

# MEMORIES OF THE HAMILTON BRIDGE CLUB'S FIRST 50 YEARS

## Formation of the Club

The Hamilton Bridge Club was started in 1952 by Fran Jolly with 58 women members - no men.... Play was held in the Centreway Tearooms which was upstairs at the north end of Garden Place and Victoria Street. The subscription was one pound and table money one shilling.

## 1953-1960

In 1953 a levy of 7/6d a player was made as supper costs had escalated. Also in 1953, owing to the discrepancy between numbers of men and women, the committee decided to accept nominations from men and married couples only, and this remained in force until 1956 when the membership was conditionally reopened - the condition being that weak players not be accepted. It was strongly recommended that a phantom table be avoided if possible "as people get bored if they have to sit out for several hands, and boredom spreads through the whole room".

## 1954

Table money was raised from 1/- to 2/- and from 1955 an entrance fee of 10/- was imposed with subscriptions raised to one pound 10 shillings single and two pounds 10 shillings double.

## 1957

A move was made and play was held at the Hamilton Bowling Club in Pembroke Street where tables and chairs had to be assembled before play and taken down after play. In the winter it was so cold members played in their overcoats and very nearly hats! Table money was raised to 2/6d.

During the years to 1958 membership fluctuated between 60 and 70. For the first four years play was held fortnightly and in 1956 they graduated to weekly.

## 1958

Ron Matheson, an experienced player, made the telling remark "It is impossible to work out handicaps in Bridge Clubs on any cut and dried system taking into consideration partnerships etc." A junior section was started and new members were accepted only if they had been members of other clubs or were sponsored by A Grade members who guaranteed their play was of a reasonable standard. This meant that the poor unsuspecting prospective members spent an anguished night trying to do the right thing on a specified night in someone's home.

## 1960

After much discussion the O'Neill Street property was bought for 4,700 pounds with a mortgage of 2,475 pounds. The Club had 300 pounds in the bank and 500 pounds in an Auckland Harbour Board debenture. A member, Mr Ira Fraser, offered a second mortgage of 1,000 pounds and debentures of 1,000 pounds at 5% were raised from the Club members and the Club paid the rest. The Harbour Board debenture was not touched. In addition to the debentures, some of which were lent interest free, some holders refused to reclaim, the sum of over 300 pounds was donated in smaller gifts. This from a membership of about 112 was a superb effort. We took over on 1 April 1960 and many members spent a busy weekend pulling down partitions and ripping up lino and carpets. All the curtains were donated by members who had changed their interior decor. Somewhat of a hotch potch but it was ours. Alterations were done by a carpenter with the vital help of Nigel Harris, a member, who accepted' only a peppercorn salary.

During the early years at O'Neill Street the help and architectural advice of Errol Care-Cottrell (a member) was at our disposal and to him too the Club owes a debt of gratitude. Three jumble sales over 3 years raised more than 1,000 pounds towards alterations and furnishings and in 1962 Colin Ross ( a member) offered us a carpet at cost price - 450 - 500 pounds. By April 1963 Ira Fraser's mortgage was repaid and all debenture holders were paid by March 1965. Later in 1965 it was decided to do major alterations to the room by taking the old kitchen into the playing area, making a new kitchen, building men's toilets and removing the wall between the lounge and alcove. These alterations, together with extra carpet cost 2,452 pounds.

Ira Fraser again advanced 1,000 pounds by way of mortgage which was repaid by mid 1967. The main mortgage was cleared in November 1968 and the club proudly owned a comfortable freehold property.

The house had a self-contained flat at the back and was let to husband and wife teams who acted as groundsman and caterer/cleaner. It worked most satisfactorily.

### **1961 - 1977 Increase in Membership and "Growing Pains"**

Paul Hobbs (a member) recalled that the Club would not have grown over this time without the dedication of Secretary Kath Hobbs and Treasurer Artjus Head.

These were the days when tournaments were held, hats and gloves were worn (gloves removed for play but not hats) and the men wore black ties at night, women were in evening dress. All players were met at the door by the President and his wife, their hands shaken, and the same procedure followed when they departed. Tournaments were played during the whole weekend and all the catering was done by members - including dinners with pavlova cake and chocolate eclairs, and afternoon teas with every possible type of sandwich, savoury and cake that can be imagined. The scoring was all done manually and took anything up to three hours to complete, by which time the haze of tobacco smoke had become unbearable. At one NZ Pairs Championship tournament a mistake was made with the scoring and the championship cup awarded to the wrong pair. This was not returned in spite of them being told of the mistake!

In 1961 a special general meeting was held to discuss the handicapping system. There was a long discussion re the present handicapping system created by Doris Head and Errol Care-Cottrell, and the Universal System recommended by Antoine Derderian. For a long time there had been endless dissatisfaction and controversy concerning handicaps and feelings ran very high. Entries to tournaments were eagerly sought after and were allocated on merit, which meant that the handicapping system needed to be the fairest. It was decided not to adopt the Universal System and as a direct result of this the Hamilton Contract Bridge Club was formed in August 1962 by Antoine Dederian later changed to the Waikato Bridge Club.

### **1963**

Intermediate group formed - the Club now consisted of senior, intermediate and junior groups. The senior group had 120 - 125 players. About this time it was reported at a committee meeting that two male members appeared "sartorially lacking" although they "appeared fairly suitable types". It was decided to see whether or not they improved in this direction and, if not, asked not to come again. History does not relate how they got on.

Demotions as well as promotions were introduced from one group to another and handicaps were still a very controversial subject.

### **1967**

The NZCBA decided on a system of Centres - Clubs to be affiliated to centres and centres to the NZCBA. Our Centre included Waikato, Thames Valley, Bay of Plenty and Poverty Bay and became known as the Waikato-Bays Centre. The master points system was commenced - the fees to go towards a travel fund for our representatives overseas.

Former member of this Club and representative of NZ, and current member of the Australian senior team, Bill Haughie recalled that in 1971 a very fine Australian team visited NZ and played matches against provincial teams and a couple of test matches... "That team was probably the best team that Australia ever assembled: the inimitable Tim Seres, Dick Cummings, Roelof Smidge, Dennis Howard (later president of the WBF) and Jim and Norma Borin. That team went on to take the bronze medal at the Bermuda Bowl later that year. The Waikato Bays Team against the Australians was Ron Scott, Paul Hobbs, Diego Vettori and Joan Care-Cottrell (all Hamilton Club members) Cedric Friis and Peter Notley. Suffice to say that we led the Australians at the half way mark and held on for an historic win in the end by 124 to 113.

In 1968 a sinking fund was suggested to assist financing new rooms as the O'Neill Street property was costing a lot of money for maintenance. Membership numbers were now 350.

Two members of the Club - Ron Scott and Bill Haughie represented NZ in 1978 at the World Bridge Olympiad. They were presented with the princely sum of \$50 each to help with expenses.

### **1976 New Premises in Richmond Street**

In August 1976 steps were taken to negotiate a lease and execute a lease of the Richmond Street property from the Hamilton City Council for a minimum term of 33 years. Errol Care-Cottrell was instructed to prepare the necessary plans for new clubrooms, tenders to be called and arrangements for debenture issue to members for \$25,000 with interest at 7%. The cost of the building was not to exceed \$80,000. In March 1977 a very successful 25 anniversary was held - lunch for foundation members and past and present Presidents and Secretaries.

In April 1977 a tender of \$150,000 was accepted for building of the new clubrooms. They were eventually built for \$148,730, \$1,270 less than the contract price.

That year the O'Neill Street premises were sold to the Hamilton Day Care Centre for \$31,500.

On 4 February 1978 the new clubrooms were opened by the Mayor. A loan of \$100,000 at 10% for 25 years was arranged with the Waikato Savings Bank. It was a day to celebrate and at night 188 members played bridge for the first time in the new rooms. Membership was now up to 601. These were extremely busy times for the president, John Christie, and committee and indeed the entire club. Funds were raised with a raffle of a car (\$4,000), bridge parties (\$850), private parties (\$120), sales tables (\$500) jumble sale (\$800), opportunity shop (\$1,370) and various raffles. 58 chairs were donated by members. \$26,000 was raised with debentures and nearly \$1,700 donated in lieu of debentures. In the NZ Bridge magazine dated April 1978, D W Lochore wrote - "The building is so distinctive that bridge clubs around the world should know about it. Bridge player at leisure and architect by profession, Errol Care-Cottrell has had many years to study the needs of a New Zealand Club. In the Hamilton building he has had the chance to put his ideas as an architect into being.

The Club has moved from a central site to the northern outskirts of the city. Two single-storey octagonal buildings in juxta-position stand on a one acre site that provides good parking space. The complex provides two rooms with accommodation for up to 30 tables in one room and 25 in the other. The design incorporates a sliding door to isolate the rooms and allows access from either room to a spacious kitchen and servery. The club offices are on the perimeter found the front; wall receptacles store all tables and the toilets have facilities for disabled people. Above all are the interior spaciousness and appearance created by high-domes symmetrically angled ceilings which facilitate ventilation and first class, almost shadowless lighting.

The history of the project and the details of its planning are a story in themselves. Foremost among those who brought the project into being is John Christie, the immediate past president whose drive and enthusiasm never flagged. The Hamilton City Council not only provided the site, but also guaranteed the loan that the Waikato Savings Bank provided. In working out financial details and know-how the club play tribute especially to two members, Mr Rickman, a retired bank manager, and Mr B W Hoffeins, treasurer of the Hamilton City Council.

The decor and furnishings - carpets, covers, drapes and blinds - were the responsibility of a women's committee headed by Daphne Blakely and Rae Carter. But the whole project expresses the community interest and spirit that flourish in smaller rather than larger cities.

In 1994 money that was on fixed deposit was used to pay off the mortgage of \$30,000 - the Club was now debt free. It was a combined effort of which we can be extremely proud and the club would not be in the happy financial position it is today without the support and help of these early members.

The ground work was now done and the Club has continued to run with the usual ups and downs of all organisations that cope with human beings. Smoking during play was a continuing problem and it was decided that there would be no smoking before 9.00pm and smokers carry their own ashtrays with them and wash them at the conclusion of play. Slow play and handicaps were hardy perennials. Membership in 1980 was up to 641 but by 1982 it was down by 20 players - it has continued its downward slide, apart from 1993 and 2000 and in 2001 the membership was 417.

This in spite of sterling efforts by many members giving up their nights to coach at beginners lessons. Intermediate lessons are also conducted and are a wonderful opportunity for members to improve their standard of play.

During the years the club has proudly produced a large number of players who have represented NZ overseas - Bill Haughie, Ron Scott, Martin Reid, Patrick Carter, Ken and Cathy Yule and Scott Smith.

The Labour weekend Congress and Melbourne Cup Day have become an established part of the Club's calendar together with all the usual tournaments. These, of course, demand a tremendous amount of work from our very willing workers. To all the members who have given their time over the past 50 years to help with the running of the Club - the match committees, house committees, finance, publicity, Directors, scorers, partner stewards and gardeners, the Club owes an inexpressible debt of gratitude.

In 2001 the capital value of the premises was \$590,000 - with the building valued at \$455,000 completely unencumbered. The lease term is for 33 years starting on 1 April 1977 with an annual rental of \$77.14 payable half yearly. Two clauses in the lease state that no alterations may be made to the premises without written consent of the Council, nor may it be sublet without the consent of the Council.

In 1994 the Club changed from Trustbank to ANZ and refinanced its mortgage. A loan of \$45,000 was arranged on a table mortgage with monthly principal and interest. Cash reserves were invested in a term deposit used to reduce the amount of the mortgage uplifted. As a result the net interest paid was less and the mortgage able to be repaid in a shorter period of time.

By 1988 the Club was unencumbered financially.

The trend of fewer members continued and by 1998 the national membership was down by 444. In 2001 the Club's membership was 417.

Bill Haughie who represented the Club nationally and overseas on many occasions and recalls that he learnt a lot from the Club, from its members and from its spirit. He now plays in Australia but says "nothing compares with those halcyon days in Hamilton".

## **2001 on**

A chapter yet to be written.....