The History of Professional Chess in Britain, 1774-2000

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

In 1774 Britain established a professional chess culture when it invited the Frenchman Philidor to become the resident expert in a newly established chess club. Philidor was the first of many foreigners who would use their ability at chess as the principal source of their income. Over the following centuries a number of the indigenous population did likewise, generating money by - playing, teaching or writing about chess. During the years between 1774 and 2000 a large number of sports and recreations were pursued in Britain, many involving professionals – people who specialized in that activity – it being their core occupation. Three such activities – boxing, cricket and horse-racing – were very popular and depended on professionals. While the author would not claim that chess generated anything like as much money or attention as the other activities, he would draw the reader's attention to the fact that between 1774 and 2000 there was scarcely a year when at least one person living in Britain did not derive a significant portion of their income from their involvement in chess. Of course, between 1774 and 2000 professional chess in Britain was subject to pronounced peaks and troughs. The status of chess as a recreation was subject to changes in the public's attitudes. These varied from pronounced moral disapproval, critics condemning it as a trivial waste of time, or even a practice likely to lead to moral decline. Alternatively, many praised its mathematical core, an appropriate recreation for a scientific age. Chess's professionals straddled both these domains, using it to generate a living for almost 250 years.

CHAPTER ONE

CHESS BECOMES PART OF BRITAIN'S RECREATIONAL WORLD 1735-1842

By the eighteenth century there was a good deal of sport and recreation in Britain. In financial terms the three most important were horse racing, prize fighting and cricket. As we shall see, all three sports were dominated by professionals, individuals who specialized in their particular recreation. Horse racing generated the most money during the period and three of the most important jockeys were John Singleton (1715-1795), Sam Chiffney (1753-1807) and Frances Buckle (1766-1832). Chiffney was probably the most interesting, attracting a great deal of attention, albeit in a manner that drew him little credit. In October 1791 at Newmarket he lost a race in which he was the hot favourite, only to win a race against the same field as a rank outsider the following day. It was claimed that Chiffney and his confederates won £1,400 by betting on both races.[1] In 1795 Chiffney took advantage of the public's interest in the matter by issuing a book, *Genius Genuine,* at the exorbitant price of £5 (a sum an average working man would be lucky to earn in three months) on the matter.[2] Money seems to have gone through Chiffney's fingers and he was imprisoned for debt in Fleet prison in 1806, dying there early in the following year.

Two other big money sports were prize fighting and cricket. The two foremost boxers were James Figg (1684-1734), who was an expert boxer and also ran a stadium, Figg's Ampitheatre, in Tottenham Court Road London, staging many fights that drew large crowds. Jack Broughton (1703-1789) was another expert boxer,

[1] £1,400 is worth £169,000 in 2019. Information from Prof Gary Magee.
[2] £5 is worth £520 in 2019. Information from Prof Gary Magee.

fighting many important bouts. He also provided the rules that regulated boxing matches for many years. Both horse-racing and boxing drew large crowds and attracted much betting, as did a third sport, cricket. The three best cricketers of the era, who participated in a great many matches (most being staged at Lords cricket ground) were Richard Newland (1713-1789), John Small (1737-1826) and Billy Beldham (1766-1862). All three had very distinguished careers, though Small was perhaps the best, some regarding him as the greatest cricketer of all time.

There were numerous other sports in eighteenth century Britain, some involving animals – such as cock-fighting, coursing and foxhunting, and many focusing on the skills and strength of men and occasionally women; archery, athletics, pedestrianism (the name given to any type of foot-race) and shooting.[3] With the exception of fox-hunting, these often involved competition for some type of commercial reward. Generally the stakes were slight, almost negligible, but sometimes involved many thousands of pounds. Likewise, there were often few spectators in many events, though on occasions thousands of people paid to watch. As we can see, there was a great deal of sport and recreation in eighteenth century Britain, but was there much chess?

Chess was not invented in Europe, let alone England, emerging in the east of the World in the early middle ages, and gradually being transformed into the game we know today. Throughout its long history chess has generated numerous books, many of which were translated into English. Indeed, one of the first books printed in the English language, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, appearing in 1474, issuing from the press of William Caxton, was ostensibly a treatise about chess. Caxton's work had little to do with playing chess and was essentially a political treatise based upon a book by Jacobus de Cessolis. It is unlikely that anyone became a better chess player by reading such remarks as this:

[3] Harvey, Adrian. 2004 *The Beginning of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain 1793-1850* Aldershot Ashgate p11.

"The rookes whiche been vycayrs and legates of the kynge ought to be maad a knyght upon an hors and a mantel and hood furrid with menevier holdyng a staf in his hand."

that appeared in a volume of the work from 1483.[4] A number of other books appeared after this, often translations of foreign works, which did at least provide the rules governing the game, though usually little in terms of strategy and tactics.[5] The keen chess player would have to forward-fast almost two hundred and fifty years before a work appeared in English that aimed at sharpening chess playing skills. In 1735 *The Noble Game of Chess: Containing rules and Instructions, for the use of those who have already a little knowledge of this game,* appeared. It was printed by H. Woodfall and paid for by the author, Captain Joseph Bertin, and only sold at Old Slaughter's Coffee-House, in St Martin's-Lane. Captain Joseph Bertin was born in France in the seventeenth century but came to live in England as a young man and played a lot of chess in London. The book provided basic advice, as the following shows;

Rules To Be Observed In Playing The Game Of Chess

I.—The King's Pawn, the Bishop's Pawn, and the Queen's Pawn, must move before the Knights; otherwise if the Pawns move last, the game will be much crouded by useless moves.
II.—Never play your Queen, till your game is tolerably well opened, that you may not lose any moves; and a game well opened gives a good situation.
III.—You must not give useless checks, for the same reason.
IV.—When you are well posted, either for attack or defence, you must not be tempted to take any of your adversary's men, which may divert you from the main design.
V.—Do not Castle, but when very necessary, because the move is often lost by it.
VI.—Never attack, or defend the King, without a sufficient force; and take care of ambushes and traps.

[4] This appears to basically mean 'the rooks which have been vicars and legates of the king ought to be made knights'.
[5] Harding, Tim 2018 *British Chess literature to 1914: A handbook for historians*. North Carolina McFarland pp 232-4.

VII.—Never croud your game by too many men in one place.
VIII.—Consider well before you play, what harm your adversary is able to do you, that you may oppose his designs.
Ix.—To free your game, take off some of your adversary's men, if possible for nothing; tho' to succeed in your design, you must often give away some of your own, as occasion serves.
x.—He that plays first, is understood to have the attack. When your game is well opened, you must endeavour to attack in your turn, as soon as you can do it with safety.
But the defence, if well played, is still the best against the gambets, in which you change all your pieces, except the gambit that gives three Pawns, which will be necessary to keep a Rook, to conduct your Pawns to the Queen.
xI.—A good player ought to foresee the concealed move, from three to five and seven moves. The concealed move is a piece that does not play for a long time, but lies snug, in hopes of getting an advantage.
xII. —At the beginning of a game, you may play any Pawn two moves, without danger.
xIII.—The gambit is, when he that first gives the Pawn of the King's Bishop, in the second move for nothing, the other keeps it, or takes another for it, if he is obliged to lose.
xIV.—The close-game is, when he that plays first gives no men, unless to make a good advantage; but in giving a Pawn first he loses his advantage.
xV.—He that Castles first, the other must advance his three Pawns, on the side of his adversary's King, and back them with some pieces, in order to force him that way, provided his own King, or pieces, are not in danger in other places.
xVI.—When your game is well opened, to gain the attack, you must present your pieces to change; and if your adversary that has the attack, refuses to change, he loses a good situation; and either in exchanging, or retiring, the defence gets the move.
xVII.—For example: In the beginning of a game, to shew the necessity of playing the Pawns before the pieces, if there were but two Pawns on each side on the board, that is to say, the Pawns of the Rooks, the first that should play would soon win the game, by taking the other's pieces by check; and that situation may come in less number of pieces.
xVIII.—To play well the latter end of a game, you must calculate who has the move, on which the game always depends.

xIx.—To learn well and fast, you must be resolute to guard the gambit Pawn, or any other advantage against the attack; and when you have the least advantage, you must change all, man for man. A draw-game shows both sides played it well to the last move.

The observance of these Rules will be of great use in the practicing of the game, and will prevent your making any useless moves. I wish I could give Rules to avoid over-sights.

As we can see, Bertin's was a very elementary text, providing certain basic hints on improving the quality of the readers play, such as avoiding giving useless checks, 'moving the queen until your game is tolerably well developed', and such like. This information was presented in an accessible manner that allows the reader to embrace the fundamentals. It is certainly not a deep examination of chess. The text was essentially devoted to detailing the employment of tactics in specific situations.[6] A typical example of Bertin's instruction was the following, (pp 1-4**) 1: e4 e5, 2: f4 e×f4, 3: Nf3 Be7, 4: Bc4 Bh4 †, 5: g3 f×g3, 6: 0-0 g×h2 †, 7: Kh1 d6,**

rhb1kDn4
0p0wDp0p
wDw0wDwD
DwDwDwDw
wDBDPDwg
DwDwDNDw
P)P)wDw0
$NGQDRDK

8: B×f7 † K×f7, 9: Ne5 † Ke8, 10: Qh5 † g6, 11: N×g6 h×g6, 12: Q×g6 Ke7, 13: Qf7 checkmate. In a back game Bertin shows that White would have been mistaken if he had played 12: Q×h8, because the game would have continued 12:..Kd7, 13: Rf7 † Kc6, 14: Rg7 Qg5 and Black wins. One looks in vain for abstract strategical advice, and though the treatise deserves credit for providing some elementary guidance, it is not uncommon for games

[6] Bertin, James. 1735 *Noble Game of Chess* London H. Woodfall p v.

to suddenly break off with Bertin declaring 'and the players may finish the game' (p 6).[7]

While it hardly transformed chess, Bertin's work was at least a start, offering as it did some elementary advice on improving chess play. In the 1730s chess was found in some pubs and coffee houses, along with cards and other suitable recreations, and this was the world into which a Greek from Aleppo, Philip Stamma, arrived from Paris. The patronage of Lord Harrington meant that Stamma began to work in London in the government post of interpreter of Oriental languages, for which he received £80 a year. Stamma was a strong chess player and often attended Old Slaughter's Coffee House.[8] He had already had a book published, *Essai sur le jeu des échecs,* that had appeared in 1737 and eight years later it was translated into English, appearing as *On the Game Of Chess* (London 1745). The book represented a considerable improvement on the work of Bertin in terms of the advice that Stamma gave readers and the variety and quality of the games that he presented 'illustrating various openings'.[9] Stamma described his book as 'A new and easy method to learn to play well in a short time'.[10] He set out the various openings in a very clear fashion and was quite scientific in his approach – 'to the best of my skill, I make both sides play the best moves I can think of'.[11] The work contains helpful advice for young players, such as the best pawns to advance are the king's, Queen's and Queen's Bishop pawn, or 'castle as soon as you can conveniently'.[12] Occasionally Stamma anticipates fundamental concepts that will later exert a profound influence on chess theory, notably the importance of having the move. He writes the following:

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[7] The book provided an outline of the Cunningham Defence or three pawns gambit, an opening some credit Bertin with inventing.

[8] The players met in private rooms at the coffee house. Twiss, Richard 1787 *Chess* London, G.G.J. Robertson and T. Egerton p 163.

[9] Stamma Phillip 1745 1745 *On the Game Of chess* London S.I. Reid pp 1-74.

[10] It is interesting that Stamma uses algebraic notation.

[11] Stamma Philip 1745 1745 *On the Game Of chess* (London CI Reid p xx.

[12] Stamma Philip1745 *On the Game Of Chess* London SI Reid p 110.

> "if you play their (your pieces) near the adversary, so that he may drive them back by pushing his pawns, the same bad consequence must follow; in this case you lose a move, and that alone may probably be the loss of the game".[13]

While Stamma's skill at chess might have helped him secure his government post, in no sense was he a professional chess player.[14] In the 1740s another foreign chess player, Philidor, began to visit Britain, and he and Stamma were regular opponents at the Salopian coffee house. In 1747 Philidor won a ten-game match between them, 8-1 with one draw.[15] Philidor's skill at chess was well respected in Britain and members of the establishment, such as Bruhl, sort him out, visiting Paris in an effort to entice him to come and live in London.[16] They succeeded and from 1774 to 1792 Philidor spent the period between February and June every year (what was known as 'the season' – a time when the wealthy would leave their country estates and live in London) working at the newly established chess club at Parsloe's in St James Street, London.[17] Philidor was paid a regular salary as a professional chess player. This he would send home to his family in Paris, supporting himself in London in a variety of ways, such as giving tuition at a crown a lesson, playing matches for stakes, admission tickets of five shillings to watch his blindfold exhibitions (playing without sight of the board while your opponent is able to see the board – Philidor

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[13] Stamma Philip 1745 *On the Game Of Chess* (London SI Reid p 110).

[14] While Stamma certainly was not a professional chess player the attention that he received from his chess book ensured that he secured a well paid government post enabling him to enjoy a reasonable standard of living long after his chess skill had been surpassed by Philidor. Hoffmeister, Frank 2022 *Chess theory: From Stamma to Steinitz 1735-1894* North Carolina McFarland P20.

[15] *American Chess Monthly* i 1857 301.

[16] *American Chess Monthly* i 1857 354.

[17] Of course, expert chess players, notably Kermur Sire De Legal, had been playing chess for wagers at the Café de la Régence before this, but the club that Philidor established in London in 1774 enjoyed a more sustained life, whereas Régence was disrupted by the turbulence of the revolution in 1789.

often taking on a number of opponents at the same time).[18] The last events captured the public's imagination and received coverage in the newspapers, *The Morning Post* of 28 May 1782 containing a detailed account of Philidor playing three games simultaneously without sight of the board.

Additionally, Philidor had written a book *L'analyse du jeu des Échecs*, which first appeared in 1749, and was translated into English, appearing as *Chess Analysed* (London 1750). There were a number of editions in both French and English, including 1777 and 1790. Although the emphasis on particular statements was often modified, the substance of the work remained unchanged, and can be regarded as inventing modern chess theory and exerted an enormous influence on chess, numerous editions appearing well into the nineteenth century. Philidor provides a detailed explanation of the reasoning behind moves and consequently assists the reader in becoming a better player. The following is an almost verbatim copy of the first game in Philidor's *Analysis of the game of chess* (3rd edition, For P. Elmsley, London 1773). Philidor is essentially uninterested in short-term tactical coups, and offers the student instruction based upon the systematic application of concepts.

1:e4 e5, 2:Bc4 Bc5, 3:c3 Nf6, 4:d4 'This pawn is played two moves for two very important reasons; the first is, to hinder your adversary's King's bishop to play upon your King Bishop pawn, and the second, to put the strength of your pawns in the middle of the exchequer, which is of great consequence to attain the making of a queen' (p 1). **4:..e×d4, 5:c×d4**

rhb1kDw4
0p0pDp0p
wDwDwhwD
DwgwDwDw
wDB)PDwD
DwDwDwDw

[18] Twiss, Richard *Chess*, G. G. J & J. Robinson and T & J Egerton 1787 i 164.

P)wDw)P)
$NGQIwHR

'When you find your game in the present situation, viz - one of your pawns upon King's fourth square, and one at your Queen's fourth square, you must push neither of them before your adversary proposes to change one for another; in this case you push forward the attacked pawn. It is to be observed that pawns when sustained in a front line, hinder very much the adversary's pieces to enter in your game' (p2). **5:..Bb6, 6:Nc3 0-0, 7:Nge2** 'You must not easily play your knights at your bishop's third square, before the bishop's pawn has moved two steps, because the knight proves an hindrance to the motion of the pawn' (p 2). **7:..c6, 8:Bd3** 'Your bishop retires to avoid being attacked by the Black Queen's pawn, which would force you to take that pawn with yours; this would very much diminish the strength of your game' (pp 2-3**). 8:..d5, 9:e5 Ne8, 10: Be3 f6,**

rhb1n4kD
0pDwDw0p
wgpDw0wD
DwDp)wDw
wDw)wDwD
DwHBGwDw
P)wDN)P)
$wDQIwDR

11: Qd2 'If you should take the pawn offered to you, instead of playing your queen you would be guilty of great fault, because your King pawn would then lose its line; whereas if he takes your King pawn that of your Queen pawn supplies the place, and you may afterwards sustain it with that of your King's bishop's pawn. These two pawns will undoubtedly win the game, because they can now no more be separated without the loss of a piece. Moreover, it is of no small consequence to play your Queen in that place for two reasons; the first, it supports and defends your Queen bishop, which, being taken, would oblige you to take his bishop with the King's bishop pawn; and thus your best pawns would have been

totally divided, and by consequence the game indubitably lost' (p 3). **11:..f×e5, 12: d×e5 Be6**. 'He playeth this bishop to protect his Queen pawn and with a view to push afterwards that of his Queen's bishop's. Observe that he might have taken your bishop without prejudice to his schemes, but he chooses rather to let you take his, in order to get an opening for his queen's rook, though he suffers to have his knight's pawn doubled by it; but you are again to observe, that a doubled pawn is no way disadvantageous when surrounded by 3 or 4 other pawns (p 4). **13: Nf4** 'Your King's pawn being as yet in no danger, your knight attacks his bishop, in order to take it, or have it removed' (p 4). **13:..Qe7,**

rhwDn4kD
0pDw1w0p
wgpDbDwD
DwDp)wDw
wDwDwHwD
DwHBGwDw
P)w!w)P)
$wDwIwDR

14: B×b6 'As it is always dangerous to let the adversaries King's bishop batter the line of your King's bishop's pawn; and as it is likewise the most dangerous piece to form an attack... you must get rid of that piece as soon as convenient occasion affords' (p 4). **14:..a×b6, 15: 0-0** 'You choose to castle king side in order to strengthen and protect your King bishop pawn, which you will advance two steps as soon as your King pawn is attacked' (p 4). **15:..Nd7, 16: N×e6 Q×e6, 17: f4 Nc7, 18: Rae1 g6.** 'He is forced to play this pawn to hinder you from pushing your King bishop pawn upon his Queen' (p 5). **19: h3** 'The King's rook pawn is played to unite all your pawns together and push them afterwards with vigour' (p 5). **19:..d4, 20: Ne4 h6**. 'He playeth the pawn to hinder your knight entering in his game, and forcing his Queen to remove; were he to play otherwise, your pawns would have an open field' (p 5**). 21:b3 b5 22: g4 Nd5, 23: Ng3** 'You play this knight to enable yourself to push your King's bishop pawn next; it will then be supported by three pieces' (p 5). **23:..Ne3, 24: R×e3 d×e3, 25:**

Q×e3 R×a2.

wDwDw4kD
DpDnDwDw
wDpDqDp0
DpDw)wDw
wDwDw)PD
DPDB!wHP
rDwDwDwD
DwDwDRIw

'He playeth the knight to hinder your project, by breaking the strength of your pawns, which he would undoubtedly do by pushing his King's knight pawn; but you break his design by changing your rook for his knight' (p 6). **27: Re1** 'You play your rook to protect your King pawn who would remain in the lurch as soon as you push your King bishop pawn' (p 6). **26:..Q×b3, 27: Qe4 Qe6, 28: f5 g×f5, 29: g×f5 Qd5.**

wDwDw4kD
DpDnDwDw
wDpDwDw0
DpDw1PDw
wDwDQDwD
DwDBDwHP
rDwDwDwD
DwDw$wIw

'He offers to change Queens, in order to break your scheme of giving him checkmate with your Queen and bishop (p 6). **30: Q×d5 c×d5, 31: B×b5 Nb6, 32: f6** 'You must observe, when your bishop runs upon White, you must strive to put your pawns always on Black, because then your bishop serves to drive away your adversary's King or rook when between your pawns. Few players have made this remark, though a very essential one' (p 7). **32:..Rb2, 33: Bd3 Kf7, 34: Bf5 Nc4, 35: Na5 Rg8†, 36: Bg4 Nd2, 37: e6 Kg6, 38: f7 Rf8, 39: Nf4 † Kg7, 40:Bh5** and White wins.

Philidor's book provided an excellent guide to chess play and versions of it were the basis of numerous books in a variety of languages. In 1844 George Walker described it as 'the first regular treatise with copious notes for learners', and this was the opinion of many others.[19] In addition to being an excellent chess player, Philidor was also a highly skilled musician and between 1774 and 1792 his life was nomadic. Each year the period between February and June was spent by Philidor in London working at the chess club. Then, in July, he would migrate to Paris, spending the months until the following January working as a composer of opera. The chess club at Parsloe's in St James Street was a socially elite institution, membership numbers being restricted to one hundred, each paying three guineas. The club had such celebrities as Fox, Gibbon, Lord Mansfield and the Marques of Rockingham.[20] Philidor was a man of considerable social stature at that time, mixing comfortably with the socially elite. By contrast, other professional sportsmen in Britain were little more than the playthings of their employers. This reached a savage peak in 1790 when the Dukes of Queensberry and Bedford staked 100 guineas a side for a pugilistic bout between Chiffney and Goodison.[21] Neither Chiffney or Goodison were boxers, they were famous jockeys, who had won thousands of pounds in prize money for their respective employers. The bout represented a shameful abuse of their talents and demonstrated how low their social status was in relation to that of Philidor. Phildor was a well-respected member of the elite, able to mix with the socially esteemed of various nationalities. However, the game of chess was a fad that soon passed, the Parsloe's club rapidly shedding most of its elite members.[22] By 1790 Philidor's chess income had shrunk considerably and he was increasingly forced to provide blindfold exhibitions in order to generate

[19] *British Chess Magazine* (hereafter *BCM*) xiii 1893 212.
[20] Allen, George 1863 *Life of Philidor* Philadelphia, Baxter & Co p 80. Timbs, John 1855 *Curiousities of London* London, David Brogue p79.
[21] *The World* 5 Jan 1790.
[22] Twiss, Richard 1787 *Chess* London, G. G. J & J. Robinson and T & J Egerton p 265.

money.[23] His book sales had also plummeted. In 1749 when it was first published there were an immense number of subscribers, mostly English, and the book made a lot of money.[24] Alas, by 1790, when the book was reissued, only 63 people subscribed and as it required a minimum of 120 subscribers to break even the book lost money, only selling 64 copies.[25] While by the 1790s Philidor's chess career in London was suffering a serious decline, at least it was better than his musical career in France. The social tensions that gripped the French capital in the aftermath of the revolution in the 1790s undermined Philidor's earnings there and in 1792 these stopped completely. Philidor was strongly linked to the deposed Crown and consequently banned from returning to France by the new revolutionary government. Thus in his later years Philidor was completely dependent upon his earning's in London from chess.[26] In this sense he might be regarded as the first professional chess player.[27] While obviously there was a decline in Philidor's standard of living between 1792 and 1795 (when he died), he avoided penury and his passing was unrelated to financial problems. Evidently, far from being submerged in misery, according to at least one witness, Philidor was quite happy in the last portion of his life.[28]

While, as previously noted, chess soon lost its appeal to the elite, surpassed by other 'scientifik amusements', in 1787 it was able to attract the attention of a more philosophically inclined audience

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[23] Allen, George 1863 *Life of Philidor* Philadelphia Baxter & Co p 81
[24] *American Chess Monthly* i 1857 356
[25] *BCM* lxxx 1960 153.
[26] *BCM* lxxx 1960 152-3.
[27] Hoffmeister drew attention to the fact of most of the chess players who practised and wrote about the game in the period previous to 1800; Bertin, Stamma, Count Cozio and the modenese masters, were employed by or related to state institutions. However, Philidor, especially after he ceased to be employed as a musician in post-revolutionary France, was dependent on his earnings from chess. Hoffmeister, Frank 2022 *Chess Theory From Stamma to Steinitz 1735-1894* North Carolina McFarland P56.
[28] G. Allen *Life of Philidor 1863* (Philadelphia, John Baxter p 105 BCM lxxx 1960 154. Chess Monthly i 1857 59-60. Hoffmeister Frank, 2022 *Chess Theory From Stamma to Steinitz 1735-1894* North Carolina McFarland p 34.

when Twiss printed Benjamin Franklin's *Morals of Chess*. The *Morals* was a highly influential essay that had originally appeared in 1779 in which the author claimed that the practise of chess fostered foresight, circumspection and caution. Franklin's arguments were often reprinted and sometimes applied to justify other recreational activities.[29] Ironically, Franklin did not live up to his own principles, being both a poor player and bad loser. Additionally, Franklin's *Morals* had been plagiarised from another author.[30] The essay exerted immense intellectual influence and was a core element of those trying to justify the playing of chess against critics who regarded games as a waste of time, if not sinful. The attitude of these critics, which one can broadly refer to as 'puritan', was summed up in 1849 by the nineteenth century historian Macauley:

It was a sin to hang garlands on a Maypole, to drink a friend's health, to fly a hawk, hunt a stag, to play at chess, to wear lovelocks, to put starch into a ruff, to touch the virginals [a predecessor of the piano], to read the *Fairy Queen.*—Rules such as these, rules which would have appeared insupportable to the free and joyous spirit of Luther, and contemptible to the serene and philosophical intellect of Zwingle, threw over all life a more than monastic gloom. The learning and eloquence by which the great reformers had been eminently distinguished, and to which they had been, in no small measure, indebted for their success, were regarded by the new school of Protestants with suspicion, if not with aversion. Some precisians had scruples about teaching the Latin grammar because the names of Mars, Bacchus, and Apollo occurred in it. The fine arts were all but proscribed. The solemn peal of the organ was superstitious. The light music of Ben Jonson's masques was dissolute. Half the fine paintings in England were idolatrous, and the other half indecent.[31]

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[29] *BCM* M 1980 495. *Sissa* iv 1850 179-184. *SM* i (Oct 1792) vi-vii. Twiss, Richard 1787 *Chess*, London i (G. G. J & J. Robinson and T & J Egerton 1787) i 141-148.

[30] *BCM* Miii 1983 174-5. *Palemede* i 1836 41.

[31] Macauley Thomas Babbington 2013, *The History of England from the accession of James II* London Cosimo Vol 1 p 63.

The struggle to find a place for chess

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, by the eighteenth century there were lots of sports and recreations in Britain and in 1792 a very significant development occurred within this culture, the appearance of *The Sporting Magazine*, a monthly that embraced everything that could be regarded as sport and recreation, providing the reader with a detailed framework within which activity could occur.[32] The journal provided a monthly record of fixtures, reports on events, details on rules and tips on cultivating skill. Within a very short while *The Sporting Magazine* was selling 3,000 copies every month and it seems likely that the first significant awareness many people in Britain had of games such as chess stemmed from the references they stumbled upon in the periodical. Nonetheless, these were by no means copious and attention was usually stimulated by novelties, such as the chess playing machine called the Automaton (or Turk), or the claims made by Beyfus, who declared his profession to be that of teacher of the double game of chess.[33] In the early nineteenth century chess received little attention in Britain, though in 1819 'The Turk', a well constructed confidence trick that was passed off as a chess playing machine, visited London, its performances attracting large, awed audiences.[34] While 'The Turk' had a brief, gimmick appeal it does not seem to have stimulated a great appetite for chess and there seems to have been little organised effort to disseminate the game. It was, evidently, largely up to the individual to seek out information on chess. For instance, in 1811 Charles Tomlinson found a tutor in a pub at Lincoln's Inn Field's who taught him to play.[35] However, despite this, some individuals obtained skill at chess. One of the best was a lawyer from Scotland, John Cochrane. During a visit to Paris in 1821 Cochrane played against De la Bourdonnais (1795-1840) and Deschapelles (1780-1847). Although he generally came off worse

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[32] Harvey, Adrian 2004 *The Beginnings of a Sporting Culture in Britain 1793-1850* Ashgate, Aldershot pp 31-41.
[33] *Sporting Magazine* April 1819 19-20, Feb 1821 222-3.
[34] *Gentleman's Magazine* Jan/June 1819 558-9.
[35] *BCM* xi 1891 51.

against such experts, he showed some promise

Generally there was not much chess activity in Britain during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The biggest event was the correspondence match between the Edinburgh CC and the London CC that went from 1824 to 1828 and resulted in a surprise victory for the former, who were generally regarded as the underdogs.[36] Such a protracted contest necessitated that both teams had large squads of players, though generally the contest was undertaken by much smaller numbers. London lost one of its strongest players, John Cochrane, at a crucial stage in the contest, and as he did not return from India until 1840 his presence was not felt.

There were only ten chess clubs in the whole of Britain, four in London: London Chess Club at Tom's Coffee house, founded 1807, Hercules Pillars Tavern, founded 1819, Percy's, founded 1823 and Parsloe's, founded 1825; two in Dublin: Dublin, founded 1810, Trinity College Dublin, founded 1819; and four elsewhere: Brasenose College Oxford, founded 1810, Ipswich, founded 1813, Manchester, founded 1817, and Edinburgh, founded 1822.[37] So far as one can discern, the membership of these clubs was drawn from important local figures.[38] Despite this, such clubs were often short-lived. An insight into the problems that chess confronted can be gleaned from the memoirs of one of the members of an early London based club, Percy's. To begin with, it was difficult to acquire premises, the club only obtaining rooms;

> 'After inquiring at about fifty taverns, with the occasional rebuff of being told by some wringletted lady "wittler" that they could allow

[36] There is a good account of this in Harding, Tim 2011 *Correspondence Chess in Britain and Ireland 1824-1987* South Carolina McFarland pp 7-27.

[37] *CPC* iv 1843 146. *SM* Oct 1813 42. Tomlinson Charles 1856 *Chess Player's annual for the year* London Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co p 44. The club at Dublin that was founded in 1810 had no fixed club room, simply meeting at members houses.

[38] See, for instance, detailed biographies of the members of the first Manchester CC in *Club Minute Books* 3 September 1917 (Held at Manchester Central Library archive).