

## **On To the Millennium (1965-1999)**

### **CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS**

The approaching centenary year of 1967 increasingly occupied committee discussions from early 1965. In March of that year a Centenary Committee was formed with Gerry O’Nolan as controller and Mr C. Ennis as Honorary Secretary.

It was agreed that a Centenary Fund should be established to be financed by voluntary subscriptions not to exceed ten shillings per member per month. In addition Mr. M. Tarlo sponsored a ticket tourney. The proceeds were to be applied to a Centenary Dinner, an invitation tournament for members, a simultaneous display to be given by a master player and the improvement of the amenities of the club. By the following October the fund stood at the disappointing sum of £39.2.6. Fifty pounds would be required for a master’s attendance alone.

Seemingly, the committee’s consideration of these weighty matters were temporarily interrupted by complaints from Mrs Walsh, the housekeeper, who was objecting to the late hours being kept by members. A closing time of 11.30pm was agreed. Regrettably the minutes do not record the extent to which the new agreement was observed.

The celebrations commenced on Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1966 with a dinner in the Central Hotel, which was preceded by a sherry reception. Amongst those invited were the President of the Irish Chess Union and representatives from Ulster and Munster. While the club minutes do not record who attended the dinner they do record that it was a considerable success.

By the following January the Centenary Fund has increased to over £200 and the question as how to spend it arose. It was agreed that one-third of the final sum would be retained as a reserve. This was shown in our annual accounts for many years.

The balance was spent on restoring our boards and sets, repairs to clocks, re-decorating the club rooms and the hanging of new curtains, draught proofing and the provision of electric heaters. This last improvement resulted not only in warmer rooms but also there was a significant labour saving, as the house keeper had previously to bring up coal, clear the grates and light the fires before the members arrived. The tournament, which was an open one, was a success both in its organisation and financially. Tributes were paid to Martin Drew and Jim Walsh for organising the tournament which added substantially to club funds.

The success of the centenary year was to be followed by successes over the board the following year. We were runners-up in the Armstrong Cup while Wolfgang Heidenfeld retained the Irish Championship. David Cox won the Leinster Schoolboys championship with Teddy Lewis as runner up and Stephen Myler won the junior championship.

Following Dr Luce’s resignation as president a presentation of a pair of silver candlesticks was made to him in September 1968 and in the same month a presentation was made to Jim Walsh and Maureen Kennedy on the occasion of their forthcoming marriage. This was the first, and so far the only, marriage between members of the club.

## **FINAL YEARS AT LINCOLN PLACE**

As early as the Annual General Meeting of 1973 members began to view with alarm the prospect of having to leave Lincoln Place when the Club's lease would expire on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1980.

Some three years later the matter began to be discussed seriously by the committee. Various suggestions emerged including that we should look for alternative accommodation in schools, libraries and restaurants. Someone suggested that we consider buying our own small house.

During the years that followed various attempts were made to discuss future arrangements with the Mission to Lepers, the club landlords. However it proved impossible to get them even to acknowledge letters so much so that when new lighting and an intercom from the club to the front door were installed they waived all payment from the club (they had sent us a bill for £300) rather than enter into financial negotiations with us.

It was later revealed that Mission's reluctance to negotiate was due to its own landlord's (Trinity College) desire to obtain possession with a view to future development. They were not interested in a financial return, which, at the then current office rental values could have amounted to as much as £3000 p.a. depending upon the length of the lease and whether there would be rent reviews. It was generally agreed that such a rent coupled with the other expenses of running the club would be beyond our means.

More suggestions were considered including an offer from the Phibsboro Chess Club to share their premises in North Great Georges Street. This was rejected by the members at the Extraordinary General Meeting held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1980.

It must not be thought that during the final years in Lincoln Place the committee and members were solely preoccupied by the prospect of impending doom when the rooms would finally have to be relinquished.

Numerous other matters which arose in the ordinary course of events had to be considered. Amongst these was the question of the position of women within the club. From 1920 women had been admitted as associate members at a reduced subscription. A motion was put to the 1975 Annual General Meeting "That women members be granted the same rights and privileges as ordinary members." The two women who spoke at the meeting said they wanted the right to vote and were willing to pay for it. The motion was passed unanimously.

The nineteen seventies ended and we were now in the nineteen eighties and still the problem of the lease was unsolved. The landlord had agreed that we could remain in the club rooms until they were required but it refused to accept rent, though later it did accept a donation of £100.

The fact that no rent was being accepted was a source of worry to the committee. There was the possibility that at some future time arrears would have to be paid and with the passage of even a few years this would amount to a considerable sum.

In 1981 we won the Armstrong Cup and the following year we won the All-Ireland Club Championship as well as the British Airways Cup. A photograph of the winning British Airways team hung on a wall in Lincoln Place for a few years and is now in our archives.

In 1982 the club was honoured by a visit from Efim Geller the Russian Grandmaster. He gave an exhibition against a team of three players consisting of Paul Delaney and David Dunne who were both Irish Champions and a young Jonathan O'Connor. Jonathan was added to the team by Maura Murphy who was Dublin Chess Club Hon. Sec at the time. The team played in consultation and secured a draw with the Sicilian defence. There are photographs of this event on the clubroom walls.

As mentioned by Dr. Luce in his history, there has always been a hard core of members who attend regularly on club nights and from whom officers are drawn. One such stalwart was Gerry O'Nolan whose Golden Jubilee of membership, it was generally agreed would occur in 1984 (although Dr. Luce's history shows Gerry's date of joining the club as 1935).

Gerry, who had an intense interest in the game, held the positions of Hon. Secretary and President for many years. To celebrate Gerry's Jubilee the committee decided to hold a reception and a tournament in his honour. The venue selected was the restaurant in the I.D.A. Enterprise Centre in Pearse Street and very welcome sponsorship to the extent of £500 was obtained from Smurfit Corrugated Cases. Sadly Gerry died two weeks before the competition was due to be held. The reception had to be cancelled but as it was felt that Gerry would not have wished the tournament to be cancelled, a memorial tournament, which proved to be very successful, was held in its place.

This period was also marked by a number of disputes with the Leinster Chess Union. While it may be felt that no useful purpose would be served by relating the details of these disputes, it must be remembered that this is a work of history and to omit occurrences, just because they bring back unpleasant memories or the printing of them might cause distress or annoyance to any of the people involved, would be a failure of duty to future members if mention was not to be made of at least two of them.

The nineteen-seventies were probably the golden days of the club, surpassing in terms of membership and achievement the eighteen-nineties which Dr. Luce considered to be the club's golden period.

Our membership, which had dropped to a near disastrous twenty-nine in 1969, had risen to over one hundred by 1976 due largely to the Fischer-Spassky world championship match which excited considerable media comment resulting in increased interest in chess amongst the public in general. We had no less than nine teams competing in the leagues at this period with an unprecedented number of young players of a very high standard among our members including Bernard Kernan who was Irish Schoolboy champion in 1971 and Stephen Myler who was runner-up in that competition the following year. As regards league competitions, we opened the decade by winning the Armstrong Cup in 1971 and followed that by successes in the Heidenfeld Trophy in 1972 and in 1973 with Brian Beckett and Denis Dempsey as respective team captains.

Inevitably as the memories of the Fischer-Spassky match receded in the minds of the public our membership began to decline though the benefits of that encounter remained to some extent for many years. It happened that, shortly before the league season began in 1977, four members who had earlier indicated that they would be available to play for one of our Armstrong Cup teams announced that they would not after all be available. Faced with this, the committee had no option but to withdraw one of our Armstrong Cup teams. At this stage the draw for the cup had been made

but had not yet been circulated to the competing clubs. The reaction of the committee of the Leinster Chess Union was completely unexpected. Their Hon. Secretary proposed that the Dublin Chess Club should be suspended from the L.C.U. for bringing chess into disrepute and this was supported by the majority of its committee. Probably a no more disgraceful decision was ever arrived at by a chess committee in Ireland, certainly not in that era. Needless to say a major row erupted. Eventually reason prevailed and the decision was reversed. Bill Lewis, who was Club President at the time, stated that had this not been done it was his intention that the club should seek redress by taking legal action. We were later advised that during the same season the L.C.U.'s Secretary's own club withdrew a team from one of the lower league divisions, thereby disrupting the league.

A further dispute with the Leinster Chess Union occurred over an incident which happened during the final minutes of the very last game being played in the O'Hanlon Cup in 1984. The problem arose when Gerry O'Nolan, who having a clearly won game against a Drogheda player, made a move but then forgot to activate his opponent's clock. A Dublin player, new to the game and not knowing that he would be in breach of the rules, drew Gerry's attention to his oversight. The Drogheda player immediately made a move and then claimed a win on grounds of interference. Both sides claimed the win. The controller decided in favour of Drogheda – a decision which, if it had stood, would have deprived us of the O'Hanlon Cup that year. On appeal the L.C.U. declared that the game be "null and void." To this day it is maintained that this decision ( which deprived us of the O'Hanlon Cup, as Dublin required a full point) was both inexplicable and wrong. By making a move, before claiming a win on grounds of interference, the Drogheda player should have lost his opportunity to benefit by Dublin's mistake. In giving the decision the Hon. Secretary of the L.C.U. made the following comment in his letter to the club dated 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1985 "In normal circumstances we would order that this game be replayed. However, due to the unfortunate death of Mr. O'Nolan, such a course would be ludicrous and in extremely bad taste."

These are just two of the disputes which occurred. There were a number of others where the members felt aggrieved by decisions which seemed to us to be unjust. Fortunately since then we have enjoyed excellent relations with the Leinster Chess Union which will no doubt continue into the future.

But to return to the problem of the lease. No progress was made until early 1985 when Bill Lewis, whose earlier suggestion that we should move to the Merrion Cricket Club was not accepted, proposed that we should enter into discussions with the United Arts Club of 3, Upr. Fitzwilliam St. Under this proposal, each member of the chess club would be elected a member of the Arts Club and a room in the Arts Club premises would be set aside for chess with the Dublin Chess Club's sets and boards permanently set up therein. In return for decorating the room, the Arts Club would waive the entrance fee normally paid by new members.

Members of the Arts Club would be entitled to use the facilities of the chess club and to join it if they wished.

The Dublin Chess Club had always the best facilities of any chess club in Ireland and it now seemed that not only would this situation continue but we would also have the facilities of the Arts Club including its excellent dining room and comfortable bar and function room.

Now that we were leaving Lincoln Place it proved possible to finalise matters with the Mission to Lepers. Under the agreement reached, we received a sum of £14,000 after expenses had been paid and, in addition, all arrears of rent were wiped out.

As our new room was going to be considerably smaller than the rooms which we were about to vacate it was decided to sell off the older books in our library. After obtaining offers from a number of bookshops a sum of £1825.22 was received. This amount, together with sum from the Mission to Lepers, was, after the deduction of expenses and the payment of our first year's subscription to the Arts Club, invested in Guinness and Mahon's Unit Trust Fund. The proceeds were used to subsidise the subscriptions to the Arts Club for those members who played regularly in the leagues.

For many years members were required to pay their own subscriptions to the Arts Club. Each year a number of units were encashed and the proceeds used to pay the running expenses of the club and members' fees to the Irish Chess Union.

The terms of the agreement reached between the committee and the United Arts Club were put to the chess club members at the A.G.M. held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1985 and were accepted. At an E.G.M. which immediately followed the A.G.M. a motion was approved whereby members who were not suited by the new arrangements would be recognised as 'retiring members' and would be eligible to receive an honorarium, the amount of which would depend upon the length of membership with a maximum of £200. No one claimed the honorarium.

The club will forever be indebted to Bill Lewis for his introduction to the Arts Club and also for the part he took, together with Pat Loughrey and the other committee members of that time, in the successful negotiations which ensured our survival. Members are no less indebted to the then committee of the United Arts Club and in particular to the late Dr Michael Scott. Dr. Scott, an internationally renowned architect, was President of the United Arts Club at that time. He played a crucial role in the negotiations between the club and is sadly missed by all those who had the good fortune to know him.

The club closed its doors in Lincoln Place at the end of June 1985. An era spanning almost seventy three years had ended. Another was about to begin.

## **THE UNITED ARTS CLUB**

To effect the assimilation of the chess club into the Arts Club each member was proposed and seconded for membership by an Arts Club member in accordance with Arts Club rules. Not all members were proposed at the same time. As each one was elected he became eligible to attend the club in his own right as a member instead of being a guest of an existing member.

Except for the period already mentioned during the nineteen-seventies, the Dublin Chess Club's membership had always been composed almost exclusively of men over the age of thirty. We never had more than three or four lady members. Occasionally remarks such as "we must attract younger players" are made. Such sentiments are not realistic. Arts Club rules preclude members under the age of eighteen and the annual Arts Club membership fee has acted as a deterrent to most young people. Since we moved from Lincoln Place, our new members have been mostly either existing

Arts Club members or established chess players who were invited to join. These members had to be elected by the Arts Club committee in the normal way.

As regards ladies, it seems that we are not destined to have more than a couple of such members at any one time, which is a pity. Ladies are well represented in the Arts Club as a whole but to date almost all Arts Club members joining the chess club have been male.

In the early years of the new arrangement, the process of assimilation to the Arts Club was a little slower than what had been expected. However, that was perhaps natural. After all, the principal interest of the chess club members in the Arts Club is chess. However, assimilation is taking place. Chess members are to be seen in the bar or dining room entertaining friends unconnected with chess. Many of our chess members have served on the committee of the Arts Club. In this connection mention must be made of Jim Walsh who was the first to so serve and who fulfilled two terms as Honorary Secretary of the United Arts Club.

Further evidence of assimilations is shown in chess club members participation in artistic events. Louis Pieterse exhibited a collection of photographs and Jim Walsh has shown a number of his paintings in the Sunday Painters exhibition. In addition, Anthony Byrne the concert pianist, who is a comparatively new member who came to the club through chess connections, gave a piano recital and hopefully will give more in the future. When one considers that the chess membership is only a minor proportion of the total, it is fair to say that we are undoubtedly making a significant contribution to the life of the Arts Club.

The Dublin Chess Club can no longer be looked upon as a separate entity. It is a club within a club. Its members, individually and collectively, are bound by the rules of The United Arts Club. We no longer have complete control over our own affairs. We have little control over who joins us. Any Arts Club member is entitled to membership of the chess club. Those Arts Club members who have joined us are all more than welcome and, indeed, they play an important part in the life of the club. Three of them have been regular members of our league teams, including James Downey who captained our 1991/2 British Airways team. There is however always the possibility that someone, whom we would not welcome, might gain membership through the back door by joining the Arts Club. Of even more significance is the issue of the expulsion of a member. That is a matter for the committee and general membership of the Arts Club. But if you were to ask the members who transferred from Lincoln Place if they would favour the club going back there if it were possible, the answer would be a resounding "no". The welcome and acceptance which we have received from the Arts Club members, not to mention the facilities which we now enjoy, make any other answer impossible.

Our new circumstances, as may be discerned from the above, have had implications for our rules. Some of our old rules had fallen into disuse, while others were no longer appropriate. To rectify this, a new set of rules was presented to members and these, with a few minor changes, were adopted at the Annual General Meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1988.

Membership of the Arts Club has led to the establishment of a new custom. It is the annual Chess Club Christmas dinner held in the Arts Club dining room. They have all been enjoyable occasions and reasonably well attended.

An older custom which has been revised is that of making visits to, and receiving visits from, other chess clubs. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1988 twelve members of the Glasgow Polytechnic Club arrived for a weekend visit. As well as playing two matches there were some social events, notably a reception in Irish Distillers and a dinner in the club. The club was indebted to Guinness Group Sales for their sponsorship of the visit to the extent of £250. A photograph of those who took part in the match is hanging in the club rooms. A year later a return visit was made to Glasgow and this was equally enjoyable. Glasgow Polytechnic made their second visit to Dublin in September 1992 as part of our one hundred and twenty fifth anniversary celebrations. This time ten visitors made the journey. The events arranged, which included two matches, a dinner in the club, and a visit to Glendalough, were no less successful than the visit of four years earlier. Regrettably, we lost both the matches by eight games to two, a result which compared unfavourably with that of Glasgow's first visit when Dublin won with a combined score of 12½ : 11½.

Dublin Chess Club has always had its share of "characters" amongst its membership. One of the best known was undoubtedly Myles Shevlin, a prominent club member. Myles was an Irish Republican Dublin-based solicitor known as "the Provisionals' legal adviser" and represented several individuals accused of IRA membership and/or activity. One of his favourite phrases, when under pressure in a chess game, was to mutter "smart boy needed" echoing a popular phrase used in job ads in former times. On hearing the news in 1990 that Fianna Fail had lost the Presidential election, Myles laughed so heartily that he suffered cardiac arrest and could not be resuscitated – perhaps not a bad way to go.