

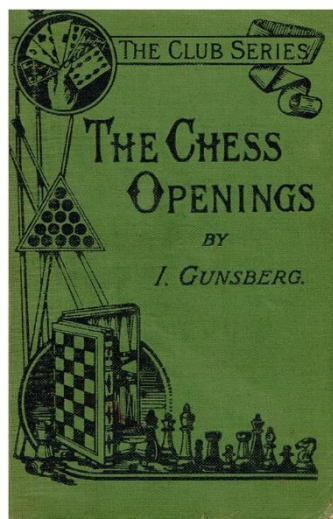
An Old Chess Book that I Bought

By Kev Byard

Who was the first person to be a British citizen and to have played in the final of the World Chess Championship? No, it was not our Nigel. However, our question is answered later.

First, though, let's talk about me. I emigrated to New Zealand in 2004, after which I immediately gave up chess for reasons that are totally to do with the appalling state of chess clubs in Auckland and nothing to do with any waning interest in the game on my part. As a result I gave up the game. So, because I had been living in the chess wilderness for such a long time, the decision of Chandlers Ford Chess Club to move online was therefore a Godsend to me. And, following my first foray into competitive chess for seventeen years via the weekly online CFCC Arena and Swiss tournaments (I'm still shaking after my baptism of fire in my first ever game against Kev Lamb, whose playing style clashes completely with mine!) my interest has been thoroughly rekindled. Indeed, immediately following my first such tournament on 19 November 2020, where I achieved a very proud third place and a much-treasured bronze cup, I ventured into the cold, dark, damp basement under my house to find my collection of chess books that had lain undisturbed for seventeen years in a large plastic box, in which also lies a signed non-chess autobiography by Brian Clough. I successfully retrieved all but one of my endgame books (the other is titled, 'Tactical Chess Endings – the word 'Tactical' put me off!) and nothing else. However, after an online discussion about openings (Philidor's Defence in particular) with David Culliford, John Zastapilo, Graham Stuart and Kev Lamb, I decided to have a further rummage and I found a few other books, this time on the openings. It was during the retrieval of my four books on the Philidor Defence and my seven books on the Scandinavian Defence (which I didn't open) that I stumbled on an absolute gem of a volume that I had long, long neglected. Now, I know most of us are guilty of not having read every book in our collections (my own copy of Staunton's Chess Player's Handbook remains virtually unopened) but I really should have made much more of an effort to delve into this particular 1927 print of this work from 1895 (this being the earliest date I can find for the book).

My article here is devoted to that book, titled 'The Chess Openings' by Isidor Gunsberg. Gunsberg was an interesting character (albeit admittedly less colourful than Claude Bloodgood) whose second major claim to fame was his being the main operator of the Mephisto, a Victorian-era chess playing automaton that gave a reasonable challenge to even the best players of the age but I'm guessing would have been roundly thrashed by Stockfish, if not by John Zastapilo himself. However, Gunsberg's crowning achievement was his challenge



to the great Wilhelm Steinitz for the 1891 World Chess Championship, which Gunsberg only narrowly lost by a score of 6-4, which brings us back to my question at the top of this piece. Sometime after his loss to Steinitz, Gunsberg became a British citizen, thus being the first person to be both a British citizen and a World Championship finalist, albeit not at the same time (sorry, Nige !) In fact, after five games of the 1891 final, Gunsberg was actually leading which makes him the only

person in history to be a British citizen and to have actually **LED** in a final of the World Chess Championship (even more sorry, Nige !) Yes, I know that the internet tells us that Gunsberg was born in Hungary and only emigrated to the UK to become a citizen at the age of 53 long after his tour de force vs Steinitz, but if Andy Townsend and Tony Cascarino can play for the Republic of Ireland in the 1994 World Cup then, as a Brit, I'll take Gunsberg's claim.

Let's look at my copy of Gunsberg's book. Bearing in mind that the book is titled 'The Chess Openings' its 1895/1927 content is fascinating. Each chapter provides a brief description (typically one page) of an opening, followed by columns of analysis, MCO-fashion. Each opening is afforded a number of such columns. The breakdown of the numbers of columns for each of the openings, and in order of appearance in the book, is as follows:

French Defence:	4 columns
Sicilian Defence (N.B. 1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 – that's all, no other 2 nd moves for White!)	4 (only 4 columns– unbelievable when one considers the statistics below)
Centre Counter:	4
Philidor's Defence:	8 (yes, 8!)
Petroff's Defence:	8
Ponziani's Opening:	4
Scotch Opening:	16 (seeing any patterns?)
Ruy Lopez:	12
Two Knights'	12
Giuoco Piano:	8
Evans Gambit Declined (yes, JUST the declined):	4
Evans Gambit (accepted):	10
Bishops Opening:	4
Centre Game:	4
Danish Gambit:	4
King's Gambit Declined:	8 (how DARE we decline?)
King's Gambit Accepted; King's Bishop Gambit (3.Bc4):	8
KGA Cunningham Gambit:	4
KGA King's Knight Gambit: (3.Nf3):	4
KGA Salvio Gambit:	4
KGA Muzio Gambit:	4 (!!)
KGA Kieseritzky Gambit:	8
KGA Allgaier Gambit:	12 (!)
Vienna:	12
Bird's Opening:	4
From's Gambit:	3
English Opening:	8
Reti (called the Zukertort in Gunsberg's book):	8
Queen's Pawn opening (incl. Dutch)	8
Queen's Gambit Declined:	8
Queen's Gambit Accepted:	4

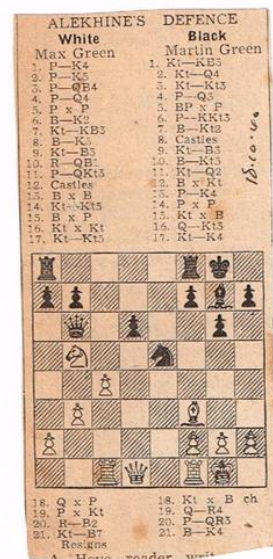
What's most interesting, I think, about this list is the complete dominance of lines that include an f4 gambit by White over almost anything else, in particular the King's Gambit. Indeed, there are 64

columns that include the f4 move (52 being directly the KGA or KGD) out of only 213 columns in total (30% of all columns). Also the entirety of the Queen Pawn openings is dealt with in only 20 columns (9%). The French and Sicilian are relegated to mere sidelines in Gunsberg's push for a White f4 and these openings are given the same space (5 columns) as the Muzio Gambit on its own, would you believe? And if you're player of the Sicilian having only four columns to peruse, then please spare a thought for players of the Caro-Kann.

The French Defence, admittedly being the first opening addressed in Gunsberg's book, is described disparagingly in its first paragraph thus: "It seems almost superfluous to explain that the French Defence is resorted to by players who do not care to face the attack which may result from Black's reply of P-K4." I hope, Graham, you are hanging your head in shame! That said, those who wish to play 1.d4 are also not let off the hook by Gunsberg who says, "...[players playing 1.d4] of even mediocre talent are often enabled to make a display of strength against better players than themselves." Now that IS disparagement!

However, while the book itself is an absolute treasure, the real gems were to be found in the extras that were between the pages of the book upon my opening it when I returned from my basement. Between the leaves of this volume I found two newspaper cuttings and, far more importantly, a recorded game from a previous owner of the book (did I mention that when I bought the book it was second-hand?) who failed to retrieve his (her?) score sheet. Absolute gold!

The first cutting is from a newspaper showing a game played between a Max Green and a Martin Green, maybe two brothers, and won by Martin as Black. The game is an Alekhine's defence, as indicated by the title, which was a win for Black. According to Stockfish, White's decisive error was 20.Rc2. Stockfish gives 20.Rfd1 as equal (0.0). After Black's error of 20.Rc2 a6 Stockfish recommends 21.a4 (-5.0) since 22.Nd4 loses to 22...Rfd8. I wonder how Gunsberg, operating Mephisto, would have rated these positions? Pity the players didn't have access to Stockfish in those days – or is it? Are we really better off these days having access to the correct move at our fingertips without the satisfaction of having to have worked for it?

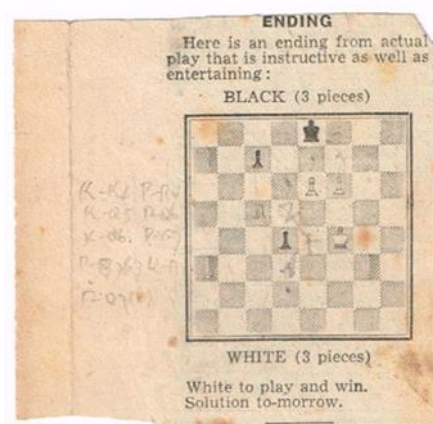


A note scribbled on the cutting is a date: 18/10/40. At first I thought this was more likely to be the date of the game than the actual date of the cutting, as the cutting seemed to me to be from the 50's or 60's. I tried to find out the date of this cutting so I looked at the reverse to find a list of football fixtures from the South Regional and North Regional leagues – note that Southampton were to play away to Watford and Portsmouth at home to Aldershot the following day. This seemed to me to predate the football league, but a preliminary Google search of the games themselves (e.g. Arsenal v Northampton) didn't uncover the date of the cutting, which made me doubt the veracity of Google searches. However, following an excellent point made by John Zastapilo that this places the regional leagues within WW2, I did some more detailed research and indeed did find that the fixtures were played on Saturday 19 October 1940, thus confirming that the date scribbled on the cutting was indeed correct, namely Friday 18 October 1940.

(see: <http://www.englishfootballleaguetales.co.uk/season/w1940-41/1940-10-19.html#dag>).

Incidentally, Southampton lost their game 3-2 at Vicarage Road and Portsmouth lost 3-1 at Fratton Park. So, while chess automatons might change, some other things never do!

The second cutting is an endgame study, again probably from the same era as the first cutting of the game between the Greens. This is a pawn ending with White to play and win. It's really complicated so put it into Stockfish and don't let anyone tell you that pawn endings are easy! The reverse of this is just a few adverts so no clue as to its date, although if anyone has an Austin, a Fiat, a Ford, a Hillman, an MG, a Morris, or a Riley then go to 336 New Cross Road, London S.E.14 and you can get cash for it, otherwise there are no other clues. Any information as to the date of this piece would be gratefully received.



The third extra piece that I found is by far the best and is the stuff of chess dreams. It is a 'Hollings Chess' score-sheet from a game played on 20th February 1956 which was a Monday. The reverse of the score-sheet states that Hollings Chess was run by a Frank Hollings, Great Q. Street, Kingsway, London. I've never heard of Hollings. Has anyone else? Also, the reverse of the sheet advertises a number of books that can be purchased from Hollings, including 'How to Play Chess Endings' by Znosko-Borovsky. I actually have this book and would heartily recommend it, so if you are able to save up 12s 6d, the price listed for this book on the reverse of the score sheet, and send your postal order to 68 Great Queen St., Kingsway, London W.C.2 then you'll be handsomely rewarded. Alternatively, telephone Holborn 8104. The game on the Hollings score-sheet itself is between a (Mr?) JWG and someone called Brown, which is a win for Brown as Black. After an Albin Counter Gambit, Black gradually builds up a slightly better position (Stockfish says -2.6 after 12... Rh3) but then White blunders with 13.Nd2 after which 13...Nxf3+ wins the white queen for a rook and knight and, soon after that the game, although Stockfish says that 13...Qd7 is just as good.

HOLLINGS CHESS SCORE SHEET			
Played <i>68 Queen</i>		Date <i>20 2 56</i>	
White <i>JWG</i>		Opening	
Black <i>Brown</i>		Club	
WHITE.	BLACK.	WHITE.	BLACK.
1. <i>P-Q4</i>	1. <i>P-Q4</i>	29.	
2. <i>P-QB4</i>	2. <i>P-K4</i>	30.	
3. <i>P-KP3</i>	3. <i>P-Q5</i>	31.	
4. <i>N-KB3</i>	4. <i>R-QB4</i>	32.	
5. <i>B-Q2</i>	5. <i>N-QB2</i>	33.	
6. <i>P-QR3</i>	6. <i>N-K2</i>	34.	
7. <i>P-K3</i>	7. <i>N-N3</i>	35.	
8. <i>B-Q2</i>	8. <i>B-N5</i>	36.	
9. <i>B-N</i>	9. <i>R-P4</i>	37.	
10. <i>P-P</i>	10. <i>B-N</i>	38.	
11. <i>P-B</i>	11. <i>N-P</i>	39.	
12. <i>B-Q2</i>	12. <i>R-K6</i>	40.	
13. <i>N-Q2</i>	13. <i>N-P4</i>	41.	
14. <i>B-N</i>	14. <i>R-Q</i>	42.	
15. <i>N-R</i>	15. <i>B-Q6</i>	43.	
16. <i>N-Q2</i>	16. <i>B-K2</i>	44.	
17. <i>N-B</i>	17. <i>B-K4</i>	45.	
18.		46.	
19.		47.	
20.		48.	
21.		49.	
22.		50.	
23.		51.	
24.		52.	
25.		53.	
26.		54.	
27.		55.	
28.		56.	

Yes, I know all these extras in a book, and their analyses, are irrelevant, superfluous and inconsequential, but to find such gems inside an already fascinating volume and be able to use modern technology to study them is highly interesting and great fun.

Has this ever happened when you buy a chess book? It has happened to me on other occasions and I'd be interested to hear of your experiences.