



English Bridge Union and the County Associations

By Peter Littlewood

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For most of the last sixty years, the EBU and the county associations have developed side by side. Looking back at the chicken and egg stage, which came first?

In fact, as often happens, it was a mixture of both. A few eggs appeared and produced the chicken. Then, once the chicken had matured, more eggs arrived.

The original British Bridge League (not to be confused with the present one) had been operating from 1931, and many local associations and clubs became affiliated to it. For instance, in Yorkshire there is documentary evidence of Halifax, Harrogate, Hull, Leeds, Sheffield and Yorkshire (East) being under the BBL umbrella. Leeds and the BBL had co-operated in starting the Yorkshire teams-of four championship in the 1934/35 season.

In those days, public perception of card games complicated the establishment of venues for bridge events, as illustrated by the *Yorkshire Evening Post* in March, 1934:

"On the grounds that bridge is a game of chance, the police have banned a bridge congress which some 1,500 players were to have taken part in at the Grand Hotel, Harrogate, later this month."

Thankfully, the police softened their attitude the following year and the BBL was able to hold the inaugural Yorkshire Congress. The organising was later taken on solely by the Yorkshire CBA.

In 1934, Eastern Counties CBA became the first area association to get a mention. According to *Bridge Magazine* (October 1934) it held its first AGM at Ipswich on September 4.

There was still no EBU but more area associations were formed - in Yorkshire and the North East in 1935, quickly followed by the North West, and in 1936 those three areas indicated their willingness to join together to form a single Northern Association within the BBL.

But E Bruce Parker reported in the *Contract Bridge Journal* October 1948 that *"the Scottish and Irish representatives refused to meet on equal terms with any body but a national (and democratic) organisation. Ultimately it was decided to form an English Bridge Union, composed of the three Northern Associations, a proposed London association... and as many County associations as could be formed."*

The EBU was formed on May 23, 1936, and at the second meeting of the council on June 12 it was minuted that there would be eight constituent area associations - North Eastern, North Western, Yorkshire, West Midlands, North Midlands, Eastern Counties, London & Home Counties and South Western.

Unfortunately, the BBL and another existing national organisation, the British Bridge Association, continued to operate in England restricting the development of the EBU until, during the 1939/40 season, the EBU regrouped within a structure similar to today's with the counties directly involved.

At the first full council meeting of the restructured EBU, held in March, 1940, the counties mentioned in the minutes as being represented or giving apologies were Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Devonshire, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, London, Middlesex, North East, North West, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Salop, Somerset, Surrey, Sussex, Warwickshire and Yorkshire.

The war then intervened, and it took time to resume normal service. At the end of 1945, only Gloucestershire, North East, North West, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Yorkshire were functioning within the EBU. Then, during 1946, the number of formed or reformed county associations rose to 19 with the addition of Derbyshire, Devon, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, London, Middlesex, Southern Counties, (Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire), Staffordshire and Surrey.

They were followed by: 1949 Norfolk, Worcestershire; 1950 Sussex; 1955 Berks & Bucks; 1956 Somerset; 1962 Cumberland, Northamptonshire; 1964 Bedfordshire; 1966 Cambs & Hunts; 1967 Westmorland; 1972 Channel Islands; 1980 Suffolk; 1982 Manx Bridge Union.

Cornwall joined with Devon in 1960 but split away in 1982, while Lincolnshire added South Humberside to their association in 1979. Other changes and splits have since brought us up to where we are at present, with 39 county associations.

Most of the above information was gleaned when Hubert Castle and I researched "The History of the EBU" (English Bridge, June, 1986). The inaugural years for the county associations are based on when they joined or rejoined the EBU. The dates are somewhat one-sided, as they are taken from the EBU records.

Many counties have start-up dates which are at variance with EBU records. For example Surrey claims an origin as early as 1935; while Kent seems to have surfaced in 1937, as did Nottinghamshire. Other dates: Gloucestershire 1938, Norfolk 1948, Berks & Bucks 1954, and Manx Bridge Union 1967.

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