

Boris Schapiro

Bridge champion who secured his first world title in 1929 and his final one 66 years later, Boris Schapiro, studied Textiles at Bradford Technical College during the 1920s.



Boris was born in Latvia in 1909.

His father Herman ran a very lucrative international horse dealing business there but when Boris was only a small child the family moved to St Petersburg.

His very comfortable childhood of travelling to kindergarten by carriage and eating caviare sandwiches was shattered by the Russian Revolution.

The family escaped, leaving behind everything but portable gold and diamonds as they fled in a cattle truck to Yalta. They were only saved by meeting Captain Sherwood, who had charge of a freighter that had carried thousands of their horses to Hull and Goole. They sailed to Istanbul with him and travelled from there to France, arriving in Toulon on Armistice Day, 1918.

They then moved on to Doncaster where they still had relatives. Once settled the Schapiros continued their international horse trading and young Boris attended private school but played cards for money from the age of 10. His father anticipated that the advance of motor vehicles would create a downturn in family fortunes and so prepared for diversification by sending his son to study textiles at Bradford Technical College, where he graduated as a Fellow of the Textile Institute.

Boris then went to Paris and Hamburg to study Philosophy but seems to have been more of a playboy than serious student, chasing girls and playing cards at the Sorbonne. He then reached the finals in the German tennis mixed doubles during his time at Hamburg University. A talented player, he competed at Wimbledon in 1936.

Boris spoke Russian, German and French fluently. In 1935 he acted as an interpreter for Viscount Castlerosse, who was interviewing Hitler for the Daily Express. Boris was arrested by the Gestapo and thrown into jail for 2 nights after a fracas when spotted drinking in a

public café with a non-Jewish companion. His language skills were later used against Hitler when he served in the Army Intelligence Corps during WWII.

When the family business was forced to change direction, not into textiles but into meat, Boris spent the hours between visiting Smithfields at 3am and visiting butchers shops during the day by playing bridge. At the outbreak of war Boris ran a scrap metal business before joining up.

Boris was also an excellent rider who had won showjumping trophies in his teens. This skill was undiminished at 48 as when the European Championships were being held in Vienna he took the Great Britain team to visit the famous Spanish Riding School, and rode one of the Lippizaners through their entire routine.

But despite being multi-talented it was at bridge that Boris truly excelled. He won his first Contract Bridge World title in 1932 and his first major British competition in 1946, partnering Terence Reese. He was an incorrigible joker. Having claimed that Reese was so deep in concentration during a game that he would not notice if a naked woman was present, Boris organized just such a visitor and won the £50 bet. Their partnership split after they were falsely accused of cheating by using hand signals in the 1965 World Bridge Championships in Buenos Aires.

Boris was a member of the British team that won the European Team Championships 4 times from 1948 and Britain's only World Open Team title, in 1955, achieving silver in the World Teams of 1960 and the World Pairs of 1962. He won Britain's most prestigious event, the Gold Cup, a record 11 times, the last time in 1998 when he was 89! The same year he won the senior pairs at the World Bridge Championships in Lille.

Although Boris was a menacing opponent in the game he was very popular. He taught Omar Sharif how to play bridge like a master when the actor was on a break from filming *Lawrence of Arabia* and they became great friends. He was also a legendary flirt whose opening line when introduced to any woman was "Fancy a spot of adultery?"

Boris Schapiro died in December 2002.