

Cardiff Bridge Club – a Potted History by Maggie Pierce

Fifty years ago on October 1st Cardiff Bridge Club was formed. In 1974 the privately owned Cardiff Bridge Club was situated in The Walk. It had about sixteen tables and a bar and was owned by Ted Livermore, a keen player. It was a success, increasingly members were turned away if a little late. One had to have reached a certain standard and have permission to play on a Thursday night!

In 1974 the Bennett Group was formed. This was a group of feisty women who took its name from the woman who shot her husband after his mistake as her partner when playing bridge. She was acquitted - the judge agreed with her..... One of the group had contacts with Welsh Brewers who suggested the vacant floor of the Great Western on St Mary St. They raised capital for the lease and members set to work on the new premises. We now had capacity for twenty five tables and a big bar. We opened on 1st October '74 . Livermore's financial partner wanted to keep the name 'Cardiff Bridge Club' hence 'South Glamorgan Bridge Club' which you can still see on honours boards.

The Cardiff Club soon closed as we had all moved to the new premises. Still playing are just four original members, McAndrew, Best, Melville (in another club) and yours truly. The club prospered and occasionally there were almost a hundred people in the club.

One of our members, Len Muller, was a WRU high-up. Being close to the Arms Park proved a great advantage on Rugby International days. Len formed a club 'The Grand Slam Club' with fifty-two members, all his rugby cohorts. They would assemble, drink the bar dry, have their lunch (prepared by our volunteers) go to the match then return to drink the (by now refurbished) bar dry again. A nice little earner for the club.

We also staged three Camrose Matches at the club. In the days before one sat at a laptop to watch, these were sociable events. I remember a huge Vugraph setup, manufactured at RAF St Athan and organised by one of our members who was an RAF Squadron Leader. For many years Cardiff Club usually fielded most, if not all, of the Camrose teams. Three Camrose matches were held at the Club. Some famous names to play there included Terence Reese and Hugh Kelsey – both fantastic writers.

In 1976 Patrick Jourdain was appointed a full-time manager. There are many members still playing who started at the Great Western with lessons run by volunteers and by Patrick. Our honours boards provide names of those who were around from '74. In those days the bar closed when the last person left.

All loans were repaid and by 1980 with a year to run on the lease there were attempts to find new premises. In retrospect, it would have been a wise move to purchase in '74 – but I'm sure this must have been considered. David Ronson suggested the top floor of Aberdare House, a building he owned in Mountstuart Square. The decision was taken to move. Then there was some trouble in Butetown which was a cause for concern and the Committee had second thoughts. At a crucial General Meeting the members voted to go ahead and the Committee resigned virtually en bloc. With a new Committee and a divided membership the move was organised, and a ten year lease was taken. But all rallied round, the rooms were refurbished, mainly by volunteers, and in 1981 we moved.

There were a few security problems. One, recounted by Diane Kurbalija – *'Coming out of Mountstuart Square way past midnight to find our yellow Ford Anglia was nicked. Phone call a few days later from the police- the tide was out and the roof of a yellow Ford Anglia could be seen above the water in Cardiff dock.'* I remember my late husband's golf clubs were stolen from the car. On contacting the police, we were advised to go down the Ship and Pilot on Friday night and buy them back. After a while we 'locked' the adjoining car park. Ah, how the place is now gentrified. The success continued. Once again, the bar closed when the last person left. There were

sometimes poker sessions after the duplicate which went on into the early hours. There were several sessions of 'cut-in' rubber bridge.

The Club had always run Christmas parties, these took a turn for the better when Gilly Clench started playing at Mountstuart. Gilly organised the party at the WNO for a couple of years starting in 1987. After delicious food came the cabaret – this was the start of the legendary cabarets held by the Club over the following years. One hilarious sketch -'The Birth of the Messiah of Welsh Bridge' - had Gilly cast as a (the nearest thing they could find to a Virgin).

One idea from the early days whose time may yet come again was the weekends organised at the Cliff Hotel, Gwbert, West Wales. Club members moved down en masse for the weekend. These were very much enjoyed and brought together those who played in different sessions and hardly ever met.

Patrick Jourdain resigned from the Manager's post in 1985. He continued to teach and players were fed into the club.

By 1989 the Club was actively looking for new premises. Two of our bridge players, Nick Huggett and David Teague, belonged to Penylan Bowling Club. A large room on the premises was used by a handful of badminton players. Penylan was in need of a financial boost and a move was suggested by Nick and David. Successful negotiations were entered into for the merger of the two clubs. We became full members of Penylan. Livermore gave us back the Cardiff Bridge Club name.

In 1994 the Club welcomed the Chinese National Bridge Teams (Open and Women) on their way to the World Championships in the USA. Club members hosted them and they really enjoyed Cardiff hospitality. We put on a couple of practice matches at the club. It all ended with a great party at Ann Jones' house where they were all very 'happy' - ending up with the singing of both national anthems and lots of wine-fuelled pleasantries.

An event which has sadly died out was the Cardiff-Nantes interchange, We hosted the Nantes Bridge Club for a few years and it was reciprocated. As well as good bridge it was such a social event. On one of the visits to Nantes we were entertained with oysters and champagne. We were concerned that on the return visit all Cardiff could offer would be Brains Dark and Clarks Pies! It seemed not to matter a jot.

The Christmas parties were highly entertaining, sketches and the pantomime all written by a crack team of Geoff Evans, Di Kurbalija and Di Jones with choreography by Gilly Clench. All bridge personalities had been observed over the year for inclusion (rarely flattering) in the scripts. There were pantomimes, plus a karaoke comp (for the Golden Gnome).

In those days Dr John Butler was Chairman. He was obviously disapproving of (and grumpy about) the hilarity of which he'd heard and one year decided to come and sit at the back to observe. John was heard to say at the end of the evening that it was the best night he'd had since VE Day (and the cast were all invited back to his mansion to sup his collection of fine malt whiskies).

When you have read our history I would suggest that the fact that we are in wonderful premises owned by **US** is something to think on. Yes, we are full voting members but few take interest in the whole club? How many of us go to the AGM?

From 1998 you know most of the rest.....

Many thanks to Mike Best, Liz Atkinson, Di Kurbalija and Patrick Sheilds among others for their help. There were lots of other stories but the characters may not be known to most of you.

A few photos and posters from the early days:



Diane Kurbalija (just moved to Stoke) and Gilly Clench

Paul Seal (now living in Miami)



Mike Hirst and Phil Felman with some of the 'feisty' Bennet Group

Cardiff Bridge Club Present a:-
GRAND SPONSORED WORM DIG

ON
Friday 3rd January 1992

The centre of the green will be divided into 100 numbered plots to be allocated by lots.
Dig as deep as you like. Prizes for most worms, also longest and heaviest.
 Sponsorship forms available at bar.



SPECTACULAR BONFIRE
 Old car tyres and mattresses needed.
 Please leave these, any time,
ON THE TENNIS COURTS
 where the bonfire is to be built.

Many other attractions including



PONY RIDES
(AROUND THE GREEN).
 If sufficient interest
 races will be held.

<p>GYMNASTIC DISPLAY <i>starring</i> JOHN BUTLER</p>	<p>MORRIS DANCING ***** <i>(unless Myra remains sober)</i></p>
<p>PUNCH AND JUDY Mr. & Mrs. James</p>	<p>BOUNCY CASTLE GORDON ROXBOROUGH <i>(Indoors If Wet)</i></p>
<p>TOM REDDY and his DONKEY /// <i>(not suitable for children under 18, or those of a nervous disposition).</i></p>	<p>JASON DONOVAN LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST (Previous winners not eligible) LATEST ODDS..... 2/11 Jeff Burke 3/1 Roy Wiltshire 7/1 Diana Jones 8/1 Jeremy 10/1 Bar</p>

Evening entertainment will commence at 7.00pm and finish late. There will be a buffet at half time. Admission by ticket only (£3.00) available from Heuhwen or behind the Bar.

Geoff Evans did this poster for the first Xmas party at Penylan – every time we put it up the bowlers would take it down 😊

On the Twelfth Day of Christmas

my true love said to me

*'We're going to the Bridge Club's
Christmas Party tonight, Darling!'*

Entertainment, revues, games, quiz, raffle, huge prizes
All the latest news including **EXCLUSIVE** Welsh Bridge Union Scandal

Enormous Buffet Supper lovingly prepared by **Babs & Aileen**
(Delia Smith's younger - and prettier sisters)

1996 GOLDEN GNOME Award - for the most original
interpretation of a well-known song

NB In spite of huge financial bribes to do otherwise the 1995 winner, VAL - insists that she WILL defend her trophy. All partygoers, especially music lovers, are advised to bring suitable protective clothing as the organisers cannot be held responsible.

PLACE:- PENYLAN CLUB
TIME:- 7.00 for 7.30 prompt Bar will be open earlier
DATE:- SATURDAY 6TH JANUARY

TICKETS £5 FROM....