

An Interview with....Alec Smalley and Barbara Lewis

How did you start playing bridge?

A: When I left university in the mid 80's there were few jobs (40% of my Biochemistry year were taken on by accountancy firms – they were the only companies recruiting). So, like many others I went on the dole, house sitting in Moss Side with John Athey and we played 2 handed 'bridge' to wile away the days (rather like in lockdown). On Giro day, we picked up our £58 and went for our biweekly visit to the pub...after that we lived on toast and eggs. We then moved into a house with Bob Amsbury (son of Joe) (**Journalist Note: Joe Amsbury was one of England's leading players in the 1970s**) and he taught us the rudiments of bridge including the Vagon Landy defence to a NT (you bid 2C on any 13 cards you feel like).

Then, one day at the University Bridge Club, Mark Halliwell and Paul Hackett 'rocked up' and invited us to BridgeWorld to play – and later to work. I was hooked into proper bridge and have never regretted it, and have always tried to give back to the game.

B: I watched my father play, centre right sat down, (a founder member of Sheffield BC and a local 'star' in the 1930s - can you spot Terence Reese and Ben Cohen) and had some lessons from Graham Jepson.



I joined Sale, later Altrincham BC, in the 1970s and arrived at MBC in 1983 – for duplicates and rubber bridge – and met my good friends Kevin Comrie, Diana Ackerman, Sam Herman and Jeff Smith.

How did your partnership start?

B and A: We met at rubber bridge at MBC in 1990, and we were both on the bridge club trip to Paris for the Coupe d'Or Cino del Duco. Jeff Morris fixed us up for our first duplicate together – a SIMs on Feb 14th 1991 which we won.

As chair/secretary of Cheadle Hulme and an Officer of MCBA what would say is the best and worst part?

A: The best part at CHBC has been recruiting new members and looking to the future -planning for the merger with Bramhall; worst is people who moan without contributing anything to support the club/county. We just have to deal with EBU bureaucracy!

B: The best has being able to contribute to MCBA events for newcomers and non-experts; worst is getting upset when players complain.

Who would your perfect game of bridge be with?

A: Bacchus (the only god I have any time for) - as an atheist I can't choose God and anyway Tony Forrester is a grumpy so and so at the table.

A match with The Rabbit, Karopet, The Parrot, M'Bozi, The Abbot, Brother Lucius, The Witchdoctor and myself would be fun though. (**Journalist Note: Many of these are fictional characters from Victor Mollos "Bridge in the menagerie series" and David Bird's "Miracles of Card Play" series. If you haven't read either, check them out).**

B: Elvis (**Journalist Note: This bridge player is unknown to me**)

I believe that for a period in the 90s you moved into separate parts of your house following a particularly contentious hand?

A: Rather the contrary. In that first duplicate on Feb 14th Barbara made a feather light 2S overcall and brought it home! She's yet to do so again and I'm banned from protecting! Still hoping – but no separation.

What is your most interesting hand?

A: A hand straight out of Victor Mollo - in a recent MCBA cup match with partner Tom Slater vs Anonymous. (**Journalist Note: It was Dave Sarabowski and Stuart Shalom – we don't hide names in these articles unless its libellous**)

I was South and slightly mis bid on the following auction

W N E S

1H X P 2S (the mis-bid – in our methods I would often have 5 cards)

X 4S X All Pass

Optimum: S 4S; +420
LoTT: 15-14 = 1

♠ A K 9
♥ K 2
♦ A Q 3
♣ J 9 5 4 3

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ 7 6 5 4 3 2
♥ 9 3
♦ 10 6 2
♣ Q 10

♠ A Q J 8 7
♥ A Q J 8 7
♦ K 9 8 5
♣ K 8 7 6

1

♠ Q J 10 8
♥ 10 6 5 4
♦ J 7 4
♣ A 2

	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT
N	2	1	1	3	2
S	2	1	1	4	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

13 17 2
8

Save Edit Play Options Help Analyse

This was the situation at T1 and West had a horrible lead problem – he chose a low D – with a deep breath I ran it to the J and advanced a H to A and another H – then Club to A and repeated the D finesse. Cashed AD and played C to exit leaving

Input Hand OR browse to a PBN, DLM, or bridge base online LIN file : Choose file No file chosen

Optimum: S 4S; +420
LoTT: 15-14 = 1

♠ A K 9
♥ K 2
♦ A Q 3
♣ J 9 5 4 3

Contract: 4♠ by S
NS Tricks: 5
EW Tricks: 2

♠ 7₂ 6₂ 5₂ 4₂ 3₂ 2₂
♥ 9 3
♦ 10 6 2
♣ Q 10

♠ A Q J 8 7
♥ A Q J 8 7
♦ K 9 8 5
♣ K 8 7 6

1

♠ Q J 10 8
♥ 10 6 5 4
♦ J 7 4
♣ A 2

	♠	♥	♦	♣	NT
N	2	1	1	3	2
S	2	1	1	4	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

13 17 2
8

< Stop Options Help

East on lead – who played a Spade – and I now had a Hi cross ruff for 11 tricks – BUT! I misplayed rather badly at this point - I claimed 11 tricks. I should have played it out, watching E under ruff 5 times – having 6 trumps and not taking any one of them – The Hideous Hog would have made the opps suffer.

Do any of your family play bridge?

A: No – but I'd like to teach my teenage nephews – one of them is a very committed games player.

B: my sister-in law who, together with 5 other Jewish ladies, has played every Friday for nearly 40 years – they have an amazing ability to talk all the time, eat lunch, and still play an intelligent game of bridge.

***Where have you been around the world, have you played bridge there?
What was the best place you visited?***

In the 1990s we played bridge in international tournaments. Firstly, in Vilamoura – we had to be vetted by the EBU to take part – it was a European Open – we were the top British pair in the mixed. Then, Biarritz, Barcelona and the US Spring Nationals in Arizona.....before antiques took over for Alec. Recently we have played in Portuguese tournaments in Cascais and Madeira - great international events. Best was the USA, where we also had a driving tour of Arizona and Nevada (finishing with Alec playing poker in Binion's Horseshoe). On the plane over to the USA, A was lecturing B on 'The Law' – total number of tricks (TNT) - and on the first evening we played in a charity event against Larry Cohen! and a TNT hand came up - A was telling B about it in TNT language not realising it was Larry at the table. (***Journalist's note: Larry Cohen wrote the book "To Bid or Not to bid" published in 1992, which heavily publicised the theory***)

What was your most memorable league match? Why?

A: Thumping St Titus 30-0 in a league match in the season when Grasshoppers won Division 1. (***Journalist Note: Alec is getting two years mixed up. The year they beat us 30-0 we finished 2nd and they were 3rd, Grasshoppers did win the following year though***)

B: I was called in as last-minute sub to play with Peter Jones 😞!...we won 30-0 which curtailed PJ's usual acerbic feedback 😊.

Barbara - what would say is the best thing about Alec's bridge? And the worst?

B: Best is Alec's ability to analyse at the table and produce expert declarer play or defence, closely followed by his interest in and skill at mentoring. Worst is his ability to over-think at the table!

And the same question to Alec

A: The best thing about B is always reliability – worst is that she is always worrying about other things in the club – when we are away from things on holiday etc our results improve markedly.

And what is the first thing you will do once life returns to normal?

A: What I'd relish most would be a high-level tournament (eg Spring Fours, Premier League) with an expert opponent on my side of the screen, and Tom's chirruping voice on the other side of the screen.