

# New Englander

## Chess Club Update – Christmas 2017

### Chessmas Chatter

According to the sitcom stereotype, the festive season means excessive food and ill-considered presents. I hope the reality is rather different and we shall be enjoying more traditional pursuits – convivial company and shared memories. To my mind, nothing beats an evening of good conversation liberally sprinkled with sentimental gems from yesteryear.

This is also the theme of this newsletter. It has long been an objective of mine to add a few pages to our website to detail the history of New England Chess Club and with reminiscence as our theme, I thought this was a good time to make a start.

Of course, nostalgia and indulgence are thoroughly compatible! Please enjoy the Christmas break with friends/family and return in 2018 with a determination to create more moments to remember.

*Paul Hanks*

### Memories

The inaugural Annual General Meeting of New England Chess Club was held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007 and it is heartening that 10 of our 17 founder members still play at the club. They will know that for many previous seasons, we had competed as Perkins Chess Club until the company withdrew its support for its Sports and Social Club.

Our heritage was brought to life for me very forcefully when I was recently clearing out an untidy room and picked up a small notebook that I could not remember ever seeing before. I opened it and found :

Friendly Match - 4 <sup>th</sup> April 1967			
Peterborough B	4	Perkins	2
Mr Benson	0	M Frost	1
Mr Hayward	0	T Hulber	1
Mr McRobert	1	A Sampson	0
Mr E Jeffrey	1	R Green	0
Mr R Bayes	1	T Moore	0
Mr Steels	1	F Medhurst	0

Wow! This is the scoresheet of the very first match played by our club and moreover, it shows we are unknowingly celebrating 50 years since our creation! And how things change... Just look at the formality of the listing of our opponents' names (though this is just about the only example in the notebook).

A month later, Perkins entered a team in the Hunts and Peterborough Jamboree. The Huntingdonshire Chess Association formed in 1961 and as its scope

spread (with various name changes), it started this end-of-season event 2-3 years later.

Hunts & Pboro Jamboree - 5 <sup>th</sup> May 1967	Pts
Huntingdon	4½
Peterborough B	4
Peterborough A, March, St Ives	3½
Perkins, RAF Brampton, Warboys	3
Stamford, Hotpoint	1

The club continued its build-up to entry into the County League by arranging friendly matches through the summer including two in July, losing 4-3 away at Stamford but beating Warboys at home 3½-2½.

County Chess League - 11 <sup>th</sup> October 1967			
Peterborough	1	Perkins	5
D Rogers	0	J S Walton	1
A Scott	0	A M Figiel	1
G N Martin	0	T Hulber	1
A Hayward	½	E Dolby	½
N Wedley	½	A Foster	½
E Jeffrey	0	M Frost	1

“By losing 1-5 to the new entrants to the County League, Perkins Works Club, Peterborough made a disastrous start to the 1967/8 season, and, incidentally, sustained their worst ever defeat. Peterborough have been beaten previously but twice, once by Brampton 3½-2½ and once to Huntingdon by the same margin. In fairness to the Peterborough club, it must be pointed out that they were playing a less experienced team than in previous years, nevertheless Perkins Works club are to be congratulated on making such an auspicious beginning to their league career.” (The Hunts Post)

The in-house magazine, the Perkins Echo, was also fulsome in its praise :

“Perkins newly formed chess team gave the county league champions their first defeat for five years when they met in the first match of the winter season this month... Two reigning champions were playing on board number one, Don Rogers, captain of the Peterborough Chess Club, the Peterborough and Hunts County champion and for Perkins, John Walton, the Nottinghamshire County champion.”

The sharp-eyed among you will have noticed the Peterborough's youthful squad included a certain Norman Wedley – subsequently, the long-serving member of Perkins Chess Club. Norman had just

returned to Peterborough to work at Perkins and had gone back to the Peterborough club he had originally joined around 1959 after finishing O-levels. After the game, Alan Foster immediately recruited Norman for the Perkins club despite a warning from Dennis Rooke, "You'll have to watch him. He beat me in the Cracknell!" Dennis never forgave the 16 year-old for beating him a few years earlier - even though it was a handicap and he had to give odds of a knight! Incidentally, Alan Foster was the only player to beat the ex-world champion Smyslov at a sponsored simultaneous display in the Perkins canteen in 1970.

Norman appears playing for the correct side in November when the club staged another friendly match (nominally, Perkins B) and made his full debut in the County League on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1968, unfortunately, a loss to RAF Wyton. This match also had another archaic feature because the overall result was delayed by an adjudication.

In that first season, the league comprised nine teams with each playing the others only once. Our record was a very creditable P8 W5 D2 L1 but I have nothing to say where that placed us in the final league standings. At the halfway stage, Huntingdon were leading and as they were the only team to defeat us, I presume they went on to win.

In 1968/9, the club was making tentative steps towards forming the B team on a formal basis and in addition to friendly matches against the established teams, there was an intriguing fixture against the "Crown and Anchor". Perhaps, the highlight was a good run in the cup competition though the trail is a little confusing. A win in the first round against Spalding B was followed by victories against RAF Wyton and King's Lynn in what is described as the Littlechild Knock-Out. By the time that we were defeated 3½-2½ by Peterborough, it was sufficiently late in the season to suggest it was the final and our opponents were completing a league and cup double.

For 1969/70, we must cast our minds back to the times when the press carried chess reports; nowadays, we can hardly believe the principal sources of information were thriving local newspapers! The Hunts Post gave the league table with one significant match remaining.

Team	P	W	D	L	Games	Pts
Warboys	6	4	1	1	23	9
Perkins	5	3	2	0	18½	8
Huntingdon	5	4	0	1	18	8
Peterborough	6	2	1	3	20½	5
March	4	1	2	1	11	4
Stamford	5	1	0	4	11	2
St Ives	5	0	0	5	4	0

Our last match was against Huntingdon and it would decide the league title for that year.

County Chess League - 13 <sup>th</sup> April 1970			
Huntingdon	3	Perkins	3
T Hazel	0	N Wedley	1
T Janikowski	1	A Foster	0
P Alexander	1	M Frost	0
J Whitmarsh	0	E Dolby	1
J Brading	1	A Skietnieks	0
D Gasson	0	S Jucha	1

An unbeaten season but no honours - Warboys were the team to profit from the result. Six matches were not enough and the club also entered the Fenland League taking on Spalding, March, King's Lynn, and Wisbech. Against Peterborough, one match counted in both events. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1970, if the records are correct, we played Warboys in both competitions with 5 boards in common and a different board 6. We drew 3-3 in the County League but lost 4-2 in the Fenland!

The Fenland League wound up in the 1970s but Warboys stalwart Jack Taylor continued to run its cup event, the Littlechild Knock-Out. The trophy went missing in 1981 and the competition was taken over by the Hunts and Peterborough Association (with the then-chairman Phil England donating a new cup) which is the Fenland Knock-Out we know today.

Sadly, the notebook finishes in 1970/71 with a very unsuccessful season. Even with the B team formed the previous year in the Fenland Minor competition, there is not a single victory until late March.

Of the founders, the player who remained longest was Tony Skietnieks. A Latvian emigré, he served a cup of tea during a game played at his home on a mat with a photograph of the impressive buildings in his beloved Riga. He was an extremely heavy smoker and before the ban, playing Tony was definitely a health risk! The last record of him at the club was in February 1989 after which he returned to his homeland following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### P Hanks v A Skietnieks

Perkins Club Championship

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 c6 5 e3 b5** This looks like an innocuous standard position and I was considering a small combination I had learned as a schoolboy **6 Nxb5 cxb5 7 Qf3**. In the nick of time, I noticed **7 ... Bg4** when the white queen cannot evade the bishop due to **8 ... Qa5+** with mate next move!

Now, we have computer analysis, ready availability of chess books, internet distribution of a word-processed newsletter and digital clocks with an incremental time limit. Let's not forget the world of adjudications, newsprint and reporting results by post. Moreover, our memories should be of the bygone competitions, the friendly rivalries, half-forgotten names of the personalities and the happy times we shared over the board.

Merry Combinations and a Happy New Year!

*Paul Hanks*