

Palmerston North Bridge Club

President's Annual Report 2020

It is my pleasure to present the President's Annual Report for 2020 and, particularly, to present it following such a tumultuous year. It is only in reviewing all the Club communications over the year that it is evident how much the COVID pandemic affected our playing programme. But perhaps unexpectedly, I also get the sense that it cemented our relationships with each other and the Club. It also allowed for some heroic actions by many of our members. My report is presented chronologically so we can all relive the experience!

January: The Club kicked off with busy Summer Bridge sessions on Monday afternoons and Thursday evenings. It was great to see so many people – between 8 and 11 tables - continuing to play through the summer. The Club Rooms were given a Spring Clean – the carpet was cleaned (thanks to Anne Gordon and Morgan Booker) and we took possession of the beautiful playing supplies cabinet made for us by master craftsman/member, Martin Carryer.

February: The Playing Programme started slowly. The new programme had initially moved the Tuesday Open session to Monday and replaced it on Tuesday evenings with a "Social" evening. However, it became obvious that this was not going to work for our senior players so Tuesday Open sessions were reinstated. The Social Evenings have proved very popular and we have retained them in the Playing Programme for 2021. The Committee was preoccupied with preparing the Annual Report and Accounts for the AGM.

March: Started off like any other month! We had started a new lessons group and monthly competitions were well underway. Two very successful mentoring sessions with one of our Gold Grand Masters, Bob Hurley, as part of the "Social" Tuesdays, had taken place. On 13 March, the Committee issued notice of the AGM which included a note about extra handwashing needed to try and control the spread of COVID-19. A week later the Club was closed under Alert Level 4 as the country went into national lockdown.

April: And so, we started to play online! The international bridge community responded to lockdowns by moving activities online and New Zealand was no exception. Many of us began playing on BBO for the first time and the popularity of Auckland Bridge Club's initiative to run nightly tournaments kicked off a number of other online events.

During those early weeks of lockdown, I remember feeling uncertain about the future. People react differently to crises, but I am proud of how our Club and our Committee responded. Everyone was amazing. I do not want to single out individuals, but I do want to acknowledge two of our heroes at this point:

Committee member, Tony Fayerman, went so far above and beyond expectations to help us all stay safe. He set up a hand sanitiser factory in his garage – yes, in his garage – and supplied our "at risk" members (and let's face it – that is most of us!) with steady supplies.

Our lessons tutor and de facto Junior Mentor, Jack James, continued teaching lessons online and also established a process using Discord whereby our members could play online via BBO but also chat with each other at the same time. I know this was a sanity-saver for many of our members.

May: Jack and Lorraine began to run a Club Swiss Pairs tournament twice a week which supplemented the ABC events and the casual arrangement via BBO/Discord, available to all our members at any time. Sadly, our Junior and Intermediate tournaments were cancelled due to the lockdown.

However, we started to see the light at the end of the tunnel as New Zealand moved to Alert Level 3. News from around the world continued to be grim, but in Aotearoa we congratulated ourselves that our “Team of Five Million” approach had helped us escape the worst.

June: Lorraine and Jack had set up an online Teams event and Lorraine had worked with her Auckland counterpart to run a pairs event on BBO on Monday afternoons. However, in June we moved quickly through Alert Level 2 and back to Alert Level 1. The Club opened again for the last two weeks of June and returned to the normal playing sessions.

July: We held our deferred AGM on 2 July as part of the first playing session of the month – a bit of a milestone. The new committee immediately swung into action to organise the National 15A Pairs event which was held over the last weekend of July. Clearly having been starved of national tournaments, we had a very healthy 20 tables with players from throughout New Zealand.

At this point, I want to mention another of our heroes – or rather an heroic group. Committee member, Robyn Anderson, undertook to organise all the catering for this two-day event and gathered together a group of our members as our “Catering Team”. Their mission was to cater for our tournaments within the established “commercial” budgets and donate any surplus back to the Club. The National 15A Pairs event was their first triumph: between them, they organised two morning teas, two afternoon teas, two lunches and after-play bar snacks. The Team went on to cater for the Open Swiss Pairs tournament in October and the Christmas Cheer tournament in December. Their catering has been outstanding, and our accounts show the value of their contribution to Club funds. Thank you so much to our Catering Team.

August: In mid-August, a community outbreak of COVID in Auckland sent the rest of the country into an Alert Level 2 lockdown. My thanks to our Directors, Lorraine, Val, Julie, Liz, and Graeme, for continuing to work through this Level 2 lockdown with the additional stresses of implementing the strict Level 2 protocols that enabled us to stay open. You did a magnificent job – thank you.

September: We continued playing throughout the Level 2 lockdown which ended in late September. Our members made their own decisions about whether or not to play under these conditions and our table numbers halved throughout Level 2. This, alongside the complete closure under Levels 3 and 4, impacted on our table money for the 2020 year. Congress was cancelled, and our Open Swiss Pairs tournament had to be relocated to October.

October: What a relief to be back at Level 1 with session table numbers creeping back up to pre-COVID levels. During the first half of the month, the Club rooms were transformed into an Advance Polling Station for the deferred general election. This meant that our day-time sessions were held in the back room of the Club, but it also means we were able to recoup a substantial amount of revenue lost from cancelled venue hire bookings during the lockdowns. We held our deferred Open Swiss Pairs tournament in mid-October, and we held it in two sections – Open and Restricted Open. We had 27 tables – again indicative of how much people had missed the opportunities to play at Congress. On the last Friday in October, we hosted Feilding Bridge Club at the NZ-wide Pairs event sponsored by Babich Wines.

November: our most serious competitive month – the Club Championships. Congratulations to all our Club Champs but a special shout out to everyone who played outside their grade/comfort zone and took on the Championship Challenge. In Committee, we agreed that we needed to revisit our Club grading (at about the same time that NZ Bridge did the same thing and “demoted” Open players with fewer than 100 A+B points back to Intermediate grade). The important thing about the grading is that it encourages as many people as possible to play as much as possible and this will be at the forefront of our minds when we make any recommendations for change in 2022.

December: Party time! We held our Daytime Xmas Party, our Club Prizegiving Party, and our Christmas Cheer Tournament Party. All these events were successful NOT LEAST because of the wonderful support from all the Committee and the membership. And another couple of heroes to thank: Jenny Kelland for being a cakebaker extraordinaire and Liz Burrows for (yet again) producing such beautifully wrapped prizes for Christmas Cheer. My thanks to everyone who helped in any way and to those of you who took part in any (or all) of them.

I would also like to acknowledge Committee member, Anne Gordon, who undertook to run a block course of lessons over five afternoons in one week in mid-December. We had been wondering if this would suit a certain demographic more than 10 weekly evening lessons. The group included 4 new members, two relatively new members who decided they needed to re-do the lessons and some supporters who helped Anne with delivery and mentoring. It seems that this format does have a niche market.

The Committee

I would like to thank the Committee for all their support and hard work. Even though we have been closed for much of the year – and maybe even because of it – we have been busy planning. A Club like ours – where we are managing a building as well as running our bridge activities – involves a lot of work. The Committee has been working on Position Descriptions which hopefully will help us and our successors when we take on a particular job. So far, we have:

Bar Manager	Programme Booklet Editor
Building Facilities	Programme Booklet Sponsors Coordinator
Biscuit and Milk Monitor	Recruitment/Lessons
Catering	Room Reps (*)
Fundraising	Secretary (*)
Garden Maintenance	Session Hosts
Hireage & Bookings	Tournament Secretary
Membership Secretary	Treasurer (*)
Newsletter editor	Vice-President (*)
President (*)	Welfare

(*) denotes MUST be a Committee member but other portfolios can – and often are – done by Club members. Some members hold several responsibilities but at least sharing the load means not so much falls on the shoulders of a few people. It also means that if anyone does want to volunteer for a job, then they will know what they are taking on, and that it does not have to include attending Committee meetings.

In addition, we have paid positions for:

Administrator (Honorarium)

Cleaner

Session Directors (Daytime and Evening)

During the latter part of the year, the Committee undertook the annual review of our paid position descriptions and we are working through potential changes to the Cleaner and Administrator positions.

The Committee meeting in January 2021 was devoted to strategic planning for the Club's future. As noted previously, maintaining our building takes a considerable effort (and regular expense). Our main strategic priority for the next three years will be to increase revenue from rental of our rooms. The Committee is still considering what structure or position(s) might best achieve this goal.

Finally

There are always too many people to thank for their outstanding contribution - I have already named a few of our heroes but there are so many more!

Julie Bunnell has been an outstanding Vice-President, having undertaken and achieved some amazing work on the Positions reviews and Portfolio descriptions for which I am very grateful. Julie is not able to continue in this role now she has assumed the presidency of Hokowhitu Bridge Club, however, fortunately she is willing to remain on the Committee. Our new secretary, Gayle Leader, has heroically tried to make sense of our meetings and keep a record of our important decisions and actions. As any Committee member will know, this is never an easy job and Gayle has risen to the challenge magnificently. Our new treasurer, Grant Elliott, has made excellent progress in managing and presenting our accounts – thank you, Grant, your work has really helped the Committee to establish priorities in managing our finances. A special thank you as well to our member, Alan Martin who has reviewed the annual accounts for 2020 as a voluntary contribution to the Club.

Big shout outs to our members who have undertaken “position descriptions” ex-Committee, to Susan Baty who has managed the venue hire for many years now, to Ray Kemp who has prepared and edited our bi-monthly newsletters, to Jan Whyte and Kay Townsley who do our shopping to keep biscuit and milk supplies in stock, to Dianne Hunter who sends best wishes cards to our members who are indisposed, to Lynn Wilson, Glyn Robinson and Carolyn Brodie for dealing boards, to Carolyn Brodie and Michele Kaye for maintaining the gardens, and to Lorraine Stachurski, Julie Bunnell, Val Pain, Liz Burrows, Graeme Donaldson and Bryan Northcott for directing our playing sessions.

I would like to thank Lorraine Stachurski who yet again has supplied outstanding administration, and Kate McNamara who has been our long serving Cleaner, prior to retiring at the end of January 2021.

Of course, many thanks to the Room Reps and Session Hosts - you have made a real difference to how our sessions run for the enjoyment of everyone. As always, we are so grateful to all members who have supported the Club in so many ways throughout the year.

Denise Servante

President

March 2021