

# John Matheson

1945-2004



John was born in Edinburgh. He went to Daniel Stewart's College, then studied medicine at Edinburgh University. It was there that he learned to play bridge in the University Union: the rubber stakes were high for a student, so John had to learn fast. He did. Scotland had a very strong Camrose team in the 1970s, but John found his way in, partnering two of the strongest players, John MacLaren and Victor Goldberg, later Ian Thomson and Willie Coyle. He was part of the winning team 3 times, and also once when Scotland tied with England. In 1973 he won the Gold Cup, the hotly contested British teams Championship, in an all-Scottish team. He met his wife Trish at the bridge table. They married in 1969, a union that stood the test of time and adversity. They had two children, and for 18 years John gave up competitive bridge to devote himself to his job and family. He did allow himself an annual week in London to play high stakes rubber against the top players of the day, including one of his idols, Zia Mahmood. He returned to competitive bridge in 1994, finding that bidding had moved on a lot in 20 years. He returned to the Camrose team, first with Victor Goldberg, then with Les Steel with whom he won the Camrose Trophy twice more in 1995-96 and 1997-98. He was delighted to win a second Gold Cup in 2006, again with an all-Scottish team. John played with many partners in his illustrious career. He was a dedicated student of our game, always happy to share what he had learned over many years. He will be sorely missed.

Jim Patrick was invited to speak at his funeral: I have been asked to say a few words about two of John's great loves, poker and bridge. I first met John when I joined the Edinburgh Men's Union poker school in 1971. This now old-fashioned draw poker game has continued unchanged but developed from a cut-throat high stakes game into more of a social occasion with my late wife, Kathy and Trish vying to host it. Now, understandably, we find raising a quorum more difficult. John was a good aggressive player, but with a determination not to be bluffed. An unsuccessful call would be explained by, "You've got to keep them honest." It was only a good while later that I learned that he was the rising star in Scottish bridge who would go on to win a record number of Scottish Cups and make a record number of international appearances. Twice he won the Gold Cup, the British Championship. 18 times winner of the Scottish Cup and 76 international appearances playing with nine different partners in each. And this was done while taking a decade out at the peak of his game to help bring up his family. I was proud to be asked to play with him and anything I know about bridge I learned from him. He was generous in his advice even though it was sometimes along the lines of: Jim, when the bidding is finished, I wish you could be replaced by Ian Morrison. His only fault as a bridge player was that he unrealistically expected his partners to play to his high standards. Even in the latter stages of his bravely borne illness he managed to play a friendly rubber bridge game when he was not only house-bound, but chairbound. In the later part of his life, he generously gave a lot of his time to help developing partnerships. He also wrote many good articles on bidding for the SBU magazine. John and Trish were introduced by Kathy, and many a Thursday evening we had a hotly contested game against the wives over a couple of bottles of wine. We also played regularly during their annual stay with us in France. John loved the game, and I miss the early morning call asking if I had time for a few hands. **Jim Patrick**

Paul Gipson is a fellow bridge enthusiast who also devotes a lot of time to mentoring Juniors.

I'm sorry to hear that John Matheson has passed away, another member of a great Scottish generation. I've only known John for the past 20 years and just as a bridge player. I remember him as an exceptionally strong player, a man who loved the game: he loved the latest systems and conventions and thought he should adopt anything that was played by the Italians (particularly Versace-Lauria and Bocchi-Duboin). In his later years, BBO was a godsend, bringing the games of the greats into his home. He did not commentate often, but frequently provided insight to commentators that they had missed. I've lost count of the number of times he talked about his favourite game: he played with Malcolm Cuthbertson in the 2002 European Championships against Bocchi and Duboin. They finished the 20-board match in 55 minutes! The Scots lost heavily but John felt he was playing with the gods. In his later years, John often volunteered to mentor aspiring pairs and would invite them to his home for a day of training. Few recovered! John could, and would, provide reams of information on any topic, far more detailed than most could cope with. In the background was always his wife, Patricia. As John's Parkinson's got worse, she was always on the

keyboard while he directed what to do and say. I have no other details of John's family: like many bridge players, he'd rather discuss hands **Paul Gipson**