



26-year-old Fiona Brown is one of our new bridge stars. Together with Susan Stockdale, she has represented England twice in the Lady Milne, played in the English Under-28 team which finished 5th in the World Mind Sports in 2008, and was part of the English Women's team that came 4th in the Venice Cup last October and 2nd in the Bridge Women's Teams at the World Mind Games last December.

### Early Bridge Life

I GREW UP in a small coastal town called Ballina, 800 km from Sydney. I learned bridge as a child at home, and when I was fifteen I joined the Australian Colts' team of young bridge players. Peter Gill, the youth coordinator, took an interest in my progress, making sure I attended tournaments in Canberra and elsewhere. I had a great time, made heaps of new friends and lost much of my shyness. I was a member of the NSW Youth team and we travelled to all the capital cities in Australia and we also went across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand.

All my friends in Ballina were Surfies who spent their days on the beach, catching the next wave. No one at school knew I was a bridge player, until the local paper decided to feature me in an article ... and my secret was out!

### From Australia to England

The best tournament in Australia is the Gold Coast Congress: you can swim and laze around on the beach in the morning, play bridge all afternoon and evening – and the *après* bridge parties are great! It was at the GC Congress in 2005 that I met the Irish international Hugh McGann, and so I made a big move all the way to Harrogate to live with him. My life since then has changed from being a full-time uni student and junior bridge player to becoming an IT graduate and a member of the England women's team.

### Work

Because of my bridge commitments, having a 'proper' full time IT job would be impossible, so I work part-time at an independent pharmacy. I am not a morning person and especially find it hard on the cold mornings to remove myself from the 'doona' (must be my Australian background ... all that sunshine). My employers are

great! They let me have time off whenever I need it, so I can play all the bridge I want, and the shop is only 10 metres from my house, so I never have to get up before 8.30.

### Hobbies

If I am not working at the pharmacy or away playing bridge I can be found at the limit tables on Pokerstars. Terence Reese wrote a book called *Poker Game of Skill*, so as I idle away the hours, I can remind myself that lots of bridge players are keen poker aficionados.

No matter how my day goes, I always try to hit the gym for a class or a run. My favourite class is body pump which is an hour of weight-bearing exercises set to music, though spinning (cycling) isn't far behind. I think it is very important for bridge players to be fit in mind and body.

Whenever I am away at an important bridge tournament I will try and go for a run before the day begins as it improves my concentration and energy.

### Tournament Life

At the Venice Cup, bridge began at 10am and finished at 7pm, then it was out for dinner, a quick look over the boards, then on to sleep only to repeat the same pattern over and over again for an entire two weeks. Not to mention all the pre-tournament preparation that included hours of learning the system and bidding hundreds of practice hands online with my bridge partner, Suzy Stockdale.

Bridge brings its highs and lows and I have had my best times and toughest times in bridge tournaments. It's so wonderful when we do well, and so disappointing when things go wrong.

These long tournaments can be really draining mentally, physically and emotionally and it is really important to stay focused and not let the highs and lows interfere with your decisions at the table.

### Bridge Books

My favourite bridge book is *Card Play Technique* by Molloy and Gardener; I had a wrestling match with a young Australian player to win possession of a copy. I also like to challenge myself with *Adventures in Card Play* by Ottlik and Kelsey.

### Family

Each January I travel to Australia to see my parents, my friends and my delightful niece – ten-month-old Coco – and to take part in the Gold Coast Congress. This year I am playing in the Canberra tournament too.

### Personal Life

Hugh is an avid bridge player like me but he is also a busy infectious disease consultant in Leeds. He uses all his holidays to attend bridge tournaments, which suits me just fine. We play mixed events together and do quite well. We go to Ireland quite often, and play in the Irish country congresses.

Because of bridge dominating most of my life, I feel like the busiest person in the world. I am always doing something and wish I had more time to attend art house cinema, or walk in the Yorkshire Dales and read more books.

### Thoughts on Bridge

I rarely spend a weekend at home. Bridge has been very good for me. I have travelled to many countries and enjoyed different foods, wines and cultures. Most of my friends are bridge players and there's always a hand or a new convention to discuss.

I sometimes wonder how my life would have turned out had I not been a bridge player. Some well-paid computing job in Sydney, life on the beach, surfing, parties, the Manly ferry, sunshine – hey, that's not too bad! But I still think the life of a bridge player is better.