

# Guildford Chess Club Celebrates 125 years



## Nigel Povah is a long-time member of Guildford, one of the UK's leading chess clubs

Lockdown and the lack of over-the-board chess, coupled with me being retired from my business activities, has afforded the opportunity to spend some time exploring the 125-year history of Guildford Chess Club through the minutes of the numerous AGMs, the early ones of which are in paper form, with the more recent versions in digital form.

They make for some fascinating reading and I discovered things about the Club which I never knew and which I'd like to share.

However, I should start by mentioning that the Club is actually celebrating its 125th anniversary this year and to commemorate this we are holding a special, open-air, Simultaneous display on Guildford High Street on Saturday 11th September.

The display will be given by a selection of players, all of whom have played for Guildford over the years, headed up by GMs Gawain Jones and Nick Pert and supported by IMs Andrew Martin, Matthew Wadsworth and Nigel Povah, as well as FMs Harry Grieve, Alex Golding and Akshaya Kalaiyalahan and former European School Girls U11 Champion, Jessica Mellor.

Participation is open to all, and free of charge. Registration is required and places can be booked at: [guildfordchess125.eventbrite.co.uk](http://guildfordchess125.eventbrite.co.uk) where you can also find further details.

### The Early Years

Guildford Chess Club was founded on Friday 10th April 1896 at the Guildford Institute, as the 'Guildford and Working Men's Institute (GWMI) Chess Club' and the first set of minutes state "That a Club should be formed amongst the members of the Institute for the purpose of promoting and teaching the game of Chess." Intriguingly there was no reference to playing chess. The minutes also noted that Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll), who lived in Guildford for a period until his death in 1898, occasionally visited the Club.

On the Club's third anniversary on 10th April 1899, GWMI amalgamated with the original Guildford Chess Club, which had been in existence since at least 1887 and used to meet in the Station Hotel, although unfortunately no minutes appear to exist for that club, so little is known about its background. It was decided to adopt the latter's name and to make the Guildford Institute its home venue, which it has

remained to this day. The minutes recorded an amendment to the Club's purpose: "The object of the Guildford Chess Club is to play, promote and teach the game of Chess".

In 1899 the newly formed Club immediately registered its first ever league success, by winning the Surrey League's Beaumont Cup, which had only been instigated in 1895. This early success was in some measure due to the fact that the membership included G.E. Wainwright, the former President of the Oxford University Chess Club and a top British player with international experience.

The Club continued with its activities which included playing league chess in the Beaumont Cup, as well as various friendly matches and running internal tournaments. This was the case for many years, although interclub competition completely ceased during the Great War, with the minute book reporting "some of our keenest and best players have joined his Majesty's forces to help checkmate the German Emperor." Interestingly the Club saw its first lady member join in 1918.

The Club celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1920 with an invitation to the legendary Jose Capablanca (who was to become world champion the following year) to give a 42-board simultaneous display, which he graciously accepted and unsurprisingly won every game.

Capablanca was welcomed by the Mayor and top British Chess dignitaries such as Miss Holloway, the reigning British Ladies Champion, and former British Champion R. Griffiths, were also in attendance. The Club President, R. Wells, presented Capablanca with an ivory rook mounted on an ebony pedestal with a silver-plate, engraved with the borough arms and inscribed to commemorate the event. Capablanca expressed his great pleasure with such a unique gift, which he would take back home to remind him of his very pleasant visit to Guildford.

The Club demonstrated its commitment to its original object of promoting and teaching chess by creating a junior section, which saw some very promising young talent coming through from the Royal Grammar School based in Guildford and it is great to see that this strong association between the Club and the School is still evident today. Amongst this talent were two very promising players, B.C. Gould and A.W.J. Down, both of whom went on to win British Boys Championships

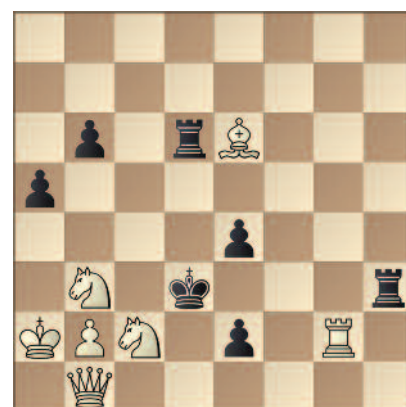


*The soon-to-be-third world champion enjoyed his visit to Guildford for a simul in 1920.*

between 1929 and 1933.

The 1930s saw the Club's membership grow and in 1932 the Club had two very prominent Guildfordians as vice-presidents, the Right Hon. The Earl of Onslow, P.C., O.B.E., and the Hon. Charles Rhys M.C. the local Member of Parliament. In 1933 the Mayor William Harvey O.B.E also became a vice-president. In addition to these worthies the Club also acquired the services of a very notable problemist, G.C. Holroyd, who was extremely well known in the problem world and was elected as match captain in 1933.

### G.C. Holroyd *West Sussex Gazette* 1929



*White to play and mate in 2*

The Club continued with its commitment to promoting and teaching chess, when in 1934 E. Znosko-Borovsky, the noted Russian Chess master, gave a lecture on 'General Principles', which was followed by a consultation match against two of Guildford's leading players, although sadly it went unfinished due to a lack of time.

Guildford's reputation as a thriving club was further evidenced by an invitation to the reigning British Champion, Sir George Thomas, to give a 25-board simultaneous display at the Royal Grammar School on 13th December 1935. Sir George met strong resistance, winning 17, drawing 6 and losing 2 – a fine result for Guildford members.

### Post World War II

After the War, the Club resumed its winning ways by securing the Surrey Waechter shield in the 1946/47 season, the first time it had been contested since Guildford's last victory in the 1937/38 season. On 5th February 1947 the Club also played an unusual 12-board match against a team of German Prisoners of War at the Meroo POW camp, with Guildford winning 10-2. There was a return fixture on 1st July, which Guildford also won by 9½-2½.

The 1959/60 minutes report that the Club benefited from "having P.C. Gibbs, the young Yorkshire and International player taking part in the later matches." Peter Gibbs had been joint British Under-18 Champion in 1952 and represented England at the 7th Student Olympiad in Leningrad in 1960 where he lost as Black in an exciting King's Gambit against future World Champion, Boris Spassky. Unfortunately he only played for the Club in that one season as he moved out of the area.

The 1960/61 season saw Guildford winning the Surrey knockout competition, the Alexander Cup (inaugurated in 1922/23) for the first time, beating Streatham & Brixton in the final by 6-4. This season also saw another new name amongst the Club's members, namely Graham R. Mitchell, who unbeknown to the membership was the Deputy Director of MI5 from 1956 until his retirement in 1963. Graham was the Deputy to Sir Roger Hollis, who was, of course, the father of Adrian Hollis the well-known correspondence GM. Graham, who was a correspondence IM himself, played for Guildford up until his death in 1985.

The 1961/62 season was quite memorable in that it saw the formation of the Surrey Border League on 14 August 1961, with the Surrey Chess Association presenting the Waechter Shield to the newly formed league and much to the Club's delight, Guildford managed to win the trophy in its inaugural season. Guildford also decided to enter the Surrey Trophy competition (the Surrey League's first division) for the first time, having previously spurned it due to the geographical spread of the participating clubs, but it was now viable as it was split into two geographical regions.



Sir George Thomas was another to give a simul in Guildford, doing so in 1935. Here we see him in action to inaugurate Mitcham Chess Club on March 2nd 1939, where he won all 27 games.

### The 1970s and 1980s

The 1969/70, 1970/71 and 1971/72 seasons saw some guest appearances for Guildford Chess Club from well-known England international, Andrew Whiteley, who was attending the Guildford College of Law. The 1972/73 season saw several new members joining the Club, most notably the well-known Chess historian and author R.N. Coles, who had written books on Howard Staunton and Sultan Khan, amongst others.

The Club organised its second Open weekend tournament on 5th October 1974, which was won by David Pritchard with Roger Abayasekera coming second out of 38 contestants. Neither were Club members at the time, but both joined the Club subsequently and made significant contributions to it over the following years. Half an hour after the tournament had finished and most of the competitors had departed, the Horse and Groom Public House opposite Guildford Library was devastated by a bomb which had been planted by the IRA. Four Club members were still clearing up and were some of the first to arrive on the scene of carnage.

In 1984/85 the Club won the Surrey Trophy for the first time, as well as achieving its now customary victory in the Surrey Border League first division. It also won the Border League knockout competition, the Haslemere Trophy, for the first time, it having been instigated two seasons earlier in 1982/83.

### The 1990s – a decade of advancement

In 1990/91 the Club was strengthened by the arrival of IM Nigel Povah, who was now

living in Guildford. 1993/4 was a particularly successful season for the Club with it winning the Surrey Trophy for only the second time since 1984/85, as well as winning the Border League first division. The Club also achieved its best ever performance in the National Club championship by reaching the Final where it sadly lost 4-2 to a strong Paisley YMCA team.

**J.Shaw-N.Povah**  
 Guildford vs Paisley YMCA 1994  
 Closed Sicilian

**1 e4 c5 2 g3 ♘c6 3 ♙g2 g6 4 d3 ♙g7 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♖h3 e6 7 0-0 ♗ge7 8 ♙e3 0-0 9 ♗d2 ♖e8!?**

9...♗d4 10 ♙h6 e5 11 ♙xg7 ♖xg7 12 f4 f6 is fine for Black, but I preferred to play for ...d5.

**10 f4 b6!? 11 f5?!**

John decides to go for it, but it doesn't quite work.

**11...exf5 12 ♙h6 ♙d4+ 13 ♖h1 fxe4?!**

13...♙b7 was best when Black is better.

**14 ♗xe4 ♙xh3 15 ♙xh3 f5**



### 16 c3?!

16 ♖g5! ♗xb2 17 ♚ae1 ♗e5 18 g4 gives White a dangerous initiative.

### 16...♗g7 17 ♗xg7 ♗xg7 18 ♖g5

18 ♗g5 ♖g8 defends and is excellent for Black.

### 18...♖g8

And not 18...♗d7?! 19 g4! when White is OK.

### 19 ♗g2 ♗d7?!

Not best as it leaves the d5-square under White's control. If 19...♗e5!? 20 ♗d5! with rough equality (and not 20 ♗xa8?! ♗xa8+ 21 ♗g2 ♗xg2+ 22 ♗xg2 ♖xd3), but 19...d5! was best when Black is clearly better.

### 20 g4! ♖h6!

20...h6? 21 gxf5 hxg5 22 ♗xg5 is disastrous for Black.

### 21 gxf5 ♖xf5 22 ♗e4 ♖f8

22...d5? now doesn't work in view of 23 ♗xf5 gxf5 24 ♖f4 when the black king is too exposed.

### 23 ♗g2



### 23...♖fe7

This allows White to force a repetition. Instead, 23...♖ac8 24 ♗d5 (and not 24 ♗xc6? ♖xc6 25 ♗e6+ ♗xe6 26 ♗xc6 ♗e2! 27 ♗g2 ♗xg2+ 28 ♗xg2 ♖e3+) 24...♖f6 would be roughly balanced. 24 ♗d5! ♖xd5 25 ♗xd5 ♗h8 26 ♖f7+ ♗g7 27 ♖g5 ♗h8 28 ♖f7+ ♗g7 29 ♖g5 ½-½

This season also saw the Club launching a Junior Section driven mainly by Nigel Povah and Roger Abayasekera who created three levels of Achievement Certificates for children to demonstrate their progress. The Club staged its second Open Rapidplay event in March 1994 which attracted over 250 entrants and was won by Nigel Povah, scoring 5½/6.

In 1994/95 the Club managed to win the National Club Major Plate competition beating the Royal Air Force in the final 3½-1½. The Club also won both the Surrey Trophy and the Border League first division, as well as winning the Alexander Cup for only the second time.

In the 1995/96 season Guildford Chess Club celebrated its centenary by organising a series of events, which included a 12-board match against the Surrey Border League, which the Club won 8-4, the restoration of an open-air chess board in the Castle grounds, staging the first Masnou tournament in the UK and holding a



Many chess clubs have led quite migratory existences. In contrast, Guildford Chess Club was founded at the Guildford Institute back in 1896 and still meets there every week to this day.

Centenary dinner with IM William Hartston as the keynote speaker. The Club capped its celebration by winning the Surrey Trophy for the third year in succession, as well winning the Border League Division 2 and the newly formed Division 3, receiving the Graham Smith Shield, a most fitting result in remembrance of probably the Club's longest-standing member – Graham had been a member of the Club for over 50 years.

In September 1995 the Club received a last-minute nomination as one of the clubs to represent England in the European Club Championship played at the Barbican. The Club managed to win one of its three matches. The Club managed to repeat this feat of representing England the following year in the 12th European Club Cup in September 1996, as was reported in the judges' recommendation when it awarded the Club with the title of the British Chess Federation's 'Club of the Year' in 1996/97. Their recommendation was as follows:

*"The club is celebrating its centenary in 1996 and claims to be unique in having survived for 100 years without interruption at the same venue – the Guildford Institute. An impressive list of special events has been organised to mark the significant event. The local council has been persuaded to renovate an old chess board which was buried for 25 years within the grounds of the castle, and photographs were submitted showing the pleasing result.*

*"It is expected that a plaque commemorating the centenary will be placed on the club building. A celebration dinner was held with William Hartston as guest speaker and sponsored simultaneous events have been held in local schools. The summer will see further significant events including a 'Chess*

*Variants', tournament at Charterhouse School and an open-air simultaneous event in the town centre in July with Steve Davis present, but perhaps the most interesting project is the first Masnou Tournament to be held in the UK, scheduled for June. This is a special kind of rapidplay event without a set number of rounds where one third of the competitors wait to replace losers (or White drawers). Also in June, players from Guildford's twin town Freiburg will visit and attend a civic reception in the town hall.*

*"The judges were impressed by the well-developed coaching scheme for junior players constructed by Nigel Povah. This is held for two hours every Saturday morning with certificates being awarded to celebrate stages of achievement. At least one lady player is involved in the coaching.*

*"The club has played a very full part in supporting national chess. They represented England in the European club championships at Orebro, Sweden and finished fourth. Guildford were quarter-finalists in the National club championship, semi-finalists in the Major Plate and entered the 4NCL. Locally, the club participates with great success in the Surrey/Hants Border League and Surrey Trophy, and its annual rapid-play event attracts around 240 players, making it one of the largest such events in the south of England.*

*"Also of great interest was a fully documented history of the club, compiled by Richard Bryant and Graham Smith which is intended for future publication. The overall presentation of the Guildford entry was clear and attractive, with useful supporting documentation and photographs."*

As a result, Stewart Reuben subsequently attended the Club to present an engraved chess clock and give a short talk.

## The 2000s

In 2000/01 the Club won the Beaumont Cup (the Surrey League second division) for the first time in a decade and retained the Stoneleigh Trophy for the third year running and the Colin Price Shield for the second year running. The Club also managed to retain the Alexander Cup for the second year running.

Guildford's 4NCL team maintained its status as a decent middle-order team in the 4NCL first division, and its prospects were further enhanced when Nigel Povah's company, Assessment & Development Consultants, became the sponsor and the team was rebranded Guildford-A&DC.

The following game was the top-board clash between Guildford and Redhill, who were one of the strongest teams in the Surrey Trophy.



The Club's logo is modelled on the iconic clock on Guildford High Street. A special event on 11th September will celebrate the 125th anniversary.

### N.Povah-A.Ledger Guildford vs Redhill 2003 *Pseudo-Trompowsky*

#### 1 d4 d5 2 ♘g5

I have played this over 100 times with a score of around 70%.

#### 2...c5

Black immediately challenges White's play and intends targeting the weak b2-square. Instead, 2...h6 and 2...c6 are the most common choices.

#### 3 dxc5! ♖a5+ 4 ♖c3

White scores very well from here. He now aims to blow the position open and exploit his lead in development.

#### 4...e6 5 e4! ♙xc5

5...dxe4?? is a well-known blunder, first played in 1928, with White winning all eight games on my database: 6 b4! ♖c7 (to defend against ♗d8#) 7 ♖b5 ♗d7 8 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 9 0-0-0+ ♘c6 10 ♗d8 (10 ♖d4+ also wins, as does 10 ♖d6) 10...♖d7 11 ♖xa7+ ♗xa7 12 ♗xc8+ ♘d5 13 ♘b2 wins.

#### 6 exd5 ♗b6

This was the first time I had encountered this natural looking move, although it actually fails to create the threats that Andrew was clearly hoping for.

#### 7 ♗d2

I had already seen my ninth move before playing this.

#### 7...♙xf2+?

Far too ambitious. Black had to play more reservedly with 7...h6 8 ♙h4 ♖e7 9 ♙b5+ ♖d7 10 dxe6 ♗xe6+ 11 ♖ge2 when White still enjoys a clear advantage.

#### 8 ♗xf2 ♗xb2



#### 9 ♘d2!

This simple move, sacrificing the exchange, gives White a big lead in development and a winning attack. Black is already busted after only nine moves.

#### 9...♗xa1 10 ♖f3!

Calmly continuing to develop. 10 ♙b5+ ♖d7 (10...♙d7? 11 ♗c5 wins) 11 dxe6 (but not 11 ♖f3? ♗xh1 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 ♗e2 ♖gf6 14 ♗xe6+ ♘d8) 11...fxe6 12 ♗e2 is also winning.

#### 10...♖d7

10...♙d7 11 ♖e5 f6 12 dxe6 is also pretty devastating.

#### 11 dxe6 fxe6

Or if 11...f6 12 ♙f4 ♖e7 13 ♗e3.

#### 12 ♗g1!?

12 ♗e3! was stronger, but fortunately my move was good enough.

#### 12...♗b2 13 ♙b5

Continuing to develop and preventing ...♗b6.

#### 13...♖gf6

13...♗b4 14 ♗e1 is an overwhelming attack.

#### 14 ♙xf6 gxf6 15 ♗c5!



Preventing both 15...0-0 and 15...♗b4, while threatening to win the queen with 16 ♗b1. 15...♙f7 16 ♗d6! ♖b6 17 ♖e5+!



Stripping away Black's defences, and not 17 ♗b1?? ♗xb5 18 ♖xb5 ♖c4+ when it would be Black who is winning.

#### 17...fxe5 18 ♗f1+ ♘g6 19 ♙d3+ ♘h6 20 ♗f6+ 1-0

It's mate in two.

2003/04 saw the Club winning the Surrey Trophy for the first time in the 2000s, although it had a rare disappointment in the Border League first division. However, the most notable achievement this season was Guildford-A&DC winning the 4NCL first division for the first time, with a final round 4½-3½ victory over Wood Green, thanks to impressive wins from GMs Emil Sutovsky and Danny King, who scored a stunning 9½/10 throughout the season. IM Alexander Cherniaev also had a good season for the team, scoring an impressive 8/10, which included a solid draw against GM Luke McShane in the final crunch match with Wood Green, enabling him to secure his final GM norm.

2004/05 saw the Club winning the Surrey Trophy for the second year running, as well as winning the Beaumont Cup again, enabling the second team to be promoted to the first division. The Club also managed to regain the Border League first division title, but it sadly just missed out on retaining its 4NCL title with Guildford-A&DC only managing to secure a 4-4 draw with their great rivals Wood Green, who won the title on game points.

On a sad note Graham Smith passed away in December 2004, having been a Club member since 1947. The Graham Smith Trophy, which he donated in 2002, is awarded annually to recognise 'off the board' contributions to the Club.

2006/07 saw Guildford-A&DC winning the 4NCL first division for the second time and retaining it in 2007/08. Then 2010/11 saw the arrival of a few new members, with one in particular being Roger Emerson, a long-standing friend and former club-mate of Nigel Povah, when they both played for Streatham & Brixton in the 1970s. Roger, who was graded around 200 ECF, added usefully to the Club's playing strength and brought his captaincy and organisational skills, both of which were soon put to good use.

2011/12 was a season of only limited



*A star-studded Guildford squad from their 4NCL winning campaign of 2003/04. Plenty of famous faces to spot, with top-scoring Daniel King second left and Nigel Povah on the right.*

success, due to several near misses and the Club only managing to win the Stoneleigh Trophy, the Graham Smith shield (third year running), and the Colin Price shield. As Nigel had a few health issues at this time and his company's sponsorship of Guildford-A&DC in the 4NCL had ceased, Roger Emerson agreed to take on the captaincy of the 4NCL team, which was now renamed as Guildford-4NCL and he started the process of rebuilding the team by becoming its sponsor. Roger brought in GMs Nigel Short, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Romain Edouard and David Smerdon and brought back Ety Stefanova, but things didn't go quite to plan and Wood Green once again emerged on top with Guildford being runner-up.

2012/13 was a highly successful year for the Club, with President Phil Stimpson saying he considered this to be its best ever season. In addition to winning the Surrey Trophy, the Border League first division and the 4NCL, the Club managed to win the Centenary trophy for the first time and the Graham Smith and David Pritchard shields once again. Six trophies!

Regaining the 4NCL title after a four-year gap was particularly satisfying for Roger, who had strengthened the team further with the addition of GMs Gawain Jones, Matthew Sadler, Robin van Kampen and Mark Hebden. The final battle with Wood Green was close fought as always and ended 4-4, but this time it was Guildford who won the title on game points. In addition to his success with Guildford-4NCL, Roger also enjoyed a personal success, when he came joint first in the British Seniors (Over 60) Championship. This season also saw Nigel Povah returning to active play, after a nine month interval due to illness.

After the highs of the previous season, 2013/14 was much less successful, with victories in the David Pritchard and Colin Price shields (Border League Divisions 4 and 5), being the only successes in the local leagues. However, Guildford-4NCL managed to retain their 4NCL title with an impressive 6-2 victory over Wood Green in the final match, thanks to Guildford having two of the world's top ten

playing on their top two boards, namely super-GMs Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Anish Giri.

2014-15 was another successful season with the Club securing its second-ever victory in the Surrey Ellam Trophy (third division) and winning the Stoneleigh Trophy, as well as winning the Border League first division, the Haslemere Knockout and retaining both the David Pritchard and Colin Price shields. To cap it all, Guildford-4NCL (now jointly sponsored by Roger Emerson and Nigel Povah) retained its 4NCL title, achieving its third success in a row. In addition to these over-the-board successes, the Junior section was continuing to thrive with over 24 members. Some of these juniors played for the Club in Division 6 of the Border League – the Bill Lowe shield, which was named after a former Guildford member and started in 2005/06.

On an individual level, Guildford members enjoyed success at the 2015 British Championships, with Nigel Povah becoming joint British Over-50s Champion and Roger Emerson joint British Over-65s Champion.

The next four seasons saw Guildford-

4NCL retaining its first division title each year, making it seven consecutive titles, with the team now having achieved a stunning 81 victories and only two draws over the previous eight years. When added to the three earlier successes of the Guildford-A&DC team, Guildford can claim 10 titles in the 4NCL's 26-year history, making it by far the most successful Club ever in the 4NCL.

2019-20 saw the temporary demise of over-the-board chess due to the Covid pandemic, so Guildford turned its attention to playing online chess in the 4NCL Online League. Guildford fielded a team of youngsters in a team called 'Guildford Young Guns' and it achieved a very creditable result, being the losing finalists in a strong competition.

2020-21 followed the same pattern as the previous year with the pandemic still preventing OTB play. Once again the Guildford Young Guns performed very well, but still ended up the bridesmaid and not the bride. However, Roger and Nigel decided to sponsor a Guildford-4NCL entry in the European Online Club Championship and our five-board squad comprised of England's top four: Mickey Adams, David Howell, Luke McShane and Gawain Jones plus Bulgarian GM Ivan Cheparinov, all of whom had played for Guildford in the 4NCL over the previous two-three seasons. The team was seeded third out of over 90 entries and it easily qualified for the final stage of the tournament with the top ten best teams. However, it unfortunately failed to live up to its seeding at this point and ended up in a disappointing seventh place.

So it has been an interesting 125 years for the Club, which has been based at the same venue for its entire existence, but I think it is fair to say that during this time, thanks to the Club's various achievements, it has evolved to become one of the most successful chess clubs in the country.

Solution to Holroyd's problem: **1 ♣f1!**  
 Any (1...exf1 ♣/♙/♘ 2 ♙d2#; 1...exf1 ♘ 2 ♘c1#; 1...♙xc2 2 ♣b1#; 1...e3 2 ♣f5#; 1...♙e3 2 ♘e1#) 2. ♣xe2#.



*Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Anish Giri are normally rivals, but they were team-mates for Guildford in May 2014. We'll explore more about Guildford's 4NCL dominance next month.*