

New Englander

Chess Club Update – Christmas 2025

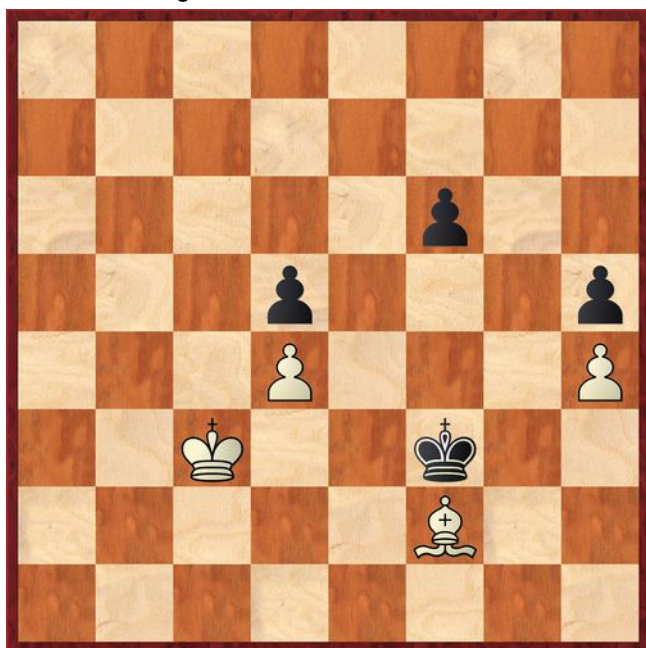
Chairman's Chatter

A few years ago, we just had weather. Now, the autumn months are a succession of named storms coming thick and fast! Short days with their dim light seem to make matters worse, at least psychologically, and it all adds up to deter venturing forth in the evening.

It should not be so! The club prides itself on its friendly, welcoming atmosphere as the setting for both the enjoyment coming from the camaraderie of team matches and the intrigue of the mental challenge we mutually create at the board. More attendance, more games, more pleasure. It should be a win-win situation whatever the game results.

So which highlights in 2025 can we point to as examples of satisfaction and fulfilment from our joint enterprise?

- After three years as county champions, the A team had to bow to a strengthened and resurgent St Neots but there was great pleasure in visiting our successors for the last game of the season and showing there is life in the old dog yet.
- The B team achieved a creditable runners-up spot in Division 2.
- Patriots performed heroic feats by winning the North division of the Team 7000 competition but were sadly unable to follow up this success in the play-off. Instead, they fought through to the final of the Fenland Plate winning the event on board count. Well done!



- The Team 4200 squad found it difficult to defend their crown but it was a sign of our low membership numbers in that sector rather than lack of effort and commitment.

- The Junior Club is continuing and attracting more participants all the time. If you want to pit your wits alongside the youngsters, presented here is a puzzle set for them (see diagram).

The position was set up at the back of the room and was intended as an interesting diversion in the interlude between games. I looked at it and could see that it must be White to move because 1 ... Kxf2 is trivial. I found it far from easy because there are always draws by repeated attacks on the bishop to consider.

Initially, I went for 1 Bg1 Kg2 2 Be3 Kf3 3 Bg5 fxg5 4 hxg5 h4 5 g6 h3 6 g7 h2 7 g8=Q h1=Q 8 Qxd5+. This seemed a difficult line for beginners, more so when 3 ... f4 introduces another variation, albeit losing after 4 Kb4 Ke4 5 Kc5 f4 6 Bxf4 etc.

One problem is that 1 Be1 Ke4 wins the d pawn unless White permits the repetition 2 Bf2. There is a trick, however.

1 Be1 Ke4 2 Kb4 Kxd4 [2 ... f5 3 Kc5] **3 Bc3+** and by engineering a skewer, White is now in control. **3 ... Ke4** [3 ... Ke3 4 Bxf6 d4 5 Kc4 d3 6 Bg5+ Ke2 7 Kc3] **4 Bxf6 d4 5 Kc4 d3 6 Bg5** etc. It will be the right rook's pawn to promote with a dark-squared bishop. Did Ed really expect this analysis of 7-year-olds? Aha, I did waste my time – it was Black to move!

We are now taking a short break from chess. This gives us time for a period of meeting and eating, the same game, rousing carousing and then booze and a snooze. It is a tried and tested formula and once a year, we are allowed to indulge in a little collective celebration. I hope that you will have the opportunity to spend time with friends and family and enjoy the festive season.

Please remember other club members relish having your company and playing against and alongside you – rain or shine. I look forward to seeing you at matches and our internal events next year.

Merry Chessmas and a Happy 2026.

Paul Hanks