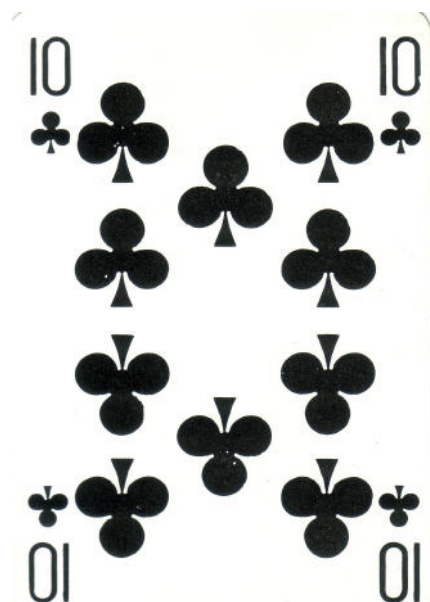


READING BRIDGE CLUB

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2006



Attendances

For the 2004/2005 season Tuesday evenings averaged 7.5 tables. For the 2005/2006 season Tuesday evenings averaged 7.25 tables but attendances in the second half of the season were lower than in the first half. Interestingly attendances in the peak year of 1994/95 were averaging 12 tables.

For the 2004/2005 season Thursday evenings averaged 8.25 tables. For the 2005/2006 season Thursday evenings averaged 9 tables, a welcome increase.

Relocation

Progress has been slow over recent months. The results of our approaches to a dozen schools in central Reading was disappointing. Although some initial positive responses were received, our proposals were not pursued by any.

In March, the relocation sub - committee had a useful meeting with Steve Ward, the Head of Parks and Leisure at Reading Council. We initially discussed the possibilities at the Rivermead leisure centre but he then suggested other ideas and promised to give further consideration to our aims.

Some of his suggestions are already being investigated but none has gone beyond the first contact stage. We are continuing to explore the Rivermead avenue.

League of 8

2005-2006 has been a good year. The "A" team has regained the Division 1 championship it won two years ago. The "B" team dominated Division 2 and will go straight back to Division 1. The "C" team held their own in Division 2. The "D" team struggled in Division 4 but may survive. The "E" finished 5th in Division 5.

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In February the club received an email from a member of a Bridge club in Berne, Switzerland. He was involved in trying to get his club to obtain a Duplimate Dealing machine and set up a web site. Our site seemed to him to offer exactly the information that he thought should be available and he asked if we could give him some advice and explanation.

Having written up a response to these queries it was suggested to me that the Reading Bridge Club membership would also be interested in such an overview. Hence my response to him was as follows:

1. How our Dealing and Scoring system works.

We have a very old Duplimate Dealing Machine (the mark 1 DOS version, which we acquired in about 1997), which is attached to an equally old PC (a 386 chip version which the local hospital was upgrading). We also have a Laser Printer attached to this PC. At some point each week someone generates the sets of boards required for a weeks tournaments (that's 3 sets, for Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings). Generally this takes about an hour, including printing hand records for each tournament (between 12 and 20 copies per tournament depending on the likely attendance and their propensity for studying the hands). The print program is our own software but is based on the subroutines provided with the Duplimate machine. The Duplimate files containing the hand details are then "stone-age networked" (i.e. copied to a floppy disc) and transferred to the scoring computer.

For scoring we have a more modern PC running Windows XP, which also has a dial -up line to the Internet. (We need two PCs because we have the ancient DOS based Duplimate machine and newer PCs just run much too fast for it.) If one purchased a Duplimate now, it would run under Windows and one would have everything connected to the same PC. We use the FIN/s system for scoring. This is an Excel based system that allows scope for personalisation to the specific requirements of the club. We have added an initials based directory of players (the standard being first letter of first name and first 2 letters of surname), and we have added an interface to produce a file of competition results that we can use to generate the results of our club competitions (we have annual and 6 monthly competitions, based on either Tuesdays, when only some weeks count, or Thursdays when all weeks count, and we have individual and pairs based competitions, some of which are handicapped by ones running average percentage.)

2. Getting results to the web

To get the results to the web, there is a button on the system to "Upload to Web". What actually happens is that enough information is packaged to provide the results of each tournament and is stored during the scoring process into a particular folder, which is where the Duplimate files referred to above are copied also. Then the "Upload to Web" button just sets up an "ftp" link to the web site and loads everything from this folder to it. There is obviously software in the web site that then decodes this information into the web pages you see. It doesn't matter that some Duplimate files may be loaded onto the web days before they are used since the filenames are in effect the dates on which they are to be used, and we have a lock on the file so that it is inaccessible until 10.30pm on the day of use.

To get the results on to the web therefore takes no time at all (the upload takes at most 30 seconds to a minute) and anyone wanting to see how well they have done can be assured that by the time they get home they will be able to see the results. The secret of course is in getting the information packaged in the correct way to minimise the transmission time. Our system was developed by Michael Neuser and Walter Zwiefelhofer. Currently Gill Smith is further developing the competition results system. I try to specify an "idiot-proof" interface.

4. Duplimate costs

At the time we bought it (around 1997) the Duplimate machine cost about 2500 pounds sterling and has cost us nothing in maintenance since then. We have had no significant problems with it and only an occasional misread has needed to be handled.

5. Benefits

- a. You get a greater variety of hands (hand dealing tending to produce more even hands)
- b. It is possible to provide hand records for the players
- c. It makes multiple section events much easier to organise, rather than having duplication at the table
- d. At the time we felt that there may be a market for providing sets of boards to others but apart from a few occasions to close neighbours we haven't in fact made anything of this.

6. General view

There were at the time (and still are, I'm sure) those players who believe that all computer dealt hands are "strange" and consist of long suits, voids and singleton kings off-side, not being convinced that it is the "Hand Dealt" boards where the chances of a 3-3 break are nearer 50% that are the anomaly. In general, most people like being able to refer to a record of the hands, if only so that they can authoritatively blame their partner for their bad scores. Certainly those of us who regularly play teams Bridge where no such facility exists find the computer dealt experience vastly superior.

Tony Parkinson