



HOUSE OF COMMONS V HOUSE OF LORDS

BRIDGE

1976 - 1997



## BRIDGE IN PARLIAMENT

The first match between the House of Lords v House of Commons at contract bridge was held in 1975 at the inspiration of Rixi Marcus. As the bridge correspondent of the Guardian she had persuaded the paper to sponsor the first few matches with all the arrangements held tightly in Rixi's hands, with the annual cup presented and known as the Guardian Trophy.

Over the twenty two years the Lords have been victorious twelve times and the Commons ten. Victories year by year are:

1975	Lords	1986	Commons
1976	Commons	1987	Lords
1977	Commons	1988	Lords
1978	Commons	1989	Lords
1979	Lords	1990	Lords
1980	Lords	1991	Commons
1981	Lords	1992	Commons
1982	Lords	1993	Commons
1983	Lords	1994	Lords
1984	Commons	1995	Commons
1985	Commons	1996	Lords

The match has stimulated much interest even beyond the confines of the limited amount of bridge played in parliament. It should be remembered that up to 1987 the playing of Plaques in the House was forbidden. This arose as the playing of cards was thought to be evil and could only be for gambling purposes. But then this was way before bridge was discovered. It was only when John Silkin and I in partnership, were able to persuade the Services Committee to overcome that ancient ruling that MPs were not to be seen quietly sneaking a bridge table and cards from one room one night to another. Even a Minister's Room (the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mike Noble) would be used for another game on another night a week later. With the death of Rixi for whom Tony Berry as a whip had previously been able to arrange for an MBE, the English Bridge Union stepped into the breach. Since this time and with the constant interest and financial backing of Jack Perry, the English Bridge Union have been willing to be the organisation and general 'Uncle' to the Lords v Commons match; much of the organising credit going to John Williams.

In early years the match was held at many different venues, The Inn on the Park, the Meridien, The Park Lane, and usually at an Hotel where Rixi was able to arrange for the sponsorship of the Luncheon. It was in 1991 that the Portland very kindly agreed to allow the Match to come to the Club, and Members of Parliament of both Houses are most grateful that we can now regularly use the excellent facilities provided by the Portland.

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Rixi was not satisfied with organising just the annual match. She arranged sponsorship for matches in Sweden, Holland, Algeria, France and of course the United States. The Lords and Commons have three times had matches with American teams; with the House of Representatives in Washington which we won; a return match with the Senate and Supreme Court back in London which again we won; and perhaps the most interesting of all, the third match came back to London.

The coach of the U.S team, Kathy Wei, was determined to achieve an American victory, so she recruited a team entitled Corporate America. The qualification was that the players had to be multi millionaires. The British were somewhat put off by the very professional coach of the United States team and that two of their members had been international players. The match was held in Malcolm Forbes' marvellous house in Battersea and the Americans were full of confidence. Rixi, with all her enthusiasm, held out little chance of a British success. The American optimism was evidenced by the fact that the prize of a cheque for \$1000 to be presented to the charity selected by the winning side, had already been made out for the American Red Cross. Lady Emery had been asked to present this prize.

In the morning four members from the Commons, led by Baker and Emery, took to the two tables and finished at Luncheon just one match point down. In the afternoon with quite outstanding play and leadership by Ian Atholl and his colleagues in the Lords, the British team so surged ahead that the American non playing Captain asked me if I would name a British charity by the middle of the afternoon to whom the cheque should be presented. Furthermore she requested that as the prize was to go to the British, would I mind if an American made the presentation rather than Lady Emery. This was rapidly agreed and rather than a purely British charity, I suggested that the cheque should go to the International Social Services, an international charity of which Mrs Carol Price the wife of the then American Ambassador had given great support. Who should receive the cheque? Rather than myself, I suggested that the President of the International Social Services should be asked to come to receive the cheque. This Miss Wei readily and happily agreed. So it came about that rather than giving the prize Lady Emery attended to be given the cheque for her charity.

The only sadness of this event was that Malcolm Forbes (of Forbes Magazine), who had played with verve all day and been a great host at dinner in the evening, got on his Harley Davidson to 'bike' to Heathrow. He got into his private plane to fly to Newark, to return to his home in New Jersey for the night. Tragically he died in his sleep.

Rixi Marcus' Swedish trip is perhaps worth a mention. She had arranged a triangular match, supposedly between the Swedish parliament, the Norwegian parliament and ourselves. Arriving in Stockholm, the team was mildly surprised to be put on board a very smart and comfortable ferry. It transpired it was going across to Denmark and we played our first match on board, while it took us to Copenhagen and back. This was against the Swedish parliament and the British team won. The next day back in Sweden we played the Norwegians and were

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somewhat startled to find that due to a misunderstanding, instead of their parliamentary team, we were facing the Norwegian national team. Not surprisingly we lost!

The last international event was a match in London against the Chinese national team. By this time, we were aware of the folly of taking on a national team - particularly as the Chinese team were at the end of a highly successful world tour, and we stipulated this should be a 'pro am' side. To this end we recruited Jack Perry, who had organised this evening with his excellent Chinese connections, with Boris Shapiro, Tony Priday and Irving Rose. Despite this infusion of talent, the Chinese won. But it was a very jolly evening, helped by the fact that Ray Whitney a former diplomat is a fluent Mandarin speaker.

In memory of Sir Anthony Berry, murdered by the IRA in the Brighton bombing, who was House of Commons Captain, the two Houses combined to provide a Silver Rose Bowl - the Anthony Berry Memorial Bowl. This is presented each year for the best playing or bidding of a hand by one of the competitors during the match. Winners have included the Duke of Atholl (3 times), Lord Smith (2), John Marek (2), Lord Lever, Peter Emery and Michael Mates, Lewis Moonie, Lord Brougham & Vaux, and the only lady, Bridget Prentice in 1996, playing for the first time in the match.

The only other matter of some interest is the captain of the two teams: the Lords, Mike Noble as Lord Glenkinglas in 1975 and 1976, the Duke of Atholl until 1992, with Lord Gisborough 1993 to the present. The Commons were first captained by Sir Timothy Kitson until he left the House in 1987, Sir Anthony Berry until his death, and then myself.

The change of the format of the match has altered, with dealt hands at the table playing ordinary rubber bridge, to playing duplicate to which we turned in 1991. Due to the general increasing interest in bridge in both Houses, the match originally of two tables was increased to four tables in 1993. To meet this massive rise in interest the bridge tables in the chess/bridge room in the Commons are in frequent use, whilst their Lordships meet regularly and have even gone to having coaching and instruction. So we proceed with the pleasing support of the Perry family.

Thirty nine Members of Parliament have played in the winning team during the twenty two years of the contest. This is made up by 21 players for the Lords and 20 players for the Commons. It will be readily seen that there appear to be two more players for the two teams than the thirty nine members of the two Houses who have played. This is because for three years Harold Lever played for the Commons (1976, '77 & '78) before transferring his allegiance to reverse the run of three victories for the Commons with five victories for their Lordships (1979, '80, '81, '82 '83), he went on playing for the Lords until 1993. The other person to represent both sides is Sally Oppenheim who played in the first match for the losing Commons team, but played more or less consistently until she turns up on the winning Lords team in 1994 and 1996.

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At the Annex is the list of all the players and the year they were part of the victorious teams. It is sad we do not have on record the names of the members of the losing teams, but even if we had I do not think the list of players would be much enlarged. Let us hope over the years it will grow and grow.

P.F.H.E.  
January 1997



The Annexe

The Duke of Atholl	(Capt.) 79 80 81 82 83	87 88 89 90		
Earl of Birkenhead	79 81 82 83			
Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker	76 77 78	84 85 86	92 93	95
Sir Anthony Berry	76 77 78	84 (Capt)		
Rt. Hon. Paul Channon		82	92	95
Marquess of Dufferin and Ava		87		
Rt. Hon. Alastair Goodlad		84 85 86		
Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Emery		84 86 (Capt)	91 92 93 (Capt)	95
Sir Harwood Harrison	76 77 78			
Mr Ralph Howell			93	
Mr Richard Holt		86	91 93	96
Lord Gisborough			94	
Lord Glenkinglas (Capt)	75 79 80 81			
Lord Grimthorpe	75 80 83	90		
Lord Grantley			94	96
Lord Hothfield				96
Lord Lever of Manchester	76 77 78 // 79 80 81 82 83	87 88 89 90		96
Sir Timothy Kitson (Capt)	76 77			
Earl Macpherson	75			
Duke of Marlborough		81 82	88	
Dr John Marek		84 85 86	91 92 93	95
Rt Hon Sir Cranley Onslow		84 85		
The Rt. Hon. Baroness Oppenheim	76 77 78	84 85 86	// 94	96
Lord Paget	75 80 82 83			
Earl of Macclesfield				96
Mr Michael Mates		85 86	91 92 93	95
Dr Lewis Moonie			91 92 93	95
Lord Rennell			88 89 90	94 96
Rt Hon Sir Timothy Sainsbury	77 78	84 85 86	91 92	95
Lord Strathcarron	75			
Lord Smith of Marlow				
Rt Hon Lord Soames	79 80 82 83	87 88 89 90	94	96
Rt Hon John Silkin	79			
Lord Skelmersdale		84		
Lord Stamp			94	
Lord Swaythling			94	96
Mr Robin Squire				96
Mr Michael Stern			94	
Sir Ray Whitney				95

// Transfer from Commons to the House of Lords