

## BECOMING A VIRTUAL CLUB

Physical distancing measures during the first COVID-19 outbreak in March led to the closure of golf clubs, libraries, theatres, gyms, cafes, cinemas and community centres across Northern Ireland. This resulted sadly in the closure of our three bridge clubs in Newcastle, much to the dismay of so many dedicated bridge players. Our three clubs are run by volunteers and the ages of our members range from 50 to 90 +.

When restrictions on indoor gatherings had closed the doors of our physical clubs in mid-March, Maria Doyle and myself decided to play bridge online from home. At first, we played online as individuals with strangers or robots on the Bridge Base Online platform. We then started using our phones to communicate and a small group formed to play together online. We decided to create a new online version of our club and offered to help anyone who needed technical assistance to play from home. It is great tribute to the friendliness and camaraderie that exists within our bridge community that many have helped some members to become more computer-literate either in person or by telephone. Over 70 members now regularly play online in casual games and tournaments. One of our members set up a WhatsApp group so that we can chat or call each other on the phone to arrange games or when there is a break between games. Online bridge is not for everyone. Some prefer having in-person games in smaller groups at home. Others have stopped playing altogether. However we are always encouraging members to get involved.



### SOME COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS

*“I feel that online bridge has been a saviour from boredom.”*  
*“Playing together online is the next best thing to playing at the club.”*

### COMMENTS FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- ✚ My friends ring me to make an appointment because they are aware that I play bridge online so often!
- ✚ My family was very concerned at first when I told them I was playing in a tournament in Dundalk or Newcastle or Warrenpoint etc. They told me that I shouldn't be travelling to any of those places! Needless to say I was playing in the comfort of my own home and will be very happy in the cold winter nights to be staying indoors.

**Rosemary Cunningham**

