My Chess Career and Holidays - A Book of Memoirs



By

Gillian A Moore

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to each reader

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages consist of a series of prose pieces written on different occasions, giving glimpses of my chess career and related travels. My humble aim is to have my readers enjoy these compositions as I have enjoyed creating them.

The collection is in some sort of chronological order, but may be dipped into in any order. I describe a great variety of events and ideas. The tone varies too from light holiday mood and humour to the philosophical and back again.

PART 1 is a chess biographical sketch about my early years. *This article, in essence, has already appeared in the comprehensive book by Roger Leslie Paige, entitled, 'Hampshire Chess Games 1950-1970'. It can be bought online from Amazon.*

PART 2 describes particular chess holidays, some concerned more than others with the tournaments themselves.

I have been happy for decades to take my holidays in the UK. As the British Chess Championships go to a different city or town each year, I have been up to Scotland, across to Wales and all over England. I have written about a sampling of my visits. Places I have stayed at with the British Champs are: –

Aberystwyth*, Bath, Bognor Regis, Canterbury, Coventry*, Edinburgh*, Great Yarmouth, Hastings*, Leicester, Liverpool*, North Shields*, Paignton*, Scarborough, Sheffield*, Sunderland, Torquay* and Whitby. The places marked with an asterisk* have been written about in these memoirs. I have also included an article about my stay in Southend-on-Sea* for a tournament there, although not for the British Champs.

If you fancy reading about two holidays packed with fun and adventure, then Chapters 10 and 11 are the ones to read: Aberystwyth and Torbay 2014. Here and there you are invited to laugh with me! If you would like to have a good laugh then Chapter 5 on Scarborough 2004 should do the trick! Chapter 15, Not Just an Intellectual Matter, might also make you smile.

PART 3 is about my more local activities and general experiences within chess, and more about me as a player. If you would like to study some of my thoughts on chess and life, and read my poem, Pawns with a Purpose, then the last two chapters 16 and 17 are for you.

A note about getting around the book: my current software does not have some of the advanced features I would have liked, such as allowing the reader to point, click and jump immediately to particular parts of the book. If you have a Go To, Search or Find facility in the program you are using, that should help to navigate the pages without too much scrolling! For example, if you type in 'CHAPTER 10', you will hopefully be taken straight to the chapter on Aberystwyth 2014.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to Gareth Jones of Southampton Chess Club, for careful proof-reading of the entire manuscript, and for good suggestions.

With best wishes to my readers,

Gillian A Moore

MY CHESS CAREER AND HOLIDAYS:

A BOOK OF MEMOIRS

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PART 1

CHAPTER 1

My Early Chess Career

(A biographical sketch)

CHAPTER 1

MY EARLY CHESS CAREER

'Chess, like love, like music, has the power to make men happy.' – *Tarrasch*

It greatly helps a chess player to have learned when very young, to have a member of the family to play with, or to have been encouraged in the game at school. I was fortunate to have had all three.

Fast Progression

My father taught me the rudiments of the game when I was 9, but I took it up seriously at Weston Park Girls School, Southampton, age 13.

We had a special chess-playing teacher, Mrs Bertha C Weston, who set up boards and sets in the lunchtime and who put a team of us in the schools chess league. With these advantages plus my intense interest, ability developed fast. It also gave me contentment as a teenager that I otherwise might not have had.

Just a year later, I was regularly winning championships. Yearly between ages 14-17, 1959-1962, I won the Southern Counties Girls Championship at Bognor Regis. In 1960 I was Southampton Girl Champion.

In one of these years, my headmistress had this shy schoolgirl up on the stage before the whole school at morning assembly, to encourage all to do something special according to the ability of each one.

In 1962 at Whitby I won outright the British Girls Championship, followed by 1963 at Bath where I shared the title and cup with Dinah Dobson (now Dinah Norman) and Marcia Syme (now married, name unknown).

Then in 1966 at Sunderland, I achieved the pinnacle of my career by winning the British Ladies Championship jointly with Margaret Clarke. We shared the beautiful large silver rose bowl trophy for 6 months of the year each. We did not have a play-off, I think because Margaret was expecting a baby at the time.



BRITISH GIRLS JOINT CHAMPIONS

Bath 1963

Marcia Syme, Dinah Dobson (now Norman) and Gillian Moore

Congratulated by Ald. Major Adrian Hopkins

Photo from a grainy old press cutting



BRITISH LADIES JOINT CHAMPION

Sunderland 1966

Gillian Moore with the Rose Bowl Trophy

Photo taken in Southampton 1967

My Original Clubs and Their Players

Back home in Southampton, I have fond memories of my original club, Woolston Community Centre Chess Club in Portsmouth Road, which I joined at age 14 in 1959. My father escorted me there, joined with me initially and then left me in the care of the club secretary, Mr Harold G ("Greg") Dell. There I competed in the local adult Southampton League and at one point I was a match captain.

Other notable players I recall at the Woolston club, which later moved to become the Sholing Community Chess Club in Butts Road, were: Alfie Edmonds, Geoff Daw, Marshall Thompson and another pipe smoker, Ron Learmouth. These and others were all strong players who helped to develop my play.

I liked and admired Marshall Thompson, nine times the Hampshire Champion between the years 1958 and 1977. Naturally, he played board 1 for Hampshire. I also remember his entering into the British Championship in 1960. Another strong player I came to know was John Patience, a Southampton club member who qualified for the British Championship and was also there in Sunderland in 1966 at the same time as me.

Now as I write in December 2008, Messrs Thompson, Dell and Learmouth have all sadly passed away, along with the dear old club itself. I don't know what happened to the other Woolston players or whether they are still alive.

In the 1960s, I was a civil servant employed at Post Office Telephones, before it was privatised to become British Telecom. I therefore played for a while for Portel, a team for Post Office Telecommunications and I think H M Customs workers. It was a Civil Service team. This club and team have also "gone to heaven" or wherever old clubs go upon becoming defunct!

Later Years 1970s and Early 1980s

After I jointly won the British Ladies Championship at Sunderland in 1966, I might have gone on to represent Britain abroad if I had not taken a long break from chess. After this pinnacle of success, I lacked inspiration to try for anything further.

After about a 7 year break, however, I came back to chess in May 1976 up to 1983. That is another 7 year period and I seem to have been having 7 years on and off the game! I played in competitions to the end of 1980, and from 1981 to 1983 I had Tuesday night friendly chess evenings with elderly Mr Greg Dell at his bungalow within a short walking distance of my home. This suited us both to have a chess evening but without going to the club.

With his ginger tomcat Jamie for additional company, Mr Dell used to puff his pipe contentedly as we waged friendly battles over the board – we were about evenly matched. Mr Dell was a real gentleman of the old school, always seeing me home safely and raising his hat upon taking leave of me.

My Special Teacher

Mrs Weston took a proud interest in her chess star pupil - 'I shine in your reflected glory', she once declared. When I left school she became my friend Bertha, and I loved going to visit her once a month or so on a Saturday at her home in Rownhams, near Southampton.

An army major's widow, Bertha had been a head teacher out in Karachi then came back out of retirement to teach at my school, Weston Park. With a white bearskin rug over the sofa and with her celestial sphere by her side, her cosy bungalow showed signs of her foreign travels and her passion for astronomy.

We enjoyed many an afternoon talking about life, love and the universe. In the winter, we sat beside a roaring log fire. Sometime during my visit, she would throw a cloth over the little table in front of us and make tea, always a blend of Earl Grey and regular Indian. The tray was then brought in together with some delicious cake. To this day, this is one of my favourite brews.

Bertha longed for world peace. She was Vice President of the British-Soviet Friendship Society and had been welcomed aboard a Russian ship. She was also President of the Solent Astronomical Society.

My special teacher and friend kept all her faculties, except for her impaired vision towards the end, and just dropped off the tree of life like a ripe fruit, as it were, at age 95 in 1981. Her memorial service closed to the strains of Holst's Planets Suite. Bertha C Weston was a great lady as well as one of the great friends of my youth.

Something she once said back at school still sticks in my mind. A girl had asked her a poignant question: 'Mrs Weston, what is God?' Mrs Weston the astronomer gave a non-dogmatic good reply, I feel, to young enquiring minds. 'God is goodness and wisdom', she said simply.

A piece of chess advice she once gave us too, is clear in my memory. 'When you have found a good move, look around for a better one!'

Chess Passion Rekindled at Last

For a whopping 18 years from 1983 onwards I had disappeared from the chess scene altogether due to life's various other aspects and duties! I concentrated instead on everything else that life is full of: in particular friendships, my home, training courses, changes of career, philosophical and spiritual interests, and supporting people in the family and local community.

Nature abhors a vacuum. After two major bereavements, of my dearest friend in 1999 and my mother the following year, a rebuilding of my life was indicated. I'm glad that one of the constructive things I did was to come back to chess.

Furthermore in due course of time I took up various forms of volunteering, mostly involving giving support to people in need. The caring side of my nature was free to make myself useful again.

To continue about my chess return, in 2001 I joined the venerable old Southampton Chess Club, founded in 1883. I was pleased to see a few faces from county matches in the old days.

Elderly Peter Marshall – he used to play on board 1 for Hampshire decades ago – was pleased to see me again. I remember him as another pipe-smoker. Apparently he gave it up after retirement from Bramtoco, when his erstwhile employer no longer gave him free tobacco. He used to jovially declare me as his favourite lady chess player. The joke, of course, is that I was the only one around!

Len Walters, another former upper county board player, also remembered me. Ian Stenhouse was there too at the club. In his capacity as a Daily Echo Reporter, he used to do little write-ups about my chess doings in the 1960s.

Now in 2016 as I put these memoirs together, Peter, Len and Ian have all passed away.

PART 2

CHAPTERS 2-12

CHAPTER 2

RETURN OF THE WOMAN WOOD-PUSHER 2002/2003

'Chess teaches foresight, by having to plan ahead; vigilance, by having to keep watch over the whole chess board; caution, by having to restrain ourselves from making hasty moves; and finally, we learn from chess the greatest maxim in life - that even when everything seems to be going badly for us we should not lose heart, but always hoping for a change for the better, steadfastly continue searching for the solutions to our problems.' — *Benjamin Franklin*

In this article, I'll describe my return to three of the venues where annual tournaments are still held.

It tends to be once a chess player, always a chess player. The magic game wove its spell on me to lure me back in 2001 after an 18-year absence since 1983. For years I seemed to be swallowed up with other duties at weekends or to feel too tired after work (as a sessional tutor in computer skills to adults) to go out mentally extending myself again over a chequered board of 64 squares.

Coming Back

As I explained in Chapter 1, I'm a former chess champion of sorts, decades ago. Since my return I have won some prizes again. As I write in 2002, I bear the title of Under 125 Hampshire Champion and hold the silver cup. That is, I am the champion of those with a British Chess Federation grading of under 125. My BCF grading is currently 124, although it used to be distinctly higher and I'm aiming up.

And it is good to be back in a club and the local Southampton League, and playing for Hampshire against other counties. Last but not least, I've returned to competing individually in tournaments at various locations.

My former club Sholing Community Centre (formerly Woolston Community Centre) no longer exists, so I chose to join the venerable Southampton Chess Club, founded in 1883. It has the largest membership of clubs in the Southampton area and has plenty of strong players among the membership.

I am the only woman at my club and the only woman who plays for Hampshire! But a player is a player and gender is irrelevant for the purposes of the game.

PAIGNTON, DEVON

During the first week in September 2002, I returned to Paignton on the Devon coast, for a week's holiday and to compete in the Challengers tournament once more. Run by Devon County Chess Association, the 52nd annual congress was held at Oldway Mansion, by courtesy of Torbay Council whose premises it is. Oldway Mansion is a grand old building up on a hill amid lovely grounds.

Tournaments that I enter, I would classify as either tough, tough tough or tough tough tough, depending on the playing strength of the fellow competitors. The Challengers was tough tough, with players with grades up to BCF (now ECF) 170. Anyway, I achieved what I hoped for in scoring 3 ½ points out of a possible 7 – there were 7 rounds. This is as good as I used to do long ago.

Paignton is in the best tradition of English seaside resorts, with all the usual attractions. Nothing is lacking for a good holiday. Together with Torquay and Brixham, this is the part of the Devon coast known as The English Riviera.

Paignton has parks, ponds, pier, golden sands, deck chairs, crazy golf, donkey rides, children's' playground, amusement arcades, hotels, guest houses, shops, restaurants, fast food kiosks, cafés, bars, theatre, bus trips, boat cruises around the harbour, cliff-top walks with splendid views, seafront illuminations at night, ice cream parlours and seagulls. Beautiful big white birds they are in this area, too, but watch out or they might snatch your food, as I have experienced more than once!

And the Paignton Zoo/Wildlife Reserve deserves a special mention, for it is an expansive, special zoo with masses of space for the animals and birds, and one could spend all day there. I spent a thoroughly enjoyable few hours there before one of my rounds.

One day I took myself off to Brixham, a quaint town with its harbour of assorted privately-owned boats moored there, bobbing and tinkling. I was so engrossed in looking over The Golden Hind, a spectacular replica of Francis Drakes' famous ship, so that I was a bit late getting back to Oldway Mansion for my round.

Another day, I took a bus trip with Raymond G amble, my friend, to Torquay. He treated me to a delicious meal at a local Wetherspoons pub. Raymond has shares in Wetherspoons and he is interested in seeking out any Wetherspoons wherever he goes. The illuminations there in the evening along the Torquay seafront afterwards were just stunning.

HASTINGS, SUSSEX

Hastings is also a seaside delight, though in January 2003 when I returned there it was cold and I even saw a dusting of snow. The delights of the seaside did not apply, except from my hotel window. It was a warm and comfortable hotel along the seafront.

I stayed at Hastings for an extended weekend, to compete in the Minor tournament. For grades up to BCF (now ECF) 130, it would be tough but I knew I stood a chance of a prize if I worked hard.

I won £250 as joint first prize winner. This was the most I have ever won at chess. After taking off my expenses of hotel, travel and so forth, I donated my winnings to a favourite charity. I had it in mind before I started, that I'd like to win for that purpose. My wish was granted. I am happy that there are ways to make one's chess playing useful to others.

I have written about my adventures at Hastings, next chapter in my article entitled, 'Gillian the Conqueror'.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

The Journey There

Over Easter 2003 I returned to this venue for the Open tournament. That means that there was no ceiling on the grades and hence the strength of the players. I knew it would be very tough indeed and I wouldn't stand a bat in hell's chance of winning anything. There were lots of players graded over 190! There had to be other gains from such hard work of around 8 hours of intense concentration per day.

I travelled by train on Maundy Thursday – play was due to start on the following day, Good Friday. My journey to Southend via London went smoothly – there were railway employee strikes that day, but luckily none that affected my train companies. The matter of hoisting up my suitcase onto the overhead rack on the train from Southampton to Waterloo made me think. The case was so heavy – I now realise that I needn't have packed so many clothes – that I had difficulty lifting it far enough. A young woman fellow passenger assisted me!

Well, I am used to young men offering their seats to me on the buses as a courtesy towards my gender. I feel no loss of vigour or strength, but it is true that I am due to receive the State Retirement Pension at the end of next year, when I reach age 60. I guess that makes me some sort of venerable granny figure!

Cheap and Cheerful!

I found my guest house in a down-market area. The building needed a lick of paint. My room was fine for my needs: it was clean and spacious, though it was not en-suite, which I knew it wouldn't be. I was very pleased with the kettle and tea-making facilities.

I laughed when I examined one of the towels provided for my use: I counted four distinct holes with a fifth one coming! At least the bathroom was right next to my room, though I had to remember to take my own soap and towel with me each time. My bedroom door had an annoying continuous rattle, which I fixed by stuffing my folded bus timetable underneath the door to firm it up.

The breakfasts were the usual full English breakfasts, which is more than one ever eats at home. My non-meat eating was no trouble. I started with cereals and fruit juice. For the cooked course I was given scrambled egg with baked beans, tomatoes and mushrooms. Then one was 'finished off' with toast and marmalade. Naturally, it all came with a pot of tea.

Towards the end of my stay, I decided to try sitting in the one simple wooden chair in my bedroom. When I did so, it tilted to the left and was in danger of making me lose my dignity in a heap on the floor. I examined the chair and found it to be unhinged and unsafe. I couldn't fix it so dismantled and folded it.

When I mentioned my plight to the proprietor next morning at breakfast, she was most apologetic and vowed to have the chair replaced straight away. 'Miss Moore's chair has collapsed', I heard her declare to her husband. Perhaps he had a mental image of Miss Moore in an ungainly heap too!

Well, what can you expect for £17.50 a night bed and breakfast! I would, however, be happy to go there again. At least nothing bit me in the night or ran out from under the bed at me! Who needs to be posh when you can have more fun and save lots of money going cheap?

Highlights

Southend-on-Sea boasts the longest pier in the country. Having unpacked my things at the guest house, I ventured out to stroll along the promenade and I took the miniature train along the pier. Disembarked at the end, I sat awhile sunning myself overlooking the sea, then wound up with a cream tea in the little restaurant. I avoided the ubiquitous fish and chips, though it was tempting, as I had brought plenty of sandwiches and other foods with me for the day, and what's more it's fattening.

I rode back to the shore. I called into Raymond's hotel (we never stayed at the same place) and was pleased to find him in. He was delighted to see me. Raymond has been my chess buddy since we were both aged 20, an awfully long time ago! He goes to the same chess tournaments every year, with now and then a new one as well. Now I am joining him for my return to some of my old haunts.

Raymond and I spent some time together before and after supper that first day of arrival. We sat in a shelter poring over his pocket chess set, discussing opening theory. It was bracing along the seafront, but we toughed it out until the wind seemed to get into my bones and we decided to retire to our respective accommodations.

On Good Friday, before my chess round was about to start, I came across the Salvation Army about to start an open-air service there in the shopping precinct. It was so good to join in the good old rousing hymns, backed up with their trombones and drums. This was the only bit of music I had during my weekend stay, as I hadn't managed to pack my little personal stereo this time.

I was thoroughly moved by the whole service, the singing, the words of the hymns, and missing loved ones who have died and couldn't be with me at this time, or any time, any more. Raymond would have enjoyed this religious service, but I had no means of quickly fetching him to join me.

Petticoat Prize

My performance in the Open chess tournament was unremarkable, as I knew it would be. I was an 'also played'. I won two games and lost five, so that my final score was 2 points out of 7. I feel I should have won the last game, since the player was graded distinctly below me.

The trouble was I was just so tired and with a nasty headache still dogging me from the previous day. I had slept only three hours the night before. I was suffering from "chess poisoning". Oh yes, you can have too much of a good thing, even this one!

Anything from six to twelve hours a day of intensive concentration involved in competitive chess takes its toll. The seven rounds, with two rounds a day, is heavy going. The playing hours were from 9.30 am to a possible 3.30 pm and then again from 5 pm until a possible 11 pm, which is crazy times to be playing through meal times too.

I don't intend to enter the Southend-on-Sea Congress again. Either one round a day, as at Paignton, or just five rounds in three days as at Hastings suits me better.

Mind you, there was a Lightning Tournament on the Saturday, open to all and which I entered. Thrown in with a line-up of some of the same ferociously strong players, I managed to draw or win some games. I ended up with a 50% score, an excellent result in such a challenging event.

Lightning naturally means that the players must play make all the moves very speedily. The buzzer went off every ten seconds and everyone moves at once; plonk! No matter how unready to move you might be, in a dire situation of being threatened with losing a piece, or the game, you must move on the buzzer! There is no time to analyse at all, but fortunately, I am reasonably good at seeing threats and parries at a few glances.

There were three women, including myself, who entered in the Lightening Tournament. I don't know how they scored at the end, but we were all equally awarded a Ladies Prize. What was it, my reader will ask: was it money or something that ladies particularly like to have? Yes, it was the latter! While engrossed in my game that evening, in the second game of the day, the Controller handed me my useful prize: a delicious, tiny cream-filled chocolate egg!

Raymond and I

Raymond did not enter the Lightning Tournament. He did well in the main event, finally scoring 3 ½ points out of 7. Part of that score consisted of his usual quota of half points for drawn games.

With due admiration for his playing skill – he is a former Derbyshire county champion who always had the edge over me – his games can be dull, I feel, and often end in a draw. Not like me, I'm more adventurous, in chess as in life. He takes more care at defence than I do, and I am more of an attacking player. My gung-ho tactics can get me into deep water, but at least make for exciting and memorable play.

It was good to have Raymond to hang out with in-between our games. He is easy to be with. His is company that one slips into like a comfortable pair of slippers! On the Sunday, he took me out to a slap-up meal in a Wetherspoons pub – they always do delicious cooked meals, including vegetarian options. It was a welcome treat.

Home and Away!

On Monday after the end of the tournament, I wasted no time in journeying home. Arrived at Southampton Central station, I treated myself to a taxi to my door. I slept for about nine hours that night.

Going away can be very pleasant, but so is coming home. There is no other place I would rather be. My headquarters and place to be me, my respite, my retreat, my meditation cave, I love my flat in Bitterne. I've lived here since 1977. It felt like home as soon as I stepped inside it when originally looking it over in this 'sought after block', according to the Estate Agent's description. That feeling of rightness to be here has never left. I feel very fortunate to have found my ideal home straight away.

CHAPTER 3

GILLIAN THE CONQUEROR JANUARY 2003

'A strong memory, concentration, imagination, and a strong will is required to become a great Chess player' – *Bobby Fischer*

HASTINGS

The historic town of Hastings along the Sussex coast is famous for The Battle of Hastings in 1066, when William the Conqueror from Normandy, France, took England by brute force.

This same town also has a long-standing tradition of witnessing an annual intellectual battle, known as the Hastings International Chess Congress. December 2002/January 2003 was the 78th such event.

I competed in the Weekend Minor tournament, from Friday 3 to Sunday 5 January 2003, to pit my mental strength against others of similar dignified pugnacity. True, in November of 2002 I had won the minor Hampshire Championship for players with British Chess Federation grades up to 125 – my current running-in grade after a long absence of competitive chess is 124 (July 2002).

This Hastings tournament was going to be a little bit stronger, as players were graded up to BCF (now ECF) 130, and sometimes with a playing strength greater than that indicated by the grading.

Great Uncle's Monocle

My journey from Southampton to Hastings went without incident, except for one minor annoyance that threatened to be a major inconvenience. On the train, the left lens of my reading glasses fell out. The frame was broken. Like Humpty Dumpty, it couldn't be put together again, though I fiddled for a long time with minute bits of sticking plaster painstakingly cut up with my nail scissors.

Oh golly, I would be able to see the large chess pieces and their squares, though not so sharply, but as to writing down the moves on the scoresheet, an essential activity, I would squint uncomfortably. What should I do?

Arrived at my destination on time around 12.27 pm, I found and settled into a popular seafront hotel. My third-storey room overlooking the beach was spacious and comfortable. After a quick welcome coffee – I'd been travelling for 4 hours without access to a drink, as there were no buffet cars or station buffets open – I went straight outside again.

My friend Raymond was waiting outside for me as arranged. Like me, he is a player who has been 'somebody' in the past. He won the Derbyshire Championship six times. After greeting each other, we retreated to the railway station and entrained for Rye, about a 20-minute ride away. He has been taking an annual trip to Rye for decades.

He's very predicable is my friend Raymond, mostly going to the same chess tournaments/holiday venues year after year. Also he stuck with the same employer (Rolls Royce aircraft engines) almost all his working life, not necessarily a bad thing.

He's not as adventurous a person as I am and not as broad in his interests, but terribly loyal and easy to be with for all that. I once asked him if he ever felt that his life was in a boring groove. He replied that he was stuck in a rut and knew it, but that change frightened him.

Rye is a comely little town with all the usual tourist facilities of restaurants, cafés and shops. But the first thing I saw after exiting the station was an optician's shop! I joked about how ridiculous I was going to look if they couldn't mend my specs, what with just one lens through which to peer, like somebody's great uncle with his monocle. 'And a pocket watch', Raymond added.

Perhaps, after all, I should complete the facade and stick on a false moustache! Luckily, the shop stocked some cheap but very good non-prescription glasses. I bought a pair I liked very much for just £6, a terrific bargain.

Next, my friend showed me around his usual haunts in Rye. After discovering quaint little side streets with sudden lovely countryside views, browsing around a book shop and buying a couple, visiting a church he likes and the library, we wound up in Simon the Pieman restaurant. The ambience and good food restored our energies as we relaxed beside a roaring log fire. We needed this refreshment ready for the hard slog ahead starting at 7 pm.

Grandeur and Growth

The chess venue is ideal. Horntye Sports Centre has plenty of room and all necessary facilities, including a bar and a canteen where cooked meals were served daily. There were always veggie options, catering for folks like me.

The line-up of players entered in the top Premier and Challengers tournaments was also impressive. Grandmasters (GM), International Masters (IM), Woman Grandmasters (WGM) and Woman International Masters (WIM) graced the seats. The tables for these seats had little national flags on top.

On the far side where the well-known personalities sat for up to 7 hours per game, the big demonstration chess boards enthralled spectators quietly watching progress on the high-profile games. There were chairs for this purpose on the near side of the personality big names.

The hall was large and accommodated the various graded tournaments going on simultaneously. On the other end of the scale were those for novices. Mine, the Weekend Minor, was somewhere between the two extremes of expert and novice. Raymond was in the next section up, the Weekend Major, which I also could have entered, but knew that I stood a better chance of winning a prize in the other one.

Alas I only drew my first game, giving me just a half point instead of the full point for a win. But this is chess, to be expected, and I felt not a jot discouraged. Next round, as compensation, I would play someone who also only drew his game, as per the Swiss system

of pairing, in which opponents are matched throughout the rounds according to their on-going score. So, I would have one second chance to catch up the next day. I did!

On Saturday, with hard work, I managed to win all three games, making me jointly in the lead with 3 ½ out of 4. I was particularly pleased with winning game number 4, not just because this enabled me to have a chance of winning a prize, which I had hoped for all along, but because I won by sheer determination and perseverance.

My opponent, perhaps tired after hours of play in the morning and afternoon, offered me a draw. He seemed fidgety and fed up that I was playing on in a position with admittedly very even chances and not too many pieces left to manoeuvre with.

Whereas he had apparently mentally given up the idea of winning, I persevered and kept on looking for a chance to gain an advantage. I found it, forced it and pressed home my slight advantage of just one pawn up in the end game. It was enough to eventually gain a new queen and hence win the game. He knew this and shook hands with me in resignation, after his game turned clearly hopeless.

This 4th round game was actually my toughest game of the tournament, but one of my most instructive. I always gain a sense of joy when I learn, relearn or increase my learning about any aspect of the game and how to improve it. In this case I had executed dynamic will on the basis of the maxim, 'Never give up hope!'

My Whole Self

I went on to win my 5th round game on Sunday morning, to a man I knew by sight, as we were both from Hampshire. He was much more gracious in losing than the previous player. We went up to the analysis room after for post mortems, the what-ifs and might-haves that players love to pore over. We played through our game. But before that we talked.

We agreed that chess is a whole person pursuit, not just an intellectual one. The physical brain is used and must be in peak condition to perform well. For this, sleeping, eating and exercising are important, we both knew.

And the emotions need to keep calm, else the player is distracted from the total concentration that this greatest game of skill deserves. Naturally, the mental ability has to be there, otherwise no amount of physical and emotional health and control will be to any avail.

What about spiritual (and social) development we asked? We agreed that this too was most desirable for a chess player as with anyone, though certainly not all of them seem to have much of it. In fact, one could be a world champion, yet a supreme egotist with very few friends. I could name one, actually, but had better not!

Essential to my well-being, alongside chess and any other mental work, is to allow the change of body and brain rhythm made possible by some relatively thought-free enjoyable activity. Back in my hotel, agreeably holed up in my room for the evenings, I mellowed out with music on my personal stereo with headphones. Music was followed by a spot of yoga meditation, which I have done almost daily for decades.

It is the original ancient raja yoga philosophy and practice I follow, rather than the super bendy postures more well-known in the West. I was enwrapped in a shawl of extraordinary peace that is both an essence and a sort of presence. As usual, I was reluctant to go to bed, since I am always happy in this state of consciousness. But I need sleep too.

A Woman and a Child

My last round was to be the deciding factor in whether I won first, second or third prize. I was the only woman in the section and there was one junior. He was brilliant. We were equal in our scoring after round 5 and therefore had to play each other in the 6th and last round. If I beat him, I would be the clear winner; if I drew with him we would share the prize money and the Herbert Dobell Trophy.

I was content that with the Black pieces I got into a Cambridge Springs variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, which I knew well but he appeared to know less well. I won a pawn in the opening, with no compensating positional advantage for him. If I kept this up and he did not win it back, I should win the game in due course. It was a passed pawn, meaning to say it had a clear passageway with which to march ahead to the last rank and turn into a powerful queen.

But the boy fought back hard, twice offered me draws which I refused, because at those stages I did have the edge. But then I lost the impetus I had and realised that to be safe I should now accept the draw. I offered it this time and it was done, both relieved not to have lost that last pivotal game. The woman and the junior had won! We had both won first prize, receiving £250 each, the most I have ever won in monetary terms.

I briefly chatted to the boy's father afterwards and told him his son had a great future; he was just 13 years old! The Congress Controller congratulated me and arranged for my prize to be sent on by post as I had a long journey ahead and couldn't stay for the prize-giving ceremony.

It actually took over 6 hours to get home, due to engineering works on the railways, necessitating a bus journey from Hastings to Polegate, a train from Polegate to Clapham Junction, London, then finally a train to Southampton, followed by a taxi to my door. The taxi driver told me the journey from Hastings to Southampton takes only 2 hours by car!

My Friend

How did Raymond fare, my reader might ask? Well, if he can be called champion of anything these days, it could be "Draw Champion". Even before he started the first round, he was hoping for a quick draw, so that he could go home and have a rest. That is exactly what happened.

I humorously chided him beforehand, saying that this was not the spirit and that if spectators had paid to view his game on the demonstration boards (that was not actually the case), they would be disgruntled and want their money back for such a poor show! Raymond drew all his games except for one win. His final score was 3 ½ out of 6 points.

The same age as me, Raymond feels slowed down a bit, but then at any time any of us can improve and any of us decline! I hope both of us will do well in the future.

CHAPTER 4

EDINBURGH JULY 2003

'I am still a victim of Chess. It has all the beauty of art and much more. It cannot be commercialized. Chess is much purer than art in its social position.' – *Marcel Duchamp*

Anticipation

Edinburgh here I come! After Hastings in January 2003, I anticipated Edinburgh in July. This year the British Championships are on there and I would enter one of the weekend tournaments, a, non-championship event. It was to be held at the distinguished George Heriot's School, aesthetically set at the feet of Scotland's most famous landmark, Edinburgh Castle.

Chess friend Dinah Norman told me she couldn't get an en suite hotel room in Edinburgh for less than £40 a night and that hers was the last room at such a price. Well, I mused, I'll have to settle for a guest house with shared bathroom facilities once more. Of course, I could always take myself off with plenty of wraps up the Castle and sleep there cheapest and roughest of all!

I had never been to Scotland in my life and it was about time I did so. The more I heard about Scotland, the more I looked forward to it. A friend told me that it is not just a place but a state of being. I understood what she meant.

Chess Friends and Old Rivals

Of the original female players in the British Girls and British Ladies in the 1960s, only Dinah and I are still active players at tournament level, as far as we know. After many years of not seeing each other, since I dropped out of matches and tournaments, we bumped into each other at Basingstoke for a Chiltern League county match of Hampshire versus Berkshire sometime in the early 2000s.

'I never thought I'd see you at the board again!' Dinah declared with surprise, after I had recognised her and approached. Apparently, she had heard that I had entered a convent. Well, long ago I considered becoming a nun, so that when I wasn't to be found anywhere in chess circles, people must have assumed that I had indeed taken up the monastic vocation.

I didn't become a nun; as you see. I'm still here in society and glad about it. In a convent (or the ashram I had been considering) I would be somewhat restricted in my chess-playing activities, for a start. Some nuns might certainly be fond of chess. Saint Teresa of Avila, the patron saint of chess, was keen about it to the point of mentioning it in one of her works, The Way of Perfection. However, chess and other games were not permitted in her Carmelite convents. To be sure nuns are not as free as I am to join a chess club full of men and to roam all over the place for competitions!

Dinah and I became friends, not just old rivals, keeping in email contact ever since that meeting. In fact she is the only competitive female chess-playing friend I have. We consider ourselves fortunate to have enjoyed our great pursuit so long.

Wisps of Memories

As I finish writing this brief article now 13 years later in 2016, I do not remember all the details of the adventure, but just a few points I will never forget. I am aware that I have not even begun to do justice to Edinburgh let alone Scotland with the following vignette, but on the other hand not mentioning them at all seemed totally wrong.

The train journey there was straight through from Southampton Central, scheduled to last 7 hours 37 minutes. The tedium was relieved when I watched, wide-eyed, the dramatic change of scenery as we passed over the border into Scotland. The alluring mists on the hills and the masses of heather were a delight to behold. Ah, already I see the truth of the friend's enthusiasm, as my state of mind was at once affected by the surprisingly pleasant environment.

Round 1 of the tournament started on Friday night at 7 pm and rounds 2 to 5 were on the Saturday and Sunday, with two rounds per day. I travelled in by bus daily from my guest house in Pilrig Street to the historic George Heriot's School. I travelled via Princes Street, the main road, with shops on one side and parks on the other.

One day in the vicinity of Princes Street, I saw a man wearing a kilt. I had hoped that I would at least once see someone in this national costume.

I had no time to do any sight-seeing over the weekend, but I had purposely allowed Monday as a free day before travelling home on the Tuesday. On Monday, therefore, I walked up and up the famous Arthur's Seat steep hill overlooking the city. Settled in a scenic spot, I took in the panorama and then heard down below in the valley what I had hoped to hear during my stay: the strain of bagpipes!

So there we have it: tantalising mists on the hills, lovely heather, the call of bagpipes and the display of national costume; perfect!

CHAPTER 5

SCARBOROUGH 2004

'Are you going to Scarborough Fair,
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme …'

– from the folk song

Scarborough is a seaside town with all the usual attractions for holiday-makers, with everything from donkey rides on the sands for the children to cliff walks and views. Talking of which, one day I was in a dilemma faced with the descent of the said cliffs.

The Wrong Keys

It happened to me, as it does to many, that back in my hotel I needed to go and 'powder my nose'. My room on this occasion was not en suite, so I went outside to the appropriate little room in the hall. I had my keys in my hand with which to get back into my bedroom, or so I thought.

To my horror, I discovered that the keys in my hand were not those of my hotel room but my home keys. I had locked myself out of my room! So, I went downstairs to ring for assistance. Alas the hotel proprietors and apparently everybody else were out.

It was getting near the time for me to trek to the Spa Complex at the base of those cliffs, for my next round. I rang and rang the guest bell and rang the hotel phone from a guests' call box: nothing!

There I was in my normal clothes, thankfully, but no handbag with all the bits and pieces one carries around and which I would need, such as money, comb, pen, lipstick, roll-up umbrella, sunglasses, but I was wearing – wait for it – my bedroom slippers. After waiting awhile in the lounge for the return of the hotelier, to no avail, I decided that 'the play must go on'.

So, I had to go to the tournament just as I was, no cardigan for if it turned chilly, no money for a cup of tea during the up to four hours of intensive mental work on a hot day, and I'd have to borrow a pen with which we have to record our moves on scoresheets. But ah, the cliffs!

The only way down to the tournament hall was via those cliffs, either using the cliff lift at 70p a go – but then I didn't have any money on me, did I – or down the masses and masses of winding, steep steps in my blue slippers. At least they matched my dress and didn't have silly pompoms on them.

I must say the views were superb and so was the exercise in those fairly sturdy slippers which, fortunately, did not slip. That old song comes to mind, *'She'll be coming down the mountain when she comes. She'll be coming down the mountain when she comes. She'll be wearing silk pyjamas, wearing silk pyjamas, wearing silk pyjamas [bedroom slippers] when she comes. Singing aye, aye yippee yippee aye …'*

Something Else Funny

As I said, it was a hot day. Sometimes we can find it hard to get to sleep in our hotel rooms on such days.

I noticed that the player sitting immediately to my left kept on falling asleep. Fortunately for him, at least he managed to awaken enough, bleary-eyed, each time it was his turn to move, make his move and then nod off again.

Well, it was a day of humorous happenings. This very serious pursuit certainly has its funny aspects on occasions.

The Tournament

Alongside the grandmasters, international masters and other very fine players, there were others like me who have been notable at some time in the past, or else are just plain chess enthusiasts. I played in one of the non-championship events: the Soanes weekend tournament.

This game (in my slippers and without various ‘essential’ items) was my best game of the tournament, for I beat the man who won it the previous year. He was graded well above me. The slippers had won the day! Someone at my club suggested I should keep those old slippers as a mascot.

CHAPTER 6

PAIGNTON 2005

'Chess mastery essentially consists of analysing chess positions accurately.'

– *Botvinnik*

One Week, Double Purpose

The first week in September found me back in Paignton, for my usual week's holiday in the popular Torbay area of Devon, which includes Paignton, Brixham and Torquay. The weather was mostly sunny, amid sandy beaches and all the usual tourist attractions.

I stayed at the same guest house as the last two years, close to the seafront and amenities. The proprietors were very cordial, and I think that they want me to win a chess title so that they can proudly display a plaque saying that I stay there! They are also very obliging with my dietary (vegetarian) and other needs. How those full English breakfasts fortify me, though I come home fatter every time!

My other purpose was the Paignton Chess Congress. I competed in the 5-round morning tournament. For over 50 years this great event has been held at Oldway Mansion, the former home of the millionaire Isaac Singer of Singer sewing machines. The magnificent old building, hung with oil paintings and with a museum area showing off the venerable machines, is now civic offices for Paignton council. A very lovely setting too it is, among gardens, tennis courts and winding, rocky footpaths down to a duck pond.

I went around with one or other of my two friends Raymond and Elizabeth in the afternoons and evenings. Both these friends are good companions. Elizabeth is not a chess player. At the time of writing, she lives in an alms house in Somerset, established in 1820 originally to provide individual homes for 'decayed gentlewomen' who had no close relatives to support them. She came to share the holiday with me.

Elizabeth and Raymond occupied a family flat each in the same holiday apartments, away from where I was staying. I introduced them to each other, but I'm pleased to say that they didn't go off spending time with each other and leaving me alone! Now then, if we weren't all so jolly independent, space-loving and used to living alone, we could have reduced expenses very considerably by all three of us piling into one of those spacious family flats!

Outings with My Two Friends

We enjoyed various meals out, including my favourite Indian food with Raymond. The high quality Vegetable Balti curry, bhindi (okra) bhaji and mushroom bhaji dinner was Raymond's treat. I'm fond of Indian food and Raymond tolerates it – he's very traditionally English and generally prefers fish and chips or lamb and mint sauce on a Sunday.

Elizabeth can't stand curries, as they remind her of dogs' dinners! (A mutual friend who was going to feed her with dinner once asked me, 'If I give her spaghetti, will it remind her of worms?'). However, we both belong to the same spiritual fellowship and are single free

spirits who like to write, walk and practice yoga meditation. I'm 60 and my friend is in her late 60s, and there is nothing 'decayed' about either of us. We are physical and mental live wires and did a great deal of enjoyable walking and talking.

My first trip, with Elizabeth, was a Sunday Round Robin excursion on the Paignton steam train of a bygone era. We disembarked at Kingswear, where everyone else went on immediately across the ferry to Dartmouth, but we stayed awhile. Upon asking a railway official if we could split our journey at Kingswear, I was told that it was okay but that 'there is nothing there'. On the contrary, we found this hilly and scenic harbour much to our liking. We alternately ambled and sat enjoying the views and fresh air of woods and open spaces. (Some nice pictures of Kingswear are included later in this book, in Chapter 11).

Later that day we crossed by ferry to Dartmouth, a popular harbour town, we availed ourselves of the restaurants and shops like everybody else, as we were hungry and needed to buy sundry items. Refreshed, the excursion then continued with a wonderful, long cruise along the river Dart, where we enjoyed so much unspoiled countryside as our boat meandered through dense woods reminiscent of the Amazon jungle. There was a running commentary on the wildlife encountered. Finally, at our destination at the town of Totnes we strolled around awhile eating ice-cream before catching the bus home to Paignton.

On Tuesday afternoon, Raymond and I took ourselves off to the Living Coasts aquatic zoo, Torquay, in the semi-free company of penguins, seals, ducks, puffins and rats. Raymond hastily quitted the rat house, whereas I enjoyed watching those big black rodents in their safe enclosure. Raymond, always the perfect gentleman, then treated me to a superb meal at his favourite Wetherspoons restaurant.

Other activities with Elizabeth included walks along the cliff-tops (a bit too long and wearying for Raymond), visits to the butterfly farm, otter sanctuary and the model village at Babbacombe. The last evening, all three of us swayed with the waves on a cruise boat around the harbour, viewing the spectacular night illuminations and beautiful yachts of well-off owners around Torbay.

The Wood Pushers Performances

In my first round, I was fortunate to have the least strong player in the tournament, so that was a pushover win for me. Next round I had a much stronger player, as in this Swiss system of pairing, in which we are paired with players of equal running score. I was very pleased to hold that player to a draw, as his grading was well above mine. I then had 1 1/2 points out of 2, that is 75% score. Last year in the same tournament I finished with a 50% score, and that is all I was aiming for this year. So, after round two I was doing very well.

Then came the big test. By misfortune of the draw, I had two more high graded toughies in a row, 'stinkers' as Dinah put it. There were just three ladies, by the way, in a tournament of 49 players. This is typical. As I've mentioned previously, Dinah from Berkshire and I go back to the 1960s, when we used to compete together in the British Girls and then the British Ladies championships (those tournaments, at least, were all female!). We are both former girls and ladies champions from that time. As a player recently put it, we have pedigree. Woof!

To continue with the story, I then lost to the two difficult opponents, and drew my last round to someone not so challenging. Hence I finished with an honourable 2 points out of 5, whereas last year I had 2 1/2 out of 5. But I enjoyed every single game. And I shall enjoy them once again by playing them back from the notation, analysing and learning from them. And in other less strong tournaments, I can hope to do better and win a prize and title, which I do occasionally.

Raymond, mind you, did brilliantly this year, coming joint 2nd with 4 1/2 out of 5 points. As at 2005, although he and I have been friends for 39 years, we have amazingly never yet had to play in a serious match. We have of course played many friendlies.

One day I expect we will have to face the inevitable duel over the board, in friendly (one hopes still) rivalry. Raymond too in his heyday was a champion, of Derbyshire. He, Dinah and I are a trio of former 'big cheeses', in a humble way, still not bad players though soon eligible for the tournaments specially for senior citizens. Well, we may be 'has beens' well past our primes, but who knows what we may yet become as seniors!

Ah well, as Raymond says when we do not win, 'It's only a game'. And there is always another tournament another year and various matches throughout this year yet to come! True, but to me chess is also much like life, and life is a sort of chess.

CHAPTER 7

HASTINGS AGAIN, 2005-2006

'The pin is mightier than the sword.' – *Reinfeld*

Someone asked me how I fared at Hastings, so I composed this (now revised) trip report ending with, 'Sorry if you just wanted something terse; you got the verbose version!'

Hastings, as we know, is down in history because of the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It is also one of the big names in the chess world, with Masters, International Masters, Grandmasters included among the hundreds of players of all levels who compete there in the various tournaments.

In the highest tournament, the chess grandees – I call them 'big cheeses' – sit in a display area with big demonstration boards to one side of them and rows of seats for spectators on the other side. Me, I'm just a lady player, with a pedigree as someone put it, in other words I'm a former champion of sorts though with no current title.

I'm part of the phenomena of woman power at the board, as it seems that about 1 in 20 of chess players in the UK is female; that is just 5%. The oft-asked question is why that should be, which I will not attempt to answer here. As usual, a sprinkling of ladies added to the spice of this banquet of chess here at Hastings.

The Journey from Hell

It started 27th December 2005, the day after Boxing Day, a very different sort of battle as a prelude to The Battle that was to continue into 1st January 2006.

The journey from Southampton to Hastings, which should have involved two or three train changes and taken three hours, turned out to involve five changes and five hours. Hastings was one of the towns worst hit with snow and ice, and typical of me with my poor time management and general other-worldliness, I didn't even know it before I set off.

And on one leg of the journey, there were no seats left and I had to stand or sit on my case in a very crowded corridor. As one passenger dramatically put it whilst ringing someone on his mobile, 'It is a slave train and with everyone shouting'. Well, people did shout at each station stop, because passengers had a terrible time of it trying to get off as more were trying to squeeze on.

Cancelled trains due to frozen points on the line were the reason for the inhumane cramming. It also meant that I had no train from Brighton to Hastings but had to keep moving east in little steps. Finally at Eastbourne, not that far from Hastings, a train was put on and I arrived at my destination.

Travel worn, I trundled up the hill for over twenty minutes (I'd already paid for one taxi that day) with my blue case on wheels and matching big bag over my shoulder. The snow was layered underfoot and still coming down thick and fast. Oh what we endure for love of chess!

Ideal Accommodation

When I found my guest house at last, after some false leads as to where exactly it was, the effort, the trauma, the damp and the long wait for a drink all day became worth it. It was an ideal place to stay, with all sorts of homely extras.

The guest house was run by a friendly lady and her business partner. I was treated like a right royal personage and made very comfortable in a twin-bedded room (with just me in it) with an excellent view over the town and countryside. Better than the usual little cartons on a side tray, I had fresh milk in my own fridge, hair dryer and bathrobe. What's more, it is just a few yards away from the Horntyne Sports Hall chess venue.

And the breakfast menu was fantastic: health-minded and vegetarian-friendly and offering daily choices. Not just the usual three-course English breakfast, but I started my morning meal with a plate of exotic fresh fruit: kiwi, mango, melon and pineapple, making four courses.

The other courses were cereals, cooked breakfast including Linda McCartney veggie sausages and my favourite mushrooms followed by toast and marmalade. Even the toast was brown, I should say wholemeal, as all toast is brown! All this washed down with a pot of Earl Grey tea gave me good brain food for my daily endeavours, although possibly in excess of my needs. Every time I go away and enjoy these big breakfasts, I come home weightier.

The Chess, the Chess

I competed in two tournaments, the Christmas Morning and the Christmas Afternoon. In previous years I went in a weekend event (and won it twice), and felt like I wanted a fresh challenge.

They were gruelling days, Tuesday to Sunday inclusive, with playing times from 9.30 am to 1.30 pm and back again from 2.15 pm to 8.15 pm. That is a possible ten hours per day of intensive, hard mental work. However, I did not get overtired and I enjoyed all the games. And some of the games were over well before the end of the session times, thankfully!

I got off to a very bad start, with some losses. However, I was undiscouraged, knowing that chess is a kind of snakes and ladders game, despite having only a little bit of the element of luck in it. Besides, I've known myself to lose my first game and then go on to win the whole tournament. It is as if I need a warming up round.

What, no moments of glory to report? Yes, I do have! In the afternoon tournament (the six hour killers!), on the fourth day after round four I had scored three points out of four, due to winning three of my games, and was thus jointly in the lead with four others. Everything depended upon the fifth and final round. Alas I did not win that. However, my opponent very gallantly suggested that it might have made a difference if I had the white pieces instead of black ones, (since the white player always moves first and is thus always a move ahead). Well, maybe, maybe not.

I had had my picture taken at one point in the tournament, to appear in Chess Moves magazine I expect. A player once told me that back in the 1960s he called us young lady players ‘chess dollies’!

Well, if they wanted a bit of eye candy for the magazine, I added a splash of coloured clothing I suppose, compared with the typically more sober shades of male attire. Mind you, there is no telling what sort of facial expression I wore, probably somewhat serious if not po-faced or frowning! As Raymond once remarked, 'When we play chess, we are not normal!'

In any case, I aimed to enjoy lots of skilful, pardon the expression, intellectual 'bloody skirmishes', to add to my experience and my scorebook. I certainly achieved that; also this piece of prose came out if it.

If we fret too long over lost games, we could be missing other points about chess, such as the opportunities to study your play, introspect and improve. Even world champions lose sometimes, and even if no human opponents can beat them the machine might do, as there are some extremely strong computer chess programs these days.

Besides, a saint I admire once said that it doesn't matter so much what happens to us in life, what we become through what happens to us matters! I heartily concur.

CHAPTER 8

TRAVELS WITH THE BRITISH CHAMPIONSHIPS 2008-2012

'Discovered check is the dive-bomber of the chessboard.' – *Fine*

More memorable holidays over the years include the following:

LIVERPOOL

The British Championships 2008 were held at the palatial St George's Hall, Liverpool. I competed in the British Seniors tournament. This breathtakingly ornate venue is regarded as one of the finest neo-classical buildings in the world. I heard that it was also breathtakingly expensive to hire, much to the strain of the English Chess Federation coffers!

British Girls Champions from the 1960s

Apart from Dinah Norman, mentioned in earlier chapters, the only other female player from way back I have seen anything of at all since the 1960s was during this year at Liverpool. I noticed a smiling lady, at a discreet distance from the board, among the spectators taking a keen interest in one of my games, in its dying throes alas.

Afterwards I was delighted to discover that she was none other than Marcia Syme, as she used to be, the third player of the original trio winning the British Girls championship 45 years ago in 1963 at Bath, as pictured in Chapter 1!

As with the destiny of the others, I suspect, Marcia stopped playing competitive chess after she married. She just plays with her grandchildren now, but was thinking of coming back. Well, at the time of writing she hasn't done so to the point of having an official grade. It seems that Dinah and I are the only two ladies who have kept going to this day.

Music and Art

Liverpool was named European Capital of Culture in 2008. With its rich tradition of music, both classical and pop, its visual arts, theatres, and writers who spent extended time in the city, it has a great history.

One day I enjoyed thoughtfully wandering around one of the art galleries, and then elsewhere a special display gallery about the life of the famous musicians who lived or performed there, notably the Beatles and Cilla Black.

Anyone for a Ducking?

Another day I had a unique, unforgettable experience of travel by an amphibious bus-boat, the Yellow Duckmarine. These 'Ducks' are rebuilt and updated 30 seat ex-military amphibious trucks, the DUKWs.

The Duckmarine took us on a sight-seeing tour of the city streets, with a commentator pointing out the various places of interest connected with the Fab Four, including the legendary Cavern Club where the Beatles performed.

Then the vehicle-vessel headed to the water edge. In order to enjoy the scare all the more, we were instructed to scream as the bus hurtled down the slipway to splash into the river Mersey. The tour continued afloat, with our adrenaline rushes subsiding with relief!

Years later I heard that the Duckmarines were no longer seaworthy! In March 2013, a vehicle sank on a voyage after passengers were moved to a pontoon for safety. In June 2013, another craft sank in the Salthouse Dock with 33 people on board. The hapless passengers are reported to be 'extremely fortunate not to have drowned'.

Dozens of people including pensioners and a small child were taken to the Royal Liverpool Hospital for treatment after that massive rescue effort by the emergency services. The popular tour had its license revoked in 2013 and has since had a bid for the return of the tour rejected, as experts continue to mull over new safety guidelines.

So, it seems I had an exciting experience but with a lucky escape!

SHEFFIELD

The British Championships 2011 were held in Sheffield at the Ponds Forge International Sports Centre. It was very spacious and included a restaurant as well as sports facilities for those who wished to use them.

I knew that the ECF always takes the Champs to somewhere worth visiting, but in my ignorance I had a mental image of Sheffield as an industrial steel-making city. That is past history. I was pleasantly surprised to find how clean and green it was. In fact Sheffield won an award for its many parks and green spaces.

Perhaps this better air and environment had an impact on the people too, for I found the locals very relaxed and friendly. They not just gladly answered your question as to where something was but might take you part of the way there too.

Outings and Sight-Seeing

Getting around the city was so easy with the frequent, pollution-free trams. I made a good choice in staying at a guest house outside the city area, with a quality at least as good, much quieter and around half the price as the hotels very near the Sports Centre!

As competitive chess is a kind of work as well as leisure, what a healthy work/life balance it was to visit the expansive Botanical Gardens. I spent a couple of mornings there, peaceful and content to amble around or sit in the sun or shade reading. I like factual books such as biographies and autobiographies.

Another fine sunny day I enjoyed a relaxing barge trip, with commentary, along the canal from Victoria Quays. This excursion made such a pleasant real-life contrast with hours of mental concentration on the board of 64 dark and light squares, although admittedly chess has a pleasant reality all of its own.

NORTH SHIELDS

In 2012 The British Championships came to North Shields on the north bank of the river Tyne. In the metropolitan borough of North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear in North East England, and historically part of Northumberland, North Shields is located eight miles (13 km) east-northeast of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Dining and Getting Around

To get around outside of town one can take the Metro, a train that resembles an Underground tube.

Lodged at a bed and breakfast guest house in South Shields on the other side of the river Tyne, as there was hardly any accommodation in North Shield, I was able to cross the water daily by ferry. Then from the ferry terminal I took a bus to the playing venue.

This daily travel arrangement was fine until Sunday when I could get across by ferry in the morning, but I was stuck for getting back to the guest house as the ferry stopped running after midday or so! There were no buses to take me there either. Luckily, Lara Barnes, one of the Congress Controllers, generously gave me money for a taxi from Congress petty cash for sundry expenses.

Lunches were provided at the playing venue. Evening meals were easy to access from my guest house and to my liking, as there were several Indian restaurants in the very same road! I am fond of Indian food and for the first time I savoured a Vegetarian Thali, a big metal platter of various dishes in their own containers. The dilemma of which delicious dish to choose was therefore solved by sampling several of them at once.

To do something one does on holiday, one day I took a longish bus trip to Whitley Bay, a very nice seaside town with the usual amenities. I heard that some of the players stayed at Whitley Bay and simply travelled in by bus daily to the congress. I never considered doing that, as it looked too far away on the map.

I sat sunning myself on the promenade eating ice cream. I had to watch the clock though – no escape from that even in real life alas – in order to be back at the playing hall for the afternoon round. All my life I have had issues with time and if Time were a person, I would take an immediate dislike to that person!

CHAPTER 9

REMEMBERING OLDWAY MANSION UP TO 2012

'For when the One Great Scorer comes
To mark against your name,
He writes – not that you won or lost –
But how you played the Game.'

– *From the poem Alumnus Football by Henry Grantland Rice*

Oldway Mansion was the focus of not only the Paignton Congress but also of my Torbay holidays for 11 years between 2002 and 2012. Its grandeur and style, gardens and wooded approach made it a tourist attraction. It was also irreplaceable as a chess congress venue.

There was also a certain pomp attached to the opening ceremony that preceded the start of the rounds, when a member of the Mayor's entourage announced, 'All rise for His Worship the Mayor!' followed by the mayor's opening speech.

Alas, the Congress has had to move, as the Mansion is now intended to be sold off by the Torbay Council, in order to raise money. From 2013 the Congress has been held at Livermead Hotel in Torquay. This hotel is very pleasant in its own way, with excellent food, rooms, friendly staff and a swimming pool. However, nothing can compare with the previous exceptional venue.

Rich and Colourful History

For 62 years the Devon County Chess Association held the Paignton Chess Congress at Oldway Mansion in the magnificent Ballroom. This very ballroom is where Isadora Duncan, the colourful dancer who came to a tragic end, once performed.

For many years up to and including 2012, I participated in the Congress there, enjoying not only the chess but the special setting. It was all part of the pleasure of a late summer holiday in Paignton.

The grand old building has such an interesting history too: before the period of the chess events it was home to the late millionaire Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-1875) of Singer sewing machines. I have viewed the museum of these good old machines in the building.

Mr Singer led a flamboyant life with an eye for the ladies, shall we say. In fact I read that he fathered a total of 24 children with his wives and mistresses, the details of which are way beyond these memoirs!

Happy Memories

The walk to Oldway Mansion made a pleasant exercise after breakfast, in mostly fine weather. In early September, it was the tail end of summer along the Torbay coast. After all, I would be doing plenty of sitting once at the chess table.

The trek took around 20 minutes from my guest house in Garfield Road. I walked briskly through the parks, past the duck pond, up a side road and then out into Torquay Road to Oldway Mansion entrance. There were layers of steep steps to navigate before getting one's breath back and beholding the shining white vision peeking through the trees. A photo of this is included at the end of this chapter.

I usually competed in a morning tournament finishing by 1 pm at the latest. I was free to do as I pleased for the rest of the day. I have written about a number of my afternoon and evening adventures elsewhere in this book.

If wishing to tarry awhile before going off for a trip somewhere, there were players to chat with and benches on which to sunbathe or sit in the shade and read. The canteen also made a welcome place to refresh oneself in body and mind for lunches and teas, including the mandatory Devonshire cream tea. Now, when having a good holiday in the area, the only dilemma is whether to put the jam on first and then the cream or the other way around, and does one call those little cakes scones (as in 'on') or scones (as in 'oh')?!

Since the change of location, I know I am not the only player who has gone back visiting the grounds of the past Paignton venue (access to the interior of the building is not possible now), haunting it in person and with our memories. In fact we still refer to the Devon CCA 'Paignton' Congress, despite its shift to Torquay.

How the river of our lives is forever flowing on, sometimes straight ahead and strong over familiar territory, other times it meanders where new backdrops engage our attention and delight us to a greater or lesser degree! Sometimes we encounter knocks and shocks instead.

A Nasty Accident

It happened to me one year that I became engrossed in analysing positions with another player after finishing our games. We were both Alekhine Defence players – not many of us play it – and so were looking at lines of that opening system. We forgot time but alas it didn't forget me!

Then I remembered that I really must go for my planned journey back to Southampton. I hurried more than I should through the wooded paths of Oldway Mansion, as I was worried about missing my train. My pace broke out into a run.

Suddenly I found myself flat out on the stony ground with my arms outstretched ahead of me and with something digging into the left side of my face. I didn't know what had tripped me up (it was years later that I found the large embedded stone on that path that must have been the culprit).

Shocked and not knowing the extent of my injury, I managed to gently move over to a sitting position on the ground. I signalled for help from a lady I spotted in the distance. I had no idea whether I could get up unaided. I explained my accident to the lady and cautiously managed to get up with her reassuring presence.

With great care and slow speed I wended my way back to my guest house to fetch my stored suitcase. The task was to get there safely. I realised I would have to catch a later train. I anticipated the friendly proprietors would render me aid if need be.

Help Awaited Me

Back at Rosemead I was surprised to find that the proprietors were out but my friendly player, the one I had left behind at Oldway, was there with his luggage. It was not surprising that he got there before me in view of my accident drama, delaying my return, even though I had gone ahead before him, but I wondered why he hadn't gone on his journey home.

The player explained that he thought it odd how my luggage was still there in the lounge but with no sign of me, so he decided to await my return. After examining my injuries in the bathroom, I found bruises and grazes but no blood. Nothing appeared to be broken and I needed no immediate medical attention beyond minor jobs I did myself. Apart from being shaken up, I felt alright.

I was so glad though of my player companion kindly escorting me to the station. We both needed to catch the same train for part of my journey. He generally kept an eye on me and once on the journey asked how I was feeling. He gave me nothing more and nothing less than required. I arrived home in Southampton safe and largely sound, although the blue bruise on my face lasted some days.

Moral: never run in the woods or along ground that is dangerous in any way. I do occasionally run for a bus on an even, dry pavement, but taking care to look down at where I am going!



Oldway Mansion woodland path,

lovely but perilous!



Oldway Mansion lower lawn



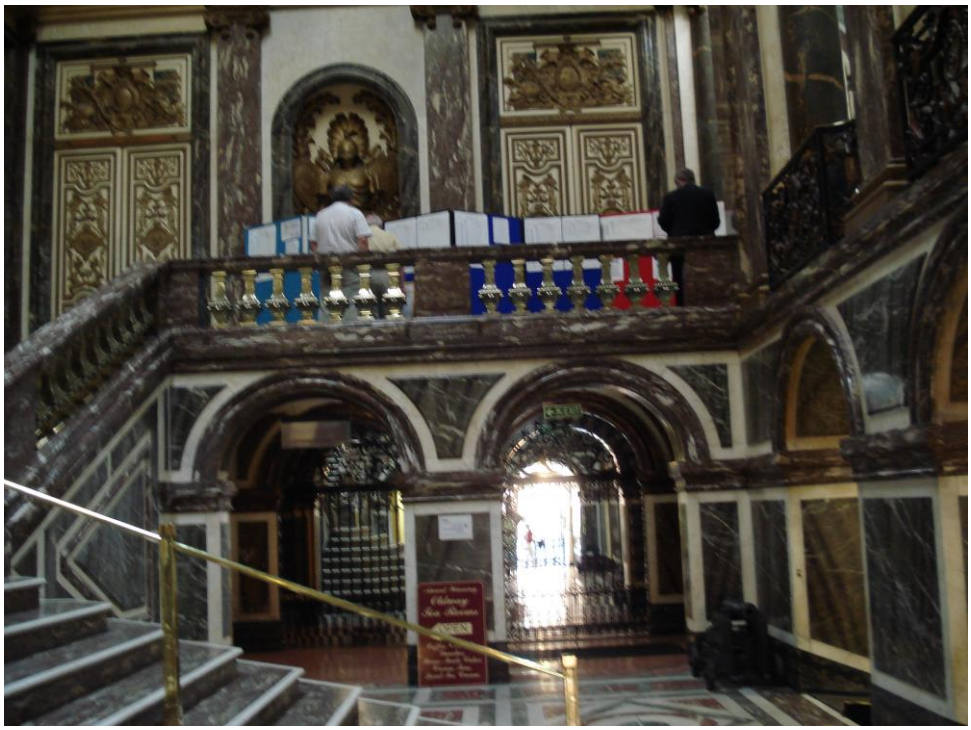
Oldway Mansion wooded approach



Beautiful Oldway Mansion



Oldway Mansion upper lawns



The Mansion Interior

Note the player charts being viewed at the top of the stairs

CHAPTER 10

ABERYSTWYTH 2014

'A Passed Pawn increases in strength as the number of pieces on the board diminishes.' – *Capablanca*

Once again I took my usual two summer holidays with chess congresses. One event was the British Championships this year at Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, Wales, and the other was in Torbay, 'The English Riviera'.

A Less Than Ideal Journey to an Ideal Place

On Friday 25th July I travelled by train to Aberystwyth. Provided with advance economy tickets, I found I had to economise with comfort too. It was a hot day in a hot week, the train from Southampton Central to Newport had passengers crammed in like sardines and the air conditioning had failed.

Luckily I had thought to pack a proper Spanish fan in my bag, whereas other ladies were seen using sheets of papers for makeshift fans. Also the train was too late to make my planned connection from Newport to Shrewsbury, making my journey even 2 hours longer than it would have been, since the trains from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth operated only every 2 hours!

After around 10 hours of travel, I finally arrived at Aberystwyth University, the playing venue, and was escorted to my en-suite room in the student accommodation around 10 pm, only to find the towel rail heating system on in the shower room. Would you believe it! One of the porters kindly turned it off, as he had already done for another player finding the same problem in his room.

Furthermore, the windows opened only at a slight angle, preventing anyone getting in or out but also preventing a welcome breeze that might otherwise manage to cool me off after a long, hot journey.

I went outside awhile for a breath of cool evening air and somehow coped for the week, despite it all, mostly sleeping on top of the bed covers. Thankfully, the shared kitchen was cooler and the playing hall was very good in this regard.

ABERYSTWYTH

As a teenager, many suns ago in 1961, I attended the British Championships for the first time and entered the British Girls Championship. That was my first experience of Aberystwyth and of Wales. Now in 2014 I was back again but this time in the British Seniors Championship for those over a certain age (a lady might not tell her age, although one can guess!).

Aberystwyth University is up a hill away from the main town. I remembered nothing of Aberystwyth except that it was hilly. Indeed so, much to the benefit of my daily exercise. Even on campus I walked up and down at least twice a day from the accommodation to the

restaurant and playing hall and back again. The route included steep steps, a steep path and some wooded area. When exploring the town, I was fine walking downhill to it but very glad of a bus back up that long hill!

I had seven good games although my overall results were not special, despite getting off to three very good draws against much higher graded players. I was successful, however, in bringing back home the British Seniors' Ladies' trophy, a beautiful large cup ('That will hold a lot of champagne', someone remarked), as I won it solely – last year I was joint champion with Dinah with whom I shared the title.

How many ladies did I manage to fight off, this time? None, as I was the only female entrant out of 61 in the Seniors' tournament, and so won it by default! This tells us much about the state of senior women's chess in the UK.

Cambrian Mountains, Culture and Comedy

Let's start with the comedy. I seldom go to the theatre, so it was a treat on Sunday at the University Arts Centre to attend a musical stage production of Sister Act, on the lines of the film made famous with Whoopi Goldberg, with dancing nuns. The tickets were sold out night after night and I only just managed to get a seat. The show was brilliant acting, singing and dancing and very funny with a standing ovation at the end.

I soon saw adverts about the centenary celebration of Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet, and about a special display at the Welsh National Library in Aberystwyth. I am glad I went. I watched, heard and read engrossing multimedia presentations about Dylan Thomas.

The main exhibition takes visitors on a beautifully presented chronological tour through the poet's life and work, with manuscripts, letters, personal documents, artwork, photographs and sound recordings offering an intimate insight into Dylan's world.

Here was a man in love with words, especially poetry, by which he was able to evoke from his readers responses of feeling, thought and imagery. The magic lies in not just what the words mean, but their association of ideas: their connotations as well as their denotations, and sometimes the sheer pleasure of how they sound. Though knowing very little about him before, I felt an immediate admiration.

Then towards the end of the display, I read that before his 50th birthday he did, alas, drink himself to death after downing lots of straight whiskeys. He went into a coma from which he never recovered.

Later on back at home, I came to hear about the controversy over the cause of Dylan Thomas' death. Although his first biographer stated that DT drank himself to death, others have blamed a combination of pneumonia and misprescribed morphine. Whatever the truth, this was such a sad and untimely end to such a talented man!

On a later day in Aberystwyth town, I came across a book shop with Dylan Thomas books displayed in the window. I entered, had a good browse and came out with two books about him to be devoured over time. Luckily I was able to purchase them with a National Book Token I had received upon my recent retirement from some voluntary work. I had feared the Token would not be valid in Wales.

Another time I came back to just sit and be outside Welsh National Library, up on the hill there, admiring the splendid view over Cardigan Bay. Such vistas are food for inspiration.

Now I will write about the mountains. On Friday, my last day of the holiday, I rode with The Vale of Rheidol Narrow Gauge Steam Railway, leading to the spectacular Devil's Bridge Falls. At first, the views out of the window were of a merely rural nature, and then the train started climbing with an ever receding valley beneath.

Finally a stunning panorama was reached high up. We were clinging to the hillside but I felt no fear, as the train seemed to dance in slow motion around those bends. After all, the purpose was not to get to a destination fast but to enjoy 'The Eternal Now'.

This agrees with my philosophy that the past is history, the future a mystery; the best possession is the gift of the present, grasped moment by moment. Granted, it is fine to reminisce over happy times gone by and to anticipate future ones, but hopefully we are able to match up our present with what has gone before and what is yet to come.

CHAPTER 11

TORBAY 2014

'Life is mostly froth and bubble.
Two things stand like stone.
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own'.

– *Adam Lindsay Gordon*

From 2013 the Devon 'Paignton' Congress has been held instead at the Livermead Hotel in Torquay. That year I stayed at the hotel, very handy for the Congress but also more expensive than the accommodation I am used to.

I judge that the special deal for the chess players of £60 per night for bed, breakfast and evening dinner was good value, though, considering how well the guests were treated. The four-course dinner was of very fine quality and quantity with plenty of choices. During the meal, the restaurant manager presented himself dressed in bow tie and tails as a pianist played good old tunes on the piano. I came home pampered but disconcertingly plump that year!

This year, 2014, I decided to stay where I've been for many years, Rosemead Guest House in Paignton, for bed and breakfast and then to eat out more economically daily wherever I fancied. I would travel in to the Livermead in Torquay each morning – the buses were frequent and took around 16 minutes.

This schedule needed planning of bus times and a kind concession by the proprietors for an early breakfast. Happily, Paul and Carmel at Rosemead were most obliging and the arrangements all went to plan. I enjoyed my usual full English vegetarian breakfast, including mushrooms by special request, and I was there at the board ready for the start of the White clocks at 9.30 am, Monday to Friday for the Boniface 5-Round Morning Tournament.

Pizza Feasts

In Chapter 6, I have written about how my friend Elizabeth previously stayed at Paignton in order to go on walks and trips in the Torbay area with me. This year my friend Ann of Sidmouth, Devon, drove to Paignton on two occasions to share some holiday time with me. As with most of my female friends, she doesn't play chess, but I am interested in various things. We had plenty to talk about and had quite some adventures.

Soon after 2 pm on Saturday 30th August I made myself tea in my room at the guest house, unpacked, walked around the promenade and awaited Ann's arrival. She parked outside around 5 pm, we made our way to the seafront and sat having a good catching up conversation until time for dinner.

I gave up eating meat at age 23 and have been fully vegetarian for decades, meaning that I don't eat anything that had a face to it ('fish, flesh or fowl'). Ann would be happy to be meat-free, but her husband would not! She is, however, content to go veggie with me.

Looking over different menus in nearby restaurants, we decided on the Pelican Café in a scenic spot by the harbour, where we ordered two large vegetarian pizzas. Normally in a Pizza Hut I would have a side salad with the hot savoury, but there wasn't anything like that in this café and nothing else on the menu took our fancy.

When the pizzas came we managed to devour only one of them between us as they were huge. We washed down the 6 slices with tea. They were very tasty as well as very reasonably priced, by the way, and could be called Vegetarian Supreme. Seeing our dilemma, the young chef kindly cut the remaining untouched pizza into halves and gave us a box each to take away to our separate abodes, to continue the feasting the next day, which we did. I think in times to come we will say, 'Remember those enormous pizzas at the Pelican'!

KINGSWEAR

We decided to go on the steam train from Paignton to Kingswear on Friday, meeting at the station at 2 pm for the 2.15 pm departure. I never tire of this scenic coastal ride and of Kingswear, and I have written about it earlier in Chapter 6.

Although our ticket had to include being able to cross the ferry from Kingswear to Dartmouth, Ann and I decided not to follow the crowds to the restaurants and shops there. Instead I would show my friend something of Kingswear. Others may consider there is nothing there at this harbour village, but the walk through woods overlooking the river and finally reaching a beauty spot with a bench for eating our packed lunch would be plenty for us.

During this outing we encountered two dramas. Firstly, when Ann had failed to show up at 2.05 pm at the station I rang her only to find that she had difficulty in parking and was doing so at Rosemead Guest house about 8 minutes' walk away. She needed to run! She made it just in time, but alas not before falling flat on her face, though she said little about it at the time.

The steam train journey went smoothly. Due to a drama at Kingswear station as follows we had a bit less time for our walk and sit, but we still greatly enjoyed it. It was ideal weather, not hot but just right. In fact Ann vowed to visit this delightful place again.

Mrs Bannington's Handbag

Arrived at Kingswear station, we first went to wash our hands in the public conveniences. I saw there straight away that someone had left their handbag behind hung over the hand drying machine.

We felt it to be our duty to be instrumental in getting this lost property and its contents back to its owner. Knowing that we are honest, we decided to open the bag looking for a name and any mobile phone number rather than hand it straight to station staff. Failing that, we would find a police station. Rummaging through, we found a name but no number. We

discovered bank cards and, shockingly, a great wad of £20 notes to the value of perhaps £400 or more.

I hadn't noticed it at first, but it occurred to us that the train still there farther up the platform ready to depart might include the owner of the bag. We therefore enlisted the help of the station master, who agreed to announce over the public address system about a message for a Mrs Bannington if she is on the train.

A man then quickly came out reporting that his wife had left her handbag in the Ladies. Seeing the bag slung over my shoulder he cried, 'that's it' and gave us ID showing that he was indeed Mr Bannington.

You can imagine how relieved we all were that the valuable handbag was reunited with its rightful owner, complete with enough cash to pay for her whole holiday, one supposes. Fancy carrying as much cash around as that! The saga of Mrs Bannington's handbag is surely something we will never forget!

Another Drama

I was pleased Ann could stay for a meal out in Paignton with me before driving home to Sidmouth. It would just round off the day out nicely. The café I had in mind was, alas, just closing but they kindly directed us to a pub across the road that served the kind of food we were after.

We both refreshed ourselves with jacket potatoes with vegetarian chilli filling, plus salad and coleslaw, and I had my favourite Earl Grey tea with it. Very often, the only filling for a jacket potato suitable for vegetarians is cheese and baked beans, so this veggie-friendly change was welcome.

During the meal my friend started feeling a lot of pain in both her hands. It transpired that when she ran and fell over in haste to catch the steam train, she had hurt her hands quite badly. It could no longer be ignored. She needed strong pain killers in order to get home. I offered to ask Paul and Carmel at the guest house for some, as chemists were now closed, but Ann declined saying she would get some elsewhere along the journey.

Next day during on my journey home to Southampton, I had a text message from Ann explaining how she had to report to Accident and Emergency somewhere last night. The good news was that there was nothing broken; the bad news was that she had to wait for four hours there at the hospital to be seen and given pain killers, to enable her to finish the journey. She arrived home at 2 am!

With Ann gone home, it was back to my solo explorations of Torbay. There is an endless array of possibilities. As the games in my tournament were all finished by 1 pm at the latest, I had afternoons and evenings free. I repeated some of the things I always do in the area, but also tried some new ventures.

On Sunday I took the open-top tour bus from Torquay. The running commentary was informative as well as entertaining! It was a hot sunny day and despite wearing my big, white floppy sun hat, my nose at least caught the sun.

On Monday, it was the last night of the world renowned Moscow State Circus in Paignton. I enjoyed this spectacular show with a variety of very skilled artists. It combined beauty, laughter, danger and the downright unbelievable, all choreographed with the utmost precision.

BABBACOMBE, BRIXHAM AND DAWLISH

Tuesday saw me on a bus to Babbacombe to explore this coastal town with some of the most superb views in Torbay, which I had glimpsed from the tour bus on Sunday. I had in previous years been to the model village there, but this time went walking and sitting above the cliffs contemplating the view.

I faced a temptation at Babbacombe – I had glimpsed an award-winning fish and chip shop advertised. Although I simply could never face eating meat and am perfectly happy with a true vegetarian diet, not eating anything that has breathed, fish doesn't actually repel me. I have been known on a special occasion to eat it, a perhaps once a year. Sometimes it is socially awkward not to do so.

I did not succumb to the temptation. I remembered that my original idea was to dine that night at the Bombay Express back in Torquay, for the first time. I decided to follow that through and thus relished one of my favourite curry dishes of Vegetable Balti with Mushroom Pilau Rice. The state of the art fish and chips may have also been very nice, I told myself, but fattening anyway, and some of my even stricter veggie friends might even have considered it naughty too.

On Wednesday I entrained for the pretty seaside town of Dawlish. There's a river there with black swans; this time I watched a pair of them making a nest for their forthcoming cygnets. Each year I generally visit this charming place of tranquil vibes, with gently rippling water sparkling in the sun.

On Thursday I rode a bus to another of my yearly haunts: Brixham, a popular harbour town with lots of shops and restaurants. I found a very nice veggie meal in the Lemon Heaven restaurant, appealing with its large Buddha statue in peaceful meditative repose outside.

As I remembered Thursday at Brixham as Pirates Day, I had hoped to see as I did the previous year pretend pirates having a mock duel with swords like last, but there were no pirates that day. Never mind, I went on a longish walk up the hill past the quay and along the coast to a special viewing point at Berry Head. I had never been there before; the panorama was worth the hike.

Why Vegetarian?

In my 20s I belonged to the Theosophical Society, where some of its members were vegetarian. The ideas of these friends percolated through my mind to the point where, aged 23, I knew that eating meat was not right for my body or mind. Living at home with my parents, one day I pushed the meat aside on my plate. I have never touched it since, although at first I might eat chicken or fish.

People become vegetarians for different reasons. A friend of mine did so purely as a commitment to animal welfare, although she admits she actually likes meat whereas I do not. Some do it for health reasons or the question of how best to feed the world population. With me it was mixed reasons of health and repugnance at the thought of unnecessarily killing animals for food.

Some people seem to doubt that I have never missed meat since giving it up in my youth, and they think I must muse or dream of delicious sausages and bacon or whatever else they deem irresistible. No, the only dreams of meat I have had all these years have been bad ones, such as my being a cafeteria with nothing on the menu I can have!

How Did I Fare at the Chess?

I had five good games in the Boniface Morning Tournament.

In Round 1 on Monday I was paired with Raymond. I had the Black pieces. I played my Queen's Knight Defence opening (1 d4 Nc6) and on move 21 accepted his offer of a draw. Oddly enough, the same thing had occurred at the Aberystwyth tournament: first round with Raymond, Black, same opening and an agreed draw on move 21!

As Raymond has been Derbyshire champion half a dozen times or so in his heyday and is still a strong player graded 161, these were good results for me. Mind you, I later realised that I could have played more aggressively in the opening and come out with superior development and the better chance. That is chess: as with life it is full of 'should haves' and regrets!

In Round 2 on Tuesday with the White pieces I played the Pseudo Trompowsky (1 d4 d5; 2 Bg5), also known as the Queen's Bishop Attack. Although this game was a draw against this 167-graded player, and thus a good result, I now believe I could have 'tromped' him better – I wasted a tempo with a safety move 7 a3, although I am not saying I would thus have won the game.

Round 3 saw me with the Black pieces and I played my usual Alekhine Defence (1 e4 Nf6) – I am all cheeky knights and bishops with a number of my opening systems! My opponent turned it into a Tartakower Variation, and with each of us chasing the other's knight (2 Nc3 d5; 3 e5 d4), a line I am happy with. He offered me a draw on move 17. Bearing in mind his grade of 169, I decided that I should not push my luck by playing on hoping for a win; I accepted the offer, securing a third fine result in the bag.

In Round 4 I lost to an opponent with the same grade as me at the time, 142. I think I should have won the ending if I hadn't made an ill-considered move 36 to make the time control, before the 15 minutes quick play finish. Well, we try to blame something for our errors other than our plainly bad choices!

In Round 5 I was fortunate to be paired with one of the lowest graded in the tournament: 130, which is not to be sneezed at, but he missed being eligible to play in the Under 130 tournament by one grading point.

I did win the game, but I am going to make excuses for my opponent this time, not because of grade but due to his showing signs of being unwell. I was concerned when at one point he left the board for around 15 minutes; I was about to report to the controller. It turned out the player was experiencing tummy trouble due to eating too much the night before!

My overall performance for the tournament gave me a grade of 154 and I won a grading prize of £50 for the best result of the eight players with grades under 143. My grade has for years been stuck on a plateau sliding up and down the 140s, although I am determined to escape to a higher level sooner or later!

Anyway, it was a pleasing result and all in all I had a very good week at Torbay.



Paignton clifftop gardens



Torquay gardens by the seafront



Brixham

The Golden Hind

Replica of Francis Drakes' famous ship



Dawlish



Kingswear harbour



Kingswear, a quiet nook

CHAPTER 12

COVENTRY – AND STRATFORD-UPON-AVON – 2015

'It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.'

– *Shakespeare*

The most recent British Championships as I write were held in 2015 on the vast self-contained campus of the University of Warwick, just outside Coventry. I stayed in an en suite room in one of the student blocks.

I was surprised to find that although we had our own shared kitchen with all facilities, there was not so much as a cup or spoon to be found anywhere. We had to buy those things along with supplies at the handy shop. The playing hall was nearby and plenty of eating places to choose from were scattered around the campus.

Dinah was also competing in the Congress, along with her husband Ken. It was good to see them there, especially as Dinah had suffered some ill health worries but was now fit enough to come back in the chess scene.

I entered the British Seniors (for those over a certain age!) and got off to a good start with a fine draw against a player graded ECF 170 in round 1. I was pleased to score 50% success by the end of the 7 rounds, with 3.5 points, in other words I finished higher up the list of players than my grading would indicate. As most players were graded higher than me, that was a good outcome.

In any case, I was the only woman in the British Seniors, as I was the previous year. I thus won the Ladies' trophy by default again.



Gillian Moore Receiving the Trophy
From ECF Official, Kevin Staveley

British Seniors' Ladies' Champion – Aberystwyth 2015

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

I had arrived at Coventry in a deluge. Sometimes the rain made it uninviting to go anywhere. The weather was a bit like my chess results tend to be: unpredictable! The only thing you can predict is that it is going to change, ha ha! I didn't get to explore Coventry town.

However one fine day I had one very memorable trip to Stratford-upon-Avon by bus from a stop on campus. I seem to recall that the journey was an hour or so each way, so I had to plan to ensure that I would be back cool, calm and collected for the starting of White's clocks for the afternoon round at 2.30 pm.

Ah, the river, parks and gardens all greeted me with an air of noble aspirations. The area was abuzz with happy visitors, including naturally some from abroad – I spoke to an American family. The whole town was still permeated with the vibes of our famous English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare.

After taking in the loveliness of the river area and strolling around among the milling multitudes, pleasure boats and swans, I enjoyed a leisurely boat trip with commentary along the river Avon.

Guided Tour of Shakespeare Connections

I followed this river excursion with a guided tour on foot lasting nearly 2 hours. We trailed behind Margot, our highly knowledgeable guide with her coloured pole so that we didn't get lost. The tour was most informative about Shakespeare and the places associated with him and his family.

Firstly down by the river to our left, we passed the tall imposing Royal Shakespeare Theatre, where the Royal Shakespeare Company regularly put on productions. I had stepped inside this building earlier, and imbibed the Shakespeare atmosphere.

Farther along the river bank we soon arrived at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford's oldest building and England's most visited parish church. This is where Shakespeare was baptised and regularly worshipped. He is also buried there in a beautiful 15th century chancel. His wife Anne Hathaway is buried next to him along with his eldest daughter Susanna. We tarried there for some time, as there was so much to see and read.

Another sight-seeing spot was King Edward VI Grammar School, where Shakespeare almost certainly was a student in the 1570s. We also stopped to admire Anne Hathaway's picturesque cottage and gardens, where she lived as a child. We also saw the house of his daughter Judith and her husband, Thomas Quiney.

Just before the end of the guided tour, I took my leave of Margot and the group, as I needed to catch the bus back to the Congress. I told them about this and mentioned that I would be receiving a trophy, hastening to add that this was only because I was the only lady in the British Seniors. They were impressed nevertheless, as one supposes that a trophy has some meaning, and they wished me well.

Stratford-upon-Avon was a beautiful place on a beautiful day; what more could I want on holiday? On this high note I will end this chapter.

PART 3

CHAPTERS 13-17

CHAPTER 13

TWO NEW LADIES' TROPHIES ARE BORN 2013

'Chess is thirty to forty percent psychology. You don't have this when you play a computer. I can't confuse it.' – *Judit Polgar*

Torquay 2013

I was down in Torquay twice this year, once for the British Championships at the beginning of August and later for the Devon County Chess Association Congress the first week in September. I didn't mind that, as I love the Torbay area. As written about in Chapter 9, since the last time in 2012 the Devon CCA no longer has Oldway Mansion in Paignton for a venue.

The British Championships were held at the Riviera Centre, Torquay, and play started in the afternoon on Saturday 1st August. From 8 pm that night a gala dinner was held for all competitors. A conjurer also moved from table to table during the course of the evening, displaying his magic tricks to the guests. The ECF officials and the Riviera Centre staff had laid on a splendid treat for us.

The seating was arranged at individual tables where we were directed to our place names. We were encouraged to mingle and talk to our dinner companions, some of whom we did not know. Dinah was seated at a different table to mine. Next day Dinah told me something very interesting about a conversation she had had with the unknown lady sitting next to her at the dinner, and an amazing development.

The Gibraltar Cup Is Born

The lady had asked Dinah whether there was a Ladies' trophy in the British Seniors' tournament, in which Dinah and I were competing. Upon hearing there was no such trophy she said she would speak to her husband about it. Dinah didn't give any importance to that statement at the time; it could have been just polite dinner conversation.

We do not recall the name of this couple, only that they came from Gibraltar. The husband, whoever he is, was instrumental in getting a Ladies' trophy bought, engraved and ready forthwith for presentation to guess who? As the sole female entrants in the British Seniors, Dinah and I therefore won the Gibraltar Cup jointly, as we finished equal points with each other. We kept the cup for 6 months each.

Apart from the sizeable cup, as you see, we were given little replicas as permanent reminders of our new 'conquest' as British Seniors' Ladies' Champions.



Dinah Norman and Gillian Moore

Joint British Seniors' Ladies' Champions

Torquay 2013

The Gillian Moore Cup Is Born

A kind member of my club, Mr Tony Roberts, couldn't get it out of his mind that there should be a Gillian Moore cup. Intended as a ladies' prize, his idea was an award to the best performing female entrant in the Hampshire Congress, put on by the Hampshire Chess Association at Eastleigh College each November.

Tony first joined the Southampton Chess Club around 2006 in his 50s. He was a former boxer and new to competitive chess. He fervently wished he had seriously taken up this intellectual sport earlier in life. His enthusiasm knew no bounds. 'I want to be a grand master', he pleaded. Not wishing to dampen his ardour and yet remaining realistic, I encouraged him to keep going and watch his performance improve over the years. This he has achieved.

Tony felt strongly about having a cup with my name on it, in view of the work I do for chess – I hold several offices, plus the fact of my having won female championships long ago. 'You don't have to be dead to have a cup named after you', he reassured me.

I liked the idea and so Tony's wish was granted. The Hampshire CA committee approved the plan. I bought an attractive cup for the purpose and donated it. From 2014 the first name was engraved upon it was mine! I was the female entrant with the most points in her respective tournament of the Hampshire Congress. I was the sole lady in the Major tournament as usual. Two other ladies in the Congress, in the Minor tournament, finished with dismal results.

Someone remarked that when I eventually pass away my ashes could be placed in the Gillian Moore Cup, so that I could keep an eye on it! Well, many years hence I trust, from the Hereafter maybe I will wonder, 'who has been winning *my* cup?'



Gillian Moore Cup

Hampshire Chess Association

Ladies' Champion

CHAPTER 14

MY CHESS SINCE 2001

'Examine moves that smite! A good eye for smites is far more important than a knowledge of strategical principles.' – *Purdy*

Here is a bird's-eye view of what I am up to with my chess doings, since my return 15 years ago.

Southampton Chess Club

Southampton Chess Club was founded long ago in 1883 and is still going strong with a membership of around 35. Open to all players of whatsoever strength, we have been putting no less than six teams in the Southampton League, although this is reduced to five for the coming season 2016/17.

Apart from the League, all players can compete in the club championship and club knockout tournaments that go on all season. The latter can go on until late in the season or be cut short, just depending upon in which round one is knocked out.

We also have rapid play events, in which we have just half an hour each to complete a game, which is thus over within an hour. The colours are then reversed with the same pairs of players with the same time constraints as in their first game. The event is therefore finished within two hours.

Of course blitz chess whizzes even faster than rapid play. We usually have one of these evenings at the end of the season in late May and at start of the season in September, before the serious business of club champion games gets underway.

For this supreme speed, we either have Five Minutes Chess with the clocks, in which each player has to make all your moves in five minutes, or Ten Seconds Chess with the buzzer. No matter how unready one is to move, one must move on the buzzer, *plonk*! Whichever method is used, it could also be called Crazy Chess, since the extreme lack of thinking time makes for lots of ridiculous moves: illegal moves, queens thrown away, you name it!

Also towards the end of the season, the reigning club champion usually gives a simultaneous display. He – I have never won it yet although I have been in second and third place – has to literally go around in circles for hours, playing against a number or opponents at once. He, obviously a strong player, tends still to win most of the simultaneous games, even though each of his opponents has so much more time to think than he does. The champ has to make fast decisions at each board before moving on to the next and the next.

When I joined in 2001, the club met at Oaklands School in Lordshill; it later became Oasis Academy. The only problem with this good and spacious venue was the shortness of the evening, as at 10.00 pm the man with the keys came and pushed us out promptly. Starting the games at 7.30 pm, a skimpy 2.5 hours was not enough to play our best and not everyone wants to adjourn and continue games another evening.

Currently the club meets at St Denys Community Centre, which is much better as that extra half hour until 10.30 pm makes all the difference. As we know, games of chess can easily last for four or more hours given the opportunity. At least we now have a full three hours of playing time and we have our own keys.

I feel that I could not have joined a better club, and it doesn't bother me in the least that I am and almost always have been the only lady there. A player is a player and I have always been treated with the same respect given to all the rest, and I am never stuck for a lift home.

Southampton Chess League

The Southampton Chess league has five Divisions. The Southampton Chess Club A team has won Division 1 of the League for the second year running, that is for 2014/15 and 2015/16. As the League includes clubs as far away as Fareham, Basingstoke, Andover and even Salisbury that is not even in Hampshire but in Wiltshire, to come top of the League is a great achievement.

For my sins, I took over as captain of our B team at the beginning of the season just completed. We competed in Division 2 and I am pleased to see we have not done badly, considering losses of some team members, and at least we will not be relegated to the lower Division for the coming season.

As at September when I took over as captain, my team situation was not looking bright. With losses of every sort, including one death, another seriously ill, another having a rest from chess, and another no longer keen to play due to aging, I wondered whether I would even be able to field a full team of five at every match.

However, life moves on and replacements came, not that the two good B team players who have now died can be replaced exactly. They will be remembered for the fine people they were as well as the games left to us for all time. I have recorded some very good games with both of them; RIP Les Allen and Michael Roberts. The club has also recently suffered the loss of another valued and well-liked player from one of the other League teams, Tony Summers.

At the club AGM in 2009, the members clapped upon hearing that Gillian Moore had been elected as Chair of the Southampton Chess League. I recognized that this response included an element of pride in someone from their club getting the position; nevertheless their warm response felt good. Now seven years on, I am still 'Madam Chairman', although someone good naturedly quipped that if you cross the 'I' out of CHAIR, you have something very different!

Hampshire Chess Association



Your author officiating with Roger Marsh, our grading officer, at the Hampshire Congress 2013

As well doing something useful in the club and the League, another of my hats is being a member of the Hampshire Chess Association committee. I am Treasurer of the HCA as well as Secretary to the annual Hampshire Congress.

In 2013 too, I was called upon to be in the team of organisers of the Hampshire Congress, when our regular organiser, Mr John Wheeler, was ill and unable to be present. We learned from experience just how much work is involved in organising the congress all weekend, a job that John did single-handed and that he now continues to do!

So, Tony, I suppose you are right that I do a bit of work for chess, although it is a pleasure rather than an onerous duty.

Referring to the HCA someone at the club once asked me, 'What does it do?' The short answer is that the objectives of the Association are to encourage the establishment of clubs throughout the county, and to foster and encourage the game of chess generally.

I realised that although the questioner would be affiliated to the HCA, his lack of knowledge is understandable and typical of many players as we might seem rather out of sight and therefore out of mind. After all, most would be automatically affiliated through joining their clubs that are affiliated to one of the Leagues.

The clubs affiliate to the Southampton and Portsmouth Leagues, which then affiliate to the HCA. Hence all the members of those clubs become affiliated to the HCA, some without realising it probably.

Yes, Yes, but What Does the HCA *Do*?

We provide the Hampshire Chess Association website with lots of interesting information in it for all.

A major job is our big annual congress held at Eastleigh College in November. This is open to all players wherever they live – some come from different parts of the country – whether affiliated to Hampshire or not. However, only those HCA affiliated players can win titles and trophies such as 'Hampshire Champion' with its enormous resplendent silver rook, as well as the money prizes that any entrant can win.

We also organise various county matches in the Chiltern League and, until recently, in the West of England Chess Union. We are still affiliated to the WECU and put one team at least into the National stages of competition. All players affiliated to the HCA, whether through their clubs or directly to us, are therefore eligible if selected to play for Hampshire against other counties. We have both an Open team and an Under 150 graded team.

Another benefit of being under the umbrella of the HCA is the services of our grading officer, so that all players' games go towards an official grading with the English Chess Federation (ECF). Without a local grader like this, player identification would be much harder for the ECF grading officer responsible for the whole country, and muddles and mistakes would be sure to ensue. For example, there is at least one more G Moore in the UK chess world, and whereas I might look better off getting his games for my grading, he might not be so pleased to get mine!

Naturally all members of the HCA can vote at our AGM held in June. Thus they may have a say in how chess in Hampshire is run. Mind you, only a few bother to turn up to note what is going on, or to put their hands up to vote for or against proposals. I can sympathise with the general perception that AGMs are boring, but it is hardly possible for us responsible committee members to be bored with it!

What Do I Compete in Now and Where?

Well, it is true to say I am a very active chess player. Locally I participate in all the club competitions described earlier plus county matches and the Hampshire Congress. I also currently play for the Gosport team in the Portsmouth League, not that one has to live in Gosport to do that.

Another congress I frequent and will enter this year is the British Championships, in the British Seniors' tournament as before. It is coming to Bournemouth this year, which is very handy for me as I can commute by train daily, and do not need to stay away at an expensive hotel. And I have a rail pass giving me a third off the price of train tickets.

You bet I am also going this year to the Devon 'Paignton' Congress held at Torquay, as this is my main holiday week. Playing in a morning tournament that finishes at 1 pm, I will be free once again to roam the Torbay area in my favourite old haunts, or to explore new places and activities. What adventures will I have again?

CHAPTER 15

NOT JUST AN INTELLECTUAL MATTER

'A chess game is divided into three stages: the first, when you hope you have the advantage, the second when you believe you have an advantage, and the third... when you know you're going to lose!'

– *Tartakower*

Chess at serious level yet has its lighter side and with a range of feelings and emotions. Elation and frustration, gladness and gloom, self-confidence and doubt, and humour and annoyance are all there.

Noises

Of course, chess requires silence in order not to disturb the players' trains of thought, and even the slightest noise, usually of no consequence, can be a nuisance.

A few years ago, I played for a Wessex team in the prestigious 4NCL (Four Nations Chess League) tournament. This was by virtue of the rule requiring a female player or a junior on one of the boards. I recall a time when a player came into the room loudly crunching an apple. I gave him one of my stern 'looks'; he got the message without a word and hurriedly departed the room, leaving me to resume my peaceful analysis.

Another time at a county match, when all but one game was finished, we were crowded around the remaining game in silence at a discreet distance. A player came in nonchalantly munching a ginger nut biscuit. The Hampshire match captain sharply called out, 'Quiet please!', as even a crunchy biscuit under such circumstances had the effect of a boom microphone and at a critical time of the game, with probably not much time left on the players' clocks. Taken aback by this scolding, the biscuit man retorted. 'You can't be serious!'

Remarks

Naturally one doesn't talk at the board, but now and then an innocent remark is permissible in your own thinking time.

Once I was playing a junior in the Berks & Bucks Congress. He was a very polite small boy who was competing in an adult tournament for the first time. He didn't want to do the wrong thing by leaving the room if this was not permitted, so he looked at me and cutely asked,' Is it alright if I go to the toilet?'

At a League match another time, I took ages to develop my queen's bishop. When I did eventually manage to get him off the back rank, I declared, 'A late developer!' Sharing in the fun, my opponent quipped, 'Like me!'

Another time at a county match, Hampshire away to Berkshire, I swindled my opponent into thinking he had a deadly sacrifice. In fact he overlooked that I could force the exchange of queens, after which his 'sac' just wouldn't come off. 'Oh pooh!' he exclaimed, perhaps restraining his language to anything stronger as there were two ladies present.

Happenings

Before the start of a match, we are often reminded to 'Turn your mobile phones off'. The rules are the rules: in some matches we are given one warning, in other matches no warning about the dire consequence if it makes a sound. Despite this, there have been times when someone's phone does go off, and eyes swivel to see who the guilty party is, perhaps embarrassingly rushing out of the room. What a shame, he will have to forfeit his game!

At the Chiltern League matches I sometimes assist the match captain. One year at the end of season Jamboree of the four counties (Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire), I did the honours of filling the urn, setting out the cups, tea, coffee and biscuits in the kitchen.

During the match, through the open kitchen door I noticed clouds of steam coming from an overheated urn. It was clearly visible to dozens of players seated much nearer the kitchen than I was, but surely there was a tea lady to see to those things? The hall was full of around seventy-nine men (four times each team of twenty per county, less one female player). Of course, dear players, I am happy to look after you – I left my game for a minute or two to turn off that urn in crisis!

Board Rage

It is not so uncommon for a player to withdraw from a tournament after a disappointing start, perhaps two or more lost games in a row. I recently heard about the behaviour of a strong player who, upon losing one game in the Southampton League, screwed up his scoresheet and declared he would never play chess again!

Although I have never felt discriminated against on account of my gender, I hear that some women players certainly have. My friend Dinah told me a funny true story about a woman player who beat a man at the game and he was so angry about it that, quote, 'He threw the queen at her'.

Whether or not he actually picked up the piece and took aim or merely threw it across the board towards her, I do not know. The symbology of throwing the queen, though, seems clear and hits one on the nose so to speak!

Say It With Chocolates!

In September 2006 I competed in the Paignton Congress in the Boniface Morning tournament as I have done many times now. I have not written about the holiday that year, but here is a little event that put my chess philosophy to the test. I believe that a player who takes winning and losing *too* seriously is a fool.

Of course the object of the game is to win and one fervently hopes to do so. There has to be other good motives besides, though, such as mental challenge and development, and sheer love of the game. If one happens to win and do well and people take delight in it, then that is a bonus.

I won the first round and, upon losing, the opponent showed the right spirit by remarking with a smile, 'I think it is time for coffee!' I lost my second round but went on to win rounds three and four. Now if I were to win the fifth and final round, I would win the whole tournament either solely or jointly.

You are invited to take a look at the opening moves of this Queen's Gambit Declined pivotal game. I am Black:

Helge Hjort (White) versus Gillian Moore (Black)

8th September 2006

Paignton



Position after Black's move 6 ... Nxd5. White to move

Who is better off?

1 d4 d5; 2 c4 e6; 3 Nc3 Nf6; 4 Bg5 Nbd7; 5 cxd5 exd5; 6 Nxd5?? Nxd5!!

Now then, Black has won a piece for a pawn, right? (If 7 Bxd8, Bb4+; 8 Qd2 Bxd2+; 9 Kxd2 Kxd8 regains the material and Black is still ahead). Therefore, all being well I should go on to win the game and the first prize. What did I do? I goofed up, letting him win another pawn, push my pieces back and walk off with the game and first prize. How grotty is that; I had him on toast but stupidly turned off the heat!

The next morning at breakfast– my victorious opponent of the day before was staying at the same guest house – a surprise box of Black Magic chocolates sat on my table with a kind note saying, 'Thank you for letting me win!' Well, I can't say it was intentional, and of course I was disappointed, but I had to take the dismal loss on the chin; besides I had won some rather

nice chocolates, with a name befitting the occasion I thought. So that's it, perhaps my opponent cast a spell on me to make me go to pieces or give away my pieces!

Anyway, my task was then to look into what went wrong to lose that 'won' game. Playing it through, I knew the reason for my subsequent bad moves, but what was the reason for the reason? This is something that interests me very much: how we can become aware of our weak points and govern our thinking processes better to improve our play. I am on to this job of self-evaluation now.

Chess is clearly a game of emotional as well as mental self-control, such as not being lazy, smug or overconfident when in a good position. Gillian, it is not won until the end!

Lament for My King

A Poem by Gillian Moore

The humble king upon the board stands tall,
As he's the most important piece of all.
His modest action his true value hides,
For when he's lost the game is lost besides.

So in the vastness of our mental screens,
Where vistas of the world of chess are seen,
We sit for silent hours and stare, and strive
Above all else, to keep the king alive.

For with the king in his impending doom,
The losing player feels the monarch's gloom,
Though sportsmanlike we hope to banish pain,
And carry on of fine good cheer again.

Though some there are, for reasons understood
Of human nature, still do not feel good
For hours or days beyond the sad lost game.
This paradox has ever been the same!

For if the king lives long and we pursue
The contest 'til a good result ensues,
We feel all praises for the game that brings
Such joy and peace beyond the wealth of kings!

CHAPTER 16

MY CHESS AND ME

'Chess is everything – art, science, and sport.'

– Karpov

A university student recently interviewed me for a project on Chess he is doing. He asked me a number of questions, some of which I will repeat here that have not already been answered in this these memoirs.

Q. Why do you play chess?
A. Well, the short answer is that *it is a passion and I enjoy it*.

Thinking about it now, I love wondrous vastness: the universe, the sky and oceans. There is something about the fathomless depths of chess that keeps me enthralled and ever diving into it for more, as it were.

There is something about its pin-drop silence, with eyes averted from the world in which we live and breathe, which keeps us exploring this fascinating oceanic world within. The pieces themselves, made of plastic or wood, are just figureheads for the real arena they give rise to in our minds. Imagination is a world all of its own: a world within a world.

Q. What is your favourite piece?
A. *The knight*; it is original and so am I!

In Praise of the Knight

A sonnet by Gillian Moore

The knight now, he is different from the rest,
Original, eccentric we could say.
For in the mighty battle known as chess,
He serves the cause in his peculiar ways.
Where other chessmen find their passage barred,
The daring knight springs forward, left or right,
Or backwards, where his vision is not marred.
Yet schemes of his can hide in plainest sight!
With tricky tactics he's adept, we know;
Mere sight of him is somewhat worrying.
Most shocking when he charges near the foe,
And takes them prisoner for his noble king.

Of all the chessmen, especially the knight
Suggests that we should follow our own lights.

More Chess Particulars

Here goes with a few more pithy questions and answers I've just thought up that might interest my reader.

Q. Do you have any favourite openings?
A. *There are several I specialise in*, such as the Alekhine (1 e4 *Nf6*) and the Chigorin (1 d4 d5; 2 c4 *Nc6*) with Black and the Pseudo-Trompowsky (1 d4 d5; 2 *Bd5*) with White.

I particularly like playing certain gambits, when the chance occurs: Staunton Gambit as White against the Dutch Defense (1 d4 f5; 2 e4), and as Black playing my own gambit line, the Alekhine Attack (4. e4), against the Budapest Gambit. You could call me Gambits Gill.

Q. Have you ever felt discriminated against on account of being a female player?
A. If ever a man felt shame upon losing to me or unchivalrous for beating me, he has not shown it. *So no, I have never felt discrimination in the chess world*.

Q. What do you feel about junior players?
A. *Ambivalence*! On the one hand it is good to see them doing well and improving fast, but on the other hand their strength tends to be greater than their grade is indicating and I have a poor track record in my games against them.

Q. Have you any idea when you might retire from competitive chess?
A. *I have no idea*. Although of senior years, my chess career is still in full swing.

Of course I know that life can throw all sorts of unwelcome happenings at us at any time, but I am so grateful to still be enjoying good health of body and mind so far. To tell you the truth, I feel better on all levels than I was as a young woman; go figure!

Why So Few Lady Players?

This is a moot point: is it nature or nurture, character or culture? It all plays a part, no doubt, but I'm inclined to think that it is predominantly a lack of particular interest among most women, compared to men, explaining why about only 5% of chess players are female. That is just 1 in 20. Dinah and I are obviously among the fortunate few.

A humorous male joke says that 'Women can't shut up long enough'! Well, let me put it more positively: women are generally good conversationalists. Of course, women tend to be busy with home and family, but it doesn't exclude them from all manner of outside interests too.

I am reminded of a remark made to me years ago by a non-comprehending lady acquaintance, 'Gillian, [referring to my chess playing] I thought you were more practical than that!' I couldn't think of a good reply at the time – we often can't, can we – but now I wish I had retorted something like, 'I'm practical enough; this is intellectual culture that is also important to humans. And chess is our greatest game of skill.'

The example of the extremely strong Hungarian sisters, Judit, Susan and Sofia Polgar, shows there to be no essential intellectual reason why women cannot play chess to the same high

level as that of men. Grandmaster Judit Polgar is considered to be the strongest female chess player in history.

Their father, Lazlo Polgar, brought the three girls up according to an intensive chess education at home, proving his theory about what is possible for women chess players under the right circumstances and with their natural inclination.

Thoughts on Chess and Life

Journeys may be so long, and so can games of chess, but the learning and the delight involved in my life's journey and in my game of life are without end. In chess, I am always analysing where I'm at. In life I'm always introspecting. I enjoy the insights I sometimes gain about myself and others.

I also enjoy watching my life unfold, with its inner plans and outer projects, and peering into the future concerning how my circumstances are about to unfold. I am able to make certain predictions about what's coming next or in due course in my life, when I become clear about what I would like! I have faith in providence to actualise my legitimate needs and requests.

Strategies and their realisations, imagination and its fulfilment: my life is full of this and my life is full because of this. No two games are identical and no two days are entirely the same for me. Themes are recurring but details differ. Life, as in chess, is ever full of surprises!

Naturally, as we live in the world of duality with all the pairs of opposites (good and bad, pain and pleasure, gain and loss, sickness and health and so forth), kindly challenges in the guise of difficulties can also be presented to us and are bound to occur!

As in chess, so in life, which to me are at once both games and yet serious endeavours. Both require dynamic will in order to be successful. In both cases, we have to take the rough with the smooth. No one achieves everything they wish for without struggle and setbacks before victory.

Win or lose, the important thing is to enjoy The Game for its own sake; it's a great game; it's a great life!

What Next?

For some time I have been putting together a selection of my games from the last 15 years. They all start with a brief commentary. With just one game per page, I will let the moves speak for themselves, and the reader can critique them!

I aim to have a diagram of a position with a caption for each game. I hope to have this much bigger and very different sort of chess book available in the near future, after this current work is available. I might call it:

My Chess Revealed

The Games and Thoughts of a Woman Player

Apart from that, for me it is a question of 'more of the same please', enjoying chess and attempting to improve my present performance that has been stuck on a plateau for too long for my liking. Most of us have not yet reached our zenith at the game or in life generally, and despite my advanced years I feel I can still be included in that category!

Is not chess a science, art and sport of deep thought, imagination and dynamic will? So, what are the desires of our hearts and what, within reason, can we achieve in other spheres of life? What do we have to develop, express and share with others? We all have so much inside to come out and with which to make our mark in society!

CHAPTER 17

THE PAWN IN US ALL

'The Pawns are the soul of chess.' - *Philidor*

Pawns hold great fascination for me. One of my chess books I have had for decades is still one of my favourites: Pawn Power in Chess, by Hans Kmoch

Apart from its various uses just as itself, the pawn is the chessman of least value and yet they can reach the heights. If a pawn manages to reach the eighth rank, it can and most often does become a queen, the chess piece of highest value.

I see an analogy there between pawns and humans, with our huge potential for progress in various spheres of endeavour, whether or not we appear to be humble in the eyes of the world. Personal evolution lies latent in us all.

From the vast arena of variegated human skills, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, what latent abilities does each of us have to achieve something of value in life? And, like pawns advancing, what is our personal SWOT analysis, that is what are our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as we march ahead along the route to the achievement of the goals?

Pawns with a Purpose

Poem by Gillian Moore

The chessmen, as we know, comprise a splendid team
Whose diverse members differ in the play's esteem.

Yet every piece, no matter what the rank or role,
Partakes of the potential of the Player's whole.

For, on the board there is a place and time for all --
Each piece has its allotted space and interval.

And every piece is gifted with its strengths to share,
Yet none has access all the time to everywhere.

True, merest pawns may not assume immediate rights
And attributes of queens and bishops, rooks and knights.

Instead, those plodding pilgrims, patient questing souls,

Must tread the files as paths towards their glorious goals.

Remember, pawns are valued least, yet their devotion
Can crown their service with success of pawn promotion.

When time is ripe and higher purpose supervenes,
Those pawns might stride as powerful and free as queens!