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## University's coming up trumps with latest PhD... in bridge!

By **Tim Bugler**

**JAMES** Bond famously beat arch villain Hugo Drax at it in the film *Moonraker* and *Doctor Zhivago* star Omar Sharif loved the card game so much he played it professionally.

Now a Scottish university has decided to fund a doctorate in bridge after a study showed it keeps people sharper, happier and more social into old age.

The three-year PhD at **Stirling University** is part of a research project which will examine what drives people to take up the game and keep playing throughout their lives.

It will also explore the role a hobby can play in friendships, as well as how it creates a sense of belonging and collective identity.

Bridge has become ever more popular and exponents include Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke, former Wimbledon champion Martina Navratilova and Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates.

As part of Stirling's sociology of bridge course, the university is also inviting people to join a new bridge club under a series of projects investigating the game's benefits.

A study funded by English Bridge Education and Development has found those who play bridge have higher levels of well-being than non-players.

Professor of Sociology Saman-

tha Punch - an international bridge competitor - is leading the research together with Dr Caroline Small, from Imperial College, London.

Professor Punch said: 'As well as contributing to healthy ageing and brain fitness, participation in the mind sport of bridge enhances social networks and a sense of belonging to a wider bridge community.'

### 'Contributing to brain fitness'