

The development of correspondence chess in the United Kingdom in the 19th century

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A little bit about my project

- In-depth research from 1824-1914
- Primary sources e.g. chess columns
- “Grass-roots” not master chess
- Social/cultural context & connections
- Game/ result collection is secondary
- Double objective: chess book & thesis

Types of event

- Consultation matches
- Private games between individuals
- Serial games in periodicals
- Knock-out tournaments
- Thematic events (set openings)
- All-play-all tournaments
- Team matches (individual opponents)

The Bruno Bassi thesis

- First CC history (1948-52, incomplete)
- Bassi divided into periods:
- “Prehistory” to 1800
- “Golden Age” 1800-51
- Early Modern 1851-88
- International tournaments 1888-
- IFSB 1928-39 (technical organisation)
- ICCA 1946- (precursor of ICCF)

What is wrong with this picture?

- Methodologically & empirically flawed
- Cited by ‘Oxford Companion’ as if fact
- “Pre-history” didn’t end until 1824
- No “golden age” before 1851
- CC grows, not declines, after 1851
- Factors benefiting OTB also helped CC
- What did Bassi really mean?

U.K. timeline: landmarks

- Only landmarks: NOT Bassi-style “periods”
- 1824 London-Edinburgh match starts
- 1840 Penny Post. Individual games
- 1853 KO tourneys in weekly journals
- 1870 First CC club founded
- 1877 UK-USA match
- 1887 Fraser International
- 1906 BCCA founded

Some tournament organisers

- Henry C. Mott
- James Chatto
- William Nash
- James Pierce
- G. B. Fraser
- The Rowlands
- Rhoda Bowles



Some successful players

- James White (Leeds)
- Rev Arthur B. Skipworth
- W. Bridgwater (Birmingham)
- Charles J. Lambert (Exeter)
- George B. Fraser (Dundee)
- Joseph Blake (Southampton)
- William Gunston (Cambridge)



Edinburgh v London 1824-8

- First inter-club match to start (just!)
- Great public interest
- 'Scotch Game' got its name
- Winner was first to win 2 games
- Replay of draws helped Scots (4 whites)
- Influenced CC rules to this day
- Controversial after-life of event

'Family Paper' tournaments

- Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper
- Seven knock-out events, 1853-67
- Organised by columnist H. C. Mott
- 32 players: took 6 years to complete
- Largest had 128 entries
- Some leading amateurs participated
- Many players used initials or 'handles'

Some major inter-city matches

- 1824-8 London loses to Edinburgh
- 1834-5 Westminster lose to Paris
- 1848-51 London win Amsterdam matches
- 1871 Oxford University bt. Cambridge
- 1872-4 London beat Vienna
- 1880-1 Liverpool beat Calcutta
- 1886-7 St Petersburg beat British CC

Nash's tournaments

- Organised by William Nash of St Neot's.
- More information badly needed on these!
- 1877-80: 1. Skipworth, 2 Ranken
- Second (1881): 1. Ranken
- Third: ??
- Fourth: ??
- Fifth: 1. H. F. Cheshire
- Sixth: 1= W. T. Pierce & F. Budden
- 7th event (to 1887): 1. D. Y. Mills
- 8th event (1887-8): 1. J. Russell?



International Post Card Tourney

- First transatlantic chess event
- USA v United Kingdom (28 boards)
- Judd and Delmar on US team
- Began July 1877, 4 games per board
- Intended to last 2 years: took 4 or 5
- Never completed, no official result

Various tournaments

- Irish Sportsman and Farmer (1871)
- British Chess Assoc. (1873-4)
- CPC: various events in 1870s
- Preston Guardian ('79-80): 1 W. McArthur
- CPC Handicap (1880): 1 J. Snelgrove [3]
- BCM (1882-3): 1. W. Bridgwater
- LMI-2: 1. Berger, 2. Blake
- 'Hobbies' series begins circa 1899
- Womanhood-1 (1901-2) 1. Gunston

English Mechanic tourneys

- Organised by James Pierce
- 1882-3: 1. J. Russell (SCO)
- 1884-5: 1. F. A. Vincent
- 1885-7: (double round-robin)
- 1. Charles Lambert
- 1887-9: 1. Lambert; 2. H. Balson (Derby)
- 1890-2: 1= W.T. Pierce & T. G. Hart
- 1892-4: (run by WTP) 1. A. E. Tietjen



Mail & Warder tournaments

- Run by T. B. Rowland
- 1 e4 e5 compulsory
- 1889-90: 1 Locke Holt (WLS)
- 1890-3: 1 W. H. Gunston,
- 2= Mary Rudge & J. Neill
- 1893-4: 1 Blake, 2 Bellingham
- 1894-6: 1 Blake, 2 W. Monck
- 1896-8: 1 Dr R. C. Macdonald (SCO)



United Kingdom Corr. Tourney

- Organised by G. B. Fraser of Dundee
- July 1887-September 1889
- 6 players each England, Ireland, Scotland
- All-play-all but Archdall (ENG) withdrew
- 1. Fraser; 2. Barry; 3= Blake & Gunston
- Winning team: Ireland??
- Many games survive

Some books about CC history

- London v Edinburgh (Lewis)
- Bledow, Lange & Fraser
- ICCF Gold
- Diepstraten (Netherlands)
- Avery (USA, mostly CCLA)
- Pagni (club matches)
- Zehr/ MacDonald (Canada, 2006)
- ? Harding (2007/8)

