



Torquay Bridge Club Inc.

The first 21 years

A History

by

Kym Fraser and Liz Fowler

The period covered in this history is from 2001 – 2022.

Members, both past and present were contacted for help in preparing this history of the Club.

We thank those who responded.

The Origins of the Club

Fay Harrison, a long-term resident of Torquay, recalls teaching history at Spring Creek Community House, (SCCH), in Price Street, Torquay as a Geelong U3A class. Fay had been playing bridge socially and very much wanted to teach a U3A bridge class in Torquay, but lacked the confidence to do so alone. While at SCCH, one lunch time she struck up a conversation with Elizabeth Wapshott, another long-term resident of Torquay and U3A member. Elizabeth explained that she was an expert bridge player and would be happy to teach a beginners' bridge class with Fay. While the 'Bridge for Beginners' class started in 2001, Fay left the class after a few weeks.

Elizabeth encouraged people with whom she was playing Mah jong to join the bridge class and Helena Bourke, and Bernie and Isabel Mahon were three of the first people to enrol. Isabel remains a member of the Club as of the publication of this document in January 2023. Elizabeth continued to teach the class until 2004. From 2005 until 2012 she taught 'Advanced Bridge' under the auspices of U3A Geelong. From 2007 – 2010 Mark Cline taught the 'Bridge for Beginners' U3A class. In 2012 Elizabeth once again taught the 'Bridge for Beginners' U3A class in Torquay as well as 'Contract Bridge'. The latter 'class' was essentially the playing bridge group.

The Early Years

Spring Creek Community House was the base for both bridge lessons and play until renovations to enlarge the building meant it had to close. Bridge moved next door to the Torquay Improvement Association (TIA) hall in Price Street Torquay for a couple of years. When the Community House re-opened Elizabeth decided not to return there to play and bridge moved to the Grant Pavilion, a Council owned property in Torquay. The building was not ideal because the playing room was on the first floor and occasionally the lift did not work. So the Group moved back to the TIA hall until 2014.

Council buildings that the group used closed during the school holidays and members fondly remember playing in people's homes during these breaks, sharing food and enjoying the social side of the group. "This was always a lot of fun and we would accommodate up to 16 – 18 people scattered around the house".

At the end of 2014, U3A Geelong discontinued paying the rent for the TIA hall and bridge moved again, this time to the Torquay Senior Citizens Club (TSCC) hall until 2020. For the first time since its inception in 2001, the group was no longer under the auspices of U3A Geelong. All members paid a fee to become members of the TSCC and therefore the rent for the hall was free.



Photo 1: Clara Fletcher, Isabel Mahon, Anne Harvey and Helena Bourke enjoy playing socially at a member's home

Memorable Members

Members surveyed identified three former members as particularly memorable. These are:

"Gentleman George"

"We all liked 'Gentleman George' as he was called. He suffered with Parkinson's and became increasingly immobile, he spoke so gently we struggled to hear him. But he was unfailingly polite, loved his bridge and many of us went to his funeral."

Nils

Another member with an interesting story was Nils, who trained as a butcher in Sweden, didn't speak much English but answered an ad in his local paper, and ended up in regional Victoria working in an abattoir. "His style of bridge was 'boom or bust' so there was some overbidding but occasionally he'd pull off a real coup. He suffered a severe stroke but with the help of his wife Lyn, came to bridge in his wheelchair determined to enjoy a game. As time went on both his English and his play deteriorated but we welcomed his presence".

Cousin Mary

'Cousin Mary', was a relative of another member and was called this to distinguish her from our other Mary (Watson). She had a great passion for bridge – and the biscuits to go with it! She was a great addition to the Club and we were all sad at her passing.



Photo 2. Anne Harvey, Cheryl Merritt, Rob Kain and Nils Wyren at Christmas lunch

The ‘Club’ is born –

On 9th January 2012 at the general meeting of the U3A Geelong bridge playing group, members approved the formation of the Torquay Bridge Club (the Club) which was to be affiliated with the Victoria Bridge Association¹ (VBA). The Club President was Elizabeth Wapshott, Vice President Val Clarke, Secretary Glenifer Howell and Treasurer Helen Casey.

Eight days later on January 17th 2012, an account was opened at the ANZ bank in the name of the ‘Torquay Bridge Club’. Early in 2012 the Club became affiliated with the Australian Bridge Federation (ABF). Their records show that the Club was called the Torquay U3A Bridge Club.

From 2012 – 2019 Helen Casey provided hand written financial records which we still have today. Twenty-two members were charged a \$20 annual subscription fee. The Club remained a ‘class’ of U3A Geelong, which paid for the venue on the Monday afternoon of play until the end of 2014.

Initial expenses included tables, side tables, boards to hold the cards and sweets for Christmas bags. On February 27th 2012 the Club submitted their first masterpoints (MP) to the ABF. Mary Watson’s partner Bill Rogers, who played bridge at the Ocean Grove Bridge Club was given the ASE scoring program by Margaret Wiley from the same Club. Mary brought home the travellers from the Monday afternoon play at Torquay and Bill entered the scores manually into the program, providing both the results and Masterpoints for the Club. Bill did that work for the Club until 2014 when Mary took over that task and the role of ABF liaison, a role which she still held at the publication of this document.

Members recall that four and occasionally five tables played on a Monday afternoon. Income in 2012 was \$2948.48 and expenses, which didn’t include venue costs for the Monday afternoon, totalled \$1019.55 with a profit of \$1929.43. The Club was off to a flying start in its first year as an ABF affiliated Club.

Incorporation, the Covid Years, a New Venue and Club Transformation

2020 – Incorporation

At the AGM held on January 20th 2020 there was a general discussion about whether the Club should be, or needed to be, incorporated. Amongst the reasons given in favour of the proposal were that the Club would have a set of Consumer Affairs Rules to follow, and that as an incorporated club, if there was any issue, only the Club could be sued, not the members. Arguments against the proposal were that ABF insurance and TSCC insurance already covered the Club, Club members and visitors and that the Club would have to pay rent for the TSCC venue if incorporated and therefore would need to raise table fees.

After the discussion the motion to incorporate was put to the members/affiliates present and members/affiliates voted 17:4 in favour of incorporation. The certificate of Incorporation for Torquay Bridge Club Inc was issued on 11th February 2020. From this point on the Club followed the Model Rules provided by Consumer Affairs Victoria.

On the 11th March 2020 a letter was sent from the TSCC Committee stating that as “Torquay Bridge Club,” not “Torquay Bridge Club Inc” had signed the original contract for venue hire, TBC Inc would need to sign a new contract for the venue and that the Monday afternoon that had been our playing afternoon since 2012, would no longer be available with effect from 24.3.2020. The same letter requested the removal of all stored equipment.

2020 – Covid

Within a week of receiving the TSCC letter, face-to-face bridge play ceased due, not to the loss of our venue, but to the 2020 Covid lockdowns. The first lockdown, called by the Federal Government, began on 31st March. As the year progressed there was a gradual lifting of some restrictions but no face-to-face bridge took place because the TSCC hall is owned by the Council and, even though many locations allowed limited numbers of people into their premises, Council owned buildings remained closed.

Face-to-face bridge was finally able to resume on 22nd November 2020. During the months without play, many members started to play Bridge Base On-line (BBO). Although not possible to see each other during these sessions, using a telephone conference facility allowed groups of four players to talk together providing more of a social element to play. Many continue to play BBO today.

The Committee continued to meet between March and November, frequently consulting the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Covid website, and making decisions on behalf of the Club. Those decisions included extending 2020 membership until the end of 2021, moving the Club bank account from the ANZ to the Bendigo Bank so that online payments with two signatures could be made, determining fees for beginners’ classes and formulating an approach for the marketing of the Club.

¹ While the 2012 AGM minutes referred to affiliating with the VBA, clubs were affiliated with the Australian Bridge Federation and as a result with their state or territory bridge association.

After receiving the letter from the TSCC committee, members of the TBC Committee contacted a sample of members canvassing the possibility of playing on an afternoon other than Monday. Almost to a person the respondents declined to play on another afternoon.

The Treasurer, Kym Fraser, set about trying to find a new venue for the Club. The difficulty lay in finding a venue that would allow us to store our equipment, in particular our tables. Kym contacted several organisations, including the Surfcoast Council, and while told that they had numerous facilities that we could use, none had storage facilities for our equipment. While Kym was having no success finding a new venue, Val Clarke had her eye on the renovation of the Uniting Church rectory in Anderson Street. In November, the Committee signed a contract with the Uniting Church for the hire of Oak Tree Place (OTP) in Anderson street.

2021 – Oak Tree Place and Covid 19

In January 2021 a new Committee was nominated with Kym Fraser as President, Cathy Smith as Vice President and beginners Di More and Liz Fowler as Treasurer and Secretary. The Bridge Club moved to OTP and the year started well with 26 members and 4 visitors playing (seven and a half tables which was well above the pre covid table numbers). The move was well received by the members as OTP was large, filled with light, well cooled and heated, and it provided a lockable cupboard for our valuable equipment as well as storage space for our tables and side tables. We paid the princely sum of \$37.50 for an afternoon of play in 2021, rising to \$40 in 2022.

However, it was not long before Covid was again causing disruption to our face-to-face bridge as another Victoria wide lock down began from February 13th.



Photo 3: May 2021 afternoon tea break
Photo courtesy Robert Setterfield



Photo 4: Playing at Oak Tree Place
Photo courtesy Robert Setterfield

BBO playing resumed and the Committee met via Zoom to consider the ways in which play could safely resume once lock-downs were lifted. Supplies of hand sanitisers, disposable gloves, wipes and other products were purchased. A Covid Safe plan was devised, based on the Victorian suggested model. QR codes had by now become a part of everyone's day-to-day life and OTP instituted a QR for tenants to use. The layout of Oak Tree Place was measured so that numbers allowed on the premises could be confirmed. Throughout these months the Committee held regular Zoom meetings to discuss our playing options and to keep up to date with the ever-changing situation and DHHS Covid rules.

There was a further easing of restrictions and on 27th July OTP was open again and we resumed face-to-face play with a cap on numbers, compulsory mask wearing and hand sanitising. Members helped other members to register with the QR code as they arrived, until everyone became proficient at doing so.



In line with DHHS requirements, the Committee required people playing at OTP to be vaccinated and to wear masks unless they had a medical certificate. Initially we played across two tables, removing the table cloths. Tables and chairs were wiped with sanitizing wipes between each round. At the end of each session equipment and the toilets, light switches, door handles etc. were wiped down with sanitizing wipes. We did everything that we could to prevent the spread of Covid at our bridge afternoons. Only the truly dedicated played during this period.

Play was soon disrupted again by a “short, sharp” Victoria lock down in August. But the President was ready! Kym, Cheryl Brook, Andrew Hume and Sandra Walsh enrolled in a Real Bridge (RB) workshop to learn how to use the platform which allowed people to see and talk to each other while playing bridge. On 27th August the Club played a trial game in the RB platform for both our members and regional players who were registered to play in the Western Region Bridge Association (WRBA) Novice Competition which was to be hosted by the Torquay Bridge Club. The trial was a great success and soon afterwards many members and affiliates started to play on the RB platform at our regular playing times.

In September the Club provided free online play for Club members and affiliates in the RB platform. At the time the Committee wasn't sure how long we would play on RB but we played on Monday and Wednesday afternoons until

restrictions eased in late November. Through October and November the Committee used an honesty system for player payment. The RB platform continued to be used periodically during Club closures in early 2022 and since June 2022, Anne Hurst has held a weekly Thursday evening social RB session for the Club and visitors.

2021 – Transformation

It was during 2021 with our move to OTP that the Club transformed from a social bridge club to a contemporary 21st century bridge club. While the Committee had purchased a \$4500 dealing machine in 2020, we were first able to use the machine in 2021, providing pre dealt cards and hand records. Alan Fowler, Kym Fraser and Margaret Pearson attended the lesson on using the machine and Kym then wrote up detailed notes and encouraged others to join the dealing group. Initially four pairs dealt cards once a month and Alan took over as Dealing Coordinator as Kym moved onto learning about our next purchases, the Compscore2 and Bridgemates.

In May of that year the Club purchased 11 Bridgemates to replace the hand written travellers that we used to score the results of each hand. We also bought a scoring program called Compscore2 and again Kym learnt how to use this equipment, writing up detailed notes and showing Cheryl Brook, Sandra Walsh and Andrew Hume how to use it. The four became the Directors for our afternoon sessions.

2021 was a busy year for the Club with the Committee introducing table fee vouchers for a reduced cost of \$50 for 11 vouchers, an idea gleaned from the Ocean Grove Bridge Club. The Committee organised our inaugural Teams Championship and our first bridge expert session was taught by Mike Stokie from the Geelong Bridge Club. For the first time the Club hosted the Novice competition for the Western Region Bridge Association with 16 pairs participating from Clubs in the region. On the 10th March, after consulting with the membership the Committee started the very successful Wednesday afternoon duplicate session and towards the end of 2021, the relaxed bridge with a wine Friday afternoon session was introduced. Our catered Christmas lunch was held at OTP with 51 people in attendance. The Club subsidised the meal and drinks and in the afternoon, people played with a partner drawn from a hat.

2022

2022 was a year of further change and also of consolidation. The Committee introduced three additional Club championships: Beginner (5 or fewer Masterpoints [MPs]), Novice (50 or fewer MPs) and Open (every member and affiliate is eligible to play). The Oaks Challenge was also introduced. The competition ran from on the first Wednesday of every month from March through until December. To be eligible for this competition an individual needed to play with six different partners across a nine month period. The Committee allocated wonderful prizes for the Championships, with first place each winning \$100 gift vouchers for a local restaurant and second place each winning a set of eleven vouchers for play.



Photo 4: Christmas lunch 2022
Photo courtesy Di More

Denny Newland from the Geelong Bridge Club ran a most useful and enjoyable workshop on slam bidding with a fantastic turnout of 46 members and affiliates in attendance.

In the middle of the year the Committee documented what was involved in running of the Club. The vision, mission and aims were drafted along with an operational handbook. The documents were sent to the membership for comment. The idea was to provide in one 'living' document, the essential elements for running the Club.

By the end of 2022 we filled OTP at our Christmas lunch with 64 members and affiliates. Ginger Monkey again provided excellent catering. An enjoyable and memorable afternoon was had by all.

Membership from 2012

Table 1: Number of members and affiliates by year

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Members	16	20	22	25	29	28	25	20	30	58	70
Affiliates	6	7	?	3	?	3	5	7	7	15	12
TOTAL	22	27	22+	28	29+	31	30	27	37	73	82

'Members' refer to the people listed as Torquay Bridge Club ABF members.

'Affiliates' are registered as ABF members with another Club but affiliated with TBC Inc.

Table 1 shows how the membership grew, declined and grew again from 2012 to the present. (The authors of this history were unable to determine the number of affiliates in 2014 and 2016.) During 2020, we decided to do more in the area of marketing with the hope of growing the Club.

Table 1 illustrates the 'Covid years' marked a dramatic change in membership and not in the expected direction, growing from 27 members and affiliates at the end of 2019 to 82 at the end of 2022. This tripling of numbers was truly remarkable during a time when the vast majority of bridge clubs in Australia lost members during the Covid 19 pandemic. In the 2020 Marketing workshop run for the Torquay Bridge Club by Peter Cox from the ABF, Peter explained that the annual average decline for Australian Bridge Clubs was 10%. This statistic was pre the Covid years and is reflected in the ABF membership numbers for the Club from 2016 – 2019 which show a 30% decline over the three years.

The increase in numbers from and including 2020 was brought about by a lot of work. Kym recalls making a determined effort to market the Club at the start of 2020 before the Covid pandemic locked down Australia and the world. "I contacted the Surf Coast Times and they interviewed me and came to the Club to take photos. The resulting article, which advertised both the Club and the start of beginners' classes that Val Clarke and I ran from February that year, brought a dozen people to the classes. We started those classes face-to-face twice before in the second half of the year, I finished the classes with nine people who were willing to complete the classes through a combination of Zoom and the online platform BBO. All nine subsequently joined the Club."

By 2021 when it was possible to play face-to-face again with some regularity, people who had not played at the Club for years returned to play at the Club. Kym taught classes again in 2021 and 2022, increasing membership numbers by ten and six people respectively in those years. In the latter half of 2022 Geoff Warren took on the marketing of the Club primarily in Anglesea and Aireys Inlet, bringing a further five members and affiliates to the Club. Geoff recalls "speaking at Anglesea Probus, De Bortoli Wine Dinner, Friends of the Red Cross, Anglesea Community House, Aireys Inlet Hotel functions, Geelong Rotary and the Anglesea Bridge Club". Word of mouth about the transformation of the Club and the friendliness of the Club, as well as member recommendations, brought other established players to our Club.

Our Club is the smallest of the three ABF affiliated bridge clubs in our region. Before Covid struck Geelong Bridge Club had 250+ members/affiliates and Ocean Grove Bridge Club had 140+ members/affiliates. But by 2022, we were amazed to find that during 2022, our Club hosted the most tables of the three clubs on Monday afternoons. Tripling the membership during the Covid years was a truly remarkable feat.

Club finances

Income and expenses

Table 2: Financial information from 2012 – 2022 where records exist (all figures rounded to the nearest \$)

Year	Income	Expenditure	Profit / (loss)	Bank balance At year end	Term deposit At year end	Table fee income	Fees		
							Table	Membership	Affiliate
2012	\$2499	\$1020	\$1,479	\$1,479		\$1,756		\$20	
2013	\$2519	\$1213	\$1,306	\$2,785		\$1,589		\$20	
2014	\$3009	\$1617	\$1,393	\$4,178		\$2,244		?	
2015*									
2016**	\$1416	\$1022	\$394	\$1,544	\$7,072	\$1,310	\$3	\$25	
2017	\$4009	\$2089	\$1,920	\$3,391	\$7,145	\$2,947	\$5	\$30	
2018	\$3801	\$928	\$1,883	\$5,202	\$7,217	\$2,901	\$5	\$30	
2019	\$3227	\$1423	\$1,804	\$4,816	\$9,407	\$2,536	\$5/6	\$30	\$13
2020#	\$2511	\$7657	(\$5,146)	\$9,077		\$737	\$5/6	\$30	\$13
2021	\$12,793	\$13,475	(\$682)	\$8395	-	\$8910	\$5/6/4.54^	\$30	\$13
2022	\$16,149	\$17,162	(\$1013)	\$7382	-	\$9819	\$5/6/4.54	\$32	\$15

* No records could be found

** The financial records for the second half of the year only.

Club transformation and the Covid 19 pandemic begins.

^ Members and affiliates \$5 cash or \$50 for 11 vouchers = \$4.54, visitors paid \$6 cash.

Although the Club remained a 'class' of U3A Geelong until the end of 2014, from 2012 Club members paid both a membership fee to U3A as well as a membership fee to the Club, the latter presumably in order to pay the ABF and VBA capitation costs which were based on member numbers. As Table 2 indicates, in 2012 the fee was \$20 rising to \$32 in 2022. This increase in cost covered ABF, VBA and WRBA capitation fees. From 2012 until 2018 it appears as though affiliates paid the same membership fee as members even though their ABF/VBA/WRBA fees were paid by their home club. Affiliate fees appear to have been introduced in 2019.

Table fees were also charged from 2012. It's not clear from the records how much the fees cost in that first year, or if there was a different fee for visitors. Some members think that the table fees may have been \$3 in 2012, for everyone. By 2017 the table fee for everyone seems to have been \$5. Annual table fee income ranged between \$2000 and \$3000 between 2012 and 2019, and even though member numbers increased by approximately 30% in 2020, table fee income remained in that range because, of course, there was very little play because of the Covid 19 lockdowns. Expenses between 2012 and 2019 ranged from \$1000 to \$1700. In 2020, when we weren't playing, expenses increased by a factor of five to \$7657. At the end of 2019 the Club had accumulated \$16,000 and with membership agreement, in 2020 the Committee began to purchase the necessary equipment to become a fully functioning, contemporary bridge club. In 2020 the Committee spent \$5,500 purchasing a dealing machine and lap top.

In 2021, with a return to play for much of the year, and a doubling of member numbers, and the opening of Wednesday afternoon play, the income quadrupled. Along with this quadrupling of income came another marked increase in expenditure. The Club expenses grew to over \$13,000. Of course, with the doubling of members came the doubling of ABF and VBA capitation fees. Along with this increased expense was the purchase of scoring software, a server, bridgemates, website development and maintenance, and extra boards and cards for the increased sessions. The Club also paid for half of the cost of our catered Christmas lunch. A significant extra cost in that year was the payment of venue costs. From 2015 when the Club moved to the Torquay Senior Citizens Club (TSCC) hall in Price Street, all Club members also paid a \$10 membership fee to the TSCC and by doing so, the venue was provided for free. In 2020, the Club incorporated and in line with TSCC rules, we were required to pay for the venue. This made little difference to Club expenses in 2020 because there was so little face to face play that year. However, the venue cost increased from effectively \$0 in 2020 to approximately \$2,500 in 2021. Even so, the Club was able to maintain the table fees at \$5 per session for members and affiliates.

Committee positions from 2012

Table 3: Committee positions

Year	President	Vice President	Secretary	Treasurer
2012	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Gleniffer Howell	Helen Casey
2014	Elizabeth Wapshott	*	Jean Setterfield	Helen Casey
2015	Elizabeth Wapshott	*	Jean Setterfield	Gerard Casey
2016	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Jean Setterfield	Gerard Casey
2017	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Ian Pasquill	Helen Casey
2018	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Ian Pasquill	Helen Casey
2019	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Ian Pasquill	Helen Casey
2020	Elizabeth Wapshott	Val Clarke	Jean Setterfield	Kym Fraser
2021**	Kym Fraser	Cathy Smith followed by Jane Cotter	Liz Fowler	Di More
2022	Kym Fraser	Anna Miller	Anne Hurst	Di More

No records were available for 2013

* No Vice President is recorded as having been elected during this year

** Val Clarke was Acting President for one week before the January AGM that year.

From 2001 Elizabeth Wapshott ran the U3A bridge class that became the Torquay Bridge Club and in 2012 she became the inaugural President. She held that role until and including 2020. Val Clarke held the role of Vice President from 2012 until and including 2020 except for 2014 and 2015 when there appeared to be no Vice President for the Club. From 2014 – 2020 Jean Setterfield and Ian Pasquill held the role of Secretary in different years. As indicated earlier, the role of Treasurer was held by Helen Casey from 2012 – 2019 inclusive except for an 18 month period in 2015 and half of 2016 when Gerard Casey held the role.

In 2020 Kym Fraser was elected to the position of Treasurer and she was elected as President in 2021 and 2022. In 2021 and 2022 new faces took on the roles of Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. It appears from the records that the number of nominations have always matched the number of committee positions. In 2022 the Committee introduced a change to the role of President, limiting it to no more than two consecutive years.

What Next?

Torquay Bridge Club has undergone many changes over the years and now, rightly takes its place alongside more established local bridge clubs. What has not changed is the reputation that the Club has for being a very friendly and welcoming club.



Denny Newland's well attended workshop for the Club on the 24th of October, 2022 – photo by Kym Fraser