

4

CHESS IN BRENTWOOD

A Search for its Roots

No-one currently playing chess at the Brentwood Chess Club could remember whether there had been a Club before the war. The written records of the Club go back to 1947 and some of the early entries refer to a Ted Newton who had once been Chairman. He retired from the Club a few years ago on health grounds but, on contacting him, he thought he could remember a pre-war Club.

Further light was thrown on this era when the Essex Chess Association records revealed that Brentwood Chess Club had won the local league in 1933. Then coincidentally an elderly acquaintance, Howard Earl, died leaving me his Chess Library. He had been playing chess in Essex for over sixty years and had been Secretary, first of the Hornchurch Chess Club (now sadly defunct) and then of the Upminster Chess Club. His books comprehensively recorded the history of chess in Essex going back to 1920.

The Brentwood Chess Club had been founded in 1921 and had begun to play competitively in 1924. However, that wasn't the end of the story. A visit to the Brentwood Library and its local history shelves produced the Wilson & Whitworth's 1906 Brentwood and Warley Almanack Directory (after the store of that name). A "Brentwood and Warley Draughts and Chess Club" had been formed in 1905 with "the object of encouraging Draughts and Chess". It met on a Thursday night at the Recreation Hall - which used to stand at the end of the High Street (numbers 126 - 136) - just down the hill past Westbury Road. They must have been a competitive club as they had two match captains. A later publication - Dutton's Essex Almanac - revealed that the Club was still going strong in 1915 but now it was meeting at the Recreation Institute - at 116 High Street - long since demolished when Kings Road was widened. Presumably the First World War then swallowed up the Club - only for it to rise again as the Brentwood Chess Club in 1921.

This new Club first met at Somerset Hall in King Edward Road, just off the Kings Road, near the station. Somerset Hall was later pulled down and the Boys Brigade Headquarters built on the site. Being near the station was an important consideration in those days when few people had cars. This was the old "Great Eastern Line" and the Mid-Essex Chess League, which the Club soon joined, consisted of Clubs from Hornchurch, Upminster, Harold Wood, Romford and Chelmsford - all in touch with each other by train.

In 1926 the Club moved premises to the Town Hall - an impressive Paladian building - occupying the site where Courts Furniture Store now stands. In that year Lieutenant Colonel G. E. F. FitzGerald became the Club's President - a post he was to hold continuously until the Club folded at the beginning of the Second World War.

In 1927 some members left to found the Hutton & District Chess Club - but this was not successful and only lasted until 1930 when the Brentwood Chess Club once again became the only focal point of chess in Brentwood.

In 1928 the Club again moved premises to Church House in New Road, opposite the Library, and continued playing there on a Tuesday evening until 1933 when they changed headquarters to the Log Restaurant on Shenfield Common. Whether it was the air or the view or just coincidence, the Club now achieved its best results ever by not only winning the League but also in having one of their members, T. E. Ketterer, win the Essex Minor Trophy (the Wilson-Marriage Cup).

In 1935 the Club moved to another eating house - Norrish's Cafe - at 68 High Street, now converted to The Baker's Oven. They were now meeting on a Wednesday night and had membership of just 13.

In 1937 a final move was made to the Conservative Club at 106-114 Kings Road, a site now occupied by Bradley's Wine Bar.

Then war intervened.

In those inter-war years the Club members, though small in numbers (never less than 12 nor more than 18) were very active in Essex Chess. Many of them played for the County Team and they supported the Club and ensured its survival when other Clubs - including Harold Wood, Hornchurch and Hutton & District - were falling by the wayside.

After the war Brentwood Chess stuttered into existence - first as the Brentwood and District Chess Club in 1947, which met at Holland's Restaurant, Kings Road - on the corner of Gresham Road. The Club was fortunate in having the services of J. Grieshaber - a very strong player - but nevertheless had mediocre results and sadly folded in about 1951.

There is then no record of any organised chess in Brentwood until 1955 when the Doddinghurst Chess Club was formed under the Chairmanship of the Reverend E. Spray. They met in the Church Room at Doddinghurst and subs were 10 shillings a year. In 1957 the Club broadened out to become the Brentwood & Doddinghurst Chess Club meeting on the second and fourth Tuesdays in Doddinghurst and the first, third (and fifth) Tuesdays in Brentwood - at the Hermitage. The Publicity Officer persuaded the Gazette to start a Chess Column - one of the major factors in the bandwagon of increasing membership and success, which the Club began to enjoy.

In 1960 the Club reverted to its former name, The Brentwood Chess Club, and the new Chairman was the aforementioned Ted Newton.

Since then there has been a steady process of consolidation - membership between thirty and fifty - three to four teams competing in the Essex League - and increasing individual success.

Karl Bowden joined the Club whilst still at primary school, some ten years ago, and is now the strongest player in Essex.

Jonathan Rogers joined some five years ago and is now the British Under 15 Champion.

The Brentwood Chess Club has come a long way since 1905 - not least in the fact that we do not now play Draughts.