

The History of the Cnucha Bridge Club

John and Clodagh Havel (Brother and Sister) formed the Cnucha Bridge Club in 1995 when John and Clodagh were 36 and 26 years old respectively. They both lived in Laurel Lodge at the time.

John and Clodagh had recently completed their Bridge classes with Roisin Troy and David Green (RIP) but found it impossible to access membership in a local club. They were allowed to play as visitors over the Summer in some clubs but membership was out of the question.

We due respect to the clubs that allowed them play, John and Clodagh did not enjoy their experience. The clubs were not particularly friendly and devoid of the inclusive culture they were looking for. The decision to create their own club was a natural consequence of their experience. It's was Clodagh's idea to call the club Cnucha. Castleknock in Irish is Caislean Cnucha. They knew they could not use Castleknock in the name as the Castleknock Bridge Club was the largest club in the area but wanted a name that could readily be identified with Castleknock. Thankfully, no one from Castleknock Bridge Club objected to them calling their club, Cnucha.

John and Clodagh had multiple issues to resolve:

- They had no location in which to play.
- They had no members.
- They had no cards or tables and chairs.
- They had recently learned how to play bridge but had never learned how to run and score a competition.

John was friendly with Fr. Eugene Kennedy (RIP), being a reader in the Church dating back to Fr. O'Moore's time. John asked Fr. Eugene for access to the Cry Chapel on a Wednesday evening to which he readily agreed. John chose Wednesday evening as it was the only evening that a bridge competition was not being run by another club in the Dublin West area. History would prove Wednesday to be the correct night as it freed time for experienced players and teachers to help in the club's development. John and Clodagh were aware that the Cry Chapel would only ever hold 6 tables at a push and if successful would need a larger location.

To attract the initial membership John and Clodagh stood outside the Sunday Masses in Laurel Lodge at weekends and distributed leaflets to the effect they were starting a bridge club in Laurel Lodge. John still remembers the slagging he got from some parishioners who thought bridge was only played in retirement homes! Nevertheless, on opening night 14 - 16 people turned up. In those days, it was allowable to smoke in Bridge competitions. When a competitor lit up, John immediately asked that the cigarette be extinguished and declared

the Cnucha Bridge to be a Non- Smoking competition. The following Wednesday only 6 – 8 people showed up.

Philip Maloney and Mary Costello (husband and wife) were in Rosin Troy's class with John and Clodagh. Philip and Mary embraced the new club concept from day one and were instrumental in the club's success.

Having no Cards, tables and chairs was overcome by John financing the initial years until such time as the club's receipts grew to a self-sustaining income. As the club's first President, John even purchased grandiose Cups to be played for on an annual basis.

Not being able to run and score a competition, albeit a frightening thought at the outset did not in the end turn out to be an issue. From the outset, Pat and Stacia Connelly attended on a Wednesday night. Pat was not known to any of the founding members but John is of the opinion the club would have struggled to survive those early years had Pat not offered to run and score competitions specially designed for 4 – 6 tables (pre bridgemates). David Green (RIP) also helped in running and scoring competitions in those early years. John speaks with the deepest respect for both Pat Connolly and David Green (RIP). Two gentlemen that are central to the growth and success of the club. (John is still in awe of the incredible bridge playing skills possessed by Pat Connelly.)

John's history with Fr. Eugene extends back to the fund-raising required to build the parish church. It was a logical step then to involve John in the fund-raising to build the parish centre. John's involvement with the centre's building committee was to prove instrumental in securing the parish hall on a Wednesday evening. John fondly remembers the 'White Lies' he told to secure the entire hall. As the building of the centre commenced the committee invited applications from local clubs and associations to secure the use of the hall on an hourly basis from 7.00 pm to 10.30 pm. The hall had to be divided in two by a retracting curtain to accommodate the huge response the committee received. John managed to persuade his colleagues on the committee that the Cnucha Bridge was the largest adult association in Laurel Lodge and would require the entire hall from 7.00pm to 10.30pm. At the time the club had barely 30 members and only a handful of tables and chairs. John was convinced that with the new facilities the membership would grow exponentially and fill the hall in a relatively short time. This is exactly what happened.

In those early years, John, Clodagh, Philip and Mary employed the inclusive and friendly culture they found missing in other clubs. In fairness, it was easier to introduce as in the early years the club held separate competitions for beginners, 'B' players and a smaller number of 'A' Players, so everyone played to their own standard and formed friendships and playing partnerships that are still prevalent today. The club's entire receipts were ploughed back into the club in the form of prizes and quite a few party nights, the majority of which were subsidised by John. The social side of the club attracted the attention of local players from beginners to 'A' players and the membership flourished. Unfortunately, as the club

grew so did the demands on John and Clodagh's time. The administration involved in running 3 – 4 competitions and a membership that was now filling the Centre's Hall outgrew the original 4 founders. At that point, the club was officially recognised as one of the largest clubs in West Dublin by the Contract Bridge Association of Ireland and all our players were being included weekly in their Masterpoints System.

In addition to those mentioned above the early participators in the formation of the club include, Kathleen McCorry, Rachel Dockrell, Jenny Hudson RIP, Niall Burke, Bernadette Drennan and Gladys Smith. Their support was central to the growth of the club.

However, as with all good things, there comes an end. John Havel had a young family which together with his career made it impossible for him to continuously commit the time required for the bridge club. Clodagh Havel, now Clodagh Barrett married and moved to South Dublin. Philip and Mary also found new interests and eventually left the club. However, the original four are proud that not only did they start and build the club they left it in very capable hands. The superb committees and membership that joined and served the club over the past 30 years have all excelled in making the club what it is today. They can all take a well-deserved bow.