

2007-11-24

## In memoriam Dr Jean Mennerat



**(\* 11 August 1917 - † 21 September 2007)**

Only very late we received the sad news: **Dr Jean Mennerat**, the doyen of our association and the greatest French chess collector of our age is no longer alive. We don't know anything about his last months, unfortunately we had lost contact already since August 2006.

After many years of active life as a doctor in Paris he had settled with his wife in the small village of Amancey in the French Jura Mountains where he lived a very secluded life devoted in great parts to the extension of his collection.

He had entrusted only few with his address, and certainly the number of those who were permitted to reach his "Holy of Holies" was still much smaller. Christophe Bouton belongs to this small circle of chosen ones, he reports in his obituary (worth reading, see [Echecs64 blog](#)), that tough preliminary negotiations were required at that time to get to an on-site interview with Dr Mennerat and to have a look at his very impressive collection. It is known that C. Bouton reported on this unique event in *New In Chess* 2005/5.

Therefore it was quite remarkable - in view of Jean Mennerat's suspicious mind especially of collectors -

that he decided to join the Ken Whyld Association in 2004. The possibility of an exchange of ideas exclusively via the internet may have had a favourable influence on his decision as well. As a result more frequent contacts by letter or e-mail between him and different KWA members – in particular with Michael Negele – came about and Jean Mennerat always turned out to be very obliging and ready to help. But it was also clear from the beginning that Dr Mennerat – due to his advanced age and poor health, he called himself an invalid – was not able to make additional contributions to our association. Unfortunately he didn't accept our invitation to attend the general meeting in La Tour-de-Peilz 2006, though we had offered to drive him there and back. Therefore the only KWA board member who has personally met Jean Mennerat is Jurgen Stigter who met him at some Dutch auctions in the eighties.

The last letter of Jean Mennerat to Michael Negele dates from August 3rd, 2006, when he replied to Michael's enquiry about Le Lionnais. This typewritten letter is reproduced here by a [scan](#). (The date ... 2005 given in the letter is a small typo – here is a [scan of the envelope](#) with the date as postmark.)

Further details about Jean Mennerat have been archived in our August birthday greetings of the last 3 years (... August 2007). Moreover you will find some personal reminiscences of the deceased as well as an outlook for the potential fate of his collection in the above mentioned obituary by C. Bouton. Our Belgian member Guy van Habberney has supplied a short summary considering the most important details:

On September 21, one week after being named honorary member of the Ken Whyld Association, Dr Jean Mennerat passed away. He survived his wife by only a few months, and after his 90th birthday (on August 11) he himself had only a short time left. An avid collector from an early age on, his library contained 27,500 books (not counting duplicates; one year's issues = 1 item). Dr Mennerat was editor of *L'Echiquier de France* (1946-1955), and he was also known for his work on Chapais, an 18th century French endgame expert. Since 2005, he had virtually ceased all collecting efforts, being unable to climb the stairs to his sumptuous library. He is survived by 4 children, 9 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

He donated his collection by testament to the City of Belfort, but when the librarian of Belfort came to inspect the collection in October, he was in for a surprise: 425 meters of books, the equivalent of 18 cubic meters! It is not yet clear what the authorities of Belfort will do with such a big legacy in such a variety of languages, as an earlier attempt by Dr Mennerat to donate his books to the city library of Besançon came to naught.

Michael Negele's draft letter which should inform Jean Mennerat about his honorary membership will be published here as well:

[Letter on Honorary Membership \(10.8 KiB\)](#)

We would like that the "collection Jean Mennerat" will be completely preserved as designated by his last will. And we hope that the city of Belfort will seize the opportunity to make Jean Mennerat's heritage to

the chess world available to coming generations of collectors and researchers.