

Happy 80th Birthday, Jim Proctor!

IT is typical of Jim Proctor that he intends to spend November 27th, his eightieth birthday, directing a bridge congress in Porthcawl. Jim is by far the longest-serving member of the EBU Tournament Directors' panel and has held the top rank of National Tournament Director for several decades. He joined the panel proper as a 'B' Congress Director in 1974 after the Brighton Congress, having been a trainee for some six years, and four years later in 1978 he resigned from his day job, as a computer programmer for the civil service in Cheltenham, to work full time in bridge.

Asked about how he started as a TD, Jim says: 'I drifted into it at Cheltenham Bridge Club in the mid '60s. The TD kept messing up the movements. I was always interested in the mathematical side of movements and so I decided to put my name down as a volunteer to look after Monday evenings. There was an elderly TD based at Cheltenham, Willie Morgan-Brown, and when he realised I was quite good at scoring he took me to Droitwich to help with the scoring of the Regional Masters Pairs and the Portland Pairs.' From that start, Jim became an EBU trainee and his first job for the EBU was with Graham Jepson at the Pachabo at Leicester in 1968, assisting Harold Franklin.

Jim was born in Wakefield but moved to Skelmersdale when he was seven, and says: 'My Yorkshire accent has been corrupted by being brought up in Lancashire.' He moved back to Yorkshire, to his mother's bungalow in Scarborough when she died in 1986, but nowadays he spends a lot of time in Brighton where his partner lives: 'I found my soul-mate when I was 63 and I've been very happy ever since. It's made a big difference to me in my declining years, it certainly has.'

It's in Brighton that Jim plays much of his bridge, afternoon rubber bridge at the Avenue Bridge Club.



'I really do enjoy a game – I'm not very good but I'm very proud to have had a hand I played in *Fit for a King* (an anthology of articles originally nominated for the brilliancy prizes sponsored by BOLS – Ed.). I do prefer duplicate really, but they are two different games.'

Other directors often comment on how much they have learned from Jim, with his wide and deep knowledge of the Laws, careful planning and attention to detail, although it can be challenging to work with someone with such exacting standards. He says of himself: 'I am finicky, fanatically tidy. I

keep my eyes open and try to pick up everything – for example, in the first six hours here at the Brighton Congress I found six mistakes – notices with spelling errors, nameslips that don't match their colours, that sort of thing.' When asked about the way bridge has developed, Jim says: 'What's changed most is the scoring. It was wonderful in the old days but very, very difficult and took a long time.'

Bridge is far from Jim's only interest in life: he used to play football and cricket, and tells of one Portland Pairs weekend, scored by hand over three venues, when he got special dispensation to start at 7pm so that he could play football in the afternoon. Another time he cycled the thirty miles from Cheltenham to Droitwich for a Sunday event because 'it was the only safe way of ensuring I got there on time.'

As I finish talking to Jim for this interview, he tells me a story that reveals his quiet humour as well as the importance of communication in directing. 'At the Kings Lynn Congress I had to postpone the play of a board and I said to a table: 'Would you please play Board 6 before 5 so that another table can play it?' At the end of the round one of the players came to me apologetically and said: 'We didn't quite manage it', showing on his watch that it was two minutes past five!' □