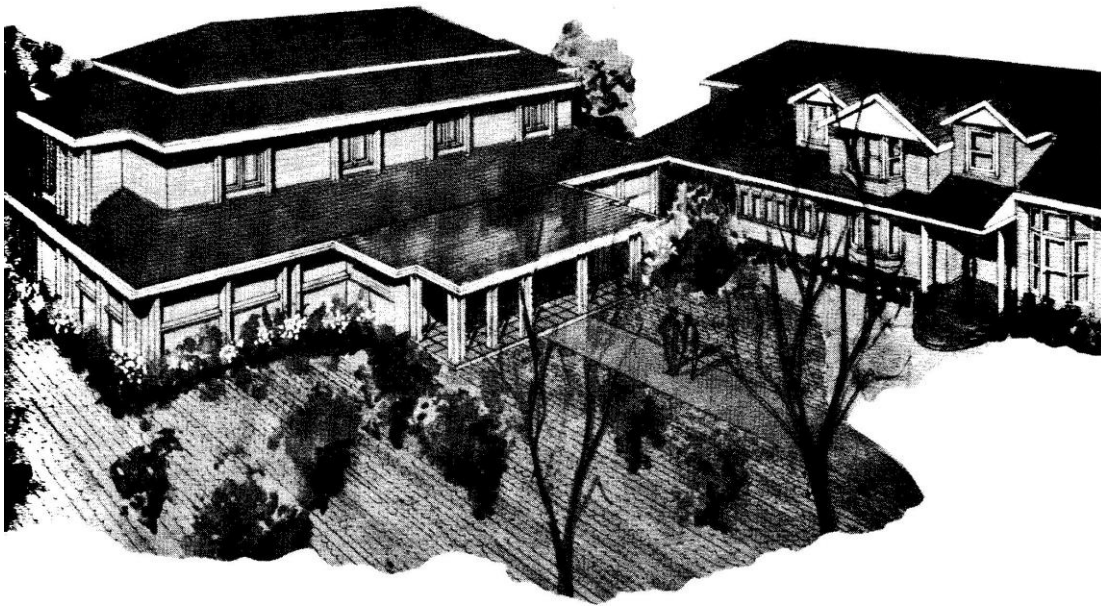


THE AUCKLAND BRIDGE CLUB



Foundation Days . . . and After

By D. W. Lochore

*“What vigorous growth from cerebral causes springs,
What mighty contests rise from humble things”.*

– Alexander Pope (almost, with apologies.)

This memoir must not be considered formal history, let alone a complete and official record. It has been compiled to accompany the formal opening of the Auckland Bridge Club's new property in Remuera on 11 September 1971. The sources are the first minute book of the club and the recollections of members.

Just 40 years ago, plus one week – 18 September 1931 – a group of six held a meeting in the New Zealand Insurance Company's building, Queen Street, to decide to found the Auckland Bridge Club. The six were termed “a committee” but who appointed them is not recorded. The sheet recording the proceedings is pasted on to page one of the first minute book of the club and it states that those present were Mr. J. F. Hosking, Mrs. J. Robb, Mrs. Bilton, Captain H. C. Barnes, Mr. H. Meltzer and the Secretary.

The name of the secretary is not stated, nor is it clear who wrote these minutes. The handwriting is stylish and quite different from any other entries in the book.

The foundation secretary, in whose writing the minutes of the next nine meetings of the committee are set down, was conceivably a better bidder at the bridge table than an accurate speller of English. Some of the proceedings are termed “minnets” and the club's book is inscribed with a word which can be deciphered as “minnet”, “mimiuet” or “minuet” – the reader can take his choice. Minuet or no, the early history of the club was assuredly not stately.

The young club faced all sorts of difficulties; it lacked money for years and a president for five months. What it had was debt, which proved a haunting problem for years. How the club acquired this debt is not clear. A reasonable supposition is that a founder or founders of the group that developed into the Auckland Bridge Club, Incorporated, bought unwisely and too well in furnishings and books. The furniture which became an immediate embarrassment to a succession of committees was not bridge tables and chairs, but a table which proved too big to move from the New Zealand Insurance Company's building to the club's first home in His Majesty's Arcade and a large suite which, on 6 June 1932, the Farmers' Trading Company was stated to be prepared to take back and thereby reduce its account (debit unspecified) by £25. A further £8 was also offered for a small suite, with 7s. for each chair returned.

The issue concerning the return of the large suite was debated at a special general meeting of the club on 27 June 1932. The minutes laconically report: “*Proposal lost*”.

It seems reasonable to infer that no one really wanted to be president of an insolvent club.

The meeting which adopted the constitution and rules was held on 5 October 1931. Seventeen members and two visitors were present, with Mr. Meltzer in the chair. But no president was elected. On 19 October the committee (Mr. Tileman in the chair, Captain Barnes, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Meltzer and the Secretary) approved taking rooms 41 and 42 in His Majesty's Arcade for club premises. At the same meeting it was decided to offer the presidency to Mr. B. H. Bennett, but he did not consent to take office until the following February.

At the same meeting comes the first evidence of the value of the furniture in this entry: "It was decided to value assets at £100 (last year £115 10s.)".

The sum owing to the Chess Club was for monthly rent for its premises in His Majesty's Arcade which the club had decided to share, as an economy, two months earlier. They were to be the club headquarters until July 1936, when it was decided to move to new rooms in Pacific Buildings at a rental of £1 a week from 1 September.

By 1936 the club was round the corner. Debit balances are still reported fairly frequently in the monthly minutes. But the nip and tuck days were plainly over.

Mr. Morgan and his cohorts reaped their reward in membership growth. What faith they must have had! At 12 December 1932, the membership was recorded at 45; by November 1934, this had dwindled to 27. But this figure must have proved rock bottom. From about the middle of 1936, the minutes regularly record the nomination and acceptance of new members – sometimes in twos and threes and sometimes in a dozen or more.

The club remained at Pacific Buildings (demolished for the Auckland Savings Bank) until 1959, when it moved (not without strong opposition) to its own site and buildings at the top of Wakefield/Airedale Streets. Now the club with a tally believed to be the largest membership in the world has moved again to what is expected to be its permanent home.

The new quarters in Remuera are such that the founders of 1931 would surely have imagined that they were seeing visions and dreaming dreams.

In a formal history of the club many names would be set down for contributions of one sort or another. This sketch cannot contain them. But two more must be mentioned.

The first name occurs initially in the club records in the minutes of 1 June 1937. Here are set down the names of 27 new members proposed by Mr. Morgan and seconded by Mr. C. D. Warren (who was later a president). There are illustrious names among them in Auckland bridge history, but none more honoured than the simple entry "Miss Coutts".

Did anyone do more for tournament bridge in Auckland than this lady from Devonport whose name became inseparable from the club in ensuing years? As club secretary (1943-56) and tournament director of great experience and effortless authority, her contribution must surely rank with that of Polly Morgan. The Friday afternoon tournament which began with half a dozen tables and now attracts two large sections is still her special charge and equally a monument in her own lifetime to personal achievement.

Finally is the name of Mr. W. F. ("Bill") Williams, the club president who laboured mightily to move the club from rented quarters to the first home of its own in Airedale Street. The expansion which followed the move of 1959 proved spectacular and dramatic.

Now in its new and splendid surroundings, the club salutes the names of Morgan, Coutts, Williams, and many with them who have brought to fruition such tangible evidence of the growth and strength of the game in Auckland.