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Kenneth Whyld
(6-3-1926 - 11-7-2003)

In Memoriam

Ken Whyld, one of the greatest scholars of the history of chess, if not the greatest ever of the last twenty years, suddenly died on the morning of July 11th, 2003.
A serious loss for the whole international chess community.

It is well known that for over one century there has been a movement of a permanent intense activity, sometimes with results of scientific value, worked out to the study of the origins, on the mutations and about the development of the game of chess which has involved scholars of different nationality, of different origin, without boundaries. An international community in which the various researchers soon learn to respect the own, and above all, other scholars' works; in such environment the ethics of the study, the respect for other opinions and the correctness seem to be engraved in the DNA of everybody.

Italy can boast of an excellent tradition in this particular matter. Matter, must be said, of great historical and cultural importance for my country, as it is testified by the great ancient chess works which characterize our literature on the game, its rules and its strategies: from the very precious chess manuscripts, sometimes commissioned by princely Courts, and often superbly illustrated, to the first printed books of the fifteenth and seventeenth-century, when, with the fame of the Spanish theorists declining, Italians soon belonged to the more reputed players of the world, and the chess schools of the peninsula attracted players from every European country. Probably for these motives, but also, and perhaps above all, for the admiration that he felt for Adriano Chicco, Ken Whyld became soon a friend of Italy and of our chess history.

Surely a natural kind disposition favoured their reciprocal sympathy; competence, an even nature, style, wisdom, simplicity belonged to both. Ken always appreciated, such as Chicco, the humble work and the modesty in the search of the profundity of chess knowledge, without "vulgar showmanship" - as he used to remember - because nobody possesses the truth.

In his youth he was repeatedly chess champion of his county; several times he participated in the British championship and he became a player of international level. In the fifties he published the *Chess Student's Quarterly*; from 1955 to 1965 he reviewed over 500 chess books in the *Chess Reader*; he compiled numerous bulletins of tournaments and in collaboration with J. Gilchrist he wrote an anthology of Emanuel Lasker's games in three volumes. In collaboration with D. Hooper he wrote the famous *The Oxford Companion to Chess* in 1984, with a following edition in 1987 that he excellently worked up in 1992. For many years he was the editor of the famous column *Quote & Queries* of the *British Chess Magazine*. In 1986 he wrote *Guinness Chess - The Records*. Innumerable and of high cultural level were his papers devoted to the history of chess.

In the sixties of the last century I met Adriano Chicco – who, according to Ken Whyld, was the greatest chess historian of his time – and soon I became his preferred pupil, but surely not the best! Doctor Chicco often spoke to me about Ken Whyld and when I had the opportunity to meet him in London I understood why. Then started many years of correspondence and reciprocal sympathy which became sincere friendship much beyond the only chess aspects.

When the late Mrs. Alice Loranth, Director of the Chess Department of the Cleveland Public Library asked me to study the chess manuscript *Il Dilettevole e Giuditioso gioco de Scacchi*, stored for many years in the library, I discovered to my great surprise that my colleague for the English version of the book was Ken. To work with Ken was an enthusiastic experience.

Among chess researchers Ken Whyld became still more famous for having picked up on the beautiful idea of A.C. White, in the beginning of the last century, to prepare some chess booklets to be sent at his own expense and only to his friends at Christmas time every year.

Just in the last years of his life he informed me that he was completing two works, which, like my *Italian Chess Bibliography*, Ken defined as "works of service."

The first, the precious *Chess Columns*, a careful list of the chess columns published in newspapers, magazines etc. all over the world which he personally gave to me with a dedication; while the second he wrote in collaboration with C. Ravilious *Chess Texts in the English language, printed before 1850* was unfortunately handed over to me by other kind hands after his death.

The feeling of loneliness is strong in every scholar; you are alone in the silence of a library, you are alone in the silence of your own study, you are alone when you are writing, but then you may have the comfort to talk to your colleagues which often results in a friendship forever, where both have the same intellectual chess adventure.

It was only some months before his death that we told in Berlin about this and other personal and private questions – and I'll keep some words that Ken told me forever in my heart.

Unfortunately a destiny often difficult to understand had already decided that those days would be the last chance of two sincere friends.