

If the name Brian Jackson is familiar to readers of English Bridge, it is likely that it is as the writer of occasional articles about bridge-playing holidays he took abroad, notably in Juan-Les-Pins. He was not a high-profile player, although he certainly had the ability to become well-known on a wider stage, but he made his living from the game, gracing most London Rubber Bridge Clubs either as a host or, post-retirement, as a player.

Most people who host at Rubber Clubs (of which there used to be many more than there are now) are either on their way somewhere, or on the way back from somewhere. They are either keen and youthful, perhaps just out of university and unable to find a regular job, or perhaps semi-retired or redundant and filling the hours doing something they like and (hopefully) generating a bit of cash. Brian Jackson defied this categorisation – he was a professional host: it was what he did, and he did it better than most, if not all.

If Brian came up to you with a hand scrawled on a piece of paper, it wasn't, like 99% of the bridge population, a prompt for a gloat. It was always instructive – he was always on the lookout for hands that actually had a point. He wasn't a result merchant – the story would end either with "I managed to wake up just in time and spot that" or "I came a cropper on that one". He wasn't interested in proving how clever he was.

Unlike most hosts he wasn't over-endowed with ego. He never lectured a partner, and famously claimed that after any hand there were only two things that a host should say. They were either "Well done, partner" or "Bad luck, partner". Anything else he viewed as unprofessional. This, of course, paid practical dividends, as well. Even the club duffer knows when he's made a mess of things (he may not understand why, mind you) and the important thing is to get him on to the next hand without him worrying about a hand that's already history.

Growing up during the Blitz ("After that, a rubber with R\*\*\*\*\* A\*\*\*\*\* was pretty much plain sailing", he once said), South Londoner Brian went through grammar school and studied Chemistry at college. He and the test tube soon fell out, and he left in order to pursue a life outside the world of science. National Service intervened, and he subsidised his meagre RAF pay with regular trips to the Mayfair Bridge Studio for the big 6d game, capitalising on the skill he'd picked up when he should have been learning the Periodic Table.

After National Service he fell among good bridge players, and soon decided that the world of commerce (having sampled the insurance and oil industries) was not for him. After a short spell subbing for Irving Rose as host at Crockfords he took the job up full-time, first at Curzon House, then at Green Street, Mayfair, where he enjoyed a long residency. It was at Green Street that he honed his trade, and after a brief spell at the London School of Bridge in the King's Road, where he delighted in playing in a low-stake game because he enjoyed the company, he moved to the higher stake club at St. James' moving to TGR when that club opened (essentially St. James' moved a mile up the road).

Brian liked a drink, he liked a day at the races and he liked walking across London – well, more accurately, he despised the London Underground, so made a virtue out of a necessity. Happily his route home would take him through Berwick Street market, where he carefully chose supplies for meals at his Marylebone flat. He was, perhaps, a frugal man, but mainly with himself – you'd never accuse him of not getting his round in. He did like Bridge Tournaments in warm, amenable places, so took busman's

holidays there (Deauville, Las Palmas, Monte Carlo, Torquay). He wasn't monomaniacal, however. He was quite capable of holding his own conversationally on non-bridge matters.

Perhaps since his retirement – and the reduction in number of Rubber Bridge Clubs – his renown has faded slightly in recent years, but to those who worked with him in the hosting trade, in his prime he was *primus inter pares*, the Bridge Host's Bridge Host. An impossible act to follow.

Brian Jackson 1938-2016