



BERNARD TELTSCHER came to the UK in 1938, and gained degrees from University College, London and Trinity College, Cambridge, where in 1946 he was instrumental in restarting the Cambridge Bridge Club that had been dormant during the war. He became its President and played in the first post-war Oxford match. Bernard has played bridge for more than eighty years and has won most major national competitions. He is President of the London Metropolitan Bridge Association and has sponsored, as well as won, the prestigious Lederer and Teltscher trophies.

When did you start playing bridge?

At the age of 8, I had a recurrent hip problem, was put in plaster for three months and was sent to a children's sanatorium in Switzerland. My mother went with me and there I started playing bridge, now 83 years ago. I was then moved to another sanatorium for twenty months, without bridge.

When I returned home, I had very limited physical activities but my aunt, my two older cousins and my grandmother all played bridge, and I joined them. I also remember playing at a bridge club in Austria and they were surprised by a prepubescent's ability to play.

It must be running in my family, as a cousin of my mother's played in the same team as Rixi Markus, when the Austrian ladies became world bridge champions in 1937.

How often / where do you play?

These days, unless I am playing in a duplicate, I play rubber bridge every Monday at the Portland Club, £10 per 100 in the afternoon, £30 per 100 after dinner; as we play goulashes at £30, it is quite a tough game.

Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates?

In serious duplicate, I mostly play with Victor Silverstone (addressed by me as 'Sir Victor'), occasionally with Willie Coyle ('Sir William') and my former wife, Kitty, with whom I am on my best behaviour, without a single word of criticism!

The highlight of the year is of course when Tony Priday ('His Serene Highness, Richard Anthony, Prince of Quedgeley', where the Priday family originates from) comes from Marbella to play with me in the two events I have sponsored, the Lederer and the Senior Camrose, now renamed the Teltscher Trophy.

All these partners are excellent players and for my bridge system I am vastly indebted to Sir William – it's a system originally based

on the one I used to play in the 1970s with many improvements.

His Serene Highness is always magnificent. As far as I am concerned, he *never*, and I mean never, makes a mistake. His concentration is flawless and occasionally a look of surprise comes to his face but, like Sir Victor, he always tries to take the blame if any mistakes occur.

What do you do for a living?

I have been in business for almost 68 years. I joined my father and uncles' wine business in 1946, by 1967 became sole proprietor and sold the trading company in 1991 to Martini & Rossi, stayed for another five years as non-executive, non-useful chairman of Teltscher Brothers but kept the buildings in the Isle of Dogs and used them as a business centre. There we had some unusual tenants, like the warlike Paintball Centre and a multi-sports centre, but our offices were just used as business centres.

I sold the buildings in 2006 but kept the two property companies which own a few factories which we let, and all I do now is look after those, so I do not work too hard.

I still go to my Marble Arch office four times a week. Years ago we had 120 employees; now we have one.

What are your favourite bridge books?

In 1942, I bought a thin book which gave card combinations and how to play, and which I read every day on the tube when I travelled from East Putney to Belsize Park during university holidays.

Like everyone else, I am very impressed by Terence Reese's books; they are fantastic. I actually played with Terence in one long duplicate in Abu Dhabi and that was the only time when any partner of mine fell asleep while I was playing a hand!

What are your hobbies?

At 91, one doesn't seem to have many hobbies left. I used to love playing table tennis and backgammon. Now at table

tennis I am just as likely to put the ball under as over the table! And backgammon is fading fast. I watch TV and go out and entertain at dinner quite a lot.

What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

I am saddened that rubber bridge is fast disappearing. I think it is caused by the fact that young people don't seem to be playing cards when there are too many alternatives.

My main complaint, though, is a complaint all bridge players make when they have been playing for a long time. There seems to be absolutely no limit to conventions which are not even published and have to be explained on the spot. I have no quarrel with transfers over one club and over opponents' doubles but when various bids have no obvious meanings and therefore no recognised defence, it requires discussions before every match.

When it comes to pairs, time prevents any long discussions and I think there should be quite strict limitations on the systems used in pairs.

In any case, I fear that making bidding at bridge so convoluted means that it is becoming much less popular than it could have been. This also means that it is less comprehensible when non-experts watch bidding in the Vu-graph and on the internet.

What is the bridge success closest to your heart (so far)?

My most pleasing result was playing with Terence Reese in Abu Dhabi (see above); in the teams we beat Garozzo and Belladonna, Flint and Sheehan to come third. I cannot quite remember but we were about fifth in the pairs. The pairs event was won as expected by Garozzo and Belladonna. That was before it was customary to pay bridge partners and all I did was to send Terence two cases of wine.

One of my worst 'achievements' was when, years ago, I played in successive Camrose trials, once with Irving Rose and once with Jeremy Flint, and failed to qualify in both.

My first major win was in 1971 in Brighton with Irving Rose (named by me 'the Great Rose'), but beating Garozzo and Belladonna must rank amongst my big bridge joys.

I also enjoyed the creation of the Senior Camrose Trophy. While there was a Ladies equivalent, the Lady Milne, and two similar events for youngsters, the Junior Camrose and the Peggy Bayer, it amazingly took some eight years to finally come up with the Seniors equivalent, which I sponsored for six years, won twice and was second in twice as well. It is now a permanent feature in the UK bridge calendar. □