

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY (1999 – 2013)

In general the history of the Club since 1999 can be characterised as an initial period of expansion of our membership, which was followed by a gradual decline in numbers and attendance on chess evenings. This decline has recently been replaced by a distinct revival in both membership and enthusiasm. As previously mentioned, the annual subscription to the United Arts Club in the past acted as a deterrent to new players who did not wish to participate in the many and varied cultural activities of that Club as it represented a significant expense compared with the cost of joining another chess club in Dublin. In order to mitigate this, the practice grew up of allowing these players to play in the chess room for a few months as guests of Dublin Chess Club members. If they want to do so they can then of course apply for full membership of the United Arts Club with every prospect of success, as following a purge of its non-paying members a few years ago the United Arts Club urgently needs more members in order to balance its income and expenditure.

The establishment of a Club website has succeeded in attracting new players from a number of European countries and further afield who have come to live and work in Dublin for a few years. Their contribution to the life of the Club as well as to the Club teams is greatly appreciated. Members of the Fischer-Set Chess Club from Amsterdam continue to be annual visitors at the end of November en route to the Kilkenny Tournament. They challenge us for the Louis Pieterse Trophy and join us for a convivial dinner in the beautiful Arts Club dining room. There have been welcome visits too from the Elche Chess Club in southern Spain. All this gives our Club an international flavour and underlines the common bond which all chess players share.

However and unsurprisingly, it is our hard core of regular members who have contributed most to the Club. Officers who have served with distinction during the period include Jonathan O'Connor and Eddie O'Connor as Presidents, Ronan Nolan as Hon. Treasurer (since at least 1990) Shannon Clements, James O'Leary, the late Louis Pieterse, Martin Schmidt and most recently Rory Broderick as Hon. Secretary, not to mention long-serving League team captains and Committee members. Pat Loughrey has very generously contributed some very fine chess sets and boards and an equally fine cabinet to store them, all of which are made of wood in accordance with Club tradition. Equally in accordance with tradition, members of the Dublin Chess Club who have served as members of the Committee of the United Arts Club have included Jim Walsh, Pat Loughrey, Frank Brady, Colm Egan, Denis Dempsey, Paul Guinness, Louis Pieterse, Shannon Clements, Jim Downey, Terry Carroll, Jonathan O'Connor, Eddie O'Connor, and Rory Broderick. Shannon Clements has continued Jim Walsh's precedent of service as Hon. Secretary of that Club, a very time consuming position. This is both essential and appropriate in view of the need to maintain close and warm relations with the Arts Club and to ensure that chess is regarded as one of the core activities carried on in the Club premises, on a par with the artistic and literary events which take place there. The degree of commitment required of United Arts Club Committee members is very considerable, and full tribute is due to our members who have participated. Mention should also be made of our members such as Frank Brady and Colm Egan who have entered fully into the life of the United Arts Club and who have contributed so much to our acceptance there.

We salute Jonathan O'Connor's achievement on becoming an International Master in correspondence chess, the first of our members to be awarded an international title since Wolfgang Heidenfeld. We also salute him for filling with distinction the post of President of the Irish Chess

Union and achieving significant advances in the teaching of junior chess in Ireland. In many ways the Presidency is a poisoned chalice, (like the presidency of FIDE) and it is lamentable that the top body in Irish Chess is riven with dissension and so much concerned with the settling of scores. Denis Dempsey also filled this onerous position and that of President of the Leinster Chess Union some time ago, and during this current period he has served as a Leinster Chess Union Divisional Leagues Controller.

Mention should also be made of the contribution by Dublin Chess Club in the 1990's to the wider chess scene in Ireland. This took the form of a weekend Swiss tournament known as the Dublin Classic, an annual event which was held in the fine function room of the United Arts Club. It attracted a strong entry, partly because it was held at the end of August, when players were keen to sharpen their skills in preparation for the winter season. It was run by Louis Pieterse, Paul Guinness, Pat Loughrey and Shannon Clements, with help from other members. This was before the time when computer software made the manual draw for successive rounds redundant. As a result, there were some occasions when the Controller, after having to revise the manual draw at least once, wished he were somewhere else.

Although it has been a problem in recent years in finding a satisfactory formula for running an annual club tournament our members Colm Egan, Eddie O'Connor, Shannon Clements, Denis Dempsey, Paul Guinness and Lorcan Ryan have acquitted themselves well in chess tournaments in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland and, in Colm's case, in Guernsey and Spain. In the Leinster League competitions, the Club won the Heidenfeld Trophy in 1999 with a team captained by Martin Schmidt and the Bodley Cup in 2001 with Brian O'Mullane captaining the team. Paul Guinness led his team to victory in the Ennis Shield in 2004 and the British Airways Cup was won in 2009 with the Dublin team captained by Rory Broderick.

The Club currently fields an Armstrong Cup team of 8 members, an Ennis Shield team of 6 members and a British Airways team of 5 members. However the highlight was undoubtedly the participation of our team in the European Club Team Championships following its second place in the Branagan Cup Competition in 2001. In our match against a Norwegian Club Shannon Clements with a rating of about 1570, was playing white; his boy opponent turned up about 50 minutes late with his arm in a sling and his father in tow. The father explained that his son had broken his arm and had just come from hospital. Shannon's psychological well being was not improved by the fact that his opponent scarcely looked at the board and stared at him instead during the very long (62 move) game which followed. Shannon eventually lost and told the father afterwards that his son would make a very good chess player. In fact the boy's name was Magnus Carlsen who is now the new World Champion, and who subsequently annotated the game.

Our club also participated in the European Club Championship held in Turkey in 2004. Although seeded in 36th. position, they achieved a commendable 26th. finish place under Martin Schmidt's captaincy.

On a more negative note, the financial situation of the United Arts Club has given and continues to give some cause for concern, as has been mentioned earlier. If it does not improve, the future for that Club is bleak and we may well have to move elsewhere or else amalgamate with another Club, with potentially serious consequences for our memorabilia and traditions, including the tradition of having our wooden chess boards permanently set up and ready for use. In the summer of 2013 the

possibility was explored of a move to St. Anne's Parish Centre, just off Dawson Street in the heart of Central Dublin. However the room which was offered to us was too small and the rent too large, so that this came to nothing. Such a move would have allowed us, for the first time since our move to Fitzwilliam Street in 1987, to admit as members players under the age of 18, if we wanted to do so. On the other hand many of our members greatly appreciate the comfort and facilities of the United Arts Club and would hope that the Dublin Chess Club will continue to remain in its premises.

In conclusion a comment on the current fortunes of the Club seem appropriate. Although the Chess Room is open every night, the United Arts Club recently decided to close its premises on Monday evenings, which was one of the nights when our members could expect to find opponents for friendly games of chess. Consequently our Committee decided to encourage members to attend a Club night on Thursdays, and this wise decision has led to a marked increase in attendance and enthusiasm.