

Dublin University Chess Club

A brief history by Tim Harding

Chess was almost certainly played at Dublin University from the earliest times as it was a popular game among the Tudor elite in England, but the earliest Irish reference I have seen dates from 1707. According to A. A. Luce, the great expert on the philosopher bishop, George Berkeley in a youthful publication chided some of the students for spending half the day playing chess instead of learning algebra.ⁱ Then around 1813 a young TCD fellow called Edward Hincks was a member of an informal chess club in the city which is mentioned in an 1843 *Chess Player's Chronicle* article about early chess in Ireland. The break-up of this informal society, perhaps because of the departure of Hincks to become Rector of Ardtrea, appears to have led to the formation of the Philidorean Chess Society in 1819 or 1820.

The 1843 article says, but with extreme vagueness about dates, that:

Another Club, called the College Club, was established shortly after, composed of graduates and under-graduates of Trinity College, but it produced no players deserving commemoration. This latter Club in a few years became merely nominal, owing to the dispersion of its original members...

The reference directories of the period only record a university chess club in one year. *The Dublin Almanac and General Register of Ireland for the Year of our Lord 1838* gives the following information.

DUBLIN UNIVERSITY CHESS CLUB

President, The Rev John McCaul, LL. D., Trinity College, Dublin
Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, William Goddard, jun. esq., 17 North Great George's street. *Committee of Management*: The Rev John McCaul, LL. D., Trinity College. William Goddard, jun. esq., 17 North Great George's street. John W. Hallowell, esq. Schol TCD. John Walker, esq. Schol TCD. Henry Kennedy, esq. A.B. 1 Blessington st..

'The season commences in October, and terminates in July. Members are elected by Ballot, and none but Graduates or Under-Graduates of the University are admissible.'

George Salmon, who much later became Provost, was pursuing research in mathematics at Trinity in his early years before turning to theology. He was very active in matters to do with chess in the late 1840s and early 1850s. When a leading Scottish player, Rev John Donaldson (known as 'Delta') visited Dublin in 1857, he considered Salmon the strongest chess player in Ireland and Sir John Blunden (a barrister and TCD graduate of the mid-1830s) 'the second best in Erin'.ⁱⁱ It was almost certainly Salmon who gave Howard Staunton the idea to hold the first international chess tournament in London in connection with the Great Exhibition of 1851 although Staunton claimed, and is usually given, the credit for this.

In 1850 Salmon won a game against Harrwitz which was published in *Bell's Life in London*, as well as two games that he lost to Saint-Amant, so he was a strong enough player not to receive odds against all but the top masters. He does not appear to have played chess much, if at all, in public between 1858, when he was one of Paul Morphy's blindfold simultaneous opponents at Birmingham, and 1881 when he was one of those who played in a consulting team against the future world champion Steinitz in Dublin. Salmon certainly did play socially and at the Dublin Library chess club in D'Olier Street, but regret was expressed that he did not play in the telegraph match for Dublin against Liverpool in October 1861.

There is very little information about what chess arrangements may have existed for students in the mid-nineteenth century, but *The Chess Player's Magazine* published, early in 1866, a correspondence chess game against the senior members of Cambridge. It is likely that a scholar named William Henry Stanley Monck, later a very keen correspondence chess player, was involved. As this is the earliest known game by a Dublin University club, we offer it here, although they lost.

Cambridge University – Dublin University CC

Cambridge-Dublin match 1865-6 corr

Notes by J. J. Löwenthal

Löwenthal published this in the *Chess Player's Magazine* and then again in 1868 in his column in *Young Men of Great Britain*, saying 'The following is an excellent

specimen of "Petroff's Defence", played some time ago, by correspondence, between the Clubs of the Cambridge University and Dublin.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 d4 d5 6 Bd3 Be7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Re1 Nd6

Thus far the defence has been conducted strictly in accordance with the best authorities.

9 c3 0-0 10 Bf4 Bf6 11 Nbd2 Ne7 12 Be5 Ng6 13 Qc2 b6 14 b4 Be7

This looks to us like loss of time.

15 Nf1 Bg4 16 N3d2 Qd7 17 Ne3 Be6 18 g3 f5 19 Nf3

White play throughout with great judgment, never allowing their adversaries to escape from their confined positions.

19...Ne4 20 b5 Rae8 21 c4 dxc4 22 Bxc4 Bxc4 23 Qxc4+ Kh8 24 Qc6 Nxe5 25 Nxe5 Qxd4?

The capture of this pawn loses the game.

26 Nd7 Rg8 27 Rf1 Nxf2 28 Nxf5 Qb2 29 Rab1 Nh3+ 30 Kh1 Qd2 31 Ne5 Ng5 32 Rbe1

White's attack is now quite irresistible.

32...Rgf8 33 Nxe7 Rxf1+ 34 Rxf1 Qd8 35 Qd7 Qa8+ 36 N5c6 Ne4 37 Nf5 Rg8 38 Nh6 and Black resigns **1-0**

A new university chess club was formed in 1876. This is mentioned in the college calendars which provide some information. Until then chess may only have been available in a Reading Room Society (with which Monck was associated) which is stated in the Calendar to have had chess boards. The 1877 supplement to the College Calendar has the following about the new chess club proper.ⁱⁱⁱ The 1878 Calendar has more or less the same information except for some of the names.

DUBLIN UNIVERSITY CHESS CLUB

Patron. Rev. George Salmon, DD, Regius Professor of Divinity.

Officers for the year 1876-7.

President—Thomas William Harpur.

Treasurer—Bertram C. A. Windle.

Secretary—George Dames Burtchaell, 24, *Trinity College*.

Committee—Arthur N. Leahy

Edward C. Mac Master

Robert J. Polden, B. A.

John Olphert.

This Club has been established with the sanction of the Board of Trinity College for the promotion of the Science of Chess-playing in the University. The Club meets every Saturday evening from the 1st of November till the 20th of June, at 8 o'clock. Three tournaments are played during the year, one in each Term. A Cup is given annually to the winner of the greatest number of tournaments; other Prizes are also given, the number and value of which are determined by the Committee.

Annual subscription, 5s. No Entrance Fee.

Full information regarding the Club can be had on application to the Secretary,

GEORGE DAMES BURTCHAELL,
24, Trinity College.

In 1884, when chess activity was stepping up in the Dublin area, it was said in the *Irish Sportsman* that: 'only the University Club (which can meet only in term time) is playing handicap tourneys, contests for silver challenge cups and having matches with other clubs.' The main Dublin Chess Club was very inward-looking but this was soon to change with several new clubs opening and the establishment of the Armstrong Cup league competition in which the university club was regularly involved. The chess column of the *Dublin Evening Mail* had several reports of its activities, including opening sessions each autumn when Salmon, as president of the club, regularly presided. Mir Aulad Ali, professor of oriental languages, was also involved.

In 1892 Dublin University celebrated its tercentenary and a book was published to commemorate this. It includes a photograph of the chess club with Salmon seated proudly in the middle, a cup in front of him, but unfortunately it is not known what that trophy is. Also there is no caption naming the individuals. It is known from a press report some of the senior members such as Monck were not in the picture.

In that year Cambridge won another match 2-0 against Trinity but the third match in 1893-4 against the Cambridge undergraduates ended in one win for us and one draw. The games appeared in *British Chess Magazine* for 1894 with notes by the Irish-born chess master James

Mason. The Dublin players were W. H. S. Monck, S. P. Johnston and W. E. Thrift. P.H. Dyke and E. Young played the first half of the games for Cambridge, but they were finished by H. E. Atkins, who later won the British Championship nine times between 1905 and 1925. The university club also won a game against Oxford around this time.

Cambridge University CC – Dublin University CC

Postal match 1893-4

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 Bc5 3 Nf3 d6 4 c3 Bg4 5 h3 Bxf3 6 Qxf3 Qh4+ 7 g3 Qf6 8 Bc4?!
Nc6 9 d3 g5 10 Qh5?**

10 f5 is correct.

**10...gxf4 11 gxf4 Qg6 12 Qf3 f5 13 Be3? fxe4 14 dxe4 Bxe3 15 Qxe3 Qg2 16
Qg1 Qxe4+**

16 ..Qxb2 17 Qg7.

**17 Be2 Nf6 18 Nd2 Qxf4 19 0-0-0 Rg8 20 Qe1 0-0-0 21 Bb5 Nd5 22 Rf1 Qe3
23 Qh4 Nxc3!? 24 bxc3 Qxc3+ 25 Kb1 Nd4 26 Ba4 Qb4+ 27 Bb3 a5 28 a3 Qb5
29 Ka2 Nxb3 30 Nxb3 Rg2+ 31 Rf2 Rdg8 32 Rdd2**

If 32 Rfd2 e4!

32...R2g3 33 Rf8+! Rxf8 34 Qxg3 a4 35 Nc1 Qc4+ 36 Kb2 Rf1 37 Qg4+?

37 Rc2 seems better said *BCM* but 37...Qb5+ still looks promising for Black.

**37...Qxg4 38 hxg4 Rg1 39 Rh2 Rxg4 40 Rxh7 Rg3 41 Rh2 b5 42 Rd2 Kb7 43
Rd3? Rxd3 44 Nxd3 c5 45 Kc3 Kc6 0-1.**

The brothers Thrift, who both later became fellows and one of them Provost, were actively involved in university chess around the turn of the century but perhaps due to the First World War and the disturbances that followed, the club became inactive. However, this needs research in post-war sources and my main research stops in 1914.

The modern Dublin University club

The above shows that at various times there have been at least three chess clubs at Trinity College Dublin. University clubs are always liable to fluctuations because of the turnover of students and maintaining continuity is always a problem. Senior members of the university have tended to play for other clubs and leave the university club to be run by undergraduates and a few postgraduates.

The club that now exists was essentially refounded in 1941 by a group of students including John Victor Luce, the retired Professor of

Greek and former vice-Provost, who has presented two minute books to the manuscript department in TCD library. One of these dates to 1941-2 and the other to 1955-6.^{iv} The first begins with a committee meeting on 4 February 1941, which decides to ask the provost to be President of the Club and the Honorary Secretary is instructed to write to LCU requesting affiliation. These details are fairly clear indications that this is a new club starting up, the old one having lapsed at some point between the world wars. They decided to have a club tournament to determine ranking, starting the following week, and to buy a half-tin of USA biscuits for not more than 1/6. A letter from W. Nash was read asking to be a member and they decided to ask him to be a Vice-President. This was probably Warwick Nash, who played for Ireland in the 1939 FIDE Olympiad in Buenos Aires.

Minutes of the meeting of 18 February show that the Provost has agreed to be President. The biscuits only cost eightpence halfpenny. The question of opening a bank account was discussed. By 1943 John Luce is on the committee: first as treasurer, later secretary and at a later date his father, the philosophy professor A. A. Luce became President. The book was filled up by the annual general meeting in June 1957; presumably it went missing for a while as the other minute book covers 1955-6. No documents later than this have been examined.

In recent times, the Dublin University Chess Club has competed regularly in the Leinster leagues, in various divisions but probably no lower than the third. In the 2003-4 season the team won promotion back to the Heidenfeld (second division) and a new team was entered in a lower division. In 2005-6, the University won the Heidenfeld trophy for the second time in its history, and was promoted back to the Armstrong Cup for the first time since the 1980s. In our first season there, the team finished fourth, a very creditable result as the second best player was unavailable for part of the season.

© **Tim Harding, 2007. Tim is pursuing doctoral research at Trinity into aspects of the history of chess, under the supervision of Dr William Vaughan.**

- ⁱ A. A. Luce, *A History of the Dublin Chess Club* (1967) p.4.
- ⁱⁱ John Donaldson, 'Delta's Memoirs', in *British Chess Magazine*, xi (Oct. 1891) pp. 450-9.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bound in front of volume 1, p28 in the catalogue supplement.
- ^{iv} MUN/CLUB/CHESS/1 and MUN/CLUB/CHESS/2.