scale from the Austrian match (see Chapter 5), together with the Victory Point scale used in the European Championship. Not that it made any difference to the outcome: a team captained by Harrison-Gray won in both 1937/38 and 1938/39.

Lederer's

A significant development in November 1936 was the opening of Lederer's, a new club in opulent surroundings (Upper Berkeley Street). Having previously been based at the Adams Club off Oxford Street and the Tyburn Club in Hyde Park Place, Lederer took the plunge and opened his own. Whilst the club's main function was rubber bridge, there was a regular duplicate every Tuesday.

Sadly, Lederer's ambition proved greater than his business ability, and within two years he had to move back to the Tyburn, where he remained until the bombing of the next door convent forced him to leave. Lederer's has an important place in the history of the game: virtually all of the players who made Britain a force to be reckoned with in post-War international bridge honed their game there. As Reese, who played part of his first season of top bridge in partnership with him, put it:

> "Dick is commemorated by the Richard Lederer Memorial Cup and, in another way, by the successes of British teams in the 1950s and 1960s, which consisted almost entirely of players who had developed their game under his friendly auspices."

If further evidence were needed regarding the success of Lederer's and the quality in depth of its members, the fact that the club won the Affiliated Clubs Cup on the three occasions that it was contested before the War - a total of 15 different players being successful - should be sufficient.

Overload

It was possible to have too much of a good thing. In a letter to *BBW* in the latter part of 1937, Mayer expressed the view that, until good players were seeded and exempted from the opening rounds of big tournaments, they would remain hidden in their clubs (i.e. devoting themselves to the more profitable business of rubber bridge). Reese echoed this in an article in 1939, listing some thirteen separate events in which a first class player might take part, with the possible addition of trials and international matches. The workload was formidable indeed:

> "I calculate that I play about 75 sessions of match play in a season, and that reckoning does not include casual events at congresses nor does it include Club duplicate games. Sessions of duplicate play total about 125 to 150."

Reese went on to argue the case for top players being exempted from the early rounds of knock-out competitions. He pointed out that it was extremely rare for a strong team to lose a match where there was a genuine difference in class and added that having to play such matches was expensive and sometimes tedious. He added that one result was that some players would not take part in knock-out events whilst others rationed their appearances.

In the next issue Hervey (who seemed proud of the fact that he had never played in a bridge tournament and never would; he claimed that this meant that he could bring an unbiased mind to the issue) responded to Reese with two questions:

> "1. Does he want to create more discord and jealousy among Bridge players than already exists?
> 2. Since Bridge competitions present a strain upon the players, would it be fair to relieve the leading players of strain and so materially increase their chances of winning?"

Perhaps the new tournament structure which would have come into being as a result of the EBU-BBL merger would have eased the position. The international situation meant that this never happened and, when bridge resumed after the War, the world was very different.

Commenting on declining tournament entries in the September 1948 *CBJ*, Reese pointed out that, in the years prior to the War, travel (in particular), money and time were all easier. Later, in *Bridge at the Top*, he remarked that one didn't need much money in pre-War days and didn't bother about it - £250 a year would do.

Four suits not enough

One would have thought that bridge played with four suits would be a sufficiently challenging game for most people. However, during 1938, there was a short-lived craze for five suit bridge. The fifth suit was called Royals (Eagles in the USA) and ranked higher than spades but below no-trumps; every player was dealt sixteen cards. The 65th card ("the widow") was turned up and could be exchanged by the declarer after the opening lead for a card in either his own or dummy's hand. The book was eight tricks so a one bid required the making of nine tricks - if a contract at the level of eight was made, this was termed a Super Slam.

Five suit bridge was sufficiently popular to be included in the programme of the BBW Harrogate congress in May 1938. A report in *The Times* said that sixteen pairs took part, the small number being attributed to the fact that two other events were in progress at the time.

Later that year, a five suit congress was held at Bournemouth and attracted some famous names: Beasley and Wood-Hill captained the winners of the two team events whilst the main pairs' event was won by Leslie Dodds and Norman Mudie Bach, who had won that year's Gold Cup and represented Britain in the European Championship. However, the attendance was low (the main team event only attracted eight tables) and five suit bridge ceased to feature thereafter.

Congress life

In a number of respects, congress life in the 1930s was different to what we now experience. Assuming, that is, that the congress took place at all: I mentioned in Chapter 6 that the 1934 BBW tournament at Harrogate had to be cancelled at very short notice, but the BBL also had problems in this area.

The October 1938 *BM* contained an article about the forthcoming Buxton congress and boasted that its success was assured. Sadly, there was a sticker on the cover of that very issue stating that the congress would have to be postponed. In the next issue, Manning-Foster conceded that it had not been possible to find an alternative date and that the event had accordingly been cancelled.

It would be interesting to know why this debacle occurred but there was nothing further in either *BM* or *The Times*, then still an official medium for BBL news. Indeed, as late as three weeks before the scheduled date, there was a notice in *The Times* inviting entries. Perhaps the most likely reason is that there had been some sort of misunderstanding with the hotel regarding the date: the previous year's congress had started on Friday the 8th of October and the scheduled start date in 1938 was Friday the 7th. Could it be that someone had casually booked the hotel "for the same weekend as last year" and the hotel had interpreted this as meaning that the event would start on the second Friday in October, that is on the 14th, not the 7th?

One of the ways in which pre-War congresses were different is that many events were scored by aggregate: unless a pairs' event specified that scoring would be by match points, aggregate would apply. Aggregate had the great advantage that results could be calculated and published quickly, a relevant consideration in the days when all scoring was performed by hand. The rule was that, having finished play at a table, one agreed the net score over that set of boards with the opponents: theoretically at least, this meant that scoring errors would be minimised, though a lot depended on the numeracy of those adding up the scores at the end.

Another significant difference was in the programme of events. It was common to have more than one event running at each session, and invitation events were popular. Swiss events, of course, did not feature at all, not being tried out in this country until the 1970s; not all progress is beneficial.

In Chapter 6, I referred to the article that Hasler wrote about the work that went on behind the scenes: one point that he made was the difficulty inherent in running a congress where the finals of major events were being decided (as was common). It was necessary to schedule events to avoid undesirable clashes: Hasler gave as an example the fact that it was virtually certain that some players would be involved in the final stages of both the Gold Cup and the National Pairs so it was particularly important to ensure that these two events did not clash. And it was of course necessary to provide events for those eliminated from the main ones.

As an example, consider the Friday evening programme at the abortive Buxton event to which I referred above. There was the first round of an invitation event (Northern Counties v Midland Counties), the first round of *The Field* Cup for mixed teams and an open pairs for those choosing not to participate in either of the other events.

Perhaps the greatest change compared with eighty years ago is the social aspect. The Buxton programme included a reception by the Mayor, a golf competition and a dance, though with rubber bridge for non-dancers. In addition, the Mayor was scheduled to return at the end to present the prizes and trophies.

It might be superfluous to add that most players would dress up (long dresses and dinner jackets) for the evening sessions. Indeed, the general standard of dress was far more formal than nowadays, with men invariably being pictured wearing their jackets and ties. Bridge was very much a middle class occupation for mature people and the references to young players, apart from special events such as the Varsity Match, were few and far between, and not all of these were favourable.

Demonstrating that poor behaviour at the bridge table is not a new phenomenon, Phillips laid down the law after the autumn 1937 NBA Congress:

> "Two or three competitors - young chaps who have never learned, or have forgotten, their manners - caused annoyance to others by impertinence, or boorishness, at the tables. They will be debarred from future congresses. … We are not going to have anyone's enjoyment marred through the antics of one or two individuals who do not know how to behave."

Systems

One final respect in which a visit to a 1930s congress would seem strange was the system rules. Convention cards did not then exist and the norm was to tell your opponents what system you were playing and the expectation was that one of the generally recognised systems would be used. The most common system in use was the Culbertson Approach Forcing System: whilst Acol had made its bow in the mid-1930s, its use was at first restricted to a small number of good players in London; Acol only started to become more widespread when the first book on the system, by Ben Cohen and Reese, made its appearance in 1938.

Whilst allowing the use of recognised systems might have been sensible enough at a time when there were relatively few of them, it didn't work so well when there was a multiplicity of methods. In "*The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post Book of Contract Bridge*", written in 1938, Norman de Villiers Hart provided details of a dozen different systems, and in this he had restricted himself to those "commonly encountered in this country". In *Why You Lose at Bridge*, Simon referred to:

> "The advanced arguments for interminable refinements in carefully complicated systems that made competitive bridge such a nightmare before the War."

Whilst players were entitled to ask for explanations, there was no system of alerting so those playing complex methods (assuming that they worked!) were liable to be at an advantage, arguably an unfair one.

As well as system players, there were natural bidders. These included Buller's British Bridge and also Kempson's followers, his methods being ostensibly natural without conventions but in reality something quite different. Reese, having been part of the South team which had lost to the North in the 1936 match, put it this way:

> "I do not accept Kempson's statement … that the contest was a definite triumph for British Bridge in general and the "Kempson System". The South lost not because they were playing an inferior system but because they made a large number of bids that were bad under any system. This talk about "British Bridge" and "common-sense methods" is all nonsense; the Kempson System is in reality a network of highly conventional understandings, logical and wise enough, but not entitling its users to claim that they are the only people who can bid their cards without the aid of artificial conventions. … The Kempson System is much less truly *natural* than, for example, the Lederer Two Club, which provides for an artificial bid for big hands, and leaves it at that."

Reference to *Kempson on Bidding*, his exposition of British Bridge, establishes the essential truth of Reese's view. Although loth to use the term "forcing", there are many instances where Kempson explains that a common-sense player would certainly bid again. For instance:

> "A jump take-out [in response to 1 of a minor] is not a "forcing to game" bid, but it is a common-sense request to the opener to call again and, if the opener changes the suit - 1♣-2♥ then 2♠ - the responder's only excuse for passing would be that he was mentally defective."

Certainly, Kempson was more measured and discreet than Buller in his approach to bidding. In particular, if the responder to a two-bid had a strong hand, he was advised to bid slowly. Thus, with ♠Q5 ♥J74 ♦AK82 ♣Q1073, the response to a 2♠ opening was 3♦, for no bridge player "worthy of the name" would open with a two-bid and pass in the event of a change of suit.

And it may surprise readers to learn that Kempson was the inventor of what came to be known as the "Stayman" convention. His view was that, after a response of two in a minor to 1NT, the opener would always bid again: a weak responding hand would pass 1NT and not surrender the initiative to the opponents by bidding a minor suit, and it therefore followed that removing 1NT to 2♣ or 2♦ implied values. It followed from this that the responder could exploit this for his own purposes by bidding a minor with either a short or a long suit, relying on the fact that opener would not pass.

And at his turn the opener would of course take advantage of the opportunity to bid a four-card major suit (although not explicitly stated in the book, the strong tendency was only to open a four-card major when there was no palatable alternative). To describe this as "natural" bidding, as was Kempson's wont, is no more than an exercise in sophistry.

The ranks of British Bridge would shortly suffer a great loss. According to Kempson, Buller had been in ill health for many years and the death of his wife, Mary, in early 1936 had affected him badly - "a terrible blow from which he never really recovered". He died of bronchial pneumonia in May 1938 at the age of 51.

Smoke and mirrors

Conditions at tournaments in the 1930s were very different from those which prevail nowadays in one important respect: smoking was commonplace, with *BM* carrying many advertisements for tobacco products.

And, as well as physical smoke to contend with, there were the practitioners of psychic bidding, the bridge equivalent of the conjuror's smoke and mirrors. As Ramsay put it:

> "In the mid-thirties, when psychic bidding was in its heyday, with all the glitter of novelty, all the attraction of the bizarre, all the lure of fairy-gold."

The approach to psyches was more relaxed in those days. Notorious exponents such as A G Figgins made no secret of what they did: indeed, after the War when psychic bidding was less common - though by no means obsolete - Figgins wrote two articles for *CBJ* setting out his methods, summarising them in what he termed the Figgins Theory:

> "Except when opening the bidding, void suits should *always* be bid when an opportunity occurs at a low level. Singletons should similarly be bid, except when vulnerable and holding a hand devoid of honour tricks."

The response of officialdom was unamused, a brief notice in *CBJ* stating that the Rules and Ethics Committee had considered Figgins' articles and had deemed his methods to constitute a private system and had consequently banned its use in all EBU competitions.

Wartime official activity

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the old EBU Council held its last meeting just after war had broken out. In the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that the record of this meeting is absent from the minute book, though the agenda for it has been preserved.

The new structure that the EBU had decided upon took the form of a limited company operating by means of an unincorporated association and, given the hostilities, one would have been forgiven for assuming that there would have been no activity until peace had been restored. This fails to take into account the "Phoney War". After Germany invaded Poland and Britain and France both declared war two days later, very little happened on the Western Front for several months. Until France and the Low Countries were invaded in May 1940, it was in some respects almost business as usual.

Accordingly, we need not be surprised that the first meeting of the new EBU Council was held in March 1940. England was elected Chairman, Rex Vincent Vice-Chairman and Kathleen Salmons, already the BBL Secretary, was appointed to the same position for the EBU. The Council was now composed of delegates from county associations (twenty-three were represented in person or had sent apologies) in recognisably the same form as endured for almost sixty-five years. Significantly, those present represented both predecessor organisations, including Lederer, Phillips and Walshe (EBU) and Hasler, Mrs Lowry and Mobbs (BBL).

In some cases, however, democracy was more a theoretical concept than a real construct since the county associations that the delegates purported to represent had not been set up. The Bye-laws were not yet approved and would not be for over five years since the EBU now went into abeyance.

Given the fact that the country was at war, the ambition displayed at this first Council meeting was remarkable, including decisions to hold a North v South match and National Pairs competition. The Council even agreed that it would be desirable to start a bridge magazine as soon as practical.

The EBU Council did not meet again until June 1945. This meeting revived the EBU on the 1940 model, though with the appointment of a full-time secretary (H D King) at an annual salary of £300 together with an expense allowance of up to £50 per quarter. This may not sound like very much but, to put it in context, an MP's salary in 1945 was £600.

At the same meeting, a Tournament Committee was appointed and a programme of events inaugurated using the trophies from pre-war days, although the BBL retained responsibility for the Gold Cup. It was agreed to hold the much delayed North v South match and also to organise a congress in London: this was duly held in Hendon towards the end of November and the teams in the main event competed for the Tollemache Cup (won by Leo Baron's team). A week later, fifty-two pairs took part in the National Pairs final won by Eric Leigh-Howard and Fritzi Gordon.

Shortly afterwards, what I am sure is a record was set for delay in completing a competition. A country-wide tournament had been organised in 1940 under the aegis of the Red Cross to raise money for the Lord Mayor's Fund.

The final of the Red Cross tournament was held at the Mansion House on 8th December 1945 and won by F James and Dr O Twinning. Per a report in the *Western Morning News* (there was local interest since James was from Plymouth) the prizes included eight motor cars!

Bridge during the War

It would be reasonable to assume that, whilst rubber bridge (particularly in a domestic rather than club environment) might prosper during wartime conditions, competitive bridge would stop. Indeed, *The Times* correspondent envisaged this in an article which appeared a couple of weeks after the declaration of war.

Possibly to the correspondent's surprise, he found himself reporting a month later that a London War-time Bridge Committee had been set up and that this proposed to hold events for open teams, women's teams, mixed-teams and pairs. The team events were open to players in all parts of the country subject to the condition that, failing agreement to the contrary with their opponents, they were prepared to play in London. The pairs' event would, it was hoped, include local heats and one was certainly held in Bournemouth. The events duly took place, with results being sporadically reported in *The Times*, and (given the circumstances) were well supported: nineteen teams contested the open event, compared with nine that took part in the London Association's championship teams event in 2016.

The Gold Cup was restarted in 1940 with twenty-four teams entering the London region. It was envisaged that, after three knock-out rounds, the surviving three teams would join either eleven or thirteen teams from other parts of the country in the semi-final and that the two leading teams would contest a 64 board final. If qualification for the semi-final was pro rata, this indicates that well over one hundred teams entered originally. The BBL decided that the semi-final and final would be held at the Waldorf hotel in June but nothing seems to have taken place.

In May, *The Times* gave news of the qualifiers from the two London heats of the National Pairs, but nothing further was published about it. There was an article in September 1940 stating that competitive bridge had come to a virtually total halt "since the war entered a sterner phase", also pointing out that people would not tie themselves down to an engagement which involved being in the same place for three or four hours. However, it should be noted that Ramsay reported in *Aces All* that Stern ran a regular duplicate in Hampstead during the Blitz.

By late 1942, tournament bridge resumed again, with a London event organised by Stern attracting twelve teams. The winners were a formidable crew: captained by Boris Schapiro, the team included Reese, Simon, Adam "Plum" Meredith and Dr Melvyn Rockfelt. All of these players later went on to play in the European Championship, and all save "Rocky" won it at least once.

So far as I have been able to establish, this was the first time that Reese and Schapiro were in the same winning team and it might even be the first time that they played in partnership (there is no information about how the team lined up, though doubtless it was flexible). Although Reese wrote some 30 years later that he started playing with Schapiro in "about 1944", it would not be surprising if his memory were a little hazy on this point. I would like to think that this was the genesis of Britain's most famous and effective partnership.

Stern organised another event in 1943 and this time received sixteen entries. The winners were again a powerful team: Dodds was the captain and he had with him Ellinger, Kempson, Mathieson, Rixi Markus, Edward Rayne and Walter "Wash" Carr, Rixi's boyfriend. In her autobiography *A Vulnerable Game*, Rixi referred to this event, stating that they played matches in Colchester and Leicester. She added that it was never repeated and that she still had the cup.

As well as conventional tournaments, Stern organised a series of par contests. These were well supported, one of them attracting participants in nineteen centres across the country. Stern seems to have had curious ideas about what constituted a par contract: on one deal, he gave maximum bidding points for bidding a slam missing an ace and with a trump holding of A973 facing K1084; he recommended the unspeakable sequence1♣-1♠-3♠-4♠-6♠ (i.e. the hand could be played in 3♠ or in 6♠ but not in 4♠).

The point of the hand, of course, was to time the play so as to make the contract via a "Devil's Coup" as follows:

	♠ A 9 7 3 ♥ J ♦ A Q 10 5 ♣ A K 8 3	
♠ J 5 ♥ A 9 5 2 ♦ J 8 6 3 ♣ Q 10 7		♠ Q 6 2 ♥ 10 7 6 4 ♦ 9 7 2 ♣ J 9 4
	♠ K 10 8 4 ♥ K Q 8 3 ♦ K 4 ♣ 6 5 2	

West was instructed to lead the ace of hearts and continue the suit. It was hoped that South would achieve par in this manner: he takes his two heart winners, discarding dummy's low clubs, and ruffs a heart; he then cashes the two top clubs, crosses to the king of diamonds, plays a diamond to the ace and ruffs a diamond.

Now, he ruffs a club in dummy. Dummy is left with ♠A9 and a diamond whilst declarer holds ♠K108: when dummy's diamond is led, East's only (faint) chance is to ruff high but declarer overtrumps and finesses against West's jack. Not surprisingly, this hand proved too difficult for many players.

Disrupted events

Inevitably, the outbreak of war disrupted some big events. The 1939 Camrose series was abandoned with several matches still to be played and the event very open (only the Northern Irish were unbeaten), and that year's L&HC Masters Pairs appears never to have been held: this event was normally held in December so it is likely that it was cancelled.

A mystery surrounds the NBA's flagship event, the Tollemache Cup. Hart (with Harrison-Gray, D H Haslam, Ingram and Merkin), had won this in 1938, beating Reese's team (Elizabeth Corke, Ralph Evans, Marx, Simon), and the same two teams were due to contest the 1939 final.

It was announced in the May *BBW* that the final would be played at the Mostyn Hotel in June. However, nothing further appeared in the magazine and nothing in *The Times* either. Since Reese was the technical editor of *BBW* at the time, one would certainly expect a report of the 1939 result assuming that the match did indeed take place.

In *Bridge at the Top*, Reese commented that his mother (Anne) had started a club in Guildford and that he went back there for a time. Sadly, she contracted cancer which proved terminal.

Anne Reese had been a prominent figure for several years, having been one of the first BBL local secretaries and an assured tournament organiser for the NBA. Notice of her death appeared in the July 1939 *BBW* and an advert for Reese's bridge services at the time gave a Guildford address, though shortly after he returned to London living at a West End club.

It is reasonable to conclude that, with the illness and death of his mother, it proved impractical to arrange the final before Reese's return to London, and arranging a match in the holiday period might also have been difficult. Once the War broke out, arranging the delayed final is unlikely to have been anyone's priority.

Bridge players and the War

As was only to be expected, a number of the country's younger players joined up. Amongst many others Domville, Marx and Konstam all served in the forces. As was inevitable, some did not return.

In particular, two prominent players were amongst the casualties: Ivor Birts, who had played in a lot of big matches including the North v South, was killed in mysterious circumstances when the plane on which he was a passenger exploded in mid-air; and John Naughton, a player of great promise who had finished third with Reese in the Masters Pairs, was also killed in the War.

Others served with the Home Guard or Air Raid Precautions, Dodds, Reese and Simon among them. Reese's motivation for this seems questionable: in *Bridge at the Top*, he described this as a "shrewd safety play", and he was later employed in a factory making black-out curtains, owned by a fellow bridge player, Pedro Juan. His duties there appear to have been less than onerous:

> "Once an inspector from the Ministry of Labour called, to see whether I was performing my duties. "Our Mr Reese is at the other factory, about a mile from here", Pedro told him. By the time the man from the Ministry got there, there I was, surrounded by various important-looking ledgers."

Meredith followed another course. Although, as a severe and chronic asthmatic, he would have been exempted from military service on health grounds, he instead registered as a conscientious objector. Ultimately, he was assigned to agricultural work on a relative's farm, hardly a healthy environment for an asthmatic with the pollen clouding the air. But, as Ramsay put it:

> "It is no secret, however, that for a great deal of the War he was in London; and when he was in London, he was playing cards."

Two great losses occurred in the early part of 1941, the deaths of both Lederer and Rose. Having been much associated with each other in bridge success, it was perhaps fitting that they should die not long apart, though tragic that both were relatively young men – under 50 – and at the height of their powers.

The Tournament Bridge Association

During the latter part of 1944, Reese, in association with Harold Selby whom he knew as a fellow-member of Crockford's, took advantage of the national bodies' inactivity to set up the Tournament Bridge Association. This ran a programme of well-supported competitions, including a number which are now prominent EBU tournaments, including Crockfords' Cup, the Two Stars Pairs and the Four Stars Teams.

Once the BBL and EBU resumed their activities after the War, the TBA was on borrowed time. It continued to run its own events until 1950 when it was agreed that its activities should be merged into those of the EBU, though the Masters Pairs continued to be run as a TBA event until 1953.

The first two events launched by the TBA attracted a combined entry of 191 teams: one of these, the Richard Lederer Memorial, initially the TBA County Championship, is now run by London, the result of a short-sighted decision by the EBU. Perhaps failing to appreciate how great a figure Lederer had been, the EBU decided in 1955 that it no longer wanted the event and offered it to London: the county has staged it for the past 60 years, now in the form of an invitation event commemorating Richard Lederer, his son Tony and Tony's wife Rhoda.

The other event, the Equity Cup, was a handicap team event and appears only to have been held once. Perhaps the thought of starting a 32 board match with a deficit of up to 3,000 points proved unattractive when there were other events available. A wonderful story from this event was published in *The Times*:

> "One of the best stories of the handicap concerns a team new to duplicate play. Two women players had a remarkably good session of 16 boards and were warmly congratulated by their team-mates. Modestly disclaiming any special credit, one of the pair explained that they had been very lucky.
>
> "Our opponents", she said, "were very inexperienced players who would insist on playing in contracts one trick higher than they could make."
>
> It was not until much later that she discovered that her two inexperienced players were a famous pair who had represented Great Britain at the IBL Congress [i.e. the European Championship] and had previously won the Gold Cup."

Both the Lederer and the Equity Cup featured a number of giant-killing feats by unheralded teams. Certainly, the first winners of both events would not have been amongst the favourites.

Simon and Stern were quoted in *The Times* as attributing this to a general improvement in standard, though Simon thought that another reason was a decline in the standard of expert

play, saying that any of the leading teams from 1939 could give the top 1945 teams a 2,000 point start over 32 boards and beat them nine times out of ten.

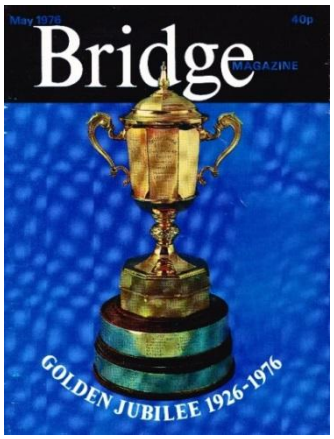
Some years later, Harrison-Gray supported this view, writing in *Country Life* that tournament play before the War was a lot better and tighter all round. He opined that Lederer's had a part to play in this: the small community of London experts were to a large extent based there, meaning that any horror stories quickly became public property.

Was this fair comment? Certainly, there was nowhere after the War to rival the pre-War Lederer's as the place where experts would gather. Although the club continued under the ownership of Lederer's widow, Peggy, Richard himself was irreplaceable. For someone who played tournament bridge for a mere seven years, his influence was colossal and his legacy substantial.

Chapter 9

The Gold Cup and Camrose series

Given that the Gold Cup is the country's oldest and most prestigious competition, it seems only right to award it prominent coverage in a work of this sort. And it would have been equally remiss were I not to have included the early history of the Camrose series



The Gold Cup, as portrayed on the cover of Bridge Magazine, May 1976

Gold Cup progress

The Gold Cup grew rapidly in popularity. *The Times* reported that the entry had grown from 72 teams in 1932 to 123 in 1933. There was another big leap in 1934 to 197 and the entry had reached 204 teams by the time that the 1935 event was held; to put this in perspective, the BGB website indicates that 133 teams entered the 2016 event. This was the high water mark for pre-war entries, the institution of other competitions meaning that there were plenty of alternative attractions available for those wishing to play knock-out matches.

1933

It took the BBL a few years to arrive at a settled format. In the first year, all matches were of thirty two boards and, whilst this was the specified format for the early rounds, it was announced that the 1933 semi-finals and final might be different: in fact both these rounds were contested over forty eight boards.

That year's final was won by Lederer: he partnered Collingwood with Newmark and Rose at the other table. Their opponents were Ingram's team: as usual, he partnered Hughes, with Cole and J K Mannooch as team-mates.

The 1933 competition was controversial in that the BBL restricted allowable systems to just four: Approach-forcing (Culbertson), One over one, Two clubs and Vanderbilt one club. Such were the passions raised by this move that Manning-Foster was obliged to defend the position in a letter to *The Times*.

The final was a very close affair and the winning margin was only 960 points. Writing some 30 years later, Ingram referred to a hand where he was holding ♠AK7542 ♥653 ♦7 ♣863: Lederer (vulnerable) on his left dealt and opened 1♥, Hughes (non-vulnerable) overcalled 1♠ and Collingwood raised to 4♥. One would perhaps assume that this was hardly the most testing of bidding problems but Ingram saw matters in a different light.

> "Knowing Stan Hughes's game very well, I was pretty confident that he had psyched in spades, probably with a long diamond suit as an escape. If this was so there was a good chance of beating Four Hearts so I passed, but Lederer made the contract while Four Spades was made by his team-mates in the other room. Stan's hand was ♠J9863 ♥A2 ♦A84 ♣A72."

It might have been better to double 1♥ (surely even Hughes would not psyche a take-out double). It would be interesting to know how the play went: the spades must have been 2-0 (otherwise it seems inconceivable that the contract can have made) and, leaving aside the possibility that successive spade leads would leave the declarer short of trumps, the defence would surely have had more than one opportunity to find their diamond ruff.

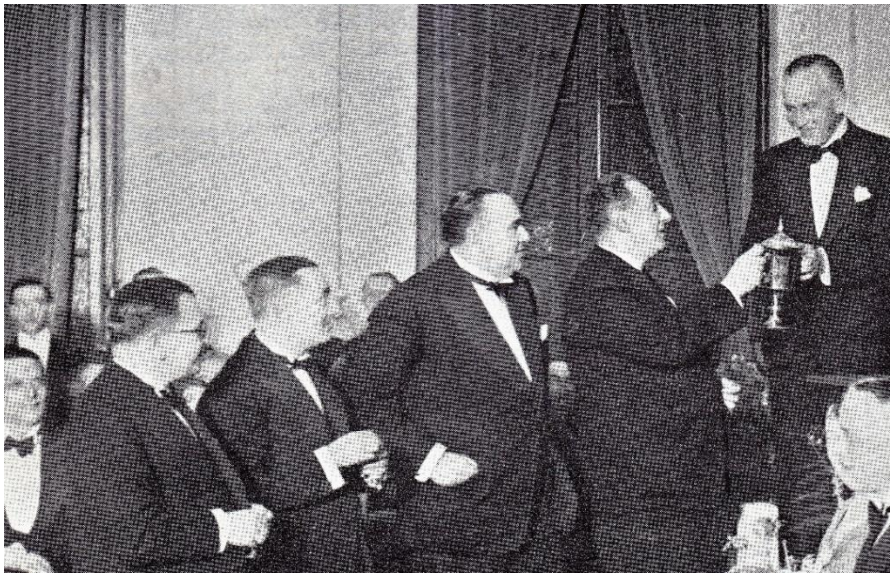
The 1933 competition was significant for another reason: the result of every match was published in *The Times*. It is fair to speculate that one of the reasons for the substantial increase in entries might have been that team captains liked to see their names in print.

1934

The format of the Gold Cup was significantly changed for 1934: the competition was organised so as to produce eight regional winners and they contested a final of twenty four board matches against each of the other teams, four boards being played against every other team in each of six sessions. Another change was a tightening of the system regulations, with the Vanderbilt one club being removed from the permitted list.

The hand below, which occurred in the London regional final, is from *Modern Contract and Duplicate*; Lederer titled it "A big swing against Mr Ingram".

	♠ K J 6 3 ♥ J 8 7 6 ♦ J 8 5 ♣ 7 6	
♠ Q 8 4 ♥ 5 3 ♦ A Q 9 7 4 3 ♣ J 2		♠ A 10 9 7 5 ♥ A 2 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ A 10 3
	♠ 2 ♥ K Q 10 9 4 ♦ 2 ♣ K Q 9 8 5 4	



The 1934 Gold Cup winners, left to right Rose, Kosky, Collingwood, Lederer, receive the trophy from Eastbourne Alderman Roland Gwynne; Ingram is seated on the left at the front

At Game All, there were two passes to Lederer who opened 2♠, a bid for which he lacked the values. However, and surprisingly given his predilection for bidding on rubbish, this was sufficient to silence Hughes, and the unopposed auction was 2♠-3♦-3NT-4♠. So long as declarer got the trumps right, there was no defence to this contract and Lederer duly made it.

At the other table, Collingwood had the bit between his teeth:

S	W	N	E
C'wood	England	Kosky	Cole
			1♠
X	2♦	P	2NT
3♣	P	P	3♦
3♥	P	4♥	X
P	P	P	

As Lederer observed, Collingwood did not underbid his hand. And better was to follow since he made his contract! Details of the play are not supplied but it is easy to see what might have happened: I suspect that West led the queen of spades (top of your partner's suit was standard in those days) to the king and ace and East returned one. And if this didn't happen, it seems virtually impossible that the defence could have let the contract make.

In fairness to Cole, the 2♦ bid was generally played as a weak rescue in those days, implying shortness in partner's suit: surely England should have bid spades at some point - at the very least, he could have bid 3♠ over 3♥. On the other hand, it was not very likely (to say the least) that Collingwood would have bid this way with three small spades.

The regional competitions were major events in their own right, and Dr George Melville Smith had presented a trophy for the winners of the London region. As was hardly surprising given

that they were the recipients of a 1,360 point swing on the hand above (the score at Collingwood's table was 740, there being no bonus of 50 for making a doubled contract at this point), this was won by Lederer's team.

Lederer's team was the same as that which went on to win the 1934 Tollemache Cup (see Chapter 6), whilst Ingram's showed one change from the one which had lost the 1933 Gold Cup Final, England having replaced Mannooch. The four teams in the London regional semi-finals were all strong and any of them would have been worthy Gold Cup winners. When the Melville Smith became a separate competition in 1935, it attracted an entry of forty teams and, in the form of a pivot teams event, it remained a prestigious London tournament until declining entries resulted in its abandonment at the end of the twentieth century.

Rather bizarrely, the tournament regulations did not prescribe the method by which the winner of the Gold Cup would be determined: it was instead announced that the method of determining the winner would be decided at a meeting of the captains and tournament committee. Not that it mattered: Lederer's team won all its matches and had an aggregate score over twice as high as that of the second placed team and so was a very clear winner.

1935

In 1935, and it may well be the case that the teams did not approve of the format of the 1934 final (which required presence at Eastbourne for four days), the Gold Cup reverted to a straight knock-out event. That year's final was a 100 board match, and this remained the format for over 30 years. In addition, the BBL had had a change of heart on permitted methods, with competitors being allowed to play "one of the generally recognised systems".

The 1935 winners were captained by Abe Wolfers, partnering his brother Lionel, with Pat Cotter and Edmund "Jack" Loftus Tottenham at the other table. They won a close match against Hughes-Ingram, this time playing with Dodds and Leonard Ritte. The margin was reported as 1,050 points in *BM* (1,210 per *The Times*) but Ingram's team had been leading with five boards to go at which point a gross overbid by Hughes resulted in an 800 point penalty.

At this stage, the Gold Cup had been contested four times: Ingram had lost in the final twice, in the semi-final once and in the final of the London regional event (this could realistically be regarded as a Gold Cup decider) on the other occasion. As consolation, his team (though on this occasion captained by Dodds) won the 1935 Melville-Smith Trophy.

This was the start of a run of fine Gold Cup performances by Dodds: he was runner-up again in 1936 and 1939, beaten semi-finalist in 1937 (effectively the final) and winner in 1938.

1936

This was the year that Ingram finally got his name on the Gold Cup. He and Hughes were playing with Newmark and Tommy Simmons, regarded by Ingram as the fastest card player he had ever known. Their opponents were captained by Lederer, with Dodds having replaced Collingwood from the victorious 1934 team. Bertie Collingwood had been very successful in 1933 and 1934, winning the Gold Cup twice, the Tollemache and playing in the European

Championship. After this, however, he vanished from the bridge scene: having been very prominent, he no longer featured.

Perhaps he simply lost interest in tournament bridge or found the incessant round of matches tiresome. However, there is another possibility. Collingwood's grandson, Charles, is a well-known actor (he plays Brian Aldridge in *The Archers*): in his autobiography, he referred to his grandfather's expertise at bridge and mentioned that he lived in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, but had to move out of London after he lost all his money.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Collingwood's abrupt departure from the bridge scene might well have been connected with his financial issues and having to leave central London. If so, this would have been a sad end to an illustrious, if short-lived, career in tournament bridge.

Ingram's view was that the standard of bridge "was by far the best that had been played in any final at that time". As Mandy Rice Davies commented, albeit not in a bridge context, "Well he would say that, wouldn't he?".

Lederer took the early initiative and led by 1,270 points after the first session of 32 boards. Ingram pulled back in the second session and led by 330 boards after 64 boards. The hand which follows below occurred early in the final session and was regarded as decisive, being written up as the hand of the year. West was the dealer with North-South vulnerable. With North-South cold for 6♦ and East-West having a very cheap save in spades, a normal result (particularly with aggregate scoring) would be for East-West to finish in 6♠ doubled, making anything from nine to eleven tricks depending upon the defence. However, this didn't occur at either table.

	♠ 3 ♥ Q J 9 8 3 ♦ 10 8 3 ♣ K 8 5 4	
♠ A K Q J 10 8 ♥ A 10 7 ♦ Q J ♣ 9 6		♠ 7 6 5 2 ♥ K 6 5 4 2 ♦ ♣ J 10 7 3
	♠ 9 4 ♥ ♦ A K 9 7 6 5 4 2 ♣ A Q 2	

When Lederer's team sat North-South, Hughes elected to open 4♠ (the *Bridge Magazine* report attributes this to Ingram but both Lederer and Ingram wrote that it was Hughes, and they were certainly in a position to know).

Hughes was the sort of player who always had the courage of his convictions, and this turned out to be a good moment for his somewhat irregular opening bid. 4♠ was passed round to Rose who bid 5♦. After two passes, Ingram bid 5♠ and Rose had his first big decision: somewhat surprisingly, he decided to pass.

When discussing the hand later, Lederer commented that, since he did not know who could make what, Rose was passing the buck. But why should Rose have thought that Lederer would feel called upon to bid at adverse vulnerability?

Simon, who discussed the hand in *Why You Lose at Bridge*, was out of sympathy with Rose:

> "Once he has not been doubled in five diamonds by either opponent (a big consideration this) he should have bid six diamonds himself. In fact, at this stage, he would have been risking far less in bidding six diamonds than he had already risked when he bid five."

As Lederer admitted, he knew even less about the hand than his partner did. He passed the decision back to Rose with a double, trying to show that he had some values. Rose, with the final say in the matter, stood the double.

This did not impress Lederer (writing in the *Sunday Referee* and reprinted in the *British Bridge World* for June 1936):

> "As the match was decided on aggregate, he should have bid six diamonds.
>
> On his hand, six diamonds, in view of my double, is quite probable, and in any event is unlikely to be defeated by more than one trick. Five spades, on the bidding, cannot be set more than two tricks at the outside and might even be made. If he bids six diamonds, is doubled, goes one down and finds that five spades could have been set two tricks, he has chucked 500 points, which is not fatal. By passing, he is risking about 2,000 points. He is laying 4-1 that his pass is correct. The hand does not warrant these odds."

Simon agreed with this but nonetheless felt that Lederer should have bid 6♦ himself, which couldn't cost much facing a partner who had found a bid at the five level when vulnerable.

The reports state that Hughes played the hand well and made the contract by means of a heart-club squeeze. As I see it, this must have needed a defensive error: a diamond was led to trick one and there is simply no way that declarer can isolate the club menace in the North hand without the defence's co-operation.

Five spades doubled scored 750: there was no bonus of 50 "for the insult" in those days but West had 150 honours. Even if five spades had failed by one trick, West would still have come out ahead!

This was bad enough for Lederer, but worse was to happen at the other table. Dodds opened 2♠, natural and non-forcing. Playing the Lederer system, Dodds had the values for this bid, though with nothing to spare.

Kosky responded 3♣, natural showing a biddable suit! This was a clear departure from the system, as well as from rational bridge, 3♠ being the correct response. Newmark jumped to 4♦, Dodds bid 4♠ and Simmons bid 5♦. Kosky, who should surely have bid 5♠, elected to pass and Dodds doubled in the pass out seat. Kosky removed to 5♠ and Newmark, whose hand had improved once spades were supported, bid 6♦.

Dodds found a very good bid now - he passed. Kosky, who had given a decidedly misleading picture of his hand, doubled 6♦ and there the case rested. Both Lederer and Simon attributed the blame for this debacle to Dodds but I have more sympathy. Given his ace of hearts and

his partner's "biddable" club suit, there seemed little risk of 6♦ making whilst there was no guarantee of making even ten tricks in spades (a 3415 shape with five clubs headed by the king-queen seems consistent with Kosky's bidding).

Dodds decided to lead the ace of hearts (a strange choice on the bidding) and Newmark could have made thirteen tricks: since the necessary line of play - the ruffing heart finesse discarding a spade - carried considerable risk (though king from ace-king was standard in those days), it is hardly surprising that he settled for making twelve for a score of 1,490 (1,540 nowadays). The swing to Ingram was therefore 2,240, slightly more than the final margin in his favour (2,130).

1937

The "Acol" team (Harrison-Gray, Macleod, Marx and Simon) had a wonderful 1937, winning many major events. Their victory in the Gold Cup, with the team also including Macleod's former university partner, Colin Harding, was widely expected and the draw favoured them: their opponents in the final from the North-West (Hugh Frost, Mrs Bayley, Major Dewhurst and J Edgar Gordon) had earlier done well, beating teams of international players from Scotland and Wales, but were outclassed in the final, the margin being a crushing 8,320 points.

In a letter to *BBW*, Gordon commented that, unlike previous matches where there had been a series of exciting swings favouring first one team and then the other, Gray's team had simply continued to accumulate points "by a sound and solid appreciation of the possibilities of each individual hand". An article in *BM* gave details of three hands from the final: in each case, Gray's team had gained by making a part-score at both tables. The author commented that:

> "They play a cold scientific game and do not seek to gain the plaudits of onlookers by spectacular bidding or play."

Not everyone was impressed with this approach to the game. Harrison-Gray had encountered stiffer opposition in the semi-final, a strong London team (Dodds, Konstam, Mathieson, Ritte and Summers), but had beaten them by a comfortable enough 3,890 points, one of the reasons being several speculative (and failing) slams bid by the losers. Konstam, for reasons that must have appealed to him at the time, wrote a lengthy open letter to the *BBW* in which he criticised Gray's team for playing an uninspired, mechanical game.

> "You started life with four sound players. But you were handicapped. You had no Buller, no Kehoe and no Lederer as inspiration. And therefore you had to study the game from a different angle.
>
> You mapped out for yourselves an inexorable par below which nothing can induce you to fall, but above which (I know you will forgive the liberty) you seem unable to rise. …
>
> I should be far more impressed if I could point my finger at any one piece of brilliance, any one bid that lifted the side out of "perfect" mediocrity. …

> You make no mistakes worth speaking of, but I ask you, for the good of the game and the enjoyment of it - introduce a little enterprise into it - you are all good enough to do so - and you may still produce a team that could compete with a fair hope of success against a first class continental team such as the Austrians, the French or the Four Aces of America."

The 1937 Gold Cup winners, left to right Simon, Harrison-Gray, Macleod, Marx, pictured with the Daily Telegraph cup; Reese is on the far right

Gray's retort was crushing:

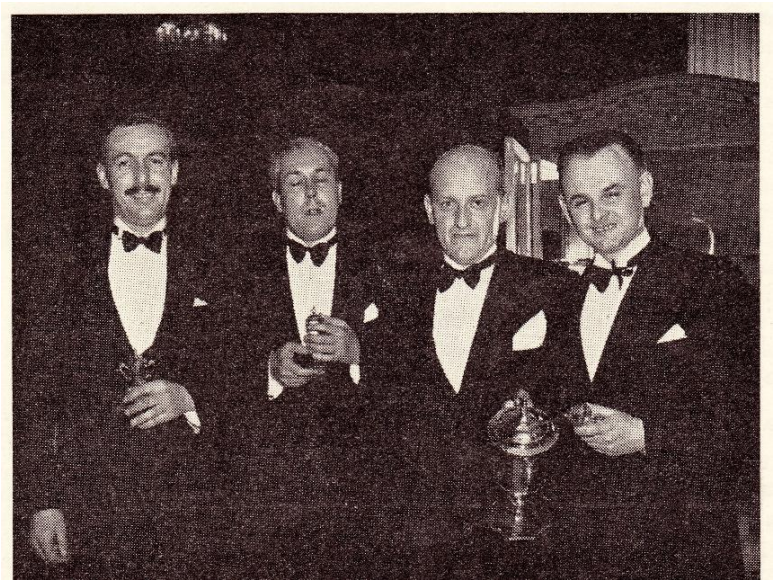
> "I have no intention of seeking to inculcate into the methods of my team the sort of brilliance which you have in mind: for I have a strong suspicion that, should I make that endeavour, the result would be not that we should beat the best continental teams, but that we should lose to you."

Several hands were published in *The Times* and illustrate the slam zone failings of Konstam's team. On one, Mathieson held ♠AKQ10 ♥6 ♦A8764 ♣KJ6 and made the dubious decision to bid on after 1♦-1♥-1♠-3NT - he finished in 5♦ and went one down for a loss of 540 points. On another, Dodds and Summers reached a 6♣ contract with a trump suit of KQ1053 facing 9762: fair enough, you might think, but there was also a side-suit of AK1082 opposite 763 which had to be negotiated for no losers.

1938

The 1938 final had all the appearance of another mismatch. Bach's team (Cotter, Dodds and Tottenham) versus a ladies' team from Birmingham, the only occasion upon which an entirely female team has reached the final of the Gold Cup.

The underdogs, Alison Crisford's team (Mrs A N Carr, Mrs F M Chatterley and Mrs E Le Couteur), had failed to read the script, however. They had beaten a strong London team captained by Willie Rose in the semi-final and showed that they were no pushovers. They had an early lead and, with sixty four hands played, only trailed by 840. However, they couldn't keep it up: with tiredness possibly playing a part, Bach's team pulled away to win by 3,680.



The 1938 Gold Cup winners, left to right Tottenham, Cotter, Dodds, Bach

One of the key hands in the last session was this:

♠ K Q 9 7 4	♠ A 5 3 2
♥ 3	♥ A 8 4
♦ A 4 3	♦ 2
♣ A 10 6 4	♣ K J 7 3 2

At both tables, West opened 1♠, East responded 2♣ and West raised to 3♣, which was generally regarded as an encouraging action in those days. Whilst Mrs Carr now bid 4♠ which ended the auction, Dodds bid 4NT (the Culbertson 4-5 No-trump, showing in this case two aces and the king of clubs). Holding two aces, it was compulsory for Bach to bid 5NT and Dodds removed to 6♠ - the clubs were 2-2 and so thirteen tricks were easy. Although the hands didn't have to fit as well as they did, it looks to me as though Dodds simply valued his hand better than Mrs Carr.

1939

This was Lederer's last great hurrah, a Gold Cup victory at his final attempt, thus becoming the first player to win the trophy three times. He was partnering Joel Tarlo with Jackie Janes and Louis Tarlo at the other table (the Tarlo brothers very rarely played together).

The 1939 Gold Cup winners, left to right Lederer, Louis Tarlo, Joel Tarlo, Janes being presented with the trophy by the Mayoress of Bexhill, Mrs W N Cuthbert; Mobbs is standing at the back

The correspondent in *The Times* commented that Lederer was probably the most popular player in the country and one of the few experts who, by regarding bridge as a game, refused to be ruffled whatever the circumstances might be. They did not have an easy passage, winning a close semi-final against Kempson and then facing the holders: had Bach's team won, Cotter and Tottenham would have been the first players to achieve three wins. This again was a close match, with Lederer only pulling away at the end to win by 3,130 as a consequence of what was described in *BM* as "mild gambling" on the part of the losers.

What was probably the most interesting hand from the final follows below, with an interesting angle on the 1939 tactical approach to bidding freak hands. Dealer East, love all.

	♠ A Q J 10 5 2 ♥ A 7 ♦ A Q 9 4 ♣ Q	
♠ 9 8 ♥ 6 5 4 3 2 ♦ 10 3 ♣ 9 8 5 4		♠ K 7 4 3 ♥ K Q J 10 9 8 ♦ K J 7 ♣
	♠ 6 ♥ ♦ 8 6 5 2 ♣ A K J 10 7 6 3 2	

S	W	N	E
J Tarlo	Tottenham	Lederer	Cotter
			1♥
P	2♥	3♠	4♥
5♣	P	5♠	X
6♣	P	P	6♥
P	P	X	P
P	P		

S	W	N	E
Dodds	L Tarlo	Bach	Janes
			1♥
P	2♥	3♠	4♥
5♣	P	P	5♥
6♣	P	P	X
P	P	P	

I find it a strange coincidence that both South players decided that the best way to describe their hand was to pass on the first round, and the outcome was that their opponents had every opportunity to find a profitable sacrifice. Cotter did well at his table, inferring from his partner's silence that the chances of breaking six clubs were limited. Details of the play in 6♥ were not supplied but it can be inferred that South led a top club: with no entries to dummy, Cotter had to lose four tricks and duly did so; with his 100 honours, the loss was 400 points.

By comparison, and in a very similar position, Janes did rather less well. Reese, however, was inclined to blame his partner instead:

> "He might have reflected that his partner did not double five clubs, so that perhaps he was wrong to allow the double of six to stand, especially as Dodds is just the player to turn up with a giant after a show of weakness in the earlier stages."

It is noteworthy that Bach, by passing 5♣, shows that he clearly expected Dodds to have this sort of hand. Dodds made an overtrick: since he also had honours, he scored 1,240 for a net gain of 840. My personal view is that passing with the South cards over a 1♥ opening is simply too clever by half. Depending upon North's degree of optimism (one can imagine a heart lead causing problems), an honest 5♣ overcall would either have bought the contract or been raised to slam - and to make game with an overtrick and 100 honours scores 520, better than defending the sacrifice and getting 400.

Reese reviewed the final in *BBW*, opining that the bridge was probably the best there had ever been. The bidding and play on both sides was excellent, with the slam bidding being of a high standard. Reese felt that Lederer deserved to win and the reason for his victory was simple - his team made fewer mistakes.

Afterwards

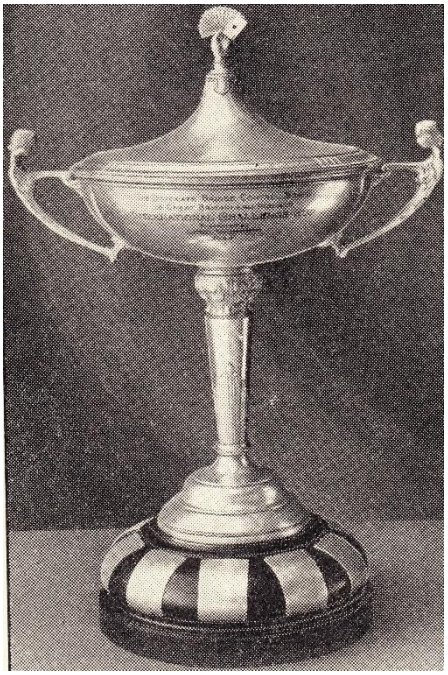
As was discussed in Chapter 8, a Gold Cup competition was started in 1940. The London area results published in *The Times* indicate that there were some strong teams, with the victorious captains' names including Harrison-Gray (though Mrs H-G on this occasion) Mathieson, Reese

and Whitby - and teams captained by Beasley, Hart, Ingram and Stern had already been eliminated. It can reasonably be inferred from the absence of any further results that, once the War became more serious on the Home Front, the competition was abandoned.

An announcement was made on July 14th 1945 in *The Times* that the Gold Cup was to be resumed, with the early rounds taking place during the winter. The semi-finals and final were duly held at the Cheltenham congress in May 1946, so it is likely that some matches were played towards the end of 1945. Aside from this, nothing further is known about the competition apart from the names of the winners, two of the losing team and the losing semi-final captains.

The Camrose starts

With the passage of almost 80 years, it is difficult to appreciate the excitement engendered by the home international series (Camrose for convenience) in its early years.



The original Camrose Cup

It was an opportunity for a few to take part in an international bridge competition and for others to turn up and watch. Aside from the friendly matches played from time to time around the country, and these had diminished with the growth of organised tournament bridge, there had hitherto been little opportunity for enthusiasts to improve their game by watching the stars of the day at work.

1937

The first ever match in the Camrose was between the Irish Free State - as it was then called - and Scotland, the IFS being victorious by 3,560 points in the 100 board match. The *BBW* report seems to imply that this may have been something of a shock result and one can only wonder whether the legendary hospitality provided in Dublin had a part to play.

As discussed in Chapter 7, England's first match was against Wales. This was won by a deceptively large margin of 4,120 points, the Welsh throwing away many points in a desperate attempt at the end to generate swings in their favour. The match seems to have been an absorbing, interesting contest but the staging of it was criticised. Phillips described it as "hardly worthy of the occasion" and Kempson, contrasting the match arrangements with those in Dublin, confessed to feeling ashamed of the "casual reception and lackadaisical treatment" offered to the Welsh visitors.

The IFS continued their good form in their second match against Northern Ireland, winning in Belfast by 2,280. The Irish team was different to that which had beaten Scotland and the Selection Committee felt called upon to issue a statement saying that, although they were completely satisfied with the performance in the first match, they thought that there were about a dozen pairs worthy of selection and that it was their policy to give as many of these as possible the opportunity of representing their country.

England played Scotland in their second match and another formidable team made the journey to Glasgow: Ingram (capt)-Hughes, Macleod-Marx plus the Leicester pair Sydney Josephs and Dr J Mackay. They proved too strong for the home team, winning by 5,020 points. There was substantial coverage of the match in *BBW*, including comments by the players. Whereas most of these were relatively tactful (though Josephs said that he was disappointed only to play 35 boards, about the same number as Kempson-Wraith in the previous match), one of the Scottish team, Alice Mackenzie, was sufficiently forthright to say that she was disappointed with the performance of her team-mates.

Wales recovered from their disappointment against England to beat Northern Ireland by a substantial 6,510 points. To judge from the selection of hands that appeared in *BBW*, the standard of bridge could charitably be described as mixed.

Kempson's view was that shocking card play by Northern Ireland (and from this he excluded wrong views and "understandable lapses") was responsible for 6,000 of the points lost. Writing about the match, Simon Rivlin commented that he was "greatly impressed by the fine display given by Gabbey and Shanks" (for the losers), which doesn't say a great deal about the performance of their team-mates.

The next match was Wales versus the IFS and this must have been a terrific one to watch. Wales took an early lead which reached 2,640 points by board 57. The Irish fought back and were leading by 1,000 with ten boards to go. A Welsh grand slam gave them a swing of 750 so it was anyone's match at the death: on board 100, the Irish gained a good swing to win by 620. David Rivlin, who had played in the first match for the IFS, commented in *BBW* that:

> "The Welsh team were by no means the formidable opponents that we were led to believe they were. The only strong point in their favour was the good judgement in doubling unmakeable contracts."

He added that the Irish played their cards much better than the Welsh. In the light of his comments, which at the least appear somewhat uncharitable in tone, one could be forgiven for wondering why the match was close.

For the remaining two matches, the EBU made some extraordinary decisions. With what was described by George Baxter in *BBW* as "a splendid disregard for the necessity of playing established partnerships", the team selected to take on Northern Ireland was made up of four London experts - Whitby (capt)-Cotter, Merkin-Joel Tarlo - plus an established pair from Yorkshire, Cohen and Bobby Mercado. For the match against the IFS, they selected Phillips (capt)-Mrs Evers, Reese-Abe Wolfers, with Edgar Foster and H F Pepper (Warwickshire): this team was at least composed of three acknowledged partnerships but arguably lacked the class of the teams which had been selected for the previous matches.

England duly dispatched Northern Ireland, but by a mere 370 points having been 1,100 down with seven boards to go, to set up a Camrose decider with the IFS. Louis Tarlo played instead of Cotter, the latter having been forced to withdraw from the team "owing to unforeseen engagements", and the lack of partnership understanding proved to be a handicap. Baxter commented that:

> "It was significant that most praise on the English side went to Cohen and Mercado, the only pair which was playing a system which both knew."

Meanwhile, Wales had beaten Scotland by 3,290 points to complete their season in mid-table; their finest hour was yet to come. Scotland took an early lead but, once Wales got ahead, they were in no danger of defeat.

Scotland finished their programme against Northern Ireland in Edinburgh. The excitement at the end was terrific: Northern Ireland were leading with two boards to go but Scotland gained a swing on the penultimate hand to lead by 240.

On the last board, Northern Ireland went one down a vulnerable 6NT: the contract was the same in the other room so it didn't seem to matter much whether the Scottish declarer (J J Tidd) made his contract or not - except that it was redoubled at his table! Fortunately for Scotland, he succeeded (he needed to decide which squeeze would work and got it right), the final margin being 2,350 points.

One feels that the Scottish auction on the hand following below deserved to win the match:

♠ K 9 8 2	♠ A Q 10 7 6
♥ A J 9 3	♥ K Q 8 4
♦ A 9 8	♦ K 6
♣ 10 8	♣ A 6

When Northern Ireland held these hands, East opened 1♠, West raised to game and they finished in 6♠. For Scotland, however, Peter Duff was able to make a forcing raise to 3♠ and Stanley Nicolson responded with a natural slam try of 4♥.

This was the key bid: Duff had the perfect hand to employ the Culbertson 4-5 No-trump convention, so bid 4NT showing in this case two aces and the king of spades. Nicolson made the compulsory response of 5NT, indicating that all the aces were held, and Duff now found the great bid of 6♥, offering a choice of both level and denomination. Appreciating that his major suit queens were crucial, Nicolson raised to 7♥.

This was clearly the best spot so Duff and Nicolson deserved all the plaudits. One feels that the applause would have been somewhat muted, however, had West's lengths in the minor suits been reversed: had that been the case, there would have been no play at all for the contract.

And so to Blackpool for the deciding match between the two unbeaten teams. This was an important event, significant enough for the BBC to broadcast part of the play. The IFS took an early lead but this was quickly recovered, and for most of the match England had a lead of between two and three thousand, with the final margin being 2,830. At the start of the last session, however, the lead was down to 1,350 and at this point an England win was far from a foregone conclusion.

The arrangements for the match were apparently far from perfect: Phillips made a point of criticising them - and the hotel generally - at the EBU Council meeting, saying that matters must be thought through carefully before the next season. So far, England had hosted two matches and done it poorly on both occasions.

And thus ended the first season of home country international bridge, England being the champions, the IFS worthy runners-up, followed by Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. One has sympathy for the luckless players from Northern Ireland: they could so easily have won two matches but finished with nothing.

1938

As mentioned in Chapter 7, the EBU had appointed four playing captains and they duly selected their teams. To be accurate, they selected four London players, with two provincials being added later. Three of the London teams were clearly strong combinations, the fourth being Phillips' team: since this was the same as had played in the 1937 deciding match against the IFS, one could argue that, whatever private reservations there were about the merits of this team, they had at least earned another chance.

The EBU had already selected a provincial pair to take part in the first match of the season (against Wales). In order to determine the third pair for the other three matches, a seven table trial (scored by match points) was held.

Since the North-East association had withdrawn from the EBU, the participants in the trial came entirely from the Midlands, North-West and Yorkshire. Pairs from each of these areas occupied the top places in the trials and so all three were represented in that year's matches.

England's team against Wales was Lederer (capt)-Rose, Lewis Ellison-Whitby, Josephs-Dr J Hurwich and the match was won by 4,660 points. Compared to the closeness of the 1937 match, the result appears never to have been in doubt. Josephs played even fewer boards (30) than on his debut, though on this occasion his views on the subject have not been recorded: since the team lost almost 2,000 points when he was playing (Baxter's view was that the luck was not running with England at this point), it seems doubtful that he had much to complain about.

Scotland played the IFS in the second match and made a better fist of it than in the previous year. The Scots led for the first half of the match and were only 860 points behind with eight boards to go. However, these favoured the IFS, the margin at the end being 2,660.

England's second match was against Scotland, the team being Phillips' four plus Yorkshire's Major Geoffrey Fell and Rex Vincent. Having gained 1,890 points on the first sixteen boards, England held onto the lead throughout the first day. When play resumed, they added to it steadily and ultimately won by 3,660. The performance of Fell and Vincent was particularly noteworthy: they had played 42 of the 100 boards, a record for a provincial pair.

The IFS continued where they had left off, beating Northern Ireland by 2,400 points. This was a close affair, the margin only widening towards the end when Northern Ireland were attempting to chase points.

The Ulstermen finally secured their first Camrose win when they beat Wales by 3,780 points, "an excellent revenge for last year's defeat" (Reese). Reporting the match in *BBW*, Professor Alan MacKinnon generously conceded that the luck had been with his team.

Northern Ireland started very shakily and were quickly 2,000 points in arrears: from this point, they settled down and, had it not been for Wales shooting a vulnerable grand slam on the last hand (a decent contract but by no means guaranteed to make), the margin would have exceeded 4,500 points.

On the basis of the form displayed to this point, one would have expected the IFS to beat Wales easily. Not a bit of it: the Welshmen (and women) won by 1,320. The IFS was in the lead for a long time but, at about the half-way mark, a rash double of a 3♦ contract (which made with an overtrick) surrendered the initiative. From this point onwards, Wales were on top and, with the hands being relatively unexciting, merely had to hold on to their lead.

The first Camrose match to be held in London was against Northern Ireland. The London players in the home team were formidable: Harrison-Gray (capt)-Simon, Haslam-Ingram, with the addition of the provincial pair Bearn-L Westell. After an even first day, England pulled away and won by 4,340 points.

Any thoughts of a Welsh renaissance must have been rudely shattered when they encountered Scotland in Edinburgh. The Scots led all the way and won by 5,280, condemning Wales to the wooden spoon.

But this was a false dawn for Scotland and they lost their last match of the season to Northern Ireland by the tiny margin of 160. Having been nearly 3,000 behind with twenty boards to play, Scotland so nearly won: having recovered the deficit, they were leading after 97 boards, but Northern Ireland finished the stronger.

All of this meant that England's final match against the IFS was largely academic since they would have had to lose by a very substantial margin to fail to win the Camrose. Although the IFS led after 72 boards, at no point did it look likely that they would win by enough to cause an upset. Two large swings followed and England won by 1,930 points, champions again with the IFS runners-up.

There is a mystery concerning the composition of the winning team: the London four were supposed to be Mayer-Cedric Kehoe and Ellinger-Furse, plus the provincial pair A C Douglass-Gordon. However, Mayer actually played with Carr and Ellinger-Furse were replaced by Harding and Macleod. Since the change of personnel is not referred to in the EBU minutes and attracted no comment in *BBW*, I can shed no light on it. Perhaps the most likely answer

is that Ellinger, Furse and Kehoe had assumed that the match would be in London (or maybe Mayer had implied this) and didn't fancy the trip to Dublin.

1939

The 1939 Camrose series was never completed and the results of the matches played do not appear on the BGB website, though the names of the players who took part are included.

I find this somewhat strange: so far as the competing countries were concerned, they were taking part in Camrose matches with no thought that the tournament might be truncated. And, as will become obvious from what follows below, the failure to include these matches has resulted in the omission of an event of more than trivial significance.

The first match of the season featured the IFS against Scotland. The IFS kept up their good form and won by 1,490. I have been unable to trace any report on the match so have no further details.

England took on Wales at Leicester and fielded a strong team: Lederer-Joel Tarlo; John Grew-Whitby; Fell-Vincent. The Welsh team was experienced but hardly expected to extend England.

No-one had told the Welsh, however: after two boards, they were 1,000 ahead! This wasn't expected to last and, to no-one's surprise, England had a lead of over 4,000 with a third of the match gone. At this point the Welsh fought back to such good effect that, a dozen boards later, they had eradicated the deficit. Perhaps inspired by this, they continued to have the better of things and won by 1,610. England's first defeat in the Camrose and it doesn't appear in the record books!

This was perhaps the crucial hand; South dealt at Game All.

	♠ Q J 10 4 ♥ A K J 6 3 ♦ K 6 4 3 ♣	
♠ ♥ Q ♦ Q J 10 9 5 2 ♣ A Q J 5 4 2		♠ K 6 2 ♥ 10 7 5 ♦ A 7 ♣ K 10 8 7 3
	♠ A 9 8 7 5 3 ♥ 9 8 4 2 ♦ 8 ♣ 9 6	

S	W	N	E
Ricardo	Tarlo	Rivlin	Lederer
P	1♦	1♥	2♣
2♠	3♠	4♠	P
P	5♣	5♠	X
P	6♣	6♠	X
P	P	P	

S	W	N	E
Whitby	McAllister	Grew	Carter
P	1♦	1♥	X
P	2♣	P	3♣
3♥	4♣	4♥	5♣
P	P	P	

Tarlo's 3♠ bid was decidedly questionable. Although in the methods of the day he unequivocally agreed clubs and showed first round spade control, he was well short of the high cards implied by such a strong bid.

The consequence was that Lederer, with no realistic expectation of making a grand slam (the ace of hearts was surely missing) and confident that the Welsh were sacrificing, doubled 6♠ "to take the money".

As the cards lay, twelve tricks were easy and perhaps this was a slight (though no more) misjudgement on Lederer's part. His defensive assets against a major suit contract were decidedly limited and, given the bidding (particularly on North's part), it was not out of the question that his opponents would be able to make their contract. But how silly it would have looked to concede 500 in seven clubs when six spades would have failed by the same amount - even in a long match, a potential one thousand point swing was hardly a trivial insurance premium.

All that one can say about the auction at the other table is that Jack Carter chose a very fine moment to psyche his double of 1♥: this was an out and out penalty double in those days and he got unbelievably lucky. Perhaps Whitby should have redoubled or supported hearts; alternatively, he might have bid 1♠. And, when he did belatedly support hearts, the entire tempo of the auction had changed.

Grew, surely expecting the hearts to be 5440 round the table, led the queen of spades and all thirteen tricks were made. Although the result at their table was ridiculous, it is difficult to blame the English North-South pair. Their hands were hardly devoid of defence and the last thing that they could have anticipated was a making slam their way. In particular, it looked as though there would be a couple of trump losers in hearts, though Carter's failure to double 4♥ might have been a straw in the wind.

This was a swing of 2,250, 1,610 points at one table and 640 at the other. The credit has to go to Carter for his inspired double. As one of his team-mates put it, "I don't like it - in spite of the result."

England's uninspired season continued against Scotland. For the first time, there were two provincial pairs in the team (Col Coates-Mrs Sciama and Cohen-Ralph Niman), reinforced by

Harrison-Gray and Simon. This was another close affair and England, having earlier had a lead of over 3,000 but being only a few hundred ahead with ten boards to play, held their nerve to win by 980.

The 1939 England selections look a bit strange. I'm sure that it is no more than coincidence that the teams were selected by the Council and that Coates, Lederer, Vincent and Whitby were amongst those present.

Northern Ireland started the season well, beating the IFS by 3,500. Kempson, writing in *BM*, commented that Northern Ireland were doing particularly well that year. He quoted one hand which featured Northern Ireland missing a cold slam and the IFS declarer contriving to go down in it.

Northern Ireland then went on to beat Wales (apart from the absence of Simon Rivlin, who was arguably their best player, the team was the same as that which beat England) by 1,510.

There was time for one further match - IFS versus Wales - to take place before the outbreak of war forced the abandonment of the series: it must have been a real thriller - the IFS won by a mere 50 points, certainly the smallest winning margin before the War and I believe it to be the smallest ever.

And so the 1939 Camrose series came to a halt, unfinished with three countries having a chance of victory. Northern Ireland, with two wins out of two were in the box seat but the IFS, also with two wins would have fancied their chances. And it would have been foolish to write off England, even though their form had been as erratic as their selection decisions. What a shame that the series was never concluded!

Chapter 10

And finally

I have covered a period of some twenty years and for about half of this there was little if any tournament bridge taking place. Until the Buller-Culbertson match in 1930, duplicate bridge was unnoticed if it took place at all. And the exigencies of the War meant that, for a five year period from the late summer of 1939 until the end of 1944, the competition programme was exiguous. And, as Kempson put it, when bridge resumed, the times were "starved, stinted".

But the period in between was extraordinary, filled with larger than life characters endeavouring to impose themselves by force of personality. The development of contract bridge, and with it tournaments, during the 1930's was rapid indeed: if illustration were needed, one only needs to compare the haphazard way that even the best players groped towards their contracts at the beginning of the decade with their assured competence and reliability within a very few years.

The premier events are examples of the great developments that took place. Bridge matches were so much a novelty that, when the Gold Cup was launched, a "Duplicate System" was provided so that the matches could be played without boards being required. However, within a very short period, no further mention was made of this and knowledge of the mechanics was assumed. Similarly with the National Pairs, from a rudimentary event with North-South and East-West winners to an event of standing with a final properly staged as part of a major national congress.

Yes, there were hiccups along the way and great rivalries to boot, but they must have been exciting times for bridge players. I have quoted Reese extensively in this work: he was involved in tournament bridge from the mid-1930s, and his mother from even earlier, and knew all the major players. If a second instalment follows, he will be centre stage. I leave to him the last word (from 1976):

> "We have moved into calmer waters now; for my part, I sometimes miss the turbulence of former times."

Appendix

Pre-War international performances

In contrast to the glory years immediately after World War 2 (Great Britain won the first three post-war events), it is received wisdom that our performances in the pre-War European Championships were pretty dismal. One of the reasons why I have compiled this Appendix is to clarify exactly how well - or how badly - the teams performed. A comment from Manning-Foster in the January 1937 *BM* is perhaps revealing:

> "Now the reason why a British team has not so far won in any International Contest is not because the British Bridge League does not produce the best team available - I defy any constituted body to have done better - but because we regard our games from a different standpoint. Our players will never take these contests very seriously or regard them as more than a pleasurable exercise or a holiday."

1932 Scheveningen

Whether or not it is correct for this event to be recognised as the first European Championship, the fact is that the European Bridge League regards it as such.

Manning-Foster wrote that he hoped that the Gold Cup winners would take part on behalf of the BBL but, for whatever reason, this did not come to pass. There is no information available as to what happened - maybe some or all of the team were unavailable or simply not interested.

The event started on 4th June and *The Times* reported ***on that day*** that the British team had been changed "owing to unforeseen circumstances". I have been unable to find any details of what the team was prior to the change but the one that took part was Melville Smith (Captain) and Hasler; Alexander Sefi and Mrs Edith Sefi; with C B Yule as reserve.

Writing in *BM* a year later, and in response to suggestions that females lacked stamina, Mrs Sefi commented that she and her partner had played throughout the six day event and that Yule had played as and when required with either of the other **men** "who felt the imperative need of a breather to relieve the tension".

As well as Great Britain, the other countries represented were Austria, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands and Norway. Both Austria and The Netherlands won four of their matches and Austria (who had won the match between the two) were placed first.

Given that the British team had no international pretentions, and no experience of this sort of event, it did remarkably well, beating Germany and Norway and losing by small margins to Austria and The Netherlands. This was certainly not a bad performance.

1933 London

The BBL held a trial to select the British team. Invitations to take part were issued to several individuals and clubs but a few declined, including a number of the best known players. On the basis of the trial, the team selected was Cole and Ingram; Collingwood and Lederer; with Cedric Kehoe-Furse as reserves - they played in two sessions to rest each of the other pairs. England was the captain and actually played on one day when Cole was indisposed.

The team selection came in for criticism from Walshe (writing as "Yarborough") in the *Sunday Times*. He particularly criticised the fact that none of the players from Crockford's were taking part, mentioning Beasley, Domville, Mayer and Morris. Hasler replied in a letter pointing out that all these players could have taken part in the trial but did not do so - they were given an opportunity but had failed to take advantage of it and so could hardly complain.

In addition, Walshe criticised the British players' performance, stating that it was humiliating and that they should have won all their matches (presumably on the basis that foreigners could not possibly be better than the British at the game). This was echoed by Stapleton-Harris:

> "I do not suppose they will dispute the statement that they bid and played at least 25% below their form. Whether this was due to nerves, inferiority complex, or lack of experience of the big occasion, I cannot tell, but almost all of them made mistakes at times no average player would make."

From this it might be inferred that the team did really badly, but in fact this was not the case: scored on the basis in general use at the time (a straight match against each opponent over thirty-six boards, scored by aggregate points) the team lost only once, to The Netherlands, and would actually have won the Championship.

However, this was not the scoring method in use. There were no set regulations regarding how the tournament should be scored and it varied from year to year. Hasler explained it in the July *BM*:

> "In conducting the International Bridge League Tournament, knowing the views of our guests on scoring methods, out of compliment to them we used a match point method At the same time I kept a record of all the scores both for pairs and teams, and as will be seen clearly something is wrong somewhere.
>
> Each group of six boards to count as one match. The team winning the greatest number of matches to be deemed to be the champions."

So the teams played six separate matches against each other, each of six boards, instead of one match of thirty-six boards.

It is not clear from Hasler's article how the individual matches were scored. A report in *The Times* set it out in detail: the swing on each board was converted to match points (as with IMP nowadays) with a maximum of eight points on any one board. The team that won the six board match, whether by one point or many, took the Victory Point (though the term was not then in use) for the match.

The finishing positions were as follows, showing that the match point scoring method affected all the teams except Belgium:

	6 x 6 boards	VP	36 boards	VP
1.	Austria	21	Great Britain	4
2.	The Netherlands	17	Norway	4
3.	Norway	15	Austria	3
4.	Denmark	15	The Netherlands	3
5.	Great Britain	14	Denmark	1
6.	Belgium	8	Belgium	0

Now one can say that the British players should have adapted to the match point method but it was not one with which they were familiar or for which they had had any practice. As shown above, Britain won 14 of their 30 matches (not such a bad result as Walshe implied) and finished fifth out of six. Yes, the 1933 result was hardly a triumph, but it was no disaster.

1934 Vienna

The selection mechanism for the 1934 championship in Vienna can perhaps best be described as ineffective. Less than a month beforehand, *The Times* announced that the team would, with Mayer as playing captain, include Domville, Ellinger, Furse, and both Kehoe brothers. There is no evidence that trials were held and their only result of note was the winning of the Portland Club Cup by four of the team. Perhaps they were unavailable, but one would have thought that Lederer's overwhelming win in the Gold Cup might have counted for more.

A fortnight later, *The Times* listed the members of several of the teams taking part: no comment was made, but Domville's name did not appear as part of the Great Britain team. This was not the only change since the team that actually took part, just over a week later, did not include Cedric Kehoe.

The official report of the championship (a lavishly produced book written in German; my thanks to Wolf Klewe for providing this translation) stated that, as a result of "Several misunderstandings England only fielded four players", and went on to praise them for their performance.

Manning-Foster had reported in *BM* that it was proposed that, because objections had been made to the scoring method used in London, aggregate scoring would instead be used but with reduced slam bonuses – 300 and 500 for small slams and 600 and 1,000 for grand slams. This was a bizarre proposal, to hold what was purportedly a contract bridge tournament and yet ignore one of the crucial aspects of the laws of the game, the bonuses for slams.

As it happened, and how one wishes that this was a more frequent occurrence, the responsible committee reached a relatively sensible decision. Each team played two twenty-board matches against each of the other nine teams with EMP scoring using the same scale as was referred to in the 1937 Austria match (i.e. a swing of 2,000 points was enough for a maximum 12 EMP).

Britain did well, but not quite well enough. Hungary won with 14 points (i.e. they won fourteen of their eighteen matches) on a split tie from The Netherlands, whilst Austria

finished third with 13, winning a split tie from Great Britain; ties were split in favour of the team with the highest match point score over the entire tournament. The next highest score was Norway's 10.

Manning-Foster wrote that the team's play was "steady and consistent" and noted that they were the youngest team there, with an average age of thirty. They won the special prize for the winners of the greatest number of slams bid and made, thirteen out of eighteen. Viewed on any reasonable basis, the performance in the 1934 European was very decent.

1935 Brussels

As mentioned previously, the BBL selected the team which had done so well in the 1934 Schwab Cup (Hughes-Ingram; Lederer-Rose) to play in the European Championship and added (as reserves) Abe and Lionel Wolfers, who had been part of the team that won that year's Gold Cup.

The scoring method was changed from 1934: each match consisted of 32 boards and a complicated method involving both aggregate and point-a-board was used, with the team getting the higher percentage of the points available winning the match 1-0. As Lederer commented afterwards, "This must call for very different tactics from those we use in a duplicate match at home".
After an excellent start (three wins out of three), the team rather fell away and finished fifth out of twelve teams, with a score of 6. Manning-Foster attributed this in part to unfamiliar playing cards and airless playing conditions: apparently, some players so defied convention as to remove their jackets and waistcoats!

One cannot but have sympathy with Lederer on this hand from the match against Belgium. Dealer West, love all:

	♠ Q 9 8 4 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ A 9 3 ♣ 10 7 4	
♠ 10 5 2 ♥ A J 10 ♦ J 10 4 ♣ 9 8 6 2		♠ K 3 ♥ 9 5 3 ♦ K Q 7 6 5 2 ♣ J 5
	♠ A J 7 6 ♥ K Q 8 4 ♦ 8 ♣ A K Q 3	

After two passes, the Belgian East, Brigode, chose a very good moment to open 1♠. Rose doubled, and Lederer responded 1NT: in those days, a 2♠ bid by Rose would have been natural so this choice was not available to him - he decided to bid 3♥ and passed Lederer's 3NT bid. Whatever one thinks of East's opening bid, his choice of lead seems utterly beyond comprehension: with the world's most obvious diamond lead, he decided to lead the jack of clubs. Lederer won, crossed to the ten and led the queen of spades to the king and ace.

With communications a problem, the next move was to play the king of hearts, expecting to make four tricks in each black suit plus one in each of the reds and with reasonable hopes of winning the board (430 as against 420). West switched to a diamond and Lederer, needing to be in hand for the spade finesse, won: when East (Finkelstein) turned up with the ten of spades, the roof fell in.

The 1935 result was clearly a disappointment after the good showing in 1934, the Schwab Cup performance and the fact that the team had started so well. But it wasn't dreadful by any means.

An innovation this year was the first Women's European Championship. Britain was represented by the team that had won the first Whitelaw Cup, Mrs Davies, Miss Gairdner, Miss Mackenzie and Mrs Weech, all from Cheltenham. They won two matches and drew a third, finishing sixth out of the seven teams.

Rixi Markus, who played in the victorious Austrian team, described them as "impossibly elderly … between forty and fifty". Rixi also echoed Manning-Foster's comments about the playing conditions, saying that the heat and lack of effective ventilation compelled her to resort to a wet handkerchief around her head and ice cubes in her brassière!

1935 Women's team, left to right Miss Gairdner, Mrs Davies, Mrs Weech, Miss Mackenzie with the Whitelaw Cup

1936 Stockholm

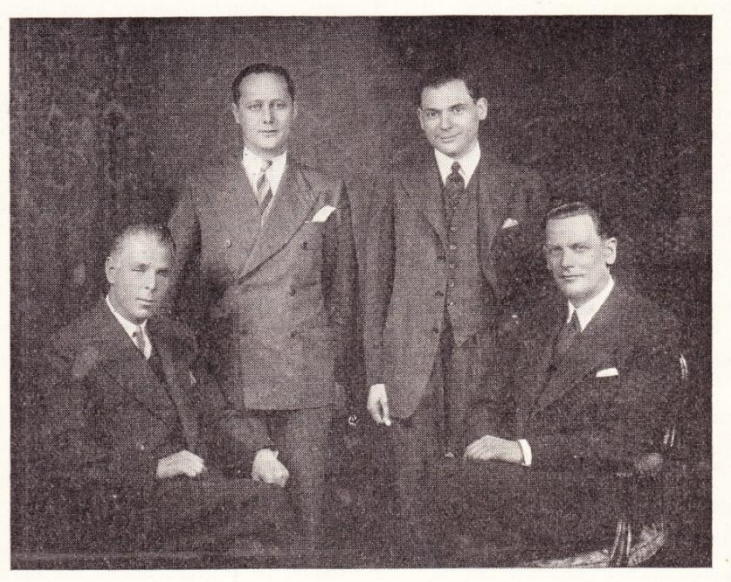
Once again, the scoring system was changed. The theory behind the method was that all the teams were awarded a "starting score" and that the event was scored by EMP (on the same scale as applied in 1934): the net margin in EMP was added to the winner's score and deducted from the loser's.

There was an added complication in that the winner of the match received a bonus of 10 EMP if the margin of victory was greater than the number of boards played in the match divided

by four, or a bonus of 5 EMP otherwise, these bonuses being deducted from the losing team's score. Finally, the total number of match points to be added in one round (or presumably deducted from the losing team's score) was not allowed to exceed double the number of boards played.

It will surprise no-one to learn that this all proved "extremely complicated" but there is no evidence that it significantly affected the British performance: this can charitably be described as lacklustre.

The BBL had picked the Gold Cup winners (Hughes-Ingram; Newmark-Simmons) to play in the European Championship but it did not work out at all well. Next to bottom at one point, they at least recovered to finish seventh out of thirteen teams.



1936 Open team, left to right Hughes, Simmons, Newmark, Ingram

This was a poor performance by anyone's standards and one clue to what went wrong can be found in a story included by Ingram in his reminiscences almost thirty years later:

> "I well remember Edmund Pollak, then resident in Vienna and playing for Austria, coming to me in Stockholm and saying one morning on the steps of the Grand Hotel, "Ingram, what is the matter with your team? You are probably as good as any team here, but you play bridge like millionaires at a penny a hundred." I am sure that he was right as far as the latter part of his remark was concerned."

Manning-Foster's view was that the team "were inclined to slightly underbid and to underestimate the strength of their opponents". On the face of it, this appears to be self-contradictory.

What of the women's performance this year? It could be described as featureless: for whatever reason, no team took part.

1937 Budapest

I discussed in Chapter 7 the machinations leading to selection of the team for the first official World Championship and one might have concluded from this that it would be futile to hope for anything other than a second poor performance. Indeed, Reese's comment "The team finished fifth out of seven" seems to imply this. However, to take what Reese said on face value is to overlook the trifling difficulty that eighteen teams, not seven, actually took part in the event. Sixteen of these teams were from Europe and two from the USA, an official team from Minneapolis plus a private Culbertson team.

Showing that the IBL was incapable of maintaining a settled arrangement from one year to the next, the eighteen teams were divided into four pools with two teams to qualify from each. Britain did well in the qualifying round, beating Denmark, Egypt and Yugoslavia (though the small margin of victory meant that this was a tie) and losing only to Austria. Austria's margin of victory (17 EMP) was their smallest and Stern is reported to have commented that:

> "He considered this team was the strongest England had sent and the Austrians found them most formidable opponents."

The quarter-final was against Hungary, the match being scored by aggregate. After thirty-six boards, Britain led by 1,930 points but then things went wrong. Hungary bid and made a succession of games missed at the other table to even things up and then "four unfortunate leads" cost a further 4,000 points. In the end, we lost by 3,220 points. Hungary were a strong nation at the time (they won the 1938 Championship) so to lose to them was no disgrace. The team did well, particularly in finishing ahead of Yugoslavia in the qualifying round, probably a lot better than anyone expected.

The women's event was also a World Championship. Seven European teams took part together with one from the USA. The Great Britain team, consisting of the winners of the 1937 Whitelaw Cup (Minnie Bell, Mrs Maxwell Briers, Doreen Hopewell and Daphne Kleuser) finished 6th with 6 points out of 14.

1938 Oslo

The BBL Council had discussed the outcome of the Budapest event at its meeting in September 1937. Lieutenant-Commander Foote from Bexhill had commented that "it was not generally considered that the team … was sufficiently strong" (whether Foote was remotely competent to judge must be, at best, moot) and the outcome was that the Council, in its infinite wisdom, decided to send the 1938 Gold Cup winners to the next event.

As selection decisions go, this one was firmly in the West of Dagenham category (Barking, that is), but the BBL got lucky. A strong team (Bach-Dodds; Cotter-Tottenham) had won the Gold Cup and all were available for Oslo (this might not have been straightforward: Cotter was a schoolmaster by profession and the European Championship started on June 26th).

Needless to say, the championship format bore no resemblance to what had gone previously. Twelve teams were present - two of them from Norway - and there were seven rounds of Swiss Teams playing thirty-two board matches, but with rematches being permitted (the Danish system). A more sensible (to say the least) plan would have been to have had a round

robin consisting of eleven rounds of twenty boards each. These matches were scored by EMP converted to Victory Points, using the scale: 0-8 = 2-2; 9-31 = 3-1; and 32+ = 4-0.

The top four teams then contested a round robin of sixty four board matches, also scored by EMP converted to VP. Hungary led the way in the qualifying stage with 22 VP and Great Britain were second with 17 VP. Sadly, the team could not keep it up in the final and finished fourth. This was another decent performance, auguring well for the future.

The BBL had announced that the Whitelaw Cup winners would be invited to play in the women's European Championship. However, the winning team was not available so the BBL did the next best thing: a team of four women had reached the final of the Gold Cup (this is the only occasion upon which an entirely female team achieved this) and they were invited to take part.

Unfortunately, illness forced the team captain (Alison Crisford) to withdraw, and the team that played was Mrs A N Carr, Mrs F M Chatterley, Mrs E Le Couteur and Mrs N Lewis, Mrs Lewis being the late substitute. Only five countries took part and the scores were very close: the British score of 8 VP left them in fourth position, but only 2VP behind the winners (Norway); the *BM* report attributed a poor start in the event to unfamiliarity with the EMP method of scoring.

1939 The Hague

The BBL sponsored an innovation in 1939: for the first time ever, they organised a meaningful trial to select the team. This was a very strong event in its own right and Birts, who played in one of the fancied (although unsuccessful) teams, presented a silver trophy for the winners. Eight teams took part, playing a 32 board match against each of the others, scored by EMP converted to VP.

The trial was convincingly won by Bach's team: this was the team that had played in the 1938 European with the addition of T Cotter. They drew with the teams that finished second (Harrison-Gray) and third (Lederer) and scored maximum wins against all the others.

The selectors were not committed to any particular course of action and invited the main four from Bach's team, plus four of Harrison-Gray's team (Gray himself plus Macleod, Marx and Simon; Haslam and Merkin were not included) to play a further series of matches, but this time involving switches of team-mates. At the end of the day, two pairs (Gray-Simon and Cotter-Tottenham) had won four matches and lost two and were clear selections. The other two pairs had both won two matches but lost four, with Bach-Dodds having a better individual score than Macleod-Marx. Given their strong performance in the first stage of the trial, it can have been no surprise that Bach and Dodds were selected.

No-one who has read this far will be remotely surprised to discover that there was yet another new scoring method this year. The matches were scored by EMP with the winning team getting 1 VP and the losers none, irrespective of the margin of victory, with draws split by aggregate. This certainly did not favour the British who lost to Germany by 2 EMP and drew with the Netherlands, losing the tie split by 40 aggregate points. A very few more points in these matches and they would have finished level with Sweden at the top of the table.

Yes, it was a familiar story in the 1939 European Championship, the team finishing sixth out of eleven.

Reese discussed the reasons for Great Britain's lack of success, concluding that a lack of tenacity might be a reason. Certainly, when playing an event scored by EMP in which a difference of ten aggregate points equated to an EMP gained or lost, it was essential to play hard for every possible trick. Without criticising any of the players by name, Reese contrasted their approach with that of others:

> "Somehow, teams of today seem emasculated in comparison with those of the past. They are too easy-going, too complacent …
>
> The real fighters are rare. Willie Rose is one. See him today playing at Rubber Bridge a 3NT contract in which five is lay down. He will try as hard to make six as if he had bid it. That sort of determination tells.
>
> In the present duplicate world, there are only one or two pairs who can really be described as "tenacious". Outstanding are Juan and Meredith, who will defend a Two Club contract as though their life depended on it …
>
> To tenacity must be joined self-criticism, and that means humility, of all qualities the most difficult for bridge experts to achieve. … Improvement comes when a player is ready to examine the merits of every card he has played in a critical session, and it is with such players that the future lies."

Trials were also held for the women's team, the winners being Pat Cohen (later Pat Gardener, the mother of Nicola Smith), Elizabeth "Penguin" Evans (née Corke), Mollie Furse and Kathleen Salmons. The selectors chose to augment this team with Dimmie Fleming and this proved a wise move: per Harrison-Gray, "By common consent Mrs Fleming was the mainstay of the team".

1939 Women's team, left to right Kathleen Salmons, Molly Furse, Elizabeth Evans, Dimmie Fleming, Pat Cohen

The British women won the silver medal, which sounds impressive until one learns that only four teams took part and we lost two out of three matches, though the margin against France (the winners) was a heart-breaking 1 EMP.

Conclusion

In summarising this, it seems to me that two factors stand out, both to do with preparation for the event.

Firstly, it cannot have helped that the scoring method was different every year and that British teams had relatively little opportunity to practise it. So far as I can see, our teams never took part in a serious event scored by the method used in the championship: when the BBL did the best that it could in the 1939 trial (i.e. matches scored by EMP converted to VP on the basis that had applied in 1938), the IBL changed from scoring by VP to a win/loss basis.

The second factor was the lack of familiarity with overseas players and their systems. The teams rarely if ever practised against foreign opposition and playing against unfamiliar systems takes its toll. Under the strain of championship play, it is hardly surprising that errors were made and that players generally failed to play up to their known form.

The overall performance prior to the War can fairly be likened to the proverbial (from a famous *Punch* cartoon) curate's egg: good in parts.

Index of principal characters