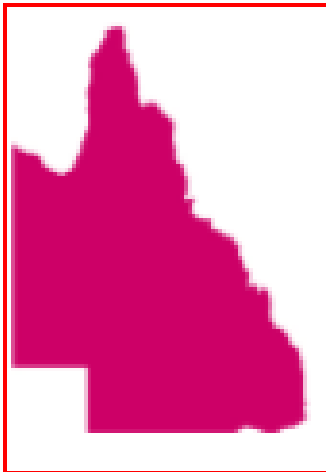


The Early Days of Queensland Bridge

Part Two

The Charity Bridge Clubs



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The Charity Bridge Clubs

In terms of bridge organisations, what was most novel about the period between 1927 and 1933 was the emergence of the charity bridge clubs in Brisbane. These met weekly at various spots in the city centre with the proceeds from the bridge going to charity. Some were associated directly with a specific charity. Others were independent and supported different causes from time to time.

Most of the sessions were in the afternoon but some ran occasional evening events which could attract several hundred players. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1950s, in terms of numbers of players, they constituted the main bridge centres in Brisbane.

Some of these clubs were socially very exclusive and there was often a strong social element to play. Nevertheless, the organisers tended to be known good players and women from the charity bridge clubs and women's clubs were important contributors to the QBA membership and Queensland Open and Women's teams in interstate competition of the 1930s to 1950s.

The Depression and Bridge

As Queensland had relatively little manufacturing in the 1920s, the Depression initially had less effect than in other States. However, by 1932, unemployment in the State had reached 32 per cent.

At this time, unemployment assistance was seen as primarily a State responsibility rather than Commonwealth as now.

Queensland was the only State that had an unemployment benefit scheme but this only covered some workers and only for a relatively short time. It was never intended to deal with mass long-term unemployment.

The Government introduced a scheme of relief works but shortage of revenue and opposition to government deficits, meant that government action only very partly reduced the suffering.

Despite all this, bridge boomed during the Depression period. It could be a relatively cheap form of entertainment and not everybody was badly affected. People who had secure jobs or whose businesses or investments had survived could find themselves better off because their money went further.

For over-stretched charities, bridge events, even more than before, became important cost-effective ways of getting at least a little money from those who could well afford it.

The Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club

The first charity bridge club to be established and one which would be among the most prominent throughout the 1930s and into the 1950s was the **Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club** (sometimes referred to as the Brisbane Ladies Charities Bridge Club). It was founded by Marie Campbell, Marie Cusworth and Barbara Lipstine in 1927.

This club was still a far-cry from having a truly open membership. Its members were drawn from the social pages of the newspapers. In addition to paying to play, one also had to play for stakes that were regarded as modest in the circle but would be beyond the means of most.

Nevertheless, it broke new ground in offering regular afternoon sessions in a central location. It was also not fixed to a particular charity but distributed its funds annually.



Marie Campbell, prominent social figure and leading auction bridge player, and co-founder and first President of the Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club.

She was also founder of the Queensland branch of the Wattle League that aimed to support Australian art and artists

Like most of the charity clubs, it combined regular weekly afternoons sessions for a core membership (bridge was played every Friday afternoon from 1.30 to 5pm) with occasional guest afternoons or evening benefit event.

These evening events would draw in much larger numbers. One benefit in 1933 attracted 200 players.

Venues

The club had several venues over its long life. It first met at Vaughan's Café before moving to the Ann Hathaway Café in George Street and (from 1933) the Griffiths Brothers Tearooms.

Benefits were held either at the tearooms or at the Canberra Hotel. In August 1935, it moved entirely to the Canberra, and, partly in consequence, changed its name temporarily to the Canberra Charity Bridge Club. In April 1937, 100 players attended one of its social evenings.

The move to the Canberra though was only temporary. In November 1937 it moved to the Coronation Tea Rooms in Wickham Terrace and changed its name to the Brisbane Ladies Charities Bridge Club.

From Wickham Street, it moved in October 1938 to the McWhirter's Department Store auditorium, where it seems to have found its permanent home—at least for the next 15 years.



The Hotel Canberra in 1930, the year of its opening, on the Western corner of Ann and Edward Streets. This high quality hotel had been developed by the Queensland Prohibition League and did not serve alcohol. In addition to the Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club, it was the headquarters of the QBA for a period, and a popular place for ad hoc bridge afternoons and evenings.

Photo: Queensland State Library

Organisers

After Marie Campbell, the Presidents who are known were Barbara Lipstine (1929-31), Louisa Lyons (1931-33), Mabel Cohen (1933-34), Mrs R K Brand (1935), and Mrs GA Ball (1936-39).



Mabel Cohen (later Myers): Justice of the Peace, President of the Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club from 1933 to 1934, Treasurer of the Social Service League, President of the Queensland Branch of the League of Jewish Women.

Mrs Cohen was also President of the Jewish Women's Bridge Club, which was one of the first clubs in Brisbane to move to duplicate bridge in cooperation with Mick Sullivan at the Brisbane Bridge Club.

Photo: Pamela Huppert

To the 1950s

The Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club was a long-lived club and still operating at least until the mid-1950s. Over the period, the club seems to have lost its place as the leading charity club and became a relatively small, although stable, grouping, averaging between 30 and 40 core members.

This might, in part, be because it seems to have been one of the few where rubber bridge continued to be played for money. This created a controversy in 1953 when a clergyman, the Reverend Rees-Thomas, accused the club of existing purely for gambling. The club hit back hard in the papers, not denying the gambling but pointing to the amounts it had contributed to charities.

Charity

It is hard not to be cynical about the motives of many participants in the charity bridge clubs (as also in many current charity events) where the money raised seems quite small compared with the outlays or the benefit to the participants in terms of being seen and enjoying the event.

Altruism was, no doubt, a relatively low priority for some of the attendees. However, it is important to understand the role of charity work amongst upper middle class women in this period.

In part, it was an opportunity to use strategic and management skills and to have a sense of purpose beyond the home—but the needs the charities tried to meet were real enough.

The system of the time meant that a wide range of institutions, that would now be seen as core responsibilities of government, required charitable support just to keep going. This included areas such as major hospitals, ambulance services and kindergartens.

Not only did government provide less funds but it was also less involved in administration. Hospitals and other objects of charitable support were frequently run by semi-autonomous boards, which, unlike most other areas of administration, were open to married women.

The Creche and Kindergarten / Atcherley / Brisbane Charities Bridge Club

The **Creche and Kindergarten Association** was responsible for management not just of a number of creches and kindergartens but also the associated teacher training college. It received partial funding from the State government and the State lottery but private donations and fund-raising were very important.



Josephine Bedford

The driving force behind the Association, and supporter of its bridge club, founded in 1929, was its organising secretary, Josephine Bedford, who many years before had founded the Queensland Branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty (later to become the RSPCA) and was also Secretary of the Playground Association, that was behind the development of children's playgrounds.

In 1953 she gave her home at Kangaroo Point to the Sisters of Charity in memory of her long-term companion, Lilian Cooper, with whom she had migrated to Australia and who, in 1891, had been the first female registered doctor in Queensland and who practised for more than fifty years. This became the Mount Olivet Hospital and then the present day St Vincent's.

The inaugural President of the Kindergarten Bridge Club was Marie Campbell, who had previously been President and co-founder of the Brisbane Ladies Bridge Club.

It met on Monday afternoons, initially at the Carlton Hotel, and then at the Atcherley Private Hotel in Queen Street, Petrie Bight. In 1932, members of the club decided to support a broader range of charities and it changed its name to the **Atcherley Bridge Club**.



The Atcherley Private Hotel

This residential hotel opened in 1927 for both permanent and short-stay residents. The hotel advertised that it had lavatories and bathrooms on all floors with hot and cold water. Its dining room facilities became a venue for several bridge clubs in the 1930s.

Photo: Queensland State Library

By 1934, driven by a talented and socially prominent executive, it had become by far the biggest bridge club in Queensland. In 1934, one of its social events combining bridge and dancing attracted 500 attendees.

Atcherley Bridge Club Organisers



(Lady) May Blair

Socially prominent and regarded as one of Brisbane's best players.



Mrs B Snell



Mrs G A Cryle, long-term Treasurer and prominent member of the Queensland Social Service League

In 1936 the club moved from the Atcherley Hotel to the auditorium at Finney's Department Store café and changed its name to the **Brisbane Charities Bridge Club**.

Between 1936 and 1938 it seated on occasion more than 200 bridge players at its guest afternoons. In 1939 it had 100 full members.

The club strongly maintained its presence during the war years and combined its usual weekly afternoon sessions with large guest sessions in the reception rooms at City Hall.

It seems to have lost momentum in the post-war years. In 1951 it was operating from the more modest surroundings at the Seaman's Institute hall and there are no further reports of the club's existence after that.

The Creche and Kindergarten Bridge Club: Mark Two

The Creche and Kindergarten Association bridge club, originally founded in 1929, had been absorbed into the Atcherley club in 1932. However, it restarted in 1934 as an independent body using the clubrooms initially at the National Mutual Building but later at the Empire Buildings in Wharf Street.

This was a successful venture and an important fund-raiser for the organisation, which led to the club needing to rent extra space. Average attendance at its weekly session throughout the 1930s was around 50 but special events could bring in many more.

Mary Clarke was the President throughout the remainder of the 1930s. The initial secretary was Kitty Hillcoat, who was also the long-term secretary of the Association and also the Metropolitan branch of the CWA.

Pauline Carvosso was secretary from 1938.

A separate group met at the Atcherley Hotel specifically to support the Ashgrove Kindergarten from 1929 to 1940.

This group met only monthly but they were major events with an average attendance of more than 100.



Mary Clarke



Kitty Hillcoat



Pauline Carvosso

The Annerley Bridge Club

The **Annerley Bridge Club** was formed in 1929 by ladies from the St Stephen's Croquet Club. It was originally intended to benefit only the Croquet Club but after a while broadened its scope to support a wider range of charities.

The long-term President was Ada Florence Weston. Mrs Weston was somewhat unusual in that, contrary to general custom of the time, she must have insisted on being named with her own initials (as Mrs A F Weston), rather than those of her husband.

The membership of the Annerley club was limited by the fact that for many years it mainly met at Mrs Weston's home (albeit a home that could cater for 16 tables) in Cracknell Road, Annerley.

Nevertheless, it remained one of the largest clubs in Brisbane until its closure in 1937 and was a frequent participant in competitions with other charity bridge clubs. One of its original members was Harold Hiley, one of Queensland's most prominent players.



Harold Hiley pictured in play at the 1949 interstate championships in Brisbane. Hiley, an accountant and timber merchant, was a member of many interstate Open teams and, with Mick Sullivan, a winner of several Australian par championships.

As was the case with many home-based clubs, its continued existence depended on the willingness and ability of the main organiser to keep it running.

When Mrs Weston fell ill in late 1937, the club held some sessions at the croquet club and various members' homes but either this was not suitable or convenient or the momentum was simply lost.

In March 1939, after eight and a half years, the members agreed to discontinue.



The retiring president of the Annerley Bridge Club (Mrs. A. F. Weston), second from right, receiving a presentation from the newly-appointed president (Mrs. George Melton) at the eighth annual meeting of the club, which was held at the residence of Miss D. Barter, Villa Street. Also in the picture are the secretary, Mrs. E. Allison (left) and treasurer (Mrs. H. Thompson).

The McWhirter's Bridge and Mah Jong Club

1928 The **McWhirter's** Mah Jong Club decided to run regular bridge sessions. McWhirter's was the major department store in Brisbane at this time.

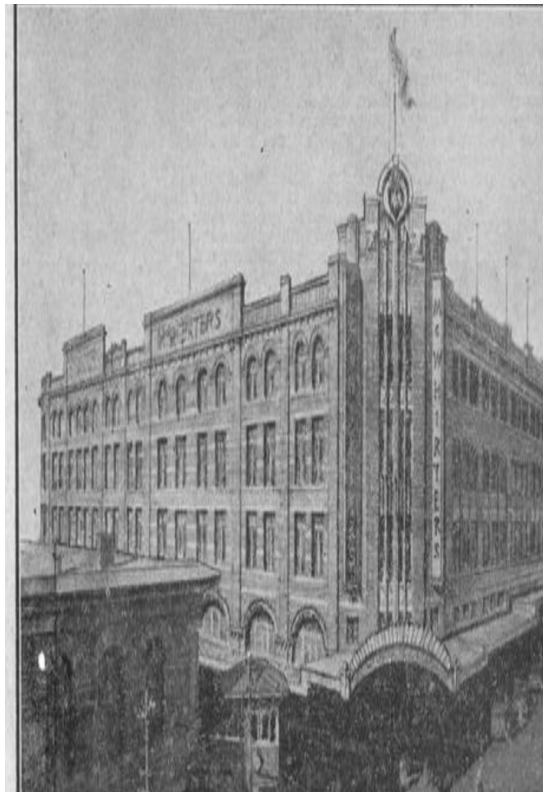
As in Sydney, major department stores set aside spaces for daytime bridge and often provided lessons.

The club was stable but small throughout the 1930s averaging between 35 and 40 members. It distributed its proceeds to various charities.

In 1939, it ceased its links with McWhirter's and changed its name to the Child Welfare Bridge Club.

Its final location was Overell's, another large Department store in Fortitude Valley.

The last newspaper mention of the club is in September 1944.



McWhirter's Department Store



Mrs J Jackson, long-term McWhirter's Club President.

Overell's Bridge Club

Before the move of the McWhirter's Bridge Club, Overell's store had been a location for bridge. There was a short-lived Amitie Bridge Club in the mid-1930s. In 1938 it opened a new auditorium and the owner, Claude Overell, took a strong personal interest in encouraging its use by bridge clubs.



Overell & Sons

In March 1938, the new Overell's Bridge Club was inaugurated. This was run by and for the Housewives' Association.

Unlike other charities, the Housewives Association was primarily a lobby group, concentrating on social issues affecting women and children, ranging from food prices and safety to public transport access to hospitals. It made extensive use of the media to get access to politicians.



Edith Pottinger: The owner of a sand-mining business in Brisbane and the Gold Coast and convenor of the bridge group of the Housewives Association and one of its more prominent lobbyists.

In 1939, the Housewives Association vacated Overell's and moved to its own premises in the City Building in Edward Street.

In 1951 it was the subject of some controversy as some members were complaining that the Association was losing its political 'fire' and in danger of becoming just a bridge and social club.

The Overell's Bridge Club was taken over by the Ambulance League, which had run a bridge club since 1933 (starting at the Brisbane Women's Club, which was also to be the location of the Brisbane Bridge Club).

This club continued until at least April 1941 but there is no record of its existence after this point.

The Catholic Daughters of Australia (CDA) Bridge Club

The CDA metropolitan bridge club was formed in May 1929. It had the advantage of being able to use the organisation's rooms in Hempenstall's Building in Queen Street.

As was the case with other clubs, it operated one weekly daytime session and occasional evening events. About 80 people attended its first birthday celebrations.

It ran occasional tournaments but the daytime sessions seem to have been primarily informal rubber bridge, where some tables would play for small stakes and some simply for the score. The club limited stakes to threepence per 100 points but most played for a penny a point.

In 1938 it had 100 members and 150 in 1939. Weekly sessions seem to have attracted between 40 and 60 players.



Women at a Brisbane CDA bridge session in 1938

Photo: Queensland State Library

The club was quite active in competition with other bridge organisations. A series of matches was held with the McWhirter's club during the 1930s and there were matches with smaller bridge clubs associated with local institutions such as the Merthyr Croquet Club Bridge Club and the Loreto Convent Bridge Club.

The group had three main convenors through the 1930s and 1940s. It was begun by Lily Leutenegger, followed by Mary Boland and Clair Barbeler.



Mary Boland



Clair Barbeler

The club was still meeting weekly in 1954.

The Country Women's Association (CWA) Metropolitan Branch Bridge Club

In the state as a whole, there was almost certainly more bridge played and taught at CWA bridge clubs than at any other organisations. The metropolitan branch though was relatively short lived.

The Metropolitan Branch of the CWA Bridge Club was formed in 1930. Rubber bridge was played but strictly for points—no stakes were allowed. The club met in the Branch's rest room in Griffiths House.

The club was organised by Mrs J R Nicol who had moved to Brisbane from Toowoomba.

The club, for reasons that are not clear, was not as long-lived as the other charity clubs. It seems to have folded at the end of 1934. In February 1939, it was reported that the organisation was considering re-establishing the club, but nothing seems to have eventuated.

The Branch was still organising occasional bridge events into the 1950s but did not again hold regular weekly sessions.

The Sesame / Social Service Bridge Clubs

In July 1931, the **Sesame Bridge Club** opened in Brisbane to considerable publicity with the aim of creating a major venue for serious bridge for both men and women.

It consisted of two linked ventures—a **playing club** owned by the Social Services League and benefitting that charity and a private **tuition club** owned by Wilf Boyce that would help the playing club get new members.

The President of the club was **Mary Moore** (wife of the Queensland Premier but also in her own right a prominent farmer, advocate for rural women and a radio broadcaster on social issues).

The Vice-Presidents were **Joyce Stobo**, and **Wilf Boyce**. The Secretary was **Olive Free** (a city business owner and prominent Brisbane Anglican) and the Treasurer, **Sylvia Soares** (a teacher and bridge columnist for the Brisbane *Daily Mail*). The club met in the Astoria Café in the National Mutual Building.



Mary Moore



Sylvia Soares

The Social Services League

The Social Services League was created in October 1930, with the support of the Queensland Government, to encourage private relief efforts and to coordinate existing activities. The League was run by volunteers from the churches and existing charitable organisations.

It was initially confined to Brisbane but very soon local committees were established in the major regional centres and many smaller towns.

The League committees were a central point for local relief donations. They did a lot of fund-raising and were responsible for a large number of bridge events in the early to mid-1930s.

Most funds raised by the League were channelled through existing local charities. A major priority was support for relief works for women, who were less catered for in the government schemes.



Captain Eustace Royston Pike.

Eustace Pike, a former British army engineer, was a major figure in Queensland social services and the home and charity bridge scene for over thirty years.

He was Secretary organiser of the Queensland Transport Board, which managed ambulance services in Queensland; Chairman of the Social Services League and involved in many other charities. He acted as Tournament Director at major Sesame / Social Services Bridge Club events.

Initially, the two linked clubs-arrangement seems to have worked well. The Tuition Club created a milestone in July-September 1931 when Carol Carling, the teacher at the club, broadcast a series of eight talks on bridge on Radio 4QG, which went to regional centres as well as Brisbane. This was the **first radio broadcast on bridge** by a Queenslander, and possibly the first by a bridge professional. Unfortunately, nothing more is known about Carol Carling, and she does not appear again in the record.

However, in March 1932, arrangements broke down between the Sesame Tuition Club and the Social Service League.

The League became concerned that the Tuition Club was advertising that the proceeds from its lessons benefited the League when this was not the case.

The League forced the tuition club to stop this and remove fixed advertising from trams with the misleading statement.

To make the separate status clear, the League club changed its name to the **Social Service Bridge Club**. Boyce kept the **Sesame Bridge Club** title for the tuition club.



National Mutual Building
(Building on middle right with
flag on roof) (Anzac Day 1940)

Initial location of the Social
Service & Sesame Clubs):

The new Social Services Bridge Club

The split does not seem to have affected personal relationships between Boyce and the League (probably showing he was not responsible for the problems) and he gave lectures to the League club in 1933 and 1934.

Following the split, the Social Service playing club started offering lessons, with the first teacher being **Louise Hollander**. It also started a bridge library for use of members, managed by **Florence White**, the first club in Australia known to do this.

In the short-term, the Social Services Club, which met every Tuesday evening, continued to prosper. It left the premises in the National Mutual to the former Sesame Tuition Club and held its weekly Tuesday night bridge sessions at the Astoria Café.

In August 1933, it had 85 members. However, over the medium term, the club struggled. By August 1934 membership dropped to 40 and the club moved to meeting once a month.

It seems to have picked up briefly and in 1936 it was back to weekly sessions, first at the Mary Elizabeth Lounge and then at the Carlton Hotel.

By that point though, the bridge club was facing too much competition and was tangential to the work of the league and it seems to have ceased operating sometime after September 1936.

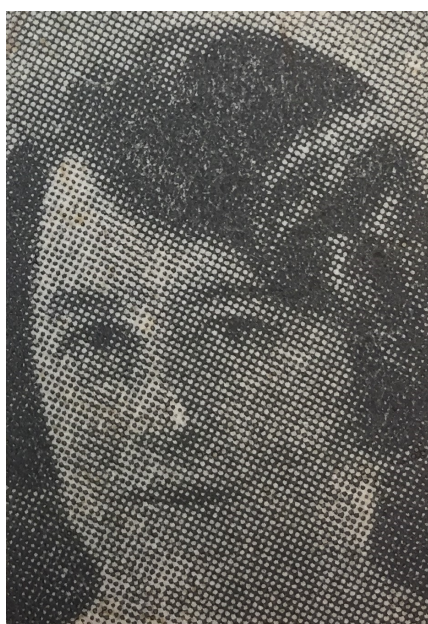
The new Sesame (Tuition) Bridge Club

The now-separate Sesame Tuition Bridge Club had a far more prominent role than its former partner. It provided the venue for Queensland's first participation in the World Olympiad par contest in February 1934.

Following the formation of the QBA, we have very little information about who played at the Sesame Club or when their sessions were held.

The main focus of the club appeared to be the original one of teaching. The club offered groups of ten lessons for beginners in both auction and contract and did extensive advertising in the classified sections of the papers before each session.

The club's teachers hosted probably the most frequently broadcast bridge radio programs in Australia. Following the broadcasts by Carol Carling in 1931, **Laura Ludgate**, broadcast weekly on 4BK for almost two years from June 1932 to April 1934.



Laura Ludgate: Bridge teacher and broadcaster

In addition to her bridge work, Laura Ludgate was a high-profile Brisbane music and elocution teacher and performer. Elocution in the 1930s was partly about teaching people to lose their Australian accent but recital of poems or passages from literature was also a popular performance art and competitions were common.

Music and elocution and bridge teaching often went together in the 1930s and beyond, both in Queensland and other States.

Mrs F S Chapman from the Sesame Club also had a program on bridge on 4BC in May 1934. Mrs Chapman went on to be a prominent advocate of social reform, including the campaign to introduce family allowances and the Women to Canberra movement, begun in 1943 to pressure political parties to select more female candidates. She was also a leading member of the short-lived Queensland Party of the 1940s.

It is not known if Wilf Boyce retained his original interest in the club. In 1938, Sylvia Soares was reported to be President of the Sesame. She was a well-known teacher, had been the match referee for the Brisbane section of the 1934 Olympiad, and throughout the thirties was a frequent place-getter at QBA events.

In 1938, the Sesame moved from the National Mutual Building, to Horsham House at 329 Adelaide Street. The building was requisitioned by the army during the war. There is no record of the club after November 1940.



Horsham House on Adelaide Street, (bottom left corner) final site of the Sesame Bridge Club.

Photo: Queensland State Library

The Lady Mayoress's Bridge Club

The Lady Mayoress's Charity Bridge Club was founded in early 1938 by Martha Jones, the wife of Alf Jones, the Labor Lord Mayor of Brisbane, and a long-time activist for various Brisbane welfare institutions (particularly the children's hospital).

The club met in the Mayoral reception rooms in City Hall and seems to have been an almost instant success, regularly attracting more than 100 players. It catered for both contract and auction players.

When Jones left office in 1941 the club was taken on by her succeeding Lady Mayoresses. It met weekly on Saturday afternoons and attracted large numbers of players, up to a hundred, throughout the war years. It operated until at least 1954.

The club's secretary and principal organiser from the beginning to the early 1950s was Grace Marriott, private secretary to the Lord Mayor and a long-established organiser of bridge events for charities during the 1930s.



Grace Marriott



The Lord Mayor's Reception Rooms:
Home of the Lady Mayoress's Bridge Club.
The venue was also used by the Brisbane Progressive Bridge Club and the Brisbane Charities Bridge Club.

The 4BH Bridge Club

The radio station 4BH bridge club was established sometime in the first half of 1937. It was organised by Dulcie Scott who had a regular afternoon program on the station, which often publicised local bridge events.

Dulcie had been on the stage in Sydney as a professional actress, singer and dancer, and had appeared in several J C Williamson productions. She came to Brisbane when she married and, before joining 4BH in 1937, organised charity events, managed her own theatre company and performed and produced plays for the local repertory company.



Dulcie Scott

The 4BH club was big. At the beginning of 1938 it had 300 nominal members of whom about 100 attended sessions at any one time.

Initially it met on Tuesday nights at the Golden Glow Café. In March 1938, a 4BH beginners club was added which met on Wednesday nights at the Young Australia League rooms in Desmond Chambers on Adelaide Street.

The system was that once people had progressed to a certain level they could go on to play on the regular Tuesday nights. A "local expert" was hired to do the teaching but his or her name is unknown.



A session of the 4BH bridge club at the Golden Glow Café on 1 February 1938. The Golden Glow Café was where Mick Sullivan had given his first evening lessons in 1932.

At the start of the 1939 season, the 4BH Club moved to the Brisbane Bridge Club rooms at the Edwards & Co Building in Petrie Bight. Twenty-eight tables were in play. Over the next few weeks play alternated between here and the Griffiths Brothers Café.

At the beginning of March, Wilf Boyce, announced in his column that the club would play at the Brisbane Bridge Club from that point.

But something seems to have gone wrong. We do not know if 4BH withdrew sponsorship or if the players had a problem with the Brisbane Bridge Club. There is no further mention of a 4BH club but ex-4BH members formed a Brisbane Progressive Bridge Club, which met on Tuesday nights at the Griffiths Brothers Café.



Griffiths Brothers Café

Home of the Brisbane Progressive Bridge Club in 1939.

The Brisbane Bridge Club also operated from here occasionally during the war.

The club prospered in its new location, with an average attendance of 120 members during 1939.

For the start of the 1940 season, it moved to the Mayoral reception rooms, and it was decided to donate all funds to the Queensland Patriotic Fund.

This was an initiative by the Lord Mayor, Alf Jones, to coordinate donations to causes associated with the war effort, in a way similar to the depression-era Social Service League.

There is no mention of the club after April 1941.

Other Clubs, Other Places

There was a lot more to bridge and bridge clubs in the 1930s to 1950s than the charity clubs described in this section, even if no other clubs could match their attendances.

A lot was happening in the suburbs of Brisbane in often less glamorous venues than the central Brisbane cafes. In Brisbane, for example, in just one week in October 1933, a benefit for the Glennie School attracted 50 tables; Holy Name Church, 50; Town and Country Women's Club, 32; Corpus Christi 64; and East Brisbane Bowling Club, 20.

There were also short-lived clubs. Several would-be club organisers found that getting critical mass was not easy. The privately owned Ambassadors Club, the Round Table League Bridge Club, and the Lyric Theatre Society Bridge Club all seem to have had relatively short lives.

Most importantly, the QBA (from 1934) and the Brisbane Bridge Club (from 1936) would provide centres for contract and duplicate auction bridge and link Queensland with national competition. These are discussed in Part Four.

Bridge was also very much alive in the country. This would eventually provide much of the influx of new players to the QBA and associated clubs in the 1960s. The country bridge clubs are the subject of Part Five.