

Crockfords History

In 1934 a small group of card players met in the Federal Hotel and decided to form a bridge club. The name Crockfords came from the club in London. Premises were leased by the Club in the Press Company building in Cathedral Square, where the Club remained for 10 years.

The next move was to rooms in Stewart Dawson's building in High Street for eight years. In 1952, a quarrel erupted between members over a proposal to build clubrooms. This resulted in 67 members breaking away to form the Christchurch Bridge Club.

Bridge players are a competitive lot so it wasn't long before arrangements were made for a annual inter-Club competition between Crockfords and the Wellington Bridge Club (then an easy and comparatively cheap overnight ferry trip away), with the two Clubs taking turns to host the event. The Stringer Cup was at stake during these competitions, with the trophy being donated by a Christchurch lady — and it should come as no surprise to learn that her name was Mrs Stringer. After the Christchurch Bridge Club had been formed, she presented another — the Coronation Cup — for similar competition. Sadly, this generosity was the undoing of the whole exercise. Whereas in earlier days Wellington members had undertaken a journey south every second year, they were now faced with the necessity of travelling each year to visit one or other of the Christchurch clubs, and entertaining the other one in Wellington. When, in 1953, Crockford's declined a Wellington invitation to "come and play in our yard" the writing was on the wall. Comparatively cheap the ferry passage might have been, but times were getting harder.

After eight years renting the large Van Ash homestead at 107 Bealey Avenue, it was agreed by the Crockfords Committee in 1959 to purchase land at 85 Bealey Avenue and construct purpose-built clubrooms. The cost of those clubrooms was £4,200, and they were officially opened on 31 May 1960. It was a momentous day for duplicate players to have open-plan facilities, after years of moving awkwardly between closed rooms. As the Club continued to grow, additions and improvements were made, but by 1974, with a membership of over 500, parking and access problems were being experienced at this site.

The next move was to purchase the present site at 218 Riccarton Road with its large parking area. It had been the original post-war RSA Riccarton Club but later converted into a residence. Substantial interior modifications had to be made including removal of the interior walls, raising the ceiling and fitting the acoustic panels.

There was a gap of approximately \$70,000 between the sale price of 85 Bealey Avenue and the total cost of the Riccarton property. Members contributed more than half of this with loans and gifts, and a lot of work was done by the Committee and other members.

We were also fortunate that we had completed arrangements for the purchase of the Riccarton property ahead of the fire at the Christchurch Bridge Club, as they also became interested in the Riccarton site.

Ten years later, construction of "The Annex" on the east side of the building provided much-needed additional playing space.

In the early days, before the advent of modern-day computer software for bridge clubs, scoring on a Tuesday night was done manually. A team of six, on a six-week roster basis, would call and check each pairs score at the finish of play, and hopefully balance by 1.30am ... providing there were no

birthdays to be celebrated as that required the consumption of some wine. Results were phoned to the Press early Wednesday to appear in Thursday's newspaper.

Until 1968, duplicate competitions were open to all members on Tuesday and Friday nights. However, the growth in membership during the 1960s led to the creation of three playing grades (Intermediate, Senior Reserve and Senior). After vigorous recruitment through learners' lessons, a Junior grade for beginners began and the clubrooms were then being used every night of the week.

Crockfords affiliated to the NZ Contract Bridge Association in 1938 and, in 1962, initiated and joined the Canterbury Bridge Centre Association.

Smoking in the clubrooms was rampant in the 1960s (incessantly browning paint and curtains), but in 2000 the rooms were declared a smoke-free zone. This saw after-play socialising increasing in popularity. Bar facilities were an integral part of the development of the Riccarton Road premises, and the Club obtained a liquor license in 1987.

Over the many years the Club has been very fortunate in having such able Secretaries and Secretary-Managers. They were Mrs Hollingum, Geoff Bradbury, Sheila de Stiger, and Diane Coughlan who retired from the position in 2009 after 25 years service. They have all contributed to the progress of the Club, which had a peak membership in the 1980s of over 900, before the proliferation of small clubs in the suburbs of Christchurch.

Long-standing Club members include Lois Mottram who joined in May 1962, Beverley Maples who joined in March 1963, and Michael Anda, who initially joined in August 1960.

Over the years Crockfords has had some very good players amongst its members, with perhaps the most outstanding being Nola Mather and Val Bell who succeeded in winning in both the Australia and New Zealand Women's Pairs in the same year. Ann Oakley was also a Canterbury representative internationally. Nola Mather achieved Grand Master status in 1994, only the second Canterbury woman to have achieved the distinction at that time. Max Morrison became a Grand Master in 2005; Darcy Preston in 2006.