Chess Heroes: A Post Mortem

‘Whatever happened to

David Bronstein?

He got skewered and checkmated,

And then critiqued by Sosonko.’

*(*[*No More Heroes*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gfIgA-PYyQ)*, The Stranglers)*

As funeral eulogies go, you would be hard pressed to beat the one for Graham Chapman, delivered by John Cleese at a memorial service in 1989 after his fellow Python had ‘gone to meet the Great Head of Light Entertainment in the sky.’ It was the antithesis of good taste, insulting in the extreme, and had the audience in stitches with laughter. No, I’m not going to quote it here (this is a family publication) but you can [Google it](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkxCHybM6Ek) if you want to.

There are many ways of remembering our chess heroes. Some get books written about them (such as Bronstein or Viktor Korchnoi, in the excellent works by Dutch GM Genna Sosonko), some get famous tournaments named after them, and others are fondly remembered over a fun evening of blitz (the ones commemorating IMs Andrew Whiteley and Colin Crouch in a London pub come to mind).

Certain images stick in my mind when I recall some of my favourite players, now sadly no longer with us. Bronstein, who once let his clock run down 20 minutes against me in a weekend tournament, just so he could thrash me at blitz. Of Andrew Whiteley, smoking his knight-shaped pipe at the chess-playing bar of the King’s Head (try doing that these days); and of Colin Crouch, flapping his arms nervously during a tournament game or chortling away at some scathing article he had penned for the satirical magazine *Kingpin.*

Another player you may not have heard of, but who remains very dear to me, was a certain E.L. Stuart (his finest achievement was finishing 2nd in the 1952 British Championship in Chester). Many years later, Les shared his secret intricate analysis of the Sicilian Pin Variation with me at his home in Darlington. I also recall him (less expertly) inadvertently bouncing his pipe off our board and into my lap during a time scramble in a Newcastle League game, or the time he decided the best way to get around the just-introduced smoking ban in tournaments was by loudly chomping away at Nicorette gum with his false teeth throughout the 1994 Sheffield Congress.

Another of my best chess friends was Eric Isherwood, of Killingworth Chess Club, a player of modest chess strength but a heart of gold, who often invited clubmates to his home for an after-hours drink and friendly game after the pubs had shut.

Recent events have prompted me to think of chess players departed, and to wonder what kind of legacy they leave. Some players leave behind beautiful games to remember them by; many of us are lucky if we play one of those in a blue moon, and that it is somehow recorded for posterity. Other people leave bequests in their wills, to fantastic chess charities such as the [Chess Trust](http://www.chesstrust.org.uk/), [The Friends of Chess](https://friendsofchess.wordpress.com/), or [Chess in Schools and Communities](https://www.chessinschools.co.uk/).

But what can we, the living, do to best commemorate the departed? Given the rapidly ageing population of club players in the UK, it seems to me that there is one great, simple thing we can do: Introduce a young person to the game who otherwise would not learn it. It can be a friend, a grandchild, someone at our local library, a work colleague, or even a total stranger. Teach them how the pieces move; show them how to avoid Scholar’s Mate; share an instructive checkmate or puzzle.

Seeing the joy of learning chess in the eyes of someone new can be a wonderful thing. It enables us to realise that we are merely custodians of the game we love for future generations.