

Memorial Service for John Stafford Knight

Born 18-10-1937; Died 6-7-2024

Held at Lake Hood on Saturday 7th September 2024 at 2.30pm

The following is from John's service, with thanks to Carol Gunn who conducted the service.

You are all aware that John was a very private person who did not seek public adoration. He made his wishes known for a no fuss, low key service, with no open tributes. With this in mind, I would like to thank David Dynes from Methven Travel, Mike Holdaway and Mary Buckland from Ashburton Bridge Club and Kaye Nicolas Timaru Bridge Club, for providing me with stories from these two important spans of John's life. I am hoping that today you may learn some aspects of John's life you were not aware of!

John's involvement in the Ashburton bridge club was long and considerable.

John was the club's last surviving Grand Master. Being a Grand Master means nothing to people outside of the bridge world, so Mike has passed on some perspective.

After a player has developed their skills in the game, a process that takes most bridge players many years, they can play at A point tournaments. These are the toughest tournaments to play in, competing against the best players. By gaining top placings in these tough tournaments, you are awarded with a small number of A points. So, to achieve Grand Master status (500+ A points), requires success at many such tournaments over many years.

The other prerequisite to achieve this success is a similarly ambitious and able partner, as bridge is a card game where a pair of players play against an opposing pair. In John's case this was the late Bev Smith, the club's only other ever Grand Master to date.

John and Bev were a formidable force in the club over many decades. They won the annual "A ladder" trophy, the highest accolade in the club, 30 times, including a continuous period of 13 years from 2001 to 2013.

John was a life member of the Ashburton club, and he served two terms as president.

However, that doesn't scratch the surface of what these two contributed to the club. John and Bev were both on the committee for decades, and actively involved in every aspect of the club's operation.

John was one of four Ashburton members who made a longstanding and extensive contribution to the Canterbury Centre Management Committee. Eileen Knight (no relation), long time Secretary, Joanna Fechny and Bev Smith (John's Bridge Partner).

John together with Alison Wilkie and Mervyn Doake provided a range of Directors' Lessons in Timaru on a regular basis as part of the Centre's initiative to educate and support Directors at all levels of expertise (excluding National Directors).

Local tournaments are a lot of work, and every local tournament would see John and Bev bring lunch along, and they would reside in the office over the lunch break, processing results, attending to any problems, preparing prize envelopes, and snatching lunch when they could! This never seemed to detract from their ability to perform well at these home events.

John was a highly intelligent man with a wry sense of humour, which was easy to miss, until you had time to digest what he had said! A memorable laugh! John had immaculate manners “a true gentleman”, well read, knowledgeable and always willing to share his knowledge with others. If you rang him you knew you were in for a very long phone chat, mostly chatting about interesting hands from the previous week.

As an example of his impish sense of humour: John was directing a tournament at Ashburton, before the days of the dealing machine, he set up a hand for the tournament. At the end of the session, he asked Bev and Mary Buckland what they did with the hand. He wanted to know because the hand had come from a world tournament in the 1930's and he wanted to know how Bev and Mary would handle it. A little bit illegal in bridge terms, using a previously dealt hand!! This story shows both his sense of humour, and also his immense knowledge of the history of bridge.

John was also known for his frugality, and the juxtaposition between this, and the need to travel from Barhill to Ashburton multiple times per week to attend bridge is a great indicator of just how much he enjoyed the challenge of this wonderful game!

If there is an afterlife, let's hope bridge is available, and the deals are complex and difficult, just the way John would enjoy it.

In life we are dealt a hand of thirteen cards
Maybe aces, kings - or a Yarborough, sadly yes
But if we can make the most of what we pick up
We can say that our approach to life is a success.

We can make all the fancy bids in the book of life
Splinters, Stayman, Blackwood or psychic trickery
Or maybe we just have to pass, pass, pass
Hopefully our auction in life has been a victory

When we play the hand, we can do a trump coup
If we are lucky, we can do a ruffing finesse
Sometimes we are defending and just follow suit
Either way we have played the game of life with happiness

If we are dummy, we can sit back and relax
Would it have been played any better by me?
Hopefully we can admire the play of partner
Because appreciating friends in life is the key

After the hand we ask if we could have done better
Not drawing trumps surely got us into strife
But if we try our best whenever we can
We have played our part in the game of life.

By Mary Buckland
