

A Brief History of the Wagga Wagga Bridge Club

In April 1976, Jan Rava and Yvonne Colhoun attended the inaugural Griffith Bridge Congress where they met John Brockwell of Canberra. John suggested that a bridge club be formed in Wagga and offered support from himself and the Canberra Bridge Club to do so.

On returning to Wagga, Jan and Yvonne enlisted the support of Frank Rava and Alf and Moira Sundstrom. Local players were then contacted to ascertain expressions of interest. The response was enthusiastic and a public meeting was held at the RSL Club on July 17th, 1976. Twenty three people attended the meeting and it was decided to form the Wagga Wagga Bridge Club. A committee was elected with Alf Sundstrom as President and his wife, Moira, as Secretary.

The support promised by John Brockwell was duly forthcoming and he travelled to Wagga for several weeks, bringing with him boards, score sheets, etc loaned by the Canberra Club. The initial sessions were played at the Education Centre with John giving instruction on playing, organization and scoring of duplicate bridge.

Shortly thereafter, the Club moved to the Riverine Club with one session per week being played on Wednesday evenings. At the AGM in July 1977, it was reported that there were 80 members – a significant increase.

The Riverine Club remained the playing venue until early 1983. At a special meeting in September 1981, a motion to move to the RSL Club was defeated. However, at the AGM in 1983 a motion to change the venue to 12 Docker Street was carried and the move made soon after. This room behind Bal Krishan's surgery served the club well, but by 1986 numbers had increased and a larger area was needed.

In April 1986, it was strongly suggested that the Club buy "Kingdom Hall" in Cullen Road, which was for sale by auction at the time. The idea was finally abandoned mainly due to a lack of funds.

On the 17th June, 1986, at a special general meeting, the motion to change the venue to the Wagga Leagues Club was carried and the Club moved there. For more than 18 years, the Club enjoyed an excellent relationship with the Leagues Club. The help and wonderful support they gave to the Club at the time was very much appreciated. Playing sessions increased to three times per week with very good attendances at all sessions and a membership base in 2001 of 148. In 1998, the Wagga Wagga Bridge Club was incorporated within the Leagues Club to become "The Wagga Leagues Bridge Club".

During the first 25 years several professional teachers conducted lessons in Wagga. These included Dick Cummings, Ron Klinger, John Roberts and Sean Mullamphy. There were also Directors courses given by professional directors and numerous local members conducted fairly regular beginner's courses.*

On the 5th July 2004, creditors voted to place the Wagga Leagues Club into liquidation after the club lost its financial support. The Bridge Club had now lost its venue that it had used for nearly 20 years. The Bridge Club committee searched for another venue and settled on using the facilities of the Commercial Club. However, years of being on such a good thing with the Leagues Club were not to be repeated at this location. The relationship was not always easy and in 2007, the Club again searched for a new home.

The Wagga Wagga City Council came to the party with an arrangement for the Club to rent the vacant Scout hall in Bolton Street. It even encouraged the Club to apply for what were ultimately, successful grants to help with the cost of renovating the building. The Wagga Wagga Bridge Club clubhouse was officially opened on 27th September, 2006 by Frank Rava, one of the founding members of the Club. The Club continues to enjoy an excellent relationship with the Wagga Wagga City Council. Having its own premises, even if they are rented, has given it the freedom to make further improvements to both the venue and the way that bridge is played in Wagga Wagga.

The members of the Club and visitors enjoy a very good venue both socially and competitively. It has all the modern equipment that is needed to run a large bridge club these days and even boasts an excellent web site. As a not for profit organisation, the Club has been able with prudent management and the significant assistance of the many volunteers over the years, to be placed in a sound and stable condition despite some turbulent events in 2013.

While the Club has organised and hosted an annual Congress in August since 1978, in recent times improvements in the clubhouse facilities have meant that it is able to be used as the venue for a congress with over 100 competitors. Competition sessions these days are held 5 times per week with a mixture of daytime and evening sessions to cater for a variety of needs.

The Club owes much of its existence to the efforts of so many people who have contributed their time, effort, labour and financial resources. Over the years, these would easily number in the many hundreds.

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* Early years based on "25 Years on" by Yvonne Colhoun, 2001