

## TE AROHA BRIDGE CLUB – CELEBRATING THEIR DIAMOND JUBILEE

### Fame, Fortune and a Future

The year of 1953 evokes special memories for many. The Coronation of a new Queen, Sir Edmund Hillary reaching the top of Mount Everest, and, in a small rural community in the Waikato, Te Aroha Bridge Club was born. The latter may not have made national headlines but it was a brave step forward for the town and the culmination of hard work by its founding members, some of whom remain associated with the club with some of their descendants still playing there. More about the family dynasties to come but first a look back at those beginnings in 1953.

A band of keen bridge enthusiasts got together and started the club in the National Party rooms. They then moved to a Guest House on the corner of Russell Ave and Main Street. Among those pioneers were the parents of Sir Peter Snell. Whilst Peter was pounding the streets of Te Aroha, his parents were busy laying the foundation of a club to serve the community for the next 60 years. From these humble beginnings, they moved to bigger rooms above a picture theatre. In the '50's thru to the '70's members "dressed" for bridge. The cinema-goers would come out to find club members arriving in suit and tie or evening dress with furs for their bridge session. Members recall when a lady first turned up at a club night wearing then fashionable culottes, which was very much frowned upon, and a quiet word was had with the offending member to explain the error of her ways!

In 1978, Gordon Body, a generous benefactor of the club, lent them \$10,000 to buy the Body Buildings which were formerly tea rooms. The double fireplace was no longer needed but the bricks from it were used to make the small courtyard in the club's garden which is still used today. The members engaged in furious fund raising, including hiring the nearby second-hand shop for several weeks to sell items made or donated by members as well as baking and raffles. They were able to repay the loan in three years and the clubrooms were theirs. Those rooms, opposite the domain, are still used by the Te Aroha club today and look out to the famous spa that attracts so many visitors to the town.

Being the first club in the region, they thrived. In the early '80's there were over 70 members. Players came to Te Aroha bridge club from all over the Waikato. Their Christmas parties were, and are still, legendary. The club spawned the Jacob family bridge dynasty. Jack and Connie Jacob, their daughter Carol Wilson, and their grandson Tom Jacob, together with Stephanie and their son Nick Jacob, trace their roots back to Te Aroha. Indeed Carol remembers that her parents taught her and her

then future husband to play bridge. Maurice seemed to be more interested in the card game. So Carol thought she had better learn as well! Tom's father, Don, was also taught by Jack and Connie. He made Tom, Tom's mother and sister learned. His sister never took to the game but Tom's mother, Margaret, still plays at the Waikato Club ... and for Tom, great success was to follow. The famous Bruce Bell had a soft spot for Te Aroha club and played there many times, his name on the honour boards still at the club. Barry Jones, Gold Grandmaster, played regularly at the club when stationed there for work and Te Aroha now boasts its current family dynasty with the Kalma family. Hermanna Kalma, together with her son and daughter Guy and Anna, and their grandson Jacob, aged just 15, are all keen supporters and players at the club today.

When Matamata Bridge Club began, it was the Te Aroha Club that lent their support to help them become established. In more recent years, as Te Aroha has suffered the fate of many clubs nationwide with dwindling numbers, it has been Matamata members who have strongly supported Te Aroha and continue to do so.

In 2012, the club decided it was long overdue for action and started to take steps to make not only their celebration of their Diamond Jubilee extra special, but to try and put their club back on the bridge playing map of New Zealand and to relaunch and rebrand itself to ensure its regrowth and future for another 60 years. Enthusiasm and help arrived in the form of Bridge Babe Jane Stearns from Cambridge who extolled the club to "sex up their bridge." As a consequence, the club has undergone some radical and exciting changes since the end of last year. They have a new website at [www.te-aroha.bridge-club.org](http://www.te-aroha.bridge-club.org) which just goes to show how a small club can "Go Large." They applied successfully for a grant and now are the proud owners of a new dealing machine. The clubrooms have undergone an interior facelift and are looking more modern with a bright red feature wall and their window signage has been updated. Sir Peter Snell has sent a message of support to the members and is cheering them all the way. The club enters the Waikato Interclub teams trial at the end of June for the first time in its history. They hosted a heat of the Waikato Area Pairs at the end of May and will be hosting the Spa Town Teams on Saturday 13th July. Look out for the poster with their original "When Harry Met Sally" theme. They need the support of clubs from around the country entering teams so please do register to join this event.

Down to their last 10 members and fortnightly sessions at the end of December 2012, they have increased to weekly sessions with 5 tables by April and have started a new weekly daytime session too. Existing club members are

embracing their new image from their orgasmic teams poster to their club T-shirts inspired by the NZCBA request for new slogans which has produced for Te Aroha “Wham, Slam, Thank You Partner.” They have joined the X-Club and with their Bridgemates and the ultramodern results service hosted on their new website, the existing membership is revitalised with enthusiasm for the game. Lessons began in May and, with around 20 keen new players, the vibrancy at the club is there for all to experience.

Lucky enough to have their own garden, they plan a celebratory garden party for their Diamond Jubilee bash. The members are justifiably proud of their heritage which they celebrate this year but they are now also looking to their future and at the moment that future is looking sparkingly diamond bright.