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Chess History & Literature Society - Frank Hoffmeister



Frank Hoffmeister, Budapest 2024

An interview with Georges Bertola, editor-in-chief of “Europe Echecs” magazine and chess historian.

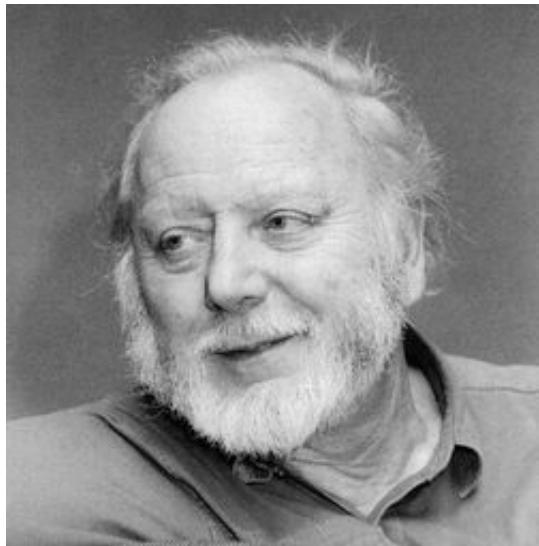
Frank Hoffmeister is currently President of the “Chess History & Literature Society”, which was originally founded as the Ken Whyld Association. At the general meeting held in Budapest on 13 and 14 September, we had the opportunity to get to know each other better.

Georges Bertola: *First of all, what is the difference between the current “Chess History & Literature Society” and the former “Ken Whyld Association”, and what distinguishes it from “Chess Collectors International”?*

Frank Hoffmeister: The name “Ken Whyld Association” comes from the English historian [Ken Whyld](#), who died in 2003, who had gathered a few friends around him to research the history of chess (Ken Whyld is notably the co-author, with David Hooper, of the reference work *The Oxford Companion to Chess*). After his death, his friends decided to continue his work by coming together in an association intended to become a meeting and exchange circle and to broaden his horizons with a new name “Chess History & Literature Society”. The idea is to attract members who are not focused solely on the United Kingdom, but whose interest in history corresponds to a global vision of the world of chess.

“Chess Collectors International” brings together people who like to collect books, chess boards, pieces, manuscripts, etc. to facilitate exchanges or gather information.

Our association “Chess History & Literature Society” is rather interested in research to treat different subjects in a concrete way of the history of chess. For example, this year, at our general meeting in Budapest, we concentrated on the history of FIDE.



— Ken Whyld

GB: *What is the significance of adding the term “Literature Society”?*

FH: This was one of the major projects of the “Ken Whyld Association” right from the start. We have a “Tobiblion” database where members can find books, who has written about what, when and in what language. It's an electronic catalogue of games, tournaments and especially newspapers. Newspapers are particularly important for research. I don't usually have newspaper articles in my library. When I'm doing my research, I can consult the database to see if there are any interesting articles. Find out, for example, that there was an article in a Swedish newspaper that year on the subject I'm studying.

GB: *Who manages this database?*

FH: It's the association and, more specifically, one of our members, Per Skjoldager, who has been doing this work for many years. Each member receives a password and can easily access this database.

GB: *In terms of how the association works, is it primarily an annual meeting, or are there other events on the programme?*

FH: This is indeed an annual general meeting. Over the last three years we've been to Marostica in Italy, Belfort in France and now Budapest. But we also inform our members about other important events via our website: <https://www.kwabc.org/en/about-us.html>

All our activities are voluntary, and there is no remuneration for the members who run the association. Setting up an annual conference is already a lot of work, and it's also the main subject of our reflections.

GB: *What is planned for 2025?*

FH: We've had discussions with our members about going to Valencia in Spain to visit our friend José Antonio Garzon, a renowned Spanish historian. Another plan is to go to the United States, but for the American option, we also need the support of St Louis. For the moment, nothing is certain.

In Valencia, we could combine the visit with an event on the Spanish chess heritage that is going to be organised by Garzon.

GB: *At the last meeting, several members suggested Amsterdam. Is that on the agenda?*

FH: Amsterdam remains a very interesting destination with the Max Euwe Chess Centre, the legacy of a former world champion. We also have a member, Jurgen Stigter, who has an impressive collection. It remains an option.

GB: *Since the word literature is part of the association, are there any plans to develop the link between the world of chess and that of artists in greater depth? I'm thinking in particular of Marcel Duchamp, an important figure in the 1924 Paris Olympic tournament?*

FH: I think about a subject every year and if we decide on a subject like chess and art, it will of course be a very important figure. In Germany, we don't have a personality of that stature, but there are many chess players who have been interested in other subjects. The world champion Lasker was interested in philosophical and mathematical questions. Many players have been interested in art or science.

GB: *It is therefore necessary to broaden the history of chess by including writers, painters, artists and scientists in order to reach a wider audience?*

FH: I absolutely agree and also think that chess is a cultural tradition, that it has a much wider influence that can be highlighted without any problem.

GB: *Another fascinating subject is the importance of the game in relation to religions. One of the first treatises by the Dominican monk Jacques de Cessoles, which dates from the thirteenth century, "Le Jeu des Echecs moralisé", is a text in the service of feudalism and the ancien régime, where everyone has to stay in their place. Is this a subject that could be on the agenda?*

FH: If we go to Valencia, the general subject could be "The modernisation of chess in the 16th century" and, in that case, there are all these aspects that could be the subject of debates and conferences. Why were the rules renewed? Why did the Queen become so powerful after Lucena? What are the theories or explanations? A historical subject, that of Isabella the Catholic, who was the symbol of a strong, even dominant woman who was given more power alongside the King. This is a thesis supported by several historians. Other historians liken it more to the symbolism of the Virgin Mary.

GB: *What does the "Chess History & Literature Society" represent today? How many countries, how many members?*

FH: I've been at the head of the association for three years and at that time I inherited an association that was somewhat dormant. To relaunch the association, we had to create activities of interest to all the members. We removed those who were no longer active and no longer paying their subscriptions. Today, we have over 90 active members, most of them in Europe and a few in the USA. Personalities of international stature such as Youri Averbakh and Lothar Schmid have been members of our association.

For our congress here in Budapest, members from France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Serbia and the President of the FIDE Historical Committee, Willy Iclicki, came. Of course, today with the Russians it's not easy. However, our aim is to be an association open to all historians and chess history enthusiasts throughout the world. We are looking for younger members, I myself am 54 years old and I encourage all those who are not experts to join us.

The history of the great players, their contributions to chess or in real life, the links between different countries that have been forged thanks to chess, if all this interests them, they are welcome. They can contact us by e-mail. We've decided to set up a WhatsApp group to make it easier for members to keep in touch with each other. It's one of my aims to create a platform where there's trust, where you can have

colleagues and share knowledge, a platform for international exchange.



— Georges Bertola

Georges Bertola

Budapest on 15 September 2024