

A Warm Hullo

Stephen Greep reports on the social element at this year's British Championship

For the first time in its history the British was coming to Hull. The challenge from Kevin Staveley, the Championships manager, was: Can you do us a social programme? Yes, we could, and we set ourselves the aims of promoting Hull (and chess in Hull and District), and to make the British in Hull one to remember, while remembering that the main event was, of course, the chess itself.

With the help of a financial contribution from the ECF and a very generous one from Hull Culture and Leisure (who provided the Championship venue), together with our own charitable funds, we were well placed. Our plan was to try and do something for everyone, with events from the first Saturday to the second Friday, and with a mixture of things for adults and juniors. The following is a brief account of some of what we did.

The programme was complete well before the British and a full version placed on the British Championship website. We ran an event every day, sometimes two. Every single event we put on ran; nothing was cancelled. Altogether 500 players and families took part in a social event (obviously some repeat attendees). Our funding meant all events (except entry to the Deep, Hull's huge aquarium, and the Championship meal) were free to participants and their families. The most popular were:

The film night – we hired a whole screen and played *Pawn Sacrifice*, with an introduction from Stewart Reuben who was in Reykjavik in 1972 (100 with a waiting list).

Open air chess night (80, although the 100 free pints of grandmaster ale might have helped).

The Deep (78 reduced price tickets sold and 50 took the land train from the Championships venue).

History, ghost and pub walks (100, with waiting lists).

Quiz night (45).

A casino night, championship meal, pizza making afternoon and a live chess event (see below), made up our eleven offerings. It didn't all go without a hitch – the machinery broke at the start of *Pawn Sacrifice* and the Land Train was late – but all things considered, it was not a complete disaster!

The Hull City of Culture volunteers did us proud, with every train arriving at Paragon Station – Hull's main train station – met with a friendly smile and an offer of help. Standing alongside our congress banner and a chess board

(just so they couldn't be missed), we estimate that well over 100 players and their families received a formal welcome to the City of Hull.

We also managed savings for players. The reduced-price tickets we negotiated with the Deep saved people around £300 in total, and they got the land train for free. Two local eateries who also had social events offered a 20% discount to all players and their families – these were well used as we gave out over 60 discount vouchers. HEY (Visit Hull and East Yorkshire), who had produced the Championships accommodation website for free, also produced the 'Hull Passport', a discount book of local venues, and provided a local tourist information table throughout the event.

Our 'star' event was probably the Living Chess, taking place on the Wednesday lunchtime with a giant, specially-made 64 square metre board, with players supporting sandwich boards with local designs (we did it this way because we didn't know the sizes required until late on): for instance, the rooks were the Humber Bridge; the queen, the Queen Victoria statue, the kings; the three crowns of the Hull shield. Despite a last-minute panic, where 10 pieces (sorry, players) dropped out because of the hot weather, it all went very well with a few championship competitors able to have a go at commanding the pieces in real live games.

We estimated 400 or so members of the public watched the Living Chess (although not all at once), and about 30 members of the public (non 'normal' chess players) played games in the surrounding area, where we put out chess boards – which were fully in use for the event's three hours. Radio Humberside did an hour-long live broadcast from Queen Victoria Square – their anchor man, Burnisy, was the black queen as we started by playing out the Evergreen and Immortal games from the nineteenth century.

Chess publicity as good as this is has to be priceless. Moreover, the day before the Living Chess, Radio Humberside had carried a live interview with Kevin Staveley and Chris Bird, an international arbiter who left Hull for the states 20 years ago, but who returned for the British.

We manned our own stall for 56 hours during the championships, with at least two local players there all the time – where we gave away tickets for the events and ran a raffle and a Cake Chess solving Competition (all proceeds went to The Chess Trust). We

gave away 80 Championship mugs and nearly 100 copies of a new book, launched at the British – a 100 page history of local chess entitled *Rank and File*, by Roger Noble (enquiries to roger_noble@hotmail.com). So far around £900 for Yorkshire Cancer Research has been raised by Roger through donations [Ed. – *It's certainly a beautifully produced work, well illustrated, and full of some fascinating tales*].

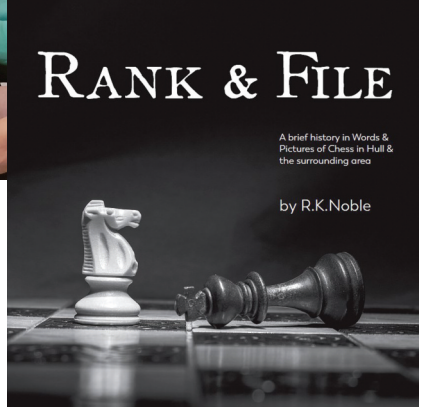
We also gave out over 600 badges – mostly to children, but not all! – and we distributed 1,100 copies of the social programme booklet and 2,000 event flyers. Alongside the programme we provided a new trophy, the City of Hull Trophy, for the Over-50's Championship. In return, an economic evaluation by Visit Hull and East Yorkshire puts the value of the British Chess Championships to Hull at £1.3m!

If we did it all again, we'd do even more for families and juniors. All tickets for the family-oriented events went very quickly. We'd also consider a small charge for events – we had enough funding to make most free, but were disappointed that a small number of people failed to turn up for events, leaving it too late to bring in people from the waiting list. The costs? £10,000 went on *Rank and File*, the Living Chess, Over-50's prize sponsorship and the City of Hull trophy (a splendid 20-inch high, silver-plated trophy). On the actual social programme, including printing, mugs, badges, banners, etc, costs were around £3,000.

The commitment? We couldn't have done all this without the commitment of local players who freely gave up their time, of the British Championship Management Team and the ECF, of Visit Hull and East Yorkshire and, in particular the support and funding from Hull Culture and Leisure.

Local players gave up an enormous amount of time and effort – apart from the 150 hours manning the stall and another 50 hours at events, there was probably 100-plus hours in pre-Championships organising, not to mention the three hours of training and a further three hours of 'playing time' that the Living Chess pieces gave.

Was all this worth it? Judging by the number of compliments we received and the increased profile for Hull – yes. The final judgement lies with those who took part. We just hope it made the British that little bit different and one that players will remember.



Just a small selection of photos from some of the many social events

- 1. Living Chess Display in front of the City Hall
- 2. Radio Humber's anchor man Burnsy aka the Black Queen
- 3. History Walk
- 4. Open Air Chess Evening
- 5. The new City of Hull Trophy
- 6. One of the many pubs visited during the two pub walks
- 7. Pizza making afternoon for children at Ask Restaurant
- 8. Championship Meal
- 9. The cake from the Chess Problem Solving Competition
- 10. The cover of Roger Noble's book which has so far raised £900 for charity

All photographs: Stephen Greep & Roger Noble

