

# A Piece of History

By Patrick Jourdain



I first came to Cardiff in 1964 and joined the privately-owned Cardiff Bridge Club in The Walk. It had about 16 tables and a tiny bar, and the owner was Ted Livermore. I gave bridge lessons there, and one student, Tony Casey, later became captain of Wales. In 1973 a promotion in my job with British Steel took me to Glasgow.

The Cardiff Bridge Club was a success. Increasingly, members arriving a little late were turned away as it was full. In 1974 a group of Ladies within the Cardiff club, called the Bennett Group (after the woman who shot her husband playing bridge) decided to try to set up a members' club. Their leader, June Jones, had contacts at Welsh Brewers who suggested the vacant top floor of the Great Western Hotel in St. Mary St. The Ladies, including Myra Morris, Mary Knapton, Estelle Ash, and others, raised a couple of thousand pounds and then went public on their idea, raising more capital and help from other members and the Brewery. The old Cardiff Bridge Club wished to retain its name and the new club was called the South Glamorgan Bridge Club. The founding members of the new club signed a seven-year lease and set to, decorating the new premises which had several rooms with capacity for 25 tables and a big bar.

On Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1974 the club opened. It was an immediate success, attracting most of the members from the old Cardiff Bridge Club which closed a couple of weeks later. Club nights attracted as many as 18 tables, and despite staff problems, the club began paying off the debt to the Brewery. The Club hosted a couple of Camrose Matches. Despite being in Glasgow, I retained contact with my friends at the club and learned in 1976 from June Jones that they were hoping to find a full-time manager. I was interviewed, offered the job and then, after working out six months notice at British Steel, moved back to Cardiff on the weekend of 30/31<sup>st</sup> March 1977. I was playing for Scotland in the Camrose Match against Wales in the Club. Scotland won the match and the Camrose Trophy, and the next day I became Manager of the South Glamorgan BC.

The Club prospered, and occasionally we had almost a hundred people in the club at one time. One unusual ruling I had to make as Tournament Director came the night that David Johnson brought his pet python to the club, wrapped around his waist, hidden within his cardigan. I was called to the table by a worried-looking member who complained she was unable to concentrate. The play of the hand had just begun when the python stuck its head out of David's cardigan and looked straight at her. David Johnson's protestations that it was a very friendly python had no effect. The lady was unable to play a card. I ruled that the python represented "an undue inconvenience to another contestant" and awarded an adjusted score.

# A Piece of History (continued)

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All loans were repaid and by 1980 with a year to run on the lease the Club had a few thousand pounds in the bank. After some abortive attempts at finding new premises, a member, David Ronson, suggested the top floor of Aberdare House, a building he owned in Mount Stuart Square, which had recently become vacant. In mid-1981 the decision to move to the Docks came just before the Birmingham riots. There was some copycat trouble in Butetown, the Club Committee had second thoughts, and recommended to the members a change of mind. At a crucial General Meeting of the Club the members decided to go ahead and the Committee resigned, virtually en bloc. As Manager, with a new Committee and a divided club, I had to organise the move. But the members rallied round, we decorated the new premises, and moved in with a ten year lease in the second half of 1981.

The new venue, opposite the Cardiff Exchange, was a success despite some worries about the safety of cars. With a capacity of only 18 tables we often had tables playing in the bar, and when half the floor below became vacant, we took that over. Some nights we had more than a hundred people in the club. At the same time the Exchange Club for businessmen, in the basement of the Exchange, closed down. Their snooker table was put in part of our new space, and the Bridge Club did lunches for their members working in Mount Stuart Square. These lunches often went on until it was almost time to get ready for the evening duplicate. And after the duplicate there was sometimes poker sessions lasting into the early hours. It was long hours for the Manager!

One idea whose time may come again was the weekends I organised at the Cliff Hotel, Gwbert on the west coast of Wales, which were enjoyed by members, and brought those who attended different club nights, and so rarely met, together.

In August 1985 I decided to go into business on my own, resigned as Manager, and launched the Cardiff School of Bridge. Some members feared I was setting up in competition, but they soon realised that it was a teaching exercise only, and the Members Club would benefit from the new players.

By 1989 the Club was actively seeking new premises. By then I was a Committee member and recall Nick Huggett suggesting the badminton room at his bowls club in Penylan as a possible new home. At first we were sceptical but when the club warmed to the idea, Colin Smith and I negotiated the merger of the two clubs. We moved in April 1990, changed our name back to Cardiff Bridge Club, and the rest you know.

Patrick Jourdain 28<sup>th</sup> September 1999