

## Susie Barna (1918 – 2014)

Susie (also Suzy) Barna may have been more famous as the wife of 23-times World Champion Victor, but she was a great supporter of table tennis in her own right, enjoying enormously both the game and the social opportunities it presented.

She was born Suzette Arany in Budapest in 1918 – the family's surname means 'gold'. There is no record of her background growing up in a new country, Hungary, which was experiencing considerable political and social turmoil in the post-Great War era, nor of when she first met Victor, who was seven years her senior.



They were engaged to be married in the winter of early-1939, at a time when Victor was already an established international player and traveller who had already turned his back on his native Hungary. One picture of them from this time shows the young couple happily striding along a London street, making light of the cold against which they are well-wrapped. This was clearly a partnership that would last.

In August of that year, Susie and Victor were married at the Registrar's Office in Holborn, central London, in front of a small gathering of invited guests. Bill Pope of the ETTA was Victor's Best Man and Richard Bergmann, Victor's gold medal doubles partner at the recent World Championships in Cairo, described Susie as "radiant and charming" on her wedding day.

After a short honeymoon in Cornwall, the newly-weds headed off for America, where Victor was due to be involved in a series of exhibitions. In early September, however, War was declared in Europe. Whereas most people would have happily stayed away from the Old Continent, the Barnas were desperate to return and to serve Britain, the country where they hoped to settle, against the Nazis, who were threatening their homeland. They managed to get passage on a boat heading for Italy and, as the fighting in western Europe was about to begin, Victor went back to London through France whilst Susie detoured via Budapest to visit her mother for what would turn out to be the last time.

After what for Victor was an eventful war, the couple settled in Pinner, north-west London, where Susie would live for over fifty more years. They travelled widely, Victor playing in events and exhibitions all over the world for the next decade. Susie's prowess as a player is not well-known, although she was to partner her husband occasionally in the mixed doubles events in local competitions they entered on their travels. Later, Victor became a representative for the Dunlop sports company which meant he had to travel even more, and it was on a working visit to Peru in 1972 that he suffered a fatal heart attack – on this occasion, Susie was back in London.

After Victor's untimely death, Susie was elected as an honorary member of the Swaythling Club International (SCI) which had been founded by her husband, and she was an active member for the next 30 or so years, enjoying lifelong friendships established with people from all over the world. In addition, she and the SCI donated the Victor Barna Award to the ITTF, to be given to the player with the best record at each World Championships.



As dutiful anglophiles, Victor and Susie took a liking to cricket. Susie was also an active bridge player and by all accounts a formidable one. And those of Victor's numerous trophies that she did not present to the ITTF museum in Lausanne she kept in her flat, regularly cleaning them – a sparkle of devotion that she never lost.