

WB&TBC 80th Anniversary Dinner Speech

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! Looking around at our ten full tables tonight, I can see what a great turnout we have for this special occasion. A warm welcome to you all as we celebrate the 80th Anniversary of Whitley Bay Bridge Club.

I'm delighted to see so many familiar faces, including some we haven't seen for some time, alongside our regular members and visiting friends. I'm particularly pleased to welcome our distinguished guests: Marion Curran, current Chair of the North Eastern Bridge Association; Graham Cox, NEBA Vice-Chair; and Sue Davies, former NEBA Chair, accompanied by her husband Dick.

Our story begins in 1945, when our club was established as the Whitley Bay Branch of the North Eastern Bridge Association – which, coincidentally, is celebrating its own 90th anniversary this year. Even earlier local bridge enthusiasts were the United Commercial Travellers Association - Whitley Bay Bridge Section, formed in 1936. The board in the clubroom lists their chairmen and reminds us of the long local bridge past.

In 2016, we embraced change by amalgamating with Tynemouth Bridge Club.

Our venues tell their own story. We earlier played at Kilburn Hall in North Shields, opposite the magistrate's court. Then, seventy years ago in 1955, we found our long-time home at 220 Whitley Road. Over the decades, we transformed that space with countless improvements: central heating, upgraded toilet facilities, a stairlift, better lighting, and much more. We hosted many NEBA competitions and events there.

Unfortunately, last year brought unexpected challenges when building work by our landlord damaged our premises, creating fire safety issues that forced us to leave. However, every cloud has a silver lining – Rockcliff Rugby Football Club stepped forward as our rescuers and have proved to be first-class hosts.

We are taking legal action to recover our costs and have reluctantly had to abandon Whitley Road, but tonight isn't about problems. It's about celebrating eight decades of bridge, friendship, and community.

Now, on a lighter note! In the past the club had evenings with up to 25 tables, playing single-board rounds, and nearly everyone smoked. That was before my time, thankfully!

The evening sessions were legendarily competitive. I'll never forget our first evening session (Anne and I) – we almost didn't return! The club was full of the nicest people you could meet... until they sat down at the bridge table, where they transformed into dragons. Heaven help you if you made a mistake! I think we are better these days.

This reminds me of some bridge wisdom I've collected over the years:

A partnership misunderstanding is when your partner assumes you know what you're doing.

There are three kinds of bridge players: those who can count, and those who can't!

And finally: there are only two acceptable reasons for not leading partner's suit – having no cards in that suit, or having a death wish.

As we celebrate 80 years tonight – we are looking to the future. Our club has endured because of one constant: you our members.