

Obituary Ken Whyld

Obituaries / Nécrologies / Nachrufen

Ken Whyld, 6 March 1926 - 11 July 2003⁽¹⁾

On July 11, 2003, an incredible amount of knowledge was lost with the death of Kenneth Whyld, "The Omniscient One". I still cannot imagine how we shall do without him. When someone – not only a chess researcher – asked him a chess question, Ken was willing to answer. My first contacts with Ken related to books he offered for sale. But after I'd met him for the first time at a chess history meeting, I had regular contact with him by letter and email and I enjoyed several visits from him. Most contacts were about aspects of chess bibliography and culture (he knew the smallest details), but on whatever subjects we discussed he had interesting things to say. I remember him discussing with Dale Brandreth the search in Ireland for the birth certificate of James Mason. Fortunately, Ken published many books and articles which made such well-researched knowledge available to others. One *magnum opus* is the *Oxford Companion to Chess*, written together with David Hooper (Oxford University Press, 1984; 2nd edition 1992).



But he did much more. His publishing career started when he assisted E.G.R. Cordingley with his *Student's Chess Quarterly* (published 1946-1952), ending as (co)editor. Then he started the Whyld Limited Editions series of tournament bulletins (6 bulletins, 1953-1962) and his first bibliographical publication, the *Chess Reader* (1955-1965, 6 vols.) in which he also offered chess books for sale (including Cordingley's library). Later, Ken wrote many more bibliographies, often with a historical interest, e.g. on *Fake automata in chess* (1978), but also (K. Whyld, Chris Ravilious) *Chess texts in the English language, printed earlier than 1850*, Olomouc 2003 (the prequel to Douglas E. Betts' *An annotated bibliography of works published in the English language, 1850-1968*, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1974), as well as a *Worldwide directory of Chess columns* (Olomouc, 2002).

Another lifelong project was the collection of games of Emanuel Lasker, which he started with the publication of *The James Gilchrist collection of Lasker games* (2 vols, Nottingham: Ken Whyld, 1956, 1958) and his own vol. 3 with other games, including *Leap-frog simultaneous games* (1976)⁽²⁾. In 1998, the complete games were published in

one volume, but still more games were published in *The Chess Historical Quarterly*, the very bulky and highly interesting (but non-quarterly) magazine of Vlastimil Fiala (Olomouc, since 1999)⁽³⁾.

Ken also assisted with the publication of Skinner/Verhoeven's *Aljechin Games "Bible"* (McFarland, 1998), preparing an accompanying biography, using material collected by Brian Reilly (unfinished).

But Ken did still more. In the early fifties, as a tournament prize, he won a copy of Murray's *History of chess* (Oxford University Press, 1913), which he studied intensively. It spurred his taste for the (early) history of chess. After finishing the first edition of the *Oxford Companion*, he started publishing small-circulation booklets for chess historians, such as Murray, Harold J. R. *A - History of Chess. Corrections and additions mostly by the author* (Caistor, 1994). He took over the *BCM Quotes and Queries* column in October 1978 and had been talking about how to celebrate his 25 years as columnist.

Of course, Ken attended the first meeting of the Königstein Gruppe in 1988 which studies the (early, cultural) history of chess, and was also taking part as one of the authors in their project to write the "New Murray".

Other conferences to which Ken contributed, were the Board Games in Academia conferences and the recent Von der Lasa conference in Kornik 2002. At the latter, Tomas Lissowski asked⁽⁴⁾: "Ken, how many days a week you work (8 hours a day) on chess matters, three, four?" He answered simply: "I work 7 days a week, 12 hours a day."

For many years, he lived very quietly, with his cat as his only company, in a farmhouse near Caistor, Lincolnshire. This explains how Ken was able to transcribe the von der Lasa – White letters (800 pages) in a few months in 2002. (Ken told me in Kornik that he was somewhat fatigued because of the hard work; unpublished.)

Ken will be missed, not only for his knowledge but also for his kindness, humour and writing style. Of course – like Murray – Ken had many knowledgeable correspondents. When I asked Ken for information on a book from Carl Otto, Rostock, c. 1943, he wrote back: "Unfortunately the only chessplayer I knew in Rostock died a few years ago."

Ken was able to read many languages. He acted as interpreter from German into English at various conferences. He showed his humour and understanding of Dutch in an e-mail: "By the way, can 'Minze bij de Weg' really be someone's name?" [translating "bij de Weg" as "by the Way"!]. When I finally answered his e-mails after a long time: "Well, I am pleased that 'Jurgen the Silent' does not have me looking for bullet marks in Delft!" – Ken stayed in my house in Delft for the Leiden BGA II conference and refers to the bullet holes that were made during the murder of William the Silent and which are still on view.

I didn't talk much with Ken about his private life. I know he married his last wife, Pat Frankish, a former president of the British Psychological Association, in April, 2002⁽⁵⁾. He told me that his former wife provided him with wine from France. Below, I'll give a short resumé based on an interview by Sarah Hurst in 1988⁽⁶⁾ and information from Tony Gillam.

Kenneth Whyld was born in Nottingham on 6th March 1926, attended Mundella Grammar School in the city and was drafted into the army immediately upon leaving

(about 1944). He was an officer in the Lincolnshire Regiment, but didn't leave Britain during World War II. He married in 1946⁽⁷⁾ and had two sons born around 1950 and 1952. Ken went to college in Nottingham, but then started working as computer expert and chess publisher/writer.

Ken was a strong amateur player⁽⁸⁾. He liked making his opponent feel uncomfortable (on the board), in the style of Lasker⁽⁹⁾. At the end of the fifties, chess playing took a back seat to family life and his career as an IT expert. Ken divorced at the end of 1963 and then gave up chess book collecting⁽¹⁰⁾. He worked in Switzerland as a project manager and married Janie (they had a daughter Abigail born on Jan. 1st, 1971) and played chess again, then worked in South Africa⁽¹¹⁾. Back in England in 1973, Ken started chess research with David Hooper for the *Oxford Companion* – which took 10 years⁽¹²⁾. In the new millennium, he moved to the village of Kirton Lindsey, 15 miles west of Caistor, to live with his third wife, Pat Frankish.

On Tuesday, 8th July 2003, he was told by doctors that he had a heart problem and he died suddenly three days later, a few minutes after returning home from a walk⁽¹³⁾. Everyone was shocked⁽¹⁴⁾. Ken's last visit to my home was for the first meeting of the Amsterdam Group⁽¹⁵⁾, for which he showed great interest. This association, now founded as *Ken Whyld Association* (website www.kwabc.com), hopes to keep his memory alive with its activities.

Jurgen STIGTER

Notes

1. My thanks to Tony Gillam and Michael Negele for their support and to John Beasley for gently polishing the English text.
2. Nottingham: The Chess Player, 1976.
3. Current issue is No. 7, 2002, published June, 2003.
4. Tomas Lissowski, in an e-mail to Michael Negele, July 2003
5. I met her at the BGA IV in Fribourg, 2001. On July, 1st, 2002, Ken wrote in an e-mail: "Pat and I are well indeed. Next week sees the 3rd (monthly) anniversary of our wedding."
6. Published in *Chess*, 1988; reprinted as "A Walk on the Whyld Side", p. 199-208 in *The Curse of Kirsan*, 2002
7. Told me about being injured by the explosion of a hand grenade in 1945 (see Hurst, p. 200).
8. Ken won the Nottinghamshire county championship and took part in the British Championship in 1956 [Gillam].
9. Hurst 1988: 203.
10. Which started with the purchase of George Hume's library in 1949 [Hurst 1988: 200/1].
11. Hurst 1988: 204.
12. Hurst 1988: 205.
13. Gillam. His last email to me was from July 3rd: "Have you looked at the auction list for London, later this month? Could be worth a visit from you (www.bloomsbury-book-auct.com)."
14. See for reactions on his death: <http://www.bcmchess.co.uk/news/obitwhyld.html>
15. See its website: <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Jurgen.Stigter/>