

**News and Views: 2021–2 Season – Special Edition –
12 April 2022**



The founding fathers (and mothers) of Macclesfield Quiz League have pretty much all moved on, so we can't be certain; but they were surely inspired at least in part by the iconic BBC television quiz show *Mastermind*. The programme had been going for around ten years at the time the League was founded, and had already established itself as the Grand National of television quizzes. In both *Mastermind* and the League, proceedings begin with specialist rounds and finish with general knowledge; and the contestants in both have to master the art of answering individual questions under the pressure of limited time.

1974: Elizabeth Horrocks – Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Dorothy L. Sayers



It was in 1989 that a former *Mastermind* champion joined the Quiz League. Liz Horrocks, an English teacher born in Cardiff but living in Crewe at the time, had won the programme's third series, in 1974. She joined the team that played out of the Butley Ash, and not surprisingly (with that pedigree) she quickly became one of the team's leading lights. They moved to the George and Dragon on Rainow Road in 1997, and in 2005 they became the Dolphin Dragons. Liz has long been the only survivor from the 1989–90 team who still plays regularly.

Liz thinks she may have been the youngest ever female winner of *Mastermind*. Her specialist subjects were Shakespeare's plays, the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, and the detective novels of Dorothy L. Sayers. She told me that she felt she won the final by default, the other contestants letting themselves down somewhat, but she was much happier about her performance in the semi-final. Unfortunately I couldn't find a clip of the semi-final, but you can watch Liz's general

knowledge round from the final [here](#) on the BBC website. She took part in a Champion of Champions series in 2010, and in 2014 (40 years after her original triumph!) she was the featured quizzing champion of the older generation in *Amazing Greys*.

It was her love of fantasy fiction that led to Liz becoming a published author herself in 2010, when her first novel *Edge of Doom* was published. Set (as hinted in the title) on Alderley Edge, near where Liz now lives, this was the first book in a trilogy that introduces the concept of time travel into Arthurian legend, and has garnered rave reviews on Amazon.

2008–9: Brian Bogie – Ian Botham

As far as we know, the first person to appear on *Mastermind* while actually taking part in the Quiz League was Brian Bogie. The sales director of a company based in Bollington, Brian was quite new to the League at the time. His team, playing out of the Knot Inn in Rushton Spencer, joined us in 2007 and won promotion to the B League in their first season. Brian was their most consistent performer, although that position would come under some pressure the following season when Art Higham began playing more regularly. The team (known from 2018 to 2021 as Rushton Diamonds) crossed the county border into Cheshire for a second time soon after the start of the 2021–2 season, since when they've been the Harrington Diamonds.

I found details of Brian's *Mastermind* heat on a blog named [Life After Mastermind](#) – compiled by the 2008 winner, David Clark. According to David, Brian was up against some tough opposition: "*Mastermind* veteran" Christopher Gonet, and [Dr. Ian Bayley](#) – "a familiar face to viewers of *Are You An Egghead?*".

Brian was in seat number one, and his specialist subject was Ian Botham. He set a challenging benchmark for his three opponents, with 15 points and no passes; none of them equalled it, and at the end of the specialist rounds Brian had a clear lead of two points.

Unfortunately Brian was unable to keep this form going into the General Knowledge round. Ian Bayley, who'd scored 13 points on Tchaikovsky in the specialists, scored the same in the general knowledge. Brian's target of 12 to win seemed eminently achievable, but sadly he managed only 8. This left him three points behind Ian, and level on points with Chris Gonet; but he'd passed on four questions in his general knowledge round, while Chris had no passes at all. Brian thus finished in third place.

Ian Bayley – the winner of Brian's heat – reached the final, but lost out to Nancy Dickmann. Nothing daunted, he tried again in 2010–11; and this time he went one better, taking home the glass bowl. And this is only one of his many quizzing achievements, which include partnering Pat Gibson to the European Pairs title in 2005.

2020–1: Ashton Davies – Nick Drake and John Wesley



In 2020–1, another English teacher and MQL regular appeared on *Mastermind*. Ashton Davies joined the Church House Bollington team in 2014 and soon established himself as one of the League's best players, finishing in the individual top three every year. The Church House won promotion in his first two seasons; known since the post-lockdown resumption as the Poachers, they are now one of the teams to beat in the A League.

In his *Mastermind* [heat](#), broadcast on 14 December 2020, Ashton's specialist subject was the singer–

songwriter Nick Drake. He finished joint first on 11 points in the specialist round, and began the general knowledge needing just 10 to win. He did much better than that – scoring 15, to finish on 26 points. John Humphrys described him as "a runaway winner".

In the [semi-final](#) Ashton's specialist subject was John Wesley, the co-founder of the Methodist movement within the Church of England. This proved to be a tricky subject, and Ashton scored a disappointing 8 points. At the end of the specialist rounds he was in third place – three points behind the leader.

In fourth place at this stage, on 7 points, was Tim Hall. Ashton later described Tim as "probably the strongest competitor in the whole series ... a regular Top 10 finisher in Grands Prix ... [but] he had an even more nightmarish Specialist round than me". Tim's specialist subject had been R. E. M. (the American rock band, not the physiological phenomenon).

Going first in the general knowledge round, Tim scored a creditable 15 points. Ashton, going second, scored 14. The next contender scored only nine, making a total of 18, and this meant that Tim and Ashton were joint leaders on 22 points as the first-round leader took his place in the black chair. Harry Heath, a buyer from Worcestershire, needed only 12 to win the semi-final; he scored 13, and his total of 24 points saw him through to the final. It was a very disappointing result for both Tim and Ashton.

2021–2: Alice Walker – Rodgers, Hammerstein, Julia Margaret Cameron, and the Peak District

It was shortly after the end of the 2020–1 series that Alice Walker (a retired IT consultant, living since 2020 in Whaley Bridge) received confirmation that she'd been selected to appear on *Mastermind*. Her heat was filmed on 5 July 2021, and broadcast on 27 September. Macclesfield Quiz League's 2021–2 season opened on 23 November, since when certain people (you know who you are) had been shamelessly trying to trick Alice into revealing how far she'd got in *Mastermind*. Well now the truth is out: the final was broadcast on Monday 11 April, and Alice was the winner.

Even Alice herself is not quite sure when he began taking part in Macclesfield Quiz League. She started with the Cock & Pheasant (Bollington), probably in 1983; this team became the Chestergate in 1986, the Star Inn in 1994, the Ox-fford 'C' in 2002, and the Queens in 2019.

Alice's scores have improved steadily over the years. She won the A League Individual title for the first time in 2016–17, and for a second time in 2021–2. (Or the third time, if you include 2019–20. When that season was abandoned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with one game left to play, she was tied with Ashton Davies – see above – in first place.)



Alice's [Mastermind heat](#) was the fourth episode in the programme's 48th series, and her specialist subject was the musicals of Rodgers & Hammerstein. Alice is a big fan of musical theatre, and her favourite film has always been *The Sound of Music*. Even so she left nothing to chance, and many hours were spent watching the films on her 'syllabus' and poring over *The Rodgers and Hammerstein Encyclopaedia*.

The rule these days is that *Mastermind* contestants have to nominate five specialist subjects, even though no one has to answer questions on more than three. They can say which ones they would be happy to do in the first round, but in the later rounds they often don't get a choice.



Macclesfield Quiz League

Sponsored by AstraZeneca

The two subjects that Alice didn't get to do were the novels of D. H. Lawrence and the life of Émile Zola.

Alice scored 11 points on Rodgers & Hammerstein, with two wrong answers (but no passes). This put her in joint first place, along with Andrew Whiteley – a "punting manager". Unbeknownst to either of them at the time (contestants weren't allowed to fraternise due to COVID restrictions), quizzing was not the only interest they had in common: they were both morris dancers!

Going third in the General Knowledge round, Alice scored 15 points, leaving Andrew with a total score of 26 to beat. As the white line began to snake around Andrew's score he was on 24, but he made a mistake on the next question that he won't easily forget – answering "a pint" to the question about the Imperial UK unit of measurement that's equal to 160 fluid ounces. (The correct answer is a gallon; a pint is 20 fluid ounces.) Andrew answered his next question correctly, but the buzzer went just as he did so – leaving him out of time, and one point behind Alice.

The Semi-Final: Julia Margaret Cameron

Alice's [semi-final](#) was even more tense. Going last in the Specialist round, her target was 11 points. This was set by two of her opponents: Paul Risebury-Crisp, a performance director, and Patrick Wilson, a health communications specialist. Their specialist subjects were the Bill and Ted films, and drum and bass music, respectively.

Alice was answering questions on Julia Margaret Cameron – "the acclaimed nineteenth century photographer", in the words of Clive Myrie's scriptwriter, "who took up the art form at the age of 48." This time Alice got a full house – answering all 13 questions correctly, putting her two points in the lead going into the General Knowledge round.

Paul scored only nine points on his General Knowledge questions, but Patrick went four better – setting Alice a target of 12 points to win. This time the questions were tough, and Alice scored only 11 – putting her level with Patrick. Neither of them had passed on any one of their questions; it was a tie-break situation!

As she was in seat number four, Alice was asked to leave the studio while Patrick (seat three) faced five questions. Neither he, the audience nor the viewers were told how many he'd got right, and then it was Alice's turn to answer the same five questions. The correct answers came up onto the screen as Alice answered, and when the fourth question came up we knew that both she and Patrick had answered two of the first three correctly.

Question number four was: "In Greek legend, which sculptor fell in love with a life-like ivory statue of his ideal woman?"

Patrick had been stumped, and answered "Heraklion" (because he had to say something). But this question was right up Alice's street; she answered "Pygmalion", and the screen confirmed that this was the correct answer. One question to go, and Alice was in the lead!

The final question was quite a tricky one: "What name is given to the part of a horse's leg between the fetlock and the top of the hoof?"

Patrick had been stumped by this one as well, and guessed "shank". This time Alice was similarly bamboozled, and came up with "the shin". But what was the correct answer?

Turned out it was the pastern. Neither Patrick nor Alice had guessed correctly, and this meant that by the narrowest of margins, Alice was in the final!

The Final: The Peak District



Viewers had only five weeks to wait. The date was 11 April – six days after the final round of League matches in Macclesfield.

This being the **final**, there were six contenders. Alice was in seat number two – the same as in her heat. First up was Ian Wang: an auditor, and a University Challenge alumnus (late of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge). Answering questions on the film maker Sir Steve McQueen (who made a guest appearance in his 'bio-pic' – known to the production team as a VT), Ian surprised no one by setting a challenging target of 13 points.

But Alice proved herself more than equal to this. She answered all of her specialist questions, on the Peak District National Park, correctly – and raised the target for the remaining four contenders to 14.

The last of the six finalists, Sarah Trevarthen, equalled Ian's total. But no one matched Alice's score; going into the General Knowledge round, Alice Walker was in the lead.

First up in the second round was Patrick Buckingham, a solicitor from London, who'd scored 10 points on the Hollywood film star Carole Lombard. Patrick's general knowledge was right on the button, and he scored a highly impressive 17 points – giving him a total of 27. The next two contenders failed to match that target, and Ian Wang scored only 12, leaving him two points behind Patrick. But Sarah Trevarthen scored 14, to finish equal with Patrick on 27 points (and open up the possibility of a Final tie-break).



I can reveal that the possibility of a three-way tie-break crossed Alice Walker's mind as she made her way towards the famous black chair for the seventh time. But putting that thought behind her, she got off to a flying start – answering her first eight questions correctly. She drew level with Patrick on question 15, correctly naming the kidney(s) as the organ(s) that feature Bowman's capsule. The hearts of her supporters were in their mouths as she failed to identify the country in



Macclesfield Quiz League

Sponsored by AstraZeneca

which the technology companies Tencent, Baidu and Alibaba were "headquartered" (it was actually China) ... but Alice nailed it with the very next question, naming Tom Hiddlestone as the actor who played Loki in the *Avengers* films. And it didn't stop there; she also answered the next five questions correctly, to finish on a total of 33 points – no fewer than six more than her two nearest rivals. Clive Myrie announced that it was the highest score of the series.

There was dancing in the front rooms of Whaley Bridge, if not actually in the streets. And I'm not joking – I've seen the video clips.

You can see all of Alice's questions from the Final – both Specialist and General Knowledge – [here](#).

Life After *Mastermind*

Alice's first appointment as *Mastermind* champion was to take part in Gareth Kingston's *All Things Quiz* podcast, which opened almost before the credits had finished rolling on the broadcast. She was joined by Sarah and Patrick – as well as Jonathan Gibson, the retiring champion, and Eleanor Ayres (another solicitor, and another of Alice's fellow contenders in the 2022 final).

Jonathan had been the youngest ever *Mastermind* champion. But it soon became apparent that the title had gone from one age extreme to the other, as the [BBC website](#) revealed that Alice was the oldest ever female champion. (The previous holder of this particular honour was Isabelle Heward, the 2017 winner. Bizarrely, although Alice and Isabelle had never met until quizzing brought them together a couple of years ago, their respective fathers had been best friends back in the day!)

Needless to say, the messages of congratulation were already flooding in from friends, family, and fellow quizzers. But it was on the morning of Tuesday 12 April that it began to become apparent what it really meant to have won *Mastermind*.

First of all, Alice got a mention on the 8 O'clock News on BBC Radio 4 (the *Today* programme).

And then the telephone lines went crazy. The BBC local radio stations in Derby, Cheshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Manchester and Sheffield all wanted to claim Alice as their own. The *i* newspaper picked up a BBC press release and hailed the "oldest female *Mastermind* winner". At 10:45 she was on Radio 5 Live with Nicky Campbell. Then it was BBC *North West Tonight*, where Alice was interviewed on the sofa by Annabel Tiffin.

On Wednesday 13th, *The Guardian* carried a piece on *Mastermind*'s "oldest female winner". At 10:45, Alice was zooming with Emma Barnett on *Woman's Hour*.

Last we heard, *The Sun* was wanting to get in on the act. (We think their article was only published online.)

I originally wrote (tongue in cheek, of course) that Edwina Currie may not have been aware that she was no longer Whaley Bridge's most famous resident. But on 16 April (Easter Saturday) a card came through the door offering "warmest congratulations ... from one (Celebrity) *Mastermind* winner to another." It was signed by Edwina Currie. How lovely!

I still think, though, that you might question who's the most famous Alice Walker, right now and in this part of the world.

Haydn Thompson