

Alan Williams (1947 – 2020)

Alan Williams, who has died after a long illness, was a gifted computer scientist, manager, player and administrator in both the chess and bridge worlds. He was General Manager of the English Bridge Union between 1994 and 1997. He was made a life vice-president of the Bristol & District Chess League in 1994, having previously served terms as Vice-President, President, Treasurer and General Secretary.



I first met Alan and his wife to be, Chrissie, nearly forty years ago when we were all working in the Computer Centre of the University of Bristol. He persuaded me to join his chess club, Horfield and Montpelier. Alan went off to work for a software house called Praxis, based in Bath, in about 1985. Not long after, he talked me into leaving the University and going to Praxis as well and we worked together for the next six years. He was a talented techie who seemed to effortlessly move into management: a skilled negotiator and administrator, and a true people person.

While treasurer of the Bristol Chess League in the late 1980s, Alan realised that the League was over-reliant on the efforts of one man, the secretary, Chris Carter. Chris did everything: he worked out the fixtures, handled adjudications, processed results, and ran the committee meetings and represented the League externally. He got through a prodigious amount of work and replacing him would be almost impossible. Alan came up with the idea of splitting the secretary's role into two: the match secretary and a general secretary and took on the latter role himself, leaving Chris with the part he enjoyed. Alan rewrote the baroque set of rules, creating a simplified constitution with accompanying rules; the structure which is still in use today. Once again he talked me into something, becoming the Bristol Chess Times Editor. When the British Chess Federation proposed the introduction of a compulsory player registration scheme in 1992, something deeply unpopular with a number of Bristol players, Alan was a key figure in persuading the clubs of the value of the new system. Believing Bristol should be a major chess centre, he strongly supported Bristol becoming one of the six founders of the 4NCL.

Alan had a weakness all too common amongst good chess players – he also liked bridge, and came to prefer it. In 1994, he was offered a job for which he was ideally suited: General Manager of the English Bridge Union. The downside was he had to leave Bristol and move to Buckinghamshire. Alan was very keen to broaden the base of English Bridge, not least in wanting to promote the game in schools. However the old guard on the management board proved highly resistant to change so after 3 years he decided to move on. Shockingly, in 1998 he was diagnosed with a serious heart defect and underwent major surgery. That didn't stop him, he went on to 3 years of technical support and management work for the Mc Nicholas construction group followed by 11 years of technical support at the Open University. At the same time he worked independently providing Web services and found time to write and publish a book : 'What can possibly go wrong?' detailing 'Chilli' his own bidding system for Bridge.

I was delighted when he accepted my invitation to be my best man at my wedding in 2004. Alan and Chrissie returned to Bristol in 2013 after retirement and moved into an apartment at the harbourside. Alan's bridge playing continued and he was Chairman of the West of England Bridge Club. He became a volunteer for Transform, a charity campaigning for the legalisation of drugs.

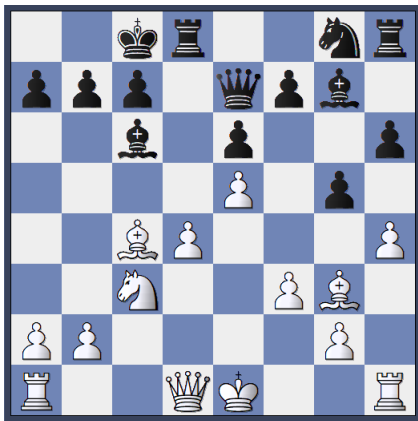
Alan was always good company and had a great sense of humour. A sharp mind and a polymath: Alan had such an outstanding life of varied achievements and personal challenges - always with the same humane intelligence and absence of self-promotion.

Here is one of his games with his own annotations, in an opening variation he invented while driving between Bristol and Bath:

Tim Headlong – Alan Williams

Clifton-Horfield, Bristol KO Cup, 1990

1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nc6 Last time against Tim he played 2. Nf3. Either he forgot I played the Chigorin or he was prepared to take it on this time. **3.Nc3 dxc4 4.Nf3** Tim has played what I have concluded from my studies of the Chigorin to be the most testing line. The book line 4...Nf6 is in my opinion not good enough. [4.d5 leads to wild, materially unbalanced positions, eg. 4...Na5 5.Qa4+ c6 6.b4! b5! 7.Qxa5 Qxa5 8.bxa5 b4 9.Nd1 cxd5 with good compensation for the piece.] **4...Bd7!?** The Keynsham By-Pass Variation, my own invention. It's almost certainly garbage, but it does have its points. First, since Black can hardly prevent d5, driving the Nc6 to a5 or b8, he may as well make a virtue of it. **5.e4 Na5 6.Bg5!** A very good refutation try, giving me great development problems. **6...h6 7.Bh4 g5 8.Bg3 e6 9.h4 Bg7 10.Ne5** A plausible plan based on a positional misjudgement. As Tim learns in the game, capturing on c4 doesn't deliver and therefore I can afford to attend to the king-side threats. [10.Qd2! would be much more demanding.] **10...Qe7!** An excellent move. It defends the king-side weaknesses, prepares 0-0-0 and threatens ...Qb4. [10...b5? fails to 11.hxg5 hxg5 12.Rxh8 Bxh8 13.Nxf7! and the Bh8 is doomed after 14. Qh5+] **11.Nxc4?** After this, Black stands better. White should find another way to sustain his initiative, perhaps 11.b3 **11...Nxc4 12.Bxc4 0-0-0 13.f3** Tim had an extremely long think over this, and coupled with time spent earlier, he was now in time pressure. His problem is that Black's position is suddenly free of major weaknesses. **13...Bc6 14.e5?** A major positional concession, played to relieve immediate pressure.



14...Qb4! 15.Qd3 Ne7! White has to spend a move defending b2 at some point. Meanwhile, my knight enters the game devastatingly. [15...Qxb2 may be playable but I didn't want to let Tim back into the game with e.g. 16.0-0 and a queen-side wellie.] **16.0-0-0 Nf5 17.a3 Qb6 18.Bf2 Bxe5 19.Ne2 Bf6** The start of an important re-grouping. I saw no immediate decisive combination, so I was happy to consolidate my material and positional superiority. **20.h5 Ne7 21.Qc2 Nd5 22.Ng3 Bb5 23.Bxb5 Qxb5 24.Ne4 Be7 25.Rd3 b6** White starts the inevitable wellie. Although b6 creates some weaknesses, it also minimises the impact of Rb3, discourages Nc5 and prepares an eventual c5. White is now in serious time trouble. **26.Rb3 Qa6 27.Kb1 f5 28.Nd2 Kb8 29.Nc4 Bf6 30.Rc1 Rc8 31.Ka2 Rhe8 32.Be1 Bxd4 33.Na5 c5! 34.g4 Ne3 35.Bg3+ e5?!** [35...f4! would have left an amusingly large number of pieces *en prise*.] **36.Rxe3 Qxa5 37.Qxf5 Bxe3** The sealed move. White resigned after seeing this continuation, 38.Bxe5+ Kb7 39.Qd7+ Ka6 40.Rc4 Rxe5 41.Qxc8+ Kb5. **0-1** This game

marked a welcome return to form for me. Tim is the first 'class' player I have beaten for quite a while and I had a particularly poor personal record against him.

John Richards, August 2020