

English Bridge

The Two-minute Interview

Bridge-playing celebrities talk about themselves
and their love of bridge



Susan Hampshire



Susan Hampshire is one of Britain's finest actors, especially famous for her television roles as Fleur Forsyte, Sarah Churchill, Becky Sharp, and more recently Molly in *Monarch Of The Glen*. In 1995, she received an OBE for her work for the dyslexia cause and has written a memoir about her own struggle with the disorder.

How did you start playing bridge?

I was looking for a sedentary activity to share with my husband, who is not the active type, so five years ago I took a weekend beginners course supervised by Simon Stocken at the Andrew Robson Bridge Club in London.

How often do you play?

Not as often as my husband, who is a keen duplicate player and plays five times a week! I play as often as I can when I am not working, so it's fairly spasmodic.

What does bridge mean to you?

I enjoy playing because it is relaxing, but the main benefit for me has been that bridge has improved my memory as well as the way my brain works. Acting entails learning a lot of lines very quickly, which does not become any easier with age. Bridge has helped me enormously in this respect.

How could bridge be more enjoyable for you?

I would love to be able to have a regular partner. We might stand a better chance of understanding each other's bidding than I do with playing with a different partner each time!

What are your hobbies outside bridge?

Gardening and music.

James Mates



AWARD-winning journalist James Mates is ITV News' Senior Correspondent. He mostly plays at the Andrew Robson Bridge Club in London, and also used to play in Washington when he worked there as ITV correspondent.

How did you start playing bridge?

My girlfriend, now wife, taught me at the kitchen table.

How often do you play?

As often as I can, and not nearly often enough. On average, about once a week.

What does playing bridge mean to you?

Paradoxically, it's a combination of a real intellectual challenge and great relaxation. I've met so many people I now call friends around a card table, and hope I'll continue to do so.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would keep on moving down the road away from 'alerts' and towards 'announcements' of partnership agreements.

What are your hobbies outside bridge?

Riding my mountain bike and playing tennis.

Name up to six people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

To make up a bridge four: Zia Mahmood, Omar Sharif and Andrew Robson. To put the world to rights: Lance Armstrong, Nelson Mandela and Arnie Schwarzenegger.

Liz Fraser



One of Britain's most popular comic actresses, Liz Fraser has sixty-three film appearances to her credit. Recently she has appeared in episodes of *Foyle's War*, *Doctors* and *Holby City* on television.

How did you start playing bridge?

In the early '60s I went to play golf at the Mill Hill golf course, and was intrigued by the funny card game some ladies were playing. So I got a book and taught myself in three days! I was helped by having a good grasp of card games, especially whist, as I had played a lot when evacuated during the war.

How often do you play?

Not as often as I would like now that my regular partner has moved to Spain. I still manage the occasional Monday and Wednesday at Young Chelsea, my favourite club.

What does bridge mean to you?

I enjoy the competitive side of bridge, so even when I go on a bridge holiday – as I will this Christmas, with Hilton – I look for a good game.

What are your other hobbies?

Bowls, golf, charity work, and especially walking. Usually I walk my basket hound two hours a day.

Name up to six people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

It would be six people who don't play bridge! I think bridge players are extremely boring, since for the most part their conversation starts with: 'You hold...'

Ed Glinert



Journalist and author Ed Glinert specialises in writing about London and has published several books on the subject – most notably *The London Compendium*, chosen by two leading newspapers as one of their ‘books of the year’. His latest book, *The Manchester Compendium*, published by Penguin, is out this month.

How did you start playing bridge?

My maths teacher at school when I was 12 threatened the class: learn to play bridge, or find pi to a million decimal places.

How often do you play?

Twice a week, although I often retire at night with Goren and Kelsey to keep myself fresh.

What does playing bridge mean to you?

The chance of being humiliated by my peers at the cost of only a few pounds (unless we’ve won the week before and have a free entrance ticket).

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I once saw someone open as dealer with a double. When it was explained to her that this was against the rules, her reply – too long to go into here – convinced me that she was right and that the laws should be changed.

What are your hobbies outside bridge?

Translating the Bible from the original Hebrew properly, writing ever more books, eating, and Arsenal Football Club and everything associated with it.

Farokh Engineer



FAROKH Engineer’s test cricket career started in 1961 and continued to 1975; he was India’s first-choice wicket-keeper for most of that period. As a batsman, he plundered 94 before lunch on the first day in the Madras test in 1966-67. Farokh also lent his face – and hair! – to the Brylcreem advertising campaign.

How did you start playing bridge?

I had a knee replacement operation – not an uncommon occurrence for a cricketer – and was bored during the long recovery period that followed. A friend took me to the Manchester Bridge Club; I played a few times and was hooked! As in cricket, I didn’t take lessons but just threw myself in at the deep end. However, I had help from Jeff Morris, owner of Manchester BC, who gave me a portable bridge-playing computer to practise with.

How often do you play?

Two or three times a week, either rubber or duplicate.

What does bridge mean to you?

A lot! It keeps my mind alert. As in cricket, you never stop learning.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would discourage from playing those opinionated people who make life a misery for others with gratuitous criticism. The really good players are not like that and advise only when asked!

What are your hobbies outside bridge?

More bridge! But I also do a lot of commentating for the media all over the world – mostly cricket, but I hope bridge will be next!

Benjamin Whitrow



BAFTA-nominated for his performance as Mr Bennet in the BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*, Benjamin Whitrow has appeared in TV dramas since the 1960s. He has also been a regular stage performer with such famous companies as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre.

How did you start playing bridge?

My parents used to play rubber bridge and I learned from them, but I became really interested as a young actor. When I worked at the National Theatre, Laurence Olivier, the director, allowed us to set up a table in the wings. It was good fun to play until you heard your cue, go on stage, do your bit . . . and come back to find that someone else had played the hand for you!

How often do you play?

If I am not working, two or three times a week. I play duplicate at the Wimbledon Bridge Club: I like the ambience – and the club is not far from home.

What does bridge mean to you?

It keeps me occupied in the evening and gives me the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life. More importantly, I like the fact that bridge enables you to be totally absorbed for three hours and forget all about your sorrows and problems in life.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would re-instate the re-redouble! The redouble has become almost a convention, so it would be good to have a call that only means business!

What are your other hobbies?

Golf, though I am not very good at it, reading and going to concerts.

Baroness Henig of Lancaster



Ruth Henig, Baroness Henig of Lancaster was a distinguished academic before taking up a political career that has led to her being made a life peer in 2004. She is currently Chairman of the Security Industry Authority, and still lectures and writes on 20th century international history.

How did you start playing bridge?

I played Solo Whist at university, so when I got married and saw my in-laws play bridge I thought I could easily learn and enjoy the game. I did not take lessons but started straight at a club where I learned by humiliation, doing badly for quite some time!

How often do you play?

About once a week, either at the House of Lords (I am the Secretary of the HOL Bridge Club), or at Young Chelsea. When I am in Lancaster, I play at the Lancaster Bridge Club.

What does bridge mean to you?

It gives me the opportunity to escape into a parallel universe which is challenging and competitive, but also fun.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

The boorish behaviour of one or two opponents – no names mentioned!

What are your other hobbies?

Fell walking, gardening, watching football (I support Leicester City), wine appreciation and especially Sudoku.

Name up to five people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

I have a low boredom threshold, so I would invite Rory Bremner, Victoria Wood, Lenny Henry, Dawn French and especially my husband, Jack Johnstone.

Kosha Engler



Photo: Claire Newman-Williams

Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, Kosha Engler moved to London in 2005. She has worked in theatre, film, TV, radio, video games, and print in the USA and the UK. Most recently she played Pat Collins opposite Andrew Lincoln as astronaut Michael Collins in *Moonshot* for ITV and Dangerous Films, about the Apollo 11 moon landing. It will be broadcast in 2009.

How did you start playing bridge?

My husband and his Cambridge Footlights buddies taught me while on a group holiday over New Year 2002.

How often do you play?

About once a month.

What does bridge mean to you?

I grew up playing cards – it's the way my family bonds. My uncle taught me the riffle shuffle with a cascade finish when I was 8. Then I worked my way up from one- to four-player games: solitaire, gin rummy, casino, euchre, spades. Bridge was always the 'hard game.' My parents didn't play and I felt intimidated by its complexity. But when I finally gave in and learned to play, a new world opened up: the intricacies of the game are exactly what make it so thrilling.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

Declarer could have the option of asking dummy for advice on any given trick. As a penalty for the advantage, the trick won with dummy's advice would be worth half points, so if trumps are a major, the trick in question would only be worth 15 instead of 30 points.

What are your other hobbies?

Country walks, reading, writing, travelling, watching films, looking after our two kittens, gardening, knitting, games.

Louis Sachar

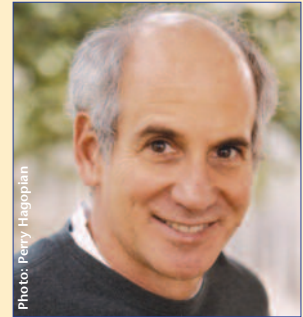


Photo: Perry Hagopian

International best-selling writer Louis Sachar is best known for being the author of global blockbuster *Holes*. The novel has won several awards and was made into a film in 2003.

How did you start playing bridge?

I learned to play bridge when I was very young by watching my parents play. I don't remember if I actually had any lessons, but I was fascinated by the game, and occasionally they'd let me sit in on a hand. I also learned by using Autobridge. I stopped playing once I became a teenager. Nobody I knew played. Decades passed. I got serious about chess, and would play in chess tournaments. I'd read the chess column in the newspaper. Then in 1991 I moved from San Francisco to Austin, Texas. There was no chess column, so I started reading the bridge column, and my interest in the game returned. Shortly thereafter I met a duplicate player who asked if I wanted to give it a try. I scoffed when she mentioned that there was a game every day, and we could play several times a week. Once a week seemed more than enough, thank you very much. I now play four times a week, sometimes more.

What does bridge mean to you?

I think one of the reasons I became a writer is because I'm not all that adept at most social situations. I'm no good at small talk. I don't like it. The communication in bridge is essential, but minimalistic, where you and your partner exchange ideas succinctly, without a whole lot of unnecessary words, yet there is true delight when your thoughts and efforts are perfectly coordinated.

What are your plans for this year?

I'm currently working on a novel that is very much about bridge, although that's all I can say about it for now. If I can pull it off, I hope it will not only be enjoyed by a wide variety of readers, but will also cause a new group of young people to become interested in the game.

The Two-minute Interview

Ross Harper



Ross Harper founded a legal practice in Scotland in the 1960s. Awarded a CBE for political and public services in 1986, he was appointed part-time Professor of Law. As President of the International Bar Association, in 1994 he moved to London, where he still lives. One of his most famous cases involved the first private prosecution in Scotland for fifty years (the 'Glasgow Rape Case', memorably described in a book by Ross) which led to the resignation of the then Solicitor General of Scotland, Nicholas Fairbairn QC MP.

How did you start playing bridge?

On holiday, with the wife, Ursula (forty-five years happily married), playing 'bidding whist' in our thirties. She said that she was allergic to bridge, because of my mother!

How often do you play?

Three times a week, plus congresses and international events.

What does bridge mean to you?

A lot. It keeps the brain cells working and hopefully healthy. Tony Priday and Bernard Teltscher in their 80s are my role models (and of course the 'young' Martin Hoffman).

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

Playing too late at night; the French do it better. I would also outlaw eating at the table and send those who snap cards loudly to Siberia.

What are your other hobbies?

Angling, Scottish Fine Art, and having grandchildren.

Name up to six people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Socrates, Diogenes, Sophocles and Pericles (with Cicero as the waiter).

The Two-minute Interview

Sue Lawley



Photo: Sky Arts

Sue Lawley is one of Britain's best known radio and television broadcasters, hosting *Desert Island Discs* for eighteen years. She has now become famous as the first winner of Sky Arts TV's *Bridge: Celebrity Grand Slam* (see page 17).

How did you start playing bridge?

I took up bridge in my late twenties. My husband and our next door neighbours taught me and we became hugely keen, playing into the wee small hours. We were producing children in those days and I have to confess to having fed a baby at the bridge table.

And after that?

I divorced and re-married a non-bridge player so I hardly played for twenty years. Then we bought a house in a small coastal town in East Devon. The local 'Bridge & Croquet Club' turned out to be thriving and suddenly I discovered the bug had bitten me again! I was very rusty but the members were patient with me – formal, precise, sticklers for the rules and etiquette, and *mustard* at the game!

And now?

Over the last fourteen years I've learned much more than I ever knew about bridge, and I play regularly during holidays. I know that if I'm not getting the cards, I need to sit on my hanky instead of walking around my chair.

What does bridge mean to you?

Just as when I was 30 years old, the sound of the cards being shuffled sets my heart a-flutter and banishes any sense of tiredness. Bridge for me is true escapism – there's no room in your head for any of life's serious concerns when you're short of entries to the table, the opposition's strength is all on the wrong side and you've said you can make three no-trumps.

The Two-minute Interview

Mike Gatting



Mike Gatting, who recently took part in Sky Arts TV's *Bridge: Celebrity Grand Slam*, was the Middlesex and England Cricket captain for several years. He captained England to an Ashes series victory in Australia in 1986-87 and was awarded an OBE in 1987. Mike is currently the ECB Managing Director of Cricket Partnerships.

How did you start playing bridge?

On tour in Pakistan in 1978, aged 21: there was not much else to do apart from playing cricket! But I always liked playing cards: as a child, I used to watch people play whist at the sports club where my parents played.

How often do you play?

Not often – mostly with friends when cricket matches are stopped by the rain! I'd like to play with my son, but the boy prefers poker. However, I have repeatedly been invited to play duplicate at MCC, so I'm busy learning Acol from a computer program and hope to be ready soon.

What do you like about bridge?

I love the challenge of playing the cards right. I count points and tricks non-stop!

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would like the bidding to be simpler, so that the partnership can be confident of understanding each other's bids.

What are your other hobbies?

Golf, because I like the fresh air; reading, because I caught the bug on tour and need my fix – especially of thrillers; and watching anything geographical, especially nature documentaries.

Name up to six people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Sir Donald Bradman, Elton John, Daley Thompson, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

The Two-minute Interview

Val McDermid



Val McDermid is an award-winning and best-selling crime novelist. To date she has written twenty-two books. One of her series was turned into the TV drama, *Wire in the Blood*, and it has run for six seasons. Originally from Scotland, Val now lives in the North of England.

How did you start playing bridge?

My parents used to play Solo and I loved to watch, so I had an early grasp of the idea of making a contract. I got roped in by friends when I was at university, but it was just social kitchen-bridge stuff.

How often do you play?

Sometimes two or three times a month, sometimes not at all. It depends on how busy I am and how much I am away from home.

How did you get involved with the Sky Arts TV *Bridge: Celebrity Grand Slam* programme?

At the Harrogate Crime Writing Festival every year, we have a flexible bridge game with people dropping in and out. Hugh Dehn (the producer of the TV series) had a friend in publishing who knew about our criminal play!

Has it had an effect on your bridge since?

Yes, I learned quite a bit from the experts. It was really encouraging to feel I'm still capable of learning new tricks. Of course, my friends have been teasing me mercilessly ever since. Every time I make a mistake, it's: 'Ooh, what would Clive Anderson say?'

What does bridge mean to you?

I am normally a very competitive person but bridge is the only area of my life where I genuinely don't care if I win or lose. I love the cut and thrust of the play and the stimulus of the game.

The Two-minute Interview

Dinah Stocken



Dinah Stocken was called to the Bar in 1967 and, after a short time as a solicitor, was appointed a District Judge in 1989 and a Recorder in 1994. At that time there were only seven other women at her level of judge out of a total of about two hundred and fifty. Dinah is married to former EBU Chairman Peter Stocken and they have three sons, who are all successful bridge teachers, and a daughter who now only plays very occasionally.

How did you start playing bridge?

My aunt, Alice Bridgewater, was a very good county player, but did not want to teach me from the start and so I learnt at Trinity College, Dublin, where I met Peter: some would say that we played too much to the detriment of our studies! My aunt then continued the teaching process.

How often do you play?

Sadly I play competitively no more than four or five times a year with occasional forays on-line and I do some bridge teaching for my eldest son, Jack. I am looking forward to retirement in 18 months' time, when I hope to play more often.

What does bridge mean to you?

I love the intellectual challenge and of course it is immensely satisfying when you get it right – rather like golf, which is another hobby and which I also look forward to playing more of later. Apart from that, I am an avid reader and a garden-potterer with my Ipad.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I am glad to see that the EBU is clamping down on bad behaviour at the table and I hope it will continue to do so.

Name up to four people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Jane Austen, F. E. Smith, Elizabeth David and Terry Wogan.

The Two-minute Interview

Rune Hauge



Rune Hauge is a current European Open Mixed Teams Champion and he can be seen at most major Open bridge championships together with his team of fellow Norwegians. Rune is based in London and Guernsey, and is a well known football agent. He has been involved in major deals such as the transfer of Rio Ferdinand from West Ham Utd to Leeds Utd.

How did you start playing bridge?

I first got interested when studying economics in Germany.

How often do you play?

My business life is very full, so I can only manage ten major tournaments a year. In between, I squeeze in training sessions and the occasional duplicate at Young Chelsea Bridge Club. Unfortunately I am too busy now to continue playing rubber bridge, which I used to enjoy.

What does bridge mean to you?

A lot. I love it especially because it takes me away from business.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I like it as it is, and enjoy the different approaches to the game in different parts of the world. For instance, in my native Norway bridge organisers are very technically minded, so you know your exact score board by board. That is fun, but I also like English tournaments where you only discover at the end of a match or session how you have done. That's when it counts, anyway!

Name up to four people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Norwegian bridge champion Tor Helness (you never know what he's going to do next), Martin O'Neill (the Aston Villa Manager), and Bill Gates. That makes us four at the table and we can play bridge after our meal . . .

The Two-minute Interview

Baron May of Oxford



ROBERT MAY, Baron May of Oxford, has been Chief Scientific Adviser to HM Government, President of the Royal Society, and a Professor at Sydney, Princeton, Oxford and Imperial College London. He is a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, a crossbencher in the House of Lords and an appointed member of the council of the British Science Association.

How did you start playing bridge?

I learned as a postgraduate student, but only started playing seriously as a young lecturer at Sydney University. Sadly, by the time I became good enough to be considered for the New South Wales state team, I switched from physics to ecology, which meant spending more time on my academic career, and less and less on bridge.

How often do you play?

Not nearly enough, maybe four or five times a year, mostly at the House of Lords.

What does bridge mean to you?

I have always loved puzzles – I could spend my life solving problems and playing games, and bridge is one of the best. All my training as an administrator comes from bridge. It taught me to make decisions in a fog of uncertainty, relate to partner and team-mates, and move on cheerfully when things go wrong even if you have done everything right!

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would like to see it taught in schools as it is an excellent way of fostering cooperation and equanimity under uncertainty.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

Walking amid beautiful scenery. My wife and I have just finished walking the entire 630 miles of the South West coast path from Minehead to Poole.

The Two-minute Interview

Francine Winham



FRANCINE WINHAM is an acclaimed photographer, best known for her work in the world of jazz. After a spell as a film director, in 1991 Francine started training as an opera singer and has performed in productions both home and abroad.

How did you start playing bridge?

When I was a teenager my aunt taught me whist – which I have now forgotten how to play. Later a group of friends learned to play together, having bridge parties with total beginners. We felt very grand. I started to read bridge books, and we'd sit around testing each other on the quizzes in the books.

How often do you play?

Probably on average twice a week nowadays. I used to play at weekends all night with the curtains drawn, and then be astounded to see light coming in the window when we finally went to bed at about 5 or 6 in the morning.

What does bridge mean to you?

It's my main form of entertainment (except for singing). I've met many very good friends through bridge and although I'm hooked on Sudoku, it's much more interesting to read bridge books and do bridge problems when I'm on my own.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

It would be good if the rules in duplicate about what needs alerting and when one has to announce could be the same here and abroad, especially the USA.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

Singing, tennis, and formerly skiing. The singing is now mainly jazz and I attend lots of 'open mics' (music competitions open to all).

The Two-minute Interview

Dennis Amiss



DENNIS AMISS played cricket for both Warwickshire County Cricket Club and England, and scored 103 centuries in first class cricket. After retiring as a player in 1987, he served as Chief Executive at Edgbaston for twelve years and has been Deputy Chairman of the England & Wales Cricket Board since 2007.

How did you start playing bridge?

My wife and I were taught by friends about 40 years ago, on a sailing trip around France. Learning bridge was one of the best parts of a wonderful holiday.

How often do you play?

We play twice a week either at the golf club or with friends as a social activity.

What does bridge mean to you?

It's a way of relaxing, keeping in touch with friends and exercising the little grey cells, all rolled up in one.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would like to be a better player! But I am working at it, by taking lessons from a bridge teacher with a group of friends.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

I am still involved with cricket as an administrator, which takes up a fair amount of time. But I also love gardening, golf and looking after our two grandchildren, who are now aged 7 and 9.

Name up to four people you would invite to your dream dinner party.

Omar Sharif because everyone has heard that he is a very good bridge player; Julia Roberts so I can look at a beautiful woman; Ernie Els in order to dine with a top golfer; and of course my wife, or she won't play bridge with me any more!

The Two-minute Interview

Bob Blackman



BOB BLACKMAN was elected Member of Parliament for Harrow East in 2010. He is also a former member of the London Assembly and former Deputy Leader of Brent Council.

How did you start playing bridge?

I learned at school, from a school friend of mine whose parents were very keen players. We learned quickly as a group of four who eventually became the school team. The team I joined then reached the National Schools Final. This entailed progressing through two heats of twenty schools and a semi-final of twenty qualifiers before finishing in the top half of the finals each year. I then went to Liverpool University where I was a member of the university bridge team for four years and reached the national finals each year.

How often do you play?

Sadly, I only manage to play very occasionally although I would like to play more often.

What does bridge mean to you?

Bridge is the only game I have played where I completely immerse myself in the game to the exclusion of all other thoughts. I thoroughly enjoy the game and look forward to playing more often.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

Its lack of popularity amongst young people.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

Football, cricket, reading mysteries and thrillers, chess, listening to music and watching films.

Name up to four people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Omar Sharif, Winston Churchill, Hercule Poirot and Margaret Thatcher.

The Two-minute Interview

Simon Heffer



SIMON HEFFER is a journalist, columnist and writer, currently Assistant Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*. His latest book on the English Language, *Strictly English*, has just been published by Random House.

How did you start playing bridge?

I was taught by other boys at school when I was 11 or 12. I was already quite a serious card player, notably cribbage and whist.

How often do you play?

Not often enough. Two or three times a year, partly because I am so busy, partly because I have a family of non-card players. But I do have a bridge computer that I play with regularly.

What does bridge mean to you?

Bridge is the most enjoyable indoor game I know. I never become bored by it.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I wouldn't change anything. It is perfect as it is.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

Music, films, reading, cricket, photography and architecture.

Name up to four people you would invite to your Dream Dinner Party.

Mr Gladstone, Vaughan Williams, Elizabeth I and Charles Dickens.

The Two-minute Interview

Michael Clayton



MICHAEL CLAYTON is a former Editor of *Horse and Hound*, and Editor-in-Chief of *Country Life* and *The Field*. Michael has written over twenty books, and his latest, an illustrated history of the Belvoir Hunt, is published by Merlin Unwin this year.

How did you start playing bridge?

I used to play poker as a young reporter but considered bridge a waste of time. My wife Marilyn started playing bridge six years ago. She persuaded me to take up the game, but I made very little real progress learning at home. Then a friend suggested we attend Stamford (Lincs) Bridge Club's Wednesday morning workshop sessions. Listening to Graham Hedley every week explaining the game lucidly, with black-board illustrations, suddenly made the game more explicable – and enjoyable.

How often do you play?

We play two or three times a week, once at the club, and often at home with friends.

What does bridge mean to you?

It's been a tremendous boon, especially in the last two severe winters when night falls in mid-afternoon in the East Midlands. I have made new friends I would otherwise not have met. Now in my latter seventies, and suffering a few infirmities, it has given me a new interest I much appreciate. I fear I shall continue 'bumping along the bottom' as a competitive player, but sometimes I surprise myself by what can be achieved. I had not realised previously how varied and interesting bridge can be.

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would seek to limit the huge proliferation of complicated conventions. I think they put off many would-be players, and I do not believe that some of the way-out conventions are really of much use even to the experts.